

The Sufi Tradition

Interview with Idries Shah

EH: Idries Shah, you are the West's leading exponent of Sufism, that rich religious tradition growing out of the Middle East. Why, at a time when new cults are springing up, do you refuse to be a guru? You could easily become one.

IS: There are a lot of reasons. But if we are talking about the teacher who has disciples, it's because I feel no need for an admiring audience to tell me how wonderful I am or to do what I say. I believe that the guru needs his disciples. If he had a sufficient outlet for his desire to be a big shot or his feeling of holiness or his wish to have others dependent on him, he wouldn't be a guru.

I got all that out of my system very early and, consistent with Sufi tradition, I believe that those who don't want to teach are the ones who can and should. The West still has a vocation hang-up and has not yet discovered this. Here, the only recognized achiever is an obsessive. In the East we believe that a person who can't help doing a thing isn't necessarily the best one to do it. A compulsive cookie baker may bake very bad cookies.

EH: Are you saying that a person who feels that he must engage in a certain profession is doing it because of some emotional need?

IS: I think this is very often the case, and it doesn't necessarily produce the best professional. Show an ordinary person an obsessive and he will believe you have shown him a dedicated and wonderful person - provided he share his beliefs. If he doesn't, of course, he regards the one obsessed as evil. Sufism regards this as a facile and untrue posture. And if there is one consistency in the Sufi tradition, it is that man must be in the world but not of the world. There is no role for a priest-king or guru.

EH: Then you have a negative opinion of all gurus.

IS: Not of all. Their followers need the guru as much as the guru needs his followers. I just don't regard it as a religious operation. I take a guru to be a sort of psychotherapist. At the very best, he keeps people quiet and polarized around him and gives some sort of meaning to their lives.

EH: Librium might do the same thing.

IS: Yes, but that's no reason to be against it. Why shouldn't there be room for what we might call "neighborhood psychotherapy" - the community looking after its own? However, why it should be called a spiritual activity rather baffles me.

EH: One can't help getting the feeling that not all gurus are trying to serve their fellowman.

IS: Some are frankly phonies, and they don't try to hide it from me. They think that I am one, too, so when we meet they begin the most disturbing conversations. They want to know how I get money, how I control people, and so on.

EH: They want to swap secrets.

IS: That's going a little too far. But they feel safety in numbers. They actually feel there is something wrong with what they are doing, and they feel better if they talk to somebody else who is doing it. I always tell them that I think it would be much better if they gave up the guru role in their own minds and realize that they are providing a perfectly good social service.

EH: How do they take to that advice?

IS: Sometimes they laugh and sometimes they cry. The general impression is that one of us is wrong. Because I don't make the same kind of noises that they do, they seem to believe that either I am a lunatic or that I am starting some new kind of con. Perhaps I have found a new racket.

EH: I am surprised that these gurus tell you all their secrets as freely as they do.

IS: I must tell you that I have not renounced the Eastern technique of pretending to be interested in what another person is saying, even pretending to be on his side. Therefore, I am able to draw out gurus and get them to commit themselves to an extent that a Westerner, because of his conscience, could not do. The Westerner would not allow certain things to go unchallenged and would not trick, as it were, another person. So he doesn't find out the truth.

Look here, it's time that somebody took the lid off the guru racket.

Since I have nothing to lose, it might as well be me. With many of these gurus it comes down to an "us and them" sort of thing between the East and the West. Gurus from India used to stop by on their way to California and their attitude was generally, let's take the Westerners to the cleaners; they colonized us, now we will get money out of them. I heard this sort of thing even from people who had impeccable spiritual reputations back home in India.

EH: It is an understandable human reaction to centuries of Western exploitation.

IS: It's understandable, but I deny that it's a spiritual activity. What I want to say is, "Brother, you are in the revenge business, and that's a different kind of business from me." There are always groups that are willing to negotiate with me and want to use my name. On one occasion a chap in a black shirt and white tie told me, "You take Britain, but don't touch the United States, because that's ours." I had a terrible vision of Al Capone. The difference was that the guru's disciples kissed his feet.

See what I mean?? Nasrudin was throwing handfuls of crumbs around his house. "What are you doing?" someone asked him. "Keeping the tigers away." "But there are no tigers in these parts."

"That's right. Effective, isn't it?"

EH: Gurus keep proliferating in the United States, always with massive followings. A 15-year-old Perfect Master can fill the Astrodome.

