A black and white photograph of a young child, seen in profile from the side, looking intently at a stream of water flowing from a metal pipe. The child is on the left side of the frame, and the water is on the right. The background is a blurred outdoor setting, possibly a well or a water source in a rural area. The overall mood is one of curiosity and focus.

making  
our own  
paths of  
learning and  
living

**swapathgami**

## film making workshop

july 3-13, 2010

*Re-storying our Communities...*

Twenty people, ages 7-65, from around India participated in the Swapathgami Filmmaking Workshop in Udaipur. Aspiring filmmakers made short emotional films revealing their own personal stories. The workshop was hosted by Ruchir, Gungun, Sanjay, Vishal and Manish. Check out the films on youtube (search for swapathgami).

For more information, contact Ruchir at <ruchirguitar@gmail.com>



## self healing gathering

march 4-8, 2010

For four days, Gandhi Smarak Bhavan in Chhatarpur, M.P. hosted a Self Healing Meeting. About 50 people met and hosted seminars, played together, ate organic food and strengthened an emerging network.

People were interested in a wide range of things including healthy food, traditional herbs, acupuncture, massage, reiki, yoga, trataka meditation and naturopathy.

The meaning of self-healing was accepted as quite broad, and people were challenged to ask themselves: "What does 'self-healing' mean to you?"; "What needs to be healed in the world?"; "How would you go about healing?"

For more information, contact Sanjoy and Damyanti at <sanjoydamyanti@rediffmail.com>



## cycle yatra!

october 25-31, 2010

*Can you live for a week without any money, technology, medicine, food supplies?*

This year there were 19 people, ages 7 - 42, who took up the challenge at the annual Swapathgami Cycle Yatra. This time the Yatris travelled through tribal villages and forests of Hardoti, Rajasthan in the south-east part of Rajasthan (on the border of M.P.).

Along the way, Yatris realized that the most so-called backward and poor area of Rajasthan was actually the richest - in terms of wild, natural foods, medicinal herbs, eco-friendly housing, clean environment and love and hospitality. The local folk music was really amazing. Yatris felt how gracious local communities were in sharing their wealth with others.

For more information, contact Ramawtar Singh at <ramjiram1@gmail.com>



## oasis game

april 12-18, 2010

'Playing to Change the World', Udaipur was host to Edgard Gouveia from Brazil and the Oasis Game. A team of 40 players shared cooperative games, gifts, and dreams with local people in Shivaji Nagar Basti.

For more information on oasis games, visit [elosbrasil.org/en/metodologias/oasis](http://elosbrasil.org/en/metodologias/oasis) and contact Vishal Dhaybai at <aachi8@gmail.com>

# An Invitation to Sangatya

*Are you a young person seeking a space in the world to live a life of freedom, peace and harmony?*

Sangatya is a voluntary association formed in 2007 by like-minded people united by a common concern for peace, equality and sustainability. We are situated in a village called Nakre in Udupi district, coastal Karnataka. We are a small group of people with some experience in activism, science, engineering and academics.

Our principle aim is to live without using more than our share of the world's resources. Since it is difficult to ascertain what is our share of the world's resources, our practical goal is to support as many livelihoods as possible with the resources we have while continuously using renewable resources. We believe that the challenge of sustainability can't be met with technology alone. It is important to build caring relationships that facilitate the sharing of resources and labor.

We do organic farming. We obtain the biomass required for maintaining soil fertility from recycling all the biomass that grows with the crops. We grow grains without tilling. It lightens our labor and reduces soil vulnerability to erosion during monsoons. One of the questions we are trying to answer is: How can one be a good farmer and still have time and energy for other creative activities that enrich life?

We do some spinning and weaving, but it is not a significant activity as of now. We would like to build a network of home spinners and weavers.

We intend to meet all our energy requirements from renewable sources. The source that can be most easily harvested here is biomass. Direct use of solar energy is also possible for some purposes.

We welcome new people who share our values and concerns to live and work with us. Even short term (minimum duration is one month) volunteers and people who are exploring opportunities to live a different life are welcome. A spirit of equality and sharing within the group and a readiness to do physical work are important. Food and accommodation will, of course, be provided.

- **Sahadevan** <k.sahadevan@gmail.com> or  
**Shreekumar** <shreeudp@gmail.com>  
Tel. number: 08258-205340

## the slow thought movement

*...is a peaceful revolution in the way we think. it is about stepping away from the borrowed, second-hand thinking of our times and moving towards original, first-hand thinking.*

*...is thought that comes directly from you and the realm of your experience.*

*...embodies a conscious renunciation of borrowed ideas.*

Through the strength of community - learning and sharing with each other in a spirit of honest self-expression - we can accelerate the pace of our personal and collective evolution.

Learn more about our online community at:  
[www.SlowThoughtMovement.com](http://www.SlowThoughtMovement.com)  
[freedom@slowthoughtmovement.com](mailto:freedom@slowthoughtmovement.com)

## the walkouts-walkons network

The Swapathgami Network is a collection of people engaged in exploring individual pathways outside of institutionalized structures. As *swapathgamis*, we trust our own creative intelligence over the prescribed lives of the Ready-Made world. By 'walking-out' from unhealthy and isolating lifestyles, we are 'walking-on' into endless possibilities. Anyone can be a *Swapathgami*, and all are invited to join us for:

**Learning Journeys** – to connect individuals and groups engaged in exciting thinking and doing.

**Celebrations/Gatherings/Public Dialogues** – space to explore crucial issues and to build strong relationships between people with common concerns. Possibilities for future collaborations often evolve during these events.

**Communications** – print, film and web resources to share experiences of walking-out and walking-on.

**Communities of Practice** – collaborative explorations and sharing of skills. Past groups have focused on a diversity of projects including (but not limited to) film making, theatre, eco-livelihoods, self-healing, Oasis Game, organic farming and *kabaad se jugaad*.

For more information, explore our website:  
<[www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/walkoutsnetwork.htm](http://www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/walkoutsnetwork.htm)>

*You are invited to share your experiences as a Swapathgami co-creator!*

## art workshops as an engagement with our creative spirit

After my graduation in Fine Arts from MS University, Baroda, I was dreaming of becoming a big-name artist who would engage in gallery-based art practice.



However, in my search for a deeper understanding of art beyond the individual realm, I found tremendous meaning in becoming involved with the tribal communities of Bihar. I spent most of my days in the most economically deprived villages as a Jesuit priest.

