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NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future

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The Science of Tomorrow: an alliance of
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NEW ACROPOLIS is an international organization working in the fields of philosophy, culture and volunteering. Our aim is to revive philosophy as a means of renewal and transformation and to offer a holistic education that can develop both our human potential as well as the practical skills needed in order to meet the challenges of today and to create a better society for the next generation.

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Editorial

Farewell to Delia Steinberg Guzmán

I would like to dedicate this editorial to my teacher Delia Steinberg Guzmán, International President of New Acropolis from 1991 till 2020, who passed away peacefully on August 15. A few years ago, she said in an interview: *"We should all take time to think: why are we in the world? Not because we feel so important, but because there must be some reason. We have come into the world, we are here. What can we do? The meaning and purpose of life is to be found in this question: What can I do, now that I am here? What can I improve, now that I am here? How can I help, now that I am here?"*

Delia certainly lived all her life with this vocation to do something useful, to help others and to improve the world she encountered. For all those who knew her, she was an exceptional human being, a great example of wisdom, humanity, willpower, infinite kindness and a generous love that expected nothing in return.

Born on 7 January 1943 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, into a family of Jewish immigrants fleeing the horrors of the Second World War, she showed from an early age a natural propensity for profound questions and a great love for music. At the age of 17 she graduated as a Teacher of Piano and Composition and continued to study the piano for a concert career. However, when she was 23, she met New Acropolis and its founder Jorge Angel Livraga. Here is how she described this first encounter: *"When the class had finished, I found myself in an indescribable state of inner happiness. In spite of the fact that it was already midnight, I walked home because I needed to breathe, to reflect, to go over all the events of the day, to get used to the idea that – at last! – I had found what I had always been looking for, a living philosophy."*

"After that class, I no longer had any doubts, none at all, because of the way he spoke, the way he explained things, his common sense, the fact that he never presented things – however mysterious and esoteric they might be – as something occult or magical, in the lower sense of those terms. He spoke with a lot of common sense, he presented things with great intelligence, with great clarity, very sensibly and when I was listening to him, I thought: that's it, this is the Master I have been searching for all my life. I really felt a direct recognition towards him."

A few years later, she decided to dedicate herself completely to New Acropolis. When asked whether it was difficult to give up her music career, she explained: *"When I chose to leave my career as a pianist, I did so because I was convinced of something that Jorge Livraga had taught us: that philosophy is a music made by the soul."*



"Because philosophy fills the whole of life and is useful for every aspect of life. Philosophy is everything; it is everyday life, it is the meaning of life, it is the daily chores, it is the search for moral principles, it is the transformation of a society. And, with music I could not have done that, so it was not so difficult to choose." "I found that speaking, expressing oneself with the soul, was much more important than anything else... It was the same as, or almost better than giving a concert..."

Music, however, continued to accompany her throughout the rest of her life and in 1982, she instituted the International Piano Competition which now bears her name. Some years later, in 1988, she founded the Tristan Music Institute that today operates in several countries and continues to expand.

All good teachers leave a mark and influence the lives of those they teach. Delia is no exception. She believed in her students and could see the best in everyone. Her love of others also inspired an enormous love towards her. One of her students wrote after her death: *"The love that contained us all in your heart is so great that we just need to close our eyes and we can still feel your warm, generous and strong embrace. When we open them, we see the immensity of your work, which was a continuation of the work of your teachers and their teachers. We are truly fortunate..."*

I would like to end with some of her own words, from her last book, *The Path to Victory*, that sum up the way she lived: *"Practise loving continuously, because this is the best way to understand others. Help others cheerfully and generously, which is the best way to feel at ease with yourself."*

Sabine Leitner

In Praise of Folly and Other Teachings of Erasmus

"We live in times when to speak endangers the body, but to remain silent endangers the soul."

Erasmus of Rotterdam

Nowadays Erasmus comes to our mind when we hear about the student exchange program of the European Union. The educational program was named after a Dutch Renaissance philosopher, Desiderius Erasmus, who was a great intellect and philosopher of his time, and who travelled across Europe to promote communication among intellectuals and the reformation of the Catholic Church.

