

A Magazine on Philosophy, Culture & Volunteering

# THEACROPOLITAN

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2021



**Facing Life, Beyond Life**

**FEATURE**

**Ubuntu:  
I Am Because We Are**

**Othello & I**

# FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

Dear Reader,

For decades it has seemed that our civilization is unstoppable; with unprecedented advancements in technology and medicine, sophisticated economic infrastructure, and a celebration of so-called human rights across the globe, we have promised ourselves a glorious future. However, the last several months have revealed the underlying uncertainty and fragility that lie at the foundation of almost every political, economic, and social construct, that we have taken for granted in our times.

For many, it is clear, now more than ever before, that there must be more to life than simply amassing comfort and ensuring survival. There is a need to really live with the resolve to discover and fulfill a meaningful purpose - one that cannot be isolated and disconnected from others. Because ultimately, there is Ubuntu; we are intimately connected to each other, we depend on each other, and our identities are defined in light of each other.

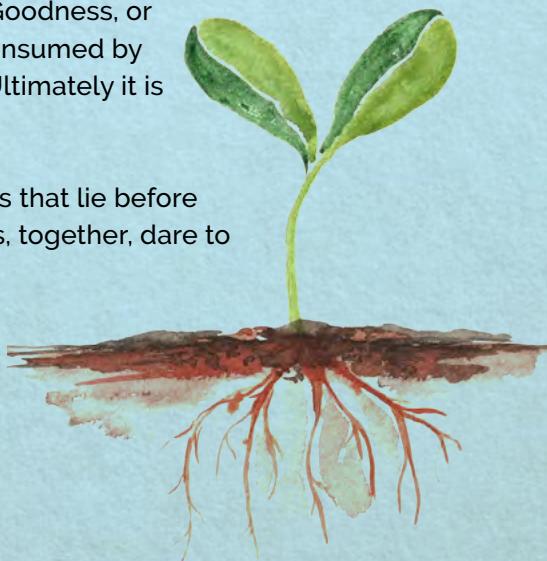
Hence, the opportunity to awaken the inner hero to face the everyday battles where the eternal virtuous Self struggles against the egoistical and ignorant self. The reality of this battle is offered time and again in our mythical and literary traditions. Either like Arjuna, we courageously use our time here to face life on the side of Truth and Goodness, or like Shakespeare's Othello we allow ourselves to be consumed by the confusion of doubt and fear to meet a tragic end. Ultimately it is a matter of our own inner decision.

Let us therefore Discover and recognize the battlefields that lie before us. Let us Awaken the inner warrior of peace. And let us, together, dare to Transform our world. Let us make our time here count!

**Harianto H Mehta**

Editor

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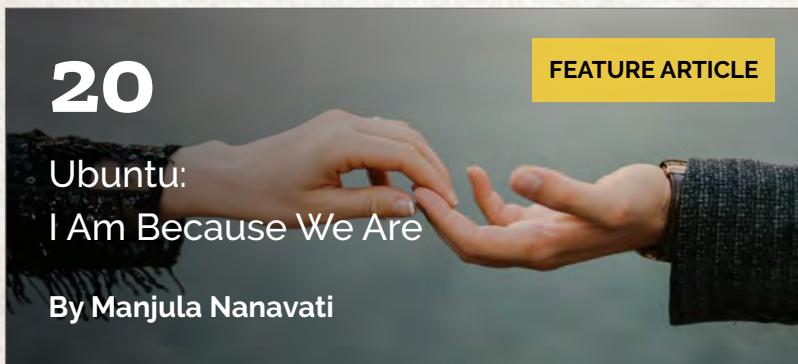
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# FACING LIFE, BEYOND LIFE

By Sukesh  
Motwani

**A short night  
wakes me from a dream  
that seemed so long.  
Yayu (1783)**

The following piece is my humble investigation into my fear of death; the fear of my own (impending) death and also the fear of the eventual death of a loved one. This journey began 8 years ago with my mother's sudden death. It has been insightful that while processing my grief some years down the line, a psychotherapist helped me conclude, that the trauma resulting from a loved one's death, can actually embed itself in hypochondriac behaviour. The consequent anxiety about my own health and mortality, however, opened doors for me to investigate the nature of the 'personal' self, the fear of losing that personal identity, and the illusion of the finality of death. The pandemic has further forced us to look at our unquestioned mortality and evaluate the parameters of our identity in these uncertain times.

**"Detached" observer  
of blossoms  
finds himself in time  
intimate with them--  
so, when they separate from the branch,  
it's he who falls...deeply into grief.  
Saigyo (Translated by William LeFleur)**

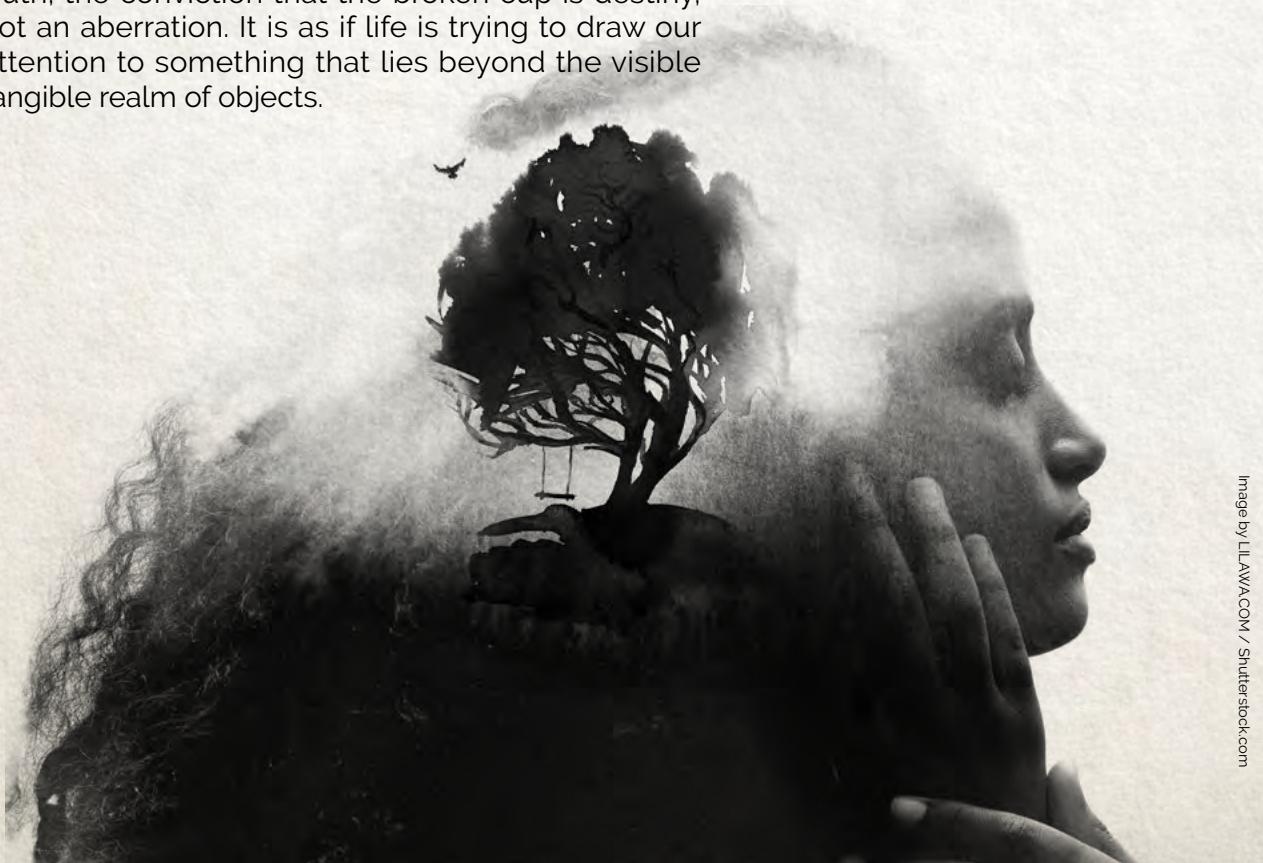
While spending time in the terrace garden during the lockdown, I often felt melancholic when I noticed a small bud bloom gently into a magnificent flower, only to fall in a short time and wither away. I pondered this seemingly tragic quality of impermanence. But it struck me that each and every flower lives, fulfilling its duty by exuding its fragrance, and disseminating Beauty, even evoking joy. Would a flower ever worry about falling off a branch to die? And would the shortness of its life reduce the fullness with which it offers itself? The blossoms seem to meet death in the face, whenever it chooses to come. It is as if they are living from moment to moment,



content with the time accorded to them, fully able to devote their effort to living. Their silent sense of joy and uninhibited ability to experience each moment became extremely inspiring for me, shedding light on my own paranoia. The negative fantasies I indulge about difficult health scenarios, and the fear of an uncertain tomorrow have been paralysing and deterred me from living in the present more fully. In the present moment, even where there is some difficulty or pain or resistance, I do realise that a higher 'witnessing' self can choose to experience the fear gracefully and allow that transient emotion too to pass.

Renowned Buddhist Teacher Ajahn Chah held up a beautiful Chinese tea cup and said, "To me this cup is already broken. Because I know its fate, I can enjoy it fully here and now. And when it's gone, it's gone." This again invites me to introspect on this illusion of control, and the freedom that lies in learning to gently accept the Truth about the transient and uncertain nature of the physical body. The key is the acceptance of this truth, the conviction that the broken cup is destiny, not an aberration. It is as if life is trying to draw our attention to something that lies beyond the visible tangible realm of objects.

