



DIE BEFORE YOU DIE

DR. ANAB WHITEHOUSE



© Dr. Anab Whitehouse
Interrogative Imperative Institute
Brewer, Maine
04412

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I died as a mineral and became flora.
I died as a plant and journeyed to fauna.
I died as animal, yet, then, I was Human.
Why be afraid given that I was never less by dying?
Soon I shall cease being human and go flying
With angels of Grace, but even from that state
I'll pass away since, except for God, to perish is our fate.
When I have surrendered my angelic dimension,
I will become more through an unknown ascension,
Longing for non-Being's station of burning
With the truth that: "To God we are returning."

Maulana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi (may God be pleased with him)

For my mentor, Dr. Baig ... who taught me, among other things, that searching for the truth is essential to being human. He also taught me how important character is to such an undertaking.

I am unlikely to ever realize the truth in the way, or to the extent, that he did. Nonetheless, the fact that after more than four decades I am still deeply engaged in trying to bear witness to the foregoing process of searching – albeit in my own way and according to my very limited capacity -- is largely due to his example.

There are no words that adequately can convey the depth of gratitude I feel for the fact that he came into my life and helped make it better than it otherwise would have been. The words that follow are mere shadows of the truths that he tried to communicate to me, and I wish I had been a better student.

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Introduction

Until one merges horizons with, and acts in compliance with, the nature of truth (according to one's capacity to do so), one has not died before one dies and, thereby, been able to take full advantage of the great opportunity that is entailed by the gift of life. Each of the sections of this book give expression to different facets of my existential journey toward trying to comply with the reminder of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that one should strive to die before one dies ... die to one's desires; die to one's ignorance; die to one's biases; die to one's base emotions; die to one's fears; die to one's delusions; die to the one's false self.

A little over a year ago -- and quite inadvertently -- I took the spiritual counsel of the Prophet in a different direction than intended (as well as did so, perhaps, overenthusiastically) -- and I died ... several times. One moment I was speaking with my wife, and, the next I was gone.

I never felt a thing. However, by the Grace of Allah, several days later I awoke from a medically induced coma.

I had survived what is commonly referred to as "the widowmaker". This involves a complete blockage of the left anterior descending artery.

Even when someone undergoes the foregoing sort of heart attack in a hospital setting, the mortality rate is 75%. Moreover, with respect to the 25% of the people who do survive that kind of an incident, only about 10% of those individuals are able to escape incurring cognitive damage of one kind or another.

I was doubly blessed. Not only did God spare my life, but, as well, I was able to recover without any sort of cognitive deficit -- other than, perhaps, whatever cognitive deficits I already had going into the medical emergency.

More than 30 years ago, my shaykh suffered a heart attack and passed on to the next life. He was 58.

Not too long prior to his passing away, he unexpectedly returned to Canada several months earlier than anticipated after spending much of the previous year overseas on academic sabbatical leave with his family. Shortly after his return, he indicated during one of our

Thursday evening Sufi gatherings that he had had a certain spiritual experience at the shrine in Ajmer, India.

He proceeded to describe a portion of that experience. He, then, indicated, as well, that he had been informed that his work was complete, and most, if not all, of the people who were present on that occasion (including me) probably missed the terminal implications that were entailed by his words.

I was 72 when I had my heart attack. Apparently, my work is not yet complete, and I have been given some additional time through which to try to modulate my life in a constructive fashion and become more compliant with the idea of dying before I die.

My spiritual repechage is running out an unknown rate. Furthermore, while I am not sure that I will be able to complete the task of dying to all my faults, biases, misunderstandings, shortcomings, and errors before I die my final physical death, nonetheless, I am making a serious effort to embrace the extended opportunity that God has extended to me.

Part of the foregoing effort involves continuing to bear witness to the truth as best – hopefully – as I am able to do. One form of bearing witness is to write books.

To date, 37 books have bubbled to the surface of my consciousness. Those works have explored a variety of topics, ranging from: Quantum physics, cosmology, and evolution, to: Psychology, political science, constitutional law, 9/11, religion, Islam, Sufi path, spiritual abuse, sovereignty, and education

Some of the foregoing books are written under the name: Bill Whitehouse, while other works feature the name: W. Leonard Whitehouse, and a few others carry the name: Anab Whitehouse. I have used different variations of my name as the spirit moves me to do so.

Even if an Islamic or Sufi vernacular might be missing from the content of some of the works being alluded to above, nevertheless, and quite irrespective of a given topic, the foregoing books were all written from an Islamic/Sufi perspective. Among other things, this means that I always have tried to discover the truth concerning the nature of my relationship with Being because in essence, Islam is a process of

seeking to submit to the nature of truth ... for, indeed, there is no reality but Reality, and, therefore, there is no truth, but the truth to which such Reality gives expression.

I do not purport to have realized the full truth of things ... in fact, far from it. However, I do believe that by the Grace of Allah and with the help of a servant of God that I have stumbled on certain facets of the truth, and, as a result, I have done my best to try to communicate some of what I might have discovered in the books that have surfaced through me ... including the present one.

Each of the sections in the present book gives expression to issues that relate, in one way or another, to seeking the truth concerning life and, therefore, dying to mistaken ideas concerning the nature of truth. God knows best the extent to which any of the ensuing efforts have succeeded in complying with the spiritual counsel of the Prophet, but if nothing else, food for thought is being provided and, perhaps, God willing, some of the following material might be able to induce readers to critically examine what is being said in the present book and, thereby, help to facilitate their own task of struggling with what it means to die before one dies.

Whatever reflects the truth in *Die Before You Die* is a function of what I have learned from the Qur'an, my Sufi shaykh, as well as through a variety of spiritual practices (including the five pillars). Whatever does not reflect the truth in this book is a function of my susceptibility to the possibility of error ... something to which all human beings are subject to one degree or another.

One does not have to read this book in linear fashion ... that is, starting with page one and, then, following the sequence of pages until one reaches the end of the material. Any one of the four sections can be read independently of the other three segments and, therefore, to some extent, one can skip around the sections according to one's inclinations.

Notwithstanding the foregoing proviso, the first section of the book is intended to provide readers with a variety of personal information concerning me. Hopefully, the material in the first section will help provide something of a context through which to engage the remainder of the book.



Section I – Die Before You Die

How I Died and Lived To Tell About It

Nearly every Friday night for many years, my wife, Maureen, and I have invited our grandson, Mason, to stay with us. Sometimes we would go to a movie together or would watch something on television, and, on other occasions, we would try to find something else to do, but irrespective of whether, or not, we did anything, we always had to try to find something to eat.

The weather had been frigid for a number of days and had left the driveway in an icy mess. I was going to take a quick trip to the grocery store in order to try to find something to have for a meal that would be acceptable to the three of us.

In an uncounted number of preceding winters, my car – a Volkswagen Jetta – had never become stuck in the driveway. However, on this particular Friday night, the car would not budge.

I reported the situation to my wife. She put on her coat, pulled on some boots, joined me outside, and, then, got behind the wheel while I tried to rock the car to help free the vehicle from its ice-bound rut, but this soon proved to be a futile venture.

My wife indicated she had a few 50 lb. bags of sand in the trunk of her car and suggested we try spreading some sand in the driveway to see if this might help things. She opened the trunk, and I removed one of the bags from her trunk.

Something in my 72-year old body felt overburdened by the process of lifting the heavy sack, and I dropped the bag on the ground. I told my wife: “I can’t do this.”

Nothing in my body seemed to be suffering all that much, but there was a discomfort associated with lifting the bag. My wife asked me if I was in pain, and I said no but confessed that earlier in the day, I had experienced a certain amount of minor unpleasantness in my chess area when I had been doing something, or other, outside while my wife had been at an appointment some 40-50 miles away.

I had taken a couple of aspirin on that occasion, and the unpleasantness had disappeared quite quickly. Although I might have been in a state of denial concerning my physical condition, the discomfort had been so mild and transitory that I really hadn’t thought

much more about the incident until I had begun to experience something of a similar nature when picking up the bag of sand.

Initially, my wife and I thought we would go to a 'Walk-In Care' facility that was located a couple of miles away from us. We thought this might be the quickest and cheapest, available option to pursue.

First, we called my wife's daughter to inform her that we were going to be bringing her son, Mason, back to her house. My wife also gave me an aspirin to take.

After dropping off Mason, we headed for the medical clinic. My wife hadn't traveled more than several hundred yards in the required direction, when she pulled into a near-by parking area, turned around, and started going in a direction opposite to our earlier trajectory.

She had decided to go to the emergency room in a nearby hospital. She said she felt the emergency room might be a better option than going to a 'walk-in care' facility.

The hospital was about a 15-minute drive from our house. We arrived without incident, and I was not in any kind of pain or discomfort during the journey.

When we arrived at the hospital, my wife dropped me off at the main entrance and, then, proceeded to park the car. I went into the emergency room area and began the process of providing various kinds of information and identification to the receptionist on duty.

A few moments later, my wife joined me and helped me to finish checking into the emergency ward. Very shortly after that, we were taken just down the hall to a room where a nurse asked me to lie down on a gurney, and, then, I was hooked up to an EKG monitor.

The nurse exited the room, and my wife and I were left alone. Since none of the emergency room staff returned to our room for ten minutes, or so, we began to feel that, perhaps, everything might be okay because we both were of the opinion that if the monitor were displaying problems with my heart activity, then, presumably, there would be medical personnel who would be coming back into the room to do whatever they had to do in order to attend to the situation.

I was trying to adjust my position on the gurney and was asking my wife what she was seeing on the monitor. Not really understanding what she was looking at, my wife called our friend, Gail, who used to

be a cardiac nurse and sent her a picture of what was being displayed on the monitor.

While the foregoing was taking place, I gurgled, my eyes rolled back, and in mid-sentence I died. I never felt a thing.

As my wife was grappling with what was transpiring, our friend, Gail, had been looking at the picture she had been sent and immediately told my wife she was on her way. My wife went out into the corridor to call for help, and she saw a crash-cart team rushing toward her and into the room where I had just died.

The medical staff hadn't actually left us. They were monitoring the situation from another room, and as soon as I coded, they were on their way with their crash carts and expertise to deal with the problem – i.e., me.

A few seconds before, my wife and I were the only ones in the fairly small examination room. A few seconds later, the small room was filled with people and equipment buzzing about in chaotic precision

Of course, I didn't know what was going on at this point. I was, so to speak, dead to the world.

In fact, I don't remember anything that took place during the next three to four days. The first memory that I have concerning the living side of the trauma mountain that my body had to traverse involved my wife trying to satisfy my thirst by using the stick end of a small water-filled sponge to swash my mouth with liquid, and I wondered to myself why she was giving me water in this fashion ... why not just give me a drink of water (My next "memories" – which will be related shortly – are a little more interesting).

However, first, let me fill you in a little bit on what had been happening during the 4-5 days that preceded my first memories of returning to consciousness. Events had taken a few twists and turns.

My wife thought I had suffered a stroke and had died on Friday evening. She was taken to a family room adjacent to the one in which I was lying, and a member of the hospital staff stayed with my wife throughout the ordeal.

At some point, my wife was asked whether, or not, I had a living will. She answered in the negative but added that I had previously had

informed her that should certain life-threatening circumstances arise, I didn't wish to be left in a vegetative state ... just let me go.

When queried further on the issue, my wife said she would like the staff to save me. However, this was not to be done at the cost of crossing the aforementioned line in the sand that I had drawn up during an earlier conversation with her.

While my wife was waiting for information about what was taking place in the near-by room where I had died, a nurse would come out every so often and update my wife concerning the status of my treatment. Several times she indicated that the team had lost me only to bring me back.

Things were touch and go. This back and forth period lasted for about fifteen minutes.

During this time, intubation had taken place. In addition, they had to perform CPR and were required to resort to the use of defibrillation paddles at least two or three times.

One of my lower front teeth was knocked loose during one, or another, of these procedures, and this was a source of on and off bleeding over the next several days. In addition, one of my ribs, or surrounding cartilage, was damaged during CPR, and this would lead to some subsequent, residual problems.

Later on (and I'll come back to the circumstances that gave rise to such information), I found out that when the doctors and nurses had succeeded in stabilizing me, I, apparently, was not ready to go gently into that good night because I was raging against the dying of the light. Less lyrically, six people were required to hold me down while they went about doing whatever they were trying to do.

In retrospect, I am somewhat amazed by the foregoing information. Here, I had just died ... several times apparently. Yet, a few minutes later, I was taking on the combined might of six people, and they were having difficulty holding me down.

Why all this exertion didn't lead to another heart attack seems steeped in the unknown. This mystery is punctuated with something of an exclamation point since at this point the decision was made to place me in a medically induced coma in order to protect me against any sort of strain being placed on my heart.

The emergency staff felt this would give my heart, and the rest of me, an opportunity to recover from the trauma that I had just endured. For whatever reason, my engaging in hand to hand combat with six of the medical staff hadn't transformed the medically induced coma idea into a moot point.

I was transported to the cardio care unit (CCU) of a much larger hospital that was located not very far from the hospital to which my wife first brought me. That night, over a period of approximately four hours (going from about midnight to four or five in the morning), four stents were placed in an artery on the left side of my heart.

The doctors also wanted to install some stents in an artery on the other side of my heart as well. However, the medical staff was worried about what impact additional hours of surgery might have on me, and, consequently, they decided to delay completing their game plan.

My wife, along with our friend Gail, the former cardiac nurse, together with my two brothers and their wives were present for part of, if not throughout, the duration of surgery. Our friend, the nurse, had known I was in trouble as soon as my wife had sent her pictures of the emergency room monitor

Following surgery, the doctor who had been lead surgeon went to my wife and reported on my condition. He indicated I was doing as well as might be hoped for under the circumstances, but the prognosis was uncertain because my condition was still fairly critical.

He told her about the stents he had inserted into my being. He added that if I managed to survive over the next several days, he hoped to be able to complete the stent process with respect to the right side of my heart.

My wife's life had been thrown into turmoil. While I was blissfully unaware of all that was transpiring, she had to deal with the reality of the crisis that was taking place.

She had been up all night and desperately needed to get whatever sleep she could. As a result of what was happening to me, she had lots of errands to oversee in conjunction with medical issues, home-life, several cats, work, as well as friends and family.

I might be sleeping on the job. She didn't have that luxury.

The heart attack had been mine. However, that event threw both of our lives into disarray, and, she was the one who had to do much of the heavy lifting when it came to carrying on with the demands of life.

My wife went home to, if possible, get some sleep. She was exhausted, and her friend, the former cardiac nurse, went home with my wife to also get a little sleep because not only was her house some 17 miles away, and she was too tired to drive that distance, but, as well, she was the sort of person who would have stayed with my wife even if she lived next door.

They each slept for an hour or so. My wife had put on one of my shirts and prayed for a long time before drifting off to sleep.

Shortly thereafter, they returned to the hospital to continue the vigil. They found me, the way they had left me: Full of all manner of tubes running to my arms, neck, mouth, and other areas, and I was still comatose ... a condition that would continue on for the next several days.

Although a medically induced coma had been established in order to give me what the doctors felt was the best chance of surviving the heart trauma and coding experience, there were no guarantees attached to the procedure. This was one of the most difficult things with which my wife had to grapple ... the excruciating, unrelenting uncertainty that permeated each passing moment.

While I was withdrawn from the land of conscious beings, my wife read an e-mail that had been sent to me by a company that, prior to the heart attack, had expressed interest in publishing some short stories I had written. The head of the company indicated in the e-mail that the editorial board of the company met and had voted to offer me a contract for publishing the collection of stories, and, if things worked out well with respect to sales for that book, then, they might consider publishing other works of mine as well.

My wife wrote back to the publishing company on my behalf. She provided the gentleman with an overview of what was happening with me and indicated that if things had a fortuitous outcome then, perhaps, I would be able to respond to the offer in the not too distant future.

The publishing company executive responded to my wife's e-mail. He said he was saddened to hear about my situation, wished us well,

and he said he would await further developments before making any final decision on whether, or not, to proceed with the book deal.

From near the beginning of the period when I was placed in a medically induced coma, my wife had been given a general idea concerning how things might proceed if and when the time arrived to bring me out of that condition. It would involve a fairly delicate and intricate set of procedures.

Among other things, parts of my physiological functioning would have to be analyzed in order to determine whether, or not, the medical staff felt that I was ready to be able to breathe on my own and, thereby, permit them to remove the breathing tube that had been helping to supply me with, and regulate, oxygen. If my body gave indications that I was not ready to breathe on my own, removing the breathing apparatus would be counter-productive.

Once the necessary checks had been completed and my body seemed to be ready for the breathing tube to be removed, I would slowly be brought out of my induced coma. A team of specialists would be called in at that point to complete the process of removing the breathing apparatus.

A nurse who hailed from Canada was supervising my return to consciousness by decreasing this and adjusting that in order to move the process along in an ordered and artful manner. As she was doing this, she called for the specialists to come and remove the breathing tube.

Unfortunately, an emergency of some kind occurred elsewhere in the hospital. As a result, the team that had been called to remove the breathing tube would be delayed in its arrival.

However, the process of awakening me from my comatose state was already underway. My wife was concerned that I might become sufficiently conscious to realize that tubes were running out of me in all directions and, as a result, she worried about me becoming upset with, and frightened by, the situation.

She and my brother were by my bed. As my consciousness gave outward signs of bubbling to the surface, she tried to say short sentences about what was transpiring in order to help me orient myself and not become alarmed.

I don't have any recollection of what she was saying to me. I'm not sure whether I heard her at that time, let alone understand what she was saying.

Moreover, in light of what took place over the next several days, I'm not sure I even understood who she was. Events were about to take a short journey into the Twilight Zone ... cue the voice of Rod Serling.

I started to thrash about and reach for some of the tubes running into and out of me. My brother tried to hold me down on one side of my body, and my wife was working to restrain me on the other side of my body.

Later on, my brother's response to the situation appeared to indicate that his barely conscious brother had given him quite a battle. Based on that experience, he said he wouldn't want to have to get in an arm-wrestling contest with me.

My brother is someone who tries to keep in reasonable shape. Apparently, his prone, recently returned from the dead brother was giving him all he could handle on that occasion.

The foregoing scenario went on for about twenty minutes, or so, and ended - somewhat -- when the team that would oversee the removal of the breathing apparatus finally showed up after attending to an earlier emergency elsewhere in the hospital. While we waited for the arrival of the specialists, I went through periods in which I quieted down as my wife continued to try to reassure me about things, and, then, I began thrashing about again, reaching for the breathing tube, as I lost patience with the situation and fought to become free.

Once more, the anomalous character of the circumstances re-asserted themselves. Here was a person who had died, been revived, operated on, and, then, been placed in a coma to protect his heart. Yet, this same person was engaged in a monumental struggle with two healthy people who were trying their best to keep me restrained and prevent me from ripping out tubes of one kind or another.

My fierce fury might have been fed by some very serious delusions that gripped my being shortly after being brought back to consciousness. I have been informed that such delusions are not uncommon in conjunction with people coming out of induced comas

(part of what is referred to as a medication psychosis), but, for me, my delusions were uncommon and quite terrifying.

One delusion – which I recall but the memory is relatively vague – had to do with the sense that I was on a spaceship. This probably had to do with the fact that the room was dark but all kinds of blinking, colored lights and beeping sounds were manifesting themselves from the many monitors that were in the room and, perhaps, resembled the bridge of the Starship Enterprise.

At that point, I wasn't recognizing anyone. This included my wife.

She would try to explain to me what had happened, as well as attempt to comfort me and reassure me that everything was okay. However, I didn't know who she was or why we seemed to be on the bridge of a Starship-like vehicle.

On a number of occasions, the doctor who had performed the stent-surgery had cautioned my wife that we would have to wait and see to what extent my cognitive faculties might recover from the previous few days. According to my wife, when the doctor was informing her of such possibilities, the doctor would tap his index finger against his own head and say: "Next, we'll have to see how this is" ... referring to me rather than himself.

There had been periods during the resuscitation process in which my brain might have been oxygen-deprived (anoxia). In addition, the possible effects of the induced coma – involving some very powerful drugs -- were unknown.

Although I had a hazy memory of the spaceship phenomenology, I had another set of experiences that were fairly overwhelming in their intensity and implications. The memory of that delusion lingered long after the actual condition of being deluded had passed.

I was convinced there was a conspiracy among certain members of the hospital staff – especially one of the male nurses who was charged with my care – to abduct me, ship me overseas, ritually sacrifice me, and, then, sell my body parts to the highest bidder. Everything I was experiencing – including interaction with the wife whom I didn't recognize as such -- was being framed by, and filtered through, the aforementioned delusional understanding.

At one point during this delusional episode, Maureen tried to convince me that she was my wife. I countered by informing her that she wasn't my wife because my wife would never do to me what this woman was trying to do to me.

I'm not sure if I didn't trust what my wife was saying to me because I couldn't see my wife clearly due to some sort of side-effects from the drugs that had been in my system while I had been in a coma. Alternatively, my failure to recognize my wife might have been part and parcel of the delusion that had completely enveloped my consciousness, or, conceivably, my failure to acknowledge Maureen as my wife might have been giving expression to a dysfunctional aspect of my cognitive state as a result of all that I had been through in the last few days ... a possibility that had concerned the doctor and about which he previously had cautioned her on several occasions.

I seemed to be somewhat more at ease when I closed my eyes and just listened to her voice. However, for the most part, I was very suspicious of pretty much everyone that came into contact with me, and, as a result, I began to plot my escape.

Freeing myself entailed a bit of a challenge. I had been placed in restraints following my earlier rebellion against the attempts of my brother and wife to restrain me while they were waiting for the team that would remove the breathing tube to show up.

My wife thought that, perhaps, the hospital staff should have placed me in restraints before the specialists came. She and my brother were having difficulty keeping my thrashing about under control.

In any event, eventually the breathing tube was removed, and the medical staff battened down the hatches and secured the cargo – me – as I continued to struggle trying to survive the mysterious, tumultuous storm that had engulfed me. For much of the rest of the day, I was not in the sort of mental and physical shape that would enable me to do much of anything.

In the beginning, most of my communication with the world was in the form of short child-like, shouted complaints such as "Let me go!" Another phrase was: "I can't breathe," which everybody seemed to find

amusing given that no one was restricting the intake of oxygen through which I was voicing my complaint.

The next day was similar in many ways to the previous day, but my wife was somewhat buoyed by the fact that my sentences seemed to becoming a little more complex than they had been the day before, and she was hoping this transition in complexity was a sign that, maybe, I might be working my way toward some semblance of normalcy. However, whatever the increased complexity of my sentences might be, I was still deeply immersed in the abduction delusion, and, consequently, I often busied myself with cursing everyone around me (apparently I swore more – and more colorfully -- in a couple of days at the hospital than my wife had ever heard from me previously during years of marriage), as well as trying to kick people (including the woman who called herself my wife) if they came too close to that part of my bed.

Somewhere around mid-afternoon, I suggested to my wife that she should go for a walk and leave me alone for a bit. My wife thought that I was getting irritated by a friend of ours who had been in the room with us, and, so, my wife indicated that she needed to go home and attend to some of the exigencies of life (e.g., feeding the cats, checking the mail, paying some bills, eating, and contacting people that had called her or e-mailed her while she had been at the hospital) that existed beyond the borders of the hospital, and she also suggested that our friend should take this opportunity to do similar sorts of things.

When she returned to the hospital a couple of hours later, she found me covered in blood, the result of my having been able to successfully break free from my restraints and, then, once freed from the restraints, I had moved on to ripping out various tubes that had been ferrying fluids and drugs into and out of my body. The other person who had been in the room earlier hadn't been irritating me as my wife had feared, but, instead, I had been planning my escape and didn't want anyone to be able to interfere with things.

I was convinced that any moment might be my last. I was certain that people were about to abduct me, transport me overseas, slaughter me in some ritually sadistic manner, and, then, sell my body parts to some shadowy, malevolent set of forces. Three or four days removed from having died, laying prone, barely conscious, and tied down to a

bed, my terror was such that I somehow summoned the strength to break free from my restraints and set about trying to remove the other tubes that still bound me to various machines and bags of fluids.

Fortunately, I either hadn't gotten to, or noticed, the tube running from the jugular vein in my neck. The delusion game might well have ended permanently if I had been able to rip out that tube.

Eventually, the medical staff was able to get things under control. However, before she left later that evening, my wife noticed me studying the new restraint knots with considerable intensity, and she warned the staff that I might be planning another escape.

However, there were no more escape attempts. At around five o'clock the next morning, I snapped out of my delusional state and began acting with some degree of normalcy.

Once again, the inexplicable had occurred. Previously, despite being on death's doorstep, there were several occasions in which I had engaged in hand-to-hand conflict with multiple individuals, and, now, somehow I had managed to summon the strength to break free from my restraints ... something that no one – including me – knows how it was accomplished.

When my wife arrived at the hospital early the next morning, the nurse informed Maureen about my having snapped out of my delusional state. She tested the information by asking me who was playing in the Super Bowl this coming Sunday, and when I quickly replied: "The New England Patriots and the Atlanta Falcons", she sighed with relief ... not only because it served as an indicator that my delusional state had departed but, as well, because my prompt reply appeared to indicate that my cognitive faculties might be reasonably intact.

Another kind of difficulty soon filled the space that was created through the departure of my delusions. Toward the latter part of the day when I recovered from the delusional state that followed being withdrawn from the medically induced coma, I began to experience some diarrhea.

This created a problem because the doctor who had performed the original surgery wanted to finish what he had begun on the night I was admitted to the hospital – namely, to place some stents in the arteries

on the right side of my heart. The doctor actually had wanted to perform the surgery at some point following my recovery from the delusional state that had arisen after being withdrawn from the drugs that been used to induce and maintain my coma, but I wasn't sure that I could manage to stay still long enough for the surgery to be done successfully because ever since returning to "normalcy" following my delusional journey, I had a great deal of difficulty lying down ... perhaps, a function of nightmarish body memories left over from several days of having been in a coma.

The doctors decided to wait one more day to see if I would be better able to cope with the surgery. After that day passed and despite the emergence of several bouts of diarrhea during the interim period, the decision was made to go ahead with the stent surgery.

I had a few gastro-intestinal problems lying on a gurney outside the theater of operations while waiting for the surgery to commence. However, they were relatively minor in character.

Due to delays, the doctor who had performed the initial stent surgery was not able to perform the current procedures. Therefore, the process continued on with a new surgeon.

Not too long after returning from surgery, additional bouts of diarrhea began again in earnest. The problem was so extensive and persistent that the medical staff began to suspect that my body might have been invaded by a potentially dangerous and unwanted life form.

As a result, while they sent off stool samples to the lab in order to try to identify the underlying cause of my condition, they began to wear protective clothing and observe hazardous materials protocols when dealing with me. My wife became very concerned at this point because she worried that I might have been able to escape the existential threats associated with dying, resuscitation, coma, several rounds of surgery, and delusional states only to be finished off with some sort of exotic infection.

She later told me that I seemed to become extremely weak during this phase of things. I remember experiencing a considerable sense of vulnerability and feeling like I barely had enough energy to survive from one moment to the next ... a condition that was fueled, to some extent, by the fact that from the time I was no longer plagued by the

condition of medication psychosis until I left the hospital four or five days later, I had considerable difficulty laying down, spending most of my time in a recliner.

Within a day, or so, a report came back from the lab that I was not suffering from the malady they initially had feared might be the case. The room and I were no longer considered to be a breeding ground for possible hazardous materials, and, as well, the bouts of diarrhea came to an end.

A few anomalous events transpired around the time of the second surgery. One experience took place prior to the second placement of stents, while the other set of events occurred at some point after the second surgery had been completed and continued on for a day, or so, as it overlapped with being moved to a newly opened wing for cardiac care.

The first experience might have been a hallucination, or it might have been something else. I certainly don't know what to make of the experience.

Different people are likely to have one, or another, hermeneutical view concerning the situation. Nevertheless, I am fairly certain that no one knows what the significance is of the event about which I am about to relate.

Evening had descended on the hospital. Supper had been served earlier and, now, my room was relatively dark. However, a little light was filtering into my room from the nursing station that formed the hub for a number of surrounding rooms in CCU.

Someone – my wife, I believe – was to my left and camouflaged by the shadows that were present in the room. To my left, there also were a number of monitors with a variety of small colored lights that were blinking and beaming away.

My period of delusion had passed. I had returned to some semblance of normalcy and was lying in bed but not asleep.

I looked to my right where a window was located. Standing before the window, dressed all in white, I saw – quite clearly – an image of my niece (who lives in the city where I am hospitalized), and she looked quite radiant.

I thought she spoke, asked her what she had said, and had raised my hand with the index finger pointed in her direction. Whoever else was in the room to my left – and I believe this person was my wife -- said: “There’s no one there.”

This took my attention away from the image. When I looked back to my right, the image had disappeared.

The transitory nature of the experience left me with many questions. Was the experience just a drug-induced image created by imagination’s re-working of a random memory and was being projected onto the external world, or did the image signify something else? Why did I see my niece rather than some other individual? Why was she dressed in white? Why did the image have such a luminous character?

Another experience – or, more accurately, a continuous series of them -- took place after my second round of surgery. The experiences occurred during my last day in CCU and continued after I had been moved into another room in a newly opened wing of the hospital that also dealt with cardiac patients.

The nature of the experience is very difficult to describe. It seemed to have to do with the structural character of the space between objects.

Objects were not affected and appeared as they do to most of us under normal circumstances. However, the space between objects seemed to be filled with intricate, complex, dynamic, darkly colored, moving parts that gave expression to all manner of fractal-like shapes.

Everywhere I looked, the space between objects was alive. Initially, I thought that what I was seeing might be an artifact of one of the drugs that had passed through my system over the last 4-5 days, but, if this were the case, then, why did objects still appear relatively mundane and normal? Why weren’t objects displaying the same sort of dynamic intricacy? Why was space the only aspect of experience that appeared to be entangled in whatever was occurring?

Initially, I didn’t mention any of this to my wife. However, after I had been moved into the new cardiac facility, I continued to see the same sort of dynamic, spatial phenomena.

I described to her what appeared to be taking place, and I asked her if she saw what I was seeing. She responded in the negative, but, for me, the phenomenon was visually very vibrant as it manifested itself in the space between objects wherever I looked.

Eventually, whatever was transpiring came to an end. Nonetheless, the experiences persisted for quite some time.

After I got out of the hospital, a number of people – including my older brother – asked me if I had any kind of a near-death experience. I said that I hadn't, but I also said that a side effect of one of the drugs I had been given to keep me in a coma had amnesiac properties, and, so, if something had happened, it probably got wiped from my memory.

As outlined above, a few strange events did transpire. However, I am unsure what, if anything, might be signified by their occurrence.

When the foregoing, anomalous experiences began, the medical staff had been working toward moving me out of CCU (the Cardiac Care Unit) and into another cardiac unit that, as noted earlier, was located in a newly finished part of the hospital. To verify that I was ready to leave CCU, the medical staff got me to push a rolling walker around the ward, and, after performing this task a couple of times over the course of a day, or so, without encountering any difficulties or suffering any adverse repercussions, I was provided with a change of venue in another part of the hospital.

Although I had been improving in a variety of ways during my stay in CCU, nonetheless, I still felt relatively weak and fairly fragile after settling into my new room. One of the reasons for feeling as I did was because my medically induced coma -- together with several days of being in a delusional state -- not only interfered with my ability to sleep but, as well, also had interfered with being able to eat.

After I snapped out of my delusional condition, the hospital began to try to transition me to various forms of food that had to be eaten rather than delivered through a tube. I had a couple of meals at the CCU before being moved into my new accommodations, but for whatever reason, I wasn't very hungry, and, as well, the hospital had come up against my long-standing, natural aversion to eating things that are healthy for me, and, as a result, there weren't many choices on the menu that resonated with my eating habits.

From a very early age – and for whatever reasons (which opens up a treasure trove of speculative possibilities for those with psychoanalytic inclinations) – I had developed a deep dislike for the smell, taste, texture, and look of most kinds of vegetables. Peas or carrots (as long as they were cooked and presented in just the right way), along with potatoes, were pushing the limits of my willingness to engage the world of vegetables ... although, on occasion, my mode of being permitted me to take a few isolated steps toward corn on the cob (but never off the cob).

The foregoing aversions were exacerbated by decades of being required to work my way through undergraduate and graduate school, and this left me with little time, money, or inclination to prepare proper meals. For the most part, my life entailed only the simplest of meals, and this significantly reduced the diversity of the sorts of foods to which I was exposed and which I consumed.

Now and then, there were small deviations from the foregoing set of arrangements. However, these sort of culinary ventures into the unknown were few and fairly narrow in scope.

I have been described as being someone who is very easy to cook for but someone with whom it is extremely difficult to eat. Fortunately – but not necessarily so inexplicably -- I ended up marrying someone whose eating habits are very similar to mine ... despite the fact that she is someone who actually likes string beans, celery, and a few other vegetables that would never be permitted to touch my plate, and, therefore, she is something of a radical to my way of thinking.

In any event, although I was managing to eat a few things here and there in the hospital, I wasn't consuming very much. In addition, I wasn't getting a whole lot of sleep.

For various reasons, I was finding the act of lying down very difficult. One factor involved the collateral damage that had been imposed on me during the process of resuscitation a few days earlier.

Every time I coughed, a pain shot through my chest area. Initially, I was worried about this because I never knew whether the pain was related to my heart problems or whether it had to do with a cracked rib or torn cartilage in that region.

Eventually, I was able to determine that pain on the left side of my sternum represented something other than a pending heart attack. The pain merely was giving expression to some collateral damage from earlier resuscitation efforts, and I found that when I coughed, if I would squeeze a special pillow I had been given for such purposes, then this helped to disperse the pain that accompanied the coughing.

The nursing staff encouraged me to follow some breathing exercises in conjunction with the aforementioned pillow. Apparently, they were worried about the possibility of my becoming congested and that congestion could turn into something much more problematic and life threatening.

I also was having difficulty sleeping because of the heart attack and the induced coma. Among other things, I had lost confidence in my body to be able to manage things and believed, somewhat foolishly, that if I stayed awake, then, I might be in a better position to look after whatever problems were to arise.

In addition to the foregoing considerations, my body chemistry was out of whack in various ways, and, consequently, I was going through rapid transitions when I would feel first too hot and, then, too cold. No sooner would I wrap blankets around me in order to get warm, then, I would have to begin removing what I had just put on because I was becoming uncomfortably hot, and neither condition was all that conducive to falling asleep or remaining asleep.

When my wife was not present, then most of the time I sat in a recliner-like chair, watched all manner of old television re-runs, and was thankful that I had something to distract me. To a certain extent, I was hanging on to life through the images and sounds emanating out of the television.

When my wife was present, I did the same. However, I also talked with her in conjunction with whatever topics of conversation might arise.

My wife was a little concerned about my sitting up all the time, and she kept trying to get me to put my feet up so that fluids would not be likely to pool in my lower legs. I attempted to accommodate her wishes as best I could, and in retrospect, I was rather surprised that no one on the medical staff was urging me to do the same.

Despite the fact that I did not feel all that strong, doctors began to talk about me going home on the weekend. However, they wanted to perform an echocardiogram to determine how well – or poorly -- my heart was functioning.

Earlier in the week, they had done an echocardiogram, and my ejection fraction score was around 30. This was not very good, and if my next score were similar to that one, they were entertaining the idea of sending me home in a LifeVest (a wearable defibrillation unit) that would be capable of providing my heart with a supportive jolt under the right sort of circumstances.

On Friday, a technician visited me in order to conduct the requisite tests. As he went about his business, he, my wife, and I talked – but mostly the conversation took place between my wife and the technician.

At one point, my wife recounted all that happened in the previous week, or so, including my descent into a world of delusion. She talked about my episode of hand-to-hand combat with her and my brother, and, as well, she outlined my seeming super-human feat of strength when I broke free from my restraints and attempted a great escape from those whom I believed at the time were conspiring against me.

After listening to my wife, the technician performing the test related an account of his own concerning someone who had been lying unconscious on a gurney. The patient was a 6-5, 280 lb former football player.

For whatever reason, the unconscious client awoke. As he came to -- and while still lying down -- with one hand the patient picked up the male nurse who was hovering over him and threw the nurse across the room.

This sounds like someone else with whom my brother would not like to arm wrestle. Moreover, the demonstration of such strength under conditions of diminished capacity is as mysterious as was my capacity to break free from my restraints or to be able to do battle with six people in the emergency room despite the fact I had just been brought back from the dead and was operating by means of a cardiovascular system that was in need of serious repair.

Later on Friday, the results of my echocardiogram came back and were much better than anyone had anticipated. Within a few days, the score had gone from around 30 up to about 49, and, as a result, the doctors who had reviewed the data from the echocardiogram test decided that I was sufficiently healthy to be able to home sans the LifeVest they had been considering for me.

Prior to being released on Saturday, my wife and I went through a de-briefing session with several cardiac nurses that informed us about a variety of things including how to continue recovering from a heart attack beyond the walls of the hospital. Toward the end of the session, I was asked to sign off on the fact that I been informed about this or that aspect of things.

I was presented with a bright red, 3-ring binder full of helpful information entitled: "Congestive Heart Failure: Patient Education Guide." My wife felt the label was not very hopeful sounding and wished that it had been called something like: "Heart Success Education Guide."

One of my last meals at the hospital involved some sort of chicken soup. Although the concoction contained a bevy of vegetables, I really liked it, and when the nutritionist came by again, we asked her if we could get the recipe for the soup.

The woman quite happily volunteered to go down to the kitchen and retrieve the information. She disappeared and, then, came back an half hour, or so, later with the recipe in hand just as we were about to leave for home ... in fact, we had delayed our departure to wait for her to return.

After learning that I would be leaving the hospital on Saturday, my wife had become quite busy on both Friday and Saturday (prior to departure) going to various stores and purchasing all manner of food and equipment (e.g., a scale, blood pressure device, thermometer, baby monitors) in order to assist my transition back to home life. If she had not been able to secure family medical leave for much of February from her place of employment, I'm not sure how – or if -- I would have been able to manage on my own.

As we got ready to leave the hospital, we discovered that the edema in my feet and lower legs was so extensive that my socks and

shoes didn't fit. The person who was going to wheel me down to the main entrance found some hospital socks and cut them to that they would cover my feet.

My wife went to retrieve our car from the parking lot. She drove up to the main entrance of the hospital, and I walked out into the cold, slushy February afternoon wearing nothing on my feet except improvised hospital socks.

I got into our car. First, we drove to pick up my prescribed medicine because my wife didn't want to have to be alone at home, and, then, we went home.

I was feeling extremely weak and vulnerable. I also had a very difficult time concentrating on anything for even a brief period of time.

My rapidly changing hot and cold spells were still in effect. Furthermore, although the pain in my chest was not as sharp and biting as it had been whenever I cleared my throat or coughed, the pain seemed to have transitioned to the middle of my back and, therefore, whenever I would try to lie down, there was a nagging, uncomfortable pinching in my back, and, as a result, I couldn't remain in a prone position for more than a minute, or so, without feeling like I had to stand up to relieve the pressure.

Consequently, I began to set up base camp in one of the recliners that was located in the living room. My wife insisted that if I were going to do this, then, I had to keep my feet up because the edema in my feet and lower legs was pretty severe, and she was afraid this condition might trigger, or represent a precursor for, another heart attack.

Although my wife is able to fall asleep quite easily in the recliner, I find falling asleep in that sort of chair quite challenging. In addition, our two cats liked to jump up on me ... especially at 4-5 o'clock in the morning when one of their biological clocks went off and they wanted to be fed.

A further impediment to sleep involved a fairly constant shuttling process between the recliner and the bathroom. These seemed to occur about every hour, or so, from midnight onward and was due in no small part to a diuretic someone had prescribed for me to take around 10:00 p.m.

In addition, I was using an electric blanket to try to stay warm, and this needed to be adjusted from time to time. Moreover, I was becoming overtired, and this also interfered with being able to fall asleep.

I desperately wanted to lie down. However, every time I tried to do so (and this occurred at least once a day for several weeks), the pain in my back would make its presence felt, and I would get up, slink away in defeat, and return to the recliner.

One of the purchases made by my wife in anticipation of my returning home was some baby monitor equipment. She did this to comfort herself as well as to comfort me so that we would be able to communicate with one another whenever she was on the other side of the house either in bed or looking after work-related issues in the office.

She would begin the evening by sleeping in the recliner next to my chair. However, around 12:00 a.m. she would get up and move to a bed on the other side of the house, but before returning to sleep in the bedroom, she would turn on the monitor that permitted her to listen to what, if anything, was going on with me and also would enable us to talk with one another, if necessary.

I did find the arrangement comforting. However, there was something else that also was strangely comforting.

A battery-operated candle that earlier had been placed in the front living room window early on during the recent holiday season had not, yet, been packed away to await the resumption of festivities some 11 months later. To the best of my knowledge, there is no timing or solar mechanism built into the aforementioned candle that automatically turns it on and off at certain times of the day, and, as a result, if we wanted the candle to stay on or stay off, we would have to tighten or loosen, respectively, a top section of the candle.

Around 1:30 in the morning on the day following my release from the hospital, the candle began shining without either my wife or me making any adjustments to it. The candle remained on until 4 or 5 in the morning.

I knew this was taking place because the front window is directly across from my recliner chair, and, in addition, I was constantly getting

up to go to the bathroom, and, consequently, I was able to keep track of the light's activity. With a few soon-to-be-discussed interruptions here and there, the process went on for months.

At one point, several months later, the light stayed off for a few days. When the light resumed its vigil, it began coming on at sunset and went off around 10:00 or 11:00 at night ... a schedule that persisted for a number of weeks.

The cats liked to lie down and move about on the wide sill that constitutes part of the front bay window where the candle is located. Sometimes they would knock the candle over.

Whenever I discovered this, I would right the candle. After doing so, the candle might stay off for a few days, but, then, it would return to its previous schedule.

Without any change in batteries, the process continued on through the spring and summer and into the fall. As we moved through the year, the light would go through various periods of inactivity because, from time to time, the cats -- accidentally or otherwise -- would knock it about, but, despite being subjected to such treatment, eventually, the light always returned to one schedule or another of alternating periods of shining forth and remaining dark.

At some point, one, or both, of the cats had knocked the candle onto the floor and its base broke in half. I took some duct tape, repaired what remained of the base, and returned the candle to the front window.

A week, or so, later, the candle came back on and maintained a modified schedule over a period of time. However, by October and November, I wondered if the phenomenon had run its course because there didn't seem to be much light activity.

Yet, when December arrived, the candle came on at sunset and went off approximately 3-4 hours later. For the next 24 days -- until it once more had been knocked over by one of the cats -- the candle maintained the same schedule.

There might be some sort of battery and atmospheric physics that accounts for the light's behavior over the course of nearly a year. Nonetheless, irrespective of whether there is a plausible explanation for that phenomenon, I found the resiliency of the light quite amazing,

and that resiliency was a source of considerable comfort for me during my convalescence.

I was released from the hospital on a Saturday. The Super Bowl took place on the following day.

I wanted to watch the game. My wife was worried that I might get too excited with either joy or disappointment and made me promise to try to maintain a composed demeanor – both internally and externally.

I assured her that I would assume my best Zen-like state of mind. I would engage the game with complete equanimity and detachment.

My wife is not really a fan of football. Sometimes, however, she will sit down with me and cheer for whomever I would like to see win,

Once the game started, she fell asleep. I was left to view the game on my own.

I was hoping that New England would be victorious over Atlanta. Before the game, I had a strange feeling of confidence that the Patriots would win the game ... a feeling that was severely challenged during the first three quarters of that contest.

I remained calm throughout the hours-long debacle that the Super Bowl seemed to becoming. My demeanor remained composed when the first hint of hope began to manifest itself in the fourth quarter and continued on throughout the remainder of the game, including Julian Edelman's amazing, juggling catch that involved a subtle repositioning of his hands in order to better secure the ball while it hovered just off the ground.

My sense of confidence concerning a Patriots' win that was present prior to the game had been vindicated. Nevertheless, through all the twists and turns of that game, I kept my promise and watched events unfold through a haze of Zen-like detachment.

When the game was almost over, my wife returned to consciousness ... sort of. She kind of drifted in and out of awareness during this period but joined me to celebrate the win ... in, of course, a fully detached manner.

At some point following the game, my wife noticed some red splotches on my feet and lower legs. She became concerned and began

looking for information on the Internet that might shed some light on the splotches.

The Internet is filled with all kinds of very useful information. However, one also can be easily misled, or misinformed, by the information one discovers there as well.

After looking at various sites, my wife was worried I might be exhibiting symptoms of sepsis. What alarmed her even more was that the redness in my legs seemed to be spreading rapidly up my legs and was about to engulf my torso.

After some discussion about the situation involving the pros and cons surrounding the credibility of information retrieved from the Internet, we decided around 2:00 in the morning to take a trip back to the Emergency Room at the hospital from which I had just been released.

Normally, the Emergency Room at the hospital is pretty busy on the weekend. However, perhaps, because of the Super Bowl, there were very few people waiting for assistance.

Consequently, someone saw us right away. Various doctors and nurses examined me, asked questions, took some blood cultures, uttered a few speculative possibilities (one of which was that I might be allergic to the remnants of hospital adhesives that were still stuck to my skin on various parts of my body), and released me without coming to any conclusions about my condition or offering any course of treatment.

They said that lab results would be forthcoming in a few days. Until then, apparently, I just was supposed to go about my life as if there were no problem.

The red splotches continued to move up my body. Now, they were all over my stomach and chest, and, in addition, they were expanding their areas of invasion on my legs.

Around noontime on Monday, my wife called the walk-in clinic located a couple of miles away from us ... the one to which my wife was going to take me on the night I died before changing her mind and transporting me to a hospital in the next city over. She asked someone at the walk-in clinic to pass on a message to my primary care physician

that I was seeking some medical assistance in relation to my rapidly changing situation.

Someone at the clinic assured my wife that her concerns would be relayed to my primary care physician and indicated that someone from the clinic would get back to my wife about what had been decided. We waited for about four hours, but there was no response.

My wife phoned again, indicated she had called previously and had been promised a return call, but no reply had been forthcoming. She restated the problem.

In rather imperious tones, my wife was informed that we would not be able to see a doctor unless we came to the clinic in person. Apparently, the person with whom my wife was talking didn't seem to grasp the fact that my wife had called the clinic four hours earlier in order to make arrangements to do precisely what we were being directed to do now.

The edema in my feet and legs was still pretty bad. Consequently, I went to the clinic in stocking feet.

After signing in, we waited a long time before my name was called. By the time someone called our name, I was fairly exhausted.

The person who saw us seemed to be quite defensive about things and said, when asked, that he couldn't call the cardiologists who had performed my surgery because their office would be closed. Furthermore, he indicated that he wasn't about to change my medication without their authorization.

My wife stipulated that she wasn't asking him to change medications. She was asking the person to contact my doctors in order to be able to consult with them about my current symptoms, and, moreover, she indicated to the individual that the cardiologist office in question was staffed with people on a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week basis (and without saying as much, she knew this to be true because she had learned about it through her work).

The individual went away and made the call. Before leaving, the person said that, in one way or another, we would be contacted about the situation.

Sometime later – around 7:00 p.m., or after – my wife received a call from someone at the walk-in clinic. She was informed that the

cardiac surgeons who were contacted by the walk-in clinic were authorizing some changes in my medication.

My wife was told that the red splotches that had been engulfing the skin on my body were being diagnosed as an allergic reaction to one of the medications I was taking – namely, carvedilol (coreg). Furthermore, as a replacement, I should start taking metoprolol succinate twice a day.

My wife asked me if I would be okay by myself while she went to the pharmacy and picked up the prescription that had been ordered. When I indicated I would be fine, she left immediately to pick up the prescription because she wanted me to get started on the new medication as soon as possible.

Within a few days of stopping one medication and beginning another, the splotches on my body began to disappear. With each passing day, they retreated a little more, reversing the course that had been traversed on the way up my body.

Over the next several weeks I had several appointments with my primary-care physician. During these visits, there were some urine and blood tests done.

Subsequent lab analysis indicated that one, or both, of my kidneys were showing signs of distress. Apparently, this is a fairly common occurrence with many people who have heart attacks.

More specifically, my creatinine serum levels were low. As a result, the related glomerular filtration rate (GFR) computation raised the possibility that my kidney functioning might have become compromised to some degree.

Following a heart attack, a person's body chemistry often tends to bounce about a little bit. My primary care physician was uncertain about whether the creatinine serum and GFR numbers were reflecting Stage II, or higher, kidney disease, or whether those measurements just constituted a temporary post-traumatic aberration that in time would return to normal levels.

To help clarify what might be taking place, I was scheduled for a Renal Ultrasound. This was a necessary prelude for me to be able to be seen by a kidney specialist.

In the meantime, I was taken off lisinopril and spironolactone. I had been complaining that I was having trouble with sleep because, among other things, I was getting up every hour on the hour in order to urinate, and one of the reasons for taking me off those drugs might have been to give my kidneys a breather of sorts.

My blood tests also indicated that there was something about my cholesterol levels that were problematic (they were low rather than high). Consequently, the atorvastatin prescription that had been given to me earlier was cut in half, and, then, after another blood test had been conducted a few weeks later and my overall cholesterol levels were found to still be low, the prescription was cut in half again down to 20 mg.

Although the constant trips to the bathroom might be interfering with my sleep, there did seem to be an upside associated with those journeys. I was losing a considerable amount of weight that had been building up due to fluid retention, and, as a result, the edema in my legs and feet was rapidly disappearing.

Over a period of roughly two weeks, I lost about 30 pounds. Part of this was due to the diuretic effects of some of the drugs I was on, and part of it was due to some changes in my diet.

I stopped consuming all soda beverages. Moreover, I also kicked my candy habit as well as reduced my sugar consumption by switching over to stevia-based products.

I discontinued my tendency to snack between meals. In addition, I replaced salt with a no-sodium substitute.

As far as possible, both my wife and I refrained from eating out. We settled for what we could cook at home.

The foregoing changes might not sound very revolutionary in nature. However, there was no arguing with the results.

Over the years, I had added girth to my waistline and bulk to other parts of my body. Now, all of this extra baggage was being cast off like so much flotsam.

The time for my wife to return to work was fast approaching. I still felt very vulnerable and didn't know how I was going to manage without her.

In preparation for her return to work, my wife had purchased a couple of Apple watches. The devices had a lot of neat features, but for the time being, the aspect that most interested my wife concerned its capacity to allow either of us to speak into our respective watches and have our words converted into text that, then, would be forwarded to the other individual.

The watches provided each of us with a certain amount of comfort knowing we were each just a text-message away from being in contact with one another. If an emergency arose while she was at work, her watch would let her know silently that she was receiving a message, and by looking at her watch she could easily determine what was taking place.

Part of the aftermath of my close encounter with the Great Beyond was that, for some reason, I had developed a sense of claustrophobia. This might have been connected with body memory that ensued from the time when I was in an induced coma, intubated, and subsequently restrained, or, alternatively (or, as well), it might have had something to do with the resuscitation process.

Whatever the cause, getting into the small confines of a car filled me with dread. Furthermore, whenever we were waiting for the doctor to show up in an office where we had been taken, I would have to stand near, or in, the doorway.

During the time when the feelings of claustrophobia were present (and they did pass), I remember seeing someone in scuba gear on television. The thought of having a mask over my face sent slivers of panic through me, and I couldn't image how people could tolerate placing a mask over their face.

After I got out of the hospital, there had been some near-record snowfall. This added to my sense of claustrophobia.

I watched my wife from the window as she used a snow blower to clear the driveway. On the one hand, I felt badly that she had to do this on her own.

On the other hand, I felt increasingly closed in by the piles of snow that were accumulating everywhere. As a result, I was feeling very vulnerable and fragile.

There were reports that another big storm was on the way. I had to fight against the inclination to panic when I heard the news because I felt the elements were ganging up on me.

When I first came home from the hospital, I lacked even sufficient concentration to be able to read the comics. Moreover, there was a Jumble Word Puzzle on the comic page that I always enjoyed completing in my head, and, now, I would just stare at the letters in the various boxes and couldn't figure out the simplest of words.

Furthermore, as much as I liked reading the sports page, in my present condition, I couldn't do it. I would look at the headlines and almost immediately lose focus and interest.

After a week, or so, of the foregoing sort of listless behavior, I forced myself to write a few e-mails. While I managed putting together such communications, more, or less, successfully, I usually only could complete just one e-mail on any given occasion, and, usually, I would have to rest up for a few days before I would be ready to undertake that kind of an arduous task again.

At some point, I responded to the e-mail that an executive had sent to me while I was in the hospital indicating that my book of short stories had been approved for publication and that an advance would be sent to me as soon as I signed off on the agreement. After reading the conditions surrounding the contract, I had some reservations concerning the arrangement.

I discussed the matter with my wife. Following that conversation, I wrote a fairly lengthy e-mail to the publisher detailing the nature of my reservations concerning the structure of the agreement.

A few days later, the publisher wrote back indicating that in the light of what I had said in my e-mail to him, the publishing offer was going to be withdrawn. He felt the gulf between our respective views on the matter was too great and, therefore, reaching some sort of compromise would not be possible.

Although seeing the publishing possibility disappear was disappointing, I was not unhappy with the result. Among other things, I already had released the material through my own publishing company and, I had been able to sell quite a few copies of that work in a number of different countries (although probably not as many copies

as might be sold through an established publishing house), so, when placed in perspective, the loss of the publishing opportunity was not all that devastating.

Returning to the issue of working on my post-death diet, I should note that in addition to crossing off soda, sugar, candy, salt, ice cream, and between-meal snacks from my list of consumables, both my wife and I made a few efforts to eat a little more healthily. Aside from a few semi-successful attempts to re-create the taste of the delicious soup that I had encountered at the hospital in the waning days of my stay there by trying to follow the recipe that had been retrieved for us by a member of the hospital staff just prior to our vacating the premises, I'm afraid our efforts didn't significantly diminish the boundaries of neglect as far as eating in healthier manner is concerned.

The difficulties surrounding this issue were exacerbated somewhat by a cardio rehab program I began to attend about a month, or so, after having been discharged from the hospital. More specifically, the program required me to go to the hospital three days a week and participate in two 15-minute rounds of exercise during each session while being monitored by members of the hospital staff, and, in addition, there were a number of educational features thrown into the mix that were intended to complement the physical side of things.

A number of the aforementioned educational components involved trying to help the attendees (about 8 to 10 people per class) develop better eating habits. These suggestions involved everything from: What kinds of foods to eat, to: What amounts to consume and how to read the labels on packaging with respect to the kinds of ingredients that were present, as well as information about how much of this or that substance was in a normal serving of a given product.

I remember one talk on phytochemicals that was given by the nutritionist associated with the cardio rehab program I was attending. Phytochemicals are active compounds that are found in a variety of edible plants and vegetables, and various colored flora constitute rich sources of different members of the phytochemical family.

The nutritionist went through some of the research that stood behind her recommendations concerning the importance of consuming an assortment of phytochemicals. I didn't have any reservations about her data, but I knew I was in deep trouble with

respect to being able to follow through on much of what she was saying.

My eating patterns were not just a function of long ingrained habits. As previously noted, there was something else going on here as well, and those issues were not likely to be resolved in the few years that I had left in my life.

I was going to have to make some sort of choice. On the one hand, I could try changing the way I eat.

I was fairly confident I would not be successful with respect to that sort of challenge. Forty years ago, I actually had tried to renovate my life by moving in a similar direction, and things hadn't worked out very well.

Another possible option to consider would be to cobble together my own way of doing things by controlling what I could and letting the rest slide. I might not be consuming all manner of phytochemicals, and my portion sizes might be too big, but if I were disciplined with respect to the items I had removed from list of consumables, stuck to just three meals a day, and exercised, then this sort of protocol might work for me.

The nutritionist said we should try to limit ourselves to portions that were about the size of a deck of cards. I wanted to eat enough so that I didn't feel hungry during the day and, therefore, wouldn't be tempted to snack between meals, but I didn't mind if I went to sleep feeling a little hungry because I would be sleeping through most of those hunger pains.

I selected portion sizes that seem to resonate with the foregoing set of conditions. Consequently, while I often went to sleep at night with a mild sense of hunger, nonetheless, I was able to sail through the daylight hours without feeling haunted by the specter of hunger swirling about my consciousness.

My wife had purchased equipment to enable me to create some juice fusion drinks. The concoctions consisted mostly of water, but there was some taste of fruitiness – which varied from day to day – that manifested itself.

Occasionally, the fusion drink turned out quite nicely. Most of the time it tasted like weakly flavored water, but it permitted me to keep

hydrated and took away some of the hunger cravings that built up at certain points of the day ... especially during the evening hours prior to going to bed.

Every morning, I ate a large bowl of: Wheat flakes, skim milk, and a sliced banana. I sprinkled the mixture with stevia.

Around mid-morning, I had a cup of yogurt mixed with fruit. The medication I had been prescribed was supposed to be accompanied by a little food, and the yogurt-fruit combination seemed like a good choice ... possibly a little healthier than other possibilities I might have chosen.

At noon, I consumed a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. The bread was some sort of whole-wheat, 12-grain variety, and I used yogurt-based "butter," together with a brand of peanut butter that had less sodium.

For supper, I selected from among 3-4 possible meals. I either had: A ½ lb. burger (without buns) consisting of 91 % fat-free meat to which 3-4 slices of 2 % cheese were added toward the end of the cooking cycle; or, I had a grilled cheese sandwich using 12-grain whole-wheat bread and 2 % cheese; or, I had French Toast (two eggs, yogurt-based "butter", cinnamon, nutmeg, 12-grain whole-wheat bread, and maple syrup), or I cooked 6-7 GMO and hormone free organic chicken tenders.

Prior to my stint with cardio rehab, I began an exercise program of sorts by pacing back and forth through the kitchen and living room of our house. A week, or so, later, my wife and I decided to go to the hospital, park the car at some distance from the building where the cafeteria was housed, walk to the dining area, check to see if they had any of that great soup (which, oddly enough, despite going every day for several weeks, never showed up on the menu), find something to eat, sit down in the cafeteria to consume our purchases, and, then, walk back to the car.

I found this routine pretty tiring, but it got me moving. Both my wife and I thought that if there was going to be some sort of medical emergency due to the strain that exercise could place on my heart, then, perhaps, walking in the hallways of a hospital might serve as a good choice of venue.

When cardio rehab began a few weeks later, I was required to do half an hour of exercise, three days a week. By the time cardio rehab ended, I was completing half an hour a day, or more, of exercise seven days a week.

Approximately nine sessions into cardio rehab, someone at my wife's place of work wanted to sell an exercise bike. She purchased the item, and I began to use it in earnest on the days that I didn't have to go to the hospital for a workout.

I began to lose additional weight beyond what I had lost while taking the diuretic. This was especially evident on those days that I either ate a burger (without buns) or the chicken tenders.

I weighed about 283 pounds when I left the hospital, and by the end of cardio rehab, I had lost about 60 pounds. Once cardio rehab was completed, I continued the eating and exercise regimen outlined earlier for another two or three weeks and was able to lose an additional 13 pounds.

In fact, my primary care physician advised me to slow down on the weight loss program. So, the next challenge was to try to maintain weight, and this is what I have tried to accomplish during the last 9 months ... fluctuating within a few pounds (running both ways) of 210.

I didn't always follow the protocols that were written up in the literature with which I was provided at the hospital. I adjusted that advice to reflect my strengths and weaknesses, but I was able to achieve the goals that I had set for myself when asked at the beginning of cardio rehab what I wanted to accomplish through that program.

Toward the end of the 36 sessions of cardio rehab, the nutritionist affiliated with the program checked in with me to see how things were going. I told her about the weight that I had lost, but I also told her I had gone about things in a fairly unorthodox fashion in which I tended to color outside the lines of good nutritional practice.

She seemed unfazed by my comments. She indicated that while what I did wasn't best practice, nonetheless, it constituted an effective set of practices and, consequently, shouldn't be dismissed just because it strayed from the sort of advice she had been giving during some of the information sessions.

When I first started cardio rehab, a nurse discussed a variety of issues with me. One of the observations she made had to do with the nature of the metoprolol prescription I had been given.

I was taking 50 mg of the succinate form of metoprolol twice a day. The succinate form: Is slow acting, stays in the system longer than the quicker acting tartrate form does, and the two drugs also operate somewhat differently from one another when interacting with the heart.

The nurse who was overseeing my entry into the cardio rehab program had been a health professional for many years, and she raised a few questions about the metoprolol prescription, wondering, among other things, if I might have made a mistake concerning the identity of the aforementioned drug. According to the nurse, when metoprolol is prescribed for heart patients, it usually is given in the tartrate rather than the succinate form, and, furthermore, she was somewhat surprised that I was taking the drug twice a day rather than just once.

I told the nurse I would check on the prescription. The next day I called the office of the doctors who had performed the stent surgery and explained the situation, and the person with whom I spoke said that my concerns would be forwarded to the doctors.

Later that day, I received a call back from the doctor's office indicating that I was taking precisely the drug, dosage, and form which the doctors wanted me to have. However, there was no accompanying explanation as to why I had been given that particular prescription.

There's a reason why I'm mentioning the metoprolol issue. During cardio rehab, clients had their blood pressure taken at the beginning of the session.

Next, we would engage in some warm-up exercises, followed by 15 minutes of walking, riding a stationary bike, or several other exercise possibilities. Upon completing the foregoing phase of things, our blood pressure would be taken once more.

After those blood pressure measurements were made and recorded, clients, like me, would embark on another 15 minutes of exercise. Some cooling down exercises would follow, and, then, our blood pressure would be taken a third time.

Prior to exercise, my blood pressure often registered around 120/60. After exercise – especially the second round – my blood pressure often was recorded as 90 over 45 or 50 and sometimes went as low as 75 over 40.

The nurses kept asking me if I felt light-headed, dizzy, or was experiencing any pain. My answer was always in the negative with respect to their questions because I wasn't feeling light-headed, dizzy, or in pain.

At one point, the medical staff at cardio rehab got so concerned about the situation that the on-call doctor e-mailed the heart specialists and, among other things, inquired again about the metoprolol succinate prescription. The same answer came back as had been given to me earlier – stay the course, but, once more, no real explanation was provided about why the metoprolol prescription was the way it was.

I used to joke with the cardio rehab staff that I was going to die one day, but on that occasion if someone took my blood pressure in order to see if I was still among the living, they probably would dismiss any low reading that showed up. After all, a fairly low blood pressure reading just seemed to be part of the normal course of events for me following exercise.

At some point, I asked my primary care physician about the metoprolol issue. The answer that I got was sort of two-tiered.

On the one hand, she didn't really know why the prescription had the form it did. However, she added that a possible explanation might have to do with the sort of clinical experience the cardiac specialists had had in the past – that is, they might have discovered that such a prescription had developed a good statistical track record in conjunction with patient outcomes, and, therefore, they were merely applying the same protocol to me as they had done with other patients in the past.

When I went for my first check up with the medical group that had been responsible for placing a series of stents in several arteries, I wanted to ask the person who operated on me about the metoprolol situation. Both my wife and I were a little disappointed when we were

seen by someone other than either of the two doctors that had performed the surgery, but I decided to ask my question in any case.

Initially, after listening to what I had to say, the person we saw seemed to be leaning toward changing the form or dosage of the medication in some way – and both my wife and I had the same impression of the situation when we compared notes following the session. However, upon reflecting on the matter a little further, the individual decided that I should continue on as I had been doing over the last three months, but, once again, no clear explanation was given as to why the prescription had the form it did ... just that it would be better, somehow, if I were to continue on as before rather than change things in any way.

What I'm about to say is not intended to constitute a criticism of any particular individual, including the individual being referred to in the foregoing paragraph. What is being said is more a reflection on the state of medicine that seems to be practiced today.

Oftentimes, doctors have no idea whether, or not, a given prescription will help a person. Based on clinical experience, certain drugs are prescribed because they seem to have worked with other patients, but there is no guarantee that what is being prescribed will be successful or that that a patient will be able to avoid encountering one, or another, problematic side-effect or ineffective outcome that sometimes occurs in conjunction with the use of a given drug.

Take the drug coreg that was prescribed for me when I left the hospital. The drug had been prescribed for me in good faith, but less than one day after beginning the prescription my body began to manifest an allergic reaction.

Other people had taken that drug, and, presumably, had benefitted from its use. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, my body didn't tolerate the presence of the drug, and, therefore, its use was discontinued, and another drug – metoprolol – was prescribed instead.

No one (including doctors) really knows why people tolerate some drugs but not others. No one (including doctors) really knows why certain side effects manifest themselves in some individuals but not in others.

Apparently, despite the fact that quite a few people in the medical profession whom I asked about the metoprolol issue had no idea why my prescription had the form it did, I was kept on twice-a-day dosages of metoprolol succinate because – unlike my experience with coreg -- my body seemed to tolerate it. I never really knew whether the fact that my blood pressure dipped so precipitously following exercise at cardio rehab was a good thing or an indication that something else was taking place.

I had considerable anxiety about the metoprolol issue. Some of my health care providers at cardio rehab also had sufficient anxieties concerning the matter that they sought clarification from the cardiac specialists about it.

In part, medicine is based on science. Nonetheless, in part, medicine also constitutes an art form in which experiments with the unknown are performed upon individuals (called clients or patients) in order to see what happens.

Statistical records are maintained in conjunction with how drugs perform (both in terms of success and problematic outcomes) under various circumstances. Every patient shows up as one, or more, data points somewhere on the statistical charts, but one can never tell in advance (and this is true for doctors as well) what will happen in conjunction with any given patient.

I have a friend who is a good doctor. He lives in another state.

At some point after being released from the hospital, I had a phone conversation with him about my situation. He also e-mailed me some information about various health-related topics involving both nutrition and the nature of heart disease.

He informed me that not everyone in the medical world believes that stents are necessarily a constructive method through which to combat heart failure. Furthermore, not everyone in the medical world believes that the pharmaceuticals often prescribed for the treatment of heart failure are necessarily the best way to treat heart disease.

Even before I had my heart attack, I had come across literature that explored various dimensions of the controversy surrounding the treatment of heart disease. My friend was merely reminding me that

there were alternatives to what was being said and done with respect to my treatment.

Whatever the upside and downside of stents might be, the issue was rather moot as far as I was concerned. When I finally was brought back to life -- but in a debilitated condition -- my wife had to make a decision under extremely stressful circumstances about how to proceed, and she did the best she could with the information she had.

Nearly a year has passed since I died, and, yet, I still am among the living. Did the surgery help me, or did it compromise me in some fashion, and is the medication I am taking helping, hurting, or not accomplishing much of anything?

The medical personnel at cardio rehab seem to feel that I must remain on these drugs for the rest of my life. Some medical professionals are of the opinion that committing patients to a life-long regimen of ingesting drugs has limited therapeutic value and constitutes little more than a way of generating a cash flow for pharmaceutical companies and various other facets of the medical profession.

Whether I will continue on with the drugs I am now taking will depend on a decision that will be made a little further down the line in consultation with my wife and medical professionals. For now, I will roll the pharmaceutical dice while wondering what actually is going on within my body as far as the presence of those drugs is concerned.

I am unlikely to ever know -- for certain -- the answer to any of the foregoing questions. What I do know is that I am still alive and, consequently, there are now a series of data points concerning my life that can be positively correlated with the use of surgery and certain medicines, but I also know there is huge potential difference between establishing correlation and demonstrating causation.

I remember a philosophy course I took as an undergraduate. The professor conducting the course was Morton White.

One of the discussions taking place during that class involved the issue of causation. Professor White explored the simple case of striking a match to light a fire.

In order for the fire to ignite, many conditions had to be satisfied. For example, the materials that were to be set on fire couldn't be wet, and there had to be sufficient oxygen available for a fire to be possible.

In addition, the match had to be constructed properly with the right combination of phosphorus and sulfur or potassium chlorate. The matchstick itself also had to exhibit certain structural properties, and the match had to be struck with the right amount of force against the right kind of surface.

Moreover, the presence of too much wind could interfere with either the match lighting, or, once lit, a fire being able to take hold. Alternatively, if snow or rain were falling when one tried to light a fire, those sorts of conditions also could affect whether, or not, a fire might be able to start.

Striking a match doesn't necessarily cause a fire to light. There is a complex set of features that have to come together in just the right way in order for a fire to be possible.

Similarly, one can't necessarily trace the causal efficacy of a course of medical treatment to the performance of surgery or the administering of certain drugs. Medical outcomes are usually a function of a whole set of factors that need to come together in just the right way in order for life to continue on.

Putting aside the issues of surgery and drugs for the moment, one might ask what role did losing more than seventy pounds have on my recovery? What impact did changing my diet to the extent that I did – even though those changes were far from ideal – have on the health of my heart? To what extent did the exercises I performed benefit me? How did all the things that my wife did for me in order to try to remove stress from my life after I was released from the hospital affect my condition?

There are some people who survive heart attacks despite not receiving stents. There are some people who survive heart attacks despite not taking any of the drugs that are prescribed for them.

The very nature of statistics is to provide a way of describing a set of variables that characterize a group of individuals in the wake of some set of events. Before the fact of those events, then, where any given person will show up in that data is unknown.

If one plays the odds, the course of treatment will be in conformity with where the statistics seem to be taking one. However, there is no guarantee that following, or not following, what the statistics indicate will lead to successful or disastrous outcomes.

Health professionals are sort of like medical actuaries who have – to varying degrees -- successfully learned how to play the odds of correlation when treating various maladies. However, perhaps no one should suppose that anyone knows what is actually going on as far as issues of medical causality are concerned.

Toward the end of my 36 sessions of cardio rehab, on one of my off-days, I was using the stationary bike that my wife had purchased. Everything seemed fine until I stopped, and, then, my stomach began to hurt.

Approximately ten years ago, an umbilical hernia had surfaced. At that time, I was told that if the hernia: Turned color, became hard, or began to hurt, then, I should seek medical attention, but if none of those events occurred, then, I could put off doing anything about the condition if that were the way in which I wished to proceed ... which it was.

After I finished my stint on the bike, all three of the warning signs showed up. My wife took me to the walk-in care facility a couple of miles away, and, after examining me, I was referred to the emergency ward of a local hospital.

The hospital to which I went was the same one where I had died five months, or so, previously. While waiting for an emergency room physician to show up, the nurse who was with us recognized my name from the earlier visit and said that two of the nurses who were on duty during that incident were also on duty on this particular occasion as well.

She wanted to know if I would have any objections to her letting those two nurses know that I was in the building. I gave her permission to contact the two individuals to whom she was referring.

A short while later, they appeared. They were so happy to see me.

I had read somewhere that less than 50 % of the people who receive CPR actually survive. Moreover, with respect to the ones who

do survive, only a relatively small percentage of those individuals who do live are able to avoid incurring some sort of cognitive damage in the process.

When I was in a coma, the doctor indicated to my wife on a number of occasions that he was concerned about whether, or not, my brain would be okay once I was awakened. The foregoing statistics backed up his concerns, and the reaction of the two nurses indicated that being brought back to life and surviving relatively unscathed were sufficiently rare occurrences that it resulted in great joy or their part when they discovered that not only was I still among the living but I had all my cognitive faculties as well.

The two nurses stayed and talked with my wife and me for quite a long time. When they departed, they each hugged me.

Before they departed, I learned something from them that I mentioned earlier in this Foreword. More specifically, I asked them if there was anything that happened during the process of resuscitation that was notable in some sense, and they replied that after I was resuscitated, and despite my near-death condition, six people were required to hold me down while a decision was made about how to proceed from that point onward.

After one of the two nurses left the room, the other nurse stayed with my wife and me while we waited for one of the emergency physicians to attend to my situation. A doctor came, examined me, and tried, without success, to reduce the hernia with his fingers.

A hernia specialist was called. He came, examined me, and, then, using a different kind of reduction technique, was able to resolve the problem ... at least for the moment.

My wife referred to him as the hernia whisperer. In any event, one minute the hernia was hard, painful, and discolored, and the next minute - following some manipulation -- the problem had dissipated.

I set up an appointment with him to consult about whether, or not, to perform surgery on the hernia. He was of the opinion that the hernia was very shallow and that it could be repaired in a minimally invasive way.

This was an important consideration because the cardiac specialists had indicated earlier that they were not likely to consent to

my being taken off either Baby Aspirin or a blood-thinner I was on if the hernia surgery were to proceed. The hernia specialist felt that he could do what he had to do without placing me in harm's way with respect to possible bleeding issues.

After I consulted with him and talked the situation over with my wife, we decided to go ahead with the surgery. Just prior to the surgery being performed, the anesthesiologist talked with me, looked at the charts, and was somewhat reluctant to proceed.

However, the issues were finally ironed out, and the surgery was performed. Notwithstanding some severe constipation that I believe was the result of the oxycodone (and I took only two of those tablets) that was prescribed for pain following the surgery, the procedure went smoothly.

Prior to the hernia surgery, I had gone to get a renal sonogram. This was a follow-up to several anomalous creatinine and Glomerular Filtration Rate readings that had showed up in some of my earlier tests.

Several weeks later, I met with a nephrologist in order to discuss the results of the sonogram. After another blood test, I was given a clean bill of health with respect to my kidney functioning, and the previous anomalous readings were attributed to my body chemistry going through some fluctuations following my heart attack before settling down to normal modes of functioning.

Prior to my heart attack, I had begun writing Volume 5 of the *Final Jeopardy* series of books. At the time of death's brief incursion into my being, I had completed the Foreword for the book but not much more.

As my strength and concentration improved following my stay in the hospital, I began to think about trying to finish what I had begun several months earlier. Eventually, I took the creative plunge and began to write.

At first, progress was slow. I felt fortunate if I could produce just a couple of pages of finished material on any given day.

The rate of production picked up with each passing week. Eventually, a rhythm of 6-8 finished pages a day emerged, and this continued until the book came to its destined form of completion.

As soon as *Volume 5* was done, I began doing some research in preparation for the next entry for the series. After critically engaging the written works of some 17 individuals and reflecting on a number of video lectures and presentations dealing with an array of topics, I felt ready to begin working on the sixth, and, perhaps, final, volume of the *Final Jeopardy* series.

While still engaged in preparatory research for that work, my wife and I decided to take a day trip to the Boston-Cambridge area. There were a few art museums in that region that I thought my wife might enjoy, and, as well, I wanted to visit Harvard University for only the second time since I graduated nearly half a century ago.

For whatever reasons, someone either had donated copies of some of my books to Harvard, or Widener Library, one of the premier research libraries in the world, already had purchased a few of my books. This surprised me somewhat because I haven't done a very good job of publicizing my work and wondered how someone had found his, her, or their way to my writing.

In any event, I began to think about the possibility of donating a set of the *Final Jeopardy* works to Widener... at least the five volumes that had been completed. I wrote a covering letter to accompany the books.

In that communiqué, I indicated I was one of the most prolific, diverse, innovative, and, for a variety of reasons, unknown Muslim writers in North America. I also noted that I had written another thirty books, or so, beyond the ones I was presently giving to the library and would be quite happy to donate any, or all, of the rest of the collection to the library if it were interested in receiving that material.

My wife and I took the train to Boston, went to Harvard, dropped off the books, along with the aforementioned covering letter, at Widener Library, visited an art gallery on campus, went to the Boston Aquarium, stopped for a meal in the waterfront area, and, then, headed back to the train station to catch a return trip to Maine. The day was quite enjoyable.

Less than a week after returning from our journey to Boston-Cambridge, I received a short letter from a librarian at Widener Library. He thanked me for my donation and indicated that the library would be quite happy to receive any other works of mine that I might like to donate to the university.

Upon reading the letter, I believe I hooted and hollered a bit in celebration. When I attended Harvard some 50 years ago, never in my wildest imagination did I entertain the possibility that one day I might write books that would show up on the shelves of Widener Library.

My wife and I packed up a carton of my works, together with several CDs of poems set to music that I had written, as well as the DVD for a talk I had given at Fordham University during an interfaith symposium, and sent them off to Widener. A few days later, I received another letter from the same librarian who had communicated with me previously.

He thanked me for my generous donation. He also indicated that he felt the collection constituted an impressive intellectual achievement.

Since my summer trip to Harvard and the Boston area, two further books have been put together that I hope to send off to Widener in the not too distant future (assuming, of course, that the library is still interested in receiving my work). The first book is entitled: *Evolution Unredacted*, and it brings to fruition a tentative plan formed more than twenty years ago when I wrote *Evolution and the Origin of Life ...* namely, to provide an update that complements the discussion which took place in my first work on evolution.

Writing *Evolution Unredacted* proved fortuitous in at least one unexpected way. Since I wanted to include the contents of my first book on evolution in the new work on evolution, I had to go back and review the earlier material.

There must have been some sort of problem with my spell-check program when I first wrote the book in 1996 – or, maybe, I failed to exercise due diligence concerning what had been written -- because I found a lot of spelling errors and typos in the text. Moreover, every time I thought I had eradicated various problems, additional issues would emerge during a subsequent review.

Getting rid of the mistakes became like encountering Jason Voorhees in the Friday the 13th series of movies. No matter what I did to eliminate the spelling problems, various issues kept coming back to life to haunt me.

Finally, after uttering various incantations (just kidding), most of the difficulties seemed to disappear. So, I republished the original work in a new, relatively error-free edition (hopefully) alongside of the recently released *Evolution Unredacted*.

Despite all of the hype by a variety of scientists and writers that evolution has been proven to be true and should be taught to all students, there are a variety of theoretical and empirical difficulties that challenge the foregoing sorts of claims. *Evolution Unredacted* as well as *Evolution and the Origin of Life* help provide an account of some of the problems to which I am alluding.

The second book that I hope to forward to Widener Library -- once that work is completed at some point, God willing, during the next several weeks -- is the present one: *Die Before You Die*. This book (as well as *Evolution Unredacted* and *Volume V* of the *Final Jeopardy* series) would not have seen the light of day if not for God's Grace to provide me with the additional time and wherewithal to complete such projects.

On the night I died, the most important decision -- the decision that I believe had the most powerful impact on the medical outcome -- did not come from health care professionals. I say this with: All due respect, appreciation, and gratitude for the tremendous jobs those individuals did during the evening of that day and throughout the following morning.

More specifically, when I indicated to my wife that I was experiencing some chest discomfort after lifting the 50 lb bags of sand out of the trunk of her car, we initially decided to go to a walk-in care health facility just a few miles up the street. We thought this might be the quickest, cheapest, and least problematic option to pursue.

One minute into the journey, my wife turned the car around and headed for the emergency room of a hospital that was located a few

miles across the river in another city. That decision – along with, perhaps, her urging me to take several aspirins prior to going for medical assistance -- very likely saved my life because it not only delivered me to the very people who would be able to do what was medically necessary to help me, God willing, to survive the forthcoming cardiac event, but equally important – if not more so – her decision brought me to those medical professionals in a timely fashion that afforded them the opportunity to be in a position to successfully do what they did.

Less than ten minutes after arriving at the emergency room at the hospital, I died. If we had gone to the walk-in care facility instead of the hospital emergency room, I very likely would have died and not been successfully resuscitated because the walk-in care facility is not equipped, nor are its personnel trained, to do what would have been necessary to do in order to save my life.

The foregoing judgment is not my opinion. When several members of the walk-in facility heard the story of what transpired that evening, they said my wife had made the correct decision on that occasion because the walk-in facility is not really geared to handle those kinds of situations.

People who do not believe in God will likely interpret the foregoing set of events as being a matter of luck, chance happenings, and/or some form of intuitive, but rational, decision-making. Of course, such individuals cannot prove that the foregoing orientation is correct any more than I can prove that what happened in the early evening of January 27th, 2017 was arranged and orchestrated by God.

Let's review a few of the elements that shaped that fateful night. First of all, If my Volkswagen hadn't got stuck in the driveway – something that had not happened in the previous 10-12 years of rigorous Maine winters -- I would have gone off to the local supermarket, walked about the store, and shopped for food ... probably while lugging around a hand-held shopping basket that I was filling with various products. Although the following statement is somewhat counterfactual since I didn't go to the grocery store, nonetheless, if I had gone to the local market place, I very likely would have collapsed at some point when in the store, coming out of it, or during the ride home.

I make the foregoing claim because the time that would have elapsed while engaging in the foregoing activities is roughly the amount of time that it took to get to the hospital, check in, become hooked up to an EKG, and suffer a heart attack while waiting for test results. Furthermore, I wouldn't have had the possible benefit of the low-dosage Aspirin that my wife decided to give to me prior to our getting into the car in order to seek medical attention.

Only a relatively small percentage of the individuals who have the sort of heart attack that I experienced on that night survive even when such a heart attack takes place within a hospital, and those percentages dwindle considerably when that kind of event takes place outside of a hospital. Consequently, if I had gone to the supermarket on that occasion, I stood a very good chance of dying while laying in wait for emergency services to show up.

Similarly, if my wife had carried through with our original plan to go to the walk-in care facility a couple of miles up the street, my fate likely would have been much the same as likely would have occurred if I had gone to the supermarket – that is, I probably would have died. As indicated previously, several medical personnel from that very same walk-in care facility independently agreed with the foregoing assessment.

Of course, I might have survived while at the walk-in care facility just as I might have survived while shopping at the supermarket, but, in both instances, the surface odds seemed to be prohibitively stacked against survival. Indeed, even given that emergency medical personnel with lots of appropriate equipment and drugs were at my side in seconds following my heart attack while in the hospital, nevertheless, they lost me a couple of times and had to fight tooth and nail to bring me back ... a set of circumstances that could not be duplicated at either the supermarket or, somewhat ironically, the walk-in care medical facility.

Next, let's consider several of the thoughts that occurred to my wife once we had made a decision to seek some sort of medical attention. First, one might ask: What is the source of ideas?

Modern scientists of the brain claim that the roughly three-pound collection of neurons and glial cells that make up the brain is the source of all our ideas, beliefs, values, intuitions, rational capabilities

and so on. The problem is that despite a great deal of correlation between, say, fMRI measurements and various kinds of cognitive operations, no one knows how neurons and glial cells, together with an array of neurotransmitters, generate thought, reason, or consciousness.

People can speculate about what the source of the intuition was that led to my wife changing her mind about where to bring me on the night I died, but neither my wife nor I had had any previous discussion about what we believed the walk-in facility was, or was not, capable of accomplishing. After all, that center was staffed by a variety of doctors, physician assistants, and nurses, so, on the surface of things, one might suppose they would have been able to deal with a case of cardiac arrest, but health professionals who worked there knew otherwise, and such an understanding should not be considered to be a matter of someone seeking to cast aspersions on the competence of anyone who works at the walk-in care facility.

To a much lesser degree, the second and third most important decisions made on the night I died came through me. To begin with, I provided my wife with actionable intelligence concerning my body, and, secondly, even though prior to going to the hospital I didn't have any sense that I was at severe medical risk, nonetheless, I didn't offer any sort of resistance to my wife when she decided to go to the emergency room rather than the walk-in care facility.

I'm not certain what would, or would not, have occurred if I had objected to the idea of going to the hospital when my wife turned the car around and headed in the opposite direction. The point is relatively moot given that, for whatever reason, not one objection to her decision ran through my mind as she was engaged in repositioning the car so that we could move toward the emergency room rather than toward the walk-in care facility.

The foregoing decisions had a significant impact on what subsequently transpired. Those decisions gave health-care professionals the opportunity to succeed.

Many people seem to feel uncomfortable when someone indicates that God might be operating through circumstances, people, or events in order to induce us to pursue some paths and not others. Of course, part of the foregoing sort of discomfort might be due to the fact that

many people are prepared to make all manner of claims concerning God's interaction with them – including quite a few people in mental hospitals -- and, yet, not all of those claims might be warranted.

Nevertheless, one can't help but wonder from whence the idea or intuition came that caused my wife to change her mind and take me to the emergency room of a hospital in the city across the river rather than to the walk-in care facility a couple of miles up the street. Moreover, one can't help but wonder why I – who is not shy about being willing to voice opposition to any given idea – would not object to what my wife was doing ... especially given that, for a variety of reasons, I have had a long-standing antipathy to hospital settings.

Although I cannot prove it – nor can anyone disprove it -- I do not have any problem accepting the possibility that God intervened in my life in a number of ways on the night of January 27th, 2017 (as I believe – and will discuss to some extent later on -- that God has intervened in my life in any number of ways on a variety of occasions). On the 27th, those ways include: (1) Getting stuck in the driveway, (2) having my wife give me a low-dosage Aspirin, (3) my wife's intuition concerning where to take me, (4) my lack of opposition to the change of plans, and (5) the actions of the emergency staff at the hospital.

I do not say the foregoing from a sense of exceptionalism concerning me. Indeed, in many ways, I am a quite unexceptional, but I do believe that God is present in each of our lives and such presence manifests itself from time to time in palpable ways irrespective of whether, or not, we acknowledge its nearness.

Moreover, one might want to reflect, for a moment, on the fact that although I had just been brought back from death's door and despite the fact that the doctors wanted to ship me off as quickly as possible to another near-by hospital in order to have stents placed in several severely blocked arteries linked to my heart, I was giving six medical personnel in the emergency room all they could handle to hold me down. I'm amazed at the strength that was present in a person at death's door, but I am even more amazed by the fact that, given my condition, my combativeness didn't kill me.

I, subsequently, was placed in a medically induced coma in order to take strain off my traumatized heart and, thereby, provide it with a chance to recover. Yet, before that happened, I engaged in strenuous,

prolonged, hand-to-hand combat with six individuals, and, yet, I didn't suffer a relapse.

I can't explain the foregoing set of events. Furthermore, no one else can explain the foregoing set of circumstances either, and, consequently, I feel there are a few degrees of existential freedom that permit me to entertain the possibility that God was looking after my affairs.

Approximately 800 years ago, one of the great shaykhs of the Sufi mystical tradition – namely, Maulana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi (may God be pleased with him and whose burial place I had the good fortune to visit more than 40 years ago) -- said words to the effect of:

“Come, come ... whatever your station might be: Wayfarer, idolater, or inclined to retreat. It matters not. This is not a procession of hopelessness. Join us ... even if you have transgressed against your pledge to God a hundred times. Come again. You are welcome. Come!”

Islam, and, therefore, its mystical dimension – tasawwuf or Sufism – give emphasis to the quality of resiliency ... to the importance of continuing to seek the truth despite the difficulties of life and our own shortcomings. God is resilient in the Divine willingness to forgive us our faults and lend support in all manner of ways if we are willing to take the opportunity that life provides to keep Divinity in our hearts.

In broad terms, from the human side of things, resiliency has to do with the capacity to return to a functional and effective state of being after being exposed to difficulty or forces capable of compromising that sort of functioning. From God's side of things, resiliency is manifested again and again, through revelation, the prophetic tradition, the lineage of great spiritual saints, and any number of blessings being communicated to us on a daily basis that are intended to help us orient and struggle toward the truth.

Developing a capacity for resiliency plays a very important role in conjunction with the living of life. In other words, one has to learn how to be able to quickly recover from, and respond creatively to, the difficulties of life, and developing competency in the realm of

resiliency constitutes an important formative force in being able to constructively pursue the art of life.

Islam, and its mystical dimension of tasawwuf or the Sufi path, each give expression to a methodology designed to assist human beings to develop the sort of resiliency that is needed to engage life in a rigorous fashion. Shahadah, prayers, zakat, fasting, Haj, zikr, meditation, contemplation, service, and seclusion are all designed to assist one to, among other things, develop resiliency concerning the tasks of life.

Earlier in this section, I described a candle that stood – for the most part – on the sill in the front window of our house and served as a comfort to me during my recovery. Irrespective of whether, or not, someone is able to come up with an account based on principles of physics that provides a plausible explanation for how the candle was able to shine on in the way it did over such a long period of time, the candle impressed me because of its resiliency. Despite residing in a cold location near the window and despite being knocked about – accidentally or otherwise – by several cats, and despite not having its batteries replaced, the candle continued to shine on with persistence despite interruptions here and there.

The candle helped remind me of my struggle with life amidst the exigencies of existence. The candle's display of resilience served to inspire my own quest to be resilient in the midst of my on-going difficulties.

My wife displayed similar qualities of resilience. She was the one who watched me die, and she was the one who had to make decisions about how to proceed under difficult conditions, and she was the one who came to the hospital every day and cared for me even when I was engaging the world through the filters of a medicine-induced delusional state, and she was the one who had to grapple with worries about whether, or not, I ever would return to normalcy, and she was the one who attended to the numerous contingencies of life that spilled forth from the cardiac event.

In addition, I also exhibited some resiliency throughout the process. I fought for survival in a variety of ways and was even prepared to do battle with imaginary abductors – misguided though this might have been -- as I went about an attempted escape.

I hung on to life despite: A relative absence of sleep and food, rapidly alternating periods of hot and cold that were very uncomfortable and disconcerting, as well as the onslaught of diarrhea. I persisted in moving forward – one tiny step at a time -- despite an inability to concentrate on much of anything and notwithstanding feeling very vulnerable and fragile both in the hospital as well as after I went home.

I began to exercise. I began to change the way I ate. I began to return to writing.

Slowly, I returned to someone who was, once again, actively engaged in seeking the truth concerning the nature of my relationship with Being. None of this would have been possible without the quality of resilience, and resilience, though we must struggle to acquire it, is still a gift of God.

The medical professionals who looked after me in the emergency room, as well as in the operating theater, or at CCU and its sister ward in the new wing of the hospital, all showed, by the Grace of Allah, resiliency in dealing with the ups and downs of my medical condition. They were the ones who – despite setbacks of one sort or another -- resolved various problems and cleaned up the messes created by me as my body zigged when it should have zagged.

The resilience showed by my wife, the medical personnel, and myself were reflections of God's resilient Presence. God, in many different ways, was inviting me back to life again and again in order to help me to be in a position to be able to take advantage of life's opportunity for seeking Divinity once more and pursue the death of my false self before I die.

I remember a conversation with my shaykh about the process of dying and whether it was better to go quickly or slowly. From a physical point of view, dying quickly – and one couldn't die any more quickly or painlessly than I did on the 27th of January – seems preferable because the amount of pain associated with such a process is likely to be fairly limited, but from a spiritual point of view, dying more slowly affords one some time to try to either mend whatever fences are in disrepair with respect to one's relationship with God, or try to remove those fences altogether.

Despite my heart attack, the time associated with my physical demise was being extended. I was being given additional opportunities to work on my relationship with God.

I was being given additional opportunities to actively resist my desires, biases, and shortcomings. I was being given additional opportunities to die before I die.

My next engagement with death might not be as pain-free as my January 27th, 2017 encounter with death had been. However, God was giving me some more time to, among other things, bear witness that there is no God but Divinity and that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the Messenger of God, as well as providing me with opportunities to remember God through prayers, fasting, zakat, service to others, the observance of fatiha, and zikr so that, little by little, I might struggle toward dying before I die.

In 2006, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., a well-known American author, was invited to visit Xavier High School in New York City. The invitation was the result of a teacher's assignment in an English class in which students were tasked with writing a letter to their favorite author and trying to induce that person to visit the school.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. was the only individual to respond to the foregoing overture. Although due to age (84) and health issues, he did not visit the school, he did respond to the letter of invitation that he had received.

He thanked the students for their kindness, explained why he would not be able to attend, and, then, said something that certainly resonates with me (and many others). He urged the students to pursue – “no matter how well or badly” -- any art that appealed to them and do so: “...not to get money, and fame, but to experience becoming, to find out what's inside of you, to make your soul grow.”

Becoming, discovering the potential within, and nurturing the growth of the soul are at the heart of Islam and its mystical dimension. One must realize the potential within In order to help the soul – however this might be conceived – to grow, and this is what is meant by the idea that one of the essential challenges of life involves an individual's attempt to produce the best answer one can (which

resonates with Vonnegut's words of "no matter how well or badly") with respect to seeking the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being.

The practice of art need not be restricted to activities such as: Dancing, poetry, painting, music, drawing, writing, sculpting, and so on. The art lies in the process of growing the soul through: Critically reflecting on, learning from, developing insight concerning, and acting in concert with one's discoveries during the process of exploring whatever medium in which one is immersed ... and all of us are immersed in the medium of life.

In a sense, the purpose of life is to learn how to die before one dies. Islam and its mystical dimension are gifts sent by Divinity to struggle toward, God willing, developing proficiency with respect to the art of dying to all that is false.

Due to my willingness to do battle with people who were only trying to help me (including members of the hospital staff, my brother, and my wife) I was placed in restraints by the medical team that was looking after my recovery. The restraints were intended to help protect me against me.

Yet, in the delusional state that descended upon me as a result of the collateral damage caused by the powerful drugs that had been given to me during my period of induced coma, I was plotting and planning my escape from "captivity". In other words, I wanted to break free from the system of restrictions that were in place to help me survive.

Often times, one's relationship with Islam is like the foregoing scenario. In other words, despite the fact that the principles of Islam are intended to help people survive their own worst tendencies and inclinations, we often try to plot and plan our escape from Islam because in our dunya-induced and nafs/ego-induced delusional states, we fail to understand what is in our best interests -- physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually -- and, instead, look upon Islam as a set of restraints that is holding us captive and from which we often believe that we need to escape.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, there are both enlightened practices of restraint as well as counter-productive practices of restraint. The former empower us to work toward becoming spiritually healthy, whereas the latter entangle us more deeply in one delusional state after another.

Enlightened practices of restraint help us to learn how to die before we die. Debilitating practices induce us to die in the wrong way ... that is, to die to our essential selves rather than to our false selves. (*Section III -- Shari'ah: A Muslim's Declaration of Independence* addresses some of these issues).

Previously, I talked a little about having been placed in a medically induced coma in order to give my heart a chance to recover from the trauma that it had experienced on the night I died. I also provided an account of the delusional states that descended upon me when I was brought out of a drug-induced comatose condition and how these incidents were either an artifact of the manner in which my system reacted to being taken off certain drugs or those delusional states were an artifact of the impact those drugs had on me before they were flushed from my system (or a combination of both of the preceding possibilities).

At another point, I indicated (using: Spironolactone and metoprolol succinate as illustrative examples from my own experiences) that doctors often have no idea, before the fact, how someone is going to respond to any of the drugs that are prescribed. While the intention underlying those sorts of prescriptions is done in good faith, nonetheless, there are no guarantees concerning the sort of outcomes that will be forthcoming because the process is entirely experimental in nature despite being based on an array of data derived from the treatment of other patients/clients.

If a person reacts negatively to the presence of a drug, then, it is discontinued. If a person does not react negatively to the presence of a drug, then, this means the person's system tolerates that drug, but it does not necessarily mean the drug is beneficially contributing to a person's life.

Almost all of medicine takes place within a cloud of uncertainty known as statistics. Various health professionals interpret the meaning and significance of those statistics in different ways.

The same is true in the realm of spiritual healthcare systems. There is no shortage of data associated with systems of spirituality just as there is no shortage of opinions concerning the meaning and significance of that data.

I'm going to make a very provocative and contentious statement at this point. Theology constitutes a process that, in certain ways, is similar to a medically induced coma, and, as well, the process of theologizing often resonates with the experimental manner in which the medical profession tends to prescribe drugs ... that is, without actually knowing how the administering of any given treatment (spiritual or medical) is going to work out with respect to the person for whom the treatment is prescribed.

In a comatose state, a person loses control over much of what happens to their bodies and mind. Everything is regulated and imposed.

Just as medical professionals might make a decision to place someone in a medically induced coma because they believe that sort of condition affords an individual the best chance of achieving a certain state of well-being upon awakening, so too, many theological systems place individuals in a coma-like state in which the ideological system takes over monitoring and regulating various vital cognitive and emotional functions for a person (i.e., believer) in the hope that such a process will provide that individual with the best opportunity to realize a spiritual state of well-being when the person is brought out of that state (i.e., training process). Furthermore, theological systems often prescribe methods of treatment (called curricula) that are highly experimental in nature (like the prescribing of drugs in medicine) with no actual foreknowledge of whether those treatment methods will impact students in constructive or negative ways.

As often is the case in medicine, one of the criteria for assessing the value of some given form of treatment in spirituality is simply whether, or not, a student can tolerate what is being administered. Moreover, as is also the case in medicine, a person's capacity to tolerate the presence of some spiritual methodology, treatment, or form of instruction does not necessarily constitute proof that the treatment being administered is effective (i.e., enables a person to

learn or demonstrates that what is learned is significant and important).

Earlier I described how I had to be restrained when being brought out of my medically induced coma. This was done in order to try to prevent me from interfering with, or undermining, the process of healing.

Many theologians also are fairly keen to entangle believers in all manner of restraints and do so because, like medical professionals, they don't want the client/patient (believer) to interfere with, or undermine, the alleged educational process. These constraints range from: The physical restraints that often are imposed upon a person's existential movements within a given theological frame of reference, to: The restraints that often are applied to how believers should think, feel, believe, and express themselves, and all of these restraints are applied in good faith because the practitioners believe that such a process will provide believers with the best opportunity to realize spiritual well-being once they are released from their institutionally induced-coma (i.e., training program). Yet, the evidence indicating that such a process does offer the best opportunity for individuals to be able to realize a condition of spiritual well-being that will enable them to seek the truth concerning the nature of their relationship with Being is far from convincing ... even assuming agreement can be reached on what spiritual well-being means).

Instead, all too many aspects of theology and spirituality seem to be dedicated to establishing control over a believer for the sake of control. Moreover, such forms of theology and spirituality use that control to exploit believers in one way or another.

Similarly, just as being withdrawn from my medically-induced coma led to the emergence of several delusional states within me as a result of my body's reaction to the drugs that were still in me or in response to the fact that certain drugs were no longer flowing into me, so too, many believers undergo delusional states that are a function, or artifact, of the theological and "spiritual" treatments they endured during the process of training and that become active as they are withdrawn from the institutionally induced coma (i.e., graduating from such training programs). However, unlike the case of the drugs that are used in medically induced comas, the cause of delusions in the

context of some theological and spiritual training programs often does not disappear from one's system in a few hours or days, but, instead, tends to persist for a much longer period of time ... sometimes for an entire lifetime.

Informed consent tends to play a central role in medical forms of health care. Moreover, a patient often has the right to refuse medical treatment even if this is done against the advice of medical professionals.

Health care professionals approached my wife and asked her how she wished to proceed with respect to my situation. Although an extended discussion concerning the pros and cons of stents, together with a critical review that covered the risks associated with the use of this or that drug did not take place, the doctors would not proceed until my wife indicated that she wanted them to save me as long as this did not result in my entering into a vegetative state for the rest of my life.

For the most part, informed consent does not exist in spiritual forms of health care. Furthermore, in the case of compulsory theological and spiritual training, one often does not have the right to refuse treatment or, alternatively, whatever treatment one does undergo often must operate in accordance with someone else's theory of spiritual health care and well-being irrespective of whether, or not, that theory can be demonstrated to be effective, appropriate, ethical, and/or true.



The Journey to Islam and the Sufi Path

The present book ventures into the realm of spirituality from a variety of directions ... and people – both believers and non-believers - - might find the ensuing journey challenging for I often have been inclined to take the road less traveled and, indeed, for me, that has made all the difference irrespective of whether at the time of moving down one path rather than another I understood the difference that would be forthcoming.

Up until the age of eleven (minus a relatively brief period of time spent in Colorado following my birth), I grew up in a neighborhood whose inhabitants pursued spiritual beliefs of an unknown nature. All I was sure of was that they didn't attend the same church as I did ... a Congregational Church in the next town over.

I can't remember any conversation involving the kids with whom I played in the neighborhood that delved, even peripherally, into matters concerning God, religion, or spirituality. We played baseball, football, went skiing, swam, played army games, and built cabins in the woods, but I had no idea what they believed about religion, and, quite frankly, I didn't care.

The first time that the issue of religious differences arose even in a vague sort of way was when I played basketball in a grammar school league that included schools from three towns in the area, and several of the league teams represented two different Catholic schools located in another part of the town where I lived. From time to time, I used to chum around with some of those kids, and on one occasion – when I was about ten -- they invited me to attend Mass.

I asked my mother if it was okay, and she gave her permission. The kids with whom I attended the Mass ceremonies tried to warn me that Catholics offered a slightly different version of the Lord's Prayer than Protestants did ... it was shorter.

I thought my friends might be trying to play a trick on me. Consequently, when it came time to recite the Lord's Prayer, I was the only one in attendance who was continuing on when everyone else in the church had stopped reciting that prayer. Aside from a certain

amount of embarrassment, there was no additional fallout from the incident.

Quite a few of the girls with whom I danced on Saturday night at a youth social center (known as the Institute) were Catholic. However, their religion wasn't what attracted me, and religion wasn't the topic of conversation when we danced.

Not only were the religious beliefs of my neighbors a mystery, but, quite frankly, so were the religious beliefs of several of my family members. Every Sunday I went to Church with my mother, but my father and older brother didn't go with us (at the time, my younger brother had not, yet, been born).

I never asked my mother, father, or brother about why things were the way they were in this respect. Nor did I wonder about it ... I just accepted it.

Occasionally – very occasionally -- there were times that my father offered a prayer of thanks prior to a special meal of some kind. The prayer seemed to be offered from a Christian perspective.

I can remember my father, mother, myself, and, sometimes, my older brother going to Church on special occasions such as Christmas Eve. Nonetheless, these times seemed relatively few in number.

My mother didn't drive or have a license. Consequently, my father would have to drive her to various church functions, and, then, he would return to the church when she needed a ride home.

I don't remember much about going to church in those days. I recall one occasion when I forgot my lines in a Christmas pageant of some kind and was quite distraught over the gaffe. I also remember several occasions when I stopped at a drug store while walking home from church (on those occasions when my mother was required to attend administrative or choir meetings of some kind following church services) and ordered a cherry coke from the soda fountain using coins that should have gone into the church collection plate.

I have a few recollections that arose in conjunction with some of the summer field-day outings that had been organized by the church I attended. There were various kinds of competitions, including running and throwing a baseball for distance.

One of the kids in these competitions (who was five or six years older than me) was later killed in an automobile accident. I don't recall going to his funeral or having heard much discussion about the circumstances of the accident ... although the incident was mentioned a few times by my mother.

For the most part, I don't really recall much about what went on in Sunday school in those early years. Furthermore, I don't remember much, if anything, from any of the sermons or services that I attended when accompanying my mother.

For the most part, I didn't read the Bible. Whatever familiarity I had with its contents was largely indirect and derived from other people.

I don't recall any discussions concerning religion that took place within our home. For the most part, everyone seemed to be pursuing things according to their own inclinations.

Probably most of what I knew about religion (which was very limited) came from movies or radio programs (the family didn't have a television set until I was about seven or eight years old). For me, religion consisted largely of going to church with my mother and participating in some of the sporting and social events (such as Halloween costume parties) sponsored by the church.

When I was ten, our family moved to another town in north-central Maine. The town was quite small (700-900 people).

Once again, I accompanied my mother to a local church, sans my father, older brother, or younger brother (who had been born two or three years prior to our move northward). As an older child, I became more active in the local church and began to sing in the choir and teach Sunday school, but the only reason I can think of for why those activities took place is because the ministers (there were a number of them over a period of time) appeared to be desperate for male participation in the church ... it certainly wasn't because I had a great voice or knew much about religion or the Bible (which was not the case in either of those matters).

When I was in high school, I was invited by whomever the presiding minister happened to be at the time to conduct a number of church services, including giving the sermon. Again, the idea seemed to

be to encourage active male participation because the young, teenage women my age weren't being invited to do the same ... and, in fact, my mother used to have running battles with a variety of ministers about permitting women to play a role in the church that went beyond: Choir, teaching Sunday school, and baking something for some activity being organized by the church.

The people who attended the foregoing sort of services seemed to like what I was doing. However, I really didn't have a clue about what it was that I was doing ... I was just winging it.

I do recall one of the adult Sunday school teachers marveling at my ability to get the young children in the classes I conducted to speak up because she could never get them to do that. I also remember a number of adults in the congregation coming up to me after giving a sermon and saying that they felt I had a gift for speaking about religious matters and would miss my calling if I didn't pursue things further in that respect.

Between my junior and senior year of high school, I was selected to participate in a National Science Foundation program -- being held in New York City -- that was intended to explore the theory of semi-conductors. For whatever reason -- maybe due a sense of isolation and loneliness from being away from home for the first time in my life -- I would listen to religious programming late at night on a radio in the dorm room where I stayed, and, something began percolating in me.

The feeling was very diffuse. It was not about being a Christian per se but, instead, it had to do with one's relationship with God quite independently of organized religion.

It was not Bible-oriented. It was more of a wonderment concerning the nature of life and feeling a deep sense of connectedness to existence in some manner that was very difficult to articulate.

If someone had asked me what it was all about, I couldn't have explained in any coherent fashion what was transpiring within me at that time. It had something to do with becoming open to spiritual possibilities ... of wanting to explore such possibilities, but I had no clear idea about what it was that I was seeking.

At some point during my stay in New York, the instructors took the students to see Spartacus that was being shown at a very large

movie theater near Times Square. I'm not exactly sure why that particular movie was chosen but it might have had something to do with Dalton Trumbo's name being associated with the movie after ten, or so, years of being blacklisted in Hollywood because he had been a member of the Communist party.

Whatever the reasons were for our instructors bringing us to the film, the movie resonated with many of the sorts of emotional themes that were going on within me at the time. For me, it symbolized the existential circumstances of jedermann (everyman) to struggle to become free and to be willing to stand powerless before the presence of overwhelming forces, pronounce one's identity, and accept whatever consequences came from that act.

At some point in the mid-to-late 1950s, I recall seeing the movie '*A Man Called Peter*', a film about the life of Peter Marshall based on a book written by his wife. Among other things, he would become Chaplain for the United States Senate and, as well, served as the pastor for the prestigious New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. until dying at a fairly early age of 47.

One of the features in the foregoing movie that struck an essential chord within me involved an incident – which I am assuming is true – when a 21-year old Peter Marshall was walking across the moors on a dark night near a quarry area in his native Scotland. At a certain point during his walk, he believed that he heard someone call out his name.

He stopped, listened and looked around. Hearing and seeing nothing, he continued on, only to hear his name being spoken again and in an apparently urgent manner. Once more he stopped, but when he heard nothing else, he began to move on.

Upon resuming his walk, he stumbled. When he fell, his hand reached out, and it did not find solid ground but was hanging over the edge of a quarry. If not for the stumble, he likely would have fallen to his death.

There are a number of ways to interpret the foregoing experience. I have referred to that incident for no other purpose than to indicate that Peter Marshall's sense of having been touched in some essential, existential manner by the universe (or more) during his walk across the moors resonates with my own sense of having been touched by

something of an elemental nature when I listened to various religious programs late at night in the dorm room in Brooklyn, New York during my six-to-seven week stint that was being sponsored by the National Science Foundation.

I don't remember anything from those radio programs. I just felt that something had awoken within me.

When I returned home and, subsequently, began my final year of high school, I decided that I wanted to become a minister of some kind. My father sought to discourage me and said that I would come to regret such a choice.

My mother, of course, was quite happy with the decision. In fact, she had read something about Harvard broadening its search for the sorts of individuals who might benefit from such an education, and she thought I reflected some of the qualities for which they were searching.

As a result, she encouraged me to apply to Harvard. Shortly after that interchange with my mother, I sent for the application forms.

Much to my surprise – and, perhaps, to the surprise of a lot of people -- Harvard accepted me. I later learned that, apparently, one of the reasons why I was accepted at Harvard was because they wanted me to play basketball there ... something that (according to my older brother) was intimated to my mother at some point when she talked with someone from Harvard but if such an exchange did take place, the information – for whatever reason -- was never communicated to me until many years after my mother passed away when my older brother mentioned it.

If the foregoing scenario is accurate, there is a certain amount of irony coursing through the situation. With the exception of a few informal games between dormitory teams, I more or less retired from basketball, and, in fact, the idea of trying out for the freshman or varsity basketball teams at university never crossed my mind.

I played basketball in grammar school and high school because I was good at it and enjoyed playing the game as a game. I had almost no competitive feelings within me concerning the sport and had no interest in seeing how I might stack up against anyone else.

I began my career at Harvard with a pre-theological major. It didn't take long for things to go downhill in a variety of ways.

For example, learning ancient Greek might be handy to do if one were interested in pursuing a life in the ministry. Consequently, I took a course in Greek, but, unfortunately, when I went to the bookstore, all the copies of the textbook had been sold out, and either the bookstore didn't intend to order any more copies or 6-8 weeks would be required before any further copies would appear on the shelves at the book store.

I forget which of the foregoing scenarios was the case. The result was the same ... no textbook for an extended period of time.

The Greek instructor didn't seem to be all that keen in helping me to resolve my problem when I approached him about the matter ... although he did make a few accommodations later on to try to give me some sort of chance to pass the course. Moreover, 1962 was a time when copiers were not readily available (at least to me) and, so, I couldn't just borrow someone's copy of the text and reproduce the book.

To make a long story much shorter, I wasn't able to get a copy of the book until the course was almost over. When I did finally obtain the textbook, there was a person, Bill Weld, in my Greek class who would later go on to become Governor of Massachusetts, and he offered to help me out preparing for the final, but, despite his kindness and assistance, I was pretty much a lost cause (within the short span of time available to me) as far as learning Greek was concerned, and, as one might have anticipated, I flunked Greek.

Coming from a rural school with a graduating class of eleven people, I was in over my head. I had no idea about how to be a student in such a competitive atmosphere.

As a result, I didn't do too well in several of the other courses I was taking besides Greek. Furthermore, I was going through some personal issues that were leading me toward an identity crisis of sorts.

When I first reached Harvard, I was assigned an advisor by the name of Bill Crout. Unknown to me at the time, Bill Crout was a gifted classical pianist, and later on, he would be instrumental in establishing the Paul Tillich lectures within the university.

Bill was very active in Memorial Church at Harvard. The church was located immediately behind my dormitory in Harvard Yard, and that is where I first met him.

Through no fault of Bill Crout's, I only saw him a few times during my first year at Harvard. During my last meeting with him – during the spring of 1963 -- he expressed being disappointed with me.

He felt that I had not been forthcoming with him. Among other things, I had failed to keep him apprised about what was going on with me at Harvard.

He was right. However, there were some – possibly -- mitigating circumstances.

I had never had an academic advisor before, nor even understood what such a person did. Bill Crout was an individual that someone within Harvard told me that I needed to see, and so I went and met with him.

One should add to the foregoing that I had a natural reticence when it came to talking to other people about my problems. I wasn't close with my: Father, athletic coaches, teachers, or ministers, and I didn't have any real friends ... mostly just acquaintances.

Bill Crout seemed like a very nice, spiritual person. Nonetheless, I didn't know him, and, consequently, I was not about to let him know me.

Finally, one might toss into the foregoing existential stew the considerable doubts, confusion and uncertainty I was experiencing at the time concerning my suitability for the ministry. Bill Crout seemed to be an individual that knew what he was about, and I was someone who did not know what I was about and, in fact, at the time, I was strongly thinking about moving away from a life of religion or spirituality altogether ... I didn't see much reason for talking to him about such matters.

