

The Joy of Living Philosophy

By Akanksha Sanghi

Know Thyself. This famous axiom from the ancient Greek tradition seems so simple but in reality these words are a key to living life. As I reflect over the last 5 years, since when I began my journey as a philosopher and started to explore the meaning of these words, it is easy for me to see that I am a totally different person. While externally I may seem quite the same to many, there is a deep inner transformation, a sense of joy, inner strength, purpose and wonder; a whole new outlook to life, a spirit of discovery and adventure.

Traditionally, Philosophy is defined as *the love for wisdom*. It is this beautiful journey of humbly beginning to discover the mystery that we call LIFE, by beginning the inward journey of discovering ourselves, daring to identify who we really are. However, this journey is possible only when we start *living philosophy*; practicing it in our daily lives. Upon reflection, we might find that many of us are going through life mechanically, simply surviving, rather than really living.

Just as the sun shines 24/7, fulfilling its potential and serving its purpose, so too it can be observed that everything in this universe has a purpose and lives in accordance with that. But what about human beings?



What then does it mean to really live? Traditions world over suggest that each of us has come to this world with a purpose, *swadharma* as it was known in the ancient Indian context. Just as the sun shines 24/7, fulfilling its potential and serving its purpose, so too it can be observed that everything in this universe has a purpose and lives in accordance with that. But what about human beings?



What might be our purpose? Our education system and social upbringing are directed towards building successful careers, acquiring wealth, earning prestige in society and so on. However, it is evident that these are temporary achievements, and while they do satisfy some of our desires, for many they do not necessarily lead to long-term inner happiness, or a sense of fulfilment. Some might experience a strong need for something more transcendent, a more permanent search, an inner voice that we often ignore. Maybe our purpose becomes clearer to us, when we dare to start listening to this inner voice, however soft it maybe.

To strengthen this inner voice, is to dare to listen to it more. It can help us discern the real from unreal, the just from the unjust... It is to strive to express the virtues such as compassion, love and beauty, in our lives, even if in the smallest of ways. It is the practice of raising ourselves towards our true potential as human beings, raising ourselves towards who we can, and who we are meant, to be.

Hence, when we start living philosophy, we engage with an inner battle, symbolically captured in the battle of the *Kurukshtera* between the *Pandavas* and the *Kaurava*. Perhaps we can understand the *Pandavas* as our virtues, archetypes such as Justice, Beauty, Goodness and Truth. The *Kauravas* are the temptations, the multiplicity of distracting voices, and the countless desires of the material self that are constantly shouting and pulling us in various directions. Living philosophy enables us to engage in this battle on a daily basis, and not run away from

it. We learn to make choices when at a crossroads; to actively choose to align our actions with the archetypes, rather than the desires; right over wrong, good over bad, just over unjust - even when it is not comfortable. It allows us to make difficult choices, to remain loyal to what we see as our own higher potential, more and more towards our purpose. Without this friction there can be no fire, without this inner battle there can be no growth. Through this inner battle, we emerge stronger, we emerge surer. And every time we fall, we learn to transform the failure into an opportunity for us to fight again.

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With it also comes the understanding that each person has his own battle to fight, his own *Kurukshtera*, his own journey. And yet, my study of philosophy demonstrates the ancient recognition that everyone and everything in the universe actually comes from the same common source. Why then, is there so much separation because of religion,

skin colour, wealth, etc.? While our expressions may be vastly different, isn't our source one? Don't we all come from the same "God", the same one Life? Aren't we One? Of course, the application of this is easier in theory than in practice, but reminding ourselves of this every time that we see separation can help us change our approach. It can help us bring more love, compassion and generosity.

My journey has helped me develop a strong direction, a focus, and a sense of purpose in my life. In this scattered world, which is filled with innumerable choices, distractions, voices, people and temptations it is easy to get pulled towards various directions. We think that keeping our options open, and avoiding commitments enables us to be free! But is this really freedom? Being a slave to our moods, to our emotions, to the external expectations and obligations – is this really freedom?

I have gradually learned that freedom is really about daring to choose and committing to something with a higher purpose, something which you truly want, to live your life in accordance with that. And slowly life becomes much simpler. Things fall into place. It is exactly like a circle; with a centre as the focal point, everything else falls into place, revolving around it. It is about decluttering life of the things that are not so essential, i.e. things that are temporary, transient, serve the ego, etc. This does not mean that we neglect or abandon these needs. It just means that we give priority to working towards a centre, around something more essential, something more permanent.

Over these last few years, I have learned to push so many boundaries. It has actually helped me to see that boundaries are self imposed; they are illusions that we can push ourselves beyond if we really want to. It has made me begin to wonder about all that is beyond the tangible, all that we cannot see, touch and feel, to develop this need to discover more and more. It also helps me recognise that there is something higher within me – higher than the physical, the emotions and the thoughts that I had identified with so much. We may think that we are our thoughts, but in reality when we learn to hear the inner voice, we realise that even our thoughts are temporary. This realisation and the attempt to practice it daily, helps to change my outlook to life. It helps me moderate my reactions to situations,

allows me to pause, to absorb. It allows me to see that I need not be a slave to my emotions and thoughts; that I have the power and the ability to direct them.

In this way, living philosophy gives hope, in a world of despair. In a world in which everyone thinks that there is no point being different, nothing can change. In a world in which everyone blames external circumstances, situations, politics, government, etc. we can look inwards to find that the real problem today may be within each of us. Perhaps it is in our inability to see that we have a higher purpose. Perhaps it is our inability to see that every human being, and everything else in this universe, is actually from the same source. It is with this realisation, and the decision to take the tiniest steps towards our inner potential to change ourselves from within, that we might begin to change our world today. Because, if I can change, others can, and will, as well. It develops the strong need to take a step towards the better - for you and for humanity.

I invite you to take a step towards Living Philosophy – embark on this beautiful journey of Life, with joy.

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