***The blossoms seem to meet death in the face, whenever it chooses to come. It is as if they are living from moment to moment, content with the time accorded to them, fully able to devote their effort to living.***



**The ongoing contemplation of death can invite us to engage with life more meaningfully and joyfully, in every action, no matter how mundane. The present moment never returns. And confronting the reality of death triggers within us the desire to bring beauty, courage and joy into each moment of our lives.**

**Today I put on summer clothes and journey to a world I haven't seen yet.**  
Michikaze (1709)

But what is 'death' really? A termination of the stream of consciousness as we understand it? A complete unification with the dark void of nothingness? A sleep so utterly deep that no one can awaken us from it? And to my utter horror, if I ever woke up from this sleep, would I perhaps fail to recognise myself? However, this may not be the right way to investigate this most mysterious aspect of life. Instead, perhaps much more interesting is if there is still a sense of 'existing' and 'living' after what we call 'death', without the body. All esoteric wisdom concurs that the real nature of the human being is not limited to the body, emotions, or the thinking mind. Akin to sand trickling from between slippery fingers, our present identity, wealth, possessions, status, attachments, families, friends - everything in its current form will not travel with us after death. And if these are all transient by nature, who is the 'I' beyond all the impermanence?

Then unravelling this truth, of discerning between the eternal and temporary aspects of us, is the beginning of trying to comprehend our true nature. There may have been some opportune deep moments of silence or a sense of meditative timelessness that some may have experienced, when faced with a deeply beautiful natural landscape, a wondrous bird, or a magical piece of art, that makes us realise that we *are*, even when the thinking mind or the sense of 'I' is absent.

Therefore, I choose to walk on the path of philosophy in the classical manner, through which I discovered that we are not our 'personalities' or 'bodies'; instead, timeless traditions suggest that we are essentially souls, drops of an ocean of ONE unified field of consciousness. Investigation of this truth, that I am a soul, and that the physical body is just an expression of the real me, in time and space, is just the beginning. And developing this conviction may take many lifetimes to ripen. But

this also has an implication on how I decide to live my life in the present.

Mystics and the esoteric wisdom of The Vedas and Buddhism, all propound the truth of reincarnation and suggest that we keep 'dropping' our bodies like old clothes at the end of each life, and take on new ones, to keep continuing our journey of evolution of consciousness, till we truly learn to live our true nature. For me, the philosophical path is essentially about becoming able to live this 'truth' in my everyday life. If I believe that I am a soul, then that brings me to accept the fact that I simply don a different personality in every incarnation... and everyone else too, appears with a new role, new gender, new nationality, new karmic identity; beneath the different masks, all of us are but a fraternity of souls. A deep sense of love for all beings emerges. And I also feel lesser preoccupied with seeking more comforts and validation for the temporary self. Instead, I search for answers: Why have I been given this body? How can I use this personality better to serve me?

I also realise that awareness of death enables us to live each moment, appreciating the opportunity to create something of our time on earth. Bhutanese people, for example, contemplate death five times a day as part of their tradition. Wouldn't that appear morbid to the rest of us? But no; it seems to hold the key to a deeper sense of joy. Perhaps the ongoing contemplation of death can invite us to engage with life more meaningfully and joyfully, in every action, no matter how mundane. The present moment never returns. And confronting the reality of death triggers within us the desire to bring beauty, courage and joy into each moment of our lives. Can I continually exercise the choice to be more centred, and live a more virtuous, empathetic and just life?

So then, why fear Death? The deep inner knowing and conviction will shine through my essence when it will; in the meantime, I shall stay committed to living my life, learning to accept the joys and sorrows, witness and challenge my fears boldly, learn to love, and use this transient body as a tool to elevate my consciousness.



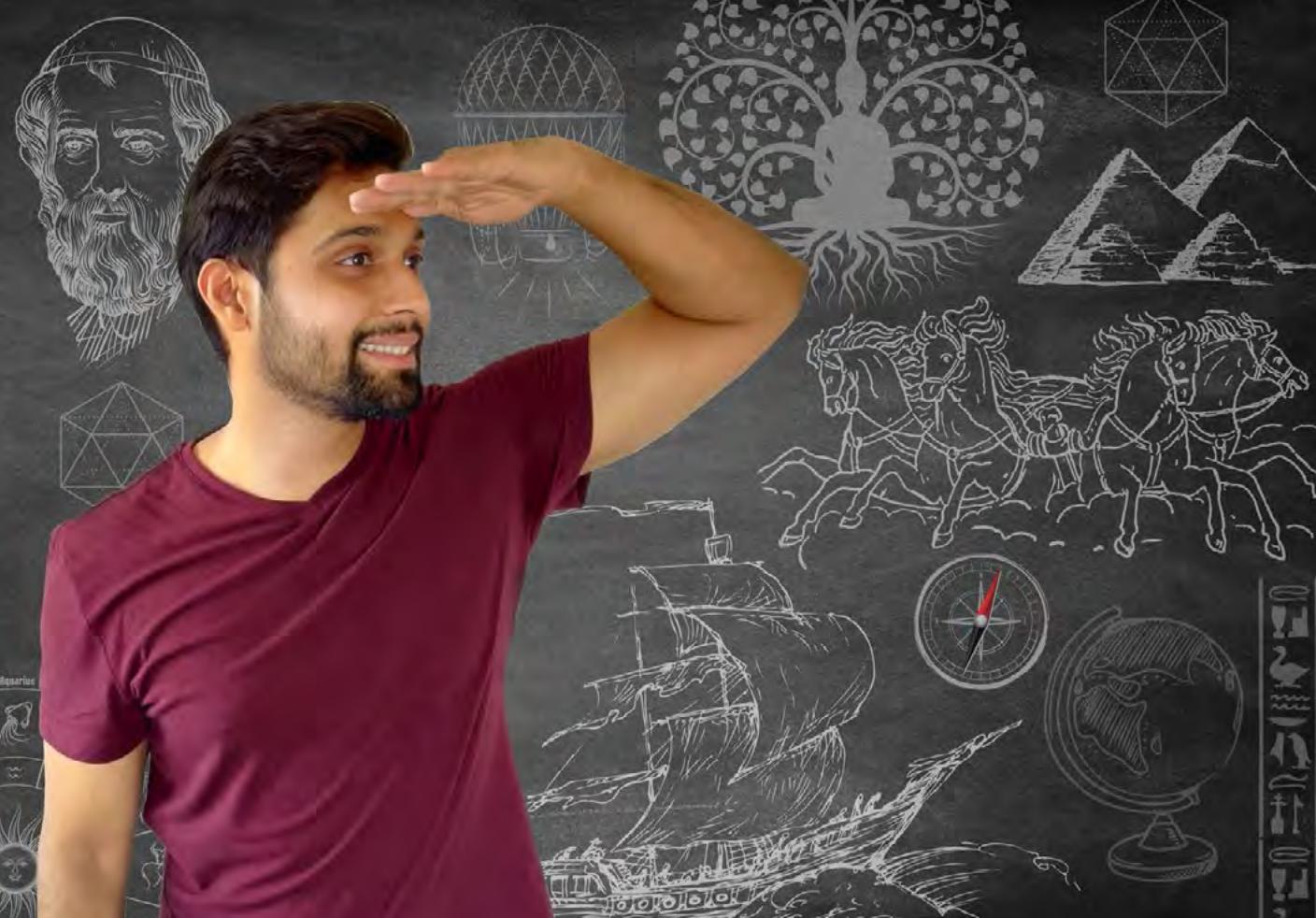
**All esoteric wisdom concurs that the real nature of the human being is not limited to the body, emotions, or the thinking mind.**

All ancient Wisdom propounds that 'Death' and 'Birth' are just two commas in the continuity of existence and hence Life always continues.

The great Sufi Mystic Rumi writes, "Every mortal will taste death, but very few will taste life." Just before his death, he is said to have recited one of his most inspirational poems. I end this investigation with an excerpt from Rumi's alluring poem called *When I Die*.

**Remember a grave is only  
a curtain for the paradise behind.  
You'll only see me descending into a grave.  
Now watch me rise.  
How can there be an end,  
when the sun sets or the moon goes down.  
It looks like the end,  
It seems like a sunset,  
but in reality, it is a dawn,  
when the grave locks you up,  
that is when your soul is freed.  
Have you ever seen a seed fallen  
to earth not rise with a new life?  
Why should you doubt  
the rise of a seed named human?  
Have you ever seen a bucket lowered  
into a well coming back empty?  
Why lament for a soul  
when it can come back  
like Joseph from the well.  
When, for the last time,  
you close your mouth,  
Your words and soul will belong  
to the world of no place, no time.  
When I Die, by Rumi  
(Translated by Nader Khalili) ○○○**





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# OTHELLO & I

By Anusree Menon



It is evident that beyond entertainment, theatre might also be a means to investigate the world in which we live, and what it means to be human. Recently, I had the opportunity to revisit *Othello* in which Shakespeare deals with an array of human experience that is always pertinent. As I re-read and met the characters once again after many years, a different theme began to emerge before my eyes. Here's my attempt to share what I learned from the play from the three central characters – Othello, Desdemona and Iago. To me, these three characters are pivotal in conveying something fundamental about the human experience.

***At the precipice of making a decision, what is required of me is to make a choice - one that is not defined by my limitations but one that is of inner self-belief. Magic happens when I take that leap of faith - only to realise that I can fly!***

At first, Othello is portrayed as a courageous, accomplished and ambitious army captain, who has participated in many well-known war expeditions and has gathered experience through his travels. The play starts off with a confident Othello secretly marrying his beloved Desdemona, ready to face the courts, as he didn't believe he had done anything wrong; he had simply followed his heart. Yet, as seeds of doubt take root, Othello's love for Desdemona weakens, and he gives in to his insecurities. At the end of the play, Othello accuses her of infidelity, kills her, and his character metamorphizes into a guilt-ridden remorseful individual who ultimately takes his own life, realising that he has no purpose left to live for. The juxtaposition of love and betrayal are evident themes of this classic Shakespearean tragedy.

