

Q&A\_7 - Aug 8 #2, 2023

**Q:** *Can you say what Shah means in the last sentence here about a teacher “marking time”?*

“The beginner is saved from complete insensitivity because within him there is a vestigial capacity to react to ‘true gold.’ And the teacher, recognizing the innate capacity, will be able to use it as a receiving apparatus for his signals. True, in the earlier stages, the signals transmitted by the teacher will have to be arranged in such a way as to be perceptible to the inefficient and probably distorting mechanism of the receiver. But the combination of the two elements provides a basis for a working arrangement. At this stage, the teacher marks time to a great extent. (*The Sufis*, Idries Shah).

**A:** First let me say that the use of words is meticulous beyond belief. As for the last sentence, until someone wakes up, they need information more than anything. After they wake up, they need information, but of a different kind. Oftentimes the most naïve students – also the most enthusiastic commonly – have a lot of energy and want exciting material. Back in the day, everybody wanted practices. A walking meditation, something with mala beads, dressing in the robes of a Zen practitioner, the whole deal. It often became a costume party or social event masquerading as a learning environment. You can't get lost in that, because none of that matters. But it's dangerous for some people because it's vital to them. They're getting the connection they need with other people through it.

Thus, the Sangha becomes a very important element for some people. I put all that aside, as these needs – psychological, interpersonal, emotional – have to be met by any religion that's going to last. None of this is the real teaching, however. If someone is hung up on these things to the neglect of, say, reading the material, then we have a waste of time to the teacher, the student, and many others. It's too expensive to take someone through the material painstakingly for lack of their own effort. The teacher must put their time to better use. All this information has been written, edited, reviewed, and published for a reason. A lot of work went into some of these books, particularly the Sufi books or the Avatamsaka. We're talking about lifetimes of devotion for a good cause – so to squander that on the other stuff I mentioned is unfortunate.

I can testify. If a Chicano from a ranch in South Texas with my character can make it to the stage of waking up and then have the good fortune to be exposed to what I've been exposed to, anybody can do it. It may be my purpose to say that this has nothing to do with how outwardly “good” you are as a person, or how smart, or anything. It only has to do with your sincerity – and people aren't always sincere. Most are not necessarily looking for truth. They're looking for an answer to their problems. The quicker the better for them. They've often tried 10 or 20 different things – Hinduism, Sufi dancing, always bouncing around between gurus. It's all preposterous. So the teacher bears or “marks” his time. He waits in hope that the student will get the information, burn out some of the excitement, and get to learning.

Don't get me wrong, the spills, chills, and thrills are a nice part of human life. There's nothing wrong with enjoying a good party and a good time. The problem is confusing this with serious study. And serious study doesn't have to always be serious or solemn. You could just do it joyfully. This has been the best life I could have dreamt of by far, and not because of med school or my specialty, or anything. Nothing compares with this endeavor that has no characteristics I can mention. I didn't trust anybody during my lifetime, and to my detriment. But I'll say that if you're going to trust anyone about the truth, take it from dying men and women.

For 2,000 years and longer, people have been working, successfully as we will learn, to pass down this information. This generation is going to have to go through a hideously difficult transition. It's not necessary that it be difficult – it could be fun. But if you're attached to the wrong things, then there will be alarm, and alert, and difficulty. We are trying to learn how to serve God, meaning we first have to know his will. If we want to accord with the Way we have to recognize it first. And none of this excludes our mundane work. There's been many enlightened lay people; they even help run countries. But there's a lot of people who get lost on the spiritual path because they get sidetracked by chakras or this and that experience or whether this guru had sex with that person or not. Cut through this stuff, ask yourself, what is the difference between a belief and an opinion. This is something to contemplate.

People who are lazy and won't do this may say, "I can't do this spiritual work because I have a job. I need to clear everything away and I need to have my little ashram and I need to not work. I need to get rid of the kids, get rid of my husband, move to a nicer place where there's more spirit, more energy. Maybe Santa Barbara, that would be good. Just put me up in an apartment in Santa Barbara and I'll go get enlightened. you know? I have to get my outfit for it too, and the right bracelets."

Forgive me if there's some pressure in what I say, but I've been working with people for a long time. I'm talking to the walls so that the floor can hear.

*Q: On my second reading of Shah's work, I have noticed my appreciation for his writing increase dramatically. I can still tell there's depths still to plumb, but I would like to comment on how remarkable these texts are. To that end, could you please comment on the use of the word "liberal" in this passage from Idries Shah's *The Sufis*, and the Saadi quotes he mentions:*

"Generosity and liberality are two of the important factors which, when applied energetically and correctly, go to prepare the candidate for Sufihood. When it is said, 'you get nothing for free' there is very much more to it than that. The manner of giving, the thing which is given, the effect of the giving upon the individual, these are the factors which determine the progress of the Sufi. There is a strong link between the concept of persistence and bravery with that of liberality. In ordinary discipleship, as known in other systems, where the inner understanding of the mechanism of progress is in disarray, the disciple will think in terms of struggle. He gets nothing without struggle, he thinks, and he is encouraged to think in this way.

