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MBS ([00:00](#)):

I had two quite different experiences of a library when I was a child. I mean, first in my school, the librarian, the dreaded Mrs. Sibly, well, she quite liked books, but she really didn't like kids. So I was encouraged not to take out multiple books, not to hang out in the library. I had someone sh-ing me the whole time. I was basically scared away from that space. But luckily my local library was a whole other adventure. There was a kid section upstairs where I could just wander the stats to find books that I might like. And then there was that moment when you got to go down to dip your toes in the grown up section below where a whole new world opened up. Actually, not just a world, but worlds, books open up worlds and libraries help you stumble over the books you never knew you would love until you did. I love books.



(01:08):

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Shariff Abdullah is the director of The Common Way Institute, an organization that seeks to create a world that works for all. Now, Shariff has an impressive resume. He's well educated, was a lawyer, is an author, has traveled the world, and has worked in over 120 different cultures across 45 countries.

Shariff (01:39):

When you see that resume, you get an idea of, well, he's graduated from two Ivy League colleges and upper middle class silver spoon rammed up something or another. And the almost opposite is true.

MBS (01:56):

Shariff was in fact, born in Philadelphia and raised in Camden, and he's got some strong feelings about that.

Shariff (02:02):

Which is America's worst city. Anybody who says there's another one has not been to Camden. And I was raised in the worst parts of the worst city in America on welfare, public housing, the whole nine yards of a toxic environment.

MBS (02:18):

But Shariff has a special skill that helped him to begin to rise out of that world. In his words, being really, really good at standardized tests, knowing how to play the game landed him with a full ride scholarship, including Boston University Law School. And from there he became a lawyer. But after starting his career as a lawyer, he had an epiphany about what it meant to practice law.



Shariff ([02:43](#)):

This ain't for me. And I've been trying to figure out what is for me since that time. The things that I know is that there's something fundamentally wrong with our society. And I figured that out when I was eight years old, and I figured out that we can change it if we actually want to. And then the question is, why don't we want that?

MBS ([03:11](#)):

When I was eight, I definitely was not having insights about the state of the world. So I was curious to know when the moment came to Shariff.

Shariff ([03:19](#)):

Our television broke. And from that, up until that time, I was just happy as a clam to do what everybody else was doing was just sit there and zone out in front of a TV with I Love Lucy and The Honeymooners and all the other stuff that was on that looks great now compared to the garbage that's on it.

([03:38](#)):

And the TV broke and we didn't have any money, so we couldn't fix it. And so I'm about to pull my hair out and somebody suggested that I go down to the library and get a book. And I remember the day walking into the library in Camden, which at the time was open, they closed all the libraries and then they burned down, welcome to Camden. But you walk in the front door and it's like walking in one of these old Carnegie libraries.

MBS ([04:09](#)):

Oh yeah?

Shariff ([04:10](#)):

Like walking into a museum or a church. And they quickly sent me downstairs to the children's section, and I read every book in the children's section that was in



English. That was my first trip around the world, or recognizing the world was bigger than Camden, New Jersey. That was my escape from the psychology of Camden. And it was very dismaying when I found out that they first closed the libraries 'cause they couldn't afford to keep them open and then put fences around them. And then homeless people broke in and keeping themselves warm in the wintertime, they set the books on fire and set the whole building on fire.

MBS ([05:01](#)):

Like some dystopian science fiction story, isn't it?

Shariff ([05:04](#)):

Yeah, welcome to Dystopia. We got there before everybody else.

MBS ([05:09](#)):

Hey, Shariff, so you have this moment as an eight or nine year old, and a library and a book takes you beyond Camden, New Jersey. It's one thing to see the door, it's another to kind of keep walking because the status quo has a strong gravity. It pulls you back. What allows you to keep moving away from that other perhaps more predictable life?

Shariff ([05:40](#)):

I think that's my second epiphany. And at 11 years old, I was very affected by the Black Power Movement. I helped form an organization that still exists called The Black People's Unity Movement and led my first demonstration when I was 12 years old. And at that time, if you had asked, I would've said, I am creating a world that works for all black people, because I knew all white people were fine. I could watch TV. Ozzie and Harriet were having a ball. And so that remained my focus all the time I was in Camden, how can you work? How can we create a city that actually works for all the black people who are in it?