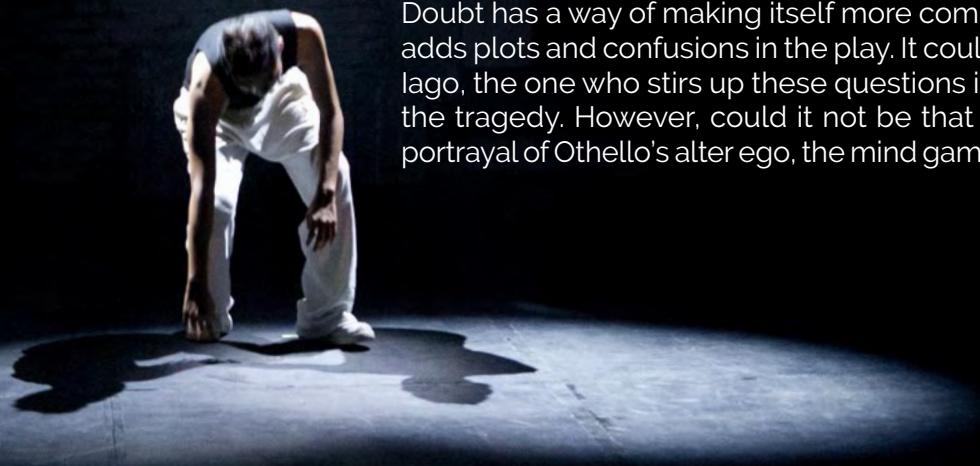
So what enduring reflections of the human condition might we find in *Othello*? Could the play be a metaphor of the human journey of life? Could the play be exploring the human experience, entwined with the opposing forces of virtues and doubt?

We are born into this world, untainted by doubts or confusion. Full of curiosity and wonder, we are able to recognize beauty naturally and are ever-eager to explore, with a thirst for



adventure, armed with courage and determination. As we grow up, however, our thoughts, ideas and perceptions are often influenced by those around us: our education, our circumstances, and our experiences. But could it be that Desdemona continues to silently whisper her youthful and resilient call? Despite what fate had in store, in the play Desdemona never doubts or questions Othello's integrity and fidelity. She defends him until her last breath. It would seem that the unwavering Desdemona signifies the virtues of beauty, goodness, purity and love that Othello initially identified with. Perhaps Desdemona's unflinching fidelity offers a clue that we as human beings have the ability to aspire for and express virtues regardless of the external circumstances. Othello's suspicion of her loyalty could suggest the inability of human beings to maintain a sincere pursuit of these virtues.

Doubt has a way of making itself more complex, just as Iago adds plots and confusions in the play. It could be argued that Iago, the one who stirs up these questions is responsible for the tragedy. However, could it not be that Iago is merely a portrayal of Othello's alter ego, the mind games of self-doubt?



In my experience, doubts present themselves as nagging questions, sometimes almost as a statement of negation. For example, they might begin with *Why can't I?* or *How can I?* and sometimes *Will I be able to?* They soon transform to *I will never be able*, or *I can't*.

On occasions that I have chosen to believe my doubts, I have realised that it immobilizes me causing me to eschew any action. In doing so, I lose an opportunity to express my determination to overcome challenges. In this way, doubts can be paralysing, blind to any opportunities. When such doubts arise, however, I have also discovered that I always have the option to believe them, or to resolve them.

Paradoxically, I discovered that the doubt itself also has a voice of ability, which might be faint at first. The more I listen, the more it invites me to dare, and become able to act. With persistence, one might uncover what's beyond it, and therefore strengthen our inner conviction.

Such an experience of overcoming doubt can further help when faced with more doubts in the future. For example, when faced with the dilemma of the inability of accomplishing a difficult task, there is a need to engage with and identify the various fears; of failure, of commitment, to name but a few. To give in to the conflict is to identify with the limitation. But as a human being, I also have the ability to experience and pursue intrinsic virtues that are not dependent or limited by circumstances.

***I discovered that the doubt itself also has a voice of ability, which might be faint at first. The more I listen, the more it invites me to dare, and become able to act.***

Othello's narrative could therefore denote the consequences of being taken over by our fears, failing to recognise our true abilities and innate nature and potential. Unlike Othello, as I live my life today, I have discovered the ability to recognise the whispers of Desdemona within me despite the loud shouts of Iago. Every day, I strive to harmonize these voices. When Iago says, "I can't accomplish what I intended to do because I am incapable of doing so," Desdemona softly whispers, "Isn't it a good opportunity to make myself capable?" At the precipice of making a decision, what is required of me is to make a choice – one that is not defined by my limitations but one that is of inner self-belief. Magic happens when I take that leap of faith – only to realise that I can fly!

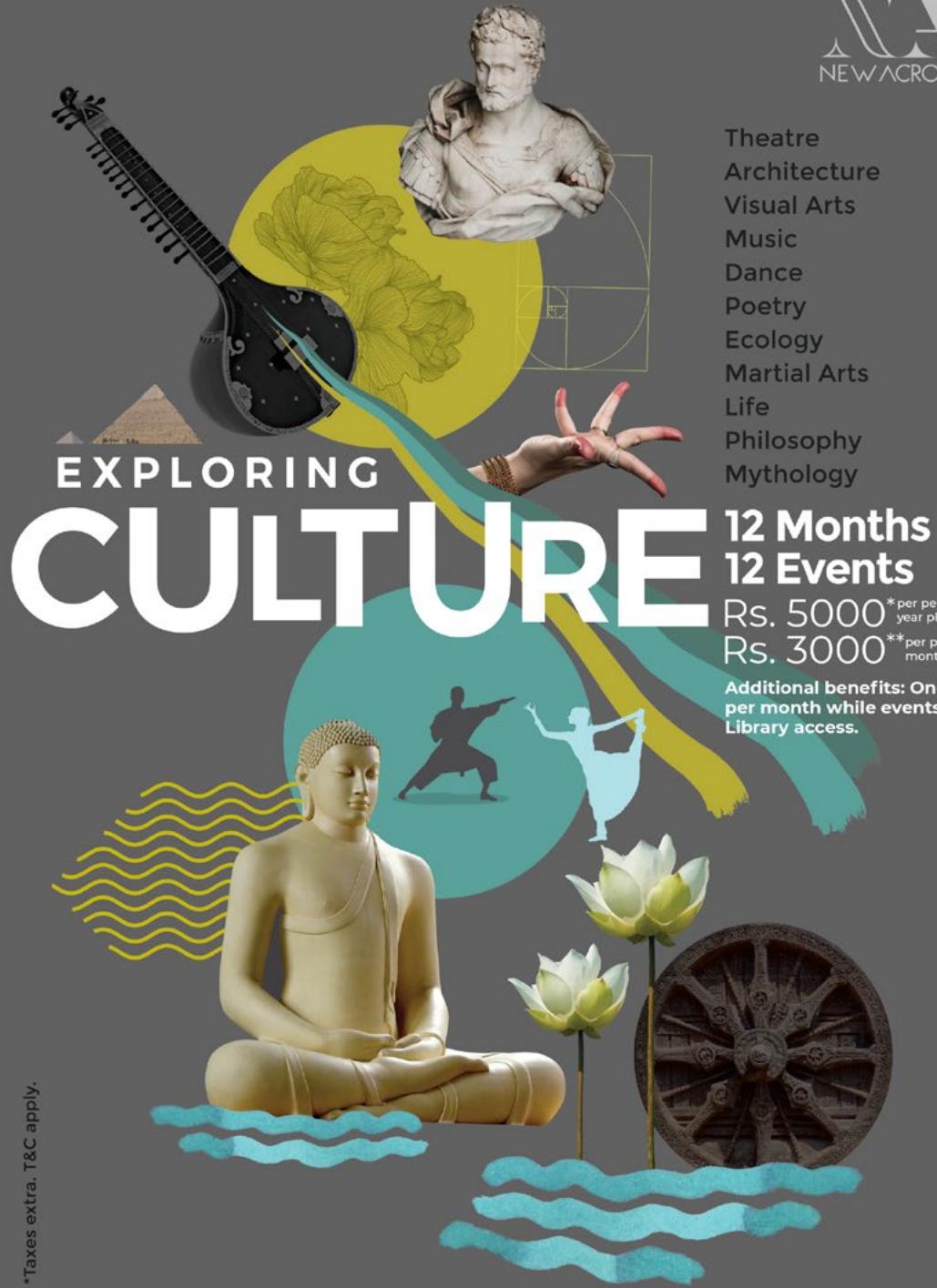
One way to address the fears, is to begin the work towards the task itself. After initiating the task, I realise sometimes, how silly the fears were in the first place; a result of my own fantasy. Sometimes, I realise that despite the fear, I can make things work. Gradually it starts to lose its grip, because through the action, I am able to validate that it is possible to confront the fear.

***My dilemmas gave me an opportunity to strengthen my resolution, overcoming them by putting virtues into practise. Along the way I made mistakes which I value as valuable lessons.***

As I look back and reflect on the doubts that I have dealt with, I am filled with gratitude. My dilemmas gave me an opportunity to strengthen my resolution, overcoming them by putting virtues into practise. Along the way I made mistakes which I value as valuable lessons. It would be foolish to wish or believe that doubts and fears will simply go away. Without these, perhaps we would have never been able to recognise what we need to overcome, to grow.

