



Sananda Maitreya - In Defiance of the Gods



March 9th, 2023

“Life is the lake of existence. It is as turbulent as you make it. As calm as you allow it to be. It forms around you and your thoughts about yourself. Therefore, make sure your thoughts about yourself are consistent with the life you wish to live.”

Sananda Maitreya

On July 8th, 2022, Sananda Maitreya celebrated the 35th anniversary of *Introducing The Hardline*, his iconic, timeless and intensely seductive debut album that sold 1 million copies in the first 3 days of its release and rocketed him to international success. Following a very public schism from the music industry and the sacrificial altar upon which he argues he had been placed, Sananda has flourished as a multi-instrumentalist, songwriter and writer.

His creativity is reflective of his expansive, curious and questioning mind, an untamed soul that is free from shackles and restraints that are imposed on us. It is his mind to own. The rules are his own. Imagine how powerful that must feel...

I wanted us to have a conversation about the here and now and where we go from here. We acknowledge and talk about the past, but in a way that informs us. So, what follows is a fascinating and unique conversation to explore the world view of one of the most talented artists of our generation with a majestic voice that can – quite literally – stop you in your tracks.

Giles Sibbald

You've done a lot of writing over the years. How do you see that and your music contributing to this debate of how to get more people to think for themselves and stop this, let's say, not-so-creeping corporatization of our lives?

Sananda Maitreya

I don't really see separation as an artist, I see different departments and things that I have to do. I'm an artist, and I'm a writer, whether you're writing Hallmark greeting cards, whether you're writing essays, whether you're writing novels, whether you're writing songs, writing is writing. And not everything fits into a song. It's the moment that tells me what avenue to pursue with a view towards following that train of thought. I'm a massive Beatles fan and the late, great maestro George Harrison. His song *Think for Yourself* 'Do what you wanna do. Go where you're going to go.



But think for yourself because I won't be there for you.' It's beautiful. But it's the reason the Beatles only lasted 10 years. Somehow their situation was infiltrated. Things were introduced to keep those guys from making an even greater contribution to our life. I saw them as New Testament prophets – just like I saw Dylan as an Old Testament prophet – who came back to serve more time. Take some time off, come back, do some more work, because the work of humanity is never really finished. We're always on the move. And, you know, for me, Dylan always had this cadence of an Old Testament prophet and this sense of authority that he brought into our time. I actually saw The Beatles as modern day saints, spreading messages of love and peace and to think for yourself, don't just mindlessly do shit. They opposed the war in Vietnam. The British establishment created a monster.

And at some point, they realised that that monster was having a greater influence than just selling Beatles wigs and amps and guitars and things with the Union Jack label slapped on it. But, they were promoted precisely because they were promoting Britain. I believe the Beatles were an example of one of the greatest soft weapons ever created. They had such an impact in countries that the British Government was able to move military and industrial policy objectives in after The Beatles had opened the doors. I think at some point, they came to realise not only their power – clearly – but what was being done in their name. And John and Paul were both very, very uncomfortable with this idea and began to fidget and speak out about it. And I don't think that their eventual separation was just a matter of the guys getting tired of one another. I think it was a deliberate attempt to bring to a close something that was becoming a threat to the very establishment that had espoused its benefits. So they weren't allowed to grow beyond what they were becoming. Once they were denuded and no longer a political threat – you couldn't turn into any corner without being smacked in the head by some Beatles shit. It has become a religion. You shouldn't even say anything against the greatness of the Beatles – it has literally become a state religion. So now it's safe to make it a household brand. Conversely, I'm a massive Stones guy. And this is not an any level of criticism of the Stones...but, you notice that the reason they're still going is because at some point, they turned off all the politics. Mick is a very, very clever guy. And Keith is nothing if not a survivor, by definition. After those guys were thrown in jail in the 60s, it didn't take much for them to realise, 'okay, yeah, maybe we need to, like dial this shit back and just be the world's greatest rock and roll band.' So they spent their time as velvet revolutionaries. And that's why they're still here.

Giles

They blunted their own subversiveness for their own survival?

