

“All I can do is be me, whoever that is
— Bob Dylan”



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BRIEFLY

Evolving Mosquito
The tunnels of the London Underground are hot, dark, and damp. The subterranean transit system is, in other words, a lovely home for a mosquito (or many thousands). Although the insects look just like their aboveground counterparts, the common house mosquito *Culex pipiens*' behaviour is remarkably different. The subterranean insects feed on mammals, are capable of breeding in confined spaces, do not require a blood meal before laying eggs, and do not go dormant during London winters. The subway, it seems, has birthed a brand new species. We are living, it is often said, in Anthropocene, an era in which humans are radically altering Earth's ecosystems. But human-induced extinctions are only part of the story. Our lifestyles and activities are also driving the evolution of new traits in organisms across the globe, and even, in some cases, the emergence of entirely new species.

“It's a counter narrative,” says Erle Ellis, ecologist at the University of Maryland. “Human-induced speciation.” This oft-overlooked phenomenon, the focus of a recent review paper, paints a more nuanced picture of the ways in which humans shape life on this planet and exposes our need to reconsider how we measure biodiversity.
— theatlantic.com

Stare at the floor as if it is the screen of your mind and then at the count of three, see what your next thought says and where it vanishes to,” says Kambiz Naficy, leading me through a direct experience of Vedanta.

“One...two...three,” he snaps his fingers. There is a pause. My mind just goes blank. “See, I did not hypnotise you. But you just had a direct experience of non thought. When you mind the mind, the mind vanishes,” he says.

“And?”
“This goes to prove that the background reality of you, 'Mona', is an ocean of silence. If 'Mona' were real, you would not have vanished at the count of three, just like your love for your child does not vanish. 'Mona' is just a name given to you in the maternity ward. When you were in your mother's womb, before you had developed your nose and fingers, there was just *Shakti*, Divine Force. When you were born, you forgot who you really were and started to identify yourself with your name, profession, and position — the root cause of all pain. And in this scenario, God forbid should you get promoted, the pain only increases, because then you are literally falling into the trap of false identity,” says Naficy explaining the essence of Vedanta.

A poet and Kriya Yoga master of Iranian origin, Naficy spends half the year in his home in the US and the rest in Asia, running the Joy of Life Organization, promoting joy and wellbeing through Kriya Yoga, and teaching Indic philosophy for the last 25 years.

The God-force

Vedanta, he says, talks about the *spanda* — the throbbing of the God-force or consciousness in space. It is the original raw essence of God. *Spanda* has two motions — *nimesa*, the outward activity of the God-force as she comes out of *ananda* (supreme rest or bliss) into action; in between, there is *iccha* or will power and then there is *ummesa*, absolute rest. “Everything is made of these steps — day time and night time, youth and old age, where things start moving towards rest; even in the jungle, the tiger becomes hungry, grabs a deer, eats it and then rests under a tree. The rest is coming to the source energy and in Vedanta they always insinuate that energy is the source of physical matter. Therefore, if you don't stop to dip yourself in the source-energy now and then, what you try to create in physical matter just diminishes, because you are not refueling yourself,” says Naficy.

With this, he gives us the formula for enlightened living: 'prayer, medita-

Mistaken IDENTITY

The root cause of all our problems lies in our sense of mistaken identity. But hold on, Vedanta offers a simple yet effective cure for it, says Iranian Vedanta scholar and Kriya Yoga master KAMBIZ NAFICY in an interaction with MONA MEHTA in New Delhi



tion — action, prayer, meditation — action”. “And when you go back to *ummesa*, the state of rest which is also the state of love, detachment and concentration, as opposed to *nimesa* which is characterised by fear, attachment and scattered mind, all mental conditioning starts to unravel and you are able to see things more clearly, develop a better relationship, say, with your spouse. You don't hate Jews, you don't feel guilty about making money — all of which is because of your *samskaras* or self-defeating belief systems,” says Naficy.

Since progress comes from the net result of your daily habits — and if those habits are unbiased and they respond to the needs of the moment, present moment consciousness — you get rid of *samskaras* and become completely attuned to the needs of the moment. This brings *sanyama* or unsolicited grace into your life.