Desdemona can be kept alive. Unlike Othello, we do have the ability to silence Iago, and fortify love for Desdemona. What we can take away from Shakespeare's *Othello* therefore, is the need to develop an inner recognition of our abilities that help us develop an inner compass to guide us, a compass that can help us remain focused on our virtues. We don't need to get persuaded by the impulses of doubts. We can fight the cacophony of Iago and tune ourselves to the beautiful song of Desdemona. ☺☺





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# THE MAGICAL FUNCTION OF RITUALS AND CEREMONIES

By Julian Scott



**A ritual or ceremony is a re-enactment of the creation of the world, an opportunity to connect with the creative forces of the origins and so to begin again, to regenerate oneself and to emerge renewed.**



From an esoteric point of view, a ritual is dependent on the existence of the invisible dimension. This invisible dimension consists of a spiritual-mental aspect, which is the domain of the archetypes or 'living idea-beings' spoken of by the Platonists; and an 'astral' aspect, which is an intermediate world between spirit and matter, just as imagination is the link between the world of ideas and the physical world. In this view of things, the invisible world exists, the material world reflects. The visible is the shadow of the invisible.

A ritual or ceremony is a re-enactment of the creation of the world, an opportunity to connect with the creative forces of the origins and so to begin again, to regenerate oneself and to emerge renewed. An example of this is the rite of baptism, which is to be immersed in the primordial waters, to suffer the Deluge and to re-emerge on the primordial mound of a new creation. Another way of looking at the ritual is to see it as a door to the invisible dimension, a means of access to the sacred. And this is why rituals are necessary, because the invisible is by its very nature difficult for us to access, prisoners as we are of flesh and matter. So we need special tools and devices to help us reach it. These tools are symbols, myths and rituals.

In the ritual, material elements play an important part. They are the vehicles through which the invisible can become manifest and the consciousness can ascend to a more exalted state than its usual mundane condition. These elements are, by way of example: sound, movement, aromas, postures, gestures, as well as ritual objects, statues and images. The power of the spoken word is of great importance in any ritual, for example in the reciting aloud of a prayer. As H.P. Blavatsky explains in

the first volume of The Secret Doctrine: "... the spoken word has a potency unknown to, unsuspected and disbelieved in, by the modern 'sages'... and such or another vibration in the air is sure to awaken corresponding powers..."

A prayer, in the philosophical sense, is not asking some god for a special favour, but is a means of offering the best part of oneself to something higher; it expresses an aspiration to become better, nobler, greater, to express the very highest part of ourselves. If the essence of that prayer is not somehow expressed in the actions of our everyday life, however, it has little or no value. The reciting of it in a ritual, alongside other aspiring human beings, reinforces our daily efforts, takes its power from our successes and our failures, and then feeds back into our daily existence. Perhaps this prayer will elicit a response from the invisible world, for, as the ancient Egyptians believed, the human being will receive the unconditional support of the Gods if he acts with justice and wisdom. The whole ceremony itself is a prayer in action – a way of connecting with the archetypal world and bringing it into action.

Music, as the harmonious expression of sound, has always played a central role in ceremonies everywhere. Mozart famously composed music for Freemasonic ceremonies

**A prayer, in the philosophical sense, is not asking some god for a special favour, but is a means of offering the best part of oneself to something higher; it expresses an aspiration to become better, nobler, greater, to express the very highest part of ourselves.**





and Pythagoras is said to have used it in the ceremonies conducted at his school in Crotona. Movement includes ritual postures and gestures, as well as the use of the directions of space: the four cardinal directions plus the nadir and zenith. For example, pointing up or down with the hand, turning to the left or the right, walking clockwise or anti-clockwise, etc.

For the current mentality, to give importance to such things is often considered 'mumbo-jumbo'. But in all symbolic traditions, the cardinal points have particular meanings. To take the simplest example, east symbolises sunrise (birth) while west represents sunset (death). Hence in the Egyptian city of Thebes (modern Luxor), the tombs were all constructed on the west bank of the Nile, where the sun sets over the Western Mountain. Newgrange in Ireland and Stonehenge in England face the east, so that the rising sun of the solstice can strike a particular point in the temple and bring enlightenment and renewal to participants in the rituals.

Is this all just fantasy and imagination? Fantasy, no; imagination, yes. For imagination is the capacity to symbolise and to connect with what the symbol (image) represents – its Being. The sun in this world represents another sun in the invisible world: God or the Great Spirit. The four directions are living symbols of the four great powers that, in some traditions, are said to govern the Cosmos.



Think of the knight who kneels in a gesture of humility, to be touched by the sword, symbol of justice, will and spiritual awakening, and then makes his oath to uphold justice and protect the weak against the strong. In this ceremony we have a posture, a gesture, a prayer (the spoken word) and a ritual object. In India we find a whole system of *asanas*

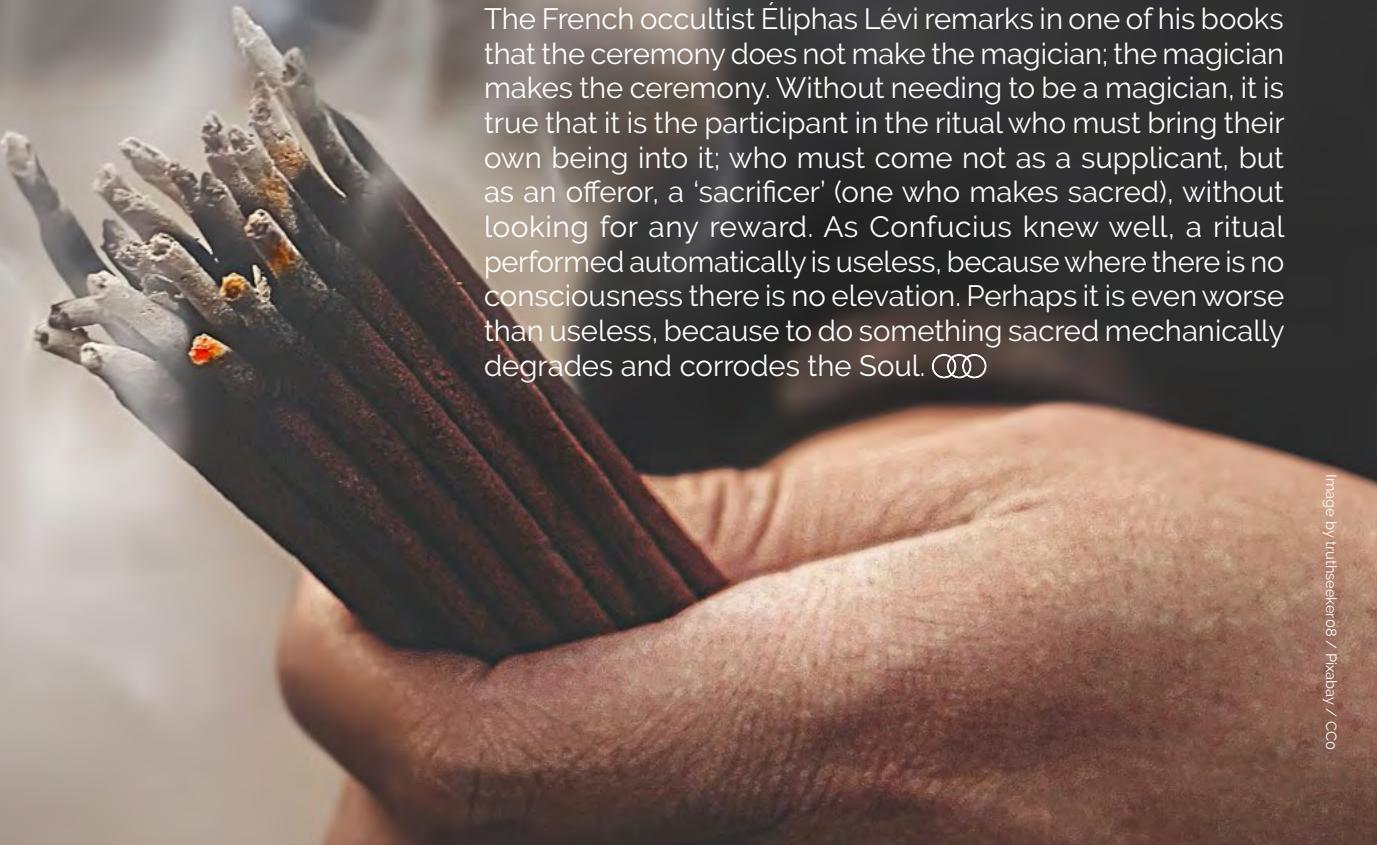
**A ritual performed automatically is useless, because where there is no consciousness there is no elevation.**

(postures) and *mudras* (ritual gestures) which reflect the same importance given to these elements.

Other universal ritual objects are shells – symbols of birth and rebirth – used either as receptacles for the waters of life or, in the case of conches, as trumpet-like instruments to awaken the soul from its lethargy, dozing away in the folds of matter: a call to battle, to new life instead of stagnation. In ancient Egypt, the land of magical rituals par excellence, we find the *Was* sceptre, a magical staff with the head of the god Set. Set is the instigator of chaos and confusion. By placing his head at the top of this magical staff, it is transformed into a powerful instrument of renewal and strength.

No ceremony would be complete without some special aromas, which evoke certain subtle and higher feelings. Frankincense, myrrh and sandalwood are some universal examples. Many people will be familiar with aromatherapy and may have experienced first-hand the power of aromas to induce certain psychological states. We can also think of their opposites – unpleasant smells – and how these bring the consciousness down to a lower physical level.

The French occultist Éliphas Lévi remarks in one of his books that the ceremony does not make the magician; the magician makes the ceremony. Without needing to be a magician, it is true that it is the participant in the ritual who must bring their own being into it; who must come not as a supplicant, but as an offeror, a 'sacrificer' (one who makes sacred), without looking for any reward. As Confucius knew well, a ritual performed automatically is useless, because where there is no consciousness there is no elevation. Perhaps it is even worse than useless, because to do something sacred mechanically degrades and corrodes the Soul. ☩



# UBUNTU: I AM BECAUSE WE ARE

By Manjula Nanavati

One of the foundations of how we conceptualize our sense of self today, perhaps came from the 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Rene Descartes' most famous maxim, *cogito ergo sum* or *I think therefore I am*. Taken to an extreme that Descartes himself may never have meant, we are conditioned to prioritize self-interest, applaud the pursuit of our own happiness, and promote personal freedoms dictated by one's own morality. Today we think of society as made up of a collection of autonomous, human beings, separate from the environment and, in many ways, independent of society, where only the fittest survive, leading to competition and conflict in an attempt to achieve success by protecting *me* and *mine*.

