

Sufism for Western Seekers

(excerpt)

Dr. Stewart Bitkoff

Our Conversation Continues –

Are You Really Saying We Can Co-Create Our Reality?

If you have fear, you have no need to think of punishment. Fear itself is punishment enough. Similarly with hope. Intense hope leads easily to fear that the hope may not be realized. To feel that one possesses something may at any moment lead to fear of deprivation. Feeling that one possesses nothing is a producer of fear. If you fear, or desire, beyond a certain point, you have lost your way, perhaps completely.

Idries Shah

Good morning, I'm back.

Where have you been? We've been waiting.

I had to have some fun, visit with people. You know, that sort of thing. This metaphysical, philosophical material has to be lived in the here and now. Life is much more than fine words, fancy sentiments and sending good wishes out into the universe.

Aren't you in a fine mood this morning?

Haven't had my second cup of coffee yet.

Well, OK. Why don't you get your second cup and see if that helps. Before ending yesterday, what were we going to discuss?

We were easing our way into travelers being co-creators with God, and what exactly all of that means. Here's a short vignette about searching for eyeglasses, that a fellow traveler experienced, which speaks to the point of creating one's own individual reality:

Emotionally Charged

A traveler had just returned from shopping, been home for about an hour, and was now getting ready to go out again, and was running late. Before leaving the house, frantically she raced up and down the stairs, searching in different rooms, for her missing eyeglasses; earlier she had taken them off and could not remember where she put them down. Retracing her steps by making several phone calls to the stores where she had just been, she realized they were in the house somewhere. Again, up and down the stairs, getting more anxious because she was running even later; now, trying to decide if she needed to go to the pharmacy and buy a substitute pair from the generic eyeglass rack, until she could get to the optician later in the week. Certainly, her efforts were slowed by not having glasses on to see; usually, in past searches, she was able to overcome this temporary handicap.

All the while, her father was busy fixing dinner, observing this scene wondering where her glasses might be. This is a typical scenario in any home: where have I misplaced the car keys, phone numbers, or eyeglasses, etc. Patiently he waited for the situation to 'mature.' Usually, in a few minutes the object is recovered and all is again right with the world. This time, no such luck; so, her father calmly joined the scavenger hunt. Everyone knows it's much easier to find something when are not emotionally charged and are actually wearing your own eyeglasses. In less than 2 minutes, her father found the missing item on a windowsill in the master bedroom. As he handed them over to his daughter, she asked where he found them; and remarked she had gone past the window several times, and did not notice them. Well, the day was saved and off she went, breathing a sigh of relief.

Nice story, but for our readers, what's the spiritual angle or lesson here?

Please give me a minute, will you? Talk about being impatient. For those few minutes, her reality was supercharged by emotion; got to be some place, will be late, and I cannot see that well and need my glasses to drive. The process of retrieving the lost object was heightened by emotionality, which in part clouded "spiritual sight" or the ability to see. We all lose things and have a similar reaction, but the part that was individual and controllable, for the most part, was the level of anxiety and how we react to the lost item. In a sense, her reality for those moments was super charged by a pattern of frequently losing things and repeating this search and find scenario. There was good reason for this, not being able to see, and needing glasses to drive the car; however, her reality, or the way she under took the search, to a certain degree, was controllable and yet clouded by her growing anxiety.

You're doing great, why don't you rest a minute? Let me continue while you finish your coffee.

Thanks. I can use a moment to let the caffeine clear some of those pesky cobwebs from my head.

For the spiritual traveler, reality is perceived and experienced. Through guided experience, the traveler understands reality is an onion with multiple layers, and at its center, seemingly, the onion is without substance or form, yet, it is this 'invisible essence' that the traveler learns to seek in all things. This is the spiritual, inner core, which makes the onion an onion, and which the peeled away layers of our consciousness surround.

Each moment is here for a brief instant and then is gone. Within each moment there is opportunity. What are you going to do? Will you reach higher and embrace the highest part of self? When the teacher shines the Light upon the traveler's heart, the soul is alchemized from self-interest to a higher interest. In a caress of love, within the Light, the heart instantly realizes we are joined in Oneness. Within each moment, we have the opportunity to reach higher and join in kingship with the Light as co-creator. Inside everyone, there is an awareness of this potential.

In the spiritual school, the traveler is taught how to put on the glasses that will enable them to see the inner essence of things, and not get caught up, for the most part, in the frenzy of everyday living. In this way, both the Creator and creation may be perceived and known; it is precisely our emotions, certain ideas and thoughts, which keep us from seeing this inner connection.

Various forms of consciousness while necessary and important to daily life, often block the hidden level from stepping forward. When we are super-charged with emotion or strong ingrained belief, the higher consciousness will not operate. That is why the traveler talks about stilling emotion and pushing aside certain thoughts and ideas. These thoughts, while necessary in everyday life, for the most part, limit capacity in the spiritual realm.

Perceiving the spiritual is nothing more than a trained extension of consciousness, and understanding some of the conditions necessary for this level of consciousness to operate. It is already inside us, operating at a level that for the most part is not perceived and used in everyday life. Getting in touch with this aspect of our being is a fundamental step towards co-creating our own reality.

To continue with the analogy of the lost glasses, it is like the person who is running around searching, needing glasses to see so she can find them. What the spiritual school teaches is how to put the “glasses” on to really see what is in front of you.

Say, has the caffeine worked yet? Perhaps you can offer other examples of how this is done.

