

Q&A\_5 - Aug 7, 2023

*Q: What are some good resources, texts, for beginning learners (Dharma neophytes) – those who have not yet woken up?*

A: Don Miguel Ruiz's *The Four Agreements* is a good introductory text for almost anyone. Business people enjoy it, which says something of its quick, effective, and accessible nature. Krishnamurti's work can be useful when appropriate, but he has limitations as a teacher. You might recommend him to a learner who is more cerebrally inclined. Another dense one would be Idries' Shah's *The Sufis*, but again be mindful of who you are recommending the text to. Only a serious reader – perhaps a history buff – would be interested in a book like that. For Christians and vacillating non-Christians, Scott Peck's two books are helpful (*People of the Lie* and *The Road Less Travelled*). Eckhart Tolle's work is great. He has at least two books that are useful (*The Power of Now* and *A New Earth*). Rupert Spira's work is probably too advanced for a beginner, unless they are already in Dharma. Thomas Cleary's work is wonderful but it requires focus, concentration, and discipline. Of course, the rewards are commensurate with that, but in general, the only book of his that has really sold well is the *Art of War*, sad to say. He will not be appreciated fully for another 400 years, at which point he will be considered a Buddhist saint of the highest order. It is hard to know what to recommend.

There is an art to it. But the book that I used with the best result for people that are totally naive to all this work is *The Four Agreements*. As a general rule of thumb, if a book has been popular, you might feel more comfortable recommending it. You must be sensitive to the learner. If you are going to be helping other folks you need to keep up with the latest teaching technologies and the latest verbiage. Of course, nothing of the Teaching has changed, but if you want to get across to folks, you must speak in a language to which they can respond.

The following *Mulla Nasrudin* story conveys something of this: Nasrudin was entering the train station when he heard a commotion on the tracks. He rushed to the scene to find a group of people trying to help a tax man out of the tracks who had fallen in. A train was inbound and time was of the essence. The people who came to the tax man's aid shouted "give me your hand!" repeatedly, but the poor soul would not grab their hands. Nasrudin walked up to the edge of the tracks and said "out of the way, let me do it." He knelt and said "here, *take* my hand!" The taxman promptly grabbed Nasrudin's hand and was saved in the nick of time. Nasrudin reprimanded the crowd: "Fools! Never ask the tax man to *give* you anything."

Many people have not had the great fortune of merely hearing of enlightenment. The vast majority of the world has not heard of such an opportunity, let alone believed it as an equally available, inherent quality for all of us. The fact that this is not more widely known is a temporary problem, as I see it. Before people had to travel to get any teaching. In my day, it was tough because everything like Zen was in another language; Buddhism and Chan in Japanese or Chinese; Tibetan Buddhist traditions and origins and Sanskrit. Now, that problem is solved. Machines can give us instantaneous translations, and their accuracy is increasing. So now it is a matter of selecting those parts that are most germane, whatever the level of the student and – as goes the admonition of the Sufis – in accord with the level and capacity of the student to understand.

Another point is to shield the shorn lamb from the wind, referring to the fact that when you possess truth, you could be devastating to naive or inexperienced people. Instead,

you can use your knowledge to help others along sometimes very rapidly if their consciousness is open. You do not want to shut that possibility down. By inadvertently using a word that is misinterpreted you can hinder someone's progression. You must be very careful. This involves all the problems of capitalization. For example, big, or capital 'M' mind and small 'm' mind are two completely different things. Distinguishing them is very important. You can see how over the centuries teachers have struggled to find appropriate words for Mind: Buddha, kingdom of heaven for the Christians, ablation of the ego for the more secular. There is an infinity of names for something with no form or characteristics whatsoever. 'Names can be given, but not fixed labels', as the *Tao Te Ching* has it in Cleary's translation. It is tough to teach what is Love with a capital 'L', or Truth with a capital 'T', or Beauty with a capital 'B', or God.

The only characteristics we can even mention really are Love and Creativity, far beyond human capacity to imagine. So, you do not want to approach this stuff casually or in the wrong way because you can blow someone's circuits. You must teach vocabulary and then you have to use vocabulary. It is always a continuous process. The Sufis understood better than anyone else that we have to update constantly to teach according to time, people, culture, current methodology, state of religion, and so on.

*Q: What are some of the landmines we can run into when teaching? For example, please comment on this excerpt from Saadi (from Idries Shah's The Sufis):*

A man had an ugly daughter. He married her to a blind man because nobody else would have her. A doctor offered to restore the blind man's sight, but the father would not allow him for fear that he would divorce his daughter...[pause ]

*A:* It is gorgeous (laughing) . As you can imagine, there are some things not to be discussed in public except to warn people of 'landmines' as you put it. One that people might want to know about and that is not secret is that if you are going to start working or messing around with energies and the chakras, you better know what you are doing. You can really screw things up very easily with half-baked amounts of information. People do this all the time, messing around with their shockwaves, moving energies around, and they have no idea what they are doing. Then we see the side effects of that.

Another one is something that is equally true of psychiatry. There are psychoactive elements to mysticism. Used improperly, these elements can detract from learning or sidetrack people. For example, some texts are psychoactive, some procedures are equally psychoactive or more so, and then there's mind to mind transmissions and a bunch of other things that must be taken in order. Before you go into the living room, you have to enter the foyer; before the foyer, the door; before the door you must park the car and walk down the driveway; before that you must make the drive, and so on. This order is yet another reason, as the Sufis mention, that teachers play an essential role. This is why there are lamas and sheikhs.

Of course, it is possible to do it on one's own, but you could easily waste a lifetime, and many have. When I first woke up, I had no idea what I was doing. I was just working as hard as I could to get to where I wanted to get and I was using the Ngöndro as best I knew how on my own in my house. I made a lot of mistakes in practice and saw many others do so. There is a lot of cleanup afterwards when you do it like this. We can and should learn from observing the mistakes and the successes of others. That is the great thing about the Sufi and

the Tibetan traditions that you do not get in Zen until later: becoming morally, socially, and egoically cleaned up.

*Q: Please reiterate your comment about the relation of this work to AGI.*

A: While it is basic stuff in the beginning – psychology, self-help, a bit of coaching, “do not lie, do not take advantage of others” – the vast majority of people take no interest in it, especially not the later work. It is a shame. We only get one opportunity – only humans can get enlightened. With extremely intelligent machines coming, AGI, people face a lot of anxiety thinking of them. Of course AIs will be able to accomplish everything small ‘m’ mind can, and people largely think that is the height of what it means to be human. But, the real gift for mankind, big ‘M’ Mind, the machines cannot reach. They cannot be conscious. There has always been urgency in this world for more people to move toward the next level of consciousness, and hopefully for some to move to Enlightenment (Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed). This is the most precious endowment that humanity has and my opinion has not changed for over 40 years on that. This is the purpose of human life and is the sum of the work we are doing. It is the point at which we diverge from the AGI.