

ROUND ONE, DEC, 2021—DECEMBER 31: INVITATION AND MY RESPONSE

Haldeman, Ira P wrote:

Hello

By way of introduction, my name is Ira Helderman and I am a religious studies scholar who teaches at Vanderbilt University here in Nashville, TN (where I am also a psychotherapist in private practice having worked in mental health for over two decades now). You can learn more about my work at the website below, but, generally speaking, my religious studies research examines how psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic frames influence the way people are religious in the United States and beyond. My first book, Prescribing the Dharma, came out with University of North Carolina Press in 2019 and is a history and (auto-)ethnography of the diverse ways psychotherapists have approached Buddhist traditions. I'm hoping you might be willing to be interviewed for my new book project. My current research examines the history of studies of "spiritual emergencies" over time and in particular "mediation sickness" and "meditation-related adverse effects." I, of course, have considered it to be essential to speak to you for this new work as you have produced seminal scientific study of adverse effects of meditation, in particular, I see your paper from the early 90s to be extremely important. Just let me know if you'd be available, but, regardless, I'll again express my appreciation for your contributions. All the best Ira

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Book: Prescribing the Dharma: Psychotherapists, Buddhist Traditions, and Defining Religion

From: [dhshapir <dhshapir@uci.edu>](mailto:dhshapir@uci.edu)

Sent: Friday, December 31, 2021 11:38 AM

To: Helderman, Ira P <ira.p.helderman@vanderbilt.edu>

Subject: namaste and reply:!)Re: Interview Request - Shapiro

Hi Ira,

thank you for your kind and thoughtful note.

In this final phase of my life I am now living in a metaphoric contemplative cave, and therefore will not be available for an interview. However, I thank you for your interest. If it is helpful, I

am enclosing the last piece of writing I plan to do--it was for the Oxford Handbook of Meditation. Here is a link to that article, which you may enjoy....a) exploring your own origin story and other aspects

of
your involvement with meditation; (I share my own); and b) the article

cited in the book by Britten on adverse effects (you may already know her work).

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In any case, thank you for your contributions, and during these "crazy times" I wish you peace, happiness, joy, and health for the New Year
Namaste, Dr. S

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ROUND TWO: JAN 2-7 2022,

On 2022-01-02 06:32, Helderman, Ira P wrote:

Good morning

Thank you so much for getting back to me; especially as it sounds like it meant coming out of that contemplative cave to do so! THANK YOU FOR YOUR THANKS AND FOR HEARING AND RESPECTING MY CONTEMPLATIVE CAVE PHASE. I totally understand your needing to decline my interview request and just appreciate your still taking the time to respond and even sending on some ideas for resources. VERY KIND. Britton has agreed to be an interviewee for my project so I am indeed familiar with her work, but your writing here (as well as your website as a whole) is very helpful. DELIGHTED. I FEEL VERY HEARD AND APPRECIATED...

I'm hoping, in fact, that going through what you have posted on your website will allow be to piece together something of your own biographical/professional journey even if doing actual oral history is not possible at this time. AGAIN, THANK YOU FOR HEARING ME.

I wonder, however, whether you might be open to my writing you a question here and there as I continued forward with my research. It just occurred to me that you may not be able to come all the way out of your cave for full interviews right now, but perhaps we could correspond just a bit and you'd be able to write me some of your thoughts from time to time on some of the core questions I'm seeking to explore in this new book. HAHAAH, OK, SO WHAT YOU DID HERE IS WHAT'S CALLED "TAI CHI DANCE." YOU HEARD ME VERY WELL, RESPONDED FROM A PLACE OF XUJING, AND THEN DECIDED TO TRY A DIFFERENT YANG BAR APPROACH (OF DONJING!.. VERY WELL CRAFTED!:) For example, the first piece I will be publishing from this research is a chapter for an edited volume. In the chapter I'll be analyzing popular news articles on the topic of adverse meditation experiences treating them as cultural artifacts to discern what kind of religiocultural work these sorts of articles are doing. I wondered:

do you have any reflections you might be willing to share on the media depiction of meditation practices and their potential risks from your vantage point as someone who has seen firsthand real shifts over

time in their place in our popular discourse?
I think your perspective would be so useful,

----- Original Message -----

Subject: tai chi dance, xujing, dongjing....Re: namaste and reply:!)Re:
Interview Request - Shapiro
Date: 2022-01-07 09:16
From: dhshapir <dhshapir@uci.edu>
To: "Helderman, Ira P" <ira.p.helderman@vanderbilt.edu>

Good morning, Ira,

Thanks for your understanding reply (xujing)--the Chinese word for calm, centered, coming from the unity/emptiness of the cosmic void.

From formless xujing, it is believed that form (yin and yang) occurs. In my own work on how we gain a sense of control I've explored how there are two positive modes, an assertive/change mode and a yielding accepting mode of control. I then came across the term "dongjing" many years later---the Chinese word meaning, from a place of xujing, the "best" combination of yin and yang for a given situation. I love it. Sometimes maximum yin, sometimes maximum yang. (for more on this, sorry, you can go to Controlresearch.net...)