(06:33):

And it took me going to college up in Massachusetts to realize that the world didn't work for a lot of white people. And by the time I had graduated, I realized that the world didn't work for anybody, even the people it purports to work for, the people that you look at, the rich, the famous, the powerful, et cetera. You set them down and you find out the world isn't working for them either. And so our job is a universal job, even though there's lots of folks who deny that that's part of their job. So my work is around the people who are literally awake enough to be functional and wanting to take the next step and understanding that there is a next step for us.

MBS (07:28):

How do you Shariff, I'm going to say, keep your heart open enough to embrace a range of different people like that? Because one of the things that happens, I imagine, and I think if you're an activist and you're supporting a side, is it's easy to kind of, as I say other, the others, and it's like it's us and it's them. And I feel in your words, you are kind of going, it's all us.

Shariff (07:28):

Exactly.

MBS (08:01):

But that's not an easy stance to hold. I mean, we're just biologically wired to go, us and them. How have you learned to keep your heart open?

Shariff (08:10):

That's a good question. I'm facing that right now, I've got a grandson who is in his twenties and is pretty angry at the world right now. And I think it comes from a couple of things. First of all, I think it is a state of grace and a state of your relationship to the divine. And I very quickly add, for those who don't know me, I am not talking about religion. Religion has been one of the ways that we find



that we separate from people. And our challenge is recognizing that we're all in the same boat and to get over our pain. And that's something interesting because in this society, we seem to relish in our pain, be wallow in our pain. In fact, I want to give my identity over to my pain.

[\(09:08\)](#):

When I was 16, I was in a demonstration and the police did their very best to... Well, they put me in the hospital and tried to put me in the morgue. I wound up paralyzed from my neck down for about three days. And it's nothing like lying in a bed that you can't get out of and having the doctors coming by and sticking needles in your feet, and you can see them sticking needles in your feet and you know nothing's happening.

MBS [\(09:37\)](#):

Gosh.

Shariff [\(09:39\)](#):

And you have this ball of anger, frustration, feelings of powerlessness, feelings of helplessness. And you're aiming at these four guys that worked you over. And at some point in time I realize that if I'm going to be a human being living on this planet, I have to let that go. I have to simply let it go. The four people who did that will never apologize to me. Never. Okay? So I can live my life for them keeping my anger intact, or I can let it go and I can become powerful, become more powerful than them, to the point that I can forgive them. And by forgiveness, I don't mean, oh, that didn't happen. And by forgiveness, I don't mean, oh, that's okay. You can do that again. But to really understand what the Buddha meant by that, what Jesus meant by letting it go and then becoming literally who you are. It took some doing. Okay?



MBS ([11:04](#)):

I wanted to ask you about that. I mean, what needed to be true for you to do that, not just in theory, but in practice?

Shariff ([11:12](#)):

First of all, is being grounded in a philosophy that's larger and deeper than myself. And whether you get that philosophy from the Quran or from the Bible or from the Bhagavad Gita or from the Dhammapada or whatever, you have a grounding in that. And then the second piece is start practicing it. I just wrote a book, I know we're not talking about my books today, but I just wrote a book called Practicing Wisdom. And the idea behind Practicing Wisdom is that we all know these different wisdom sayings, love your enemies, love your neighbors, et cetera, et cetera. But how do you do that in a world that we are in right now? That's different from saying that's a good idea. It's like how do you actually practice that good idea? And so that's what I did. It's like, okay, I can do this, I can do this. And I had worked myself up over the four guys that beat me.

MBS ([12:16](#)):

That beat you, yeah.

