



WORLD  
PHILOSOPHY  
DAY

# CELEBRATING WORLD PHILOSOPHY DAY: BUILDING UNITY THROUGH DIVERSITY



Compiled by *The Acropolis Editorial Team*

By establishing World Philosophy Day, UNESCO has underlined the enduring value of Philosophy as a discipline that can transform individuals & societies, by developing critical thinking, & responding to the various moral and social challenges facing the world today. New Acropolis International celebrated this day with the theme **Building Unity through Diversity**, in over 500 branches across 50 countries. In Mumbai and Pune, panel discussions were held on philosophy's role in bridging fields like art, science, business, education, dance, and philanthropy; at the National Gallery of Modern Art and Deccan Gymkhana respectively, with members of diverse group of professional and thinkers coming together to exchange & understand each other's viewpoints. An audience of over 200 gathered in Mumbai and over 130 gather in Pune to celebrate this day.

**Mumbai's panel included Yaron Barzilay**, Philosopher & National Director of New Acropolis India (North); **Mandakini Trivedi**, dancer, choreographer and cultural educator; **Amish Tripathi**, celebrated author, media personality, broadcaster & former diplomat; **Inakshi Sobti**, CEO Asia Society (Indian Centre); and **Lobsang Phuntsok**, former monk & Founder President of Jhamtse Gatsal children's community.



Below, in their own words, are excerpts from the stimulating discussion by the members of the panel, who brought their diverse backgrounds and varied world views to their observations.

Head of New Acropolis Mumbai, **Sivan Barzilay**, introduced the topic and set the tone for the discussion by observing, "The degree of development of an ecosystem is defined by the value of its diversity. All the parts that make up the system contribute to its wholeness, and its unity depends on the links between its parts. A human society with diversity is capable of responding to various challenges, as long as all the parts orient themselves to unity. Unity though diversity translates into many domains. Today, perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing us is how ONE and DIVERSITY can create a peaceful co-existence. Towards this goal, over the last 68 years, New Acropolis around the globe has helped forge co-existence & build hope for a greater future."

**MANDAKINI TRIVEDI**, *exponent of the classical Indian dance Mohiniattam, has performed at prestigious dance festivals in India & abroad. Her chief work is in understanding & teaching the art of Indian dance as a transcendental form rooted in subtle yogic principles. She has received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for her contribution to Mohiniattam, and has established an institution where she imparts training to young dancers.*

MANDAKINI: I think every aspect of life comes from your particular world view. Entertainment is an expression of a capitalist world view. It is meant to lull the senses, the mind and the consciousness. It is an escape that people are looking for. But the Classical Arts stem from a transcendental world view of life, the purpose of which is to transcend the ego and the personal. These arts are Non-Personal. Their forms are extremely stylized and their content is Myths and stories, that take me away from myself but addresses the universal.



The degree of development of an ecosystem is defined by the value of its diversity.



What unites everything is *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*: that which is truth has to be beautiful, that which is auspicious is for the upliftment of the human being. The purpose of these arts is to move from outward to inward, from personal to non-personal, from lower to higher, from gross to subtle.

Transcendental gives the impression that it looks away from the world. On the contrary, it says look within. Beauty is already there, in nature, around you, and within you and the Classical Arts are systematically crafted to take you away from the personal, and put you in the space where the personal does not exist, so you can perceive beauty.

**AMISH TRIPATHI** gave up a highly successful career as banker and has become one of the fastest selling authors in Indian Publishing. His subject is Indian Mythology, and his books have been translated into over 20 Indian & International languages. He has hosted documentaries for Discovery TV, served as Minister of culture in the UK, and was the youngest Director of the Nehru Centre. Amish continues to tell stories rooted in Ancient Indian Culture, while making them relevant and inspirational for contemporary Indian youth.



AMISH: One of the key learnings of our theme today is that every culture has its own tradition to pass on. The difference between Mythology driven cultures and History driven cultures is that in the former there is no one, unquestioned way of living because mythology gives you many different contexts. For example, Ram said “follow all the laws”, yet does Krishna follow the laws? I have tried to show different models of heroism in my books, Ram, Krishna, Shiva, Sita. In our tradition there is no one path. We have multiple gods and different archetypes which all work for different times.