IS: Getting the masses is the easy part. A guru can attract a crowd of a million in India, but few in a crowd take him seriously. You see, India has had gurus for thousands of years, so they are generally sophisticated about them; they take in the attitude with their mothers' milk. This culture just hasn't been inoculated against the guru. Let's turn it around. If I were fresh off a plane from India and told you that I was going to Detroit to become a wonderful automobile millionaire, you would smile at me. You know perfectly well the obstacles, the taxes, the ulcers that I face. Well, the Indian is in the same position with the automobile industry as the American with the

guru. I'm not impressed by naive American reactions to gurus; if you can show me a guru who can pull off that racket in the East, then I will be surprised.

EH: Before we go any farther, we'd better get down to basics and ask the obvious question. What is Sufism?

IS: The most obvious question of all is for us the most difficult question. But I'll try to answer. Sufism is experience of life through a method of dealing with life and human relations. This method is based on an understanding of man, which places at one's disposal the means to organize one's relationships and one's learning systems. So instead of saying that Sufism is a body of thought in which you believe certain things and don't believe other things, we say that the Sufi experience has to be provoked in a person. Once provoked, it becomes his own property, rather as a person masters an art.

EH: So ideally, for four million readers, you would have four million different explanations.

IS: In fact, it wouldn't work out like that. We progress by means of Nashr, an Arabic word than means scatter technique. For example, I've published quite a number of miscellaneous books, articles, tapes and so on, which scatter many forms of this Sufi material. These 2,000 different stories cover many different tendencies in many people, and they are able to attach themselves to some aspect of it.

EH: I noticed as I read that the same point would be made over and over again in a different way in a different story. In all my reading, I think the story that made the most profound impression on me was "The Water of Paradise." Afterward, I found the same point in other stories, but had I not read "The Water of Paradise" first, I might not have picked it up.

IS: That is the way the process tends to work. Suppose we get a group of 20 people past the stage where they no longer expect us to give them miracles and stimulation and attention. We sit them down in a room and give them 20 or 30 stories, asking them to tell us what they see in the stories, what they like, and what the don't like. The stories first operate as a sorting out process. They sort out both the very clever people who need psychotherapy and who have come only to put you down, and the people who have come to worship.

If a pot can multiply: One day Nasrudin lent his cooking pots to a neighbor, who was giving a feast. The neighbor returned them, together with one extra one - a very tiny pot. "What is this?" asked Nasrudin. "According to law, I have given you the offspring of your property which was born when the pots were in my care," said the joker. Shortly afterwards Nasrudin borrowed his neighbor's pots, but did not return them. The man came round to get them back. "Alas!" said Nasrudin, "they are dead. We have established, have we not, that pots are mortal?"

IS: In responsible Sufi circles, no one attempts to handle either the sneerers or the worshippers, and they are very politely detached from the others.

EH: They are not fertile ground?

IS: They have something else to do first. And what they need is offered abundantly elsewhere.

I know her best: People ran to tell the Mulla that his mother-in-law had fallen into the river. "She will be swept out to sea, for the torrent is very fast here," they cried.

Without a moment's hesitation Nasrudin dived into the river and started to swim upstream. "No!" they cried, "DOWNSTREAM!"

That is the only way a person can be carried away from here." "Listen!" panted the Mulla, "I know my wife's mother. If everyone else is swept downstream, the place to look for HER is upstream."

IS: There's no reason for them to bother us. Next we begin to work with people who are left. In order to do this, we must cool it. We must not have any spooky atmosphere, any strange robes or gongs or intonations. The new students generally react to the stories either as they think you would like them to react or as their background tells them they should react. Once they realize that no prizes are being given for correct answers, they begin to see that their previous conditioning determines the way they are seeing the material in the stories.

So, the second use of the stories is to provide a protected situation in which people can realize the extent of the conditionings in their ordinary lives. The third use comes later, rather like when you get the oil to the surface of a well after you burn off the gases. After we have burnt off the conditioning, we start getting completely new interpretations and reactions to stories. At last, as the student becomes less emotional, we can begin to deal with the real person, not the artifact that society has made him.

EH: Is this a very long process?

IS: You can't predict it at all. With some people it is an instant process; with others, it takes weeks or months. Still others get fed up and quit because, like good children of the consumer society, they crave something to consume and we're not giving it to them.

EH: You say that conditioning gets in the way of responses to Sufi material. But everyone is conditioned from birth, so how does one ever escape from his conditioning?