I decided to embrace a traveler's life, constantly moving from community to community in different states, conducting art workshops. Art in the post industrial/capitalist era has been looked at as a product rather than a process, with huge profit, competition, fame and glamour serving as the guiding principles of the art-practice today. There is so much competition in the whole process that the purity of creativity is stranded.

The origin of art practice is traced back to the cave-paintings by early human beings. The practice was part of spiritual rituals and self-expressions. Even today indigenous communities are engaged in art practices as a way



of living and expressing the individual and the community, not as an act of competition. Perhaps the death of art and aesthetics begins from the moment they become a subject being taught in schools. Art has been misunderstood as merely drawing and painting. Children are being taught uniformly designed short cuts curtailing their own possibilities for innovation. Schools have been using such methods and standardizing such destructive practices. Are we not maneuvering the death of creativity in children?

Art in schools, and as generally perceived, is limited to fixed definitions of what is popularly considered as

'good', 'right' and 'beautiful'. In my workshops, the attempt is to break these definitions and boundaries. My workshops basically address the human need for a free spirit and free atmosphere in order to encourage free expressions grounded on a space of non-judgment, non-compulsive evaluations, no fixed time-table, and no rigid format.

I consider myself as a co-learner rather than a resource person. It is not a teacher-student relationship; rather it is a relationship of co-learners. The workshop becomes a process of personal internal purification for me. I believe the workshops influence the participants, who may go through similar purification experiences at their own pace. When I say internal purification, I mean the process of questioning my own lifestyle that has the traces of overemphasis on my own 'comforts' and my 'success' and, allowing myself to assimilate the qualities of simplicity, honesty and sensitivity. I believe in the importance of spending the entire time with the participants: laboring with them, eating and cooking with them, serving meals to them, singing and dancing, and even sleeping with them.

The art workshops have challenged some of my perspectives and strengthened my convictions. I realize now that anything we do from our heart is art. In order to acknowledge and appreciate the creator within, one has to become fearless of oneself and consequently of others. Becoming fearless means responding to the promptings of the inner self and accepting oneself as one is. To create art is to create oneself. Art is an expression of love. By creating oneself, we are able to create communities, because the creative force within us enables us to build relationships with oneself, other human beings and the cosmos as well. That is the basic experience of tribal and indigenous communities. Perhaps, this is the reason why artistic expressions are integral parts of the lives of tribal communities. My workshops should be looked at from this larger point of view: as a means to regenerate the soul of the communities through their expressions.

I visualize myself continuing this engagement with as many communities as possible in the coming years, going through a process of unlearning more unhealthy concepts accumulated over the years and recapturing the life-giving sources in people as well as in me. I invite you to join me.

- **Blaise Joseph, Patna**  
<blaises@gmail.com>

## the barefoot challenge

*Because the wind wants to feel your hair, and the earth  
wants to touch your feet.'* - **Kahlil Gibran**

We live in nature, but we don't live naturally. We live on the earth, but we don't touch it. Ninety percent of the time, we hide from the sun. We use hot water to bathe, which is a fast, functional affair. Most of the time we condition the air we breathe. In winter, we keep warm and in summers we protect ourselves from the heat. We burn most of the vitamins in food before we eat. We protect ourselves from all that is natural. And many of us fall ill from time to time and worry about our general health. What can we do to heal ourselves? I have found one simple and quick way to get back in touch with the earth: walk barefoot.

Soil has healing properties; it draws out toxins from the body. Minerals that get lost on their way to us otherwise seep in directly from the touch of mother earth. Walking barefoot on mother earth is like hugging your mother.

Nature has made our feet sensitive. We have many acupressure points on our feet, which love to be massaged. But we deprive our feet of different surfaces by continuously covering them with thick chappals, or walking on flat tiled floor.

Try this experiment. Twice a day, walk barefoot on bare earth for fifteen minutes. If you can't find bare earth, walk on a footpath. Make sure it is not a very smooth footpath though; mud and pebbles are important. Walk slowly, letting the earth seep into your being. It might be painful at first, but soon your feet will relish the massage. Most of your bodily aches and pains will diminish within a week. If you continue for more than a month, you will start feeling a new strength in your body, feet up. The feet will actually radiate a palpable sense of well-being.

Walking barefoot is especially good for knee pain, stiffness in the joints, and back pain. A study showed that the incidence of arthritis and varicose veins are much lower in villages, probably because they walk barefoot. Digestion also improves drastically by the acupressure effect of barefoot walking. Add to this a warm footbath at night, followed by a quick massage with oil. Soaking the feet in warm water for five to ten minutes will refresh your entire being, and the massage will soothe the creases and seal in the energy.

Nature cure is an inexpensive and straightforward system of alternative healing. All it requires is the small courage to take the small step out of our comfort and fashion zones.

- **Manjushree Abhinav**, Bangalore  
manjushree.abhinav@gmail.com

*She is a writer and filmmaker. Yes, she does walk the talk.*



The universe is so perfect  
On every living being  
She has her impact

I, we, they and you  
She binds us all  
With purpose true

She serves her cards  
With built-in plan  
How to bring the best of all

She knows and throws  
In our path  
What we most need to flourish and grow

With the mindset, we explore  
Then unfolds accordingly her stores  
Can't see hurdles any more  
All are blessings in the store

Thank you all  
Thank you universe

With gratitude,

- **Vineeta Sood**, Bangalore  
<vineetasood@hotmail.com>

# rooftop revolution

Starting a vegetable patch at home in a city isn't simple, yet it is delightful. As first time farmers, it took us to places and people we wouldn't have known otherwise.

We have been trying to move towards a healthy, fulfilling lifestyle for some time. Part of this attempt includes growing our own food and creating a conscious kitchen in our home. Our efforts began three months ago, when our first step in this journey was to collect 'green garbage' as we'd often seen plants growing on garbage (instead of in soil).

We kept our eyes peeled for any opportunity to pick up discarded waste. We soon acquired *bhusa* (straw) from our fruit vendor, coconut husks from a lady selling coconuts outside a temple, rotten veggies/leaves of vegetables thrown away at a *subzi mandi* (vegetable market), and dry leaves swept up at a local shopping complex. We also found discarded pieces of granite/ marble, and used coconuts from a tender coconut vendor. Most people were curious to know what we intended to do with the 'garbage' and when told, were eager to help. Thus began the first step of our journey. Finding the free green wealth is not difficult!