Balance is needed, within individuals, and within societies. Our Hindu tradition speaks of the law of *Dharma* as beyond religion, as that which balances, *Artha* is power, and wealth. Our religion has a goddess of wealth, yet she holds a pot that is tilted forward with gold dropping out of it, meaning balance lies in earning your wealth & spreading it.

*Kama* is not eroticism, it is the sensual pleasure of all the arts, but with balance. They are divine, enjoy them but don't get obsessed with them. The balance of all 3 lead to *Moksh*, freedom from the cycle of birth & death. And this balance naturally emerges in cultures that are Mythology driven, that celebrate different points of view.



Don't lose your roots, but be open to all forms because there is something to learn from everyone you meet, and every culture you experience.





There is a dissolving of differences, a realisation that we are all in this together, that we all have similar journeys & similar challenges, and this epiphany of solidarity and unity is what is so important.

In a broader perspective, what is philosophy and wisdom if not applied to your own life. All of us have our own way of life. I am a Hindu, but I will search for truth in any system of thought. Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism or Jainism are all wonderful philosophies, and we must be open to different points of views. And if you can look at diverse thoughts, diverse cultural and religious experiences, you will find something that will help you. That is unity through diversity. Don't lose your roots, but be open to all forms because there is something to learn from everyone you meet, and every culture you experience.

***INAKSHI SOBTI** is the Chief Executive Officer of Asia Society (India Centre). Inakshi curates public & private programmes and community initiatives to present a range of perspectives on Modern South Asia, across business, geopolitics and the Arts. Asia Society seeks to enhance dialogue, encourage creative expression & generate new ideas across India, Asia & its relationship to the larger world.*

INAKSHI: The fundamental idea of the Asia Society is that we are all part of an integrated whole. To wholly understand a people you of course need geopolitical and economic context, but the arts & culture are an important platform for dialogue because we all share commonalities in food history, inter-sections in languages and arts as well as various challenges confronting us. The realisation that development cannot happen in isolation, because we are all interlinked, and that co-existence is essential, means that we need to build a community across the sub-continent so that we can





reconcile our history unfettered from the shackles that have held us back, and really work in conjunction together.

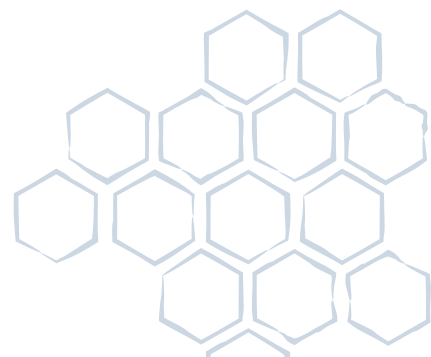
I find that contemporary challenges expressed through the arts connect in a far stronger & deeper way than any academic panel can communicate. So, I work with diverse communities and networks in what we call “caravans” and at the end of an exhausting day when we are all sitting around together, there is a dissolving of differences, a realisation that we are all in this together, that we all have similar journeys & similar challenges, and this epiphany of solidarity and unity is what is so important.

**LOBSANG PHUNTSOK** is a former Buddhist Monk and an internationally recognised figure in the field of transformative learning and social entrepreneurship, left his life as a spiritual teacher in the US and returned to India to set up a children's community, *Jhamtse Gatsal*, which translates to Garden of Love & Compassion. It is a loving, learning environment for vulnerable children that teaches an integrated model of educating the heart, mind & body. He has received several prestigious awards for his work.

LOBSANG: Basically there are 2 extreme kinds of people who become monks – extremely enlightened or extremely naughty and unhappy – like me. I tried to commit suicide a number of times in childhood, so my grand-parents sent me to a monastery to save my life.



My biggest contribution to the world would be, if I can be more loving, more giving, and more compassionate.



