

A spiritual quest-Neema Majmudar, You and I magazine, January 2021



Have you ever thought why it is important for humans to learn about the Indian philosophy? Does it really impact our lives? The answer is yes. The history of Indian philosophy is continuously evolving than any other philosophical tradition. It is not an intellectual activity but a practical one, which helps human beings to discover the true meaning of their existence. Having an understanding of Spiritual teaching is vital for mental and physical health.

This week we got in touch with an inspiring writer and teacher of Indian philosophy, Neema Majmudar. She has studied Indian Philosophy with Swami Dayananda Saraswati. Neema has been conducting seminars and retreats around the world in the domain of personal development and philosophy.

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I was born in Mumbai, India. I have done Master's in International and Public Affairs from Columbia University in New York. During my stay in the US, I met Swami Dayananda Saraswati, an outstanding scholar and teacher of Vedanta who changed my life forever.

When I first met him, I was impressed by his command over Sanskrit, his logic, his clear expression. What struck me was the importance that Swamiji gave to the tradition of teaching. He always presented this teaching as the spiritual heritage of India and clearly stated himself only as a link in the lineage of this teaching. The strength and profundity of teaching slowly transformed my whole being. I started understanding that the sense of unease and lack that I felt in spite of my achievements, is in fact, a fundamental problem shared by humanity.

The importance of this knowledge and tradition grew so much in my life that I decided to leave my job with the United Nations as an Economist and decided to study with Swamiji for three and a half years. During this course, we covered several

Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Brahma Sutra and Panini system of grammar. In addition to the classes, it was great learning to see Swamiji's compassion, care and taking a personal interest in every student.

Twenty-two years have passed since I completed my course and have been teaching Vedanta and giving conferences, conducting seminars and retreats across the world. The seminars and retreats that I conduct with my husband Surya incorporate concepts of Indian Philosophy with Western Psychology, Ethics, Physics, Neurobiology and Management. These activities are aimed at guiding individuals and leaders of various organisations to be more objective, dynamic and compassionate in an increasingly interconnected and complex world.

We have created a bilingual website in English and French www.discovervedanta.com, which explains in a modern style, the vision of the traditional teaching of Vedanta. The website gives numerous links to articles and videos of our talks.

In today's modern age, how important is it for people to learn about the universal teachings of Indian philosophy?

Indian spiritual wisdom impacts every aspect of life. Human beings, throughout existence, have searched for answers to restlessness, dissatisfaction, and problems in their lives. These problems and predicaments are not unusual but facing them and making sense of their seeming randomness require an essential shift in thinking. This is why the timeless knowledge contained in the Gita is as relevant today as it has been through the ages.

The Gita's helps us to have a proper perspective on the larger challenges of life that we have little control over, such as pandemics, wars, and economic crises. The teachings also show us how to address concerns that are unique to each one of us- the search for meaning in our daily existence, success in our careers, happiness in personal lives and also longing for personal fulfilment.

What are the vital life lessons one can learn from the Bhagavad Gita?

The teaching of Bhagavad Gita encompasses an enquiry into big questions such as our true nature, and our relationship with the universe and its cause. Its teaching broadens our view of the self and strengthens our relationship with society and the world at large.

Along with inquiring into the above fundamental questions, it also discusses practical aspects of living such as effective decision making, developing resilience to challenging situations, dealing with desires, emotions, interpersonal relationships, and most importantly, healthy relationship with ourselves.

In addition, it highlights values, attitudes and orientations needed to live our life meaningfully and responsibly. It shows us how to lead a life of dynamism and altruism and free ourselves from guilt, regret, or fear.

Any thoughts about the importance of Indian philosophy in the times of crisis?

The present crisis has shaken humanity and impacted everyone differently. Some are paralysed by fear and anxiety, whereas others have used these unprecedented times as an opportunity to reflect on the nature of human participation in the world. Human

beings have undoubtedly shown arrogance and disregarded the impact of their actions on other human beings, ecology, plant as well as the animal kingdom.

The crisis is a reminder that the world is interconnected and our well-being depends on how we treat other living beings. If we human beings continue to be selfish and insensitive to the need of other living and non-living beings, we cannot eventually escape the consequences of our short-sighted or irresponsible actions.

If we learn our lessons from the crises and begin to use our free will effectively, we can create a harmonious co-existence with other human beings, nature and thousands of species with whom we share this beautiful earth.

Any piece of advice you would like to give to our readers on how to cope with life after lockdown?

Every challenge in life can either leave us bitter and dissatisfied or provide an opportunity to grow and reflect. If we begin to use our experiences to learn and move ahead, there are no 'failures' or disappointments in life. When life is free from feeling like a 'victim' of someone's doing or guilt based on our own omissions and commissions, we can live life with cheerfulness, enthusiasm and meaning. The Bhagavad Gita teaches us to be such a person.

– as told to Akhila