Erasmus was born in Rotterdam in 1466. His father was a Catholic priest, his mother was the daughter of a doctor. His parents could not be married legally and died early from plague, when he was 17, but they provided their son with a good education. Erasmus only lived in Rotterdam for 4 years and, like his brother, he entered the Augustine monastery in Stein, where he devoted himself to a consecrated life as a canon regular. Later, he became a priest after being ordained in 1492. Not long afterwards, however, he asked to be released from his duties so that he could travel and study independently.

He went to Paris to learn and broaden his mind. Paris was a centre of Scholastic teachings at that time, but was also influenced by Renaissance humanism. He also visited England many times. During his first visit, he studied at Oxford University and attended the Bible lectures of the humanist John Colet. Thanks to this, he became interested in theology. On another visit, he stayed for a year in the house of Thomas More, the famous humanist, philosopher and statesman, writer of *Utopia*. The friendship of the two intellects lasted for over 30 years, and they disputed various topics, which had an impact on each other's

works. For instance, the *Utopia* that influenced many writers, including George Orwell, was encouraged by Erasmus.

He also spent a significant period of time in Italy, graduating as a Master and Doctor of Theology in Turin, and became a writer and philologist. He lived in Padua, where he studied ancient Greek, and in Venice, where he worked on his books. In Brabant, he lectured at the University of Leuven. In Mainz, he started to learn Hebrew. He also made regular visits to Basel to print his books. After spending some years again in England, at Queen's College, he settled in Basel in 1521. Luther's appearance resulted in social disturbances, iconoclasm, and peasant riots. In 1529,



Portrait of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam.

after an iconoclastic riot, Basel adopted the Reformation and banned Catholicism. For this reason, Erasmus left the city and went to Freiburg. But his health worsened, and after some years, he returned to Basel, where he died in 1536.

In many of his works, such as the *The Education of the Christian Prince*, Erasmus wrote about the importance of peace. He experienced as a child how war can destroy the life of the people. He said that Christian people and rulers should live like brothers and sisters, according to the teachings of Christ, and not like enemies. “War is sweet to those who have never tasted



Details from Peter Bruegel's *Peasant Wedding Feast*

it” – he quotes from Pindar in his other book, the *Adages*, which is a collection of Latin proverbs and sayings. He disagreed with the usefulness of wars and questioned the just war theory. He wrote, citing Cicero: “A disadvantageous peace is better than a just war”. He also emphasized the importance of religious tolerance and ecumenism. Originally, he defended Luther and his followers against the charges of heresy. Later, he attacked some of his views because of the radical path he took to reform the Church.

Erasmus published the first edition of the corrected Latin and Greek New Testament. He used many

sources as no single source was available. Many corrections were needed and a new, edited version was published three years later. This *Testamentum* was the one that was used by Luther, who translated the Bible into German. William Tyndale in England also used a later edition of Erasmus’s book when he was preparing the first English New Testament.

Erasmus used satirical language to demonstrate the decadence of the world and that of the Church. It can be seen in one of his most famous books, *In Praise of Folly*. The essay speaks in the name of a foolish person, who glorifies her own virtues. Erasmus’s Folly is a person happy in her ignorance, satisfied with herself. She says: “Wisdom makes men weak and apprehensive, and consequently you’ll generally find the wise associated with poverty, hunger, and the reek of smoke, living neglected, inglorious, and disliked. Fools, on the other hand, are rolling in money and are put in charge of affairs of state; they flourish, in short, in every way”. In reality, he uses the figure of Folly to reveal the dressed-up lies that are everywhere in society. His criticism is not negative, on the contrary, he is seeking the pure, simple Christianity that can be found in the Gospels, and which is the opposite of the Papacy and the Church: “Almost all Christians being wretchedly enslaved to blindness and ignorance, which the priests are so far from preventing or removing, that they blacken the darkness, and promote the delusion: wisely foreseeing that the people (like cows, which never give down their milk so well as when they are gently stroked), would part with less if they knew more.”