Explaining this in Vedic terms, Naficy refers to the *Shiva Sutra* and says that God-force is made of consciousness, and hence, the only way you can contact Krishna or whatever name you want to give to this God-force, is through consciousness. You cannot speak English or Hindi to subatomic pulsation. An easy, ultimate and supreme practice which can help us connect with the God-force goes like this: breathe in something beyond oxygen, inhale with consciousness the presence of your creator until your body starts to get full and with every exhale, let your creator take a step.

“So, what kind of a reporter would

you be if you woke up in the morning and you breathe in universal energy and let the exhalation be Her force, taking action in your life? You will never feel like a failure, because it is God who is acting through you. And what are you going to lose in seeing things this way? You will forget your worldly identity and in the process, all *samskaras*, bad habits, self-limiting beliefs which are linked to this identity will be gone; you will be free of anxiety and fear. How were they helping you in becoming an expert stock broker or a better engineer, doctor or professional, anyway? This is why Vedanta says, the main 'dis-ease' of mankind is the case of mistaken identity,” says Naficy.

So, the next time you stand in front of a mirror combing your hair, instead of seeing yourself, feel it is God-force wanting to rejoice in her own creativity, he suggests. Indic scriptures like the *Shiva Sutra*, *Tantraloka*, all talk about this primordial force celebrating her own creativity, and by giving yourself a name and thinking of it as your identify you are actually breaking Her heart, because you are forgetting that you represent Her creativity.

Breathe Free

Naficy has been successfully teaching the essence of Vedanta to students from different religious denominations, including devout Muslims and Catholics. “I am officially a Muslim, so I say, 'Allah breathes in, Allah steps out' and breath supersedes church, synagogue and mosque. There is not a sin-



gle nation who is declaring a war on breathing. In Vedanta lies the key to everyone's problems and strife. Your car having a flat tyre is an issue, not a problem. You breathe in Krishna, Krishna acts out — takes the car to the repair station. Flat tyre is going to happen till the end of eternity, dinner will have to be cooked for your children, articles will have to be written — that is the lord's activity. Movement is the essence of God. But issues and problem are two different things. With the simple practice of connecting with the Supreme Consciousness through your consciousness by way of breathing, *sanyama* or divine grace comes to you all by itself,” says Naficy.

“This formula can help you manifest anything. Need money? Attune your identity to God breathing in, God breathing out, and see after a few

months. No reason why there won't be more cash, because now there won't be any fear, anxiety, pessimism or lack of courage.

“If a rickshaw driver has no inhibition, he starts to decorate the rickshaw and thinks of ways of making God's rickshaw the most pleasant ride, may be serve lemonade to the passengers, play pleasant music — that rickshaw is going to have a line of people waiting for it. And what if the driver was to give this discourse to every passenger then it will become a relaxation spa and not a rickshaw ride. This formula can help bring world peace, too. A terrorist cannot pull the trigger if his identity shifts to 'life come in, and life acting out' and practising a few seconds of 'non-thought.' Direct experience of thoughts disappearing for a moment can even make the false identity of a terrorist vanish,” concludes Naficy. (Kambiz Naficy was in Delhi at the invitation of the Indian Council for Cultural Affairs). ■

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Sanskrit In Europe

SONAL SRIVASTAVA

“I am convinced that everything has come down to us from the banks of the Ganges...”

— Voltaire

Voltaire wasn't far from the truth when he made this remark about Indic wisdom becoming accessible through the Sanskrit language. The ancient language continues to offer interesting insights to both traditional pandits and modern scholars alike. Sanskrit scholars from across the world gathered at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in New Delhi on October 9, 2016, to discuss the progress of Sanskrit studies in their respective countries and presented interesting papers on how Sanskrit texts were being read and interpreted in their home countries.

Oscar Pujol, director of Instituto Cervantes in Rio de Janeiro, says, “Sanskrit still has many things to offer to the world. Among them are study of aesthetics and study of *nyaya*, logic.” Pujol has published a Sanskrit-Catalan dictionary of 60,000 words that includes the etymologies of contemporary philology. He is working on a Sanskrit-Spanish dictionary and later plans to bring out a Sanskrit-English dictionary.

