

# THEACROPOLITAN

*A Magazine on Philosophy, Culture & Volunteering*

## FEATURE

The Universe  
as an Answer

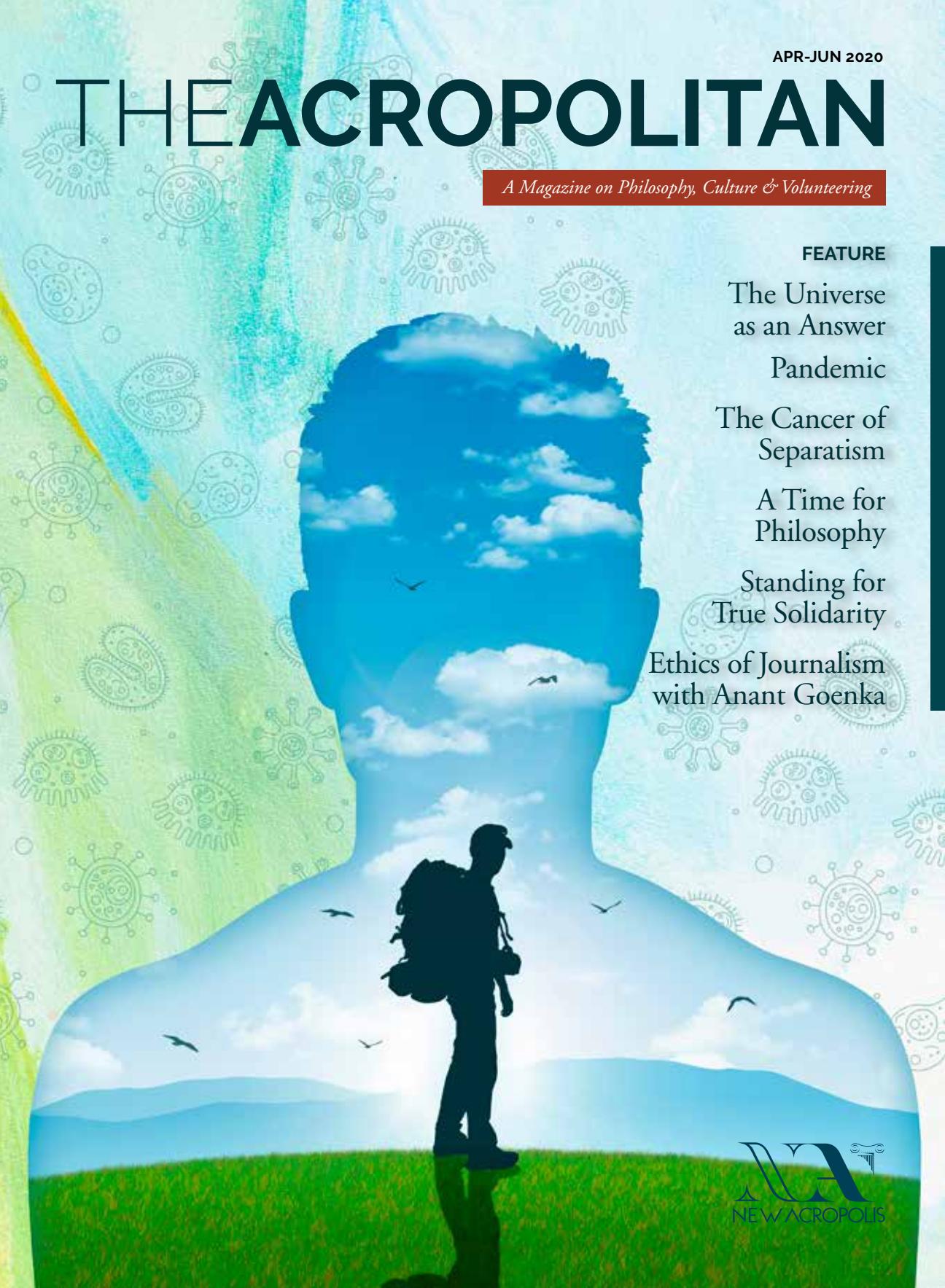
Pandemic

The Cancer of  
Separatism

A Time for  
Philosophy

Standing for  
True Solidarity

Ethics of Journalism  
with Anant Goenka





PHILOSOPHY  
CULTURE  
VOLUNTEERING

# THE ACROPOLITAN

In Ancient Greece, the Acropolis referred to the sacred centre, that lay higher than the rest of the city. It was a place of inspiration; a bridge that enabled citizens to connect to the divine, evoking the expression of the higher human virtues. Deriving inspiration from its purpose, The Acopolitan Magazine serves as a tribute to every citizen yearning for these higher principles in all aspects of Life: **Truth, Beauty, Justice, Goodness.**



**PHILOSOPHY** when practical, helps us to know and improve ourselves. It is a way of life, not an intellectual attitude, committed to the best aspirations of humanity.

**CULTURE** broadens our understanding of life, and fosters a spirit of mutual respect and solidarity, strengthening human dignity and facilitating harmonious coexistence.

**VOLUNTEERING** is the natural expression of a spirit of union with life and humanity, which manifests in the practice of values such as unselfishness, commitment and striving for the common good.

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**Editorial Department**  
Editor-in-Chief: Yaron Barzilay  
Editor: Harianto H Mehta  
Editorial Team: Manjula Nanavati, Sukesh Motwani, Malini Nair, Ashik Bhuta

**Publication & Production**  
Harianto H Mehta

**Design**  
Janki Shah, Neha Mehta,  
Sanjana Nanodkar

**New Acropolis  
Cultural Organization (India)**  
Yaron Barzilay  
National Director  
A-0 Connaught Mansions  
Opp. Colaba Post Office  
Colaba, Mumbai 400005  
Tel: +91 22 2216 3712  
Email: info@acropolis.org.in  
Web: [www.acropolis.org.in](http://www.acropolis.org.in)

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## FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

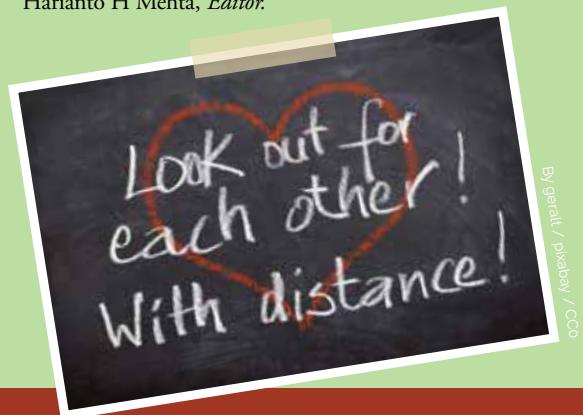
*Dear Reader,*

As we remain confined to our homes, as a result of the global pandemic, it is becoming increasingly clear that we will need to work together, in solidarity, to overcome the enormous challenge at hand. But let us recognize the full scope of the battle. While we fight the virus itself, perhaps even more dangerous than the loss of life, is the loss of our humanity that becomes evident when we collectively give in to the fear mongering and the panic that emerge from unethical dissemination of inaccurate information.

With the courage of a warrior, the sentiment of a poet, and the unwavering pursuit of a philosopher, now is the time to seek out real answers. Let us not satisfy ourselves by dealing with symptoms. Instead let us dare to DISCOVER the inner causes of the phenomena we encounter. Let us AWAKEN an authentic pursuit of Truth. Let us TRANSFORM ourselves collectively, to become new and better.

History beckons. It is a time for Philosophy, a sincere Love of Wisdom.

Harianto H Mehta, *Editor*



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Mr. Yaron Barzilay

# MESSAGE FROM OUR NATIONAL DIRECTOR

Dear Friend,

Along with most of the world, we are in almost complete isolation, as a result of the rapid spread of COVID-19. The world seems to have stopped for a while and people, as well as organizations and governments, are uncertain about the near future.

The scene is somewhat surreal, giving an apocalyptic feeling towards what is yet to come. There are some who report a growing interest in 'end-of-the-world' literature, films, doomsday theories and alike. Even if the world is really far from heading to complete disaster, it is interesting to examine, as some have already done, the root of the word "apocalypse". In its Greek origin, the meaning of the word included the idea of 'revelation'; something that might have been hidden, but is now exposed in broad daylight. As per this sense of the word, we are indeed somehow experiencing a kind of apocalypse.

It seems as if the virus is shaking the ground beneath the structures we have established and a little of the true nature of things is being revealed to us.

Many things that we might have taken for granted earlier, are already seen differently now; the possibility of flying from one place to another, the illusion that wealthy nations with leading economies serve its people well, the incompetence and blindness of certain leaders is clearly revealed, while others are real examples, sometimes even surprisingly, of nobility.

The meaning of boundaries between countries, and between social and economic classes, is highlighted a bit differently in the face of the invisible virus; for it, we are all equal. Nature reappears on the outskirts of cities after only a short period of lockdown, as if laughing at us, impressing upon us who really is the master here...

The quick change in our reality showcases different forms of responses; some respond with panic, some with complete apathy or denial; others manage to keep calm and even dare to act decisively.

Such circumstances also give rise to strange paradoxes, such as the term 'social distancing': for the sake of society, we maintain isolation from each other. The virus has rapidly spread across the globe and has led to complete separation between countries; paradoxically, it is our unprecedented ease of travel, across the planet, that has accelerated the need for isolation and separateness.