Erasmus was a scholar, not a revolutionary. He formulated philosophically the principles of Christian reform, but was unable to put them into action as Luther did. He tried to be neutral in the battle between the Catholic Church and the representatives of the Reformation, but criticized both sides. He disagreed with Luther regarding free will. Luther denied the independence of the human will, but Erasmus thought it is the tool that humans can use to reach salvation. According to him, all divine prescriptions, teachings and threats are pointless without the free will of the human being. Salvation is the work of the human being and it is helped by the grace of the divine.

Istvan Orban

Early American Democracy

When speaking of early democracies, it is customary to think of the Greeks of classical antiquity, the Roman Republic or certain city states of Italy such as Venice or Florence. These references are generally familiar to Europeans and people from the colonies they founded, as they are part of our written history. When speaking of democracy in the New World, one might think about the United States of America

but not about the Native American tribes. However, as we will see, some of the founders of the USA, such as George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, were inspired by the Haudenosaunee, the People of the Long House (commonly known as the Iroquois Confederacy), to create the US Constitution and Congress.

For the Native Americans, the history of democracy most likely began in the early 15th



Famous Seneca chief, Red Jacket, political negotiator and critic of European religion, speaking to crowd. Painting by John Mix Stanley, 1869.



century, even though there are some historians who claim that it could be as old as the 12th century; in any case it occurred before the arrival of the Europeans on the continent. But as there is no written history before the 17th century, it is difficult to know for sure, and all we know is the story that was transmitted down the generations by the Haudenosaunee.

The story begins with a Mohawk warrior, Hiawatha, who went through terrible tragedy, losing his wife and daughters. Through his grief he met a mentor, called the Peacemaker, who guided him to find peace, not just for himself but for his Nation and its neighbours, the Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca.

But Hiawatha had to convince the strong warmonger chief of the Onondaga, Tadodaho, for whom war was the only way to power.

To help him in his quest, he found a wisewoman from the Seneca Nation, Jigonsaseh. The peace seekers convinced the tribes to meet in their Long House and talk for peace. One by one they agreed to make peace until the last Nation to be convinced remained, the Onondaga lead by Tadodaho. It was Jigonsaseh who brought the most convincing argument while promoting the three virtues of her tribe: Righteousness, Health and Power. To get Tadodaho on board, she made him the chief of all chiefs, giving him through peace the power he was craving through war.

As a symbol of their unity, they created the Wampum belt (see image below), using the white and purple shells of the lake, to represent the five nations united in peace, with a tree at the centre: the tree of peace. A symbol that would later be used by European nations.

The five nations created a 117-point constitution and were to have a number of representatives to meet in their Long House. Each representative was chosen by a council of women from their own Nation, whose seat would bear their name as a reminder that they come from wisewomen and should represent them as such. They also used the symbol of arrows bound together to represent strength in unity, a symbol used in the US seal with a bald eagle, another Native American symbol, holding thirteen arrows in one claw.

Seeing the success of the Haudenosaunee, another nation, the Tuscarora, joined them in 1722. Later on, Washington and Franklin would meet with the leaders of the now Six Nations and gained some inspiration to form their own Constitution and Congress.



The Six Nations' contribution to American democracy was not acknowledged by the US government until 1988. The Haudenosaunee have kept their union and constitution until today and remain one of the oldest living democracies.

Florimond Krins

Alchemy and its *Mute* Language

To spread and transmit its teachings, Western alchemy has often resorted to the visual arts, with their symbolic and imaginative language. This fact should not surprise us if we take into account that 'working according to nature' is the *modus operandi* of the alchemist. In other words, if one sets out to discover the hidden laws of nature and its cycles of transformation, he must adopt nature's language. And since the language of nature is *mute*¹ and expresses itself only through symbols and analogies, he cannot help but follow the same method.

