

Journal of a Sufi Odyssey:
A True Novel

Book II

by
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In memory of Layla and Majnun ...

As with love, the Sufi path has many twists and turns with which to struggle. Indeed, finding one's way in love is part of tasawwuf.

February 14, 2001

I have begun advertising again in the local paper to see if any interest can be generated for a weekly discussion group that explores the Sufi mystical tradition. This had been done, for a short while, about a year ago with limited success.

On the earlier occasion, there seemed to be a few people who were genuinely interested in exploring the Sufi spiritual tradition, but, unfortunately, there was an older individual from the next town over who attended some of the sessions and was very opinionated, argumentative, and, in general, just not a very nice person. As a result, a number of the sincerely interested got frustrated and never came back.

Years ago, when I had been conducting similar meetings in Canada, the same sort of thing would happen from time to time. Sometimes these people were from organizations claiming to be Sufi and, yet, were Sufi in name only, but this didn't stop them from wishing to share their ignorance with everyone. On other occasions, the people intent on doing mischief were from fundamentalist-inclined Muslim groups who had graced the participants with their (the fundamentalist's) presence in order to show us the error of our ways. Sometimes the source of the problem came from individuals rooted in other religious traditions who wanted to engage in theological debate.

In any event, once more into the breach I jump. Perhaps, this time the results will be somewhat different -- hopefully better -- than the last time.

§

February 23, 2001

A woman phoned today and inquired about the proposed meetings of a Sufi discussion group that had been mentioned in the newspaper. She says she just returned from a weekend retreat, and during the facet of the retreat that required the participants to each announce intentions or aspirations for the up-coming year, she told the other individuals attending the retreat that she had been reading

Rumi a lot and would like to find out more about the Sufi mystical tradition.

Apparently, the first thing she did when she got home was to pick up the local paper. In it, and much to her amazement -- since Bamford isn't exactly known as a center of Sufi activity -- she came across my ad for the Sufi discussion group, and she immediately gave me a call.

I tell her that, at the present time, there are only a couple of people who have expressed interest in being part of the discussion group. I also inform her that I plan to hold off with the sessions until a few more people indicate a willingness to join in on things. If she likes, I will take down her phone number and contact her when a few more people have decided to participate in the meetings, but there was no way to know if this would be in just a few days, few weeks, or few months time.

In the meantime, I tell her, there is a book on the Sufi tradition called: *Meditations Along the Sufi Way* that she could pick up at my office. The deal I give her is pretty much the same deal I give everyone -- namely, if she likes the book, then, she can pay \$20.00 for it, and if she doesn't like it, she can just return the book back to me.

The woman identifies herself as Lara von Kalb. She says she would like to put her name on the contact list.

She also tells me she would like to pick up a copy of the book. She asks if it would be okay if she dropped over in a few minutes -- that is, if this would be convenient.

I assent to her request and give her directions to my office. We end the conversation, and I return to working on the book that I am writing ... or trying to.

About 15 minutes later, there is a knock on the office door. I indicate for the person to come in, the door opens, and a woman, in her late 30s or early 40s enters the office. She identifies herself as Lara, the person who just called.

I begin to rummage around for a copy of the book about which I had told her. As I do this, we continue to talk about various topics.

Among other things, she tells me she works with the judicial system a great deal ... especially in conjunction with cases of abuse --

sexual, physical, and emotional. She says she has had the same job for nearly 20 years.

Finally, I locate a copy of *Meditations Along the Sufi Way*. I give her the book and reiterate the nature of the deal that I had outlined on the phone.

I inform her that the book is a good, non-technical introduction to the Sufi path. It is a very practical book focusing on issues of importance to everyday life.

As I am telling her about the book, she is paging through it. She thanks me, tells me that she hopes to hear from me soon that the meetings have started, and, then, she leaves.

§

March 17 2001

A few more people respond to the ads that I have been placing in the local paper concerning the proposed Sufi discussion sessions. I now feel there are enough individuals who have expressed an interest in attending the group meetings, and, so, I begin to contact people and inform them that the sessions will begin the following week. I provide a day, time, and place to each person on the list.

§

March 21, 2001

Just an hour, or so, before the first discussion meeting is scheduled to begin, Lara calls me and asks if it is all right to bring a few friends to the discussion group. I say okay, and the conversation ends with me telling her that I'll see her and her friends shortly.

Five or six people attend the first meeting, including Lara and a friend. The session goes uneventfully which, actually, is a good sign because it seems to indicate that there are no troublemakers present ... that is, people who have come for reasons other than seeking a

sincere discussion concerning the Sufi path – such as what had occurred when I gave a talk at a local library last year.

§

March 24, 2001

A few days after the meeting, Lara von Kalb phones and asks me if she can drop by in order to be able to speak with me. With the exception of an ESL student I am tutoring one day a week, along with the time I spend working on my new book, my calendar is pretty empty, so I invite Lara to come to the office in approximately thirty minutes.

She arrives on time, and we spend the first 10 or 15 minutes just exchanging bits and pieces of biographical information. She tells me she is married and has three grown children, all in their 20s. One daughter is married, but her other two children are still single.

Slowly, we begin to work our way toward other issues. She tells me the friend who came with her to the meeting the other day just sort of invited herself, and she hopes the extra person didn't create any problems.

I try to alleviate any concerns she might have in this respect. I tell her, within reason, the more people who attend the sessions, the better the discussion often becomes due to the differences in perspective that often are given expression during such gatherings.

She further explains that prior to the meeting she and her friend had been sitting in a local sandwich shop. Apparently, when her friend learned about the Sufi discussion group, her friend expressed concerned that Lara might be getting involved in a cult of some kind and asked if Lara would mind if she -- her friend's name is Jane - sort of tagged along just as a safety precaution.

Lara tells me she wasn't keen on Jane's suggestion. Lara wanted to attend the meeting alone, but, she really didn't know how to say no to Jane without hurting her feelings. Furthermore, Lara was touched that Jane would be worried about Lara's safety.

So, Lara ended up calling me and asking permission to bring Jane along. Again, she apologized, and, again, I reassured her there was absolutely no harm done.

I felt the recent discussion session had gone pretty well and said as much to Lara. I told her about some of the earlier sessions in both Bamford, as well as, Canada. I indicated that I was thankful the discussion of a few days ago had been uneventful and, hopefully, of value to the people who attended the meeting.

Lara said she liked the meeting. We spent a few minutes further exploring some of the issues that had arisen during the session.

There was a period of silence. Eventually, Lara told me she had been disappointed when she found out the Sufi discussion group was going to be conducted by a man rather than a woman.

When I asked her why, she said she wasn't sure. She just would have preferred for me to be a woman rather than a man.

She said that, in a way, her calling me, coming over to the office, picking up the book, signing up for the meetings, and attending the discussion group was a little out of character for her. She tends to be pretty much of a stay at home sort of individual.

Work and her family occupied most of her time. However, when she saw the ad about the Sufi discussion group in the paper, and this occurred so soon after her week-end retreat with some friends, she didn't want to miss the opportunity of finding out more about the Sufi spiritual tradition.

In some ways, she tells me, the synchronicity of her saying she would like to find out more about the Sufis and her seeing my newspaper ad, was a little bit of déjà vu with something that had happened a number of years earlier. Apparently, she had been going through a difficult time of some kind and was looking for something to give her peace and solace.

She had gone to a nearby bookstore and was looking around. Suddenly, the title of a book consisting of selections from Rumi's writing almost jumped out at her from the shelf.

She picked up the book, began to read, and was totally captivated. Lara says she didn't understand a lot of what she was reading, but,

somehow, the book gave her a very much needed sense of comfort and security.

She purchased the book, and it became almost a constant companion of hers. Lara says the book saw her through some very trying times.

Before leaving, Lara gives me \$20.00 for *Mediations Along the Sufi Way*. She says she wants to keep it.

I assure her there is no problem if she would like to return the book. I tell her I don't want her to feel like she is obligated to buy the book, and she won't be hurting my feelings if she doesn't care for the book.

Lara shakes her head and insists that I take the money. As she is preparing to leave, she says she really likes the book and is finding it very informative.

Just before opening the door, Lara glances down at the book, and as she does, she stops and stares at the book for some time. She looks up at me and, then, back at the book.

When she looks back at me, she seems a little confused or uncertain. She says that she sort of just actually noticed the name of the author and wondered if I was one and the same.

I nod yes. She seems a little embarrassed about being slow to make the connection, says good-bye and, then, leaves.

§

March 28, 2001

More people show up at the next meeting of the Sufi discussion group. Jane -- the individual whom Lara brought to the last meeting -- has invited a minister friend who is also a counselor of some kind. This new individual apparently has an interest in different mystical paths.

Once more, fate is tempted with whether, or not, any trouble-seeking interlopers have slipped into the meeting. Once again, good fortune prevails and a productive discussion takes place.

§

April 2, 2001

Lara phones and asks if she can come by to speak with me in about an hour. I agree to meet with her.

When Lara arrives, we start out by addressing a few questions that she has concerning the Sufi path. Some of these relate to the meeting of a few days ago, and some are questions that Lara carried around with while reading Rumi (may Allah be pleased with him).

She asks about how one becomes a Sufi. I provide her with a broad outline of the process of initiation.

Among the issues I cover are some that are directed toward Lara's husband. I ask Lara if he knows about her interest in the Sufi path, in general, as well as her attending the Sufi discussion meetings, in particular.

She says he does know about these things. Lara indicates her husband is happy for her on both counts because he knows she has been searching a long time for something of a spiritual nature -- something through which she might find peace, solace and guidance.

I tell Lara that, usually, if a person is married and interested in stepping onto the Sufi path in a formal manner, then, there should be an agreement between the spouses that initiation is something with which everyone will be comfortable. This is especially so if the other spouse is not interested in pursuing the Sufi way of life.

I further ask if her husband has indicated any sort of inclination to spirituality or mysticism. She says he has his own way of spirituality -- part of that is through the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous, and part of his spirituality comes from her husband's love of nature. He loves to go out into the wilderness and spend extended periods ... fishing, hunting, or just enjoying communing with nature.

She asks me what sort of changes in commitments, priorities, and so on, might a person expect who decided to step onto the Sufi path. I indicate that the answer to her question really depends on the individual in question, circumstances surrounding that person's life, and God's Grace, but, I felt that an individual is unlikely to face any

major changes during the first six months, or so. I, then, repeat something my first shaykh used to say: “The purpose of the Sufi path is to unite hearts, not separate them.”

§

April 7, 2001

About the same numbers of people attend the next meeting of the Sufi discussion group as had attended the previous gathering. However, there are a couple of new people, and some of the previous participants do not come.

Lara, Jane, and another friend of theirs -- Carol – are among the attendees. The minister friend of Jane’s also joins in once again.

The meeting covers a lot of material. People seem to enjoy what is going on.

At the end of the meeting, as people are getting to leave, several of the women seem to want to hug me -- apparently, it is a fairly standard thing in AA -- to which they all belong. Not wishing to encourage this, I merely extend my hand to shake theirs ... there is an awkwardness about all this.

§

April 8, 2001

I have been working quite diligently on my critique of Professor Forsythe’s book concerning his understanding of the Sufi path. I send Baba some of the chapters that have been written. Around supper time, I receive an e-mail from Baba:

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

Your works are all the best that Art can offer to the Human family, because you do it with the best of intention and with all your heart and

soul. In fact I may write a book on you, to let the world know where the spiritual thirsty can quench their thirst.

The material you sent me before is wonderful and I am sure the remaining will also be the same. INSHA ALLAH I will read it starting from the time I finish replying this email. I just sat at the computer and received your email. This is a fact, that all your works are remarkable, and needs the attention of people who are at a loss and do not know where to go. ALLAH in HIS MERCY and GRACE will bring such people to your doorstep soon, ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA

§

April 9, 2001

As has been Lara's tendency the last several weeks, a few days after the Sufi group discussion, Lara calls and asks to talk with me. We make arrangements to get together later in the day.

When we meet, Lara tells me she has been thinking seriously about taking initiation. I ask her if she has spoken with her husband about that possibility.

She says she has and that he supports her -- or, at least, he doesn't have any problems with her wanting to do so. I ask her whether he might want to accompany her at some point and talk with me about the Sufi path, initiation, and so on ... just so he would have a better sense about with whom and what his wife might be getting involved -- but Lara says her husband, whose name is Ron, doesn't seem to be bothered by what is going on.

Lara also informs me that Jane has an interest, as well, in becoming initiated. She says the two of them have talked about the idea on several occasions.

I suggest that, perhaps, we all ought to get together and discuss the matter. While I don't have a problem with initiating the two of them, I am concerned about whether they have an appropriate appreciation of the seriousness of the step they indicate they wish to

take, and I want to make sure they understand to what they are committing themselves before they take the plunge.

§

April 11, 2001

I go to the office in the evening. When I arrive, there is a small, decorative bag hanging from the door knob.

The bag contains some Easter candies and a card. The card is from Lara, and she notes she is using Easter as an excuse to provide me with some chocolate fixes to feed my addiction ... an addiction to which I confessed during an earlier conversation.

§

April 14, 2001

I arrange to meet with Lara and Jane following the regular, weekly, group discussion meeting. However, the two women are the only ones who show up for the discussion, and, so, we spend the 'free time' exploring the process of initiation.

Among the many things that I say, one of my remarks is clearly directed toward spelling out the relationship of the Sufi path to Islam. I tell them that although there can be no compulsion in Islam, they should both understand that, ultimately, becoming a Sufi entails, at some point, also becoming a Muslim.

The aforementioned juncture might not come right away. Eventually, however, if one sought to travel very far on the Sufi mystical path, one would have to accept Islam. I provide a brief overview of what accepting Islam involved by briefly describing the nature of the five basic pillars, together with a summary of the essential tenets of iman or faith.

I ask both Lara and Jane whether any of what had been described constituted a problem for either of them, and both say 'no'.

They ask about the initiation process itself, such as: how long does it take; should they wear special clothes or dress up for the occasion; should they bring anything in the way of food? I indicate the initiation takes only a few moments, that they do not have to dress up unless they wish to, and if they would like to bring some sweets of some kind to mark the occasion, then, they should cook whatever they bring, themselves, rather than purchase something ready-made at a store.

We agree to meet for the initiation observance in three days time. They say good-by and leave.

§

April 15, 2001

Lara calls. We chitchat about various issues for a few minutes.

She informs me that Carol told her that she -- Carol -- found me too rigid, and that is why she didn't come back to the meetings. Apparently, not offering Carol a hug as she was leaving the meeting last week didn't sit well with her.

§

April 17, 2001

Lara and Jane show up at the time agreed upon for their initiation. I ask them to do the wuzu, or ritual ablution, which I had described to them in our earlier session when we talked about the possibility of initiation, and when they return I provide them with a brief overview of what is going to transpire.

Prior to the initiation, they both declare shahadah -- that is, they make an attestation that there is no reality but God, and Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the Messenger of Allah. Previously, I had explained to them that this attestation concerning Muhammad (peace be upon him) is not meant to be exclusive toward other prophets, but, rather, that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the last in a long line of Prophets (numbering some 124,000), dating back to the first Prophet Adam (peace be upon him).

The initiation takes just a few moments. Essentially, they indicate they are entering the silsilah, or spiritual lineage, of our Order of tasawwuf, and they agree to seek spiritual counsel through the locus of manifestation known as Tariq Knecht who is a khalifah of Baba who, in turn, serves the silsilah.

Afterwards, I give each of the women a copy of the Qur'an that contains both English translation as well as corresponding Arabic script. One of the books is a hardcover and one is a soft-cover, but the books are in bags, and I let each of them choose a bag, so I am not sure who gets what.

§

April 18, 2001

In the morning I write Baba and tell him about the two new people who have entered the silsilah and, as well indicate that when the two women were asked if they would like a Sufi name, they both said yes. I cite the two names that have been given.

Later in the afternoon, I receive the following e-mail from Baba:

My son, Tariq!

ALHAMDU LILLA AH, this is really very good news, and I do congratulate you for this Blessing. May ALLAH in HIS MERCY and GRACE, bestow upon you more and more, ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN.

There is no need for any change in name, ordinarily, but yes, if someone himself or herself wants it very much and feels good with it, then I suppose it is alright. Yes, since some names have negative meaning, and then it is important to change the name as soon as possible. I am pleased with the names you have given the children.

Please do remember to educate them regarding the fact that there is no such thing as a Muslim community any more. Islam among human society left with the physical passing of the Holy Prophet, the Four Caliphs, the House members and family. After that Islam has remained with individuals only. It remains with the Sufis now. Unfortunately Arab culture and Iranian culture has been introduced as Islam throughout the world.

Love, forgiveness, sympathy and human respect are some of the most important points of the constitution of Islam, which is not practiced anywhere in the so-called Islamic countries. In fact just the opposites are being practiced.

To be a Muslim one does not have to be an Arab, Iranian or any other. Just like being a noble person one does not have to be of any particular people or tradition.

Through the light of experience it has been observed that even though there are certain imperfections in North America -- and that too due to politicians and some greedy people -- comparatively the Americans, Canadians and few European countries are closer to Islam than the rest of the world. The first few Presidents here were very noble and had the purest of intentions. Their efforts have not been wasted.

Even today, regardless of the attempt of some greedy people, the most important rules of the Constitution of America that were established by the great personalities are reasons for America to be the safest place in comparison to the rest of the world. Those noble points in the Constitution are in actuality Islamic Constitution.

Anyway my son, you know what I mean, and I can go on and on. I congratulate you again. These matters should be discussed with the children only at times when you feel correct and not as a must.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

April 19, 2001

Lara calls and would like to speak with me after work. We set a time.

When she arrives, some time is needed to develop a rhythm to our conversation. We begin to fill one another in our respective past histories ... but mostly superficial sorts of things.

However, Lara does tell me about how both she and her husband are members of Alcoholics Anonymous. She says her husband is much

more active than she is, giving talks, sponsoring newcomers, going to a number of meetings every week, and so on. Nonetheless, Lara is fairly active and, among other things, she does regular volunteer help with an AA hotline, trying to help individuals who call in with life problems revolving around alcohol.

Lara informs me that, based on her years of conversations with many people -- both in and outside of AA meetings -- 90% of the women who are in AA have experienced some form of sexual abuse in their past. For many women, the inducement to drink to excess often comes through: either a desire to stop or deadened the pain and sorrow that came into their lives through such abuse, or the drinking served as a kind of slow form of suicide in which such individuals no longer cared what happened to them.

Sooner or later, the liquid 'cure' to their emotional and life problems turned on them, and, then, they usually found that the alcoholic solution was as bad as, if not worse than, the problems that had led them to drink in the first place. If such people were lucky, then eventually, in one way or another, they came to a realization that they were not only hurting themselves, but they were doing damage to a great many other people, and they needed help to prevent alcohol from totally consuming and destroying their lives.

I tell Lara about my current job woes and a little of my past experiences concerning the working world. I indicate that I am earning a few dollars here and there -- mostly by doing odd jobs for my brother. Yet, somehow, I am not exactly sure how, I am managing to survive -- including paying for the rent on the office in which we sit, the office phone, my apartment, food, and my internet connection.

§

April 20, 2001

I am working in the office, trying to add new material to the book on which I am working ... a critique of an academic who is proclaimed by many to be a real scholar of the Sufi path but whose writing -- at least in conjunction with the book I am critiquing -- would seem to

suggest otherwise. The phone rings and Lara wants to know if it would be okay to drop by for just a minute, and I say okay.

Ten or fifteen minutes later, Lara knocks on the office door. She has brought me a macaroni-and-cheese casserole, some chocolate chip cookies, and a book of Rumi's poetry drawn from different sources.

She says she wanted to cheer me up in relation to my difficulties with finding regular, gainful employment. I am overwhelmed by her kindness and tell her how much I appreciate her concern and thoughtfulness.

§

April 21, 2001

The Sufi discussion group is continuing. However, for the most part, only Lara and Jane are attending the sessions.

Toward the end of the meeting, I indicate that if Lara and Jane are interested, we could begin holding weekly fatiha sessions. I briefly describe what fatiha involves -- from: Quranic recitation, to: the giving of thanks to God, remembering the spiritual luminaries of the silsilah, seeking blessings on our families and all of Creation, doing zikr, and listening to qawwali or sacred music. Both Jane and Lara like the idea, and we agree to start this coming Friday.

§

April 26, 2001

Lara calls around noon and says she is going to a local sandwich shop for lunch and wants to know if I would like to accompany her. She says she is on a feed the poor kick and thought of me, so, I humbly accept.

§

April 27, 2001

I am working on my book. It is coming along quite well, but writing it is a very time-consuming process, but since time is the one resource I have a lot of these days, I don't mind spending it on the writing project.

Lara calls after supper and wants to know if I would like some butterscotch toll house cookies. Not wishing to be impolite, I accept her offer.

An hour, or so, later, Lara drops by with cookies in hand. Although I don't like butterscotch chips as much as I like chocolate chips, I -- being the good Sufi that I am -- exercise an iron will and wolf down the cookies. Discipline is a wonderful thing.

As I am working my way through the plate of cookies, Lara and I begin to talk. I ask her how her family is, and she begins to weep, and, then, slowly, her words become more copious than the tears.

Lara tells me she has been seeing a counselor for 2-3 years. Apparently, the counseling began in a strange sort of way.

She had been looking for someone to hypnotize her and help her recreate the circumstances surrounding the night her mother dies. Lara was six at the time.

Lara seems to recall she had heard a noise of some sort late at night that woke her and her brother from a sound sleep. She believes she went to investigate and found her mother on the floor, and she also believes someone else was in the apartment ... that she saw a man standing over her mother -- but the lighting in the apartment is poor and, so, Lara is not quite sure what she saw.

Lara seems to recall someone telling her to go back to bed. The next thing she remembers is that it is morning time, and she and her brother are being whisked away by relatives ... vaguely aware that something has happened to her mother.

Later on, she and her brother are told that their mother is dead. Her brother -- who is just a few years older than Lara -- becomes hysterical.

Inexplicably, given that Lara's mother was a very young woman – in her mid-twenties -- there is no autopsy performed on the mother. The death certificate is signed citing a stroke as the cause of death.

Lara and her brother are taken in by an uncle who lives in the vicinity. Her father and her mother had divorced earlier, and the father lives in another state.

Oddly enough, although the father is somewhere in the vicinity when her mother dies, he doesn't attend the funeral. However, he does take Lara and her brother for a plane ride after the funeral ... flying over the house where the children and their mother had lived.

No one in the new family talks about the death of Lara's mother. There seems to be a veil of mystery and silence that has been drawn over the event -- one of the most significant and traumatic events of Lara's life.

For many years afterwards, Lara's mind and emotions return to that night of childhood. She wonders about whether she really heard something. She wonders if she actually saw someone standing over her mother. She wonders if someone told her to return to bed. She wonders why her father did not attend the funeral when he was in the area. She wonders why there seems to be such an aura of mystery that hangs over her mother's death.

At some point, Lara tells her story to someone she knows who used to be a state trooper. She talks about her interest in undergoing hypnotic regression to try to uncover the truth about that night long ago.

The once upon a time state trooper knows of a counselor who, on occasion, does hypnosis. The former law enforcement official offers to introduce her to the counselor. Lara accepts, and steps are set in motion to arrange a meeting.

Less than a week later, Lara is ushered into the office of the counselor by her friend. Lara outlines her reasons for wanting to undergo hypnosis.

The counselor, a woman, is reluctant to participate. She seems nervous.

Lara tells the counselor that if she won't do the hypnosis, Lara will find someone else who will. Lara is determined to go through with the

process in her attempt to resolve a mystery that, at this point, is nearly forty years old.

The counselor relents, perhaps feeling there is no telling what shady characters Lara might end up with if she, the counselor, turns her down now. Reluctantly, the counselor proceeds with the hypnotic induction.

They are not very far into things when Lara begins to become quite agitated while in a state of hypnosis. Apparently, there is something that Lara is being regressed through that is very powerfully and emotionally charged.

The counselor panics a little and begins to hastily bring Lara out of the trance. Seemingly, the counselor doesn't do something she should have, or she does something she shouldn't have, because Lara leaves the office in a dissociated, altered state of consciousness that goes on until Lara falls asleep later that evening.

When prompted by a question of mine, Lara says the feeling she had when she left the counselor's office was not painful. In fact, it was quite the opposite because if Lara had anything to say about it, she would want to be in that altered state on a permanent basis.

In any event, the failed hypnotic session was the beginning of a long counseling relationship with the would-be hypnotist. Yet, the mystery concerning her mother remains.

Lara asks me if I have ever hypnotized anyone. I indicate that, yes, a long time ago, there were several people whom I hypnotized ... but I don't do hypnosis anymore.

She asks why. I explain that my first shaykh or spiritual guide indicated to me that one should never permit oneself to be placed under hypnosis, nor should one induce a state of hypnosis in another human being. My teacher further indicated that hypnosis has the potential to adversely affect a certain dimension of one's spirituality, and, therefore, one should try to stay away from it.

Although I sense there is much more to be said by Lara, the time is late. She has to get up for work, but I don't - at least, not in the sense of having to go somewhere and be accountable to a task master other than myself.

§

April 28, 2001

Jane has an appointment of some kind, and, consequently, she is not able to attend the Sufi Study Circle discussion group. Lara does come, and we sort of pick up where we left off the night before.

Without my saying anything or asking any questions, Lara begins to tell me about some of her past. She first started drinking when she was around 11 or 12. She said it was love at first taste.

Lara quickly moves into some of the stories and escapades that were born from her alcoholic predilection. She talks about the times when she would stand outside the liquor store and get some of the men going in to purchase booze on her behalf. She refers to the hiding of bottles in the place where she is living as well as her attempts to hide her drunken state.

Apparently, the latter form of hiding didn't always go so well. She relates a story about how she was drunk and playing a school basketball game.

Just before half-time, she took a hook shot from mid-court and sank the heave. Her coach immediately removed her from the game, and Lara never played again -- that night, or in succeeding nights ... a female variation on the *'Basketball Diaries'* movie that starred Leonardo DiCaprio.

She talked about the numerous times -- as a teenager -- she would drink herself into oblivion and wake up not knowing how she had gotten to wherever she was and not knowing what she had done or with whom. She talked about showing up to a school prom drunk and, then, proceeding to a Go-Kart track and driving away the night in a drunken stupor.

Lara relates a number of harrowing stories that emanate from her years of drug and alcohol (mostly alcohol) abuse. One, in particular, stands out.

After leaving the home of her uncle – following the time when he chased and slugged her in the face, Lara went to live with a cousin and

her husband. On one occasion she had taken off, without permission, to go to a seaside resort area with a friend of hers.

While at the seaside resort area, Lara had a skate-boarding accident. She was hurt seriously enough that she was taken to a local hospital to have the severe gash in her leg fixed.

Because she was a minor, the hospital staff needed permission to treat Lara. However, Lara knew that her current guardians would be very upset if they knew what had happened and how it had transpired, so, she left the hospital with friend, and they began to hitchhike home.

They were picked up by a couple of men in a station wagon. Almost as soon as the two girls got in the car, the guy in the passenger seat throws a bag in the back seat containing just about every kind of recreational drug one could think of.

Although Lara was not shy about taking drugs, for some reason, she refused the offer. She had a bad feeling about the situation, and she sensed that she might need all of her faculties to defend against whatever might transpire in the near future ... but she couldn't put her finger on why she felt this way ... this sense of foreboding that 'something wicked this way comes'.

Lara wants to get out of the car, and is looking for an excuse. She sees a McDonald's restaurant coming up on their side of the road, and she tells the two men in front that the two girls have not eaten and are pretty hungry, so, would they just let the girls off at the restaurant.

The two men comply with the request. The girls get out and go into the eatery.

They only have sixty cents between them, but in those years, it was enough to get a small drink. They did this and shared the drink.

As they are drinking the soda and talking, Lara notices the car with the two men driving back and forth past the restaurant. However, eventually, the car and its occupants seem to disappear.

Lara begins to think that, perhaps, her worries are all in her head. She begins to feel that maybe they never had been in any real danger.

Afternoon has turned to early evening. It is dark out now.

The two decide to venture into the night and continue hitch hiking. They need to get home.

As soon as they start hitch hiking, the same car with the same two men comes out of nowhere and stops. Against her better instincts, Lara gets into the car with her friend.

Although the journey starts out in the direction of where they live, at a certain juncture, the car takes a left and heads in a direction at right angles to the destination of the two girls. Lara objects, but she is told in a forceful voice that the two guys have decided to go swimming and the two girls are going with them.

The guy in the passenger side of the car takes out a weapon and shows it to the girls. They are nunchucks – a traditional weapon of a particular form of Okinawan martial arts. The man adds: The only thing that will stop someone with such weapons is a bullet ... and, then, he re-emphasizes that the girls are going swimming with the two guys.

Lara's girlfriend seems to like the whole idea and says 'okay'. Lara can't believe what she is hearing her friend say – especially after their lives just have been threatened.

Has her friend lost her mind? More than swimming seems on the agenda as far as the two men are concerned.

Lara is on the passenger side of the car in the back seat. She is watching the speedometer, and the car is traveling about fifty miles an hour.

Lara is trying to calculate how badly she might get hurt if she were to jump from the vehicle. She also is desperately looking for alternative ways out of the situation ... she wishes that she had listened to her earlier sense of foreboding concerning the two men.

At some point, her girlfriend indicates that she needs to buy some cigarettes. The car pulls into a combination gas station and convenience store.

As her girlfriend gets out, Lara gets out with her. As they are walking toward the store, a man comes out of the store in order to pump gas for another car that has been waiting at one of the gas pumps.

When this occurs, the two men take off in their car. Afterwards, the two girls tell the whole story to the young guy who was pumping gas and his manager.

The store manager is about to close up shop and wants the two girls to go back out and continue hitch hiking. The two girls do this reluctantly and are still very much afraid.

They hide in the bushes so the store manager will feel that they have gotten a ride. When the manager finally leaves, the girls come back out of the bushes trying to figure out what to do.

A little while later, the young guy who had been pumping gas comes back in his Volkswagen and tells them to get in. He says that he has spoken with his mother, and she has offered to put the two girls up for the night.

Many years later, when Lara is working in the court system, the past revisits her. She is shown what might have become a reality on that night so long ago.

The driver of the car with the two men that were planning out the destinies of the two female hitch hikers they had picked up along the side of the road is appearing in court on charges of rape and murder. Eventually, the man is found guilty of having committed a number of rapes and murders over a period of time ... there, but for the Grace of God, Lara might have gone.

She talks about these things with a mixture of regret and amazement. She regrets that such events were ever a part of her life, and she is amazed that, somehow, she has survived through it all.

Lara indicates that a high school teacher she once knew took an interest in her, and, in an entirely selfless manner, helped get her started with some treatment programs for substance abuse. Not too long after she began treatment, when she was only 17, or so, she met her husband Ron who was a counselor of some kind with one of the treatment programs.

Ron was about ten years older than Lara. He had been sober for approximately eight years, or so, when they met.

On one occasion, Ron had almost killed his first wife when he was drunk. He was thrown in jail and was told that either he could sober up or he could go to prison, and he chose the former option.

Ron was married to a second woman. Lara informs me that he almost killed that woman as well ... he nearly strangled her to death -

except this time he didn't have the 'excuse' of being drunk when he did so.

Earlier in his life, when he was still drinking, Ron had been involved, in some way, with a case of gang rape involving a poor, unfortunate woman. Ron claims that he didn't do anything ... that he just happened to be present when some of his friends did what they did. Even if true, Ron's failure to do anything to stop what was going on makes him complicit in the act of rape.

Lara asks me if I know what one ends up with when an alcoholic horse thief gets sober. I indicate that I don't, and she answers: 'A sober horse thief'.

I understand the allusion to Ron. He might have found his way to sobriety, but the person who resides beneath the alcoholic veneer is a constant, and the inclinations of that person manifested themselves in his abusive treatment of his second wife ... not to mention the first wife ... and in other ways as well.

Although newcomers to treatment for alcoholism, like Lara, were supposed to be off-limits to people such as Ron -- even if he had been single, which he was not at the time he met Lara -- a relationship soon developed. In a short time, Lara became pregnant.

When they went to AA meetings, Ron had Lara sit apart from him. He didn't want anyone to know what was going on -- especially his wife who also was part of the AA community.

While she was pregnant, Ron left Lara some 16-17 times, and returned to his wife. Sooner, or later, he and his wife would become involved in an ugly scene of one kind or another, his wife would kick him out, and he would go and stay with Lara.

During these times, he would say how much he loved Lara. Yet, within days or a few weeks of his having arrived on Lara's doorstep, he would leave Lara again and return to his wife -- until the next time he got thrown out, and, then, the whole cycle would start again.

I asked Lara why she kept taking Ron back. She said that when they first met, Lara felt he was the most honest person she had ever met.

She remembers they went out for coffee not too long after they met, and Ron had told her his whole life history ... much of it very, very

unattractive. Moreover, when Ron got up at the AA meetings, his words just seemed to resonate with truth and honesty.

Lara had not encountered such brutal honesty before. She felt she could trust Ron.

In addition, Ron painted a picture of having had a very difficult childhood. His father was an alcoholic, and he said that his mother physically abused him -- often beating him with a coat hanger ... a set of life circumstances for which Lara had deep compassion. In addition, apparently, he could barely read, and he seemed to have an image in the AA community of a past 'bad boy' trying to turn his life around ... all of which tugged at Lara's heartstrings.

The entire, aforementioned life package lent Ron a strange aura of vulnerability. As a result, Lara not only had a deep empathy for him as a human being, she also fell in love with him. However, in the process, she became blind with respect to much of the rest of his behavior that often wasn't about truth telling or honesty.

People -- who are in deep emotional crisis and need -- will often enter into relationships that they wouldn't touch wearing a bio-hazard suit in less troubled times. Necessity might be the mother of invention, but it is also the drug that lures people into relationships that are often terribly destructive.

Yet, Lara also tells me about one of the times when Ron had come back to her after having had an argument, once again, with his wife. He was at Lara's door, pleading for her to let him in.

A very clear intuition went through her to not let Ron in ... sort of reminiscent of the time when she was hitch hiking and got in the car with the two men who were up to no good. Unfortunately, once again, Lara didn't heed the foreboding, and out of concern that Ron might not have any place to go, she let him in.

This time he stayed for several decades. And, Lara lived to regret her decision to accommodate his whims yet once again.

After a brief silence, Lara tells about a third pregnancy. Ron had more, or less, left her in the lurch with respect to the first pregnancy as he kept going back to his second wife. Moreover, Ron had been both violent and abusive toward her when she was pregnant with their second child, often keeping her in a state of fear and anxiety

concerning Ron's potential for explosiveness and violence at the drop of a hat.

When she became pregnant a third time, she wanted to know whether Ron was going to be supportive of her and the child. She wanted to know whether he wanted the baby. She asked him what she should do.

As with everything else that didn't fit into Ron's self-serving vision of life, Ron never answered Lara's questions. As he had done with children of an earlier marriage, he acted as if he had nothing to do with such matters -- in fact, it was Lara who made sure his previous wife received child support ... Lara paid for it herself, with only occasional, token assistance from Ron.

Ron never visited his children of an earlier marriage. He didn't even know the names of his grandchildren when they came.

Lara felt she could not endure with a third child that which Ron had put her through with the first two pregnancies. Consequently, first she had an abortion, and, then, she had a tubal ligation, vowing never to permit herself to be placed in a position of needing help from someone who wasn't interested in helping her raise a family -- except in ways that weren't all that helpful ... in fact, in ways that were quite destructive.

Lara actually had asked for her tubes to be tied prior to the third pregnancy. However, the doctor she asked felt that Lara was too young to make such a decision ... and believed that Lara might regret such a decision later on.

Lara has been weeping through much of her recounting certain parts of her life history. In fact, she exhausts the supply of tissues that I have in the office.

We have spent 3-4 hours engaged in conversation. Most of the talking comes from Lara, with an occasional question or comment thrown in by me.

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April 29, 2001

Jane phones me in the afternoon. She says she has been trying to refrain from bothering me at the office because she knows I am writing a book, and she doesn't wish to interfere.

I tell her that spiritual instruction takes priority over writing. She responds by asking if she might take a few minutes of my time over the phone. I assent, and we spend about 40 minutes discussing various issues -- mostly some dreams she has had in the past, as well as relatively recently, and we talk about some of her concerns concerning several of her children who are adults now.

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May 2001

Lara is beginning to come almost every day. Sometimes, during the day, the visits are relatively brief as she eats a sandwich during her lunch break, but the evening sessions average several hours, or more, at a time.

I tell her I am a little concerned she might be upsetting her husband by coming to the office so much. She says he has been encouraging her to come because he feels she is being helped by the time she is spending with me. He says he knows Lara has been looking for something of a spiritual nature for a long time, and he is happy she seems to have found something in which she is interested.

I ask again whether, or not, her husband might be interested in meeting me just so that has some idea with whom his wife is spending time. Lara indicates she has asked Ron if he wants to meet me, but he told her that he is not really interested in doing so at this time.

He reassures her that he has no problem with her coming to the office. Apparently, he is often quite busy with AA-related activities ... either attending meetings, giving talks, or serving as a sponsor to this or that individual.

Little by little, more details concerning Lara's past begin to surface. At seven years of age she was raped by her cousin who was

the son of the uncle who owned the house where Lara and her brother were living.

Beginning around the age of nine and continuing for several years, Lara's uncle sexually abused her on a regular basis. Lara loves her uncle, and her uncle seems to need love, and, so, she says nothing.

Somewhere within Lara there is a deep problem beginning to develop around this sexual abuse. She remembers going into the barn and beating her legs with a crowbar after many of these sexual encounters.

In some way, she feels responsible for what goes on. She reaches a point when even though she still loves her uncle and believes he loves her, she feels that what is going on is wrong, somehow, and she discontinues complying with her uncle's "requests".

Toward the end of the abuse, or not too long after it comes to an end, Lara begins to drink to get drunk. She seeks out the numbness of feeling and thought which booze can provide.

She is, for the most part, a solitary drinker. She jokes she is able to tell the amateur drinkers from the 'professionals' -- and she considers herself among the latter -- because amateurs always drank beer that takes up way too much space and prevents greater amounts of alcohol from having access to one's nervous system.

At some point, there is a blow-up between Lara and her uncle. Lara asks her uncle how he would like his wife to know what has been going on for the last several years.

Her uncle chases Lara through the house until he catches up with Lara. He proceeds to punch her in the face, bloodying her nose.

Lara goes to stay with other relatives. The drinking continues.

Her father lives down south somewhere. Occasionally, she goes to visit him. On one occasion, her father takes her for a long drive into the country.

He parks the car. It is night time.

Somehow, the conversation gets around to drinking. Her father says he has heard Lara is quite the drinker.

Lara recalls how the entire atmosphere in the car changes almost instantaneously when her father raises the issue of drinking. Her father makes it clear he wants some sexual favors from his daughter.

She refuses ... a number of times. At some point, when Lara has become extremely tired from fending off her father's horrific advances, she tells her father that if her father wants to have intercourse, he can do that, but Lara says she will kill herself if he does so.

This seems to put a damper on her father's activities. When her father finally stops insisting on what he wants from her, he asks Lara if she would mind if he masturbated.

Lara tells him to do whatever he wants, just not around her. So, he opens the door on his side of the car, gets out, and masturbates next to the car.

After the trip, Lara never sees her father again. To this day, her father is hurt that Lara never calls him or writes to him or visits with him, and he keeps complaining to her brother, asking why Lara is being so unfair toward him.

Many years later, Lara tells her brother about the sexual abuse of the uncle and asks him to keep quiet about it. Her brother proceeds to tell the rest of the family about what has happened ... perhaps out of a misguided desire to right a wrong that had been done -- but almost everyone in the family either doesn't believe Lara or blames her for what went on ... a typical response in families in which sexual abuse is transpiring, and these are some of the reasons why so many young girls and boys keep silent about the sexual abuse that is being perpetrated against them by family members -- namely, no one will believe them and/or they will be blamed for what has happened.

At various times during the month of May, the subject of her husband Ron comes up during our conversations. Lara relates a number of incidents involving Ron's abusive treatment of her.

On one occasion, he slams Lara up against a wall and begins choking her because she wouldn't behave the way he wants. On another occasion -- after forcing her to sit on a broken chair for more than an hour -- and, therefore, a chair on which she could not put her full weight and with respect to which she had to sit at a physically awkward angle -- Ron drags her across the room and throws her out of

the house in her bare feet, and when she begins to wander the streets of the city, with nowhere to go, he comes after her, drags her back to the house, and forces her to sit in the same broken chair for another hour ... this is all reminiscent of the stress positions that torturers put their victims in as the former seek to break the will of the latter.

Lara recalls another occasion when Ron found displeasure with something Lara had done while he was driving the car. Their daughter is in a car seat in the back, and, suddenly, takes his right fist and slams it down on Lara's leg ... the pain is so bad that Lara suspects her leg might be broken.

The physical abuse is not directed just toward Lara. When Lara's youngest – her boy – was about four or five, Ron spanked the child so hard that there was an imprint of Ron's hand on the boy's bottom.

Many years later, when the boy was an adolescent, there was an incident in which Ron was carrying on a one-sided argument with the boy. Most of the time, Ron was just screaming at the youth.

Lara and her daughter were present. However, both had learned a long time ago to not get in the way of Ron's run-away train assaults.

At some point, the boy didn't say anything but gave his father a look that fully expressed the contempt that the boy had for the way his father was carrying on. This was too much for Ron to bear, and he totally lost control of himself.

When this occurred, the boy took off running in fear. Ron pursued him into the boy's bedroom, caught him and threw him up against the wall. Ron's hand was around his son's throat, choking the boy, while Lara and her daughter looked on in horror.

The only look in the boy's eyes was sheer terror. Lara says that her son became so overwrought that his leg muscles gave out, and he slumped to the floor.

One only has to witness these physical abuses once or twice before one becomes super-vigilant with respect to doing anything or saying anything that might trigger such rage. Ron's family has been well-conditioned to tread softly whenever Ron is around.

If Ron doesn't get his way with something involving Lara, he coerces Lara into staying up all night. He yells at her, keeps the light

on, and pressures her relentlessly until she becomes exhausted and complies with whatever he wants or is demanding.

On many occasions, Ron forces Lara to take rides into the country, along back, deserted roads, holding her hostage as he riles away at her. Lara is never quite sure if she will ever survive these rides, or, like Jimmy Hoffa, just go missing some day.

Lara is often awakened during the night to find Ron having sex with her. On such occasions, she enters into a sort of fugue state of paralysis and is neither able to voice an objection to what is going on or be able to move her body.

There have been many times when she has asked him to not have intercourse with her when she is asleep and unresponsive. Yet, still he continues on with his 'amorous' activities.

Their bedroom lacks proper insulation. Ron intentionally built it that way.

During the winter, Ron insists on sleeping with the windows wide open. Lara freezes, and, yet, even after telling him that she is freezing, Ron insists on keeping the windows open -- and, as a result, every winter, Lara freezes at night until the arrival of spring or summer.

However, there is one advantage to the foregoing scenario. The cold requires Lara to wear long-johns and a sweater to bed and, therefore, it is not so easy for Ron to sexually attack her during the night when she is asleep.

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In addition to nearly killing his first wife during a drunken rage, Ron molested the 14-15 year old daughter of his second wife. Moreover, there were enough other incidents of violence and abuse that went on during the second marriage that his second wife called the police concerning his behavior on a number of occasions.

One acquaintance remembers a time when Ron and he were driving to some destination, or other. Ron's second wife had committed an 'offense' that had enraged Ron, and as he was driving

along talking about the situation to the acquaintance, Ron became more and more upset.

He took his anger out on the steering wheel. He bent it in half.

A number of years later, the acquaintance talked to Lara about the incident. Apparently, the topic was Ron's rage, and the steering wheel incident was the acquaintance's contribution to the discussion.

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As well as having a brother -- the one with whom Lara grew up in her uncle's house after their mother died -- Lara also had a sister whom Lara came to find out about only much later. After finally making contact with this unknown sister -- which is a whole story in itself -- her sister stays with Lara for a while in an apartment that is attached to Lara's house.

At some point, Ron makes advances toward the sister. This incident is kept secret until a Thanksgiving Day 'event' in which, apparently, words about the previous incident are exchanged and Lara's sister slaps Ron. In retaliation, Ron throws Lara's sister across the room.

Lara's sister immediately heads for the police station to lodge a complaint. When the police arrive with guns drawn, Ron is sitting at the supper table, feeding two young children, polite as could be to the officers, and wondering what all the fuss is about.

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Throughout their marriage, Ron constantly phones Lara wanting to know where she is and what she is doing. This becomes worse when they get cell phones.

In public, Ron is a real charmer. He is a respected 'old timer' of the AA community -- thanks, in large part, to the fact that Lara both keeps his domestic side hidden from the world, as well as constantly and visibly supports him within the AA community.

Lara lives in constant fear and terror. She never knows when Ron will fly into one of his ugly, terrible temper tantrums, and she lives in dread of such times.

His temper and demeanor are so ferocious during these tirades that even men -- especially those individuals Ron sponsored within the AA community -- cower before him and are terrified of him. Outsiders only have to live in fear occasionally with respect to such rages, but Lara has to live in such fear continuously.

In the early days of their relationship, with one child in tow and another on the way, and while Lara is both working and going to school full-time, as well as being a mother, Ron gambles away Lara's money on one-arm bandits. Then, he lies about what has happened, saying the money must have got lost, or something.

