

Journal of a Sufi Odyssey
Volume 1

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June 1988

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, 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 Irfan, 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. Irfan 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 Professor Irfan – 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.

§

July 1988

No instructions were left by my shaykh except that in the event of his leaving this world, then all of his writings and personal effects should be placed in storage and no one was to be permitted access to them. He had given no indication as to whom -- if anyone -- should succeed him spiritually.

Shortly before his passing away there had been a strange incident that occurred at one of our group gatherings. After the main purpose of the meeting is served, we are all sitting in our shaykh's living room, eating sweets, and having tea.

Our teacher begins to relate an experience of his. He might have said it was a dream or a waking vision, but I am not certain.

Essentially, he says that all of the members of our immediate silsilah (which I took to mean the individuals who were his mureeds in North America) are gathered together with him. He is called by his shaykh (who had passed away nearly twenty years earlier) to go to another plane of existence, and before our teacher leaves, he gives us all instructions not to wander off and just to wait for his return.

When he comes back from visiting with his shaykh, everybody, except one individual, has failed to heed his instructions. Everyone, but the one person, has wandered off and things are in disarray. The circle is in shambles.

As our teacher tells us of this dream or waking experience, I become very angry with myself and am quite distraught over having failed to follow the instructions that had been given by our shaykh. I remember looking down at the floor in embarrassment as his story unfolds.

When the time comes for the session to end, and we are all leaving, our shaykh asks me to stay behind. Once everyone has left, he speaks with me for just a few moments.

He tells me that the individual in his dream or waking experience who has not wandered off is me. I am both shocked and relieved.

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Within a fairly short time following the passing away of my shaykh, I am given the unenviable task of having to contact, by phone, the hundreds of individuals who are on our group's mailing list. Over and over again, I must break the news to people that Professor Irfan has passed away from this world. Repeatedly, the news is met with shock and grief. Invariably, many questions are asked, and I try my best to answer what I can. Eventually, I must break off the conversation because I have hundreds of more calls to make, and, so, as politely as I can I seek to disengage myself and usually end the conversation by providing information concerning the funeral and burial that will happen in a day, or so.

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On the day of the funeral, I go to the mosque that my shaykh helped to establish. Before stepping into the prayer area of the mosque, I -- along with some of the other mureeds who are present as well as a person who knew and respected my shaykh -- have been engaged in the ritual bathing of the body in preparation for the funeral and subsequent burial. My job is to keep the fresh water coming with the bucket I have been given, and as the empty bucket is given to me, I rush to fill it up again so that the one who is washing the body might proceed without delay.

After my shaykh's body has been completely cleansed in the prescribed manner, I kiss his forehead. Later, I feel badly thinking that, perhaps, I should have kissed his feet instead.

Following the foregoing preparations, I walk upstairs to the main prayer area of the mosque. I become engaged in doing silent zikr (chanting the Names of God) -- I am kneeling, my eyes are closed, and my head is lowered somewhat while doing this.

When I began doing zikr, there were very few people in the mosque. When the announcement for the prayer comes, I discontinue saying zikr and open my eyes.

Now there are many people in the mosque. As I look to my right and left, the people I see are like so many chapters out of the life of my shaykh -- and, quite a few of these chapters have an unpleasant theme since among the people I am seeing there are those who sought to oppose, denigrate, undermine, and ruin my shaykh ... individuals who, now, are seeking to convey their smiling, solicitous condolences to me with respect to the passing away of my spiritual guide.

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After the funeral prayers are said, I join the procession that conveys the body of my shaykh to the cemetery where he will be laid to rest. The body is lowered into the grave, and the space above the pine box is filled with dirt.

Fatiha is said. Two members of the congregation write the name of Allah in Arabic in the loose dirt at the corners of the grave. They do this with their index fingers.

The ceremony for the one who has passed on comes to an end. The rituals of the living continue.

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August 1988

A member of the silsilah -- or Sufi order -- to which I belong (a person who lives in another city) communicates to me through someone who attends the Thursday-night gatherings (i.e., fatiha). The message is both short and cryptic.

The individual – Mustafa -- had a dream and in that dream our shaykh, who recently had passed on to the next world, asks the one whose dream it is to pass on a message to me. The message is this: there are two wolves that I should avoid.

Who or what these wolves are, I do not know. How I am supposed to recognize them, I do not know. When and where the ‘wolves’ are to appear, I do not know. Why the dream is communicated to someone else rather than to me directly, I do not know. Is the dream veridical? I do not know ... but, trying to look on the bright side of things, I am in familiar territory since there are many things that I do not know.

The incident triggers a memory concerning an event that took place many years before ... near the time when I first met Professor Irfan. At the time I was living out in the country in part of an old farmhouse.

Behind the house was a small ridge that marked the crest of a hill that bordered the backyard, maybe 50 feet, or so, away from the back of the house. It was wintertime and the hill was covered with several feet of snow.

I had awoken to say morning prayers and to do a zikr or chant of remembrance that had been given to me by Professor Irfan. I had not, yet, been initiated into the Sufi silsilah for which Professor Irfan was a shaykh, but I had been given a zikr, and, in addition, I was trying to observe some of the basic pillars of Islam – such as praying and fasting.

The sun had not risen, but the light of the impending day was beginning to advance in brightness. I was at the kitchen sink washing a glass when I looked out the window above the sink. There on the ridge above the farmhouse were two wolves ... nearly as white as the snow.

They were side by side and seemed to be peering into the distance across the field that spread beyond the road on the other side of the farmhouse. They were very still for a number of minutes as if studying the landscape, and, then, they turned around, trotted away, and disappeared from view behind the ridge.

When I later told various individuals about the experience, not many people seemed to believe me because wolves were a rarity in the area. They tried to convince me that what I had seen was a couple of German Shepherds or a couple of Huskies or something of a similar nature ... but I knew what I had seen, and what I had seen were not dogs ... they were wolves.

Did that experience have anything to do with what I was now being told? I do not know, but like the people to whom I had related

the ‘two wolves’ story many years ago, I was not quite certain what to make of what I was being told with respect to the cautioning tale concerning the new ‘two wolves’ story.

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November 1988

Last night a group of us were returning from a visit with Momin in another city quite some distance away from the destination where the people in this modern caravanserai are heading. I am driving, and Munir is in front with me.

He begins to tell about a dream he recently had. In the dream he is taken away to another plane of Being.

Eventually, after being taken here and there, he is led through a dark tunnel that opens out on to a heaven-like vista. Next, he is led to a palatial home where countless angels and saints are gathered.

At the front of the congregation is a raised platform with someone on it who is presiding over things. Munir does not recognize the individual at first, but, then, realizes it is our shaykh who has passed away just a few months earlier.

A conversation between the shaykh and Munir ensue. During this discussion, the person on the platform indicates that Munir should become a shaykh or spiritual guide.

Munir says he does not have a khirkah or mantle of spiritual authority to wear. Our shaykh has a patched frock brought out, and Munir recognizes it as being like the one his own father, who had been a shaykh, used to wear -- a khirkah that Munir had been keeping as a cherished artifact of his father’s days as a spiritual guide and that Munir had been preserving since his father had passed away a number of years earlier.

The dream ends with Munir asking our shaykh if Munir will have the honor of visiting again with the shaykh sometime soon. Apparently, the answer is “insha’ Allah” ... if God wishes.

After Munir relates his dream, we discuss it for a time. Munir is of the opinion that the dream means he should not only assume the

duties of being a shaykh for the silsilah, but, as well, he should become the president of the community organization that our shaykh had established nearly seventeen years ago.

I have no aspirations in either of those directions. Moreover, I really have little understanding of how such things actually work as far as succession issues are concerned, nor did I ever ask my shaykh what should be done if, one day, he were not with us in the physical world ... it is one of those things that we all knew would happen, eventually, yet no one wishes to broach the subject because of the implications inherent in such earthly finality.

After Munir has related his dream, the thought does cross my mind that if our shaykh – who had died just a few months ago – gave no indication while he was alive concerning the identity of the individual who should succeed him as a shaykh, then why was the shaykh communicating things in a different way now? On the other hand, another thought also bubbles to the surface – namely, the spiritual world operates according to its own set of principles, many of which I am not all that well versed on, and, therefore, the epistemological footing is somewhat shaky – no pun intended

Not wishing to create difficulties, and not wanting to attribute various kinds of darker motivations to Munir concerning his dream, and not knowing what else to do, I accept Munir's interpretation of his dream at face value. However, for a variety of reasons, I do not wish to take initiation with him.

§

Many years ago, Professor Irfan had told me the story of how he had come to be a shaykh. He said that he had been teaching courses on Islam and the theory of the Sufi path for a number of years at the university, and, after a time, quite a few of the students who were taking the academic courses had approached him and inquired about whether, or not, Professor Irfan could be their shaykh.

He explained that although he had taken initiation quite a few years previously with a shaykh in Ajmer, he was not qualified to be a spiritual guide and that teaching academic courses on Islam and the

Sufi path was a very different proposition than that of being a shaykh. However, he said that he would write to his shaykh and inform his spiritual teacher about the interest in the Sufi path that Professor Irfan was encountering among various university students. Professor Irfan was hoping that his own shaykh would be willing to come to Canada for a visit and, perhaps, initiate some of the interested students.

Sometime after posting his letter to his spiritual guide, Professor Irfan received a letter from his shaykh indicating that the shaykh was too old to undertake such an arduous physical journey. The shaykh also indicated that he and Professor Irfan should wait and see who might be appointed to undertake such a responsibility.

Subsequent correspondence took place, but nothing more was said on the subject. Yet, more individuals were beginning to come making the same sort of inquiries as had other university students.

Again, many months later, Professor Irfan wrote to his shaykh broaching the same issue. This time Professor Irfan was hoping that, perhaps, his spiritual guide might send an individual who, among other things, had taught Professor Irfan Persian when the latter was much younger ... someone who also was a friend of Professor Irfan.

Eventually, a letter came. The letter indicated that Professor Irfan was to assume the responsibilities of being a shaykh and looking after the spiritual needs of the individuals coming to him who were expressing an interest in the Sufi path ... and, then, the letter went on to detail some of the instructions and guidance in relation to the responsibilities of being a shaykh.

§

Now, Munir was claiming that he had been appointed a shaykh through a dream ... that he had been appointed a shaykh in the dream by none other than Professor Irfan who not too long ago -- when he still was among the people of this world -- had given no indication about a possible successor within the silsilah and also had left instructions that none of his writings or spiritual artifacts should be accessible to anyone. Among these sequestered artifacts was a khirkah – a mantle of spiritual authority that is often handed down from

shaykh to successor – which Professor Irfan had been given by his shaykh when the Professor Irfan had traveled back to India during one of his sabbaticals.

Instead, according to Munir’s dream, Munir was to wear the khirkah of his own father that Munir just happened to have in storage. This certainly was a convenient turn of events given that Professor Irfan said that the khirkah for our silsilah should remain inaccessible to people in the group.

Maybe, Munir’s dream concerning becoming a shaykh was true. However, dreams aren’t always transparently veridical ... sometimes they give expression to individual aspirations in symbolic form and as such only constitute a person’s unredeemed nafs or ego appointing itself to be a spiritual guide for others.

§

There is some sort of friction going on between Munir and the members of Professor Irfan’s house-hold. Apparently, since Professor Irfan passed away, things have been kind of tense and somewhat conflict-ridden between the two residences.

I don’t know what all the details are, but both sides have alluded to certain kinds of problems. I broach the subject of my willingness to serve as a mediator in the matter since I don’t want these people to be at odds with one another ... I am sure that Professor Irfan would not have wished for such to be the case and would have taken steps to try to breach whatever rift might exist between the two sides.

The two parties agree to a meeting with me in order to try to clear the air. A time and place is arranged.

At first, there is a considerable amount of tension in the room. However, after a little bit of trial and error, the two sides begin communicating with one another and by the end of the evening, things seem to be much better.

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A few weeks later, I am having a conversation with Suriyah. I forget, exactly, how the topic comes up, but Suriyah tells me in a rather scolding, stern voice that there was something that I should have done shortly after Professor Irfan passed away ... something that I didn't do.

She won't tell me what it is that I should have done. I let the matter drop, but I am rather mystified by her comments.

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January 1989

Through a strange set of circumstances, I am introduced to a shaykh who is visiting from Pakistan. I visit with the shaykh at the house of the individual who, first, told me about the individual from Pakistan.

A few people are already present at the house when I arrive. I am invited in, sit down, and am offered some tea.

Pleasantries are exchanged, and, eventually, questions are raised about the Sufi path. The gentlemen from Pakistan and a number of other individuals who are present have tasbihs (a string of beads that serves as a means of keeping track of how many times one has recited a certain name of God, a verse of the Qur'an, or some other form of remembrance or zikr.). The beads on the tasbih are in constant action while the conversation takes place.

For some reason, this bothers me a little. Perhaps, this feeling is because, for the most part, Professor Irfan's manner of going about things was always low-keyed, but what is going on in the living room is fairly conspicuous.

Professor Irfan did many forty day seclusions, did extra fasts beyond the requirements of Ramadan, said prayers beyond the set of five daily prayers, kept many night vigils, and did zikr a great deal. However, none of this was done in a readily visible way ... it was always sort of behind the scenes, so to speak, and unless one spent a great of time with him – as I fortunate enough to be able to do – one might never suspect that such things took place based on what was visible to the generality of people.

In any event, I put aside whatever oddness I felt with respect to what is going on in the living room of the shaykh with whom I am visiting. I do know – having been in the company of quite a few shaykhs from various silsilahs – that different shaykhs and silsilahs do things in different ways ... so, maybe, the way in which the people who are present do things is just not what I am used to.

The discussion has hardly begun when the doorbell rings. The front door is down a hallway that is to my right.

Someone answers the summons, and there is a little bit of inaudible, muffled talk that filters into the living room. Then, all of a sudden, I hear something like high-pitched moaning coming from the hallway area. These are accompanied by some shrieks or cries.

Several women are ushered into the living room. They seem to be in some sort of state as they greet the shaykh.

The shaykh has a few words with them, and they begin to settle down. The moaning begins to subside, and the conversation continues on with no reference to, or explanation of, what has just taken place.

§

At a subsequent meeting, I learn that the shaykh wishes to get married. Apparently, one of the reasons why he came to Canada was to find a suitable bride.

My shaykh's widowed wife, Suriyah, comes to mind. She now has gone through the requisite period of mourning following her husband's death, and, therefore, she is available for marriage.

Suriyah has a young child and she is working mother. Things have been difficult for her since her husband passed away.

Several days later, I speak to, first, Suriyah and, then, the visiting shaykh about exploring the possibility of matrimony. They agree to meet.

Both parties have requested me to attend the aforementioned discussion. The meeting is an unmitigated disaster.

When we arrive at Suriyah's residence, a friend of Suriyah's welcomes us. We are ushered into the living room and are invited to take seats.

The friend indicates that Suriyah will be down shortly. The woman asks if we would like some tea, and upon receiving an affirmative answer she leaves to prepare things.

The visiting shaykh has brought a friend with him. They begin talking and, then, arguing about different interpretations of the Qur'an. The situation becomes rather heated and uncomfortable to be around.

The argument comes to an end when Suriyah appears. An aura of awkwardness settles over the room ... partly due to the purpose of the meeting and partly because the after-glow of the argument still permeates the room. I sense that Suriyah has overheard part of the argument as well that appears to have been somewhat embarrassing to her.

Tea is served, but the conversation is stilted and sparse. Politeness controls the conversation, and there is not much of substantive value that is given expression.

I feel first impressions have been made and Suriyah is not impressed with what she sees, hears, and feels. By the Grace of God, the get together comes to an end.

Prior to the meeting, I had some fleeing thoughts about, possibly, taking initiation with this shaykh. As I am leaving the car, his parting words to me are that even though the marriage proposal didn't work out he has big plans for me.

I can't run away from the car fast enough. It reminds me of the time when I was looking for part-time work while going to school, and, quite innocently, applied for a job at a local psychiatric institute that, among other things, is engaged in sex research -- as I subsequently discovered during the interview and tour of the facilities.

More specifically, the job, which was mine to have -- a dubious distinction -- would be cleaning up after the test subjects who had been exposed to pornographic photos while being hooked up to stimulator/repository tube of some kind. I ran from the car of the shaykh like I ran from the building after the job interview -- never

wanting to return to either one and deeply afraid that, somehow, they would track me down and call me back.

I wonder if the 'shaykh' is one of the wolves whom my shaykh might have tried to warn me through a friend's dream. I wonder if the person is actually a shaykh since just on the basis of my limited interaction with him, he seems very unlike my shaykh in a variety of ways, and, yet, shaykhs come in many shapes and temperaments, and the truth of the matter is, I really don't know what to think ... except I want to get away.

I also am reminded of a time not too long after I met my shaykh, Professor Irfan, when a group of Tabliqī Jamaat (a movement originating in Pakistan/India in which a small group of people travel to different countries, visit local mosques, and seek to go out into those local communities and induce people to become reconnected to, among other things, mosque activities) had been visiting at a nearby mosque. The group had asked me to accompany them to a city not too far away and to stay with them for the weekend.

I asked my shaykh about this. He thought it would be okay and that, maybe, I would learn some more about Islam during the three-day retreat.

To make a long story much shorter, I found the experience to be fairly distasteful. This was not because of prayers, sleeping on the floor of the mosque, or late nights, but, rather, the problem arose out of the rather stifling nature of the group experience.

Everything one did was watched and commented upon. One also was a captive audience to long talks that had a lot of theology and not much spirituality. Moreover, one constantly was subject to the interests, concerns, and timetables of other individuals.

If one wanted to do zikr, one often was discouraged from doing so and encouraged, instead, to join group activities. If one wanted to be alone with one's own thoughts and reflections, one was pressed to share with group members what was going on within one. There was little room or respect for personal space.

When I returned back to the local mosque toward the end of the foregoing three-day venture, I kept looking for a way to gracefully bow out of the group proceedings. I just wanted to go home. Nevertheless,

no matter what excuse I gave, what I said would be countered by members of the group with reasons as to why I should continue to stay on.

Finally, I just said to the members of the group that I had to go, and left the mosque, walked down a small hallway heading for the ‘escape’ exit. Bust, just as I was about to become ‘free’, a voice came out of a doorway along the hallway.

The voice belonged to one of the leaders of the group. He was inquiring about where I was going and why I was leaving.

I mumbled a few words, didn’t wait for a response, and left the building. As I exited and got into my car, I felt as if heavy shackles had been removed from my being ... the experience was a very visceral feeling that seemed to reverberate through the core of my being.

Maybe, the feeling arose from my ego. Maybe, the feeling arose from my heart ... maybe a combination of the two

Whatever the truth of the matter might be, I knew that I didn’t want to have anything to do with the Tabliqui Jamaat’s way of doing things. Their way of teaching about Islam was so very different from Professor Irfan’s manner of teaching about spirituality ... and, perhaps, this is the lesson that my shaykh wished me to learn in a very direct and essential manner.

§

February 1989

I ask someone if he would be willing to recite Qur’an at one of our up-coming public functions. This person had been a favorite of Professor Irfan and always readily joined in, both with Quranic recitation, as well as with some Sufi poetry in his native tongue. He and I rode together to the cemetery following Professor Irfan’s funeral.

The man indicates that although he had been willing to participate in our functions while our shaykh was still physically present, he no longer wishes to join in with our observances now that the shaykh has passed away. He doesn’t say things openly, but his manner makes it

clear that he is unhappy with something that is going on with our silsilah.

The individual always has been very friendly and pleasant with me. On a number of occasions, we have spent a little bit of time together. I like him.

He does not seem to be angry toward me or upset with me in particular. However, he is very firm in informing me that he does not wish to be included in the forthcoming public function.

§

March 1989

There are many problems and tensions arising within the group that is now being led by Munir. Everyone seems to be pulling in a different direction.

A number of things that Munir has done, or is doing, are quite troublesome to me ... as well as to others apparently. However, I really don't know what to do about any of it except to try to continue to promote harmony and co-operation within the group as much as possible, as well as to help out with whatever organizational projects are settled upon.

We continue to hold the Thursday night fatiha sessions. Occasionally, on spiritually auspicious occasions – such as certain nights during Ramadan – night vigils are held, and for both of these kinds of activities we meet at the house of Munir.

Nonetheless, in a variety of ways dissension is growing within the group. Factions are forming and people are going in different directions. Cooperation is becoming increasingly difficult to come by.

§

May 1989

We observe the first anniversary of the passing away of our shaykh. The occasion takes place in the same room of the university where, over the years, so many public functions were held and at which our shaykh presided.

§

June 1989

An old Saudi acquaintance of Professor Irfan 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 in 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 that, maybe, I would wait for a Hajj season that might take 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 is one point when I go to the Saudi embassy in Washington, D.C., in order to get my Hajj visa and pick up my round-trip air ticket. However, I don't even have enough money to make the plane trip to New York.

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 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. Someone opens the door just a crack after I knock, 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. They are just closing the door on the last flight to New York when I reach the gate at the Washington airport.

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.

Somehow, God provides me a way through it all. 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 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 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, Allaahumma labbaik; labbaik, laa shareeka-lak, labbaik; innal-hamda wan-ni'mata lak wal-mulk, laa shareeka 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 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 Irfan 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 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 than 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 for cleaning and care-taking tasks. 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

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 that 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 cast into the bottomless pit of what is referred to as 'lapsed 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 get back to Momin's house and take a closer look at the papers that have been given to me by the man, 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 Momin 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. I am going to visit with Momin in the near future and will discuss the 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

I am visiting with Momin. There is an annual, community dinner that is taking place. At the last minute, one of the scheduled speakers cannot attend the function, and someone who knows I am in town calls Momin, with whom I usually stay when I am visiting in that city, and asks if I can 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 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.. Munir and I have been invited to attend the meetings.

We decide to go and take a few other individuals from our group for 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 – in fact, Professor Irfan's group was one of the first Muslim organizations to undertake this sort of work in North America in a systematic fashion – through newsletters, magazines, lectures, press conferences and so on.

The whole process had been a real education for me into how the media, educational institutions, and governmental bodies respond to such challenges. I was pretty naïve about such things, but I was a fairly quick study, and Professor Irfan kept throwing tasks my way in relation to such issues.

The round table discussion went very well. Many of the attendees were quite intrigued when they heard me provide an overview of such experiences, and, as a result, a lot of questions were asked and answered with respect to 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. One of the talks I attended was given by a Muslim woman who 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, along with the responses she had given to some of the questions asked by various people in the audience. I told her about the interest that Munir – now the head of our community group – had in 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 about this or that, so, I thanked her for her time and moved on.

§

June 1990

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

Momin 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 Momin 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 Tasawwuf Association meetings (Tasawwuf is the technical term for the Sufi path) 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.

A great many things are touched upon that day ... thanks be to God. 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 do 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 Irfan. A group of six or seven individuals who had taken initiation with Professor Irfan accompanied him on a trip to various countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Turkey.

Prior to the trip, Professor Irfan 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 Provincial 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, Professor Irfan 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 that Professor Irfan had brought with him on the trip. By the Grace of God, we found a store that sold film projectors, and even though our initial attempts to communicate 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 us and God.

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 that 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, each religious tradition has its own 'welcome area'. People from a given spiritual 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 these 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 Irfan 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 man.

I didn't know whether, or not, the individual knew that Professor Irfan 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 Professor Irfan'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 Irfan'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 Irfan 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 Irfan 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 Professor Irfan'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 a traveler of the path.

§

September 1990

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 will finally 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 bear 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 thesis 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., David Knecht) 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. ... the government officials, apparently, have objected to this and are trying to find ways

of undermining people like myself who are part of the campaign ... thus, the 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 that the student group released some time ago. Consequently, perhaps, the government is also upset about this 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, 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 psychology. 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 California, I think, 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, and 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 could have saved 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 such 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, and as a result, they will pass me over for consideration quite independently of what I actually might have to offer.

Nevertheless, I was 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.

November 1990

Things within Munir’s group are still very problematic. There is a lot of tension, stress and subtle forms of conflict taking place.

I have suggested to several individuals who live in another city and who are connected with our silsilah, but who have not taken initiation with Munir, that, perhaps, they should begin a Tasawwuf Association at the university in their city, just as I had been doing, at my shaykh’s request, for the last 14 years, or so, at another university in the city where I lived. For whatever reason, initially, the suggestion gets a very cold reception, but, eventually, the two do start a Sufi discussion group in the university community of which they are a part.

I continue to run the weekly Tasawwuf Association meetings at another university where I am doing graduate studies. Prior to Professor Irfan’s passing away, he had never indicated that I should stop doing the Wednesday evening meetings, and, so, I do what I have been doing for nearly a decade and a half, almost without cessation.

However, there are people who are coming to these sessions and wishing to be initiated into a silsilah. I don’t know what to do except to refer them to Munir.

§

January 1991

An unidentified woman called a little while ago. She asks me my name and whether I conduct discussion meetings on the Sufi path at the local university.

I give her my name and answer her question in the affirmative. She asks for the day, time and place of the meetings, and I provide her with the information.

§

The next week the woman shows up at the Wednesday meeting. She attends every week but asks few, if any, questions and makes few comments. From time to time, she mentions her shaykh, whom she refers to just as Baba, and I am told this means 'spiritual father'.

If she has a shaykh, I wonder why she is coming to the meetings. Based on the few things she does say about her shaykh, he seems to be a very knowledgeable and powerful spiritual guide ... which makes her attendance at the Tasawwuf Association meeting even more puzzling - because, really, these meetings are intended to provide nothing more than rudimentary information about the Sufi mystical tradition. Nevertheless, whatever her reasons for coming might be, she is welcome.

§

August 1991

I am told that the shaykh of the women who began attending the Tasawwuf Association last January has returned from overseas. He is staying somewhere in Pennsylvania, Maryland, or New York -- I'm not exactly sure which is correct.

In the near future, this woman, 'Asma, and her family are going to go down for a visit with the shaykh. One of the other participants in the Wednesday evening group expresses a desire to meet the shaykh, and he is invited to go with 'Asma and her family.

'Asma says that a number of other families in the area who are mureeds of the shaykh also are going to travel to Jefferson around the same time as 'Asma. Apparently, this shaykh has quite a few followers who live in both Canada and the United States, as well as in certain localities elsewhere in the world.

§

December 1991

‘Asma and the other member of the Tasawwuf Association have returned from their trip to the United States. They are both effusive in their accounts about the wonderful and amazing time they had during the visit.

Rasheed -- the young man who accompanied ‘Asma on the journey to the south -- took initiation with Baba during the visit. Apparently, Rasheed is getting married soon, and there is some possibility that Baba might attend the wedding that is to take place in Canada.

§

March 1992

Rasheed’s wedding will be taking place soon. I have been invited.

Baba is also invited, but he says he will not be able to attend the occasion in person. However, he also indicates -- somewhat mysteriously -- that he will be at the wedding in a form that everyone will see.

§

May 1992

The wedding has come and gone. ‘Asma wants to know the identity of the form in which Baba attended the wedding and asks Baba whether, or not, he was there. She indicates that Baba laughed and says he was surprised that ‘Asma didn’t see him.

Baba maintains he was present in the form of an unshaven man. This perplexes ‘Asma because Baba is said to have a very long beard.

We all speculate about whom Baba might have been referring to. ‘Asma remembers that the person who was dispensing soft drinks as part of the catering services was clean-shaven and, therefore, nominates him, unofficially, as the camouflaged form of Baba.

‘Asma informed Baba about her candidate -- the catering guy. ‘Asma reported that Baba laughed over this during the phone

conversation but remains non-committal concerning the identity of his surrogate.

§

July 1992

Through a strange set of circumstances, I am going to India. A ticket has been arranged for me by someone 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, as I am waiting in line to check my bags and so on, 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 air line 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 Irfan. 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 air line 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 such 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 country side. 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 my back in Canada. He is an initiate of Professor Irfan.

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 head first - 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. 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, 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 Irfan.

One day, one of the individuals to whom I am introduced - a native of Ajmer and a friend of Professor Irfan -- 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.

There is a place of seclusion up on the mountain. The place consists of a cave 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.

We enter the cave, and there is a man inside, seated. 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 us. 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 who speaks English.

I had understood there is a place that is known as 'the mosque of the jinn' that is nearby. 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 in that case perhaps it would be best if I went another time.

The advice of the caretaker stirs up memories of a story that Professor Irfan 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 Irfan 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 Irfan and asked for that friend's assistance.

Apparently, the 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 Professor Irfan to come to a certain location at a certain time. When Professor Irfan'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. Professor Irfan'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 Irfan thought he was doing reciting things.

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 Irfan continued to recite whatever he was reciting. Suddenly, a rather terrifying voice came out of the youth instructing the friend of Professor Irfan that there were seven steps that were necessary to rid a person of a jinn ... what the friend of Professor Irfan was doing was only the first step. The voice went on to say that unless the friend knew the other six steps, then, the friend would be in for a lot of trouble very, very quickly unless he stopped.

Upon hearing that, the friend of Professor Irfan 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 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.

§

August 1992

'Asma calls me and informs me that Baba wants me to teach 'Asma's children about Islam. Her two children are girls -- one is about 14 or 15, and the other girl is about 10 or 11.

I have no idea why the request is being made and neither does 'Asma. Nonetheless, both she and her husband have accepted Baba's proposal and would like me to teach their children about Islam.

The lessons have begun. We meet once a week, usually on a Saturday or Sunday, and, afterwards we have a meal together.

‘Asma is a great cook. I feel the family is getting cheated because, in exchange for my sharing my ignorance with their children, I get a wonderful meal.

§

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 ... one of the trains 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 such degrees of separation ... closer or further away?

§

December 1992

Munir and the rest of the members of our silsilah, including me, continue to hold public functions commemorating the anniversary dates of various spiritual luminaries, ranging from: the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), to: Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him), Hazrat ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with him), Hazrat Khwajah Muin-ud-deen Chishti (may Allah be pleased with him), Hazrat Qadir Jilani (may Allah be pleased with him), as well as both our own recently departed shaykh and the anniversary date of his spiritual guide.

Our community organization has initiated a number of projects. I am doing a lot of the writing associated with these undertakings.

Despite these projects, and, in some ways, even because of these activities, tensions and subliminal conflict continue to run high within our circle. I don't know what to do other than to try to cooperate with Munir and the others, but beneath the surface of seeming-harmony, there is a lot of discord.

§

February 1993

I receive a call from a mureed who is associated with a Shaykh Yaqub in another silsilah. He says his silsilah is sponsoring a cultural event in the not too distant future and is seeking help from me with respect to promoting the occasion – although I am not sure why he has called me rather than someone whom he knows.

I agree to meet with the man at a restaurant and explore the matter. In the meantime, I outline a variety of suggestions concerning possibilities for promotion that I will pass on when we get together.

The two of us meet and discuss my suggestions. An hour, or so, later, we end the discussion.

Toward the end of the conversation, the man indicates that if I, or any of the other people associated with our silsilah, would like to get tickets to the forthcoming occasion about which we have been talking, then he will reserve however many tickets we would like in order to ensure our participation. Arrangements are made to talk again in several weeks' time.

§

April 1993

'Asma has announced that Baba is going back overseas to be with his own shaykh for a period of time and, as well, to look after certain duties on behalf of their silsilah. 'Asma indicates that Baba not only

wishes me to continue giving instruction to ‘Asma’s two daughters, but, in addition, he would like me to begin to conduct regular fatiha sessions with ‘Asma’s family.

I really don’t know what to make of all this. ‘Asma passes on a copy of the instructions for saying fatiha according to the manner of Baba’s silsilah that she has taken down over the phone as Baba dictated the words to her. Their way of saying fatiha is quite different, in certain respects from the way in which my shaykh’s silsilah observes the recitation of fatiha.

I don’t really want this new responsibility. At the same time, I also don’t know how to withdraw from it gracefully without hurting anyone’s feelings, and, so, I agree to conduct fatiha for ‘Asma’s family.

The first few times that I say the fatiha the recitations are fairly ragged. My pronunciation is not very good, and I stumble a lot. However, ‘Asma and her family are kind, accepting what I do but probably wondering what is going on ... as am I.

§

July 1993

Someone from Shaykh Yaqub’s 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, a mureed of Shaykh Yaqub passes on a request for me to say a prayer to bring the session to a close. I am nervous about doing this but try to accommodate the request.

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, and Shaykh Yaqub is smiling at me, indicating he is very pleased with the prayer.

§

September 1993

'Asma tells me that Baba is returning to North America. She also indicates that Baba is coming for a visit and hopes to meet me during his trip here.

§

October 1993

Baba has come. I am to meet him at 'Asma's on a 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 various Sufi shaykhs to support his replies.

Many engaging stories are told. His manner is 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 at 'Asma's 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 as me.

On Tuesday evening, a crowd of people assembles at 'Asma's, 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 is 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. First, there is the issue of continuing my journey on the Sufi path.

Although I had been quite satisfied with my relationship with my shaykh, I have become increasingly dissatisfied with the manner in which Munir is doing things and the way in which he is 'leading' the group. While, on the one hand, I have no desire to be in charge, nevertheless, on the other hand, there are a lot of doubts and questions swirling within my being concerning Munir.

I know I have no desire to take initiation with him. Yet, I also know I need additional guidance with respect to the Sufi path.

The so-called shaykh from Pakistan with whom I had, very briefly, considered taking initiation and from whom I ended up running away as fast as possible, gives rise to some concern within me about what I might be getting myself into this time if I were to seek initiation with

Baba. However, Baba -- at least, to date -- has exhibited none of the harshness, pushiness, presumption, lack of humor, and self-satisfied attitude of the earlier candidate ... quite the opposite actually.

Another issue is the time I have spent working for, and with, the community organization that my shaykh had established. Not only are there relationships that might be adversely affected if I switch to another silsilah, but I will have to start all over again -- developing a relationship with a new shaykh, new people ... in some ways, I would be right back where I started 17 difficult years ago.

Then, there is the matter of the two wolves that my shaykh had warned me about through Amir's dream. As sad as it makes me feel, I have come to the conclusion that one of those wolves is Munir who has dreamed his way to being a shaykh and to taking over my shaykh's community organization.

Furthermore, another 'good' candidate for the second wolf is the alleged shaykh from Pakistan whom I had met earlier and introduced to Suriyah to explore the possibility of matrimony. But, in truth, I am not sure about the validity of either of these possibilities as expressions of the two wolves about which I might have been warned.

Hal and his wife -- both of whom are mureeds of my shaykh and both of which have attended the session with Baba on Tuesday evening -- appear to be very much taken with Baba. Neither Hal nor his wife are ones to rush into things, and, each of them, in his and her own way, has a strong streak of skepticism running through their veins, yet, they seem to be very positively disposed toward Baba.

These sorts of thoughts keep bubbling about in my consciousness right up to Thursday evening. When I get to 'Asma's house, I ask her whether 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 'Asma I am going to seek initiation. She smiles and tells me something of a rather curious nature.

'Asma said 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 'Asma 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 that 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 spiritual throne, 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, Hal, his wife, together with 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 with respect to 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.

'Asma 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 -- and, 'Asma has done an admirable job in

this respect because absolutely everything that unfolded that night is beyond my wildest imagination.

'Asma 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. 'Asma also informs me that she was sent by Baba several years ago to locate me and with instructions for her to come to the Tasawwuf Association meeting 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. 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 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 the community group for which Munir was now president and that originally had been started by my first shaykh, Dr. Irfan.

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 such 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 -- but, by the time I leave, all the preliminary organizational work to launch the television program has been completed, and, 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 *dua* 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

Baba, 'Asma, I, and several other individuals take a trip to see Hal and Chris in another city. Several talks have been arranged at the university.

The talks go very well, and, subsequently, a number of people take initiation with Baba at the home of Hal and his family. Chris -- who also belonged to the same silsilah as Hal, his wife, and me prior to Baba's appearance on the scene -- is not among these individuals who take ba'yat.

At one point, Chris asks for an individual audience with Baba. I don't know what transpires during the session, but Chris later relates that, although he has a great deal of respect for Baba, Chris does not believe -- at least, at the present time -- he can take initiation with Baba. When I ask Baba about this situation, he tells me that, normally, such things are not discussed with anyone else, but, because of my position and function within the silsilah, he explains to me that he is obligated to tell me what transpired during his meeting with Chris -- and, he adds that, really, when it comes to matters pertaining to our silsilah that there is nothing that he will not inform me about ... he will never keep things from me in relation to such matters.

Apparently, during their discussion in the bedroom, Baba said that Chris wanted to know what Baba thought of our previous shaykh. Baba told Chris that our shaykh was one of the great, spiritual luminaries of this age and in this part of the world.

Upon hearing Baba's assessment, Chris proceeds to list a variety of grievances against our -- that is Professor Irfan -- former shaykh. Chris indicates that his previous shaykh has ruined his life and the life of his wife, and Chris is rather bitter about things. Moreover, Baba says that Chris does not see how he can take initiation with Baba when Baba is so positively disposed toward Chris's former shaykh.

When getting ready to return home, Susan decides to stay on a bit longer and asks if someone could drive her car back ... 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. I can't see where the road begins or ends. 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 Hal's house.

Eventually, a few lights of civilization blink into view. The storm dissipates somewhat near my destination. Everyone -- and Baba most of all -- enjoys the telling of my adventure when I show up long after all the other cars have returned safely to port.

During a conversation, the issue of marriage comes up in relation to Baba. He says his shaykh has always wanted him to marry but that circumstances never seemed to co-operate.

He indicates that, in fact, once when he was very young, he did marry a woman who was young like he was at the time. However, subsequently, he came to find out that an uncle of his was keeping the woman as a mistress and wanted Baba to provide a facade, of sorts, for the woman to be accepted by the community while the uncle could still be close by in order to carry on with the trysts with the woman.

Baba tells me that after he found out about the arrangement, Baba questioned the young woman and asked her if she were happy with what was going on between his uncle and her. She said that she wasn't, but, for a variety of reasons, felt trapped.

After their discussion, Baba arranges for a quiet divorce with her. Then, he gives the woman some money and helped her move to a distant city to start a new life away from his uncle.

Somehow, the topic of my first shaykh, Dr. Irfan, arises following the foregoing story ... especially in conjunction with the fact that Dr. Irfan married one of his mureeds. Baba says that although he realizes various Sufi silsilahs do things differently, and Baba emphasizes that nothing that he says should be interpreted as a criticism of Dr. Irfan or the silsilah of my first shaykh, nonetheless, Baba states that he would never marry one of his mureeds because they are like daughters to him -- furthermore, as a general rule, his own shaykh has prohibited this course of action among those who serve as a Khalifah (authoritative spiritual representative of a silsilah) within our current Sufi order.

§

My first shaykh, Professor Irfan, used to say his prayers facing in a southeasterly direction. This was qibla, or the direction of the Ka'bah for him, when he was living in North America, and, consequently, I said my prayers using the same direction for qibla.

There are other individuals in North America who insist that the direction of qibla is northeast, following the Great Meridians, which --

counter-intuitive though this might seem -- constitutes the shortest distance between most geographical points in North America and the Ka'bah. In fact, there is one mureed of Professor Irfan, who had adopted this northeast qibla convention and became quite critical and derisive toward me for the fact that I continued to say prayers in accordance with the practice of my shaykh -- apparently, this mureed did not realize that by criticizing me in conjunction with my choice of qibla, he was, in fact, criticizing his own shaykh for the same thing.

I never read that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said that qibla is to be determined by the shortest distance between some given geographical point and the Ka'bah. I never read that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said that one must use the system of Meridians to determine the direction of qibla.

My first shaykh, Professor Irfan, was aware that different individuals calculated qibla differently. In fact, the mosque where we said Juma prayers (Friday noon congregational prayers) used the northeast convention to establish the direction of qibla, and Professor Irfan never objected to this, but, nevertheless, when he said prayers in his house, or when we said prayers with him, he always used southeast as the direction of qibla.

Baba uses the northeast convention. Consequently, just as Muslims once changed their direction of qibla from Jerusalem to Mecca by Allah's command, so, too, now, out of respect for Baba, I have changed the direction of qibla from southeast to northeast ... although I believe that both directions are equally correct ... indeed, qibla is whatever the direction of the heart might be oriented when remembering Divinity or praying to God.

§

December 1993

I have called Momin who lives in another city quite some distance away. He is someone who also was a mureed of Professor Irfan.

I ask him if he would be interested in meeting another spiritual guide. He has not taken initiation with Munir either, and, based on a number of conversations I have had with him over the last several

years, he has been less than happy with what has been going on within the group and community organization that had been established by our previous shaykh.

He agrees to a visit, but there is a lot of wariness in his voice. We arrange a date and time.

Baba, Hal and his family, several other people and I take the trip to visit with Momin. 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, Hal, who is driving, 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 – which is not easy given the slick road conditions. I am first out of the car, working my way back up the road.

Hal gets out of the car as well. He proceeds to fall down on the road because it is covered by a sheet of ice. The entire road is covered with ice.

After a brief search, we come upon an overturned vehicle. There are people inside, and 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 and now have been strewn along the ditch as the trunk popped open. Another person is only concerned about the dog, 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 Momin's house and knock on the door, Momin and his wife, Sairah, answer the door. The tension between them and us is extremely palpable. Momin and his wife 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 Momin and his wife melt through the warmth of Baba's engaging manner – which is especially interesting given that Sairah is fairly wary when it comes to the idea of Sufism.

There is much laughter. In time, the discussion turns to spirituality, and the next day both Momin and his wife take ba'yat with Baba – both are extremely satisfied with what is transpiring.

We leave them very, very happy. 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.

In fact, Momin is designated as a shaykh by Baba. Baba indicates he would have done the same in relation to Munir -- who took over after Momin's and my first shaykh passed away -- that is, Baba would have appointed him to be a shaykh within Baba's silsilah, but, unfortunately, Munir was too caught up in his deception of others and himself with respect to the way he was continuing on in a, spiritually speaking, illegitimate fashion.

January 1994

A letter came for me from Baba. It had been sent via 'Asma and Iqbal and was dated January 11.

Bismillah,

My son, Tariq,

Assalamo alaikum.

May Allah in His Divine Mercy bestow upon you and within you, His Mercy and Grace. Sallallahu alaika, ya Mohammad.

Remember always your spiritual relationship with your spiritual Father (Murshid) in anything you do, wherever you might be, at all times.

The pas-an-faas practice that has been asked of you should be done as much as possible. Establish it within yourself.

Other than your duty to your source of income and one's family life (which also must be taken care of not in forgetfulness but always keeping in mind and feeling in heart and soul, your relationship with your Murshid), keep yourself as busy as possible in a good, constructive way in the healthy promotion of our silsilah.

Always remember that 'Asma is your very close spiritual sister. You have my permission to consult each other on any matter and when you need my advice you know that I am always available. Other than that try to remain private in discussing important matters with others. I do not want anyone else to have any say in matters related between you and me.

Habib is your young brother. He loves you very much. Habib, 'Asma, and you are very close and Insha Allah will remain so.

See to it as much as possible to keep the sheep together. You are like the shepherd. The sheep are those who entered our silsilah in North America.

Your purpose is "Nisbath" (Relationship) and that you have! So there should be no limit to your happiness. Remember, your happiness, your confidence, and your understanding is all based on your Nisbath (Relationship).

There is no matter which cannot be solved. All one needs is patience and courage. Spiritual support is very essential. You have that from us. Realize that.

This is my first letter to you. Insha Allah, others will follow in time.

I love you son!

Baba

§

January 14, 1994

Bismillah

My son, Tariq,

Assalamo alaikum.

May Allah bestow within you and upon you His Mercy and Blessings. Faith is the purpose, the key, the way, and the answer.

One day long ago, due to pressure, yours truly was very depressed. Some friends had come over. At once someone suggested to read Fateha and Salaam to Holy Prophet. We all agreed.

While we were reading Fateha and especially during Salaam a thought occurred, that if Fateha and Salaam is done with love and eagerness, the effect is definitely, rain of Blessings. The thought did not weaken. It strengthened its climax and turned to faith. Well God knows where the depression went. All that was felt was peace and tranquility. Happiness that has no equal and cannot be explained.

One day it is recorded that someone gave one of the elders in our silsilah a prayer mat with his – the gift giver's -- name humbly where the feet are supposed to be. This man's name starts with 'Mohammad'. During 'Maghrib, when the mat was placed before the shaykh and during the time he lifted his foot to stand on the mat, it immediately was realized by one and all that: "Oh! Oh! Now what?"

In a split of a second, the shaykh said: "And may I ask, whose feet are these?"

Love,

Baba

§

January 19, 1994

Bismillah

My son, Tariq,

Assalamo alaikum

May Allah establish His Blessings within you and have mercy and shower His Blessings upon you.

This universe is but a manifestation of the Divine Names and attributes of Allah. Allah has always first perfected capacity and realized the capacity to be able to endure then breathed into the Soul.

Man is the soul of Creation and Divinity is the soul of Man.

Man has all the attributes of Allah within. The difference is that attributes belong to Allah.

While Man has all within, yet, Man is dependent on Allah for everything. Only Allah is independent.

Man is within himself the way and invitation to meet Allah. That is why it is stated, “Know yourself and you shall know your Allah.”

Times have changed. Today, there are certain exercises of old which cannot be practiced in the same fashion. The spirit of those exercises remains the same. The modes change.

Just like exercises for the body cannot be just one. As long as the purpose is served, you could perform any such new method you feel appropriate according to time and circumstances. History proves a certain fact.

Think of the Romans. For them, work and play were set apart. They needed separate times for play and eventually play became more important. The rulers engaged in so much play that they had no time to ponder. They lost everything when they lost their selves.

They did not realize that understanding and performing responsibilities sincerely with truth is exercise enough for the soul. No extra time is needed.

Your shaykh says to you, my son, his spiritual legal son, “Realize what is said!” Be true to yourself. You have enough time. Twenty-four hours every day. Change your outlook. Think correctly.

Love is the purpose. Worshiping Allah means Love.

Getting to know the Self. Getting to know all about the Self, is what this world and life here is about.

Exercises are performed for correct thinking, stability, and attentiveness. We give you all that.

“Love and be loved.” What has been praised most, from the very beginning? “Belovedness.” What is the reality of creation? “Perfect Man!” “Belovedness!”

Learn not to worry. You are able to do that only when you resign from fighting against the truth. Which means you must believe and realize that all Power and Defense is Allah alone. He loves you. Learn and practice to trust Him. You are a manifestation of all His attributes, except real independence.

If never to be inattentive of Whose manifestation you are is what is required, then, what better way than love would be perfect?

How can one in love ever, for a moment, or even less, be inattentive to his “Beloved”? It is only love that will make you realize your Self!

There is one unique Name and attribute of Allah mentioned in the Quran and that too, only once, with Allah only.

“Allaho Samad.”

We are required to be sincere which means free from pretense or deceit, in feeling, manner and actions.

What is the meaning of “Path of Poverty” in Sufi science?

It starts with complete realization of the truth of the science of the Self, which results in believing and practicing “sincerity” ... In being happy and satisfied in poverty. Here, poverty is chosen and preferred. Poverty here does not mean to be poor because you are a have not unwillingly. Here, poverty is chosen, willingly and with pride.

Poverty here means without malice, jealousy, greed, revenge, hate, anger, etc. All this is the outcome of Love.

This oath of poverty is to one's Self and is taken very seriously with sincerity.

By adopting certain given formula you learn the way of correct thinking, clean thinking, resulting in realization, of reality of Self.

Sufi Meditation

To meditate on Sufi given truths. These are realized truths.

You are informed of the attributes of the Self. You learn and strive sincerely to realize them and develop. While doing all that you are asked always to remember that, "Love is the essence of life!" You will eventually realize that here, death really means death to hate, malice, greed, revenge, anger, and ignorance.

"Die and you shall live!" A Sufi realization. Love, Baba

§

A letter came for me today from Baba in care of 'Asma and Iqbal.

Bismillah

Dearest Son, Tariq!

I pray to Allah to grant you the best of physical and spiritual health, all the happiness of a spiritual life of this world and the Hereafter, to Bless you to attain all the Divine spiritual stations based on truth!

I do not exaggerate when I say that what you are going through has not been experienced by the ones who had, have, and are treading the path of the ones who have been Blessed and awarded great success! Yes, it is not a child's play and easy.

Yes, it is empirically a known fact that the one who treads this path of tasawwuf comes face to face with such situations! Yes, my son, it is so, but there is another truth. You and I, in fact we all know that, knowing the truth is power! This power gives you more insight. The insight to make you realize that in spite of the problems and misunderstandings, Allah and His Rasool (Prophetic Messenger) is with you.

First imagine the truth. You are treading the same path laid down by Allah for his Beloved Rasool. The same path of all the Nabis (Prophets who came without revelation) and Rasools. The same path of all Aulia Allah (the saints of God).

Allah and Rasool, all Aulia are witness to the truth of your intention. This should be enough to give you contentment and peace of heart.

The Imam of all Muslims, the Quran relates: "Is Allah not sufficient?"

So, you see, my son, you do not need this world to approve of the Godly spiritual life which you have chosen of your free will. Belief in the hidden promises of Allah is very important.

The success which you are approaching every moment of your life, though hidden, will be known to all who are Blessed with understanding and those who misunderstand shall be compelled to acknowledge the facts.

Do convey my Salaam and prayers to the people of Fateha. Insha' Allah, I will write to you more, and Insha' Allah we will meet in the future. Maybe the near future.

Love,
Baba

§

A letter from Baba has been given to me by someone in the silsilah. It is entitled: 'The Essence of Creation'.

Bismillah

The essence of creation is the reality of Hazrath Mohammad Rasool Allah, Blessings and Mercy for all its manifestations which means "Creation."

Noor is a name given to us from Allah relating it to Himself. The manifestations of Noor are many. Light (Divine Light) is one of them. (Allah knows better.)

The layman and laywoman experience it in terms of visual light. A higher intelligence than the layperson realizes good and productive “ideas”, also to be light, in terms of metaphor or symbolically.

The higher the intelligence, the more the realization. Then, the human intelligence fails at a certain point because that is the end of its capacity. If, and only then, Blessings and Mercy of Allah take over as, and when and with whom Allah so pleases. When that happens, then, Divine Intelligence comes forth which was before not realized due to the cloudiness of ignorance.

Please know this for a fact all this relates to you. There is nothing that is not related to the essence of Creation. That is the point which tasawwuf makes. This is the Divine Logic which is the base of the Truth that over-powered Mansur Hallaj and so many other Aulias.

This is the Divine Logic that is the base of what Ghousul Azam said of himself. That is the same point manifested in Ghareeb Nawaz and so many others. This is the main teaching of all the saints of our silsilah. This is what my shaykh told me and made me realize.

I say this to you -- that Noor which is the essence, in fact the zaath, is hidden in you. Please do realize this because without this realization tasawwuf becomes meaningless. Tasawwuf also has an outer aspect and inner aspect.

You will come across many who have reached only the outer aspect. This outer aspect keeps them too involved in just the rituals of the Sufi system, unfortunately, without making them realize that the main difference between actual knowledge and so-called knowledge, which in truth is also ignorance, is “Experience and realization” which is found within. That means whatever you know first begins in the knowledge which you experience in the form of your Shaykh which can happen only due to “Nisbath”, but it should not end there. It goes deeper and deeper till you experience the truth and realize it within yourself. That is when you realize the real meaning of the Kalima of Unity. Do remember that the result will be more and more humbleness, not arrogance.

Serve our silsilah by propagating as much as possible this humble side of all Aulia. Miracles have always been the focus of attention of both writers as well as readers of the biographies of Aulia.

You should enlighten people towards this main and most important aspect of the Aulia because this is the reason that they supersede others. Not through miracles but through their love and humaneness. Give the world the real news about how well-mannered, how humane, and how humble and simple they were.

There are no incidents or people or even smaller creation to prove that they ever insulted or broke the hearts of the most little or ordinary. Make available the lives of all Aulia of Islam without mentioning religion (Naturally, people will understand because Islam will be mentioned in their lives.) Put light mainly in their Nisbath, Love, patience, tolerance, service to creation, love for the poor and needy.

Love and dua (prayers), Baba

§

February 1994

While stopping for refreshments at a coffee shop in another city, Baba, 'Asma, and I have a conversation. Baba states that my previous shaykh is very upset with Munir for what the latter did after our shaykh passed away.

Apparently, Munir is accepting ba'yat from people, something which Baba stipulates is very wrong under the circumstances. However, Baba also makes reference to the fact that the enormous kindness, love, and compassion of my previous shaykh are such that the people who are coming, illegitimately, into my old silsilah through Munir are, nonetheless, being cared for spiritually.

Baba adds that, hopefully, the situation will be rectified in time. Baba mentions that one of my previous shaykh's sons is destined for great things spiritually, and, that, in time, Baba will have something to do with instructing the youngster with respect to the Sufi path and, if Allah wishes, the youth might be the means through which harmony is reestablished in relation to Munir's ongoing activities.

Baba further informs me that once, back in 1985, he had actually met with my first shaykh at the university. At the time, Baba was

exploring immigration possibilities, and, through one means or another, had been put in touch with Professor Irfan.

Baba speaks very highly of my former shaykh's spiritual station. Baba says that in the spiritual world, my former shaykh is known as 'the Establisher' because of the work he has done in helping, by the Grace of Allah, to establish Islam in this part of the world.

§

Baba writes me a brief note saying that I should do a retreat on the 26th of Ramadan. The retreat should be from Isha until dawn, and if, due to work-related obligations, I am not able to observe the retreat on the 26th, then, I should observe it on the 21st of Ramadan which will extend into the weekend, and, therefore, shouldn't conflict with my work schedule. During seclusion, I am to alternate the pas-an-fas zikr with Darood Shareef.

§

March 1994

A number of us who were connected with Professor Irfan ask what we should do with respect to Munir and the community organization he has taken over. Baba suggests that we continue to attend the fatiha sessions and to participate in whatever projects come along. He advises us not to tell Munir about our having taken initiation with Baba because it might create conflict, but, aside from that cautioning, Baba encourages us to carry on as before.

Munir hears about Baba's presence in the city and invites him to one of the fatiha sessions at his house. When I arrive, Baba is already sitting on the floor next to Munir.

Although, out of a desire to accord Munir respect, I usually knelt and shook hands with Munir before greeting anyone else, on this occasion, I knelt, greeting Baba first because he was, after all, my shaykh, and then, proceeded to greet Munir while still kneeling. Munir was visibly agitated by this, and I later came to find out that he seemed

to forget who had done this and blamed Hal for showing such disrespect and was extremely angry over the incident.

Munir's response to the situation ... his manner of behaving with respect to the 'so-called' slight bothers me. It does not seem appropriate decorum or adab for an alleged shaykh to display.

§

Soon after this fatiha session, the situation vis-à-vis Munir becomes, for a variety of reasons, untenable. When it is clear that I am leaving his circle, Munir wants to get our story straight -- the one, that is, which would be told to the rest of the Muslim community in the city since for 17 years I had been associated with, and was active participant in, the community organization established by Professor Irfan.

I indicated that there really isn't any story to get straight. Moreover, since I am dropping off the radar screen in a variety of ways, I doubt there will be much, if any, occasion for me to have to tell any 'story' at all.

§

Once I have made the decision to make a complete break from Munir's group, I write a letter which indicates that I do not want anything which I might have written in conjunction with the community group established by Professor Irfan or that I wrote in conjunction with that group following the passing away of Professor Irfan – and this encompasses a fair amount of material -- to be used by the group. I never wrote for the group, but rather, I wrote because Professor Irfan has asked me to do so and because, God willing, what was being written might lend support to the purposes for which that group had been established.

I was no longer convinced that under Munir's direction those purposes still were being served. Consequently, I tried to make it as clear as possible in my letter to Munir's group – without going into my

reasons for giving such a directive – that my writings were off-limits with respect to whatever future activities Munir’s group might become engaged.

I made a number of copies of the letter. I gave these copies to Professor Irfan’s wife and asked her to pass the material on to Munir and other members of his group when she joined with them for the recitation of the Thursday evening fatiha.

§

March 17, 1994

Bismillah

My dear son, Tariq,

Assalamo alaikum.

May Allah in His Divine Mercy give you courage and patience and may His Blessings help you to face and solve all your present problems. May His Mercy remain with you always. Ameen!

The following is called ‘Guldasta’ (a poetic tribute to, or remembrance of, different members of the silsilah based on the idea that the spiritual elders of the silsilah are the potted seeds from which the silsilah grows) and is read by the whole group together before Fateha.

[Baba provides a rough translation in English, covering 4½ pages]

Now, of course, you should select the tune in which it could be sung. There is a song in Meher Baba’s tape where they all sing. That is the tune.

‘Asma has it. If you could just be there and call me from there, I could tell you which one it is so that it could be taped.

If you want, you could change the words accordingly, but the spirit of the words must not be lost. In fact some of the words could remain the same.

Remember, you are the first who will be doing this in English in about 69 to 70 years. It is about 70 years ago that it started being sung. You are the first who will be, after seventy years, doing it in English.

Love, Baba

§

March 24, 1994

Bismillah

Dear son, Tariq, Assalamo alaikum.

May Allah bestow upon you the best of physical and spiritual health.

May Allah establish Blessings and Mercy within you and shower His Divine Blessings Mercy upon you.

Son, learn to see your intentions and purpose have effect on the outside world. You will start realizing those effects in North America first and then eventually further and further.

I want you to believe this one fact. I may not repeat this again but Allah knows best. All you have to know is that your spirituality is the Pole of North America. It will increase more and more eventually.

Your faith in a fact which you cannot see physically is most important. Try and persevere with all your sincerity to realize and experience what is started by us.

Love, Baba

§

March 25, 1994

I dream I am in Medina. The thought crosses my mind that, since I am in the city of the Prophet, I should pay my respects, and, therefore, I go to the mosque of the Prophet.

I am sitting there when a girl/woman comes up behind me -- she seems to be affectionate toward me and inclined toward me. I believe I know the person from somewhere previously and her affection for me is very surprising and unexpected, but I am happy that this person likes me.

We are involved in some sort of romantic interlude with sexual overtones when the time for prayer comes. I don't have wuzu (ritual cleanliness), and the thought of just joining the congregational prayer without ritual ablution, and, then, making up the prayer later, passes through my mind. I decide against this idea and start to leave in order to do wuzu.

There is some sort of group ceremony involving singing that is going on as I am leaving. This is being orchestrated or conducted by a few officials trying to generate some enthusiasm in the group by swaying with the music and moving their hands like a conductor.

The people in the group are all standing. They are all men, and there aren't many of them.

They seem to be at some distance from one another (i.e., not all together, but here and there). They seem to be dressed very much the same, with a long white shirt-like garment which goes to ankles, and there is a red sash ... they might have been wearing dervish-like hats ... not sure.

Someone seems to be encouraging me to go a certain section. The girl/woman who is with me disapproves of what is going on and disappears to the left.

I stay on for a little period of time. Finally, I leave because I need to do wuzu, and, also, because I am searching for the girl/woman who left.

There is some sort of market or zuk outside. Television sets are on.

There are reports of some kind of turmoil, revolution, or fighting that is going on. Troops are on the move, but I can't tell if the troops are retreating or going somewhere to fight.

One soldier who is behind on the back of a transport or pick-up truck sees me. He aims his rifle at me in order to kill me.

I hide behind a pillar of some sort. I stick my head out a little to see what is happening, and the man fires, just missing me. The bullet hits the pillar.

After the man fires, I grab hold of him and kill him. I believe I do this with my bare hands.

Another, authority-like official comes along -- someone who has been giving me trouble previously. The man has several children or passengers with him.

He wants to kill me as well. However, I break the front window of the vehicle, pull him out, and proceed to beat him up.

The man is on the ground, lying face up, helpless. I could have killed him, but I don't. On the other hand, I might have hit the man again, just for good measure.

§

When I tell Baba about this dream, he gives a long interpretation. Included in this account is the idea that in the first part of the dream, dunya -- or worldly entanglement -- is trying to seduce me. The group of men being conducted, and with whom I join in, for a time, is symbolic of my coming role of leading people in zikr. Finally, the people who are trying to kill me give expression to the battle of Divine Names which is taking place in conjunction with, and through me, but, in the end, a spiritual purpose will be served.

§

May 1994

I go to the university to renew the application for the Tasawwuf Association in relation to obtaining official recognition by the University's Office of Student Affairs. I am informed that someone else already has done this.

Quite nonplused by what I am hearing, I ask who has done this. Apparently, Munir has induced one of Professor Irfan's children, a daughter who is attending the university, to cancel my affiliation with the student group and take out authorization for the Tasawwuf Association through someone else so that Munir can control the group.

I am informed by the Vice President of student affairs that if I wish to contest the move, then, I can do so. However, in that event the student group will cease to exist for the coming academic year.

I know that, for many years, the University has been seeking some excuse to enable them to shut the Tasawwuf Association down as a result of our many activities on campus -- especially in relation to a plagiarism case which we brought against a professor who 'teaches' at the university. Consequently, I indicate I am not interested in contesting the issue and simply let Munir have his way with things ... and thirteen years (consisting of 50, or so, meetings a year) of being Chairman for the Tasawwuf Association -- something which had been the wish of my shaykh and Munir's shaykh -- comes to an end.

I tell Baba about what has happened. He laughs and says I have done the right thing.

He adds we should not become bogged down in skirmishes with Munir and his group. There are much more important things with which we should occupy ourselves.

§

May 24, 1994

I have a dream after returning to sleep following the fajr (pre-dawn) prayer.

Native people are going to some sort of spiritual ceremony. For some reason, I am following them. The place they are going to is not close by.

I am crawling along the path behind the Native people. However, I am not right behind them.

I am at some distance. Moreover, I have been trying to avoid detection.

I am picking up feathers. I don't know if the feathers have been dropped, lost, or were just there.

Some of the feathers are in good condition or new. Some are not in good condition. I am giving the feathers to one of the native people who, from time to time, is coming back for what I am picking up.

At one point, I am given a feather by a Native person. I don't know whether, or not, this feather is from among the ones I have been collecting.

Later, I am given something. It is like a small cylindrical vegetable of some sort. I am suppose to eat it, and I seem to have the impression that it has certain, special, spiritual properties or importance or has played a role in some spiritual ceremony of Native people.

I eat the vegetable, or part of it. Or, I put it into my mouth.

At another juncture, there is some kind of rest stop along the way, and I either join, or am invited to join, the small group of Native people. It seems to be a sort of social get together ... just talking and personal interaction going on.

I seem to know one of the Native people from somewhere before. I believe the person has been sick previously -- maybe a stomach or intestinal problem.

I am inquiring after the person's health. I awake.

§

June 1994

There is a criminal case in the news. A number of Americans who are black and Muslim have been charged with conspiracy to bomb several buildings in two, non-Muslim religious communities in Canada.

I have been approached by the lead defense counsel for the defendants to be an expert witness in the case. He wants me to testify about some of the principles and teachings of the Sufi mystical tradition because, apparently, the people on trial are connected with some Sufi shaykh in Pakistan.

The lawyer indicates he only wishes me to testify about the Sufi path. I tell him that I would like to think about the matter a little and that I would get back to him shortly.