As a result of all of the foregoing considerations, I didn't give Bill Crout much of a chance. Without understanding what I was doing, I took the fork in the path that led away from him and any idea of pursuing the ministry.

When I was going through my dark night of the soul during my freshman year, Memorial Church had decided – at least for a short

period of time -- to open up the building for students, faculty and staff so that anyone who wished to do so could go into the church at night (up until 10:00 p.m., or so, I seem to recall), and pray, meditate, reflect, and/or enjoy the solace.

The lights in the church were turned off for the most part. Presumably this was done to help create an atmosphere that might be conducive to meditation and reflection.

I took advantage of this sort of semi-open house policy. Almost every night, I would walk over to Memorial Church and spend time there meditating on my concerns, issues, shortcomings, and problems.

One of the things that stayed with me in relation to my visits to the church and the hours that I spent there during this open-house period at Memorial Church is that I can't recall anyone – or, perhaps, at best, the odd (no pun intended) individual – who showed up at the church to take advantage of the opportunity that was being afforded to the Harvard community. In any event, during all the times that I went to the church during the evening hours, I didn't speak with anyone, and no one spoke with me ... mostly because no one seemed to be around at the times when I was there.

I ended my first year of university as someone who had put the issue of God and religion on a back burner. I wasn't an atheist, nor was I agnostic, but, instead, I just didn't want to think about such matters too much at that time.

When I returned to Harvard several years later, I went through a number of changes in my choice of major before finally ending up in Social Relations, an interdisciplinary concoction involving psychology, sociology, and anthropology. For unknown reasons, I started to do well academically, and eventually graduated with honors.

Six months after emerging from Harvard with a degree, I went to Canada to express my opposition to the Vietnam War. Within three years of my entry into Canada, I stepped onto the Sufi path and, in the process, became a Muslim.

The transition to Islam didn't come quickly or all of a sudden. I went through a two-year period that consisted of a fairly intensive -- albeit conceptual -- exploration of different mystical traditions – from: Gurdjieff, to Buddhism. In fact, for a period of time, I was an active

participant in a Gurdjieff group in Toronto, and, through engaging readings by, and about, Gurdjieff, I was led to look at some of the spiritual sources that had shaped his understanding ... and one of those influential sources appeared to involve the Sufi mystical tradition.

Following the foregoing period of study and through a remarkable set of circumstances, I was introduced to a Sufi teacher. More specifically, the path that led to my spiritual guide began with my application for a job at a youth center in a city near to Toronto.

While waiting to be interviewed, I engaged, and was engaged by, a youngster (he looked to be about 17, or so, years, old) who seemed to be working or volunteering at the center in some capacity. The young man was very intelligent and, for someone so young, he was well informed about a variety of topics, and, as a result, our conversation was quite diverse in character.

The time for my interview arrived. I said my farewells to the youngster.

I didn't get the job for which I was applying. However, the conversation I had with the aforementioned young person prior to my job-interview eventually had some fortuitous ramifications.

I used to frequent (at least once a week) a bookshop in Toronto that was owned and operated by a Buddhist couple. Although the store was filled with works on Buddhism, it also contained sections on a variety of other spiritual traditions ... including works on, and by, George Gurdjieff – something in which I was interested at the time.

The Gurdjieff section contained a few books on and about some of the people who supposedly had taught him. Some of those individuals were from a Sufi tradition, and, as a result, I began to read a variety of accounts concerning that spiritual path.

Approximately six months, or so, after going to the aforementioned interview and speaking with the previously mentioned young man about a litany of topics – including spirituality – I walked into the Buddhist bookstore and noted that the usual people who helped run the bookstore were not present and, instead, the young man that I had spoken with prior to the job interview in another

city was sitting behind the counter where one went to pay for books. No one else was in the store.

We each recalled the previous encounter. I asked about where the rest of the staff was, and he indicated that he was just filling in as a favor because the owner got called away on some task or other.

I had never seen the young man in the store prior to that day. Furthermore, I never saw him again in that shop following that meeting, nor did I encounter him elsewhere.

He asked me about my current interests. I mentioned Gurdjieff and the Sufi path.

We talked a bit about those topics. He, then, asked me if I would like to be put in touch with a Sufi teacher.

I indicated that I would. He gave me a phone number.

One phone conversation led to second call involving a different person. An appointment was set up with the latter individual who was not a Sufi teacher but was an initiate in a Sufi order.

When I met with that person, he received a call from his teacher. My presence at the initiate's home became a part of the conversation he had with his teacher, and, as a result, a meeting was arranged for me with the teacher.

For the next sixteen years – until his passing away in 1988 -- I went through a very intense set of occurrences of one kind or another.

For many reasons, the foregoing sixteen-year period was, perhaps, the most difficult period of my life. It also probably was one of the most – if not the most -- exhilarating and constructive facet of my life.

The second or third occasion that I met with my spiritual guide, we got together in one of the first mosques that had been established in Toronto. On that occasion, he gave me a zikr or chant to say silently, and, almost immediately upon beginning the chant, my internal condition changed ... a change that continued on for some time even after I stopped reciting the Arabic formula.

I had not expected to be given a chant during that meeting. Furthermore, I had no expectations about what would, or would not, happen during the saying of the chant.

I was given some instructions concerning the saying of the chant. I followed the instructions.

During the aforementioned meeting with my future Sufi guide, my existential condition was torn in two directions that sort of typified my spiritual condition at the time. I lived some 20-30 miles from the mosque where I would meet the spiritual teacher, and before traveling to that appointment, I remember noting that among the television listings for later that evening was one of my favorite movies: 'The Day the Earth Stood Still' with, among others, Michael Rennie, Patricia Neal, and Sam Jaffe.

I wanted to meet with my future mentor, discuss whatever was to be discussed and, then, return home so that I could watch the aforementioned movie. Yet, upon meeting my soon-to-be spiritual guide something happened to me, and, in a sense, although I actually was experiencing what was, for me, the day when the earth actually stood still, all I could think about was going home and becoming engaged in something unreal and fictional ... I'll have a few more things to say about this situation shortly.

Over the span of sixteen, or so, years that I interacted with my spiritual teacher, he observed 16 forty-day seclusions, as well as a number of 19- and 21-day seclusions. Having performed a few seclusions of my own, I can bear witness that such exercises are very demanding.

One: Goes into a room by oneself; kneels or sits on the floor for much of the time one is in the room; fasts from several hours before sunrise until sunset; says the five daily prayers; keeps the night vigil, and spends the hours during the period of seclusion engaged in combating one's ego and seeking to remember God. One breaks the fast with bread and water, and one does not order in other food to consume after the fast is over.

After a few days of following the foregoing regimen, one begins to sleep for, at best, only a few hours a day. When one does sleep, one does so on the floor and not on a bed.

In addition to the foregoing form of spiritual exercise and in order to accommodate the needs of various people – both Muslim and non-Muslim -- my spiritual guide would often spend night after night –

until 3-4:00 A.M. in the morning – attending to the needs of various individuals I knew this because I was present at many of those meetings and gatherings.

He also took a very active role in addressing and attempting to resolve many of the problems that were facing the Muslim community at the time ... problems arising both from without as well as from within that community. Such activity took a considerable amount of his time, and I – along with a few other individuals -- assisted him with a lot of the tasks that were entailed by those matters.

One can add to the foregoing that he was a tenured professor at the University of Toronto and was a popular teacher who made himself available for his students outside the classroom. As well, he had an array of family responsibilities that were attended to with considerable care ... something that I also witnessed on many occasions.

I went on several extended journeys with my spiritual guide. During those sojourns, we visited England, Switzerland, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Pakistan, and Turkey.

One of the foregoing excursions occurred during the month of Ramadan, and, so, I had a chance to experience what fasting is like in an exceedingly hot climate (e.g., Saudi Arabia during the summer time). Such a process tends to be more demanding than fasting is in a more temperate climate, but, somehow, survival managed to embrace me on the far side of that fasting experience.

When my teacher passed away, he had left no indications that identified one of the surviving members of our Sufi circle to be his spiritual successor. However, since I felt the need to continue to pursue the Sufi path under the guidance of an authentic spiritual guide, I began to search about for someone who might be able to help me continue on with my quest.

My foregoing intentions were sincere. Nonetheless, despite the presence of such sincerity, I gradually became entangled with a charlatan who claimed to be a Sufi teacher but was not, and because he was very good at counterfeiting spiritual authenticity, it took eleven years for me to discover the manipulative nature of his various forms of duplicity.

After becoming disengaged from the foregoing individual, I went through a period of doubt, uncertainty, confusion, and soul-searching. Eventually, I emerged from this further dark night of the soul but did so with a reshaped understanding of many issues. In short, while my commitment to the Sufi path remained (although done so according to my very real limitations), I also began to exercise a greater caution -- if not skepticism -- concerning many matters of a religious and spiritual nature.

A great deal of my current understanding concerning an array of matters has been given expression through the 37, or so, books that have been issued through me over the last several decades. The vast majority of those works have emerged since 2002 ... the time when I was made aware of the pathological side of a person who for a number of years I had considered to be an authentic spiritual guide (see *The Sufi Lighthouse: Illuminating Spiritual Abuse* for an account concerning such matters).

I have spent vast portions of more than 60 years critically reflecting on matters dealing with religion, spirituality, mysticism, philosophy, psychology, physics, evolution, and cosmology. The foregoing reflections are not only informed by purely conceptual, academic kinds of investigations but, as well, by active, hands-on exploration of many, but not all, of the foregoing issues.

Consequently, over the years I have managed to gather a certain amount of facility with some of the possibilities and problems surrounding and permeating the issue of religion. I feel there is a considerable amount of confusion and misunderstanding on the part of an array of both believers and nonbelievers concerning religion, and the following sections of this book are an attempt to critically explore a variety of issues through what I hope will be an interesting and constructive perspective.

Earlier in this foreword, I mentioned Peter Marshall's experience on the moors of Scotland when he believed he had a Divine encounter of sorts that saved his life. As well, previously, I alluded to an experience of my own when my internal condition changed in conjunction with saying a chant that had been given to me by someone who would become my spiritual guide.

By their nature, the foregoing experiences are not necessarily something that can be subjected to “objective” study. In other words, one cannot scientifically examine what happened to Peter Marshall on the moors that dark night in Scotland, or what happened to me when I began reciting a chant.

Of course, one might attempt to study the process of chanting in some sort of a scientific fashion. Nonetheless, one cannot scientifically study what happened to me on that occasion because that event has come and gone ... there is nothing left to examine.

If I were to reveal the content of that experience, then, scientists, psychologists, and philosophers might each have her or his manner of interpreting my account of the experience. However, that is all it would be ... an interpretation by someone who had not been present at the time of the experience and who was basing their interpretations on nothing more than their biases, beliefs, and ignorance concerning such an experience.

Although many remarkable things subsequently happened in the life of Peter Marshall, as far as I know, he never again heard someone calling his name urgently and, then, proceed to stumble, landing within a few inches of falling into a quarry. Although many remarkable things subsequently happened in my life, I never again experienced whatever occurred on that night when my earth came to a standstill.

Were the foregoing experiences products of overactive imaginations? Were they auditory hallucinations? Were they illusions of some sort? Were they real, and if real, what kinds of reality were they?

No psychiatrist, psychologist, theologian, religionist, atheist, or scientist can claim that he or she knows in any determinate, certain manner what transpired on the two nights mentioned previously. Those encounters were one and done experiences that left existential residues in the lives of the individuals to whom they occurred.

Some people refer to such incidents as anecdotal because those experiences are not based on rigorous research and, therefore, are not necessarily considered to be reliable. Unfortunately, the term “anecdotal” is often used like the term “conspiracy theory” – that is, as

a means of dismissing lived experience as being something less than it might actually be.

To assert that some report is merely anecdotal says nothing at all about the truth, falsity, meaning, value or significance of what has been experienced. All an assertion about the anecdotal nature of something does is indicate there is not sufficient evidence available to be able to make a definitive determination concerning what has transpired.

For most people, much of life is anecdotal in the foregoing sense. We are left with the problem of trying to make sense of what transpires in our lives and to do so without the benefit of having rigorous processes of testing and scientific analysis at our beck and call.

I believe – based on experience -- in the value of reason, science, and critical reflection. However, I also believe – based on experience -- in the possibility of an essential, mystical dimension of reality that cannot necessarily be reduced to considerations of reason, science, and critical reflection.

This book does not constitute a proof of anything except, perhaps, that the essential problems and questions with which many of us are interested are far more complicated, nuanced, and subtle than many people – both believers and nonbelievers – might suppose. In the end, and along the way, we will all be making choices about which way to proceed.

The first verse of the poem ‘The Road Not Taken’ by Robert Frost goes as follows:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

No matter what one’s choice of path might be, it will, indeed, make all the difference for no one has traveled down that particular road

before. What, precisely, the nature of that difference will be is an issue to which I am not privy.

If an individual or a group of people believes something to be true, then one could claim that the existence of such a belief constitutes a fact. However, what that individual believes to be true or what those people believe to be true might not turn out to be all that factual.

Many scientists, medical doctors, and/or engineers have asserted all manner of "facts" that have turned out not to be true in relation to problems involving: Pesticides; iatrogenic diseases; the abuse of antibiotics; the toxicity of thousands of chemicals that have been released into the environment; problematic pharmaceuticals; GMOs; nuclear issues (spent fuel rods, Chernobyl, Fukushima, nuclear weapons, and Three Mile Island, anyone); depleted uranium; the Challenger and Columbia disasters; the Mars 1998 Climate Orbiter; the Hubble Telescope fiasco; the addictive and carcinogenic properties of tobacco; 9/11; string theory; Supersymmetry; HIV research; fracking, and more. Consequently, the fact that a scientist says something does not necessarily say anything about the nature of reality or truth just because what was uttered was said by someone who is called a scientist or was said by a group of people who refer to themselves, or are referred to, as scientists.

To say the foregoing is not intended to denigrate science or scientists, for many incredible discoveries have emerged through the process of science that has been assiduously pursued by a remarkable group of men and women, and, as well, many of the mistakes concerning the nature of truth and reality that were committed by earlier scientists have been overturned or corrected by later scientists. Instead, the foregoing remarks are intended to be a way of reminding ourselves that not everything which glitters in the realm of science -- even though it might be praised by many people who call themselves scientists -- necessarily turns out to be gold.

When it comes to the nature of reality, determining what is factual and what is not factual can be a very complicated matter. Such complications tend to haunt the decisions that each of us makes as we seek to arrive at some sort of understanding concerning the nature of the reality problem.

I believe there might be more truth to be found in the interstitial dimensions of ontology that lie between so-called facts than there is to be found in the set of facts that supposedly gives expression to what we know about the nature of reality. The boundary dynamics of the existential manifolds through which phenomena and noumena make their presence known are exceedingly complex.

June 1988 – Someone Who Died Before He Died

My shaykh ... my spiritual guide ... passed away last night. It was totally unexpected, though not without fore-warnings.

He was on sabbatical leave from the university and had taken his family to different places in Saudi Arabia, India and Pakistan. He had been away for over half a year, but his return was not supposed to have taken place for another 2-3 months ... not until just before the start of the university's fall semester.

Suddenly, he arrives ... about half way through the month of Ramadan (the month of fasting). I don't recall him specifying why there has been a departure from his original travel plans.

We all enjoy the fact he is back with us again. His physical presence had been missed by all of us a great deal.

Within a few days following his arrival, there is a gathering for fatiha (a ceremonial giving of thanks and remembrance) at his house. After the completion of fatiha and sama' (spiritual poetry set to music), we sit around, eat some sweets, drink some tea and are talking as we usually do.

At one point during the conversation, our shaykh speaks about an experience he had during his recent sabbatical while visiting the great shrine of Hazrat Khawajah Mu'in-ud-din Chishti in Ajmer, India. Within his spiritual experience, he is shown certain things and as well, he is informed that his spiritual work is, now, complete.

His spiritual work consisted in many, many activities. Among other things, this includes the fact that for every year I had known him (approximately 17 years), and actually for two years prior to my meeting him, he observed a 40-day seclusion – including not too long after he had suffered a heart attack. Furthermore, he also often did an additional 19-day chillah, or spiritual seclusion, each year around Christmas vacation when the university closes down.

This means that during the time I knew him, he spent more than three years in seclusion, fasting during the day, keeping the night vigil, remembering his Lord, praying almost constantly, eating less (a little bread and water after breaking the daily fast), sleeping less (usually not more than a few hours a day), and being with people less – all on

the floor of an empty room. We all benefitted from the struggles he went through during these periods of seclusion.

In addition, there are his decades of service to the Muslim community, both in North America as well as in England. At various points during the 1970s and '80s, nearly everyone -- so-called Muslim leaders, media personalities and news organizations, university officials, federal as well as provincial governments, the movers and shakers of Bay Street (Canada's counterpart to Wall Street), and even some of his own mureeds (individuals who had taken Sufi initiation with him) -- tried to oppose that service or subvert it, and, yet, he handled it all with tremendous dignity and integrity.

Over the years, he conducted hundreds of fatihas and 'Urs functions (celebrations of the anniversaries of specific spiritual personalities) in which thousands of people were fed, largely at his own expense. He spent years -- literally, night after night after night -- helping people who were being bothered by Jinn or with personal problems, and, yet, he always found time for family and work-related responsibilities.

After fatiha, many people would stay at his house until 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning -- talking, asking questions, discussing the issues of the day, and drinking 'one more cup' of his delicious boiled milk-tea. I never heard him ask anyone to leave because it was getting late -- always, he would accommodate people, even if, sometimes, we were overstaying our welcome and being inconsiderate with respect to the needs of the shaykh and his family.

He was a brilliant scholar, an accomplished poet, and gifted with a near photographic memory. Yet, he was an extremely humble and considerate individual -- very much given to observing all facets of adab (spiritual etiquette) in relation to everyone with whom he came into contact ... even those who were trying to destroy him or who opposed him in some way.

I learned as much, if not more, from his demeanor and character, as I did from his encyclopedic knowledge of Islam and its esoteric dimension of tasawwuf. But, now, all of that has come to a close.

A little over half way through Shawwal, the month that follows Ramadan, he passed away. A little over a month after his sudden return from sabbatical, he breathed his last breath in this life.

I am told that on the night he passed away, he went around and shut all the windows in the house even though the weather was warm. Apparently, this is something that he had never been observed to do previously by the members of his household.

I did not cry when my father died many years ago. Yesterday, I cried.

Seventeen extremely difficult years have come to an end. Yet, this time has been the centerpiece of my life, and I treasure the opportunities that God gave me through my teacher, Professor Baig, during this period of time.

I remember the good times I had with him: the trips overseas; eating curry in obscure restaurants in London and Jeddah that my shaykh knew about – eateries that cooked the most delicious of curries; saying prayers in the desert, under the moonlight, between Medina and Mecca; climbing the Mountain of Light and visiting Cave Hira, the Cave of Research, where the Prophet is reported to have had his first revelation; performing umrah (the lesser pilgrimage); having an audience with the King of Saudi Arabia; being served tea, personally, by the Oil Minister for Saudi Arabia; spending time at the mosque of the Prophet; sleeping on a house boat anchored on the Nile; saying prayers in a gorgeous mosque -- seemingly in the middle of nowhere – located near the Green Mountains of Libya; having lunch on the banks of the Bosphorus; saying 'Eid prayers in Karachi; saying fatiha with Dr. Baig and his mureeds in Hyderabad, Pakistan; walking the streets of Geneva; traveling by car from Ankara to Istanbul; getting a rub down following a dip in the hot springs of Bursa; giving our salaams in the shrine of Rumi; having unforgettable ice cream just across from the mosque of the Prophet; being invited to attend a fatiha session with a group of Sufis in Medina; fasting during the month of Ramadan in Mecca when summer was in full-bloom; the endless delightful stories, the discussions, the laughter, and much, much more.

However, the nearly seventeen years that I spent in the company of my shaykh also were filled with a litany of challenges and difficulties. For years, on a variety of issues and under the direction of

my shaykh, we battled the provincial and federal governments concerning prejudice concerning Islam and Muslims, and, in addition, we dealt with the same issues in relation to many facets of the media and the education system, including universities.

Letters, reports, newsletters, and magazines were prepared. Rallies and marches were organized. Public functions of many different kinds were planned, arranged, conducted, and cleaned up after. Albums providing information about Islam and the Sufi path were recorded and distributed. Videos were recorded and edited. Weekly discussion groups concerning Islam and the Sufi path were organized. Lectures at various universities in different cities were given. Numerous errands were run, and endless details were attended to.

In addition, there were: many night vigils; personal times of spiritual seclusion to observe; prayers to be observed; fasts to be kept; a succession of jobs that were sought in order to pay bills; graduate classes and assignments with which to keep up; domestic responsibilities to fulfill, and so on. There was little down time, and, as a result, events seemed to unfold under a constant cloud of stress as government, media, and educational officials all tried to undermine our group's activities or threaten, in different ways, individual members of our group.

There also were individuals and groups from the Muslim community who had their own aspirations and agenda that went in directions that were in opposition to the activities of Dr. Baig – aspirations and agendas that caused many difficulties for my shaykh and our group. Finally, there was the gut-wrenching, time-consuming, and extremely trying period during which a number of my shaykh's mureeds – individuals whom I considered to be friends and fellow travelers of the path -- left their spiritual guide due to an assortment of complaints – mostly, if not entirely, of a phantasmagorical and delusional nature.

Sorting through the good, the problematic, and the challenging, I wonder about the future. Where do I go from here? The path ahead looks very obscure.

June 1989 - Hajj

An old Saudi acquaintance of Professor Baig, my shaykh, phones up. He wants to send me on Hajj and, consequently, has nominated me to the Saudi government as a candidate to be sponsored by them on that sacred occasion.

I never would have imagined such a possibility. Yet, not too long before the time when my shaykh passed away, I remember a conversation that took place after one of the Thursday fatiha sessions.

Somehow, the topic of Hajj came up. The next time of pilgrimage would be smack dab during the middle of summer for Saudi Arabia.

Not being a person who takes to heat well, I said something to the effect that if God ever permitted me to go on Hajj that, maybe, I would wait for when it took place at a cooler time of the year.

My shaykh smiles at me in a very strange way. There is a twinkle in his eye, but he says nothing.

What is going on with the smile and the twinkle, I really don't know. Yet, the following year I am on my way to Mecca and Medina -- hot temperatures and all.

In fact, while on Hajj, our hosts indicate that the heat is so extreme that even seasoned Saudis are staying inside, out of the sun. A Divine blessing and a tweaking of my nose all rolled up into one trip.

I have almost no money. Aside from what a friend has given to me in order to buy some things for him and his wife while I am there, I don't have more than a few dollars to my name to take with me for Hajj.

In fact, there comes a point during my trip to the Saudi embassy in Washington, D.C., in order to get my Hajj visa and pick up my round-trip air ticket that I am confronted with a major problem. I don't even have enough money to make the plane trip to New York to be able to catch my flight for Hajj.

Earlier, when my shaykh's friend initially contacted me about the Hajj possibility, I explained to him that I had no money, and, consequently, I wanted to know how much I would need to make the

trip, to which he replied: “none”. I pretty much took him at his word for that is about what I left home with.

But, then, here I am at the Saudi embassy in Washington, with visa and plane ticket (which had a New York city starting point) in hand, and no means to get from one point to the next – not even enough to take a taxi from the Saudi embassy to the Washington Airport. I explain to the Saudi officials at the embassy that pretty much all the money I had has been spent getting from my home in Toronto to Washington, and, therefore, I could not afford the trip to New York’s J.F.K airport.

Time has almost expired in being able to make my New York flight when I am summoned to an office in the embassy. After I knock, someone opens the door just a crack, I identify myself through the slightly ajar doorway, and a crisp \$100.00 bill is handed to me through the small opening – just enough to pay for the trip to New York, including cab fare to and from the different airports.

I am among the last people to leave the embassy. When I reach the gate at the Washington airport, the airport personnel are just closing the door leading to the last flight to New York that is capable of linking with the overseas flight to Saudi Arabia.

When I arrive in New York, people are commuting home from work. Furthermore, there is an extremely heavy rainfall, and, as a result, a number of streets are closed ... as if a normal clogged rush hour in New York is not enough with which to have to contend.

When I arrive at the New York airport, I get delayed by someone in security who begins asking me endless variations on questions concerning whether, or not, I packed my own bag and whether, or not, there was anyone in the room with me when I was packing, or whether, at any time, I left my bag unattended while I was packing it. Despite the fact 9/11 is still more than a decade away, I am subjected to considerable scrutiny.

Finally, I tell the person interrogating me that I am going to miss my plane because I still have to travel across the airport in order to get to my loading gate. Somehow, God provides me a way through it all, but I am one of the last people boarding the New York flight to Saudi Arabia.

During the journey, a few other emergencies arise for which I have no money. Yet, by the Grace of God, sufficient funds are forthcoming from unexpected sources that enable me to get through things okay.

While staying in Mecca, I enjoy walking from the hotel to the Ka'bah five times a day. Depending on the time of day and the imminence of prayers, I take different routes to the sacred precincts.

At the time of my Hajj, there is a great deal of construction going on because the mosque is being expanded. On one occasion, everybody at the hotel where we are staying hears an explosion that comes from the direction of the sacred precincts.

We all assume it is from the construction blasting. It turns out to have been a terrorist bombing, and someone is killed in the explosion.

The previous day, I traversed the exact route where the bombing has occurred. Truly, life is a matter of inches, minutes, and hours that unfold in accordance with Divine Decree.

Our hosts show us a secret way to get to the roof area of the great mosque. No matter how late we are, and even though thousands of people are lined up in the streets surrounding the mosque because the main floor is filled to capacity and people are being turned back at the gates to the mosque, nevertheless, when we take this route, we gain access to the roof area of the great mosque and are able to say our prayers from there.

Without being shown this way, one is never likely to find it on one's own. I use the route every day since -- because of activities that have been arranged for us by our hosts -- we often get a late start on getting to the great mosque in time for the five daily prayers.

Near the end of our stay in Mecca, our hosts arrange for one of the Imams of the great mosque to eat dinner with us and, afterwards, to not only speak, but to answer, whatever questions we might have about Islam or related issues. Although our guest is quite young, he is a Hafiz of Qur'an and is called a shaykh (in a non-Sufi sense) because of,

among other things, the thousands of hadiths (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him) that he has committed to memory.

The man does not speak any English. But, there are a number of people in attendance who are fluent in both English and Arabic.

After his talk, the gathering is opened up to a question and answer session. Many questions are asked, but one, in particular, interests me. One of the members of our group wants to get the shaykh's opinion of what to do to stop the tide of Sufi influence in North America.

The shaykh proceeds to deride and ridicule those who are Sufi. I have no wish to create a controversy or create hard feelings, so, I remain quiet.

Interestingly enough, part of the package deal, so to speak, of our all-expense paid trip for Hajj is to attend two and, sometimes, three-a-day sessions with our hosts as they seek to teach us about their understanding of Islam that is very deeply influenced by the teachings of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab who sought to 'purify' Islam of what he considered to be all 'undesirable' influences, understandings, and practices.

Although I seem to be the only Sufi in the group of some 40, or so, individuals from North and South America who are the guests of the Saudi government, nevertheless, one of the few people to attend these sessions on a consistent basis is a Sufi – namely, me. Perhaps, many of the others believed they had no need of such sessions, but even if this were true, as a matter of etiquette, the guests should have attended, and even without translation, one could tell our hosts were disappointed, if not hurt, with the decreasing size of the turnouts for these meetings.

The sessions are rather torturous to have to sit through. Aside from the lack of sleep that makes concentrating on what is being said something of a challenge, the teaching style is rather heavy-handed and oppressive – almost devoid of anything that might actually have a chance of touching one's heart or soul. The people who are giving the talks seem oblivious to the fact that they are products of a dysfunctional way of engaging Islam.

Although there were many memorable events that take place during my Hajj, one of the most moving occasions -- at least for me, but, I also think this occurrence stuck with many others in our group as well -- happens while we are waiting on a bus to travel to Muzdalifah, a short distance from 'Arafah. It involves a zikr of sorts.

Much of the light of day is fading, and the interior lights of the bus are off. Apparently, certain arrangements are being made elsewhere by our hosts, so, we are waiting for these details to be completed.

Someone, I am not sure who, begins to recite a standard ritual part of Hajj -- the Talbiyah ... something that is supposed to be recited as one moves from one facet of Hajj to the next. The Talbiyah goes: Labbaik, Allahuma, labbaik: labbaik la sharika-laka, labbaik; innalhamda wan-ni'mata laka, wal-mulka laka, la sharika lak (Here I am, O Allah; Here I am in Thy presence! Thou has no partner; I am here! All praise is due to Thee alone; Thou alone can bless; Thou alone art Sovereign, and Thou has no partner!).

In the beginning, the recitation is: Perfunctory, flat, somewhat ragged, done without much attention or spiritual presence. Then, after a few minutes, something happens. Everything changes.

The intensity and level of emotion being given expression through the recitation grows palpably -- it resonates deeply within and seems to be reciprocated by everyone. We begin to recite in unison -- 40 to 50 voices together -- instead of as individuals. Moreover, the sound is as if the Talbiyah is being done in multi-part harmony.

Everything else in existence fades away. There is no thought of the future, and there is no thought about the past. There is only the recitation.

There is nothing more beautiful than to hear the sound of that recitation. There is nothing more pleasurable than to be a part of that recitation.

This goes on for a half hour, or more. At that point, someone begins reciting the Qur'an, and the Talbiyah comes to a close.

After the fact, I had a sense that someone might have started reciting the Qur'an because there seemed to be a certain amount of alarm among our hosts about the intense nature of the experience that was transpiring during the collective recitation of the Talbiyah and,

perhaps, they wanted to try to contain, if not defuse, what was taking place. Whatever the truth of this intuition might have been, nonetheless, the half hour of joint recitation still echoes in my mind, heart and soul as among my most cherished experiences of Hajj.

We are spending the night in Muzdalifah. We are sleeping on the ground outdoors in a little open-air compound that has a very low wall – not more than a brick or two -- running around the perimeter. One end is walled, and that is the side on which I will be sleeping.

The night prayers have been combined with the early evening prayers. Activities are slowing down as people drift off to sleep.

I have a fairly lengthy zikr I want to do. It is one of the zikrs I was assigned by Professor Baig for whenever I went into seclusion for the purposes of doing chillah.

I and one other person are watching one of our hosts pour water in a line along the open ends of the compound ... first one side, and then the others. I ask what he is doing and the reply I get is that he is 'feeding the scorpions' ... he is laying down a defense against whatever scorpions might wander into the general area of the compound – apparently, they are reluctant to cross such water lines.

I begin to recite my zikr quietly. I am about the only one who is still awake.

One other person who has not, yet, fallen asleep apparently wonders if I am afraid of the scorpions and asks me if that is why I am not sleeping. I am doing the zikr so I can't answer, but I shake my head in a negative fashion and continue doing the zikr.

When I am finished, I lay down. Soon, I am fast asleep.

Throughout the pilgrimage, I have problems with footwear. Many years before, I had been blessed by God with an opportunity to accompany my shaykh on 'umrah, and during that time, we had found some really comfortable, rubber sandals (which were one piece and unsown as required), and I took these with me when I went for Hajj.

However, in Jeddah, our hosts very generously gave us some quite expensive-looking wooden shoes that also met the requirements for

Hajj. When our Saudi hosts gave us this foot apparel, they took away whatever sandals we might have been using.

The gifts were very fancy looking and, also, very uncomfortable. One day, after morning prayers at the Ka'bah, I went to look for my gifts (one takes the sandals off and stores them at various footwear depositories sprinkled near the various gates leading into the mosque) in order to walk back to the hotel, and they are nowhere to be found.

This sort of thing often happens for many people after prayers, as things inadvertently get moved about during the cleaning of the mosque and as people come and go. But with tens of thousands of people coming and going, the disappearance of footwear in the great mosque happens a lot less that one might suppose.

Nevertheless, this now has happened to me. Without footwear, I walk barefoot into the not, yet, hot streets of Mecca, and go in search of some sandals. Eventually, I find some that are both cheap (I don't have much to spend on them) and give the appearance of possibly being comfortable.

I purchase the sandals, begin walking back to my hotel, and, discover very quickly, that I know nothing about selecting sandals. The rubber thong between my toes begins to dig into my skin, causing an irritation.

Over the next few days, the irritation graduates to a lesion that begins to grow in size with the passage of time and walking about. Fortunately, a day, or so, later, these ill-fitting sandals disappear after morning prayers.

Once again, I am barefoot and scouring the shops of Mecca for another pair of sandals. I buy another very cheap pair, only to find that the different style does not alleviate my foot difficulties but is adding to my problems.

The irritation has now become a deep gouge that might be getting infected. Fortunately, there are many temporary medical facilities set up throughout the path of the Hajj journey, and, therefore, I take my woes to one of these tents.

My foot is inspected, and something is sprayed on. The pain created by the spray contacting the area between my big toe and its nearby companion is so intense, that my body shudders involuntarily.

However, in a little while, the pain subsides, and my foot begins to feel better.

Despite getting treatment, my footwear problem is still with me. Nothing I wear seems to be working.

In Mina, one of the people in our group -- an Egyptian from the eastern part of the United States -- learns of my foot problem and gets a local resident to go and purchase me some comfortable sandals. The latter individual leaves on his moped, and a little while later, he returns with a package.

My Egyptian friend hands me the package and insists on paying for them. The new sandals are, indeed, very comfortable.

However, fate steps in again, because several days later, while we are engaged in throwing the required number of stones at the pillars, someone in the huge crowd steps on my feet, and my sandals are lost ... for not only is there no time or room to stop and look for the sandals, but there is a veritable graveyard of sandals piled up at least a foot deep almost everywhere one looks, and one likely never would be able to find the precise set of sandals one had lost.

So, once again, I am bereft of sandals. After all the rites for that part of the day conclude, I manage to find a left and right set of non-matching, rubber sandals from among the many pairs of orphaned sandals that lie about and slide my way back to the hotel with the ill-fitting foot apparel.

I must return to Mecca to perform part of the Hajj. The rest of the group had done this a day, or so, earlier, but I was sick on the day when they all went to observe the requisite rites.

Arrangements are made for me, along with a number of others, to return to Mecca. We go back to the hotel where we stayed prior to going to Mina.

I perform the necessary observances. Later, I am informed that preparations are being made to go to Medina.

Before we leave the hotel, we gather together in the basement of the hotel to say prayers because there is not sufficient time to be able to go to the great mosque. I am one of the last to leave the large room where prayers are being said and when I exit the door, looking for the sandals that have been gifted to me, they are gone.

I go back to my room to pick up my bag for the journey to Medina. Since the main rites for pilgrimage have been completed, I don my western-style shoes and continue to wear these for the remainder of the journey. Whenever I go to say prayers, I take the shoes off at the entrance to the mosque, tie the shoelaces together, put the tied shoes in a transparent plastic bag, drape the plastic bag around my neck, and place the bag near me whenever I say prayers. The plan works both with respect to helping my foot problem heal up and as well with respect to not losing my footwear again.

There is a saying that indicates: 'if you want to understand someone, then walk a mile in his or her shoes'. Anyone wishing to do this with respect to my experiences during Hajj would have had a hard time doing so, simply because I kept losing my shoes and having to find new ones.

After the main rites of Hajj, we go to Medina to pay our respects at the mosque of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Of course, everyone else on Hajj is doing this as well, so, despite the increased space that has been established through the renovation of the mosque, things are still very crowded.

On the first day there, I make my way very, very slowly toward the area where the Prophet and several of his Companions are buried. It is wall-to-wall people, and, among other things one must be careful not to walk in front of people who are praying, so, the stoppages and delays are many.

On the second night, the group is informed by our hosts that special arrangements have been made for us to visit the mosque of the Prophet when it is closed to the public so that cleaning and other care-taking tasks can be completed. This is a wonderful opportunity.

We are given about 45 minutes to an hour to spend in the mosque. Now that thousands of people are not present, the mosque seems cavernous, when just a day before, one felt like one was in a can of sardines.

I want to say a series of prayers near the pillars to the right of the burial area. For whatever reason, I am the only one who does this.

Later, I join my companions in giving Salaams or greetings to the Prophet. There is a period of quietude, and, then, it is time to go.

The next evening, we are treated to, yet, another private visit at the mosque. This one seems to last not quite as long as the first one, but, every minute is precious and I am very grateful for the chance to spend time in the Prophet's mosque in this way.

However, perhaps, the first day at the mosque of the Prophet -- when I had to struggle to make even a few inches of moving progress every five minutes, or so, as I worked my way toward the front of the mosque -- was filled with more baraka than the time of ease that has been afforded us with these two late-night visits to the mosque of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Blessings come in different shapes and colors ... some pleasant in character and some fraught with difficulties.

October 1989 - Dissertation

I continue to struggle with my dissertation. I am nearly through my second, completely new effort in this regard since running into problems with my thesis committee a number of years earlier ... a committee that wouldn't even read the first dissertation I had completed and, as a result, I was forced to undertake writing yet another one.

For a number of years now, I have been working on my own with respect to the dissertation. Although I have been cast into the bottomless pit of what is referred to as 'lapsed candidacy status' with respect to my doctoral program - meaning, among other things, that I no longer have any official recognition as a student within the university and, therefore, I am not entitled to have access to the professors who, supposedly, are overseeing my graduate 'progress' -- I continue to occupy space within one of the graduate student offices that exist in my department. I have secured several keys to the departmental door and to the office that I am using

This is all done somewhat surreptitiously since I don't have any official right to occupy the space in question. However, until someone tells me to my face that I must leave, I continue to work on my thesis ... usually coming in late at night, after work, and undertaking the task of writing a second dissertation ... so, for the most part, I am off the main social paths that are traversed by the usual inhabitants of my university department.

At one point, my financial and employment situation is so dire that I am homeless for a few days during Christmas break. I hide from the building security guards when they make their rounds, and my student office becomes my home ... fortunately, both students and professors are away from the department on holidays, so, once I evade the security guards, I am relatively free to enjoy the standard of living to which I recently have had to become accustomed.

A few months earlier, I had stored some of my possessions with an acquaintance. The rest of my belongings are in several bags that I have smuggled into the building and that are now stored under my desk to hide them from any prying eyes that might unexpectedly peek into the office space.

There are rest rooms just down the hall from my university department. There are vending machines on the second floor of the building. I have a few changes of clothes. The floor is my bed, and my coat is my blanket ... I have all the basic necessities for living a life of stealth.

At a talk that I give -- on the relationship between mysticism and modern science -- I meet someone who might be able to help me with the mess surrounding my doctoral program. He seems to like some of the things I cover in the talk. After the session, he introduces himself and gives me a couple of papers of his that he thinks I might enjoy.

Since I am busy with trying to answer some of the questions that are being asked by members of the audience who have approached me following the talk, I don't really have much time to speak with the mysterious bearer of gifts. So, I thank the gentleman for the papers that have been proffered to me and indicate that I look forward to reading them.

I glance at the name on the papers but it doesn't register with me right away. However, later, when I return to the house where I am staying, I take a closer look at the papers that have been given to me by the man following my talk, and I realize that I have read a number of his books.

Upon reflecting about the synchronicity of the meeting, some seeds of a plan begin to germinate in my mind. There might be a way for me to re-fashion my whole thesis committee and overcome all of the problems that have been plaguing me for years.

I intend to ask my host to get the address of the individual whom I met. Perhaps, if I write to him, he will agree to help me out and serve as my external reader at my oral examination -- if I ever get to that stage of things.

February 1990

The writer whom I met at the talk I gave in October has agreed to help me out. In the near future, I will be returning to the city where he lives, and at that time I hope to be able to discuss my academic situation with the one whom Allah has supplied to help me, God

willing, to overcome the difficulties with which I have been, and am being, confronted in relation to my dissertation.

March 1990 – Engagements

I am visiting someone in Ottawa. There is an annual, community dinner that is taking place.

At the last minute, one of the scheduled speakers cannot attend the function. Someone from Ottawa who knows I am in town calls the owner of the house where I usually stay when I am visiting in that city and asks if I could speak at the dinner.

The request comes about 45 minutes before the dinner is set to begin. I am reluctant to do this on such short notice, but, apparently, the organizers are in a tough situation.

In the ride over to the hall where the dinner is taking place, I silently try to work out the outlines of a talk during breaks in the conversation that is going on. I am quite nervous about the situation for several reasons -- one, I really don't enjoy public speaking, and, two, I really, really don't like public speaking when I have little, or no, time to prepare for such an event.

My nervousness turns to near panic when I arrive at the hall because there are hundreds of people in attendance. Embarrassing oneself in front of 20 or 30 people is one thing, but embarrassing oneself in front of hundreds of people, is quite another matter.

When my turn to speak arrives, I stand up and begin to address the audience. I'm not quite certain what I am saying, but, somehow, manage to fill up empty air space for ten or fifteen minutes.

When the talk is finished, the crowd rises to its feet, almost immediately, and gives a standing ovation. Truly, God is merciful and supports those who depend on Divinity and are in need.

May 1990

There is going to be a gathering of Muslim community leaders, organizations, and imams in Washington, D.C. A friend of mine and I have been invited to attend the meetings.

We decide to go, and we take a few other individuals from our group to accompany us on the drive. The weather is beautiful throughout the weekend.

I have been asked to sit in on a round table discussion concerning the treatment of Muslims in the media. My contribution will be to talk about my fifteen years of experience in this regard.

Prior to his passing away, Professor Baig led one of the first Muslims organizations in North America to undertake the foregoing sort of work and do so in a systematic fashion. As a result, our group produced a variety of: Newsletters, magazines, lectures, press conferences, protest campaigns, and so on.

The whole process had been a real education for me with respect to how the media, educational institutions, and governmental bodies respond to such challenges. I was pretty naïve about the foregoing facets of life, but I was a fairly quick study, and Professor Baig kept throwing tasks my way in relation to those challenges.

The round table discussion went very well. Many of the attendees were quite intrigued when they heard me provide an overview of our group's experiences, and, as a result, a lot of questions were asked and answered in conjunction with my contribution to the session.

Later on during Saturday, after the round table had finished its business, I began roaming around to see if I could find anything of interest. A Muslim woman gave one of the talks I attended.

She was a lawyer and/or professor of law. I was not quite sure since there was no literature available about the speaker.

She talked about the plight of woman in many Muslim countries. She also talked about some of the fundamentalist schools for engaging so-called Muslim law and the abusive impact this tended to have on Muslim women in many countries.

After the talk, I went up to her and told her that I had enjoyed her talk as well as the responses she had given to some of the questions asked by various people in the audience. I told her about the interest that someone I knew who had the idea of instituting Muslim family law in North America.

Although the woman had been quite friendly in receiving me when I first approached her, as soon as I mentioned the idea of Muslim family law in North America, she cooled off considerably. I wanted to pursue her thoughts on the matter further, but I felt that, perhaps, on the basis of her demeanor I already had overstayed my welcome, and,

besides, there were some other individuals who wanted to question her about this or that, so, I thanked her for her time and moved on.

June 1990

I am visiting with someone in Ottawa. The day before I am to leave, a friend from Saudi Arabia who lives in the city calls my host and wants to know whether I can come to his place and talk about the Sufi path with just a few people.

My host indicates that I am leaving the next day, and he gives the time of my flight. The friend asks if, perhaps, something – a brief stop - - couldn't be arranged on our way to the airport.

He suggests we come by at a certain time, have a meal with his guests, and, then, a short talk could be given, followed by some questions and answers. He assures my host that I will be free from things in plenty of time for my air trip home.

I know the person who is making the request. He is a decent man, and while I don't look forward to the prospect of talking with an unknown group of people, I also don't want to disappoint the individual, so, I agree to come.

When we arrive at the man's house, there are about nine or ten people already present. I am introduced to the guests and my heart sinks because many of them are from very conservative, often anti-Sufi, schools of thought. Furthermore, almost all of them are Arabic speaking (but they speak English quite fluently as well) and are well schooled in matters of Shari'ah, the Qur'an, and hadith -- things that are not true of me.

To make matters worse, our host introduces my talk with a specific request for me to talk about hidayat, or guidance. The problem with this is that he just uses the Arabic expression, and I really don't know what he is asking me to talk about because it is not a term with which I am readily familiar at that particular point in time and space.

By the Grace of Allah, just before he turns things over to me, I, somehow, realize he wants me to speak about the issue of guidance in the context of the Sufi perspective. Now, at least, I know what issue I need to try, God willing, to address.

Without knowing where I am going with things, words begin to come from my mouth. Surprisingly, they even sound intelligent.

There have been a number of special times during the weekly Sufi Study circle meetings when someone would ask a question, and I would listen to what was being uttered through my vocal cords and be very surprised ... learning as much from what was being said as the people in the room. The luncheon gathering that is now taking place is one of those special times ... thanks be to God.

A great many things are touched upon that day. Many questions are asked, and many replies are given.

When the time for my departure arrives, the people in attendance are disappointed that the session is ending. Despite the conservative, wary orientation of many of the individuals in the room when it comes to the Sufi tradition, they all seem to be satisfied with what they have heard.

Several of them ask where I learned such things. I indicate that whatever I know about the Sufi path and Islam I know from my shaykh, and they express a general agreement that I was very fortunate to have been associated with such a shaykh ... a sentiment that I share and reflect upon fairly frequently.

August 1990

Someone whom I do not know calls and asks me to give a talk on the Sufi path at the forthcoming World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. I agree and a round-trip plane ticket is sent, but nothing is said about transportation to and from the airport, accommodations, or food expenditures once I get to Chicago.

Once again, with just a few dollars in my pocket, I dive into the unknown. Indeed, the nature of things is so murky that I don't even know in which building the Parliament is taking place. I assumed that, at some point, I would be receiving an orientation package that has been promised to me, but the information never is sent or, if it was, I did not receive it.

I arrive at the airport in Chicago with no further known destination and with no money to get there even if I knew where to go.

I ask around at the airport and, eventually, I locate someone who says he believes the Parliament is taking place at the Palmer House.

Asking around some more, I discover there is shuttle bus that makes the rounds for a number of major hotels. Fortunately, Palmer House is one of these establishments, and, even more fortunately, the trip is free.

Arriving fairly late, things have pretty much shut down as far as Parliament related activities are concerned. I ask at the check-in desk if there are any reservations for me, to which I get a negative reply.

I ask someone who is standing at the desk if they know who is in charge of things, and one thing leads to another. Despite the lateness of the hour (around 2 in the morning), soon, by the Grace of Allah, I find myself ensconced in a hotel room by myself -- which I inhabit for the remainder of the Parliament even though I have been told that the initial arrangements are only until the next morning, and, then, I will have to find something else.

Many years previously, before becoming Muslim and stepping onto the Sufi path, I had set out for Canada during the Vietnam War as an opponent of the conflict. I had, maybe, \$100.00 (loaned to me by a friend) with no place to go once I reached Canada and with no job prospects to pay for living expenses once the hundred dollars was consumed.

Somehow, by the Grace of God, I managed to survive for the next eight months. The theme of going into the unknown with no, or little, money, and with no established itinerary, visible means of support, or reliable accommodations seems to be woven into the fabric of my life.

I remember fondly – but still with considerable amazement – an event that took place two or three years after I first met Professor Baig. A group of six or seven individuals who had taken initiation with Dr. Baig accompanied him on a trip to various countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Turkey (I had to borrow \$1,500 to be able to go on the trip and was only able to pay off the load a number of years later).

Prior to the trip, Professor Baig had commissioned a short documentary to be made about a struggle that was going on between the Muslim community and several levels of government in Canada in relation to misinformation concerning Islam that was being

disseminated in officially sanctioned textbooks being used in Ontario schools. He had brought with him copies of this documentary to show to various officials at various junctures of the journey, but we had no movie projector with which to show the film, and none of the officials whom we met had access to a movie projector to be able to see the film.

When we arrived in Mecca, Dr. Baig instructed me, along with one other individual, to go to Jeddah to see if we could purchase a film projector. The only problem was that we had no money or credit cards to use to complete such a transaction.

So, here are a couple of young white kids who might know ten words of Arabic between us going into a strange city with no money and on a mission to bring back a film projector so that we can show the documentary which Professor Baig had brought with him on the trip. By the Grace of Allah, we found a store that sold film projectors, and even though our initial attempts to communicate with the sales people at the store were filled with problems, we eventually were brought to an office in another building where the owner of the store could be found ... an owner who, fortunately, could speak English.

We outlined the situation to him and told him that as soon as we returned to Canada we would send him a check for the projector. He agreed to the proposal and let us leave the store with an expensive projector saying that, now, the matter was between God and us.

A strange sort of situation takes place during the talk I was supposed to give at one of the sessions of the World Parliament of Religions. There were a number of individuals present at my talk who professed to be Sufis of one sort or another.

Every time I would try to give my talk some so-called Sufi would interrupt and suggest that we should hear from someone else instead. Or, once I finally was permitted to start my talk, I would be interrupted and told that I should finish up so that someone else – someone who was not scheduled to speak at that session – would be able to speak.

I tried to accommodate those people even though I felt they weren't exhibiting much spiritual etiquette in the matter. Consequently, I cut my talk short, but I did manage, by the Grace of

Allah, to say enough things with sufficient quality that later on, after the session was over, several people who were in attendance during the proceedings indicated that they really liked the talk.

In any event, the foregoing experience tends to resonate with other experiences that I have had or with the experiences which I have seen others undergo in which for many people (both Muslim and non-Muslim), the Sufi path is all about whether, or not, one has the right kind of name or accent or family pedigree ... or whether one has the word 'shaykh' in front of one's name. If none of these things is in evidence, all too many people tend to automatically assume that such an individual has nothing of value to say ... they seem to believe that something is true because of who said it rather than to consider the possibility that the truth is independent of who says it and that God might permit whomever Divinity wishes to be a locus of manifestation for such truth ... even people who might not be able to speak Arabic or who do not have the title of shaykh in front of their names or who might not be from the traditional lands of the Muslim world.

During the Parliament of World Religions, each spiritual tradition has its own 'welcome area'. People from a given religious tradition – or invited visitors -- go to these locations during breakfast, lunch, supper, as well as at the break times in between sessions.

One can find food, drink and conversation in those places. A lot of networking occurs.

I'm not a regular visitor to the rooms that have been set aside for Muslims, but I do go there from time to time during the three or four days of the Parliament. Some of the Parliament participants who visit the Muslim welcome area are quite well known to the general Muslim community in North America.

One individual who attends is a fairly famous author. Apparently, at one of the conferences to which Professor Baig was invited – either in the United States or in North Africa – my shaykh had met the man and later had told me a little about his conversation with that individual.

I didn't know whether, or not, the foregoing person knew that Professor Baig had passed away. Consequently, I approached him in

order to inquire about the matter and, if necessary, pass on some information concerning the circumstances.

He indicated to me that he had heard of Dr. Baig's death. He said a few pleasantries appropriate to such an occasion, and, then, seemed very interested in moving on ... almost as if he were running away from me.

His behavior left me feeling somewhat awkward. However, since I really had no purpose to interact with him other than to make sure he knew about Professor Baig's passing, I turned to other matters.

As I did this, I reflected on something my shaykh had said to me about the man. The words stick with me because Professor Baig was not inclined to say things about other people unless it was good, but on one occasion when he and I were alone and, somehow, this man's name came up -- I think I was praising one of his books -- Professor Baig told me about some of the circumstances of their encounter. He was silent for a bit, and, then, he indicated that he had his doubts about whether the man practiced anything involving the Sufi path, and, then, changed the subject.

I was shocked when I heard the words come out of Dr. Baig's mouth. Yet, subsequently, when I thought on the matter more, I felt this was my shaykh's way of indicating that not everyone who writes books about the Sufi path is necessarily an actual traveler of that path.

September 1990 – Oral Examination

I receive notification today from ‘Graduate Studies’ that the appointment for the oral defense of my dissertation has been set. This has been 16 years in the making, and I have had to write two dissertations, as well as to organize two separate thesis committees in order to be able to arrive at this juncture in the process, but, by the Grace of Allah, it seems that I finally will get my day in court, so to speak.

October 1990

My oral exam is tomorrow. I have gone to the grave of my shaykh to say fatiha.

The skies have been threatening all day to let loose with a torrential rainstorm ... a threat confirmed by all the local weather forecasts. I hope I will be able to do what I have to do without getting soaked.

Shortly after finishing fatiha and spending a few moments of silence at the gravesite of my shaykh, I walk to the nearby bus shelter and hope a bus will come soon because I have an informal meeting with my thesis committee at the university. No sooner have I walked into the small bus shelter, then, the skies open up and there is a heck of a storm ... the force of the wind and rain shake the shelter that is housing me in a fairly substantial manner.

After a time, the rain subsides. There still is no bus, and my meeting is fast approaching.

I am pacing in front of the bus shelter, and a car approaches. The car slows to a stop, the passenger-side window rolls down and the driver, whom I don’t know, leans over and asks me if I want a ride.

This has never happened to me before. I accept the offer.

When I ask the driver why he decided to stop and pick up a complete stranger, he said I looked like someone who really needed a ride. He drops me off at a subway stop, and I eventually get to my meeting on time ... just.

The next morning, I rise early in the morning, say fajr prayers, and then, begin reviewing my dissertation in preparation for the oral exam later that morning. I do this for three or four hours and curse myself for having written so much -- there is no way I am going to be able to review all of the material.

I have run out of time and must get ready to go to my oral examination. I am feeling very tenuous about things.

For the most part, the examination goes well. At one point, one of the examiners, before asking me some questions, makes a statement that he has never seen a thesis like mine, and he hopes never to do so again.

Nevertheless, after being asked to leave the room while the examiners discuss my academic fate, upon being led back into the room, everyone congratulates me, and I discover that no one votes against me. Moreover, some people on the committee indicate that the quality of my defense is what convinced them to vote in favor of granting me a doctorate.

Afterwards, my thesis advisor tells me that it took a lot of guts to get the oral examination convened in the way we did. He further stipulated that while some of the guts belonged to him, most of it was mine.

I return to my graduate department, and the chairman of the department meets me in the hallway. Almost everyone in the department is fairly convinced that I was going to fail the oral exam, so, his jaw drops noticeably when I tell him that I passed the examination.

Subsequently, when reflecting on the day's events, something occurs to me about the symbolism of an event of the previous day. I think back to the stranger who stopped to give me a ride, and I began to suspect that, perhaps, this was God's way of disclosing to me that I was about to be given a free ride on my examination, because that is, thanks be to God, pretty much the way things turned out for me.

Sixteen years of frustration, obstacles, difficulties, delays, setbacks, resistance, and an array of institutional forces that have been aligned against me are brought to a close with the end of the oral exam and

ensuing vote. The foregoing might sound somewhat paranoid and conspiratorial, but I remember a number of years earlier a conversation I had with my, then, thesis adviser – an individual that I later ‘fired’ from my thesis committee that bears upon the issue. (In fact, I ended up firing the whole committee and began to patch together a new committee on my own but in full compliance with university regulations)

More specifically, I am supposed to have a meeting with my adviser about my thesis. I barely have time to sit down before my ‘advisor’ – I use the term loosely and somewhat euphemistically – is asking me what I have done to tick off the provincial government. I can think of several possibilities, but I deflect the question with one of my own concerning why he is asking.

He says that he has just gotten off the phone with the Director of the Institute and the Director indicates that he, the Director, had been contacted by someone from the Ministry of Education making inquiries about me (i.e., Anab Whitehouse) and wanting to know why I am still being allowed to continue with my graduate program. My ‘advisor’ again asks the question about what I could have done to warrant this kind of active scrutiny.

I tell my advisor that I have been involved in a community campaign concerning false information in provincial textbooks with respect to Islam. Since the textbooks are given official sanction through one of the provincial government education circulars, the Muslim community has made its concerns known to government officials, including the Ministry of Education. ... Apparently, the government officials have objected to this and are trying to find ways of undermining people like myself who are part of the campaign ... thus, the government phone call to the Director.

I also tell my advisor that I am part of a student group that has brought charges of plagiarism against a faculty member of the University. The group has gone public with the issue and has received back letters from a variety of professors across North America who sent back written responses of agreement with our position ... a position that has been outlined in a package of information which the student group released some time ago. Consequently, perhaps, the government is also upset about that campaign as well.

My advisor does not respond to anything that I am saying. He moves on to other things, but he is obviously miffed over what is going on ... he is in the crosshairs of the Director and the Ministry because of me, and, quite naturally, he doesn't like the situation.

My real sin as far as my advisor is concerned, however, has nothing to do with community textbook campaigns or charges of plagiarism against a faculty member. My real sin is that I refuse to bow down to him and his opinions about psychology, philosophy, truth, and what constitutes a proper education.

He finds it impertinent and highly disrespectful that I would dare to question either him or any of the established 'names' about their ideas or theories concerning various academic disciplines. They are the masters, and I am but a wretched peon who should know his place in the scheme of things ... and because I don't seem to know my place, then, I must be punished and hit with various kinds of unofficial sanctions and penalties that end up helping to cost me sixteen years of my life.

When I was wandering through the desert of higher education, I had seen news items posted on the bulletin boards all over the University about a graduate student in, I believe, California who had killed his thesis advisor because the latter was abusing professorial power and creating all manner of difficulty for the doctoral candidate, and, finally, when the student had been pushed past the breaking point, the doctoral candidate lashed out at the professor and killed him. The news item went on to say that the student had been sentenced to thirteen years, and in a hand-written comment next to the news item was the statement: "think about it ... only thirteen years."

My understanding of the comment next to the news item was that someone who knew about the abuse of power that is exercised by all too many professors with respect to their students was not that the individual making the comment felt the punishment was too little, but, rather, that thirteen years was not necessarily all that heavy a price to pay to be able to fight against the injustices of higher education ... which are many. My sentence had been for more than sixteen years.

I hadn't done anything except to resist being pushed around by professors who were drunk with their institutionally granted ability to irresponsibly create difficulty for students out of mere whim while hiding behind the amorphous defense of 'academic integrity'. If I had gone to the 'dark side' as the aforementioned student had done, I might have been able to save myself three-plus years with respect to my sentence.

I now have gained my freedom. Nonetheless, like those who have been incarcerated for having committed alleged crimes, I undoubtedly will have difficulty getting employment. Indeed, I might never get a full-time job in academia or elsewhere that is dependent on my doctoral degree – after all, one can't take sixteen years out of one's prime employment years ... years when one is supposedly building a dazzling résumé ... and expect to be able to build much of a career.

Prospective employers will look at the sixteen years lost in the wilderness and will draw the conclusion that there must be something wrong with me rather than consider the possibility that there is something wrong with the system of higher education. As a result, they will pass me over for consideration quite independently of what I actually might have to offer.

There is God's way, and there is the way of the world. Sometimes, for reasons best known to Divinity, God permits the world to have its way with things, and I sense that the world will have its way with my academic past.

Nevertheless, I have been determined not to let the oppressive nabobs of my graduate school prevent me from getting my doctorate. They made concerted efforts to this end, but by the Grace of God, they failed despite having almost all the power and advantage of position and influence ... the victory has been costly but eminently satisfying.



July 1992 - A Trip to India

Through a strange set of circumstances, I am going to India. Someone has arranged a ticket for me who wishes me to carry out an errand on that individual's behalf.

I go to the Indian embassy and obtain a visa. In addition, I receive all the requisite vaccinations.

My ticket is economy fair. However, while I am waiting in line to check my bags, an Air India employee who has been roaming the area for some unknown reason tells me to get in another line that, apparently, will mean somewhat better seats on the plane. I am told that the upgrade will come at no additional cost.

While I am continuing to wait to check in and get my boarding pass, another employee of the airline taps me on the shoulder and escorts me to the First-Class line. Again, I am told that the upgrade will come at no additional expense.

I am quite thankful for this. The journey to India is a long one, and economy seating is pretty cramped.

What occurred in relation to Air India reminds me of the second time I went overseas with Professor Baig. Among other destinations, we first were going to the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva. We had a petition, consisting of many thousands of names, to deliver to the Commission's offices.

While we were waiting in line to check our bags, an employee of the airline tells us to go to the First-Class line. We are never given an explanation as to why we have been chosen since there are many people that are in the economy line who are waiting to board just like us.

The accommodations – from living space to cuisine – prove to be quite nice. Having flown economy before, First-Class is almost like another world within the airplane.

I am welcomed in New Delhi by some people who will accompany me for various portions of my time in India. The first leg of the journey is to southern India.

We travel for three days down the east coast of India on a train. The conditions on the train are not all that great – relative to western standards – but, somehow, I manage to survive.

My hosts had tried to obtain a private compartment but were unsuccessful in doing so. Apparently, bribes are necessary to obtain those accommodations, and none of us has very much money.

The beds are steel slabs that fold down from the wall when the time for sleeping arrives. There are upper and lower berths, and there are a number of different people who sleep in each area.

Although I talk with my traveling-companions part of the time, a lot of my time is spent just looking at the countryside. There are amazing changes in the flora and fauna as we travel south, and I am happy because I feel like I am getting a good sampling of things from different parts of India ... at least in a visual way.

As the train slows down for one stop, I notice a sign with the word 'Bhopal' near the outskirts of the city. A shudder passes through me as I think about the horror that transpired during the Union Carbide gas leak that took place back in 1984 – not so long ago. Thousands of people died within 72 hours of the incident, and thousands have continued to die from the lingering effects of the gas since that time.

Eating and drinking is restricted to what can be purchased from vendors hawking their goods at the various stations where the train stops. I try to be careful in what I select because I don't want to have trouble with my bowels while we are on the train.

The seemingly unending train ride is followed by a long bus ride on the national holiday celebrating Indian independence. The bus driver spends a lot of time talking over his shoulder to the guy behind him while driving at high speeds along narrow, winding, monsoon swept roads, as he, somehow manages to dodge the numerous cars, pedestrians, sacred cows, mopeds, motorcycles, horse-drawn carriages, and bicycles that are out and about for the holiday -- I think NASA could use this guy to pilot one of their shuttle craft, but I am very thankful to God when I walk off the bus still among the living.

Someone with a car receives us at the end of the bus ride, and a further trip is taken to a nearby city. When we arrive, it is 1:00 or 2:00

in the morning, and, most hotels are either booked up for the night or shut down until the next day.

We do manage to locate a hostel of sorts that has some rooms available. The rooms are pretty primitive, but beggars can't afford to be choosy, so, we take our baggage and settle down for what remains of the night.

The cost of the rooms is about \$1.25. I remember, prior to the trip, going to a travel agent and making inquiries about the cost of accommodations in India. I was shown a computer screen with hundreds of locations and prices, ranging from: several thousand dollars a night (these were virtual palaces) to a dollar, or so, a day.

At the time, I had thought the dollar figure must have been some sort of data-entry error. However, I came to know first-hand the nature of what can be purchased for \$1.25, and our room came with everything that one might imagine would accompany such an investment ... including various kinds of lizards and insects.

The next day, we arrive at the town where my hosts live. In fact, this 'small town' is fairly hard to find on maps, and, yet, it is populated by something over a half million people.

Quite a few of the individuals who I meet act in seemingly odd ways toward me. When I later inquire about this, I am told that many of those people have never seen a white person close up and in the flesh. I am a bit of a novelty for them.

I had encountered this sort of thing once before. When I went on Hajj, I came into contact with individuals who, apparently, had never met a white 'Muslim' before.

I remember on one occasion saying prayers near Mina - a little distance from Mecca. One young fellow in the prayer line in front of me kept turning around and looking at me prior to, and following, the prayer. The reality of such a being as me seemed to represent something of a challenge for him to get his mind around.

While we are in the 'small town' of a half million people, we visit some Sufi shrines in the area. At one shrine, the tomb of the saint who

is buried there is in a sort of cave. Part of the cave slopes upward toward one end of the tomb and sort of forms a semi-circle around the end of the place where the body is buried.

The only people who are present – it is fairly late at night – is one of the caretakers of the shrine, one of my hosts, and me. The caretaker encourages us to climb up on the slope and kind of creep around to the other side of the site. He encourages us to do this several times.

When my host asks what this is all about, not much information is forthcoming. However, we are told it is something of an honor to have been permitted to do what we have been encouraged to do.

As I am visiting the shrines, I think about a friend of mine back in Canada. He is an initiate of Dr. Baig.

He and his wife originated from a city not too far away from where I am now. He used to tell me about some of the times when he was growing up, and he used to be asked by a Sufi in the area to help the latter do a special and relatively rare form of seclusion.

Each evening at sunset, my friend would help lower the man headfirst – his feet were tied to the rope – down a well. After sunrise the next day, my friend would help raise the man who had stayed dangling headfirst down the well for the night.

This sequence would go on for as many nights and mornings as the period of seclusion lasted. My friend felt quite honored to be the individual who helped the Sufi into and out of the well.

A day or two later, I am heading back toward New Delhi. This time I am to take a plane rather than a train.

I am driven to the next city over which has an airport with planes capable of making the trip to Bombay (now called Mumbai). We almost don't make the plane because the person who is driving us can't find the proper entrance to the airport.

In Bombay/Mumbai, we are to meet with several relatives of my host. We have not much time or money to do this, but we contact them and are invited to supper.

Later that night, we take a plane to New Delhi. A few days later we embark on the long train trip to Ajmer, the birthplace of my shaykh and the resting place of many Sufi saints of the Chishti spiritual lineage.

We spend three days in a little room, overlooking the main gate of the darga or shrine. Every day we go to the shrine and pay our respects, say prayers in the mosque next to the main part of the shrine.

Prior to my trip, I had been given some instructions as to where to go within the shrine area to meet people who knew Professor Baig. One day, one of the individuals to whom I am introduced – a native of Ajmer and a friend of Dr. Baig -- takes us on an excursion of some of the shrines up on the mountains that encircle Ajmer.

This man has been kind enough to serve as something of a guide throughout our stay in Ajmer. He takes us to a place of seclusion up on the mountain.

The destination consists of a cave that exists within an extremely large boulder that is large enough to fit four people, or so, with a little space left over. Our guide enters the cave first, and, then, comes back out and motions us to follow him back inside.

We enter the cave, and there is a man seated within. He is the caretaker of the shrine, and he speaks no English.

We spend a little bit of time inside the cave. There are some interchanges between the man who sits in that cave throughout much of the day and our travel guide. There also are some periods of silence.

Finally, our guide indicates we should go and that it is customary to leave some money with the caretaker. I ask how much is appropriate, and I am given a response with which I comply.

Once outside, I am examining the rather large boulder that houses the cave and a question occurs to me about the cave. As soon as I quietly voice this question to our guide, the man who has been sitting inside the cave suddenly pops out of the cave entrance and gives an answer to my question ... an answer that is translated by our guide.

Later on during our excursion of the mountain shrines, we stop at the final resting place of my shaykh's shaykh. I say fatiha, and, then, we return to the city.

A few days later, we return to New Delhi. While in New Delhi, we visit a number of shrines that are of importance to the Chishti Order. At one shrine -- that of: Hazrat Khwajah Qutub-ud-Din Bakhi-ar-khaki (may Allah be pleased with him) -- we are befriended by one of the caretakers of the shrine ... someone who speaks English.

I had come to India with the understanding that there is a place known as 'the mosque of the jinn' that is nearby to the shrine we are visiting. I ask him how to get there.

He notes that it is nearing sunset and he asks me 'what I know'. I understand he is asking me about my spiritual understanding of things, and I indicate: 'not much'. He replies that, perhaps, it would be best if I went another time.

The advice of the caretaker stirs up memories of a story that Professor Baig told me -- and several others who were in attendance -- a number of years ago. The story centered on a friend of his, back in India, who liked to dabble in the strange and the mysterious.

Someone learned that this friend of Professor Baig supposedly knew something about how to help someone to rid himself, or herself, from the influence of jinn (beings mentioned in the Qur'an who are, among other things, shape-shifters who tend to be, for the most part, invisible to human beings but who do have the capacity to enter into and take possession of human beings). As a result, the man came to the friend of Professor Baig and asked for that friend's assistance.

Apparently, the foregoing man had a son who had been bothered by jinn for some time. Therefore, he was quite desperate to have his son freed from the controlling influence of the jinn that was bothering his son.

The man arranged for the friend of Dr. Baig to come to a certain location at a certain time. When Professor Baig's friend arrived, he was taken to a second story of the compound where there was a large room.

In the center of the room was an adolescent sitting on the floor. Dr. Baig's friend took off his shoes and went toward the center of the room to a point that was neither close nor distant from the youth.

He knelt down and began reciting certain verses from the Qur'an. After a time, a strange voice issued forth from the boy inquiring about

what the friend of Professor Baig thought he was doing with the recitation of certain verses from the Qur'an.

The man remained quiet and continued to recite things sub-vocally. Again, a strange sort of voice arose from the youth, and, again, the same query was made as before.

The friend of Professor Baig continued to recite whatever he was reciting. Suddenly, a rather terrifying voice came out of the youth instructing the friend of Dr. Baig that there were seven steps that were necessary to rid a person of a jinn ... what the friend of Professor Baig was doing was only the first step. The voice went on to say that unless the friend of Dr. Baig knew the other six steps, then, unless he stopped, then, the friend would be in for a lot of trouble very, very quickly.

Upon hearing that, the friend of Professor Baig quickly arose in a rather terrified manner. He scooped up his shoes and left the room all in one motion. Apparently, he had had enough dabbling into the strange and the mysterious to satisfy him for quite some time.

During our stay in New Delhi, we also visit the shrines of Hazrat Nasir-ud-Din Charagh Delhi and Hazrat Khawajah Nizam-ud-din Awliya (may Allah be pleased with them both). At the latter shrine, we first pay our respects to Hazrat Amir Kusrah (may Allah be pleased with him).

This experience is very moving for me, and I cry. Later on, I discover that I have lost my cap at his feet.

Following our visitations with the various shrines, we travel back to Bombay/Mumbai where we meet the same host who had met me in New Delhi when I first arrived in India. After visiting the shrine of a famous Sufi who is buried in a place that is at the end of a sort of peninsula or jetty that extends a little way out into the Indian Ocean, it is time for me to return to North America.

A month, or two, following my return from India, I read a small item in one of the local papers about some kind of incident involving Muslims and Hindus in India. A number of people have been killed.

The individuals who are murdered are Muslims. Apparently, they were taken off a train and hacked to death.

I catch my breath when I learn that the train in question was one that was either heading for, or returning from, Ajmer. These were the trains that I likely had been aboard not too long ago.

I think back to the terrorist incident that took place in Mecca near the great mosque when I was on Hajj. Now, the incident near Ajmer involves something of a similar nature – someone dying.

I reflect on my less than six degrees of separation with respect to such events. I wonder what the future holds in store with respect to those degrees of separation ... closer or further away?

I do not know when life's opportunities will be taken from me. However, I do know that time is running out on my quest to die before I die.

July 1993

Someone from another Sufi silsilah contacts me and invites me to attend a public function that they are giving at one of the local libraries. I and another friend go.

The session is quite nice although sparsely attended. Near the end of the event, the shaykh communicates with me through one of his initiates that he wants me to say a prayer to bring the session to a close.

I am nervous about doing this. However, I try to accommodate the request.

I ask Allah to increase us all in the qualities of: Repentance, Dependence on God, spiritual enabling power, piety, patience, gratitude, sincerity, spiritual character, and intense love for God.

The prayer is about seeking to die before we die. The prayer is about acquiring the qualities that will help achieve that purpose.

The prayer is relatively short. Upon its being completed, someone is patting me on the back gently but repeatedly.

I turn around, wondering what is going on. The shaykh is smiling at me, indicating he is very pleased with the prayer.

Into the Wilderness

I consider religion to give expression to the process of seeking the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality. There are many individuals and forces that are interested in undermining, corrupting, and derailing the foregoing sort of search, and those activities give expression to spiritual abuse.

Spiritual abuse is not a theoretical concept for me. I interacted with a perpetrator of spiritual abuse for 11 years.

While many of us are aware of the existence of sexual, financial and terrorist-oriented forms of exploitation that take place in a religious context, nonetheless, the presence of spiritual abuse is not necessarily easy to recognize. The ways of spiritual abuse can be quite subtle.

The aforementioned individual with whom I spent time – on and off – over a period of 11 years was a very funny, charismatic, knowledgeable, and intelligent individual. He was accessible, affable, and very down-to-earth.

With equal ease, he could skillfully engage those who were oriented in a fundamentalist manner concerning Islam as well as enticingly engage those who were neophytes. He could hold sway over groups of people for hours on end (sometimes up to nine or ten hours at a time), regaling them with a seemingly endless supply of: Stories, anecdotes, histories, explanations, and reflections concerning Islam, the Qur'an, Hadiths -- words attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) – Sufi saints, mystical teachings, poetry, world affairs, politics, and the events of the day.

He patiently answered all manner of questions. When he responded to those questions he continued on until the person who raised the question was satisfied with the answer that was being given.

If an individual wanted a personal, one-on-one meeting with him, he was very generous with his time. Despite the fact that he was busy with people from the time he got up until the time he went to bed, I never saw anyone who made a request for personal attention being refused ... although those individuals might have to wait an hour or two until time became available for them.

The tale of how I came to meet my second teacher is instructive on several levels. My first shaykh or spiritual guide had passed away several years previously.

I had spent 16-17 years with my first shaykh. I was introduced to Islam and the Sufi path through him.

As indicated earlier in this section, those 16-17 years were probably the most difficult and, yet, rewarding period of my life. I learned more about: Me, life, people, government, news media, education, spirituality, and the world, than during any other facet of my life. However, when my first shaykh passed away, I still felt the need for additional spiritual guidance and, consequently, I was trying to figure out what to do in that respect.

Several possibilities arose, but I decided to keep looking. While I was considering things, I was continuing to conduct a weekly, informal group at the university where I was doing graduate studies in education.

The meetings explored various aspects of the Sufi path and Islam. Usually, those gatherings involved between 5-10 people, some of who were regulars, while the identity of others shifted from week to week.

I was not a spiritual guide in any sense. Nonetheless, my own teacher had asked me to lead the discussion group.

I had been conducting those meetings for fifteen, or so, years prior to the time when my guide passed away. I continued leading those meetings for a time after my teacher passed away.

One night I received a call at home. The woman who contacted me wanted to know if I was the person who was leading a weekly discussion group concerning the Sufi path that was taking place at the university.

When, I indicated that I was such a person, she indicated she would be coming to the next meeting. She asked for the day, time, and location of the meeting, and once she received that information, she terminated the conversation.

At the next meeting of the Sufi discussion group, a new woman showed up. As indicated previously, the meetings usually only involved 5-10 people, and, consequently, identifying a newcomer was not all that difficult.

I asked her if she was the person who had called me earlier in the week. She answered in the affirmative.

For the next five or six months, she attended every meeting. She rarely spoke or asked questions, but, on several occasions, she made a few, fleeting references to her spiritual guide.

On one occasion, she indicated that she and her family were going to New Jersey to meet with her shaykh. There were a couple of other people at the meeting who expressed interest and inquired about whether, or not, they might be able to go down and meet with the shaykh as well.

Permission was sought by that woman from her shaykh on behalf of the foregoing individuals, and, as a result, one or two people who had been regular participants in the Wednesday night Sufi discussion group made arrangements to travel to New Jersey and spend a day, or two, with that teacher. When they returned to the discussion group meetings the next week, they seemed to be quite happy with what had transpired during their journey to meet with that shaykh, but not a great deal was said about what took place.

At a certain point – after a number of months had passed -- the aforementioned woman invited me to have dinner with her family. I accepted and was happy that I did because she was a great cook.

The foregoing scenario took place several additional times. During one of these occasions, the woman indicated that her spiritual guide had asked her to inquire about whether, or not, I might be willing to instruct the woman's young daughters concerning Islam and the Sufi path.

I wasn't excited about the idea, but I also didn't want to just say no. I expressed some reservations, but the woman and her husband indicated that they were quite open to the arrangement and would be happy with whatever I might be able to do in that respect.

Consequently, on Sunday afternoons, I began to go to the couple's house, and spend an hour, or so, interacting with the couple's children while we explored various simple themes concerning Islam and the Sufi path. Each time I went, I was treated to a great meal with the family.

Eventually, the couple indicated that following my sessions with their children -- and prior to the meal that would be served later -- their spiritual teacher had indicated to them that he wanted me to offer Fatiha (a litany/prayer that involves: Recitation of various surahs, or chapters, from the Qur'an; giving thanks; spiritual remembrance). My Arabic pronunciation was not all that good, and, as a result, I was hesitant to lead Fatiha, but the parents indicated they would be content with me doing the best that I could do.

The foregoing arrangement continued on for quite a few months. At some point during this period of time, the woman and her husband indicated that their teacher was going to be coming to Toronto in the near future, and they informed me that their teacher was looking forward to meeting with me.

The day of the meeting finally arrived. There were quite a few people in attendance (perhaps 30, or so, individuals ... although the precise number was hard to determine because as the evening progressed some people had to leave for various reasons while various newcomers replaced them.)

I spent most of my time just listening. I was impressed with his understanding of a great many things.

Since I had spent 16-17 years listening to, interacting with, and asking questions of my first shaykh -- someone who was both a university professor in Islamic studies, as well as a rigorous practitioner of Sufi discipline (including 17-19 instances of observing 40-day seclusions) -- I had acquired a fair amount of familiarity with Islam, the Qur'an, Hadiths, and the Sufi mystical tradition. What the individual from Pakistan -- by way of New Jersey -- was saying during the meeting resonated strongly with what I knew about Islam and the Sufi path.

I attended two or three of those meetings. Each meeting lasted four, or more hours, but after 2-3 hours I usually had to leave in order to get ready to go to work the next day, but there were many others who participated in those meetings and who stayed on into the wee hours of the morning.

After the second or third meeting, I decided that I had met the individual with whom I wanted to continue to learn about Islam and

the Sufi path. I asked the woman whose children I had been teaching if she would ask the gentleman if he would be willing to initiate me into his spiritual Order.

She did as I asked. Shortly thereafter, she came back with an affirmative response, and arrangements were made for me – and a number of other individuals – to take initiation at a subsequent gathering.

My relationship with my previous shaykh was quite close. I had become something like an assistant, of sorts, for my first shaykh. As a result, for nearly two decades, I engaged in all manner of activities (including writing a number of reports and numerous letters in conjunction with various campaigns that occurred during those years, as well as serving as chairman for the aforementioned Wednesday night Sufi discussion group) and, in addition, I had the great good fortune to accompany my shaykh on several extended journeys overseas.

I was not seeking, nor was I expecting to have, the same sort of relationship with my new shaykh that I had enjoyed with my previous shaykh. I was completely ready to start over again.

The past was the past. The present constituted a new day.

On the night when I became initiated by my new shaykh, something totally unexpected took place. After I was initiated, the shaykh indicated to the other members of the gathering that it had been the wish of his own shaykh that I be made a shaykh or spiritual guide in the silsilah or spiritual lineage of his Sufi Order, and that by initiating me and making me a shaykh, he was merely carrying out the instructions of his own spiritual guide.

After the process of my initiation had been completed -- along with the initiation of a number of other individuals -- there was a break in the proceedings. During that break, I talked with the woman whose children I had been instructing in some of the basics of Islam and the Sufi path.

She indicated she had known, for some time, about what was going to take place in conjunction with my initiation (i.e., being given the responsibilities of becoming a shaykh). However, she also informed me that her spiritual guide – who was now my spiritual

guide – had told her that he would be very, very upset with her if she disclosed anything to me – even by way of the slightest hint -- about what was to occur.

When I asked to be initiated, nothing had been promised to me. Not even in my wildest dreams would I have anticipated that what took place on that evening would actually take place.

I might have spent 16-17 years with my previous spiritual guide engaged in all manner of spiritual activities, but I never really thought of myself as having the qualities necessary to be a shaykh. By the Grace of God, the foregoing period of time helped me to become a much better person than I might otherwise have been, but, nonetheless, I felt that a tremendous gap existed between, on the one hand, the manner in which my first shaykh went about things and, on the other hand, how I engaged life, and, therefore, it was difficult for me wrap my head and heart around the idea of being a shaykh.

However, I believed that whatever might be possible through me would be due to God's presence and not as a result of my capabilities (or lack thereof). Consequently, I was willing to proceed forward with the understanding that God could work through anyone ... even me.

The whole process leading to initiation took place over a period that lasted for almost two years. Although the woman who had called me up and asked about the Wednesday night meetings occasionally made references to her shaykh during those meetings, such references were brief and fairly rare.

When I began meeting with the family – first, just for meals, and subsequently for instructional sessions involving her children, and, then, for the observance of Fatiha -- there was very little conversation about her and her husband's shaykh. They never placed any pressure on me to go down to New Jersey and visit with their shaykh. They never so much as even hinted that I should consider becoming initiated into their Sufi group

When I finally met the shaykh – nearly two years later – he was friendly. However, he was friendly with everyone, and, consequently, I never felt as if he were paying any special attention to me.

The primary attraction during those meetings was that I liked what he had to say and the manner with which he conducted himself.

His words and behavior reflected what I already believed to be true concerning Islam and its mystical dimension, however, what also seemed to be quite clear was that the depth of his understanding concerning the Sufi path appeared to be fairly substantial.

During the next 11 years I became occupied with trying to do whatever I could to fulfill the spiritual responsibilities that had been assigned to me. To make a long story very much shorter, and due to a variety of circumstances, I: Moved six or seven times involving several countries (Canada and America); became unemployed for nearly two years, and, then, worked for a little over a year before going through several more years of being -- with the exception of the doings some part-time proof reading -- unemployed; became married and divorced on several occasions, and, as well, I wrote several books (one was fictional in nature, while the other was non-fictional in scope and focused on introducing readers to the Sufi path.

My new shaykh, or spiritual guide, had told me on several occasions that I was very important to the silsilah, or spiritual lineage, to which we belonged. He kept emphasizing that because of my status within the silsilah, he was under an obligation to tell me everything that was taking place within our group.

It took me 11 years to discover that, among other things, he wasn't living up to the aforementioned obligation. One of the reasons that it took so long for me to figure out what was going on was because my life was often quite chaotic during that period of time due to: Relationship problems, financial difficulties, long periods of unemployment, having to move around a fair amount, and, as well, trying to fulfill my obligations as a shaykh within the silsilah.

Although there were periods of time during the foregoing general state of chaos when I was able to spend time with my new shaykh, a great deal of the 11 years that I knew him was spent apart from his physical presence. We kept in touch through snail mail, e-mail, and phone conversations, but there were a great many things taking place within the Sufi group about which I knew little or nothing.

If I communicated -- usually through e-mail -- with someone else in the group and was informed by that individual about this or that oddity concerning what was taking place in different places with respect to various group members, I would contact my teacher -- as I

had been instructed to do by him – tell my spiritual guide what I had been told, and, then, he would provide me the back story and an account of what was supposedly taking place.

Later on – much later on – I came to know that he was spinning many stories for my consumption. In fact, if it had not been for someone – someone that I trusted -- who lived in my vicinity and came to have direct access to information that countered what the alleged shaykh had been telling me, I'm not sure that I ever would have learned the truth concerning a great many matters involving that individual.

My so-called spiritual guide had been lying to me for quite a few years about a number of things of considerable importance. In addition, concrete evidence surfaced – in the form of the aforementioned person who lived near me and who I trusted – that my spiritual guide was engaged in one, or more, illicit sexual liaisons with some of the women in the group who lived in different parts of North America.

After learning the things that I did concerning the man, I resigned my spiritual commission, so to speak. The resignation was a mere formality since, in point of fact, I never had been an authentic shaykh because the person who conducted the ceremony was a spiritual fraud.

Following the foregoing chain of events, I contacted people (sometimes in person and sometimes by phone) for whom I bore some responsibility – indirectly or directly – with respect to having introduced them to my former shaykh. I discussed with those individuals what I understood concerning the situation and tried to answer whatever questions they might have about things as best I could.

Some of those individuals took my concerns to heart and discontinued their relationship with their former shaykh. Others who listened to what I had to say chose not to believe the information being given to them and, as a result, continued to consider that man as an authentic spiritual guide.

As with all things, people make choices about what information to accept and what information to reject. As with all things, people make

choices about what they believe the nature of truth to be in any given set of circumstances.

The individual that I once considered to be my spiritual guide has left a great many tattered souls in his wake. Either because of what I said or as a result of their experiences with that man, a number of individuals decided, subsequently, to distance themselves from religious or spiritual pursuits altogether.

Those individuals discontinued their search for the truth concerning the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality. As a result, the direction of their lives changed significantly due to their experience of having been spiritually abused at the hands of their former spiritual guide.

However, the individuals that decided to remain affiliated with their so-called shaykh are continuing to undergo the process of spiritual abuse because those people continue to believe that they are being rightly guided but, instead, through an intricately constructed web of lies and deceits, they are being led away from the truth concerning all manner of issues. They have developed a false sense of the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality because everything that they understand about Islam and the Sufi path is being filtered through the distorted and corrupt conceptual lenses of their false teacher.

Recovering from spiritual abuse is a very difficult process. Among other things, one grieves over having been violated in such an intimate, essential manner.

One feels rudderless and without a compass. One is disinclined to trust others ... especially in matters involving the issue of religion.

Of considerable importance to the process of recovery from spiritual abuse is to have an opportunity to have access to what might be termed a "compassionate witness". A compassionate witness is someone who will permit one to be able to debrief about all aspects of the experience of having been spiritually abused without feeling like one is being judged and who will offer various kinds of emotional support to assist one through a dark period in one's life.

I had access to such a compassionate witness in the form of the aforementioned individual through whom I first came to learn about

some of the hidden activities of the person I once considered to be my spiritual guide. I also served as a compassionate witness for that same individual who been exposed to spiritual abuse from the same so-called teacher.

Eventually, one has to accept responsibility for whatever role one might have played in opening oneself up to such a process of spiritual abuse. At the same time, one also has to struggle with trying to derive whatever constructive dimensions one can from those events.

If one does not spiritually grieve in a proper fashion, if one does not have ready access to a compassionate witness, if one does not accept responsibility for whatever small part one might have played in helping to facilitate such a state of affairs, and if one does not do the work that is necessary to derive constructive benefits from a problematic situation, then, one is likely to become stuck spiritually speaking. In other words, one loses interest in or loses one's desire to continue to pursue – as best one can – seeking the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

I was very fortunate because for 17 years, or so, I had been provided with an opportunity to spend a lot of quality time with my first shaykh ... someone who I consider to be an authentic spiritual guide. If I had met my second teacher first, and my first teacher second, I'm not sure there would have been much of a relationship – if any – with the second teacher.

Of course, someone might wish to raise questions concerning my first shaykh. How do I know he was authentic?

True knowledge of anything is very difficult to acquire. Most of us engage life through a conglomerate of beliefs, opinions, speculations, understandings, theories, worldviews, and ideas that have not been, or cannot be, proven to be true.

All too frequently, we are willing to kill or harm one another on the basis of such unsubstantiated perspectives. Truly, oftentimes, we know not what we do, but, nevertheless, we choose to proceed as if we did know what, in fact, we do not know.

Could I be wrong about the spiritual authenticity of my first spiritual guide? Yes, I could be, but after considerable reflection on the matter and after having sifted through years of experience with him, I

feel there is sufficient reliable evidence to strongly support the reality of his authenticity.

Do I know that my first spiritual guide was authentic? No, I don't because real knowledge has a high threshold to achieve before one can actually claim that one has that sort of knowledge. Nonetheless, I have fairly strong grounds for believing that he was an authentic source of mystical teachings concerning the truth about the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality.

Is it possible that I am wrong about the spiritual authenticity – or lack thereof -- of my second teacher? For example, is it possible that I should not have trusted the person who helped me to come to realize the nature of what was taking place within the Sufi silsilah of the second shaykh?

Possibly, yes! However, this is very unlikely to be the case because, independently of the foregoing individual, I have been able to assemble a fair amount of reliable evidence indicating that the alleged, second shaykh repeatedly lied about a variety of issues as well as carried on in a manner that is completely inconsistent with the responsibilities and duties of an authentic spiritual guide.

Do I know that the second individual was a spiritual fraud? No, I don't – again, because the threshold for having real knowledge is quite high -- but, nonetheless, I have done due diligence and, as a result, I have taken the matter as far as I am capable of doing and, in the process, I have chosen to believe – on the basis of considerable evidence – that the second teacher was deeply involved in activities of spiritual abuse – that is, activities intended to undermine, corrupt, and derail individuals as they sought to discover the truth concerning the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality.

While the 11 years that I spent associating, in one way or another, with the person I now consider to be a fraudulent spiritual guide have been fraught with difficulty, I still learned a great deal about: Me, life, other people, and spirituality, but the nature of the lessons that were learned had a largely negative quality to them. In other words, during the course of those 11 years, I wasn't so much engaged in discovering the truth concerning the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality as much as I was learning about the nature of certain forces that are

dedicated to disrupting the foregoing process of searching for the truth.

My first spiritual guide – the one who I consider to be an authentic teacher – never tried to interfere with, disrupt, undermine, corrupt or derail my search for the truth concerning the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality. He encouraged me to undertake a rigorous and disciplined study of myself as well as of the world around me.

He worked with me in order to help me acquire the sort of positive, constructive character traits that would assist me to engage the central question of life – the reality problem – objectively and with equitability. In addition, he worked with me in order to help me to try to rid myself of the negative, destructive character traits that tended to interfere with and disrupt the foregoing search.

Throughout the period of time that I spent with the individual whom I currently consider to be a spiritual fraud, I was engaged in a process of searching for the truth concerning the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality. However, instead of learning about that sort of truth, I was developing an understanding – unbeknown to me at the time -- about a variety of problems that often tend to surround any such search, but this sort of understanding didn't come into clear resolution until after those 11 years had passed.

Sometimes, learning what is not true is almost as important as learning what is true. Such learning serves as a complement to whatever truths one is able to realize with respect to the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality.

During my 17 years, or so, of associating with my first spiritual guide – the individual I consider to be an authentic teacher -- the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality consisted in one set of experiences. During the 11 years, or so, that I associated with the second guide – the person who I consider to be a fraudulent teacher – the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality consisted of a different set of experiences.

Ultimately, both sets of experiences have contributed to helping me search for the truth concerning the nature of my relationship with Being/Reality. As a result, I now realize that such a search is a lot more complicated than I initially thought was the case (For further

information concerning the nature of spiritual abuse, please read my book: *The Sufi Lighthouse*).

Today, there are many individuals who are inclined toward one, or another, form of atheism. I am sure that they believe they have good reasons for believing in the way they do.

I am quite willing to leave it to Being/Reality to decide who is closer to the truth in any given matter and acknowledge that everyone – including myself -- must accept responsibility for the extent to which their perspectives reflect – or fail to -- the truth of things concerning the nature of Being/Reality. We all are engaged in the challenge of trying to come up with the best response we can with respect to the ‘reality problem’.

However, some atheists are as deeply involved in a process of perpetuating spiritual abuse as are individuals like my second guide – the fraudulent one. More specifically, on the one hand, I am willing to recognize that there is potential value to be found in conjunction with criticisms of individuals who claim to be religiously inclined but who, simultaneously, engage in acts of: Hatred, dishonesty, cruelty, greed, arrogance, injustice, deceit, selfishness, murder, exploitation, manipulation, and so on. However, on the other hand, what religious hypocrites do does not give expression to the essential nature of religion – which is to seek for the truth concerning the nature of the one’s relationship with Being/Reality.

Individuals such as: Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and Daniel Dennett, as well as, among others, the relatively recently deceased Victor Stenger and Christopher Hitchens, often don’t seem to be content with merely pointing out the errors and mistakes of individuals who claim to be interested in religion but whose actions appear to indicate otherwise. Instead, the aforementioned individuals seem to want to attack religion per se, and part of the method they use to attempt to accomplish this involves their attempt to use the errors and mistakes of individuals as if the latter behavior constituted factual evidence that religion – no matter what its character might be -- is a fraudulent activity that has no redeeming value.

Religion – understood as the search for the truth concerning the nature of one’s relationship with Being/Reality – is the most important activity in which any human being can engage. When people such as

Sam Harris and other like-minded individuals seek to undermine, derail, corrupt, or distort the pursuit of religion through their speculations, opinions, and unsubstantiated theories, as well as by treating their likes and dislikes as if those were necessary truths, and, thereby, discourage people from pursuing certain modalities of searches for the truth concerning the nature of their relationship with Being/Reality, then, to me, those activities seem to be every bit as spiritually abusive as are the acts of ministers, imams, rabbis, theologians, priests, and spiritual guides who discourage people from pursuing religion as a result of the reprehensible activities of the former alleged experts concerning religion.

To be sure, individuals like Sam Harris and his colleagues ought to be free to point out what religion should not be by exploring what they consider to be the mistakes that various people make in certain circumstances. However, one cannot validly take arguments concerning what religion should not be – that is, being spiritually abusive in a broad sense – and, then, try to claim that what religion should not be is the essence of religion.

I might agree with Harris, Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens, Stenger, and others on all manner of things concerning the behavior of certain individuals who claim to be religious but aren't. However, the actual nature of religion transcends the foregoing sorts of behaviors, and, consequently, if one seeks to argue that because certain individuals engage in problematic behaviors, then this constitutes proof that religion, per se, is not worth pursuing, then this seems, to me, to give expression to a form of spiritual abuse that is directed toward discouraging and undermining anyone who might be interested in pursuing the essential nature of religion but who do not wish to do so in a manner that is reminiscent of the kinds of behaviors that are being criticized – sometimes justifiably so -- by Dr. Harris and company.

Dr. Harris and other like-minded individuals should be encouraging the latter sort of individuals. Instead they appear to want to throw out the baby with the bathwater. (To further explore some of my critical reflections concerning the work of Dr. Sam Harris, please refer to Section II of this book and material contained in *Sam Harris and the Future of Ignorance*. In addition, you might take a look at:

Epistle To A Sam Harris Nation: Debunking the Moral Landscape, as well as Sam Harris and the End of Faith: A Muslim's Critical Response).

Spiritual abuse often corrodes and destroys religious aspirations, inclinations, desires and motivation. As a result, those who are subjected to spiritual abuse are often left bereft of holy longing.

Holy longing is the desire to seek, discover, understand, and act in accordance with the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with Being/Reality. That truth gives expression to that which human beings are inclined to cherish as sacred precisely because the truth concerning the nature of Being/Reality, together with how we fit into the scheme of things with respect to that Being/Reality, is deserving of our veneration and also is deserving of our commitment to its principles.



The following excerpts form a relatively small sample set of experiences that are related to the general information that was presented earlier through the *Into the Wilderness* essay. The episodes described below are drawn from a period spanning about seven years and provide some of the flavor of what transpired in my life while wandering about in the wilderness. Dying before one dies tends to be a process rather than a one and done experience.

October 1993 – Meeting the ‘Shaykh’

Baba (the title means “spiritual father”) has come. I am to meet him on Sunday.

There are 10 or 15 people present when I arrive. I am introduced to Baba, and, then, we all sit down, have tea, and questions are asked of Baba by different people who are attending the gathering.

I find Baba’s responses to these questions to be eloquent, detailed, insightful, and filled with humor. He is constantly referring to the Qur’an and the hadith, as well as to the teachings of various Sufi shaykhs to support his replies.

Many engaging stories are told. His manner is simultaneously, gentle, soft, and, yet, rigorous.

Everyone, including me, is captivated by both Baba and his words. More people are constantly arriving throughout the afternoon and into the evening.

Finally, but reluctantly, I have to go. Plans are made for meeting again with Baba on the forthcoming Tuesday.

I ask if it is all right to invite other people. The answer is ‘yes’.

During the next day, or so, I contact a number of people and tell them about Baba’s presence in town. Several of them are interested ... especially one family from another city who belong to the same silsilah as I do and who had the same shaykh (i.e., Dr. Baig) as me.

On Tuesday evening, a crowd of people assembles ... including my friends from the silsilah. Once again, everyone is enthralled.

New questions are asked, and new responses are given. The answers are every bit as engrossing as they were several days earlier.

The same patient, calm, kind, compassion, empathetic, friendly, humble, humorous demeanor exudes through Baba's presence. The same rare quality of knowledge, understanding, and mastery of the subject matter seems to be in evidence.

While the meeting had been going on, in the background the television in another room was spewing out national election results. I harbored a great dislike for the government in power and its arrogant and callous disregard for so many segments of society, and I had prayed they would lose the election.

Just before we left for the evening, the television political commentator announced that the party in power had just suffered the worst defeat by a standing government in national history. From enjoying a huge plurality, and with the exception of a few candidates, they were virtually wiped out, in a single night.

In all but name, the party no longer existed as a viable national political organization. How the mighty had fallen, and I enjoyed their plummet.

My friends and I went home, quite happy, both with the election results as well as with Baba. Arrangements had been made for a further meeting on Thursday, in two days.

Between Tuesday and Thursday, I reflect on a lot of issues. Most of them have to do with what I should be doing with my life -- especially in conjunction with the Sufi path -- now that Dr. Baig is no longer present in the physical world.

These sorts of thoughts keep bubbling about in my consciousness right up to Thursday evening. When I arrive at the designated meeting place, I ask someone who is close to Baba if she would speak to Baba on my behalf about the possibility of taking initiation with him.

She agrees and goes away. A short time later she comes back and tells me that Baba had indicated to her that my taking ba'yat with him would not be a problem if that were what I wanted to do.

I consider the matter a little longer and, then, tell the woman that I wish to seek initiation. She smiles and tells me something of a rather curious nature.

'She says Baba had informed her that there is a great deal of excitement in Karachi about tonight's events. Apparently, the spiritual waters are running at high tide for some reason.

Everyone is assembling downstairs in the basement. The area is quite large and the place is packed.

At a certain point, Baba calls me to approach him. He whispers and asks me if I want to be initiated, and I affirm that this is my wish.

He had someone bring a cup of milk, and, then, he has me recite the Shahadah (the basic attestation of faith that God is one and that Muhammad is the messenger of God), followed by a repeating of the words that he speaks -- words which specify that I am taking the hand of one of the elders of the silsilah through the form of Baba. When this part of things is completed, he tells me to stand and to drink all the milk in the cup.

I did this, and when I have done as instructed, he takes the cup from me. He inspects the interior of the cup very carefully and hands it back to me, asking me to drink the few drops that are ringing the bottom of the cup.

After the second drinking, he takes the cup again, inspects the interior portion briefly, and then, he asks me to bring my ear next to his mouth. As I do this, he whispers into my ears that his shaykh has instructed Baba to tell me that not only am I to be made a shaykh in the silsilah, but, as well, I have the greatest spiritual capacity of anyone born in this part of the world in the 1900s. In addition, something called a masnad, or symbol of spiritual authority, is to be given to me and that the masnad will have a very special significance in the not-too-distant future.

Next, he asks me to sit down again, and, as I do, a number of other individuals, all indicate to Baba that they wish to be initiated as well. Altogether, there are about five or six people who take ba'yat with Baba.

Upon completion of the initiations, Baba announces to the gathering that I am to be a shaykh in the silsilah. Afterwards, a number of people approach me in order to offer their congratulations.

Quite frankly, everything that Baba has whispered into my ear has stunned me. I sincerely was prepared to go back to the beginning again

with respect to tasawwuf, and, now, it seems that things have taken a drastically different direction.

I really didn't feel up to the responsibility being given me, but I also feel that it is God who will be doing things, and all I am contributing -- and not really even that -- is my being to the process. Moreover, although I don't see any of the great spiritual capacity to which Baba alluded to when he whispered in my ear, I am prepared to continue on and let Divinity disclose and unveil whatever Divinity wishes to do in this respect, for, in truth, I have no spiritual capacity other than the one that God has bestowed on me, and I figure God knows more about such matters than I do.

As far as the masnad is concerned, I have no clue as to what that is all about. I am familiar with my ignorance but not much of anything else -- especially in the realm of spirituality.

I wonder if the whole scenario is a ruse or practical joke of some kind. However, the order of events seems to make little sense if, somehow, I am being duped.

For example, presumably, Baba's disclosing various spiritual stations that, supposedly, are associated with me might have worked much better as an inducement to get me to take ba'yat with him -- if that is what this is all about -- if I were told such things before the fact of initiation rather than after the fact. When I decide to take ba'yat with Baba, I am ready to go back to the beginning with everything -- including the mystical path, and I really wasn't looking for anything but spiritual guidance when I approached Baba about becoming initiated.

By taking ba'yat, I am already hooked, so to speak, so there really is no need to dress things up with pronouncements concerning alleged spiritual gifts. Telling me such things after the fact -- and why only me because he did not whisper in the ears of anyone else who took initiation that evening -- doesn't seem to make sense if the intent is something other than sincerity and truth.

Someone informs me later that night that she has known, for quite some time, I would be made a shaykh, but Baba has told her that if she even so much as hinted about such matters to me he would be extremely upset with her. The woman has done an admirable job in

that respect because absolutely everything that unfolded on this night is beyond my wildest imagination.

She also tells me that the excitement in Karachi to which she alluded earlier in the evening is because Baba's shaykh had indicated that tonight was to be the occasion of my coming into the silsilah and that the night is very auspicious. The woman also informs me that she was sent by Baba several years ago to locate me and with instructions for her to come to the Sufi Study Circle meetings and just wait until Baba is ready to come and take me into the silsilah.

Apparently, over the last so many years, the Divine tumblers slowly have been clicking into place, and the right combination of events finally came into alignment. Baba indicates that the delay in my initiation had been partly his fault, and he described the situation in terms of a guy who is waiting for certain things to happen and who -- during a stroll through a park that has been taken in order to while away the time -- comes upon a card game, sits down, participates, and becomes engrossed in the game ... thereby, forgetting that he has an appointment to keep when the time is right.

A few days later I meet with Baba, and we discuss a number of issues. Among the topics that are touched upon is a group I have been working with for almost two years in order to develop a prime-time program on Islam for a national faith-based television channel.

For much of the time this group has been in existence I have been its chairperson. In addition, because everyone else seems too busy, I have assumed, with group approval, much of the responsibility for writing drafts of materials, organizing various activities, and running a variety of group-related errands.

In addition, we are planning for a big fund-raising dinner in the spring that will feature Muhammad Ali. We are working on putting together a demo of the type of program we would like to do, and I have come up with a script idea that everyone seems to find appealing, and, so, I have busied myself with writing the script for the demo.

I tell all of this to Baba. In addition, I relate some of the many problems involving group dynamics that have taken place.

When I first started participating in the group, I had no intention of being chairperson, and I had no intention of writing a script, or performing any of the other tasks that tended to come my way because no one else seemed to have the time for such things. In fact, I had come to the group as just an observer for another community group that originally had been started by my first shaykh, Dr. Baig.

Almost any organization is steeped in politics, jealousies, personal attacks, and petty arguments. The television-group with which I was affiliated was no different.

After listening to me for a while, Baba tells me that this group is never going to let me have any real position of influence. Yes, Baba says, to get the thing started, they are all prepared to let me do the work, but once it gets going, and there is money available, I will be pushed to the sidelines.

I don't really have any agenda concerning the group. Moreover, I am not really interested in being in control, and I am happy to have helped out in the ways that God has permitted.

However, I know that what Baba is saying is likely to be true. Over the last several years, I have watched the politics being played out in committee meetings, and I really don't have much stomach for those sorts of machinations.

I have a growing number of responsibilities in conjunction with my new silsilah. Consequently, after discussing the matter with Baba, I decide to resign from the television group -- which, apparently, comes as quite a shock to the individuals on the Advisory Committee for the television program.

However, by the time I leave, all the preliminary organizational work to launch the television program has been completed. So, perhaps the timing of my departure is fairly efficacious.

One of the women who participated, to a degree, in some of the meetings involving the proposed television program has called me up to ask a favor. She would like me to say fatiha for her father who passed away a little while ago.

She is an out-spoken woman who doesn't seem to suffer fools gladly. She is a feminist and, as a result, she is often at odds with the

way women are treated within the Muslim community – a view with which I have considerable empathy.

During some of the meetings concerning the proposed television program on Islam, we had found ourselves on opposite sides of some discussion or other. As the saying goes, a frank exchange of ideas took place during these encounters.

Given these exchanges, I am surprised that she wants me to say fatiha, but she says she doesn't know how to do it, and she wishes to honor the memory of her father. Consequently, a time is arranged and I am given directions to her home.

At the arranged time, I travel to her place of residence. She is alone in the house.

I'm feeling a little uncomfortable with this situation, but we set about setting things up for fatiha. I recite the requisite Quranic verses, offer a du'a or prayer for her father, and, then, bring the session to a close.

We talk a little after fatiha while we are eating the sweets over which verses of the Qur'an have been said. At one point, she says that she feels she has misjudged me and is inclined to believe that I am quite different from the person whom she thought I was when the Islamic television program meetings were taking place, and she apologizes for anything she did or said that might have offended me.

I indicate there is nothing for which she has to apologize. Shortly thereafter, the meeting comes to an end.



November 1993 - Excursions

Baba, I, and several other individuals take a trip to London, Ontario. Several talks have been arranged at the local university.

The talks go very well, and, subsequently, a number of people take initiation with Baba at the home of our hosts.

As we are getting ready to return home, one of the people in attendance that resides in Toronto decides to stay on a bit longer. She asks if someone could drive her car back to Toronto.

She will get a ride from her husband later on. After some discussion, I am elected to drive the car.

I am informed that the heater and windshield wipers are not working properly. Not wishing to inconvenience, or endanger, anyone with the primitive condition of the car's operating system, I insist that I go alone in the car.

Before leaving, Baba -- who is riding back in another car -- asks to see me and tells me not to worry, God is with me. I thank Baba, nodding my head as if I knew what he was talking about and feeling, as well, that there was a rather strange quality to the whole interchange.

The trip is about 200 miles, or so. A quarter of the way back, I lose contact with the other cars as a winter storm hits with such ferocity that everything is lost in a whiteout.

The heater is not working, the windshield wipers work only occasionally, and if this is not enough with which to deal, I soon discover that there is no cleaning fluid for the windshield wipers. There are no gas stations, houses, or places to stop. I can't tell where the road leaves off and the shoulders of the road begin.

On a fairly regular basis and despite zero visibility, tractor-trailer trucks are bombing through the storm. I both thank God for, as well as curse, their approach, because, when they come up behind me, for a few brief seconds I can sort of see and feel comforted with a semi-human presence, but, as they pass me by at high speeds, visibility becomes worse than ever as the snow swirls about even more viciously through the capacity of the truck's movement to displace snow in chaotic gusts that render me more blind than I already am, as well as buffet the car about in the accumulating snow.

I can't stop. I can't go on, but somehow, the car worms its way through the night. Things go on this way for a number of hours, and I have numerous opportunities to reflect upon the significance of Baba's parting words to me as we left the house of our London. Ontario hosts.

Eventually, a few lights of civilization blink into view. The storm dissipates somewhat near my destination.

I show up at the designated meeting place in Toronto long after all the other cars have returned safely to port. Everyone -- and Baba most of all -- enjoys the telling of my adventure.

Baba, several other people and I take a trip to Ottawa. All the individuals in the car have taken initiation with Baba, and, with one exception, we all, previously, had been mureeds in the same silsilah.

The weather conditions are not good. During the final 100 miles, or so, a substantial sleet is falling, and, as a result, the roads are icy and slick. In addition, the night is quite dark and there are no lights along the road.

All of a sudden, I catch a glimpse of something out of the corner of my eye, and, as I do, the person who is driving our car indicates he believes he saw an overturned car in the ditch by the side of the road.

He brings the car to a halt as quickly as he can, and this is not easy given the slick road conditions. I am first out of the car, working my way back up the road.

Our driver gets out of the car as well. He proceeds to fall down on the road because sheets of ice have formed all along the surface of the road on which we are traveling.

After a brief search, we come upon an overturned vehicle. There are people still inside, and, apparently, the accident has just happened.

Fortunately, no one is hurt, but all four of the people, plus a dog, are in shock. They each wander about, focused on their own inner world.

One person wants to know what happened to all the Christmas presents that were in the trunk of the car but are now strewn along the ditch because the trunk popped open during their accident. Another person is only concerned about the dog that is riding with them, but,

apparently, not anyone else. A third person, -- who already had a broken arm -- just stands silently, not communicating with anyone. A fourth person is worried about being late to wherever they are going.

Some passing vehicles are waved down. Eventually, we find a person with a cell phone, the police are called, and emergency help finally arrives, whereupon we resume our journey.

When we arrive at the home of our hosts in Ottawa, we knock on the door. Our hosts answer the door.

The tension between them and us is extremely palpable. The couple are very distant and cold, which is unlike their normal, diplomatic, kind, and cordial way of doing things.

We are invited in, just as supper is about to be served. We eat in relative silence with only the occasional question being asked or answered.

After the meal, we all retire to the living room in considerable discomfort and with a great sense of unease in the air. Soon thereafter, magic happens, as our hosts melt through the warmth of Baba's engaging manner ... and this is especially interesting given that the wife of our host is, normally speaking, fairly wary when it comes to the idea of tasawwuf or Sufism.

There is much laughter. In time, the discussion turns to spirituality, and the next day both of our hosts take ba'yat with Baba, and both individuals are extremely satisfied with what has been, and is, transpiring.

We return to Toronto, leaving our former hosts in a very, very happy condition. Baba remarks during the return journey that our time with them was very much like the car accident that we happened upon earlier ... that is, everything has been turned upside down, but no one got hurt and things turned out okay.

September 1994 -- Anomalies

I am working in my apartment on something that Baba has given me to do. I live on the 10th floor of an apartment building.

It is late afternoon, heading toward sunset. I notice there are about half dozen gigantic bumblebees mulling about the window of the room in which I am working.

The bees don't fly away, and, yet, they don't alight on the window ledge. They just sort of hover about, and this goes on for some 10 minutes.

Later on, I tell Baba about the incident in the presence of one of his mureeds (followers). Baba and the woman look at one another smiling.

Baba says that he and she were having a discussion around the same time as my bee-incident took place. Baba was looking for a particular ayat in the Surah of the Bees but, for whatever reason, couldn't find it, and, finally, had to give up because they were getting late for an appointment.

I also tell Baba that the bee incident is very reminiscent of something that took place when I was working on a sacred poem that Baba had given to me to render into poetical English. A sparrow had perched on the 10th story ledge outside the window of my workroom, and my desk is set against the wall where this window is located.

The bird picked up his/her head in such a way that it seemed to be trying to peer onto my desk and oversee what was going on. The bird, then, would fly away, return, and proceed to do the same thing again.

I remember being very happy, somehow, with the event. It made me laugh.

Baba says that, like dreams, each and every event of life is a symbol or sign of something. I wonder what the meaning of the presence and actions were of the bird and bees that had visited with me?

Baba and a husband and wife couple are talking about an incident downtown. They had been driving along in a certain part of the city with which I am quite familiar, and, for whatever reason, the group had to stop for a moment and park the car.

When the car is parked, Baba spots someone on the street and instructs the husband to go and give the man some money. The husband also is instructed to tell the man that Baba extends his greetings.

The man to whom the money is given is referred to as the 'man with two suitcases'. Upon receiving the money, the man looks over to the car in which Baba is seated, raises the money in the air, sort of bows in both thanks and acknowledgment of Baba's greetings, and, then, walks on with his two suitcases in hand.