To shed some light on the intricate theories and doctrines that populate the world of alchemy, a conceptual and rational language, which is directed to the left hemisphere of the brain, will be sufficient. But to effectively convey the intrinsic and infinite potential of the 'Royal Art' and its transformative practice, one must make use of a persuasive and compelling language. A language that is directed to the right hemisphere of the brain, where intuition and creative imagination reside. Many esoteric traditions have often

1. Incidentally, one of the most famous alchemical texts, consisting entirely of images, is called *Mutus Liber*. C.G. Jung, who studied and owned a copy of this text, used it extensively to illustrate his work *Psychology and Alchemy*.



Depiction of an *Ouroboros* from the alchemical treatise *Aurora consurgens* (15th century)



emphasised the importance of the active or creative imagination and alchemy is no exception.

The images found in the alchemical iconographic tradition function as intermediaries leading to the *mundus imaginalis*² (imaginal world). A world which is as real as the world of the senses and which is said to lie in between the physical and the purely spiritual realm (also termed *mesocosm*, *metaphysical* or *middle world*). For the alchemist, metaphysical knowledge or the knowledge concerning the inner workings of nature, is a type of knowledge which is better depicted than described.

The use of a coded and symbolic language also has a historical motivation, stemming from the fact that the hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt, popularised in Europe during the Renaissance, were considered to be a sacred script that was not phonetic but ideographic. The alchemists, influenced by this

2. This term was coined by the philosopher Henry Corbin who asserted that 'Nature' communicates through images, but not through the passive form of imaging that we associate with daydreaming or dreaming in our sleep, but rather through an active form of imaging which has to be developed through practice.

discovery, soon began to transmit their esoteric knowledge with *tabulae pictae* (painted boards) or *emblemata* (sets of emblems) often accompanied by short hermetic mottos to be used during meditation. This is why we find literally thousands of images and diagrams scattered throughout the alchemical and hermetic literature.

It is important to remember that in antiquity, the *symbol* was understood as the bridge connecting us to the metaphysical and invisible side of reality. Thus, Plotinus in his *Enneads* tells us that: the Egyptian sages [...] when they desired to represent things through wisdom [Sophia] did not use letters descriptive of words and sentences [...] but drew pictures (*Enneads* V.8.6).

There are a few other reasons why the alchemists in their communication favoured an 'obscure' or mute language. Those alchemists who, in the eyes of the Church, expressed their unorthodox views too explicitly, risked being persecuted, if not burned at the stake! Therefore, the spiritual or metaphysical purpose of alchemy often had to be cloaked in a chemical or metallurgical language so that, for instance, the transformation of coarse into noble metals could mask the psycho-spiritual evolution of



A crowned woman in red holding a rose-topped caduceus, 18th century



the alchemist himself. Depictions of operations performed in the laboratory also become the means to transmit subtler teachings or experiences.

There is another interesting fact worth mentioning. From the very beginning of the alchemical tradition, there was an underlying ethical motive, which intentionally made its language hostile to those who were considered unworthy of its lofty teachings. Thus, for instance, in the *Rosarium philosophorum* (c. 1550 AD) we find the following statement: “Whenever we have spoken openly we have [actually] said nothing. But where we have written something in code and in pictures we have concealed the truth.” And in the *Turba Philosophorum* (c. 800 AD) we read: “Nature is one, and they all agree and say the same. But fools take words as we say them... They, on the other hand... must go back to our intention, and not hold to the letter...” And the intention of the alchemist is precisely to develop an intuitive faculty which can aid the correct understanding of the alchemical

process which is taking place within and without himself.

In summary: (1) alchemical imagery is the training ground for the development of intuition and imagination. (2) each visible process in nature is like a metaphor, which hides an invisible cause (a certain power) which the alchemist through his inner practice and intuition must seek and find. And (3) the symbols encountered in nature (animals, plants, geometric forms and numerical symbolism) or depicted on alchemical textbooks ‘are keys, doorways and pathways into the inner spiritual realms’³.

