

Why did Akbar say no?.

By Harry Jivenmukta

Akbar .

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I hadn't met Dr N for more than five years. I was just getting out of a drunken stupor and was going for a walk in the park. I didn't have a hangover because I was too far gone for that. I just felt tired and vulnerable. Anyway, Dr N was across the road and I was crossing towards him. I thought I'd just say hello, answer the short questions of what are you doing, where do you live, that kind of stuff and then get on my way. In any case Dr N was always in a hurry and would probably be lost in his own thoughts.

Let me tell you a bit about how he thinks. Most people start at the beginning, wherever that might be, and then set out their thoughts in a logical step by step fashion until they can come neatly to a conclusion. Dr N starts anywhere he wants to, leaps backwards, forwards and sideways, seemingly randomly, until suddenly, when you are completely lost, he turns the arguments and hits you with the conclusion. You go away thinking that whatever he told you is important but you can't make head or tail of what it was or how he came to the conclusions, or why you need to know in any case.

Anyway, I crossed the road and he came up, took my hand in a handshake and asked me:

Why did Akbar say no?

I was taken aback because I didn't know what was going on.

Why did Akbar say no when Sharazadne said she wanted to marry the servant's son?

Suddenly, it was as if I had been hit by an electric shock, you know, when someone stops breathing and the doctors shock the heart. Well, I felt like he had put those electric pads on the sides of my head and shocked me. From a drunken bum, walking to the park, I was suddenly full of a strange energy. My brain started racing up and down trying to locate the information. It felt like a lifetime but was probably only about three seconds, then I found it.

No! That's not right. The question is wrong. The question shouldn't be why did Akbar say no, but why could he have never said yes. You see Sharazadne was female and he was a male, she was young and he was an old man, she was his daughter and he was her father, she was ecstatically in love and he was a materialist military man steeped in politics. If she had any sense left she would have known not to even ask the question. But she was in love and blinded to the impossibility of such a refusal.

He changed tack.

We say a salaam a lekum. We know what it means. Sardars say Sat Sri Akal...

You don't have to say any more, I interjected, because I know what you're going to say.

Tell me, he insisted, getting excited to a point of aggressive enthusiasm.

The Sardars, (another name for Sikhs), say the greeting but hardly anyone knows what it means, I said.

Exactly! He waved his arms up and down and ended by pointing his finger like a gun, straight at me.

And, I continued, I know what it means.

Tell me.

Well, it comes from Sanskrit. Sat means truth, but not just any truth, the ultimate truth. Sri comes from Shri, and Akal means Khudaah (God). I had started in Panjabi, switched to a bit of Sanskrit, touched into Hindi and finished with Urdu.

After that he spoke in six languages, slipping effortlessly from one to another, and I desperately hung on to his coattails trying to grasp everything that he was saying. I did stop him when he went into Pashtun and Farsi and told him that was a bit far for me.

I met a Sardar, he said, and I have realised my life has been a waste of time. I am a doctor of Chemistry, have met the Queen to get my OBE and have been a leader in community relations and politics for more than 30 years.

I told him that I knew his life had been a waste. Most people's lives are but I wanted to know what the Sardar had told him. He had tested me with Sat Sri Akal and so before I let him tell me what the Sardar had said, I thought I better test him. It was like a child testing an adult.

I want to tell you a story, I said. He was all ears but very impatient at the same time. Some years ago, a priest came from India and together with five or six other people came to my home. I invited them in and listened to the request. The priest said he was collecting donations to build a new temple.

As soon as I said that, Dr N collapsed in laughter. I know, I said, isn't that stupid? He was the only person except me who had got the joke in seven years. You see, it is impossible to build a new temple; either there is a temple or there isn't. It's not like a new

house, or a new car. The temple represents something more. The temple is a house to hold a faith. How can you have a new one? (If the reader doesn't understand this point don't worry, most people don't.)

Anyway, I continued, I realised I was dealing with an idiot in the priest, so I challenged him. I said I would give him a blank cheque, and even if I didn't have enough money I would find it, on the condition that he answered one question. He agreed.

