

A Magazine on Philosophy, Culture & Volunteering

THEACROPOLITAN

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2021



**Do Not Give In to
Pessimism**

FEATURE

Akbar, The Great Enigma

**Racism, a Product of
Modernity**

FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

Dear Reader,

For many, it is easy to recognize the prevailing sense of pessimism or hopelessness in our times; the feeling that one is unable to cause a lasting impact on the world, either because of the enormous scale of the challenges that need to be resolved, or because one gets lost in dealing with symptoms, ill equipped to deal with the root cause of the challenges. Perhaps this is one of the attributes that characterizes the onset of a middle ages, which are marked also by a tendency towards separation, competition, and racism – a general degradation of human connections and human values.

As the courageous amongst us persevere to find real solutions for real change, it becomes evident that the secret to change lies not in new laws, new committees, new systems, or new funds or resources. The ancient sages have always maintained that the key lies in purifying human consciousness; individually and collectively, we must embark on a sincere pursuit of Beauty, Goodness, Justice, and Truth.

This suggests that the solution is an internal solution, to be found within the human being, and therefore independent of external circumstances. It relies on the human will to transform, and master himself. Obscure, but ever present through history, we find few great and enigmatic heroes, torch bearers, who dared to set off on this inner path. Let us also dare to follow their example. Let us Discover, Awaken, Transform.

Harianto Mehta

Editor



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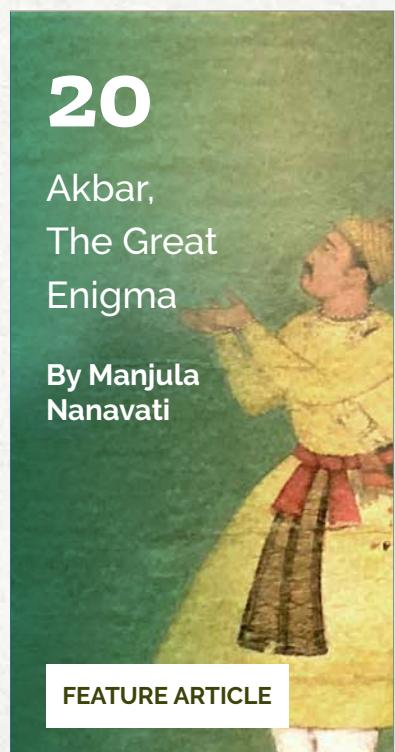
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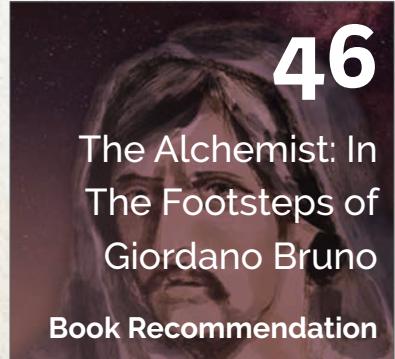
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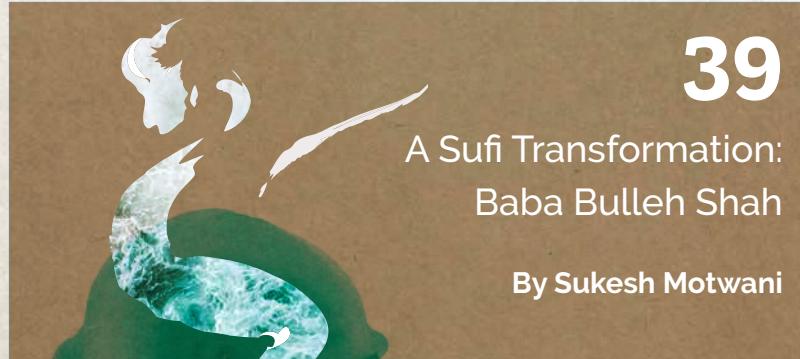


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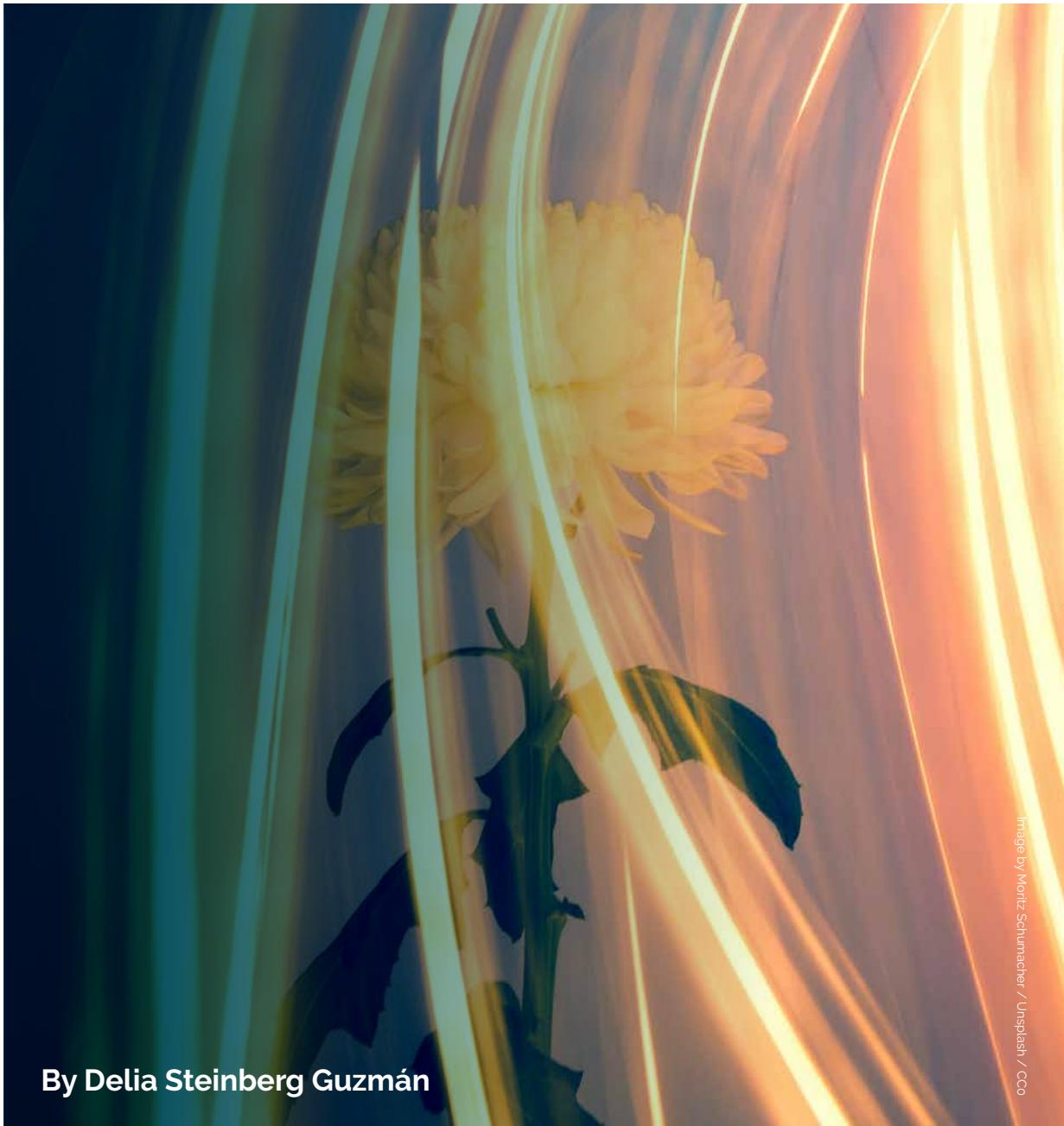
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DO NOT GIVE IN TO PESSIMISM



By Delia Steinberg Guzmán

We live at a time in history – which is everybody's life – when events are accelerating unstoppably, and often give us the impression that they are completely beyond our powers.