At this point of time we do not know to say how this crisis will develop, but it is clear that the world will be, at least slightly, different. Even if, as we all hope of course, we quickly overcome the impact of the virus, our perceptions will

A photograph of a person standing on a high mountain peak, looking out over a vast, rugged landscape. The sky is filled with soft, pastel-colored clouds. The person is seen from behind, wearing a dark jacket and shorts. The terrain is rocky and uneven, with patches of snow or ice on the slopes.

certainly not remain the same as before.

Since the response to the virus demands isolation, it is also possibly a time of revelation for the individual; a time of solitude, with a possibility of silence, the likes of which we couldn't easily have had before.

Philosophy is an art of living. Its aim is to see the good in things. It teaches us to pay attention to what really depends on us, and set it apart from what is ultimately not in our control. We cannot change the situation that we are in right now. But we can definitely learn from it, and discern between what should really matter to us, and what does not deserve to consume our time as it may have up until now. This is a time that permits, and even demands, real reflection. In such moments fear and panic easily spread. It is therefore an opportunity to discover the strength of our inner tranquility, based on the stability of our consciousness.

It is a good time to find the pleasure of paying attention to the little things; simple actions which in earlier days might have seemed like a waste of our precious time. In this sense, *what* exactly we do is not so important...what is much more important is, *how* we do it.

It is a good time to discover the power of concentration, the ability to deepen our thinking, to slow down a bit. It is a time to give real value to things, to real human virtues.

The current crisis will pass, as everything passes. Try using the time to invest in what is essential to you, in the permanent things. It's totally worth it.

As much as possible, stay safe and keep calm.

Yaron Barzilay.

Editor-in-Chief, The Acropolitan Magazine.

National Director, New Acropolis Cultural Organization (India).

# Standing for True Solidarity

By Trishya Screwvala

In many ways, the last decade can be considered a decade of protests - starting with the Arab Spring in 2010 and the Occupy Wallstreet Movement soon after, to the still ongoing clashes on the streets of Hong Kong, Venezuela's uprising against its leadership and the widespread protests against India's Citizenship Amendment Act, to name only a few that have occurred within the last year

itself. As the number of demonstrations increased almost to a state of permanent protest in some part of the world, what is noteworthy is that several of these protests witnessed equally passionate demonstrators on both sides, often leading to anger and violent clashes.



The very definition of protest is "a strong complaint expressing disagreement, disapproval or opposition". At times of civic discontent and confusion, many of us take to the streets - Because we feel we are standing up for what we believe is right, or because we feel it is important to make our voices heard, to validate our views that are also held by many others.

With smart phones, social media and other technology today, it has become easier than ever before to galvanize large numbers of people with a common viewpoint. So much so, that often the measure of the success of a protest today lies in the number of participants garnered than in actual results. But perhaps one of the biggest pitfalls of being able to rapidly organize such impulse-led

we must recognize that with this freedom comes responsibility. To exercise this liberty, we need discernment. The ability to voice any opinion without thought, verification or concern for its consequences can be dangerous, and we have seen its ramifications through social media trolling and fake news. Without a sincere pursuit of truth, the need to objectively examine the problem from both sides before fervently expressing subjective opinions with only a superficial understanding of the circumstances, can result in temporary solutions, and worse, create confusion and distrust.

With social media curating content we view daily to corroborate our already existing opinions, whether through Facebook's friend recommendations

# We are so busy contentiously arguing over what divides us that we are unable to see the commonalities that hold us together. And because we are so taken by our narrow personal perspectives, we fail to even recognize this blind spot.

protests, is the lack of investigation to really examine the situation holistically, and the inability to offer real solutions.

It is far easier to respond to a viral video urging you to join a gathering to express your viewpoint, than it is to think systemically about change. It is more convenient to stand in a crowd holding a sign shouting what should not be, than it is to stand for what is needed. Moreover, the very act of choosing a side, can easily allow us to fall into the illusion of seeing only two extreme and contrary approaches, rather than an altogether alternative narrative that actually considers the nuances of a situation with all the shades of grey in between.

While it is true that plurality of opinion and freedom of expression are fundamental criteria for progress,

based on common interests and backgrounds, or the narrowcasting of news information instead of broadcasting, it should be no surprise that we see a dramatic increase in extremism and intolerance in our world today. Harvard Professor Cass Sunstein reveals that the more we surround ourselves with people sharing the same view as us, the more extreme we tend to become. (2) As a result, we lose our very essential ability to empathize with others. We are so busy contentiously arguing over what divides us that we are unable to see the commonalities that hold us together. And because we are so taken by our narrow personal perspectives, we fail to even recognize this blind spot.

Is it therefore possible that our seemingly well-intentioned participation in demonstrations can actually contribute to more divisiveness? Can

dissent alone really offer a plausible way forward? Perhaps we need to look beyond the momentary self-satisfaction of joining a protest, where we feel we have acted productively and contributed towards a positive future, and instead recognize that in reality, when we protest, we are simply voicing an opinion.

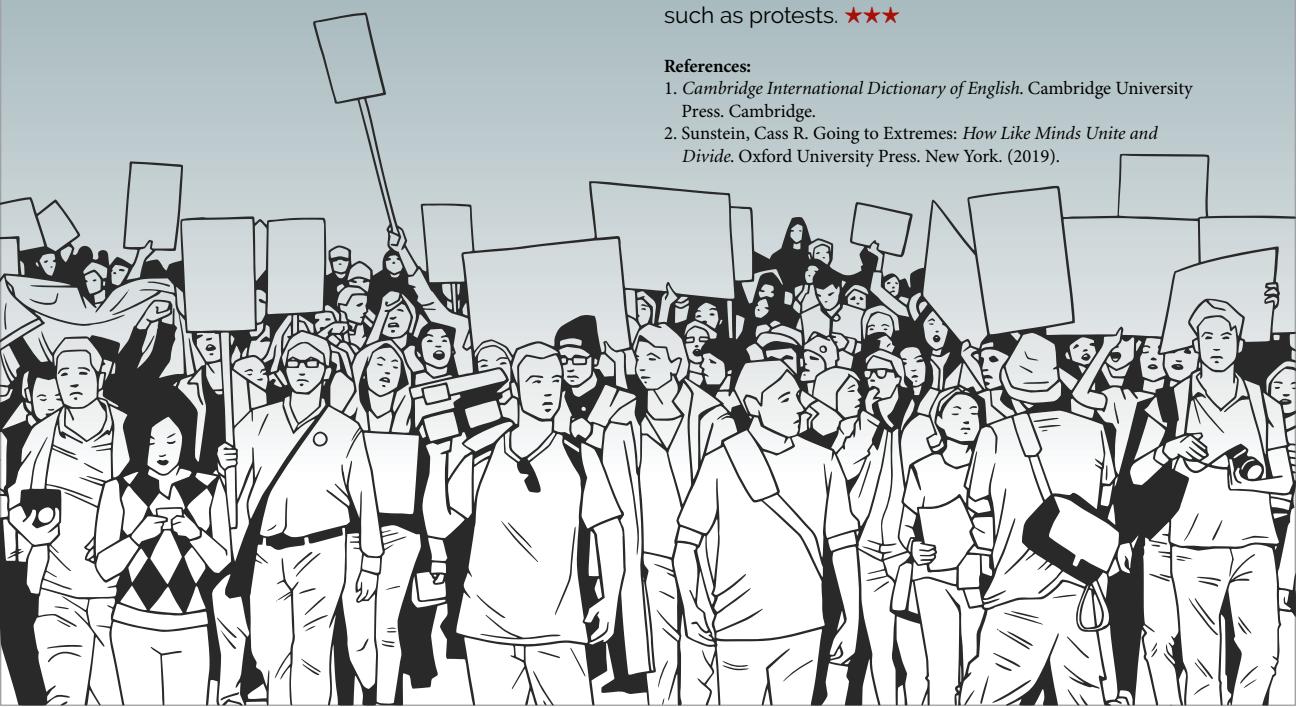
**Beyond our political inclinations, our religious backgrounds, or our genders, there lie far more essential and fundamental values that unite us. But to discover them, we need to look deeply within and discover what makes us human.**

Additionally, we need to carefully explore multiple perspectives in order to come closer to the truth, and ensure our actions are not motivated by our own personal interests or latent fears. It takes effort and investigation to truly consider opposing points of view, before rejecting them based on our impetuous assumptions. Can we learn to not just tolerate, but genuinely embrace alternative outlooks, while still remaining loyal to the common good? Rather than clutching onto our impassioned opinions, interests and backgrounds that we think bind us, perhaps we need to recognize that these seemingly shared realities can easily become blinders that only intensify separation.