Sananda

Right. I was taken from my perch for the same reason. I was considered a political threat. This is the point. You don't have to be talking about politics to be considered a political threat. All they have to see is your capacity for bringing disparate peoples together that they've spent a fortune separating. I remember being told by a Sony executive that at that time, 'Michael Jackson might have sold more records than you up to this point, but your demographic is as wide as anybody in music.' They used to have all their boxes. And I ticked every single one of them: bikers, conservatives, liberals, grandmothers, children, boom. That's alarming for them. The revolution is not in what you're singing about, it's in the barriers that are being erased and the disparate people you're bringing together. And of course, my music has always had an element of nonconformity. It's not willing to be contained in anybody's convenient little box. Music is extremely convincing, even to the point where there's a reason why we push music with vocals more than we push instrumental music. Because instrumental music means a guy could be polish, a guy could be South African, he could be Nigerian. Without words to get in the way everybody can understand it. The moment you write in the language, you're already limited by that particular language. The MTV era was also a massive exercise in mind control to limit the perception of what a song was about. That doesn't mean I don't appreciate the creative effect of videos as their own art form.



Maitreya in 2023

Giles

This is a very good point.

Sananda

The establishment prefers it if you're very political because you're easier to marginalize. 'We'll take this black nationalist band because we like the idea that they're trying to keep black consciousness away from our shit' or 'We like white nationalism, because it marginalises and it's easy to all know that that's white nationalism. We don't want that near our shit either.' So they actually encourage marginalisation exercises because it's then easier to pin you into a space.

I mean, I love the music of Rage Against the Machine, but as powerful as they are, the state prefers them being a very pointedly political exercise, because they can keep them walled off as exactly that.

Giles

Do other art forms, such as body art, marginalize? I've used it later in life as a self expression of how my life has changed. But is there a wider issue at play here?

Sananda

The bottom line is, what we're seeing with body art is entirely a projection and commensurate with the fact

that we are going through phases of nationalism and phases

of identity whereby we're resorting and reverting to tribalism. Because ultimately, race is a completely political construct. We're tribes – there is only the human race . There isn't a black race. Or a white race. We're tribes. The human race is comprised of various tribes. Even the way we talk about cultural appropriation is complete bullshit. Evolution has always been tribal, peeking over at other tribes to extract, diversify and upgrade their own experience. So, you know, when I hear people go on about cultural appropriation, I think 'So at what point do we only allow Japanese people to eat sushi?' Or 'only certain tribes of black people should have sweet yams.' By that logic, you can't say all black people can have sweet yams, because all black people didn't come from the same tribe.' Where do you draw the line? Highly ridiculous. It also shows the degree to which we've reverted to being mean spirited, stingy bitches who carry misery for allowing ourselves to be bunched into such a thing as 'I'm French because I grew up in France and I speak the French language because I've been colonised by language.' So, a lot of body armour is a return to tribal identification whereby we undertake to identify ourselves as belonging to a unique set of circumstances, that basically we're redefining ourselves. And then being forced into this sense of patriotism that says, right or wrong, this is my country where, quite frankly, most of us don't really have a genuine consciousness that extends much beyond our neighbourhood.

Giles

When does appropriation become exploitative?

Sananda

Humans have been exploiting the human experience from the beginning of the human experience.



We exploit shit. It's who we are. The question is always 'have you stepped over a line for me?' But to say that a white guy can't dress in a sombrero and Mexican costume because it disrespects sensitive Mexicans is, again, part of the culture war that is being perpetuated by the system to continue to divide and conquer. Colonisers are really nervous because we keep showing evidence that we want to go beyond the smaller definitions of ourselves and our humanity to join into something greater. The point is, if I see a white person with cornrows, do I give a shit? And what right do I have to give a shit to claim that 'Well, you're stealing from them'. Nobody's stealing from anyone. We're only looking at what inspires us, what moves us and what we wish to take upon ourselves. Especially when you consider that a white person might only be politically defined as a white person for a couple of generations. They may be blacker than me. They may have more black people in their past than I do. But in the last couple of generations, they might have bred white. So now they can join this white people's club, where they're now supposed to forego all of the ancestral knowledge within them, and pretend and act in a certain way, prescribed by people nervous of the idea that we interchange and exchange with one another and always have done. But that culture war makes us stingy and mean. When we're stingy people, we squint and when we squint, that narrows our vision. We see things much, much more selectively. We are living in an age of the politics of meanness which creates greater isolation. The truth is, the trick of colonialism is always to marginalise every group, but under the pretence that it's in fact trying to elevate it to a point of recognition. We need to talk about human rights, everything under that umbrella is a marginalization exercise, meant to divide us from the greater larger issue of simple human rights. Marginalizing, slicing and dicing means further control and manipulation and it puts a target on the backs of those communities. Marginalised people will be much more protected under the simple umbrella of human rights. Our right to self-determination is a human right.