However, a swift and sweeping glance at the crime, gender inequality, poverty, racism and the violence all over our world asks me to consider if there might be a different paradigm we can use to build a better and brighter future for our children; a just society, whose warp and weft are empathy, compassion and generosity, where we cloak others with the same dignity with which we cloak ourselves, where wealth is not equated to worth, and where unity, and the things that bind us together as one humanity, are the basis on which we premise our relationships and our lives.

These are some characteristics of what we might refer to as *Ubuntu*, which encompasses a complex aggregate of values, attitudes and a code of conduct, which I have tried to identify and unravel in my investigation.

A community's lexicon arises from the need to express common values and shared ideas and beliefs. It is therefore interesting to note that *Ubuntu* has no direct translation in English, perhaps because this intricate and composite notion is not articulated as a culturally valued pursuit in modern society. *Ubuntu* comes from a Zulu word, whose equivalent exists in almost every African language, and can be loosely translated as "A person is a person through other persons" or "I am because we are".<sup>(1)</sup> Both phrases are a condensation of the idea that there is a universal thread of connectedness that stitches together all of humanity, and that community, indeed fraternity, not individuality, is what makes us human.

***This gem of ancient African wisdom asserts that who we are, is defined by a sense of belonging to something larger than our own separate selves, and it is only when the whole flourishes, that each constituent part can reach its full potential.***



Image by aranprime / Unsplash / CC0

This gem of ancient African wisdom asserts that who we are, is defined by a sense of belonging to something larger than our own separate selves, and it is only when the whole flourishes, that each constituent part can reach its full potential. Ubuntu then, would reject the idea of a self-made man, positing that our every interaction and every experience has intrinsically contributed towards our growth, to who we are today. Our parents and care takers nourished our bodies and spirits when we were helpless. Our teachers taught us how to read and write. We learned how to work from mentors and colleagues, and how to build emotional connections through lovers and friends. All the technology and tools we use to increase our efficiency have come from the labor and creativity of other human beings. We must therefore acknowledge this enormous legacy with humility and gratitude, as well as the infinite worth of every individual whose life intersected with our own.

If Ubuntu sounds like a naïve and simplistic tribal construct, irrelevant to modern society, one has only to look to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who headed the Truth & Reconciliation Commission assembled at the end of apartheid in South Africa, to help the country heal. He presided over the testimonies of perpetrators of crimes on both sides of the abyss that divided the country. These were broadcast on television so that the whole country would bear witness to the extent of the atrocities carried out, both in trying to bolster apartheid, and in trying to vanquish it. Hearing the complete stories of the chain of events that led to antithetical belief systems, however misguided, accomplished a ground-breaking phenomenon; as the entire world watched astounded, South Africa brought empathy, compassion and forgiveness to the process of justice, resulting in not just a punitive, retributive justice, but a restorative and redemptive process of healing, an important step towards unity.

This is Ubuntu.

By putting yourself wholly into another person's shoes, by letting go of your point of view, and by stepping back and changing your angle of vision to see things from another's



Image by Nicolas Ramirez / Unsplash / CC0

***Ubuntu asserts that individually we are all beautiful tiles. But only by playing a fitting, supportive and rightful role, can we become a cohesive, unified, and glorious mosaic.***

perspective, perhaps you might come to the painful conclusion that given those self-same circumstances, you too might have reacted in a similar manner.

Desmond Tutu explained the essence of Ubuntu as "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up in yours." <sup>(1)</sup> And this was perfectly exemplified by Nelson Mandela when he extended an invitation to his inauguration, even to his jailor, Christo Brand. How can we practically find within ourselves this extraordinary level of generosity of spirit that recognizes even an established enemy, first and foremost as a fellow human being? Perhaps we can begin by recognizing that the hurt and injustice caused to us may not necessarily have been a personal attack. People adhere to long held beliefs and experiences implanted in childhood, ingrained and affirmed by established ways of life. By striving to understand the reasons for their choices, we might end up seeing our adversaries in a completely different light.

However, this requires a seismic shift within us.

Ubuntu seeks out the good in each one, trusting that it exists. It is a formidable task to continually look for the good around us, despite the socio-economic challenges of our times. And even more arduous, is to unceasingly strive to bring out the capacity of goodness that lies within ourselves. But, in my own experience, inherent to human beings is a moral compass, an internal ethical framework that when activated, can unerringly guide us to the Truth. We are all a mixture of strength and weakness, of the admirable and the inadequate, of areas of darkness and areas of light. But the glory of the human condition lies in recognizing this, while unfailingly striving to choose the light.

This is Ubuntu.

Bryan Stevenson, the civil rights lawyer and social activist who founded the Equal Justice Initiative, in his heart wrenching book *Just Mercy* said, "We are not the worst thing we have done in our lives. Each of us is more. I've always believed that if someone tells a lie, they are not just a liar, if someone takes

**We are all a mixture of strength and weakness, of the admirable and the inadequate, of areas of darkness and areas of light. But the glory of the human condition lies in recognizing this, while unfailingly striving to choose the light.**



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something, they are not just thief, and even if you kill someone, I don't believe you're just a killer." <sup>(2)</sup> Ubuntu asks that we recognize the other things we are too. And that it is possible to confront our own darkness and emerge into the light.

In fact, Ubuntu is a wholly consistent and compelling construct. It is also seen in the underlying universal principles that govern nature. The interconnected web of life, of which we are a small but integral part, is a living matrix of the ethic of Ubuntu; everything I do has an effect on you, and on the whole, and so even the least hurt done to you is also a wound to me.

Once we perceive that we truly create each other, surely it is undeniable that we are obligated to sustain each other. Our humanness is a quality we owe to each other, to mankind, and all of nature. Seen through this lens, we might recognize that the unfettered materialism that is depleting our planet, our home, is a violation of this universal truth and diminishes our humanity.

Ubuntu asserts that individually we are all beautiful tiles. But only by playing a fitting, supportive and rightful role, can we become a cohesive, unified, and glorious mosaic. And so, each individual is invited to always consider the larger picture, acknowledging that everyone has a valuable function. Furthermore, it is pivotal that as we fulfill our duty, our actions inspire others to do the same, so that together we might build a new and better world for succeeding generations.

South African anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko echoed this when he said, "We believe that in the long run, the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in the field of human relationships. The great powers of the world may have done wonders by giving the world an industrial and military look, but the greatest gift still has to come from Africa – giving the world a human face." <sup>(3)</sup>

This is Ubuntu; elevating harmony and the spirit of solidarity into a moral duty, inevitably leading to a world that is richer, more connected and more humane. ☩



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ALL  
THE  
TIME  
IN THE  
WORLD

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By Sivan Barzilay

For many of us who live in big cities, Time is something we always lack. We find ourselves struggling to reach places on time, to submit our work on time, to wake up on time, and the list can go on and on... If only someone could give us a little more time to complete everything we want to. If only someone could teach us how to stop time from always moving forward, as if it is falling through our fingers.

Then came COVID-19, and among many other things, it had some impact on the way we work with time, the way we experience the present moment, and the way we imagine the future.

Being at home during the months of the lockdown, the question of how much more time is needed before we can return to our familiar lives, has come up in many of our conversations. The same Time that was moving so fast just a few months ago, seemed to move slower...

I heard friends complain about how COVID put us 'on hold' and made us waste precious time

in which we could have travelled to one more exotic place, met new people, and done more fun activities. A precious year has gone for a toss...

But while I write this article, when external movement seems to be on the rise again, it catches us almost by surprise; time again seems to be running away fast.

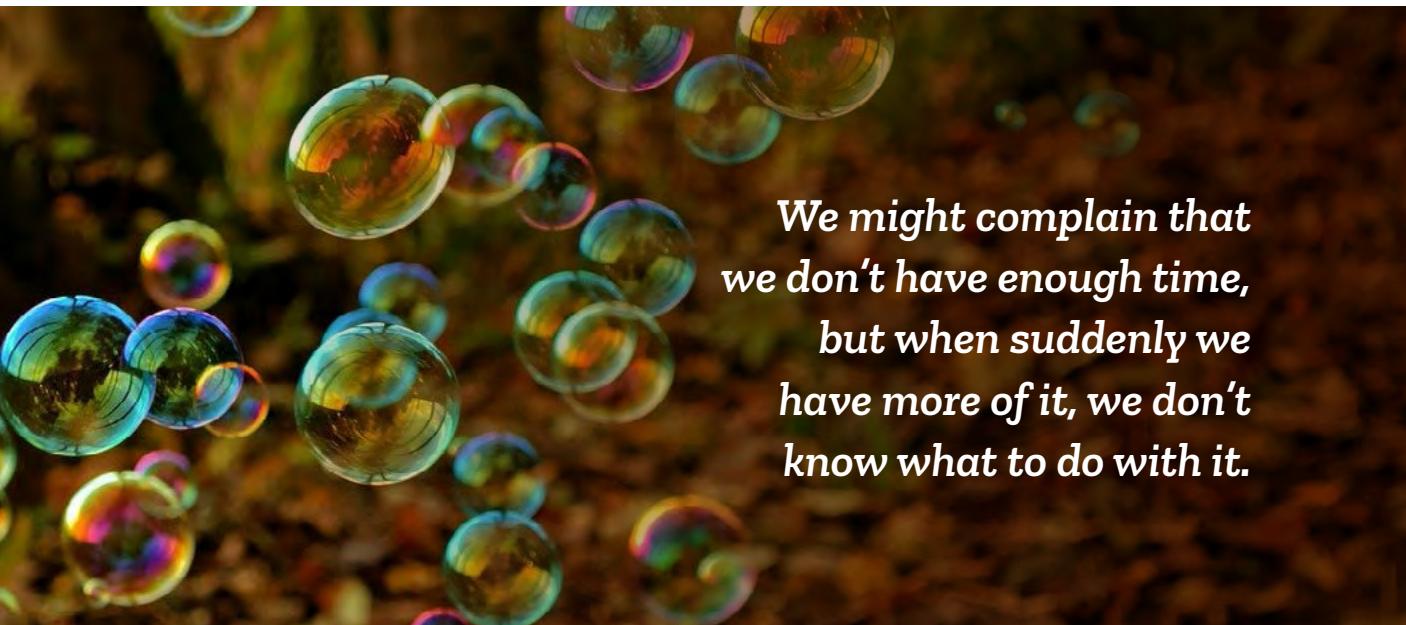
So let's talk a little about Time, its movement and its use. It is a most basic concept of the day-to-day, which almost all our daily actions refer to, and at the same time it is the most fluid, abstract concept we might come across.