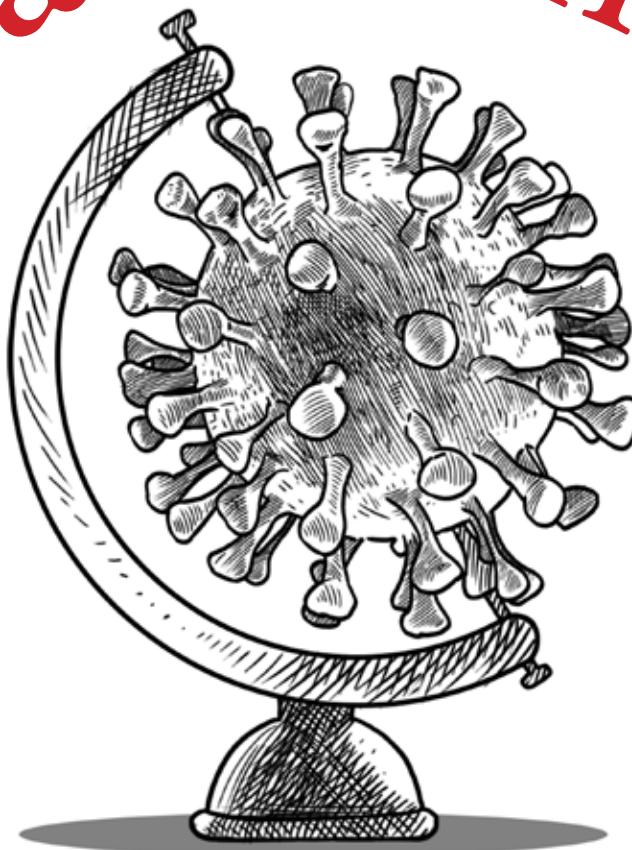
Beyond our political inclinations, our religious backgrounds, or our genders, there lie far more essential and fundamental values that unite us. But to discover them, we need to look deeply within and discover what makes us human: our search for happiness, our recognition of goodness, truth and beauty, our inherent nature to be generous and compassionate. And most importantly, the recognition that we are all part of a single interconnected web of life; that we are drops as well as the ocean, an individual human being, yet at the same time, intrinsically part of the ocean that we call Humanity. The strength, clarity and conviction that comes from this simple yet profound realization, is perhaps what can lead us towards true solidarity: a pursuit of truthful, sustainable and inclusive solutions, which we try so hard to come close to, each time we take part in collective expressions such as protests. ★★

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# Pandemic



*By Juan Manuel de Faramiñán Gilbert*

There are moments in history, turning points that we could interpret as junctures that change the meaning of life. This pandemic, generated by the Covid-19 virus (Corona Virus), which has spread throughout the planet, will surely generate radical change in our future habits. It would be a serious mistake not to become aware of the need to evaluate our future behaviour by extracting a teaching from this painful experience.

The dystopia seems to have been incarnated into our daily reality and in the film "Contagion", by Steven Soderbergh, released in 2011, starring Matt Damon, which relates, through fiction, the same reality that we are living today. It's strange that this film is based on a story published in 1981 by Dean Koontz. "The Eyes of Darkness" tells the story of an extremely deadly virus that emerges in a laboratory as a "powerful biological weapon" in the city of

Wuhan, which is called "Wuhan-400". It is curious that the Corona Virus has also emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan, capital of Hubei Province, and has spread its contagion, in many cases lethally, across the planet.

*This virus has shown us once again that the laws of nature are not to be played around with, and that every bad action has an equal and opposite bad reaction.*

I would like to say firstly that we are realising that the borders between States, for which so much blood has been spilled in defence of sterile nationalism, are now being violated by an invisible agent such as this virus. This has shown us that those borders do not exist and that the pandemic spreads without geographical, cultural or social considerations. We are all vulnerable without exception. At those same borders we have discriminated against human beings who, fleeing poverty, hunger and wars, have not been allowed to enter the fortress of Europe, as we consider ourselves superior to everyone else. This virus has shown us that we should have been more humane. Now it is us who are being persecuted by an invisible force that is confining and killing us.

Secondly, with the same arrogance with which we act when we look the other way in the face of the pain of others, we have not had the least bit of consideration for the deteriorating planet on which we live. We have polluted it, we have submerged it in plastic and rubbish, we have depleted its natural assets, we have burned the forests and we have laughed at climate change. This virus has shown us once again that the laws of nature are not to be played around with, and that every bad action has an equal and opposite bad reaction. For a virus that was probably born in some laboratory or through the recklessness of some human being, as a result of seeking food from living beings that we ourselves have contaminated, is spreading

across all continents, wreaking havoc on the most vulnerable human beings.

Thirdly, this pandemic is teaching us that everyone, without exception, should take the individual and collective responsibility that reminds us that the good of the other, is also our own good, and that what we have always possessed can vanish with the blink of an eye. This confinement to which we have all submitted to avoid the contagion, is opening our eyes to understand the importance of fraternal embrace. This isolation is therapeutic for us to learn to know ourselves in solitude and introspection. Also to value our environment, our family, our friends, our loved ones.

What conclusions can we draw from the distress of this pandemic?

Firstly, when the pandemic is over we will no longer be the same; our behaviour will have changed and that if it does not, we will have made another unforgivable mistake. The pain has to be a vehicle of consciousness, to realize that "we are all one", and that the pain of the other is also our pain. I cannot imagine what the world will be like after this pandemic, but I wish it to be better; that we have all learned not to stand for the borders that are really just geographical fiction, which we have seen fading away with an invisible enemy.



By Alexandra\_Koch / pixabay / CCO

Secondly, we will need to learn to care for and respect the planet we live on. By thinking that we are just lying on the planet's crust, revolving around the Sun, in our everyday life, during which our existence evolves, we are losing the notion

that we are living on a celestial body that revolves according to the laws of the universe. This forgetfulness has been very harmful because it has made us not only despise the health of Planet Earth, but excessively ambitious of dominating natural resources, we are also looking avidly at the other planets of the solar system and the asteroids. There seems to be no limit to our greed. We must realize that all this nonsense is paid for, that all these mistakes have a price that unfortunately today, we are paying with human lives.

How long will we need, to learn that "**the laws of the universe are not to be played around with**"?

Thirdly, locked up in our homes, which is what we must do to avoid the spread of a virus having an incredible speed of contagion, such as Covid-19, we have noticed many things that we have lost, including human contact. There is nothing more didactic than losing something, in order to value its lacking, and to realize that we have lived without realizing what we had. In the face of this pandemic we are obliged to communicate by virtual means and our embraces are also virtual, and so we once again miss the carnal embrace. When all this is over we should develop more fraternal ties and broaden our concepts of otherness, since no one is in complete seclusion, for we all need everyone in a

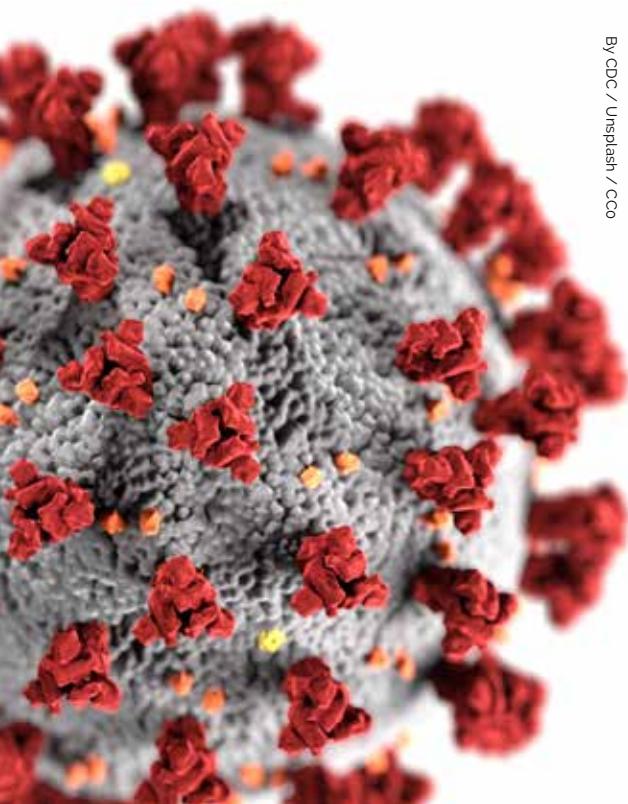
collective world, the global village. The materialistic and consumerist society that we have developed has forgotten individuals, and we relate to each other in economic terms. And so it has gone and goes: the virus too does not respect anyone and does not discriminate on the basis of social status, cultural or economic condition; everyone falls, without commiseration, under its yoke. In the future

*There is nothing more didactic than losing something, in order to value its lacking, and to realize that we have lived without realizing what we had.*

we are going to have to "develop a consciousness of co-responsibility" that allows us to work side by side; otherwise other even more lethal viruses are likely to return. The pain that this pandemic has produced should make us react.

These days, the work *The Plague* by Albert Camus, published in 1947, has once again been cited in numerous interventions and is becoming a redeeming metaphor that reminds us that an epidemic makes us reflect on ourselves, on our moral values and, especially, on time. Camus tells us: "Only one thing had changed for them: this time which, during the months of their exile, they would have liked to push forward so that it would go faster, and which they were still determined to speed up, even when they were already in sight of the town; then, as soon as the train began to brake, before stopping, they wanted on the contrary to slow time down and hold it in suspension."

In conclusion, this confinement in our homes, necessary and appropriate, is offering us another dimension and understanding of that which we call "time". Minute by minute we will be able to understand in our introspection the value of our hours and the importance of travelling together with other human beings, in the suggestive and interesting experience of this "journey of life" that we are on, with the rest of humanity, because as the wise men from the East remind us: "You, the Westerners, have the clocks; we, on the other hand, have the time." ★★



By cdc / unsplash / cco



# The Cancer of Separatism

**By Delia Steinberg Guzman**

*Former President of International Organization New Acropolis*



When we argued some years ago in our writings and lectures that a new Middle Ages was approaching, the prediction seemed exaggerated and almost fatalistic.

We also explained at the time that the repetition of historical cycles did not necessarily have to be seen as a calamity or regression, but as part of the natural course of life, which progresses gradually in a circular and spiral-shaped manner, touching similar points along the way, although at different levels of evolution.

Far from being fatalistic, let alone exaggerated, events today are proving the truth of those words. Now there are a great many authors and scholars who are talking about the phenomenon of a medieval period resulting from the last few centuries of our history, as a period of rest and recovery before a possible "renaissance".

