

THE SPIRITUAL TEACHER OR GUIDE

‘People think that a teacher should display miracles and manifest illumination. But the requirement in a teacher is that they should possess all that the disciple needs.’

Ibn el Arabi

Necessity for a Spiritual Teacher

‘Water needs an intermediary, a vessel, between it and the fire, if it is to be heated correctly.’

Rumi

- o The higher teaching is transmitted by means of the human exemplar, the teacher. There is a saying that ‘teachership is function, not appearance’.
- o It is acknowledged that spiritual progress and enlightenment is possible without the direct guidance of a living teacher, although it is emphasized that such cases are rare.

Q: Do we need an external guru, a spiritual teacher, when we have an inner guru?

A: Theoretically no. Practically, yes, except in very exceptional cases. We are conditioned to take, not to let go. Attachment to our self-image hinders us from surrendering to our totality.

Q: How can one look for a guru?

A: You cannot look for a teacher because you do not know what to look for. You cannot understand, cannot conceive of, a guide. You can only look for secondary functions, names, outer representations, magic, power, personality, etc. So you cannot try to find a teacher. All you can be is open to the teacher finding you. (1)

- o Spiritual traditions are unanimous that for the vast majority of humanity a guide is absolutely essential.

Everyone, when he gets to a certain stage of mere personal sophistication, thinks that he can find the way to enlightenment by himself. This is denied by the Sufis, for they ask how a person can find something when he does not know what it is. ‘Everyone has become a gold seeker,’ says Rumi, ‘but the ordinary do not know it when they see it. If you cannot recognize it, join a wise man’. (2)

- o The journey to Truth begins with a guide who has traveled the path, and who can conduct or shepherd others to the goal. *‘The Way requires a teacher, who has been that way before.’*

The ideas are a summons, a summons towards another world, a call from one who knows and is able to show us the way. But the transformation of the human being requires something more. It can only be achieved if there is a real meeting between the conscious force which descends and the total commitment which answers it. This brings about a fusion.

A new life can then appear in a new set of conditions which only someone with an objective consciousness can create and develop.

But to understand this one must have passed through all the stages of this development oneself.

Without such experience and understanding the work will lose its effectiveness and the conditions will be wrongly interpreted; they will not be brought at the right moment and one will see situations and efforts remaining on the level of ordinary life and uselessly repeating themselves. (3)

- o Although certain students may require more than one teacher at different phases of their spiritual journey, they must only have one teacher at a given time.

By definition, your teacher can teach you, and does so. What is the purpose of another teacher? You can't eat two meals at a time, so to speak. A 'disciple' who goes from one teacher to another is not a disciple: and someone who 'teaches' him under such circumstances is not a teacher. (4)

- o Having two or more teachers simultaneously inevitably leads to confusion and the dissipation of focus and energy on the part of the student. "If you chase after other teachers like a weather vane turning with every fresh wind, you will succeed only in confusing yourself with no gain."

Q: Why isn't a student twice as well off with two teachers?

A: Actually he's worse off. Sooner or later he's bound to become confused, with the result that he will either neglect both teachers or drop them. The student who tries to serve two masters fails both. And he is the loser, for neither one will treat him as a serious aspirant. Lukewarm students invite a lukewarm response from a teacher.

Even within the same tradition teachers have different methods, depending on the training they themselves have received, their personalities, and the depth of their awakening. The first may tell you one thing and the other say what seems to be the opposite. They are not contradicting each other; if they are both spiritually developed, each of their instructions is valid. But for the novice the seeming contradiction may pose problems of such an imposing nature that they discourage him and sap his energies. (5)

- o Some seekers are under the false impression that enlightenment can be attained by reading books and studying on one's own. The seeker needs human guidance because books and texts "while telling you what is needed, do not tell you when." There is a proverb: 'Words have to die if humans are to live.'

Q: Many Westerners interested in Zen may not initially have access to a teacher. They do the best they can on their own – reading books, attending talks, perhaps meditating with a small group of like-minded people. Can one practice Zen authentically without a teacher?

A: Yes, up to a point. Books can certainly help one get started, but there comes a point when just reading books is not enough. You can't ask a book questions. The value of a teacher is that he or she has been through the whole process that the new student has yet to experience, so the teacher can perform important functions as a guide. (6)

- o Navigating the hazards of the spiritual path is difficult and requires the guidance of an experienced teacher.

All true ways insist upon the need for a teacher. There are many blind alleys, false trails, and places where the path peters out completely. If there is no one to give guidance at these times, months or even years of work can be wasted. But it is essential that this guide has traveled the way already and can, in fact, act as a true guide. The dangers inherent in the blind leading the blind are as great in Zen as in any other endeavor, and the fact that a person calls himself or herself a Zen teacher is no guarantee of insight or ability. What is most important is that the teacher has come to awakening and that this awakening has been authenticated by a competent teacher whose own awakening was, in turn, verified. (7)

- o A common human problem is attachment to externals and mistaking the vehicle or container for the content, thus requiring a mentor to monitor the student's behaviour and direct attention according to actual possibilities. The teacher provides guidance and a starting point for the seeker in the process of "self-work".
- o A student's assumptions and preconceptions about the nature of spiritual development can prevent learning. Hence the need of a perceptive teacher to point these barriers out to the pupil.

The problem for the seeker on the Way is not knowing where the Way is going. Thus the need for a guide. Arbitrary preconceptions about what form the teaching and practice will take hinder would-be learners from making a genuine start. Nevertheless, just because the goal is not what may be imagined by the beginner, that does not mean there is no such thing. Zen master Musho says that the trouble with many people is that they expect to be paid before they have done any work; this is equivalent to expecting the Way to accord with one's own imagination. (8)

- o The ordinary person is generally unable to recognize and take advantage of the developmental influences needed for spiritual growth. A teacher knows the nature of these influences and to what measure they are to be used.

- o A teacher is responsible for the proper application and interpretation of real knowledge. “Only a Teacher, someone who has attained “sight,” can select from an individual’s environment and from the repertoire of available techniques a curriculum suitable to the task”.

The development of man’s superior capacity requires the activity of a Teacher – one who has reached the goal and by means of that special knowledge is equipped to teach according to the needs of the particular culture, the particular time, historical period, and the particular person. (9)

- o People in the West often have difficulty with the concept of a “master” or “spiritual teacher” because there is little historical context for such a function in most Western countries.

For hundreds of years, one of the functions of a teacher has been to explain the teaching and how people can best make use of it.

Teaching the Tradition in the West is very difficult because people in the East have a much longer contact with teachers. This means that some of the words and instruments we use are already familiar to people in the East, whereas in the West, these words and instruments have to be taught to people very carefully. (10)

- o Ultimately life itself is our greatest teacher.

There is only one teacher. What is that teacher? Life itself. And of course each one of us is a manifestation of life; we couldn’t be anything else. Now life happens to be both a severe and an endlessly kind teacher. It’s the only authority that you need to trust. And this teacher, this authority, is everywhere. You don’t have to go to some special place to find this incomparable teacher, you don’t have to have some especially quiet or ideal situation: in fact, the messier it is the better. The average office is a great place. The average home is perfect. Such places are pretty messy most of the time – we all know from firsthand experience. That is where the authority, the teacher is. (11)

Preparation of the Teacher

*‘A real teacher was asked how it was
that he could teach, and he answered:*

*I am what you will be:
What you are, I once was.’*

Idries Shah

- o A teacher must have been through the succession of developmental experiences which are essential to higher understanding before guiding others along the path to completion.

The function of a teacher is to know the theory, teach it, and present it in such a way that it can be followed at a practical level. A teacher does not

interpret theory: he explains it, gives examples of how it works, and keeps the Tradition moving forward all the time. (12)

- o An individual may be prepared for a teaching task through a series of 'journeys', later transmitting the teaching into a specific place or culture. The teacher may be sent to a certain location and then wait years until a pupil is sent to them.

Certain individuals may be 'called' to make journeys, in order to acquire certain capacities. This call is the result of natural conditions. Such people are attracted, we might almost say, 'imported', to be a center of teaching when this is necessary, in order to fit them for their task. There are different varieties of such individuals. They are 'called' from one cultural area to another precisely when it is necessary for the teaching to be projected in an area of similar cultural background to their own. They become the instruments of the transmission of the teaching into a fresh culture. (13)

- o In genuine mystical schools the teacher is actually taught how to be a teacher and will, in turn, have a number of disciples who eventually become fully-fledged teachers in their own right.

In Zen, as in other Asian traditions, a disciple is ready to teach when his teacher says he is. This naturally places a great deal of responsibility in the hands of the master. If he is wise, with high standards, his seal of approval is the public's safeguard. If he is mediocre his disciple will leave much to be desired.