We weren't sure how exactly to go about making the garden on the terrace. Luckily, we met a few people in Pune who already had thriving terrace gardens. Rashmi's garden with a 10-foot, fruit-laden papaya tree growing in just 4 inches of soil; Jyoti Shah's garden with many vegetables, flowers & fruit trees growing in green garbage, without any soil. Seeing this gave us new confidence and ideas.

We got to work – cut up plastic sheets and laid them, used granite bits and used coconuts to create beds, lined the bottom with coconut husks, straw and used *patta* (leaf plates). Finally, we put the vegetable waste on top, and lo! - four beds were almost ready!

We now needed soil. Getting hold of soil can be quite tricky in a concrete city area. But as we looked down from the terrace, we spotted a pile of garbage with a lot of dry leaves in an empty plot in front of our house. Apprehensive at first about what we'd find - plastic, metal, sharp objects - we were soon elated to find such rich manure right beside our home. We salvaged about four sackfuls, which went right on top of our beds. The first plant to go in was 'khajur' (date palm) which we'd found growing on the garbage heap itself.



It was all in a morning's work or *karma yoga* as we like to believe. And we even got a bonus! We found two whole cabbages with just their outer leaves decaying. So we simply took off some of the outer leaves and were left with good-looking fine cabbages for our lunch. Our veggie patch had started yielding vegetables even before we could plant!

We watered the beds for a few days to help the green matter begin to compost. The top layer of soil was drying up quite fast, so we covered it with jute sacks to preserve moisture. A few days later, we planted our first seeds. In the first bed we put fenugreek and mustard, and in the second, spinach and *rajgira* (amaranth millets). In the third we put a pineapple head, a bulb of onion, and 'mango ginger' (*ambe-halad* in Marathi). In the fourth bed, we put safflower and coriander.

Up to now, we have harvested spinach, mustard greens and amaranth greens twice and enjoyed including them in our meals. It's a delight to eat what you have grown yourself. We are still exploring where we can source local seeds from, what seeds we should plant and when, and how much of each variety we should plant in order to provide for our needs.

Our journey with our terrace garden continues. A beautiful off-shoot of this process is that we're meeting several people who are engaged in similar experiments. Meeting them provides us with good ideas and encouragement. It's almost as if other people are nurturing us, and we're nurturing our plants in turn!

**-Shirish and Vanaja Vaidyanathan, Pune**  
<ajanav@yahoo.com>

# The Transcendental Brinjal

A few months back the Minister of State for Environment and Forests held public hearings to determine the future of BT Brinjal in India. When I attended talks and read the research about Genetically Modified (GM) seeds, I became concerned about the irreversible damage it would inflict on the health of humans and animals.

In the last two years, I had spent considerable time living in remote villages, learning organic farming and reforestation. I lived with many farmers in their mud homes and developed meaningful relationships with them. I saw firsthand, that farming is a lot about 'soil building' but that GM seeds would kill the microbial activity in the soil leaving it infertile. GM seeds could contaminate thousands of traditional species of the same crop, endangering the rich biodiversity of nature. This would result in an enormous threat to the economic stability of farmers, who are already struggling hard to survive. It was while spending time in Vidarbha, Maharashtra that I also became more aware of the causes of farmer suicides. I felt deeply moved to do something.

I started writing articles, mobilizing resources, holding public meetings and awareness campaigns to sensitize people about GM seeds in Ahmedabad. At the time, I had typhoid fever and was not in the best of health. However, since the issue was so grave and the threat so imminent, I felt called to go out and put in as much energy as I could to inspire more people to attend the public hearing and take a firm stand against BT Brinjal. It was an intense period of my life. After the month of campaigning against BT Brinjal and the subsequent public hearing, I took time to slow down.

In the past five years, I have spent a few weeks every year in complete silence, with no contact to the outside world, in places as diverse as a forest monastery in the deep crevices of the Himalayas to a closed room near a city where the food is dropped inside my room from a small window. This time of solitude has helped me direct my attention inward. I saw that I was feeling a lot of anger towards Monsanto (the corporation that supplies GM seeds), the politicians and the big farmers. Through my daily work routine, I had not realized that I was experiencing all this noise and negativity in my mind, but when I would sit alone in silence, the hopelessness and discontent revealed itself more clearly.

I could also see that this hatred and cynicism was draining me and making my mind unhealthy. For, today if we were struggling against BT Brinjal, two months later, it could be against a new pesticide or a forest that

could be cut or a chemical factory might grab fertile land from poor farmers. The old insensitive politicians will retire and new ones will step in to play the same game. I had begun wondering, how many times would we as activists find the energy to fight against issues, one after another, in isolation? I have friends who have been dedicated activists for many years. Most of them feel burnt out today!

But now the question had intensified for me: "What was I supposed to do? How should I use my energy so that I don't get drained, but can channel it to bring more goodness and peace in my life and in the world?" Because at one level I felt that it was crucial for me to engage with the GM issue. But at the same time, I do not want to carry the burden and pain of negative emotions towards people or corporations in my being.

When I spent time in meditation and solitude to observe the subtle workings of my mind, I was able to get a deeper glimpse into the subconscious layers of my inner ecology. It became clearer to me that all problems that our world is facing today, such as environmental destruction, economic injustice, terrorism, animal cruelty, are all intertwined branches stemming from the seeds of fear, greed or ignorance of our collective minds. I realized that while it is imperative to work rigorously on issues from the outside, we cannot afford to ignore the correlation of these issues to their roots.

I started to look more closely at my own anger, hatred and discontentment towards the corporations and politicians. It struck me that in order to address any imbalance in the outer ecology, the internal disturbances and negativities within my mind needed to be resolved first. I could not solve the problem from the same inner space that created it. I realized that first I needed to make a radical shift from fear to faith, from anger to acceptance, and from restlessness to stillness.

I have come to believe, that as an activist I am affecting the world at multiple stratum. One layer is through the physical and intellectual energy that I put into my projects. But an even more profound layer is at that of thoughts. The internal matrix of emotions, feelings and awareness in our minds is forcefully radiating into the world, reflected in our actions and vibrations that touch others. Many of us are drawn to change the outer circumstances, but a deeper transformation can flower only through an inner spiritual activism that holds the true power to awaken, love and heal our earth.