We know that the duration of time varies in accordance with the inner state with which we measure it. For this reason, neither in the life of human beings nor in their historical life as a whole, can we avoid this sensation of uncontrollable speed. Partly because everything happens without intervals that allow us to breathe; and partly because the number of events that are happening all over the world exceeds our capacity for assimilation; when we think we have understood something, or at least have endured it, ten or twenty other things jump out and paralyze us with their quantity, dimensions and rapidity.

It is not necessary to be a scholar to understand what I am referring to, nor do I need to give many examples. Fortunately or unfortunately, the efficiency of the media makes it possible for anyone to experience what is happening in every corner of the world without leaving home; to feel the impact of pain, misery, confrontations, wars, death, violence, insecurity, helplessness... For every global situation that occurs - those that fill the media, those that go down in history - there are other very similar personal situations that repeat in small scale what is happening in the large scale. The small things may not make big headlines, but they affect those who suffer through them. Also in small human groups, in the family, among friends, in daily relationships, there is aggression, pain, confrontations, helplessness and, unfortunately, crimes and murders.

**Although it
may seem that
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in truth we are
not defeated.**



The important thing is the perseverance to start again until the desired results are achieved.



The aforementioned speed with which we live and the quality of what we live, sometimes makes us give in to pessimism. And even if we try to be objective and analyze the quantity and quality of the things we experience, the end result is overwhelming.

I believe, however, that it is not pessimism or the negative feeling of life that dominates us. Although it may seem that helplessness sometimes paralyzes us, in truth we are not defeated.

Look at the enormous efforts that both nations and individuals make to reach agreements, to breathe easy, to stop the maelstrom, to stop the destructive and sterile struggles. The results are not encouraging in many cases, it is true, but the important thing is the perseverance to start again until the desired results are achieved. There are endless dialogues, it is true, and one even wonders whether states or men want to reach an agreement, whether there is an authentic dialogue or simple monologues in which no one listens to no one. However, it is repeated, and this is a good sign, that we are becoming aware of our deafness.

In the inner heart of everything that happens to us, there is a spark of light, of optimism, of hope for the future, of recovering a harmonious rhythm of life. We speak of pain, but we do it thinking of the happiness that awaits us... if we want to achieve it, of course. We speak of war, but we do so dreaming of peace. We condemn violence because we love coexistence, we resent intolerance because we want to understand each other in earnest.

Those who do not live the present – even if it is a little confused and dark – with that spark of hope, are the ones who make the present – and also the future – dangerously negative. Those who feel that spark of recovery, of renewal, of broad and safe paths, are building a more dignified future in the midst of the difficulties of the present. Needless to say that, as philosophers, and in the name of that love of Wisdom that encourages us, it is important to take care of the spark, however small it may be, because we see in it the seed of a definite clarity for tomorrow. 

MASTERING THE BOW

By Harianto Mehta





Image by Hitesh Choudhary / Unsplash / CCO

A dedicated volume on the art and science of archery, warrants a deeper look, for anyone seeking to "establish being in yourself", as an elementary step in the preparation to charge into the inner battle.

Yogastha Kuru Karmani

First establish being in yourself, and only then perform action.

Introduction

Amidst a series of mystical verses compiled in the Bhagavad Gita, this is one of the fundamental instructions that Krishna transmits to a distraught Arjuna, when faced with the prospect of killing his own cousins in the battlefield of Kurukshetra, in order to reinstate *dharma* in the kingdom.

The philosophical tradition suggests that beneath this storyline lies a deeper dimension, revealed only to one who knows to unravel its mysteries, by turning inwards, to the inner Kurukshetra, within the human being. Captured within the elaborate mythology is a fundamental truth about the human condition, characterized by an inner battle between the Kauravas (the innumerable human vices, and the cause of ignorance) and the Pandavas (the divine potential), between non-truth and Truth.

In order to maneuver through this inner battlefield, the protagonist Arjuna serves as a symbol of a human hero – a mighty warrior accomplished specifically as a legendary archer. Hence, when the same tradition offers a dedicated volume on the art and science of archery, it certainly warrants a deeper look, for anyone seeking to "establish being in yourself", as an elementary step in the preparation to charge into the inner battle.

**The word
Dhanurveda
literally
translates as
"Knowledge
of the Bow".**

Dhanurveda

The word *Dhanurveda* literally translates as "Knowledge of the Bow". It is considered a supportive text that supplements the Yajur Veda (Book of Ritual), one of the 4 primary canons of Vedic Literature. At first glance it appears to be a technical treatise documenting the ancient science and practice of archery. It elaborately details various kinds of bows, arrows, targets, postures, and various usages of each, and even includes recommendations on auspicious moments to commence the study of archery. Pupils are given a well-rounded holistic training, so that they are equipped to respond to all situations.

However, to reduce *Dhanurveda* to a simple catalogue of weapons and battle strategies would be a mistake. Like in any practice, it is easy to imagine that the discipline and practice required in archery training facilitates the development of the human being, physically and mentally. Although this by itself is an audacious work, when considered in the context of the vedic tradition, it seems that even this difficult work is akin to the preparation of a well-formed vessel; it is ultimately meant to be used to carry something of value; in this case, a purified human consciousness.

Forming the Vessel

Dr. John Douillard, author and scholar of Yoga and Ayurveda, says, "When you fully draw a bow back in an attempt to shoot an arrow... You must hold and establish that arrow and bowstring into a state of absolute stillness or silence. The slightest movement of the bowstring will create an exponentially distorted flight of the arrow."



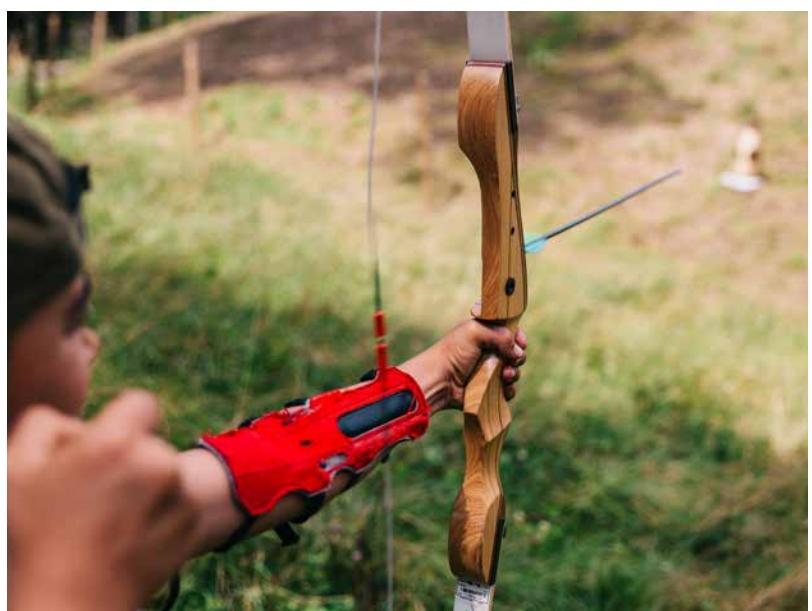
In the practice of wielding the bow, the pupil begins to transform himself, with self-control, concentration, and inner stability.

It must be noted that it is not enough to understand this. It demands actual practice and perseverance, because generally the mind is reactive, calculating, ever-busy attached to the past, anticipating the future, and rarely in one's own control. We might describe it as concentration, or as an ability to dispel distractions caused by attachments. Douillard explains, "The minute we let the mind wander, be distracted or think about the outcome, the mind instantly attaches itself to the fruits of that action. The mind will seek the reward, the satisfaction of hitting the target, the return on investment...every action becomes a manipulation of the environment to deliver a reward."

And so in the practice of wielding the bow, the pupil begins to transform himself, with self-control, concentration, and inner stability. The motivation of each action is gradually purified, such that it emerges not from attachment, fear or anticipation, but from stillness. It is from this meditative state of "establishing being" that the archer is able to perform right action, the release of his arrow. This is perhaps the most important part of meditation, often neglected in our times – the imperative to act. Such right action becomes the reward in itself.