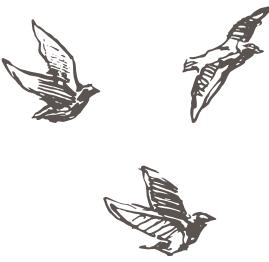


There are various characteristics that indicate the presence of an intermediate cycle for our civilization. But there is one which is particularly relevant today, due to the serious complications it may bring if we fail to realize its true magnitude. I am talking about separatism.

*As there have been many other Middle Ages before, and as human beings have emerged from all of them, we will also be reborn from this strange period that awaits us. But to be reborn an awakening is necessary, a firm mind that allows us to recognize the mistakes of the present in order to transform them into future successes.*

Beyond its political meanings – although these are also included – separatism is a force that infiltrates all human expressions with a tendency to dissolve everything that has been achieved until now. It leads one cell to oppose another and results in an extreme form of individualism, which encloses each person within themselves, within their own reality.

Terms like *freedom, independence, autonomy, free expression, self-determination* and so many others are no more than synonyms of the process of separatism. Today nations are divided into provinces and regions, which claim absolute



originality and self-sufficiency. But the process continues, and the regions and provinces continue to be divided up into smaller segments, based on any differences or distinctions that can be shown. The next step will be for one town to become separated from another, and even within the same families we will begin to notice cracks that will inevitably result in clashes between the generations.

When, as the culmination of this process, the individual becomes the ultimate unit and becomes "separated" from all the rest, what will happen then? We will be in the heart of the Middle Ages. Everyone will have to look out for themselves even in the simplest of difficulties, and all the achievements of civilization, founded on collective work and cooperation, will have disappeared.

*When, as the culmination of this process, the individual becomes the ultimate unit and becomes "separated" from all the rest, what will happen then? We will be in the heart of the Middle Ages.*

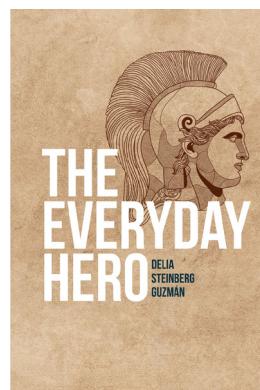


Perhaps, in the present, we may find it difficult to imagine a world without communications, where roads are cut off, where there is no fuel or energy; it may be almost impossible now to imagine large houses in the middle of the countryside and the great cities abandoned because they have become uninhabitable... But as separateness increases, all of these trends are on the rise.

However, as there have been many other Middle Ages before, and as human beings have emerged from all of them, we will also be reborn from this strange period that awaits us. But to be reborn an awakening is necessary, a firm mind that allows us to recognize the mistakes of the present in order to transform them into future successes.

The human being is a social being. The family, the village or town, the Earth that witnessed our birth all give rise to feelings of affection that cannot be erased from human nature. Those bonds just need to be strengthened in a healthy way. It is enough to remove the parasites from this plant of civilization, so that the new Middle Ages can pass over us like a fleeting dream and, after that brief hour of rest, the dawn of a new world can re-emerge, powerful and radiant.

New and therefore better. ★★



This article is an excerpt from a book called *The Everyday Hero*, a collection of articles by Delia Steinberg Guzman, philosopher, musician, writer, and educator. To get your copy of *The Everyday Hero*, please order at <https://www.amazon.in/Everyday-Hero-Delia-Steinberg-Guzman/dp/8192019365/> or write to us at [info@acropolis.org.in](mailto:info@acropolis.org.in)

COVER FEATURE

# The Universe as an Answer

**By Prof. Jorge Angel Livraga**  
*Founder of International Organization New Acropolis*

This article is a transcript of a lecture given by the author in Madrid in January 1976.

We often speak about the stars, the planets, the animals, the sky, the Earth, water or snow and we forget the real sense and meaning of the word *Universe*. Man asks himself questions about the whole of Nature, of which he himself is a part, but he tends to lose the central idea to which it refers.

'Universe' means that which is going in a single direction, so what we must discover is where it is going. This was perhaps one of the first approaches that humanity had. All the ancient civilisations asked themselves, through their religions, their metaphysics and their philosophies, where the universe is going and why; but the new materialistic-type ways of seeing things, especially in the post-Cartesian age, present us with a different point of view, and then man begins to analyse the characteristics of the universe, its size, form and weight.

Man claims to know the universe, because he has given names to the stars and measured the distance from the Earth to the Moon; or because he knows the list of chemical elements and the characteristics of the physical forces, and yet, in that detailed kind of knowledge, although there has been a specialisation of knowledge in each of the areas, these areas have become increasingly separate from one another.

In mineralogy, for example, we are taught the different characteristics of the rocks and the orogenic movements that have brought about changes to the Earth's surface; but we are not taught about the fundamental meaning of material things.

Let us suppose that we pick up any object and drop it suddenly; we will see that it falls and always looks for the lowest place; there is always a natural attraction between this little piece of matter and that big piece of matter where we are. This material attraction is untiring.

What can we extract, then, from the nature of the mineral world? We can extract a tenacity, a search for destiny; and which of us can say that we share with the stones that search for destiny? In general, when we meet a difficulty, we tend to fight it for a while, and if the difficulty does not give way, we give way. The things of Nature, the stones, for example, have the tenacity of being beyond time and of always looking for their final destination.



Our children are taught the different characteristics of plants, about the process of photosynthesis, but it is not mentioned that, beyond every phenomenon of light absorption and conversion into energy, exists the capacity of the plant to know how to wait and to know how to grow. A little seed, buried in the earth in winter, under the snow, patiently awaits the advent of spring. When it arrives, that little seed rises up and seeks the air and the sun. It is another teaching of tenacity, of verticality and from a philosophical point of view, we are interested in the final meaning of the action of things.

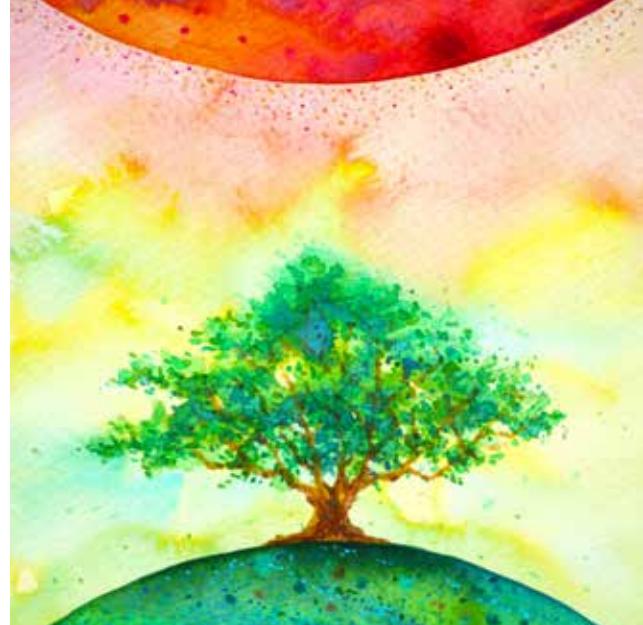
We also have water; wherever we pour it, water will run off in search of the sea and there, in the sea, it evaporates, rises up again, condenses and becomes part of a great cycle again. The universe has a purpose.

Obviously, in the new characteristics of the recent centuries, alienated by material things, with a psychology of production and consumption, Man has forgotten the natural elements and how to interpret them. The ancients did not ask themselves so efficiently, perhaps, about the distance between the Earth and the Moon, but they tried to understand what the Moon signifies in the Universe. Through ancient sciences like astrology and others, they tried to interpret the natural phenomena and see in what way they were connected with this phenomenon which is called Man. And that gave the man of antiquity the sensation of being accompanied by intelligent beings, and of being himself an intelligent being.

*A little seed, buried in the earth in winter, under the snow, patiently awaits the advent of spring. When it arrives, that little seed rises up and seeks the air and the sun. It is another teaching of tenacity, of verticality and from a philosophical point of view, we are interested in the final meaning of the action of things.*

Our present problem is that we feel isolated in the midst of the universe, in other words, since we are so much in contact with artificial elements, we have lost the ability to seek a purpose in things, and the dramatic part of this is that we have lost the possibility of finding a purpose in our own lives. As we live only from instant to instant, we have lost a teleological sense of life, of our ancestral roots and of the purpose that life has. And in this way we become beings of a moment, subject to time, feeling certain that we have been created by chance and that we are going to disappear at any moment; and this subconscious thought overwhelms us and damages us. Instead of trying to interpret Nature, we try to create a series of intermediary elements which are absolutely artificial.

The leaves of trees have their respiratory pores on the lower part; why not on the upper part? Simply because the dust would cover them. By being on the lower part, they are saved and can breathe. Is this chance?



Is it chance that the colour of butterflies' wings blends in with the flowers and the foliage so that the birds cannot catch them? Is it chance that the tips of owls' wings are smooth, so that they do not make any noise in their nocturnal flight and are thus able to catch the rabbits by surprise? Is it chance that those rodents have their ears pointing backwards, so they can capture the slightest sound of any predators that might be coming in their pursuit? Is it the number of colours into which the spectrum is divided when it is touched by white light also chance? Is the way in which we classify sounds also by chance?

It is obvious that the entire universe is co-ordinated in such a way that it has a wholeness about it, a kind of pyramidal sense of existence, where things, even though they are multiple, are going in search of a single end; they are all going towards the encounter of a single thing and they are all governed by a single intelligence.