Shariff ([12:19](#)):

But I also recognized I had extrapolated that to all blue uniforms. I would get twitchy around blue uniforms and I would get to the point where I can recognize that I wasn't beaten by every police officer in the United States. I was beaten by those four guys. I could then recognize their frustration, their anger at me, their feelings of helplessness around me, that all the stuff that was going on in me is going on in them too. And we're sitting there making it worse by butting heads against each other. So I let that go and I could. And because I felt that, I could feel what they were feeling, I could let all of that go and say, I don't like what happened to me. I don't like what's happening in our society with the number of African Americans being killed, but I also can put it in perspective. It



doesn't happen every day. It doesn't happen a lot. It happens more than it ought to, but it's not like it's as endemic as people make believe it is.

MBS ([13:42](#)):

Yeah. Shariff, I'm curious to know whether you can hold this perspective, this generous openhearted perspective and still be an activist.

Shariff ([13:54](#)):

Well, I'm not sure. It depends on what you are an activist for. If you are an activist and you think that your job is to stir up and agitate the conflict between a particular community and the police, then no, you can't do that. But that's not my job. My job is to create a world where everyone, all human beings and all living beings can live and can thrive. And when I do that, I change and then they change. For many of the people who call themselves activists, they don't want to change. They're really happy scratching that itch. Okay? I'm trying to remember the person who said that, there's a book.

MBS ([13:54](#)):

I remember that quote too somehow.

Shariff ([14:51](#)):

I think it was How Real Is Real? And I think the author's name is something like Wattenberg, it's Watten something or another. And he said that there are people who carry their pain around and they keep scratching the itch to keep it fresh, to keep the pain fresh. I want to let go of the pain. You're not your pain. If you think that that's your identity, you need to get an identity. And the people who think that their identity is their money, you need to get an identity because it isn't. Okay?

([15:34](#)):

And so again, my spiritual practices, which incorporates all religions, but is not a part of those religions, gets me to the point of doing that. And Michael, as we're



talking, what's coming up for me is all of the workshops I've done around the world with either police officers or with military people, et cetera, and these are people who have a really depressingly full resume of violence and cruelty. And you're trying to understand where they are, what's brought them to this place. And in order for me to help them, I've got to let go of whatever level of animosity that I've got going on.

[\(16:35\)](#):

So I'm going to give you one quick story. So I'm doing a training and I call my trainings inclusivity trainings. How do we learn how to act like human beings to each other? And this is all small town police officers, which have a whole different reality than big city police officers. So there's a guy sitting right down front, and he was a really beefy guy, and then he had on a full armor bodysuit. And so he's really broad and...

MBS [\(17:20\)](#):

I've got a presence here, yeah.

Shariff [\(17:22\)](#):

And the bush cut military style haircut, and he had the cop stare. Okay? When a cop stares at you like that, you want to confess to something. So I'm walking up and down the front and he doesn't move his body, he just moves his head. He's following me the whole time, giving me the cop stare. And I'm like, "Okay, there's 39 other people in the room, I'm going to pay attention to them." And so I had to go on half an hour and I asked if there were any questions. And of course, Mr. Cop Stare raises his hand, doesn't change his expression. And he says, "I just want you to know I'm getting a whole lot out of this." He said, "You're really treating us with respect and I appreciate that and I've learned a lot." Okay. I'm like, "Okay. Any other questions?"



MBS ([18:15](#)):

That came better than I thought it might. That was good.

Shariff ([18:18](#)):

Yeah, no. And at the end he came up and double shook my hand and was looking at the books and things like that. And everything about his demeanor, et cetera, was saying something else to me. But that was my internal conversation. It wasn't him. I was projecting onto him as I projected onto many people around the world. And I have to, every time it happens, even projecting good things, this is just my projection. Let me see who I'm actually talking about. Let me hear who I'm actually talking with. Not always an easy thing.

MBS ([19:01](#)):

Shariff, tell me about the book you've chosen to read for us.

Shariff ([19:06](#)):

So this book, the book is titled The Timeless Way of Building, and it's by an architect by the name of Christopher Alexander. And I think that there are five books in the world that every human being ought to read, and this is one of them.

MBS ([19:25](#)):

Wow.

Shariff ([19:26](#)):

If you take the word building and change it to the word being, this is how you live your life.

MBS ([19:34](#)):

Gosh.