A Zen master is a person of deep spiritual insight and wisdom who has experienced the emptiness and impermanence of all things, and whose lifestyle reflects such awareness. Zen master Dogen defined a master as one who is fully enlightened, who lives by what he knows to be the truth, and who has received the transmission from his own teacher. (14)

- o Even though a person may have attained illumination, they are not permitted to teach until they have received, from their own mentor, permission to enrol students.
- o Many spiritual traditions stress the need for the teacher to be free from subjective reasons for seeking leadership. "As with any other specialization, teaching is a vocation, open only to those who are truly capable of discharging its functions".

Sufis receive no permission to teach until they are known to have no urge to teach which could be a mask for a desire for attention or power. 'Vocation', therefore has a special meaning, and has no connection with the belief that one should spread the work. Teaching is, therefore, based upon capacity, not desire. (15)

- o It is held that the desire to teach is disabling. A genuine teacher will teach only when the need and desire to teach is absent.

The mere desire to teach is regarded as a disability rooted in ambition developing before understanding is mature.

One major Sufi says: 'I had a desire to teach. I therefore ceased teaching until I became mature enough to do it properly, without the desire influencing my ability and therefore my duty to students. When the desire to teach left me, I started to teach.' (16)

- o When a teacher is free of all subjective motivations to teach they spontaneously offer each student the teachings most appropriate for their spiritual development.

Q: Does a sage have any responsibility to teach and help others?

A: The word responsibility is not at all suitable. Teaching comes out of love, compassion, out of thankfulness. There is no sense of duty in it, no desire to personally improve the world. It is free from all motivation. It is a mistake to think the teacher does something. Transmission cannot happen intentionally. When there is ripeness the candle lights up. But there are those who escape being citizens of the earth. The task is to come to a balance, to be in the world but not of it. (17)

- o As soon as possible a real teacher will dismiss the disciple, who becomes autonomous and continues the process of self-development on his or her own. The job of the mentor is to teach or coach the student until they are sufficiently advanced on the Way to be able to progress on their own.

The teacher's role is to render himself superfluous to the learner, by helping him to escape from the toils of lesser ideas and of the shallow mind. Until that moment comes, like a guide to a path which is invisible to the learner, the teacher is followed with absolute trust.

The great Sufi Abdul-Qadir of Gilan stresses that this is like the role of the wet-nurse, who has to cease suckling the infant when it is able to eat solid food. When secondary and low-level attachments have vanished, the Seeker goes into a relationship with objective Reality. At this point there is no further need of the disciple relationship. (18)

- o The spiritual guide exists for a specific purpose and a limited time. A teacher fulfills their educational mission when they work themselves out of a job.

The teacher is by his nature transient, operating upon the disciple for the necessary length of time, then moving on. The teacher himself is neither permanent nor immortal. He is not an idol to be worshipped, but truly exists only in action. Indeed, were he venerated as and for himself, he might be said to have failed in his task, for there is a limit to the dynamism possible in such a relationship. At some moment there would have to be an end to the disciple's development, since it would be implicit in his standing with such a teacher that he could not aspire to the latter's level. The process, not the person who inducts one in it, is primary, and its end is self-perfection. (19)

- o There are different levels of teachers, each type fulfilling certain functions and responsibilities.

There are two kinds of teacher: the familiar type, who feels a need to teach, which is often referred to as a vocation, a calling. The second kind has had, initially, a stronger thirst to *learn*. When this thirst is assuaged he is then in a position to tell whether he should be a teacher or not. Those who act on behalf teachers, administering – as it were – their prescribed courses, are not teachers but channels, though they may sometimes be learners at the same time. The distinction may seem subtle to those not accustomed to it, but in practice it becomes completely clear. ‘Patience is the food of understanding.’ (20)

- o An important psychological concept, traditionally rooted in the East, is the role of the teacher as an “instrument rather than as a name”.

Some of the most important individuals in Eastern history are practically unknown as personalities. What has been considered important is their message. In many cases we do not know where they were born, where they were buried, what they were like. We only know what they tried to do. The same phenomena is strong in certain spiritual schools today. Among the Sufis, it may be the least significant-looking who is the teacher: even the youngest. Books and other teaching materials which circulate, sometimes couched in the greatest poetry of Arabic, Persian and other languages, are anonymous. Works of art are rarely signed. There is not a single authentic portrait of any of the spiritual teachers of most of Asia before the nineteenth century European influence and interest in personality. Then there is the interchangeability of teacher and pupil; something unknown to our thinking. In some dervish schools, senior members are taught certain things and then sent to complete or improve personal and group characteristics by acting in a lowly capacity in another school. (21)

- o A teacher does not necessarily teach continuously, have regular or frequent meetings or concentrate the teaching community in only one place. “Such teachers may or may not be publicly known, and may have very few students, and from time to time none at all”.
- o Many of the great classical Sufi masters, whose teachings have had the greatest effect, commanded audiences of only a few. The Sufi teacher el-Ghazali is reported to have said that: “People tend to want to study under famous teachers. Yet there are always people not considered distinguished by the public who could teach them as effectively.”
- o Not every person who has experienced higher reality is invariably a guide capable of helping others along the same way. Not all sages or realized beings are teachers and some exist, according to tradition, in order to exercise functions imperceptible to humanity.
- o Enlightened beings who possess the gift of teaching others can lead them to spiritual understanding by creating a perspective in which the teacher, the taught and the teaching merge into one.

Q: What is a teacher?

A: When you become established in truth you may or may not be a teacher.

To be a teacher takes a certain pedagogical gift, the capacity to perceive the mind directly so that the answer comes with the perfume of silence and unveils silence in the questioner. It is the capacity to see into the disciple and know instinctively in which way to present the teaching. There is no fixed teaching as there is no fixed disciple. In fact there is no teacher, for the teacher is identical with what is taught.

The disciple takes himself for an ignorant person with something to acquire. When he meets the nothingness of the teacher and the teaching, he is brought to a letting go of his desire to be somebody who is enlightened, spiritual, religious, and so on. He is brought back to himself. (22)

Relationship with the School and Tradition

- o The teacher and students are involved in a complex of activity and interaction which together constitutes an esoteric school. The whole process, teacher, teaching and taught, is a single phenomena.
- o The higher teaching resides in the being and knowledge of its teachers, projected and diffused among humanity.

The secret of the teacher was that he taught his students just what he could and what was necessary. Then he directed them to study on their own, or to travel to another teacher, for a definite and understood purpose.

Such a teacher would have to be very different from the mystical teacher who insisted upon keeping his disciples forever around him and dependent upon him. He would have to be free of any vestige of 'self.' (23)

- o A teacher is given permission and the authority to initiate the teaching process and guide others on the Path through a 'chain of transmission'.

There is a continuing chain of inductor and inducted, linked always by the relation between an unforced authority and a willing submission, and stretching back across the centuries. It is this chain of Master and disciple that itself provides the necessary authority for the latest neophyte desiring to add his link to it. (24)

- o A School provides a mandate to teach and ensures that the individual is properly fulfilling their teaching role.

Anybody from our Tradition who is sent to a particular area must and does have a mandate from his teachers. This is his only authority to teach. Without that mandate, a person who has learnt or assimilated certain things can do a lot of damage. This is why there is such insistence on the production of an actual mandate. (25)

- o The level of connection between a teacher and a School determines the quality of energy and

knowledge made available to the teacher.

There are also various possibilities as regards the teacher's situation in relation to the esoteric center, namely, that he may know more or he may know less about the esoteric center, he may know exactly where this center is and how knowledge and help was or is received from it; or he may know nothing of this and may only know the man from whom he himself received his knowledge. In most cases people start precisely from the point that they know only one step higher than themselves. And only in proportion to their own development do they begin to see further and to recognize where what they know came from.

The results of the work of a man who takes on himself the role of teacher do not depend on whether or not he knows exactly the origin of what he teaches, but very much depends on whether or not his ideas come *in actual fact* from the esoteric center and whether he himself understands and can distinguish *esoteric ideas*, that is, ideas of objective knowledge, from subjective, scientific, and philosophical ideas. (26)

- o Although similar ideas and practices are found in many forms of esoteric teaching, a teacher will focus on only one particular teaching. 'We are interested only in the Path which leads to truth. We do not follow more than one Path at a time.'
- o The continuity of the Tradition is guaranteed and maintained through people's involvement and devotion to the Teaching. "All over the world at this very moment, there are people at every stage of development in the Tradition".

Connection with a Higher Order

- o The instructions of a real teacher originate in an invisible pattern, since a master has knowledge of the 'hidden dimension' in life.