I am amazed with the story for several reasons. Five or six years before, I had rented a small, one room apartment with a bathroom in the cellar and no kitchen. The apartment is not too far away from the part of city about which Baba was talking in relation to the 'man with two suitcases'.

At the time I lived in that part of the city, I was working and trying to finish my doctoral dissertation at the same time. I used to go directly from work to an office at the university and work on my dissertation until 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning.

After finishing writing for the day, I would walk home to my room that was a 15-20 minute walk from the office. On many occasions I would see this homeless person perched on his two suitcases, asleep in the doorway of this or that store that had closed for the day, and despite being homeless, the man always was dressed in a suit.

Even on the coldest nights that were many degrees below zero, I would see him asleep in one, or another, area doorway, dressed in nothing more than his suit. I often had wanted to give him some money, but when I had a few dollars, I never saw him, and when I saw him, I never had any money.

Baba said the man was one of the friends of God who had certain spiritual functions in the area. The circumstances surrounding this man had always seemed rather strange to me, and, until Baba's current explanation, I had no idea just how strange things were concerning 'the man with two suitcases'.

The silsilah has opened up an Astana or spiritual center in a suburb of Toronto. Baba wants us to mark the occasion with an 'Urs

celebration, or anniversary commemoration, for one of the shaykhs of our silsilah.

A long-standing friend of mine who is an initiate in our silsilah is visiting Toronto for the weekend. At one point, during a zikr session, my friend goes into a state of ecstasy and begins to roll around on the floor, screaming out.

This goes on for quite some time. Finally, he seems to recover, and when he does, he immediately comes to me, hugs me, and in a very excited state tells me a number of things that were disclosed to him during his altered state.

Among the things he relates to me is that his life and mine have been intertwined since pre-eternity. We are like spiritual twins.

I have known my friend for 14-15 years. He and I both had the same previous shaykh – namely, Dr. Baig.

He is not the sort of person to fake a spiritual state in order to get attention or in order to imply that he is, somehow, special. He is a very down-to-earth and quite unassuming person.

I tease him and refer to him as the ‘holy roller’. We enjoy a laugh together.

Later, I ask Baba what it that episode was all about. Baba says that my friend was starved for love and that God, in His Mercy, had given him a little sip of the Divine nectar.

Not too long after the Astana (spiritual meeting place) opens, a special spiritual occasion is observed at the Astana. A variety of people are invited.

At certain points, I am answering the door and welcoming the visitors to the Astana. A lot of the people whom I greet are not known to me ... undoubtedly invited by one or another initiate of Baba.

One of the people I welcome is a young, white woman who arrives by herself. I don’t believe she is Muslim, but I am not sure.

She asks a few questions to make sure she has the right place. I indicate that this is, indeed, the correct address.

She starts to take off her coat and, then, stops. Her condition seems to change somewhat. She seems to become very apprehensive and anxious ... almost agitated.

She puts her coat back on, apologizes, and leaves the building. I am somewhat puzzled, wondering if there was something that I might have said or did that could have induced not only the observed changes in the young lady but, as well, helped to bring about her desire to leave.

A little later, I tell Baba about what happened. He says that the woman was being bothered by a jinn, and, consequently, when she walked into the house, and the jinn that was accompanying her felt a spiritual presence in the house, the jinn began to apply psychological and physical pressure on the woman to force her into leaving, and this pressure was what led to her departure shortly after having arrived at the house.

At another juncture during the evening, a relatively young Pakistani or Indian man arrives at the door. He seems to be in something of an intoxicated state – but, apparently, not from drugs or alcohol. His state is quite palpable to anyone who sees him – which I did since I was in the general area of the foyer when the man arrived.

Baba is in another anteroom toward the back of the Astana. When the seemingly intoxicated individual begins to approach Baba, the man's condition seems to become sober.

Baba and he seem to know one another. They greet one another in a smiling, engaging manner, and, then, they talk for a short while.

This interchange consists mostly of Baba asking questions about the young man's welfare. The visitor's answers are brief but to the point.

Soon after arriving, the man leaves. Baba later indicates that the young man is something of a mathzub – or someone who is, more often than not, in a state of spiritual intoxication. Baba had met the man on one, or another, earlier trip to Canada. The young man seems to have sort of role in the invisible spiritual government that oversees many things in the created world.

Apparently, Baba and one of his mureeds have talked about this individual before. After the man leaves, Baba and the woman carry on a little bit of a discussion concerning the gentleman, and it is through this conversation that I glean some details about the visitor who has just left.

There have been a few other instances when 'the foregoing woman has told me that on several occasions she had been with Baba out in the middle of nowhere, and Baba would give her and her husband directions to some house, or other, in the rural area where they were traveling. They would find the house to which they had been directed by Baba, and, then, Baba would get out of the car, go to a door, and knock.

Someone would come to the door, and Baba would be welcomed in. The people traveling with Baba would also go into the house.

Seemingly superficial conversation would take place having nothing to do with spiritual issues. During these occasions – which apparently were few in number -- there didn't seem to be any indication that Baba had met the individual previously, and, yet, the two individuals would be engaged in animated, friendly conversation.

A short while later, Baba, then, would seek permission from his host to be able to leave, and the entourage would subsequently depart. When the group was back in the car and had resumed their journey, Baba would be asked what the visit had been about.

Baba would explain that the individual with whom they had just visited was part of the 'invisible' spiritual government who had various functions and responsibilities in the general area. Baba said he was merely paying a courtesy call.

This reminds me of 'the man with two suitcases' story one of Baba's mureeds had told me about in Baba's presence, as well as in the presence of her husband who also had been in the car when the two-suitcase incident happened. I took, at face value, the accounts about the young – apparently spiritually intoxicated -- Pakistani or Indian man who had briefly visited the Astana one evening during a celebration function, but the story about 'the man with two suitcases' had surprised me quite a bit because I had encountered that man on

many occasions when walking back to my apartment after having wrestled with my dissertation following a full day of work at the library – but these encounters with ‘the man with two suitcases’ were years before I ever knew Baba.

I often wondered about him whenever I saw him asleep in some store-way door – using his suitcases like a chair. I thought the whole situation was odd since he was always dressed in a suit ... but I guess I didn’t realize how odd it was until after I heard the story of Baba’s encounter with that man.

January 1995

There is another ‘Urs function at the Astana. A number of different silsilahs (Sufi Orders) are invited.

A shaykh whom I know only very slightly attends the gathering with a number of his initiates. Toward the end of the evening, members of our silsilah adjourn to another room where people from the other shaykh’s silsilah are singing various sacred songs that are very beautifully rendered by the singers.

A discussion begins, and someone asks a question of the visiting shaykh. During his reply, he indicates that while he has love for his family and for his mureeds, there are only two people in his life whom he has loved in a deep, essential way.

One of these two people was his shaykh. Then, he turns to Baba and points to him and indicates that Baba is the other individual whom he loves in this way.

Baba and this shaykh have only known each other for a few months -- at least, as far as earthly existence is concerned. To the best of my knowledge, they only have interacted a few times beyond the several ‘Urs functions that they have celebrated together.

February 1995

Baba, a friend of ours who is not Muslim but is interested in the Sufi path, and I go and visit the aforementioned shaykh. We are served tea by the shaykh and, then, there is much silence ... although, from

time to time, a few brief things are said – mostly in the way of questions from the person who has driven us to the meeting.

Finally, Baba asks for permission for us to leave. Permission is given, and, as we get up to leave, the shaykh embraces each of us in turn, and when he gets to me, he whispers congratulations in my ear with respect to an internal spiritual faculty that supposedly has opened within me.

March 1995 – Employment Issues

I have resigned from my job over a number of problems at my place of employment -- including the fact that: someone is stealing money from one of the booths that serves as an outlet for the library services we perform. My bosses know who the person is that is responsible for the thefts, but they do little about the situation because of worries about union activism that might occur should they take the requisite steps.

Yet, at the same time, management terminates the employment of a student for another infraction (something much more inconsequential). They could have handled both situations quite differently.

I stick up for the student they wish to fire and with whom I have worked for several years and who is-- despite some personal problems here and there -- a decent kid. Pressure is placed on me by management to back away from my willingness to testify on the student's behalf at an upcoming grievance hearing.

I refuse to yield to the pressure and testify. Management begins to create difficulties for me in my job.

The union has told me that although they respect my position, they have exhausted their funds for contesting grievance cases against management. I tell the union officials that I am not interested in getting their help and that whatever steps I take I'll do on my own.

As the management-created problems begin to mount in relation to my job, I resign, knowing what the shape of the future is likely to be should I continue to stay on. Before I resign, I discuss the matter thoroughly with Baba during a train trip to Ottawa.

I outline the options that I believe are open to me, including staying on the job and trying to continue to struggle with the managerial harassment that is occurring. Baba says that in light of the circumstances at work, perhaps, the best thing to do is to resign from the job, however, he adds that the decision is entirely mine, and he is with me no matter what I might choose to do.

Without a job and finances, Baba has given me permission to move into one of the rooms in the Astana. He says that he has wanted this all along so that I could be at the center and oversee activities there.

In addition, he says that he has a few aces up his sleeve that might lead to some job possibilities for me later on. More specifically, there is a person who has befriended him in the United States and who is quite a wealthy businessman, and Baba feels the man might be open to helping to fund some small business venture or other.

One day, Baba comes to me in the Astana and gives me \$100.00. He says he knows I am having financial trouble and that he had a little extra money that he has earned through various means and wanted to share it with me.

June 1995

An old friend of Professor Baig -- the same friend who had, by the Grace of Allah, sent me on Hajj about six years ago -- calls up and offers me a job in Washington, D.C. He wants me to be his assistant at the education mission there, and although the job does not pay much in the beginning, he has said that a much better salary could be arranged once things become organized, and, furthermore, he will help me find an apartment and get settled.

I tell him that I will have to think about the offer because I am involved in something that carries certain responsibilities that might or might not, permit me to accept the job that is being offered. After he gives me his home phone number, we agree to speak again in a few days' time.

Baba is visiting at the Astana, and I tell him about the job offer. Baba asks me if any salary figure has been mentioned, and I indicate that the subject did not come up during the phone conversation.

I inform Baba that, irrespective of whatever the salary might be, I am inclined not to accept the job. The position would take me away from my duties at the Astana -- such as saying fatiha, providing people in the silsilah with whatever assistance I can, helping to organize different events, and so on.

Baba counsels me to call back and find out what the salary is, and he adds that, maybe, if the salary were high enough, then, I could work

in Washington, D.C. Monday through Friday, but fly home for the weekend and look after my silsilah-related responsibilities, or, if going back and forth were not financially feasible, then, some sort of schedule might be worked out where I could both do the job as well as continue on, in some way, in relation to silsilah activities. He indicates to me that he is with me whatever I decide about the matter.

I call the fellow in Washington and a salary figure is given that I know will not permit me to both work in Washington and continue on with silsilah activities. I thank the gentleman for thinking of me with respect to the education position and politely refuse the offer.

I tell Baba the gist of the conversation with the person in Washington, along with my decision. He receives the information without much comment and indicates that we should wait to see what Allah is arranging.

Several days later, I am talking with Baba, and he relates a dream he had the previous evening. He starts out by remarking that when he first stepped onto the Sufi path many years ago he used to have dreams by the truckload -- indeed, he had filled up many journals with them and, from time to time, used to go over some of them with his shaykh.

Nevertheless, in the last 10-15 years, he dreams very little. However, when he does, they tend to be fairly significant.

In any event, he begins to tell me about his dream of the previous evening. Apparently, Baba several individuals from the spiritual world visited Baba and wanted to know why I had not taken the job-offer in Washington. Among other things, the 'visitors' indicated that work was very necessary.

The dream conversation went on with various exchanges being given for, and against, my decision. After Baba was finished describing the dream, he told me that the whole job offer had been an extremely big spiritual test and, by the Grace of Allah, I had made a proper decision in the Washington matter.

Baba is returning to his home in the United States. No one is free to drive him back, so, a car is rented, and I become chauffeur for a day.

I am quite happy to do this. Usually, there are always lots of people around, so, the eight to nine hours I spend with him during the journey offers exclusive access.

We are having a great time on the way down. The talk is constant, easy, varied, and two-way.

However, something very worrisome and embarrassing occurs. About half way through the trip, an extremely strong, persistent thought pummels my mind -- I want to hit Baba ... I am mortified.

I have all I can do not to give in to this thought. In fact, in order to not have my hands free to do something I will deeply regret, I grab hold of the steering wheel extremely tightly.

This condition eventually passes. Despite its extremely unflattering nature, I feel I must talk about it with Baba because I don't want it happening again, and I would like to find out what is wrong with me.

I describe the experience to Baba. He listens.

When I finish, he says that I have a lot more courage than he has. He proceeds to tell me that a similar incident occurred to him, many years ago, with respect to his own shaykh.

He goes on to point out that there is a difference between his experience and mine. It took him a long time to work up the nerve to broach this issue with his shaykh, whereas, I had done so right away, and, he is very happy with me for having done so.

Baba indicates that the spiritual brigands always mull about the place where the treasure is being dispensed. Such incidents are an occupational hazard for those who not only are traveling the mystical path but who are, by the Grace of Allah, making spiritual progress.

He knows how uncomfortable such experiences are. However, he says that one's nisbath (essential affiliation with, and regard for, a spiritual teacher) with the shaykh protects one, God willing, from giving in to such urges and that since I have a great deal of nisbath with him, I shouldn't worry about the matter.

The rest of the evening is very pleasant. Later, Baba describes the journey down to his home in the States as being one of the nicest he has ever had.

October 1995 - The Masnad

Due to a variety of financial problems and squabbles among some of the mureeds, the Astana is closing. A friend of mine has found me a place to rent in the same building as his apartment.

A few weeks before vacating the Astana, Baba gives me the masnad (a fleeced sheepskin that serves as a symbol of spiritual authority). I assume that this arrangement is just for safekeeping during this transitional period to other residences, but Baba informs me that for a number of years – even prior to our meeting -- plans were in the works to deliver the masnad to me.

In fact, he informs me that his shaykh is the one who has given instructions to Baba concerning me for a number of years. More specifically, his shaykh is the one who informed Baba many years ago about me as well as told Baba to find a way to make contact with me and bring me into the silsilah. Baba's shaykh is the one who told Baba to disclose the things to me that Baba did on the night of my initiation, when he whispered into my ear. Baba's shaykh is the one who instructed Baba to deliver the masnad to me.

So, today, by delivering the masnad to me, Baba has completed the series of tasks that his shaykh had requested of him. Baba proceeds to provide some tips on spiritual etiquette concerning the masnad.

October 1995 to July 1996 – Several More Journeys

Three or four of us take a trip to visit with Baba. Baba wants me to speak at a Ashram near where he lives in the United States.

Baba says that the Guru who established the place and he had become friends before the latter individual passed on. Baba says that prior to the Guru's death, the latter had asked Baba to keep a watch over his flock after he is gone and to try to help them if Baba is able.

According to Baba, the group of followers is caught up in all kinds of organizational politics as different parties vie for control. He has tried to lend some assistance from time to time, but to little avail, even though many of the people associated with the Ashram have enormous respect for Baba and are aware their Guru was very close to Baba and that Baba was a confidant of their teacher.

On the trip down to the Ashram from Canada, we are running late. We are trying to arrive in time for the scheduled talk.

I am driving and traveling over the speed limit by a substantial amount. A state trooper pulls us over.

He asks for the usual things, such as driver license and registration. He asks me if I know why I got pulled over. I say, 'yes'.

He asks me why, and I reply that I believe I was speeding. He acknowledges my response with 'by quite a bit'.

He asks me if I had seen the posted speed limits. I say, 'yes'.

When he discovers that we are from Canada, he inquires whether I might have gotten confused between miles per hour and kilometers per hour. I answer that, no, I was not confused.

He asks me several more questions. Each time he states things in such a way that, if I lied, I could have put my situation in a more favorable light.

On each of these occasions, I decline the opportunity being given to me. On each occasion, I answer his questions truthfully.

He asks me where we are going in such a rush. I explain that I am supposed to give a talk on spirituality at an Ashram in such and such a location at such and such time.

He gives me back my license and registration and lets us go. He says, in parting, 'you better slow down or you might never get there.'

By the Grace of Allah, the talk I give goes extremely well although the number of people who attend is less than expected. Later on, Baba tells me of a conversation he overheard as we were leaving the Ashram.

Apparently, one of the members of the Ashram said that it was a good thing the normal-sized crowd didn't show up because the quality of the talk -- together with the question and answer period following it -- were of such a high caliber that there might have been a lot of people who would have been very impressed with what went on and, as a result, defected from the Ashram community to pursue the Sufi path. Baba indicates that some of the leaders of the community treat the Ashram like a business and would consider someone like me to be a threat to their commercial interests.

The next evening, I am invited to give another talk. By the Grace of Allah, this talk also goes well.

On Sunday, some of us are invited to have lunch at the Ashram. Baba declines the invitation, but he encourages the rest of us to go.

At one point, one of the leaders of the community takes me into her office and wants to give me some money for the talks I have given. I have no idea how much it is, but I am reluctant to take it and ask if I can use a phone.

I call Baba and fill him in on what is going on and how I feel. I ask him about what I should do because my understanding is that one should not take money for such activities.

Baba says a few things on the matter. Eventually, he says that if I feel the money is being offered with love, then, it will be all right for me to accept it, but if I feel that it is being offered with some other intention, then, I should reject it.

Once off the phone, I go and find the woman who has offered me the envelope. I explain to her that, while I very much appreciate her offer, I really can't take the money.

She tries to insist on giving me the money, and, as well, runs through several possibilities that she feels might be preventing me from accepting the money. Each time, I give a reply and, again, decline as politely as I can, and, finally, if reluctantly, she accepts my answer.

When we return to Baba's house, I give an account of what transpired after my conversation with him. He is happy with my replies, and, once again, indicates that the woman probably has never been refused before on the money issue because so many people consider giving talks at various spiritual centers as part of a big business.

Some members of several other silsilahs discover that Baba is in Toronto and wish to meet with him. Arrangements are made and following fatiha, Baba joins the circle.

The visitors begin to ask all manner of questions. Baba does 'his thing' and everybody becomes immersed in what is taking place.

At one point during the discussion, one of the members of another tariqa (Sufi silsilah), gets some 'zingers' sent his way. Baba begins to tell the visitor about certain kinds of anomalous experiences in his background.

The guy is dumb-founded by what is being said to him by Baba. He later tells me that many of things that are being said to him are things that he has never shared with anyone else and wonders how Baba knows about those events.

I had met the foregoing individual many years before in Ottawa. I always had found him to be s forthright and honest individual.



An Artful Liar

A group of us take a trip in order to visit with Baba who is visiting some mureeds in New York. While we are there, Baba indicates that he and whomever he wishes to bring along have been invited for a meal at the spiritual center of a shaykh who lives about 30-40 minutes away.

We have a little trouble locating the center, and by the time we reach the spiritual center, things are already well underway. We sit down in a visitor's section and observe the proceedings, uncertain whether or not the meal already has been served or is, yet, to come.

Afterwards, our host shaykh invites us to sit with him and his mureeds in another room. The shaykh notes, in passing, that it is too bad that Baba and company were not in a position to join in on the meal that already had been served, but, he says there is still some food left, and he asks if any of those with Baba have eaten.

Everyone but me says, no, they have not eaten. Food is arranged for them, and they are taken to another room to eat the meal.

After these individuals return from eating, the shaykh leans forward and looks down the row of people to his right until he locates me, near the end. He asks me if I really have eaten, and I inform him that, yes, earlier in the day I had eaten.

He nods and turns to his mureeds, saying: 'if you wish to see an artful liar, look at him (i.e., me), for although he (I) told the truth in as much as he (I) did eat at some point during the day, he (I) was, nonetheless, somewhat misleading since he (I) had not eaten recently. The shaykh, then, went on to relate an incident involving one of the Companions of the Prophet who was hiding the latter from those who were searching for the Prophet in order to kill him, and when people came to the door of the Companion and asked him if the Prophet was there, the Companion had his hand in a pocket and while focusing on the contents of the pocket said, no, the Prophet was not there.

The shaykh treats Baba with great respect. The shaykh begins to tell various stories, and there is much laughter.

Baba, who sits just in front and to the left of the shaykh is very silent throughout our stay with the shaykh and his mureeds. Afterwards we ask him about his reticence, and Baba explains how his

shaykh always had instructed him that whenever Baba is in the presence of another shaykh and the latter's mureeds, Baba should remain as silent as possible, as a matter of adab.

February 1996

While a group of us are returning from visiting with Baba, a strange incident occurs. We are driving on a portion of the New York state freeway that is utterly deserted -- without a house or business in sight for miles.

The time is about one or two a.m., and the weather outside is very frigid. The four of us are talking about this or that, just passing the time as we return home.

Suddenly, on the side of the highway, in the middle of nowhere, we see a figure that is hitchhiking with a big smile on his face. Afterwards, there is considerable discussion and disagreement about what we might have seen.

Some of us say that the person was naked except for sunglasses and a scarf or Palestinian-style head covering. Others say that the individual was wearing a body stocking and wore a mask. Everybody agrees that there was a smile on the individual's face.

When Baba was later told about the incident, he didn't do much except laugh. He told us that maybe we should have stopped. We might have had an interesting experience if we did.

April 1996

I go on a trip with 'a married couple in order to visit with Baba in the United States. On the way down, the couple related to me an incredible experience that they recently had.

Among other things, the event involved a large number of luminescent butterflies winging about the room where they sat. This was not a dream but was taking place in real time, so to speak, and was experienced by both husband and wife.

Later that evening, after arriving at Baba's house, Baba indicates that a letter has just arrived that day from Karachi. The letter had been

dictated by Baba's shaykh to a mureed -- the wife of an executive from Karachi, both of whom I have met previously.

In the letter, Baba's shaykh relates an experience that Baba had had just a few days earlier, although Baba has not, yet, had the opportunity to inform his shaykh about it. Baba already had read the contents of the letter to the members of his immediate household before our arrival, and, now, he proceeds to relate his experience to us ... the one that has been described in the letter that had arrived from his shaykh earlier in the day and that Baba had not yet informed his shaykh about.

The time is near 'asr (late afternoon prayers). Baba is not asleep but awake.

Baba sees a Baaz that he describes as not being an ordinary eagle, but one that soars very high and is, sometimes, used for hunting. When he sees the bird, Baba is filled with awe and fear.

Baba feels like he is in someone's presence. However, he doesn't know who that someone is ... a Prophet, some mystical friend of God?

Somehow, the falcon takes Baba and flies away. Subsequently, Baba finds himself on a huge estate that is very beautiful.

All about are many, many butterflies -- different colors, different fragrances, all unique. Some of the butterflies are flying. Some are stationary, and some are on trees.

[As Baba mentions the butterflies, the married couple (with whom I recently drove down to the United States) both look at one another in a startled fashion ... apparently nonplused by the resonance with their own recent experience involving luminescent butterflies]

The place where Baba has been taken is not a room or a home. It is more like being inside of a gigantic palace, but there are trees, rose gardens, and so on within the structure.

There is a divan or throne that is floating in the air. It is stationary.

Many people have gathered. Many of them are Awliya (friends of God) from different Sufi Orders. Some of these individuals Baba recognizes, and some he does not recognize.

A youth of 18-19 years is standing nearby. There is a beautiful crown on the young man's head.

Something is written on the crown. It reads 'taji shahan' -- the crown of kings.

The atmosphere is very, very bright. However, this brightness is not due to the light of a sun or moon of whatever world Baba was in.

The brightness or light is not coming from outside. Everything in the world has a light of its own -- like nur ... the butterflies, the trees, flowers, divan, people ... everything.

The youth -- whom Baba thinks is an angel -- makes announcements concerning the individuals in the assembly that include Prophets, Sahaba (Companions of the Prophet), and saints. Each time an announcement is made, the robe worn by the youth changes color -- and the same color is never repeated.

As the announcements proceed, Baba notes that the name of the shaykh of his own shaykh is not announced. Baba wants to ask someone why this is so, and he is told that good things are often saved for last.

The falcon that had brought Baba has now changed into a youth who asks Baba: 'Don't you recognize me?' Baba, then, realizes the youth is his shaykh.

All the assembled people are staring at Baba who is standing on the divan. Due to the pressure of the collective gaze, Baba both feels very hot, as well as shivers.

He is given a goblet of milk. Baba drinks every drop.

He becomes very ecstatic. A sword is placed in his right hand, and he makes a pledge to be sincere, to be honest and truthful, and to serve the silsilah and all of humanity.

Baba raises the sword and tells the assembled people that the sword is going to be a seal for all those who wish to be part of the silsilah to which he belongs. A ray of light begins to emanate from the sword, and everyone present is imbibing the light, absorbing it into their hearts.

Baba's shaykh is in a garden, and he is extremely happy. He says: 'Baba has made the pledge. Today is 'Eid for me. Everybody put on new clothes, perfume, and rejoice.'

That is the end of the experience. Baba indicates that, in addition to the letter that arrived earlier in the day, a phone call also has come with instructions from Baba's shaykh that Baba has permission to tell everyone about the experience and that, as well, his shaykh has his own reasons for wanting Baba's experience to be known to people. Baba, then, reads his shaykh's letter out loud.

July 1996

I, along with several friends, take a trip to visit Baba. Someone from Karachi -- who is not a mureed of Baba's but who is a close associate of Baba's shaykh -- is also visiting when we arrive.

On one occasion, we are about to say zuhr prayers. Just prior to the giving of azan, I have cut my right foot.

I have cleaned the wound and put a band-aid over it and refreshed my ablution. The cut is minor, but I am worried about it bleeding during the observance of prayers.

Consequently, as we say prayers, I try not to put too much weight on the foot as I go through the various positions of prayer. At certain places, I lift the foot slightly as I make the transition to a new prayer position.

After the prayer is concluded, the man from Karachi mentions several things to me. First, he makes a reference to my shirt and indicates that, when saying prayers, one should wear a shirt or garment that covers the elbows. Furthermore, he indicates that all of the imams he knows never raise their right foot when they are saying prayers, but, rather, the right foot remains anchored to the ground throughout the prayers.

I know about the 'elbow-being-covered' issue but also know there are different opinions within fiqh (the interpretation and application of so-called Muslim law to the events of everyday life) concerning this matter. Later, Baba backs me up on this point of shari'ah, but I don't argue with the man over his remark at the time he is discussing the matter with me.

The man's other comment about imams not moving their right foot puzzles me. I wasn't the imam for zuhr (early afternoon) prayers. Baba was the one who was leading the prayers ... he was the imam.

A woman who has been listening to the conversation is as puzzled about the man's comment as I am. I ask her about it afterwards, and she indicates that she has not heard of anything like this before or why it is being said in relation to me.

Later, I talk to Baba about the situation. Among other things, Baba informs me, laughing, that I am something of an enigma to the man from Karachi.

More specifically, that individual doesn't understand how someone like me, whose high spirituality is so palpable to people like him, doesn't even realize my own spiritual condition. Feisal doesn't understand how I am not aware of my own spiritual luminosity and, as a result, begin to act in accordance with that spiritual station ... thus, his comment about what imams do with their right foot during prayers.

August 1996 – A Book And A Car

My first book on the Sufi path is published through a local press. Baba encourages a number of the people in the silsilah to pay for the cost of printing. As well, there is at least one person who is not part of the silsilah but who is a friend of mine from Ottawa who also helps out financially in relation to the book.

During the time when I am working on the last half of the book, Baba is visiting Toronto. He stays with me.

While I am in one room typing, Baba is in another room talking with guests about the Sufi path. From time to time, I take a break and visit with Baba and his guests.

The people who are visiting with Baba ask me how the writing is going, and I say words to the effect of: 'I don't know what I have said, and I don't know where it is coming from'. When I said this, Baba would nod his head in agreement and would remark that this was the proper attitude to have with respect to such an undertaking.

I am hoping, God willing, the publication of this book will lead to sufficient sales to permit me to look after, at least, my basic expenses. I have begun to work on another book to assist in this regard as well, God willing.

A member of the silsilah who is from Ottawa tells me about his trip to Pakistan, including his meeting with Baba's shaykh. The individual informs me that the first thing Baba's shaykh says to him when the person presents himself at the Astana is: "What are you doing here?"

My friend apparently mumbles something about wanting to pay his respects, along with a few other things. He, then, tells about an incident in which Baba's shaykh gives some Paan (a Betel leaf filled with lime paste, areca nuts, and various other ingredients) to my friend.

When my friend puts the foregoing concoction in his mouth, everything changes, he feels like he has become one with Baba's shaykh. The experience is very powerful and lasts for some time.

Baba has hinted that he knows about something that is going to happen soon and teases me about what I don't know. A few days later, I discover that a number of the mureeds have joined together to buy me a used car and have arranged for insurance on the vehicle.

I learn that Baba has planted the car idea in the minds of several of his mureeds during various conversations. Over time, the idea seems to have taken on a life of its own.

Today, I am picking up the car and title from the party who sold it to Baba's mureeds. I am overwhelmed by it all.

Baba wants me to use the car for silsilah activities. I think I will call the vehicle the Sufi-mobile (Batman, eat your heart out), since it is to be used for furthering the aims and purposes of our mystical way.

March 1997 – New Jersey

A couple from Ottawa that has provided me with temporary living accommodations is going to visit some relatives in the United States. They ask me if I would like to come with them, and I accept the invitation.

When we arrive at our destination, we discover that a woman has just passed away who has been something like a spiritual guide for a number of women in the community ... including several individuals that are related to the couple with whom I am living. There is a gathering in commemoration of this woman at the house where we are to stay.

For reasons I don't grasp, I am asked to say a few words to mark the occasion. I don't understand why this is being done, because I know neither the woman in question nor any of the people who have gathered to mark the occasion.

Nonetheless, out of politeness, I try to comply with the request. I speak for about 10-15 minutes, or so. When I have concluded, I am asked to say fatiha for the woman.

Afterwards, a number of the people who are in attendance and indicate that they found the words that came through me to be very moving. They are shocked to learn that I did not know the woman because they feel that what had been said is very reflective of the character and personality of the woman they all knew and loved.

An older woman approaches me and tells me that her daughter would have been in attendance but one of her daughter's children has an ear infection of some kind, and, therefore, she was unable to attend. She feels her daughter would have very much appreciated what I had said because her daughter knew the woman in question and was quite close to her.

She asks me if I will recite something from the Qur'an and, then, blow on some water that she can give to her daughter's ailing child. I am a little uncomfortable doing this but comply with her request.

Word seems to spread about the brief talk I gave the night before. Now, they want to organize an event in which I would speak to the

young people in the family ... and it is a very large, extended family, encompassing scores of children.

I'm not overjoyed about doing this. Nonetheless, despite a few protestations on my part, a gathering is quickly arranged.

Everything goes quite well apparently. Parents and their children are both happy with what transpires.

The woman with the daughter who has an ailing child speaks with me again. She is with her husband.

I ask about the child who has been ill, and the woman says she is much better by the Grace of Allah. As she says this, she points over her shoulder to a woman in the next room, about 60 to 70 feet away, and indicates that the woman is her daughter.

A sister of the woman with whom I am staying approaches me and indicates that she is so impressed with some of the things that I said in my talk that she wants me to address her class on Sunday at the Islamic school. Again, I feel like she is asking the wrong person, but I don't know how to decline the invitation without hurting anyone's feelings, and, so, I accept.

The Sunday session at the Islamic school arrives. The woman in charge of the proceedings has invited several other classes to join in with her group (the children in the various classes range in age from about 10 to 16 or 17 - both boys and girls).

I indicate I will give a brief talk about Islam, and, after this is done, we should open up everything to a question and answer format or a dialogue of sorts. Everyone seems to like this idea.

The talk is given. Questions are asked. Answers are given. Perspectives are exchanged. The woman seems extremely happy with the session.

Today, we are leaving to head back to Canada. Someone has phoned the house where we are staying and wishes to meet with me before we depart.

The person is one of the members of the extended family who is visiting from another state. In fact, apparently, he has broken several land speed records to reach me before having to quickly turn around

again and return to his home to fulfill various work-related obligations.

Our time-line for departing is rather tight, and things already are running late. However, arrangements are made to meet with him.

When he arrives, we are introduced, and we go into another room for privacy. After a few pleasantries, he states the nature of his problem, and he asks for my help.

He wants to know if I could give him a zikr of some kind that will assist him, God willing, to overcome a personal difficulty he is having. We discuss the situation a little further.

Although I have been given authorization to serve in the capacity of a shaykh by our silsilah, I am still uncomfortable with people asking me for spiritual advice and counsel. Nevertheless, following our discussion, something occurs to me, and I give him something to do.

He thanks me and, then, leaves. Soon thereafter the couple from Ottawa and I take our leave as well.

April 1997

There are several phone conversations that take place which are sort of follow-ups to the trip south that I took with my hosts when we visited with their relatives. One call is in relation to a request for a zikr that one of my host's relatives - who had come from another state at the last minute -- made to me just before we all returned to our respective homes.

He indicates he has been saying the zikr I gave on a regular basis, and he also states that the zikr has, by the Grace of Allah, been having the desired effect as far as the problem he disclosed to me is concerned. However, he wants to know if he can stop doing the zikr because he finds that in certain aspects of his professional life he needs the quality that is a problem in other parts of his life -- and to which the zikr is directed -- and due to the successful nature of the zikr, his professional life is suffering.

I tell him the decision is up to him. He might do the zikr as little or as much as he likes, and, perhaps, he can find a balance where his

personal problem will be effectively treated through the zikr but, yet, his professional life will not suffer as a result of such a practice.

A second phone conversation also involves a zikr. While we were visiting previously, a close relative my host's wife had asked me to recommend a zikr for him.

I told him I would meditate on the matter. If something came to me, I would pass it along to him.

Something did occur to me after our return from the journey south. I phoned the man and related the instructions to him.

Several weeks later, he phoned me back to tell me about a spiritual experience he had in conjunction with the zikr. He was quite excited about it.

June 1997 -- England

Baba calls and tells me that he wants me to go to England for two or three weeks. He doesn't exactly specify the purpose of the journey, but it seems to have something to do with establishing a presence, of sorts, with respect to our silsilah.

He says the airplane ticket is looked after by one of his mureeds who lives in another state. Nothing is mentioned about living expenses while I am there, but he indicates he wants me to stay with a couple of brothers he knows who are living in Oxford and who are very friendly with Baba.

Neither of these brothers is Muslim nor have they taken initiation with Baba. I ask Baba if they should express an interest in taking ba'yat, is it all right to initiate them, and Baba says 'yes'.

I have very little money. I take what is there and hope, God willing, for the best.

In addition, I take along 20-30 copies of my relatively newly published book. Some of them will be given away as gifts, but, if God wishes, I might be able to sell a few of them and supplement my meager finances.

The first part of the journey is to travel from Ottawa to Baba's residence in the United States. This takes nine to ten hours.

On the trip down, I stop about half way to eat something and use the washroom facilities. No sooner do I pull out of the area and hit the freeway, my car just dies.

I check the few things I can think of but can't identify the problem. I raise my hood and wait for a state trooper to arrive.

After some time, a state trooper shows up, and I explain the problem. He radios for a tow truck to come, and while we are waiting, I sit with the officer and we talk about Canadian and American country music, along with a few other issues.

I am worried about the costs of repairing the car because I only have a limited amount of money with me. If the problem is anything major, I really have no idea of how I am going to deal with the situation.

Eventually, a tow truck comes. The car is hooked up, and I join the driver in the cab of the tow truck.

We take the next exit and travel through a town before stopping near the outskirts of whatever town, city, or village it is. The man begins to examine the car.

A little while later, he had located the problem. Apparently, some of the connector cables have corroded over and a vital electrical contact is being obstructed.

Fortunately, I have just enough to cover the costs of towing and the brief repairs that are needed. I pay the bill and continue on with my trip to Baba.

When I arrive at Baba's, I tell him about the delay. He listens to my account and, then, mentions the idea of rizq ... that is, the dynamic through which God apportions material, worldly things to created beings.

Everything that goes on in life is an expression of rizq transactions. Sometimes we are the recipients of material and financial things from others, and sometimes we are the means through which that rizq is apportioned to others. But, in point of fact, all physical, material events are expressions, in their own way, of rizq transactions of one kind or another.

We use scientific, economic, political, and philosophical language to try to explain those phenomena. The essence of these events, however, is that they are all manifestations of Divine rizq being apportioned.

Seemingly, I had a rizq transaction to conduct with a tow truck operator and mechanic. My car helped out in this transaction by ceasing to run in just the right place where the aforementioned tow truck operator resided.

Once my rizq business has been conducted, I was free to go on my way. The delays, problems, obstacles, detours, expenses, and opportunities of life, are all about rizq dynamics.

Once I arrive where Baba is staying in the States, Baba gives me some instructions of a general nature with respect to my forthcoming

trip to England. I also am given the names and phone numbers of some people Baba wishes me to contact both in London, as well as in Oxford.

Before I left Ottawa to go to the United States, my host's wife indicated that she has a nephew who is affiliated with an Islamic institute of some kind in England. She asks me to visit with him while I am there and gives me both an address and several phone numbers.

Someone else finds out that I am going to England. She wants me to see someone whom she knows in London.

She is the sister, I think, of the woman who passed away the same day that I, and my hosts from Ottawa, arrived at their relative's house on our southern journey.

Baba gives some instructions on something I am to say as I am landing in England. He also indicates what should be said when I am taking off from England. Both are part of the adab of venturing into geographical areas where various spiritual governors reside.

I am met at the London airport by one of the two brothers with whom I am to stay. He has been holding up a sign with my name on it, but, somehow, I have missed him several times as I have walked about the lounge area, but, eventually, we make contact.

As soon as we get to Oxford, I begin to meet people. Quite a few of these individuals have met Baba previously.

Several of the individuals whom I meet, teach at the university. One of them helps me out in a variety of ways, including arranging an interview about the Sufi spiritual tradition with someone at BBC-Oxford.

While in Oxford, I try to see about arranging a public talk at the university. One of the brothers with whom I am staying, knows someone at the student center where he used to work.

He calls his friend up and broaches the subject of my using one of the rooms in the facility to give a talk on tasawwuf. He is told that the center had such a bad experience with some other Sufi group on an earlier occasion that the center is not inclined to accommodate another such Sufi-related event.

I go to London to meet with some of the people whom Baba and other individuals wish me to meet. My directions have been to reach certain places via the tubes, but, unfortunately, there is a bomb scare associated with the IRA, and the tubes, including me, are emptied.

Surface transportation is provided, but I have no idea where I am going. Eventually, I call one of the numbers Baba has given to me and explain what has happened. I am given directions to the husband's business, and, quite some time later, I find my way there.

I give several impromptu talks at one of the houses. There is some interest, but many of the people are wary of anything that brings them into unfamiliar, spiritual territory.

One of the families that I am to contact invites me to supper. After a few minor misadventures, I find my way to my destination.

On the way back from London to Oxford, I run into some trouble. I have not dressed warmly because when I started out in the afternoon, the weather was fairly mild.

In order to return to Oxford, I have been directed to get to a certain location, and I can pick up a bus that goes to Oxford. However, at that time of night, the buses run, maybe, once every half-hour or forty-five minutes.

The area to which I have been directed is a small shopping plaza type of area ... with a number of small shops running to my right. I was told to wait on the corner of the plaza and that a bus would stop to pick up passengers going to Oxford.

As I am waiting, the temperature has plummeted quite a bit. I am getting pretty cold.

Finally, I see a bus with the word 'Oxford' lighted up on the front of the vehicle. I am very happy ... saved in the nick of time.

My happiness quickly fades, however, when the bus stops at an area - maybe several hundred feet away -- across the plaza. Since there are no potential passengers waiting there, the bus waits only briefly before pulling out and heading back out onto the highway.

At first, I think that, perhaps, there are several different buses going to Oxford, and since Oxford is not exactly a small place, maybe the bus that I need to take has not passed by yet ... that the bus stop

across the plaza is for a different part of Oxford than the one I need to take.

However, when the previous sequence of events takes place again and, in the meantime, there has been no other bus for Oxford that is running through the plaza where I am standing, I begin to suspect that the instructions I have been given might not be completely up to date ... or, perhaps, I have misunderstood what I was told. By the time several buses have come and gone, I feel like I am on the verge of hypothermia because my teeth are chattering away.

The place in which I am standing is fairly isolated. There is not much local traffic ... in fact, the only traffic has been some people who, apparently, have just come from a pub and are going to some other club or pub, yelling something or other at me out the window as they go by.

I am hoping that there will be at least one more bus going to Oxford. I make my way over to the other bus stop and wait while trying to do anything I can to try to generate a little body heat.

Eventually, another bus does come. I get on and, then, a half hour, or so, later, the bus lets me off in downtown Oxford. I have no money for a cab, and there don't seem to be any local buses running at this time of the night ... and, even if there were, I don't think I have enough for bus fare.

I call up the brothers. They already have gone to bed.

I explain the situation to them. They grumble, but one of them does get dressed and comes to pick me up about a half hour later.

The next several days are spent trying this and that. I go to a number of bookstores in Oxford to see if they might be interested in carrying my book.

I get laughed out of one business establishment. Another one -- a bookstore specializing in alternative forms of spirituality that one of my hosts has mentioned to me -- takes several books on consignment.

I visit the Islamic institute that the couple in Ottawa told me about back in Canada. I speak with my host's nephew, as well as to one of the education directors of the institute.

The visits are pleasant, but, clearly, no one there is interested in things related to tasawwuf (the Sufi path) -- at least not in the form of a white guy who speaks little Arabic. After a few hours, I leave.

A friend of one of my Oxford hosts is prepping for one of his final papers at the university. It is a course in political philosophy.

When he learns that I have had classes with John Rawls and Robert Nozick, he wants to pick my brain. I protest that the courses I took were nearly 30 years ago, but he is insistent we talk, and, so, I relent.

We go to his apartment – which is just downstairs from where I am staying -- and engage in a sort of Socratic dialogue for several hours. He seems to be pleased with some of the ideas that have arisen in several of the areas we discuss since he has been steadily taking notes, and I am surprised that I remember anything at all about political philosophy.

A few days before I need to return to the United States, the father of the two brothers with whom I am staying returns from India. He has been on a business trip.

On several occasions we talk about various things of a spiritual nature. He seems to be testing me in some way, perhaps, believing that someone from my background can't know much. In addition, Baba had warned me that if I meet up with the father of the two brothers at any point, he might try to induce me to go in some other spiritual direction than the one I am on.

I, more or less, hold my own in the discussions. I tell the gentleman about a book I have written, and I indicate to him that the book is such that one can read any chapter and that no other chapter in the book is presupposed by that chapter. I tell him that I have done things in this fashion so that readers don't necessarily have to follow the book in any linear fashion – say from beginning to end, but instead, they can jump from section to section as they like.

I give a copy of the book to him as a gift. He takes the proffered volume but has a skeptical look on his face even as he thanks me for my generosity.

A few days later we talk again. He says that he was surprised by the book – that it really is pretty good, and he adds that I was right ... one can pick the book up and start reading anywhere without needing any of the chapters that came before the one being read.

He inquires after Baba's health. I provide a brief synopsis of things. When I have completed my account, he gives me a recipe for an herbal remedy of some sort and tells me to pass it on to Baba ... that the concoction will help Baba with his condition.

On the day I am going to leave a Muslim professor and his wife – whom I had met earlier in the trip – want to speak with me about a personal matter. We arrange a time that is convenient for everyone.

When they arrive, the first five or ten minutes are spent in exchanging pleasantries of one sort or another. Eventually, they find their way to the topic that has brought them to the meeting.

They indicate that they have been trying to have a child for years. Unfortunately, nothing they try has worked. They are asking for my assistance.

I am rather nonplused by the request. I talk with them a little about the situation, but I am feeling fairly uncomfortable with what is going on.

I throw out some general ideas concerning the matter. I indicate that I will pray for them, and I let the matter drop by raising a few other issues.

When I return to the United States and tell Baba about this facet of the journey, he is somewhat miffed with me. He tells me that the couple was telling me that they wanted to take initiation with me and were doing so by the nature of the personal matters that they were entrusting to me ... something that the people in question – whom Baba knows -- are very reluctant to do. Their willingness to entrust me with such intimate information demonstrated that they had developed a certain nisbath or spiritual connectedness to me and were prepared to place their lives in my care.



July 1997 – State of Ecstasy

I continue to work on writing a number of books while I am staying with the couple in Ottawa. I am hoping that, maybe, somehow, God willing, these books will either lead to a publishing contract, or, perhaps, might even help bring about a teaching job of some kind ... possibly somewhere down the line.

Much of the rest of my time is filled with either meeting with my mureeds, doing things on behalf of the silsilah, observing both weekly fatihas and special occasion fatihas, holding a few talks here and there, participating in various social events planned by my hosts, or trying to help mureeds of Baba who are located in another city and who are in need of assistance while Baba, from time to time, is out of the country.

A friend of my hosts who lives in Ottawa and is not Muslim – a person that I have met and like -- has taken an interest in my writings. He would like to give me a small stipend to help my financial situation.

He explains that, actually, he does this sort of thing for a variety of writers and artists, as his circumstances permit. The money is much needed, and after consulting with Baba about it, I accept the money.

Baba has come for a visit and is staying with some of his mureeds who live in Ottawa. Within a few days of Baba's arrival, an anniversary of one of the elders in our silsilah is held at home of my hosts.

The occasion is attended by about twenty-five or thirty people. Most – but not all -- of these people have taken initiation with Baba or myself.

After fatiha, a group zikr is said. At a certain point, my host goes into what appears to be a condition of ecstasy. He is rolling around on the floor and crying out from time to time. The episode is similar to what had gone on at the Astana or spiritual center in Toronto a little over a year ago.

A neighbor of my host – someone who has not been initiated and, in some ways, keeps his distance from things 'Sufi – attends to my host and tries to make sure that my host doesn't hurt himself while rolling around on the floor. The fact that my host's neighbor is doing this is

almost as much of a surprise as is the fact that my host is rolling around on the floor.

However, the gentleman who is assisting my host seems to have been going through a spiritual realignment of sorts over the last several months. Initially, he had been invited over to such spiritual anniversaries as a sort of neighborly gesture, and based on different things that he had said at various junctures, he appeared to be rather skeptical of Baba.

Nonetheless, within a few sessions or visits, Baba seemed to have the man literally eating out of Baba's hand. Within a fairly short period of time, the man appeared to undergo a transition from skeptical orthodoxy to being somewhat open to – maybe even relatively enthusiastic in relation to -- the idea of the Sufi path (at least as it is presented by Baba).

I had witnessed this same sort of 'magic' on any number of occasions across many venues, situations, and gatherings. There appeared to be little doubt that Baba had incredible influence with respect to many of the people who 'happened' upon him in one way or another.

People became transfixed when Baba did 'his thing' ... whatever that 'thing' was. When questions were asked – Sufi, Islamic, or otherwise – Baba could go on for hours with a very engaging combination of stories, anecdotes, Quranic verses, sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and teachings of different saints ... sessions often went from 8 o'clock at night until early the next morning and were conducted in both 'Urdu and English. If people were forced by contingent life circumstances (such as sleeping and work) to leave those sessions, they did so only very reluctantly.

August 1997 – Border Crossings

Upon returning to my host's home in Ottawa, I begin to make preparations to move to the United States. I take what I can with me and head for the border.

I am worried about how things are going to play out at the border. I know a great deal depends on the personality of the officer who does the interviewing.

I remember one time, quite a few years ago, that due to a postal strike in Canada, a Muslim friend of mine and I had gone down to the States to mail a newsletter our community organization had published. We tried to cross at one border point, and, although I was free to proceed, my friend was turned back because the guy who interviewed him didn't like him and this was clear during the interrogation.

We went 20 miles or so down the road and tried at another border crossing point. This second time was successful.

Quite vividly, I also recall another occasion, when I am going to visit Baba, and, in the process, I am bringing some books down that Baba has left at the Astana. I am stopped at the border, asked a few questions, told to park the car, and when I am parked, they begin to search the vehicle.

In the trunk, they find books on Islam in English and quite a few that are written in 'Urdu. The authorities want to know what this is all about.

I tell them the truth. They ask me if I have a phone number for them to call in order to verify my story, and I, with some trepidation, give them Baba's number.

My worry about doing this is that Baba doesn't want his number being given out to strangers. However, under the circumstances, I don't know what else to do.

The officer makes the call, and, fortunately, Baba is there to receive it. The officer asks a few questions, including some that have to do with what I look like.

Soon, thereafter, I am permitted to proceed on to my destination. I don't know if my being stopped, searched, and detained is random or

has to do with unknown factors, of one kind or another, which reflect changing world events or are related to tips that the border officials receive on a fairly regular basis.

Once I get to Baba's, we laugh about the situation. Nevertheless, it isn't really a laughing matter – especially when one is the object of investigation and one is uncertain about the outcome.

With respect to my present attempt to cross the border, when I reach the border, the officer to whom I am assigned takes a look at all the stuff piled up in the back seat of the car and asks me what I am up to. I tell her.

She runs me through things two or three times, coming at the main issue from several different directions. Apparently, she is trying to see if my story changes, which it doesn't.

It is clear that she is intrigued by all the stuff in the car. She inspects the material a little, looks in the trunk, and, then, tells me to move on, which I do with considerable relief.

March 1998 – Survival Mode

For a number of months now, I have been sleeping on one of the office floors at a friend's place of work. She has been uncomfortable with my driving an old car so many miles (between her town and Baba's home), late at night, during the wintertime.

Long before anyone arrives for work, I have departed. I set my alarm clock for a relatively early hour, wash up, say prayers, and leave.

There is a bathroom within the office space. This makes things much easier.

Often times, I go to the local library where I have a card and spend much of the day reading. Sometimes I arrive at the library too early, and I have to wait for it to open.

One day, after I leave the office, I go to the library. It is both too early, and, as well, there is a heavy sleet that is falling and has been doing so for several hours.

I am tired and don't want to drive around in such inclement weather while I wait for the library to open. I park in the lot near the library and drift off to sleep for a few moments.

I awaken to a tap on the driver's side of the car. A police officer is staring at me through the partially frosted glass.

He motions for me to step out of the car. As I do so, I notice three cruisers encircling my vehicle.

The officer begins peppering me with questions. Who am I? What am I doing here? He runs through the usual set of who, what, why, where, when, and how queries.

I answer the questions as best I can. After five minutes, or so, of interrogation, the contingent of police officers decide -- despite my inability to remember my phone number in Canada -- that I am not a threat to the community and go about their business elsewhere.

The experience is disconcerting. I know the officers are only doing their job, and, apparently, someone thought the car with the Canadian license plates was suspicious, or the like, but, nevertheless, I realize, once again, how vulnerable my situation is.

Later, I tell my friend -- on whose office floor I have been sleeping -- about what happened. She informs me there has been some sort of

problem in the community involving drugs and alleged drug dealers from Canada.

The truth of the matter is that I have been homeless for over a year. I was able to spend about five or six months with a couple in Ottawa, and I was fortunate to have such a place to go to because I had run out of money and options. No matter what I try with respect to finding a job, I seem to be coming up empty.

For a time -- after leaving Ottawa -- I couch-surfed at Baba's place. However, this is just a euphemistic way of saying that I didn't have a home of my own to which I could return.

Now, I have been downgraded from a couch to a floor in my friend's office ... sort of reminiscent of the time when I was homeless for a few days prior to getting my doctorate and was hiding away in the offices of my university department over Christmas holidays. I am lucky that I have an office floor on which to sleep ... it beats a dumpster or sleeping under a bridge or in the doorways of a business as 'the man with two suitcases' used to do in Canada ... but a rose by any other name still spells homelessness to me ... even if, in a way, my form of homelessness is sort of upscale relative to other forms of homelessness.

July 1998

I am going for my driver's test today at a local state motor vehicles center in New Jersey. My friend has told me all kinds of horror stories about how tough and abrasive some of the inspectors are who work there.

I have been driving in Canada for many years, but I really don't like test situations. I am nervous about the upcoming exam for a New Jersey motor vehicle license.

While waiting in line for my driving exam, a man with a Pith helmet approaches my car, opens the door, gets in, and asks to see my application papers. He introduces himself to me as my examiner.

He asks a few questions and notes that I am from Canada. He says that as long as I don't hit anyone or anything, he will pass me.

He tells me to proceed. The exam is held in a specially constructed area away from real traffic.

He asks me to do some simple maneuvers. On one sign, I fail to come to complete stop ... I do a sort of running stop, and he says that we better try that again.

We do it a second time, and he is watching out the window at the ground very carefully. This time, the stop meets with his approval.

We go to the parallel parking area, which consists of a set of sticks set up as cars. I do a terrible job, and I tell him that I would like to try it again. He says, 'no' it was okay, and tells me to proceed.

We work our way back to the place from which we began. I am sure I have failed the exam.

When we come to a final stop, he congratulates me. Apparently, I didn't hit any people or things, and, so, he seems to feel obligated to keep the promise that he gave me at the beginning of the exam.

A business friend of the woman whose office floor I am sleeping on has a brother who, every year, puts on a symposium at one of his palatial houses. The symposia all involve Islamic themes of one kind or another.

This year, the man -- who, somehow, has heard about me -- wants me to speak on tasawwuf, or the Sufi path. There also will be another individual -- a professor from a nearby university -- who will speak on bio-ethics and Islam.

I give my talk, and it seems to go well. There is a lively question and answer period following the talk.

After the talk and discussion end for the evening, I am walking away, in search of my ride 'home'. The man who has organized the program rushes up to me, thanks me for my participation, and sticks something in my hand.

I try to protest, suspecting that he has given me a check of some kind, and I indicate that I did not expect any money in exchange for my talk. He is deaf to my protests and insists that I take the gift, and, as he does, excuses himself and hurries away.

Later, when there is light to see, I look at the check. It is for \$500.

I thank Allah. I am especially grateful because I am almost out of funds.

I have heard about a bookstore in lower Manhattan that sells Sufi books. I call the bookstore and ask for directions.

I put together a package of some of the books that I have written and decide to go on an adventure to New York and see if the store might be interested in selling some of my books. I could have broached the subject on the phone, but I figure it might be harder for them to turn me down in person.

I somehow manage to navigate the multifaceted New York City subway system and get off at West Broadway. Eventually, I find the bookstore, which is not too far away from the World Trade Center complex.

The manager of the bookstore is away on business. I talk with one of the clerks and indicate that I am prepared to leave a couple of copies of the books for the manager to inspect upon her return. If she likes them, she could either sell the copies that I am leaving, or I could send some new copies via mail.

I would like to visit the World Trade Center, but I am a little concerned about catching my bus back home. So, caution rules, and I just retrace my journey to the Port Authority where my bus back to New Jersey awaits me.

A few days later, I receive a call from the bookstore manager. She has paged through the books and likes what she is reading. She orders some books from me, and she indicates that she will send me a check when she receives the material.

Some Spiritual Considerations

There is a gathering, of sorts, at Baba's house. My former host from Ottawa is there as well as a number of other individuals.

Both my friend from Ottawa and I are given a written version of something that had been proclaimed nearly two years earlier. It is the Khilafat Nama (proclamation concerning spiritual authority).

In my case, the document reads as follows:

"In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

This letter of authority is issued in favor of Anab Azghari, Chishti, Qadri, Nizami, Sabri, to identify him as a Khalifa of silsila-e-Qaderia, Chishtia, Azghari.

The appointment was proclaimed at an auspicious assembly in Ajmer Sharif, Old Mehboob Manzil Dargah Gharib Nawaz on the 6th of Rajab, 18th November, Monday 1996.

May Allah in His Mercy guide him to do his duty without expecting worldly gains.

Baba

After giving us our respective documents, Baba indicates that the conferring of this Khilafat is irrevocable. No matter what happens in the future, the authority will never be withdrawn.

There is a low-lying light fixture hanging from the ceiling in the room where the documents have been given to us. My friend from Ottawa is much shorter than me, so, he is able to elude the dangling fixture without any problems.

However, in my preoccupation over what has transpired, I manage to engage the light with my head two or three times. I would like to be able to say that I was in a state of ecstasy when I kept banging my head, but, unfortunately, it was just my normal, klutzy self.

A few issues have arisen in conjunction with the appropriate etiquette to observe in conjunction with other shaykhs. I receive the following e-mail from Baba concerning those matters.

12 Sep 1999 18:27:39-0700 (e-mail)

Anab my son,

Assalamo alaikum. ALHAMDO LILLAH, what is true is being proven, by these incidents.

AL HAQ, is always victorious! The purity and sincerity of Baba Anab Shah is shining bright, known as the "Guiding Star" with arms outstretched to the downtrodden souls looking upwards in hope.

Now is the right time to inform you, Oh rare jewel of the hidden Treasure! (KANZAN MAKHFI) certain truths regarding human psychology that play an important role among many who even though have been given permission to lead their respective groups but are still unsure of their Nisbath. If they come to you, even slightly revealing their spiritual weakness, they are in fact knowingly or unknowingly being unmasked by ALLAH for you to realize, and to help.

How does that happen? If you remember, I had explained this some time ago about the difference between a normal Shaikh who has not been granted FATAH, in Roohaniath, (Spirituality) and a FAQEER. Today, meaning these times, there are only very few such Silsilahs belonging to the FAQEERI family. These are the ones about whom Rasool ALLAH (Peace be upon him) had said that they are some who are hidden in his spiritual cloak. INSHA ALLAH, from time to time you may have the pleasure of meeting them, and they in turn shall have the pleasure of meeting you. Their attitude will be very different.

You do remember the Shaikh we met in Toronto, the one whose residence we went to. He first came to the 'Urs of the Shaikh of my Shaikh. That is when we met him.

Later we invited him, to the temporary Astana, where he proclaimed in front of all his muredeen that after his Shaikh, this is the first time he loved anyone with such intensity, meaning me. Then you remember him saying to you, that he does not differentiate between his muredeen and mine.

Well, he is one of those Faqeers, (Fuqara) who are hidden under THE CLOAK. So you see, his love for us from the start is an example of the love these CLOAKED ONES have for each other, and whenever you come across them, you will feel that Divine love flowing from their

hearts. They will love you at first sight, and you will observe them to be very sure of themselves.

Other than them, my son, most that you have come across and will in future, are the ones who may be sincere in their quest and are definitely known as Shaikhs. They also have a role to play. But they are the ones I spoke of, at first, regarding whom you need not worry about ADAB (spiritual etiquette). With such Shaikhs you are required to be polite, yet fully aware of the fact that it is they who need you, and therefore, you have the responsibility towards them too.

Yes, it is a suitable thing to do, that wives should be advised to take permission from their husbands if they want to get any benefits from you, or maybe since they are not sure of their Nisbath, ALLAH may in HIS MERCY attract them to you spiritually. So, do not deny them their lot. Maybe their portion will be bestowed through you. Whenever you meet them, open out your love and concern for their soul's cry. And whenever you meet such Shaikhs who are not of the family of the CLOAKED ONES be very loving to them yet make no mistake in letting them know for sure, your high rank, through your love for mankind, and through your conviction in speech. It is now the right time for you to behave in their company as an elder would in company of children.

I am in no way advocating for pretense, rudeness, or conceit. I am advocating for truth. And MASHA ALLAH you know for certain that we have placed you above most of them. None of them are your equal.

Yes, when you meet the CLOAKED ONES, it is different, because there is no big or small in them. They are all one. But my son, very rarely you will come across them. They are so few.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA

Due to several web pages I put together, I have been contacted by a variety of people from different parts of the world. The following are my responses to an interview conducted via e-mail by a university student from England.

1. How did you become a Sufi Muslim?

There is a long answer and a short answer to this question. I will give the shortened version.

I was working in Canada and had become interested in exploring various mystical traditions. I did a great deal of reading during this period -- including works dealing with Carlos Castaneda, Buddhism, Yoga, Taoism, Christian mysticism, the Kabbalah, trans-personal psychology, the Sufi path, as well as material on, and by, Gurdjieff.

My heart was drawn to various aspects of all of the foregoing traditions. However, the first practical taste came with a Gurdjieff group.

Eventually, I discovered that many of the original teachers of Gurdjieff were Sufi masters who also are known as -- depending on geographical location and linguistic influences - pirs, shaykhs or murshids. Consequently, I began to look at the Sufi path more closely and read a great deal in this area.

Through a somewhat circuitous route, I, finally, was introduced to a professor who taught at a local university. This individual also was a Sufi teacher or shaykh from the Chishti Order of tasawwuf (path of mystical science -- a term that is used by the mystics of Islam rather than the term "Sufism" since Tasawwuf is not an "ism" like capitalism, socialism, communism, and so on that are purely conceptual systems and theories).

Early on in my research, I believed that mysticism was one thing and spiritual traditions like Islam were something entirely different. Eventually, I came to understand that the esoteric or inner aspect of a spiritual tradition was intimately linked with the exoteric or outer form of a given tradition.

More specifically, I learned from the aforementioned Sufi shaykh that one could not be a true Sufi without being a Muslim. Indeed, the mystical dimension is at the heart of Islam. So, I became Muslim by stepping onto the Sufi path and learning that one could not do the latter without also attending to the requirements and obligations of being Muslim.

However, there was never any pressure on me to become Muslim, and I was permitted to attend all of the Sufi gatherings that were arranged by the Sufi guide, as well as to participate in a variety of practices – especially zikr or a form of spiritual remembrance that involves repeating certain Names of God or repeating certain verses from the Qur’an. In this way I was permitted to come to my understanding of the relationship between the exoteric and the esoteric dimensions of Islam at my own pace.

2. How do you give worship to Allah?

There are many different ways to offer worship to Allah. Indeed, the basic pillars of Islam [namely, (1) the Shahadah or attestation of faith, (2) daily obligatory prayers, (3) Ramazan -- the month of fasting, (4) zakat -- the giving of charity, and (5) the Hajj or pilgrimage) are all different ways of worshiping Allah. In addition, there is zikr or remembrance (chanting), contemplation, meditation, sacred turning, recitation of the Qur'an, and Sama or audition (listening to sacred music). In fact, every act that is done with the intention of remembering, serving, thanking, loving, singing the praises of, and submitting oneself to Allah is an act of worship.

3.) Which festivals are important to you?

The two ‘Eids (‘Eid al-fitra – this occurs after the completion of the month of fasting, and ‘Eid al-adha -- observed during the period of Hajj by Muslims all over the world) are, of course, very important. The birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) -- Milad an-Nabi -- that is observed around the 12th of Rabi Awwal (and

throughout this auspicious month) is another celebration of importance.

In addition, there is the 10th of Muharram a date that commemorates, among other things, the martyrdom of Hazrat Hussein (may Allah be pleased with him), the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), along with the martyrdom of those who fell with Hazrat Hussein (may Allah be pleased with him and his associates) at Karbala.

Another date of importance is the 21st of Ramadan that marks the anniversary of Hazrat Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) who was the son-in-law of the Prophet. Hazrat 'Ali also was the father of Hazrat Hussein (may Allah be pleased with him).

The night of power (said to be an odd numbered night between the 20th and 30th of Ramazan and celebrated by many on the 27th of that month) -- when the Qur'an was initially revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him) through the agency of the archangel Gabriel (peace be on him) -- is another important date of observance. The 27th of Rajab -- commemorating the Prophet's night journey to Jerusalem and, then, his ascension through the seven heavens to the Lote tree and beyond -- is also important.

Finally, there are a number of occasions during the year that mark the passing away of spiritual personalities important to various silsilahs (chains of spiritual lineage) of the Sufi way. There are hundreds of these dates that populate the calendar. In fact, one might be hard-pressed to discover even one day in which a commemoration of the passing away of one special friend of Allah, or another, isn't observed through festivals of celebration in some part or parts of the world.

The date of passing away from this world marks the transition to the real life of the world to come. Therefore, among the Folk of the Way (the Sufi path) this time of passing away is an occasion of joy and happiness since it marks the time of meeting with one's Lord -- the One to whom these people have, by the Grace of God, dedicated their whole lives in seeking and serving.

4.) How do you view the Hajj and have you ever been to Mecca on pilgrimage?

I am not exactly sure what you mean by the first part of this question. The Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam, and this rite is incumbent on every adult Muslim at least once in one's life if a person is financially and physically able to make the journey.

The Hajj offers an opportunity to participate in observances marking, and drawn from, important spiritual events in the lives of, among others, Prophets Adam, Ibrahim, and Ishmail (may Allah's peace be upon them all). It is an opportunity to seek forgiveness from God for one's transgressions against Divinity, others, and oneself. It is an opportunity for spiritual awakening, purification and re-commitment.

By the Grace of God, I had the good fortune of going on Hajj approximately ten years ago. It is a set of experiences that I treasure and remember with fondness, tears and gratitude.

The time spent in Mecca is only one part of the Hajj. One also spends time in Mina, the plains of Arafah, and Muzdalifah that are outside of Mecca. In addition, no Hajj is really complete without visiting the mosque of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in Medina.

5.) As a Sufi, how do you view Sunni and Shi'a Muslims methods of worship and beliefs?

The Sunni and Shi'a approaches to Islam represent different people's understanding of what is being taught through the Qur'an and the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). There are different schools of thought within the Sunni tradition, just as there are different schools of thought within the Shi'a tradition.

On some issues, these different schools of thought agree. On some issues, they differ.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has said that there are 71 sects among the Jews, and only one of these ways is correct. He also said

that among the Christians, there are 72 sects, yet only one of these paths is correct. Finally, among Muslims, there are 73 sects, yet only one of them is correct.

People of tasawwuf (i.e., the Sufi path) are committed to finding the Truth of Being. Theological debates do not interest them -- only realization of the Truth interests them.

The more time one spends in debates with others or pointing fingers at others, the less time there is to spend on struggling toward self-realization of the Truth that is being manifested through each of us according to our individual capacities.

6.) How do you feel Sufism is viewed by Sunni and Shi'a Muslims?

One really can't make a generalization in responding to this question. There are some people from a Sunni background who disapprove of what they believe the Sufi tradition entails. On the other hand, there are some individuals from a Sunni orientation who are in empathy with what they believe the teachings of the Sufi path to be. The same split of opinion can be found among people of the Shi'a community.

However, many of these people -- irrespective of whether they dislike, or are attracted to, the Sufi path -- do not have any real understanding of what the Sufi path is about. Therefore, ultimately, what people from these respective communities feel or think about the Sufi path (whether positive or negative) doesn't really matter.

The Sufi path is what it is. If it is a valid way to knowing God, then those who view it in a negative light are irrelevant. If it is an invalid way for knowing God, then those who view this path in a positive light are also irrelevant. In short, what matters is the Truth of things, and not people's opinions about this Truth.

Truth is not a function of our likes and dislikes, theories, theologies or feelings. An individual must learn how to permit the Truth to shape, color, permeate and determine her, his or their understanding. Everything else is but speculation -- regardless of whether, or not, this is positive or negative speculation.

7.) Do you believe that Sunni, Shi'a and Sufi Muslims are seen equally in the eyes of Allah?

What I believe really has nothing to do with how Allah sees individuals from the Sunni and Shi'a communities. We all are sinners in one way or another. We all make mistakes in one way or another. We all misunderstand in one way or another. We all see, hear, think, and act through a set of veils known collectively as ignorance.

God loves all of creation. Unfortunately, we veil ourselves from this love by our biases, emotions, blindness, opinions, presumptions, assumptions, speculations, judgments, and theological dogmas.

The Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) teach us to be tolerant, loving, forbearing, forgiving, patient, empathetic, helpful, generous, courteous, honest, thoughtful, respectful, just, and kind in our dealings with other people -- whether these others are Sunni or Shi'a, Muslim or non-Muslim. If one busies oneself with what one has been counseled to do, one will have no time to wonder how God sees the differences between Sunni and Shi'a, and one will know that however God sees these respective groups, the individuals therein will be treated with fairness, justice, and mercy and that no wrong will be done to any of them by God.

8.) What do you believe will happen to you after death?

The vast majority of us will face a Day of Judgment in which we will be held accountable for our deeds and misdeeds. There will be some (a relatively small group) who will face no Day of Judgment and be admitted directly into a felicitous, joyous, intimate and eternal state of being brought near to God. God alone will decide who will be in which group.

For those of us who will face a Day of Judgment, God will not be our judge on that Day. Rather, our own deeds, intentions, and motivations will judge us. As it indicates in the Qur'an, our hands and feet will testify against us, and as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be

upon him) intimates, the *niyat* or intention of our hearts in relation to any given act will also testify against us.

As a result of this judgment, some people will enter into one or another level of hell that marks separation and distance from awareness of God's Presence. For some, this stay will be eternal, while for others, the stay will mark a period of purification from which they eventually will emerge and be permitted entrance into a realm of paradise appropriate for them.

For still others, one or another level of paradise will be given as a reward for the good works that have been manifested through them. These rewards are described in both the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet as consisting of all manner of desirable experiences.

The People of *tasawwuf*, however, are concerned with neither heaven nor hell, but only with the Beloved. For them, to do things out of desire for heaven or fear of hell is to prostitute the true nature of Love such that God is seen as merely a means to an end other than God (i.e., attaining heaven or avoiding hell), rather than the End ... and Means, in and of Itself, which is independent of all other considerations of reward or punishment.

9.) What views do you feel to be uniquely Sufi?

There are many, many things that could be said here. Perhaps, one of the most important of these is the following -- the purpose of life is neither a matter of attaining heaven nor avoiding hell ... the purpose of life is to realize one's essential spiritual identity and the unique spiritual capacity associated with this identity that each of us has been gifted in order to be able to bear loving, reverential, and constant witnessing to the fact there is nothing in existence but Divinity.

10.) What practices do you feel to be uniquely Sufi?

Practices like *zikr*, contemplation, mediation and *Sama'* (audition, or listening to sacred music) are often associated with the Folk of the path. In point of fact, however, many people who have not been

initiated onto the Sufi path participate in these practices -- although they might do so in their own fashion and not in accordance with the teachings of the Sufi shaykhs concerning the proper observance of these practices. Consequently, one cannot necessarily treat these practices as, necessarily, being uniquely identified with the Sufi path.

One might come closer to a better answer to your question if one were to mention the "practices" of fana and baqa. In one sense, these two terms do not so much refer to practices in the usually accepted senses of this term, as they are conditions of Being. On the other hand, every practice is, in reality, a condition of Being of one kind or another, so whether or not one refers to fana and baqa as practices depends on one's point of view.

Roughly speaking -- very roughly -- fana is being immersed in Divine Presence while being absent from self. Baqa is being present to the Self as manifested Divinity.

Those who are preoccupied with exoteric matters are, generally speaking, uninterested in pursuing either fana or baqa. Therefore, such individuals tend to pursue practices that are unlikely to carry them -- although God knows best -- in the direction of either fana or baqa.

The Folk of tasawwuf, on the other hand, undertake a journey that takes them, God willing, to nowhere but the practice of fana and baqa. These stations, states, or conditions of Being are the culmination of all other practices that they might pursue.

11.) To what extent does the Qur'an influence your moral judgments and that other authorities would you seek if your situation was not covered by the Qur'an?

The two primary sources of guidance are the Qur'an and the Sunnah (actions/conduct) of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). But, there are many different ways of, if you will, hermeneutically engaging these primary sources ... which is why different schools of jurisprudence, theology, philosophy and so on, have arisen over time in various places within the Muslim world.

The Folk of the path do not believe in hermeneutics or theories of interpretation or understanding. Instead, they recommend direct tasting, drinking and immersion in the Reality of Being.

Do not read the Book. Become the Book ... according to one's capacity to do so.

Do not read about the Sunnah (actions) of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Become the Sunnah of the Prophet, according to one's capacity to do so.

Do not try to grasp the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet with just one's mind. Grasp this guidance also with one's heart, sirr, ruh, kafi and aqfah -- the spiritual potentials that Allah has placed in us and through which one can come to a direct knowing of Divine guidance and the sunnah of the Prophet.

12.) To what extent do you feel the Hadith [sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)] is an important guide in your life?

The Prophet did not tell people to follow his hadith. People were encouraged to follow his Sunnah ... his mode of conduct. At best, one examines the hadith (what he said) in order to try to gain an understanding of, or insight into, what appropriate Sunnah (conduct) might be in different circumstances. On the other hand, one also might keep in mind that there are a number of reports coming from a variety of sources among the Companions of the Prophet indicating that the Prophet, himself, ordered that anyone keeping collections of his sayings should destroy those collections, and, consequently, pouring through the hadiths might not be the most appropriate way of trying to gain insight into the sunnah or conduct of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)

To properly understand any given Sunnah, one must try to gain insight into the niyat of the Prophet in relation to such Sunnah. One can never do this on one's own. One needs the help of God to properly accomplish such a task.

The Qur'an asks a question of the believers -- 'Shall I tell you who are the greatest losers in their works?' And, then, God gives the answer

-- 'those whose works go astray in the present world while they believe they are doing good deeds.'

There are many people who believe they understand the niyat of the Prophet concerning his Sunnah. Those who believe this and who have arrived at this understanding through their own individual efforts invariably will be wrong. Only those who are rightly guided will come to know something (according to their capacity to do so) of the niyat of the Prophet concerning the meaning of his Sunnah.

Furthermore, the Sunnah of the Prophet cannot be taken in piecemeal fashion and, therefore, out of their proper context. Like the verses of the Qur'an, the meaning of any given Sunnah (ayat in the case of the Qur'an) can best be understood in the light of other Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Just as the Qur'an must, ultimately, be taken as a whole, so, too, must the Sunnah of the Prophet, and any attempt to consider things in isolation from that whole is doomed to failure and misunderstanding.

13.) Which sins do you regard as most wrong and what repercussions do you believe befall those who commit such sins?

As Ra'bia of Basra said to a fellow Sufi who was quite taken with his own sense of spirituality -- "Thy existence is a sin with which none other can compare." The existence being referred to here is that of the unrealized servant of God ...the one who believes that he or she has an existence that is independent of, and apart from, God.

All sins are committed in this condition of ignorance. For, only through the belief that we are separated from God do we permit ourselves to be seduced by our lower selves, or Iblis or dunya (the realm of entanglements with the world by virtue of our desires).

God, alone, knows what will happen to us for the transgressions we commit. God is most merciful and forgiving and is ready to forgive all sins -- except the sin of shirk that occurs when a person dies in a state of associating partners with God -- and this includes associating ourselves as real entities apart from Divinity ... for we have no such independent existence, and it is only our inclination to shirk that supposes otherwise.

14.) What difficulties do you find, if any, in dealing with a non-Muslim society as a Muslim?

To be frank with you, I have encountered far more difficulties living with Muslims who believe prepared to commit all manner of injustice and hypocrisy against both Muslims and non-Muslims in direct contradiction to the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Neither the Qur'an nor the Prophet teach us to be intolerant, unjust, or to be full of hate, prejudice, bias, meanness, arrogance, insensitivity, cruelty, and so on. Yet, unfortunately, time and again, my experience has been that all too many Muslims appear to believe otherwise.

There is a reason why the condition of the Muslim world is like it is. Unbelievers are merely the agents being used by God to construct the mirror of conditions that reflect the sad condition of all too many elements of the Muslim community.

There are many good people in the Muslim ummah or community. But, to borrow from the New Testament, why do we complain about the mote in the eye of our non-Muslim brothers and sisters, while we refuse to address the beam in our own collective eye?

15.) How do you view non-Muslim's status spiritually and what do you think awaits them after death?

I pray for the spiritual redemption of all who go astray -- whether they are non-Muslims, Muslims, or me. All of our affairs are in the hands of God's Mercy, and only God knows what will happen with those who transgress against their own essential selves.

No one can take anything for granted. Even the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) indicated that he would not achieve Paradise except through the Mercy of God, and he was a man without sin in his life -- so what can be said of the rest of us? What right do any of us have to look with presumption and contempt on the sins of

others when we have so many of our own misdeeds staring us in the face?

16.) How do you regard the status of women in Sufism and in the Islamic world as a whole?

If you are asking me whether I believe women are being treated with equity and justice in the Muslim world considered as a whole, then I would have to say that their status is abysmal. If you are asking me what the spiritual potential of women is, then, one must acknowledge the teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet that women have a capacity for self-realization just as men do, and that each woman has a unique capacity to give expression to that essential Self, just as each man does.

Some people, both men and women, have been given greater spiritual capacity than have some other men and women. However, some people of lesser spiritual capacity -- both men and women -- might achieve far more of their potential, by the Grace of God than do some people of greater spiritual capacity -- both men and women. Whatever one's capacity might be, the goal should be to realize that capacity for it is through such realization that we are best able to worship God that, as the Qur'an points out, is the reason why man and jinn have been created.

The purpose of the Sufi path is to help each individual realize his or her spiritual potential -- both in terms of essential identity, as well as in terms of spiritual capacity. It has been my experience that all legitimate Sufi shaykhs are engaged in equitably helping individuals -- whether women or men -- to achieve life's purpose. At the same time, some of those who have stepped onto the Sufi path and who have not, yet, realized the purpose of that path might treat others -- those on and off the path -- with injustice, and this includes women.

Being on the Sufi path is not a guarantee of freedom from misogyny. People step onto the path with a great deal of emotional, cultural, and ideological baggage, and it is the task of the shaykh to, through the help of God, to encourage people to move toward the light of spiritual freedom and away from the darkness of oppression -- both of oneself and others.

The individual who oppresses another is himself, or herself, or themselves, oppressed. One must get to the root of this self-oppression if one is to have any hope of getting a person to move away from the oppression of others.

17.) To what extent do you view Allah as personally approachable?

We are told in the Qur'an that God is closer to us than our own ventricular vein. I don't think you can get any more personally approachable than this.

Our problem, however, is that we are blind to the presence of Divinity within us. God is quite prepared to have a personal, intimate relationship with us, but it is we who keep refusing the invitation.

However, to say that Allah is personally approachable does not mean we can circumscribe or exhaust God. There are dimensions of Divinity that are entirely independent of, and transcendent to, creation.

We can know God personally to precisely the extent that God has given us the capacity to do this. Yet, just as there are aspects of other people -- even those with whom we are very close and intimate -- which will never be known by us, so too, there are dimensions of Divinity that are off-limits to humanity ... even the Prophets. Nevertheless, the relationship for which we have been especially created is that of a deep, intense, abiding and personal love between the seeker and the sought.

18.) What do you feel to be the goal of the human spirit?

I feel I have answered this in a previous response -- namely, to realize our essential spiritual identity and unique capacity for manifesting that identity through loving worship of, and servitude to, God.

19.) Would you mind if, at a later time, I asked some additional questions regarding your answers to the foregoing questions?

You can ask, but I can't promise the responses will be posted as quickly as you might like. I do whatever I can as I am able to do it.

With warmest regards,

Anab



September 1999 – Car Problems

On the way back to Baba's house from New Jersey, I begin to experience car problems. I am having trouble putting the Sufi-mobile into certain gears.

Somehow, by the Grace of Allah, I am able to nurse the car through the 60-mile journey, but as soon as I get off the freeway, the car begins giving me a lot of grief.

Little by little, I edge toward Baba's house. There is a short, rising driveway near to Baba's house. I pull into the neighbor's driveway with the intention of backing into a parking space on the opposite side of the street that is in front of Baba's house.

As I pull toward the top of the neighbor's driveway, the car begins to die and reverse is not working. I use the incline of the driveway to coast back down the hill and across the street to the parking space, and just as I come to a stop, the car dies completely.

I consider myself very fortunate to have been able to get to Baba's house. The car could have died anywhere along the 60 mile journey, but, I was able to get where I needed to go before the car expired ... now, if I can only get to where I need to go spiritually before I expire.

Someone who lives in Baba's house has informed me that the local auto mechanic at the place where the car has been towed indicates the Sufi-mobile is not good for much of anything but the junk heap. Someone has kindly has offered to lend me a van to tide us over while I am without my own vehicle.

Supposedly, with the exception of a problem with the radiator, the van is in pretty good shape. As long as I take it easy with the vehicle and carry around plenty of water to keep the radiator cool and full, I should be all right.

Generally speaking, I drive the van only locally, and I keep a close watch on the radiator situation. However, something comes up, and I must travel from New Jersey to New York in order to see Baba.

When I leave New Jersey, it is nighttime. I believe I have enough water to make the trip if I stop here and there and add water to the

radiator from time to time. However, because of weather conditions, I find I am using water at a faster rate than originally anticipated.

I stop several times on the side of the Interstate. Each time I do so, it is cold, there is no light near where I have stopped, and the trailer trucks going by are both coming close to the van, as well as blowing me about, but, by the Grace of God, I manage to add sufficient water each time to continue on with the journey.

Finally, I run out of water, the temperature gauge is rising, and I am on the Interstate looking for the first turn-off that comes along. The situation is becoming desperate, when, finally, an exit appears that I take.

But, now, the trick is to find a filling station in time. I have no idea where I am or in which direction to go, and, so, I arbitrarily choose a particular street.

The van's radiator is about to boil over. Suddenly, a filling station looms on the next corner.

I drive in, stop the van, turn the car off, and very carefully, first raise the hood, and, then, with some rags, knock the radiator cap off and jump back. Mount Vesuvius erupts as I do this.

I let the system cool down, add some water, and fill up my various jugs and containers with a reserve water supply. Then, I proceed on with my trip to Baba's, thanking God that I have been able to get off the Interstate and find a filling station before the radiator blew, while thinking that, once again, things have been pushed right to the limit.

November 1999 – Voices in the Dark

I have always been fairly good at the game of *Trivial Pursuit* ... a reflection of my capacity to pick-up and retain relatively useless information as I make my way through life. In fact, I don't remember ever losing a contest in relation to the game of *Trivial Pursuit*. I don't play the game anymore, but there was a period of several months a few decades ago when I took on any and all comers among my family, friends and acquaintances – until we all got sick of it.

I am returning to Bangor, Maine by bus. Nighttime has descended, and there is a group of high school and elementary teachers on the bus who are coming back from some conference in one of the cities that the bus has passed through on its journey east. They are playing a sort of modified game of *Trivial Pursuit* to while away the time in an entertaining fashion.

The bus is dark. The mistress of ceremonies who is standing in the aisle and conducting the game is asking the questions, and, then, the participants – who seem to number about ten, or so, individuals -- are responding when they think they have the answer.

Sometimes they are right. Sometimes they are wrong.

A few questions are asked to which none of the participants seem to know the answer. The person who is sitting next to me is a participant in the game, so I whisper the answers to her and she is hesitant at first but, eventually, blurts out some of what I am saying ... answers that turn out to be correct.

When there is a pause of unknowing in relation to future questions, I continue to whisper suggested answers to her. She passes these suggestions along, and most of the time, the answers are correct.

Finally, she encourages me to just offer up my suggestions on my own. I do this whenever there seems to be a bit of trouble among the group of participants in relation to coming up with the right answer. Most of the time, the answers I offer are correct.

Increasingly comments by the participants and the mistress of ceremonies are made that wonder about the identity of the 'ringer' who has become an interloper into their game. Since the bus is dark and it is nighttime, I enjoy the anonymity of tossing out answers into the darkness along with the mystery that surrounds the whole affair.

Fifteen, or so, minutes later, the game ends as the majority of the participants disembark from the bus. The journey continues on in silence.

Real shaykhs are like fellow passengers in the bus ride called life. They tend to ride along in a condition of anonymity and, when appropriate, they offer up various responses that help illuminate the darkness that tends to envelop the people on the journey.

My trivial offerings on my bus trip back to Bangor were about unimportant issues. Authentic shaykhs have something of essential importance to relate to whoever is willing to listen with sincerity to what those spiritual guides have to offer, but, sometimes, a voice speaks out in the darkness of the journey, and one can't be sure if such a source can, or cannot, be trusted.

Recovering From Spiritual Abuse

I have decided to discontinue my journal. In thinking back over the last twenty-some years, a question came to me. What if someone were to come to me with incontrovertible proof that everything Baba had done was somehow spiritually proper?

I must confess that such an individual would have a steep incline to climb and a very heavy load to carry with respect to pulling me over the top on this possibility. This is because I don't believe that God encourages the servants of Divinity to: Lie on a regular basis, spiritually exploit those whom one is supposed to be protecting and caring for, or to betray one's alleged friends.

My foregoing caveat notwithstanding, in one sense what has occurred with respect to Baba is all spiritually proper because it is all part of the Divine plan. We might not understand the nature of that plan, and we might howl in protest at the pain that we experience as we are processed through that plan, but I have faith – and I am not asking anyone else to accept this perspective – that there is a good purpose inherent in the Divine plan.

God might play rough at times. Nevertheless, Divinity is not malicious even as God permits people to be so.

Baba was acting in accordance with his role in the Divine Passion play, just as Iblis or Satan stays within character in that same Passion play. And, the fact of the matter is that I have learned a great deal through my association with Baba even if the nature of that association was, for many years, not what I initially considered it to be.

After I discovered the nature of Baba's many betrayals, I learned even more about: Life, other people, the Sufi path, and myself. So, in a sense, I am grateful to Baba that he has been the locus of manifestation through which so many opportunities for change and learning came into my life.

If not for him, I might not be the person I have become ... and I feel I have become a better person than I was prior to Baba. However, such growth is in spite of Baba and not because of him.

Divinity was the One Who took me by the hand and helped me become free from all of Baba's tricks, manipulations, exploitations, re-framings, and betrayals. However, part of the Sufi approach to adab is

that one should always acknowledge the role of the one through whom God's Grace arrives at one's doorstep ... no matter how problematic the nature of that locus of manifestation might be.

I also realize that God is the real Teacher and that God is the one who has been using Baba's locus of manifestation to teach me about life and myself. God is the One toward Whom the real praise should be directed, whereas Baba was merely a locus of manifestation who colored, shaped, and flavored the nature of the teaching that was coming my way.

I have implicit trust in God that the right thing will always be done with respect to me. However, even if evidence were disclosed to me that indicated that Baba had been a knowing and willing locus through which this part of the Divine plan was given manifestation with respect to me, nonetheless, I would tell Baba that, in the future, he would have to earn whatever trust might be extended to him by me since my unconditional trust these days is for God alone and not necessarily for any given locus of manifestation.

Furthermore, I would tell Baba that the bar would be set exceedingly high with respect to the issue of trust in relation to him. I have my doubts that he would be able to clear such a bar without knocking it to the ground.

The foregoing sort of exercise led to another thought-experiment. What if: Someone were to come to me with incontrovertible proof – and, at this point, I have no idea what this would look like -- that Dr. Baig was a spiritual fraud. What would I think about this, and how would it affect me?

First, I believe that my faith in God has, to some extent, become independent of Dr. Baig, just as, in a sense -- to be elaborated upon shortly – my faith in God has become independent of the Qur'an, or the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), or the prophetic tradition, or the awliya (friends) of God. In addition, my faith in God is independent of Islamic and Muslim history.

Even if someone were to come to me today and demonstrate that the Qur'an was not Divine Revelation, and that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) never existed, and that the recorded

events of Islamic history were mere stories without substantive reality, nevertheless, my faith in God would remain. This is not a blind faith but is a faith that is rooted in more than fifty years of rigorous critical investigation into the many mysteries surrounding: The origins of the universe; the origins of the universal constants; the origins of life; the origins of consciousness; the origins of logic, rationality, and mathematics; the origins of language; the origins of genius and artistic talent; the origins of moral character.

Science, despite its many accomplishments, really doesn't have the slightest credible thing to say about any of the foregoing mysteries. To be sure, science has generated many theories over the years concerning all of the foregoing, but one really only has to study science – and I have done this most of my life -- to understand just how truly impoverished science is when it comes to the most important questions with which human beings are confronted.

Of course, I don't have the answers to any of the foregoing mysteries either. However, I do have faith that God has made it all possible. I also have faith that God is not 'an absentee landlord' as the Al Pacino character roared in the movie: *'Devil's Advocate'*.

I have faith that God is both imminent as well as transcendent. I have faith that God has a purpose for me and for all of creation.

I have no desire to try to induce others to accept my form of faith. This is between Being and me.

I know science cannot disprove any of what I am saying. I know there is nothing in science that is capable of shaking my faith since even if science were to come up with a unified field theory for the physical universe, science still would have an even more arduous challenge before it in order to be able to show how one could reduce the multifaceted origins issue down to purely physical events.

I don't believe that science will ever be capable of demonstrating any of the foregoing possibilities. However, if science should, some bright sunny day, come up with the answers for every single mystery known to human beings, it wouldn't matter, because I know that this is not likely to happen in my lifetime so, really, such considerations are irrelevant to my present mode of faith.

Show me the money, so to speak, in the form of the empirical coin of the realm and, maybe, the nature of my faith will change. Until then, scientists are every bit as much rooted in matters of faith as I am.

Some scientists have faith that the universe is a self-contained, purely physical/material set of phenomena. I have faith that this is not so, and, although I am biased in this respect, I feel my faith is rooted in more fertile earth than their faith is.

Dr. Baig, the Qur'an, the Prophet, the saints, Islamic history, and even Baba have served as a kind of scaffolding for me. However, I do not mean to infer by saying the foregoing that I consider them to be merely incidental props in my life.

Scaffolding is very necessary in the building of all kinds of things – including faith. My faith would not have the characteristics, shape, colors, orientation, or inclinations it has if it had not been for the scaffolding that has been given to me through my relationship with Dr. Baig, the Qur'an, the Prophet, the saints, and, yes, even Baba.

Discipline, purpose, intentionality, remembrance, understanding, and modalities of truth all have been built into my life because of the aforementioned scaffolding. Qualities – in varying shades of completeness and purity – of patience, forgiveness, compassion, integrity, honesty, perseverance, humility, gratitude, love, piety, longing, nobility, charitableness, sacrifice, and friendship have been built into my being because of the scaffolding that was arranged for me across my life through my association with Dr. Baig.

If someone were to show me incontrovertible proof that Dr. Baig were a spiritual fraud, I still would be grateful to him because of the way that the scaffolding that came to me through him has, in my opinion, made me a better, sturdier, more aesthetically pleasing structure that is capable of withstanding, God willing, intense earthquakes, tornadoes, and hurricanes of the emotional, psychological, and spiritual kind.

I had faith before I met Dr. Baig – however tattered, weak, and pathetic that faith might have been. Dr. Baig took me by the hand and helped me to learn how to make whole again that which was tattered, and he showed me how to become stronger, and he helped me to be a better person than I had been.

I do not profess to be a perfect human being. However, thanks to God and the manner in which Divinity had Dr. Baig's rizq and my rizq fused together for a time, the faith with which I came to him was hammered into a somewhat useful metal that is not quite so ignoble and dross as it once was.

Someone once said to me during a private chat in Baba's virtual community that I could not help being what I was any more than she could stop being what she was. There are, at least, two dimensions to her observation and, at the time, the foregoing individual was only looking through the lens of one of these possibilities.

I believe we all have the potential for constructive good and that the nature of this constructive goodness is fixed for each of us in a unique way. This is what Islam refers to as fitra – our essential capacity ... the purpose for which each of us has been created and the purpose for which Deen, or the spiritual way, was given to human beings in order to help each of us to realize the potential of fitra.

At the same time, we all have a potential for destructive evil, and this capacity is manifested through the actions and intentions of the unredeemed nafs or ego. This is the part that, at the time of our chat, the foregoing woman was referring to and in which she believed, rightly or wrongly, that I was caught up in.

All of life is series of engagements with Divinity through a variety of loci of manifestation, each of which has something to teach us concerning the nature of the Divine plan and the nature of our own essential capacity to come to realize and understand our role within that plan. Some of these engagements are expressions of jalali qualities of Divinity ... the difficult, rigorous, painful, heavy, problematic aspects of existence. Some of these engagements are expressions of jamali qualities of Divinity ... the loving, compassionate, ecstatic, easy, friendly aspects of existence. Finally, some of the aforementioned engagements with different loci of manifestation are mixtures of jamali and jalali qualities ... as in the case of learning spiritual discipline and trying to purify one's nafs.

My interaction with Baba, considered as a whole, was a case of severe compassion, with the accent on 'severe'. My interaction with Dr. Baig, considered as a whole, was a case of compassionate severity, with the accent on 'compassionate'.

My faith is not an intellectual exercise. Rather, my faith is informed by intellectual rigor just as much as my faith informs my rational probing of experience. There is a dynamic dialectic between the two (i.e., intellect and faith). In fact, among other things, my faith encourages, if not pushes, me to seek to have integrity in all intellectual pursuits.

I feel truths in my heart and soul through the lens of faith every time I pray, or fast, or give charity, or read the Qur'an, or do zikr, or listen to Qawwali, or do service to others. Moreover, every time I engage in these activities, they help me to purify and, thereby, constructively enhance the manner through which I engage the universe – intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

My faith is not predicated on miracles or wondrous deeds or mystical experiences even though I do not deny that those kinds of events do and have occurred in relation to me as well as with respect to others. My faith is not dependent on requiring others to understand life in the way that I do, for I believe the truth is sufficiently broad, rich, and deep enough to accommodate many angles of engagement even while, at the same time, reality, by its very nature, establishes principles and criteria through which, if God wishes, one comes to discern the true from the false.

I do have faith that the Qur'an is one of the Divine Revelations that have been sent to humankind, and I am nourished in many ways when I, with God's help, open my heart to what the Qur'an wishes to disclose to me. I do have faith that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is one of the authentic prophets -- beginning with Adam (peace be upon him) -- who have been sent to humankind, and I am opened up to much wisdom by reflecting on his example.

I do have faith in many saints from a variety of spiritual traditions, and they all have inspired me, at one time or another, to try to be a better person than I was. I do have faith that Baba was a false shaykh while Dr. Baig was, by the Grace of Allah, an authentic shaykh.

Yet, even if, through some strange congregation of events, all of the foregoing sources of spiritual guidance in which I have faith were, suddenly, inexplicably turned upside down and, somehow, were proven to be incorrect, then God willing, I still would have my essential faith in Divinity – the raw faith that God has given me in an act of pure,

undeserved Grace that assists me to continuously work toward deepening, strengthening, expanding, and rendering this primitive faith to become wiser than it has been in relation to all aspects of my life, both within and without. May God enable me to increase such efforts, and may God bless such efforts with success in the form of a constructive faith through which I might benefit myself and other individuals.

One of the ways that one dies to oneself – especially one’s preconceptions concerning oneself -- is through being brought face-to-face with one’s essential vulnerabilities. My close encounter of the unfortunate kind with a spiritual charlatan helped me to die to some of the biases I had concerning myself.



The Educational Process

The grammar school that I attended was not an institution that could be labeled – at least in any overt sense – a troubled school. Although it was not an establishment for the children of the well-to-do (or even for the offspring of less affluent cousins), there were no: Gangs, or drug-related activity, or much, if anything, in the way of bullying that took place in that school.

It was a two-storey, wood-framed building of very modest size. Some 60 years later, when I visited my former hometown with my wife, I discovered that the institution had been razed to the ground quite a few decades ago.

I remember very little of the time I spent in that school. There are just snippets and isolated snapshots that remain in memory.

For example, there is a very fuzzy sense within me of having cried inconsolably when my mother dropped me off at kindergarten for the first time. Perhaps this is a confabulation based on what my mother later said concerning the apparently traumatic character of the initial, if temporary, transfer of control from home to school that occurred in relation to me.

With the exception of a few fleeting images of cutting paper and spreading a white paste, by means of a paint brush, in order to stick paper cuttings together, there is only one clear impression that has stayed with me about doing hard time in kindergarten. This impression involved receiving graham crackers and milk before being forced to lie down with all the other kids in a darkened classroom.

I tended to resist the exercise and was restless throughout its duration. I'm sure I got a flunking grade on my report card for my inability to comply with the program.

I have vague recollections of an art teacher who used to visit my school from time to time when I was in kindergarten and/or the first grade. As far as I am able to recall – which is not very far -- she seemed to be very talented ... but, then since, at the time, I had a hard time coloring within designated lines, almost anyone might appear to be talented to an artistic miscreant such as myself.

Penmanship was another of the subjects through which I underwhelmed the world. The handing out of white sheets of paper

that had been provided with a number of lined spaces suitable for practicing the formation of the letters of the alphabet were like instruments of torture for me ... and I dreaded their arrival.

After all, since I had difficulty coloring within the lines, one might anticipate that filling up lined spaces with perfectly proportioned letters – or reasonable facsimiles thereof -- might also fall beyond my capabilities at that time. Perhaps, I was precociously working my way toward perfecting the terrible handwriting that often is associated with advanced degrees.

Throughout my days of attending public school – both grammar as well as high school -- I walked to class (about a half mile in each case respectively). One of the few things I remember about this aspect of my life is that, for the most part, I seemed to do it alone – at least this appeared to be the case from the first grade onward – and, in addition, I pretty much was always the last person to enter the building before – and, occasionally after -- the final bell rang marking the beginning of any given school day or session.

I don't recall ever eating school cafeteria food. I either browned-bag it or walked home, and, then, back to school, in the time allotted for the lunch break.

At some point during grammar school – perhaps around the 2nd or 3rd grade -- a dentist, plus an assistant or two, descended on the school and applied fluoride treatments to the teeth of the students. I don't recall asking for this to be done, but, then, there were a lot of things associated with school for which I didn't ask, and, yet, I got to experience the fruits of those sorts of impositions.

About half of the names of my grammar school teachers have escaped my memory. What they taught seems to be even more elusive.

I remember the report cards – sometimes done on heavy stock paper and sometimes on regular paper. These consisted of a listing of subjects and categories for which I was being evaluated, followed by numbers, and, occasionally, some written comments concerning whatever problems or progress I might be displaying during class.

Although my mother might discuss this or that aspect of my report card with me, I don't ever recall being all that much interested in, or

concerned with, the issue of grades. Like a lot of other things involving school, report cards were just something that had to be endured.

One of the few memories of a – possibly -- positive nature that is associated with grammar school took place in the third grade. My teacher – Mrs. Perry – seemed to me to be a somewhat gruff, heavy-set, gravelly-voiced woman who ran a fairly tight ship but who, otherwise, seemed okay.

Apparently, at the beginning of third grade I was considered to be a member of the less gifted end of the student spectrum in my class. At some point during the year, something happened – I have no idea what that something might be – and, as a result of this “happening” (or, perhaps, a series of “happenings”), I was moved into the more advanced reading circle that consisted of seven or eight other kids.

In other words, at one juncture in the third grade, I was ensconced in a lower academic circle of schooling. Then, came the great transformation (just kidding) and I was transitioned into a higher academic rung of schooling.

In retrospect, I’m not quite sure what to make of it. On the one hand, perhaps my teacher might have seen something in me and, as a result, she wanted to help nurture what she felt she had glimpsed in the way of raw potential, but, on the other hand, her husband was a friend of my father – I think, on occasion, the latter two individuals used to share a drink or two together – and, consequently, perhaps, she just was giving me a chance of some kind as a favor, of sorts, to my father.

Whatever the truth of the foregoing matter might be, it was the first time that I began to become consciously aware – however marginally -- that there were group distinctions being drawn within the class that differentiated among students according to academic potential or ability. I’m sure that, on some level, I was aware there were different reading groups, but the process of undergoing a switch from one reading group to another during the school year seemed to suggest that the grouping of students was not just an artifact of random selection.

The foregoing decision by my third-grade teacher might have set me on the road to better things as far as schooling is concerned.

Apparently, I felt her aforementioned decision did change things for me to some degree because when my parents transported me to college, we stopped in my former hometown, and during this part of the trip, I told my father that I wanted to visit with my third-grade teacher and thank her for taking an interest in me ... which we did.

Teachers do have the power to constructively shape the lives of their students. Conversely, they also have the power to shape the lives of their students in problematic ways, and I have witnessed the flip side of the dynamic at work over the years both in relation to myself as well as in conjunction with the lives of other individuals.

With a few exceptions, grades four through seven seem to be largely absent from my memory banks. There are only two school-related memories that date from those years.

The first memory involves a show-and-tell that my best friend – who lived next door to me – and I did during either the fourth or fifth grade. I can't remember if the opportunity for show and tell rotated through the various members of the class and that the occasion I remember happened to be our turn, or if show-and-tell was a voluntary sort of thing that occurred from time to time at the discretion of the teacher.

In either case, I don't recall what was being shown and talked about during the class. Whatever the focus of the exercise might have been, I'm sure (ahem!) that it was thoroughly informative and a rewarding educational experience for everyone involved.

The only other memory from the temporal period bookended by the fourth and seventh grades occurred during the latter graded bookend. One day, the male principal of the school came into the room, and he appeared to be quite angry and agitated.

He walked over to one of the kids in the class (someone who lived about ten or twelve houses down from my home) and began to violently shake the kid around while he sat in his chair. The principal might even have lifted the kid and his chair off the ground while shaking things about. Or, perhaps, this aspect of things is a cognitive embellishment that got constructed somewhere along the line in the ensuing years.

I have no idea what the object (i.e., the student) of the foregoing exercise had done or was accused of doing. At the time, my best friend was going out with the shakee's sister, but I never discovered what the ruckus was all about, and I don't know if my friend ever knew the backstory concerning the shaking event.

I have very fleeting memories of working in conjunction with the school safety-patrol unit. My task was to try to help protect students from the cars that were traveling near the school around lunchtime and when school was letting out for the day.

Another very ephemeral memory concerns my assigned responsibility – together with another student -- to deliver pint containers of milk to different classes at a certain time each day. Part and parcel of the foregoing are a few memories of how, on occasion, after delivering the milk, the other kid and I would go down to the cellar and hang out for a short period of time before returning to our class.

Throw in the odd, flickering memory that involved reading about the captivating adventures of Dick, Jane and/or Spot, and – when you add the foregoing several pages of excerpts from my school life extending from kindergarten to the seventh grade – you, now, have been introduced to what I remember from eight years of schooling that encompassed thousands of hours of attendance. I have no idea what other people remember from their grammar school years, but for me the time seems to have become something of a black hole from which a few energetic memories have sought to escape before falling back into the darkness.

Perhaps, I had some sort of cognitive problem while attending grammar school, and, as a result, my memory wasn't working properly. However, I have access to a plethora of memories arising in conjunction with non-school activities that took place in an around my time at school, and, therefore, I can't help but wonder why I seem to have such a dearth of memories associated with schooling.

I remember swimming, skiing, hiking, climbing, and exploratory expeditions. I remember playing football, baseball, and basketball with other kids in the neighborhood as well as against kids from other neighborhoods in the town. I remember playing in a small sandpit up the street that was located behind a neighbor's house. I remember

trading comic books and collecting stamps and coins. I remember playing games of dice baseball using cards of professional players that were acquired through the purchase of certain brands of bubblegum. I remember cub scouts and the elaborate skits (with costumes and scripts) that were organized by the den mother (my mother). I remember boy scouts and how our troop won a citywide competition and was rewarded with a trip to climb Mt. Washington. I remember learning how to play chess on the back porch of my next-door neighbor. I remember learning how to play basketball – along with quite a few other kids from different grammar schools in town – through the assistance of Mr. Prebble who was, I believe, some sort of gym teacher associated with the high school but, from time to time, also conducted basketball clinics for younger children in the town. I remember going to the movies on Saturday afternoon and watching sci-fi, cowboy, war, and, sometimes, horror movies. I remember games of army that were played in the forests and fields around my neighborhood. I remember the fights and squabbles within the neighborhood. I remember buying records (\$.99 45s) when they first came out. I remember bowling, playing pool, and learning to dance at the Institute (a gathering place for kids in the town where I lived). I remember going to street dances. I remember walking a mile, or so, to and from the Church in the next town over. I remember delivering the Grit Newspaper in the early evening hours half way across the town in which I lived. I remember stealing my older brother's bike and teaching myself how to ride it. I remember going to watch my older brother play high school basketball. I remember performing a variety of acts of juvenile delinquency for which I – mostly -- never got caught. I remember participating in town-sponsored Easter egg hunts with clues being given out on the local radio station. I remember going outside during the waning remnants of a hurricane. I remember building snow forts and having snowball fights. I remember accompanying my mother and father on several occasions after sunset when they drove the family car to a height of land about 17 miles north of the town where we lived and looking for UFOs after my mother and a group of other mothers in the neighborhood claimed to have seen a UFO hovering over the neighborhood. I remember listening to a variety of radio shows on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays (e.g., Gangbusters, Johnny Dollar -- Private Detective, Tarzan,

The Inner Sanctum, The Shadow, Amos and Andy, and so on). I remember going with my father on some of his electrical contracting jobs. I remember picking beans and mowing lawns for money. I remember trips to the family farm and the associated outhouse up on the hill behind the farm.

All of the foregoing events – and many others that I haven't mentioned but do remember -- took place at various junctures during the eight-year period of schooling mentioned previously. The time spent outside school is well represented in my memory banks, but the time spent in school I remember hardly at all.

Evidently, all those years ago my memory had been working properly – albeit, somewhat selectively. So, something else must be responsible for the relative absence of memory that I have in conjunction with my time in grammar school.

One possibility underlying the differential in memories involving school and non-school activities might revolve about the issue of the locus of control that I had on any given occasion. I never quite got what the point of having to go to school was all about.

I knew that they wanted me to learn things. Nonetheless, I often didn't understand why they wanted me to learn some of those things – and, furthermore, I wasn't interested in learning many of the things they wanted to instill in me.

I had very little control over the foregoing process. However, there was one aspect of things that, to a degree, remained under my control, and this had to do with being able to resist the process of schooling in a variety of ways.

School was something that – for reasons unknown to me -- I was required to attend. I understood this on some level, and, therefore – within certain limits – complied with the adult expectations that surrounded school, but apparently, while my body was present, much of the rest of me was somewhere else.

Remembering things – at least for me -- becomes much more difficult when I am not a willing participant in the process and do not have a certain degree of control over its dynamics. Moreover, in retrospect, it seems rather strange to me that adults should have

assumed that compulsory schooling was something in which I – or any kid -- would be interested.

There were a lot of things that I learned outside of school without being compelled to do so. Compulsion actually undermines the learning process in many situations.

My fondest memories of life in grammar school came in June of each year. I remember on the last day of school all the kids in my class were required to apply, and rub in, a paste-like polish to the wood desks we had been using during the school year. This process became a harbinger of the relative freedom that was soon to come because the desk-polishing exercise marked the end of the school year.

I liked to learn things, and in various ways – school notwithstanding -- I did manage to learn a variety of ideas and facts. I just didn't seem to like learning those sorts of things in school or, in some way, found the experience traumatic and, apparently, this had an adverse effect on what I was able to take away from the schooling experience.

Presumably, somehow, I learned enough to satisfy the minimum requirements associated with the schooling process. After all, I did bring home those report cards that -- despite whatever problems I might be experiencing in school – nonetheless indicated that I was being promoted from one grade to the next, but how any of this was accomplished is pretty much of a mystery to me.

Prior to starting the eighth grade, my family moved from the hilly regions of Western Maine to a town along the northern edge of central Maine. The town to which we were relocating was fairly small -- maybe 800, or so, people – and, therefore, it was about one-tenth (or less) the size of the town in which I had been living.

I was never all that good at making friends. Moving to a new town didn't change things in that respect, and, consequently, in a lot of ways, I felt – and became -- fairly isolated.

The trend of not remembering much about what took place through the process of schooling carried over into the eighth grade. My new teacher reminded me a lot of my third-grade teacher both with respect to physical stature and her manner of conducting the class, but

I don't remember much of what took place within the classroom during that period of time.

There are just a few school-related memories that have survived from that part of my life. One had to do with the cliques that were present among my new classmates and often manifested themselves at recess ... cliques that I had no desire to join and, therefore, social groupings that helped to lend further definition to, as well as reinforce my status of, being an all-around outsider.

One of the few other memories that I have concerning the eighth grade – at least the schooling part – involves music class. Maybe once a month, or so, a woman would visit the school and get us singing various songs (not your top ten type of melodies) down in the school basement.

In addition, I believe that, from time to time, she tried to teach a little bit of music theory. For the most part, it went in one ear and out the other.

My initial year of high school started out problematically. There was a hazing process that had been a fairly well established tradition at the school.

During hazing week, first-year high school students were considered to be fair game to be treated arbitrarily – if not, at times, abusively -- by all upper-class students. This took place in several stages.

One part consisted in being required to memorize some set of passages from the Maine State Constitution (the Preamble, I think). Then at random junctures throughout a designated day, any upper-class student could demand that a first-year student would have to recite the requisite material, and if the student made any mistakes, then he or she would be forced to take a bite of a raw onion.

I was challenged to recite the indicated material once or twice. On each occasion, I managed to recite the required passages, but on one of those occasions, the upper-class student who was challenging me claimed that I made a mistake, but when I asked him to indicate the nature of the mistake, he just kept insisting that I made a mistake, and I was forced to take a bite of an onion.

The other part of the hazing process took place in the Community Hall during school assembly. My task was to wear large rubber boots and avoid being tagged by another first-year student equipped with equally large rubber boots as we ran around the basketball court.

I was good at running as well as zigging and zagging. After a while, I felt sorry for the guy chasing me and let him catch me, and our part of the festivities were over.

There were many parts of the hazing process that bothered me. I deeply resented being treated in what I considered to be abusive and arbitrary ways, but even more troubling to me than the aforementioned behavior was the fact that the teachers and principle – having knowledge of the situation -- let it happen.

I was the only first-year high school student in my school that played varsity baseball and basketball (there was only one other male in my class). Almost all – if not all -- of the other members of those teams were juniors and seniors, mostly the latter.

During the basketball season, the team was doing pretty well for the first five or six weeks of our schedule. However, there was a lot of flu going around at one point during the season, and, so, the coach instructed the team members to stay away from some of the area dances.

He knew that I liked – loved – going to some of those dances. He told me (to the best of my recollection none of the other players frequented those area dances) that he was going to show up at those locations, and if he found me at any of those dances, he would suspend me from the team.

In other words, he was indicating that his intention was to visit those locations and expose himself to whatever viral agents were in the air, and, then, he would come back and interact with his players during practice ... exposing his players to whatever he had been exposed. I thought the idea was dumb, and, moreover, I didn't think much of his belief that he felt he had the right to control what I did away from school, but, despite my thoughts on the matter, I complied with his directive because I wanted to be able to continue playing basketball.

The basketball coach also had this 'thing' about salt tablets. Prior to the start of the season, when team members were getting into condition, he would force everyone to take a salt tablet toward the end of practice.

My body knew better than the coach what, if anything, was missing from my body following a work out. My body's response was to vomit soon after being given a tablet, but this didn't stop the guy without a medical license from insisting what he believed needed to take place.

When baseball season arrived, the baseball coach – who also was the foregoing basketball coach – wanted to challenge his players, so he brought in a former graduate of the high school to pitch batting practice. From my own experience – as well as that of my older brother (who already had graduated from high school) – I knew the person the coach was bringing in was often inclined to be mean, violent, and drunk.

I was fourteen years old and that guy was 20, or so, with a blazing – if sometimes wild -- fastball. Given what I knew about the situation (and, I might note that this was a time in which there were no batting helmets), I told the coach that I wasn't going to bat against the guy the coach had brought in.

The coach kicked me off the team for a week or so. He might have questioned my courage – or, perhaps, he didn't like being defied -- but I was the only one on the team who had the guts to stand up to him and indicate that I was not his chattel to be subject to whatever dangers he wished to expose me.