*"What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know." - Saint Augustine (1)*

As mentioned in the above quote, we are all familiar with it, but unable to explain what it is. While we do have ways to measure time, the experience of its movement can be different for different people. What is considered a lot

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***We might complain that we don't have enough time, but when suddenly we have more of it, we don't know what to do with it.***



of time for one, might be too short for another...

The same 10 minutes can feel like a lot on one occasion, and like almost nothing on another occasion. In some incidents time is an ally, while in others, it is like a vicious enemy we fight with.

So not only do we find it difficult to explain, but it seems that we experience its movement in different ways, based on what we do, how we do it, and when we do it.

Two Greek Philosophers from the pre-Socratic era, whose ideas I encountered as part of my Philosophy studies at New Acropolis might help us shed more light on the topic.

**Heraclitus of Ephesus**, around 500 BCE, is credited with the phrase *Panta Rhei*, meaning 'everything flows'. He uses a very particular expression: the constant flux. He claimed that there is no beginning and no end to things. In the world of concrete things, everything flows, everything runs.

He famously said, "No man ever steps into the same river twice," meaning that everything is in motion and nothing remains still. There is no form which is the same forever, everything changes with time.

**Parmenides of Elea**, another Greek philosopher, at approximately the same time, said that in reality there is no change; only ONE thing exists, which is timeless, uniform and unchanging. This one thing, which he refers to as the 'entity', is immovable, because motion presupposes *coming to be* or *ceasing to be*, which implies a duality. Therefore, it cannot be One.

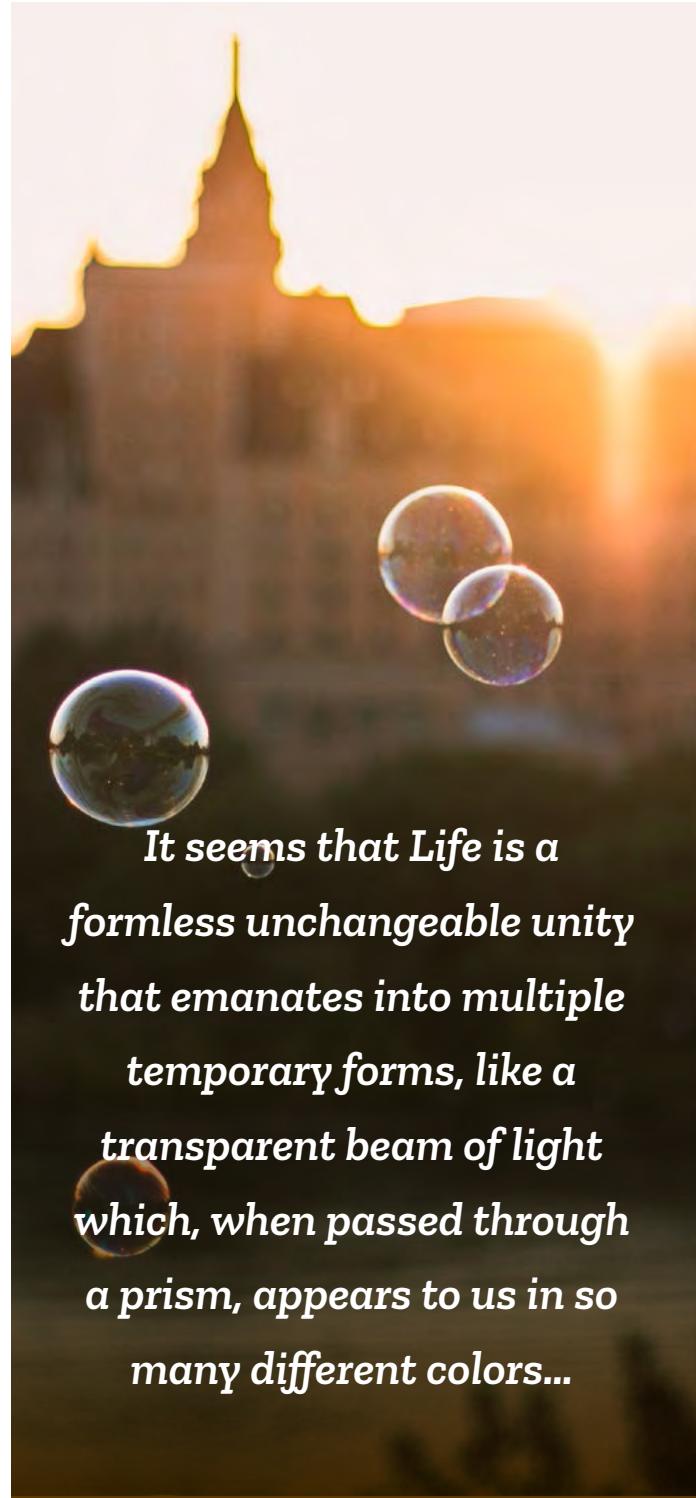




Image by @andreuuw / Unsplash / CC0

At first glance it might look like these two philosophers are referring to totally different realities. While one says that everything is in constant motion, hence time cannot be stopped, the other says that nothing really changes, hence time does not progress. However, taking one step deeper in understanding both doctrines might help us see that there might be truth in both. Once more, a comparative study can help us open our eyes and look at Life from more than one angle.

When asking about motion, Parmenides doesn't claim that there is no motion, but he explains that motion is only what we experience; we are born and we die, the body becomes and ceases to be. It is like a game of light and shadow. When things are in darkness we say that they are not, because we do not see them. When we say that things are, it is because there is light and we see them.

This is not a new idea. Again and again, from philosophies of both East and West, we come across the attempt to discover the uniting element amidst variety, i.e. the one in many, the permanent in the ever changing world.

***The same 10 minutes can feel like a lot on one occasion, and like almost nothing on another occasion. In some incidents time is an ally, while in others, it is like a vicious enemy we fight with.***

It seems that Life is a formless unchangeable unity that emanates into multiple temporary forms, like a transparent beam of light which, when passed through a prism, appears to us in so many different colors...

Coming back to our topic, we can suggest that time can also be understood in similar way.

On one hand, there is Chronological Time, which we are very familiar with - it is the day-to-day time, in which every second is equal to another.

***The ancient traditions  
saw the importance  
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the changeable forms.***

It always flows forward and cannot be stopped, as it connects between the past, present and the future. In this dimension everything is in constant movement. It is the dimension of time that every manifest form must obey.

In this dimension there is a beginning and end to everything, and therefore it creates within us a notion of urgency. We must make sure we complete everything we want to before it runs out. Experiencing life from this perspective, we always feel deficient of time, time is always lacking.

But sometimes, especially when taking a moment off from the busy race, we can experience a slowdown of time. When we quietly sit with eyes shut, we can experience a different sense of time. For a few moments, there is only the present, the movement slows down, and even completely stops, and there might be an opportunity to experience a different type of time, which we can refer to as Sacred Time. The ancient traditions saw the importance of creating many techniques to help man grasp what lies beyond the changeable forms; to help him fight against the veils of illusion which cover the ineffable form of the Being, and rescue him from falling in love with the temporary and dazzling forms,



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so that he might direct his gaze toward the unchangeable reality of himself, and of Life.

In our day-to-day, racing against chronological time, we often lose sight of the things that are really important. We get tangled up in doing things, so much so that we even tend to forget what we are doing it for.

We might complain that we don't have enough time, but when suddenly we have more of it, we don't know what to do with it. And when all the external activities are suddenly constricted, we find ourselves filling ourselves with too much food or too much meaningless TV, just because it seems that we don't remember why we are living, or how to be in solitude with ourselves.

Don't just wait eagerly for things to return to the 'normal' routine. Don't be consumed by the fast and ever-changing reality of the day-to-day. Instead, use the time well; sow seeds of a better tomorrow, first within yourself.



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Image by @danielcpn / Unsplash / CCo

Take the time to learn to re-evaluate your feelings, your thoughts, your intentions, your words, your actions, and try to make them more aligned with the real, with the good, with the beautiful. There is a natural compass inside of you; if you find it, you will never be lost.

Time is a special gift, if we just learn to use it well. The Stoic Philosopher Seneca said in his book *On the Shortness of Life*: *"It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste a lot of it. Life is long enough, and a sufficiently generous amount has been given to us for the highest achievements if it were all well invested. But when it is wasted in heedless luxury and spent on no good activity, we are forced at last by death's final constraint to realize that it has passed away before we knew it was passing. So it is: we are not given a short life but we make it short, and we are not ill-supplied but wasteful of it... Life is long if you know how to use it."*<sup>(2)</sup> ☺☺

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# EMPOWERING **REAL** CHANGE

For further information please contact:

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New Acropolis presents 'Empowering Real Change - Leadership for a Better Future'. This series of 5 Online sessions of 3 hours each, covers the following topics. Participants will have the opportunity to gain a different perspective of self, work and life. They will get more clarity and tools to engage with these uncertain times and to forge real change within themselves and others.

