

## CRAZY WISDOM: UNCONVENTIONAL BEHAVIOR BY A TEACHER

*'None attains to the Ultimate Truth until a thousand  
honest people have called him a heretic.'*

*Junaid*

### **Unusual or Unexpected Behaviour**

- o A teacher's actions may seem inexplicable to an outsider. "The teacher may appear nonsensical when he is talking or behaving in terms of an extra cognition, imperceptible to the ordinary man."

The behaviour of the teacher may appear at times bizarre, unpredictable or meaningless; he may act in ways that are flippant, domineering, cold, manic or tyrannical, he may scream as though gripped by fury, sit in disapproving silence or set the disciple a flurry of apparently inconsequential tasks. Any outsider might well conclude from his behaviour that he is mad; even the novice himself may realize only long afterwards what the teacher's true intentions were. (1)

- o In certain situations the behaviour of a teacher may appear shocking and seemingly transgress conventional moral standards. It may be virtually impossible to understand such actions unless the true motivation of the teacher is known or perceived.

One day, in the monastery of Nan Chuan, the monks of the East and West wing had a dispute over the possession of a cat. They all came to Nan Chuan for arbitration. Holding a knife in one hand and the cat in the other, Nan Chuan said, 'If any one of you can say the right thing, this cat will be saved; otherwise it will be cut into two pieces!' None of the monks could say anything. Nan Chuan then killed the cat. In the evening, when Chao Chou returned to the monastery, Nan Chuan asked him what he would have said had he been there at the time. Chao Chou took off his straw sandals, put them upon his head, and walked out. Whereupon Nan Chuan commented, 'Oh, if you had only been here, the cat would have been saved!' (2)

- o The ability to teach in unexpected ways is similar to the physician who prescribes a treatment correctly even though outside observers fail to see the necessity or the relevance of the procedures being followed.

*Q: Why do teachers often make people uncomfortable, or even hostile, by what they say and do?*

*A: If you are a surgeon lancing a boil, and it hurts, does the patient say, 'Why am I being made uncomfortable?' or 'What is being done is a means to an end?' (3)*

- o At times teachers may apply a powerful emotional shock to provide experiences conducive to the spiritual ripening and development of a student.

In certain personalities certain shocks are needed to turn the mind out of a groove. The needed shocks come in a form of intense emotional excitement such as anger, indignation, humiliation, etc. Such passions, when incited to a certain degree of intensity, acquire an extraordinary power to break through the limits of consciousness which we generally set for it. In other words, an intense emotional disturbance often awakens in us a mysterious power of which we have ordinarily been unaware. (4)

- o A sage may use 'deception' or indirect teaching to obtain positive results.

*Q: How can you justify influencing people against their wishes. Can any good come from deception?*

A: You could call deception doing something without the knowledge of another person. Well, what about secret charity? What about helping someone while pretending not to? Your idea of deception is likely to be flawed, to say the least; people use these catch-phrases without thinking about them.

Now, about influencing people against their wishes, listen to a story:

There was once a man who went to a doctor and said: 'I know that medicine will not help my disease: both because of my experience with doctors and through my own beliefs. I want you to cure me, if you are as wise as they say, without the use of medicines.'

The doctor gave him a stick, and said, 'Take this stick and use it for a three-mile hike every day for twenty days, and then return to me.'

When he returned, the man was cured. The doctor said, 'You did not believe in medication; so I put a powdered medicament on the handle of the stick. When your hand sweated, the powder acted on your tissues.'

Now, as for acting against wishes, which WAS the patient's real wish: to be cured or to avoid medication? (5)

- o One characteristic of a teacher is the ability to play a 'role' appropriate to a given situation.

Another aspect of Gurdjieff was his ability on the one hand to make himself almost invisible and on the other to make himself appear like one of the Rishis, blazing with energy and radiance. When visitors were being shown round the grounds they would sometimes pass him with only a glance, like an American who was talking to me about what a wonderful man Mr. Gurdjieff must be, and that he would like to meet him. Just then Gurdjieff passed by and went into the house. 'That is Mr. Gurdjieff,' I said. 'Well,' he replied, 'isn't that queer! I spoke to him in the grounds and thought he was the gardener.'

In ordinary life people play roles unconsciously. Gurdjieff played them consciously, and those who worked closely with him usually knew when he was playing a role.

In 'A Letter to a Dervish', he wrote: 'The sign of a perfected man and his particularity in ordinary life must be that in regard to everything happening outside of him, he is able to, and can as a worthy action, perform to perfection externally the part corresponding to the given situation; but at the same time never blend or agree with it.' (6)

o Historically, the behaviour of certain sages has been described as flippant or as severe, and by all the gradations between these extremes.