My first year of high school was 1958. Sputnik had been positioned into orbit the previous October, and, as a result, many people within the United States had become alarmed about the possibility that American students were falling behind their Russian counterparts in subjects such as science and mathematics.

As a result, a variety of programs were instituted on both a national (e.g., through the National Science Foundation) and state level. In the latter case, the Maine Department of Education implemented several courses – one focused on science and the other

program revolved about mathematics – that were conducted through television programs and roving instructors.

For some reason – and I don't recall how it came about – I was selected for participation in the state educational programs. I was the only student in my high school (small as it was) to become engaged in the program.

Two or three times a week during the school year, a television would be set up for me in one of the school class rooms. The audience of one would watch lectures on science and mathematics.

Every month, or two, representatives of the program would show up at my school and talk with me about the material. In the case of the science course, this involved one-on-one tutorials, and in the case of the mathematics course, participants from several surrounding schools (all much, much bigger than my high school) would get together with a visiting program teacher and go over the material and discuss it.

I was one of two first year students in the state who were participating in the program ... most of the other participants were juniors and seniors. In the science portion of things, I placed 11th in the state, while the other first year student was second or third, but I did less well with respect to the mathematical side of things.

For whatever reason, my high school science and math teacher – who also was the principal – never participated in any of these one-on-one or group sessions. Moreover, to the best of my recollection, he never really asked me any questions about what was going on with those courses.

I found the situation somewhat perplexing. On the one hand, the principal of the school had made special accommodations for me to participate in the program, while on the other hand he didn't seem to have much interest in what I was doing even though he was the science and math teacher for the high school.

Another indication concerning the growing emphasis on science in high school curriculums involved the addition of Earth Sciences to the usual litany of science subjects – namely, physics, chemistry, and biology. The teacher in my high school who was saddled with teaching

the course had absolutely no knowledge of the subject ... he taught history and civics related courses.

I liked science, and, therefore, I read the textbook for the Earth Sciences course. Apparently, few others in the class read the textbook or were interested in the topic of Earth Sciences.

Therefore, classes usually involved the teacher asking questions, but, for the most part, I was the only individual prepared to answer his queries. Whenever the teacher was uncertain about some aspect of things in the textbook, he would call on me to, hopefully, provide some sort of illuminating commentary.

From one perspective, the teacher was giving me a chance to shine. From another perspective, the teacher was unqualified to teach the course and was using me to help him get through the year. From yet another perspective, the teacher was putting me in a position that might be resented by other students -- students with whom I had to socialize and get along with independently of that class.

I already was something of an outsider. What was transpiring during Earth Sciences classes wasn't helping my situation.

At some point during that course, I got irritated with the situation. The teacher asked me to provide some sort of explanation for an issue, and I responded: "You're the teacher, you should teach."

Naturally, I got kicked out of class and suspended from school. I wasn't allowed to return to classes until I apologized to the teacher, and eventually, this did take place when I went to the teacher's apartment accompanied by my mother.

The teacher was not a bad guy ... in fact he was pretty easy-going, mild-mannered, and, generally speaking, quite supportive of students. He was just trying to do the best he could under difficult circumstances in which he was being asked to teach something about which he knew nothing.

However, the teacher was not required to apologize to me -- or the other students -- for not knowing the subject. In addition, the school was not required to apologize to me -- or the other students -- for putting a teacher in a position of having to teach a subject about which he was ignorant. Furthermore, neither the teacher nor the school was

required to apologize to me for putting me in a difficult position vis-à-vis the other students.

I learned something from that series of events. What I learned is not flattering to the process of schooling.

Moving on to another issue, for a variety of reasons, I took quite a few extra courses during high school relative to most other students. One of those courses was business law.

My basketball and baseball coach taught the course. That teacher had replaced the previous coach with whom I had a few run-ins (outlined earlier) during my first year of high school.

I didn't set out to cause the teacher problems, nor was I trying to be a wise guy. He was attempting to teach a straightforward course in business law – mostly for commercial-track students – and being largely ignorant of the business world, I was approaching the course as if it involved an exploration of issues involving the philosophy of law.

To his credit – and part of this might have been due to the fact that I was his star athlete and he was trying to avoid problems between the two of us – he permitted me to raise a wide variety of questions concerning business law. Those questions, quite likely, were only of interest to me because no one else in the class seemed to be inclined to raise those sorts of issues or take part in the ensuing discussions.

Many years later (more than 50) I discovered – after talking with my former teacher/coach during a reunion -- that he considered my questions of sufficient value to approach some lawyers that he knew in several near-by towns and ask them the questions that I was asking of him. After consulting with those individuals concerning such matters, he would come back to class and provide some feedback to me about various issues that I had raised in previous classes.

I also subsequently learned from my former teacher/coach that the year after my graduation from high school he would begin some of his business law classes in the following way. He would indicate – without mentioning a name – that he once had this student (i.e., me) who used to be the bane of the teacher's existence by peppering the instructor with all kinds of philosophical questions concerning business law, and my former teacher/coach indicated that he wanted

the new students to just read the text book and learn the material in the book without trying to stray too far from the text.

If I hadn't been a star athlete, I'm not sure how the business law class might have gone. He accommodated me to a significant degree in that class, but, clearly, based on what he told some later classes in business law, he didn't want other students to do what I had done, and, so, I have to wonder why he let me do what I did.

The aforementioned discussion that took place between my former teacher/coach and myself and that occurred some fifty years after my graduation from high school brought a number of additional issues (beyond the business law class) to the surface that were interesting ... at least they were of interest to me. The foregoing meeting took place as a result of school reunion (occasions that I avoid like the plague) that my older brother had attended, and, at some point during the reunion, my former teacher/coach told my brother that he (the teacher) had heard that I had moved back into the area and that he (the teacher) was sort of desperate to speak with me.

My brother passed on the message along with a phone number. I was miffed with my brother for putting me in that sort of a situation, but, eventually, I called my former teacher, and, one thing led to another, and, reluctantly, I finally agreed to drive 50 miles, or so, and have lunch with him at his home.

The meal he wanted to serve me was some sort of pork dish. I indicated that I was Muslim and couldn't eat pork.

He recovered quickly from the – I am sure – somewhat surprising information and remarked that we all worshipped the same God. It was a statement with which I didn't disagree, but the remainder of the extended discussion did not return – except in several very peripheral ways – to the topic of religion.

After that we spent about three or four hours talking about a variety of issues – some having to do with the years we spent together, while other topics touched on some of the things that he and I had been doing since we last had met.

I came away from our discussion with a lot more appreciation for him as a human being than I previously had had – not that I ever

thought badly of him. However, I also came away with some other sentiments as well.

For example, during the conversation he expressed surprise when I told him how much of a loner I was in high school. He thought I had been someone who was very popular with lots of friends ... neither of which was true.

His surprise told me a great deal. The reality was that he knew little, or nothing, about me when I was his student/player.

He had an impression of me based on his roles as a coach and a teacher. However, like an iceberg, there was a lot more to me than what appeared on the surface.

He knew little of my hopes, frustrations, thoughts, fears, difficulties, anxieties, likes, interests, and so on as a human being. This wasn't his fault since I really wasn't interested in divulging any of the foregoing personal issues to other people - including teachers, coaches, ministers, acquaintances, girlfriends, brothers, or my parents.

For example, he didn't know that although I participated in high school basketball and baseball because I liked the athletic aspect of those sports and because I was fairly good at them, nonetheless, I hated the competitive nature of high school sports. For the most part, I had no deep feelings about winning or losing as long as I felt I had done the best I could on any given occasion.

Everyone - or most everyone - likes to win. However, wanting to win is not the same thing as having a burning desire to compete against other human beings and in the process try to dominate or defeat the latter individuals.

Although Harvard doesn't give out sport scholarships, apparently (or, so, I was later told) one of the reasons I was admitted to Harvard was because of my skills on the basketball court. Nevertheless, when I went to Harvard, the idea of trying out for the basketball team never even crossed my mind since I had no desire to try to competitively prove myself against other students.

There was another dimension of my reunion with my high school teacher and coach that I found to be intriguing, if not disturbing. I noticed at certain points of my interaction with him during the reunion

that I still had a sense of feeling subordinate to him ... of perceiving him to be a person who wielded authority over me.

This is one of the main things that schooling seeks to instill in the youth – both intentionally and unintentionally -- who pass through that process. There is a primary division in schooling – that plays out on a variety of levels -- between those who have power and those who do not possess power.

My former teacher/coach was a decent man. He was not an authoritarian or mean individual, but, rather, he was someone who had been given legal authority to bring about certain results within the classroom and in the arena of sports.

Yet, there I was – more than fifty years later – feeling the unwelcome presence within me of an indelible mark that had been imprinted on my being five decades earlier and that played a role, of some sort, with respect to shaping how I felt about a variety of issues. The feeling was very disconcerting.

Teachers and coaches often want to have a molding influence on their charges ... to imbue students with a variety of life-lessons concerning how to think or feel about a variety of issues. Some young people seem to enjoy the foregoing sort of molding process, but there are many students who do not want to be molded in that manner but wish to have, instead, a non-authority-based relationship with adults that would be directed toward helping to facilitate a student's exploration of this or that dimension of life without – within certain practical limits -- any expectation about where such an exploratory process should go.

Before moving on to other issues, there was one other piece of information that emerged from my decades-later meeting with my former teacher/coach. He told me that after he accepted the job as teacher and coach at my high school and was doing an inventory of different kinds of school resources, he found that there was no sports equipment or uniforms present in the storage lockers for athletic materials.

He later found out that before the previous coach moved on to another school the latter coach – the one with whom I had several disagreements – had given everything away to a number of students

who either had graduated, or were graduating, from the high school. Although quite a few individuals might be adversely affected by the previous coach's actions – not to mention financial costs to the school for replacing that equipment and athletic uniforms -- I have no doubt that the guy was throwing a parting-shot my way because I was about the only carry over from his team to future basketball and baseball hopes at my high school during the next several years.

I heard from my older brother that the coach in question went on to win quite a few titles with various high school athletic teams in different parts of Maine. This just goes to show that winning doesn't erase the jerk factor that sometimes resides in people who are considered to be "winners".

Between my junior and senior years of high school, I won a National Science Foundation scholarship to study the theory of semi-conductors at a college in New York City. This was another part of the renewed emphases on science and mathematics that had been sweeping America since Sputnik assumed its orbit in space.

There were about 15, or so, students (consisting of both male and female) in the New York program. Some of them came from as far away as California and other distant locations, but many of them were from the Tri-State area.

The first couple of weeks were directed toward renewing various aspects of science and mathematics. I remember several classes dealing with, among other topics, thermodynamics and matrices.

For reasons that were never clear to me, the course-work stopped approximately a third of the way through the semester. In the place of lectures, the students were taken on a variety of field trips – some related to science/technology while others were cultural or artistic in nature.

For example, we visited the Indian Point Nuclear Plant that was being constructed around that time. The facility subsequently became the source of a lot of environmental problems.

We also visited an oil-refinery and a paint factory. Later, of course, lead-based paint and oil were involved in a variety of environmental and health problems.

I don't know how much the college and the professors were receiving from the federal government to run the course on semi-conductors. However, for the most part, the reasons for which they were provided with money had little to do with what actually went on during that summer program.

I enjoyed my time in New York. I was able to: Exercise my artistic side a little bit (a teacher in the college's art department provided some constructive feed-back with respect to some of my drawings); perform a few off-book experiments in one of the college's chemistry labs; visit a few museums (e.g., the Museum of Natural History); become exposed to some Improv-comedy in Greenwich Village; have Theodore Bikel (a folk-singer and actor) come out from his apartment in the Village and sing us a few songs from a Washington Square bench; go to an exhibition game between the New York Yankees and the San Francisco Giants (the year that Roger Maris set the home run record); participate in some walking tours of various parts of Manhattan and, in the process, acquired a little feel for big-city life (while in New York, a rape and a murder occurred just down the street from our dormitories and near the small restaurant where I used to go to indulge myself in a Lime Rickey or two); and, finally, tour the facilities of a number of big corporations involving nuclear power, oil, and chemistry.

However, none of the former activities was the reason I traveled to New York City in the summer of 1961. Neither I nor my parents were paying for the trip, and, therefore, at the time, I saw no reason to register a complaint (and as far as I know, none of the other students complained about the situation either), but it was another instance of someone else making a decision about what they felt was the best way to proceed in conjunction with my life without really consulting with me or trying to determine how I felt about the matter or how I might want to use the time available to me.

I remember at some point following my return from the summer program that my father decided to quiz me about semi-conductors in front of a visiting relative (maybe a little older than my father) from New Hampshire. I don't know whether my father was trying to provide me with an opportunity to dazzle that relative concerning what I

learned or whether he was trying to show me and my uncle how little I actually knew, but the questions kept coming.

My father was an electrician, and around the time that I went to New York, he had been studying the theory of semi-conductors on his own so he knew a fair amount about the subject. Despite asking me a variety of questions, all he got from his sixteen-year old son was silence since, in truth, there was really nothing I could say about a subject that was largely absent from my summer program, and I really didn't want to get into the whole matter of what actually had taken place during the summer.

Perhaps the difference between how my father and I engaged the topic of semi-conductors is instructive. I might have learned a great deal more about semi-conductors if I had been given a grant to study the subject on my own rather than having to go through a schooling process that, for whatever reasons, didn't seem all that committed to exploring the topic for which the instructors - and college -- were being paid by the federal government.

Academically speaking, I seem to do best (as far as learning is concerned) when I am just permitted to go about things in my own way. When I am encouraged to work on my own, have an opportunity to stumble about a little, experiment, and, if necessary, ask questions I consider to be relevant concerning this or that topic, I seem to be do much better than when things are arranged to take place in pre-determined ways that often have little to do with my interests or capabilities.

The final episode from high school that I will outline here has to do with my graduation speech. Tradition dictated that I should memorize my talk and present it.

I told the principal I wasn't going to do that. He was upset with my decision and kept trying to persuade me that I was not doing the right thing, but I held firm and just read my speech.

Nothing really rested on whether, or not, the speech was memorized and presented or merely read. The real issue was about whether, or not, I was going to live up to the expectations that were rooted in an arbitrary tradition ... much like the hazing episodes that

had to be endured four years previously at the beginning of my first year of high school.

At that point in the schooling process, I wasn't interested in trying to prove anything to anyone about my abilities. I had done my time, and I had had enough of the arbitrary nature of some of the traditions that surrounded schooling, and, as a result, I was indicating to the principal my desire to take control of my own life and do things in accordance with what I thought might constitute the best use of my time.

There are a few experiences from my years at college that resonate with some of the foregoing high school themes. For example, I encountered quite a few difficulties making the transition from an extremely small rural high school (44 students, 11 in my graduating class) to one of the most competitive, academically challenging universities in the world (i.e., Harvard), and one of those problems involved a course in ancient Greek that I took my first year (the course was selected as part of the pre-theological career choice that I had made prior to entering university).

For whatever reason, not enough textbooks were ordered for the course. I was the one who was left without a chair when the textbook music stopped.

I approached my professor about the matter, but he didn't seem to be too interested in my situation. Apparently, the problem was left for me to try to solve independently of him.

Whatever he might have been trying to teach me, the lesson that I learned was that he was uninterested in me as a human being. Eventually, I stopped going to class and, as one might have anticipated, I ended up flunking the course.

Another course I took my first year involved social relations – an interdisciplinary approach consisting of various elements from psychology, sociology, and anthropology. At one point during the course, a paper was assigned that was supposed to be based on some sort of empirical project that the students in my tutorial section were individually required to produce.

For my project – and I didn't discuss the matter with my tutorial instructor -- I decided that I would go across the river to Boston and

ask various people some questions about birth control. I would do this in two different guises -- one guise involved wearing a suit while the other guise consisted of wearing a sweatshirt and sneakers -- because I wanted to see if people might be more willing to respond to me when I wore one kind of attire rather than another.

This was back in 1962-63 when birth control was an even more controversial topic than it is today. Moreover, Boston -- both because of its sizable Italian and Irish populations -- was heavily Catholic.

I went and knocked on doors in several urban locations in Boston. I did this wearing different attire.

I discovered that people seemed to be more willing to talk to me when I wore a sweatshirt and sneakers than when I wore a suit and tie. I reported the results in my paper.

My professor seemed to doubt that I had done what I had done. Perhaps -- and, if this is the case, he might have had a point here -- he felt that no one could be stupid enough to do what I had done and that I would have just been asking for trouble with that sort of a project.

I will admit to being very naïve. Coming from a small-town background, I really didn't have any appreciation for the nature of big-city life or how city people -- who, in Boston, were very likely to be Catholic -- might react to the questions I was asking.

Nonetheless, apparently, my tutorial leader was no more interested in me than my Greek professor had been. I forget what I got for a grade on the paper, but it wasn't all that good and, mostly, this seemed to be because he didn't believe that I had done what I had done ... although, admittedly, there were a number of methodological issues that swirled about the project and not all of those problems were properly addressed in my paper.

Proving that I had done what I had done in conjunction with the project would be quite difficult. Consequently, I didn't have much recourse for challenging the grade I was given and, as a result, I just let it go.

In general, I did poorly my first year. Consequently, I was instructed by Harvard to take some time off and try again later.

A couple of years passed by, and I decided to take a summer course at Harvard in German. It was an intensive course, with classes

running for an hour, or so, five days a week complemented by a number of required language labs.

I took the foregoing course in order to satisfy the language requirement that Harvard had in place at the time. In addition, I needed to get at least a C in two courses in order to be re-admitted to Harvard, and the intensive course in German counted as two courses.

Despite working a full-time, afternoon/evening shift within the Boston University library system, I managed to get an A in the course. I returned to Harvard in the fall of 1965.

However, when I returned to college, I petitioned to live off-campus. Despite working part-time and receiving some financial aide, nonetheless, even back then, when tuition and on-campus living expenses were only a small fraction of what they are today, Harvard was too expensive for me, and I needed to find ways of cutting expenses.

I received a lot of opposition from various Harvard administrators on this issue. However, I kept pressing the point, and, eventually, they relented.

The social networking side of college life likely suffered considerably as a result of the foregoing decision. Nevertheless, I felt much more comfortable in my relatively inexpensive apartment in East Cambridge than I would have had I decided to live in one of the upper class 'Houses' on campus.

There are only a few further items from my undergraduate college life that I will review here. For example, the first year that I returned, I took a course in psychology.

At some point during the course I wrote a paper on nature versus nurture. The woman who read and graded the paper spoke to me when she returned the essay to me.

She said that the paper was too long. She gave me an A on the paper, but she told me that the only reason she did so was that the paper was too good to mark down despite its length, but, nonetheless, she went on to indicate that if I did this sort of thing again, then no matter how good the paper might be, she would hold the length issue against me and mark me down accordingly.

I was a little nonplussed. I was the one paying tuition, and she was the one who was getting paid to help further my education, and, yet, the problem between us seemed to be a function of the time she might have to invest in reviewing future papers from me rather than being about what I could learn from researching and writing such papers.

During my junior year, I wrote a paper on anxiety. I got an A on the paper with the following comment. "An excellent overview on the topic of anxiety but 300% of the suggested length."

I realize that for professors, teaching assistants, and tutorial leaders, time is a very valuable commodity. I also understand that, relatively speaking, there are far fewer instructors and teachers than there are students, and, therefore, educators have to apportion their time carefully.

Nonetheless, I'm paying for an education. Yet, apparently, my education must fit into what teachers consider to be most convenient for their schedules.

On any number of occasions, I wrote papers that would come back with the odd word or phrase underlined in the paper followed by a question mark or an illegible word or phrase written in the margins. There might be, as well, a sentence or two written at the end of the paper to summarize the instructors overall sense of the essay.

For the most part, I had no idea what any of the foregoing squiggles meant. It took me between 10 and 20 pages to try to elucidate some sort of complex issue, and, yet, I was supposed to know what an instructor was thinking by a, presumably, well-placed, scribbled question mark or often indecipherable word/phrase in the margin of my paper.

It was the academic two-step. The instructor would pretend to be interested in what I was writing, and I would pretend to be interested in what the instructor had to say (or not say) about what I had written.

During the oral defense of my undergraduate honors thesis, one of my examiners – a graduate student in psychology who was one of the individuals who had been tasked with quizzing me about my project -- indicated that he didn't see much in my honors thesis that reflected established academic views. Oy vey!

After four years at Harvard, I still hadn't learned the lesson that, apparently, education was not about critically seeking the truth of things. Instead, education was – at least as far as the person who was making the foregoing critical comments was concerned – about exploring the interests, opinions, and theories of other people irrespective of whether, or not, those ideas had anything to do with the truth.

The thesis I was attempting to defend was an exploration of my ideas about certain issues. During the thesis, I critically reviewed the ideas of various historical figures prior to developing my own ideas but, according to the individual who was commenting in the aforementioned manner, apparently I was not being sufficiently deferential to those historical figures since I rejected their ideas and was trying to develop a more satisfactory account of a given issue that was not built around what those theorists had to say on the matter.

For the most part, I enjoyed and benefitted from my time at Harvard. There were a few professors in particular that I really enjoyed working with – most notably my thesis advisor – Robert White – who took a genuine interest in what I was doing even though I approached him initially as someone who didn't agree with the theory of anxiety that he had put forth in a textbook on psychopathology that he had written.

Nonetheless, my four years at Harvard were far from problem-free. Some of those difficulties have been outlined in the previous five pages.

Following graduation from college, I went to Canada to resist and protest against the war effort in Vietnam. Initially, I didn't have any plans to go to graduate school within my new national home, but after a few years of doing this and that, I decided to pursue a doctorate in clinical psychology.

I applied to one school and was accepted. Prior to beginning the program, I talked with a number of professors about taking a few non-traditional courses (having to do with phenomenological and existential approaches to psychology) in addition to my regular courses, and I was given approval to proceed in this manner. However, once the year began, the department backed out of the agreement, and, as a result, I withdrew from the program.

A few years later I changed directions and decided to work toward a doctorate in education. I applied to another university and was accepted into its doctoral program for education.

17 years were required to obtain a doctoral degree. Some funny (in the sense of 'odd' but quite 'normal') things happened on the way to the forum where diplomas were being awarded.

To make a very long story mercifully shorter, I eventually fired – after 17 years -- my thesis committee and cobbled together an ad hoc group of people (both from within and outside of the university) who were acceptable to university administrators and who would serve as an examination committee for an oral defense of my thesis. On my own, I had researched and written a second thesis (the first one was never read by anyone on my original thesis committee), and, after completing the second dissertation, I went around to various individuals and asked them if they would be interested in serving on the aforementioned examination committee.

The final committee consisted of individuals from quite diverse backgrounds. There was: A physicist; a biophysicist; a linguist; several individuals with strong backgrounds in philosophy of science, as well as someone who was a specialist in adult education, but since my thesis involved an exploration into: Quantum physics, relativity theory, chronobiology, holography, language, mathematics, epistemology, education, and hermeneutics, the assembled group of examiners were quite appropriate selections.

The thesis was approximately 900 pages long. Obviously, I had not been able to break free from my inclination to go on at length in relation to my written submissions ... an inclination that had been on display during my undergraduate years and that – as noted previously – had been critically commented on by a number of my instructors.

After I exited the program with my diploma in hand, the university passed some sort of rule indicating that a thesis could not be longer than 300-400 pages. I could be wrong, but I believe I might have been an unnamed co-conspirator who had helped inspire the implementation of the new length guideline for dissertations.

Toward the end of my doctoral oral defense, one of the examiners – a gentleman from adult education – summed up his feelings about

my thesis in a way that was not intended to be humorous but was, nonetheless, quite funny. He said: "I have never before seen a thesis like yours, and I hope to never do so again."

Since the committee voted 7-0 in favor of accepting my dissertation, I'm not quite sure what to make of the foregoing statement. On the one hand, he, obviously, had judged the dissertation to be – at least in some minimal sense – acceptable. Yet, on the other hand, apparently, he considered the thesis to be – in some unelaborated sense – rather disconcerting and troubling, if not problematic.

There were several reasons why 17 years were needed to obtain a doctorate. Many of those reasons had to do with prejudice, but the nature of that prejudice was varied in character.

One form of prejudice revolved about my unwillingness to adopt the world-view of my thesis advisor concerning a variety of issues. For example, I was critical of certain individuals that he appeared to consider to be something akin to philosophical gods, and, as a result, he maintained that I – as a mere student – had no academic standing to engage in those sorts of critical activities.

With respect to establishing the place of students in the scheme of things, various other colleagues of my advisor appeared to share his sentiments. For example, I had conversations with a number of students from other graduate programs (including the sciences) at the same university, and they all bore witness to having encountered a similar strain of an authoritarian dynamic in their own graduate programs ... and while not all professors were inclined in such an authoritarian manner, nonetheless, there were enough of the authoritarian kinds of individuals to make the lives of many students quite miserable.

Maybe if I had just submitted to the philosophical catechism being promulgated by my advisor, I might have been able to obtain my degree quite a bit more quickly than the 17 years that actually were required. Doing so, however, would have flowed in opposition to everything that I considered was important with respect to a search for truth.

Rather impractically – at least from the perspective of some -- I didn't look at graduate school – or even my undergraduate days in college -- as a means to a career. Instead, I was looking at education as an opportunity to work toward trying to resolve issues concerning: Truth, justice, morality, identity, purpose, community, knowledge, and understanding, but my advisor was rather insistent that I do things in a way that was subservient to his sensibilities with respect to those sorts of issues.

Academia has something in common with the legal and medical professions. Individuals operating within those realms are often very reluctant to buck the system when it comes to defending their domains against interlopers such as myself, and, as a result, there weren't very many people in my department – or the graduate school in general -- who were sympathetic to my situation ... although, eventually, I managed to locate the requisite number of independent individuals who were willing to give me a fair chance with respect to obtaining my doctorate.

The other source of prejudice that helped grease the skids of longevity that played a role in preventing me from being able to realize my doctoral aspirations had to do with my religion – Islam – and the fact that I was part of a community group that was challenging the provincial government concerning certain aspects of its educational curriculum. The provincial government – through its Ministry of Education – had a certain amount of influence concerning what took place in the university that I was attending ... indeed, at one point, a person from fairly high up in the chain of command of the Ministry of Education called up the director of my graduate school and made a variety of suggestions indicating that, perhaps, it was time for me to be shown the door (I learned this through the person who was my thesis advisor at the time -- someone that I would later fire -- who was getting heat from the aforementioned director, and, as a result, my thesis advisor was upset about whatever I might have been doing that could be causing those sorts of difficulties.)

Another facet of the lens of disfavor through which many people in my graduate school – as well as among faculty and administrators in other parts of the university -- viewed me had to do with a student group (The Sufi Study Circle) for which I was a chairperson. The group

released several documents that, among other things, put forth evidence indicating how one of the faculty members in the university was guilty of having plagiarized material for several articles he wrote in conjunction with a book of readings that was being used as a textbook or as a form of resource material concerning Islam and the Muslim world in various institutions of so-called higher learning in Canada and the United States.

Our student group made copies of the evidence we had accumulated and sent the material out to a variety of universities across North America, asking those individuals to provide us with their judgment about the allegations our group was advancing. Almost all of the professionals who filled out our survey and returned the material to us indicated they thought that the professor had committed plagiarism.

There was only one consequence for the professor in question as a result of our activities. The powers that be in the university appointed him to serve as faculty liaison in conjunction with a committee consisting of both students and professors that investigated potential honor code violations by members of the student body ... honor code violations like those that would encompass instances of plagiarism that might have been committed by students.

If the allegations of the student group to which I belonged had been without merit, I feel fairly certain that our group would have been disbanded and, as well, I -- along with other members of that group -- very likely would have been suspended for a time, if not dismissed, from school altogether. The fact that no action -- not even a letter of reprimand -- was made with respect to either the group or its members suggests that the university authorities realized they would have been entering into very hazardous territory if they had tried to penalize the group or its members for releasing clear-cut evidence concerning material that had been plagiarized by a faculty member.

The fact that I was able to get my doctorate at all indicates there were a few individuals in academia that had integrity and, consequently, were willing to support my unusual route to a degree. The fact that 17 years were required to complete such a journey also indicates there were -- and continue to be -- substantial and very fundamental problems in certain dimensions of higher education.

Prior to getting my degree, I remember seeing photocopies on a variety of bulletin boards across the university that reproduced an article about a graduate student in California who was being released after spending 10 or 11 years in prison for having murdered his thesis advisor (some form of manslaughter I would imagine). Written in red letters on the photocopy was a comment: "Think of it ... only 11 years."

I didn't kill anyone – nor was I ever tempted to do so. Nonetheless, I still had to serve 17 years while being held prisoner in an academic gulag.

My career opportunities were all adversely affected by the foregoing dynamic. What remained intact, however, was my willingness to fight to defend my sovereignty despite the presence of an array of slings and arrows from outrageous misfortune.

During the 17-year period during which I was trying to obtain a doctorate, I took a variety of jobs in an effort to pay the bills. This work ranged from: Working in different libraries, to: Being a security guard; serving as a delivery person for an up-scale clothes shop; grading exams for the psychological component of an accounting program, and teaching – on and off -- an array of courses for a local community college.

In light of my earlier comments concerning the relative lack of comments that used to appear on my essays after they had been read, graded and, then, returned to me by this or that instructor or professor, the aforementioned job of grading psychology exams in conjunction with an accounting program has an interesting dimension. More specifically, knowing – from experience – how disappointing it was to spend hours researching and writing a term paper only to have the essay come back with little feedback, I decided that I would not expose students with whom I interacted to the same sort of disappointment. Consequently, wherever appropriate to do so, I provided copious amounts of constructive feedback on the exam papers I was grading.

However, one of the students whose exam paper I graded made an official complaint to the people that had hired me. The individual said that never in his life had anyone written so much on any paper or exam that the person had done.

Apparently, the person in question found the experience quite disconcerting. Of course, when someone is used to being abused, and, then, someone comes along to offer something of a much more constructive nature, then, the latter sort of offering can seem like a form of abuse when considered against a backdrop in which a variety of forms of actual abuse have become normalized.

Another experience of mine also resonates with the foregoing episode. After teaching psychology on and off at a community college over a number of years, I decided to apply for a full-time opening in the psychology department at that college.

The screening committee consisted of three individuals. One of those members was the program head who, originally, had hired me as a part-time instructor and who was quite happy with my work.

One of the other committee members was a former fellow graduate student in the education program discussed earlier. We had a variety of conversations during our tenure together, but we hadn't taken any of the same courses at the same time.

During the job interview, my former graduate school colleague asked me how I planned to engage my students if I was hired. I answered that I would use a system that combined aspects of individualized instruction with group instruction.

Given that most of the classes that I would teach would have enrollments of 30-40 students, my former graduate school colleague expressed a certain amount of incredulity with respect to the individualized aspect of my intentions concerning education. He said it wasn't possible ... that all one could do - with perhaps a few exceptions -- was to engage students as a group.

When I taught part-time, I had always tried to provide all my students with as much individual attention as I could. I spent time learning their names so that within a few weeks of the beginning of a semester, I knew their names, and, as well, I tried to provide each of them with a variety of opportunities that were designed to assist those students to make it through a course if not flourish during their association with me during that semester.

I knew what efforts I had made with respect to engaging former students. My former colleague did not have any insight into, or direct

knowledge of, how I interacted with students, and, as a result, chose to dismiss both my ideas and experiences concerning education simply because they ran contrary to his beliefs and biases.

I didn't get the job. The committee's vote was 2-1 against hiring me on a full-time basis.

The mind-set of my former graduate school colleague concerning the relationship between teachers and students seemed to be shared by quite a few other teachers and instructors at that community college. For example, I remember inviting a student to have lunch with me in a dining area within the college.

After sitting down with the student, I noticed a number of professors/instructors giving me rather hostile looks. Finally, one of the teachers/instructors came over to me to inform me that students were not permitted in the faculty area of the dining hall.

I listened to the faculty member and didn't say anything. I just kept eating.

After delivering his message, the faculty member walked away from our table. My guest and I left the dining table when we were ready to do so.

About fifteen or twenty years later, I was hired as an adjunct professor for a small university in north-central Maine. The classes were similar in size to the ones at the community college being alluded to above ... that is, those classes consisted of between 30 and 40 students.

One of the standard requirements that formed a part of many of the courses I taught involved producing a term paper. I often wrote more in the margins of those essays than the students had written in their entire papers.

Was my profuse commentary unnecessary? No!

For instance, I don't know what is being taught in many high schools these days (and my students came from different parts of the United States). However, the vast majority of the students that I taught could hardly write a proper sentence, let alone a cogent paragraph, or a well-constructed essay.

I remember one year attending a pre-semester meeting with the new dean of the school. As an adjunct professor, this was the only meeting I was permitted to attend because the rules of engagement for the university were that adjunct professors were not supposed to have any contact – the foregoing exception notwithstanding -- involving full-time teachers.

Someone in the pre-semester meeting brought up the subject of the lack of writing skills that seemed to be fairly common among members of the student body. The suggestion that the dean gave – who came from a background in English Literature – was to return the essays to the students and have the student do the essay again.

There was no hint from the dean about trying to interact with the students and help them with their writing problems. The responsibility for improving things was shifted away from the teachers who were supposed to be involved in helping to educate students and placed squarely on the students themselves who already were victims of educational abuse in the high schools they attended and, now, were being abused again in university.

The university where I taught as an adjunct professor required students to evaluate their teachers at the end of each course. The questions asked were fairly comprehensive, and the students had an opportunity to add their own comments – positive or negative -- concerning their experience during the course.

The evaluations were done without a name being attached to them. Moreover, the evaluations were only undertaken after I left the room, and I was not permitted to return to the room until all students had completed their assessment of the course and its instructor in order to try to ensure that students would not feel intimidated by some sort of undue influence that might be perpetrated through the presence of an instructor.

The students left their evaluations on a table at the front of the room. When all the students had left the room, I would collect the reviews and place them in an envelope that was marked with the name of the course and the instructor.

The evaluations eventually were returned to me after members of the administration had a chance to go through them and assess how

students felt about the course I was teaching and/or about me as instructor. I possess about five years-worth of those evaluations.

With a few exceptions, the student evaluations were highly positive. This was the case irrespective of whether a student had done well or poorly in my course.

The evaluation procedure provided students with an opportunity to make critical comments about, among other things, the manner in which I made extensive comments on their term papers. However, no one ever did make such a criticism ... instead, they seemed to appreciate the fact that someone had actually taken the time to offer them something more than merely going through the motions.

Prior to entering my first graduate program – the one in clinical psychology from which I withdrew after some of the individuals in the program reneged on their promises – I taught a summer course for the Ministry of Education in Ontario dealing with educational psychology, and the course was being given to about 30, or so, grade school and high school teachers who were interested in becoming guidance counselors.

I was in my early twenties at the time. Most of the members of the class were my age or older.

I began the course using a more, or less, traditional approach to learning theory. In other words, I went through classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and, then, began to branch out into additional forms of learning theory.

The course ran five days a week. After about a week, I realized that members of the class seemed to be tuning out and, therefore, I stopped what I was doing, indicated to the members of the class what I felt was occurring in the class, and, then, I opened up the class for discussion concerning my observations.

Different members of the class began to indicate they felt there were topics relevant to guidance counseling that might be more deserving of attention than the material being presented to them. For example, drugs were a huge problem and were having a major impact on what did -- or did not -- take place in schools as far as learning is concerned.

In addition, some of the teachers in my course were talking about how kids in their classes were prostituting themselves at lunchtime and after school in conjunction with other students at their schools. Many of the kids to whom they were alluding were between 9 and 11 years old, and, for me at least, this was quite shocking even in the early 1970s.

The members of my class indicated that they appreciated the importance of studying learning theory, but that kind of material was fairly abstract. They were interested in trying to find concrete, practical methods for dealing with the sorts of problems – such as the ones outlined above -- that were taking place in their respective schools.

Consequently, I took their concerns to heart and transitioned the focus of the class away from established ideas about learning and education. Instead, I began to explore a variety of alternative topics with the members of the class involving: Meaning, purpose, identity, existence, and sovereignty ... issues that were important not only for a course in educational psychology but, as well, carried implications for how those members of the class might interact with students when they returned to their respective schools.

There were a few of the older members of the class who were unhappy with the change in direction that was to be given expression through the remainder of the class and told me as much. They wanted to investigate traditional ways of thinking about various issues.

However, the vast majority of the class members seemed to want to move in a different direction. I tried to come up with a compromise solution that would offer class-members opportunities to have exposure to a variety of possibilities ... both in traditional and alternative forms.

The course abandoned the traditional teacher-student model and operated out of a co-operative enterprise between me – the nominal instructor – and the prospective guidance counselors who made up the class. I took a risk – for instance, I didn't ask anyone's permission to do what I did – and, in the process, I tried to loosen the usual way of doing things within a classroom, and, I believe the risk paid off ... at least that was the feedback provided to me by most of the students at the end of the course.

Sovereignty gives expression to a set of principles through which an individual neither seeks to control others, nor be controlled by them. Sovereignty is important to me, and this is true not only with respect to my own personal life, but, as well, the issue of sovereignty is central to how I try to approach education in conjunction with members of any course that I might conduct.

Unfortunately, the educational systems within which I have worked – both in Canada and the United States – have been inclined to try to avoid the whole issue of sovereignty (see *Volume V* of the *Final Jeopardy* series of books for an extended discussion concerning the idea of sovereignty) with respect to teachers as well as in relation to students. Within those systems, I only had a few degrees of freedom through which to operate, and where I could, I would try to implement sovereignty-based approaches to education, but, for the most part, there were not many degrees of freedom accorded to me with respect to the foregoing sorts of matters.

Consequently, about eight years ago, I withdrew from teaching in formal settings (e.g., colleges and universities). I switched over to writing books, developing my own publishing company, as well as used blogs, Podcasts and web pages to try to generate a certain amount of interest in a variety of topics that all, in one way or another, have to do with the issue of sovereignty.

I wish I could say that I had a clear, deep understanding of what was going on within me during: Grammar school, high school, college, graduate school, or teaching. Although I might have had some dim awareness of what was transpiring at any given point in my life, oftentimes, whatever insight might have become associated with those facets of my life came after the fact – sometimes quite a while after the fact -- and not necessarily while things were taking place.

I stumbled through many parts of life. I made my fair share of mistakes in a lot of areas, but I tried to learn from those errors and, thereby, avoid those problems in the future.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, my real education did not begin until I began an association with my Sufi guide. Through the Grace of Allah that came into my life by means of, among other things, the example of my spiritual teacher, I learned about: Islam, the Sufi path, myself, other people, spiritual psychology, community,

government, the media, education, history, discipline, freedom, character, identity, purpose, truth, and so many other issues.

I did not learn the foregoing things by reading about them or taking formal courses. I learned about them by learning discernment in the presence of my shaykh – according to my capacity – in conjunction with the process of feeding my soul and doing what I could to help the soul to struggle toward various degrees of spiritual realization ... however limited this might be.

My life began to change substantially when I stepped onto the Sufi path and began to learn how to die before I die. Whatever I learned – painful though it might have been -- that helped me to die, even a little, to my: Delusions, biases, false beliefs, nafs/ego, dunya/world, or ignorance was a constructive experience.

Section II: Sam Harris and the Future of Ignorance



Chapter One: Opening Volleys

Sam Harris begins his dialogue with Maajid Nawaz in the book *Islam and the Future of Tolerance* by talking about “the prospects for reforming the faith” ... something that Maajid Nawaz is interested in doing. Perhaps, however, what has to be reformed is the understanding of various Muslims and non-Muslims with respect to the nature of Islam.

Dr. Harris assumes that he understands Islam, but he provides plenty of evidence in his books that such is not the case. In fact, Dr. Harris is presumptuous in precisely the same way as many fundamentalists are presumptuous for they all seem to be incapable of considering the possibility that they might be wrong about – along with quite a few other things -- their understanding concerning the nature of Islam.

At a dinner gathering associated with the Intelligence Squared debate in October 2010, Dr. Harris criticized Maajid Nawaz for arguing in the debate that Islam is a religion of peace that has been hijacked by extremists because, according to Dr. Harris, “Islam isn’t a religion of peace, and the so-called ‘extremists’ are seeking to implement what is arguably the most honest reading of the faith’s actual doctrine.”

What is the evidence that the “extremists” are implementing “the most honest reading of the faith’s actual doctrine”? What “actual doctrine of the faith” is Dr. Harris talking about, and on what is he basing his claim concerning the nature of such a doctrine? Moreover, what makes the reading of the “extremists” the most honest one?

Dr. Harris proclaims to Maajid Nawaz that: “Someone has to try to reform Islam from within. ... But the path of reform appears to be one of pretense. You seem obliged to pretend that the doctrine is something other than it is – for instance, you must pretend that jihad is just an inner spiritual struggle, whereas it’s primarily a doctrine of holy war.”

What is the evidential basis for Dr. Harris claiming that jihad is primarily a doctrine of war? He just makes the claim ... he never backs it up ... he never demonstrates how Islam and the Qur’an demand that jihad must primarily be understood as a doctrine of physical war and

that any conflict with others on the part of Muslims automatically gives expression to holy war.

On the other hand, contrary to what Maajid Nawaz claims, the Qur'an should not be understood in terms of the historical contexts in which certain passages of the Qur'an were revealed. Rather, while those historical events might have been the occasion when revelation was manifested, the Qur'an must be understood as a whole, and the application of the Qur'an must be done in accordance with what constitutes the best way of engaging a given set of circumstances through the entirety of the Qur'an's teachings and not just this or that cherry-picked passage of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an is guidance, not a rulebook or a law book. The Qur'an gives expression to a nuanced, multi-dimensional, rich, insightful understanding concerning the nature of existence and an individual's relationship to such existence. One must draw from the entirety of that understanding when engaging experience or one does injustice to the guidance.

According to Nawaz: "... what can unite us is a set of religion-neutral values. By focusing on the universality of human, democratic, and secular values, we can arrive at some common ground."

This all sounds very good, but it is almost meaningless. While there might be values that are held in common by humanists and Islam, those values are not necessarily religion-neutral because we don't know where ideas come from ... goodness, truth, character, value, justice, peace, harmony, and so on are concepts that refer to issues that have to do with the possible nature of the universe, and until we know the underlying nature of the reality to which such concepts give expression or what makes our understanding of such concepts possible, then, all one can say is that there are a number of potential points of intersection where non-believers and believers might be able to reach an agreement about how to proceed in order to provide everyone with an opportunity to continue to be able to seek the truth concerning the nature of reality.

Just what does Nawaz mean when he talks about the "universality of human, democratic, and secular values"? Such values are universal in what sense? There are many different ways of parsing ideas such as: freedom, rights, fairness, justice, democracy, and so on.

The foregoing words might be universally used. However, there are tremendous differences in meanings ... it is a Tower of Babel.

Maajid Nawaz states: "Religion doesn't inherently speak for itself; no scripture, no book, no piece of writing has its own voice."

I disagree with him. If I write something, then, what is written gives expression to my voice.

If Nawaz, or anyone else, wishes to interpret what I am saying in some other way, then that interpretation gives expression to their voice. Nonetheless, to try to give priority to their interpretation over what I am intending through the writing is to try to deny my voice.

Moreover, reality has its own voice. It is what it is.

If a certain section of scripture – and this sentence is intended to be hypothetical in character -- gives expression to the voice of reality, then, in what sense does such scripture not have its own voice? If religion is a process of seeking to access the truth concerning the nature of reality, then, in what sense does that reality not have its own voice, and isn't one of the problems that plagues many modes of understanding (whether in the case of religion or the case of science) a function of how people often seek to give priority to their own voice over the voice of reality, and, thereby, discount what reality has to say?

Nawaz goes on to argue that: "I asserted that Islam is a religion of peace simply because the vast majority of Muslims today do not subscribe to its being a religion of war. If it holds that Islam is only what its adherents interpret it to be, then it is currently a religion of peace."

Deen – or the way of Islam -- is neither a matter of interpretation nor a matter of majority vote. One has to be opened up to the reality of Deen.

One cannot impose one's own ideas onto it. Furthermore, one cannot impose the agreements of a collective set of individuals upon the nature of truth.

Although Nawaz wants to challenge "the narrative of violence that has been popularized by" militant fundamentalists, he is, in fact, introducing his own narrative into the discourse. In the process he has deprived Islam of its own voice ... the voice that God has given it and

the voice that needs to be heard in order for an individual to be opened up to the essential nature of Islam.

The book *Islam and the Future of Tolerance* has a footnote on page 8 that talks about a 2013 PEW poll conducted in eleven Muslim majority countries and shows that “support for suicide bombing against civilians in defense of Islam has declined in recent years.” Nonetheless, the footnote goes on to list the percentages by country “who still think that this form of violence against non-combatants is ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’ justified are sobering ... Egypt 25%; Indonesia, 6%; Jordan, 12%; Lebanon, 33%; Malaysia, 27%, Nigeria, 8%; Pakistan, 3%; Palestinian territories, 62%, Senegal, 18%; Tunisia, 12%, and Turkey 16%.”

What does it actually mean when someone says that killing noncombatants is “sometimes” or “often” justified? Does it mean that they are prepared to do it themselves? Does it mean that while they wouldn’t necessarily engage in such acts themselves, voicing such things is the only options they are being given by the pollsters to express their disagreement with the way that the United States, Britain, or Israel goes about killing people with impunity? Or, does it mean that they are angry, and, therefore, they are prepared to say something violent because that is how they feel, but, if push came to shove, they would not commit that sort of violence? Unless one can meaningfully and precisely translate the extent to which words can be transformed into certain kinds of acts of violence, then, all such polls indicate is someone’s willingness to speak the language of violence without necessarily being willing to act out the language of violence.

Millions of people around the world – including Sam Harris (for example, see page 129 of the 2005 Norton paperback edition of *The End of Faith*) -- use words of violence. However, only a very limited number of those individuals ever put those words into the sort of motion that ends in physical violence.

Moreover, what does it mean that: “... support for suicide bombing against civilians ... has declined in recent years”? Is the decline due to the way in which some individuals have had a chance to reflect on such actions and, therefore, no longer feel that those actions are justified ... even though at some point they might have been reluctantly sympathetic to that sort of behavior?

What has brought about such a decline? More importantly, if such opinions can change, then, what conclusions, if any, can one draw from an opinion poll except that, perhaps, one cannot necessarily be certain of just what those polls are reflecting or tapping into?

Relative to the United States, the vast majority of countries in the world that are not in a state of war consist of people who, if given a choice, are, for the most part, not violent. The United States, on the other hand, is one of the most violent countries in the world – both domestically and internationally, and the latter includes the unprovoked invasion of numerous countries around the world including Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Vietnam, Yemen, Syria, Cuba, and so on that has led to the death of millions of people.

Whatever the shortcomings of the foregoing countries might be America is more of a terrorist nation than any of the foregoing countries or peoples. America has long been a country that propagandizes about the speck of terrorism in someone else's eye while ignoring the beam of terrorism in its own.

While discussing various military conflicts in the world, Dr. Harris indicates that many Muslims viewed some of those operations as being sacrilegious ... no matter how evil or secular the target of Western power happens to be. Dr. Harris says: "Saddam Hussein was the perfect example: he was a universally hated secular tyrant. But the moment a coalition of non-Muslim states attacked him, much of the Muslim world was outraged that 'Muslim lands' were being invaded by infidels

As usual, Dr. Harris has got his facts wrong. The several invasions of Iraq by a coalition of countries involved quite a few Muslim nations, and, therefore, infidels were not invading Muslim lands, but, rather, the invasion was carried out by a group of countries that, in one way or another, consisted of soldiers who could be considered to be "people of the book" (e.g., Christian, Jewish, and Muslim), but each of those countries had its own reasons – almost invariably bad ones – for invading Iraq.

Saddam Hussein might have been a secular tyrant, but the United States was quite happy with him when he was doing its bidding in, among other things, the horrendous Iran-Iraq war. It wasn't until

Saddam Hussein started to work toward undermining the Petro-dollar by advocating the implementation of a new gold standard for making oil purchases on the international market that Saddam Hussein began to fall out of favor with the United States.

While, most murderously, Saddam Hussein did gas his own people, nonetheless, it was the West who supplied him with the chemical materials that enabled him to carry out that job. Moreover, Winston Churchill arranged for the Iraqi people to be gassed long before Saddam Hussein came up with the idea, and, perhaps, the actions of the supposedly great icon of British history who got away with such reprehensible actions inspired Saddam Hussein to follow suit.

In 1990, the case against Saddam Hussein's tyranny purportedly was so strong that the United States felt compelled to fabricate evidence in order to persuade the Saudis that the Iraqi army was massing along the border to Saudi Arabia when satellite imagery indicated this was not the case. In addition, in order to obtain Congressional permission to carry out a military attack on Iraq, elements within the U.S. government arranged for the daughter of a high-Kuwaiti official to lie during a hearing before Congress by claiming (falsely) that she had witnessed Iraqi soldiers taking babies from incubators in Kuwait and smashing them on the hospital floors ... testimony that helped turn the tide of opinion within the United States in general, and the U.S. Congress in particular, to look favorably upon the idea of military action against Iraq.

In addition, let us not forget the role of Ambassador April Glaspie in helping to convince Saddam Hussein that the United States had no interest in Iraq's border dispute with Kuwait. By doing so, the United States misled Saddam Hussein and, thereby, helped make possible all the carnage that followed.

All the United States had to do was to let Saddam Hussein know that it would not look favorably on any invasion of, or attack on, Kuwait, and the crisis could have been averted ... at least for the moment. However, by playing games with Saddam Hussein, the United States government is, in part, culpable in relation to the tragic events that followed.

Moreover, one should keep in mind that both George W. Bush and Colin Powell went before the United Nations and put forth

manufactured evidence in order to get international approval for the United States' desired illegal war with Iraq in 2003. Indeed, apparently, information is now coming out via the e-mail controversy involving former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that Bush, Powell, and Tony Blair conspired to generate an array of false information in order to try to justify their intention to invade Iraq.

What is problematic about the United States invading Iraq – both through the 1990s as well as beginning in 2003 – is that there was no real justification for such actions. The United States -- together with a morally challenged group of coalition partners -- invaded a sovereign country without provocation and, in the process, killed hundreds of thousands of innocent non-combatants.

Whatever Saddam Hussein's sins might have been, they were his sins and not the sins of the Iraqi people. The United States, and its coalition partners, perpetrated war crimes against the people of Iraq

Whatever the tyrannical sins of Saddam Hussein might have been, the terrorist actions in Iraq by the United States along with its partners in crime were far worse. The United States destroyed the infrastructure of a once viable country, killed its citizens by the hundreds of thousands – many of whom were children -- detained and tortured large numbers of innocent citizens in places like Abu Ghraib, as well in a number of illegal black sites, and helped push the entire Middle East into a destabilized freefall.

Was Saddam Hussein a terrible tyrant? Yes, he was, but where is the evidence that Saddam Hussein did anything remotely like what the United States and its allies did to the people of Iraq? In fact, the evidence indicates that the US military and its allies killed hundreds of times more innocent Iraqis than Saddam Hussein did.

Dr. Harris states: "One of the problems with religion is that it creates in-group loyalty and out-group hostility, even when members of one's own group are behaving like psychopaths." As usual, Dr. Harris frames things in a way that suits what appear to be demagogic purposes.

What are the 39 countries of the US led coalition but an exercise intended to whip up in-group loyalty in order to ferment in-group hostility against their out-group target -- namely, the people of Iraq?

Why blame religion for doing what many, if not most, social groups – religious and secular -- have done throughout history?

Moreover, what is Sam Harris doing by going after religion if not engaging in an exercise that seeks to establish an “out-group” with respect to those whom he and others who think like him can feel justified in harboring hostilities toward the members of such a group? Dr. Harris is so busy wagging his finger at religion for making in-group and out-group distinctions that he apparently fails to see that he is engaged in precisely the same kind of activity with his diatribes against religion.

The problem is not religion per se. The problem is human beings who use social forms of control, persuasion, indoctrination, and propaganda to create “us” and “them” scenarios for reasons having to do with the exercise of power.

While referring to Maajid Nawaz’s distinction between “revolutionary Islamists” and “jihadists,” Dr. Harris refers to a group of Muslims who: “... apparently wake each morning yearning to kill infidels and apostates. Many of them also seem eager to be martyred in the process. Most of us refer to these people as jihadists.” Although years ago, I employed such terminology myself on several occasions, nonetheless, I think there are some problems entailed by such usage.

First of all, the primary sense of jihad – the greater jihad to which the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) referred -- is an individual’s struggle with his or her ego or nafs. This dimension of jihad remains relevant even if there had never been any armed conflicts involving Muslims throughout history.

By referring to fundamentalists as jihadists, one corrupts the idea of jihad – even in its minor, lesser sense. While the idea of jihad does encompass the possibility of using physical force to defend a Muslim community, any use of force that does not serve the more basic and greater sense of opposing the machinations of the ego is an inappropriate use of force and, therefore, does not give expression to the notion of jihad.

The people to whom Dr. Harris is referring are not jihadists. They are narcissistic, ideological psychopaths.

Like narcissists, the individuals to whom Dr. Harris is referring are deeply enamored with themselves. Like narcissists, those people are incredibly delusional concerning their own sense of self-worth, and they become belligerent toward anyone who does not agree with their inflated sense of self-worth or takes exception with the manner in which they filter reality in accordance with their delusional belief systems concerning themselves and the world.

Like psychopaths, the people to whom Dr. Harris is referring have no conscience with respect to either destroying the lives of others or causing others pain. Like psychopaths, such individuals have poor impulse control and have little insight into the problematic nature of their own behavior. Like psychopaths, such individuals are interested only in their own gratification, and they don't care who has to suffer while they go about seeking to realize such gratification. Like psychopaths, the people to whom Dr. Harris is alluding are willing to engage in risky behavior with little appreciation for the consequences that might arise through pursuing that sort of risky behavior. Like psychopaths, such individuals are inclined toward manipulating and controlling situations to serve their own desire to pursue one, or another, form of self-gratification. Like psychopaths, they tend to use people and, then, discard them when the latter individuals no longer serve the purposes of the former individuals.

Finally, the narcissistic psychopathy that afflicts the individuals to whom Dr. Harris is making reference entails being ideologically driven rather than being due to some set of biological, social and/or set of psychological conditions. That ideology is thoroughly delusional, and, therefore, everything they think, feel, and do is filtered through that delusional system of understanding.

To refer to them as jihadists – as Sam Harris and Maajid Nawaz do -- frames the conversation in a way that attempts to give some degree of unwarranted credence to their manner of portraying Islam. Such a usage gives the impression that what they are doing is just one of many, possible, legitimate ways of engaging or reading Islam.

However, there is absolutely nothing in the delusional systems of the manner in which fundamentalists and extremists understand things or in their manner of conducting themselves that reflects the

teachings of Islam. Such individuals are deeply disturbed ... emotionally, psychologically, socially, and spiritually.

The Qur'an is very clear (Surah 2, Verse 256). There can be no element of force or compulsion present in the matter of Deen or the way in which one engages Islam.

Whoever treats Islam as if it were an imperialistic creed that is intended to control the people of the world and to which all of the people on Earth are required to submit has failed to come to grips with even the most rudimentary teaching of Islam. Islam is, first and foremost, a matter of free choice.

Maajid Nawaz says that: "... Islam is a traditional religion like any other, replete with sects, denominations, and variant readings. But Islamism is the desire to impose any of those readings on society. It is commonly expressed as the desire to enforce a version of shari'ah as law. Political Islamists seek to impose their views through the ballot box ... Revolutionary Islamists seek change from outside the system in one clean sweep. Militant Islamists are jihadists."

Although many people of faith might have their interpretations and understandings of what is entailed by their approach to religion, one must distinguish between what a religion might actually mean and what various people take it to mean. Again, Nawaz seems comfortable with taking away the voice of religion itself – and this is true independently of whether religion is a human construction or it is something that is given through the nature of reality.

Individual Muslims and Muslim communities might be "replete with sects, denominations, and variant readings." However, Islam is not a function of any of those sects, denominations, or variant readings, irrespective of whether such hermeneutical orientations are considered individually or collectively.

To whatever extent a person seeks to impose his or her ideas about Islam on other people – whether through political, legal, revolutionary, or military means – then, such an approach is rooted in a misunderstanding of the tenets of Islam. However one wishes to interpret this or that passage in the Qur'an, such passages must all be modulated in accordance with, among other things, the light of the

Surah 2, Verse 256, and any “reading” of the Qur’an that ignores Surah 2, Verse 256 will be in error.

To the best of my understanding, the term shari’ah appears just once in the Qur’an. In Surah 45, Verse 18, one finds: “O Prophet, We have put you on the Right Way (shari’ah) concerning the Deen (way of Islam), so follow it, and do not yield to the desires of ignorant people.”

In Arabic, the noun shari’ah refers to a place where animals go for purposes of being able to drink water. The related verb shar’a involves the act of ‘taking a drink’. By extension, both the noun and the verb forms allude to a path, road, or way that leads to a place where one might take a drink.

There is another word, shari’, that is derived from the same root as the two foregoing terms. This other word refers to a lawgiver, legislator, or one who determines the law, but, as well, this term also can refer to a street, path, or way.

If one brings all of the foregoing senses into juxtaposition with one another, one arrives at the following sort of understanding. Shari’ah is a way, path, or means that leads to a place where one will have access to something that, like water, is of existential import ... a set of circumstances that reality has organized into a means through which the individual, the way, the process of traversing the path, the act of drinking, and the value of what is imbibed are linked with one another.

The sense of law that is associated with the foregoing understanding has to do with the ordered nature of existence. God is the One Who has arranged reality in the way it is, and God is the one who has created the individual, the path, the water, and that which will happen when that water is drunk.

Being put on the Right Way – shari’ah – with respect to Deen, or the way of Islam, refers to the process of coming to realize one’s relationship with reality’s existential nature. Shari’ah has nothing to do with a legal system intended to control people or society, and shari’ah has everything to do with a process of struggling to find, and journey along, the path that will provide one with an opportunity to drink that which will assist one to realize one’s relationship with Being.

I consider both Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz to belong to the group of ignorant people with respect to whom the Qur'an was warning the Prophet against yielding to their desires concerning matters of Deen. They toss all kinds of terms about when it comes to Islam, but they have no understanding of what it is they are doing.

Dr. Harris refers to various groups that have analyzed the elections of Muslim-majority countries over the last 40 years and goes on to state: "This suggests that 15 percent of the world's Muslims are Islamists" – that is, people who wish to impose their beliefs on others through one means or another.

He goes on to argue: "However, poll results on the topic of shari'ah generally show much higher levels of support for implementation – killing adulterers, cutting off the hands of thieves, and so forth. I'm not sure what to think about a society in which 15% of people vote for an Islamist party, but 40 percent or even 60 percent want apostates killed."

Even if one were to accept the foregoing analyses and poll results, there is a strange sort of inconsistency between the poll results and the results of election in Muslim-majority countries over the last forty years. If the so-called Islamists are all about shari'ah – at least as they understand it -- and if 40-60% of the people are in favor of the sort of severe punishments that are mentioned by Dr. Harris which forms part of what the Islamists are promoting, then, why isn't the support for the fundamentalist approach to things up around 40-60% rather than holding at roughly 15% for more than 40 years?

Conceivably, people respond to polling questions in a way that they think will be least problematic or threatening for themselves and their families. After all, the person being polled has no idea who the person or people doing the polling will talk to about what they hear from this or that individual who is responding to the poll ... better to respond in a fashion that meets the expectations of fundamentalists rather than to say something that might get the individuals answering the questions in trouble.

However, for the sake of argument, let's assume that Harris' information is accurate and reflects the actual position of Muslims worldwide. To answer Dr. Harris' question, what I would make of such societies is that Muslim leaders – educational, political, legal, and

spiritual – have done a terrible job of teaching their respective peoples about the actual nature of Islam.

Let's approach the foregoing issues from a different vantage point. How many people in the United States believe that it was right to kill hundreds of thousands of innocent noncombatants in Iraq and Afghanistan despite the fact that neither country invaded the United States nor, prior to such invasions, took one American life?

The pretext for invading Afghanistan is that its government was giving safe harbor to Osama bin Laden and his followers. However, the Taliban government at the time of the invasion said that they would be willing to turn bin Laden over to US authorities if the latter would provide the Afghan government with proof that bin Laden did what the US claimed he did (e.g., arranged the attack on the Twin Towers in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington), but the United States rejected that offer.

Incidentally, Robert Mueller who was the head of the FBI at the time of the September 11, 2001 events publicly stated that there was no paper trail or hard evidence that tied bin Laden to 9/11. Moreover, on a number of occasions, bin Laden indicated during several interviews with media representatives that he did not have anything to do with 9/11.

Terrorists often take credit for atrocities irrespective of whether they did them or not ... since this is, after all, a way of helping to bring a sense of terror into the lives of the people being targeted. Yet, on several occasions, bin Laden publicly disavowed any connection to the events of 9/11.

Much of the so-called information concerning bin Laden's alleged involvement with 9/11 came from an individual (Khalid Shaikh Mohammed) who was water-boarded by the CIA at least 183 times and whom the CIA would not permit the 9/11 Commission to interview directly. Therefore, whatever information came via Khalid Sheikh Mohammed is completely unreliable and has not been substantiated in any independent manner that is not also substantially tainted with respect to its methodology or process of analyzing the data gained through such methodology.

Moreover, even if bin Laden were complicit in some way with the events of 9/11, the United States did not have such evidence at the time it invaded Afghanistan in the fall of 2001. When, prior to the invasion, NATO asked the United States to provide evidence that Afghanistan was involved in the events of 9/11, Colin Powell promised to give NATO such evidence but never did so, and, therefore, there was no legal grounds for either NATO or the United States to become involved in the Afghanistan invasion because, according to the rules of engagement of NATO, a member country must be able to show hard, concrete evidence that one, or more, of the members of NATO have been attacked by another country in order for an attack on the latter country to be justified ... and this was not done by the United States.

The United States government did not provide evidence to NATO members that the Afghani government co-operated with bin Laden, or co-operated with other individuals, to attack the United States on September 11, 2001. Furthermore, the United States government did not provide the members of NATO with evidence that bin Laden was responsible for the 9/11 attacks on the United States, and even if the United States government had been able to provide such evidence, the rules of engagement governing the conditions under which NATO members might go to war involve the aggression of countries against one, or more, NATO members rather than the acts of a small group of non-governmental criminals.

Millions of people in the United States were caught up in the fog of war created by the US government and its media puppets during the hysteria and the climate of fear that were generated following the events of 9/11. Vast portions of the population of the United States wanted Muslim blood, and they didn't care whether the Muslims were innocent or guilty.

For example, first Madeline Albright, former Secretary of State, during a *60 Minutes* interview, and, then, Bill Richardson, former US Ambassador to the United Nations, during an interview with Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now*, both responded to a question about whether, or not, the US actions in Iraq during the first Gulf War were worth it given that as many as 500,000 innocent people died there and especially given that many of these casualties were children. Both of the aforementioned individuals indicated that what had been gained

through the US's actions in Iraq was worth the price that was paid for by Iraqi lives.

Unfortunately, nothing was really gained. The world did not become a safer, better, more stable place.

Instead, Iraq was destroyed, millions of people in that country were killed or displaced, the Middle East was destabilized, and the actions of the United States in that region were a primary cause underlying the rise of such psychopathic groups as the Islamic State.

One might think that attitudes of people like Madeline Albright and Bill Richardson, could not get much more barbaric. Then, however, one remembers that it was the United States that used 'Shock and Awe' as a form of collective reprisal or punishment against the Iraqi people as retribution for the sins of Saddam Hussein, as well as committed extensive acts of torture in locations such as Abu Ghraib, and used white phosphorus in places like Fallujah, as well as extensively made use of depleted uranium throughout Iraq (and the latter is deeply implicated in the massive increases in cancer and birth defects that have been recorded among Iraqis).

When one recalls such horrors, one realizes that the West is also filled with its share of narcissistic, psychopathic ideologues. The only thing that distinguishes the narcissistic, psychopathic ideologues of the West from their counterparts in various fundamentalist groups in the Middle East is that the West has conducted its psychopathic acts of barbarity on a far, far greater scale than have the fundamentalist groups in the Middle East.

And just in case people like Sam Harris forget – as he seems to be wont to do -- using collective punishment against the Iraqi people for things that Saddam Hussein did, and/or invading countries without provocation, and/or torturing its citizens, and/or using white phosphorous on the inhabitants of such countries, as well as using munitions made with depleted uranium to attack those people are all in contravention of international agreements. The West likes to think of itself as civilized, but its actions indicate otherwise.

One can acknowledge that many, if not most, of the individuals who are members of the Islamic State are narcissistic, psychopathic ideologues. Yet, despite all of their terrible, reprehensible, and vicious

actions, those people don't begin to approach the magnitude of the atrocities that the United States has visited upon, among others, the people of Afghanistan for the past fourteen years, along with the people of Iraq for more than a quarter of a century ... and Iraq is another country that had nothing to do with 9/11 except in the power-drunk, delusional thinking of people like Dick Cheney and his minions.

Dr. Harris is worried about the number of so-called Islamists (people who supposedly wish to impose their religious beliefs on others) around the world as being in the vicinity of 20%. Perhaps he should be just as worried, if not more so, about the 40-70% of Americans (depending on the issue) who have supported, and continue to support, the militaristic and imperialistic policies of numerous US administrations to actively work to help bring about the death and displacement of millions of innocent people in Korea, Honduras, Iran, Vietnam, Chile, South Africa, Argentina, Palestine, Panama, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, and beyond ... the same type of mentality that helped commit genocide with respect to Native Peoples in North America and instituted a series of racist policies concerning African-Americans that continues to operate right up until the present time.

Martin Luther King, Jr. got it right nearly 50 years ago during a speech he gave in 1967 against the war in Vietnam. He stated that: "The greatest purveyor of violence in the world today" is the United States government, and one might add that the greatest perpetrator of terrorism in the world has been, and continues to be, the United States government.

Dr. Harris vociferously and constantly criticizes, and rightly so, the misguided Muslims who serve as suicide bombers. Too bad he doesn't spend as much time and energy criticizing the far more egregious misguided actions of the United States government when it comes to the dispensing of violence, death, and destruction around the world.

Chapter Two -- Fundamentalism

Maajid Nawaz makes a distinction between fundamentalists and Islamists. He claims that the former's: "... support of death for apostates hails more from a medieval, tribal desire to punish the 'out-group,' which is justified by religious scripture than from a belief in the Islamist ideological project of codifying shari'ah as law and imposing it on society."

Earlier I noted how Nawaz had argued that: "Religion doesn't inherently speak for itself; no scripture, no book, no piece of writing has its own voice." If religion and scripture don't speak for themselves, then, he cannot simultaneously claim that religious scripture justifies enforcing the death of apostates.

In fact, from his perspective, he can't argue that religion or scripture justify anything. Everything is a function of the voice that a given group of individuals impose on religion and/or scripture.

Philosophically speaking, Nawaz is really not all that different from the Islamists he wishes to criticize. After all, just like the Islamists and the fundamentalists that he is critiquing, Nawaz is seeking to misdirect people away from the idea that scripture might have a voice of its own that does not reflect what Nawaz, the fundamentalists, or the Islamists are trying to argue with respect to the nature of Islam.

Nawaz goes on to refer to such non-Islamist fundamentalists as conservative Muslims. He points out that such individuals are "extremely conservative in their own families and lifestyles" and in the process often pose problems for various dimensions of human rights.

According to Nawaz, conservative Muslims don't want the state to impose religion. Instead, "they want to retain the right to have their own understanding of what this religious conservatism means."

I think the foregoing way of saying things is somewhat disingenuous. Conservative Muslims (just like conservative Christians and conservative Jews) do want the state to enforce their view of things, but when the state has a different take on any given issue and wishes to move in a direction (be this fundamentalist or liberal in nature) that is opposed to what conservative Muslims believe, then, the latter want to be free to either agitate for change in government

policy or to take matters into their own hands ... such as occurs in relation to the issue of honor killings.

Nawaz believes that the great majority of Muslims in Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and so on are conservative Muslims rather than Islamists. He argues that, on the one hand, such people are opposed to groups like al-Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Jamat-e-Islami (i.e., who advocate some version of a so-called Islamist ideology), but, on the other hand, conservative Muslims are often opposed to various ideas involving the advancement of human rights.

If one takes seriously the Quranic injunction that “there can be no compulsion in matters of Deen” (Surah 2, Verse 256), then, not only are so-called Islamists and conservative Muslims in error when they wish to enforce their perspective on others (whether socially, politically, and/or legally), but, so too, is Nawaz for trying to argue that the only way to proceed is through some form of democratically enforced system of human rights that denies the possibility that religion and scripture might have a voice of their own that is not dependent on the opinions of this or that person or this or that group or government.

Everyone has the right to seek the truth. No one has the right to use that right to interfere with, undermine, or curtail the like right of others.

Nawaz notes how the organization Quilliam that he cofounded is dedicated to the process of promoting “secular democratic counter-messages” to the so-called “Islamists and other forms of cultural extremism” that are espoused by, among others, conservative Muslims. Democracy – secular or otherwise -- cannot resolve the tensions and problems that arise in conjunction with the idea of neither seeking to control the lives of others nor being forced to cede agency with respect to such matters of control.

The answers – to whatever extent they can be accessed by human beings – rests with the issue of sovereignty. The idea of sovereignty is something that I believe is inherent in every authentic religious tradition that has appeared on Earth, and resonates, as well, with the Magna Carta that was agreed upon at Runnymede in June of 1215.

The United States did not begin as a democracy. In fact, democracy was a “dirty” word for many of the so-called Founding Fathers.

Instead, the document that came out of Philadelphia in 1787 was rooted in the Enlightenment philosophy of ‘republicanism’. This was a moral philosophy that was supposed to govern the behavior of those who were in power and, thereby, provide a form of governance that, supposedly, had never been established previously in human history.

One can confirm the foregoing – at least in a limited way – by reading Article IV, Section 4 of the United States Constitution. That portion of the Constitution guarantees every state a republican form of government ... and do take note of the fact that what is being guaranteed is not a democratic form of government but a republican form of government.

The meaning of republican government has nothing to do with the philosophy of the Republican Party. As previously indicated, it refers to a form of Enlightenment morality that was intended to govern the behavior of those who were in power.

Unfortunately, the principles of republicanism were abandoned even before the Constitution was ratified over several years following the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention of 1787. In fact, the convening of that Convention violated many of the moral principles of republicanism, but, apparently, as Ralph Waldo Emerson is reported to have said: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.”

Prior to, during, and following the Philadelphia Convention of 1787, there were many individuals frequenting the teahouses and taverns on both sides of the Atlantic who were interested in something more than democracy and republicanism. Thomas Paine was one of those individuals.

Such individuals were interested in the issue of sovereignty. This is a concept that transcends both democracy and republicanism (For an in-depth exploration of the idea of sovereignty, one might read: (1) *The Unfinished Revolution* or (2) *Final Jeopardy: Sovereignty and the Reality Problem, Volume V*. These matters also are critically explored in Section III of the present book: Namely, *Shari’ah: A Muslim’s Declaration of Independence*.).

Nawaz refers to the activities of Quilliam as being reformist in nature. He says: "By 'reform' I mean renew or update interpretations." He goes on to assert that: "... by pointing to historical and contemporary pluralism in scriptural reasoning, we can challenge the rigidity of violent, fundamentalist, or ideological dogma."

I am not sure how such an approach will be able to "challenge the rigidity of violent, fundamentalist, or ideological dogma." More specifically, how does citing historical pluralism concerning the interpretation of Islam challenge dogma?

Dogmatic ideologues are true believers. If they were patient – which they usually aren't – they would listen to all of Nawaz's historical data, and, say: "So what? ... The people that Nawaz is citing are all wrong, and we are right", or they would point to the teachings of certain individuals ensconced within such historical data and claim that those people got it right and everyone else being cited by Nawaz is wrong.

Nawaz wishes to relativize Islam. He wants to deprive Islam of its own voice and argue that because historically speaking there have been a plurality of views concerning the meaning of Islam, then, the Islamist voice is just one voice among many, and, therefore, does not give expression to what a majority of Muslims believe about the nature of Islam – irrespective of whether one is talking in current terms or with respect to the past.

If scripture or religion has no voice of its own, then, what does it matter how this or that person interprets the meaning of Islam? Revelation alludes to the idea that something not human is conveying information to human beings, and, therefore, revelation is not a function of how someone interprets that information but, whether, or not, an individual can grasp the significance and value of the information that is being disseminated through non-human agency.

Sam Harris, of course, doesn't believe in revelation, and that is his choice. I don't agree with him, but I acknowledge his God-given right to make such a choice.

More perplexingly, however, is the fact that, apparently, Nawaz doesn't believe in revelation either. If he did, he would understand that the existence of a plurality of meanings concerning the possible

meaning of Islam is irrelevant to the question of trying to determine the nature of the reality that is being conveyed to human beings by a non-human Agent.

Everyone who offers an opinion concerning the nature of Islam believes that his or her opinion is correct. However, just as not every hypothesis that is offered in science is necessarily correct and, as a result, must be tested against, and considered in conjunction with, the available evidence, so, too, not every opinion ventured in relation to Islam is necessarily tenable.

The task facing any given Muslim is not a matter of going about parsing or interpreting Islam in this or that fashion. The challenge is to struggle toward realizing the truth of what has been revealed to human beings.

Harris responds to Nawaz's use of the term "secular" by saying: "... you're using a more precise definition of the word 'secular' than is common in this context. To spell it out for our readers: Secularism is simply a commitment to keeping religion out of politics and public policy."

Why stop with religion? Why not keep every form of philosophy, ideology, and belief out of politics and public policy?

What is the difference between imposing religion on people and using some set of philosophical, political, legal, and/or economic doctrines to generate a version of politics and public policy that will be imposed on people?

In his book, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, Sam Harris tries – unsuccessfully -- to put forth a conceptual framework that might form – or so he believes -- a tenable basis for shaping politics and public policy in a secular manner. His book is filled with unresolved problems, questions, and difficulties, and anyone who cares to pursue the matter can read about such issues in my book: *Epistle To A Sam Harris Nation: Debunking the Moral Landscape* where I engage Dr. Harris on his own turf – that of science and philosophy – and leave religion out of the matter.

Many secularists tend to be every bit as fundamentalist, rigid, and dogmatic in their approaches to life as do many people of religion. The choice before us is not a matter of having to choose between either

some form of secularism or some kind of religion but of trying to come up with a way of doing things that provides everyone with the opportunity to work toward an understanding that transcends ideological dogmatism of whatever kind ... and, when properly understood, sovereignty does offer a means of bringing about the foregoing sort of opportunity for everyone better than democracy, republicanism, or any other form of 'ism' does.

While discussing polling data in Britain, Dr. Harris states: "To learn that 78 percent of British Muslims think anyone who published the Danish cartoons should have been punished – and surely some significant number would have wanted them killed – is extremely troubling."

First of all, why is it any more troubling that 78 percent of British Muslims voiced the opinion that "anyone who published the Danish cartoons should have been punished" than that various newspapers inside and outside of Denmark saw fit to publish those cartoons? If the issue is freedom of speech, then, why is one exercise of free speech any more troubling than some other exercise of free speech?

Complaining, criticizing, commenting, grumbling, and disagreeing are virtually universal human characteristics. People speak out under all sorts of circumstances ... when alone, with family, among friends, with strangers, in e-mails, on blogs, in bars, in letters to the editor.

However, while Dr. Harris gives the Danish cartoons a pass, he finds it troubling that polls indicated how 78 % of British Muslims exercised their right to free speech and responded to a poll that was intended to put Muslims in a negative light, and, in the process, stated that people who published such cartoons should be prosecuted. Apparently, Harris is among those whose perspective on things can be summed up in the line from Orwell's *Animal Farm* which stipulates that: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

Why wasn't Dr. Harris troubled by the way Danish cartoonists and the papers that published those cartoons knew that what they were doing would stir up trouble? Why didn't Harris find it troubling that hatred, hostility, and antipathy were behind the drawing of such cartoons and their publication?

If the Danish cartoonists had selected the Jewish community and its religious tradition as their targets of opportunity, many people in the West would have been outraged about the anti-Semitism being displayed in those cartoons and publications. Moreover, I am fairly certain that many people from the Jewish community would have demanded that the cartoonists and papers involved should be prosecuted for hate speech.

In the West, however, many people feel it is perfectly okay to deride and belittle Muslims and/or Islam. Moreover, to add insult to injury, many people in the West get upset with Muslims because the latter individuals seem reluctant to accept such discriminatory treatment as expressions of the “very best” of what democracy has to offer.

At least one of the Danish cartoons portrayed the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as someone who supports violence in general if not suicide bombing in particular. Dr. Harris seems oblivious to -- or, perhaps, is merely indifferent to -- the historical realities that counter such a depiction.

Neither the cartoonist in question, nor the owner(s) of the paper(s) that published that pictorial editorial had ever met the Prophet. Apparently, those cartoonists and publishers knew little, or nothing, about the life of the Prophet or what kind of a person he was.

Furthermore, the Prophet hadn't done anything of a hurtful nature to any of those cartoonists or publishers or to the Danish people. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) would never have endorsed or supported the killing of innocent people.

The Prophet taught that: Women, children, the elderly, and other non-combatants were off-limits as targets in any armed conflict. Therefore, what suicide bombers do and what members of the Islamic State have been doing (for example in relation to Yazidis and Christians) runs contrary to the teachings of the Prophet.

So, why use the image of Muhammad (peace be upon him) to make a point about Muslim violence when the Prophet was against the very sort of violence that the cartoonist and the publisher(s) were protesting? Either the cartoonists and their publishers were completely ignorant of what the Prophet taught and stood for, or,

perhaps, they didn't care what the truth of the matter was and decided to indiscriminately besmirch the integrity of the Prophet as well as to smear Islam when their grievances actually were against people who call themselves Muslims and, yet, do not act in accordance with the principles and values of Islam.

The form of the foregoing logic is along the following lines. Some Jewish people have murdered Palestinians, and, therefore, all Jews – along with their religious tradition -- are evil.

Such logic is faulty when used in conjunction with Judaism and the Jewish people. That same logic is also faulty when extended to all Muslims and Islam.

Unfortunately, the Danish defenders of secular democracy [i.e., the cartoonist(s) and their publishers] went ahead and gave expression to their hostility toward, and hatred of, someone (i.e., the Prophet) whom they didn't even know or understand. Perhaps more to the point, the cartoonist(s) and publishers knew they could get away with doing what they did.

After all, there are nearly six million people who live in Denmark while approximately only 175,000 to 200,000 individuals of that total are Muslim ... a rather large mismatch in relative power. Moreover, recent polls have indicated that some 50% of the Danish population believes that various kinds of limits should be placed on both Muslims and Muslim immigration within Denmark

There was nothing noble about a number of the published Danish cartoons. The problematic cartoons and their publication were not giving expression to hallowed features of secular, humanistic, democratic, critical reflection, but, instead, were giving expression to ignorance, fear, hostility, hatred, and bigotry concerning Islam and its Prophet.

Some of the cartoonists and their publishers had the mentality of a gang of schoolyard bullies that picks on kids that the members of the gang know are unpopular within the school system, and, therefore, such actions occur with the understanding that members of the gang are not likely to be taken to task for their hate-speech. Whatever points the Danish cartoonists and publishers were trying to make about the immorality of suicide bombings or any other shortcomings

they perceive to exist within the Muslim community, such points are embedded in a deep-rooted hostility toward Muslims as well as a fear of Islam ... and Islam is something that they – along with, unfortunately, all too many Muslims – don't even understand.

The published cartoons weren't meant to resolve any problems or to constructively further the discussion in a civilized fashion. Rather, they were intended to ridicule a religion, its Prophet, and its adherents.

I don't have a problem when cartoonists or editorial columns go after the bad behavior of Muslims (or non-Muslims). Bad behavior is fair game for such forms of commentary.

However, I do believe that problems tend to arise when someone uses the bad behavior of the few to denigrate the many, or someone uses such bad behavior as a means of trying to justify the denigration of a religious tradition that does not support or advocate that sort of bad behavior.

Free speech is not an absolute right. There are limits to free speech.

Yelling "Fire" in a crowded theater if there is no fire does not fall under the umbrella of free speech. Giving false witness and/or perjuring oneself while giving testimony in a court of law are not protected forms of free speech.

Claiming that a product is safe or free of defects when one knows this is not the case is not covered by the right to free speech. Furthermore, the principle of free speech does not give one the right to demean, denigrate, ridicule, or belittle someone because of his or her race, religion, creed, sexual orientation, gender, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity.

By doing what they did, the Danish cartoonists to whom I am alluding – along with their enabling publishers -- demonstrated their lack of creative imagination. This is the case because if the cartoonists and publishers wanted to critically examine some belief, value, or behavior of the Muslim community in order to improve the quality of life in Denmark, then, they should have found a way of doing so that constructively engaged Muslims rather than using their artistic talents and positions of power within the media to belittle and hurt Muslims

within or outside of Denmark and, in the process, add fuel to a fire that is already burning out of control.

In the previously given quote, Dr. Harris says that: "... surely some significant number would have wanted them killed." He is talking about "some significant number" of Muslims, and the "them" to whom he is referring are the Danish cartoonists and publishers."

The foregoing statement is problematic on several levels. To begin with, Dr. Harris is merely speculating when he alludes to some significant number of Muslims who would have wanted the cartoonists and publishers killed since if he had evidence to back up what he is saying, then, he would have put forth such evidence.

Secondly, putting aside the fact that the phrase "some significant number" is relatively meaningless in its amorphousness, even if one were to come up with hard evidence that "some significant number" of Muslims might have wanted the cartoonists and publishers killed, Dr. Harris has no way of knowing who, if anyone, would have tried to realize such a desire. Many people talk about wanting to kill this or that person, but only a limited number of people actually carry through with such a course of action.

Some husbands say it to their wives, and some wives say it to their husbands. Some kids say it to their parents, and some parents say it to their kids.

Some people in the out-group say it about members of the in-group. Some people in the in-group say it about members of the out-group.

Dr. Harris stated in his book, *The End of Faith*, "... the only thing likely to ensure our survival might be a nuclear first strike of our own. Needless to say, this would be an unthinkable crime – as it would kill tens of millions of innocent civilians in a single day – but it might be the only course of action available to us, given what Islamists believe." (Page 129 of the 2005 Norton paperback edition). Dr. Harris is disturbingly reckless with his language since no matter what so-called Islamists might believe, killing millions of innocent people is not a solution to any problem.

Yet, here is Dr. Harris contemplating the possibility of killing people ... killing tens of millions of innocent people. He recognizes that

what he is contemplating is an unthinkable crime and, yet, he claims that such a course of action might be the only way to proceed.

Will Harris ever follow through on his talk of killing Muslims? I don't know ... I hope not, but, nonetheless, he has given expression to such a thought.

So, if a Muslim extremist should make a statement about wanting to kill Danish cartoonists and their publishers, how – and why – should one distinguish such statements from Dr. Harris's own stated idea about killing tens of millions of innocent Muslims. Are these instances of reckless verbiage, or should we be every bit as concerned about the possible lethal, future actions of Dr. Harris as Dr. Harris is concerned about the possible lethal, future actions of some unknown number of Muslims who might make statements about killing someone ... or, perhaps, it is all a matter of the pot wanting to call the kettle black and failing to realize the hypocrisy present in such published statements.

Are there pathological idiots present in almost any given group of people who believe they have the right to kill whomever they like? Yes, there are.

Are there some individuals in virtually every race, religion, political persuasion, ethnicity, creed, and socio-economic niche who have acted on the foregoing sorts of lethal desires? Yes, there are.

However, even in the United States, where tens of thousands of people are murdered – year in and year out -- the number of people who actually act on their murderous ideation is extremely small. Not everyone who speaks about killing someone is prepared to follow through on one's words.

In fact, thankfully, only a very small percentage of people are willing to do so in any given society. Unfortunately, some individuals within the aforementioned small percentage of people have power, and, consequently, they are able to leverage that power in ways that enable them to kill others more efficiently ... as is the case with all too many politicians, military commanders, and corporate leaders.

While on occasion this or that Muslim in the United States, Britain, France, or some other country in the West might have ceded agency to their base instincts and either attempted to kill someone or succeeded in doing so, there is no evidence of which I am aware to indicate that

Muslims in the West – or anywhere else -- are more willing or more likely to translate any given desire to kill someone into an active reality than are individuals from other religious, political, racial, philosophical, or ethnic backgrounds.

Unfortunately, Dr. Harris appears to want to engage in the politics of fearmongering. In other words, he puts forth carefully framed arguments – often based on faulty reasoning -- that have the effect of encouraging people in the West to have unreasonable fears concerning Muslims and Islam in general, when the actual problems posed by Muslim extremists is far narrower in scope.

Citizens of the United States are as likely (perhaps more so) to be killed by their furniture than be killed by Muslim terrorists. All one has to do to verify this claim is to look up the numbers in the reports of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and The National Counter Terrorism Center.

All the time that Dr. Harris has been engaged in a variety of propagandistic activities against religion, the West busily goes about its military, political, financial, and corporate policies that are killing, oppressing, and displacing millions of people (some of them Muslim) in virtually every part of the world. So-called “Islamists” constitute a very real problem for the world. Nonetheless, such people are not the only terrorists about whom one has to be concerned.

Many governments in the West have been actively pursuing policies that are intended to terrorize various populations around the world. In fact, it is the terrorist activities of Western governments in places like: Indonesia, Vietnam, Panama, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Yemen, Libya, Syria, and beyond that have been one of the most significant causal factors underlying the spawning of several generations of the sort of non-governmental and non-institutional terrorism about which Dr. Harris is so hysterically invested.

I do not agree with, nor do I support, the activities of any Muslim group or individual that employs the tactics of terrorism and/or seeks to oppress Muslims or non-Muslims. However, I also do not agree with, nor do I support, the activities of military, institutional, governmental, financial, corporate, or coalition groups that terrorize and/or seek to oppress people – both Muslim and non-Muslim – throughout the world in order to exploit territory, societies, peoples, or resources for the

selfish, narrow, greedy, and corrupt ends of the foregoing sorts of groups and who, by proceeding in such a fashion, help create the conditions out of which the limited terrorism of individuals and disaffected groups arises.



Chapter Three - Ideological Recruitment

Maajid Nawaz states: "... one of the most alarming polls reported recently by the London Times found that one in every seven young Britons has 'warm feelings' toward the Islamic State. Whether or not this is accurate, it suggests a level of grassroots sympathy that is too high for comfort."

I assume that when Nawaz mentions "one in every seven Britons" he is referring to just Muslim youth. He doesn't say anything about the ages of the individuals that were polled, and it would be interesting to know how much of the "warm feelings toward the Islamic State" is a function of British Muslim youth having had to endure various forms of abuse, bigotry, profiling, racism, and discrimination in Britain as those young people grew up while the British government was waging war on innocent Muslims in different parts of the world.

Nawaz says that he is not sure whether, or not, the figures cited in the poll are accurate. If he doesn't know their accuracy, why is he reporting them? Moreover, why is he claiming that such uncertain figures suggest a "level of grassroots sympathy that is too high for comfort"?

Ignorance doesn't suggest anything but ignorance. However, because the unknown accuracy of the poll serves his purposes, he proceeds to indicate that such data is discomfoting.

Another problem with Nawaz's foregoing statement involves the ambiguity that permeates his use of the term "warm feelings". Just what does this mean?

Does it mean that such British Muslims support the beheadings and slaughter of innocent people? Or, does it mean that those individuals are somewhat positively disposed toward the idea that someone - despite engaging in reprehensible behaviors with respect to innocent people - is trying to oppose the attempt of Western powers, as well as entrenched Muslim tyrants, to continue running things in the same old way?

I like the line from the song "For What It's Worth" by the Buffalo Springfield that runs: "Nobody's right if everybody's wrong." And, surely, there are few, if any, right ways that are being pursued

throughout the Middle East irrespective of whether one is talking about Muslims or non-Muslims.

However, some British Muslim youths might dislike the Islamic State for the way in which it slaughters innocents, while liking the fact that someone is fighting against Western and Muslim governments who engage in their own forms of slaughter of innocent people. We live in a world in which many of our choices are done against a backdrop of an array of undesirable possibilities, and, unfortunately, oftentimes, many of the options that are available are highly problematic ones.

A person might feel compelled to act in some manner. Yet, trying to navigate one's way through all the pitfalls and problems on the way to realizing one form of action or another is not an easy process.

Life is complicated and often messy. A person's feelings about some given group might not be as black and white as Nawaz and Harris seem to want to make things, and conceivably, some Muslims might consider the Islamic State – as reprehensible as its actions are – to be the lesser of the many evils that are at play in the Middle East.

Nawaz indicates that some 500-1000 Muslims who live in Britain have gone to Iraq and Syria in order to join the Islamic State. There are nearly 3 million people who identify themselves as Muslim that live in Great Britain, and a considerable proportion of that population involves young people, so, the percentage of Muslims in Britain that actually went off to join the Islamic State is quite small.

If, based on recent demographic data indicating that due to rising birth rates the Muslim population in England has doubled in the last ten years, then, somewhere in the vicinity of half to two-thirds of the Muslim population in Britain is likely to be under 25 years of age. Previously I noted how Nawaz indicated that a recent poll in England showed that one in seven British Muslim youth had some sort of "warm feelings" toward Islamic State, and, as well, Nawaz estimates that somewhere between 500-1,000 Muslims left to join the Islamic State.

One in seven amounts to a little over 14%. If one multiplies that figure times the number of Muslim youth who live in Great Britain, one comes out with a figure that falls somewhere between 210,000 and

280,000 individuals who had “warm feelings” toward the Islamic State, and, yet, only 500-1,000 people (and we don’t know their ages) actually went to join up ... an extremely small percentage of the possible candidates who could have joined given the number of people who, according to a poll, expressed some degree of “warm feelings” toward the Islamic State.

Assuming that any of the 500-1,000 British Muslims who joined the Islamic State actually live long enough to return to England, one wonders how many of them will still have “warm feelings” toward the Islamic State after they have had the opportunity to see that organization operate up close and personal. Starting out, fighting a war might seem to be all about glory, principle, defending the moral high ground, and the like, but, very quickly, people find that war is cruel, barbaric, dishonest, brutal, arbitrary, duplicitous, hypocritical, disillusioning, and oppressive with virtually all moral principles being among the first casualties of armed conflict ... there is a reason why the suicide rate among American veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq has been so high.

Dr. Harris states: “To return to your personal story for a moment, your Islamism seems to have been primarily political, borne of some legitimate grievances – primarily racial injustice – that you began to view through the lens of Islam. But you haven’t said, as members of al-Qaeda do, that you were incensed by the sacrilege of infidel boots on the ground near Muslim holy sites on the Arabian Peninsula. To what degree did religious beliefs – a desire for martyrdom, for instance – motivate you and your fellow Islamists? And if no such ideas were operative, can you discuss the religious difference between a revolutionary Islamist outlook and a jihadist one?”

I don’t know why Dr. Harris is treating Nawaz as if he is an expert on everything that has to do with fundamentalism, extremism, terrorism, and the like. To be sure, Nawaz might – or might not – have a certain amount of insight into his own reasoning process that led him to make the choices he did concerning such groups, and, and as well, he might have derived a certain amount of insight with respect to some of the individuals with whom he had the opportunity to talk and interact that were operating in the same circles within which Nawaz was working, but none of this necessarily makes Nawaz an expert on

the outlook of fundamentalists, extremists, and terrorists in general. In fact, one can't even be certain that Nawaz correctly understands his own motivations, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors with respect to such matters.

In any event, earlier in *Islam and the Future of Tolerance*, Nawaz indicated that the Islamist group to which he belonged "didn't exist in Pakistan until we exported it from Britain." So, what Nawaz is familiar with is a British export, and this does not qualify him to speak with any degree of expertise or insight concerning the reasons why people from other parts of the world make the choices they do with respect to joining extremist and fundamentalist groups.

During his travels, Nawaz might have had extensive contact with a small circle of people. He might, or might not, have some understanding of the individuals with whom he might have had extensive contact, but as for the rest of the world, Nawaz is only speculating about the factors that shape the decisions of the hundreds and thousands of people with whom he has had little, or no, interaction, and, therefore, I think that anything he has to say about such issues needs to be reflected upon with some degree of critical caution.

Nawaz provides an outline of his theory about what he believes motivates those he refers to as Islamists and jihadists to do what they do. He states: "... I believe that four elements exist in all forms of ideological recruitment: "a grievance narrative, whether real or perceived; an identity crisis; a charismatic recruiter; and ideological dogma. The dogma's 'narrative' is its propaganda."

The four elements listed by Nawaz are so amorphous that virtually every single philosophical, political, religious, economic, scientific, and social system of ideas could satisfy his set of conditions. If his intention is to account for why fundamentalists and extremists do what they do, I don't think his intention will be well served by his explanatory framework because it doesn't provide any insight as to why a person might decide to move in one ideological direction rather than another.

Society, politics, law, communities, nations, the media, education, and most institutions are replete with "grievance narratives" ... both "real and perceived." The problem is to try to figure out which, if any, of such grievance narrative reflects the actual data of life.

How does a person go about resolving the foregoing problem? How does a person epistemologically engage experience to be able to filter out the false and retain the truth?

According to Nawaz, a charismatic recruiter plays a significant role with respect to resolving such problems. However, charisma is something of a will-o'-the-wisp kind of phenomenon ... what one person finds to be charismatic another person will find to be boring and uninteresting.

Charisma is not necessarily a matter of one individual having a quality that magically attracts other people. Charisma might be a function of a complex dynamic in which one person has to be in a condition that renders him or her open to certain qualities that are manifested through another human being.

There are many factors involving family, friends, education, psychological tendencies, motivational elements, and personal history that might determine whether, or not, a given individual will be receptive to what someone else is saying. One might claim that what causes a match to light is the person who is operating on the match, but unless the match is made in the right way with the requisite ingredients that are in proper proportions with respect to one another, and unless conditions such as the amount of oxygen, wind, and dampness fall above, or below, certain parameters, then, obviously, whether or not the match lights when struck depends on more than the person doing the striking.

On one occasion, a person might listen to someone while operating out of one mixture of the aforementioned factors, and what the speaker has to say might be ignored or rejected at that point in time. However, the relationship among the psychological, emotional, conceptual, physical, and social factors that shape a listener's perspective can be so sensitive to slightly different mixtures and arrangement of such factors that listening to the same speaker saying the same things on some other occasion might, suddenly, become strangely attractive to that same listener.

The dynamics of undue influence are complex. Indeed, they are far more complex than can be accounted for by the very simplistic outline provided by Maajid Nawaz during his conversation with Sam Harris.

Nawaz actually indicates that the presence of charisma, in and of itself, is not enough to account for why someone moves in the direction of fundamentalist or extremist ideological positions. He alludes to the importance of the role played by an array of psychological, social, emotional, and personal factors – which he terms “an identity crisis” – in helping to push or pull someone toward extremism or fundamentalism.

An identity crisis exists when one is not sure who one is or what one should believe in or whom one should trust or what one should do with one’s life. Almost everyone goes through an identity crisis at one, or more points, in their lives, and, yet, not everyone chooses to become committed to some sort of fundamentalist or extremist ideology.

The foregoing sorts of identity crises occur in contexts that are permeated with an array of ongoing grievance narratives. In addition, there are many people – so-called leaders -- who are proposing solutions concerning such narratives, and, as a result, might be perceived by a person who is experiencing an identity crisis to be charismatic.

Even when considered collectively, the foregoing three elements (i.e., grievance narrative, charismatic recruiter, or identity crisis) do not account for why a person moves in one direction rather than another. What is missing is the moment-to-moment phenomenology of an individual as she or he attempts to come to some sort of understanding and decision in relation to an array of grievances, charismatic leaders, and an ongoing identity crisis.

Similarly, adding a fourth element – namely, ideological dogma – adds little to trying to figure out why a person moves in the direction of extremism or fundamentalism rather than in some other direction. We are all surrounded by ideological dogmas of one kind or another – political, economic, legal, social, scientific, religious, and philosophical – and, therefore, accounting for why a person becomes committed to one kind of ideological dogma rather than some other kind of dogma is not advanced by referring to the existence of ideological dogma per se.

Living amidst numerous forms of grievance narratives, potential charismatic recruiters, identity crises, and ideological dogma tends to be confusing, frustrating, disturbing, overwhelming, and anxiety provoking. People often become angry, impatient, fearful, envious,

jealous, hateful, revengeful, guilt-ridden, ashamed, and despairing under such conditions and, as a result, often make decisions based on a combination of emotional reactions to ongoing existential conditions that render them vulnerable to the attractions of one or another set of grievances, charismatic recruitment, and dogma at a time in their lives when they were experiencing an identity crisis.

The foregoing considerations provide a general framework through which to appreciate that people do make decisions to move in one direction rather than another under such a collection of factors and conditions. Nonetheless, the aforementioned considerations do not really account for why people make the decisions they do.

There is an element of: 'you had to be there (within an individual)' to have any chance of understanding what is transpiring in a person's mind, heart, soul, and life when he or she makes a decision to move in one direction rather than another in a given set of circumstances. Such dynamics can be so subtle that even the person himself, or herself, might not understand what is really driving a given decision.

Nawaz's four-element framework about what supposedly underlies a person's decision to move in the direction of fundamentalism or extremism rather than in some other direction gives the illusion of providing an explanation for the behavior of certain individuals. However, it does not offer the sort of detailed, nuanced, coherent framework that a tenable explanation requires.

Ironically, the theory being advanced by Nawaz can be directed toward his own activities. In other words, viewed in terms of his own model, Nawaz plays the role of a charismatic recruiter who is offering an ideological dogma (involving elements of secularism, human rights, rationalism, and democracy) – which constitutes a form of propaganda – to induce an identity crisis in those who currently are involved with some form of fundamentalism or extremism as their chosen way to try to cope with the presence of an array of grievances. If Nawaz succeeds in his agenda, then, the precipitation of an identity crisis in various targeted individuals through the use of propaganda and manipulation would bring about a condition of vulnerability thorough which the fundamentalist ideological dogma of an individual could be replaced by Nawaz's brand of ideological dogma.

For Nawaz, truth doesn't seem to matter. Everything appears to be a function of dogma, charismatic manipulation, propaganda, and leveraging people's vulnerability (i.e., their sense of identity crisis) in order to push those individuals in one ideological direction rather than another.

Nawaz believes his form of ideology is superior to that of the fundamentalists and extremists. However, what he doesn't seem to understand is that the sort of ideology he offers is just another form of fundamentalism and extremism because it appears to be indifferent to the issue of truth concerning the actual nature of reality or Islam.

Reality is not a function of ideology. Rather, the task facing human beings is to discover – to whatever extent this is possible -- a form of understanding that reflects the nature of reality rather than a form of understanding that imposes some form of an ideological dogma upon reality.

Being willing to accept anything less than the truth concerning the nature of reality tends to give expression to some form of fundamentalism or extremism. Committing oneself to seek out the truth is a very different kind of undertaking than is the process of committing oneself to this or that ideology, and this remains true irrespective of whether such an ideology consists of the kind of dogma that Nawaz is promulgating or the sort of ideology that so-called "Islamists" and "jihadists" are promoting.

Dr. Harris speaks about a possible distinction between people like Nawaz who experienced extensive prejudice in Britain and, then, becomes "politically radicalized by Islam," and those individuals who decide "... to go fight for a group like the Islamic State because he genuinely believes that he's participating in a cosmic war against evil, and will either spread the one true faith to the ends of the earth or get himself martyred in the process." To begin with, Nawaz was not politically radicalized because of Islam, but, instead, he was radicalized by his own choices.

The choices made by Nawaz were a process of his ceding agency to various influences and understandings that came into his life. Islam did not take him by the hand and politically radicalize him, but, rather, he permitted his understanding to be shaped by a variety of individuals, books, events, experiences, feelings, and interpretations.

People should take responsibility for their decisions to proceed down some road of extremism or fundamentalism. Islam did not induce those individuals to make such decisions, but rather they chose to become committed to forms of understanding that don't actually reflect the nature of Islam.

When people -- whether Muslim or non-Muslim -- isolate and remove verses of the Qur'an from the full spiritual, dynamic, layered, nuanced, subtle, ecological context of that book, then, they will come to incorrect conclusions concerning the nature of the guidance that is being given through revelation. Their erroneous parsing of the Qur'an has nothing to do with Islam but has everything to do with the condition of ignorance in which they are immersed.

My spiritual guide often indicated that unless one approaches the Qur'an with the right attitude of humility, sincerity, courage, patience, perseverance, piety, respect, and willingness to abandon the machinations of one's ego or nafs, then, the Qur'an closes itself to such an individual. There are many native speakers of Arabic who haven't got the slightest idea about the actual nature of the guidance to which the Qur'an gives expression because they lack the proper adab or spiritual etiquette to be able to benefit from what the Qur'an has to offer.

Moreover, even when one observes the proper adab concerning the Qur'an, the matter of whether, or not, one is opened up to such guidance is entirely dependent on God's Grace. The individual must struggle to become open to what the Qur'an has to offer, but -- and one can only do this with God's help -- whether, or not, any wine is poured into one's empty cup is up to God.

Furthermore, contrary to what Dr. Harris indicates in the previous quote, it is not the responsibility of anyone but God to spread Islam. Anyone -- such as this or that form of fundamentalist -- who arrogates to himself or herself the responsibility for spreading Islam is merely deceiving herself or himself.

The Qur'an makes clear that not even the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) can place Islam in the heart of another human being. Consequently, for some arrogant fool to suppose that God has assigned him or her the task of doing something (i.e., spreading Islam) that even the Prophet was not tasked to do constitutes the height of

folly and, in fact, helps explain why so many atrocities are often committed by such individuals because they have ceded their moral agency to the machinations of their own spiritual ignorance and vulnerability to all manner of destructive forces that are flowing within and about them.

If a person is doing whatever she or he is doing for the sake of getting martyred, then, that individual is motivated by something other than service to God. Such service to God should be its own reward, and, therefore, when one introduces the idea of martyrdom to motivate one to do what one does, then, one muddies the waters of intention and, thereby, removes martyrdom from the picture because martyrdom only comes to those who have busied themselves with worshiping God as an end in itself and give no thought to how God will end their lives.

In the end, God slays us all. Anyone who offers up his life to the service of God while waging war on the most important battlefield of life – that is, the war with one’s ego or nafs -- and does so without thought of receiving a reward for such service will die a martyr.

Martyrdom has nothing to do with fighting wars or being killed in physical combat. Rather, martyrdom has everything to do with the purity of the *niyat* or intention through which one engages life in general.

Nawaz gives the impression that anyone who doesn’t seek martyrdom is insincere. However, I believe the reality is that anyone who seeks martyrdom as a reward for what they do is insincere because such a desire contaminates the sincerity of one’s worship of God.

Those misguided, Muslim simpletons who have been lured on, if not indoctrinated, with the belief that their reward for killing innocent people will be 70 virgins are wrong on, at least, three counts. Firstly, the Qur’an doesn’t say what such individuals have been led to believe it does with respect to the promise of virgins and instead the Qur’an is being hermeneutically filtered through – quite incorrectly – the lenses of sexual desire rather than understood in terms of the dimensions of spiritual purity to which the Qur’an is actually making reference.

Secondly, irrespective of what the Quranic text in question means, Islam does not sanction the killing of innocent people under any circumstances. And, thirdly, since the goal of Islam is to realize one's relationship with Divinity, what a tawdry affair it is to reduce the rich potential of existence down to the dimension of lust in which a person only thinks about sex and forgets about the deeper purposes of life.

In effect, the foregoing sorts of people have forgotten about God and become caught up in their obsession with a delusional fantasy. To sacrifice the actual teachings of Islam for the sake of physical desire is hardly a matter of martyrdom.

At one point, Dr. Harris states: "As you know, the public conversation about the connection between Islamic ideology and Muslim intolerance and violence has been stifled by political correctness. In the West, there is now a large industry of apology and obfuscation designed, it would seem, to protect Muslims from having to grapple with the kinds of facts we've been talking about. ... These experts insist that we can never take Islamists and jihadists at their word and that none of their declarations about God, paradise, martyrdom, and the evils of apostasy have anything to do with their real motivations ... [the apologists] deny any connection between heartfelt religious beliefs and Muslim violence."

First of all, it is not at all clear just what "kinds of facts" are being discussed by the co-authors of *Islam and the Future of Tolerance*. There has been a lot of speculation, theorizing, hypothesizing, inferring, as well as extrapolating, interpolating, and so on with respect to the possible meaning of various poll numbers, but the facts that exist in the first 47 pages of the aforementioned book appear to have been few and far between ... mostly connected to the historical background that outlines some of the time Nawaz spent with an extremist political group.

Secondly, I don't have any problem with acknowledging the idea that some Muslims are violent due to the way in which they have misinterpreted the Qur'an and Islam, just as I don't have any problem with acknowledging the idea that many people in the United States are violent due to the manner in which they have misunderstood the nature of their own Constitution, together with their self-serving sense

of American exceptionalism (which is the counterpart to Muslim myths and ideologies concerning martyrdom).

What I object to is that people like Dr. Harris arrogates to himself an illegitimate authority to claim that what violent Muslims believe gives expression to the teachings of Islam. Extremists, militants, and fundamentalists can make all the statements they like about God, paradise, martyrdom and the evils of apostasy as being heartfelt beliefs that -- supposedly (but doesn't) -- justify their use of violence to achieve their stated ends, but none of this has anything to do with Islam.

Their heartfelt religious beliefs are their own philosophical invention. And, while those people might refer to such a construction as being Islamic, and while they might invoke the name of God, and while people like Dr. Harris might try to use their utterances as a form of "evidence" that such hermeneutical concoctions constitute legitimate and honest readings of the Qur'an, Dr. Harris just doesn't know what he is talking about.

He has every right to talk about the problematic connection between unwarranted Muslim violence and the "heartfelt religious convictions" (which are delusional in nature) that underlie violence, and, in addition, I would agree with him that the sort of connection that is being described is a very real problem. However, Dr. Harris has no legitimate, evidential basis for trying to pass himself off as an expert on Islam or the Qur'an and, in the process, make claims that the foregoing sorts of delusional behavior gives expression to certain ideas, values, and principles that are inherent in the nature of Islam and the Qur'an or that such delusional understandings constitute the "most honest" reading of Islam.

Chapter Four: 9/11

In passing, both Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz make remarks about, among other things, the individuals they consider to be perpetrators of the events of 9/11. Consequently, I also have a few comments to make in passing concerning the events of 9/11.

To begin with, the two authors of *Islam and the Future of Tolerance* have a discussion about the way in which a number of alleged 9/11 hijackers engaged in activities such as frequenting strip clubs (and, apparently, one can add prostitutes, drugs, and alcohol to the list). In this context, Nawaz states: “Yes. The strip club thing is a red herring, because even in a traditional view of jihad, when you believe you’re engaged in an act of war, you’re allowed to deceive the enemy.”

While it might be true that deception is permitted during a time of war, this does not free a Muslim to commit any, and all, acts that he or she wishes. Lying to someone, or engaging in misdirection, or manipulating information is one thing, but going to strip clubs and engaging in drug and/or alcohol fueled sexual escapades is another matter.

There is nothing to which Nawaz can point in the Qur’an or the words of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that is capable of defending the sort of acts (strip clubs, illicit sex, alcohol consumption, or drug usage) that supposedly were engaged in by the alleged perpetrators of 9/11. Moreover, both Maajid Nawaz and Dr. Harris are assuming (i.e., they have no evidence to substantiate their claim) that the Muslims being alluded to were attempting to deceive people rather than openly catering to this or that desire.

The fact that some of the alleged perpetrators might have said they believed one thing but did something in contradistinction to their alleged beliefs is not necessarily an indication that they were merely trying to deceive the enemy. Hypocrisy is a common phenomenon in many parts of the world.

Dr. Harris wants to argue that people in the West should be taking extremists and fundamentalists at their word ... that such people fully believe what they say. I believe the more persuasive argument is that while such people might, or might not, believe what they say,

nonetheless, what they say and believe has little, or nothing, to do with Islam.

In the foregoing discussion, I use the term “allegedly” in relation to the 19 Muslims who supposedly brought about the tragedy of 9/11. I do this because there is considerable uncertainty concerning the actual identity of those individuals since with respect to the photos that have been published depicting the identities of the 19 individuals who supposedly were responsible for bringing about the tragedy of 9/11, at least seven of those depicted individuals have been interviewed and are still alive and, therefore, could not have been on board any of the planes that supposedly crashed into the World Trade Towers, the Pentagon, or at Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

Moreover, the hijacker, Hani Hanjour – who allegedly piloted the commercial Boeing 757 jet that supposedly crashed into the Pentagon -- tried to rent a small Cessna aircraft just a short time before 9/11, and the pilots running the company from whom he sought to rent that plane indicated he didn’t know the first thing about flying even such a small aircraft, so one has to wonder who actually was flying the plane that supposedly flew into the Pentagon.

The term “supposedly” is used in conjunction with the events that took place at the Pentagon on 9/11 because there is a great deal of evidence – which doesn’t appear in either the *Pentagon Building Performance Report* or the *9/11 Commission Report* – that things did not occur in the way that those two “official stories” indicate with respect to the events of 9/11.

Many ex-military and commercial pilots (e.g., Pilots for 9/11 Truth) have come forth and demonstrated aerodynamically that the commercial 757-jet that supposedly hit the Pentagon could not have followed the path claimed by the *Pentagon Building Performance Report*. In fact, among other issues, such a flight path would have subjected the plane and its occupants to incredible g-forces as well as to the ‘Ground Effect’ and, therefore, would have prevented the plane from being flown in the manner described in the aforementioned report.

In fact, more than thirteen witnesses – including a number of individuals who were members of the Pentagon Police -- indicated that the only plane to approach the Pentagon near the time of the

explosions that took place on the morning of 9/11 flew over the Navy Annex as well as a portion of the Arlington National Cemetery that are on the north side of a Citgo station that was situated about a mile, or so, from the Pentagon. The foregoing kind of a flight path is totally at odds with the “south side” flight path that is relied on in the analysis that takes place in the *Pentagon Building Performance Report*.

If the foregoing plane is what struck the Pentagon – and there appears to be no other commercial jet candidate capable of accounting for what was witnessed -- then, virtually everything concerning the flight path of, and ensuing damage from, what struck the Pentagon in the *Pentagon Building Performance Report* is incorrect. Moreover, there is considerable evidence (e.g., the work of Pierre-Henri Bunel, an explosives expert who served with General Schwarzkopf during the first Gulf War) to indicate that a great deal of the physical evidence involving the damage at the Pentagon on 9/11 is more consistent with what would have occurred if a hollow charge device of some kind had been delivered by either a Global Hawk or Predator Drone.

The only photos and video that have been released in conjunction with the 9/11 Pentagon attack do not permit one to identify the nature of the craft that appears to be heading toward the Pentagon. The matter is further muddled by the fact that a problematic time-stamp (wrong day and/or time) appears on some of those photos and videos.

The FBI confiscated all Pentagon videos, as well as all of the videos that were captured by the surveillance equipment affixed to various businesses proximate to the Pentagon. For whatever reason, the government refuses to release such material to the public.

