

A Magazine on Philosophy, Culture & Volunteering

# THEACROPOLITAN

APR  
MAY  
JUN  
2022



Matrix 4

The Wisdom of Trees

The Metaverse,  
A Philosophical Perspective

FEATURE

Towards Permanent Co-existence:  
Lessons from Permaculture



## FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

Dear Reader,

Still reeling from the global pandemic, many continue to suffer, and the difficulty is compounded by war and widespread economic turmoil. Faced with the enormity of the challenge ahead, it might be tempting to deny it altogether by escaping into the “metaverse”.

However, Plato might caution us against going deeper into the cave. In our own times, Morpheus of The Matrix echoes the same warning. How might we instead dare to face the Truth, in order to alleviate the suffering of those around us? For ultimately, we are all an integral part of the same One Life.

Be it through mythology, art, or magnificent megalithic monuments, our heritage has always pointed towards the glorious role of the human being as a bridge between the terrestrial and the celestial. This has always been the true power of Living Philosophy; to bring beauty, goodness and justice into the world.

On the occasion of International Mother Earth Day, which falls in April, let us look to the wisdom of trees, to all of nature, in order to learn how to harmoniously coexist, and to value our underlying unity that is enriched by our vibrant diversity. Let us dare to hope and build a future by humbly taking our rightful place as custodians of the planet. Let us Discover, Awaken, Transform.

**Malini Nair**

Editor



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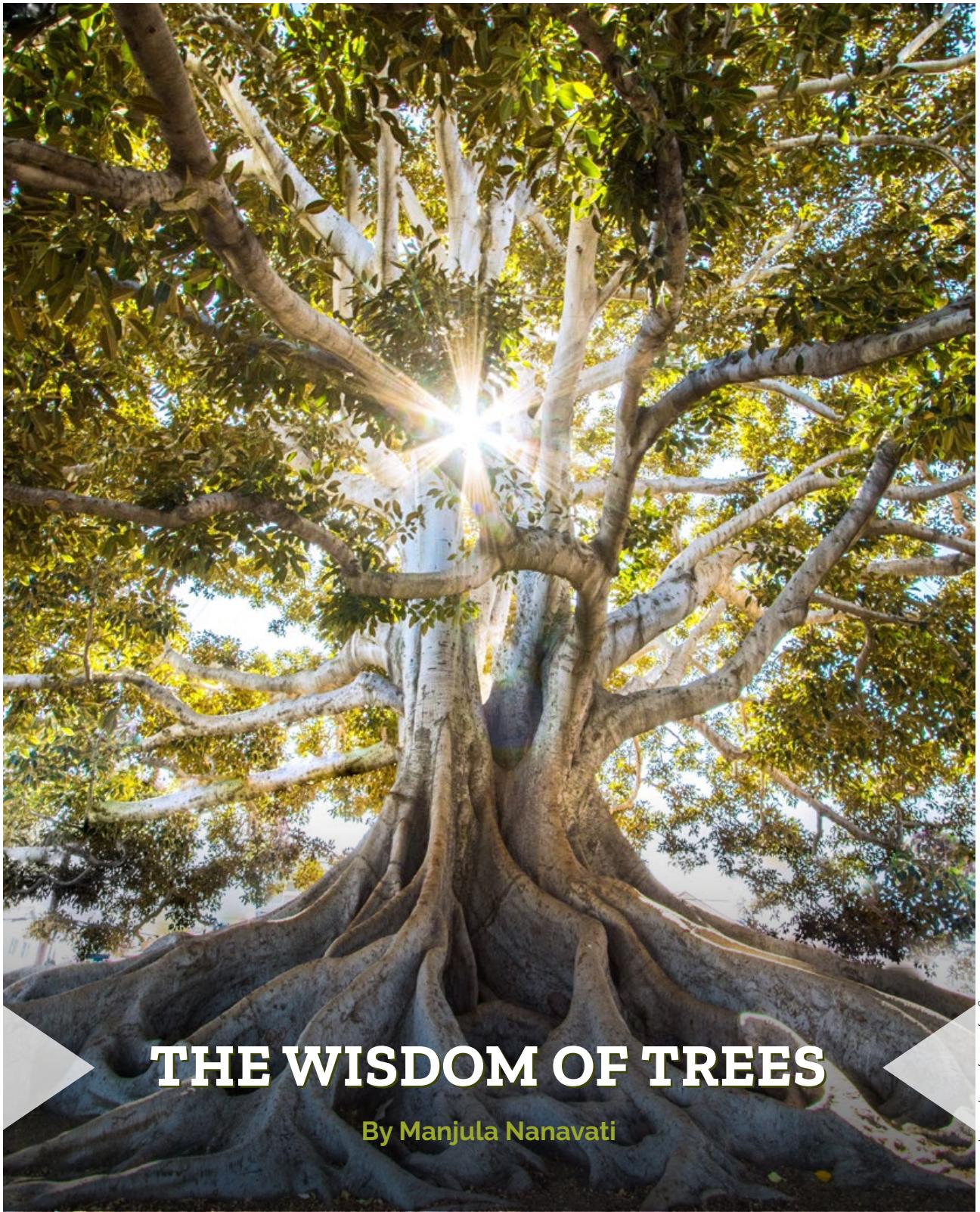
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Film Review by Pierre Poulaing

*Translated from French; originally written for Revue Acropolis*

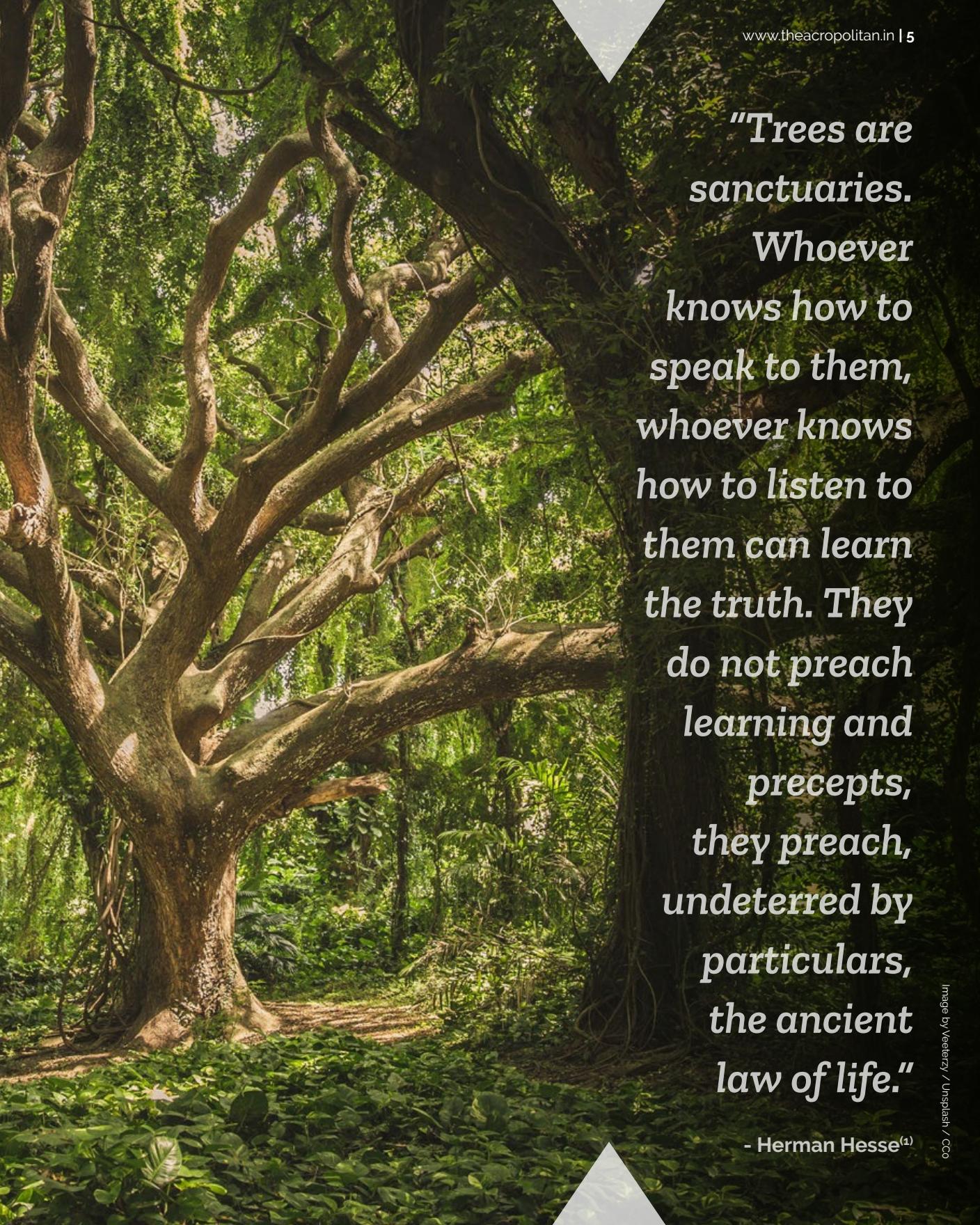
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# THE WISDOM OF TREES

By Manjula Nanavati



*"Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them can learn the truth. They do not preach learning and precepts, they preach, undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life."*

- Herman Hesse<sup>(1)</sup>

There is a relative uncertainty as to when our earliest human ancestors evolved on earth. But it is certain that by that time, a myriad variety of plants and trees had already been thriving on the planet. The very structure of a tree, with its trunk segmenting into branches, twigs and leaves, is a physical manifestation of the philosophical concept characterizing the relationship between the universe and the One; multiplicity from Unity. The tree's concealed roots further extend the metaphor, of unity springing from a hidden origin or source. Even those of us who do not share this perception cannot help but experience a sense of awe, perhaps even an intuitive reverence, in the presence of a forest of these majestic giants clothed in their silent, steadfast, resilient beauty. Older than man himself, trees have been integral to myths and folklore in almost all cultures as symbols of solace, strength, abundance, and immortality.

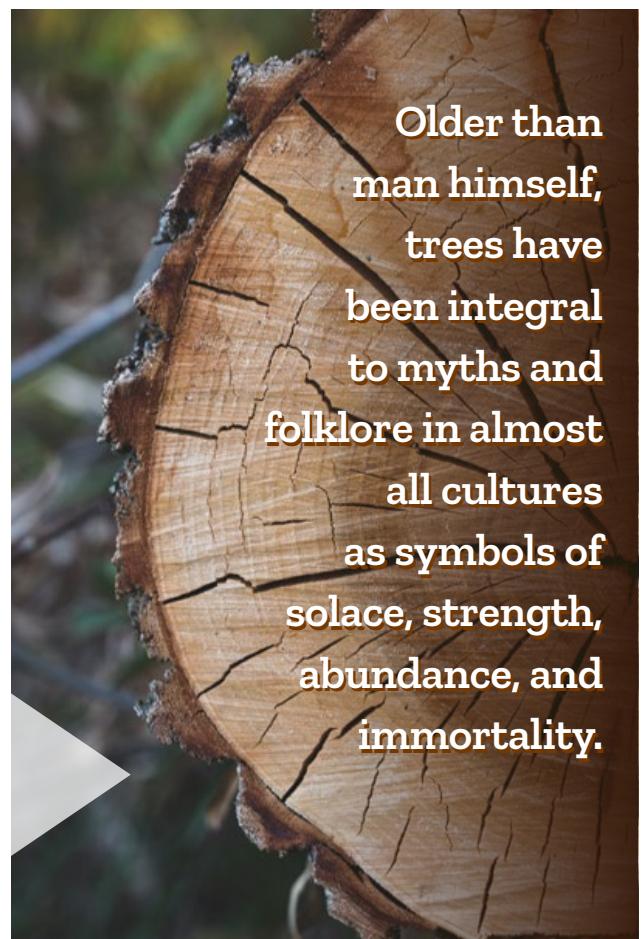
Could the ubiquitous presence of these symbols across so many cultures and traditions suggest an affiliation between human beings and these arboreal beings that transgresses time and geography? Is there a synergistic and collaborative relationship in the fact that while they can consume carbon dioxide and give off oxygen, we do the exact opposite? Living as we do in cities of cement, steel and glass we may be losing our appreciation for the immense contribution trees continue to make to our lives, in terms of shelter, food, medicine, fuel, while balancing the very ecosystem of the planet we call home. Well before *Shinrin-Yoku*, or forest bathing, developed as a therapy to boost the immune system in the 1980's, the benefits of spending time among trees was well

documented by philosophers and poets. Walt Whitman saw them as 'an unheralded source of moral wisdom.' <sup>(2)</sup> Herman Hesse called them the 'most penetrating of preachers.' <sup>(3)</sup>

***"In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks."***

- John Muir <sup>(4)</sup>

A single tree is usually home to a universe of life from roots to branch tips. Yet they themselves can give the impression of being separate, silent sentinels. Scientists are only now beginning to discover that trees can see, learn, communicate, and display social



**Trees can see, learn, communicate, and display social behaviour, forming alliances to nurture and protect damaged or dying neighbours.**



Image by Bruce Kee / Unsplash / CCO

behaviour, forming alliances to nurture and protect damaged or dying neighbours.<sup>(5)</sup> If consciousness is defined as the quality of sentience, the capability of sensing and responding to the environment, then these magnificent entities certainly qualify. If the level of consciousness depends on the ability to process, differentiate, integrate and communicate information, then it is evident that consciousness is not exclusive to humanity.<sup>(6)</sup> And if we believe that age and experience can contribute toward wisdom, then trees with lives that span hundreds and even thousands of years, perhaps have much to communicate about life, if we could but learn to listen.

### A Sense of Time

In those latitudes that trees shed their leaves to hibernate for winter, how do they differentiate between an unseasonal warm spell and the definitive arrival of spring? Scientists working on fruit trees have documented evidence that they wait for a certain amount of consecutive warm days, before beginning the process of 'awakening'. Beeches, for example, start

growing new leaves only when there is at least thirteen hours of daylight a day. This astonishing evidence suggests that trees can "see", or register the presence of light, and use some kind of memory to compare day lengths and count warm days!<sup>(5)</sup>

### Information Exchange

Trees "speak" to one another quite clearly through scent, warning of danger. Scientists in the African Savanah found that Acacia trees that giraffes were feeding on, began pumping toxins into their leaves as a bitter and effective deterrent, while releasing ethylene gas to warn neighbouring trees. The fore-warned trees begin to pump toxins into their leaves, in turn warning other trees down wind. There are trees that can recognize the saliva of different attacking insects, fighting them off by producing compounds to "call" specific predators to devour the harmful insects.

Communication can also take place underground. The roots of a tree can extend far beyond its crown, criss-crossing, and intersecting with those of its neighbours. In

1990 Suzanne Simard discovered that fungi attach themselves to root-tips releasing thin filaments, or hyphae, that penetrate through the soil, weaving through miles of root-systems of forest, creating a network capable of carrying signals from one tree to the next, in an exchange of information about insects, drought, or other dangers. Over centuries, a single fungus can network an entire forest, which prompted the journal *Nature* to dub this phenomenon the 'Wood Wide Web'.<sup>(5)</sup>

### Seeking the Light

Trees in suboptimal conditions adapt to make the most of the available light. With plenty of elbowroom, trees will branch out laterally, growing a wide canopy. But the same species when close to its neighbours will grow straight upwards, developing a longer, thinner trunk in an effort to reach plentiful light at higher elevations. Some species adapt by bending and twisting themselves over time as they reach towards the light.

With available sunlight, chlorophyll in the leaves allows a tree to photosynthesize - capture sunlight in the presence of carbon dioxide and water to produce needed sugars, while releasing oxygen back into the air. As sunlight and water become scarcer, deciduous trees save energy over the winter, by breaking down the chlorophyll, and loosening the grip of the leaf-stem to the branch. As the green chlorophyll fades other dazzling pigments become visible: the brilliant yellow of xanthophyll, the flaming orange of carotenoids, and the resplendent reds and purples of anthocyanins, that lay invisible under the green cloak of chlorophyll.<sup>(7)</sup>

To a philosopher, here are some wondrous lessons from trees. Firstly, underneath veils lie mysteries waiting to be uncovered. We need to dare to go beyond our comfort zones to discover something new and beautiful waiting to blossom...if only we let go of the familiar, to discover who we really are. Like trees, can we too turn away from darkness and orient ourselves toward the light? And finally, the wisdom that loss need not be looked at with



regret, but as a portal, to resurrect and and renew ourselves.