Yet, strangely, almost inexplicably, despite all the terrible things that Lara has revealed to me about her husband, Lara believes that underneath all of the problems, Ron really loves her. Just as strangely and inexplicably, Lara tells me that Ron professes an undying love for her -- he keeps telling her that no one will ever love her like he does.

§

Somewhere along the line, Lara and her brother discover they might have a sister. Although the whole situation is steeped in mystery, Lara and her brother are able to garner enough information to learn about how their mother (after Lara's father had been sent packing for this or that indiscretion) had had a relationship with someone -- perhaps a local doctor, or, perhaps, an employer, or, perhaps, someone else in the community -- and from this relationship a child is born who is given up for adoption.

Lara and her brother devote hundreds of hours, as well as spend thousands of dollars in phone bills, trying to track down one lead after another. Finally, after many years of effort, Lara and her brother succeed in locating their sister, and a meeting is arranged.

Lara is very excited about the prospect of meeting her sister. She wants to be able to fully focus on that get-together, and, consequently, she doesn't want to have to spend time trying to make sure, all the

time, that Ron is okay -- and, she knows, from long experience, that Ron's feelings always have to be attended to and nurtured.

Consequently, she tells Ron she wants to meet her new-found sister with just her brother. Ron goes into a funk about this and seems to lack any degree of insight, at all, into how important this forthcoming meeting is to Lara -- all he cares about is how he feels about things. For the very first time, Lara's 'normal waking consciousness' begins to admit -- however vaguely -- the possibility that her husband really doesn't love her.

This episode becomes linked with a number of events whose cumulative effect leads to a mental and/or spiritual breakdown. Some of the precipitating causes were as follows.

In addition to the many problems Lara has concerning her husband, a close friend -- one of Lara's few friends -- betrays Lara on a project on which she and her friend had been working quite hard. Then, after investing much energy and effort in finding her sister, things transpire that lead to Lara withdrawing from her sister because Lara feels she cannot trust her. At another point, Lara is betrayed by her brother -- including the time when he tells the rest of the family about the uncle's spiritual abuse of Lara even after Lara specifically has asked him not to tell anyone.

Finally, her last refuge of security -- work -- betrays her by forcing her to make a long-distance drive during the infamous, January/1998 ice storm that hit large sections of the East Coast as well as parts of Canada. As a result, Lara begins to sense that her employers do not care the least about her safety and even though announcements have been made indicating that people should stay off the highway because conditions are extremely treacherous and dangerous, she is forced to make a long drive along ice-coated, deserted highways.

As a result of all the foregoing set of forces -- forming a perfect storm of vulnerability for her -- Lara feels totally exposed in the world, without any place of refuge, without any support, without any friends, without anyone who cares for her as an individual, without anyone whom she could trust. Consequently, from time to time, Lara begins to faint and experience severe anxiety attacks.

In addition, she starts to see all manner of pictures before her eyes -- not hallucinations, but images that were superimposed on the so-called real world. She develops a deep, inexplicable, intense, disturbing empathy for certain people whose lives are troubled, in one way or another ... these are often people she meets in her work or people she sees when she is required to go to court to serve as a witness, or something similar. She weeps a lot -- not exactly crying -- but the tears keep falling. She begins to think of suicide, and many of the images she sees are ghastly scenes of death.

Lara slides into a lethargic, depressed state. She has no energy for anything.

The mail piles up for months and is not opened. From time to time, when visiting, one of her kids would ask her if she wants to throw all the mail out that has been piling up, and only then would Lara have an inkling of how 'out of it' she has been.

Psychiatrists have no idea what is wrong with Lara. She doesn't fit neatly into any of the categories of DSM.

Nevertheless, whenever in doubt, psychiatrists and doctors prescribe drugs. Lara becomes a guinea pig for whatever biochemical fancies a given doctor might have.

Lara recalls how one of the drugs they had her on made it impossible for her to stop moving her feet. Another drug has her talking up a storm -- irrespective of whether anyone is present or not.

None of the drugs help. Perhaps, this process of prescribing drugs of dubious value has something to do with why medical doctors refer to what they do as the 'practice of medicine'. Many doctors do not seem to have a clue what they are doing, sometimes, and many of them appear to feel no sense of responsibility for what the drugs they prescribe do to their patients ... after all, it is all part of the 'practice' of medicine, and their patients are often the ones whom the doctors practice on.

Then, suddenly, inexplicably, Lara's condition begins to change. Undoubtedly, doctors will take credit for this, but, then, two-thirds of all psychological conditions result in spontaneous remission of symptoms, irrespective of whether, or not, a person receives treatment.

In any event, after months of being little more than a vegetable on a couch with an afghan pulled over her, Lara slowly begins to regain control of her emotional, mental, and physical life. Following roughly six months on sick leave that had accumulated over the years, Lara is ready to return to work.

Bit by bit, her life struggles its way toward some semblance of 'normalcy'. However, the circumstances of Lara's life are, to a large extent, anything but normal.

The only constant during this descent into, and back from, hell has been Lara's weekly visits to her counselor -- the one who tried to hypnotize her with respect to the circumstances of Lara's mother's death. The counselor is not perfect and rarely says much, but the woman has been a comfort to Lara ... an oasis, of sorts, in the brutal desert storms that keep drifting through Lara's life.

I am developing a deep respect and caring for Lara. She has been through so much, and, yet, she refuses to let the many sordid, traumatic, and problematic events of her life undermine her ethical integrity and decency as a human being.

Lara only attended church for a short while during her youth. She knows little about the Bible or religion, but I believe she is a very spiritual human being.

I let Lara know how I feel. She responds by saying that she wonders if she really deserves the Sufi path.

She has an odd combination of low self-esteem mixed with a nobility of being. She is painfully aware of the former, yet, she often seems totally unaware of the latter quality.

§

May 27, 2001

I e-mail Baba with respect to the book I am writing in relation to the alleged expert on the Sufi spiritual tradition. I have sent some of the new chapters that have been finished as an attachment.

Late in the evening, I hear back from Baba:

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Tariq my son,
Assalamo alaikum.

How are you? I am well ALHAMDU LILLAAH. You are definitely doing a very important piece of work on Professor Forsythe. People should know that this man has no knowledge of Arabic, nor does he have any connection with Tasawwuf. Forsythe is like a person who has never been to medical college, and has no connection with medicine, but has the audacity to write books on medicine.

May ALLAH grant you the fortune of success in serving the cause of Islam in the true sense, and may thousands come to your door step to quench their spiritual thirst, ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

May 28, 2001

Lara is aware of my financial difficulties. On the way back from lunch at a local restaurant, Lara says she is getting a \$100.00 a month raise at work and, she would like to know if I could use that money to defray some of the office expenses. After all, Lara indicates, she is benefitting from the use of the facilities, and she feels it would only be right to help pay for some of it.

I tell her I appreciate the offer, but, for now, I will try to struggle on as best I can. Perhaps, if somewhere down the line, I run into financial difficulties with respect to office expenses, then maybe at that time, I might ask for her assistance ... but I indicate that I hope this won't be necessary.

§

May 30, 2001

The day is warm and bright, with a gentle breeze blowing. Nevertheless, I trudge to the office hoping to continue work on my book.

Toward noon, Lara calls. She has some free time and wants to come over.

I counter with a suggestion involving the beautiful weather. Why don't we go for a drive in the country, and she accepts?

I do want to take advantage of the weather, but I do not wish to take advantage of Lara. Instead, I want her to feel there are men whom she can trust and who will not try to exploit her.

The drive goes well. Nothing but an enjoyable and peaceful time occurs.

§

June 3, 2001

Jane calls and asks to see me in the office. We arrange a time.

When she arrives, she again indicates the reason she hasn't been contacting me much is because she doesn't want to interfere with my writing. I, again, tell her that I appreciate her thoughtfulness, but, nonetheless, spiritual assistance has priority over writing, and she shouldn't keep herself at a distance just because of the book.

We spend most of the session talking about various spiritual experiences Jane has had over the years. I tell her that although such experiences have a role to play, part of the Sufi path's real essence is to work toward purifying the nafs, or the seat of our rebellious attitude toward different dimensions of the Truth. This is a very long journey with many ups and downs.

Our responsibility is, with God's help, to do what we can to place ourselves in a position of spiritual readiness. What, if anything, happens when we are ready in this sense is up to Divinity, and we shouldn't undertake the path with some gain -- such as mystical experiences -- in mind. In fact, I add, my first shaykh used to tell me that some of the greatest Sufi saints never had one mystical experience

... so, such experiences are not necessarily the primary gauge for determining spiritual progress.

We talk about a few other issues, mostly of a private, family nature. She leaves approximately an hour and a half after she arrives.

§

June 5, 2001

Lara drops by to take me to lunch. We talk about a lot of things during the hour.

Lara hints at something a number of times during the conversation. She says she is not ready to tell me, yet, what her secret is about.

I believe I know what the secret is. Lara likes me.

I have known this for a few weeks. I tell Lara that whenever she feels comfortable with telling me whatever she wishes to disclose, then, I will be happy to discuss the matter with her.

Although I know that Lara likes me a great deal, and she cannot hide it, there remains the question of what the origins of her feelings are. Is what Lara is feeling an expression of nisbath for her shaykh? Or, is it an expression of the sort of positive transference that takes place between a therapist and client? Or, is it something else?

§

June 7, 2001

Lara calls in the evening and asks permission to visit with me for a short time. I say okay.

Not long after arriving, Lara confesses. She says she loves me.

She is both very upset by her feelings, and, simultaneously, she is exhilarated. She is upset because for 20-plus years, she never even looked at another man other than her husband, and she is exhilarated because her feelings are more intense than anything she has experienced in her life.

I inform her I have been aware, to some degree, of her feelings toward me for a number of weeks. I try to reassure her and indicate she should not be embarrassed by such feelings, and, moreover, nothing, really, has happened -- other than hours of conversation, lots of weeping, and a long drive in the country.

I outline some of the possibilities with respect to the nature of her feelings for me. I also reiterate how much respect, admiration, and love I have for her as a person who is my mureed and who has had to endure so much and has accomplished it, by the Grace of God, with such integrity and nobility.

Although I do not mention the following to her, Lara's confession reminds me, to some extent, of a time when I was doing counseling at a university health center some years ago. A student whom I was seeing as a client said she was thinking about becoming a nun but she wanted to go out with me to see if her resolve for the spiritual life would remain intact.

The situation was a difficult one. I didn't want to hurt the student's feelings or her sense of self-esteem by just rejecting her. On the other hand, clearly, I couldn't date the student either, no matter what her reason might be, and even though, at the time, neither one of us was married.

Now, in the case of Lara, I was faced with a situation somewhat similar to the one that occurred many years ago. However, the present set of circumstances was even trickier ... not just because Lara is married, but, also, as well, because Lara is my spiritual student who, unlike a university student, intends to have an on-going relationship with me while seeking to journey along the Sufi path over the course of a lifetime.

I ask Lara's permission to write about our situation to my shaykh. I also ask Lara's permission to be able to relate to Baba some of the details about her past that might help provide him with a context for what is transpiring.

Lara has no objections. She leaves soon thereafter with a certain amount of relief that she has given voice to what she has been carrying around with her, in silence, for some time.

After she leaves, I phone Baba. I summarize what just transpired in relation to Lara. I also indicate to Baba something that I have not clearly said to Lara -- namely, that I have an intense feeling of love for her ... an intensity that I have never felt before.

Baba simply says 'why don't you propose to her?' I am nonplused over his question.

I respond by informing Baba that she is married. Baba replies with the words -- 'But he is an unbeliever and always has been'.

I follow up with, 'I thought you had said that in our Silsilah shaykhs are not permitted to marry their mureeds. Baba keeps the ball in play by indicating that, yes, usually speaking, shaykhs do not marry their mureeds, but, on the other hand, there are precedents within our silsilah which make such things possible. This involves a transfer of initiation to someone else in the silsilah prior to the marriage.

Baba tells me that if she were to accept the proposal, then, I could re-initiate her. At that time, I would relinquish my shaykh-mureed relationship with her, and, then, I would accept her into the silsilah on Baba's behalf, and Baba would become her shaykh. Then, a marriage could be performed.

I ask who would officiate at the ceremony. He indicates there is an acceptable form of marriage in Islam known as Nikah sirri -- without any writing and witness -- in which the offer, acceptance, and consideration that are essential to the marriage contract are stated before God by the participants themselves, without the need of any formal mediation by an imam or someone similar.

The phone conversation ends with Baba requesting that I keep him abreast of developments concerning Lara. I hang up the phone in a dazed condition.

June 8, 2001

Lara calls around noontime inquiring if I would like to accompany her to lunch. I accept.

We order our selections, wait, pick up our sandwiches when called, sit down at a table, begin to eat, and enter into a bit of light chatter about the events of the day. When we are about half way through the meal, I relate to Lara my conversation of the previous evening with Baba.

Lara is stunned, intrigued, and scared all at the same time. She doesn't know what to say except she will have to think about the offer.

I ask her about the circumstances surrounding her marriage to Ron. She says that for the first several years they just lived together.

After her daughter -- her first child -- came into this world, and while she was pregnant with her second child, Ron had pressed her to get married. She says they found someone -- a musician or entertainer of some kind -- who also was registered by the state to perform civil ceremonies.

I inquired about the form of the marriage -- the words that were used. Lara answers that she doesn't remember the precise wording but it was along the lines of 'do you, Ron, take this woman, Lara, to be your wife, and do you Lara, take this man, Ron, to be your husband, and, now, by the powers invested in me by the State of Vermont, I now pronounce you man and wife.

I ask her if the name of God was ever invoked in the marriage. She replies she is fairly certain the subject of God never came up during the ceremony.

We go on to talk of other things. However, clearly, the marriage idea hovers all about us, like mist on a field just after an early autumn sun has risen over blue skies.

After lunch, I return to the office and send off a brief e-mail to Baba bringing him up to speed on what has occurred. Following the early afternoon prayers, I write a much longer e-mail to Baba.

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

When Alice forwarded my message to Ken -- the one that I read to you on the phone -- she, unfortunately, divulged my e-mail address to Ken. Perhaps, she did not want to get caught in the middle, but I wished she had not done that.

Oh, well -- what is done is done. Furthermore, perhaps her disclosing the e-mail address does not make all that much difference since, God willing, my e-mail address probably will be changing soon -- not because of Ken but due to other reasons.

In any event, Ken felt compelled to write a lengthy rebuttal of my e-mail concerning him. As usual, his way of putting things is self-serving and tends to leave out a lot of relevant issues, but the bottom line is that he wonders why the people responsible for appointing people to overlook different spiritual tasks would have put a jerk like me in charge of anything.

I am not planning on writing back to him, or responding to any of his comments. My feeling, and I could be wrong, is that he has been given chance after chance after chance after chance, and he continues to hurt others, as well as himself, with little sincere interest in turning things around.

I hate to write anyone off -- and, in a sense, I haven't written Ken off, because, insha' Allah, I will continue to pray for him -- but unless someone shows a readiness to try to help himself or herself, I don't see that much can be done. People like Ken take a lot of resources, time, and energy away from those who might, God willing, better benefit from, and be prepared to try to work with, whatever help is directed their way.

The bottom line is that I am reluctant to be actively involved in Ken's life at the present time. However, if you wish me to continue on with maintaining contact, then, God willing, I will do the best that I can with respect to him.

The situation with respect to Lara is very complicated, problematic, and up-in-the-air. She is a good, kind, sensitive, intelligent, and caring person who does not take responsibilities or

relationships lightly, and she has, I believe, a sincere interest in Islam and the Sufi path.

By your love, kindness, and practicality, you have suggested something that could, insha' Allah, provide a way that might permit something constructive and healing to happen with respect to both her and me, but I am not sure what might come of your efforts in this regard. One of my biggest concerns is to make sure that irrespective of what, if anything, happens with respect to your suggestion, that nothing get in the way of the reason why she originally called me ... which was an interest in spirituality, for, I truly believe that her heart is in the right place when it comes to the path.

For more than two months, I have had extensive talks and discussions with Lara ... almost on a daily basis and often lasting for more than 3-4 hours at a time. It would take me too long to go into all the details, but suffice it to say that despite her own admission of having made mistakes along the way -- something with which I am all too familiar with respect to myself -- some terrible, terrible things have been done to her by others ... including her present husband.

Given what she has had to deal with in the past, and given what she has accomplished, and given how she is handling a very problematic marriage, and given the kind of person she has turned out to be, I have nothing but admiration and respect for her. She has struggled long and hard to get to where she is, and although she knows she has a long way to go, she is prepared to work at what needs to be worked at as best she can.

Although she points out many good qualities of her present husband, and she acknowledges that marrying him twenty-three years ago probably helped her a lot in various ways, nonetheless, not only have there been too many abusive, violent, and terrorizing events that have happened over the years, but she realizes that although he is caring toward her in a variety of ways, there are also many, many counter indications that indicate that he is very uncaring about her in a lot of other, very important ways. She has said the abuse and so on is not on a daily basis or even a monthly basis, but the abuse and violence have happened frequently enough over the years -- and in front of the children (who are young adults now) -- that she feels very

insecure and uncertain about what could erupt through him at any moment.

Long before I ever showed up on the scene, she and her husband were having problems, and she had been thinking about leaving him, and they had discussed the situation on a number of occasions. Despite all the problems, she has been faithful to her husband throughout their relationship, and she has been very loyal to him, but she is finding being with him becoming more and more difficult.

She does not want to hurt her husband and is very concerned about how he would react to her leaving. She is uncertain if he would become violent toward her, or if he would become self-destructive, or what would happen to the relationship between her husband and their two grown children – since he has always turned his back on children from previous marriages.

She does not love her husband and, probably, never did (although she might have used the vocabulary of love throughout their marriage), but, like a lot of us, settled for something that came along and seemed to make some sort of sense at the time. Nonetheless, she cares for her husband and considers him a good friend and would like to maintain a relationship of friendship no matter what happens -- but she is not sure that he would be interested in doing the same.

Because of her history, there are a number of issues that are coming together and making it very difficult for her to figure out what to do. Added to this mix is her tendency to let things unfold without doing anything pro-active ... and while this is not necessarily a bad tendency, it does make it harder for her to come to any resolution about the situation.

Part of her is extremely starved for a sincerely loving relationship -- one that might not involve sexual relationships, and for a variety of reasons, this might be something that is extremely important for her to have. She wants and needs companionship with someone who cares about her as a person and will be a friend, and with respect to whom the caring and the friendship are something quite independent of anything sexual in nature.

She was not looking to start a man-woman relationship when she first came here, and she is not necessarily interested in having one

now. On the other hand, she has developed very intense feelings for me over the course of the last five-to-six weeks, and this is creating a lot of confusion and conflict within her.

I knew this was happening and had told her early on -- but in an indirect way -- that whenever she felt comfortable talking about what was on her mind, I was prepared to listen, but I also told her that if she felt what was going on within her was not interfering with the path, then, she didn't have to discuss whatever it was that was of concern to her. I left the decision with her.

In the meantime, I did spend a great deal of time with her -- almost all of which was in the office -- although there were a few occasions in which we had lunch at a delicatessen just down the street from my office. The time we spent was pretty much half and half between talking about the Sufi path and/or Islam together with talking about her life and/or mine.

When Lara begins to express more than a passing interest in the Sufi path and wanted to do something beyond just attend the Thursday night discussion sessions that have been going on for three to four months, or so, I tell her that, before doing anything, she should discuss the whole situation with her husband. She had said in an earlier conversation that she had talked with him a little bit about the Sufi path was about and had received -- she thought -- sort of mixed messages from him ... on the surface he seemed to be saying that it was okay with him if she attended talks and spoke with me about the Sufi path, but underneath the 'okay' she felt she sensed a certain amount of reluctance, or anxiety, or lack of enthusiasm for the idea.

It was because of the foregoing that I told her a number of weeks afterwards -- when she was becoming very interested in the path -- to go back to her husband and, again, speak to him about things ... especially, the fact she wanted to be initiated. I wanted her to be sure about whether, or not, there would be any kind of problem.

She said she did speak with him again, and he had no objections to her pursuing her interest in the path. I questioned her on this point several times, and she indicated he really didn't have any problem with what she was doing, and that this time she felt he was being open about the whole issue.

She hasn't hid anything from him about visiting with me, and in fact, on a number of occasions when she hadn't seen me for a few days, he was the one to suggest to her ... why not go and visit with me. Recently, he was also the one to suggest the idea of having his wife and Jane go down with me to visit you ... which I would not do without your permission.

Furthermore, not too long ago he indicated to a mutual friend of his and Lara's that his wife's involvement with the Sufi path was something that she had been looking for, for a long time. I am sure that in some - perhaps many -- ways, her husband's support for what she is doing is genuine ... although there also could be an element of his knowing that the marriage is in trouble and this is his way of trying to provide Lara with some space in order to try to save the marriage ... which also is not necessarily a disingenuous thing to do.

On the other hand, I find it somewhat strange that despite the fact that another man is spending a great deal of time with his wife -- even though nothing untoward is going on during these sessions and I am sure that he trusts his wife completely in this regard -- nevertheless, he has expressed absolutely no interest in even meeting me. I would have thought that he might want to at least briefly assess the general situation and see whether or not his wife was being opened up to anything that might be injurious to her ... emotionally, psychologically, or otherwise. Or, I don't know, maybe he just thinks this is something his wife needs to do, and has no interest in becoming involved in even a casual way.

Just as Lara was not looking for a relationship with a man when she called in response to the notice that I was running in a local paper, I was not looking to get a relationship out of the people who called. My marriage to Sima has taken its toll on me, and there is a lot of pain there to which I am not eager to add.

For six or seven weeks there was no problem -- although I knew that I liked Lara. I didn't ask to like her, I just did, but, at the same time, I had to make sure that the liking didn't spill over in any inappropriate fashion ... which, by the Grace of God, has been the case.

With one or two minor exceptions early on that had to do with necessary business, I never called Lara at her home. Moreover, with

the exception of one instance that occurred at her request, I have not called Lara at her place of work.

I do not think I have mislead her or suggested anything indirectly to her by deed or word, but I have tried to be open, honest, straightforward, accommodating, caring, and loving toward her. I did tell her she was in my heart, and I had love for her -- but I also was quick to explain to her that I did not mean this in a man-woman way but in a spiritual way ... which was true, but, after a time, something else began to be present in my heart as well.

She, eventually, got around to begin to talk to me about what I had known for some time -- that she liked me -- and she said that this (i.e., the fact she liked me) was not only upsetting to her, but it had shocked her because she really had never been unfaithful to her husband despite their many problems -- and she really didn't have any desire to be unfaithful to him now. When she got done telling me about the situation, I told her I had known what she was telling me for quite some time and -- if she would remember -- I even had dropped a few hints about the fact that I knew what was causing her distress and discomfort and that I was ready to talk about it when she was.

I told her she shouldn't be ashamed of liking someone ... that the problem was not in the liking but in the possibility of acting inappropriately on the basis of such liking. I told her that I liked her as well but that: (a) she was a married woman, and (b) even if she were footloose and fancy free, there was nothing that could be done about it because in our silsilah a shaykh cannot marry his mureed and my shaykh – you -- had been very clear about that.

My hope had been that if she talked about it, then, it would be out in the open between the two of us, and we might deal with it more effectively. I tried to ease her mind and heart as much as possible and indicated that, after all, a mureed was supposed to fall in love with his or her shaykh and a shaykh should have love for the mureed, and we just had to be careful that the spiritual kind of love was not confused with other things.

She was vulnerable and lonely, and so was I. I couldn't do anything about that for either of us except to try to love her in a good way and do right by her, as best I could, with respect to the Sufi path, and this

still is my goal, but the task has become more difficult in a variety of ways.

She also had hoped that by talking about the situation that it might help, but she said that if anything, the feelings had intensified over the next little while following her 'confession'. She also said there were sexual desires associated with the feelings and she was fantasizing about such things.

I told her that she should, as best she could, stay away from drifting off into fantasies about us. I also said that I was thinking about running our situation past my shaykh to get his opinion on the matter and, perhaps, he might have some useful suggestions to offer as to how to deal with the situation, and I asked her permission to talk with you about the matter as it stood at the time.

In addition, I said I felt Baba probably already knew what was going on, but, nonetheless, such things had to be raised within the context of an actual discussion. I told her that even if there were no specific suggestions from you that, nonetheless, just having your prayers and focus directed toward us would be helpful and, God willing, assist us to both deal with the situation better.

For awhile, I put off contacting you about this. Partly this was due to working on the book, and, partly, this was because -- although it was not easy -- we both seemed to be dealing with the situation okay, and, therefore, our feelings for one another did not seem to be interfering with the more important matters of the spiritual path.

A week or two later, however, she told me she was having problems with the situation. She indicated that no sooner had she left being with me at the office that she wanted to come back and, if she could, she probably would stay all the time and had to force herself either to leave or to not come to the office.

She also said there was considerable tension building up in her about wanting to touch me, or have me touch her. I said this was a very slippery slope, and it is something best stayed away from ... having had some tangential experience along these lines with our lady friend from Africa, and I did not wish to revisit that scenario.

This was when I approached you on the phone and gave you an overview of the situation. I certainly wasn't expecting what you said,

but I was thankful because it represented a very constructive way of helping, God willing, to resolve the situation ... at least potentially.

The next day -- Friday -- Lara called and wanted to go for lunch. I said 'yes' and while we were eating our lunch I went over all the options -- from her being on her own without her husband or me, to working on reconciling with her husband (which, given her anger, resentment, hurt, and frustration concerning the situation might not have been impossible but it would require a great deal of work on her part with herself), to marrying me, to letting the present situation with her husband continue on in limbo.

There is a strong element within her that just wants to be on her own without having the responsibilities that go with being in a relationship with another man ... her husband, me, or anybody. She has indicated there is part of her that is very resistant about moving from one relationship directly into another, and given what has gone on in her life, I quite understand her position.

She was surprised I would include the reconciliation option with her husband and hadn't been thinking in those terms at all. She indicated that while that alternative was something to consider, she was disinclined to pursue it because her feelings on this ran very deep.

I told her that, sometimes, if other people won't change, then, the only option is for us to change ourselves. Furthermore, I remarked that although this way can be extremely difficult, nonetheless, God willing, there also could be tremendous spiritual growth that might accompany such efforts and struggles.

With respect to the 'marrying me' option, she said that if her husband were not a factor, she had no doubts what she would do with respect to marrying me. On the other hand, she also said a number of things that contradict the 'marrying' sort of option ... so it is very difficult to know how she really feels about things.

For example, she also said she did not trust herself for a variety of very complicated reasons having to do with past events in her life -- reasons that I have talked about with her and that I believe I understand ... at least to some degree. Part of her reasons for distrusting herself have to do with sexuality and the abuse that was forced upon her in the past; part of these reasons have to do with her –

again because of her past history -- questioning her motives concerning me and how sincere they are; part of these reasons of resistance to marriage have to do with her feeling she needs to love and be loved in a context removed from marriage; part of the reasons have to do with her feeling she is not worthy of happiness and kind of deserves what has happened, and is happening, to her; part of this is due to her worries about how her husband would deal with the situation; part of this is due to how pro-active choices on her part have, in the past, blown up in her face and, therefore, she does not want to risk this happening again; part of her reasons for distrusting herself is because the many ordeals she has gone through over the years -- including an extremely difficult recent period of three years in which she had all she could do just to stay alive -- and she is not sure she could handle one more situation of losing people she cares about -- including her husband and her children -- should any, or all, of the latter react badly to her leaving; part of her reason for distrusting herself with respect to the marriage idea is because she is worried about having to establish a relationship with a new shaykh despite my having said that, in truth, I would be extremely happy about that prospect since my shaykh is a 1000 times better than me (and I am very likely flattering myself by limiting it to 1000); part of her reasons for distrusting herself is due to her desire for things to just go on with me as a friend and shaykh and not anything else; and, part of her reason for distrusting herself in such matters is because she has lost a lot of self-confidence in herself over the last four or five years with respect to her capacity to deal with life issues in an effective manner.

I told her you had indicated to me that if she and I were to get married, you said no one should know about it. She asked why, and I said I hadn't asked ... although I had a few ideas on the matter -- but I would inquire further on this matter. I did say one possibility that might serve as something of a compromise concerning some of her worries and needs was for her to live in her own apartment or house but that we could still be married and conduct our relationship in a way that suited our respective needs without anyone else -- including my family or hers, or anyone else -- knowing.

She, obviously, is going to need time to think about everything. How much time, I don't know.

She has been hoping her husband -- who has indicated, as well, that, maybe, they should get divorced -- would take the first step. She feels a lot of her concerns might be taken care of if he were the one to act rather than her, and, yet, she has said that even if this were to happen, there would be no guarantee she would marry me ... for some of the reasons to which I have alluded to above.

I have suggested that whatever she decides to do she might want to consider transferring her spiritual oath of allegiance so that it is through you rather than me, for this would keep the marriage option open if that were something she might want to do some time in the future. In addition, she would have the best shaykh possible even if she decided she didn't want to marry me, and, moreover, I felt fairly certain her new shaykh would permit her to come to fatiha and the Wednesday night discussions here in Bamford.

I said, however, that if she did change shaykhs, her spiritual direction would have to come through you and not me... or in whatever way you decided. She seemed disturbed by all of this and said she felt like I was kicking her out or trying to get rid of her.

I tried to allay her concerns in this regard, but I am not sure I succeeded. On the other hand, she has a desire -- again due to historical events in her life -- to be away from circumstances that make her feel uncomfortable and not 'at home'. Feeling that she is in secure, familiar surroundings is very important to her, and, I guess, the prospect of having to try to establish a relationship with someone she didn't know was upsetting to her even though I was vouching for you.

With respect to the option of just having things go on as they are I told her this could be done, God willing, but we each would have to change in certain respects. More specifically, I told her we would each have to bury the man-woman part of things and doing this -- or trying to -- might prove problematic and, conceivably, get in the way of spiritual progress ... which is another reason why transferring her spiritual allegiance to you might be an important alternative for her to consider.

I said the bottom line was that the choice was entirely hers and I was merely trying to lay out what all the options were. She said, at one point, that, maybe, she should just stop coming and drop out of things, and I said this was not really a very constructive consideration given

the reason why she had come in the first place -- which was for the Sufi path, not me.

I told her if her decision was that she just wanted things to stay the way they were, then, I would do the very best I could, God willing, to ensure my feelings did not get in the way of her spiritual journey, and I only wanted her to be happy, at peace, feeling secure, and spiritually realized ... that was the bottom line, not marriage, for me.

She is very concerned about doing the right thing and doing God's will but how does one know what that is. I indicated I believed there were a number of indications that pointed in a certain direction.

I told her that although you had specified you were neither trying to encourage nor discourage the idea of marriage between Lara and myself, nonetheless, you had shown that if this was something we both -- Lara and I -- felt was the right to do, then, an acceptable, spiritual means had been given to us where, previously, I thought no such possibility existed. This I felt was one indication.

Another indication was the dream she had involving Dr. Irfan, my previous shaykh. When she initially told me the dream, she mentioned a ceremony of some sort taking place at the house in her dream and, apparently, she knew why she was there at the house where Dr. Irfan was situated.

However, what I did not find out until after I talked to you on the phone about this whole situation was that the ceremony in her dream was a wedding and she was there for that. When I asked her why she hadn't mentioned that to begin with, she said she didn't want to sound like she was suggesting something.

I don't know whether I was right or wrong, but I said I felt this was also an indication of what might be the right thing to do. At the same time, I indicated it is possible the dream did not mean we should get married -- only that it might be something that was okay to do under the appropriate circumstances ... whatever those might be.

On another occasion when we were talking about the general situation, she pointed to a section of one of my books that lists the different stages of love between a mureed and a shaykh (beginning with inclination and compatibility and working toward enslavement and bewilderment), and she asked me where she went wrong. She

wanted to know why our situation wasn't in the book and what mistake had been made.

I said I didn't think she necessarily had gone wrong anywhere. Maybe, God, in His Wisdom and Mercy had provided us both with something -- i.e., our feelings for one another -- which would not only permit her and I to be brought together in a way that had the potential of healing and blessings for each of us, but that would still allow her, God willing, to go through all of the stages of love with another shaykh ... who served the same silsilah, Prophet, and God as I tried to, and did so much better than I did ... what difference did it make, I added, which locus of manifestation was the one through which one achieved the purpose of life as long as the purpose of life is realized? In addition, I felt she and I might make a very good team to serve the silsilah, and, perhaps, this aspect as well was part of the Divine Providence that was being offered to us.

She was looking at the whole thing as an indication that, maybe, Satan, nafs and her past had entered the picture. I was looking at the situation as a possible manifestation of Divine Grace and Mercy that was being extended to us.

I have asked her to look at her feelings concerning me very closely. I said that, maybe, you -- Lara -- are just not used to having someone treat you in the way that I am treating you and that you like it and feel good about it and want it to continue and are happy with that but, ultimately, you are confusing these other things with love.

Or, maybe, although she does not trust many people -- and she has said that she trusts me -- having someone to trust might be a big relief for her and, as a result, she appreciates having that sort of relationship a great deal. Nonetheless, trusting someone is not necessarily the same thing as loving someone in a man-woman sort of way ... although, hopefully, the two are connected to one another in a health relationship.

Toward the end of several discussions on all of the foregoing, she said that through the suggestion that you -- Baba -- were introducing and the different options that were being laid out in front of her, she felt like the door to her cage had been thrown open but she was -- for all of the reasons cited earlier -- too afraid to leave. As I said previously, her situation, and our situation, is a very complicated one,

and I really don't know how, or if, it is going to resolve itself because I see many contradictory or counter-veiling tendencies that are running parallel to one another.

My basic, gut feeling -- at least at the present time -- is that because she is feeling pulled in a lot of different directions, she is very confused about what to do. Quite frankly, I am not really sure if what she feels for me is a sincere love or something else, and for both of our sakes -- as well as the sake of others -- she ought to be as sure as she can be before making any decision.

On the other hand, I also indicated to her she might never have 100 %, absolute clarity on this matter. There might always be doubts lingering about her consciousness concerning this or that aspect of the situation, and she might have to listen carefully to what her heart is really telling her without necessarily being certain of what is being said. In other words, she might have to have some degree of faith concerning the proper direction in which to go based on what she has seen and known to date concerning her life and me.

In the meantime, being together can be, on occasion, quite awkward because this situation sort of is hanging over our heads, hearts, and souls. I am trying, as best I can, to push on and just attend to what needs to be done spiritually -- but this is not always easy to do ... not so much with respect to being able to provide her with material, ideas, stories, anecdotes, Quranic passages, teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and so on, concerning Islam and the Sufi path – but, rather, the difficulty lies more the problems surrounding having to work through, deal with and suppress, where necessary, the range of feelings I have concerning the situation.

I have tried to deal with the foregoing issues appropriately, but I am not sure I have. I don't feel like much of a shaykh or much of a khalifah, and I wish the problems that are being, and have been, for some time, emanating out of my life would stop arriving at your doorstep on such a regular basis. I am sorry Baba!

Love, Tariq

§

Later in the day -- toward evening -- I receive a reply to my e-mail from Baba:

Tariq, my son,
Assalamo alaikum.

Let me tell you a story about a student and his teacher. This student was a very devoted pupil and loved his teacher very much. One day the teacher gave him an errand that would last a whole month. The errand was to go to a certain town and hand over a letter to the mayor of that town, and wait for an answer. Now the teacher told the student that the mayor would take time to answer. The mayor's habit was to ponder and meditate much before answering. That is why the student might have to remain in that particular town for a month at most.

Well, the student started his journey and finally arrived at that town. It was a very old town, and to his surprise there were some people who knew him as a child. He went straight to the mayor's office and handed him the letter. The mayor received him well and with grace. He asked the student where he will be staying while he waited for the reply. The student said that since he knew some families there, he might just stay with one of them, and so it was decided that he would come visit the mayor on a weekly basis.

Now as the days passed by, events started unfolding and as much as the student tried to keep away yet he kept getting intensely involved.

Much happened, and before the month was over, the student felt very ashamed and confused. He was very devoted to his teacher, and the teacher trusted him with a very important and personal work. With all that happened, what was the mayor going to think about him, and how is he going to present himself to the teacher on his return?

The time arrived and the mayor had finished his reply to the teacher's letter. A whole month had passed, but it seemed to the student that many years went by.

When he arrived at the teacher's doorstep, he had tears rolling down his cheeks. He gave the teacher the letter that was written by the mayor. The teacher asked him to wait while he read the letter. Each

minute that passed by while the teacher read the letter, it seemed many hours to the student. By now he was tired and his mind was weary. Suddenly it was like a dream to him when the teacher finished reading the letter, and looked at him smilingly with love.

"Do you know what this letter contains, my child?" asked the teacher. "No sir." answered the student. "Well, here read it yourself." said the teacher while handing the letter to the student. To the amazement of the student, there was nothing written. It was a blank piece of paper. The teacher said, "Son, you were my letter, and you are his answer."

This is an abrupt ending of the story, but only to those without a heart. To the people of the heart, this is the secret of the way. The traveler is the way and the destination. What unfolds are the many chapters of the Self.

So my son, please do not feel that you burden me with these happenings. In fact these very happenings are like parts of the body without which the body is incomplete. You are the traveler and you are the way. You are the destination. The one you love is actually the personification of the capacity of your love. When she talks to you it is your inner aspect expressing. The dialog is in fact within the self, the interpretation of which comes as you and her. Once you realize this, you will observe that your heart is telling you exactly what her heart is saying, and vice versa. It is the GRACE and BLESSINGS of ALLAH that HE allows this DIVINE Romance to be signed in wedlock.

No matter what she decides, you are involved in the DIVINE happening. It is up to her now, to remain just a ladder, an insignificant means to an end, or rise up to the occasion and become the personification of your achievement by becoming your bride. The moon is just a different name, reflecting the light of the sun.

Do keep me informed regarding her thoughts and her final decision.

I could not open the attachment you sent. I hope it is the same as this one.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

June 10, 2001

Early in the morning, I respond to Baba's e-mail:

Dear Baba,

Wa 'alaykum as-Salaam!

Thank you for your very kind and loving e-mail. I looked at my portion of the e-mail -- that which you were responding to -- and you did receive the entire e-mail, although, for some reason, when I looked at my 'sent' version, it had been cut off half-way through ... which is why I sent the second e-mail with the attachment that you couldn't open.

In any event, the following is not directly about the situation with Lara and myself, but it does concern Lara. In my e-mail and in my phone conversation with you, I alluded to a 2-3 year period in Lara's life a few years go (around 1998) in which she went through a very difficult time.

More specifically, among other things, when she was in the court room -- where her work oftentimes takes her as either an advocate or witness -- she used to see people, faces and images that no one else could see. Apparently, most, if not all of the things that she saw during these 'incidents' were of a horrible, ghastly nature.

She did not want to let on to anyone in court that these things were going on and so the problem was enhanced many times over with the stress she put herself under to make sure that nobody knew she was in difficulty. In addition, she had to perform her tasks as a witness that, in and of itself, is very demanding and stress-filled.

She reminds me of the Nobel laureate, John Nash, who later in life had developed the ability to cope with life despite the presence of hallucinations. I do not believe that Lara is suffering from schizophrenia like Professor Nash, but, nonetheless, she seems to have to navigate the same tricky course of dealing with several 'realities' at once while trying to focus on the one to which most of the people in her immediate environment are attuned.

She also began to have severe anxiety attacks with respect to the unpredictable nature of the onset of her visions, as well as with respect to their vivid, horrific nature. Moreover, when she would have these anxiety attacks, they were very debilitating and left her exhausted. In addition, when these attacks were going on, they often would interfere with her ability to function at work, at home, and in life in general.

She went to a variety of medical doctors, as well as a psychologist and a psychiatrist, and none of them could figure out what was wrong with her, but they began prescribing all kinds of medications that began to have side-effects that were as bad as, if not worse than, the problems with which she began with and for which she had come to them for assistance.

All of the foregoing went on for a two-to-three year period, and at the lowest point of her journey, she eventually had to take 5-6 months of leave from work to deal with the situation. For much of this period, she was falling apart before her own eyes, as well as before the eyes of her family and friends -- and there was nothing that anybody seemed to be able to do to help her.

Somehow, by the Grace of God, she hung on through all of this and came out the other side. For the most part, now, many of the foregoing problems seem to be behind her -- although she still worries about it coming back.

Recently, when she had the dream about Dr. Irfan and she told me about it a few days later, as she was telling me, she had an experience in which she could see Dr. Irfan behind me. This brought back all of what she had been going through previously and she began having an anxiety attack in my office.

None of this lasted very long. Yet, as one might well imagine, it was upsetting to her.

She is beginning to wonder if all of this -- both the recent incident involving Professor Irfan and the previous period of 2-3 years -- is an indication that she might be suffering from something like temporal lobe epilepsy. I told her that I am not a medical doctor but from what I know, I do not believe what she experienced recently or what she had

experienced previously was an indication there was something physically, medically or psychologically wrong with her.

Furthermore, I do not believe she is psychotic -- and I have been around psychotic people when I worked in a private mental hospital in Virginia. I also feel she is not manic-depressive since I also have been around such people – in fact, I had an uncle who had been diagnosed as manic-depressive, and I had interacted with him from time to time. To be sure, manic-depression comes in a variety of forms, and there are individual differences from case to case, but, nonetheless, I do not believe Lara suffers from manic-depression.

I also believe Lara is not clinically depressed. Again, although I am not a medical doctor, I do a little something about this as well through some of my past clinical experience, as well as through the time when I was an orderly in a Virginia medical facility several life times ago, and a number of the patients I interacted with not only had medical problems but suffered from clinical depression as well.

She certainly has her share of problems due to the terrible things that happened early in her life, but she is not suffering from any personality disorder ... although she does have some obsessive and compulsive tendencies. However, this is more a matter of a slight case of neurosis and not indicative of severe psychological or emotional disturbance.

I am not an expert, but I have worked in a variety of clinical settings -- from mental hospitals to counseling centers to youth havens -- and I did do my undergraduate work in this area. My gut feeling is that whatever the problem might be, it is not psychological – except, perhaps, with respect to her anxiety attacks, and these arise because she doesn't know what is going on and this leads to a debilitating emotional condition ... as a reaction to what is going on and not as an expression of psychotic disturbance.

The anxiety attacks are characterized by sweating, intense feelings of panic, paralysis, as well as a fugue-like state that comes over her in which she can't remember what went on during the attack or, alternatively, what she remembers is all jumbled up. In addition, she has what she describes as an electrical tension throughout her body that leads to spasms in her shoulder and neck area on her right side.

She also has described cases in which she seemed to experience not only tremendous empathy for people -- usually in the court room -- to the point where she would cry and be very emotionally caught up. She also feels like she is able to either sort of look into the souls of these people or have some deep psychic connection with such individuals. However, she could never figure out any pattern in relation to the sorts of people with whom this would happen.

She is taking a drug called Serzone that was intended for anxiety attacks but that has had the effect of dampening, if not eliminating, the electrical feelings in her body, along with the neck and shoulder spasms. The down-side of the drug is that it affects her mental clarity and interferes with her ability to organize her life because the drug also dampens the constructive sort of anxiety we all need in order to get different things in life done on time.

A have given her a naksh to help her with her smoking, as well as the anxiety attacks and the neck spasms. I have told her to check with her doctor about cutting down on the dosage of the Serzone, and, maybe, in time, the drug can either be eliminated altogether or can be taken at a lower dosage level so that it would help with the spasms but not interfere with her mental functioning.

Unfortunately, she started cutting down on the drug dosage too quickly without talking to her doctor about it. It is possible that her recent episode of seeing Dr. Irfan while talking to me about her dream, plus her anxiety attack that transpired during this episode, might have been triggered by the too rapid cut in dosage of the medicine she had been taking, or the lower dosage worked in conjunction with the vision to bring on the anxiety attack.

She wants to go on another round with doctors to try to find someone who will be able to put a medical diagnosis -- a name -- on what is happening because she would feel a great deal of relief to be able to say to herself or others that if and when such events take place that this is just such and such medical condition kicking in.

Lara has had a very difficult life. She has been under severe kinds of stress for a longtime.

The period just preceding the two to three year problematic period that I described above was filled with a significant number of

emotionally devastating events all happening in a row, and when one adds to these events what went on, earlier in her life, plus the fact I believe she has been engaged in a serious search for a meaning to not only her life, but life in general, amidst all that was happening to her, I think she had a spiritual breakdown that was complicated by a variety of emotional and physical reactions to that break-down.

I don't know what those earlier visions were all about. I don't know why they were of a horrific nature.

I do know that Lara is an extremely sensitive person, and many of the court cases with which she has been involved have to do with rapes, incest, murder and abuse that all have played roles in her own life. So, quite frankly, I am not at all surprised her visions were of such a nature or that they seemed to first show up in court.

I don't know why I feel the following -- and it might not be correct -- but, for some reason, I feel all of these visions started as part of some kind of invasion or attack -- satanic, jinn, magic, or something else -- and that someone or something was trying to force her to commit suicide or to destroy her life. Various kinds of emotional, psychological, and physical problems might have arisen as a result of these, primary, precipitating causes, but the latter were not emotional, psychological or physical in nature -- but might have been either occult in nature or occult-like.

I have tried to get her to separate off the vision part of things from all of the other problems that arose in conjunction with those visions. I also tried to tell her that her seeing Dr. Irfan was coming from an entirely different source than were the other visions ... but she feels, quite understandably, that most people don't see such things and she feels very uncomfortable about being the only one to see such things, and, thus, would feel much better if some sort of medical tag could be put on it so she wouldn't think she was crazy and so other people wouldn't think she was crazy.