Irrespective of whether one is talking about the testimony of the aforementioned 13 witnesses concerning events at the Pentagon or one is talking about the possibility that some sort of missile system caused the damage at the Pentagon, the *Pentagon Building Performance Report* is seriously flawed. That report is inconsistent with a great deal of forensic evidence and eyewitness testimony.

Moreover, one should keep in mind that April Gallop -- who had just begun work at ground zero in the Pentagon when whatever happened, happened -- reported something that completely contradicts the “official story” concerning the 9/11 events at the

Pentagon. She has given sworn testimony that as soon as she sat down and turned her computer on, there was a tremendous explosion.

She indicated that there was considerable damage to the Pentagon due to an explosion of some kind. However, despite the fact that she was in the area where the commercial jet supposedly hit, she saw no airline wreckage, passenger bodies, or baggage as she helped lead people out of the damaged area of the Pentagon.

She further reports that a number of men in suits visited her in the hospital and tried to get her to change her story. The men never identified themselves.

Furthermore, even putting aside the aforementioned highly questionable flying skills of Hani Hanjour, one might find the following information interesting. On the afternoon of 9/11, John Lear, of the Lear Jet family, took a number of professional pilots into a commercial jet simulator and found that almost all of those highly skilled and experienced pilots could not manage to get their simulated aircraft to hit either of the Twin Towers, and the few who were able to succeed required a number of tries to accomplish the task.

One can mention “Beginner’s luck” if one likes, but it stretches credulity to the point of breaking to suppose that Arab pilots who were reported to have done an extremely limited amount of training with small aircraft were able to accomplish what skilled, experienced, commercial pilots could not achieve or had great difficulty in doing so. As veteran pilots themselves have indicated, the way a Boeing commercial jet handles involves a great many differences from the manner in which small aircraft operate.

Furthermore, one should note that many military and commercial pilots have come forward and indicated that large commercial jets of the kind that supposedly struck the Twin Towers could not possibly fly so close to sea level at the speeds indicated by the NIST reports concerning the events of 9/11 (National Institute of Standards and Technology, a division of the Department of Commerce). Consequently, the force of the impact and the damage that ensued from crashing aircraft would be considerably less than what appears in the NIST reports.

In addition, NIST claimed that one of the primary causes for collapse of the Twin Towers was due to way in which the floor assemblies in those buildings would have failed due to the conditions and forces to which they were exposed on the morning of 9/11. However, Underwriters Laboratory did an independent analysis and demonstrated that the floor assembly units of those buildings would not have failed under the conditions present in the Twin Towers on 9/11.

Prior to 9/11, there were no high-rise steel buildings that collapsed due to fires. On 9/11, three buildings within the World Trade Center complex supposedly collapsed due to the presence of fires.

There have been numerous instances around the world (e.g., Philadelphia, Madrid, Caracas, and Beijing to name just a few) involving high-rise steel buildings that had been completely engulfed in raging fires for periods of time that lasted many hours longer than what occurred in relation to the Twin Towers on 9/11, and, yet, none of the foregoing buildings collapsed. Indeed, more than 2,300 architects and engineers have unanimously agreed that the damage which resulted from crashing commercial jets and jet fuel-initiated fires would not have been able to cause the collapse of the Twin Towers.

Then, of course, there is the fact that the seismic data associated with the disappearance of the Twin Towers on 9/11 does not properly reflect what should have been recorded had two 500,000 to 600,000-ton buildings actually collapsed at the World Trade Center on 9/11. The seismic waves recorded on that day indicated that the measured length of the collapse was considerably less than one would expect (it actually took place in about 10-14 seconds, but the sort of pancake collapse proposed by NIST would have taken a number of minutes to unfold), and, in addition, the amplitude of the seismic waves that were recorded in conjunction with the disappearance of the Twin Towers on 9/11 were far less than one would expect from several collapsing 600,000 ton buildings.

A further problem with the pancake collapse scenario proposed by NIST is that the pile of mangled steel that remained after the demise of the Twin Towers was far too small. There should have been 220

stories worth of debris, but the debris pile that existed at the World Trade Center was only about 10 to 12 stories high.

After the demise of the Twin Towers, there were 14 people who survived in Stairwell B of Tower 1. A few more people located just outside of that stairwell also survived.

The building came down in its own footprint. Why weren't the foregoing survivors crushed by more than a hundred stories of steel and concrete weighing in the vicinity of 500,000 to 600,000 tons?

If one likes, one can use the word "miracle" with respect to the foregoing survivors, and this might have been the case. However, using the word "miracle" does not explain how those survivors avoided being crushed by 110 stories consisting of some 500,000 to 600,000 tons of falling debris but, instead, described how when the dust cleared, all they saw above them was blue sky and sunshine.

Judy Wood, a materials scientist and mechanical engineer, also notes that the base of the World Trade Center was enveloped by a dike-like structure known as the 'Bathtub' that was built to keep the Hudson River from flooding the Towers and Lower Manhattan. The Bathtub structure was so fragile – relatively speaking – that some of the heavy equipment that was brought in during the clean-up phase was breaking through the 'Bathtub', and, yet, two, 600,000 ton buildings did no damage to that structure.

One might also have anticipated that two, collapsing, 600,000-ton buildings would have obliterated the stores and subway tunnels that existed below the ground in the World Trade Center complex. Yet, this did not happen, and one has to wonder why this didn't occur.

There were four transformers located at a number of sub-stations within the Twin Towers. Moreover, there were two such sub-stations on four different floors of each of the Towers.

The transformers weighed 30,000 pounds apiece. And, yet, none of those transformers were found in the wreckage piles at the World Trade Center.

What caused their disappearance? A pancake theory of collapse cannot account for the forces that would be necessary to completely obliterate all of those 30,000-pound transformers.

In fact, with the exception of the 14 stories, or so, of wreckage that remained at the feet of the former Twin Towers, virtually everything involving those two buildings had been turned to dust. The pancake theory of collapse put forth by NIST cannot explain the extent of pulverizing destruction that occurred at the World Trade Center on 9/11.

Quite some time after 9/11, a debris field of body parts connected to those who perished on that day was discovered on the roof of one of the buildings near to Ground Zero. A building that pancakes down (the NIST theory) might crush people, but it doesn't generate body parts ... especially when such parts are found on the roof of a building outside of the World Trade Center rather than found in the debris pile that was situated at the foot of where the two Twin Towers previously stood.

In addition to the foregoing considerations, there was considerable evidence indicating that during the demise of the Twin Towers, massive, multi-ton steel beams were sent flying for hundreds of feet. The physics of a pancake collapse doesn't generate this kind of horizontal force.

The demise of Building 7, the 47-storey Salomon Brothers building, at the World Trade Center also should give one pause. No plane struck that building, and, although there were some fires in the building, none of those fires were capable of causing Building 7 to collapse at the nearly free-fall speeds that were recorded.

In fact, David Chandler, a New York high school physics teacher forced NIST to acknowledge that Building 7 was actually in free fall for at least 2 ½ seconds. The only way building materials can move at free-fall speeds is if something has removed resistance to the fall of such materials ... something that could not possibly have happened if one accepts the NIST pancake account for the demise of Building 7.

A number of people (e.g., William Rodriguez who was a janitor for the North Tower that helped rescue many people on 9/11 and was honored by George W. Bush for doing so) reported huge explosions in some of the sub-basements of the North Tower prior to the time when that building allegedly was struck by an airplane. Mr. Rodriguez's account was verified by another janitor, Kenny Johannemann, who also was working at the Twin Towers and who was present in one of the sub-basement areas at the same time as William Rodriguez.

Mr. Johannemann indicated that a nearby elevator suddenly blew up. In the aftermath of that explosion, he pulled a burning man to safety.

If the airplanes didn't strike the Twin Towers until after such explosions occurred, then what caused those explosions. Philip Zelikow (the Director of the 9/11 Commission and the primary author of its report) didn't consider such information sufficiently important to explore in the main body of the *9/11 Commission Report* ... and such an omission is quite baffling because the foregoing information concerning the occurrence of explosions prior to the impact of hijacked planes completely undermines the "official story" concerning 9/11.

On 9/11, Barry Jennings, who is now deceased, was the Deputy Director of Emergency Services of the New York City Housing Authority. Shortly after the first plane supposedly hit the North Tower, he was instructed to go to the 23rd floor of Building 7 where the city of New York had built an emergency control center, a little over 300 feet from the Twin Towers.

Barry Jennings was at the emergency control center in WTC7 at the time the second plane allegedly struck the South Tower. He states that he, then, received a notification that he was to leave the building.

Since the elevators were not working, Jennings began to go down one of the stairwells in the building. No one seems to have asked the question of why the elevators were not working given that at the time nothing had happened at WTC7.

During his journey down the stairwell, he encountered massive explosions on the 6th Floor of Building 7. As a result, he was trapped in the building for a period of time before finally being rescued by first responders.

He indicated that the explosions came from somewhere below the sixth floor but were sufficiently massive to destroy the 6th Floor stairwell landing and, therefore, forced Jennings to retreat back up to the 8th Floor of Building 7. When rescued by first responders, he was taken out through the main floor of the building, and the main floor was in a devastated condition.

The explosions that destroyed, among other things, the 6th Floor landing took place shortly after 9:00 A.M, and, therefore, well before either of the two Twin Towers disappeared. So, what caused the explosions in, and damage to, Building 7, and why didn't the 9/11 Commission investigate this ... in fact, quite inexplicably, the 9/11 Commission Report has virtually nothing to say about Building 7.

I've written at length about many of the foregoing issues, along with many others (see *The Essence of September 11th, 2nd Edition*, and *Framing 9/11*) and, therefore, I will let things having to do with 9/11 conclude at this point. However, I mention the foregoing matters in passing because neither Sam Harris nor Maajid Nawaz (nor anyone else) can plausibly and credibly reconcile the existence of the foregoing sorts of problems with the official narrative concerning 9/11.

One might also note in passing that during the foregoing discussion I have not engaged in any sort of conspiracy theory concerning 9/11. In fact, the only conspiracy theory that appears in the foregoing discussion is that of the "official story" concerning 9/11 in which 19 Arabs conspired (supposedly with one another and with Osama bin Laden) to attack America on 9/11.

I have no idea who is actually behind the events of 9/11. However, to whatever extent 19 Arab hijackers and Osama bin Laden are parties to those tragic events, then, their involvement does not adequately account for the many, key, unanswered questions concerning physical evidence that permeate the events of 9/11 in New York and at the Pentagon.

Crashing planes and subsequent jet fuel-initiated fires did not cause three buildings at the World Trade Center to collapse in pancake style. Moreover, a jet plane crash did not cause the damage to the Pentagon that is described in the *Pentagon Building Performance Report*.

There are thousands of people who are architects, engineers, professional pilots, scientists, and explosives experts who agree with me (or with whom I agree) on the foregoing issues involving 9/11. Apparently, Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz seem to have been bamboozled when it comes to critically reflecting on the evidence that is entailed by the events of 9/11.

One can't help but wonder if they have been so willing, apparently, to uncritically swallow -- hook, line, and sinker -- the official narrative on 9/11 because doing so serves their respective ideological agendas. Unfortunately, like so many Muslim extremists and fundamentalists, Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz appear to be quite reluctant to let actual evidence enter into their consciousness.

Chapter Five: Liberalism

During a discussion about liberalism, Maajid Nawaz states: “While they [the pseudo-liberals to whom he is referring] rightly question every aspect of their ‘own’ Western culture in the name of progress, they censure liberal Muslims who attempt to do so within Islam, and they choose to side, instead, with every regressive reactionary in the name of ‘cultural authenticity’ and anti-colonialism.”

The term “progress” is an idea that is notoriously sensitive to the biases and assumptions of the individuals who invoke the word. I am less interested in the idea of progress than I am in the issue of truth and what this might entail with respect to human action.

Similarly, I am not all that enamored with the idea of “cultural authenticity”. While, within limits, I believe that any given community has the right to establish its own cultural approaches with respect to the engagement of life, nonetheless, to whatever extent such “cultural authenticity” prevents individuals from pursuing the truth concerning the nature of reality or seeks to advance its own cultural agendas at the expense of other ways of engaging life, then, the issue of “cultural authenticity” is problematic.

Finally, I tend to take exception with the reasoning of people like Nawaz who want to make liberal progress with respect to Islam, when it is obvious that in so many ways he doesn’t seem to understand that – namely, Islam – which he wishes to revise in order to better reflect his own ideas concerning liberal philosophy. Nawaz might want to take issue with the idea of “cultural authenticity” within various Muslim communities, but this has little, or nothing, to do with Islam.

“Cultural authenticity” is often a code word for the way in which a given community has distanced itself from the pursuit of truth and seeks to camouflage this feature of distancing by papering it over with this or that set of cultural beliefs, values, or practices. For example, honor killings within certain Muslim communities might give expression to some form of cultural authenticity in those communities, but it doesn’t reflect the teachings of Islam.

Nawaz wishes to criticize – and rightly so -- such communities for the beliefs, values, and practices surrounding such honor killings. However, this has nothing to do with revising Islam and everything to

do with stopping a barbaric practice that lacks any justification except in the delusional musings of people who are caught up in the circular reasoning of their own sense of “cultural authenticity.”

He continues on with his argument by saying: “... they [i.e., the pseudo-liberals to whom he is referring] leap whenever any (not merely their own) liberal democratic government commits a policy error, while generally ignoring almost every fascist, theocratic, or Muslim-led dictatorial regime and group in the world.” Almost any time someone wants to control the lives of other people in the name of some ideology – whether this be liberalism, cultural authenticity, or something else – one is going to encounter problems.

The key to improving the life of any community or nation is rooted in the issues of character. If one can't induce the people of a community or nation to freely pursue the acquisition of such qualities as: Courage, patience, honesty, nobility, forgiveness, compassion, generosity, perseverance, humility, tolerance, love, and the like, while eschewing such qualities as: “Dishonesty, arrogance, intolerance, selfishness, cowardice, impatience, enmity, greed, and so on, then such a community or nation is in for a very difficult journey.

Nawaz states that” “Classical liberalism focuses on individual autonomy.” However, a personal autonomy that is devoid of the aforementioned positive, constructive character traits while being steeped in the foregoing sorts of negative, destructive character traits will lead to nothing but trouble.

Clearly, something more than giving reign to individual autonomy is needed. While individuals need to be free from the tyranny of society, so, too, society needs to be free from the tyranny of individuals.

I am not enamored with the idea that people such as Nawaz seem to want to impose their ideas about progress and liberalism on me. Nonetheless, I do believe that it is possible to work out negotiated settlements that balance individual autonomy and social harmony ... including the people for whom Nawaz is most worried such as: women, gay and lesbian individuals, and those who have decided, for whatever reason, to disengage from Islam.

However, I don't believe it is necessary to revise Islam in order to accomplish any of the foregoing possibilities. What is necessary is to revise the understanding of Muslims concerning the actual nature of the spiritual tradition to which they claim to subscribe ... but, unfortunately, in all too many cases just do not.

Whatever the sins of the West might be with respect to: Killing Muslims, illegally invading their countries, destroying their infrastructure, oppressing Muslims, and the like, the West is not responsible for the woeful condition of the way in which all too many Muslims understand Islam. The Muslim community is primarily at fault for having failed to properly educate succeeding generations of young people concerning the true nature of Islam ... in fact, it is all too many Muslims [aided over the years by a variety of Western Orientalists, as well as Machiavellian governments and corporations (both Muslim and non-Muslim)], who have laid a lot of the groundwork for misleading people in the West, as well within the Muslim world, about the nature of Islam.

While discussing what Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz consider to be the difference between real liberals and pseudo-liberals, Nawaz indicates that the latter individuals often end up empowering fundamentalist and extremist Muslims by considering such individuals to be, in some amorphous sense, purer exemplars when it comes to the issue of what it means to be a Muslim. As a result, according to Nawaz, liberal and reform-minded Muslims are marginalized in any discussion of Islam, and, then, Nawaz adds that in the process pseudo-liberals "...adopt the role of thought police by asserting that liberalism isn't authentic to Muslims."

When it comes to the question of: What does being a Muslim mean, both the so-called pseudo-liberals and Nawaz are off the mark. A Muslim is someone who submits to the truth, and, therefore, the purest form of being Muslim is someone who adheres to truth and avoids what is false.

Being Muslim in the foregoing sense has nothing to do with either culture or language. Moreover, in order to identify such individuals, one has to have some degree of insight and understanding concerning the nature of truth when it comes to Islam.

What are the evidential grounds on which pseudo-liberals base their claim that fundamentalists and extremists give expression to the purest form of truth-seeking and truth-adherence? As far as I can see, they have no such grounds because they have little, or no, idea about the actual nature of Islam.

They look at Islam from some external perspective and make arbitrary judgments about what Islam entails and who best grasps such an understanding. They permit themselves to be misled by quite superficial issues such as: Linguistic skills, ethnicity, race, where a person was born, or in what kind of culture they were raised, as well as who her or his parents/relatives are or were.

Everyone who seeks to live in accordance with the truth concerning the nature of Islam aspires to be a Muslim. Only God knows the degree to which any given individual succeeds in such an endeavor.

Moreover, the Qur'an makes a distinction among individuals who are: Muslim, Mu'min, and Muhsin. As indicated previously, a Muslim is someone who seeks to submit to the truth concerning the nature of Islam, whereas a Mu'min is someone who actually has some degree of accurate insight into, understanding of, and accurate knowledge about the truth of Islam, and a Muhsin is someone who has ingested and realized the truth concerning Islam to such a degree that their actions become beneficent expressions of that truth.

I don't believe that anyone -- such as pseudo-liberals -- who looks at Islam from afar is in a position to distinguish whether a person is a Muslim, Mu'min, or Muhsin. Moreover, I rather doubt that anyone who goes about: Killing innocent people, abusing people, oppressing people, exploiting people, or misleading people about the nature of Islam -- as fundamentalists and extremists are inclined to do -- thereby becomes qualified to represent one, or more, of the foregoing three kinds of spirituality no matter how well they might be able to speak Arabic, Farsi, Turkish, Urdu, or the like and irrespective of the culture in which they might have grown up.

Just like there is no one kind of flower, and, yet, flowers are distinguishable from other kinds of life forms, so, too, there is no one kind of Muslim, Mu'min, or Muhsin, and, yet, there are qualities that distinguish such individuals from those who are non-Muslim, non-

Mu'min, and non-Muhsin. However, anyone who, irrespective of what faith label is placed upon them, submits to, has knowledge about, and gives realized expression to the truth is, respectively, a Muslim, Mu'min, or Muhsin which is why Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) is referred to as being a Muslim (see Qur'an: Surah 2, Verse 131) long before the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) appeared on the face of the Earth.

Human beings have been given free will. I note in passing that my Sufi guide once indicated to me that although we do have free will, we have a lot less of it than most people suppose.

To whatever degree human beings have free will, then, to that extent they have autonomy. Nonetheless, with autonomy comes responsibility.

We are free to make whatever choices we like. Nevertheless, from an Islamic perspective, the responsibility that one has in relation to her or his capacity for autonomy involves processes of seeking, grasping, and giving lived expression to the truth.

Every authentic spiritual tradition has taught the same kind of liberalism. Human beings possess free will, and we have autonomy, but we also have responsibility to the truth with respect to the manner in which we exercise such autonomy and free will.

Any political philosophy that wants to define liberalism only in terms of personal autonomy is flawed. An autonomy that is not balanced with a concomitant responsibility toward the truth leads nowhere but to chaos.

There are many ways of combining autonomy and responsibility. Therefore, there can be many possible ways to seek, come to know, and realize the truth through our lives and actions, but all feasible forms of liberalism are constrained by the truth.

When science establishes the truth of something through a responsible use of autonomy, it gives expression to the general principles of liberalism. When spirituality establishes the truth of something through a responsible use of autonomy, it also gives expression to the general principles of liberalism.

The reason why liberalism – in the foregoing sense of a balance between the free exercise of autonomy and a responsibility to the

truth -- appeals to so many people in the West is because it resonates with something deep within the structural character of being human. To whatever extent the foregoing sort of liberalism does not resonate with people within various Muslim communities, then, I believe this is due to the way in which such communities have lost touch with the spirit of Islam.

Liberalism did not create Islam. Rather, Islam gave rise to liberalism in the foregoing sense, and shari'ah, when properly understood, refers to a process that is intended to permit human beings to have autonomy with respect to the manner in which they exercise responsibility concerning their search for, and realization of, the truth.

There might be many differences of opinion concerning the nature of autonomy, responsibility, and the truth. However, we all are constrained by the need to establish a form of public space (social interaction) that assists people to seek the truth in ways that do not interfere with or undermine the capacity of the public space to enable people to engage the challenge of trying to balance autonomy and responsibility concerning the truth in a variety of ways.

In other words, unless principles of tolerance, within certain limits, are operational within the public space, then there is likely to be an excessive amount of interfering with, and undermining of, the attempt of people to exercise autonomy while, simultaneously, demonstrating responsibility toward the truth concerning the exercise of such autonomy. Nonetheless, tolerance is not a matter of letting anyone do whatever they like within the sphere of the public space, but, rather, tolerance is a matter of being willing to allow a multiplicity of approaches to the process of trying to balance autonomy with the need to exercise responsibility toward the truth.

Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Native Peoples, Humanists, and so on might all have different ways of trying to balance autonomy with exercising responsibility toward the truth. However, when any of those different ways begin to invade, interfere with, or undermine the manner in which individuals go about seeking the foregoing sort of balance, then, the public space must be organized in such a way that those modes of invasion, interference, and disruption are constrained and are not permitted to continue.

The degrees of freedom to which tolerance ought to be extended might be a legitimate subject of debate. Nonetheless, I believe that the issue of whether, or not, tolerance of some kind needs to be present to shape what transpires in public space is beyond the need for debate.

Maajid Nawaz and Sam Harris should be free to balance personal autonomy and responsibility to the truth in ways that seem best to them as individuals. However, such freedom or autonomy doesn't give either one of them the right to denigrate something or seek to revise something – namely, Islam – when neither one of them appears to exhibit much responsibility with respect to trying to establish the truth about the nature of Islam.

Both Maajid Nawaz and Dr. Harris take exception with the ideas, beliefs, and actions of various Muslims. Within certain limits, there is nothing wrong with this.

Unfortunately, both of the aforementioned individuals take a further step and attempt to make an illegitimate jump that extends from criticizing individual Muslims to generalizing their criticisms to apply to Islam and Muslims as a whole. If liberalism is about personal autonomy, then, when someone abuses that autonomy, whatever criticism is being voiced should be directed at individuals and not that – i.e., Islam or Muslims in general – which is being abused by the misuse of such autonomy.

In fact, there are two misuses of autonomy taking place in the foregoing context. One misuse of autonomy is by the fundamentalists and extremists who try to distort the nature of Islam, while the other misuse of autonomy belongs to Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz when they go about -- each in his own individual manner -- distorting Islam in a fashion that is similar to what the fundamentalists and extremists are attempting to do with respect to Islam.

The extremist and fundamentalists do not exhibit a proper responsibility toward establishing the truth concerning Islam. Yet, Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz make precisely the same mistake when they try to argue that Muslim fundamentalists and extremists give expression to some dimension of Islam and that, therefore, Islam deserves to be denigrated and/or revised.

The extremists, fundamentalists, Dr. Harris, and Maajid Nawaz have all exercised personal autonomy. At the same time, they all have made mistakes when it comes to exercising responsibility toward the truth in the manner through which they have given expression to their autonomy, and, as a result, they all are trying to undermine or interfere with the opportunity of people in general to come to the truth, to whatever extent such people are able to do so, with respect to Islam.

Nawaz asks: “What does killing the Yazidi population on Mount Sinjar have to do with US foreign policy? What does enforcing headscarves (tents, in fact) on women in Waziristan and Afghanistan, and lashing them, forcing men to grow beards under threat of a whip, chopping off hands, and so forth, have to do with US foreign policy?” The answer, of course, is that none of the foregoing actions have anything to do with US foreign policy ... unless, of course, one wishes to point out that US foreign policy fooled around with Afghanistan, Iraq, and other Muslim countries in a way that helped create a set of circumstances that enabled people with the foregoing sorts of ideas to assume a position of social, political, institutional, educational, and physical dominance in such places.

The foregoing list of actions cited by Nawaz also has little, or nothing, to do with Islam. Islam provides spiritual guidance, but people are the ones who exercise their autonomy with respect to that guidance and such individuals either pursue, or fail to pursue, an appropriate mode of responsibility toward the truth in relation to such guidance.

Dr. Harris adds to the litany of mistakes that have been committed by various fundamentalists and extremists when he says: “What does the Sunni bombing of Shi’a and Ahmadi mosques in Pakistan have to do with Israel and US foreign policy?” Again, the answer is nothing at all.

All of the foregoing actions noted by Nawaz and Dr. Harris give expression to a failed responsibility on the part of fundamentalists and extremists with respect to seeking and realizing the truth concerning Islam. On the one hand, the fundamentalists and extremists have failed to understand the basis – namely, the Qur’an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) – that they cite as

justification for what they impose on others, but, unfortunately, on the other hand, Dr. Harris and Maajid Nawaz have failed to point out that such a fundamentalist and extremist perspective is not based on any correct understanding of Islam, and, consequently, they, themselves, both use the actions of various extremists and fundamentalists to also obscure the truth concerning Islam as they each advance their own individual agendas.

Dr. Harris raises the following issue. While addressing a question to Nawaz, he states: "... what do you make of the fact that there are more protests in Muslim communities over Israel than over the Islamic State? Even more preposterous is the fact that if a pastor in Florida burns a copy of the Qur'an – or merely threatens to do so – it reliably produces more outrage in dozens of Muslim societies than the atrocities committed daily by Sunnis against Shi'a ever will."

While, currently, there might be more protests in various parts of the Muslim world concerning Israel than with respect to the Islamic State, the fact of the matter is that Israel has been every bit as barbaric – if not more so -- in its treatment of Palestinians as the Islamic State has been with respect to the people it has terrorized and slaughtered. A much more balanced question might be: "Why aren't people such as Sam Harris as upset about the activities of Israel with respect to the Palestinians as they are about the actions of the Islamic State – especially given that Israel, with the assistance of the United States, has been perpetrating its atrocities, oppression, and terrorism in relation to the Palestinians for nearly 70 years, whereas the Islamic State has been in operation for only a few years?"

There is virtually nowhere in the world in which "the atrocities committed daily by Sunnis against Shi'a" have not been facilitated by, and made possible through, the manner in which Western powers and Israel have actively interfered with, manipulated, undermined, and sought to control what takes place in those communities. This doesn't excuse the sectarian bloodshed that is taking place between Sunnis and Shi'a in various communities around the world, but one needs to place such conflicts in a more accurate context.

Moreover, there are 1.6 billion Muslims in the world. How much of that total protested when the pastor in Florida sought to organize a burning of the Qur'an a few years ago, and how many of the relatively

small amount of people who did protest were organized by so-called leaders who were seeking to whip up emotions to advance the agendas of the latter individuals, and how many of the aforementioned total of 1.6 billion Muslims voiced disillusionment with one another concerning the state of the Muslim world?

The fact that the latter discussion did not assume the form of a public protest does not mean that such issues are not being actively and critically explored by Muslims the world over. Apparently, if Muslims do not engage problems in the way in which Dr. Harris wishes them to do so, then, he feels this constitutes evidence that Muslims are more concerned with what a pastor does in Florida than with what Sunni and Shi'a do in relation to one another.

I do not believe that Dr. Harris has the slightest clue about what goes on in the minds, hearts, and souls of 1.6 billion Muslims. His claim that those individuals are not concerned about all that is taking place in the Muslim world – including the sectarian strife that pits Muslim against Muslim – is not based on any amount of factual evidence other than that some Muslims (and most Muslims do not engage in public protests) are more likely to hold public protests about certain issues (e.g., Israel) than they are about other issues (i.e., Islamic State) ... and the issue of being able to safely (physically and politically) conduct such demonstrations might have a lot to do with what is publicly protested and what is not publicly protested.

There were hundreds of millions of people in the United States who did not participate in the civil rights marches led by Martin Luther King, Jr., and there were hundreds of millions of people in India who did not join Gandhi during his public protests, and, yet, many, if not most, of those hundreds of millions of people in the US and India probably had strong opinions, one way or the other, concerning what was taking place with respect to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi. One cannot really use participation in public demonstrations as a reliable gauge for determining how people think and feel about any given issue.

According to Dr. Harris: “tribalism is one of the consequences of religion. There are other sources of tribalism – nationalism and racism, for instance – but a shared religious identity has global reach. As I’ve said, it creates in-group loyalty and out-group hostility. ... Muslims

often rally to the cause of other Muslims, no matter how badly behaved they are, simply because they happen to be Muslim. Other groups do this as well, but it is especially a problem among Muslims in the twenty-first century.”

Dr. Harris mentions religion, nationalism, and racism as sources of tribalism, but he fails to mention corporatism, militarism, and atheism as also being sources of tribalism. For example, the United States is the largest supplier of arms in the world, and those arms are not used to promote harmony and peace among the nations of the world, but, instead, the weapons are used by military forces around the world to make the world safe for banks, corporations, and tyrants of one description or another.

Smedley Butler, a United States Marine Corps major general who at the time of his death was the most decorated man in US military history -- including two Medals of Honor -- said in a 1933 speech (which is also the title of his 1935 book on the same subject) that “War is a racket.” He stated that war “is conducted for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the masses.”

Contrary to the propaganda put out by the real purveyors of wars, the latter are not conducted for the purpose of promoting freedom, justice, democracy, and the like. Rather, war is conducted for purposes of securing profits for the few by expending the lives of the many, as well as for purposes of controlling the many by the few.

The purveyors of war often stir up religious, racial, and national sentiments in order to fuel a lust for war among the common people. Consequently, the “Masters of War” – as Bob Dylan refers to them in one of his songs – are the bankers, corporations, military commanders, and rulers who manipulate various sectarian differences among various populations in order to serve the economic and political purposes of those “Masters of War.”

In addition, all too many atheists also appear to be champions of a very virulent form of tribalism. After all, isn't the effect of many of Dr. Harris's books a matter of establishing atheists as some sort of in-group while treating people of religion as being members of some kind of 'degenerate' out-group, and isn't one of the effects of many of Dr. Harris's books to encourage hostility toward people of religion?

Dr. Harris seems to believe that he is the voice of reason. However, for the most part, all he appears to do is give expression to the logic of his own fundamental biases concerning an atheistic perspective while deluding himself that he is actually arguing in accordance with what facts and reason indicate should be said.

While there might be Muslims here and there who are prepared to defend certain Muslims irrespective of how bad the behavior of the latter individuals might be, just as there are atheists who are prepared to cheer Dr. Harris on no matter how ridiculous, irresponsible, and factually challenged his pronouncements might be, I really don't know what Dr. Harris is talking about when he tries to argue that Muslims are among the worst perpetrators of tribalism in the twenty-first century.

It was not the people of Afghanistan who attacked the United States in the fall of 2001, but, rather, it was the United States who attacked the people of Afghanistan. However one wishes to parse the whole harboring a terrorist issue (i.e., Osama bin Laden), not only was the Afghani government prepared to hand over bin Laden to the United States if the latter would merely produce the evidence that bin Laden was guilty of what he was being accused of (which the U.S. never did) but, even more importantly, the United States, in contravention of the Geneva Conventions, was using a form of collective punishment involving the Afghanistan people to deal with whatever sins might have been committed by its Taliban rulers.

In my opinion, many – if not all -- of the people who are members of the Taliban give expression to the actions of a bunch of ignorant thugs who pursue policies of terror that are directed toward women, children, and helpless individuals. I have a hard time distinguishing such oppressors from their American counterparts who also are in Afghanistan.

Moreover, it was not Iraqi Muslims who attacked the United States without provocation in early 2003. Rather, it was the United States government that attacked the Iraqi people without provocation.

The United States government is responsible for the death and displacement of millions of people, in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Middle East in general. Yet, somehow, in the mind of Sam Harris, this all proves that Muslims are the real troublemakers in all of this.

It is not Muslims who have some 700-800 military bases all over the world. Instead, the United States government is the one who is using its power and military might to terrorize people around the globe.

It is not various countries in the Muslim world that are outspending the rest of the world combined with respect to military spending. Rather, the United States government is the one that is seeking to impose its will on everyone else through its projection of military power.

It is not Muslims who are using drone technology in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen to kill innocent people. The individuals who are responsible for drone attacks on innocent people work for the United States government.

It is not Muslim Palestinians who are attacking the United States. Rather, it is the United States who, for nearly three-quarters of a century, has been providing the Israeli government with billions of dollars in military aid to help the latter government continue to occupy, kill, torture, steal from, oppress, and brutalize Palestinians.

I don't approve of suicide bombers killing innocent people. I also don't approve of the US government killing innocent people either ... whether this is done directly or indirectly by the United States.

I was never a fan of Saddam Hussein. However, it was the United States and its allies who supplied him with the weapons that he used against his own people and who encouraged him to go to war with Iran and, then, after that war was over, tricked him into attacking Kuwait so that the US would have an excuse to realize the war it longed for in the Middle East.

I was never a fan of Muammar Gaddafi. However, it was the United States and its allies who brought about the death of many innocent Libyans through the bombing campaigns of the former ruler's government and who, as well, supplied arms to whomever the West felt might advance the corporate agenda of the West with respect to Libyan natural resources while remaining indifferent to the reprehensible acts that might be committed by the militants that were being supported by the United States and its allies.

I was never a fan of the al-Assad family dictatorship in Syria. However, irrespective of how badly that family abused its power with respect to the people of Syria, the people of Syria did not attack the United States, and, yet the people of Syria are the ones whom the United States is attacking, killing, and helping to displace through its use of military force in Syria.

I am not a fan of al-Qaeda or ISIS. However, it is the actions of the United States government that brought about the emergence of both groups through its many oppressive forms of military, economic, political, and financial interference with respect to Afghanistan and the Middle East.

The Muslim world is united about virtually nothing. They differ linguistically, culturally, socially, politically, economically, educationally, tactically, strategically, militarily, and spiritually.

Even the polling data that Dr. Harris loves to throw about indicates that the Muslim world is divided on many issues. Unfortunately, Sam Harris appears inclined to misinterpret such information in a way that attempts to support his contention that Muslims are among the worst purveyors of tribalism on the face of the Earth, and even more unfortunately, Maajid Nawaz says nothing to disabuse Dr. Harris of the latter's delusional ideas concerning such matters.

While discussing the issue of fundamentalism, Dr. Harris raises the issue that Muslims look at the Qur'an in the same way that fundamentalist Christians look at the Bible – that is, as the literal and inerrant word of God. By raising this issue, Dr. Harris wants to make the further point that: "... basically all 'moderate' Muslims – that is, those who aren't remotely like Islamists, or even especially conservative – are nevertheless fundamentalists by the Christian standard, because they believe the Qur'an to be the literal and inerrant word of God."

What does it mean to be the "literal" word of God? Normally speaking, using the term "literal" in the way that Dr. Harris does in the foregoing quote refers to a process of engaging words in their most usual linguistic sense and, thereby, ignoring whatever allegorical, metaphorical, or nuanced senses that might be given expression through the more common understandings concerning such words.

Now, while it might be possible that some people – including Dr. Harris and certain Muslims – would want to reduce the Qur’an down to only certain limited ways of parsing its meanings, I don’t recall God saying that this is the way the Qur’an should be understood.

In fact, throughout the Qur’an, one is encouraged to reflect on, think about, and seek to gain insight into what is being said. Why would the Qur’an place such an emphasis on reflecting upon the meanings of the Qur’an if that book is supposed to be engaged in only a literal manner?

Moreover, the foregoing question remains irrespective of whether, or not, someone considers the Qur’an to be a human construction or a Divine revelation. Whomever someone might consider the source of the Qur’an to be – whether, or not, that individual is a Muslim or a non-Muslim – then, nonetheless, that S(s)ource is giving many indications throughout the Qur’an that the book is not meant to be understood in a literal way, and, yet, its meanings will be made clear to whoever has taqwa or piety.

Let’s take the foregoing points a step further. There are more than 6,000 verses in the Qur’an, of which only about 500, or so, have to do with various proclamations concerning dietary habits, marriage, divorce, adultery, apostasy, murder, theft, and the like.

Why assume that the themes in the Qur’an that should take precedence are the 500, or so, verses that talk about the foregoing sorts of proclamations? The Qur’an speaks again and again throughout its more than 6,000 verses about the importance of: Love, forgiveness, tolerance, patience, courage, piety, balance, perseverance, nobility, justice, honesty, humility, compassion, generosity, equanimity, and repentance, so, why shouldn’t the ideas and values that are repeated again and again throughout the Qur’an take precedence over some sort of legalistic understanding of a number of verses that only occupy a twelfth, or less, of the Qur’an.

The foregoing does not mean that issues of marriage, divorce, theft, murder, and so on are not important. Rather, what the foregoing suggests is that, perhaps, one needs to spend considerable time reflecting on how all of the different dimensions, principles, values, and ideas of the Qur’an relate to one another and that, unless one

engages such issues through an orientation of piety, one will not be able to understand what is being said.

Who are the pious ones? God alone knows the answer to such a question, and, therefore, one cannot automatically assume – in a self-serving fashion -- that one is pious and, therefore, whatever one believes must be what the Qur'an means.

One either accepts the guidance that the Qur'an offers, or one does not accept such guidance. However, even assuming that one understands the nature of the spiritual guidance that is being offered, this does not give one the right to forcibly impose that guidance on other people – whether they be Muslims or non-Muslims.

The Qur'an often addresses its audience with the words: "O Ye who believe." However, as the Qur'an itself indicates when it talks about certain Bedouins who have professed their belief in Islam and, yet, such individuals were corrected by God and told they were merely individuals who had accepted -- in some basic, minimal sense -- the idea of Islam (i.e., they are Muslim), and belief – that is, the condition of being Mu'min or actually having some knowledge and insight concerning the nature of Islam – had not, yet, entered their hearts.

What is appropriate for a Mu'min is not necessarily appropriate for a Muslim. Moreover, what is appropriate for a Muhsin is not necessarily appropriate for either a Muslim or Mu'min.

When one mixes all of the foregoing considerations in with the aforementioned Quranic injunction that there can be no compulsion in matters of Deen (or religion), as well as with the fact that eleven-twelfths of the Qur'an place greater emphasis on qualities of character than to specific possibilities concerning this or that transgression, then anyone who comes away from the Qur'an with a desire to reduce Islam and the Qur'an down to a set of legal prescriptions concerning certain kinds of behavior has not understood the Qur'an. Furthermore, such people compound their mistake by going about trying to find ways to impose their ignorance on other people.

One could agree with Dr. Harris that there are some Muslims who have a very literal understanding concerning the contents of the Qur'an. However, none of this has anything to do with the actual

meaning of the Qur'an, and, therefore, to speak about the literal meaning of the Qur'an is to introduce a red herring into the discussion.



Chapter Six: The Qur'an

Maajid Nawaz responds to Dr. Harris's foregoing comments (see the previous chapter) concerning the issue of the literal meaning of the Qur'an by talking about different methodological ways of engaging the textual content of the Qur'an. For example, he mentions how Muslim history has been characterized by two different methodological approaches to the Qur'an – that of the Mu'tazila and the Ash'ari schools of thought that differ, among other things, on whether, or not, the Qur'an is the eternal Word of God.

Those who were persuaded by the methodology and arguments of the Mu'tazila believed that the Qur'an is not necessarily eternal. On the other hand, those individuals who were persuaded by the methodology and arguments of the Ash'ari maintained that the Qur'an was the eternal Word of God.

Nawaz goes on to point out that such perspectives gained conceptual ascendancy or faded to the fringes of the discussion as a result of who was in power. Thus, at one point in time, the ideas of the Mu'tazilites gave expression to the preferred position of many Muslims, and, then, political and social changes occurred that replaced the Mu'tazilite perspective with the ideas of the Ash'ari school of thought.

While Nawaz is right that the sort of understanding that a person derives from the Qur'an is a function of the kind of methodology he or she uses to engage the Qur'an, he is completely wrong when he claims that "... no approach to a text is without method." In fact, the Sufis have taught that if one wishes to have the opportunity, God willing, to be opened to different dimensions of the Qur'an, then, one must leave oneself and all methodology behind.

Truth concerning the Qur'an does not come through methodology. Instead, from the Sufi perspective, truth can only be realized when God takes one by the hand and opens one up to this or that dimension of the truth.

Nawaz has taken a post-modernist hermeneutical stance that gives emphasis to the way in which methodology filters, colors, and shapes understanding. However, Sufi masters maintain that such an

approach will lead to nothing but distortion concerning the nature of the Qur'an.

If one seeks to know whether the Qur'an is the eternal Word of God, then, ask God, and, then, God might, or might not, teach one accordingly. However, neither the Mu'tazilites nor the Ash'ari school of thought is the appropriate medium through which to have the foregoing question addressed.

According to Nawaz: "... these matters are constantly evolving. I'd argue that no doctrine on earth has ever been or will ever be immutable because of course doctrines are constructs – the work of human beings."

Nawaz is right when he states that human constructs are constantly changing in a variety of ways. Nonetheless, he is totally wrong when -- by arguing that human constructs are constantly changing – he, thereby, seeks to give the impression that Islam is a function of the doctrines that are introduced by this or that human being.

The Qur'an is guidance from God. Nawaz, however, is indicating that Quranic guidance is merely a matter of what human beings make of it.

If what Nawaz claims were the case, then, the Qur'an wouldn't be Divine guidance. Instead, it would merely be a form of misguidance that was filtered through the desires, assumptions, biases, interests, ignorance, and limits of this or that individual.

People such as Dr. Harris, of course, are of the opinion that Nawaz is correct when the latter claims that so-called sacred texts are nothing more than human constructs. However, neither Dr. Harris nor Maajid Nawaz can demonstrate that their assumptions concerning the nature of the Qur'an are correct, and, in fact, all they get from the Qur'an is to see their own reflection looking back at them.

Dr. Harris argues that: "In the twenty-first century, the [religious] moderate's commitment to scientific rationality, human rights, gender equality, and every other modern value – values that, as you [Maajid Nawaz] say, are potentially universal for human beings – comes from the past thousand years of human progress, much of which was accomplished in spite of religion, not because of it. ... The truth is that

most of our modern values are antithetical to the specific teachings of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.”

The best way of describing what is going on with the foregoing argument is to refer to an old adage of computer science: ‘Garbage in, Garbage out.’ Since the beginning of time, there has existed in every human being a potential for understanding the importance of qualities such as: Rationality, human rights, gender equality, and a host of constructive moral and character traits.

Despite being a neuroscientist, Dr. Harris does not know how or when life, consciousness, intelligence, memory, language, creativity, talent, morality, or reasoning came into being. One can plausibly argue that evolution did not create such capabilities (i.e., there is no tenable evolutionary account for the emergence of such capabilities), and human beings (either individually or collectively) did not invent those capabilities ... so, how did they arise?

Neither science nor religion can explain the process through which such capabilities originated. One can choose to go with some theory that is rooted in either science or religion (or a combination of the two), or, perhaps, one might choose to go with some alternative kind of philosophical worldview, but the answers are, presently, unavailable to human beings.

Nonetheless, for thousands of years, human beings have had all the necessary capabilities to be able to rigorously engage issues of morality involving, among other things, matters of gender equality, human rights, and rationality. There is considerable evidence to indicate that some people successfully negotiated their way through the moral pitfalls (the Abel-types) while other individuals were not as successful with respect to such endeavors (the Cain-types).

As the Cain-types demonstrate, human beings are vulnerable to an array of forces – both within and without -- that are capable of undermining, distorting, and interfering with the process of coming to realize the inherent potential for understanding the nature of truth that exists within human beings. At the same time, Abel-types have demonstrated that through the assistance of authentic revelation, prophets, spiritual guides, as well as a sincere search for the truth by an individual, human beings are capable of realizing ways that

resonate with the foregoing inherent potential and, thereby, help to induce human beings to actively seek to realize that potential.

Contrary to what Dr. Harris tries to claim, none of the foregoing is antithetical to the teachings of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon them all). Furthermore, when properly understood, such understandings are not antithetical to the teachings of the actual books of revelation -- or Divine guidance -- that were given to the foregoing individuals.

If one wishes to better understand the foregoing issues, one should not waste time with theologians. One needs to actively investigate the teachings of the authentic mystics concerning such matters.

Toward the latter part of the *End of Faith*, Sam Harris explores some of what the Buddhist spiritual tradition has to offer. Buddhism is something that Dr. Harris appears to believe constitutes a far better alternative than does religion, and, yet, Buddhism is a religion because it is a process of seeking to realize the truth concerning the nature of reality and the way in which human spiritual potential fits into that reality.

Buddhists might not give emphasis to the idea of God. Nonetheless, no matter which form of that spiritual tradition one pursues, they are all very clear that there is a truth concerning the nature of reality and human potential that, with appropriate effort and assistance, can be realized.

If an individual doesn't feel comfortable with the idea of God, then choosing to proceed in that manner is a person's prerogative for which they must assume responsibility with respect to its ramifications -- for better or worse. But, irrespective of whether human beings like it or not, reality does exist, and such reality gives expression to the truth of things.

The first part of the Shahadah -- that is, the first pillar of Islam is: There is no god but Allah. The Sufi mystics pursue the foregoing proclamation to its logical conclusion and assert that there is no reality but Divinity.

The Sufis also indicate that the process of realizing the presence of such reality -- to whatever degree this is possible -- is beyond language.

In fact, the nature of reality is beyond all linguistic description, and one (but only one) very important dimension of the Sufi mystical path involves having to overcome the traps that are present in various linguistic and conceptual understandings concerning the nature of reality and human potential.

As a scientist and a follower – to some extent – of certain Buddhist practices, Dr. Harris obviously believes there are truths to be discovered concerning the nature of reality. Unfortunately, he appears to be caught up in a variety of linguistic and conceptual cul-de-sacs when he seeks to claim that Islam has nothing to do with the truth concerning the nature of reality or human potential despite the fact, as previously indicated, that the first pillar of Islam – namely, bearing witness to the truth that there is no reality but Divinity -- is – despite the presence of certain linguistic differences -- not all that different from what Dr. Harris professes to believe.

Reality exists. Realizing truths concerning the nature of such reality is possible given the right kind of guidance, methods, effort, and good fortune.

Furthermore, reality and the truth are worthy of respect and veneration. In other words, reality and truth give expression to the realm of the sacred.

Unfortunately, Dr. Harris appears to be less interested in determining the nature of truth about various dimensions of reality and much more interested in trying to denigrate others by means of an array of problematic assumptions, biases, speculations, misunderstandings, and erroneous forms of thinking that protect such ignorance from becoming contaminated with actual facts. How is the latter approach much different from those religious fundamentalists – such as the Taliban or ISIS – who claim that it is their way or the highway when it comes to the issue of seeking truth concerning the nature of reality?

Dr. Harris goes on to argue that religious moderates: "... seem unwilling to grapple with the fact that all scriptures contain an extraordinary amount of stupidity and barbarism that can always be rediscovered and made holy anew by fundamentalists – and there's no principle of moderation internal to the faith that prevents this. These

fundamentalist readings are, almost by definition, more complete and consistent – and, therefore, more honest.”

People from other faith traditions can address the foregoing comments from their own perspectives. What follows comes from the heart and soul of a Muslim.

I don't find any amount – extraordinary or otherwise – of stupidity and barbarism in the Qur'an. I do find a great deal that is worthy of considerable reflection.

I do not feel that the Qur'an is calling on me to tell other people how to live their lives. I do feel that the Qur'an addresses me with the offer of considerable guidance concerning how to go about living my life.

The Qur'an provides an array of levels and modalities of guidance. God has given me the capacity and opportunity to choose how to go about putting such levels and modalities of understanding into practice, and I alone am responsible for the choices that I make in this regard.

If I choose to try to respond to a situation through compassion, patience, and forgiveness rather than in some other way, I am following the guidance of the Qur'an. If I choose to try to engage certain life circumstances through humility, generosity, and gratitude, rather than in some other fashion, I am following the guidance of the Qur'an.

If I choose to try to live life in accordance with qualities of honesty, tolerance, and love rather than in accordance with the antithesis of such qualities, then I am following the guidance of the Qur'an. If I choose to try to seek to understand the Qur'an through reflection, meditation, contemplation, and insight rather than restricting myself to various much more limited possibilities, then, I am following the guidance of the Qur'an.

Attesting to the Oneness of Reality, observing daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan, giving charity, going on pilgrimage, engaging in the remembrance of God, and seeking to acquire an array of constructive character traits, while avoiding giving expression to an array of problematic character traits, are principles, values, and practices that apply to all Muslims, and by attempting to do

such activities as best I can, I am following the guidance of the Qur'an. Moreover, if I choose to regard some facets of the Qur'an as being more appropriate to the circumstances that prevailed during the times of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) while regarding other features of the Qur'an as being more appropriate for the times in which I live, then, I also am following the guidance of the Qur'an because I am attempting to exercise, God willing, discernment in order to find the most harmonious, peaceful, constructive way to provide all people with the opportunity to seek and realize the truth concerning the nature of reality and human potential.

All of the foregoing considerations demonstrate that Dr. Harris is completely wrong when he claims that: "...there's no principle of moderation internal to the faith that prevents" fundamentalists from carrying the day. Furthermore, Dr. Harris is also totally incorrect when he tries to assert that: "... fundamentalist readings are, almost by definition, more complete and consistent - and, therefore, more honest."

Dr. Harris does not state what he means when he argues that "almost by definition" what fundamentalists do somehow gives expression to more complete, consistent, and, therefore, honest readings of the Qur'an than what anyone else does. Just what definition is he alluding to and what justifies such a definition?

What are the criteria for determining what constitutes "consistency" and "completeness"? What justifies using such criteria?

How can any understanding of the Qur'an that ignores the injunction that there can be no compulsion in matters of Deen or religion be considered to be consistent, complete, or honest? How can any understanding of the Qur'an that marginalizes - if not ignores -- qualities such as compassion, nobility, honesty, humility, generosity, tolerance, love, forgiveness, justice, kindness, charitableness, and so on (all of which are mentioned on numerous occasions in the Qur'an) -- be considered to be consistent, complete, or honest?

Dr. Harris's whole approach to the Qur'an seems to be immersed in arbitrariness. He has a Classics Illustrated sort of understanding of Islam that is missing all of the richness, nuances, subtleties, complexities, and details of the original text on which his comic book version is problematically based.

Dr. Harris continues on with his analysis by saying: "... every moderate seems to believe that his interpretation and selective reading of scripture is more accurate than God's literal words." First of all, the Qur'an is not to be interpreted, but, instead, one must wait for insight concerning any given situation to manifest itself in one's understanding, and this is one of the reasons why one should not be too quick to assume that a superficial reading of the Qur'an is the best way to proceed.

Secondly, concepts such as: Patience, love, compassion, charitableness, forgiveness, tolerance, humility, peace, equanimity, and kindness are all given positive forms of expression through the words of the Qur'an. Moreover, concepts such as: Impatience, enmity, greed, selfishness, injustice, arrogance, intolerance, and hardness of heart are given negative forms of expression through the words of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an contains many parables that address both of the foregoing sorts of constructive and destructive potentials in human nature. How are the foregoing concepts – whether of a negative or constructive kind -- any less literal than are the sorts of things to which Dr. Harris is alluding?

Dr. Harris argues: "Presumably, God could have written these books any way He wanted. And if He wanted them to be understood in the spirit of twenty-first-century secular rationality, He could have left out all those bits about stoning people to death for adultery or witchcraft. It really isn't hard to write a book that prohibits sexual slavery – you just put in a few lines like: "Don't take sex slaves" and "When you fight a war and take prisoners, as you inevitably will, don't rape any of them."

God put in more than a few lines in the Qur'an concerning the treatment of other people ... irrespective of whether, or not, these other individuals are slaves or non-slaves, Muslim or non-Muslim. Considerations involving: Equanimity, fairness, justice, compassion, not mistreating or abusing those who are under one's care, not transgressing limits, and the freeing of slaves are all mentioned quite a few times in the Qur'an.

The Qur'an is a book of guidance directed toward assisting human beings during the process of making choices with respect to the living of life. If people choose to ignore that guidance, or do not properly take

that guidance into consideration, or are not interested in trying to acquire insight into the nature of that guidance, then, how is any of this God's fault?

The Qur'an itself is a test. The test is whether, or not, a person will permit herself or himself to become open to the guidance that flows through the Qur'an.

Both those who are misguided as well as those who are guided make reference to the Qur'an. Only one of those two groups operate in accordance with what the Qur'an has to offer, and, unfortunately, Dr. Harris seems to be only interested in what the misguided have to say about the Qur'an.

The decisions that were made during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) were apropos to those times and circumstances. However, the Prophet used to discourage people from coming to him and reporting their sins, and, instead, he encouraged them to repent to God for whatever sins they might have committed.

In addition, he used to discourage people from asking him specific questions about the appropriateness of this or that kind of behavior. He instructed them that unless he said something to them, then, they should leave him alone concerning issues that he, himself, did not raise.

Finally, the Prophet told people to destroy the compilations they had made concerning what he said and did. He didn't want there to be any confusion between the words of God and the words of the Prophet.

On the relatively few occasions when some form of punishment was handed out during the times of the Prophet, this was usually because the person who had transgressed, in some way, against other human beings within the community (e.g., theft, murder, adultery) insisted on, or agreed with, receiving the prescribed punishments because they believed that by doing so, the slate would be wiped clean in the eyes of God.

Currently, we don't live in a time when the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is with us in any physical form. Moreover, there is no one in the Muslim world who can serve a Prophetic role, and, therefore, there is no one who can justify trying to impose on the rest of the Muslim world any particular style of: Government, social

arrangement, legal system, punishment, or manner of using the Qur'an to compel people to pursue life in one way rather than another [and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was never interested in exercising some form of authoritarian control over what people did or didn't do].

The foregoing comments do not mean that anything and everything is permissible. Individuals – at least those who seek to be Muslim -- must still try to become open to the guidance of the Qur'an.

Nonetheless, there is nothing in the process of becoming open to the teachings of the Qur'an that indicates that a Muslim must show deference to the opinions (fatwas) of fundamentalists and extremists when the latter stray from Islam in the way in which the latter individuals appear to be inclined to do. Fundamentalists and extremists will cite passages from the Qur'an in an attempt to try to justify what they do, but the hearts of such people are closed to the actual teachings of the Qur'an.

Dr. Harris asserts that: "...the most straightforward reading of scripture suggests that Allah advises jihadists to take sex slaves from among the conquered, decapitate their enemies, and so forth." The foregoing statement indicates that Dr. Harris has either not read the entire Qur'an, or that he has done so in far too cursory and superficial a manner, or that he misunderstands what the Qur'an says in a manner that is strikingly similar to the people he is criticizing.

When the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) rode triumphantly into Mecca following many years of brutality that had been committed by the Quraish and their allies against Muslims, the Prophet did not behead anyone nor did he take any slaves. Instead, he: Indicated that on this day he found no fault with the people of Mecca, proceeded to appoint someone from among the Meccans to serve as an administrator for the area, and then returned to Medina.

Furthermore, following the siege of a community by Muslims, one of the members of the tribe that had been besieged poisoned the Prophet and at least one of the people with him. Although the Prophet survived the poisoning, another individual was not so fortunate.

When the woman who had committed the act of poisoning was brought before him, the Prophet did not behead her or make her a sex

slave. Instead, he forgave her and set her free, indicating, as he did so, that the woman was only acting to defend the honor of her people.

By proceeding in the foregoing manner, the Prophet was acting in accordance with the guidance of the Qur'an. However, when the members of the Islamic State behave in the way do, they are ignoring the guidance of the Qur'an as well as the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Dr. Harris wants to argue that when it comes to religious scripture, such texts are very specific in what they demand of adherents. In other words, he wants to claim that such texts are not open to interpretation.

According to Dr. Harris, "You can't say, for instance, that Islam recommends eating bacon and drinking alcohol. And even if you could find some way of reading the Qur'an that would permit those things, you can't say that its central message is that a devout Muslim should consume as much bacon and alcohol as humanly possible. No one can say that the central message of Islam is pacifism. ... One simply cannot say that the central message of the Qur'an is respect for women as the moral and political equals of men. To the contrary, one can say that under Islam, the central message is that women are second-class citizens and the property of the men in their lives."

Actually, the Qur'an does permit such things as consuming bacon or drinking alcohol under certain circumstances. For instance, if there were a set of circumstances in which one needed to consume bacon or drink alcohol in order to preserve one's life, then such actions would be permitted.

Contrary to what Dr. Harris is trying to argue in the foregoing quote, flexibility is, within limits, one of the central messages of the Qur'an. There are many constructive ways to give expression to the teachings of the Qur'an.

For example, there is not just a single way to be: Loving, honest, compassionate, generous, charitable, grateful, noble, forgiving, tolerant, humble, friendly, and so on. There is not just a single way to observe the five basic pillars of Islam, and there is not just one way to remember God or engage in reflection concerning the nature of the Qur'an.

Dr. Harris is trying to frame things in a way that compels Muslims to act in the ways that he wants to criticize. He wants such acts to be considered to be the literal meaning of Qur'an, and he wants such acts to be considered to be the central message of the Qur'an.

For instance, without justification, Dr. Harris asserts that: "No one can say that the central message of Islam is pacifism." Without itemizing all of the relevant Quranic passages, nonetheless, one can honestly assert that there are many, many verses in the Qur'an indicating that peaceful solutions to problems are always to be preferred to the way of conflict, and, as well, there are many passages in the Qur'an indicating that one should be inclined to be open to reconciliation, forgiveness, and letting things go.

Are there passages in the Qur'an indicating that Muslims have the right to defend themselves when attacked? Yes, there are, but there also are warnings about not transgressing beyond bounds with respect to such a right.

Moreover, one might want to keep in mind that the Prophet would not permit Muslims to retaliate against their Quraish tormentors for more than 13 years. Physical resistance to the ongoing oppression was only undertaken when Divine permission came (in the form of specific verses of revelation) that permitted the Muslim community to fight back against Quraish aggression.

The foregoing permission to wage war is not open-ended. A clear indication from God (i.e., revelation), the particular nature of circumstances, and the presence of the Prophet are delimiting conditions that govern the foregoing sort of permission ... yet the aforementioned Divine indication, circumstances and a Prophetic presence (at least in a physical sense) are no longer operative.

Given the current absence of the above noted conditions, then, to a large extent, the principles that tend to govern the issue of engaging in physical conflict are those that were in effect prior to the time when Divine permission enabled a Muslim community -- led by the Prophet -- to engage in such physical resistance. There are exceptions to the foregoing principles that give expression to non-violence -- such as those that involve instances of needing to protect oneself or one's family against imminent physical attack -- but, for the most part, there is nothing to indicate that the permission to engage in war-like

physical resistance was intended to be extended to all Muslims in perpetuity.

Dr. Harris is also completely wrong when he claims that: “One simply cannot say that the central message of the Qur’an is respect for women as the moral and political equals of men.” Actually, one can say this, and there are many verses in the Qur’an indicating as much.

Dr. Harris seems to be confusing the arbitrary systems of Muslim law that have arisen over the centuries with the actual teachings of the Qur’an. While there is one Quranic verse that does allude to a small degree of superiority that men have with respect to women, nevertheless, the precise nature of that superiority is not spelled out, and, more importantly, with a few exceptions, throughout the Qur’an, all of the practices and benefits that are discussed in the Qur’an apply equally to women and men.

Can both women and men give birth to children? No!

Can both women and men breast-feed babies? No!

Can men put off prayers and fasting during their menstrual cycles?
No!

Can both men and women have more than one spouse at a time?
No, but the Qur’an indicates that unless a man can treat all of his wives with complete fairness and impartiality, then, he should be content with one wife.

Moreover, nothing in the Qur’an indicates that women are the property of men or that they are second-class citizens. Such views are entirely a function of the legal systems that were dreamed up by men who decided to ignore the teachings of the Qur’an after the Prophet passed away.

Muslim culture does not necessarily reflect the teachings of the Qur’an. Unfortunately, both Muslims and non-Muslims often conflate and confuse the former with the latter.

According to Maajid Nawaz: “to interpret any text, one must have a methodology, and in that methodology, there are jurisprudential, linguistic, philosophical, historical, and moral perspectives. Quentin Skinner of the Cambridge School wrote a seminal essay ... that addresses the danger of assuming that there is ever a true reading of texts. It asks the question, does any piece of writing speak for itself. Or,

do we impose certain values and judgments on that text when interpreting it?"

Nawaz doesn't seem to consider the possibility that both of the foregoing alternatives might be true at the same time. In other words, perhaps, a given text does speak for itself, but, simultaneously, some people might be inclined to "impose certain values and judgments on that text."

Suppose I pass a note to someone sitting near to me. The text of the note states: "Would you please hand the salt shaker to me that is near to your plate?"

Let us assume that my only interest is gaining access to the salt. Nonetheless, the person to whom my request is presented might have any number of ideas about the meaning of the text in my message ... such as: I am trying to start a conversation and using the text as my opening ... or, I am making a flirtatious pass, or I am trying to annoy the recipient of the message ... or, I am trying to manipulate the individual in some way ... or the message is a code of some kind that involves something other than salt ... and so on.

The text does speak for itself. It conveys my intention.

The person receiving the message might understand what is going on, or that person might move off in one interpretational direction or another that imposes various ideas and feeling onto the message that don't accurately reflect the nature of the intention being expressed in textual form. However, if the person near me reaches for the salt and passes it to me, then, the person has correctly understood the meaning of the text even if, at the same time, he or she wonders if there might be some sort of additional subtext to the message.

There is a term in hermeneutics that is known as "merging horizons." The process of merging horizons requires a person who is engaging some text to merge horizons with the intentions of the individual who generated the text that is being engaged -- that is, to become one with the intentions being conveyed through the text.

When one has exhausted merging with all levels of the text in question, then, one fully understands the perspective of the person who generated the message. If, on the other hand, one fails to do this, then one has failed to grasp the nature of the voice that gave rise to the

text. Finally, if one only succeeds in merging with some of the semantic and emotional horizons to which a given text gives expression, then, one has only a partial understanding of what is being engaged.

Now, either Maajid Nawaz believes that the Qur'an gives expression to the intentions of Divinity or he doesn't. Moreover, he either believes that it is possible to merge horizons, to varying degrees of accuracy, with the nature of those intentions or he doesn't.

If there are no Divine intentions associated with the Qur'an, and/or it is not possible to grasp such intentions to varying degrees, then, all of Nawaz's talk about the Qur'an is an exercise in arbitrariness. Irrespective of how many kinds of linguistic, cultural, philosophical, historical, and theological forces that might be at play, Nawaz provides no reliable criteria for establishing what constitutes the truth concerning the meaning of anything ... including one's interpretive effort since thoughts and feeling just become further objects that can be subjected to a process of interpretational engagement that is endless, relativistic, and arbitrarily imposed on the text.

The Sufis indicate that one must free oneself from all possible linguistic, cultural, philosophical, historical, and legalistic treatments of a text – e.g., the Qur'an -- and seek to merge horizons with the intentions underlying such a text rather than setting about trying to merge horizons with all the ideas and feelings that have been imposed on that text over the years. Before the truth can be poured into a vessel of understanding (e.g., the heart or the mind), the receiving vessel must be emptied of anything that might interfere with, or contaminate, the quality of what is being poured.

No single verse in the Qur'an can be isolated from the spiritual ecology of the entire Qur'an. Everything bears upon everything else.

When the intentional horizons of the Qur'an have been properly merged to whatever extent one is capable of achieving at a given time and to whatever extent God permits on such an occasion, then, one engages existence through the lenses of the Qur'an. In other words, an understanding arises within an individual that permits her or him to engage the events of life in a way that is in accordance with, or compatible with, the teachings of the Qur'an, and the more extensively that one is able and permitted to engage the intentions flowing

through the Qur'an, the greater is one's God-given insight concerning some existential situation in which one is immersed.

The meaning of the Qur'an can never be exhausted. Moreover, the extent to which one will be able to succeed in merging horizons with the intentions flowing through the Qur'an will always be a function of inherent capacity and God's Grace.

Maajid Nawaz claims that: "... the only truth is that there is no correct way to interpret scripture." In effect, he is saying: "...there is no right answer." And, according to him: "... in the absence of a right answer, pluralism is the only option."

He is right that pluralism is the only option, but he is wrong about why this is the case. Pluralism is important not because there are no right answers but because the truth concerning reality's nature and the relationship of human potential with respect to such reality encompasses a wide set of possibilities that are all -- within certain limits and within certain contexts -- acceptable.

Human capacity is variable. Divine Grace is variable. The degree to which human beings succeed in merging horizons with Divine intentions is variable.

One has to respect the fact that God opens up different individuals to the truth concerning Divine intentions in different ways. Consequently, one has to extend various degrees of freedom to people with respect to how they go about seeking to realize the truth concerning Reality and human potential.

Nevertheless, the degrees of freedom that are to be extended to any given individual cannot permit that person to be able to deny, corrupt, or undermine anyone else having that same opportunity to pursue the truth about the nature of reality and human potential. One can neither seek to control others nor permit oneself to be controlled with respect to the issue of pursuing the truth about the nature of reality.

Furthermore, Maajid Nawaz is wrong when he claims that: "... pluralism will lead to secularism, and to democracy, and to human rights." He is wrong because human rights are already present in the plurality of opportunities that are necessary and that enable people to pursue the truth in relation to reality and human potential.

He is also wrong because pluralism does not lead to democracy but, instead, presupposes the condition of sovereignty. If people do not have the opportunity to pursue the truth concerning reality and human potential, they do not have sovereignty, and if there is no sovereignty, pluralism of opportunity will not be possible, and if there is no such pluralism, democracy just becomes an exercise in which the majority (however it is conceived) become inclined toward authoritarian control over various minorities.

What Maajid Nawaz is proposing will lead nowhere but to confusion, relativism, arbitrariness, and conflict. In effect -- and as he readily admits -- he is arguing that there is no such thing as truth, and in such a context, peace and stability are not indications of progress but, instead, give expression to the presence of a deadly stasis that stands in the way of ever being able to discover the truth -- to whatever extent this is possible -- about the nature of reality and human potential.

When discussing the idea of moving "away from viewing religion as a set of legal injunctions," Nawaz does come close to alluding to something that, in certain ways, resonates with the former perspective when he says: "It's no longer a matter of strict legal interpretations, but a spiritual, mystical relationship with God, a journey." Unfortunately, he gets to this point through a superficial, cursory, and problematic interpretation of the Sufi path.

For example, his references to the Sufi path are especially problematic in conjunction with the Mulaamatiyya and the Qalandariyya. Contrary to what Nawaz asserts, the intention among such Sufi groups was never about any alleged right to sin.

In the case of the Mulaamatiyya, the group's modus operandi was about committing acts that were likely to induce others to subject the person to ridicule or criticism that could be used as a means of disciplining and subduing the ego or nafs of the latter individual since ridicule and criticism are virulent, painful poisons to the ego. On the other hand, in the matter of the Qalandariyya, certain mystical states and pronouncements to which members of that group, by God's leave, sometimes gave expression tended to trouble and disturb certain dimensions of the Muslim community because the sorts of states and pronouncements being alluded to tended to challenge the

understandings of many Muslims concerning the nature of reality and what might be possible with respect to how one aligned oneself with such reality.

The Qur'an was never intended to be a legal document. It was always intended to provide guidance for an individual's spiritual, mystical journey toward realizing the presence of Divinity in one's life. In fact, from the Sufi perspective, worship is nothing other than a process of realizing the presence of Divine reality.

Chapter Seven: Perspective

While expressing some support for Maajid Nawaz's post-modernist, relativistic text-based approach to Islam, Dr. Harris also expresses concern. He argues: "Any position arrived at through this (granted, more appealing and more modern) approach to interpretation seems unstable, because fundamentalism can always rise again. And it will tend to rise again to the degree that anyone feels the impulse to hew closely to the texts. What can you say to a person who thinks: ... It (i.e., the Qur'an) says here that I should hate and fear infidels and take none as friends."

To begin with, no matter what one does or says, there have always been those who will allocate to themselves the right to distort reality in whatever way they see fit. There is nothing that can be done to prevent people from taking liberties with the truth any more than there seems to be anything that can be done to disabuse Dr. Harris with respect to his ignorance concerning such topics as Islam.

Notwithstanding the foregoing sorts of considerations, there are easy ways to respond to the question Dr. Harris raises – namely, what can a person say to someone who "feels the impulse to hew closely to the texts" with respect to the idea, of hating and fearing infidels and not taking them as friends. For instance, one could say: "O ye who believe. Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity and let not your hatred of any people seduce you to not deal justly with them. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty. Observe your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is informed of what you do." (Surah 5, Verse 8).

Many other verses of the Qur'an could be recited in conjunction with the question being raised by Dr. Harris. The point is that Dr. Harris has settled on an overly simplistic, narrow, shallow, distorted approach to both the Qur'an and Islam because doing so seems to serve his purposes.

Apparently, when it comes to religion, in general, or to Islam and Muslims, in particular, Dr. Harris wishes to remain deeply entrenched in his ignorance concerning such matters. If this were not the case, then he would take the moral steps that are necessary to do whatever research he does with a much more open mind as well as commitment to the sort of intellectual rigor that is necessary to arrive at a fair understanding of what Islam entails.

I'm not asking Dr. Harris to believe in Islam. I am asking him to be fair, and he doesn't seem to be able to accomplish this.

One should also be clear about what an infidel is. This is something that Dr. Harris fails to do.

To begin with, an infidel does not refer to anyone and everyone who is not a Muslim. There are many forms of spiritual belief that are recognized by, and alluded to, in the Qur'an.

For example, the Qur'an states: "Surely, those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day, and does good, they have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve." (2:62) Moreover, the Qur'an also indicates that throughout history (up to the time of the Qur'an) there were many prophets (some 120,000) who were sent to assist people spiritually, but only some of those prophets were specifically named in the Qur'an (see Surah 40, Verse 78).

Consequently, one should not be too quick to reject someone as a believer simply because that person follows the teachings of someone who is not mentioned in the Qur'an. Moreover, while there might be certain differences in how such people seek the truth, nonetheless, as the Qur'an points out again and again, human beings are not the ones who have the responsibility for judging such matters, but, rather, God is the One Who will decide things in this regard.

Clearly, therefore, from the perspective of the Qur'an, the canopy under which believers congregate is very wide and is capable of including many different categories of people. Now, Dr. Harris presents an interesting case with respect to the foregoing issue of who is and isn't an infidel, because in many respects he seems to be an individual who believes in truth and seeks it out ... although in the case of Islam he doesn't do a very good job of separating out the Islamic wheat from the chaff of those (which includes himself) who do not understand the nature of Islam.

Furthermore, given that Dr. Harris wrote a book titled: *The Moral Landscape*, he appears to be someone who wishes to do that which is moral and good. The fact that I disagreed with many – not all – of the arguments in the aforementioned book and wrote about those

disagreements in my critique of the foregoing book in my own work: *Epistle to a Sam Harris Nation*, does not mean – irrespective of whether I am right or wrong with respect to my criticisms – that Dr. Harris is not interested in seeking what is good, true, or moral.

In Chapter 7 – ‘Experiments in Consciousness’ – of the *End of Faith*, Dr. Harris talks about spirituality and mysticism. He makes clear that he is using such terms in a non-religious sense, but, for lack of better words, he proceeds to talk about those sorts of possibilities within the context of Buddhism.

While Buddhism is considered not to be God-centric, there is a distinction within Buddhism that I always have found to be intriguing. The distinction involves two terms: ‘jiriki’ and ‘tariki’.

The idea of ‘jiriki’ refers to the dimension of spiritual struggle that is rooted in the efforts of an individual. ‘Tariki’, on the other hand, refers to a dimension of spiritual assistance that is external to whatever efforts are put forth by an individual.

The Buddhists have their own way of understanding such terms. However, given that none of us – including Buddhists -- knows how to viably account for, in any great detail, the origins of: The universe, life, consciousness, intelligence, language, imagination, reason, creativity, talent, morality, or spirituality, then, it is quite conceivable that the realm of ‘tariki’ (i.e., other help or external help) extends much further than either the Buddhists or Dr. Harris supposes.

There is a story associated with the Buddha that is apropos to the foregoing. The Buddha was reported to have been sitting in the forest with a small group of individuals.

He picked up leaves from the forest floor and indicated to the people present that spiritual truths exist that are more plentiful than the leaves of the forest, but he teaches only those truths that are necessary for liberation from illusion.

Is Dr. Harris an infidel? I don’t know, and, quite frankly, from my perspective that is not really any of my business.

What Dr. Harris believes is up to him, and he is responsible for the choices he makes. I might disagree with him in relation to this or that aspect of what his philosophical, scientific, spiritual, or mystical perspectives might be, but I respect his right to make such choices.

However, what I do find objectionable is that so much of his commentary concerning religion and Islam is rooted in ignorance. Dr. Harris is a highly intelligent person, so when he makes the errors he does with respect to Islam and religion, and, in addition, he seems uninterested in searching for the truth concerning those matters, then, I consider such willful ignorance to be problematic because, among other things, he is whipping up hostility toward Islam and Muslims in a manner that is unwarranted, if not dangerous.

When he proceeds along the sort of path of ignorance that has been demonstrated throughout the pages of this book, I consider him every bit as worrisome as the fundamentalists whom he seeks to disparage. Consequently, I can't think of any reason why I might want to ignore Divine guidance that inclines me toward disliking what such people *do* (and not the person) or refraining from taking such people as friends.

At the same time, the foregoing sort of dislike and distancing of myself has to be modulated by other guidance that comes through the Qur'an, such as the aforementioned Verse 8 of Surah 5 that warns me about not treating the foregoing sorts of people with injustice. Contrary to what Dr. Harris seems to suppose with respect to Islam, nothing prevents me from joining together guidance from different parts of the Qur'an to arrive at a position of caution concerning the ignorance-based behaviors of people like Dr. Harris while, simultaneously, remembering that I have an obligation to be equitable toward those same individuals.

Now, lest Dr. Harris – or those who idolize him – feel that what I am objecting to is his alleged atheism, let me introduce something from the principles of Islam in general and from the Sufi mystical path in particular. Within every human being exists a resistance to the truth that is seated in the ego or the rebellious self (*nafs*) – (See Surah 12: Verse 53 ... “Truly the soul commands unto evil.”)

The Qur'an says: “O ye who believe, fight against those infidels close to you.” (Surah 9, Verse 123) The infidels who are closest to us are our own egos or our individual, rebellious selves that are inclined to resist acknowledging the truth in this or that context.

I object to the dimensions of my own being that are resistant to coming to the truth with respect to any given issue. I object equally to

the dimensions in others – such as Dr. Harris’ ignorance about various topics – that also are resistant to coming to the truth in relation to this or that issue.

I don’t have to kill Dr. Harris because he is ignorant about certain things any more than I have to kill myself when my own ignorance rears its ugly head. In fact, and as the present book demonstrates, there are many forms of fighting against and attempting to combat ignorance that don’t have to be rooted in physical combat.

The most “violent” thing I ever saw my Sufi teacher do or say (and this is based on enjoying a very close relationship with him for 17 years) was to tell a drunk who was acting in a menacing manner toward my spiritual guide to “buzz off!” The inebriated person buzzed off.

I might add that the foregoing event occurred during a time when the university at which he taught, along with various elements of the surrounding Muslim community, together with representatives of the provincial government and different media outlets were all doing their best to try to destroy him just because he refused to accept the ignorance of such people concerning the nature of Islam. This all took place more than 30 years ago ... long before the present climate of ignorance arose, but those were circumstances that give expression to the long-standing animosity concerning all things Islamic that have existed in the West for quite some time and that have helped to nurture the ignorance of such people as Dr. Harris with respect to Islam.

When my spiritual guide was a young man, he was part of a small group of friends that used to hang out together and go on various adventures in and around their locality in Pakistan. One of members of the group was an atheist.

My teacher told me that they used to engage in good-natured, light-hearted banter concerning issues of belief and unbelief among themselves, but the young man who was an atheist was an accepted part of the group. One of the funny stories that my spiritual guide related to me about the man had to do with the latter’s appearance.

The young man possessed a long flowing beard and had the appearance of a holy man. From time to time, as the group of friends

was going about its activities, various people in the street would approach the young man asking for spiritual blessings and advice ... something that amused everyone in the group of friends including the young atheist.

Dr. Harris maintains that: "It seems to me that the Qur'an contains two central messages ... The first is the demonization of infidels ... The evil of unbelief is spelled out in the Qur'an on almost every page, and one finds only a few stray lines – for example, 'There is no compulsion in religion' (2:256) with which to offset the general message of intolerance. There is also the doctrine of 'abrogation' under which later – generally less tolerant – verses are believed to supersede earlier ones. My understanding is that 2:256 is nullified in this way."

I find it somewhat ironical that Dr. Harris should spend so much time demonizing people of religion, in general, and Muslims, in particular, and, then, he wants to talk about what he considers to be the manner in which Islam demonizes those who don't believe. I was watching an interview the other day that featured Richard Dawkins, and, on several occasions during the interview, he said quite emphatically that anyone who didn't acknowledge evolution as a fact was an ignorant person, and I have heard the same sort of words from many other true believers who espouse the theology of evolution despite the fact that such people cannot answer the simplest questions about the origins of life, or the origins of consciousness, memory, intelligence, language, reason, creativity, talent, or morality.

I had such an encounter with a professor of anthropology during a meeting sponsored by the provincial government that was attempting to formulate policies concerning the issue of educational bias. It was during a break in the meeting, and the conversation turned to the issue of evolution.

I raised some questions concerning evolution, and I was not advancing a Creationist position, but, rather, I was talking about the science of evolution. The aforementioned anthropology professor didn't answer any of the questions being asked but, instead, went off on a diatribe that was preoccupied with my intellectual qualifications for being a graduate student given that raising questions about evolution indicated otherwise ... clearly, I was trespassing on sacred, conceptual ground.

Since that time, I have written several books on evolutionary theory (see: (1) *Evolution Unredacted*; (2) *Evolution and the Origin of Life*; or (3) *Final Jeopardy: The Reality Problem, Volume I*. Among other things, those works explore the alleged science of evolutionary theory at the level of chemistry and molecular biology and point out that there are fundamental lacunae in the theory of evolution ... problems that are capable of bringing into question whether the theory of evolution is actually as viable as its advocates try to maintain.

The aforementioned sort of demonization often also goes on toward people who question the Big Bang scenario of cosmology or who find fault with the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics with all its many modalities of supposed weirdness. To be sure, certain truths have been established concerning astronomy and particle physics – as well as biology -- but, nonetheless, the truths that have been discovered often get caught up in interpretive philosophies that tend to stray considerable distances from such truths, just as often happens with respect to various kinds of interpretive philosophies in relation to Islam.

For instance, in the latter case, let's consider the so-called doctrine of "abrogation" mentioned by Dr. Harris in a previous quote. "Abrogation" refers to a methodological doctrine of interpretation which claims that portions of the Qur'an that were revealed at an earlier point in time are nullified by portions of the revelation that were given at a later time, and for those who are unfamiliar with the history of Islam, the Qur'an was revealed piecemeal over a period of approximately twenty-three years.

Nowhere in the Qur'an does one find instructions telling human beings that one should forget about whatever was said previously and just pay attention to what is being said now. To be sure, there are instances in the Qur'an when some previous practice is transitioned to a new form of that practice such as occurred in conjunction with the direction of qibla or prayer when the latter was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca.

However, the foregoing sorts of transitions are quite particular with respect to the nature of the change that is being introduced. There are no blanket changes in the Qur'an that replace everything

that was revealed previously by whatever is revealed after the earlier guidance was given.

The doctrine of abrogation is a human construction (as opposed to being a Divinely revealed form of guidance) that entails several errors. Firstly, it is premised on the erroneous belief that the Qur'an requires interpretation.

God either opens one up to understanding some dimension of Quranic meaning or those meanings remain closed to one. The process of interpretation is an attempt to do an end-around with respect to the etiquette of the Qur'an by imposing on the latter the imaginings of a person who is trying to invent his or her own interpretation of what the Qur'an means ... the very antithesis of becoming open to Divine guidance.

The second error entailed by the doctrine of abrogation concerns – as indicated earlier – the scope of what is being changed in any given instance of revelation relative to previous facets of such revelation. What is clearly indicated in the Qur'an as being narrow in scope has been transmuted into something it is not.

Unfortunately, many people (and Dr. Harris appears to be one of these individuals) seem to want to engage the Qur'an in terms of a black and white or an either-or sort of orientation that allows no room for different verses of the Qur'an to modulate one another in an indefinitely large, but completely legitimate, number of ways. The principle of abrogation follows a similar line of thinking in which one must accept what comes later at the expense of what came earlier.

The Qur'an must be understood as a whole. Whatever changes are introduced must be understood in the context of the whole.

For example, with respect to the change in qibla, or direction of prayer, from Jerusalem, there were some Muslims who made the change as soon as the corresponding revelation was made known, whereas other Muslims were, for various reasons, reluctant to make the switch immediately. Among other things, the change in qibla was a test of faith, and some people did not fare well with respect to that test.

Does the Qur'an spend a great deal of time emphasizing the difference between the importance of acting in accordance with the

truth rather than aligning oneself with falsity? Yes, it does, but so do science, philosophy, politics, and economics.

The annals of science and philosophy give expression to many instances in which people who did not agree with scientific or philosophical orthodoxy were considered to be pursuing falsehood rather than truth. In addition, the history of politics and economics is replete with similar processes during which one group considered themselves to be the proponents of truth while other people were considered to be advocates of falsehood.

Dr. Harris considers himself to be on the side of the angels, so to speak, when it comes to pointing out the problems of religion and the concomitant need to adhere to the tenets of science and rationalistic secularism. On almost every page of some of his books he talks about how, on the one hand, people of religion are misguided while, on the other hand, people of science and secularism are on the right path.

If the Qur'an is correct with respect to its statements concerning the nature of truth and falsity, why shouldn't it castigate those who deny, act contrary to, or stay from the truth? Dr. Harris, of course, doesn't believe that the Qur'an is Divine guidance, so, he spends his time castigating those who don't agree with his ideas about how to differentiate between truth and falsehood.

What is true? What is false?

These are the issues. Most everyone recognizes that a great deal turns on being able to identify what constitutes the truth and what gives expression to the false, but there is considerable disagreement about how to draw up a map that can assist one to successfully navigate an existential terrain that consists of so many dangers with respect to the issues of truth and falsity.

Dr. Harris believes he knows how to draw up such a map, but I find his arguments (and I have read most of his books) to be far from convincing in this respect. Instead, I find the Qur'an as a whole gives a far more coherent, nuanced, rich, and insightful framework through which to engage life than does anything that Dr. Harris has to offer – especially given that Dr. Harris doesn't seem to understand much about the book – namely, the Qur'an – that he is so ready to criticize.

Dr. Harris is concerned about the fate of apostates within the Muslim community. What this or that Muslim community decides to do with respect to someone who is an apostate is beyond my control, but I can say that there is plenty of guidance in the Qur'an indicating how one can put such matters into a workable perspective.

For example, consider the following passage of the Qur'an. "We raise by grades of Mercy who We will, and over every lord of knowledge, there is one more knowing." (Surah 12, Verse 76).

The first thing to note is that God is the One who either raises someone in grades of Mercy or does not do so. If an individual has done something that deprives him or her of such Mercy, then that sort of set of events (such as transitioning from one who believes in God to someone who does not believe in God) is an occasion for sorrow rather than an occasion that justifies engaging in some sort of murderous rage toward such an unfortunate individual.

Secondly, irrespective of what one knows, there is One Who knows more. Human beings – whether Muslim or non-Muslim -- are, for the most part, ignorant about the many dimensions of truth that exist, and, therefore, human beings should not be so quick to act on the basis of their ignorance.

God knows what is going on with each individual, and human beings do not. God gives people however many opportunities He likes.

The Qur'an states: "We have shown humankind the way, whether they be grateful or disbelieving." (Surah 76, Verse 3). Divinity will deal with those who have turned away from such opportunities in His own way and time.

The Qur'an also indicates: "Surely We have revealed to you the Book with the truth for the sake of human beings; so whoever follows the right way it is for the benefit of that person's soul, and whoever errs, such error is only to the detriment of that person's soul: and you are not a custodian over them." (Surah 39: Verse 41). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is being directly addressed in the foregoing Quranic passage (and by implication the rest of humanity is also being addressed), and, yet, even he is being told that he does not have custodial responsibilities for what people do with respect to whether, or not, they accept revelation, and, therefore, how much less

custodial responsibility does the rest of the Muslim world have for whether or not someone decides to reject Islam after having accepted it?

There is a further problem surrounding the idea of killing apostates. More specifically, once that person dies, his or her opportunity to have a change of heart concerning such matters has also been terminated.

The Qur'an says: "O my slaves who have transgressed against their own souls! Do not despair of the Mercy of Allah Who forgives all sins." (Surah 39, Verse 53) If God has indicated that the capacity to forgive all sins belongs to Divinity, what gives anyone the right to deny human beings an opportunity to recant an act of apostasy through seeking the forgiveness of God?

Denying other people the opportunity to undergo a change of heart concerning apostasy is to express a certain kind of despair and disbelief concerning what God has indicated in the Qur'an with respect to the issue of forgiveness. Killing apostates is tantamount to their executioners becoming interlopers with respect to spiritual territory that is far beyond their jurisdiction.

Surah 9, Tauba or Repentance, is the only Surah in the Qur'an that does not begin with: In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. In Verse 80 of that Surah, one finds the following words: "Ask forgiveness for them or do not ask forgiveness for them; even if you ask forgiveness for them seventy times, Allah will not forgive them; this is because they disbelieve in Allah and His Apostle, and Allah does not guide the transgressing people."

On one occasion, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have responded to the foregoing verse by indicating that if God would not forgive such people even if the Prophet prayed for their forgiveness 70 times, then, the Prophet was prepared to pray for those individuals 71 times. There is much food for thought here.

The Prophet was not trying to one up Divinity. The Prophet was giving expression to the reality inherent in the following ayat or verse of the Qur'an – namely: "We have not sent you (Muhammad) except as a mercy to all the worlds." (Surah 21, Verse 107).

If the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was prepared to pray on behalf of unbelievers 71 times, why should any Muslim suppose that killing apostates is a good thing? Moreover, since the Qur'an states: "Say Muhammad: If you love Allah, then follow me [i.e., Muhammad], so that God may love you." (Surah 3, Verse 31), then, following the example of the Prophet with respect to, among other things, praying for the forgiveness of people who are unbelievers would seem to make sense.

Moreover, for those who like to quibble about things, there is no inconsistency between the previously noted Quranic verse indicating that God forgives all sins and the idea being expressed in Surah 9, Verse 80 that God will not forgive those who continue to disbelieve in God and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The key to forgiveness is repentance or tauba ... that is, a person must be willing to acknowledge that he or she committed an error as well as acknowledge that only God can forgive such a mistake.

Ask for forgiveness. Do not despair of the possibility of such forgiveness because God is capable of forgiving all sins.

Nonetheless, know that if one continues on with one's intransigence, then God will not forgive the individual even if the Prophet should seek such forgiveness for the individual 70 times. Then again, perhaps the Prophet's seeking forgiveness for the unbeliever a seventy-first time might result in God extending forgiveness to such individuals.

Settling the issue of apostasy is between a given human being and God. Neither Muslims, nor anyone else, has a moral imperative to jump into the breach and decide, by virtue of their ignorance, that apostates must die.

The last several pages have contained quite a few Quranic references. This has been done for only one purpose – namely, to show that a central premise in Dr. Harris's perspective concerning Islam is wrong in fundamental ways.

More specifically, Dr. Harris has claimed again and again in his writings that fundamentalists have the most honest reading of the Qur'an. Therefore, anything that so-called moderates have to say about

this or that issue (e.g., that Islam is a religion of peace) is just a form of dissembling pretense.

The fact of the matter is there are numerous ways to demonstrate that fundamentalists do not have any understanding or insight concerning the nature of the Qur'an or Islam. The foregoing several pages help to outline just a few of the ways showing how fundamentalists are steeped in ignorance with respect to the Qur'an and Islam.

Given the foregoing considerations, a question arises in conjunction with the activities of Dr. Harris. For example, while Dr. Harris has the right to accept or reject the Qur'an as being a form of Divine guidance, must one assume that he has a concomitant right to distort the truth concerning Islam and the teachings of the Qur'an?

Before Dr. Harris switched career-paths and transitioned into a graduate program focusing on neuropsychology, he studied philosophy. Since I also was engaged in the study of philosophy during a year, or so, of my undergraduate days, I have some insight into how it is done.

For instance, one might take some philosopher such as: Kant, Descartes, Hegel, Wittgenstein, Husserl, or Plato, and, then, proceed to critically analyze what such individuals had to say. The first part of critical analysis involves trying to grasp what such people actually believed, and, then, one is in a position to move on to pointing out the strengths and weaknesses for that sort of a perspective.

If one hopes to be any good at philosophy, one has to be able to engage a given philosopher in a fair manner. This means trying to merge conceptual horizons with the manner in which any given philosopher orients herself or himself with respect to an array of issues.

If one doesn't understand what a philosopher is saying, then, one is not in a position to tenably criticize the ideas of that individual. Among other things, philosophy involves gaining facility with the process of exploring the problems that surround trying to understand what someone means, as well as learning how to ask the right sorts of questions concerning both what is meant and what is being missed within the context of such meaning.

Given his academic background, I am surprised that Dr. Harris failed so miserably with respect to being able to arrive at an accurate understanding concerning the nature of the Qur'an and Islam. Dr. Harris doesn't have to accept Islam in order to have a fair understanding of at least some of what that spiritual tradition actually involves, any more than one has to accept the philosophical perspective of individuals such as Wittgenstein, Husserl, or Plato in order to be able to have an unbiased grasp of their respective positions.

Unfortunately, in terms of critical analysis, Dr. Harris puts the cart before the horse. That is, he proceeds to criticize Islam before he even has acquired an understanding of it in some minimal fashion.

Perhaps one of the reasons why Dr. Harris left the pastures of philosophy for the rigors of neuropsychology is because he wasn't any good at philosophy. I have read, and critically explored, three of his books, and each of those books gives expression to considerable evidence that he doesn't know how to go about the process of philosophy --- that is, he doesn't know how to give something a fair reading before proceeding with a critical analysis.

Instead, he lets his biases get in the way of coming to understand, among other things, the nature of Islam. He fails to question the assumptions underlying his own position and, as a result, permits those assumptions to filter, color, and distort his understanding of Islam ... in other words, what he does is the mirror image of the fundamentalists, militants, and extremists that he likes to criticize.

The least problematic thing I can say about what Dr. Harris has done in conjunction with Islam is that he exhibits considerable incompetence as a scholar, philosopher, and advocate of critical analysis. If Project Reason -- the organization that he founded in order to promote science and secularism -- is beset with the foregoing sorts of problems, then, there is nothing very rational about that project.

There is little that is rational or reasonable about a process of analysis that gives preference to the pathological ideologies of fundamentalists that are based on a complete misunderstanding of Islam. One wonders why Dr. Harris would be willing to argue so vociferously to defend the views of fundamentalists as constituting the

most accurate reading of Islam when there is so much evidence to the contrary.

He claims to be in favor of peace, harmony, honesty, morality, rationality, well-being, fairness, co-operation, and justice. Yet, he identifies the views of fundamentalists – which are opposed to all of the values that Dr. Harris supports -- as encompassing the most honest reading of Islam rather than indicating that although he doesn't believe in Islam or God, nonetheless, based on a fair reading of its texts and teachings, he has discovered that Islam espouses many of the same values as those that he favors.

Is Dr. Harris really so philosophically incompetent? Or does he have another agenda that involves deliberately distorting the nature of Islam in order to serve his own biases, assumptions, and purposes?

Chapter Eight: Biased Hermeneutics

After voicing – in a rather ironical manner -- his concerns about the manner in which Islam places so much emphasis on being able to differentiate between what is true and what is false, Dr. Harris introduces what he considers to be a second central message of Islam – namely, the promise of paradise.

He claims that the promise of paradise “devalues life in this world.” He goes on to argue: “Islam teaches that dying in defense of the faith is among the surest ways to paradise – and the only one to reach it directly, bypassing the Day of Judgment.”

Dr. Harris misconstrues all of the foregoing issues. For example, rather than devaluing life in this world, Islam teaches that there is a direct connection between what we do in this life and what will happen in the next life.

In Surah 18, Verse 7, The Qur’an states: “Lo! We have placed all that is on earth as an ornament thereof, that We may try them: which of them is best in conduct.” Elsewhere, the Qur’an indicates: “And surely We shall test you with some fear and hunger and loss of wealth and lives and crops ...” (Surah 2, Verse 155).

Life entails a series of tests. How we conduct ourselves with respect to those tests is critically important, and, therefore, contrary to what Dr. Harris claims, what takes place in this life couldn’t be more important.

Dr. Harris is also mistaken – as are many other fundamentalists – about the connection among: struggling in the way of God, dying, and paradise. To begin with, Islam is not in any need of being defended.

If people struggle in the way of God, then this is for the benefit of their own souls and not to save Islam. As the Qur’an indicates: “And if you turn away, God will exchange you for some other folks, and they will not be the likes of you” (Surah 47, Verse 38), and, consequently, quite independently of what we might do or fail to do, Islam will continue on.

Secondly, merely because someone dies doing what he or she believes to be “in defense of the faith,” this does not mean that God accepts such a death as an instance of martyrdom. As a previously

mentioned verse of the Qur'an indicates, the events of life are tests to determine which of us is best in conduct.

If one kills innocent people while supposedly trying to defend Islam, then such conduct is qualitatively challenged. Furthermore, if one immerses oneself in practices that abuse, exploit, torture, cheat, oppress, or perpetrate injustices toward other people, then such practices also are qualitatively challenged and do not give expression to the sorts of activities that might constitute instances of martyrdom.

The Qur'an stipulates: "Those who spend their wealth for increase in self-purification and have in their minds no favor from anyone for which a reward is expected in return, but only the desire to seek for the Countenance of their Lord Most High." (Surah 92, Verses 18-20) If one wants to be granted paradise in exchange for one's deeds, one is seeking something other than the Countenance of their Lord.

Martyrs are those who are prepared to sacrifice their wealth (which includes their talents, intelligence, property, money, time, character, and life) for nothing other than being brought closer to God. Martyrdom has to do with the quality of one's conduct, and while fundamentalists might be prepared to sacrifice their lives, they do so for the wrong reasons, and they do so in the wrong way.

They have been tested, and they have been found wanting. This is due to problems involving the sincerity of their intentions and due to the defective quality of their conduct.

Fundamentalists are issuing promissory notes to gullible human beings for which the former do not have the wherewithal to honor on the occasion of the death of the latter individuals. God is the Exchequer who distinguishes between the honorable conduct of true martyrs and the counterfeit currency of fundamentalists.

Dr. Harris states: "The belief that a life of eternal pleasure awaits martyrs after death explains why certain people can honestly chant: 'We love death more than the infidels love life.' Again, you and I both know that these people aren't bluffing. They truly believe in martyrdom – as evidenced by the fact that they regularly sacrifice their lives, or watch their children do so, without a qualm."

Actually, the individuals to whom Dr. Harris refers in the foregoing quote do not believe in martyrdom. Instead, they believe in a

delusional system of spiritual bartering in which one supposedly can exchange life for goodies such as sexual favors in the next life.

While it might be true that the foregoing sorts of individuals honestly believe that they love death more than other people love life, it is also true that such people don't know what they are talking about. If they truly loved death, then, they would follow the advice of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) 'to die before you die' ... that is, die to the desires of one's ego before one experiences physical death, and, certainly, the idea of enjoying the eternal company of 70 virgins is one of the many desires of the false self.

Delusional narcissists have many false beliefs about the nature of life in which they honestly, if pathologically, believe. Why Dr. Harris should be willing to go along with such nonsense and claim that this is what Islam teaches appears to give expression to a delusional idea to which Dr. Harris honestly subscribes, but the honesty of his belief has nothing to do with the actual facts concerning Islam.

What Dr. Harris is doing in the foregoing is like trying to contend that because some people suffer from a pathological delusion of some kind, then all human beings necessarily suffer from that same delusion. One cannot tenably conclude that because some people who call themselves Muslim are proponents of a given delusional belief system, then this means Islam actively encourages that sort of delusional system ... because this is just not the case.

Dr. Harris concludes his comments concerning the issues of infidels and martyrdom by saying: "On any list of Islamic doctrines in need of reform, I think those relating to infidels and to martyrdom should be at the top of the list." As previously pointed out in the foregoing pages, the manner in which fundamentalists approach the issues of apostates, infidels, and martyrdom is not the way in which Islam engages such matters, and, consequently, there are no Islamic doctrines to be reformed in this respect.

The nature of fundamentalist belief is not a function of Islam. What fundamentalists believe is a delusional system marked by considerable pathology that is given the label "Islam."

I would agree with Dr. Harris that such individuals constitute “a genuine danger to civilization.” However, none of this has anything to do with Islam or Islamic doctrine.

When people speak about something called ‘radical Islam’ or ‘militant Islam’ or ‘extremist Islam’, or ‘fundamentalist Islam’ they are using terms that are oxymoronic in character. Radicalism, militancy, extremism, and fundamentalism are not permissible variations of Islamic thought, and by juxtaposing such words next to Islam, one – intentionally or otherwise – is engaging in a distortion concerning the nature of Islam.

Moreover, there is a double standard at work with respect to the whole media labeling industry. Why aren’t the American forces who illegally invaded Iraq and Afghanistan referred to as Christian terrorists, or why aren’t the members of the IDF who are occupying, oppressing, and killing Palestinians referred to as Jewish terrorists, or why aren’t atheists like Sam Harris who promote the idea of nuking innocent Muslims referred to as an atheistic terrorist since even the suggestion to wipe out millions of innocent people should be considered an act of terrorism ... especially coming from someone like Sam Harris who gives a great deal of emphasis to what people say in this or that poll.

Muslim fundamentalists are called Islamic terrorists because it is a way of denigrating Islam. Islam doesn’t advocate terrorism of any kind, so, why is the word “Islamic” being linked to the murderous acts of people who are not following the teachings of Islam.

Muslims don’t inform Islam what the latter is about. Rather, Islam informs Muslims – at least those who are willing to open themselves to what is being communicated – concerning the nature of Islam.

Toward the latter part of the book, *Islam and the Future of Tolerance*, Maajid Nawaz, ventures into an extended exploration concerning the meaning of Quranic terms such as (transliterated) “*kamar*” and whether through the use of that word the Qur’an is prohibiting alcohol in general or merely prohibiting the ingestion of wine that is fermented from grapes. At a certain point in the foregoing discussion, Nawaz introduces the idea of *qiyas* which refers to a method used by jurists that relies on the logic of analogies to determine whether one object, condition, or action is sufficiently

analogous to some other object, condition, or action to be brought under the same legal umbrella when deciding cases. A little later in the aforementioned discussion, Nawaz talks about what certain ahadith (statements and actions of the Prophet) say with respect to the issues being analyzed.

All of the foregoing ideas are being engaged in terms of a legal framework. While the discussion in which Nawaz is engaged is attempting to demonstrate the potential for flexibility that he believes is inherent in a textual analysis of the relevant literature, I think he generates some problems that substantially confuse matters by proceeding in the manner in which he does.

For example, let's begin with the issue of hadith. On a number of occasions, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) ordered that all collections of hadith should be destroyed.

When Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), the close friend and companion of the Prophet, heard about what the Prophet had said in conjunction with the destruction of hadith collections, he spent the whole night agonizing over whether or not to destroy his collection of ahadith he had compiled concerning the Prophet, but when morning came, he destroyed his collection.

I understand that individuals might be so attached to the Prophet that they wish to keep a compilation of what he said and did. However, disregarding the Prophet's directive for reasons that have to do only with the individual's own life and are not intended to be imposed on anyone else's life is one thing, while disregarding the Prophet's directive in order to socially, legally, institutionally, educationally, or politically impose some set of sayings or actions of the Prophet on other people is a completely different matter and runs completely contrary to the wishes of the Prophet.

Secondly, the matter of qiyas or analogies that is mentioned by Nawaz is a human construction that is not only being problematically imposed on the Qur'an, but, as well, is intended to be used for purposes of imposing various understandings concerning such analogical reasoning on a community in general with the claim that such interpretive efforts give expression to the meaning of the Qur'an. Again, if someone wishes to do this with respect to her or his own life, that is one thing, but there is no Quranic authority for doing so with

respect to the additional step of imposing such interpretations on other people.

Finally, if a person wishes to engage in an interpretive process with respect to the meanings of the Qur'an, then, even though the Qur'an provides considerable guidance about the importance of learning how to acquire the sort of taqwa, or piety, that is needed to become properly opened to what the Qur'an has to offer rather than imposing one's own ideas and limitations on the Qur'an, then, such an individual proceeds at his or her own spiritual risk. However, when someone wishes to engage in an interpretive process concerning the Qur'an for purposes of imposing such interpretations on other individuals, then the Qur'an really offers no authority for doing so.

According to Maajid Nawaz: "... Islamists do refer to certain plausible scriptural justifications in support of this tenet, which must be addressed. Quranic passages such as "the rule (hukm) is for none but God" and "whomsoever does not rule (yahkum) by what God has revealed, they are disbelievers" are among the most oft quoted in this regard."

Commenting on the latter part of the foregoing quotation first, just what is it that God has revealed and who, but God, can determine or make rulings concerning whether or not someone has acted in accordance with what has been revealed? These are topics for the Day of Judgment and should not be left to people's arbitrary ideas and interpretations concerning the meaning of revelation that are, then, problematically and oppressively imposed on other human beings.

A community's social space - which gives expression to the ways in which people who live within such a community interact with one another -- should provide everyone with a fair opportunity to try to seek the truth concerning the nature of life as well as to be able to seek the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with existence. The rules governing such community social spaces should be oriented toward protecting and supporting the aforementioned sort of opportunity and nothing more.

I believe the foregoing kind of social arrangement offers people, in general, the best opportunity to pursue the truth free from the impositions of an array of ideological, philosophical, theological, historical, economic, political, and scientific predilections concerning

the nature of existence. In addition, I also believe the foregoing kind of social arrangement gives Muslims the best opportunity of being able to become opened up to the meanings of the Qur'an free from the impositions of fundamentalist, extremist, militant, and radical distortions concerning the nature of Islam.

Striving for the truth concerning the nature of truth is an individual responsibility. Providing individuals with the opportunity to seek such truth is a collective, fiduciary duty of care that each of us owes to one another ... indeed, the Golden Rule which indicates that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us is a very good way of summing up such duties of care. (I have written extensively about such issues in: *The Unfinished Revolution, Democracy Lost and Regained, The Pathology of Leadership, Shari'ah: A Muslim's Declaration of Independence, What's Wrong With What's Right, and The Moral Landscape: Epistle To A Sam Harris Nation,*)

At one point during Dr. Harris's response to Maajid Nawaz's aforementioned discussion concerning matters of hadith, qiyas, law, and so on, Dr. Harris argues: "...when Muslim armies were stopped at the gates of Vienna in 1683, the world had witnessed a thousand years of jihad – which had spread the faith from Portugal to the Caucasus to India to sub-Saharan Africa. Islam was spread primarily by conquest, not conversation." Contrary to what Dr. Harris indicates in the foregoing quote, whatever might have been spread during the period being discussed, what was being spread was not Islam, but, instead, consisted of various forms of Muslim cultural, legal institutional, and political forms of control.

By way of personal note, I became a Muslim through conversation with a Sufi teacher and not via conquest -- although I will admit that my heart was conquered by what was said to me. In my opinion, if one wishes to follow the real history of Islam – rather than the history of Muslims – one needs to look to the authentic, Sufi, spiritual guides who journeyed to many parts of the world across the centuries – including Canada and America – and, by the Grace of Allah, provided many people – both Muslim and non-Muslim -- with an introduction to the essential nature of Islam by virtue of their qualities of character and depth of understanding concerning the Qur'an.

Nonetheless, no human being – not even the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) or the greatest Sufi teachers can spread Islam. God, alone, accomplishes this with respect to whomsoever He pleases ... as the Qur'an indicates: "The one whose breast God has expanded unto Islam enjoys a light from one's Lord." (Surah 39, Verse 22)

Moreover, contrary to the previous contention of Dr. Harris, the spread of such cultural, legal, institutional, and political forms of control did not give expression to jihad. Rather, the spread of the foregoing sorts of ideas and practices gave expression to a desire to conquer people, resources, and territories for the sake of ego, power, and control, and not for the sake of a spiritual struggle in which the desires of the ego are constrained and subdued.

Irrespective of whether or not one engages in physical conflict, if there is no struggle against the ego that is taking place in conjunction with all one's surface actions, then, there is no jihad. There might be conflict and wars, but there is no jihad.

People usurp the term "jihad" as a means of trying to render sacred that which is but a machination of the ego. If people say they are fighting to satisfy the desires of the ego, then, this all sounds so tawdry, but if one says that the nature of one's cause is holy, in some sense, then, going to war seems to be transformed into a sacred act even though the underlying intentions indicate otherwise.

Dr. Harris proceeds to provide an overview of his take on such things as the Crusades, treatment of non-Muslims while under Muslim control, some of the mythology surrounding life in Andalusia, and the issue of Muslim slavery. Once again, his analysis of such matters is neither here nor there because it has nothing to do with Islam.

For instance, consider the last issue – namely, slavery – first. While it is true that, under certain conditions, the Qur'an permitted certain people to be taken as slaves, the Qur'an also indicated that freeing slaves was better for a Muslim.

Moreover, during the time of the Prophet, there was a code of etiquette in place concerning the treatment of slaves. Any Muslim who had a slave was under the obligation of a fiduciary responsibility with respect to the treatment of such individuals in which, among other things, a Muslim who possessed one, or more, slaves, had to feed those

individuals with the same food that the Muslim ate, and had to clothe them with the same sort of clothes as the Muslim wore, and had to house them in the same manner as the Muslim was housed, and was required to treat such individuals in a way that was free of abuse – either physical or sexual.

Muslims took on a fiduciary responsibility with respect to whatever slaves became a part of their households. Furthermore, if their faith was sincere, they understood that: "Not a leaf falls, but God knows it" (Surah 6: Verse 59) and, as well: "We shall surely question them, everyone, about what they were doing, (Surah 15, Verses 92-93) and, therefore, everything they did or didn't do with respect to such slaves would come under Divine scrutiny.

Did individuals subsequently arise who called themselves Muslims but departed company with all of the foregoing considerations? Yes, there were, but the Qur'an refers to such people in, among other ways, the following manner: "Have you seen those who take their own caprice to be their god, and Allah sends them astray purposely, and seals their hearing and their heart, and sets on their sight a covering." (Surah 45, Verse 23)

The Muslim history that ensued following the time of the Prophet provides ample evidence that many Muslims – especially those who were in power – strayed far from the teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet with respect to issues such as, among other things, slavery. All manner of barbarism, cruelty, and exploitation, entered into the issue of slavery among various Muslims following the time of the Prophet, but the Qur'an didn't sanction any of it.

Dr. Harris ends the foregoing sorts of comments with the following comment: "... in the year 2015, horrific footage of infidels and apostates being decapitated has become a popular form of pornography throughout the Muslim world. All these practices, including this ghastly method of murder, find explicit support in scripture."

I have no doubt that all too many Muslims -- like all too many atheists, Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Buddhists – are capable of committing all manner of abominable acts (and if this were not the case, the world would be a very different place than it is). Nonetheless, I would like to raise a question or two concerning the nature of the

evidence that supposedly indicates how the horrific footage of infidels and apostates being decapitated “has become a popular form of pornography throughout the Muslim world.”

On what is Dr. Harris basing the foregoing sort of claim? Has he visited hundreds of millions of Muslim households around the world and personally verified his claim that viewing such beheadings is a popular form of entertainment throughout the Muslim world? And, if he has not done this, then who has compiled such data, and why should anyone accept the pronouncements of such unknown “researchers”?

Furthermore, contrary to the claims of Dr. Harris, such practices do not “find explicit support in the scripture.” Unfortunately, however, many fundamentalists -- as well as Dr. Harris, apparently -- have imposed their own imaginings, biases, assumptions, delusions, and arbitrary interpretations onto the Qur’an.

Dr. Harris tries to give the impression that he is dedicated to truth, honesty, morality, facts, reason, justice, fairness, and the like. However, his foregoing comments about the video footage of apostates and infidels being decapitated has become “a popular form of pornography throughout the Muslim world” and that such beheadings find “explicit support in scripture” have nothing to do with facts, honesty, reason, fairness, or the like.

Instead, such comments are intended to disparage a whole class of people – namely, Muslims – through the use of innuendo and factually challenged claims. Furthermore, such comments appear to be designed to incite hatred toward Islam and Muslims.

I am quite surprised that Maajid Nawaz did not take exception with the foregoing comments of Dr. Harris. I am even more surprised that Harvard University Press that published their book did not appear to appoint a fact-checker to critically examine the comments like the foregoing ones.

If Muslims were as bloodthirsty, irrational, pathological, violent, and delusional as Dr. Harris appears to be trying very hard to depict them to be, then, I would have thought that the 5 million-plus Muslims living in the United States would have slaughtered all their neighbors by now. Indeed, if Dr. Harris were right in his pronouncements about

Islam and Muslims, one might have anticipated that the more than 1 billion Muslims who currently occupy planet Earth would have tried to behead everyone with whom they disagreed.

Perhaps, the reason why Muslims have not run amok across the face of the Earth is due to the following several possibilities. (a) They are not – with certain minor exceptions – the would-be terrorists in waiting that Dr. Harris appears to be claiming they are, and, (b) the Qur’an is not the terrorist training manual that Dr. Harris seems to be intent on arguing that it is.

Dr. Harris appears to be so focused on stirring up hatred and revulsion toward Islam and Muslims that one can’t help but wonder if he might be an agent of the CIA or Mossad who had been given the mission to do exactly what he is doing in order to generate the sort of social discord that could be leveraged by various militaries to carry on with their war-mongering activities in places like – to name but a few - - Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine. Moreover, if Dr. Harris is not such an agent, then, he is very foolishly helping to further the militaristic, imperialistic, oppressive, and extremely destructive ends of such agencies.

Of course, one doesn’t have to entertain the foregoing sorts of possibilities because, quite clearly, Dr. Harris has a vested interest in doing what he is doing. Fermenting anger, misunderstanding, hatred, distrust, and so on in relation to Muslims and Islam has become a very lucrative profession for people such as Dr. Harris.

Many people have jumped onto the anti-terrorism industrial bandwagon and made careers and money out of the tragedies of the lives that were lost on 9/11. Indeed, it was shortly after 9/11 that Sam Harris began to churn out his scurrilous material on religion, Muslims, Islam, and so on in the form of his book: *The End of Faith*.

Unfortunately, he is wrong about so many things. For instance, he is wrong about the events that appeared to motivate him to sit down and write the foregoing work.

