

October 2021

# heartfulness

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Discover Yourself

DAAJI

Ancient Wisdom  
on the Climate  
Crisis

DR. ASLAM  
PARVAIZ

Indigenous  
Global Citizens

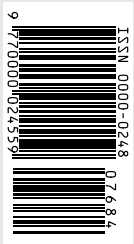
WAKANYI  
HOFFMAN

The Biology  
of Time

DR. SATCHIN  
PANDA



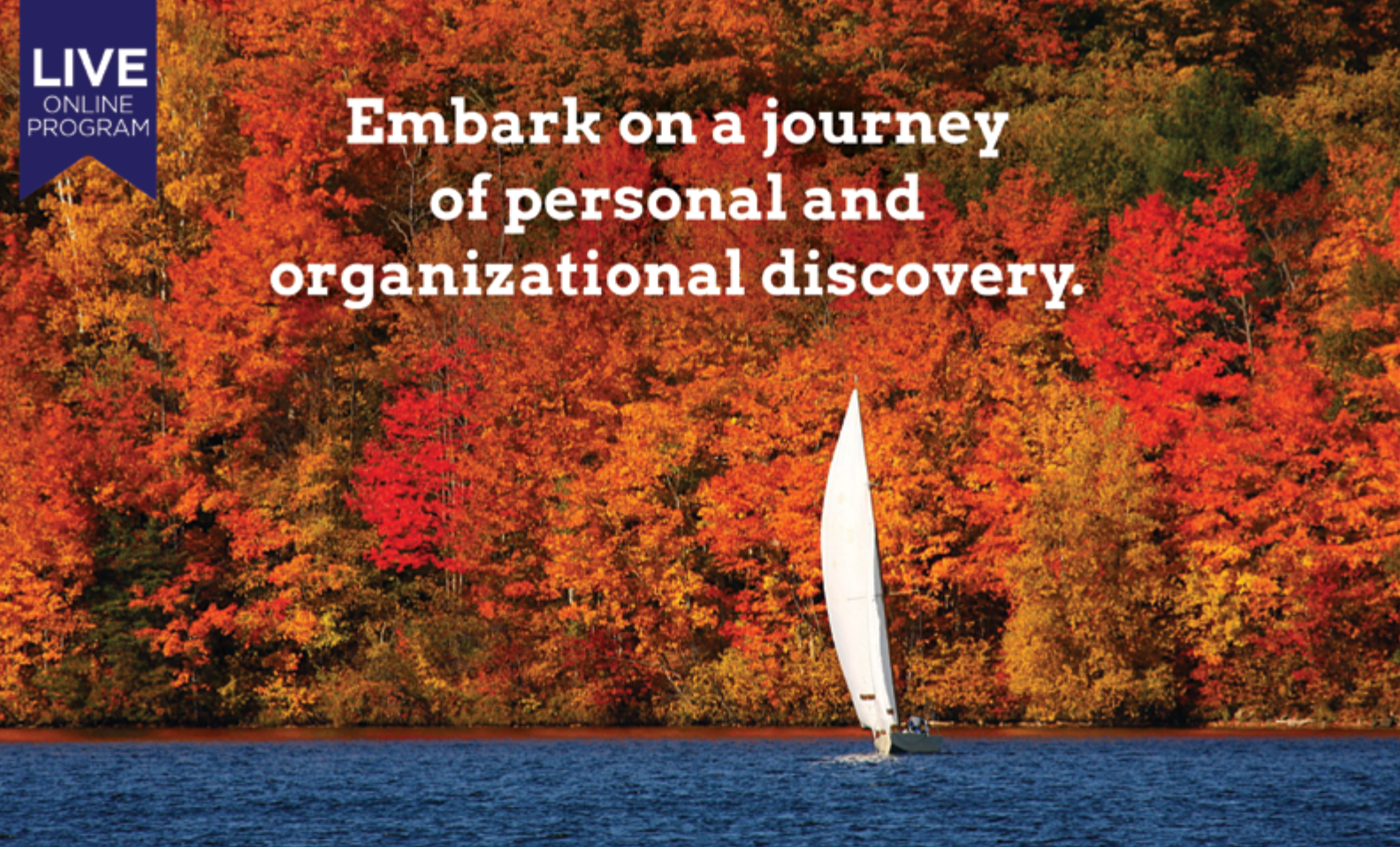
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*Wisdom*



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ISSN 2455-7684

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PRINTED BY — Sunil Kumar

Kala Jyothi Process Pvt. Limited, 1-1-60/5, RT C Cross Roads, Musheerabad, Hyderabad-500 020, Telangana.

PUBLISHER — Sunil Kumar representing Heartfulness Education Trust on behalf of Sahaj Marg Spirituality Foundation.

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Dear readers,

Wisdom comes to us in many forms. It is passed down from generation to generation, woven as years of cultural and familial storytelling. It is learned through difficult situations and unwanted pain that opens our hearts to let the light in. It slowly develops with the passage of time as we grow, age, and allow life to do its thing. It magnifies when we meditate to improve our consciousness. And the result? Our consciousness expands naturally as wisdom develops.

In this edition, wisdom is gifted to us by many different storytellers. Wakanyi Hoffman introduces us to traditional storytelling, Dr. Aslam Parvaiz to the wisdom of the Quran regarding Nature and the environment, and François Boudier to the wisdom of Indian sages. Dr. Panda speaks on the biology of time, Liz Kingsnorth concludes her series on heartfelt communication, Smriti Krishna reminds us how to love ourselves, Annie Murphy Paul continues with expanding the minds of children, and Ravi Venkatesan presents the importance of communicating ideas for an innovator. The outstanding art of Jyoti Bhatt is a reminder of how we can blend timeless traditions with modern life, and Ramya Sriram's cartoons continue to lift our spirits.

This month, Daaji's series on habits focuses on the value of self-study, the surest way to nurture the getting of wisdom.

Happy reading!  
The editors

Illustration by LAKSHMI GADDAM

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## DAAJI

Daaji is the current Heartfulness Guide. He offers a practical, experiential approach to the evolution of consciousness that is simple, easy to follow, and available to people of all ages and walks of life. Daaji is also a prolific speaker and writer. Two of his books, *The Heartfulness Way* and *Designing Destiny*, are #1 bestsellers.



## WAKANYI HOFFMAN

Wakanyi is a Global Education Specialist, writer, editor, storyteller, and founder of the African Folktales Project. The theme of peaceful, cross-cultural cooperation is a common thread in her writing and personal life. For more than a decade she has lived in 7 countries, on 3 continents, as a global nomad, developing a rich intercultural intelligence built upon her training as a journalist.



## SATCHIN PANDA

Dr. Panda is a leading expert in the field of circadian rhythm research. He is Associate Professor at the Regulatory Lab at the Salk Institute, a Pew Scholar, and a recipient of the Dana Foundation Award in Brain and Immune System Imaging. His book, *The Circadian Code: Lose Weight, Supercharge Your Energy, and Transform Your Health from Morning to Midnight*, is helping people around the world to align their lifestyles with these daily cycles, having a dramatic effect on their health.

## JYOTI BHATT



Jyoti is a celebrated artist, best known for his work in painting, printmaking, and his photographic documentation of rural Indian culture and folk art. He studied art in North America and Europe before returning to India and founding the “Baroda School” of Indian art. His etchings, intaglios, and screen prints combine the traditional and the modern. His work is displayed in The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Smithsonian in Washington D.C., The British Museum, London, and The Museum of Art & Photography, Bangalore. He was awarded the Padma Shri in India in 2019, the 1967 Gold Medal at the Biennale of Prints in Italy, and many other awards, including five Lifetime Achievement Awards.

## ASLAM PARVAIZ



Dr. Parvaiz was the Vice Chancellor of Maulana Azad National Urdu University in Hyderabad, India, from 2015 to 2020, and before that was the Principal of Zakir Husain College, Delhi University. He is a science communicator with six books and many articles and book chapters to his credit. Since 1994, he has also been the founding editor of *Urdu Science*, a popular science and environment monthly, and heads the Islamic Foundation for Science and Environment (India), a non-profit charitable organization.

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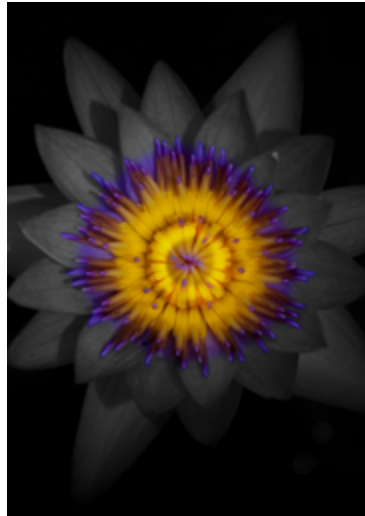
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# focus: Timeless Wisdom

# A Formula for INNER STRENGTH

**FRANÇOIS BOUDERLIQUE** shares some very practical ideas on how we can move forward toward a “new normal” in our post-Covid world. They are not new ideas, instead coming from the timeless wisdom of two great sages from India, Swami Vivekananda and Ram Chandra.



For more than a year now, our lifestyle has been put to the test. The pandemic and its consequences on our family and economic situations have disturbed life as we knew it. I guess it is just the beginning of multiple challenges that will come in the coming years. This phenomenal change has been very challenging for most of us, with a flow of events that are pushing us to assess our deepest convictions, consciously or unconsciously.

How to get stronger to regain a lost balance, build new inner convictions, and try to cement a renewed harmonious lifestyle and face life courageously as it comes to us?

How to keep our balance?

How to know what decisions will keep us on the right track, living a life of purpose and fulfilling action?

How to tap into our deepest ideal while strengthening our character in a practical way?

Quite challenging right now, no?

Let me share with you the formula of Swami Vivekananda, who, at the end of the 19th century, was the epitome of strength and vision with a practical approach to life. It has been my favorite quote, and I believe it summarizes a wonderful approach for life in modern times. It compresses a timeless wisdom on how we can synchronize our hearts and minds for our ultimate benefit:

“You must try to combine in your life immense idealism with immense practicality. You must be prepared to go into deep meditation now, and the next moment you must be ready to go and cultivate these fields. You must be prepared to explain

the difficult intricacies of the shastras now, and the next moment to go and sell the produce of the fields in the market. You must be prepared for all menial services, not only here, but elsewhere also.