Shariff ([19:36](#)):

And I'm not overstating, this is an amazing way of looking at how we function in our society. We can see that indigenous people function this way. And we can see that people of all cultures in their past operate it this way. And it's when money contrivances, professional degrees, et cetera gets in the way, we begin to lose the way of our timeless way of being on the planet. I think that we can get back to that timeless way. Most of my work is geared in those directions, and I think Alexander's work is just phenomenal in terms of that.

MBS ([20:37](#)):

How did you come across the book? I mean when did it come into your life?

Shariff ([20:40](#)):

That's a good question. I am very interested in architecture. When I left my practice of law after six years, I really thought about going to school for architecture. And somebody, I don't remember who it was said, "Before you think about that, read this book." And basically in the book he says, "You don't need to go to school for architecture." And so I still feel that I am a social architect, a psychological architect, and maybe even a spiritual architect, that just like you can have a landscape architect who focuses on plants and the lay of the land, et cetera, you can have the architecture of an entire society that it's not sticks and bricks and where do you put the streets, but it's really what are you trying to do in this space and with whom are you trying to do it? So this is, I think [inaudible 00:22:00]

MBS ([22:00](#)):

Knowing this is such an important book, how did you even select two pages?

Shariff ([22:07](#)):

Now a more challenging point would be if I opened this up to anywhere, is there anywhere that's not really good? Yeah, maybe I'll just, instead of reading two



pages, maybe I'll just read the whole book until you shut me up. Yeah, no. So this is from the very beginning when he starts talking about the timeless way of building. My only other choice from where I would read would be the next chapter over which he calls The Quality Without a Name. He says that we're driven by the search for equality, but that quality doesn't even have a name. It's just that we know it when we see it. It's not beauty. And he tells a lot why it's not beauty. It's not perfection. He tells about why it's not perfection, it's not this. And he says, "By telling you all these things, it's not them pointing to where it is." Okay? So yeah, I could have done that.

MBS ([23:15](#)):

You could have done that.

Shariff ([23:17](#)):

Now actually I'm turning to the back now. Oh no, no, you can't go too far back. So now I have to tell you that this is a companion book. The other book that he wrote is called A Pattern Language.

MBS ([23:36](#)):

That's right.

Shariff ([23:36](#)):

And he says that we can't make things that make sense because we've lost the language. We've forgotten where we come from. We're so lost in abstraction that we can't figure out what's real.

([24:00](#)):

If you look for example at the... There's an art museum in Los Angeles that's done by a famous architect, I don't remember which one now. And he made it all out of stainless steel. And it's like this curved weird kind of shape.



MBS ([24:20](#)):

Maybe Frank Gehry, I think

Shariff ([24:21](#)):

Frank Gehry, yes. You know what I'm talking about. And when you make this weirdly shaped building out of stainless steel, it reflects light. And the way it was reflecting the light, it was setting neighborhoods on fire in Los Angeles. There are people that it would cook the paint off of your house. It would cook the paint off of your car. Now, so he designed a building as though the sun didn't exist. Okay? Now...

MBS ([24:56](#)):

Well, he's Canadian and Canadians have a long history of burning American buildings down. That's what your national anthem's all about. So it's just an homage to that.

Shariff ([25:06](#)):

All right, there you go. Okay. Either that or you don't get that much sunlight up there.

MBS ([25:13](#)):

That's also true.

Shariff ([25:13](#)):

It's an irrelevant little ball of fire there.

MBS ([25:16](#)):

Why don't you take us to the two pages, Shariff?

Shariff ([25:18](#)):

Okay, let's do this. And so this section is called The Timeless Way.



MBS ([25:31](#)):

Beautiful.

Shariff ([25:36](#)):

There's one timeless way of building. It is thousands of years old and the same today as it's always been. The great traditional buildings of the past, the villages and tents and temples in which man feels at home have always been made by people who were very close to the center of this way. It is not possible to make great buildings or great towns, beautiful places, places where you will feel yourself, places where you feel alive, except by following this way. And as you will see, this way will lead anyone who looks for it to buildings which are themselves as ancient in their form as the trees and hills as our faces are. It is a process through which the order of a building or a town grows directly out of the inner nature of the people and the animals and plants and matter which are in it.