Nowhere in his writing does Sam Harris demonstrate, in a defensible manner, that the “official story” concerning 9/11 explains what actually happened to the Twin Towers and Building 7 at the World Trade Center in New York, nor to the Pentagon on 9/11.

Instead, without taking the time to carefully determine whether or not the “official story” concerning 9/11 actually holds up under rigorous examination (which it doesn’t) – Dr. Harris blindly accepts the incompetence, if not worse, of other people concerning the events of 9/11 and runs with that because such nonsense can be cited in an attempt to try to justify his agenda of disparaging religion, in general, and especially Muslims and Islam, in particular.

By accepting the “official story” concerning the events of 9/11, Dr. Harris places himself clearly in the camp of conspiracy theorists. In other words, he believes that 19 Muslims conspired with Osama bin Laden to destroy the Twin Towers, Building 7, as well as to inflict considerable death and destruction at the Pentagon, but, unfortunately, a considerable body of facts gets in the way of such a conspiracy theory and indicates that what took place on 9/11 is far more complex than what Dr. Harris supposes to be the case.

Even if Dr. Harris were 100 percent correct concerning his understanding of the events of 9/11, nonetheless, what 19 alleged Muslims plus Osama bin Laden allegedly conspired to do is not an accurate reflection of how the vast majority of the Muslims in the world go about engaging Islam. By seeking to advance his version of the events of 9/11 as a means of indicting the rest of the world’s Muslims, then in the language of the courts, he is attempting to introduce inflammatory material that has zero probative value when it comes to the vast majority of Muslims.

Furthermore, quite independently of 9/11, Dr. Harris is also wrong about Islam in general. He has permitted his religious biases and antipathies to cloud and undermine his judgment concerning his understanding of the Islamic spiritual tradition.

As previously noted, at the heart of Dr. Harris’s negative perceptions concerning Islam is the idea that the manner in which extremists, militants, and fundamentalists read the Qur’an constitutes the most honest reading of that book, and, therefore, neither the Qur’an, nor Islam, has anything to offer to be able to counter the understandings of those Muslims who are inclined to wreak havoc upon the world ... and, therefore, when so-called moderate Muslims say anything that runs contrary to the allegedly more “honest” reading of the fundamentalists, then such moderate Muslims are merely being

disingenuous and engaged in one, or another, form of dissembling pretense.

However, if Dr. Harris had bothered to give Islam a fair reading instead of an extremely biased one, he would have discovered that Islam actively promotes themes of peace, honesty, harmony, justice, self-restraint, compassion, forgiveness, reason, balance, patience, charitableness, truth, tolerance, love, and so on. Why did Dr. Harris fail to give Islam a fair reading or hearing?

For Dr. Harris to have missed all of the foregoing realities concerning Islam appears to suggest that one of two dynamics (perhaps both) is (are) at work with respect to his diatribes against Islam and Muslims. Either he is a very incompetent researcher, or he actually does know that Islam is something other what he publicly describes it to be, but since such inconvenient truths would not serve his biases and antipathies, he decided to run with a distorted version of Islam and Muslims that would enable him to give the impression that his underlying biases and beliefs merely were giving expression to some sort of justifiable outrage rather than constituting something much more sinister.

Even in conjunction with his career as a neuropsychologist he has problems with respect to being able to arrive at the truth of things. Neither he, nor his fellow scientists, have the slightest idea how the events of molecular biology or the physiological and cellular activities that take place in the brain are able to make consciousness, intelligence, memory, imagination, reason, understanding, language, creativity, morality, and/or spirituality possible ... there are many correlational, but almost no causal, statements that can be made with respect to such phenomena.

If neuropsychology is his religion (and I have seen statements to this effect that are associated with Dr. Harris's name), then that religion gives rise to as many unanswered questions concerning the nature of existence as other religions do. He claims to be a man of science and reason, and, yet, neither science nor reason has been able to resolve any of the critical issues that arise in conjunction with the many unanswered questions that permeate neuropsychology, and, therefore, his perspective is not really superior to the perspective of

those religiously inclined individuals that Dr. Harris loves to find fault with and ridicule.

If psychologists are correct (for example, Martha Stout), then approximately 1 in every 25 people who inhabit the world has psychopathic tendencies. Data seem to indicate that such people are found across all racial, ethnic, religious, political, philosophical, and socio-economic strata, as well as occurring in both genders.

Rather than blame Islam and other religions for the world being the way it is, perhaps, Dr. Harris should try to factor in the 4% of the world's population that have psychopathic tendencies and, as a result, have no problem with killing, torturing, oppressing, terrorizing, exploiting, and abusing the people of the world. Psychopaths can call themselves anything they like – Muslims, atheists, Christians, Jews, patriotic soldiers, and so on. However, their activities are rooted in psychopathy and not religion or any other philosophical set of beliefs.

Unfortunately, there are some “normal” individuals who cede their authority to such psychopaths and, as a result, proceed to commit atrocities while under the influence of psychopathic individuals. In fact, experiments such as those conducted by Stanley Milgram in the early 1960s suggest that as many as two-thirds of the subjects he studied were prepared to inflict what they believed – falsely – would inflict great pain, if not harm, on innocent people simply because such subjects had ceded their moral authority to the people in charge of the experiment.

Military, economic, legal, educational, religious, philosophical, and political institutions around the world exploit the willingness of “normal” people to cede their moral authority to people who have no moral compass. The problems that exist in the world today are far more complex than Dr. Harris's simplistic and shoddy analyses would have his readers believe (i.e., blame Muslims, Islam, and religion in general), and, in fact, Dr. Harris helps to lend considerable confusion to the issue because he offers cover for the psychopaths of the world who will exploit the sort of hatred that Dr. Harris is fermenting by means of some of his writings ... such as through his contributions to the book *Islam and the Future of Tolerance*.

Toward the end of the foregoing book, Dr. Harris claims that: “... the example set by Muhammad himself – which, as you [i.e., Maajid

Nawaz] know, offers ample justification for religious violence.” The previous statement is made without citing any evidence that would justify making such a claim.

In addition, the previous quote from Dr. Harris is quite amorphous. For instance, what constitutes the criteria for considering the example of the Prophet to constitute “ample justification for religious violence.” To what sort of “religious violence” is Dr. Harris alluding?

When the Prophet and some of his family were placed under siege for several years by the Quraish power structure in Mecca, the situation became so dire that the Prophet had to eat the bark off of trees in order to acquire some sort of sustenance. Is this the sort of “religious violence” to which Dr. Harris is alluding?

After years of persecution during which the Prophet instructed his Companions not to fight back against that oppression, the Prophet escaped to Yathrib (Medina) in order to escape the assassination plots of the Quraish. Is this the sort of “ample justification for religious violence” to which the example of the Prophet gave rise?

During all the years of war in which Muslims resisted the aggression of the Quraish Tribe and their allies toward Muslims and Islam, less than 400 people – and this includes the casualties on both sides -- died during those conflicts. Is Dr. Harris trying to argue that a community that defends itself against armed aggression is committing religious violence?

In relation to the foregoing conflicts, the Prophet never killed anyone personally. He was present during the waging of hostilities) and often the battle was most intense in his vicinity), but he did not engage in those hostilities.

On one such occasion, a tooth of the Prophet was knocked out by one of the opponents. However, the Prophet did not respond in kind. Is this the sort of example of religious violence on the part of the Prophet to which Dr. Harris is alluding?

If such battles do not constitute the sort of religious violence to which Dr. Harris is alluding, then he should be specific and cite his supporting evidence concerning those matters and not just make

vague claims. Where is the “ample justification for religious violence” that Dr. Harris wishes to attribute to the example of the Prophet?

When the Muslims conquered Mecca – and this was done without shedding a drop of anyone’s blood -- everyone in Mecca who had been an opponent of the Muslim community and Islam for years could have been slaughtered, but they weren’t. They were placed in charge of their own affairs and, then, left in peace.

When the woman who poisoned the Prophet and some of his companions (one of whom died) was brought before him, he could have ordered her to be killed. He didn’t do this ... he set her free.

When a Jewish tribe committed treason against the Muslim community with which it previously had been allied, the Prophet could have had them all killed. He didn’t do this, but, instead, he sent them into exile.

On one occasion, the Prophet ordered an attack upon the people who had killed a Muslim emissary that had been sent to those people. Is this the sort of “religious violence” to which Dr. Harris is referring?

Is Dr. Harris trying to argue that a community doesn’t have a right to take steps to ensure that the killing of its ambassadors will not be permitted to continue? Is Dr. Harris really trying to argue that there should be an open season on the killing of envoys that come in peace?

When a Muslim woman came to the Prophet wanting to confess her sin of adultery and was seeking punishment for her deed, the Prophet expressed considerable resistance in relation to even listening to her public confession.

He wanted her to confess her sins to God, not him. However, she insisted on doing so and wanted to be put to death for her previous actions.

The Prophet told her that she might be pregnant so she should come back to him when that matter was determined. She was pregnant, and so when she returned to the Prophet, he told her to deliver her baby, and, then, come back to him after she gave birth.

Following the birth of her baby, she returned to the Prophet and said she was ready for her punishment to be carried out. The Prophet indicated that she should suckle the baby for several years. When that

period of nursing came to an end, then she should return to the Prophet.

After she nursed the baby for the requisite time, the woman returned to the Prophet and wanted her punishment to be carried out. She did this because she believed that by accepting the indicated punishment her sin of adultery would be wiped clean in the eyes of God.

The Prophet never wanted to hear her confession in the first place. Things proceeded as they did because of the woman's insistence on going through a certain process of adjudication, and during that process, the Prophet extended considerable mercy to the woman across a number of years.

The woman was not interested in harming anyone else. On the other hand, she was interested in facilitating a punishment of death because she believed that existence had a certain kind of reality to which she subscribed, and the Prophet, reluctantly, honored her wishes concerning the matter.

The Prophet had a responsibility to the woman. However, he also had a responsibility with respect to the rest of the community, and once the woman publicly insisted that her wishes concerning the matter be acted upon, the Prophet proceeded in a way that served the interests of the woman, her child, and the community.

Is the foregoing conduct of the Prophet the sort of thing that Dr. Harris has in mind when he claims that the example of the Prophet offers "ample justification for religious violence"? Just what is it – if anything – to which Dr. Harris is alluding via his vague statements?

Aside from being extremely vague in his statements concerning religious violence, Dr. Harris is something of a hypocrite. In his book: *The End of Faith* (see page 129 of the 2005 Norton paperback edition), he advances the idea that nuking millions of innocent Muslims might be a justifiable and reasonable thing to do because Muslims cannot be trusted to be, or remain, moderate given that Islam requires them to be otherwise --- one of Dr. Harris's many problematic delusions concerning both Muslims and Islam.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) never provided an example that offered "ample justification for religious violence." The

reality concerning the nature of the Prophet is quite the opposite from the way in which Dr. Harris is trying to frame things.

Yet, Dr. Harris – the peace-loving atheist – appears to believe that proposing the possibility of killing millions of Muslims – people whom he readily acknowledges are innocent of any wrong-doing -- does not constitute a potential form of extreme and appalling sectarian violence. He wags a finger of condemnation toward the non-existent example of the Prophet with respect to “religious violence,” while blithely trying to justify his own conceptual inclinations toward committing nuclear atrocities against innocent Muslims.

Was Dr. Harris reprimanded for giving voice to such dangerously inflammatory remarks? No! Instead, in 2005, he was given the Pen/Martha Albrand Award for First Nonfiction (although when it comes to Islam, the award should have been given for fiction).

The foregoing situation is merely one small indication of how absurdly and precariously skewed the thinking in America is with respect to Muslims and Islam. Moreover, we have the ignorance of Sam Harris to thank for, at least in part, helping to bring about such an atmosphere of bigotry.

Dr. Harris is hostage to his own ignorance concerning Islam. Unfortunately, he appears to want to induce as many other people as possible also to become hostage to that same ignorance.

Conclusion

What Dr. Harris does with respect to the Qur'an is like someone who picks up a book that is 400-500 pages long, reads a few passages, and, then, proclaims that he understands the rest of the book and how such passages fit into that book. Such a claim is beyond ludicrous, but when it comes to Islam, then distortion, misrepresentation, and derogatory ways of framing issues are accepted forms of expression in all too many parts of the West and, unfortunately, in all too many parts of the Muslim world, as well.

However, apparently not content with limiting himself to the foregoing sorts of conceptual chicanery, Dr. Harris proceeds to give aid and comfort to the fundamentalists, militants, and extremists of the world by trying to argue that those people are the only ones in the Muslim world who got things right when it comes to the Qur'an.

When he proceeds in the foregoing manner, he tries to pass himself off as something of an "expert" when it comes to Islam, and he has identified fundamentalists, militants, and extremists as Muslim "experts" who agree with him concerning the meaning of the Qur'an. Furthermore, Dr. Harris criticizes any Muslim who is unwilling to accept the delusional belief system of such fundamentalists as being disingenuous members of the faithful who are engaging in games of pretense with the rest of the world.

Dr. Harris considers fundamentalists, extremists, and militants to be "experts" on the Qur'an and Islam not because those individuals possess such expertise (which they don't) but because they are advocates of a belief system that can be used to further Dr. Harris's agenda to fraudulently misrepresent Islam and disparage Muslims in general. He is like a person who knows little, or nothing, about baseball but, nonetheless, proceeds to appoint himself to be an "official" umpire who, despite his ignorance concerning various matters, has arrogated to himself a counterfeit form of authenticity that he believes (falsely) entitles him to oversee and regulate the game of baseball in any way he sees fit.

There is a reason why there are many protections set in place within most societies with respect to trying to prevent fraudulent behavior. A society that permits fraudulent activities to permeate the

fabric of its existence is a society that is inviting all manner of discord, violence, destruction, misery, and chaos into its midst.

If Dr. Harris wants to publicly promote the idea that there is no God, then, I don't have a problem with that. Such promotions can be likened to the process of defensive indifference in the game of baseball when the team playing defense permits a base runner to steal second – perhaps even third base -- without making a throw because the game is so far out of reach that what that base runner does, or doesn't do, is not going to affect the outcome of the game (e.g., disproving God's existence) one way or the other.

However, when Dr. Harris jumps on the playing field, proclaims that he is a knowledgeable umpire concerning the game of baseball (which in the current context he is not), and, then, proceeds to try to encourage some of the players (e.g., fundamentalists, militants, and extremists) to undermine the on-going game in any way they like because he is going to rule in their favor, and, as well, proceeds (through his books and public appearances) to try to incite the fans (ordinary people) in the stadium to engage in aggressive behaviors (such as using nuclear weapons) in relation to players from the visiting team (e.g., Muslims), then, no fair-minded person would permit Dr. Harris to get away with such self-serving, demagogic-like activities. And, yet, all too many Americans and people in the West in general do not seem to have a problem with, on the one hand, permitting Dr. Harris to try to pass himself off as something he is not – namely, knowledgeable about Islam -- and, on the other hand, permitting Dr. Harris to help create an incendiary atmosphere of bigotry concerning Muslims while he champions fundamentalists, militants, and extremists as being the true representatives of Islam due to his fraudulent representation of the Qur'an.

What Dr. Harris is doing when he behaves in the foregoing manner is to engage in activities that have a potential for recklessly endangering the lives of innocent people. He also is exhibiting a callous disregard toward -- and, therefore, negligence concerning -- the acquisition of the sort of skills and insight that are necessary for a person to have to be able to develop any sort of authoritative insight into the nature of the Qur'an and Islam.

Dr. Harris claims that he is interested in peace, harmony, cooperation, tolerance and the like. And, yet, when it comes to Islam and Muslims, he does not appear to exhibit the same commitment to, or fervor for, the ideas of peace, harmony, cooperation, and tolerance.

The fact that Dr. Harris appears potentially willing to recklessly endanger innocent lives – both Muslim and non-Muslims – by fraudulently promoting a false idea about the nature of Islam seems rather incongruous with some of his stated values. One can't help but wonder what his underlying motives actually are because there seems to be little reason underlying his insistence on maintaining such a jaundiced and factually challenged view of Islam unless his purpose is something other than peace, harmony, co-operation, tolerance, and the like.

The fact that Dr. Harris appears to be willing to identify fundamentalists, extremists, and militants as constituting the only “true” Muslims, while referring to other Muslims as acting out of disingenuous and hypocritical pretense (simply because the latter individuals refuse to accept the delusional and ignorant ranting of fundamentalists) also causes one to wonder what the actual underlying motives of Dr. Harris are.

He claims to be a man of reason, facts, methodology, and so on. However, none of that is in evidence when he claims that fundamentalists, extremists, and militants have the most honest reading of the Qur'an, and, in doing so, he ignores, if not belittles, any evidence that runs contrary to his factually challenged biases.

Sam Harris has got to be one of the most foolish people in the world because, on the one hand, he says he believes in a variety of constructive, rational values, yet, on the other hand, he is trying to tell Muslims that unless they operate in accordance with the beliefs of the extremists, militants, and fundamentalists, then, the Muslim community is being untrue to the principles of Islam. In other words, instead of trying to pull back on the throttle of hostilities, he appears to be pushing forward on that throttle as hard as he can and, in the process, refuses to listen to any Muslim who tries to tell him that he doesn't know what he is talking about when it comes to the nature of Islam.

Sam Harris is insistent (he has been spewing the same argument for ten years now) that if Muslims want to be true to Islam, then, they must be violent, irrational, belligerent, bloodthirsty, intolerant, and so on. One wonders, why Sam Harris doesn't side with those people within the Muslim community who believe in many of the same constructive values as Sam Harris does – namely, justice, peace, rationality, civility, harmony, tolerance, and so on -- but, instead, he keeps trying to promote fundamentalists, militants, and extremists as being the true heirs of Islam.

The foregoing sort of wondering dissipates when one realizes that Dr. Harris's antipathies toward religion are so profound that he will not permit himself to recognize that he has allowed his biases to distort a great deal of what he says and writes with respect to, among other things, Islam. He should be helping Muslims to socially and conceptually isolate the fundamentalists ... that is, to help Muslims put forth a united front which stipulates that the beliefs of the fundamentalists, militants, and so on have nothing to do with Islam.

Unfortunately, rather than approach things in a rational, evidence-based manner, Sam Harris appears to do everything he can to induce people to hate Muslims and Islam. Consequently, when it comes to such issues, Dr. Harris has nothing constructive to say about how to resolve the problems of the world except to advocate that some sort of genocide be committed against Muslims (see page 129 of the 2005 Norton paperback edition of *The End of Faith*) ... something that renders his position completely irrational and profoundly frightening.

When it comes to the Qur'an and Islam, he doesn't seem to care about facts, reason, logic, understanding, or the like because he is addicted to his own ignorance. And, like any addict, he is willing to sacrifice what is truly valuable in order to be able to keep his blissful addiction to ignorance going.

Moreover, like someone who seeks to distribute (for a price) that to which he or she is addicted, Dr. Harris wants to transform everyone else into the same sort of ignorance junkie that he is with respect to Islam. Unfortunately, there is little room for tolerance in the mind and heart of someone who is so deeply addicted to his or her biases concerning Islam, and, consequently, the future that such ignorance seems focused on bringing about will involve considerable intolerance,

oppression, and social dissolution for all concerned – both Muslim and Non-Muslim.

Up until now, I have not said anything about Maajid Nawaz in the context of this conclusion. Let's change that status.

In my opinion, the only reason that someone such as Maajid Nawaz was permitted to participate in a dialogue with Dr. Harris (such as the one that took place in the book upon which they collaborated and which the present book critically engages) is because as far as Islam is concerned, Maajid Nawaz has as little insight into the nature of Islam as does Dr. Harris. Anyone who wishes to argue – as Maajid Nawaz does – that the Qur'an is something of a blank slate and derives its meanings from whatever conceptual frameworks are imprinted on it by this or that Muslim has almost no real understanding of Islam.

Maajid Nawaz might know a great deal about Muslim history or Muslim culture but Islam is not a function of Muslim history and/or culture. Rather, the spiritual success of a Muslim will depend on the Divine assistance that flows to, and interacts with, the essential capacity of a given individual through, among other possible sources, the Qur'an.

I consider Maajid Nawaz to be someone who became a pawn – unwittingly or otherwise -- in Dr. Harris's propaganda war. Apparently, he failed to understand that he was being used to help advance Dr. Harris's agenda of trying to persuade whoever is foolish enough to listen to Dr. Harris that the Qur'an is a purely human construction that is subject to, among other things, an arbitrary array of post-modern textual analysis that begin and end in the same place ... namely, nowhere.

Maajid Nawaz, most kindly and cooperatively, provides Dr. Harris with exactly what the latter individual seems to desire. More specifically, Maajid Nawaz is someone who has a Muslim name, and he is not only willing to argue that there is nothing Divine in revelation but, even more importantly, that Islam must be reformed from top to bottom ... which is the mirror image of Dr. Harris's inclinations with respect to Islam.

There were many junctures during the dialogue that are recorded in *Islam and the Future of Tolerance* at which Maajid Nawaz should

have taken exception with the ignorance being spewed by Sam Harris concerning the nature of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Unfortunately, for whatever reason, Maajid Nawaz chose not to address those issues but, instead, proceeded to promote his own post-modern, relativistic, arbitrary interpretation of Islam, and in doing so, I believe he did himself, the Qur'an, Islam, Muslims and non-Muslims a great disservice.

Postscript

As I was working on the final edits for this section of the book, the tragedy in Paris, France unfolded ... more than 120 people have been reported to be dead, and scores of people have been critically injured. At the time this book went to press ISIS had claimed responsibility for the attacks, and in doing so, those individuals have committed terrible injustices against innocent people and, as well, those responsible have committed gross transgressions against their own souls.

My heart grieves for the people who were killed and injured during the November 13, 2015 Friday attacks. My heart also grieves for the families and friends who lost loved ones on that day.

Having said the foregoing, I also must say something else. The Paris events, along with: The bombings a few days earlier in Lebanon; the blowing up of a Russian plane over Egypt that was filled with vacationers; the killing of Palestinians by Israelis, and vice versa; the killing of several thousand innocent people in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere by means of drone technology; the tragedies that have been transpiring for more than two decades in Iraq and a slightly longer time in Afghanistan; the ongoing dissolution of once viable – if troubled -- countries such as Syria and Libya, as well as all too many other senseless tragedies that have occurred in countries across the face of the Earth ... all of this is due to the ignorance of those who perpetrate violence or who advocate the use of violence to resolve human problems.

The foregoing events – each in its own manner -- give expression to the shape of things to come if we continue to double-down on our different forms of ignorance concerning one another and the nature of existence. To liberally paraphrase a saying that is attributed to George Santayana: “Those who fail to overcome their ignorance are doomed to endure the consequences of such failure in the future.”

The world is in the terrible condition it is in today largely because of human ignorance. As long as people like Sam Harris and other fundamentalists (irrespective of the manner in which they are religiously, economically, politically, militaristically, philosophically, corporately, educationally, or institutionally inclined) insist on holding onto their ignorance concerning the events of life, then the prospect

for resolving the ongoing crises in which humanity has become entangled seems very unlikely.

Ignorance – whether that of Muslims or non-Muslims -- can never be part of the solution. It will always be at the heart of the problem.

One of the greatest obstacles to dying before we die is to believe that we know and understand the nature of Being when this is not the case. The path to transformative learning tends to be strewn with the carcasses of false beliefs and values that, like a chrysalis, must be sloughed off to realize, God willing, our essential nature.

Section III – Shari’ah: A Muslim’s Declaration of Independence



Introduction

In order to pre-empt, to some extent, some of the concerns that might arise in conjunction with the main focus of this essay concerning Sacred Law and shari'ah, a few things need to be said in order to try to place things in an appropriate perspective before proceeding with the commentary proper. I am a Muslim, I love Islam, and I strive -- although God knows best with what degree of success -- to wholly submit myself to God because I accept as true that God: "created humankind and jinn only to worship" [Qur'an, 51:56] God.

I bear witness that God is one and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. I make efforts to observe my prayers on a daily basis. I participate in the fast of Ramazan. I give zakat in accordance with my circumstances. I have, by the Grace of Allah, performed the rites of Hajj. In addition, I have faith that God is one and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. I also have faith in the reality of angels, and I have faith in all the Books of revelation that have been sent to various messengers of Allah, and I have faith in the lineage of prophets who came prior to the appearance of the Seal of the Prophets, Muhammad (peace be upon him). I also have faith that there is a Day of Judgment during which most of us will be held accountable for our deeds and misdeeds, and, as well, I have faith that God is the sole determiner of good and evil.

I believe in Sacred Law and shari'ah, but I do not approach these issues in a manner that is consonant with many traditional modes of engaging such matters. The fact that I do not share the belief of certain others concerning the nature of Sacred Law and shari'ah does not make me -- or those with whom I have differences on this subject -- an unbeliever, but, rather, this merely means I have an alternative method for engaging the themes that are entailed by Sacred Law and shari'ah.

For approximately 45-plus years, by the Grace of God, I have sought to serve the Muslim community in my own way and according to whatever abilities and opportunities God has given me. What I am seeking to do in the present essay, God willing, is to continue to serve the Muslim community, although I am sure there will be those who will choose not to see things in this light.

I am not asking others to necessarily accept the perspective that is about to be put forth. Rather, I only ask people to reflect on what is being said and to strive for the truth of whatever issues might be raised through the following considerations.

Prior to writing the material for this section of *Die Before You Die*, I read through a number of treatises concerning the notion of Islamic law. Those works include: *Toward an Islamic Reformation* by Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Islamic Legal Theories* by Wael B. Hallaq, *Understanding Islamic Law*, edited by Hisham M. Ramadan, *Islamic Law* by Mawil Izzi Dien, as well as *Islam and the Living Law: The Ibn al-Arabi Approach*.

I engaged the foregoing books with close attention and critical reflection, and, as a result, the margins of the pages of those works are filled with notes, thoughts, questions, issues, and the like. However, rather than provide a point-counterpoint response to the aforementioned material, I decided to write from the heart and address a variety of issues in accordance with whatever insight God has enabled me to acquire in relation to Islam over the last 45 years.

I freely admit that I am not an Islamic scholar, imam, shaykh, or qadi. Yet, I have undertaken a task that every Muslim needs to pursue at some point in their lives – namely, to try to come to an understanding concerning the nature of spiritual guidance.

The purpose of the following discussion is not to persuade the reader to accept what I am saying as true. Instead, the point of the exercise is to induce readers to think about the issues that are being explored throughout the following pages of this section.

A Brief Overview

I will begin by providing a set of brief overview statements concerning the themes that are to be explored in this essay. These are summary statements of the perspective that will be delineated, God willing, during the course of the essay that follows, but the order of appearance of these statements does not necessarily reflect the sequence in which issues will be engaged through the main body of the essay.

(1) The ways in which Sacred Law and shari'ah are understood by many Muslims, in general, as well as by a variety of Muslim religious scholars, in particular, are often problematic, if not incorrect, in a number of respects;

(2) Sacred Law gives expression to the principles, realities, and truths [physical, spiritual, psychological, etc.] through which the Created Universe operates;

(3) Shari'ah refers to the individual's realization of that portion of Sacred Law which enables an individual to grasp truths, as God wishes, concerning one's essential identity and spiritual capacity that, God willing, lead to the fulfillment of an array of rights concerning all manner of being - including those rights that are inherent in the individual himself or herself ... and this is what is meant by the idea of being God's vicegerent or Khalifa on Earth;

(4) To the degree that shari'ah is correctly understood and applied, it becomes a manifestation of Sacred Law;

(5) The journey toward shari'ah is an individual pursuit, not a collective one - although the degree to which shari'ah is properly realized might have ramifications for the social collective, and, as well, the manner in which the social collective is organized could carry implications for the way in which shari'ah is understood and/or pursued;

(6) While the Qur'an and the sunna of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) constitute the two most essential primary resources through which to engage and understand the nature of Islam, many of the customary ways of describing just what is entailed by this process seem to problematic, if not incorrect;

(7) Qiyas [analogical and rationalistic reasoning processes] tends to have a distorting and therefore, misleading way of construing the teachings of the Qur'an;

(8) The issue of ijma – consensus – is generally misunderstood and misapplied with respect to the issue of shari'ah;

(9) Using naskh or abrogation is untenable when done in accordance with the manner in which many Muslim religious scholars understand this concept to be a methodology for engaging the meaning of the Qur'an;

(10) The idea of ijtihad – that is, striving to secure a spiritual determination or judgment in a given set of circumstances – might also be improperly understood as well as improperly used by many Muslim religious scholars;

(11) The five major madhabs or schools of jurisprudence do not exhaust the ways through which one might legitimately engage Islam, and, moreover, none of these schools – or any other such school – can be used to compel people to behave in particular ways when it comes to matters of shari'ah; moreover, no one is under any obligation to align herself or himself with any given school of jurisprudence, or, stated in another way, the various schools of Muslim jurisprudence do not necessarily have the requisite spiritual authority to impose judgments on others that are binding.

(12) One of the primary purposes underlying governance is not to enforce shari'ah but, rather, one of the essential purposes of governance is to ensure that a community – or, more specifically, the public space or commons of that community -- is free from oppression of any kind [including religious] so that people will have an unhindered opportunity to engage the gift of choice that God has bequeathed to them ... providing such an exercise of free will does not interfere with a like gift that also has been bequeathed to others;

(13) Two of the other primary tasks of government are to establish principles of equitability and justice to help prevent the injury, exploitation, and abuse of the members of a community by forces from within or from without that community, and this includes a responsibility to ensure that spiritual abuse will not be permitted to

be perpetrated through the political imposition of religious theories of jurisprudence;

(14) The specific guidance given expression in the Qur'an concerning issues like punishment, fighting, and even such matters as inheritance, are subsumable under, and capable of being modulated by, other principles of general guidance given in the Qur'an, and, in addition, such specific injunctions might not have been intended as a form of universal guidance – that is, for all peoples, all times, and all circumstances – but, instead might have been intended to guide a specific group of people during, and shortly after, the period during which the Prophet lived;

(15) None of the foregoing fourteen statements undermines, removes, or alters the basic duties of care one has to oneself, others, creation, or God that are being taught through the Qur'an and for which shari'ah is intended as a spiritual journey of striving to understand and apply the truth of those issues during the course of one's life.



A Few Thoughts Concerning the Idea of Schools of Jurisprudence

Although there have been more than five madhabs, or schools of jurisprudence that have arisen over the last 1300 years, or so, five such schools are generally recognized today as constituting the major, mainstream approaches to issues of so-called Islamic law. These are the Hanīfa, Māliki, Shāfi'i, Hanbali, and Jafari madhabs.

The four surviving schools of Sunni jurisprudence were established during the early Abbāsīd era [the Abbāsīds had challenged the Umayyad rule on the basis that the latter was not Islamic enough in its form of governance]. The Umayyads came to power after the rule of the four righteous caliphs came to an end with the assassination of Hazrat 'Ali [may Allah be pleased with him] around 40 A.H. [660 A.D.]

There is an essential, potential difference between the idea of Sacred Law in Islam and schools of jurisprudence that purport to give expression to the former. Oddly enough, this realm of difference revolves around the fact that Sacred Law does not necessarily have anything to do with theories of jurisprudence.

Generally speaking, jurisprudence is defined as a collection of rules that is imposed on a community or nation by someone who, legitimately or illegitimately, claims to have authority to impose those laws upon others. The collection of rules being alluded to here concerns the manner in which the public space or commons of a community or nation is to be regulated with respect to what people will and will not be permitted to do with, or in, that public space, as well as in relation to what rights and principles of justice the people of a given community are to be entitled, along with a specification of whatever duties and obligations are believed to accrue to different individuals under various circumstances.

Sacred Law (in the sense of that to which Divine revelation [such as the Qur'an] gives expression and in the sense of the operating principles through which Creation is manifested) is a function of the reality or truth of being and Being. To say that such and such aspect of life is a facet of Sacred Law is to make a claim concerning the order, nature, and purpose of that aspect of life in terms of the manner to which it allegedly gives expression to truth and the reality of things as ordained by God. Sacred Law is a function of the manner in which God

has arranged Creation, including whatever degrees of freedom are inherent in the structural properties and principles of Creation, as well as in terms of the purposes for which Creation has been so arranged by Divinity.

As such, Sacred Law is not necessarily a legal system per se. For example, the physical principles that govern the manner in which the physical/material dimensions of Creation operate are not legal rules in the sense of statutory provisions that have been established for purposes of judging the conduct of the physical world and whether, or not, that conduct conforms to, or deviates from, the established statutory provisions in question.

Physical principles give expression to the reality or truth of their nature by manifesting God's truth concerning their modes of being. By acting in accordance with their essential nature – that is, the properties and qualities that constitute the reality of that which God has ordained them to be -- physical principles are manifestations of Sacred Law. Sacred Law is simply the way things operate in relation to that facet of created existence or being.

The law of gravity does not refer to a legal set of rules. When one fails to exercise due diligence in relation to such a law, one has not violated a legal rule, but, rather, one has failed to take into consideration the way reality operates within certain circumstances, and, as a result, one must suffer whatever consequences ensue from such a failure.

The reality of gravity is an expression of Sacred Law. Every aspect of Creation is a manifestation of Sacred Law.

Sacred Law also governs human beings. Such Sacred Law concerns the potentials, capacities, faculties, qualities, and possibilities that are inherent in the human form – a form that ranges from: physical, mental, and emotional properties, to: spiritual qualities.

Once again, as was the case with gravity, such Sacred Law is not necessarily a matter of determining what statutory injunctions apply to human potential and behavior. Moreover, as was the case with gravity, such Sacred Law becomes a matter of trying to understand the reality or truth with respect to the manner in which some given dimension of existence operates – in this case, human beings.

To whatever extent a given school of jurisprudence does not reflect the totality of the Sacred Law concerning the nature of how a given aspect of existence gives expression to the Sacred Law, then, to that extent such an approach to jurisprudence tends to introduce errors and problems into a person's understanding of Sacred Law. Therefore, one issue that arises when attempting to ascertain the relationship, if any, between a given school of jurisprudence and the Sacred Law becomes a matter of seeking to establish or adjudge the degree of accuracy contained in a given perspective of jurisprudence with respect to the capacity of the latter to be able to reflect the truth of the reality of some dimension or dimensions of Sacred Law in relation to human beings.

Schools of jurisprudence give expression to a set of methodologies that proponents contend will permit an individual to ascertain the nature of Sacred Law in any given set of circumstances involving human beings. Such schools of jurisprudence use the aforementioned methodologies to construct hypotheses that are said to be able to capture the governing principles of Sacred Law that an advocate of the school believes are at work in a given set of circumstances and, thereby, permit an individual to come to understand how to engage those circumstances in a manner that is consonant with Sacred Law.

In order to be able to generate a context for beginning to explore the relationship, if any, between the idea of a school of jurisprudence and the Sacred Law of God, it might be of value to briefly take a look at some of the ideas entailed by some of the different madhabs or schools of jurisprudence. This discussion is not intended to be exhaustive but, rather, is merely intended to provide some food for thought before proceeding on in other ways.

Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man ibn Thabit [80 AH/699 A.D. – 150 AH/767 A.D.] is credited by some as being among the first to put forth some of the working methods for engaging Sacred Law in order to try to understand the nature of one's relationship to Sacred Law [a process that is now referred to – and, in fact, has been referred to in such terms for some time -- as a madhab or school of jurisprudence]. Interestingly enough, there are a number of incidents that transpired during the lifetime of Abu Hanifa that give rise to some important questions

concerning how one might approach the issue of understanding and applying that understanding to matters governed by Sacred Law.

More specifically, at one point in his life, Abū Hanīfa had decided to turn down an offer to serve as chief judge – an offer that had been extended to him by Marwān ibn Muhammad, an Umawi caliph. As a result of this rejection, Abū Hanīfa received a public punishment consisting of 110 lashes.

The reason that Abū Hanīfa gave with respect to his refusal to serve as chief judge is relatively simple and straightforward. He did not want to be in a position where he would be required to pass legal judgment on other individuals.

When the 'Abbasids overthrew the opposing Umawi caliphate in 132 AH, a new caliph – Abū Jafar al-Mansur [died in AH 158] – came to power. The new caliph wanted Abū Hanīfa to be in charge of judicial proceedings in Baghdad.

Once again, Abū Hanīfa declined an invitation that was being extended to him that would have required him to assume responsibility with respect to making judgments concerning others in relation to legal issues. Once again, he was punished – this time with imprisonment – and he remained in prison until he passed away in 150 AH.

Abū Hanīfa believed in the importance of seeking to arrive at determinations concerning what the nature of Sacred Law might have been in a given set of circumstances. However, he apparently did not believe in the appropriateness of using such determinations to pass legal judgments on others.

Consequently, very early on in Muslim history we encounter a situation in which someone who is cited as being, in a sense, the founder of a school of jurisprudence did not believe that determinations involving the Sacred Law were necessarily a matter of jurisprudence. Instead, the individuals who were seeking to use Sacred Law as a system of jurisprudence were certain leaders who were attempting to impose a particular kind of authority and control over other human beings and using the Sacred Law as justification for what they were attempting to do in those respects.

One of the methods which Abu Hanifa emphasized in his approach to engaging issues of Sacred Law involved shura or consultation with others. Oftentimes, he would present a problem, case, or question concerning Sacred Law and, then, encourage his students to discuss the matter with one another while they analyzed and reflected on the challenge before them. Over a period of time – and this might last for a number of weeks – the group finally would reach a decision concerning the issue in question, and this would be a reflection of all that had gone into the process of consultation.

However, Abu Hanifa once counseled his students by saying: “Anyone who utters a fatwa based on my sayings is only permitted to do so if that individual knows what I used as proof [*dalil*].” The fatwa being referred to here was not a legal obligation incumbent on all who heard it, but, rather it was a pronouncement about a spiritual determination that had been reached concerning what Abu Hanifa believed was the nature of Sacred Law in a given set of circumstances.

For Abu Hanifa, truly knowing the roots of the proof of something is not at all the same thing as being able to read an account concerning that same something. Proof is in the experiential heart-knowledge and understanding of the hukm -- or the authoritative and governing spiritual principle(s) -- of whatever aspect of Sacred Law that was being explored.

Unless someone understood a given matter in the same way as Abu Hanifa did, then that individual would not understand the nature of the proof upon which Abu Hanifa rested his determination. If one lacked such an understanding, then Abu Hanifa did not want an individual to blindly make a fatwa or pronouncement concerning something that the individual did not properly understand and, then, merely use the name of Abu Hanifa as justification for what was being said.

To the extent that a true ‘proof’ existed concerning the matter at hand, the authority was not Abu Hanifa. Rather, the authority was in the extent to which a given ‘proof’ reflected a truth concerning the nature of Sacred Law in a given set of circumstances.

The fact that Abu Hanifa offered a proof in a given case does not necessarily mean that the issue for which a proof was being provided was correctly or fully understood by him, any more than it necessarily

follows that because a 'proof' is offered by any given individual, then, therefore, such a 'proof' must be correct. Be this as it may, at this point I am far less concerned with whether Abu Hanifa was right or wrong with respect to the 'proofs' offered in this or that instance than I am concerned with some of the methodological, considerations that appear to have shaped certain features of his perspective.

The features that seem to stand out for me in this respect are two in number. The first methodological principle involves the manner in which Abu Hanifa seemed to be disinclined to use the process of seeking spiritual determinations concerning Sacred Law as a basis for passing judgment on others in any sense that carried legal ramifications. A second methodological principle revolves around the importance of acquiring an understanding of, and insight into, the precise nature of a 'proof' that is being offered in conjunction with some given spiritual determination concerning the Sacred Law – blind adherence to such a determination or citing someone's name as the authority for such a determination is not enough.

Malik ibn Anas, a second name with which a major school of jurisprudence or madhab is associated, was believed to have been born somewhere between 90 AH and 97 AH. He died in 179 AH [796 AD].

Apparently, Malik ibn Anas did not leave any explanation concerning the specific methodology that he used for making a determination or judgment concerning the Sacred Law in any particular case. His students indicated that he used a variety of tools through which he sought to assess a given problem, issue, or question concerning what he believed to be the operative aspect of Sacred law in any particular case. These tools included: the Qur'an, the sunna of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the practices [or amal] of the people of Medina, a form of analogical reasoning, as well as considerations of public interest [that is, maslaha] and various kinds of custom.

Of course, all of the major madhabs considered the Qur'an, along with the Sunna of the Prophet, to constitute two essential sources to be utilized in seeking determinations concerning the way Sacred Law might be related to a given set of circumstances. However, citing the

foregoing two sources as having central importance to any process of spiritual deliberation is one thing and demonstrating that the manner in which one understands and applies those sources is another matter altogether.

Malik was not only very much aware of the foregoing difference, but he also realized that there could be more than one way of utilizing the Qur'an and the sunna to arrive at a spiritual determination in any given instance. For this reason, Malik sought to indicate to the 'Abbasid Caliphs that his approach to attempting to understand the nature of the Sacred Law in any particular case should not be the only methodology considered when trying to solve a problem or resolve a conflict.

Once again – as was also the case in relation to the previous discussion involving Abu Hanifa -- I am not as much interested in the specific determinations that Malik might have reached in any particular case as I am interested in a certain dimension of his general approach to the process of trying to understand the nature of the Sacred Law. To this end, one of the most important themes that I see being given expression through his approach to such matters is his willingness to acknowledge that there could be more than one way to pursue Sacred Law, and, as such, there should be no one "official" position concerning how to go about trying to understand the nature of Sacred Law.

Malik was not attempting to establish a systematic and definitive legal code with respect to the nature of Sacred Law. Rather, he was trying to provide food for thought that might be reflected upon by others in relation to various problems, questions, and issues.

Ahmad ibn Hanbal, a third name with which a major school of jurisprudence is associated, lived from 164 AH to 241 AH -- that is, 780 A.D. to 855 A.D. Like Malik before him, ibn Hanbal also sought to dissuade others from attempting to systematize the latter's modes of thinking about various matters concerning the nature of Sacred Law.

He was opposed to the idea of codifying shari'ah. In fact, ibn Hanbal's teachings often can be understood as a reaction against the

tendencies to codify matters of shari'ah that had been emerging not only during his lifetime but in earlier times, as well.

For instance, Ibn Hanbal was strenuously opposed to the practice of taqlid – that is, blind obedience – which was beginning to become commonplace during his lifetime. Consequently, as one means of countering this tendency toward blind obedience, he instructed his students that none of his deliberations and determinations concerning any particular case should be written down.

For ibn *Hanbal*, the Qur'an and the sunna were the preeminent authorities in all efforts of spiritual deliberations. In fact, he was inclined to give preference to a weak hadith rather than use some form of analogical reasoning in order to reach a spiritual determination concerning the Sacred Law in a given set of circumstances.

On the other hand, sometimes ibn *Hanbal* would encounter issues in which neither the Qur'an nor the sunna seemed to provide a solution in conjunction with a problem or question that was being considered. On such occasions, ibn *Hanbal* might use analogical reasoning as a tool of last resort.

The Issue of Ijma

Ibn *H*anbal also was often very deferential to the various pronouncements of the results of a given spiritual deliberation concerning the nature of the Sacred Law that were given by some of the Companions of the Prophet – often referred to as a fatwa. However, he attached an important caveat to using such pronouncements as aides to arriving at a spiritual determination in a given issue or problem, and this proviso stipulated that the Companions had to have been unanimous in their agreement with such a pronouncement in order for it be accepted as a possible resource to use in seeking spiritual determinations concerning the nature of Sacred Law.

This foregoing idea of *ijma*, or consensus, is more complicated than it appears. First and foremost, one faces the question of: Who is going to be counted as a Companion of the Prophet?

For example, is mere acquaintanceship sufficient to qualify someone as a Companion? There were likely to have been many individuals – especially during the later Medina period -- who might have seen and heard the Prophet but who might not thereby necessarily have satisfied the conditions – whatever these might be -- of what it means to be a Companion of the Prophet.

Furthermore, and irrespective of how one decides to identify who is a Companion of the Prophet, one also must deal with the methodological problem of determining whether, or not, all Companions were actually in agreement with some given fatwa issued by one of the other Companions.

If someone does not speak in relation to some given spiritual determination, does such silence necessarily imply consent? Maybe someone who might disagree with such a pronouncement remains silent for personal reasons or out of a wish not to generate dissension or further problems.

Moreover, can one be sure that all Companions knew about such a pronouncement or that they had been asked to give their opinion in relation to that pronouncement? Can one be sure that all of the Companions continued to be in agreement concerning such a pronouncement throughout their lives?

Aside from the foregoing considerations involving the issue of consensus, there is another aspect of ibn *Hanbal*'s approach to seeking to understand the nature of Sacred Law. For him, the issue of *ijma* or consensus only had relevance and importance in relation to those individuals who lived in the time of the Prophet. Consequently, a consensus of opinion among religious scholars who lived at some point after the time of the Prophet did not necessarily carry much weight as far as ibn *Hanbal* was concerned.

One of the major reasons why questions like the foregoing are important to raise is because they should induce one to pause and reflect on just what relevance the idea of *ijma* or consensus has with respect to the issue of determining how one might approach Sacred Law and *shari'ah*. For example, if there were consensus concerning some matter of Sacred Law, then, possibly, such a state of affairs might carry considerable spiritual authority in shaping how one proceeds with respect to engaging the nature of Sacred Law.

Many people refer to a hadith that is attributed to the Prophet in which he is reported to have said that: "My community will never agree in error." Consequently, if some facet of *shari'ah* is unanimously agreed upon, then, one might conclude, on the basis of what has been attributed to the Prophet, that whatever has been agreed upon must be free of error and, therefore, true.

Unfortunately, there are those who define *ijma*, or consensus, in terms of the religious or theological teachings of certain groups, religious scholars, mullahs, and so on who came after the lifetimes of the Companions of the Prophet. In other words, according to this kind of an understanding, if some post-Companion group decides unanimously that such and such is an important facet of, say, *shari'ah*, then, those who advocate such a perspective claim that this sort of consensus has a binding authority upon other members of the Muslim community.

Furthermore, individuals who think in this manner often cite the aforementioned hadith that has been attributed to the Prophet – namely, 'my community will never agree in error.' The primary problem with this approach to things is that assumptions are being made concerning what the Prophet meant when he is reported to have said the foregoing statement.

Was the statement of the Prophet concerning his community only intended to refer to decisions made by his Companions? If so, the fact of the matter is that available historical records indicate there were very, very few instances in which the Companions were all asked a question concerning some facet of the shari'ah and with respect to which they all answered in, more or less, the same way, and, as well, none of the Companions responded by silence with respect to such questions or changed their position concerning such a question.

Did the statement of the Prophet about his community never agreeing in error refer only to certain religious groups or scholars or legal experts who would arise in subsequent times? If so, what is the basis for such a claim, and why would the Companions be excluded from consideration in such matters? Moreover, if the Companions are not to be excluded, then, surely, one is brought back to the default position in which, relatively speaking, there were very few issues that could be shown to have enjoyed unanimous agreement on the part of the Companions, let alone on the part of the Companions as well as whatever subsequent group one wished to cite.

If a group of religious scholars, theologians, or jurists reaches a consensus – that is, a unanimous agreement – on some issue concerning the nature of the Sacred Law, this, in and of itself, says nothing at all about the correctness of what is being agreed upon by that group. The value of such consensus becomes even more suspect if there are other groups of religious scholars, theologians, or jurists who do not share such a perspective on the matter in question.

On the other hand, there might be those who might wish to argue that ijma, or consensus, doesn't necessarily mean unanimity of agreement. For those individuals who might want to argue in this fashion, they are going to have to come up with an authoritative argument from the Qur'an which indicates that such is the case, and these sorts of individual are also going to have to plausibly justify and explain just what the Prophet meant when he said that his community would never agree in error if ijma does not mean unanimity of agreement on any given point being addressed.

Certainly, there is nothing wrong with considering various positions on a given issue and trying to determine which, if any, of the positions being engaged might be giving expression to the truth.

However, the fact that some group has reached consensus on something carries no prima facie binding authority over one unless what is being said can be shown or proven to be stating the truth of a matter, and this means that it is not consensus, per se, which is the source of such binding authority, but rather, it is the truth that carries binding authority upon one – although even here, one has a choice to accept or reject such truth.

Finally, although one can certainly take into account the conduct of the Companions as a possible guide in relation to how one might proceed with respect to understanding and engaging the issue of Sacred Law, there is nothing in any of the foregoing considerations that requires one to follow their example. More specifically, the Companions of the Prophet pursued their particular modes of seeking the truth concerning the nature of Sacred Law according to their individual experiences, historical circumstances, life histories, cultural influences, capacities, needs, and so on. The understandings that arise out of all of this might, or might not, be relevant to the task of struggling toward finding a viable mode of understanding the nature of Sacred Law for life in today's historical circumstances according to the varying needs of different peoples in different historical and cultural circumstances with varying spiritual capacities – there are many, many factors to consider when engaging such matters.

Consider the following verse:

“And whoever acts hostilely to the Apostle after that guidance has become manifest to him and follows other than the way of the believers, We will turn him to that to which he has [himself] turned.” [Qur'an, 4:115]

The foregoing ayat is given by some as support for the idea of ijma -- that is, there is an equivalence being established between the idea of ijma and the Quranic phrase: “the way of the believers”. However, the way that is being alluded to refers to Divine guidance concerning the path to truth, and this becomes ‘the way of believers’ only when those believers follow the indicated path.

As such, this is not a matter of God giving authority for believers to define what that way is and, then, permitting them to proceed to impose that path, so defined, on others. Secondly, the ayat makes clear that the warning being given only becomes operative after proper understanding has come to someone [that is, become manifest] concerning the truth of the guidance, and, then, such an individual proceeds to not only pursue some other path but to do so in a manner that is hostile to the Prophet. Only at such a juncture will God close the path to truth and allow the individual to stray in error along the path that he or she has chosen.

Although there are various exceptions to what is about to be said, for the most part, ijma or consensus is irrelevant to matters of shari'ah because the latter is an individual pursuit not a collective activity. To be sure, the pursuit of shari'ah carries ramifications for the collective, because through such a journey or struggle, the individual, God willing, might acquire qualities of character, understanding, knowledge, wisdom, faith, and adab that can be shared with others and that, God willing, have a constructive, beneficial impact upon society. However, the actual spiritual journey does not require the consensus of others in order for one to be able to proceed even though such consensus, if and when it does occur, can help inform the spiritual journey of the individual, and, moreover, such an individual would be well advised to carefully consider what has been established through such consensus.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations and given that in the time of the Prophet, or shortly thereafter, there were very, very few issues on which consensus had been reached, it is unlikely that consensus will ever be meaningfully established in any way that extends beyond the consensus reached by people during the times of the Prophet. To be sure, there is consensus about the importance of the five pillars, but there are both agreements on, as well as differences concerning, how, specifically, to go about implementing these pillars and the nature of any degrees of freedom one might have in relation to such implementation.]. There is consensus about the importance of the Qur'an, even if, once again, there is no consensus with respect to what the Qur'an necessarily means – although there might be agreement on this or that ayat/verse. There is consensus

about the importance of loving the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and having love and respect for the other members of the Prophetic tradition, but there is no consensus on how one should give expression to this love. There is a general consensus on the importance of the basic principles of faith or iman, but there are differences of understanding with respect to how such faith is to be incorporated into one's life. There is consensus that everything one does should be done for the sake of Allah, but there are differences about how all of this might fit in with a person's understanding concerning the nature, purpose, and potential of life. There is consensus that one must strive and struggle with life ... that one must make efforts and that one has been given the capacity to choose between good and evil, but there are differences of opinion about what constitutes the good and what constitutes the evil or how to make the best use of the freedom one has been given.

Beyond the foregoing sorts of consensus, one is likely to find very little consensus in relation to matters either public or private. So, rather than canvassing 1.3 billion Muslims, or canvassing this or that group that seeks to arrogate to itself – rather arbitrarily -- the title of “consensus authorities” and allocate to themselves the sole right to establish, or not establish, spiritual consensus -- one might be better off to realize that shari'ah really is an individual journey during which one might consider this or that perspective of others but with respect to which one will, by and large, find no consensus, and, therefore, as indicated earlier, the notion of ijma is relatively unhelpful when it comes to pursuing and struggling with shari'ah.

“No soul benefits except from its own works, and none bears the burden of another. Ultimately, you return to your Lord, then He informs you regarding all your disputes.” [Qur'an, 6:164]

As was the case in relation to both Abu Hanifa and Malik, my primary interest with respect to ibn Hanbal has little to do with whatever spiritual determinations might have been reached by him in conjunction with some particular problem or issue involving the nature of Sacred Law. In fact, as was pointed out previously, ibn Hanbal gave specific instructions that his spiritual determinations and judgments concerning particular cases not be written down in order to

deter people from blindly adhering to whatever conclusions might be generated by ibn Hanbal, and in this respect he is advocating a position that is very similar to the one voiced by Abu Hanifa, and noted earlier, concerning the importance of properly understanding an issue rather than seeking to blindly apply a determination or judgment with little or no understanding of what one is doing.

Like Abu Hanifa and Malik, ibn Hanbal was not interested in establishing a codification of the Sacred Law. Like Abu Hanifa and Malik, ibn Hanbal was not trying to make claims that his particular approach to understanding the nature of Sacred Law was the only way of making spiritual determinations or judgments. Like Abu Hanifa and Malik, ibn Hanbal had his own unique way of approaching the challenges of life, and he engaged such sources as the Qur'an or the sunna of the Prophet from his own perspective of appropriateness and correctness. Like Abu Hanifa and Malik, ibn Hanbal sought to do what he could to constrain the tendency of people to try to generalize a given spiritual determination arrived at in conjunction with a particular set of circumstances to cases that were beyond the specific situation being considered.

The birth of Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i is said to have occurred in 150 AH on the very same day that Abu Hanifa passed away. al-Shafi'i died in 204 AH.

During his various travels and studies, al-Shafi'i spent time with Malik in Medina. He also is said to have spent time and studied with an individual who had been a close student of Abu Hanifa.

al-Shafi'i rooted his perspective in the Qur'an and especially the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). al-Shafi'i believed that what the Prophet said constituted a law that was incumbent upon the community. He felt that the Prophet's sayings did nothing more than to explain, complement, or particularize the teachings of the Qur'an.

However, in the Qur'an, God says: "And if all the trees in the earth were pens, and the sea, with seven more seas to help it, were ink, the words of Allah could not be exhausted." [31:27]. Therefore, since the Word of God is infinite in nature, that Word cannot be exhaustively

explained nor exhaustively particularized – not even by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Saying the foregoing does not in any way diminish or denigrate the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), but, rather, it is a way of trying to allude, however inadequately, to the greatness and plenitude of the Divine mystery. In fact, this is a perspective that the Prophet would have been the very first to acknowledge as having priority over everything else.

In addition, this issue of the possible relationship of the sayings of the Prophet in relation to the meaning and significance of Quranic teachings points in the direction of a further matter of considerable importance. More specifically, in a tradition or hadith narrated by Abū Huraira (may Allah be pleased with him), the messenger of God was informed that some people were writing down his sayings. The Prophet took to the pulpit of the mosque and said, "What are these books that I heard you wrote? I am just a human being. Anyone who has any of these writings should bring it here." Abū Huraira said we collected all these writings and burned them.

Ibn Saeed Al-Khudry (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

"Do not write anything from me except Qur'an. Anyone who wrote anything other than the Quran shall erase it."

Abu Bakr Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with) had a collection of some 500 hadiths of the Prophet. However, upon hearing about the dire consequences that might befall anyone who perpetrated untruths concerning what the Prophet said, this close Companion of the Prophet -- after he had spent an entire night struggling over the issue of whether, or not, to retain his set of traditions -- burned his collection of Prophetic sayings.

In another tradition, some thirty years after the Prophet had passed away, Zayd Ibn Thabit, another close companion of the Prophet, visited the Khalifa Mu'aawiyah and related a story about the Prophet that Mu'aawiyah liked. Mu'aawiyah ordered someone to write the story down. But Zayd said: "The messenger of God ordered us never to write down anything of his hadith."

The Qur'an does say:

“He who obeys the Messenger obeys God, and whoever turns back, We have not sent you as a keeper over them.” [4:80]

And again:

“Whatsoever the Messenger ordains, you should accept, and whatsoever he forbids, you should abstain from.” [Qur’an, 59:7]

Thus, if the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) gives a specific directive to someone, then, according to the foregoing two verses of the Qur’an, complying with what the Prophet indicates in such a matter is something that is sanctioned and encouraged by God. However, when one attempts to move from, on the one hand: instances in which the Prophet directed people to whom he was speaking or to people in his immediate physical community to do something, to, on the other hand: concluding that, therefore, such directives are intended for all people and all times and all circumstances, then, one is making a very sizable assumption ... an assumption that needs to be demonstrated as viable or that can be proven to be correct.

The clearest evidence that stands in opposition to the viability of making an assumption along the foregoing lines with respect to questions concerning the identity of those to whom the Prophet, on any given occasion, is giving specific directives or that stands in opposition to jumping to conclusions with respect to identifying those who are being addressed by the Prophet is given expression through the Prophet’s act of prohibiting the writing down of his sayings. If the Prophet had wanted his specific directives to carry over to the circumstances, times, and conditions that would arise after he passed away, then, he would have indicated that what he said should be written down and passed on – yet, such an indication is just the opposite of what he actually instructed the people in his physical community to do.

Furthermore, however one wishes to understand such matters, nonetheless, as the remainder of Surah 4, Ayat 80 cited previously

indicates, neither the Prophet nor the believers have been given the responsibility of assuming the role of keepers over those who turn back from following the Prophet. Even if one were to accept the idea that what the Prophet said more than 1400 years ago still applies to Muslims living in today's world, the Qur'an is also giving an indication that God has not authorized anyone to be a keeper over people with respect to such issues.

When the imperative mood is used in grammar, many people wish to interpret this to mean that whatever is being said in this manner constitutes an obligation, command, ordinance, duty, order, or law. Generally speaking, however, the imperative mood is meant to give expression to an intention that is designed to influence a listener's behavior or understanding.

To say that something is a command, ordinance, duty, order, or law certainly all constitute ways intended to influence another person's behavior or understanding. Nevertheless, to urge someone to do something, without commanding or ordering that person to perform such an action, or to try to persuade someone, or to indicate to someone, or impress on someone concerning the importance of some given activity – all of this still gives expression to the imperative mood because one's intention is to influence the behavior of the individual being addressed, but doing things in this way is not necessarily in the form of a command, order, ordinance, or law.

If there is a cliff toward which someone is unknowingly running, and I seek to influence the behavior of that individual to stop running in the problematic direction, I am not necessarily ordering or commanding or ordaining that the individual should stop running. Furthermore, I am not necessarily saying there is a law stipulating that one must stop running when approaching a cliff, nor am I necessarily saying that the person has a duty to stop running.

What I am trying to do is somehow impress on the individual that difficulties might lay in store for that person if she or he continues to run in the same direction and, thereby, fails to give proper cognizance to the warnings being given. What I am trying to do is impress upon the individual in question that there is a potential benefit associated with listening to what is being said.

God has said:

“There is no compulsion in Deen.” [Qur’an, 2:256]

To place someone else under an obligation, duty, ordinance, or legal injunction, are all forms of compulsion.

On the other hand, if one chooses to heed the counsel, advice, or warning that is given, then, one is acting in accordance with the information that has been communicated, but one is not necessarily acting in this manner in order to fulfill a perceived duty or obligation or because what is being communicated is a legal injunction of some kind that is incumbent on one to obey. One has chosen to comply with some warning, advice, counsel, or guidance because one has been persuaded – for whatever reason -- by what has been said to the point where one is willing to permit one’s behavior to be influenced in a certain way.

When one sees the truth of something, one is not obligated to act in accordance with such truth. At the same time, when one comes to understand the truth of something, one is not necessarily inclined to act contrary to the manner in which such a truth informs one’s understanding and manner of engaging certain facets of life.

There is a difference between, on the one hand, stating that something is an ordinance which is incumbent on the individual who is listening to what is being stipulated and, on the other hand, stating that performing certain actions would be in a person’s best interests. The former invites one to do little more than obey without necessarily having any understanding as to why she or he is doing something, whereas the latter approach to things invites a person to explore the relationship between what one is being advised to do and the issue of trying to determine what might constitute one’s best interests.

If one comes to understand the operative principle involved in what might happen to someone if he or she runs off a cliff, then, such understanding tends to shape one’s way of engaging certain aspects of existence. However, once this sort of understanding takes root, one does not necessarily feel under some duty or obligation to keep such understanding in mind, nor does one necessarily consider such understanding an ordinance or command or legal injunction of some kind even as one does understand that acting in accordance with such an understanding might be in one’s best interests.

Divine guidance is not necessarily about duties, ordinances, legal injunctions, commands, or obligations. True guidance is about assisting an individual to come to an understanding of the way things are and to help such a person to learn how to act in accordance with such an understanding.

One is free to accept such guidance or reject it. However, one rejects the guidance at one's own risk because the guidance is seeking to communicate to one something of essential importance about the nature of how things are with respect one's potential and the relationship of that potential with respect to the rest of existence.

Aside from the fact that the Qur'an indicates that there can be no compulsion in matters of Deen, the Qur'an also indicates that: "Tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter [2:191]." To seek to impose Sacred Law onto people is to oppress them even if one's intention is a matter of seeking to do that which one believes will be of assistance to them. Sacred Law is something that must be realized, not something that can be imposed.

Whatever one does in the way of assistance with respect to other individuals, this cannot involve oppression. One can talk with people. One can debate in good ways with them. One can seek to persuade others provided that one does not exceed due limits. One can engage in research and discussion in the hopes that people might see the value of what one is saying ... but one cannot oppress them.

Moreover, God has not given authority to anyone to oppress other human beings. Rather, the guidance is precisely the opposite - to struggle against oppression and to help terminate the latter.

Or, if one engages the issue of the Sacred Law from the perspective of justice and equitability, then, one is not doing justice to others if one takes away their freedom to choose between good and evil. Life is meant to be a struggle, and it is a struggle in which not everyone might succeed so far as spiritual issues are concerned.

One of the rights that others have over us is the right to be free from being oppressed by us. When shari'ah - which is, in actuality, the spiritual journey toward seeking to understand the nature of Sacred Law -- is imposed on others, then one is violating such a right, just as much as someone who rejects shari'ah is violating the rights of

others when the former seeks to impose his or her way of doing things on those who wish to pursue shari'ah.

People have the right and they should have the freedom to choose between good and evil. People do not have the right and they should not have the freedom to impose such choices on others.

The basic right to choose between good and evil is integral to the path of shari'ah. The issue of providing the sort of environment in which people are free from any sort of oppression, exploitation, or abuse that would interfere with, or undermine, such a basic right is the province of governance – that is, the regulation of the public space or commons so that the freedom to pursue shari'ah is protected.

Whatever force is used – and one cannot transgress due limits here with respect to the use of force – such compulsory measures can only be used to ensure that no one is oppressed with respect to the right to choose as they please as long as their choices do not spill over into the lives of others and, thereby, introduce oppression into the community. Indeed, one of the primary tasks of any government is to protect the public space so that it is free from oppression of any kind. The task of government is not to ensure that people follow a particular understanding of Sacred Law or to compel them to pursue a particular spiritual journey [i.e., shari'ah] toward understanding the nature of Sacred Law.



Sunna and Hadith

The Prophet is reported to have said:

“I have bequeathed to you two things; if you hold fast to them, you will never go astray. They are the Qur’an and my Sunna.”

There is a general confusion in many parts of the Muslim community concerning the issues of Sunna and hadith. Unfortunately, this confusion also seems to perplex all too many religious scholars.

Hadiths have to do with the sayings of the Prophet. Sunna have to do with the conduct of the Prophet.

The Qur’an encourages believers to follow the example of the Prophet not necessarily his hadiths. The Qur’an states:

“Say: If you love Allah, then, follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your faults, and Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.” [Qur’an, 3:31]

The Qur’an also says:

“You indeed have in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern of conduct [us‘wat hasanah] for anyone whose hope is Allah and the hereafter and who engages much in the praise of Allah.” [Qur’an, 33:21]

Other than those instances in which the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) gives someone a direct instruction or directive [for example, through a dream or some other form of spiritual unveiling] that the individual in question knows is specifically intended for him or her, then, the Divine guidance to follow the Prophet is a reference to the Prophet’s general pattern of conduct through which his beautiful character is being manifested. In other words, one is being encouraged by God to follow the example of the Prophet with respect to: repentance, humility, compassion, friendship, tolerance, forgiveness, courage, patience, gratitude, balance, equitability, charitableness, nobility, integrity, honesty, sincerity, spiritual excellence, dependence on God, steadfastness, seeking for knowledge, adab, purifying oneself, and justice. Follow this multifaceted example of the Prophet – which, truly, is a beautiful pattern -- according to one’s capacity to do so, then, God willing, Allah will love one and forgive one one’s faults.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) placed a ban on all written documentation of, or collections involving, his sayings. Naturally, such a ban could not erase people's memories concerning what they had heard, or believed they had heard, in relation to what the Prophet might have said on this or that occasion, and, consequently, those who had a memory of what had been said to them by the Prophet were reminded by the Qur'an – as noted earlier -- that those who obey the Prophet are obeying God and, therefore, such individuals should try to act in accordance with what was being said to them by the Prophet.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, whatever else the Prophet might have meant with respect to his banning of making compilations of hadiths, the ban effectively placed constraints on people of a later time being able to try to use people's memories as a definitive and authoritative guide to what the Prophet said, did, and, most importantly, understood and intended with respect to any given set of circumstances. In other words, the Prophet's ban on compiling hadiths tended to create a degree, or more, of separation between, on the one hand, what the Prophet actually said, did, understood, or intended, and, on the other hand, what people remembered or understood concerning what the Prophet is reported to have said, did, understood, or intended.

The foregoing degree of separation introduces an important cautionary principle into this issue that would not have been present if the 'hard evidence' of documented words were to have been permitted by the Prophet to continue. People can say that I heard so and so say that he or she heard so and so say that such a person heard so and so say that the Prophet is reported to have said "X" – but this is not at all the same thing as saying that the Prophet did, in fact, say and intend X in such and such a way.

Consequently, one should be extremely careful about putting words and intentions into the mouth of the Prophet that could have ramifications for people's understanding of the nature of Sacred Law or that might lead to attempts by some people to seek to impose [forcibly or otherwise] such an understanding on others. Indeed, this sort of cautionary principle is likely to have been among the sorts of considerations that might have induced Abu Bakr Sidiq (may Allah be

pleased with him) to destroy his own collection of hadiths out of fear concerning the possible consequences for misleading others with respect to what the Prophet might actually have meant, understood, or intended whenever he said something.

Some have argued that the reason why the Prophet placed a prohibition on the writing down of hadiths is because he wanted to ensure that there would be no confusion in the minds and hearts of people concerning the difference between, on the one hand, the Word of God and, on the other hand, the words of the Prophet. Oftentimes there is an implication in such an argument that while the people who lived during the time of the Prophet were, apparently, incapable of differentiating between the two categories of words – and, thus, the prohibition -- yet, somehow, later generations were fully capable of making correct distinctions between the two, and, therefore, the ban might be lifted.

One has difficulty understanding the nature of the authority on which the foregoing sort of judgment rests – i.e., to lift the ban on compiling hadiths. One has even greater difficulty trying to understand why people believe that such an arbitrary judgment should, in turn, be able to justify the kinds of uses to which various hadiths have been put such that in all too many places people are forced – under penalty of punishment - to live in accordance with this or that interpretation of those hadiths.

There are those who might wish to argue that a hadith merely constitutes one of the modes of conduct of the Prophet and, as such, should be considered as part of the Sunna or example of the Prophet that the Qur'an has counseled people to follow. I would maintain, however, that the ban which the Prophet placed on all attempts to collect and document his own sayings indicates that such a perspective is untenable – especially, since, as far as can be ascertained -- this is a ban that the Prophet did not subsequently revoke.

Furthermore, one encounters something of a puzzle here. On the one hand, one is encouraged to take note of all the other sayings of the Prophet. Yet, on the other hand, apparently, one does not need to take note of the saying of the Prophet that concerns the voicing of a ban with respect to any compiling of such sayings in a written form. How is one to reconcile the two?

The Prophet is reported to have said:

“May Allah bless a person who listens to what I say, memorizes it, understands it, and applies it.”

In one sense, I have never listened to what the Prophet said during his lifetime on earth because I was not physically present at the time during which he lived. In another sense, I have always striven to listen to the spirit of the Prophet – a spirit that has not passed away – as the Qur’an indicates:

“Think not of those who are slain in the way of Allah as dead. Nay, they are living.” [Qur’an, 6:97]

In this latter sense, I have striven to listen to the spirit of what the Prophet has said about not maintaining collections of hadiths. I have memorized what he is reported to have said in this regard, and I believe – although Allah knows best if this is so -- that I understand it to mean, at the very least, that one should not be using hadith as a means of trying to impose on others either the Sunna or hadith of the Prophet.

Without the presence of the Prophet, without explicit indications as to whom is being addressed by a saying of the Prophet, without knowing what the intention of the Prophet was within a particular set of circumstances, and without knowing whether, or not, the Prophet would have provided a different counsel in relation to current circumstances that might share some similarities with the circumstances in which he was heard to say something, then, one really is not in a position to do anything but oppress people if one tries to impose one’s interpretation of Prophetic traditions on others.

I do try to sincerely listen to the spirit of the one to whom various hadiths are attributed. According to what resonates with, and according to what might be verified by, my heart during this process of listening, I strive to develop a feeling or sense of empathy for a variety of issues through which to inform my own personal, individual spiritual understanding of, and approach to, life.

However, there is no expectation on my part that whatever facets of this process of sincere attending to the sayings of the Prophet that might inform my individual perspective should, therefore, also inform the perspective of other individuals. In this sense, my perusal of

hadiths is intended to assist my individual struggles and striving toward understanding the nature of the Sacred Law as part of my own, personal, spiritual journey, and none of this is, or should be, intended to seek to compel others to go in any particular spiritual direction.

If it is a mistake for me to, say, even read the hadiths because of the ban that has been placed on compiling them, or if I make mistakes in conjunction with the way in which I might come to understand such sayings of the Prophet, then, these are mistakes for which I personally might, or might not, be held accountable by God. However, the mistakes that I might, or might not, make with respect to hadithic literature will never, God willing, spill over into activities that induce me to try to compel others with respect to how, or whether, they should engage the sayings or the Sunna of the Prophet.

I believe such a position is consonant with what the Qur'an teaches. I also believe such a perspective is consonant with the spirit of what the Prophet was seeking to place constraints upon when he banned the compilation of hadiths – namely, that what he said should not be subsequently used as a way of trying to lend the authority of the Prophet to any attempt to compel people to act in one way rather than another with respect to matters involving the seeking of Sacred Law.

I believe the example of the Prophet gives expression to the sort of Sunna to which the Prophet wanted Muslims to adhere. The character of the Prophet is what is truly breath-taking – how he consistently interacted with people through courtesy, patience, honesty, integrity, compassion, love, friendship, humility, generosity, kindness, mercy, forgiveness, gratitude, equitability, sincerity, self-sacrifice, and dependence on God in all things.

Surely, if a person held fast to the Qur'an and to the extraordinary example of the Prophet– his real Sunna – one would, God willing, never go astray. At best, one peruses the hadith literature in order to glean some understanding of the quality of character through which the Prophet engaged life and not in order to try to determine what he said on this or that occasion which was in response to specific circumstances existing then and not now.



The Issue of Qiyas

Previously, I briefly explored the idea of hadith and ijma as two of the major resources that usually are cited in many discussions concerning Sacred Law and shari'ah. Earlier, I also outlined some important problems revolving about those ideas. Such problems are especially important to keep in mind when people seek – as, unfortunately, all too many theologians and religious scholars seem inclined to want to do – to use either hadith and/or ijma as a basis for trying to impose on others some given approach to Sacred Law and shari'ah and claim that the religious determinations that emerge through one's use of such resources are obligatory or a duty or a Divine ordinance or compulsory and with which, therefore people must comply or to which they must submit.

Qiyas is another methodological source cited by some religious scholars as having authoritative weight when it comes to trying to determine the nature of Sacred Law and shari'ah. While not all of the four schools of jurisprudence noted earlier accept or use the methodology of qiyas to help reach their determinations concerning the nature of Sacred Law in any given situation, most of the aforementioned schools do, under certain circumstances, employ qiyas as a basic tool.

Qiyas is a word that, in literal terms, means measurement. In effect, when a qiyas is used in discussions concerning religious legalisms, the word is meant to give reference to a standard, metric, or method of establishing a similarity, analogical relationship, or a logical connection between two situations, objects, or issues.

The idea of qiyas gives expression to a form of reasoning or logic that seeks to link two situations or sets of circumstances and focus on the similarities and/or logical relationships between the two. In other words, qiyas is a measuring device, of sorts, that has been constructed in accordance with a mode of logic or discursive thinking that is to be used as a means for comparing the results generated by such a measuring device, standard, or metric that is being used to assess or analyze the structural character of whatever situation, problem, issue, or question that is being considered and to which the qiyas mode of measurement or logic is being applied.

Inherent in the nature of this sort of logic is the idea that if one constructs such a ruler, standard, or measure and lays that measure against one object [or case, issue, question] of interest and, thereby, obtains a measure or assessment of some kind, then, one might be able to take that same mode of measurement or assessment and lay it against other objects [cases, issues, or questions]. Furthermore, if such a mode of measurement generates, with respect to the new object or case, a similar kind of result in relation to the new object/case as was obtained during the first application of the standard, then, the principles inherent in the mode of measurement or logical relationship are considered to be reflected by both objects or cases that are being compared, and, on the basis of such a measurement or application of a standard, one proceeds to argue that the two cases or objects are similar in a certain way or that the two cases/objects share a logical link which is tied to the mode of measurement or assessment – that is, qiyas -- being used.

Thus, suppose one is seeking to measure a cat with a measuring ruler, and, then, one places this same ruler against another object. Suppose further that there are similarities detected by one's mode of measurement in the new object that are reminiscent of what one found in the case of the cat. According to the logic of qiyas inherent in such a situation, one has grounds for arguing that the new 'object' is a cat – even if that new object is not a cat but, instead, turns out to be a rabbit, mouse, dog, or some other life form.

Obviously, one needs to understand what one is trying to measure, and one needs to understand whether the units of measurement of the ruler or metric being used are appropriate to that which one is seeking to measure. One also needs to know whether one's mode of measurement actually reveals anything of significance concerning the issue of similarity or logical relationship between two objects or cases – beyond, that is, the manner in which one's ruler or standard of measurement is constructed and has been used in both instances of measurement or analysis.

The logic of any measuring device is that such a device will find, or not find, only that for which it is looking. Furthermore, if a measuring device captures what it has the capacity to establish in the way of a measurement, this finding, in and of itself, does not necessarily say

anything about the nature of that which is being analyzed through such a process of measurement except that one's method of measurement or assessment is capable of reflecting certain facets of the situation to which it is being applied.

If, for example, one understands that a measuring device can only tell one about the length, width, or height of a given object, then, one knows that when one finds two, or more, objects which exhibit common properties that can be measured by the metric or ruler being used, then, all one has found is a reflection of one's own method of measurement concerning length, width and height. One has not necessarily discovered anything about the actual nature of that to which such a measuring device has been applied other than that, within certain limits, one's measuring device can generate a quantitative description concerning, for example, the height, breadth, or width of that something.

To say that a cat is ten inches long or three inches wide or six inches tall says nothing about what it is to be a cat other than the fact that some cats come in such a size. If one wishes to know what cats actually are, one has to find a method for assessing the structural character of 'cat-ness' and determining this requires a far more complex process than merely using a simple ruler that measures inches and feet.

Quantitative measurements constitute one kind of similarity or logical relationship among certain objects and situations. However, qualitative measurements constitute a very different way of trying to compare two situations, objects, or the like.

To say that two objects share similar physical properties as determined by the measuring or logical process that links the two objects or cases, is one thing. Such quantitative measurements and subsequent comparisons often tend to be fairly straightforward – although using a foot ruler to measure light years could become a little unruly.

However, trying to measure the qualitative properties of two objects or cases tends to be much more problematic. This is especially so when one is trying to say that two objects or cases are similar in some way and that such similarity is sufficient to justify treating the two objects or cases in similar ways or that such similarity is sufficient

to justify drawing conclusions concerning how to treat the two objects or cases.

For example, even if one were to come up with a complex measuring metric with respect to cat-ness, nonetheless, determining the nature of a cat will not necessarily tell one very much about the nature of a bird or dog or human being. Furthermore, even if one could construct a measuring device that would permit one to instantaneously calculate similarities and logical relationships among, say, mammals, birds, reptiles, marsupials, and bacteria, none of this might be very helpful in understanding what significance any of these species carried with respect to God's understanding of Creation.

There are a variety of assumptions inherent in the use of qiyas which tend to suggest that if one believes one knows how God wishes one to engage one situation, case, or object, then, as long as one can demonstrate that a relevant similarity exists between a new case and the already established case, then, whatever behavior, prohibitions, permissions and the like that apply to the former set of circumstances also are said to apply to the latter set of circumstances. Yet, the basis of the alleged similarity or logical relationship that has been put forth through the use of qiyas and that, allegedly, ties together two situations, cases, or objects in question is claimed by the proponents of this method to be a valid way of arguing or justifying what is being claimed.

One assumption permeating the foregoing mode of thinking is the contention that one knows how God wishes one to engage the original set of circumstances at issue. If one misunderstands the nature of the original exemplar, then whatever similarities, analogical relationships, or logical features one points to as being held in common by the two cases will not have much value.

Another assumption inherent in the foregoing way of approaching things is that one is claiming one knows what constitutes a 'relevant' similarity or logical relationship when seeking to link two different sets of circumstances. Two objects, cases, or situations are likely to have many things in common, but such commonality does not necessarily justify treating the two objects or cases in the same way or interacting with the two objects or cases in the same way.

In short, the method of qiyas presumes to know what constitutes the most appropriate way of linking things in terms of logical relationship and similarity. Moreover, the use of this qiyas presumes to know which properties and qualities among various objects or cases are the ones that God wants human beings to focus on, or to be measured, or to be shown to be similar, or to be linked through some logical relationship.

Qiyas is a proposal or hypothesis. This proposal or hypothesis claims, in effect, that the manner of arguing through the use of such a method is something that gives expression to the truth of things in a given set of circumstances. Yet, there is nothing independent of such a claim that is necessarily capable of demonstrating the truth of what is being alleged through the use of the tool of qiyas.

Qiyas is nothing more than a rational argument claiming that a given similarity or logical relationship that is established through the use of such a tool is a possible way of thinking about a given issue, problem, or question. That argument might make sense in its own terms

. but having an internal consistency with respect to its own mode of logic doesn't necessarily mean that this form of reasoning has captured the truth of things or that it will lead to a correct understanding of the truth of things in terms of how God understands the situation. As such, the use of qiyas gives expression to a theory of things that stands in need of independent proof that the theory underlying such a use of qiyas reflects the truth of matters in relation to the Sacred Law or shari'ah.

Consequently, at the very least, an individual needs to exercise caution concerning the use of qiyas. This caution should be exercised not only when one is concerned with one's own spiritual journey, but, as well, such caution should be exercised even more rigorously when it comes to offering advice to others about how one believes they should lead their lives in relation to matters of the Sacred Law and shari'ah.

One needs to engage the Sacred Law in a way that provides one with the best opportunity of becoming open to God's communication and being able, God willing, to discover a condition that will permit one to be led back to the hukm – that is, the authoritative and governing principle with respect to the reality of something -- inherent

in some given aspect of a Divine communication as that hukm relates to the problems and questions with which one is grappling. However, if one relies on qiyas, then, one might be trusting in something involving human theoretical constructions rather than Divine disclosure.

To give some intimation of the dangers that might be inherent in using the method of qiyas, I will put forth an example that, although ridiculous in nature, nonetheless, fits into the logical form of a qiyas. More specifically, through the use of qiyas, I am going to demonstrate that I am a Prophet of God.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is a man, and I am a man. The Prophet lived to at least the age of 63, and I have lived to at least the age of 63. The Prophet had a beard, and I have a beard. The Prophet spent time in Mecca, Medina, and Ta'if, and I have spent time in Mecca, Medina, and Ta'if. The Prophet traveled across the desert between Mecca and Medina, and I have traveled across the desert between Mecca and Medina. The Prophet prayed, fasted, and went on Hajj, and I have prayed, fasted, and went on Hajj. The Prophet spent time in seclusion, and I have spent time in seclusion. The Prophet spoke to people about Islam, and I have spoken to people about Islam. The Prophet had no male children who survived him, and I have no male children who have survived me. The Prophet had a sense of humor, and I have a sense of humor. The Prophet sought to live in accordance with the Sacred Law, and I seek to live in accordance with the Sacred Law. The Prophet passed away, and I will pass away.

I could continue on along the foregoing lines, pointing out other similarities between the two of us. Therefore, if similarity is the fulcrum through which such logic is leveraged, then, based on such similarities, I must be a prophet ... and as we all know, this is not the case.

The Qur'an says:

"... he (Muhammad) is the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets;" [Qur'an, 33:40].

In this case, the Qur'an serves as an independent source to demonstrate that the foregoing exercise in qiyas is not tenable.

Moreover, the hukm – that is, the authoritative and governing principle with respect to the reality of something – that is operative here is that the status of being a prophet is rooted in Divine appointment and not the presence of similarities.

One can point out as many similarities between two situations as one likes, but if those similarities do not go to the heart of the matter, and if those similarities do not touch upon the appropriate hukm or authoritative principle that governs such situations, then, despite the existence of similarities or logical links between two cases, one cannot necessarily use the presence of such similarities as a basis for drawing conclusions concerning how to think about the two cases in question.

Being able to point to similarities or logical relationships between two cases does not necessarily mean that one understands a situation in the way that God understands that situation. In short, similarities or logical relationships, in and of themselves, are not necessarily sufficient to be able to discover what might be most resonant with the Sacred Law and/or shari'ah in any given case.

Consequently, in the light of the foregoing indications, the use of qiyas is a potentially problematic tool. This is especially the case when one takes into consideration that qiyas is usually only resorted to when people are not able to find the guidance that they are seeking in either the Qur'an, the Sunna of the Prophet, or consensus of opinion concerning some question or issue.

Under such circumstances, the individuals who have not found what they are looking for in the Qur'an, the Sunna, or through consensus are not likely to possess some independent source – such as the Qur'an or Sunna -- which is capable of showing that the similarities or logical relationships being noted through a given use of qiyas are either viable or untenable ... a case that stands in contrast to the previous thought experiment in which I sought to demonstrate that I am a prophet through applying the tool of qiyas. Fortunately, however, I did know of an ayat of the Qur'an to which I could point to demonstrate the fallacy of the thinking inherent in the qiyas that had been constructed by me.

To be sure, God encourages human beings to think about, and reflect on, the communications that are being expressed through the Qur'an.

“Did they not consider [yanzuru] the Kingdom of the Heavens and Earth ... ?” [Qur’an 7:185]

“Do they not reflect [yatafakkaru] that their companion has not unsoundness of mind.” [Qur’an, 7:184]

“Do they not reflect within themselves ...” [Qur’an, 30:8]

“... thus do We make clear the communications for a people who reflect.” [Qur’an, 10:24]

“Had We sent down this Qur’an on a mountain, you would certainly have seen it falling down, splitting asunder because of the fear of Allah, and We set forth these parables to humankind that they may reflect.” [Qur’an. 59:21]

If one considers, thinks, and reflects, then, God willing, one might arrive at certain general realizations concerning the nature of truth and one’s relationship with that truth.

However, these truths that might come to be realized through thinking and reflecting have a resonance with the nature of such Divine disclosures that is not a matter of establishing similarities or analogies concerning such truth. Rather, the nature of such realizations has to do with the truth of certain limited aspects of the nature of reality itself being made manifest to one – to be understood according to one’s capacity to do so and according to the Grace that is conferred on such understanding.

One is, for example, asked in the Qur’an to think and reflect upon the experiences of past peoples and nations. Think and reflect upon how all peoples, empires, and nations have eventually crumbled and lost all that they had acquired in life ... is there not a lesson here – a lesson that does not involve similarities or analogies but a certain stark expression of the truth of things that is relevant to one’s life?

So it is with all of the things about which God asks the individual to think and reflect upon. Open oneself, God willing, to what is being communicated and, as a beginning, permit thinking and reflective faculties to operate in an undistorted and unbiased manner so that one can understand, according to the capacity or limits of thinking and reflecting to do so, what is being communicated to one.

In the Qur'an God might use analogies and likenesses in order to communicate with human beings. For instance, consider the following examples:

"The likeness of the two parties is as the blind and the deaf and the seeing and the hearing: are they equal in condition? Will you not then mind?" [Qur'an, 11:24]

Or:

"The likeness of this world's life is only as water which We send down from the cloud, then the herbage of the earth of which men and cattle eat grows luxuriantly thereby, until when the earth puts on its golden raiment and it becomes garnished, and its people think that they have power over it, Our command comes to it, by night or by day, so We render it as reaped seed; produce, as though it had not been in existence yesterday; thus do We make clear the communications for a people who reflect." [Qur'an, 10:24]

And, an analogy or simile with which many Muslims are familiar, God also says in the Qur'an:

"Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth; a likeness of His light is as a niche in which is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass, (and) the glass is as it were a brightly shining star, lit from a blessed olive-tree, neither eastern nor western, the oil whereof almost gives light though fire touch it not -- light upon light -- Allah guides to His light whom He pleases, and Allah sets forth parables for men, and Allah is Cognizant of all things." [Qur'an, 24:35]

Individuals could use analogical reasoning, but one has to be aware of the potential for error that is present in that practice. More specifically, while God does employ similes, metaphors, parables, and analogies in the Qur'an, an important consideration to keep in mind is that God knows the precise meaning of such similes, metaphors, parables, and analogies, whereas human beings do not understand their meanings unless God chooses to disclose such understanding, insight, and knowledge to a given individual.

Therefore, when humans use analogies of their own construction as a basis for trying to establish the nature of the deen, then, there is a potential for considerable error. Only when one understands the

structural character of God's use of simile, metaphor, parables, and analogy, can one hope to tread a straight path, God willing, with respect to understanding and being able to gain access to the hukm – that is, the authoritative and governing principle with respect to the reality of something -- of whatever is under consideration.

One might approach the issue of qiyas in another, perhaps, more direct manner than the foregoing. Consider the following verses from the Qur'an:

"This, then, is Allah your God, the Lord, the Truth [your true Lord]." [Qur'an, 10:32]

"That is because Allah is the Truth." [Qur'an, 22:62]

"And God speaks the truth and leads [guides] to the way." [Quran, 33:4]

"Do you not see that God created the heavens and earth through [with] Truth." [Qur'an, 14:19]

"He did not create the heavens and earth and what is between them except through [with] Truth." [Qur'an, 30:8]

If God is truth, and if the Word of God is the truth, and if everything that has been created in the heavens and earth, as well as between them, is the truth, then what is one trying to accomplish when one seeks to construct a qiyas that attempts to establish a certain dimension of similarity between two things or that attempts to show the logical relationship of one thing to another? Presumably, one is trying to use qiyas as a means of elucidating, or giving expression to, the nature of a truth governing such situations.

However, if a given use of qiyas is incorrect, then, surely, as the Qur'an indicates:

"What is there after truth but falsehood [error]?" [10:32]

Moreover, according to the Qur'an:

"Allah's is the conclusive argument," [Qur'an, 6:149]

so, one must look to God in order to gain access, God willing, to the nature of such a conclusive argument with respect to any given application of qiyas.

As such, a qiyas is something that, itself, stands in need of further proof – from God – concerning the extent, if any, to which a particular

use of qiyas gives expression to truth. A qiyas, in and of itself, is nothing more than a proposal concerning a possible truth about, say, Sacred Law or the shari'ah, and one needs to have such a proposal confirmed by God rather than by human beings.

One might be able to follow the logical mapping entailed by some analogical relationship between two situations that is being proposed by this or that religious jurist, but this is not enough. One must know whether, or not, what is being proposed in the form of such a qiyas is acceptable to God as an appropriate manner of linking two situations with respect to helping one to better understand the nature of Sacred Law or the nature of shari'ah.

The use of qiyas in any given set of circumstances often operates with a hidden presumption. The presumption is that the analogical relationship or logical relationship that is being set forth through such use of the methodology of qiyas carries a Divine sanction, but this sanction is not demonstrated merely by putting forth a qiyas – one needs a further conclusive argument from God concerning the matter that only can come through spiritual disclosure and not rational argument.

In the Qur'an, one finds:

“Indeed, there have come to you clear proofs from your Lord; whoever will therefore see, *it is for his own soul* and whoever will be blind it shall be against him, and I am not a keeper over you.” [Qur'an 6:104]

Proof is a matter of understanding and seeing ... of having wisdom ... of being taught by Allah. Furthermore, this understanding is for each individual soul and is not something that is to be imposed on others.

The proof is in the understanding that comes to one's heart. Moreover, when one comes to understand the nature of the Divine proof, it becomes incumbent upon one – as a requirement of the way things are -- to act in accordance with that truth.

Unfortunately, some individuals are blind to this understanding even as they suppose that they see the truth. When one comes to understand how gravity operates, it behooves one to take into consideration the nature of gravity when dealing with physical reality. Similarly, when one comes to understand the nature of some spiritual

principle, then, it behooves one to take into consideration the nature of that spiritual principle when dealing with Being.

Such an understanding reflects part of the order of things. Once one knows something of that order, then, one departs from that order at one's own risk.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, none of what has been said so far necessarily rules out, or automatically invalidates, using the methodology of qiyas as a possible aid in relation to someone's spiritual deliberations concerning the nature of the Sacred Law. On the other hand, while the use of qiyas in any given situation might appear to be persuasive to an individual when it comes to the making of judgments and choices in his or her own spiritual journey, the method carries little authoritative, spiritual weight, in and of itself, unless one can demonstrate – in the sense of the sort of conclusive proof that belongs to God – that the qiyas in question reveals an important truth concerning the nature of the Sacred Law and/or shari'ah. More importantly, there is nothing about the logical force of any attempted use of qiyas, considered in and of itself, which has the capacity to justify trying to compel anyone to comply with the logic of such a qiyas, and this would be true even if the Qur'an had not already indicated that there can be no compulsion in matters of Deen.

In legalistic approaches to: the Qur'an, Sacred Law, and shari'ah, one is taught that the nature of the authoritative, governing principle of something's reality – that is, determining its hukm -- tends to be a function of deductive, inductive, and analogical modes of reasoning. However, one cannot use such rational methods to arrive at the hukm of a verse of the Qur'an – one must be taught this directly through spiritual means ... the depth and character of understanding being determined by: (1) the faculty through which one is taught or through which one comes to understand; (2) the extent of the Grace of disclosure that is manifested through that faculty, and (3) the character of one's spiritual capacity in such matters.

The surface meaning of a Quranic ayat is related to the hukm of that ayat. Nonetheless, the latter cannot be reduced to the former.

Whatever is plainly communicated in the Qur'an is the surface meaning of that verse, and God has given every human being the freedom to accept or reject what is being communicated through such

surface meanings. At the same time, in order to understand the full guidance of the Qur'an, one must be led to the nuances of how the collective meanings of the Qur'an might be most harmoniously and efficaciously brought together and be applied as one moves from one circumstance in life to the next, and this involves being brought back to the roots of things by God. One needs to be shown the hukm or reality or spiritual authority of something, and only God can do this ... only God can teach this. Thus:

“If you are God-fearing (have taqwa), He will give you discrimination.” [Qur'an, 8:29]

And again:

“Be God-fearing [have taqwa], and God will teach you.” [Qur'an, 2:28]

One cannot use the capacity of reason to penetrate through all levels of meanings inherent in God's communications. Beyond the capacity of reason are the capacities of heart, sirr, kafi, and spirit, and these additional faculties have capacities for knowing and understanding that transcend the capabilities of rational modes of knowing and understanding.

At best, rational methods might only grasp -- according to their capacity and only if God wishes -- something of the surface features of revelation. However, as indicated earlier, the surface meaning of an ayat is but one mode of resonance or wavelength or frequency arising out of the hukm of the Qur'an taken as a whole.

Just as light consists of an array of frequencies that give expression to the phenomenon of light, so, too, the Qur'an gives expression to an array of meanings that give expression to the hukm of any given Quranic ayat in a given instance of applied guidance. Furthermore, each of these meanings has a reality that is resonant with the overall reality of the Qur'an.

In the Qur'an one finds:

“So learn a lesson, O ye who have eyes.” [Qur'an, 59:2]

The Arabic term for “learning a lesson” in the foregoing is: i'tabiru.

The imperative form of i'tabiru comes from a verbal noun 'ubur that conveys a sense of "crossing over" as in from one bank of a river to the other, or as in making passage from one place to another.

Literally speaking, the term 'itibar' gives expression to a metaphor of sorts that involves a process of seeking to engage a mode of transport that takes one beyond the original or actual context of a given issue. In the context of the Qur'an, when one is trying to 'learn a lesson' one is seeking to cross over from the particulars that are being expressed through a given aspect of the external form of revelation to the underlying hukm or governing principle which is inherent in that external form.

Thus, to learn a lesson in the foregoing sense is to begin one's journey with the structural character of a given situation in terms of its facts, particularities, and contingent circumstances, and, then, use such a starting point to struggle or strive to gain insight into the nature of such a situation. To learn a lesson is to cross over from the surface features of a situation to its hukm – its governing principle, reality, or truth.

Virtually anyone might be able to see the external, surface features of a given set of circumstances, but not everyone might be able to grasp the spiritual meaning, significance of, or principle inherent in such a situation. Those who, by the Grace of God, successfully have made such a transition are those who have learned a lesson concerning that to which God is directing one's attention through this or that facet of revelation ... these are the ones who have eyes ... these are the ones who can accomplish the process of crossing over from worldly facts to a spiritual understanding concerning those facts.

The use of rational faculties – such as in the use of qiyas -- is one mode of crossing over. However, it is not the only mode of doing so, and, in fact, spiritually speaking, rational methods are the most limited, constrained, and problematic forms of crossing over because such methods tend to introduce a variety of distortions and biases into the crossing-over process – problems and distortions that reflect the form of logic inherent in the rational methodology that is being imposed on reality and that filters or frames what we experience by means of the logic of that methodology.

The crossing over process of learning a lesson from a given set of Quranic circumstances is more deeply and thoroughly understood when the faculties that are used to make passage from the external realm to the internal realm is done through, for example, the heart (especially the dimension of the heart known as fo'ad), sirr, kafi, and the ruh. All of the foregoing faculties are mentioned in the Qur'an – for example in conjunction with sirr and kafi, one finds: “God knows the secret (sirr) and that which is more hidden (kafi)” [Qur'an, 20:7] -- but, unfortunately, many theologians, religious scholars and jurists tend to restrict themselves to purely rationalistic methods when engaging the

Qur'an, and, as a result, run a very real risk of developing a skewed understanding concerning various Quranic passages.

The Qur'an

Many people want to treat the ayats of the Qur'an as an absolute list of injunctions that serve as rules for life that must be applied in the same manner in all circumstances with respect to the contingencies of life – which usually means in the manner prescribed by such individuals. In addition, all too many believe they have a God-given right to police the manner in which others go about pursuing shari'ah.

There are, of course, certain themes in the Qur'an that are absolute and, as such, do not change. For example: There is only one God, and Muhammad is a messenger and Prophet of God; the Qur'an is a Book of truth; there is a purpose to life; all of life involves a struggle of choosing between good and evil; human beings will be held accountable for what they do and do not do; purifying oneself plays an integral role in an individual's spiritual journey; acquiring, and acting in accordance with, character traits such as humility, equitability, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, generosity, integrity, honesty, gratitude, love, friendship, compassion, dependence on God, courage, sincerity, and steadfastness are essential tools for not only dealing with the difficulties of life but assisting one in one's search for truth, justice, essential identity, and the realization of one's unique spiritual capacity; faith is not only a condition that constitutes more than an exercise of blind belief but actually gives expression, if God wishes, to an array of modalities of understanding, insight, and wisdom concerning the nature of existence; empirical observation and reflecting or contemplating on what one observes is something that God encourages rather than discourages; one's intention should always be to serve God in whatever one does; one should seek to oppress neither others nor oneself; daily prayers, the fast of Ramazan, the payment of zakat, and the observance of the rites of Hajj all have the capacity to assist one to make progress along the spiritual path.

All of the foregoing are entailed by the process of shari'ah. Nevertheless, there is not just one way to engage such challenges – nor is there anything in the Qur'an which indicates that one must either reduce the possible ways of engaging shari'ah to what has been decided by, say, the five major madhabs (i.e., schools of jurisprudence) or that one must necessarily insist that shari'ah should be construed in terms of a legal system, or that one is entitled to impose one's

understanding of shari'ah onto other people ... even if there might be a majority of people in a community who wish to oppress and compel others in such a manner.

The Qur'an is not a collective revelation but an individual event. This is true not only with respect to the life of the Prophet, but this is also true in the life of anyone who seeks to engage the Qur'an in a sincere manner ... even though, from time to time in the Qur'an, individuals are being referred to collectively -- both generally [O humankind] or in particular circumstances [O Ye who believe].

It is individual fitra – in other words, one's primordial spiritual capacity -- that responds to Divine disclosure. We come to understand our duties of care with respect to all of Creation through our relationship with God. It is through our individual commitment to God that we are prepared to acknowledge the right that other aspects of Creation have over us, as well as the rights that we have over other facets of Creation.

Divine guidance is directed toward helping individuals to engage life as best they can and to apply such guidance to their individual lives as best they can. Forbidding the evil and encouraging the good are part of the discourse of community for, as the Qur'an indicates, one should:

“Enjoin the good and forbid the evil and bear patiently that which befalls you; surely these acts require courage.” [Qur'an, 31:17]

However, these actions of forbidding evil and encouraging good carry no authorization that justifies a person seeking to enforce onto others one's expectations concerning evil and the good with respect to how such people will conduct themselves in relation to matters of Deen. If this were not so, the Qur'an would not be indicating in the same context that forbidding evil and encouraging good must be pursued through patience and courage.

Forbidding the evil and encouraging the good must be done in accordance with an adab through which one uses kindness, respect, wisdom, and a beautiful form of communication that is alluded to in the Qur'an when speaking about such matters with others – namely:

“Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation and have disputations with them in the best manner.” [Qur'an, 16:125]

Moreover, when one comes to discover that such communications are not welcome, then, one should say peace and leave those individuals alone. As the Qur'an indicates:

"So turn away from them and say, Peace, for they shall soon come to know." [Qur'an, 43:89]

"And the servants of the Beneficent God are they who walk on the earth in humbleness, and when the ignorant address them, they say: Peace." [Qur'an, 25:63]

In asserting that Sacred Law and shari'ah primarily involve an individual struggle and not a collective one – although it is an individual struggle that has implications for the collective -- I am seeking to encourage the good. In claiming that Sacred Law and shari'ah should not be forcibly imposed on people I am seeking to forbid the evil.

"And (as for) those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance and gives them their guarding (against evil). [Qur'an, 47:17]

The words of Allah are the forms that issue forth from Kun and give rise to the manifest and the non-manifest. The hukm – that is, the governing principle of a given facet of reality – of such words is the authority of the truth of meaning that is being given expression through the names or linguistic forms of the Qur'an.

Authority for anything can only be given via the truth. One must grasp the truth to grab hold of the hukm or authority or governing principle of a given portion of text or word of the Qur'an.

Truth cannot come through human interpretation. Truth can only come through an understanding that is granted by Divine Generosity. As the Qur'an indicates:

"We raise by grades whom We will, and over every lord of knowledge, there is one more knowing." [Qur'an, 12: 76]

"We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and in themselves, until it is clear to them that God is the Real." [Qur'an, 41:53]

"The Real has come, and the unreal has vanished away. Lo! Falsehood is ever bound to vanish." [17:81]

When human beings seek to interpret the Qur'an, human conceptual constructs are being imposed upon Divine guidance. As long as human interference is present, then, the unreal will not vanish away.

To interpret the Qur'an is to interfere with the process through which God discloses the Divine signs upon the horizons and within us. It is the Real that banishes falsehood, not the interpretive efforts of human beings.

It is God Who raises one by degrees and grades of knowledge. This process of being raised is not done through the process of interpretation but through the act of sincerely listening to that which God is communicating to humankind.

The hukm or the governing authority of a given truth or reality influences the heart through the qualities of that truth and not through the need for compulsion or force. This is why there is 'no compulsion in Deen' because there is no need for compulsion when the heart is attracted by truth, and when the heart is not so attracted, no amount of compulsion can bring such a heart to an understanding of the truth.

Linguistic forms of Arabic are not the bearers of meaning, but, rather, they are portals through which Divine meanings might enter one's life. Linguistic forms constitute the structural character of the portal that gives expression to part of the Divine meaning that encompasses but extends beyond the portal through which one initially accesses that Ocean of Truth lying beneath the linguistic surface. In short, Quranic words are portals to a non-linguistic wisdom that if God wishes, informs a person's understanding of the linguistic form that serves as a covering for the portal.

"The Faithful Spirit has descended with it upon your heart that you may be of the warners ... in plain Arabic language." [Qur'an, 26:193-194]

The warnings inherent in the Qur'an are in plain Arabic language, but much more descends on the heart than just warnings. As the Qur'an informs us:

"O humankind! There has come to you a direction from your Lord, and a healing for the diseases in the hearts, and a guidance, and a mercy for the Believers." [Qur'an, 10:57]

“Qur’an” means ‘that which is recited’. The word: ‘Qur’an’ is an active verb.

Divinity recites the Word of God to the heart of the receptive individual, and, as an active verb, that recitation gives expression, if God wishes, to a continuing process of acting on the heart of the individual. The recitation of the Qur’an is a process of mediating between the receptive heart and the Author of such communications.

As an active verb, the Qur’an speaks to us now. The Qur’an is not a book of the past but, rather, it is a form of communication that is taking place in the present.

The Qur’an is perpetually new in its descent upon the receptive heart, but for those who are not properly receptive, then, their hearts are made to engage the Qur’an in a distorted manner that filters the Divine communications through the biases of unbelief and conceptual or ideological and theological idol-making – that is, through the filters of that which hides the truth that is shining forth. This is the nature of unbelief ... to hide the truth, and this is what one who recites the Qur’an does when his or her heart is not receptive with his or her whole being with respect to what is being communicated by God through the Qur’an.

In this respect, the Qur’an states:

“What? Is the person whose heart Allah has opened to Islam, so that such an individual is in a light from his Lord, like the hard-hearted? Nay, woe to those whose hearts are hard against the remembrance of Allah, those are in clear error.” [Qur’an, 39:22]

God indicated that the heart of His believing servant does contain Him. This descent of the truth of God’s Word into the heart of the believing servant is at the heart of nuzul or descent, for God is truth, and that which resonates with the truth when it has descended and is present, does contain God to whatever extent that truth has been realized.

The Qur’an continually brings new, better understandings and knowledge to the heart of the sincere believer without annulling any of the truths that have been brought to the hearts of believers previously. Moreover, all such meanings, knowledge, and truth have

been inscribed from the beginning within the infinite plenitude of the Word.

Each believing heart has a different structural capacity – or fitra -- for hearing the Qur’an’s Ocean of Truth. The Truth of God’s Word does not change – indeed, “The Words of God do not change [la tabdīla fi kalimati Llah]” [Qur’an, 10:64]. Nonetheless, the unchanging truth is engaged by different capacities that lead to an array of understandings that give expression to various dimensions and facets of that unchanging Word – all of which are true to precisely the extent to which those understandings give expression to such truth.

The Qur’an says:

“And do not make haste with the Qur’an before its revelation is made complete to you and say: O my Lord! Increase me in knowledge.” [Qur’an, 20:114]

One is being counseled to not make haste or to not be in a hurry with the Qur’an. One must exercise patience, diligence, sincerity, and have taqwa, or piety, concerning the process of laying oneself bare to be able to be open to what is being communicated through the Qur’an. One must allow oneself to marinate in the juices of Divine communications before their meanings will be made complete to one – that is, before understanding will descend from God to the heart of the individual.

The true reciter of the Qur’an is Allah. Consequently, the individual must wait for God’s recitation to enter one’s heart in the form of understanding and knowledge.

One cannot force this issue through compulsion. Moreover, no power of reflection, in and of itself, is capable of grasping truth.

Truth must be bestowed through a Divine recitation to the heart. One recites to provide an opportunity for the Reciter – that is, God -- to communicate through the Divine recitation in a manner that will move and influence one’s heart.

The knowledge must come from God and not from interpretation. When we interpret God’s communications, we actually leave the truth and/or hide that truth in the meanderings of one’s own meanings.

The Qur’an says:

“And who is more unjust than he who forges a lie against Allah or gives the lie to His communications; surely the unjust will not be successful?” [Qur’an, 6:21]

To interpret the Qur’an is, in effect, to forge a lie with respect to the Word of God.

In a sense, there is something like a spiritual vibration that is set up between the recited word of God and the internal faculties of the individual. When an individual is receptive to being guided – that is, when the individual has taqwa or piety -- then, God willing, there is an entrainment process that occurs wherein the faculties of the individual are shaped and colored by the resonances of Divine guidance, and the resulting condition is a species of knowledge that comes from Allah. In this regard, the Qur’an states:

“O humankind. We have created you from a male and a female and made you tribes and peoples so that you may know each other; surely, the most honorable among you with Allah is the one who has taqwa.” [Qur’an, 49:13]

-- in other words, the one who is most careful with respect to one’s Deen or relationship with Divinity.

All tajalli – that is, all flashes, disclosures, or manifestations of truth -- arise from encounters with the Word of God. The two books of the Word of God – i.e., revelation -- are the Qur’an and Creation or Nature. The individual must seek to open himself, or herself, up to the truth being manifested through both Revelation and Nature ... for this is what revelation is – the disclosure and manifestation of truth.

The spiritual capacity of the individual must be freed from all biases and sources of distortion in order to be open to the delineation of truth that shines through Nature and the Qur’an. Indeed:

“Those will prosper who purify (tazakka) themselves and glorify the Name of their Guardian Lord and lift their hearts in prayer.” (Qur’an, 87: 14-15)

The Qur’an and Nature/Creation are barqzikh. Barqzikh is the plural of barzakh that refers to any juncture that simultaneously separates and joins two sides – in this case, Divinity and humanity.

Considered from another direction, manzil is an Arabic term that, literally speaking, refers to a place where one gets off. In the current

context, a manzil is the place through which God descends, via the Qur'an, toward the individual such that the Divine communication, in a sense, gets off at the point of human engagement.

The letters, words, phrases, sentences, verses, and chapters of the Qur'an are all manzil. They are the portals or stations through which Divine communication descends to the individual.

In addition, the heart of the individual is also a manzil or place of descent for Divine revelation. Indeed,

“Wa huwa ma’akum aynama kuntum. (And He is with you wherever you are.)” [57:4]

When the individual's faculties of understanding are purified, then, according to the individual's capacity and the Grace of God [who gives by degrees], what is grasped is an understanding of truth on a certain level and not an interpretation of that truth. In other words, such understanding is a truth limited by individual capacity, degree of purity, and God's Grace. There is a resonance that is present between the individual's purified faculties and the truth – a resonance that is not present in the usual sense of understanding concerning someone's rational interpretation of something.

If the Qur'an does not descend upon the heart, then, it descends no further than the throat. To comply with the Sacred Law or Truth – which is the purpose and task of shari'ah -- is to submit to the truth of things according to one's purified capacity to understand such truth as this is communicated through the Word of God ... whether this is in the form of the Qur'an or Nature/Creation.

As such, Sacred Law is not a matter of judicial rulings, pronouncements, and/or the compulsory imposition of such rulings and pronouncements on other human beings. Rather, Sacred Law is about the Truth, and Deen is the way prescribed for allowing human beings – each according to her or his capacity and the degree of God's Grace -- to approach, engage, and come to understand the nature of such Sacred Law as it is manifested in any given set of circumstances.

Truth, of whatever kind and on whatever level, is the Sacred Law giving expression to the order, nature, and potential of Creation. In the Qur'an each article, verb, particle, word, or phrase constitutes individual portals of truth that manifest, if God wishes, tajalli -- flashes

or expressions of truth – to the individual. This is why letters, phrases, and parts of sentences in the Qur’an communicate guidance not only in and of themselves but, as well, in the context of the verses and surahs in which they appear.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) who is the paradigm of human perfection [uswa hasana], was described by his wife, ‘Ayesha [may Allah be pleased with her] as having a nature that was the Qur’an. To reflect [in understanding, action, and character] the Qur’an according to one’s spiritual capacity is to submit to the Sacred Law.

The realized fitra is that primordial spiritual capacity upon which the Qur’an has descended and through which God has made truth manifest according to the capacity of an individual’s fitra and God’s Grace. The realized fitra recites the Qur’an in the form of applying the communications from God to the circumstances of life and, in doing so, gives expression to the Sacred Law. This is the qirat, or mode of Quranic recitation, which is most pleasing to God.

“Most surely it is an honored Qur’an, in a book that is protected. None shall touch it save the purified ones.” (Qur’an, 56:77-79)

The Qur’an gives expression to the truths that are capable, God willing, of assisting the sincere seeker to recover the internal order or sacred law governing spiritual identity, capacity, and purpose with which human beings have lost contact ... and with which we no longer resonate. The Qur’an is intended as a means of guidance to assist human beings to reclaim an understanding of our original status as God’s Creation and all that this entails.

The Qur’an applauds:

“... those who are constant at their prayers” [Qur’an, 70:23],

but these prayers are not just the five daily prayers. Rather, true prayer or remembrance is the constant state of immersion in God’s presence, and, more importantly, there needs to be a realization that the prayers do not belong to the individual but, rather, are acts of God that are being manifested through the individual as a locus of manifestation.

“Lo! Ritual worship preserves one from lewdness and iniquity, and verily, remembrance of Allah is more important.” [Qur’an, 29:45]

Problems associated with any of the foregoing tend to arise from two sources. The first problem involves the condition of al-ghafla [forgetting, distraction, or inattention]. This condition or state refers to the inclination of human beings to lose focus with respect to our relationship with Divinity. For example, Surah 20, verse 115 of the Qur'an indicates that Adam "forgot" the pact that had been made with God – a forgetfulness that alludes and resonates with the Quranic ayat in which the spirits are asked:

"Alastu bi Rabikkum?" – "Am I not your Lord?"

And the spirits answered:

"Yes, we testify" [Qarbala]." [Qur'an, 7:172]

The second source of problems that might arise in conjunction with the process of seeking to realize one's essential and primordial spiritual nature is entailed by the idea of al-isti'jal – that is, haste. As the Qur'an indicates:

"And man prays for evil as he ought to pray for good, and man is ever hasty." [Qur'an, 17:11]

'Ubuda is a spiritual station through which perfect expression is given to the Sacred Law according to the capacity of an individual's God-given fitra. The true servant, or 'abd of God, is one who experiences a knowing awareness that the character of truth which is being manifested through that station of servanthood or locus of manifestation belongs wholly to God and not to the individual.