Agostino Dominici

3. Quoted in Adam Mclean’s book *The Western Mandala*.

The Symbolic Dimension of Grimms' Fairy Tales

“Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life.”
Friedrich Schiller

Over two hundred years ago, the brothers Grimm published the first edition of their “Children’s and Household Tales”. Little did they know how important their work would be and for how long it would be cherished. We all grew up listening to

fairy tales. They are guides that show us something universal in human experience. They tell us we are not alone, that people have been through this before, whatever it may be.

Contrary to popular belief, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm did not travel the land collecting tales from peasants. They were philologists and scholars who depended on an array of different informants to provide them with tales rooted in the oral tradition.

The Grimms prioritised recording tales exactly as they heard them initially. They meant to retain the



“pungent and naïve flavour of the oral tradition”¹. There are seven editions of their narratives, and in the course of the different versions they gradually started adapting the tales and making them their own. While the first edition was fairly unfiltered and uncensored, the last one was highly influenced by a sentimental moralism linked to a puritanical ideology². Reading the first version of the Brothers Grimm’s Fairy Tales gives us a better doorway into the collective unconscious, as there are no misleading embellishments.

Fairy tales can be seen as a celebration of the irrational material of the human mind, they provide us with stories about the unconscious as well as ways of solving our problems. As Marie-Louise Von Franz explains, “fairy tales are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes. [...] They represent the archetypes in their simplest, barest, and most concise form.”³

We can understand these tales as a repository of patterns that put us in the right direction to understand the meaning of events and situations in our lives.

Much like a dream, we can interpret a whole fairy tale as happening inside the psychological life of one person. For example, reading further into



illustration from "Cinderella" from the book *Les Contes de Perrault* by Gustave Doré, 1892.

“Cinderella”, we can understand the sisters and Cinderella to be different aspects of one single person. While one part is meek and unassuming, the other part of her psyche is passive aggressive - the stepsisters’ entitlement repressed.

If we understand fairy tales as symbolic we can unlock multiple levels of meaning and emotion, as well as deep psychological content. “Beauty and the Beast” doesn’t suggest women should be patient and mould bad-tempered men, but rather that all of us should transform our own inner beast. If instead of saying we feel lonely and unappreciated, we say we feel like the ugly duckling we can convey a lot more information about what we are feeling.

Fairy tales are healing because they give us words. Through their symbolic language we can access and find unconscious themes in people’s lives. Most of us are living in a theme or a journey that we need to see reflected in outside narratives to understand more profoundly what is happening on the inside.

It is an interesting exercise to ask ourselves, what is our favourite fairy tale, what story are we living and why? Recognising what archetypes and tales are running behind our minds provides a sense of meaning and a context to understanding why certain situations and patterns repeat throughout our lives.

Ana Luisa Lellis

Recommended further reading: *The Uses of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, by Bruno Bettelheim.

1. P.xx. GRIMM & ZIPES, “Introduction”. *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*. Princeton University Press. 2014.

2. *Ibidem*.