“The next thing to remember is that the aim of this institution is to make men. ... The true man is he who is strong as strength itself and yet possesses a woman’s heart.”<sup>1</sup>

Strength is the hallmark of Swami Vivekananda. He goes so far as to say that weakness is a sin!

Now, if we combine this with the idea of an ashram as presented by Ram Chandra, known to many as Babuji, we get a magic combination that will fuel our enthusiasm to lead a life of perfect alignment with our deepest dreams and inner

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<sup>1</sup> Swami Vivekananda, 1947. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 3, “Lectures from Colombo to Almora. Sannyasa: Its Ideal and Practice.” Vedanta Press.

## FOCUS

convictions, in the most natural way.

For Babuji, an ashram is not a place for religious zealots living with a set of artificial rules away from society. Instead, it is the field of action of our immediate families, where practical duties meet commitments to higher forces to which we all aspire deep within ourselves.

Here is his definition:

*“Grihastha ashram (family life) is not a bar in gaining the real aim in life. I think this is the best ashram in which higher approach is easily possible. ... I assure you that a perfect saint may be found in this ashram alone. We perform our duties and remember Him as Ultimate Reality.”*<sup>2</sup>

Our immediate field of action – given at the time of our conception in our environment – starts with our family. It needs to be cultivated and enriched first. Our strength will develop naturally with efforts, dedication, and sacrifice. Daily meditation keeps the flame of our inner ideals when we live a life of practicality, as beautifully explained by Swami Vivekananda.



*“Family life is not a bar in gaining the real aim in life. I think this is the best ashram in which higher approach is easily possible. ... I assure you that a perfect saint may be found in this ashram alone. We perform our duties and remember Him as Ultimate Reality.”*

*-Babuji*

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<sup>1</sup> Ram Chandra, 1989. *Complete Works of Ram Chandra*, Vol 1. Shri Ram Chandra Mission, USA.

Take care of our immediate surroundings harmoniously, get stronger in the process, and naturally develop a healthy lifestyle year after year. What a simple formula for success!

If I am facing each and every challenge within the close circle of my family, work environment, and social interactions, I will equip myself with the necessary strength to enlarge my circle of influence. If I succeed to create harmony in this small circle, the ripple effect of that harmonious circle will affect the world on a larger scale.

At times, we are tempted to run away from it, creating the

illusion that the immediate circle can be neglected or avoided, to pursue a new home somewhere else. The problem is that if we have not taken the time to build our muscles of acceptance and compassionate action within our close encounters and families, what are we really going to achieve elsewhere?

In the gym, you start by lifting 30 kilos then 35 kilos etc. Muscles of inner strength and character are also built in a proportional manner, consistently, starting at our doorstep.

So, let us get strong together, step by step, kilo by kilo, practically,

while keeping the inner eye alert on our ideal by daily introspection. How can we nurture this *grihastha ashram* within our own homes and offices, as described by the heritage of those saintly figures who lived a practical life and succeeded in embracing both the inner ideal and the worldly environment?

Such a simple path is given to us to attain strength of character, and this worthy strength is the only thing that will really shape our destiny and make us happy in the long run.

Illustrations by JASMEE MUGDAL





# Ancient Wisdom On Nature And The Climate Crisis

**DR. ASLAM PARVAIZ** is a teacher with a passion. Coming from the Islamic tradition, he integrates the wisdom of the Quran with a scientific attitude toward Nature, the environment, and our responsibility as human beings. In November 2020, DR. PARVAIZ was interviewed by **ELIZABETH DENLEY** and **KAMBIZ RAVAN** from the Heartfulness Institute.

ED: Welcome, Dr. Parvaiz. Since we first met a few years back, I have been touched by your passion for integrating modern scientific approaches about Nature and our current climate crisis with the wisdom traditions of the Quran and Islam. Why is this so important for you?

AP: It's not science per se, but the need to have a scientific attitude. My passion is for Muslims all over the world to understand the logic behind the practices in the Quran. Whatever is happening around the globe today in the name of Islam is not what is offered in the Quran, which is a book for the entire humanity.

What you find there will depend on your capacity, your willingness, and your desire to know and internalize the teachings. While I challenge the way people currently practice Islam, my approach is not at all controversial, as it is based on the Quran.

ED: Can you please tell us about the importance of Nature, ecology, and the environment in Islam?

AP: I would start with the first verse of the Quran, which says that God created the Earth for *all living beings*. Second, the Quran says that if you wish to count the

bounties of God, you will not be able to do so. Nature has gifted us all with countless bounties in the form of resources. Third, the Quran says that whatever resources are there, they are to be distributed amongst us all. All creatures in the Universe reflect the creativity of God. Fourth, the Quran defines the position of humankind as the custodians, the *khalifa*, with the role of protecting the environment and protecting the Earth's resources.

Whatever resources are there in Nature move from one place to another by the Law of Diffusion, which tells us that

All creatures  
in the Universe  
reflect the  
creativity  
of God.





The planet is for all. Distribution of resources should be as per the need of the moment.

things move from a region of high concentration to a region of low concentration. For example, when you add water to a bowl of dry soil through a dropper, the water will spread throughout the bowl. Only once the soil becomes saturated with the water will it start accumulating on top of the soil. The movement of air, which controls the temperature and the climate, uses the same process of diffusion. When air pressure

decreases, air rushes in. The same is true of the action of gases in our body, in our lungs. Hemoglobin in our blood has the capacity to bond with carbon dioxide and with oxygen, depending upon the concentration. If more oxygen is there, hemoglobin picks up oxygen, whereas if more carbon dioxide is there, it picks up carbon dioxide. So, our capacity to breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide is because of diffusion. This Law of Diffusion is operating everywhere in Nature.

Similarly, the Law of Diffusion tells us how to share resources: Where there is a need, the resources must go. There is no need for hoarding or reserving things for near and dear ones for generations to come, whether it is money, property, food, or anything else. The planet is for all. Distribution of resources should be as per the need of the moment.

The Quran also says to establish balance. Don't disturb the balance of Nature. Don't spread impurity, like corruption and pollution. Air pollution is an imbalance of gases in the atmosphere. In Islamic countries we don't have a strong awareness of environmental consciousness and protection, yet it is part of Islam.



The Quran talks of *Ibadat*, which means submission to the divine laws or principles. Often the word is understood as “worship” or “prayer,” which has then been reduced to praying five times a day, fasting for thirty days a year, traveling once a year to Mecca for *Hajj*, and giving 2.5% of wealth to charity as *Zakat*. I call this cherry picking. We have picked those few practices from the Quran and made them mandatory, forgetting all the other practices that are there, including those about the environment and Nature, about service, and so many other things that are designed to make a person a wonderful human being.

The human-centric approach is missing. While it is wonderful to do prayer five times a day, is your prayer helping the poor lady who is your neighbor, who has nothing

For us, green is the symbol of peace, productivity, and tranquility.

to feed her kids? There are so many people who are hungry, and the Quran tells us that giving food to a person in need is our duty.

QR: Why is the color green associated with Islam?

AP: For us, green is the symbol of peace, productivity, and tranquility. When we talk about peace, there are two important words: one is “Islam” and the other is “Iman.” *Iman* is usually translated as

“faith,” but it also has the same root as the word for peace, “*Aman*.” The root word “*slm*” has eight meanings, one of which is “peace,” and another is “productivity and growth.” So, if someone says they are a Muslim, the true meaning is that they are a harbinger of peace. They are at peace with themselves, and everyone should feel peaceful with them.

They do not give any offense to anyone or anything, either mental or physical.



Balance is important everywhere. Now, balance and justice are the same thing. Where there is justice, there will be balance without chaos, because things are at peace. In Nature, peace is prevalent because the divine laws are in operation. When we are in sync with Nature, we feel peace.



How does Nature work? After the Industrial Revolution, with the fallout of air and water pollution, it dawned on us that the green trees in our neighborhoods are themselves a huge industry. They produce so many resources and chemicals, giving so many products to humanity, such as dyes and medicines, yet the industry inside the tree is creating all these things without pollution, without heat, and without noise. That is why the shift is now toward bio-products, because we know that Nature's models are better than our human-made models. In Nature, things are always in balance.

Balance is important everywhere. Now, balance and justice are the same thing. Where there is justice, there will be balance without chaos, because things are at peace. In Nature, peace is prevalent because the divine laws are in operation. When we are in

Photograph by C. ANANTHA PADMANABAN

sync with Nature, we feel peace. The entire Universe is tuned with us, and I call this, “Swimming with the current.” The moment we don’t follow the natural laws, for example, when we hoard wealth, disrespect our spouse, are cruel to our kids, a neighbor, or workers, we feel uneasy and not at peace, because these things are against Nature.

We become disturbed, then angry, frustrated, depressed, and eventually we may even feel suicidal. This is the sequence which arises from the internal situation where we are not comfortable. So being in sync with Nature is important, and this is what the Quran tells us.

ED: If you were to advise young people today how to find peace, what would you tell them?

AP: I would tell them what I have practiced and implemented myself, which is to follow the natural laws. For example, in the Quran it says, “We have created the children of Adam [meaning all human beings] to be respected.” It is a divine principle to respect all people. Whatever their color, religion, race, language, and gender, they must be respected. This is binding on all of us.



When we respect people, it means we respect their likes and dislikes, we respect their faith, their dress, and everything else. We have ours, but we have no problem with theirs being different. When we are able to do this, it is *Ibadat*. If we are respectful 24/7, it is acceptance of the divine laws.



Photograph by MONA MISHRA

The human connection is very important, as all human beings are brothers and sisters coming from one source.

When we respect people, it means we respect their likes and dislikes, we respect their faith, their dress, and everything else. We have ours, but we have no problem with theirs being different. When we are able to do this, it is *Ibadat*. If we are respectful 24/7, it is acceptance of the divine laws.

Next, the Quran tells us to speak in the best way – no foul language, no abuse, no taunts, no sarcasm, etc. This is again a divine principle. So, if someone abuses us, no matter who it is, do nothing! Our duty is to be nice. This is a hot topic today, just as it has always been. The Quran tells us that when we are in the company of people who are speaking badly, simply move away and join them again after they have finished. Don't react. The human connection

is very important, as all human beings are brothers and sisters coming from one source. There is no specific Islamic brotherhood. The human brotherhood is supreme – we must respect everyone. If we don't respect a household helper, or even our spouse or partner, it doesn't help.