*Q: Are there any analogies between the use of Sufi behaviour and arguments today and the times when famous Sufis used to deal with bigots and limited understanding in the East, in the past. Perhaps there are, in humour, for instance. It seems a pity that we do not know more about the day-to-day activities of these Sufis.*

A: There are indeed analogies. One Sufi of the past who would find himself very much at home today among our contemporary limited thinkers was Nuruddin Abdur-Rahman Jami (1397-1474), a major Persian-language poet and Afghan Sufi.

Jami, in addition to writing his Sufi classics, also lived the part of the Sufi corrector of idiocy. The religious scholar Haidari of Baghdad once challenged him to a discussion. Jami asked: 'On religious law or mystical perception?' Haidari chose the first. Jami then said: 'Before we start, we must put your moustache right: according to the religious law it is too long.' Scissors were sent for, and the hairs trimmed, first on one side and then on the other, until there was nothing left. The religious scholar then withdrew, as he would have to grow another moustache to conform with the religious law before debating it.

A poet once complained to Jami that all his best thoughts had been stolen by another. Jami asked to see the poet's works, and then said: 'Yes, I can see that your poems have no meaning: the ideas must have been stolen from them...'

When he was on his deathbed, people brought in a large number of Koran-readers to recite the holy words loudly over him.

Jami raised his head. 'What is the point of all that?' he asked, 'Can't you see that I am dying?' (7)

### **The 'Path of Blame'**

o One of the most unusual types of spiritual guides is the 'crazy wisdom' teacher who employ a radical style of teaching designed to shock the conventional mind. "They are masters of inversion, proficient breakers of taboos and lovers of surprise, contradiction and ambiguity."

There is a world-wide tradition of spiritual adepts whose behavior and teachings prove shocking to ordinary moral sensibilities and challenge widely held norms of thought and conduct. These are the crazy adepts of Tibetan Buddhism, the eccentric teachers of Ch'an (Zen), the holy fools of Christianity and Islam, the *avadhutas* and *bauls* of Hinduism, and the tricksters and religious clowns of tribal traditions.

In order to teach spiritual truths, these masters often adopt quite unconventional means – certainly means that are not ordinarily associated with holy folk. Their generally outrageous behavior does not at all conform to our cherished ideas of religiosity, morality, and sanctity. (8)

- o A part of the ‘crazy wisdom’ developmental process is the achievement of a transformation created by the friction set up by the deliberate creation of an environment of blame and abuse. By enduring opprobrium a person may ‘refine’ themselves and have their resilience tested.
- o The behaviour of a ‘crazy wisdom’ teacher, the ultimate exemplar of indirect teaching who achieves results by oblique action, usually baffles observers. “Students suspect the nature of this activity in proportion to their degree of inner perception, but the activity of the “crazed saint” remains incomprehensible to outsiders.”

A fair amount of literature exists on the activities of teachers in the “crazed saint” pattern. The following is an attempt to summarize his qualities.

1. Supernatural powers.
2. Healing.
3. Physical indulgences.
4. Takes money.
5. Redistributes money, gifts, etc.
6. Never withholds actions because of lack of money.
7. Exercises are an alteration of harmony and opposition, of piety and apparent impiety.
8. Goes against the norms of the society in which he lives and works.
9. Is never understood, because people who support him seek to conceal his “excesses” as quirks and not as an essential part of his operations; also because people do not recognize that some of his actions are illustrative, miming the weaknesses of others.
10. Is opposed by the orthodox authorities, civil and religious.
11. Attracts many people who follow only the lure of the strange, who are thought to be his disciples, creating an incorrect outer impression of his activities and associates.
12. Has dance, music, or other physical movements, exercises thought to be religious by the converts, to be improper by the orthodox.
13. Has spent a great deal of time in mortification and also in indulgence. The twin operation of these, their polarity, releases in him a strange power. He attempts to release it in those with whom he is in touch as well.
14. Usually only a small (“acceptable”) part of what he says and does is reported, and this becomes respectable, may even become a sub-cult. Or he may even come to be absorbed, after his death, as a saint by the orthodox church. (9)

- o In Sufism, teachers of ‘crazy wisdom’ are termed ‘Malamati’ or followers of the ‘Path of Blame.’ They may find it necessary to incur feelings of opposition in others, in order to challenge fixed ideas and assumptions. The ‘Malamati’ procedure involves incurring blame for a higher purpose and “may completely cut across all ordinary comfortable beliefs that one can judge by appearances.”

A Sufi may allow himself to be attacked, to dramatize a situation. This is known as the Malamati technique: incurring reproach to illustrate its absurdity, or the shallowness of the attacker, or the superficiality of the audience. (10)

- o Teachers of the ‘Malamati’ persuasion (‘People of Opprobrium’) deliberately annoy people and behave badly so that “only the sincere and perceptive among would-be disciples can bear their company.”