Inner Archery

One might turn to the Manduka Upanishad to reveal more clearly the larger goal, a spiritual purpose, of this solitary practice.





Take up the mighty bow of the Upanishad, place upon it an arrow [Mind], sharpened and straightened, Draw back the bow string, mind suffused in Brahman, the goal, let fly and pierce [know] it unerringly. The practice is the Bow, you are the Arrow, Brahman [Truth] is your target, Hit it unerringly, become one with it.

dhanur gr̥hitvā aupaniṣadām mahāstra śara hy upāsā-niśita sadadhīta, āyamya tad-bhāvagatena cetasā lakṣya tad evākṣara, saumya viddhi. praavo dhanuh, śaro hy ātmā, brahma tal lakṣyam ucyate, apramattena veddhavyam, śaravat tanmayo bhavet.
 Take up the mighty bow of the Upanishad, place upon it an arrow [Mind], sharpened and straightened, Draw back the bow string, mind suffused in Brahman, the goal, let fly and pierce [know] it unerringly. The practice is the Bow, you are the Arrow, Brahman [Truth] is your target, Hit it unerringly, become one with it.

We find therefore, that ultimately the human tradition has unceasingly whispered through the ages, the need to cross the distance of ignorance, by acquiring living knowledge, an inner realization that results from experience. The mastery of archery, and the system described in the *Dhanurveda*, can serve as a symbolic and formative practice, to "establish being in yourself", transcending the transient masks, in order to facilitate this transformation. ☺☺

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Tue 16th Nov, 7:30PM (2hrs)

Course Begins:

Tue 23rd Nov, 7:30PM

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Free Intro:

Sun 10th Oct, 6PM (2hrs)

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TRANSFORM**





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- **Know yourself better:** Your strengths and weaknesses, our potential as human beings, and how you can harness them
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- **Contribute to society** in a meaningful and impactful manner with like-minded individuals
- **Embark on an adventure** of living life as a Philosopher-Volunteer: Offer your own transformation as a key to impacting positive change in the world around us

PUBLIC EVENTS NEW ACROPOLIS MUMBAI

Philosophy for our Times: Event Series

Celebrating World Philosophy Day 2021

In honour of World Philosophy Day, New Acropolis India commemorates the value and need for reviving Philosophy and its practical application for our times today. Join us as we learn from seekers of wisdom across traditions from our past, to discover how we can live better today, and contribute to a better future.

**Sat
9 Oct**

Webinar
6:00 - 7:15 pm

[Register Here](#)



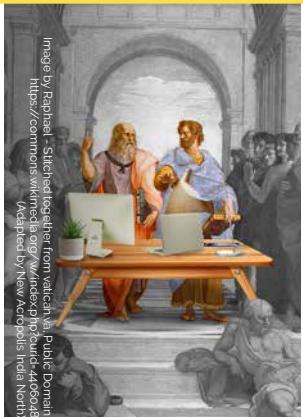
LET'S TALK ABOUT HAPPINESS!

The search for happiness has always been a fundamental human goal, yet it often seems to elude us. Is happiness a utopic idea? As aspiring philosophers seeking truth, we will try to bring more clarity to the state of happiness and explore how we can look for it in our day to day.

**Thurs
18 Nov**

Theatrical
Interview
& Panel
Discussion
7:30 - 9:00 pm

[Register Here](#)



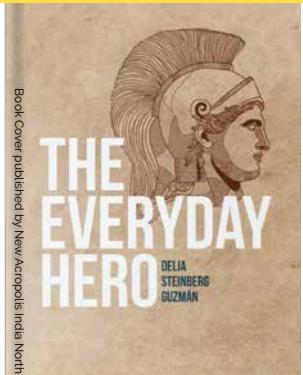
PHILOSOPHY FOR LIVING: SEEKING CONTEMPORARY SOLUTIONS FROM PHILOSOPHERS IN HISTORY

What would great philosophers across history say to questions we continue to ask ourselves in the context of our world today? Join our celebration of World Philosophy Day, as we encounter Marcus Aurelius, Madam Blavatsky and Plato through a theatrical interview style discussion, to learn the value of the pursuit of truth and wisdom for our times today, and how philosophy can offer direction and stability in uncertain times.

**Sat
11 Dec**

Book Reading
& Discussion
6:00 - 7:15 pm

[Register Here](#)



THE EVERYDAY HERO

"Everyone has the desire to change, to improve, to leave the world a little better from the way they found it"
- Delia Steinberg Guzmán, *The Everyday Hero*

This book reading and discussion is an invitation to bring the heroic spirit into our daily life. Join us as we share excerpts from Guzmán's *The Everyday Hero* as she offers practical philosophy as a tool to overcome our own self-imposed limitations and live with more courage, clarity and fulfilment.

PUBLIC EVENTS **NEW ACROPOLIS PUNE**

Awaken Your Muse: Event Series

Can we invite the Muses into our day to day lives ? Can we inspire one another to be a better version of our own selves? Join us for this series of three events, to learn to awaken our inner muse and dare to practically live a meaningful and happy life.

**Sat
23 Oct**

Webinar
6:00 - 7:15 pm

[Register Here](#)



AWAKEN YOUR MUSE: LEARNING TO IMAGINE

"Imagination is more important than knowledge" –Albert Einstein
It is said that Imagination is a tool with which we can create. To work with imagination in our day to day can help us build ourselves and our lives, by facing reality rather than escaping behind overwhelming fantasies. It can help us find creative solutions, dream and express them as authentic artists of our own lives. Can we develop this tool with practice? Let's explore.

**Fri
12 Nov**

Webinar
7:30 - 8:45 pm

[Register Here](#)



AWAKEN YOUR MUSE: WHAT CAN MYTHOLOGY TEACH US?

Mythology can be found at the heart of ancient civilisations across the world, be it the mighty Hercules from the Greek tradition or Gilgamesh of Mesopotamia. In fact, the concept of super heroes continues to pervade popular culture even today. What can we learn from the journey of these mythical figures as they conquer challenges and learn to express their true nature as heroes?

**Sat
4 Dec**

Webinar
6:00 - 7:15 pm

[Register Here](#)



AWAKEN YOUR MUSE: WORKING WITH NATURE

"Those who side with any flag other than nature – the master of all masters – labour in vain" – Leonardo Da Vinci

Nature combines beauty, economy and functionality in an incomparable way and has always remained a source of inspiration for humankind. While we may have made a lot of progress by emulating nature's creations, with our focus on the material benefits we can extract from nature, we seem to miss out on the essential lessons of life that nature has to offer. Perhaps working with natural principles could naturally bring more harmony order and beauty into our lives as well! Join us as we investigate lessons from nature.