I have told her she isn't crazy -- and, as indicated previously, I do not believe she is. However, I do believe something else of an unusual nature was, and is, going on, and, for whatever reason, she was being targeted. I also believe someone, by the Grace of God, intervened on her behalf and brought her out of that condition several years ago.

Any suggestions or comments that you care to make, or are in a position to make, concerning the foregoing, would be much appreciated.

Love,
Tariq

§

Tariq, my son,
Assalamo alaikum.

Yes, I understand what she has been going through, and there is only one suggestion that comes to heart which is the best and only solution regarding such matters. I remember someone I had met in Karachi who was having the same problems but in a different way. I told him that he is a Muslim but unfortunately he has not realized the NOOR of Islam within his heart, and therefore is not in a position to benefit from it. He somehow understood what I said and from that day onwards, he improved. Finally he succeeded and the malady vanished. When I asked him what he did, he said that he used his will power to auto suggest to himself that ISLAM is here and all else has to go. If Islam is actually here, then the proof is in all else disappearing.

Now Lara has a better advantage, because she has recently accepted Islam. If she practices telling herself to understand and believe the power of the NOOR of Islam, then gradually she will come to the truth resulting in all else vanishing. The more she believes in the truth of Islam, the quicker she will be able to free herself of all else. Unless the mureed believes that the Shaikh is there to protect, and unless the mureed believes totally that NISBATH is more powerful than all negative forces, success does not come. NISBATH takes the mureed eventually to the holy feet of RASOOL ALLAH. How can any negative force harm someone on whom is the GAZE of RASOOL ALLAH. Yes, these negative forces try their best, but cannot succeed with those who have NISBATH. Now she has to keep on repeating to herself this TRUTH: LA ILAAHA ILLALLAAH. Our interpretation of this is, "There is nothing else but ALLAH with all his attributes and qualities." When

Faith arrives at this truth, then all that seems as other vanishes and the TRUTH dawns.

This is what I suggest, and my son this is the only remedy. I find her to be very honest and brave. I also feel that once this is told to her, she will appreciate it to the extent of being BLESSED in SUCCESS in realizing the NOOR of LA ILAAHA ILLALLAAH.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

June 22, 2001

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-alaykum!

I have struggled with this whole Lara matter for nearly five months now, but I am not at all happy with the present status of things. By the Grace of God, I believe that, for the most part, Lara has received quality care on almost a daily basis -- and for many hours each of those days -- during the last four months, but, nonetheless, I feel I am failing in this situation on a number of levels.

Throughout the aforementioned period, I have tried to counsel her about the Sufi path as well as help her work through a variety of personal problems. I, probably, got too involved, and we, probably, spent too much time together ... although nothing inappropriate went on during that time. On the other hand, she kept asking to come and see me at the 'center', and I kept letting her ... and, maybe, this was just one of my many mistakes in this whole matter.

I don't know exactly when it happened, or even why it happened, but, as I told you in an earlier e-mail, we seemed to, almost simultaneously, develop a deep man-woman love -- or something -- for one another, and what this 'something' is I'm still not really clear about. It was surprising and embarrassing for both of us, since, among other reasons, it was very strong, and, as a result, this has created a lot of problems with which we both have been struggling ever since. In addition, these feelings have helped confuse Lara concerning the

reason why she came to see me in the first place -- which was not for me but for the Sufi path.

I have passed on to her all you have said with respect to this matter. I have told her there is a way through for us, and while she is, definitely, interested, nevertheless, coming to this stage has taken quite a lot of time and, as well, in a variety of other ways, the situation is not straight-forward.

For example, her present husband of 23 years is a very unpredictable, occasionally violent, and, for the most part, a controlling sort of person. Enough acts of violence have taken place over the years that Lara is terrorized about the situation, and is afraid her husband will either get violent toward her or himself, or create a very difficult situation for her, and this is one of the primary reasons for delays in reaching some sort of resolution to the issue.

I have tried to convince her to just leave her home and become anonymous for awhile. The process of divorce is relatively easy in Vermont, and she could do whatever she has to do while living at a distance from her husband and being somewhere where he couldn't have access to her.

Although he might not go looking for her, apparently, he has been sufficiently controlling, violent, and abusive in the past that he might go looking for her. If he did do this, she is uncertain whether this would lead to additional problems.

A friend of Lara's from work lives in Weston Beach -- which is about 10 miles, or so, outside of Bamford -- and she has agreed to let Lara stay there. The house is in a rural area where there are no police readily available in case difficulties arise.

Unfortunately, Lara's husband knows where her friend's house is. Consequently, Lara feels that if her husband does go looking for her, her friend's house might be one of the first places her husband tries to locate Lara.

There are no other members of Lara's family in the greater Bamford area to whom Lara might go, but all the friends she has are known to her husband. In addition, Lara likely would not feel safe in any of these places even if these people were willing to help her out ...

which they might or might not be willing to do -- since they are fearful when it comes to Ron.

Another option, of course, is for Lara to find a place of her own. Although she has not ruled out this possibility -- and a few things have been investigated in this regard -- she seems somewhat reluctant to do so ... even though there are certain aspects of this option that appeal to her.

I have suggested another possibility -- although this might be just one more of my mistakes. While there are a number of advantages concerning this further possibility, there, also, are some definite problems -- at least, potentially. This alternative concerns her staying with me.

We have talked about this possibility. We have talked about a lot of possibilities.

The building in which I live is somewhat secure since it has both a buzz-in system as well as security cameras in the elevators and entrances. In addition, the police station is just a short distance away from the building.

Furthermore, since no one visits me there (not even my brothers) and since the people in the building tend to keep to themselves, no one would have to know she is there. Plus, the apartment building is very close to where Lara works -- which also is fairly near to the police station.

Taking out a lease on her own apartment is a bit of a problem with respect to having to sign a contract since it would bind her to a set of circumstances that might not be Lara's long-term interests. On the other hand, such leases need not constitute an insurmountable problem since people often are able to get out of them by paying some sort of penalty for breaking the lease.

Having to pay for an apartment in addition to paying for a mortgage on the marital home, plus the cost of having to furnish a new apartment, is something that Lara, probably, could do on her current salary. On the other hand, all of this might prove to be something of a burden.

In addition, depending on what Lara could find in the way of apartments, there might or might not be worries about security and

safety or about her husband locating her ... and Bamford is the sort of city in which one could not easily lose oneself and become 'invisible'. Consequently, staying with me might be able to provide a feasible way of dealing with many – but not all -- of the foregoing issues.

Even though Lara's husband knows she comes to my office a fair bit -- since she has told him, for the most part, where she is going or where she has been -- as far as I know, he doesn't know about how Lara and I feel toward each other. Lara is afraid to deal with this issue directly because irrespective of the problems that might be created by her leaving her husband in and of itself -- and this is something that they have touched upon several times now over the last three years but Lara, apparently, has been reluctant to pursue because of her worries concerning the unpredictable nature of her husband's inclination, on occasion, to violence and abuse -- nonetheless, if Lara left her husband for another man, she feels there would be major problems arising out of this.

In any event, whether, or not, her husband would come looking for her at my apartment building I don't know. Few people in Bamford know me or know where I live, and since I don't have a car or phone in the apartment, tracing my home address might be difficult to do -- but not impossible -- even if he did want to ask me some questions. On the other hand, he does know where office is.

Whatever the advantages of Lara's staying with me might be, there are, obviously, a variety of problems. First of all, we would be unmarried and living under the same roof, and, in addition, it might be a number of months before Lara could obtain a divorce, and, consequently, not only would we be unmarried, but, she would be a married woman staying with me in the process of a potentially problematic divorce -- even though there are no custody issues involved and even though there would be no property disputes since Lara is prepared to sell the house so the proceeds could be split between her husband and her two children -- one of whom is now married and another one -- her son -- who, apparently, might be getting married in the fall.

Beyond the foregoing, there is a worry about the potential for establishing conditions that -- even if nothing inappropriate went on between Lara and myself, 'appearances' could create problems with

respect to people's perceptions about the silsilah or the Sufi path or Islam. If her husband creates problems, then, the potential for a very difficult situation with respect to the above concerns might be quite real.

Furthermore, although Lara could take the bedroom and I would either sleep in the living room or on the floor of the office, being in close proximity to one another under those circumstances -- even though she would be working during the day and so, hopefully, would I -- nevertheless, this might not be easy in view of the intensity of our feelings. God willing, even though no sexual relations would take place, there still might be other casual contact that is possible and this is a concern.

This brings up a further issue. Like the rest of the situation, this matter is fraught with problems.

I have tried to deal with the situation in a way that, God willing, might be healing and constructive. However, there is a very good chance that I have failed in this and have committed an error in the process.

I don't want to offer the following as either a rationalization or spin, at the same time, there was a method to my madness even though I realize I was skating on extremely thin ice -- and, perhaps, even fell through. In terms of Muslim law, what I am about to discuss might have been incorrect, but from the perspective of compassion, love, and healing, then maybe, there are mitigating considerations.

Lara was raped by her cousin when she was around ten. She was sexually abused by her uncle for several years between the ages of 9 and 11, and this sexual abuse was complicated in a variety of ways -- not the least of which was that Lara loved her uncle. In addition, there was the attempt by her father to rape her.

The whole period was not only very confusing and traumatic to her, but, very likely, led to a number of psychological and physical problems with which she still has to contend. Nevertheless, she, by the Grace of God, has done a remarkable job of dealing with the wrongs committed against her.

The foregoing situation also, quite likely, played a major role in Lara's problems with alcohol and drugs when she was a teenager. And,

while, initially, her relationship with her present husband -- that began under very difficult circumstances when she was around 17 -- probably helped her get off drugs and alcohol, nonetheless, because of her husband's violent and abusive tendencies, she eventually had another problem with which to deal -- a problem that complicated her feelings about issues of trust, as well as her sense of security, self-worth, sexuality, and so on.

Some of the issues that confused and worried Lara with respect to her feelings for me had to do with her past, and I outlined this previously. Issues of trust, self-worth, and sexuality were all muddying the waters concerning her feelings for me -- which were very strong but were getting all mixed up with problems from her past and present.

I have been working with her on all of this over the last four months, in a very intensive way. When we became interested in one another and developed feelings for one another, the whole situation became very problematic and much more awkward and difficult to deal with, and trying to sort things out, has been, at times, very slow going.

I have tried in a variety of ways to show Lara she has nothing to fear from me ... that I am not going to sexually molest her, or abuse her, or exploit her. I have tried to show her that I am not her cousin or her uncle, or her father and that my love for her is genuine, sincere, and long-term.

I have tried to show her in any number of ways that she can trust me and that I won't try to take advantage of her. Yet, at the same time, because of her past history, she also has put me to the test in a variety of ways, and the fact there was something of a fairly substantial emotional nature going on between us made the situation all the more problematic and trying ... for each of us I suppose.

With some difficulty, and by the Grace of God, we have managed to walk the tightrope without slipping ... although the search for balance sometimes has been a pretty shaky affair. I often have wanted to run away because the situation was so emotionally and psychologically difficult for me to deal with ... because of my own vulnerabilities in terms of my marital past, my loneliness, and my own weaknesses.

In any event, at times the lines between me as her shaykh and me as a man who loves her have become very blurred. I have tried to do both things at the same time, and, by the Grace of God, for the most part -- despite a variety of difficulties -- somehow, both of these sides have been attended to ... although it might be that the more important side -- which is that of my responsibilities as her shaykh -- has not always fared so well.

I have told Lara that, perhaps, irrespective of how things turn out for her and I – marriage-wise -- it might be a good thing if you, Baba, were to become her shaykh. I am not saying it would be impossible for us to proceed on, as best we could, on the Sufi side of things if we didn't get married, but I think she would be in much better spiritual hands with you than with me ... no matter what happens on the other side of things.

On the other hand, I don't know whether you would be prepared to go through with the transfer process, if she and I didn't get married. Maybe, we are just going to have to sort out our own difficult situation without mixing you up in the matter.

I do believe she has a genuine interest in the path. However, getting entangled with me has introduced a lot of problematic wrinkles into the matter.

Returning to the marital issue, without being a nag about things, I have tried to impress upon Lara that making a decision about the issue of separating from her husband, getting divorced, making the transfer of initiation, and, if she wants, getting married to me, should -- for a lot of different reasons -- be done sooner rather than later. However, there is a lot of anxiety, fear, uncertainty, tension, and confusion that is clouding the atmosphere and rendering a decision difficult.

Although she seems to be steadily moving in the direction of favoring taking whatever steps are necessary to resolve the situation, sometimes it is a matter of one-step ahead and two steps back. And, sometimes, I am not certain that it is going to happen at all, and, consequently, sometimes, I really don't know how to proceed on any front ... spiritual or in terms of marriage ... and get very confused by the whole situation, and really don't know what is going on -- with her, with me, with us, with life.

Yesterday, she was either in one of her testing modes or she was in need of something that would help her with all of her emotional turmoil and tension, or it might have been a bit of both. She was seeking affection from me.

She called me at the office and said she had been having a great deal of trouble sleeping because of the constant stress and tension at home. She asked if she could sleep at my apartment for a little while.

I didn't want to say no, but I didn't want to say yes either. Eventually, I responded by saying okay.

I wanted her to leave her marital situation, but I also wanted her to experience the fact that someone could love her for her, be affectionate, as well as trusted not to try to sexually exploit her. I reiterated the fact that I loved her, wanted to marry her, and was not looking for any sexual favors from her outside of marriage.

She said she was not looking for that either. She just needed to rest in a secure, peaceful environment.

She came to the office, and I accompanied her to my apartment. I showed her the bedroom and said that I would be out in the living room.

She said she would feel a lot safer if I would stay with her. We lay on the bed for a long time, but she couldn't go to sleep.

We began talking a little. I put my arm around her and kissed her an affectionate kiss on the forehead. I hoped this might be what she needed to help her know that someone really did care about her and wanted her to be happy ... which she has not been for a very long time.

We exchanged kisses for a bit, but nothing more happened. There was no undressing, fondling, or sexual intercourse ... but things definitely went further than they should have.

I am now, and have been, for a long time very unhappy with myself and/or my spiritual condition -- not because I believe there is anything remiss on your part, or the part of the silsilah, or Allah, or because I feel I deserve this or that, but because I do not feel I am a very good Muslim, Sufi, or, especially, a shaykh.

I wish I could say this is all a matter of my being humble, but it is not. For quite some time, something has been going on with my life that I really don't understand and might never understand.

I'm not saying there haven't been many blessings in my life because there have been. I know I have been fortunate in so many ways.

Nonetheless, my life seems to consist of a lot of constrictions -- in relation to family, marriage, parenthood, finances, education, career, jobs, friends, stability, spirituality, and so on. Perhaps, the reason for such constriction is me and my faults. In so many ways -- both present and past -- I feel I have let you down, let the silsilah down, let the Prophet down, and let God down ... not that any of you need me or my 'contributions', but I feel I have let you all down in relation to the duties, responsibilities, and opportunities that have been given to me.

Seemingly, I can't get, or keep, work, no matter what I try to do. I can't even create my own work ... or, more accurately, although I have put thousands of hours trying to create work for myself, no one appears to be interested in purchasing what I have to offer ... even though everyone who actually reads what has flowed through my fingers and out of the computer considers the material to be remarkable.

I am not saying I am owed anything or should be treated in any particular way or there aren't a lot of other people in this world who have far worse problems than I do. What I'm saying is I believe I am the problem and I don't know what to do about it. I pray, and do zikr, and fast, and try to do acts of service, of one sort or another, but, nevertheless, my life appears to be one big mess.

I am barely able to keep my head above sea level, plus I am swallowing a lot of water in the process. I really don't know what to do, or how to proceed, or how to plan, or where to go, or how to survive.

More and more, options seem to be becoming fewer and fewer. I feel like I am being hemmed in by Allah, and I really don't know why I should be surprised about this since I don't feel God has had much reason to be happy with me for a long time.

You, through your kindness and compassion, say nice, encouraging things such as: you want to tell people who are thirsting for knowledge about me and send them here. Yet, all I want to do is run away because I do not feel at all fit to serve such a purpose.

On the other hand, I don't have any place to run to. Even if I did, I couldn't afford to get there or, at the present rate, survive once I got there.

Since the time of initiation with you, I have felt totally unequal to the responsibilities that were being given to me ... not to mention feeling up to all the other stations that were disclosed by you to me at that time. When I look at my actions and my life, I see, for the most part, little more than mistakes, ignorance, weakness, and faults ... although scattered here and there have been, by God's Grace, a few good moments.

Sometimes, I feel my present (and past) situation is really just a reflection of my spiritual condition and that all of the confusions, mistakes, problems, failures, weaknesses, and so on, that characterize my past and present life are merely my many sins visiting themselves upon me in a palpable form.

I feel I am being put through test after test, but I am failing these tests just as quickly as they are put to me. I could try to rationalize and say I am sincerely trying to do the best that I can, but I'm not sure I really believe this is true, and, yet, I can't seem to do things any differently than what is taking place.

I try to observe the basics of Islam, but often fail. I try to do some of the things of the Sufi path, but, more often than not, come up wanting. I try to do some of the things that seem appropriate for a shaykh to do, but, oftentimes, these seem to go nowhere ... and, sometimes, I stray over into areas where a shaykh should not be (such as with Amina and, now, Lara -- even though nothing, in either case, really involved sexually inappropriate behavior).

I look at individuals like you, Dr. Irfan, Shaykh Yaqub, Taufiq Baba, and Shaykh Anwar, and I feel like I am about as far as one can get from your examples. I am not of your caliber or quality, and I feel I am pretty much an embarrassment to you and the silsilah.

We both know that whatever is good in my published work, or the book that I am working on now, doesn't come from me. I might sit at the keyboard, and my fingers might be moving, but the material -- at least the good stuff -- comes from somewhere else.

I might have been a locus of manifestation for the outlet of the material in those books, but I also feel I am a locus of manifestation for a lot of problems and difficulties ... with respect to you, myself, and others. I don't feel I am serving the best interests of the silsilah -- or anyone else, for that matter, including myself.

Everywhere I go, I seem to be discarded, cast aside, and rejected. Since I know I am, and have been, making mistakes, it seems reasonable to assume that what is happening is due to problems in me.

I'm not exactly sure why I am in Bamford, although the thought has crossed my mind that, perhaps, such a reason might have something to do with putting me somewhere, out of the way, where my problematic impact might be limited in scope. The thought also has crossed my mind that my character defects are so much in evidence that I am being, yet again, challenged to get things right by being placed in a situation with which I will either sink or swim -- and, quite frankly, I believe I am sinking a lot more than I am swimming ... if I am doing any of the latter at all.

I have been struggling with the path for nearly four decades now, and in a lot of ways -- at least as far as I can see -- I am not a whole lot better than I was when I first started out. I am not blaming the path, or you, or Dr. Irfan, or anyone for this state of affairs ... only myself. And, the terribly frustrating thing about this is that I do feel I have tried, and, yet, no matter how hard I try, I seem not only not to get anywhere, but, actually, I seem to be going backward.

I look at myself and have to ask the question: what is Sufi about me? I'm not like you or the others mentioned above ... I'm not like any of the good people about which one reads in the Sufi books. I don't even have the Sufi qualities that are talked about in my books ... I am supposed to be helping people yet I can't even help myself.

Professor Forsythe might be misleading and misinforming others in a variety of ways with respect to Islam and its esoteric dimension.

However, in my own way, I also might be a fraud and not really all that different from Forsythe.

All of the foregoing is not something new with me. It has been with me for a long time ... indeed, even before I met you and was initiated by you.

I have absolutely no fault to find with you or with Dr. Irfan ... although there, certainly, is a lot I don't understand about what has transpired during my interaction with you both. In any event, I have a great deal of fault to find with me.

I have love for you, Dr. Irfan, the silsilah, the Prophet, and Allah, but, all too obviously, not nearly enough. Maybe, if the proper level of love were present in me, I might be different ... but it isn't, and I'm not.

From time to time, things occur, and these occurrences remind me about the nature of the false self that is very dominant in me. I pretend to be a Muslim, or a Sufi, or a shaykh ... but, in reality, I am something else.

The latest occurrence that points in this direction concerns the situation with Lara. For a variety of reasons, in this matter, I am in way over my head ... and, in part, this is because it has to do with unresolved issues with which I am most vulnerable and have been for much of life -- yet, the same situations keep happening over and over again ... you would think that I would learn, but, apparently, I don't.

One of the reasons -- but not the only one -- why I have wanted to get married is to have the support and protection that marriage can lend in helping one to stay away from problematic situations. Yet, all of my efforts in this regard seem to be doomed to failure, and, instead, I keep getting entangled in this or that way ... however, I am not blaming anyone but myself.

I might sincerely have been trying to help Lara, and my intentions toward her might have been honorable and loving. But, nonetheless, too many mistakes are being made.

I don't think I went looking for this to happen. The office or 'center' was established, insha' Allah, for good reasons, not bad ones.

On the other hand, I feel that, perhaps, all along I have shown poor judgment ... in the present situation, and in past situations. And, maybe, that is why my life is the way it is.

I ask for your forgiveness.

Tariq

§

Tariq, my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

I have read your email over and over. To reply in detail will take some time, but I would like to just point out a few facts. Yes you might feel that my answer may be just in kindness to make you feel good, but that is not true. The truth is that whatever you have said in your email is not something new or surprising. I can quote many instances in my own life many years before, when if not exactly yet very similar feelings I have encountered. I remember 1965 when I really felt very depressed. Five years after I had become a mureed, I suddenly realized that I am in the same situation as I was when I started. Many of the things you say that you feel, is just a repetition of what I had felt then.

How it all changed, and how I got out of the depression, I do not know. All I know is that when I spoke to my Shaikh and explained all the details, he just listened patiently and said nothing. I did feel better after getting my feelings out, and went home to sleep. I slept the whole night through, feeling better the next day. I had decided to just keep going without thinking about my hopeless condition. All I can say is that every day for me after that was like a new day and I a stranger, just drifting along, not knowing what to do or what the result is going to be.

How I was saved by all the confusion I do not know, but somehow everything gradually started going well to such a degree that it made me forget the situation I was in.

That is why my answer to you is that ALLAH can, and does, change situations. Let us not trust ourselves to be able to figure out what is happening and what will happen. Let us completely surrender to HIM, ourselves and all that is related to us in every way. Believe me my son, each time I thought or even imagined to try to get out of the mess, it became worse. Then I completely gave up trying to engineer my

situation. ALLAH be praised, and ALLAH be thanked. How HE did it, to this day I have no clue, but this I know that HE got me out of despair, and ALHAMDU LILLAHAH it just changed my situation.

Let us do the same now my son. Take every day as it comes, and let HIM handle it. Let us stop thinking about the situation, instead let us now believe that we have put this in HIS hands, and wait for HIS BLESSINGS.

INSHA ALLAH all will be well. I love you and am praying.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

June 24, 2001

Dear Baba,

As Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I spoke with Mitchell Hong yesterday. I discussed with him all of the things that you and I previously had discussed concerning him. I told him there is a difference between informing and asking permission. I told him that unless there was some sort of problem with the meaning of his Chinese name, he need not change it.

He indicated that when he went to a Muslim travel organization near where he lives, for purposes of getting passage for 'umrah, he was told he would have to change his name. I told him this was not so although he might have to get a declaration, of some sort, from a mosque that indicated he was Muslim ... but there were mosques where this could be done, and no one would request a name change as part of the process. He said he already had checked with the mosque in his home town, and they would be prepared to do this for him.

I told him it would be better if he were to wait before going on 'umrah and do so with people of our silsilah or in conjunction with some other authentic Sufi group that was approved by you. I also said there were better places to go than Syria -- such as Ajmer Sharif -- if he wanted some place to go after 'umrah.

He said his plans had changed, and he wasn't going to go on 'umrah this year. He said he wanted to go on Hajj sometime during the next several years, and I told him that for Hajj, too, he would be better off going with people of our silsilah and, God willing, perhaps, there would be a group of people from our silsilah who would be going sometime in the next year or two.

I asked him if he had been in touch with Barry with respect to attending the fatiha sessions. And, he said that he hadn't. I again urged him to try to do so, and, even if he can't go to fatiha every week, then, at least as often as might be convenient for him to do so.

He said the last two times after doing zikr on his own and listening to Qawwali (spiritual music) following the zikr session that he had some experiences that worried him. He said his upper body began to vibrate on its own and he would, then, find himself standing up, twirling about, with his hands raised up, shouting out such things as "Allah Hu Akber" (God is Great – Beyond Compare).

Mitchell said the only way he could make what was going on stop was to throw himself down on his bed. He said he was worried this experience was his imagination, or that he was possessed, or that he was being disrespectful to the Qawwali music, and he was worried that this might happen in one of the fatiha sessions.

I told him I didn't feel there was anything to worry about ... that what had happened was not his imagination or possession or showing disrespect ... in fact, quite the opposite. I felt he should be very happy that he had been blessed by God with such a state.

However, I said I would forward this information on to you. In the meantime, I indicated that -- just in case -- perhaps he should discontinue listening to Qawwali until we got further direction from you.

Love,
Tariq

§

Tariq my son,
Assalamo alaikum.

Regarding Mitchell, I think you should tell him that even though he regards himself a Muslim, and he imagines himself a Sufi believer, does he really believe in Tasawwuf. How can he believe something that he knows nothing about? There are various means of beginning to get the correct impact. Has he read any Sufi book that has impressed him so much that he just cannot get it out of his mind? Has he met anyone with whom he has found his heart being attracted to a degree that he knows for certain without any doubt that he will benefit by becoming a mureed etc?

These are some of the questions he should seriously ask himself. We are trying to help him realize before these realizations hit him hard in later times. We have more experiences regarding such matters.

He should also be given the correct information regarding what ALLAH has stated about such matters. It is in the QURAN that ALLAH says it is not enough for anyone to just say that he or she is a Muslim and expect ALLAH to be satisfied. No, ALLAH says that HE will test the one who says that he or she believes, as HE has tested others before and will test the one's in the future too.

My son, Mitchell has never sad that he has been missing his Shaikh. It's not his fault, because he was not given much time for the seed to grow. That goes to prove that his becoming a Muslim is not through attraction of NOOR (Divine Light). He has not come up with anything that suggests what caused him to become a Muslim as well as a mureed. History has proved many a time, as to how the Sahaba (Companions) and the ones after them entered Islam. He must not think that we are not accepting him. In fact he should realize that we are helping him, so that he does not get confused later.

When the correct Islam is not present among the so called Muslims, where is Mitchell going to learn? If he is to learn through Tasawwuf, than how much is he prepared to let go ... let go of his own little knowledge and his own choices and opinions?

NISBATH is the strong stable relationship of the heart for someone you love and trust, to such a degree that one is prepared to let go of everything and anything, to become united with the object of the

NISBATH known as BELOVED. Arriving at the stage of NISBATH is also a journey, along with the most important of all journeys called SULOOK. The journey of Sulook starts once NISBATH is confirmed. Mitchell should know that his pre-Nisbath journey has not yet even started, leave alone the main Journey. Explain to him the tears shed by RUMI for his beloved SHAMS. Has Mitchell even felt a fraction of a similar kind for the one he calls his Shaikh? Does he even believe in the connection? Do make him realize that these questions are because we love him, regardless of whether he loves us or not.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA

§

June 25, 2001

Dear Baba,

Wa 'alaykum as-Salaam!

I have spoken with Mitchell in accordance with your instructions - - at least, as best as I was able to do under the circumstances. The themes and issues that were mentioned in your e-mail to me, I passed on to him, and I emphasized -- several times -- that the things being said were because you loved him and wanted him to succeed spiritually, and, moreover, because you realized Mitchell had not had much of an opportunity to spend time with you.

I gave a lot of focus to the issue of nisbath and tried to convey to Mitchell how important this was to the Sufi path. I suggested he go back to my book and read the material on nisbath, and I indicated that while I understood how traveling from his home in Milford to Barry's residence during the winter time, was a daunting prospect -- having done it myself during not so wonderful driving conditions -- nonetheless, there really was no reason why he couldn't attend the fatiha sessions at Barry's the rest of the year ... during the periods of good weather. He mentioned something about having done this on one occasion (I believe a fatiha was held at 'Ali's place in Freiburg) and that he didn't like the spiritual atmosphere.

I told him Barry had a place of his own now, and I believed that from here on in most, if not all, of the sessions would be taking place at Barry's new apartment. Furthermore, I said that whatever Mitchell might feel about the spiritual atmosphere of any given fatiha, he should go with the intention of doing something that would please his shaykh, and he should not feel that you were not at those sessions just because, physically, you might not be there ... at least, not in the usual sense of physically.

I mentioned the fact that he should not suppose he could say some prayers, do some zikr, listen to a little Qawwali, and, thereby, believe he was doing everything he could with respect to the Sufi path. More was needed, and he should be prepared to make whatever sacrifices were indicated with respect to his own likes, dislikes, ideas, and opinions.

In addition, I pointed out how the Qur'an indicates that God will put us all to the test throughout our lives. One cannot suppose it is enough to say I submit and this is the end of the matter.

I told him he should feel free to call or contact me at any time. God willing, I would do my best to help him in whatever way I could.

He sounded a little down about what was being related to him. However, at the same time, he seemed to appreciate what was being said and appeared to accept that what was being mentioned was out of love, and for no other reason.

Love,

Tariq

§

June 28, 2001

Lara calls. She tells me she has asked Ron for a divorce.

Ron is unhappy with the idea. He suggests they see a marriage counselor even though he has rejected the idea of a counselor when it was raised by Lara on a number of occasions over the years.

Apparently, they are arguing a lot ... more than normal. There seems to be no peace for either of them in their home.

§

June 30, 2001

Lara calls and asks if she can come over for a bit. She says the tension between Ron and her is higher than it has even been ... which, given what I know about some of their past, is apparently saying a lot.

I assent to her request. I continue to work on the book until she comes ... which is about thirty minutes later.

When she arrives, she brings me up to date on what is happening. She doesn't feel the marriage can be saved, but, at the same time, she is very reluctant to give up on it.

Mostly, she feels extremely sad ... especially with respect to Ron. All Ron has to do is look a certain way ... which Lara interprets as Ron's expression of vulnerability and/or betrayed, and she begins to cry.

Despite all Ron has done to her, Lara can't bear to hurt him or see him looking as if he is hurt. She caves in every time this sort of thing happens, and she doesn't know if she can muster the strength to leave him even though this probably would be the best thing for both of them.

Lara describes how Ron keeps apologizing and saying he is sorry for this or that offense. However, Lara has seen him do the same thing thousands of times, and there doesn't seem to be any sincerity in the apology -- because his behavior never changes ... he goes on to perpetrate the very same offenses that he is offering his apologies.

He appears to believe that if he is man enough to say he is sorry, then, it becomes Lara's duty to forgive him. Even though Ron is in AA, he seems to forget the step about making amends. Or, he believes the only amends he has to make is to apologize and, then, this entitles him to continue to commit the same sort of offenses ... for which he will say he is sorry and, then, Lara must do her job and forgive him for what he has done, yet, once again.

According to Lara, Ron feels that the problem with their marriage is that Lara never really forgives him. He seems to believe he has some

sort of diplomatic immunity and, therefore, should not have to suffer any consequences for his violence, abuse, intimidation, meanness and controlling behavior ... not just toward Lara, but with respect to his whole family, as well as anyone who happens to be pulled into his gravitational field.

Once again, I outline the options in front of her. She knows them well, but she just doesn't know if she can follow through on any of them.

She would prefer to sacrifice her own happiness, peace of mind, and sense of security than hurt Ron. She feels he has had such a difficult life, and leaving him would hurt him terribly.

Lara feels caught. She can't bear to stay and, yet, she can't bear to leave.

Ron has been pressing her for a number of years to go through a renewal of vows ceremony. Lara has resisted.

Ron has wanted them to refinance their home. Lara has said no because doing so would entangle them even more deeply in financial obligations that, in turn, would bind them together more than already is the case.

To the world, Lara always presents a happy, content, peaceful, supportive face with respect to her marriage. Many people within the AA community consider Ron and Lara to have an ideal marriage, but this is because none of them know the truth about the terror that goes on behind closed doors ... a secret that Lara has been keeping from almost everyone -- including herself -- for more than twenty years.

Whenever Lara brings up the possibility of divorce, Ron accuses her of going back on a vow she supposedly made to Ron's father ... that she would never leave Ron. However, apparently, the circumstances surrounding the promise were more along the following lines ... Ron's father well knew what kind of son he had, and he was afraid that, someday, Lara would wake up to this reality and want out of the marriage. Ron's father had said to Lara 'You're going to leave him some day aren't you?' To which Lara replied that she wouldn't.

Ron was really big on other people being fair with him. He just didn't seem to believe he was under any obligation to reciprocate.

§

July 8, 2001

Independence Day comes twice this year. This occasion is observed once on July 4th, and, then, again, on July 8th ... first for the country and, then, for Lara

Lara is moving out of her home. She is taking an apartment that a friend at work had told her about.

The only downside to the decision is that Ron has insisted on helping her move. Lara tries to resist the offer, but, as with everything else, he is relentless in pursuit of how he wishes things to take place ... and 'helping out' also permits Ron to know precisely where Lara is going to be living.

§

July 10, 2001

Lara takes me to see her new home. The apartment is out in the country ... 15-20 miles from downtown Bamford.

I am a little concerned that she is in such a, relatively speaking, isolated area. There are no police nearby who might be capable of intervening on Lara's behalf if Ron should decide to terrorize her in some unexpected manner.

Lara is aware of this possibility as well. Nonetheless, she feels the most important fact is, by the Grace of God, she has been able to muster the strength necessary to leave the matrimonial home ... and, perhaps, she is correct in her assessment of things since it has taken her a long time and a lot of struggle to get to this point.

§

July 15, 2001

Over the last several days, Lara and I have spoken about marriage. Part of her would like to wait until she gets a formal divorce from the Vermont courts. Part of her does not want to wait.

I indicate the 'State' is not God. Yes, governments do have their laws, but so does Divinity, and I believe that the latter has priority.

I remind her about the circumstances surrounding her marriage to Ron. The person who performed the marriage was primarily an entertainer by trade who, on the side, did some marriages that 'the State' had authorized him to do. Moreover, the word God never passed the lips of anyone at the marriage ceremony.

While I appreciate the fact that 'the State' is a jealous God and does not like anyone showing allegiance to other than 'the State' -- together with its rules, values, and ideas -- I tell Lara our marriage will be before God and no one but ourselves and Divinity need know about our marital circumstances. I am prepared to let anyone -- including my family -- think whatever they like about me ... such as the idea that I am living in sin with a woman who is not my wife.

As far as 'the State' is concerned, I indicate to Lara that I won't tell if she won't tell. Moreover, if we don't tell, and God doesn't tell, and if the angels who will be witness to the marriage don't tell, then, what 'the State' doesn't know in this case won't hurt it.

Getting married before God is not really akin to treason to 'the State'. Although, I suppose, there are those who would think this so and wish to punish us most severely for such an outrage.

Lara says she doesn't believe in such ceremonies. Even the one with Ron was as a result of his pressuring her to participate in such an event.

She believes if someone is not sincere in treating another person fairly and with love, a piece of paper or a state-sanctioned marriage is not going to solve the underlying problem. I don't disagree with her, but I also indicate the way of a Muslim and a Sufi is to do things before God.

In Islam, marriage is a contractual arrangement. Such arrangements can be entered into, and such arrangements can be terminated.

There is a concerted bias among many Muslim men concerning who might initiate the steps leading to the termination of a marriage. The bias in this regard is that men might unilaterally take steps to divorce a woman without consulting with anyone, while woman might not do so without getting the approval of Muslim courts ... which are almost always run by men who often are guided by male biases.

I feel the 'grounds' for such a bias are the result of what most biases concerning women in the Muslim community are rooted in – namely, misinformation, ignorance, and self-serving interpretations of the Qur'an. I was of this opinion before Lara came along, and, consequently, I do not feel my thinking concerning Lara's long-standing desire to divorce her husband is an opinion of convenience.

There is a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) which says that of all the things that are permissible, divorce is the least pleasing to God. Therefore, one shouldn't enter into or dissolve a marital contract in a frivolous manner. Nonetheless, marital relationships are contractual in nature, and, consequently, are not intended to be absolute and binding no matter what might transpire within the marriage.

Ron has engaged in sexual activity with his wife without her consent ... indeed, he would do so even after Lara has explicitly indicated to him not to do so. This really is a euphemistic way of saying Ron has raped Lara on numerous occasions ... although many men (both Muslim and non-Muslim) might wish to argue that having unimpeded and unconditional access to their wives is a right since wives are often considered by men (Muslim and non-Muslim) to be the personal chattel of men ... a right that cannot be plausibly defended, I believe, except in a context of authoritarian, rigid, contrived, and self-serving, male-oriented theologies and philosophies.

In addition, Ron physically abused his wife. He has stalked her. He has sought to control her every action. He has terrorized his wife ... in fact, he has terrorized the whole family along with quite a few people outside the family. At times, his treatment of Lara has bordered on torture ... if not crossed the line.

Even if one were a saint, one should not have to tolerate such treatment. In fact, one has every right to distance oneself from such behavior.

Again and again, Lara has told Ron that she wants a divorce. He has stonewalled her on the issue.

Now, Lara has made her version of an ‘emancipation proclamation’ by leaving the matrimonial home. She has told Ron that is she not coming back ... she says she is done with the marriage.

For Lara to leave is a huge step in her struggle for freedom and independence. I Have talked with her for many, many hours about how much she wants to walk away from the marriage and end things in this respect, and, yet, I also have talked with her across many hours in relation to how difficult such a move is for her ... not because she loves Ron and wants to be with him, but because she feels sorry for him and can’t stand it when he looks at her with that ‘look’ of sadness or vulnerability like some sort of wounded animal pleading for its existence ... and because her emotional being is inexplicably tied to his person in some mysterious way – sort of like the emotional ties that sometimes develop between a hostage and a hostage-taker ... or between a victim of torture and his or her torturer ... or between a slave and a slave-owner.

Whatever the state of Vermont might say about such matters, I am satisfied that in her own way – in her mind, heart, and soul – Lara has divorced Ron by leaving the matrimonial home. She has divorced him by virtue of what she has said to him and to me about this issue. She has divorced him by her actions.

As far as Lara is concerned, whatever contractual arrangement she might have had with Ron, those arrangements have been terminated. As far as I can see, she has done this of her own free will and choice.

§

July 15, 2001

Lara phones me at the office. She gives me permission to contact Baba concerning how to do a marriage ceremony.

I phone Baba right after getting off the phone with Lara. Unfortunately, Baba is not available, and the person on the phone suggests I call back in a couple of hours.

Several hours later, I phone again. This time Baba is free.

I bring Baba up to date with what is happening in relation to Lara. He is happy, and he dictates to me the nature of the marriage ceremony.

In addition, he says that he wants to send a special cloth that we are to use during the transfer of allegiance ceremony (that is, Lara's re-initiation with Baba rather than with me) prior to the marriage. Baba says he will try to send this in a few days.

§

July 26, 2001

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I don't know if you have sent the package, or not, but it hasn't arrived, yet (including today's mail), and 9 days, or so, have passed since we talked. Maybe, the mail from your area to our area is just slow, or, perhaps, it is a case of 'the watched pot never boils', or a matter of clocks always seem to run more slowly through the eyes of impatience. Or, maybe, you have had second thoughts or concerns about my situation or are not happy with it in various ways, or, have, for whatever reason, decided to postpone sending the package, or the mailing got delayed somewhere along the line.

Or, maybe, you were waiting for further word from me on the issue -- especially given that when I last spoke with you I intimated the path to 'true' love was not running all that smoothly at that time. There have been a lot of twists and turns, as well as ups and downs, along with some precarious maneuvering, but, it seems, that, by the Grace of God, Lara has consented to proceed with a marriage -- that is, if it still is okay with you that such a marriage be conducted in the way you indicated earlier. In any case, I'm just wondering where things stand.

Please give my love and Salaams to your household and to the people of fatiha. Love,

Tariq

§

Tariq my son,
Assalamo alaikum.

Regarding the package, I thought it would be better to send it to you via UP, which is safer and cheaper because Bashir mia has an account through the place where he works, and it does not cost much. Only on Fridays we have time to meet, and therefore I waited till today, which is Friday. When he comes for Fateha I will give it to him to mail it to you, so INSHA ALLAH you will receive it in a few days. Anyway, I am pleased to know that all is well.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

July 27, 2001

Dear Baba,
As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Below is a copy of the e-mail that I sent today to 'Asima. If there is any problem with what has been said in it, then, let me know, and I will include this in a follow-up e-mail to her --

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Dear 'Asima,
Wa 'alaykum as-Salaam!

I am sorry for delaying my response to you, but I am not offended in any way by your previous or present e-mails. You are quite correct to believe you should be able to express and share your thoughts, feelings, worries, and concerns with your shaykh, and I am glad you have done so.

As you have noted in your current e-mail, the situation is a little problematic for me since, among other things, your husband is not my mureed. Consequently, I wanted to discuss the matter with Baba

before replying to your earlier e-mail, and this has been part of the reason for the delay in my response.

I won't go into the house hunting situation that you mentioned other than to say that, apparently, mistakes were made in the matter both by Feisal and your husband. In any event, that situation is done, gone, and is far less important than the other matters that you raised in your first e-mail several weeks ago.

I'm not going to give a detailed analysis of the situation, but I will provide an outline of the issues, and this outline represents not only my feeling about the matter, but the judgment of both Baba and Momin Shah Baba, and, moreover, these judgments all have been reached independently of one another ... based on our individual interactions -- both written and spoken -- with your husband over the last 6-7 years.

When Bilal first met Baba, he had a number of questions for Baba, and, Baba, in turn, had a few questions for Bilal. Bilal's questions mostly had to do with things that he had heard or read about Islam, the Prophet, and the Companions -- things that were not true but that reflected either Arab culture, or Persian culture, or some other cultural perspective.

Baba took a lot of time with Bilal and explained all of these things to him on numerous occasions ... some of which I was present for, and some of which Momin Shah was present for, and some of which we both were present for. Baba explained to Bilal that Bilal was picking up his information from unreliable sources and that the doubts which these sources were generating within Bilal concerning Islam, the Prophet, the Companions and the Sufi path were rooted in misinformation, distortion, and -- as indicated above -- Arab/Persian culture, rather than on any authentic understanding of concerning these matters.

No matter how many times Baba explained these things to Bilal, Bilal kept coming back with variations on the same questions and issues ... questions that placed Islam, the Prophet, the Companions, and the Sufi path in an unflattering, critical -- but untrue -- light ... and issues that questioned the integrity of all of the foregoing -- although I am not saying, nor was Baba, at any point, saying, that Bilal was trying to be mischievous and create problems or was, himself, trying to cast

aspersions on anything. Rather, he, unfortunately, had been listening to the wrong people and, for whatever reason, couldn't get out of his mind and heart what had been said to him by some of his "friends" or what he had read in this or that book.

Baba was, and has been, very gentle, as well as patient, in the manner in which he has dealt with these matters again and again over the years. Yet, no matter what Baba said, Bilal would re-raise the same matters over and over.

As noted above, I said that Baba also asked Bilal several questions. He asked Bilal why he had become Muslim, and why did he want to step onto the Sufi path.

Bilal never had an answer for these questions even though they were very basic and very important. Whatever Bilal did have to say in response to such questions, his responses tended to be rather confused, vague, and somewhat rambling.

Now, despite this, and despite the fact that Baba had certain concerns and reservations about Bilal's feelings with respect to Islam and the Sufi path, Baba, out of compassion -- and wishing to give Bilal the benefit of a doubt and an opportunity -- permitted Bilal, nonetheless, to take ba'yat or initiation. Moreover, even after the initiation, Baba continued, with patience and love, to answer the same questions that Bilal raised on numerous occasions.

The adab of the Sufi path is that one has the right to ask the shaykh questions about life and spirituality -- as long as the questions are asked with sincerity and respect. However, the other side of this adab is that once one has asked the shaykh whatever questions are on one's mind and heart, and once one has asked whatever follow up questions concerning these issues -- in order that things can be made as clear as possible by the shaykh -- then, the mureed has a decision to make ... namely, either (1) be satisfied with what the shaykh has said and accept that and attempt, as best one can, to work in accordance with the answers of the shaykh and treat those answers as Divinely inspired guidance concerning spirituality and life, or (2) admit that, for whatever reason, one does not believe in the shaykh or what the shaykh is saying and seek permission to disengage from the Sufi path -- that is to recant the conditions and obligations surrounding ba'yat.

Baba's e-mail to Bilal, on this matter -- the one that, at some point, you read -- was simply trying to help Bilal to understand the foregoing decision that has been in front of Bilal for many years. Baba was not saying that Bilal was a bad person, or that he was not a Muslim, or that he couldn't attend fatiha, or that he -- Baba -- would no longer be Bilal's well-wisher or that Baba would not be prepared to help Bilal in any way Baba could. Instead, Baba was trying to relieve Bilal of some of the tension, anxieties, and emotional worries that Bilal has been carrying around for years with respect to the foregoing decision.

Baba was asking Bilal to admit that -- in his (Bilal's) mind and, most importantly, his heart -- Bilal had a basic reluctance to accept what Baba had been telling him over the years. Baba was telling Bilal, in as gentle and nice a way as possible, that Baba knew what was going on within Bilal in relation to these issues ... that Baba understood the situation, and Baba was letting Bilal know that as far as Baba was concerned there were no ill-feelings surrounding these issues -- instead, Baba just wanted Bilal to be honest and forthright about the matter ... that he should say what was in his heart and mind and that Baba was prepared to accept such as Bilal's decision.