After some reflection, I agree to testify and am willing to go through whatever the process is which would permit the court to certify, or recognize, me as an expert witness. However, not too long after informing the lawyer of my decision, Baba comes to the city on a

visit and during a subsequent conversation with Baba, I am convinced that I should recuse myself from the legal proceedings.

Among other things, Baba indicates that he does not believe my previous shaykh, Dr. Irfan, would have wanted me to become entangled in such matters. Furthermore, he advises me that we, either personally or as part of the silsilah, should have nothing to do with terrorists, those who are engaged in terrorist practices, or those shaykhs who seem to be implicated in such matters.

I inform the lawyer who has requested my assistance about my decision, and, naturally, the lawyer is disappointed. A few days later I receive a call at work from one of the defendants standing trial in the bombing conspiracy case. He is calling me from jail, asking me to reconsider.

I realize from whom he got my number and who had encouraged him to call me – namely, his lawyer. I explain to the defendant, as best I can, why I am withdrawing from the case and, eventually, the conversation ends.

§

Baba is staying with a family other than ‘Asma and Iqbal – the family with whom he usually stays when visiting in the city. He asks me to meet him at the residence of the family where he is staying and gives a time for us to get together.

After being served with some tea and refreshments by our hosts, the people with whom Baba is staying begin to absent themselves and, he starts to provide instructions concerning the giving of a naksh. This is an amulet of sorts, consisting of a rectangle of Arabic numbers that is intended, God willing, to assist people who are in need and carries the barakah which God has invested in one of the saints of our Order who initiated the giving of this naksh.

Certain things are to be written on the naksh at the time it is given to someone who is requesting assistance. The rectangle of numbers can only be assembled or written on a particular day of the week, between the time the sun has risen and a certain point of the afternoon.

Baba has me do a few practice rectangles to see that I am able to do this all right. When he is satisfied, he tells me about various points of etiquette concerning the wearing and dispensing of the naksh.

§

July 1994

Tonight, we celebrated the 'Urs or anniversary of one of the great saints of our silsilah. Yaqub and Muin, a shaykh and his successor from another silsilah, along with their mureeds, are invited to join us. The function is held at one of the universities in the city.

At one point during the procession, I am given a khirkah as one of the external signs of having been made a shaykh and khalifah of our silsilah. Baba and the other shaykh, Yaqub, both help me put on the mantel of spiritual authorization.

Afterwards, I sing the English version of a sacred poem which was originally written in Urdu. Baba prefaces the singing of the poem with an announcement saying that this occasion marks the first time in more than 70 years that the poem has been delivered in English, and, in addition, this occasion marks the very first time in North America that the poem has been recited in English.

Several months earlier, Baba had given me some rough notes concerning the translation of the poem and had asked me to render them into poetical English, as well as to create a tune to go with the lyrics. Several weeks later when I had finished the task, I sing it for him in Delaware where I and some other mureeds were visiting him ... he seemed quite happy with the finished product.

After the poem was recited at the 'Urs function, almost everyone attending participates in a session of sacred turning. Shaykh Yaqub and Muin lead the session, but at the very end, Shaykh Yaqub focuses attention on Baba, and Baba becomes like the hidden kernel surrounded by layers of reality, as all of the sacred turners radiate out in a spiral from the center where Baba, at Shaykh Yaqub's gentle prodding, is located.

§

July 19, 1994

Baba has a dream. He says he dreams only very rarely -- almost not at all.

He says that in the dream, he, I and his shaykh were near the Ka'bah in Mecca. His shaykh was in a state of ecstasy and whirling about the Ka'bah like a dervish.

Baba and I were moving about his shaykh in very special way. There didn't seem to be anyone else in the Ka'bah precincts except us.

Suddenly, Hazrat Ibn al-'Arabi (may Allah be pleased with him) sticks his head out from inside the Ka'bah and says to Baba that this is how one makes three out of one, or words close to this.

After disclosing his dream, Baba indicates that although the following was not part of the dream, per se, nonetheless, Baba feels that an after-effect of the dream is that his shaykh wants Baba to tell me to learn the 99 names of Allah. I am to do a zikr which invokes Allah through these names -- and I am to do this with all my heart and soul. I should make this a practice as often as I can (perhaps once a week or more).

§

The foregoing is very much like the dream which Baba told me that Nadine, Noah's wife, experienced just a short while ago. At the end of her dream, Baba's shaykh says that this is how one makes three into one and one into three -- her dream involve Baba, his shaykh, and myself.

§

Around the same time, Iqbal, 'Asma's husband has a dream that he tells Baba and which Baba relates to me. In Iqbal's dream, Baba is

leading prayers, and while doing so, Baba falls prostrate and begins to shake with ecstasy. Iqbal goes to help Baba, and the prostrate figure turns into me, and there is an extremely palpable, charged atmosphere of ecstasy which radiates and stays with Iqbal even after he awakes.

§

August 1994

There has been an all-night session at 'Asma's house. Time for fajr comes and Baba asks me to lead the prayers.

Given that Baba is present, I express reluctance. He says words which convey he understands and appreciates the humility underlying my caution, but, nonetheless, he knows what he is doing and that what is about to transpire is spiritually necessary.

Later, after prayers, another khirkah-like garment is given to me, along with a light brown scarf, by Baba. He speaks to several of those present and asks them if they remember the night many years ago involving the scarf and the garment which have been bestowed upon me.

The individuals to whom Baba has addressed his query nod their heads in recognition of the occasion to which Baba is referring. On the basis of the things which are said, they all seem to be alluding to a very powerful and auspicious spiritual event.

§

There is a disturbing incident at the house of Haroon and his family. There are a number of people who are visiting with Baba at Haroon's house, including Hal and his family.

At some point, I see Baba and Hal engaged in a discussion. The room where they are talking has a front portion which is lined with a series of glass doors.

The conversation appears to be tense, and just before it terminates, Baba seems to be quite upset with something Hal has said. Both leave the room in an agitated condition.

I am curious about what transpired between the two of them. However, I do not raise the issue with Baba or Hal.

§

August 5, 1994

(A dream takes place after fajr)

A group of people are gathered in a small room. There is an antechamber of some sort connected to the room, with no partition between the room and the ante-chamber.

Some kind of ceremony is going on, of which I am a part, but I don't know exactly what is going on. It seems to be something of a spiritual nature.

Baba is either at the ceremony or came at its conclusion. He asks me to join him in some sort of prayer in the antechamber.

He starts to recite something, but I am not reciting with him. So, he tells me to recite as well.

The recitation is Arabic -- Quranic, I think. It sounds like the Shahadah, but I am not sure.

Baba is holding my hands apart and raising them up until they are fully -- or nearly fully -- extended. At some point, Baba blows or breathes into my mouth, and my condition changes.

I fall to the ground. However, I am still conscious of my surroundings to a certain extent.

Baba is placing, or trying to place, himself on top of me or over me in order to shield or cover or protect me. I don't know exactly.

I am conscious of the thought that people in the other room might not understand or might misunderstand what is going on.

People begin to crowd around, including children. Someone (maybe one of the children) asks about some function that is to take place on, or around, Christmas.

Baba replies. But, either I don't know what he says, or I forget it.

§

August 16, 1994

(Another dream occurs following my return to sleep after observing fajr prayers)

I am waiting at an elevator door. It opens.

There are crepe-paper decorations hanging in the elevator's interior. Some of them are brightly colored -- maybe pinks or reds, possibly some blue ones, but there also are some black-colored streams.

The elevator has no people. There is a sense of foreboding about going into the elevator -- that, somehow, things are not right, or that, perhaps, death is being indicated.

I want to go up, but the elevator starts going down. And, as the elevator goes down, then the top of the elevator starts coming down. The more the elevator descends, the more the top of the elevator begins to slowly lower, cutting off more and more space.

I have to lie down on the floor. The elevator ceiling continues to lower.

I might have called out for help. There is a definite air of urgency about the situation and about what to do.

The dream ends.

§

I relate the dream to Baba. He indicates it symbolizes the last cry of the nafs in expressing anxiety about, as well as resisting, spiritual ascent.

§

September 1994

I am working in my apartment on something which 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 bumble bees 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 'Asma. Baba and 'Asma look at one another smiling, and, then, Baba says that he and 'Asma were having a discussion about the same time as my 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 which Baba had given me and attempting to render it into poetical English. A sparrow had perched on the 10th story ledge outside the window of my work room, 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 bird's presence and actions were?

§

Baba has instigated five or six of his mureeds to arrange a birthday party for me at the house of Paul and Susan. The party is supposed to be top secret, but someone inadvertently lets something slip and I play along, pretending that I do not know what is going on.

Although Baba is out of the country, the party is fun. To take the time to plan for such an occasion is a very nice thing for Baba and his mureeds to have done for me.

§

October 6, 1994

While sitting with Baba, he has me take down some notes. Most of it is about various kinds of prayer which are in addition to the five, regular, daily observances.

Tahajjud -- This is the most important of nafl prayers. It can only be read when one wakes up from sleep. If one is doing a night vigil, one cannot really do tahajjud unless one's shaykh gives permission to one, and even then, one must sleep for an half an hour, or so, wake, up, and read tahajjud.

The time for the prayer starts after midnight and goes until fajr time. It is a secret between the servant and his/her Lord -- a Love affair -- that should not be proclaimed to anyone else. Of course, if one is giving instruction to one's mureed, and it becomes necessary to tell him/her, then, such disclosure is permissible.

Because it is nafl, any ayat can be read. There should be a minimum of two rakats (cycles of ritual prayer) and not more than

twelve rakats. One can do whatever one wants between, and including, these two parameters.

Ishraq -- This is read after fajr prayers when the yellowness disappears once the sun has risen. This is about 1/2 hour to 3/4 of an hour after the sun has risen. It consists of either two or four rakats.

Chast -- This is a mid-morning prayer. It is read approximately 2-2½ hours after sunrise. It consists of anything between two and eight rakats.

Awwabain -- This is the most important prayer after Tahajjud. It is said after the two sunna and two nafl of maghrib prayers.

The niyat for this prayer is -- 'my niyat is of awwabain'. It consists of between six (two by two by two) and twenty rakats.

Salaat-e-tasbeeh -- The Prophet (peace be upon him) said this was so important that it should be:

-- read every day if possible, but, if one is not able to do this, then, it should be

-- read at least once a week, but, if this is not possible, then,

-- read at least once a month, but if this is not possible, then,

-- read at least once in one's life time.

There are different procedures for observing this practice, but our silsilah does it in accordance with the requirements of Hanafi teachings (one of the five major schools of jurisprudence among Muslims). Baba is in the process of writing these instructions, and he will give them to me when they have been completed.

§

Baba continues with the instructions. He proceeds to tell a story and, through the story, to give something which is only for me:

Hazrat Gharib Nawaz (may Allah be pleased with him) was sitting with his successor, Hazrat Qutub-ud-Din Bakhti-ar-khaki (may Allah be pleased with him) and asked the latter if he would like to know of a namaz (ritual form of prayer) which is better than ordinary namaz? ... to say namaz when I (Gharib Nawaz) am sitting in front of you. And, then, Gharib Nawaz (may Allah be pleased with him) said: "Would you like to know of a namaz that is even better than this? ... to say namaz and have you sitting in front of you."

And, then, Gharib Nawaz (may Allah be pleased with him) said: "Would you like to know of a namaz that is better still? ... to say namaz and have Qutub-ud-Din sitting in front of Gharib Nawaz."

The first kind of namaz is rooted in the Hadith concerning excellence (ahsan) -- to worship God as if you see him, and even if one cannot see him, then, at least, see His nur.

The second kind of namaz is when the duality between mureed and shaykh has disappeared -- fana fil shaykh.

The third kind of namaz is based on when the Prophet (peace be upon him) went on miraj (spiritual ascension), and the Prophet (peace be upon him) reached a point when he was told to wait because Allah was saying namaz. Allah's namaz was His anxious awaiting of His beloved, the Prophet (peace be upon him). This is the stage of Belovedness.

The second kind of namaz noted above should be undertaken only when the first kind has been perfected. The same is true with respect to undertaking the third kind of namaz ... that is, it is only to be done after the first two forms of namaz have been perfected.

§

The silsilah has opened up an Astana or center in a nearby suburb. Baba wants us to mark the occasion with an 'Urs celebration, or anniversary commemoration, for one of the shaykhs of our silsilah.

Momin and his family are visiting the city for the weekend. At one point, during zikr, Momin goes into a state and begins to roll around on the floor, screaming out in ecstasy.

This goes on for quite some time. Finally, Momin seems to recover, and when he does, he immediately comes to me, hugs me, and tells me a number of things which were disclosed to him during his altered state, and among the things I am told are several items which indicate how the spiritual life of Momin and myself have been intertwined since pre-eternity.

I have known Momin for 14-15 years. He and I both had the same previous shaykh.

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. Momin is very down-to-earth and quite unassuming.

I kid Momin and refer to him as the 'holy roller'. We enjoy a laugh together.

Later, I ask Baba what it was all about. Baba says that Momin was starved for love and that God, in His Mercy, had given Momin a little sip of the Divine nectar.

§

Baba indicates that when it comes to matters affecting the silsilah, he is obligated to keep me up to date because of my position and responsibilities within the silsilah. He begins to tell me about the problems with some of the families in the silsilah.

He mentions that 'Asma and Iqbal are having marital difficulties. They are fighting all the time and, from time to time, have expressed a desire to divorce, but Baba reminds them each time the subject comes up about the obligations they have in relation to their children and how divorce can be very devastating for children that age.

Baba also indicates that 'Asma and Iqbal are having a lot of problems with their eldest daughter. Apparently, there has been some drug usage by their daughter. Moreover, she is running around with several youngsters who might be involved in some low-level criminal activity. In addition, her grades at school have been slipping.

I remark that it seems the time I spent earlier with their children (at Baba's request) has not been all that productive. I feel I have failed the family and Baba.

Baba disagrees. He says I have done the best I can do, which is all anyone can ask of another human being. He also indicates the problems with this family were present long before I came along.

§

November 1994

Somehow, Baba has been introduced to one of the top immigration lawyers in the country. I have accompanied Baba on several excursions to the legal firm of this lawyer, and the office covers pretty much the entire floor of one of the swankier commercial towers in the city.

Baba is not passed off to one of the other lawyers of the firm. Instead, his case is handled by the head of the firm.

Baba and this lawyer (who comes from a Jewish background) seem to get on very well with one another. Everyone with whom we come in contact at the firm seems to be very much attracted to Baba, and they are all very friendly with him even though Baba is not paying any money for the legal assistance because of his financial situation and because the head of the firm has agreed to help Baba without charging him except for a few limited administrative charges which actually come from the government and are not connected with legal fees, per se.

Earlier, Baba had asked me to start up an organization which could serve in an official capacity as a liaison with the rest of the world. In conjunction with this legal entity, a letter is written in support of Baba's immigration, indicating that his presence is integral - - from the perspective of spiritual guidance, education, counseling, and so on -- to the success of the community organization which has been formed, as well as the spiritual and psychological well-being of its members.

Baba had insisted that the truth be told about his situation. In other words, Baba wants the immigration authorities to understand that in his capacity as a Sufi teacher or shaykh, he has taken an oath of poverty. Moreover, while he would not be taking any salary from the community organization which had been established, nonetheless, he wished to convey to the immigration authorities that he had no intention of becoming a financial burden on the government and was quite prepared to sign a waiver, releasing the government from ever having to give him welfare or any other form of financial assistance.

§

December 1994

Baba, 'Asma and her husband 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 'Asma's husband to go and give the man some money. Iqbal 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 which was a 15-20 minute walk from the office. On many occasions I would see this homeless person -- and despite being homeless, he always had a suit jacket on -- perched on his two suitcases, asleep in the doorway of this or that store which had closed for the day.

Even on the coldest nights, 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'.

§

Baba has asked me to take down the following statement, photocopy it, and distribute the statement to the members of the silsilah who come to the Astana (spiritual meeting place). The statement reads as follows:

3rd December, 1994

For the first time in North America, Roohani Gaddi Masnad (this refers to a special sheep skin which Baba has – given to him by his shaykh for safe keeping -- and which, on occasion is brought out and placed in the room where prayers are said) has been established. Masha' Allah (as God has wished). This is the spiritual seat. This will be known as 'such and such spiritual seat' (the name of the silsilah is given here), also known as the kursi (throne).

We know what it means, you do not. Insha' Allah, in time, those who love us will gradually realize the importance of this wonderful gift.

For now, all you have to know is that this is a special spiritual gift to all who have nisbath (connection) with our silsilah and also for all who consider us as their well-wishers. Now that the Astana has also been established, this is a house of worship and service to all who belong to this silsilah.

You are all expected to honor it, follow the rules kept for it. Come and receive the spiritual benefits it offers ... remember, come and serve. You all know what 'to serve' means.

At times when I, physically, might not be present at the Astana, I assure you that the spiritual attention and blessing of my shaykh is present at all times here ... in fact, wherever you may be.

So, come and serve. This is not just a suggestion, it is your duty given to you by your shaykh, Baba. Do anything useful. Keep the place clean. This is your house of worship. Work in whatever capacity you can. Work in the kitchen. See and realize if anything needs to be done and do it. Whenever you have time to spare, come and spend it here in service. If you have no time, then make time. Some could come on a daily basis. Some on a weekly basis. Some maybe every ten days or, at most, a fortnight.

If you have problems or just need peace, come and sit respectfully in silence in the room where the masnad is. Sit facing the masnad and meditate. Pray or talk to your shaykh knowing and realizing that he is there, attentive, even though you may not see him. Now, that does mean that he is only there. You could do this anywhere, but start practicing here first.

When you are here in the Astana, you are not a guest. You are here to serve, to worship. Therefore, it is your duty, to serve those who are there as guests.

Go to the door when the bell rings to open the door for people who come. Always be attentive to your shaykh. At the slightest sign, get up and do what is asked of you. Every new arrival must be presented with a cup of tea.

We could go on in detail of all that one has to know to serve, but we know that, by now, you have arrived at an attitude of understanding which does not need any more explanations. So, love and serve.”

§

Baba mentions several people to whom the foregoing written statement is not to be given because they have not, yet, decided, whether, or not, they wish to take initiation into the silsilah. Another person, Mickey, who has not taken ba'yat with Baba is identified as someone to whom the statement might be given.

§

Not too long after the Astana opens, a special spiritual occasion is observed at the Astana. A variety of people are invited.

Some of the time, 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 which 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 who 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 -- but when he begins to approach Baba – who is in another ante-room toward the back of the Astana -- his condition seems to become much more 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 – mostly, Baba asking questions about the young man’s welfare and the visitor answering briefly but directly to the queries.

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 which oversees many things in the created world.

Apparently, Baba and ‘Asma have talked about this individual before. They 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 ‘Asma 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 locality. They would find the house which was indicated by Baba, he would get of the car, go to the door, and, then, knock.

Someone would come to the door, and Baba would be welcomed in. The people 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, 'Asma would ask what that was all 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 which 'Asma had told to me while in Baba's presence, as well as the presence of her husband who also had been in the car when it happened. I took the accounts about the young Pakistani or Indian man at face value, 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 long 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 'Asma's account of her own encounter with 'the man with two suitcases'.

§

January 1995

There is another 'Urs function at the Astana. A number of different silsilahs are invited.

Shaykh Yaqub and many of his followers participate in the celebration. Toward the end of the evening, we have adjourned to another room where people from Shaykh Yaqub's silsilah are singing

various sacred songs which are very beautifully rendered by the singers.

A discussion begins, and someone asks a question of Shaykh Yaqub. As he gives 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 own 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 Shaykh Yaqub 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 they have celebrated together.

§

February 1995

Baba, Stan, and I go and visit Shaykh Yaqub. We are served tea by Shaykh Yaqub and, then, there is much silence ... although, from time to time, a few brief things are said – mostly by Stan in the way of questions.

Finally, Baba asks for permission for us to leave. Permission is given, and, as we get up to leave, Shaykh Yaqub 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 which supposedly has opened.

§

Whenever Baba comes to the city, people are coming to the Astana and stay all night. They sleep on the floor of the main meeting room.

Although Baba appreciates that his mureeds love him, miss him, and want to be with him, he is unhappy with the situation and feels that people are not paying adequate attention to their own family life

or worldly obligations that are external to the silsilah, and, furthermore, he feels such people are not paying proper respect to the adab of the Astana. A set of rules is drawn up and posted in the foyer near the front entrance for all to see, but people seem to keep ignoring the requests and reminders to behave differently than they have been doing in the past.

§

Baba keeps me posted on what is happening with 'Asma's family. He tells me that the oldest daughter has run away from home several times recently.

§

February 23, 1995

(Ramadan 23rd -- a dream)

I think I'm in the subway at a particular intersection of north/south lines. I happen upon Abdul Rahman who is doing some sort of promotional work for a local radio station that features mostly 50's and 60's music.

I don't know if he actually doesn't recognize me or if he is just pretending not to acknowledge my presence, but he is enthusiastically asking me all kinds of questions to see what category I fit into and whether I qualify for any of the prizes he has to give.

Finally, he asks me if I've ever had a job giving directions or giving out information to people -- like an information booth. I say, 'sort of', but I don't really feel that what I've done actually fits in with what he has in mind.

I get a bamboo cane or take a cane from among his prizes, while he gets busy doing something else. I break the cane into tiny pieces and hide them in my coat pocket (it is a winter coat).

I think I should get a cane for Baba. However, I am wondering if I should pay for the other cane.

I ask the man how often he does this job. He says just on weekends, and he indicates that the job is too dangerous or problematic to do during the week.

§

When I tell Baba the dream, he is very happy for me. He indicates the dream is very auspicious.

He begins by saying that the reference to Abdul Rahman in the dream is to a spiritual station. It does not refer to a personality.

He refers to the ayat of the Qur'an in which Allah informs people that they might call upon Him in various ways. Or, they might invoke Him through the name Rahman. Rahman is a viceroy in Allah's workshop of Divinity.

The Prophet is the perfect man who reflects or serves as a locus of manifestation for all the Names. But, he cautions, this is not to be confused with the Divine Essence.

§

March 1995

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 which serve as outlets for the library services we perform. My bosses know who the person that is doing this, but they do little about the situation because of worries about union activism which 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) ... something which could have been handled quite differently and more humanely.

I stick up for the student they wish to fire and with whom I have worked for several years and who, despite some personal problems here and there, is 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 visit with Momin. I outline the options which I believe are open to me, including staying on the job and trying to continue to struggle with the managerial harassment which 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 which might lead to some job possibilities for me later on. More specifically, there is a person who has befriended him in Massachusetts and who is quite a wealthy businessman, and Baba feels the man might be quite 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 which he has earned through various means and wanted to share it with me.

§

In a telephone conversation, I have been asked to come to some zikr sessions which are being organized and supervised by one of the people, Yusef, who is associated with Shaykh Yaqub's silsilah. I seek permission from Baba to do this, and when the permission is granted, I and another person attend the gathering.

In succeeding weeks, I attend several more of these zikr circles. There seems to be some sort of problem within their silsilah, but I am not sure what is going on.

On several occasions when I attend these sessions, a form of sacred turning is performed and in which we all participate. Usually, Yusef arranges for me to be next to him.

However, one on occasion, a new individual from the Caribbean attends. He is reported to be a shaykh in some silsilah or other.

Yusef now invites this gentleman to be next to him. I have been demoted.

I mention these things to Baba. He receives the information and laughs about the demotion but remains silent with respect to the matter of what might be going on with the silsilah to which Yusef has been attached.

§

Not too long after moving to the Astana, a real cold spell hits the area. Although the heating for the house works fairly well downstairs, the bedrooms upstairs often seem devoid of heat.

After one night of freezing in my bed, I go to Baba who has several electric heaters in his bedroom, and ask whether I could borrow one of the heaters for a night or two – just until the cold wave passes. Baba has no hesitation in the matter and tells me that Bashir, a mureed of Baba's and someone who has been staying at the Astana with his wife and young child, will be by later in the evening with the heater.

The time for sleeping arrives – which in the Astana is fairly late – and Bashir has not shown up with the heater. I am reluctant to re-raise

the issue with Baba and decide to put my winter coat on top of the covers to, hopefully, produce some heat. In addition, I keep my pants and shirt on to further protect me against the cold.

I climb into bed and, a short while later there is a knock on the door. I say come in. Bashir appears with a heater.

There is a look of real anger or hatred on his face as he gives me the heater. Nothing is said, and he leaves, closing the door behind him.

I don't know what to make of the incident. Fortunately, the following day is much, much warmer, and, therefore, I return the heater to Baba.

§

Baba informs me that 'Asma's oldest daughter, Sadia, has been suspended from school for carrying a knife. The school's zero tolerance rule concerning weapons on school property has led to the expulsion.

Sadia claims she was only keeping the knife for a friend. Irrespective of the truth of what she says, the school doesn't care whose knife it is -- only who is carrying the weapon.

According to Sadia there is a lot of sectarian violence at school. Many of the students run in gangs to protect themselves.

A few days later -- during a gathering at 'Asma's and Iqbal's house -- Sadia asks Baba if she can take ba'yat again. She says she feels her recent actions have broken her previous vows, and Baba initiates her again.

§

A car is rented and I drive Baba back to his home in the United States. The trip is eight or nine hours long.

Baba has been in touch with a friend of his concerning the possibility of helping to fund some projects. Baba has asked me to type up a proposal of sorts to give to the man with Baba has been speaking.

A number of projects are outlined in the proposal, ranging from: books, to: education and t-shirts with Sufi logos on them. Initially, the gentleman seems interested in some of the ideas, and, subsequently, there are a number of productive phone conversations between Baba and this man with respect to the proposal.

The man invites Baba and me to supper to finalize arrangements. When we get there, the man seems quite uncomfortable and later on, after supper, tells us that he has decided not to fund any of our projects.

Afterwards, during the trip back to Baba's house, Baba is quite perplexed about what has transpired. Based on the phone conversations Baba had with his friend, Baba was quite certain we were going to be successful in our bid to find work for me and some worthwhile projects for the silsilah.

§

April 1995

Baba, Stan, and I all go and visit Shaykh Yaqub. Things go much as they did in the previous meeting ... that is, there is a great deal of silence. However, at one point, sort out of the blue, Baba asks Shaykh Yaqub to explain to me what is transpiring with 'Uthman and his brother, Yusef -- the ones whose zikr sessions I have been attending -- with respect to the present rift in Shaykh Yaqub's silsilah.

Shaykh Yaqub doesn't hesitate at all before providing an account of events. It seems that Yusef has always wanted to be a shaykh and that his ambitions are urging him to behave foolishly and carelessly, as well as to make unfounded charges concerning Shaykh Yaqub.

Earlier I heard – I forget from whom -- that Yusef has had a dream in which he has become a shaykh. There seems to be a lot of that going around.

§

May 1995

Another silsilah has invited members of our silsilah to meet with their shaykh -- Anwar -- who is on a visit. I and another mureed of Baba attend.

There are several question and answer periods. During one of these periods, Shaykh Anwar asks the person sitting next to me -- who is one of his mureeds and whom I had met several years earlier at an 'Urs function in another city -- to tell the shaykh about the person who is sitting next to the mureed ... i.e., me.

A few details are given about me, Baba and our silsilah. Shaykh Anwar asks me a few questions, and, then, says, you (referring to myself and the other mureed of Baba who had accompanied me to the session) are very lucky ... with which I agree by nodding my head in acknowledgment.

Later on, I relate this incident to Baba. He says this shaykh has been quite curious about Baba for some time and has been fairly persistent in his attempts to make contact with Baba through spiritual means.

Baba indicates he has rebuffed these overtures. But, he does not say why.

§

June 1995

An old friend of Professor Irfan -- 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 which carries certain responsibilities that might, or might not, permit me to accept the job which 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 which 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, but 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 was visited by several individuals from the spiritual world who 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.

§

June 18, 1995

(a note is given to me which is from Baba -- it concerns Baba’s mureed, Ken):

Do inform him (i.e., Ken) in a very artful way without hurting his feelings that he is not supposed to make such major decisions without permission of his Shaikh. Keeping a beard is not a small matter in our faith -- since it is a ‘Sunnath’ of the Prophet (Peace and blessings be upon him).

Now that he has done it, he has to decide to keep it up. First he should realize whether he has done this because of following the ‘Sunnath’ or just for a fancy. Then now that he realizes the reason and also realizes the importance, he should re-decide and either take permission if he wants to follow the Sunnath.

Otherwise he should just state that it is not for that purpose and it would be better for him to also realize that with this appearance he would be disrespecting the Sunnath by doing anything which has been forbidden by Allah, for example, using liquor, etc.

Masha Allah, the group has improved. They are gradually improving.

This is good. I see them now taking more interest.

Get them more involved. Gradually make them spend more time with the silsila get together

Make them feel responsible. Make them want to get permission for important issues.

May Allah bless them to commit themselves totally to the love of Rasool, Insha Allah.

§

June 26, 1995

Bismillah

My spiritual son, Tariq

May Allah through the intercession of Rasool Allah, Rahmath of all aalameen (May Allah's Blessings and Peace be upon him) and his aulia always protect you from harm in this world and the Hereafter, May Allah bless you with His pleasure and nearness always. May Allah always accept and answer all your prayers. May Allah give you all the opportunities of loving and serving humanity. Love and service of mankind is love and service of Allah.

Know this for sure son that those who come to us with love and good will are healed from the spiritual sickness as well as physical sickness. They also shall get their wants approved by Allah as long as their wants are not against the pleasure of Allah. Pray for them before they leave your presence. The way to do this is that you ask them to remain silent with eyes closed as if praying for what they want and while you do that you also close your physical eyes and see from the eyes of the heart the countenance of the Shaikh and believe and those, or the one in front of you, to be present in the presence of your Shaikh. Present all their matters and affairs with the strongest of faith that you are definitely at his presence and you are definitely heard. Make it a habit to proclaim aloud to them so that all or as many before you can hear clearly, "Definitely His Reverence and Majesty is present and definitely He hears and accepts the prayers of all. He is Rahman. So, now I ask you to close your eyes in meditation and pray with all your

heart and come back to the physical world when you hear the physical word 'Ameen!!' Then after that do exactly as instructed above.

Through the blessings and grace of your nisbath, Insha Allah, there will be good positive results.

Love, Baba

§

July 1995

I have not seen Hal since the mysterious incident (argument?) in the room when he was talking with Baba. Several times, he and his family have been invited to one, or another, function, and, on each occasion he has indicated that they have had some prior engagement which interfered with their coming to the city.

I raise the matter with Baba and ask about the incident in the glass-door room. Baba admits that, yes, he had become upset with some of the things which Hal had said but, nevertheless, nothing which went on in the room was of such a nature to warrant Hal's staying away and that, as far as Baba was concerned, Hal and his wife were still part of the silsilah even though they weren't coming to any of the fatiha sessions and commemorations which had been arranged over the last few months. Baba says he misses Hal and his family.

Finally, on my own initiative, I call Hal and inquire about the situation. He says he does not want to discuss the matter but that he still considers himself Baba's mureed. At the same time, Hal indicates he will have to get back into silsilah activities in his own way.

§

Baba tells me that a number of his mureeds at the Astana have been complaining to him about the fatiha sessions. According to the complaints, the sessions go on too long, in general, and the zikr portion of the gatherings, in particular, seem to be too burdensome for them.

The complaint concerns me because Baba has assigned the task of conducting both the fatiha, as well as the zikr which follows, to me. Whenever Baba is in the city and staying at the Astana, he usually is busy with new guests, so that, when the time for fatiha arrives, people assemble in the main meeting room while Baba continues on with whatever might be engaging him at that time.

I am mortified by the complaint until Baba begins to explain a few things for me. He says that spiritual discipline is very necessary for his mureeds.

He adds that what I am doing in this respect is very much appreciated by him, and he has no fault to find with the manner in which I conduct either fatiha or the zikr. In fact, as far as he is concerned, the receiving of complaints about such things is a sign that something right is happening, not something problematic.

In time, he will address these issues in his own way. For now, he wishes for me to continue on in the way I have done so in the past, and although he is certain that complaints about the situation will continue to be voiced, nonetheless, as long as I approach the problem in accordance with his explanation of the situation, everything will, God willing, work out okay in the long run.

§

July 30, 1995

(a letter arrives from Baba)

Bismillah

My son Tariq,

Assalamo alaikum.

I pray to Allah for the success of your spiritual zenith and may Allah bestow upon you His choicest Blessings. May He establish Blessings within you and shower Blessings upon you. May Allah give you the best of physical and spiritual health.

Though we have discussed certain principles before, I would still like to put it down in writing.

Experience has shown us that there are certain things we should never compromise with, because if we do then the result becomes very uncomfortable. Yes, there are many occasions where we do and should consult with the close members. Those are those social matters which do not disturb the rules of our silsilah. At the same time we should be very careful and watchful regarding our principles. For example, there are some things which my Shaikh has told me and explained as principles which I have been and will continue on different occasions to keep informing you. These are the principles regarding which there should be no compromise at all.

As you already know son I have certain problems due to my softness in nature. You have that nature too. So please bear with me on those points. Don't get confused. Keep up the good work. We are proud of you. This I am saying from the depth of my heart.

Always trust and act on only those matters which I myself inform you. When others try to interfere do not get upset or confused. You keep on with what you have been told to do.

Sometimes due to my softness others try to take undue advantage, but since you know now, we, between us both, with patience, thankfulness, steadfastness, and courage continue to serve the silsilah. Ameen! I love you. Baba

§

August 1995

There is a weekend gathering at the Astana. After the official part of things has finished, a number of Baba's mureeds stay in the room where the masnad (the sheepskin rug-like artifact which was given to Baba by his shaykh) lies on the floor, near the front of the room. Baba has gone to another room to take a telephone call from someone.

While Baba is away, a number of the mureeds begin to sing songs and carry on a bit. I feel they are being disrespectful to the presence of the masnad, but say nothing because they are not my mureeds and feel that whatever is said, if anything, ought to come from Baba.

Later on, I explain to Baba what I have observed. He agrees with me that such behavior clearly lacked spiritual etiquette and that he would speak to those people when the situation was appropriate.

§

Baba tells me 'Asma has indicated to him that her daughter, Sadia, had several boys in the house while the parents were away at some engagement or other. There might have been drug use and sexual activity during that period of time.

§

August 29th, 1995

Baba relates to me a dream which Susan, Paul's wife, had. In the dream, Susan is visiting me in an old apartment and she says to me: "Are you still living in this grotty old apartment." I reply with words to the effect that I fill the shoes of Nizam-ud-Din Awliya (may Allah be pleased with him). Susan, with Baba's permission, later tells me the same dream herself.

§

September 1995

Someone, an adult who should know better, is fooling around in the room where the masnad lies. The man steps on the masnad and, immediately, becomes violently ill with some sort of gastric upset, barely making it to the bathroom in time -- although not quite to the toilet before beginning to throw up with projectile vomiting.

§

On another occasion, Baba, I, and some other people are in a room adjacent to the main meeting room where the masnad is kept. One can see the larger room from where we are sitting through the glass doors which section off the larger room from the rest of the rooms on the 1st floor.

All of a sudden, I notice that Baba is looking intently on what is going on in the meeting room. I turn and notice that Mickey is fully prostrate with his hands extending toward the masnad.

Apparently, Baba is checking to see whether the masnad is touched by Mickey. When Baba is satisfied that Mickey has gone as close to the masnad as he is going to on that occasion, Baba relaxes somewhat and continues on with the conversation, monitoring the situation in the room where the masnad lies as he interacts with the others who are present.

§

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.

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 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

Due to a variety of financial problems and squabbles among some of the mureeds, the Astana is closing. Stan has found me a place in the same building as his apartment.

A few weeks before vacating the premises, Baba gives me the masnad. I assume that this arrangement is just for safe-keeping during this transitional period but Baba informs me that the masnad had always been intended to be given to me.

In fact, he informs me that his shaykh is the one who has given instructions to Baba concerning me. More specifically, his shaykh was the one who informed Baba about me, as well as told Baba to make contact with me and bring me into the silsilah. Baba's shaykh is the one who told Baba to disclose the things 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 which his shaykh had requested of him. Baba proceeds to provide some tips on spiritual etiquette concerning the masnad.

§

'Asma and Iqbal's daughter, Sadia, has been sent to Bangladesh to live with her grandparents. 'Asma says she and her husband have discussed the whole situation with Baba, and they have decided that, maybe, the best thing for Sadia is to have time away from the problems of school, gangs, weapons, drugs, and other possible activities.

§

Three or four of us take a trip to visit with Baba. Baba wants me to speak at a local Ashram.

He says he and the Guru who established the place 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, 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, and 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 may 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 quality 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 which 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.

§

November 28, 1995

On the 5th, or possibly, the 6th, of Rajab I have a dream in the morning. There is a party taking place.

My first shaykh, Professor Irfan, is going away to Virginia. I am sitting on the couch next to him, and I cry in his arms or on his shoulder.

He has just come out with a new book. He has left me a copy, but it is hidden.

He gives me a small package with a key in it. I am to figure out where the book is hidden.

There is also another package in another room -- a frying pan, I think. This is part of the puzzle to be solved. The key and the frying pan have the same name on them.

I can't figure it out. This remains the case even though he gives me some assistance or hints.

Inside the pan (he had to show me), there is an elaborate-shaped container of cooking oil. It looks somewhat like the Enterprise spaceship of Star Trek, but its two arms seem to curve back on themselves.

There is something in the dream about having to obtain a parking paper for the friend of Professor Irfan who was visiting with him. However, the needed papers are no longer being issued or no longer available.

On some paper there is a phone number, and on the paper I had drawn -- or someone had drawn -- a picture of the shrine of Hazrat Khwajah Muin-ud-din Chishti Sanjiri. I said I hoped that my first shaykh could read the handwriting, and I felt that after all the practice he had with my handwriting in relation to the many projects we pursued when he was in this world, he should have no problems.

Apparently, I discover that I made a few simple mistakes in writing down the number. I correct these.

We go outside to get something, and I see one of my first shaykh's mureeds dressed up in a Chinese robe. My first shaykh also has such a robe on, and he makes some sort of comment about how some people will be annoyed with his wearing apparel.

Off to the side, I see my first shaykh's friend who is visiting him, along with a friend of mine, Don, who is smoking something in a hash-like pipe.

My first shaykh has a young friend with him, but it is an old friend of his. I thought the friend was the person who used to teach my first

shaykh Persian. The person had something to do with Hazrat 'Ali (May Allah be pleased with him).

My first shaykh gave this latter person a copy of Professor Irfan's new book. The person smelled, touched, and tasted it, and said the book was excellent.

I liked the man. The thought crossed my mind that because he was a friend of my first shaykh, then, I should have met him before, but I never had.

I, then, thought that, perhaps, the book must be the reason why I haven't seen my first shaykh in such a long time. I remark on this, and my first shaykh says that he has been to all of the fatihas.

I ask for Professor Irfan's address, but he hasn't settled down yet. So, I give him my phone number.

§

December 1995

Baba is visiting the city and staying with me. The apartment is pretty devoid of food, but there is some cheese, a few eggs, and a little milk.

I ask Baba if he would like an omelet. He seems to be wary of my capacity to do anything but burn water, but in order not to hurt my feelings, he agrees to be a guinea pig.

Baba is busy talking with someone in another room while I play master chef in the kitchen. I finish cooking up a storm and serve Baba the result of my fiendish activities.

He takes the fork and looks at the plate with considerable trepidation, Finally, he takes a leap of faith and eats some of the omelet.

At first, his expression is one of waiting for an attack of food poisoning to set in. Then, he smiles and says the omelette is wonderful.

§

A young, very attractive, woman Stan knows drops by the apartment. In her own way, she is interested in the Sufi path, and, from time to time, she likes to hang out with Baba and/or me.

At one point in time, she and Stan almost marry. However, it doesn't work out.

Apparently, she has come to see Stan who lives nearby, but, when she discovers that he is not at home, she decides to visit with Baba and myself.

She wishes to speak with Baba alone. While she is in the kitchen, I tell Baba, and he says that he would prefer if I were present in the room while the two of them talk.

I'm not sure what is going on, but I comply with Baba's request. She stays for a couple of hours and, then, leaves.

§

Some members of several other silsilahs discover that Baba is in town 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, gets some 'zingers' sent his way. Baba begins to tell the visitor about certain kinds of anomalous experiences in the latter's background.

The guy is dumb-founded by what is being said. He later tells me – I had met him many years before in another city – that many of the things which are being said to him, he has never shared with anyone else, and he wonders how Baba knows such things.

§

January 1996

A group of us take a trip in order to visit with Baba who is visiting some mureeds in Delaware. While we are there, Baba indicates that Baba and whomever he wishes to bring along have been invited for a meal at the center of a, relatively speaking, near-by shaykh.

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, Shaykh Taufiq 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 which 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, Shaykh Taufiq 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. Shaykh Taufiq, 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 is not here.

Shaykh Taufiq 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 Shaykh Taufiq 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 which is utterly deserted -- without a house or business 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 who is hitchhiking with a big smile on his face. Afterwards, there is considerable discussion and disagreement about what might have been 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.

§

March 1996

Tonight fatiha was said. Omar has just returned from spending two or three weeks with Baba, and, among other things, he has been helping Baba translate a work concerning one of the saints of our silsilah.

After the fatiha and zikr session has been completed, a conversation ensues while we are eating sweets and having tea. A

question is asked of me, and I answer the query to the best of my ability.

For whatever reason, Omar is extremely unhappy with my answer. He proceeds to behave in a very un-Omar-like manner.

I have known Omar for quite a few years via the Tasawwuf Association meetings. He is not overly religious, but I have always considered him to have a soft, mild, and humble demeanor, and his heart seems to be very drawn to Sufi teachings.

He used to enjoy the discussions which took place within the Tasawwuf Association gatherings. Omar hardly ever said a word during the meetings, but he also rarely ever missed a week, and this had been going on for years.

I try to get to the bottom of what is really bothering Omar, but he just gets more upset. Finally, he leaves.

I speak to Baba, by phone, about the incident and worry that I might have made a mistake somewhere along the line with respect to Omar. Baba says that, to the best of his knowledge, I am not doing anything wrong and, quite the contrary, he has been very pleased with the way things have been going with fatiha, his mureeds, and so on while he has been away.

He counsels me not to worry about the flare-up. Baba indicates that he has his own way of approaching such situations and, in time, he will talk with Omar about what went on.

§

Sadia -- 'Asma's and Iqbal's daughter -- who is staying in Bangladesh with Asma's parents, has sent Baba some letters and has phoned him several times. Baba tells me the only reason he is about to tell me certain things is because, as he has noted on several other occasions, that when matters affecting the silsilah are involved, he keeps nothing hidden from me.

Apparently, Sadia went to Bangladesh to deal with a pregnancy which resulted from her interaction with one of the boys she knew from school – the same one who she brought into her parent's house a

number of months ago ... the same one with whom she might have been doing drugs. Before Sadia left, Baba indicates that she had hinted at certain things and, reading between the lines, Baba surmised that she might be pregnant at that time, but he said nothing to Sadia or her parents.

§

April 1996

I go on a trip with 'Asma and her husband in order to visit with Baba in the United States. On the way down, 'Asma and Iqbal tell of an incredible experience which 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 'Asma and Iqbal.

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 which 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 to us his experience -- the one which has been described in the letter that had arrived earlier in the day.

The time is near 'asr (late afternoon prayers). Baba is not asleep but awake.

Baba sees a Baaz which 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 ... a Prophet, an awliya or friend of God?

Somehow, the falcon takes Baba and flies away. Subsequently, Baba finds himself on a huge estate which 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, Iqbal and 'Asma 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 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 youth'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 which 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 which 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 which 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, and one of the people present translates the ‘Urdu as he reads.

§

May 4, 1996

I have a dream in which I am interested in, or in love with, someone -- a girl who is linked in some way, or related to, Shaykh Anwar. My interest seems to be in the form of an idea of getting married to her.

Shaykh Anwar is in the dream. He gives a positive indication or assent of some kind. However, he says that he had to have me checked out first -- which, apparently, already had taken place prior to the positive indication.

§

May 1996

Apparently, Barry, who has taken initiation with Baba, is concerned about my financial situation. He tells me that he has spoken with Baba about the matter, and Baba has indicated to him that if Barry would like to help me out financially that would be a very nice thing to do.

Consequently, Barry, who has a pretty lucrative job, says he would like to give me a check each month to cover my basic expenses and asks me to itemize things, which I do. I convey my sincere gratitude to Barry for his charitable assistance.

On a number of occasions, Baba has suggested that I take an oath of poverty. I have expressed my reluctance to do so as long as I still have outstanding debts.

From time to time, Baba also has encouraged me to serve the silsilah as much as possible and that, God willing, finances would be forthcoming in one fashion or another to help subsidize such work. I am hoping that something might break in the near future with respect to finding some sort of gainful employment so that I can look after my own expenses, but, in the meantime I am very thankful to Allah for the Grace being shown to me through Barry's kindness.

§

A person whom I thought was out of my life has re-entered the picture. Her name is Amina, and she is from Africa.

Around six or seven years ago, I had seen her at one of a series of public lectures we were doing after our first shaykh had passed away. I inquired with Momin and his wife whether, or not, she was single or married.

Initially, the answer came back that Amina and another person were apparently intending to get married. However, upon further inquiry, Sairah had determined that Amina was, in fact, a single woman.

Momin's wife knew Amina and an introduction to her was arranged for me. For a time some five or six years earlier, we explored the possibility of marriage, but, somehow, things never worked out.

We each had gone our separate ways. Moreover, not only did I lose track of her whereabouts, but Momin and his wife did not know what had happened to her either.

Suddenly, when I had visited with Momin and his wife a short while ago, she reappeared on the scene. We still liked one another, and, so, once again, we begin exploring the possibility of marriage.

§

Recently, Momin, Amina, and I went to visit Baba in another state. While visiting, Baba decides to go to the shrine of a Sufi saint that is located in a nearby state.

Prayers are said at the shrine, and Baba has Amina recite something from the Qur'an. The time spent there is very powerful, and I, along with some others, cry for a long time while we are in the shrine.

Amina -- who is a mureed of a well-known shaykh, and who has spent quite a lot of time with that shaykh and knows him very well (in fact, during my first go-around with Amina on the courting merry go-round (which took place after my shaykh had passed away), I even briefly considered going to see Amina's shaykh with her and taking ba'yat with him -- is extremely impressed with Baba and finds him to

have an incredible understanding of the Sufi path, in general, and a great deal of spiritual insight into her life, in particular. She is extremely pleased with Baba and says as much to me.

When we return from visiting Baba, there is a bit of a potentially sticky situation about sleeping arrangements. Momin asks Baba if it is all right for Amina and him to stay with me at the apartment for the night because Momin has a work-related meeting to attend to the next morning, and, therefore, he will not be in a position to take Amina and himself back to their respective homes, some five-six hours away, until sometime later the next day.

Baba says that Amina could use the room which Baba occupies when he stays with me. I have my own bedroom, and sleeping accommodations can be set up for Momin in another room of the apartment.

Momin leaves early the next morning for his appointment. Amina and I remain in the apartment.

When we both awoke, Amina and I began to talk. She invites me to come closer to her ... which I do, but I shouldn't have.

Nothing untoward happens, but we did hug a few times, and, consequently, I feel, nonetheless, things really have gone too far. Amina says she believes nothing wrong has gone on between us, and she feels there is nothing about which to feel guilty, yet, I feel I have not been true to my own set of values even though, in certain ways, I agree with Amina that no ultimate transgressions have occurred.

Amina wants to know if I will tell Baba about what has transpired, and I say that, yes, I will tell Baba what went on. A little later in the day, I phone Baba, describe the situation, and Baba is quite pleased that I have trusted him enough to disclose to him what has happened.

He agrees with me that Amina and I were pushing boundaries in an inappropriate fashion. Yet, he is happy to know those boundaries have not been pushed past the breaking point.

Baba chides me a little for my conduct and clearly states he does not want me to make a habit of such behavior. However, he ends by saying that no real damage had been done and to not go on berating myself.

Amina and I part company at that point (she has to return to her home in another city). The parting is rather strained, but we have not lost interest in pursuing the idea of marriage with one another.

§

June 1996

Baba is visiting for a little while, and today is Friday. With Baba's permission, I have been attending some of the Friday prayers at a mosque which is aligned with a different Sufi silsilah than ours.

Due to a variety of circumstances, not too many people have been attending the Friday prayers at this mosque. Shaykh Anwar, who lives in another country, but who, from time to time, visits his mureeds in our city, has been trying to encourage different people to establish Friday prayers at the mosque on a regular basis.

I ask Baba if he would like to go to the mosque for Friday prayers. He agrees, and we make our way over to the center.

Except for one mureed of shaykh Anwar, no one else shows up. Since we do not have a sufficient quorum for saying Friday prayers in the normal way, we just say zuhr (early afternoon) prayers.

Afterwards, Baba goes to a corner of the mosque to recite a zikr of some kind. When we are all done with our various recitations, 'Umar, who is the only one from shaykh Anwar's silsilah to come, asks Baba and me if we would like some biscuits and tea, which Baba accepts.

'Umar says something complimentary about Saddam Hussein, the President of Iraq. Baba becomes visibly upset with the remarks.

Among other things, Baba stipulates that Sufis should stay far away from tyrants, murderers and terrorists. He adds that people like Saddam Hussein -- who are so-called Muslims -- are the ones who are giving Islam a very bad reputation with respect to the world at large, and Baba wishes to have nothing to do with such individuals.

Baba thanks 'Umar for his hospitality and apologizes for becoming emotional about such matters. However, Baba indicates that he has seen how such things work from close up, and he is very much opposed to the havoc being wreaked by the Saddams of the world.

§

July 1996

I, along with several friends, take a trip to visit Baba. Feisal 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, Feisal 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 which 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 Feisal over his remark at the time Feisal is discussing the matter with me.

Feisal's other comment about imams not moving their right foot puzzles me. I wasn't the imam for zuhr prayers. Baba was the one who was leading the prayers ... he was the imam.

Sena, who has been listening to the conversation, is as puzzled about this 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 for Feisal.

More specifically, Feisal 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

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 Momin's and mine 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 the city. 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, God willing, assist in this regard as well.

§

I drop off some documents for Baba at his immigration lawyer's office. I also present a copy of the newly published book to his lawyer.

A week, or so, later I must return to the offices of Baba's immigration lawyer to pick up some material for Baba. I meet for a few moments with the lawyer, and he mentions the book I gave to him.

He has been paging through it, reading things here and there. He likes the essays and finds some of them quite moving and profound.

§

I am visiting with Momin and his wife Sairah in another city, and I am starting to see Amina again. I am not conducting myself any differently now than I did the first time around when I visited Momin six or seven years earlier and, with his full knowledge and acceptance, I had been spending time with Amina. Nevertheless, even though there is nothing immoral or illicit transpiring between Amina and myself during this second round of courting, Momin is quite agitated about something concerning the nature of the relationship.

On one occasion, he sits me down for a long talk about issues of propriety. On another occasion, he says, with a great deal of emotion, that Baba has told him I have strayed from the path.

Baba happens to be in the city at the time, so I phone him because I am quite concerned that Baba is upset with, or angry, toward me. When Baba comes to the phone, I explain the situation and ask him if he is upset with me as Momin has indicated is the case.

Baba laughs and asks me how he could ever be upset with, or angry toward, me? I repeat what Momin had said to me, and Baba dismisses the remarks as being just an emotional outburst on Momin's part that is based on some misunderstanding or other. Momin, he says, is like that sometimes, but, then, we all have our weaknesses and we should just forgive one another for these sorts of mistake.

§

Amina is being very mysterious with me. She says she has to be away for most of the day, but she is evasive about what she is doing. She tells me she will contact me later in the day.

In the evening, Amina and I – I am still staying with Momin and Sairah -- get together. She tells me what she did for the day.

Apparently, she went to see a psychic who lives in a rural part of another province or state. The psychic is both well-known, in certain circles, but tends to keep a very low-profile.

Somehow, Amina has found out about the woman, called her, and the woman agreed to meet with Amina. Amina, then, proceeds to describe the events of the day.

She had gone to the woman to ask two sets of questions. One set concerned me, and the other set concerned Baba.

First, she relates what the psychic said about me. Most of the information about my personal life and my nature is very accurate.

I don't know if Amina has, somehow, inadvertently, tipped the woman off about me -- that is, during casual conversation given the woman personal information about me which the woman, then, uses in an artful way to make educated guesses about my life or personality. Amina claims she has given the woman little or no information about me, and, quite frankly, there is some information about me which is repeated that I don't believe I ever shared with Amina ... although it is possible and I have just forgotten about it.

Amina has asked the psychic if I am the person whom Amina should marry. The psychic gives an emphatic 'yes' to this query, and, then, the psychic goes on to make certain pronouncements about my future.

Amina is a little less forthcoming when it comes to her psychic queries concerning Baba. About all that is said is that the psychic didn't seem to have much to say about him ... that he was sort of okay, and that was about it.

In a subsequent conversation with Baba, I outline my intentions concerning Amina, and Baba encourages me in that direction. He says Amina is a remarkable woman who possesses considerable spiritual capacity.

Baba indicates I might propose to Amina before she goes back to Africa where she is hoping to clear up some family business. In fact, he intimates I should ask her if she would like to get married before she leaves.

Baba describes the issue of marriage as a test for Amina. Her response will reveal a lot about her priorities and commitments.

When I propose marriage to Amina, she, in turn, broaches the idea of my moving to Africa and finding work there. She feels I would stand an excellent chance of obtaining a teaching post at one of the universities.

I say my responsibilities in relation to Baba and the silsilah prevent me from going to Africa, even for a limited period. Amina feels she needs to return to Africa to attend to certain matters there.

A few days later, she leaves the country and returns to Africa. While she is away, she writes a few postcards and calls me several times. In each instance, there is something which seems problematic about her communications.

I share my impressions of the matter with Baba. He agrees there is a problem. However, he says the ultimate decision is mine, and he is with me no matter what I decide.

§

Eventually – through various phone calls and letters -- I learn from Amina that, among other things, she is very angry with me and, apparently, Baba, as well. She seems to be upset with some of what has happened and feels Baba has interfered in our relationship.

At one point she accuses Baba of having made a pass at her when she, I, and Momin were visiting with him earlier in the United States. I find it strange that this accusation is only surfacing now when, previously, she had so many extraordinarily good things to say about

Baba, and, in addition, I feel her accusation might have more to do with some sort of emotional response to the fact I recently have told her that for a variety of reasons, which I outline to her, I wish to discontinue our relationship.

Although she feels Baba has been interfering in my relationship with her, the truth of the matter might be that she, herself, might have been trying to place distance between Baba and me by wanting, among other things, to take me away to Africa. Her claims concerning Baba's alleged pass toward her do not ring true in the light of present circumstances, nor do such accusations ring true in the light of what my own experience of Baba, together with the experiences of others whom I know better than Amina, all seem to indicate concerning the nature of Baba's character.

She continues to call and leave long messages on the voice mail. She apologizes and indicates she gets very agitated during her menstruation period -- often saying things which she later regrets.

What she says might be true, but I feel she has gone too far. I do not return any of Amina's calls, nor do I communicate with her further.

§

August 22, 1996

Ken, an initiate of Baba's, tells me about a dream he had the prior week. In his dream, I am a gentleman farmer, and behind me, there is some sort of machine ... a strange kind of machine. Ken comes to me and cries on my shoulder.

When I relate this dream to Baba, he says that the meaning of the dream is very clear. The symbol of the gentleman farmer in this context is referring to someone who knows how to plant spiritual seeds, nurture them, water them, look after them, and help them grow -- which are the tasks of a shaykh ... someone to whom people can turn for spiritual assistance ... someone who can take initiates, and someone whose directions should be followed.

§

Momin tells me about his trip to Pakistan, including his meeting with Baba's shaykh. Momin informs me that the first thing Baba's shaykh says to him when Momin presents himself at the Astana is: "What are you doing here?"

Momin, apparently, mumbles something about wanting to pay his respects, along with a few other things. Momin, 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 Momin. When Momin puts this in his mouth, everything changes, and he feels like he has become one with Baba's shaykh. The experience is very powerful and lasts for some time.

Momin also talks about how on his trip he used to give his money to one of the people in the Astana where he is visiting, and, then, go out into the city, walking about, with no money in his pocket and how this was a very liberating sort of experience for him. I reply there is a big difference between someone who, when the need arises, merely has to ask someone nearby in order to be able to get his money back, and someone who walks about and, when a need arises, there is no one who is safe-keeping his money because he has no money to entrust -- not just for the moment but on an on-going basis.

§

September 1996

Susan and Paul, who knew Professor Irfan and who are mureeds of Baba, phone up and indicate they wish to speak with me. We fix a time.

When they come, they begin to question me about whether or not I am doing what Baba actually has instructed me to do. I ask them to be more specific.

They tell me that Baba really wants me to get a job and that he is very upset with me for not doing so. However, he loves me too much to approach me about this issue directly.

I suggest that, possibly, there is some misunderstanding here. I am quite certain, both from conversations, as well as from letters, that Baba wishes me to continue on in the same fashion – indeed, Baba has, on a number of occasions, urged me to take an oath of poverty in order to better serve the silsilah.

Paul and Susan are equally positive about their understanding of the situation. In addition, Paul talks about a technical writing job for which he is willing to recommend me through the company where he is employed.

I indicate that I will discuss the matter with Baba. I thank them for coming and talking with me about the matter.

Later, I do raise the issue with Baba. He informs me that Paul and Susan have misinterpreted something which was said.

However, in order to keep the peace and avoid hard feelings why don't I ask Paul he advises me to go ahead and put my name forward for the technical writing position, and let's see where Allah takes things. I follow Baba's instructions.

§

Barry, who has been helping me financially, indicates that some problems have surfaced with his parents, and, as a result, he needs to help them financially and, therefore, can no longer assist me. I explain that I understand the situation and that I very much appreciate the help he has been able to give to me over the past several months.

He raises a point similar to the one broached by Paul and Susan – namely, am I sure that I properly understand what Baba wants from me with respect to the job issue. Again, I maintain that I am fairly certain that I am aware of what Baba wishes concerning this and have had a number of conversations with Baba about the whole situation.

About ten days later, Baba, Barry, and I are all sitting together in the apartment. Barry re-raises the issue of me and a job and wants to know whether he has misunderstood the situation or if, perhaps, I have.

Baba states that Barry has misunderstood what has been mentioned in this regard by Baba. I hope, unless Baba indicates otherwise, this is the last of the matter.

§

Baba has hinted that he knows about something which 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.

§

I go with Stan to visit Baba who is staying with 'Asma and her family in the latter's new house. 'Asma has been reassigned at work and, consequently, the family has had to move to another city.

When we get there, several other people are already visiting, including Susan, Paul's wife, and Judy, who is a friend of 'Asma's daughter, Sadia. Sadia has returned from Bangladesh.

Judy is an extremely bright 16-year old. She is very much enamored with Baba, as are a lot of young people who come into contact with him.

According to Baba, Judy is quite gifted spiritually. Among other things, she has a very strong sense of intuition about people and circumstances.

Baba is concerned about Judy because her spiritual condition is such that without the right kind of assistance, she easily could drift off into some sort of psychotic condition. In effect, without proper spiritual guidance her substantial potential for spirituality might also become the biggest threat to her emotional, psychological and spiritual stability or health.

‘Asma seems very distracted and upset by something. She has made a few discrete signs of some sort to me, but I don’t know what she means, and there is no opportunity to pursue the matter with her.

Baba asks me to write out the instructions for doing ritual ablution. The instructions are for Judy wants to learn how to do the cleansing ritual.

When I complete this task, Baba inspects the instructions very carefully. He is going so slowly down the page, I am afraid that, perhaps, I have made some mistake.

Finally, he nods in satisfaction. Then, he asks me to take Judy to the basement and sort of supervise the ablution process.

I do this. When we are through, we go back upstairs.

Discussion goes on for some time. At a certain point, we break for supper.

When the time for leaving arrives, Susan tells me that she wishes to give me a ride back to the city. Stan doesn’t mind because he wants to stay on with Baba a little longer.

On the drive back, Susan drops a bombshell. She claims ‘Asma has told her that her eldest daughter has informed her that it was Baba who impregnated her, not one of the boys with whom she used to run around.

Furthermore, according to Susan, ‘Asma says that a few days earlier she came home and found Baba in bed with Judy. ‘Asma doesn’t know if anything was going on because they had the covers pulled over them.

I don’t know what to say, so, I just listen to what Susan is saying. But, as I am listening, my mind is whirling back in time ... remembering events that were going on during my tenure with Professor Irfan.

At one point back then, things had become pretty ugly. Because of the involvement of our cultural/religious organization in a whole series of problems involving discrimination, prejudice, and bigotry toward Muslims, Islam and the Sufi path, there were an array of forces aligned against Professor Irfan, including: the university where he taught, the government, the media, certain so-called leaders within the Muslim community, some of the imams at different mosques, and even a number of his own mureeds.

Nafs (ego, the lower carnal self), Iblis (Satan), dunya (the world of entanglements in which the nafs becomes engaged), and unbelievers were all, in one guise or another, seeking to destroy Professor Irfan at that time. I witnessed all of this from pretty near ground zero because I had been helping my shaykh in all aspects of our organization's activities ... the same activities which were drawing fire from so many directions.

Sexual allegations began to fly from some of my first shaykh's mureeds. At one point or another, I spoke with each and every one of the people centrally involved with these allegations.

I found evidence of jealousy, pride, envy, anger, arrogance, lies, resentment, frustration, ignorance, and ambition among the people who are the accusers. Moreover, none of their allegations are substantiated.

These people were not claiming my shaykh had had sex with them. Rather, they were identifying another of my shaykh's mureeds as being the person allegedly involved with such illicit and immoral activity ... a person who was doing a great deal of work for my shaykh in relation to the community organization which Professor Irfan had established.

Shortly thereafter, I discovered -- because Professor Irfan told me -- that he and the woman, in question, had been married. From the perspective of secular law, my shaykh was in error because he already had a wife, but from the perspective of so-called Muslim law, he was within his rights to take a second wife.

The people who were making the allegations were all behaving badly in a variety of ways, not only with respect to my shaykh, but in relation to me and several other people. In fact, I couldn't believe some

of the things which they were doing because, prior to these events, I had admired these people and felt them to be far better, spiritually, than me.

I knew, through various sources, that they had been making other kinds of non-sexual allegations about me, as well. For several years, I had been working closely with Professor Irfan and, unfortunately, there was considerable jealousy on the part of a number of people within the local silsilah concerning my relationship with our shaykh because I was, from their perspective, sort of a Johnny-come-lately to the silsilah.

The problem was there was a lot of work to be done, and, yet, none of these people wanted to take the time to pitch in and help out to any substantial degree. I stepped into this void, and I was resented for having done so, and, consequently, at a certain stage of things, I, along with my shaykh and a few others within the silsilah, became targets of opportunity.

After investigating the so-called evidence concerning sexual improprieties on the part of Professor Irfan, I came to the conclusion that there was, in fact, no evidence to support the allegations of wrongdoing. Instead, what I found was a lot of vested interests of other people who were seeking to gain control and have influence within the silsilah -- one individual, for instance, who had gone to India and received a khirkah from Professor Irfan's shaykh believed he -- the individual who received the khirkah -- was destined to take charge of silsilah activity in North America, but, in point of fact, this was not the case, and when the opportunity arose to take advantage of a chaotic situation, he did his best to betray his own shaykh and make a difficult situation even worse.