A Sufi teacher (not all Sufis are teachers) is one who has 'gone beyond' ordinary limits and has become aware of a reality which enables him to see humanity's general and specific condition and other matters in relation to this greater dimension. This we may roughly render as being equivalent to looking at something from the ground and being able to fly or hover over it. The perception of the world may enable the teacher to guide others to where he 'is'. That is why it is said that he not only knows the answers to questions but also knows what the real questions are. Because he is also human ('In the world but not OF it') he can understand the barriers to perception which exist from time to time, and in a certain flow, in the minds of others. Hence the words: 'The Guide to the Way is one who, having been there before, can conduct his students to the destination.' (27)

- o The enlightened guide is capable of maintaining multiple forms of relationship with the outer world.

The perfected man, because of his living in different dimensions at the same time, must appear to follow more than one set of doctrines. A man who is swimming across a lake is carrying out actions and responding to perceptions other than a man walking down a hill, for instance. He is the same man; and he carries with him when he is walking all the potentiality of swimming.

The Perfected Man has three frameworks of belief:

1. That of his surroundings.
2. That which he conveys to students in accordance with their capacity for understanding.
3. That which he understands from inner experience, only to be known among a special circle. (28)

- o A teacher's knowledge is ultimately derived from direct inner experience of a spiritual nature. One of the characteristics of teachership is the ability to teach others from the vantage point of a more comprehensive awareness.

The guide teaches from a position which is at times 'in the world' because he has to maintain contact with his environment. He follows the 'arc of ascent' to learn; and when he has completed the 'arc of descent' he is among the people. He is now transmuted. This means that although his outward form and even a part of his essence may be visible, his whole depth only unfolds to those who are developed enough to understand and perceive it.

There is more than an analogy here with teaching or leading in other fields; because leadership in the more ordinary things is a 'shadow' or distortion of the essence of 'teachership'.

If you are teaching a child, or a student, something which you know and he does not, you have to draw yourself to what you call 'his level', and pull him up, slowly. Again, you have to withdraw from involvement, in order to see things objectively. As in the ordinary, so in the extraordinary: hence the teacher is in a way (or in what seems to be many ways) apart, or has been set apart, from the mass. He does not belong to the mass, and yet he does. His relationship to the mass is like that of the refined gold compared with the ore. (29)

- o The degree of illumination of a real teacher may be invisible to the ordinary person and perceptible only to the enlightened. The functions and abilities of such a teacher may not be readily apparent to others who lack a 'larger perspective' of the actual teaching process.
- o A part of the teaching, a higher element uniting the teacher and student, stands outside conventional time and space. "The Guide is responsible for relating the individual progress to that of the total needs of humanity".

Guides and spiritual benefactors "descend" from higher consciousness in order to contact people according to their level of understanding, and "emerge" from the most basic ground of experience to contact people who are alienated from it.

Guides teach through fostering particular relationships among people, and between people and the environment. Their guidance is followed through life conduct as well as mental disposition. (30)

- o A teacher's power and success are supported by the higher energies which flow through their work.

The Sufi master organizes studies, each according to his type, and he also plans the outward formulae according to which the school will function in the world. This may take any seemingly worldly shape. He will also protect his disciples from calamity; though, since many disasters are averted by the *baraka* (spiritual force) of the master, his followers will be unable, until they in their turn become illuminated, to understand just what a burden he carries on their behalf.

According to this point of view, it is because of this that, when he comes to realize it, the disciple-turned Sufi feels gratitude towards his Teacher to the end of his days. During the novitiate, however, he is unable to understand the sacrifices and services of the Master, and must only assume that they are there. (31)

Outer Form and Appearance

*'Do not look at my outward shape,
but take what is in my hand.'*

Rumi

- o There is no such thing as an archetypical teacher with a common pool of typical characteristics. Rather, teachers manifest a wide variety of appearance and behaviour.

What is so perplexing to conditioned attitudes about the Sufis is that, unlike teachers of other kinds, they refuse to stick to one kind of appearance. As an example, if you go to see a Sufi divine, he may not look, talk or act like a mystical master at all. This is because he says either: 'You can teach only by the method indicated for each pupil and you may have to teach by what seems to him unlikely'; or else because he says: 'There is a time and a place and certain company. According to these, we will teach. When it is a time to be serious, we will be serious. When it is a time to work through what looks like ordinary things, we have to do so. (32)

Q: I have read that the great Sufi Gazur-Ilahi quoted, with approval, Sheikh Yahya Munir as follows:

A: There is no uniform behaviour amongst the Masters. One may eat and sleep well, another will fast and sit up all night. One may spend time with people, another holds himself aloof. One will be found dressed in rags and another in silks and linen of high quality; one is silent, another speaks animatedly. One will conceal his saintship, another will show it publicly. One of them will serve all human beings, both the devout and the debauched: and another will have no truck with the evil . . .

Q: If this is so, how are we to know the true Sufi, and why should Sufis behave in such disparate ways?

A: Sufis behave in any way which is necessary to their fulfilling their function; so you would expect a wide variation in behaviour. Again, remember that the things of the world referred to by Sheikh Yahya are superficial, secondary and not essential to the Sufi, hence he has only a secondary and relatively unimportant connection with them. This is why they behave differently, one from the other: or even the same individual at different times. (33)

- o A true teacher is often very different from what the untrained and indiscriminating Seeker thinks a teacher should be like. A teaching master may possess none of the exterior characteristics which one would expect and may teach in unexpected channels and ways.

A true spiritual teacher does not have anything to teach in the conventional sense of the word, does not have anything to give or add to you, such as new information, beliefs, or rules of conduct. The only function of such a teacher is to help you remove that which separates you from the truth of who you already are and what you already know in the depth of your being. The spiritual teacher is there to uncover and reveal to you that dimension of inner depth that is also peace. (34)

- o Many people are impressed with the outer shape and behaviour of a teacher and disregard the inner content.

If you recall how people whom you have met struck you, you will tend to remember superficialities. The person was impressive, or disappointing; smiled or frowned, was rich or poor, old or young, pleasant or unpleasant. The teacher, on the other hand, is not a circus clown or baby-sitter. He or she is, for the student, a source of learning. (35)

- o A real teacher has attained an inner unification of personality that is expressed through a diversity of ways. For instance, to avoid attack and interference from the people of the world, spiritual teachers may, at times, have to assume a disguise and “cover themselves in a rug”.
- o Historically women have been proportionately under-represented as recognized spiritual teachers. Some explanations for this fact are offered in the literature.

Proportionate to their number, the number of women teachers in the Tradition has been very small. One of the reasons is that some of the characteristics required of a teacher do not come easily to women in general.

For instance the capacity to be cold, dispassionate, clinical in certain situations, and not to allow any subjective emotion to cloud their judgement, and to be able, if necessary, to maintain a cold or even callous face to people they are teaching. These aspects of a nature are generally foreign to the makeup of a woman.

This is all the more difficult because such qualities have to be learned by a teacher. It makes it difficult, because you might say “Well I know a woman who has a heart of stone; she’d make a marvelous teacher.” Such a male or female is the last person to do this. The person who makes the best teacher has a warm heart, which, under necessary circumstances, he or she can switch off.

This partly explains why the proportion of women teachers is small. (36)

Role and Function of the Teacher

*When there's no teacher there's teaching
When there's no pupil there's understanding
Jean Klein*

- o The function of a teacher is sometimes described as that of a “herdsman” who guides others with the power of certainty.

No person may be a teacher of Sufism unless he has himself been through the succession of experiences which are essential. When he has been through these, he is changed, so that he remains an ordinary human being only in the obvious sense. His functions have changed, and he is now a “herdsman.”

It may be noted that the Sufi cannot benefit another person beyond the extent to which his function is acknowledged by that person. As a shepherd he can look after the external needs of a flock; he has the inner qualities to cater for their essential progress. (37)

- o The influence of a teacher on his or her students has been compared to that of a mother and father on a child.

The teacher fulfils the dual roles traditionally ascribed to a father and a mother. Alternately he is the strict, reproving father who prods and chastens and the gentle loving mother who comforts and encourages. When the student slackens his effort he is coaxed or goaded, when he displays pride he is rebuked; and conversely, when he is assailed by doubt or driven to despair he is encouraged and uplifted. An accomplished teacher thus combines stern detachment with warm concern, flexibility, and an ego-lessness that can never be mistaken for weakness or flabbiness, in addition to self-confidence and a commanding air. Because his words are charged with the force and immediacy of his liberated personality, what he says has the power to rejuvenate the student's flagging spirit and reinvigorate his quest for enlightenment despite pain, frustration and temporary boredom. (38)

- o There is no need for a new teacher if there are already enlightened people present in a community. As well, those who have already attained higher knowledge need not be taught again.
- o The presence of a teacher is the bridge between the relative incapacity of the student and the finished product of a realized being. The student must learn how to learn. “The difficulty of transmission of knowledge is bound up with the orientation of the student. Wanting knowledge is not enough”.

