

Oral History Discussion Questions

The Heritage of All Mankind

1. What new information (that was not covered in the biography) did you pick up about Abdus Salam from this interview? Reference the pertinent segment in your answer.

Possible Responses:

- Salam was a private man. He did not discuss his response to the banning of his religion with the person interviewed.
- Salam did not align himself with a particular political party. Instead, he was most concerned with the advancement of science.
- He was courteous. He rarely said something negative about another person, as shown by the exchange between Salam and Beradini.

2. What are the differences between an interview for journalism and an oral history interview?

Possible Responses:

- Interviews conducted by reporters often focus on a specific event or theme, whereas oral history interviews can cover a broad range of topics (this answer is a generalization, some oral histories can be specific, and some journalism interviews can be extensive).
- Oral histories and journalism interviews cover different topics.
- Oral histories are conducted with the intention of gaining a historical account. Leading questions or those that may gain specific responses are avoided in a manner that is not always true for journalism interviews.
- A journalist might want to find out facts from their interview, whereas an oral history interview is concerned more with memories, impressions, or other things which are not necessarily verifiable – especially if the events in question took place many years ago. For example, a journalist might ask: when did this important event take place? In contrast, a historian might ask: how did you feel about the important event?

3. You have now read both short segments of written and oral history. Compare and contrast the two forms. What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of oral history?

Possible Responses:

Comparison: Written history is generally a compilation of many sources. While this can be the case in oral history, oral history often captures one individual's perspective.

Strengths: Interviews can bring out personal details that are often ignored, giving an in-depth picture of a person or event.

Weaknesses: The person interviewed may have forgotten details or misremembered pieces. Poorly constructed questions can introduce bias.

4. What aspects of Abdus Salam's character and life were clarified in the oral history interview?

Possible Responses:

- Salam's politics and professional goals were highly intertwined. The goals of ICTP intermingled with politics.
- Salam was disturbed by the legal religious discrimination he experienced.
- Salam's character becomes more clear, as the interview highlights his courtesy and interpersonal skills, which were useful in many of his projects.