The Quran also tells us to accept all the revered books from all traditions, right from the Vedas, to the Torah and the Bible, etc., and to accept all the Prophets that have been sent. A few we know, thousands we don't know. I believe that the Vedas were the first divine books. The wisdom is the same. Many of the slokas of the Vedas are exactly the same as the verses of the Quran. These wonders are waiting to be discovered and practiced.

**We Are All Indigenous**

# **Global Citizens**

**- Part 1**



**WAKANYI HOFFMAN** is a Global Education Specialist and founder of the African Folktales Project. Here, she speaks with **SARA BUBBER** about the value of storytelling and passing down wisdom through generations, her Kikuyu culture, and how all of us are indigenous people contributing to the world.

Q: Hello Wakanyi. It is a pleasure to meet with you today. I love listening to stories, reading them, and meeting people who tell stories, so I'm very happy we are talking.

Thank you! I'm also quite excited to have this conversation with you, Sara.

Q: In the Heartfulness community, we often talk about the Wisdom Bridge – the transfer of wisdom from elders to youth, and from youth to elders, because learning is a dual process. It signifies the relationship between traditional cultural heritage and wisdom, and the present. What is the importance of the Wisdom Bridge from your perspective?


Wow, that's a really important way of framing it! Off the top of my head, the Wisdom Bridge is a rite of passage from one generation to another. It signifies the idea of passing the baton from the old to the young, so that they become custodians of knowledge, whether that is cultural knowledge, spiritual knowledge, or values.

Of course, there is reciprocity as well. Children offer wisdom to the old, so there is a kind of remembrance for our elders that wisdom is an

ongoing pursuit, and that they can gather wisdom from the young as much as they can gather from their peers. Then, the other way around, elders are passing down wisdom to the younger generation, signifying, "It is our task to carry you forward."

To some degree, I see the Wisdom Bridge as a reminder that we are all indigenous to this planet. It is very important to hold that in our hearts, to understand that we're all human beings and our knowledge is ancient. It has been growing. It never ended. We tend to put indigenous people to the side and have parallel worlds going on. I think it's important to recall, and to recall from each other, that we are all indigenous to our planet.

For me, the Wisdom Bridge is a symbolic movement of knowledge from one generation to another. It is also a symbolic movement from one culture to another. That way, we're not stuck. You can take the wisdom and knowledge that has been passed down to you and recreate it, using it to learn about others. It is also a bridge to other worlds. There's a lot there. I see it as a rite of passage from one generation to the next, and a way to connect with others who do not come from your cultural background.



It is the gift of elders to the next generation, and it is a way for elders to recall who they were when they were younger, receiving that gift from others. There's a whole exchange of knowledge that goes on when that is allowed to happen.

Q: I really like what you said about it being a rite of passage and a gift. It's a wonderful gift! As you said, we often keep indigenous people aside, so we are losing out on their wisdom.

The Wisdom Bridge is creaky and in need of repair. The relationships between grandparents and grandchildren, tribes and urban populations, are not so strong now. Many of our ancient cultures are either being absorbed into modern urban life, or people are moving away from them. So we are losing a lot of wisdom from our past. This affects all areas of lifestyle. What can we do to save and preserve the bridge that we have?

First of all, I want to start on a hopeful note. I'd like to think of this as the audacity of hope – we are all human beings, and we are all indigenous to this world. Yes, there is a crisis around how much of our old oral traditions and cultural knowledge have been passed on, whether it's to global modern culture, or national modern culture. There is definitely a big divide between indigenous knowledge and the rest of the world, however, I believe that all the knowledge is carried in every generation. Like we started off with the idea of the Wisdom Bridge, I believe my mother holds within her heart the knowledge of the past. Now she's living as a modern woman, but that knowledge lives somewhere in her.

It's less a question of where to find the knowledge, and more an issue of how to open up the path; for people to open their hearts to share the knowledge. It's a living thing. And we can recover that knowledge through storytelling. Telling stories is something inherently human.

We all tell stories. You and I are telling stories now, and we're telling stories on social media, and we're telling stories on the news. We're telling stories with friends when we gather, and when we're at the supermarket we're telling a story. I believe a story is a living thing, and it lives from one person to the next. As soon as we have a conversation, we exchange some form of story. You will carry part

of my story with you, and I will carry part of your story with me. That's the link.

We can bring storytelling into classrooms, so that children who no longer live in their indigenous communities, or rural communities, where a lot of this culture and wisdom is practiced don't have to lose it. We just shift it to the masses.

Also, indigenous knowledge and wisdom is not something that is stuck in the past. It is not lost; it is living in modern populations. It's just not being utilized in the same way that it was in its indigenous settings. There's a need to recall it from each other. The power of storytelling is such that we can





The Wisdom Bridge is a symbolic movement of knowledge from one generation to another. It is also a symbolic movement from one culture to another.

recall the past by beginning from where we're standing.

If you know a folktale from your own community, that is a way to recall some part of your indigenous heritage. The more people are telling stories from the past, the more we are recollecting that knowledge and bringing it into the present. We don't necessarily need to move backwards. In fact, that's what the hesitation usually is.

There is the challenge of how to embrace indigenous cultures in the modern world. I think that's the wrong question to ask. We are all indigenous. We're indigenous to this planet. The question should be, "How do we work together? How do we bridge the gap?" One good way is to open up the avenues of storytelling, whether it's digitally, through social media, or orally. Create storytelling sessions. In that way, we begin to discover where we have deviated, and the cultural values and principles we're still applying to our modern world that are from the indigenous past.

Don't forget, also, that indigenous folk have been moving on. They're not stuck in the past. They are using knowledge that they have refined over

time. Through storytelling and openly wanting to learn about each other, we create the space where knowledge is considered as another source of being, rather than separate from who we are.

I think storytelling is the answer to your question. I have realized that we are made up of stories; it is our stories that feed us. If we're able to understand that and bring indigenous wisdom into schools, without distorting the way knowledge is passed down (usually, orally is the best way to do it) then we will regenerate and recollect this wisdom.

**Q: This dialogue is breaking a lot of myths: for example, indigenous people are not stuck in the past, we are all indigenous, and we are not separate from each other. These are great insights.**

**There are age-old traditions all over the world. What are the initiatives you are taking up in your culture as a storyteller to bring them back, to tap into them, and to open things up?**

I'm a Global Education Specialist, and through my research I discovered the UN Sustainable Development Goals. I discovered that there's

a lot of talk about how to engage children in classrooms to understand and embrace the SDGs, and how they can become better-informed global citizens who can find solutions to the challenges of achieving these goals.

But the SDGs are complex for young children. So how can we package them for young children who just want to be children? They want to play and learn and be happy. They don't want to be bothered by big ideas about what the world looks like, and what the problems of the world are. Take climate change, for instance. Even though we've seen an amazing movement of children around the world protesting for climate justice, there's still a big question mark around how they truly understand the crisis itself. They can understand that there is a lot of pollution, there are a lot of fires and earthquakes, but to what extent do they understand that this major crisis could signify the end of times as we know them?

As a result of my research, I founded the African Folktales Project. I collected African folktales that contain ideas about sustainability, and through that process I discovered that all folktales have some lesson or idea about the future. A lot of stories are about conflict between humans and wildlife, and about climate issues like drought. There are a lot of African folktales related to climate change. This

was a very exciting discovery for me. I realized that storytelling was one of the ways I could bring the Sustainable Development Goals to the classroom, so as to help kids understand them and get inspired to do something.

So, I started taking stories tied to the 17 SDGs and reimagining them. For example, I have taken a story about a big fire that happened, and how the fire was put out and the land was regenerated and recovered. I'll use the same characters, the moral of the story remains, but I reimagine it in the present time. Often, folktales are set in the past, so they are not relevant to kids growing up in today's world, especially when you're telling stories to children in modern settings versus indigenous settings. As I tell these stories, I ask the children to take them and remake them, recreate them. It is that Wisdom Bridge you were talking about initially – passing down stories and leaving them incomplete, so they can have ownership of the stories.

I'm deconstructing the idea of folktales being held by a certain group of people. I'm trying to create an environment in which we can embrace the idea that these are our stories – all of us indigenous people on planet Earth. I don't discount the fact that the stories came from a certain space, but even within an indigenous population there is a clear understanding that stories never had an original

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storyteller anyway. A story was always meant to be passed down. When I heard a story from my grandmother, she couldn't possibly tell me where the story originally came from. The objective was for me to take the story, use it in my own life, and pass it on to my children. That keeps the stories going.

This is one of the ways I'm trying to promote storytelling, promote indigenous wisdom, especially in my country, Kenya, where there is a rich oral tradition from indigenous cultures that is not seen any more in classrooms.

I've transformed the stories into podcasts, and next year I will publish a book of the first series of UN SDG folktales. I'm trying to use as many forms of communication and media as possible – digital, audio, and live sessions in schools. These stories can become our stories, not stuck in one space.

Even within indigenous communities, there is a concern that children are not always told stories by their elders, because of the formalities of going to school and the way in which the culture has been separated from formal education. So, I'm hoping that these storytelling sessions will also engage indigenous elders in the process of recollecting, retelling, and recreating their stories. Then we're all learning from each other, and we're doing something relevant for the times with what we already have.

I'm trying to bridge and marry cultures through storytelling, using folktales as a pedagogical approach to learning more about who we are.

*To be continued.*

Illustrations by SANTANU CHATTERJEE



thought in action





Our spirituality  
is oneness and an  
interconnectedness  
with all that lives and  
breathes, even with all  
that does not live  
or breathe.

MUDROOROO

# The Heartful Innovator

– Part 9

## ENGAGING OTHERS

In the previous articles, **RAVI VENKATESAN** outlined aspects of the “inner state” that we want to fine tune to become Heartful Innovators. He covered ways to overcome barriers to innovation like stress and fear, and also enablers of innovation like imagination and courage. To be effective innovators, we need three skills: coming up with unique ideas, articulating them well, and influencing others to rally around the idea. In this article he looks at the best ways to articulate ideas and influence others to rally around the ideas.