He who knows himself knows his Lord – man 'arafa nafsahu 'arafa rabbahu. Such knowledge discloses the condition of 'ubuda in which there is the realization that a'yun thabita – the fixed form of one's created nature -- is no more than a locus of manifestation for giving expression to Divine realities in accordance with the God-given capacities and limitations of such fixed forms.

Each of us has always been what we are in terms of the possibilities that are encompassed by our fitra or primordial spiritual capacity. However, we have not always realized the nature of the truth concerning the modality of our potential for giving expression to such Sacred Law and all that this Sacred Law entails.

The Qur'an is a source of guidance that, if God wishes, assists an individual to struggle toward the full, active realization of the Sacred

Law that is inherent in the essence of every human being. The Qur'an maps out the nature, principles, warnings, possibilities, understandings, wisdom, insights, limits, and adab of the shari'ah, or spiritual journey, through which one struggles and strives for realization of the Sacred Law, and as such, the Qur'an – and, therefore, shari'ah -- is an expression of the Sacred Law.

The Sacred Law gives expression to the Qur'an that, in turn, delineates the nature of the way through which human beings might, if God wishes, come to realize the nature of truth to varying degrees. This process of shari'ah leads back, if God wishes, to a condition of spiritual realization concerning the manner in which the Sacred Law gives expression to all truths under appropriate circumstances – including:

“O people, you are the poor toward God, and God is the Independent, the Praiseworthy.” [Qur'an, 35:15]

The tradition of tafsir deals extensively with what is known in Arabic as *asbab al-nuzul* [the circumstances or occasions through which revelation emerged]. Some suppose that without reference to this context of revelation, then, most of the verses of the Qur'an would be susceptible to any and all forms of interpretation.

However, the occasion surrounding the emergence of a given instance of revelation only serves as the locus of manifestation for such instances of revelation. Therefore, one must distinguish between the locus of manifestation and that which is manifested through that locus.

Nevertheless, to make revelation a function of the circumstances of revelation would be inappropriate. If one reduces the former [that is, what is manifested] to the latter [that is, the locus of manifestation], then, the locus of manifestation tends to become that which determines, restricts, shapes, and orients revelation. Approaching things in this manner seeks to assign a greater role to the lesser reality while relegating the greater Truth to becoming a servant of, and irrevocably limited by, a lesser realm of being.

Is there a relationship between the locus of manifestation [i.e., historical circumstances] and that that is manifested [i.e., revelation]?

Yes, sometimes – but not necessarily always – there is a resonance between the two, and certainly, there are aspects of that locus of manifestation [i.e., the circumstances through which revelation is manifested] that are illuminated by the light of guidance that is being given expression through those circumstances. Nonetheless, the lights of guidance have their own reality, and once manifested, those lights communicate truths beyond that which is being illuminated with respect to any particular locus of manifestation or immediate set of historical circumstances.

Contrary to the worries of some individuals – worries that were alluded to earlier -- not just any understanding of revelation becomes appropriate if one leaves aside the particulars of the historical context through which a given instance of revelation arose. The task of the individual is not to interpret the Qur'an, but, rather, one should be struggling to open oneself to objectively receive what God is seeking to communicate to one through revelation.

If one permits God to teach or guide one through revelation – which is, after all, the whole point of revelation – then one understands the truth according to one's capacity, and, as such, there is no interpretation. What occurs, if one proceeds in this fashion, is an understanding or insight that comes from the light of revelation and is limited only by one's current spiritual condition, along with one's ultimate spiritual capacity, and, most importantly, by the degree to which God chooses to disclose aspects of that truth to the individual.

One does not have to use the historical context through which revelation emerges to place limits on the possible meanings of the Qur'an. Divinity is the One Who infuses the Qur'an with its meanings and, therefore, limits of appropriateness or degrees of freedom.

Some of these degrees of freedom are imposed by Divinity in terms of the extent to which Grace is conferred on a person during an individual's engagement of the Qur'an, and vice versa. Some of these limits of appropriateness or degrees of freedom are introduced through the spiritual condition and the spiritual capacity of the individual.

Consequently, when the Qur'an is sincerely engaged, one cannot place just any meaning one wishes onto the Qur'an, and this remains true irrespective of whether, or not, one understands the historical

circumstances surrounding the occasion of revelation. Understanding is a function of the truth – whether written large or small – and there are dimensions of all revelation that extend beyond the historical occasion of revelation.

In fact, I think that expecting people to learn the entire history of the occasions surrounding revelation in order to be able to understand revelation is somewhat impractical. God is communicating the nature of Sacred Law to each human being through the Qur'an, and such nature has meanings that might be considered independently of the initial historical occasions of revelation.

Obviously, a person's understanding might be deepened and complemented through knowledge of the historical circumstances that are transpiring at the time of revelation. However, the scope of any given instance of revelation is not restricted to the particulars that are occurring when such revelation issues forth.

Moreover, oftentimes, the closest that some commentators are able to "place" certain revelations is in terms of whether a given revelation took place during the Meccan period or during the Medinan period. I am not certain how such a general placing of the occasion of descent of revelation can necessarily inform one about "the" necessary meanings of the revelation ... although some of the meanings of such revelation might address various aspects of such historical circumstances.

There were many, many things that were happening during the general period of time through which the Qur'an was made manifest ... politically, legally, culturally, socially, individually, and among different communities. Consequently, why should one select just one small facet of such events and proclaim that those circumstances should have the predominant controlling authority with respect to meanings and truths in relation to the nature of Quranic guidance?

Even in those instances where a given revelation can be historically placed in a precise manner with respect to what was historically transpiring at the time during which a given instance of revelation descended on the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the meaning of such guidance cannot be circumscribed by those historical events. The created particular [that is, historical

circumstance] cannot circumscribe or exhaust the significance of the uncreated universal [that is, Divine Guidance].

The Qur'an says:

"What is with you comes to an end, but what is with God remains."
[16:96]

Some General Issues Surrounding Shari'ah and Fiqh

As far as I have been able to determine, the Qur'an mentions the term shari'ah just once. In Surah 45, verse 18 one finds:

"O Prophet, We have put you on the Right Way (Shari'ah) concerning the religion, so follow it, and do not yield to the desires of ignorant people;"

In Arabic, the noun shari'ah refers to a place where animals would come for purposes of being able to drink water. The related verb shar'a involves the act of 'taking a drink'. By extension, both the noun and the verb forms allude to a path, road or way that leads to the place where one might take a drink.

There is another word, *shari'*, that is derived from the same root as the two previous words. This word refers to a lawgiver, legislator, or one who determines the law, but it also can refer to a street, path, or way.

If one combines the foregoing possibilities, one arrives at something along the following lines. Shari'ah is a way, path, or road that leads to a place at which one might drink that which has come from the One who has established the principles governing the individual, the way, the journey along the way, the process of drinking, and what awaits the individual at journey's end.

A lawgiver need not be one who passes legal injunctions. A lawgiver might be the one who organizes a situation so that it operates according to the possibilities that have been built into a given situation. As such, a lawgiver is one who establishes the degrees of freedom within which such a set of circumstances might unfold over time.

Gravity, electromagnetism, the weak force, and the strong force establish the degrees of freedom that appear to be involved in the way the physical world is manifested under a variety of circumstances. The regularities to which these four physical forces give expression are described in terms of laws, but these are laws concerning the nature of the ordered character of the physical realm ... they are not legal injunctions.

One needs to take such regularities into consideration when seeking to pursue various possibilities, but each of the forces contains

degrees of freedom that permit people to engage them in various ways. Scientists probe what is possible in this sense, and new technologies often emerge from such exploration – technologies that seek to take advantage of the properties and qualities of such regularities – hopefully, for purposes that are to the benefit of all humankind.

The same is true in the realm of spirituality. There are a variety of non-physical forces that act on, and through, human beings. These forces give expression to an array of regularities and degrees of freedom that permeate and envelop lived, spiritual existence.

Shari'ah is a process of probing what is possible within the spiritual realm in order to be able to discover that which might assist an individual to come to an understanding of the properties and qualities to which the realm of spirituality gives expression and that might be utilized for human benefit. Just as scientific explorations of the physical world might, God willing, lead to many ways -- within certain limits -- for engaging physical regularities, so, too, a rigorous exploration of the spiritual world might lead to many ways – within certain limits – for engaging spiritual regularities and from which, God willing, human beings might derive benefit.

Some individuals distinguish two realms when it comes to the order of the created universe. On the one hand, there is that which is encompassed by what is referred to as: *amr takwini* -- which alludes to the manner in which truth or reality is given expression through the realm of existent things. In this realm, the truth and reality of what is cannot be other than what it is.

When God says:

“I have not created human beings nor jinn except that they may worship Me” [Qur'an, 51:56-57],

this is an expression of the truth and reality of one of the dimensions of existence to which *amr takwini* gives expression. As such, this truth remains a reality irrespective of whether, or not, human beings and jinn seek to realize their God-given potential to worship Divinity.

Another expression of the truth or reality of *amr takwini* is alluded to in the following ayat of the Qur'an.

“The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein praise God and there is nothing that does not glorify God in praise, but you do not understand its manner of praise.” [Qur’an, 17:44]

All of created reality glorifies God, and this remains so irrespective of whether, or not, we are aware of this or understand that such is the case.

In fact, the whole of the Qur’an is an expression of *amr takwini*. Indeed, “Allah speaks the truth and guides to the way.” [Qur’an, 33:4], and the way to which Allah guides those who are fortunate enough to be open to this process is that which leads to realizing the truth that is manifested through the Words which God has spoken in the form of Divine books of revelation, such as the Qur’an, or in the form of the essential realities of created existence.

The realm of *amr takwini* cannot be other than it is.

“The Words of God do not change [la tabdīla fi kalimati Llah].” [Qur’an, 10:64]

In contrast to *amr takwini*, there is another Arabic term that is used by some commentators, and this is known as *amr taklifi*. This involves the normative realm of things, and, in fact, this realm gives expression to the manner in which people choose to acknowledge or accept the truth and realities of *amr takwini*, or that realm gives expression to the manner in which people choose to reject – in part or whole -- the truths and realities of *amr takwini*.

Shari’ah is an expression of *amr takwini* that has the capacity, God willing, to guide individuals in relation to the problems of spiritual navigation that characterize the realm of *amr taklifi*. However, having said this, one should not suppose that shari’ah is incumbent on anyone or that anyone can be compelled to submit to shari’ah.

There is no path to the truth except through truth. As such, shari’ah is a methodological set of truths that are capable, if God wishes, of leading an individual to the realization of the larger Truth of which shari’ah – in its sense as a path or way -- is but one expression.

The aforementioned set of truths cannot be reduced down to any one way of approaching the truth. At the same time, the degrees of freedom that are inherent in the nature of shari’ah are all in compliance with the Quranic guidance that stipulates:

“Go into the houses by their doors and be careful with respect to Allah, that you may be successful.” [Qur’an, 2:189]

To whatever extent an individual is able, by the Grace of Allah, to discover, adhere to, and apply the realities inherent in shari’ah, then, to that extent is such an individual able to struggle toward realizing the truths of amr takwini. To whatever extent an individual chooses to reject and/or not apply the realities inherent in shari’ah, then, to that extent will the person be kept distant, if God so wishes, from the truths and realities of amr takwini.

Some people tend to confuse the unalterable nature of the truths inherent in the methodology of shari’ah with the realm in which choices are made and proceed to try to argue that one is under compulsion to follow a given path of shari’ah. When this sort of confusion occurs, people are conflating the unalterable character of shari’ah – which is an expression of amr takwini -- with the spiritual tasks and challenges of the normative realm – which is an expression of amr taklifi – and, thereby, such people are seeking to claim that normative issues are of an unalterable and mandatory nature, as well – which is why they seek to make shari’ah compulsory.

The compulsory force that is being read into the imperative mood in certain ayats of the Qur’an often are confusing the metaphysical realities that are being alluded to through such ayats with the issue of normative choice with which God has endowed to all human beings. In other words, the Divine-ordering or determining of the Created universe gives expression to the ontological order of things and cannot be other than it is [it has been ordained as such ... it is the truth of things], and this remains so irrespective of what human beings do or say. Nevertheless, human beings are entirely free to acknowledge, or to not acknowledge, such truths and realities.

When God says that the nature of some aspect of Created existence is such and such, then, human beings are being told something about the nature of amr takwini that is entirely independent of our understanding concerning those things. When God encourages or warns or urges or seeks to persuade human beings to pay attention to such realities, this is not an order, but, rather, this gives expression to guidance concerning a path that, if God wishes, might carry one to understanding the way things are.

There is a difference between a Divine decree or determination or order that gives expression to the truth of reality – i.e., what reality is irrespective of what humans say or do – and a Divine encouragement/urging to do that which is in one’s best interests but that can still be resisted by a human being. The latter is a normative issue, and, therefore, it is not compulsory [i.e., it is a matter of choice], whereas the former is metaphysical and sufficient no matter what human beings might think, say, or do about the way reality is.

A person does not have to believe in gravity in order for gravity to govern what that person can and cannot do. This will remain so irrespective of whether, or not, the individual likes this aspect of the way things are and irrespective of whether, or not, the individual accepts the idea of gravity as being an expression of the truth of things.

Recognizing that shari’ah is the way to truth because it is an expression of the truth is one thing. Claiming that, therefore, people can and should be compelled to obey shari’ah is an entirely different matter and, as indicated previously, confuses the ontological realm with the normative realm.

All sin is a dysfunctional expression of the normative realm – that is, the choices we make -- concerning our engagement of the ontological realm ... in other words, the way things are. Sin interferes with the process of working toward, or realizing, or coming to an understanding of the reality of things. Sin is problematic because of the manner in which it distorts, biases, and camouflages the nature of truth, and the path to truth, and our grasp of the truth.

“Evil is the likeness of the people who reject Our communications and are unjust to their own souls.” [Qur’an 7:177]

The communications being referred to in the foregoing ayat are not just the Divine revelations that have been sent to humankind. The communications being referred to allude to whatever words of God that might be issued through the command of “Kun” – that is, be or become – to which the Created universe gives expression.

Sin is a transgression against the Sacred Order of the Created universe in a manner that is similar to instances in which violations of the law of gravity constitute transgressions against the Sacred Order of the Created Universe. There are boundaries of transgression that

have been set up as the natural order of things, and if one crosses those boundaries, then, there are problematic ramifications arising out of such transgressions.

When one fails to observe the boundaries of transgression associated with gravity, then, problematic ramifications of a physical nature arise. When one fails to observe the boundaries of transgression associated with human potential and identity, then, problematic ramifications of a moral, spiritual, and epistemological nature arise as we become deaf, dumb and blind to the truth of things.

Sin is whatever gets in the way of our understanding the true reality of Being. Sin is whatever gets in the way of our ability to access certain dimensions of truth. Sin is whatever gets in the way of our doing justice to creation (including ourselves), and sin is whatever gets in the way of our doing proper service to the purpose of Creation.

Sin leaves its imprint and influence upon us, just as ignoring the law of gravity can leave its imprint and influence upon us. Ignoring these physical and spiritual principles can lead to deadly consequences.

Sin affects our capacity to understand truth or to realize our spiritual potential and our essential identity, or to develop the stations of character that all serve as supports to the basic struggle and striving to grasp the truth of things ... to grasp the sacred order and principles of the Universe. This is the Sacred Law toward which the Qur'an is seeking to draw our attention.

Only about 500 [600 according to some scholars] of the 6,219 verses of the Qur'an have what is said to be a 'legal' element to them. Most of these 500-600 verses involve various aspects of different rituals of worship -- involving wuzu, prayer and times of prayer, zakat, Hajj, fasting, and dietary restrictions. When one subtracts these ayats involving guidance concerning rituals of worship from the aforementioned set of 500-600 verses, one is left with approximately 80 verses that involve other issues such as: Contracts, marriage, divorce, inheritance, the giving of testimony, adultery, fornication, the use of alcohol, and forms of punishment.

If we leave aside the vast majority of the aforementioned 500-600 Quranic verses that concern rituals of worship and just focus on the

80, or so, verses that involve matters other than the basic pillars of Islam, one needs to ask several fundamental questions. For example, what evidence is there in the Qur'an that demonstrates that the 80 verses in question must take priority over the many other forms of spiritual guidance that are given in the Qur'an? Or, approached from a slightly different direction, what evidence is there in the Qur'an that any of these 80 verses cannot be modulated in various ways as a function of applying the many verses of the Qur'an – which are far more than 80 in number -- that deal with matters of: love, forgiveness, patience, humility, nobility, kindness, generosity, compassion, tolerance, sincerity, respect for others, peace, harmony, wisdom, reconciliation, gratitude, and the like? Or, approached from a still different juncture, what evidence is there in the Qur'an which demonstrates that many of the specific indications being expressed through the 80 verses in question were necessarily intended for all people, in all circumstances, across all times rather than constituting specific guidance for the people who lived in the time of the Prophet?

When God addresses people in the Qur'an with phrases such as: "O ye who believe", how do we know what the referent of "ye" is? Does it refer to just the believers in the times of the Prophet, or does it refer to all believers in all times and circumstances, and how does one know which is the case?

Moreover, given the physical absence of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in today's world, even if one were to know which of the foregoing possibilities is true, does anyone today really have the spiritual authority to impose such directives on other human beings? How does one go about demonstrating the grounds of such alleged authority?

The spiritual authority of the Prophet in such matters is one thing. The spiritual authority of non-Prophets in such matters might be quite another issue – in fact, with respect to the latter sort of scenario, such authority might be non-existent.

Or, let's ask another question. If one wishes to treat the aforementioned 80 verses as legal injunctions that are to be forcibly imposed on human beings, then, why should one not treat as legal injunctions -- which also should be forcibly imposed upon people -- all of the Quranic directives concerning patience, love, forgiveness,

tolerance, gratitude, humility, and so on? In other words, even if, for purposes of discussion, one were to entertain the idea that there might be aspects of Deen that people are to be forcibly compelled to obey – something that I believe the Qur’an clearly prohibits – why are only certain dimensions of Quranic guidance to be compulsory?

The Qur’an gives great emphasis to the importance of developing qualities of character. In fact, the Qur’an gives far more attention to the issue of character than it directs toward matters of theft, adultery, and drunkenness.

So, should one be every bit as punitive with respect to people’s failure to display qualities of, for example, kindness, love, gratitude, humility, forgiveness, and tolerance in the same manner as many aspects of the Muslim community wish to do with respect to moral failings that lead to drunkenness, adultery, or theft? And, if not, then, why not -- given that the entire Qur’an gives expression to guidance?

Unfortunately, I suspect there are all too many individuals in all too many Muslim communities who might find the foregoing approach to things very enticing so that not only would one, for instance, be able to beat men if they don’t have a beard – even though nowhere in the Qur’an is such guidance given – but such a perspective might also lead to punishing people, in some way, for not pursuing Islam in accordance with the manner in which such self-appointed experts believed that others should behave.

If someone is not kind enough, then beat that person. If someone is not tolerant enough, then give the individual 50 lashes. If someone is not forgiving enough, then stone that person.

Of course, one might want to be careful about that for which one wishes. After all, if one pursued the foregoing form of logic, then, one might have to beat the beaters because they were not being sufficiently kind. One might also have to consider giving 50 lashes to the ones administering the lashes because they were not sufficiently tolerant toward the ones they were lashing. Moreover, one might have to think about stoning the stoners because they were not being sufficiently forgiving of the ones whom they were stoning.

If someone wears fingernail polish or lipstick, or if someone does not wear hijab, then, many theologian, religious scholars, and mullahs

want to punish such people. Yet, nowhere in the Qur'an does one find any authority or justification – other than that which is invented and, then, imposed onto a Qur'an that is silent concerning these matters -- to punish people in such a fashion with respect to these kinds of issues.

One should not construe the questions being raised in the foregoing as being tantamount to advocating some form of libertine approach to society in which people are to be free, with impunity, to be able to do whatever they like. Rather, the questions that are being raised have to do with the very complex problem of what are the permissible ways, or degrees of freedom, through which one might engage the guidance of the Qur'an.

What degrees of freedom does the Qur'an permit? Who gets to decide this, and what is the justification for doing things in one way rather than another?

What is entailed by the issue of Deen and what is entailed by the regulation of public space or the commons? Are the two necessarily the same? Is shari'ah primarily a matter of Deen, or is shari'ah intended to regulate public space so that everyone must go about the pursuit of shari'ah in precisely the same way?

Do matters such as theft, adultery, and abuse of alcohol carry problematic ramifications for society? Yes, they do.

Does the Qur'an specify what might be done in conjunction with such behavior? Yes, in the case of theft and adultery but not in the case of alcohol consumption.

Is one obligated to follow the specific punishments that are indicated in the Qur'an for theft and adultery? Not necessarily, since there might be other approaches to such issues that could be developed using principles of guidance that not only are communicated through the Qur'an but that tend to permeate the vast majority of Quranic teachings.

During his lifetime, the Prophet observed certain principles and made certain kinds of judgment in relation to the guidance communicated through the Qur'an. However, do we necessarily know that if the Prophet were physically amongst us today that he would continue to do things in precisely the same way as was done more than 1400 years ago, or would the Prophet – due to changes in

circumstances, conditions, capacities, peoples, and times – choose to give expression to the guidance of the Qur’an through different ways of seeking to resolve issues?

The Prophet was given authority by God to judge various occurrences and events that took place in the surrounding community *if* he were called upon to do so.

“Surely we have revealed the Book to you with the truth that you might discern between people by means of that which Allah has taught you [or has you see] and be not an advocate on behalf of the treacherous.” [Qur’an, 4:105]

However, one is making a rather substantial inferential jump to suppose that such authority has been delegated to anyone in the Muslim communities of today.

Furthermore, people might be confusing two different issues. On the one hand, the Prophet has a role that, among other things, involved communicating and explicating the nature of shari’ah. On the other hand, the Prophet had a role that involved certain responsibilities – including the authorization of punishment -- concerning the regulation of public space in a particular set of historical circumstances.

The latter responsibilities – that is, the regulation of public space - do not necessarily have anything to do with the former responsibilities – that is, the delineation of shari’ah. Yet, many people assume that the regulation of public space and the pursuit of shari’ah are one and the same or that the regulation of public space is but a subset of, or entailed by, shari’ah.

I do not believe the regulation of public space is an expression of shari’ah. I do not believe that the regulation of public space is a subset of shari’ah.

By pursuing shari’ah in a sincere fashion, one might, if God wishes, develop the sort of character traits (such as honesty, patience, forbearance, kindness, integrity, compassion, and so on) as well as spiritual understandings that might enhance the quality of what transpires in public space and could constructively shape what occurs in that public space or commons. However, the regulation of public space is tied to Divine guidance in a totally different way than the

manner in which shari'ah is tied to Divine guidance [and there will be more said on this issue in the last section of this essay.]

One should not infer from the foregoing that what is being proposed here is that nothing should be done when problems and conflicts arise in the public space. Instead, what is being suggested is that there are serious questions of credibility or legitimacy surrounding the claim of any person

in today's world indicating that he or she has been delegated the authority - either by God or the Prophet - with respect to the imposition of certain kinds of punishments in relation to various kinds of problematic behavior.

Why roughly 80 Quranic verses have come to totally dominate, color, and orient the understanding of so many Muslims with respect to how one should engage and approach the totality of Quranic guidance concerning the regulation of public space is an interesting question. There are likely to be many forces - historical, cultural, social, gender-related, philosophical, theological, and political - that are at work and that have helped to bring about the present state of affairs.

Unfortunately, the bottom line in all of this is that shari'ah has been made into a public issue when, in fact, it is a private matter. Spirituality has all too frequently been subordinated to systems of theology, power struggles, and what can only be described as a pathological desire to control and, thereby, oppress, the lives of other human beings. With only a few exceptions -- limited mostly to the Prophets and, possibly, a few others -- there ought not to be any system of leadership that seeks to have influence over, or to make impositions upon, the spiritual lives of human beings.

In fact, the prophets, themselves, did not seek to control the spiritual lives of anyone. Instead, they gave the good news, and they conveyed the warnings:

"And We do not send emissaries but as announcers of good news and givers of warning, then whoever believes and acts aright, they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve." [Qur'an, 6:48]

Guidance is not a set of legal injunctions that must be obeyed. Guidance is not a demand for obedience but is an attempt to draw

one's attention to a path that travels through, toward, and by means of truth, justice, identity and purpose.

Spirituality has become legalized in the sense that it has been reduced to being a function of legal dogmas and rules that tend to oppress spirituality rather than serve as a means of realizing and unleashing the rich potential of spirituality. Spirituality has been made a matter of obedience when, in truth, spirituality is entirely at the opposite end of the spectrum from matters of obedience.

Spirituality is about honoring – through realizing and fulfilling – the amana or trust that has been bequeathed to human beings. Spirituality is not intended to be a process through which one cedes one's moral or intellectual authority to others.

Spirituality is about coming to understand what it means to be a servant of God. Spirituality is about becoming one who creatively serves the responsibilities of being God's Khalifa on earth and, by doing so, gives expression to worship in everything one does.

It is not possible to realize the amana or trust through obedience to authority. Doing things in accordance with obedience to authority removes the active and dynamic element of personal responsibility, commitment, and on-going intellectual and moral choice that is necessary for the struggle entailed by spirituality.

The intention with which one pursues spirituality should not be to satisfy authority, qua authority, but should be directed toward seeking, according to one's capacity to do so, the truth concerning oneself and one's relationship with Being and to do justice in accordance with that truth. The inclination toward obedience, qua obedience, is an expression of a person's desire to get out from underneath the burden of having to constantly be engaged in the spiritual journey in which one travels, God willing, from: what is less true and less just, to: what is more true and more just.

Sincere spirituality requires one to stand alone before God and strive to affirm [through understanding and action] the nature of one's relationship with God ('Am I not your Lord?') in every facet of life. This affirmation is not done out of, or through, obedience but is, rather, an expression of one's understanding concerning the way

things are with respect to the natural order of the Created universe and one's place in that universe.

In the Qur'an, one finds the following:

"No soul can believe except by the Will of Allah, and He will place doubt/obscurity on those who will not understand." (Qur'an, 10:100)

According to one sense of the foregoing Quranic ayat, those who choose to not believe in the truth will have doubt or obscurity placed upon them. This is one of the possible consequences that might follow from such a choice ... but God knows best.

However, one might also want to give some consideration to another possible sense that might resonate with the foregoing verse of the Qur'an. More specifically, if one fails to understand that "no soul can believe except by the Will of Allah" and, as a result, one seeks to compel people to believe in, and conform to, a certain theological or religious perspective, then, one runs the risk that doubt and obscurity about many matters concerning spirituality might be placed on the one who insists on compelling the obedience of others concerning matters of Deen.

Understanding shari'ah is rooted in direct knowledge. Understanding is not rooted in the imposition of external directives.

As the saying goes - 'to those who understand, no explanation is necessary, and for those without understanding, no explanation will suffice.' One can allude to the nature of shari'ah, but the only proper way to understand this sacred realm is through direct experience ... to have God take one by the hand and lead one to the place where one might drink, God willing, from the waters of Truth.

"So, they found one of our abds [abdan min ibadina] on whom We had bestowed a Mercy from Us, and We taught him knowledge from Our presence [ladunna]" [Qur'an, [18:65]

The hukm - that is, the governing authority and principles or reality - of shari'ah is with Allah. The hukm of shari'ah does not reside with aql or intellect or the manner in which the public sphere is regulated.

In fact, the way in which the public space is regulated could be totally corrupt or oppressive or embroiled in turmoil. Nevertheless, none of what goes on in the public space can prevent an individual,

God willing, from pursuing and, if God wishes, even realizing the truth of shari'ah – although, certainly, what takes place in the public space can place difficulties and obstacles in the way of the person who wishes to seek the hukm of shari'ah.

What goes on in the realm of public space can problematically or constructively affect an individual's pursuit of shari'ah, and, in addition, the extent to which an individual sincerely pursues shari'ah can constructively or problematically affect what goes on in the public space. However, the pursuit of shari'ah entails activities that are entirely independent of the sort of activities that are entailed by the regulation of public space.

Divine guidance provides insights concerning both the activities of shari'ah as well as the activities of regulating public space. Moreover, there are degrees of freedom inherent in the Divine guidance that permit both shari'ah and the regulating of public space to be approached and engaged in a variety of ways even as certain principles are kept constant.

Various religious scholars, theologians, and mullahs want shari'ah to cover commercial/economic, penal, real estate, contract, tort, inheritance, family, tax, government, and international law. However, none of these considerations – however important they might be under certain circumstances -- is the purpose of shari'ah.

Naturally, to the extent that individuals realize the purpose of shari'ah, then, the water drunk at the end of the road that is followed during the process of observing shari'ah – both as a spiritual means and as a goal -- will have ramifications for all of the foregoing legal considerations. This is true with respect to the modes of equitability, as well as the quality of the character traits, through which people engage one another in their respective dealings. This also is true with respect to the manner in which a person who has responsibility for helping to arbitrate and mediate conflicts within a community is able to bring spiritual wisdom or insight to bear to assist people to come to harmonious solutions to such conflicts.

Nonetheless, shari'ah is only for the individual. It is the individual's path to truth, to reality, to the realization of fitra and

essential identity, and, as such, shari'ah is not a group path or legal journey ... although, as indicated above, the realization of truth that, God willing, takes place, during the journey of shari'ah does have ramifications for both group/social/community and juridical issues ... but not in the sense that is usually believed to be the case.

Shari'ah cannot be forcibly imposed on anyone, nor can compulsory measures be used to impose those matters on others. Shari'ah cannot be legislated, and when counsel is sought with respect to shari'ah, one is not obligated to follow that counsel unless one's heart resonates with what is being said or unless one's heart resonates with the one who is offering the counsel, and, therefore, one has faith in the counsel being offered and provided that the counsel being offered does not induce one to impose that counsel on others or oppress others through such counsel.

Shari'ah cannot be used as basis for institutional government of any kind. On the other hand, the fruits of pursuing and applying shari'ah can benefit the manner through which public space is regulated.

The Prophet and the subsequent caliphs ruled in accordance with the truth to which shari'ah opened them up. Nonetheless, their manner of regulating public space was not shari'ah, per se.

During those early times, people who were not Muslim were not compelled to become Muslim or to act in accordance with Muslim spiritual traditions. Moreover, this absence of compulsion with respect to non-Muslims is the clearest indication possible that shari'ah was neither compulsory, nor was it being imposed on communities, nor was it an integral part of the regulation of public space.

Rather, a public space or commons was being established through which people would have freedom of choice, as well as freedom from oppression, together with the promise of justice so that the opportunity to pursue shari'ah in a peaceful manner would be available to everyone. Whatever laws were constructed with respect to commercial, penal, real estate, contract, tort, inheritance, family, and international issues were intended to serve no other purpose than to help establish a public space that was relatively peaceful, harmonious, and free from oppression of any kind and through which people would

each, individually, have the opportunity to pursue [or not pursue] shari'ah according to her or his individual choices.

Consequently, none of the foregoing sorts of laws concerning the regulation of public space carry any binding authority except to the extent that these arrangements give such substantial, demonstrable expression to principles of truth and justice that the people in the community are witnesses to the obvious benefit of those laws with respect to the manner in which they serve the public interest. Moreover, the public interest is served when an environment is created that is relatively free from oppression and injustice, as well as which gives people an array of degrees of freedom through which the members of that community might become committed to a rigorous seeking of truth and justice in all matters.

In the Qur'an, one finds the following guidance:

"No soul shall have imposed on it a duty but to the extent of its capacity." [Qur'an, 2:233]

And again:

"We do not impose on any soul a duty except to the extent of its ability." [Qur'an, 6:152]

And, again:

"And we do not lay on any soul a burden except to the extent of its ability." [Qur'an, 23:62]

And again:

"We do not impose on any soul a duty except to the extent of its ability." [Qur'an, 7:42]

And, finally:

"Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty but to the extent of its ability; for it is (the benefit of) what it has earned and upon it (the evil of) what it has wrought: Our Lord! do not punish us if we forget or make a mistake; Our Lord! do not lay on us a burden as Thou did lay on those before us; Our Lord do not impose upon us that which we have not the strength to bear; and pardon us and grant us protection and have mercy on us; Thou art our Patron, so help us against the unbelieving people." [Qur'an, 2:286]

On five different occasions, the Qur'an confirms that Allah does not impose any burdens, duties, or obligations on an individual that are beyond the ability or capacity of a person. God knows what the capacity or ability of any given individual is, and Divinity does not exceed the limits inherent in those capacities.

As we, God willing, acquire more knowledge and come to gain a deeper understanding concerning our relationship with Allah, then, the nature of our spiritual status changes. As a result, there is more for which we can be held accountable as a function of such growth in understanding and knowledge, but this is a Divine accountability and not a human accountability as far as matters of Deen are concerned.

When human beings seek to impose shari'ah – however construed – on others, such individuals are arrogating to themselves the status of Lordship. They are not only seeking to usurp God's relationship with the individual, but they also are claiming – without any evidence -- that they know what the spiritual capacity is of a given individual.

In the process, limits are being transgressed. Allah sees the spiritual condition of human beings and knows what the limits of their capacities are, but theologians, jurists, imams, rulers, or legislators do not enjoy such a privileged position, and, therefore, they lack the knowledge and insight that would permit them to possess the wisdom to know what an individual's God-determined limits are and act accordingly.

The Prophet was said to have spoken with people according to the level of understanding of the latter. Unfortunately, for the most part, the theologians and religious scholars of today tend to speak with people according to the level of understanding of the one who is doing the speaking – that is, the theologian or religious scholar – and, as such, often tend to lack all insight into the capacities, abilities, and levels of understanding of those being addressed.

The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said:

“What I have commanded you to do, perform it to the extent that you are able and refrain from what I have forbidden you to do.”
[Bukhari, *i'tisām*, 6; Muslim, *fadā'il*, 130]

Here, again, there is an indication that shari'ah is not a function of compulsion, nor is shari'ah a matter of one size fitting all. The Prophet

is alluding to the existence of differences in abilities and circumstances of various individuals, and those who are being addressed are being encouraged to comply with what has been said in accordance with what they are able to do rather than in accordance with what someone else – say a theologian, religious scholar, or the like -- expects such people to do.

“Each one does according to his rule of conduct, and thy Lord is best aware of the one whose way is right.” [Qur’an, 17: 84]

There is a hadith qudsi that says:

“I am according to the impression that My worshipper has of Me [that is, God] so let the impression of Me be Good.” [Bukhari, tawhid, 15]

Theologians, imams, muftis, and jurists often rule in accordance with their own opinions about God. As a result, they tend to be inclined to impose on others that which is in accordance with their impression of God.

Apparently, the impression that all too many Muslim theologians, jurists, muftis, and religious scholars seem to have of God is that Allah is: petty, small-minded, vindictive, unforgiving, intolerant, cruel, punitive, arbitrary, mean-spirited, lacking in wisdom, oppressive, and in desperate need of obedience. Such a poor impression seems to be the case because these sorts of qualities often are reflected in their fatwas, pronouncements, rulings, and writings concerning the illicit attempts of these sorts of individuals to impose shari’ah on others, and one presumes that they are acting in accordance with what their impression of God indicates is expected of them by God.

The word ‘qadi’ often is translated as ‘judge’. However, such a translation really doesn’t properly reflect the actual role that a qadi should have.

A qadi – in its original sense and usage -- refers to one who helps settle or decide an affair (‘qada’). Nevertheless, this process of settling an affair is not a matter of imposing a judgment on the various parties to the affair under consideration.

A qadi is not trying to impose a perspective that is external to either the particulars of the situation being explored or the individuals

who are seeking a just resolution to that situation. Rather, the task of, and challenge facing, a qadi is one of trying to assist individuals to navigate among an array of spiritual possibilities and work their collective way toward a destination that will be a harmonious solution for everyone involved – without necessarily knowing, in any predetermined manner, what the nature of such a destination will be or what that destination might look like at the beginning of the journey.

As such, a qadi is more of a resource person, facilitator, and a communicator than she or he is a judge of matters. The parties to a given conflict are helped by a qadi to explore the nature of that conflict in terms of its history, perceptions concerning that history, the nature of community and/or family, different needs of the parties to the conflict or affair, various character traits, the abilities of the individuals involved, and ideas concerning the nature of justice.

A qadi encourages the participants to address and discuss issues in such a way that the participants are the ones who learn how to struggle their way toward arriving at an understanding concerning how their affair or situation might best be resolved. The qadi guides this exploratory discussion in accordance with a principle voiced by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) – namely, “la darar wa la dirar”, which in today’s parlance might be translated as ‘do no harm’.

In the Qur’an one finds the following ayat:

“And it does not beseem the believers that they should go forth all together; why should not then a company from every party from among them go forth they may apply themselves to obtain understanding of deen, and that they may warn their people when they come back to them that they may be cautious.” [Qur’an 9:122]

Fiqh is related to the word: *tafaqquh* which means understanding and, in the context of the foregoing Quranic ayat, the understanding that is being sought concerns the nature of Deen.

Furthermore, such understanding is not something that is to be imposed on people. Rather, the previous Quranic ayat says that those who seek such understanding are to use the knowledge that is

obtained in order to “warn their people” so that those people “may be cautious” concerning matters of Deen.

In addition, the Qur’an indicates:

“We have revealed [anzallna] to you al-zikr [The Qur’an] so that you may explain to people what has been brought down [nuzila] to them; and that they may reflect.” [Qur’an, 16:44]

Shari’ah is not necessarily a matter of telling people what to do – although this might be so in some instances. Instead, the Qur’an indicates that people are having things explained to them concerning the nature of revelation or remembrance, and, then, those individuals are being asked to reflect on that which is being explicated so that they might take what is being said and have it inform their own shari’ah or journey/struggle toward the truth.

The process of understanding Deen – tafaqquh fil-din – requires one to struggle toward becoming open or receptive to the hukm of Deen – that is, its governing principle, reality, or truth – in any given set of circumstances. Hakim is one of the Divine Names and refers to the One Who determines the property of a given aspect of reality, and, therefore, the individual is seeking to become open to the nature of the truth or reality that Allah, through the agency of being Hakim, establishes as the governing authority or principle or reality of something in a given set of circumstances.

In this context, one often hears the term Usul al-fiqh. Fiqh, as already indicated, refers to the process of struggling to reach an understanding concerning the nature of the hukm or governing reality of Deen within various circumstances, and the term usul refers to the sources or principles one needs to understand in order to be in a position to be able to counsel or warn others with respect to the nature of Deen.

The principles and sources that are to be understood are all contained in the Qur’an. After all, God has “neglected nothing in the Book.” [Qur’an, 6:38]

Fiqh is the process of engaging the Qur’an for purposes of struggling toward the truth with respect to revelation or guidance. Fiqh is a search for right understanding, right belief, right character,

right action, and right balance in the pursuit of doing justice to the truth or hukm of individual lived circumstances.

Each novel situation presents the practitioner of fiqh with possibilities and choices in relation to selecting that which might be right, good, just, and/or appropriate behavior to pursue with respect to that which, God willing, might be of most spiritual benefit to an individual or individuals in a given context. Fiqh is the process of seeking to come to an appropriate understanding of the hukm – or reality and governing principle or authority -- for a given set of circumstances, and, then, using that understanding to establish what are appropriate ways for proceeding through or conducting oneself in such circumstances.

A qadi seeks to induce the parties to a conflict to engage in the process of fiqh concerning the affair or conflict or issue that brought the various parties. Collectively, those individuals seek to struggle, with the assistance of the qadi, toward arriving at an understanding of the hukm – that is, the governing principle or reality – that has authority in the matter at hand.

For many, there is a sense in which life takes on the appearance of a judicial proceeding. For example, Muslims believe there is to be a Day of Judgment. We are further informed that what we do, and do not do, will be used as evidence -- both in support of, as well as being counted against, us -- and that our hands, feet, and other bodily members will give testimony concerning various matters on the Day of Judgment. Muslims also believe that punishments and rewards are associated with the manner in which evidence and judgment intersect with one another. Muslims further believe that a record of everything one does in life is being maintained and that each of us will carry such a record in either our right hand in front of us or our left hand behind us on the Day of Judgment.

Given considerations like the foregoing, when shari'ah and Sacred Law are mentioned together, many people are inclined to jump to the conclusion that Sacred Law and shari'ah must be matters that give expression to legal injunctions. Nevertheless, one can stipulate to the truth of ideas involving: the Day of Judgment, evidence, testimony, a real-time record, punishment, or reward, and, yet, still maintain that the Sacred Law and shari'ah are not, ultimately, about judicial

proceedings but, rather, are about truth, knowledge, understanding, spiritual realization, essential identity, and the process of purification that is necessary to, God willing, put a person in the position of being receptive to whatever God might wish to disclose to that individual concerning the nature of Sacred Law and the process of shari'ah.

Life consists of a series of opportunities through which to purify ourselves. For example, the Qur'an says:

"That person prospers who purifies oneself, invokes the name of one's Lord, and prays." [Qur'an, 87: 14].

And, again:

"But those will prosper who purify (tazakka) themselves and glorify the Name of their Guardian Lord and lift their hearts in prayer." [Qur'an, 87: 14-15]

And, again:

"Those who spend their wealth for increase in self-purification and Have in their minds no favor from anyone for which a reward is expected in return, but only the desire to seek for the Countenance of their Lord Most High." [Qur'an, 92:18-20].

This last ayat in particular indicates that the purpose of purification is linked only to a "desire to seek for the Countenance of their Lord Most high" – without any thought of reward. This theme is echoed in another verse of the Qur'an:

"Say: Surely, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and death are all for Allah, the Lord of the worlds." [Qur'an, 6:162]

Or consider the following verses from Surah Shams [The Sun]:

"In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

I swear by the sun and its brilliance,

And the moon when it follows the sun,

And the day when it shows it,

And the night when it draws a veil over it,

And the heaven and Him Who made it,

And the earth and Him Who extended it,

And the soul and Him Who made it perfect,

Then He inspired it to understand what is right and wrong for it;
He will indeed be successful who purifies it,
And he will indeed fail who corrupts it." [Qur'an, 91:1-10]

According to my shaykh (spiritual guide), the rhetorical style of the Qur'an is such that whenever God wishes to draw attention to the importance of some given point, theme, or issue, oaths are used to introduce such a point, theme, or issue. The more oaths there are that occur prior the matter in question, the more important is the issue to which our attention is being directed.

Nowhere else in the Qur'an can one find as many oaths piled upon oaths as one does in relation to the opening verses of Surah Shams. To what is our attention being drawn and what is so important, if not the process of purification?

What does purification lead to if God wishes? Purification leads to taqwa.

And, why is taqwa important? Because the one who is in a condition of taqwa is the one who, God willing, will be taught knowledge and discernment.

"Be God-fearing [have taqwa], and God will teach you." [Qur'an, 2:282]

In other words, be careful with respect to one's relationship with Allah. Understand that such a relationship is rooted in the hallowed, sacred ground of Being and that one must seek to gain insight into that ground, and if one exercises due diligence in these respects, then, God willing, one will be taught knowledge by God.

"If you are God-fearing (have taqwa), He will give you discernment [furqan]." [Qur'an, 8:29]

The process of developing an appropriate awareness and respect for the sacredness of Divine presence is a work or 'amal . This struggle is a form of remembrance or zikr.

With respect to what is one to be given discernment or about what is one to be taught? One is to be taught about, and given discrimination concerning, the nature of Sacred Law and the process of shari'ah.

One of the prayers of the Qur'an is:

“O my Lord, increase me in knowledge.” [Qur’an, 20: 114]

One is seeking knowledge of the truth concerning the nature of the Sacred Laws governing the Created Universe and one’s place in it. One is seeking knowledge about the nature of shari’ah and how such a process both leads to, as well as is an expression of, the Sacred Law. One is striving toward an understanding of the hukm that governs, and has authority over, this or that aspect of being – including one’s own essential identity and spiritual capacity.

The five pillars and zikr [both in their role as basic, fundamental expressions of shari’ah that are intended to be accessible to all, as well as in conjunction with their role as supererogatory extensions of those basic fundamentals] are ways, God willing, of striving toward taqwa. The five pillars and zikr are processes of purification that, God willing, helps rid one of everything that can serve as a source of distraction, distortion, bias, and corruption concerning our achieving a state of receptivity – that is, taqwa – with respect to the real teachings of spirituality involving the Sacred Laws of the Created Universe.

The five pillars are not the end of matters, but are, rather, the beginning of a process that is intended to lead one to the place of drinking the water or knowledge that, God willing, renders one receptive to the hukm of God’s Word or revelation. Nonetheless, there are many gradations of knowledge and understanding concerning such matters.

The five pillars and zikr that a Muslim observes are engaged through a different understanding than are the five pillars and zikr that a Momim or Mohsin observes. The five pillars and zikr of the one who is a condition of taqwa are different from those who are not in such a spiritual condition. The five pillars and zikr of an ‘abd of Allah is different from the five pillars and zikr of someone who is not an ‘abd of Allah.

“Whoever submits one’s whole self to Allah and is a doer of good has indeed grasped the most trustworthy handhold.” [Qur’an, 31:22]

And, as well:

“O Humankind! Surely you are toiling towards the Lord, painfully toiling, but you shall meet Him ... you shall surely travel from stage to stage.” [Qur’an, 84: 6, 9]

Today, and for many centuries now, all too many Muslim religious scholars, theologians, imams, mullahs, and so on have sought to make the process of coming to a proper understanding of the nature of Sacred Law and shari'ah an unnecessarily complex, convoluted, and a most difficult and contentious journey. According to such individuals, one must become familiar with some 1400 years-worth of various people's religious fatwas and theological meanderings, and/or one must become an apprentice with respect to some given madhab or school of jurisprudence, and/or one must undertake to learn so many thousands of hadiths, and so on, before one can be said to be in a position to properly understand the nature of Sacred Law and shari'ah.

However, the Qur'an says:

"Allah does not desire to put on you any difficulty, but He wishes to purify you and that He may complete His favor on you, so that you may be grateful." -- "ma yaridu Allahu li-ajala alaykum min haraj." [Qur'an 5:6]

Shari'ah is not a matter of intellectualized, rationalistic, or politicized engagements of the Qur'an. Shari'ah is a process of purification entailing activities such as prayer, fasting, charitableness, pilgrimage, remembrance, service, worship, and the acquisition of character traits such as: gratitude, repentance, tolerance, perseverance, integrity, honesty, humility, nobility, forgiveness, patience, compassion, love, generosity, kindness, and so on -- all of which will assist one to pursue shari'ah's journey toward taqwa and, in turn -- if God wishes -- to real, essential knowledge concerning both the nature of shari'ah and the Sacred Law governing Created existence.

One pursues these activities as best one's circumstances permit and according to one's capacity to do so. To demand that more than this be done or to demand that people pursue this in accordance with someone's theological interpretation of matters is to impose an oppressive difficulty on people, and, yet, this is precisely what all too many Muslim theologians, mullahs, and religious scholars would do when they claim that people must be made to act in accordance with those people's arbitrary ideas concerning the nature of shari'ah and the Sacred Law.

“And God wishes for you that which is easy, not what is difficult.”
[Qur’an, 2:185]

That which is easy is not necessarily that which is without struggle. Rather, that which is easy is that which falls within one’s capacity to accomplish if one makes efforts in this regard and if God supports such efforts.

Through the process of purification, God is seeking to assist us to simplify our lives. In other words, God is wishing for us to have ease – at least as much as this is possible in this life – rather than difficulty.

When everything we do is distorted, filtered, framed, and corrupted by our biases, delusions, and false understandings, life becomes very difficult – much more difficult than it has to be. However, through the process of purification – that is, through the journey of shari’ah -- one begins, God willing, to not only shed all the unnecessary conceptual and emotional baggage that we impose upon ourselves through our biases and false understanding concerning the nature of reality and ourselves, but, as well, one is brought to a station of taqwa where one is taught the kind of knowledge and discrimination by God that helps ease us through the ups and downs of lived existence.

The Issue of Ijtihad

Mu'adh ibn Jabal was dispatched by the Prophet to govern Yemen. Before ibn Jabal left for Yemen, the Prophet asked him about the nature of the method through which ibn Jabal would govern. Ibn Jabal replied: 'In accordance with God's Book.' Ibn Jabal was then asked by the Prophet that if the former could not find what he needed in God's Book, how would ibn Jabal proceed in relation to the process of deliberation. Ibn Jabal responded with: 'Then, according to the Sunna of God's Prophet.' The Prophet then asked what ibn Jabal would do if the latter could not find what he requires in the Sunna of the Prophet. Ibn Jabal replied that he would exercise ijtihad." The Messenger of God indicated that he was happy with the answers that ibn Jabal had given to each of the Prophet's queries.

Some people have tried to construe the meaning of ijtihad as involving legal reasoning in some form. However, ijtihad – which comes from the same root as 'jihad' – refers to a process of personal striving or struggling to assert the truth of a matter.

The Qur'an says:

"And strive hard in the way of Allah, such a striving as is due to Him;" [Qur'an, 22:78]

All of life requires one to exercise ijtihad. All of life requires one to strive for the truth.

Among other things, God has given each of us a capacity for seeking truth. To use such a capacity for anything other than striving for the truth is to strive in a manner that is less than what is due to God.

Reason might be one tool entailed by such an exercise. Nonetheless, there are other faculties and capabilities within the individual [e.g., heart, sirr, kafi, spirit] that also might be employed during the process of ijtihad.

Furthermore, whatever the nature of the faculties and methods that might be employed during the process of ijtihad, one is not necessarily seeking a legally enforceable solution to the question, issue, or problem at hand through such a process. This is especially so with respect to matters of shari'ah -- which is an individual, spiritual

task and not something that should be imposed collectively or through compulsion.

To govern is to oversee the regulation of public space so that that space is free of oppression, injustice, and tumult. Governance is not about the enforcement of shari'ah, but, rather, governance is about the regulating of the 'commons', so to speak, so that individuals are free to pursue, or not, the issue of shari'ah.

Presumably, if ibn Jabal was looking to the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the exercise of ijihad in order to find solutions to problems of governance, one should not necessarily assume that he was trying to discover various facets of shari'ah that could be imposed on people. Rather, ibn Jabal might have been trying to discover those principles of justice, equitability, tolerance, truth, wisdom, and so on which will permit a community to exist in relative peace and harmony, free from oppression, so that the members of that community might individually tend to the responsibilities that revolve about and permeate the issue of free will in a manner that does not oppress others. As the Qur'an indicates:

"O ye who believe! Be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice, and let not hatred of a people incite or seduce you to not act equitably; act equitably, that is nearer to piety (taqwa), and be careful with respect to Allah, surely Allah is aware of what you do." [Qur'an, 5:8]

Ibn Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him) was seeking to be "upright for Allah". He was seeking to be one of the "bearers of witness with justice". He was seeking to "act equitably". He was seeking to struggle toward a condition of taqwa. He was seeking to "be careful with respect to Allah".

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, and without prejudice to either the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) or ibn Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him), there is a great deal of ambiguity in the interchange between the two as related in the foregoing hadith. For example, one might ask: What does it mean to find or not find what one needs in the Qur'an? Or, what is meant by the idea of finding or not finding what one seeks in the Sunna of the Prophet? What is actually entailed by the process of exercising ijihad?

There is no one answer that can be given to any of the foregoing questions. Much depends on the spiritual capabilities and condition of the individual doing the needing, seeking, and striving in relation to, respectively, the Qur'an, the Sunna, and ijtiḥad. Much also depends on the nature of the problem that one is attempting to resolve or the kind of question one is trying to answer.

The truth of the matter is that many people read about the account involving the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and ibn Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him), and such individuals tend to impose their own ideas onto the exchange. For example, because ibn Jabal was being sent off to Yemen to govern, there are those who suppose that only someone who has been given the authority to govern can observe the practice of ijtiḥad. Then, again, there are others who understand the interchange between the Prophet and ibn Jabal to mean that only someone who has been given the authority to make legal pronouncements is permitted to exercise ijtiḥad, and, then, such commentators often proceed to put forth a list of qualifications that such a person must have in order to be permitted to exercise 'legitimate' ijtiḥad.

There is an underlying logic inherent in the perspective of those who seek to restrict ijtiḥad to only certain kinds of individuals with certain kinds of qualifications. The nature of that logic goes somewhat along the following lines: The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was sending ibn Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him) to govern the people of Yemen; the Prophet was only showing approval concerning the exercise of ijtiḥad in the case of someone whom he had authorized to fulfill a specific task of governance; therefore, the Prophet would only approve ijtiḥad in someone whom he had authorized to accept such a responsibility.

The foregoing kind of logic is nothing more than presumptions that are being read into the conversation in question. In point of fact, there is nothing in the interchange between the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and ibn Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him) to which one can point that authoritatively and decisively demonstrates the necessity of concluding that only people who govern or only people who promulgate laws or only those with specific qualifications have the right to exercise ijtiḥad.

Above and beyond the foregoing sorts of difficulties, there are two other kinds of presumption inherent in the sort of logic that seeks to place limits on those who might exercise ijtiḥād. On the one hand, there is a presumption that those who exercise ijtiḥād today -- and, therefore, those who are referred to as mujtahids -- have been authorized by the Prophet to do so, and this is, at best, a very dubious presumption. On the other hand, there is another presumption present in the foregoing sort of logic that arrogates to itself the right to forcibly impose upon others the “fruits” from someone’s exercise of ijtiḥād that is, once again and at best, an extremely dubious presumption.

We are each governors of our own being. We each have been given the capacity to consult the Qur’an, the Sunna, and, when appropriate, to exercise ijtiḥād as we strive to find our way to truth, justice, essential identity, and our primordial spiritual capacity.

In fact, one might argue that every engagement of the Qur’an and Sunna is an exercise of ijtiḥād. Each individual strives and struggles to purify herself or himself in order that one might be led, God willing, to a spiritual condition that allows one to drink in what is necessary to have ears with which to hear and eyes with which to see the true nature of what God is disclosing to us through the Qur’an and the example of the Prophet.

Having said the foregoing, one should not suppose I believe there are no differences in the quality, depth, insight, wisdom, balance, or appropriateness as one moves from one exercise of ijtiḥād to the next exercise of ijtiḥād among different individuals. The Qur’an states:

“Are they equal – those who know and those who do not know? Only those of understanding are mindful.” [Qur’an, 39:9]

In this regard, there are some mujtahids who truly do know what they are talking about with respect to matters of shari’ah, truth, and justice, just as there are all too many mujtahids who do not know what they are talking about when it comes to matters of shari’ah, truth, and justice. Nevertheless, whether someone who engages in ijtiḥād knows what he or she is doing, or whether someone who engages in ijtiḥād does not know what she or he is doing, neither individual has the right or authority to forcibly impose their understanding upon others when it comes to matters of shari’ah.

If one wishes to think of shari'ah as Divine Law, then, as previously indicated, one should understand the idea of law in such a context as being an expression of the way the universe spiritually operates rather than as being an expression of a legal system. No one has to impose the law of gravity on anyone since most of us become aware of the existence and nature of gravity through life experience, and, as a result, we begin to factor in our understanding of this law of nature with respect to our daily lives concerning what might be practical and what might be problematic when it comes to matters that are affected or influenced by the force of gravity.

When one runs afoul of the law of gravity, one is not being punished for a legal transgression. Rather, one is suffering the consequences of failing to exercise due diligence in one's life with respect to the law of gravity.

Similarly, when one runs afoul of the principles inherent in shari'ah, and, then, if things begin to become problematic in one's life as a result of such transgressions, one is not being punished. Instead, as is the case in relation to the law of gravity, by failing to exercise due diligence with respect to shari'ah, problematic ramifications might begin to become manifest in one's life. This is just the way the universe is set up to operate unless God intervenes and interrupts the normal sequence of events.

The truth of the matter is – and as the Qur'an has indicated in a number of verses – difficulty, problems and trials come into the lives of everyone – whether they are believers or non-believers. Thus, the Qur'an notes:

“And we test you by evil and by good by way of trial.” [21:35]

Or, again:

“Do they not see that they are tried once or twice in every year, yet they do not turn nor do they take heed.” [9:126]

And, finally:

“And surely We shall test you with some fear and hunger and loss of wealth and lives and crops;” [Qur'an, 2:155]

Pursuing shari'ah in a sincere fashion can assist one to cope with such problems, and when one turns away from that spiritual journey, one is actually placing oneself at a disadvantage when it comes to

dealing with the rain that must fall into the life of everyone, and this is another natural law of the universe. Indeed, the following Quranic ayat alludes to those who properly understand the natural laws of the universe:

“But give glad tidings to the steadfast – who say when misfortune strikes them: Surely, to Allah we belong and to Allah is our returning.” [Qur’an, 2:156]

Furthermore, just as no one has to impose a penalty beyond what happens naturally when one transgresses the due limits of the force of gravity, so, too, with certain exceptions (to be noted shortly) no one has to impose a penalty beyond what happens naturally when one transgresses the due limits of shari’ah. If one does not say one’s prayers, or if one does not fast during the month of Ramazan, or if one is financially and physically able to do so but does not go on Hajj, or if one fails to give zakat, or if one fails to act in accordance with the reality that God exists and that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was given a Book of Divine revelation, or if one does not seek to acquire the noble character traits [such as forgiveness, tolerance, patience, gratitude, humility, steadfastness, love, generosity, and the like] which are part of what is sought by pursuing shari’ah, then, one will have to deal with the problematic ramifications of such negligence in one’s day-to-day life.

Only when such ramifications spill over into the lives of others and, as a result, an individual’s negligence of shari’ah leads to that individual pursuing courses of action that abuse, exploit, injure, or oppress others does the community have a right to step in and seek to restore harmony, peace, justice, and balance within the community. Such intercession is directed toward protecting the right of people in a community to be able to have the opportunity to make choices concerning shari’ah – either toward it or away from it -- which are free from interference by others. These corrective efforts of the community are not directed at forcing some given transgressing individual to follow shari’ah but, rather, are directed toward honoring the rights of individuals to have the opportunity to be free of oppression from others.

After such corrective measures are taken – and these measures need not be punitive and could involve attempts to mediate and

reconcile individuals as a means of restoring balance and harmony in the community – if the individual who originally had introduced oppression into the lives of other people wishes to continue to choose to live life in opposition to the principles of shari’ah, then, the person should be free to do so as long as such a life does not transgress further against the rights of others to be free of any tendencies toward oppression that might arise out of such choices. However, just as someone who does not wish to follow shari’ah has no right to oppress others in the community, then the following is also true: those who wish to follow shari’ah have no right to oppress others in the community in terms of the way the former wish to pursue shari’ah.

Oppression is not about whether someone has transgressed this or that legal injunction. Oppression occurs when someone interferes with, or seeks to undermine and diminish, the sort of right with respect to which there is virtually universal consensus [and irrespective of whether someone believes in God or does not believe in God] – the right to be free to choose the course of one’s life. The responsibility that accompanies this right is a duty of care to others in the community – a responsibility which stipulates that however one exercises one’s basic right to choose, such choices cannot spill over and adversely affect the right of others to make similar free choices in their own lives.

Legal laws do not have to be transgressed in order to know that oppression exists in a family, community, or nation. All one needs to look at is whether there are imbalances and inequities among individuals in their respective abilities to effectively exercise the most basic of rights among human beings – that of free choice.

Freedom to choose is one of the most basic natural laws of the universe. When that natural principle is transgressed against, the result is oppression, irrespective of whether, or not, any legal rules have been broken.

In fact, in all too many societies, the legal laws that exist are intended to oppress people while simultaneously sanctioning the right of certain favored individuals under the law to oppress others with impunity. Indeed, in many Muslim nations and communities where certain laws are enforced that are referred to as shari’ah -- but, in truth, are not shari’ah – the legal structure of those communities and

nations is set up in such a way so as to give government and religious authorities the right to impose what is called shari'ah on people and thereby oppress them and, in the process, transgress against the freedom to choose that God has given to all human beings -- whether they believe, or they do not believe, in Divinity.

Just as air, water, and food are intended for all to use irrespective of whether, or not, they are believers in God, so, too, the right to choose is a basic entitlement of all human beings. In fact, at the very heart of shari'ah is the right to freely choose among alternatives, and when legal injunctions that are referred to as shari'ah are imposed on people, the very essence of shari'ah is violated.

Those who are, by the Grace of God, good at exercising ijtiḥād – that is, those who are spiritually insightful, truly knowledgeable [as opposed to just being filled with information], as well as wise mujtahids [i.e., practitioners of ijtiḥād] perform an important service for those who are seeking counsel concerning the pursuit of shari'ah. Nonetheless, that service is limited to offering counsel and nothing more, and, furthermore, no one has the right to take such counsel and use it to justify attempts to compel other human beings to live in accord with that counsel. To do so totally misses, if not distorts, the meaning and purpose of both being a mujtahid as well as pursuing shari'ah.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: “When the qadi judges and does ijtiḥād and hits the mark, he has ten rewards; and when he does ijtiḥād and errs, he has one or two rewards.”

The Prophet is indicating in the foregoing that the exercising of an intention to seek truth and justice is rewarded in and of itself, even if it turns out that one who is exercising such an intention pursues a path that does not give expression to either truth or justice. Moreover, the foregoing also seems to indicate fairly clearly that ijtiḥād is the process of struggling for the truth of a matter, while being correct or in error concerning the results of that process is quite another matter altogether.

However, one should not assume that the Prophet was indicating in the previous hadith that making errors concerning the exercise of ijtiḥād is okay and without consequences or that one has the right to

impose such erroneous judgments on others. This latter point is especially relevant with respect to those individuals who have not been authorized by either God or the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to exercise ijtihad on behalf of a community – as opposed to exercising ijtihad in conjunction with respect to oneself ... something that we all have been given the capacity and responsibility to do.

To make judgments as a mujtahid is not a matter of imposing shari'ah on others. Rather, to make judgments as a mujtahid is to strive toward assisting members of a community to identify those tools of truth and principles of justice that might be useful resources to apply, like salve on a wound, to help alleviate the pain and difficulties that have ensued from some manner of disturbance in the peaceful fabric of a community so that harmony and balance might be restored through a peaceful reconciliation of differences and conflicts.

During the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) there were occasions – and, in fact, these were not many in number -- in which rigorous penalties were applied in conjunction with the commission of certain crimes. There were a number of reasons for this – reasons that are no longer necessarily applicable to present circumstances.

First, the law of retribution was already the acknowledged and accepted way of doing things among the Arabs even before the emergence of Islam in Arabia. The revelation of the Qur'an indicated that such a law could continue to be exercised, but, at the same time, people were reminded that forgiving such transgressions would be better for the believers and pointed out, as well, that this same principle of forbearance also had been in place among the Jewish people. Thus, in the Qur'an, one finds:

“We have ordained [in the Torah] that a life [should be taken] for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and wounds [are to be punished] by qisas [exact retribution or retaliation]. But if someone remits exact retaliation by way of charity, that will be an act of atonement for that person. Whoever fails to exercise discernment in accordance with what God has revealed shall be of the unfair ones.” [Qur'an, 5:45]

One of the recurrent themes of the Qur'an was to guide individuals toward constructively reforming the way in which they engaged

themselves as well as one another. These reforms often were introduced over a period of time in relation to, among other things, prayer, fasting, alcohol, slavery, and the treatment of women.

The principle of retribution continued to be permitted not because such a policy was necessarily the best way of dealing with various situations but, rather, because many Arabs in those days would neither have tolerated nor understood any approach to such issues that departed very much from their usual customs in these matters. At the same time, the Qur'an sought to induce people to begin to reflect on issues like retribution by emphasizing the importance of qualities such as forgiveness, tolerance, humility, patience, love, preferring others to oneself, generosity, justice, compassion, mercy, being charitable, and so on. Thus, one finds in the Qur'an verses such as the following:

"Take to forgiveness and enjoin good and turn aside from the ignorant." [Qur'an, 7:199]

Another factor involved with permitting certain harsh punitive measures to be applied during the lifetime of the Prophet concerned the right of individuals to ask for 'purification through punishment'. More specifically, there were people who came to the Prophet and confessed sins with which harsh penalties were associated such as theft, fornication, and adultery, and they confessed such sins not because anyone had evidence to prove that those individuals had committed transgressions but because the individuals in question believed in the idea that if one pays for a given sin in this world, one will not be held accountable for that sin on the Day of Judgment - the slate is wiped clean in that respect, and one has been purified.

The Prophet did not encourage people to come to him and confess their sins. In fact, he indicated that people should, instead, sincerely repent before God with respect to their sins and to seek God's forgiveness in those matters.

However, the Prophet also made it clear to the community that if people did come to him and confess their sins, then - as a Prophet who had a responsibility to maintain equitability within the community -- he would become obligated to take steps that might lead to certain punitive measures being applied to the case - measures that were associated with the commission of such transgressions. Nonetheless, some people - several of whom are talked about in the hadith

literature – did approach the Prophet with a clear understanding of what was being set in motion through their confessing of some transgression, but these individuals wished to avail themselves of the principle of ‘purification by punishment’ because they wanted the certainty that such a sin would not be held against them on the Day of Judgment.

One case that is related through the hadiths concerns a woman who came to the Prophet wishing to confess to adultery. The Prophet responded in a manner that suggested that he did not wish to hear what the woman had to say in this regard.

The woman kept insisting on confessing her sin to the Prophet in order to be able to undergo a process of purification through receiving the indicated punishment that would wipe her slate clean with respect to such a transgression. Finally, the Prophet informed her that the penalty for such a transgression was death, and she accepted this.

The Prophet said that the woman might be pregnant, and, therefore, she should permit the child to be born. He informed her that when the infant was born, she should return to him for purposes of carrying out the punishment.

After the child was born, the woman returned to the Prophet seeking to have the penalty enforced. The Prophet indicated that the woman should suckle the child and that when the period of suckling came to an end, she should return to him so that the indicated penalty might be exercised.

Several years later, the woman returned to the Prophet and indicated that the period of suckling the child was now complete. She wanted to proceed with the process of purification by punishment.

The woman was executed, and the Prophet led the funeral prayers. Someone objected to his leading of the prayers for such a woman, and the Prophet is reported to have said that the woman was as innocent at the time of the prayers as she had been on the day she was born.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, there is a very substantial difference between, on the one hand, enforcing a penalty because the recipient desires this out of his or her own free choice and, on the other hand, seeking to enforce such a penalty because one believes one has a God-given duty to impose such penalties on others

independently of whether, or not, an individual agrees to become subject to an application of the principle of ‘purification by punishment’. Furthermore, today, there is no one among us who is a Prophet, nor is there anyone among us who necessarily has the God-given authority or the obligation [although there are many who have illegitimately arrogated to themselves such an authority and an obligation] to apply the punitive sanctions that are indicated in the Qur’an concerning certain transgressions involving acts of, for instance, theft, fornication, or adultery.

The timeframe when such measures were necessary or appropriate has passed. There are alternative ways of dealing with such transgressions – ways that are entirely consonant with other teachings of the Qur’an concerning the importance of forgiveness, compassion, mercy, patience, tolerance, love, humility, generosity, nobility, and the like.

Indeed, there is nothing in the Qur’an that stipulates that when one has a choice between two alternative ways of handling a situation, then one must necessarily choose the more rigorous or more punitive means of dealing with such a matter. In addition, there are a great many spiritual principles distributed throughout the Qur’an that strongly indicate that, where possible and practical, one should be inclined toward treating others with forgiveness, compassion, mercy, patience, tolerance, and generosity rather than through rigor or harshness.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) encouraged people to take responsibility for pursuing their own form of striving with respect to the truth. He is reported to have said:

“Do not ask me questions as long as I leave you alone.” [Bukhari, *i’tisām*, 2; Muslim, *hajj*, 411]

The Prophet was, in effect, telling people: if I leave you alone, then, you should leave me alone. In other words, if the Prophet did not give people some particular guidance or direction, then, people should not seek to bother the Prophet by asking questions about how to proceed in life or with respect to how to pursue Islam.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is also reported to have said that one should:

“Seek the guidance of your heart (istaftii qalbaka: ask for the fatwa), whatever opinion others may give.”

This process of seeking the guidance of one’s heart is not a matter of following whatever whims, passions, or desires that might arise in consciousness. Rather, the process of seeking the guidance of one’s heart is to exercise ijthad – to strive for the truth of a matter by purifying oneself so that one might enter a condition – namely, taqwa – through which, God willing, one might be opened to the truth or to the hukm – that is, the governing authority or reality of something – so that one can act rightly.

By listening intently to one’s heart and asking for a fatwa – or guidance – one was seeking to hear the resonance of truth with the Words of God. Indeed, as the Qur’an indicates:

“And who is better than Allah to make judgments for a people who are sure.” [Qur’an, 5:50]

In seeking the guidance of one’s heart, one is seeking Divine assistance. If one has taqwa, then, God willing, the guidance one seeks from one’s heart will reflect the truth or reality of a matter that God wishes one to understand.

Furthermore, in conjunction with this process of seeking the counsel or guidance or fatwa from one’s heart, one should be careful concerning the sort of things for which one seeks an answer. The Qur’an indicates:

“Do not ask Us about those things that if they were shown [or declared to you] could bring you wrong [or trouble you].” [Qur’an, 5:101]

The Qur’an also stipulates:

“O Prophet, why do you declare illicit what God has made licit, simply to give satisfaction to your wives.” [Qur’an, 66:1]

One might ask another question that has resonance with the foregoing – namely, why should one be inclined to declare as illicit that which God has made licit – by remaining silent on a matter -- simply to give satisfaction to theologians, mullahs, religious scholars, and the like?

Some have proposed that a principle to keep in mind when engaging the guidance of the Qur'an is not to fill in the gaps and spaces that God has left in the Qur'an as degrees of freedom for human beings. Whatever is not specifically prohibited in the Qur'an is considered to be licit unless a compelling case from the Qur'an itself can be given that demonstrates why such degrees of freedom should not be permitted.

Through the use of qiyas or analogical reasoning, many religious scholars and theologians have sought to argue that, for example, because one thing is like something else, and since God might have prohibited the latter, then, the former must also be considered as prohibited. By approaching things in this manner, they have sought to introduce prohibitions where none actually existed in the Qur'an.

For example, some individuals have sought to argue that because the flesh of pigs has been prohibited to Muslims [as well as Jews and Christians] as a food, and because some footballs are made from pig skin or because some forms of suede shoes have been made from pig skin, then, one may not touch those balls or wear such shoes.

Yet, the Qur'an is silent about both matters. People are reading their own ideas into the guidance of the Qur'an.

In order to arrive at such conclusions, those individuals might have exercised ijtiḥad. However, by means of such reasoning and striving, they have not necessarily captured the *hukm* of a matter – that is, the principle that governs a particular aspect of reality.

In this respect, the Qur'an states:

“He grants wisdom to whom He pleases; and he to whom wisdom is granted receives indeed a benefit overflowing; but none will grasp the message but men of understanding.” (2:269)

Not everyone who exercises ijtiḥad necessarily does so through a God-granted wisdom. And, truly, only those who have been graced with such wisdom will understand that this is so. Moreover:

“Each one does according to his rule of conduct, and thy Lord is best aware of the one whose way is right.” [Qur'an, 17: 84]

Ijtiḥad is not the creation of something new in the way of guidance. Rather, ijtiḥad is a process of struggling toward trying to discover [according to one's capacity to do so and the Grace that God

bestows] the nature of the original hukm concerning the principles that already govern the truth or the reality of a matter and that are being expressed through the two books of revelation – the Qur’an and Nature (considered in its entirety).

A sincere mujtahid does not seek to make discernments except in accordance with, and as expression of, what Allah shows that individual through her or his exercise of ijtiḥad. As the Qur’an attests:

“True believers are only those who have faith in Allah and His messenger and have left doubt behind and who strive hard in Allah’s cause with their possessions and their lives. They are the ones who are sincere.” (49: 15)

Supposedly, at least according to some religious scholars and theologians, the gates of ijtiḥad [striving, strenuousness] became closed after the 9th century A.D. Evidently, these individuals were of the opinion that what they referred to as Islamic law [but, in reality, this was nothing more than laws made by Muslims] had matured sufficiently enough that individual attempts to understand the limitless depths of the Qur’an and Sunna had been exhausted.

The Qur’an states:

“And if all the trees in the earth were pens, and the sea, with seven more seas to help it were ink, the words of Allah could not be exhausted.” [Qur’an, 31:27]

The Prophet is reported to have said:

“Truly, the Qur’an has an outward and an inward dimension, and the latter has its own inward dimension, and so on, up to seven dimensions.”

In light of the foregoing guidance of the Qur’an, as well as in light of the aforementioned understanding of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) concerning the depths of the Qur’an, I cannot think of anything more arrogant than for someone to try to claim that the doors to ijtiḥad were closed in the 9th or 10th century.

The truth of this matter is that certain individuals sought to close the door to ijtiḥad in order to establish a politically expedient compromise between two groups of individuals. On the one hand, there were the rulers who wanted the authority and legitimacy of what would be treated as established and unalterable law to be placed

at their disposal so that they might exploit such law to do as they saw fit. The other party to the politically expedient compromise was from among the ulama who wanted a fiqh – that is, a mode of engaging the Qur’an and the Sunna of the Prophet -- over which they would have control and that, in addition, would ensure that they had a position of status in the community where their “expertise” and authority would be sought out by others. Both sides to this compromise made a deal that would give the respective sides power, status, and control at the expense of doing justice to the either the community or the reality of Quranic guidance.

The aforementioned ulama reduced fiqh down to a set number of issues [some say these are 589 in number]. Each madhab, or school of jurisprudence, developed its own theological positions relative to these set number of issues.

Furthermore, the leaders of these various schools issued pronouncements indicating that one would not be able to switch from one school to another. In addition, and this is where the idea of closing the doors of ijtiḥad came in, no one was permitted to open up any of these codified positions to the exercise of ijtiḥad.

The true location of hukm [determinative authority] is with Allah, and the location of such a hukm does not rest with some given school of jurisprudence or with the rational intellect considered in isolation from other spiritual faculties of the individual. When one does not know what the nature of the hukm or reality is with respect to some given matter, then, one must rely on Allah, and such true and sincere reliance requires that one ‘become like the corpse in the hands of the one who washes it’ -- that is, a true ‘abd or servant or bondsman of God – and one moves in whatever direction the Hands of God move one. This is the real essence of ijtiḥad.

Why do human beings believe they have the authority or responsibility to hold other human beings accountable for what is, clearly, according to the Qur’an, obligations or duties of care that one has to God? God is the One Who has ordained such duties of care, and God is the One Who will judge such matters, and God is the One Who will hold people accountable for their deeds and misdeeds in this respect on the Day of Judgment, and God has not asked people – other

than the Prophets – to assume responsibility for, or to take authority of, such matters. So, why do Muslim theologians, imams, muftis, mullahs, and leaders believe it is their duty to police the Deen of others and make sure that it conforms to their own individual likes and dislikes?

According to some modern-day, self-proclaimed mujtahids, they represent the members of the community in the matter of determining what constitutes the nature of one's spiritual duties of care to God. They believe that when the mujtahids of a certain school of law reach a consensus concerning some given facet of what the members of that school consider to be shari'ah, then, from an epistemological perspective, such an agreement gives expression to an understanding that is just as certain as anything from the Qur'an or Sunna. Furthermore, they believe they have the right to impose their views on others.

However, as indicated previously in this essay, there is not necessarily any evidence – other than self-serving claims – that such individuals actually have been appointed by God or the Prophet to either determine what the spiritual path should be for others or that such mujtahids have been granted the authority by either God or the Prophet to impose upon others whatever judgments at which they might arrive during the course of their deliberations concerning the Qur'an and Sunna. Nor is there necessarily any evidence – other than the self-serving circularity of their own belief – that the agreements these so-called mujtahids reach should be considered to have the same level of authority or authenticity as either the Qur'an or Sunna, and, in fact, there is not necessarily any evidence – other than the mutually reinforcing opinions of the parties to the agreement – that the participants have even arrived at a correct understanding of things.

Anyone who strives or struggles to ascertain the nature of shari'ah is performing ijtihad and, therefore, is a mujtahid. Nonetheless, the fact that one is a mujtahid or is referred to as a mujtahid does not inherently compel others to accept the proclamations of such individuals as anything more than their understanding of a given issue, problem, or idea.

There are mujtahids who truly understand the nature of shari'ah, and one would be well advised to consider what they have to say about

things and to reflect on such matters with due diligence. On the other hand, there also are mujtahids who truly do not understand the nature of shari'ah, and one would be well advised to stay as far away as possible from these latter sorts of individuals.

The problem, of course, is one of knowing who is which kind of mujtahid. Everyone makes a choice concerning who they will listen to or go to for counsel with respect to spiritual matters, and much might be decided by the nature of one's choice in this regard.

Choose correctly and one has, God willing, good spiritual counsel. Choose incorrectly and one has, may Allah have mercy on us, bad spiritual counsel.

For far too long, the Muslim world has been making a lot of bad choices with respect to the sort of spiritual counsel to that they have been willing to listen and to which they have opened themselves. We see the problematic ramifications of such choices almost everywhere in the Muslim world.

One of the problematic areas being alluded to above has been the insistence of all too many self-promoting mujtahids that shari'ah is a legal system that is to be imposed on a community. Shari'ah is not a legal system, and it should not be imposed on anyone.

Shari'ah is the spiritual journey of an individual who seeks to arrive at the truth concerning the nature of one's relationship with God. Shari'ah is the process of seeking to discover the nature of one's essential identity. Shari'ah gives expression to a person's striving to realize, God willing, the full spiritual potential of fitra – one's primordial spiritual capacity. Shari'ah is a way to honor one's duties of care to oneself, to others, to creation, and to God.

“And (as for) those who disbelieve, their deeds are like the mirage in a desert, which the thirsty man deems to be water until when he comes to it he finds it to be naught, and there he finds Allah, so He pays back to him his reckoning in full, and Allah is quick in reckoning.” [Qur'an, 24:39]

Human beings are inclined to search – through ijihad -- for that which they believe will satisfy their spiritual thirst. One who searches is in a condition of unbelief because the truth or reality of things

remains hidden from them at that point – that is, after all, why they are engaged in a process of seeking.

When, after striving and struggling, one comes to the understanding that everything for which one has been searching in order to satisfy one's spiritual thirst is a mirage, then this is the time when, God willing, the realization comes to the individual that Allah is the only One Who is capable of satisfying one's need or longing or desire. Everything else is a mirage – including one's reasoning and the various schools of jurisprudence.

The individual who, by the Grace of Allah, comes to such an understanding or realization finds Allah waiting for her or him, and God is ready to respond to that individual in accordance with the nature of the realization that has been reached. If one submits to the reality of one's need for God, God is quick in reckoning concerning such a realization and guides the individual in their striving or ijihad, but if one persists in turning away from God's presence, then too, God is quick in responding to such a spiritual condition and the individual is maintained in a state of disbelief.

In the Qur'an, one reads:

"He it is Who has revealed the Book to you; some of the verses are decisive, they are the basis of the book, and others are allegorical; then in those whose hearts there is perversity, they follow the part of it which is allegorical, seeking to mislead and seeking to give it [their own] interpretation, but none knows the interpretation except Allah, and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge say: We believe in it, it is from our Lord; and none do mind except those having understanding." [Qur'an, 3:7]

Which are the decisive verses and which are the allegorical verses? Understanding and guidance come from Allah. They do not come from theologians and mullahs or books of fiqh that might be inclined to place their own interpretations onto the Qur'an.

Only Allah knows the correct determination of such matters, and the people of knowledge or understanding are the ones whom God has taken by the hand and guided them through the hazards of the spiritual journey. These people of knowledge accept all of the Qur'an

as revelation, and they pursue shari'ah so that they might be led to the water of knowledge and be permitted to drink according to God's blessings and according to their present spiritual condition and ultimate spiritual capacity.

Shari'ah is a way [that is, the struggle toward self-purification], and a result [namely, the truth made manifest to the individual]. Neither the way nor the result can be imposed from without as many advocates of this or that school of jurisprudence or madhab would have Muslims believe to be true, but, rather, one must become engaged in a life-long process of ijtihad through which one strives for the manner of discernment that will permit one, God willing, to distinguish between, on the one hand, the substance and basis of the Qur'an, and, on the other hand, that which is allegorical in the Qur'an.

Both the substance and allegorical dimensions of the Qur'an constitute guidance. However, when, as a result of problematic facets in one's process of ijtihad, one confuses the allegorical with the substance of the Qur'an, then, as God warns, one might be carried in the direction of misguidance, and, this, unfortunately, is what has happened across the last 1300 years, or so, in all too many instances with respect to various individuals and their respective schools of jurisprudence.

"And know that this is My path, the right one, therefore follow it, and follow not other ways, for they will lead you away from His way; this He has enjoined you with that you may guard against it." [Qur'an, 6:153]

The Concept of Naskh

Many religious scholars and theologians recognize, in one form or another, the principle of naskh or abrogation. Allegedly, this principle refers to the manner in which certain later manifestations of revelation are believed to nullify or overrule certain earlier instances of revelation.

Some people cite the following Quranic ayat in support of this approach to the Qur'an:

“Whatever communications we abrogate or cause to be forgotten, we bring one better than it or like it. Do you not know that Allah has power over all things?” [Qur'an, 2:106]

However, an assumption is being made concerning the precise identity of the communications to which God is referring in the foregoing verse.

For example, let us suppose that a people of an earlier time were given a revelation, and then over time, the people to whom it was given forgot that revelation. Let us further suppose that God in his mercy then sent another revelation to replace the previous guidance.

According to the Quranic ayat noted earlier, the second revelation might be better than the first revelation in certain ways, or it might be like the revelation that had been sent previously. If the second revelation is better than the first in certain ways, only God knows what these ways are, and if the second revelation is like the first revelation, again, only God knows the nature of the likeness between the two.

Furthermore, in neither instance can one assume that anything in the first revelation has been replaced or nullified by aspects of the second revelation. The second revelation might be better than the first revelation because something has been added rather than taken away. Or, if the second revelation is like the first revelation, then, we are dealing with variations on certain themes rather than one revelation nullifying another.

So, even in the case where a second revelation wholly replaces a previous revelation in accordance with the foregoing scenario, one cannot assume that anything has been nullified in conjunction with the first revelation. Rather, the first revelation was forgotten, and, therefore, God sent another reminder to the people in question and,

thereby, provided those people with, yet, another opportunity to be guided toward realizing life's purpose.

Those who believe that abrogation is a working principle inherent in the Qur'an sometimes cite another verse of revelation - namely:

"And when We change one communication for another, and Allah knows best what He reveals, they say: You are only a forger. Nay, most of them do not know." [Qur'an, 16. 101]

As is true with respect to the earlier Quranic ayat - namely, 2:106 - concerning the issue of God's replacing of one Divine communication by another, people who understand this ayat in terms of the idea of abrogation or the nullification of an earlier Divine communications are making certain assumptions in relation to such an understanding. The fulcrum that leverages the guidance of the verse is this: "God knows best what he reveals" and the other side of this principle is that "most of them do not know".

In what way is God changing one communication with respect to another such communication? Unless God discloses the nature of such a change, then clearly, one is only guessing concerning such matters.

Does change necessarily give expression to a principle of abrogation? No, it doesn't. There might be an array of changes that complement, supplement, enrich, or modify a given communication without abrogating or nullifying that which came previously.

Among those who accept the principle of naskh or abrogation, there are those who wish to argue that within one and the same revelation - for instance, the Qur'an -- later portions of the Divine communications that make up the content of such a revelation are believed to nullify or abrogate certain earlier expressions of the Divine communications that are part of the same Book of Divine guidance. As an example of what such people have in mind, consider the following Quranic verses. In 2:219 one finds:

"They ask you [Muhammad] about wine and gambling. Say: In both there is sin and utility for people."

In 4:43, one finds:

"O ye who believe, do not come to pray when you are in a state of intoxication, till you know what you utter."

In 5:90 one finds:

“O ye who believe? Intoxicants and games of chance and sacrificing to stones set up and divining by arrows are only an uncleanness, the work of Shaytan; shun it therefore, that you may be successful.”

Those who accept the idea of abrogation as a working principle maintain that the last of the three ayats given expression here nullifies the first two verses of the Qur’an that have been listed. In other words, ayat 219 of Surah 2 indicates that there are both bad features as well as beneficial features that are associated with the consumption of wine or participation in gambling, but nothing is specifically said about abstaining from drinking wine or gambling.

One might note, however, that even in the case of 2:219, there is an indication that there are problems inherent in such activities. Perhaps, a reflective mind and heart might begin to consider what those problems were and what implications, if any, they carried with respect to how one went about living one’s life.

Ayat 43 of Surah 4 informs people that one should not engage in prayers when one is in an intoxicated state – that one should know and be aware of what one is saying while one offers prayers. Despite this cautionary note, nothing is specifically said about abstaining from the consumption of intoxicants.

On the other hand, as was true in the case of verse 2:219 discussed earlier, there is a subtle hint given in ayat 43 of Surah 4 for those who might wish to reflect on the matter. More specifically, all of life is intended to be a matter of worship – indeed:

“And to your Lord turn all of your attention.” [Qur’an, 94:8]

And, as well:

“Whoever submits one’s whole self to Allah and is a doer of good has grasped the most trustworthy handhold.” [Qur’an, 31:22]

So, although there is no specific prohibitions in ayat 43 of Surah 4 about either consuming intoxicants or becoming intoxicated, and although the guidance is ostensibly only about staying away from prayers when one is in an intoxicated state, nonetheless, there is more to think about in conjunction with that verse than that to which one’s attention is being drawn with respect to the specific caution that is

being given expression through the ayat in question. For example, among other possibilities, one might ask oneself the following: If one's goal is God, and if one considers all of life a matter of worship, then, is it not the case that whenever one is intoxicated, there is a sense in which one is engaging the issue of worship in an intoxicated state?

Does this mean that one must refrain from the consumption of intoxicants? As far as verses 4:43 and 2:219 are concerned, no, it doesn't. Does this mean that one must not become intoxicated? As far as verses 4:43 and 2:219 are concerned, no, it doesn't.

Ayat 90 of Surah 5 indicates that if one wishes to be successful spiritually, then, consuming intoxicants and participating in games of chance should be avoided all together. Has anything really changed among 5:90, 4:43, and 2:219?

The difference is that what has been implicit in both 4:43 and 2:219 has now been made explicit. More specifically, if one wishes to -- God willing -- achieve spiritual success, then one should refrain from consuming intoxicants and participating in games of chance.

The imperative mood of this directive in 5:90 is intended to influence the behavior of those who will listen to such guidance. The grammatical constructions in verses 4:43 and 2:219 are also intended to influence those whose hearts are receptive to what is being said.

In each of the three verses, warnings, cautions, and guidance are given. In two of the three verses one is being informed about the relationship between, on the one hand, intoxicants and gambling, and, on the other hand, what might be in one's best interests with respect to living life, while in the other verse one is being informed about the relationship between the condition of intoxication and its potential effect on the quality and propriety of one's prayers.

Can one choose to drink and gamble? Yes, one can because none of the three ayats nullifies or abrogates one's freedom to accept or reject guidance.

However, if one is at all concerned about pursuing the actual purpose of life and, God willing, becoming spiritually successful in that pursuit, then in all three of the foregoing ayats one is being guided in similar ways. Nothing has been abrogated or nullified.

The implicit has been made explicit. Something that already was present in the earlier two verses has been made manifest.

Another example of what is considered to be an instance of naskh or abrogation involves the issues of bequeaths, inheritance, and debt. In 2:180 of the Qur'an, one finds:

“Bequest is prescribed for you when death approaches one of you, if he leaves behind wealth for parents and near relatives, according to usage, a duty incumbent on those who guard against evil.”

In addition, Surah 4, verses 11-12, contains a detailed set of specific parameters laid out for distributing inheritance in conjunction with whatever debts and bequeaths might have been made previously. Indications are given that debts and bequeaths need to be given priority – although there is an allusion to the idea that one needs to take into consideration the possibility of harm that might arise out of the paying of a debt. In addition, a large set of permutations are set forth in these verses concerning possible scenarios of what should be done according to who survives a deceased individual.

Some jurists have come to the conclusion that verses 11-12 of Surah 4 abrogate or nullify the guidance of 2:180. This is especially so since some of these jurists site a hadith based on a solitary report attributed to the Prophet that indicates that there should be “no bequest in favor of an heir.”

Taking the last point first – namely, the idea that the Prophet is reported to have said that there should be no bequest in favor of an heir – if one believes in the relevance of taking into account what the Prophet says, then, the Prophet also has said that he wanted all collections of his sayings destroyed so that no one would possibly confuse or conflate what he said with God's decrees. Consequently, while I believe that what the Prophet told people directly is important to those individuals being directly addressed, I believe the Prophet also placed a limit on the potential sphere of applicability of such sayings when he also indicated that collections of his sayings should be destroyed.

Secondly, when the Prophet said what he is reported to have said concerning the idea that there should be “no bequest in favor of an heir”, do we know whether, or not, the Prophet was addressing a

particular individual or a group of individuals with the intention that what is reported to have been said by the Prophet concerning the issue of bequests and heirs – if it actually was said by the Prophet – was intended to serve as counsel for the person or persons who were being addressed and no one else? The answer is: ‘No, we don’t know what the intention of the Prophet was in this respect.’

Is it possible that the Prophet might have meant that no single heir should be favored or be given priority over other heirs in the matter of bequests or that heirs should not be given preference to others in the matter of bequeaths? Possibly, but once again, we really have no way of determining the intention with which the Prophet said what he is reported to have said concerning bequeaths and heirs.

Furthermore, whatever the Prophet might have meant with respect to the indicated solitary report, the Prophet also indicated – via his directive to have collections of hadith destroyed -- that the context of applicability of what he might have said in this respect should remain with those who lived in his times and who were part of the Muslim community at that time. Otherwise, the Prophet would not have ordered that collections of his hadith should be destroyed, thereby, limiting the sphere of applicability of what he said to those whom he directly addressed and who had committed such counsel to memory.

Beyond the foregoing considerations, I’m not sure there really is any conflict between the verses cited in relation to Surah 2 and Surah 4. The first verse [2:180] indicates that one should make plans for distributing one’s wealth as the time of death approaches, and that verse also indicates that leaving behind wealth for parents and near relatives is an important thing to do. However, the wealth that is to be left behind for parents and near kin need not be in the form of bequeaths.

Another consideration in the foregoing is that not every permutation concerning the possible combinations of heirs who might survive a deceased individual is listed in verses 11-12. So, how should one handle those cases that fall outside the boundaries that are indicated? ... maybe in accordance with the provisions of 2:180 in the Qur’an -- that is, to distribute one’s wealth in as equitable a manner as one is capable of doing.

Or maybe the reason for the existence of two instances of Quranic guidance [i.e., 2:180 and 4:11-12] concerning the issue of distributing wealth in the case of actual or approaching death is to provide people with options concerning these issues. These options are the parameters that help define the limits that God is establishing with respect to justice and equitability.

On the other hand, however one goes about the process of distributing one's wealth and whichever option one chooses in dealing with this matter, the underlying counsel is that one should distribute one's wealth in an equitable manner. One way – but not necessarily the only way -- of satisfying the issue of equitability is in conjunction with the method outlined in Surah 4, verses 11 and 12.

Thirdly, Muslims are enjoined by the Qur'an to be equitable. Since there might be additional issues of fairness, need, and differing contingent circumstances that should be taken into consideration with respect to dealing equitably with heirs, bequeaths, debt, and any possible harm that might arise out of such interacting variables in a particular set of circumstances, one might feel the need to bring such additional considerations of equitability to bear on these matters in order that the greatest quality and quantity of justice possible be done with respect to all affected parties.

The specific provisions outlined in Surah 4, verses 11-12 might be guidance for the individuals who lived in and around the times of the Prophet Muhammad. Those specific provisions might have been intended to serve the particular circumstances of Arabian society at that time, but when historical, cultural, and other contingencies change over time, then, one acts in accordance with the essential default principle concerning the importance of distributing wealth that is inherent in both Quranic excerpts -- 2:180 and 4:11-12 – although each of these sections deals with the same underlying issue from different directions and in relation to different contingencies.

Finally, irrespective of whatever specific decisions which might be reached by an individual as she or he seeks to comply with what that person believes to be true and just with respect to matters involving bequeaths, heirs, debt, possible harms, and equitability, nevertheless, these matters are, for the most part, not the purview of a government's regulation of public space unless the manner of distribution chosen by

individuals has a substantial potential for leading to the oppression of some by others. Indeed, the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few inevitably does lead to the oppression of others, and, perhaps, this is one of the reasons why God indicates to humankind, through the Qur'an, that the distribution of wealth has a potentially central role to play in helping to place obstacles of equitability in the way of the sort of accumulation of wealth that all too frequently tends, in time, to lead to oppression of one kind or another.

I believe the foregoing considerations tend to shape the basic operating principles in such matters except, as noted, when the potential for the emergence of oppression is demonstrable as the result of some person's decision to distribute wealth in a certain, possibly problematic manner.

Even in the event of such potential for oppression, a preferred manner for handling such problems might be through mediation among various parties rather than through legal pronouncements or injunctions that are forcibly imposed on people.

However, such considerations notwithstanding, how a person handles these matters is, generally speaking, between the individual and God. God is the One Who will hold a person accountable for either fulfilling or not fulfilling the requirements of shari'ah – not governments or religious jurists and courts or imams.

A third example mentioned by some as an expression of the principle of abrogation that, supposedly, is at work in the Qur'an is said to concern the issue of Qibla or the direction of prayer. For instance, in 2:144, one finds:

“...so we shall surely turn you to a qibla which you shall like, turn, then, your face to the Sacred Mosque, and wherever you are, turn your face towards it...”

The foregoing guidance doesn't really constitute an abrogation, per se, of anything. At the very most, it constitutes a slight modification of the way in which something already established is to be done.

More specifically prior to the foregoing revelation, Muslims sought to worship God through, among other possibilities, the act of prayer. After the revelation, Muslims still sought to worship God through, among other possibilities, the act of prayer.

Changing the direction of Qibla did not alter anything of an essential nature with respect to the basics of Islam. An external feature of the form of worship was modified.

Prior to the night journey and mi'raj of the Prophet, prayers did not have any specific external form. During the Prophet's ascension, one of the gifts given to the Prophet, specifically, and to Muslims, in general, was certain aspects of the external form of ritual prayer.

This new form of worship did not alter or nullify any aspect of the essence of what is involved in prayer. As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said:

"Prayer is the sacrifice whereby every believer comes closer to Allah."

Every instance of prayer is an exercise in sacrificing the interests of one nafs in order to remember God, and through such a sacrifice, one becomes purified so that one might enter a condition of taqwa through which, God willing, one might be brought closer to the reality of things through whatever truths God might disclose to the individual.

Similarly, in the case of the change in the external direction of Qibla, none of this altered the internal direction of Qibla that has always been to God. Indeed, the true Sacred Mosque is the purified heart of every believer, and one concentrates on the external form in order that one might be guided to remember that the external is but a reflection of the metaphysical realities within us. The true Qibla is the realization that:

"Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God." [2:115]

As well as:

"Wa huwa ma'akum aynama kuntum. (And He is with you wherever you are.)" [57:4]

In reality, what has occurred with respect to the issue of the change in Qibla is not a nullification of a prior Divine communication, but, rather Muslims were being informed that a timeframe of appropriateness had come to an end or had passed by with respect to the activity of prayer. That is, the external form of an activity – namely praying -- which had been entirely appropriate for Muslims to observe before the revelation concerning a change in the direction of Qibla was being modified and, as a result, the previous external form was no

longer the appropriate external form through which to observe prayers.

The principle involved in the foregoing is not that of nullifying or overturning what previously had been sent. The principle is that everything has a context of appropriateness, and this principle is operative throughout the Qur'an.

In short, the revelation concerning the change in Qibla gives expression to an important principle involving the nature of Quranic guidance. What is appropriate is not a function of that which is unchanging with respect to understanding, but, rather, what is appropriate is a function of taking into consideration the manner in which guidance changes as a function of contingencies.

Attention is being directed to the importance of context. Attention is being directed to the importance of the manner in which the criteria of appropriateness changes with the nature of contingent factors and forces that surround historical and existential circumstances.

Just as, in some cases, subsequent revelation might alter one's understanding of past verses or changes how one understands or engages spiritual practice, so, too, different God-granted insights into one and the same verse might change over time in a way that informs faith and practice and affects the manner in which one engages or understands other verses of the Qur'an in a manner that is different from what previously had been the case. This is how faith, knowledge, and wisdom increase – not through nullification, per se, but through the supplementing, complementing, modification, and enriching of one's previous understanding concerning Divine guidance.

There is some indication that several of the Companions understood things in the foregoing sense. For instance, consider the following cases.

Despite the specific guidance of 9:60 in the Qur'an that stipulates who is to be a recipient of state funds – an ayat that includes the idea that winning over the hearts of certain people for the Muslim community is to be included among such uses -- and although the Prophet, himself, always directed a share of the state funds toward such a purpose [namely, winning over the hearts of certain people for the benefit of the Muslim community], nonetheless, Hazrat 'Umar (may

Allah be pleased with him) refused to direct a portion of community funds to such a purpose. He argued that during the time of the Prophet, Muslims were weak and in need of such support, but those times had passed, and the community no longer was in need of such assistance, and, therefore, the guidance inherent in 9:60 was, in the indicated sense, no longer relevant to the Muslim community – although this could change again, depending on contingent circumstances.

Hazrat 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) wasn't abrogating, or nullifying, verse 60 of Surah 9. Rather, he was taking into consideration the appropriateness of the context or timeframe for the application of a given facet of guidance.

On another occasion, during the conquests of Mesopotamia and Syria, Hazrat 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) did not observe the requirements of 59:6-10 in the Qur'an that governed the distribution of ghana'im [booty or spoils of war]. Instead, he indicated that the state was more in need of such resources than individuals were, and if this were not done, then the Muslim armies in various territories could not be equipped or maintained.

Here, again, a decision was made that required one to compare the character of contingent circumstances in relation to specific provisions of the Qur'an that, superficially, might have been thought to govern such matters. The task faced by Hazrat 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) was to determine whether, or not, the character of the latter actually addressed the character of the former.

Apparently, Hazrat 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) decided that the nature of the hukm of the historical circumstances and contingencies with that the Muslim community was faced at that time was different from the nature of the hukm inherent in the guidance of Surah 59, verses 6-10. In doing this, he was not abrogating or nullifying this aspect of the Qur'an, but, instead, he was seeking to determine the conditions of appropriateness for applying one facet of Quranic guidance rather than some other aspect of such guidance.

Along these same lines, consider the following excerpt from Bukhari that is narrated by Nafi':

"During the affliction of Ibn Az-Zubair [which took place after the Prophet had passed away], two men came to Ibn 'Umar and said, "The

people are lost, and you are the son of 'Umar and a companion of the Prophet, so what stops you from coming out and joining the conflict?" He said, "What stops me is that Allah has prohibited the shedding of my brother's blood."

They both said, "Didn't Allah say, 'And fight them until there is no more affliction?'

Ibn 'Umar said "We fought until there was no more affliction and so that worship would be for Allah Alone, while you want to fight until there is affliction and until the worship becomes for other than Allah." (Volume 6, Book 60, Number 40)

Once again, the foregoing tradition brings home the point that the task facing human beings is not just a matter of looking in the Qur'an and applying whatever one likes. One must try to understand the hukm – that is, the reality or governing principle – of both the situation in which one is involved, as well as strive to discover that hukm of the Qur'an which best serves the hukm of life's circumstances.

This is an expression of ijtihad. This is not an expression of naskh or abrogation.

The issue of trying to struggle toward establishing what is an appropriate frame of reference for tying together certain existential contingencies with various facets of Quranic guidance is a theme that occurs again and again throughout the Qur'an. There are times and circumstances when it is appropriate to apply certain facets of guidance, and there are times and circumstances when it is not appropriate to apply such aspects of guidance.

Everything is about discernment and doing what is appropriate at the right time, and in the right way, and for the right length of time, and with the right intention before some other principle becomes more appropriate for one to pursue as circumstances change. Context and the nature of the contingency of events that come together and give that context the structural character it has is of fundamental importance. It is the context that calls out for relief from Quranic guidance and, therefore, it is, in a sense, the context that establishes the conditions that must be satisfied through the appropriate application of Divine guidance.

If one understands a situation, then one also understands what one is looking for in the way of spiritual relief. By opening oneself up – in the unbiased manner of taqwa -- to the Divine Word, then, God willing, the solution to that context is given through what is most resonant in the one doing ijtihad in relation to a given situation.

The times for fasting, hajj, prayer, wuzu, zakat, and so on are all to be observed from within a given timeframe of appropriateness. When a given timeframe of appropriateness has passed, then certain guidance is no longer necessarily applicable.

For example, the Qur'an indicates that:

“Worship at fixed times has been enjoined on the believers.”
[Qur'an, 4:103]

When the timeframe for a particular instance of worship has passed, then one moves on to what is appropriate with respect to the changed timeframe. The ritual fast only occurs during the month of Ramadan, and when that timeframe has passed, then the ritual fast cannot be observed -- although there are provisions for making up what might have been missed due to, say, travel or ill-health or for expiating the transgression of intentionally not fasting during the indicated timeframe. Hajj only occurs within a fixed timeframe, and when that period has passed, the rituals of Hajj are no longer operable – although one still can perform the lesser pilgrimage. The times for saying the five daily prayers exist within a fixed timeframe, and when that window of opportunity passes, then one has missed the prayer – although one can offer prayers at a later time in the hope that God will accept such offerings in exchange for the fixed prayers that were missed.

Appropriateness changes with circumstances, contexts, peoples, and contingencies. Therefore, the timeframes for the conditions of appropriateness pass into and out of existence. This is not to say that everything is relative or that there are no boundaries of propriety, because there are such boundaries, and God is continually warning people in the Qur'an not to transgress due boundaries. For example:

“But whoever seeks to go beyond that, these are they who exceed the limits;” [Qur'an, 23:7]

However, there is no principle of naskh or abrogation that is operative in the Qur'an. What is operative is a principle of appropriateness in which as the hukm or reality of circumstances change, then one must go in search of the appropriate Quranic hukm to address and reflect such changes.

A Few Comments Concerning Regulating Public Space

There has been a great deal of confusion in the Muslim community swirling among questions about the possible relationship between, on the one hand, what might have been done in the lifetime of the Prophet -- as well as during the lifetimes of the Companions of the Prophet over the course of the reign of the first four caliphs -- in relation to the issue of regulating public space, and, on the other hand, what might be appropriate to do today in relation to the same issue involving the regulation of public space. The root of the term 'hukumah' [governance] refers to a process of seeking to assist an oppressor not to oppress, and such assistance includes helping those who would exercise this responsibility – that is, political and religious leaders ... i.e., the government itself – to refrain from any inclination existing within such governance to oppress, exploit, or abuse those whom such governance is supposed to be protecting from these very problems.

The Qur'an says:

“And if there had not been Allah's repelling of some people by others, certainly there would have been torn down cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which Allah's name is much mentioned; and surely Allah will help the one who helps His cause; most surely Allah is Strong, Mighty.” [Qur'an, 22:39-40]

Hukumah or governance is one of the means through which Allah repels the oppression of some people by others. Moreover, it is important to note that God alludes to the right of those who worship in cloisters, churches, synagogues, and mosques to all be free to remember, worship, and invoke the name of God in their own manner.

There is a hadith that relates the story of Abū 'l-Husayn, a companion of the Prophet, whose two sons had been converted to Christianity in Medina by two Syrian merchants and then accompanied those merchants back to Syria. When Abū 'l-Husayn heard of this, he went to the Prophet and sought permission to go after his sons and bring them back – not only to Medina but to Islam. In answer, the Prophet recited the Qur'an: “There is no compulsion in Deen, truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error.” [Qur'an, 2:256] Upon hearing the foregoing, Abū 'l-Husayn let his sons go their own way.

When Abu Bakr Sidiq (may Allah be pleased with him) was Caliph [died in the 13th year after hijrah and was Caliph from 632 A.D. to 634 A.D.] he sent the Muslim army into Syria. As he did so, he issued the following guidance:

“When you enter the land, kill neither old men, women, nor children. ... Establish a covenant with every people and city who receive you peacefully, give them your assurances, and let them live according to their laws.”

The Prophet, as well as the first four caliphs, all made decisions concerning the regulation of the public space, but these decisions were not shari’ah, per se. As has been pointed out repeatedly during this essay, shari’ah is an expression of a person’s private spiritual journey in search of reality or the truth concerning human existence and the place of such existence in the scheme of things, whereas the decisions of the Prophet and the first four Caliphs were particularized applications of their understanding of, and insight into, the nature of Divine guidance that had been given to them and were intended to address the circumstances, history, conditions, problems, cultures, capabilities, and issues of those times.

As the Prophet was instructed to say:

“This is my way. I call to God – I and whoever follows me -- being certain.” [Qur’an, 12:108]

Just as the appropriate times for fasting, pilgrimage, and prayers are to be observed within a certain timeframe, so, too, there might be an appropriate timeframe or contingency-based set of considerations concerning the application of certain other facets of the Qur’an. However, in order to determine the truth of such matters, one needs to call upon Allah – not books of fiqh, jurisprudence, judicial precedent, or legislation. In the Qur’an, the Jews are told that they should have judged matters in accordance with the guidance that had been given to them ...

And why do they make you – Muhammad – the judge when they have the Taurat wherein is Allah’s judgment?” [Qur’an, 5:43]

The Qur’an also indicates that Christians should be judging matters in accordance with the guidance [Injeel] that had been given to them ...

“And the followers of the Injeel should have judged by what Allah revealed in it; and whoever did not judge by what Allah revealed, those are they who are transgressors.” [Qur’an, 5:47].

Moreover, the Prophet is also told in the Qur’an that if the Jews and Christians come to him for purposes of seeking judgment in a matter, then:

“... judge between them or turn aside from them, and if you turn aside from them, they will not harm you in any way; and if you should decide to serve as a judge, then judge between them with equity; surely God loves those who judge equitably.” [Qur’an, 5:42]

The choice of whether, or not, to decide issues that were brought to him by people from the Christian and/or Jewish community was up to the Prophet. He was not made a keeper over their affairs and, in fact, the Prophet was reminded – as noted in the foregoing commentary – that both the Christian and the Jewish peoples had been given their own means of deciding matters through the Torah of Moses and the Injeel of Jesus (peace be upon him).

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is no longer with us in a physical form. The Companions are no longer with us in a physical form.

For the most part, we do not have access to the intentions through which the Prophet or the first four caliphs made their decisions and judgments concerning the regulation of public space. If the Prophet were with us now as a physical presence to which we had ready access, one cannot be sure that he necessarily would decide matters today concerning the regulation of public space exactly as he did more than 1400 years ago when circumstances, conditions, history, culture, and needs were very much different than they are today. Yet, there are people today who have arrogated to themselves the presumption that they know what the Prophet would do or how he would decide matters concerning the regulation of public space if he were here with us in the present set of circumstances.

It is reported that a person wanted to place a book written by Imam Malik in the Sacred Mosque. Apparently, the idea behind that individual’s desire was so that people coming to the Sacred Mosque might discover the book, read it, and, God willing, learn something

from its contents. When Imam Malik heard about the person's desire to place one of the Imam's books in the Sacred Mosque, Imam Malik indicated that he was not in favor of such an action.

Imam Malik is reported to have said: "The companions of the Messenger of Allah disagreed about the branches and dispersed to different countries, and each one is correct." He further commented: "The people have handed over to them positions, and they heard hadith and they examined reports, and each people takes what was handed over to them, and they yield to Allah with it. So, leave the people alone and what they choose for themselves in every country."

The Qur'an reminds us that:

"... for every one of you did We appoint a law and a way, and if Allah had wished He would have made you a single people, but that He might try you in what He gave you, therefore strive with one another to hasten to virtuous deeds; to Allah is your return of all, so He will let you know that in which you differed;" [Qur'an, 5:48]

Prior to becoming Caliph, Hazrat Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

"Listen to me, ye people. Those of you who worshipped Muhammad know that he is dead like any other mortal. But those of you who worship the God of Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) know that He is alive and would live forever."

Then he repeated a passage from the Qur'an:

"And Muhammad is no more than an apostle; apostles have already passed away before him; if then he dies or is killed will you turn back upon your heels? And whoever turns back upon his heels, he will by no means do harm to Allah in the least and Allah will reward the grateful." [Qur'an, 3:144]

Public space should be governed in a way that prevents oppression, exploitation, or abuse of any kind to undermine or interfere with people's basic right – which is granted by God – to decide the spiritual direction of their path in life. This is a right and a freedom that each human being has so long as whatever acts arise out of such choices do not spill over into the lives of other individuals and, in the process, adversely or problematically affect the latter's ability to freely chose and act with respect to their own individual course in life.

The public space, or commons, should be governed through principles of justice, equitability, peace, tolerance, integrity, honesty, charitableness, freedom, compassion, balance, harmony, and the sort of mediated settlements that help limit, if not eliminate all together, all forms of oppression, persecution, abuse, and exploitation. A public space governed in accordance with the foregoing qualities will, if God wishes, generate the type of environment that might prove to be most conducive to the exercise of the basic right to choose between good and evil – a responsibility that belongs to each and every human being.

If one looks to the example of the Prophet, the public space of his community was regulated in accordance with all of the foregoing considerations. He did not force people to pursue shari'ah but, rather, regulated public space in such a way as to provide people with the fullest opportunity to individually pursue shari'ah as rigorously as the latter individuals were so inclined to do as long as that pursuit did not infringe upon the right of others to do as they were inclined to do with respect to their own individual journey of shari'ah. Moreover, quite frequently, the Prophet made judgments concerning the regulation of public space that were in accordance with pre-Islamic, customary practices of the Arab or Jewish tribes.

The Qur'an instructed the Prophet to:

"Say: 'This is the truth from your Lord', then, whoever wills let him believe, and whoever wills let him disbelieve." [Qur'an, 18:29]

At another juncture the Qur'an informs the Prophet:

"You shall remind; you are entrusted to remind. You are not a watcher over them." [Qur'an, 88:21-22]

And, at another point, the Qur'an indicates:

"Say, 'Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger.' If they refuse, then, he is responsible for his obligations, and you are responsible for your obligations. If you obey him, you will be guided." [24:54]

Moreover, the Qur'an states:

"The guiding of them is not thy duty (O Muhammad), but Allah guides whom He will." [Qur'an 2: 272].

If, according to the Qur'an, the Prophet is not responsible for the guiding of people to God, and if the duty of the Prophet is not to watch

over whether, or not, people pursue shari'ah, and if God is making it clear that it is up to the individual as to whether he or she believes in the truth that has been sent through the Qur'an and that each person has her or his own responsibility with respect to God, then why do Muslim religious scholars, imams, theologians, mullahs, leaders, and the like all believe they have duties and responsibilities that were not entrusted to the Prophet? And, in the light of the foregoing considerations from the Qur'an, what is the source of their authority for assuming such duties and responsibilities?