HUMAN CONNECTIONS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN DIGITAL ONES

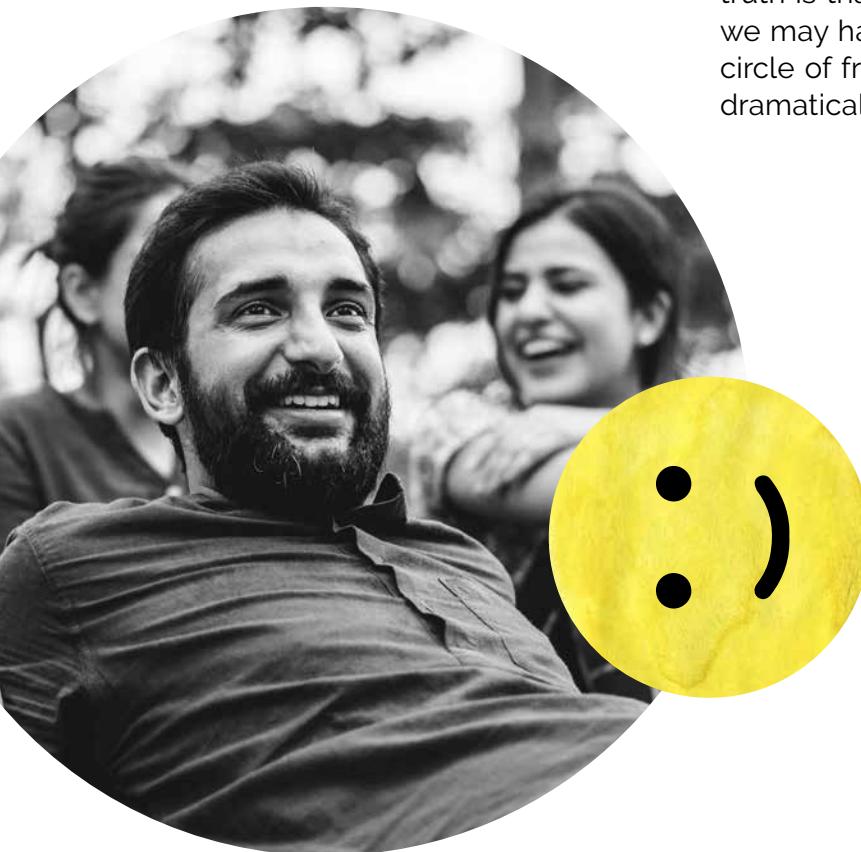
By Sabine Leitner

Which would you prefer: meeting for a quick cup of coffee with a friend or spending the same amount of time texting back and forth about the same topic? Chances are that most of us would prefer the first but usually end up doing the second. But can 10 texts really equal a face to face exchange? Can an emoji replace the smile and the look in the eyes of a friend? Is a network the same as a community?

In recent years, our human interactions have become eroded by modern technology in almost all areas of our lives. Shops have replaced friendly cashiers with self-checkout lanes, airports helpful check-in staff with machines, at work we have virtual meetings and we now communicate primarily through

writing. However, without hearing the tone of voice and registering the subtleties of body language, the written words can often quite easily be misinterpreted. Speaking to someone in person will usually give us a much more accurate understanding of a situation and even business has started to understand that the secret to success lies in human connection. When there is belonging there is engagement, and when there is engagement there is productivity.

There is little doubt about the positive effects of modern technology. The possibility of building global networks, maintaining long-distance friendships and communicating quickly with many people at once are just some of its advantages. However, the sad truth is that for all the social media friends we may have, studies have shown that the circle of friends and confidants has shrunk dramatically over the past two decades and



Can 10 texts really equal a face to face exchange? Can an emoji replace the smile and the look in the eyes of a friend? Is a network the same as a community?

Strong social connections lead to a 50% increased chance of longevity, strengthen our immune systems and improve our physical and psychological well-being.



that as a result people are finding themselves lonelier than ever. Nearly a quarter of those surveyed say they have no close friends or confidants at all – a 14% increase since we all became so digitally connected.

Modern technology has also changed dating and our intimate relationships. You may have heard of 'situationships' – a rather confusing phenomenon of modern dating. These are noncommittal 'relationships' that are so completely undefined that those who are in one don't know whether they are in a relationship or not. It is more than a friendship but not quite a relationship, which means that there are no clear boundaries and therefore allows people to get away with some very bad behaviour indeed. What a sure recipe for a lot of heartache, for a roller coaster of hope

and disappointment, for uncertainty when we are all craving some form of stability and certainty! The philosopher and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman speaks about 'liquid love' – a metaphor for the increasingly brief and superficial encounters that characterise modern love and the frailty of human bonds.

There are many studies that show how important human contact is for our health. Strong social connections lead to a 50% increased chance of longevity, strengthen our immune systems and improve our physical and psychological well-being. Their absence is of greater detriment to health than obesity, smoking and high blood pressure, and the emotional impacts of loneliness can actually trigger cellular changes that alter the gene expressions in our bodies.



No matter how much technology we will have in the future, some things will remain fundamental, and a deep connection between human beings is one of them.

We are profoundly social beings. Brene Brown, professor and author of many popular books, says: "A deep sense of love and belonging is an irresistible need of all people. When those needs are not met, we don't function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick."

The late poet and philosopher John O'Donohue wrote: "In this post-modern world the hunger to belong has rarely been more intense, more urgent. [...] And although technology pretends to unite us, more often than not all it delivers are simulated images that distance us from our lives. The 'global village' has no roads or neighbours; it is a faceless, impersonal landscape from which all individuality has been erased."

No matter how much technology we will have in the future, some things will remain fundamental, and a deep connection between human beings is one of them. But it seems that digital connection has negatively impacted our ability to connect. So, don't wait for others to take the first step. Open your heart, dare to make yourself vulnerable and treat others how you would like to be treated yourself. ☺☺

AKBAR, THE GREAT ENIGMA

By Manjula Nanavati



File:India_mughal_1580-1605 - Akbar worshipping the sun.jpg - Wikimedia Commons 10 November 2018

Vector created by vishnezh / freepik

During the Renaissance, while Europe was experiencing a gigantic shift of ideas in almost every aspect of knowledge, in India, was born a man who, as Emperor of Hindustan, would use his indomitable courage and a restless search for wisdom to weave a similarly audacious social, political, and spiritual vision in the Indian subcontinent. His name was Abu'l-fath Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar.

Akbar the Great, was 13 when he inherited the throne from his father Humayun.

There is much that has been documented to justify the appellation Akbar, The Great. During his lifetime, scribes, artists and poets were commissioned to record his life and chronicle the events and circumstances of his reign. They accompanied him on battlefields and hunts, and were ever present in court, to capture his images, his words and his deeds in a treasure trove of material that gives us an insight into the many facets of this evidently extraordinary human being: the ruthless Mughal conqueror, the solicitous and liberal Hindu Raja, the unschooled but enlightened Sufi mystic, the generous patron of a unique blend of Indo-Persian culture, the iconoclastic founder of a revolutionary syncretic religion. But is the sum of these parts a true reflection of the heart and sinew of the man? Or are these separate







At the age of 35 it seems that Akbar experienced what might be called a sort of spiritual epiphany that would change the course of his rule.

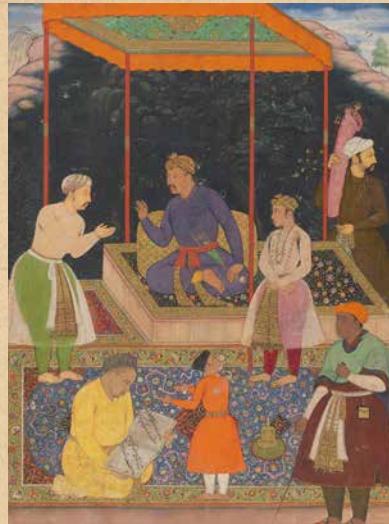
From all these well documented accounts it seems that Akbar experienced what might be called a sort of spiritual epiphany that would change the course of his rule. From then on he invited scholars and thinkers of all religions and sects to the *Ibadat Khana*, the House of Worship. Sufi, Sunni, and Shiite scholars engaged in complex discussions and arguments with Brahmin, Jain, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christian thinkers, so that Akbar had the opportunity to assess the validity of their various beliefs. From these interactions Akbar concluded that "There are wise men to be found in all religions, and men of asceticism and recipients of revelation and workers of miracles are found in all nations." (1) This became the foundation for the principles by which henceforth Akbar would govern his empire; all people could live and worship God as they pleased, and in all legal matters, people of all religions would be treated equally, resulting in a social, cultural and spiritual freedom that historians agree was unprecedented at the time.