Some of the smartest people I know struggle to express their ideas. They have clarity of thought, can quickly identify solutions to problems, but are poor at expressing themselves. Often, they are frustrated that no one seems to listen to them, so poorer decisions are made by people who are not as smart but speak with a “louder voice.” The reality is that it is not just the “louder voice” that is heard. Let’s revisit some of the concepts around the subtle bodies of Mind, Intellect, Ego and Consciousness that we have discussed; in this case, we will consider them collectively instead of individually.

How to articulate ideas to others in a way that they feel heard? Let’s go through the cycle of how your listener is processing what they hear from you:

If you develop the habit of always placing your ideas in a simple and logical manner, you will go

through the filter of their Intellect. This is the easy part.

If you refer to something you heard earlier from them, or place your ideas in the context to conversations you’ve had with them, you will naturally go through their Ego filter. This is the hard part, but with practice it becomes second nature.

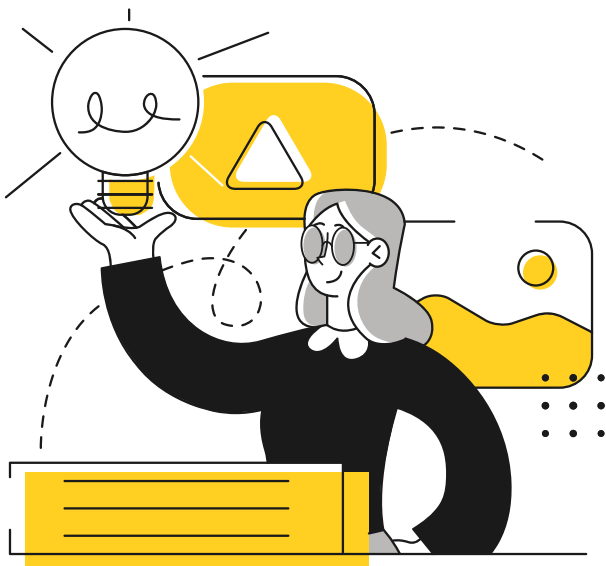
As more of your conversations “feel” positive to them, their Consciousness will shift to be open to your ideas. This is not about being devious or manipulative. Instead, it is simply following the principle that we all appreciate being listened to, and when your conversation reflects that you have listened, then your ideas are more likely to be accepted.



To encourage people to rally behind your ideas, try to create a shared vision of what they can accomplish. The three steps I recommend for a Heartful Innovator are these:

**1. Tell a story** to articulate the problem you are solving. For example, when pitching the idea for a bookmark you could tell the story of your favorite book that was ruined by dogears on multiple pages. This is a simple example, but it highlights the importance of storytelling.

**2. Paint a picture** of the future. For example, when pitching the benefit of a high-speed subway for a city with heavy traffic congestion, you might share something like, “Imagine if all our daily commuters went from the current average commute of an hour to 30 minutes. We could give them all the gift of an hour a day.” This is also like the habit, “Begin with the end in mind,” Stephen Covey describes in his famous book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.



**3. Express optimism** in the possibility of what you are proposing. Most innovations would never happen if every idea were analyzed objectively for the probability of success. There is need for optimism, at times even irrational optimism. Optimism toward the possible achievement of challenging goals always inspires people to do more than they thought possible.

**EXERCISE**

Maintain a personal influence journal over the next few weeks. Every time you share an idea with anyone at work, or even with family members, observe their reaction and assign yourself a score as follows:

- 1 if they immediately appreciate the idea and agree
- 0 if they seem neutral
- 1 if they clearly oppose your idea

Reflect on your score after a couple of weeks. You will improve your ability to articulate ideas and influence people if you apply the principles of Heartful Innovation that we’ve covered in this article. After all, what use is it if you come up with the best ideas but are not able to convince anyone to support them!



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**DR. SMRITI KRISHNA** shares some reflections on the value of solitude and alone time during the pandemic. She reminds us of some ancient wisdom from both the Japanese and Indian cultures on how to love ourselves, spend time with ourselves, accept our imperfections, and celebrate life, even during a pandemic!

As I glance outside my apartment balcony in the heart of Melbourne, Australia, to the piece of sky above and a green patch that I can see through the high-rise buildings, I notice that the streets are unusually quiet. The occasional chirping of birds breaks the deadly silence. The sixth lockdown due to the pandemic has turned the city into a ghost town.

Many who have been resilient throughout the past emergence of the pandemic are starting to feel the sand wash away from under their feet. Holding on to positivity and being resilient is becoming harder as each day goes by. Many are lonely and confined to limited physical and emotional spaces. Yes, there is a vast virtual or digital world out there where we can hang out and reconnect with anyone across barriers, but still, many people feel lonely.

I have listened to my friends' complaints that the lockdown has made them realize how lonely they were.

Why are we so reluctant to spend time with ourselves?

Loneliness is an experience which, when turned into a positive, becomes a divine practice. Solitude is an enjoyable phase to detach yourself from your body and allow yourself to heal the wounds that past experiences have inflicted upon you. The solitude phase is transformative and non-judgmental. You might be broken from inside: a broken marriage, broken friendships, children being irrational and alienating, loss of career growth, a lack of personal growth and feeling stuck. But it is okay to be broken, it is okay to have failed. You are beautiful the way you are.

How to make solitude a divine experience?

The practice of meditation takes us to a stage where we learn to accept the things that come our way in life. Yes, life may not have been rosy, and there have been lost opportunities and occasions of discrimination, but so what? None of that has changed who we are "inside."

Many of us have been lucky enough to have a list of friends on social media, a group of friends to help us enjoy weekend parties, and school and university social media groups that erase international borders, all of which have brought us together in the time of the pandemic. Those are all good support systems. But you want to go beyond that and live fully in the present moment. That's when you are left alone with your real self and that is when you start to love yourself without judgment.

The Japanese art of Kintsugi puts broken pieces of pottery together with gold, which is a metaphor for highlighting the flaws and imperfections in a damaged art piece. However, we don't need Kintsugi. It is okay to be broken, it is okay to have been hurt in the past, it is okay to carry scars that have healed only on the surface. The whole of our life may not be perfect, but the pieces are just as beautiful as they are whole in themselves. The broken pieces don't need to be aligning perfectly. Every piece or experience in life is a story, and it is perfect the way it is.

Hindu philosophy teaches that the *gunas* (a Sanskrit word meaning tendencies or personalities) are not the true "Self," or *Atman*. So, practice *Atma-Prema*, or unconditional self-love – love of the Self that exists at the center of all of us. *Atma-Prema* arises from the realization that beyond our imperfections, beyond the titles and genetic lineages we carry, our fundamental inner being is pure and eternal.

As lockdown continues, now is the time to put all those years of reading about meditation into practice. Meditate and enjoy time with yourself. Congratulate yourself on the amazing journey so far. Be your best friend!

Illustrations by ARATI SHEDDE



# innerview





Most of science talks about how  $x$  affects  $y$ , but it doesn't talk about timing. So, I realized that maybe the biology of time would be the next frontier in science.

**SATCHIN PANDA**

Photograph by SREEKAR NAGULA



# THE BIOLOGY

## OF TIME – PART 1

**DR. SATCHIN PANDA** is a leading expert in the field of circadian rhythm research. He is Associate Professor in the Regulatory Lab at the Salk Institute, a Pew Scholar, and a recipient of the Dana Foundation Award in Brain and Immune System Imaging. His book, *The Circadian Code*, has helped many people to regain their energy, sleep well and lose weight. Here he is interviewed by **UDAY KUMAR** on how he developed the ideas in his book, and what inspired his research.

Q: Good morning, sir. It's very nice to see you. Thank you so much for taking the time. I believe in karmic coincidences, and one day I was thinking that there should be something around the circadian code, not a complex research paper but something simpler for the common person to read and understand, beyond superstition and ritual, which really explains the science. Then I discovered your book, and I was very happy.

Thank you.

Q: The more I read it, the more I can feel your sincerity in putting the contents across.

Yes, it is difficult because being a scientist it's always hard to simplify and at the same time not to lose the facts.

Q: Yes, it's a very fine line.

I wanted to talk to you about your circadian clock app. I've personally been using it and it's a very comprehensive app! It covers a lot of things.

But first, can you talk a little more about your childhood, especially time with your grandparents?

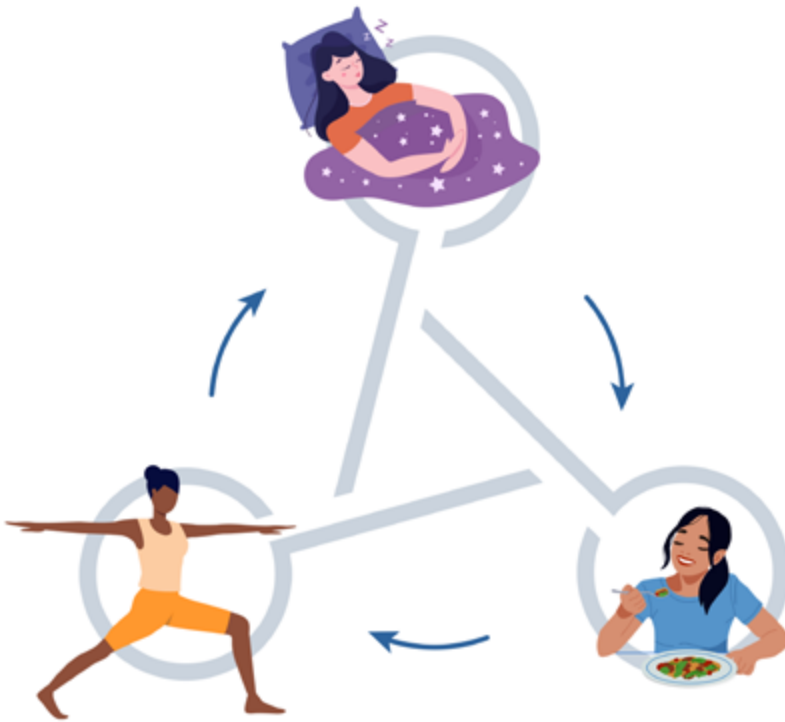
It's pretty well described in the book, and as an idea it's immense. Only in retrospect, after studying circadian rhythms, could I understand the difference between the way my paternal and maternal grandparents lived their lives. My maternal grandfather was working for the Indian Railways in a small town in Odisha so at times he had to do the night shift. He had access to relatively good health care. My paternal grandfather was a farmer, who lived on a farm and didn't have access to health care because it was a small village in the middle of nowhere. The end stages of their lives were very different. My maternal grandfather, who ate better food and had better access to health care, succumbed to a neurodegenerative disease. He died earlier than my paternal grandfather, who lived in sync with Nature. He didn't have electricity, he slept well, and he ate a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables. I guess

the only thing he bought from the market was salt. I can't remember anything else, not even jaggery.