IS: We can't live in the world without being conditioned. Even the control of one's bladder is conditioned. It is absurd to talk, as some do, of deconditioned or nonconditioned people. But it is possible to see why conditioning has taken place and why a person's beliefs become oversimplified.

Nobody is trying to abolish conditioning, merely to describe it, to make it possible to change it, and also to see where it needs to operate, and where it does not. Some sort of secondary personality, which we call the "commanding self" takes over man when his mentation is not correctly balanced. This self, which he takes for his real one, is in fact a mixture of emotional impulses and various pieces of conditioning. As a consequence of Sufi experience, people - instead of seeing things through a filter of conditioning plus emotional reactions, a filter which constantly discards certain stimuli - can see things through some part of themselves that can only be described as not conditioned.

EH: Are you saying that when one comes to an awareness that he is conditioned, that he can operate aside from it? He can say, "Why do I believe this? Well, perhaps it is because..."

IS: Exactly. Then he is halfway toward being liberated from his conditioning - or at least toward keeping it under control. People who say that we must smash conditioning are themselves oversimplifying things.

EH: A number of years ago an American psychologist carried out an interesting experiment. He had a device that supplied two images, one to each eye. One image was a baseball player, the other was a matador. He had a group of American and Mexican schoolteachers look thru this device. Most of the Americans saw a baseball player and most of the Mexicans saw the matador. From what you have said, I gather that Sufism might enable an American to see the matador and a Mexican to see the baseball player.

IS: That is what many of the Sufi stories try to do. As a reader, you tend to identify with one of the people in the story. When he behaves unexpectedly, it gives you a bit of a jolt and forces you to see him with different eyes.

EH: When one reads about Sufism, one comes upon conflicting explanations. Some people say that Sufism is pantheistic; others that it is related to theosophy. Certainly there are strains in Sufism that you can find in any of the major world religions.

IS: There are many ways to talk about the religious aspects of Sufism. I'll just choose one and see where it leads. The Sufis themselves say that their religion has no history, because it is not culture bound. Although Sufism has been productive in Islam, according to Sufi tradition and scripture, Sufis existed in pre-Islamic times. The Sufis say that all religion is evolution, otherwise it wouldn't survive. They also say that all religion is capable of development up to the same point. In historical times, Sufis have worked with all recognized religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Vedanta, Buddhism and so on. Sufis are in religion but not of it.

Early to rise: "Nasrudin, my son, get up early in the mornings." "Why father?" "It is a good habit. Why, once I rose at dawn and went for a walk. I found on the road a sack of gold." "How did you know it was not lost the previous night?" "That is not the point. In any case, it had not been there the night before. I noticed that." "Then it isn't lucky for everyone to get up early. The man who lost the gold must have been up earlier than you."

EH: What is the Sufi attitude toward mysticism and the ecstatic experience?

IS: Sufis are extraordinarily cautious about this. They don't allow a person to do spiritual exercises unless they are convinced that he can undergo such exercises without harm and appreciate them without distraction. Spiritual exercises are allowed only at a certain time and a certain place and with certain people. When the ecstatic exercises are taken out of context, they become a circus at best and unhinge minds at worst.

EH: So the ecstatic experience has its place but only at a certain time at a certain stage of development?

IS: Yes, and with certain training. The ecstatic experience is certainly not required. It is merely a way of helping man to realize his potential.

They (Sufis) don't allow a person to do spiritual exercises unless they are convinced that he can undergo such exercises without harm and appreciate them without distraction.

Hall: Many of the great Sufi teachers seem to regard the ecstatic experience as only a way station.

Shah: Oh, yes. The ecstatic experience is absolutely the lowest form of advanced knowledge.

Western biographers of the saints have made it very difficult for us by assuming that Joan of Arc and Theresa of Avila, who have had such experiences, have reached God. I am sure that this is only a misunderstanding based on faulty stories and faulty retrieval of information.

Hall: Sufis also seem to take extra-sensory perception as a matter of course and as not very interesting.

Shah: Not interesting at all. It is no more than a by-product. Let me give you a banal analogy. If I were training to be a runner and went out every day to run, I would get faster and faster and be able to run farther and farther with less fatigue. Now, I also find that I have a better complexion, my blood supply is better, and my digestion has improved. These things don't interest me; they are only by-products of my running. I have another objective. When people I am associated with become overwhelmed by ESP phenomena, I always insist that they stop it, because their objective is elsewhere.