*Q: You have spoken of the Path of Blame. Can you say more about this?*

A: The teacher incurs ‘blame’. He may, for instance, attribute a bad action to himself, in order to teach a disciple the way to behave without directly criticizing him. Direct criticism of a bad characteristic cannot always be used to overcome that obstacle. This is where the Malamati expertise comes in.

If you say ‘I have such a bad habit of doing or thinking such and such’ you remove the personal aspect and prevent the remark from being fought off or absorbed by the learner’s self-esteem.

Many people follow the Malamati (blameworthy) behaviour, even making themselves out to be wrongdoers, in order to highlight these characteristics in others. The reason for this is that when a person sees someone saying or doing something, he will tend to judge him by himself. This is what Rumi and others call ‘Holding up a mirror to oneself and calling the image the other person.’ (11)

- o Individuals who follow the ‘Malamati’ approach do not worry about appearances, ‘image’ or the impression made on others. They incur reproach, take no care with their reputes, and simply say and do what they consider right. “Enduring the criticisms of others may be part of doing good to them.”

Centuries before the Zen masters in Japan found that you could disarm an opponent by using his strength against him, the Sufis did the same thing with words and appearances. It fitted in well with their contention that so-called ‘reality’ is in any case comparative, subjective. This is how it works: Someone vilifies a Sufi. He answers: ‘Everything that you say against me is true, and it does not even go far enough. In fact, in the nature of things, you can only have an incomplete idea of how bad I am. I am the one who knows all the secret failings and shortcomings in me, and it is I therefore who am an expert on my iniquity.’ (12)

- o Practitioners of the ‘Malamati’ path often directly engage and absorb negative energy found in certain people, situations or places.

One of the functions of the Malamatis is to involve themselves in or provoke circumstances which could have considerable negative and destructive effect unless one of these persons is present to absorb the negative.

Quite simply, the amount of negative which a member of the Malamati can absorb and ground could literally, physically and psychologically, reduce a normal person to ashes. (13)

## The Sufi Teaching Figure 'Mulla Nasrudin'

*'Enjoy yourself, or try to learn – you will annoy someone. If you do not – you will annoy someone.'*  
*Sayings of Mulla Nasrudin*

o Mulla Nasrudin is a folk hero of timeless appeal who plays the part of the 'wise fool' and countless other characters in many Sufi teaching stories. "His role changes, sometimes he is the sage, sometimes the fool: he is courtier, beggar, physician, judge and teacher."

The Nasrudin stories, known throughout the Middle East, constitute one of the strangest achievements in the history of metaphysics. Superficially, most of the Nasrudin stories may be used as jokes. They are told and retold endlessly in the teahouses and the caravanserais, in the homes and on the radio waves, of Asia. But it is inherent in the Nasrudin story that it may be understood at any one of many depths. There is the joke, the moral – and the little extra which brings the consciousness of the potential mystic a little further on the way to realization. (14)

o Mulla Nasrudin frequently appears in Sufi teaching stories as a comic figure. His words and actions are often inexplicable and may appear mad to the onlooker. "Humour cannot be prevented from spreading; it has a way of slipping through the patterns of thought which are imposed upon mankind by habit and design."

One Nasrudin story, showing how the right result comes for the Sufi through a special mechanism ("the wrong method," to the uninitiated) explains much of the seeming eccentricities of Sufis:

Two men came before Nasrudin when he was acting in his capacity of magistrate. One said, "This man has bitten my ear – I demand compensation." The other said, "He bit it himself." Nasrudin adjourned the case and withdrew to his chambers. There he spent half an hour trying to bite his own ear. All that he succeeded in doing was falling over in the attempt, and bruising his forehead. Then he returned to the courtroom.

"Examine the man whose ear was bitten," he ordered. "If his forehead is bruised, he did it himself, and the case is dismissed. If not, the other one did it, and the bitten man is compensated with three silver pieces." The right verdict had been arrived at by seemingly illogical methods.

Here Nasrudin arrived at the correct answer, irrespective of the apparent logic of the situation. In another story, himself adopting the role of fool ("the Path of Blame," to the Sufi), Nasrudin illustrates, in extreme form, ordinary human thinking.

Someone asked Nasrudin to guess what he had in his hand.

"Give me a clue," said the Mulla.

"I'll give you several," said the wag. "It is shaped like an egg, egg-sized, looks, tastes and smells like an egg. Inside it is yellow and white. It is liquid within before you cook it, coalesces with heat. It was moreover, laid by a hen . . ."