**-Nirali Shah, Ahmedabad**  
<niralis@gmail.com>

# A Recipe for Halchal Saturday Cafe

The Halchal Saturday Cafe is a simple young experiment birthed from the timeless tradition of building healthy community around good food. Cooked up by some swapathgamis in Udaipur, this recipe is less as a guide and more me wanting to share my experiences of and reflections on our cafe. I hope it serves as a delicious offering of inspiration for any and all forthcoming cafe varieties you might create in your community.

Serves anywhere from 10—50+ friends & guests.

## Ingredients\*

\*dependent on seasonality and what's available in the local market/who's available in your local village.

- creative, crazy people
- slow food
- beautiful ideas
- kitchen or food prep locale
- THE MAGIC CONNECTION

## Method:

1. The general method is to marinate the guests with the ideas and slow food overnight. Stir occasionally.

2. Before or perhaps whilst you and your guests are marinating, you will be left with the question of what to cook. We feel that, for our cafe, we explore health, ecology and spirit. We cook, as much as is possible, with

- zero processed oil [operative word being *processed*]. We realize oil is important so we use naturally oily foods such as coconut, peanut, etc.]

- zero processed sugar [our sweets are made with gur, mishri, dates, mahua, raisins, or honey]

- zero animal products [vegan]

- local [especially local millets such as ragi, jo, jowar, rajgira, sama, etc.]

- organic and zero-waste.

A very important lesson I learned about serving such bravely executed foods: you must tell people of the miracle on the plate before them. In my experience, they likely won't believe the feat you have just accomplished, in which case you can invite them to cook next week and otherwise engage them and the people nearby in conversation around the importance of kitchens as the laboratories of our culture[s].

3. Decorate your space as you would to make a good pulao. It should feel warm and comforting—familiar even—but should be a textured experience that invokes the earthiness of a root vegetable, the sweetness of dried fruit, a spicy awakening of the senses, and a crunchy, cashew-ey something that makes the space really creamydreamy. Most importantly, it should subtly feature what makes it your own—an upcycled CD lampshades, chairs from old tires, scavenged table tops from carom

boards, old saris, etc. all work well for us.

4. Do not go out and purchase THE MAGIC CONNECTION. You can spend the rest of forever wandering in the aisles of the sickly, late-capitalist remains of SprawlMart and its look-a-likes *it is not there. It has been within you all along.*

5. Don't worry if THE MAGIC CONNECTION doesn't always or immediately grace your cafe with its presence. If ever there were a way to understand the complexities of connection, plugging into local food systems does well to simultaneously bring you closer to understanding the interconnectivity and oneness of everything on our planet. Doing so also leaves you in quiet awe and wonder at the complexity of everything. Our cafe is a casual affair, and developing connection never feels overwhelming or cumbersome. Gingerly put your fears and doubts aside, as you would the seeds of a particularly potent chili, to be thrown into the cosmic compost after everyone has gone home and you're cleaning up.

6. Do not charge money. The concept of a gift economy resonates strongly within me, especially because I'm the kind of person who always used to believe that whatever you do for a job, it should be your passion. But it turns out my passion is serving people, and I am beginning to suspect that I don't want to take what I am passionate about and turn it into a commodified thing to do between ninetofive. Exchanging love for money doesn't feel very good, and so we at the Halchal Cafe promote a gift culture and economy. People pay what they want or are able to pay, which may come in the form of money, time, service, musical and dance performances, or any other gift they have to offer.

7. At the end of the night, you will know that the *halchal* of the fusion of friends, food, and ideas is an infinite one, perpetually reborn and exploding its way into our quietly awaiting future. Serve humbly with a side of mint chutney.

-Kate Morales, Udaipur/Atlanta  
<kmorales1@student.gsu.edu>



# just in time library

Books have been an inherent part of my life. Over the years, I selected them carefully and guarded them closely. They have been a source of inspiration, wisdom, laughter, tears and so much more.

For many years, I would conduct an interview before even lending a book. Will you look after it? Make sure you don't fold the pages! When will you bring it back? Family and friends would be exasperated, but put up with it because I really had some great books! Many were expensive or hard to get hold of.

But all that changed about ten months back. My friend Sheetal Sanghvi began discussing how his collection was gathering dust and he wanted to give them away. He suggested I should do the same. Sheetal told me to imagine how much difference the books could make to another's life. Just as they had impacted me – another would benefit. As I listened to him, I realized that I had read many of them several times and it was easier to look up material on the internet now, then to search through the books. I was simply holding on, because it was hard to let go.

I reminded myself of all the lessons I have learned over the years – the important one being that nothing is permanent. It was unrealistic to cling to objects and try to keep things unchanged.

Besides, Sheetal's argument was highly persuasive and with a deep breath I agreed. Sheetal immediately carted away dozens of my books, clearing one shelf at a time. The stagnant energy was suddenly flowing and I could feel the bookcase, the room – myself feeling lighter. It felt really good to imagine those beautiful masterpieces finding new lives to touch.

Together with some of Sheetal's books and other donations, we set up '**Spread the Word**' at The Urban Ashram. This is a library which has no cards, no supervision. People are encouraged to take books and pass them on. They may also add to the collection if they wish.

Each time I visited the Urban Ashram, my satisfaction grew and I felt happy with my decision. I continued giving away my books to who ever asked for one. I shared the idea with many others. There were mixed reactions. Some thought it made no sense. But many others took to the idea with enthusiasm and began. When I spoke to my friend Arun about this, we discussed how abundance principles, Misogi, space clearing, and so many teachings

and practices support such movement. He also said something that stayed with me. Arun said that instead of '*just in time*' inventory, we tend to accumulate material '*just in case*' we ever need it again. But if we are willing to trust the process of life, let go and be in flow, we can count on the universe providing us whatever is needed – 'Just in time'!

So this entire exercise had yielded a lot of positivity and learnings for a lot of people, including myself. Because you really learn when you practice the teachings that appeal to you.

Last evening, I remembered my favorite comic books – 'Calvin and Hobbes'. They were particularly precious to me, not only because I thoroughly enjoy them, but they were possibly the last of Sameer's possessions I had held onto for all these years. I felt a brief moment of sadness when I realized I no longer had them. I had given away the entire collection to Sheetal. I reminded myself how everything is in divine order and the universe is constantly looking out for me. What I truly need is provided in the moment. I thought of how much Sheetal had been enjoying them and smiled and moved on.