In the Second World War, aviators understood that it was good to fly their planes in the V formation, whereby the plane at the front is replaced from time to time by those at the back; it has been demonstrated that this increases the speed of the squadron. Ducks and geese fly all together in the form of a great V, which works in such a way that the strongest is the one which is in the middle and the others are benefited by its slipstream.

*Our present problem is that we feel isolated in the midst of the universe, in other words, since we are so much in contact with artificial elements, we have lost the ability to seek a purpose in things, and the dramatic part of this is that we have lost the possibility of finding a purpose in our own lives.*

We cannot think that all of this happens by chance. It took man centuries to be able to understand it. We could give many examples showing how nature is designed. We cannot assert that the sum of all these incidents is mere chance, on the contrary, we have to recognise that the universal intelligence has planned everything. And if we accept this universal planning, we would have to ask ourselves why, for what purpose? It is inconceivable that everything is planned for no reason, it is more logical to think that it has been designed for a purpose; and if it has been designed, it is good to try to discover what answer the universe can give us, for what purpose it was designed, where we are all headed, where we come from and where we are going.

There are seven principles or seven fundamental laws, in accordance with the natural divisions of the whole universe.

1. The first principle, the highest of all the principles



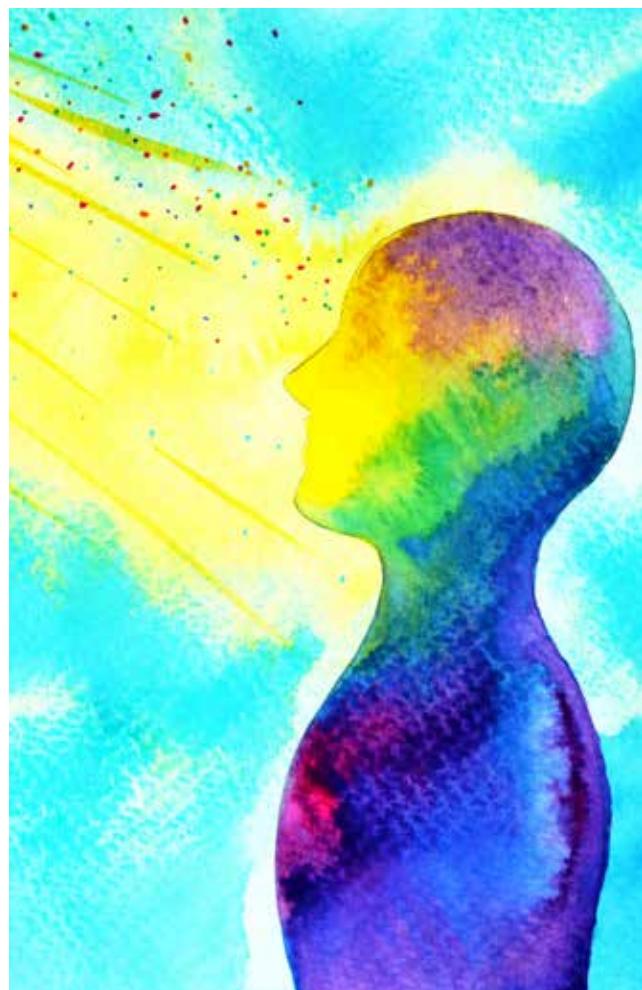
of Nature, is the principle of unity. The whole of Nature is co-ordinated, in other words, it forms a vital unity and nothing is excluded from it. When things are alive, they do not destroy others, but make possible the life of all. When the wolf pursues the deer on the steppe, it does not catch the youngest, but the oldest, the sick one, the one which could transmit its illness to the rest of the herd. In other words, even what seem to us to be acts of destruction, what might seem to be acts of cruelty, are made in such a way that the species can be perpetuated.

*We can be equivalent, but not equal; we can be similar, but not equal; and that does not separate or divide, it does not destroy human beings; it enriches them, like a mosaic of different colours which can have similar tones, but are never exactly the same. The concept of equality is a human invention; in Nature equality does not exist.*

There are no doubts in Nature, no dialogues of oppositions. Everything is given perfect expression and is going in a single direction.

2. The second principle is that of illumination; all things in Nature have that principle, whether it is a physical or a spiritual illumination. The realities exist, but they need an intellectual or spiritual light to enable us to distinguish them, and when we sometimes say that there are no truths, that there is nothing on which we can rely, that we are alone, it is because we are in darkness and we need to rediscover the principle of illumination.

3. This principle brings as a consequence the third one, which is differentiation. All things in Nature are differentiated. There are no two things that are absolutely equal, or the same. This principle exists even though sometimes we may not see it; all things are different; even the grains of sand that we step on on the beach and that seem to be all the same are not the same. If we look at them attentively with a magnifying glass, we will see that each of them has its little difference, its little characteristic. Hence, we have to be careful when using the words *sameness* or *equality*. We can be equivalent, but not equal; we can be similar, but not equal; and that does not separate or divide, it does not destroy human beings; it enriches them, like a mosaic of different colours which can have similar tones, but are never exactly the same. The concept of equality is a human invention; in Nature equality does not exist.



4. The fourth principle is the principle of organisation. Things are organised; we all see a tree, a solid trunk that rises above the earth and supports a tree-top full of branches and birds' nests; but we do not see another inverse tree-top which lies beneath the earth and which also with its wooden branches supports all the rest and sinks deep into the earth; and although it has no birds, it has worms and insects, and nourishes everything. In other words, everything is perfectly organised, everything is designed in such a way that there is support and cooperation between one thing and another. And the mistakes we humans tend to make are due to a lack of organisation.



Organisation is not a massification, it is not the imposition of some people over others; organisation is supportiveness. The hands are opposite and yet they organise themselves to pick something up; if we had the two hands on the same side, we would have difficulty in picking anything up. So, it is necessary to recognise this principle of organisation, even when we are opposed in something. This principle allows us all to work together, without ceasing to be who we are; this is something we should apply in our lives, in the here and now.

5. There is a fifth principle, the principle of causality: all things are the cause of something that follows them and the effect of what went before them, all of us descend from something and give rise to something; anything, taken at any point, is the result of something and the cause of something else, even apparently inanimate things. Nothing is only a cause or only an effect, they are linked together. From day comes night, from night comes day.

*There are no doubts in Nature, no dialogues of oppositions. Everything is given perfect expression and is going in a single direction.*

6. The sixth principle, that of vitality, tells us that all things are alive. Absolutely everything. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>, people used to speak about living beings and inanimate objects. Still today, due to inertia, we continue to repeat this because we say that something is alive when it moves or when it flies or when it grows. Since the beginning of the world things have not only been alive when they act, they are also alive when they resist. All things are in constant movement, even if we cannot see the molecules or the atoms revolving in the air, which make up our hands, our bones. Everything is penetrated by vitality; this vitality which in the East is called "prana", a life that enters into all things, that never stops, so that even the things which we call dead are not dead, they have simply changed condition, shape, or way of living.

7. Finally we have the principle of periodicity. Since we were born we have noticed that in Nature there is an alternation between night and day, summer and winter, and so many other states which in this way oppose one another and

alternate with one another; and yet, we do not realise - until we read Plato, until someone teaches us or until we ourselves awaken to that reality - that we, too, are within that periodicity. All these cycles include a great cycle which we call human life. But why stop there? Why not understand that this human life is a short day of being awake within a great life? That after this physical life there is a spiritual life and that it is like a dream, and that then we will have a physical life and a spiritual life.

The law of cycles embraces all things and never stops, everything is cyclic: the planets revolve cyclically in the sky, and the tiny particles also move within the atoms.

This periodicity allows life to be continuous and pulsating. We have to try to take from Nature what is not easily destructible. We have to look after something, not only our physical part, but the other parts, too. Because, to what extent do we look after our psychological part? To what extent do we give food to our mind, every day? To what extent do we have spiritual food? We have to look after our dreams. We have reached such a point of materiality that we take care that a jug or a car does not get broken, but what about a dream, a hope, an effort? What happens with the crystal birds of our dreams when they are broken? They are smashed to pieces and injure our hands.

We have to have the courage to pulverise our broken dreams, and with that glass dust of our dreams, to create new birds. It is time that we understood that we do not just have to drag ourselves through the world as if we were tortoises or snakes, but we have to learn to fly with the power of wings.

Philosophy is not mere speculation; it is not to sit in a corner and watch life pass by, nor is it a discipline of sorrows and withdrawal. Philosophy is to have a strong attitude in front of life, it is to understand the spirit of things, it is to be able to conquer the fear within ourselves, to conquer death, to be able to connect with others, with the deeper part of everyone. Because we do not see each other; sometimes it is said that when Man dies, he passes into the invisible world; however, Man is always invisible; he is behind the things that he does, behind his own body, his own words, his own acts. Man is a great question, a great enigma.

The answer lies in this very universe in which we live. It is written on the walls of history and on the walls of this universe that surrounds us. We simply have to learn to read it. It is a natural attitude; it is not against any creed or statement. It is to return to Nature.

We have discernment and yet we lack it in many things; who wants a car that only works from time to time? No one. And yet we accept ideas that are sometimes good and other times not, principles that apply sometimes and sometimes



not, honesty which applies sometimes and sometimes not. We have to go back to having that common sense that we use on the physical level. In the spiritual part we have to go back to requiring from ourselves, from the world around us, absolute values that are easy to understand, to handle, to assimilate, that allow us to have an exact understanding of the universe.