“The similarity between Sanskrit and Lithuanian has become a sign of national identity,” says Audrius Beinorius, professor of Indian studies at the Center of Oriental



Studies, Vilnius University, Lithuania. “In India, you have unbroken tradition; in our country the tradition was broken. Simple people still follow pre-Christian traditions and there are still many pre-Christian terms used in Thracian — a group of Indo-European tribes inhabiting a large area in southeastern Europe — a context that has really close relations with Sanskrit.

For instance, we have *Vayu* and *Viespatie* (*Vishvapati*) *Deva*. Interest in India is very high; people are always surprised by similarities and look for connections. Many people are trying to restore pre-Christian religious tradition and they look to India for that. Not so much research has been done on this relationship,” adds Beinorius.

Bulgarian scholar Professor Milena Bratoeva has translated Chapter VI of *Natyashastra* from Sanskrit to Bulgarian. She started her academic journey with the study of law and she soon realised that it wasn't for her. “In 1983, the Indology department had just

been established and I decided to join it. I'm very satisfied with my choice.” Bratoeva is a professor of Indian Literature and Culture at the University of Sofia, Bulgaria. She says there are many young people in Bulgaria, who began to study Indology by chance, and later realised how important it is for them and their worldview. For her, the concept of *rasa* is much more than pure aesthetics; it is connected with modern philosophy and psychology.

“Rasa in the hymns of the *Vedas* is connected with *soma*, the juice of the enigmatic soma plant and later it develops into the theory of *rasa*.” The reason she chose to study *rasa* is Bharatanatyam, the traditional Indian dance form that is quite popular in Bulgaria. “Many young people are interested in Bharatanatyam and there are independent schools that teach theory and practice of Bharatanatyam. Indian classical dances are not just dances; they are sources of spiritual *ananda* or bliss. That's why I decided to translate chapter VI of *Natyashastra* and now I am translating chapter VII on *bhava*, as they are connected.”

Different scholars presented papers on common roots as well as loanwords that have been adopted from Sanskrit in other European languages. Professor Shashibala, head, Indology, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan says, “Sanskrit with its capacity of building millions of words using around 2,000 roots, 80 suffixes and 20 prefixes gave a lexical energy to European languages.” ■

A FULLER LIFE

Growing old can be a happy experience for the elderly, if family is sensitive to their needs, says INDU JAIN

Not all older people are happy and healthy — nor do they live very long or have a good quality of life. Children and other younger family members can make a world of difference by taking even small steps to make the lives of their elders more comfortable.

To live longer alone is not enough; mental health is as important and for this, one has to keep one's mind alive and kicking.

As a senior citizen, I have to say that my son has done a great deal to make my life hassle-free both in terms of physical comfort and keeping my mind engaged with constructive work by encouraging me to found and head an NGO, The Times Foundation.

I find myself so busy, planning future projects and consolidating what we have already started. For instance, an initiative was done by Uttam Sharma of Times Foundation with Dr Prashun Chatterjee, Founder President of Healthy Aging India on inter-generational empowerment that was launched on September 4, 2016, at Raj Bhavan in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, followed by a workshop on 'Caring for elderly people with the help of youngsters'.

The event was attended by ministers and senior officials of the education and health departments. Principals and teachers from many schools in Gujarat participated in the workshop that focused on tackling lifestyle changes including leading an

active life that can help minimise common geriatric diseases.

This was followed by an interactive session presided over by Gujarat Governor O P Kohli on the occasion of World Elderly Day with 1,500 students and many grandparents, on how to empower the elderly. We are now planning ahead with Healthy Aging India to take this initiative forward to many more schools across India. You are welcome to join this mission.

Coming to the physical aspect, my son has added many years to my life by redesigning my furniture (no low beds) and washroom for greater safety and comfort.

He has arranged to include grab bars and anti-skid mats in bathrooms, ensured that the washroom door opens outside, and that all doorframes, knobs and switch points are prominently visible by using contrasting colours.

It is clear that to improve the quality of life and increase the longevity of the elderly, only small but significant changes are required. This can be easily replicated in every household, so that the younger and older generations can live in perfect harmony — and enjoy good health and cheer. All that is required is a bit of sensitivity and care, and some effort to put things in motion. ■

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