Hall: They are supposed to be developing their potential; not attempting to read minds or move objects around. Do you think that researchers will one day explain the physical basis of ESP or do you think it will always elude them?

Shah: If I say it will elude the scientists, it will annoy the people who are able to get enormous grants for research into ESP. But I think, yes, a great deal more can be discovered providing the scientists are prepared to be good scientists. And by that I mean that they are prepared to structure their experiments successively in accordance with their discoveries. They must be ready to follow and not hew doggedly to their original working hypothesis. And they will certainly have to give up their concept of the observer being outside of the experiment, which has been their dearest pet for many years.

And another thing, as we find constantly in metaphysics, people who are likely to be able to understand and develop capacities for ESP are more likely to be found among people who are not interested in the subject.

Hall: Is that because disinterest is necessary to approach the subject properly?

Shah: Something like that. Being disinterested, you can approach ESP more coolly and calmly. The Sufis say: "You will be able to exercise these supernatural powers when you can put out your hand and get a wild dove to land on it." But the other reason why the people who are fascinated by ESP or metaphysics or magic are the last who should study it is that they are interested in it for the wrong reasons. It may be compensation. They are not equipped to study ESP. They are equipped for something else: fear, greed, hate, or love of humanity.

Hall: Often they have a desperate wish to prove that ESP is either true or false.

Shah: Yes that's what I call heroism. But it's not professionalism and that's what the job calls for. Hall: You've also written a couple of books on magic: *Oriental Magic* and *The Secret Lore of Magic*, an investigation of Western magic. Today there's an upsurge of interest in astrology and witchcraft and magic. You must have speculated somewhat about magic in those books.

Shah: Very little. The main purpose of my books on magic was to make this material available to the general reader. For too long people believed that there were secret books, hidden places, and amazing things. They held onto this information as something to frighten themselves with. So the first purpose was information. This is

the magic of East and West. That's all. There is no more. The second purpose of those books was to show that there do seem to be forces, some of which are either rationalized by this magic or may be developed from it, which do not come within customary physics or within the experience of ordinary people. I think this should be studied, that we should gather the data and analyze the phenomena. We need to separate the chemistry of magic from the alchemy, as it were.

Hall: That's not exactly what the contemporary devotees of witchcraft and magic are up to.

Shah: No. My work has no relevance to the current interest whatever. Oh, it makes my books sell, but they were written for cool-headed people and there aren't many of those around.

Hall: Most of the people who get interested in magic seem to be enthusiasts.

Shah: Yes, it's just as with ESP. There's no reason why they shouldn't be enthusiasts, but having encouraged them-which I couldn't help-I must now avoid them. They would only be disappointed in what I have to say.

You know, Rumi said that people counterfeit gold because there is such a thing as real gold, and I think that's the situation we are in with Sufi studies at the moment. It is much easier to write a book on Sufism than it is to study it. It is much easier to start a group and tell people what to do than it is to learn first. The problem is that the spurious, the unreal, the untrue is so much easier to find that it is in danger of becoming the norm. Until recently, for example, if you didn't use drugs in spiritual pursuits, you were not considered genuine. If you said, "look, drugs are irrelevant to spiritual matters," you were considered a square.

Their attitude is not at all a search for truth.

Hall: Many people seem to use drugs as an attempt to get instant enlightenment.

Shah: People want to be healed or cured or saved, but they want it now. It's astonishing. When people come here to see me, they want to get something, and if I can't give them higher consciousness, they will take my bedspreads or my ashtrays or whatever else they can pick up around the house.

Hall: They want something to carry away.

Shah: They are thinking in terms of lose property, almost physical. They are savages in the best sense of the word. They are not what they think they are at all. I am invited to believe that they take bedspreads and ashtrays by accident. But it never works the other way; they never leave their wallets behind by mistake. One thing I learned from my father very early: Don't take any notice of what people say, just watch what they do.

Hall: Let's get back to your main work. What is the best way of introducing the Sufi way of thinking to the West?

Shah: I am sure that the best way is not to start a cult, but to introduce a body of literary material that should interest people enough to establish the Sufi phenomenon as viable. We don't plan to form an organization with somebody at the top and others at the bottom collecting money or wearing funny clothes or converting people to Sufism. We view Sufism not as an ideology that molds people to the right way of belief or action, but as an art or science that can exert a beneficial influence on

individuals or societies, in accordance with the needs of those individuals and societies.

