

*Declaration of the
People of the
Tradition*



and Twenty-Two Principles

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Documents sent to groups in an early, introductory phase of
Idries Shah's work.

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Declaration of the People of the Tradition

Among all peoples, and in all countries, there is a tradition about a secret, hidden, special, superior form of knowledge accessible to man after passing through circumstances of difficulty.

This declaration is concerned with that subject.

We declare that such knowledge does exist and that, at the present time and for the people to whom this declaration is addressed, there is a possibility of its being transmitted.

Because this knowledge, in its nature and operation, is different from what people are accustomed to expect of knowledge, attempts to find out and make use of it generally fail. It will respond and operate fully only if approached in a certain manner. This is the first of the difficulties encountered in the 'path.'

It has been said that: "a thing can be approached only according to the manner in which it can be perceived." Thus trying to mend a watch with a cobbler's tool will not succeed, trying to look for the sun at night will not succeed.

Few people can hope to live long enough to discover by trial and error the necessary conditions of the search. Specialized knowledge and technique are required. Mass endeavor cannot compensate for the incapacity or ignorance of the individual.

The knowledge to which we refer is concentrated, administered and presided over by three kinds of individual existing at any given time. They have been called an

"Invisible Hierarchy" because, under ordinary circumstances, they are not in communication or contact with ordinary human beings; certainly not in two-way communication with them.

In one sense, the way to the knowledge passes through a "chain of succession" in which perception of the ordinary man must have help in attaining a higher degree of contact. Religion, folklore and the like abound with disguised examples of this progress. Many manifestations, taking religious, magical, alchemical, psychological and other forms, are, in reality, vestigial parts of the science to which we refer. Very often, procedures, which are considered to be "Ways of Truth" and the like, are neither more nor less than traces of techniques which have been used in the past to attain the link referred to above.

One of the "difficulties" in this quest for knowledge of a higher order is the very existence, or rather the misuse, of these survivals. That which was, as it were, the chrysalis for a butterfly becomes a prison for the caterpillar which tries to use it to become a butterfly himself. He fails generally to realize that he has to make his own chrysalis.

Thus, we have attachment to the form of rites, beliefs and personalities which, in their origin, were of specific and high function. This attachment becomes a conditioning which may be sentimental or intellectual. If the true greatness and importance of such institutions, procedures and individuals were rightly understood by those votaries who now attach themselves to superseded methodologies and pathetically attempt to identify themselves with externals, they would be able to appreciate the true beauty, grandeur and greatness of the very things which they imagine to be threatened by such remarks as these.

It is this enterprise upon which we are at present engaged.

Conditions now exist in the community being addressed in which work of this kind can take place. There is no advantage at this point and upon this level in discussing any "reason" for the existence of these conditions. Such discussions degenerate into mental exercises which are useless unless they are accompanied by parallel experience.

There will always remain many people attached to the externals and emotionally evocative aspects of esotericism including that of religion. No attempt will be made to wean such people from their present allegiance towards a more effective and hopeful alignment.

This is something which they have to do for themselves. This present announcement provides as much material as such people, if they are able to make the step, require in order to align themselves. Presenting this document to them constitutes the limit of our duty towards them. They must see for themselves whether they can work with the material and arrive at any genuine cognition of its significance and truth.

It is the task of the Custodians of the Tradition to communicate, as best they can, in whatever language is indicated, to those who may be able to benefit from what can be made available. They are concerned with the capacity of the people addressed and capacity alone. They have no special interest in the nominal background, seniority or superficial psychological characteristics of the people addressed. If anything is consistent, it is the experience that suitable candidates may be found among the members of any tradition.

We should mention here another of the difficulties of the Path of Truth, which is due to the fact that the knowledge of which we are speaking exists in places and among people who might not be expected to possess it. Its appearance, therefore, is often **contrary to expectation**. What has been said about "difficulties" will show that these

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are always more apparent than real. A difficulty is always great to one who cannot adjust himself to the real facts of a situation.

In addition to making this announcement, to feeding into certain fields of thought certain ideas, and to pointing out some of the factors operative in this work, the projectors of this declaration have a practical task.

This task is to locate individuals who have capacity for obtaining the special knowledge of man which is available; to group them in a special, not haphazard, manner, so that each such group forms a harmonious organism; to do this in the right place at the right time; to provide an external and interior format with which to work, as well as a formulation of 'ideas' suitable to local conditions; in short, to balance theory with practice.