In retrospect it was interesting to see how these two lives played out. I think that also gave me some early insight into the seasonality of plants and flowers, and it brought some curiosity. Most of science talks about how x affects y, but it doesn't talk about timing. So, I realized that maybe the biology of time would be the next frontier in science. That's why I decided to work on the biology of time.

Q: Beautiful! I love the phrase "biology of time." I also noticed the way the time with your grandparents nurtured a natural curiosity in you. You talk about this even in your TED talk, for example, your sister telling you that the frog comes up at a certain time. I thought that was just fascinating.

Back then, we didn't have the time displayed everywhere. In those days, perhaps we had one watch in the house. It is interesting that animals and plants keep track of



time to fifteen minutes accuracy, or even five minutes accuracy, irrespective of what time they go to bed and wake up in the morning.

Q: There is something to be said about the world today. I work in the technology sector and ten years ago I was also involved in some BPO activity and went to India to visit one company. At 2 a.m. all these young people were working like it was like broad daylight, and I was worried for them. I'm more worried now knowing the science. What are they doing to their biological clocks? Can it be reversed? Can we heal? What does science say?

So, we are saying that some of it can be reversed. One can live a healthier life. It's not irreversible damage. Even if you take the case of a car. I may not have taken good care of my car, but if I start taking good care of it, it will not continue to degrade at the same rate. If I reduce the rate of degradation I will get a few more years out of the car. The same thing happens when taking care of your health. If you think about the modern healthcare system, where we find medication and surgery, underlying all that is one universal principle which stems from the germ theory of disease. Sanitation, vaccination, and antibiotics are the foundation of the modern healthcare system. For example, there is no way

a person can successfully go through surgery without sanitation and antibiotics. Similarly, the foundations of day-to-day physical health are also three factors: sleep, nutrition, and physical activity. Whether a person is healthy or sick, if they don't pay attention to these three things, their system will break down. Conversely, no matter how sick they are, if they pay attention to these three, then the chance of recovery is much better.

Q: I think that's where the whole notion of prevention and cure comes into play. Money put into prevention probably goes much further than trying to fix the system.

Yes, but we should not make the distinction between prevention and cure because people who are already sick feel that they have missed the train. For example, when somebody gets diabetes, it may never be cured. They learn to manage it. Giving them hope that they can manage it and stay healthier is a very powerful message, because most people will pay attention to their lifestyle only after they get the disease. We should not tell them, "Hey you missed the train because your condition cannot be reversed." Instead, everything we are talking about actually helps them live life to their full potential, irrespective of what condition they may have.



Animals and plants keep track of time to fifteen minutes accuracy, or even five minutes accuracy, irrespective of what time they go to bed and wake up in the morning.

Q: I love that. It's a very ennobling message. There's always an opportunity to get on the train and start from wherever you are, which is what you say a lot in the book – it's never too late. And to your point about observation, especially when observing plants, there is a line in your book – it was like watching a Broadway show sitting in the front row – and you also describe vanilla farmers.

Can you talk a little bit about observing plants and how that triggered your curiosity further as you went along?

The plants and animals on the planet have circadian rhythms. That's how they adapt to cold, warmth, and everything else. For example, if you plant seeds, you'll notice that the seedlings spread their leaves during the daytime to capture the sun, but at night they close their leaves as if they're shivering from cold, because they want to reduce the heat loss.

Similarly, depending on what time of day pollinators are present, most flowers open their petals at a specific time. When I was working with vanilla, I discovered that it flowers very early in the morning before sunrise, and that's why the farmers wake up around one or two a.m. and go to the vanilla field to hand-pollinate the flowers before sunrise. Being in tune with the circadian rhythm of the vanilla flowers was breaking the workers'

circadian clocks because they had to wake up early! I observed that a lot of the farmers in the vanilla fields slowly developed an allergic reaction to vanilla. I don't know whether it's genetic, because of exposure to a lot of pollen, or due to a combination of their circadian rhythm being broken, being sleep deprived, and exposure to the allergen. That's why the chance of getting allergies might have increased.

It is an interesting observation, but I guess these days we don't have time for these observations because instead we observe what is trending on Twitter and Facebook. What is interesting is that if you mine the Twitter data, there are very nice circadian, weekly, and annual rhythms. In Google Analytics you can look for these patterns in the searches that people make. You'll clearly



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see that the things people think about, worry about, or are curious about have circadian rhythms. As you might imagine, searches for pain medication increase at night. People search for coffee more often in the morning and late afternoon. Studying these data, you start to know the predictive value of rhythms to help us anticipate events as opposed to just being responsive. Anticipation versus response actually increases efficiency by 10% to 20%.

**Q: Wow!**

For example, if you are opening a shop in a market and you know that people only come to the market by 9 or 10 a.m., after finishing their morning activities at home, what is the point of opening the shop at 6 a.m.? Also, it'll be useless to open at 12 noon because you have missed the morning customers. So, rhythms are played out in commerce. Plants turn their photosynthetic mechanism on one or two hours before sunrise. They are opening

shop one hour before sunrise so that they can get the first rays of the sun and convert them into energy.

Having that circadian clock gives them the advantage of getting maybe 10% to 15% extra photosynthesis. The circadian clock helps the plant kingdom fix 10% more carbon. And imagine, if they didn't fix that additional 10% we would be dead by now. Then, at the end of the day, photosynthesis winds down one hour before sunset, so they don't waste any unnecessary energy to keep the photosynthetic system going.

**Q: Brilliant!**

It's all about prediction.

**Q: As you rightly said, one of the key things is that rhythm is universal, and if we flow with it, it supports us, whereas if we go against it, there is friction. In Heartfulness, it is recommended that we meditate early in the morning, before dawn, and do**



the detox cleaning practice in the evening, and a prayer before sleep at night. The timings are based on the circadian importance of getting better returns at certain times of the day for certain activities. Is this also the case with other aspects of lifestyle? For example, is there research on recommended times for students to study? A lot of kids nowadays burn the midnight oil.

Sometimes this can be taken out of context. For example, we know that there are better times

to exercise, but that's for elite athletes who want that extra one second advantage. If we say that late afternoon is the best time for exercise, then people who need to exercise may say, "Well, morning may not be the best time to exercise." So, in the pursuit of perfection, we should not give up what is good now. For sleep, it's very clear that we should sleep at night. We have excellent sleep when we go to bed at 9 or 10 p.m., whereas we cannot sleep for six to seven hours, even when we try, during the daytime. But that's very different from exercise, or studying

for an exam, because when there is an exam, we have to study. We cannot say, "No, I'm just waiting for my best time!"

Q: I've used that excuse a few times, but it didn't work out very well. I like what you are saying, and it is the same with meditation. Even though there is a best time of the day to meditate, it is still better to do it now than wait for that ideal time.

*To be continued.*



it changes everything



Spirituality is the search and discovery of truth, the nature of reality.

It is the relation of you as an individual to the greater whole, the understanding of what exists in you, what its nature is, what its implications are for your life, and how you are a part of the whole.

**MIRABAI BUSH**

# Listening with the Intent to Understand

## Heartful Communication

### - PART 3

In this 3-part series, **LIZ KINGSNORTH** introduces the value of effective communication, the basic principles of Heartful Communication, and how it can guide our understanding of our personal feelings and needs, and the feelings and needs of others, ultimately leading to a more consistent state of harmony. In part 3, Liz shares how listening can be a powerful and empathetic tool of communication.

We can listen in a range of ways. We can listen in attentive silence, offering our alert presence, communicating acceptance, respect or care, without words. Or we might need to listen for factual information – for example in a work meeting – and then we can check back with the speaker if what we have picked up is accurate.

Perspective taking is another way to listen. Paying attention and acknowledging someone's perspective or opinion, particularly when it is very different from our own, requires us to be centered and to let go of any urge to persuade them they are wrong! If our intention is connection not correction, we first listen for their way of seeing things and then we may reflect back to them

our understanding of their perspective. “So, your view is that vaccination should be compulsory for everyone, is that right?” Remember, you don't need to agree with their perspective, but when someone feels accurately heard, not immediately argued with, not judged, they are much more likely to be open to hearing your perspective also.

Another level is to listen for how a person is feeling, and we can offer back what we sense. For example, someone might say, “My husband is never at home. He's married to his job!” Even though feelings are not explicitly named here, we can sense that this person is in pain about her situation, that she has feelings of frustration and anger, perhaps loneliness, or even despair. If we gently respond to this outburst by asking if she is feeling a bit



hopeless and alone, she may experience relief from being heard; here is someone really trying to understand her experience.

What matters is that we don't fall into the habit of immediately trying to fix things or make light of the situation. Habitual responses might be:

To try to console, for example, "Never mind, at least he does come home!"

To give immediate advice, for example, "Why don't you complain to his boss?"

Very commonly, to tell our own similar story, for example, "Oh, my husband's just the same,"

and off we go with our own story, often with a sort of one-upmanship, like our situation is even more horrible than theirs!

I call these kinds of responses "circuit breakers," because they can so quickly break the flow of connection and cut across the person's need to express themselves. We jump in and reply with what comes instantly into our mind. Stephen Covey wrote, "Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply." It's not that we should eliminate these responses altogether, as at times they may be what someone wants, but often not as a first reaction. It can be an issue of timing, being sensitive to their need to vent without interruption.



Take a moment now and reflect on the ways you commonly respond: “Do I tend to immediately give advice, for example? Or perhaps start telling my own experience?”

You might also reflect on how *you* feel when someone tries to immediately fix things, when you want to simply share something and be heard?

What we are often yearning for from our listener is empathy, that they are willing to imagine our world, to gently step into our unique experience and affirm it. Heartful Communication teaches us to listen so carefully that we can hear or sense what someone may be longing for, as well as their feelings, even when they don’t articulate them clearly. So, an empathic response to, “My husband is never at home. He’s married to his job!” might

sound like, “I guess you’re feeling really fed up and alone, and you would love to have more quality time together with your husband.” We tune into her longing for companionship, even though it is being expressed indirectly as an exasperated complaint.