Did our shaykh take a second wife? Yes, he did.

People, if they wish, might treat this fact as being inconsistent with the secular law of the land. However, this has nothing to do with allegations of sexual misconduct because every single person making such allegations both knew, as well as had signed on to committing themselves to, the moral and legal perspective of Islamic law when they took ba'yat with our shaykh. Furthermore, there was nothing which our shaykh had done that violated any of these precepts.

Now, as Susan's words concerning 'Asma's testimony unfolded, once again I found myself confronted with the issues of alleged sexual misconduct on the part of a shaykh with whom I was associated. What to do?

One of the thoughts running through my mind was that it was strange that 'Asma had let Baba stay in her home while, apparently, simultaneously making allegations concerning Baba's supposed indiscretions with her daughter ... although, possibly, she didn't know how to handle the situation and that concerns about etiquette might have been confusing matters with respect to how she and her husband should proceed. Another series of thoughts running through my mind that followed upon Susan's 'revelations' was that 'Asma was, perhaps, feeling guilty about how she and her husband had permitted things to get so out of control in relation to their daughter at the high school with respect to drugs, weapons, suspensions, and trysts with delinquent boys, and, as a result, she was looking for someone else on whom to place the responsibility for the nature of their dysfunctional family.

§

The next day, quite unexpectedly, Baba shows up at my door. He has his suitcase in hand and indicates circumstances were such in relation to 'Asma and her family that he felt it necessary to leave. He has no other place to go.

Baba didn't say much about the situation, and, he further stated that it was not his habit to do so. He did say, however, that his physical condition precluded him from having done what he had been charged with -- namely, physically impregnating 'Asma's daughter -- and in this respect he referred, in passing, to his diabetes.

§

I remember a conversation I once had with Baba several years before as I was driving him back to the United States after his visit to

our city had come to an end. On the one hand, he stated that he considered all his mureeds to be his children, and, as such, they were off limits for purposes of marriage. On the other hand, in passing, Baba mentioned that although he realized my previous shaykh's silsilah went about things differently than did our present silsilah, nonetheless, if he had been in the position of my previous shaykh vis-à-vis the mureed whom my previous shaykh married, Baba would not have done the same thing -- that is, marry his own mureed.

Later on, during the same journey, I raise the topic of whether Baba would ever marry. In response, Baba relates certain facts about his physical condition which might interfere with this idea.

One of these facts involves his diabetes. He says the impact of this disease upon his system has been such that he is not certain all his 'equipment' is capable of functioning and, thereby, permitting him to carry out the related duties of a husband.

§

A few days later, Baba returns to his home in Jefferson. Upon leaving, he indicates to me that he has forgiven 'Asma, Sadia, and her husband for making such allegations and that he continues to be their well-wisher.

§

Shortly after Baba's departure for the United States, 'Asma calls and wants me to meet with her and her husband. We decide to meet at my apartment.

When they come, the situation is filled with stress of all kinds. Initially, 'Asma does the talking, and she begins by apologizing to me for getting me involved with Baba by coming to the Tasawwuf Association several years ago.

She asks permission to give their side of things. I accede to her wish, and she proceeds to cover pretty much the same information as

Susan already has related to me on the drive back from 'Asma's house a few days ago.

I ask a few questions, and some answers are given. Based on what I know about: (1) Baba, (2) the dysfunctional nature of 'Asma's and Iqbal's family situation, and (3) what I learned by going through the whole series of events involving the allegations of sexual misconduct which were thrown at my previous shaykh, I am not convinced, beyond a reasonable doubt, about the credibility of what I am hearing, especially when it comes to their daughter's testimony.

Sadia might be telling the truth. On the other hand, I have been able to observe her under a variety of circumstances over a number of years, and, at times, I have found her to be something of a manipulator. In addition, when her purposes were served, Sadia sometimes lied, and, now, a lot is riding on whether I should believe what she is currently saying with respect to Baba.

She is angry with her parents about a number of things. She is having trouble with school. Based on conversations with her mother, 'Asma -- along with my own personal observations -- I know that Sadia is, and has been, quite rebellious in a number of ways.

She might feel her parents are more concerned about Baba than they are about her or her sister (and, for quite some time, their household has been filled with people, morning, noon and night, because Baba often stays with them when he is in the city). If she says that Baba engaged in sexually inappropriate behavior with her, and this resulted in pregnancy, she becomes a victim of sexual exploitation by an older person who exercised undue influence on a minor, and, if this is the case, then, to a great extent, her part in the whole matter becomes wholly excusable. Whereas, if her pregnancy is the result of an affair she had with a boy from school, then others, including her parents, will view her behavior in a vastly different light,

All of the foregoing considerations are -- both individually, as well as collectively -- potential sources of strong motivation which might alter the sort of story she tells her parents. On the other hand, such considerations notwithstanding, she still might be telling the truth.

'Asma's claim that she saw Baba in bed with Judy might be another matter. Even, here, however, there are various possibilities to be reflected upon.

Is 'Asma jealous of Judy? I have been witness to an incredible amount of jealousy, possessiveness, and entitlement from many of Baba's mureeds with respect to Baba. This includes 'Asma.

On many occasions I have been the recipient of unwanted gossip – and I have told people as much -- concerning different people in the silsilah ... as they each jockey for position as Baba's favorites. The families are constantly sniping at one another – fighting over where Baba will stay when he visits, and where he will eat, and whose house he will visit, and whose suggestions he will accept, and what the implications of all of this are for someone's 'spiritual standing' in the silsilah.

Whenever Baba comes, the backroom squabbling and politics begins. In order to keep some of the old-timers happy, Baba often has to agree to spend so many days at three or four houses. The women involved in this version of musical chairs -- along with their husbands - - are often in competition with one another because many of them take the issue of whom Baba stays with as a reflection on whom he loves most and who is most spiritually advanced.

Baba has been unhappy with this foolishness for quite some time and has told the people -- both individually and collectively -- as much. Unfortunately, although the people in question comport themselves with adab for a short period of time after they are mildly chided by Baba for such behavior, not much time has to pass before old habits surface and reassert themselves.

Recently, Baba has indicated that Judy has a great deal of spiritual potential, and, consequently, he has been giving Judy a lot of attention whenever she visits him at 'Asma's house. Perhaps, 'Asma has some other agenda going on because she has indicated to me previously that, if she could, she would marry Baba, and she is, obviously, more in love with Baba than she is with her husband.

Conceivably, the very fact of 'Asma's daughter having accused Baba of sexually molesting her might make everything 'Asma

experiences become colored and shaped by the filter of that accusation. Other possibilities occur to me as well.

One of these additional scenarios is problematic from a number of different directions. Nevertheless, this possibility points in a very different direction from issues of sexual abuse and exploitation.

More specifically, Baba has indicated to me, and a few other people within the silsilah, that he would like to get married. What if Judy really loved Baba and the two of them had secretly married to avoid obvious public controversy with respect to their age difference ... as well as Judy's young age.

People might wish to criticize such an arrangement, or they might believe someone Judy's age is not capable of making a mature decision about such matters or that someone Baba's age should stick to women his own age. Or, people might feel that someone so young as Judy should not be tied down to marriage, and, possibly, children, at such an early age -- that she should have an opportunity to explore life first, but I know of a number of women who married at age 16 or 17 and went on to have very happy and fulfilled lives.

Judy's parents knew she is spending time with Baba at 'Asma's house. Apparently, they have no objections and seem to not only believe that Judy is benefitting from the contact but are encouraging her in various ways to interact with Baba.

Children are not the chattel of their parents. To be sure, parents have a responsibility toward children, and, as a result, must seek to do whatever is in the best interests of their wards.

Yet, across cultures, there is considerable disagreement about when and under what circumstances parents should discontinue trying to make decisions for their sons and daughters. In addition, there are differences of opinion about what constitutes the best interest of an individual. Adults often make as many mistakes in this respect as do their teen-aged children.

Returning to Sadia's accusations concerning Baba, 'Asma's daughter might be jealous of the attentions which Baba has been directing toward her friend Judy. To introduce a friend to Baba only to experience one's own relationship with Baba to, seemingly, become eclipsed as a result of that introduction, this might have been very

upsetting to Sadia. If this is the case, then, maybe the accusations of sexually impropriety which Sadia has directed toward Baba are being fueled and shaped by jealousy, envy, anger, and the like.

I am just not certain about what is going on in the relationship between Baba and Judy. Therefore, I am reluctant to make a definitive judgment about a situation that is being described to me through second- and third-hand accounts, as well as through, possibly, questionable motives.

I could, perhaps, try to find some diplomatic, but direct, way of raising the foregoing issues with Baba. On the other hand, if our situations were reversed (I was the shaykh and he was my mureed) and 'if' I had done nothing wrong with either Sadia or Judy, then, there might be a strong sense of 'et tu Brute' coursing through my being if he were to direct such queries toward me -- especially, if the person asking such questions is, supposedly, someone who trusts me with his spiritual life. What does the asking of such questions say about the health of our spiritual connection?

A mureed needs to be able to trust the shaykh. However, a shaykh needs to be able to trust the mureed, as well.

Spiritual progress and assistance become very problematic issues when doubts begin to enter the picture on either side -- that is, either with respect to the seeker or the guide. Truth is one of the most important allies one can have on the mystical path, but this is also true of faith, and one is facing a real spiritual dilemma when questions concerning faith and truth collide.

§

'Asma and Iqbal become very argumentative and bitter toward the end of our conversation about their Baba accusations. In some ways, they are being verbally abusive toward me, and since I am not doing anything except trying to listen to their story and become clear about various aspects of what is being said, their growing belligerence is not, exactly, winning me over, and, finally, I ask them -- politely, but firmly - - to leave.

§

Many people are leaving the silsilah as a result of the accusations about Baba which are making the rounds ... but not everyone is doing so. I speak with some of the individuals from both factions, and we exchange perspectives, concerns, questions, and information about the situation.

In the end, I am left with doubts. The doubts I have about the credibility of the testimony, so to speak, of 'Asma, Iqbal, Sadia, Susan, Paul, and others are substantially greater than whatever doubts I have concerning Baba.

Sometimes, doubts are the result of having incomplete information and arise in the interstitial spaces between islands of facts. Sometimes, doubts are the points of vulnerability which are exploited by nafs, Iblis, dunya, and unbelievers in order to entice one away from a path of truth. Sometimes, doubts are the ghosts of uncertainties which continue to haunt the decisions one makes under less than ideal conditions in relation to issues which affect the quality of life ... both now, and in the future.

Sometimes, doubts help one to avoid problems. Sometimes, doubts close one off to the truth.

§

Baba's immigration lawyer calls me and wants to speak with me in his office. 'Asma has contacted him about what she claims went on between Baba and her daughter, as well as her daughter's friend, Judy.

I visit with the lawyer later in the day. We exchange chit chat for a few moments, and, then, he gets down to business. What is my understanding of the situation?

I explain to him what I know. I indicate the family in question is quite dysfunctional in many respects.

The parents are constantly in conflict with one another and seem to have been on the verge of divorce for quite some time. The oldest daughter has been running around with a gang. She has run away from

home on a number of occasions. She is doing drugs. She got kicked out of school for carrying a knife. She had invited several boys into the house when her parents were away. The parents had to send her to stay with her grandparents in Bangladesh in order to try to settle her down and with the hope of helping get her life turned around.

I feel there is a considerable amount of anger in the daughter toward her parents. In addition, I believe there might be some substantial degree of resentment within her concerning Baba, because, in a variety of ways, the house where she lives, as well as the attentions of her parents, are no longer 'hers', so to speak, because when Baba is staying in the house, the entire residence is given over to hosting the people who come to visit Baba from morning time through until late evening.

I tell him I am not convinced beyond a reasonable doubt, or even according to the lesser standard of a preponderance of evidence, that the daughter has been telling the truth about what has transpired. He asks me a few more questions, and, then, the interview is over.

As he is walking me through the suite of offices toward the main entrance, he says one last thing before bidding me farewell. He says: "You are good friend for Baba."

§

October 1996

My financial situation is pretty desperate. Stan, who is self-employed, has been kind enough to throw some work my way, now and then, but I need to find something more permanent and regular.

Paul informs me that I didn't get the technical writing position with his firm. He doesn't know the reason for the rejection.

§

I ask Momin who lives in another city if he would be willing to put me up while I finish the book on which I am working. Once the book is done, my intentions are to move on ... where, I don't know.

Momin indicates he would like to be able to help me out, but he will have to speak with his wife and Baba about the idea. He'll let me know shortly.

Several days later, Momin calls and indicates that both his wife and Baba have accepted the proposal. I suspect that the individual who is making the biggest concession in all of this is Sairah who is fairly orthodox in her thinking about Islam and, therefore, permitting someone who is not a member of the family to stay at her house for any length of time is an extraordinary concession ... something for which I am deeply appreciative.

§

I sell quite a few of the books in my personal library to several used book dealers, store a variety of things with Stan, throw out a lot of items, and pack the remainder of my possessions into the newly acquired Sufi-mobile when I make the trip to the house of Momin and his wife Sairah, who live some 400+ miles away.

I leave on Halloween night. Both the trick and the treat are on me.

§

December 1996

Momin tells me that Baba has indicated to him that I am not to go back to the city where I have lived for about twenty-six years. I am informed that I can return there on matters of business related to my recently published book, or the like, but I cannot go back to live there.

This is the first I have heard of the instructions, and I wonder about the reasons underlying this. The 'whys' of the matter puzzle me, and I suppose, at some point, I will ask about what I am being told by Momin, but, for now, the whole affair is something of a *fait accompli*.

§

February 1997

Baba has told both Momin and me that he is not interested in having a large number of would-be mureeds coming to the silsilah. Indeed, he tells us that one of his prayers is to ask Allah not to send anyone to the silsilah who is not sincerely interested in the Sufi path ... he wishes to be saved from the numerous problems that multitudes of insincere people might bring to a shaykh and the silsilah.

Momin and I busy ourselves with trying to promote the silsilah. However, for the most part, and with certain exceptions, because Baba does not wish either Momin or me to have much of a public presence, we are trying to find ways to spread spirituality both quietly and with discretion.

Despite the low key nature of our activity, a number of people enter the silsilah. Two sisters take ba'yat with me, and their parents take initiation through Momin. A friend of the two sisters also joins the silsilah by becoming my mureed. All of this takes place following one, or another, of the fatihas which are being held at Momin's house.

§

Sairah has been worrying about whether I am getting enough to eat. I am not into vegetables all that much, but a lot of the meals she fixes involve many sorts of vegetables to which I am not accustomed. I have been a vegetable-challenged person for most of my life.

Somehow she finds out that I like baked potatoes. She begins to prepare these for almost every dinner meal (I have become accustomed to eating just once a day - in the evening).

I really enjoy them. Sairah is very happy that she has found something I like.

After a time, however, I am getting sick of baked potatoes. Not wishing to hurt her feelings - especially since she expresses so much enthusiasm and joy in fixing them for me - I say nothing and continue to eat what she prepares.

At a certain point, I broach the subject with Momin. I tell him how much I appreciate Sairah's concern for me as well as the happiness she

shows in feeding me something which I like, but, I feel that, perhaps, I might have reached my limit with baked potatoes.

I say all of this is a way which Momin finds extremely funny. He starts laughing uncontrollably, and his laughter is infectious, and I begin to laugh as well.

Later on he relates the incident to Sairah, and she also finds the situation very humorous. We laugh about it at the next meal, and Sairah promises to cook baked potatoes only occasionally from now on.

§

March 1997

Momin and his wife are 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, 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 among Momin's and Sairah's relatives. 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 which 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 which 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 many 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.

I talk with the couple for a few more minutes, and, then, something very odd happens within me. Seemingly, for no reason, there is a very loud impression within me -- almost like a shout -- which is directed at the woman's husband ... the shout or impression states: "I sure wouldn't want this guy for a father-in-law."

I am startled by it, but my face does not change expression ... at least, I hope it doesn't. I don't even know this man, so, why are these kinds of sentiments boiling about in me and in such a forceful manner? Shortly thereafter, I excuse myself.

A sister of Momin's wife approaches me and says that she is so impressed with some of the things which 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.

§

Momin has, on his own, approached one of the wealthy members of the relatives whom we are visiting. He wants the wealthy individual to subsidize some of my writing projects. Momin tells me that the man would like to meet with me and discuss the situation.

I am not happy Momin has set up this appointment without consulting me. I tell him as much and try to explain that this is embarrassing for me. Nevertheless, I keep the appointment which both Momin and I attend.

The man agrees to subsidize a few of my research and education ideas which we discuss during the session. However, for tax purposes, and because he is often forgetful about such things, he proposes that he put me on the payroll of one of his companies in order to make sure that I get a regular check.

§

The Sunday session at the Islamic school arrives. Sairah's sister 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. Sairah's sister is 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 here 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 which 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, Momin, Sairah, and I take our leave as well.

§

April 1997

Momin and I are invited to give several Sufi workshops at a university some distance away. The sessions are to be free of charge and open to the general public. We accept the invitation.

We spread things over several days. A talk is given, followed by a question and answer period; a zikr session is held involving the 99

names of Allah; we do a session of sacred turning; we have a farewell supper.

About twenty people attend the two-day set of events. Apparently, everyone is satisfied with what goes on.

§

There are several phone conversations which are sort of follow-ups to the trip south which Momin, his wife, and I recently took to visit with their relatives. One call is in relation to a request for a zikr that one of Sairah'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 which 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 of Momin's wife, Sairah, 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.

§

The third call related to the earlier trip south was from the daughter of the woman with whom I had spoke -- the woman whose daughter's child was ailing. The call was quite unexpected.

It turns out I actually had met the daughter, without realizing it, during the southern visit. As I was leaving the house where I had been asked to address the young people of the extended family (and there were about 20-30 teenagers who came), a woman stood by the door and indicates she has enjoyed the talk and wonders when I might be returning for further talks on a subsequent visit.

Her name is Sima. She apologizes for calling and hoped she wasn't bothering me, but there was something she wanted to discuss with me concerning what shari'ah had to say about certain art projects she was interested in pursuing.

We talk for a long time, and, then, finally, the conversation ends. I tell her that, God willing, I will try to find out additional information which might bear upon her problem, but I believe that what I have said to her is accurate and correct.

After the phone conversation, I talk with Sairah and Momin about Sima. Among other things, I am informed that Sima is divorced and has been going through some difficulties for quite some time. A number of these problems are detailed by Sairah.

§

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 Momin's house to Baba's residence. 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, then 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 which 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, how things are Divinely apportioned.

Everything which 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 such 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 such 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 am 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 to go to the United States, Momin's wife, Sairah, 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.

Sima 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 Momin, his wife, and I arrived at their relatives 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. Ananda, 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 Sima 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.

The family whom Sima wants me to contact invites me to supper. After a few minor, misadventures, I find my way to my destination.

On the way 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 that city. 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 which 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 which 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. 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 which Ananda mentions to me, takes several books on consignment.

I visit the Islamic institute which Sairah had told me about back in Canada. I speak with Sairah'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 Ananda is prepping for one of his final papers. 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 which 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 -- they can jump around 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 which 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 which 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 which 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 which they were entrusting to me ... something which 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.

§

May 1997

I continue to work on writing a number of books while I am staying with Momin and Sairah. 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, exploring with Momin about matters involving the silsilah, participating in various social events planned by Momin's family, 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 Momin, Jim -- whom 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.

Jim 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 the same city as Momin and Sairah. Within a few days of Baba's arrival, an anniversary of one of the elders in our silsilah is held at Momin's house.

The occasion is attended by about twenty-five or thirty people. Most of these people have taken initiation with Baba, Momin, or myself but a few of them have not yet done so.

After fatiha, a group zikr is said. At a certain point, Momin 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 a little over a year ago.

A neighbor of Momin's – someone who has not been initiated and, in some ways, keeps his distance from things 'Sufi – attends to Momin and tries to make sure that Momin doesn't hurt himself while rolling around on the floor. The fact that Momin's neighbor is doing this is almost as much of a surprise as is Momin's rolling around on the floor.

However, the gentleman who is assisting Momin 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 which 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. 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) within a fairly short period of time.

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 such sessions, they did so only very reluctantly.

§

June 1997

Sima and I have a number of further long-distance conversations. Out of these discussions, personal matters are touched upon, and we begin to explore the possibility of having a life together, but there are many difficulties to overcome ... one of the biggest being my finding gainful employment.

The relative of Momin's wife -- the one who Momin and I met with when we visited earlier in the year, and the one who said he would subsidize some of my writing and education projects -- never puts me on the payroll as he promised to do during our previous discussion. I do not raise this issue with Momin.

I don't know whether, or not, something is going to be worked out in that regard. In the meantime, I still need to find work.

Sima asks my permission to send my resume, together with a covering letter, to a number of the universities within a hundred mile radius of where she lives. For a variety of reasons, I don't think this will result in a job for universities rarely seem to accept walk-on candidates, but I feel her offer to do this is very nice, and, besides, if we don't try, we won't know what might be possible in this respect, so, I consent to her idea and tell her I will send her the information in the near future.

§

July 1997

Things were not working out very well as far as getting replies back from the universities to which Sima had sent my resume. The few that do reply say, in effect, 'thanks, but no thanks, and we will keep your information on file'.

In addition, there are a variety of problems concerning her immediate family as well as her relationship with the extended family near whom she lives which are creating obstacles to Sima and I getting together. Furthermore, apparently there have been certain spiritual 'happenings' to which Baba has alluded that indicate, possibly, I might be headed for the Pacific Ocean side of North America, and Baba says if I go to the west coast, there will be someone in that location who is of a certain description and who will help me get settled.

As a result of these different considerations, there is some question about the tenability of a long-term relationship between Sima and me. Sima feels she needs to prove something. Consequently, she tells me to be on the look-out for something which she feels will demonstrate her commitment to me.

A week, or so, later, a delivery of four or five boxes arrives at the house of Momin and Sairah. It is addressed to me and has been sent by Sima.

The boxes contain an IBM Aptiva computer, together with a color monitor, an Epson Stylus color printer, and a few other related materials. I am nonplused.

I had been using a real old IBM computer which Barry, one of Baba's mureeds, had picked up for me quite cheaply. My first book had been written on that computer, as had a further book which had been completed while I had been staying with Momin and Sairah.

Barry's gift has been somewhat clunky but quite serviceable. Sima's gift is state of the art ... at least relative to what I have been using.

§

Momin is planning a trip to pick up his wife who has been visiting with her relatives down south again. He asks me if I would like to accompany him.

I am strongly thinking about asking Sima if she will marry me. However, I also want to speak to Baba about the situation as well,

because, among other things, if I marry her, I will have to leave one locality, where I have mureeds, and move to another location where the silsilah has not been established ... I don't know how Baba will react to this scenario.

Since Momin plans on stopping to visit with Baba on the way to meeting his wife, I think this might be a good chance to discuss things with Baba vis-à-vis Sima. Therefore, I agree to go with Momin.

§

We arrive at Baba's quite late in the evening, but, nonetheless, Baba receives us. We proceed to talk much of the night.

At one point during the conversation, I mention the Sima-possibility. We speak for a short time, and, then, Baba excuses himself.

Thirty to forty minutes later, he returns. As soon as he sits down, he begins to talk about the marriage issue with Sima.

He says that Sima's position with respect to the extended family is problematic in a variety of ways. He indicates that she has been used almost like a slave by people in the family, and she has been through very difficult times.

However, if she can manage to free herself, somehow, from the family influence, she feels that Sima and I can be quite happy. Baba further stipulates that he does not have any problem with my moving to another location in order to marry Sima because the silsilah can be served there as well.

The next day Momin and I continue our journey. An hour, or so, later, we arrive at the home of the relative where we are to stay.

Supper is about to be served, and Sima is at the house when we arrive. Prior to supper, Sima shows me some of the items she has been working on and with respect to which she is thinking of trying to do something of a commercial nature, and she gives several of the artifacts to me as gifts.

After supper is over, Sima is about to leave. I ask her if there is somewhere we can speak in private because there is something important about which I wish to speak to her.

She takes me to the house of her uncle, for whom she works. She has several job-related things to drop off there, and she has a key to the house.

No one is home. We go into her uncle's study and begin to talk.

A few minutes after the conversation begins, the phone rings. Sima's mother is calling from India -- apparently, Sima's parents are in the process of divesting themselves of various possessions in preparation for a move to America where they have green cards.

After the call has ended, Sima and I begin to talk again. I raise the issue of marriage fairly early in the discussion, but, then, go on to talk about various possibilities, obstacles, problems, and so on.

I inform Sima about pretty much every detail of my past. In addition, I am very clear about my financial situation -- including my debt load -- as well as my commitment to the silsilah and what implications this may have with respect to finances in the future..

Reciprocally, Sima begins to tell me about some of her past. She has gone through a lot of difficulties.

Sima's aunt returns home. It is time for Sima and me to leave. We agree to continue exploring the marriage issue.

Although finding conditions of privacy is difficult, several more conversations on this matter take place over the next several days. She wants me to move down near her so that we can work toward finding a solution to some of our problems.

I tell Baba about what has been discussed with Sima. I ask whether it might be possible for me to stay with him for awhile until she and I are able to sort things out.

He says there is not much room because of the rest of the several families whom he stays with. However, after speaking with the other members of the household, he encourages me to come and stay with them.

August 1997

Upon returning to Momin's house, I begin to make preparations to move. I take what I can with me and head for the US.

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, Munir 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, Munir 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 which 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.

§

Over the next several weeks, I travel almost every day from the place where Baba is staying to Sima's town. The trip takes about an hour each way.

She and I meet in a relatively large and anonymous parking lot near a karate club/physical health center. We talk about our situation and what to do, and we don't even so much as hold hands.

Her parents have arrived from overseas and are living with her now. She is reluctant to bring the issue up with them and wants to see if there is some quiet way we can do things which would afford her the opportunity to gradually break the news to her parents.

Sima's father knows of our interest in one another. Nevertheless, he has informed Sima that he is not even prepared to talk with me about the possibility of marriage with Sima.

He says he has too much respect for me to have to say 'no' to me. Consequently, he feels there would be no point served by our meeting.

He wants me to have a job before there is any further discussion. Even though the house in which Sima, her two children, and her parents live is being paid for mostly by Sima, her father is not prepared to have Sima get married to me and for me to live with the family until the job situation is sorted out.

§

Sima asks me to request Baba's permission to come to his house with one of her aunts in order to speak with Baba about marriage, the Sufi path, and a few other issues. I broach this topic with Baba and, graciously, he fixes a time for the meeting, but the get-together is to take place at the house of one of his mureeds where Baba feels there will be more privacy.

The meeting of Sima, her aunt, Baba, and myself takes place. Most of it is conducted in 'Urdu.

Afterwards, I am debriefed, on different occasions, by both Sima and Baba. Although I get somewhat different information through each debriefing session, apparently, both Sima and her aunt are extremely impressed with Baba.

Sima tells me about a Sufi shaykh, who lives in India, that she and her family have known for much of their lives. This Sufi shaykh had recommended a name change for Sima, and after a certain amount of resistance to the suggestion, Sima relented, and a variety of problems cleared up in her life.

She has a picture of the shaykh in her bedroom which she showed me after we were married. She said that, among other things, the man is famous for swimming in crocodile-infested waters without incident.

§

September 1997

Sima and I have decided to go ahead and get married. She is an adult woman, once divorced, with two children, and she has the right to make her own decisions in such matters irrespective of what her father might feel about the situation. Nonetheless, she hopes to work out the family problems over time, and, in the meantime, I will keep commuting between Baba's place and her town.

There is a Sufi shaykh and his wife whom Sima knows who is willing to perform the marriage ceremony. He and his wife have kindly offered their house as the place where the ceremony can occur.

An uncle of Sima's, whom I have met on earlier trips, is prepared to be one of the witnesses. The husband of one of the women who works with Sima is ready to serve as the other witness.

Everyone who participates knows the wedding is going to have to be kept quiet for the foreseeable future. Baba also had advised us to keep things secret until circumstances permit us to announce things publically.

The ceremony is very simple. Our hosts have provided some refreshments for those in attendance -- which is just four to six people, if we include the maid.

Our hosts also indicate that, if we wish, we are free to stay at the house for the rest of the day and night. Sima and I discuss the offer and, then, decide to do something else, but we tell them how much we have appreciated everything they have done for us, and, a short while later, we leave.

Sima's uncle (the one who served as a witness at the marriage) has an unoccupied house out in the country. He has invited us to use the residence whenever we like -- although he says we should probably check with him first because, on occasion, his wife or some of the other members of the family go out there for an afternoon just to check on things.

In a few days, Sima and I take a trip out to the house. The house is palatial and beautiful, situated in the middle of nowhere.

After looking around, we go upstairs, and I look out the windows. There are several deer foraging in a secluded field near the house.

Because the house is uninhabited for much of the time, there is a problem with the water and plumbing. When we turn on the water, there is a leak, and we immediately shut things off.

Although, once in a while, we use the house as a sort of refuge and retreat, the water problem prevents us from staying there very much, and when we do go, we usually bring a supply of water to tide us over. The uncle has offered to fix the leak, but neither Sima nor I want him to go to the expense, and, besides, the house really is in the middle of nowhere, and, as a result, there are certain logistical problems associated with the house even if the water issue were to be resolved.

§

October 1997

Sima makes arrangements for me to see a copyright lawyer. She wants the three books I have written to be properly documented and registered with the US government.

§

I meet with Sima at her office, after hours, when everyone has gone home. I have to try to keep a low profile because Sima has many relatives in the area, and, if I am seen, there might be questions which are asked that might prove problematic.

When I phone her office, I give my name as Dr. so-and-so -- the code word that Sima and I have decided upon to alert her to when I am calling. Since the office gets many calls from medical doctors, no one will take note of one more doctor wishing to speak with Sima.

Sima is anxious to introduce me to her children. Yet, she is afraid to do so because they are young, and she doesn't know if they can keep a secret.

§

No one is responding to the letters which Sima has been sending out to area universities. I have been trying a few possibilities with respect to teaching some adult education classes as well, but these ideas are going nowhere.

We register a business with the state government. It is a sole proprietorship with nothing going for it right now, but, God willing, in time, something will happen and a cash flow will be generated.

I have developed a brochure to teach a course on evolutionary theory. Sima has underwritten the costs for producing the brochure. I go to a number of universities, libraries, and churches in the area in order to distribute and post the brochure in order to try to generate some interest in the proposed course.

Sima feels that no one will be interested in such a course. She might be right, but if she is, it is more of a comment on the times than it is on the need for such a course for, the truth of the matter is, most people -- even university students -- know almost nothing about evolutionary theory and just adopt whatever biases they are being taught or to which they are exposed.

§

An embarrassing situation has arisen. Due to circumstances, Sima and I are rarely able to get together to be able to know one another in a 'Biblical' sense.

There are a few -- very few -- amorous occasions which happen after hours in her office suite where, from time to time, I have slept on the floor. Circumstantial evidence from one of these trysts has inadvertently been left behind as we scramble to pick up some sheets, covers, and pillows in the dark.

The next day, Sima's right-hand man in the office, who is also a Muslim, discovers what he considers to be evidence of wrong doing. Although usually he treats Sima like a sister and dear friend, he is -- since the discovery -- very moody and distant around her.

Sima is quite sensitive about relationships and, of course, notices, the behavior and attitude. Toward the end of the day, Sima calls the man into her office, shuts the door, and asks him what is going on.

At first, he is evasive. He doesn't quite know how to say what he has been suspecting in relation to Sima. He tells her that he has always respected her as a moral person, but, now, he is not sure what to think.

Little by little, the story gets told. The fellow has not announced his findings to anyone else. Nevertheless, he is quite upset with the implications of what he has discovered ... or, what he thinks he has discovered.

Sima decides to tell him the truth about her relationship with me ... that we are married. The man is greatly relieved to hear this and asks Sima's forgiveness for entertaining inappropriate suspicions.

Sima tells him not to worry. The two are happy to re-establish the friendly, harmonious relationship which they enjoyed prior to the discovery.

Once again, I am reminded how much appearances rule the understandings and emotions of the vast majority of people. Although the truth might be otherwise, many people will believe what they like and will even point to 'evidence' as meaning one thing, when, in reality, the evidence means something quite different.

§

November 1997

There is something important which I need to pick up at Sima's house. Her parents are visiting with relatives elsewhere in the town, but her daughter has a cold and is staying home from school. Her son is not quite old enough to begin classes.

Sima invites me to stop by. I do, and she introduces me to her children without specifying what our relationship is.

Her children and I hit it off right away. Sima says she has never seen her children take to a stranger the way they accepted me, and she is very happy with this first step. I think her children are really sweet.

§

Sima enlists the help of another uncle, a brother of Momin's wife, Sairah. He has a lot of business connections in the area, and Sima gives him my C.V. to distribute to whomever he knows whom he feels might be able to offer a job.

§

My mother has been suffering from a menagerie of physical ailments for quite some time. Despite her many physical problems, she continues to lead a productive, creative, politically active life.

As her health permits, she writes poetry and music, as well as performs and directs musicals at various functions around the town where she lives. In addition, she is forever sending off editorials to the local newspaper -- quite a few of which get published -- and she has taken on, among other things, the state university over a number of issues involving school drinking songs and various depictions of women.

She travels about the city in her motorized wheel-chair. Even during the height of the famous ice storm, she was out and about ... much to my older brother's chagrin and dismay.

For quite some time, I have had neither the money nor the time to be able to make the journey to visit with her. We have kept in touch through regular phone calls, cards, and letters, but we haven't visited with one another for a number of years.

When I was working, I would send her money to help out with her expenses. However, I haven't been working for awhile.

Sima thinks it would be good if I spend some time with my mother. Thanksgiving is fast approaching, and, so, arrangements are made, with the few resources I have -- including the Sufi-mobile -- to go and visit with my mother and the rest of my family.

I stay with my mother and sleep on the couch. We get to catch up on a lot of things, and while I am staying there, I try to put my mother's letters, poems, sketches, editorials, newspaper clippings, and other

documents in some sort of order ... she has enough material to supply a small library.

My mother gets me to drive her down to my brother's business. I haven't seen or, for the most part, talked with my brother in nearly twenty years.

I walk into his business, and he sees me from his office and comes out to greet me. We embrace, and later on, my mother tells me how happy she is to have been a witness to that meeting.

For the first time in more than two decades, my two brothers, and their families, along with my mother and me, sit down to a holiday meal. We have much for which to be thankful, and despite my being Muslim and the trepidations which my brother has about that, he asks me to say grace.

A day, or so, before leaving, my mother and I have a conversation about various issues. My mother has always liked my dark variety of humor, so, she laughs when I tell her: there will be two kinds of sighs when she, finally, is taken away by God -- (1) the sorrowful sighs from those to whom you still owe money, and, (2) the sighs of relief when various officials in education, government, and the newspapers discover they will no longer have to put up with your community activities.

I phone Baba and indicate I am about to return from visiting with my mother. He asks me if I need to stay on longer and look after her some more, but I feel she is doing all right and tell him this.

§

December 1997

Sima's daughter is very, very smart. She begins to ask her mother certain questions about me.

The two siblings share confidences, and, soon, both of the children are pestering their mother with all manner of questions and innuendoes. They are curious as well as excited about the prospect of, maybe, having someone like me around on a permanent basis.

One day I am visiting their house on some pretext or other, and the two children begin to giggle and allude to certain things concerning my relationship with their mother. Finally, they both say they want me to marry their mother and come live with them.

The offer is so cute and endearing. Where do we go from here?

Sima decides to tell her children the real story. They are happy but not entirely surprised since they suspected something of this sort for quite some time.

Their mother impresses on them the importance of keeping things secret. The two children appreciate the situation and enjoy being part of the conspiracy.

Sima also tells her children that both she and I are trying to find a nice way of resolving the problem. Neither of us wants the secret to have to be kept for very long.

Telling her children solves some of our logistical problems. Now, Sima can take them with her when we meet at her office.

Sima often brings me supper at her office, and, sometimes, all of us eat together. Occasionally, we go to a Turkish restaurant in a near-by village.

On Friday evenings, we say fatiha together in her office. Occasionally, afterwards, I play games of hide and seek with the children, while on other occasions, when something suitable is playing, we go to the movies -- although on these latter occasions, Sima gets quite nervous because, apparently, a lot of the youngsters in her extended family often go to the same movie theater complex, and Sima is afraid of being seen.

§

January 1998

From time to time, we are able to sell some of my books, and this brings a little money in. Furthermore, I still have some of the money left over from the stipend which Momin's friend, Jim, had given me some months previously.

Nonetheless, financial reserves are beginning to dwindle. Although I do not have to pay rent at Baba's, and between Sima and Baba's household, I am eating, the Sufi-mobile costs money to run, and I am traveling a hundred, or more, miles, almost every day.

§

Sima's uncle has given my C.V. to a number of business people in the area. No one offers a job.

§

February 1998

Sima suggests that until we can find a workable solution to her father's opposition to the idea of marriage between Sima and myself, we need to find an apartment, or somewhere for me to stay. She says her uncle -- the same one who was a witness at our wedding -- has purchased a building which is being used as a mosque.

There is an Imam who is living with his family in the building. However, there are several other spare rooms in the basement, near the kitchen, which I might be able to use for living quarters.

The uncle is hoping that if I live at the mosque, maybe, I could begin to hold classes on Islam for the young people. Sima's uncle has, for the most part, liked what he has heard about me from many of the young people in the community, including his own daughter, and, yet, he also has certain reservations about the Sufi approach to things.

Despite his concerns in this respect, he is still willing to explore possibilities and would like to give the teaching possibility a chance. He also is trying to help his niece deal with a difficult family situation.

Sima and I go and take a look at the rooms. Unfortunately, they don't really offer much privacy, and both Sima and I feel the arrangement isn't very practical from a number of perspectives, so, consequently, although we very much appreciate her uncle's attempt to help us, we turn down the accommodations.

§

March 1998

For a little while now, I have been sleeping on one of the office floors at Sima's place of work. She has been uncomfortable with my driving so many miles, late at night, during the wintertime, with an old car.

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 which 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 Sima's office, I go to the library. It is both too early, and, as well, there is a heavy sleet which is falling and has been 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. Parked in the lot near the library, I drift off 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, I notice three cruisers encircling my vehicle.

The officer begins peppering me with questions. Who am I? What am I doing here? ... the usual set of who, what, why, where, when, and how.

I answer the questions as best I can. After five minutes, or so, of interrogation, they 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 Sima 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 Momin and Sairah at their house, 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 I stayed with Momin and Sairah -- 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 Sima'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.

§

Sima tells me that all her uncle's efforts on my behalf -- to find me a job among some of his contacts in the area -- have, more or less, struck out. I appreciate the fact her uncle has tried to do what he could, and I ask Sima to convey those sentiments to him.

§

April 1998

Baba is in Malaysia. He has met someone there by the name of Ata, a holy man, who often is said to be in an ecstatic state.

Apparently, some remarkable things have occurred in conjunction with this man. Baba says he will tell me all about these experiences when he returns.

The man wants to have a web site which offers a unique service. People would contact Ata through the web site and make a petition concerning whatever problem they were having, and, Ata would pray concerning the request being made.

The man wants the web site to be called the "Voice of Allah". He also wants a phone number to be placed on the page.

There are to be no strings attached to the web page. People of every faith might use the service.

During a phone conversation, I point out to Baba that there might be a number of potential problems associated with Ata's idea. For instance, there will be a lot of Muslims who might take exception with the web site's name -- Voice of Allah -- for it sounds, among other things, rather presumptuous and raises some theological problems as well.

In addition, I comment that, perhaps, Ata has not thought through the idea of putting his phone number up on the proposed web site, thereby inviting people from around the world to call him at all hours of the day and night. This might not only pose a few logistical problems, but, I remark, as well, that I wonder how good Ata's English is, not to mention other languages, in order to be able to properly understand the prayer requests which might come his way.

Baba thinks the points I am making are all valid and says he will pass my suggestions along to Ata. Baba says he will try to call in the near future.

I have moved most of my things out of Baba's house. Some of my possessions are being stored at the rural house belonging to Sima's uncle; some of them are being stored at Sima's house, in her bedroom, in places where it is not likely to be discovered by her father or mother, and the rest of my goods are being stored in some unused cupboards at the place of business which she manages for her uncle and where I am sleeping on the floor.

§

Baba encourages me to contact the Prime Minister of Malaysia, as well as a number of universities in that country. He hopes, God willing, they might become interested in some of my writings, especially the material on evolution.

§

May 1998

After a number of phone calls involving negotiations surrounding the Ata web site idea, Sima and I agree to put up a modified version of the proposed web site. Sima will pay for the Internet connection, and I agree to not only write the content and do the HTML programming for the web page, but, as well, I will serve as a sort of North American liaison in relation the web site and will pass on to Ata whatever e-mails I receive concerning his page.

When I complete writing the content pages, I forward this material to Baba for his approval. He replies that everyone seems happy with what has been said and the way things have been said.

The only thing I need now is an e-mail contact in Malaysia through which I can contact Ata or forward e-mails to him. I am told that such an e-mail should be arranged within a few days.

§

A few days later, I receive the following e-mail from Baba. It is addressed to someone else, but he has cc'd a copy to me.

My Dear Son Ayat,

Assalaam O Alaikum,

Received your mail. I feel Tariq's introduction to be virtually appropriate. I am satisfied with it. Secondly, since Allah has honored me to read Al-fatiha seventy times and pray, I am humbly thankful to Allah and have done it. Again, since Allah has honored me to pray for Malaysia and the people of Malaysia, I am thankful to Allah and I have done it.

Regarding the mosque to be frank with you, I have always wished to be able to construct such a one for the last so many years. And now God has blessed me and honored me by accepting my intention. I am thankful to Allah.

From the day I arrived in America, it has been raining day and night ever since. Dr. Tariq Knecht is my spiritual son and your spiritual brother. He is very consciously devoted in the work of our silsilah. He was given the Khilafat (Vicegerency) for North America in 1993. When I finally come away with my family to reside in Malaysia, I will come with a satisfied heart because I will be leaving behind a very loving, devoted, able, and pure, clean hearted myself in the form of Dr. Tariq Qadri, Chishti, Nizami, Sabri.

Tariq Shah has been established as the spiritual pole for North America. Spiritual pole in Sufi vocabulary is known as 'Qutb'. This does not mean he will not advance. If Allah wants, his spiritual territories can extend as far as Allah wants.

I am also there in Pakistan in the form of Sabir Shah Sabri. You have another spiritual brother who is also our Khalifa in Canada. And there the name of our form is Momin Shah Chishti, Sabri.

Now, Masha Allah you are my first mureed in Malaysia. You became my mureed in Shwawaal. In Jama Di Sani which will be six months complete, you will be honored with the Khilafat. Your Grandfather was a Wali Allah. Aside from our Khilafat (in Urdu it is known as khilafat, in English it is known as Vicegerency). So, beside our Khilafat, you shall also inherit the Wilayat of your grandfather.

Insha Allah at the opening ceremony of our silsilah in Malaysia, I pray to Allah to enable my spiritual Vicegerents Tariq Shah, Momin Shah, Sabir Shah, and some devoted mureeds to visit Malaysia so that we can all be together for as many days as possible.

Love,

Baba P.S. [This seems to be addressed to me, but I am not sure] Mansur Rahim, known as Ata had already mentioned to me in Malaysia that he had a vision telling him that if I prayed for the welfare of the Ummah, there will be peace and harmony all over the world. To tell you the truth I was not being able to get into that spiritual attitude. This is why Ata had again for the second time requested Dr. Ayat to remind me. It was only last night that I was able to. This is not for the general people. Please keep this as a record. You are allowed to show this only to your wife for now. Until when the time comes and Sarkaar will allow you to show it one and all. But, of course, you are allowed to show this to your mureeds in time to come.

Love, Baba

§

June 1998

Baba has returned from Malaysia. He says there might be a solution to my job woes and proceeds to outline the idea over the phone.

He says that all I will have to do is take orders, do e-mails, handle in-coming calls, and write some correspondence. The business involves importing various items from Malaysia and serving as a distributor here in America for those products.

I tell Baba that I am not very good at business, and, furthermore, what little I know suggests that one can lose money very easily with such a business unless one really knows what one is doing. Baba encourages me to listen to the proposal and that he is arranging for the businessman in Malaysia to call me up.

The man calls, and we discuss the idea. He says he will ship us some samples of his wares, and we can get our feet wet with these and

see how things go, and if the items don't sell, then, we can send back the goods to him.

Sima and I agree to give it a try, and a few days later, we receive a box of goods. There are a few intriguing products in the shipment, one of which is an electronic, battery-operated, hand-held tasbih which can display not only the 99 names of Allah, along with an English translation of those names, but, in addition, provides a variety of zikrs to do in conjunction with these Divine names, and is able to keep count of the number of times a given zikr is repeated.

Both Sima and I think this item has commercial possibilities, and we begin showing it to various individuals. A few people purchase the electronic tasbih.

§

There are several Muslim organizational gatherings which are occurring in some nearby cities. Sima and I decide to go to these and see if we can sell any of the goods which have been shipped, and, as well, we bring along some of my books.

We do manage to move some of the merchandise but barely enough to pay for basic expenses. In fact, when all the costs are factored in, we probably are losing money.

During a luncheon at one conference, the subject of Y2K comes up. Most people haven't heard anything about it, and of those who have, most are skeptical that it will amount to much of anything ... although many among the latter group really don't know anything about computers. There is one programmer in the group who says that the issue is being taken very seriously by one of the largest brokerage houses on Wall Street.

He describes the situation as sort of a controlled panic even though the due date is quite some time away. Time and money seem to be the big issues ... namely, whether there is sufficient time left to complete the necessary adjustments; how much money it is all going to cost, and from where is this money going to come since in most companies there are no budgetary provisions to look after the problem.

I am struck by how much the Y2K topic is rooted in faith ... not faith in God, nor faith in destiny, but faith in technology, business, and personal desires. Most of the people with whom I talk know almost nothing about the underlying technical issues, but they all speak out of faith of one kind or another, and there is almost no flexibility to explore possibilities, one way or the other, with such people.

They have made up their mind about the matter. They don't want to be confused with either facts or discussion, and they often get quite angry if talk of Y2K goes on beyond surface gloss.

Y2K has entered the realm of theology. There are the true believers, the atheists, and the agnostics, and almost all of them are whistling past the cemetery.

§

I visit Baba, and he gives me a special zikr to do. My niyat for the zikr should be that all of the reward or blessings associated with the zikr should be given to Baba's shaykh.

This niyat appeals to me. I like the idea of doing something for someone else for which there is nothing in it for me -- it kind of helps place things in an appropriate light of sincerity.

I am to do this zikr every week on a certain day. This is added to another zikr which I observe on that day ... a zikr which Baba gave to me several years before.

The new zikr is from the Qur'an. The older zikr is Persian, I believe, but I have never asked Baba for a translation of the latter, and Baba has never offered to provide me with one.

§

I feel that, perhaps, the most cost-efficient way available to us for promoting the products which are being shipped to us from Malaysia is through a web site. Sima is rather skeptical concerning the idea, but she is willing to give it a try.

I set about trying to learn as much as I can about e-commerce, HTML programming, marketing, advertising, and so on. It is a crash-course in trying to do business in a virtual world.

While I am doing this research, I also begin to think about e-publishing in relation to some of my books. This might serve as another stream of revenue.

Moreover, rather than just try to sell various commercial products I would like to develop a web page which contains material on the Sufi mystical tradition. As I continue to do my business research, I put together a simple web page on tasawwuf.

§

Sima has been urging me to get my motor vehicle license for the state. I have been driving around with my Canadian license, and, perhaps, it is time to switch over, but I am not looking forward to the driving exam.

In the meantime, after studying the rules of road handbook for the state, I take the written test. I pass easily.

§

During a phone conversation with Baba, I speak about something which has been bothering me somewhat ... although not in a big way. Shortly after he went away, I was at his house for fatiha with the rest of the family and some of the other mureeds from different places.

Siraj -- Habib's and Musa's father -- is a long time friend of Baba. The wife of Siraj, who passed away a number of years ago, had been a particularly close devotee of Baba -- moreover, on her death bed she had made Baba promise to raise Habib, who was very young at the time of her passing away. In fact, Baba often describes this woman as being more spiritual than he is, and, indeed, he has instructed me to include her among the list of awliya Allah whose names are read at fatiha.

In any event, I really don't know much about such things, but I ask Baba about a point of spiritual etiquette. As far as I know, Siraj is not Baba's Khalifah, and, yet, when Baba was physically away on his journey, Siraj, without even asking what Baba's vicegerent wanted to do, proceeded to say fatiha.

Possibly, Baba had made this arrangement at some point prior to his leaving. Quite frankly -- and I express this to Baba -- I don't really care who says fatiha, and, indeed, since my pronunciation is not all that good, I actually prefer other people to recite fatiha, but notwithstanding such considerations, would it not have been appropriate for Siraj who is not Baba's Khalifah, to ask permission to say fatiha from someone -- namely me -- who is Baba's Khalifah?

I tell Baba that I have not mentioned this matter to Siraj or anyone else -- nor do I intend to do this. I am quite content with others reciting fatiha if this is what Baba wishes, but I am concerned about the lack of adab which I believe has been shown by Siraj -- a lack of adab that has more to do with problems vis-à-vis respecting the spiritual chain of authorization that has been established by Baba and his shaykh than it is about me and whether, or not, I say fatiha.

Baba listens to my concerns. He agrees that Siraj should have sought my permission before proceeding but also indicates that people in our position need to be tolerant, patient, and forgiving in our dealings with other people, whether they are within or without the silsilah.

Toward the end of the phone conversation, I mention to Baba that I really haven't made much progress as far as any of my e-mails to the Prime Minister and universities in Malaysia are concerned. In fact, aside from an automatic e-mail response from the office of the Prime Minister, and one other e-mail saying that I should try another department within a certain university, there has been no response to my various overtures on the evolution project in which I am trying to interest different individuals.

He remarks that he finds it both surprising and saddening. He encourages me to keep trying because one never knows which door of opportunity Allah might open to one.

In closing he indicates that many of the people whom he has met in Malaysia have very strange ideas about both Islam and, especially, the Sufi path. He says I will witness this for myself if, God willing, I go there at some point in the future.

§

My younger brother, his wife and teenage daughter are coming to New York to see some Broadway plays – something they like to do every so often, especially in relation to musicals. He wants to know if I would be able to meet up with them at some point during their trip since they haven't seen me for awhile.

I don't have much money, and the logistics of the situation present some problems, but I agree to take a bus trip and meet up with them in New York. They have booked a room just up from the Port Authority.

At the appointed time, I take a bus and, eventually, this brings me to the Port Authority. I get off, find my bearings, and begin making the walk to my brother's hotel.

Surprisingly, I don't have any trouble finding the place, although I had nightmarish visions of becoming lost in the Big Apple – at heart, I am just a small town boy. I admire my brother for his willingness to take his truck and drive into downtown Manhattan, but he indicates that he has never had any problems making the trip ... although the first time they did this, there were a few adventures, apparently.

We decide to take a trip out to Battery Park on the subway. Once we get there, we take the ferry for a little ride over to Staten Island, and when we get to the other shore, we sort of come right back.

The excursion gives us all a chance to catch up a little and take in a few of the sights. We look at the Statute of Liberty from afar, and we see the World Trade Center buildings from a little closer proximity.

The trip is all too brief, but we have a good time. I have to rush off to catch my bus so we part company at the Port Authority.

§

July 1998

I am going for my driver's test today at a local state motor vehicles center. Sima 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.

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 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 which he gave me at the beginning of the exam.

§

A business friend of Sima 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. There is 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.

§

Sima, her children, and I make a trip to a theme park which is three hours away. We all have a great time, and I long for the day when we won't have to sneak away in order to do things as a family.

§

Sima wants me to get a room or an apartment. She is uncomfortable with my living conditions and the constant shell game we have to play in relation to the office floor where I am sleeping as well as with respect to my 'invisible presence' in the small town where she lives.

She takes me around to a number of places she has found through the classifieds, but none of them are very good. I don't want Sima to have to spend money on a room or apartment for me because I know she can't afford it, and, so, although I make the rounds with her, in the

end, I tell her that while I appreciate her wanting me to have something better than the present set of arrangements, the truth of the matter is that we can't afford to do anything else than what we are doing.

§

Something happens -- I'm not quite sure what it is -- and Sima tells her mother about our marriage. Her mother is upset about not having been told about Sima's actual relationship with me but agrees to not pass the information to her husband, and, in the meantime, she will use indirect methods in an effort to persuade her husband to accept the idea of a marriage between Sima and myself.

Often times, Sima's mother fixes supper for me, and Sima brings the meal to the office where I eat it. Her mother is a great cook, as Sima has been telling me all along, and, now, I am able to put Sima's claims concerning her mother's abilities in this regard to the empirical test.

§

August 1998

There is a Sufi conference taking place in Washington, D.C.. Sima and I discuss the idea of going to it and trying to sell the electronic tasbeeh, some of my books, and a few other items. We worry about the expenses associated with such a venture, but, in the end, we feel the investment might, God willing, pay off somewhere down the line.

I have been working on trying to put together some of my writing in an e-book format. I think I might have come up with a possible solution, but we have run out of time.

We load the computer equipment into the car, and, I hope to work further on this e-book project while we are in Washington. If, God willing, I were successful, then, maybe we would have some e-books to show to people who come to our table looking at some of the other things we are offering for sale.

Sima doesn't know much about computers, the Internet, or e-commerce, and she is skeptical about the e-book idea. I know more than she does with respect to these areas -- but not much more -- and while I acknowledge she might be right to express reservations concerning such possibilities, I don't believe our financial and job situation is so secure we can afford not to try to find something which might provide additional income that might enable us to have her father have a change of heart concerning our marriage and my being welcomed into her family.

§

There are quite a few Sufi shaykhs who have come to the Washington conference. I recognize -- at least by name -- a number of them, and I am sure there are many others in attendance about whom I do not know or about whom I have not heard.

Sima and I set up shop downstairs in the market area that has been set up for commercial purposes in conjunction with the conference. Books, tapes, videos, CD's, clothes, food, perfume, prayer rugs, and many other items are available through the mini-market.

Whenever I get a chance, I try to work on solving some of the problems associated with generating e-books containing different writings of mine. Every time I think I am close, I run into problems and finally give up on the idea -- at least, for the time being.

A mureed of Shaykh Shams, the friend of Sima's who performed our marriage, drops by and pays a visit. He is a cousin of Sima's, but he does not know about the relationship between Sima and myself.

Sima is nervous about his seeing us together, but she introduces him to me. He has wanted to meet me for quite some time because he has read my first book and is quite taken with it ... in fact he had been so enamored with the book that he was ready to take a trip to Canada in order to meet the author.

He says that if I wanted to speak at a mosque near where he lives, he could arrange it. The congregation is very open to a variety of ideas and issues.

He does not foresee any problems with someone giving a talk on the Sufi path. His own shaykh has spoken there on a number of occasions.

I thank him for the offer. However, I indicate I am no longer involved with giving public talks like that ... I have sort of retired.

Sima and I sell a few items but not enough to cover our expenses. She has spoken with a number of the other merchants, and, apparently, commercially speaking, no one is doing very well at the conference, even though the weekend events are very well attended by people from all over the United States and other parts of the world, as well.

§

I am having trouble with the muffler of the Sufi-mobile. It is making horrendous sounds, and I fear that sooner or later I am going to get pulled over by the police ... either city or state.

I go to a Midas Muffler shop near where Baba lives and get an estimate. The repair costs will take most of the money that I have left, but I don't see any way around getting the necessary things done.

§

We get off to a late start, but Sima, the children, and I head for the coast to enjoy a little leisure time together. By the time we get to where we want to go, it is dark. We walk along the boardwalk, do several rides with the children, eat a few things, and, finally, we take our shoes off and go to the ocean shore.

The tide is coming in and the surf is pretty strong. The night is very warm, and looking out across the ocean, things are quite dark.

We venture just a few feet into the waves. They seem to come out of nowhere.

From time to time, a big wave comes in unexpectedly. The children are both frightened and delighted at the same time.

Sima is somewhat concerned about one of her children getting carried out to sea. So, we stay fairly close to shore and keep the children close at hand, but Sima enjoys herself as well.

Later on we walk along the boardwalk. We get some ice cream cones, and, then, we ride the bumper cars. I wish we could do these sorts of things more frequently.

§

I have heard about a bookstore in lower Manhattan which sells Sufi books. I call the bookstore and ask for directions.

I put together a package of some of the books which 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 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 which 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 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.

§

September 1998

One night, I am working in Sima's office. I receive an e-mail from my younger brother.

He says he hates to have to tell me in this fashion, but our mother has passed away. She valued her independence and personal freedom a great deal, and, as a result, among other things, we all had been worried about her running into health problems while alone and unattended, and, so, I wondered about the circumstances surrounding her passing away.

I phoned my younger brother, and he brought me up to date. While recovering from one of her many medical procedures, she had been in a short-term health care facility, waiting to be released back to her apartment.

She was not alone or unattended when she died. I am grateful to God for this.

I feel badly that my mother is, finally, gone -- at least, physically. Nonetheless, my mother has been an inspiration to me because despite all of the numerous medical, financial, social, and emotional difficulties which she endured, she underwent those trials with so much nobility, dignity, and integrity ... without ever losing her faith in God or becoming jaundiced concerning the beauty of life. In addition, I am happy that my mother's suffering has come to an end.

My younger brother, Jerry, wants me to come to the funeral. However, as usual, I am broke, and I tell him this.

He says he will loan me the money for the bus, and, when, I am in Bamford, I can stay with my older brother's family. We make financial arrangements for my taking the trip.

§

My mother has outlined the program for the church service associated with her funeral. She has picked the hymns and songs she wants played, as well as the Biblical verses she would like recited.

One of the songs that is played is a composition of my mother's called Cathedrals. The church organist plays it, and I note to myself what an appropriate and wonderful eulogy it is for my mom.

I don't think I have ever heard it played so well. I tell the organist this after the service.

Near the end of the service, the woman pastor (which my mom would have loved) asks if anyone wishes to say a few words. Everyone else seems reluctant, so, I volunteer, having no idea what I will say, but feeling that something should be said.

During the brief talk, I mention various things - including how exasperating she could be at times when she became committed to some issue, cause, or problem - a comment which was met with knowing smiles and nods by a number of in attendance. Mostly, I indicate that I have learned a great deal from my mother's example, and I am proud that she is my mother and of all that she has accomplished.

A day, or so, following the funeral and burial, I make preparations for returning to my office-home. I don't know when I will see my brothers again.

§

There is another, smaller conference which is taking place in a city not too far away from where Sima lives. We can't afford a merchant's table, but a business friend of Sima who has a booth at the symposium has agreed to let us share his table with his family, and if we make any money, we can make a negotiated settlement later on.

The man's family is extremely nice and very loving. Later Sima tells me that one of the women at the table is going through terrible times because her husband, more or less, kidnapped their child when the husband returned to East Africa with them for an alleged 'visit'. The man won't even let her speak with the child by phone, but every

so often arrangements are made by certain individuals to put the woman and her son in contact with one another for a few moments.

Sima describes the woman's ordeal as pure torture. Seemingly, however, there is nothing which can be done although there are some legal procedures which are being explored.

In the meantime, the woman has returned to school. She is trying to build a new life for herself and hopes, God willing, that sometime in the future she might be reunited with her son.

§

October 1998

The businessman in Malaysia with whom we have been trying to work is pressuring us to accept another package of 'samples' which consist of additional products that he wishes us to see if we can find a market for. He wants either the package of samples sent back to him or he would like payment for those samples within 30 days.

We -- or, more specifically I -- try to explain to the man some of our difficulties. We indicate that the time period is too short to have any realistic chance of finding a market for the items, and, furthermore, we feel the profit margin which he is offering us is too small.

Sima is absorbing most of the financial risks and expenses. In general, she is making some money for the guy in Malaysia, but we are not able to do much more than pay for past shipments with nothing to show for it because whatever profits we are making are not sufficient to cover our expenses.

The man goes into a diatribe about imperialistic America, the evils of capitalism, and exchange problems between the ringette and the American dollar. He is not receptive to anything we have to say, nor is he willing to try to work out any sort of deal which might be to both of our commercial advantages.

I had made several suggestions to the man earlier about securing written distribution rights for North America in relation to the

electronic tasbih. I also had asked the man to inquire whether certain modifications could be introduced into this product in the next generation of software.

In each instance, we never seem to get any straight answers. More than once, I have the distinct impression we are dealing with different people using the same name.

I explain all of this to Baba in a long e-mail. When I speak with him again by phone, he says he read my e-mail during the air flight back from Malaysia and agreed with most of the points I had made.

He describes the person in Malaysia with whom we are trying to do business as being a very emotional and somewhat temperamental man. He says that, sometimes, when the man gets too emotionally distraught about things, his wife or another person has been corresponding with me.

§

I am informed by the man in Malaysia that I will be getting a call from a businessman in the States who is seeking bids on a contract for supplying his company with plastic bags. The call comes and I take down all of the specifications.

The US businessman tells me the offer which is already on the table from the Chinese with respect to filling the proposed contract. I know there is no way the Malaysian people are going to be able to compete with the Chinese tender, but, nevertheless, I pass the specifications on to our contact in Malaysia who knows a manufacturer there who wishes to make a bid.

§

Sima and I both agree that the import business is not working out. Perhaps, if the fellow in Malaysia were a bit more flexible about certain issues -- which he is not -- and, perhaps, if I were any good at business -- which I am not -- or if I were a good sales person -- which I am not -- then, we might try to stick with the import idea a bit longer.

We decide to inform the person in Malaysia of our decision. We tell him that we will ship his samples back as soon as we can, but, quite frankly, we don't have the money to do this right now.

§

Over the last six months, or so, several people have been hired and let go at Sima's place of business. She manages the office, and she is the one who does the hiring and firing.

I have often wondered why she has never offered me a job in her office. I wouldn't mind the fact that she would be my boss and would have to tell me what to do because she is very competent at what she does and, almost single-handedly, she has turned her uncle's billing operation around to being a functioning, efficient entity.

Moreover, neither the clerical nature of the work nor the low pay would bother me. I have done this sort of thing before. Something is better than nothing.

Notwithstanding a few minor, brief exceptions, almost all of the nearly 50 jobs which I have had in my life are low-paying, marginal, working-class sorts of positions. Beggars can't be choosy, but, for various reasons, the obvious seems to have eluded Sima ... she would like me to get a job in order to get our marital situation straightened out, but there have been jobs available in her office which she has given to strangers.

I have never asked her why she didn't offer me a position. On occasion, she does drop hints that she feels I ought to have a position which carries some prestige with it ... or, at least, something on a par with my educational background, and she also has a cultural thing going about the 'proper' roles of husbands, wives, and so on.

However, I have never raised this issue with her and don't intend to. Perhaps, she has thought about the possibility and, for whatever reason, just feels it won't work.