## EMPOWERING REAL CHANGE – LEADERSHIP FOR A BETTER FUTURE

### 1 THE NEED FOR REAL CHANGE

- What is real, sustainable change?
- Fear of change. What makes change difficult?
- Why do attempts to change fail?
- Mind: the lock and key to finding solutions

### 2 THE EVERYDAY HERO

- Facing challenges with the spirit of victory rather than with the attitude of a victim
- Discerning between what is in my control and what is not
- Standing up for what is right
- Transforming obstacles into stepping stones



### 3 PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP: LESSONS FROM LIFE

- Movement and change as a life principle
- Concentration and mindfulness
- Finding the right tension and balance: The key to harmony, order and rhythm
- Building stability and flexibility

### 4 LEADERSHIP FOR THE COMMON GOOD

- The Individual and the collective: Learning to belong
- Coexistence, collaboration and the ability to see the big picture
- The strength of the collective: Bringing out the best in each other
- Effective communication

### 5 PURPOSEFUL LEADERSHIP FOR REAL CHANGE

- The need for authentic leadership to forge sustainable change
- Defining success and happiness
- Bringing meaning and value in the workplace
- Empowering self and others

# COURAGE TO BE A DAILY HERO



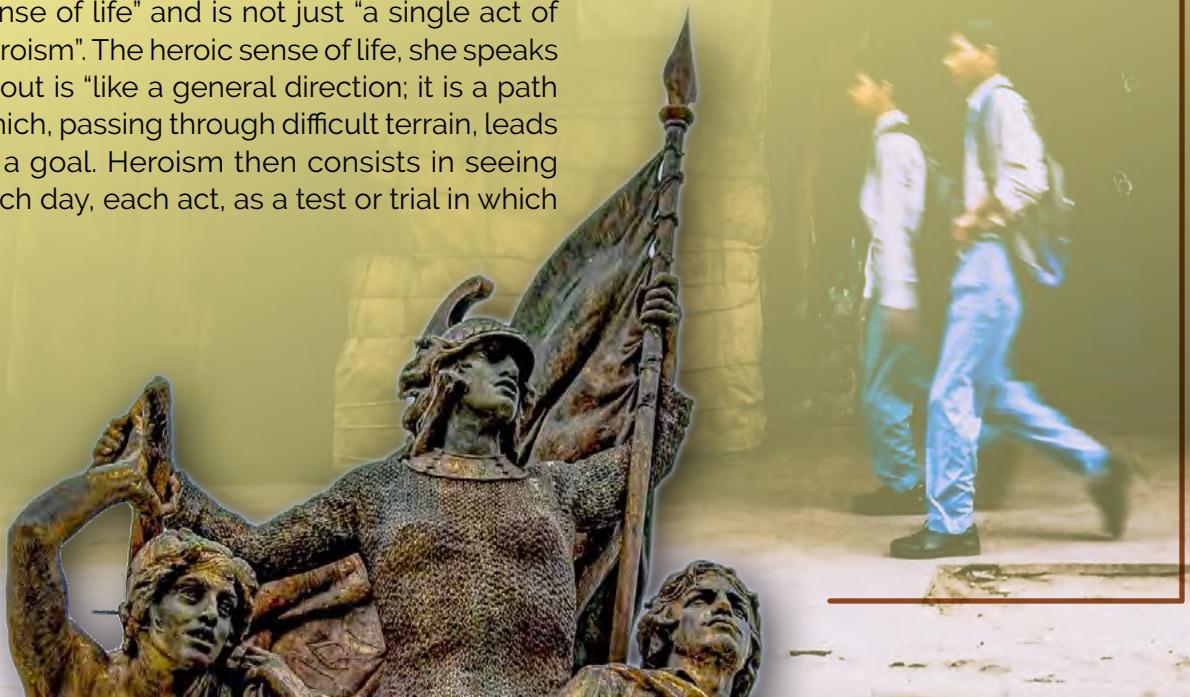
By Vasant Sanzgiri & Samarth Shetty

The word 'hero' comes from an ancient Greek root, which literally translates to 'protector' or 'defender'. Dictionary.com defines the word as "a person noted for courageous acts or nobility of character", and popular perception recognizes a hero as one who performs deeds that are not commonly possible, or one who exhibits virtues or values that make them stand out. So, we usually think of superheroes celebrated in movies, or victorious warriors like General Patton and Napoleon. Fernando Schwarz, in his book *Perseus: The Warrior of Peace*, talks of a potential hero who is "someone who seizes a destiny, not a destiny that others impress upon us, but his own destiny... but it is also to have the courage to implement that vision every day."<sup>(1)</sup> How might we draw inspiration from archetypical characters from mythology and history? What are some of the challenges we are likely to encounter? Can we too be heroes?

In *The Everyday Hero*, Delia Steinberg Guzman writes that being a Hero is to hold onto a "heroic sense of life" and is not just "a single act of heroism". The heroic sense of life, she speaks about is "like a general direction; it is a path which, passing through difficult terrain, leads to a goal. Heroism then consists in seeing each day, each act, as a test or trial in which

all our strengths – from physical strength to the subtle powers of intelligence and the soul – are going to come into play."<sup>(2)</sup> Hence, the 2 important elements are first, having a goal, and second, seeing a path that leads to that goal. The challenges on the path that we face every day can be our source of inspiration. They allow us to discover and develop the qualities which we perhaps already inherently possess, to surmount obstacles and navigate through troubled waters successfully, emerging like true heroes, victorious.

To be able to fight our daily battles requires us to call upon our inner strength, supplemented with some abilities that equip us to overcome challenges. These include the **conviction** in what we do with the **humility** to accept the outcome, whatever it may be. Beyond just good intentions, we need to act with **consciousness** and **intelligence**, and exercise an **unswerving will** to remain steadfast in the face of our day to day challenges.



In our quest to unravel how to become heroes, we took inspiration from the daring and tenacity of those who seem to have endeavoured to channelize the above qualities. Some of them are celebrated for their outstanding, noble and ground-breaking conduct, while some of them though lesser known, have in our experience abundantly displayed the tenets of an authentic everyday hero, in thought, demeanour and action. Our investigation uncovered 5 approaches to overcome some common challenges we encounter almost every day.

### **Stand for Truth**

The post-truth world creates external circumstances that cause us to be swayed by opinions, assumptions and speculations. It is far more convenient to surrender to herd mentality than to step up and be the lone voice of Truth. Not only must we develop the courage to stand for truth, we must also ensure that we are prepared to face the consequences of our stand in a world in which social media can shred reputations in an instant. Only a strong conviction in the pursuit of Truth, a well-defined goal, and an unrelenting determination can give us the inner strength to remain resilient. As Gandhiji

said, "Strength does not come from physical capacity, it comes from indomitable will." <sup>(3)</sup>

### **Fight Fear**

Fear arises from our preoccupation with consequences. It is natural that we will encounter fear as it is a natural defence mechanism inbuilt in our biology to safeguard survival. But the challenge is to resist the temptation to escape, to embrace the fear, to work with it by facing it and responding to it objectively. Then perhaps, the fear, rather than a prison, can become a ladder to help go beyond our limitations to encounter the unknown. In a passage from the book *Rules for a Knight*, the author Ethan Hawke says, "Fear is nothing to be ashamed of, it is a powerful resource, reminding us to be wary, alert and mindful. Fear is dark and courage is the light. Fear is the call and courage is the answer. When struggling to find his courage, a knight relies on his breath. Sword fighting,

**Not only must we develop the courage to stand for truth, we must also ensure that we are prepared to face the consequences of our stand in a world in which social media can shred reputations in an instant.**



archery, horsemanship – virtually every task I can think of is aided by an awareness of breath. By focusing on our breath, we can more adeptly inhabit our bodies and function on instinct." <sup>(4)</sup>

### **Forgiveness and Compassion**

Reacting to perceived hurt with anger, ego, and vengeance, will always result in alienation, conflict and violence. Is it possible to begin to see an adversary as a person, a human being, also caught within a set of circumstances and resources, not always in his control? Can we develop the empathy to hold on to our own humanity? Nelson Mandela said, "Our human compassion binds us to one another ... as human beings, who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future". <sup>(5)</sup> On the other hand to forgive and show compassion does not mean to yield and surrender. Sometimes compassion is expressed as a just battle. "Compassion and tolerance are not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength," says HH Dalai Lama. <sup>(6)</sup>

### **Facing the Tests of Life**

In the book *Rules for a Knight*, author Ethan Hawke says, "Anything that gives light must endure burning." To cut and polish a diamond to perfection requires a lot of friction. So, dealing courageously with the challenges that life throws at us, contributes to our growth, whether we fail or succeed. In moments of defeat, Hawke advises us to "let those feelings pass over and through you. Like a dead branch falling from a tree, which then decomposes and nourishes the soil, your disappointments can transform into the element of change and growth." <sup>(4)</sup> The joy of victory can make a person resting on his laurels, complacent and blind to imminent danger lurking round the

corner. We must recognise, how we deal with both victory as well as defeat, have lessons embedded within.

### **Dream**

The courage to dream and then to make those dreams into reality calls for the ability to imagine; to dare to aspire for what is as yet invisible, lying latent within our potential. Yet without the tremendous inner work of discernment and discipline, dreams are reduced to mere fantasies; idle talk, building castles in the air,

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with no connect to reality. A trainee fighter pilot can dream of flying a jet and manoeuvre it to the best of his abilities, but if he thinks of manoeuvring a passenger plane like a fighter jet, then it becomes a fantasy, a total waste of energy and time. Pursuing the dream with courage, not deterred by external challenges and fulfilling it without deviation, is to slowly make those aspirations tangible. Marcus Aurelius said, "Nothing happens to any man that he is not formed by nature to bear." <sup>(7)</sup> To me then, it follows that that we always have the capacity, both to dream, and fulfil our dreams. Dreams, and not fantasies, take us closer to our goals, on the path towards actualization.