"I know!" interrupted the Mulla. "It is some sort of cake." (15)

- o Nasrudin's humorous exploits are employed by the Sufis as a teaching device to illustrate the characteristic patterns of human thought and behaviour.

The Mulla is variously referred to as very stupid, improbably clever, the possessor of mystical secrets. The Sufis, who believe that deep intuition is the only real guide to knowledge, use these stories almost like exercises. They ask people to choose a few which especially appeal to them, and to turn them over in the mind, making them their own. Teaching masters of the dervishes say that in this way a breakthrough into a higher wisdom can be affected. (16)

### **Inexplicable Conduct in Daily Life**

- o A teacher will violate accepted norms of behaviour or the superficial canons of appearance in order to demonstrate to those who are perceptive that conduct alone does not demonstrate interior worth.

To be at the stage of unconcern for appearances is not the same as the deliberate adoption of untoward behaviour. But the 'contrary to expectation' conduct and words which are attributed to many teachers is traceable to the working of this characteristic, and also to a lot of their innovative and perceptive mentation on lower levels, too; for it indicates the absence of hampering assumptions.

Inwardly, this condition is that of the sovereign individual, whose perceptions and understanding, not rules or dogma, motivate him or her. (17)

- o By attacking the derivative and secondary, a teacher will draw attention to the essential or real element in a situation or event.
- o Although spiritual masters generally condemn violence, there may be certain situations where apparently violent behaviour is necessary and appropriate.

All acts of violence are in principle born from egotistical states. An egoless man is therefore, in principle, non-violent. But non-violence should not be turned into a sort of taboo. There are certain definite cases where the use of force, of compulsion, even violence, is imperative. In such cases the egoless man will make use of such force and may apparently act with violence. But it goes without saying that this will be a mere appearance since his action is completely void of desire or fear.

The non-egotistic man, from his very nature, neutralizes violence and spreads around himself the peace which is within him. However, he may be led – I repeat very exceptionally – to employ force, his motivation being pure, that is non-egotistic. (18)

- o Unexpected behaviour may have an inner purpose and teaching function.

*Q: Why do teachers display behaviour which seems at variance with that of people of insight and of holiness?*

A: One might as well ask why dictionaries have so many words with conflicting meanings in them. Here is a classical instance of teaching through behaviour:

Abu-Uthman relates that he was once with Abu-Hafs, who had with him some raisins. Abu-Uthman took up a single raisin and placed it in his mouth. The other man seized him by the throat, crying out:

“Thief, why are you eating my raisin?”

Abu-Uthman explained:

‘I believed in your freedom from attachment to things of the world, and I knew of your unselfishness, so I took a raisin.’

Abu-Uthman said:

‘Idiotic man! You are trusting me while I cannot trust myself (to be unselfish).’

Abu-Hafs was demonstrating that one cannot rely upon reputation, but must develop to the point of perceiving inwardly what the real status of another individual is. (19)

- o Conduct-teaching may involve playing a role or pretending to be other than what one really is in order to illustrate an essential truth.

Saadi reports one quite characteristic example of conduct-teaching, from the life of Hatim al-Asamm: ‘The Deaf’. Some didacticists, he says, hold that Hatim of Balkh was deaf: do not believe it. One day he saw a fly caught in a web and spoke to it, for the edification of those present, saying that it had been deceived by something attractive and desirable, but had only managed to get itself caught.

But this analogy of the human condition was further given point by the audience when they realized that Hatim’s attention had been attracted to the buzzing of the fly, which other people could hardly hear: and yet it was he who was supposed to be deaf.

Hatim explained that he was not deaf at all. He pretended that he could not hear because then he would not be expected to listen to praise or opposition intended to influence him. If people thought him deaf, those who surrounded him would say what they really thought about him. (20)

- o An important teaching method in Eastern schools of higher development is challenging customary models of thought and breaking habit-patterns.

In the West, spiritual unification is generally thought to be the finding of common denominators in faith or action. In the habit-breaking methods, the first step is to state that unity underlies diversity, and diversity must be exposed as secondary and unessential before the unity can be found. Systematized practices are merely cloaks or frames by means of which something is achieved. Prince Dara Shikoh was a noted exponent of this iconoclastic method, as was Sarmad. ‘Unless and until a man can see that all ritual, all observance, all idols are useful for some things and useless in another sense,’ said the latter, ‘he will remain in chains – even if they are golden chains, made out of gold coins spent by his ancestors.’ The method could be summarized as ‘shock’. Students are expected to abandon completely their religious or

psychological framework, dogma or system, changing it entirely for another one, so that they can develop cognitions of a far higher order than those which they get from repeating actions laid down in the past. (21)

### **Perception of a Higher Order**

- o The behaviour of a spiritually enlightened individual may be at variance with the norms of society since it is ultimately based on higher understanding.
- o Many realized beings have been called idiots or mad, since this is the only conclusion that an ordinary person can reach about behaviour which is linked with 'something beyond'.
- o One of the characteristics of higher knowledge is to 'think the unthinkable' by supposing developments which are not acceptable to current opinion or normal ways of thinking. All conceptions are possible to the realized being, while for the ordinary person fashions in thought have to change before they can entertain certain concepts.
- o In some cases a teacher may act quickly and paradoxically in a situation based on a higher perception of events. According to the Sufi Haidar Gul: 'There is a limit beyond which it is unhealthy for mankind to conceal truth in order not to offend those whose minds are closed.'