Is it possible that the 'flash of insight' that Akbar's court chroniclers referred to, far from being an isolated, inspired revelation, was really a culmination of an ongoing pursuit of a man consumed by a search for something greater? Could his inner compulsion to spend his childhood in close proximity with nature have been an impulse to see and experience life for himself, rather than through theory and

"Truth is an inhabitant of every place" - Akbar

formal learning? This seems to have continued into adulthood also, for Henrique the Jesuit priest who visited Akbar's court at Fatehpur Sikri, wrote that the emperor could often be seen "shearing camels, hewing stones,



cutting wood, or hammering iron, with as much diligence as though engaged in his own particular vocation."⁽¹⁾ The early exuberant curiosity of the child would find maturity in his youth, for Akbar himself said that "On the completion of my twentieth year I experienced an internal bitterness, and from the lack of spiritual provision for my last journey, my soul was seized with exceeding sorrow." Until finally, the extensive philosophical and religious arguments in the *Ibadat khana* perhaps convinced him of the integrity of life, leading him to proclaim, "Truth is an inhabitant of every place."⁽¹⁾

What could possibly make an opulently wealthy, all-powerful monarch indulge in all these activities? Was this restlessness and melancholy emblematic of a deep disquiet? Was his subsequent immersion into spirited spiritual debate a search for meaning? Perhaps Akbar found some answers in the principle of Harmony and Unity, embodied by *Sulh-i-kul* and which he strenuously strived to impart into all aspects of his rule, weaving it into the religious, social, economic, political, and artistic fabric of the times.

The great Mughal Emperor evidently began fashioning



for himself a new identity that reflected the cosmopolitan nature of his beliefs. He began his day with the Hindu ritual of worshipping the morning sun. He wore a *tilak* on his forehead, a *rakhi* or protective thread on his wrist, and prohibited the slaughter of cows. He decreed that a sacred fire be maintained at Fatehpur Sikri in consonance with Zoroastrian ritual. He kept fasts in the tradition of Jains and Buddhists, repeated mantras and examined his conscience in an effort to find a code of ethics that would make him a better person, and a worthy king to his subjects.⁽¹⁾ A letter to Philip II of Spain from Akbar stated that good emperors must pursue "the possibility of ascertaining the truth, which is the noblest aim of the human intellect."⁽³⁾

Harmony also reflected concretely in matters of state and in the diversity of his courtiers; men whose Hindu, Muslim, Rajput, Irani, and Turani lineages would normally translate into conflicting temperaments and beliefs, were nevertheless able to administer and co-ordinate their obligations and duties effectively. To the dismay of court clerics Akbar abolished the *jaziya* tax collected from all non-Muslims, and the pilgrim tax collected at sacred Hindu sites, proclaiming it was morally wrong to penalise anyone in search of the light of God.⁽²⁾ Highways with rest houses were built to ease the plight of travelling on pilgrims, and caravanserais were built to house and feed the poor. In addition, forced sati was forbidden, widow remarriage permitted, and the legal marriageable age was raised to 16 and 14, for boys and girls, respectively.

In his *Maktab Khana*, House of Translations, a unique strand of Indo-Persian literature was coming into existence; an elite circle of writers and theologians began the translation of the Mahabharat and the Vedas from Sanskrit to Persian; Akbar believed that "harmony would be encouraged, if Muslims would become familiar with this ancient system of thought". To further this spirit of understanding and accord, Akbar ordered translations of Persian, Arabic, Greek volumes so that all "could



have the pleasure of benefitting and seeking the Divine Truth." ⁽¹⁾

Accompanying these translations, would be sumptuous illustrations in a mix of Persian and Indian styles, also reflecting the influence of the west. Akbar's Tasveer Khana was filled with artists, working painstakingly on miniatures with pigments made from pounded gold and silver, lapis lazuli, copper and saffron. Calligraphers and scribes were commissioned to copy the sacred Koran. A style of Architecture called *Akbari*, an amalgam of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Islamic characteristics began to mould the landscape of Hindustan in the form of mosques, temples, palaces and garden tombs.

So deeply was Akbar inspired to reconcile the differences that divided his empire, and so convinced of the correlation among different faiths, that he even dared to propound a new religion called *Din-i-llahi*, said to be a synthesis of elements drawn from Islam, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism, but also including tenets from Buddhism, Jainism, and Christianity. More than a religion it was a personal moral code, to be adopted completely by choice, that sought to build fraternity, and weld together the diverse communities that made up his empire. ⁽¹⁾

Throughout history, when a civilization is on the rise, there is often a leader whose astonishing daring and unflagging energy are crystalized in building a conducive environment, not just for a few, but for ALL who seek to uplift themselves, and raise their consciousness. They tend to be controversial figures, for they row against the tide, churning the waters around them, as they churn within themselves, delving deeply to find the light. To me, Akbar was undoubtedly an extraordinary king in constant churn, and he has been judged for it many times over. Some have vilified him, myths and legends have deified him, Bollywood has romanticized him, and the tongue in cheek folktales of Akbar and Birbal have humanized him.



Throughout history, when a civilization is on the rise, there is often a leader whose astonishing daring and unflagging energy are crystalized in building a conducive environment, not just for a few, but for ALL who seek to uplift themselves, and raise their consciousness.

However he is viewed, Akbar remains a great enigma and an inspiring exemplar; A philosopher - king, whose life was marked by a sincere search for unity and harmony, and a relentless courage to give it manifestation; A mighty monarch who persistently honed himself to discern the essential from the nonessential; An emperor whose belief in rational investigation equalled his deep and abiding faith in God; A ruler who steadfastly chose tolerance over prejudice, empathy over indifference and unity over separation; And ultimately for us today, a visionary from the past, whom we could justifiably look to, for lessons concerning our future. ☺☺

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All the sessions were like emotional and intellectual battles with my own self and forced me to relook at my own behaviour – which was effective, but not easy at all. End of the day, this self-challenging introspection was really rewarding for myself. Really appreciate the openness, sincerity and willingness of the entire faculty of educators. This is highly recommended.

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RACISM, A PRODUCT OF MODERNITY

By Fernando Schwarz



**All the moral
teachings in
the world have
promoted tolerance
and a greater
understanding of
the other.**

Racism can be expressed and experienced on different levels. Not knowing how to value another race or another religion is part of an ethical conception of racism. This is a relatively recent phenomenon. It appears in the Renaissance and especially develops in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Non acceptance has always existed; in this regard, we can speak about a constant in human behavior, together with selfishness and narrow-mindedness, which can even manifest itself within the same family. Not surprisingly, all the moral teachings in the world have promoted tolerance and a greater understanding of the other.

The notions of separateness and segregation existed in ancient times under very different forms than the ones we know today. Nevertheless, even if a people or a human being were considered different, this notion never became a group ideology.

Thus, for the Romans, there were on the one hand those who were civilized, and on the other the barbarians, that is, all the others. But this segregation was neither ethnic nor religious: it was only a question of knowing whether the individuals or peoples in question were or were not integrated into civilization. In this sense the barbarian is simply the foreigner, without any value judgment attached to this term. The barbarian, however, can be integrated and assimilated, and become a full-fledged Roman citizen. It is at the fall of the Roman Empire that the foreigner becomes "evil". In the 5th century barbarians invaded the empire and destroyed it. It is then that the term "barbarian" starts referring to a "destroyer", a meaning which was not part of the original term.

In a coherent society, differences are considered as a guarantee of dynamism, originality and harmony. For example, nine ethnic groups were grouped in Egyptian society, and the important thing was to be Egyptian. The important difference was whether one was Egyptian or not. The legal principles that governed the country made it a multiracial society. And this society has been a success at this level.

Rome had black African generals. The important thing was to be Roman and not whether one has this or that skin color. The Roman Empire developed the idea of the "citizen of the world." After its fall, where did this great idea of a world where all races and all religions could freely move around and express themselves go?

Man has always been aware of the differences; they are part of his daily existence. But are the differences negative or are they, on the contrary, a criterion of variety, and therefore enriching?

With the entry of the Middle Ages, a uniformity of faith and political system was organized. It

is then that a new type of difference appears, linked to the religious aspect. In the desire to homogenize the world, new differences have appeared. These engendered an instinctive defensive act, and from this overly narrow vision came an inability to think that the other may also be right.