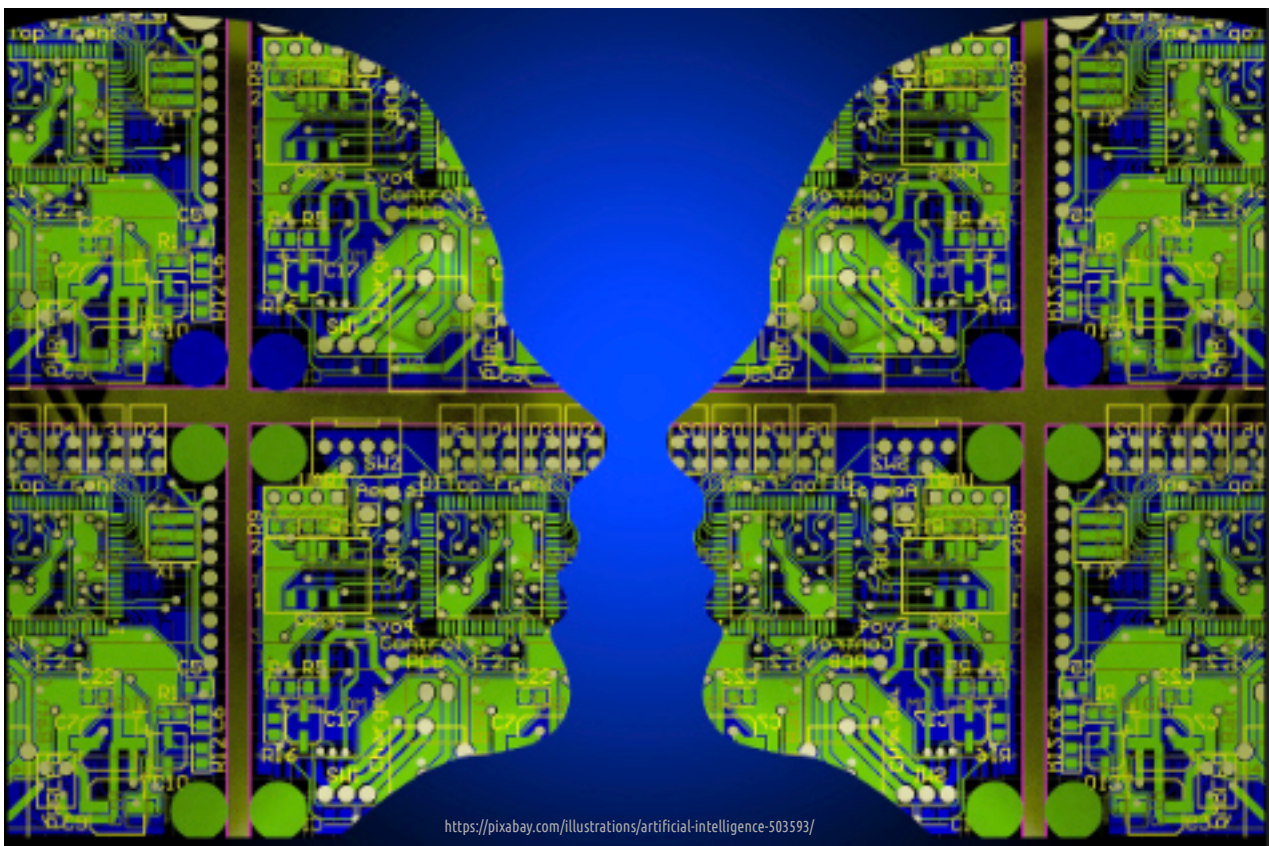
3. P. 1. VON FRANZ, MARIE-LOUISE. “Theories of Fairy Tales”. *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales*. Shambhala Boulder. 1996.



The Science of Tomorrow: an alliance of reason and spirituality

In view of what is happening today, it is possible that science may hold a less important place in the culture of tomorrow. Why? Because when science is called upon to express its view on certain subjects, it often adopts an excessively authoritarian tone. This uncompromising approach has discredited it in the eyes of public opinion and, over the years, has led to an attitude of rejection. We have reached a point today where this deleterious effect is feeding an increasingly virulent current of thought: the antiscience movement.

Science found its place and its legitimacy in the last century with the blossoming of modernity. If in our age, the so-called post-modern era, it still wishes to occupy its rightful place, it needs to reform itself. Unless it does so, it risks leaving the centre stage to obscurantism and ceasing to contribute to the progress of ideas. To avoid this, a change of model is necessary, not only so that its virtues can be restored, but also so that it can gain the approval of two significant elements in society: the general public, with a renewal of trust, and governments,





with a level of financial support that is worthy of the name.

In order to bring about this change towards a new public perception, science has to become more humble. To be aware of its limits. To accept a great challenge, which I believe is the challenge of tomorrow, which is to dare to present itself, not only with a face of reason, but also with a spiritual dimension: a quest for truth, a quest for knowledge, a search for meaning, far removed from all forms of dogmatism.