I have been on a sabbatical and mostly keeping to myself. But today, Sheetal called and insisted on meeting me. So I went to meet him and we had a nice chat over some other matters. As I was leaving, he called me back and handed over three Calvin and Hobbes! I was stunned at the timing and even more at what he said. He realized that it was difficult for him to pass on these particular books as he found them too precious himself. So he thought to himself, how hard it must have been for me to give them away. They are a part of you and you should have them back, he told me. When I told him I had missed them only yesterday, he said they had not been getting attention – lost in all my other books, but with less of them, they were now back when they were called from the heart.

What lovely validation from the universe.

I really do feel taken care of right now. And emboldened to trust life more and more every day - We are provided what we need – Just in Time.

- **Sangeeta Bhagwat, Pune**  
<besangeeta@gmail.com>

Check out Sangeeta's new book *S.O.U.L. - School of Unified Learning*.

# Welcome to Sustainable Shitting

At a young age I learned that toilet time can be used productively. My dad always drinks juice, listens to music, and reads while sitting in the loo. Last week, upon reading *The Humanure Handbook* (2005) by Joseph Jenkins, I learned that that toilet *deposits* can also be used! Meeting human needs and safely disposing of human by-products can play perfectly into earth's ecology by recycling human poop and pee into nutritious compost.

5 gallons of water are contaminated each time we use a toilet. After we flush, the contaminated water rushes off into the sewage and then a sewage cleaning facility. To clean this poop-water – so we can drink it – toxic chemicals are used. Then it returns to the system (if it wasn't dumped into a natural body of water) for us to re-contaminate. If this isn't convincing enough, here's a fun fact: "If all the world's drinking water were put in one cubical tank, the tank would measure only 95 miles on each side." Thus, stewardship is essential.

American officials even in the early 20th century often were stunned that Chinese and other East Asian peoples have cultivated the same land for thousands of years – our land is already getting worn out after a few hundred! A key difference is the nutrient cycles. In China, human defecation and the nutrients therein are returned to the soil regularly rather than pumped away to a processing plant or buried with toxic waste, which deprives the soil of the nutrients it gifted us (Jenkins also addresses the



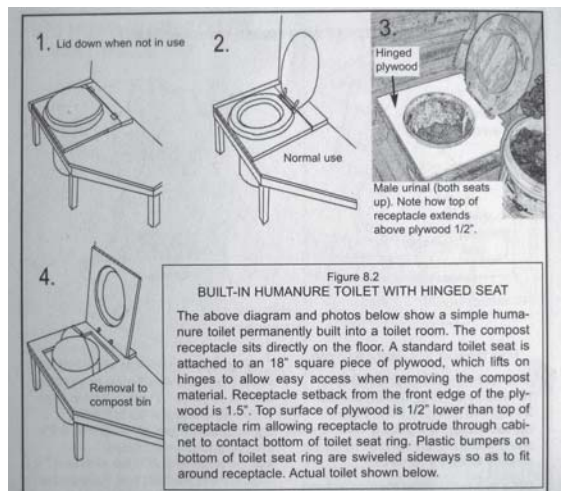
issues of applying raw humanure as opposed to composting it first.)

### *Why flush feces when you can compost it?!*

If human feces are composted properly, all pathogens will die in the heat of the compost pit and it will become very

clean, nice smelling compost that can be used to grow food. Out of the many models Jenkins shares, a home bucket model is highlighted. The basic process involves going potty in a bucket, covering the deposits (think of it as money in the bank!) with a clean organic material like sawdust, creating a large compost bin, and adding carbon-rich material like grass and leaves to the pile. This works because our shit is full of microbes ready to decompose itself and other biomass. Also, it contains high levels of nitrogen, which balance the often excessive amount of carbon in a compost pile. This process requires minimal water since pee and fruit-waste provide

moisture. Finally, if you don't have space for such a project, especially since the compost pile ought to sit untouched for up to a year, never fear! You can promote it municipally, as models for large scale use are popping up.



The hope for sustainable living and fresh food inspired me to tackle unknown skills and the untouchable excrement. A bucket model compost toilet is the first thing I have ever built. I had to explore new parts of Udaipur to find the materials and try building for the first time in this endeavor. The craftsmanship is not perfect, but I am quite happy with the functional poop-pot ready to recycle one of our most repelling waste products.

The chance to build a toilet, use it, and know that I am not wasting water – in fact, know that I am partaking in larger life, not just what is contained in *my* body and brain — is more than enough to slap a smile on my face and feel great relief each time I sit (or squat, thank you India) to shit.

The more I face the dirtiness of my life, the stuff that is more easily flushed or forgotten, the more I discover the miraculous. Microbes in potentially harmful poop show me the intricacies of problems that provide solutions. Zero waste is possible. From our consumption to our defecation, we can fit naturally into ecology. Saving shit seriously *is* a solution to the human problem of sustaining our lives here on Earth.

- Mackenzie Shreve, Udaipur/Omaha  
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# Walking out of Posh Dreams

I was doing well at Baskin Robbins in Mumbai (world's leading U.S. based ice cream company). There were lucrative offers to work abroad and I was looking forward to an appropriate break when my college friend approached me with an innovative business idea.

Multimedia computers were the latest and so was multimedia educational software, which made complex lessons simple and enjoyable. Being a back-bencher in school, I was fascinated by this concept and I decided to quit my job. We operated our business from a posh locality of Mumbai and had one of the best schools in the city as our clients.

During this period my grandfather insisted I meet Dr. Kalbag, a scientist turned educationist, and see his experiments with Vigyan Ashram. I was not keen to travel all the way to the remote village of Pabal to visit an unfamiliar person. When I finally met Dr. Kalbag, it was hard to believe that someone would migrate from a posh bungalow in Juhu to a barren land in a village. I never knew this was going to be a turning point in my life.