Today, modern education is about accumulating something new. In a monastery it is not about adding, but about letting go of something that you have been holding on to that has been making you unhappy. The focus is on 'unbecoming' and it's been my honour to have the opportunity to study one of the most profound philosophies of the world: Buddhism teaches the idea of letting go of the non-essentials so as to experience the essential, to find the essence of life, and I wanted to make this education available to non-monks and non-nuns also, the education of the Heart.

Today, a huge problem is a modern disease I call Compassion Deficit Disorder. There is 'convenient' compassion, which is to alleviate guilt, and there is 'inconvenient compassion', which is when you give of yourself, something that means a lot to you, something that is hard to give, and that is inconvenient compassion, and it is this re-education of the Heart that we have to reintroduce into the country. My biggest contribution to the world would be, if I can be more loving, more giving, and more compassionate.

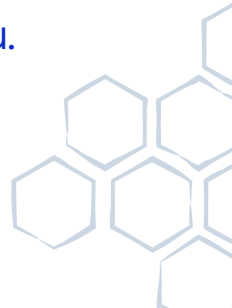


**YARON BARZILAY** is an Acropolitan Philosopher who has dedicated his life to philosophical pursuits. As the founder and director of New Acropolis India (North) he has spearheaded the expansion of the Mumbai branch, overseen the establishment of a Pune branch, and Manav Bustan (which translates to a Garden of Humanity) in the rural area of Raigarh, Maharashtra. All 3 establishments are committed to promoting culture and the spirit of volunteering, through various community building initiatives, as well as offering the invitation to reflect & introspect about ourselves, our relationship with each other, and the universe.

YARON: In our studies we engage & explore various traditions, East & West, and we try to learn how human beings saw themselves, their world, and the meaning of life. It is not about reviving what was in the past but aspiring to the best we can, in our relationships with ourselves, each other and with nature. What is essential is a Human Renaissance, the key to which is human development. And for this we cannot revive ourselves from the outside alone. On this path of Philosophy, ethics has an essential role. But the concept of ethics & values is misunderstood as Do's and Don'ts. Ethics is not what is imposed on you. It is what impels you, an inspiration that comes from within you. As Gandhiji said, "We must BE the change we want to see in this world."



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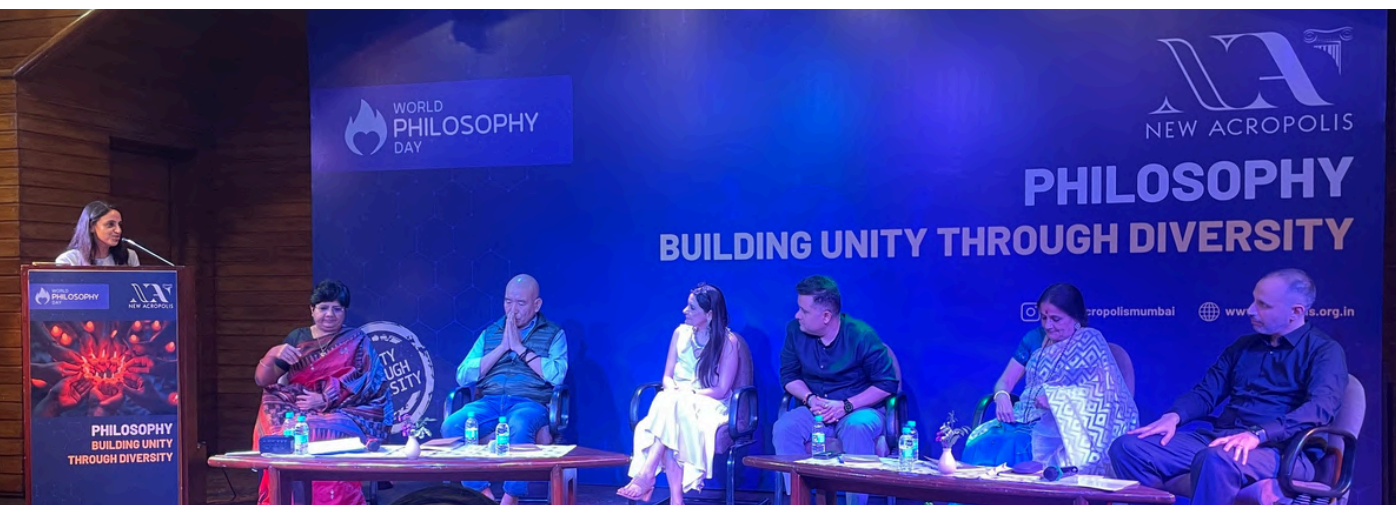
We can't make everyone the same, we need to celebrate the diversity but not lose the unity. To respect the diversity and respect the deeper connection we have with one another. This is to transcend the personality, to see the other.