§

On a number of occasions, I speak to Baba about the Y2K controversy. I tell him that I really don't know what, if anything, is going to happen when the time finally arrives for the 0s and 1s to collide with destiny, but I feel we ought to be prudent, without going overboard, and, perhaps, try to do whatever we can to provide some maneuvering room for people in the silsilah so that we can go in whatever direction might be indicated by events.

I ask Baba's permission to speak with Shaykh Shams about whether there might be ways for our two silsilah's to collaborate in relation to making some preparations, of a modest sort, with respect to the Y2K problem. Baba says he thinks my getting together with Shaykh Shams might be a good idea and asks me to keep him (Baba) posted on what happens with the meeting which I am proposing.

I call Shaykh Shams and tell him that I would like to speak with him. He fixes a time, and I make the journey to his house.

The conversation doesn't last very long. He is polite, but it is clear he doesn't think the Y2K problem will amount to much and believes there is nothing for which to prepare.

Shaykh Shams is well-versed in a variety of technical issues. However, his main argument concerning Y2K is he believes technology is too well-established and modernized for it to just fall apart.

I play devil's advocate and throw out various possibilities. His replies suggest that, despite his technical proficiency in some areas, he really doesn't seem to know all that much about computers or the actual guts of the potential Y2K problem.

Shaykh Shams might be right about technology not falling apart, but his position appears not to be based on having thought much about the Y2K issue, but, rather, it is rooted in the fact that the shaykh has faith in technology. He doesn't foresee any problems, and, as far as he is concerned, that is the end of the matter, and he does not want to discuss the topic any further ... this is his position despite the fact that some people who know a lot more about the situation than either of us are spending millions of dollars trying to become Y2K compliant.

November 1998

The uncle of Sima who had been one of the witnesses at our wedding has a job possibility that he wishes to discuss with me. He wants me to meet with himself and another man at a certain restaurant in another city.

Sima accompanies me. The other man who is to join us is late, so, we begin the job-related discussion without him.

Sima's uncle is beating all around the bush. He doesn't tell me what the job involves, but he asks me whether I would be willing to take some courses, because in his line of work a person cannot even answer the phone without proper certification.

I tell him that, yes, I am willing to take some courses. But, he continues to be vague about what the job is, or where it is, or how much it would pay, or when it would begin.

At a certain point during the conversation, he makes a disparaging remark about Sima and myself and whether, or not, it was appropriate for us to get married -- the same marriage for which he served as a witness. He goes on to editorialize about the problem with secret marriages ... even though he is married to another women which almost no one knows about, including his first wife, although many people suspect that such might be the case.

I get very annoyed with him and tell him that I do not appreciate the things he is saying, for they are insulting not only to me but, as well, to my wife, his niece. I inform him that if he feels this way about things, then, he really shouldn't have offered to serve as a witness to the marriage.

Further words are exchanged. The temperature of the exchange just begins to cool down when the other fellow who was to have been part of the discussion shows up.

The new person is the same person whom Baba had introduced me to several years before and who, then, seemed ready to subsidize a few writing and educational projects of mine until, at the last moment, and to the surprise of both Baba and me, he backed out. I greet him, and I can tell by the way that he assesses the table that he guesses that the discussion has not gone well.

I thank Sima's uncle for the meal, and I indicate to Sima that it is time to depart. I leave her uncle and his newly arrived friend to discuss the situation themselves.

§

I have been working on the Internet quite a lot -- both during the night as well as in the day time -- trying to get something going with e-commerce. Sima is out of her office quite a lot, running office-related errands of one kind or another, or doing various sorts of work for her uncle, and, consequently, Sima's office is free.

There are five to six people working in the office, and only two know about the true nature of my relationship with Sima. However, they have come to accept my presence there ... especially, since most of the time, I am in Sima's office -- out of sight and out of mind -- working with Sima's computer and the Internet.

Sima always has the fear that either her uncle or his accountant is going to show up at the office while I am there. I don't know if there would have been a problem if either of these things were to have happened, but it is uncharted territory, and Sima doesn't want to visit that possibility quite yet.

On one occasion when I am working in Sima's office while Sima is present, she suddenly comes into the office, tells me to stay where I am and shuts the door to the office. 15-20 minutes later, she returns with a sheepish grin on her face.

Her uncle had showed up at the office without warning. Sima had managed to keep him out of the room where I am working, while she handles the purpose of his visit.

On another occasion, the accountant shows up unannounced. There is some sort of internecine battle going on between Sima's uncle and his accountant, and, although Sima only alludes to things, the two men seem to be engaged in something of a Mexican stand-off where they each have 'things' -- of an unspecified nature -- on one another, and have learned to accommodate -- although rather uneasily at times -- to each other's presence in the company.

Sima is not in the office when the accountant shows up unexpectedly. She has feared this scenario for quite some time, and she has described the accountant as being a very suspicious, inquisitive type of person.

The man walks into Sima's office where I am working. For some reason, I know who he is right away, and, then, he introduces himself by name, and this confirms what I already have intuited.

I don't identify myself but am pleasant. I engage him in a bit of chit chat, and, then, he leaves, none the wiser.

Later, Sima tells me that the accountant thought I was a computer repair guy. When he was in the office with me, I didn't do anything to cause him to reassess his belief.

I never lied to the man. I just didn't tell him who I was or what I was doing there, and he never bothered to ask me ... the assumptions which people make sometimes can serve as camouflage which permits one to hide in plain sight.

§

There is a gathering, of sorts, at Baba's house. Momin is there, as well as me and a number of other individuals.

Both Momin and I are given a written version of something which had been proclaimed nearly two years earlier. It is the Khilafat Nama. 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 Tariq Knecht 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. Shah Muin-ul Iqlas. [i.e., 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. Momin 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 rising to the occasion.

§

Following the presentation of the Khilafat Nama, Baba wants me to initiate a nine year old boy with Down's Syndrome, who is the son of a woman who has been friendly with Baba for many years and who is interested in things mystical. Apparently, Baba has received the mother's permission for this, and the boy, himself, seems to want to take ba'yat ... although how much he understands about the process is uncertain ... but, then, I suppose the same could be said of many people -- even those who are adults and who do not have Down's Syndrome.

Baba tells me to take the youngster in the next room and have him say Shahadah -- the bearing of witness. I do this and the boy -- although clearly willing and trying -- is having difficulty repeating the Arabic words ... something with which I identify and for which I have considerable empathy.

Even when I say a short phrase, the boy starts out well but, then, kind of invents some sounds to 'complete' the remainder of the phrase. We do this a number of times, and in each instance, the result is the same.

The boy doesn't lose interest in what is going on, and every time I ask him to repeat something, he tries. I am impressed with his perseverance and focus, and I am dismayed with my inability to find a way to help him.

Finally, I repeat the Shahadah one syllable at a time and ask him to follow along with me. He is successful the first time we try this method.

Afterwards, we join the rest of the group and Baba begins to talk. At some point during the discussion, the young boy lies down on my lap and falls asleep while I am sitting on the floor. He remains there throughout the discussion.

Although a point comes when my legs are aching with the weight of his body on me, I do not wish to wake him. Eventually, a natural break comes when the mother and the boy must leave Baba's place and go to their home.

§

December 1998

On the way back to Baba's house, just before going on to the Interstate, the engine of the Sufi-mobile begins to smoke and catch fire. I call Sima at her office, and she arranges to have the car towed to someone she knows who is Muslim and runs an auto repair shop.

§

Sima books me into a near-by motel for a few days around Christmas. She worries about my continuing to sleep on the floor in her office, especially since I am just beginning to get over a severe respiratory infection of some sort, and, due to my lack of health insurance, I really have not been able to go to a doctor and have it properly monitored and/or treated.

In addition, she wants to have a sort of a small exchange of presents for Christmas. She and the children have gotten me some things, and the children are excited about what they have selected for me.

I have zero money to purchase any presents, and, consequently, I feel badly about not being able to reciprocate. Sima has purchased some things for the kids and written both of our names on the tags.

§

Sima is very much impressed with Baba as a Sufi shaykh, but she is not sure she wants to take initiation with him. She is leaning toward taking initiation with Shaykh Shams ... the individual who officiated at our wedding.

I have spoken with Baba about this issue on several prior occasions. He says he does not have any problem with Sima being in another silsilah and that he has known about a number of instances where husband and wife belong to two different silsilahs, and, yet, things work out quite well.

However, he does worry sometimes. Shaykh Shams has been having Sima do a number of things for him and his silsilah, and Baba hopes that her commitment to the other silsilah will not take away from her support of my commitment to our silsilah, because, among other things, she will be the mother of my mureeds, and there are various responsibilities which go along with that.

On a number of occasions, Shaykh Shams has expressed an interest in meeting with Baba. Baba says that, maybe, such a meeting might be possible sometime in the future, but he continues to deflect the interest every time either I or Sima raise the issue, and one of these occasions, he confides in me that he is not happy about the way he feels Shaykh Shams received and interacted with me with respect to the Y2K issue, and this is part of his reason for not wishing to meet with him.

§

January 1999

There is an Imam at a local mosque that Sima has come to know. The man is a Sufi, and Sima has been telling him about me and vice versa.

She arranges for us to meet one night after Isha (late evening prayers). Although his English is limited, we manage to exchange a few pleasantries and a little information about this and that.

After we leave, Sima relates to me that the Imam told her he is surprised about some aspect of our meeting. He tells her, apparently, that although he knows I am Sufi, he wasn't expecting to meet with someone so nice.

I smile and indicate to Sima that I enjoyed the meeting as well. Silently, I attribute the Imam's remarks to language problems and Sufi hospitality.

§

After a number of delays, I have gotten the Sufi-mobile back from Sima's mechanic friend. I ask Sima about the cost, and she says she has reached some sort of an accommodation with her friend and refuses to discuss the details with me.

§

Thu, 07 Jan 99 22:19PM PST (e-mail)

Dear son,

Tariq Shah,

May ALLAH, always surround you with the NOOR of the love of HIS BELOVED, Rasool ALLAH (Peace be upon him) and may HE plant, HIS pleasure and approval, in your heart.

How are you feeling now? I know how tired one feels with this flu. How are Sima and the children? May ALLAH in HIS MERCY, bring her very close to you. May ALLAH in HIS DIVINE MERCY, bring about a change, for the best, in the hearts of her parents. ALLAHOMMA AAMEEN.

Have you heard, that Momin and Sairah are preparing for Haj. I have suggested to Momin, to proceed to Ajmer shareef, straight after performing Haj. I have even advised him, to first present himself and

Sairah in Medina. Then proceed, to Makkah. Before leaving, they should again, present themselves, in Medina.

This will be like, reading Darood Shareef before and after Dua. MASHA ALLAH, he has decided to do just that.

I know that you will not admit, how uncomfortable you really are in living, with such abnormal circumstances, but please do let me know, what I could do, in my physical state, to ease, your uneasiness.

I love you. You are an example of, sincerity and devotion, for thousands and more who, INSHA ALLAH, will smell the fragrance, of the DIVINE cooking, in the person of, Tariq Shah and present themselves.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

Somewhat unexpectedly, I receive an e-mail from Momin, Baba's Canadian Khalifah. It concerns details about the formalization of a new organization.

Wed, 13 Jan 1999 11:57:53-0500(e-mail)

Here are the documents that were finalized under guidance from Baba. They have been notarized yesterday. Because of the difficulty of getting your signature in front of the Notary Public and the urgency to produce the documents, we added the signature of our friend, Jim Hunter, and mentioned your name in the text.

The Circle of Trans-personal Psychology is registered. Bilal is preparing a brochure for potential members.

I have had a heart to heart talk with Bilal to help him realize the errors he has made and how he could make amends. I am not at all sure that he is understanding or accepting what he is being told. I am really afraid for him. Please pray that he comes back to and follows the Path.

We celebrated the Urs of Hazrat Ali Rehmatullah Alae at the house of Salih and Maryam Chishti. Their daughters, Uzma, Samia, Alia and Asimah were there. Alhamdulillah it was a blessed occasion.

Mansur is trying hard to fast but having difficulty with the cigarettes. He is using the instruction book you wrote when you stayed here in order to try to learn his prayers. Please pray that he succeeds.

Sairah is well. She is reading *Ihyaul Illum* by Imam Ghazali and thoroughly enjoying it. Hopefully it is a beginning.

I hope all is well with you. Sairah and I think of you often with much love and best wishes,

Momin.

§

[The following comes as an attachment to Momin's e-mail to me]

Subject: The Documents January 11, 1999

To whom it may concern:

This to certify that the Sufi House of Gnosis, previously run as a sole proprietorship by Dr. David Knecht, was incorporated as a non-profit organization on November 23, 1995 (Corporation no. 1168132) with the following objectives:

To make Sufi spiritual teachings accessible to the general public in North America through: individual instruction, personal counseling, and public education.

To help the needy by providing food, clothing, shelter and gifts of money.

To advance spiritual sciences and culture directly related to the Sufi path, through research and through production of original Sufi poetry and Sufi music for the devotees.

The Sufi House of Gnosis has been operating in accordance with its objectives and on a continual basis since its creation and offering spiritual guidance to its devotees.

On November 16, 1998, the Sufi House of Gnosis registered The Circle of Trans-Personal Psychology as a business name (Registration no. 992658264) in order to serve the varied needs of people who are not devotees of the Sufi House of Gnosis.

Reverend Iqlas (Azgar Muin-ul Iqlas, Ph.D.), who is a Spiritual Scholar, has been employed as a teacher and guide by both the above organizations. Confirmed by:

Dr. Momin Behani
(President, Sufi House of Gnosis)

James R.
Hunter (Treasurer, Sufi House of Gnosis)

§

[A further document is attached to the e-mail from Momin]

To whom it may concern:

Reverend Iqlas (Azgar Muin-ul Iqlas, Ph.D.) is a Spiritual Scholar in the Sufi tradition. He travels throughout the World serving people in need of spiritual guidance. Being under an Oath of Poverty and having no income, his devotees, in many countries, jointly pay for his travel and basic financial needs whenever they require him to travel.

In Canada, Reverend Iqlas has been providing guidance to his devotees and to the Sufi House of Gnosis, a non-profit organization (incorporation no. 1168132 November 23 1995) which was previously a sole proprietorship run by Dr. David Knecht. More recently he has also been providing guidance to the members of The Circle of Trans-personal Psychology, registered as a business name of the Sufi House of Gnosis, (Registration no. 992658264, November 16, 1998). Reverend Iqlas has been employed as a teacher and guide by both of the above organizations. His travel expenses and basic financial needs

in Canada are met jointly by the devotees of the Sufi House of Gnosis and the members of The Circle of Trans-personal Psychology, on an ‘as needs’ basis.

It is against Reverend Iqbal’s principles to be a burden on the state which means that he does not believe in accepting social welfare.

Confirmed by:

Dr. Momin Behani
(President, Sufi House of Gnosis)

James R.
Hunter (Treasurer, Sufi House of Gnosis)

§

February 1999

Baba asks me to get in touch with one of the people at the Ashram. He seems to recall from an earlier conversation with this person that the individual knows someone who can dig wells.

Although Baba is uncertain whether, or not, there will be any problems related to Y2K, he feels being self-sufficient with respect to a supply of water is a good idea since it might come in handy in other kinds of emergency situations even if Y2K never occurs.

I speak to the person by phone, and, he says that he doesn’t have the well-drilling material at hand, but, he will pass the information onto me as soon as he can.

§

Wed, 03 Feb 1999 22:35:44-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

We know of a Bert (?) who is the brother-in-law of Trent Charles at 643-5836, who owns a hydraulics company that drills wells. Call Trent and he'll connect you. (Trent did work on our house and we have become friends.)

All the best. Jeff

I forward the foregoing e-mail attachments to Baba.

§

On the way back to Baba's house from Sima's office, 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 next to Baba's driveway. 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 have been informed by someone who lives in Baba's house 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. Sima's uncle -- the same one who served as a witness at our wedding and with whom I recently had a bit of a verbal dust up -- kindly has offered to lend us a van to tide us over while I am without a 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 to see Baba.

When I leave it is night time. 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 which comes along. The situation is becoming desperate, when, finally, an exit appears which 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.

§

Baba tells me the family in Jefferson has had a lot of problems with the landlord in relation to their having made inquiries about whether, or not, they could get permission to drill a well on the property. When the landlord asks why, they indicate it would be as a precaution for emergencies, as well as the possibility that if some Y2K scenarios prove accurate, there could be water pumping problems in certain areas as a result of embedded computer chip malfunctions.

Apparently, with the mention of Y2K, the landlord goes ballistic. Among other things, the landlord accuses Baba and the rest of the family of being terrorists.

§

Sima tells me that her uncle would like to deposit some money in my bank account in order to help us out a little. I am thankful and note how strange it is for a man who is not a big fan of the Sufi tradition -- although he does have a certain amount of respect for it -- and with whom I have had some past disagreements, should be the one person in Sima's family who keeps trying to help me out.

§

I request Baba to send me the phone number of an Australian woman whom he met in India. Baba wants me to contact her to discuss various possibilities in relation to the Sufi path and spiritual activities.

§

Baba discusses an idea with me concerning the possibility of my approaching some of the administrative leaders he knows at the Ashram and asking if they would be willing to offer me a room for a

time. In exchange, I could speak at the Ashram and serve as something of a consultant.

He is raising the issue for several reasons. First, he would like to see me have a place of my own and not have to sleep on the floor of Sima's office. Secondly, he is thinking about his promise to the Guru before the latter passed away in relation to the idea that Baba would try to help the people at the Ashram.

I tell Baba that I would be very uncomfortable doing this. Being asked is one thing, but, more or less, begging at their door, is quite another matter.

§

Sun, 21 Feb 1999 12:59:31-0500 (EST) (e-mail)

Dear son Tariq,

Assalamo alaikum. I have tired myself searching for the Phone no. of the Australian lady, yet no result. So I decided to wait.

I am sure just like many times before, when I am not searching for anything, things come out from such nooks and crannies where I am sure to have looked before.

Regarding "All my children" It is a very good format, and I am sure much good can be done with it. INSHA ALLAH , we can discuss it and go ahead with it, but sometimes I wonder. Will all of this hard work which you have already put, and continue to, just be available for a few more months, resulting in the "Technological Crash"

I shudder at the thought of it. Then one never knows, ALLAH in HIS DIVINE MERCY, may prolong the waiting, or even make it happen and save those whom HE knows to be his own, like he saved, Hazrath Ibraheem (Abraham) peace be upon him, and he saved Hazrath Lut (Lot) peace be upon him. Also remember Hazrath Nuh (Noah) peace be upon him, and those who listened to his call.

They who shun you when you call them to do something, anything to save themselves, do not understand that they would shun Nuh (peace be upon him) if they were in his time.

By the way, the mureeds in Karachi are looking into this matter of drilling some wells as precaution with respect to Y2K, etc.

LOVE AND DUA, BABA

§

March 1999

Things are not going well between Sima and me. There are too many pressures, financially, socially and logistically, which are weighing down upon us.

Once again, I discuss the situation with Baba. He tells me he has had two spiritual guides in his life and that one of them would have handled this situation by meeting with Sima's father and asking why some sort of accommodation couldn't be worked out so that I could live with the family as a legitimate part of that family while I tried to sort things out financially and otherwise ... after all, how much space does it take to have a husband be able to be with his wife, and how much extra food is actually consumed.

The other shaykh -- his present one -- however, would have approached things differently. He would have just been patient and let God dictate the course of action which is to be taken.

Baba further informs me that his shaykh has indicated to him that I should go live near my brothers. He tells me there is a big, open field near where I am to settle down.

For a whole variety of reasons, I am not keen on this idea. Nevertheless, under the circumstances, this might be the best thing for me to do, and, consequently, I begin to make preparations for the journey.

Sima is going to loan me the use of her car. When I get settled, I will return it to her, and, then, take the bus back to wherever it is that I am settled into.

Sima and I discuss different scenarios. We are not happy about the prospect, and we do not wish to divorce, but we both feel that, maybe, something, job-wise might happen by my returning to the state where I grew up, and that through such a possibility we might be able to turn around the rest of our marital problems.

§

April 1999

I make the trip to Sutton, where a university is located. I have enough money (which Sima's uncle earlier had deposited into my bank account) to last for three months, or so, and I am hoping to get a job of some sort through that institution of higher learning -- or, perhaps, through one of the other educational facilities in the region -- before my money runs out.

For a few days, I stay at a local motel. I check the classifieds for apartments in the area.

I select a couple of possibilities and phone for an appointment. One of these -- a furnished apartment -- pans out, and the landlord is a professor of psychology at one of the colleges in Bamford.

While we are going through the lease paperwork, I inquire about work possibilities in his department. I tell him about my educational background and teaching experience.

He appears interested and tells me to send an application. He gives me an address and a person to whom I should send the material.

Not too far away from my new apartment, there is a large, secluded field. Although Baba said the place where I would settle down would have such a landmark nearby, I forgot all about it until after I signed the lease for the apartment.

§

After settling in, I proceed to take Sima's car back to her. On the afternoon prior to my bus departure back to Sutton, Sima takes me to a store where she insists on buying a number of Y2K-related items.

At a clothing store near the bus depot, she buys me several shirts. I don't want all of these things, but I don't know how to refuse without hurting Sima's feelings.

§

[Before I leave, I send the following e-mail]

May 2 99 17:21:18 EST (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I now know the secret of why you have been advised to keep away from objects with a certain color by your shaykh. You already celebrate two birthdays a year [which Baba's shaykh had sort of instigated], and if you were to be near to such objects (or vice versa), the rate of your birthdays would accelerate in direct proportion to the intensity, saturation and hue of these objects relative to the problematic color.

Undoubtedly, somewhere along the path of your life you came into contact with such an object and from that time on, you have had two birthdays a year. It is either this, or it is that Allah wishes us all to remember at least twice a year -- preferably more -- what a great blessing it is to have you as a friend and guide.

Happy birthday!

Love,

Tariq

§

[A little later, I receive the following e-mail]

3 May 99 20:43:31 BGT (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum. Let me give you a surprise! I am at the moment in Singapore. INSHA ALLAH I may be back in a few weeks. It is not too easy for me to use other computers, first because I am not comfortable with other systems. By the time I get used to the system here, I should be on my way back. I miss you very much. I will still try to check the mails to the best of my efforts.

Thank you for remembering my unusual birthday, and thank you for your kind and loving feelings regarding our Nisbath. May you be successful with all your endeavors to serve the Silsila, AMEEN.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

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 Trivial Pursuit. I really don't play the game at all 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.

On the way back to Sutton, it is night time 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 which 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 which 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 night time, I enjoy the anonymity of tossing out answers into the darkness along with the mystery which 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.

§

Once back in Sutton, I begin to look for work. I apply for a variety of jobs at the state university. I also apply to several institutions of higher learning in Bamford, including both a theological seminary, as well as the place where my landlord teachers.

None of these possibilities work out. In the meantime, I continue to stalk the Internet hoping to find a way to make some money through e-commerce.

§

June 1999

My older brother has thrown some odd jobs my way. I really would prefer to just help him out, but he insists on paying.

Part of his insistence is probably due to the idea that he doesn't like to feel he is in anybody's debt. But, quite likely, part of his insistence is that he suspects -- correctly -- that I don't have much money, and he is trying to help me by offering some work in exchange for money. In either case, he is very generous (perhaps overly so) with his payments.

§

July 1999

My older brother has a clerical position available in his office. He asks me if I am interested in the job.

Since I am pretty much devoid of money, I am definitely interested. Consequently, I go to work for my brother.

As it turns out, there is a bus service which links a number of the surrounding communities. One of the routes passes right by the street where I live and drops me off at a bus depot which is within walking distance of my brother's office.

§

Sima and I have been in touch via phone from time to time. Sometimes I call her, and sometimes she calls me.

The talks are mostly about how everyone is feeling and getting caught up on the minutiae of one another's life. We rarely venture into sensitive conflict-ridden areas.

§

August 1999

I decide to give a talk on the Sufi path at a library in Bamford. I run the idea past Baba and he approves.

I advertise according to my means -- which are limited. About ten people show up for the talk and discussion.

At the end of the evening, I give everyone who attends the talk a copy of my book. I explain to them -- as I have in most other similar situations -- that they should not feel obligated to purchase the book.

If they like the book and can afford to pay, then, they may do so if they wish, and I tell them the price of the book. If they don't like the book, they can return it to me or pass it on to someone else. Or, if they

want, they might consider the book as a gift, and then, they are free to do whatever they like with it.

Finally, I pass out a sheet of paper and indicate that if they would like to be informed about future talks, or if they are interested in participating in a fatiha and/or zikr session, then, please give their name, address, and phone number. Most of the people there fill out their information on the sheet.

§

September 1999

I take a trip to visit with Sima and the children. It is good to see them, but nothing much gets settled between their mother and me with respect to the marriage.

§

Sat, 11 Sep 1999 09:54:38-0400 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Just when you thought it was safe to come back into the waters of North America, one great white shark, or another, is populating the waters near your shores and creating problems for you. In any case, I had a dream the other day, and I thought I would relate it to you since I seem to dream so infrequently -- at least ones that I remember -- these days.

In the present dream, there is some event which is being celebrated in what seems to be a huge hotel. In one of the rooms of this hotel, my shaykh, Professor Irfan, is presiding over a fatiha which is going to take place soon, but which has not, yet, started.

Apparently, Professor Irfan is visiting whatever location at which the fatiha is being held. However, he has some members of his family

with him -- most, notably, his wife Nasreen Apa and his daughter Sena. I seem to have a sense that Hal is present as well.

We are waiting for fatiha to begin, and I decide that I should renew my wuzu (ritual ablution) and, therefore, leave the room. After performing wuzu and going back to the room where fatiha is to be held, there seems to be some kind of mess outside that room, and I began to set about trying to clean it up.

At some point, Sena comes out and says her father is waiting for me and wants to start fatiha. Just prior to her coming out, I thought I had heard fatiha begin with a seeking of protection from the shaytan (satanic forces).

I go back into the room and fatiha has not, yet, begun. I apologize to Professor Irfan for my tardiness, and I might have tried to give a brief explanation of what I had been doing. Professor Irfan's response is terse or brief and appears to be said in a way that indicates he is not happy with the answer or is a little annoyed, or, perhaps, exasperated with me.

The next thing I remember is that everyone is standing after the fatiha has finished. Professor Irfan is standing in front of me and is blowing on me.

Following this, the next scene is taking place outside the hotel. Professor Irfan is going somewhere with, I believe, some of, or, maybe, all of, the other people of fatiha.

For whatever reason -- I don't think it is due to my choice -- I am supposed to go somewhere else. I find myself going to the other side of the street and away from the hotel to the right, some distance down the road but still within sight of the lights of the hotel. It is night time.

I am waiting -- apparently -- for a bus which is to take me in either the opposite direction of Professor Irfan, or maybe just in another direction or a different direction. I am not sure.

I wait for quite a long time for the bus to come. The place where I am waiting is very dark and no one else is around. For some reason, I have a feeling that I am in Boston, Massachusetts, near Boston University in the Back Bay area of the city.

I begin to wonder if the bus is actually going to come, or whether I should be where I am, or whether I should have been going with Professor Irfan. Eventually, I walk back to the hotel.

As I am walking back to the hotel, a bus comes along the road in the opposite direction from the one for which I have been waiting. The thought goes through me that this bus is not the one for which Professor Irfan is either waiting or going to take.

When I reach the hotel, Professor Irfan is nowhere to be found. The hotel is extremely crowded, and there are many people there who are wearing masks -- the one mask I seem to remember is someone wearing a dog's mask or an animal mask of some kind ... one of those big rubber ones which fits over the entire head of a person.

I see a worker at the hotel that I have met somewhere before. I say hello and he acknowledges with a sort of brief knowing smile of remembering me from previously. We exchange a few pleasantries, and, then, I move on.

I continue looking around the hotel but see no one I know. There is a great deal of activity going on.

I go up to the next floor and, once again, I see no one I know or recognize. There seems to be various kinds of parties taking place on this floor.

I am thinking about trying to see if I can find Hal's room and ask him a few questions. I finally decide against this, and the dream seems to end at this point.

Please give my Salaams to all the people of fatiha. Love Tariq.

§

Sun, 12 Sep 1999 11:43(e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum. Many a time, you have informed me of your thoughts, and some of your rare dreams, and in each one, I have somehow found my experiences repeated through you. This very meaningful dream of yours also reminds me of a time when such dreams had made me wonder, if there is anything I should be doing

which I am not doing. So one day I asked my Shaikh. He said that there are so many questions in a sincere mureeds heart which he tries his best to sort out by asking his Shaikh, except a few which he himself might feel but not understand. These are the ones which sometime or other come to him in forms of dreams. When this happens then the Shaikh tells the mureed that he has already been given the answers through the strongest assurance which results from Nisbath. What Sarkar had meant was that this happens only due to occasional clearing of data in our subconscious, which is automatic by nature. This does not happen due to any weakness on the part of the mureed.

One more incident which I want to share with you regarding my lack of knowledge which made me sad, and then which, to my good fortune, my Shaikh so clearly transformed depression into joy. It so happened that there was a dream in which it was felt that the Shaikh was upset. After about ten days, when I was sitting before him, I was asked as to why I seemed depressed. When I told him about the dream, he smiled and informed me that there was a time when he was upset, but I was having very spiritual dreams, which had made me happy. This time he was very happy with me, yet it's in my dream that he is not. Actually what happens is that we habitually judge ourselves and make a decision. It is that which we decide about ourselves that we misunderstand as coming from the Shaikh. What really happened was that on several issues I found myself wanting. I should have cleared it up by asking him if my findings were correct, and he would have lightened the burden of doubt by letting me know that he is very happy and satisfied with me.

Tariq Shah Baba, what I am trying to say is that we are very satisfied and happy with you. May ALLAH'S BLESSINGS and GRACE be your strength and courage in all matters of life, ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN.

LOVE AND DUA, BABA

§

Sat, 11 Sep 1999 09:54:09-0400 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I don't know if Barry has been able to get in touch with you concerning Alice and Ken, but Alice had asked Barry to do this on several occasions. I'm not exactly sure what any of us can do since Ken seems intent on destroying himself in one way or another as well as being relatively indifferent to the difficulty and pain he is creating for others, especially Alice.

In any event, the most recent turn of events is that after the latest cycle of Ken running off to another woman, drinking himself into oblivion, and, eventually, returning to Alice after some months away, Ken came back this time in very bad physical shape. He spent quite a lot of time in the hospital emergency room to bring him back to a relatively stable condition, but, he now has the shakes on a fairly regular basis and, apparently, has a bad headache a lot of time, plus severe pain in one of his eyes.

Alice e-mailed me the other day and indicated they were planning to take a week to ten day trip to British Columbia where one of Alice's sons lives. She was asking me if, under the circumstances, taking the trip is a good idea.

Ken does not get on well with Alice's sons and, of course, they don't think much of him because of the way he has treated their mother. In addition, due to a variety of reasons, Ken is consumed with jealousy in relation to the son they are planning to visit.

I have had many conversations with Alice on the phone concerning the twists and turns of her relationship with Ken. Almost invariably, these conversations only take place when Ken has disappeared for some given length of time.

Alice seems fairly clear in her own mind that, no matter what, she is prepared to accept Ken back after his ventures away from home. She has been through this cycle more times than any of us care to remember, and she seems to understand that whenever Ken comes back this is, simultaneously, his first step toward leaving again.

She has resigned herself to accepting this. However, one of the primary things that has helped her to deal with the situation is the zikr which you gave her to recite.

She is very, very regular with this. Moreover, by her own admission, she feels that at least one of the benefits of the zikr is the

way she has been helped -- within certain limits -- to emotionally distance herself from her whole relationship with Ken and not be as obsessive about it as she used to be.

In addition, Alice has been saying prayers a couple of times a day. Moreover, whenever circumstances permit, she has been a regular participant at fatiha.

One feeling which I have had concerning the trip is, maybe, they should take the risk and just do it despite all of the problems -- potential and actual. I think getting out of the city for awhile -- and away from their usual routines and habits -- might be good for everyone. Even if the time spent with Alice's son is stress-laden, the drive to, and from, British Columbia might be very nice and relaxing since they will be going through some beautiful country.

In addition, since Alice is resigned to accept the cycle through which things go, I feel she shouldn't put her life on hold any more than it already is with respect to Ken. While I certainly am not advocating indifference to Ken's condition, I don't think she should have to walk around on egg shells all the time either.

She should try to be accommodating with Ken up to a point but at some juncture, for her own sanity and sense of dignity, she has to let the cards fall where they may. If this leads to Ken's departure, well, so be it, and this too -- given their history -- she should realize is also the first step Ken will take that, eventually, will lead him back to Alice.

For a long time Ken has been very lucky -- physically speaking -- because he had gotten away with no serious -- at least observable ones -- health problems in conjunction with his drinking. This all finally might have changed with the latest round of abusing himself.

If his present physical ill-health is not a passing thing, then this trip to British Columbia also might be one of the last opportunities which Alice and Ken have to do something like this. It might be nice if they had at least the chance for a few pleasant memories to mix in with all of the nightmarish ones they have had and might have more of very soon if Ken's physical condition deteriorates even more -- and, as it is, his doctors don't know how he has gotten away without serious health repercussions for so long.

Maybe you already have communicated with Alice directly or indirectly through Barry. If so, then you already might be familiar with the foregoing, and you also might have passed on whatever you wished to concerning Alice and Ken. If not, then you will have been brought up to date on the situation in a worldly sort of way -- although I am sure you have your own, superior ways of keeping abreast of these events.

I am sending another e-mail on a separate matter since the present e-mail is quite long as it is.

Love,
Tariq

§

12 Sep 1999 00:21:55-0700 (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum. The whole situation regarding Ken and Alice is very ironic. We know all about Ken, but it is Alice's attitude regarding all this which does not make any sense.

It's like in the case of Siraj. There have been times when I have asked him to get regular medical checkups, and to no avail. Then his chain smoking was getting to a point where all at home became concerned, yet he continued. A few days ago he started complaining about his health. He started feeling very tired and could not sleep comfortably. About ten days ago, we all forced him to go get a medical checkup. Fortunately there is a kind doctor known to the family who is willing to help us out despite the fact that we have no health insurance.

The result was disturbing. His heart and pulse rate were found to be very fast, and the doctor advised him to immediately stop smoking and go admit himself in a hospital where the doctor works. He said that Siraj needs to be given blood thinners. Then when he realized that Siraj does not trust hospitals, he gave some prescription for a week and said to come back after four days.

This last Tuesday, about six thirty early morning Musa came and informed me that Siraj has been very restless the whole night and that he is not able to breathe comfortably so he has to sit up in bed to sleep.

I had to ask Musa not to go to work that day and take Siraj straight to the hospital. To make the story short, Siraj spent four days in hospital. Today he came back home, but he still has not understood the amount of anxiety he caused to his children and all at home. I say this because though he has not smoked for four full days and night, I still find his children trying their best to keep him from starting it all over again.

As the saying goes, "You can take the horse to the water, but you can't make him drink." That he has to do it for himself.

I do not wish to make any harsh and pelting remarks about Alice's attitude regarding Ken, but I do remember an old saying, "You got to sleep on the bed you choose." Another saying, "Ok, so now that you have realized that you have made the wrong choice, yet you are doing nothing about it, Lady you deserve it!"

Alice is very noble. My son, why can't you and I, come across such examples of loyalty and devotion! But at the same time I must say, that her asking for advice is very silly. What advice can you and I give her when she is just not ready to let go of Ken. She should know that she is the cause of his not getting rid of his addictive habit. Once he comes to know that he will not be welcome in Alice's house any more, and know other woman in her right mind will ever accept him and make him feel at home as long as he continues to be an alcoholic, he just might quit drinking for good.

Alice has never thought on these terms. It is my personal opinion that Alice is the cause of Ken's continuance of self abuse.

This happens only because our friend knows for certain in his heart that no matter what his lady will always take him back.

This E-mail has turned out like a lengthy thesis. So I should now request permission to let you in peace.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

Sun, 12 Sep 1999 15:09:09-0400 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Although I have not specifically told Alice that her attitude and behavior concerning Ken plays a key role in helping to maintain Ken's addiction, I fully agree with what you are saying -- not that my agreement is necessary here. On the other hand, I have tried to do three other things during my various discussions with her.

First of all, I have tried to get Alice to move on with her life and stop having her world revolve around what Ken does or does not do, or whether he leaves or stays. Since she often is forced into having to cope without much help from Ken, irrespective of whether he is present or absent, she ought to adopt this as a full time approach to things for own good, as well as for her peace of mind and heart.

In a sense what other choice does she really have except to do something along these lines, and, yet, she cannot bring herself to take this step completely even though she recognizes the value of what is being said. Part of the reason for her inability to do anything about this is because of a theme which I introduced to her quite some ago ... namely, often times in situations like that of Alice and Ken -- especially when one of the partners is unable to remove himself or herself from the situation despite being abused -- one is dealing with a problem of co-addiction or co-dependency.

Alice might not have Ken's drinking problems, but she is as much addicted to Ken, as Ken is addicted to alcohol and other diversions. She can no more let him go than Ken can let booze and sexual misadventures go.

She is extremely unhappy with the situation, yet, she cannot withdraw from it even though she realizes the relationship is abusive and quite capable of destroying her. These are all indications of addiction.

She put off doing the zikr you gave her a long time because she was afraid that what you meant when you said, according to her, that

the zikr would solve her problem is that by doing the zikr, this would remove Ken from her life, which she did not want to risk. It took a little coaxing and reassurance from me, by the grace of God, to help her start saying the zikr. I had no idea of what the purpose or effect of the zikr was in relation to Ken, but I was convinced it was in her best interests to do it and she should trust that you, Baba, had her best interests at heart irrespective of where this might lead.

Secondly, I have pointed out to Alice, on more than one occasion, that if she has made up her mind to keep accepting Ken back no matter what, then, she should be prepared to accept all of the ramifications of that decision. More specifically, she shouldn't be surprised when this commitment of hers leads to a lot of emotional turmoil and heartache.

It's all part and parcel of her decision. If she does the one, the other will naturally follow.

I have told her that Ken's coming back is merely the first step toward his leaving again, just as his leaving is the first step toward his coming back. This has been the pattern of their relationship for 10 or 15 years.

Nonetheless, every time it happens, Alice goes into a panic. And, on each occasion, we have, more or less, the same sort of conversation, with maybe a new idea or new wrinkle thrown in here and there.

The third thing which I have tried to do is get her to set some conditions on what she is, and is not, prepared to do with respect to when Ken returns from his alcoholic-induced walkabouts. This is especially the case since Ken -- during his most recent absence -- has used very violent language in some of the letters which he sent to Alice ... these threats of violence concerned both Alice and one of her children.

I don't care whether these threats are alcohol-generated or not, I was concerned about the safety of Alice and her son. I told Alice she should change her phone number to a new unlisted number and that she should change the locks on her door since Ken still has a key to her apartment.

She did, eventually, change the locks. However, she did not change the phone number despite the fact that she often was received

harassing phone calls of one sort another from both Ken and the woman he was living with at the time.

All of this is rather academic since, now, Ken has returned, once again. Presumably, he has a new key to go with the new locks which were put on.

I pray for Alice and Ken as I know that you do. However, as you have indicated, what really can anyone do since they both seem intent on -- each in his or her own way -- following the downward spiral of a destructive relationship.

I don't know if it would do any good, or if it would be appropriate for me to do so, but I am inclined to tell Alice outright what you have said about her role in maintaining Ken's addiction without, in any way, attributing this suggestion to you. I feel the condition she should put on things is that the next time Ken leaves, then this should be the end of things between them, and she should stick by this condition and let Ken know she means it.

Alice has some sort of inheritance coming -- at some point -- to her which is, although I don't know the exact figure, modestly large. Large enough, apparently, that it would permit her to set up a sort of small hospice for elderly people, and this is something she wants to do.

She also has indicated she is thinking about moving to British Columbia when the inheritance arrives. Part of her reason for thinking about moving to British Columbia is to be near her son. Another reason for her wanting to do this is to remove Ken from ready access to his other woman. A still further reason for wanting to do this is that it might be a way to, at least, try making a fresh start in several different ways.

Whatever the reasons might be, I think the move would be good for her. At the same time, I feel that if push comes to shove she ought to be ready to do it without Ken, and this might be able to help her make a clean break with the present situation and get on with her life.

There is a program called "Tough Love" in which parents are taught to draw the line with children who are into drugs, sexual promiscuity, in trouble with the law, and, generally speaking, completely out of control. Part of this line is to realize that a time might come when the kids have to be kicked out of the house and onto

the streets as the first step in helping everybody, children included, to regain control of their lives.

Although this program doesn't always work, as a last resort, there have been some successes with it. By following the harsh realities of this program, many families that had been in complete shambles have, by the grace of God, been able to reclaim themselves as a true family with the full re-integration of the problem children back into the home and the disappearance of the previous dysfunctional behaviors and relationships.

I think Alice and Ken both need a touch of Tough Love if they are, God willing, ever going to regain some semblance of normal, family life. With your permission, this is what I would like to tell Alice.

There is another set of issues which I would like to relate to you, but the present e-mail already is very long, so I will, once again, send another e-mail on those matters.

Love, Tariq

§

Sun, 12 Sep 1999 15:10:18-0400 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Recently, a few issues have come up that I am not completely sure about ... although I have, nonetheless, been following a particular course of action which might, or might not, be correct. For example, when I was visiting Sima, Shaykh Shams (I think this is how to spell his name) who has been given some spiritual responsibilities by his shaykh in Algeria [as far as I know Shaykh Shams is a shaykh although some other word -- which escapes me now (maybe something like "mukaddum") -- seems to be used in relation to his spiritual responsibilities] had invited me to meet with his group and give a talk at one of their gatherings.

Remembering your behavior in relation to Shaykh Taufiq, Baba, when the latter was with his mureeds and remembering what you told me about what your spiritual guide had said to you with respect to not

saying much when in the presence of another shaykh who is with his mureeds, I declined the invitation and indicated to them that it wouldn't be appropriate for me to speak.

More recently, I had given Sima a naksh to treat a physical problem that she has been experiencing for some time. Although I had told her on a number of occasions, in general terms, quite some time ago, that this was something which you had given me permission to do, I didn't offer doing it for her until she specifically asked for me to do it.

Primarily, my reasons for doing this were that: I really didn't know how she felt about such things, and, more importantly, how she might feel about such things coming through me. I also didn't want to force anything on her, so, I just let it go until she specifically requested such help.

By the Grace of Allah and through the support of Hazrat Musa Shah Baba, your shaykh, and yourself, the naksh has been having a beneficial effect upon Sima's physical condition. It has improved remarkably, praise be to God, over the last several months.

Sima related this to Ruth, Shaykh Shams' wife, and Ruth told Sima that there was something for which she might want a naksh, as well. Ruth is the mureed of Shams' shaykh in Algeria.

I told Sima that I didn't feel it was appropriate for me to intervene in such a situation. Ruth ought to be going to her own shaykh for whatever help of this sort she needs, or that, at the very least, she should be asking her shaykh's permission to do something like this.

More recently, still, Sima was telling me about a conversation with an Imam for a mosque in a near-by city, relatively near Sima's home. At some point, she had been talking with the Imam about something or other and Sima discovered that the man, and his wife, were members of the Qadri Order and they were Circasian (I am not sure if this is the proper spelling) from somewhere in the Middle East which means their ethnic origins are in Russia although they are Arab-speaking.

Sima told him about my book and, at some point, after asking my permission to do so, presented him with a copy of the book The Imam seemed to be very pleased at having received the book but told Sima that he had no need to read the book for he knew its contents and

knew about me ... although what exactly he knows, I am not sure. Furthermore, he wanted Sima to supply him with more books because he felt it was a very good work on the Sufi path, and he wanted to be able to pass it on whenever he felt it was appropriate to do so ... which he has done already on at least one occasion with a woman from Indiana who might be affiliated with a shaykh out in California.

On several occasions, a month or two after the foregoing took place this Imam had been relating some of his own worries and concerns to Sima with respect to his own family situation ... more specifically his relationship with his wife. He outlined a number of these problems to Sima going into a fair amount of detail concerning such family matters.

Sima has specified the nature of these difficulties. However, I don't wish to repeat them at the present time.

On one occasion, he said these things in the presence of Sima and her mother. On another occasion, apparently, such things were said to Sima during a phone conversation.

In any event, I thought all of this was, from several points of view, somewhat inappropriate for the Imam to be relating these things to Sima. I also thought it was somewhat strange he was doing so.

I don't know if this Imam's shaykh is still alive or what sort of relationship he has or how physically accessible his shaykh is, but I would think these problems should be raised with his own shaykh. Maybe, for whatever reason, he is reaching out to me through Sima, but if he alludes to having secret knowledge concerning me and his spiritual station makes such knowledge accessible to him, then, I don't understand why he doesn't just approach his own shaykh with his problems.

This Imam has indicated, on several occasions, to Sima, that he would like to meet me. Circumstances, however, really don't permit this ... at least, at the present time, and I am not really even sure of the appropriateness of such a meeting, especially under the current circumstances.

I guess all of the foregoing issues are variations on the same issue of adab. However, I would like whatever input you care to make on these matters since I am not exactly sure what to do in the present

case ... although, as I indicated, I have been acting along certain lines despite not being sure if my approach is correct. Moreover, I am sure these, or similar issues, might come up in the future, so I would like to have some sort of a framework out of which to operate -- at least until such time, if God wishes, I know what I am doing.

Love,

Tariq

§

12 Sep 1999 18:27:39-0700 (e-mail)

Tariq 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 Tariq 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 plays 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. 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 Silsilas 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 Stoney Creek, 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 mureedeen 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 mureedeen 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. 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

§

Tue, 14 Sep 1999 04:53:44-800 (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum. ALLAH'S MERCY and BLESSINGS be within you and shower upon you, at all times.

I have read your messages concerning Y2K very clearly and have sent e-mails to all the mureeds whose e-mail addresses I have. Yes, these are wise steps which you have suggested. Even though you and I have nothing to worry personally, yet we have loved ones to care for, and if they get affected, it would affect us too. INSHA ALLAH we will do our best to tie the camel. Very true, that this is the way Rasool ALLAH taught us to Trust ALLAH in a practical way.

As you have said, if nothing as such takes place, no one is a loser because, in any case, these precautions like saving water and the seeds which you informed about will all come to use later on.

I am sure that all concerned will be very grateful to you when it's all over, one way or other, INSHA ALLAH.

Yes, do let me know whatever else comes to your knowledge.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA

§

October 1999

I know that, due to his diabetes, Baba is concerned about sugar-related issues, including some of the sugar-substitutes. So, I send him a link about the Stevia plant.

§

3 Oct 1999 16:33:9-0200 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

You might be interested in the following article:
<http://www.healthfree.com/herbgarden/stevlife.htm>

Love,

Tariq

§

3 Oct 1999 21:23:12-0700(e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum. May you always be in ALLAH'S Blessings and Grace my son.

I cannot describe how the surprising news regarding "Stevia" has touched me. Recently it has been bothering me that the sweeteners used may have their side effects, and I should try to do something about it.

It also occurred to me that it is the SUNNA of Rasool ALLAH to wish for others what you wish best for yourself.

It has come to my attention that you, are a perfect personification of this Sunnah of Rasool ALLAH.

All the time you are pre-occupied with ways and means to help one and all.

With nothing for yourself, and in such odd circumstances, where others may have just collapsed, you still hold on to the emblem of "NOBILITY" "HELP" and "GUIDE"

You are my son, a true example of the "SAHABA" an example for all to observe, that FAITH IN ALLAH and NISBATH is all one needs to survive. (Of course, I mean the practical way, "Tying the camel to a tree or post etc")

Your words, your guidance, your way, in fact you, yourself, is the way to salvation. If only those who come in contact with you could see and realize this.

Time will come my son, for the needy of guidance to throng around you. ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN!

Thank you very much for this wonderful news about Stevia. Where to get it from? Do let me know.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

I am settling into my new job with my brother. The job is just basic clerical stuff, along with running whatever errands my brother wants, but I am thankful to God to have it.

In my spare time, I am reading a variety of books as well as working on the web page that I started in Sima's office. Although statistics for the site suggest that quite a few people are coming to the web page and looking around, few people seem to want to buy anything.

§

I finally have managed to pay my brother Jerry back for the money he loaned me to enable me to attend my mother's funeral. It feels so good to be able to pay off debts ... something which I am not able to do all that frequently.

§

November 1999

My brother asks me if I would like to invite Sima up for Thanksgiving. I tell him I will inquire.

Sima says she would like to come, but she feels it would be better if the children don't accompany her. So, she comes alone.

As I expected, Sima gets along well with the rest of my family. Moreover, they, in turn, take to her quite well.

I ask Sima whether she would consider moving to Bamford with her children. Her father's previous objection to the marriage has been my lack of job, and, now, that I have one, maybe his attitude will change.

I don't make a lot of money, but it might be enough for us to get by on, until, hopefully, something better comes along. Plus, there would be opportunities for Sima to work, as well, if that is what she wants to do.

I try to point out the many advantages of raising children in Vermont. I am so eloquent on the subject that I wish I would have taped it and sold it to the Department of Tourism for the state.

Sima is non-committal. She will have to think about it.

§

I ask Baba if he would be willing to write me a letter of recommendation for a position at the state university. The job seems ideal in a lot of ways since it involves dealing with multi-cultural issues among students.

§

Fri, 5 Nov 1999 10:22:03-0500 (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum. May ALLAH keep you in HIS DIVINE MERCY at all times, and may HE bestow within you and upon you HIS RAHMA and HIMMA through which all your difficulties be removed and silsilah Nisbath be spread from East to West, and North to South. ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN !

Regarding the request, you already know that even though it will be the first time for me to do this, I will certainly get it done. All I ask is a few days, because I do not have the letterhead of "Darul Irfan" with me, and will have to ask Professor Hasan to kindly send me the needed so that I could type it and send to the mentioned address. At the same time, I will also request him if he could possibly write one for you as an extra credibility.

Well, to be frank, you actually do not need such letters because you are an icon of knowledge as well as nobility. I do understand that these things are required though for such purposes. The good news is that he is here since six months now. He recently underwent a heart bypass in Dallas. I spoke to him just a few days ago. In case he says that he does not have the letterheads here, then the only step that I could take is to type it on our silsila letterhead.

Do let me know if there is anything else also that I could add in the letter. LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

Tue, 16 Nov 1999 01:20:08-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Someone from UK contacted me through the SpiritualNotion web site. This individual indicated he is an initiate of a Chishti-Sabri tariqa through a shaykh in Multan.

Apparently, the name of the shaykh in Multan is Nazm ul-Hussein, and this shaykh is said to have been initiated through, and to be a khalifa of, a shaykh Mahdoomzada. I was wondering if you have heard of either of these individuals or know anything about them -- at least anything which can be said.

Love, Tariq

§

Tue, 16 Nov 1999 17:24:08 PST(e-mail)

Dear Tariq Shah

My son, Asaalamo alaikum.

First let me tell you that I have sent the letter of recommendation which you requested to the specified address today.

Regarding the names you mention about the gentleman who contacted you from England and his Shaikh, I have not heard of them before. Makhdoomzada, is not a name. It is a title. Makhdoom is an honorific title and zada means "son of" which is rarely used. Anyway, if he has contacted you out of love and respect, there is always the option of making acquaintances with the legitimate Sufi circle. The legitimate ones will only contact you out of love and sincere wish to just make acquaintance, or maybe to rekindle their connection with Tasawwuf which they feel to be weakening.

Otherwise, there may be someone who, out of curiosity, tries to find out, "who the white guy" is. Ha! Ha! You can realize the intent by their first approach or the second etc.

It must be getting cold out there now. Do you have a heater in your bedroom? Yes, I am poor but please do let me know if there is something I can do.

You have been so kind and considerate about all of your PIR Brothers and sisters, and have generously given all possible information to help if and when the Y2K matter arises. May ALLAH always keep HIS GLANCE upon you. May ALLAH'S Blessings and Grace always be within and upon you, ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN.

LOVE AND DUA,

Baba

§

Tue, 16 Nov 1999 23:21:57-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

Wa 'alaykum as-Salaam!

Thank you for the information concerning the SpiritualNotion overture by the individual from the Chishti-Sabri tariqa in the UK. It seems that this mureed with whom I am in contact is very desirous of making contact with other people on the Sufi path and feels quite isolated where he is, as well as indicating that he is going through something of a spiritual struggle.

He doesn't seem to have much physical contact with his shaykh. I don't know what access to, or opportunity for interacting with, his spiritual guide he has.

Sima told me that she had met an elderly woman from Turkey -- someone, apparently, of considerable spiritual station -- who was attending one of the recent fatiha sessions at Shaykh Shams wife's place.

Although this woman didn't seem to know much, if any, English, somehow the topic of Tariq (i.e., me) came up, and the woman seemed to know about that individual and had a few things to say to Sima about him. Apparently, everyone knows about me except me.

I very much appreciate your extremely kind offer of willingness to help me out in some way despite the limitations of your financial situation. Insha' Allah, I have everything I need in the way of material supplies -- but I suppose we shall soon find out.

I am happy I had the opportunity to share whatever I could with my shaykh, as well as my Pir brothers and sisters, with respect to Y2K. For my part, it wasn't much, but I am thankful that God placed the motivation within me and helped me find a way to participate in this fashion. It has been my pleasure to be able to serve the Silsilah in this small way.

To be sure, on the one hand, I hope, God willing, that no one -- including me -- has to make use of any of the information concerning Y2K. But, if God wishes, in accordance with His Wisdom, that Y2K should have some non-trivial impact on society, then I hope, insha' Allah, the aforementioned information might assist some people to be able to tie their camel as best they can ... and the rest (indeed, everything) -- whatever that might be -- is, as we know (and you know much better than me) is with God.

I have been in touch with Mitchell from time to time - although right now he is having trouble with his computer and having access to the Internet. He misses you very much Baba, as do I.

No word from Alice since I wrote the tough letter. I hope I didn't over do it and that, as a result, she has crossed me off her Christmas card list ... or, maybe, no news is good news, since I never used to hear from her unless things were problematic with Ken.

Please give my love and Salaams to the people of your household and to the people of fatiha. I hope everything is okay with Siraj's physical condition, and I pray for the best for him and his children ... I know the situation must not be easy for them or you.

Love,
Tariq
§

Fri, 19 Nov 1999 14:54:01 PST (e-mail)

Dear Tariq Baba,

Asalamulaikum. How are you? Everyone here is doing fine. I visited your website and I have to say that it has evolved a lot since the last time I saw it. I went there looking for information on Y2K and ended up finding information that will be very helpful for my sister's sociology class.

I received my last two marks this week, and I passed them, and I did quite well. I was surprised and happy. I am grateful for this.

I wanted to ask you if you know where I could look to find some information on Moharram. I am going to do some research on what

happened and some facts etc.... Everybody is going to do a little bit of research on something.

Daddy will be researching the Prophet (PBUH) and mommy the ninety nine names of Allah. I was wondering if you could point me in the right direction.

And also for my personal information I wanted to ask you about the Prophet as more than just a person. I am thinking that he was more than just a person, and what does this mean? I am not sure if you will be able to understand my question. But, lately I have been thinking that the Prophet (PBUH) is more than just a person who once lived on this earth.

Ramadan Mubarak. (I know it's coming soon)
Khudafiz, With Love, Uzma [one of my mureeds]

§

Fri, 26 Nov 1999 17:22:11 PST (e-mail)

Dear Tariq Baba,

Asalamulaikum. How are you? I hope that you are in good health.

I wanted to ask you a question about my courses for next year. Since, I am in the programming course I thought I would be taking program analyst for the next year. But, they have a new course. It is Oracle Database Administrator. A lot of people in my class are signing up for this course instead ... which means if there are not enough students I will not be able to take the Program Analyst program anyway.

Oracle seems to be a good course. But, I am not sure what I should do. I have to register but, I don't know in what?

All I know is there is demand for Oracle Database Administrators and it doesn't seem as difficult. But, there is also a lot of responsibility with it.

You are responsible if information is lost. On the other hand I like programming but, I know that I struggle with it and at times I find it difficult. I wanted to ask your permission for the next year and also

permission for taking Program Analyst or Oracle Database Administrator.

Also, I wanted to ask you what you think I should take?

Everyone here is fine.

Take Care. Khudafiz With Love, Uzma

§

Wed, 9 Dec 1999 02:14:26-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Uzma,

Wa-'alaykum as-Salaam!

I have been meaning to write to you for some time but one or another thing always seemed to get in the way. But, whether I write or not, you should be confident that you are always in my thoughts, heart and prayers.

I was very happy that you did well in all of your course marks for last term. I know that the material is not always easy for you and that you have to work hard, and I am very pleased you have, by the Grace of Allah, both persevered and met with success in your course work.

As far as your question is concerned about what you should take next year, there are a number of considerations upon which you might reflect. First of all, as we all know, things often change very quickly within the fields of computer and information technology ... and, then, again, sometimes they don't change at all ... which is one of the reasons why we are going through the Y2K scare.

Generally speaking, it is probably good to try to take courses that will prepare you to be as versatile and flexible as possible for your work future. This is one of the reasons why the programming course seemed like a good idea to begin with.

I don't know what your curriculum for programming is like. Nonetheless, I assume you are getting exposed to a variety of programming languages, as well as becoming acquainted with some of the principles and art involved in the process of programming and problem-solving through programming in general.

Programming languages come and go, although some stay longer than others. However, getting a sound introduction to the logic and algorithms of the structural character of this underlying programming activity equips you to be able to learn and deal with new languages as they come along down the road.

Programming is difficult for most people ... although different people have varying strengths and weaknesses from language to language. I know you find it hard some time, but, if you can, try to keep at it -- although if it becomes too problematic, then, you, obviously, don't want to become overwhelmed to such a degree that you can't pass the course.

On the other hand, even before you started your programming course, I remember you indicated that you were concerned about it and wondered if it might be too much for you. Yet, by the Grace of Allah, you have not only been passing your courses but doing pretty well in them.

Usually -- although there are exceptions to the following -- if someone has a learning disability with respect to a specific subject, this inability tends to show up earlier rather than later. While not everything has been smooth sailing for you in this course, and while I am sure there will be problematic sections ahead of you in future portions of this course, you seem, by the Grace of Allah, to be holding your own.

With continued hard work on your part, I feel, insha' Allah, that things will go OK for you with the programming course. But, as I indicated to you before you began this course, even if it turns out that the course does not go all that well, whatever credits, course work, and experience you gain in the area of programming might, insha' Allah, be of benefit to you down the road.

In other words, when you apply for jobs in the future, the fact you now have some programming courses successfully tucked away beneath your belt, so to speak, will, insha' Allah, be an asset which can help strengthen your resume and marketability. The more courses of this sort that you successfully can tuck beneath your belt, the greater, God willing, will be your appeal to prospective employers.

Even if some of these courses don't turn out that well -- and, God willing, this won't be the case, your exposure to the ideas, concepts, techniques, and so on, from these courses will be an asset to you. If a person doesn't do well in a course, this doesn't mean nothing has been learned ... only that one didn't learn as many of the sorts of thing as were tested for as the teachers would have liked to be the case. And, quite frankly, sometimes the precise grade is not all that important to some employers.

You have indicated in your e-mail to me, however, that all of the forgoing considerations might be purely academic since not enough people will be taking the programming course. If this turns out to be the case, then the choice might be taken out of your hands, and you will have to go with what is available.

I don't know if Oracle will be a passing trend or a long lasting approach to data processing. My basic feeling is that programming might have the greater long-term value for you -- but, I am, by no means, an expert in any of this.

The foregoing notwithstanding, you should reflect on this matter and make the decision which seems right to you. You know the situation better than I do, and you have more of a feeling for how you feel about doing more programming course work and whether the courses coming up are something which, with hard work, you have a reasonable chance to not only pass, but even do well in, God willing.

Several e-mails ago, you mentioned your feeling that there was more to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) than just as a historical figure. Your feelings were right.

The historical Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the most perfect manifestation of the Muhammadan Reality, but, in fact, all of creation is, on the one hand, a tapestry woven from the Divine Names and Attributes, and, on the other hand, a manifestation of those Names and Attributes through the capacities of the "things" which constitute the created Universe.

The facet of created existence which has the greatest potential capacity to give expression to the Names and Attributes of Allah in a balanced, knowing, conscious and loving way, are human beings. Al-insan al-kamil ... the perfect human being, is the one who has realized

the purpose of life by giving expression to that dimension of the Muhammadan Reality for which they have been given the spiritual capacity to do so by Allah.

All of the 124,000 Prophets who have been sent to the peoples of different nations in different times, as well as the Companions of these Prophets, along with the awliya of Allah who were not physical Companions of these Prophets, together with the generality of believers and non-believers are all made possible through the nature of the Muhammadan Reality ... all are derived, in one mode or another, from the light or nur of this underlying Reality ... with the historical Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) being the brightest, most noble, most beautiful expression of this Reality.

However, in truth, every manifestation of this Muhammadan Reality is unique. As Sufi shaykhs say -- Allah does not repeat His Self-disclosures as reflected in the locus of manifestation of this or that modality of the Muhammadan Reality.

This means we each have a responsibility to do what we can to work toward bringing to light the unique spiritual capacity for giving expression to our role or participation in the full realization of the Muhammadan Reality. Why do we have this responsibility or amanat (trust)? ... because each of us is an expression of that Muhammadan Reality since our very being and capacity have been derived from the light of that Reality.

This is attested to by the Hadith Qudsi in which Allah indicates that the first thing which He created was the light of spirit of Muhammad (peace be upon him) - which is the Muhammadan Reality. From this light, Allah brought forth the lights of the angels, jinn, Prophets, saints, believers, non-believers and so on.

We each have been given the opportunity to participate in the Muhammadan Reality which is the hidden treasure for which Allah brought forth creation. Our mode of participation can be co-operative or it can be rebelliousness.

If we co-operate, this is the path of Deen. Through Deen, we find our way back to our fitra, or original nature, which is none other than a manifestation -- according to our unique capacity to do so -- of the Muhammadan Reality.

If we fail to co-operate, and, therefore, rebel and transgress against our own self, we will not find our way back to realizing our original nature, and, consequently, we will constitute a veil of darkness with respect to this underlying Reality. As such, we become our own punishment, since by being veiled, we separate ourselves from -- as far as awareness, knowledge, and conscious participation in the Muhammadan Reality are concerned -- from our true nature or fitra. And, in this separation, we distance ourselves from our Lord who is longing to disclose Himself to us through that nature by virtue of the Divine Names and Attributes.

When a person says Darud (seeking blessings) on the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), one is, in reality, saying Darud on all of Creation -- including your own true self, since all of Creation is derived from the light of the Muhammadan Reality which is at the heart of the historical Muhammad (peace be upon him). In saying Darud on the Prophet (peace be upon him), one is saying Darud on all of the 124,000 Prophets, their companions, the awliya, and all of the shaykhs and mureeds of all of the silsilahs since they all, each in their own way, are unique manifestations of that Muhammadan Reality toward whom the Darud is being recited, even though the historical Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the most prominent, noble and perfect manifestation of this Reality.

I hope the foregoing, insha' Allah, helps you. If you have further questions, then insha' Allah, I will do my best to address them in future correspondence.

Please give my love and Salaams to your parents, your sisters, and to the people of fatiha.