Giles

Where do you see this going? Because it feels like there's a long journey, you know, to get from where we are now which is here, to anything approaching equal human rights which is way over here.

Sananda

It's gonna go right into a wall where they meant it to go. If it goes into a wall, then we can be more easily shot. It's a colonising exercise. The life that I live now as a 60 year old is just a portion of the greater life that I've been observing for the centuries that my bloodline has existed. I'm coming from Native Americans, whites, Scots, Irish, Spanish and North African Berbers. My consciousness is wide because my male ancestors have been spread far and wide. And we have access to all of that. If we choose only to recognise ourselves as this entity we call 'ourselves' in this moment, that's our prerogative and it's often for the benefit of what we're here to do right now in this space, but we also have the right to zoom out and see that we belong to something that has been part of the marks of time forever. The other part of your question (about the journey) is that the journey, regardless of where we're going, is always wrong. Because that's the whole purpose. Get to your 'destination' and then 'oops, what now? Boredom?' Okay, I had an experience when I was 29 years old, where basically, because of various meditations I had undertaken – I'm being honest, I'm not exaggerating – after 10 days, I experienced a blissful nirvana. I had actually attained this blissful state. This wasn't anything hallucinogenic. I wasn't even smoking pot until I was 33. For 10 days, I was literally walking around in a state of higher altered consciousness and experiencing complete bliss, freedom from thoughts and worries that controlled my actions. It was an incredible experience. But the wonderful thing is that, at some point near the end of the experience, I began to panic and go 'okay, now what? What the fuck am I going to do with this for the rest of my life? I have shit to do, I'm a creative person.' For those 10 days, I didn't have any real thoughts towards creating anything because I wasn't agitated towards any sense of resolution, problems or worries.

**Giles**

When you were emerging from that state of nirvana, did you start to think differently about your purpose in life? And what impact did that experience have on your creativity? Did you find your creative mind in a better place?

Sananda

People have near death experiences and they see that there is no reason to fear the hereafter. But that only allows them to get on more with what is here now. This is what happened to me: the world was created from chaos and crisis is the opportunity for new birth and new forms. But literally, nothing can be created without friction. But as long as there is no crisis, as long as there's nothing pressing upon us creating that friction, that dynamic of urgency, things just tend to stay stagnant as they are. So, when I was in the state of nirvana, I wasn't thinking about sex, I wasn't thinking about sitting down writing something because there was no motivation to do anything but remain in this state. So, nirvana is a state of existence that is real. I don't need it right now.

I didn't find my creativity necessarily in a better place, because my creative mind is not mine, it's something I've inherited, but I'm grateful to have it. I listen to it and follow it, it doesn't follow me. But again, once you verify the realities beyond your existence, you can just appreciate the value of why chaos exists. See, basically most spiritual and religious practices encourage us to judge ourselves. And they maintain control of us by selling us the idea that we are imperfect beings. Of course, we're fucking imperfect! What the fuck are you gonna do?

Giles

We know our brains and our behaviours are flawed, but why do we not find it easy to accept that?

Sananda

Our main flaw is our need to judge ourselves. We're easy to manipulate if we chase a perfection shadow and as long as we're chasing it, we're never going to catch it. Basically, the shit is what it is. We inherited the bag of circumstances that we've agreed to incarnate and take on. So, it's in the judging of ourselves as imperfect and flawed, as opposed to accepting the value of why we have these various characteristics to work through. That's the main problem, not the flaws themselves. I've said to people who have asked for advice that the biggest enemy of relationships has always been our idea of relationships. It's not the relationship itself. It's the ideas that two different persons bring about what a relationship means, what it's supposed to mean and what you've been conditioned to believe.