Religious or ethnic intolerance flourished in the 18th century, when all the techniques of scientific classification were developed. After classifying minerals, vegetables and animals, the human being also entered the inventory. The expansion of biology contributed to the development of a racism based on physical differences, with the thought that the other's differences are congenital, irremediable and prevent them from evolving. This is how the West of the eighteenth century came to think that it is necessary to confine "savage" peoples in reserves or to exterminate them. Diderot's Encyclopedia defined the word "savage" as "Barbarian peoples who live without laws, without police, without religion and who have no fixed place of residence." It

*In a coherent society,
differences are considered as
a guarantee of dynamism,
originality and harmony.*



explained by etymology the use of the word, derived from *silvaticus* (of the woods), because according to the *Encyclopedia* savages ordinarily lived in forests, giving America as an example, which was supposedly still largely populated by savage nations. No king, no faith, no law, and no fire or home. At first glance, a cascade of negatives connotes the savage state, that is, the natural state of society.

Indeed, the anthropology of the Age of Enlightenment was particularly significant because it sought to account for the recently discovered existence of savage nations, in order to better oppose it to that of the civilized European world. What interested philosophers at that time is to discover the meaning of human history in relation to the evolution of the European nations. In doing so, they "confounded racial appearances with the sociological and psychological productions of human cultures" (C. Lévy-Strauss, *Race and History*) seeking to place contemporary savage men among the historical ancestors of modern man. This historical order in turn created an order of values.

In 1739, the Comte de Buffon, in his *Natural History*, marked very clearly the separation between man and animal. He sought at the same time to explain the causes of variations in the human species. The criteria that Buffon recognized were the color of the skin, the shape and the size, and in conclusion, what he calls "the natural" characteristics. If the first three criteria are physical and visible, the natural refers to the interpretation of cultural behaviors. But, to explain the variations deriving from the unity of the human phenomenon, it was necessary to believe that human beings have gradually become distinguished from an original model by degenerating as they moved away from the temperate zone. "Because" – Buffon writes – "the model or the unit to which it is necessary to refer all the other parameters of color and beauty is found in this climate." These are, then, according to Buffon, the accidental causes that make the nations that populate the Earth vary, thus widening the gulf between civilized Europe and the savage world. Because of the progress manifested by civilized Europe, the savages must be convinced, always following Buffon,



to become part of the nature of man again.

Thus, Europe wanted to fulfill, given the degeneration of savages, the mission of leading them to higher law. This becomes the excuse for colonial conquests.

If Voltaire's goal is different, his conclusions echo those of Buffon in that he places Europe at the pinnacle of civilization. He sees among the peoples of the Earth such differences that he believes savage men to be of another species. On the basis of these different degrees of genius, which seem to vary so strangely, Voltaire proclaims the superiority of the cultivated nations and the logic of domination over the whole world. And if he protests against the atrocities of the conquerors, it is because he would like to see civilization triumph not by violence, but only by right and reason. The savage man is always the opposite of civilized man, and very often reduced to the quality of primitive. History thus oriented places savage peoples in the infancy of Humanity and designates Europe as the missionary of civilization after having been so in regard to religion. It is in the name of the superiority of the civilized that progress and its order are imposed.

Appearance and realities of Western racism in the 20th century

Behind an appearance of a great openness of mind, unclear conflicts are sometimes hidden. The difference is apparently acknowledged and accepted as normal, but if a concrete problem arises, a real contact, then it becomes clear that nonacceptance was actually a dormant feeling, momentarily subdued: the difference was tolerated, that is, it was

*Human beings
breathe the same
air, share the same
planet, have the same
origins, the same
mother (Nature).*

*Their physical,
psychological and
spiritual structures
are common. Our
experiences have
changed us, but
our paths have not
changed.*

endured, but it was not accepted. In order to adequately treat this problem, one must, first of all, accept the difference and not only tolerate it temporarily.

Racism is born as a result of the difficulty each person experiences to accept the other, refusing, voluntarily or involuntarily, to open to others.

The human being abandons himself to his habits: routine, comfort, and the laziness of questioning our ideas, limit us terribly. This load of prejudices, of which we are not aware most of the time, is an obstacle to opening up to the other. Human beings breathe the same air, share the same planet, have the same origins, the same mother (Nature). Their physical, psychological and spiritual structures are common. Our experiences have changed us, but our paths have not changed.

Racism is born as a result of the difficulty each person experiences to accept the other, refusing, voluntarily or involuntarily, to open to others.

It is true that each human being is different because of their outer and inner goals. This is also observed in their psychology, sensitivity, tastes, and objectives. It is no less true that there is a common denominator, which is Humanity. This common root creates union, but the dynamism of life forces the appearance of differences. We must be cautious about homogenization, because it often involves disappearance, destruction. Does Claude Lévy-Strauss not insist on the fact that any tendency to homogenization inevitably entails annihilation? The diversity of experiences allows the development of undeniable survival qualities. All human groups have contributed their part to the human experience. To develop a uniform culture would be to reach a planetary catastrophe. That is why certain international organizations try to promote difference but not segregation.

All systems that aim to homogenize a society make it lose its tone. This is the case of collective societies that do not allow the expansion of human potential; millions of beings are deprived of the possibility of keeping a living memory of multiple possibilities. They tend to be uprooted and therefore to make the entire planet into a clean slate. ☩



A SUFI TRANSFORMATION: BABA BULLEH SHAH

By Sukesh Motwani





Hazrat Baba Bulleh Shah is believed to have been born in 1680, in the small village of Uch (Bahawalpur, Punjab) in present-day Pakistan, where his father, Shah Muhammad Darwaish, was a Paish Imam and teacher. Most historians confirm that Bulleh Shah worked as an adolescent herder in the village. Despite his poverty, however, he was able to educate himself very well, and became a well known Sufi mystic, and celebrated Kaafi poet, using the main lyrical form of Punjabi Sufi Poetry.

It is said that his desire to experience the divine and to be guided on a spiritual path, is what drew him desperately to find a Teacher. When he found Qadri Sufi Faqeer Hazrat Inayat Shah Kadiri, tradition describes the intensity of Bulleh's frenzied spiritual desire as so fraught with energy that the mangoes from nearby trees started dropping down in hordes. Having noticed, the teacher smiled and asked him,

'Did you pluck these mangoes?'

'Saijee, how could I? I stand here waiting for you to notice me...'

The intuitive Inayat laughed, 'You are a thief too! And a shrewd one at that.'

Bulleh fell at his feet: 'Sai, I am seeking God!'

As Inayat Shah continued transplanting some onion seedlings in the orchard, he replied, 'Yes, then don't look below. Look up at me. The path to a glimpse of God is akin to the process of gardening... as simple as uprooting the plant from here and planting it at the appropriate place!' Bulleh realised that the secret lay in diverting his heart from the matters of worldly life, towards the path of seeking the Divine, which needed the guidance of a gardener, a Teacher.

In this way, Bulleh's devotion to Inayat Shah became a primary catalyst. His poetry is in the female voice, yearning the attention of his Master, or the Divine, represented as the male lover. Classical Punjabi folk love stories, such as of Heer and Ranjha, are often used as a metaphor for the human soul seeking to unite with its true identity, by unshackling itself from the illusions and obstacles of worldly matters, including external expressions of spiritual practices, beyond exoteric pilgrimage sights, or any motifs/rituals of a religion.

**The path of
seeking the
Divine needed
the guidance
of a gardener,
a Teacher.**

The Teacher is himself a path to the Divine that no external pilgrimage could replace.