With much love and affection,

Baba Tariq

§

Fri, 11 Dec 1999 13:38:01-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

On Thursday evening, the second of two public meetings was held -- the second one was at the university. Given the lack of resources to publicize the event, I thought that, by the Grace of Allah, the turnout was OK, although, naturally, more is, sometimes, nicer.

There had been seven people who came to the first meeting at the Bamford Public Library. There were about twice that many who showed up at the meeting at the University. From those two meetings, seven people have signed up for attending a forthcoming zikr/fatiha/qawwali session -- approximately half men and half women.

A few of them are older -- in their sixties. The rest are probably in their late teens or early 20s ... university students.

I've given everyone at the second meeting a copy of my book, and the three from the first meeting who have been reading it (with whom I have been in contact) indicated to me that they liked the book very much. People who were given the book in the second meeting obviously haven't had a chance to read any of it yet.

Insha' Allah, I will be contacting the people who have expressed an interest in attending one of the zikr/fatiha/qawwali sessions and try to find a common time. I am thinking that, probably, the best time might be on a Saturday or Sunday evening during next weekend.

In the lecture on Thursday evening most of the people stayed to the end and there was a fairly good question and answer period. However, there were three professors who came who left before the lecture was over. I guess I wasn't sufficiently polished and/or academic enough for their tastes.

There was one person who stayed until the end who was from a local Native Peoples community. He asked a lot of questions and came up to me after the questioning session and spoke a little more, however, he did not leave his name or address or indicate an interest in any of the zikr/fatiha/qawwali session.

I had invited someone to the talk from the nearby Native community who works at a center for Native Studies at the university but that individual did not come ... maybe the young Native individual came on his behalf.

At the same time I think there was something going on at the Native Studies Center on the same evening. Consequently, even if interested in attending the talk, this individual might not have been able to come.

There was one young woman who attended the lecture who asked a number of questions during the Q and A session. Afterwards she came up and inquired about whether I was an authorized teacher and, if so, where did that authority come from. I mentioned you and our silsilah, but, then, I also said that, in reality, permission can come nowhere but from Allah and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). When I said this she smiled in a sort of appreciative way and seemed to be quite satisfied with that answer.

She is not Muslim, as far as I know, but looks to come from an Anglo-Saxon background. Her name, which I believe to be Denise Brophy (although this might not be correct) is certainly not overtly Muslim. Maybe she has done some reading on her own or taken a course somewhere or has some friends who know something.

The names of the other people who have expressed an interest in pursuing things at least to the extent of one further meeting are as follows: Ronnie Pert, Sandy O'Connor, Dan McClusky, Bob and Terri Sanders, the aforementioned Denise Brophy, and Jack Boone.

There was one other person -- a Mark Boone (I don't know if he is any relation to Jack Boone) who attended the first meeting at the Bamford Public Library who expressed an interest in attending further sessions. However, I have my doubts about his sincerity.

The background on him is this. I saw some notices in the Bamford Courier about an interfaith group which was meeting on a weekly basis in Bamford.

I called him up and inquired if the group would be interested in having someone from the Sufi mystical tradition come and address the group. And, this fellow Mark Boone -- who puts out a pre-recorded syndicated radio broadcast about spiritual issues that is aired in various parts of the U.S. -- indicated that the interfaith group really doesn't have other speakers come to the group.

It turns out this guy is the local representative for a Sikh meditation group called, I think, Sant Mat. Later on, I saw a poster in a

local book store which invited people to come and explore the various spiritual traditions of India, and one of the these spiritual traditions was the Sufi path.

I later found out that this fellow had been acquiring and reading a lot of material on the Sufi path and apparently was giving talks on this from time to time within the interfaith group meetings. He was aware that much of the holy book of the Sikh's comes from Hazrat Baba Farid ud-deen Ganj Shakar (may Allah be pleased with him), and he said he had heard something about the Chishti Order of tasawwuf.

I didn't care for the way that the meetings which were being announced as a supposedly interfaith group was not really open to contributors from other faiths. In fact, it really seemed to be a front for the Sikh group -- a way of getting people to come for one purpose only to be maneuvered toward another agenda entirely.

Another thing that this fellow did which I didn't care for is the following. At the very end of the meeting at the Bamford Public Library, he kind of went out of his way -- since what he said really had little to do with the sorts of things which the people in the meeting had been discussing -- to inform everyone at the people that they should realize that if one wanted to become a Sufi they would have to bow to Mecca five times a day.

This might be quite true. Nevertheless, the way he introduced it seemed to me to be that he was trying -- in his own, not-too-subtle way -- to scare people off.

I gave an answer to him which I hope, insha' Allah, was adequate to the situation. I tried to stay midway between answering truthfully while, at the same time, putting the situation in a proper context and, among other things, indicated that how far an individual wanted to pursue the Sufi path was up to the individual but the shaykhs of the Chishti path were not in the habit of turning people away just because they were not Muslim.

In any event, this fellow called up a few weeks after the first meeting (which was before I had begun to advertise the second meeting) saying how much he had enjoyed the first meeting and would like to be informed about future meetings. My feeling is that his interest is not a sincere one but might be more one of keeping tabs on

what the "competition" is doing as well as, perhaps, seeing what could be done to -- in indirect, subtle ways -- to undermine what was going on in the meetings and dissuade people from the path ... may Allah forgive me if my concerns in this regard are misplaced.

Well, that is the status report of how things stand at the moment in Sutton, vis-à-vis Sufi activities. Allah knows best where things will go from here.

I am thinking of visiting Sima around Christmas time, and I wanted to know if it would be okay to visit with you if you are available at that time? I realize this is during Ramadan and that it is probably better to not travel during this time.

However, this might be the last opportunity for awhile that I have of visiting -- especially in view of the whole uncertainty that is surrounding the Y2K issue which might, or might not, start on January 1, 2000 but, if it does, very likely will not be limited to that day but will crop up in numerous ways throughout the rest of the year and beyond into 2001 and could impact on travel in a number of ways.

I am not planning on having any session here on that weekend since it is Christmas and most of the people who have expressed an interest in attending a zikr/fatiha/qawwali session are likely to be engaged in Christmas activities with their families. Moreover, it has been some nine or ten months since I have seen you and would like to have the chance to be with you again.

If this is not a good idea or if it would pose inconveniences for you or for others in your household (I am planning on staying in a small hotel that I know of near Sima's home town which has holiday rates so I am not seeking to sleep at your place), then, that is okay. Insha' Allah we can get together on another occasion.

With love,

Tariq

§

Sun, 05 Dec 1999 22:09:23 PST (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

It is always a pleasure to hear from you, and I am glad that you have started the introductions to the Sufi path which of course will bear fruits. In fact, how good it would be if this all turns out like your famous Wednesday meetings you used to hold in Canada. Of course now, through the light of experience, you will know how to keep the meetings free from such hypocrites like the person you mentioned.

Yes, I agree with your notion of that person. He is not sincere. Experience has taught us both not to allow the innocent newcomers to become confused by such gate crashers.

It would be a good idea to get the ones interested into signing a commitment which most probably you have already done, and then to wisely communicate to them that this learning is very personal to each student in accordance with their different needs and capacity, which, therefore, demands undivided attention on the teachers part. Now this can only be done if all present are there only for the sake of learning.

We go to different restaurants to taste cuisines, and finally we decide which restaurants are not to our liking, quality wise, and then we frequent the ones we appreciate. How odd it would be if we frequented the ones we do not appreciate.

In the same manner, the new visitors should be told that this world is full of "Restaurant de Informations" So if for some reason, some do not appreciate what our "Restaurant de Sufi" offers as its spiritual cuisine, they should move on trying out other ones in a matured way, rather than keep coming to just inform us that its not to their liking.

In saying this, you could then establish this as a rule among the genuine seekers to keep their favorite restaurant clean and free from germs. Who in their right mind would not want to be given the opportunity to study their interest in peace and tranquility. So it's they -- the sincere seekers -- that should be responsible enough to very wisely keep these sessions only for the ones who have a flare for knowledge.

They should also be informed that these meetings are not for debates. Anyway, I am sure that you know what to do and how to go about doing them, MASHA ALLAH.

Momin had called me today, and I asked him if he knew what the result was regarding your appointment at the university, and he said that he did not. I do not know if my letter had any effect. It was short and precise, the way you had indicated.

About coming here for the Christmas vacation, you know very well in your heart that you are always most welcome. Are you staying in a motel only because you want to be there where Sima can visit you? If so, then I suppose it's all right, and you can stay with us one night too, but if it's because you feel that it would inconvenience us here in anyway, then you already should know my response. You are a member of the family. Always was, are, and will be. You are most welcome, to stay with us.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

Mon, 13 Dec 1999 01:14:04-0500(e-mail)

Dear Sima,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Please indicate to your mother that the following zikr will, insha' Allah, help her condition. She should say it every night after isha prayers ... just before retiring, as well as every morning after fajr prayers.

She should say the darud (a form of recitation which seeks blessings be bestowed on the Prophet Muhammad – peace and blessings be upon him) of her choice prior to the zikr, and she should finish the zikr with the same darud. The zikr is: Ya Ra'uf 133 times.

As far as words go, this Name of Allah gives expression to the Divine quality of intense sympathy and empathy which Allah has for creation. She should focus on this sense of the Name as much as she can while she recites the zikr. When she has finished reciting the zikr,

she should blow on her hands and rub her hands over her body from head to foot, doing first the right side and, then, the left side.

You need not say that it came through me. However, irrespective of whom it came through, it is intended as a gift for her from Allah and His Rasul (peace be upon him) who are her well-wishers.

Love,
Tariq

§

I have spent several days visiting with Sima and Baba. Baba has asked me to contact him when I get back to Sutton, after my long bus ride.

§

Sun, 26 Dec 1999 22:27:13-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,
As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I have arrived back safely in Sutton by the Grace of Allah. I wish I had more time to visit with you on Saturday, but I am very thankful to God for the chance to be with you for even a brief time.

§

Sun, 26 Dec 1999 20:40:51 PST (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

To me these few moments were more precious than gold and platinum. It was so good that you could visit. I pray for the fact that Sutton becomes your base from where your love spreads throughout North America, ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN!

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

The bewitching hour is fast approaching. The tumblers are about to roll over to '00, and the whole world is waiting to see what will happen ... the apocalypse or a big yawn.

I have talked with my younger brother a number of times about such things as the embedded chip problem. He is an electrician and knows something about computers, but he is something of an agnostic on the matter ... that is, he is willing to acknowledge the possibility that something could happen, yet, he is not at all certain there will be any problems.

Nonetheless, his company has taken steps to make themselves Y2K compliant. This includes an extensive round of testing with respect to their embedded chips and making whatever fixes that are deemed to be necessary.

I am as prepared as I can be, which, given my resources, is not all that much. But, I have tried to exercise a certain amount of prudence in relation to the technological problems which might be looming.

§

January 2000

With the exception of a place in Africa, and a few isolated problems, the world comes through Y2K unscathed. Despite the billions of dollars which have been spent by corporations and governments in preparation for Y2K, no one ever explains why the companies and countries which were unable to become Y2K reliant fared no worse than the countries and businesses which did become Y2K compliant. Those people who have said the problem is serious but manageable and who cautioned that there is no reason for panic as long as appropriate steps are taken cannot explain why machines and chips that supposedly are non-compliant do not experience any problems, for the most part, although in a couple of countries and in a

few businesses, there do seem to have been some instances of Y2K meltdown as allegedly non-compliant machines and chips fail.

Personally, I am happy there has been no major repercussions from the Y2K problem. However, I will have to eat tuna quite a lot from now on -- that is, until my Y2K supplies begin to dwindle ... a small and affordable price to pay.

§

A number of people are beginning to contact me as a result of the web site.

Mon, 3 Jan 2000 09:37:05-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Web Master

'Eid Mubarak!

Twenty years ago I took the hand of Shaykh Abu Musa Sabri. The times I was closest to my shaykh led to peace and turmoil, longing and hope, a belief in the reality of forgiveness. Lacking any reason, I pursued a path of isolation determinedly, and met with some success. Now longing and turmoil are constants, but where is peace and forgiveness? Where is my shaykh? Why have I lost him and how do I re-discover him, or be found again. Reading your web site this Ramadan is comforting. Thank you for your kindnesses.

salaam.

Feisal Omar.

§

Sun, 09 Jan 2000 18:50:28-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Feisal,

Wa 'alaykum as-Salaam!

Thank you for your greetings of Ramadan, and please accept my wishes -- previously thought but now voiced -- that you, God willing, may have received many blessings on the occasion of 'Eid. I apologize

for the lateness of these salutations, and although I had hoped, God willing, to write to you before this, nevertheless, sometimes -- to quote Robbie Burns -- "the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft aglay" (often go astray).

I hope you will receive the following comments in the spirit with which they are given -- which is in the spirit of being your well-wisher. You indicate in your e-mail to me that after you left your shaykh you "pursued the path of isolation determinedly, and met with some success".

You can accept or not accept the following, as you will, but in my opinion -- consisting of, by the Grace of Allah, nearly 30 years on the path under the careful and loving guidance of two shaykhs, there can be no success away from one's shaykh ... irrespective of what appearances might indicate. Indeed, when one leaves one's shaykh, one leaves behind the greatest criteria for ascertaining one's degree of success in spiritual matters.

If human beings were not in need of spiritual assistance and guidance, there would have been no need for 124,000 Prophets to have been sent to humankind as a Mercy, a cure and a help. Moreover, there would have been no need for the Books of Divine Revelation to have been sent. Finally, there would have been no need for silsilahs which -- through the shaykh -- are our link with the Prophetic tradition.

When one leaves one's shaykh -- however appealing and attractive this might seem from some point of view -- one, in effect, leaves the Prophetic tradition and the essence of spiritual guidance and assistance. This is so because there are no entry points for spiritual progress without the help of those whom Allah has appointed for this specific purpose ... did not the Qur'an counsel us to 'enter houses by their doors'? No one -- absolutely no one -- can traverse this path on her or his own, and this was as true for the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them) and all of the other Prophets of Allah (peace be upon them all), as it is true for any of us lesser lights.

You indicate in your e-mail that when you were with your shaykh you believed in the reality of forgiveness. You also raise the question of where that forgiveness is now.

You don't mention where your shaykh is or whether he is still in this world. Irrespective, however, of whether he has, or has not, passed away, forgiveness is still a reality, but it doesn't necessarily come on demand or because one needs it or because one has hope of it. Forgiveness comes on its own terms, and you have to find a way of learning what those conditions, if any, are.

Transgressions against Allah are forgiven by Allah if we petition God with sincerity and do not return to those sins again -- and Allah is the warrant for what is being said here. However, if we transgress against a human being, then God cannot forgive us for those mistakes. Rather, we are in the debt of the one against whom we transgress, and we must seek their forbearance directly.

If your shaykh is in this world, then I would recommend going to him as soon as you can and begging for his forgiveness with respect to your mistakes concerning the adab of the path. If your shaykh is not in this world, then I would suggest going to his grave site or shrine and cry for his forgiveness, since the Qur'an clearly indicates that those who have been slain in the way of Allah are not dead but are alive and enjoying a sustenance from their Lord. And, quite frequently, a shaykh is even more powerful, by the Grace of Allah, after passing away from this world, than might have been the case when such a spiritual light was on the face of the Earth.

If your shaykh is no longer in this world, then you have the choice of staying with him, or of seeking guidance from another shaykh. But, this time, whatever you do, hold tight to the rope which has been extended to you by the Grace of Allah, no matter with what turmoil the rope might swing amidst the trials of this earthly existence.

I pray you will find the forgiveness and peace which you are seeking.

Tariq

§

Mon, 10 Jan 2000 23:50:37-0500 (e-mail)

Dear 'Asima (one of the people who has taken initiation with me)

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Although I have conveyed 'Eid Mubarak to you through Bilal's e-mail, nonetheless, just in case he forgot to relay my message to you, then, I wanted to let you know that I hope, insha' Allah, your Ramadan was spiritually prosperous, and I hope your 'Eid day was happy and filled with friendship and family. A month of fasting and fatihas is a tremendous set of blessings.

You mentioned that having Baba's picture on one of the walls of your house is causing a certain amount of problems. Apparently, some people consider it bi'dat (innovation) to do this.

You don't mention which wall of the house the picture is on. If the picture is in your living room, you could always move it to your bedroom in order to avoid such conflict. It is enough that the picture of Baba is in your house. It doesn't have to be on display for others to see.

On the other hand, perhaps, you should ask these people -- most, if not all, of whom have pictures of themselves on their student IDs, and/or health cards, and/or passports, and/or car licenses, and/or carry pictures of their family members around with them, and/or have pictures of family members, friends and loved ones in their own homes -- what exactly is it that is bi'dat or innovative and unacceptable about the picture. You needn't ask this question in an argumentative manner or in a confrontational manner or in a condescending way, but the fact of the matter is that very, very few Muslims have absolutely any idea of what conditions have to be met in order for something to constitute the sort of bi'dat which the Prophet (peace be upon him) warned us about.

Ask them if they know of the four conditions which must be present in order for something to be considered bi'dat. Do they know why Hazrat 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) referred to the public congregational observance of tarawih prayers as a 'bi'dat hasanatan'? Why take to heart the statements of people who really don't know what they are talking about and consider everything with which they disagree or do not understand as bi'dat?

Baba is the shaykh of your shaykh. He is our link through which, by the grace of Allah, we became associated with the silsilah, and the silsilah is the chain of spiritual lineage and authority which stretches back from your shaykh to Baba to his shaykh, and the shaykh of his shaykh, and so on back to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Baba is one of those who was appointed by the Prophet (peace be upon him) to help people achieve the purpose for which they were given existence -- and that purpose is neither the attainment of paradise nor the avoidance of hell ... indeed, there is nowhere in the Hadith or the Qur'an which says that attaining paradise or avoiding hell is central to the purpose of life -- as desirable as these goals might be -- but few Muslims in this day and age have even the slightest glimmer of understanding concerning this.

Although what I am about to say is not to be used for propping up one's ego, the fact of the matter is that, through initiation, you, as well as others who have taken this step, have been given an extraordinary opportunity to come into close association with Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) who -- along with other friends of Allah who have passed away from this world -- is, as the Qur'an clearly indicates, not dead but is alive -- not biologically but spiritually -- while enjoying a sustenance from Allah. What you do with this opportunity depends, to a great extent on you, but the opportunity has been, and is being, given to you.

Baba is a door of spiritual opportunity -- as am I, your shaykh. You must find the key to unlock these doors, and the place to look for this key is in your heart.

It is unfortunate that you have, as you indicate in your e-mail, a difficult time with things Sufi, for all of the elements and facets of this path are designed to help you find the aforementioned key, learn about the many properties of that key, and set about doing what is necessary to fit the key to the lock on the door of spiritual opportunity in a proper fashion so that the secrets and mysteries which lie beyond the door -- and these are infinite in nature -- might become open to you. As is true for all of us, nobody keeps one from this undertaking but oneself.

You don't have to be apologetic to me concerning your problems in this regard. You should be apologizing to your essential Self, for you are transgressing against your true Self when you keep yourself pre-occupied with everything but tasawwuf.

All of the things of this world -- work, family, money, material possessions, houses, formal education -- will all pass away. The only things of lasting value are spiritual in nature.

You are a very intelligent person. How does the ephemeral stack up against eternity?

You indicate in your e-mail that as you get older, time seems to be moving faster. Take it from one who is much older than you, it will only get faster, and, therefore, you need to understand that your moments of spiritual opportunity are slipping through your hands faster than grains of sand slip through the narrow aperture of an hour glass -- and this rate will increase with age unless you choose to do something about it now -- and, if not now, then, when?

On the day of Judgment each of us will be shown the many spiritual opportunities which have been given to us. Much rests on what percentage of these we have actually taken hold of and the quality of our sincerity in doing so ... therefore, as we are enjoined to do by the Qur'an, hold tight to the rope which Allah has extended to us. In your case and mine, this rope has become manifested in the form of our respective shaykhs.

If you cannot find a time to hook up with Uzma and Samia to say fatiha, then, by all means do say the fatiha on your own -- but say it. This is very important because saying fatiha is one of the things which will help you to find the key in your heart to the door of spiritual opportunity which is before you.

You went to school for many years before you finally realized a university degree, and all of the projects you did, and papers you wrote, and books you read, and classes you took, and tests for which you studied helped you realize your goal. So, too, there are many things which are necessary to do, in order to realize the goal of the Sufi path, and all of these things come much, much easier when there is love in your heart concerning the purpose of this path.

You are concerned with finding permanent employment. You also should be concerned with making your true calling in life your real vocation. Is there really no way that you can find to spend a few hours, or so, each week making the necessary arrangements to get together in order to remember God with one another ... and, if not every week, then, every other week, or every third week, or even once a month?

If you people are not careful, you might find that in having no time for Allah, there might come a time when Allah will have no time for you. As the Prophet (peace be upon him) has warned us ...one should take advantage of the door of opportunity when it opens to us, for one never knows when that door might close.

There is a reason why I am requesting you to meet with one another to say fatiha. There is no intention to punish you or segregate you from Momin Shah Baba's fatihas, but there are certain things which you all need to learn before being permitted to attend those gatherings on a regular basis ... and, so far, what needs to happen, has not taken place.

I say these things not in a scolding way or in a manner of condemnation but from my heart. I have love for each of you.

I am concerned for your spiritual welfare. I want you to succeed. I want you to discover the Lost Horizons which are within you. I don't want you to be filled with regret on the day of Judgment when it finally is made clear to us all what could have been if only we had taken the few steps which are needed to work toward opening the door of spiritual opportunity which is being extended to us by Allah through the events of this life.

You all are in my heart and my prayers. Love,

Baba Tariq

§

Tue, 11 Jan 2000 00:34:52-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I have taken to heart your caution about returning to Sima's home town on a permanent basis. I am trying to work toward inducing Sima to leave Milton and be with me, but I don't know if this is going to happen, and I really don't have any idea of how long to work on this project before I come to the conclusion that it just is not going to take place.

I know that you did say you would be with me even if I decided to go back. However, contrary to what many people might believe, I really don't enjoy pain and difficulty.

I have resolved in my heart, insha' Allah, that either Sima must be prepared to leave Milton -- and I am trying to find a nice way of doing this which, God willing, gives us something to work with financially and otherwise -- or, I am going to have to leave the relationship. As things stand, no one is benefitting by the current arrangement -- except, perhaps, Sima's father -- but other than this, I feel the present situation is hurting Sima, her children, her mother, me, and the silsilah.

I have felt this for quite some time, yet still, I have been trying to find some way through ... if there is such a way. But, time is passing, and none of us has forever to sort this out ... especially since people are suffering -- perhaps unnecessarily -- during this whole process.

I have received word back from the university, and they basically said "Thanks, but no thanks." They said that many worthy candidates applied for the position and that the Selection Committee had decided to go with one of these other candidates.

In a separate e-mail, I am sending to you a proposal which I have drawn up concerning an art project which actually has been in my mind and heart for many years. At various times, I have tried to interest different people in the idea, but no one seemed to have an interest and, furthermore, there were no funds available.

I wrote in an earlier e-mail that Sima's uncle has close connections with the Governor and the Secretary of State. I also indicated that her uncle had been told that there was money available for religious groups to do something along spiritual lines.

Sima went to a dinner with her uncle where she found out more about this, and she met the Secretary of State who encouraged her to submit an arts proposal. I told Sima about my idea and wrote it up so

that it could be shown to the Secretary at a forthcoming meeting which her uncle is having with the official.

My hope is that some grant money might be given for the proposed project and that this money could be used to help lead that project into, God willing, a reality, while, simultaneously, both providing Sima, her children, and me the financial means to start a new life somewhere other than Milton, as well as have a means of helping to support her parents in the house where everyone currently lives. In addition, if this art project were successful, then I see it as a potential means of, God willing, helping to work toward having a center for the silsilah in the United States, and, maybe, even Canada since I believe the finished works could be sold in either their original form or as prints for which the silsilah could receive a percentage for each sale.

However, before getting too far ahead of myself, I have some concerns about the project itself, and I wanted to run it by you to see what you thought about it. Insha' Allah, I believe that Sima has the artistic talent to implement the idea, but much rests on the kind of help she gets from our side -- whether directly through you, or, indirectly, through some distant facsimile of you -- because this help might well spell the difference between whether this project would be, God willing, a good thing or a, God forbid, not so good thing.

In any event, I will be sending another e-mail that contains a proposal which I have given to Sima to forward to the Secretary of State with the hope that it, too, might strike some chord of interest. Finally, in a final e-mail, I am sending an interview which I did with a college student from England who approached me through the SpiritualNotion web page in relation to a term paper she was doing for her religion course.

Apparently, the professor liked my answers quite a lot, apparently, and supposedly is going the teacher is going to adopt a portion of the perspective in the interview for a course of his that he is going to give sometime in the near future. However, there are some things which I have said in the interview which I would like to run past you to see if they are okay since I was thinking of putting the interview on the Sufi segment of the silsilah web page.

I hope all of these e-mails are okay.

Love,
Tariq

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Tue, 11 Jan 2000 00:55:50-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Here is the 'Art Proposal' to which I alluded in an earlier e-mail. I guess what I would like to know is the following: Quite independently of whether the project gets any funding from the state government as a cultural program, are the underlying ideas that are being given expression here okay?

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Traditionally, many Muslims have placed certain restraints on the forms through which visual arts are given expression. More specifically, with certain exceptions, much of the Muslim world has restricted visual artistic expression, across the ages, to roughly four forms: (1) architecture -- which includes both the aspects of design, as well as that of construction; (2) calligraphy in its various modalities ranging from the rectilinear kufic style to the very fluid Neskhi style; (3) geometric patterns -- one well-known example being that of the arabesque, and, finally, (4) crafts which encompass the creation and production of such things as tapestries, rugs, jewelry, clothes, and many items used in the course of a day -- from pottery to furniture.

Almost invariably, all of the foregoing forms refrain from the use of human images. Among other things, this restriction is frequently traced to a well-known hadith, or saying, of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that warns believers against trying to assume the role of the Creator through acts of generating images of the human form.

This Prophetic cautioning is also often linked, by many Muslims, to a Quranic principle which indicates that human beings have been created in the image of Divinity. As a result, those Muslim artists who might be inclined to venture in the direction of generating human forms are being warned that the territory through which they seek to travel is sacred in a variety of senses and might be best avoided altogether.

Nevertheless, there have been a few historical periods of artistic expression in some parts of the Muslim world which have departed from the aforementioned general rule. One such exception involves the use of human figures in what have come to be known as "Persian miniatures".

A compromise, of sorts, explored by some Muslim artists is the use of certain elements from nature. However, such features rarely are the central focus of a work of visual art and, instead, tend to play a secondary, decorative or ornamental role which is incorporated into more fundamental motifs involving architecture, calligraphy, geometric patterns and/or craft work.

Having said the foregoing, a natural question to ask is the following. What is the purpose of art in an Islamic context?

In general, one of the primary intentions underlying such art has always been to use beauty as a means of inviting believers to contemplate Divine Attributes through aesthetically pleasing arrangements of space, form, medium, color, style, perspective, and vision. Properly implemented, Islamic art gives expression to a perennial wisdom that is manifested through a beauty which integrates form, medium, color, and perspective in a manner that points forcefully and persuasively in the direction of important universal principles.

Harmony, balance, equilibrium, peace, purity, transcendence, imminence, unity, integrity, nobility, absence, presence, stability, transformation, and precision are some of these universal principles. The foregoing are principles of sacredness that are given expression through an artistic beauty which is intended to help lead believers toward reflecting on qualitatively expansive, universal truths rather than quantitatively constricted, individual truths.

The beauty of an instance of art -- whether architecture, calligraphy, geometric pattern, or craft work -- resides in its capacity to praise God through reflecting one or more universal principles whose origins lie within the Divine Names. The beauty of a given exemplar of art lies in its ability to induce believers to reflect upon these principles and be drawn back to their Origin which gives nourishment to these principles, and, therefore, serves as the Foundation upon which sacred art derivatively rests.

The original prototype of Islamic art is Arabic calligraphy. This art form is rooted in the Divine Word which was given expression through the Qur'an, one of the Divine Books of Revelation that have been sent to humankind across thousands of years. Muslims believe that the Qur'an was transmitted to the heart of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) via the agency of Archangel Gabriel, just as Divine Books of Revelation had been transmitted to the hearts of, among others, Jesus, Moses, David and Abraham (peace be upon them all) at previous junctures of sacred history.

Interestingly enough, however, the Qur'an is, first and foremost, an aural tradition, not a written one. Furthermore, this revelation -- as is true of all sacred revelations -- is said to be the uncreated Word of God.

Consequently, calligraphy constitutes a study of, or exploration into, some of the universal principles that are inherent in the uncreated Word of God. The forms of the letters, their proportions, continuity, rhythm, precision, and style all combine to create a beauty which points in the direction of the Divine Source of their inspiration as well as in the direction of their Object of praise, adoration and worship.

In addition, there is not only a beauty of form entailed by sacred calligraphy, the letters and words also convey Divine meanings. In other words, the letters and words have an additional and much more primary, sacred, and aesthetic dimension because they serve as so many loci of manifestation for Divine communication to, and with, human beings.

Some commentators have pointed out that the woof and warp of the Holy Qur'an are the Divine Names of God which are ninety-nine in number. Of course, ultimately, Divinity is infinite in Nature, and,

therefore, cannot be circumscribed by just ninety-nine Names, nonetheless, the ninety-nine names are the Names which God has chosen to use to help human beings reflect upon some of the qualities of Divinity that are woven into the fabric of the Qur'an and given manifested form in the parables, stories, history, teachings, values, principles, and guidance of that Holy revelation.

One of the traditional ways of reflecting these Names in artistic form is to use calligraphy. Throughout the Muslim world, one will find various modalities of calligraphic representation of these Names, both individually, as well as, collectively.

The Names Project which is being proposed in the current document seeks to approach the artistic expression of the ninety-nine Names of God from a somewhat different perspective than that which traditionally been used to convey something of the beauty of those Names. More specifically, rather than using just calligraphy, the Names Project would like to use a variety of colors, dynamic relationships, impressionistic forms, symbolic expressions, and so on to try to open up additional possibilities for reflection that could be used in conjunction with traditional Arabic calligraphy and, yet, which are both intimately tied to the sacred meaning being transmitted through the Arabic letters that make up the written form of a given Name of God, and which, simultaneously, do not violate any of the aforementioned restrictions which have been true of most traditional forms of sacred art within the Muslim community.

The series of exploratory studies being proposed by the Names Project is intended to be complimentary to, as well as supplemental to, traditional calligraphic representations of the Names. The use of colors, forms, patterns, designs, relationships, symbols, and so on to be pursued though the Names Project is intended to serve as but one, very limited way of giving visual expression to some of the meaning inherent in any given, particular Name of Divinity and which, if successful, could help enhance the beauty of the traditional calligraphic representation of such a Name.

Furthermore, use of the term "beauty" in the previous paragraph is intended in the sense that was outlined earlier. In other words, whatever artistic additions are introduced in conjunction with a traditional calligraphic representation of a given Divine Name, such

new elements must help serve as loci for the manifestation of sacred, universal principles which, in turn, reflect some dimension of the Divine Wisdom being transmitted through a given Name -- just as is the case with a purely calligraphic expression of this Wisdom.

If successful, the supplementary and complementary artistic modalities being suggested by the Names Project, are intended -- in harmonious conjunction with their calligraphic counterparts -- to become a visual zikr or mode of remembrance of Divine Qualities and Attributes. If successful, this approach to one dimension of sacred art, will use beauty to resonate with the soul and spirit of a believer, and help induce the individual to remember, reflect on, and, return to the Original Source of the underlying universal principles which link art form and the human being.

Sacred art is not a creation. It is a mirror which reflects The Names of Divinity in manifested form according to the capacity of the mirror.

Beauty can arise nowhere except through Divinity. In conveying something of the quality of Beauty, art merely places this quality in its proper Divine context, and invites the believer to understand that every artful mirror sings the praise of God in its own manner by reflecting Divine Names in accordance with its nature.

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Tue, 11 Jan 2000 00:55:50-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

The following is the 'Tasawwuf Project' to which I alluded in an earlier e-mail. Once again, I am sending it, God willing, in both a straight e-mail format as well as an attached file in the hopes that one or the other arrives in a form which is easy for you to read. The reason why I have framed the project in the form of an arts project is because the Secretary of State indicated that Arts monies might be the most accessible by individuals since otherwise one would have had to been a non-profit organization which has been in existence in the state for at least a year ... criteria which we don't satisfy.

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The Tasawwuf Project

What manner of entity is the Tasawwuf Project? It is intended to serve as a multifaceted resource for a number of different communities -- both Muslim and non-Muslim.

This potential resource entails programs focusing on education, research, creativity, and community outreach wrapped up in an ecumenical spirit of respect and reciprocity across different faith groups and conceptual perspectives.

The means, however, by which this project seeks to accomplish its aims are essentially artistic. The way in which this is so requires a brief explanation.

The question: 'What is art?' has been raised for many centuries. The proposed answers have agreed on some principles and themes while differing on many others.

If one were to distill some of the common, overlapping elements shared by many of these theories of art, one might come up with, arguably, something along the following lines. Art deals with the transformation and translation of internal vision into externally perceivable forms through the use of colors (defined by hue, saturation and intensity), surfaces, textures, mediums, relationships, symbols, movement and perspective.

The manner in which all of the foregoing elements are brought together reflects the aesthetic judgment and intent of the artist. This judgment can be used in a variety of ways -- from inducing others to reflect upon some aspect of the human condition; to introducing alternative ways of representing different facets of the beauty and majesty of being; to experimenting with the possibilities of form; to bringing into question the validity of certain assumptions about the significance, value and meaning of forms; to serving as a locus of manifestation for sacred communication; to showing the numerous possibilities inherent in technique and imagination.

Traditionally, art has been understood to be given expression through mediums such as oil, charcoal, water color, pen, pencil, clay, stone, glass, metal and buildings. Today, many people would add film, video, sound, the computer, and performance (musical, movement, athletic, acting) to the list of media which are capable of being used by those seeking to translate their aesthetic judgment into a concrete form which can communicate on varying levels with other human beings.

The 'Tasawwuf Project' intends to give expression to various aesthetic understandings and insights which are rooted in the Sufi mystical path. This would be done through a number of different mediums such as videotape, CD-ROMS (computer and audio), the Internet, and books -- all of which would employ colors, surfaces, textures, relationships, ideas, sounds, music, symbols, movement, and perspective -- but not necessarily in a traditional, Western manner.

The forms created through the use of Sufi aesthetic judgment in the 'Tasawwuf Project' would be intended to: inform; induce reflection; display alternative perspectives; experiment with possibilities; and raise questions -- which are just the sorts of thing for which art has been employed across time and which have been accomplished with varying degrees of success and appeal. Each art form approaches these issues and principles in its own way.

AIMS of the Tasawwuf Project:

- to inform Muslims about spiritual dimensions and possibilities inherent in Islam (i.e., the mystical path) about which they might be unaware or ill-informed;

- to explore themes (e.g., art, music, poetry, ethics, ecology, science, community, as well as the challenges and problems of life) from a Sufi mystical or esoteric perspective, in particular, and Islam, in general, which have universal resonance with the interests of people from many different faith backgrounds and conceptual orientations;

- to develop rigorous methodologies within areas such as: critical thinking, hermeneutics, psychology, philosophy, cosmology, and education that will have value for people from varied faith and

humanistic backgrounds and which can be adapted for use within their own traditions;

- to establish a cultural/educational/faith center which would plan, organize and promote an evolving program of exhibitions, seminars, lectures, spiritual concerts, sacred turning, seminars, forums, and courses that would implement the first three aims noted above;

- to generate effective strategies for creating self-financing streams of revenue to underwrite the costs associated with realizing aims (1)-(4) by means of a series of multi-media packages including: videotapes, CD-ROMS (both for computer and audio disc formats), as well as books which give concrete form to the aims stated in the first three aims noted previously and which could be of use to a variety of different faith communities, educational institutions, libraries, and individuals;

- to provide outreach facilities for the surrounding community through an array of educational, counseling and support programs.

Some aspects of the ‘Tasawwuf Project’ already have been implemented. For example, a number of books have been written which give expression to some of the foregoing aims. In addition, a Web site has been created -- <http://www.spiritualnotion.edu> -- that consists of some 1300 pages and seven sub-directories and which is visited by between 7-10,000 people each month.

We would like to build on, and expand upon, what previously has been accomplished. We are seeking grant assistance to enable us to continue unfolding the different dimensions of our Sufi aesthetic judgment through a variety of mediums which give external, concrete form to our internal vision and by means of which we hope to communicate with others -- both within as well as beyond the boundaries of the Muslim community -- with respect to issues, themes, values and principles of universal import and resonance.

Tue, 11 Jan 2000 05:11:47 PST (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

Yes, it has been a dream, and if materialized it could be termed as "A dream come true". I would like to add dramatics also and call it "Sufi plays and concerts". Believe me if that happens, I promise to take active part in the stories, scripts and also in directing.

Yes! I know that this comes as a big surprise to you! But do remember, my part will be elsewhere. It could be based in Sima's state, but I would do my part from where I am now.

That could be arranged in so many ways. If the participants could come down somewhere between the middle of Milton and where I live, well and good, otherwise your wife could be trained and told what and how to do that, while you remain on top and see to the art work and the main aesthetic matters, plus the business side and sacred turnings etc.

The other matter regarding the name is something that worries me somewhat. The term 'tasawwuf' is the best name for me and you, no doubt, but being an Islamic name rather too openly, this might become a lightning rod for some, which could be problematic right from the start. I would not mind the name of the project to be "House of Gnosis".

Now for the other matter of "Art" I do agree with your views. The only thing which I suggest that you be careful of is not to have too much of human images, which could trigger much annoyance in the "so-called Muslim world". Other than that, all artistic works done to describe the verses of the Holy Quran or the Names of Allah, is definitely permissible and appropriate.

I also suggest that one very important point should be added as a high-lighted intention: It is one of the foremost important intentions of ours to try our best to promote among young children of the Muslim faith about the Sufi path - especially in relation to many misconceptions that people have about the truth concerning numerous Quranic verses.

The human race is one big family, and here lies the problem with ignorance about what actually pleases GOD. Certain Quranic verses have been used by many self-styled "so-called Islamic Priests" to induce hatred among Muslims against all other faiths. So according to our Sufi way we would try to teach love and tolerance for all mankind ... something which has been done all too infrequently for many centuries.

Tariq I feel that the foregoing point cannot fail in getting support by any authority in North America. But you also must specify to them that this has to be done in a very artistic way without interference from the side of the so-called Muslim communities. Consequently, it must be done without the awareness of some of the trouble-makers who reside in the Muslim community. That is the only way. It should be mentioned to the authorities whom your wife will approach that this is our intention but that intention will not be displayed as part of the project in a readily identifiable way.

Well, think about what I have suggested. The decision is yours to make. You will know better if what I say is possible.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

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Tue, 11 Jan 2000 01:24:31-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Here is the interview with the student from England which was conducted via e-mail. I realize that much more could have been said with almost all of the questions, but I was trying to keep the answers short and focused since this might be easier for potential readers (the student, her professor, or others) to grasp.

Dear Chantel,

I'm sorry for the delay. I thought I would be able to get to this much sooner than has been the case.

The responses to your questions are below.

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 Kabbala, 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 which 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 which 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 which were arranged by the Sufi guide, as well as to participate in a variety of practices – especially zikr or a form of spiritual remembrance which 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) Ramadan -- 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 which 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 -- 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 -- which 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 which 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 which 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 Ramadan, 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 which 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 which 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 which 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 which 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 or his 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 which 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 which 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 which 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 which 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 are 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 which 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 which they might pursue.

11.) To what extent does the Qur'an influence your moral judgments and which 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. 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 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 niyah 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 niyah 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 niyah 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 (ayah in the case of the Qur'an) can best be understood in the light of other sunnah (verses of the Qur'an) 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 which 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 which 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 which 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 which 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 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 which is 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 that realization that we are best able to

worship God which, 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 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, 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 which 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 which 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.

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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 things as I am able to do them.

With warmest regards,

Tariq

P.S. -- Baba, if you thought the material was okay, I would publish it through one venue or another ... minus, perhaps, the last question and answer.

§

Tue, 11 Jan 2000 06:09:39 PST (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum,

I do not think that any other response to the questions could have been better! To tell you the truth I am overjoyed at the answers you gave! MASHA ALLAH! SUBHAAN ALLAH! Of course you can, and, in fact, you should make this public!

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

Tue, 11 Jan 2000 23:43:21-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Although we talked a bit about this when I visited in December, I am still not sure how to proceed in the following matter. How do I get Sima in touch with you or vice versa in a way that will be acceptable to you?

I told Sima you had come back to the United States, at least for a while, and that you had been spending some time with another shaykh -- out in California I thought -- but I wasn't sure. However, I left things at that, and didn't say much more for fear that if I said too much about things -- such as the possibility of her making contact with you -- she might suspect you really were at home.

I also said to Sima that there had been some talk when I met you about the possibility that you might be getting married but I didn't really know any of the details or particulars or when or even if it actually would take place or with whom. In any event, if you could suggest how I might go about raising the issue of her communicating with you, I would appreciate it.

On another matter, I also would like to have some clarification. You indicated to me when I visited with you that I shouldn't go back to Sima's town, and the implication seemed to be that if I did there would be a lot of problems involved in this.

In your e-mail to me of earlier today, you appeared to suggest that trying to set up something -- as far as a center of some sort is concerned, mid-way between where you and Sima live, might be a good thing. So, I am not sure how to reconcile this with what you had said to me.

Is it that I should not return specifically to the situation where Sima lives -- where I was hanging out before -- but that establishing

ourselves somewhere else in that state away from those places might be OK? Although I have asked Sima to come to Vermont with her children and she has shied away from this possibility, maybe a compromise of sorts would be to live in her state -- if one or both of these government grants comes through -- but to do so several hours, or more, in travel time removed from her present town.

This would give us some space to, insha' Allah, do our things without her relatives breathing down our necks and possibly interfering or creating problems for us, and, yet, it would be close enough for her to visit relatives, on occasion, so that she wouldn't feel that she or her children were completely isolated from her extended family. She has indicated a willingness, of late, to move out of her present residence and set up a home somewhere else -- maybe, somewhere else in her state might be an alternative solution if the financing for it came through. But, I don't know how -- or if -- this fits in with what you told me during my visit.

Love, Tariq

§

Wed, 12 Jan 2000 02:51:25 PST (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

At first she refused to leave her present place and to such an extent that you had given up hope of her ever doing so, but she has changed her stand now by agreeing to come stay with you. How do we know that later she might also agree to come away entirely from her town to stay wherever you are? If she has come this far, then why not come a little farther?

The reason I gave that suggestion about midway between her place and here was only if the Sufi plays would be included and I might want to participate in the script and direction of it. I was just thinking aloud when I mentioned it, meaning that if this venture becomes possible, then, I could also add my two bits which has been like a

dream, ever since I read the book, "Problem Island" I have always wanted to awaken the audience through art and plays.

Actually it was not that I would personally come there, but maybe some other way of participation by preparing your wife to do it, and I remaining invisible, so to speak.

As you know that I will never ask you to break up the relationship, and as you well remember, I had said that if you so decide to go back to her home town, it's all right by me. I understand how difficult it is for you at the moment to decide.

I do know this for a fact that your brother will be very hurt if you should leave. He might not have mentioned this to you, and in fact he might be keeping a non-emotional front, but in his heart he is overjoyed that you are with him. Knowing all this, yet, you have my full permission to decide where you would eventually want to make a base for yourself. This offer of finance coming from Connecticut does make me feel that I was right that they will try to get you back, some way or other.

I do not wish to ruin that opportunity, yet I am rather skeptical about it. It will surprise me to know that they will come up with an appropriate amount for the project you have in mind. All this while when you were there and in such financial difficulty, they just did nothing much. Now that you have proved to them that you can make it on your own, they have come up with this idea. If the uncle has any relationship with the government there, surely it's not a recent one. He had this relationship even when you were there.

Please do not feel that I am trying to insinuate anything. No. I am simply previewing my inner thoughts and in turn typing them to you.

Whatever you do decide, please do not let go the hand stretched out to you by your brother. Tariq, whatever you may have experienced regarding your brother in the past, he is better than a thousand so-called Muslims, who are anything but sincere to others or to themselves.

Anyway, you know in your heart that I am with you all the way, no matter what. INSHA ALLAH may you succeed in all the steps you take.
ALLAHUMMA

AAMEEN.

LOVE AND DUA, BABA.

P.S. Regarding her contacting me, as I had said, it could be done through e-mail. At the moment I think it best to let her know that I am about to return to Islamabad, and I have my laptop with me for e-mail purposes. She can e-mail me if she so wishes. E-mail address: sm_aj@netscape.net. If she so decides to keep up the contact, then later if I see it appropriate I may even decide to meet with her at some time. She has to prove first that she can be trusted to not let her relatives in Canada know that she is in touch with me. If she cannot do that, then it would prove that she will not be able to keep the meeting also as a secret.

I love you son with all my heart and soul, and you know that.

Dua,

Baba

§

Mon, 17 Jan 2000 09:27:18-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Just a short note -- which I'm not even sure I will finish. We got snowed in last night and the buses are not running so my brother is coming to pick me up to go to work.

I gave Sima your e-mail. I gave her explicit instructions to not give the e-mail to anyone, or tell anyone that she is in touch with you, or tell anybody that you are in Islamabad.

There are a few things which are bothering me and I thought that I would voice them and see what, if anything, you might have to say about it. Maybe I am being petty or unnecessarily concerned about certain issues about which I ought not to be concerned, but, nevertheless, these things are bothering me and I wanted to run them by you.

The other night at the fatiha to which Sima went at Shaykh Shams', the shaykh had Sima repeat a dream in front of their group. The dream was about the zikr which they do, and the dream indicated that their zikr was the best of zikrs.

All of this might be true, but this is not what concerns me. My understanding is that a wife is not to tell her dreams to anyone except her husband or her shaykh, or that she should at least ask permission to tell someone else before doing so.

In addition, Shaykh Shams had said to her that he feels that some of Sima's dreams are meant for him and that she should tell him these dreams. Again, this might be true, but I would have thought that he should have had the courtesy to ask my permission about such matters.

On a number of occasions, he has invited Sima to do things for their silsilah (such as sit on the board of directors of the foundation which they are trying to start for their group), and, again, this was done without asking me. On a number of other occasions, he has applied a certain amount of, what I would call, pressure -- slight though it might be -- to encourage her to come to their fatihas and indicating how important it is for her to do so.

I have gone to great lengths not to try to influence her decision in these matters, and have clearly left the decision up to her about where she wants to go and with whom she wishes to be affiliated. Nonetheless, I don't appreciate the lack of reciprocity which seems to characterize this situation.

I have not said anything to Sima about this because I don't want to cast anyone in a negative light -- especially since it is someone with whom she is contemplating taking initiation, but I am unhappy with the situation both with respect to Sima and Shaykh Shams.

During this same session in which shaykh Shams asked Sima to repeat her dream before the group, this other woman from Turkey about whom I told you earlier also indicated certain things to the group concerning the status of their silsilah. One of these things is that she told their group about a spiritual souvenir which Shaykh Shams recently had received from his shaykh that contains the 99 Names of Allah and which, apparently, dates back to the time of the founder of the silsilah. This woman told Shaykh Shams exactly what his shaykh had told him when he received the souvenir but about which Shaykh Shams had not told anyone.

It seems that this woman has kashf (unveilings – which can be either having to do with the world or with spirituality). However, when one mixes this in with the "magical" solution which she has given to Sima about the evil eye which that woman said was on Sima, then, I begin to wonder what is going on.

Shaykh Shams had indicated to his group that this woman is a special gift to their group and that she is part of a secret awliya of Allah. All of this might be true -- God knows best -- but the situation is taking some twists and turns about which I am not sure what to think, and because Sima might becoming mixed up in it, I am not quite sure what to do.

The foregoing has been written in a rather rushed manner because my brother is coming and he has just knocked at the door.

Love,

Tariq

§

Mon, 17 Jan 2000 21:10:29 PST (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

Well, what to say and what not to say. Anyway let's just say it. The fact that we had given her the full freedom to choose was our abiding by the rules of TRUTH, and her not wanting to share the spiritual side with the man she calls her husband, is her very open attitude which is the result of her incorrect thoughts about TRUTH. As a Sufi shaikh it was my IKHLAAQ, to ask you not to put any pressure on her to join the same silsila with you and that it should be her own choice. It was now her turn to be sensible and a properly devoted wife to you and, as a result, make the decision to accept her responsibilities as your wife in worldly matters as well as a spiritual mother to your future mureeds.

The rule of etiquettes in tasawwuf is very clear about such matters. When one of the spiritual guides of our silsila asked his wife to choose whom she wants as her shaikh, she immediately said that she has decided very truly to ask him to decide for her. Then he told

her that it has to be her own decision. She said that she has decided, and the decision was that he as her husband should decide. Then only did he chose a certain shaikh who was very close to him.

Now what did this shaikh say, after she became his mureed? He said to her that since this is the right way, I have allowed you to become my mureed, but now I command you to remain with your husband as if you are his very own mureed and you are the spiritual mother of his mureeds. All Fateha attendances will be with your husband and not here with me.

Just imagine! This was the IKHLAAQ of the actual Aulia ALLAH those days and even these days the rule and IKHLAAQ has not changed. Please remember to realize the true position of these so called ones through their IKHLAAQ. According to my teachings and, very frankly, even according to the teachings of your first shaikh, these people who fall short and are found wanting in IKHLAAQAY RASOOL ALLAH, are not to be taken as good spiritual associates. Your first shaikh also, as you very well know, had come across such so called shaikhs. That is the reason why people like your first shaikh and myself have to keep ourselves aloof from such associations.

Tariq my son, this is pure tragedy. I don't know what to say. I am very disappointed with her and I feel that she has certainly gone much beyond the bounds of being a caring wife. In fact now she has started introducing other people on a large scale to another Imam of some Mosque also. This is not a game, but one would have hoped her to do that for you, being your wife!

She has no respect for your spiritual status. In fact I will not be surprised if she has even openly told her new associates that she has no faith with you anymore. That is the reason why they so freely invite her to their gatherings. She has now involved herself to such an extent that I do not think it will do any good for her to contact me through e-mail. Now that you and I know who and where her Kaaba is!

What else can I say son? My Prayers are with you. ALLAH is with you. ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

Sat, 29 Jan 2000 12:36:09-0500 (e-mail for a visitor to the silsilah web site)

Dear Ellen,

However you decide to proceed with your pursuit of things Sufi, there are several points which ought to be made. These points are offered for your consideration in the hope that this process of reflection will help you to proceed in a way which will be constructive for you and not harmful.

Although you have made contact with our silsilah, the leads given in the previous e-mail were put forth for a purpose. Without wishing to over-emphasize the following point since this can be misleading and end up in confusion, there is such a thing as spiritual chemistry.

In effect, what this means is that an individual's heart is sometimes more receptive to the spiritual guidance which comes through one mode of manifestation rather than another, even though, ultimately, all guidance comes from One and the same Source. Therefore, before jumping into something, a person should check things out a little to see if that individual is drawn more in the direction of one mode of Divine guidance rather than another.

Now, as indicated above, this search for spiritual chemistry can be problematic and confusing in a variety of ways. For instance, a seeker can go hunting for an epiphany in his or her beginning relationship with a shaykh, and this event(s) might never occur.

If this doesn't take place, the individual might conclude -- incorrectly, that this means the given shaykh at whose doorstep the person has arrived must not be either an authentic guide or might be an authentic guide but not a very great one. By setting expectations and pre-conditions on what should transpire in such relationships, a seeker becomes veiled and might wind up further from the Truth than when she or he began the spiritual quest.

Nonetheless, having given this caveat, there still can be a spiritual chemistry which is important to find -- if God should choose this for a

given seeker. Such chemistry is important because the Sufi path is a very long one, and there are many difficulties along the way, and, in many cases, all one has to help one through those difficulties is, at least on the surface of things, one's relationship with the shaykh.

When the aforementioned spiritual chemistry is present, then, this can make holding on through: 'the dark night of the soul', easier to do than if such spiritual chemistry is not present. Consequently, the suggestion that you make contact with some of the other shaykhs mentioned in the previous e-mail is for your potential benefit rather than merely passing on dispensable information.

Of course, another problem which can arise out of the foregoing -- and it is somewhat related to the epiphany syndrome -- is that a person spends so much time looking for the "perfect" shaykh for herself or himself, the individual never does settle down and get on with the process of real spiritual struggle. Another problem is that a seeker might begin to make judgments about the spiritual station of a given shaykh, and this is not a good thing to do since, among other things, the seeker is not competent to make such judgments.

None of the foregoing is intended to push you away from us. Rather, the counsel is for 'you look before you leap' while balancing this with 'he/she who hesitates is lost'.

Another suggestion involves our silsilah's web site in general, and the Sufi directory of that Site, in particular. There is a great deal of information about the Sufi path which is contained in our web site, including a reading list.

Although reading is not an absolutely essential pre-requisite to the Sufi path, nonetheless, it can play a supportive and constructive role within certain limits. I don't know what or who you have been reading, but both "what" and "who" can make a big difference in terms of the kinds of problems one might encounter on the mystical path. Just as there are all too many spiritual quacks running around professing to be Sufi shaykhs, pirs, guides, teachers, or masters, there also are many authors who claim to have spiritual insight into the Sufi path but who do not.

The bibliography provided in the Sufi directory of the silsilah's web site is a fairly good one. The book titles appearing there will help an individual and not hurt her or him.

On the other hand, just because a book title might not appear in that bibliography, this absence does not necessarily mean such a book is problematic in some way. Let the following question be raised, however: namely, why venture on one's own into unknown territory when a clearly marked path has been provided?

Finally, in the light of certain things which you have said in your previous e-mails, a further point needs to be made, and you might do with this what you will. A spiritual teacher is not an advisor, although, clearly, advice does come through such an individual.

A Sufi shaykh is a locus of manifestation of Divine guidance in the form of an individual who is rooted in a spiritual silsilah (or chain of spiritual lineage) that can be traced back to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and through the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) back through all of the 124,000 Prophets who have been sent by God to help humankind and all of creation, including Adam (peace be upon him) the first Prophet that God sent to Earth. A Sufi teacher has been authorized to serve as a guide by none other than God and, by Divinity's permission and design, the Prophet of God -- Muhammad (peace be upon him).

If one is contemplating taking initiation with a given spiritual guide, then understand in Whose Hand one is placing one's hand. Furthermore, if one does not have confidence in what is being said here, then one ought to stay away from such things so that neither the seeker's time is wasted, nor the time of the spiritual guide. Sincerely, Tariq

§

Tue, 18 Jan 2000 13:36:43 PST (e-mail)

Dear Baba Tariq,

Asalamulaikum. How are you? How is everything? 'Eid Mubarak to you too. Hope you had a nice 'Eid.

We ('Asima, Samia, and myself) have finally decided that inshallah we will start reading fateha together again at the university on Sundays at 10:30 a.m.. We will start this Sunday (inshallah).

I received all of my final marks and I have passed all of my courses with marks that I am happy with. I am planning on buying a computer so that I don't have to stay at school for so long.

I am happy that so far the Y2K bug has not caused huge problems. So far I have heard almost nothing, but I guess that we are not in the clear yet. I am grateful that the power did not go out.

Everyone here is doing fine. My parents send their salaam and they say 'Eid Mubarak to you. Daddy seems to be recovering well now but mommy seems to be getting sick. I think maybe she just needs to change her medicine or something.

Samia is doing fine also. I don't think I told you but, she is taking economics at the university. She is having some trouble with her courses.

Originally she wanted to be in commerce but only got accepted into economics. She is still with Salman and doesn't talk to me much about him. I don't think she told you, and for some time I felt maybe it's not my place to say anything but then I think that it's important for you to know the situation.

I am still working at Sarah's Petite Shop. Now, however, I only work one day a week on Saturday normally the 11-7 shift.

I spoke with Sima one day and she was talking about girls in the silsilah and how there is an etiquette for marriage. I wasn't clear on what she meant, so I thought I would ask you what the etiquette is.

I hope to hear from you, and I hope to write soon. Khuda hafiz, with love, Uzma

Sun, 30 Jan 2000 15:56:33-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Uzma, from Canada, e-mailed me the other day and said she had been speaking with Afzal's wife, Ra'bia, and, at some point during the conversation, Ra'bia had told her there is an etiquette for women within the silsilah with respect to the process of coming to marry someone. Uzma wanted to know what this involved ... so would I so that I can tell her, as well as be properly informed about such matters myself.

Love, Tariq

§

Sun, 30 Jan 2000 16:11:14-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Hasan Qadri,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I apologize for the lengthy delay in responding to your last e-mail. I had meant to respond to you much earlier, but such was not the case.

Toward the end of your e-letter, you indicated you were going through something of a mental/spiritual struggle at the time. How is this going? Have you talked with, or written to, your shaykh about it?

If you haven't done this, then I would recommend doing so at the earliest opportunity. Among other things, shaykhs have been provided by God, in Mercy, to help us deal with such problems and, where indicated, to provide different remedies, such as zikrs, or praying for us, and so on, which help us through these kinds of difficulty -- difficulties which everyone on the path has to go through.

Tariq

§

Wed, 2 Feb 2000 09:40:17-0800 (PST) (e-mail from a web site visitor)

As-salaam alaikum my dear brother,

Thank you for your reply, it does not matter whether early or late. The thing is that my shaykh keeps telling me I do not love him and that is why I have conflict within me.

The reason for this is that I initially took ba'yat with a relative of his who passed away, and I loved that person. I took initiation with my second shaykh because of my parents and that has always worried me.

Although I pay the shaykh the highest of respects, and he has given me a lot of blessings -- as has my Granshaykh -- I feel at times that his tariqa is hard for me. My sheik is very jalali, and the deficiencies are all mine, and he has told me that I can look for another sheik if my heart is not content and this, at times, confuses me more as I am not sure what to do.

I have had many dreams involving this shaykh and have received his blessings, and I keep telling myself that I should be patient and that is my current position. I'm thinking about traveling to several countries and visiting with other shaykhs soon. Maybe you can give me some information on this point? Or tell me about your own experiences, my heart also tells me that you are a shaykh yourself -- is that true?

Write soon,

Hasan

P.S. -- Could you tell me some zikrs for controlling my nafs or any information about nafs. I would be grateful.

§

Thu, 24 Feb 2000 12:54:21-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Hasan,

Wa 'alaykum as-Salaam!

It has been said by the Sufi shaykhs that nobody comes to Allah without having to experience both the attributes of jalal (majesty and

rigor) as well as those of jamal (mercy and beneficence). Naturally, most of us wish to come under the sway of those attributes which are all beauty, joy, ease, expansion, love, forgiveness, and given to ecstasy. At the same time, most of us tend to shy away from those attributes which reflect difficulty, rigor, privation, contraction, and heaviness.

To realize the purpose of the Sufi path, we must come to recognize, accept, submit, and, yes, love Allah in all manner of Self-disclosure which encompasses both the attributes of jalal and jamal. This is a sign of the perfect human being: al-insan al-kamil. By God's Grace, the perfected individual harmoniously reflects all of the attributes of God, according to the spiritual capacity of that person.

Whether you go someplace else and seek a new shaykh or stay with your present one, the issues will remain the same. Sooner or later, if you are to continue to make progress along the path of tasawwuf, you will have to learn how to deal with manifestations of jalali attributes as well as those of jamal.

There are at least two questions which, I believe, you need to ask yourself in the present context. First, who is the one being manifested in a jalali form through the guise of your shaykh. Secondly, what is it within you that resists this manifestation?

There is a hadith concerning the Day of Judgment in which God manifests Divinity to a group of people in a certain way, and the people do not acknowledge the presence of Divinity in that form of manifestation. Then, without God revealing Who is being manifested to this group of people, they are asked by God if there is any sign by which they would recognize Divinity and they say "yes", indicating what that sign is.

God manifests himself according to that sign, and this group of people affirm that, yes, indeed, this is Divinity. Some of the Sufi shaykhs have commented on this hadith and pointed out that the sign mentioned by this group of people gives expression to the "concepts" which govern that group of people's understanding of Divinity.

We cannot travel the path of tasawwuf in accordance with our likes and dislikes or in accordance with those concepts we are and are not prepared to accept with respect to our relationship with God. God is beyond all concepts, likes, dislikes, preferences, and inclinations.

To be sure, there is such a thing as spiritual chemistry in the sense that we sometimes are drawn or attracted to individuals who seem to transmit an aura of spirituality which lends itself to feeling at ease, being comfortable with, and lovingly devoted to, a given shaykh. This can aid progress at times, and at other times it can get in the way of progress because we only are prepared to learn when the lessons come to us in a form which we find palatable.

You must know there is only one Teacher, and this one Teacher is disclosed through a variety of loci of manifestations which are expressions -- each in their own way, according to their Divinely-given spiritual capacity -- of the second half of the Shahadah -- namely, that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the Messenger of God. The entire realm of creation is but a manifestation of the original Muhammadan Reality, and this Reality is a perfect balance and blend of all of the Attributes of God.

Our task in life, if Allah wishes, is to bring forth our active, knowing, conscious, loving participation in this dance of Shahadah. We are from God, and it is to Divinity we are returning, but the coming and going can be done either in constructive co-operation with the underlying Muhammadan Reality, or in rebellious opposition to that Reality, and since it is that Reality which is at the heart of the reason for Creation, that Reality is also at the heart of our individual purpose in life.

Spiritual guides are born, raised up, and, then, they pass away. They all serve the same purpose of life, and they are all different manifestations of one and the same Reality.

Trust in God's purpose for your life. Trust in Allah's way of introducing you to Divinity. Trust in the sequence of life events which God uses to help guide you.

Your previous teacher came and went as part of God's plan for you. Your present teacher has come and is here now as part of God's plan for you.

Recognize that your teachers are but different manifestations of the same underlying Truth. And, no matter where you go, and with whom you accept initiation, your Teacher remains the same.

There is no compulsion in Deen (the path of self-realization). Your present shaykh bears witness to this by giving you the choice of staying or finding another shaykh.

However, wherever you may go, you will bring your same self along. This is the self or aspect of nafs (the carnal soul) which is experiencing difficulty in your current situation.

Your present shaykh has all love for you and knows what you need in order to be able to progress spiritually. But, this knowledge is being fed in a form which, at the present time, you are having trouble swallowing and digesting.

Like a strong medicine, the initial consumption of it may not be to your liking, but, insha' Allah, you will find that it has many healing properties. Yet, as with many things, these benefits may take time to show up, and in that you must have, God willing, sabr or patience.

The love, the ecstasy, and the spiritual expansion are, insha' Allah, waiting for you. You just are going to have to submit to the realization that it is necessary to go through some of the difficulties associated with travel of this kind before, God willing, you, with your shaykh's assistance, arrive at your destination.

What you are experiencing is part of what is referred to as 'the dark night of the soul'. Be steadfast with the Truth in these trying times, and the Truth will be steadfast with you beyond, insha' Allah, your wildest imagination.