We understand philosophy as a state of mind & heart: *Sophia* means wisdom, and wisdom is not knowledge, like truth is not information. Wisdom includes a movement forward & upward. *Philo* is love, which is a movement towards unity. It is not intellectual, love is what brings us closer, and so it resonates with a movement of life.

The ideas of Unity and Diversity sound contradictory but I prefer to think of them as complementary. Everything in our universe expresses in duality, in polarity. The word universe, has within it, unity & diversity. And if the human being is a microcosm of the macrocosm, then we too embody both these concepts.

Life is unity & diversity at the same time. It needs to be brought into practical co-existence. We can't make everyone the same, we need to celebrate the diversity but not lose the unity. To respect the diversity and respect the deeper connection we have with one another. This is to transcend the personality, to see the other. It is the essential foundation of empathy.

The highest experience one can have is the experience of unity with life, but to interact with unity I need to open my inner eye, to see with the heart, to build the bridge between *roopa* and *arooka*, so that, as Rumi says, we begin to realize, "We are not a drop in the ocean, but the ocean in a drop".



**Pune's panel included Dr. Shraddha Shetty**, Philosopher and Branch Manager of New Acropolis Pune; **Dr. Bhushan Patwardhan**, Biomedical Scientist; **Pt. Uday Bhawalkar**, Dhrupad artist, Founder of Swarkul; and **Zarina Screwvala**, Philanthropist, Co-founder of Swades Foundation.

***DR. SHRADDHA SHETTY** is the branch manager of New Acropolis Pune which she founded in 2018. As the branch manager, she has collaborated with several institutions like Jeevit nadi, Oikos, Visda etc. to mark the significance of Philosophy, Culture and Volunteering, led many workshops and talks on Eastern and Western philosophies related to Bhagwad Gita, Tibetan Buddhism, ancient Egyptian symbolism and Greek Philosophy to name a few. She is a professional M.D.S Orthodontist who has been practicing for the last 14 years and she currently works at Ruby Hall Hospital and its branches.*

DR. SHRADDHA: We all are born, and we encounter life. In the visible realm, we have a lot of circumstances, and situations; life happens to everyone. So, one doesn't have to be an intellectual because circumstances are part of everyone's life. And that's true for all human beings, right? So, when you encounter life, there is the mind that questions – Why this way and why not that way? Why do some people like this and some people like that? There are questions related to the causes of things. At some point in life, I think everyone has these questions. You want to understand a little more than what is the most apparent answer. You want to go deeper in your understanding. Then, another criterion is that you need to have an open mind. If you are in love with wanting to know the truth, then you don't stop, even when the answer doesn't fit into what you would like to hear. You go deeper because you love something, you want to know. And if you do, how do you know any of the answers? You can, first of all, try borrowing ideas. When you borrow ideas, you don't really know them because it's not yours. So, what do you do? Just like in science, you work with a hypothesis. This may help you understand what could be the reason for things. And then



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you take that idea and you experiment with it. And then you come to some sort of analysis-based conscious learning from the application of things. And then you extract something, and then you go back to your inner reflections. With this, you keep an inner life alive so that you can balance your outer life. We need to have an inner life and we need to have an outer life. The idea of philosophy therefore is for anyone who has life. And we consider ourselves alive. Everyone has a mind. Everyone has circumstances. We can really come to some kind of a clarity for our own life and continue to build on this. I think this is being human, and philosophy is very much a part of being human in my view.