***Haaji Lok Makkeh noo Jaande
Mera Raanjha Maahi Makkah
Nee Main Kamli Aan.***

*Haajis Go to Mecca.
My Mecca is my beloved Raanjha.
Oh, How crazy I am.*

At another time Bulleh sought Inayat's consent to go for a pilgrimage to Medina Sharif. After a pause, Inayat tersely replied, 'Give me three days and I shall tell you about my permission then.' On the third night, Bulleh saw a dream in which Hazrat Rasool Allah asked him to send for his teacher. In the dream, Rasool Allah lovingly gets Inayat to sit with him. Bulleh bends his head in reverence, and when he looks up he suddenly realises that they both looked absolutely the same. He awoke from the dream in disbelief, and realised that the Teacher is himself a path to the Divine that no external pilgrimage could replace.

In his verses, Bulleh Shah further urges that true wisdom elevates inner consciousness, to feel a deep sense of unity, love and fraternity with humanity and Nature. Intellectual knowledge alone would only feed the ego, and be flaunted for wielding more power and influence in society, and find favour with the rulers.

*A single alphabet should do for you.
Stop acquiring worldly knowledge.*

Bulleh Shah describes four stages of his own development in his poetry: **Shariat, Tariqat, Haqiqat and Marfat.**

Shariat is the preliminary stage when the Salik (the novice Sufi seeker) conforms to an ethical code of conduct, a practice of nobility, as prescribed by scripture. This is the stage of instruction that the novice disciple must first conquer, as an elementary stage of formation. The way he quotes Islamic Scriptures in his verse speaks volumes:

*Understand the One and forget the rest.
Shake off your ways of a non-believer,
Leading to the grave and to hell, in quest.*

Tariqat, or Observance, refers to a process of transformation, with the assistance of a Master, or Murshid, along the arduous path of challenges, replete with spiritual exercises. At this stage, the seeker collects merit through Good Deeds which are the 'dowry' that the bride (Seeker) collects, to mark her union with the Divine. The assimilation of virtue is emphasized, in thought and action, and the seeker discards the external rituals prescribed earlier at the novice stage.

*People become exhausted reciting Vedas and Qurans.
From prostrating themselves, their foreheads have
become worn.*

*The lord is not in the sacred bathing places, nor is the
Lord in Mecca.*

*Whoever finds him, is filled with brilliant light.
Burn your prayer rug and break up your ablutions pot;
Do not pick up your rosary, your staff, or your stick.*

Haqiqat, or Truth, is the stage of realization, or integration, such that the Divine is perceived in everything. The disciple no longer discriminates between the Hindu and the Turk, the temple and the mosque. He can hear the call of the Muezzin in the flute strains of an idol worshipper, and is no longer lured by the robbing clerics of institutionalized religions.

*The wick of true knowledge is lit like this.
For sure I am no Hindu or Turk, it is the name of love to
which I adhere.
The lover is conquered by God.*

*The wick of true knowledge is lit like this.
See what a clamor the robbers have raised, how they
have created birth and death.
The fools make a loud fuss when lost in confusion,
which the lover exposes.*

It follows that Bulleh Shah saw the futility of strife between followers of different religions and castes, and made his case for understanding a glimpse of the idea of Unity. So he would seamlessly use Hindu and Islamic motifs in the same verses without any trepidation.

**True wisdom
elevates inner
consciousness, to
feel a deep sense
of unity, love and
fraternity with
humanity and
Nature.**



*My Mind is fixed on my dark beloved.
Sometimes I see a Brahmin, sometimes a Shaikh.
He is the one who creates all these guises. How skilfully
he has played.*

*When I realized this, I appealed to Ram: you and I are
one, there is no one else in this house in the city of love.
How many hundreds of thousands of kinds of existence
the pandit describes.*

*But the soul does not go anywhere, or come anywhere.
It is like a bracelet worn on the wrist.
Bullha, let us fall at the lord's feet.
Let us cut off our head and lay it before him.
Now I have seen God in everything.*

Marfat is the final merging into the Divine reality, a Union, sometimes called Fana, a kind of trance, an alternate state of consciousness. The entire world appears to the disciple as a reflection of the Divine Reality. Bulleh is said to have reached this final stage.

*In repeating "Ranjha, Ranjha" I have myself now become Ranjha.
Call me Dhido Ranjha, let no one call me Heer.
Ranjha is in me and I am in Ranjha, this is my only thought.
There is no me, there is only him, and he is the one who
shows tender care for himself.
Whoever dwells in me determines who we are.
I have become just like the one I love.*

For seekers, Bulleh Shah is a symbol for the sublimation of the ego! Sublimating one's idea of oneself in the love for the Teacher, the Path, and Divinity.

*Bullha, the lord is found by those who become a goat for
the butcher.*

My teacher walks ahead, escorting me towards the light. Do I have the humility, courage, love and conviction in my heart to follow him/her? Yes... This investigation further fuels my conviction and deep desire towards transforming into a disciple on the path of philosophy. Each lifetime is an opportunity for us to be guided into understanding the true nature of



self and reality. I need to continue to discern and follow the voice serving my 'eternal' aspect over those of my transient egoic personality. I need to submit my egoic self further into following the wise ones, on the lifelong process of gathering my 'dowry'; of integrating virtues in my daily life, as I walk in the direction of Light, amidst the chaos of these new Middle Ages.

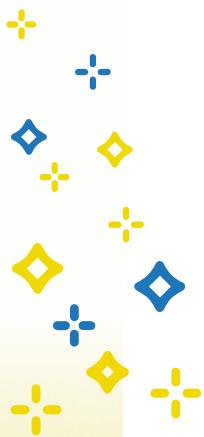
Some historians claim that when Bulleh Shah died in 1757, Mullahs refused to lead his funeral prayer. But Bulleh Shah's heart had touched the divine nectar beyond any distinction of gender, caste, religion, opinion, any form of duality. I believe he wouldn't have cared at all.

*Bullha, what do I know who I am?
I am not a believer in the mosques, nor do I follow the
rites of unbelief.
I am not among the pure or the polluted.
I am not Moses or Pharaoh.
I am not in the Vedas or in the scriptures;
I am not in drugs or in liquor.
I am not among the drunken reprobates.
I am not among waking, nor am I in sleep.
I am not in joy or in sadness,
nor am I in pollution or purity.
I am not of water or of earth,
nor am I fire or air.
I am neither an Arab nor from Lahore,
nor an Indian from the city of Nagaur.
I am not a Hindu nor a Turk from Peshawar.
Nor do I live in Nadaun.
I have not discovered the secret of religion;
nor am I born of Adam and Eve.
I have not given myself a name;
nor am I found in sitting or moving about.
I know myself to be first and last,
I do not recognize anyone else.
No one is wiser than I am.
Bullha, who is the lord standing here? ○○○*

**My teacher walks
ahead, escorting
me towards the
light. Do I have
the humility,
courage, love and
conviction in my
heart to follow
him/her?**

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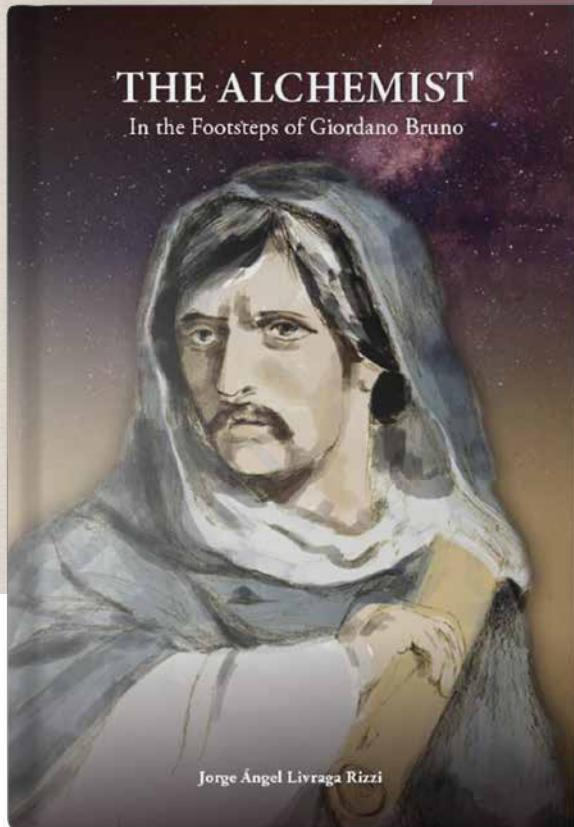
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BOOK RECOMMENDATION

THE ALCHEMIST: IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF GIORDANO BRUNO

By Jorge Ángel Livraga Rizzi

A young chemist, Pablo Simón, a member of a Hermetic Lodge of Catholics, is working in obscurity with the brotherhood, to preserve the wisdom of the ages. Being forced to flee his town to escape from the Holy Office, sets him off on a journey. Read his story, as he follows his destiny and continues in the footsteps of his master Giordano Bruno and so many other philosophers of the 16th century, victims of the ignorance and fanaticism of their age.