This is made manifest in the tradition of the Wise, who have handed down the tale of the Horseman and the Snake.

A horseman from his point of vantage saw a poisonous snake slip down the throat of a sleeping man. The horseman realized that if the man were allowed to sleep the venom would surely kill him.

Accordingly he lashed the sleeper until he was awake. Having no time to lose, he forced the man to a place where there were a number of rotten apples lying upon the ground and made him eat them. Then he made him drink large gulps of water from a stream.

Finally, when he was near to exhaustion, and dusk was falling, the man fell to the ground and vomited out the apples, the water and the snake. When he saw what had come out of him, he realized what had happened, and begged the forgiveness of the horseman.

Those who are endowed with knowledge have responsibility. Those who are not, have none beyond what they can conjecture. (22)

- o Etiquette and proper behaviour are relative to the situation. "If a house is on fire, you will act accordingly."

A Sufi may often, during many of the stages of the search, seem to be unheeding of the feelings of others, or otherwise out of step with society. When this is so, it is because he has glimpsed the true character of a situation behind the apparent situation visible only partially to others. He acts in the best possible way, though he does not always know why he has said or done a thing.

Jalaluddin Rumi, in *Fihi Ma Fihi*, gives an illustration of just such a situation. A drunken man saw a King pass by with a highly prized horse. He called out some uncomplimentary remark about the horse. The King was angry, and summoned him to his presence later. “At that time,” explained the man, “a drunkard was standing on that roof. I am not him, for he is gone.” The King was pleased with the reply, and rewarded him. The drunk is the Sufi, just as is the sobered man. The Sufi, in his state of association with true reality, acted in a certain way. As a result he was rewarded. He had also performed a function in explaining to the King that people are not always responsible for their actions. He had, too, given the King a chance to perform a good action. (23)

- o A knowledge of cause and effect underlies many of the unusual words and actions of genuine teachers.

Most people have no idea that the most trivial-seeming actions may have extremely far-reaching effects. Only occasionally are cause and effect seen in a short run within a contracted time-scale, giving an equivalence of what we are talking about.

#### THE WINE AND THE FINGER

The French playwright Victorien Sardou was sitting at a table during a dinner when he upset a glass of wine. A lady by his side, to prevent the liquid staining the cloth, poured salt on it. Spilt salt, to some people, means bad luck. To counteract this, a pinch is thrown over the shoulder, and Sardou did just this.

The salt got into the eyes of the waiter who was trying to serve him, and the chicken on a plate which he held fell to the ground. The dog of the house started to gobble the chicken, and a bone lodged in his throat so that it began to choke. The hostess’s son tried to get the bone out of the dog’s throat. Now the dog turned on the youth and bit his finger so hard that it had to be amputated.

The waiter, the dog and the son of the house were all acting automatically, through the secondary self: a mixture of greed, hope, fear and conditioning. Only the woman acted for practical reasons: but her attempt to retrieve the situation was foiled by the playwright, whose second action – throwing the salt over his shoulder – set the whole train of actions going. (24)

#### Testing and Deflection of Students

- o In some spiritual traditions, such as Tibetan Buddhism, prospective disciples are exposed to difficult trials and tests before they are accepted as students.

Tibetan lamas are well known for confronting spiritual aspirants with any number of fierce tests – not least personal abuse – though, perhaps in the interest of preserving their teachings, many have adopted somewhat milder

manners with eager Western students. Traditionally, at any rate, the spiritual seeker could expect to pass through a period of trials before being accepted by a Tibetan adept teacher. And after his or her initiation, the disciple was subject to still more severe testing. There is no sanctuary for the ego-personality in spiritual discipleship. The teacher's function is precisely to make all egoic retreat impossible. And some gurus are more theatrical and ruthlessly surgical in performing this task than others. (25)

- o Certain spiritual traditions have historically used unexpected physical techniques in an effort to test disciples and open their eyes to spiritual truth.