*“Of all the seasons, Autumn offers the most to man, and requires the least of him.”*

- Hal Borland <sup>(8)</sup>

### I Am Because We Are

Each tree in a forest grows in a unique location, and growing conditions like soil, water and nutrients can vary greatly over even small distances. This should make for variations in strength, and health measured by the rate of photosynthesis of each tree. However, students at the Institute for Environmental Research at Aachen discovered that in an undisturbed Beech forest, the trees shared nutrients through the fungal network intertwined within their roots, so that the rate of photosynthesis was the same for all trees. This means that “stronger” trees in rich growing conditions were giving sugar and water to those who were more deprived, ensuring their survival. But why would they do this? It seems to be in contradiction of the Darwinian principal of *survival of the fittest*.

In fact their much longer life spans seem to allow trees to experience time in a different way than the relatively short-sighted human view. The principle at work here seems to be that by losing weaker members of the community, everyone loses. Through gaps in the tree cover, the hot sun can dry out the moist floor, swirling winds can disrupt the formation of nutrient-rich humus, and turbulent storms can infiltrate, causing destruction. In hurricane force winds that can blow tree trunks dangerously past their flexion point, every tree plays an

**Their much longer life spans seem to allow trees to experience time in a different way than the relatively short-sighted human view.**

integral part to protect its neighbours. Minute differences in the unique characteristics of the trunks and branches, allow the trees to sway at slightly different speeds, gently hitting each other’s crowns lessening overall sway and angle of bend. But this is only possible if the trees are positioned very closely together. So, disadvantaged or diseased members of the community, regardless of species, are protected and supported with essential nutrients from richer neighbours, contributing to the strength of the whole forest. <sup>(5)</sup>

**As extraordinary exemplars, trees show us how to have the courage to persevere against the harshest of circumstances. They teach us how to stay grounded even as we soar upwards towards the light.**



Image by Mitch Hodge / Unsplash / CCO / Unsplash / CCO

How much would humanity have to gain if we could truly perceive the wisdom of this: To be able to see beyond separation, to perceive that we are all part of one web of life, and that everyone ultimately loses when we compete, because in the ONE life of which we are all a part, a wound to one damages the whole.

This unity is hard for us to comprehend, but clonal forests serve as emblematic examples. Pando, also known as the Trembling Giant, is composed of 47,000 genetically identical trees spread across 106 acres in Utah. Aspens reproduce by sending up shoots from their roots, instead of seeds. They rise through the soil and grow into fully mature trees. What may look like a forest of individual trees, is really one giant organism, connected through a complex subterranean root-system. Though each individual tree lives to be 130 years old or so, Pando is estimated to be 80,000 years old! <sup>(9)</sup>

Just as we must look below the surface to understand how these aspens are all

connected to each other, so too must we look beyond the visible, if we are to perceive how all human beings are connected. Many ancient traditions emphasize that we all come from the same source, that we are all part of a universal consciousness. But until science is able to catch up and perhaps develop the tools to explain what appear to us as indecipherable mysteries, we can take our cue from the wisest, ancient sages and philosophers, who all urge us to look deep into nature, for it is in understanding her laws, that we may comprehend life.

***"Nature is the source of all true knowledge."***

- Leonardo Da Vinci <sup>(10)</sup>

As extraordinary exemplars, trees show us how to have the courage to persevere against the harshest of circumstances. They teach us how to stay grounded even as we soar upwards towards the light. They demonstrate that flexibility is not a function of how much the trunk can bend, but rather how to stay rooted, so that even as we bend, we can

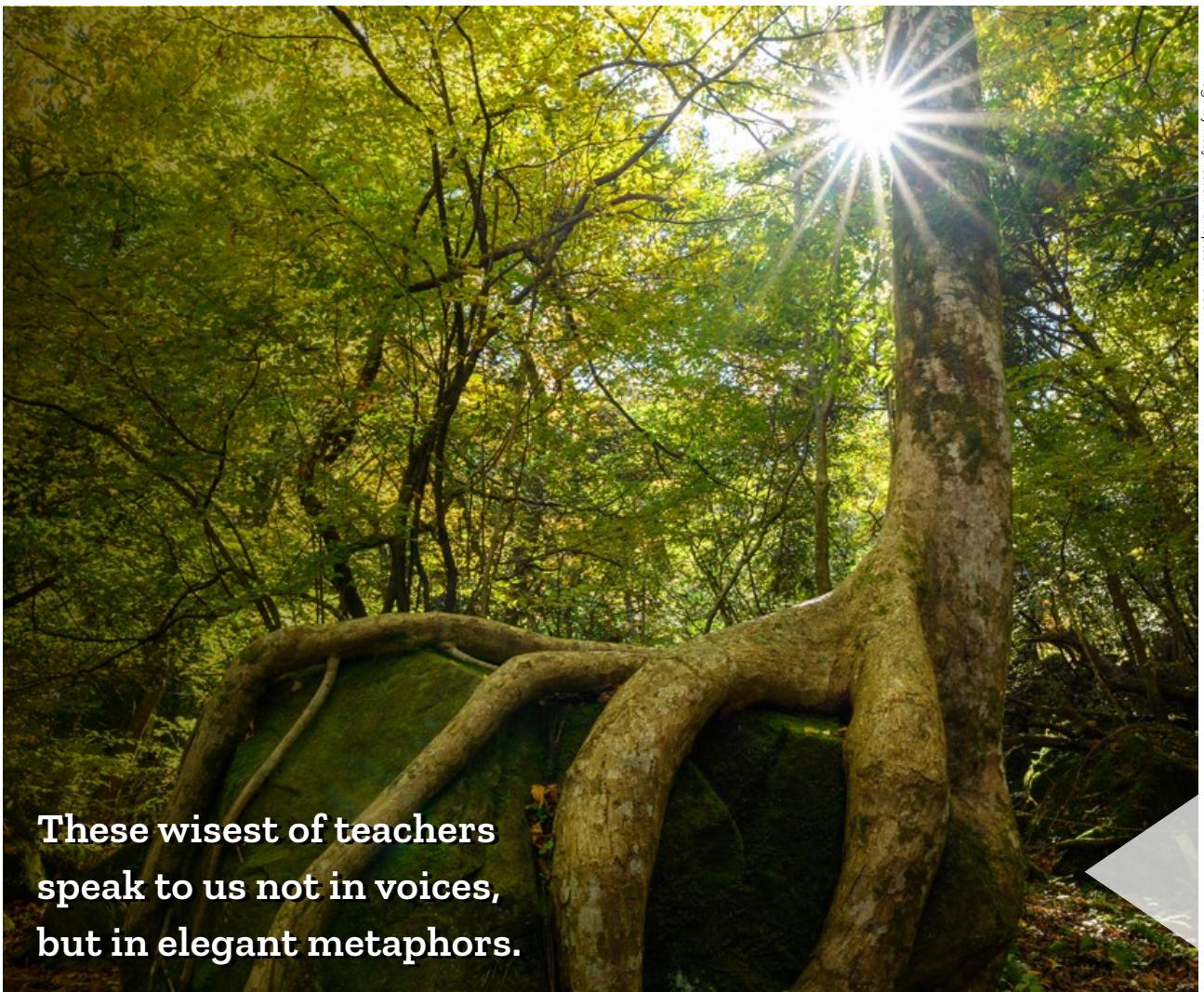


Image by Kouji Tsuru / Unsplash / CCO

**These wisest of teachers  
speak to us not in voices,  
but in elegant metaphors.**

come effortlessly back to our centre. They show us simply and authentically, how to give abundantly, and how to align to the rhythm and cycles of life. These wisest of teachers speak to us not in voices, but in elegant metaphors of not only how to live, but how to die, and how to ceaselessly strive to be the best we can be. However, if there is one overarching precept that humanity can take from these magnificent beings, it is this: to respect and protect all life because we are all essentially an interconnected, interdependent and integral part of one unified web of life. 

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# 22nd APRIL, INTERNATIONAL MOTHER EARTH DAY

The United Nations has designated 22nd April as International Mother Earth Day, encouraging celebrations and events all over the world, to address the growing environmental and ecological concerns confronting us, due to our own daily choices and actions.

Biodiverse ecosystems support all life on Earth. The healthier our ecosystems are, the more robust our planet grows and the stronger the interconnected web of life becomes, resulting in a flourishing of all living beings and a vibrant, bountiful planet. Mother Earth Day serves as a reminder, and a call to action to shift to a more sustainable way of life, one that promotes the collaboration and the correlation between Human beings and Nature.

One of the fundamental tenets of New Acropolis as a school of practical philosophy has always been to honour truth with action; to implement philosophy not as a way of thinking but as a way of living and of improving our world. Therefore, as aspiring philosophers, we recognise that it is not enough for us to tackle just the symptoms of distress as they erupt all over the world, but to find a solution that heals the ail at the core. Sustainable change perhaps

can only be brought about by the inner work of realising our role as human beings within our delicate ecosystem, before engaging in any work externally.

**New Acropolis honours this occasion with events and celebrations across 60 countries globally.**

In line with this, New Acropolis India hosts three events during the month of April. On 30th April, our Mumbai centre will present an event exploring our role in reviving and deepening our reciprocal relationship with mother earth, with the Director of New Acropolis India as one of the speakers. New Acropolis Pune hosts a gardening session and talk on the same day, exploring lessons from nature. Additionally, members of New Acropolis will participate in a practical seminar at our own land in Mangaon (Maharashtra) called Manav Bustan, ('manav' is translated as humanity, and 'bustan' as fragrant garden), where simple activities that will help towards sustainable and regenerative development of the terrain will be initiated.

We invite you to join us in this year's celebration of Mother Earth Day, as we explore the privilege and responsibility of our stewardship of this planet, we call our home.



**Sat, 30th April 6pm (2 hrs)**

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Commemorating Mother Earth Day  
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Mother Earth Day:  
Does the Earth Belong to Us or do We Belong to it?  
*Gardening Session & Interactive Talk*

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# TOWARDS PERMANENT CO-EXISTENCE: LESSONS FROM PERMACULTURE

By Trishya Screwvala



The word 'Permaculture' was coined by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in the 1970s to refer to the "consciously designed landscapes which mimic the patterns and relationships in nature, while yielding an abundance of food, fibre and energy for provision of local needs"<sup>1</sup>. What began as an ecological movement towards 'Permanent Agriculture', over time, evolved into something far more holistic and all encompassing; a set of principles and values of what it means to be conscious, contributing human beings and reviving a way of living that aims to develop interdependence and personal responsibility in every sphere of life.

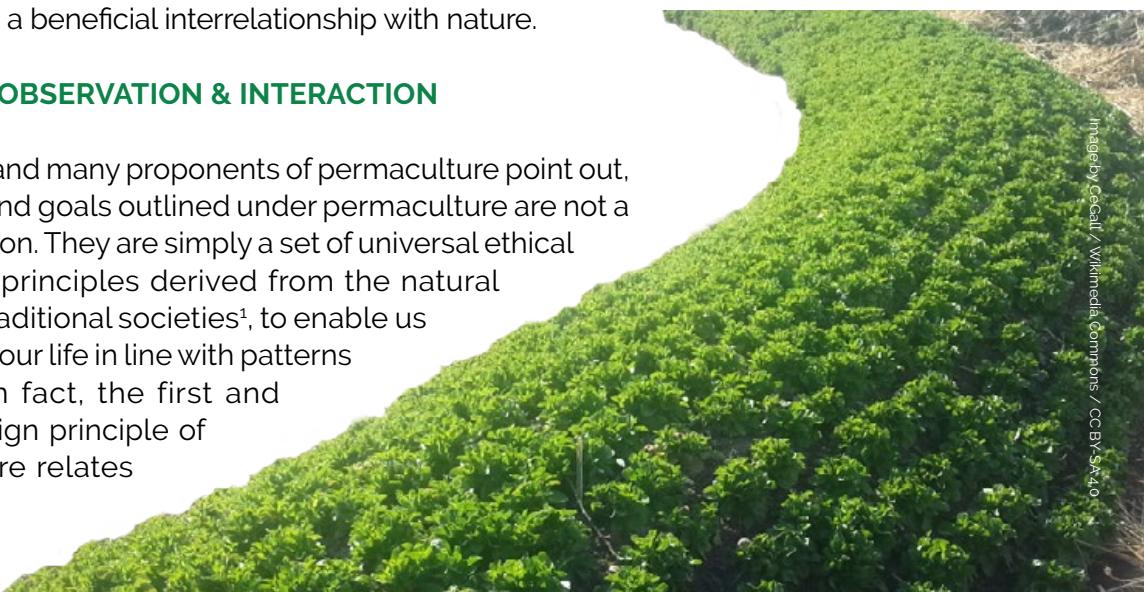
The word 'agriculture', comes from the word 'agrarian' which relates to soil, and 'culture' which relates to its enrichment. Ironically, today agriculture seems to have become a process of destruction and extraction of soil. With the onset of the industrial revolution, we as a society, in a matter of a few generations, have begun to deplete the enormous stores of fossil fuels like coal and natural gas, that took the Earth billions of years to create<sup>2</sup>. In fact, many of our modern systems, be it economic, social, health or governance, tend to neglect a fundamental reality that we are part of nature, mistakenly putting our human needs at the forefront, without taking into consideration the impact it has on our entire ecosystem. To move towards a permacultural mindset, first and foremost requires us to develop a philosophical approach to living: transforming ourselves and our interactions with life to see ourselves as a part of a whole, and entering a beneficial interrelationship with nature.

## CONCIOUS OBSERVATION & INTERACTION

As Mollison and many proponents of permaculture point out, the means and goals outlined under permaculture are not a novel invention. They are simply a set of universal ethical and design principles derived from the natural world and traditional societies<sup>1</sup>, to enable us to construct our life in line with patterns in nature. In fact, the first and primary design principle of permaculture relates

**"All we need  
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Cooperation with  
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opposition to them  
brings disaster  
and chaos."**

Mollison





**Nature, if we know how to work with her principles, has every solution we need.**

to developing the art of seeing, to cultivate thoughtful observation rather than thoughtless action<sup>3</sup>. Mollison summarizes: "All we need to live a good life surrounds us. Sun, wind, people, buildings, stones, sea, birds and plants. Cooperation with all these things brings harmony, opposition to them brings disaster and chaos." Permaculture principles beautifully prescribe to this maxim, allowing nature to flourish when we are able to work with her, rather than against her. For example, rather than to impede natural elements such as weeds, permaculture suggests using them to retain soil moisture, prevent erosion and add to the microclimate. Similarly, pesticides are avoided, because it leads to the creation of drug resistant pests, and reduced population of pest predators, that eventually result in larger imbalances rather than effective solutions. Instead, introducing companion plants that deter pests, or fowl that regulate pest population, can allow for a thriving, healthy and self-sustaining ecosystem. Nature, if we know how to work with her principles, has every solution we need. Permaculture encourages us to become practical philosophers in our daily life, redeveloping our sensitivity to the world that we belong to, with the humility to assume our roles as custodians rather than consumers of nature. It emphasizes the need to develop a deep respect and gratitude towards nature, not only for our physical sustenance but for the extraordinary messages of wisdom she provides<sup>4</sup>.