([26:33](#)):

It is a process which allows the life inside a person or a family or a town to flourish openly and freedom so vividly that it gives birth of its own accord to the natural order, which is needed to sustain this life. It is so powerful and fundamental that with its help you can make any building in the world as beautiful as any place that you have ever seen. Once you understand this way, you will be able to make your room alive. You'll be able to design a house together with your family, a garden for your children, places where you can work, beautiful terraces where you can sit and dream. It is so powerful that with its help, hundreds of people together can create a town which is alive and vibrant, peaceful and relaxed. A town as beautiful as any town in history without the help of architects or planners.

([27:35](#)):

If you are working in the timeless way, a town will grow under your hands as steady as the flowers in your garden. And there is no other way in which a



building or a town which lives can possibly be made. This does not mean that all ways of making buildings are identical. It means that at the core of all successful acts of building, and at the core of all successful processes of growth, even though there are a million different versions of these acts and processes, there's one fundamental invariant feature which is responsible for their success. Although this way has taken on a thousand different forms at different times in different places, still there is an unavoidable invariant core to all of them. Look at the buildings and the photographs which start this chapter. They are alive. They have that sleepy awkward grace, which comes from perfect ease.

MBS ([28:42](#)):

What's the clarion call of truth for you in those pages?

Shariff ([28:49](#)):

He's saying something about building that I feel is true about being, that if there's a timeless way of building, I believe that that's an interesting part of a timeless way of being. And it's how we are being in the world that becomes the fundamental truth. I remember when I was about seven or eight years old, we were moving yet again. We moved as most poor people do, moved from one place that you can't afford to another place you can't afford. And the landlord was moving us into a house and the house had this big red sign on it that said condemned. And at seven or eight years old, I could read the sign, I was reading the fine print. And when I was doing that, the landlord walked over and tore the sign off the building and looked at me and said, "Don't worry about it, kid." And those were all the repairs he made to this condemned structure. And we moved in.

([30:01](#)):

And like I said, I knew there was something fundamentally wrong with that. Now contrast that with... Again, I can give you examples from literally every continent that has people on it and every way that we are configured. But I'm



thinking right now about a poor house in Thailand. And I had been invited by the family to have a simple meal with them. And there was nothing fancy about this house, I mean the materials were ordinary and the house was ordinary, but it had a shine to it.

[\(30:56\)](#):

I just really appreciate it, the connection. I appreciated the timeless way of building of people who knew nothing about architecture, but knew a lot about how to live a quality life. The places in the world that have attracted me, the city of Prague, in Bali, the Balinese temples and the Balinese living compounds where people live their lives, places, and well, every single country I've been to, places in Africa, places in Europe, places in South America. As long as you don't have lawyers mucking it all up. I mean architects mucking it all up, this timeless way can just come out of you. And when it comes out of you with regard to your building, it's probably going to come out of you with regard to your being and how you are with your neighbors.

MBS [\(32:15\)](#):

Shariff, what does progress look like? I've got two questions for you. They're both hard. First of all, if there's a timeless way of building and being, how do you balance that against progress? And then maybe connected, is this. It feels like a timeless way of building doesn't grow out of an individual, it grows out of a community. If our communities feel more fractured than before, you can perhaps debate. But if they feel more fractured than before, is it actually possible still to generate this timeless way of building without a collective sense of togetherness that will allow that to emerge?

Shariff [\(33:02\)](#):

I'm seeing if I can answer both of those with one answer. So give me a second here. The distorting factor on everything that we talk about in terms of progress is money. We believe that progress is anything that gets me more money. So



therefore our houses like our bodies get bloated, more rooms than you could possibly use. And the houses are cheaper. Even the McMansions, they have the cheapness to them. I remember walking across, this guy had two spiral staircases in his living room, but I remember walking across the floor and the floor was spongy. It was a cheap floor. All of this glitter thrown all around. And so everybody walks in, "Oh my God, two spiral staircases," and they're bouncing across the floor. There was no foundation there. And I mean that in the clear [inaudible 00:34:16]

MBS ([34:15](#)):

... senses. Yeah.