Saadi pinpoints the problem in one of his smaller aphorisms. A person, he says, went to a sage and asked whether it was better to be valorous or liberal. He answered, 'he who is liberal does not have to be valorous.'" (Idries Shah, *The Sufis*)

**A:** This is dense, rich, articulate, and absolutely accurate. Each reading of Shah reveals more, and I simply have to get the information I have out to people. How could I ever repay what these people have done for me? The Sufis, Shah, and so many others. There's no possible way to repay them. If you ever get even a glimmer of what they did, what they went through, what they were willing to fight for, stand up for, and die for. Ultimately it doesn't matter who said the words, that's not what's important. I certainly don't matter in any of this, but what they have transmitted matters more than anything. This is a long tradition and I'm late to it.

I believe Shah reports in his work a Sufi quote, from one of the old masters, "ordinary men repent their sins. The wise repent their heedlessness." We repent not seeing what's in

front of us, as clear as the hand in front of our face. You have been doing this work only a few months and have gotten to a second reading of his canon with greater understanding in that time. For many people this could take years because of that heedlessness, not knowing the way or having a good teacher. Your mind has luckily been prepared to read by your schooling, as well. Do you know what Doris Lessing said about reading? She said she didn't know how to read until she was 65. Doris Lessing, Nobel laureate (though that's not what matters) and likely the best author of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And she was telling the truth. I can say the same for me having lived past that age and done a lot of this work. You may read well for an academic, or lawyer, or whatever your profession. But through this work you can soon begin to learn to read well, period. Along with writing well, these are superpowers in the new world.

This is exceedingly necessary for thinking in these times. People don't know which direction to head. In each of our disciplines we're looking for solutions and coming up with old answers to new problems, and we are failing. In psychiatry we see we've had, who knows, 100,000 deaths from overdoses over a period and increasing suicide rates. What do 80% or more of us say and do in response? Prescribe pills and medications like we're candy bar dispensers. This is our idea of evolution, making drugs easy to get from big pharma. This is not to criticize good medications, they can be lifesaving – they can literally annihilate some suffering. I'm saying that our mentality has to grow up. We cannot do medicine or law or anything just for money. It's corrosive. It's destructive. It's a horrible life.

I've dealt with really wealthy and successful people. They're just like you and me. They're miserable. They realize what they're doing doesn't matter as you get older and as you're approaching death. At that time there's much more suffering, remorse, and regret. This is not woo-woo, or even "spiritual" if the word steers you away. This is basic. This is psychology 101, but people forget it and do stupid things. We waste our human life and there's no greater regret than that. I've known people personally who all they had to say at the end of their life is that it was misspent. That was going to be the title of their memoir: "A Misspent Life." And they were right, peace be upon them.

There's a lot of stuff in me that I'd like to get out and most of it's not written down anywhere because these teachers don't write stuff down unless it's good for the general public. They don't want to hurt anybody with premature teachings.

**Now for the quote.** I think it was Rumi who might have said "provide morsels of wisdom for your soul." That struck me as odd when I first read it, but now I know that it's really my hobby. I treasure these teachings and they stay with you as your understanding grows. Remember too, that we are working with an English translation. The original Arabic, or Persian, is infinitely more rich.

When you're approached with something like this, it helps to get an Oxford English Dictionary, or dictionary of etymology. (You really should use one from at least as early as the 1960s, because they get changed to the detriment of the language. The cultural revolution that we're in now began in the late 40s or the 50s, and really hit its stride in the 60s. It began to contaminate the dictionaries in the 70s, 80s and 90s. For example the word psychiatry used to refer to the soul, psyche, or spirit. Now it means brain or mind, a major shift.) If we look up 'liberal' in these dictionaries we get the following:

Circa 1384: free and giving, generous, magnanimous

Circa 1400s: free from prejudice

Circa 1400-1600s: ample, full, large

Circa 1500s: free from restraint, speaking or acting freely unrestrained by prudence or decorum

Circa 1780s: free from bias, prejudice, or bigotry – open minded, tolerant

And for ‘bigot’, or ‘bigotry’ around the same times we get:

obstinate or unreasonable attachment to a belief, practice faction.

a religious hypocrite, a superstitious adherent of religion, or a person considered to adhere unreasonably or obstinately, obstinately to a particular religious belief or practice

The net effect of these shows us how many meanings one could possibly glean from Saadi. Three come to mind for me: liberality is a paramita. If someone is generous and free enough, unattached to some ideology, then that person is free to give their life if need be. Another interpretation relates to warfare, which is tangential to the interpretation I just mentioned. A third one still is that Insight is closely related to liberality and one’s capacity. With Insight into Truth one can be ultimately liberal and free from the need for valor. One understands that nothing can touch oneself. “Do what you’d like with my body, mind, or brain. They all will leave and have nothing to do with me anyway.” Keep in mind that freedom is another word for “nothing to lose.”

To this end, some people’s paths are as soldiers – they will face real physical danger. And they will have a short journey relative to the rest of us. The recognition of this alone will make you cry. The quote, at another level, means that one does not necessarily have to be on the front lines the way Mohammed or Jesus was. But that doesn’t detract from their efforts even the slightest bit. It’s terrible what wars are waged. We kill mothers, sons, and daughters. We’re going to kill so many more the way things are headed, and it’s us Americans who are responsible yet again. We have to do something. I didn’t and I’m ashamed. We stopped Vietnam and we thought we learned our lesson. Evidently we didn’t.