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We need a new science, a science that will move away from the vice of vested interests, a science in which there is no sense of violence. We need art that will allow us to be united once more with beauty, which is not based on anguish, but on true investigation. We need a politics that can lead men to live together in harmony and to be elevated, rather than leading us into conflicts or artificial coexistence. We need, in short, a New World. But this world already exists: it is the universe itself, it is Nature. The only thing we have to do is to live intensely the moments which destiny has offered us. To be like a key which is inserted into the lock of the universe and springs open the door of history, to pass to another dimension, to pass into that world which is awaiting us, that world which must be not only new, but better. ★★



# A Time for *Philosophy*

By Yaron Barzilay

According to legend the word Philosophy can be attributed to Pythagoras who spoke of himself as a philosopher, a lover of wisdom, rather than a Wise man as he had been called by others. Of course, the word Philo-Sophy, the Love of Wisdom, does not give Pythagoras any innovation rights over the concept; there always were, and are, philosophers in all times, and in all places. The quest for truth and wisdom can be found, in one way or another, across all civilizations, in numerous and varied expressions.

The fundamental questions of 'who am I?', 'where have we come from?', and 'where are we going?' have kept our interest for thousands of years, along with a constant wonder about Life, Nature and the great Universe. Some may consider these questions as naive or outdated, others as existential and everlasting; but perhaps they have always

been present in the background - precisely because they are fundamentals...

It is not too difficult to explain that Philosophy is a combination of Philo - Love - and Sophy - Wisdom. Hence Philosophy simply means the Love of Wisdom. However, it is easy to let the profound meaning of these words escape us; they have a great significance and at the same time, they are quite elusive.

To be a philosopher is not simply to learn philosophy as profession, or as a hobby; it is to Live philosophically... It is a way of life and a certain state of mind and action.

How shall we imagine, for example, the image of a wise man or wise woman? Would they simply be knowledgeable people, intellectuals? Or would they be examples of living in complete harmony



with some higher order of life, with the laws that govern nature? Do we not imagine such a man or woman as perfect examples of goodness, justice, truth and beauty?

Aren't such individuals often conceived of as those who have managed to overcome the illusion of separateness, overcome their own egos, channeling to others something of an extraordinary quality that we call Wisdom? Several traditions refer to it as the Cosmic Mind, the higher intelligence that governs the whole Universe. Even the term Cosmos itself suggests that the universe is an integration of Chaos and Theos, Divine Wisdom.

As extraordinary and elusive as Wisdom may be, the idea of being a Philosopher indicates the possibility of forming some kind of relationship with it, some kind of recognition of it, even though it can only lead one to acknowledge one's own ignorance of the Real.

The possibility of recognizing Wisdom indicates a purpose and direction, a possible evolution of consciousness, even a duty and Dharma. It can change everything in the way we perceive ourselves and the others...

To conceive but a spark, beyond the visible phenomena of Life-Nature-Cosmos, of the extraordinary intelligence, is like the sense of awaking from a mindless sleep. It is to move away from the speculative plane of beliefs and opinions, to a vertical axis of observation...from the illusion of the many, towards the profound richness of One Life.

As per the ancient tradition of India, it is the Manas - the pure mental - rather than Kama-Manas - the calculative mind - that has the capacity of discernment - Viveka. To discern between right and wrong, the real and the unreal, doesn't simply come from following a manual or scripture. It depends on a certain elevation of the mind, raising the consciousness above the manifest self, the persona, the mask of our lower identity. It is a quality of the soul, the individual self. It is from there that we may begin to grasp that, what is expressed as a phenomenon outside, has an inner cause, not less real than the visible one. It is in this form of inner life that philosophy may be found; the Love towards Wisdom.

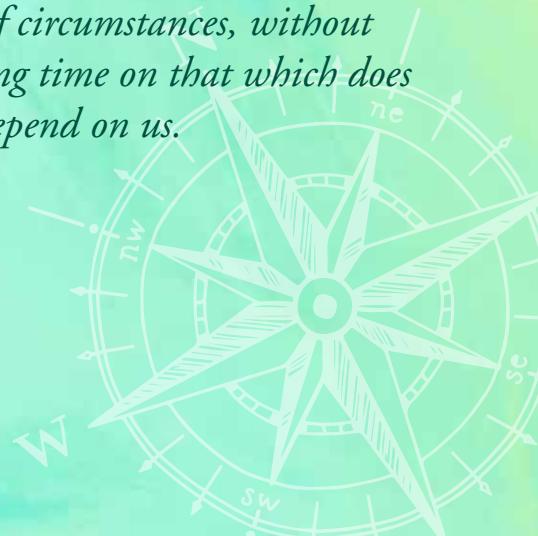
In this regard, we may speak of philosophy as a state of mind, and even more, as a state of awakening of the soul towards the higher, the Good.

To be a philosopher is to act with common sense, not dimmed by opinion and the constant dance of outer forms. It is to become able to maintain calmness, and a center, in the middle of a storm - the drowsiness caused by temptations or the yearning for comfort.

To be a philosopher is to develop an inner compass so important in today's world. It is to focus on what we can do, how to act in the face of circumstances, without wasting time on that which does not depend on us. It is to always keep hope and imagination directed towards the good; not based on wishful thinking, but rather, on the confidence of being part of something far greater, and because there is love and there is wisdom.

If you are a philosopher, if your heart and mind already know, already yearn, you have a wonderful gift. But know that it is also a duty, because today, more than ever before, there is a great need of Philosophy! ★★

*To be a philosopher is to develop an inner compass so important in today's world. It is to focus on what we can do, how to act in the face of circumstances, without wasting time on that which does not depend on us.*



# On the Ethics of Journalism with Anant Goenka

By Manjula Nanavati

Image Courtesy: Anant Goenka



What is the primary ethical obligation of the press? Is it not to seek the truth, actual facts, and to present it as objectively as possible? Yet, the facts alone are not the whole truth. Given the facts, there is a need to apprehend context, connect the dots, discern patterns, and collate them into statements of cause and effect using the highest standards of ethics. Can we ask this of journalists and newspapers? Must we not demand from them professional ethics, diligent verification of facts, training in methodology, and an unswerving loyalty to the truth?

The Journalist's classical role has been to inform citizens, not entertain them. Yet today the lines are blurring. The business of journalism, sensationalism and Fake News dangerously sways public opinion, and society stands the risk of being overtaken by fiction, resulting in distorted perceptions of reality.

Mindful of our own opinions and prejudices, we must cultivate the discernment that allows us to recognize Justice and Truth; we must dismiss agendas or biased points of view, and strive for objective and healthy public debate when faced with published news.

The Acopolitan Magazine met with Anant Goenka, executive director of the Indian Express Group, one of India's most widely read and respected newspapers. It is also amongst the world's largest digital news media groups reaching well over 148 million unique users a month in 6 languages around the world. Known for its accurate reporting and courage to call the powerful to account, it builds on an 85 year history of globally recognized investigative journalism that has shaped public discourse and national policy.

Seeking to investigate the role of newspapers and journalism and their crucial influence on society, here are excerpts from our conversation.

**THE ACROPOLITAN:** Journalism plays many important roles that influence society. What do you consider the most vital?

**ANANT GOENKA:** To monitor the powerful, to give a voice of the voiceless, to provide citizen with the information they need to make informed decisions, to understand change, but above all the pursuit of truth, no matter what the cost.

Yet, whenever we say we want to respect the truth, the question that has been argued and debated for years now is, "Whose truth?" For example, in any war you've got 2 truths coming at you. In the polarized world we live in, every freedom fighter is someone else's terrorist. So, there can be conflicting truths. In practical terms, what this means is the same event would have two completely different headlines depending on the readership that the paper was targeting.

The challenge really is to find a Universal Truth. Can we look at a single incident or event objectively, from so many angles that it is printed as the same front page for so many different audiences? That would be a great role and service to society. But I'm also saying that it has not happened, and perhaps is not possible. What is possible is to sign on to a fierce, unshakable commitment to fairness and accuracy, to search without fear or favor, and to strive to get as many disparate voices as we can.

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**TA:** What would be the challenge to accomplish that? The economics?

**ANANT:** Yes sure, the economic is one. If no one is reading the newspaper then what's the point? And that's the biggest problem of good and honest objective journalism. Often you end up becoming some sort of spam, or some kind of academic journal that just loses that engaged audience that you need, to make it sustainable. If I don't engage the audience, then what really is the point of what I'm doing?

Let's take the other extreme. Arguably, what the largest news channels are purveying today is current affairs pornography. And even though I wouldn't be able to sleep at night if I was putting out stuff like that, it's working, and it is great business, because fear sells, blood sells, and emotions sell. But the belief is that in a growing democracy, as young and richly diverse as ours, there will be readers, audiences, citizens, who will value the truth in all its complexity; enough to want to pay for it.

**TA:** Does our news then reflect our society?

**ANANT:** Arguably yes. But there is no one newspaper for all of society. There are several different newspapers, some more responsible, some less. Each reflects a different but very real part of society.

*This is the danger that our industry faces: we just shut ourselves off into silos and micro silos with the result that there's no understanding of the larger picture at all.*

**TA:** If newspapers do not honor their role as guardians of truth then society stands to be overtaken by fantasy, fraud and fiction. How do you draw the lines between verifiable facts to encourage public discourse, and shaping community opinion?