Shariff ([34:17](#)):

Yeah. So once you get money out of the way, you're like 80% there. So that I don't derive my identity from money or money equivalents. So I don't derive my identity from a car. A car has a function and I want to have a very functional car. And if it's a very functional car, it will have its own duty. And when I come together with my neighbors and we take money out of the issue, out of the equation, we can start the process of identifying what our true needs are, what our true wants are, what is beautiful for you as opposed to that costs a whole lot of money, it must be beautiful. So once we can do that, we can start following that with a way of articulating more and more beauty, more and more perfection. And when we start doing that, I think that we can start seeing things a really different way.

([35:47](#)):

That's what my experience is when we do things around the world. But how many societies allow that to happen? I was doing a presentation to a group and I said, "You have to do something. You can figure out anything you want to do that's taking us closer to a world that works for all." So a couple came up to me and said, "We're retired, we've got some means. And the thing that we've



decided to do is that we're going to put solar panels on our house and we're going dig up our front yard and plant vegetables and fruit trees and things like that." I said, "No, great." So I saw them three years later and they said, "As soon as we said we were going to do that, our entire neighborhood came up against us. The city council came out against us. The building codes, the restrictive covenants that they put in the leases, in the deeds, everything." And they said, "We want to do the right thing, not follow what everybody else was doing."

[\(37:16\)](#):

And they said, "We finally got them on. We only got half of our yard converted back to production." But they said it was so hard because it was a new idea and everybody came out against it.

MBS [\(37:34\)](#):

This is, I imagine, part of the challenge of the vision that you're laying out because if people of means are finding that battle hard, if you are less resourced, if you are a voice that is less often heard and less able to be heard, it must be even harder to not have the timeless way of being, just end up being a maintenance of the status quo of the power structures that are already there.

Shariff [\(38:06\)](#):

Exactly. Or we wind up doing one thing or a couple of things and then say, "Oh, I've done my part. And I drive a Prius and I recycle all my cans and bottles, so that's enough." And it's not enough. And what I say in my book, we know when we've hit the world that works for all when you can walk around to the other side of the table where someone is sitting and take their deal.

[\(38:42\)](#):

And I tried to practice that when I was practicing law. It's amazing how the practice of law doesn't allow you to do that. It creates winners and losers. And that person hasn't lost enough, and I haven't really won then. And so our challenge is how do we all win? And there is a win for all, all we have to do



though is look for it and talk honestly about how to get that. But if what I want in my world is for you to lose, we never get there. We never get to that point. And I would hope sincerely that people understand what it takes for them to win and to not have that as a moving bracket. I was talking to a friend who had just gone out to test drive a brand new Mercedes and he was driving a two year old BMW. And it's that once you get the Mercedes, then you'll be hungering for a Rolls-Royce. And because of that progression already stuck in your mind, you can't be satisfied. You can't be filled. In Buddhist terminology, they're called hungry ghosts.

MBS ([40:07](#)):

That's right.

Shariff ([40:08](#)):

So you keep eating and eating and eating and you can't get full. There's no way to get full. That's bad.

MBS ([40:15](#)):

Which I would say is that's the very opposite of this conversation so far, which has been extremely nourishing.

Shariff ([40:23](#)):

Yeah. Yes.

MBS ([40:23](#)):

Hey Shariff, I know this is a conversation that could last actually hours because this is wonderful and you are an eloquent man. So I'm going to ask you a final question if I might, a chance to put a bow on it if you'd like to do that. And the question is this, what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation?



Shariff ([40:48](#)):

I think the one thing that's been... I can't say what hasn't been said, but I can say the one thing that's been top on my mind for a while now and it's actually caused me to rewrite... I'm writing a book now, and I thought I was almost done and I'm now several months behind.

MBS ([41:09](#)):

That's the way books work. They betray you.