It is as true as anything else which can be spoken to say that all knowledge is really available everywhere.

In practical terms, however, it is only the presence of a teacher which makes it flow in the students.

The human element is absolutely essential.

Teachers are not, as you might hope, people who make you feel peace and harmony. They may give you love, knowledge, the capacity for action which are of such an advanced order that these concepts as formerly known to one now seem imitations. (39)

- o The role of the teacher is to provoke capacity in students and guide them towards spiritual progress by providing the necessary ‘nutrients’ at the most useful time.

The teacher has the task of communicating his message and reality. He has to reduce, not increase, the effect of his own personality, in favour of content.

The teacher’s mission is to be in the service of those who can learn. He does not exist to please or displease anyone. To accord with the preconceptions of others as to appearances is irrelevant to his functions.

He works in accordance with the prospects of his students and the possibility of maintaining the continuation of the community of the Wise.

He does not hand out formulas nor does he insist upon the performance of mechanical procedures. His knowledge, on the contrary, makes it possible for him to prescribe apposite studies for suitable people, at an indicated time, in the proper place. (40)

- o A guide will teach those who are ‘Seekers after Truth’ by a combination of theory, practice and living.

The “guide, philosopher and friend” who is the teacher, performs what may be considered to be many functions. As a guide he shows the Way – but the aspirant must himself do the walking. As a philosopher he loves wisdom, in the original meaning of the term. But love, to him, implies action, not merely enjoyment or even the despair of one-sided love. As a friend he is a companion and adviser, provides reassurance and a point of view which is influenced by his perception of the other’s needs. (41)

- o An individual who has attained a state of integration or ‘completeness’ is able to perceive what prevents ordinary people from reaching such a stage of development. They can then construct a teaching method designed to facilitate arrival at this state.

Q: How does one view the role of the guide in relation to the learner? Is he the source of knowledge, which he imparts; does he conduct the Seeker to places and experiences which cannot otherwise be reached?

A: The process is like a journey. The teacher follows the path and knows it well. Then, in the case of each and every disciple, he retraces the way with him. This is allegorized as starting a circle with a point, which then describes a complete revolution and ends with the point, which is itself a part of the circle.

The teacher is also likened to the activity of a seed; which becomes a

plant and which gives rise to another seed, which has to complete the cycle, and so on. This is the meaning of the Path, the Journey, and so on. (42)

- o Traditional descriptions of mystical teachings allude to the intuitive dimensions underlying the teaching function.

If he is your teacher, he will make you benefit from his luminescence, whether you know it at the time or not.

When you meet him, he will act upon you, whether you know it or not.

What he says or does may seem inconsistent or even incomprehensible to you. But it has its meaning. He does not live entirely in your world.

His intuition is that of the rightly guided, and he always works in accordance with the Right Way.

He may discomfort you. That will be intended and necessary.

He may seem to return good for evil, or evil for good. But what he is really doing is known only to the Few.

You may hear that some men oppose him. You will find that few men really do so.

He is modest and allows you to find out what you have to find out slowly.

When you first meet him, he may seem to be very different from you. He is not. He may seem to be very much like you. He is not. (43)

- o A paramount concern of the inner sage is to entrust knowledge only to those who can benefit from it. The protection of this knowledge may be more important than teaching itself, so that a teacher “must make sure that the student realizes that this knowledge cannot endure together with competitiveness, boasting or a desire for power in respect to it”.

- o One of the most important functions of a spiritual teacher is to test students who report purported higher states of consciousness in order to determine if the experiences are genuine or products of imagination or self-deception.

It is frequently claimed that genuine enlightenment ought to be self-validating and therefore no need for testing should arise. But self-deception is as strong here as in other realms of human behavior, even stronger perhaps because of the very nature of enlightenment. It is all too easy for a novice to mistake visions, trances, hallucinations, insights, revelations, ecstasies, or even mental serenity for awakening. The oceanic feeling experienced by certain types of neurotics has likewise been confused with enlightenment since it conveys a sense of oneness with the universe. For all these reasons, and especially because the danger to the personality resulting from such self-deception is real, Zen teaching has always insisted that awakening be tested and confirmed by a master whose own enlightenment has, in turn, been sanctioned by an enlightened master. (44)

- o The spiritual guide performs the role of a teacher only until the student reaches spiritual maturity and is independent and autonomous, free and liberated.

In Zen it is said that the primary role of the master is to protect students

from his influence. A good teacher tries to guide himself accordingly. The teacher's aim is not to control the lives of his students but to make them strong enough to lead their own lives with awareness, equanimity and compassion. While it is also said in Zen that the teacher stands in place of the Buddha, this really means that he manifests the awakened Buddha-nature common to all. In any case, the authority of a teacher over his students extends for a limited period only. When they have completed their Zen training, approached his level of understanding, and "graduated," his authority over them ceases. What remains is the disciples' deep respect and gratitude towards their teacher. (45)

Nature of the Teacher-Student Relationship

*'Allow what is done for you to be done for you.
Do for yourself that which you have to do for yourself.'*

- o As in any specialized field of knowledge, the student must accept the teacher's expertise and authority in order for real learning to occur.

The guide, after all, is the person who has made the journey that the novice wants to make. He not only knows what the novice wants to know, he is what the novice wants to become. As a result, the disciple, once accepted by the teacher, cannot judge the latter's words or actions: he must trust him. In practice, this means his total acceptance of the fact that his teacher knows better than he what he should do, the pace at which he should progress, the exercises he should perform and the disciplines he should undergo. If the disciple does not accept this, there is no point in his sitting at a teacher's feet. He will reject the only truly valuable thing the teacher has to offer. Theories, arguments, dissertations can all be found in books; the impact of one person on another is quite a different matter. It is this acceptance of what amounts to the teacher's omniscience, certainly in the matter of the pupil's development, that is the basis for the surrender that the novice must make: it is precisely for this reason that he is not a student but a disciple. (46)

- o The relationship between a student and spiritual teacher has been compared to that between a teacher and pupil in ordinary life. There are both similarities and differences.

Let me clarify the differences between the master-disciple relationship (in a Zen context) and the teacher-student relationship (in a secular setting). In the ideal teacher-student relationship the student respects the teacher as the possessor of a certain body of knowledge or of a skill that the student would like to acquire, while the teacher values the student for his eagerness and his ability to absorb this knowledge. Their relationship is largely impersonal and limited; what sustains it is their common interest in a particular study. The master-disciple relationship of Zen is deeper and more personal because it is grounded in a karmic affinity. What moves the disciple in the direction of the

master is not the master's knowledge but his compassion, enlightened wisdom, character, and warm personality – traits born of long discipline and training. The disciple senses that it is through these qualities that he will be able to complete himself and eventually come to full awakening. (47)

- o It is sometimes said that the true teacher-pupil relationship is a mirror image or analog to God's relationship with humanity.

The special form of friendship and love which grows between teacher and pupil is simultaneously a bond of friendship between man and God. Such a process is the very reverse of hero-worship. The teacher systematically and very effectively rejects those manifestations from his charges which have their origins in the self. Pupils are weaned at the outset from the tendency to fixate and identify with authority figures. If this first lesson is not learnt, there are no others. The teacher is merely a channel of communication; his presence may elicit love and devotion from those around him, but these are destined not for himself but for the reality his teaching represents: 'The teacher's acceptance is the nearest thing to divine acceptance and represents it as far as it can'. He is able to transmit the 'divine acceptance' for the sufficient reason that his motives have, by virtue of his own training, been divested of self, and are entirely at the disposal of a higher purpose. There is no arrogance in the claim that the true teacher-pupil relationship is an exact counterpart of God's relationship with mankind. It is a simple technical fact which does no particular credit to either participant. (48)

- o Some of the psychological characteristics which hinder the teacher-student relationship have been clearly identified. These include such things as personal pride, greed disguised as aspiration, extravagant attitudes towards the teacher and lack of commitment.
- o The teacher is to be regarded as an instructor or a conductor of knowledge and personality worship is discouraged. Rumi: 'Look not at my exterior form, but take what is in my hand.'
- o It is not always possible for a student to accurately assess and understand all of the words and actions of a teacher, who is by definition at a higher level of development.

Q: I have seen a statement to the effect that a disciple should conceal his teacher's shortcomings. How can a man be a teacher if he has shortcomings?

A: One might almost put it the other way round – how can a teacher be a man *unless* he has shortcomings? But your question is more properly and probably usefully answered by pointing out that the fact that someone is a disciple means that he is likely to regard some actions of a teacher, which he does not understand, as shortcomings. It is a matter of understanding.

If the student imagines that something said or done by his teacher is a shortcoming when it is not, and this student maintains publicly that his teacher has deficiencies, the results will be undesirable for everyone.