Twenty-Two Principles

1. Certain things can be studied anywhere and at any time. Others can be studied only at certain moments and under certain conditions. The things that can be studied at any time are given to people so that they can study them. The others are introduced or emphasized when the right time comes. This last decision comes from the teacher and cannot be put in a programme.
2. Make a list of the qualities which you like in other people. Study each one of them and ask yourself which of these virtues you have and which you lack.
3. In this work, change is one of the most important things. If a change occurs and you perceive its connection with essential facts -- so much the better. But if there is a "change," and you are incapable of grasping its connection with the totality, this is inherent in your situation. If you were really able to understand the pattern of it all, you would not be where you are now. Let understanding develop. Beyond a certain point, you cannot struggle to try to understand without, at least, receiving some help.
4. We are in a situation in which we have an immense debt. Recognition of this fact is preserved mainly in the functioning of what is regarded as "Conscience," one of the few remains of a certain knowledge. In reflecting attentively on this matter, you become aware that in reality, the debt is towards the teaching as you know it. Therefore, be conscientious and bring your power of concentration to bear upon the teaching, the only way that can guide thought in the right direction. In your own interest you should be grateful to your master. This does not mean that he needs your gratitude in the form that you experience it; but he has

need that you should experience it so that you yourself can grow and develop.

5. The struggle of mankind to go forward, to succeed and make progress is the symptom of an inner evolutionary need. This need is almost blind. It is destined to express itself in work as well as in the conventional efforts made in the ordinary life. The two are not mutually exclusive. Effort and non-effort equally, though necessary, are not sufficient. The work must be in harmony with the fundamental need. You must allow the evolutionary need to find its expression within the work itself, for it is the vessel and instrument intended for this, the means whereby we can realize and satisfy the need. You need a pretaste of harmony. This is given in the work.

6. When you do an exercise, you should not blindly apply to it any analytical test. The first principle is to do the exercise and to be certain of being able to do it correctly. After that you will make use of the exercise in the way you are told. Remember that you cannot obtain from any exercise all that you may happen to want. It will give you only what it is intended to give you and not what you imagine you can get from it. The exercise will give the right results only if you remain within its limits.

7. There is a series of relations that arise successively between the individual and the teacher. Every time something positive develops in the individual, his understanding of the teacher grows and expands. This makes it possible for the teacher to give him more and more. It is absurd to think that everything can be given at once, or that a complete relationship with the teacher can be established according to a plan drawn up in advance. As the aptitudes of the individual gradually develop, so also will there be new capacities with which the teacher can communicate. Consecrate a little time -- just a few minutes from time to time -- in picturing to yourself a bond of sympathy with your teacher; in that way your mental power

will draw nearer to harmony with that which he seeks to transmit to you.

8. You have only a weak potential for the development of your 'I.' This potential can very quickly be spoiled. If you do not concentrate, you will waste your time. If you dabble in a variety of systems, you will only waste your potential and very probably you will give away to others an essential substance, without making any progress yourself. Learn that this is a loss or escape of energy that you cannot allow yourself. Decide, therefore, if you prefer to dabble, or if you wish to make this work your one and only effort. As you cannot afford to waste your substance, neither can the work allow itself to carry mere passengers. There is all the difference in the world between making this positive and consecrated work on one side and on the other side dabbling in metaphysics or associating with people whose aims are different from yours.

9. There is a constant influx of the desire for evolution that flows through humanity. This enters all the time. You also are involved in all that. Make this fact your own possession for this force is one of the few things that help the teaching to take its rightful place.

10. The success of an enterprise depends upon the material, upon skill and upon right use of that skill. Many schemes conceived for ensuring the progress of mankind are only sketches, repeated ad nauseam, of such an enterprise. When the element of skill disappears, the whole activity falls victim to negative influences even though it may have the appearance of working well. But if even one person is awake and not asleep, this automatism cannot continue; for either the person will take the situation in hand (if that is his function) or at least he will draw attention to the uselessness of trying.