This message may be written from my hand, but it is from your shaykh. May Allah grant you all success in your quest.

Good luck my brother, Tariq

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Thu, 16 Mar 2000 21:15:00 PST (e-mail)

Tariq, my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

I got back on the 9th. March, evening. I had to be in Canada to sign for the sponsorship of my wife. From London I flew into Canada on the 8th, and, then, to the States on the 9th.

MASHA ALLAH, this was a very memorable visit, because of my marriage. I was a bit nervous at first, but when she arrived at the Singapore airport and we met, the developments came naturally. We sat with an interpreter for almost two hours, and when I was assured that she is willing to embrace the Faith, I finally decided to go ahead with the marriage.

The next day, in the afternoon, she formally accepted Islam before the government appointed Qazi (judge) and before several witnesses. She was then presented a certificate. To my surprise immediately after that, we were asked to be prepared for Nikah, or marriage. I was told that it is not possible the same day, and that the Nikah would be done at another place at a given date which usually is given at least two weeks later.

The Qazi who administered the Nikah said that he was given instructions by his superiors. Anyway we were told that this is only a Nikah based on Shariath, and we would still have to go to the Registrar's Office to get an appointment for the official date. It made no sense, but we went along with this incredible system to avoid any delay.

Later we went to the other office, where we had to present my wife's conversion certificate and our passport copies with two extra photographs. The date given was the 11th. February, Friday after the Friday prayers. We were very punctual on the 11th. We were taken to a marriage hall and there the Nikah was once again done. This time of course we were given our marriage certificate.

In the following days I found to my fortune that she is a very noble and wonderful lady. There is so much to tell, I would not know where to start from. So INSHA ALLAH, in my next e-mail I will try to give the details.

'Eid here is on Friday, tomorrow. My greetings to you, my son. May ALLAH bestow upon you, the best of health, happiness and success. I missed you very much, and mentioned you to the mureeds there.

LOVE AND DUA, BABA

§

Sun, 26 Mar 2000 14:11:30-0500 (e-mail for a visitor to the web site)

Dear John Ashton,

I have received and have read your e-mail to my web site. I do not know if you will recognize your reflection in the following, but, nonetheless, as the old rock group Buffalo Springfield once suggested, take it "for what it's worth" -- and oddly enough, there is a resonance with certain aspects of that song echoing in this e-mail.

Your experience appears to be one of spiritual kashf or opening -- as opposed to worldly kashf, although many people often confuse, and conflate, the latter with the former ... but more on this shortly. And, while your experience might be quite authentic and legitimate, you seem to be making an assumption about that experience which, in my opinion, is not legitimate.

More specifically, you have had one opening and appear to have jumped to the conclusion you have reached the summit of spiritual realities in that experience. This is like someone walking through the Catskills and being overwhelmed by the beauty there and believing there could be nothing more beautiful, intoxicating and illuminating than this set of experiences -- never suspecting there are mountain ranges such as the Rockies, Andes, Alps, Urals, and Himalayas which are higher, more spectacular, and more overwhelming than anything the Catskills have to offer -- as beautiful and real as the latter range of mountains might be.

God is infinite and cannot be exhausted, nor circumscribed, by one experience or one series of experiences. What you have experienced is a beginning -- an opening to possibilities -- not a terminus.

God, with a flourish of Divine generosity and barakah, or blessings, has come into your life. Nevertheless, there is a distinction to be drawn between hal (state) and maqam (station).

To some extent, there are instances in which hal and maqam merge together in such a way that one cannot tell whether what is

going on experientially is a case of maqam or hal -- and, in some ways, and at certain times, the distinction might be rather arbitrary. On the other hand, there are certain features which tend to characterize each.

For instance, instances of hal or states, are considered to come by Divine grace without necessarily having been earned through spiritual efforts of one sort or another. Instances of maqam, on the other hand, tend to be preceded by spiritual efforts and rigor of one kind or another.

Moreover, instances of hal or states, often are relatively short-lived in duration as far as the immediate intensity of such experiences are concerned, whereas, maqam are, more or less, permanent and on-going.

Now, to be sure, the nature of an experience of hal might be such that it stays in memory and in one's heart for the rest of one's life and can have a significant impact on how one lives one's life, but it does so in a somewhat faded manner, whereas there is an immediacy, accessibility and intensity to instances of maqam or stations which generally is not present in hal and/or which cannot be sustained over long periods of time in the latter condition.

As you describe your experience, it has the properties of hal and not maqam. And, as important as hal might be as signs on the mystical path, they are not the spiritual way stations which are of fundamental importance to a true and lasting progress on the mystical journey.

The foregoing points to something else which you said in your e-mail. You indicated you have achieved something which many mystical paths -- including that of the Sufi way -- claim is obtainable only through initiation into a given Order or silsilah under the guidance of a spiritual teacher or master.

Naturally, God can give to whomsoever Divinity pleases -- and can give without stint. Moreover, God certainly is not answerable to human beings as to whom can get what, when, and how much. Nonetheless, just as with everything else in the created universe, there, generally, are principles at work in the vast majority of cases which govern how things operate and how things must proceed for the generality of created beings.

There are laws of physics, chemistry, and biology which constrain, direct, and regulate life on earth. Similarly, there are laws of spirituality which constrain, direct and regulate journeys along the mystical path, and an individual ignores these laws at their own peril, just as living organisms who try to do an end around the laws of the physical universe do so at their own peril -- even though, on occasion, someone or something, by the grace of God, seems to get away with pushing the envelope, so to speak, in such instances.

However, one cannot use the exception as the norm. There are reasons for exceptions just as there are reasons for the norm, and one cannot suppose that because exceptions do occur, therefore, one can live one's life on the edge, if not beyond, in expectation of exceptions ruling the day, and permitting one, somehow, to always come away unscathed. This is the stuff from which tragedy is often born.

The norm of the mystical path is initiation. The norm of the path is to seek out and obtain the oasis of the spiritual guides who are provided by God to nurture and protect the seeker against the surrounding desert with its predators, brigands, scorpions, snakes and unforgiving elements.

You, yourself, have divulged something very telling in this respect. You admit you have no idea what the ultimate meaning and significance of your anomalous experience might be. Furthermore, other than shaping your life in a broad sort of way so that it is oriented toward Divinity in a certain vague sense, your experiences have not provided you with intimate, detailed, certain and precise insight about who you are or what the specific purpose of your life -- as opposed to anyone else's -- is.

You also indicate your experience has not been an unalloyed blessing. You allude to the difficulties you have had in trying not to be overwhelmed by the Presence which you have felt and being sucked into a vortex of unknown nature, significance or ramifications.

This is the sort of thing with which a spiritual guide can help you. This is one of the functions of authentic guides.

In addition, there are practices which can be done that help strengthen an individual's spiritual condition. Between a seeker's efforts and the support and help of a spiritual guide, the individual is

gradually introduced into a condition of being through which one can live with, and, yet, still effectively function, while immersed in, or influenced by, such conditions.

Many people today believe they can read some books or listen to a spiritual guide, take some of the practices which are mentioned, and, then, go off by themselves and put it altogether so that neither initiation, a teacher, nor an Order or silsilah are necessary to achieve spiritual realization. Some of these people might even have certain sorts of extraordinary experiences which they take as indication that they are on the right path -- when, often times, nothing could be further from the truth.

As the Qur'an indicates -- 'shall I tell you about who are the greatest losers in their works -- those whose efforts go astray in the present life, while they believe they are doing good deeds.' This applies as much to the realm of mysticism as it does to the world of exoteric litanies. The road of history is strewn with the bodies -- spiritual and physical -- of those who thought otherwise.

In your e-mail, you indicate that while there is nothing overtly spiritual about your life, you do, sometimes make certain hidden adjustments of people in the world about you. You don't say what these adjustments are, but whatever they might be, who has given you the authority to interfere with these people's lives in this manner? By what set of criteria are you evaluating the 'goodness' of such adjustments?

According to the Sufi masters -- and God is their authority for what they say -- there can be no compulsion in matters of Deen ... Deen being the path which leads to the realization of one's inner, essential, original nature or fitr. You might feel you are doing these people a favor, but you are usurping one of the most important elements in all of this -- a person's right to choose how, when, or if, they wish to place herself or himself under such influences.

Toward the very beginning of this e-mail I alluded to a distinction between spiritual kashf and worldly kashf. Your original experiences were instances -- although God knows best -- of spiritual kashf. Your use of whatever psychic, telepathic or other powers with which you might have been linked are instances of worldly kashf.

With the exception of those – in other words, Prophets and certain other friends of God -- who have been given specific permission to use gifts of worldly kashf under certain conditions, the Sufi masters have warned seekers and initiates against the use of such gifts. Such gifts are considered to be more of a spiritual trial than anything else.

Having a capacity is one thing. Exercising that capacity is quite another thing.

Each of us has a capacity to kill, but this doesn't entitle us to kill others. Each of us has a capacity for sexuality, but this doesn't mean we have the right to exercise that capacity whenever we choose to do so.

For many of those who are inclined to the mystical path, there is often confusion in their minds and hearts about acquiring and using various 'powers' or 'gifts' of one extraordinary sort or another. Unfortunately, all too many people pursue these and forget about the real purpose of the path which is to discover one's original nature or fitr, together with the unique spiritual capacity and purpose which has been assigned to us by Divinity as part of that fitr.

Furthermore, the masters of the Sufi path warn initiates and seekers that a very rigorous and exacting examination will be conducted of anyone who exercises instances of worldly kashf. My own shaykh has told me of some very great shaykhs who confessed to him of their wish to be able to go back and taken another path than the one which permitted them to be seduced by this aspect of things.

In your e-mail you seem to be under the misunderstanding -- although it might be purely a matter of terminology -- that the Sufi path focuses on the purification of the ego. Depending on what you mean by ego or what is entailed by this notion, this is not necessarily what the Sufi way is about.

There is only one I. This is Divinity.

The ego -- at least this term is understood by me -- and as it is commonly used in both everyday language, as well as in the psychological literature (although there are significant differences between the two uses), the ego is really the false self. The 'nest of rats' to which you refer in your e-mail is as good a way of describing it as any.

The Sufi term is nafs, and it is the seat of those tendencies in humankind which tend toward rebellion against Deen and fitr, and, therefore, God's intention for human beings. While it is true that these tendencies must be constrained, purified and re-directed to constructive activities rather than destructive ones (for oneself as well as others), it represents only one of the dimensions of the human being with which the Sufi path is concerned.

Within the human being are many other internal potentials of a spiritual nature. These are: the heart, the sirr or mystery, the ruh, (spirit), the kafi (the hidden), and the aqfah (most hidden) which is intimately related to our essential fitr or original nature.

Purification of the nafs is but a very early precondition, if you will, of proceeding on with the rest of the spiritual journey. Without purification of the nafs, further progress is unlikely.

You "started" with a very intense experience and have been trying to integrate this into your waking life. However, proper integration of such an experience cannot take place without attending to the stages of the path which involve purification of the nafs, as well as bringing online, so to speak, one's other spiritual modalities.

The reason why your attempt at integration and reconciliation has never succeeded is because, in my opinion, you lack the proper methodology to do so, and, even more importantly, you are trying to do so in a spiritual void -- that is, without the help, support, guidance and protection which comes from an authentic Order or silsilah (or its counterpart in other mystical traditions) and is transmitted through one of the spiritual guides who has been appointed to serve as a locus of such transmission -- a transmission which extends back through all of the shaykhs of a given Order, to the Prophets of God, and, ultimately, of course to Divinity Itself.

I hope the foregoing has been helpful.

Tariq

§

Sun, 26 Mar 2000 14:21:53-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

A few days ago, I received an e-mail from one of the readers of the Silsilah web page. His name is John Ashton, and I am including, as an attachment, the text of his original letter, as well as my response to him.

I hope, insha' Allah, that what has been said in the response is okay, but I thought you ought to know about what had been said by him and through me.

His experience is certainly more understandable by you than me. So, just in case anything incorrect or improper has been said, you can let me know, and God willing, I shall pass that on to the fellow in question.

Love,
Tariq

§

Sun, 26 Mar 2000 21:45:57 PST (e-mail)

Tariq my son,
Assalamo alaikum.

Superb! What can I say! I have read your response to the gentleman's e-mail. I definitely could not have said it better!

LOVE AND DUA, BABA.

§

April 2000

I am probably going to move from Sutton to Bamford. This is being done for several reasons.

First, I want to be closer to work. I can't get much closer, now, than the place I have selected in Bamford because, I would be living less than a block from my brother's office. Secondly, I am opening up an office with the intention of making it a center both for spiritual

activities, as well as a means of pursuing various business ideas which I have.

I have been thinking about the office idea for some time. After exploring the issue a little with government officials in both cities, I decided that Bamford might be a better place to locate an office, and, once the location had been decided upon, the limited nature of the area bus service in Sutton helped convince me that I should try to find living accommodations near to the new office as well as my brother's place of business.

If things work out well, God willing, then, the office, my job, and apartment are all within a few hundred feet of one another. However, I won't be able to move into the new apartment until my lease for the apartment in Sutton is up at the end of June.

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There are a number of visitors to the silsilah web site who are requesting additional information and assistance beyond what is supplied through the silsilah web site. The trend of increased communications from visitors to the web site for the first three months of the year seems to be continuing.

§

Mon, 03 Apr 2000 21:13:18-0400 (e-mail from a web site visitor)

As salaam aleikum beloved friend and teacher

It is with a rejoicing heart that I have come across your beautiful web site devoted to the Love that is Allah. I am a very poor mureed of shaykh Jameel al-Quds in Palestine.

I live in Montana and am the only student of my Order in this area. It is difficult to be without a community of friends of the heart. I am 46.

I write to you because I am walking through many difficult and strong pictures with the guidance and dua of my master and his spirit. My nafs is insidiously strong and my mind is sometimes white,

sometimes dark as I continue walking and falling into the dust. This is a time of great and intense Jihad, through the Face of Allah in the Jelal, but where there is in the deep eye, no Jamal or Jalal, only Allah. I write to connect with a soul that has the Love and who lives in the Unity, for your prayers and friendship in the Way.

The central issue involves the fear of complete surrender and trust, to be a dead man in the hands of the Guide and Allah. There are times, astagfirullah (may God forgive me) that I mistrust my guide.

There are times that I even wonder, due to a prolonged search through Indian and Buddhist cosmology, that Allah is the God of all Creation, but not the Supreme One. Astagfirullah (I seek Allah's forgiveness). These doubts I must face bravely. This thought that the Heaven of the prophets, peace be upon them all, is but a temporary abode of glory, one among countless heavens, that lasts for eons but that ultimately, dissolves. There is a picture that I especially struggle with, and I humbly ask your permission to receive the view of your heart.

When I was a teenager, the CENTRAL experience of my life, thus far, took place. It has been the Lighthouse that has always guided me on the sea storms of life in this world. It was at Christian Youth Conference held at a near-by university. After a Sunday service, I invited several friends to join me in my dorm for a prayer of thanks to God.

We went into my room and I asked them to kneel down, and we could take turns saying a prayer. Each of my friends said a prayer.

When I started to pray, the most brilliant White Light began to shine ... this was brighter than millions of suns and whiter than millions of full moons. This Light was pouring, flowing out of my upturned face. Its unimaginable brightness didn't hurt the eyes. It was soft as wool, so soft and gentle.

Then a Man of Light appeared who was even brighter than the Light that surrounded him. I saw him through my closed eyelids, as if there were no eyelids and an inner eye saw him more clearly than one sees another in this worlds.

He looked at me and sweetly smiled. He was wearing a white robe. He was bearded, with dark hair and eyes that poured a living sweet

Love. I could see his bare feet and hands and his palms opened to me in a blessing of Peace. He was Love.

I was bathing in an Ocean of Infinite Love without a beginning or ending -- without a shore. This Ocean was the Ocean of Love. There was no time. This Ocean and this Man were complete Acceptance, Peace, Love. There was no judgment whatsoever, no separation, no fear or doubt ... Perfect and TOTAL Calmness, Love and Peace. It was like waking up from a dream and seeing clearly again for the first time in my life.

I saw that the ONLY Reality was Love. I learned many things in those five minutes. He gave everything away of his presence.

He didn't speak or say who he was. I stopped praying and the Light began to flicker and then stop shining. We all wept with joy and wonder.

It was not a dream or an "inner" subjective experience without other witnesses present. It was an awesome, awesome few minutes in the presence of the Reality of Love.

Dear friend, everything in this world, all the beauty that the senses can contain, a sea of diamonds or human praise are all echoing darkness compared to this Place of Infinite Love and Light. Any man that one can see with the eye is dark compared to that Man of Light. I have searched everywhere for an understanding of this little event and have shed many tears to be reunited with Him. With the deep eye, there is only One Face, and it is my face and your face and only the One Face of Allah. This is a picture unlike any from the nafs or that are mental impressions. Yet a picture. The great sadness has been that I cannot match the face with any human face that I have encountered. There is the very subtle pride that I experienced that this event somehow made me special -- such foolishness!

When I first wrote to my master, he humbly said that he has known me since before my birth. And I quickly ran to him, traveled to meet him and take his hand into mine and make the promise to Allah.

Friend, nothing replaces eye witnessing, not words of wisdom and amazing outer phenomenon. How do I trust that I am walking to this Place of Love and not a lesser, temporary abode that I can only witness

after death? This is the trust ... this is the walking through the shadows in the hope and faith that one is nearing the Nur of Allah.

Your every good word will be received with gratitude. I send you my thanks. I say Alhamdulillah (All Praise be to God). I send you my kiss of peace to your soul.

Hamid Saladin

§

Fri, 7 Apr 2000 01:13:05-0400 (e-mail)

Dear Hamid,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I have heard of you shaykh. And, in fact, some time ago, I read a book which contains translations of some of his discourses. Masha' Allah, it is a good book -- although I am sure that much is lost in the process of translating from one language to another.

Doubt is a natural part of the path in the sense that God, in his Infinite Wisdom, has given us this capacity which is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, there are many facets of life experience which need to be treated with caution, circumspection and critical reflection, and doubt can play a valuable role in this process of holding up experience to close scrutiny. On the other hand, doubt can also be the scourge of faith since it seeks to eat away at the fabric of our relationship with Allah, as well as with the prophets, the saints, those who are appointed to guide us from darkness into light, and even our own essential selves.

The perennial question, of course, is when should we trust doubt and when should we shun it. This question really has two possibilities associated with it which are like the two kinds of mistakes which can be made in science -- known as Type I and Type II errors.

A Type I error is when an individual accepts a hypothesis as true, when, in reality, the hypothesis is false. A Type II error is when one rejects a hypothesis as false, when, in fact, the hypothesis being rejected is actually true.

Is one's shaykh a true guide or a false guide? If the shaykh is authentic, and one rejects the shaykh, one has committed the spiritual

equivalent of a Type II error. If one's teacher is a false guide, yet, one accepts the "teacher" as authentic, then one has committed the spiritual counterpart to the Type I error mentioned above.

The spiritual problem is complicated by the presence of a variety of forces which are actively seeking to confuse the issue. Nafs, Iblis, mischievous jinn, dunya, and unbelievers come together separately and in combination with one another in an attempt to undermine our spiritual judgment.

The Mercy, Love, Generosity, Support, Protection, and Kindness of Allah shield us from the relentless pursuit of those enemies of ours who constantly are seeking openings of personal weakness through which to attack us. On our own, we have no chance to defeat the forces which have been set against us by God Himself.

One of the potential weapons with which God has equipped those who step onto the Sufi path is 'nisbath' or, roughly speaking, the spiritual umbilical cord which links a seeker with his or her shaykh, and, through the shaykh, to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and, ultimately, to Allah -- although the nisbath, shaykh, and Prophet are but different expressions of one and the same Reality -- our relationship with God.

The nisbath is with one even in pre-eternity ... that is, the time, so to speak, or the state of being we had prior to coming into the created physical realm. However, it is in the crucible of created existence that the nisbath either grows or withers -- it is that potential about which we are warned in the Qur'an toward the beginning of Surah Shams ... namely, those who cause this potential to wither will fail in the purpose of life, while those who seek to increase it, and with God's help, do so, succeed in life's purpose.

A seeker must distinguish between the false self and the essential self. There is much spiritual and moral ugliness to which the false self gives expression, and it is very easy during the heat of spiritual struggle to suppose that one is, in essence, this ugliness, but such is not the case.

Nevertheless, we have responsibility for what goes on with our false selves. This means we have the task of striving to make sure that what goes on with the false self does not spill over into the realms of

commission and omission, and, thereby, induce us to transgress the bounds of propriety.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) did not say that the feeling of anger was wrong. He indicated that what was wrong was not swallowing the anger once it started to rise within one.

Even such a spiritually seminal eminence as Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) showed, very clearly, there is a difference between the false self and the essential self. You might be familiar with the story of Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) in which he was in battle with one of the unbelievers. Eventually, by the Grace of Allah, Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) was able to put the person against whom he was fighting in a vulnerable, submissive position. This latter individual chose this time to spit in the face of Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be please with him) as one, last act of defiance and contempt.

When this happened, Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) immediately withdrew his sword and walked away from the defeated antagonist. This action of Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) astonished his opponent.

The latter asked Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) why he had lowered his sword and walked away when he was in the superior position and easily could have vanquished his enemy.

Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) replied that when the man spit in his face, the nafs of the Hazrat reared up and demanded that the opponent be run through. When this happened, Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) knew that the real enemy was within and that it would be far more important to cut to shreds the inner, invisible antagonist than to vanquish the external, physical one. Consequently, he lowered his sword and walked away.

Both you and I are far removed from the spiritual capacity of Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him). Yet, here is an individual of unbelievably great spiritual stature who admitted to the existence of the force of nafs within him.

Anger is just one of the ways in which the nafs is manifested. Doubt also can be another form of expression which is assumed by the nafs.

Through a process of self-hypnosis, the nafs tries to induce us into supposing that we are this doubt or anger or pride or lust or jealousy and, that therefore, we should run with such feelings when they arise. But, Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) have shown us that we must make a distinction between the emanations of the false self and the potential of the essential self -- the potential which, with the help of God, permits us to see the nafs as something other than who we, in essence really are ... an essence which has the God-given ability to resist anger when it arises, and to swallow it as Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) did during the heat of battle.

Al-Muhasibi (may Allah be pleased with him), the great early mystic of Baghdad, was one of the first spiritual psychologists. Part of his method was to examine the contents of consciousness and trace these entities back to their origins in order to see what was at the root of some given thought, feeling, or the like.

Was the underlying intention of a given act one of sincerity, love, trust, and so on? Or, was the motivating intention, one of insincerity, hypocrisy, doubt, deceit, and so on?

When doubt arises in you, try to trace this state of consciousness back to its origins. Be like the astronomers who take the electromagnetic radiation readings of their instruments and attempt to figure out how far back in time the radiation began and what the significance of that radiation is to the meaning of things in the world of today.

The Sufi shaykhs talk about the term 'dhawk' which means tasting in an experiential sense. Every experience has its own characteristic taste.

However, many years of work and study are required before an individual can become, by the Grace of God, a spiritual connoisseur and, thereby, be able to discern what elements have gone into the 'cooking' of any given experience merely by the "taste" of the experience. By examining the contents of your consciousness and exploring the forces which are operative in generating and shaping those contents and lending to them their experiential 'taste', an individual takes the first necessary steps toward becoming a master "chef" of the way.

As indicated earlier, sometimes the origins of doubt are rooted in appropriate intentions, concerns, and motivations. On other occasions, this is not the case.

You must learn to distinguish between the two. Furthermore, when doubt is from a spiritual injurious source, one must understand that this 'source' is not our essential self even while we realize that essential or not it must be resisted with our nisbath for Allah, the Prophet, the awliya, and the shaykhs of the way.

Our nisbath is our sincere love for the Truth, for the Reality, of Being which both transcends us, as well as underwrites, our created existence. When nisbath is fully realized, the individual comes to understand that "we" are one with that Truth/Reality even while that Truth/Reality can, in no way, be limited to our participation in such Oneness.

All the practices of the way are designed to help nourish, protect, support, and assist the growth of nisbath. Our relationship with our shaykh is for the purpose of bringing to full realization the significance and value of nisbath, for it is through nisbath that we find our way to our true, essential identity and our unique spiritual capacity for worshipping Divinity.

When we doubt our shaykh, we doubt our essence. When we doubt the spiritual luminaries of the Way, we become aligned with the forces of dissolution. When we spin out of control under the influence of such doubt, we permit ourselves to become hypnotized by the mesmerizing hype of the unholy four -- dunya, nafs, Iblis and the unbelievers.

The presence of the foregoing sort of doubt is a warning sign. Spiritual alarms are ringing ... shake loose from the spell which doubt has cast upon you before it is too late.

Shake loose through critical self-examination like that practiced by al-Muhasibi (may Allah be pleased with him). Shake loose from the would-be hypnotic forces by holding tightly to the hem of the tresses of one's spiritual guide.

One needs to clear one's spiritual perception by realizing that one is not the doubt, but, rather, the doubt is being generated by one or more of the unholy four noted earlier. Free oneself from the

maelstrom of the false self which would suck one down into the darkness that is far from the light, beauty and truth of the essential Self.

You must work on your nisbath with your shaykh -- and through your shaykh, the Prophet (peace be upon him), and, ultimately, Allah. Your nisbath is the key to everything.

Guard your nisbath with your life, for your happiness depends on its continued security and growth. It is the amana, or trust, which has been vouchsafed to you and which must, as the Qur'an indicates, be given back to the One from Whom it issued originally. It is what you will bring with you on the Day of Judgment and which will be placed in the Scales of Discernment, and it is that about which you will be questioned in the grave.

Do not permit the sweet nothings which doubt whispers to your heart and mind dissuade you from suluk or traveling along the path of sobriety. Remember well that in the end, the kind of doubt of which you speak will leave you in a soiled state, ashamed before your Creator, if you should let it seduce you.

Know that Allah is beyond all comprehension and no matter how many spiritual experiences one might be graced with, these are but quantum drops in an Ocean of Infinite dimensions, and that this Ocean or Muhammadan Reality does not exhaust Divinity. Know that God is One, and there is no other, for the other is an illusion of absence in which something less than Presence is being manifested to understanding and consciousness of which the manifestations of a given understanding or consciousness is attending to Presence in an absent sort of way.

All these questions and doubts about whether there is some other Reality beyond the God of Creation is merely the idle chatter of that which does not know. It is in the nature of that which does not know to engage in such idle chatter since it has no Reality with which to work except the reality of its own emptiness of understanding and spiritual insight.

You were blessed at an early age with a wonderful and very powerful experience. It showed you possibilities. It showed you potential. It provided you with something to work with and toward.

But, it was not, and is not, all that can be. Divinity cannot be exhausted by one experience, nor can it be exhausted by an infinite series of such experiences, all different from one another.

Just as the archangel Jibriel (Gabriel -- peace be on him) was, on occasion, manifested in human form (as is attested to in the hadith), so too, the attributes and names of Allah might be manifested in human form. The Prophet (peace be upon him) reported having seen God in the form of a beardless youth.

Manifestations -- whether in the form of an archangel, a beardless youth, or a luminous being of overflowing love and generosity such as appeared in the experience of your early years -- do not, and cannot, circumscribe Divinity, but are, in fact, made possible through Divinity. The luminous figure you saw is a potential within you -- it is a potential within all of us -- and is not necessarily someone or something external to you.

Do not permit doubt to divert you from meeting up with the Reality of which your earlier experience was merely a 'taste'. Do not permit your doubt to prevent you from realizing your true fitr or nature.

But, the choice is in your hands. More specifically, it is in the hands of your nisbath. When we let the shaykh come into our lives and wash us clean of the sins of ignorance and rebelliousness, like the one who washes the dead body, we submit to a process which is necessary for our spiritual health and protection. Submission is in our best interests, but the doubts of nafs, Iblis, dunya and unbelievers would try to convince us otherwise.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has counseled us to be careful about those with whom we spend time, for our spiritual conditions is greatly affected by the quality of such companionship. Companionship is as much an internal matter as it is an external issue.

If one spends time with doubt, one's spiritual condition will be dyed in the color of doubt. If one spends time with a loving, encouraging, hopeful, sincere, committed, supportive nisbath, one's consciousness will be dyed with this color. Be careful whom you take as internal companions.

Similarly, one must be circumspect with respect to the individual or individuals whom one takes as external companions. While everything which I have said previously concerning the importance of nisbath with one's shaykh is true, I would be remiss if I were not to issue a caution concerning the existence of fraudulent shaykhs in our midst ... charlatans who also seek our nisbath but who have nothing to offer in return but misguidance, spiritual difficulties, and darkness ... and, unfortunately, these false guides are far easier to find than are authentic teachers.

I hope, insha' Allah, the foregoing will be of assistance to you.

Tariq Shah

§

Wed, 12 Apr 2000 14:28:36 +0100 (e-mail to me)

Hello,

I have recently read the Sufi section on the Spiritual-Life web site. It seems to have a very clear understanding of the kinds of experiences/feelings/ thoughts that I have been getting over the last five years ... and it is becoming more important to me to try to understand what is going on.

I do know what is going on -- I have thought about it a lot. But it is beyond thought.

I identify with everything you say on your web site, in a very personal way. It's just that I do not follow any religion ... I have read extensively around many different religions but still haven't found what I am looking for ... until I started to look into Sufism/Islam ... and, then, after reading your site I wanted to know more about the unfamiliar words you are using and, therefore, would like to know more about the correct Sufi path .. I feel like a Sufi but I am in the need of guidance ... I have got stuck ...

I don't know if you are the right person to be speaking to or not. I am based in Canada. Is there anyone I can approach here that you may be able to put me onto ... ?

I know there seems to be a big Islamic community in Toronto, which is quite near to me ... but I am unsure of how to approach them.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Woods

§

Tue, 18 Apr 2000 00:45:57-0400 (e-mail)

Dear Cynthia,

You have asked a question in your e-mail -- namely, am I the right person with whom you should be speaking in relation to the questions which are in your heart and soul? You already know what the answer to your question is.

There is a resonance between us. You felt this as you worked your way through and around the Sufi material in the web site.

Whether this will ever go beyond the aforementioned sense of connection is entirely up to you. You are going to have to make some decisions about all of the things which you are, and have been, feeling.

Are there people in Canada with whom you could, or should, get in touch? There, undoubtedly, are such individuals, but I am not the one to put you in touch with them.

I know of some legitimate Sufi groups in Canada. I also know of some not-so-legitimate organizations which call themselves Sufi but are anything but.

You have a problem before you Cynthia. If you wish to pursue the Sufi path in a serious and sincere fashion with an appropriate degree of commitment, then, it is essential for you to find someone you can trust with your spiritual life.

Who will that be? Will it be me, or someone else? Will it be through someone in Canada, or will it be through someone from outside Canada.?

The answer is within you. If you wait too long in making this decision, your life could pass you by, and this is one of the ways in which Satan or Iblis can whisper to you and urge you to put off making

a decision until you are absolutely sure that you have found the perfect spiritual guide for your needs.

On the other hand, if you are too quick and careless in this decision, you could end up with an individual or individuals who really do not have your best spiritual interests at heart. There are many people who have gone astray by befriending those who never can be, or never will be, their true spiritual well-wisher and friend, and, here again, Satan/Iblis will be only too happy to urge you -- from within the shadows of your consciousness -- to waste your time on those whom he knows only too well cannot provide you with any real spiritual benefit.

You asked about approaching the Muslim community in nearby Toronto. While there are many good Muslims, unfortunately, you are very unlikely to find these people by going to the mosques and speaking with the "leadership" there (or elsewhere in North America, for that matter, or even elsewhere in the Muslim world) -- this is especially true when it comes to trying to find one's way to the true Sufi path, and, therefore, the real essence of Islam.

You might as well look for water in the desert. There is, of course, water to be found in the desert if one knows where to look or if one is very lucky, but more often than not, one will die of thirst long before one will ever stumble onto drinkable water.

We live in desolate times as far as the health of the spirit is concerned. Caveat emptor (Buyer Beware)!!

Am I someone about whom you should be worried? I know the answer to that question, but what I know in this respect is inaccessible to you unless God wishes otherwise.

Something in you responded to something in the Spiritual-Life Web site. Were you, or are you, mistaken in your attraction to that to which you have resonated sufficiently to write and ask the advice of someone whom you don't really know at all?

You have questions. Ask them.

Let us see where things go from here. You are free to go elsewhere whenever you like.

In the meantime, if you already have not done so, you might take a look at some of the essays at: <http://www.mysticalquest.com/> . You

might find some useful things on which to reflect as you go about trying to decide how to proceed.

Tariq Shah

§

Wed, 19 Apr 2000 00:01:37 +0100 (e-mail)

Hello, I hope you are well.

These are the sort of questions that go through my mind.

In the Sufi material on your web site, you say that it is possible for other spiritual practices to guide people along a Sufi-like path within their particular esoteric tradition. You, then, go on to say that these people cannot actually manifest true Spiritual Consciousness unless they actually become a Muslim.

Why then, in your first email reply, do you say that seeking out Muslims in my area would possibly get me nowhere? Even though I do not follow any one religion (or ritual), nevertheless, I do tend to align myself, personally, with the Bahai faith. As such I am part Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Sufi etc ... also Muslim in the sense that ... "Muslims - that is those who seek to align themselves totally with God's wishes concerning life on Earth."

How literally or non-literally should I be taking you with regards to the "Muslim-thing" ... ? :)

When you say Mohammed was the first Sufi ... do you think he called himself a Sufi? How do you think the Spiritual Awareness possessed by Mohammed differed from that of Moses, Jesus or Buddha ... etc... don't you think that it is possible that Jesus was a Sufi ?

Trying not to cling onto the personal meaning of these words, I think there is a Universal word for people from all nations and cultures, regardless of what religion was started during or after the life of the person involved ... this word would embody what it means to be Spiritually Enlightened ... these people, by the very nature of their experiences, would be a light unto others ...

Another kind of question ... although this is regarding Spiritual Teachers, I am not being disrespectful. But these are genuine questions I have.

Ego (Nafs) ... Everyone has an ego trap waiting for them ... yes / no ?

Is it not possible that a self-proclaimed Spiritual Teacher has fallen into his or her own ego trap. Surely they, themselves, are satisfying an egotistical need.

Is it not possible that the only teacher a person needs is their own Inner Spiritual Self ... and one just needs to listen to their own personal teacher to start to follow the Sufi Path ... or whatever esoteric tradition one is most familiar with because of cultural circumstances etc ... ?? In fact, isn't that the essence of Tasawwuf ? or Buddhism ... or Hinduism ... ?

If one had followed one's own Spiritual Self, and been guided by it ... why would that person, then, need an external teacher? What reasons might that person have for approaching a teacher in the first place?

What do you think the purpose of the Nafs is? Recognition and non-identification with the Nafs is a strong indicator to ego free being ... as you can see past the Nafs ... if you start to identify with the Nafs then you have lost a foothold on the Consciousness ladder ... I see Identification of the Nafs as allowing one to have a yardstick to measure oneself against at any given time. Possibly. Then again, I suppose, measurement is ego based.

Sorry if this seems like a jumble of questions ... just a few of the first ones on my mind at the moment.

Sincerely & Respectfully, I hope you find the time to reply.

Cynthia Woods

§

Wed, 20 Apr 2000 00:03:46-0510EST (e-mail)

Dear Cynthia,

I don't know if I will be able to try to answer all your questions in one e-mail, since you have asked a pile of them. But, perhaps, I can begin to work my way through them a little at a time.

One of the first questions you raised concerned what you felt to be a bit of a puzzle about my claim that a person needs to become a Muslim if she or he is going to have an opportunity to pursue the Sufi path to its ultimate conclusion, and, yet, at another point, in a communication to you, I indicated that you should stay away from Muslim groups.

To begin with and starting with the latter aspect first, as I believe was indicated in one of my earlier e-mails to you, while there are many good Muslims in different places -- Canada included -- and while the leadership of different mosques varies with respect to their receptivity to the general idea of the mystical dimension of Islam, more often than not, an individual who is looking for help with respect to the Sufi path is not likely to find it among Muslims, in general, or through the mosques, in particular -- although, to be sure, there are exceptions in both cases.

For the most part, a seeker after the Sufi path will be met with ignorance, misinformation, hostility, or indifference in relation to things Sufi among many of these people and organizations. You might be very fortunate and stumble on to those within the mosques or Muslim groups who are prepared to help you in your quest but I wouldn't hold your breath in anticipation of this. However, if you wish, you certainly can take the empirical route and check this out for yourself, but you might waste a lot of time and energy in the process ... it's up to you.

A further, though related, factor is that many people who call themselves Muslim have a very limited understanding of their own spiritual legacy. One of the root meanings of the term "Muslim" entails the idea of being an individual who submits to the will of God, and, yet, many so-called Muslims rarely ask themselves what, precisely, is the nature of the Divine Will with respect to human beings.

In other words, why did creation come into being, and what is the role of human beings within the context of this coming into being? Many so-called Muslims limit themselves only to issues of heaven and

hell, along with learning those things which will help them to attain the former, while avoiding the latter.

This is an extremely truncated view of the notion of submission to the Will of God. Out of such an understanding arises a very distorted and fragmented perspective concerning both Islam and what it means to be a Muslim in the fullest sense of this word.

Whatever spiritual path you end up choosing, Cynthia, you are going to have to learn what it means to submit yourself totally to the Will of Divinity, or Reality, or Truth, or whatever label you wish to place on the Ultimate Nature of 'What Is'. If, by the Grace of Reality, you are successful in this venture, then, whether you wish to call yourself Muslim, or not, you will be a Muslim in the sense in which the essential meaning of this word was given to humankind through revelation.

One shouldn't let the way some so-called Muslims go about submitting to the Will of God be confused or conflated with what is actually entailed by this word. At the same time, one shouldn't let one's own aversion to a given word deter one from pursuing the Truth which stands behind that word.

The issue is not a matter of what we believe to be what God wants of us. The issue is to determine what it is that God actually wants of us. One can believe whatever one likes and call oneself whatever one likes, but this might be irrelevant with respect to the Divine perspective.

You asked in your e-mail whether the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) referred to himself as a Sufi? You also inquired about whether there was any reason why Jesus, or Moses, or the Buddha (peace be upon them all) couldn't be Sufi or have the same sort of spiritual awareness as someone who called oneself a Sufi?

In *Kashf al-Mahjub* -- the oldest extant treatise on tasawwuf (Sufi mystical sciences) written in the Persian language -- al-Hujwiri (may Allah be pleased with him), the author of this work, quotes someone who lived a hundred years, or so, earlier than al-Hujwiri (may Allah be pleased with him). The person quoted said this: "Once, Sufism was a reality without a name, and, now, it is a name without a reality."

This latter individual was referring to the spiritual decline which had set in among many so-called Sufi groups, as well as how various people were calling themselves Sufi but, in reality, such individuals were far from the truth and essence of that which was practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and some of his Companions. This latter esoteric reality did not have the name "Sufi Path" associated with it at that time, but, it was a Deen or Way which those who pursued it understood in an intimate and direct, experiential fashion.

There always has been an esoteric or mystical spiritual tradition available to human beings from the time of our first being brought into created being -- just as there always has been an exoteric facet to the spiritual legacy taught to humankind through the Prophets, saints, and guides of the different periods of history. The outer and inner aspects of this spiritual tradition have been given different names and labels by different people in various locations and historical eras for a variety of reasons ... some good and some not so good, but the purpose of both (i.e., the inner and the outer aspects of spiritual tradition) has always remained the same.

Whatever labels are applied to a spiritual path, there has been one constant throughout these traditions. To attain, according to one's potential to do so, ultimate spiritual realization, one must have spiritual contact with someone who has been specifically appointed by God and someone with the requisite spiritual capacity and attainment which is entailed by this appointment, who is to serve as the "touchstone" which, with God's permission, is capable of effecting a spiritual transformation in those individuals who choose to work under, and in conjunction with, the spiritual authority of such individuals.

There is a saying among the practitioners of tasawwuf which indicates that Divinity never repeats disclosures. Every Prophet, every saint, every spiritual guide, and every human being constitute so many Divine disclosures, and in keeping with the aforementioned Sufi saying, none of these copies any of the others.

Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, Muhammad (peace be upon them all) and other spiritual giants shared in the same One Reality, but they did so in accordance with the potential capacity which God gave them.

Each of them was a Divine touchstone, and through each of them, by the Grace of God, many others were spiritually transformed.

However, to be in a position to be spiritually transformed, an individual had to choose to become a follower, or initiate, of one of these authentic touchstones or of someone who was appointed by one, or another, from among this group -- and, ultimately, of course, by God, -- to serve as a doorway through which the touchstone would operate. Unless given permission, a person initiated under one touchstone (or a touchstone's doorway) was not free to seek out initiation from other touchstones or their respective doorways -- even though the goal was the same in each case ... namely, to realize human spiritual potential.

The ultimate Sufi touchstone always has been the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and only those who have been approved by the Prophet might serve as doorways for this touchstone. Other spiritual Ways have other touchstones and doorways.

One of the problems today is that getting authentic access to these touchstones and their doorways is becoming increasingly difficult. This is one of the signs that the latter days spoken about in the Qur'an, as well as the New and Old Testaments, are upon us, or near at hand.

Individuals working on their own or working with those who have not been appointed to serve as a doorway by one or another spiritual touchstone, will, in all likelihood, not be able to realize their spiritual potential. One can believe what one likes, call oneself what one likes, and do what one likes, nevertheless, just as there are laws which govern the way of the physical/material world, so too, there are laws governing the way of the spiritual world.

If one wishes to pursue the Way of tasawwuf, or the Sufi path, then, one must become initiated by the touchstone or an appointed doorway of this Way. Once this happens, and if the initiate is sincere and constant with the commitment to this Way, then God willing, spiritual transformation begins to take place, and one sets sail for the final destination of complete transformation, and, consequently, complete submission to the Will of God.

You mention the word nafs or ego, and go on to ask whether it is possible for a self-proclaimed teacher to succumb to her or his own

nafs -- what you refer to as the "ego trap". Then, you ask: isn't it better to just listen to one's own Inner Spiritual Self?

Let me pose a counter-question. Isn't it possible that what one believes to be one's Inner Spiritual Self is really nothing more than one's own ego or nafs whispering to the individual and misleading them into their own ego trap?

Hazrat 'Ali (may God be pleased with him), the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), is reported to once have said words along the following lines. 'The individual who attempts to step onto the Sufi path without an authentic spiritual teacher as guide, has Iblis or Satan as one's guide.'

Those who believe they can guide themselves end up in the mother of all ego traps. This is the belief one is able, without assistance and support from a spiritual touchstone or an appointed doorway, to traverse the mystical path on one's own. There are many pitfalls and dangers on the journey to Self-realization, and one will die in the desert created by Iblis and one's own nafs, after wandering for years in endless circles which gain nothing but the drooling anticipation of circling vultures.

Each of us does have an Inner Spiritual Self. But, one must be gradually led to that Self before one will be able to know, with certainty, the nature of that Self and learn from it in a direct, unmediated manner without any fear of falling prey to the machinations of nafs or Iblis in relation to it.

The mystical path is an apprenticeship. And, it takes many, many years to master this path before one begins to gain familiarity and facility with its hidden dimensions.

Tariq Shah

§

Wed, 19 Apr 2000 04:52:19-0400 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I believe that wishes for a happy birthday are in order today, and if this belief is true, then, you have my wishes and hopes that today, and every day, will bring much barakah from Allah. If you like, you can consider the following as something of a birthday present -- although I am afraid our customer service department will be closed during working hours should you wish to return the gifts and exchange them for something else.

There is now a Sufi center, of sorts, in Bamford which is quite independent of my apartment. An office has been opened up in downtown Bamford under the auspices of the an organization that I have put together which is under the direction, insha' Allah, of our Order of Tasawwuf.

The office is a rather modest affair for the time being, and, perhaps, the foreseeable future. It is bigger than a closet, but smaller than a large living room.

It is, however, the right size, God willing, for holding meetings like the Tasawwuf Association used to hold in days gone by at the university in Canada. This is to say that the office space can accommodate a gathering of about 10-12 people if seated on chairs and, maybe, 15-16 people if seated on the floor.

I hope, insha' Allah, to begin holding Tasawwuf Association-like discussion sessions in about a month's time. Nonetheless, in order for this to take place, I will need -- as soon as I can afford it -- to put some basic furniture in the office so that people will, among other things, have something on which to sit.

The space also will, insha' Allah, be a presentable place at which to arrange individual meetings should there be people who wish this. I think, God willing, this will be better -- in the sense of being less problematic from a number of perspectives -- than having to invite people to my apartment.

God willing, I shall be taking out an eighth of a page advertisement in the yellow pages of a phone book published by the *Bamford Courier*.

This publication covers three of the local counties and reaches several hundred thousand people.

Part of the ad is slated to read (in reference to the center here in Bamford) -- "where the process of asking questions becomes an artful journey to solutions for life". The ad also should indicate that the Institute is active in the following areas: counseling, educational consulting, Internet courses, home schooling, Sufi practices, research, and community development.

Insha' Allah, a phone will be installed on Thursday. One of the options that has been selected for the phone system is a programmable multi-messaging unit which allows the caller to select from amongst a series of choices what they want to hear -- such as, the hours for the center; information on an upcoming function; as well as, possibly, an inspirational thought or message for the day, and, maybe, even a joke for the day.

Tentatively, the number which has been assigned is 892-1953. However, this might change by the time the phone is installed. And, it probably will be three or four days after that before I will, insha' Allah, have the different message possibilities up and running.

Your second gift, of sorts, is something of which you already might be aware. Our Silsilah has a new (old) web page. The old address: <http://www.spiritualnotion.net> is in the process of being moved to: <http://www.mysticalquest.com>.

A lot of this already is done and can be viewed by just logging on to the new web site address. However, some parts of the web Page are still being converted over to the new address format which is a lengthy process given the size of the web site (many megabytes, or so, by now).

I have made the name change for a number of reasons. For some time, rightly or wrongly, I felt that, perhaps, the name: SpiritualNotion.net might be putting people off unnecessarily.

More specifically, many people's views of the notion of mysticism is that it has something to do with the occult, or magic or subjective fantasies of no substance. As a result, I felt that the MysticalQuest.com designation might be less intimidating or problematic and more neutral, and, therefore, God willing, more inviting to be explored.

Furthermore, I am hoping that, God willing, the MysticalQuest.com designation will be much easier to promote in a variety of mediums than the SpiritualNotion.net name seems to have been.

There is more that is new than just the address and name of the web site. There have been a number of changes introduced into the design format of the site. Mostly, this has to do with the color schemes for the various sub directories of the MysticalQuest.com web site ... changes which I hope, insha' Allah, make the web site more appealing to the eye and also easier to get around from one sub directory to another, or from one section of a given sub directory to another facet of that same sub-directory. Insha' Allah, during the next several months, additional new sub-directories will be forthcoming.

For almost a year now, the SpiritualNotion.net web site has been drawing between 250 to 300 unique visitors a day, seven days a week, 30-31 days a month. This amounts to a running total of around 80,000+ combined hits on different facets of the Web site for any given month.

All of this, by the Grace of Allah, has been done with virtually no promotional work on my part. I would like to see what happens if a concerted effort is made to let people know we are here.

It is possible, of course, that increased efforts might not result in any significant gains in people coming to the Web site on a regular basis. However, let us hope that God blesses these efforts and that the result will be many, many more people who will come to the web site and benefit from it, even if they do not actually step onto the Sufi path.

I think one of the truly amazing things about all of this is that of the 80,000, or so, hits on the Web site in less than a year there has been only one person who e-mailed a rather nasty comment concerning one article which was posted on the web site. Let us pray that God continues to protect us from all of the weirdoes and potential troublemakers who are drifting around in cyber-space.

Also in the works, God willing, for the fall is the start of a virtual mini-university as a separate sub directory within MysticalQuest.com . I am working on a catalog which would list some 14 potential courses which could be offered through the web site.

Obviously, I won't have time to teach them all at once, but I was thinking of offering two or three per semester. If there are other people within the group -- either you, Momin Baba, Barry, or someone else who would like to offer a course, I can put in a word with the President of this Virtual University since I am, sometimes, on intimate terms with him.

Insha' Allah, the game plan is as follows. By stepping up the promotion campaign for the new Web site, the hope is that enough people will make regular use of the web site to provide the possibility of: (a) generating a greater interest in, and understanding of, the Sufi path among the peoples of the world; (b) providing resources which can God willing, benefit people and help improve, to some degree, the quality of their lives even if such people are not interested in the Sufi path; and, (c) opening up the possibility of a number of sources of revenue through the Web site (e-publishing, courses, advertising, affiliate programs, home schooling, and so on) which can, God willing, provide money for silsilah projects/activities and, maybe, even a modest income for me.

Well, now that your gifts have been unwrapped, I hope you will be able to enjoy use of them for many years to come. And, if you wish to return them, I should warn you in advance that the guy who runs the Service Department is something of a grump and might give you a hard time about getting an exchange or a refund on your gifts.

Turning briefly to a somewhat different issue, I am in further contact with the fellow about whom I had sent you previously his e-mail concerning his spiritual experiences along with my response. He might be interested in stepping onto the path ... although this remains to be seen, depending on what transpires in the next several correspondences.

He lives in Massachusetts. Obviously, at some point, if the fellow is really serious about the Sufi path, physical contact should be made.

I remember something you had said to me in, I believe, Canada. You indicated that some arrangement would have to be made about determining which of the new candidates should be with you and who should be with me -- or Momin Baba for that matter.

It has been my practice, for the most part, to let you know about such possibilities – few though they might have been to this point -- in the hope that you would let me know whether I should continue on with such people or whether the individual was someone who should be with you.

So, I am mentioning this fellow again for the same sort of reason. He is more or less equidistant between us (probably some four hours, or so, traveling time). If he should express a sincere interest in stepping onto the path, should he come to see you or come to see me (or, should I go and see him).

This issue, of course, might not be restricted to just this guy. If the forthcoming promotional campaign for the MysticalQuest.com Web site is, God willing, successful -- either modestly so, or otherwise -- then, there might be others about whom this same discussion will be taking place.

There is another fellow in Canada with whom I am corresponding, and a young woman in the United Kingdom who has contacted me through the web site. Now, nothing might come of any of this, but, then, again, if God wishes, maybe something will take place.

As far as the Internet is concerned, I have made what might be termed more than passing contact with maybe 10-15 people. Most of these contacts fall apart, so to speak, at one point or another as it becomes clear that these individuals really are not interested in the Sufi path -- at least at the present time.

However, in the near future, there might be more genuine, sincere people who come along. I have always considered the silsilah Web site to be part of a sifting process -- like panning for gold. Sometimes you have to run the sluice gates wide open for a while before anything of value shows up in the bottom of the pan or tub.

However, with the opening of the promotional sluice gates for the web site about to begin, I am hopeful, God willing, that there might be some genuine prospects which come our way. The problem facing us, or me, is how to take this to the next level so that these potential candidates get some physical contact from you, or Momin Baba or me.

One of the ideas behind the organization which, by the Grace of God, has been established in Bamford was to provide, at least on a

local level, a place where such physical contact might be able to occur. But, making physical contact with people outside of this localized arrangement has been something of a problem.

At the present time, I am not really financially able or free from a need to work for a living to be able to travel, except in a very limited sort of fashion. I am hoping that, God willing, this set of circumstances might change if the web page plus the organization here in Bamford produce enough revenue to underwrite such travel.

The other part of the problem is getting people to invite us. This becomes somewhat embarrassing since on a number of occasions people don't seem to have the sense that not everyone has a lot of money to cater to the whims of potential candidates and that it is rather unrealistic for them to expect that we should be willing to travel about at our expense on the possibility that such people might be interested in the Sufi path.

For whatever reason, invitations to: come and speak or get together in small groups with people, is not coming. And, I am not exactly sure how to plant the seed in people's minds that if they are interested in even just making exploratory contact with us beyond cyberspace, then, perhaps, they should get together with a few other families or friends and work something out.

The few times I have tried to suggest something of this nature the proposal has fallen on deaf ears. This has made me wonder whether it is something which should be proposed at all even if the circumstances seem right.

A lot of the people with whom I have established -- even if only for a relatively brief time -- more than passing contact through the web site, seem to be living in isolation (physical, emotional or spiritual) and are not, therefore, in a position to arrange anything of a group nature in their locality. However, in other cases, I am not exactly sure what is going on even though I have indicated on the web site that I am willing to come and talk with people if they would cover basic travel and accommodation costs associated with such a trip. If you have any suggestions or insights which you care to share on any of this, please let me know.

I guess this is everything for now. Please give my love and Salaams to your new wife, your household, and the people of fatiha.

Love,
Tariq

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Wed, 19 Apr 2000 21:21:48 HST (e-mail)

Tariq my son,
Assalamo alaikum.

There is no doubt that you are a very important sign from ALLAH to the thoughtful, attentive and the observant. The very first who will learn of this truth, are your old acquaintances and members of the silsila who have somewhat known you for a long time now. In truth I am the most bonafide witness to this miracle of stability and constancy.

People who have watched and observed you from the beginning, they will know and understand what I am saying. There might have been many who thought to themselves that very soon you will collapse, and they might have expected that to happen on a number of occasions. Now if they are still there watching, they are surely knocked out flat, seeing this miracle. You are not only still there, but rather in a successful manner.

Yes, my son! Baba Tariq Shah Chishti! These are the best presents I ever received! I will not be incorrect if I say that, son, we are proud of you! As soon as you get your phone number, please let me know.

Sima, your wife, is in contact with me via the e-mail system. She believes me to be in Islamabad. MASHA ALLAH she has chosen our way, and is very satisfied.

She has been kind enough to keep the sensitive topic regarding her marital matters with you far from me, and that is the reason why she is now my Mureed. We all miss you very much and I am sure that all who love you will be happy to know that now MASHA ALLAH you have a center in Bamford, Vermont.

I feel ecstatic just thinking of it!

LOVE AND DUA,

P.S. Regarding the people you mentioned, please go ahead and put the seeds of Nisbath in their hearts if they open up to you. They should be informed that it is they who have to invite you. Openly tell one and all that you are poor, and proud of your poverty!

BABA.

§

Thu, 20 Apr 2000 19:06:11-0400 (e-mail)

Dear Sima,

As-Salaam-u-'alukum!

Mubarak and congratulations on your initiation into silsila. I am very happy for you.

Thank you for sending me the e-card. It was very nice -- although it took forever to download.

Since the most important event in your life has now taken place, other things are of less importance. Nevertheless, day-to-day life still requires a certain amount of consideration.

A final decision needs to be made about our marriage. As I see it, we have two broad possibilities before us, although there are several variations on the second theme.

The first possibility is that we should end the marriage properly with a declaration from one, or the other, or both of us that such is the case. Although this possibility is not a palatable idea for either of us, nonetheless, things cannot continue on as they are without an on-going violation of the requirements of Muslim law in relation to marriage.

Living in a state of such violation is not the way one should start out on the path. Furthermore, it is not the state in which I wish to be. In addition, the present arrangement is not fair to you, to me, to your children, to your parents, or, now, to the silsilah.

Your most important relationship is with your shaykh. If I am absent from the scene, this is not all that big a deal as far as what is

most important is concerned. If we decide that the marriage should end, you need to understand that nothing of essential value will be lost or suffer either with respect to you, your children, or anyone else in your life.

I have love for you and your children and want only what is the best for you all. Baba is the very best for all of you, and he is what I have wanted for each of you all along although spiritual etiquette required me to keep this wish in as low a profile as possible.

If the decision should be to divorce, then, we have had a period without contact of any kind, and, insha' Allah, this will make living with such a decision somewhat easier to get used to. Emotionally speaking, we probably each have been through the worst of things by now, and though taking such a step still would have its sadness and hurt, if there is any time to do it, the present time would seem to offer the easiest opportunity.

The second possibility alluded to earlier involves maintaining the marriage. However, Sima, I will not mince words here.

I have much work to do. I can't afford to get hung up on a family situation which is not going to be constructively conducive to proceeding with such work.

I need a wife who will actively and fully support the work which needs to be done. I need a wife who is going to be the mother of my mureeds. I need a wife who will be there by my side doing whatever can be done -- to the best of her ability -- to help, God willing, to advance the work I am doing on behalf of the silsilah.

I feel you have a great many talents and, insha' Allah, much to offer in service to the silsilah. You can do this with Baba alone or you can do it with both of us, but if I am to be included in this, then, you will have to be married to me -- otherwise, you should just concentrate on offering your service to Baba alone.

I don't know how long my present job will last since my brother is in the process of selling his economic interest in his business. He has indicated that the new owner plans on keeping all of the present staff on since that individual considers the current staff to be one of the most attractive aspects of the deal.

In addition, the soon-to-be-new owner is planning on being a largely absentee owner since he has another full time job in a related business and is buying my brother's business and another business office up north as an investment. Consequently, the new owner wants to put all profits into expanding the business, hiring new agents, and so on.

I will be holding on to the job for a while yet. However, my plan is to be able to shift over to doing the kind of work which is more consonant with my abilities, education, and spiritual responsibilities.

If you or your father or both want a guarantee about things, then, you are talking about something else beside life and the will of Allah. I am working as hard as I can to do what is necessary to fill my part of things.

Either you are prepared to trust: in the work I am doing, in Baba, in the silsilah, and in Allah, and take your chances with me, or you are not. There is no in-between on this.

You can share your life with me as well as have your children share their lives with me or you can choose to not do this. Whether you do or you don't, you will not be able to escape your fate with respect to material things.

If you are basing your decision about what to do on the degree of material comfort you and your children will have with or without me, then, I can tell you now that this is far away from the way a Sufi should be thinking. What is best is not always what is easiest, and, in fact, usually is not.

Please don't turn your children into carbon copies of the other people in Milton where things which are of little value matter, while things which are of great value are often ignored. Please do not make the mistake of supposing that by giving material comfort to your children that you necessarily are doing them any favors.

One thing I can guarantee you is that whatever rizq (Divine apportionment) is fated for you and your children will come to you irrespective of whether you are with me or not. I am not the fly in the soup here.

Undoubtedly, if you and the children were to come here there would be difficulties of one sort or another. Some of these might be financial/material, and some of them might be social or the like.

Nonetheless, I hope you do understand that you and your children are going to have problems of one kind or another no matter what you do. We can face these together. Or, we can face our individual problems separately from one another.

Your children do have many cousins where you currently live and, naturally, having playmates, companions and friends is nice. But, if you will permit me to make an observation on this, the fact of the matter is that while I was there a great deal of their time was occupied in something other than spending lots of time with their cousins, and as far as the time they did spend with their cousins, more often than not the two of them would come back with reports of problems rather than glowing reports about the great time that was had by all.

I am not trying to bad-mouth their cousins. I am sure your children do things which bug and upset their relatives. It is not a one-way street.

However, the reality of the matter is, one has very few real friends in life. Most people are acquaintances -- and this is true even in the case of relatives.

How many friends do you still have from your childhood? How many people in your extended family do you have such a relationship with that even though you love them and care for them it would be unbearable for you to spend life away from them -- with the exception of visits every now and then? Is this likely to be any different for your children, or for their cousins?

Life is about change...adaptation...struggle...impermanence. As much as we might like to protect ourselves or our children or those we love from this truth, we cannot.

You might think you will be able to protect your children from all this by staying where you are, but you cannot. Sooner or later they are going to learn about the nature of life -- life will not permit them to escape from this, so, why not have them learn these lessons with someone who loves them and can help them with these difficulties in ways that nobody else in your family or community can.

Of course, Baba is near-by, so you have that option for such things as well. However, Baba might not always be physically near-by.

There is work here for you. And, there are some Muslim people both in the Bamford area, as well as in the university, for your parents. Furthermore, I believe I could find ways of getting your mother, and your father for that matter, busy with a variety of things, cultural and otherwise.

Obviously, I still am prepared to have your parents live with us. But, it would have to be here, not in Milton. Besides, Milton is not so far away that your parents couldn't make extended visits to the people in Milton on any number of occasions just as Momin's wife, Sairah, does, from time to time.

If your parents were to come here, then obviously, arrangements would have to be made to obtain space which would be able to accommodate all of us. At the present time, this is beyond my means, so there might have to be a transition period of some sort. But, I would not want this to drag out into something akin to what has been going on for the last year or so.

I still would like to get you working in your field of art and music. We could try to find a way to do that and you should know that there are quite a few artists and musicians in the Bamford area and surrounding communities.

Vermont has one of the highest qualities of life in the United States, and you cannot beat the varied beauty of the landscape here – from lakes, to forests, to mountains, fields, and rivers. There is even a city and town here and there.

The school systems in Bamford and Sutton are excellent. Home schooling is another possibility for your children.

I am not prepared to have the status quo maintained simply because you do not want to make a decision about how to proceed. You want everyone who is involved in this situation to be satisfied and without difficulty, but this just is not possible.

You are going to have to make a decision. Make a decision to divorce, or make a decision to be with me, but make a decision, and let us all get on with our lives.

If I didn't love you Sima, I wouldn't be writing this e-mail. I wouldn't be trying one last time to get our married life out of the quagmire it has been in for three years. Nonetheless, if you feel that after all is said and done, the best thing for you, your children, and parents is to stay where you are, then, I will accept this and bear no malice or ill-will toward you or your family, but our marital relationship will have to end.

Love,
Tariq

§

Sat, 22 Apr 2000 10:12:21-0400 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I had a dream on Friday morning -- the 21st -- after fajr prayer. It might be nothing, but since it stuck with me, I thought I would pass it on to you.

I am in some sort of large lobby area. A man and a woman are in a lounge chair nearby and the woman, who appears to be on the man's lap, is passionately kissing the man. She is injecting something into the man's mouth during the kiss, intending, it seems, to hurt the man. The thing which is being injected turns out to be a small scorpion ... maybe green in color.

As the scorpion comes out of the man's mouth, either I or someone, tries to knock or brush the scorpion away, but it falls down the front of the woman's dress. However, she does not appear to be stung or harmed by the scorpion.

The next scene seems to be a continuation of the above dream but it is taking place in, maybe, a large hotel or convention center of some kind down south somewhere along the coast of one of the states between Florida and Texas. There seem to be scorpions all over the place of different sizes, colors, and shapes, but, apparently, the ones

which are considered the most problematic or poisonous are small green ones.

There is going to be a presentation or discussion in the center/hotel about some particularly deadly snake. The name of the snake might be Adder or Addison or something similar sounding.

I am intending on going to the session but one of my shoes is missing. I'm not positive which one it is but it might be the left one.

A man arrives and indicates, apparently, that he will help me to find my missing shoe. He takes me to a room where I begin to suspect that the man's intentions are insincere and that he wishes to take sexual advantage of me.

Some hotel clerks or personnel come into the room, and the man seems to be worried about the cost of the room and having to get out before some deadline -- maybe noontime. During all of this, I am trying to extricate myself from the situation, and in the process go toward the bathroom area. But, the room is either unclean, or something, because I decide against going in the room.

The next scene involves a graduation of some sort for young people -- like a high school graduation dance. The kids seem to be wearing formal attire ... gowns and the like.

There seems to be some sort of antagonism between a Japanese or Oriental group of girls and some of the other kids attending the dance. Something odd is going on, but I am not exactly sure what it is.

