

A. Hameed Ali – the Teacher

interview by Bob Olson

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Why is your teaching called the Diamond Approach instead of the Diamond Path?

This is more historical than anything else. At the beginning I had no idea that my work would develop to be a whole path. I saw it then as a particular approach to inner work, to truth, characterized by the precision, clarity and objectivity of diamond consciousness. The name stuck, and I have felt no reason to change it. A path is actually a way of approaching the truth, so each path is a particular approach. And I also think approach is still appropriate because the inquiry characteristic of the Diamond Approach can be applied to any field of investigation or research, not only to the investigation of consciousness and true nature. So the Diamond Approach expresses an approach to investigation of truth in general, truth in any field

You often say and write that what motivates people in this work is love of truth. My experience is that most students in the school seek to alleviate pain in their life, have better relationships, or achieve some ideal state. Please comment.

I do not say that people do the work because of love of truth. I say that it works effectively when the motivation is love of truth. When it is out of wanting to alleviate pain or achieve an ideal state it tends to be taken over by the pleasure-pain principle that governs ego life, and hence cannot be effective in dissolving the ego. Students come to the work mostly out of wanting to alleviate pain or achieve a positive goal, yet they need to find the love that is also present but of which they are usually not aware. We inherently love truth, but this love is obscured and covered over, not supported or nourished. The work supports and nourishes it. In time students get to see for themselves that only the true selfless love for the truth reveals the truth, especially the truth of our nature. Now, alleviating pain can also work, but only if it is coming out of selfless compassion. It is trickier to come from selfless compassion because of the difficulty of coming from selflessness. And it can easily be co-opted by the pleasure-pain principle. Furthermore to focus on pain means focusing on the ego self and to focus on love means focusing on true nature. Whatever we focus on tends to develop more.

How do you feel about the reception of the Diamond Approach teachings in the world?

I am actually quite pleased by how it has been received. The Diamond Approach has reached much further than I thought it would. I think it will be more widely received as time passes, for the more people become aware of it the more they seem to recognize its value. It has an intrinsic value for the way we live these days, and it will be interesting to see what value it will be perceived to have in the future. I think it would be great if the Diamond Approach penetrates more to the academic, scholarly and intellectual circles than it has so far, but I do not know whether this is part of its destiny. I think this would be a good thing because many of its conceptualizations and perspectives can be useful in the general development of thought and wisdom in the culture at large, and not just for spiritual work. This is one reason I wrote the Inner Journey Home to include the relation of the Diamond Approach to Western culture and Western thought.

From the beginning, I thought that some of the concepts would trickle down to larger circles in the consciousness and inner work movement. And I think some of that has happened. We see this in the greater usage of the concepts of essence, presence, personalness, and so on. I am happy about that, because I think this trickling down can have a usefulness of a different order than the direct teaching. I am happy about this because it is my function to put out the Diamond Approach. This includes all of its concepts, views and experiences.

What books do you have planned for the future?

Essence of Intelligence
Essence of Love
Diamond Heart, Book V
The Loving Void

And a book that will come out of the last summer retreat, which I called Open Realization. We are already discussing this with Shambhala, as a response to their suggestion of putting out a simple, short and easily readable book, that can have a more popular appeal.

What role do your books, versus retreats and work with individual teachers, play in helping people move toward truth?

The books have several functions, according to how I see things:

- a. The books support the students who are undergoing the work of the Diamond Approach, because they give more detailed and exhaustive discussions of various segments of the work in ways different from the direct teaching.
- b. The books can be used to support students of other paths, for the Diamond Approach includes ways of practice and working on oneself that are very effective for working through obstacles and obscurations. It includes a unique and new understanding of how ego is related to true nature, based on a new useful paradigm of qualities of true nature. This new paradigm of spiritual qualities can aid students of many paths for it helps to give them contexts for understanding their experience that have not been available before. The books also discuss true nature in its aspects and dimensions in a kind of detail, specificity and precision not available much in spiritual literature, which can be useful for students of the inner path regardless of the particular path.
- c. The books contribute to the spread of spiritual knowledge, understanding and wisdom to human beings in general. It is a way of teaching, not as effective as direct personal teaching, but can nevertheless have a beneficial impact in awakening people to inner truths, encouraging and inspiring them to engage the inner path.
- d. The books can contribute to the knowledge of humanity in general, by transmitting new effective ways of investigation, learning and inquiry.
- e. The books also have the function of being records of a new teaching. It is the responsibility of the researcher to put out his learning and discoveries, and by doing that the spiritual literature of mankind is enriched and expanded.
- f. The books can have functions I am not aware of myself. I know it is my function to put out the Diamond Approach. I know some of the benefits, but I do not profess to know all the possibilities of germination and consequences of its spread. It is an interesting question, for instance, to wonder what will be the overall and long term consequence of putting out such new a paradigm of spiritual essence.