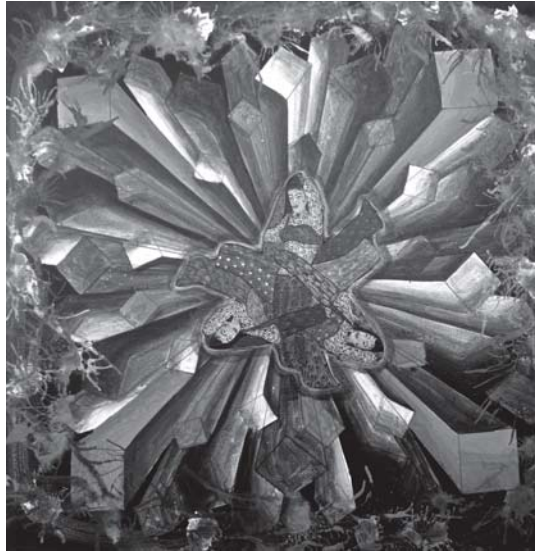
I was inspired by Dr. Kalbag's vision so I started concentrating more on schools in remote areas. During one of my presentations I was invited by the Don Bosco School in the tribal district of Jhabua, M.P. I learned a lot during my travels in the tribal areas. Having escaped 'education' and 'development,' they are still original and authentic and are holding on to their culture and worldview, which has sustained them for centuries.

I met Minal at Indore. We shared common thinking and values. Overall business was flourishing, however, it was an extremely frustrating experience. We were dealing with stubborn teachers who didn't have the self-determination to transform themselves and money-hungry school managements. All this made us continually negotiate with our business ethics. This led me to question the value of leading this completely build-your-business-at-any-cost kind of life. Finally, Minal and I decided to quit the business.

We were convinced that despite of all the glitter, the five star hotels, malls, consumerist hospitals and schools, the culture of greater India is still in rural areas. We had, in days of yore, excellent architects, super human minds, amazing space walkers, all of them in

villages and forests. None of the great of that time had to leave and go to foreign countries or cities for 'higher education'. Our soul resides in the soil of Mother Earth. Our education ought to be related to Mother Earth.

We decided to migrate to our ancestral village in the region of Konkan. My great-grandfather migrated from this village to Kolhapur town to join Rajaram College as professor of mathematics. Since then our house was lying idle. It was a very 'irrational' decision. We were



absolutely not clear about what we were going to do. Minal and I read more on K.J. Baby's non-formal school at Kanavu, Bunker Roy of Barefoot College as well as J. Krishnamurthi's and Mahatma Gandhi's ideas on education

We converted our 80-year old abandoned ancestral house into a school that would provide real education - not through lectures in closed classrooms - but by helping children learn through observation, mistakes and experiencing responsibility. We were initially joined by two youth from a local

orphanage for this experiment.

'School without Walls' came together by questioning, experimenting and exploring. Whatever problems we faced in our daily lives became our curriculum to learn. It slowly developed into a school 'for the students, of the students and by the students'. Today, our daughter, Mrunalini, is no longer going to school. She is grooming herself wonderfully in this natural learning system.

To nurture the spirit of entrepreneurship and self-reliance among ourselves and our ex-students, the concept of 'Incubation - A Resource Center' has emerged. We are producing vermi-wash/vermi-compost on an industrial scale. We are now planning to start a bakery unit, organic fast food center, and soil brick production.

Over the years, I have learnt that money is not an end in itself. Ms. Anu Aga, ex-Chairperson, Thermax once said: "Profits are important but not the only thing...without breathing, you and I can't live, but if you ask what is the purpose of my life and if I say breathing, it is such a narrow way to define it."

Minal and I feel content these days. There is finally greater convergence between what our conscience tells us, and what we actually do in our daily lives.

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# Hosting in the Hub

Hosting visitors, parties, gatherings, celebrations and conversations is an age-old practice present in all human societies. What's more, cultures root themselves in rituals that involve hosting others in our space. I remember the period before Christmas in Paraguay where neighbors take the time to visit each other's nativity scenes. Families prepare themselves for hosting the visitors that will arrive anytime; setting aside food, drinks and even little gifts for them to take home. Each of our cultures has practices that involve visiting others or being visited. Those hosting spaces have great potential to influence – for good or ill – the outcomes of these social encounters and the experience people will have there.



I wasn't aware of the active role of hosting others before I became a member and then *host* of the first 'Hub' ([www.the-hub.net](http://www.the-hub.net)) that opened in London in 2005. After being told I was one of the first hosts ever of that space, I had to find out what this role was all about in practice. I still remember putting the word '*hosting*' in *google* to find out what I was supposed to do. Of course that didn't help! The learning didn't come from existing social theories that I now know more about, but from following what felt intuitively right. Some insights came from conversations with members of that space back then and with people who were hosting other communities around the world. But most came from what felt natural to do in each specific situation.

At the *Hubs*, hosts set the conditions for interdependence, collaboration and collective social action to happen among a diverse group of people. This sounds big but how it is done lies in the simplicity of everyday activities.

To facilitate connections and to inspire and support people in the realization of their ideas, hosts do three key things. Firstly, they co-create an open and inspiring physical shared space together with the community, where people can work, meet, talk, share, learn. Secondly, hosts attract a good variety of skills and personalities needed into the network or community. People and projects are mapped and invited to form

communities of interest and practice across disciplines. Finally, hosts also help set a rhythm of common activities and co-create a culture and environment that is conducive to experimentation, courage and mutual support. Learning that every conversation we have can lead to creating inspiring and meaningful activities for others is one of the biggest satisfactions I have felt as a host. A common challenge for hosts is knowing when you need to pause and host yourself. A host I know was so busy that she was, without knowing, creating a stressed environment that was affecting everyone. It is challenging to host when you are not feeling great, because, as with any party, dinner, event, everyone expects the hosts to be jolly and entertaining. That's why you host in teams because nobody can be a host all the time.

I see hosting as a new paradigm for inspiring and supporting people realizing their initiatives. It is rarely seen inside conventional 'incubators' or development agencies where people are encouraged to work in isolation to achieve more on their own. Hosting responds to complex situations which value, indeed require, a rich number of diverse ideas, projects and peoples.

I even see hosting as the emergence of a new profession. The emergence of this role could allow millions of people, currently rather hidden hosts and conveners – think of librarians, secretaries, youth workers, nurses, mothers to name but a few – to unlock their collective and individual capacities to generate new ways of creating social interactions and transformation in their organizations and communities.

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***Are you tired of the monotony of your school or your job?***

***JOIN THE 'YEAR ON' CAMPAIGN!!!***

***We invite you to Take a Brake Year after class 5, 8, 10, 12 or college To:***

***Explore who you really are...  
Explore who your community is...  
Explore who your world is...***

# No More Mile-Markers

I've learned that there is no one "right" life path. Thinking of life as a direct, linear life path doesn't serve me well; neither does it serve a lot of other people well.