11. In our work, certain elements, some of which have no obvious connections, have to be present before it can have

the impulse and the movement that corresponds to its needs. That means that every idea, every activity, every exercise and every action must be put into effect correctly and in their totality if the effort is to advance sufficiently. The teacher will seek, according to the preferred method, to provoke certain responses in the people who are in the work. Failing this, he will have to prepare them so that they can make the correct responses. Where it is necessary that certain things should be done, he will be obliged to insist upon them, so that a phase of the work should not be delayed. People help themselves by observing in themselves any tendency, however slight, to avoid carrying out instructions. "Consecration" does literally mean consecration. Often tasks are given to people to do partly so that they can learn from them whether or not they are really devoted to the work. At the same time, it is necessary to remember that no task has only one single purpose. While it helps the individual, it also enables him to help the circle or the group.

12. Search for coincidences in every-day life. Examine them and look for the meaning that recognizing them can have for you. Search for the association of the bond between things which in the ordinary way are not connected. Hold your thought a little on this idea and allow awareness of coincidences to develop in you.

13. Effort is never lost. Disappointment arises only when things do not go the way you expect. Recognize this, otherwise you will constantly find that there are many things that do not connect and that you are unable to put together. In the work, nothing is ever said or done without a certain intention. Nor are they avoided without intention.

14. One of the characteristics of this system is that an individual learns according to his capacities. There are few instruments available. Among them are: devotion, the practice of effort and sacrifice; one must also have the feeling of conscience. The same material, or the same

exercise, will reveal meanings and uses appropriate to the stage the individual has attained. The "shock" given him can take one form among many others, and produce upon him an effect corresponding to his own capacity to deal with it. A "shock" or an "impact" may be direct, indirect or even accidental. What is called an "upset" is a very subtle method of administering the shock so as to get through the artificial defences erected to defend the so-called "Self." One of the functions of the teacher is to tell the pupil when he must fight against one thing and when he must work upon something else. What an ordinary person imagines to be a problem should rarely be expressed as the dilemma according to which he sees it himself. Problems can go on indefinitely if a fixed attitude towards them is adopted. Never take theoretical assertions for absolute facts: unless they are given to you as such.

15. Be ready to see your "tasks" through. This is the name given to the efforts you are asked to accomplish, either individually or in association with others. Tasks can appear to be solely for their own sake, or to be part of something else. For example, it can happen that you will have to carry out a task and at the same time connect it with your inner development. On the other hand, a task can be used mainly in order to prepare oneself for a certain line of development.

16. You should cultivate the power of speaking the truth in the context of the work. In ordinary life, you may have to give way to the requirements of your professional work. But inside the work, you are in danger if you fail to make use of what you believe to be the truth. Remember that sincerity is one of the rare things that can help you to achieve liberation and the development for which we work.

17. The person chosen to teach you acts in a certain manner because of the needs of the work. If you try to evaluate his behaviour and his reactions in usual terms, you will lose much of the value of what he does. Consequently, you

should not interpret his words and his actions in the way you would do with just anyone you may happen to meet. With other people, behaviour is the result of factors which have no connection with the work. Their motives are different. There is a typical procedure which consists in "throwing out" material so that people can collect it and study it. One must not have to remind you of this.

18. What is known is the bridge towards the unknown. By means of things we can grasp, we arrive at things which we should not have been able to grasp previously. Unless the mind is exactly and correctly prepared, the right result cannot be obtained.

19. The artificial character of our lives tends to divide our consciousness in such a way that things that are essentially the same appear to be different. Things which are really connected seem to be quite separate from one another. It is necessary to see things as they really are. In our work, this comes through our activity in the world and not otherwise.

20. There are different kinds of awakening. A man may be asleep: but he should wake up in the right way. It is also necessary that when he does wake up, he should have the means of making full use of his waking state. Our present task is to prepare this desirable end, as well as to prepare for awakening.

21. The influence of mechanicalness is constantly increasing its grip upon man and even tends to take possession of the system destined to struggle with it once the flexibility of this system is spoiled. The result is a double mechanicalness, because something which was originally good and has been corrupted can go wrong worse than something less important.

22. Self-observation and work on oneself are absolutely necessary. Nevertheless, this work must be balanced by work for the group and for the teaching. For this reason,

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one's attention must constantly be directed upon the other two factors as well as upon oneself.

Study the "principles" which have been given to you: both from your personal point-of-view and also from the point-of-view of the group.