PREVIEW EXTRACT

Pablo Simón felt cold. In the middle of November, the midnight air was harsh and chill, singing strangely worded mournful ballads and majestic litanies in the fissures of the ruins. Standing in the middle of a large courtyard half-destroyed by overgrown weeds, he seemed to hear the footsteps of guards still echoing along the side-corridors, and to see fleeting lights inquisitively approaching the window-ledges.

He began to walk over the loose stones which murmured in complaint at the step which was disturbing their silent return to nature, violating the undeniable right to die in silence.

His thoughts rose above the murmurings of the ground: 'Is the soul absolutely immortal? If that were true, it would also be absolutely infinite and constantly free. But - and here his thoughts came down to earth with the fatal velocity of a stone rolling towards an abyss - how was it then that there were forbidden sectors of knowledge, fighting between religions, men who shed blood in the name of God? Every faction proclaimed a special divine protection. Could one and the same God inspire contradictions? And if some were in error, while having the Divinity within them, where was the logic in this? Or maybe the Creator of all things was a formidable madman, a cosmic child?'

The whole of this problematic exercise ended inexorably in the struggle between reason and the principle of authority. But what sad examples of spiritual authority he had within his reach...

The young man sat down on the ruins of the portico of a chapel and imagined the day which

he would start living in a few hours' time. He would arrive at the college where his pupils of chemistry and mathematics would be awaiting him. First he would have to greet the Rector. Then he would teach about twenty sleepy or quarrelsome youngsters, for whom numerical science went no further than a game of dice and chemistry was only interesting for the possibility of obtaining an aphrodisiac. Those were the students, the reasoners, the lecturers of the future, the guides of youth, the artisans of philosophic and abstract thought...

Pablo Simón stood up abruptly. On several nights he thought he had seen reflections of torches around the walls and the heaps of debris, and he had attributed it to some hallucination or the phosphorescence of buried corpses; but this time the phenomenon had been too evident and close by for him to ignore it.

For the space of five or ten seconds a clear light had appeared through a deep crack in the flagstones of the tiled floor. The movement of the luminous beam had given him the impression of a torch being carried at a slow pace. In three bounds he was by the crevice; it was dark and its course was too irregular for anything within to be discerned even indistinctly; but a murmur like the sound of voices spread out through the chill night air.

Pablo Simón did not believe in ghosts or witchcraft, nor even in the blood-curdling legends about groups of monsters, devils incarnated in corpses with the appearance of life, who held evil ceremonies, of which all men, except obedient Christians, were slaves. But all this was not enough to free him from

the cold hands of fear which were beginning to clutch at his heart.

For several minutes he stood hesitating as to whether he should go away as though he had neither seen nor heard anything, or whether he should try to find out who was walking through the vaults and catacombs of the ancient fortress.

The solitude and the desolate situation of the place were not propitious to acts of courage; but the young chemist's spirit of investigation and a hidden desire which he could not understand, made him determined not to leave until he had unveiled the mystery.

He passed through to what used to be the nave of the chapel and made his way with difficulty towards the altar, which was virtually intact; in the heart of the silence the sound of voices blossomed like an ephemeral flower of hope. Pablo Simón silently climbed the flight of steps which led up to the altar and glimpsed a flickering light on the floor, which emerged from beneath a flagstone. He tried it and found to his surprise that it was far lighter than it had seemed from its imposing appearance. With difficulty he succeeded in sliding it back, and he felt a warm breath of air on his hands. The hole which it had covered was a kind of descending tunnel, with a staircase coarsely cut out of the rock; a few yards down, a large oil-lamp hung from the ceiling, illuminating the stairs, until these ended in another horizontal tunnel.

As he began to descend he understood the reason for the lightness of the flagstone which served as a trap-door; it had been

dug out from underneath and looked like an inverted chest. Having walked a short way down the horizontal corridor, he had to descend yet another staircase that led to a large subterranean hall, which was half caved in and dripping with water; the vestibule was very faintly lit by the last lamp at the foot of the staircase.

From there the courageous impulse of the young man might have gone no further, had it not been for a little window at the back of the hall, from which emerged a certain amount of light. Calling forth all his courage and casting timid glances towards the dismal side-walls, Pablo Simón went to meet his destiny. The orifice, formed by the collapse of one of the huge blocks of stone, was more than fifteen feet from the ground, so that he had to climb onto the heaps of rubble which were piled up everywhere; but not even in this way was he able to reach the hole. Suddenly a severe and vibrant voice like a bell immobilized him with the words: 'Abraxas is a cock and the cock crows before dawn.'

NEWS SPOTLIGHT

● Philosophy ● Culture ● Volunteering

● The Diamond Path To Transforming The Heart (Aug 21)

In this talk hosted by New Acropolis, Director Yaron Barzilay shed light on the diamond as a symbol of purity, and the human heart as a symbol of consciousness. He suggested that the path of philosophy can purify and transform us into the radiant and resilient force that the diamond represents.

● Live Meaningfully

This series of 3 multi-format events presented by New Acropolis, investigated how we can bring depth and purpose to our daily choices and actions:

Turning Intention Into Action (July 21)

How many times have we mentally admonished ourselves thinking I should've, would've, could've? This **webinar** explored the gap between our intentions and our actions, and how to gain more control of our impulses, so as to make meaningful daily choices that could translate into a more purposeful life.

The Mind Our Best Friend Or Worst (July 21)

This **interactive session** outlined practical tips for participants to train the mind as an effective tool for organization, imagination & creativity, rather than allow it to control us by creating obstacles that we are compelled to helplessly struggle with.

Above All Be Good (August 21)

Using inspiration from the timeless wisdom of the stoic philosophers of Ancient Greece, this **panel discussion** centered around how recognizing our role and responsibility as human beings can help us find true happiness.

● Education For Transformation (Aug 21)

Professor T.S. Powdyel, the former Education Minister of Bhutan, spoke to members of New Acropolis Culture Circle, on the idea of education as a means to enhance the nobility of Man. He proposed that as the most profound human yearning is the achievement of happiness, the purpose of education should emphasize transformation rather than information overload.



● Book Discussion: Dharma (June 21)

The New Acropolis Library hosted a discussion on the newly released book Dharma, co-authored by New Acropolis member Bhavna Roy. Using examples from the book, Bhavna clarified this complex concept and explained how to bring Truth & Justice into our lives. The lively question-answer session that followed touched upon many related concepts such as karma, swadharma, and the path of the disciple.

● Blood Donation Drive (Aug 21)

In collaboration with Think foundation and St. George Hospital, New Acropolis' Volunteer Aid Team organized a Blood Donation Camp at the main centre in Colaba, to augment the acute shortage of blood during the pandemic. New Acropolis members responded to this essential need quickly and generously, donating blood for the emergency use of the community.



● Immunity Kit Distribution In The Local Community (July 21)

New Acropolis volunteers organized community awareness briefings on the importance of boosting immunity during the pandemic. Additionally, 120 kits were distributed which included a 3-month supply of multivitamins and supplements for mothers and children living in the neighboring Geeta Nagar Slum Community.



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PHILOSOPHY

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.



CULTURE

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.



VOLUNTEERING



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