In the next scene, boys and girls are lined up in two rows facing one another, as if they are paired off for a coming dance or about to take part in a group dance of some sort. I don't recognize anybody among the participants -- either in the dance scene or in any of the rest of the dream -- but there is one girl who sort of sticks out in my mind although I can't distinguish or remember any facial features.

The girl is facing the boy with whom she is going to be dancing or with whom she is paired. She appears to be oriental. I am looking at her and the whole paired off rows as if I am standing somewhere behind the boys line looking on.

And, that is the end of the dream. Earth shattering, wasn't it?

§

There is another dream, which is not mine and since I was thinking of responding to it, I thought I would run both the general theme of the dream and my tentative response past you. This dream is from the guy in Massachusetts with whom I have been corresponding.

The guy appears to be in an art gallery of some sort. He is facing three portraits or pictures.

Idris Shah is on his left telling him about the pictures. The picture on the right is said to be wrong or incorrect. The thought occurs to the dreamer -- the guy from Massachusetts - that the middle picture is flawed in some way. And Idris Shah describes the picture on the left as being, or going, way beyond the prescribed boundaries.

The dreamer awakes from the dream in a sort of upbeat or hopeful mood. He said that part of this might be coming from the resonance between the Shah in my name and the Shah of the person in the dream.

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The final aspect of this e-mail is a request. I don't know if it would be appropriate or not, but I wanted to publish the complete list of names -- all three lines -- for our silsilah and put it in the Sufi section of the web site under the heading of "Spiritual Lineage" or the like.

Please convey my love and Salaams to your wife, your household, and to all the people of fatiha.

Love,
Tariq

§

Sat, 22 Apr 2000 20:37:09 HST (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

The first dream you mention is particularly an invitation to you towards the reality of ONENESS, WAHDATUL WAJOOD.

The second dream means that there was someone who wanted to rise to the occasion of his ego's desire wanting to become famous through you, but he failed due to your strong NISBATH. ALLAH even showed you that he was nothing but a bathroom man. I know the person, but let's not get into details because our mission is love and forgiveness. May ALLAH actually make him a WALI so that he does good, and in turn receives good, ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN.

The third dream is very clearly showing you that you are about to become rather busy and active with people being sent to you for instructions in better life and becoming mureeds, ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN!

All three are very significant and good, MASHA ALLAH! You are a miracle my son, and those who love you are very fortunate!

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA

§

Mon, 24 Apr 2000 00:30:59-0400 (e-mail to a web site visitor)

Dear John,

At the end of your initial response to my e-mail to you concerning your intense spiritual experience as a teenager, you inquired about whether or not I, or my designate, would be willing to take on the responsibility of providing spiritual guidance for you. You indicated you "understand somewhat ... what it takes to be a reasonable student".

My own personal experience, along with that of others I know who are on the path, suggests that most of us don't really know what it takes to be a 'reasonable student' prior to the fact of stepping onto the path. This is something one tends to learn as one goes along.

Many things which we take to be reasonable about ourselves in the beginning often turn out to be quite unreasonable, if not burdensome, later on. If one knew, prior to the spiritual quest, where, precisely, one was going, or how, or if, one would get there, or what one would find out about oneself when one got there, there would be no need for such a venture.

The nature of our essential spirituality is, with apologies to a recent Star Trek movie, the real unexplored country. The great cloud of unknowing that shrouds this country both attracts and terrifies us.

Sir Alec Guinness said at the beginning of his autobiography, when he was invited to jot down thoughts on his life and career -- 'my ego was flattered, but I was terrified'. When one contemplates the possibility of setting out on the great spiritual voyage, there are many facets of the ego which get enamored with the idea of mystical pursuits, but there also are deeper, more knowing dimensions of the self which have good reason to feel an intuitive terror since the journey often tends to be long, difficult and rigorous, with many pitfalls along the way.

Like Dorothy, we all feel the ecstasy of setting out on the yellow brick road with the whole town of Munchkins to see us off -- singing, waving, laughing and dancing. But, soon the town and its people are left far behind, and we have only the unknown with which to deal, and we begin to realize that we are not in Kansas any longer.

Not everyone who starts out, finishes. And, of those who do finish, everyone of them is slain.

You spoke about your absolute attraction to, as well as your absolute terror of, your experience. Notwithstanding what has been said above, it is your ruh or spirit which is absolutely attracted by that to which you were given a brief opening so many years ago, and it is your nafs, or carnal soul, that is absolutely terrified by what it senses to be the significance of the potential which was given expression by the experiential portal to which, by the Grace of God, you were given a threshold exposure.

Your spirit wishes to return to its original relationship with Divinity -- the one which it enjoyed in pre-eternity prior to coming into

this world. The nafs is terrified because it must become completely transformed if the ruh is to be able to return 'Home'.

For the nafs, transformation is death. This is why I said earlier that every individual who reaches the desired goal of spirituality or mysticism is slain.

All that we think of as "me, I, or the self", must be effaced. One must become absent from the influences of self, so that one can become open to the Presence of Self.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has said that the movements of the nafs or carnal soul within us is more difficult to detect than the movements of a black ant on a smooth rock in the dead of night. We must surrender to Haq or Reality, and, yet, more often than not, every time we feel we are surrendering fully, we come to learn we only are surrendering to one or another concept of things which we have, or to one or another attachment which we have, or to one or another orientation of the nafs.

The nature of the phenomenology of experience is such that there always tends to be a sense of fullness about it. The fetus has no conception of the external world, and, yet, there is 'fullness' to its experience in the womb. The child has no conception of adult interests and feels that whatever is experienced during childhood has 'fullness' to it. The adult gains success, fame and material goods and wonders what more could there be? The one who aspires to heaven and listens to the descriptions of paradise says, surely, there could be nothing beyond this. A person falls madly in love and believes this is the be all and end all of experiential possibility, until one falls even more deeply in love with something or someone which had not been conceived at the time of initially falling in love.

The fact that your spiritual experience had a sense of fullness about it is like the foregoing. You might feel there is nothing more that could be added to it, but you are being influenced by the phenomenology of that experience and not by the Nature of Reality.

The Sufi Masters speak of "bewilderment" being one of the highest stations or maqams. Those who are in this station are bewildered because they cannot keep up with the openings of the Infinite which are being disclosed to them on a continuous basis.

The very nature of Infinity is to be inexhaustible and not capable of being circumscribed. Whatever one's experience might be, and as full and complete as it might seem at the time one is undergoing it, nevertheless, will, in time and if one is blessed, be shown to be but one of an endless array of possibilities.

Prior to arriving at the station of bewilderment, there are many other maqams or stations which must be experienced in order for the individual to become complete and fully operational, so to speak. Different individuals have different ways of "talking" about this journey of stations.

For instance, one way of describing the stations is as follows. First there is: compatibility, then: inclination, fellowship, passion, friendship, exclusive friendship, ardent affection, enslavement, and, finally, bewilderment.

Another approach to the same sort of journey of stations uses a different vocabulary. Thus, there is repentance, longing, fear, sincerity, gratitude, patience, dependence, and love.

Whatever the vocabulary which might be used, there are a number of things which are going on during the journeying from station to station. The nafs, heart, sirr (mystery), ruh (spirit), kafi (hidden), and aqfah (more hidden) -- which are different instrumentalities, if you will, of human potential -- are being calibrated and brought on line so that the individual becomes, God willing, a fully functioning and realized servant of Divinity.

This process of spiritual journey or suluk is not a matter of one or a small handful of experiences. In fact, there might be no "mystical" experiences, per se, attached to such a journey.

It is faith, understanding, certainty, piety, and commitment which is being alchemically transformed. This transformation might, or might not, be accompanied by mystical experiences of a particularly intense and overwhelming sort.

The experience which you had was, as indicated in my previous e-mail, not a maqam. It was a harbinger of possibility.

A maqam is a very great thing in which, by the Grace of God, one abides on an on-going basis. Its influence is not that of a distant experience which still reverberates in one's memory, but of a fully

present companion that informs the individual directly, presently, and intensely according to the nature of that station.

Your faith, understanding, and commitment were, to a degree, affected by your experience. But, a great deal of work still needs to be done. A great many stations remain to be traversed. There are many dimensions of your potential which have not been calibrated and brought on line.

This is not work which can be done on a trial and error basis or in isolation. Hazrat 'Ali (may God be pleased with him) who was the son in law of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and is one of the great Sufi Masters, once said: 'The one who would step onto the spiritual path who does not have a spiritual guide, has Satan or Iblis as a guide.'

Iblis is not a myth suitable only for scaring impressionable children. Iblis is a real, metaphysical force capable of destructively affecting all that we feel, think and do.

The one who seeks to undertake the spiritual journey without proper support, protection and assistance, has absolutely no compass, map, or means of determining whether the provisions and drink one finds along the way will be helpful or lead to one's destruction. As a result, such an individual is vulnerable to the urgings, direction, and whisperings of Iblis to the nafs.

Under such circumstances, everything becomes a mirage. Reality is lost. What seems reasonable might not be. Judgment becomes suspect.

In such a condition, one really is not ready to teach others. How can the blind lead the blind?

Given the foregoing sort of situation, trying to serve as someone else's guide becomes burdensome. This is so because we are being informed by something true within us that we are not currently suitable for such an undertaking, and, yet, we are seeking to swim upstream against that current of understanding. When the time is right, when the call to service has been made, when the proper spiritual authority and support are present, then sincere seekers are never experienced as a burden, for service to humanity becomes service to Divinity.

Being a spiritual guide is not an individual choice to do or not to do. Being a legitimate spiritual guide is an appointment given through a lineage of spiritual authority which, ultimately, is sanctioned by Divinity.

The truth, value, weight, and authoritativeness of guidance are not rooted in an individual but in Divinity. The individual is the one that has been selected and prepared to serve as a door of manifestation of such guidance.

It is the spiritual lineage which stands behind an individual guide. And, Divinity, in turn, underwrites, all that is done through the spiritual lineage.

In order to bring balance into another person's life, one must, first, come to know what balance is, and, one must struggle to inculcate such balance in one's own life. In this regard, many of us have a habit of putting the cart before the horse.

We might feel we know what we are doing when we direct energies toward this or that person, but, more often than not, we are like Mickey Mouse in the Sorcerer's Apprentice portion of Fantasia. In reality, it is more akin to practicing medicine without a license, and the fact no one complains does not necessarily mean, therefore, no harm is being done.

There is no object and subject. There is only Divinity.

Object and subject are experienced in a state of epistemological and phenomenological separation from Divinity. When, by the Grace of God, full spiritual realization is achieved, then, manifestation comes to understand its essential nature and true identity: in essence we are Divine, but we are not Divinity in Essence.

There is a sound to one hand clapping. But, it helps to know whether one is talking right hand or left hand clapping.

The sound of the left hand clapping is that of misguidance and illusion. The sound of the right hand clapping is that of God calling us back to our original Home.

Learning to tell the difference between the two is not an easy task for there are many forces and factors which impact on this differentiating process. The mystical path is the means by which one

comes to learn, understand and apply the difference between the two sounds of clapping.

I asked you about your family situation because a person does not pursue the Sufi discipline outside of a social/family/community context. You should speak to them about what you are thinking of undertaking.

You should see if they have worries, concerns or questions about the process. It is always easier to pursue the path when you have the support and encouragement of your family.

You don't want to appear to them like Richard Dreyfuss in 'Close Encounters' who, much to the chagrin of his children and wife, is constructing strange shapes and forms at the supper table with the mashed potatoes. Although you might not have to do anything as strange as that on the Sufi path, nonetheless, to a casual observer, the whole idea of mysticism can seem rather bizarre and irrational, and loved ones might wonder if you have lost your mind.

Finally, although I have, by the Grace of God, been given authority to serve as the locus of manifestation for spiritual guidance, you shouldn't accept me by default simply because you feel there might be no other spiritual guides in North America. There are a number of authentic guides in the eastern part of the continent - ranging from Canada, to various parts of New York State, New Jersey, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, Illinois, and Vermont (where I am located).

This brings us full circle to where the present e-mail began and your e-mail ended. As such, it raises the question of just what do you think becoming a student of a given spiritual guide -- whether me or someone else -- entails?

I hope the foregoing is helpful.

Tariq

§

Thu, 27 Apr 2000 15:11:40 HST (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

The reason why I delayed in responding to the request of the SHAJRA being put on the Internet is because even though I knew that SHAJRA is supposed to be very personal to mureeds only and as a result should not be made public, yet knowing how special you and your mission is to the ELDERS of the Silsila, I thought there might be an approval here. So I waited for the signal, and I am still waiting. As soon as permission comes I shall pass it on to you.

Regarding the SHAJRA the rule is to hand it over to the Mureed only after you are certain that he or she is with NISBATH, and not before. In the beginning the Mureeds duty is to only know of the Shaikh and the Grand Shaikh and sometimes also the Great Grand Shaikh.

You as a Shaikh are required to have the SHAJRA, and you are also allowed to show the SHAJRA to your new Mureeds, but should not give it to them. Give them only when you realize their NISBATH with you is strong, because unless their NISBATH with you is strong and everlasting they will not benefit anything by the SHAJRA.

We are very pleased with your progress there. MASHA ALLAH I see very good potentials there now. If you know that having residence in Bamford would not be expensive and it will be the same as Sutton, you could shift but if it's going to be expensive and will cost more on a monthly basis, then, of course, you should not shift.

Do not worry regarding not being able to be there for the phone calls, because the e-mail system is better.

Siraj's health is MASHA ALLAH improving, and he along with the other members of the household convey their sincere Salam to the QUTB, Tariq SHAH QADRI, CHISTI, NIZAMI, SABRI.

May ALLAH bestow you the FOWZUL AZEEM, the GREAT SUCCESS, ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN !

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

Tue, 30 May 2000 03:46:04 HST (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

I was just laughing at myself the other day, regarding my strange situation. I got married and my wife is in China waiting for her immigration papers to finalize. Little does she know what she has got into, leave alone the fact that there are some important questions that have to be answered in the sponsorship form for which I certainly have no answer. Questions like, what is my income and how am I going to support her etc.?

This is what was in my thoughts when the organization that is helping with my wife's immigration called. He said: "Dr. Iqlaq, congratulations! The approval of your application to sponsor your wife has come!"

Now the application form was before me, empty because I had no answers for the questions that were in it, and I receive this call saying that it has been approved! What actually had happened was that the attorney of the organization that was handling this spoke to the concerned department and told them that I was under an oath of poverty, but Sufi Priests are allowed to get married. The lady who is being sponsored agreed to be my wife knowing this. The devotees are looking after my board and lodging and are prepared to do the same for my wife too. Then they were also told that Dr. Iqlaq does not wish to lie regarding his circumstances, so what do they suggest that the answers be for the questions in the form.

Exactly after three days the approval came. The normal time for the approval or rejection of sponsorship is supposed to be 60 days.

40 days had passed by, and I had no clue what to say. I thought that it will be rejected because I have no answer for even one question leave alone so many.

Now that the sponsorship has been approved, the rest is her immigration papers takes about 6 months I am told.

I received news from my wife that the Embassy called her and asked her to come the following day. She went very nervously. All they asked her were two questions.

"Did you know that your husband is under an oath of poverty and has not much to offer?" She said yes she knew.

Second question, "When did he last come to China?" She said that I had never been to China, and we met and got married in Singapore. In the end they said that they need some signatures from me and if possible in person.

These days I am more poor than ever, so that also worried me. How will I go? I will need some cash along with my tickets etc.

For about two weeks I was praying real hard to ALLAH SUBHANAHU ! The attorney calls. "Rev. Iqlaq, hi! You know, I am willing to go along with you, because I have some clients there who need my presence at the Embassy. My ticket will be paid for by the company. You just make arrangements for your ticket."

I was almost in tears, because the irony of the situation was such that I just could not explain the details of my poverty. I made an excuse that I will call back later and put down the phone.

Two three minutes later, Bashir mia calls. "Baba, qadam Bowsi! The airline has now informed the staff that there is an extra pass aside from the buddy pass, which allows confirmed seat for any special friend of the staff. Bashir had already added my name in his buddy list, but that is not for a confirmed seat. It works only if there is a seat available, and since it's not a confirmed seat ticket Embassies do not give visa, but this new pass is for a confirmed seat.

So we went to the Chinese Embassy and got the visa. On the third is our flight. The attorney is also accompanying.

My wife sent me an e-mail that I need not worry about money because her people gave her enough as her wedding present. What more can I ask for?

These miracles seem to be due to so many different secondary causes, but I know in my heart that these secondary causes are effects of ALLAH'S MERCY and GRACE.

I just wanted to share these experiences with you.

Times are hard, but HIS MERCY and BLESSINGS softens the hardness into simple and easy results, ALHAMDU LILLA AH.

The other good news is regarding your wife. MASHA ALLAH, as you know, she now regards herself completely part of our silsila, and is in constant touch with me through the e-mail media. She knows that I am in Islamabad.

There is no mention of the delicate situation between her and you since she knows that I will not interfere. Yes, she did mention once that she has no contact with you and even her children are missing you very much.

The family with whom I shall be staying there has a computer so I will be in a position to receive and send e-mails INSHA ALLAH.

We are all missing you very much. All members of the household convey their Salam and love to you.

LOVE AND DUA, BABA.

§

Wed, 31 May 2000 00:12:26-0400 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-alaykum!

Mubarak for all your wonderful news. I can think of no one who is more deserving of Allah's blessings than you.

Your wife might be getting the poorest of men in the material sense, but she is, by the grace of Allah, getting the richest of men in all of the most important senses. I believe she understands this, and this in itself is a great blessing for you and her.

I pray everything goes well during your upcoming journey. And, insha' Allah, everything will be made easy for you and your new wife.

I have sent Habib a lot of critical commentary concerning his thesis. However, I'm not sure it is helping him very much since it might be difficult for him to see the forest through the trees in relation to such material.

He is polite in his return e-mails, but I'm not really sure what is going on with him concerning all of this. He has a lot of work to do and not much time in which to do it.

I will try to help, insha' Allah, to do whatever I can to help, but I'm not really sure what else I can do. I have a few more sections of his thesis on which to comment, but I thought I would give Habib some time to try to digest what I have sent already before sending the remainder.

I believe he has the basic ideas for his thesis project, and I have attempted to point out to him the general nature of what he seems to have been trying to get at in the material which I have read. However, it is possible he feels that I am trying to impose something new on him -- when, in reality, I have been trying to lend focus to ideas which are in his thesis -- both explicitly as well as implicitly. I might be using a slightly different vocabulary than he has -- but the underlying perspective mirrors much of what I see him struggling to do without him necessarily being consciously aware of what it is he actually is trying to do.

Love,
Tariq

§

June 2000

Now that my lease has expired, I am making the move from Sutton to Bamford. By the Grace of Allah, my job, apartment, and the new spiritual/business office, are, now, all within a short distance of one another.

§

Wed, 7 June 2000 03:16:18-0300 (e-mail)

Dear Sima,
As-Salaam-u-alaykum!

I had intended to start this e-mail much earlier, but I ran into a number of problems -- one of which is that my e-mail composer does not seem to be writing properly ... among other things the whole process is sticking in the sense that when I hit the keys, they don't always work -- that is, nothing appears on the page until much later. It is quite frustrating, annoying and time-consuming.

Everything went sour after I downloaded what was supposed to be a good program, and it really fouled things up with respect to my access to the Internet after I installed it.

Despite having just put in a 56K modem which was working really well and which was permitting me to zip around the Internet, relative to before, at the speed of light, everything slowed down like it was immersed in molasses.

I uninstalled the program, and most of the previous speed of surfing the Internet has returned. However, I now have discovered that I am having problems with the e-mail composer with which one writes e-mails.

In any event, I don't know what else to do but to proceed and hope for the best. I hope I can finish before it gets too, too late -- it already is late into the morning hours.

None of what follows should be treated as a matter of finger-pointing at you, nor should it be considered to be a matter of after-the-fact recriminations. What has happened has happened, and there is nothing that can be done to change that, and absolutely no purpose is served by trying to hurt you, punish you, or try to make you feel guilty about anything.

Nonetheless, there are some things which need to be said if there is to be any hope for us as a married couple. I know what I am going to say might not be easy to swallow, but try not to get too defensive about things and do your best to keep an open mind ... something easier said than done almost irrespective of whom this is being said to.

Before saying what I have to say about our situation, first, I want you to know that I admire you, and have a great deal of respect for you in so many ways. You have had to move from one country to another under very trying circumstances -- including an extremely abusive husband as well as some abusive in-laws ... some of whom might even

have attempted to kill you. You have had to start all over in so many ways, and during these new beginnings, you have taken over a commercial service for your uncle and sorted out what was a total mess and disaster by shaping things into a very efficiently and productive operation.

You have had the responsibility of, more or less, raising your children by yourself. I think you have done a wonderful job – your children are very sweet intelligent, and get along well with others ... both strangers as well as the extended family.

You have managed to purchase your own house. In addition, you have literally raised yourself, through the Grace of God, by your own bootstraps and gotten your financial affairs largely in order after traveling through some very difficult times.

You are, I feel, an extremely talented individual ... artistically, musically, and in other ways as well. You are, as well, very creative in many of your solutions to life problems.

You are a kind, sensitive, caring, and thoughtful individual. You are a very spiritually-oriented person

You have been very, very generous with me. You have helped me out in many different ways – from the computer which you sent to me while I was living with Momin, to helping me, subsequently, with many other contingencies of life.

You have tried, I feel, your level best to make things work out for us. I have no complaints concerning your willingness to look for, and try, different possible solutions to the problems with which we are confronted.

You have taken a number of risks. Some of these risks have brought about constructive changes in our lives.

I hope you will keep all of the foregoing ‘positive’ comments and feelings which I have concerning you in focus, as I move toward broaching some of the issues that I feel are, or have been, problematic. I am not trying to belittle you in that which follows ... I am offering it as, potentially, constructive criticism which might help us to put things in perspective and, thereby, deal with our situation more effectively in the future.

Although I have indicated as much before, the first mistake which was made is when you said nothing to your parents when they were still in Bangladesh, and I had proposed to you. They called when I was in your uncle's study with you, and although certain preparations were being made, and had been made, by them, to move out of their house as well as sell some of their possessions, something should have been said to them within a day, or so, of our conversation.

The fact nothing was said to them was not fair to them, and it was not fair to me. I know you were hoping for everything to work itself out and, you deeply wanted, somehow, for all of us to be able to live happily ever after, but this is not what has happened. Consequently, a serious misjudgment was made that has cast everything in a very problematic light ever since.

I probably am as much to blame, in some ways, as you are with respect to this aspect of things. I should have insisted, perhaps, that you tell your parents what was going on ... but even under Muslim law, as a once-married individual, you have the right to make your own decisions when it comes to matrimonial issues, and, therefore, you don't need your parents approval in order to marry again ... although, obviously, having their approval is much better than not having that approval.

Secondly, you seem to have entirely misunderstood the job facet of my life from the very beginning. Although you went to a great deal of effort and expense in trying to help me get a job at one of the universities or colleges in areas surrounding Milton, I told you from the very start it wouldn't work.

I believe I understood the situation much better than you did, but you didn't trust my judgment about the matter. You were so intent on "making" things work that your eyes and mind were often closed to some of the realities of the situation.

I suppose I could have insisted and told you not to proceed, but I didn't. I thought -- why not leave it to Allah and see what happens. If God wanted me to have such a job, then, God easily could have made it so.

Such was not the case. There was a very important message in this, but you disregarded it.

The next thing we tried was the evolution course. Again, you helped out a great deal with underwriting the cost of getting the brochures done.

You had your doubts about the plausibility of this attempt. I shared many of your doubts, and I admitted to you when I was still in Canada that it was a long shot, but the issue was so important I felt that at least an attempt should be made to give it a try and see what happened.

As with almost everything we did, there really was not enough time, money, nor resources to go about this course idea properly. Whether things might have worked out if we did have these resources is neither here nor there, since success comes only from God.

Sometimes, however, whether one succeeds or not is a purely secondary consideration to why one undertakes something. Some failures are noble, and the nobility resides with the intention, struggle, and effort which are committed to such projects. Sometimes one must -- like those who participated in the famous charge of the Light Brigade -- ride on even though one realizes one might be heading toward death ... figuratively speaking in our case.

Naturally, we all would like such ventures to succeed. If one can serve a good cause and get paid for it at the same time, this is a great situation, but, sometimes, one must serve a cause irrespective of the issue of payment.

Although you often tried your best to go along with me on some of these charges into the Valley of Death, and you did whatever you could, materially, to support me, I could tell that your heart often was not in it. On such occasions you were too narrowly focused on your own agenda of having things turn out, or go, in a certain way with respect to the marital situation.

It was very frustrating to, and hurtful for, me to feel all this resistance coming from you.

This resistance is even more puzzling after I told you about my spiritual function as Qutb or Spiritual Pole -- which Baba indicated that I must inform you about once you became my wife. In addition, I -- and, again, Baba had counseled me to inform you of this before we got married (which I did in very clear terms) -- that my life is about

spirituality, not about an economic career, and you said that you accepted this fact.

You were often frustrated and puzzled about why I used to get upset with you at certain times. You never seemed to understand that much of the time when these situations arose, you were so completely immersed or entangled in seeking to impose your own personal desires on the situation that you were really being quite disrespectful toward me, Baba, and our silsilah by the way you reacted to what I was trying to do -- as if your desire should have pre-eminence over such matters.

I don't attribute any malevolent conscious intention on your part with respect to any of this. But, it hurt me deeply that no matter how many times I explained things to you, you just seemed to resist "getting" what was going on.

If I turned down Mr. Aftab, it was not because I felt work was unimportant, and it was not because I was trying to avoid trying to find a way for us to have a source of income. It was because I was trying to find a way through to accomplish a number of goals at the same time, and, I felt at the time, that the job being offered by Mr. Aftab would not have permitted me to do this in relation to some of the more fundamental goals that needed to be pursued.

Some of the goals I was seeking to realize were ones which you often seemed quite prepared to put off until later as if they were less important than what you first wanted to establish. Your argument always was along the following lines: if we get this financial/work thing out of the way, the other stuff will follow.

Your priorities, unfortunately, were, in my opinion, wrong. It has been my experience -- based on some 30 years on the spiritual path -- that those people who have thought in the manner you were suggesting almost invariably have lost their way on the path.

I have tried to tell you in so many ways and on so many occasions that your priorities in certain areas of spirituality often have been incorrect. It is not surprising that many of the issues about which we frequently have the most trouble in coming to a common understanding revolved around this theme of priorities.

The problem with your uncle's semi-employment offer had little to do with the type of job being offered in and of itself. The problems surrounding that job were three.

First and foremost, I did not at all care for the things he was insinuating about us, in general, and you in particular. And, I cared even less for what he had to say once this rift opened up. I had very little desire to work for someone who operated in this manner or held such opinions.

In addition, I didn't really appreciate the manner in which you defended him after the fact with virtually no appreciation of why I was responding as I did. In fact, this was just one of many situations in which you made it very clear to me that I was an outsider as far as how you looked at the idea of family -- but more on this in a moment.

The second problem with his job "offer" is that it would have required me to spend a lot of time studying material in order to be legally qualified to do whatever would be required of me to fulfill my job function. This was unacceptable to me since it would have taken me even further away from being able to concentrate on things which needed to be focused upon.

Thirdly, everything you have told me about what goes on at that office of theirs spelled one thing: becoming completely immersed in the job. I knew where it was likely to lead, and, again, this was the complete antithesis of where I needed to go in order to be able to attend to my spiritual responsibilities.

You looked at my turning away from such jobs as somehow betraying you and the marriage. I looked at your failure to understand why I did what I did as a betrayal of what I was all about -- something which I took a great deal of time to explain to you when I first proposed to you.

You should have understood what you were getting into with me because I certainly didn't hide anything from you. Apparently, however, you listened only to some of the things which I said and went on to form your own idea about things.

We tried the import business thing. I spent a great deal of time on this, and I really tried whatever I could do to get this going within the limits of what I thought made good business sense. Unfortunately,

once again, we really didn't have the resources, money, or time to make the proposition feasible or workable ... and, besides, we had a huge liability working against us – namely, I really am not a businessman, and I lack the talent, art, and insight which are necessary for someone to succeed at business.

When I realized that the enterprise was not going to work as conceived of at the time, I began thinking about other possibilities. One of these was starting a web page.

Initially, the idea was to put up a web page relevant to our import products. But, the more I involved myself in this, the more I realized there many additional facets to e-commerce than merely putting up a web site.

When none of the commercial potential materialized as quickly as you -- or I -- would have liked, you believed I had given up on finding any way to generate an income through the Internet. The reality of the matter is that no matter how much I tried, I couldn't make you understand that I hadn't given up on that idea -- rather, I had merely let it evolve into something which might accomplish several things at the same time: (a) make money for us; (b) advance the work of the silsilah.

I have spent the last four years, on and off, working on this Internet project. Little by little it has been coming into focus.

I have taken a job with my brother, Bruce, because the job doesn't get in the way of any of my other purposes. I could continue working on the project and, yet, simultaneously earn the money needed to get by.

Although, to date, no money has been generated by any of this Internet-related activity, the web site has, by the Grace of Allah, had some success in introducing people to Islam and to the Sufi path, as well as offering them various kinds of help with nothing being asked from them in return.

Thousands of people have been helped in this way by the Grace of God. So, even if things up to this point have been a financial bust, some very important purposes have been served.

This would not have happened if I had worked for Mr. Aftab, or your uncle, or as a driver on a local school bus route which you once

broached to me, or even the import business. I believe that although the decision has been a financial drain -- mostly for you -- nonetheless, it was the right thing to do, and insha' Allah, it has been, and will continue to be, a source of blessings for people -- including you who have helped make all of this possible.

I believe there is more that can be done with the web site. And, irrespective of whether, or not, anyone comes to the Sufi path through it, the web site, nonetheless, radiates, by the Grace of Allah, its own form of barakah and light into the darkness of dunya. It is a beacon that can serve the community in a variety of ways. It establishes a presence of sorts for the silsilah which might have to be supplemented by other kinds of activities.

I came to Vermont because I was sent here by the silsilah. The order to come here arose only after things had broken down in Milton on a number of fronts.

On the phone you remarked about how I was able to get a place and establish myself after just a short time in Sutton/Bamford. You indicated that you were hurt by this because the question you were asking yourself is: why couldn't I have done this in Milton? Somehow, the fact this didn't happen has -- according to you -- cast shadows across my commitment to, and feelings for, you.

The difference between Milton and here is simple. There was no barakah or blessings in Milton ... this is not the case in Sutton and Bamford.

You and I drove ourselves crazy in Milton trying all manner of things -- all of which either came to nothing or were beset with all kinds of problems. All of this was a reflection of the reality of things in Milton.

I tried to tell you this, but you never seemed to either listen or take the message to heart. You kept insisting that things must happen in Milton even when there was all kinds of evidence to indicate that we would never flourish or survive as a family there.

You seemed to want to blame me for all of this -- as if I were somehow not committed to you or the marriage or your children. In truth, I believe I simply understood the situation more clearly than you.

Speaking of family, I want to return to something to which I alluded earlier. Without pulling any punches, you have made me feel, on all too many occasions, that I really am something other than family as far as you are concerned.

Your parents came a long way to be with you. They disrupted their lives, left their possessions and friends and came to Milton. You often have indicated that because of this you really aren't free to leave them out in the cold.

Well, I came a long way to be with you as well. I disrupted my life, altered my plans, left many of my possessions behind, and left my friends, in order to come to Milton. However, apparently, I don't rate the same treatment as your parents since I definitely got left out in the cold -- both literally and figuratively.

The clear implication is they are family, and I am not. Apparently, while it might not be 'nice', nevertheless it seems to be okay to leave non-family members out in the cold. After all, seemingly, one's first obligation should be to family members and not to the outsider, the stranger.

Or, consider the following. You won't talk to your father about the situation.

You are too afraid of him, or you are too afraid of upsetting him, or you are afraid of "killing" him with the possible stress of the "confrontation", or you love him too much to hurt him in this way, or you respect him too much, or you are too afraid of what the rest of the family will think, or whatever, that you defer to the wishes of your family on this matter. But, apparently, it is okay to put my wishes aside because, after all, I'm not really family am I?

Keep me hidden. Stuff me away here and there. Leave me out of things.

You would never do any of this to any other family member. The fact it is done to me leaves the clear impression that it is because I am not really family.

Shari'ah indicates your responsibility is to your husband and children first, and the rest of your family secondly. You have been told this on a number of occasions by others beside me.

This information has made no difference to how you have proceeded. For you, your parents and the other members of your extended family are more important than your husband or your children, and if this were not so, things would not be as they are, so, please do not try to deny it.

I realize that you have grown up in a culture where parents are often made into virtual idols -- that to not act in accordance with their wishes is – according to that system of belief -- almost tantamount to waging war against God. However, there is a difference between, on the one hand, showing one's parents loving respect and, on the other hand, having one's life micromanaged by them according to their likes and dislikes ... and quite irrespective of whether their likes and dislikes are consonant with the teachings of the Qur'an.

Some parental wishes are expressions of attempting to help one's children in a constructive manner. Unfortunately, there are other parental wishes which border on being abusive toward the children.

You say that my earlier e-mail to you broke your heart. What you don't seem to realize is that you have been breaking my heart all along in so many different ways until you finally left me with nowhere to go.

Please don't place the responsibility for your daughter's sad condition at my doorstep. I love her, but I was never really permitted to be family for her except in very limited ways ... even when your son and daughter wished for things to be otherwise.

Tell me! If things in Milton are so important to the well-being of your daughter or to your mother, then, why are they going through what they are going through? When are you going to understand that something is terribly wrong with how you and others in Milton are approaching things?

I told you on many occasions when I was there that what was going on in that town is not in the children's best interest. You did not paid heed to this, and now you, your daughter, your son, and your mother are reaping the consequences of your failing to listen.

You said that my earlier e-mail to you hurt you far more than your unfaithful previous husband ever did. You said on the phone that because of that e-mail, you don't feel you can count on me to be there

for you, and you don't know from one moment to the next if I will abandon you.

I think you have things a little confused. Despite the many nice and supportive things which you have done for me, the truth of the matter is that I haven't been able to count on you to stand by me as my wife and accept whatever comes with that. I am the outsider -- the one who can be treated as non-family ... the one whom it is okay to treat in ways that you would never, ever treat other members of the family.

You found no place for me in your family. You pushed me away in any number of ways. You did the things which helped lead to a state of affairs where the silsilah finally stepped in and said that it is time to leave this situation and move onto something else.

When you said what you said at Shaykh Shams' place about your dreams, and when what was said to you by him about many of your dreams were intended for him, it was the last straw -- I really was left with nowhere to stand in the relationship. So, I felt the best thing to do was to leave you completely free to move in whatever direction came to your heart, without interference from me or anyone else.

This move to Vermont was not punitive. Rather it was giving you freedom to do whatever you wanted to do.

Since my move, you have, by the Grace of Allah, been brought into our silsilah. I was very happy about this, but I still have nowhere to stand in our marital relationship.

If I wanted to divorce you, I could have done this before now. It would have been a simple process, but I didn't, and, evidently, you failed to understand the significance of the fact that such an avenue was not pursued by me. Instead, you choose to be hurt by the situation rather than reflecting on the matter.

You, your two children, and your mother are never going to find true happiness in Milton. A great deal of evidence supports this. You ignore this evidence at your own risk ... and at the risk of your children and mother as well.

It is not too late to change things around. The choice is yours.

If your father cares about you, your children, and his wife, he should be able to appreciate what needs to be done. If he cannot do this, then, well, what can one say?

I'm sure if you were to come here with the family, there would be financial and material problems -- although Allah knows best. But, I also believe there would be a great potential for much happiness, togetherness, and spiritual work. You have to decide what priorities are most important to you and your immediate family.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) lived in a simple house and lived a simple, materially uncomplicated life. So, did his family. If this was good enough for such a family, then, why is it not good enough for us?

If material simplicity is your destiny and the destiny of your children, you will not escape it in Milton. It will find you no matter where you are or go, and if it is intended to find you, then you might as well be with someone who loves you and your children and who understands that some things are far more important than material well-being. And, if, on the other hand, the destiny of you and your children is for a certain modest level of material comfort, then why not wed your fate to someone whose rizq is somewhat tattered and torn so that good works, insha' Allah, could be done for others.

With much love,

Tariq

P.S. I'm sorry if some of this rambles on, but it is 4:30 in the morning and I have to get some sleep before I start work today.

§

Several weeks later, during a phone conversation with Sima, I tell her I am trying to get a few chairs and tables for the silsilah office. I ask her if she could loan me some money to help purchase these items, and she agrees to help me out as best she can.

§

July 2000

Sima has come with her children. The visit is only for a few days, but I am very happy they are here. Among other things, we take a trip to the coast, and it is reminiscent of the time we waded in the surf that night several years ago, along the coastal area which is not too far away from Sima's home in Milton.

§

While Sima is here, I am having a problem with my bank account. There seems to be less money in it than should be the case, and I believe there is an Internet-related service which is going to be automatically deducted from my account.

I am afraid I will have insufficient funds and, as a result, I will be hit with a \$25.00 overdrawn service charge by the bank. Money is already in such short supply with me that having to pay an extra service charge could prove to be very problematic for me given that I live such a hand-to-mouth kind of existence.

When I return to the apartment, Sima and the children are asleep. I wake Sima and tell her the situation.

She says she can borrow enough money from her daughter to cover the \$20.00, or so, that I need to make sure that I will have enough money in my account to meet the impending deduction. She will tell her daughter in the morning.

Sima indicates she has done this sort of thing before with her daughter when Sima has been in need of a few dollars during a period of acute cash-flow problems. In fact, Sima says the borrowing thing has become a running joke between her and the children, and, in fact, I recall several instances when 'living' in Milton that such situations had arisen and the children teased their mother about it.

§

August 2000

Following her visit, I speak with Sima on the phone a number of times following her visit. Among other things, Sima mentions she has been listening to Qawwali music every day in the car as she goes to the office or while she is running work-related errands for her uncle, and, on a number of occasions, she has gone into such states of ecstasy that she had to pull the car over to the side of the road in order not to have an accident.

I ask her if she has spoken to Baba about this, and she says she has not had the opportunity to do this so far. I suggest that until she does, maybe, she should discontinue listening to Qawwali while she is driving -- but I know this will be difficult for her because of her love for spiritual music.

§

September 2000

My brother, Bruce, has given me a belated birthday card. It contains some much needed cash, and I am thankful to God and the locus of manifestation -- namely, Bruce -- through whom the money is dispensed.

§

Tue, 24 Oct 2000 00:50:52-0400 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

There is an old television gag which used to have someone taking another person's picture with a flash camera on board a cruise liner. The individual who is acting as the photographer tells the other person, whose picture supposedly is to be taken, to go this way and that ... seemingly to get the most photogenic picture.

After surveying the scene, the photographer would motion to the one whose picture was to be taken to go back a little further. When the

latter person had moved back a little, he or she would say: "Is this far enough?"

The photographer would bend over slightly to peer through the view finder and, then, would stand upright examining the scene. This process would be repeated several times, before the photographer would finally say: "No, go back a little further."

This whole sequence of events would be repeated any number of times, until, finally, after one request too many by the photographer, the one whose picture is to be taken backs up and falls over the rail into the water below.

For a long time, I have felt pretty much like the person in the foregoing story whose picture was supposedly to be taken. The end result, of course, might be quite something else.

What has been said above, and what follows, is not really about you, or about the great shaykhs of the silsilah, or about Allah. Furthermore, I pray that what is being said is not done with the intention of complaining about or criticizing -- either with respect to you or anyone else.

I have no doubt you serve Allah's Purpose, and, I believe, you do so knowingly, consciously -- at least to whatever degree it is that Allah has given you such capacity, which I suspect is quite a lot. Whether I understand this Purpose or not, or what part, if any, I play in it is irrelevant to my basic belief that this Purpose will be served ... with me or without me. In other words, when all is said and done at the end of the Day, God's Will shall be done, and any given person will find himself or herself at the end of that same Day either in alignment, to a greater or lesser degree, with God's Purpose, or will find herself or himself to be out of alignment with that Purpose even while serving it, albeit in a unknowing, unconscious, and rebellious manner.

When you tell me to go back a little further, I trust you that you know what you are doing, although, almost without exception, I really have no idea what is going on. If the object of the exercise is for me to fall backward over the rail and give everyone a good laugh, so be it. I know that I am not all that important -- although you people, out of your kindness, might give me this or that errand to run.

In this respect, I feel not sort of like, but "exactly" like the Danny Kaye character in "The Court Jester" when he is rushed through the various stages of becoming a knight so that he can meet the requirements of chivalry which permit him to accept the challenge to do battle with the Black Knight (Robert Middleton) and, of course, be killed (the Danny Kaye character that is) in order to serve the plan. Now, the character played by Danny Kaye really isn't knight material, but, sometimes, circumstances, require one to go with what is available, and in the movie, the true Knight Templar -- played by Richard Todd (reminds me of you, for some reason) -- must hope that the Danny Kaye character can somehow do what needs to be done.

You just can't get help like you used to. Unfortunately, it is the nature of the times in which we live, and, as has been said in other situations, we might be getting toward the bottom of the barrel -- spirituality-wise.

You once said that a shaykh is someone who has mastered himself or herself. Anyone who has done this is a shaykh irrespective of whether they have mureeds or not.

You also have told the story about the ship magnate who is, first, told by an assistant that all of his ships have sunk during a typhoon, and, then, somewhat later, told that his ships did not sink after all. On each occasion, the ship magnate listens, is quiet and says: "That is good!"

When asked about this, the ship owner indicates that on each occasion, he looked into his heart, to see if there were any ripples of disturbance in his heart. When in each instance he found that there were none, he said: "That is good!"

I can remember my first shaykh, Dr. Irfan, once saying that the potential for becoming a shaykh is exemplified by someone who has been without food for several days and is remembering God in the mosque. And, when this person hears footsteps nearby does not wonder if this is someone who is bringing food to him or her.

By the criteria of any of the foregoing ways of characterizing a shaykh, I am a miserable failure. I have not mastered myself; I have all kinds of ripples of disturbance in my heart, and I would be wondering

when the food is coming even if I heard no footsteps and hadn't been fasting.

No, I am the Court Jester. And, if the label of shaykh has been applied next to my name, it is only because of circumstances and the times in which we live. I often feel quite badly for you and what you are required to put up with in the way of your assigned "help"(?).

The foregoing is by way of prolog to the remainder of this e-mail. Whereas I do trust you, as best as I am able, to go where and when you tell me to go back further, there are many, many other people, forces, and things which also are telling me to go back further and, apparently, will not be happy, or so it seems, until I am out of the picture altogether, or have fallen off the ship, or whatever it might be ... as long as it will remove me from the scene.

I used to joke with my mother that there will be two groups of people who will sigh when she passes away. To the first group belonged all those people to whom she owed money. To the second group belonged all those people (like city hall, the newspapers, government officials, the university, and so on) with whom she engaged in intellectual and moral combat.

The first group would be sad to see her go -- not because of her but because of what she still owed them. The second group would be happy to see her go because they would no longer have to deal with her.

My mother laughed when I told her the foregoing. She always enjoyed my black sense of humor.

In any case, with respect to the foregoing two groups, I am very much my mother's child. For, when I pass away, there also will be those who will regret this because of what I owe them in financial terms, and there will be, as well, those who will be happy because they don't have to deal with me anymore.

I have tried my best to be friendly, courteous, helpful, encouraging, supportive, thoughtful and happy around others. Obviously, my best is not good enough.

I am 56 years old. I am alone most of the time, even when there are other people around. I can count on a few fingers, the number of

times someone has come to visit me -- for me -- during the last 15-20 years ... and during that time I have visited others many, many times.

I have tried to cultivate friendships, but something always seems to happen. I am not saying that I am without fault in any of this, or that I haven't made mistakes, but, more often than not, there seems to be something at work to keep me isolated and to keep pushing me toward the ship's railing because I never seem to be far enough back to satisfy other people.

Let me give you some specific examples. I am not trying to back-bite here, and I pray that this is not what is going on ... for, I am just trying to state the "facts" as I see them.

I have been estranged from my brothers for a long time. Vietnam, Islam, mysticism, finances, distance, and a few other things have all taken their toll.

I am thankful that circumstances have permitted me to establish a modicum of relationship with them. I am thankful that I have had an opportunity to see, close up, that they are both quite successful in their own right and have good family lives -- although they each have had their difficulties over the years. Each of them is a decent, moral, hard-working, intelligent, community oriented, and loving individual, and you are right Baba, they are better than a thousand so-called Muslims ... perhaps, me included.

But, I also know that we will never be close. We probably will never really be family.

Unless Allah intervenes in some way, we have come about as far as we are going to come. There is too much misunderstanding, and lost time, and missed opportunities to overcome.

Their lives are pretty much set, and, for the most part, I really am not a part of those lives. I am not blaming them for this, it is just the way things are.

Bruce has retired from his business. I work for the new owner ... at least for now.

I rarely see Bruce or Jerry -- especially since Bruce has retired and is no longer at the office every day, while John lives some 90 miles away and I have no car to make the journey. In any event, neither of

them visits me, although we do get together from time to time ... usually at a sporting event of some sort.

On a few occasions I have brought your name up when it naturally fit into the conversation. This has not been done in any overbearing, argumentative, or proselytizing fashion -- just as something which is important to my life.

Nevertheless, as soon as I do this, a big emotional wall goes up, and there is silence. Consequently, I have learned to keep my mouth shut about that and a lot of other things, and as long as I remain silent, then, things seem to go relatively smoothly in a sort of superficial way. But, I know that I am only one or two words away from problems, and it is very difficult to base anything substantial on this sort of shaky, uncertain, tenuous foundation.

I have to struggle just to fail. Things have been this way for quite some time.

For years, now, I have tried to find a way of creating a job for myself. I have done this because, all other things being even, no one is going to hire me.

I am an interstitial human being. I have fallen through the cracks of society and do not really fit in anywhere.

For some, I have too much education. For others, I don't have enough education of the right kind. For others, I don't have the necessary letters of reference. For others, my "career" is too slipshod. For others, it is my age. For others, it is Vietnam. For others, it is my spirituality and religion. For others, it is my lack of published work in recognized journals. For others, it is that my teaching experience was too long ago. For others it is that they think I won't be willing to lower myself to do menial jobs (wouldn't they be surprised to find out that, with a few exceptions, in more than 46 years of work, menial work is about all I have ever done). For others, it is other things.

I have tried any number of things, and none of them have worked out. As I said, I have to struggle, just to fail.

I have about reached the end of the line with the Internet. I have tried, and tried, and tried to find a way through, but there is not even the faintest hint of a possibility of anything working there.

I have contacted some 200 Muslim groups, maybe 40-50 Sufi groups, and, perhaps, 25 other individuals/groups who might have an interest in evolution, or the Sufi path, and the like. I have contacted people all over the world -- from Canada, to the UK, to Germany, to Italy, to The Netherlands, to Japan, to Mexico, to Australia (about 20 places there), to New Zealand, and so on. I have offered free copies for evaluation to all of these people.

With a few exceptions, the bottom line on all of this is pretty much zero. In more than ninety percent of the cases I didn't get so much as a returned Salaam.

During the last three or four years, the entire Internet experience has been one of almost continuous problems, frustrating delays, and mysterious happenings, with virtually no help or cooperation from anywhere. If other people had to go through what I have had to go through in relation to the Internet, believe me, there would be no Internet.

I can't pay bills. I can't pay back money borrowed. I can't support a family. I can't afford to travel. I can't afford to subsidize silsilah activity in a way, that God willing, might bring even a few people who are interested in the Sufi path.

I am living, and have been living, on the edge. If I get sick, even for a few days, the game is over.

I cannot afford to go to the doctor for even simple things. I cannot afford a dentist. I cannot afford to get eye glasses repaired or replaced.

If I lose the present job, the game is over. If I die, there is not any money to bury me. If I am not careful, they will cremate me irrespective of how I might feel about it.

It is no wonder Sima does not want to have anything to do with me. Who would want to condemn their children to poverty -- for that is what I am ... impoverished? And, today, poverty seems to be a sin unlike all others.

In fact, I am the poster boy for what not to be as far as many people -- even within the silsilah, at least in this part of the world -- are concerned. I have heard, indirectly, that you have told others how they should interact with people in such a way that these people will say: "I want what you have!", and, God willing, these people will step onto the

Sufi path as a result of the light which has attracted them in this or that individual.

Sima told me how someone reacted in this way to her (Sima). The individual in question saw a light of happiness or contentment or whatever on Sima's face and said: "I want what you have". And, the rest is history.

I am happy for Sima's friend. I am happy for Sima. I am happy for Momin, and you, and the silsilah.

I have tried my level best to be outgoing, upbeat, encouraging, and enthusiastic, supportive, helpful and friendly, but, in the end, no one wants to be like me. No one wants what I have.

Nobody wants poverty, alienation, isolation, menial work, friendlessness, material discomfort, or to be an outcast, or to be without family, or a failure at life. Nobody wants to go through bankruptcy. Nobody wants to have the Sheriff come and evict them from their apartment. Nobody wants to spend 17 years getting a doctorate degree which, in the end, is worthless.

It's a good thing your shaykh has got me stashed away in Vermont, off the beaten path. But, who knows, maybe, I serve a purpose in this way. People look at me, and, then, they look at you, and they definitely know which one they wish to be like, so, in this sense, I help clear up any lingering ambiguities in the matter.

I have tried my best, but my best is just not good enough. I have said it before, and I will say it again ... I am struggling just to fail.

You said during our last phone conversation that you thought you saw some light at the end of the tunnel with respect to Sima and me. I don't know what it is that led you to say this, but my basic feeling -- and I don't wish to be argumentative on this -- is that this situation is not going to resolve itself in a way that will preserve the marriage.

You might feel that I am being negative in all of this and failing to avail myself of the power of positive thinking and the miracles which can come from prayer, but I pray every day, quite frequently, and my hopes for a better future have risen so many times from the ashes of difficulty that the bird will no longer be called Phoenix, but 'Tariq's Folly'. Consequently, there might be other reasons for my situation.

You once told me (and others) how Iblis has a chant he has been saying for tens of thousands of years. He thinks this is his get-out-of-hell free card because he has heard, on good authority that anyone saying this chant on the Day of Judgment will be saved from hell-fire. What Iblis doesn't know or doesn't believe is that he will be caused to forget this chant at just the right (or from his point of view "wrong") time, and, therefore, he will not be able to benefit from this chant.

What does this have to do with Sima and me? Well, I suppose, the moral of the story is that having a positive attitude and invoking the name of God is not enough when Allah wishes things to be otherwise.

One can be very, very confident that one can jump off a cliff and that one will not fall. In almost all cases, those who believe they can defy the laws of gravity tend to fall until the ground stops them. Sima has said, or not said, many things which, more and more, are coming to have the appearance of the laws of gravity. My heart has been dashed many times as a result -- even when I have tried to be positive, upbeat and confident that this time she will not let me fall to the rocks below.

My heart aches from the pounding it has taken in the last three years. I am sure that I have committed my fair share of mistakes in this affair, but she has said enough, or not said enough, to make me wonder if my heart can survive what she seems to expect from me with, apparently, little need for reciprocity on her part.

She is a good person. A kind-hearted, generous, supportive, helpful human being who is extremely happy that she has found you ... and I am happy for her -- but I am happy for her from the ocean side of the railing to which I have been relegated because, apparently, I still am not far enough out of the picture -- although I am sure she does not suspect that anything of the sort is the case or that she has done anything much to help make it like this.

I do not wish to tell tales out of school, so to speak, so I will keep the following comments somewhat brief and cryptic. I would appreciate not being queried about this further.

I gather from certain things Sima has said that she has some sort of honored position or potential within the silsilah. I am not jealous of this in any way, and I am very happy for her, and, quite frankly, I have always felt that if having spiritual experiences is any indication, then,

she certainly seems to have a lot more spiritual actuality and/or potential than me.

I don't really care who has what. God can give to whomsoever He pleases whatever He pleases. The matter is God's affair, not mine.

However, when Sima was here, she said something which was both untrue and very hurtful to me. I really don't see how anyone who says she loves me could have said it.

This sort of thing has not been an isolated instance. At the same time, I don't wish to say they have been common occurrences either.

However, they have happened on enough occasions to place serious doubt in my heart about her true feelings concerning me. Is continuing to hope for positive things to happen under such circumstances a healthy thing, or am I merely being stupid and failing to understand that in relationships, as in physics and chemistry, there are, indeed, laws for which one must accept the consequences if one continues to try to defy them?

There are reasons why God has instituted laws of physics. And, only under very rare, special circumstances does He permit such laws to be abrogated.

Rather than ask for a favor and run the risk that the mere asking constitutes a complaint that I wish things other than the way Allah has arranged them, perhaps, discretion is the better part of valor, and I should accept defeat gracefully. In either case, a desire to withdraw from all things is growing within me.

The current situation is complicated in many ways. Sima is your mureed. She, by the Grace of Allah, seems to be very busy serving you and the silsilah.

Shazia, who knows about Sima and me, is now part of the silsilah. Sairah, who is related to both Shazia and Sima knows as well and is also your mureed.

In fact, a lot of people now know about Sima and me, including her children. Unfortunately, I was never consulted in any of this as to whether I was okay with all of these people knowing about us.

Let us just say that the situation is very messy already. Maybe, the best thing is for me to go someplace else where my contact with any of

these people is not likely to aggravate the situation, and we all can be left alone in peace.

I know there are many, many other people in the world whose situation is far, far worse than mine ... from just about every angle one cares to consider -- from money, to jobs, to housing, to health, to food, to family, to spirituality. I have a great deal about which to be thankful, and I am -- or something is -- constantly reminding me of this truth. But, nevertheless, as a human being, I know that I am struggling, struggling, struggling just to fail.

I am slated, insha' Allah, to go to Canada this coming weekend for Uzma's walima (sp?). Quite frankly, I would rather not go, but I am doing so because Uzma's invitation seemed very much from the heart and sincere, and I would not want to disappoint her in this matter.

On the other hand, there is much which has happened which leaves an extremely heavy feeling in my heart concerning the trip. If I could afford to stay in a hotel during my time in Canada, I seriously would be tempted to do this.

At the same time, I do not wish to create the spiritual version of a diplomatic incident. Momin Shah Baba and Sairah have asked me to stay at their place. In fact, Sairah has e-mailed me, left a phone message, and passed on a further message through Sima, to this effect.

I am not going to go into a whole litany of issues about what is bothering me about things. Let it suffice, for now, to say that I am not very happy with the way this whole marriage thing between Uzma -- who is my mureed -- and Seth was handled by Momin Shah Baba and some of the others in Canada.

In a sense, it was kind of the straw which broke the camel's back for me. It was one last event, piled on top of a number of others, which has had the effect -- at least from where I sit and according to my understanding (or lack thereof) of seemingly relegating me to a further and further distance from things.

If this has all been done per your wishes, then, I am prepared, insha' Allah, to accept it. But, I would prefer to be just told straight out that I am not a part of things, and, God willing, I shall withdraw peacefully.

I had no expectations when I came to you. I have no expectations now.

If you told me tomorrow that everything you told me previously had to be rescinded, then, part of me -- the more essential part I believe -- would not be at all upset. I would understand that there would be nothing unfair in this since I didn't deserve any of it to begin with ... it would be like finding money which you knew really belonged to someone else and should be returned to its rightful owner.

I'm not in your class, or Dr. Irfan's class, or Yaqub Baba's class, or the class of any of you people. For the most part, I am a pretty pathetic human being who, by the grace of Allah, has had a few good moments.

But, if possible, I would rather not live under false pretenses -- as hard as this might be on the nafs. If you want things to be arranged in certain ways within the silsilah, then, just let me know, and I will stay out of your way, and the way of others as best I can. Insha' Allah, I am not going to cause trouble for you or for anyone else.

Love,

Tariq

§

Mon, 23 Oct 2000 21:14:47 HST (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

No, I am not surprised or upset, in reading what you wrote. Why? Because I understand. How do I understand what you are going through? I also went through this, much before in the past many years ago. A day came when I had no idea of what is going to happen, and where should I go. All I know is that, I remained silent waiting for something to happen. Nothing happened.

I was in Multan at the time, serving the Silsila. Then, as usual, I went to Karachi for the special, end of month Fateha. At that time I was

not officially known as a Khalifa, but was given the permission to conduct Fateha and introduce people to enter the Silsila.

From the airport, I went straight to Zachariah Shah Baba's Aastaana. He asked me where I am going to stay for a few days that I am there. I was surprised because I had no where to stay.

My parents were not there at the time, and relatives all for the same reason as your brothers, did not want any part of me. I had believed that Zachariah Shah Baba, knew of all this, and so I was really shocked to hear him ask me that. I had no answer, so I just put my head down and kept silent.

After the Fateha, he asked me to visit our Shaikh, which I did. This is what our Shaikh said to me, when I just informed him that I was asked to visit him: "Muin, you are shocked and hurt, because you don't understand. You see Zachariah Shah Baba, having a place to stay, and you see many mureeds and non mureeds visiting him, throughout the day till late night. You wonder why he asked you this question, instead of realizing that you have nowhere to stay.

Tell me my son, what will happen when Zachariah Shah Baba physically passes away, and later when I too pass away? Where will you stay, and what will you do? Do you think that the other mureeds will help in anyway? Yes, some of them who are sincere, and have Nisbath will do all they can, yet they too are alone in their Nisbath. A mureed who has the Nisbath, is alone in Nisbath, because his wife, or her husband, might not share in that Nisbath. The children might not be a part of that Nisbath.

Some time ago, I remember, Tariq, you were asked to earn your livelihood. You said that it will be very difficult to be employed and at the same time do Silsila work. Then you were told to start some small business, which till now you have not done. The Sahaba also all, were either employed or were in trade and business. Now my son, allow me to tell you a very important secret regarding life here in this world. Do not ask me why, or how, but just listen and try your best to understand what I am about to say, because this is what has been established and approved by ALLAH. It is called ECONOMY. There is no soul that comes to this world for an appointed time, except the Majzoob (spiritually intoxicated) or the mental invalid, that does not have to deal with Economy. Even the poorest of the poor have to deal with it.

By Economy, is meant, "Paying the bills, and if able then also what you want". Now there is another secret attached to this, the result of which no one can avoid. As the spirit needs the body to express itself here in this world, one's spirituality needs economy to flourish. The reason is that, however you might be advanced in spirituality, you will still have to deal with the ORDER which ALLAH has established, and that is ECONOMY."

Tariq, my dearest most respected son! This is what was explained to me, many, many years ago. Ever since then, I have tried to go by the rules. In the beginning I was successful. Then it became difficult, yet I keep trying.

Please do not think that I am trying to say that you have not tried. I know how much you have tried. All I am saying is that I know why you are going through these feelings. There is no other reason, other than the fact that you are economically not adjusted. Believe me Tariq, when I say this. You might have many arguments in your mind to prove this incorrect, but it is exactly as I say.

The other fact of being alone is a fact we all have to deal with. Those who have all family members and very good friends around them all the time, also have to realize their loneliness when the time comes to go. You and I, and some others by the Grace and Blessings of ALLAH, have been made to realize this much before our times comes, only as a reminder that ALLAH and only ALLAH is what we need and is enough for us.

Regarding this wedding which is taking place, in Canada, Momin is witness to the fact that I asked him if the girl has taken your permission. Momin mia said that she should have, and she might have.

How could she make any decision without consulting you? In fact this is the first that I am being told that you were not kept in the picture by her. Let us forgive her, because naturally she does not have Nisbath. We have to pray, and try our best to coach such members towards the correct approach.

Regarding Momin mia, I give you my word when I say that he respects and loves you very sincerely. He has always had, and still has, much respect for you and your station.

You say that Sima has a very special position in the Silsila. May I ask what that special position is, which I know not of, other than the fact that she is like a daughter and is a mureed. Yes, she has had certain good dreams and experiences, which she reports occasionally, and I try to explain to her, to the best of my knowledge.

Now, I do not know how you take this, but it is my very sincere advice, that you please try to understand, and believe what I have related regarding what my shaykh informed me about. Also please do not misunderstand by thinking that I am in any way implying that you have nor tried to do anything to improve your economical situation. You have tried your best.

Now allow me to try my best. If you agree, then I would like to try to get you a job, in Twilight National Airlines. Knowing that Bashir mia has a position there, I will INSHA ALLAH call him tomorrow morning, and ask him, if it is possible for you to apply.

I say this also because, just the other day, he said that applicants do not need any qualification, so you having such qualifications will INSHA ALLAH be very successful. Unless you have very strong reasons, and objections for me not to try this, please allow me to try my best to get this done.

I am sure INSHA ALLAH, that I will succeed in getting a job for you here, and though at first the basic salary is about \$1000 or maybe even a little more, with insurance benefits etc. You will also be entitled to free tickets to travel anywhere in the world.

You may be wondering as to how you will do the Silsila work while you are employed. Well, to tell you the truth, you were doing much more when you were having a job. It's strange but a fact. One wonders how one can do anything else other than one's job these days, but the fact is that without a job, one's attention gets disturbed, due to the same secret called "Economy".

After many years of struggle, I realized what my Shaikh had said to me. Ibaadath is not satisfactorily complete without all the parts together, of which economy is very essential. Why am I saying this to you now? Why not much before?

Well, you were doing everything possible towards that goal, and that is what is required. Now that we realize that maybe, I should step in and try, I am going to do exactly that.

Why have I related what my Shaikh told me? Only to let you know the real reason of being unhappy with the present situation, not that any of it is your fault. ALLAH knows best why you have failed in your sincere search to get a job, and also business. We are no one to ask him why. Yes, this much I know and that is what I am going to do.

What is going to happen to the dream place, which I had seen for you there? Well, that too ALLAH knows best. I don't know. Maybe the dream place will wait for you to return one day, in a much better condition, or maybe the dream place will be transferred to wherever you will be.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

Wed, 25 Oct 2000 03:13:08-0400 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

Wa 'alaykum as-Salaam!

I do understand what is being said about the necessity of being in harmony with the requirements of the ORDER or realm of Economy. In fact, since I was 8 or 9 years old I have been working -- overall, some 50 jobs, or so -- although there were, of course, periods in which I did not work.

I worked my way through undergraduate school -- that is, I both worked and went to school. I also worked my way through graduate school.

Since, by the Grace of Allah, becoming Muslim and stepping onto the Sufi path, I have worked -- although there were periods which, for different reasons, I did not work because the union to which I belonged was on strike (this happened several times and lasted from three weeks to more than 3 months), or because I could not find work, or because I had to try to catch up on school work.

When I was with Dr. Irfan, I worked at a regular job, went to school, was married, helped raise a child, and also was heavily involved in our silsilah activities. It was not easy, and everything was always being done in a rush, and that was not much time for a lot of things, but I know that it is possible to work, go to school, be married, raise a family, AND be engaged in silsilah activities.

After quitting the job at the library at the university, I sort of went into free fall for a while. I tried a number of things, and, as well, you tried, on my behalf, a number of things (such as the ill-fated Iqbal Cheema situation), but nothing seemed to work ... although there was that job in Washington which I turned down and later found out from you that the whole situation was a big test.