### **INTEGRATE RATHER THAN SEGREGATE**

Current agricultural processes involve creating large expanses of fields where the tilling of the land, in addition to machinery,





**Can we learn  
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pesticides and external water supplies extract top soil and its nutrients, all towards a single 'monocultural' crop cultivation purely for human consumption, killing all other life forms in the process. Permaculture instead proposes a 'polycultural' ecosystem, integrating plants, animals and human beings in a symbiotic relationship, that benefits the whole, with the most efficient use of energy and resources. Plants provide food, medicine, oxygen, nitrogen fixation, water retention, and prevent soil erosion. Grazing animals efficiently decompose plant waste to nourish the soil, while fowl remove pests and weeds while naturally tilling the earth. This is another core principle of permaculture: 'Integrate rather than segregate'. Here human beings facilitate the creation of a functional and self-regulating ecosystem, by correctly placing elements in a manner where each serves the needs and accepts the products of other. Our earth, along with every living being that inhabits her, is one coherent and interconnected whole. In a time of increasing separation and divisiveness, this is a powerful principle that can be applied to all aspects of our lives. The diversity of nature is what makes her vibrant, beautiful, and bountiful, yet the countless forms all exist in clear unity. Perhaps, starting with our relationships with fellow human beings, we need to recognize that what unites us is far stronger than what divides us. Can we learn to celebrate our differences, without losing sight of the unifying whole that each of us is a humble yet integral part of?

### **SELF - REGULATION**

In fact Mollison's definition of a pollutant as "an output of any system component that is not being used productively by any other component of the system", implies that there are

no inefficiencies or wastage in natural systems. It is only in our misguided manipulation of nature to serve ourselves, in the name of





**"Man did not weave a web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself..."**

maximizing yield, that we justify our current industrial system based on mass production and long distance transport, ignoring the irreversible damage to water, air and soil quality and the unquestionable impact it has on all of Earth's living beings. As Native Indian Chief Seattle predicted in 1854, "Man did not weave a web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself... to harm the earth is to heap contempt upon the creator... contaminate your bed, and you will one night suffocate in your own waste"<sup>5</sup>. Permaculture points out that ironically, we have even managed to turn useful waste like human excrement into sewage, polluting our water, rather than as biomass to replenish our soil. Tribes in North African deserts, for example, have lived for generations sustaining themselves with as little as goats, camels, date palms, sparse scrubs and some simple grains, finding ways to maximize the beneficial relationships between their modest resources. This compared to a modern teeming metropolis that couldn't survive for 24 hours without any external inputs<sup>5</sup>, given our unchecked needs and "have it all" mindset. Permaculture reminds us that cooperative, mutualistic systems are more stable and resilient than predatory or competitive interactions, and can only be sustained if each contributing member takes only what it needs. From our economic systems propagating unlimited growth, to our consumerist way of life, we seemed to have developed a sense of entitlement and ownership of nature's wealth, forgetting that without in turn learning to give and participate in this dual movement of life, we threaten not only our own future but the longevity of all life on Earth.



### VALUE THE MARGINAL

We are so conditioned into viewing our world as divided by borders and boundaries, mine and yours, that we forget that our planet comprises a series of communities and ecosystems, that together make a single biosphere. Permaculture highlights that the edges and margins of bordering

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ecosystems are often teeming with more species and productivity than either system on their own. Estuaries are the most bio-diverse areas on earth, with shallow waters promoting algae growth and nutrient exchange, rich plant and marine life, and foraging animals and birds. Forest edges have the strongest trees due to wind, and accumulation of nutrients<sup>6</sup>. Yet in reality, we tend to ignore the edges and margins of our societies and systems, focusing only on prime agricultural lands and staple crops, large cities, big businesses, and majority demographics, often at the detriment of marginalized communities and species, small businesses and satellite townships. Ancient traditions and martial arts spoke of the value of peripheral vision in expanding our area of focus and offering a more holistic perspective<sup>1</sup>. This permaculture design principle shows us that instead of ignoring the edges and margins, we need to recognize their value and use their strength to contribute to the health of the whole.

While there are many more principles of permaculture ethics and design that are both profound and practical, enumerated here are only a few that can encourage us to live a more collaborative and regenerative way of life. There are numerous ways of living these principles, enabling us to design a template that can allow us to meet our own needs, while making our planet rich and bountiful in the process. We as human beings are one of 30 million species on earth<sup>7</sup>. We need to change our relationship with our home and our co-habitants, shifting our approach from "dominance to partnership; from fragmentation to connection; from insecurity to interdependence"<sup>7</sup>. It is in our own hands to rediscover our roots, redefine our direction as a society, and recognise that it is indeed possible to lead an abundant and fulfilled life, while leaving our world a little better, because we lived.



**Mumbai Centre**

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# LIVING PHILOSOPHY

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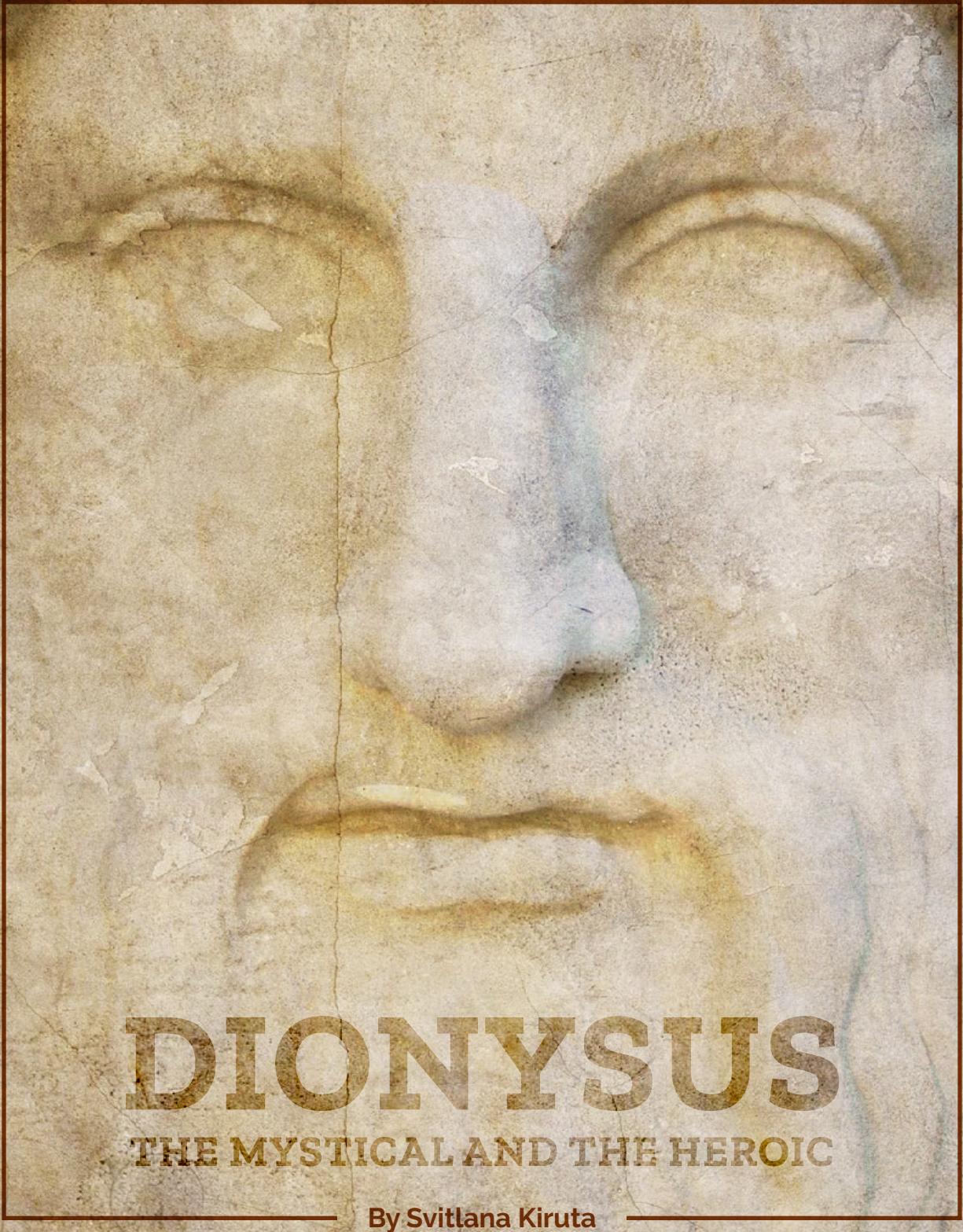
Double vaccination certificate required for in-person classes, as per Government regulations.



Living Philosophy is an opportunity to discover ourselves and the world around us, with the insights of ancient philosophies and human wisdom put into practice in everyday life. Extract practical tools through the course to learn to live with more freedom and sustained happiness. Explore the path of inner change as a key to actively contribute towards building a better world.

### What will you take away from the course?

- **Know yourself better:** Your strengths and weaknesses, our potential as human beings, and how you can harness them
- Explore practical tools such as concentration, order and reflection, to **live with more clarity, purpose and happiness**
- **Bring more courage and authenticity** in daily living: Learn to approach challenges with a spirit of victory
- **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



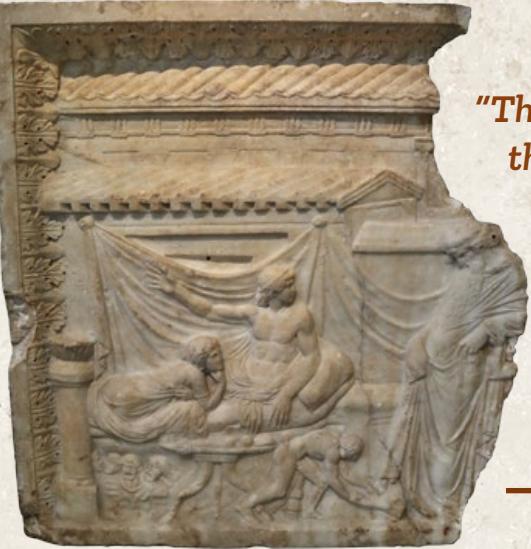
# DIONYSUS

## THE MYSTICAL AND THE HEROIC

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By Svitlana Kiruta

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**"The myths about the god Dionysus tell us about the mysterious connection that exists between the mortal and the immortal in man.**

**He is a symbol of the inner path, the return to the centre, to the throne of Zeus, a symbol of the heroic enthusiasm that inspires a disciple to walk the path, and the mystical insight that gives a vision of this path."**

Antun Musulin, National Director, New Acropolis Ukraine and International Secretary, Pythagoras Institute

It is impossible to touch on certain mythical stories without touching the deepest strings of our souls.

The theogonic myths contain universal elements of the journey of the soul. They warn us about the dangers of this journey: about what enslaves the soul, takes it captive—all our vices, fears and weaknesses. They also tell us what elevates the soul and leads to its liberation—all our virtues. The myths contain the generous gifts that the gods offer us. All we have to do is learn to find them, recognize them and use them in our lives.

## INTRODUCTION

Dionysus is perhaps one of the most mysterious gods of the ancient world. One of his key characteristics is movement: he penetrates everywhere — in all countries, to all peoples, in all religions. He has an incredible number of names, epithets and attributes, he can take a lot of different guises, he amazes with his numerous epiphanies and metamorphoses. The deeper we go

into the study of Dionysus and try to get to his origins, the more clearly we feel a great delight and awe, because we find ourselves as if involved in the mystery of life itself, inevitably transforming ourselves.

Dionysus is the “archetypal image of indestructible life,” the prototype of inexhaustible life, he symbolizes the creative and fruitful power of nature in all its diversity. Dionysus is associated with winemaking and fertility, abundance and pleasure. He produces intoxication by the beauty of Nature, by bringing inner states beyond time and space that allow us to touch the mystery of life.

Dionysus is the gift of enthusiasm<sup>1</sup>, the joy of true existence, the joy of prosperity and growth. And at the same time, he is a dark spirit of the underworld, who knows the mysteries of life and death.

Dionysus is a suffering god, sometimes reaching the point of complete madness. At the same time, he is a jubilant god in a state of ecstasy<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The word “enthusiasm” comes from the ancient Greek ἐνθουσιασμός “(divine) inspiration, delight”. In European languages, the word came from the Latin *enthusiasmus*. It is a special “state of grace,” the absolute “fullness of being,” in which there is neither time nor space, but only abiding in eternity, in God.

<sup>2</sup> The ancients interpreted ecstasy as the departure of the soul from the body. It is a state of going beyond one’s own limitations, an experience of the highest degree of wonder, inspiration and exultation.



Dionysus possesses an infinitely powerful ability to penetrate into the depths of matter, and at the same time remain in the solar heights of Zeus's throne.

Dionysus is the one who spiritualizes matter, the Demiurge of the human soul.

## ORIGINS

More than three millennia separate us from the first historical references to Dionysus (approximately 14th-13th centuries BC) which have come down to us and which were deciphered in the middle of the 20th century. Despite all the research, especially plentiful in the last century, we still do not reliably know what was the history of the appearance and penetration of the cult of Dionysus into Greece, which, according to the generally accepted version, took place around the 8th-7th centuries BC.

But one thing is certain. The name of Dionysus is associated with the greatest phenomena in the spiritual life of Greece, either directly - within the teaching of the Orphic and Pythagorean doctrines and their corresponding sacraments -

or indirectly, through the presence of the image of Dionysus, his spirit, in the cults of other gods.

In Crete, we find one of the most ancient symbols, which was one of the attributes of Dionysus-Zagreus as the hypostasis of the Zeus of Crete. This is the Labrys—an axe that carves the way to the light, both inwards and outwards<sup>3</sup>. With it, the god whom the Greeks called Ares-Dionysus created the world and carved out the First Labyrinth.

"This is the story: it is told that this Ares-Dionysus, a very ancient god of the earliest times, descended to earth. There was nothing created, nothing embodied; there was only darkness, only gloom. But, from on high, this Ares-Dionysos was given a weapon, the Labrys, and was told that with it he is to forge the world.

"Ares-Dionysos, in the midst of this darkness, begins to walk in a circular way...

"Behold, Ares-Dionysus begins to walk in circles and, with his axe, he carves out the darkness and opens a furrow. The path which he opens and which gradually becomes illuminated is called the labyrinth, that is to say, the path carved with the Labrys.

"When Ares-Dionysus, after carving and carving, reaches the very centre of his path, he discovers that he no longer has the axe with which he entered the labyrinth. Now his axe has become pure light; what he holds in his hands is a fire, a flame, a torch that illuminates perfectly, because he has performed a double miracle: he has carved the outer darkness with one edge of the axe and he has carved his own inner darkness with the other edge

<sup>3</sup> On the island of Tenedos, archaic coins have been found depicting a double-edged axe combined with ivy. The national emblem of Tenedos was an axe - the labrys.

of the axe. To the extent that he has made light without, he has made light within; to the extent that he has broken through without, he has broken through within. Thus, when he reaches the centre of the labyrinth, he finds the centre of the path: he has gained the light and he has gained himself."

(Delia Steinberg Guzman, article on "The Labyrinth")

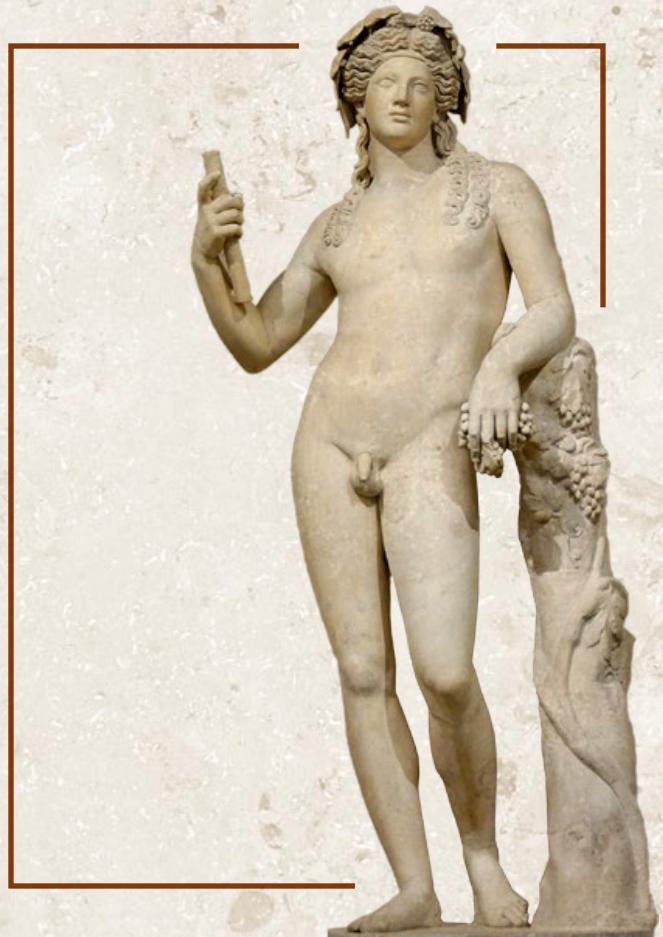
In the Histories of Herodotus we read that the cult of Dionysus was brought to Greece from Egypt. Plutarch<sup>4</sup> writes about the identification of Dionysus with Osiris, telling the Egyptian legend about the war of Apophis<sup>5</sup> against Zeus, during which Osiris, who sided with Zeus and won the victory with him, was adopted by him and given the name Dionysus.