Mark Twain is reported to have said that as a youth he thought his father ignorant. When he grew up he was surprised how much the old man had learnt

in so few years. (49)

- o Students working with a teacher pass through a succession of progressively refined ‘lessons’ as they reach toward higher spiritual understanding.

The teacher may be stricter with his students than he can ever be with strangers, for the disciples need a higher form of Truth, they need intensive and energetic supervision.

The similitude is as of the master teaching the finer points of grammar to students who already know the language. To give proper instruction, he has to be punctilious and make sure that every usage of the language is correct and every mistake pointed out.

When the master is teaching, let us say, the basic rules and vocabulary of the language, he is still on the level of relative crudity, and he will allow many mistakes to go unremarked, and will praise the successes. When the students have gone beyond the stage where they have need to be praised, when they are really serious enough to know how undesirable it is to have, say, bad pronunciation, they will adopt an attitude which will make them co-operate with the master in helping them make sure that they remember the finer points. To an outsider such intensity of effort may well look abnormal, but once the master and students are working together, the understanding is between them, and no outside individual can judge as to their relationship.

The relationship of a special kind can never be measured by the imaginings of another kind. And even the rules of the schools of shoemakers can never be the same as the rules of the schools of farmers. (50)

- o The proper attitude on the part of the disciple is crucial to the success of the teacher-student relationship. Honoring and respecting the teacher benefits the disciple not the teacher.

Your teacher does not profit from your respect just because it is respect: but *you* do. If, indeed, you do not honor your teacher, you cannot learn; so it would be you yourself who would lose. What the teacher gains is that if you can learn from him he is able to do his work. Real respect, however, comes at a much later stage, when you can appreciate his tremendous importance to you.

‘At that stage, your capacity for respect is equally great, so that you in fact respect his role and his being far more than is even possible for you at the stage of being a learner. (51)

- o Trust and belief in a teacher implies an activity and a posture which develops a higher capacity in the student. “People who cannot trust are themselves not trustworthy, and therefore cannot be entrusted with important things”.

The relationship with your teacher is the most important and complex relationship you can ever experience in life. It cannot be judged by ordinary social standards alone. You may try to evaluate and analyze whatever your teacher does and try to relate to that according to your own convictions, but you won’t get very far. You may even end up more confused. Sometimes everything seems just how it should be, and at other times your expectations are not met at all.

What is called for is a leap of faith. You have to let go of all your notions and take the teacher for what he or she is completely. This is called surrender and it has to be with a true master. (52)

- o For learning to occur the teacher and student must be in a state of receptivity and ‘spiritual’ contact.

The idea of teaching and learning among the Sufis is not always strictly similar to how it is understood in other systems. For example, few people would deny that if you are teaching a student, or trying to reach him or her, and his attention is on something else, the real situation is that no teaching or learning is in fact taking place at that moment. The student is absent in reality, though present in physical terms. In conventional schools, everyone knows this, but the fact is usually monitored retrospectively: by examinations, tests or performance. But for the Sufi the situation is everything. When you are not learning, you are not his pupil, and all responsibility towards you ceases for the period during which you have broken your contract. He seeks, of course, to draw this shortcoming to your attention, or to draw back your attention to the subject. And he tries to do this because he *can*: because, that is, he has (in the modern phrase) feedback. He realizes that what he is teaching, which he feels he is conducting, is not finding a correct response. So here we have another peculiarity of Sufi learning. The concept that people’s attention or receptivity may alternate in effectiveness is so much more than an observation, so different from a truism, that it is hard to describe it other than to use what is often thought today to be unacceptable terminology: he, or she, must be in *spiritual* contact with you, in order to know how to help your perceptions, and above all your understanding, to develop. (53)

- o One of the conditions for learning to occur is that the student must be harmonized and attuned to the teacher, by achieving a balanced attitude: neither rejecting nor servile.

There is and must be a very clear distinction between love, respect and affection for a teacher and a cult of personality. Of course there should be the closest possible relationship between the disciple and the teacher, and this should and does become deeper and deeper. But again, there should be no confusion between this deepening of relationship and feeling, and the character and nature of the teacher.

Hakim Sanai said it in one short sentence. He said that:

‘The teacher who allows his disciple to sit in his shadow when they should be making every effort to sit in the sunshine, is not carrying out his duty correctly.’ (54)

- o The concept of submission and obedience to a spiritual guide is widely misunderstood.

The “submission” that the doctor *does* need, however, is the agreement to follow his regime of treatment and to employ the materials provided in the manner prescribed. At some moment in many ordinary endeavors we place ourselves in the hands of others, when we learn to swim, when we have a

suit made, when we learn a foreign language, or when we obtain treatment for a health problem. Spiritual studies are no different. (55)

- o Obedience and subordination to the direction of a teacher must be a conscious decision on the part of the disciple.

The most difficult thing here is that it is necessary to obey someone, to submit to someone. If a man could invent difficulties and sacrifices for himself, he would sometimes go very far. But the point here is that this is not possible. It is necessary to obey another or to follow the direction of general work, the control of which can belong only to one person. Such submission is the most difficult thing that there can be for a man who thinks that he is capable of deciding anything or of doing anything. Of course, when he gets rid of these fantasies and sees what he really is, the difficulty disappears. This, however, can only take place in the course of work. But to begin to work is very difficult and it is difficult because life runs too smoothly. (56)

- o Although trust and obedience are essential in the relationship between a teacher and a student, there may come a point where the student is unable to continue working with a teacher and needs to find a more compatible spiritual guide.

A healthy skepticism need not be corrosive of essential trust and wholehearted practice. Students will not feel a need to question credentials if they are deepening their insight under severe and compassionate guidance. However, if they feel strain, or become troubled by the relationship, or repeatedly find themselves in situations of moral or psychological ambiguity with their teacher, they should simply exercise their normal critical faculties. After practicing wholeheartedly and giving a teacher the benefit of the doubt, a student may reach a point where it would be wise to seek another guide or another group. In any case, the teacher need not be confused with the teaching. The fact that a teacher turns out to have deep flaws, or that the chemistry of the relationship between student and teacher has not worked well, need not vitiate the promise of Zen training or preclude the possibility of training under another guide. (57)

- o The teacher-student relationship fulfils its greatest promise when both transcend the roles of “teacher” and “pupil.”

The relationship between teacher and disciple is quite magical. The teacher never takes you for an ignorant person, never takes you for a disciple, because he does not take himself for a teacher. To take oneself for a teacher is a restriction, and to take yourself for an ignorant person, a disciple, is a restriction. The moment you become free from this restriction there is a current, a current of oneness.

You should feel yourself really free from the teacher, because the teaching is that you become free, free from yourself, from what you are not. To feel yourself, in the highest sense, absolutely free, you must not be bound to anything, or anyone, or any institution. It is quite simple. Being free is freedom

from everything. Affection never binds you. In affection there is freedom (58)

Transmission of Spiritual Energy or ‘Baraka’

- o The feedback or exchange of energy between teacher and student occurs on many levels. Non-verbal communication is used to contact and awaken the inner being or essence of the person. Telepathic interchanges between master and disciples enables ‘heart to call to heart’.
- o Some of the world’s greatest spiritual masters, such as Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi of India, taught their disciples principally through silence and the emanation of spiritual power.

Q: Why does not Bhagavan go about and preach the Truth to the people at large?

A: How do you know I am not doing it? Does preaching consist in mounting a platform and haranguing the people around? Preaching is simple communication of Knowledge; it can really be done in silence only. What do you think of a man who listens to a sermon for an hour and goes away without having been impressed by it so as to change his life? Compare him with another who sits in a holy presence and goes away after some time with his outlook on life totally changed. Which is the better, to preach loudly without effect or to sit silently sending out inner force? (59)

- o The interaction and transmission of divine energy from teacher to disciple is one of the cornerstones of the spiritual journey. In one sense the teacher acts as a bridge or intermediary between the student and the higher dimensions of spiritual reality.

One must understand the nature of the feeling that exists, in living mystical traditions, between teacher and taught. The Master becomes a living metaphor for the perfection of the Absolute. He seems for the disciple at once the stepping-stone to divinity and, as a self-realized man, divinity made flesh. At the same time there exists in both the conviction that between them the transmission of a quality, indefinable yet unmistakable, can take place, through which the disciple will be permanently altered. When this transmission has occurred, the disciple is in no doubt about what he has gained, nor will the departure or death of the Master diminish one iota of it: he has been flooded by a perception of the Absolute so clear that almost nothing he can do will make him lose it, especially since all he does is done only in its light. In him, therefore, the fact of the teacher and the fact of the divine merge into an inextricable whole, fusing with his own essence to produce a new level of being. (60)

- o A spiritual teacher may pass on part of their mystical experience to some of their disciples who on the basis of past experience and degree of receptivity, are ready for such a development.