Giles

My parents' generation, for example, would often have friendship relationships for life. I guess life was much more linear for them in many ways. I've lost contact with friends – sometimes through my choice, sometimes due to my childhood issues with trust – but I've noticed that my friendships and relationships have changed even more over the last 10 years than they ever have and it's no coincidence that they've changed in parallel with the biggest changes in myself and how I live my life. I need people whose values are much more aligned with mine.

Sananda

Since our external reflections are always a reflection of where we are right now, does it not make perfect sense that as you change, your reflection changes, and as your reflection changes, those that you reflect around, you will also stand to change? It makes all the sense in the world. We should never be alarmed that as we are undergoing changes, our surroundings are undergoing a reflection of those changes. I only need a few people. Anyway, frankly, some people are much more outgoing than others. My wife is a very, very outgoing person and my sons have tons of friends. I've never had more than a couple of friends at a time, for reasons I can say



also pertain to issues of abandonment and moving around a lot as a child. But I also am willing to understand that I might have taken on those issues precisely to save me from too much outside influence. I actually don't like listening to a lot of people's opinions. I don't really need a lot of external confirmation of what I need to do with my energy. But not everyone's like that. You have the type of people who draw their energy from being amongst other people, my wife being one of those people that recharges her battery by being amongst people that are friends. I'm the complete opposite. I recharge my batteries by being alone. And gathering my strength and my energy in silence and being, not worrying about other voices and opinions. But as we change, our reflection will change and, and our friends reflect where we are now and what we need. So it makes all the sense now that as your values deepen, you are going to want people around you who reflect that.

Giles

I'm an only child and I got very comfortable being in my own company when I was a kid, so I completely understand and empathise with what you were saying there about recharging by being alone. I think I get a lot of my power from solitude and people I love and respect. Otherwise, the vast amount of "opinion" gets overwhelming.

Sananda

And that's totally mature. It's healthy and commensurate with just recognising what your nature is. Again, not everyone is like that. People are consensus types by nature. I've never felt comfortable being a consensus type. One thing I've learned about leadership is you can't lead and follow and you have to be arrogant enough to presume that you know where they need to go. And just fucking take them there. The best way for a parade to begin is just to start walking. And if you walk convincingly enough, you will get people to join you just based on curiosity, right? But you have to know who you are. And of course, you're gonna be called arrogant. Of course, you're gonna hear – which I've heard my whole life – 'who does that guy think he is?' My answer has always been that my lifetime has been given me to answer that very question. Who I think I am might not be revealed until the last breath I take. But in the meantime, I just go towards it anyway. Because, again, I'm blessed and cursed with not giving a shit about really what other people think about what I do.

Giles

Has that always been the case, or is that something that you've had to learn?

Sananda

I was raised in a very, very strict religious environment, in a very narrow minded way, surrounded by a very small minded, racist community that prescribed very precisely how people were supposed to behave, in order for others to feel comfortable accepting them. All that did was further confirm that I hate consensus building. I don't trust it. It's usually fear based and it's usually the need to control the minds of others. That's not who I am. Even to this day, I can't wear shirts that fit me too well, because it reflects a time when I was just kept in too straightened a situation where I couldn't express myself without the risk of censure or without the risk of someone being butthurt and offended. And it took so little for them to be butthurt and offended anyway. As soon as I was able to live on my own and start taking care of myself, in fact, as soon as I left the military, the idea of any authority other than my own authority ever controlling me again was a foregone conclusion.

Giles

Interesting paradox with consensus from that interpretation to the one when it's used by genuine consensus builders who believe in the harmony of bringing people together...

Sananda

Consensus obviously isn't controlling when it is something like a law that's necessary for our community, you know, like theft or assault. Most of the laws that our society agrees on are absolutely self-evident. There has



to be some essential basic consensus that we will all agree on – like that we should have clean water – for a community to exist. But we've grown used to the idea that a community should be able to tell me what the fuck I can smoke.. So, when I talk of consensus meaning control, I'm talking about where it reaches into our own personal space to basically dictate how we should live as individuals and as communities. As long as I'm not harming others, I should have the right to decide what I do.