According to Greek historians, the inhabitants of the city of Nisa in India, located at the foot of Mount Meros (the only place in the country where ivy grows), said that they descended from Dionysus, who came from the West with his army. They said that Dionysus founded cities, established laws, taught Indians how to make wine and keep fruits, taught them how to worship the gods (by playing cymbals and drums) and how to dance circular dances.

H.P. Blavatsky, in "Isis Unveiled," writes that "Bacchus, as Dionysus, is of Indian origin. Cicero mentions him as a son of Thyone and Nisus. Diovnusofi means the god Dis from Mount Nys in India. Bacchus, crowned with ivy, or kissos, is Christna, one of whose names was Kissen. Dionysus is preeminently the deity on whom were centred all the hopes for future life; in short, he was the god who

was expected to liberate the souls of men from their prisons of flesh." (H.P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, vol.II, ch. XI)

Among the ancient Thracians, we find the myth of hierogamy between the God of Thunder and Mother Earth. "Dionysus" was presumed to have been born from their union. We also know the Thracian names of Dionysus — Sabos and Sabazios, as well as Baseareus, which means "dressed in a long fox's skin." The Thracians associated the practice of divination with the cult of Dionysus.



<sup>4</sup> Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*.

<sup>5</sup> Apophis in Egyptian mythology is a huge serpent, personifying darkness and evil, the primordial force personifying Chaos, the eternal enemy of the sun god Ra. Apophis wanted to swallow the sun and plunge the Earth into eternal darkness. It often acts as a collective image of all the enemies of the sun.

In Middle Eastern mythology, myths were widespread about the disappearance of a God, his descent into the underworld, accompanied by the fading of life on earth. These ideas were based on the ancient Sumerian myth of Dumuzid (Tammuz) and Inanna (Ishtar). A number of researchers compare Dionysian rituals with those of the Middle East in honour of the Babylonian Dumuzid.

According to Apollodorus, Cybele, the Mother of the Gods, cured Dionysus of the madness with which Hera had afflicted him, and initiated Dionysus into her mysteries, and he begins his triumphal march across the earth from Phrygia, accompanied everywhere by frantic dancing and music from the aulos and drums.

According to H.P. Blavatsky, mystics and initiates of all time clothed their knowledge in symbols and gave them the form of myth. The garments of the truths conveyed were different, but the essence remained unchanged. In all cultures of the ancient world there were myths about dying and resurrecting deities. They tell not only of the rhythms and cycles of the plant world. Their main purpose is to show the inner path on which the human soul travels from the moment of its descent into matter, and how it can return to its origins. Philosophically, the events recounted in these myths are not

fundamentally different. Dionysus, Osiris and Jesus all represent the immortal principle of the human soul, and their life-stories not only describe the stages of the descent-ascension, but also allow us to recognise all that needs to be done to awaken "eternal life" within us.

### NAMES

From the point of view of the Neo-Platonists, a name is a "powerful symbol," which always coincides with the named entity. In fact, it is the being itself. "...he who knows the names knows also the things named." (Plato, Cratylus, 435 d)

The name "Dionysus" is translated as "God (from) Nisa," "Child (son) of Zeus," "God of light on Mount Nisa." Zeus is "Life," "Light"; "God"; "he who shines"; in his name he carries the meanings of "luminosity" and "day" (On one of the black-figure vases next to the infant Dionysus, who has just emerged from Zeus's thigh, there is an inscription: "The Light of Zeus").

The most ancient hypostasis of Dionysus was Zagreus —the son of the Cretan Zeus (who took the form of a winged serpent or dragon) and Persephone. He was torn apart by the Titans and saved by Athena, put together again by Apollo and reborn from Rhea (or Demeter). Zagreus (**Ζαγρευς**) was "the Great Catcher", a chthonic demon, "catcher of souls".



***"Ogugia calls me Bacchus; Egypt thinks me Osiris; The Musians name me Ph'anax; the Indi consider me Dionysus; The Roman Mysteries call me Liber; the Arabs, Adonis!"***

Ausonius <sup>6</sup> (Isis Unveiled, Vol. II)

6 Decimus Magnus Ausonius was a fourth-century Roman poet and rhetorician.

In different sources he was the son of Zeus (god of life), or the son of Hades (god of the souls of the dead).

From the ancient myth of the dismemberment of Zagreus stretches a definite thread to Iacchus, the son-husband of Demeter, or the son of Zeus and Kora-Persephone, who was celebrated in Eleusis.

Dionysus-Iacchus was worshipped as the final liberator (Leii, Lieber) of Kora-Persephone from the kingdom of Hades, bringing resurrection to new life. According to other myths he also brings his mother Semele out of Hades and raises her to Mount Olympus. He is the one who grants every soul the right to a brighter heaven.

According to the Olympian Theogony, Dionysus is the god of fertility, patron of vine-growing and winemaking, "twice-born."



In the classical Greek myth of Dionysus we sense a noticeable shift toward the heroic. Dionysus is no longer just a god, but a god-man, in whom the divine and human natures meet and are joined together.

### THE MYTH OF ZAGREUS

From the union of Zeus and Kora-Persephone, whom Zeus marries in the form of a winged serpent (dragon), Dionysus Zagreus, a horned baby (or a bull-headed child) is born. Zeus, seeing his son, immediately fell deeply in love with him, gave him his scepter and placed him on his right on the throne: "Zeus reigns over everyone, and Bacchus reigns over Zeus."<sup>7</sup> The baby, in imitation of the great god, began to shake lightning and hurl thunderbolts with his tiny hand.

Zeus's wife, the jealous Hera, decided to kill the baby, and when Zeus once left Olympus, she persuaded the Titans to attack Zagreus and tear the baby to pieces. Hera distracted the Curetes<sup>8</sup> who were guarding the cradle with the baby, while the Titans prepared to attack.

In order not to frighten the divine infant with their black chthonic faces, the Titans rubbed them with chalk. They entice him with various toys: a mirror, knuckle-bones (astragalos), a sphere, a spinning-top (romvos), an apple, a cone (kohnos), a pokos (a tuft of wool or donkey hair). Zagreus, playing carelessly, picks up a mirror. Charmed by the reflection, he drops his guard, and the Titans grab him.

Zagreus frightens the Titans by turning into a young Zeus, then into old Cronus, who creates rain, into a lion, a horse, a horned dragon or a snake, a tiger, and finally a bull. The Titans

<sup>7</sup> Orphic verse as reported by the Neoplatonist Proclus.

<sup>8</sup> Curetes are demonic creatures from the retinue of the Great Mother of the gods, Rhea-Cybele



retreat, but Hera, with her ferocious roar, spurs them into action. The Titans and Zagreus begin a battle, as a result of which Zagreus is torn apart into 7 (or 14) parts. Athena manages to save the heart of Dionysus-Zagreus, puts it in a casket and gives it to Zeus. Zeus incinerates the Titans with lightning, and from their ashes humans appeared, combining two principles—the good one being Dionysian (since the Titans ate the flesh of the God) and the bad being the dark and titanic. Rhea (or Demeter) collected parts of the body torn apart by the Titans and brought Zagreus back to life.

There is another version of the myth, according to which the Titans themselves handed over the torn heart of Zagreus to Apollo for resurrection, and he put it in the coffin-ark by the Delphic tripod.

According to a third version, Zeus swallowed the heart of Zagreus or crushed it and, mixing it with ambrosia, gave this drink to Semele, the "earthly Demeter," who gave birth to Dionysus the God-man (Herodotus even gives the exact date of birth — 1544 BC).

### PHILOSOPHICAL CONTENT OF THE MYTH

The myth of Dionysus-Zagreus formed the basis of the Orphic doctrine. The philosophical understanding of the mythology of "dismemberment" was continued and completed by the Neoplatonists.

According to Orphic texts, Dionysus is the god of the last cosmic era; he is preceded by Phanes, Night, Uranus, Kronos and Zeus as rulers over the world, as reported by Sirion and Proclus.

The arrival of Dionysus-Zagreus, the ruler of the sixth era, symbolizes the descent of the divine into the world of soul-body divisibility, into the world of plurality. Dionysus embodies the World Mind, the World Soul, capable of divisibility and the birth of individual souls. That is how he differs from Zeus, who is the World Soul and World Mind in their absolute indivisibility, or singularity. It is this division (dismemberment) of Dionysus and his penetration into the depths of matter (the devouring of the body of Dionysus by the Titans<sup>9</sup>) that becomes the central event in the fulfillment of the world mystery. As a result of this universal tragedy — the murder of God — Dionysus won a victory over this world of matter, spiritualizing and reviving it. The result of the fulfillment of the mystery is the cleansing of the world from evil, the introduction of divine fire and good into it through the sacrifice of himself by God in the person of Dionysus.

The heart of Dionysus is the only part of the body that the goddess Athena could save. In other words, the divine is in the heart of man. Losing one's heart means losing one's human form. The key to the salvation of the heart is wisdom personified by Athena, and thoughts of the divine, according to Plato.

<sup>9</sup> The word "titan" (ancient Greek, Τιτᾶνες, singular Τιτάν) comes from a verb that means "to spread in different directions". According to Hesiod, this word comes from the Old Greek verb. τιταίνω — "stretch, spread".



Image by Henry Walters. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

The Titans lured the baby with toys by deceit, "when he looked at a false image in the mirror." According to Olympiodorus and Proclus, Dionysus' looking in the mirror had a complex mystical meaning. Proclus wrote: "...they say that Hephaestus made a mirror for Dionysus. When he looked into it and saw his own image, he proceeded to the universal divisible creation." (Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*).

According to Olympiodorus, "When Dionysus had projected his reflection into the mirror, he followed it and was thus scattered throughout the universe. Apollo gathers him and brings him back to heaven, for he is the purifying God and truly the savior of Dionysus."<sup>10</sup>

From the writings of Proclus it is known that Dionysus was dismembered by the Titans into seven parts. This division of Dionysus helped him penetrate into all spheres of the universe, which also consisted of seven parts.<sup>11</sup>

Dionysus-Zagreus undergoes an endless

series of transformations, because matter itself is infinite, and in order to penetrate into its ultimate depths it is necessary to go through all its endless images and forms, to embrace the whole infinity of material becoming in general. Apollo finds and reunites the members of Dionysus, so that the reunited many now become order and harmony.

The Dionysian principle within us calls out to the divine, prompts us to ask questions about death and immortality, allows us to purify ourselves and be reborn, awakens higher intuition and mystical insight. The titanic principle of the soul is embodied by the elemental forces that cause man's "dissipation", departure from the center and oblivion of his true nature. Only heroic enthusiasm, striving toward the divine, helps us to gather the soul into a whole.

The Dionysian mysteries were not revealed to everyone; their initiatory mystery was kept carefully hidden. They were ancient forms of

<sup>10</sup> There is also another epithet of Apollo — Dionysodot.

<sup>11</sup> Macrobius. *Commentary on The Dream of Scipio*, 1, 12, 11.

initiation and ascent to the divine, powerful instruments of healing and transmutation. But, as has happened many times in history, when sacred rituals lose their true purpose and a deep understanding of their essence is betrayed, they are immediately distorted. Moreover, without prior purification, preparation and training, they can become the cause of true madness, of losing one's humanity. Thus, in time, the word "orgy" (οργύια), which originally meant "ritual," "sacrifice," "sacrament," the sacred acts in the mysteries of Demeter and Dionysus, gradually turned into a mad frenzy.

As H.P. Blavatsky writes, Orpheus becomes the one who purifies the Dionysian mysteries from their gross and earthly anthropomorphism

and establishes a mystical theology based on pure spirituality. Orpheus revived the Mysteries of Dionysus with new force and depth, combining "divine frenzy" with catharsis. Through purification and initiation, by leading the "Orphic" way of life, it was possible to free oneself from the titanic element and become a bakhos (someone who has awakened Dionysus within themselves); in other words, to liberate the divine—the Dionysian—from the titanic and to become united with it. ☰

***"To look at oneself is philosophical, the ability to rise above oneself is heroic, And to touch eternity is mystical."***

(Antun Musulin)





# STONES OF TIME

By Zarina Screwvala

***"Sometimes there's only a hint, a possibility.  
What's magical, sometimes, has deeper roots than reason."***

Mary Oliver, Such Silence

If you have visited Stonehenge on the Salisbury plains of England, perhaps you sensed a powerful feeling of mystery, of something hard to define. To the eye they are a series of immense standing stones set in circles. But rather, "Stonehenge is a symbol of Albion, the ancient wisdom of Britain and of different cultural values from a vanished time" writes Archaeoastronomer Robin Heath.<sup>1</sup>

Arguably, the most famous megalithic sites in the world are Stonehenge and Avebury in England, and Carnac in France. But other notable sites include Gobekli Tepe (Turkey), Atlit Yam (Israel), and Pullicondah (India), in addition to examples in Brazil, Australia, Japan and Peru. According to Hugh Newman, in The Bible there are 39 mentions of Gilgal, thought to be the village of Jiljilia in Israel, with a reference to a "circle of standing stones".<sup>2</sup>

This article seeks to explore the philosophical significance of Megalithic monuments (Greek root: large stones), which are found across the globe. What purpose could they have served? Are they a beautiful but random collection of large boulders? Or could they represent some deeper wisdom? My investigation was prompted by Megalith: Studies in Stone, a highly informative compendium of eight books edited by philosopher, artist, and geometer John Martineau. I shall refer to the various findings documented in this work.

**Mysteries abound  
with reference  
to the deliberate  
positioning of  
Megalith sites  
across the planet.**

1 Heath, Robin. (2018). Stonehenge. In J. Martineau (Ed.), Megalith: Studies in Stone. (pp 124). Somerset, UK: Wooden Books

2 Newman, Hugh. (2017). Stone Circles. In J. Martineau (Ed.), Megalith: Studies in Stone. (pp 54). Somerset, UK: Wooden Books



## CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES

How these mammoth structures were built largely remain a mystery, with some individual rocks weighing over 300 tons as is the case with Le Grand Menhir Brise. Some of the beautifully cut blue stones of Stonehenge in England are believed to be from the Preseli Hills in Wales a hundred miles away, transported over vast distances, and difficult terrain. Some have suggested that the stones were raised with sarsens and lintels. It was also suggested that the ancients used the earth's magnetic currents to levitate the stones. The History of the Kings of Britain written in 1150, speaks of the legend of Merlin, the druid, constructing Stonehenge using "gears", and of giants that Merlin directed to help him with this endeavour.<sup>3</sup> Howard Crowhurst says that stories persist of an ancient race of giant builders who used levers, ropes, logs and floaters. However, he humbly declares: "The truth is we simply don't know".<sup>4</sup> The classical Greek writer Eratosthenes spoke of an area called Hyperborea and "winged" Hyperborean temples.<sup>5</sup> The Hyperborean are believed to be a race of giants.

## LEY LINES AND TELLURIC CURRENTS

Mysteries abound with reference to the deliberate positioning of Megalith sites across the planet. In the 1920's, British antiquarian Alfred Watkins proposed the idea of Ley Lines, such as the Belinus Line, which cuts across England from north to south, connecting places of historic interest.