Anyway, you'll see how this applies to your response below (I will respond in CAPS, not because I have a loud voice (it's actually very soft) but to respond carefully to each of your points.

LET ME TAI CHI DANCE BACK. I HEAR YOUR EFFORTS, AND YOUR SKILLFUL PIVOT. I AM HAPPY YOU ARE WORKING ON THIS TOPIC. HOWEVER, IT IS ABOVE MY PAY GRADE IN BOTH CONTENT (IE.. HOW DO YOU DEFINE MEDIA DEPICTION, NEWSPAPER, TV, SOCIAL MEDIA; ETC; WHAT TYPES OF TECHNIQUES ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, WHAT IS THE INTERACTION BETWEEN MEDIA AND TECHNIQUES; BY MEDIA, BY AREA OF COUNTRY, ETC.). AND IT IS NOT AN AREA ANYWHERE CLOSE TO THE "SWEET SPOT" OF MY CONTEMPLATIVE CAVE MUSINGS. SO I MUST AGAIN RESPECTFULLY DECLINE. AND I WILL NOW ADD A YANG BAR BACK. PLEASE HONOR AND RESPECT MY REQUEST. FAIR?

but, of course, also totally understand if you need to say "sorry, Ira, but I really won't be able to participate at all." AH, HERE IS YOUR LOVELY XUJING POSITIVE YIELDING ACCEPTING MODE OF CONTROL KICKING IN...AS I SAID YOU DO THIS VERY WELL!) Regardless, I'll again express my appreciation for your work and wish you all the best TERRIFIC. LET ME CLOSE WITH TWO ITEMS. (SEE BELOW Warmly Ira
THE FIRST IS A HAIKU POEM BY BASHO

INTO AN ANCIENT POND
A FROG JUMPS
A DEEP RESONANCE.

Your missive is the frog; the ancient pond is this old guy's "mind"...and as you can see from the comments here, you created a "deep resonance." :) (that why I try so hard to limit inputs!:)

SECONDLY, EVERY SHABBAT, OUR FAMILY (THREE KIDS, SIX GRANDKIDS) SENDS A "ONE GOOD THING MISSIVE TO SHARE. I'M SHARING WITH YOU MINE FROM THIS PAST WEEK>

While doing my morning meditation, I felt the sun and thought, are you kidding me, light from 93 million miles away ,and our planet circling the sun, and that there even is a planet; and there are people, and birds (yesterday a hummingbird took a walk with me for about ten yards, darting in and out of bushes); really?!?!?

Each morning I listen to music while I have breakfast; I change the cd from our collection weekly , and this week it was a recording of the Sufi (Islam) poet Hafez;

Here is a poem that touched me:

The God Who Only Knows Four Words

Every Child Has known God,
Not the God of names, Not the God of don'ts,
Not the God who ever does Anything weird,
But the God who only knows four words
And keeps repeating them, saying:

"Come dance with Me." Come Dance.

A new year, a new dance!

and one more scrap I found--apparently there is a day, (Nov 13?) called kindness day. a school in Carlsbad, calif started a paper trail of handwritten messages each one with love and kindness; it spread to schools from all 50 states and all continents except Antarctica.; it took 18 months; They did this while isolated at home because of covid; and to remain optimistic and to connect; ; the "love links were written in multiple languages: Chinese, Farsi, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese Spanish, Swahili and Tagalog; one read love in braille. They arranged the strands in to a giant heart on a field. Love love poppers of dancing with you all in kindness..

AND NOW IRA, LET ME CLOSE THIS MISSIVE, AS I TURN TO THE SHABBAT THIS EVENING, WHEN WE LIGHT THE CANDLES TO BRING MORE LIGHT (INNER AND OUTER) INTO THE WORLD..AND MY WIFE (OF OVER 51 YEARS) WILL SING IN THAT ANGELIC VOICE OF HERS..

SO, WITH A HEARTY HI HO AND A WAVE,
I RUN, NEH LEAP BACK TO MY CONTEMPLATIVE CAVE

WISHING YOU PEACE, JOY, HEALTH AND HAPPINESS FOR THE NEW YEAR. NAMASTE, DR S

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ROUND THREE: JAN 23, 2022

HI IRA THANK YOU FOR YOUR MOST RECENT MISSIVE. AGAIN COMMENTS IN CAPS AND THEN A FEW ADDITIONAL SHARINGS...)

----- Original Message -----

Subject: Referrals?

Date: 2022-01-23 07:26

From: "Helderman, Ira P" <ira.p.helderman@Vanderbilt.Edu>

To: dhshapir <dhshapir@uci.edu>

Shavua tov!