Hall: Does Western society need this infusion of Sufi thought?

Shah: It needs it for the same reason that any society needs it, because it gives one something one cannot get elsewhere. For example, Sufi thought makes a person more efficient. A watchmaker becomes a better watchmaker. A housewife becomes a better housewife. When somebody said as much in California last year, 120 hippies got up and left the hall. They didn't wait to hear that they weren't going to be forced to be more efficient.

Hall: But there must be more than efficiency to it.

Shah: Of course. I wouldn't try to sell Sufism purely as a means to efficiency, even though it does make one more effective in all sorts of ways. I think Sufism is important because it enables one to detach from life and see it as near to its reality as one can possibly get. Sufi experience tends to produce the kind of person who is calm, not because he can't get excited, but because he knows that getting excited about an event or problem is not going to have any lasting effect.

Hall: Would you say that it might give a person an outlook on the problems of this time similar to the outlook he might presently have on the problems of the 16th century?

Shah: Very much so. And such an outlook takes the heat out of almost every contention. Instead of becoming the classical Oriental philosopher who says, "All reality is imagination. Why should I care about the world," you begin to see alternative ways of acting.

For example, some of the finest people in this country spend a great deal of their time jumping up and down waving banners that condemn the various dirty beasts of the world. Such behavior makes the dirty beasts delighted at the thought that they are so important and the jumpers are so impotent.

If the Trafalgar square jumpers had an objective view of their behavior, they would abandon it. First, they would see that they are only giving aid and comfort to the enemy, and second, they would be able to see how to do something about the dirty beasts-and if it were necessary to do anything about them.

Hall: In other words, Sufism might help us solve some of the enormous social, political and environmental problems that face us.

Shah: People talk about Sufism as if it were the acquisition of powers. Sufi metaphysics has even got a magical reputation. The truth is that Sufi study and development give one capacities that one did not have before. One would not kill merely because killing is bad. Instead, one would know that killing is unnecessary and, in addition, what one would have to do in order to make humanity happier and able to realize better objectives. That's what knowledge is for.

Hall: When I read your books, the message came through very clearly that you are not interested in rational, sequential thought-in what Bob Ornstein calls left-hemisphere activity.

Shah: To say that I'm not interested in sequential thinking is not to say that I can live without it. I have it up to a certain point, and I expect the people I meet to be able to

use it. We need information in order to approach a problem, but we also need to be able to see the thing whole.

Hall: When you speak of seeing the thing whole, you're talking about intuitive thought, where you don't reason the problem out but know the answer without knowing how you got it.

Shah: Yes. You know the answer and can verify that it is an answer. That is the difference between romantic imagining and something that belongs to this world.

Hall: Ornstein, who seems to have been profoundly influenced by Sufi thought, has suggested that most people today tend to rely on logical, rational, linear thought and that we tend to use very little of the intuitive, nonlinear thought of the brain's right hemisphere. Would you say that Sufism can teach one to tap right-hemisphere thought?

Shah: Yes, I would. Sufism has never been overimpressed by the products of left-hemisphere activity, although it's often used them.

For instance, Sufis have written virtually all the great poetry of Persia, and while the inspiration for a poem may come from the right hemisphere, one must use the left hemisphere to put the poem down in the proper form. I think that the behavior and products of Sufism are among the few things we have that encourage a holistic view of things. I don't want to discuss Sufism in Ornsteinian terms, however, because I'm not qualified to do so. I can only say that insofar as there is any advantage in these two hemispheres acting alternately or complementing one another, then Sufi material undoubtedly is among the very little available material that can help this process along.

Hall: Why are the traditional Western methods of study inappropriate for the study of Sufism?

Shah: They are inappropriate only up to a point. Both the Western and Middle Eastern methods of study come from the common heritage of the Middle Ages, when one was regarded as wise if he had a better memory than someone else. But some of the teaching methods that Sufis use seem rather odd to the Westerner. If I were to say to you that my favorite method of teaching is to bore the audience to death, you would be shocked. But I have just results of some tests, which show that English schoolchildren, when shown a group of films, remembered only the ones that bored them.

Now this is consistent with our experience, but it is not consistent with Western beliefs.

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

Until recently I wouldn't have dared speak about this, but I now have a clipping indicating that when a person endures a shock he produces Theta rhythms. Some people have associated these brain rhythms with various forms of ESP. No connection has been made yet, but I think we may be beginning to understand it.