Tokusan (780 - 866), a great monk of the late T'ang Dynasty, was noted for swinging his staff. His favorite saying was, 'No matter what you say, whether "yes" or "no," you will get thirty blows just the same.' He once gave a sermon in which he said, 'If you ask, you are at fault; if you do not, you are also in the wrong.' A monk came forward prepared to make his bow, when Tokusan struck him with his staff. The monk protested:

'I was just going to bow to you, and why this blow?'

'If I waited for you to open your mouth, the blow would be no use whatever,' said Tokusan. (26)

- o A teacher may test the fortitude of a disciple or use seemingly harsh measures in order to develop higher capacities and perceptions in the student.

In any real Tradition, one is ultimately forced to define the limits of one's own commitment to the teacher and to the Tradition, and non-conventional or shocking behaviour by the teacher is an indispensable part of the array of techniques available, so that the teacher can ensure that this testing process takes place: if a teacher did not test a pupil's trust, he or she would be cheating the pupil by preempting the pupil's ever-present option to leave.

When viewed from the outside, the normal cynical and/or conditioned view will be that the teacher is engaged in a process of self-interested manipulation: it is only when one has been able to experience the workings of the Tradition over a long period of time that one begins to realize how the time factor meshes into the individual situations and perceptions, and effects its change on the basic human material involved.

One of the hardest things for a Westerner to do is to learn to trust his or her teacher, because the entire Western intellectual tradition is based on developing a skeptical and narrowly analytical view of reality. In the Tradition we would consider such a thing to be part of the inevitable environmental or social conditioning one is subjected to, and which must be overcome. (27)

- o Playing a role is a technique used by teachers to create an impression designed to discourage or deflect unsuitable people.

Gurdjieff spoke about learning to play roles, but one should begin with something quite small and simple. He himself was a master of the technique. With officials, for example, he could play the role of a simple

man, almost devoid of intelligence, and so disarm them. Once, two psychologists from England came to the Prieuré on their way to a conference in Geneva. Gurdjieff gave them a wonderful lunch, but every time they asked him a question he turned it aside with a joke. After lunch he took them for a walk round the grounds and back to the Study House, cracking jokes and behaving like an eccentric. The men were bewildered. When they left his attitude changed. 'Now,' he said, 'they will leave me in peace to pursue my aim.' (28)

- o One classic method of deterring unsuitable people is to compel them to conclude that the teacher is worthless or insignificant. This is summed up in the phrase: 'Always be careful to make a bad impression on undesirables.'

*Q: I would like to know if you deliberately set out to affront or discourage people by what might be called dissimulation. Do you, in fact, make people think that you are not what you really are, in order to get rid of them?'*

A: You are right. You see, if you try to persuade someone of the truth of what you are saying, you may succeed or you may not. If you succeed, you may have succeeded only in inducing belief, not in communicating usefulness. If you do not succeed, you might as well get rid of the person. If you make them think that you are useless to them, this is kinder than making them think that they have not "passed a test" or anything like that.'

'Then what are you seeking in people?'

'Capacity to *be*, to serve, to understand.' (29)

- o Sometimes it may be necessary to deliberately exhibit bizarre behaviour as a means of extricating oneself from difficult situations.

I was travelling on a long-distance train with Shah and the first time the train stopped, a man got into our compartment and recognized Shah.

He started to talk to him, with a mixture of flattery (Shah was a very great man) and pompous reminiscences (he had been on travels to meet major spiritual teachers all over the world) and half-baked questions (he wanted to know how to be successful in the world and also to have spiritual peace).

After half an hour of this, Shah suddenly rolled up his eyes and moaned. Then he let out a series of shrieks and began to drink pomegranate juice from a bottle with a horrible gurgling sound. The stranger was first astonished then really frightened. When Shah went into continuous jerking and twitching, the man could stand it no longer and ran off along the corridor. Shah seemed to recover very quickly.

I asked him what had caused him to have a fit.

'It was caused by a desire to be left alone, and the knowledge that there was no other way to achieve it, when faced with a man like that!' (30)

## Unconventional Teaching Techniques

- o The unusual and sometimes bewildering methods employed by a teacher to instruct his or her pupils are a means to an end designed to bypass the logical rational mind.

Contradiction, negation, or paradoxical statement is the inevitable result of the Zen way of looking at life. The whole emphasis of its discipline is placed on the intuitive grasping of the inner truth deeply hidden in our consciousness. And this truth thus revealed or awakened within oneself defies intellectual manipulation, or at least cannot be imparted to others through any dialectical formulas. It must come out of oneself, grow within oneself, and become one with one's own being. What others – that is, ideas or images – can do is to indicate the way where lies the truth. This is what Zen masters do. And the indicators given by them are naturally unconventionally free and refreshingly original. As their eyes are always fixed on the ultimate truth itself, anything and everything they can command is utilized to accomplish the end, regardless of its logical conditions and consequences. This indifference to logic is sometimes asserted purposely, just to let us know the truth of Zen is independent of the intellect. (31)

- o The methods used by a teacher in active operation may seem unusual and, at times, at variance with ordinary social conventions.