Shariff ([41:12](#)):

No, I got a lot of them out in time. So this is definitely stopped my production. And it has to do with something I learned very recently. And I have to tell you how I learned it. I was washing dishes and that's not my favorite task to do. So I save it until I don't have any more dishes left. And then I'll wash all of them. So that takes a while. So I generally put on some YouTube videos and at the end of the dish washing, I'm smarter than I was before. And I was watching this one video on something I thought I knew about, which was ants. And I learned two things about ants, one of which blew my mind. Actually, both of which blew my mind, and the second part took my book out of production. The first part was interesting and that is that ants are ancient. They were on the earth a million years before dinosaurs.

MBS ([42:20](#)):

Wow.

Shariff ([42:21](#)):

I had no idea. The second is that ants were not colony beings at first. They were individual beings and they evolved into colony beings. And it talked about this is a process over a million years or something like that. But the first, it stopped me because it's like, wow, I'd have no idea what an ant would even look like as an individual being.



MBS ([42:57](#)):

Exactly.

Shariff ([42:58](#)):

They're all part of a colony. And then the second part was, what's stopping human beings from being a colony? And I stopped washing the dishes and dried my hand and I got a piece of paper and I wrote down colony humans with a question mark. And since that time I've recognized that everything that we're doing wrong is actually leading to doing things right and leading to the notion of us living beyond our individuality and living as a community on a planet of communities. That is really, really exciting. And you start looking at the people who would be definitely against that, which are looking at people definitely before that, how do we blend our consciousness to do that? That becomes very interesting and that is actually bringing this full circle. What I think Alexander's talking about with this timeless way of building, the timeless way of being, that is not coming from an individual, it's coming from all of us. And I think that that becomes satisfying in and of itself for us.

MBS ([44:34](#)):

There was a lot to this conversation. I mean, I can see why Shariff was initially drawn to be a lawyer. I mean, he is a great talker, a great expounder on things. So first, a picture, just one thing from it. I might season the story he told about being beaten up in that demonstration, spending three days paralyzed from the neck down, the anger and the fear and the frustration, the helplessness, the powerlessness. But here's what Shariff said, "I have to simply let it go. I could live my life from them," the people who beat him up, "keeping my anger intact, or I can let it go and I can become more powerful than them." I've been sitting with that for a while. I mean, I think it can be true. I think it is true. I mean, as someone said, maybe Nelson Mandela, resentment or sometimes holding onto your anger is like drinking poison and hoping the other person will die.



[\(45:32\)](#):

Sometimes truly the most helpful thing I've done is to work through my own anger at someone about something and let it go. Stop getting wrapped around the axle about that particular incident. And yet surely anger can be a force for change. That sense of injustice, immorality, unfairness, isn't that what moves you from lack of action to action, from passivity to actually active engagement? But I mean, Shariff is clearly a man in action. I mean, he's told us the world's not working, not for anyone in his words, but particularly not for some. And he's transmuted that anger into a force for change into a force for good. So I'm curious to know what, if anything, are you made angry by? And rather than act from that anger precisely, using the heat and the light of that anger to illuminate the work that needs to be done.

[\(46:34\)](#):

By the way, if this is chiming for you, you can put your name down to join the conspiracy at my website, mbs.works. The conspiracy is a community of people who are working on projects to matter to them and to the world. We'd love to have you join us if that sparks your interest. If you enjoyed the conversation with Shariff, I've got a couple of other 2 Pages interviews to suggest for you. My conversation with Monika Jiang, she's part of the House of Beautiful Business, a conference that I love, happens in Lisbon every year. And that conversation was called Unmasking Ourselves. And then an Australian philosopher, Roman Krznaric, he has written a book about what it means to serve future generations. That conversation was called Hope for Tomorrow.

[\(47:18\)](#):

If you want more information on Shariff, then go to his institute's website. His institute's called The Common Way Institute and the website is commonway.org. If you wish, at there, you'll be able to sign up for his newsletter at the bottom of the page and it'll tell you when Shariff's doing his free workshops. Thank you for listening. There's a free no cost resources at the Duke Humphrey's Library. If you want to go to mbs.work, click on the podcast button



and check that out. In meantime, thank you for your support, for passing the word along, for giving us a review, if you've done that, you're awesome. You're doing great.