Q: How does this transmission of light happen?

A: The flame is potentially there. When your beloved smiles at you there

is a transmission of love beyond the physical gesture. In the oneness of love you smile in involuntary imitation.

Q: Is the disciple always aware of the transmission?

A: The so-called disciple is aware of moments of fullness with the so-called teacher, moments when there is emptiness of all personality, an empty openness. Then he is ready for receiving. The presence of the teacher is itself the transmission. There is no intention to transmit. There may be moments when the disciple is freer than usual from all that he is not. The teacher may seize the opportunity.” (61)

- o The projection of spiritual powers into the mind of the student usually takes place during the process of ‘initiation’. The practice of mutual concentration exercises enables a teacher to transmit a taste of enlightenment to certain disciples. “The mutual-concentration exercise interchange between teacher and pupil enables, among other things, the teacher to provide the means of ‘stilling’, and also the necessary range of subtle stimulus to help the pupil in his development.”
- o Spiritual progress requires the presence of ‘baraka’ passed on from a teacher to the individual or group. ‘Baraka’ is defined as blessing, power or sanctity. The interaction with this force binds the members of a spiritual community together and influences their lives in many way.

The teacher transmits to the pupil the baraka he himself receives from his own master. This baraka works on the pupil according to the time, place and need and the circumstances in which he finds himself. If the baraka is to produce a specific effect on the person, then it is possible that the effect can only be created if the person is in a certain geographical region and in a certain time relationship with the teaching. (62)

- o A teacher can transmit an energy, influence or potential to a student over a vast distance when both are on the same ‘wavelength’.

There are many different types and qualities of energy. They are transmitted and received in different ways by different methods, and they are for use in different situations. Not everyone can develop the capacity to use these different energies, because it is not necessary to be able to use all of them. It is useful, though, to be able to receive all types of them. (63)

- o It is said that when a disciple is correctly attuned to higher Reality through the energy of an esoteric school, they can come into communication with all previous teachers, even across time and space.

You must not take it for granted that to teach a person one needs his physical presence. One can be taught by any number of different ways, each equally efficient, provided that the teacher and the pupil have a strong enough bond established. With that, time and distance are of no importance. (64)

- o Certain personal and psychological characteristics of the student can effectively prevent the transmission of 'baraka' from the teacher to the student.

In one aspect, Baraka is expressed through expansion and contraction. This is achieved through a special mind-body relationship and interaction. Baraka cannot enter into the mind of the seeker until his thoughts have undergone a change that will allow him to be receptive to its influence. It is possible to cut a person off from Baraka – indeed, a great many people are thus cut off. This state is called that of “being veiled”. People who concentrate on any one doctrinaire belief are heavily “veiled” by that belief. The encouragement of the Baraka force is called “removing the veils.” (65)

Individual Characteristics of the Student

- o The teacher guides each student according to their needs and possibilities, rather than starting at a fixed predetermined point. “The guide must be able to determine the capacity of the disciple and will have to deal with this disciple in accordance with his potentiality.”

Since individuals vary greatly in their capacities and aptitudes, Zen Masters must use different methods and teachings for different individuals in different circumstances. And so Zen styles and expressions vary greatly, from the most enigmatic and irrational koans to the plainest and most understandable instructions. (66)

- o A teacher must ensure that the teaching is presented in such a manner as to accord with the pupil's needs, background and abilities. “The instructions given to pupils differ according to the temperaments of the individuals and according to the spiritual ripeness of their minds. Therefore there cannot be any instructions *en masse*.”

The onus is very much upon the teacher to make sure that the student has a sufficient background of information, knowledge and experience so that he can benefit from the teaching itself.

The teaching, too, must be presented in a volume, quality and manner which will correspond with the pupil's needs, abilities and previous thinking, as well as with the teaching's own minimum requirements for its effective expression.

Without all these conditions, real teaching is not possible.

It is the teacher, not the student, who assesses the condition of the student and prescribes his studies. Without adequate supervision over the curriculum and the student's exposure to study-materials, progress is inadequate. (67)

- o The teacher must overcome the student's expectations and fixed biases and provide what the pupil truly needs. “The disciple is the last person who is likely to know what it is that he needs, irrespective of what he wants”.

Each teacher has his own method, usually patterned on his Guru's teaching and on the way he himself has realized, and his own terminology as well. Within that framework adjustments to the personality of the disciple are made. The disciple is given full freedom of thought and enquiry and encouraged to question to his heart's content. He must be absolutely certain of the standing and the competence of his Guru, otherwise his faith will not be absolute nor his action complete. (68)

- o An important task of the teacher is making students aware of the effects of the 'filter of conditioning' so that it can be removed. "The director knows by the behaviour of the student what the condition of his secondary, 'commanding' self is at any given time".
- o The task of the teacher is to prescribe the course of studies for each pupil, indicating what a person should do and should not do. "Someone might know better than the individual himself as to the course which he should pursue".

When you look at a child, you notice that it has three kinds of qualities: those which help its progress, such as eating instinctively; those which could harm its future, such as eating poisonous things; and those which are neutral. In respect to higher teaching and learning, the adult human being is the same. He can acquire valuable nutrients in knowledge. He can acquire dangerous ones, while thinking they are good for him. He can take in irrelevant ones, thinking nothing or thinking that they are significant. Like the parent, the Teacher knows which are which. (69)

Ways and Methods of Teaching

'The Apparent is the Bridge to the Real.'

- o The teaching process itself defines the relationship between teacher and pupil, by the interplay of the minds and hearts of the teacher and the student.

Ummon Bun'en Zenji taught by the model of a box and its lid. There must be a perfect fit. Reading the record of his instruction, we find a wide variety of styles. Each of his responses, however, like each of the responses of every authentic master, is cued to the time, the place, and the circumstances of the encounter. Included in the latter would be the exact nature of the student's need. You don't feed a baby a red pepper, no matter how hungry it may be. (70)

- o The methods chosen by a teacher to instruct and develop his or her students must possess certain important qualities.

A Zen Master who has obtained Awakening possesses an extraordinary capacity to understand the mentality of students working under his direction. It is because he well understands the mentality of his disciple that he can

recommend to him effective methods to initiate him into the world of Awakening. The language of Zen is one of these ways. Aimed at helping the practitioner, this language must:

1. Possess the power of liberating the man from prejudices and attachments to knowledge;
2. Be suitable to the man to whom it is addressed;
3. Be a skillful and effective method. (71)

o Teachers have traditionally employed multiple ways of communicating with and teaching their students.

Rinzai, an early Chinese Zen master, analyzed how to teach his disciples in four ways. Sometimes he talked about the disciple himself; sometimes he talked about the teaching itself; sometimes he gave an interpretation of the disciple or the teaching; and finally, sometimes he did not give any instruction at all to his disciples. He knew that even without being given any instructions, a student is a student. Strictly speaking, there is no need to teach the student, because the student himself is Buddha, even though he may not be aware of it.

When you do not hear anything from the teacher, but just sit, this is called teaching without teaching. But sometimes this is not sufficient, so we listen to lectures and have discussions. (72)

o The course of spiritual study is not fixed or constant. The wisdom and intuition of a living teacher determines how the teaching is projected. The instructor's task is to assess the pupil's potential and monitor, and help to conduct, the learner's progress.

The development and application of Sufism as a study will be organized and projected by the Sufi exponent (a) in light of his own experience rather than by means of repetitious doctrine; (b) in accordance with the actual potential of his students and not by speaking into a void, as it were, and (c) adapted to prevailing circumstances without cleaving to tradition for its own sake. If the conventional type of teaching organization has a stock of information and tested methods and students of a certain capacity, it will seek to bring these factors together in ways familiar to all of us in the more usual sort of school, university and so on.

The Sufi's position, rather, is that he is someone who has experienced something, who sees how to impart it almost from moment to moment. He structures his method, almost instinctively, so as to help to achieve the desired end. This formulation constitutes the only development and application in which he is interested – indeed, in which he is competent.

What is said and done is always subordinate to, and commanded by, a perception of what the learner needs at any given time or place, and under the prevailing circumstances, in order to arrive at similar perceptions. (73)

o In order to teach effectively the instructor must understand the psychological makeup of the student.

In order to have a mandate to teach, one has to know very fundamentally not only what one is teaching, but the people one is teaching to, and understand what makes them tick.

Anybody who teaches anything wants people to learn.

When you are dealing with a material which in this case happens to be human, you have to know exactly what you're dealing with. If you expect people to learn or understand immediately, you are living in a Utopian world: it won't help them and it won't help you. You have to understand their shortcomings, problems, negativity, positivity, the ups and downs, the whole things, and use whichever technique applies to that situation. (74)

- o The way a teaching is presented is a consequence of the teacher's own experience and understanding. A teacher, having completed the spiritual journey, has an overview which students lack and can therefore devise methods which will work.