Sure. Basically, the traveler is taught and shown that spiritual capacity is already inside and is the very energy of our lives. In our case, we met several times a week, for 4 years in Sam’s office, during lunch or after work. Usually, there were 2-4 students present and we discussed a variety of work related topics, but quickly the lessons were directed toward spiritual learning. This was accomplished through standard teaching methods: question and answer; discussion of troubling events of the week, trying to understand the underlying mechanisms and our reactions to them; at different events, fellowship with other travelers outside the office; reading assignments of the classical and contemporary masters; and perception of individual spiritual states and our learning from our reaction. Because inner spiritual centers were being activated, spiritual states and experiences would occur anytime during the day or night. As a control, Sam requested that we report these and our reactions as they occurred.

Another way this spiritual learning was accomplished was through Sam’s guidance as we meditated. After giving preliminary verbal instruction, on how to concentrate on the Holy Name, Sam showed us how to meditate and go deep within. Through transmission of spiritual grace, baraka, that passed through Sam we were assisted to concentrate and go deep within our self. It is this grace or universal energy that enables the teacher to do his job, and helps guide the student inward, past individual distraction. The universal energy gives us power, an “energy boost,” so to speak, that allows the traveler to practice on their own and connect with their spiritual center.

Sam called this fundamental spiritual energy the Light because it dissipates spiritual darkness and is a palpable, living, creative force that the teacher uses to set the fire of Divine love aglow in the traveler’s heart. This awareness, because it already exists within, albeit at a low level, can be enabled and activated from great distances, and, at other times, comes forward spontaneously exerting itself on the situation. As previously discussed, one of the most familiar of these states described in poetic literature is the oneness of creation experience; here the traveler is connected spiritually to all things and perceives their oneness in an ecstatic union of love, bliss, and spiritual energy. For those moments of spiritual awareness, there is no time or space only joy and

connection with the beloved. Words really cannot fully convey the power of this experience, and for many travelers it is strong enough to initiate their journey and place them on the path.

It seems we are going a little far a field here; let me pull this together by explaining more about the spiritual school and why it exists.

The point of the school and this type of learning is to help create spiritually completed people. Physically, the school may be located in an office, a bakery, a publishing house, a place of worship, a hospital or an international society to help disseminate cross cultural information. To the school, this is the outside form which has a viable worldly function and inside there is a spiritual mission. This training, experience, and guidance exist because the highest expression of life is to become a co-creator with the beloved. Spirituality must be in the everyday world; it is an enriching and enabling element. According to Sufi tradition, we are the King's representatives in this experience and in order to fulfill our function, must remember who we are; and in the process, regain certain forgotten spiritual capacities.

We are unique beings, and as such have both a singular and collective function. By using all of our capacities, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual, we strive toward human excellence and help make the world a better place. This is done through reaching for the highest possible expression of each moment. Inside all of us there is a 'divine spark' which tells us what the situation requires; this inner barometer or spiritual intuition when aligned with the higher destiny, knows which action will have the greatest benefit to all.

Now, let's return to the scenario of searching for our glasses. How might spiritual intuition or capacity have helped us? First of all it did; it was the energy behind the search. Fundamentally, we are spiritual beings having a human experience. What might have been useful for the traveler who was searching, was to remember an efficient search requires a balanced attitude; while anxiety is useful to get motivated and started, when anxiety reaches certain levels it can actually hinder outcomes.

Also, one can wonder, if prescience, or the ability to spiritually see things were used, wouldn't the whole searching scenario have been avoided? Yes, that would have been true; however, what the situation required was a calmer approach, not extraordinary capacity. You don't need a shot gun to kill a house fly, just a quiet approach, with rolled newspaper and a steady hand!

Here is another activity to help practice controlling your thoughts and daily consciousness.

Daily Activity: Practice Gratitude

When you are feeling down, sad, or depressed, practice gratitude. When you are at your lowest, often it helpful to take a personal inventory and number those things for which you are grateful. Thank yourself or thank the universe for placing these things, people, or events into your life. Do this over and over; in using this repetitive cycle of replacement thought which recounts the good in your life; for those short moments, you will change your consciousness and the energy being created. For example, O Lord, thank you for this sunny morning and good, hot cup of coffee! Repeat this 3 or 4 times. Say these words slowly and with meaning; for those moments your energy will change and gradually you will get used to controlling your consciousness. Often, I

find myself on a daily walk, thanking the Light for this joyful opportunity to move about in the sunshine. I repeat this over and over.

Remember, this more positive thought pattern has healthy and regenerative energy attached to it. And when you find yourself going back to your negative thoughts, don't get down on yourself; simply repeat more positive ones. Everyone has many things for which they can be grateful. Think about it.

Sam Story

Once there was a servant of God who was walking along a road and noticed a fruit seed lying in the dust. In the hope this seed would one day sprout into a fruit tree, he picked it up and tossed it into the grass beside the road.

In time, this seed matured into a large tree which gave rise to other trees. Over the years, a beautiful orchard lined the road. As travelers saw these trees, they stopped to rest and refresh themselves with the shade and fruit. Through the centuries, thousands benefited through this one act of kindness, performed by an anonymous traveler, long ago.

This forgotten act of kindness lifted the anonymous traveler into the circle of friends.

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Dr. Bitkoff is the author of the recently released, *Sufism for Western Seekers*.

For many western spiritual seekers, Sufism is often misunderstood and viewed as an Islamic mystical tradition presented through various Sufi orders. Yet this ancient path of spiritual knowing is much broader and older, available through all religions and independent of Islam and these orders.

This is a first hand account of spiritual knowing in two modern Sufi mystical schools. This message is intended for western spiritual travelers and was designed to appeal to everyone, regardless of their religious background.

Available Online, Amazon:

www.amazon.com/Sufism-Western-Seekers-Spiritual-Traveler/dp/0615562809/

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