Or, consider the following. Fatiha is an extremely important observance on the Sufi path. Although there might, on occasion, be conflicts in one's schedule and, for whatever reason, one might not be able to attend this or that fatiha, nonetheless on the whole, one should make every effort to attend as many fatiha sessions as one can. In addition, when there are conflicts between other functions and fatiha, then, one should seek the permission of the shaykh before one misses fatiha ... especially if missing such occasions begins to happen on a regular basis.

As with all things in life, one has to make decisions about priorities in life. If one continuously chooses work, or cultural events, or marriages, or other ways of passing time, over going to fatiha, then, one should understand what the implications -- spiritually speaking -- of this are.

For years, Bilal has been permitting other things in his life to take precedence over the spiritual path, and, therefore, it is not just a matter of his unwillingness to accept what Baba has to say about issues of spirituality, but, through his decisions concerning how he

prioritizes his time and resources, he has indicated that the Sufi path is not all that high on the list. Yet, despite this, Baba has never issued a directive telling Momin Shah Baba not to allow Bilal to come to fatiha or telling Momin Shah Baba that Bilal not to be included in anything ... in fact, quite the contrary has been true -- that is, Momin Shah Baba has tried to enlist Bilal's help in any number of projects, but Bilal, on a consistent basis, has permitted other things to take priority until things reached such a problematic juncture that problems were being generated for a variety of people – including Bilal.

I too have discussed the matters alluded to above, with Bilal -- both in person, as well as through e-mails. In fact, over the years, I have written many very long, detailed e-mails to Bilal on the very same issues about which he had been asking Baba.

The same questions kept coming, and I kept responding. Eventually, I realized Bilal was accepting little, if anything, I was saying about these matters, and, so, I stopped responding.

Momin Shah Baba also has discussed all these same issues with Bilal again and again for many years. I have been present on some of those occasions -- which were before you became married to him -- and, as well, Momin Shah Baba had informed me -- through phone conversations or e-mails -- that he had various conversations with Bilal about such matters.

Bilal asked certain questions (both in person and by e-mail) -- and their variations -- of Baba. He asked (both in person and by e-mail) the same sort of questions -- and their variations -- of me. He asked the same kinds of question of Momin Shah Baba.

He was not satisfied with what Baba said. He was not satisfied with what I said. He was not satisfied with what Momin Shah Baba said. Yet, in essence, we all provided him with the same guidance, information, facts, perspective, and understanding.

None of us has ever demanded that Bilal 'accept what we say or else'. He has never been given an ultimatum. He has never been excluded from anything in the silsilah that he had not already excluded himself from by his own choices.

Bilal is in Baba's prayers. He is Momin Shah's prayers, and he is in my prayers.

Nonetheless, after all three of us (Baba, Momin Shah Baba, and myself) have made repeated efforts to assist Bilal in these matters, and after, collectively, spending a great many hours with him, it is very apparent that Bilal does not accept what any of us are saying and continues to have doubts about, and resistance toward, what we are saying. If a person is not interested in observing, guarding and maintaining the adab, duties, and responsibilities of being a mureed, then, perhaps, it is time for such a person to admit there might not be present, in the individual's heart, sufficient love, respect, and nisbath, for the loci of manifestation through which Divine guidance is coming and, consequently, the individual, in truth, does not really consider himself to be a true mureed of the shaykh or the silsilah in question.

Baba's e-mail was intended to help Bilal realize this and to help Bilal not to feel badly about it. However, at the same time, Baba was trying to help Bilal to understand that he should stop struggling to try and maintain an outward appearance that was at odds with his true feelings concerning Baba, the silsilah, and the Sufi path ... feelings that have been in evidence for many years through his actions, attitudes, priorities, commitments, questions, and reluctance to sincerely, accept, and take to heart, most of the things that Baba, Momin Shah Baba, and I were saying.

If Bilal considers himself to be Baba's mureed, then he should act accordingly. If he considers himself to be a Muslim, then, he should act accordingly, but whether Bilal does or does not sincerely consider himself to be the latter, Baba's e-mail to him was not about whether, or not, Bilal is a Muslim, but about the nature of Bilal's feelings concerning being a mureed of Baba in the our silsilah.

If Bilal honestly assesses the present situation, along with his actions of the last five or six years, I believe he should be willing to acknowledge -- to himself and others -- that, at the very least, he has not been conducting himself in accordance with the adab of the Sufi path, and he should act in the light of this understanding rather than trying to keep up pretenses that are not doing anyone any good ... not himself, not you, not Momin Shah Baba, not the people of the silsilah, and not Baba. And, if Bilal does sincerely believe he is a true mureed of Baba's, then he is going to have to change a lot of the ways in which he

goes about things and thinks about them -- both in terms of life, in general, as well as the spiritual path in particular.

The choice is his. Baba's e-mail was a way of helping Bilal to remember that despite having taken ba'yat, Bilal still has a decision to make -- if, in fact, this choice had not already been made -- and that it is not fair to anyone, including himself, to act as if the decision has been made affirmatively with respect to the Sufi path while, simultaneously, permitting his continuing doubts to interfere with the development and establishment of a basic love, respect, sincerity, trust, nisbath, and adab concerning Baba, the silsilah, and the Sufi path.

As the Qur'an indicates - "Allah has not assigned unto anyone two hearts within their body." (33:4). Bilal can choose the Sufi path or he can choose other than the Sufi path ... he can choose to accept Baba as his shaykh (with all this encompasses) or he can choose to reject Baba as his shaykh (with all this encompasses), but he can't do both.

Love,
Tariq

§

Tariq My son,
Assalamo alaikum.

Well, here again you have done better. I could not have explained in better words. You have touched all angles in your response to 'Asima's email. Naturally, 'Asima has been influenced by her husband to think this way, and this fact in itself proves that he is not pleased with us. He has now proved that he is not pleased with us, and yet he keeps going to the Fateha. Why? Can he say that this is not true and that he is not displeased with us? If he is not displeased with us then, why does he not admit it. If he is really pleased with us, he should then say that yes, what we say is true and he will abide by our decision, or that he has thought much on the matter, and now feels that he has to change. But he is not saying that, in fact he is not even thinking of changing. He is very sure that he is right. Yet he goes to Fateha. Regular or not, he still goes. Anyway, I suggest that you should

continue to ask this question, "What does Bilal now think about Islam?" "What does Bilal now think about the Sufi path?" If the answers are positive, then you should say that both these are not clubs, where you just go for relaxation. These are matters of Faith. "Does he know what it means to have FAITH?" Unless he cleans his heart, these questions will remain. I also think that you should only ask these questions, or even refer to Bilal in your future e-mails to 'Asima, (Since she is your mureed and obviously there will be communication between you and her) unless she herself or he would repeat the matter in her or his communication with you. This is a fact, that you have always explained matters so thoroughly and extensively. I always appreciate what you say or write regarding any topic. Especially matters of Faith.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA

§

July 27, 2001 (e-mail from 'Asima)

Dear Baba Tariq,

Thank you for your letter. I'm sorry to have to write to you again, I know you're really busy. I'll try to make it really short.

I understand what you wrote in your previous emails. Bilal is very stubborn and he finds it difficult to conform to rules. He is very independent. When he asks questions, he likes straight-forward answers backed with proof and logic. These are all things that he admits to and that we've talked about. These characteristics make it difficult for one to follow the Sufi path whole-heartedly, and we've talked about this too. He's aware of these problems. Whether or not he wants to work on fixing these problems, I'll leave to him. There's not much I can do about these things.

With respect to myself, there are a couple of concerns I have. When two people marry, they become like one heart, body and soul. It is very difficult for two married people with different religious pursuits to help each other. It's like traveling down two different

roads. You can't support, or get help from, your partner when you are going down a different path. I hope you understand what I mean. Maybe I'm wrong in thinking this, but this is the way I've always felt. This is why this whole issue with Bilal has been affecting me so much. This and because I love him very much and I understand his intentions and I know he has a good heart, even though he has some faults (which all of us have).

Overall, he really is sincere and he tries to be a good Muslim, a good person. So when he has a problem, it's like I have a problem. That is how I feel anyway.

So back to me, the question is, how can a wife go to Fatiha when her husband doesn't go? He has never outright said that he's not going to go anymore, but I'm just saying, if he does stop going, then I will feel really uncomfortable going. At this point, I feel really uncomfortable anyway. I know I'm an ultra-sensitive person, so maybe these feelings are completely out of line, but I've felt sort of unwelcome for awhile. I'm not sure if "unwelcome" is the right word to pick, but there has been some degree of discomfort there. I feel sort of stuck on this issue.

The other issue is that if I make a mistake or do something against adab, I like to be told straightforwardly. I'm not good at guessing and taking hints, and consequently it really frustrates me when I'm told that I have done something wrong ... but with no explanation. I feel I can't rectify the situation if I don't know what the situation is. I'm not going to go into the house-hunting issue, but if the same thing were to happen to me, I would feel like it was a great injustice to be left in the dark about what exactly I did wrong. I'm starting to wonder if I have done things wrong in the past. I'm sure I have, but I haven't been told. So am I repeatedly making mistakes over and over again? Are there discussions going on about what I've done wrong, but I don't know about them? And so do I continue to offend people by repeating these offensive actions?

Another question is, can I share your email with Bilal, or should he discuss things with Baba directly? I remember you once saying husbands and wives can share everything with each other, but I'm not sure.

Love, 'Asima

§

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Below is a follow up e-mail to 'Asima in relation to her response to my reply to her original e-mail. Again, if there is any problem with what has been said -- or not said -- then, please let me know and I will try, God willing, to rectify the situation.

Love,

Tariq

§

Dear 'Asima,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

With respect to your follow up comments concerning Bilal, there are a few things to say before moving on to your other issues and questions. First of all, I remember my first shaykh had said that stubbornness is often a characteristic of Sufis, but in order for, God willing, success to come, the object of the stubbornness must change away from nafs and work toward commitment to Allah and His Rasul.

I know, from personal observation, that many, if not all, of the discussions, e-mails, and so on which were conducted between either, on the one hand, Baba, Momin Shah Baba, or myself, and, on the other hand, Bilal, were both straight-forward, as well as filled with logical arguments and proofs of many different kinds, but, unfortunately, in order for these things to have any effect, they must be received by a heart with faith -- of some minimal level. One cannot reason one's way to faith. Faith is a manifestation of Divine Grace, and there are no logical arguments or proofs that can generate faith, if the Divine support is not present that enables an individual to make use of the logic and proofs that are being offered -- any more than a plant without the necessary symbiotic life forms attached to its roots will be able to fix nitrogen from the air ... although the latter might be in great supply around the plant.

As the Qur'an indicates - 'Allah never changes the Grace that has been bestowed on any people until they first change that which is in their hearts, and that is because Allah is Hearer, Knower (8:53).' This can work both ways -- that is, Grace can be increased or decreased depending on what goes on in the heart of an individual. So, in order for someone to open himself or herself up to the blessings of faith, the individual must till the soil of one's own heart and make it receptive to the seeds of Divine Grace.

Bilal can be as stubborn, independent, and logical as he wishes, but unless he tends to his heart and opens himself to God's presence, then, all he will ever be is stubborn, independent and logical, and he will -- through his own stubbornness, independence and logic -- seal his heart to spiritual change. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has said that we die in the state in which we lived and we are raised up in the state in which we die.

On the Day of Judgment, Bilal's stubbornness, independence and logic -- if they are not infused with the light of faith -- will do him absolutely no good ... only an independence and logic that are infused with the insight of faith will be of assistance to him. In fact, on that day, stubbornness, independence and logic that are in the service of something other than faith will be like tight shackles wound around his neck, weighing him down.

The people of the time of the Prophet used to laugh at God's Messenger whenever he proclaimed the revelations to which the Qur'an gives expression ... claiming that the words were but fairy stories and old wives tales. If he wishes -- since, as the Qur'an makes clear, there is no compulsion in matters of deen (the way of spirituality) -- Bilal can do the same, but he hurts no one but himself through such an approach to life.

By virtue of our nafs, we all have problems with rules -- especially those rules and principles that come from God. The nafs (the unredeemed and unpurified self) is intoxicated with its love of itself, and believes it knows all and is quite independent of any need of God and will never be held accountable for what it does in this world, but the nafs is wrong on all counts, and one of the ways in which the Qur'an addresses this is by issuing a challenge to the nafs: 'You would express your desire for death if you are truthful' (62:6), but, the nafs

will never express its desire for death because it is not truthful in these matters and is merely full of itself and its own hot braggadocio.

What Bilal has not, yet, truly realized in his heart is that "The life of the world is but a pastime and a game. Verily, the home of the Hereafter -- that is life, if they but knew." (29:64) He doesn't appear to believe in what the Qur'an says, and he doesn't appear to believe in what the Prophet says, and he doesn't appear to believe in what his shaykh says, because he has no faith in these things since his heart is too filled with the chatter, desires, and agenda of his own nafs. He does not appear to believe that "whoever is blind in this world, will be blind in the Hereafter, and even further from the Path."(17:72)

Some people have difficulty calling your husband 'Bilal' -- rather than by his family name -- because such people might feel your husband demonstrates so little love and respect for the Prophet on too many occasions. Apparently, Bilal has been upset that some individuals refer to him by his family name and will not call him by his chosen name, and, yet, when people constantly refer to him by a nickname, he has no problems with that at all. At the very least, the standard that determines why he should be upset with people referring to him in ways other than by Bilal are very inconsistent.

As far as the house-hunting incident of a number of years ago is concerned, my understanding is that Bilal was told what the problems surrounding that were -- both by Momin Shah Baba and by Baba. He was not kept in the dark about the situation, and it is unfortunate he does not seem to recall any of what had been said to him in this regard.

You have asked whether it is okay for Bilal to see the previous e-mail from me. By all means, show him, and show him this e-mail as well ...at least those portions that apply to him, or whatever you might feel comfortable in showing him.

Furthermore, if he wants a good introduction to the Sufi path, then, he should read -- very carefully, my new book. This work, by the Grace of Allah, is filled with a great deal of essential, fundamental material and addresses a great many issues and supports them all from the Qur'an and the hadith (sayings) of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)

In any event, Bilal cannot say the issues have not been presented to him in a logical, documented, straight-forward, elaborated fashion. Through Baba, Momin Shah Baba, and myself, Bilal has been given everything he needs in the way of information, facts, and so on ... but if he lacks the faith -- and only he can open himself to God's Grace -- then, even the Qur'an or the words of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) will be of little help to him.

I do understand what you mean about marriage joining people as one heart and one mind and how, when such people are inclined in different spiritual directions, this can be very upsetting and problematic. I also understand why you might feel uncomfortable about the fatiha issue ... both in relation to the possible tension it creates between you and your husband, as well as how you might feel when you are attending Fatiha and how others might be responding to you and your situation.

To be sure, there is a great deal of awkwardness surrounding this situation. As far as how you feel when you attend fatiha, you should understand that it is precisely this awkwardness that everyone feels.

People there do not hate Bilal. They are his well-wishers, and they want good things for him, so, it is somewhat mystifying to them why Bilal would treat both fatiha and his shaykh in such an apparently casual, whimsical manner.

Because they do love their shaykh and they do understand -- each in his or her own way -- the importance of fatiha, they really don't quite know what to say or do in relation to someone (namely, Bilal) who does not appear to share their perspective. And, since you are Bilal's wife, they really don't quite know what to say to you since, on the one hand, they do not wish to intrude, but, at the same time, they want to support you in whatever way they can -- even if they are not sure what this way might be.

So, the discomfort that you might be picking up on when you go to fatiha is most likely due to the foregoing considerations. Insha' Allah, I believe you will find that with regular attendance, people will begin to respond to you rather than to the marital situation, and, God willing, I believe you will find the people of fatiha will be warm, loving, friendly, and caring toward you as an individual and will try, as best they can, to leave everything else out of it.

With respect to your desire to go to fatiha and the discomfort it creates in conjunction with your husband's not going, then, I think several points need to be addressed. First, you should have your husband's permission to go, and if he will not grant this permission, then, you are going to have to reflect very carefully on what this means and what the ramifications of such resistance might be.

If your husband is okay with your going, then, go. At most, fatiha only takes place 4-5 times a month ... depending on how the days of observance fall during any given month ... and, for only a few hours on each occasion, so, surely, this does not constitute an overbearing hardship on a marriage -- in fact, quite the contrary, it is a source of many blessings for the families of those who attend these occasions.

Even if you cannot go all the time, try to go as often as you can. Fatiha is very important.

As far as being told things with respect to your behavior, attitudes, adab, and so on, a lot depends on your nisbath with me. I address issues according to what I perceive, God willing, to be the condition of receptivity of a mureed and how open someone might be to what needs to be said. I won't keep you in the dark, but I also have to know you really want to not only hear what I have to say about this or that issue, but you are prepared, as well, to act -- as best you can -- on what you might hear from me.

In addition, even when an individual might be willing to hear something, one also must find the right time to tell someone. A person might be more prepared to hear something on certain occasions and act on it, than at other times.

A shaykh might see something that needs to be addressed at some point. However, refraining from immediately addressing such an issue is not necessarily a matter of keeping a mureed in the dark, as much as it might be a matter of trying to find the most propitious time for a given matter ... a time during which a mureed might be able to gain maximize benefit from such a discussion.

If you trust me, love me, and have sincere nisbath with me, then, don't worry, I will, God willing, tell you what you need to know, when you need to know it. I love you and want only the best for you -- in this world and the next.

With much love and affection,
Baba Tariq

§

July 31, 2001

Dear Baba,
Wa 'alaykum as-Salaam!

By the grace of Allah, the package arrived yesterday morning. Please thank Bashir mia for taking the time to send it to me. Later on, after the package arrived, its contents were used and afterwards a second ceremony was observed.

Your kindness, love and prayers in these matters have been very much appreciated.

Love, Tariq

§

During the second ceremony mentioned in my e-mail to Baba, I give Lara several of my most prized possessions to mark the occasion: (1) a work entitled *The Path of God's Bondsmen* by Najm al-Din Razi ... one of my favorite Sufi books, and a book that Professor Irfan liked very much; (2) a handkerchief that had belonged to Professor Irfan's shaykh and that had been given to me by Professor Irfan one night following fatiha as a spiritual souvenir. In exchange, Lara gives to me one of her most prized possessions – two, small roses that are preserved in a clear liquid and that had been with Lara since early grade school ... a cherished gift from a fondly remembered childhood friend.

§

August 1, 2001

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

I am pleased that you received the parcel and that all went well. Congratulations. INSHA ALLAH good will become better and better, best. ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN. And yes, your response to your mureed's email was appropriate. I could not have explained better. She does not know that while mureeds stop, their Shaikhs continue. Meaning that Bilal may have drifted away, but I still love him and pray for him.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA

§

August 5, 2001

Linda – who has taken initiation but does not come to fatiha or attend any of the discussion sessions -- calls. She asks me if I can help her manage her financial portfolio.

I tell her I really know nothing about financial affairs. If I did, my personal situation would be different than it is. Consequently, if she would like to not only hang on to what she has, and, God willing, have it grow, she would do better to seek out guidance from an expert in such matters ... and this is, definitely, not me.

§

August 11, 2001

Lara, Jane, and I decide to take a trip to the coast ... first near southern New Hampshire, and, then, perhaps, travel on to Massachusetts. We start out early in the morning, and we arrive home quite late.

We have a great time together. The highlight of the day is when we are on a small mountain top and I show Jane and Lara, as my first

shaykh had shown me, how to see a form of nur, or spiritual light, that is always present, but rarely noticed.

They both are thrilled with what they have seen and experienced. They talk about it on the way home, but when we are closer to home, I tell them that while this topic is okay to talk about amongst ourselves, it should not be discussed with other people outside the silsilah.

§

August 15, 2001

Lara calls me and indicates that her friend, from whom she is renting her apartment, is going away for the night. Lara wants to come into Bamford and pick me up so that I can spend the night with her at her place of residence.

The invitation is very appealing since even though we are husband and wife, we really have spent very little time together. However, I am worried that her friend might come back during the night or early morning unexpectedly, and since her friend has expressed some interest in the Sufi path, I don't want to do anything that might adversely affect Lara's friend from, possibly, becoming more deeply involved on the path.

Consequently, I tell Lara that I don't think staying with her would be such a good idea under the circumstances. Lara is hurt and upset with my decision. The conversation quickly ends.

§

August 16, 2001

Lara calls on the cell phones we have gotten in order to be able to stay in touch when I am not in the office. Although we speak for several hours almost every night, she and I seem to be seeing less and less of one another since our ceremonies of July 31, and since she moved out into the country.

The problem might be more than the distance involved. In some ways, Lara appears to be actively avoiding me.

In addition, Lara is spending more and more time with Ron. He is always coming up with one home improvement project after another for which he just absolutely needs Lara's help.

Little by little, Lara seems to be slipping back into the sphere of Ron's emotional pull. As long as nothing is discussed between Lara and Ron, she seems to get comfort from these work projects, but, at the same time, she is beginning to fall back into familiar patterns ... such as excusing all his abusive, stalking, controlling, terrorizing, and manipulative tactics.

She is very confused about many things. Her behavior, attitudes, and comments reflect this confusion.

I inform Lara that the bill for the cell phone is becoming unmanageable for me. Originally, we had planned to use the phones only in the case of an emergency, but this plan was jettisoned early on when a variety of circumstances overran us.

She says not to worry, she will pay the bills, and she wants the phone conversations to continue because they are important to her. Lara indicates she feels like I am the one touchstone of sanity she has in her life.

§

August 19, 2001

Linda calls and asks if I would be willing to go into business with her. She outlines an idea she has that would be of relevance to her work, and she wants me to assist her with the project.

She says she knows I am having financial difficulty. Linda feels my becoming a business partner, of sorts, with her would be a win-win situation for both of us.

I thank Linda for the offer but inform her that, unfortunately, I cannot enter into such a venture with her. I explain to Linda that the shaykh of my present shaykh once had instructed him about three rules that are to be observed in our silsilah by a shaykh --- namely, (1)

not to become involved in the marital issues of one's mureeds; (2) not to enter into business dealings with one's mureeds; and, (3) to avoid becoming entangled in real estate transactions with one's mureeds.

Linda says she understands and was only trying to be helpful. I, again, voice my appreciation for thinking of me.

I can tell Linda is disappointed with how things have turned out. However, I also know the real reason for her calling me -- now, about the business project, and, earlier, in relation to the financial portfolio issue.

I am having enough trouble with Lara in such matters. I don't need to heap more trouble onto my plate.

Nonetheless, the whole situation is fraught with peril. A fine line has to be walked between not alienating a mureed and not giving into the machinations of his or her desires.

§

August 23, 2001

Lara calls me at the office. She indicates her landlord -- Lara's friend from work -- has been pressuring Lara a great deal lately about what is going on in Lara's life.

Lara says it is almost like being cross-examined by a lawyer. Lara is trying to be congenial about the pressure ... attempting to deflect the curiosity in one way or another.

However, the constant pressuring is becoming very stressful. Lara didn't leave Ron's form of stress just so she could be subjected to another kind of stress by another individual ... even a friend who is trying to be helpful to, and supportive of, Lara.

Lara informs me she is almost certain someone has been in her apartment. A heavy trunk has been moved, and there are a number of items that have been displaced from their normal positions.

When Lara was going through her period of psychological/spiritual breakdown, she used to 'journal' a great deal. Along with Rumi, her boss at work, and her counselor, journaling was one of the few islands of peace in her life.

She tells me there are many things in those journals that she would not anyone to see ... especially Ron. She has never shown the journals to anyone. She worries someone is trying to find them.

Or, maybe, the intruder was looking for something else. Whatever the answer might be, Lara no longer feels secure staying where she is.

In addition, Lara tells me about a recent event in which Ron brought something out to her apartment. She didn't want him to do so, but he insisted.

Once he unloaded what he came to deliver, he went into Lara's apartment, sat down, and wouldn't leave. Lara found the whole ordeal to be very unnerving.

I don't respond to Lara directly because, in many ways, I feel that Lara has been enabling Ron to continue on with his abusive and controlling behavior toward her. For example, I do wonder why Lara seems to have made sure Ron knew where she was moving. Moreover, she has given him her cell phone number, as well as her new home listing.

This is strange behavior for someone who says she is trying to escape from someone she absolutely loathes and of whom she is terrified. Obviously, there is something that I don't understand in what is going on.

I change the subject. Lara ends the conversation by saying she is looking for an apartment in Bamford. The stress (both from Ron and her landlord), travel distance (which takes time and is tiring after a day of work), and recent intrusion seemed to have begun to grate on Lara's nerves and are taking their toll ... perhaps moving to a new apartment will help alleviate some of these problems.

§

August 28, 2001

Jane calls and asks to visit with me. I say okay, and we arrange a time.

Shortly after arriving, she asks me whether I am having an affair with Lara. I tell her the truth: I am not having an affair with Lara ...

although I do not say that Lara and I have become married. I further add that there is nothing sexually inappropriate that is taking place between Lara and I -- a statement that also is true.

Linda stares at me while I am giving the foregoing declarations. She seems to be looking for any sign of prevarication on my part.

After a brief silence, she begins to complain to me. She feels I am not giving adequate acknowledgment of her previous spiritual journey ... that part which took place prior to her taking initiation on the Sufi path. She is especially concerned about my failing to validate the authenticity of what she has done and the experiences she has had -- both of which she has told me about in earlier conversations.

I tell her that whatever the authenticity of her previous experiences might be, she is on the Sufi path now. I suggest the possibility that her earlier experiences might have been a necessary prelude to the current part of her spiritual journey in relation to the Sufi path.

I further indicate that the purpose of the mystical way is not to have certain kinds of spiritual experiences of an anomalous nature. The purpose of tasawwuf is to assist an individual to struggle toward realization of one's essential identity, as well as to give expression to one's unique spiritual potential as part of the expression of the Hidden Treasure.

I add that it is a mistake to become preoccupied with spiritual experiences, states, and stations. One needs to concentrate on the struggle and learn to swim in the Ocean of Being ... so that no matter what happens, one will be able to keep afloat and engage life with balance, harmony, and equanimity.

We talk about a number of other issues. I can tell that Jane is very unhappy with what I am saying.

She leaves the office. I go back to another form of activity.

§

Tonight is fatiha. Lara shows up, and she informs me that Jane won't be coming any more.

Apparently, at some point after leaving my office, Jane meets with Lara and Carol. Lara tells me that Jane was crying her eyes out, and Jane claimed I had been shaming her and humiliating her. She criticized me for being emotionally abusive toward her, and, therefore, she would have nothing more to do with me.

I tell Lara there is a difference between intentionally shaming someone and inadvertently triggering someone's deeply rooted sense of shame -- a sense of shame that has been ingrained through earlier life circumstances and that is so vulnerable and raw that a person can easily suppose someone is shaming her or him when nothing of the sort is happening ... rather what is transpiring is a projection of the past onto the present that has been conjured into action by a use of words that are innocent for a speak but which are loaded for the person who is dealing with a deep-rooted sense of shame that has been imposed on the latter individual by authority figures earlier in life.

We say fatiha. Afterwards, we both go our separate ways.

§

August 31, 2001

I have decided to move from my apartment into a new office that I am renting just down the hall from my previous office. The new office - - as was true of the old office -- is down in the basement of a building ... in fact, the new office is just down the hall from my present office.

Very few people ever come down into the basement of the building in which my office sits. There are no outside windows, and the one large picture window in the new office that does exist -- looking onto the hallway -- can be covered over so that no one can tell whether, or not, someone is in the office.

The new office consists of three very large rooms -- all with doors and locks. Moreover, there is a bathroom ... although there is no shower, but I rig a temporary hookup for taking showers, using the faucet of the washbasin as my water supply.

By not paying rent on an apartment and an office, then, God willing, I can save a fair amount of money ... and money is beginning to become a critical issue again despite some odd jobs here and there. So, I make the move.

The landlord of the office building has graciously permitted me to begin moving my stuff a month early. Little by little I start to move things ... items from my current office, as well as items from my apartment.

On several occasions, I tell Lara about my projected move, but she never shows any interest in helping me. Perhaps, she is too caught up in her own move into Bamford ... something with which I offered to help her but that she declined.

Fortunately, my previous apartment is less than a hundred yards from the office building into which I am moving. I have been spending the last few days -- late at night (or very early in the morning, depending on how one looks at such things) when absolutely no one is around -- moving the contents of my old office into the new office, as well as transporting -- via feet -- some of the things from my old apartment into the new office ... again, all of this is done in the dead of night so there will be no witnesses to the implementation of my plan.

One of the last pieces of furniture that I take from my apartment is my mattress. I put the mattress above me, more or less trying to balance it on my head, but it is awkward to work with. Nonetheless, I am able to transport the mattress from the old apartment to the new office. I am afraid that a police car will go by and ask me what I am doing, because I am thinking that what I am doing might look pretty weird to an independent observer at 3:00 a.m. in the morning.

If I were a police officer, I think I probably would want to stop me and make inquiries about what was going on. However, fortunately, not a single car goes by as I make the pilgrimage from the old to the new

September 6, 2001

Except for fatiha and the Sufi discussion meetings, I see very little of Lara. She has moved into her new apartment that is not too far away from my new office, but with the exception of, maybe, a phone call here and there, I really am not spending much time with her.

She phones me at the office and asks me if I would like to see her new apartment. I am not thrilled with the way I feel Lara has been treating me, so, I decline and say, maybe another time.

§

September 8, 2001

Lara calls in the evening. She wants to know why I am being so distant with her. I remark I have been wondering the same thing with respect to her.

We review the events of the past month. Differences of perspective are exchanged.

She invites me again to see her new apartment. I say okay, and she gives me directions how to get to her place.

When I arrive, I take a brief tour of her apartment. It is small, but nice ... newly renovated. Plus, the rent is extremely reasonable.

I am happy for her. We sit and talk a bit.

She says Ron didn't help her move this time. Rather, about six or seven of her women friends helped her out.

I had offered to help her. However, she felt my presence might create too many problems ... with respect to Ron, and, perhaps, in other ways as well -- so, therefore, she had declined my overture.

Although Ron did not help her move, I discover he does know the address of her new apartment. Furthermore, Lara has given Ron her new phone number.

I point out the apparent discrepancy between, on the one hand, a woman who is abused by her husband, and, on the other hand, the same woman who enables the abuser to be able to keep tabs on her. She acknowledges the legitimacy of the point, but says not letting Ron

know where she was or how he could get in touch with her never occurred to her.

She says Ron has to go in for some medical tests on September 10th, and he has asked Lara if she would drive him. In lots of ways, Ron is insinuating himself back into Lara's life, and she seems helpless to prevent what is transpiring despite loathing Ron's touch or loathing even being in the same room with him.

There is a deep mystery here. Why would someone who has been abused for 20-plus years by a given individual and who hates said individual, nonetheless, go out of her way to stay in contact with such an abusive, controlling individual? ... The 'Stockholm syndrome' comes to mind.

§

September 9, 2001

Dear Baba

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

About 350-400 e-mails were sent out to various publishers, organizations, Sufi groups, newspapers, and student organizations concerning my new e-book that I have been writing over the last several months ... the chapters of which I have been sending to you for your perusal. Very few people took the time to respond (maybe 5-6 individuals -- and with respect to those who did, a couple of the responses were hostile (one from a Muslim and one from a non-Muslim "Sufi"), a few were indifferent or thought the book was a useless exercise, and a few couldn't be bothered to even download the material because they were far too busy. I am not even sure whether anyone actually downloaded the book.

I am beginning to advertise with respect to some courses I am hoping to be able to teach through the Sufi center here in Bamford ... starting in January/2002. Tentative titles for these courses are: (1) Paradigms of Reality; (2) Teaching Values From A Mystical Perspective; (3) Educational Models and Home Schooling; (4) The Quest For Meaning -- An Interdisciplinary Exploration Into Philosophy,

Psychology, Mythology, and Mysticism; (5) An Introduction To The Sufi Mystical Path; (6) The Islamic Spiritual Tradition; (7) Trans-personal Psychology And The Self; (8) E-Commerce -- Doing Business On The Internet.

The courses would run for 10 weeks, with 2½ hours per session, and I am thinking of charging around \$100.00 per course. I have no idea if anyone will be interested in taking one, or more, of these courses, but I have got to find a way of making some money because my situation is getting quite desperate.

I have been sending out C.V.'s to various job postings all around the U.S. for the past two to three months, without so much as a nibble. After some difficulties for the first four months following my being laid off from my brother's former business – by the people who bought the business from my brother – I, finally, by the Grace of God, began to receive some unemployment compensation, and, along with earning a few dollars here and there at odd jobs, I have been able to survive -- just barely -- over the last eight to nine months.

However, the unemployment compensation will probably stop sometime in late October. If I can't sell any books -- whether virtual or non-virtual -- and if no one is willing to sign up for any of the courses, and if I can't find any other kind of steady work -- which I haven't been able to do up until now, then, I am going to be in a lot of difficulty come December/January.

I will be leaving my apartment at the end of this month and moving into the office space I am renting at the present time. I have just moved into a suite of three rooms (the new office) plus a bathroom for \$375/month, and by moving out of the apartment, I will be able to cut expenses, God willing, by nearly \$500/month, while still being able to have a place to stay, as well as keep the Sufi Center going ... at least, God willing, for the next three to four months ... after that, I really don't know.

The new offices are just down the hall from my old office. They are quite spacious and in good condition, and I can use two of the rooms for the business of the Institute while reserving the third room for storage and a place to sleep. I will have more space than in my apartment, and I have purchased a mini-fridge plus a microwave for storing and cooking food respectively.

Having worked in the old Sufi center office for more than a year, the whole building is pretty much deserted after 9:00 p.m., and no one is around to bother me, or vice versa. There have been many occasions when I worked until 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning, and there have been many other times when I worked until 2-4 in the morning, and there was never anyone around ... except, occasionally, a guy (he is a computer person who is operating Internet servers out of the offices) who is renting office space in another part of the same building where my office is.

When I need to take a shower, insha' Allah, I will be able to rig a temporary arrangement in the bathroom – a fairly large area. The only problem will be doing laundry, but there is a public laundry not too far away, and when I lived in Sutton a year, or so, ago, I had to use a public laundry facility then, as well.

The foregoing has just been to fill you in a little on what is happening and what I am trying to do. Hopefully, God will help me get through this intact.

The next item is a doozie, and I really don't know what is going on, or what should be done. I will attempt to explain the situation as best I can, but the whole matter is, I think, quite complex ... which makes figuring things out very difficult -- at least for me.

This problem concerns Lara. We both have been operating under very difficult circumstances, although, in some ways, and by the Grace of Allah, certain facets of the situation have been progressing quite well ... these aspects having to do with her leaving her former husband, moving to another town near Bamford, and, then, just recently, getting a more permanent place in downtown Bamford -- all of which was made relatively easy for her by the Grace of Allah.

Problems, however, began to arise after she moved to Weston Beach (about a half hour's drive from Bamford, and it is out in the countryside) ... her first stop after leaving her previous home of some 14-15 years. One problem is the apartment Lara is renting is owned by a work colleague of hers, and, unfortunately, this individual is a rather nosy, suspicious, and, at times, relentless interrogator in relation to Lara's private life.

The apartment Lara was in out in Weston Beach is one of 5-6 apartments that are situated quite near the house of the landlord. The near proximity made it very difficult for Lara to come and go without often having to face a barrage of questions and cross-examination-type of exchanges from her work colleague and landlord about where Lara has been and what she has been doing and whom she has been seeing.

Lara had just come from a situation where her husband had been very controlling for twenty-three years, and, now, she has stumbled into a situation where a woman from whom she was renting an apartment, and who was, supposedly, a friend, and colleague, wouldn't and/or couldn't leave her alone and was, in her own way, very controlling about Lara's coming and goings.

In addition, her former husband would harass Lara constantly at her new apartment with phone calls -- sometimes leaving six or seven messages a night, with each message giving expression to more anger. Moreover, he was stalking her movements in Bamford in a rather intense way ... something that a variety of evidence confirmed over time.

Among other things, he had a key to her car, and he kept leaving messages, of one sort or another, in her car just to let her know he knew where she was and so on. Eventually, he even stole one of her personal diaries/journals from her car while she was attending fatiha, and, then, lied about it to her ... although he later admitted he had done this and returned the journal to her after having read between: 1/4 to 1/2 of its contents.

All of the foregoing has been very upsetting and unnerving to Lara. Moreover, she was extremely angry toward her previous husband concerning all of the foregoing.

Despite the fact she was feeling very unsafe about things and feeling insecure no matter where she went – and much of this due to Ron's behavior -- she wouldn't do anything about the situation. I told her stalking was a criminal offense, and even one of her former husband's best friends admitted to Lara he had told her former husband that he had to stop stalking Lara.

I told Lara that she should seek a restraining order against her former husband. However, she wouldn't do this.

I told her she should change her phone number to an unlisted number, but she wouldn't do this ... perhaps, to be fair, maybe she didn't do this because she was contemplating moving again soon. I told her she should ask for her car key back from her former husband, and although she agreed to do this and actually asked for the key back, the key was never returned and she didn't push the matter further.

In addition, she didn't file for divorce, even though I told her this was sending the wrong message to her former husband, as well as being somewhat cruel, since he would likely interpret the failure to file for divorce as a sign there was some chance for reconciliation between them. When I asked her why she hadn't filed for divorce, she said she didn't know, although she also indicated she would never go back to him or be with him again.

When she first moved to Weston Beach, she avoided me. When I asked her why, she said she didn't know, but once we started talking again and she was, of her own accord, visiting me on a daily basis, things seemed to be okay.

On a number of occasions, she indicated she had never felt better in her life since starting to come to my office, talking with me, stepping onto the Sufi path, participating in fatiha, listening to Qawwali, reading the Qur'an, and doing zikr. Prior to meeting me, she had been having a lot of dreams -- many of them of a nightmarish kind, but these all had stopped. For years, she had been plagued with thoughts of suicide, and, by the Grace of Allah, all of these thoughts have left her since coming into contact with the path.

She had been journaling a lot every day (making entries into her personal diary about life problems and issues) and although this had been helping her a lot, she no longer felt the need to do it and indicated she was getting everything she needed through her personal contact with me and the silsilah. In effect -- and she said as much -- I had become her journal ... the sort of things that used to fill her journals were now being disclosed to me.

By the Grace of God, she has been taken out of an abusive, violent, and controlling environment (i.e., her previous marriage). In addition, things were being made very easy for her at work ... easier than they had been in years.

We got on very well. She was friendly, warm toward me, wanting to help in various ways, and we spent a lot of time together at the office ... something that she initiated from her side, without any prompting or requests from me.

She told me she liked me a lot, and she seemed to appreciate all the time and effort that were expended to help her sort out some of her problems. Prior to the issue of marriage ever coming up, we talked at great length about the nature of her feelings and whether, or not, they were genuine -- or due to something else ... such as the phenomenon of transference, or, perhaps, tied to her early life when she was raped by a cousin and molested for several years by an uncle.

She seemed fairly convinced that her feelings were sincere. And, although there were a few things that she did that seemed to me to be somewhat incongruous or inconsistent with her professed feelings, these things were minor and could easily have been anomalous ramifications of the turmoil surrounding our situation ... and between her former husband, her landlord, and the many rumors that were beginning to circulate among her acquaintances and so-called "friends" -- who also were cross-questioning her in various ways -- there was a lot of turmoil on an almost daily basis.

On quite a few occasions, we explored what it was she wanted from me, and I had asked her to think about this. In the end, she always came back to the same thing -- she loved me, and she wanted to be with me, and she wanted to be married to me.

Her words seemed genuine and sincere to me. Whatever her past problems might have been, she seemed to understand she was being given an opportunity for a new start.

In fact, she has said on more than one occasion that she felt like she had won the lottery with our relationship, the Sufi path, and so on.

On the 1st of September, she moved into her new apartment in Bamford. Two days prior to that, she called me to tell me that she was being flooded with a lot of fear concerning our relationship, and she felt she needed to be left alone for awhile ... despite the fact I was not bothering her with phone calls, or visiting her at her apartment, or calling her place of work, or making any demands or her whatsoever.

She avoided me for a number of days ... just as she had done when she had first moved out of her house and away from Ron out to Weston Beach. This time, however, when we finally got together to talk about the situation, there was a big difference.

Lara looked like a hunted animal. She appeared to me to be in very bad shape emotionally, psychologically and spiritually.

After exploring the situation somewhat, she acknowledged I had done nothing wrong ... nor, she admitted, had I treated her unjustly or unfairly, nor had I been crowding her, or making demands upon her time or any of her other resources. Yet, she was acting toward me in a sort of very distant, hostile, angry manner.

When I asked her about this, she said she had no explanation. She said that since a few nights before her second move, she felt like she was a completely different person, and something had shut down in her with respect to me ... she said it was like a door had slammed shut, and she felt like she was drained of all feeling and emotion ... she was numb inside.

Lara said she was still interested in pursuing the Sufi path, and I believe her on this, but she also feels that, maybe, she doesn't have what it takes. I have tried to tell her not to be discouraged and told her how the Sufi path is a long journey and she shouldn't put too much pressure on herself, and, after all, she has only been at it for 4-5 months.

I told her she should only try to do what she can, and she has, by the Grace of Allah, been doing a zikr every day, in the morning and the evening, as well as reading the Qur'an a little every day, plus reading my books, all of which she really likes and enjoys and looks forward to reading. In addition, I recently gave her a book on the life of Muhammad (peace be upon him) by a Sufi, and she has begun to read that book. In addition, she has been coming to the Thursday night discussion group, as well as Friday-night fatiha, and she indicates she wants to continue to do all of this.

However, she also feels she made a big mistake in entering into a relationship with me, and she doesn't see how she can continue on the path because of that relationship ... she says she has a hard time facing me due to the shame and guilt she feels about what has happened. Yet,

whenever I ask her about what she believes the nature of the mistake is, she either can't, or won't, express what is going on in her.

She says she didn't ever plan on the 'shutting of the door' that apparently has taken place, but now that it has, and given she doesn't know how to change the situation or open the door again, she doesn't know what to do. So, for the most part, she avoids me ... although she does continue to come to fatiha and wishes to keep doing so.

The few times we have had a chance to talk, she appears to be better -- to a degree -- after we talk. However, this seems to quickly dissipate after she leaves.

We have talked about this fact on a number of occasions over the past few months. She has said she has had a very deep and intense urge to just run away from me. But, when she is with me, these thoughts and feelings -- by her own admission -- never enter her mind. They only occur when she is away from me or doesn't spend much time with me.

Three months, or so, ago I gave her an amulet (in accordance with your instructions) for several things she wanted help with (anxiety attacks, muscle spasms in her neck and upper back, and smoking). She had been wearing it, but, then, one day I noticed it was gone, and I asked her about it, and she said the metal chain (she was wearing it around her neck) kept breaking. Eventually, I got upset with her a little because I said the fact the chain had broken was no excuse not to get another chain and continue to wear it, and this criticism was said in the context of a number of other things that were happening with her that involved various breaches of spiritual etiquette I had noted, but, up until that point, had not said anything about -- hoping, instead, that things might improve without anything having to be mentioned ... which they didn't, and, eventually, I did address these issues.

There were a few occasions in which I had the opportunity to say the safety net zikr of our silsilah and blow on her. She said this seemed to help a great deal on the several occasions when it took place.

Unfortunately, there have only been two occasions when this was possible. I have thought about trying to arrange to do this on a regular basis --- with nothing more involved than this -- but the situation is so tenuous and fragile I have refrained from suggesting it.

Although I know very little about jinn and possession, one of the few things that I knew of -- which Dr. Irfan had indicated -- was to hold onto the little fingers of the person's hand and quietly recite the Throne verse. If there are any jinn present, then, some sort of manifestation of anger, illness, growling, or discomfort tends to manifest itself ... and I was witness to this on a number of occasions.

I tried this method with Lara tonight, but there appears to be no reaction -- she said she just felt numb inside, and she made no attempt to withdraw her hand or fingers. Of course, if she is being bothered by jinn, the foregoing might only mean there were no jinn present at the time or, maybe, what I was doing was incorrect ... as I said, I know very little about such matters.

She has said, on a number of occasions, she gets into a very weird, sort of spooked state at sunset time, and she often feels most vulnerable, and most intensely troubled at these times ... especially about our relationship. But, then, the state seems to pass, or it is not felt as intensely.

I have told Lara I do not want her to go away from the path if she wishes to continue, and, on a number of occasions recently, she has stated she does wish to do this -- and, as I said earlier, she is continuing to come to fatiha and do other Sufi-related activities and practices. Yet, she feels that given how she is feeling about things -- that even though she likes me -- she has a hard time facing me these days because of what is going on ... or not going on.

I have told her that if worse comes to worst, then, I will release her from her relationship with me, because I don't want me to get in the way of her continuing on the Sufi path. However, I also have told her I am not going to proceed with this until I am sure it is the correct thing to do.

Something is driving her distancing and emotional shut-down in relation to me. I am not exactly sure what this "something" is.

What is going on in her does not seem to be in accordance with any kind of logic, reasoning process, insightful understanding, or self-awareness that she can identify. She is perplexed and somewhat stunned by the whole thing, and she says she doesn't really know what

is going on other than that she seems driven to run away from our relationship and keep her distance from me.

I know I have been tempted to feel that, perhaps, I have been, and am being used, but, for some reason I believe her when she says that none of this is what she intended, and that despite a few nagging worries she had about whether going ahead with things was the right thing to do, she felt, for the most part, quite positive about proceeding on in the way we did ... until "wham".