Can a person develop very well spiritually without having a teacher?

Possibly, and there have been instances of that, but unlikely, and usually not so effectively. The spark first needs to be lit. Also, by far most individuals do not have sufficient inspiration, knowledge, orientation, focus, guidance, endurance, supporting vessels, and so many other things necessary for effective practice or journeying on the path. There is a lot more to the inner journey than most of us realize, and there is a lot more to our personal obstacles than we usually know or want to know.

Why does this teaching seem to appeal primarily to Caucasians in Europe, Australia and the United States?

I am not sure. Most likely it has to do with historical precedence, demography of present members of the school, and economics. The school started with a couple of small groups, which were mostly of Caucasian individuals, because of the particular contacts I had at that time. I think this might have set the precedent and it became difficult for other ethnic groups to penetrate it because it was already dominated by Caucasian people. I think the non-Caucasian students in the school are individuals who are used to being with Caucasian dominated groups, and do not feel too uncomfortable in such environments. Hopefully, this will change, but it might need a focused effort to make it happen, which means it will need the right individuals who want to take it on.

Of course, the other factor is economics. We do the work in the school in a way where it is teacher intensive and the teachers need to make a living, which comes out of tuition fees for the teaching. This makes the enrollment in the school not so cheap, which could make it difficult to join, which again affects demography. This is again a difficult obstacle to deal with, because the teachers need to make a living.

I do not think there is anything intrinsic to the Diamond Approach that recommends it only to Caucasians. Its principles are universal and true for all human beings. But we also need to recognize that most work schools, including the Buddhist, Indian, Sufi and Shamanic, are also dominated by Caucasians when we look in Western countries. So the phenomenon seems to be of a larger social nature. I actually expect the Diamond Approach to be received in other places, like Eastern Europe and Russia, and also Japan at some point. The question of translation of the books will be important here, some of which are already translated into Spanish in Spain and Portuguese in Brazil.

For me your books are very intellectually challenging and the teaching is esoteric. Do you feel that this teaching will someday touch the average spiritually interested person?

I think it is doing that some already. Shambhala wants me to put out a simple short book for this reason, and we are working on that. I myself have not thought of the audience much, since my function has been to put out the Diamond Approach, irrespective of the kind of audience. I also tend to want to benefit the truly spiritually interested, especially since my perception is that there are not many good spiritual books that go beyond the beginning generalities, which by now have become platitudes and clichés, like non-duality, transcendent awareness, union with God and so on. But when I write with specificity and detail, instead of generality, the books begin to seem esoteric or technical. I am not adverse to the teaching becoming more popularly available, but I do not know whether it is part of its destiny, and hence I tend to leave it to the will of the absolute.

What is your hope for the future of this teaching?

I do not know what its future is supposed to be, so I do not have a specific hope for it. I only wish it becomes truly beneficial and does not get exploited for selfish ends. I also hope it does not become too rigidly codified and reified for it to be a vital transformative force. But I believe that the Diamond Guidance is what is behind this teaching, and its intelligence is infinitely more than my individual mind.

Why do people trust you to be their teacher?

I do not know if they do, or how much they do. I think students should find out for themselves whether I am to be trusted, just as they should do the same with all teachers and people in general. Trust is to be earned. Furthermore, trust is only one element the student needs in relation to the teacher. The student also needs love, respect, openness, humility, gratitude and service, if one is going to be receptive to the teaching of the teacher. These qualities are inspired in the student partly by the teacher's station, attitudes and behavior.

Why should someone trust the Diamond Approach as their path?

Again it is not a question of trust. One needs to find out whether the Diamond Approach, or any teaching one is engaging, speaks to where one is and to one's sensibilities. One needs to feel a certain harmony with a teaching, a sense of fit, or a sense of calling, or a kind of responsiveness to it. It has to make sense not only to our mind but to our heart. People are different in terms of what teaching speaks to them and what teaching will be effective for them. This is because each teaching has its own inner dynamics, its logos; and so one needs to see whether this logos makes sense to one's intuitive sensibilities.

What changes do you hope to see in students who have been in the work for two years? For ten years?

It is possible for students to develop commitment, inspiration and love of truth in two years. Also, there can be the beginning of wisdom in seeing that it is a path of maturation and ripening, and not just experiences and accomplishments, and hence one can begin to orient the totality of one's life so that the path becomes the central priority.

In ten years many students have realized true nature in one degree or another, or at least have some extensive familiarity with the essential realm. One's life can be largely structured and organized to express and support one's realization, and one is able to express some of the fruits of realization in their life and relations to others, and to contribute to society at large from a real place.