Robin Heath proposed the existence of huge Pythagorean triangles connecting various sites, while others, have found massive isosceles triangles connecting ancient sites. In 1969 Guy Underwood wrote The Pattern of the Past, where he suggested that ancient people were aware of subtle Earth currents, or telluric currents, which could be detected using a method called water board dowsing. He is said to have spent thousands of hours dowsing ancient sites all over England and making maps of these currents of energy. Underwood suggested that stone circles, and churches, were built over existing ancient sites where these telluric currents converged. Many dowsers believe that their art may once have been "more widespread and natural, possibly forming part of an ancient science, now almost lost".<sup>6</sup> Others speak of menhirs or obelisks as marking springs, underground rivers, as well

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3 Newman, Hugh. (2017). Stone Circles. In J. Martineau (Ed.), Megalith: Studies in Stone. (pp 12). Somerset, UK: Wooden Books

4 Crowhurst, Howard. (2018). Carnac. In J. Martineau (Ed.), Megalith: Studies in Stone. (pp 82). Somerset, UK: Wooden Books

5 Ponting, Gerald. (2018). Callanish. In J. Martineau (Ed.), Megalith: Studies in Stone. (pp 313). Somerset, UK: Wooden Books

6 Francis, Evelyn. (2018). Avebury. In J. Martineau (Ed.), Megalith: Studies in Stone. (pp 234). Somerset, UK: Wooden Books

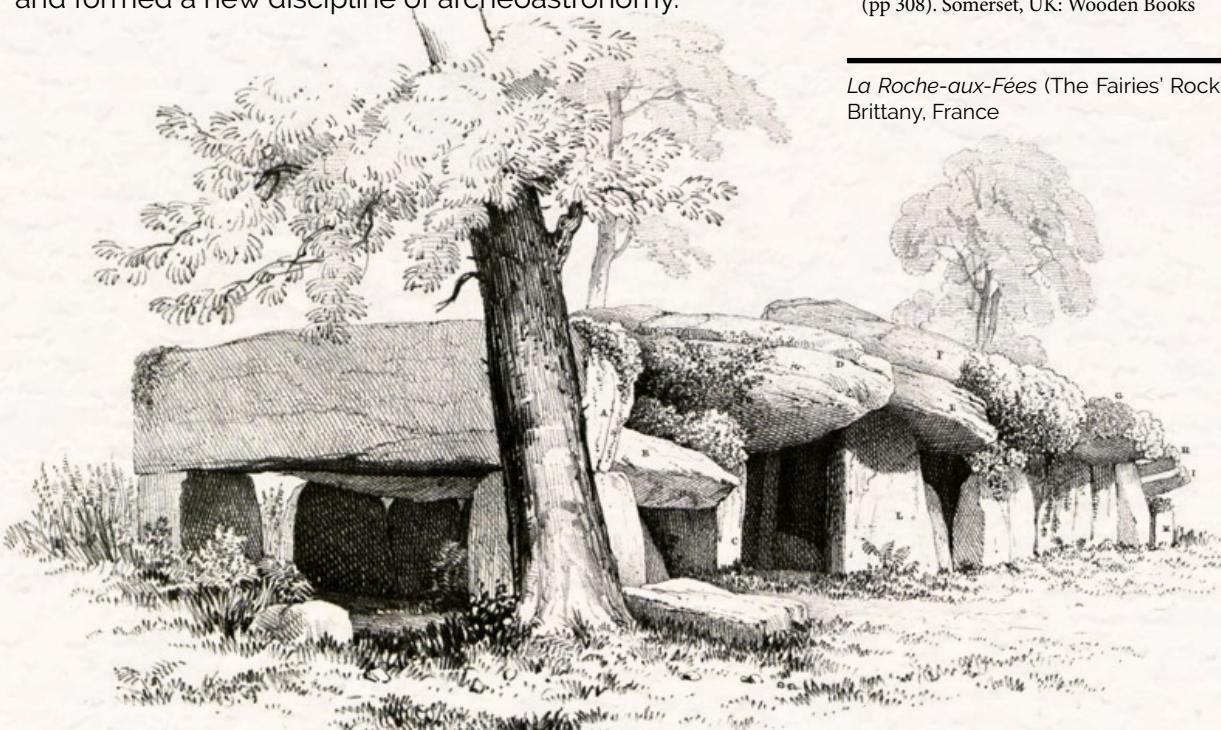
as telluric currents, almost like an acupuncturist would select points on our foot which are believed to be connected to the vital organs of the human body.

### MAPS OF THE CELESTIAL ON EARTH

But perhaps the most fascinating aspect of these ancient structures is their alignment with celestial bodies and events; often they are built in alignment to specific stars, the Sun, the Moon and Venus. Here we need to mention Alexander Thom, a professor of Engineering at Oxford, who spent years surveying standing stones throughout England despite much derision from the archaeological community. According to Gerald Ponting, Thom stood on his yacht one evening and mused, "I saw by looking at the Pole Star that there was a north/south line in this complex... I wondered whether the alignment... had been deliberately built that way..."<sup>7</sup> This initial sense of wonder led Thom to conclude that the ancient builders of stone circles used the sophisticated system of measurement he called the Megalithic Yard, throughout Britain and had a detailed knowledge of geometry and astronomy. Ponting explains that this created a furore at the time and Thom was met with much scepticism, as the skills for these types of calculations were thought to have been developed by the Greeks 2000 years later despite opposition, his ideas went on to inspire many and formed a new discipline of archeoastronomy.

<sup>7</sup> Ponting, Gerald. (2018). Callanish. In J. Martineau (Ed.), *Megalith: Studies in Stone*. (pp 308). Somerset, UK: Wooden Books

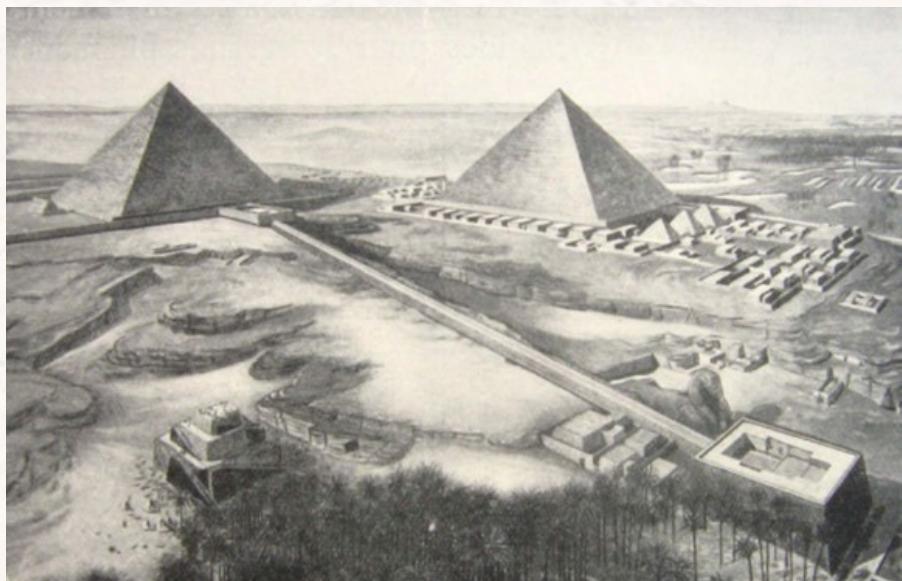
*La Roche-aux-Fées* (The Fairies' Rock),  
Brittany, France



What struck me as I researched this article is the beauty and meaning that emerges when two fields of science unite. Modern science seems to have lost this ability to connect life together. Archeoastronomy is a multi-disciplinary approach that studies how civilisations understood the role of the celestial in their cultures. Perhaps we can sense the philosophical significance of these ancient cultures who sought to bring the heavens onto Earth; to mark and celebrate the great celestial cycles that exist in nature.

One example of such an astronomical alignment can be found at the Great Pyramids of Giza, which form a precise three-dimensional earthly map of the three stars in the Belt of Orion. Archaeoastronomer Robin Heath says that carbon dating suggests that Stonehenge was built prior to 3000BC, thereby predating even the Great Pyramid of Giza (Egypt). Stonehenge is said to be a kind of compass of the celestial. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of June, the Summer Solstice, the sun rises in between the two heel stones (one is missing) and hits the now fallen alter stone. The heel stone perhaps derived its name from the Greek helios or the Welsh haul, both referring to the Sun. In 1963 Peter Newman realised the geometry of the station stones to be aligned closely to the rising and setting of the Sun and Moon. A neat rectangle is formed between the station stones, where one corner marks the midwinter sunrise and the diagonally opposite corner marks the midwinter sunset. The diagonal cutting across the rectangle marks the sunset of the ancient festivals of the Beltane in May and Lammas in August. Its opposite end marks the sunrise of the festival of Samhain in November and Embolick in February. These four festivals mark the mid points between the solstices and equinoxes.<sup>8</sup>

**Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of these ancient structures is their alignment with celestial bodies and events.**



<sup>8</sup> Heath, Robin. (2018). Stonehenge. In J. Martineau (Ed.), *Megalith: Studies in Stone*. (pp 156-157). Somerset, UK: Wooden Books

Alexander Thom observed, "It is remarkable that one thousand years before the earliest mathematicians of classical Greece, people in these islands not only had a practical knowledge of geometry and were capable of setting out elaborate geometrical designs but could also set out ellipses based on the Pythagorean triangles."<sup>9</sup>

## A SACRED PURPOSE

The alignment of Stonehenge seems to mark the summer solstice. The solstices were believed to be celebrated by ancient civilisations, perhaps to mark the great enigma's, of Light and Darkness, Life & Death. But a little thought makes us realise that while one part of the Earth is witnessing the summer solstice another is simultaneously observing the winter solstice. Is there a lesson here perhaps? That, in reality, there is only one solstice? Perhaps suggesting that death is a natural part of life? One theory suggests that the ancient Britons built an avenue from Stonehenge, where they performed a ceremony for the dead, leading to the river Avon, where the dead were placed in a boat for their final journey.

Stonehenge's blue stone horseshoe was built with 19 polished blue stones. Many believe that this is significant. As per 4<sup>th</sup> century BC Greek astronomer Meton, every 19 years the Sun and Moon return to the same place in the sky, on the same day, within 2 hours of each other. According to Gerald Ponting, in 55BC Greek writer Diodorus wrote: "... there is also on the island... a notable temple which is... spherical in shape... the Moon, as viewed from this island appears but a little distance from the earth... and the gods visit the island every 19 years".<sup>10</sup> Perhaps he was referring to Stonehenge?

Did these structures then serve as prehistoric temples? Did these ancient peoples, expertly combine not just architecture, astronomy, geometry, engineering and religion but also other sciences and arts into one cohesive framework for their lives? It seems conceivable that these megalithic monuments were a means to tune to the celestial rhythms of nature, a bridge to the celestial, to the stars and the gods. Esoteric studies speak of the purpose of man to unite the heavens with the earth, to bring the great qualities of the



Tresvennack Longstone - Cornwall - UK

<sup>9</sup> Thom, Alexander (1978). *Megalithic Sites in Britain*. In J. Martineau (Ed.), *Megalith: Studies in Stone*. Somerset, UK: Wooden Books

<sup>10</sup> Ponting, Gerald. (2018). *Callanish*. In J. Martineau (Ed.), *Megalith: Studies in Stone*. (pp 313). Somerset, UK: Wooden Books

celestial, the higher, the sacred to Earth. The scale, durability and sacred alignments are perhaps a reflection of their metaphysical function.

Today we seem to have lost this need to align with the rhythms of nature, of life held so sacred by our ancestors. To tune ourselves to Beauty, Harmony, and Goodness. To recognise that we belong to nature. Perhaps these magnificent structures have endured in order to remind us of this sacred role of humanity? Perhaps we can learn to view modern achievements with a sense of humility and direct our attention to rediscover our rich and sacred heritage to lead us into the future. 

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# ART AS A JOURNEY WITHIN

*An Interview with Olivia Fraser*

Image courtesy: Olivia Fraser

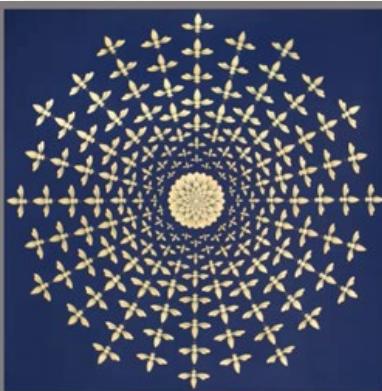
For centuries art has been a natural means to express one's inner journey - be it as a community or as an individual search. So has it been for Olivia Fraser, who has used her art to uplift, to produce wonder and beauty, and to find the 'inner essence' of things.

Olivia Fraser moved to India in 1989. Initially she was a travel painter before apprenticing with miniature and Pichwai artists from Jaipur, where she learnt their rich, rigorous and intricate tradition. The influence of Nathdwara Pichwai painting and early 19th century Jodhpuri painting, impelled her to explore its visual language, reaching back to archetypal iconography strongly rooted in India's artistic and cultural heritage, that could breach borders and was relevant to her twin life between East and West. She has drawn on that enduring tradition, combining it with her deep interest in yoga, to create paintings that could be considered spiritual road maps to reflect an inward journey.

Olivia has exhibited her work all over the world including India, USA, UK, China, Singapore, Italy and Nepal. She has also authored *A Journey Within*, in which she shares her remarkable artistic journey over the last decade. At the invitation of New Acropolis Culture Circle in December 2021, from her studio in Delhi, Olivia presented some of her paintings in an online talk with our members about the influences that shaped her as a person and as an artist, and induced her internal voyage of self-discovery. These are excerpts from that conversation.

Image courtesy: New Acropolis India North

Scent of the Lotus II



**The Acropolitan (TA):** Here is Olivia's first painting titled *Dusk*. Could you share with us, what is it about Miniature and Pichwai art that impacted you, inspiring you to create this?



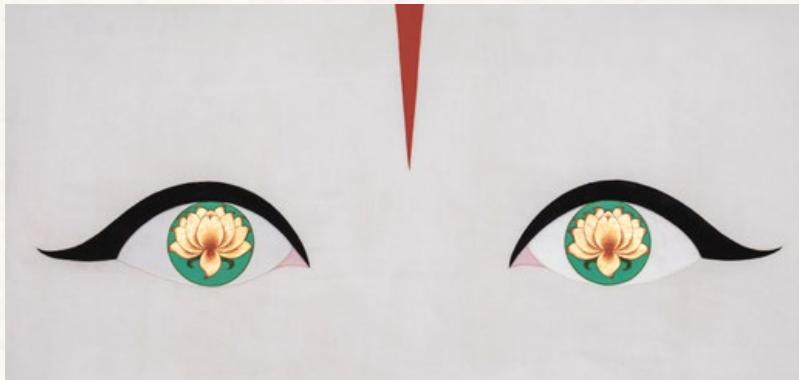
*There is a refining down to an essence, and that is what excited me. And having painted the world outside, I felt this was about extracting the noise and getting down to something more central.*

**Olivia Fraser:** Back in 1989, I was just a travel painter, looking at the world and painting what I saw in front of me – buildings, people. But then in 2005, I decided to join a gurukul, a studio in Jaipur and then another in Delhi, where I fell in love with the rigor of miniature painting just by viewing them in the National Museum. Observing the jewel-like colors, the burnished surfaces, the stylized landscapes, the particular way of patterning, I decided I was going to learn how to do this. And I was going to treat this like the process of learning a language, understanding my presence here as a foreigner, but trying to get in on the inside; not just painting on the outside. I also fell in love with Pichwai paintings: the large-scale temple backdrops used in the Nathdwara temple which houses the icon of Shrinathji. I particularly loved their strong sense of structure and also the sacred geometries associated with Shrinathji.

I also like the idea of how numbers are so important. For example, the proportion of how tall a tree is, in comparison to how tall a cow is. Even the features of Shrinathji, the proportion of how you actually painted them was related to the proportions of the actual original deity housed in Nathdwara. All proportions are intensely sought out, as is color and patterning. There is a refining down to an essence, and that is what excited me. And having painted the world outside, I felt this was about extracting the noise and getting down to something more central.

I like the flatness and the different attitude to perspective used in this traditional form of painting where distance is less important than sacrality. For this painting I was thinking about coming into a sacred space- as emphasized by the cows walking into the recessed circle within the square Yantra space. Line leads into form and each cow is "equal": there is no hierarchy, and, as it's about sacrality, no distance. So, that is the background to this painting.