When people receive empathy in this way, they often feel relief, an easing of pressure. Their need to be heard and understood is met. It’s nourishing. It’s one of the most transformative aspects of communication that we can develop.

Being able to stay calm and listen under pressure is more challenging. Yet, if we can do it, if we can empathize with someone who is angry with us, hostility can change to harmony in a remarkably quick time. I remember one time when I was living



When people receive empathy in this way, they often feel relief, an easing of pressure. Their need to be heard and understood is met. It's nourishing. It's one of the most transformative aspects of communication that we can develop.

in a house with no access to the backyard except through my neighbor's garden. I was doing major renovation work and my neighbor had agreed to allow the workmen to come through his garden with their heavy loads to access my yard.

We were a couple of weeks into the project with a lot more to be done, when one morning he bolted the gate between our gardens and piled up furniture behind it. Clearly, he had decided to put a stop to the work. If the gate stayed locked, that would be the end of my garden renovation. I needed to go and listen to this man.

I began quietly, using neutral observation: "Hello John, I see the gate is locked today."

He immediately exploded, shouting, "You think you can just go on like this every day with these idiots invading my garden like it's a public road!"

I took a deep breath and listened for his feelings and what his needs were in this moment, and then I replied, "Are you really angry because you want your privacy respected?"

"Yes!" he roared, "I don't know when this damned work is going to be over. I've had enough!"

Although I was alarmed, I remembered that he was angry because he had valid unmet needs, so I responded, "Right, it's important that you know what the timeframe is for completing."

"Of course!" he said. "And see that shed? That's my home office with all my files and my computer inside!"

I replied, "Oh wow, I can see why you're worried about security and want to be sure your stuff is safe."

Other things were upsetting him: "And see those plants – that is salad! Your buffalos are trampling over everything!"

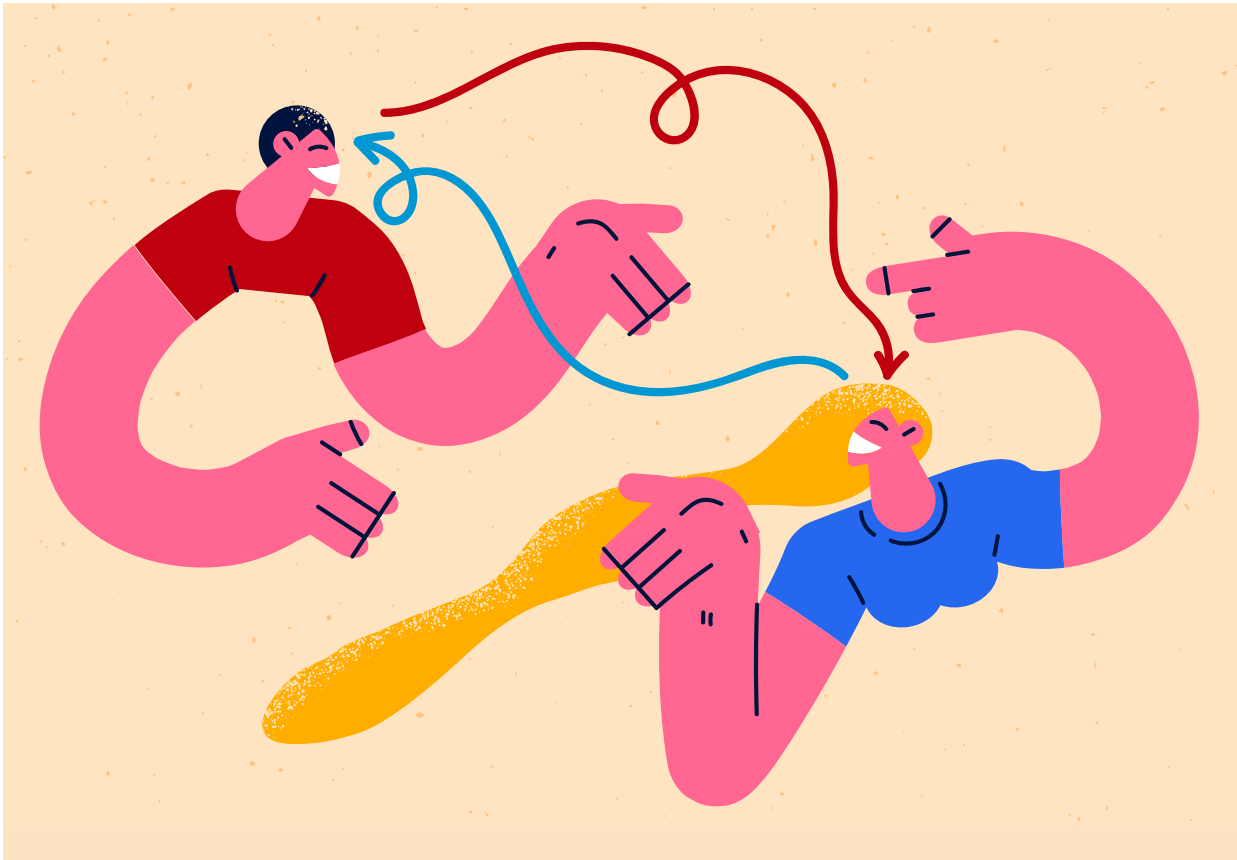
"I'm really sorry," I said. "It matters that they take care and keep to the path."

There were a couple more of these interchanges with him expressing what he was angry about and me listening and doing my best to reflect back to him my understanding of his feelings and needs. I could see him becoming calmer.

Then suddenly, to my surprise, he said, "Well, all right, I can see you have to get the work done. I'll open the gate when they come!"

I was taken aback at how fast things had shifted. I hadn't protested or defended my situation. The whole thing took about ten minutes. I quickly thanked him and assured him we would talk with the workmen about his concerns. The project was completed amicably. This is the power of focused, empathic listening that's possible even under pressure.

Learning new habits of listening instead of defending ourselves. Becoming aware when we are triggered and then being able to respond gently. These things can liberate us from the prison of



Learning new habits of listening instead of defending ourselves. Becoming aware when we are triggered and then being able to respond gently. These things can liberate us from the prison of judgment and reactivity.

judgment and reactivity. As Viktor Frankl suggests, “There is a space between the stimulus and the response. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

I have found that this can be achieved more easily when we have a practice of meditation that helps us create such spaces, bringing increasing calmness and balance inside. This is a journey where we endeavor to transcend our conditioning and re-weave a web of generous, warm relatedness, where the well-being of each one, and all of us together, matters more than pursuing our individual well-being. Here we go beyond our separate identities toward a shared sense of oneness, as an entire human family, in which each one flourishes and can contribute to the well-being of all.



*happiness*  
is when what you  
**THINK**  
**SAY** &  
**DO**  
are in  
*harmony*

MAHATMA GANDHI



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# How to Nurture Your Children's Inner Strengths – Part 2

**ANNIE MURPHY PAUL** is a journalist and author whose books include *Origins: How the Nine Months Before Birth Shape the Rest of our Lives*, *The Cult of Personality Testing*, and *The Extended Mind: The Power of Thinking Outside the Brain*. In part 2 of this interview by **UDAY KUMAR**, she speaks more about interoception and self-awareness, and how gestures and physical expressions are as important as verbal communication in helping our children to learn.

Q: As you do research on the extended mind, what do you think about the role of mirror neurons?

I don't refer to mirror neurons. I am not convinced that we know enough about how they operate and how central they are to the processes of empathy and communication. And I don't think it is necessary to understand. I say this in the book: Humans naturally engage in mimicry, subtle automatic miming of each other, when talking face to face. It's by making those expressions and gestures, and by assuming the postures of the other person, that we then read off our own bodies what those postures and expressions make us feel. That's how we get access to what another person is feeling and thinking. Research has found that people who are more attuned to their own internal signals can be more empathetic because they then feel more acutely the signals they

read from the other person. I am fascinated by processes like this in which humans bridge the divide between us, so we are not as separate as we think we are. So in my case I didn't feel the need to draw in the research about mirror neurons.

Q: You also touch upon sensing, labeling and verbalizing of emotions. One of the core practices of many meditation systems, including Heartfulness, is journaling at the end of a meditation sessions.

Oh, interesting!

Q: We observe ourselves at the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual levels, and train ourselves in the vocabulary of journaling. We develop the capacity to have one eye always looking inward while looking at another person. We learn to become adept at witnessing

through meditation and journaling.

So, I would like to know your thoughts on any research you have come across on journaling and how it helps.

That sounds like a really fruitful exercise, and it makes me think of two areas of research I write about in the book. One is around interoception. There is a suggestion that the most effective way to use those interoceptive sensations is to alternate or oscillate between attending to the outside world and attending to the inside world, so that you're getting a constant infusion of information from both places. You don't get lost in the internal sensations, but you are not so focused on the outside that you are not in tune to what is going on inside. That is an effective way to gain wisdom from both spheres. It sounds like journaling might facilitate that.

The most effective way to use those interoceptive sensations is to alternate or oscillate between attending to the outside world and attending to the inside world, so that you're getting a constant infusion of information from both places.

Second, it is very useful to take the mental contents of the brain and put them out into physical space, whether it is on a whiteboard, post-it notes, or a field notebook. I have read about how important field notebooks are to scientists. Although it may seem that a thought in our head and a thought we write down on a page are the same, they really are different – what psychologists call different affordances. We can do different

things with them. Once we put a thought down on paper, we can inspect it with our senses. We can look at it, we can read it out loud, we can change it around, we can manipulate it in ways that remain inert when it is inside our head. In journaling, we externalize our thoughts and feelings so we can look at them in the moment, and we can also revisit them later in a way that is difficult to deal with if it remains in our head. I think it is a really productive and fruitful exercise.

Q: My teacher says that when you are on a hike, if you look back every few yards, you won't know how much ground you've covered, but when you come to the summit you will see the whole thing. He says it is exactly like that when you read your journal from three years ago. You see what thoughts you were getting in meditation, and how observant you were of your own inner environment. That's a good way of gauging your own progress, of tracking your inner progress and figuring out how it is coming along.

It is remarkable how difficult that is to do if you don't write things down. It is hard to remember how you were three years ago. And that is a useful difference between an external resource like paper and pen or a computer file

and our brains, which are always transmuting and changing our memory, often in a fruitful and productive way, but not in a way that keeps things as they were. We need something that is kept as it was so we can push against it or remember how things were, which is what the brain is not meant to be. The brain is not good at being a fixed and unchanging record of what happened.