Giles

If we could talk about language for a minute. I find Chomsky fascinating, particularly on anarchism, but I was interested to read his views on linguistics and that our speech is just one tool we have of externalising our internal language – writing, touch and sign could be others. I do feel that we are passively accepting the meaning of some words being re-defined much more overtly now to fit a controlling agenda. How do you see this and how does this impact what you said earlier about how music and writing are different channels for your expression?

Sananda

Right. And Orwell was already speaking about this doublespeak and things of this nature, warning us that at some point language would be used to limit and not to express. Language is being used now as a dangerous political tool. As a writer, it has all at once made us much, much more married to the idea of precision. But it's also emboldening to say that, you know, if it's this easy to get a rise out of people, that also has great advantages. At the end of the day, you know, often whoever gets offended by reading or hearing something should be fucking offended. Often, being offended is the only way we pay attention to things and examine them and allow ourselves to look at something. Human nature tends to settle for the lullaby, not for the melody that kind of sends you on exploration.

Giles

Yes, this tension between staying in your comfort zone and the familiarity that affords versus the big, bad and dangerous unknown that you need to grow and not stagnate.

Sananda

I wrote a song many years ago called Tension Inside The Sweetness. I've always subscribed to the theory that exists in the ancient spiritual teachings of the mystics about divine dissatisfaction. Because, for me, I still am looking for the perfect song to write, I haven't really nailed it yet. I don't even listen to my music after I've recorded and mastered it. Even when I go into rehearsals, I have somebody else listen to the record, just in case my memory forgot something. Part of the reason for that is to protect the part of my nature that's hyper-critical, which I inherited from my upbringing. But the other part is to do with my rising sign of Capricorn – the mountain goat. The mountain goat represents ambition, but it also represents the inability to turn around, look back and see how much you've already done. For me, I've got a lot of mountain left and I'm still eager to explore the rest of that mountain. So, this is what I call my divine dissatisfaction where I don't want to be too satisfied or too fulfilled and to use that hopefully to my advantage.

There's a reason why I used the cosmology of Mount Olympus for the last several projects and that's because I very much identify with Prometheus. The catchphrase for the Prometheus and Pandora project was 'Prometheus was banished from heaven and borrowed from hell, because both God and the devil knew him well'. So, the bottom line is the gods of Mount Olympus got tired of Prometheus. Zeus, who was extremely fond of his son, Prometheus, was given the ultimatum that he was going to have to get rid of the small fucker because if he didn't, the gods were going to rebel against him. His whole message was 'Guys, you created this humanity that you use, abandon and leave dwelling in darkness, caring only about your wealth, your estates and your riches'. And so merely for holding them accountable, he was banished. And again, I wasn't talking about any political subjects in my music, but the problem is what we popstars are there for is to sell capitalism's idea of divide and conquer – buy this, these are the new shoes, these are the new tracksuits, this is the new car.



And most importantly, if they're trying to contain the fear of black power, then an independent, free thinking person who refuses to be contained with the establishment's idea of what being black is about, is not the motherfucker they want all the other black boys looking at looking at. They want them to identify with the guys who are basically espousing black nationalism, or black pre-appropriated identity – I was none of that. I even heard criticism that I thought I was a white dude. I mean, in fact, I do have a white heritage. And why the fuck not? I'm not going to let you tell me how much of my blood matters to me. One of the things that I always respected about my dear, dear friend George Michael was his refusal to play this macho heterosexual game. He was told that if he didn't play the game, they were going to out him. You notice even when he did the girlfriend thing, he got an Asian girlfriend. He said, 'Okay, I'm still going to subvert this and I'm not going to let you make me into a typical white Englishman.' I always respected how he chafed at the idea of what he had to be in order to please to the corporations that were using him to keep the rest of the guys in the closet so they could be contained and used for their own purposes. I'm very proud of him that he eventually set himself up to be caught in that bathroom incident in Beverly Hills, which was clearly – at least subconsciously – his need to free himself from that bullshit.

I appreciate you giving me this opportunity, Giles. Thank you very much for your support of my work. It does matter tremendously. It encourages trust in what you're doing and trust who you are.

The digitally remastered and spatial audio edition of *Introducing The Hardline*, overseen by original producer Martyn Ware, is out now.

www.SanandaMaitreya.com



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