Then the stay with Momin and his family went on for ten months in which I worked hard during this period -- every single day, but it was without pay. This was when the material on evolution and the novel was written with the hope that they might be a way of earning a living later on, but this didn't work out either.

Then the moves to your home in Jefferson and Sima's office in Milton took place. A number of things were tried, some of which you helped arrange (such as the import idea), but, again, nothing really worked out. How much of this is my fault I don't know.

There was one job which was offered in Chicago which I turned down because I was hoping to find a way to do something in my own field of education and writing. Perhaps, in retrospect, it was a mistake to have let this opportunity pass by, but if it was a mistake, it wasn't because I was trying to get out of doing work -- I was merely trying to find something more in line with my education, interests, and abilities, as well as finding something to do which might be able to help other people while still doing a job that paid money.

It was during this period that the Internet came into the picture. I probably have worked harder on this than I have worked on almost any other project, but, for whatever reason, it seems that Allah really does not wish for it to succeed, and, if so, then I am sure there are very good reasons for the failure although I really have no idea of what is going on.

Next the move to Vermont occurred. For the first several months here, I was still trying to get something going on the Internet, but, at the same time, a lot of work was being done on behalf of the silsilah through the web site, since not only was the Sufi page being put together, but over a period of several years, there were maybe 40-50 people with whom I carried on fairly extensive discussions concerning the Sufi path ... mostly in terms of trying to answer the questions which they would e-mail. Although nothing much of a tangible sort (such as people coming to the silsilah) ever seemed to arise of the Web site or the e-mail discussions, nonetheless, a lot of people did seem to gain some basic information about the Sufi path and, hopefully, a number of misconceptions were corrected.

After a few months here, I was running out of money, and didn't know what I was going to do. There were a number of jobs for which I applied at some of the area colleges, as well as a number of other positions -- some of which you knew about. But, once again, for whatever reason, nothing worked out.

This is when, by the Grace of Allah, my brother Bruce came into the picture and offered me a job in his office. For a number of reasons, this was a very hard thing for me to do, and the first several months on that job were very difficult and trying times, but because I do understand the ORDER of Economics -- at least to a degree -- I did take the job, and by the Grace of Allah, I have stuck with it.

How long the job will last, I do not know. For now, however, the new owners seem quite happy with the role I perform -- which is, basically just menial, clerical work, along with cleaning the office and running errands.

While working at the above job, I have continued on with the Internet. In addition, I have begun to try to establish something, insha' Allah, with respect to the silsilah here in Bamford.

A number of lectures have been given at both the public library, as well as at the university. Altogether, maybe, 25 people, or so, came.

I had a few follow up fatiha sessions in which 5-6 people attended. But, it soon became apparent that these people were not all that interested in what was being offered.

So, at this point, I thought I would try to go back to the Tasawwuf Association model in which informal, weekly discussions would be held and we would see what if anything, God willing, might arise out of such sessions.

I didn't want to hold these meetings at my apartment in Sutton, and holding such meetings at the university was problematic in a number of ways. I began to think about finding a small office somewhere in downtown Bamford, but this would require me to move since there is no night time bus service between Sutton and Bamford, and renting a car or taking a taxi, once a week, would be too expensive on top of renting office space.

In any case, to make a long story short, by the Grace of Allah, I found a place big enough to comfortably sit 12-14 people, plus store my books, plus have a couple of banquet-style tables on which to do work with the computer and other things. I have had to take out a lease on this office (which runs through next April). Plus, I have put a display ad in the regional phone book for which I will be paying until next May or June (2001). Moreover, I have a lease on my present apartment which runs through until next April (2001). Finally, I have spent a considerable amount of money (for me anyway) on business cards and signs which are tied to the current address and set-up.

I already am earning a little more than a \$1000 dollars, take home pay, although there are no health benefits or plane tickets. This amount of money just barely, by the Grace of Allah, looks after most of my financial obligations, although I really have nothing left over for anything at the end of the month, and there are any number of things which I can't afford, and I am not in a position to pay back what has been loaned to me by various people over the years.

I do not think, although Allah knows best, that I could afford to do as much as I am doing (albeit this is really very little) living in Connecticut, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, or New Jersey. I know the cost of living is higher there, and the cost of office space is much, much higher, plus I would probably have to get a car -- and the insurance, running, and maintenance expenses would be quite considerable.

Between my various lease and long-term financial obligations for the office, apartment, advertising, and so on, as well as the increased

costs which I would be looking at by moving, I really don't think it makes a lot of sense for me to leave Bamford at this time, or even in the foreseeable future.

In addition, there is another issue. One of the things which working in harmony with the ORDER of Economics brings is stability. And, quite frankly, more than anything else I believe I need some stability in my life.

My life has been in upheaval for more than 30 years. There has been constant stress, changing of jobs, changing of living arrangements, extended problems surrounding the obtaining of degrees, moving to different cities, changing of wives, and so on.

I don't really relish the idea of another move at this time. I wouldn't look forward to having to learn yet another job, or learn to get around in a new place, and so on.

I am tired Baba. I am not a youngster any more. All of the moves and changes have taken a lot out of me emotionally, mentally, physically – and, perhaps, spiritually. I really think I need to stop for a while and try to put my life back into some semblance of order -- economically, spiritually, and otherwise.

By the Grace of Allah, I am employed, and by the Grace of Allah, I have begun, on however lowly and limited a level, to try, God willing, to get something going on behalf of the silsilah. I am often working to the wee hours of the morning, as well as through the weekend, but, insha' Allah, both the realms of Economics and spirituality are being served according to my limited ability.

I always had hoped of finding a way of earning a living which would allow the silsilah, people, and the community to be served simultaneously. The sort of work which I currently am doing is not what I had in mind, but it is the way in which Allah has arranged things for the present time.

As far as the Sima situation is concerned, I'm not certain what should be said. I do not wish to cause her any trouble or pain, and, yet, unless I have totally misunderstood what she said to me when she was here -- and this is possible since she was very cryptic about the whole thing -- it would seem, in the light of your e-mail to me, that she may

have misunderstood something of a fairly fundamental sort which she thought you said to her in one of your e-mails to her.

More specifically, she seemed to indicate she was some sort of Qutb -- and may Allah and Sima forgive me if I have misunderstood what she was alluding to and hinting at when she spoke with me about this -- but she did use the term "Qutb" and she was indicating that this had something to do with her.

I got upset with her for two reasons. First, unless you had given her permission to talk about this with me, then, I really didn't feel it was appropriate for her to discuss the matter with me, and I didn't want to hear about it. Secondly, it was out of this same conversation that she said certain other things that I feel are both without foundation and were -- and still are -- quite hurtful to me.

Just the other day, Sima said that Momin Shah Baba had sent her something about the different kinds of Qutbs, and she asked me if I had received it from Momin Shah Baba. I said that I had not, and she said that he probably thinks you (meaning me) already know all about it.

I said that I really didn't know much about such things. And, she offered, in turn, to forward Momin Shah Baba's material to me.

I declined the offer. I indicated that if Momin Shah Baba wanted me to have the material, then he would have sent it to me himself.

As far as the Uzma/Seth situation is concerned, again, I do not wish to create difficulties, but, perhaps, I should tell you what I understand of things so that, eventually, the situation can get straightened out.

Quite some time ago, Uzma had approached me for the first time with respect to the initial proposal offer from Seth. I told her at that time that I would not tell her what she should do about the matter, but I did write some things to her about marriage in general and told her there would be nothing wrong in arranging a meeting with Seth at, say, Momin Shah Baba's house. In that way, she might get a better feeling for what kind of person Seth was.

In any case, as far as I know, the meeting was never arranged. Subsequently, Uzma turned down the proposal -- at least for the time being. I don't really know how it was turned down or what was said.

It was shortly after that, however, that the incident arose about which I wrote to you previously concerning Uzma being told -- apparently -- that within the silsilah there was a certain way of going about getting married. She asked me about it, and I asked you about it.

Fast forward to several months ago, and I received several e-mails, in fairly rapid order, from Momin Shah Baba about another proposal of marriage was being offered to Uzma by Seth. In one of the earlier e-mails in this sequence, I seem to recall that Momin Shah Baba told Uzma that in keeping with the guidelines you had set down about such matters that he couldn't become involved in these proceedings in his capacity as a shaykh of the silsilah, but as a friend, he would be willing to do whatever he could do to help out ... or words to that effect.

A short time later -- maybe hours or in a day's time -- I received another e-mail from Momin Shah Baba indicating that a meeting was being arranged with Uzma to discuss the marriage proposal. Furthermore, either in that e-mail or one of the ones which came shortly after it, I was told that 'Asima, Samia (Uzma's sister), and, possibly, someone else was going to meet with Uzma to try to persuade her that it was a good offer and that, perhaps, she should go ahead and accept it.

A further e-mail informed me that a time for the meeting between Momin Shah Baba, Uzma, and whomever else, had been set up. I believe it was at that point that Momin Shah Baba said that, perhaps, I should speak with Uzma about the marriage issue.

I was annoyed that all these preparations and activity had been going on and no one seemed to feel that I ought to even be consulted about whether this is how things ought to proceed with someone -- namely, Uzma -- who was my mureed. All of the e-mails which I had received from Momin Shah Baba on this matter were of the form - "this is what is happening" ... and not of the form - "how do you think we should proceed?", or "what do you think about all this?".

In any case, when I finally was given the suggestion that, maybe, I should speak to Uzma about the marriage proposal, I wrote to Momin Shah Baba that as far as marriage, in general, was concerned, I already had talked to Uzma quite some time ago, and that as far as the present activities were concerned I would rather be kept out of it.

Sometime later, I was informed by him that the marriage offer had been accepted and that discussions were being held about the dates of the nikah and walima (sp?) ceremonies. Momin Shah Baba wrote to me that he only had told Uzma that two auspicious months were approaching and that it would be good if everything could take place within that time frame, and, that, furthermore, there should be no unreasonable delay between the time of engagement and the other ceremonies -- this latter point was mentioned in several e-mails.

At some point in this sequence of e-mails -- maybe in the above one about the setting of the dates for the different ceremonies, I was told my Momin Shah Baba that it was my 'duty' to guide or inform Uzma concerning what she should do about setting the dates. I did not reply to Momin Shah Baba's e-mail, but I was both annoyed and upset.

A short time later, Uzma wrote to me and informed me about the date-setting issue and indicated that a certain amount of emotional pressure was being exerted to do things in a certain way and within a certain time frame. She did not use the term "emotional pressure" but this is what I concluded from what she did say in her e-mail. In any event, she asked me what she should do.

I wrote her a long e-mail about options, considerations, ideas, possibilities, questions, the purpose of life, the purpose of marriage, school, and a number of other things, but I never told her what she should do. Instead, I tried to provide her with an informed context within which to make her decision. I also told her that the question she was raising now should have been addressed before the engagement, and not after it, by all those who were so busily making plans about everything.

One day, or so, later, I got an e-mail from Momin Shah Baba thanking me and informing me that Uzma had told him that whatever had been said in my e-mail to her was very influential in her thinking and that the wedding was going to take place on the 27th of October. Then, he went on to inform me that he would have preferred certain other dates because of their auspicious spiritual nature. I did not respond to his e-mail.

Sometime later I was informed by Sima that she had been informed by someone -- Sairah, perhaps, but maybe not -- that since Sima was my wife and, therefore, the mother of my mureeds that it

was her responsibility to be arranging for various things with respect to the wedding of Uzma. I told Sima that as far as I knew, she had no such responsibilities with respect to the marriage ceremonies but that if, out of the kindness of her heart as an individual and member of the silsilah, she wanted to do something for Uzma that was a different matter, and it was entirely up to her personal discretion – and in no other capacity – whether, or not, she wished to do so.

The foregoing is, to the best of my recollection, how events unfolded in the marriage issue. Maybe, I am wrong, but I don't think what went on should have gone on in the way it did.

My heaviness about going to Canada is not a matter that I can't forgive people for things that I believe should not have happened -- after all, I realize, all too well (and, often, not well enough) how much in need of all manner of forgiveness I stand, but this whole sequence of things is part of a pattern of events -- all of which seem to point in a similar direction. Increasingly, I don't know who a lot of people are anymore -- people whom I thought I knew, to some extent -- or what they are about. This realization leaves me with a great feeling of alienation and separateness.

People say that they love me, but the things that happen make me wonder if they even see me at all ... and if they don't really see me, then, just what is it they love? It is very confusing, and I really have no idea what to make of it all ... I just know that I am very uncomfortable ... as I would be if I had to spend time with strangers.

I am not most of these people's shaykh or teacher. I also feel it would be rather presumptuous of me to either suppose that I understand the situation or that whatever I might have to say about the matter would either be warranted or correct or helpful. So, I stay silent, for the most part -- except in occasional e-mails to you.

Momin Shah Baba has done some very nice and generous things for me. By the Grace of Allah, he has helped me out in a number of situations, and so has his wife Sairah.

On the other hand, although I haven't had much money or material things to offer, I have given Momin Shah Baba and Sairah my time, effort, talents, understanding, emotional support, and intellectual resources for nearly 20 years.

I have tried to have a relationship of reciprocity and friendship with him. But, quite frankly, sometimes I really wonder what is going on.

I still remember the tremendous amount of tension, distrust, wariness, and, even, hostility, with which we were met on the occasion of your being introduced to Momin Shah Baba and Sairah. We all can laugh and joke about that now, but, then, things happen which seem to re-introduce echoes of the distance experienced on that day, and it saddens me, and bewilders me, and I feel alone.

Yes, I believe you do fully understand Baba, that these events remind us that we are alone and that only Allah suffices. But, your experience of understanding this truth is very much different than is mine. You have realized you are alone ... yet not alone, whereas I merely have faith that such is the case. Moreover, I have a much better feeling for, and insight into, the first aspect than the latter -- and my realization of this state of affairs makes me feel even more isolated even when I "know" in some limited, vague fashion that I am not alone either.

You wave to me from the heights and invite me (and others) to come, and I (and others) see that there is sun and warmth and love all about you. However, I also know I presently am in the shadows and that although you are here, you also are a long way off ... as the spiritual bird flies.

God IS with us. You understand how this is so, and I do not. Sometimes, I wonder if it will ever be otherwise.

Certainly, when I look to what I call "myself", I see very little to lend a positive prognosis to my wondering. I'm afraid that spiritual magic and sleight-of-hand will have to carry the day.

Love,

Tariq

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Wed, 25 Oct 2000 00:17:20 HST (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

I had typed a detailed reply, but before I could sign off the Email, I got logged off, which means that ALLAH did not want that reply to be sent. So just let me give you the few important points.

I am shocked and hurt with your wife, that she used my name to win any argument she might have had with you. I do understand that wives are very informal with their husbands but that does not mean that she wrongly use me to say something which I never said.

It was my shaykh who made you a QUTB. I have no information of any other QUTB besides you.

Those Emails which you speak of that came for you from Canada, I am surprised because I was not informed of that. In fact it was I who asked if you were in the picture and was told that it was taken for granted that your mureed has kept you informed. I am surprised that she had not.

The only reason I asked you if I could request Feisal mia, regarding a job for you in Twilight National Airlines was because I had thought that you want to get away from the present circumstances, but now that you have explained that you already have a job, giving you about \$1200, or so, and that you have leases to honor, I also think that it is better for you to remain there. I pray that INSHA ALLAH your income be increased, ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN!

Under the present circumstance, I also feel that it is not wise to go to Canada now. I am surprised that Uzma did not understand your financial situation. In fact I would have appreciated if she had sent you a return ticket, knowing that otherwise it would be very difficult for you to travel. I pray that may ALLAH bless her to have proper adab for you since she is your mureed.

The Email reply which I was trying to send to you was very detailed, which included how much I love and trust you, and how hurt I am with your wife for having said that I told her she was a QUTB. It seems that it's like candies being distributed.

Having said all that, I think we -- you and I -- are obligated to forgive them who have hurt us so.

I TRUST you with my LIFE. How can that be possible without LOVE? This is what your wife should know. I repeat, "I TRUST you with my LIFE."

LOVE AND DUA, BABA.

§

Wed, 25 Oct 2000 23:06:08-0400 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

Wa 'alaykum as-Salaam!

With respect to the trip to Canada, actually Uzma did offer to cover my expenses. However, her family has been through a lot of difficulties -- including financial ones, so when the foregoing offer came I was a little concerned about the expense of things when considered from the standpoint of Uzma and her family.

So, I told Uzma that, perhaps, we could share some of the expenses. Because I work for a company that deals in certain products, and, as a result, there is a car rental company that has a relationship, of sorts, with us, and I can get 25% off plus unlimited miles, and this probably will be the cheapest way to go.

Momin Shah Baba and Sairah have offered their hospitality while I am in Canada, so this will save on expenses, as well. This leaves, with a couple of exceptions, just the gas to look after.

Altogether the bills might run, maybe, several hundred dollars US. Insha' Allah, I can afford some of this. I'll talk to Uzma about the rest and see how things stand and what she really can afford to spend.

In addition, I think if, at this point, I were not to go, this would cause a lot of upset with a number of different people, and this really would serve as a distraction to, and, I think, take away from what should be a festive occasion. So, if it is okay with you, I think I should go to Canada this coming weekend.

As far as point 8 of your e-mail is concerned, I don't know if any of it was in response to some of the things I said in my two recent e-mails concerning the issue of love, but, you should know that none of my remarks or comments was really directed toward you. I know that you

love me and are supportive of me even when my actions might make you wonder what you did to deserve getting mixed up with someone like me. And, insha' Allah, with time, the discomfort I have been feeling with respect to others will pass as well.

I think of you often, and you are always, by the Grace of Allah, in my prayers. Love, Tariq

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Wed, 25 Oct 2000 17:40:17 HST (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

Well, since, as you say, you will not have to spend much and that Uzma is going to share the expenses, I also feel that it would be all right for you to accept the invitation, and yes, she will be proud of the fact that her Shaikh attended her marriage.

When you are there, please convey my Salam and prayers to Sena, Uzma and her family, also to 'Ali and Miriam. Please tell them that you received

Email from Islamabad. LOVE AND DUA, BABA.

§

I rent a car to take the trip to Canada for Uzma's wedding. The trip to Momin's house lasts about 10 hours.

Quite a few people attend the ceremony. For some unknown reason, Uzma's father disappears at a crucial time, and I have been told that if he is not able to return in time, then I should lead the bride by the hand to the place in the hall where the ceremony is to take place.

I am uncomfortable with this. However, rather than delay things, I agree.

The ceremony goes well. Afterwards, I am called on to give a brief talk about the idea of marriage within Islam and the Sufi tradition.

When the time comes for cleaning up the hall, I am working with a deaf youngster by the name of Philippe. I do not know sign language, and he actually understands French, not English, so, he can't read my lips.

Nonetheless, we work together well. For some reason, I really like him.

I feel he has a spiritual quality that shines through his presence. Maybe, he will become interested in the Sufi path ... although, as far as I know, he is not Muslim nor interested in things of a mystical nature.

Later, I am told that he and one of Uzma's sisters are fond of each other. However, there have been some problems within the family about the situation.

On Sunday, I start out on the long journey home. It is snowing and sleeting.

I do not look forward to traversing the roads near the border, because the area through which the road runs is mostly isolated, with only a few pockets of civilization, here and there. By the time I reach the border, there is quite a lot of snow on the ground, and it is getting dark.

Snow, darkness, unfamiliar territory, and isolation are not a fun combination for me. Nonetheless, by the Grace of Allah, I reach home safely, some eleven hours, or so, later.

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Sun, 12 Nov 2000 16:43:26-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

It seems someone has created a very interesting situation in Florida. The events in Florida serve as a great opportunity for people to learn about a lot of things, but one of the things it might be teaching most is that neither Bush nor Gore should be President since neither one of them seems capable of putting his own ego aside for the good of the country.

Your mureed, Mitchell Hong, has been in contact with me, on and off, over the last three years, mostly by e-mail. I have sent him various materials, and he has downloaded several of the e-books from the Spiritual-Life.com web site and has, apparently both enjoyed and benefitted from them.

He asked for, and has expressed interest in, on several occasions, the names of the silsilah lineage, and I have sent him one of the three lists. I hope I have not overstepped the bounds of propriety on this, but it did seem that there was sincerity in his request.

He also is asking about practices he can do. Previously, he informed me that he had been fasting once a week, and he asked whether it was all right for him to be doing this. He was both eager and happy to be doing it, so I indicated to him that I didn't feel there was anything wrong with his continuing to do this.

There were a few other things which he asked about - one of which seemed to have to do with disturbances to his sleep, so I told him about our silsilah's safety- net zikr to say before he goes to sleep. But, now, he is asking if there are other things he can do as well.

He asked me once about a name change which he wanted to make - he wanted to have a name which would be his Sufi name and by which he could be called. I told him that I thought the name he had chosen was nice but that he really ought to get final confirmation on such things from you.

I have encouraged both Mitchell and Barry in China Springs to try to make arrangements so that whenever Mitchell was able to come to that area he could join in on fatiha. Barry said that he had conveyed an invitation to Mitchell on different occasions, but as far as I can see, Mitchell doesn't join in on the fatiha sessions.

Now that winter is coming, Mitchell is even less likely to be coming to the China Springs area, for that stretch of highway between where he lives and Barry lives can, if you will remember, get very treacherous and is not at all a fun drive in those conditions. And, Mitchell doesn't like driving under those circumstances and doesn't like coming to the China Springs area during the winter for fear of getting caught in such storms -- some of which are very unpredictable ... and I can't say that I

blame him much in this regard having undergone such an experience myself along the same stretch of highway.

In any event, he is asking about more practices, and, quite frankly, I am reluctant to say much. First of all, he is your mureed, and, secondly, I am not sure I would know what to tell him ... I mean I could suggest some things, but I really don't know if these things would be appropriate.

Recently, when I was in Canada, and there was a gathering at the home of Uzma's parents (consisting of Uzma's entire family, Rubina, Momin Shah Baba, Sairah, and myself), I initiated a discussion about the Sufi path. Something in me said this was important to do, but at the same time, I had some misgivings because it was a mixture of mureeds -- some yours, some Momin Shah Baba's, and some mine.

Although you were not present physically, Momin Shah Baba was present physically, and I was of two minds about whether to proceed with the discussion given that Momin Shah Baba was there with two of his mureeds. Although I might well have been wrong in my feeling (and this is why I am communicating this to you in order to find out), I felt that proceeding with the discussion was the correct thing to do despite the circumstances.

It seems that almost everyone was very happy with the discussion. However, this fact, in and of itself, doesn't necessarily make it right that I proceeded as I did.

Sairah, Momin's wife, seemed intrigued and happy with much of what went on, but she also might have had some misgivings about a few of the things being said. She did ask some questions, and I attempted to answer these questions as best I could, but I don't know how she felt at the end of things. And, I certainly hope this doesn't create problems for Momin -- especially since things in that respect seem to have improved a lot ... but the delicacy of the situation is also why you indicated that you shied away from staying with them when you went to Canada at the time of your citizenship ceremonies.

One of the things which I said and which she seemed to have some difficulty with was the following. I indicated that while tafsir was a perfectly legitimate exercise as far as a way of learning about what the historical circumstances and conditions were which took place during

the time of the Prophet, tafsir should not be used as a means of interpreting the Qur'an and that many people make a fundamental mistake when tafsir is used as "the" method of trying to establish what the Qur'an means.

I further indicated that the Qur'an is uncreated and one cannot reduce it down to either purely historical circumstances or even to a purely linguistic exercise in Arabic. The Qur'an transcends both history and language, although both history and language might serve as doorways through which to begin to engage the Qur'an.

The foregoing situation leads to a related issue. There are a number of ideas which are coming to me now.

I am not a scholar (not even remotely) of Arabic, nor Qur'an, nor Hadith, nor Islam, nor the Sufi path -- although, of course, I have read some in all of these areas. The most valuable part of what I know in these areas has come through my listening to you and to Dr. Irfan over the years, and, quite frankly, I miss those sessions very much.

In any event, as indicated previously, ideas of different kinds are beginning to bubble to the surface. You already have been given something of the flavor of part of this in the "joke" I sent you a few weeks ago about the two people of dawa (the process of calling people to Islam) who were trying to invite the poor Sufi to the Qur'an and Sunnah.

I feel, although Allah knows best, that a lot of what seems to be bubbling to the surface now has to do with something which you have been trying to point out to all of us for some time -- namely, that what is being taught in the name of Islam now often has very little to do with the real nature of Islam or its actual purpose. However, I worry about what might be feeding these ideas because sometimes such ideas seem very much at odds with what is normally considered by the generality of believers to be the nature of Islam, the Qur'an and even the Sufi path.

For instance, in the latter case (that is, the Sufi path), after a very, very long time, I have begun to read again some of the literature about the Sufi path. A book I am currently reading is Devon Forsythe's *A Brief Overview of the Sufi Path*.

You might remember that Devon Forsythe is the fellow who didn't think much of my book when Momin Shah Baba sent him a copy and asked if he would be willing to write a brief blurb recommending the book -- something which he was not willing to do. I was both surprised and, frankly, a little hurt, when he reacted as he did, and, if you will remember, I said as much to you at the time.

So, some of what I am about to say might be written off as just sour grapes on my part for having been snubbed by Professor Forsythe previously, but after having read half of his aforementioned 247 page book, I am appalled at what I am reading. And, one of the things which appalls me the most is that Professor Forsythe is very, very highly respected in both academic and some Sufi circles, so that if my understanding of things is correct (which it might not be), then, a lot of people are being misled by him -- both within academia, as well as among certain Sufi groups.

I read his book *Gnosis: A Sufi Perspective* which is a study of the teachings of Ibn al-'Arabi, and I liked it mostly for the fact that it provided hundreds of pages of translation of the "Meccan Revelations". But, I also remember your objection to Professor Forsythe's tendency to render 'wahdat al-wujud' in terms of "finding" rather than in terms of manifestation. This is a problem which Professor Forsythe might have corrected in his sequel to the *Gnosis* work noted above -- a book called: *Manifestations of the Self* which I have only paged through a bit.

In any case, this guy could run circles around me with respect to knowledge of Arabic and Persian, not to mention any number of other academic disciplines, but, quite frankly, in a lot of respects, I don't think this individual knows what he is talking about -- although from time to time he does seem to get a few things right ... only to undermine this achievement through what he says a few sentences, paragraphs or pages later. Maybe, he will turn things around in the second part of his book, but I have my doubts because if he had the competency to do this in the second part, he very likely would have done it in the first part as well ... we shall see.

Because a lot of my reaction to Professor Forsythe's introductory work on "sufism" is also caught up with some of these ideas which are bubbling up from somewhere to my consciousness, I would like to write out my commentary on the book for you so that you can see (if

you already don't know) what this line of thinking involves. Where it is correct, then, fine, but where it is incorrect or problematic, then, I will need some help, because, if incorrect, I certainly do not want to communicate these ideas to other people.

However, it is possible that the length of the commentary might run between three and four hundred pages. If so, I probably would not be able to get a first draft typed up on the computer until sometime during Ramadan.

In any event, I am sure you have a lot of better things to do with your time, so you might not want to read this stuff. At the same time, I do feel that it is important for me to get a clearer understanding about what, if anything, is going on with my current understanding about the path and Islam. In addition, if what is being said in the commentary is okay, then maybe it could be used as an informational tool for some of the people in the West.

Although I am happy for Momin Shah Baba and what is going on in Canada since the beginnings of a community seems to be developing there which is rooted in the silsilah, I also feel there are some things which are missing and which are greatly needed, and one of these things is developing a clear focus -- as much as this can be done (and there might be distinct limits to this) -- about what the Sufi path is, and what it is not. I could be quite wrong about this -- and you would know much better than me -- but there seems to be a lot of vagueness in some people's understanding about the nature of the Sufi path ... and, maybe, after reading (if you choose to do that) what I have to say about the ideas in Forsythe's book, you will say to me "Physician, heal thyself", and that I am among those who are rather vague about the Sufi path.

I am not blaming anyone or pointing fingers at anyone, since God has given different skills and abilities to each of us. Some of the things in which some of us might be good, others might not be so good, and vice versa.

When you come to visit with people and give talks, I feel that we all are able to struggle a little more effectively toward becoming focused about the nature of the Sufi path. But, in your physical absence, I think we are still looking for ways to provide a substitute, of sorts, for your physical absence.

I remember you once posing a question to the mureeds in Canada along the following lines (if memory serves me). More specifically, you asked: "if a lot of people start coming, how would access to the teacher or teachings be handled?" In other words, on a purely physical level, one person, such as yourself, can only talk to so many people and can only do so much. Now, while I have no doubt that one, or more, of your hamzats [note: a spiritual body, of sorts, within an individual that might become developed in advanced travelers of the Sufi path and can assist such an individual to 'appear' to be in several locations at once] is (are) quite active in organizing and teaching things, there might be some conditions which have to be established which supplement that reality.

You have appointed khalifahs in different places to look after different things, and, so, this, too, will help deal with the issue of access should a lot of people, insha' Allah, begin coming to the silsilah. However, in addition, I think everyone who is associated with the silsilah might also have a function to perform in this respect, and certainly through both example (that is, following the sunnah of our way), as well as having a basic grasp of what the path is about (and not just, say, attending fatiha with a sort of vague mind and heart set which suggests that fatiha -- as important as it is -- is all there is to the Sufi path, or which suggests that we attend fatiha without understanding what it is, or how it reflects so much of the Sufi path).

I guess what I am saying is that teaching the fundamental framework, so to speak, of the Sufi path is very important so that we have a good sense of what we are trying to accomplish, individually and collectively, and where we are trying to go, both individually, as well as collectively.

If as many people as possible within the silsilah here in the West were to develop a good grasp of the basics, then, this sense of purpose, focus, and direction might be communicated, God willing, to others who come in contact with those members of the silsilah who have this basic understanding. If so, this would fit in with the indication you gave to us that we should have a demeanor, if not aura about us, which is attractive to other people and in which they would like to participate.

Of course, first things need to be first, and we are just beginning to try to establish ourselves in different places to be in a position to make ourselves available to people. This work is more advanced in some places than in others -- with Pennsylvania/New York/New Jersey/Connecticut, and Texas taking the lead, Canada coming in second, and Vermont being off the radar screen at the present time.

But, in addition to just making contact with people, I feel that we need to have something to offer to people in the way of teachings and training that might have a chance of overcoming the many biases, misunderstandings and prejudices which exist about both Islam and the Sufi path. To be sure, if our nisbath is sound, then those people who are inclined will, insha' Allah, be attracted to people like yourself, Momin Shah Baba, and others. yet, I also feel there is a critical transition point which is presenting a problem for us -- not you, per se, since I have seen you in action and know that, by the Grace of God, you are very creative in how you go about introducing people to, and teaching them about, the path and Islam.

However, the transition point between making contact and providing people with reasons, or motivations, to want to carrying things beyond the contact stage is problematic for people like myself and Momin Shah. Of course, maybe, this is the way things are intended to be, and, consequently, we are in a stage of things where the transition stage is meant to be problematic and that no matter what we did or tried, things would remain as they are until the time comes when the obstacles are removed and there is a natural flow across the critical transition stage between first contact and deepening interest in, and commitment to, the Sufi path.

By the Grace of Allah, you have taken us by the hand, again and again, across this transition stage within our own lives, through your physical presence, your phone conversations, your regular letters, and your e-mails. And, most importantly, of course, you do this through your nisbath with us. But, this all needs to be reinforced and repeated many times in order for it to begin to overcome, insha' Allah, the many forces and obstacles which are set against these teachings both within us and without us.

But, in your physical absence, we (people such as Momin and me) must stumble as best we can in search of a way to solve the transition

problem. The House of Gnosis, The Circle of Trans-personal Psychology, MAVA (I really don't know what this is all about although Momin has mentioned it to me in passing), and even my own center here in Bamford are all institutional creations directed at both addressing the transition problem, as well as just establishing a presence within the larger community through which, insha' Allah, help of different kinds can be extended to the community, irrespective of whether, or not, they ever become Muslim or step onto the Sufi path. Nevertheless, although we have done whatever we can to get these "institutions" moving, I feel that some fundamental ingredients are missing -- not in your case, but in our two cases.

Much of what seems to be coming to me now -- from who knows where -- has to do with a concern about the essential principles of things ... stripped of theology, vocabulary, Arabic, and a few other things. A lot of this has to do with basic questions about, and issues concerning: identity, capacity, purpose, methodology, spirituality, life, practicality, psychology, community, realization, love, possibility, manifestation, fulfillment, understanding, knowledge, wisdom, adab, primordial nature, fixed forms, faith, and so on.

It is not that I am uninterested in the Qur'an and the sunnah of the Prophet, or the Prophetic tradition, rather it is that I am very, very interested in these things but in terms of what they are really about, and not what people (whether Professor Forsythe or others) are saying they are about. I am trying to see through to the basics of these, and what I am seeing, or think I am seeing, is something which, sometimes, puts a very different slant on a whole set of issues.

For example, although I have long accepted the Sufi idea that heaven and hell is not what the Sufi path is about, and although I accept that different levels of heaven and hell are realities, I also have begun to feel that heaven and hell are a very minor set of possibilities in the scheme of things and that the purpose of our being created was not merely so that heaven and hell could be filled up with our souls -- even though this process of filling up the two is something which I believe will happen on the Day of Judgment. Unfortunately, these realities have come to dominate people's hearts, intentions, ideas, actions and theologies to such an extent that what I believe might be the real nature of things is being obscured in fundamental ways.

Now all of this might seem quite unremarkable except for the fact that my deepening reflection on such matters is raising a lot of questions -- not questions of doubt but constructive questions, I believe -- about revelation, the Prophetic mission, shari'ah, the Hidden Treasure, our role in that, the Muhammadan Reality as a manifestation of the Hidden Treasure, the relationship of the historical Muhammad (peace be upon him) to that Reality, submission, intention, freedom, the complete unknowability of Allah in His Essence, the nature of happiness, the Names and Attributes of Divinity, the Trust, and so on.

The link between this bubbling to the surface of many issues in a new (to me at least) way and the previously mentioned "transition stage problem" is that if these ideas which are coming to me are not off the wall and incorrect, then, they might serve, in part, to help resolve the aforementioned transition problem since they might provide an approach to things which is a little more - at least seemingly -- metaphysically neutral and, therefore, less tied down with historical baggage.

I am not in any way hinting about the idea of abandoning Islam. I am Muslim, and am happy to be that, and pray, insha' Allah, that I will never cease to be Muslim.

However, I am talking about strategy or methodology, and trying to discern what might be the best way of engaging people here in the West. I am reminded of the Hadith in which the Prophet tells the Companions that if they leave out even one tenth of what is obligatory that they will earn hell fire, but a time will come when if people do even one tenth of what is incumbent they will achieve Paradise.

Now, it strikes me that although we must all strive to do as much as we can, both with respect to obligatory and non obligatory actions which are in harmony with that which is pleasing to God, and although we cannot know for sure that these times are the times about which the Prophet spoke in the Hadith, there might be a fair amount of material in the Hadithic literature which was intended much more directly for the Companions, and somewhat less so for generations 1400 years removed from the "best of creation".

Perhaps, this is why we are instructed by the Qur'an and the Prophet to follow the sunnah and not the hadith -- although some people have tried to make it that the sunnah and the hadith are just

different ways of referring to the same thing ... something which I don't believe. On the other hand, I also could be quite wrong about this.

If we look to the sunnah, then, prayers, fasting, hajj, zakat and shahadah are in clear evidence, but even more in evidence are qualities such as forgiveness, forbearance, patience, gratitude, sincerity, honesty, love, constancy, integrity, generosity, kindness, thoughtfulness, sharing, respect for the environment, etiquette, being just, and helping whoever might be in need of help, whether those needing help are Muslim or not ... in fact, in many ways, the basic pillars seem to be practices which are designed to give us the spiritual strength to be receptive to and live a life of proper adab in all situations. And, on the other hand, there is an absence of jealousy, envy, anger, hatred, contempt, selfishness, lust, pride, arrogance, and so in the behavior of the Prophet which also is his sunnah through virtue of their absence and, therefore, things that we should not give expression to.

I feel that even if an individual never said a ritual prayer in his or her life, or never went on hajj, or never fasted for a single day, or never read a word of Arabic, or were not familiar with any of the so-called Islamic sciences, but if such people did have a basic belief in God and bore witness to that basic submission through trying to follow as much of the aforementioned instances of the Prophet's sunnah as they could (even if they did not know that this was what they were doing) that, maybe, the condition of the world might be a lot better than it is (although I suspect that history has had to unfold as it has and very little, if anything, could have been done to alter this -- although, it might be very important as to how our niyat or intention engages what must unfold historically), and maybe people would be a lot more open to, and interested in pursuing, what the Sufi path has to offer.

I am not saying that prayers shouldn't be said, or that the fast shouldn't be observed, or that the other basic pillars should not be fulfilled. But, since there should be no compulsion in matters of deen, then, observance of such things might work best when an individual comes to understand (and this might take longer with some people than others, and in some cases, might never happen at all) and appreciate that such things are meant as aides to faith and spiritual

development and not as a burden to be assumed because other people say that one must do it, rather than because one's relationship with Allah has improved to the point where the individual desires to do it as best she or he can.

People become lost in the so-called Islamic sciences. There are very few people who are ever going to master all of the intricacies of the methodologies and so on associated with these sciences. While I believe it is important that there have been people in the past and in the present who have done this or are doing this with varying degrees of success, I also believe it is likely to create far more confusion and error, than good, when people here try to pursue this on their own even with the "assistance" of the vast majority of "self-styled" experts who exist in the Muslim world.

What I have learned of the Qur'an, sunnah, and hadith, I have learned from you and Dr. Irfan. This is what has stayed with me.

One could fill volumes with my ignorance of the hadiths, the Qur'an, and the Islamic Sciences, but I believe you two have helped me to keep certain basic principles and teachings in mind and heart, and that these -- to me -- have been far, far more important than anything which I do not know about the sciences and the associated literature.

On the basis of my own experience, I believe that more than anything else, people like Momin Shah Baba and myself have to find a method of helping to focus people's attention on certain basic principles which are of more immediate and vital concern to them than are a lot of other things. It is the KISS method of "Keeping It Simple Stupid" -- the "Stupid" part being for people like myself, and not, in any way, intended for you.

In any case, a lot of what is bubbling inside of me has to do with a wish to concentrate, as much as I can, on basic principles in the hope that this will make it easier on those people we contact to overcome the transition problem. This is why I want to write my comments to you on the Devon Forsythe book so that you can advise me concerning about what might be okay with that commentary and what might not be okay with that material, and, then, the okay stuff can be given to Momin Shah Baba, and whomever else you feel is appropriate to receive it, so that it can begin to form the outlines of a curriculum we can use to train people and initiate them into the basics of Islam and

the Sufi path even if, at times, some of the other features traditionally associated with Islam and the Sufi path, might be de-emphasized, at least for a time, until such time as individuals get oriented toward, comfortable with, and focused on, the essentials.

You know me Baba. You know that whatever my shortcoming might be -- and we both know these are many -- that I love Allah, Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him), Islam, the silsilah, and you -- although I know that I do not love any of these enough. Insha' Allah, I would not do anything intentionally to hurt or upset or embarrass or annoy any of you -- but I am ignorant in a lot of ways and I do make mistakes, so: given the nature of some of what is coming to me, I would not wish to proceed very far in any of this without your approval and acceptance of what I am saying - something which might be best illustrated through your response to my comments on the Forsythe book.

Love,
Tariq

§

Sun, 12 Nov 2000 14:23:09 HST (e-mail)

Tariq my son,
Assalamo alaikum.

I have read very clearly what you have sent me in your Email, and I am surprised why it has taken you longer to get to where I had intended for you all along. All this what is bubbling and coming to surface, are the seeds which we had planted, and now the finality is about to arrive.

If you give a pen to someone as a gift, he or she need not ask you permission to use it. So you should realize where these bubbles are coming from, and not ask for permission to go ahead. Since you do have a very good memory, you should replay many of my sayings, and you certainly will understand that these are the very truths which I had, am, and shall always try my best to present to one and all.

Regarding such so-called authors that you mention, let me give you an account of an incident many years ago. A mureed had come to ask, what he should think of a certain Islamic History orator. I asked him, what he would do if he saw a book on Hadees fall off the hand of an Islamic scholar who has been found to be wanting in sincerity? Now this is a very complete question, based on which a book could be written.

First, the mureed said that he would quickly run and pick the book up. My second question was, "What will you call the dirt on the street on which the book had fallen, and he said, "It was dirt before the book fell on it, and its dirt even after I pick the book off it." So you see, what I meant, in my question?

The mureed understood. Hadees is Hadees. Quran is Quran, Wahdatul Wujood, is Wahdatul Wujood, but when the so called scholars of Islam, become greedy, insincere, attracted to the glitters of Shaitan, then this is exactly what happens. Such charlatans emerge, like this so called author and translator that you mention, but my son, according to my opinion which is based on Quran and Sunna, this man and many like him who have tried to show to people that they are very well versed in Arabic and Persian, are actually the filth that lies on street corners.

You ask me permission to do something about it, so that people should know the truth? That's what you are definitely supposed to do, while keeping in line with the demeanor of our silsila.

I have always instructed mureeds to remember the fact that one has to be a mureed to be able to rise up to the occasion of being Blessed with IRFAN (Wisdom direct from heart to heart.) This so called translator that you mention has no Nisbath with any Shaikh. He has never become a mureed in any Silsila. Aulia ALLAH (The friends of ALLAH). All have had to go through the stage of being a mureed. I don't even think that this person is a Muslim leave alone him being regarded as a translator of such a great Wali as Hazrath Ibne Arabi.

But my dear son, who is at fault? The so-called Muslim people are disgustingly at fault. They deserve to be guided by such hypocrites. This is their punishment.

Now on the other hand these innocent searchers of truth, just like the ASHAAB (Plural Of Sahib) QAAF. They were even before the time of The Holy Prophet (Peace and Blessings be upon him). ALLAH was so pleased with them, that they were mentioned favorably in the QURAN. So these people of the West who are completely naive regarding the truth of Islam but have love and sincerity in their hearts are the ones that deserve your attention, your guidance.

So my son, do whatever is in your power from ALLAH, to help these forsaken souls. Use whatever method you think is best, to get them to come to you, just like Hazrath Khwaaja Moinuddin Chishti did, by introducing the beat of the drums and music, called Qawwaali among the Chishti.

Methods are a means to an end, and permissible as long as they don't become ends in themselves. So do go ahead my son. In fact I had indicated this very truth to you some years before too.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

I inform Baba that I have learned about several of the talks which I gave at the Ashram are being sold -- although no permission had been sought by the people at the Ashram to do this. Someone, whom, by 'chance' I happened to meet, told me about the whole situation.

§

Mon, 27 Nov 2000 06:25:30 -0800 (PST) (e-mail)

Tariq my son,
Assalamo alaikum.

Yes, I did receive your last email and have also replied. The email which I wanted to send to you, and it came back was actually to inform you regarding my very first two hours talk at the Ashram many years ago, when I first visited.

I had heard that they tape all talks and events etc, but when I had asked them for a copy of my talk, they told me that the person who tapes is not available and as soon as he comes, they will certainly ask him to present to me with a copy. That never happened, and after a few years, when I asked, they did say that they have other ones which were taped at other occasions after my first talk, and surprisingly they do not have the very first one.

Well, after so many years to my surprise I have found what actually might have happened. I am trying my best to collect it from a source that has a changed version of it, which is now in my disposal. The problem is that it's not in my own original words. The meanings are there between the lines. I am trying to bring it back the way I had said it.

INSHA ALLAH I shall succeed. All this happened a few days after you had written to me regarding a different approach to people here in the West. I feel that the answer is very much there.

In a few days, I might be able to get it in its proper original form. The only surprise here is to find out a rather well known Sufi to have presented it as his own. I received an email from one of the old members of the Ashram, who gave me a web url of a site, and said that in it, I will find what I had been looking for. He was the one with the duty of taping, and now he is not appreciated by the new management. Then he requested me not to ever disclose his name, because then he will have to resign from even being a member, and at the same time they will never admit their fault. I promised him never to disclose his name, also because that is not my purpose.

Give me some time to get this done in its proper shape and I will send it to you. Momin mia was here a few days ago, and I gave him the first few pages. It's very taxing to the mind to rewrite it, but I am doing my best.

In fact I have requested him to send you a copy. I hope and pray that he has it also in his computer, otherwise it will be difficult for him to type it. He could fax it to you though. The reason why I need him to do it is because, in haste I gave him my original which I forgot to save. Once he sends it to you, the rest which I am working at will easily be sent to you finally.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA

§

December 2000

I have been working very diligently on the new book. By the Grace of Allah, a lot of insights are flashing before my heart's and mind's eye.

The writing is very fluid and comes easily. Perhaps, the blessings of Ramadan are making the task easier than it might otherwise be.

§

January 2001

Through several phone conversations, Sima has made it clear she feels we ought to seek a divorce. Among other things, she says her mother's emotional and physical health are deteriorating at an alarming rate, and, apparently, Sima is attributing this to her mother's constant worries about the unresolved nature of the marriage.

Sima is feeling very responsible for her mother's condition. Sima believes that if her mother were to die now, Sima would never forgive herself for the role which she feels she is playing in contributing to, if not causing, her mother's illness, malaise, and depression ... especially if these illnesses were to result in her mother's death.

I indicate that the time of our death is fixed and arranged by God, not by daughters. Moreover, I suggest that although each of us does have to accept responsibility for the manner in which we treat others, nonetheless, I do not share Sima's opinion that Sima or our relationship is the cause of her mother's illness ... in fact, if one wishes to go in that direction, then, perhaps, there are other players in this affair who bear as much, if not more, responsibility than Sima and myself for what is transpiring ... her father, for instance.

Irrespective of what I say, Sima remains resolute in her beliefs and feelings of guilt. Consequently, I speak about the ideal of seeking an annulment with respect to the marriage.

In a recent conversation about this issue, Baba has told me that if the marriage between Sima and I were annulled, then, this would leave us both with the option of marrying again in the future if circumstances changed and we wished to marry again ... this could be done without having to be bound by the prohibitions which surround marrying the same person after one divorces them. However, there remains the problem of how to go about this and whether, or not, we could find someone within the Muslim community who would be willing to officiate such an arrangement.

Sima says she will reflect on what I have said. We agree to speak again about these issues in the near future.

§

Thu, 11 Jan 2001 22:19:43-0500 (e-mail)

Assalamo alaikum,

Dear Tariq

ALHAMDOLILLAH we have an addition to our silsila family. Sadia, Uzma's sister, took Bai't this evening.

Momin

§

Despite promising my brother, Bruce, that he would continue to employ both myself and Bruce's son after he brought the business from my brother, barely a week passes in January when I am called into the new owner's office and told that he is going to have to let me go. Through a complex set of circumstances, Bruce's son had left the company several months previously.

§

I have e-mailed Sima about being dismissed from the position. In the e-mail I indicate that, perhaps, I will be moving somewhere else to look for work.

§

25 Jan 2001 14:47:50 EST (e-mail)

Dear Tariq

Assalaamo Alaikum,

I pray you are well. What are you planning to do about the loss of a job?

Please know that your family spoke with me and they informed me that the person who bought your brother's business called and told them. They were very upset at him.

They are very concerned about you. Believe me, Tariq, they love you very much even though you might not always feel it.

Please do listen to me, if you believe me a friend and well wisher, do not consider moving to another state, you need family around you and, maybe, that is why Baba's shaykh sent you there. In good and bad times they are there for you, and you also should be there for them.

How can you live out in the middle of nowhere with no family and friends, Allah cannot wish that for anyone.

Also, do ask Baba's advice. Who could love you more and give you better guidance than him? Surely he has some suggestions, if you ask him regarding your place.

My mother has been very ill lately to the extent that we have been alarmed at her condition. The doctors are advising to keep her in a very calm environment and worry free.

The family got together to have a word with me, they advised that I must settle the situation one way or the other about us, since this is a great concern that is causing her illness. To tell you the truth, Tariq, even if you had a very good job and could look after the kids and me, I

do not feel I could leave here and come, I am just not able to do that and live with it.

If anything happened to her on my account, I won't be able to live with it. As for calling you here I do not think, to begin with, that you would ever be happy, even if we had a bigger home which I do not have.

So much has happened to cause unrest here in you. I feel deeply for you, all the injustice that has been done, might Allah give you many fold blessings in its place. I pray Allah gives you some other wonderful woman for a wife, who will take away all the pain my presence has caused in your life. Allahuma Ameen.

You need some peace from all of us and from the burden of our responsibility, I finally see the light in what you have been suggesting to me for a long time. I have not brought you any good luck in all these years. Any Hindu husband would have divorced me long ago as a bad luck charm. I salute your Sufi patience. Perhaps, it was my privilege for a while to serve as some kind of wife, of a Great Wali Allah, and perhaps I was just meant to be a stepping stone to some greater success Inshallah.

I admit to you all my mistakes, in not having enough perception to know what I will, or will not, be able to do. I have a lot to blame and can only ask you to forgive me, please find it in your heart to forgive me, among other things, for my lack of courage or lack of whatever was needed on my part for you.

At the risk of annoying Baba Sarkar, I have told him all this, although he has repeatedly said that he does not wish to be at all involved and does not like separation or divorce, or to give any suggestions. I told him this is the way things are at and to pray for both of us.

Maybe you can write me a line simply saying that you wish to divorce me and that you have paid me my Mehr, and I do not ask for anything else from you. Or I can ask for Khula, I don't know which. I do not know how we can implement an annulment, if that is suitable for us as we discussed.

We cannot keep living separate lives for now, according to Shari'ah as you said. So do tell me how you wish to go about it. I will

try to make it easy as possible. As you know the kids and I always keep you in our heart and prayers and always will be there for you. Inshallah, I pray you great success in your current project and will always, as I promised, be a help in any way that you may need.

Love
Sima

§

Tue, 30 Jan 2001 00:41:10-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Sima,

Wa 'alaykum as-Salaam!

You should not speak of yourself as having been bad luck for me. There is no such thing as bad luck -- only Divine Will, and we do not know what the ultimate significance is of the difficult and painful things which happen in our lives.

You have tried very hard, sincerely, and as best you could to try to find a way for us. I have tried as well.

For whatever reason, the results have not been forthcoming. However, irrespective of the nature of the whys and wherefores of this slice of life, there really is no need for recriminations on your part.

Undoubtedly, mistakes were made by both of the principals involved in this affair. At the same time, making mistakes is part of what it is to be human -- and as someone once said -- the only thing more painful than making mistakes is not learning from them.

In truth, Sima, you were caught up in my spiritual contraction. The issue is not who made what mistake or whether you were an unlucky wife, but what was going on spiritually during the time of trying to work things out.

I am now going through, and have been going through for years now -- and Baba has confirmed this -- a state or station of spiritual contraction. This is not a bad thing, but it can be very hard on those who are associated with the individual who is going through this.

There was a Sufi who was going through his own unique brand of contraction at a certain point in his life. The individual had a reputation of being a great Sufi and, consequently, people would come to him, from time to time, seeking help with their problems.

A local village was going through a period of drought and its inhabitants were in a desperate situation. So, they came to the Sufi asking for his help on their behalf.

Upon hearing about their plight, he went silent for a moment and, then, took off a scarf he had been wearing and told them that this scarf had just been washed, but it still was a little damp. He instructed the villagers to take the scarf, find a suitable rock and lay the scarf there so that it could dry properly in the hot sun.

The villagers did as instructed. As soon as they had put the scarf out to dry, clouds gathered, and rain began to fall very heavily.

And, it continued to rain for days. In fact, there was so much rain that the local farmers were now faced with an opposite problem from previously.

Earlier, their crops were dying because of lack of water. Now, the plants were dying because of too much water.

Consequently, once again the villagers went to the Sufi and related their situation and sought his assistance. Upon hearing of their new problem, the Sufi took off another scarf from around his neck and told the villages that it was dirty and needed to be washed -- so, they should take the scarf out into the rain and wash it with the water which was pouring down.

Just as the villagers were beginning to do as they had been told by the Sufi, the rain stopped and the sun came out. The villagers brought the scarf back to the Sufi saying what had happened and that they could not fulfill his directive.

The Sufi took the scarf back and smiled. The villagers were puzzled and, therefore, asked about what had been happening -- after all, he had asked them to dry something, and it began to rain, and, now, he had asked them to wash something, and the rain had stopped.

The Sufi said that, at the moment, his relationship with God was such that no matter what the Sufi wanted to be done, Allah did the

opposite. So, when you needed rain, I asked for something to be dried, and when you needed sunshine, I asked for something to be washed.

Now, my spiritual station is not that of the aforementioned great Sufi. However, I am going through a time of contraction which marks my current relationship with God, and this has consequences for those who are around me.

Insha' Allah, this condition will not continue forever, but the condition will only end when Allah wishes this to be so. It could be tomorrow, next week, next month, or years from now, and there is nothing anyone can do about it.

Depending on how you choose to look at it, you were either in the wrong place, at the wrong time, or you were in the right place at the right time. Whatever difficulties you had to endure as a result of my condition, insha' Allah, there will be a corresponding -- if not manifold -- barakah for you and your family.

As far as the marriage is concerned, my principle concern is for your mother. As I indicated to you quite some time ago, and as you have related to me in your e-mail, a significant part of your mother's ill-health is related to our unresolved situation.

Circumstances are such at the present time that there seems to be no way through for us as a properly married couple -- either here in Bamford or in Milton. And, as long as this situation continues, your mother is going to be affected by it.

Now, naturally, your mother is not going to be happy with any decision to dissolve the marriage. Although I am sure she wishes the whole thing could have come about in a much more acceptable and conventional manner, I do not feel she was ever against the marriage and would like to have seen you happy, married, and for there to be someone around to help you bring up your children.

However, if your mother is told in the right way, I believe she will appreciate the situation. As a previously married woman, you had the right, under Muslim law to get married again without seeking parental approval.

You got married a second time confident that, in time, the whole situation could be worked out with your mother, father, and the rest of the family. It was not your intention to hurt anyone, but circumstances

-- in the form of my spiritual contraction -- conspired against your plan.

One can point fingers here and there and say if only such and such people did this or did that, or didn't do this, or didn't do that, then everything would have been okay. However, people were made to act as they did because of the spiritual station I was going through, and not because they were acting as totally free agents in this matter.

People in this matter might have felt they were making decisions on their own. However, their decisions and judgments were being influenced by something which was going on spiritually of which they were entirely unaware.

No one is to blame. There is nothing to forgive.

Under Muslim law, marriage is a contractual arrangement. As with all contracts, there are conditions which must be observed and fulfilled by all parties involved in order for the contract to be considered a proper, valid, and enforceable arrangement.

Now, again, under Muslim law, divorce is one of the possible, permissible steps which can be pursued when the conditions of the contract are not fulfilled. However, as we both know, although permissible, the step of divorce is something which Allah finds least pleasing of all the permissible things.

At the same time, annulment is also a permissible way of dealing with a situation such as ours since, in truth, neither one of us could, or has been able to, satisfy the conditions of the original contract. In short, the marriage probably never should have taken place in the first place -- not because either of us were bad people, or working outside the scope of Muslim law, or because our intention was incorrect -- but because of our respective set of circumstances.

Our circumstances were such that we were each, for the most part, unable to meet the conditions of the contract. Neither of us understood this at that time, and we each continued on in the belief, and hope, that, God willing, things would work out -- but this was not meant to be.

In the light of knowledge which has, since, emerged, we understand that neither one of us is able to satisfy the conditions of the marriage contract which we originally undertook. There is no animosity between us, nor in our hearts are there any wishes for the

marriage to end – but, rather, circumstances prevent us from satisfying the conditions of the marriage contract.

You know the source for my authority for saying this, but I will not mention that source by name. Unfortunately, there are others who have been consulted on this matter whose understanding of Muslim law is somewhat limited in this respect.

We are not going to find anyone who will be willing to draw up the papers of annulment. So, what I propose is this.

God, not man, is the one who is going to judge our intentions. Papers are drawn up for the sake of society so that people will have a clear written account of what is happening and, as such, this helps to keep society in order.

We are the ones who are declaring before God that we are unable to fulfill the conditions of the marriage contract at this time and over the last several years -- although we each, in our own way, have tried to do so in a sincere fashion. We are the ones who are declaring before God that we have no wish for the marriage to be dissolved but that we are unable to satisfy its requirements at this time. We are the ones who are acknowledging before Allah, that if we knew at the time of the marriage what we know now, then the marriage would likely not have gone forth.

On the foregoing basis, I believe the marriage should be annulled. We are the witnesses to this, as is God. We are the ones who will observe the requirements of annulment -- which is to say that from this time forward, if you are agreeable, we will no longer be husband and wife, and God will be our judge if we do not abide by this decision.

As to the Mehr (dowry), I believe I still owe you something on it. Altogether, I owe you around \$1,000. About half of this is for the office furniture, and nearly half is still left over from Y2K expenses, but several hundred dollars of the Mehr remains to be paid ... which I will do as soon as feasible.

Let me know what you think of the foregoing. I would let your mother read the whole letter -- and, insha' Allah, she will know that this is the best thing which can be done under the circumstances ... and she should know that no one is to blame for the fact that things have not worked out. We simply were all caught up in Allah's Divine

Plan which required us each to go in a different direction than what we originally had hoped to do.

Love,

Tariq

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Tue, 30 Jan 2001 16:38:35 EST (e-mail)

Dear Tariq

Assalaamo Alaikum,

Thank You for the kindness and understanding with which you are dealing with this issue. You know that the children and I are always there as your friends and well wishers. I pray Allah gives you many fold blessings, and takes you very quickly out of this state of constriction into a happy state. ALLAHUMAAMEEN.

I do not wish you to return me any money, whether it be for Y2K purchases, the Mehr, the office or anything else. I wish you to forget about repaying me for anything. Do me a favor by taking care of yourself well. I think you must have a phone in your home rather than the office, in case of any emergency, Allah forbid.

I also do agree that, hereby, and as of today, by mutual consent, before Allah we do annul our marriage contract.

Love Sima

§

Tue, 30 Jan 2001 08:07:21-0500 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Attached is a brief history of recent events as told by those involved (namely, Sima and myself). If there is something which has been done which is incorrect or not in accordance with Muslim law, please let me know. (P.S. This is not why I phoned the other day).

Quite frankly, Baba, I do not know what else to do. I have tried to keep you out of it as much as possible -- with slight lapses here and there.

Moreover, I am not asking for you to become involved in things at this juncture except to inform me if there is something in the present decision and arrangement which is being done in violation of Muslim law and/or Sufi adab. You have done your best to help Sima and myself out and put us together. I am sorry to disappoint your efforts.

Love,
Tariq

§

Wed, 31 Jan 2001 07:23:05 EST (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,
Assalaamo Alaikum,

Although in a Sufi way and before Allah what we have done by way of annulment should be enough, however neither my mother nor anyone else is going to understand that very Sufi letter you have written, which I appreciate very much.

Since we have a Nikah certificate from a person who performs Nikah and because our marriage was consummated, a mere exchange of personal words between us might not be enough. I have confirmed this from reliable sources that a document is needed since we have a Nikah document. Only if the marriage was not done on paper and if it had not been consummated, then the exchange of words would have been sufficient. So for the sake of Muslim law we must have a copy of Annulment with our signatures. I will ask Imaam Munnawar to do this as I do not wish to go to Shaykh Shams and have a conversation over all this, it is not easy, to do all this, but I will have to show some such thing to my parents.

Love
Sima

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I forward a copy of Sima's e-mail to Baba. A few days later he replies.

Sat, 03 Feb 2001 07:17:35-1000 (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

I myself would not have wanted Shams to be approached regarding this matter. Imam Munnawar seems to be a humble and good person.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

Wed, 7 Feb 2001 13:02:33 EST (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

Assalaamo Alaikum,

Hope you are well, do write and tell how you are doing. I tried to speak with Imam Munnawar about a written agreement, but he did not have anything suitable, so I had no choice but to call Shaykh Shams and he seemed to be able to come up with some words that seem appropriate. You have to, over the speaker phone, say that you agree to this, so it can be signed. I will prepare and mail it to you, then you can sign and send it back. Sometime when you are available over the phone we can implement the part where you have to be heard agreeing to this. Here is the format.

Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem

Date

This is to certify that I, Tariq Knecht

Resident of 631 Garbo Street, Unit 610, Bamford, Vermont

And

Sima Ikram,

Resident of 126 West Spruce Grove Circle, Milton, Rhode Island, have mutually and amicably agreed to divorce in accordance with the laws of Muslim law and the Qur'an. That there are no outstanding demands or financial obligations on each other and we hold each other harmless against claims.

SIGNATURES.

Tariq Knecht

Sima Iqram

SIGNATURES OF WITNESSES:

Signature of:

(Shaykh Shams)

§

Fri, 9 Feb 2001 00:29:02 EST (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

Assalaamo Alaikum,

Some days ago you wrote a very accurate analysis, of what you felt was happening at a spiritual level with you and the repercussions of that on our life. You also said that all of the reactions of people, whether it is their falling sick or reacting in any way was due to that as well. Before Allah you declared that from that day forward we are no longer husband and wife. To that I also responded that I do agree and bear witness to that we dissolve the marriage. Despite that, the following up with a document is necessary. Since ours was not a verbal agreement it was on a paper so also the annulment has to be on paper.

Yes the most major consideration is my mother's health, although family pressures are also there. Let's admit that in past so many years we have not been blessed with any kind of a married life. I pray some good fortune comes to you, perhaps if we change the nature of our relationship.

I am signing and sending the document to you. Please sign and send it back to me as soon as you can. Please know I wish you to be happy and have no ill feelings for you. I will always be your friend and well wisher.

Love
Sima

§

A few days later I receive in the mail several copies of a ‘Certificate of Divorce’ which I am to sign and send back. Accompanying the documents is a note without salutations, and it is unsigned: “I will appreciate very much if you will sign these three copies the day you receive them and mail back. I will mail you back your copy. Thank you”

I sign the documents and return them in accordance with the request which has been made. I do so with a heavy heart, for this means that unless a number of unlikely conditions are satisfied (namely, that Sima marry someone else, and, then, for whatever reason, becomes free from that marital arrangement, Sima and I will not be able to live as a married couple.

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After mailing the documents, I reflect on the last several years. Due to the trying circumstances surrounding our relationship, the positive memories are few -- although there are, very definitely, some that are worth holding on to and storing away to be brought out and dusted off during some, future wintery day.

These few good memories aside, there are two other memories which I cannot shake. First, there is the extremely strong intuition I had upon first meeting Sima’s father -- and, before I even knew of, or about, Sima -- when something almost shouted at me from within: “Boy, I sure wouldn’t want this guy for a father-in-law.”

Secondly, there is the memory of my discussion with Baba when I asked him whether, or not, I should propose to Sima. I remember how,

at one point during the discussion, he excused himself, and, then, forty-five, or so, minutes later, he returned and indicated to me that if Sima were ever able to unburdened herself from the influence which her extended family had over her, then, he felt there was a reasonable chance for the two of us to be happy, and, unfortunately, getting out from under the spell of her extended family was not something Sima was ever able to do.