The most basic teaching is that the teaching itself is produced by the teacher as a consequence of his own experience. As soon as he has had the ultimate experience, he can see from that viewpoint how to bring it to others. He has become a teacher. Now, if in order to bring it to others he has to do or say things which do not seem to be spiritual or even relevant to those who cannot in any case judge, he will always find a way to bring the teaching to those who are open to understanding. (75)

- o The way in which a teacher instructs may not always be comprehensible to the students. One of the difficulties of communicating an esoteric teaching is to "convey experiences which are not like anything that the ordinary person undergoes in life".
- o The subtle aspects of a spiritual teaching require the presence of an 'expert' at critical times to ensure proper development. This is seen as analogous to the seasoning of a dish by a master chef.

Consider the method of seasoning a certain dish. The pot is put on the fire, together with some of the ingredients. Little by little, other items are added. As they cook, they release their substance and flavour, contributing to the total effect. In addition to this, certain spices are used. These condiments are not merely dumped into the stew, they are measured out and put into the pot at certain stages of the cooking. This sort of technique is familiar to all cooks.

There is an additional technique, however, which is less familiar. This is it: an individual condiment is not all added at once. It is measured into several portions. Each portion is added at a different time. The result is that each portion of the same condiment is giving off a flavour slightly different in accordance with its stage of cooking. Such a condiment, may therefore, contain more than one 'flavour'. It is working with subtleties of this rarefaction that distinguishes the prowess of the accomplished cook. (76)

- o The teacher aims for higher development, not conditioning and indoctrination, and intervenes to provide the "right stimulus at the right time for the right person".

There is no standardized series of practices among the Wise. The reason for this is that the teacher will prescribe exercises (or prescribe none) according to the state and nature of his pupil and the character and condition of his 'work.' (77)

- o The multiple meanings of a teaching are effective to the extent and level that an individual can grasp them. In order for knowledge to be properly digested, the teaching must be presented to the student in a step-by-step fashion.

In his effort to give all he can to the disciple, the teacher must reveal himself and his teachings little by little. If he were to give his full concentration at too early a stage, the disciple would not be able to absorb the teaching. Different aspects of the teacher are seen at different times. Some people even think that they see actual faults in the teacher. These, strangely enough, are generally reflections of the faults of the student, which are coming to the surface.

It is in order to place the disciple in a condition in which he can become accessible to the understanding of truth, by an inner sense, that the teacher takes on the burden of the student. He may have to demand the sacrifice of things which the student prizes most. (78)

- o The teacher mediates the elements of learning, such as the focus, balance and weight given to different impacts and experiences.

Q: What are the roles of rituals and beliefs and studies for the Sufi?

A: To be a Sufi and to study the Way is to have a certain attitude. This attitude is produced by the effect of Sufi teachers, who exercise the instrumental function in relation to the Seeker. Rituals and beliefs, and studies, can only have an instrumental effect suitable for Sufi progress when they are correctly used, and by people who are not affected by them in the customary manner.

This has all been very clearly laid down by Abul' Hasan Nuri, over a thousand years ago:

'A Sufi' he says, 'is one who is not bound by anything nor does he bind anything. This means that he does what he does from free choice and not from compulsion or conditioning. Equally, he is not attached to things and does not bind others to him. (79)

- o A teacher provides both individuals and groups with appropriate materials, exercises and experiences for the purpose of study and assimilation.

Learning, in education and teaching in general, require expert guidance from outside, if that guidance does not exist inside the learner.

Such guidance may be unfamiliar in form or associations: but it is never random. It mediates the manner, the time, the place, the company, involved in the learning process and its applications to specific instances. (80)

- o Unless traditional teaching methods are employed with skill and insight they can become subtle barriers blocking the progress of the student.

Q: What do you think of traditional disciplines?

A: There are many traditional disciplines but these cannot be used in a systematic way. As a teacher one has all these forms at one's disposal. But all these techniques still keep alive the I-image. They keep you in the subject-object relationship. Real tradition occurs when the one you call a teacher is completely without image. He or she does not live in the restriction of being a 'teacher' with something to teach, set ways of teaching, and disciplines. In his openness he brings you to freedom from your image. In this there is direct transmission; otherwise, you become stuck in forms and disciplines which can only lead to inflexibility and the blank state. (81)

Choosing a Teacher, Selecting a Student

*'HE is a Master who may teach without it being totally labeled teaching;
HE is a student who can learn without being obsessed by learning.'*

- o The first real step in the spiritual life of an intending disciple is to find a guide on the Path.

Q: How does the teacher overcome the fixed but unperceived biases of the student?

A: Let us look at the relative positions of the teacher and the student. The student regards the teacher as someone who has a quantity of something, and will give him a part of it. Or he may look upon him as someone who knows a method of achieving something.

The teacher sees the student as someone who is eligible for gaining a portion of something. In another sense he looks upon him as someone who can achieve something.

Each in its own way, the attitudes of the two have a connection.

The problem of the teacher is greater than the problem of the student. One reason for this is that the student is anxious to learn but seldom realizes that he can learn *only under the conditions which make this learning possible*. (82)

- o Traditional spiritual teachings provide useful descriptions of some of the essential qualities of a genuine enlightened teacher.

Q: What are the distinctive characteristics of a Guru by which one can recognize him?

A: The Guru is one who at all times abides in the profound depths of the

Self. He never sees any difference between himself and others and is quite free from the idea that he is the Enlightened or the Liberated One, while those around him are in bondage or the darkness of ignorance. His self-possession can never be shaken under any circumstances and he is never perturbed. (83)

- o According to esoteric tradition, there occurs a moment of recognition in which teacher and student understand that they are destined to work together.

For each neophyte setting forth on this difficult path, the only important person, eclipsing all the great, will be his chosen Teacher. It is the Teacher he must trust, the Teacher who must know the right sequence of his development, through the Teacher that he will discover the intellectual and emotional adjustments necessary to prepare him for the knowledge to come. (84)

- o Real teachers discourage disciples who lack the inner capacity to understand higher truths.
- o It is difficult for the student to know at which point in the spiritual journey a guide becomes absolutely necessary. 'If you seek a teacher, try to become a real student. If you want to be a student, try to find a real teacher.'

The aspirant has to be guided by a mentor. The stage at which this guidance can take effect is seldom, if ever, perceptible to the learner. Those who say 'I am ready to learn', or 'I am not ready to learn' are as often mistaken as they are correct in their surmise. Yet the aspirant must try, neither thinking that he is nothing, nor 'trying to sit on a throne.' (85)

- o It is said that the teacher discovers the student, and not the other way around. One of the problems of the would-be disciple is recognizing a genuine teacher, which requires a certain degree of inner perception and refinement.

You cannot choose your teacher by logic. The reason is that logic does not extend into the field in which the teacher is operating. This is why it is better for the teacher to choose you.'

The so-called "choice" of a teacher is not a choice at all. What happens is this. The would-be disciple approaches the potential teacher and opens his heart to him. This means that he allows himself to become receptive to what the teacher is *saying and doing*. He must absorb something of the whole entity, the wholeness, the personage of the teacher *and his works*. Then a contact can be made. There is a recognition in the mind of the disciple that this is the teacher for him. (86)

- o There is always an element of uncertainty in choosing a spiritual teacher as the seeker is entering unknown and unpredictable territory.

How do you know whether you have found the right teacher? You have to follow your own intuition. Only a heart-to-heart connection makes true

communion possible. What is required is faith in your teacher's realization and his ability to help you accomplish the Way.

Approaching a teacher, you walk on uncertain ground. Nobody has any idea what is going to happen. A true teacher lives in the present moment and responds to the living situation. Because it is so unpredictable it never feels safe. There are people who say that students need to feel safe with a teacher; but with a true master, there is always risk involved. How can you feel safe with someone who carries a double-edged sword, giving and taking life without blinking an eye? (87)

- o A real teacher does not pursue or chase potential students, but rather offers and indicates a teaching to those who are open and receptive. The promising student will often feel an inner response and receptivity to the teacher independent of outward appearance or behaviour.

Q: How can I find a Guru whom I can trust?

A: Your own heart will tell you. There is no difficulty in finding a Guru because the Guru is in search of you. The Guru is always ready; you are not ready. You have to be ready to learn; or you may meet your Guru and waste your chance by sheer inattentiveness and obstinacy.

Q: Must I not examine the teacher before I put myself entirely into his hands?

A: By all means examine! But what can you find out? Only as he appears to you on your own level.

Q: I should at least expect him to be a man of self-control who lives a righteous life.