The whole situation has been made much more complicated by the fact that Jane and Lara's landlord have proved to be such pains-in-the-you-know-where. In fact, Jane has been a huge source of problems in her own right -- for herself, for Lara, and for me -- and I wonder if things might have proceeded differently if Jane had not been present to be so obstreperous and difficult ... on the other hand, I guess things have unfolded as Allah has wished.

I feel somewhat guilty about saying this, but, for whatever, reason, I never trusted Jane right from the get go, and although I tried my best to interact with her fairly and judiciously, I always had a sense of wariness toward her -- a sense which has been borne out by subsequent events. In any event, she has left the silsilah ... for, among other reasons, my not being willing to 'properly appreciate' her previous spiritual experiences and paths, and because I refused to treat her in the 'special' way she thought was her due (and there, very definitely, was a sexual component to this from her side of things).

In any event, I really have no idea how to proceed, or how best, if I can, to try to help Lara. I am in way over my head here -- just as I was previously when things began to heat up between us ... but now I am in over my head in a completely different way.

The situation is further complicated by the unstable nature of my financial picture, because I really don't know how long I can, God willing, hang on here. Prior to the present problems, Lara and I seemed to have come to a mutually agreeable way of proceeding on the financial side of things, but all of that seems to have gone up in smoke ... although even now she has indicated she would like to help in this respect in any way she can, but it is hard to know what to make of this -- although I think when the offer is made, it is sincere -- because when

she leaves me, then, things change a fair amount, and she just avoids me for the most part.

I have told her she is your mureed, but you have instructed me to look after things here with respect to her, and she should consider me to be the locus of manifestation of your presence in relation to her. However, it seems that, in one way or another, I am not doing such a great job.

Her whole situation is further complicated courtesy of all the troubles she has had in her past. She really, in many ways, has been constantly traumatized since she was six years old when her mother died and her father abandoned her (and, then, later tried to seduce her, as well as, the rape by her cousin, along with years of molestation, followed by alcoholism and drug abuse until she was about seventeen, when she jumped out of the frying pan (i.e., became sober and off drugs and went to school and, eventually, got a job some nineteen years ago while raising several young children) and into the fire of an abusive, violent and controlling husband, and, then, several years of a nervous/spiritual breakdown.

I thought, maybe, God willing, if I treated her with love, kindness, warmth, caring, compassion, affection, friendship, intimacy, integrity, constancy, and respect, then, in time, if God wished, she might be able to be pulled out of the quagmire into which her life had been sucked ... and during the first four to five months of our interaction, the foregoing plan of action did, by the Grace of Allah, seem to be of considerable benefit to her. I didn't think continuing on in this fashion would be easy, and I knew it might take time and patience, but, until recently, I thought I would have her co-operation and she would, as best she could, have love for me during the process of healing. But, now, this doesn't seem to be so certain any more, and I really don't know how to proceed.

I am not asking you to intercede in things. I'm not asking you to take sides. Moreover, if it were to be decided that her best spiritual interests will be served, then, I am prepared to step aside.

I am concerned about her spiritual welfare because she is not in control of herself, but, rather, she seems controlled by other forces of an unknown nature. She really doesn't seem to be aware of what is going on or why ... other than the fact that it is going on, and she seems

powerless to change the situation or doesn't know how to go about changing things back to the way they were.

Although she is still able to do her job with skill and competency -- and she has a very demanding job, requiring considerable focus and attention over long periods of time -- nonetheless, she seems wounded in some, very deep, essential way. She can carry on with the superficial aspects of life -- like with her job, or paying bills, or looking after surface things -- but deep down she seems very troubled.

I want to help her if I can, but I'm not sure I can, or if I can, how this best can be done. As I previously indicated to you, I do not think she is psychotic or bi-polar or a sociopath or suffering from clinical depression, but she does seem to have some deep, emotional disturbance, and this all might be due to her many years of constantly traumatized existence.

She could be suffering from a very deep and pervasive post-traumatic stress disorder which is manifesting itself now that she has been able to escape from the last of the sources of stress -- her abusive, controlling, violent husband of 23 years. If I -- or almost anyone -- had been subjected to what she has had to go through, over the last 35 years, I -- or virtually anyone, with perhaps a few, very rare exceptions -- might have brought into a condition much like her present problem-laden psychological, emotional and spiritual situation.

I asked her permission to write to you and tell you all about this, and she gave me her permission. So, she wants you to know -- if you didn't already -- but I also believe she hopes, God willing, you can help her.

Love,

Tariq

§

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

Yes, I see her as a small innocent child, deep into darkness, and you calling out to her to be brave and get out from where she is. She

hears you and wants to come out, but some horrors that are actually her horrid memories, which now she sees and feels them to be real, warns her to remain where she is and not listen to you. Well, the mind can be very tricky in such situations because it is her other ethereal self (Hamzath) which is trying to control her. She is in good condition, but her past trauma had been deep enough to penetrate into that other ethereal self (Hamzath) The human hamzath is like an animal, and lacks wisdom and intellectual force. Ordinarily except in cases of the Aulia, the Hamzath goes on feelings, and remembers experiences of feelings. I am praying for her, and wish for her all the happiness and good health. I know that she is a very innocent clean person. She could help the process of recovery if she starts realizing that aside from the present, even her past had been controlled by this other self, that she has been a prisoner and a victim of abuse by this other self. How does such happen? Well the open enemy which ALLAH mentions of in the QURAN uses this other self to destroy INSAN, of whom he has always been jealous. Now she should realize this negative force as someone else, other than herself. She should be very upset at this enemy, this open enemy, who has sworn to avenge INSAN, because he thinks that he lost ALLAH'S Grace and Blessings due to INSAN superseding him in favor with ALLAH. Hamzath is based on the Nafs Ammara, and that is why it is prone to subjugation to this horrible enemy. Nafs uses different methods with different people according to situations he sees people in, and depression is one of those methods. That is why depression when influenced by him, usually happens at sunset, beginning of darkness. My son, we can help her but this is her battle, just as in different ways we all have to face ours. We are able and permitted to equip her with bows and arrows, sword, shield and horse but she has to ride the horse and she has to have the courage to face this enemy. This enemy cannot be destroyed. Why? Well, because ALLAH has ordained a time for him, and that time is till the end. So what has to be done? Not responding to his sly whispers, his threats, his influences, and mostly by having the ultimate Faith and belief that ALLAH only is the Supreme power. We have to know and realize that only ALLAH can make things happen, and we should have implicit Faith in ALLAH. We should trust HIM more than we trust ourselves. This is the only way of salvation. People read the Quran, but do they absolutely believe what ALLAH says. The very first impact of good

fortunate news that comes to one's heart is the faith that ALLAH is, and nothing else. Only ALLAH our best, our only friend, guardian, can make the evil magic of this open enemy of INSAN be removed. This magic deceives people and influences very incorrect harmful notions, and as a result these very notions manifest into horrors which these that are deceived face. This magic makes us forget that ALLAH is our best and only friend, who is closer to us than our ventricular vein, closer to us than our selves, that nothing else but ALLAH is. The enemy attacks through notions (incorrect thinking). So we should strengthen ourselves with IMAN (Correct Thoughts) which comes to us through our spiritual mother, because all creation comes from this very spiritual womb (RAHMAH) RAHMAH is what comes as physical manifestation of RASOOLALLAH Peace be upon him.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

September 11, 2001

The alarm for my clock radio goes off. Since it is set to a station rather than the buzzer, I hear an announcer describe how a plane, of some kind, has plowed into one of the World Trade Towers, but information is still sketchy.

Immediately, I get up and turn on the television. The initial image I see is a replay of a second plane impacting another of the towers.

The commentators are running through various scenarios of what might have gone so terribly wrong. The sequence unfolds as if in slow-motion dream-time. What I am seeing seems so unreal.

Two commercial jet planes slam into the same set of buildings within a matter of minutes. Who was behind it, or what was behind it, I didn't know, but these incidents did not appear to be accidents.

I watched with the trance-like fascination of someone who doesn't like what he is seeing and, yet, can't manage to turn away. Tragedy turns to horror as the two buildings began to crumble.

In the meantime, I learn about two other planes. One has been described as having crashed into the Pentagon, while the location of

the other airplane is uncertain, but it might be flying up the Potomac River.

Eventually, news is received about the 4th plane. Apparently, it has crashed, somewhere in Pennsylvania.

Throughout the day, more information, along with the speculations of alleged experts, begin to surface. Nature abhors a vacuum, and, therefore, television cannot stand to let even a picosecond of time be left unfilled, and, to a certain extent, the filling process doesn't seem to distinguish between whether what is being communicated is garbage or facts.

Later in the day, Lara calls. She asks me if I have been watching what has been going on, and I answer in the affirmative.

She tells me she won't be seeing me for a while. She is feeling very vulnerable, uncertain, and insecure about everything as a result of the events in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania.

Lara says she needs to be in familiar surroundings. She needs to be with family. Part of me understands what she is saying. Part of me is hurt by what she is saying.

However, there is nothing I can do about the situation. Now is not the time for an analytical discussion concerning our relationship – or lack thereof.

Toward evening, I hear reports that all transit has been shutdown in New York. Bridges have been closed, the subway has stopped, and there are no buses in or out of New York.

I worry about one of the members of the silsilah who works in New York but lives about an hour away from the city. I try to call this individual, but the lines are jammed.

Throughout the evening I make the same call. Each time the result is the same.

I recall that the location of the office in New York where the person works has recently moved. I am uncertain if the move was to the Trade Towers, but the possibility concerns me.

September 15, 2001

Lara calls. She wants me to meet her at a sandwich shop that is not too far away.

She sounds very mysterious. However, when I ask her what is going on, she says she will tell me when I see her.

I go to the sandwich shop, and Lara is there waiting for me. We order a coffee and a hot chocolate.

We start to talk a little, but Lara is very jumpy. She keeps checking to see if anyone is listening to us.

She suggests we go for a walk along the river. I follow, wondering what is going to be said.

She seems conflicted about what to say and what not to say. She gives the impression she is trying to weigh loyalties of some kind.

Eventually, the whole story comes out, in bits and pieces. At first, Lara is very reluctant to talk about anything.

She tells me she didn't want to talk with me on the phone or e-mail me about things because she is afraid the FBI might be bugging my line or monitoring my e-mails. Lara tells me Jane has called the FBI and reported me to them.

Apparently, Jane feels I fit the profile of a terrorist. According to Jane, I have state of the art computer equipment ... which just goes to show how little Jane knows about computer technology. In addition, she tells the FBI I have no visible means of support ... which proves nothing more than that Jane knows nothing of my personal circumstances and how I manage, by the Grace of God, to survive from one week to the next. Furthermore, Jane informs the FBI I am ... gulp ... a Muslim, involved in a secretive group ... which means Jane really wasn't listening very carefully when I explained why some aspects of the Sufi path are hidden. Moreover, she tells the authorities that my shaykh lives in New York, not too far from the World Trade Center ... which is about as relevant as saying that millions of people live in New York not too far away from the Trade Center. Finally, she tells the FBI that during the last five to six months, On occasion, I have alluded to something very big that, God willing, might happen in the not-too-distant future.

At the time I mentioned this ‘future event’ to both Jane and Lara, I was quite clear that the ‘something’ was of a spiritual nature, not a worldly event ... and, certainly not something which would cost thousands of people their lives. However, memory often remembers what suits the nafs, and, so, the ‘future event’ has been transformed into a possible terrorist act.

Towards the end of our conversation, Lara informs me that before approaching the FBI, Jane had first talked with Carol about the matter ... Carol had come to a few of the Sufi discussion meetings and decided not to return because she felt I was too rigid when I chose not to hug her at the end of one of the discussion meetings and, instead, just shook her hand. Jane asked Carol what she thought Jane should do with respect to me in the ‘light’ of the events of September 11th. Carol replies: “If you don’t call them, I will.”

The whole scenario reminds me of Nazi Germany ... people turning on alleged friends or acquaintances for ostensibly patriotic or noble reasons yet with really no evidence whatsoever to back up such allegations. Moreover, beneath such ‘noble’ acts are some all too human weaknesses and motives -- such as suspicion, anger, fear, resentment, and jealousy -- that are fueling the ‘patriotism’ and nobility.

§

September 20, 2001

Lara calls. We chat about this and that ... mostly superficial things.

However, during the conversation she does let on that when, as requested by Ron, Lara drove Ron to and from a doctor’s appointment, Ron tried to physically and sexually force himself upon her. Lara told him never to try anything like that again.

I feel badly for Lara. Yet, she keeps placing herself in such situations vis-à-vis Ron. She can’t stand being with him. Yet, she can’t seem to bring herself to get away from him either.

He keeps spinning his stories. She keeps buying into them, only to be disappointed later when she discovers he has lied about something.

She keeps trying to love him. He keeps trying to control, manipulate, and exploit her. She knows there is a major disconnect in the relationship. She just can't seem to extricate herself from the situation.

Seemingly, Lara had escaped in July. Yet, ever since her escape, she seems to be spending an inordinate amount of time hanging around the prison fence, trying to please her former jailer, listening to his stories about how much he loves her, wanting to believe him, and, yet, every time she lets her guard down, Ron hurts her in some manner.

I am reminded of the dogs in the experiments run by Martin Seligman when he was developing the idea of learned helplessness. The dogs are subjected to shocks in such a way that they are unable to escape the pain no matter what they do, and, eventually, the dogs just go lie down in a corner and endure the pain, groaning every now and then. Such conditioned dogs often will not try to escape even when they are shown a way to free themselves from the on-going pain.

§

September 24, 2001

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I don't know how things will work out between Lara and myself, but I have been trying, as best I can, to help Lara work through things. I have passed on to her what you have said to me in your previous e-mail, and I have tried to explain to her some of the dynamics of how different dimensions of our being can influence, shape, color, and direct choices that are made.

More specifically, what I told her is: how many of us might think that something called an "I" is making choices, but, in truth, for most of us, decisions, judgments, valuations, and behaviors are generated through intentions that are dominated by nafs (the lower, carnal soul), Iblis (Satan), dunya (the world of entanglements generated through the collective interaction of everyone's nafs), and unbelievers. If we are lucky, then, by the Grace of God, our higher spiritual faculties might

shape and color intentions and behaviors rather than being filtered through the other, lower faculties and forces.

Because the results of the intention process appear in consciousness, and because it is this consciousness through which we access awareness of mental and emotional contents, we assume there is a stable center or 'I' that is responsible for everything appearing in consciousness, but, instead, we mistake the constant flow of awareness concerning the contents of consciousness for a central 'I' that is making all of the decisions and judgments in a consistent and knowing manner.

Awareness is one thing. The dynamics of the processes through which contents come into consciousness, is quite another.

I have said the foregoing, not because I feel you don't know or understand all of the foregoing very much better than I do, but because I think, God willing, it helps to establish a context with respect to which it might be helpful for me if you were -- to whatever extent is permissible -- tell me more about the nature of hamzat and how it is related to the dynamics of nafs, and, as well, to relate what some of the properties of hamzat are and how, in general, it comes to play a role in directing intentions, understandings, behaviors, and so on.

Are there different kinds of hamzat? Does the hamzat develop differently in different people according to experience, personality, and so on? In people other than the friends of Allah, is the hamzat always a potential liability? Are there useful tasks that the hamzat performs?

How, in general terms, does hamzat become pathological? Do hamzat and nafs-ammara often collaborate, or do they each have their own agendas and spheres of interest that can conflict? Does hamzat feed into nafs, or does nafs feed into hamzat, or neither?

Am I right in assuming that problems begin when, for whatever reason, one begins to cede the hamzat a sort of proxy vote and/or veto power, so that intentions begin to defer to the likes, dislikes and vested interests of hamzat? Lara has said that whenever this mechanism -- which you have identified as hamzat -- comes into play, then, it is like a switch being thrown, and everything of a reflective, action-oriented,

decision-making, love-related kind of process, pretty much shuts down.

Am I right to assume that the throwing of the switch does not just happen to a person, but a person's capacity for choice takes an active role in either helping the switch to turn off, or in permitting the switch to be thrown by not doing anything, or by not taking any steps to prevent this from happening? And, if the foregoing assumption is correct, then, presumably, the only way in which the dominance of hamzat can be overcome is by actively resisting its tendencies? ... for example, Lara is often flooded with intense fear and anxieties, so, when this happens in a given situation, then, she has to have the courage to do what is right or appropriate rather than be coerced, threatened, intimidated, pushed around, controlled, or placed under pressure and duress by the activity of hamzat?

Lara tends to go into isolation when dominated by hamzat. Furthermore, she seems to go on cruise control so that no new decisions are made, or such things are avoided or put off, and, underneath her surface behavior, this is done in a very aggressive, cold, controlling manner even though the exterior behavior might be couched in a display of gentleness ... something that, in the clinical literature, is known as 'passive-aggressive' behavior.

Would it be correct to assume that, perhaps, one way of approaching this issue is to try -- without forcing things or starting arguments -- to induce her to come out of her tendency toward isolation and avoidance? Or, is this something that she can't be helped with and she either has to: face up to hamzat and begin to exert control over it on her own, or continue to lose more control to the dictates of hamzat?

Partly because of past history, and partly because of personality, Lara doesn't like conflict of any kind. Unfortunately, this also might mean she is not willing to enter into conflict with her hamzat because she doesn't like the tension, pressure, discomfort, and struggle that surround entering into confrontation with this part of her being that is having, and has had, a very damaging and debilitating impact on her life. In addition, I have a feeling hamzat might take advantage of her desire to distance herself from conflict by turning up the heat/pressure on her (through flooding her with fears, anxieties,

irrational thoughts, forebodings) whenever she even begins to think about trying to do something about the situation.

Her strategy seems to be one of going into isolation and hoping for the switch to come back on by itself. Now, perhaps, sometimes, in minor ways this automatic switching back on of sociability and so on might happen on its own, but one of my worries is that, maybe, some day, she is going to let the switch get turned off and she is never going to be able to muster enough resistance and willingness to fight to get the switch turned back on again.

I also feel she might stand a lot better chance with her struggle if she were to associate with me more -- or, more precisely, associate more with the silsilah through me. I feel, by the Grace of God, a lot of positive, constructive things were happening in various areas of her life when she was spending lots of time with me, but now that she is avoiding me -- except for coming to fatiha -- her condition seems to be a lot worse than it was.

I believe her hamzat has identified me as an enemy who is threatening the dominance it has enjoyed for so many years, and, consequently, she is getting flooded with all kinds of fears, anxieties, doubts, and mistrust concerning me by her hamzat whenever there is a heartfelt desire on her part for greater intimacy (in terms of friendship, spirituality, and so on). I am not bothering her, calling her, making demands on her, arguing with her, generating conflict pressure, or doing anything that would cause her to mistrust me -- and, she has acknowledged this -- but, nonetheless, she continues to avoid me and is, for the most part, very distant and cold -- if not somewhat hostile on occasion -- toward me, even while, simultaneously, admitting that I have done nothing wrong that would warrant such behavior.

In any event, anything that you could say that might help me to understand the nature of hamzat more, its dynamics, and how it figures into things would be very much appreciated and might even, God willing, help me to deal with the situation a little better, or, perhaps, help me to explain to her better that which is going on within her.

Love, Tariq

§

Tariq my son,
Assalamo alaikum.

Hamzath could be imagined as a vehicle driven by the Nafs Ammara. Hamzath has no intellect of its own and just obeys what the nafs ammara (the carnal soul) wants. Since Hamzath is influenced by the nafs, so in order to make it controlled one has to try to transform the nafs ammara into nafs lawwaama (the reproachful or regretful self), and then of course the final stage known as nafs muthma'inna.(the satisfied, tranquil nafs)

You can only advise, pray and concentrate positively towards her. But the decision is for her to take.

The rule is for her to make the correct choice. If it were the other way round, meaning if we were allowed to interfere and do the decision for others, than the whole purpose of physical life on this planet called earth would be changed. The purpose is to rise above the occasion, to transform the animal self into a full complete human in its perfection, by accepting the Divine Guidance. Belief in God comes first. Only then does the believer pray to God to help. When the believer prays to God with all his or her heart and soul, then and only then does the Divine Guidance come.

I am sure you are praying, and I am also praying for her. She must want the Divine Guidance with all her heart and soul. She must prostrate herself before God, and pray with complete faith. She must also believe in the fact that there is a soul, and that the soul is in dire need of complete trust and faith in God.

Now she is confusing the subconscious and conscious self with the soul. Belief in the hereafter helps in trying to regulate life on earth.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

October 12, 2001

Dear Baba

As Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Below is a link to a re-worked formatting of the Qur'an that I had been making available to people for free from our Web Site.

The original reason for re-formatting the Qur'an that I had gotten - with permission -- from a fellow in Croatia, was because I didn't like the search function with that Quranic program ... one was limited to searching each surah as an isolated , source and I wanted people to be able to search the whole Qur'an. So, I decided to reformat the text of the Qur'an and re-do it as a new e-book.

However, as I was converting the text -- from the previous Quranic format version to the present one (the new one now available) -- I began to discover a great many mistakes. Most of these were of a typographical variety, but I also discovered other things, as well. For instance, when the original version had been scanned, there were quite a few words that were missed- usually at the end of certain verses, and, as well, a number of verses were improperly numbered, and, then, there were some other problems, as well.

All in all, there were between 300-400 errors that have been discovered. While I cannot claim the new version is error free, it is, by the grace of Allah, an improvement on the previous format. I feel a lot better about releasing this Qur'an format, now that many of the earlier problems have been corrected.

I have also wanted to do the same thing with the Hadith collections that accompanied the earlier program. However, there might be a problem here.

By the grace of God, it so happened that I had a non-virtual English copy of precisely the same translation as was used in the original Quranic program that I had borrowed from the fellow in Croatia, and, consequently, I had a ready reference to check possible mistakes when I was converting over to the new format. Unfortunately, I do not have a ready reference when it comes to the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet or attributed to the Prophet Muhammad – peace be upon him), so I am uncertain whether I should proceed with working on a new formatted

version -- similar to the Quranic one that has been done -- or just let it go.

It would be nice for people to have a collection of Hadith that could be searched as a whole, and not just from chapter to chapter. It also would be nice to be able to correct whatever typographical problems might have been incorporated into the original program format, but if I cannot do the latter, then, perhaps, no version at all should be offered from our web site -- as opposed to a fully searchable edition that might contain mistakes ... especially missing words in various places. So, I am wondering what you might suggest in this matter.

Please convey my Salaams and greetings to the people of your household and to the people of fatiha.

Love,
Tariq

§

Tariq, my son

Assalamo alaikum.

ALHAMDU LILLA AH, Tariq Shah, you have done much good to the world by getting this wonderful QURAN translation on web. INSHA ALLAH it will benefit thousands of people from all walks of life, ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN. ALLAH will surely BLESS you for each person being benefitted by your efforts. LOVE AND DUA,

BABA

§

A little later in the day, the following e-mail from Baba arrived:

Tariq My son,
Assalamo alaikum.

Regarding hadees, since it had come to our notice about some additions and subtractions, I fear that we might have to check all, before getting them to the public. We certainly would not want anyone reading what is not true. Checking the whole Hadees could be very tiring, and I wonder if you have all that time. INSHA ALLAH whatever you decide will be best, ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

October 14, 2001

Dear Baba

Wa 'alaykum as-Salaam!

Although I am not positive, if the problems with the hadiths are anything like the problems with the Qur'an program with which I worked, in the latter case, the major problem seemed to be one of scanning technology. In other words, no scanner is 100 % accurate, and, as a result, there were words in the original Quranic text (probably on paper or in a book) which were not picked up by the scanner when the text was read into the computer. The words that were missing -- when they did occur -- were always at the end of a verse, and so the way that I checked things would be to look at the punctuation at the end of a verse, and if there seemed to be something missing, then, I would check my copy of the Qur'an to see what -- if anything -- had been left out. Most of the time, I found that punctuation of some kind probably had not been scanned and, therefore, was missing, but quite a few times, I found one or two words -- usually on a line by itself or themselves at the end of a verse -- were missing, and, when I found this, I added the missing word or words.

The other problems I ran into also seemed -- although Allah knows best -- to be one of scanning limitations. For example, '1' (the number) would sometimes be substituted for 'l' (L) or 'i', or, sometimes, 'is' would be 'IS', and so on. Every so often, I would find the odd '%' or '[' symbol designation -- or something similar -- thrown into the text at

one point or another. In addition, on a number of occasions one would find, say, '3]' instead of, for example, [43] in the ayat numbering system, or sometimes, the verse number would be missing altogether and had to be added.

I don't believe there were any intentional additions or subtractions of words in the Quranic program with which I worked. Although, the program did make the mistake of adding "In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful" before Surah Tauba, but, for whatever reason, over the years, I have noted how a number of supposed scholars have stated in books which they wrote that every surah of the Qur'an begins with "In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful", when there is this one notable exception.

In any event, I don't think there are any intentional mistakes in the Quranic or hadithic programs with which I am working -- just, on the one hand, ordinary human errors (in the sense that the people doing the scanning, and so on, did not seem to check the results of their scanning process for possible errors arising from the scanning process) and, on the other hand, limitations in current technology.

Nevertheless, since -- unlike the case of the Qur'an -- I do not have a non-virtual copy of the Hadith (say, Sahih Bukhari) I would have nothing to use to check against the program with which I am working. I could pick up on obvious typos and scanning problems, and I also could locate places where words might be missing at the end of a sentence or paragraph, but I wouldn't know what to put in without an original copy to use for purposes of comparison.

In the case of the Qur'an I did, I found, maybe, 50, or so, instances, where a word, or two -- usually only one - was missing at the end of one, or another verse. I would estimate that roughly the same amount might be missing in the case of the Hadith program -- but I am not really sure.

If you feel this is too problematic or it would give a poor impression of the silsilah, then, of course, I won't proceed. On the other hand, if I could isolate where I feel there is a problem (i.e., a word or two missing), perhaps, there is someone you know who has a copy of Bukhari with English translation, and, then, I could just use the numbering system already in place with that collection of Hadith to find out whether, or not, there was something missing ... that is, I could

ask the person with the English translation to check on Book such and such, section such and such, to see if there was anything missing at the end of a sentence or paragraph.

Please let me know what you think on these matters, and please convey my love and Salaams to the people of your household and to the people of Fatiha.

Love,

Tariq

§

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

The few mistakes regarding which you speak of are scan and typo mistakes, but I am speaking of deliberate additions in Hadees which were never a part of Hadees before and which give a very scary color to Islam. This was found out recently, and since they are published in book forms, unfortunately they are being read in most homes. So I think you will do great service by publishing in the Internet only that from the Hadees which has not been added. The only thing I can do is look for a copy in English translation and hand it over to you in its original form which has in no way been tampered with. ALLAHUMMA AAMEEN.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

October 26, 2001

My brother, Bruce, drops by the office to see how I am doing. He says his daughter recently purchased several small buildings that she is intending to rent out.

In one of the buildings he indicates there is a basement apartment ... which although not great, is very livable. In particular, he tells me

that there is one room in the apartment -- the living room area -- which is very nice.

He wants me to take a look at it. If I like it, I could move in, rent free ... although, perhaps, I might want to help out with mowing the lawn during the summer and shoveling snow during the winter.

I accompany my brother, and we go to the apartment he has been telling me about. Bruce is right -- the apartment is not much, but it is livable, and the living room area is very nice.

On the way back to the apartment, Bruce waxes eloquently about the possibilities in relation to, and the advantages of taking, the apartment. I am silent until Bruce parks in front of my office building.

I tell him that the offer is an extremely generous one. However, I have signed a lease with the landlord who rents my office to me, and, I don't know if I will be able to get out of the contract.

Secondly, I indicate to Bruce that as much as I appreciate the offer, I am trying to make my own way in life -- however poorly I might be doing that. Consequently, I am reluctant to accept the offer even if I could get out of the lease.

However, I leave a little lead-way for future developments. I tell Bruce that if the time comes when I can no longer afford the rent on the office, and if the offer should still be open at that time, I would accept it very gladly ... but I haven't got to that point yet.

Bruce is quite angry, but he doesn't say anything. I get out of the car, and he speeds off into the night toward his home.

I know Bruce and his daughter are quite concerned about me. I also know Bruce doesn't think much of my lifestyle or many of the choices that I have made across the years.

Finally, I know Bruce has a certain tendency to want to control things. I am reluctant to become part of what he wants to control ... even if something very nice should accompany the control process.

Earlier on, after I was laid off by the person who bought Bruce's business, Bruce had made another generous offer. He told me that as long as I was actively looking for a job, he would be willing to pay me a salary -- certainly enough to pay my basic bills. However, I knew

accepting such an offer comes with a price tag ... namely, interference, to some extent, in my life.

Bruce and I come at life from two entirely different directions. I respect him for his accomplishments, but he doesn't seem to have much respect for what I had done with my life. Nevertheless, he continues to try to help me out which, as far as I am concerned, is a reflection of his integrity and compassion as a human being.

Nevertheless, I don't want Bruce to be constantly looking over my shoulder, second-guessing me, or indicating what sort of jobs I should apply for. So, I said 'thanks, but no thanks'. Bruce wasn't happy with this decision either ... perhaps he just is frustrated with how I go about things.

§

November 21, 2001

Bruce has invited me to Thanksgiving dinner. He wants to know if the sort of kosher chicken he and his wife got last year will be okay.

Bruce once told our mother – and, then, she related to me what she was told by him -- that although he could forgive me for Vietnam, he could not forgive me for becoming a Muslim. He says I have left Jesus (peace be upon him).

I didn't leave Jesus (peace be upon him). I left a certain theological depiction of Jesus (peace be upon him).

This difference appears to be lost on Bruce. Moreover, and somewhat ironically, I can say, in all honesty, that I love Jesus (peace be upon him) more now, as a Muslim than I ever loved him when I was a Christian. Go figure!

In any event, I find Bruce's thoughtfulness quite strange. I don't know if he has forgiven me for becoming Muslim, but, nevertheless, he is willing to go out of his way to accommodate my religious practices ... at least in this case.

The dichotomy is truly intriguing. It captures a great deal of the complex currents that seem to run through my brother's character.

§

December 15, 2001

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

After talking with you today, I started to re-read the e-mail I had sent to you, and I realized that an important paragraph had somehow been left out, so I have added it to this email.

I'm not sure what decision you have reached about 'Eid. As usual, there are the Ramadan-ending controversies about when it should be observed.

I went out to try and see if I could the crescent moon but without success. The sky was very clear, with no cloud cover ... although I don't really have a good line-of-sight to the horizon.

I went to Dr. Uthman's web site, and he has announced that 'Eid should be on the 16th (Sunday, tomorrow) in North America, but on the 17th (Monday) in the Middle East and surrounding areas. I know that you seem to like Dr. Uthman's way of doing things, but on several occasions, his calculation of dates doesn't seem to correspond with the moon as I have seen it ... although, admittedly, maybe I don't know how to look at the moon, or my calculations -- based on what I have seen of the moon's phases -- might be incorrect.

So, I am wondering what your judgment of the situation is? Is it one more day of fasting, or is tomorrow 'Eid? The uncertainties of the 'Eid situation is the easy part of this e-mail. The rest is a mess ... as usual.

Lara has just left my office/home. She brought back a few of my things that were at her apartment.

Although we have been together, on and off, over the last several months, there have been three or four times when she has abruptly said that she wants to be alone, and I get thrown out for five, six or ten days. She often does not communicate with me during this period of time.

Up until tonight, she, usually, has made it to fatiha despite these tensions. But, after her unceremoniously dumping me on Wednesday

and telling me she wants to be alone, and, in addition, after not hearing from her for the past 4 days, I called around 5:30 p.m. today and tried to speak with her. She might or might not have been there because she has a habit of not picking up the phone when someone calls, but, in any case, I left a message that, in effect, asked her if she was coming to fatiha tonight, and, if so, it would be at 7:30 p.m. but if she did not come, I indicated I would know what this meant.

I had to go out to run a few errands around 6:30 p.m., but I returned by seven, and there was a message from her waiting for me. The message was very brief, but, essentially, it said that she would not be coming to fatiha.

She had left the message only about 10-15 minutes before my return, so I called back. However, again, she did not pick up the phone.

I left a message that said, among other things, that I was very unhappy with the situation ... that the on-going saga was not just very sad, but tragic, in terms of what she was doing with, and to, her life.

I told her I had not done anything to precipitate the latest dumping maneuver, but it was her attitude that had taken her off the deep end of things, and she had to take responsibility for this. I told her the way she was, and had been, treating me was no way to treat a friend, or a shaykh, or someone with whom she had, supposedly, an intimate relationship. I told her I was very upset by all of her unfairness and unkindness and felt she was being rather cowardly by refusing to talk with me or discuss the situation ..., since, to the best of my understanding of things, I had not done anything to warrant what was transpiring.

I informed her I could see the games she was playing, and I did not appreciate such practices. I further said in response to her apparent belief that much of her problems are related to estrogen levels (which she had been talking about the last few days before kicking me out) was that although biology might create problems for people, nonetheless, we had to take moral responsibility for what we do and how we permit, or resist, the entrance of such forces into the shaping of our lives.

I might have said a few other things of similar sort, but the foregoing gives the flavor and gist of what I related in the message.

Although my tone of voice was, undoubtedly, one of being upset -- and I admitted as much to her -- I was not yelling and screaming.

A few moments after I hung up I remembered we, supposedly, had a financial arrangement concerning the end of this month. About two months ago, I had told her I wanted to try to get my e-Commerce site going and was trying to give it until the end of the year. I had asked if she could help out and did not want to be left hanging financially come December 20th with respect to paying the bills that would be coming up.

Baba, you should know I have taken hardly any money from her during the last 10 months, even though she has offered on a number of occasions to give me money. Even after we got together, there was almost no exchange of money from her to me that was taking place.

Part of this was because I was trying, as best I could, to look after my own expenses and pay my own way. Part of this was because I never felt like Lara was really, deep down, interested in having a partnership with me and found her to be unreliable in a variety of ways ... even though, in her own way, I guess she tried as hard as she could.

I did some proof reading for her over the last 5-6 months, and she paid me for the work I did, but beyond this, there was very little additional money being spent on me by her except when she would offer to buy me lunch or take me out for a pizza or if she took it upon herself to buy me a CD, or something small ... none of which happened a lot, but such things did happen from time to time.

For the most part, I have paid for bills by work I have done for her, or some money received for books I sold, or some money earned through the web site, or doing some odd jobs for my brother Bruce that he insisted on paying me for against my protestations, or some occasional money that Bruce, in his kindness, gave to me to help out, or unemployment compensation.

I do not like to ask other people for financial help. But, contingent circumstances have forced to do so on more than one occasion.

However I had a talk with her several months ago concerning the financial situation. Seemingly, we came to an understanding about how to get through November and December.

Over half of my November expenses were to be paid for through proceeds connected to proof-reading work that I did for her over the last three months but that had never been paid and about which I made no mention. At one point – at least, I was under the impression that this was the understanding which had been reached – we had agreed that I would become her primary proofreader with respect to the material she was producing for lawyers and other clients, and, in return, she would look after the expenses for the office and bills associated with trying to get a business going ... this would amount to about \$800 a month. She said she could afford this, and she would have to pay someone to proof-read her typed material in any case.

To make a long story short, the ‘arrangement’ never actually worked out. She said all I had to do was tell her what money I needed and she would give it to me. I told her on a number of occasions, but the money was never forthcoming, and, after awhile, I got embarrassed about asking ... and this was after I had done two to three proof-reading jobs for her.

In the meantime she is paying all kinds of bills for her previous husband, Ron -- even though Ron has a relatively decent paying job and could afford to pay his own bills. I told her I didn't think this was right -- for him or her -- but, I guess, like a lot of things I said, this made little difference.

She kept complaining about how our situation was so difficult (being secret and the Islam aspect of things -- especially after September 11, 2001), but she was never willing to take the steps that might have simplified her situation and ours. I told her that by putting off filing for a divorce she was not only sending the wrong message to Ron in the sense that she was giving him grounds for hope where, supposedly, according to what she has explained to me on many occasions -- there was no hope of a rapprochement, but she was also being unfair to him, to me, to herself, and to the rest of her family as she kept everything in suspense and in a state of unresolved tension -- tension with which she has a hard time dealing.

In any event, all of the foregoing is by way of background to my second phone call to her this evening ... the one to which I alluded above and was about whether, or not, she intended to leave me in the lurch financially speaking with respect to the outstanding payments

for services rendered by me to her in relation to the proofreading. On the basis of her recent actions and her message I understood that she did not intend to attend fatiha, but she also seemed to be making a conscious decision about leaving our relationship completely -- in its various aspects, spiritual and otherwise. I indicated in the message that although I felt she did not know what she was doing, there was nothing really I could do about that -- except I wouldn't call her and/or bother her -- and if she wanted to end the relationship, in all its aspects, so be it.

However, I went on to add that since I have only about 6 days before a number of bills come due -- bills that are very important to get paid -- I asked her in the message if she were going back on the financial arrangement we had made earlier and that if she were, could she, at least, inform me. I said I felt she owed me that much -- that is, with respect to her telling me what she planned on doing -- so, if I had to, I would be able to try to make some other arrangements ... even though I am not sure what I could do in such a short time if her answer was no with respect to paying for previous proofreading services.

I also said that since we, apparently, were not going to be seeing each other anymore, there was something at her place that I would like returned, if possible, and this was the second reel of the Ben Hur video tape. I didn't ask for anything else.

She called back about 10-15 minutes later and said she could bring my stuff over if I wanted and, moreover, she did not plan to leave me in the lurch financially. So, she came over a few minutes later (she only lives four to five blocks away), with a bag of things ... which included the aforementioned video.

When she got here she could see the room was set up for fatiha, but she just stood in the entry way to the room. I asked her what was going on?

She said she didn't know. I told her this answer was really not good enough anymore because she had been saying this whenever she was doing things that she didn't want to explain or talk about. I told her she was fooling around with people's lives and that "I don't know" wasn't an adequate justification for doing so.

She asked me whose life was she fooling around with, and I said her own, mine, and her children's ... and, possibly, Ron's life as well. I went on to say that she had to understand the decision she was making was something for which she would have to answer on the Day of Judgment, and the consequences of our actions and decisions here on Earth have the potential of not lasting for a day, or week, or year, or forty years, but for an eternity. I also said she shouldn't think the Qur'an was just a bunch of fairy tales that did not have to be taken seriously ... there are consequences for our actions.

I added that things, spiritually speaking, had been given to her on a silver platter, and every accommodation had been given to her, and she had gotten every break in the last ten months, and all she was doing was throwing it all away. I told her it was time for her to grow up, develop some maturity and moral responsibility for her life and stop blaming everyone else for her situation... she alone was responsible.

I again reiterated that blaming an excess or depletion of estrogen for all her actions just wouldn't cut it. We all have our crosses to bear, so to speak, but we have to act responsibly despite these handicaps. I told her she was rather arrogant, self-righteous, and condescending when she would ridicule men for their aggressiveness and inclination to violence, and, yet, she would turn around, and under the influence of estrogen, do some not very nice things.

I said that without condoning such things, men's biology had been bathed in testosterone since the time they were very young, and the inclination of men toward aggression and violence could be linked to this biological fact but, men, nonetheless, had to try to counter these inclinations, just as women had to counter problematic issues that the presence, or lack, of estrogen levels might incline them to do.

I was in the midst of saying something more about her attitude of arrogance toward a lot of things that had been discussed previously. I said that she often acted like she seemed to want to take a big puff on her cigarette and blow it in the face of things ... but, at this point she turned around and walked out.

Perhaps, I was too harsh in my comments. Maybe, I should have been more patient or more loving or more forgiving, but I wasn't, and I really don't know if what I have said and done is right or not.

It would seem things are over on a number of levels. And, this leads to the next set of subjects. I have tried, as hard as I can, in this situation. I have had to put up with a lot, and I have tried to be understanding and responsive, while, at the same time, try to help keep Lara pointed in a spiritually constructive direction.

Each time I was told she wanted to be alone, it hurt. It hurt when she didn't seem to care enough to make contact with me.

It hurt she never took the steps necessary to really get out from the abuses of her previous husband, and, yet, she went on endlessly, sometimes, about how much she hated everything about him even as she simultaneously did a whole bunch of things that kept placing Lara and Ron together and, as a result, made things a lot harder than they had to be. It hurt when I couldn't ever feel comfortable she was really interested in helping me or helping the silsilah. It hurt that my life with her felt like it was in limbo all the time and that our time together was just the interim period between getting kicked out again.

My heart went out to her -- and it still does -- for all the difficulty she has gone through during her life. Because of her history, I gave her slack and let a lot of the things she did, or didn't do, slide. However, ultimately, she never seemed ready to let us have much of a relationship and always seemed to keep her distance although, in truth, there was nothing -- at least of which I was aware -- which I did that would warrant her not trusting me or feeling that she could rely on me to be there for her.

Nonetheless, there comes a time when one has to question whether, or not, one is being taken advantage of, and whether what is going on is really fair or right or loving or friendly or spiritually proper. I am not trying to say I was perfect in this relationship, but I don't know if I could have tried much harder or, given my limitations, done much better than what took place.

I tried as hard as I could, but I failed. I have tried as hard as I could to generate gainful employment on a consistent basis, but I have failed ... not for just a few times, but for more than six years.

Recently, I have tried sending out resumes for nearly six months ... all to no avail, There were even a few not so nice letters that I got back in response to my job applications.

I have given talks on the Sufi path at: a local college, the Bamford Public Library, and a New Age bookstore on the outskirts of Bamford -- all with seemingly zero results. I have advertised -- both paid and for free -- with very little to show for it ... in fact the few people who came often didn't come for more than a meeting or two.

I have tried to sell my books with little success. Most of the time, I have given them away with no apparent result. I even gave away 40 of them (with a explanatory and nonthreatening covering letter) to faculty members of a near-by theological seminary, and with one exception, the vast majority of these people never even so much as acknowledged receipt of the material, let alone say a simple 'thank you'.

I have tried to give courses in a wide variety of things -- from e-commerce to home schooling, and few are interested. I have tried to make a go of things on the Internet and despite years of efforts and thousands of dollars spent - there is little, or no, return.

I have tried to stay out of people's way, but they still curse me. I have tried to be of help to my mureeds, but they either run away, ignore me, throw me out, or report me to the FBI (I recently was investigated by the FBI when a 'devoted' ex-mureed called them and suggested I should be investigated in conjunction with the September 11th tragedies).

I have struggled to keep a center going, and through God's grace, the center has been kept open for several years, but, seemingly, for no good purpose, since it remains empty of those who are seeking God ... unless you count me. And, before long, I might have to close it down because I might not be able to financially hold things together.

I really am running out of options. I have no place to go, or money, or mureeds, or job, or business, or friends. I have exhausted whatever money, resources, talents, and time I have to give --- seemingly, in utter futility.

I am not saying all of the foregoing because I think I am owed something and that I am being treated unfairly. I am saying all of the foregoing because I think there is something seriously wrong with me -- my intentions, my efforts, my sincerity, my attitude ... whatever.

Everything that I try has failed. Every time I seek co-operation with people, they close the door or run away or snub me in some fashion.

By the Grace of God, somehow I have survived. But I really am not feeling all that great about things ... especially me.

I have become more isolated than I ever was although this has not been my intention. What am I doing wrong? What is wrong with me?

One final note ... since Lara is your mureed, I really don't know what to say or do with respect to her. I didn't kick her out, and I didn't say she couldn't come to fatiha She, seemingly, has left on her own accord out of a sense of hopelessness or futility.

I only said I wouldn't bother her or call her. If she wants to continue on with things, then, the decision will have to come from her side of the court since I believe I have done whatever could reasonably be expected of me, and, perhaps, even a few things that were not reasonable to expect of me.

But, the final decision about all of this is yours, not mine. She is your mureed.

I will say one thing. A night or two before tonight's events transpired, I had a brief dream. Or, at least, I remember the dream as being brief.

In any case, during the dream I was looking for Lara and, so, I went to her home, or I went where I thought her home was, but when I got there, just an empty platform was present, and the house was gone. I remember feeling very shocked about this, but this seemed to be the end of the dream.

The only other thing I seem to recall about the dream was this -- the structure where I thought her house would be seemed to be like a tree house, or something similar ... something constructed out of wood and sort of slung together like kids would do. There was a platform whose back portion seem to be on stilts, and there seemed to be some other small, wooded structure to the left (my left looking on) which was behind the platform and, maybe, down at the bottom of an incline of sorts.

As usual, your problematic mureed,

Please give my love and Salaams to the people of your household and to the people of fatiha.

Love,
Tariq

§

December 23, 2001

Lara calls and wants me to come to her apartment. She has something to give me.

When I arrive, Lara brings over a number of Christmas gifts that have been beneath her small, artificial Christmas tree. I feel badly because I have had no money to be able to buy anything for her in return ... and, quite frankly, the gifts come as a totally unexpected surprise.

I mention this, and she says she doesn't mind. Lara says she doesn't like people getting her gifts anyway ... whether for Christmas or for her birthday.

Shortly after opening the presents, I do a rough, mental calculation of the cost of the gifts. I come to the conclusion Lara has spent a fair amount of money, and I tell her I wish she hadn't spent so much money, but I also express my appreciation for her generosity.

§

December 29, 2001

Although there have been a few responses to my ads in the local paper concerning some of the courses that I have proposed teaching through the office, there really has not been enough of an interest expressed to be able to pay my bills. I fear I might run out of money before the classes are over and, as a result, I will have no place through which to continue teaching the courses.