**DR. BHUSHAN PATWARDHAN**, a biomedical scientist, has made significant contributions to traditional medicine research, higher education, and institutional governance. With 2 US and 8 Indian patents, he serves as National Research Professor - Ayush for India's Ministry of Ayush and Ayush India lead for WHO's Global Traditional Medicine Centre. Dr Patwardhan's scholarly books 'Integrative Approaches for Health' and 'Innovative Approaches to Drug Discovery' both published by Academic Press Elsevier have received excellent reviews. His recent book 'Genome to Om' speaks about the evolving journey of Modern Science to Meta-Science.





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DR. BHUSHAN: What is the purpose of science? If science is trying to understand nature, philosophy is understanding the nature of that nature. In our Bharatiya Gyan Parampara, we have a concept of Gyan, which we can probably equate with information or knowledge, simple knowledge. Second is Vigyan. Vigyan is Vishesh Gyan. So, if you excel in a certain part of that, it becomes science. Something is beyond that. This is Pragyan. And I must tell you that in science, the majority of discoveries have not come only from experimentation in the laboratory. They come through intuition. Friedrich Gauss, one of the most eminent self-taught mathematicians, said that what he derived, he knew already. And he worked backward to prove what he knew. The same thing is true with Ramanujan. Einstein also accepted this.

Although modern science has made great progress, for what purpose are we using it? We are using today's modern science mostly to satisfy ego, greed, and profit. For whom are today's scientists working? Business? Or for people? These questions are extremely important. Is it going in the right direction? We are challenging the trajectory that modern science has taken today and saying that now is the time to take a pause, look back, and make a mid-course correction for universal well-being, which is the purpose of science.

**PT. UDAY BHAWALKAR**, is among the foremost Dhrupad vocalists and has been a strong force in its growing recognition, popularity and resurgence, worldwide. Dhrupad is a living and evolving classical music tradition in which Uday has developed a unique style deeply embedded in raga, ras and bhaav. Pt. Uday spent over 12 years studying and living in the traditional guru-shishya parampara with Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar (Vocal) and Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar (Rudra-Veena), the towering pillars of the Dhrupad tradition. Pt. Uday founded the Swarkul foundation which in essence is a residential Gurukul for fully dedicated Dhrupad students to learn, practice, develop and become an accomplished Dhrupad musician.

PT. UDAY: You are always in search of betterment in whatever you do. I've been performing for over 40 years now, but every concert is different. After every concert, many times, I couldn't sleep for 3-4 hours because I would keep thinking about – what happened today? Where I made mistakes? Where I could have been better? What my state of mind was? What was I thinking? It's a learning process. Every concert is a learning process. Every concert, you look for betterment. But again, there is no guarantee that the next concert will be good because I'm thinking for three hours tonight. Even if I make a mistake, it's not a problem. But I will never stop, and I will not be afraid. That's the path of art – there is no destination. The whole life is a journey in art and music. It's a journey where every moment, every day, you are enjoying, and every day you discover something new.

In music, the *swara*, the *raga*, and *laya* – which means the tempo – these three things themselves are a mystery. When you are in search of mystery, or you are trying to touch the mystery, or you are trying to find yourself in that mysterious world you are touching upon, you are learning the philosophies in there.



The whole life is a journey in art and music... where every moment, every day, you are enjoying, and every day you discover something new.



**ZARINA SCREWVALA** is an Indian entrepreneur and philanthropist. She is currently the Managing Trustee of Swades Foundation, a foundation dedicated to Rural Empowerment in India. With 300+ strong teams and 1000+ volunteers at the Swades Foundation, her organization strives hard to find and execute solutions to the multiple challenges Rural India faces. Swades work encapsulates sections of rural Maharashtra and is currently focused on the districts of Raigad and Nashik. Zarina is also an active member of New Acropolis Mumbai and heads the New Acropolis Culture Circle Mumbai.