Some of the teaching methods that Sufis use do seem rather odd to the Westerner. If I were to say to you that my favorite method of teaching is to bore the audience to death, you would be shocked. But I have just received the results of some tests, which show that English schoolchildren, when shown a group of films, remembered only the ones that bored them. Now this is consistent with our experience, but it is not consistent with Western beliefs.

Another favorite Sufi teaching method is to be rude to people, sometimes shouting them down or shooing them away, a technique that is not customary in cultivated circles. By experience we know that by giving a certain kind of shock to a person, we can – for a short period – increase his perception.

But using this knowledge has traditionally given Sufi teachers a reputation for having bad manners. The most polite thing they say about us is that we are irascible and out of control. Some people say that a spiritual teacher should have no emotions or be totally balanced. We say that a spiritual teacher must be a person who *can* be totally balanced, not one who cannot help but be balanced. (32)

- o A teacher may manifest a wide range of characteristics and behaviour in order to connect with and influence the spiritual development of their students.

Sometimes I produce or provoke situations which seem to be curious in the sense that perhaps they do not fit with what people imagine I should be doing or they should be doing.

To put it simply: I dance to my own tune, not to anybody else's. If I see

that a situation or a person is developing a form of what one might call automatic and non-productive activity, then I break the rhythm and restart it, just as you should do if you are doing an exercise and feel that you are getting into a sort of monotonous or mechanical state. To stop something or break into it is not the same thing as to destroy. (33)

- o A teacher may mimic the actions and views of others for illustrative purposes, much like a living cartoon.

Jan Fishan Khan heard that a certain narrow-minded scholar was bitterly attacking the culture, nature and ideas of one of his neighbours.

He invited both of them to a feast, and beforehand he said to the neighbour, 'Whatever I say tonight, make sure that you do not react to it in any way.'

After the meal, as is customary, the host started to orate.

He turned to the company and began to berate the very man whom the scholar was opposing. Without interruption for nearly an hour, he spoke of the man's supposed iniquities and enlarged, with quite unusual loquacity and totally devastating vituperation, upon the villainy and frightfulness of the victim.

Throughout this harangue nobody, including the neighbour, moved a muscle.

At the end of the outburst the scholar stood up and cried:

'In the name of God, let us have no more of this! I saw my own behaviour in you just now, and I cannot bear the sight. This man's patience has destroyed me!'

Jan Fishan Khan said:

'In being here tonight we all took a chance. You that our friend here might attack you; I that you might have been further inflamed by my vituperation instead of being shamed by it; and he that he might start to believe that I really was against him. Now we have solved the problem. The risk remains that the account of this interchange, passed from mouth to ear by those who do not know what we were doing, will represent our friend as weak, you as easily influenced and me as easily angered.' (34)

- o Some teachers have a reputation for being ill-tempered, due to their primary concern of reaching their objectives rather than caring what others think of them. There is a saying: 'A tactful teacher is no teacher at all.'

Some people, of course, are so wilful that even if you tell them you are not going to compromise with fixed biases, they will continue to battle. In such cases the teacher will disappoint their expectations by making himself out to be unsuitable to the student, borrowing from the *Malamati* techniques. Even then, the delinquent student may not be able to understand what is going on, and will put all kinds of fanciful interpretations on the matter. (35)

- o The behaviour of a teacher who possesses unfamiliar knowledge of a higher order may have to accord with the need to communicate such knowledge, and not with the expectations of the

student. “The teacher, at least in some systems, will sacrifice his repute, even, for the sake of the effectiveness of his teaching.”

The common denominator which I have again and again noted during over forty years of living among and studying the beliefs of people of the East (particularly India, the Khyber, Kashmir and Turkey) has been one which probably effectively prevents the Westerner from studying efficiently under such a person. There are exceptions, of course, but the concept is so strange that I can only call it ‘Inconsistency’. The teacher will seem to be, at different times, impatient, vacillatory, inconsistent, lacking in foresight. His Western disciples will regularly try to ignore or explain away these techniques (for techniques they undoubtedly are) and in doing so will miss the intended point. In the West, we cannot bear untidiness, lack of answers to questions, absence of a system which we try to find and to cause to work. These things work admirably in ordinary organizations, but according to the observed workings of mystical schools, they are a hindrance. There is an additional barrier. If the alteration of mood, change in circumstances and so on applied by the mentor so powerfully affects the learner that in his ordinary life he ceases to be efficient, he has failed. From the psychological point of view it might be said that the indolent or confusing behaviour of the teacher is a means of testing; but it would seem to me that it is intended to reflect the habits of mind of the students, so that they may learn from them, as much as anything else. There is no doubt in my mind that it works; for I have not yet met a distinguished teacher in this field who has not been through the hands of one or more of such teachers. (36)

- o There are many reports of traditional teaching masters who were able to set aside their own apparent self and concern with their ‘image’ in order to fulfil a teaching function.