Having spent my high school and college years as a distance runner, I can't help but think about my life journey in terms of racing and training. In America, we live in a society that assigns us worth through a series of mile markers. We move from high school to college, to marriage and kids and career, to eventually retirement. Those who pass these mile markers in a timely fashion are viewed as successful and serve as bearers of an ideal others should aspire to.

A few years ago, I found myself having a series of conversations with people who were reflecting on their lives over time. From my 74 year-old great aunt, my 50 year-old mom, and my 68 year-old dad, each person felt that their relationships and the things they created, were what mattered most to them now, not when they reached those mile markers, or the mile-markers themselves. Each person relayed a story from their 20s of a time where they could have made an important choice for themselves and didn't. Instead of doing what they really wanted to do, they succumbed to the pressures of what they believed they 'should' do.

As a 29-year-old woman entrepreneur and three-time college WALK-out, I've always questioned the traditional path. Through the process of building three businesses—all very different—I've come to realize that great things emerge if we allow life to expand like a web as opposed to a straight line.

Starting a business was at first confusing and hard. I was responsible for bookkeeping, marketing, networking, website design, program development—things I'd never done in prior jobs. Classes in school never seemed to cover the exact topics I needed to learn. This is why I started asking people in my network—who I knew had the knowledge I was seeking—to meet me for coffee. It's through these informal conversations that I've obtained answers to my questions or found my way into new areas of study.

I co-founded 'The New Prosperity Initiative' (NPI), <<http://thenewprosperityinitiative.org>> a media organization focused on the social sector, three years ago. We basically tell stories, good stories. Our stories seek to inspire and create change by highlighting work that solves community problems and improves the world. What's wonderful about my work with NPI is it allows me to interact with solutions-focused people who

are out-of-the-box thinkers. These are people who have the courage to rethink what has always been done before, taking on the world's toughest problems. They are passionate about what they do. The conversations I've had with them are priceless.



Through NPI, we have found that newly emerging social media tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and blogging, in addition to

in-person meetings and dialogues, have helped us further our mission. Social media is about using the power of internet and cell phones for social activism. People use these electronic media tools for organizing events, raising awareness about social causes, lobbying politicians, etc. As a cash-strapped start-up, social media initially appealed to us because it was a free way for us to distribute content. As time has progressed, we've seen our network grow through social media. Additionally, social media has allowed me to discover and connect with people who share my values rather quickly, regardless of location. Many of my online connections have turned into in-person relationships that then led to new leads, resources, or projects

There's a big debate happening right now about whether or not social media can really help bring about social change. I think it can, but in-person relationships are equally, if not more, valuable than social media networking. Social media must be paired with these offline face-to-face connections and actions. Behind each social media outlet is a person.

As happy as I am to have started NPI, I realize now that this was an important decision for me which in turn excluded me from groups I once felt a part of. When I first walked out from my previous 9-5 job and regular activities, I felt deeply lonely. My new community—a community I love and cherish—has assembled itself rather randomly. I've met a new contact at a networking event, another through a friend, some even through social media. Today, I know my community wants to see me succeed as a means to increase my own strength and creativity as a human being on this planet, not toward some business outcome/metric.

- **Jeanne Dasaro, Boston**  
<<http://jeannedasaro.com>>

# Film Review: 3 Idiots

Aamir Khan's *3 Idiots* has been touted as being the highest grossing Indian film ever. It has spawned a huge cult of 'idiots', who dream of defying the System and breaking institutionalized barriers in pursuit of the deepest truth. Its simplistic little motto of "Aal izz well" is the new anthem of the masses; blurted out whenever a desperate situation demands a beam of optimism or a ray of hope.

The story begins with two friends, Raju and Farhan, leaving behind everything, from their trousers to an international flight, to embark on a search for their long lost friend who has disappeared into the mists shrouding the hills of Shimla. They are led by their once arch-nemesis Chatur, who has his own agenda to look for Mr. Lost, Rancnodas Shymaldas Chhanchad (Rancho for short).

The narrative, like many great ones, is told through a series of flashbacks about these three idiots' engineering college days together, and their constant skirmishes with the Principal (known as ViruS) and the leading contestant for his favorite student, Chatur. These flashbacks, interspersed with happenings in the present, ultimately lead to unveiling of the mystery surrounding Rancho and his disappearance.

My friends, many of whom were engineering students, could completely empathize with the trials and unfairness faced by the three protagonists. According to them, being someone like Rancho, who always stands up against the System yet excels in it just out of his sheer brilliance, was possible only in their wildest fantasies. Most of my friends identified themselves with the other protagonists, Farhan, whose real interest is wildlife photography but is forced to get a degree in engineering by his ambitious father; and Raju, who likes engineering but is scared of failing and losing out in the rat race.

Through cheeky visuals and sharp dialogues, *3 Idiots* makes some very strong critiques about competition, institutions and the Indian Education System: "Was this suicide or murder?" Rancho asks the Principal after a student commits suicide due to not meeting a project deadline. Even the song lyrics are powerful: *Saari umra*

*hum, mar mar ke jee liye, ek pal ab hamein, jeene do jeeno do...* (We spent our entire lives leading a dull and deathlike existence, now, for one moment, let us actually LIVE...).

During the last year, I have been plagued with questions about what I want to learn/do over the next few years as all my peers go about joining mainstream colleges to get professional degrees and certificates. A part of me is also attracted to that; experiencing 'college life' and having the security of a degree in my hands. But watching this film, I became more aware of the stark uselessness of a degree, and realized that if I discover my real passion, what I really, truly enjoy doing, and learn and understand that more deeply, I shall be happier than cramming over a textbook sitting in a desolate room in a desolate college amongst desolate people all driven by a wicked desperation that competitive exams bring.

I heard of a few people who, after watching this film, found the courage to quit conventional college and start following their hearts. But many just watched the film for the sake of entertainment, the questions it raised played around in their heads for a day or two, just to be dormant again as they went back to being dumbed down by the routine of the institutionalized world.

So the question really is: can films like these that raise questions about institutions and act as motivators for people wanting to change but not finding the courage or encouragement to do so? Can these films provide that one final push? Or is that asking too much? Because in the end, this is a commercial film meant solely for entertainment of the masses, and from the perspective of the producers, making money.

As for my story, taking inspiration from this film, I finally decided to quit the formal system as well, and have joined Swaraj University to co-create an innovative learning community. Instead of studying abstract theories in a college, I am giving myself the space to explore my passions, practice them in my life, build a vibrant community of idiots, and along the way, to let myself 'jeene do'...