Therefore, I decide not to teach any of the announced courses. I am disappointed, but the same sort of thing happened when I was in Rhode Island.

I begin to reflect on how universities and colleges manage to attract students. My experience suggests people are not all that interested in learning things ... unless, of course, there is a degree, diploma, or certificate, of some kind, attached to what is to be learned, and, therefore, learning becomes a means to some other end, rather than an end in itself.

People, for the most part, do not seem to be interested in knowledge or wisdom. They are interested in qualifications and pieces of paper that, supposedly, are indices for learning, but, in reality, are merely indications that someone has endured a certain kind of process, irrespective of whether, or not, much of anything of importance has been learned or understood through such a process.

§

January 12, 2002

I have applied for a number of local jobs. Three of them are at book stores, one is in a pizza parlor, and one is at a homeless shelter ... the last one is part-time.

I get turned down on each of them. Nobody ever gives a reason why they feel I am not suitable for such positions, and even if they gave reasons, I am not sure the explanations offered would be the real reason.

The bottom line is a trend continues. Despite having actively looked for work over a substantial period of time, I remain unemployed.

Often times, people who are employed have very little understanding of, or sympathy for, those who are unemployed. This is especially so with respect to situations involving long-term unemployment.

Quite frequently, those who are employed look upon the unemployed as losers who are too lazy or too incompetent to work for

a living. They tend not to appreciate the fact that just a little adjustment here and there in the wheels of fate and the employed can quickly be assisted to join the unemployed 'dregs of the Earth'.

As is true in all other aspects of life, God's Grace constitutes the warp and woof of being's tapestry. Moreover, one can never be sure whether the situation – in the present case that of being employed or unemployed -- is a manifestation of jalali (rigorous) or jamali (compassionate) attributes of Divinity -- or some combination thereof -- that are in play ... how things appear on the surface is not necessarily a true measure of the reality of a situation.

One principle that has helped me to deal with the relative scarcity of jobs in my life recently is the fact that work, for me, has never been about having a career. Work always has been about just finding a way to survive ... surviving my way through undergraduate school ... surviving my way through moving to Canada ... surviving my way through graduate school ... surviving my way through the time following graduate school.

Of course, taking 16-17 years to get a graduate degree can have a chilling effect on establishing oneself in a career. However, even if things had worked out in a more traditional way with respect to graduate school – that is, if I hadn't got delayed – I'm not certain that my ideas would have changed much with respect to the issue of having a career.

Many people define themselves through their careers. If they lose their job or don't get on the right escalator to career success, then such people often have a difficult time trying to figure out who they are or what their value is since the work-a-day world tends to treat them not just as individuals who have no significance or worth ... but they almost become like lepers – to be shunned and avoided lest what they have is contagious.

Under such circumstances, not having a career or losing a job can seem like the end of the world. This isn't the case necessarily, and, indeed, I am astonished at how long God has kept me going despite my many years of relative unemployment. This process has not always been pleasant to endure, but this aspect of life's journey is, oddly enough, something one might look back on with a certain degree of

fondness ... sort of like someone might feel after having successfully sailed around Cape Horn during inclement weather.

For more than fifty-years, I have been drawn to spirituality. Irrespective of whether, or not, one has a job or a career, when one seeks to make spirituality the central pillar of one's life, there are always people to help ... qualities to improve upon ... things to learn ... skills to develop ... experiences to share ... works to undertake ... deeds to be done ... dangers to be avoided as best one can.

Having a job might provide a more comfortable venue through which to pursue spirituality since being able to eat, having a place to live, and earning money with which to pay bills tends to make such spiritual pursuits a lot less stressful. On the other hand, sometimes, one learns more about oneself and others when God forces one to trek through adversity ... which not having a steady job over an extended period of time tends to give expression to.

I'm not exactly thrilled with my relative lack of employment over the last ten years or so. However, when one has a job, life is a struggle, and when one does not have a job, is a struggle ... just more so ... and I have found – at least so far – that it is possible to not only survive, but in certain ways, to even flourish, God willing, in the absence of a paying career ... but, being human, sometimes I forget this.

§

January 26, 2002

I have seen Lara very infrequently. She is spending a lot of her off-work hours engaged in various home improvement projects with Ron at their home.

Lara still keeps her apartment, and she sleeps there at night. However, on the occasions when I go by, walking to somewhere else, her lights are never on ... except for Tuesday nights when a small woman's group meets at her place.

I do not phone Lara or bother her in any way. Very occasionally, she calls to see how I am doing.

She brings me up to date on what is happening between Ron and her. She says there is a lot of tension between the two of them, and they still cannot talk about anything without the conversation breaking down into an argument.

Ron tells her the problem with their marriage is that Lara has never forgiven him for anything that he has done. Lara says she has forgiven him tons of times but Ron always treats the forgiveness as a license to perpetuate the same sorts of behavior without wanting to have to face any consequences for what he continues to do.

Lara tells Ron that saying you're sorry is not enough. There needs to be something substantial beneath his words, and there never is. She says Ron makes whatever apologies he feels are necessary to get him off the hot seat of the moment, and, then, in a very short time is right back doing the very same things that have created problems in the first place.

Lara says she still wants a divorce from Ron. However, she cannot bring herself to be the one who initiates the process in an official way through the state government ... she would rather the initiating process come from him.

Moreover, every time the topic of divorce comes up, Ron has a look of sadness and vulnerability about him that Lara just can't stand to see. She will do almost anything to prevent him from entering such a state, and when such a condition does manifest itself in Ron, saying 'no' to him becomes extremely difficult and painful for her ... even though she detests Ron in so many ways and really cannot bear to be touched by him.

She feels trapped. Yet, when they are working on this or that home improvement project, she finds the process peaceful and comforting somehow. This process is almost like entering a trance, and during this period of time her problems just seem to fade into the horizons and crevices of consciousness.

January 26, 2002

I have started up an e-zine concerning the Sufi path. On the one hand, I am hoping to provide a forum for exploring various dimensions of tasawwuf, and, on the other hand, I am hoping that, perhaps, I might be able to generate some revenue either through advertising and/or by selling some of my e-books.

I have informed Baba about the project during a phone conversation. He provides feedback via an e-mail – both in general as well as in relation to an essay written by one of the shaykhs of our silsilah that I wanted to put in a future edition of the e-zine.

§

February 1, 2002

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

Yes, the ezine is very good. I read the second edition which you kindly sent me and I like it very much. I am also pleased to know that already there are some who have subscribed by the Grace and Mercy of God.

Regarding Musa Baba [Note: one of the earlier shaykhs in our silsilah], of course you could add in your own words but do it as you would in a normal mentioning as you have done with Rabia Basri (R.A.) I say this only because as you know my shaykh never allowed any spotlights etc. Regarding the essay of "The Unique Way", there are some additions to be made, and as soon as those additions are made, God Willing I will send it to you, but it should be without any name. In fact if you want then Inshallah from time to time, I could send you some "Food for thought" which you could add in your ezine in your own words.

I spoke to Muneera today over the phone, and she asked about your welfare, which she always does whenever she calls or I call. She was also enquiring whether you have written any new book. I mentioned to her about your latest work. She asked me if she can have at least two copies of each of your books, because she said that she

would like to present them to the public library near her residence, which is somewhere in Gettysburg. She does not have a computer though.

I am very pleased to realize that slowly and steadily success is being favored upon you by the "Divine Hand" that helps the ones that need, and I thank our Creator for all his kindness and Mercy.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

Dear Baba,

Wa 'alaykum as-Salaam!

Thank you for your very kind e-mail. To be quite frank with you, I thought -- following the publication of the second issue -- that, perhaps, I might be doing something that was inappropriate given the nature of the times and, this was one of the reasons why I sent you a copy of the e-zine so you could assess the matter directly.

I would love to have food-for-thought sent to me, on occasion, or whenever you wished to do so, and I will try my best, insha' Allah, to render those thoughts into essays that can be communicated to the subscribers. I need food for thought as much as the readers, and I miss being able to listen to you.

You don't mention your essays -- the ones sent to me by Momin Shah Baba some time ago -- but, I guess, on the basis of what you have said, it would be okay to use the ideas in them as food for thought and, God willing, help generate some essays in this manner. However, the other option is to follow the example of 'The Unique Way' and to publish those essays in an unattributed form ... just tell me which you would prefer.

Also, given what you have said about your shaykh not allowing any spotlights, should I be using my name in the Newsletter? My name easily could be taken out, since the material doesn't really require anybody's name to be associated with it.

Please tell Muneera, whenever you see her, that she, Paul, and the rest of her family are in my prayers every day. I will be glad to send a CD that includes all the books, plus a few extras bonus books, that could be given to the library -- or, two CDs, if that is what she wants -- but it might have to wait a bit ... although, probably, one copy could be sent now.

In fact, I was going to ask for a confirmation of your address -- which I believe is: 38 Washington Street -- but I don't know the zip code, and, maybe, the address is wrong, but the foregoing is what sticks in my head. In any event, I was going to send to you a CD copy of all of the books that, now, has a color front cover tray insert, along with a color back tray insert that goes with the jewel case in which the CD is housed.

I bought a cheap CD packaging software product and have produced some covers for the CD, as well as labels for the CD that lists contents, and so on. By the Grace of Allah, I feel everything has turned out quite well and makes things look semi-professional, or, at least, as professional as I can get them through my computer.

The foregoing is the first step in trying to market the books through a real world product that people can hold in their hands, rather than as a download through the Internet. I don't know if any of this will make any difference, but I am trying to explore every avenue.

God willing, I am going to try to sell some of the CD's through E-bay on the web. Previously, I thought that E-bay was just for auctioning things, but they have provisions for selling almost anything -- whether through auctions or through a stable price, regular store format.

Surprisingly, there is a fair amount of Islamic, Sufi, and spiritual products for sale on E-bay. How well any of these products are selling, I don't know, but I do know there is one difference between e-Bay and a lot of web sites (mine, for instance) ... people go to e-Bay with the intention of buying something, and, perhaps, just as importantly, they seem to trust the system that e-Bay has set up for trying to avoid fraud and scams.

In addition, after you indicated to me you had asked Sima whether there was someone she knew who could help out, I sent her an e-mail

outlining what is happening with the CD's and the possibility of doing something through a print-on-demand publisher. I offered to split proceeds with her 50-50 if there were people in her area to whom she might sell either books or the CDs.

I don't know, exactly, what the problem is, if any, but I have not heard back from her. Maybe, she didn't get the e-mail or, maybe, she doesn't read her e-mail, or, maybe, she is upset with me for some reason ... I don't know.

However, just in case she didn't get the e-mail or she doesn't use the Internet that much and, therefore, doesn't know the message is there, I was thinking of sending her a copy of the CD, along with a copy of my previous e-mail to her. But, if you think this is not a good idea, then, I won't.

I also was thinking of sending a copy of the CD to Canada, to Momin Shah Baba. I would make the same offer to him that I made to Sima -- namely, split proceeds 50-50, with the idea that in Momin's case, the profits could be used to help defray silsilah expenses in Canada or could be used to help fund silsilah projects there.

Despite these grandiose schemes for building a publishing empire (if a few CD's and 25 copies of a couple of books counts as such), I'm uncertain if it is a good idea to approach Momin Shah Baba about this. I don't know if it is me, or the circumstances, or something else, but there seems to be a certain amount of 'distance' that has seeped into things that goes beyond the physical miles separating us, and, consequently, I don't know if I should just forget about broaching the selling of CD's idea with Momin Shah because it might merely add tension to whatever, if anything, is going on.

Lara and I are still trying to work things out here, and, although the situation is better than it has been, the fact of the matter is, the circumstances are very difficult ones from a variety of points of view. I won't bore you with the details, but in a lot of ways our arrangement is very delicate and, in truth, I don't know from one day to the next, or from the beginning of one day, to its conclusion, whether we will still be together.

I suppose it would be very easy for me to just say "Enough"!, but, my concern is she would be the one who might stand to lose the most -

- not because I'm such a great person, but because her relationship to Islam, to the silsilah, to you, and to herself might be adversely affected.

I started out with, seemingly, very simple aims -- (1) to help her with respect to the Sufi path; (2) to help her put distance between her and her former husband, by assisting her to get out of an abusive relationship; and, (3) to offer her something that she really hasn't had much of in her life, a healthy relationship with someone who actually cared about her, her happiness, as well as her mental and spiritual well-being. However, as with many things in life, what initially seems simple often turns out to be very complicated.

One problematic area -- which existed before Lara -- is the whole issue of trying to find gainful employment. This has been going on for 6-7 years now, with brief periods of a positive cash flow.

I have tried to get conventional jobs, but due to a variety of factors, such as my age, Viet Nam, religion, current events, my recent work history (or lack thereof), the nature of my education (either too much, or not enough of the right sort), a lack of references, no car, and the absence of very many realistic opportunities, finding a regular job (whether within my field or outside of it) has been very difficult. While I have been trying for the past several years -- and, at some times this has been done more rigorously than at other times -- nevertheless, I have felt that, perhaps, my best bet for getting a relatively steady flow of income might be to produce self-employment of some kind ... whether through my books, or the web site, or affiliate programs, or advertising revenues from e-zine publications, and so on, or some combination of all of the above.

So far, things haven't worked out as I had hoped, and, maybe, they never will. Among other things, I have felt that if enough money came in on a regular basis, then Lara and I might be able to get away from things for six months, or so, and this could create the space necessary for the domestic situation to improve and stabilize, but this has not happened.

If it were a simple issue of someone offering me a job that, God willing, might last awhile, or, of my finding something of a conventional nature, my decisions might be more focused. However, because things on the conventional front are so hazy and unpromising, I keep hanging on trying to do something on the non-conventional

front ... that is, to try to create employment for myself. But, as it is, I am caught between a rock and a hard place, and nothing (whether conventional or non-conventional) is working out, so I am stuck, but, in the meantime, my financial situation is becoming progressively more problematic.

Lara is trying to help, but without going into all the details, the original plans and intentions concerning such help (which mostly revolved around my doing some work for her) have been undermined for a variety of reasons. In the meantime, I guess all I can do is try to hold on, continue to try, and hope, God willing, something changes.

I have nothing against conventional work, which I have done most of my life. At the same time, conventional work is usually dedicated to things that really don't help anybody to do anything except to put money in their pockets ... which is not necessarily a bad thing.

I like to have money in my pockets as much as the next fellow. However, I had wanted to find a way that could place a few dollars in my pockets while, simultaneously, helping people in more important ways ... spiritually, educationally, emotionally, or through community building.

I'm not getting any younger, and I had been hoping to make the most of the time I have left. The fact that time is running through the hour glass of my life has generated additional motivation or desire to do things that are worthwhile in a way that goes beyond just earning money ... as important as money might be as a medium through which to pay bills.

In any case, the whole situation has left me wondering about myself and whether my thinking has been incorrect or too narrow, or whatever. I might not understand the situation, but I have no problems with Allah doing with me whatever God pleases - including having no money.

In part, I have never declared an oath of poverty, because it seems Allah has already declared it for me. In fact, on occasion, it seems I would have to be raised several levels to even be qualified for the level of poverty.

I'm still here, so, obviously, God has been providing for me in many different ways. But, perhaps, the thing that bothers me the most

is: having to deal with all the uncertainty that seems to hang over my life like a dense fog ... I can't see through this fog in order to be able to select an appropriate direction in which to proceed.

I keep trying different things, but nothing works out. As a result, I really don't know if this means I am the source of my own difficulties, or my situation is such that no matter what I tried or how well I did it, the situation -- for reasons best known to God -- would continue on as it is, and this is just the way things are.

I have a lot of faults, weaknesses, and short-comings of which I am painfully aware. I'm sure there, probably, are more faults, weaknesses, and shortcomings, of which I am not aware.

One of my major concerns is the role that all my weaknesses and faults might have in shaping what is going on. One of my other concerns is whether I will be able to endure what God wishes for me.

I know I will not endure without Allah's support and Grace. However, I am worried about the role that my capacity for free choice might play in taking me in directions that are other than what God commands.

This is a worry that is constantly with me. I have seen the mistakes I have made -- or, at least, some of them, and I know the potential is there to make a mess of things, and, sometimes, I can't help but wonder if this is -- in part, or whole -- what is going on.

I'm certain you know all of the foregoing. However, I hope you haven't minded my giving voice to it, and if you have minded, I hope you will forgive me.

Love,
Tariq

§

Tariq my son,
Assalamo alaikum.

If you need to send anything, the address is Abraham, C/O Mr. Anwar, 1440 Brookhaven Road, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Regarding your email sent to Sima, I was not informed by her about it. I will ask her and let you know.

Regarding sending the CDs to Momin mia and offering him a share in the business as you mentioned in your email, I think that you should ask him, and I am sure he will be pleased to hear from you. I too shall ask him if this could be arranged.

Yes, E-bay is a good name among people who buy through the Internet, and I think it to be a wise thing you are doing in trying to sell your products through them.

Regarding your personal life, I am praying and I trust God to look after all matters,

Ameen.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

February 2, 2002

Baba sends me some 'Food for Thought' material for my e-zine on tasawwuf.

These are times when a very harmful misunderstanding regarding the Sufi way has to be addressed, and, unfortunately, this is not being done.

Tasawwuf means wisdom of the Soul, from which started the birth of multiple souls. Everything has a soul that comes from the ONE SOUL.

Creation is therefore nothing but GOD's Knowledge of His own Hidden Treasure that is manifested unto Himself in detail.

The most difficult thing to do is to completely erase ignorance of what is True, resulting in the awareness of the truth of all truths.

The Sufi believes in the truth of all faiths as being ONE. The way to realize this fact of all faiths (that all people, in fact all of creation, is ONE TRUTH) is to, "Know thyself, and thou shall know the Lord."

The Sufis believe that Creation means Manifestation. Now, one can understand when Sufi Wisdom proclaims that ALL CREATION is nothing but MANIFESTATION of that ONE SOUL, and that ONE SOUL is MOTHER of all manifestations brought forth from that MOTHER'S WOMB. Now that ONE SOUL, the MOTHER of all creation is actually the so called HIDDEN TREASURE of GOD ALMIGHTY, the ONE, the ONLY.

Ignorance of Truth brings forth evil. The manifestation of evil that we see, hear, or experience is due to this very ignorance.

Many major Souls appeared through the womb of that ONE MOTHER SOUL to Guide and help. These major Souls are known as Prophets. They all had but one message from MOTHER. "Remember who you are. Respect the WOMB from which you came and remember MOTHER'S warning. Never for a moment forget that you made a pledge with MOTHER to be GOOD. To always remember mother's love for you. Never to disobey, never to interfere with MOTHER'S manifestation of HERSELF which you see as Creation. Never to hurt and harm even a particle of that manifestation because in doing so you hurt Yourself.

Sufi Wisdom believes that the foregoing realization is most difficult in fact almost impossible without MOTHER'S HELP. So the Sufi Guide, The Sufi Master is that HELP.

Always remember that if any Sufi Master teaches otherwise, then he should be shunned and not followed. The Sufi way has no religion. The Sufi Way has and helps in realization of a Truth called "DEEN". DEEN is THE WAY and ARRIVAL. THE WAY to ARRIVE at THE REALIZATION of the TRUTH as well as ARRIVAL at the TRUTH completely is DEEN. Nature of the Soul is also the same as DEEN. The true Nature of the MOTHER SOUL is DEEN. By having a strong Faith in DEEN and developing it is the ADVICE of MOTHER, but unfortunately most have fallen short of it, and different so-called religions have been formed, which resulted in animosity, hatred etc.

Now the reader can realize that the Sufis have risen above the so-called Muslim ignorance. When the Sufis say that their Book is different from the Book of the so-called Muslim, it means that what they have learned through the Divine Guidance, without which the Book cannot be understood, is quite different from what ignorance teaches these so-called Muslims.

Yes, the Sufis believe: in only ONE GOD; in all true Prophets; in all angels; in the fact that the good shall be sent to Heaven and the bad shall be sent to Hell; in Fasting during Ramazan if health permits; in visiting the Kaaba at the appointed annual date, even just once in one's life time if health and pocket allows. All this and more are believed to be good and so the Sufis practice them, but the meanings and reasons are very different from the shallow reasoning of the so-called madding crowd.

The Sufi believes in promoting life and property. When it is warned that not even a fly be harmed or killed, then how is it permissible to kill other humans for whatever reason these so-called Muslims wrongly believe in. People who believe and follow such evil rules and evil people that call themselves as religious leaders, promoting evil, then they too are answerable for their evil actions. A guidance that teaches hatred and not forgiveness is only followed by evil-minded ones.

No matter what religion, society, background or race one comes from, goodness must be believed and practiced because goodness is a universal truth. Be good, and remember that there is always an opportunity to get better and best.

§

February 23, 2002

I have received some indications -- from Momin in Canada and, to some extent, via some occasional, passing remarks of Baba's to which I did not respond at the time -- that people seem to be of the opinion I am not seriously interested in getting a job. I decide to write to Baba and address this issue.

§

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I have set-up my web site so that all of the books which, previously, had been for sale can now be downloaded for free. I don't know how long I will be able to keep the web site going, but for as long as God permits, the material will be available for free to those who might have an interest.

The books are in both .exe format as well as PDF files, so, one, or another, format version of these books should be able to satisfy different people with various computer set-ups. If you come across people who might have an interest and for whom you feel it is appropriate, then, the books are there for the taking.

Obviously, in light of the foregoing, there is not much point in trying to sell the books ... something that has not been very successful in any event. Consequently, there is no need to speak with Sima about the CDs, and I won't be broaching the subject with Momin Shah Baba either ... but if anyone wishes to receive a free CD with all of the books, then, as long as I have copies and a few dollars to mail the material, then, God willing, I shall try to do this.

I have told Barry in Toronto that the proceeds for whatever books remain with Stan should be split up among the people who contributed to making the publication of the book of essays a possibility. Of course, several hundred years might be required before these books will be sold, but, if and when they are, the money should go to those people.

Since all of the Sufi material is available for free through the Internet - at least for now -- I don't think there is much of a reason to continue with the E-zine of Tasawwuf. I only would be repeating what already has been written elsewhere, and, besides, I don't think that I am the right person to be doing it, and, probably, I was in error even to have begun it.

I will be informing those few people who have subscribed to the aforementioned e-zine about the free material and that the E-zine is going to be suspended for the foreseeable future, but the free books should provide more than enough introductory information to get those who are interested started. The e-books all contain an e-mail

address plus a post office box, and if any of these people should wish to pursue things further, then, I can direct them to Momin Shah Baba or whomever else you consider to be appropriate.

I hope , God willing, someone who knows what they are doing might, in the future, continue on with the E-zine of Tasawwuf, or something like it. I apologize for any mistakes and short-comings that might be in the material already published, and if there is something that I can correct, then, let me know, and I will try my best to change what needs to be changed, or eliminate what needs to be eliminated.

As far as everything else that is going on, I realize I must be a source of on-going embarrassment to you and the silsilah. I am seeking to take steps to solve, God willing, some of these problems, but I don't know what the outcome will be.

I sincerely apologize to you and to the silsilah and to Allah for not being much of a human being. I have tried -- or, at least, fooled myself into believing this to be so -- but, sooner or later, the truth of things comes to the surface, and the inadequacies of my various efforts are very palpable and plain for all to see ... much to my shame and to their chagrin.

I am in the process of dissolving the Sufi center, but it might take a bit of time to disengage. I don't know where I will be going or what I will be doing, but it is unlikely I will be able to remain in Bamford much longer ... unless something changes.

Although my two brothers have provided some help and while Lara has provided some help, I do not expect them to support me. However, more importantly, I also realize there, really, is no place for me here ... not when a brother informs me that if I have no money I should eat at a place that provides meals for the homeless and the poor, and a spouse has made clear that if I have to leave the office of the Sufi center, there will be no welcoming mat left out for me at her residence.

Many people seem to be of the opinion I have not been trying to get work. In truth, and God is my witness for this, I have been seeking to do this almost non-stop, and have been doing so for the last six years.

I have tried to create my own work through book sales, or through the Internet, or in some other fashion. I have tried to offer various courses -- both in Rhode Island and in Bamford. I have tutored English as a second language. I have done proofreading, but this has been very inconsistent and surrounded with a number of problems. I have worked as an office clerk for one brother, and I have tried, on several occasions, to work out some possibilities with my other brother. I have applied for teaching jobs in Sutton, Bamford, Westport, and 25-30 other places in various parts of the U.S. I have applied for counseling jobs in different places. I have looked into library work. I have posted my resume in a number of places on the Internet. I have applied for other non-teaching and non-counseling jobs. If people have come to me with job suggestions, I have -- with a few exceptions -- followed up on these. I read the 'Help Wanted' sections of a number of different papers, and if I find something for which I qualify, I have applied. Some people have made promises with respect to jobs but have not followed through on their promises.

For a time, I received 'Unemployment Compensation' - something for which I was qualified and to which I am entitled by State law. Unfortunately, there were a lot of problems surrounding this (some of which I, probably, created for myself), and, as a result, there were substantial delays, miscommunications, and a certain amount of the 'run-around' directed my way ... and, among other things, a program for which I was eligible and that might have helped my situation was denied to me despite the fact the director of this program told me, in person, I had the highest profile score he had ever seen in conjunction with this program.

I have tried to do whatever I can think of to find gainful employment ... through myself or through others. I am truly sorry if people are dissatisfied with these efforts.

I misspoke myself in a previous e-mail to you. I indicated, then, that, on occasion, I feel several levels removed from a vow of poverty. I realize this sounds like I am saying that my condition is worse than someone who has taken a vow of poverty, or worse than people who have not taken such a vow but who are, nonetheless, quite poor anyway.

This was not what should have been said -- especially, since I realize there are any number of people throughout the world who live in desperate circumstances ... much more desperate and problematic than mine. While my circumstances are not good, relatively speaking, I have been quite fortunate and, in one way or another, have always been provided by God with a way through.

What I should have said in the earlier e-mail is this: I have been in debt for much of my adult life. Until I have paid off what I owe, I do not feel right about taking a vow of poverty, and, in fact, most of my present financial woes are directly tied to my attempts to find a way to get out of debt - but these have failed, and all I have succeeded in doing is adding to my debt load.

In addition, on several occasions -- too many, really -- I have failed to pay attention to the old adage: 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread'. I have rushed head-long into situations that, if I had been a smart person -- which I am not -- I would have avoided like the plague.

Well, the financial tornadoes have torn their way through my life. I am in the process of trying to pick up the pieces and salvage what, if anything, that can be saved ... which, at the present time, does not look like much.

I will try to keep as low a profile as possible in order not to embarrass you or the silsilah anymore. If there are things that are with me that you wish to be returned, then, let me know, and, God willing, I shall do so.

Love,
Tariq

§

Tariq my son,

I understand everything you say regarding being jobless etc, but I certainly do not understand what makes you say that you are an embarrassment to me, or the silsila. If you ask yourself this question, surely your heart will tell you that such a situation can never be.

My son, you have on occasions sent such emails explaining your problems and I have always prayed for you and told you the truth that hope is there, but this time when you add that if "there is anything I have given you and I want it returned then I should let you know", has hurt my feelings. Not agreeing with you when you say that there is not much hope is another matter, but for the first time now you have said what hurts me. I wonder what has been the reason for you to even imagine that I would do something against which is and shall always remain a pride of our silsila. You know very well that we never take back what we give. Furthermore let me tell you a very important and interesting incident that is a great pride of our silsila. In fact it is a very essential truth of the Sufi way.

There was an evening when the shaykh of my shaykh was present with his mureeds, and a mureed said, " Baba, you have mentioned the story of a king who had arranged a painting competition, where one of the men had washed and cleaned the wall where he was supposed to paint to such an extent that all the other paintings reflected, meaning that this is what mureeds should do with their hearts. But if one of your mureeds would do just the opposite, meaning instead of cleaning would on purpose make it more dirty and filthy" ... but before he could say further, the shaykh of my shaykh, said " If you are inquiring as to how we would react, and whether we would ever get so fed-up and leave the mureed, my answer to your question is this that, according to the Sufi Faith a father that does that to a child of his, that father is never forgiven by God, till he repents and embraces his child again." So you see my son, your error in thinking that we can ever disengage our self with our mureeds no matter how they behave. Yes, we might be hurt and pray more for such mureeds but we always keep them in our hearts as mureeds. They might leave us of their own accord, but we always keep them included in our hearts as mureeds. Even the ones that hurt our feelings and try to harm us, we always say, "Well in my heart he or she is still my child, even if he or she does not consider himself or herself to be connected to me anymore."

Now, whereas you are concerned, Tariq, you have always loved and respected us. When we can never even imagine expelling those that have intended to harm us, and we still pray for them and love them, how can you imagine that just because you do not have a job and

you have problems that we are fed-up of you? In fact I feel you to be more close to me in such times. Instead I feel like giving you much more than I have given. God is my witness that what I say is from my heart and soul my son. We will hold on to you in this world as well as the here-after. You will never get rid of us, no matter how much you try. We shall keep on asking ALLAH to shower his Blessings upon you. You are and always shall remain in our silsilah. Nisbath is unconditional. Even among the Prophets there were those that had no one to follow them and believe that they were prophets. So, did they lose their prophethood just because there were no one to believe them?

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

March 26, 2002

I have sent Baba some material that I would like to add to the Sufi web site. I ask for his response.

§

March 30, 2002

Tariq my son,

Yes, this is wonderful, and should be added to the menu. You have done well in adding it.

You have presented a very valuable treasure to the world. God Bless you. I see no other Sufi site that teaches and informs regarding the Sufi faith as you have done.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

April 4, 2002

Dear Baba,

As Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I just got a call from Lara announcing she is planning on getting back together with her former husband. As you know, things have not been going all that well between her and I for quite some time.

Quite frankly, I really don't understand what is, or has, been going on. Although she has helped in some ways, she has hurt things in a lot of ways, and in truth, she never seemed to want to give our relationship a real chance to survive and grow.

For over a year now she and I have had long intense discussions about the abusive, controlling, violent nature of her former husband ... and, apparently, soon to be husband again. She has gone into detail about all the ways in which he hurt her again and again, and, how, among other things, she had not kissed him for nearly 20 years because of something he did, and forced her to do, when she was pregnant with her second child.

She had told me many times -- prior to her leaving him last July -- how, if she had to do it over again, she would not choose someone like him, and that she was not romantically inclined toward him, and that although she didn't want to lose his friendship, she really did not want to stay married to him and had been trying to figure out how to get away from him for at least 10 years, but did not feel she had the strength to do so.

Enter the chump -- i.e., me -- who sought to take her problems seriously ... who was available -- either in person or by phone -- to talk with whenever she needed to do so ... who had a great deal of empathy for her many problems, and who tried, as best I could to help her work through these things. By the Grace of Allah, she did, eventually move out, and little by little, she seemed to gain control over her life.

She became calmer, less paranoid, and her muscles spasms and neck tension largely disappeared. She became less tense and more able to function on a day to day basis.

Whenever her former husband stalked her -- and he did -- she had someone to talk things through with and get perspective and to know she wasn't alone and there was someone around on whom she could depend. Whenever her former husband wouldn't leave her alone and would call her 10-12 times a night insisting she call or do x, y, or z, or would try to compel her to do her previous husband.

On many occasions, she has told me -- the latest time being tonight when she made her announcement by phone -- that I was a person who had treated her in the nicest way she had ever been treated in her entire life. But, I guess, none of this really counts for very much.

Eight months ago, she said all she really wanted to know was that her previous husband was going to be all right. She wanted to know that he was going to get some counseling for anger management, as well as some personal counseling, and, as a result, be able to move on with his life.

Well, all of the foregoing happened. In fact, he moved on with his life so well, he recently began to date, go to dances, and more. Quite unexpectedly (to me, anyway), she became very angry and jealous about all of this.

There ensued a number of phone conversations and personal meetings between the two of them over the last week or so. Every time she got through one of these, she would sound off to me about this or that and how -- for example -- he hadn't been willing to go dancing with her, or how for years she had tried to get him to sit at the supper table with her and the children, and he would just eat his food in front of the television set by himself, and, then, she would reveal this or that unflattering aspect of his nature.

I knew she never really supported what I was doing or trying to do, but I thought she was new to all of this and, maybe, in time, she would come around, and, yet, at the same time, there were many things that she did in relation to me that made me feel very uncomfortable, insecure, and vulnerable. I also felt she was coming through a lot of emotional turmoil and years of physical and mental stress and that, perhaps, she was going to need time to get over things.

I tried, as best I could, to take everything into consideration and continue to be able to offer her support, love, friendship, spiritual

counsel, and so on. There were a few times when I got very upset with her because she just didn't seem to want to be fair about things and because she was hitting me -- whether knowingly or not -- in emotional places where I am very vulnerable due to my own past, and because all too often, I just got hung out to dry by her, but none of this seemed to bother her.

It's never a nice feeling to give pretty much everything one has to offer, and to just be treated in the ways that she has acted toward me. I have been unhappy with such things for quite some time, but I was reluctant to do anything that might push her away from the Sufi path.

There have been several times when she was not being very nice that I just made myself unavailable to her ... whether by phone or in any other way. This would go on for 4-5 days, and, finally, she would do something to indicate she wanted peace between us, and, so, I would try again, only to be right back into difficulty within a relatively short period of time in relation to many of the same issues.

I tried not to argue with her, and, for the most part, by the Grace of Allah, was able to refrain from doing so. However, there were a few arguments that took place and seemed to arise out of her trying to bait me -- successfully, I guess -- a few times.

The bottom line, I suppose, in all of this, is that I feel like I have been used big time. I have told her before, on several occasions, I felt like she was using me, but she always denied that to be the case ... even though she also has said that such a possibility actually has been a concern of hers, from time to time -- but not a sufficiently big concern, apparently, to stop her from seeking what she wanted, needed, and received before deciding something else was the 'right' thing to do, and, as a result, I was expendable.

On many occasions, I have tried to give her the benefit of the doubt by letting things go, but I have often felt uneasy in doing so. I never knew if my heart, gut, and mind were trying to tell me an important truth, or if I was just being unfair to her.

As far as I can see, things have come to end between us on a variety of levels. I don't know what her specific plans are other than that she told me she was going to Boston tomorrow to visit her grandmother who has not been well for six or seven months, and I

suspect she will be going with her previous husband ... although I don't know this for sure ... but she went with him a few months ago at Christmas time and complained about many of the things he said during their journey together (I didn't know anything about this until after she came back).

I guess the only question I really have about all of this is what happens to her initiation. Does this constitute a breaking of her vows, and should she be barred from fatiha if she wants to come?

I remember what you said about what the shaykh of your shaykh had said about someone not being a shaykh who was not prepared to embrace someone who had gone astray and came back. But, I don't know if this means the person has to seriously repent of what they have done, or if a person just wants to hang around, then, there is nothing that should be done to discourage them no matter what they do.

I know I am no longer her shaykh, but the situation is so fouled up, I am not really sure how to proceed in a manner that will be best for the silsilah and best for her. Whatever advice you have on this matter would be greatly appreciated.

Love,
Tariq

§

Tariq my son,

First of all, you should remember what God said to the Holy Prophet. He said that the Holy Prophet should not sacrifice his good health over people who are not appreciating his sincere guidance.

Now the other matter between you and her is that her relationship with you is personal. Whether you should accept her anytime she wants to come back, well, here you have to decide through the light of experience with her. Of course if she ever wants to come attend Fateha, this is different and if she wants that then of course you should not deny her that privilege.

LOVE AND DUA, BABA.

§

April 9, 2002

There are millions of women around the world who are mired in abusive relationships. Any police officer who has sought to save a woman from physical harm at the hands of her domestic partner only to have that same woman attack the police officer when the latter seeks to take the abusive partner into custody, knows in a deep, experiential way that the currents which run through the dynamics of abusive relationships are exceedingly strange and complex.

I am deeply frustrated, upset, and hurt by what is going on between Lara and me since she appears to have been drawn back into the gravitational pull of Ron's abuse. I try to keep things in perspective knowing that Lara comes from a long history and series of abusive relationships, and, consequently, breaking free of the dynamics of such abuse is not a simple, straightforward process ... nor is likely to involve a clean break even though, initially, I thought – rather overly optimistically in retrospect – that such might have been the case. However, when the alligators are snapping away, keeping things in perspective is not always so easily done ... like a boxer who has an elaborately worked out fight strategy that goes by the way side the first time he is smacked in the face by his opponent.

As I reflect on the situation, a story -- which my first shaykh, Professor Irfan, once related to me -- is sticking in my mind. It seems oddly apropos to the current set of circumstances.

According to Professor Irfan, there was a young man about whom he knew who lived in Hyderabad, Pakistan. The young man was an accomplished artist.

At some juncture, the young man started acting in a very strange manner. He often seemed to be in a trance-like state. He also often seemed to be depressed, moody, irritable, and withdrawn.

The young man began to paint the same picture over and over again. The subject matter of the painting seemed to be a woman, however, no one who knew the youth had ever seen the woman in question.

The strange behavior went on for a number of months. Finally, the young man was taken to someone who specialized in matters connected to jinn ... after every other possibility had been explored and eliminated as a possible cause of the behavior.

Following a course of ‘treatment’ over a period of time, the young man was finally freed from the control of a jinn that had been possessing him. Apparently, the jinn was female in nature and had fallen in love with the young man.

She would come to him, enter him, possess him, and force him to paint her picture over and over again. Her jealousy had forced him to become withdrawn and irritable around others – people who vied for the attention and affections of the young man ... and, naturally, all of this depressed the young man, but because of the possession, the youth could not divulge the nature of what was happening.

When the young man was finally freed from the female jinn, he took all the portraits that had been painted of her, and he used a knife to cut the paintings to shreds ... even though both the paintings and the subject of the paintings were quite beautiful. He said that every time she took possession of him, he could not bear her presence ... it nauseated him, and, yet, he was helpless to do anything about the situation.

In many ways, I feel Lara has been possessed by Ron. She detests her captivity and cannot stand the presence or touch of her captor, but like the young man in the story told by Professor Irfan, she often seems incapable of resisting what is going on.

I think about Lara’s early life ... about the rape at age seven or eight by a cousin ... about the several years of sexual molestation by her uncle ... about the attempted sexual molestation by her father ... about the 22 years of captivity and possession by a human counterpart – namely, Ron – to the behavior of some jinn. My relationship with Lara has become very messy from a theological point of view – at least from the view of some theological points of view -- but in terms of the rights of human beings and basic principles of morality, Lara deserves to have someone fighting to help free her from her bondage ... even at the risk of offending the sensibilities of some Muslims who seem to love to make judgments about the lives of others ... lives about which they know nothing and with which they are not involved and for which

the ones doing the judging refuse to take any responsibility or make any attempt to help such people if it means running a risk of getting their hands a little soiled.

I don't know any of the steps needed to free someone from being possessed by jinn. However, I do know a little about some of the steps that might be needed to help free, God willing, someone from a case of human possession, and, therefore, I use the only tool that is available to me ... words. Consequently, I write Lara some letters that seek to address different facets of Lara's being ... if one approach doesn't work, maybe another approach might help Lara to work toward freedom.

§

Dear Lara,

I hope, God willing, you will read this letter through to its conclusion. It is written, God willing, in my capacity as a shaykh and not in some other way ... although, in places, it touches on some of these other facets of things

You might, or might not, remember the story about the mureed who had left my first shaykh's shaykh -- i.e., Dr. Irfan's shaykh -- because the spiritual guide, in his role as a teacher, had said some things that were upsetting to the individual and the latter decided to go home and leave the shaykh as a result of being upset with his teacher. The shaykh ordered that such and such a person should go and bring the individual back, and when the mureed appeared before him told him: "Yes, you can leave me, but I cannot leave you."

You might also recall, on more than one occasion, I have said to you and Jane that -- and, here, I am borrowing from someone else -- whatever service the mureed might give to the shaykh, the service that the shaykh renders to the mureed is far greater. You might assume you understand what either the service of a mureed to a shaykh, or vice versa, entails, but I assure you, you do not -- not even remotely.

You read individuals like Rumi and Hafiz and are quite taken with them, but there is something that you do not appear to understand -- or, if you do understand, then, you do so only in a relatively vague

manner. You are reading the results of what has come only after spiritual transformation had entered into their lives.

The beauty, joy, ecstasy, love, humor, compassion, insight, and so on that is given expression through their works arose only after the moon of their respective egos had been eclipsed. In both cases, it was their good fortune to be committed to, and loved by, extraordinary spiritual people, but it was in that crucible of commitment -- along with the many struggles, sacrifices, and difficulties inherent in such commitment -- that the purified metal began to collect and give shape to the inspirational character embodied in the poetry and discourses of those individuals that you so much admire.

Someone once said: "Everyone wants to go to heaven, but no one wants to die." To make real progress on the spiritual path, one has to die -- to one's ego, passions, desires, interests, likes, dislikes, habits, biases, prejudices, opinions, as well as to material comforts and conveniences.

One cannot, simultaneously, change and remain the same. Either one continues on as one has been, or one undertakes the journey of transformation by wrapping oneself within the cocoon of spiritual guidance and discipline and, God willing, emerges, eventually, as a beautiful butterfly of unique beauty and incomparable worth.

Perhaps, there were things said in my last phone message to you that you found upsetting. Yet, everything said was true, and these things were not said with rancor, hatred, venom, or revenge ... but in a calm, collected fashion, and there were reasons why these things needed to be said and were said.

On several occasions, I have told you that Baba passed on a spiritual counsel from the shaykh of Baba's shaykh. This saint of God said that any spiritual guide who would not gladly welcome back a prodigal mureed was not worthy of being called shaykh.

I told you the foregoing in relation to Jane. I mention this again in conjunction with you.

Your actions have been problematic in a variety of ways. But, just as Ron has often not understood -- to use your words: "he just doesn't get it" -- how his own actions toward you and others have been thoroughly reprehensible -- and how he often has not been the 'great

guy' he takes himself to be -- so, you, too, often 'do not get it' – when it comes to how your behavior often is in stark contrast to your professed beliefs, and, consequently, you are no one to be calling the pot black.

In a rather self-righteous fashion, you have commented, a number of times, about how this or that person in the woman's meeting or some AA meeting was all caught up in his or her own ego and how amusing it all was to you and, then, you would add how that these people would learn -- or, else, they wouldn't and, as a result, would probably move on to something else. I told you there was nothing amusing about what was going on -- that it was sad -- especially since you did not seem to understand your own ego was every bit as much in evidence by your attitude and comments as was the ego of whomever it was who was the object of your amusement.

Jesus (peace be upon him) has asked us to reflect on why it should be that we complain about the mote in someone else's eye when we are not prepared to see the beam in our own eye. You mock the mote in the eyes of others but you refuse to see the beam in your own eye -- for if you did, you would not mock these other people but have compassion for them and try to see if there is something you could do to help them ... not with the public put downs, through your sarcastic remarks, which you have related to me ... but in a private, loving manner.

You have gone on, sometimes, about this aspect or that facet of Jane's behavior that you find problematic, or whatever, and, yet you profess to love her and like her. When I said 'no' to coming out to Weston Beach on one occasion, you were quite hurt and, in your heart, you really were not willing to accept my explanation that I was not going to do anything that, if Jane were to find out, might hurt her and, as a result, create distance between Jane and the Sufi path.

Unfortunately, at the time, all you could see were your wants and desires. Your love, friendship, and liking for Jane didn't seem to extend to doing those things that might be in the best interests of such a 'friend'.

You, of course, might not agree with me concerning the problematic nature of your behavior in relation to me. But, let's take a quick look at a few things.

When you were in need, you were the one who wouldn't leave me alone. You spent hours and hours and hours with me.

When you needed support, you looked to me to provide it. By the Grace of Allah, this was done – I believe ... or, at least, God willing I hope it was -- consistently, generously, lovingly, compassionately, and empathetically ... by phone, through face-to-face discussions, and through actions.

Recently, you commented, with a certain degree of self-pity, about how Ron enjoyed such a great line of support from so many people, while you didn't enjoy the same support. Nothing that Ron might, or might not have received, from others could compare with what you got from me, and the fact you could make such a comment just indicates how little gratitude you have to God for what was given to you over these many months.

When you first started coming to see me, you asked me what sort of relationship would we have, and I told you I would be the best friend you ever had. I have proven this to you time and again, but with you, it's never enough ... as you, yourself, have remarked: you always seem to want a little more that you are ever going to get ... even when what you have received is far more extensive than you might have any right to expect.

You have told others you love me and you are my friend, but much of your behavior lends considerable credence to the conclusion that neither of these things is true on whatever level you care to consider the matter ... whether in terms of a shaykh-mureed relationship, or as a friend, or in a purely personal way. I have not asked you to do a great deal for me, so, the following incidents carry considerable weight even though, for the most part, they have to do with rather insignificant issues.

I asked, on several occasions, if you would take me back to that bookstore in Sutton, but you didn't. I asked you take me out to bookstore at the mall to get a job application, but you didn't. I asked you to take me out to the University so that I could sell my books, but you didn't. I asked you to read some things for me and discuss them, but you didn't. When I was moving my old office and out of my apartment, you didn't lift a finger to help me in either case.

When I was inquiring about why you were treating me the way you were with respect to proofreading jobs, you remarked, rather haughtily, that “your other proofreader just reads the stuff right away, but you (meaning me) leave it lying around.”

Apparently, when it comes to what you want or need, then, everything should be done right away. However, when it comes to me, then, if, or when, you get around to things, then this is okay.

There are also some problems with the accuracy of your foregoing statement. On at least three occasions, I did the job while you waited in the office, or while we were at your apartment.