So the best word I can use to describe your last/final email to me from a couple weeks ago now is beautiful - I thought it was just beautiful. VERY KIND, THANK YOU. And I especially appreciated your taking the time to write me back given that even doing that meant coming out of that contemplative cave. VERY EMPATHIC! I also really heard you draw that clear boundary and your ask that I respect that boundary which I do really want to. THANK YOU!! In fact, I was so touched really by your email that I hesitated to even write you now even though, I hasten to reassure, I'm *not* going to ask you to interview again I promise! PHEW!! OMMM...No, instead, I just had one last question hoping you might be able to help me: I hear you that you're not up for an interview, but is there anyone else out there that you think that I should talk to that maybe would be open to it, is not currently in a contemplative cave or the like? SORRY, IRA, YOU PROBABLY HAVE MANY MORE CONNECTIONS THAN ME!!

For example, one of the topics I had so hoped to talk to you about was the piece you wrote for the *American Journal of Psychiatry* that published in 1982, your overview comparison of meditation with other self-control strategies. My understanding is that you were actually commissioned by the APA to write that article and wondered if you might be able to point me to the folks who had asked you to do it, who were interested in this subject at that time.

NO, IT WAS NOT COMMISSIONED; IT WAS MERELY SUBMITTED; NO, THERE ARE NO FOLKS I CAN POINT YOU TOWARD. SORRY.

Really I wondered if there's anyone at all you can think of that I should be talking to. I just stay aware that there have been more people out there working in this area than have actually published on it.

IRA, I HEAR YOUR CONSCIENTIOUSNESS AND REACHING OUT. . I HEAR YOU ASKING IF THERE AREN'T MORE PEOPLE WITH WHOM YOU CAN DIALOGUE. THAT IS GREAT POSITIVE ASSERTIVE MODE OF CONTROL. I HEAR YOUR EXCITEMENT, ENTHUSIASM, SANGA SEEKING FOR SUCH A DESERVING PROJECT. LET ME SHARE FROM MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE THAT SOMETIMES WHEN I GET ENTHUSED (POSITIVE ASSERTIVE, IT'S SOMETIMES HARD FOR ME TO KEEP THE STILLNESS AND PEACE OF THE MEDITATIVE MIND THAT I'M SEEKING! THEN I HAVE TO REMIND MYSELF TO CONSIDER SEEKING TO BALANCE THAT POSITIVE ASSERTIVE MODE WITH THE POSITIVE YIELDING, ACCEPTING MODE OF CONTROL (LAO-TZU'S WAY OF HARMONY) THIS MAY INVOLVE A BRIEF MINDFULNESS MEDITATION, TAKING A BREATH, ..LETTING MY MIND SETTLE, FEELING SELF COMPASSION, KINDNESS, SELF-ACCEPTANCE AND SELF-NURTURANCE JUST WHERE I AM!!!

I TRY TO ALLOW MYSELF TO COME TO THAT CLEAR STILL PLACE WHERE I CAN FEEL PART OF THE COSMIC UNITY OF SEARCHERS, SEEKERS,...TRUST THAT MY PIECE OF THE COSMIC PUZZLE WILL, IS EMERGING (THERE IS A BOOK BY RABBI L KUSHNER, HONEY FROM THE ROCK. GREAT TITLE: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU? (ROCKS DON'T HAVE HONEY!?? ZEN KOAN? TO ME IT SUGGESTS LEARNING TO APPRECIATE THE SWEETNESS IN EVERYTHING. KUSHNER SAYS FROM ONE PERSPECTIVE, WE ARE EACH A PIECE OF THE COSMIC PUZZLE. WE DON'T HAVE TO BE ALL THE PIECES, JUST LET OUR PIECE GENTLY UNFOLD AND TRUST GOD WILL PUT ALL THE PIECES TOGETHER. THIS HELPS ME COME TO MY HEART CENTER.

LET ME END THIS MISSIVE WITH A SHARING FROM LAST SHABBAT.

AS I MAY HAVE MENTIONED THE KIDS, GRANDKIDS ALL WRITE "ONE GOOD THING" TO START THE SHABBAT. HERE IS WHAT I WROTE TO THEM

Hi Precious Family, Several years ago on my bday, you all gave me a book of "Rumi" (the Sufi/Islam poet). I read a poem or two each Shabbat while mom is singing. Last night I read this one.

Kids, you'll get this; grandkids you will either get this now or later!:)

*Your legs will get heavy
and tired. Then comes a moment
of feeling the wings you've grown,
lifting.*

May you all, especially on the Sabbath, feel your wings lifting you.....

Love love , poppers of taking flight playfully.....

IRA, YOU HAVE A VERY KIND HEART AND STYLE. LET ME INVITE YOU FEEL THE WINGS YOU'VE GROWN LIFTING YOU.BLESSINGS TO YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY. AS YOU NATURALLY UNFOLD ON YOUR PATH, YOU WILL TOUCH MANY PEOPLE'S LIVES IN A KIND, GENTLE WAY....

In any case, thank you again for sharing what you have already with me. I felt particularly connected reading about your Shabbos traditions, even your descriptions of them just exuded warmth. AGAIN, VERY KIND.

Gratefully

Ira

Gratefully

Ira