It just gets worse, and there’s individuals we can name who are part of the problem. It’s our duty as Americans to look into it. If you’re sufficiently liberal you’ll prevent war. All Kim Jung Il wanted and all Kim Jong Un wants is a little respect. All the Ukrainians want is a little freedom. The Russians just want to feel secure. It’s not that complicated. There are ways to provide people with what they really want. We don’t have to always go back to the same old “solution” of killing people we can’t afford to lose. And we kill them when they’re young.

Where are we as a civilization? We’ve thrown out everything of value. Beauty. Truth. Wisdom. Restraint. Care for children. Proportion. Balance. Of course we’re going to collapse. You recently asked me the difference between sadness and sorrow. Sadness is when you lose something, that you love or you care about – or someone dies. Sorrow is when you watch humanity – and you’re a human – do the same stupid, ugly, hideous thing over and over and over and over, and you’re sorry for their ignorance. And you’re sad. Mankind didn’t have a chance. At this level, once we had a mind, we were lost. That’s where our troubles come from.

And I’m not saying the mind is a bad thing. I’m saying that the mind makes us do stupid things we wouldn’t do if we were just another animal. Look at a dog or a cat or a rabbit or a crow. They don’t form armies and torture each other to death. That’s a primate thing. And so here we are. Anybody who says it’s nothing to be a human, who cares. You just go down there to Earth for a hundred years, and come back, it’s nothing. Well, let them try it first, and then they can talk about it.

I believe another statement of this is in the Torah, or maybe a Muslim text – where-from is unimportant, they all derive from the same source. A couple of angels challenge God saying, “those humans are all greedy. They’re all full of lust. They only always

see money and tits and asses. That's all they care about.” They criticize these humans and God says something like “okay, I will send the two of you down there, but don't take advantage of the fact that you have angel powers.” The angels agree and then they go down.

Of course, they get lost in gambling, women, booze, all the fun and parties, the list goes on. These are the same guys who were judging the human beings from above, saying the angels were better because they would withstand temptation – that they knew better. They cause a mess in the human realm and God brings them back, scolding them for the obvious hypocrisy. They shrug their shoulders and say “well, God, just as usual, you were right, huh?”

From the other side, in Reality, it's hilarious. But from this side, there's so much sorrow, so much pain to it. With this work you understand both. It's yet another reason why this endeavor is the journey of a lifetime, and I recommend it to anybody who's got the courage, the energy, the discipline, and the will to do so. All of these come from understanding what's at stake.

What the Sufis did for me and everyone, in addition to everything else, was make it very clear that what they were talking about was a priceless pearl; an unspeakably valuable thing. And these guys know wealth beyond the vast majority of us. So for them to say that this is more valuable than everything in their kingdom put together is really something. And they're right. I thank all of those people. They saved my life. It's all a lot for any human being to consider. We ask what we're doing now and why we're doing it. It's painful, but the pain isn't sadness, it's sorrow. We didn't ask to be primates I would think, but it's a question in the first place that doesn't make any sense. Still, these are the kinds of questions we ask, and you won't get any answers while we're here. You'll get them, but not yet.

Let me sit down in the room to save time. Someone's going to help get it. So, if you know enough, if you have enough insight, you don't need courage, right? Uh, you need courage to get insight sometimes, I mean, sometimes when you're, when you're in deeper, uh, modes of consciousness, so to say. And sometimes it gets scary.

I mean, there's nothing to be afraid of. But sometimes you get scared. And you'll see when you go deeper and deeper and deeper. But there's nothing to be afraid of. And it's hard to remember that when you're petrified out of your mind. But when the time comes [00:23:00] and you're asked the question, well, are you willing to leap?

Are you willing to give your life for this truth? Now, I don't want to be too dramatic. And I don't want to explain. Suggested that part of your journey, but in mine, that question came up. No, this is not the etymology. The Dictionary of Etymology. Oxford.

It may be on the other shelf, back there. Well, what did you find in your dictionary? I have... Which dictionary are you

**A:** You're going to need to get hard copy because who knows what's going to happen.

If there's a nuclear war, they're going to wipe out all the electronics completely. We're going to be down back to book, you know, when they say the next war, I don't know who's going to win the next war, but whoever the next, the next war after that will be fought with sticks and stones. Yeah, I've heard that.[00:25:00]

Okay. Well, I went to school with the professors of Kissinger and we're in real danger. We've got a demented corrupt man as the commander in chief of the most powerful army in the world, and he's been found out. And the normal thing that happens in history is usually if you try to start a war, so everybody forgets about the pandemic, the vaccine, and, uh, Fauci and, and CDC and NIH and Biden and all that stuff.

And so that's the oldest trick in the book. We should expect it. So. Expect it means taking precious things and putting them in such a position so that they'll be saved. And so, you gotta get a real dictionary, and you'll need it for law school anyway. Yeah, I'm