Hence, the challenges we face on our way are perhaps an opportunity to call upon our resilience. Demanding conditions give us an opportunity to test our ability to keep our centre, without compromising the practice of virtues. In this, we may fall, but failures can propel us to rise and move forward. And challenging times shall pass, to be replaced with newer challenges, for as Swami Vivekananda said, "In a day when you don't come across any problems, you can be sure that you are travelling on a wrong path." <sup>(8)</sup>

Says Delia Steinberg Guzman, "Maybe you don't yet feel the hero in yourself? Make space for him and you will see him grow like an inner column...This is an invitation to be different, to be better, to be clear, honest and reasonable in the name of natural philosophy, when everyone seems determined to harm themselves for the sake of pretentiousness and ignorance."<sup>(2)</sup> It is vital to never lose hope, never lose our centre, never lose the connection with the hero that resides within us. 

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**We always have the capacity, both to dream, and fulfil our dreams.**  
**Dreams, and not fantasies, take us closer to our goals.**

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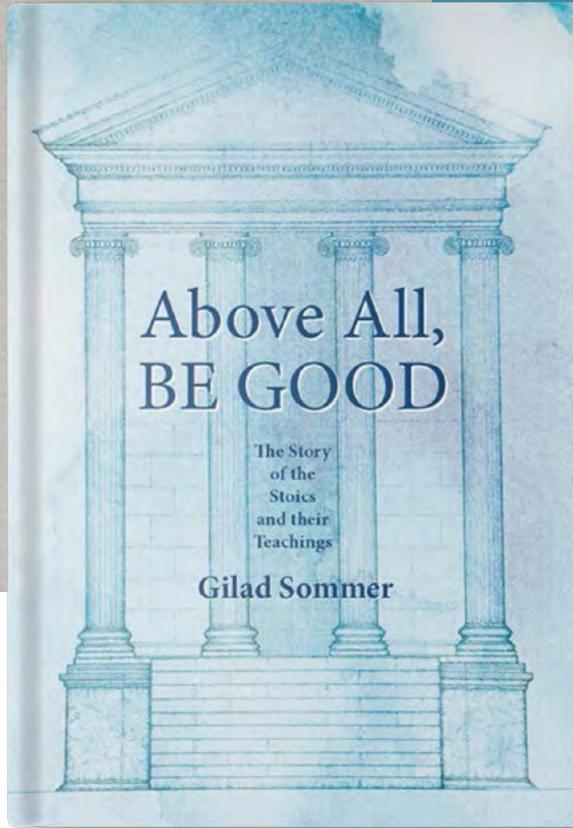
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## BOOK RECOMMENDATION

# ABOVE ALL, BE GOOD

By Gilad Sommer

The pursuit of wisdom and the good life runs like a thread throughout the history of humanity. Among the many groups and individuals who have attempted to propagate a natural philosophy of living, the Stoics stand out both for their persistence and perseverance as a philosophy school, and for their influence on the history of humanity.

We all want to live a good life, but while many of us accept the ready made answers our society, education and media offer – the Stoics believed that the real answer to the question of the good life must pass through the use of our own reason, which should not be confused with the intellect.

Stoicism developed in times in which people were losing touch with metaphysical values and the wisdom of the ancients. Today, with the disintegration of the moral traditions of our cultures, we are seeking answers as well, a wise way of life in a chaotic world. The pragmatic teachings of the Stoics find a listening ear among contemporary seekers, as they come from a time very similar to our own.

From Zeno, an eclectic philosopher who taught in the Stoa of Athens, to Marcus Aurelius, the great philosopher king who left his thoughts to posterity, this is the story of the Stoics and their teachings.

## Stoicism and Social Responsibility

It is clear that humanity today is going through a crisis. The visible aspects of this crisis are seen on the economic, environmental, political and cultural levels, among many others. But at its root, this crisis is neither ecological nor economical, but moral. All these different aspects reflect the same hidden cause. This crisis begins in the heart of man, and that is where it will end.

Let's ask ourselves, why do we have ecological and economic problems? Why do we have wars and conflicts? How long will the wars on drugs, poverty, hunger and war itself, continue, until we realize we're approaching it the wrong way?

Some say it's a god given reality. But as far as I am able to tell, God doesn't tell anybody what to do. These situations are a result of greed, apathy and even laziness, and these are all found in the human psyche. So this is not divine intervention, but just our own human faults and weaknesses.

When we don't like the content of a television show, we don't call a technician to fix the TV set. But on a social level, this is what usually happens. Instead of fixing the cause, we try to reform this or that program, make or cancel regulations, change this or that administrator. But when the TV show is bad, what you want to do is to change the content, not fix the TV.

In the human sphere, the content is found in the inner world – the psychological, ethical and spiritual spheres. While the spiritual may be beyond our reach, in the sense that we cannot affect it, we must work in the ethical sphere, which is the reflection of the spiritual in our everyday actions.

From the early days of the Roman Empire, the Stoics formed a resistance to tyranny and corruption, but this resistance was not as much against the tyrant personally, as it was an inner resistance against oneself engaging in any unethical actions, or neglecting one's duty.

Epictetus writes: *"When Vespasian sent for Helvidius Priscus and commanded him not to go into the Senate, he replied, 'It is in your power not to allow me to be a member of the Senate, but so long as I am, I must go in.' 'Well, go in then,' says the emperor, 'but say nothing.' 'Do not ask my opinion, and I will be silent.' 'But I must ask your opinion.' 'And I must say what I think right.' 'But if you do, I shall put you to death.' 'When then did I tell you that I am immortal? You will do your part, and I will do mine: it is your part to kill; it is mine to die, but not in fear: yours to banish me; mine to depart without sorrow.'" (Discourses, 1.2.19-21)*

This is a wonderful example of an impersonal stoic resistance. We cannot control the actions of others, especially the powers that be, but we can definitely control our own, and make our own choices, taking into consideration whatever consequences they may have.

This is highly relevant in today's political atmosphere, which very much revolves around the personalities of politicians, and not around ideas. To attack personalities, is not only undignified, but it is also useless. Instead the Stoics offer a much more reasonable form of resistance, based on one's own initiative and actions – *"in my own sphere of influence, I choose to take responsible and conscious actions, and not to go against my conscience."*

We cannot control the greed of corporations, yet we can control our own greed, our own constant desire for more than we need,

which feeds the greed of the corporations. A charlatan or snake oil salesman can only succeed if they have gullible clients who wish to find magical and easy cures for their conditions. There will always be ignorant predators, ignorant for not seeing the bigger consequences of their actions, but whether they succeed or not depends on whether we are willing to be ignorant prey.

Therefore, the change cannot start from without; it must start within every one of us. Because we don't have control over the external circumstances, only on our own selves.

When speaking about the Stoics it's easy to focus on emotional and mental control, on duty, on finding solutions to the challenges of our lives, but we shouldn't forget that above all the Stoics were good people, or at least aspired to be. This is something we don't need to over analyze. Marcus Aurelius wrote, "Don't discuss too much what it means to be a good person, just be one".

This ethical-moral axis cannot be overemphasized. Stoicism is a rational and practical method which can be used to improve ourselves in all aspects of life. But, this aspect of Stoicism, the central idea of goodness, is sometimes conveniently underestimated by contemporary writers. Why? Because it means the Stoics didn't aim just for personal happiness or success. The word success in fact doesn't appear once in the writings of Marcus Aurelius.

The important thing is to fulfill our duties in the best way and to be good people. We are the ones who need to climb upwards to reach their lofty ideals, and not to lower them down to us.

Epictetus tells us that we should never miss an opportunity to help a friend in need. Don't let the thoughts of your lower mind, the constant gain-calculator, to prevent you from being helpful.

"What are my duties?" was the question every Stoic asked himself, and a question each of us needs to ask ourselves. According to the Stoics we all have duties in life, some larger, some smaller, but each of us must take care to fulfill our duties in the best way possible, whether as citizens, family men, friends, teachers or leaders.

Stoicism is a philosophy of taking part, of responsibility and commitment – words that may scare some, until we understand that they are synonymous to purpose and sense of meaning. Within us, we all want to take part in something, to be a part of something which is greater than ourselves, and that gives meaning to our existence.

The ideals of Stoicism do not belong to the Stoics. We find them resonating strongly among the Samurai in Japan, as well as among the warrior tribes of indigenous North America such as the Lakota and the Apachee. They characterize a way of life that emerges and is reborn with the cycles of history and under different guises in different cultures and places. It is an aspect of the human experience, it is the way of life of the INNER WARRIOR. ☠

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Philosophy, when it is practical, is educational. It helps us to know ourselves and to improve ourselves. To be a philosopher is a way of life committed to the best aspirations of humanity.



The practice of human values is the basis for a model of active and participative Culture, which brings out the qualities of each person, broadens the horizons of the mind and opens the human being up to all the expressions of the spirit.



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.



# OUR CENTERS

## Mumbai | COLABA CENTER

A-0 Ground Floor, Connaught Mansion,  
Opp. Colaba Post Office, Colaba,  
Mumbai, Maharashtra 400005  
Tel: +91 22 2216 3712

## Mumbai | KHAR BRANCH

Mumbai, Maharashtra  
Tel: +91 98330 33239

## Pune | KOREGAON PARK BRANCH

Plot no.22, Gangajanan Society,  
Lane no. 7 Koregaon Park, South Main Road  
Pune, Maharashtra 411001  
Tel: +91 99301 98253