I am hopeful that such a science which, epistemologically, would be something quite different from what it is now, can be developed. It would lead to the decline of superstition, without setting itself up as an authority of meaning. Today, this innovative science is evolving, its outlines are beginning to appear on the horizon of the future. The works of Bernard d’Espagnat, Wolfgang Pauli, Michael John Denton, Kurt Gödel, Roger Penrose, Trinh Xuan Thuan and many others are its precursors. This new scientific paradigm has the potential to be the paradigm of tomorrow and to take a prominent place in the culture of the 21st century. It would liberate humanity from two forms

of ignorance, which constitute a threat to the coming civilization: religious superstition and scientific dogma.

Albert Einstein, a visionary, a great scientist and a philosopher, who radically called into question the assumptions of an era, ventured to give this new paradigm a name: the cosmic religion¹.

“I maintain that the cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest motive for scientific research.”²

“Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.”³.

Jean Staune

Jean Staune is a French philosopher of science, consultant, lecturer and essayist. His latest work is entitled “*La grande mutation, pourquoi votre futur sera extraordinaire*” (“The great mutation, why your future will be extraordinary”), Editions Diateno, 2021.

This article, which appeared in a special 2022 edition of the French magazine *Acropolis*, has been translated from the French by Julian Scott.

1. See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1985/12/22/einsteins-intoxication-with-the-god-of-the-cosmos/4b979fa2-7367-4814-b70c-109fb7642b1b/>

2. Albert Einstein, *The World as I See it*.

3. Albert Einstein, *Science and Religion, Ideas and Opinions*.

Tales from the Ramayana – The Abduction of Sita

Ravana's Abduction of Sita, folio from a Ramayana Series, anonymous.



In the world of literature there are a few well known epic stories in which the plot is built around the abduction of a woman. In the East one of them is the ancient Indian story of the Ramayana, and in the West, there is the ancient Greek story of the Iliad.

These are not just stories of men and women, but also of gods and goddesses. According to tradition there were times when gods would descend to Earth and bring justice in times of spiritual crisis and moral disorder. In ancient India, the god Vishnu descended to Earth

many times in human form as an “avatar”. When he came in the form of Rama, his counterpart, the goddess Lakshmi, had to descend as well. She emerged from a Lotus flower as Sita and was raised by King Janak.

The culmination of the Ramayana story is the battle between Rama and Ravana as a consequence of Ravana’s abduction of Rama’s wife, Sita. Ravana was a powerful demon, king of Lanka, son of a rishi, who gained his powers by performing austere spiritual meditation practices for many thousands of years, and as a result earned a boon or blessing from Brahma and Shiva which literally made him invincible. Though Ravana was a demon, he was a great devotee of Shiva and

Rama, Sita and Lakshmana in exile in a forest having a meal, Pahari painting, 1780-1815.



is still revered and worshipped in some parts of India to this day. In the scripture of Bhagavata Purana we learn of two gatekeepers of the highest realm of all the worlds, which is called Vaikuntha, a place of eternal bliss, who refused entry to the Kumara sages. The Kumaras cursed them and the Lord of Vaikuntha, Vishnu, gave them two options, either to be incarnated on Earth seven times as mere mortals and devotees of Vishnu, or three times as powerful demons. To be able to

return to Vaikuntha and to the Lord Vishnu in the shortest possible time, they chose to be incarnated only three times as demons. This is one of the stories where Ravana can be traced back to a gatekeeper of the heavens.

As with all the great stories, there is always a part of the story which touches everyone, that is, a journey of the soul. To begin the journey a certain transformation must happen; this is one thing that truly matters.