**ANANT:** We are very particular about dividing the sections of the paper into fact and opinion. The Indian Express has only 2 opinion pages, and the rest of the paper is literally just reporting of facts. And actually, we are quite militant about presenting a counter opinion as well, so as to allow the reader to come to his own decision. But we expend an inordinate amount of time and effort before we express an opinion. That's how we do it, but I'm very aware that reportage of objective facts is becoming less and less sexy as a format, because people want to feel that they are part of a larger community with whom they are in complete agreement, so newspapers and channels target their audience and hammer away.

I think this is the danger that our industry faces: we just shut ourselves off into silos and micro silos with the result that there's no understanding of the larger picture at all. In today's digital world you're raising a generation of specialists, people who are fabulous in the fields of their interest. But there are almost no generalists, who have a broad, horizontal understanding of everything. It's a very large statement to make, and I don't know whether I can really prove it. But that's the sense I get.

The other big concern is that you've got algorithmically curated news and news feeds. No matter how 'responsibly' the algorithm is designed to throw in the opposite point of view, you are just seeing so much content that agrees with your worldview that you are just going to skip everything else.

And this is the reality. Every time you share an article, you do so because it agrees with your view, because you like what you've read, because you believe it, and you want other people to believe it. So anything that goes viral, even if complete falsehood, complete rubbish, the fact is that it is going viral. I always say there is some truth in that virality.

Therefore, the challenge of good journalism is: can our story telling and investigation break through these silos and beat these algorithms?



**TA:** Yes, it's extremely frustrating, to know that you're consuming all this information, but don't have any ability to judge whether it is true or not. And even if you're reading it mindfully, with a grain of salt, what happens is that when you read enough of it, you already indoctrinate yourself to it. So, in this digital age of citizen-journalism, where everybody is their own editor and circulation manager, what are the citizen's responsibilities?

**ANANT:** I think readers have to be very conscious about this. When they share stuff, when they read stuff, they have to make the additional effort of stepping out of the curated newsfeeds and look for other perspectives.



Image Courtesy: Arant Goenka

**TA:** But this is not going to happen by itself. What can the industry do to educate the public and cultivate the professionalism and integrity that journalism must provide?

**ANANT:** I think it is happening. There is already a deep awareness of fake news. People recognize that they can't trust everything they read on WhatsApp. And then you have platforms like Google and Facebook investing in the idea of educating the reader about verifiable credible sources. I have been engaged with both Google and Facebook on what they call the Truth Project, to actually put a blue tick on articles to clarify them as having been verified. So if an article is put out by an anonymous user, at least the reader is made aware that there is nobody who is claiming ownership of that content and therefore it could be motivated. Closer home, there are prime-time television shows that address news items that have gone viral, but separate what is actually true, from the false.

As a parent, I also feel that maybe early in school is the place to begin; critical skills, like the introduction to accepting those you disagree with, are always first learned in the sandpit or on the playground.

I think this is a tough game, but the effort is happening. Though I do believe that it is finally your responsibility to decide what kind of journalism you want to follow.

*Do not sensationalise. Be fair. The idea is not to take somebody down. The idea is to put the facts out. And then it's the government machinery, police and regulators' job to take action on it.*

**TA:** Journalism as a profession is losing its lustre to accusations of prejudice and bribery. The institution does not have a universal code of ethics like doctors and lawyers pledge to follow. How do you ensure that your reporters are adhering to the high standards we have spoken of?

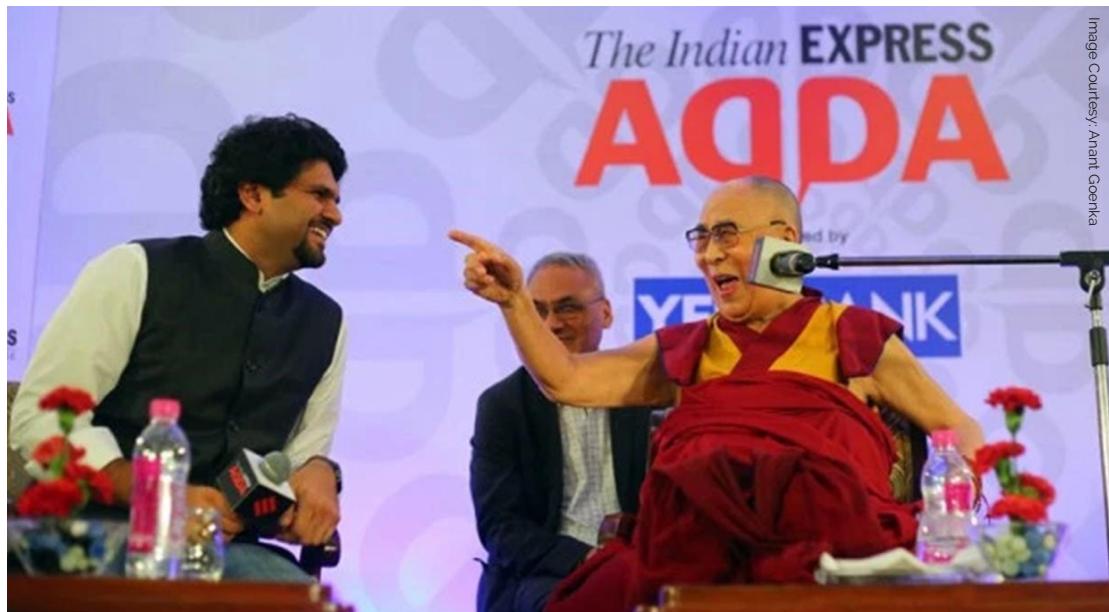
**ANANT:** No, we don't have an institutional oath. It really depends on each brand. But at Indian Express we have a 6-month training program and honesty, integrity and ethics are a big part of it. The intention behind our code of ethics is to find the truth, to get the facts correctly, and get all sides of a story. In bringing to account whoever needs to be brought to account, we give enough opportunity (usually 48 hours), for the person to respond. Do not sensationalise. Be fair. The idea is not to take somebody down. The idea is to put the facts out. And then it's the government machinery, police and regulators' job to take action on it.

*The pursuit of truth, the idea that this is what you should know, and here are all the aspects about it that you should know.*

We are not in the news business...we are in the journalism business. We tell others what's wrong and ask them to believe that what we have written is fair and accurate. So we better hold ourselves to the same standards as we hold others. That's why we have a Corrections Editor and we take our mistakes very, very seriously.

**TA:** This can be a vision of what journalism can be about...

**ANANT:** Yes of course. The pursuit of truth, the idea that *this* is what you should know, and here are *all* the aspects about it that you should know. If you do it consistently, over a long enough period of time, our hope and prayer is that you will be recognized as the company or the brand to trust - enough to attract the audience that is seeking that. And that audience, in spite of all the fake news, will keep growing; those who want to understand all angles and appreciate the huge effort that has been invested in the depth of this pursuit. And I see this optimistically, as an opportunity. Because there are people like you, who are disillusioned, and hold news brands to a higher standard than most do. They have no option but to come to news institutions like us. And the Express's growth in print and digital over the past 8 years is a very heartening testimony of this trend. This is what keeps us on our toes and makes us work harder, setting off a virtuous cycle. At least, that's the hope. ★★★



# Daring to Live as a Warrior

By Vineet Lalan

In various ancient civilizations, we find the Archetype of the Warrior as an inspiration for human beings to overcome the challenges of life. Today, most of us are not physically engaged on battlefields, as warriors fighting with swords and spears, with our lives on the line. Nevertheless, the challenges we face in our day-to-day lives are our battlefields, difficult and complex to overcome, our just and noble causes. Almost every day, we face ethical dilemmas; we struggle between our selfish tendency and altruistic nature, and encounter the difficulty of leading ourselves against our vices and limitations. Emerging victorious in these battles is difficult, perhaps even rare. But usually we don't even like to face the challenges as doing so would involve pain and suffering, pushing us out of our comfort zone. But why are we here as human beings, if not to grow by overcoming such challenges? The glory of being human perhaps lies in constantly overcoming

obstacles and pushing beyond our limitations to realise what we might be truly capable of.

It is worth taking inspiration from a historical figure, Spartan Warrior-King Leonidas, who showed the world what it really means to be a Warrior. Born in 540BC, Leonidas is best known for his leadership of 300 Spartan warriors, at the Battle of Thermopylae in defence against a vast invading Persian Army. In exchange for submitting to the will of the Persian Emperor, Leonidas was promised Earth and Water for the survival of his people. However, choosing instead to preserve the dignity and freedom of his people, he heroically led the insignificant Spartan army against impossible odds and although he lost the battle, and his life, he demonstrated a victory of the human spirit, and he forged his place on the leaves of history. And this is a wonderful example for us. Our daily challenges, no matter how small in



Leonidas at Thermopylae by Jacques-Louis David

File:Leonidas en las Termópilas, por Jacques-Louis David.jpg . Wikimedia Commons, 114 March 2020

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comparison, are our great battles; be it the struggle to make a living, to get along with others, to work with discipline and order, or even to find and follow a purpose of life. How might we emerge victorious in these battles, with the honour and values of a warrior?

What is a Warrior? Never fighting for the sake of a fight, a Warrior fights for principles, for just and difficult causes. Across traditions, the warrior's code of conduct consists of virtues like Courage, Righteousness, Justice, Benevolence, and Duty. A warrior aspires to live, and dares to die, for Truth, loyal to his ethical code regardless of the severity of circumstances. Rather than escape from an obstacle or an enemy a warrior penetrates through, transforming challenges into opportunities to overcome and grow, transcending what appear to be limitations. One might even say that a warrior is unafraid of defeat as long as he fights with courage to honour the just cause at hand thereby realizing his true potential. His victory therefore lies not in the result of the battle, but in his approach and his attitude to facing challenges, not as a victim, but as an adventurer seeking the horizons that lie beyond the known world.