**TA:** There is another beautiful painting which also may have been inspired by Pichwai art – *Lotus Eyes*. Could you share your perspective?



**Olivia:** So, I have done many eyes over the years. The idea originally came when I went to Nathdwara and I saw the deity there and did *darshan*. You look at the deity and the deity looks back. The concept of *darshan* is like having an exchange. I love this idea because coming from the west, I didn't have this understanding. In a way, this reflects the whole business of what one does with art - an exchange of visions. An art work becomes an art work only when someone else is looking at it. So, the title *Lotus Eyes* is also *darshan*.

In Tamil Nadu, South India, when watching artists that are still making Chola bronzes today, we see that the last thing that they put onto their icon are the eyes. When I travelled around in Rajasthan and saw the mobile Phad paintings that artists would paint of the local deities (*Pabuji ka Phad*), again the last thing that the artist would do, would be to paint the eyes in. Suddenly that would transform the image, to become a mobile temple.

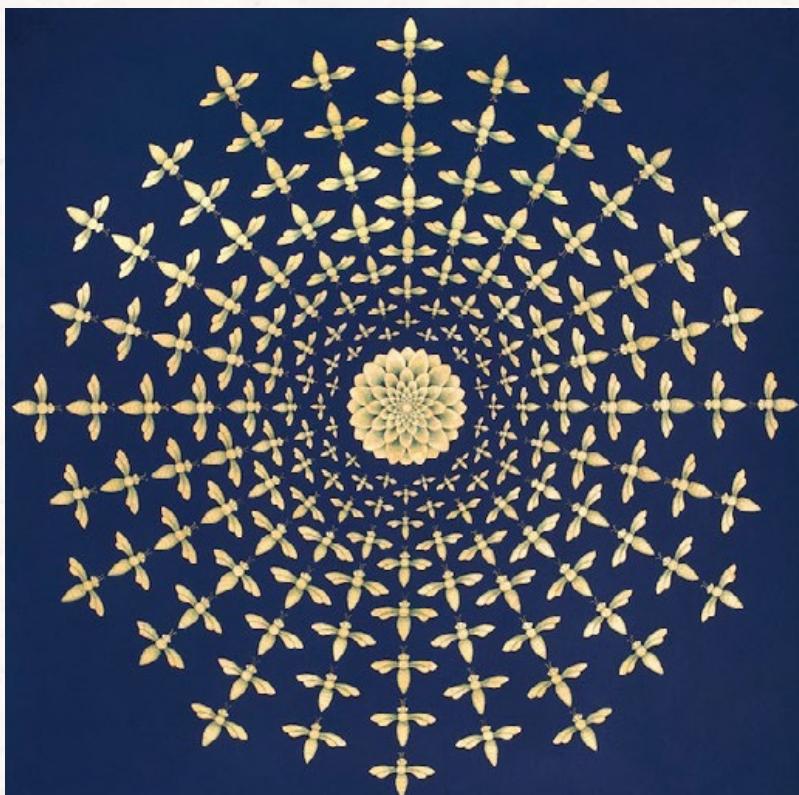
I suppose another idea behind all my 'eyes' is connected with my practice of yoga. My yoga teacher has taught me a particularly visual form of meditation; it is just eyes that instantly come to me, or rather, one eye. Hence, I realize how my art reflects these personal influences. What my yoga teacher

**You look at the deity and the deity looks back. The concept of darshan is like having an exchange.**

taught me, is similar in a way to what I grasped within the process of learning traditional Indian painting, Miniature painting, and Pichwai painting. It is essentially about using the outside, literally, the ground, the sap from the tree, which you take and use in your painting. Then you could paint on top of it. Or you can use *kadia* - the chalk from the cliffs around Jaipur which becomes this lovely natural off-white, slightly powdery, wonderfully textured, gentle white. It's not stark, but a kind of beautiful white which I use as my background... It is the background of this painting. I just adore that gentle white.

Using almost all the things I could see - the macrocosm of the world around, has become my inspiration, to use in my studio and likewise in my yoga. Creating visualizations using a sacred landscape, flowers, chakras, snakes, or any motifs that one may harness in one's yogic meditation. I feel that has been very special and has totally influenced what I paint.

**TA:** You say that a lot of your paintings are like spiritual roadmaps that reflect the journey within. The next painting called *The Scent of the Lotus* seems to start from a point of stillness that transforms to movement. How are you able to take something as subtle as meditation and express it visually?



**Olivia:** Well, I think my yoga teacher has provided the visual stimulus by suggestion. But I have also read this wonderful book called *Gheranda Samhita*. It is a yogic treatise written around late 17<sup>th</sup> century, and it has some of the most wonderful descriptions of visualizations: of bringing in the landscape and harnessing all the senses. I do yoga outside in the garden with lots of trees, and you can hear the birds, you can see the leaves, and what I am trying to say perhaps is that things don't fully stop. There isn't a total stillness. You try to focus when you are meditating, yet there is this constant movement; the movement basically of the breath. There is a stillness that you aim for, but there is also contrasting movement and the effort to get those two together.

In a way, the Miniature art form is also very still, and that is one of the things that I love about it, but there is also a kind of movement in the patterning. So, I was trying to get that effect, particularly with this painting. I was thinking also about the sense of smell. I have been thinking about all the different senses that artists over the years have tried to depict. Rothko tried to show sound, and Kandinsky too. Here I was thinking about both sound and smell. Also, about bees. I had always been terrified of bees because I was stung quite a bit as a child and then I remember first doing *bhramari* – one of the yogic practices which I learnt relatively recently, where you make the sound of a bee... that inspired this and various other paintings. There is also a lot of poetry about bees. Krishna is often described as a bee, going from flower to flower. And the lotuses being his *gopis*. Or the other way around; I love the whole way that things cross over, so the *gopis* are sometimes thought of as desirous, surrounded by a swirl of bees, or with gorgeous bee hives, and from this emerged the idea for this painting.



One of the reasons that I paint so much with blue (this is indigo, another handmade color, not a stone pigment, but a plant pigment), is obviously a reflection of my thinking of Krishna. What I am doing here is emulating in a way, the traditional sacred art. With the cows in the earlier piece I was using the two different colors of Krishna: as a child, where he is painted in a very dark, blue-black color, and then as a young man, where he is much lighter. When you see depictions of Krishna as a youth, a goat herder, he is a much softer, lighter blue. So, that was why the cows were these two different blues, echoing Krishna and implying the sacred. My usage of gold, which is precious, is again associated with the sacred.

**TA:** There is meaning behind everything you do, whether it's the pattern, the rhythm, the shape or the colors. You use gold leaf very often, for example in the painting called *The Golden Lotus*.



**Olivia:** I think I looked at the sacred dimensions of an image of Srinathji in creating this. I was using that whole idea of the lotus leaf that the *Golden Lotus* is perched on, as a halo of sorts. Many maharajas have a green halo so I used this idea, and of course the circle and the square again, implying heaven and earth. The golden lotus in particular has been something that I have also loved as a visualization. A rather simple but iconographic image.

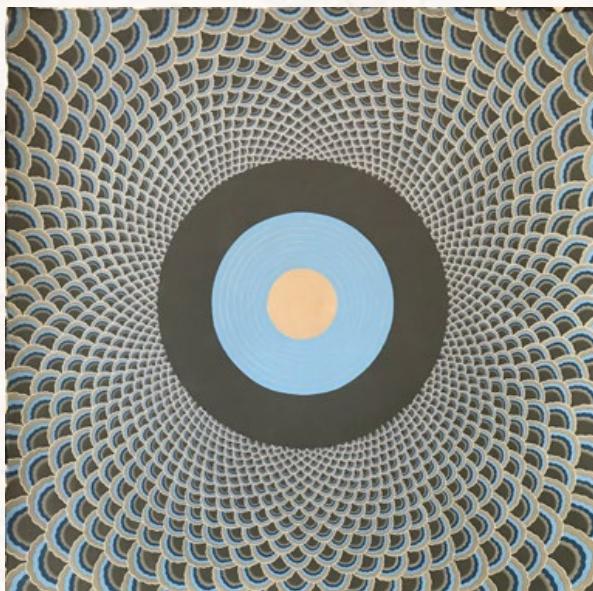
**TA:** In this painting the lotus petals look like a kind of a mudra and I remember you shared a lovely story with us about learning Bharatnatyam. Could you share that with our members?

**Olivia:** Yes. There's a treatise on Indian painting I think, the *Vishnu Purana*, and in it there's a discussion between two people, Vajra and Markandeya. They're talking about how to make a work of art. Vajra asks, "Speak to me about the making of the images of deities, so that the deity may remain always close by and may have an appearance in accordance with the shastras." Markandeya responds, "First of all you must learn how to dance." And Vajra says, "And once I've learned how to dance, can you then tell me how to make the perfect image?" Markandeya replies, "No. Then...you must learn about music." So Vajra says, "Well, then, once I've learned music will you then divulge the secrets of how to create an artwork?" And Markandeya says, "No, once you've learned music, then you need to learn how to sing." So, I love this idea here, of combining art forms in a way that I think India does, while the west compartmentalizes things.

I started learning miniature painting at the same time as I began learning Bharatnatyam. The dance form is all about movement with imagery created with your hands, your body and your position within a sacred space. It reflected perfectly the strength and confidence of the imagery that I was so attracted to in the painting tradition.

I could never paint trees back in the past. I just looked at trees and I was baffled by them! When I came to India and asked my guru, "How can I learn to draw a banana tree? Shall I go outside and do it?" He said, "No, it's got to be something you look for within. There's only one way of painting a banana leaf." I loved that idea; of actually just calming down, to reflect, look inside and reach for the absolute essence! And within that essence, there will be something that's almost dance-like. I was able to sense everything as always full of flow. It's about following the breath, which is the same as it is with dance; it's the same with singing, and it is the same combination of all these things when you're trying to create an image.

**TA:** That's beautiful! Thank you. You seem to consider western art to be more external, whereas Indian art to be more internal. Can you speak to us a little about that?



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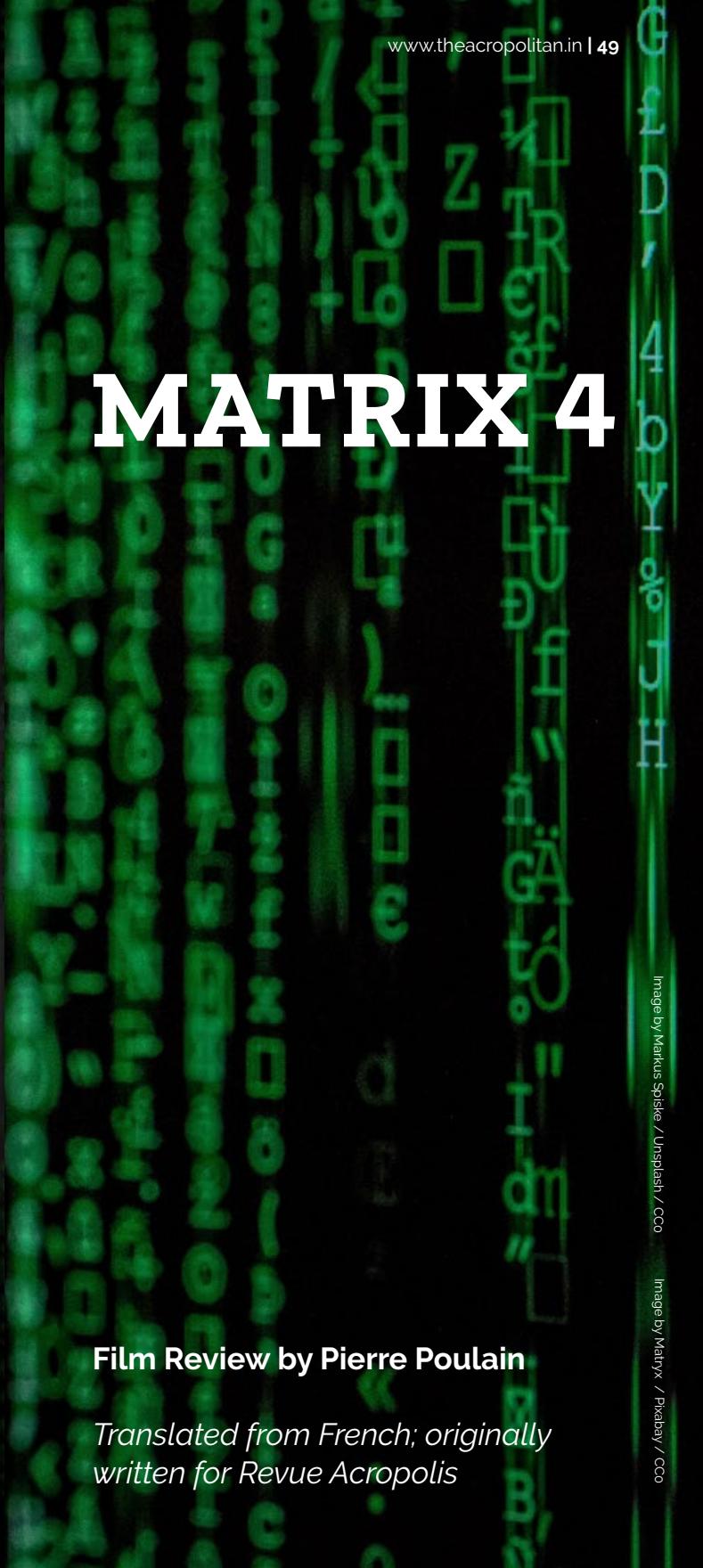
**Olivia:** This piece is called *The Moon*. This is a fairly recent one...started just before the pandemic, and continued through it. I think it has a lot of influence from the west but you can also see the sky imagery and the cloud motif that I've taken from what you see in lots of miniature paintings.

I am interested in looking at the backgrounds in paintings, at the landscape, at nature, then taking that and bringing it into the foreground, because I am the person who's walking through the landscape. One of the things I love about yoga is thinking about the landscape being within. I grew up in the west, studied languages and then I went to art school and perhaps that's why I've been thinking of and treating my art as a language.

I'd say my journey has been one from having painted from life... having started off with life drawings, life paintings, sketches of people and architecture to painting a landscape within. So, from having looked at and experienced things from the outside, to then bringing the outside into my studio, looking inwards and being guided to do this through art, dance and yoga. I would say that my life in India has brought about an internal journey, which has led to an internal vision. And that's where I am now. △△△

*All images of artworks included in this interview have been reproduced with permission from Olivia Fraser.*





**Film Review by Pierre Poulain**

*Translated from French; originally written for Revue Acropolis*

The Movie *The Matrix*, released in 1999, and its two sequels (*Reloaded* and *Revolutions*), released in 2003, have together been an international phenomena. The first movie in particular, was known as a modern version of Plato's Myth of the Cave, and the two subsequent parts are of the same universe – the real world and the cave – although further away from Plato's text.

When *The Matrix Revolutions* was released, it seemed that the dice were rolled. A cycle was complete, and the sun was rising on a world where the cards had been dealt and the rules had apparently changed.

But 18 years later, *Matrix Resurrections* is out. It is difficult to categorize the movie simply: Although it is a remake of the first movie, with references to the next two, it is also a different film, which is not a sequel, nor a copy.

One thing is for sure: We have not finished commenting on this 4<sup>th</sup> opus. Nothing in it is filmed by chance; not the plot, nor any dialog. Everything is a pretext to be analysed and deepened, and surpasses the claims and possibilities of this short article. I will only deal with a few subjectively chosen concepts, leaving aside a considerable number of themes such as the story of Neo and Trinity, as a remake of Orpheus and Eurydice, and the role of Merovingian, as the key maker (and the doors that he opens), among others.

## **Historical Cycles and The Improvement of Forms**

*The Matrix 4* shows us that History – The Great History – repeats itself, by recovering and improving the forms of previous cycles. The

Matrix in this last movie still has the same essence. It starts and ends almost like the first opus: it has the same opening sequence, and practically the same finale, with Neo – accompanied by Trinity – flying towards the sky. The plot is also basically identical: Neo looks for Morpheus, Alice's White Rabbit, he is once again initiated into Martial Arts in a virtual program, etc. Everything is the same and yet so different. Apart from Neo and Trinity, the main characters have changed forms: Smith, Morpheus and even the Architect has evolved, to become the Analyst.