On other occasions, I told you at the beginning I might not be able to get to it for a few days, and you said this was fine ... which seemingly, in light of your remark was not the case, and you just didn't tell me -- and, if so, then, that is your mistake, not mine. Finally, there were other cases in which I neither did the work right away (i.e., while you waited), nor did I delay things, but did the proofreading within a reasonable period of time – a time-frame to which you had agreed.

You have various jobs back-logged and you get to them according to your schedule. Seemingly, you have one set of rules for yourself, and one set for someone like me with respect to whom you appear to have little patience.

When I asked you, from time to time, about your approach and avoidance behavior concerning me with respect to our working together on the proofreading material, you said: “You didn't think I was really interested ... that I was always busy with so many things.” Yet, you never provided any evidence to back up your sense of things.

Yes, I was busy with a lot of different things -- including you, Jane, fatiha, The Sufi discussion group, writing, correspondence with other people about the Sufi path, the web page, and trying to find a stable form of employment. However, none of this prevented me from doing your jobs for you ... although on a few occasions, as noted above, there were some delays. Consequently, I am a little unclear about what precisely you are basing your judgment on in relation to my alleged ‘lack of interest’ in the proofreading work?

In fact, I was excited enough about the proofreading prospect that I mentioned it to both my brother and Baba and told them I was

looking forward to doing it, and I didn't mind doing this sort of work at all. But, then, you have such 'keen insight' and just "knew" that I wasn't truly interested.

You have expressed relatively little understanding of, or empathy for, my job woes, and, yet, you had evidence right in front of your nose of what I was up against. For example, the way you kept playing hide and seek with me on the proofreading jobs is a good illustration.

You would ask me if I was willing to work on various jobs, and I told you I was. Unfortunately, more often than not, you gave those jobs to someone else. This would go on for month after month.

You had all kinds of excuses such as: "Well, I don't want to leave my friend out of things", and, so on. Nevertheless, in the end, I was usually the one who got left out of things.

Several months in advance I told you I was interested in doing several big jobs you had coming up, and you agreed. In fact, more than a month later, you called me up on the telephone, specifically, to ask me if I still wanted to do the proofreading for those jobs. I told you I did, but I never saw either one, even though I desperately needed the money.

There were a number of times in which we reached an agreement that I would not charge you for proofreading jobs I did in exchange for your helping me out with my office expenses. You agreed to this on three, separate occasions, but such agreements were never really consummated.

For, many months, you left me out to dry in the foregoing fashion. You kept me suspended among "yes", "maybe", "promises", and silence over the job thing, time and time again -- time that could have been spent looking for other kinds of work, but why should I look when -- supposedly -- I was going to work with you ... but, you kept renegeing on this.

Now, of course, the reasons for all of the foregoing games have been made readily apparent. The inconsistencies, the distance, the unfulfilled promises, the excuses, and the lack of real concern for my situation are all traceable to your on-going situation with Ron.

On the surface, the story line for the situation has been constantly changing, but, in truth, you have been constant within yourself

concerning it. All the surface changes -- irrespective of whether you are prepared to take responsibility for this or not -- had to do with your immediate desires, whims, and needs.

You wanted someone in whom to confide ... to be able to speak of things that you had not even discussed with your counselor. You wanted comforting and consolation. You wanted help in finding a way out of your situation. You wanted to simplify your life. You wanted a friend. You wanted support, understanding and empathy. You wanted someone to care for you as a person. You wanted to be free of abuse, cruelty, control, and lack of reciprocity from a marital partner. You wanted peace. You wanted love. You wanted to be happy. You wanted affection. You wanted intimacy. You wanted perspective. You wanted counsel and direction. You wanted insight. You wanted purpose. You wanted help with your anger and misery. You wanted someone to trust and of whom you would not be afraid or under constant fear of imminent danger.

By the Grace of Allah, you got all of the foregoing, and much more. You got them at a time when you desperately needed and wanted them, but once you got them, you were indifferent, even somewhat cruel, toward the locus of manifestation through whom these blessings of Allah came to you.

You once claimed that if you had to do it all over again, you would never choose someone like Ron. You were not romantically inclined toward him. You said you loved him as a mother loves a child ... that is, you had a deep caring about the welfare of someone who, in many respects, needs someone to look after them because of the alleged inability of that person to look after himself. You said the very idea of physical contact with Ron repulsed you and made your skin crawl (something that you told me you said in front of the marriage counselor whom you and Ron have been seeing, as well). You said you had not kissed him on the mouth for some 20 years because of something he had done, or made you do, when you were pregnant with your second child. You said you were suffering from PTSD and being in the presence of Ron's controlling and emotionally tension-filled demeanor had many physical ramifications for you ... only one of which was the problem with your neck and shoulders. You said that if

Ron really loved you, he would let you go and leave you alone, but he did not do this.

You recounted all the many ways in which Ron had betrayed you and been indifferent to your needs or the needs of the children -- ranging from his physical violence toward all of you, to his lying about gambling, to: for years, not even being interested enough to sit at the dinner table with the rest of the family, despite your many requests for him to do so. You spoke about how happy you were whenever he went away to hunt, fish, or was away from home for some other purpose. You discussed the fact you didn't like Ron, but you had a love, of sorts, for him. You explained how you had been trying to find a way to escape for, at least, ten years. Again and again, you cried your way through the extent to which Ron's behavior over the years -- along with that of your cousin, your uncle and aunt, your father, your sister, your brother, your alleged best-friend Marnie -- all of whom betrayed you at one time or another -- had all helped lead to, if not shape, your breakdown and your current situation.

You spoke about your constant thoughts of suicide during your period of breakdown and the graphic, horrific images that would come to you in this regard. You outlined how these thoughts were, in many ways, a continuation of your long-standing tendencies toward self-destruction since a very early period in your life (say from seven to eight years of age) ... of which the descent into alcoholism was, yet, another manifestation.

You said that despite all of the foregoing sorts of event, you still had love for Ron, but it was a love in which you just wanted to know he was going to be okay, happy, and physically comfortable. You wanted to make sure he would come to the realization that he could make it on his own, that he could move on and find new relationships of a worthwhile nature. You wanted to remain friends, but you didn't want it to be more than that. You wanted him to get anger-management assistance for his own sake, and you wanted him to get counseling for his various problems so he would not continue to do with others what he had done with you.

All of the foregoing took place, and, then, the story changed again. Suddenly, you were jealous and angry in a new way ... jealous of the new women in his life and angry enough to be begin telling his friends

and me various things about Ron that would be embarrassing to Ron. Jealous enough to invade his privacy and play back the messages on his answering machine, despite the fact you were very indignant and upset when Ron had invaded your privacy by stealing your journal from your car. Angry enough to begin to remember, with clarity, all of the ways in which Ron, despite an overt gloss of truth-telling, had often lied to you about many important issues.

All through these episodes, you continued not to tell me the truth about what actually was going on within you ... things that I knew but which -- out of a wish to be a friend and give you the benefit of a doubt -- I let go. I let you spin your stories and untruths because I felt badly for you, cared for you, and accepted you with sincerity - things that, for the most were not reciprocated ... for if reciprocity had been present, you would never felt the need to hide the truth from me out of your fear that you would lose the help, support, and comfort that you were receiving in abundance from me.

Out of a sense of concern for Ron, I didn't interfere with how you were handling the situation although I was unhappy with it and concerned about the potential ramifications for me ... ramifications that have, since, become reality. In any event, because you wanted Ron to be okay, I wanted him to be okay; because you wanted him to be happy and find someone new, I wanted him to be happy and find someone new; because you wanted to remain friends with Ron, I wanted you to remain friends with Ron; because you loved Ron, I wanted Ron to be in a position to be able to receive that love; because you wanted Ron to be healthy, I wanted him to be healthy.

You told me recently that Ron is a believer in God, but what you do not seem to understand is that being a 'believer' is not about whether, or not, someone accepts the idea of God. Indeed, atheism is but one kind of unbelief.

Iblis or Satan is an unbeliever, but not because he rejects the reality of Divinity ... which, in truth, he does not. Satan accepts God's reality and, indeed, as you might have read in the Qur'an, after falling into spiritual disfavor, Iblis requested that Allah give him respite so that he might seek to dissuade human beings from the straight path ... proof that Satan acknowledges God's reality and authority.

Iblis is an unbeliever because he neither understands nor accepts the purpose of life that has been established by God. Iblis has no faith in God ... nor does he have any inclination to come to an understanding of why God created him or how life is to be used in accordance with its underlying Divine intention ... instead, Iblis was committed to engaging life according to his own opinions, biases, hatreds, interests, prejudices, values, and beliefs.

Ron might very well believe in God, but he is an unbeliever to the extent he follows his own ideas about things rather than comply with what God has ordained (and we will let pass, for now, what, precisely, it is that God has ordained). In fact, anyone who does this is in rebellion against Divinity no matter how much they claim to believe in God's existence.

This kind of unbelief is in all of us. The Sufi path is focused on helping us to overcome the pettiness and small-heartedness of such unbelief and, in the process, find our way to true belief ... a belief that is rooted in spiritual self-realization and an abiding awareness of not only the nearness of God but an awareness of how that nearness manifests itself in unique ways in our respective lives.

On occasion, I have been critical of both you and Jane when you verged on becoming excessive, if not misguided, in your praise of AA by often alluding to it as something more than it is. I have no doubt AA is a gift from Divinity and its founders were the loci of manifestation through which this blessing got introduced to other people.

Nonetheless, reflect upon the following. I remember a discussion in which someone was rhapsodizing about the capacity of Jesus (peace be upon him) to raise people from the dead. After a little bit of this, Dr. Irfan stopped the person and asked: "What good does it do if someone is raised from the dead, but they do not use this God-given opportunity to realize the purpose of life?"

The purpose of life is not about family, jobs, material possessions, money, or the so-called good life of rest and relaxation. Nearly everyone has family, jobs, material possessions, money, and a piece of the 'good life', but they have not realized, thereby, the purpose of life ... and you would know this if you really took to heart what, spiritual masters like Rumi and Hafiz are saying ... not just here and there, but according to their entire body of spiritual guidance and counsel.

Similarly, the purpose of life is not realized by just being sober. Sobriety – as is also the case with wuzu or ritual cleanliness -- is, at best, a pre-requisite to being in a position just to begin seeking spirituality in a sincere, consistent fashion.

Becoming sober is like being raised from the dead. In its own context, it is, truly, a miracle of God, but, in reality, it means very little if sobriety is not used for something beyond itself ... namely, to realize the purpose of life.

I have met quite a few alcoholics in my life. My father was one.

I have met a fair number of people for whom AA has worked wonders as far as sobriety is concerned. However, many of these people -- even the ones who manage to stay sober for long periods of time -- often are nothing more than dry drunks.

By the Grace of God, they don't drink, and, consequently, all manner of mischief, evil, and destruction is avoided. The blessing is as much -- if not more so -- for the innocents who have been suffering at the hands of drunks, as it is for those who are consumed with their desire for alcohol.

As you have reminded me on several occasions, God protects fools and drunks. To whatever extent this might be so, I am sure there is an even greater concern on the part of Divinity for the innocent people who are likely to suffer at the hands of fools and drunks who aren't protected from themselves.

Although you, Ron, Biff, Frank, Jane, Carol, and a few others I could mention are, and have been, sober for a long period of time. You all are immersed in your own version of being dry drunks.

Your destructive egos, moods, prejudices, self-centeredness, opinions, values, likes and dislikes are very much in evidence through almost everything you do. When you were all drinking, the booze served as something like a palimpsest in which there was an outer painting -- i.e., drinking and concomitant behavior -- that was hiding another kind of painting beneath the surface events ... namely, nafs. Now, by the Grace of God, that the drinking has stopped, what has been washed away is the surface painting, revealing the real problem beneath ... the problem for which the drinking was but a symptom.

Lest you think I am accusing only you and the others of being immersed in a dry drunk, the fact is, we are all dry drunks. If you remember when Carol came to a few meetings, I spoke about all of us being 'nafsaholics' -- that is, we are all addicted to our own nafs that is entangled in its moods, attitudes, demands, desires, manipulations, and self-serving agendas.

You have been committed, on and off, to AA meetings for over twenty years. Ron has done the same for even a longer period.

Yet, as is readily evident, AA has done almost nothing to help either of you to escape from your addiction to your individual egos, moods, desires, and so on. You have embittered one another's lives while being cold, cruel, distant, selfish, moody, petty, whining, rebellious, dissatisfied, angry, and destructive of yourselves, your families, and the community.

The irony is that both of you are looked up to as "successes" of the AA program. Apparently, you are 'the result' when AA works its magic, and while both of you have much for that to be grateful to God for His delivering you from the cesspool of being active, out of control drinkers, neither one of you has anything to be proud of with respect to using the opportunity, wisely, that God has given you when He raised you from the alcoholic un-dead. AA treats but one symptom ... it does not treat the underlying disease of nafsaholism that is a deadly, hydra-headed monster that we all wish were just mythological in nature instead of all too real and painful -- to ourselves and to others.

There is something important about you Lara that you must now understand and for which you must come to accept responsibility ... complete with sincere repentance. As reprehensible as were the acts of your cousin, your uncle, your father, your sister, your brother, Ron, and others about whom you have told me, you are now in danger of becoming them. More specifically, you have knowingly used someone for your own gratification and without due care and diligence in relation to the hurt it would cause to that individual.

You didn't care. You wanted what you wanted when you wanted it, and you exhibited a depraved indifference to the ramifications that might ensue from that ... and you knew the other person was playing his part out of innocence and not at all according to the rules by which you were playing things out.

All the people about whom you have told me can offer excuses for why they did what they did and why they felt justified in bringing harm to you and others, or why no one should really think what went on was all that bad, or, maybe, that it was something which brought benefit. I am sure you can do so as well, and, indeed, I have heard much of this from you over the months.

However, the fact of the matter is, you have deeply hurt someone through your self-centeredness, duplicity, insincerity, indifference, and pursuit of your own agenda. The person whom you have hurt is someone who loved you, cared for you, worried for you, looked out for you, and was your friend, but someone whom you just kept jerking around with one story after another while intentionally keeping the person at a distance except, for the most part, at those times when you wanted or needed something and probably rationalized everything as a sort of quid pro quo ... which is not what love, friendship, or a spiritual relationship is about.

After you had gotten what you wanted, you consistently squeezed that individual out of your life, spending more and more time everywhere except in the company of that individual. Among other things, you claimed you were afraid for your life and the life of the individual, and, indeed, there was some evidence to corroborate this because Ron was stalking you and harassing you over the phone.

However, there were many practical and legal steps you could have taken to help the situation, but you didn't. You could have insisted the keys to your car be returned, but you didn't. You could have asked for a restraining order, but you didn't despite the fact you were being stalked and harassed. You could have filed for divorce but you didn't. You could have stayed away from Ron, but you didn't.

And, always, there were excuses for why you didn't do these things. You didn't want to hurt Ron's feelings (but you didn't mind hurting someone else's feelings), or you didn't want to jeopardize the possibility of a future friendship with Ron (although you were quite willing to jeopardize the possibility of a future friendship with someone else), or you were being compliant and codependent, or Ron (not God, but Ron, as if Ron were the Higher Power to whom you were supposed to turn over your life that is not what whichever step it is, means) had meant so much to you when you were first recovering

from drinking (the same time that you were pregnant and Ron left you 13 times to be with someone else) ... but, through all of this, you never told the truth about the real reason for your failing to take any action, whatsoever, that might have brought clarity to the situation vis-à-vis Ron.

The resistance, antagonism, and rebellion you expressed through your passive aggressive behavior toward your shaykh and friend was not just a matter of you wanting not to be controlled -- and, in point of fact, you never were controlled at any time by me or the silsilah, and there is nothing you can point to which demonstrates this ... indeed, you were always left free to do whatever you wished to do. Moreover, your distancing behavior -- after you had gotten what you were after -- was not because you were terrified of what Ron might do to you if he felt his control over you slipping [not only did Ron do nothing of a violent nature -- except, perhaps, once when he took your keys and would not let you leave, or took you on various house-oriented errands and held you captive to his droning on about his various grievances -- but, you yourself did little to buffer yourself from the alleged threat of such violence].

Your passive-aggressive resistance to your shaykh and friend -- except at those times when you wanted something -- was so you could be free to pursue your hidden agenda. You pursued what you wanted relentlessly, until you got what you wanted, and, then, you moved away, or isolated yourself, or were antagonistic, or provoked arguments, or were indifferent to what was going on in the life of your shaykh and supposed friend.

You have often said my concerns and interaction with you were really only about money. Perhaps, I should remind you of a number of things. (1) You and Jane were the ones who insisted on getting me to talk about my financial situation; (2) despite the foregoing, I never accepted any money from either of you until I started to do some work for you [although you did buy me the occasional turkey sandwich (there might be some symbolism in this)]; (3) you mentioned to me one time early on (in March of last year, I believe, when we were either going to, or coming back from, the sandwich shop) about how you had gotten a raise, and you would like to give me \$100.00 a month to help out, and I didn't take it, but you encouraged me to tell you if I needed

anything; (4) after I got laid-off, and during the three month period prior to the time when I began to receive unemployment, I was in considerable financial need, but I didn't ask you for anything; (5) Linda wanted me to be something of a financial advisor for her and was waving the prospect of money at me, but I told her I was not interested; (6) in all the time you and Jane -- and whomever else happened along -- were making use of the facilities of the Sufi center office, none of you contributed anything (except some boxes of paper, a few CDs, a used CD player, and an occasional snack after Friday fatiha) to help maintain the 'center' (although you recognize the need, even at AA, for passing the hat to look after expenses) -- in other words, someone who was unemployed was subsidizing two people who were employed -- one of whom was quite well off financially; (7) on a number of occasions, in August and early September of last year, I came to you, per your request (noted earlier), indicating I was in need of some money -- and this was after we, supposedly, reached an agreement that in exchange for my doing proof-reading jobs without charge, all I had to do was tell you what I needed, and the money would be forthcoming -- but this didn't happen; (8) I did some work for you in August and September of last year, but the payments were not forthcoming until November, sometime, but I never hassled you about this; (9) I was ready to work with you on several large proofreading jobs, but you gave them to someone else despite having promised me I could do them; (10) you did give several large sums of cash to pay off the cellular bill but these were expenses that you had a substantial role in helping to generate because you wanted to keep on talking about your situation with Jane and your landlord, or Ron, or whatever (furthermore, you seem to forget the fact that prior to that time, I was the one paying the \$56 dollars a month that the cell phone cost for which you were the primary beneficiary of this service); (11) with respect to the money you gave in late November, I, actually, had earned nearly half of it through proofreading jobs that I had done for you much earlier; (12) with the exception of my first book, you were given everything else free of charge, and, in addition, I provided books for others free of charge as well; (13) whatever other money, meals, or gifts for me on which you might have spent money, the fact of the matter is, you got meals, gifts, and an abundance of services, in return,

that -- if one were to put a monetary value on the exchange ledger -- were entirely in your favor.

Recently, you have referred to me as a “bitter 60 year old”. Prior to that, you asked me whether, or not, I regretted the way things have turned out.

There is only one thing absent from my life at the present time ... a condition that has been present through pretty much all my life. I am poor, and, therefore, often have little, if no money, but I am not bitter about this, nor do I regret it ... although, admittedly, money is nice to have.

Jesus (peace be upon him) is reported to have said that ‘it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to pass into heaven’. People, such as yourself, are very concerned (despite your protestations otherwise) with houses, cars, material possessions, money, health care, kayaks, and so on, but you are going to be stripped of it all very soon, and, then, the real accounting will take place which is not calculated in terms of dollars and goods, but in terms of the currency of deeds and misdeeds. You are living in a ‘fool’s paradise’.

Despite what you might suppose, I have tried, very assiduously, to find a stable source of income. For many years, I have applied for all manner of jobs, both locally and elsewhere, as well as tried to generate self-employment. Although, by Divine decree, all the doors have, to date, been closed to me, this is not because I am lazy or disinclined to make efforts in this regard.

I would like to pay my bills, but I can’t. Do I regret this?

No, although I am sure that my creditors do. Nevertheless, God knows what is in my heart and what I have tried to do even if you and others do not believe me or, even, care.

In any case, why should I regret the absence of money and possessions, when so many other blessings have been bestowed upon me? One way or another, Allah has provided a way through for me on so many levels, as well as given me tremendous opportunities to struggle toward self-realization ... not because I deserve this, but due to Divine generosity and kindness.

I am not now, nor was I ever, angry that you, or others, had a job, yet, I didn't have one. I was dismayed, however, to see how people who claimed to love and care for me were not only often so uncaring and unloving toward me but would be largely unsympathetic to my situation while simultaneously benefitting from everything that I had to give.

Mother Theresa has said if you give what you can afford, it is not giving. Yet, so many people take what has been given to them by the Grace of Allah and think largely in terms of what more they can buy or possess, rather than how they can share what they have with others.

You people (Ron and you) have more than \$100,000 running through your place in Brimley, but you both are broke much of the time, and seem to get edgy about helping someone a little who has helped you and whom you claim to love and care for ... while this same edginess was not on display when it came to giving another person -- namely, Ron -- much more ... a person who was employed full-time and whom, supposedly, you didn't wish to have anything to do with. I have nothing, and, as a result, I, too, am broke almost all the time, but I have been happy to share with you whatever I have.

The former, underlying attitude is what I find to be annoying and upsetting. Jobs -- like all rizq transactions -- come from God, and, as such, have been destined from pre-eternity. However the attitude to which I am alluding in the foregoing ... that is something for which a person has responsibility, himself or herself.

By the Grace of Allah, you have helped me some -- which is to your credit, but you also have hurt me in a lot of different ways, as well -- including financially. And, on the whole, the latter side of the ledger -- the liabilities -- unfortunately, has outweighed the former.

This brings us to the present. You should not suppose this letter is being written in the hopes that money will be forthcoming from you.

Over a year ago, when you first started to come to the meetings and take an interest in things, I told you about a time in which I spoke at an Ashram in New York. After the talk, the head person came to me and said the Ashram wanted to give me some money for my talk, and this was standard practice for whoever talked at the place.

I phoned Baba and explained the situation to him. He said if I felt there was sincerity and love in the giving, then, it was alright to accept it, but if these qualities were absent, then, I should not.

Although my financial situation at the time was desperate, nonetheless, in line with what Baba had indicated, I refused the money. The moral of this story is this -- even if money were to be offered to me, now, from you, I would refuse for the same reasons given above ... and, my situation is more desperate now than it was, then.

I don't know what your spiritual fate will be, just as I do not know what mine will be. All a person can do is work toward being as ready as one is able to be in order to face a Day that cannot be avoided by any of us.

I do know this, however. Your actions toward your shaykh, the silsilah, and your friend have lacked, among things, adab or spiritual etiquette.

Ten days, or so, ago you indicated that the reward for people like me would be in the next life. This might, or might not be the case - only Allah knows what will happen to us, but whatever happens in the next life does not absolve any of us from comporting ourselves with propriety in the present life ... and this means there are right ways of doing things, as well as wrong ways of doing things.

Here, hopefully, one needs to avoid making the mistake that Iblis made in supposing that what he thought, valued, liked and desired must be the former, when, in truth, it was the latter. This was a fundamental error that was committed by him despite the fact that, at one point in his existence, he had been raised up to the level of angels after having worshiped and served God for 500,000 years ... when one looks to how few years most of have worshiped and served God, how much more vulnerable are we than Satan in this respect - a vulnerability that Satan, with our co-operation - exploits.

Just as there have been consequences for me in terms of how I have lived life and made choices, the same is true of you. Although a great many wrongs have been done to you, the ways in which you have wronged your own soul, through your choices and behavior, are even

greater. As I have told you many times ... you have great spiritual instincts, but very poor spiritual judgment.

On the last day we talked in person -- not the Friday night phone massacre -- you said I did not love you. When I asked what evidence you had to support this, you said, it was just a feeling that you had and left the distinct impression that the fact you had such feelings was justification enough for making the statement.

Allegations made in the courtroom that are not corroborated by evidence are worthless. They have no probative value.

Why should it be any different in actual life? Having feelings is not the same thing as being able to justify the feelings you have. Truth can only be found through truth, and not through vague feelings that happen to be self-serving and cited in order to justify one's actions to oneself when, in reality, such feelings have a value that is less than hearsay ... they are just fictions of the mind and imagination, used according to whim, convenience, and expediency.

I hope things work out well for you and all the members of your family, but, even if they do, you still will not have realized the spiritual potential that God has invested in you. The real tragedy of life is when a person turns his or her back on why one was brought into this world in the first place, or, alternatively, substitutes one's own ignorance, values, opinions, habits, and biases for the truth, and tries to treat the former as if it were the latter ... which it is not.

Jesus (peace be upon him) has said that 'it does not profit a man to gain the whole world, yet, lose his soul'. I pray you will take precautions so this will not to be your fate.

Several times you have spoken, of late, about how you have had an increasing desire to drink. Perhaps, you have felt you would find more protection from this in the sort of environment that Ron offers ... even though I would be just as opposed to your drinking as Ron would be.

In any event, your protection from drinking, as from the other symptoms of being a nafsaholic, rests only with God and not with human beings per se. If you are sincere with Divinity and struggle to conform with God's wishes for human beings, then, God willing, you will be buffered from such things.

Tariq

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I follow up the first letter with a second letter.

April 11, 2002

Dear Lara,

What do we call a need that, over time, becomes more and more expensive (emotionally, socially, psychologically, physically, spiritually, and materially) to satisfy while generating fewer and fewer positive returns?

What do we call a need that serves no identifiable purpose other than to serve the need?

What do we call a need that is destructive of ourselves and to others when either it is being satisfied or we are seeking to satisfy it?

What do we call a need that is beyond one's control to resist even when one can see that it has little but negative consequences for one's life?

What do we call a need that calls to be filled due to conditions of pathology and not due to conditions of health?

What do we call a need that induces us to sacrifice our integrity, self-esteem, identity, balance, judgment, and happiness in order to serve the need?

What do we call a need that if one's access routes to fulfilling it are blocked, one becomes anxious, depressed, moody, foolish, and out-of-control?

What do we call a need that constantly makes demands on us that we are compelled to satisfy, and over which we obsess, and, as a result, is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to resist without undergoing considerable distress, trauma, and mental, if not, physical turmoil?

What do we call a need that, like a whirlpool or black hole, tends to draw us into its center when we even touch or brush up against its sphere of influence and with respect to which one must establish a variety of buffer zones that prevent us from coming in contact with even its outer most regions of gravitational pull?

What do we call a need by which we are thoroughly dominated and controlled, and toward which we are angry and resentful, and of which we are contemptuous but to which we are insidiously attracted ... all at the same time?

What is the nature of such a need and what are its dynamics?

At the heart of this need is a bright shining lie ... the hook, which once swallowed, begins to control what we do as well as establishes the conditions that sow the seeds for one's eventual destruction. The nature of this bright shining lie comes in the form of a promise.

The promise is that one's life will become better by accepting the ways of the promise, and the bright shining lie is that the promise will be fulfilled ... which will never, and can never, happen through such a venue.

The promise is rooted in what is known as an intermittent, variable reinforcement schedule through which one gains certain kinds of rewards but in such a way that one can never predict when, or if, the payoff will come again. These rewards vary from person to person (because what is a reward to one person is not so to another), but they often revolve around a desire for: escape, nostalgia, release, rebellion, oblivion, avoidance, acceptance, peace, erasure of negative self-image, exorcizing guilt, assuaging anxiety, combating despair, overcoming a sense of powerlessness, a deadening of pain, and/or a lessening of stress and conflict.

Whatever the desire or need might be, it is something crucial to the individual's perception of his or her core identity. Temperament, personality, and history might all help shape and color the issue or issues around which a person's sense of self revolves, but the bright shining lie of the promise is that this manner of dealing with one's sense of self will benefit one in some fundamental way.

At the beginning of the hooking process, there is a pairing between, on the one hand, that which serves as the vehicle for delivering on the promise and, on the other hand, something that one finds reinforcing. The nature of this pairing is often given expression through some form of intensely liberating and/or pleasurable event ... a pathological peak experience, if you will, which rarely, if ever, is repeated again in quite the same manner- although one might

approach the nature of that event, as a limit, in various, lesser ways. While operating under the influence of the addiction, one's life becomes a quest to re-discover and maintain the quality and quantity of the original peak experience.

Once one permits oneself to be initiated into the processes surrounding the bright shining lie, then whether the sought-for rewards ever come again with the same sense of intensity, degree of liberation or pleasure is purely secondary to maintaining a cognitive, emotional, physical, and spiritual commitment to the promise, for it is only by adhering to the dynamics of the promise that one believes one has any hope of acquiring the sort of rewards that, initially, were associated with such promise.

There often is a condition of learned helplessness that accompanies the pairing of the promise and whatever is perceived as the payoff or reward. More specifically, no matter how painful one's pursuit of the promise becomes, one is operating under a mind-set, if not body- and heart-set, which compels one to acquiesce to the belief that not only will the promise go unfulfilled in any other way, but it is useless to try to escape from the pain that such a pursuit brings, for out of the ashes of the accompanying pain, one perennially hopes that the Phoenix will rise again.

Addiction is a one-person cargo cult. Night and day, the addict serves the cult, but the plane of promise for which she or he is waiting will never land, and, in the meantime, all of life passes the person by, and everything is sacrificed to the bright shining lie.

Whoever said you are co-dependent with Ron misdiagnosed the situation. You are addicted to the relationship, and Ron is a pusher who is the primary beneficiary of your addiction, and while there are dependencies, of sorts, on both sides of the ledger, I see nothing of co-dependency here ... at least not as I understand the term, anymore than one would call a pimp and prostitute, or a pusher and client, as being necessarily co-dependent in relation to one another.

Ron's essential problems are quite independent of you, although you are the locus of manifestation through which Ron acts out his problems. Moreover, your problems are quite independent of Ron, although, he does serve as the locus through which the bright shining

lie is delivered to you and around which the promise of fulfillment hovers.

Like all pushers, Ron exploits your need to his own advantage. Like all pushers, Ron will lie to keep the promise alive. Like all pushers, Ron seeks to control the life of the addict in order to maintain the relationship of dependency. Like all pushers, Ron feels no essential duty of care concerning the ultimate welfare of the addict. Like all pushers, Ron will become enraged with anything that threatens to undermine the control. Like all pushers, Ron feels completely justified in doing what he does and, if anything, blames the addict for having the need (s) that makes the bright shining lie work. Like all pushers, Ron is primarily a predator. Like all pushers, Ron will take no responsibility for the destructive and self-serving nature of his actions.

When you first met Ron, you were in great need of someone ... someone whom you felt you could trust and whom would speak the truth, and through whom you could feel safe and secure, as well as in whom you could believe, and by whom you could be loved and accepted, and in relation to whom your life could become stable, and from whom you could feel a sense of self-worth. These were some of the key needs around which the bright shining lie was built and in which the promise of benefit and fulfillment was set as bait to be swallowed by you.

In truth, Ron was comparable to a form of methadone in relation to your initial addiction to alcohol. In other words, through Ron, one addiction was substituted for another.

Toward the beginning of your time with him there was a promise that emerged through that relationship in which many of your most pressing needs appeared to be addressed in a manner that, seemingly, might lead to long-term satisfaction and fulfillment. Within a very short period of time, whatever peak events you experienced in conjunction with your early relationship with Ron, began to decline and were replaced by many ugly realities ... lies, betrayal, abuse, violence, control, tension, and conflict ... which are classically typical of the exploitive relationship between pusher and addict.

Your constant preoccupation with, and worry about, wanting to be sure that Ron is okay with things, your restlessness concerning whether, or not, he is satisfied with what is going on, your compulsion

to take steps that are geared toward compliance with his moods, expectations, and wishes are not expressions of co-dependency concerning him. They are signs of your need to keep the bright shining lie in active mode, for, if Ron is unhappy with things, then, the likelihood of the central promissory notes of your addiction actually being redeemable in the form of some manner of reinforcement concerning the needs that the bright shining lie is intended to address or fulfill is diminished.

Why do you feel, simultaneously, annoyed and compelled with respect to having to attend to Ron's feelings all the time? You are annoyed because it serves as evidence that he is not really capable of fulfilling the needs underlying your addiction, and, yet, you are compelled to continue on with the charade because like all addicts you find the prospect of having to live with, and act upon, the realization that large parts of your world are built around a counterfeit promise is a very unpleasant and painful thing to have to do ... i.e., you don't want to have to go through withdrawal that is what happens when one ventures outside the confines of the promise and concomitant bright shining lie that have been maintaining one's addiction.

Go back and re-read the questions with which the current exercise started. All of your behaviors vis-à-vis Ron are consistent with the characteristics of the addictive life style that is being introduced through those questions.

The addiction runs so deep and is so toxic to your mental, physical, and emotional faculties that you have become unable to explain what is going on, or why you feel the way you do, or why you have become so anxious and controlling, or why the condition is so powerful and seductive to you, or why you can't seem to help yourself even when you realize the relationship is destructive to you and all who are around you, or why you would sacrifice someone whom you love and know you can trust and God willing, find peace through, in order to satisfy your addiction to the promise of the bright shining lie that is embodied in the form of your relationship with Ron.

Why is it of such fundamental important for you to get Ron to stop controlling you? Because I think you know, now, and have known for a long time, Ron is what I have said he is ... a pusher who is exploiting

your dependence on the bright shining lie at the heart of your relationship with him for his own ends.

You want to prove this to him and you want to prove this to everyone else. You want vindication for all you have been feeling about what has been going on and how you are not crazy, nor emotionally disturbed, to feel this way ... quite the contrary, you have been trying to resist the exploitation and trying to struggle against an intolerable situation.

Nevertheless, your quest for proving your case is rather quixotic. The only people in your life who care about what is going on here are, perhaps, your counselor, myself, and yourself. Your counselor, I, and you already know, more or less, what the truth of the matter is, so, there is nothing which you have to prove to us, and your desire to vindicate yourself to the world is useless and would merely fall on deaf ears and hearts, much as did Don Quixote's quixotic aspirations.

You would just be wasting your time on something that is devoid of any real value. No matter how much proof you put forward, Ron will not accept what you are saying as being correct ... after all, haven't you brought forth considerable evidence over the years, and has this led to any change in Ron's understanding, attitudes, values, or beliefs about things?

One more meeting or discussion or phone conversation with Ron will bring you no closer to a resolution of the situation than would one more drink settle the problems that confront an alcoholic. You are trying to force something that is not going to take place ... either with respect to convincing Ron or others, of what is and has been going on or in relation to resolving your respective problems.

You have years of experience -- some of which you have recounted to me and your counselor -- that corroborates what is being said here. Over the years, you have tried to rationalize away, avoid, and deny the truth of this, but the truth speaks for itself.

You even have enabled Ron to continue on in his role in the addiction because of the learned helplessness you have acquired along the way which has you lying prostrate at the altar of self-sacrifice in the misguided and totally unrealistic hope that the underlying basis of your relationship with Ron is not built around a bright shining lie and

its, concomitant, unfulfilled promises. The enabling activity is rooted in your desperate need to believe in the initial promise on which your addiction concerning Ron is based.

You can forgive Ron as much as you want. However, your forgiveness will never transform him from being the pusher he is, and this is very clear in relation to his recent activities in which he violated his own cardinal AA rules for sexually interacting with people like Tanya. Even the way he treated this other woman, Wanda -- and I agree with you she has her own responsibility to answer for in the matter -- has the pusher mentality about it ... that of sexually exploiting someone's vulnerability and to be in such control of the situation he could tell that woman about his priorities (namely, re-acquiring you) and still get the sexual favors he desired from the young woman in question.

Ron didn't love his first wife ... who he almost killed. He didn't love his second wife ... who he almost killed. He didn't, and doesn't, love his third wife – namely, you – who he appears to be trying to kill in a quite different way. Moreover, he doesn't love his most recent paramour, and all of his actions with respect to each of the foregoing individual show this to be the case beyond any doubt.

People who love people simply do not do these sorts of abusive, exploitive, and destructive things on a consistent basis. And, the operative word here is “consistent” since we all make mistakes and do hurt the ones we love, but Ron has been engaged in abusive, violent, controlling, exploitive, selfish behavior across all of his adult life ... repeating the same patterns of behavior again and again.

You were terribly upset with Ron over his irresponsible behavior in relation to the various women with whom he recently has had sexual dalliances, but you must understand that what Ron has done recently is not a sudden deviation from what he has been doing for more than 50 years. He is showing you very clearly what is he all about, but you are in denial concerning the evidence that he has left behind in crime scene after crime scene like so many clouds of forensic toxins.

If someone fools you once, then shame on them. However, if someone fools you twice (or more), then shame on you ... wouldn't you agree?

Because of your addiction, you have been letting Ron manipulate you again and again and again and again. You knew these things were happening even though Ron tried to make you feel like you were crazy or that what you knew was going on was not going on. However, your need to believe in the bright shining lie was often too great to permit you to act on your knowledge in a responsible, constructive, consistent fashion.

You do not have the skills, knowledge, resources, strength or independence necessary to solve Ron's many problems. If Ron's counselor truly feels (and this very well might not be the case but, rather, just the spin Ron has put on what his counselor actually said) that Ron is not in need of any further assistance, then I would have to question the former's competence as a counselor, but whatever the truth of the matter in that respect might be, Ron must set about solving his own problems -- or not solving them -- as he chooses.

You are having great difficulty struggling -- or even deciding if you want to struggle -- to get out from under your own addiction. Consequently, you are fooling yourself to suppose you are going to be able to help extricate Ron from the hell he has made of his life and for the lives of others.

You can take steps to save yourself. Or, you can take steps to continue to feed your addiction and Ron's predatory inclinations. However, the one thing you will not be able to accomplish, no matter what you do, is to save both Ron and yourself ... you will simply destroy yourself in the process.

You are faced with a problem of triage. You must understand who can be helped and who is, at the present time, beyond help. In the present context, you have the potential to respond to spiritual treatment through your desire for change (even while dragging your feet along the way), but Ron does not, because he has no sincere inclination to change from where he is.

You can feel as sad as you wish about this situation, but your sadness will not change, one iota, the realities of what is the case. You can save yourself, and, possibly, your children, but Ron must find his own way to a different juncture in his life that clearly indicates he will be able to respond to treatment ... something that is not presently the case.

Before he arrives at such a place -- if he ever does -- he is going to have to experience a lot of pain ... pain that should not be stopped and pain that you should not try to alleviate, no more than one should try to prevent an alcoholic from the pain that comes with hitting rock bottom, for in such pain are sown the seeds of real salvation. One is not helping anyone by trying to shield an individual from what that person needs to go through in order to become healthy, nor can one force someone to go through such a process.

We cannot play God ... and your inclination to try to assume such a role with respect to solving Ron's problems appears to be driven by your desire to overcome a long-standing sense of helplessness that has pervaded your life along with the accompanying depression that sets in when you seem to be unable to make things come out the way you would like. All we can do is serve other people in accordance with the principles Divinity has established, and one of those principles is that people cannot be helped until they are ready to be helped ... you ought to understand this from your many years of association with AA.

Ron is not ready to be helped. What you wish were the case in this respect is neither here nor there, and if you interfere by transgressing the sort of principles alluded to above, you only will end up hurting him, yourself, and expose a lot of other people to collateral damage.

You have been trying to placate, accommodate, appease, forgive, excuse, and rationalize Ron's behavior for more than twenty-three years because you have several vested interests ... one of which is noble and the other which is, ultimately, destructive. On the one hand, you, unlike Ron, do have love for another human being, and within this love is a legitimate caring for that individual's welfare ... this is the noble part of things. On the other hand, you have bought in, quite deeply, to the bright shining lie concerning the promise of your essential needs being fulfilled through your relationship with Ron, and this has not happened, nor will it ever happen, and it is delusional for you to suppose otherwise ... this is the destructive part of things and it is evident throughout your marriage with Ron.

If you are going to rid yourself of your addiction with respect to Ron, then you are going to have to apply some of the basic principles of AA to your life. You are going to have to admit you have no power over your addiction, and you are going to have to sincerely turn your life

over to God and follow the path that Divinity has provided for you in order to learn how to survive.

If you are going to rid yourself of your addiction, then, you are going to have to do what any addict must do ... namely, completely abstain from that which feeds the addiction. All the rationalizations, evasions, misdirection, excuses and enabling must stop.

If you are truly serious about freeing yourself from your current addiction and giving Ron, at least, the opportunity for real change in his life, then, you will do the following: (1) you will get an unlisted phone number right away ... one to which Ron will not ever have access; (2) you will insist -- and, if necessary, seek the assistance of law enforcement -- in order to have the extra set of keys to your car returned to you through a third party; (3) you will immediately file for divorce; (4) you will not have any contact whatsoever with Ron except for emergencies, and these emergencies should always be filtered through an independent third party.

If you are not prepared to take even the foregoing minimal steps, then, your life -- emotionally, cognitively, physically, and spiritually -- is in imminent peril. For, a failure to take the foregoing steps would mean you are still deeply locked in a bright shining lie and living in the thoroughly delusional state of an addicted person ... far removed from the truth of your circumstances, and, therefore, you are vulnerable to all of the destructive forces that are inherent in your situation -- which, as you well know, are considerable.

To paraphrase from the *'Shawshank Redemption'* film, you can get busy living (in a spiritual sense), or you can get busy dying (in a spiritual sense). There are no other possibilities because to take no action is to do the latter since it perpetuates the status quo in which everyone will continue to lose.

Once before in your life, a school teacher intervened and helped you take the first steps toward sobriety. Now, once again, a teacher is intervening in your life, and if I could hospitalize you somewhere I would ... but, unfortunately, there are no hospitals for the addiction that ails you, so, I must hope, of your own free will, you will entrust yourself to my care.

If you did, this would not mean you were swapping one addiction for, yet, another. If you read through the questions with which these pages began, you will know that what is being offered to you is very different from what Ron was, and is, offering you.

There is a promise, but there is no bright shining lie. By the Grace of Allah, the Sufi path delivers on its promises to those who are sincere in their engagement of the process.

We seek to heal, not to destroy. We seek to assist, not to exploit. We do not want you to become addicted to us, we want your love, and we wish to give you love ... love that is constructive, not destructive.

Have we not kept all of our promises to you? Can you not see there is a clear line of difference between what has been going on in your life, and what comes to you through us?

What have you got to lose except your addiction?

§

April 13, 2002

This is the final installment of my counsel that, like Caesar's Gaul, has been divided into three parts. I will try to invoke the Knecht rule in which limitations are placed on length, but, let us see whether the adab of that rule is kept by Tariq.

(1) I'm sure you remember the CD we listened to at your apartment concerning alcoholism. I found it to be very interesting and instructive.

You might recall that on more than one occasion after having listened to it, I remarked about the point the speaker made with respect to the different 'kinds' of alcoholics who could be sorted according to what programs or systems of treatment they responded and through which they had the most success in getting, and staying, sober. The alcoholics of the 'AA' kind did not do well in rehab-facilities, other sorts of step-programs, or by willing themselves to sobriety.

You seem to be an alcoholic of the AA type. Now, no one -- including the one whose talk is on the CD -- knows precisely what this means or why it should be this way.

Moreover, it could be, there might be various aspects of the AA program that serve as catalysts which provide the “energy of activation”, if you will, that makes recovery possible for different people by helping an individual to break free from the inertial properties created by the habituating and addictive dimensions of alcoholism. Or, to switch to a slightly different metaphor, like a space shuttle, alcoholics need to reach “escape velocity” in order to overcome the gravitational pull of that which keeps them bottle bound, and for different people within AA, there might be various facets of the program that serve as the source from which the necessary escape velocity energy is derived.

Although I am speculating, somewhat, I suspect that, say, in Ron’s case, the primary source of activating energy derives from his relationship with his father, together with the role his father played in AA, and, as a result, Ron has a very strong need to follow in the footsteps of his father in this regard. I am sure there are other factors, as well, but the aforementioned feature plays a very prominent and crucial role for him.

In your case, I believe one of the crucial factors is the underlying centrality that Divinity has within the AA program ... especially, the very broad, amorphous nature of this Divinity that is largely unencumbered by theology, doctrine, expectations, and litanies. You might not have had much exposure to formal religion in your life, but you are deeply drawn to the Divine spark flowing within people like Rumi, Hafiz, and so on, and deep within you there is a felt resonance with things Divine, and the fact you didn’t have to wade through a lot of theology in order to access the Divine dimension of AA was -- in light of your personality, upbringing, temperament, philosophical orientation, and so on -- very important.

However, in your present condition of addiction, you seem to be hell-bent on trying to prove to yourself and everyone else that, on your own, you can extricate yourself from your Ron-addiction. Yet, you are an addict of the AA kind that, in your case, means you need a program similar to AA ... that is, you need a Divinity-based approach to things if you are to have any hope of success of freeing yourself from your problem.

Considered from a slightly different, but related, direction, there is much you have said and done that suggests there also might be within you a deep-felt need to try to bring change into Ron's life and your life through your own efforts in order to demonstrate to me, yourself, and others that your judgment about these matters is better, more loving, and spiritually deeper than that of either myself or my shaykh. I have given you counsel in these matters, and you have gone your own way with things, and Baba, as well, has passed on to you, through me, counsel that you have dismissed.

The Qur'an instructs us "to enter houses through their doors", and, among other things, this means one should engage matters according to the guidance that is provided in conjunction with such things by those whom God has entrusted with your affairs. This phrase also has implications for the adab or spiritual etiquette surrounding one's engagement of life's many doors, and part of this etiquette is that one ought not to go charging off on one's own, making decisions out of ignorance, whim, and impatience.

