

The Wisdom of Idiots: A Brief Sufi Morality Tale

by Cesar Chelala via cyd - Counterpunch Tuesday, Feb 6 2018, 9:29pm

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Idries Shah was a teacher in the Sufi tradition whose seminal work was *The Sufis*. He presented Sufism as a universal form of wisdom that predated Islam. In his writings, he frequently used teaching stories and humor to transmit this philosophy. His stories contained multiple layers of meaning and were written with the idea that they could trigger insight and self-reflection in the reader.

His son Tahir Shah quotes the explanation his father gave him at the end of a story: "These stories are technical documents; they are like maps, or kind of blueprints. What I do is show people how to use the maps, because they have forgotten."

The story "Bahaudin and the Wanderer" from his book "Wisdom of the Idiots" is a good example of this assertion, and may have some bearing on events now taking place in the United States. The story tells what happened when Bahaudin el-Shah, great teacher of the Naqshbandi dervishes (members of a Muslim, specifically Sufi, a religious order who have taken vows of poverty and austerity) met a colleague in the great square of Bokhara, an ancient city in the central Asian country of Uzbekistan.

His colleague was a wandering Kalendar of the Malamati, also known as the "Blameworthy". Bahaudin, who was surrounded by his disciples, asked the traveler, in the usual Sufi way, where he came from. The traveler, grinning foolishly, replied, "I have no idea." Several of Bahaudin's disciples murmured their disapproval of this lack of respect for their teacher.

Unfazed Bahaudin continued, "Where are you going?" The dervish, almost shouting at him, replied: "I don't know." By then a large crowd had gathered and was intently following the dialogue. "What is good?" asked Bahaudin. "I don't know," replied the traveler. "What is Evil?" continued Bahaudin. "I have no idea," replied the traveler. "What is right?" asked Bahaudin. "Whatever is good for me," replied the traveler. "What is wrong?" asked again Bahaudin. "Whatever is bad for me," said the traveler.

At this point, the crowd, irritated by the frivolous responses of the traveler, pelted him with rocks and drove him away. He left, striding purposefully in a direction that led nowhere, as far as anyone knew.

On watching these events taking place Bahaudin shouted to his followers, "Fools, this man is acting the part of humanity. While you were despising him, he was deliberately demonstrating heedlessness as each of you does, all unaware, every day of your lives."

The reader is invited to replace the names in this story with those he considers appropriate to the present situation in Washington, D.C.

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[Well done Mr Chelala. It was Idries Shah who introduced me to the profound wisdom of the Sufis,

particularly the tales and exploits of Mulla Nasrudin, the most absurd of all Sufi fictional characters who acted as a vehicle for Sufi teaching, which tales were readily retold by Christians and Muslims alike as they also amuse . Yet in his absurdity great wisdom is found, particularly the tale of Nasrudin searching for a lost key under a lamp post when he had lost it some distance away.

When questioned about why he was searching under the lamp post, notwithstanding he knew the key was elsewhere, he replied, 'because there is more light here!' How easily are humans distracted from Truth and why do we seek distractions and the comfortable lies and untruths that various cultures supply? And then of course there is Jalal 'udin Rumi, the Sufi mystic poet, who expressed his fascination over a prisoner locked in a jail that has the key to the lock in his hand, and so it goes ...]

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/02/06/the-wisdom-of-idiots-a-brief-morality-tale/>

Jungle Drum Prose/Poetry. <http://jungledrum.lingama.net/news/story-3167.html>