Philosophy of History teaches us that History is not linear, but is cyclical. Time is cyclical. From a heartbeat to the advent and collapse of a civilization, the cycles continue and repeat. But their expression, their forms change. The days will always have 24 hours, but the sun does not shine equally on all.

Myths essentially remain unchanged. And the *Matrix* recounts the myth about the History of the awakening of human consciousness,

***The Matrix is Maya. It is a world that exists, our daily lives, but it is an illusion because it is impermanent: it is born and dies, it has appeared and will disappear when the time comes.***

which is needed to add to our capacity to learn from our past experiences, and integrate those experiences to improve the forms that will serve in future cycles.

Thus, the protagonists of the new Matrix are in a way improved versions of the characters from the first opus. In the day to day, we face the same trial: To learn from our experiences, improve ourselves... or to repeat the same mistakes.

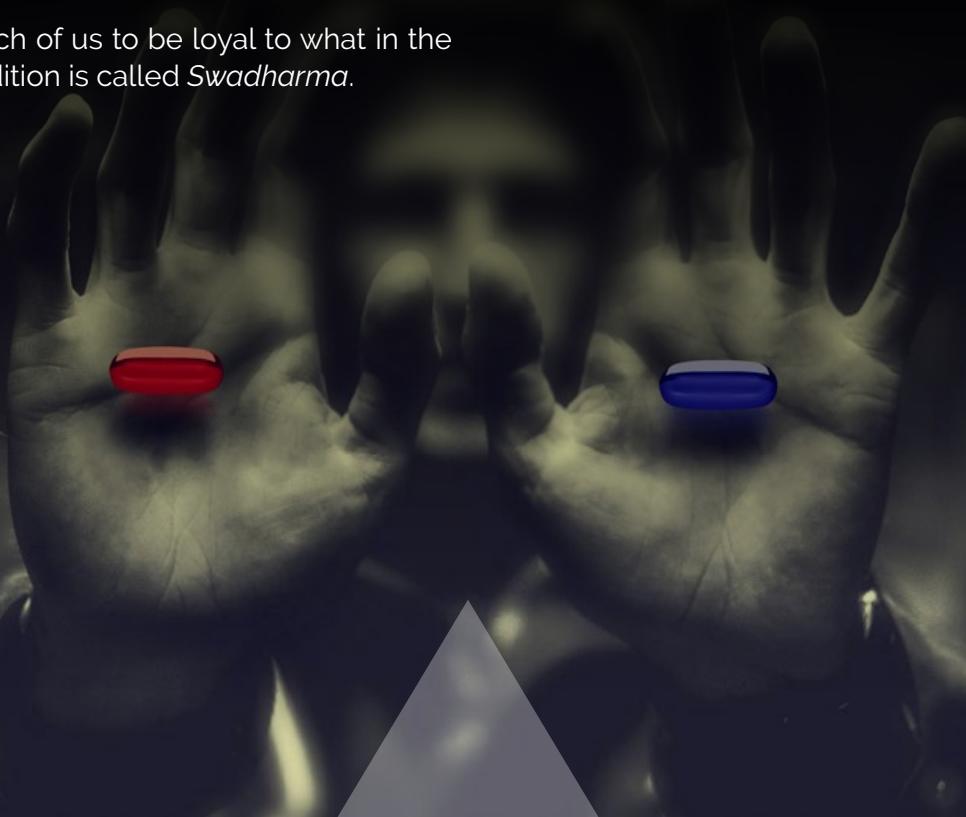
**The Choice:** The one that depends on us and the one that is an Illusion

When Neo has to choose between the blue pill (to refuse to wake up and to accept the illusion of the Matrix as reality) and the red pill (to wake up in the real world), Morpheus tells him that the choice is an illusion, and that Neo already knows what he will choose.

It is for each of us to be loyal to what in the Indian tradition is called *Swadharma*.

*Dharma* is the Law, timeless and immutable. *Swadharma* is the "Law of each individual", meaning our essence, our *raison d'être*, our personal line of evolution. In the context of the theory of reincarnation, *Swadharma* is the axis along which we evolve. It is our choice whether to awaken to it or not, to accelerate it or delay its completion. But we cannot choose to prevent it. Here lies the limit of our ability to choose, and what Morpheus is essentially saying to Neo, is : "You cannot help but follow your *Swadharma*."

Accelerating or delaying it is a function of *Karma*, not *Dharma*. If *Dharma* is the path, *Karma* is the set of all the possibilities we have to follow the path. We can choose to recognize them, activate them, use them - or not. Each of us is born with a definite *Karma*, but unlike *Dharma*, it is possible to change our *Karma*. Here lies the real choice!



In the universe of The Matrix, Agent Smith has evolved: from an obedient official, blindly following the rules of the Matrix – for which he is programmed - in the last film he becomes a “free electron”, as he defines himself. He has escaped his program, his conditioning... and Neo showed him the way.

If even a program can learn and evolve its code - which, by the way, is the essence of artificial intelligence - how can we, as human beings, not evolve our karma?

### We are our own Jailors

I will not come back to the Axiom of the Myth of the Cave-Matrix: We live in a cave-illusion, and we are not conscious of the existence of the real world which lies ...beyond our cave (or beyond the Matrix).

The illusion is not totally random. It has to be based on the real, of which it is a reflection, a deformation. This is why Neo catches a fleeting glimpse of his true form – and of Trinity – in his reflection. This is why to leave the Matrix is to go to the other side of the reflection, the other side of the mirror, and like Lewis Caroll's Alice, Neo follows the White Rabbit to do this.

**No one can walk the path  
in place of another, no one  
can free the one who has not  
chosen to break his chains.**

If we continue to refer to the Indian Tradition, The Matrix is *Maya*. It is a world that exists, our daily lives, but it is an illusion because it is impermanent: it is born and dies, it has appeared and will disappear when the time comes... just like our daily life.

Who keeps us in this state of blind unconsciousness, incapable to perceive reality? In the Matrix, the *deus ex machina* of the trilogy, the Architect of the universe, is replaced by the Analyst in the last movie. He is the one that Neo pays to answer the essential questions, to avoid having to answer them himself.

The Analyst is the real “Master of the Cave”, he is a liar and manipulator, he makes us believe that by doubting the reality of the Matrix we are sinking into madness instead of coming closer to reality.

As ‘reasoning reason’, he sows doubt.

As Psyche, he disorients us, and prevents us from listening to our inner convictions.

In the Matrix, he is the one who provides Neo with the prescriptions for the blue pills, which reinforce the illusion, away from liberation.

The Analyst is the jailor. He is a part of ourselves, an aspect of our reason and our emotions that lead us to prefer the comfortable and the reasonable, over the glorious rebellion. The Analyst of Matrix makes this clear when he addresses Neo and Trinity in the last scene. “I know the system, I know human beings. People are happy (in the Matrix) and the herd (of sheep) will not follow you.” Indeed, the majority of people will not

follow the liberating teachings of Neo and Trinity. As the traditional teachings say: No one can walk the path in place of another, no one can free the one who has not chosen to break his chains.

The Analyst makes the rebels look like fools? It doesn't matter. It is not about denying the madness, but about understanding that it is too often equated with anything out of norm. A higher consciousness, an elevated intuition can be called madness, but in this case, it is a liberating madness.

### **The first step on the Path of Liberation**

The first step consists of choosing the path of Liberation. In the Matrix, the blue pills symbolize the "calmness", or the sleeping consciousness. The red pills – the colour of blood – are on the contrary those of rebellion, revolution, and the revolt against the cave.

The first step therefore is to acquire the means to awaken: To know that we have to stop taking the pills offered by the Analyst, change the colour! But this is not enough: After KNOWING,

comes DARING – To dare to go to the other side of the mirror. And then comes to WANT – to resist, to never to give in, to not succumb to the ever-present desire, to return to the comfort of the Matrix, and of the readymade answers. Finally, we have to KEEP SILENT, to stay humble, to teach more by example than by words... to avoid the risk of becoming a new Analyst ourselves.

### **The Ultimate Goal: Unity, to Defeat Separation**

We are all the result of 2 complementary forces that reside within us, and we identify with one, or the other. The traditional teachings regard them as the Spirit and the Body, the spiritual and the material. It is also the inner being, the Individu, and the mask that allows us to act here and now – inside the Matrix: our personality.

In the movie, these 2 complementary opposites are Morpheus and Smith: Neo belongs to both and is also the result of both. Morpheus has always been – since the first movie – the liberating force, the reminiscence, the inner voice that leads Neo on the path of

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light, out of the cave. Smith, on the contrary, is everything that tends to bring back Neo – or "Thomas Anderson", as he is known in the Matrix, that is in this incarnation – to the illusion.

In the two first movies, Neo fights against Smith, his worst enemy. This is Theseus fighting the Minotaur, against his own shadow. In the third opus, Neo "integrates" with Smith, uniting with him, to liberate him and destroy the link tying him down to his own shadow.

Yesterday's enemy can become tomorrow's ally: Smith unites with Neo and Trinity to fight the Analyst in the confrontation at a bar with the most evocative name: "Simulate" (simulation). This is an effective but temporary alliance: the union must be re-conquered constantly. It is also the alliance between humans and machines that allows Trinity's body to awaken and regain consciousness. It is the same union that guarantees Peace, making IO the new Eden. It replaces Zion which was the stage of a merciless war which only survived thanks to the ultimate sacrifice of Neo and Trinity, before their reincarnation in this 4<sup>th</sup> opus.

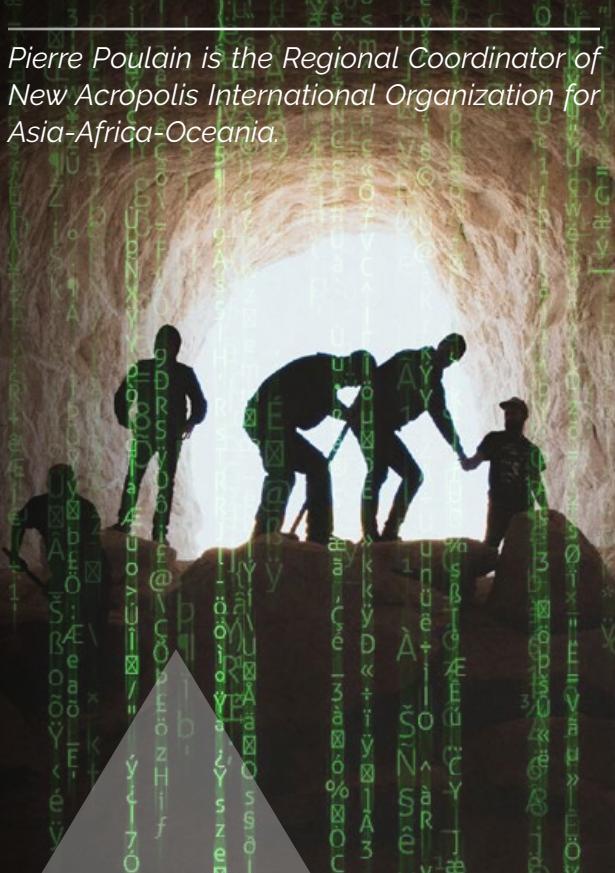
### **As long as the Cave exists, it will be possible to escape**

The cycles follow and resemble each other, but are not identical. Each new cycle is an opportunity to recover memory, to integrate the experience of the previous cycle, and to gain maturity, or even wisdom.

The reincarnation of the cave, or even its successive reincarnations should not take away our hope of one day, being able to

walk on the path leading to reality. On the contrary, being conscious of the existence of the Matrix is an indispensable and pre-requisite condition to liberate oneself from it.

In fact, throughout our earthly adventure, we all encounter opportunities to expand our limits, our consciousness and elevate ourselves. It would probably only be in a perfect world, that elevation and liberation would not be possible, because who can claim to be "more than perfect".

Imperfection is a chance; it offers us the possibility to improve ourselves. And even the Matrix cannot deceive those who know how to see beyond appearances and hear the unique sound beyond the dissonant noises. Neo says it himself, referring to the Matrix: "This world is so perfect, it must be fake..." 

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*Pierre Poulain is the Regional Coordinator of New Acropolis International Organization for Asia-Africa-Oceania.*

# THE METAVERSE, A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

By Ilanit Adar



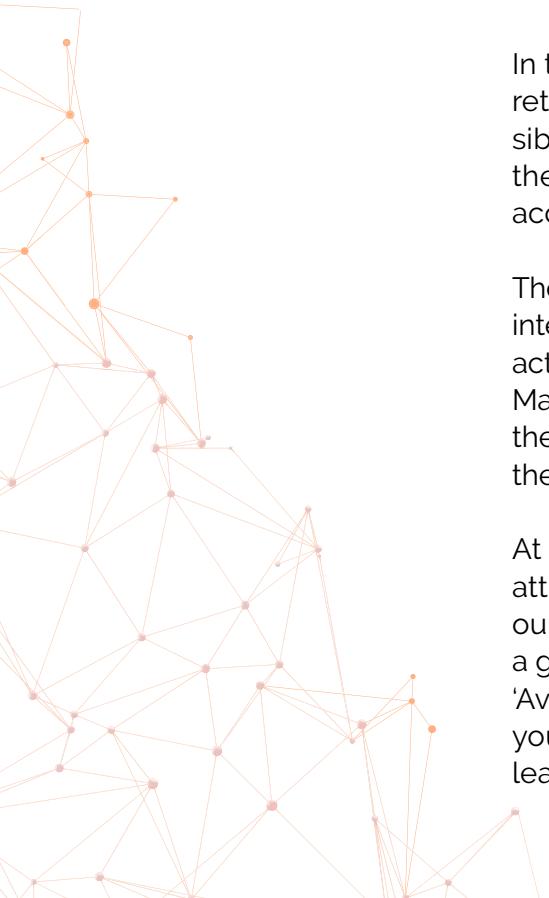
## THE CHALLENGES OF OUR CURRENT REALITY

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, many aspects of the reality that we have been accustomed to, have changed. All at once, reality has become an unstable and inconvenient place to live in. Many of our basic needs for social gathering and human interaction became very limited. This situation had a psychological impact, and emotions such as uncertainty, confusion, anxiety and fear of the future, have been growing dramatically in our society.

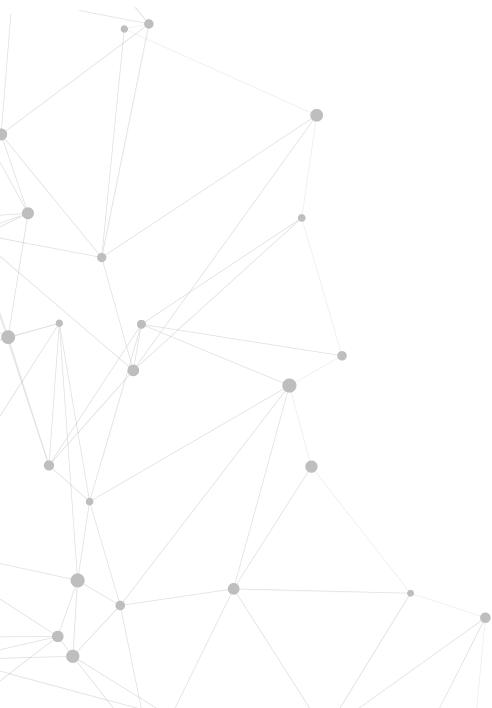
In this atmosphere, there is a common and natural wish 'to return' to reality as it was before the pandemic, or if possible 'to create a new reality'. The second option became the trigger for multiple companies in the tech industry to accelerate the development of the 'Metaverse'.