Hall: Recent studies of memory indicate that unless adrenalin is present, no learning takes place, and shock causes adrenalin to flow. We also know from experience that

when you find yourself in a situation of grave danger, you tend to notice some very small detail with great clarity.

Shah: Exactly. Concentration comes in on a strange level and in an unaccustomed way. But using this knowledge has traditionally given Sufi teachers a reputation for having bad manners. The most polite thing they can say about us is that we are irascible and out of control. Some people say that a spiritual teacher should have no emotions or be totally balanced. We say that a spiritual teacher must be a person who can be totally balanced, not one who cannot help but be balanced.

Hall: People in the United States seem to be looking for leaders, whether spiritual or political, and they keep complaining because there are no leaders to follow.

Shah: People are always looking for leaders; that does not mean that this is the time for a leader. The problems that a leader would be able to resolve have not been identified. Nor does the clamor mean that those who cry out are suitable followers. Most of the people who demand a leader seem to have some baby's idea of what a leader should do. The idea that a leader will walk in and we will all recognize him and follow him and everybody will be happy strikes me as a strangely immature atavism. Most of these people, I believe, want not a leader but excitement. I doubt that those who cry the loudest would obey a leader if there was one. Talk is cheap, and a lot of the talk comes from millions of old washerwomen.

Hall: If so, the washerwomen are spread throughout the culture.

Shah: They're not called washerwomen, but if we test them, they react like washerwomen. For example, if you are selling books and you send a professor of philosophy something written in philosophical language, he will throw it away. But if you send him a spiel written for a washerwoman, he will buy the book. At heart he is a washerwoman. Intellectuals don't understand this, but business people do because their profits depend upon it. You can learn much more about human nature on Madison Avenue than you will from experts on human nature, because on Madison Avenue one stands or falls by the sales. Professors in their ivory towers can say anything because there's no penalty attached. Go to where there is a penalty attached and there you will find wisdom.

Hall: That's a tough statement. You sound as if you are down on all academics.

Shah: Well, in the past few years I have given quite a few seminars and lectures at universities, and I have become terrified by the low level of ability. It is as if people just aren't trying. They don't read the books in their fields, don't know the workings of them, use inadequate approaches to a subject, ask ridiculous questions that a moment's thought would have enabled them to answer. If these are the cream, what is the milk like?

Hall: Are you talking about undergraduates, graduate students, or professors?

Shah: The whole lot. Recently I've been appalled at the low levels of articles in learned journals and literary weeklies. The punctuation gone to hell, full of non-sequiturs, an obvious lack of background knowledge, and so on. I went to a newspaper and looked up the equivalent articles from the 1930's. A great change has taken place. Forty years ago there were two kinds of articles: very, very good and terribly bad. There seemed nothing in-between. Now everything is slapdash and mediocre. Why are so many famous persons in hallowed institutions now so mediocre?

Hall: Critics like Dwight Macdonald have said for years that as education becomes widespread and people become semiliterate, the culture at the top is inevitably pulled down. But you're not really hostile to all academics, are you?

Shah: No, some of my best friends are academics.

Hall: That is no way to get out of it.

Shah: Of course, I'm not hostile to all academics. There are some great thinkers. But I do not believe that it is necessary for us to have 80% blithering idiots in order to get 20% marvellous academics. This ratio depresses me. I think that the good people are unbelievably noble in denying that the rest of them are such hopeless idiots. Privately they agree with you, but they won't rock the boat. For the sake of humanity, somebody has got to rock the boat.

Hall: For the sake of humanity, what would you like to see happen?

Shah: What I really want, in case anybody is listening, is for the products of the last 50 years of psychological research to be studied by the public, by everybody, so that the findings become part of their way of thinking. At the moment, people have adopted only a few. They talk glibly about making Freudian slips and they have accepted the idea of inferiority complexes. But they have this great body of psychological information and refuse to use it.

There is a Sufi story about a man who went into a shop and asked the shopkeeper, "Do you have leather?"

"Yes," said the shopkeeper.

"Nails?"

"Yes."

"Thread?"

"Yes."

"Needle?"

"Yes"

"Then why don't you make yourself a pair of boots?"

That story is intended to pinpoint this failure to use available knowledge. People in this civilization are starving in the middle of plenty. This is a civilization that is going down, not because it hasn't got the knowledge that would save it, but because nobody will use the knowledge.