Sir Richard Burton tells the story of the great Sufi Master Bayazid and the courtesan. Bayazid’s disciples revered him so much at the expense of what he was teaching that he decided that this conditioning would have to be broken. ‘Men,’ as the Sufi saying has it, ‘should not be respected at the expense of what they represent.’ One day Bayazid was surrounded by a group of admiring followers who were wedded to the belief that piety was inseparable from appearance. Bayazid sent a message to a woman of ill-fame to ‘bring him some of his clothes which he had left with her; and to send an account of the money which he owed her’. Similarly, Shamsuddin of Tabriz, teacher of Rumi, once asked a disciple, as a test, to lend him his wife. (37)

- o Anger which is consciously controlled and not the product of emotional reaction may be skillfully applied in certain situations as a teaching device.

*Q: Can anger ever be reaction-free?*

A: Yes. There is a divine anger but then it is not really anger. It is a kind of activity that is unrelated to any self-image. It is the upcoming of the totality in the gesture of the rightness of function. From outside it may look like anger

but it is not anger. It is completely free from reaction and leaves no residue. The moment the situation is over it completely dissolves.” (38)

- o A teacher may employ anger for dynamic purposes, to challenge or motivate someone, not to harm or humiliate them.

*Q: I have seen Sufis apparently angry, or talking severely to people who have not even spoken a word to them. Since there was nothing to arouse their ire, why was this done?*

A: A Sufi is not one who has ire. The Sufi is like the man who slapped the boy before he broke the pot, without anger, to prevent him from dropping it; rather than like the man who, in anger, punished the boy after he had broken the vessel.

When a Sufi knows what a person is like, that person does not have to ‘speak a word to him’.

He will know an individual’s inward state and he will, if necessary, signal his disapproval of it by a show of reproach. He is not talking to the outer personality, and so he needs no pretext. He is signaling to the raw inwardness of that individual, saying in effect, ‘I know what you are like’.

It is this ability and its usefulness which indicates a real Sufi.

The individual who is being dealt with is like the blind man of the saying, who ‘fouls the pavement and thinks that nobody sees him.’ (39)

### **Misapplication of Unorthodox Techniques**

- o Unconventional teaching techniques can only be carried out successfully by those with the requisite knowledge to apply the method correctly.

The temptation to apply the technique in a mass form is one which characterizes *Gumrahi* (strayed) or small-potential instructors. Malamati behaviour can only be used with great care. (40)

- o Many unconventional methods have been taken out of context or copied mechanically with predictable results.

Because Zen enlightenment is ultimately beyond words, teachers have been known to use other means of communicating impressions. Among the more dramatic of their techniques were various shock tactics. Surprising blows and shouts, for example, are known to have been employed by some ancient Zen masters to produce specific effects in the minds of seekers. These devices are also known to have been widely mimed. Used imitatively and at random, they lost their original intended effects. Thus they were transformed into forms of pretense and mystification. (41)

- o The use of techniques such as deliberate anger can easily be misused and must be applied very carefully and precisely to be effective.

Anger is like electricity, a good servant and a bad master. I don't know anybody who has got as violent a temper as I have: if I want to turn it on I can. I don't indulge it very often because it is a tool which one can use: just as one can use humour, so you can use arrogance, a bad temper, and you can also use anger. If you use it as a tool, it should by definition be able to achieve something. If you use it as a weapon, it can get out of control and control you. (42)

- o Although unorthodox teaching techniques are open to abuse it is important not to dismiss them out of hand without first trying to understand why they are being applied and in what context.

It is natural enough that we should feel offended by some of the escapades of crazy-wisdom masters. But instead of taking the easy option of righteous indignation, wholesale condemnation, or angry retaliation for our offended sensibilities, our first obligation is to cultivate the light of understanding, including self-understanding.

In some cases, however, a crazy-wisdom teacher may well have been guilty of overzealousness and misjudgment that caused harm to another human being. This raises serious questions about the appropriateness and usefulness of crazy-wisdom teachings in our time, and also about the moral and criminal liability of teachers who work in this manner. (43)

- o One of the marks of a real teaching is that an actual inner development follows teaching practices that involve deliberate obfuscation and bewilderment. The student actually benefits from the experience.

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