The lesson we can learn from Leonidas is to disallow fragility when we are faced with the inevitable challenges of life. There are a great variety of expressions of fragility: laziness, procrastination, fear, anxiety, etc. Rather than looking at the circumstances as opportunities for growth, we look for ways to escape and avoid them by running away. Are we able to stand for truth in our actions and choices, in the way that we conduct ourselves, despite fear or discomfort? Many a times, we submit to our circumstances without making any effort to rise above them, hoping to somehow survive, and make it through one more day, one more challenge, with the minimum amount of effort and discomfort. But is submission to mediocrity, what it means to live? To me, this is to become a slave of our limitations and survive for the sake of survival, rather than to live with the freedom of becoming what one might wish to be.

From Leonidas, we can learn that the solution to fight our fragilities lies in the force of Will. Within us, we have many voices: the body demands the fulfilment of its needs, the emotions crave stimulation, the intellect insists on conditioned opinions, and perhaps dreams and aspirations softly whisper the

search of Truth or Beauty. We don't always know which voice to follow. Voices which are driven by our lower nature (fear, anxiety, etc.) are usually strong and make us fragile, or cloud our thinking with doubts, paralysing our actions. Here, our Will can enable us to remain loyal to what is right, despite the weaknesses and distractions. To exercise the force of Will means to choose a value or virtue, over comfort. It means to take initiative, because by itself, nothing will change and we will continue to suffer. Instead we need to remember who we are, our dreams, our inner search. Traditions repeatedly suggest that as human beings, we naturally possess Will, and are equipped to find solutions to cut through obstacles and challenges to move forward. But to express it requires daily work, like building a muscle; the more we exercise it, the stronger it will become.

Perhaps, the intensity of a given challenge only shows that we are worthy to face what life demands from us. We can therefore aspire to act and live with freedom, inner strength and objectivity than submit to survival driven by fear, insecurity and judgements of others. Let us cultivate an attitude of a warrior, with love and service to a higher cause in our heart, and the courage to lead by example for others who are struggling through similar battles. The more we dare and overcome our challenges, the more we become warriors, facing life with joy and the natural pride of living with freedom, facing challenges as the inner war continues. Let us rise again after our defeats, and learn from our experiences to continue walking forward, to discover who we really are and what we are capable of. Not to fight means to never know my own potential, which might cause more suffering than the challenge of going through the battle. For in the end, what mattered most to King Leonidas perhaps, was but the glory of following a noble cause, with freedom. ★★



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# Meeting Kahlil Gibran

By Shraddha Shetty



When I was very young, I came across a book called *The Prophet*, by poet, painter, thinker, but perhaps above all, a philosopher, Kahlil Gibran. I clearly remember a sense of mystery; the existence of truths about myself, beyond the known. I did not know what I was searching for, but it awakened in me a desperate thirst to know myself. I had set off on a journey, and Kahlil Gibran's works have been a shining light ever since. Gibran was born to humble beginnings in 19<sup>th</sup> century Lebanon, in a world torn by war. So vast and diverse are the themes of his investigation of Life, that any attempt to zoom in and summarize specific ideas would be unjust and limited. In this reflective article, therefore, I trace through extracts of Kahlil Gibran's works, to touch upon just a few ideas that fellow philosophers might stumble upon in the voyage of life.

***Only once have I been made mute. It was when a man asked me, "Who are you?"***

(From: *Sand and Foam*)

I was clueless, and therefore the best I could do was search. In retrospect, I think I was also seeking some contact with pure beauty in my day-to-day reality; something that would touch my heart, and give me some clues about myself, just as I had experienced in Gibran's poems. I realized that any thought or deed, which I recognized as truth, touched the sentiment of beauty in my heart. And so, I used truth and beauty as signposts, in my search for my own identity.

***Where shall you seek beauty, and how shall you find her unless she herself be your way and your guide?***

(From: *The Prophet, On Beauty*)

The pursuit of beauty, naturally led me to search for goodness and justice in a world which seemed to be devoid of values. Deep in my heart I recognized the need for, agreed with, and craved for a world based on truth. Meanwhile I was labouring to keep my head above the water of disharmony, where partial convenient truths, halted the search for deeper truth. I saw that constant competition and the rat-race made many feel lonely and incomplete. My efforts seemed to find a float in Philosophy, for Philosophy does not halt at opinions. It is ready to replace a personal opinion with another's, if truth is discovered in it.

***Say not, 'I have found the truth,' but rather, 'I have found a truth.'***

(From: *The Prophet, On Self Knowledge*)

This journey made me realize that there exist within me two selves: one that wants to be guided by truth and pulls me out of personal comforts, and another that doesn't want to make the effort. The misery of this discovery found expression in Gibran's words.

***Have mercy on me, my Soul.  
You have shown me Beauty, but then  
Concealed her. You and Beauty live  
In the light; Ignorance and I are  
Bound together in the dark. Will  
Ever the light invade darkness?***

***You are rich in wisdom, but this  
Body is poor in understanding  
You do not compromise  
And he does not obey.  
This, my Soul, is extreme suffering.***

(From: *A Tear and A Smile*)

Gibran writes a lot about nature. But for him, nature is not limited to the mountains and rivers, plants and animals; he inquires about the eternal principles of life through each of these, which also apply to human nature.

If we could learn through his writing, maybe we could glimpse an accomplished art of unbiased observation, so essential to live philosophy. One thing is very clear - he is really good at putting his feet into the shoes of different people, different beings. Whether to see the world from the point of view of a mountain, the sea, from the viewpoint of a greedy person, or that of an altruist, he attempts

to imagine the entirety of life without excluding the various possible perspectives.

To visualize the world through a multiplicity of perspectives, could seem like a complicated puzzle from the viewpoint of each piece, because each piece sees itself as separate from the other pieces, and can only see from its own subjective point of view, missing the bigger truth. Gibran expresses agony at the lack of truth that results from sticking to this limited view.



***Said a blade of grass to an autumn leaf, "You make such a noise falling! You scatter all my winter dreams."***

***Said the leaf indignant, "Low-born and low-dwelling! Songless, peevish thing! You live not in the upper air and you cannot tell the sound of singing." Then the autumn leaf lay down upon the earth and slept. And when spring came she waked again — and she was a blade of grass.***

***And when it was autumn and her winter sleep was upon her, and above her through all the air the leaves were falling, she muttered to herself, "O these autumn leaves! They make such noise! They scatter all my winter dreams."***

(From: *The Madman, Said a Blade of Grass*)

Using multiple points of view, Gibran speaks of a common source of all beings, and hints at the essential unity and interdependence of all beings.

**You are my brother, and both of us are sons of a single, universal, and sacred spirit. You are my likeness, for we are prisoners of the same body, fashioned from the same clay. You are my companion on the byways of life, my helper in perceiving the essence of reality concealed behind the mists. You are a human being and I have loved you, my brother.**

(From: *The Vision, On Human Unity*)

From a distance, he draws logical connections in the multiplicity which allows us to grasp what unites. We may consider ourselves superior or inferior to another human being, but if we delve deeper into our nature, we may realize that the differences are very superficial. Deep inside we share the same weaknesses; we are all under the bondage of our own desires and fears, seeking freedom from the same cage.

**In my father's garden there are two cages.  
In one is a lion, which my father's slaves brought  
from the desert of Ninavah;  
In the other is a songless sparrow.  
Everyday at dawn the sparrow calls out to lion,  
"Good morrow to thee, brother prisoner.**

(From: *The Madman, The Two Cages*)

And before judging anyone else, let us first look deep inside our own selves, and it will make us humble.

**Oftentimes have I heard you speak of one who commits a wrong as though he were not one of you, but a stranger unto you and an intruder upon your world. But I say that even as the holy and the righteous cannot rise beyond the highest which is in each one of you, so the wicked and the weak cannot fall lower than the lowest which is in you also.**

(From: *The Prophet, On Crime and Punishment*)

He also speaks of the awakening of another subtle higher need that arises in such moments of truth, where we recognize the reality of the human condition, the bondages from which we all suffer. And from this reality arises the need to unite, the need to love, the need to give, and the need of altruism. This need is the glory of being human. Throughout his works Gibran explains that this need lies in everyone. In some it is strong, and in others it is less strong. We may call it good and evil, but truly it is just different degrees of longing, of the need to love. The former expresses as overcoming personal limitations for the benefit of others, the latter to a lesser degree. Those who have a strong need must follow the force of love; even if it puts you on a journey and a road which is not always easy.

So it is best that our actions speak of our longing. Labour not to judge others or blame others; but strive to be better in our own actions. If you want to compare, then let it be only between you and yourself.

**When love beckons to you, follow him,  
Though his ways are hard and steep.  
And when his wings enfold you yield to him,  
Though the sword hidden among his pinions may  
wound you.  
And when he speaks to you believe in him,  
Though his voice may shatter your dreams as the  
north wind lays waste the garden.**

**For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you.  
Even as he is for your growth so is he for your pruning.  
Even as he ascends to your height and caresses  
your tenderest branches that quiver in the sun,  
So shall he descend to your roots and shake them in  
their clinging to the earth.**

**All these things shall love do unto you that you  
may know the secrets of your heart, and in that  
knowledge become a fragment of Life's heart.**

(From: *The Prophet, On Love*) ★★★



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