I asked him, what does Gurdwara mean? (Gurdwara is the name of the place of worship for Sikhs.)

He just looked at me. He was a priest of a Gurdwara and wanted to build a new one, but he didn't know the meaning of the word! Amazing!

After a suitable pause, so that he could realise he was an idiot that someone had paid good money to send to the West, I put him out of his misery. Gurdwara, I said, comes from two words; Guru and Dwara. Most people in the West have no idea what guru means. The closest translation of guru in English is teacher. A teacher informs people, gives them knowledge that can either be from his or her own experiences but is usually learned from books and courses. This is the exact opposite of guru. The guru is not concerned with giving you anything; his job is to take away the learning, socialisation and knowledge in order to expose the real person underneath. A guru doesn't give but only takes away the rubbish that people have accumulated during their lives.

Dwara comes from the Hindi Dwar that comes from the Sanskrit. Dwar means doorway, an entrance. Outside, in the world is the hustle and bustle of the everyday whilst inside the temple is silence. Outside is war, inside is peace. Outside is ignorance, inside truth. Gurdwara means the entrance to the temple of the guru.

Anyway, I turfed the stupid priest out of my house with the rest of the crude ignorant troupe of monkeys he had brought with him. Dr N was ecstatic but I was not finished. I still had to test him.

Tell me, I said, in the context of the Gurdwara how many meanings are there of dwar in Sanskrit? Two he simply replied. I was overcome. I told him he was the only person I had met who knew there were two. Most Sardars don't even know the first one. I said that we had defined the first one in the explanation to the priest but could Dr N tell me the second meaning.

You tell me, he insisted, and I knew that he was right and the test had backfired and I was being tested again.

Well, I began, it has nothing to do with the temple building, or an entrance to it. Actually, the temple is irrelevant and that is also the reason why you can't build a new temple. The real meaning of dwar is not the entrance to the temple but the entrance to the heart of the guru.

Exactly! He was beyond excitement now, and so was I. At last I had met someone who understood what I was about and so had he.

I met a Sardar, he started again, now that we had tested each other out thoroughly. I was listening. The Sardar told me, he said, that you can forget Islam, and Sikhism, and Christianity and all that stuff because there was something more fundamental to consider first. How can you follow these teachings, said the Sardar, when you have not dealt with dil kee mehl.

Dr N looked at me for a reaction. He had been thinking about this for a while but gave me the regulation three seconds. He added, where then can I go from here?

There is nowhere to go, I said, the meaning beginning to filter through my heart centre.

I also knew now why he had been talking in six languages. Dil kee mehl means dirt on the heart in modern Panjabi. Dil means heart and mehl means dirt. But if you take it back through Hindi and into Sanskrit it means something different.

Dr N said it meant his life had been wasted so far. I told him that I knew that anyway but not in this context. He shook my hand, told me that this had been the most useful conversation in both his and my life, and wandered off, leaving me to reflect on this massive realisation.

That's what I like; why talk about family and jobs and rubbish? I live for these moments when you can step out of time into a slice of another time, another reality.

I thought for about 24 hours about what mehl really means and could only come up with one word in English that comes close. The closest translation is stain; stain on the heart. And where does the stain come from? That was Dr N's real question. And that is why Akbar said no, because the stain on his heart left him blind to love and that is why he could never have said yes. Dr N had said reincarnation. Now, reincarnation is my specialist subject.

So, in brief, what the Sardar was saying is that as long as we have the stains on our heart there is no point following the deeper realities of faith or religion because we are incapable of appreciating them through the filters of our stains. It's a bit like noticing the speck of dust in someone else's eye but not seeing the mountain of dust in your own. Or about rattling a stick under your bed to make sure there isn't a huge snake nesting there when there is already the snake of fraud in your heart.

The explosion inside me continued for several days and massive realisations came to me, as well as lots of poems and reflections.

Most of these realisations I may not be able to reveal here (talk to me directly) but there are some poems and reflections.

Don't read the words, read the spaces between them. Why did Akbar say no?