Q: I am taking a jump here, but the better we are at our own interoceptive reading, the better we are at reading others, too. Not in terms of getting into their minds, but feeling what they are feeling, understanding what they are going through, and that's how we can communicate better with people. It starts with "me," but if we are honest with our own changes, then it radiates outward in concentric circles.

I think that is absolutely true, in a way that if we stayed locked inside our own head we wouldn't be able to make that connection with other people.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about your research around meditators and the ultimatum game?

I was just fascinated by some research I came across that seemed to push against the very common and old idea in Western



culture that it's the brain that is rational and the body is an unruly, irrational animal-like entity, and the rational brain controls this unruly body. What was so fascinating to me about the research on the ultimatum game is that the body can be more rational than the brain.

In the experiment, groups of participants were asked to play the ultimatum game, where there are partners. One partner has control of the kitty of money, and they decide how much to offer their

partner. The expectation of the partner generally is that growing out of reciprocity the other person will fairly divide the kitty in half. Often, however, the offering person gave their partner less than half and kept more for themselves.

The rational thing for a recipient partner to do was to take whatever was offered: If they were given one dollar, that was one dollar they would not have had otherwise. But because they had a social expectation of reciprocity, often the people who were offered less

What was so fascinating to me about the research on the ultimatum game is that the body can be more rational than the brain.



than half, or less than what they thought they should get, refused it out of spite, almost to say, “If you are not going to give me what I think is fair, I am going to spite myself by not accepting that offer at all.” So that’s very irrational in a sense.

The research found that long-time meditators were:

1. more likely to accept the low offer, to do the rational thing, and

2. when they made that choice, the part of their brain called the insula, which is the interoceptive hub where all the sensations of the body are processed, was more active when they were contemplating this offer.

And in people who did not meditate it was the prefrontal cortex that was active, which is the part of the brain that makes judgments and decides when something is fair or not. In other

words, those people who were meditators, and probably more attuned to their bodies, were making a more rational choice in this economic game than people who were using their heads. I found that result really fascinating.

*Q: Me too! My interpretation of that study was that as you meditate, your ego becomes more humble and grounded. If you think of the ego as a spectrum, one extreme is humility and the other*



Research now shows that gesture is similarly important for building vocabulary and later academic success.

is arrogance, and you are somewhere in the middle. You may not think it's fair, but you accept and move on.

Right! I don't have to put my big ego out in front and let it make all the decisions.

Q: Exactly.

I would like to ask you more about gestures, especially for children. I was familiar with the word gap study by Hart and Risley, and I come from the Indian culture where everybody talks to their children all the time. What I hadn't understood, and what you called out, was how important gestures are for a child. I still remember my grandmother and her gestures.

She was very animated, and it did something. Can you talk about gestures and their role in our lives?

That's a lovely memory. It must have been very engaging to listen to her and watch her. You got the full helping at the start of your life!

What's interesting is the idea of a gesture gap. In the Hart and Risley study, they found that affluent children may hear as many as 30 million more words by the time they start school than less affluent children. This word gap has an enormous implication on how they perform in school. Research now shows that gesture is similarly important for building vocabulary and later academic success. We see a similar effect on how much affluent parents gesture with their children and how much less affluent parents gesture with their children. We can say there is a gesture gap along with a word gap, which may be just as significant.

And the good news here is that with a little bit of training and awareness raising, parents from all socio-economic groups can employ more gestures in their interactions with their children. For example, when they are reading a book with their children, pointing with their finger, or making a cat gesture

when they are talking about a cat. Those gestures made by parents lead children to make more gestures, and later on it shows up in a larger spoken vocabulary for the children.

This is just another example of how we are so focused on verbal language that we don't focus on gesture. Once we know the importance of gesture, however, we can bring it onto our parenting practices.

Q: Amazing! I love it because it shines the light of science onto something we take for granted.

Thank you, I really appreciate it.

Thank you for reading the book so carefully, and for having such thoughtful questions. I really appreciate it.

Illustrations by ANANYA PATEL



be inspired

Until you make the  
unconscious conscious,  
it will direct your life and  
you will call it fate.

**CARL JUNG**



# Discovering the Self

## THE ART OF REMOVING AND CREATING HABITS

### PART 10

**DAAJI** continues his series on refining habits, in the light of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga and current scientific and yogic principles and practices. This month he shares his insights on the fourth *Niyama*, *swadhyaya*, which means self-study and self-awareness. It is one of the fundamental pillars of emotional intelligence.

I think self-awareness is probably the most important thing  
toward being a champion.

—*Billie Jean King*

Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.

—*Carl Jung*

## Yoga in action

Last month we explored the three *Niyamas* that make up Kriya Yoga, which means Yoga in action. In other words, how inner changes in our thoughts and feelings are expressed in our outer behavior. At the beginning of Part 2 of his Yoga Sutras, in the section on “practice,” Patanjali reminds us that:

### 2.1: *Tapah svādhyāyesvarapranidhānāni kriyā yogah*

Austerity, self-study, and God-awareness together constitute Yoga in action (Kriya Yoga).

The second of the three *Niyamas* of Kriya Yoga is *swadhyaya*, meaning “self-study.”

But Kriya Yoga is actually more about the inner awareness and choices that define our action in every moment. This awareness purifies our activities of any negative effects of ego, removing selfishness. It propels us away from a habitual way of living, driven by the past, to a life lived in the present.

## Swadhyaya

Self-study requires us to turn out attention inward so that we can learn about ourselves. Now, that can be a daunting business when we don’t feel comfortable with what we see, but every culture has recognized the value of self-study so here we will try to solve the problem of how to face ourselves. Self-study has been the cornerstone of psychology from ancient times to the present day, in the East and the West, in mysticism, astrology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, yogic psychology, Mindfulness cognitive therapy, and many other fields. Modern scientific research also tells us that self-study and self-awareness go hand in hand with meditative practices. The two are synergistic. In Daniel Goleman’s book, *Emotional Intelligence*, he highlights the research showing us that meditation fosters emotional intelligence, of which self-awareness is one of the key pillars.

## How can you learn about yourself?

Why do you need to look within to learn about yourself? Knowledge from external sources, for example, observing the world around you, reading books, watching and listening to digital media, and talking with other people like counselors and psychologists, will no doubt give you some self-insight, but at best it is a mirror and a catalyst for self-awareness.

The most direct ways to learn about yourself are:

### 1. Meditation:

Meditation with awareness = self-study.

In meditation you will be able to notice the play of your *vruttis*, the movements and vibrations within the subtle body. You may know them as your thoughts, feelings, and emotions. As you witness them, gradually you will learn how they arise, what motivates them, where they lead, and many other things. When this is done without attachment or desire, you discover that these *vruttis* no longer generate turbulence or entanglement. They simply pass, and you are free from their hooks.

Through meditation, you will dive into deeper dimensions of yourself, from the level of thinking to the level of feeling, and beyond. Self-study does not just stay at the surface level of your thoughts and emotions. You journey into layers of your being that you cannot access through conversation or a more analytic approach to self-discovery.

After meditation, when you take the time to acquire, enliven, imbibe, and become one with

the condition you have received, you will become unified with that state (AEIOU) and develop your abilities of self-study at all levels, not just the mental level. The condition will permeate every atom of your being so that you embody the effects of meditation fully, then it will be absorbed at subtler and subtler levels of your being.

After this, when you write your experience in a journal, you will develop self-awareness to an even greater extent. Writing and expressing your experience in other ways like music, art, or dance, allow you to explore it and study it in different ways. You can revisit it and see patterns over time, which is difficult to do otherwise, because the mind is always adapting and changing. Your memories are not static; they evolve with new and added experience.

**2. Cleaning:** When you practice Heartfulness Cleaning to purify your mind of all the turbulence, impurities, and complexities that distort your perception, your self-study will develop clarity.

**3. Continuous improvement:** At bedtime, take a few minutes to go into your heart, with a prayerful attitude, and feel sincere regret for any wrongdoings, even if they were unintentional. Ask for forgiveness and resolve not to repeat them. Done sincerely, this simple practice clears your heart of any heaviness and removes guilt. The heart is the key to self-study! It allows you to observe yourself with self-compassion and self-acceptance.



After meditation, when you take the time to acquire, enliven, imbibe, and become one with the condition you have received, you will become unified with that state and develop your abilities of self-study at all levels, not just the mental level. The condition will permeate every atom of your being so that you embody the effects of meditation fully, then it will be absorbed at subtler and subtler levels of your being.



### What are the benefits of self-study?

Patanjali tells us that

#### 2.44 Svāhyayādiṣṭadevatāsamprayogah

Self-study brings about an inner atmosphere that is conducive to the divine presence, which is beneficial to our being.

He is inferring that self-study creates the field in which we can experience the Divine. Going to church, to a mosque, or to a temple, performing rituals and hanging images of saints in our houses may all be great reminders, but without self-study we will not have the experience of the divine presence.

Self-study is implied in the act of meditation, but many people meditate without self-study. They close their eyes and enjoy the experience, sometimes enjoying blissful states, and sometimes losing awareness altogether. Others are aware of their thoughts and feelings, but they remain entangled in them rather than letting them go and diving deeper. In fact, the art of meditation is not well understood by most meditators. Luckily for all of us, the simple awareness of how you feel before meditation and after meditation is a game changer. Study the difference arising out of your practice. Even to study the difference created by your practice, you will have to study yourself.

Patanjali is saying that self-study is the way to reach the Divine, which implies that the Divine



is within us. It is our innermost Center. As Babuji says, “God has hidden himself inside your hearts and exposed you. Hide yourselves and expose God! This is the real practice.” So, we go within and study ourselves from our most external states to the Center of our being. This involves layer upon layer of uncovering. In the process, everything external is a mirror of what we find within: How we relate to other people is a mirror; how we relate to Nature around us is a mirror. They are reflections of what is within us. In fact, as we journey deeper through the layers, every layer becomes a mirror for deeper layers. It is like those funfair mirrors loved by children, where two mirrors face each other, and they can see an infinite number of images of themselves disappearing into the distance.