Some religious scholars, would-be leaders, and theologians point to the following Quranic ayat as a possible source for what they consider their 'rightful' authority over people:

"O believers! Obey Allah! Obey the Rasul and those charged with authority among you. Should you have a dispute in anything, refer it to Allah and His Rasul if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day. This course of action will be better and more suitable." (Qur'an 4:59)

When would-be leaders cite the foregoing verse and seek to use it as an authority for expecting, if not demanding, that others should be obedient to the former, those who approach things in this manner are not only making several questionable assumptions, but, as well, such individuals often tend to act contrary to the full text of the guidance. More specifically, an assumption is being made that the sort of 'authority' to which the previous Quranic verse alludes is referring to worldly authority as opposed to spiritual authority, and a further assumption is being made that such individuals have been "charged" or given responsibility by God - or the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) -- to exercise authority over other individuals. Furthermore, when disputes arise in the community, then, contrary to the guidance of the Qur'an, such religious and political leaders often do not refer the matter to either Allah or the Prophet, but, instead, attempt to decide the matter according to their own theological likes and dislikes - with the assistance of imams, mullahs, and religious scholars who are loyal to those leaders -- and, then seek to impose - forcibly, if necessary -- their decisions on others.

The Prophet had a unique position within the Muslim community. Under the Divinely sanctioned circumstances surrounding such a standing, the public, for the most part, did not wish to place

constraints on what the Prophet could and could not do. This would have been antithetical to the nature of his position and the Divine authority in which his position was rooted – something that -- after all was said and done -- most [but not all] people in the community acknowledged and accepted.

However, there were those who came after the Prophet [and I do not necessarily have the four ‘righteous Caliphs’ in mind here] who enjoyed something very similar to the status of the Prophet within the Muslim community. As a result, those individuals became rulers in a more or less absolute sense without necessarily having that status sanctioned by Divinity, even though, obviously, such rulers were permitted by God to do whatever they did.

The Prophet had appointed no one to succeed him with respect to the regulation of public – as opposed to spiritual – space. On the other hand, the individuals who followed the Prophet as leaders of the community often were supported through the general trust of the public with respect to the presumed character, morality, piety, and good intentions of whoever it was that became ruler.

Once someone was elected to lead the community – and this was usually by a small group of individuals rather than the community as a whole – or in those cases where a current caliph appointed a successor – and this tended to be the case quite frequently because fathers tended to appoint their sons as their successors -- the general public would be required, en masse, to take ba’yat, or an oath of allegiance, with respect to the individual who would be king or sultan. Unfortunately, such a process offered few, if any, avenues through which a person might opt out of that oath or agreement either before or after the oath of allegiance was to be given, nor did that system permit or encourage the general public to play much of a rigorous, active role in determining who would be ruler or whether, or not, there should only be a single leader for the community -- as opposed to some sort of system of self-governance in which shura or consultation was used as the means through which to address the problems that confront a given community in accordance with the Quranic guidance that says:

“And their rule is to take counsel among themselves ...” [Qur’an, 42:38]

In addition, apparently, many people forgot what Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him) said upon becoming Caliph:

“Obey me as long as I obey Allah and His Prophet. When I disobey Him and His Prophet then obey me not.”

Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him) was alluding to the right of people to opt out of their oath of allegiance to him – or to any leader. The determining factor was not the identity of the leader, but, rather, the determining factor was whether, or not, such a person was acting in accordance with the guidance of the Qur’an or the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

The belief that there should be just one leader who was either given or assumed authority to do whatever he deemed to be appropriate became corrupted within a fairly short period of time following the passing away of the Prophet. When this sort of corruption was thoroughly entrenched and became institutionally calcified, many people apparently had considerable difficulty grasping the idea that the Qur’an actually served as, among other things, a Bill of Rights that was intended to protect people against oppression, exploitation, or abuse from their political or religious leaders. This sort of difficulty was maintained and perpetuated through the manner in which, on the one hand, the sultans and kings, and, on the other hand, various imams, qadis, muftis, and theological scholars would engage in reciprocal back-scratching among themselves with respect to mutually framing the historical situation in such a way that the majority of the community were induced to believe that both the leaders and their theological accomplices were the proper guardians and representatives of Sacred Law, despite the fact that many of these individuals might not have recognized the nature of Sacred Law or shari’ah even if the former tripped over the latter.

The regulation of public space is one issue, and the pursuit of shari’ah is quite another matter and completely independent of how public space is to be regulated. To seek to impose on others, through the public space, one’s own ideas about what the nature of the spiritual journey ought to involve is to engage in a form of spiritual abuse.

When anyone – imam, mufti, theologian, scholar, leader, qadi, mullah – seeks to control the spirituality of another human being, then, that the former individual has transgressed due limits and has entered into the realm of spiritual abuse or exploitation, and, therefore, oppression. As the Qur’an reminds us:

“Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress the limits, for God does not love the transgressors. [Qur’an, 2:190]

“... tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter.” [Qur’an, 2:191]

“And fight them till there is no more oppression, and Deen should only be for Allah, but if they desist, then there should be no hostility except against the oppressor.” [Qur’an, 2:193]

The foregoing is not sanctioning leaders to force Deen upon people, but, rather, the foregoing ayat is a reminder to everyone – especially leaders -- that Deen belongs to Allah and should not be interfered with or undermined by anyone. Moreover, when Deen – that is, the process of nurturing and enhancing the relationship of an individual with God, and, indeed, this is the cause of Allah -- is subject to oppression, then people have the right to resist such aggression so long as the form of that resistance does not transgress due limits of propriety, and one of the limits of propriety is that resistance should only be directed toward those who are being oppressive ... no one else.

Indeed, as the Qur’an makes clear elsewhere:

“The blame is only against those who oppress human beings with wrong-doing and insolently transgress beyond bounds through the land defying right and justice.” [Qur’an, 42:42]

The foregoing remains true even when the ones who are doing the oppressing are the very ones – in the form of religious or political leaders – who supposedly have assumed responsibility for protecting the people against such oppression.

Scholarly debates, rigorous research, discussions, informal conversations, symposia, conferences, round-table sessions, formal talks, books, articles, podcasts, television programs, documentaries, educational programs, and so on, are all legitimate venues through which to exchange views, ideas, and various considerations concerning

problems, questions, and issues of spirituality. The foregoing are all legitimate venues through which people might consult with one another on such matters – provided there is no compulsion or oppression involved in these activities either with respect to the matter of attending these sorts of exchanges or with respect to having to abide by what is said during those sessions.

In this respect, the Qur'an indicates:

“Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation and have disputations with them in the best manner.” [Qur'an, 16:125]

Although the foregoing guidance was specifically addressed to the Prophet, and although the calling others to the way of God is not the responsibility of a non-Prophet, nonetheless, when one engages in discussions with others concerning various issues, problems, and questions affecting the quality of public space, one still can follow the Sunna of the Prophet in such matters and, thereby, seek to do so “with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and have disputations with them in the best manner.”

“O ye who believe! Be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice, and let not hatred of a people incite or seduce you not to act equitably; act equitably, that is nearer to piety (taqwa) , and be careful with respect to Allah, surely Allah is aware of what you do.” [Qur'an, 5:8]

The public space or commons should not be operated in accordance with any philosophy or theology of public policy that imposes economic, legal, political, physical, moral, intellectual, educational, or cultural agendas on the members of the community who inhabit that public space. The sole task of governance is to guard against the emergence of any kind of oppression, exploitation, or abuse that might arise within the community or that threatens such a community from an external source.

Moreover, all members of the community have a duty of care toward themselves and others to contribute to helping those who are entrusted with governance to succeed in their sole task and responsibility concerning the struggle against oppression, along with the close cousins of oppression – namely, exploitation and abuse.

God:

“... made the balance, that you may not be inordinate [exceed limits, or transgress boundaries] in respect of the measure. And keep up the balance with equity and do not make the measure deficient.” [Qur’an, 55:7-9]

The balance, the measure, equity, and taqwa are all expressions of truth and justice. They are all expressions of the Sacred Law. They are all expressions of a realized shari’ah.

Determining the hukm or realities of such truths are challenges, God willing, to which individuals should aspire. They are not challenges that can be imposed on people or with respect to which compulsion is appropriate.

On the other hand, the ones who are entrusted to exercise governance have a duty of care to assist oppressors not to oppress others -- including themselves. Indeed, the Prophet is reported to have said that one should “Assist any person who is oppressed – whether Muslim or non-Muslim.”

The primary forms of oppression, exploitation and abuse come in the form of those actions that are likely to undermine or interfere with an individual’s God-given right to pursue, or not pursue, the realities and truths of Sacred Law and shari’ah according to the nature of that person’s capacity, circumstances, level of understanding, inclinations, and God’s Grace ... so long as the exercise of such choice does not interfere with, or undermine, the right of others to address such issues in their own manner. All other expressions of oppression, exploitation, and abuse are variations on the foregoing theme, and the process of freeing ourselves from entanglements that oppress, exploit or abuse others is part of what is entailed by the idea that one should die before one dies.



Section IV: Science, Spirituality, and Symmetry



Introduction

During the course of my life, I have cycled through periods of time in which science, spirituality, and/or philosophy – either individually or collectively – have shaped my explorations for truth. The science/mathematical facets of the cycling process began to occur at least from the time I was a freshman in high school ... two years removed from the stir created by Sputnik.

More specifically, in addition to various regular high school courses in science and mathematics (physics, geometry, chemistry, biology, algebra, and earth sciences), I was able to participate in several programs sponsored by the Maine Department of Education dealing with various facets of science and mathematics that, generally speaking, were not taught in most high school curricula of that era. These programs were part of the governmental response – at least at the state level – that were directed toward starting to cope with the possible implications posed by the perceived superiority of the, then, Soviet Union with respect to technical abilities relative to the United States.

I did quite well in the science courses sponsored by the state government – in fact I was one of two high school freshmen in the state who placed in the top twelve among the program's several hundred participants, most of whom were juniors and seniors. However, I was fairly average in the mathematics classes – although, on occasion, I surprised myself ... and, perhaps, a few others.

I could solve many of the problems in those math classes (I met with both individual tutors and, as well, gathered together, from time to time, with other participants in some of the high schools in northern Penobscot County). Moreover, I really liked learning about a variety of areas that – at least in the very small high school I attended (44 students, 11 in my freshman class) – were not part of the curriculum ... topics such as: infinity, groups, rings, fields, number theory, topology, and so on, but to be quite frank, I didn't seem to grasp what mathematics was all about ... despite the best efforts of my state-provided tutors and instructors.

Following my junior year in high school, I was awarded a National Science Foundation grant to study the theory of semi-conductors for six weeks at a college in New York City during the summer prior to my

final year of high school. I learned quite a few things during that period ... one of which was that perhaps I was not cut out for a life of science.

I came to the foregoing conclusion not because I felt there was a huge gap in ability between the other students and myself even though almost all of them came from much bigger and better high schools than the one I attended in Maine. On the other hand, there were, in fact, a number of the young people in the summer program who were quite advanced in relation to science and math and who, as well, were probably a lot smarter than me.

Rather, my reluctance to pursue a technical career beyond the horizons of high school was rooted in something that gradually dawned on me over the six-week period during which the course on semi-conductors took place. I discovered that I didn't like doing science ... a fairly important empirical data point with respect to deciding what to do with the rest of my life, and something that I would have had a difficult time realizing in my high school because that establishment had extremely limited (almost non-existent) lab facilities and, in addition, none of my teachers (there were only four in the high school) were either equipped and/or inclined to do much with what little there was in the way of scientific paraphernalia at the school.

I liked reading about science. I liked thinking about science. I liked talking about science. I even liked taking and doing well on the standardized science and math exams that were imported for me by my science and math instructor. However, I didn't like doing experimental work.

Of course, I have since come to understand that not all scientific research is a matter of lab work. Nevertheless, at the time, I believed that if I didn't enjoy experimental work, then, I needed to look in other directions as far as deciding on a career choice was concerned.

Perhaps my feelings about lab work were due to a degree of impatience within me concerning my search for truth. Setting up experiments just took too long, and there were so many things that could go wrong with, or mistakes that could be made in relation to, the set-up process. Furthermore, laboratory work was so much messier than the way textbooks made science appear to be ... even though, later

on, I came to appreciate that encountering such technical problems and messiness were all part of the scientific process.

Then, of course, one had to go through the whole analysis process following the experiment and, along the way, trying to discover the best manner through which to mathematically give expression to the data. This led to the plotting of some further significant data points to assist me to better calculate the possible slope of my adult life.

More specifically, I didn't like doing mathematics. This realization came even as I was coming to grasp some of the value that math had with respect to providing tools through which to organize empirical data in order to try to make some sense of that information.

I didn't mind other people getting to the undiscovered country sooner than I did. I was content that they were willing to share the fruits of their explorations with me and with others like me.

While I was busy in high school with mathematics and science – the subjects that most intrigued me – I also began to become interested in spirituality. Even though much of this latter interest was entangled, so to speak, with the church activities in which my mother participated, I also began to read – quite sparingly at first – about other forms of spirituality and mysticism beyond the horizons of Christianity.

Within limits, my mother was quite catholic and liberal in her approach to spirituality. For example, among other things, although we were Protestant, nonetheless, on occasion, she let me attend a Catholic church where some of my friends attended Mass.

My father was a believer of sorts ... albeit in his own private way. However, he was not much given to participating in organized religion ... although he consistently supported my mother's church activities in whatever way he could – which usually involved driving her to and from various church programs and, as well, showing up for Christmas and Easter services.

In part, I began to explore, and push, the boundaries of my spiritual horizons because the largely theological answers that I received from various ministers over the years in relation to my questions concerning spirituality were not very satisfying to me. On the other hand, although I was very inspired by the example of Jesus

(peace be upon him) and by the example of those (including my mother) who were influenced by that remarkable life, I also began to become inspired by some of the individuals about whom I was reading who were from other spiritual traditions including those of several indigenous peoples.

These forms of existential inspiration -- more than theological doctrine or the Bible or church membership -- moved me in the direction of wanting to become a minister through that I might be able to live a life of spirituality and assist others to do so as well. This is the career goal with which I entered university.

University was the first step in beginning to consciously realize that life is a very complex experimental laboratory. Even as I was placing mathematics and science on the back burner, life was strapping me to an existential lab table and beginning to probe me in various ways to determine how I might respond.

Because the aforementioned exploratory probes were somewhat painful and confusing, I felt a deep need to go in search of some coping strategies through which to engage the on-going examination of my being that was being conducted by life. Among other things, data points were beginning to accumulate during my first year of university that, perhaps, being a minister was not the calling that seemed to best fit my personality or inclinations, and part of this realization was due to the fact that my spiritual orientation -- such as it was -- was not helping me to resolve any of my questions and confusions concerning life.

As a result, I awoke in the great Agnostic Desert. I began to wander about, reflecting on my sense of being lost, and thirsting for something to quench the yearnings of my soul.

For a time, I became very interested in philosophy. I read a great deal, and, in addition, I had the good fortune to be able to attend classes being taught by some of the best philosophical minds of that era.

I liked the way philosophy seemed to be committed to critical inquiry ... and doing so in a very rigorous and relentless manner. Unfortunately, a great deal of this inquiry seemed -- or, at least, this appeared to be so to me -- to have a very tenuous and elusive

relationship with truth. I often felt that all I was getting were some techniques for treading water and staying partially afloat in the turmoil of life's stormy seas.

Philosophy is sometimes described as a journey and not a destination. This is fine if one doesn't mind taking a trip to nowhere, but I did mind, and I began to look for some other mode of transportation ... something that actually might take me to a determinate destination where I could settle down and feel that progress – to whatever limited degree – was being made in the struggle toward something substantial in the way of truth concerning myself and the nature of the universe.

One of the first ports to which I journeyed was psychology ... as Sheryl Crow might say: "The brochure looked nice." The discipline often combined elements of science, philosophy, and a quasi-spiritual search for the self (transpersonal psychology had not really gained much transaction at the time of my initial visit) and, consequently, psychology appealed to various interests, questions, inclinations, and concerns of mine ... at least up to a point.

I did receive a degree in psychology. However, the place where I went to school called it 'Social Relations' -- an interdisciplinary experiment that has since been abandoned, and I was one of the lab rats that had been let loose into, or upon, the world from that program.

A few years later, I started a graduate program in clinical psychology. Yet, despite some departmental assurances that I would be able to cobble together a curriculum that would permit me to explore various aspects of phenomenological, existential, and transpersonal psychology, the bugaboo of experimental work slowly began to be imposed on my life once again. Moreover, for many of the same reasons that had shaped my career decisions coming out of high school, I quickly became disillusioned with doing the experimental side of psychology.

I enjoyed reading about and reflecting on the implications of the experiments that others had done. This was especially true in relation to some of the experiments conducted by Solomon Asch (group influence in a perceptual task), Stanley Milgram (compliance or obedience), Philip Zimbardo (prisoner experiment), and Martin Seligman (learned helplessness) ... although, due to ethical

considerations, the last three experiments probably would not be able to run today.

In addition, during my undergraduate days, I had been quite happy to participate in a slew of experiments as a subject in exchange for a few dollars to help me survive life beyond the psychology lab. Some of these experiments were quite interesting and some of them were rather mysterious – for example, there was one experiment in which the people conducting the process wanted me to undergo electrical shocks in order to see how far I would be willing to take it ... an experiment that I never quite understood – although it might have been a selection process for identifying “candidates” for further twisted experiments of the sort that allegedly were administered to, among others, Ted Kaczynski – the ‘Unibomber’ – when he was an undergraduate student, prior to his days of infamy, and who had attended the same university as I had.

In any event, despite its varied charms, psychology exited stage left as I dropped out of the graduate psychology program in which I had been enrolled. Education entered stage right.

Being somewhat naïve about things at times, I thought that, perhaps, there might be fewer problems in a graduate program in education than in psychology. Unfortunately, despite the transformation in names, places, and subjects, there are, nonetheless, certain structural invariants that are conserved across the twists and turns of most academic programs – including education – and, thus, I began to experience, in a deeply personal way, the existential essence of the principle of symmetry ... even though, at the time, this experience of symmetry was far from the shores of my subsequent interlude with the mathematics and physics of symmetry (and a little later on I will return to this topic in a more formal manner).

In retrospect one might refer to the foregoing existential sequence of administrative and academic transformations as the ‘educational symmetry group.’ In other words, given the merry-go-round that I was on for many years (nearly seventeen) trying to obtain a doctoral degree, I am certain there is a suitable symmetry group that is capable of precisely describing (either with real or complex solutions) the many rotational permutations that my life went through during this period of emotional, physical, financial, economic, social,

psychological, and spiritual transformations as the absence of a doctoral degree remained invariant.

Because of the almost endless loops of rotating permutations that characterized much of my graduate, academic life as I pursued a doctoral degree in education, I inherited a lot of time to reflect on many issues. Among other things, I invested this temporal windfall in a day trader program of re-immersing myself in both science and mathematics, as well as the philosophy of those two disciplines.

Quantum theory, cosmology, relativity (both special and general), black holes, antimatter, holography, chaos and complexity theory, the history of mathematics, topology, Gödel's work, ideas concerning infinity, neurobiology, evolution, biochemistry, membrane functioning, and pre- biotic chemistry were some of the topics in which I invested time. I explored these subject areas not for a degree – although, eventually, not all of this work was wasted in that respect – but because I was trying to struggle toward the truth of things. My academic life might have been on administrative hold in many ways, but my epistemological longings were not so tethered.

Beyond the foregoing travel plans, my interest in spirituality and mysticism had taken some strange but intriguing zigs and zags just prior to entering the aforementioned graduate program in education. More specifically, since obtaining my undergraduate degree, I had explored – with varying degrees of intensity – different spiritual traditions ... from: Gurdjieff, to: Buddhism, the Vedanta, Jewish mysticism, the spirituality of various indigenous people, and several forms of Yoga.

For a number of reasons, I began to concentrate on the Sufi path. In the beginning, this assumed the form of a lot of reading (although at the time of my initial interest there was far less being published in English concerning the Sufi mystical tradition than is the case today). A few years later on, I took the experiential plunge by taking initiation with a spiritual teacher, and in the process, I became a Muslim by entering Islam through what some might describe as the back door ... although I like to think of it as the servant's entrance.

A Hilbert-like Challenge

When I became experientially involved with the Sufi path (including many of its practices such as: fasting, chanting, meditation, seclusion, prayer, night vigils, and community service), I continued to read a great deal of science and math. In fact, usually these interludes into science and math were fairly intensive and tended to occur approximately every ten years beginning in the late 1950s (high school) and have continued on until the present time.

The more I read on, and reflected about, science and mathematics, the more I realized that notwithstanding many superb accomplishments and breakthroughs across a litany of scientific and mathematical endeavors, nevertheless, in many ways scientists and mathematicians did not seem to be much closer to the truth of some rather important issues than were most other people. The main difference was that scientists were often able to couch their ignorance in technical terms and, thereby, were able to make it seem, on occasion, that they knew more than they actually did.

The foregoing contention becomes somewhat clearer if I draw a certain parallel with a challenge that David Hilbert extended to the world of mathematics at the beginning of the twentieth century. Hilbert initially broached the challenge at the International Congress of Mathematicians in Paris in 1900 and, then, several years later (1902) the challenged was re-issued in the 'Bulletin of the American Mathematical Society'.

Although the latter, published list was more extensive than the former, spoken list, the complete challenge involved citing twenty-four problems in mathematics that had not been solved at the time the challenge was issued by Hilbert. Since that time, ten of the proposed problems have been treated in a way that the consensus of the mathematical community agrees constitutes a definitive solution to the problem in question, while seven of the other problems have led to solutions on which there is, at least, partial consensus that, within certain limits, viable answers have been given.

Several problems, such as the Riemann hypothesis/conjecture (i.e., The real portion of any non-trivial zero generated through the Riemann zeta function -- which is defined for all complex numbers in which $s \neq 1$ -- will be $1/2$ and lies on the critical line, ' $1/2 + it$ ', where

'i' gives expression to imaginary units and 't' is a real number) are still unresolved. Four, or so, other problems posed by Hilbert have been thrown out by mathematicians as being too vaguely worded for them to ever be able to determine whether, or not, a solution had been found or could be found.

In any event, a similar set of challenges could be issued to the world of science ... in other words, problems that, at the present time, have not, yet, been solved by science. This itemized list could be stated in terms of the 'problem of origins'.

For example, what are the origins of the precise character of quantitative values such as: gravitation, the speed of light, Planck's constant, the charge of an electron, and the numerical values of the strong and weak forces? There are about 18 or 19 of these physical parameters that are steeped in mystery and cannot be derived from first principles in physics but must, instead, be hand-fed into equations based upon independently established experimental results rather than through a specific prediction that arises from some fundamental theory of physics and that subsequently becomes confirmed in the laboratory or the field.

Another problem of origins concerns the source of life. This is not about revisiting the creationist/evolutionist wars. Rather, it is a simple statement of fact -- namely, no one has come up with a plausible, defensible, consistent, precise, and rigorously tested theory for how life came to be on Earth.

There is a great deal of speculative smoke in this regard. However, no one has spotted the actual character of the fire that would be able to make sense of such smoke, and to date, anyone who claims otherwise cannot back up their contention with sound science.

Consequently, at the present time, the status of evolutionary theory as a complete account of the origins of life is somewhat akin to the status of physics at the turn of the century in 1900. More specifically, although neo-Newtonian physics dominated the explanatory landscape at that transitional time, there were all kinds of problems lurking in the bushes waiting to pounce and that soon would attack normal, Newtonian and classical sensibilities through the work of Planck, Einstein, and others.

In the process, Newtonian physics was turned up-side down when, among other things, scientists tried to generate sensible solutions for dynamical systems involving: black body radiation; high velocities (e.g., near the speed of light); intense gravitational fields (e.g., hypothesized black holes); and quantum events (e.g., electrodynamics). Consequently, in 1900 neo-Newtonian physics was very much an incomplete theory that needed to be put in a more rigorous form through developments in special relativity, general relativity, and quantum dynamics.

Now, however -- and it only took about eighty years, or so, to accomplish -- Newtonian physics can be seen as a generally workable system for understanding how to solve a variety of physical problems. What makes this possible is the hard-earned understanding that classical, Newtonian physics constitutes a set of limiting cases that can be derived from more fundamental principles rooted in special relativity, general relativity, quantum electrodynamics and quantum chromodynamics.

One cannot say the same for evolutionary theory with respect to the origins of life problem. Evolutionary theory still stands in need of its own version of quantum and relativistic revolutions.

Presently, unlike the case in physics in which one can travel from first principles and make sense of classical Newtonian physics, in evolution, one cannot go from first principles concerning the origins of life and derive modern, Neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory. One cannot make the transitions from the inorganic to the organic to the living in any consistent, rigorous, empirically viable fashion.

In many ways, the scientific illumination that accompanied the discoveries of DNA and molecular biology has brought the problems surrounding the development of a viable account for the origins of life out of the shadows. Just as Planck, Einstein, Bohr, and others began to reveal the problems and incompleteness inherent in Newtonian physics, so too, molecular biology has disclosed the manner in which neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory is inherently incomplete and cannot explain the origins of life from first principles.

Most evolutionary theorists like to ignore the many problems that exist in the pre-biotic landscape leading up to Darwinian ideas. This is

like writing only the third act of a play and assuming that the missing first two acts really won't matter all that much to the audience.

As a person of faith, I honestly can say that I don't have a vested interest in the issue, one way or the other. Evolution could be true because this is the means through which God created life, or Creation could be true because the major changes in the branches of the tree of life (including its origins) were introduced by God and not via evolutionary means ... even as population genetics, together with the idea of natural selection, might account for a considerable amount of observed variation among different species once they came into being.

Where I depart from evolutionary theory is in relation to the idea of randomness. In other words, I maintain that however life arose this was not the result of random processes.

I have no intention of trying to prove the foregoing claim. Rather, I am content to note that randomness is, itself, a concept with a faith pedigree, and, consequently, I see no reason for according such a faith initiative more credibility than a form of faith that rejects the assumption of randomness.

In fact, no process can be shown to be random - - whether in relation to the origin of life or with respect to any other phenomenon. There could always be some, as yet unknown, algorithmic set of processes (that is, an ordered, recipe-like group of steps for producing solutions to a given kind of problem) that led to whatever is currently being labeled as a product of randomness.

The most one can say is that based on a certain body of data and given certain very contentious conventions for testing the degree of confidence one has in conclusions drawn from such data, no algorithm has been scientifically identified as being the cause of the phenomenon in question. As such, the notion of randomness is, at best, an assumption rooted in an inductive argument that could be shown to be invalid during further rounds of refining the process of experimental analysis.

However, no matter what the character of the framework is in which faith might be embedded, faith is not other than faith. The idea of: degrees of confidence, is little more than a faith-based initiative

concerning the truth in relation to a particular topic ... in this case evolution and the origins of life.

If people want to believe that the universe is random, that is fine. However, this is not a belief that can be proven to be true ... even though such an assumption does have its heuristic uses. Yet, notwithstanding the valuable role that such an assumption can play methodologically, the underlying assumption of randomness still stands in need of demonstration as an ontological reality.

In other words, methodologically speaking, one can use the idea of randomness -- construed as being a set of circumstances that seem to exhibit no discernible algorithmic pattern -- to establish a baseline against which one measures and evaluates experimental results. This helps one to generate a benchmark through which one judges whether, or not, some given phenomenon might have occurred purely by chance or took place due to some other set of non-random factors.

Nonetheless, when one does this, one is not really talking about randomness, per se. Rather, one is talking about a process for decision making which sets up arbitrary cut off points that help one decide -- via a convention -- when to call something "random" rather than "determinate", even though such labeling has done nothing at all to prove that some given event is random rather than caused by, say, an, as of yet, unidentified algorithmic process or set of 'hidden' variables.

Attempts have been made to use perspectives such as: chaos theory, complexity theory, and far from equilibrium dynamics to explain how determinate structures might arise out of presumably random processes. Nonetheless, in each of these cases, assumptions are being made about the character of the initial starting conditions as well as the nature of the forces that are shaping such starting conditions.

The universe might be random, or, then again, the universe might not be random. Nonetheless, irrespective of which might be true, given our present state of knowledge (or ignorance), the claim that the universe is a set of random processes is nothing more than a declaration of faith about how someone believes the universe operates. Enscorning that piece of faith within a scientific framework does not suddenly confer upon it a status of truth or indicate that it

should necessarily and automatically be awarded a greater degree of credibility than other forms of faith.

One might say that, in some ways, there is something of a Mexican-standoff between the two perspectives of randomness versus non-randomness. Neither side has the empirical leverage to topple the respective antithetical form of faith system -- even as both sides seek to raise the ante through this or that empirical chip or logical consideration and call for a hallelujah from their respective choirs.

Nonetheless, if evolutionary theorists want to have final bragging rights with respect to the claim that the origin of life is due to purely random processes, then, the burden of proof is on them. As the Cuba Gooding, Jr. character in Jerry Maguire might say: "Show me the money."

I have written about all of this in: *Evolution and the Origin of Life* and *Evolution Unredacted* so I won't repeat myself with respect to the technical details. However, when one begins to study: molecular biology, biochemistry, pre-biotic chemistry, membrane functioning, cell functioning, metabolic pathways, protein formation, DNA and RNA synthesis, gene expression, geology, hydrology, atmospheric, and other related topics and search for a clear, plausible, rigorous, demonstrable line of argument for how one goes -- via allegedly random processes (enhanced, if one wishes with ideas from chaos theory, complexity theory, and far from equilibrium dynamics) -- from: Abiotic conditions free of living systems, to: biotic conditions containing even the simplest of life in the form of proto-cells, one tends to come up empty. In short, currently there exists no consistent, plausible, precise, and rigorous scientific theory capable of solving -- even in the flimsiest of ways -- the origin of life problem.

People (scientists and non-scientists) can argue all they like about the strength or weaknesses of Darwinian and neo-Darwinian theory. However, they are barking up the wrong tree of life, because Darwin has virtually nothing to say about the origins of life issue except to allude in *On The Origins of Species* to the possibility of there being a warm little pond somewhere during the history of Earth in which the inexplicable suddenly does its version of the 'dawn of the living dead' movies -- although Darwin, of course, did not phrase things in quite

this way -- and require the audience to enter into a state of suspended belief in order to be able to get on with the story.

One cannot even say that evolutionary theory provides the best scientific account of the origin of life issue. This is because there is no general consensus within the scientific community about what such a theory looks like.

Instead, one has a gaggle of theories concerning the origin of life that all entail numerous, fundamental, unresolved, empirical and theoretical problems. Furthermore, there is nothing on the scientific horizon that seems even remotely capable of handling such difficulties in a plausible, reliable manner.

Someone might maintain that if I am not willing to accept the current evolutionary perspective on the matters surrounding the origin of life, then it is my responsibility to provide an alternative hypothesis that resolves such a problem. Actually, this is not my responsibility. Epistemologically speaking, I have done my due diligence if I satisfactorily demonstrate what cannot be shown given our present condition of knowledge/ignorance.

When a mathematician has done all he or she can to demonstrate that a certain problem cannot be solved in a particular way, it does not, then, become the duty of that mathematician to show how the problem might be solvable in some other way -- although people might be very happy if he or she were able to accomplish this. Similarly, if I have rejected the evolutionary account of the origin of life on reliable scientific grounds (and there could be civilized debate about whether, or not, this conditional has been satisfied), then I cannot reasonably be expected to also come up with a solution to the origin of life problem any more than a jury can reasonably be required to continue on and prove who actually did kill someone after they have, beyond a reasonable doubt, ruled out a specific defendant as a viable candidate for the crime.

I don't have to prove some version of creationism, nor advance an argument from Intelligent Design. I am content to know that, currently, science has no reliable theory concerning the origin of life and, therefore, until new evidence comes along, I am free to go in whatever way is plausibly consistent with the available data.

In addition to the problem of origins concerning constants (which is really a set of 18 or 19 problems) and evolutionary theory (which, similarly, is really a set of theoretical and empirical difficulties rather than just one problem), another currently unsolved problem in science is the origins of consciousness. In fact, while raising the issue of consciousness, one might also add on several other related 'problem of origin' issues at the same time - - namely, the origin of rational/logical thought, the origin of language, and the origin of creative talent (whether artistic, musical, mathematical, or technical inventiveness).

Theories abound in all of the foregoing areas. Yet there is precious little that stands up to rigorous scrutiny and, as a result, enjoys anything close to a general consensus of support among scientists.

To be sure, there have been a lot of interesting results generated through, among other things, functional magnetic resonance imaging techniques and positron emission tomography. Some experimental results (recently reported on '60 Minutes' as well in a variety of books and magazine articles) even seem to suggest that, within certain limits, the minds of people can be read with respect to what those individuals might be thinking about from one moment to the next.

However, at best, such studies are correlational in nature rather than causal in character. In other words, while one can concede the point that there are different portions of the brain which can be identified that are correlated with various kinds of thought processes, yet, when one pushes the interrogative envelope and asks how, exactly, does a complex of neurons, dendrites, axons, electrical impulses, glial cells, neurotransmitters, and synapses generate consciousness and/or the thoughts in question, there are, no reliable, definitive answers.

We don't know how, or if, the brain generates consciousness. We don't know how, or if, the brain generates thought, logic, understanding, belief, values, insight, or interpretation.

Brain functioning might be correlated with all of the foregoing. Nonetheless, the causal pathways, if any, between the two are steeped in mystery.

To date, there has been nothing uncovered by either cognitive psychology nor neurochemistry which can prove that the brain is

anything more than a very sophisticated receiver -- like a television or radio set -- that organizes 'waves' (programs) coming in from some other source or dimension (station). In fact, a great deal of the empirical data which comes in from medicine and shows that, for example, certain kinds of lesions in various parts of the brain lead to specific sorts of disabilities can be likened to what happens in a television set when something goes wrong with a transistor, capacitor, or circuit and, thereby, prevents the set from being able to properly receive information that is coming in via satellite, cable, or antenna from some other locality.

In the near future, science might be able to prove that consciousness, thinking, creativity, and language are entirely functions of brain activity. However, this is not the status of things at the present time, and, consequently, all of these origin issues remain unsolved challenges for science.

To kick a bit of additional sand into the face of some scientists at this juncture, I always enjoy talking to psychologists -- especially those who wish to reduce consciousness, thinking, and language down to processes that are nothing more than chemistry and physics -- about the work of John Lorber, a British neurologist who did some research involving hydrocephaly.

Hydrocephaly arises when, for whatever reason, the flow of cerebral-spinal fluid is blocked or trapped in some way so that the four ventricles within the brain begin to increase in volume through the accumulation of trapped cerebral- spinal fluid. If this continues on without intervention (such as surgically implanting a shunt that allows drainage to occur), the brain tends to get squeezed against the interior of the skull, and over time, the brain is reduced to becoming a very tiny filament (perhaps a millimeter, or so, in thickness) running around the interior portion of the skull.

One of the interesting facets of Lorber's research is that he discovered some patients with hydrocephaly whose brain had been severely compressed in the foregoing manner (that is, down to a single or several millimeters). Yet, these individuals showed no cognitive defects ... in fact, at least one of them had earned a honors degree in mathematics.

Of the more than 600 CAT scans conducted by Lorber, about 50, or so, of the scans studied were of individuals in which at least 95% of the cranial cavity had been filled with cerebrospinal. Half of this group of scans came from individuals who were severely retarded and half of the group had IQs greater than 100 despite the severely compressed nature of their brains.

Roger Lewin wrote an article that was published in *Science* (210, December 1980) entitled: "Is Your Brain Really Necessary?" which summarized the Lorber research. The journal, *Science*, is fairly cautious about what it admits to its pages ... although over the years some mistakes might have been made. There are critics of the Lorber research who claim that interpreting CAT scans can be a tricky proposition and, consequently, it is easy to miss brain mass when attempting to interpret the scans. Such critics claim that Lorber's research is invalid because he has committed such errors.

Lorber acknowledges the difficulties and problems that surround the interpretation of CAT scans. Nevertheless, he asserts that no mistakes of the indicated kind were made during his research.

Interestingly, I am not aware of any of Lorber's critics who have expressed an interest in going over the scans in question and demonstrating the error of Lorber's methodology. Apparently, like the church officials who condemned Galileo, none of Lorber's critics seem willing to look through his 'telescope' consisting of CAT scans of hydrocephalic individuals and see what, if any, brain matter actually shows up in the viewing process.

Some of Lorber's critics also talk about how there are redundant systems in the brain, and, if such system becomes dysfunctional, other back-up systems come to the rescue. However, none of these critics seems to have addressed the fact that the observable evidence (namely the CAT scans) appears to indicate that all such systems have been severely compressed and, as a result, one would have to wonder how any of the systems would have been able to continue to be functionally viable, no matter how redundant they might have been originally (that is, before the destruction of a given individual's brain).

Some of these same critics also like to use the idea of 'emergent properties' (a principle related to, among other things, certain aspects

of complexity theory) to explain how brain functioning might generate consciousness, thinking and so on. Yet, emergent properties require a certain threshold of complexity to plausibly speak about what phenomena might arise out of a given system that cannot be anticipated or predicted based on an examination of the basic components of such a system, and, therefore, Lorber's research seems to undercut the whole issue of complexity and emergent properties ... taking such possible explanations of mental functioning in a direction that is totally opposite to the one in which they need to go.

In any case, in the light of the Lorber research, one is left with a variety of questions concerning the origins of such phenomena as: consciousness, thinking, and creativity. Is the brain a complex receiver of thought and consciousness, or is the brain a generator of thought and consciousness, or is it some combination of the two? The mystery of origins continues on in these respects.

If one wishes to dismiss the Lorber research, one might like to consider the findings of Benjamin Libet. He ran an experiment in which subjects were required to flex a finger at a time of their choosing and, then, to note the time on the clock that marked the point of their decision.

The experimental data indicates that, on average, subjects took 0.2 seconds to flex their finger after they had decided to do so (at least as far as the subjects noting the time on the clock is concerned). Strangely enough, the electroencephalograph that was monitoring their brain-wave activity, tended to record a spike in electrical activity some 0.3 seconds before the time of having decided (apparently) to flex their fingers.

What caused this spike? How did it arise? What does it signify?

Is some -- unconscious perhaps -- portion of the brain making the finger flexing decision ... a decision that we become aware of only 'after the fact'? Or, is the electrical spike an indication that some sort of non-physical mental process is occurring and that the time between the electroencephalographic spike and the motor firing underlying the finger flexing is the time interval necessary for the brain to translate or process a non-physical intention?

Libet referred to the pre-motor state of the brain (i. e., prior to the time of flexing the finger) that was given expression through the spike in the electroencephalograph as the 'readiness potential'. Libet and others interpreted the readiness potential as an indication of unconscious brain activity that led up to the conscious experience of having formed an intention and, therefore, an indication that human beings did not have free will.

However, the belief that the readiness potential is rooted purely and completely in unconscious brain functioning might be based on a failure to have traced conscious events back to their actual source.

In fact, even if one were able to map out the full pathway of the readiness potential with respect to all the neurological factors that are believed to culminate in the spiking of the electroencephalograph, there is nothing that prevents one from legitimately asking for an account of what caused all the collective brain processes that led to the occurrence of the readiness potential.

Maybe the readiness potential really just signifies the brain's staging process for translating a non-brain intention into a physical form. If so, then the precise character of the interfacing process between the mental and the physical is still mired in mystery, and the related origin problems remain.

Back in the 1970s, the splint-brain research of Roger Sperry and Michael Gazzaniga laid the foundations for, among other things, the idea that the human mind has a potential for maintaining multiple pockets of simultaneous consciousness that interpret reality according to the information that is available to these respective mental pockets. Consequently, it is entirely possible that physical and non-physical pockets of consciousness interact in order to translate non-physical mental intention into physically recordable impulses -- although this was certainly not the position of Gazzaniga, Sperry or Libet ... even as it is consistent with their collective findings.

'Problem of origin' issues tend to be frustrating and irritating for a lot of scientists. Such theoretical difficulties tend to suggest that, oftentimes, more questions need to be asked that place current -- supposedly established -- understandings at risk ... understandings in which some scientists might have a vested philosophical or ideological interest (e.g., that there is nothing beyond the physical, or that mental

functions are purely a matter of brain states, or that the universe runs in accordance with largely random processes that, given the right circumstances, will generate organized structures and systems in accordance with certain basic laws of physics and chemistry).

Another mystery facing science is the problem surrounding the origins of the observed asymmetry between matter and antimatter in the universe. As far as scientists can tell, there is a lot of matter, and, relatively speaking, very little antimatter in the universe, but the reasons why this is so are not readily evident.

Although many cosmological theories suggest that prior to the 'Big Bang' the relative ratio of matter to antimatter should have been fairly close, such theories all allude to some unknown mechanism that might have led to a starting point -- namely, the time of the Big Bang -- in which there was a slight asymmetry between the two in favor of matter that, over time, would have permitted most of the antimatter to be annihilated while leaving behind a universe consisting largely of matter. Nevertheless, there are no empirically verifiable theories currently in existence that plausibly account for how such an asymmetry might have come about ... assuming, of course, that it came about at all and that, at some point, matter and antimatter were in rough equilibrium with one another.

Two other cosmological themes that are still in the unsolved column involve: 'dark matter' and 'dark energy'. While it is entirely possible that no such "entities" exist -- and many scientists are quite willing to acknowledge such a possibility -- there is considerable evidence to indicate that many, if not most, galaxies appear to be rotating with velocities that cannot be explained given the amount of 'visible' matter that has been calculated to exist in the observable universe. Similarly, when scientists try to explain the large-scale character of the Universe and attempt to present a consistent picture of how they believe the cosmos might have unfolded across time from the instant of the alleged 'Big Bang' to the present day, more mass and energy is required -- by a factor of nearly thirty times -- than can be accounted for by standard theories of cosmology. As a result, the ideas of 'dark matter' and 'dark energy' have been hypothesized to account for what is being empirically observed in the cosmos.

Do such entities exist? Maybe!

On the other hand, maybe something of an even more mysterious and exotic nature is responsible for what is being observed. Perhaps the idea and character of the 'Big Bang' is different from what many have assumed to be the case.

In either event, the mystery remains unresolved. Thus, it could be added to my list of origin challenges for science, since if 'dark matter' and 'dark energy' do exist, then one would like to know where they come from and how they arise, and whether, or not, baryonic and non-baryonic matter (since there seem to be no viable, baryonic candidates for dark matter) were ever unified in some unknown state prior to the Big Bang.

In fact, having mentioned the idea of the Big Bang at several junctures during the previous pages, one might note that the Big Bang is itself rather a big mystery. Scientists extrapolate back from the present and hypothesize a set of events that might have gotten us to where things stand today.

More than thirty years ago, the Nobel Laureate, Steven Weinberg wrote a book entitled: *The First Three Minutes*, that offered a description rooted in what modern physics could tell us about the events that might have transpired following the 'Big Bang'. To be precise, the frame for his story begins with the first one-hundredth second and proceeds from there, since at the time -- and, to a great extent, this still remains true -- too little is known about the physics of the particles that might have been in play prior to a time when temperatures were believed to exceed 100,000 million degrees Kelvin and indefinitely large densities might have had existed ... conditions that make it difficult to calculate the transaction rates of processes involving strong interactions that hold quarks together (the building blocks of, among other things, protons and neutrons) via exchanges of gluon bosons (one of the foci of quantum chromodynamics).

Prior to the first one-hundredth second, allusions often are made to conditions of infinite temperature and density. What created those sorts of temperatures and densities is unknown. The nature of that which held those temperatures and densities together until the moment of the Big Bang is unknown. What would have permitted such 'forces' to be overcome, is unknown. Whether space and time existed prior to the Big Bang is unknown. Whether the initial starting

conditions actually consisted of infinite density and temperature is unknown. Whether the four known forces (gravitational, electromagnetic, weak, and strong) were unified prior to the Big Bang is unknown. Whether there was some form of spontaneous symmetry breaking that led to the Big Bang is unknown. Whether the Big Bang is a unique or recurrent event is unknown.

One problem entailed by the Big Bang that was raised early on was that if the Universe expanded in the way initially believed, then one cannot explain why the cosmos seems so isotropic and homogenous -- that is, on average, the universe appears to be pretty much the same no matter which way one peers into the cosmos. Furthermore, if this is the case (as observation seems to indicate), then 13 to 15 billion years (the calculated age of the visible universe) does not seem to be sufficiently long enough to be able to generate the isotropic and homogenous conditions that are observed today.

Alan Guth proposed a solution to the foregoing dilemma. He hypothesized that just 1×10^{-35} seconds into the Big Bang, there was a very brief period of inflation that allowed space to expand (by a factor greater than 10^{50}) for just the right amount of time and with just the right degree of intensity to, over time, generate the isotropic and homogenous universe we see today.

The only problem is that there are a lot of mysteries surrounding and permeating the inflation hypothesis. What caused it? Is space really 'something' that is subject to inflation? Why did inflation occur when it did? Why did inflation have the structural character it did? Why did inflation shut down when it did?

There are a number of theories that seek to answer the foregoing questions and, thereby, save the inflation hypothesis. However, none of these theories has yet to be empirically verified.

There is indirect evidence for the idea of inflation in the form of the 2.7° Kelvin background microwave radiation that was discovered by Robert Wilson and Arno Penzias -- but actually explained by Robert Dicke -- as to what one might expect to see (and for which Dicke and his research team had been searching) if there were an 'afterglow' of radiation left over from the Big Bang that would become visible once the Universe had cooled sufficiently to permit such electromagnetic radiation to be detected amidst electron scattering processes that had

rendered the visibility of such radiation opaque at higher temperatures.

However, the background microwave radiation that appears to permeate every facet of space also has been cited to serve as support for theories that reject Guth's inflationary Big Bang perspective. Yet, like Guth's theory of inflation, these alternative theories also stand in need of empirical confirmation.

All in all, there is an embarrassment of unknowns surrounding the so-called Big Bang. As a result, an increasing number of physicists have sought for solutions that might enable scientists to be able to avoid the many unexplained facets of the standard cosmological model while simultaneously offering a plausible account for how we might have arrived at the present state of things in the universe. Yet, these alternative theories concerning the nature and evolution of the universe each have their own set of difficulties with which to deal.

Currently, at CERN, scientists are looking for the Higgs boson, an elementary particle of spin-0 that is predicted by the Standard Model of quantum physics. Among other things, the Higgs boson is hypothesized to be the source/creator of mass (and this is why some individuals refer to it as the God particle) and that if it existed might help to explain why photons, that mediate electromagnetic processes, are mass-less, while the W and Z bosons that mediate weak force interactions are, relatively speaking, quite massive.

The predicted mass of the Higgs boson is thought to be below 1.4 Tera-electron volts. If this is true, then, the Large Hadron Collider that recently went on line at CERN is capable of generating the sort of collision energies out of which the Higgs boson might precipitate, so to speak.

Does the Higgs boson exist? Or, is some other non-Higgs model needed to help complete the Standard Model of quantum theory?

We might soon find out? Then, again, nothing like the Higgs boson might be seen at CERN, and, if so, scientists will have to determine whether this means that the Higgs boson does not actually exist or it means that the predicted mass of the Higgs particle has been incorrectly calculated and one must set about generating still higher collision energies if one hopes to catch sight of such a particle.

In any event, the questions surrounding the Higgs particle are related to the problem of origins ... namely, the origin of mass. So, we can add it to the list of currently unsolved problems involving origins.

A further candidate for the proposed Hilbert- like list has to do with gravity. More specifically, although a value for the gravitational constant has been precisely established, no one knows what constitutes the source or origin of gravity.

The consensus preference among quantum physicists is the graviton. The graviton is a hypothetical -- so far, at least -- gauge-field particle that is believed to be massless and characterized by a spin-2 property and, therefore, if it existed would behave in a way that made it capable of providing descriptions of gravitational phenomena that are indistinguishable from the descriptions that are given through general relativity theory. One of the problems with the foregoing possibility is that there might be a basic incompatibility between quantum dynamics (in the form of the graviton) and the tensor geometry of general relativity. For example, one facet of this incompatibility arises in the form of the infinities that are generated when calculating values for the gauge field of the graviton at certain high energies that are relatively close to, or which exceed, the Planck scale (1.22×10^{28} electron volts), and unlike the case of quantum electrodynamics -- however ontologically suspicious that mathematical technique might be -- a way has not been found to "renormalize" the field calculations associated with the graviton as has been done for photon dynamics. String theory claims to have a way to avoid the foregoing infinities. However, in a sense string theory employs its own version of a renormalizing technique when it uses hidden dimensions to get rid of the offending infinities.

The introduction of additional dimensions might dissolve one problem -- namely, infinities (or sweeps it beneath the dimensional rug). However, in the process, string theory might lead to another kind of problem -- that is, whether or not such dimensions actually exist mathematically ... however elegant they might be.



Some Methodological Considerations

None of the foregoing brief excursions into physics touch upon the whole issue of the precise character of the relationship between, on the one hand, the classical-visible world of large objects traveling with velocities well-below the speed of light through non-extreme gravitational fields and, on the other hand, the quantum world. Although many scientists appear to believe that Bohr and the so-called Copenhagen Interpretation of physical reality won out over Einstein's hidden-variable perspective that, among other things, insists that 'God does not play dice', there is considerable unsettled business surrounding the matter.

According to the principle of superposition, it is possible for, say, a particle to exist in many states simultaneously. Schrodinger's wave equation -- augmented by Max Born's interpretive adjustments -- permits one to calculate the probabilities of likelihood of occurrence with respect to such states, but until the equation is solved, all states are said to be existent simultaneously.

The collapse of the wave function -- that is, using the equation to solve for specific values -- 'selects' the real-world value that emerges from the cloud of quantum unknowing that is encompassed by the principle of superposition that rules over the unsolved wave equation. However, the ontology of this process of collapse is shrouded in mystery.

There have been many theories advanced that purport to describe what happens during the collapse of the wave function. Besides the 'Copenhagen Interpretation' that was set in motion by Niels Bohr, one also has: Hugh Everett's many-world's interpretation, John Wheeler's theory about the role that consciousness plays in the collapse of the wave function, and David Bohm's wholeness and the implicate order approach, which are some of the proposals that have been set forth in an attempt to make sense of alleged 'quantum weirdness'.

Personally, I like the frankness of Richard Feynman's response when he gave some advice to an individual who was concerned about not being able to understand what was going on at the quantum level. More specifically, Feynman told the individual to just do the mathematical calculations because, ontologically speaking, no one knows what is going on at the quantum level.

Beyond such bouts of honesty, however, I've always felt that there is, sometimes, a tendency to confuse, if not conflate, scientific methodology with ontology. For instance, I believe that the principle of superposition is just a methodological statement -- with no ontological implications or reality -- and that Max Born's probabilistic rendering of the Schrodinger wave equation is an alternative way of giving expression to the same idea.

If the foregoing is true, then the probabilistic interpretation of the wave function has no ontological counterpart. In other words, although the wave function does have a relation to what is going on in reality, the nature of that relationship is not one of tracking a real-world probability wave out of which a particular quantum state ontologically precipitates in mysterious fashion when the wave equation is solved.

Schrodinger's wave equation is a search function. It assists one to identify which state-candidates in a probability distribution are most likely to be found in a given set of circumstances.

Like a GPS device, the Schrodinger wave equation should not be confused or conflated with that for which a position is being determined. Similarly, I have no problem in understanding that as an ontological entity I can exist quite independently of whether, or not, I have a GPS device (the Schrodinger wave equation in the case of a particle) to locate where I am (it is). Nor, do I believe that I am brought into existence simply because a GPS device is somehow turned on which can locate my position ... or that I don't have a position until that device is turned on and viewed by someone.

Quantum weirdness is largely, if not entirely, a function of scientists trying to interpret ontological phenomena that -- as Richard Feynman pointed out -- no one really understands. Not content with having worked out a variety of methods (Heisenberg's S-matrix mechanics, Schrodinger's wave equation, the Dirac's equation, and Feynman's sum-over histories method ... all of which have been shown to be roughly equivalent to one another) for determining various values concerning quantum states, many scientists have sought to have the methodology do double duty by providing an alleged ontological explanation for what is going on, and the results have given birth to a lot of philosophical and ideological speculation concerning

the nature of reality. This is like expecting a GPS device to provide an explanation for: who I am, and why I am where I am at the moment of its fixing my location, and what the purpose of life is.

Similar confusions/conflations arise in conjunction with other aspects of physics with similar sorts of weirdness bubbling to the surface as a result. For example, consider the special theory of relativity and the accompanying infamous time paradoxes that seem to be implied by the Lorentz transformation.

Einstein made time operational by claiming that time is what a clock measures. Actually, clocks have a determinate character that time permits to be expressed through the structural nature of the clock.

Sundials, hourglasses, mechanical clocks, electric clocks, and atomic clocks all have their unique ways of serving as an index for the passage of time. If we have all of these devices simultaneously marking time and some of these indices are more periodically regular than others, we don't say that there are different temporal realities going on, each of which is generated through a different kind of clock. Rather, some of the devices are more reliable -- more precisely periodic -- than others for, say, purposes of measurement.

If one places the various devices on a rocket ship that travels near the speed of light, or if one place the devices in an intense gravitational field, one would expect there to be some kind of effect on the 'workings' of each of the clocks due to the effect of the near-light velocity or intense gravitational fields, but none of this necessarily implies that anything is happening to the ontology of time. Indeed, observations have been made (by Leon Lederman among others) in relation to the decay rates of particles which demonstrate that those decay rates are affected by the nature of the physical circumstances in which they are observed, and experiments also have been done (with airplanes) in which atomic clocks that began in synchronous harmony will deviate from one another if they are subjected to different intensities of gravitational field (e.g., at the Earth's surface versus in the air at some distance from that surface).

What has any of this got to do with the ontology of time? Nothing really!

However, it has a lot to do with the measurement of time. The Lorentz transformations permit measurements to be translated in such a way that the laws of physics are conserved in all frames of reference.

From the perspective of one frame of reference, it might seem like some other set of physical laws are manifesting themselves in another frame of reference in which measurements of velocity, mass, length, and time have not been properly translated in relation to the two frameworks. Nonetheless, if one feeds the measurements into the Lorentz transformation, one comes to understand that despite the differential surface appearances generated by the measurement process exactly the same laws of physics are taking place in each of the frames of reference.

Measurements of time, mass, velocity and length might vary as a function of the conditions of gravitation and velocity that are engaged by, and engaging, the measurement process. However, the ontology of time is not necessarily affected by any of this, and, in fact, given the principle at the heart of all relativity theory that no frame of reference has a special relationship with the universe that would enable one to identify physical absolutes of any kind, one could never actually determinately establish whether, or not, the ontology of time was affected by any set of physical circumstances, although we might have substantive evidence that the measurement of time can be so affected.

Put a person in a vehicle traveling at the speed of light and the measurement of time might slow down to zero. However, the ontology of temporality ticks on in its own independent, inimitable fashion ... or, given that I have never actually performed such an experiment, that's my intuitional assessment of the situation.

The slowing down of a clock will not necessarily affect the ontological age of an individual. In fact, increased velocities and/or gravitational fields might affect the metabolic processes related to ageing.

However, aging is a clock-like process that could be affected by the circumstances of life but does not, itself, necessarily affect the general ontology of life in any fundamental manner.

Time and circumstances affect clocks and measurement. Clocks and measurement have no capacity to affect time or circumstances ... unless, vis-à-vis Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, one wishes to note that the process of measurement has the capacity to interfere with our ability to precisely measure the character of some aspect of reality in a given set of circumstances. However, the foregoing is a statement about the epistemological and methodological character of our attempt to engage reality and is not at all -- Bohr's protestations to the contrary -- a statement about the inherent structural character of reality.

Let's take a brief look at one last example in which methodology might be getting confused or conflated with ontology. More specifically, consider the 'space-time' concept that is inherent in the mathematics of general relativity.

Space-time needed to be invented in order to be able to construct a mathematical means (with help from Hermann Minkowski and Marcel Grossmann) that was capable of accurately describing gravitational phenomena through a sort of tensor geometric mapping process that was given expression through the equations of general relativity. Nonetheless, although Einstein is reported to have said that gravitation is geometry, this is really nothing more than a shorthand form of expression that actually means that certain forms of geometry are capable of generating descriptions that are able to accurately reflect various structural features of gravitational phenomena.

One might ask, therefore, whether there actually is some ontological entity that is space-time? Asked in a slightly different way, one might ask: What is the "fabric" of either time or space -- or space-time? Does space, time, and/or space-time have any ontological "fabric" that is capable of being affected by physical processes such as gravitation (or inflation)? Do we actually know what space or time is ... even as we construct mathematical systems for describing what takes place within the mysterious 'containers' of space and time?

Does gravitation really warp space or space-time? Or, is it the gravitational field within space and time that is distorting itself, and this distortion can be measured through tensor calculations that map the nature of such deformations across the space-time dimensional system of methodology that is used for keeping track of such changes?

General relativity is a methodological means for describing ontological phenomena, and space-time plays an important role in that descriptive process. However, general relativity, and its component space-time, might only be an analog for certain facets of reality rather than reality itself, and if so, then, space-time is nothing more than a methodological means (ingenious as this might be) for representing or reflecting certain structural features (of a gravitational nature) that are being manifested through ontology and should not be confused or conflated with the actual nature of the ontology being represented.

A mirror reflects some portion of the real world. Although there might be occasions in which one might not be sure whether one is looking at a mirror reflection of reality or one is looking at reality (and usually for this to happen there has to be a symmetry in the real world setting that, when reversed through the left-right shift of reflections, cannot be detected), we do not suppose that the mirror reflection and the real world are the same thing. There is a relationship between the two that allows certain real structures to be preserved across the several dimensions of reflection, but there are aspects of the real world that do not exist in the mirror reflection.

Similarly, methodologically speaking, one might be able to generate a mathematical system that is capable of mirroring certain structural features of the facet of the real world that is being modeled. Nevertheless, this doesn't necessarily entitle one to say that the model and the real world are one and the same.

In fact, one might be willing to predict that certain differences are likely to show up over time or when different variables are manipulated in an appropriate way. For example, the infinities that plague certain aspects of physics, including quantum mechanics, could be seen as a natural concomitant of treating the idea of a mathematical point as that which occupies position but is dimensionless ... something that does not appear to be true of the physical world. Or, one might note that the self-energy problem of the electron that also seems to lead to infinities when calculations are made (and for which mathematical techniques have been constructed to help lessen or eliminate such infinities) could be traced back to the defining of the electron as a point charge that might not reflect the actual structural character of an electron ... and this is a possibility that gives expression

to some of the excitement that has been generated by string theory since the electron is no longer considered to be a geometric point particle, and, as a result, the self-energy problem doesn't arise.

Moreover, one might take a look at chaos theory and consider how rounding off mathematical calculations even to n-places will, over time, lead to wildly diverging results within a fairly short period of time with respect to the mathematical description of a system and that which is being represented through such a mathematical model. Again, this is an indication that there are important distinctions to be drawn between the nature of a mathematical system and the portion(s) of reality the system seeks to reflect, model, or represent, and that the one is not necessarily the other.

Hard and Soft Sciences

Within a hundred years, or so, of David Hilbert issuing his 24-part challenge in 1900/1902, most of his problems had been solved -- wholly in some cases and partially in others -- to the satisfaction of most mathematicians. Perhaps, within the next 100 years, or so, most of the currently unsolved mysteries on my 'the problem of origins' list (constants, life, consciousness, rational thought, language, creativity, dark matter, dark energy, matter/antimatter asymmetry, the Big Bang theory, inflation, the collapse of the wave function, Higgs boson, the graviton), but at the present time, this is not the case.

Aside from what I believe to be the intrinsic interest of the foregoing mysteries, there is a more fundamental reason for providing a brief overview of such topics and some of the concomitant questions permeating them. Whether, or not, some scientists wish to admit it, the empirical truth of the matter is that we know very little about the actual nature of the universe -- especially when it comes to the origins and place of human beings in that universe.

Many of the physics questions entailed by my 'the problem of origins' list could be settled in the near future or within the next hundred years, or so - - the length of time it took for most of Hilbert's purely mathematical list of challenges to be solved, wholly or partially. However, I am less inclined to believe that physical sciences will be able to successfully solve -- partially or wholly -- any of the mysteries surrounding the problem of origins involving: life, consciousness, thought, logic, language, or creativity.

I will admit that the aforementioned disinclination to believe that any of the physical sciences are likely to come up with satisfying answers that are verifiable and capable of explaining the origins of say, consciousness, is largely a matter of faith, or lack thereof, with respect to the capacity of the physical sciences to be able to provide a purely physical account of, among other things, human existence. On the other hand, those scientists who believe that the physical sciences have a potential that, sooner or later, will crack the, allegedly, purely physical secrets surrounding the origins of consciousness, thought, creativity, and language are also operating out of a framework of faith.

Furthermore, nothing has been said -- at least directly -- in the foregoing pages with respect to the issues of: human potential,

identity, morality, or spirituality. Are these rooted in purely physical processes? Or, are they rooted in something that transcends the physical, even as it permeates the physical? Are morality, spirituality, and identity merely arbitrary human constructions, or is there something that is ontologically present which can be discovered about identity, morality, and spirituality and, if so, how might one go about this process of discovery?

Usually speaking, there is a distinction drawn between so-called 'hard sciences' and 'soft sciences'. According to this distinction, sciences like physics, chemistry, and biology are considered to be hard sciences because of their emphasis on experimental method, empirical rigor, and so on. In fact, even within the 'hard sciences' there tends to be a pecking order of hardness, with physics considered to be the hardest of the hard sciences, followed by chemistry and biology.

The soft sciences are considered to be anything that does not manifest the priorities and methods of the hard sciences. Thus, and to take but one example, for much of its history, psychology has often been considered to be something of a 'soft science' because of its lack of rigorous methodology and, for ethical reasons, its inability to perform certain kinds of experiments.

The more physics, chemistry, and biology have been incorporated into the 'science' of psychology, the harder the discipline has been perceived to have become -- at least, in the view of some. Such hardness, however, has not necessarily translated into concrete results concerning the unraveling of any of the problem of origins issues concerning human beings that were touched on earlier.

One could argue that the hard-soft distinction needs to be altered somewhat. In other words, the so-called hard sciences of physics, chemistry and biology are actually fairly soft in as much as they tend to tackle only the most tractable problems -- that is, ones that are likely to yield determinate solutions -- and, as a result, have largely avoided all of the really difficult issues involving the origins of: consciousness, life, thought, logic, language, creativity, morality, spirituality, and human identity.

In fact, more often than not, when the so-called 'hard' scientists have scientifically engaged the latter sorts of problems, they usually fail to provide much of lasting merit.

Indeed, as impressive as the accomplishments of science have been over the last three hundred years, they are, in a sense, like the competitive diver who selects a dive of a relatively low order of technical difficulty (compared to the many mysteries of human existence) and swaggers about while being unable to perform -- or even attempt -- the dives of a much higher order of technical difficulty. Yet, the individuals of the lower-order of technical difficulty dives often laugh at, and ridicule, anyone who attempts the harder dives with less than stellar results. Moreover, oftentimes when someone does come up with a proposed solution for the more difficult dives, many of the practitioners of the less technically difficult dives claim foul because the techniques and standards of the less difficult dives have been abandoned, to varying degrees, in the dives with a harder, higher level of technical difficulty.



A Matter of Faith

Quite frequently, one of the lines of demarcation that is drawn between science and spirituality involves the idea of faith. For example, spirituality is supposedly rooted in a blind faith toward the theological themes inherent in some given species of faith, whereas science is allegedly rooted in purely empirical considerations that must be rigorously analyzed and, where possible, tested and confirmed.

While it might be true that all too many people do engage spirituality through fixed filters of an unchanging faith, this is not my understanding of the structure of faith. Sincere faith gives expression to a dynamic with many complex dimensions, including a willingness to make a rigorous analysis of empirical data and, where possible, to try to not only test and confirm the viability of some, given species of faith but, if possible, the character of the faith should be broadened, deepened and made richer than it was before any given instance of analysis, testing, and confirmation began.

If the available evidence warrants it, the character of one's faith should move in the direction of the evidence. On the other hand, arriving at a sound conclusion concerning whether, or not, in any given set of circumstances, the evidence does warrant such a transition in faith might be as contentious and problematic as what has happened time and time again in scientific circles during the last four hundred years.

In any event, faith is not meant to be a static affair. Moreover, faith should not be governed by considerations for anything but seeking the truth of a matter.

Let me provide a few concrete examples to lend a bit of substance to the foregoing. Suppose I hire two individuals for some entry level position and, then, begin handing out assignments to them.

One of my supervisors monitors the work of the new employees. From time to time, the supervisor reports back to me on how they are doing.

Over time, it becomes clear that one of the new employees seems to be a more efficient and productive worker than the other new worker. As a result, my confidence in the better worker increases, and

my feelings toward the apparently less able worker are shrouded in concerns and, perhaps, even a growing lack of trust.

The empirical data I am receiving from my supervisor is shaping my attitudes toward the two new workers. If additional information should come in from some other independent source that makes me question the reliability of the supervisor's reports concerning the two workers (e.g., I learn that the supervisor is dating the woman employee who is getting a favorable rating and that the supervisor is giving negative reviews to the other new worker -- a male -- in order to curry favor with the woman employee), then I will have to investigate the matter further in order to try to determine what is actually going on.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that the supervisor's reports are accurate and unbiased. As more time goes by, I discover that the apparent better worker is calling in sick, while the worker who has been sliding down my favorable opinion scale and hovering dangerously close to getting fired is proving himself or herself to be a reliable worker in the sense that the individual always shows up for work and seems to be making a sincere effort to do the assigned jobs -- although perhaps not as well as I might have liked.

When the "better" worker doesn't show up, I am forced by circumstances to assign various tasks to the "poorer" worker. The individual seems to respond well and does a fairly good job.

As a result, my confidence in the "poorer" worker increases. I become more inclined to trust that person with more challenging assignments.

One could add any number of themes to the foregoing scenario to enhance the complexity of the situation. Substance abuse, single parenthood, family problems, money difficulties, career aspirations, chronic illness, relationships outside and on the job, issues of self-esteem, performance anxiety, and depression are just a few of the wrinkles one might consider that could affect a worker's performance over time and, in the process, force me to reassess my feelings about, and attitudes toward, the two workers.

If I am to find out more about the off-job lives of the two individuals, this might affect my judgments concerning them. On the

other hand, while learning more about their lives might alter my perspective concerning them, there might come a point when the company's welfare might require me to make a decision about which one of the two will be retained and that of the two will be laid off or fired.

The ups and downs of this decision process mark the fluctuations in my faith with respect to the two workers. The more information I have, then the sounder, hopefully, will be my judgments, but I am unlikely to ever have a perfect, complete data set concerning the two individuals.

Decisions often have to be made in the context of an array of uncertainties of one kind or another. Faith marks the ratio of what is understood about a situation relative to what remains unknown or not understood with respect to that same situation ... a ratio that moves me in one direction rather another.

Over time, the differential faith invested in the two workers, might prove to be justified or warranted in the light of new empirical data. Or, the faith one has in one individual or the other (or both) might turn out to be unjustified, and, as a result, one alters the character of one's feelings toward them.

The foregoing scenario concerning the structural character of faith tends to be manifested in nearly every aspect of life. Friends, marriages, family, government, businesses, creditors, career, teachers, students, health, the media, doctors, products, other countries, contractors, the justice system, and banks all contribute their share to stirring the cauldron of life and setting in motion the dynamics of faith.

The same is true in science. Scientists, of course, might be uncomfortable with the lexicon of faith and, as a result, prefer terms like: judgment, belief, opinion, confidence, reliability, likelihood, and probability, but a rose by any other name is still a rose.

Consider the state of science at the turn of the 20th Century. The problem of blackbody radiation was confounding classical theory.

Black bodies are entities that, theoretically, absorb all electromagnetic radiation that impinges on them and, in the process, radiate only heat -- which is, itself, a form of electromagnetic radiation.

At different temperatures, the black body will change colors, becoming, in part, visible light through the color changes.

According to classical mechanics, when a black-body is in thermal equilibrium -- that is, a point is reached when the amount of electromagnetic energy being absorbed by a black-body is equal to the amount of electromagnetic radiation being released from the black-body -- the black-body should be emitting radiation in the form of ultraviolet light, gamma rays, and x-rays depending on the frequency of the light being released. Moreover, according to classical mechanics, the calculated emissions should be approaching infinity.

Since the foregoing does not happen, there obviously was a problem with the way classical mechanics understood things. Max Planck sought to solve this problem and discovered that if he treated the emissions as being discrete units of a certain size rather than being continuous in nature, he could get the calculations to come out correctly -- that is, match what was observed under any given condition of emitted radiation and, thereby avoid the so-called ultraviolet catastrophe that was entailed by classical mechanics.

Planck had no idea what was going on ontologically. However, he had found a way to solve problems in a way that could be reconciled with observed, empirical data and, simultaneously, avoid some disturbing scientific and philosophical problems.

The crisis of faith in the reliability of classical mechanics as a means of understanding the physical world -- which had been given expression through the ultraviolet catastrophe -- had been given a reprieve of sorts. At the same time, Planck's solution raised a lot of questions.

As additional pieces of the puzzle began to emerge through -- to make a much longer story very much shorter -- Einstein's photoelectric effect (which indicates that light, in the form of photons, seems to behave like a particle when it causes electrons to be knocked out of certain metallic and non-metallic materials), De Broglie's electron-wave notion, the Compton Effect (which suggests that the scattering of, say, X-rays and gamma-rays involves a particle-like phenomenon), Pauli's exclusion principle (which holds that no two identical fermions -- such as, say, electrons -- could occupy the same quantum state simultaneously), as well as the work of Heisenberg's S-

matrix mechanics, Schrodinger's wave equation, and the Dirac equation, physicists were accumulating faith in the capacity of the new physics to rectify some problems inherent in classical mechanics.

The enhanced faith came as a result of the increasing capacity of quantum physics to solve a variety of theoretical problems in a way that could be empirically verified. Nonetheless, there remained a whole range of uncertainties surrounding quantum theory that were given expression through all the interpretations that were emerging in relation to so-called quantum- weirdness ... that is, and in the opinion of Richard Feynman, himself a partial architect of modern quantum dynamics, no one really knew what was going on in the quantum world even as more and more facets of that world could be exploited mathematically to generate workable solutions for all kinds of real-world physical problems.

For example, among other things, the Dirac equation that was introduced in 1928, predicted the existence of a particle that was like the electron in all respects except electric charge. Four years later, Carl Anderson experimentally discovered the positron – an electron-like particle that exhibits a positive charge -- thereby lending additional credence to the viability of Dirac's theoretical equation.

During the 1950's and 1960's, a new crisis of faith began to arise among physicists. Despite the many strengths and breakthroughs of quantum physics, various kinds of accelerators were producing a plethora of particles that could not be made sense of within the theoretical framework of the quantum physics that existed during those decades. The collection of exotic entities was known as the 'Particle Zoo', and it exhibited an array of quantum properties that could be catalogued but that could not be derived from first principles of physics.

Were all these particles fundamental in some way? Or, were they a function of something more fundamental ... something not, yet, theorized and/or seen?

Eventually, and again oversimplifying the story considerably, people such as Steven Weinberg, Abdus Salam, Murray Gell-Mann, Franklin Yang, Robert Mills, Julian Schwinger, George Zweig (and many, many others) -- along with concepts like gauge fields [a mathematical treatment of fields that exhibits symmetry groups

capable of preserving basic laws of physics across the many transformations and transitions entailed by particle dynamics) and renormalization (a mathematical technique for ridding calculations of unwanted infinities)] -- joined together to create quantum electrodynamics (which describes the unification of weak nuclear forces and electromagnetic forces) and quantum chromodynamics (which entails the theory of how strong nuclear forces are generated through the exchange of gluons among different kinds of quarks, the fundamental components of, among other things, protons and neutrons) -- although the latter theory (that is, quantum chromodynamics) still has not yet been 'renormalized'.

Following the foregoing breakthroughs, a further crisis of faith arose. Can one -- and if so how -- unify the strong forces with the electro-weak forces, and, can one -- and if so how -- unify the general theory of gravity with the other three forces (strong, weak, and electromagnetic)?

In response to such questions, a variety of theories arose in an attempt to resolve the problems. Among these theories were various ideas concerning super-symmetry (which is really the search for the appropriate kind of symmetry mathematics that would be capable of linking elementary particles of integral spin units (e.g., bosons such as the photon, gluon, weak force particles Z and W) with other elementary particles with 1/2 spin (such as the electron, various forms of neutrinos, and the muon) in a way that is capable of both reflecting experimental realities as well as solving real world problems in a consistent fashion). In addition, various kinds of string theory arose that took one-dimensional vibrating entities called 'strings' (rather than the hypothetical zero dimensionality of electrons and quarks in quantum theory) and sought to construct a mathematical model that would bring all the four forces together under one theoretical roof as well as be able to avoid the embarrassing infinities that haunted the so-called Standard Model of physics that had been cobbled together by the mid-to-late 1970s [several of the particles predicted by the Standard Model -- such as the bottom quark and top quark -- were not experimentally confirmed until later ... 1977 in the case of the bottom quark and 1995 in relation to the top quark.

There is not, as of yet, any experimental confirmation (of the smoking-gun variety) with respect to any framework of supersymmetry, string theory, grand unified theories, or various 'theories of everything'. Consequently, once again there is a crisis of faith of sorts.

Much of this current crisis is manifested as a discussion -- sometimes civilized and sometimes rancorous -- between those who have faith in the ability of string theory to lead scientists to the 'promised land' and those who have little or no faith that string theory will be able to deliver on its promises. Whose faith will be rewarded and whose faith will be proven to be misplaced is an open question ... but either way one cannot ignore the qualities of faith that are present on all sides.

One of the primary points of the foregoing very abbreviated overview of twentieth century quantum physics is to indicate how -- like the earlier employee hiring example -- physicists went through many ups and downs in their level of confidence concerning the ability of quantum physics to provide a workable path through the many mysteries and uncertainties that arose when theory clashed with empirical data. There were many crises of faith that occurred across the unfolding of events.

Some ideas, concepts, models, theories, and mathematical treatments eventually came to justify the faith that had been invested in them. Other ideas, concepts, models, theories and treatments did not fare so well and people lost faith in them as their shortcomings and problems were revealed in the harsh light of reality.

Believing in something on the basis of a variety of empirical and theoretical considerations but maintained in the face of: uncertainty, unanswered questions, and possibly contradictory data is an expression of faith. Sometimes this faith is warranted, and sometimes it is not.

The only thing one can do is to continue to move in the direction that the changing landscape of faith seems to indicate might assist one to discover an oasis in the epistemological desert. Sometimes, this sense of direction might be referred to as intuition, induction, extrapolation, interpolation, inference, implication, scientific judgment, or confidence, but, in reality, it is a species of faith that seeks to plausibly transport one from the problematic confines of the

present into the expanded (hopefully) hermeneutical horizons of the future.

As pointed out earlier, there are an array of uncertainties, unanswered questions, and problems that populate the world of science. Against this backdrop of unknowns, there are many successful algorithms that have been found through which one might successfully journey amongst the ontological mysteries.

In time, some of the mysteries being alluded to might be demystified, even as others continue to cast shadows and create difficulties in trying to navigate a viable path. In between the darkness and the light resides the character of one's faith in how best to proceed.

Will science be able to solve the outstanding problems? Will science come up short in certain respects? How long should a person wait for possible solutions?

Culturally, it might make sense to take the long-term view and keep plugging away through the scientific method despite whatever problems might arise in the interim period. Individually, such a strategy might not always make sense because the exigencies of life often require decisions to be made in the present despite on-going uncertainties. Indeed, the faith of the average person is often more complicated and problematic than is the faith of a scientist since the former group of people do not always have the luxury of waiting for fully formulated scientific positions to mature in order to better inform their choices.

Does the 'faith' of a scientist in the rigorous methodology and discipline of science have a counterpart in the 'faith' of those who are committed to spirituality? I believe the answer is yes, but one will not be able to find this counterpart amidst the caverns of theology.

The Nature of Science

In order to better understand what I have in mind here, a brief excursion should be taken into the nature of the scientific method. I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself but many people might be surprised to discover that most of the fundamental themes of the scientific method that are applied to the physical world are also present in spirituality -- especially its mystical dimensions ... although there are some important caveats that need to be stated in this regard that I'll address a little bit later on.

I believe there are six or seven features that constitute the essence, so to speak, of science. These features are: (1) the interrogative imperative (the persistent asking of questions in the search for truth and/or solutions to problems); (2) empirical observation; (3) the use of instrumentation to enhance and complement the five basic senses of human beings (i.e., seeing, hearing, touch, smell, and taste); (4) objectivity (the elimination of as many sources of bias and error as is possible methodologically); (5) recursive procedures (the generation of results that are fed back into the scientific process for further treatment and analysis); (6) replication (the ability to reproduce significant results through independent means); (7) the organization and analysis of results from the first six steps (which would include mathematical treatments, logical assessments of consistency, and critical reflection); (8) an ongoing, rigorous, conceptual exploration of all of the above by a community of individuals who are considered to be knowledgeable about such matters (which could be done via journals, symposia, lectures/talks, conventions, papers, books, e-mail lists, and/or informal discussions).

Some might want to insist that a 'facility for making accurate predictions concerning various issues' should be added to the foregoing set of features -- in other words, according to such individuals, real science means being able to have a theory that can predict, with some degree of precision, things that have not yet been observed but that come to be empirically verified at a later time. However, not all science necessarily entails such a dimension of predictability, or does so only within very narrow parameters

Examples of the foregoing contention concerning the issue of predictability can be found in most, if not all, of the biological sciences, as well as in many facets of astrophysics and cosmology. Yet, one would be reluctant to say that such disciplines do not constitute sciences.

Furthermore, even in physics -- the frequent poster child for issues of prediction -- while there have been some very dramatic experimental verifications of prior theory (for instance, the discovery of the positron predicted by Dirac, or the discovery of the W and Z bosons predicted in conjunction with the weak force, or the different varieties of quark predicted in relation to the quantum chromodynamics) much physics takes place in a variety of interstitial nooks that inhabit the scientific countryside beyond (or between) specific predictions and confirmations. This aspect of things is, perhaps, best summed up by I.I. Rabi's comment of "Who ordered that?" with respect to the appearance of the muon -- something that had been empirically uncovered but that no one had been anticipating.

A great deal of science arises as a result of trying to make sense of: real-world phenomena, or empirical results, or trying to solve different kinds of problems. Theory might follow from such attempts and, then, lead the way to certain kinds of predictions, but there frequently is considerable conceptual conflagration prior to this point, and, as well, there often are a great many theoretical adjustments that are made even after experimental results have confirmed some specific prediction of a given theory.

Aside from the issue of prediction, some individuals also might wish to contend that the experimental model is a *sin qua non* of science. However, I feel that the idea of experimental research is inherent in, and derivable from, a number of the principles that have been stated earlier, while, simultaneously, the same list of principles is sufficiently flexible to accommodate a variety of naturalistic, participant observer research, case studies, survey methods, non-intrusive, cross-cultural, and comparative models that fall outside the strict confines of the experimental method and, yet, are scientific in character.

In any event, I believe the entire set of eight previously noted mainstays that collectively give expression to the scientific method

also constitute fundamental elements in any form of authentic mysticism. Unfortunately, there also are many counterfeit versions of mysticism that help to muddy the epistemological waters ... just as there is something called 'junk' science that masquerades as real science but is not, and, yet, it shows up in a variety of research venues - - from: various forms of pharmaceutical research, to: various aspects of medicine, engineering, environmental research, and the chemical industry.

Many people might be of the opinion that mysticism is as far removed from science as one can get. However, as a person who has pursued the Sufi mystical path for nearly 40 years, I know that such opinions are not well founded.

The following eight numbered and labeled sections correspond to the previously noted set of eight features of the scientific method. Due to space considerations, the discussion that is advanced in the following eight sections will be a relatively abbreviated one. Nevertheless, I feel enough will be said to provide the reader with some perspective concerning the idea that inherent in authentic mysticism are the eight elements of the scientific method.

(1) The Interrogative Imperative -- A faith that is not willing to question itself, is not a sincere faith. One of the motivations driving human existence should be a willingness to seek out the truth in any matter -- including spirituality -- and if one's faith will not help one do this, then that form of faith needs to be re-constructed to better reflect the truth.

On the other hand, the foregoing admission does not mean one needs to become a perpetual skeptic. A skepticism that is not willing to question itself is not a sincere form of skepticism since as a methodological tool, skepticism should be directed toward struggling toward uncovering the truth of a matter rather than being mired in a philosophy of skepticism which tries to claim that nothing is worthy of being called the truth ... except, of course, skepticism.

Only through a constant exercise of the interrogative imperative can one learn how to ask the right kind of questions ... that is, questions that have heuristic value with respect to a productive and constructive probing of experience. All authentic mysticisms are geared toward assisting the individual to ask pertinent questions

concerning: the structural character of human existence; the nature of reality; one's relationship with reality; the methodological means for engaging different facets of reality; the value system, if any, that should guide the asking of questions in relation to the pursuit of truth, and so on.

(2) Empirical Observation -- In addition, all authentic mystical traditions emphasize the importance of empirical observation. Pay attention to what is going on within one and without -- not just in a physical sense, but in an emotional and behavioral sense as well. Try to observe and identify the forces that are acting on one and that are seeking to influence thinking, feeling, believing, judging and behaving.

Thoughts, beliefs, behaviors, dreams, emotional states, intuitions, motivations, intentions, and an array of other experiences are all grist for the empirical mill. Try to trace the elements of these phenomenological conditions back to their origins. Attempt to make sense of what it all means through the asking of pertinent questions.

Ultimately, the understanding one develops must correspond with, or be congruent with, what has been observed. If such an understanding does not reflect experience or what has been observed, then understanding stands in need of some adjustment -- either partially or entirely.

(3) Use of Instrumentation -- In physical sciences, instruments come in many forms and permit one to observe that which might be invisible to our normal modes of engaging experience -- namely seeing, hearing, smell, taste and touch. For example, there is an array of instruments that are capable of registering data beyond the limits of visible light and, in the process provide information about such things as: cosmic rays, gamma rays, X- rays, infrared rays, radio waves and microwaves.

In mysticism, instrumentation of different kinds is manifested through internal capacities such as: the: mind, heart, sirr (mystery), kafi (hidden), spirit, and aqfah (more hidden). All of these faculties are potential ways of transcending and complementing the data gained the limited capacities of our five basic senses (seven if one includes proprioceptive and interoceptive senses -- various kinds of senses of orientation (e.g., spatial) and stimuli (e.g., having to do with internal functioning) that arise within an individual).

If a person has little experience with, or understanding of, linear accelerators, functional magnetic resonance imaging, spectroscopes, or electron microscopes, it would be foolish for that person to claim that such instruments have nothing of value to say about human beings or the physical universe. Similarly, if an individual has little experience with, or understanding of the instrumentation of, say, the heart (which extends beyond the biological organ in our chest cavity) or the spirit, then such a person would be equally foolish to try to claim that such instruments have nothing of value to contribute to helping one struggle toward an understanding of either human beings or those dimensions of the universe that might not be physical in nature.

Obviously, we tend to be suspicious of that with which we might not be familiar. Consequently, many people are likely to be skeptical concerning the ability of unknown methods or instrumentation to be able to produce credible results.

On the other hand, an individual who never gets his or her feet wet with respect to hands on experience in relation to operating some given form of instrumentation is really in no position to make informed judgments about the range, quality, or value of the data generated through the use of such instrumentation. Critical comments arising out of uninformed speculations are relatively worthless.

Like physical instruments, spiritual instruments need to be kept in proper working order and, among other things this requires one to work through some form of appropriate calibration process. In other words, one needs to be able to establish reliable base readings against which subsequent findings can be assessed as being credible indices for whatever phenomena are being considered. In the Sufi mystical tradition, a person's mind, heart, sirr, kafi, spirit, and aqfah are all internal instruments that have a structural character that operate in characteristic ways. They each have forms of calibration that are appropriate to such instruments ... just as fMRIs and EEGs have modes of calibration that are unique to those instruments.

To give just one example, the calibrating process for the internal faculty referred to as the sirr (mystery) is known as maraqabah. During this process, the individual seeks to empty out anything other than the remembrance of God, and when the sirr is operating properly

in this respect, it is said to have been calibrated in a way that guards against influences that could contaminate those spiritual manifestations or tajalli that might be displayed in the heart.

Furthermore, just as a telescope -- or any physical instrument -- has a set of parameters within which it will generate the most useful results and beyond which it will not produce useful results, so too, spiritual instruments all have their characteristic ways of engaging reality and issuing useful results. The way in which the mind experiences and understands existence is not the way in which the heart experiences or understands things. Moreover, the way in which the heart understands and experiences life is not the way in which the *sirr*, *kafi*, *spirit*, or *aqfah* understand and experience life ... and so on.

However, the understandings that arise through the different faculties are not in opposition to one another. Rather, like the various forms of understanding that arise in conjunction with different instruments that probe the phenomenon of light, the internal spiritual faculties tend to complement one another and assist the individual to develop a fuller understanding of spiritual realities.

(4) Objectivity -- Every form of authentic mysticism places great stress on the need for objectivity during the exploratory probing of life's experiences. This is why a methodology of purification is intrinsic to all authentic mysticisms.

Fasting, seclusion, service to others, meditation, contemplation, night vigils, as well as struggling against the appetites or inclinations of the ego and the body are all part of the purification process. Until one gains control over the forces that might be biasing and undermining one's judgments, arriving at a judicious assessment of life events might be difficult, and, as a result, one's search for truth is likely to be impeded.

Until the struggle toward truth becomes the sole focus of a person's efforts, then one begins at no beginning and one works toward no end. This is as true in mysticism as it is true in the physical sciences.

The ego -- or *nafs* in Sufi terminology -- is a constant source of error, distortion, delusion, corruption and fantasy in relation to our attempts to understand the nature of experience and its possible

significance. When properly trained, the ego/nafs can become an ally in the search for truth, but even in the physical sciences, an undisciplined mind that is governed by the weaknesses of the ego is more likely, than not, to adversely affect the process of science ... both in relation to oneself, as well as in conjunction with others.

Furthermore, all instruments (whether physical or spiritual) need to be kept as clean and as free of contaminants as possible. So, in addition to the process of calibrating instruments, one must keep them in spotless working order ... and just as there are procedures for maintaining cleanliness and order in a physical laboratory, the same is true with respect to our internal, spiritual laboratory.

(5) Recursive Procedures -- Modern science uses a set of recursive feedback loops to continually replenish the supply of empirical data through which we need to sift for valuable clues concerning the possible nature of reality, truth, or the solution to a problem. In addition, these recursive feedback loops include a sort of value-added component that is constantly seeking to improve the fit between the structural character of one's understanding and the structural character of some aspect of experience that one is trying to probe.

So, too, mysticism engages in recursive practices (e.g., fasting, prayer, chanting, and seclusion) that are designed to help refine one's understanding of oneself and one's relation with Being. Such recursive practices not only generate new experiences, but they provide one with an opportunity to process such experiences in a manner that allows the practices to be altered in a constructive fashion that enriches, broadens and deepens those practices through an enhanced understanding of the search for truth concerning a variety of matters.

Like authentic physical sciences (i.e., non-junk science), authentic forms of mysticism are a cumulative process that needs to be altered to keep abreast of changing data, circumstances, problems, and understandings. Like physical sciences, mysticism is not a static process but a progressive endeavor that is in constant transition as one works toward increasingly viable and credible results against a backdrop of varied experiences (data).

(6) Replication -- If Noble laureates alone could produce certain kinds of results, then science would have limited value. However, once something has been done or proposed in science, then others are in a

position to try to reproduce the same results through venues that are independent of the former sorts of individuals. The ability to replicate the results of some given line of scientific research is a key element in the scientific process.

Similarly, mysticism would be of little value to the generality of humanity if it were restricted to, say, only the Prophets and saints. The appeal of mysticism, like the appeal of science, is that anyone who follows the prescribed directions might be led to certain kinds of results ... in other words, results can be replicated.

More specifically, suppose a person is informed that if one does things in a certain way, then one will observe certain phenomena. If one follows such directions but does not experience what is indicated, then one likely will question the integrity either of what one did, or what the other person did, or what both have done. If, on the other hand, one does observe what is indicated when one follows certain procedures, then one's confidence or faith is enhanced to some degree with respect to the whole process.

Will those who seek to replicate the prescriptions of the Prophets and saints necessarily get exactly the same out-come as did their more illustrious counterparts? Probably not, but this is also true in the physical sciences.

Replication does not mean that the results sought will be precisely the same on each occasion. Rather, there are acceptable degrees of variation within which a given result will have been said to have been replicated and outside of which one might be inclined to say that a given attempt at replication has not occurred, and if this is the case, then, one must go in search of trying to determine what, if anything, went wrong during one's attempt to replicate results.

Oftentimes, as is true of so-called single-blind experiments, a mystical seeker will not be told what to expect in the way of specific experiences. Expectations can introduce considerable contaminants to the mystical path just as such expectations can contaminate results in relation to research in, say, psychology and medicine.

However, since throughout the mystical journey, a primary focus is on becoming purified or objective in one's pursuit of the truth, then one of the results that could follow from sincerely following the

methodological prescriptions of an authentic spiritual guide should be in the form of an improved character. Indeed, a strengthening of character is one of the most important forms of replication within the mystical path, since in many ways, further progress cannot be made until a person's character becomes more developed and stable.

Among other things this means that enhanced: humility, patience, gratitude, honesty, sincerity, nobility, courage, equanimity, love, tolerance, compassion, and forgiveness are all elements that can, and need to be, replicated. On the other hand, a decrease in: arrogance, impatience, ingratitude, dishonesty, insincerity, ignobility, cowardice, injustice, hatred, intolerance, indifference, and resentment would also be consistent with the structural character of replicating spiritual results.

Furthermore, just as it is the case in the physical sciences that being able to properly set up an experiment can take many years of: calibrating and recalibrating instruments, hunting down sources of experimental error, eliminating unwanted influences, and changing the laboratory set-up to produce more definitive sorts of results that can be measured in increasingly reliable ways, the same is also true of authentic mysticism. Therefore, one should not be surprised to discover that it could take many years of making adjustments in relation to some given mystical methodological process before one is likely to be in a position to replicate certain kinds of results ... and, unfortunately, this possibility also encompasses a set of issues that renders someone potentially vulnerable to spiritual charlatans since a spiritual seeker might be told by a false teacher that the reason certain results are not occurring is because of that seeker's need to continue working on refining the experimental process rather than being told that the false teacher is a junk-scientist of the mystical way and, consequently, no credible results are ever likely to arise in conjunction with such a charlatan.

Like particle physicists, authentic mystical guides do speak about different forms of tajalli or manifestation that are displayed in the bubble chambers of the heart, soul, and spirit when fundamental forces are brought together under certain circumstances. In the case of particle physicists, these circumstances involve accelerators of one kind or another that bring various particles together in a way that

permits one to observe, among other things, elemental forces at work. In the case of mystics, the circumstances are the practices of seclusion, zikr (remembrance), contemplation, prayer, and meditation in which the elements of the soul are brought together in a way that permit's the individual to observe, among other things, elemental forces at work.

Just as it took physicists the better part of seventy years to sort out the 'particle zoo' of modern science and develop an understanding concerning the nature of the physics that governed the 'particle zoo', so it takes a human being the better part of seventy years -- if she or he is fortunate -- to sort out the 'zoo' of: states (hal), stations (maqam), flashes of intuition (ilham), unveilings (kashf), and experiences that happen in the collection chambers of the 'mystical accelerators' inherent in the: mind, heart, sirr, kafi, spirit, and aqfah of a human being.

(7) Organizing and Analyzing Results and (8) The Community of Knowers -- Like the physical sciences, authentic mystical traditions also engage in an on- going process of organizing and analyzing the empirical data generated by following a spiritual methodology. Moreover, this process of critical reflection is done not in isolation but in conjunction with elders of the methodological way who are considered to be knowledgeable in the ways of mystical science ... elders who can assist one to fine tune the methodological process ... elders who can help one find solutions to problems that have risen during the course of pursuing the methodology ... elders who can lend a considered and tempered presence with respect to interpreting the nature of the states, stations, and experiential conditions that have arisen along the path ... elders who have no interest in controlling another human being but only constructively support and help enhance another individual's search for the truth.

Furthermore, just as physical scientists often go through an apprenticeship process, first as a graduate student, and then in various post-doctoral appointments in different research programs, so too, the mystical novice goes through an apprenticeship process in a research program with this or that mystical elder. Eventually in both cases, the individual is deemed ready to pursue the way of

methodology as a full-fledged individual researcher who is always free to consult with other elders in the community.

Although the foregoing comparisons between the scientific method and the methods of mysticism have been brief, I believe enough has been said to lend credence to my previous contention that there are direct parallels between, on the one hand, authentic scientists (as opposed to 'junk' scientists) who have faith in their discipline to generate constructive, useful, reliable and demonstrable results and, on the other hand, authentic mystics (as opposed to spiritual charlatans) who have faith in their discipline to generate constructive, useful, reliable and demonstrable results. In both cases, faith plays a dynamic, rather than a static, role in helping explorers from the respective disciplines to push the envelope with respect to the search for truth and solutions to problems.

Naturally, a proponent of physical sciences might be a little reluctant to ascribe much credibility to the mystical methodology. However, if this is the case, then one might suggest something to such a person that is quite consistent with the methodology of physical sciences: namely, only if one pursues the relevant mystical methodology in a persistent, rigorous, and sincere fashion with the assistance of an authentic teacher, will one have an opportunity to come to understand the nature of what is being discussed by the mystics.



Shari'ah: Confusions and Realities

One of the most misunderstood terms in Islam is 'shari'ah'. Surprisingly, this misunderstanding is as prevalent among many Muslims as it is among non-Muslims -- and in fact, Muslims have no one to blame but themselves for the perpetuation of such misunderstanding within and without the Muslim community.

One phrase that usually is used to translate the word 'shari'ah' is 'Islamic law'. Islamic law, in turn, is construed in terms of some form of legal system that many fundamentalists (and even less fundamentalist-inclined individuals) believe (quite erroneously) must be imposed on other people -- whether Muslim or non-Muslim. Two other phrases that are frequently used to translate the idea of 'shari'ah' are: 'God's Law' or 'Divine Law', but, once again, the intention underlying such usages is often to claim that the word "law" in all these cases is a function of some sort of legal system.

The word 'shari'ah' does appear in the Qur'an. In Surah 45, verse 18, one finds:

"O Prophet (Muhammad)! We have put you on the right way (shari'ah) concerning spirituality, so follow it. ..."

However out of more than 6,000 verses in the Qur'an, the indicated term 'shari'ah' occurs just once -- not as a legal term, but as a term that alludes to a path or way or method.

More specifically, in Arabic the literal meaning of 'shari'ah' is a place where animals gather to drink water. There also is a related verb form that refers to the drinking of water at such a place of gathering. By implication, the issue of shari'ah entails the path or way that leads to a watering area or place to drink.

In both instances, the idea of 'shari'ah exists in the context of: a path and/or place through which one might access water. Just as H₂O is necessary for physical life, spiritual water is necessary for the sustenance of the soul, and it is to this kind of water that the 'right way' in the Quranic verse is alluding ... spiritual water that flows through the Qur'an as a whole, not just part of it ... spiritual water which includes guidance that flowed through Jesus and Moses (peace be upon them), among other spiritual luminaries, as well.

A further word that is tied to the same underlying root from which 'shari'ah is derived refers to someone who is a lawgiver or one who determines the law. From an Islamic perspective, God is the One Who establishes the laws of the universe -- both physical and spiritual -- but this is not necessarily a matter of putting forth a legal system ... although many Muslims appear to believe this is so.

The idea of "law" can be construed in at least two senses. One sense involves the natural laws of the universe, and the other sense involves systems of law (whether cultural, social, institutional, or legal in character) that are generated by human beings.

Among other things, the 'right way' to which the foregoing verse of the Qur'an alludes encompasses: patience, compassion, gratitude, humility, honesty, sincerity, steadfastness, courage, nobility, love, charitableness, remembrance, tolerance, friendship, piety, and forgiveness. Yet, although such qualities might be of great value in any given legal system, they are not primarily legal terms even as they do give expression to laws of the Universe that govern the proper behavior of human beings.

Principles of character are not, for the most part, legally enforceable. Although human beings do, for example, construct laws governing certain aspects of lying -- or failing to be honest -- in relation to such issues as perjury or misleading police officers, by and large, nonetheless, there are few, if any, legal laws governing the practice of lying to one another throughout an average day ... and, yet, such lies often tend to be far more destructive than are instances of perjury -- if for no other reason than that they are more prevalent and pervasive than are purely legal issues of perjury.

There is no necessary inconsistency between having a legal system in which the public space is regulated, even as human beings are cruel and uncivilized in relation to one another within that society. Consequently, people who believe that legality is the royal way to spirituality have a steep slope to navigate if they want to prove that the laws which govern the universe are primarily functions of legalities rather than, qualities of, among other things, developing spiritual character or realizing the potential of such internal faculties as the heart, spirit and so on.

Nowhere does the Qur'an refer to itself as a legal book. On the other hand, the Qur'an does set forth many criteria for differentiating between the true and the false. In addition, the Qur'an explores many examples of good and bad character. Moreover, the Qur'an does encourage the development of spiritual qualities such as piety, while simultaneously warning about the consequences of pursuing a life rooted in qualities that are directed exclusively through the filters of ego/nafs and the world (dunya – that is, the problematic product generated through the entanglement of the collective set of egos that make up the population of a given society).

Just as there are laws of physics, chemistry, and biology that govern the way in which the physical dimensions of the universe are manifested, so too, Sufis believe there are laws that govern the way in which the spiritual dimensions of the universe are manifested. Moreover, just as there are consequences for ignoring the laws of physics, chemistry, or biology, there also are consequences for ignoring the laws governing spirituality.

However, in neither case are the laws at issue, legal injunctions. Rather, one is being informed about the ways of the universe.

We have free will to make whatever choices we like in conjunction with the ways of the universe -- both physical and spiritual. Nonetheless, choices that do not take the nature of the universe into account do so at the peril of the individual who is making such choices.

Much to the likely chagrin of many Muslims and non-Muslims, I would like to advance the idea that shari'ah -- at least, in the sense in which I believe the word is actually used in the Qur'an as opposed to the sense of legalisms that have been imposed on it -- is really co-extensive with the eight principles of scientific method that have been outlined previously. I also feel that the foregoing way of treating the term 'shari'ah' is more reflective of the fact that roughly 89% of the Qur'an explores the possibilities and problems of spirituality in general, while only 11% of the Qur'an addresses specific formulae for addressing issues such as: marriage, divorce, inheritance, and dietary restrictions.

Furthermore, while issues such as adultery, theft, and murder are touched upon in the Qur'an, there is nothing in the Qur'an which indicates that one is forbidden to take the 89% of the Qur'an that gives

expression to general spirituality and bring it to bear on how one proceeds with many of the specific issues that fall within the aforementioned 11% category. More importantly, there is nothing in the Qur'an that indicates that this latter 11% should be imposed on others.

The Prophet did not encourage people to report their misdeeds to him. Indeed, he tended to discourage them from doing so and, instead, encouraged them to seek God's forgiveness. In addition, there is absolutely no evidence to indicate that if the Prophet were physically alive today he would necessarily handle specific instances involving breeches of public morality in precisely the same way in which he did more than 1400 years ago.

The 'right way', or shari'ah, is the path that an individual needs to pursue in order to be able to struggle to realize truth in one's life. Shari'ah is an individual pursuit of the truth that needs to be encouraged and supported, not a legal system that needs to be oppressively imposed on the collective.

In fact, I can think of nothing that has been more injurious to the process of seeking spiritual truths than has been the inclination of all too many Muslim leaders and theologians to treat shari'ah as a collective legal issue rather than as a methodological process capable of assisting individuals to learn about, and come to understand, the ways of the universe across all dimensions of Being. Individuals are more likely to be enthusiastic toward, and committed to, an activity -- in this case spirituality -- if they are shown how they can take command of a situation in their own way and at their own pace and in accordance with their own capabilities, rather than being force-fed a theology of oppressiveness.

True spirituality comes from within, not from without. True science comes from within, not from without.

Consequently, I believe it is a fundamental mistake to try to legalize spirituality. I do not believe this is the intention of the Qur'an - indeed, I feel that the clear intention of the Qur'an, taken as a whole, is to encourage people to struggle toward understanding the 'right way', or 'shari'ah', as a rigorous process of establishing a methodology that would enable the individual to gradually come to be able to distinguish the true from the false in a wide variety of issues involving:

the self, people, history, society, the world, forces of nature, the universe, choice, character, and spiritual possibilities.

The inclination of many Muslims to try to legalize spirituality has led to disastrous results. One can see evidence concerning this mistaken approach to the idea of 'shari'ah' virtually everywhere in the Muslim world in the form of: corruption, endless sectarian strife, misogyny, arrogance, so-called honor killings, hypocrisy, infibulation (female genital mutilation), intolerance, and frequently oppressive, sterile systems of education, justice, scientific research, and governance.

Whatever the role of Western powers might have been in the colonial and imperialistic exploitation of, and injustices toward, the Muslim world -- and that role has been considerable -- all too many Muslim theologians, mullahs, muftis, imams, educators, jurists, and leaders have, across the centuries, greased the skids of cultural collapse by seeking to induce Muslim people to pursue an incorrect understanding of the process of 'shari'ah that has, for the most part, led Muslims away from reality rather than toward the truth of things. If Muslims had been encouraged to pursue 'shari'ah in the sense that is being outlined in this article/essay (and I do not take credit for this idea since it has been inherent in Sufi teachings for more than 1400 years) -- that is, as a rigorous form of critically reflective inquiry that is, among other things, capable of eliminating bias and error through the mutual collaboration of sincere seekers -- I believe the Muslim world would have been a lot better off.

However, such has not been the case. Things are the way they are because all too many Muslims have continued to make the wrong kinds of choices in relation to their understanding of the idea of shari'ah and because God has permitted Muslims to persist making such problematic choices ... indeed, as the Qur'an indicates, God will not change the condition of a people until first they change their own condition -- something that has not yet happened in the Muslim world as far as the issue of shari'ah is concerned. (Those who wish to read more on the foregoing topic might enjoy: *Shari'ah: A Muslim's Declaration of Independence*).



The Notion of Symmetry

The idea of a mathematical group is considered to be at the heart of the notion of symmetry, one of the most important ideas of modern physics. A group consists of a set of components or elements that satisfy certain conditions.

For example, for any operation or law of composition involving two members of the aforementioned set of elements, then the product of that composition must also be a member of the set of elements if that set is to constitute a 'group'. In other words, the property of closure must be present if the set of elements is to be considered a group.

Every group is also characterized by the presence of a unique identity element. For instance, I (the identity element) times 'X' (some element in the group) equals X times I equals X.

A third property of a group revolves around the idea of an inverse element. In other words, in every group there is a unique inverse element for each member of a set such that X (an element of the group) times X^{-1} (the inverse element) will yield 1, and it is permissible that X and X^{-1} could be identical to one another.

The final condition that a set must exhibit in order to be considered a group requires that the operation of multiplication within the set of elements must be associative in character. That is, $X \times (Y \times Z)$ is equal to $(X \times Y) \times Z$.

Usually, the elements of a group involve numbers or geometric forms. For example, Evariste Galois introduced the idea of groups as a way of engaging various problems in the theory of equations and deciding whether, or not, a given equation could be solved through certain methods.

He maintained that if one examined all of the permutations of a set of elements that retained the algebraic relations among the roots or solutions for a given equation -- that is, if one examined the symmetry for the group being considered -- one could discover whether or not the requisite sort of internal structure was present in such a symmetry through which one would be able to solve the equation in question through a particular path ... such as, say, by radicals.

However, the idea of symmetry actually is capable of encompassing any set of elements whether algebraic, geometric, or something non-mathematical in character. In fact, the essence of symmetry can be reduced down to three features.

First, the elements of any set have certain structural features. This structure gives expression to the character of the set members.

Thus, if one is talking about the structure of Euclidean triangles, then features such as: having three sides, being closed, the sides must be straight, and the interior angles must total 180° , are all part of the structure of the elements of such a set. If one is considering non-Euclidean triangles or topological structures or some other kind of mathematical structure, then other structural features come into play through which one identifies exemplars or elements of the set being considered.

A second essential feature of symmetry revolves around the concept or notion of transformations. Transformations allude to the operations that are permissible to be performed in relation to the features that give expression to the structural character of the members of a given set.

A third and final factor is the most critical of the three general facets of symmetry. This aspect of symmetry requires that the structural character of the set of elements be preserved across whatever transformation operations are performed with respect to, or that might occur in conjunction with, the members of such a set.

Although the foregoing outline is fairly abbreviated, I feel enough has been said to lay the basis for a conjecture. More specifically, I maintain that science -- when properly pursued -- constitutes a symmetry in which the relation among the structural features of experienced reality are preserved across the transformations (the eight principles of science noted earlier) that are performed on the elements (components of the physical universe) that constitute the members of the symmetry set.

A second, related conjecture follows from the earlier discussion in which I drew parallels between authentic physical science (i.e., non-junk science) and authentic mystical methodology (i.e., not involving counterfeit mysticism led by fraudulent guides). More specifically, I believe that shari'ah -- when construed in terms of a rigorous,

reflective, inquisitive, methodological process of experiential feedback loops that generate results that can be replicated and critically explored by a group of knowledgeable elders -- also constitutes symmetry in the foregoing sense.

In other words, the spiritual nature of the universe gives expression to certain structural features that can be engaged through the eight principles or steps of operational or transformational methodology outlined earlier. If the methodology one uses is capable of preserving the relationships among the structural features of the spiritual universe through which viable roots or solutions to life problems are to be derived, then the methodology gives expression to the principle of symmetry.

The internal structural of the spiritual symmetry (in my case, shari'ah) must be capable of accurately reflecting the structural features of experienced reality and the structural features of the actual nature of spiritual reality (assuming, of course, that it exists) in order for it to be properly said that symmetry is present. This, of course, raises the problem of whether what one takes to be a spiritual symmetry is genuine, illusory, or delusional.

Not every hypothesis, theory, or conjecture in physical research leads to success. The methodology of science serves as a mediator of sorts among alternative possibilities and assists researchers to differentiate the wheat from the chaff, but the ultimate arbiter of truth is reality itself.

Similarly, not every understanding in the mystical journey necessarily leads to success. Spiritual methodology -- e.g., shari'ah -- serves as a mediator among alternative descriptions and explanations of what is taking place and, as such, helps an individual to differentiate between, say, genuine spiritual experiences and illusory ones. However, once again, the ultimate arbiter of truth in such matters is reality itself.

The task of a Sufi -- as it is the task of a scientist exploring the physical world -- is to go in search of symmetry. This begins with methodology ... that is, one must have access to a methodological process that is capable of preserving the structural character of the relations among the different facets of reality one is investigating.

As a Sufi, I have been in search of symmetry in the foregoing sense for much of my adult life. Each internal faculty -- mind, heart, *sirr*, *kafi*, spirit, and *aqfah* -- gives expression to its own modality of symmetry relations, and the challenge for a Sufi is to seek out such symmetries through the symmetry of a rigorous methodology (which again, for me, is *shari'ah*) and, God willing, witness an array of truths (*tajalli*, manifestations) concerning the nature of the spiritual universe that might be disclosed to such modalities of understanding according to one's capacity or potential.

Physicists have been singing the praises of symmetry for ninety-odd years. Furthermore, they have been searching for the right sort of symmetries throughout that period of time -- symmetries that would permit them to give expression to, and preserve, physical principles in an elegant manner.

Not all symmetries necessarily reflect the structural character of fundamental dimensions of the physical world. However, when such symmetries are found, they have an inherent beauty and provide rich, deep insights into the way of the world -- at least those parts of the world that can be given expression through those symmetries.

I believe that one of the reasons why science constitutes such a compelling method through which to engage the unknown is precisely because when it is properly pursued it exhibits symmetry. I also believe that one of the reasons why spirituality (and not theology) constitutes such a compelling method through which to engage the unknown is precisely because when it is properly pursued it exhibits symmetry.

I have faith in both of these methodological frameworks. They both are invitations to engage in a rigorous methodology of inherent beauty through which each, in its own way, is capable of preserving essential truths concerning the nature of Being.

Epilog

The foregoing synopsis of issues involving science, spirituality, symmetry, and life events camouflages a great many twists and turns that tend to arise in the details of things but are lost within a necessarily abbreviated overview such as the present work. Those details are both quite amazing and fraught with many difficulties, but there is one rather intriguing dimension to such lived experience.

More specifically, as indicated early on in this extended essay, one of the primary reasons for my deciding not to pursue a career in science -- despite a deep love for the many interesting facets of science -- was because I didn't like the experimental side of things. It was too tedious; it was too exacting; it was too messy; it was too complicated; it was too open to error and problems; it took too long to set up, analyze, and confirm.

Oddly enough, for the last 40, or more, years of my life, I have been engaged in nothing else but experimental, empirical work. Life has been my laboratory, and I have been the focus of my studies.

Previously, when I was in high school, the idea of spending days, weeks, months, or even a few years in a lab trying to grab hold of this or that small piece of truth felt overwhelming and was not at all appealing to my impatient nature. However, the experiments that have been run in my life lab have taken decades for me to set up and run -- involving many problems, errors, and cul-de-sacs. The thought of having to take only a few months or years to complete an experiment appears somewhat illusory ... albeit inviting.

The analysis of the empirical data that have been generated in my laboratory has been detailed and very rigorous. Indeed, there is no part of my life that has been spared scrutiny, critical examination, questioning, or relentless probing.

I have found life -- at least my life -- to be a very messy affair that cannot be reduced down to a set of simple formulae. My life is given much more to: non-linear processes than linear ones ... where much has to be hand-fed into whatever qualitative and quantitative equations I have formulated in order to be able to try to make any sort of sense out of what has transpired in my lab. As a result, I am more

than a little amused at my earlier concerns about the messiness of doing experimental science.

Over the last 40, or so, years, I have come to appreciate, in a very intimate manner, the importance of, and problems surrounding, issues of: the interrogative imperative, empirical observation, objectivity, calibrating instruments, recursive procedures, replication, and the idea of a community of knowers. In the process, I have become all I didn't want to be more than fifty years ago: an experimental scientist.

During this time, I have written more than 35 books, released two CDs of floetry (poems set to music), one DVD directed toward interfaith harmony, and produced more than 80 hours of a podcast (Sufi Reflections) covering all manner of topics – from: the Sufi path, to: music, education, philosophy, science, constitutional issues, poetry, terrorism, Islam, and democracy. These works are my lab journals and they are open for anyone to examine, critique, and build upon in whatever way they choose.

I don't claim to know the truth of all manner of things. However, there are, I believe, some limited truths that have emerged during my years as an experimental scientist that I hold on to and cherish as the precious remnants of the complex and nuanced sifting process that constitutes my particular approach to conducting empirical science.

I might never win a Nobel Prize. Nonetheless, I have been engaged in a noble, experimental enterprise of struggling to learn how to die before I die.