

If I repent now will God forgive me?
No, but if God forgives you, you will
repent.

- Rabia Bastri



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Questions: A Ghost Story



“Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil.” I was uncertain where this phrase came from, but it approached my nous as the holy trinity of all reclusive minds. So, I Googled it and not to my surprise it is believed that the saying came to Japan from China in the 8th century, as a part of a Tendai-Buddhist philosophy on wisdom and ethics. The source that popularized this pictorial maxim is a 17th-century carving of three monkeys over the door of the famous Tōshō-gū shrine in Nikkō, Japan.

Another aphorism that I have been studying the history of is, “This too shall pass” (Persian: *این نیز بگذرد*). It is a Persian adage translated in multiple languages that reflects on the ephemerality of the human condition. The specific phrase is said to have originated in the writings of the Persian Sufi poet Rumi, also sometimes accredited to King Solomon, who wrote the Hebrew Book of Proverbs. In this history, we find a beautiful story, “Be still, O, my soul.”

It is said an Eastern monarch once charged his court magicians, then referred to as poets, to create for him a sentence, to be ever in view, and which would be true and appropriate in all times and situations. They presented him a ring inscribed: “And this, too, shall pass away.” In times of hardship it would comfort, though in times of abundance it would instruct. How chastening in the hour of pride! How consoling in the hour of humility!

You see, the thing is that we are all questions. Each of us are a myriad of questions, though with masks, pretending to be answers. So, why did I choose two random apothegm to juxtapose? I’m really not sure, but I did once know a witch who enjoined me in the rites of poetry. She wrote to me a letter, “Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms or like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything.”

What of these monist teachings and how to make them a Sabbath of living? Yaysaying! First, submit your answers, and your mask, to the dark. Every day give away a piece of yourself. Become a ghost. Once you can take this form, write from that point of view; hearing no evil, seeing no evil, and speaking no evil. The time will come when there is nothing left to say, for this too shall pass. Then, like candles writ by some unseen hand, you will flicker, though the winds blow, quietly dancing as you become a question, and to others you will become a ghost story.



Malcolm Gladwell: A Life



Malcolm Gladwell is one of those writers that certainly leaves an impression on the way we look at the world. He is an overactive mind, gazing into some of our ready-made responses to life and asks us to question things we have always held true and see for a moment with his eyes, or sometimes he gives us the eyes of others to see through: A Gladwellian interpretation of the world around us.

If you visit any airport likely in the world you will inevitably see a display of Gladwell's work. He has written numerous New York Times bestsellers: *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*; *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*; *What the Dog Saw: Obsessives, Pioneers, and Other Varieties of Minor Genius*; *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants*; and his newest work *Talking to Strangers: What We Should Know About the People We Don't Know*.

Gladwell is a Canadian journalist, writer, and public speaker. He has been a staff writer for *The New York Times* since 1996. Gladwell's grades were not high enough for graduate school (as Gladwell puts it, "college was not an . . . intellectually fruitful time for me"), so he decided to pursue advertising as a career. After being rejected by every

advertising agency he applied to, he accepted a journalism position at *The American Spectator* and moved to Indiana. In a personal elucidation of the 10,000-hour rule he popularized in *Outliers*, Gladwell notes, "I was a basket case at the beginning, and I felt like an expert at the end. It took 10 years—exactly that long."

Although Gladwell is quite a popular author, most of his works selling in the millions, he isn't much cared for by the academia. Gladwell's critics have described him as prone to oversimplification. *The New Republic* called the final chapter of *Outliers*, "impervious to all forms of critical thinking." Gladwell has also been criticized for his emphasis on anecdotal evidence over research to support his conclusions. Cognitive psychologist and linguist Steven Pinker criticizes his lack of expertise: "... he is apt to offer generalizations that are banal, obtuse or flat wrong." *The Register* has accused Gladwell of making arguments by weak analogy and commented Gladwell has an "aversion for fact", adding: "Gladwell has made a career out of handing simple, vacuous truths to people and dressing them up with flowery language and an impressionistic take on the scientific method." *The New Republic* has called him "America's Best-Paid Fairy-Tale Writer."

Whatever one may think of the writings of any one author, the author has chosen to write and explore what it means to be human. Making a living as "America's Best-Paid Fairy-Tale Writer" isn't so bad after all, maybe that is his point. Not to my knowledge has he claimed superiority over "the scientists." He draws our minds away from the negativity found around us, in the news, and on social media and asks us just for a moment to stop and contemplate just how things come to be. Outside of the FCPL Rochester Branch Literacy office is a display of some of his works. Check one out. Maybe, just maybe for a moment, step outside of your selves, wash your eyes, and learn a new way to read the world we live in.