When we meditate, we have the most exquisite opportunity for self-study, because we dive beneath the surface. We start by turning our attention inward, watching our thoughts, letting them go, and then centering ourselves on one thought, through the processes of *Pratyahara* and *Dharana*. Then we meditate – *Dhyana* – and we go beyond the thinking realm to the feeling realm. We go behind our thoughts. Then we go deeper still, beyond feeling and experience, exploring the states of becoming – refining and transforming ourselves. Then we go still deeper, to where self-study takes us into the realm of pure existence and eventually non-existence, where we are no longer in the picture.

The beauty of Patanjali’s sutra is that he simply tells us to study ourselves, nothing more. He doesn’t say, “You must change!” Coming face to face with yourself through self-study itself is enough to catalyze the process of transformation.

Babuji says, “God has hidden himself inside your hearts and exposed you. Hide yourselves and expose God! This is the real practice.” So, we go within and study ourselves from our most external states to the Center of our being. This involves layer upon layer of uncovering.

Become aware of yourself: What happens when you are sad? What happens when you are happy? All your moods are like different colors of the rainbow, different windows through which to look within. Maintaining that awareness is just like retaining the meditative state after meditation – one eye is always within even when the other is focused on the outside world. How do you behave when you are alone? With other people? At work? With your family? When you are going to sleep at night?

In self-study, you are shining the Light from the Center outward, illuminating every aspect of your character. Darkness disappears. All the qualities needed for evolution are contained within that Light, just as all the colors of the rainbow are contained within a beam of colorless light.

Self-study naturally propels us toward continuous improvement. And while we may be journeying closer and closer to the Center, we still need to be aware of every aspect of our day-to-day behavior in the outside world and with other people. The gift of spiritual evolution does not mean we can forget about the very human aspects of living in the world.

So, what is critical here? While we are on the journey, it is important to be aware, and this comes from expanding our consciousness in both directions along the spectrum into the subconscious and the superconscious. Our capacity for self-study expands as our awareness in the field of consciousness expands. This is the spiritual

When you witness all these dimensions of your being, the work of the *Yamas* and *Niyamas* will become effortless, because you will see what needs to be removed (*Yamas*) and what needs to be cultivated (*Niyamas*). Your habits are gradually exposed, even those that are programmed deep within the subconscious.

In self-study, you are shining the Light from the Center outward, illuminating every aspect of your character. Darkness disappears. All the qualities needed for evolution are contained within that Light, just as all the colors of the rainbow are contained within a beam of colorless light. You no longer need to recite mantras like:

ॐ असतो मा सद्गमय ।  
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ।  
मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय ।  
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om. Keep me not in Unreality, but make me go towards the Reality.

Keep me not in Darkness, but make me go towards the Light.

Keep me not in Mortality, but make me go towards the World.

of Immortality,

Om. Peace, Peace, Peace.

Instead, what you seek becomes a reality.

Self-study is based on wonder. The wonder of exploring the inner universe. Like a small child exploring a garden filled with flowers and butterflies, everything is inspiring and joyful. Self-study is not judgmental, but it is discerning – in fact it is dependent on *Viveka*, our capacity for discernment.



All aspects of our being – the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual – are enhanced through self-study. It is up to us to use the practices we have been given for that purpose. And remember, the heart is central to self-study! Authentic self-inquiry is a magnificent tool once we have mastered the art of staying within the heart.

Self-study requires you to turn your attention inward so that you can learn about yourself with complete honesty. To me it means honestly feeling yourself, looking at your inner panorama. Honest self-study is the key.

journey, and it is why spirituality is not just about God, but also about human transformation. God-Realization is no different from Self-Realization at the highest levels. As Patanjali says, we reach God through self-study.

All aspects of our being – the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual – are enhanced through self-study. It is up to us to use the practices we have been given for that purpose. And remember, the heart is central to self-study! Authentic self-inquiry is a magnificent tool once we have mastered the art of staying within the heart.

### Self-study eventually takes us beyond the self

I have observed that whenever I am deeply connected with the Master everything happens naturally. For example, the heart becomes lighter, kinder, and melting. While I am aware of his presence within, mundane and unnecessary things simply wither away.

Can you face yourself when there is cunningness in your heart and selfish intentions? When you

lack purity and contentment? I believe with all my heart that unless you become simple and pure, your peep into yourself will remain colored. Self-study requires you to turn your attention inward so that you can learn about yourself with complete honesty. To me it means honestly feeling yourself, looking at your inner panorama. Honest self-study is the key. Can you look at yourself with all sincerity while craving certain desires? Can you make a rational decision when riding high on an uncontrollable ego?

Some of you approach me and say, “Sir, please accept us, we surrender to you.” There are multiple problems here. First, you cannot make others surrender along with you; you can only speak for yourself. Second, have you looked at yourself, have you practiced *swadhyaya* before expressing yourself with such a prayer? When you look at yourself thoroughly, from all angles, and consciously unload whatever you want to be rid of, later you will realize that the very “self” is the stumbling block. You realize the need to unload the burden of your ego. Rather, as you study yourself with love, the unloading of the ego and your desires will happen naturally.

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# taste of life

Art is like a doorway,  
an entrance to yourself  
and others.

**BRONWYN CALEY**

Artwork by JYOTI BHATT





AN ART ESSAY

# *Beyond Traditional* **and Modern**

## Part 1

**JYOTI BHATT** is a celebrated and awarded artist, best known for his work in painting and printmaking, as well as his photographic accounts of rural Indian culture and folk art. He and his colleagues founded the “Baroda School” of Indian art. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 2019, and has been honoured with five Lifetime Achievement Awards. In August 2021 he had a conversation with **ANANYA PATEL**, musing about his life and his art. Excerpts from that conversation are presented in this 2-part series, along with some of his work.



was born and grew up in a small town, you could say a large village. That was a long time ago, and as a child I had not even heard about Mickey Mouse or Humpty Dumpty. So, what I create is something I grew up with. It was only after moving to Baroda to study in a Fine Arts college that I learned about Western modern art. By “modern,” I mean what happened about 100 years ago. It’s an historical term. Modern is not contemporary anymore.

I also realized that what the modernists were doing, the reforms they were trying to make, were consciously taken from other artforms. This is especially true of Cubism. Picasso was inspired by African art, which was tribal.







Similar traditional art is done by villagers and tribal people in India, along with many classical arts. My work became a combination because what was happening around the world also affected my work. But it was not like the Bengal school, or the revivalists, who wanted to do away with the British teachings and customs and go back to Ajanta or Mughal styles. I think any art is good art. And the divisions of India versus

Europe, and the West versus the East, have been made for our own convenience and selfish interest.

My photography is not really part of my “creative” work. I wanted to document things when I realized that our way of life was changing. And they had to change. We can’t expect them to remain the way they were 100 years ago or earlier. But at the same time, because of the influence of urbanization,

earlier, nicer traditions started disappearing. I thought that I should photograph whatever was alive, because after a few years it wouldn’t be there. Archaeological specimens like the Taj Mahal or Qutub Minar are old. They survive because they are made with stronger materials. But almost all the material used for folk art is something locally available and impermanent.





When we take a blank canvas, we often start thinking of selling it, or winning a prize in a competition, or seeing it hang in a museum, or something like that. Folk art made me humble: If people can make art and live with it, I should also learn. They never complain about material – they don't get good paper or canvas. Whatever is available is good enough for them and they are able to create and express themselves. Because of this, my attitude became more open to various materials. I do not stick to standard classical materials like oil paints and canvas. Recently I have been working with acrylic cut outs. The technology is now available in Baroda because many small industries have started helping artists.

My idea or understanding of tradition is connected mostly with reasoning – why did they do something? And if we adopt it, how do we adapt it for ourselves?

For example, while making a drawing of a figure or motif in the stylistic manner of a tribe in Chhota Udaipur, instead of copying I tried to think how that person might be thinking. It was a forced effort, but it allowed me to enjoy it much more. I hope that this has added to my visual vocabulary and way of working.

A few things from village, tribal, and folk art started entering my work. But I have not deliberately tried to do this. I get ideas for paintings from anything that excites me. I had come across a magic square, a *chautisa yantra*, back when I was in school, and it kept reappearing to me. It's a very simple four by four square using 1 to 6 in digits, and you arrange it in such a way that the columns, rows, and diagonals sum up to 34 each time, in every configuration. In this way, I have made several paintings.

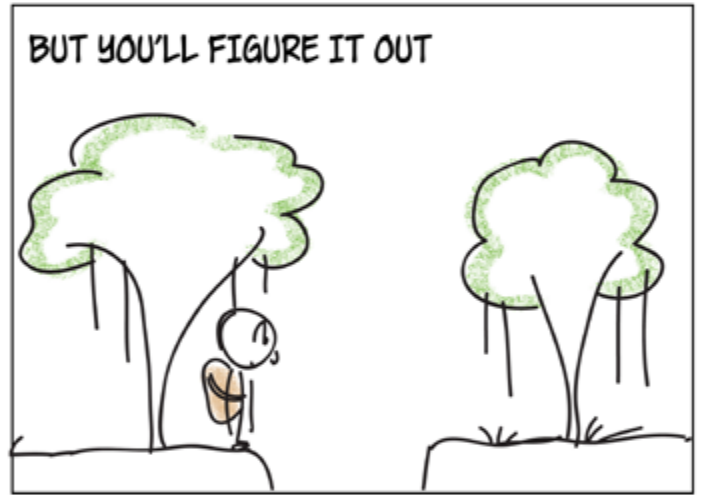
So I cannot say that there is Western, or Indian, or folk influence specifically. I noticed a *yantra* painted on the wall of a few village houses in Rajasthan, and I asked why. They said it's a good omen. Then I asked a few more people about it. Then I read a book by a mathematician, where he explained how *yantras* are made, how their symmetry works. I thought this was a very good subject to try, because all I had to do was write those numbers but the visual form would be my own.

*To be continued.*

Artworks by JYOTI BHATT



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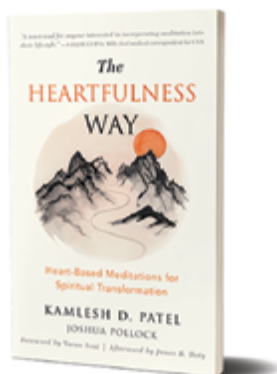
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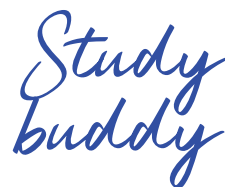


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