This transformation is already very clearly signalled in the background of the making of the Ramayana. The Ramayana was written by Valmiki, who according to some sources was born and first known under the name Ratnakar. He was a hunter, who later became a highway robber. One day, when Ratnakar was around 30 years old, he attacked a man in the forest and demanded valuables from him. That man was none other than the wandering sage Narada, who talked to Ratnakar about his wrongdoings and gave him a mantra. Ratnakar took the mantra and went into a deep meditation; it was so long and deep that all over him an anthill was formed, which is also the meaning of the name Valmiki. When Valmiki was around 70 years old Brahma appeared to him and instructed him to write the Ramayana. The book consists of seven chapters. Sita is kidnapped in the third chapter and is found by Hanuman in Lanka in the fifth, which is called Sundara Skanda. There we learn of Hanuman's adventures and of his qualities. This chapter has also been described as the heart of the Ramayana and is traditionally a recommended starting point for approaching the epic.

Hanuman is known for his enormous strength and unwavering devotion to Rama. According to the legend, his birth is also associated with the wind god Vayu. As a child he received many gifts from various



Hanuman before Rama and Lakshmana

gods and held these powers within, forgotten, until he was reminded of his powers just before a search and rescue mission in Lanka. These yogic powers or siddhis included an ability to reduce or increase the size of his body at will, so he could grow enormously big or shrink invisibly small.

Sundara Skanda describes Hanuman's flight from India to Lanka and his encounter with Sita. On the way, Hanuman encountered three obstacles. First was a flying mountain, Mainak, second was the snake Surasa, and the third was the demoness Simhika. The flying mountain Mainak recognised Hanuman and, due to their mutual affinity with the wind god Vayu, he offered Hanuman to lie down on him and to take a rest during his flight. Hanuman said that this was not possible as his goal was to find Sita, so instead he gave the mountain a big hug and continued his journey. After that, he met the snake Surasa, who told Hanuman to enter her mouth as she had received a

boon from Brahma that nobody was able to escape from her mouth. Hanuman promised to come back and enter her mouth after he had rescued Sita, but the snake said that he had to enter her mouth first if he wished to continue on his way. He agreed and immediately started to grow bigger and bigger. While he was growing bigger the mouth of the snake also grew larger to be able to hold Hanuman, but then suddenly Hanuman became very small and just walked in and out of the snake's mouth. By doing that he could escape Surasa's mouth. The snake then revealed that she was none other than a goddess, the mother of the Nagas, who had come to test him. The third obstacle he encountered was the demon Simika. Simika had a boon that nobody with a shadow could escape her. When Hanuman was flying, he felt a sudden pull in his flight, he looked down and saw Simika holding onto his shadow. In that moment he thought of Rama, uttered his name and the demoness instantly fell down dead.

By overcoming these three obstacles, he reached the island of Lanka. He eventually found Sita at the palace of Ravana. He explained the situation to her and offered to take her back to Rama on his back, but Sita refused, saying that she would only accept the rescue from Rama. She gave him a lock of her hair as proof that she was still alive and sent

him off. Hanuman went back to Rama and the story continues, leading to a great battle where justice is done.

From the fifth chapter there are already a few lessons to highlight, which can apply to a spiritual seeker. In the life of a spiritual seeker, obstacles are seen as tests. The first obstacle, the flying mountain Mainak, wanted to stop Hanuman by offering him a place



Hanuman flying across the ocean of milk.

to rest and take comfort, but Hanuman didn't forget his goal. The first tests often come from those closest to us. Our family and friends are often the first ones trying to change our minds; out of their love they would like to stop us on our way that seems different to the usual. To pass the first test one has to show love and be clear about the goal.

The second test would come from demi-gods, from our karmic influences. To be able to reach the goal and overcome karma one has to use intelligence, one has to find out what powers one holds within.

Knowledge is only a guide from the outside towards the inside, so that the wisdom can be awakened from within.

When one can overcome one's social and cultural environment and karmic bonds, the last test will come from a god in order to test our sincerity and determination. Only complete focus on the divine can overcome this final test. By overcoming this

final test, Hanuman also showed what was his strongest weapon, the fixed focus of his mind onto Rama.

There are many teachings and symbols in the story, which is why reading stories like the Ramayana can help us to awaken the soul, to remember what the soul is yearning for. It is like Sita's yearning for Rama, that natural bond of connection that can never be completely broken; but our mind, like Ravana, can cause a temporal separation.

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