ZARINA: Philanthropy and philosophy share a common word, philos, which is love. I think in the end, whether it's the arts or it's religion or it's science or it's philanthropy or it's philosophy, it's about understanding the nature of love.

When we started Swades, we had over 1,000 villages where we were working in six blocks of Raigad district in Maharashtra. I began to realize that though it looked very good from the outside, something was terribly wrong. And I owe this realization to our study of philosophy – that the changes we were trying to make were very external. The real



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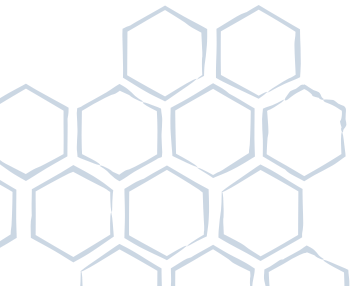
changes that we needed to make in our community had to come from their hearts and minds. So, we made a very brave decision to stop working for eight months. During this time, we continued with basic work but re-evaluated our approach entirely. This led to the creation of the Village Development Committees, which are now the lighthouses of the village. They are the ones who volunteer, roughly 10 or 12 people – men, women, youth, in certain proportions, and we invite them to come and learn how to change their own lives. We didn't want anyone to be dependent and asking and taking. Now they're generous. They share their knowledge and they're our deepest inspiration for all that we do really.

**Dr. Shraddha** concluded: We've had lovely discussions with individuals who have a goal or are inspired by understanding the mystery of life. The goal of philosophy itself is also not the end. It also has a goal to explore the mysteries of life. Anyone who began to explore this, was inquisitive about the mysteries of life, about the beauty that exists in the cosmos, about the beauty that exists in the human beings. It is idea of uniting - Yoga is something that we also speak about, Pt. Uday spoke about, Dr. Bhushan spoke about, everyone speaks about it, it's quite a known word, but it isn't just physical asanas. I resonate in my mind with an idea, but my feelings, they don't support it, because it's uncomfortable. And eventually I'm not able to bring the idea to action because it's very broken in between my ideas, my feelings, and my actions. There isn't any yoga inside of me.





When the individuals who are scientists or artists or philanthropists, ... are elevated through values, virtues, learning, open-mindedness, inquiry, love for the mystery, for wisdom, for what is true, what could be true, when an individual is elevated, then in whichever field you may work, you will make an impact.



Pyramid has been a beautiful symbol, across traditions. In fact, any sacred architecture, whether a temple or a mosque or any of these, will have the structure of a dome like a pyramid. Pyramid also is a structure which was built by the ancient Egyptians, but not only by them. It is said that, it also symbolizes this concept of a man, a human being. The word pyramid comes from 'pyre' which means fire, which is also this idea of elevation. The idea that the base is wider and you move towards a common goal. It's the idea from plurality towards unity, from diversity towards unity.

A human being thus is able to elevate through art, or through scientific inquiry, or through philosophical inquiry in the day-to-day life or through philanthropy, or anything. If a human being is able to elevate and find that one voice which resonates with you the most and from that meaningful place, if one is able to bring it back to all the aspects of your life, then that human being becomes a pyramid, a symbol. The expression of science is not the same as the expression of arts, nor same as the expression of philanthropy. These are different expressions. Each one has its unique space. When the individuals who are scientists or artists or philanthropists, when they themselves are elevated through values, virtues, learning, open-mindedness, inquiry, love for the mystery, for wisdom, for what is true, what could be true, when an individual is elevated, then in whichever field you may work, you will make an impact. And any person who will come in contact with this will be inspired and will want to elevate himself.

The goal is to move towards the betterment of everyone in my view. If, this is the goal, we can learn to have mutual respect towards different expressions and mutual collaboration between the different expressions. It's like the pyramid. The four faces of the pyramid are not the same. Yet, but when you climb up, you come closer to each other. To understand this idea, we need to be small pyramids and there's a civilization which is the bigger pyramid. Yes, this is the idea of unity through diversity. ✦✦