A: Such you will find many – and of no use to you. A Guru can show the way back home, to your real self. What has this to do with the character, or temperament of the person he appears to be? The only way you can judge is by the change in yourself when you are in his company. If you feel more at peace and happy, if you understand yourself with more than usual clarity and depth, it means you have met the right man. (88)

- o The relationship between a teacher and a student is one of mutual responsibility.

The basis of the relationship between a Master and a student in the Tradition is quite clear. It is an agreement between two people, under which the pupil accepts to learn. The Master undertakes to teach, and takes the responsibility for guiding the pupil. It is a free association, and this is what gives it its strength. If both parties to the agreement do not fulfill their promise, then the activity between the two will not function. (89)

- o Potential students must learn to develop trust and faith in their teacher in order to be real disciples on the Path.

Trust is something which the postulant must find from within himself, in spite of what the superficialities seem to indicate. This is one reason that Sufi masters have even made themselves appear ridiculous or untrustworthy to intending disciples.

One of the commonest manifestations of lack of trust in a teacher, constantly emphasized by Sufi masters, is when the disciple expects attention and instructions when he has not done what he should do as a precondition of these things. (90)

- o In order for a teacher and student to work together effectively there must be an affinity and congruence between the two.

In work of this nature there can be no sort of criticism, no sort of “disagreement” with this or that person. On the contrary, all work consists in doing what the leader indicates, understanding in conformance with his opinions even those things that he does not say plainly, helping him in *everything* that he does. There can be no other attitude towards the work. A most important thing in the work was *to remember that one came to learn* and to take no other role upon oneself.

At the same time this does not mean that a man has no choice or that he is obliged to follow something which does not respond to what he is seeking. If a man has begun to work with a leader whom he cannot follow, then of course, having noticed and realized this, he ought to go and seek another leader or work independently, if he is able to do so. (91)

Discriminating Between Real and False Spiritual Teachers

- o The would-be student needs to learn how to distinguish the difference between genuine spirituality and obsession or indoctrination.

Q: How would one know whether a devout person is in reality a Master? Surely, anyone who is deeply religious and totally or mainly absorbed in spiritual observances might well be such a person?

A: Bayazid was asked what would be the most important indication of a master who knew the secrets of the Way. He answered:

‘When he eats and drinks, buys and sells, and makes jokes with you, he whose heart is in the sacred domain – this is the greatest of signs of his being a Master.’

Those people to whom you refer, who are devout, religious and absorbed, if they are incapable of detaching from these things – if, in fact these characteristics are obsessional – then they cannot be teachers of the Path.

This, in fact, is the chief difference between the indoctrinated person and the spiritual one, according to the Sufis. (92)

- o Seekers are often unable to discriminate between real and false spiritual teachers because of psychological factors such as projection, wish-fulfillment and so on.

Q: How can we know the false prophets from the seers?

A: In openness to the ultimate, free from looking for a physical teacher, you remain outside the psychological field and its projections and transferences. A teacher who takes himself or herself as a teacher needs those who take themselves as disciples. In India and now in the United States there is a lot of guru-shopping. You will know when you have met the guru because he is not outside you and you become more and more independent. If you do not deeply feel your own autonomy you can be sure you are attached by projection and reaction

Many come looking for protection, authority, a mother, father, lover, doctor or therapist. Inquire deeply into why you came looking. You will see it arises from lack. You must face the lack directly and not escape into projections. A clear mind is also a peaceful mind and if the teacher does not bring you quickly to intellectual clarity, and greater autonomy, then go away. Do not stay, compelled by secondary factors. (93)

- o The goal of an authentic teacher is to selflessly lead others to enlightenment. The false teacher, on the other hand, is more interested in power, exploitation of others and personality-worship. “No matter what superior qualities a guru may possess, if he is obviously seeking name and fame, is after money, or is carrying on with his female students, these impurities will corrupt his teaching; a prospective student would therefore do well to avoid him.”

In Zen, the teacher’s aim, apart from bringing a student to enlightenment, is to preserve the student from his influence. He doesn’t wish to control the student’s life but only to make him strong enough to be master of his life instead of its slave. In certain other spiritual traditions the guru virtually rules his students’ lives, even to the extent of telling them whether to marry and have children. His word is law. If his spirituality is deep, there is little danger. If it is not, God help the student!

Shun any teacher who says, ‘I am enlightened.’ Beware of any guru who claims to be an avatar, an incarnation of a god or Buddha. Above all, avoid the “master” who allows his followers to shout his praises with arms up-raised at mass rallies, and to laud him as the holiest of the holies. He is the greatest menace. (94)

- o The way in which a genuine spiritual teacher works with pupils is very different from that of cult-based ‘gurus’ and self-appointed ‘teachers’.

He does not invade his pupil’s lives, create dependency or use systematically shocking techniques to achieve his (and their) ends, although he is capable of doing so. All family ties and relationships are to be respected and built upon, recourse to all artificial stimulants discouraged. He uses the normal time-frame within which we live, which means that progress will often take longer than one would have hoped, and a shock or a provocation will be held in reserve for exceptional cases, for instance when a pupil is falling into a rut of some years’ duration. A teacher doesn’t walk into a room with his ‘guns blazing’ unless there is some teaching point to the operation, but he still

has to keep it in reserve as an option if nothing less is adequate for the situation.

The notion of time and appropriateness to the situation is paramount, as well as the 'keying in' factor. One can say that, generally speaking, people have a tendency to be impatient, and western education feeds this tendency by promoting the illusion that you 'know' a subject when you have assimilated a certain amount of basic information about it.

This tendency also means that people won't consider they have learnt something unless it has taken a very heightened or dramatic form. People get drawn towards cathartic-type experiences where they are torn apart, the better, 'so the assumption goes, to be rebuilt again afterwards.' Certain therapists and many false teachers batten onto this kind of attraction by working in terms of conflict rather than towards harmony. (95)

- o One of the attributes of a genuine teacher is the ability to prescribe the appropriate course of study for each individual student.

This is one of the functions of real teachers: to tell you what to avoid as well as what to do. Equally, of course, you can tell who is a real teacher and who is not, as often as not, by whether the teacher is merely giving you a bundle of instructions (prayers, meditations, fasting, concentration, and so on) and hence not excluding, or whether he is also telling you what should be avoided. The latter admonitions will deal with the time and places, the company and the response to reactions, which are part of the authentic knowledge of the real teacher. (96)

- o Students can evaluate, to a certain degree, the competence of so-called spiritual teachers by external criteria and inner sense.

The student must study the master to see by his words and actions whether he is working on a higher level, or whether he is merely a social phenomena. The objection to this – that the student cannot tell, since the master is working in an invisible realm – is true only up to a point. When a supposed teacher manifests ordinary foibles or weaknesses as a part of his life's pattern, and if the student has also done enough interior work to give him an accurate judging capacity, the truth will be evident. (97)

- o The genuine teacher is able to teach those who really want to learn. "If there is any definition of a real teacher, it must include that he can tell the difference between entertainment and instruction, between circus and teaching, between didacticism and action, between awareness-teaching and therapy".

Competent direction is defined as direction by a competent teacher. Such a person, rare in the extreme, is not one who has called forth an emotional reaction because something which he says is acceptable to the hearer at the specific time when he hears it. Neither is he someone who relies (overtly or otherwise) upon strange or authoritative dogma. He is a teacher. (98)

- o Perhaps the most significant indicator of a true teacher is that learning on the part of the pupil actually occurs.

If I am walking through the jungle on a path and there is a stone in the path, and I trip and fall on that stone, and if I learn from that stone to look where I am going, that is my guru, because it has taught me something; not somebody who is going to teach me, not somebody who might teach you, but somebody who has taught you something. And if it is a stone, it is a stone.

‘A guru is something or somebody from whom you have learnt something, not from whom you might or will or whom you respect or whom other people respect. If you can’t learn, the teacher, effectively, “does not exist.” (99)

- o There are a number of descriptions in the literature of the qualifications and characteristics of a real spiritual teacher:

1. Has a strong sense of humour, and shows it frequently.
2. Wears, most of the time, the clothes of the country wherein he lives.
3. Ordinarily eats the wholesome food of the country where he dwells.
4. Supports himself by his own labour.
5. Can work “in the world” and make what seems like worldly activities successful.
6. Has no physical relations or familiarity with his disciples.
7. Does not allow his disciples to leave the world or cut communication with their relatives and friends.
8. Recognizes that all ‘exercises’ and ‘books’ are temporary formulae, and not to be applied automatically at all times and to all people.
9. Refuses to mystify you, and has no magical aura.
10. Produces no atmosphere of “power” around him. As the ancients have rightly said: “The fraud makes people believe that he is a man of power. The true teacher spends much time appearing very normal. (100)

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