**-Sakhi Nitin-Anita, Nashik**  
<sakhina@gmail.com>



# swaraj university: an interview with Reva Dandage

## ***How did you become interested in alternative education?***

My own experience with education was not great. I failed the 12th grade in almost every subject, and two of my peers who also failed committed suicide shortly afterwards. This moved me tremendously. I eventually retook and passed the tests for 12th grade and entered university. Once in University I was able to do well, and this further demonstrated to me that the education system didn't make sense, that it didn't understand me. I began looking out for alternatives that acknowledge who people are, and their various learning styles. So I spent the next seven years visiting, learning about, and working with free schools in the U.S., England, and Israel, as both a student and a staff member. The purpose was to learn and to find out what I could start back in India. I understand the system better in India, as I grew up in it, and that was where all my frustration came from, so I felt inspired to create something here. I saw and felt the need for an alternative.

## ***What is, for you, the most exciting aspect of Swaraj University?***

For me, I think the most exciting thing is that the khojis (learners) have a place where they can not only follow their interests and talents, there is space for their emotional needs and dreams. We can talk about our families, our relationships, our hurts, and our struggle and dilemmas with our communities. Healing is a really important part of the learning process, and the space at Swaraj excites me because it's really what I think our society needs right now... We also need people living out their dreams and not just being corporate puppets. I love supporting young people who are trying to live according to their deepest values. It's also exciting to see that the work that the learners are doing is helping to take care of local communities, all living beings, and the planet.

## ***What does self-designed learning look like at Swaraj? How do the learners connect to each other, their communities, and the world?***

Whatever the khojis are learning has to be connected to the real world. They aren't in a classroom disconnected from what's happening on the street. Some khojis travel, some do hands-on projects, some are experimenting in their own communities, some are drawn naturally to reading, the internet and media... each one is different. They co-create a small learning community on the Swaraj campus with their peers and facilitators which gives support through planning,



feedback, connections and sometimes a place just to bounce crazy ideas off. For learning a specific subject and building their own networks, they go to gurus of their choice.

Unlearning processes - releasing those fears, assumptions,

limitations, which block connection and understanding - are the first steps to meaningful self-directed learning. Schools and media have taught us many lies which we need to unlearn. Collaboration, trust and teamwork processes are also critical.

## ***Will learners get a degree from Swaraj University? What will they do after they 'graduate'?***

Why do you need a degree if you're doing something that you're really passionate about? Why do you need someone else to give you the stamp of approval? The mission of Swaraj is to bring about new community leaders required for today's challenges. For that, no degree is needed. These are unique people doing work in unique fields, and what we need today is not what you get out of a cookie-cut university. The Swaraj learners will be far better off than people studying in a classroom with no hands-on experience. Skills, practical knowledge levels, attitudes and networks matter much more than a degree. I feel confident that when they will start their own enterprises, they will be able to do some amazing things in their communities!

At Swaraj University we are challenging the system of degrees and instead equipping each khoji to create a portfolio that documents all of their practical learning and experience over the two years.

## ***How can I get involved with Swaraj University?***

The idea of self-designed learning is not limited to this university. Each person can follow their own dreams wherever they are, even if you are a home-manager, a student or have a job. Self-designed learning is about being determined to lead a more authentic, fulfilling community life, about making your own choices and taking responsibility for them, about taking control of your own learning path. Once you are committed to doing this, you can start your own learning journey wherever you are.

For more information and updates, go to [www.swarajuniversity.org](http://www.swarajuniversity.org) and Swaraj University on facebook.

"We are not threatened by silence. We are completely at home in it. From our earliest times, our Aboriginal way has taught us to be still and wait. We could not live good and useful lives unless we listened. We do not try to hurry things up. We let them follow their natural course - like the seasons. We watch the moon in each of its phases. We wait for the rain to fill our rivers and water the thirsty earth. When twilight comes we prepare for the night. At dawn we rise with the sun. We watch the bush foods and wait for them to open before we gather them. We wait for our young people as they grow, stage by stage, through their initiation ceremonies. When a relation dies we wait for a long time with the sorrow. We own our grief and allow it to heal slowly. We don't worry. We know that in time and in the spirit of *Dadirri* (inner deep listening, contemplation and quiet still awareness) the way will be made clear."

Adapted from Miriam Rose Ungunmerr

## an invitation

The power within *Swapathgami* comes from our own practical experiences and relationships. We invite you to share your essays, poems, cartoons, photographs, stories, quotes, films, books, websites, etc. We print both English and Hindi editions. Contact:

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thanks! thanks. thanks & thanks ^ thanks...

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## learning webs: online education resources

- A selection by Jack Plafker <[jlpmhs@gmail.com](mailto:jlpmhs@gmail.com)>

*There are plenty of great learning resources on the web to help you self-design your own pursuit of knowledge:*

**WikiMedia sites**- 'Free' (as in both 'speech' and 'beer') encyclopedia, dictionary, textbook collection, primary source material, and other resources created using the same unique consensus-based and volunteer-driven model that is most often associated with **Wikipedia**. Very impressive in its depth as well as breadth, with extensive documentation to explain its creation process for skeptics. <http://www.wikimedia.org/>

**iTunesU** and **Youtube EDU** - Basically the same idea with different delivery mechanisms. Aggregation of freely accessible videos of real lectures by professors at top-notch universities, on every topic of study imaginable. <http://youtube.com/education> and iTunesU accessible through Apple's proprietary iTunes program downloadable from <http://itunes.com/>

**P2PU** (Peer2Peer University) - "*Learning for everyone, by everyone, about almost anything.*" A newly-launched 'people's education' program. 6-week courses offered on university-level topics with 8-14 students each, organized by a course volunteer and co-taught by the students themselves utilizing the wealth of free materials available online. <http://p2pu.org/>

**Internet Archive** - Essentially an online multimedia library, including fan-taped copies of many concerts, archived copies of old websites, public-domain books, and more. Great if you like music while you study. <http://archive.org/>

**TEDTalks** - "*Ideas worth spreading.*" Free videos on youtube of 18-minute conference lectures by scholars from all different fields, briefly detailing their interesting theories on the world. Generally very little, if any, underlying reasoning of the ideas given in the videos themselves (though you can always research more yourself!), only the speakers' findings and conclusions. <http://ted.com>