The Metaverse is a virtual space where we will be able to both, interact with one another, and basically convert most of our activities of the real word to activities in the virtual world. As Mark Zuckerberg predicts: "From the moment we wake up in the morning to the moment we go to bed, we can jump into the metaverse and do almost anything imaginable"<sup>1</sup>

At first glance, this solution for a 'better world' looks very attractive. Imagine how each one of us will be able to build our own world, using our own preferred settings, just like in a game. Imagine that you can build a new identity using an 'Avatar' and act in the world more openly and freely. Imagine yourself going to work in the virtual space without having to leave the warmth of your bed on a very cold day, and after



Life itself holds a lot of vital energies that are necessary for living on this earth. The more we expose ourselves to the open air and the beauty of the natural elements, and the more we physically interact with one another, the more we charge ourselves with 'living forces'.



work, meeting your friends or going to travel to an exotic place. It is relatively easy to imagine that people will want to spend most of their time in such a virtual reality, rather than deal with the endless challenges of real life.

On the other hand, we cannot ignore the dangers of the Metaverse. It is enough to watch the docudrama film *The Social Dilemma* (Netflix, 2020) to become aware of the depth of these dangers. Two of them that are well described in this film are: humanity's gradual addiction to technology and hence the desire to 'be connected'; and the exploitation of human weaknesses by tech companies in order to increase their profits.

Beyond these two dangers, there is another important one: the loss of human sensitivity and the ability to experience subtle emotions! The more we engage in unnatural environments, the more our delicate senses weaken, as opposed to the rough instincts and impulses that are strengthened. We can already witness cases where people are so engaged in their cellular games, that they ignore their surroundings, including someone who is sitting beside them, needing help.

In addition, life itself holds a lot of vital energies that are necessary for living on this earth. The more we expose ourselves to the open air and the beauty of the natural elements, and the more we physically interact with one another, the more we charge ourselves with 'living forces'.

### A SUGGESTION FOR A BETTER REALITY

In light of the above, if the current reality is challenging and the virtual reality with all its temptations threaten an important aspect of our humanity, what can we do in order to experience hope, and not despair, when thinking about our future?

The classical philosophers and great leaders from east and west have already suggested to us a new and better reality! A reality that we can build with our own inner forces and influence our surroundings. For example: if there is a lack of justice and morality around us, we can be more just and moral in our actions; if

there is too much fear around us, we can give a good example of how to be a bit more courageous; if people around us are obsessed with money, we can show them a more balanced life where money is just a tool to achieve more important aims, etc.

Imagine your own life and ask yourself: Am I living in a way that I believe is the right way? Have I found something worthy to live for?



The great leader of India, Mahatma Gandhi, expressed this spirit very well: "Be the change you want to see in the world". Similar words were said earlier by the philosopher Plato: "The city is what it is because the citizens are what they are", and also by the sage Confucius: "Every social development begins with individual development". They, and many other wise people, pointed out the connection between the inner state of the human being and the general state of the society.

Now, imagine your own life and ask yourself: Am I living in a way that I believe is the right way? Have I found something worthy to live for? Do I experience my life as an adventure where I am the hero who can overcome the obstacles in my path? How and where can I discover the inner strength required to confront these obstacles?

These questions can be a good starting point in order to convert our life into a truly beautiful journey! A journey that will provide us with everything that we can find in the virtual space, and much more than that! A living journey that gradually creates harmony within ourselves, with others, and with nature. As Marcus Aurelius, a philosopher and famous Roman emperor, said: "He who lives in harmony with himself, lives in harmony with the universe".

This journey is the Philosophical path, or the Evolutionary path, that belongs to all human beings. But one needs a bit of courage to recognize it and to start walking on it. Do not wait until reality changes by itself, or until artificial realities take control over your life!

Start now to build yourself and your reality, and help others do the same. This adventure will not only give you a reality to live in, but a meaning to live for. 

1. <https://www.theverge.com/22588022/mark-zuckerberg-facebook-ceo-metaverse-interview>

# NEWS SPOTLIGHT

► Philosophy ► Culture ► Volunteering

## ► Online talks

### **The Everyday Hero (Dec 21)**

Based on excerpts from Delia Guzman's The Everyday Hero, the webinar offered practical tools to overcome the barriers we erect for ourselves, so as to live our lives with courage and clarity.

### **Know Yourself (Jan 22)**

Who am I beyond the various roles that are expected of me? This interactive workshop invited participants to dive deeper to better discover their true nature, and the purpose and privilege of what it means to be human.

### **Live Authentically" Event Series (Jan – Feb 22)**

Stepping out of our comfort zone the first online talk of this series, explored the idea that though our comfort zones are places of familiarity and comfort, they are very often places of minimal growth. To really move forward we need to encounter challenges by facing new ideas, and insights that allow us to shift our mindsets, and actualize our true potential.

The webinar on Art of concentration suggested that by learning to work with the right tools, each one of us can learn to concentrate in a practical way. This can help us stay centred, thereby develop clarity and objectivity.

## ► Back to in-person events after 2 years!

The third event in the series, a panel discussion entitled Dare to be Authentic: Lessons from Great Warrior Traditions was the first in-person event at the Colaba centre since the pandemic restrictions. With examples from various traditions such as the Japanese Samurai, the fearless Spartans and the brave warrior clans of the Indian tradition



this panel explored how to discover the heroic spirit in us, so that we too can face our challenges with determination, daring and integrity.

## ► Art as a Journey Within (Dec 21)



Live from her studio in Delhi, Artist Olivia Fraser shared with members of New Acropolis Culture Circle her artistic journey starting as a travel painter. She spoke of how on moving to India she fell in love with the rigour of Pichwai paintings, and about the various influences on her art such as her training in Bharatnatyam, her deep



interest in Yoga. Today she creates paintings that could be considered spiritual road maps to reflect a journey within, and aspires to use art as a means to uplift, to express wonder and beauty, and to find the inner essence of things.

#### ► Exploring Dhrupad with Pelva Naik (Jan 22)



New Acropolis Culture Circle invited Dhrupad exponent Pelva Naik to present an online concert. Shedding light on this ancient but timeless art form, Pelva explained in a simple metaphor how

syllables can be compared to clay, and can be bent, broken or moulded, using tools of time and space. Dhrupad is a language that can express intricate emotion, as well as a vehicle to travel inwards to experience oneness, resulting in the performer and audience sharing both Beauty and Unity with one another.



#### ► Discovering Banganga: A Heritage Walk (Mar 22)

For its first in-person event after 2 years, New Acropolis Culture Circle organized a heritage walk, to learn more about Banganga Tank situated at Walkeshwar, Mumbai. The temples there and the legends and myths associated with it were used these to highlight the virtues that we could perhaps choose to emulate from these historical places. The walk explored

the importance of heritage and the role that mythology can play in our lives today.





### ► Celebrating International Volunteers Day at Shantivan Garden (Dec 21)

On December 5th, 2021, members of New Acropolis India gathered together at Shantivan Garden to celebrate International Volunteers Day by painting and beautifying a section of the garden wall and participating in a composting activity. The work at Shantivan Garden is a part of an ongoing effort by New Acropolis India in collaboration with the Mumbai Municipal Authority to revive and support a public garden in our city.

### ► A Plateful of love



During the recent surge in Covid 19 infections in Mumbai, members of New Acropolis once again stepped forward to revive the initiative to provide hot, home cooked, vegetarian meals, free of charge to those in need.

## PUBLIC EVENTS **NEW ACROPOLIS MUMBAI**

**Sun  
3 Apr**

Interactive  
Talk  
**6 pm (2 hrs)**

[Register Here](#)



### **LIVING BETTER TOGETHER: PHILOSOPHICAL LESSONS FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

How can we be a force of unity in our world today? Philosophy can offer practical tools to develop our own inner compass by looking at circumstances more holistically and deeply. Together, we will explore how we can bring harmony and clarity within ourselves, in order to contribute to a more just and ethical society.

**Sat  
30 Apr**

Interactive  
Talk  
**6pm (2 hrs)**  
[Know More](#)



### **THE EARTH AND I: COMMEMORATING MOTHER EARTH DAY**

On the occasion of International Mother Earth Day, we will explore the roots of our challenges of living in harmony with our planet Earth. This event is part of an international series hosted by New Acropolis in over 60 countries, to remind us of our humble yet integral relationship with nature.

**Sat  
14 May**

Interactive  
Talk  
**6pm (2 hrs)**  
[Register Here](#)



### **ANCIENT EGYPT: THE SEARCH FOR MEANING**

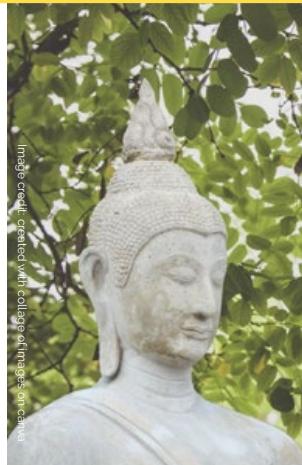
While the ancient Egyptians leave us with a rich historical and archaeological heritage, perhaps what is most striking is the spirit with which they constructed a civilisation built on timeless principles, that lasted generations. Together we will draw inspiration from this ancient tradition, to learn how we can live more meaningfully and purposefully today.

## PUBLIC EVENTS **NEW ACROPOLIS MUMBAI**

**Sat  
28 May**

Interactive  
Talk  
**6pm (2 hrs)**

[Register Here](#)



**Sat  
4 Jun**

Interactive  
Talk  
**6pm (2 hrs)**

[Register Here](#)



**Sat  
25 Jun**

Interactive  
Talk  
**6pm (2 hrs)**

[Register Here](#)



### WAY OF THE HEART: AN ENCOUNTER WITH BUDDHA AND SOCRATES

The inspiring life and teachings of the Buddha and Socrates can provide us with tools to live more courageously, compassionately and deeply. Whether through Buddha's 8-fold path or the Socratic method of dialogue and introspection, both these great figures of the East and West dedicated their lives to coming closer to the true nature of things. What wisdom can we extract to forge our own path towards wisdom and happiness?

### ARJUNA'S DILEMMA: DARING TO CHOOSE

Each day brings us countless choices, leaving us either empowered as we steer our lives in the direction we choose, or leaving us confused and exhausted with the many options in front of us. How can we learn to choose with more clarity and decisiveness? Let's draw inspiration from Arjuna, the great Hero of *The Bhagavad Gita*, as we develop the art and courage to choose.

### PHILOSOPHY FOR LIVING: WALKING THE PATH LESS TRAVELED

The path of practical philosophy has provided a compass for living more meaningfully and responsibly as human beings over centuries. We will read and discuss excerpts from Delia Steinberg Guzmán's book to discover tools to live more consciously and authentically today.

## PUBLIC EVENTS **NEW ACROPOLIS PUNE**

**Sat  
16 Apr**

Interactive  
Talk  
**6pm (2 hrs)**

[Register Here](#)



**Sat  
30 Apr**

Gardening  
Session and  
Interactive  
Talk  
**6pm (2 hrs)**

[Register Here](#)



**Sat  
14 May**

Interactive  
Talk  
**6pm (2 hrs)**

[Register Here](#)



### **INNER RENAISSANCE: LESSONS FROM LEONARDO DA VINCI**

Spring invites us to renew ourselves, and who better to inspire us than Leonardo da Vinci, the polymath who epitomized the Renaissance spirit. While his 'The Last Supper' and 'Mona Lisa' are famous works of art, his notebooks are filled with innovative ideas way ahead of their time. Can his works inspire us to bring forth an inner Renaissance within us, so that we face this world with the best version of ourselves?

### **MOTHER EARTH DAY: DOES THE EARTH BELONG TO US OR DO WE BELONG TO IT?**

On the occasion of Earth Day 2022, we invite you for a Gardening Workshop to pay our tribute to Mother Earth by sowing seeds for the future. What could our role be in maintaining the balance of this intelligent ecosystem? Let us renew our connection to Mother Earth and be inspired by the many lessons she has to teach us. This event is part of a worldwide series hosted by New Acropolis in over 60 countries, to remind us of our humble yet integral relationship with nature.

### **DARING TO DREAM OF A BETTER WORLD**

*"A dream is not that which you see while sleeping; it is something that does not let you sleep."* These words of Dr. Abdul Kalam reminds us that to dare to dream is to truly be awake. The dream of a new and better world belongs to us all, but what keeps us from awakening to this dream? Perhaps it requires individuals who "dare". Let us gain some insights from ancient philosophers who gave us keys to staying forever young and adventurous by participating in this collective dream.

## PUBLIC EVENTS NEW ACROPOLIS PUNE

**Sat  
28 May**

Interactive  
Talk  
**6pm (2 hrs)**

[Register Here](#)



### **SOCRATES: A LIFE OF TRUTH AND COURAGE**

Socrates, one of the greatest philosophers of our times, was as humble as he was brave. He dedicated his life to the enquiry and investigation towards Truth, even at the cost of his own life. Let us look at his extraordinary example, to bring a spark of courage and to search and stand for Truth in our own daily lives.

**Sat  
4 Jun**

Interactive  
Talk  
**6pm (2 hrs)**

[Register Here](#)



### **ABOUT FEAR AND THE WAY OF COURAGE**

We often find ourselves wanting to move forward but hesitating to take a step into the unknown. However, courage is not the absence of fear - it is the ability to move forward in spite of it. Join us as we explore teachings from ancient philosophers to learn how to work better with our fears and bring some courage to become better version of ourselves.

**Sat  
25 Jun**

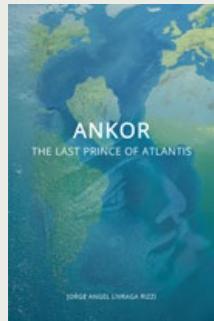
Film  
screening and  
Discussion  
**6pm (2 hrs)**

[Register Here](#)



### **BALANCE AND HARMONY: LESSONS FROM CONFUCIUS**

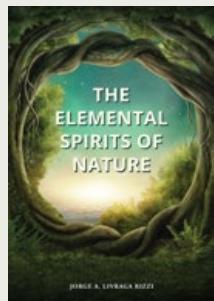
Confucius was a teacher, philosopher and political theorist, and considered to be a paragon of Chinese sages for his wisdom. It is said that with humble beginnings himself, he chose to undergo self-exile in order to understand and inspire morality in the states surrounding his own. Based on reverence, justice and kindness, his teachings can guide us to bring some balance within ourselves and our surroundings. Let us watch excerpts of a documentary to learn about Confucius' life and glean some insights to elevate our own.



## Ankor: The Last Prince of Atlantis

Ankor, the orphaned son of the last initiate-king of Atlantis, has been prepared by wise priests for terrifying 'initiations' into the 'Mysteries'. He battles not only with his own inner demons, but also with the very real demonic warriors, consumed by greed and intent on destruction. Read the story of Ankor, the last prince of Atlantis... [READ MORE](#)

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## The Elemental Spirits of Nature

Read about angels, fairies, elves, gnomes and other Elemental Spirits of Nature; open up the mind to discover a marvellous world of beings which are not "supernatural" but live on their own plane of existence, even though most people today have lost the ability to perceive them. ...[READ MORE](#)

[Buy from Amazon](#)



## The Everyday Hero

The everyday hero is a selection of short but wide-ranging essays on questions that we probably all ask ourselves at one time or another in our live. What is love? Can pain and suffering be overcome? What is freedom and how can we find the courage to live it? These questions and many more are addressed by the author – an educator, a musician and above all a philosopher. ...[READ MORE](#)

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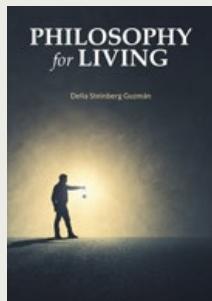
5 of our titles are now available as ebooks on Kindle.



## The Alchemist: In The Footsteps of Giordano Bruno

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. ... [READ MORE](#)

[Buy from Amazon](#)



## Philosophy for Living

Our ideas are only valid if they are good and just, both for ourselves and for others, and if we can combine them with the best kinds of feelings, so that we can apply them in the most appropriate way. An idea on its own, without the feeling and without an ensuing action, is doomed to die. The experience of everyday life is enough to show us how difficult it is to put our ideas into practice. We often tend to remain on the level of dreams, or rather, of daydreams, which calm our desires and save us having to make the effort to convert an idea into a tangible reality. ... [READ MORE](#)

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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



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

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