Long before the Friday night when you called me to tell me that you were going to Boston and you were going to get back together -- or try to -- with Ron, you knew where you were heading with things ... precisely how long before that night you knew this in a clear, conscious manner is neither here nor there. Many things that you did and said in the weeks leading up to that revelation bear witness to what I am saying, but I'm not going to waste the time or space trying to demonstrate this by running through that evidence ... given that we both know this to be so.

In any event, by your own account, you don't know what you are doing or what is going on. You've got ideas, impulses, feelings, and anxieties flying around inside of you like ping pong balls at a table-tennis tournament for drunken octopi, and you treat life and people like they are the radio in your car that exists for no other purpose except to be played with, switched on and off, and changed at will when a station plays something you don't want to hear according to your moods.

You had plenty of time to talk about such matters with your shaykh, and, in the process, try to find an approach that, no matter what it might have been, had adab and integrity. Unfortunately, you

decided to make up things on the fly and you didn't really stop to consider what you were doing or consult your shaykh ... mostly because your addictive anxieties would not permit you to do so.

Or, maybe, you did consider what you were doing, and because one path involved you having to change in essential ways, while the other path did not, you chose the path of least resistance. But, if so, this was your nafs and addiction talking ... not your essential self, and, therefore, the wrong parts of you were doing the considering and the decision making.

You often give the impression that, somehow, you have a dispensation with respect to the observance of adab -- whether in relation to me, Baba, the silsilah, or God. You seem to feel that just because you have some desires and intense feelings this entitles you to do whatever you want simply because this is what you want, and, as far as you are concerned, that is the end of the matter.

You might feel your caring for Ron is so deep, genuine, sincere, pure, and honest that your desire will cause everything to change in the desired direction. All you have to do is keep trying and what you wish will become reality.

Now, God, if He wishes, might come into your lives and change things for the better -- at least from a certain perspective. However, such changes will not necessarily be to your ultimate benefit, for you might well win the battle in this matter only to lose the spiritual war ... you have often been very foolhardy in what you have wished for with very little idea of what you were becoming involved in or what ramifications would ensue.

Hazrat Ali (may Allah keep him secure and grant him blessings) has said that when I ('Ali) 'do not get what I would like, this increases my faith' because he knows that he is not in charge of running the Universe since it does not submit to his wishes, and that, in addition, the Universe serves a purpose far beyond our desires for this or that. In contrast, your inclination to willfulness in such matters tends to make you lose sight of Ra'bia's words of rebuke to a would-be Sufi that "thy existence is a sin with which none other can compare" because you seem to assume that what you want is more important than what God wants ... and please don't be a Sophist here by raising your question of 'how do we know what God wants?' because, quite frankly,

you really never spent much time in doing what you had to do in order to find this out.

Whatever the outcome of your situation with Ron might be, there is something about this matter that you don't understand. The resolution of -- or failure to resolve -- that problem is no longer the primary issue ... and, actually, never was.

Your attitude toward, and relationship with, God is the issue. How you handle things in conjunction with, among other things, Ron/or and myself - well, these are merely loci of manifestation through which God probes your regard for Him, and your insistence on doing things in your own way displays a very clear disregard for Divinity.

You might think these things are all private matters, but I assure you they are not. Creation is not value-neutral and absolutely everything we do, think, or feel is grist for this mill whose wheels shred the meat of our intentions and actions exceedingly fine.

(2) When, and to whatever extent, you followed the counsel you were receiving from the Sufi path [which is somewhat AA-like in as much as: (a) it is God based; (b) would endorse most, if not all, of the 12 steps, and, (c) despite what you might think, is unencumbered with theological musings ... i.e., there is a difference between speculative creations of the rational mind and direct perceptions of the Truth and what is entailed by the latter], you were into recovery from your Ron-addiction. Unfortunately, as is the case with many people seeking to recover, the old way of life keeps whispering to them ... like so many vampires urging those who are seeking recovery to open up the window and let the vampires in.

You kept opening your windows of vulnerability to the vampires of your addiction, and they kept coming in to drain you of your energies and soul. As a result, spiritually, you became weaker and weaker with each new encounter.

There is a time when the victims of vampires know they are opening themselves up to destructive forces, but like a deer caught in the lights of an on-coming vehicle, they are mesmerized and cannot seem to get out of the way of imminent danger. Part of them is horrified and disgusted by what is happening, but vampires have their

powers, and when you give yourself over to them, they will have their way with you.

In books and movies, one needs certain protections to ward off or struggle against the lurking evil. Spiritual symbolism plays a role, as do certain things whose role and mechanism is inexplicable, and, yet, they seem to work ... for example, in the case of vampires, the presence of garlic or holy water.

In your real life situation, the Sufi path, rather than the cross, was serving as protection against the dark forces of the night. Furthermore, you were doing zikr and reading the Qur'an -- whose inner dynamics might not be understood -- but, nonetheless, like garlic and mirrors in the movies, those activities were having their efficacy in your life.

When you began to distance yourself from these things, you also began to go downhill spiritually. This rendered you more and more vulnerable to the whisperings that, night and day, were flooding your soul, and seeking to seduce you to open your windows, once again, to the vampires of your addiction.

Over time you began to have less and less resistance to these urges. Over time, you reacted to many facets of the Sufi path -- including me -- as do those in the movies who have come under the sphere of influence of vampires, and, then, are sprinkled with holy water.

You burned and writhed and sought to remove yourself from such things. Your mindset, emotional attitudes, and soul were more and more becoming colored, shaped, and organized in accordance with the wishes of the vampires that were lurking within you and around you.

(3) There is a substantial amount of self-destructiveness that is fueling your Ron-addiction. You, yourself, have remarked on a number of occasions, that you deserve someone exactly like Ron, and you said this in a way and in a context which made it clear that you did not consider this to be a good thing, but, rather, something akin to just desserts in which someone like you perceived yourself to be deserved someone like you perceived Ron to be.

As a result of all that has gone on in your life, together with your manner of responding to these events, you have an extremely negative self-image. Ron (for whom, by your own account: you have an ever

diminishing degree of respect; whom you don't particularly like; who treats you abusively; who makes your skin crawl, when he touches you, and, who has injured you on many levels) is a perfect vehicle through which to pursue your desire for self-destruction and through which to maintain your low self-esteem.

The attitudes and behavior that you are exhibiting as a function of the foregoing is, actually, quite typical of people -- such as you -- who have been abused (from others and/or through their own poor judgment) much of their lives. Such people believe and feel, very deeply, that there must be something inherently wrong with them ... that they are, in essence, evil or sick or depraved or defective, and this is why all the things that are happening to them are happening.

Although you are suffering from a form of pathology and an accompanying severe emotional disturbance, the pathology and disturbance are a function of contingencies and not an expression of what, in essence, you are. In broad, general terms, there are five reasons why what is happening to you is taking, and has taken, place:

(a) I have told you before that in all of our lives there are ingredients and events that take place because -- through God's mercy, compassion, kindness, and generosity -- these are the only channels available to us for receiving certain kinds of baraka ... blessings that would not accrue to us no matter how many ritual prayers we did, or no matter how many optional fasts we kept, or no matter how many night vigils we observed, or no matter how many seclusions we performed, or no matter how many austerities we underwent. When we go through these things we experience them as very painful, unpleasant, and devastating (they are, after all, coming to us in the form of loci of manifestation -- i.e., the occurrences -- of jalali (rigorous) Divine attributes), but like the invasive procedures of medicine that, in the short-term, bring pain, in the long run, many benefits might come as a result of our undergoing such procedures.

You have made choices in pre-eternity about which you have forgotten -- choices that shape and color what goes on in this life. With respect to these choices, you might wonder: "What in the hell was I thinking?", or, perhaps, "It seemed like a good idea at the time", or a bit of both, but, whatever the case might be, these were your choices, and you are responsible for what is entailed by them. Moreover, until

things become clear to you -- whether through mystical experiences in this life or through spiritual experiences in the life to come -- you will not really understand why these elements are in your life and the role that you played in putting them there.

You have made choices in this life that have not been in your best interests -- emotionally, physically, psychologically, socially, or spiritually. We all do, and we all must suffer through the consequences of these decisions -- seeking, wherever possible, to rectify the mistakes in judgment that have been made, or trying to stay clear of making the same errors again ... neither of which many of us accomplish very well.

There is a potential for goodness and spiritual realization within you about which various forces of evil are envious and jealous. As a result, these forces are trying to destroy that potential by seducing you away from that which can assist you to struggle toward activating and refining your aforementioned potential.

I have told you this before, and, now, I am telling you again. Due to your negative self-image and wish for self-destruction, you resist accepting what you are being told, but, nevertheless, what I have said above concerning your potential is true.

God tests everyone, as promised in pre-eternity, to see if we would keep our word to recognize, love, and accept God under any, and all, circumstances. (Alastu bi rabikum -- am I not your Lord?). A test that is not rigorous would not be a true test, and, in fact, because the tests that God imposes on human beings are so rigorous, the angels are in awe of those who pass them. Everyone is tested according to one's spiritual capacity ... and there is no doubt many of your tests have been of a very rigorous nature.

You are not going through what you are going through because you are inherently evil or excessively and irredeemably sinful. Your life is not a 'just' punishment for the deeds of your life, and need not be a preview of hell, but is, rather, the many faces of spiritual opportunity -- some of which are in jalali (rigorous) form and others that are in a jamali (compassionate) modality.

(4) Because of your Ron-addiction, there is a considerable amount of belligerence within you toward anything that might be seen as a

threat to interfere with, or undermine, your addiction. This behavior and attitude is a classic part of the addictive profile.

This sort of belligerence is especially prominent in relation to those who are trying to provide assistance that would help a person to break free of an addiction. Within an addict, part of the person knows that what is being offered is an opportunity for freedom and health, but there also is another part -- which often over-rides the former aspect -- that resents, or is antagonistic toward, if not downright mean and cruel to, the locus of manifestation through whom the help is delivered.

Your hostility concerning me, which often is expressed through your passive-aggressive stance and overt indifference to either me or my circumstances is a reflection of such belligerence. I know part of you understands this, but, unfortunately, that part is not in control of things but is, instead, dominated by the Ron-addiction.

(5) I do not know whether, or not, you are familiar with the concept of “competitive inhibition”, but in case you are not, I will provide an overview of the idea. This term is used in medicine, molecular biology, and neurobiology, and refers to the way in which, for example, molecules compete for access to the receptor sites that are located on the exterior of various kinds of cells.

Different receptors have various three-dimensional shapes and electrical properties that are receptive to only certain kinds of molecules of an appropriate, reciprocal shape and charge. Once a given molecule is locked onto a particular receptor, then, that receptor tends to become unavailable to other molecules which, although otherwise compatible, are, nonetheless, locked out, so to speak, because of the molecule that presently occupies the site.

Sometimes, there is a sort of hierarchy of preference that might exist in conjunction with such receptors. This means that although some molecule, currently, might occupy a given receptor site, under the right circumstances, the receptor can be induced to release a given attached molecule and replace it with something that occupies a higher rung on the receptor’s preference hierarchy (usually this is a function of constituting a better, thermodynamical fit between molecule and receptor).

When Candace Pert, along with others, discovered the existence of receptors on the exterior of cells, this opened the way for a number of other findings. For instance, I am sure you have heard of endorphins and, maybe, as well, their close-cousins enkephalins.

Endorphins get their name because they seem to have morphine-like properties within an organism -- that is, they are endogenous morphine-like substances. The discovery of receptors and these tiny peptides came within a relatively a short time of one another and, together, were part of a theory which said that different cells of the body had receptors to which endorphins, and other molecules, linked and, as a result, brought about various biochemical transformations within the cell, in particular, and, ultimately, in the organism as a whole.

When you first became addicted to Ron, your system -- especially your nervous system -- was flooded with endorphins and enkephalins that underwrote the initial high to which I alluded in Part Two of this series of three letters. Subsequently, many of the receptors in your nervous system have become occupied with Ron-related endorphins, but the pleasure of this initial occupation has, for the most part, long since departed, but, nevertheless, the receptor sites remain occupied and resist being replaced by anything new.

Some toxic chemicals and poisons operate in this fashion. They continue to occupy receptor sites and prevent various kinds of necessary cellular and biochemical events from taking place. Eventually, unless there is some sort of interdiction, the individual dies due to competitive inhibition with respect to key receptors and various molecules -- including the poisons -- which are competing for the finite number of receptors on the exterior of any given cell.

For you, your Ron-addiction is like a toxic chemical that has been poisoning your system for some time. Leaving him and distancing yourself from him allowed you, to a degree, to detoxify. However, as we both know, the process of detoxification was not permitted to be completed.

Moreover, throughout your period of detoxification, you were suffering from the effects of the addictive toxicity that was operating within you. It affected virtually all of your behaviors, attitudes, thoughts, and emotions.

The dynamics of this poisoning is that by occupying receptors within your system -- and you can construe this in a purely physical sense or, as well, in a metaphorical sense -- processes that are necessary for your healthy functioning have been prevented from taking place. You know Ron has been a toxin to your system for many years and in many different ways (and almost all of these have been recounted by you to me and your counselor many, many times), but just like a person who knows he or she has been poisoned, doing something is not always easy, especially when part of the symptomology of such poisoning is the physical, emotional, and spiritual malaise that tends to dominate one's being so that one does not have the strength to act in accordance with one's knowledge, and, as well, the toxins cloud one's judgment.

Indeed, part of the insidious nature of such poisons, when coupled with one's addiction, is that one knows one is destroying oneself, but one becomes resigned, as a result of learned helplessness, to the pain and destruction. There is a sort of morbid, horrified fascination with the whole process, just as with those who are in the presence of a vampire, and when one throws in your desire for self-destruction, then, the possibility of losing out to these forces seems, somehow, okay -- maybe, even just -- to you.

However, one of the most major sins one can commit on the Sufi path is to 'despair of the Mercy of Thy Lord' (Qur'an). But, this is what, in many ways, you are doing. Through returning to your Ron-addiction, you seem to have abandoned hope for God's baraka by turning your back on the considerable mercy and blessings that have been showered upon you during the last year.

Nothing but nafs and ego are stopping you from opening yourself up to the Divine Mercy that is being extended to you. Incidentally, one of the major reasons for your intense jealousy concerning recent events vis-à-vis Ron is little more than, on the one hand, your ego feeling jilted by someone for whom you have sacrificed and suffered so much, and, on the other hand, your ego's concern that others among your family, friends, and AA community might notice that Ron can, in fact, get on perfectly well without you and, as a result, your years of torment might seem plain stupid when seen in such a light, and, as well, maybe they will suspect that you might have been the problem

with the marriage, not the other way around ... your ego can't stand to live with any of these possibilities, individually or in combination.

(6) In a variety of ways, your attitude is like some of those people about whom the guy on the AA CD spoke. You thought you could be a 'social drinker' in relation to Ron, but this is not so ... either you remove yourself from the sphere of influence of your addiction, or you will succumb to your addiction altogether, and this is what has been happening.

Recently, you have told me on the phone the situation with Ron has reversed itself. Whereas, previously, Ron had been the one who sought to control your every move and called you umpteen times a day to check on your whereabouts or would drive past the house to find out what you were up to, now, you are the one who is doing this.

Don't you understand that if what existed between you and Ron were really love he would never have tried to control you, nor would you be doing the same thing now? Don't you understand you are just degrading yourself in the process?

What is even worse, you are putting into play the very things that Ron might use to control you more than he ever did before. As a result, you might be signing your own emotional, spiritual, and, possibly, physical death warrant through such behavior.

If you will remember, in the last letter, I spoke about the idea of "an intermittent, variable reinforcement schedule". This is one of the most powerful processes known to human kind for out of it arises many kinds of addictions from which people either never extricate themselves, or do so only with considerable difficulty.

Brian, for whom you have a soft spot in your heart, is a very good example of an 'intermittent, variable reinforcement schedule' in action. His compulsion to buy lottery tickets is locked into a feedback system which is such that once it becomes established, then, there need not ever be any reward involved as long as the underlying promise of the bright shining lie is kept alive. Your relationship with Ron is really no different than what is going on with Brian and his gambling.

(7) You are totally confused about love and addiction. You don't know which is which, and, why should you? You have had virtually no exposure to real love in your entire life.

Because what you feel in conjunction with Ron has been emotional, intense, pervasive to the point of obsessive, as well as mixed with intermittent, variable forms of reinforcement or reward, you suppose that this is love. When one throws in the fact that you genuinely care about Ron's welfare, then the whole situation becomes even murkier for you.

Real love is what Rumi and Hafiz wrote about -- and they wrote about that which was experienced through their lives and not out of philosophical speculation. Real love is what a shaykh has for his or her mureed. Real love always transforms the people involved in a positive, constructive direction.

There is little, or nothing, constructive in your relationship with Ron. There is little, or nothing, in that relationship which might induce both of you to transform yourself into better people.

What you have is two self-centered, selfish, angry, immature, stubborn, controlling, willful, impulsive children taking turns having at one another. What you have is two people making one another unhappy and engaging in destructive behavior.

How can you possibly suppose your attraction in this matter is an expression of love? None of the signs or conditions necessary for love are present, and everything about that relationship is, more and more, giving expression to destructive events.

You are suffering from addiction in relation to your pathological attraction to Ron. Your denial of this cannot turn it into something that it is not.

(8) There are four reasons why Ron carries on emotionally the way he does with respect to you -- and none of them has to do with love for you:

(a) his ego has been hurt, and you know, very well, how big a role pride takes in his image of himself ... but pride is nothing but ego;

(b) he perceives himself to be losing control of the situation, and this is very frightening to him since it has pushed him into uncharted waters in which, like a little boy who is lost (and, in many ways, Ron is just a lost little boy who has never bothered to grow up), he cries for his own sense of being lost and for having become uprooted from familiar, comfortable surroundings;

(c) when things that a child thinks are her or his possessions are taken from that individual, the person cries in outrage at the injustice of it all, and, there is little doubt, based on what you have told me, that Ron considered you to be little more than chattel to which he was entitled to do with as he liked;

(d) Ron knows he has failed his father -- that his father would be extremely disappointed in how he has conducted himself with respect to, among other things, you and the children. What his father might think of him is very important to him, and he cries because he feels the opportunity to please his father slipping away ... to whatever extent he wants to change has little, if anything, to do with loving you, and pretty much everything to do with being his father's son, and for this he also cries.

He said as much to you when he indicated he wanted to prove to his father that he could change. This is not about you and him, it is about him and his father, and he doesn't need to use you in yet another way in order to get reconciled with his father.

You might feel your opportunities with the Sufi path and related matters are finished because your various behaviors have rendered the whole situation to be rather hopeless. And, indeed, you have made a mess of things by insisting that the situation be governed in accordance with a 'my way or the highway' sort of attitude that has been directed at me, Baba, the silsilah, and, most importantly, God.

However, there are several things in this regard that you might bear in mind. What, if anything, you do with any of this information, is, of course, your responsibility, but one can always hope that something will penetrate your carefully constructed defenses and help you understand you need to stop running away from yourself and those who you know (based on real experiences) have a true love for you.

As indicated earlier, much of your bad behavior (your behavior is bad, not you), I write off as a function of your Ron-addiction. As you well know, addiction tends to exacerbate the qualities of nafs so that the latter's inclination toward: anger, stubbornness, self-centeredness, cruelty, meanness, hostility, belligerence, and so on, that already are bad enough, are made much more difficult through the catalytic properties of addiction.

I'm not trying to excuse your behavior. I'm just putting it in perspective.

If you can overcome the Ron-addiction, there, really, is a good spiritual potential that is present within you. Often times, people in your situation, who have done the kind of things that you have done, believe they have ventured beyond the pale, or boundary marker, of forgiveness and redemption. As a result, they assume -- incorrectly -- that all their bridges back have been burned irredeemably, and, consequently, they might as well keep heading in the direction they have been going and continuing to do the things that they have been doing -- thereby, perpetuating a cycle that often spirals out of control, going from bad to worse.

There was a man who once came to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and asked whether, or not, it was true that God could forgive all sins.

The Prophet responded in the affirmative.

The man said: "Even murder and adultery?"

The Prophet indicated 'yes, even murder and adultery.'

The man was silent for awhile, evidently thinking over what the Prophet had said, and, then, reiterated his previous question, but this time, more forcefully and somewhat incredulously -- 'Even murder and adultery?'

Again, the Prophet confirmed his previous answer.

Silence prevailed for a short while after the Prophet had spoken, and then yet again, the man, who was now somewhat beside himself with something akin to an outraged sense of self-righteousness, raised his question again, practically shouting - 'Even murder and adultery?'

The Prophet replied -- 'Yes, God can forgive all sins, including murder and adultery, even if so-and-so (the name of the man asking the questions) disapproves.'

There is a hadith qudsi (a saying in which God is said to be speaking through the Prophet's mouth) in which one finds the following:

"So long as you call upon Me and hope in Me, I forgive you all that originates from you: and I will not heed, Oh son of man, should your

sins reach the horizon of the heavens, and then you asked My pardon, for I would pardon you."

The foregoing is not a license to sin, but it does demonstrate that God, truly, is the oft-Forgiving, the Merciful. At the same time, the offer is on the table, so to speak, only so long as we live, for when we die, another set of principles comes into play because, then, we will no longer be able to call upon God, or hope in God, or ask for pardon, but will be brought to judgment through the testimony of our hands, and feet, and other instruments of action for which we were given responsibility during earthly existence.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has said: "We die in the state in which we lived, and we are raised up in the state in which we die". Since none of us knows when that appointed moment of death is, one would be wise to be cautious about how one lives one's life because one never knows when one will be brought to account for the life one is living.

As with many alcoholics, there is something of the perfectionist in you, and you tend to shy away from doing things that are less than what you suppose they ought to be. I assure you, nonetheless, it is better to be a failing mystic who keeps trying than someone who gives up the struggle simply because the current results fall beyond their self-imposed standard of accomplishment ... and the great shaykhs all are constantly encouraging us to keep trying, no matter how many times we might fail ... a lottery slogan in Canada use to be: "You can't win it, if you're not in it", and this also is true in relation to pursuing the purpose of life.

There is a Sufi story about two men who were at opposite ends of the spectrum when it came to spirituality. One of the two was a complete scoundrel and just went about life making a mess of his own life and the lives of others by seeking to fulfill his own agenda in the matter of life. The other individual was a true servant of God and spent his life becoming selfless in order to accommodate himself to whatever God wished of him.

One day, each of the two men was praying to God, asking for something. God directed the angels to fulfill the requests of each of the two people, but the Divine directive was expressed somewhat differently in each case.

For the scoundrel, God indicated to the angels -- ‘Give this man what he wants so that he supposes that I am pleased with him’. In the case of the true servant, God noted -- ‘Give this man what he wants so that he knows that I am pleased with him.’

You might, or might not, get what you want in the matters at hand. But, if you get what you want, you cannot suppose this is because God agrees with you and is pleased with what you are doing. Furthermore, if you do not get what you desire, you cannot suppose this necessarily is a sign that God does not care for you or does not have your ultimate welfare at heart.

What the Sufi path offers is real love, forgiveness, compassion, tolerance, kindness, generosity, acceptance, nobility, commitment, and friendship ... not counterfeit or pseudo-versions of these qualities, and you have had considerable, direct experience that what is being said here is, in truth, the case. God willing, I seek to apply to life what I have learned from my Sufi teachers, and my life includes you ... or, at least, I would like for it to be able to include you.

Nonetheless, despite the foregoing, you should not suppose you are free to dilly-dally and just do anything you please. You might think, and often act as if, you run the Universe and have a right to do whatever you wish, whenever you wish, with whomever you wish, but you don’t actually have such a right.

We either work in accordance with Divine wishes or we are abusing the privilege of freedom inherent in our condition of being human. We have a deep need to do the former, but we have no right to do the latter ... although the latter way might be how we exercise the free-will that has been bestowed upon us.

The Qur’an is a book of Truth from which nothing has been left out. We disregard its teachings at our own peril.

Rumi and Hafiz (may Allah be pleased with them both) are correct to say we should be careful about becoming too religious. On the other hand, there is no such thing as becoming too spiritual, and part of spirituality is to understand there is a tremendous difference between truth and falsehood ... as well as to understand the ramifications that might follow from adhering to each.

Doors of opportunity do not necessarily stay open forever, and there are fail-safe points in life beyond which there might be no going back. You are playing with more than fire, you are playing with your soul and eternity, and it makes no difference whether, or not, you believe in, or care about, such things, because on the Day of Reckoning, the Truth will be commanded to come and separate all of us from our delusions, pretenses, and imaginings.

You cannot use the ends you seek to justify the means you have used. You cannot cite the means you have employed to justify the ends you wish. Desire, in and of itself, can never justify ends nor means, or, in turn, be justified by them.

Justification comes only through adherence to the Truth. Unfortunately, this you have not done.

You have acknowledged in a recent phone conversation that what is going on, in many respects, is driven by your ego or nafs. It is good you seem to understand this, for such understanding indicates there might be hope in this matter if you ever tire of the mess that your ego has made of your life, and the problematic ways that your messes are spilling over into the lives of others. Nonetheless, to fail to act on, and in accordance with, the knowledge we have is a foolish way to live life.

All of the foregoing commentary, along with the material in the first two letters, is based upon more than a thousand hours of listening to what you have told me again and again, across many months. If what you have told me over these many weeks is the truth, then -- although God knows better -- all of the foregoing applies, but if what you have told me during all this time is not the truth, then, you have been squandering something that is very precious, and in the process, prevented yourself from getting the assistance you need.

Originally, I had not intended to write the second and third letters, but felt obligated to do so out of concern for your situation and because I believe that what I was prompted to say in these last two letters is an important part of the counsel that began in the first letter, and, therefore, I wanted to forward the material to you so that you, hopefully, might reflect upon the material -- or not -- as you like. This time, however, unless you wish this to be otherwise, there really will be no further communication forthcoming from me.

Be not made hollow by the noise of others,
Or led by the nose by blind and devious men.
There's one way which leads to the spring,
One rope to use for the bucket to scoop up
Clean water -- the trackless way of selflessness.
Be filled with wanton, willing, lusting self
And you are in prison with clipped wings, or
You are a piece of cod sizzling in the pan.
The world goes mad on the ferment
Of angry actions, the authorities can only inflict
Visible punishments. Now regard with the unpracticed
Inner eye the unseen presence of Judgment then
You will understand the nature of your soul's torment.
We are like toads croaking in the damp darkness
Of a well, there's no way we can know the vernal
Breath of a sunlit field in the carnal occupation.

Mathnawi, Rumi ... one of your favorite writers on the Sufi path.

§

April 14, 2002

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Well, it seems things vis-à-vis Lara have run their course. There really hasn't been much contact between us over the last three weeks, or so.

I have written three long letters to her -- some of it concerning our situation, but a lot of the content was just trying, God willing, to help her as best I could in a spiritual manner, and, sometimes, these two themes overlapped with one another. She phoned several times -- once

(last Wednesday) to thank me for the forgiveness that I extended to her in the first letter, as well as to admit that pretty much everything I said in the letter was true, and the other time she phoned (which was yesterday) was to leave a message saying that while she appreciated all that I had done for her and the effort and time that had gone into the letters, nonetheless, she indicated she did not wish any further contact from, or with, me -- which, God willing, is a wish with which I will comply.

Although the letters I wrote were direct and forthright, they were not a matter of calling her names or trying to degrade her, or anything of a similar nature. However, she might not have appreciated what was in the letters.

There was a lot said in them about the Sufi path and its emphasis on themes of forgiveness, redemption, tolerance, understanding, compassion, second and third chances, kindness, trying again, and the like. However, there also were things said that indicated none of us are free to do whatever we like and there are, potentially, serious consequences that might ensue from the choices we make ... possible consequences for this life and for the life to come. I was neither threatening, nor trying to frighten, her.

Nonetheless, as her spiritual tutor, I felt obligated to give things one last try (three tries as it turned out) -- not necessarily for the sake of us as a couple, but for her sake as a spiritual being. The essence of these letters was that although she was making mistakes that were generating a lot of bad behavior and attitudes on her part, in essence, she had spiritual potential that, God willing, could be nurtured.

If I thought there was any chance of her, once again, having a change of heart, I would be prepared to try one last time to work things out between the two of us, despite what she has done -- after all, God has given me the right to forgive someone as much as I might wish to. I do feel great compassion, empathy, and love for her, but I also have realized there seems to be very little reciprocity in these matters from her side of things.

In a lot of ways, I believe she used me. In some respects, this hurts a lot, and in other respects, even though she might have used me -- sometimes knowingly and sometimes not quite consciously -- I believe that, insha' Allah, a valuable service, of sorts, might have been

provided for her through me ... something that she might not have been able to get anywhere else but from the Sufi path.

By the Grace of Allah, over the last fifteen months, or so, I have spent several thousand hours with her, listening to her problems, providing support, reassuring her, offering comfort, as well as: consolation, safety, understanding, feed-back, friendship, tolerance, and help of many different sorts ... always trying to find ways, God willing, to ease her difficulties or find solutions. When she first came to me, she was suffering from the effects that long-term stress, conflict, and terror from years of the control, abuse and selfishness that her husband had inflicted on her physically, emotionally, and psychologically. She also was filled with intense, deep anger and resentment toward her husband for all that had gone on in their marriage, along with a certain amount of dysfunctional sexuality between the two of them.

Now -- whether this is a good or bad thing, I don't know, but I suspect the latter -- she has returned to her husband, and they are busy mending fences, re-establishing communication and intimacy, as well as proceeding on with, perhaps, renewed hope for constructive togetherness. I don't think she could ever have gotten to this point, without the help she received through our silsilah during the last fifteen months.

Nonetheless, I don't care at all for the way she went about things with respect to us, or how, in the process she – at times -- treated me rather shabbily, or the little regard that she seemed to have for our silsilah and Islam, or the lack of gratitude she exhibited, or the almost complete absence, seemingly, of any sense of shame or prick of conscience concerning what she has done (believe me, the phone message today was as matter of fact, distant, and cold as it gets). In a lot of ways she was quite controlling herself and not very given to compromise. In any event, although she tended to operate in accordance with her own agenda and set of rules, she was treated, I believe (although Allah knows best), from our side of things -- with a few exceptions when my human weakness showed through -- in accordance with the principles and values of the Sufi path.

So, while part of me is very sad and upset about things, there is another part of me that feels she received the best possible treatment,

care and love she could have hoped for while she was under the canopy of our silsilah – at least, through this locus of manifestation. I do not feel there was much else that might have been done through me that could have helped her any more than was the case. Whether she was sincere, or not, I'm unsure, but she said in the first of two, recent phone calls (the one in which I actually talked to her) that no one had treated her as nicely as I had done, and she would never have a bad word to say about me ... Allah knows best.

There are, however, a variety of questions that arise out of what has gone on. Over the months, I gradually have come to understand there were a number of layers concerning her situation that had to be excavated.

I started out, rather naively perhaps, listening to her story and accepting it, more or less, at face value. In the end, I have come to feel there is, within her, a strange mixture of complicity, bad judgment, personal responsibility, emotional disturbance, confusion, stress disorder, trauma (from the early sexual abuse she endured, along with her husband's violence and controlling ways), and problematic family history that is shaping much of what goes on, and has gone on, in her.

If I had been a smarter, more insightful, or better person, I am wondering if, perhaps, I might have handled things differently than I did. Now, in many ways, I know this sort of speculation is so much wasted effort since what happened has already happened, and one cannot go back and change things. But, there are other facets of this issue that bother me.

For instance, did I let personal needs interfere with my spiritual duties? If what transpired between Lara and myself did not take place, maybe, she might still be interested in the Sufi path ... or, perhaps, she, still, might be interested in the mystical path, but I might have created undue difficulties because of the previous situation.

Whatever Allah wishes takes place. At the same time, we each have a duty of care concerning how we engage what Allah wishes, and although the situation could not have turned out differently than it did -- because this is the way it turned out by the command of Allah -- nevertheless, I worry about the role I have played in the whole affair and whether, or not, there was anything that should have been done differently in terms of adab, Sufi principles, and so on.

For her, our relationship seems to have been nothing more than an affair and, in many ways, little more than a means to a sexual end. I believe -- although Allah knows best -- I was sincere in my love and regard for her and was not looking for an affair, nor to exploit her situation, but to help her, God willing, as best I could.

Quite frankly, she was the one who did all the pursuing. Often times, I was nearly overwhelmed because I did not know how to handle the situation.

On the one hand, I was very concerned about her emotional condition, and did not wish to do anything that might upset what I perceived to be -- potentially at least -- a fairly fragile psychological condition. She was under considerable stress, she was under medication for depression and anxiety, she, recently, had come through a two-year mental/spiritual breakdown, she had a terrible self-image, and very little self-esteem, and she had endured various forms of sexual abuse and exploitation in her life.

On the other hand, I liked her, was attracted to her, had a lot of respect for the fact that she, somehow, had survived all she had been through and was still, relatively functional, and, as well, I had been through quite a lot myself. When she expressed this deep 'something' for me -- which she claimed was love and that she indicated was more powerful than anything she had ever experienced (like she was drugged, she said) -- I wrote to you and explained what was going on.

There were several times before you sent the package in late July of last year that things were very difficult and I had all I could do not to go against what I knew was correct, and, quite frankly, she wasn't helping the situation because she kept pushing things. I bent somewhat, but I did not break ... however, in retrospect -- and, if you will remember, I sent you a long letter about all of this -- I feel I was not much of either a Sufi or a shaykh during this period of time. In other words, even though I did not transgress the lines in the sand that Allah has drawn, I feel other Sufis or other shaykhs never would have allowed themselves to get into such a situation in the first place.

All of this bothers me, and it raises questions in my mind and heart about my suitability as a shaykh. At the very least, it raises questions about my judgment.

Whatever my faults in all of this are, I also wonder why I seem to keep getting thrown into such problematic situations. I'm not looking for any of this, but, nonetheless, it keeps on happening, and I wonder why ... what's going on?

There is another facet to the situation with Lara that also has given me pause for thought. I am not trying to back-bite, nor am I trying to disparage or discredit her, but, quite frankly, there have been times during this whole fifteen months when I began to wonder if satanic forces were working through her to get at me or seduce me or to destroy me.

Without going into details, some of the things she has done seemed to have been designed to hurt me or damage me in substantial ways -- spiritually, emotionally, physically, and economically. At times, the things she was doing, or wanted to do, were intended, seemingly, to seduce me away from the path, or to make me question my commitment to the path, or induce some form of psychological, spiritual, or economic instability that would compromise my chances of having any degree of success in being able to spiritually minister to others according to whatever my capacity for such things is ... which might not be very much.

If these sorts of thing happened all the time and right from the beginning, I might have had more than -- perhaps, unfounded suspicions -- and been much more certain about what was going on, but such was not the case. Everything was mixed in together, which made separating things out very difficult ... was it her history of abuse that was manifesting itself? Was it her unresolved post-traumatic stress disorder in relationship to her husband that was rising to the surface? Was it remnants of her break-down that was driving things? Was it her seemingly fragile emotional condition that was shaping her behavior? Were her actions an expression of the ambivalence that many people seem to experience when they first set foot on the path and are suspended between their old attitudes and ways of doing things and the need to move in the direction of submission to Allah? Was what went on simply human weakness made manifest? Was that which transpired merely a problematic relationship playing itself out? Was it something much more sinister ... along the lines suggested above? Or, was it some combination of all of these things?

I have been trying to make sense of all that has gone on, but the situation is for me, at least, very, very murky, layered and complicated. I often tried to dismiss my aforementioned feelings and extend the benefit of a doubt to Lara, but the satanic possibility kept coming to mind as various things took place or occurred - and I mean satanic influences, not possession by a jinn that I do not believe was, or is, the case.

Although I could see a lot of troubling signs along the way -- and, there were difficulties at most every point of things -- recent events have been quite remarkable. It is as if someone, or something, flicked a switch, and, all of a sudden, despite her professed love for me and the Sufi path, I and the path became 'history', and she wants absolutely nothing to do with me ... as if she couldn't get away from me and/or the path fast enough.

This is rather odd, to say the least, because unless she was lying -- which I don't believe she was -- I don't see how she could have made the transition, so quickly, from someone with such anger, hostility, resentment, hurt, stress, and so on concerning her husband, to someone who doesn't seem to be having any problems -- although Allah knows best -- getting back together with such an abusive, violence-prone, exploitive, and controlling individual ... someone whose physical contact, according to her, made her skin crawl. Something is very strange in this whole thing.

Part of the problem is that in some ways her story kept changing. She started out giving an account of an abusive relationship in relation to her husband. Among other things, she said she was terrified of him, and her reasons for not taking certain steps (such as moving out, or getting a divorce, or getting an injunction against his stalking and harassment, or demanding he give her back the spare set of keys to her car ... if you will remember I told you that he once unlocked her car while she was attending fatiha and took some personal journals from her car -- was because she was afraid of what he would do to her and/or me and/or himself. As you might know, in cases of abuse, these kinds of concerns often are genuine, and, so, I went along with her to some degree, although I wasn't all that happy about her decisions.

Some months later, she said the reason she was not taking certain steps was because although she really didn't love her husband,

nonetheless, she would like to remain friends with him for the sake of having some sort of family harmony with their grown children. She said she just wanted to make sure he was going to be okay, that he would be able to find someone new, settle down, be happy, and move on with his life, and she felt, if given sufficient time he would do this in a natural, harmonious way, without a lot of discord and conflict being generated through a divorce.

I had no wish for bad things to happen to her husband. I also felt that, if possible, harmony, peace and a reconciliation of sorts were better options than conflict and hostility ... so, once again, I tried to be patient with things.

Recently, her husband began having relationships, of one kind or another, with a number of different women all at the same time, and she went crazy. Wham, bam, thank you sir, I was pushed aside without so much as a how do you do.

I know there is a sickness at the heart of abusive relationships in which the person being abused gets tied to the abuser in a variety of emotional and psychological ways that defy logic. I guess you are familiar with this from what your sister has gone through, and, maybe, this is a large part of what happened ... or, maybe, there were other considerations and factors at work in all of this -- I really don't know.

I do know I have tried the best I could, but it wasn't good enough ... which raises a few questions. Since I do not believe there is going to be any change of heart with respect to Lara, I don't feel there is much point in maintaining the situation, but I am not sure of how the thing gets ended ... does she have to be informed, or is it enough for me to form the intention and speak it to Allah?

Another problem is the following. All of these failed relationships have taken a lot out of me.

Although people might question my choice of candidates, no one, I think, should question the sincerity of effort that I have invested in trying to help get these various relationships working with some degree of normalcy. I have made mistakes, but I don't think in any of the cases, they were the sort of errors that were: either so pervasive, offensive, hurtful, or problematic, that they would cause the relationships to fail ... but, nonetheless, each of them has failed.

I really don't think I could face trying again, even if there were some person, some place who might be receptive to the idea of being with me. I just don't want to have to go through the various phases of a relationship again ... I guess I'm getting too old for this sort of thing, and, yet, I feel like I have been alone for years -- even in the midst of these relationships -- and this is very difficult. I seem to be in something of an irresolvable dilemma ... as they say in North America, caught between a rock and a hard place.

Another issue concerns work. My situation is not good, and although I keep trying different things, nothing works ... in fact, it is worse than nothing working, for, to use another expression that is common here, if it were not for 'bad' luck, then, seemingly, I would have no luck at all.

I recently went for an interview at a homeless shelter in Sutton. The position was only 10 hours a week and it was something for which I am fully qualified and with respect to which I have had considerable relevant experience.

The job interview seemed to go extremely well, and both people made comments that indicated that my sense of things having gone well was not just my imagination. Yet, I didn't get the job ... although I did have a sense that the director of the homeless shelter (who was part of the two person team that interviewed me) was a little too taken with my intelligence and experience and, perhaps, feared that if I should get my foot in the door, then, maybe his position might not be so secure down the line – but Allah's knows best about such matters.

There have been other jobs for which I have applied, but I can't even get the time of day from many of these places of employment ... not because I am unqualified or couldn't do the job, but because of: who knows what? This has been happening time and again.

I have tried so many different things, seeking to find some spark of co-operation. But, all doors seem to be closed to me.

In any event, my financial situation grows worse by the week. I really don't know if I will have a place to live within three weeks or so.

I probably will be closing down the web site in a few days in order to cut costs. In addition, I, probably, am going to drop my internet account for the same reason ... although before I do, I hope to sign up

for 45 free days of service with AOL that, God willing, might keep me in contact with the outer world for a little while longer.

I am beginning to sell off what few possessions I have in order to obtain money for food and other basic necessities. In the not too distant future, this form of cannibalism will come to an end, because the body of saleable goods will have been consumed.

I have sold most of my books that have any monetary value, and I have thrown out almost all of the rest of the books because I am tired of carting them around and also feel I might have to be ready to travel as light as possible in the near future. Moreover, I feel it is very unlikely -- although Allah knows best -- I will ever get a teaching job (either full time or part time) for which I might need these books ...- and God knows I have tried to obtain such positions.

Even if I could get a job in the Bamford area, nevertheless, because of things that have happened here, I'm not all that sure I want to stay ... although beggars shouldn't be choosy. Moreover, I have tried a number of things such as: giving a talk at a local college, as well as talks at the Bamford public library and a book store dealing with mystical and occult material, together with advertising and running Sufi meetings, plus giving away -- and, sometimes, selling copies of my books ... but none of this has generated any lasting interest in the Sufi path, and, therefore, I really don't know if there are any genuine seekers here or not. On the other hand, I do know I share your previously expressed perspective that wished for Allah to not send you people who were not really interested in pursuing the mystical path because it just takes up so much resources, time, energy, and money, with, unfortunately, nothing to show for it in the way of sincere seekers.

I'm not looking for lots of people. I was happy when just Lara and Jane, were coming but, now, there are not even these two people.

I was sent here, and I have stayed here and tried a variety of different things in the hope of making myself useful in some fashion. But, after all has been said and done, I'm not really sure what I am here for ... unless it is to be a locus for the generation of problems ... which, if it is, then, I guess I have done a good job after all.

I really don't know whether I am coming or going, and if things continue on as they have been, then, I might soon be a client at the homeless shelter where I recently applied for a job. On the other hand, as bad as things are here, I really have nowhere else to go.

This leads to another issue. Maybe I am being paranoid about things, but, in a number of ways, I am wondering what is going on with respect to my relationship to various people in the silsilah, or vice versa. I'll be specific.

Over the last several years, I have felt that the relationship between Momin Shah Baba and me has deteriorated. On three separate occasions, he has been rather harsh in some of the things that he has communicated to me and that, whatever my shortcomings might be, were not only unwarranted, but, were, I feel, completely out of line, and, seemingly, quite uncharacteristic of what I know of Momin Shah Baba.

On one occasion, he said I have completely strayed from the path. On another occasion, he went up one side of me and down the other because I hadn't found work in the Bamford/Sutton area and about breaking promises I, supposedly, made to you. On, yet another occasion, he was rather rude, intrusive, and insistent that I had a duty to speak to Uzma and convince her she should get married to someone within the silsilah.

When Momin Shah Baba went on the trip to Ajmer with you and the others, I don't recall hearing anything from him about the whole thing -- except, perhaps, in a very vague way about some trip that might take place in the future -- prior to his going on the trip. I wasn't hurt he went, but I was hurt he didn't seem to consider it worthwhile to share things with me ... someone who had lived in his house for five or six months, and someone who had been a mureed along with him of Professor Irfan, and someone who joined in with him on so many different Sufi activities, and someone who he came to after his holy roller episode and told me that he and I had a special bond.

Some time ago, I got an e-mail announcing his appointment for some new, higher position in the government -- which I wrote back and congratulated him on -- and I haven't heard from him since even though he said he would contact me about his new e-mail address. In addition, I've sent 'Eid greetings to him and his family that were not

reciprocated, and, during the last three years, he has made, maybe, two, possibly, three attempts to contact me by phone, although, if he wanted to, he easily could have left a message saying when, precisely, he would call so I might be available, off-line, or whatever. I've talked with Mitchell Hong, Alice, and 'Al in Canada more than I have talked with him.

Quite some time after the new organization (the one after the Metaphysical Society) was formed, I found out about it from Sima, and late last year I got an invitation from Momin Shah Baba to join an e-group that was discussing the meaning of Canadian identity -- something that I know little about -- and that was being sponsored by the aforementioned organization ... an organization that, for whatever reason, I seem to have been kept out of except in an after the fact sort of way. Much earlier, I had invited Momin Shah Baba to participate in an e-group discussion on the Sufi path, and he said he would look into it, but I never heard back from him about it.

He did inform me, sometime after the 9/11 tragedy, that he, Jim Hunter, and others were deeply engaged in a Gardens for Peace Project to be contributed to whatever park is built for this purpose at the site of the World Trade Center. He said it was going to be really big.

Some time ago -- last year sometime, I think -- I received an e-mail from Momin Shah Baba asking whether there was something that might be said to Samia about her relation with a certain boy. I told him I had spoken to her, at length, on several occasions about it, as well, I had sent a long e-mail to her sister Uzma who was concerned with the situation, and I gave her permission to pass on my letter for her sister to read.

I received notice from Uzma (prior to Ramadan, I believe) that her sister's wedding was slated to take place, I think, in late January and she remembered the advice I had given her on a previous occasion to try to be supportive of her sister and help her and be there for her ... not to abandon her because of what was going on. But, I have received no further information from anyone about the matter ... except a notice of an inability to deliver e-mail to Uzma's account when I tried to send her and her family an 'Eid greeting in December.

I send copies of CDs to people within the silsilah, and, for whatever reason, I don't even get an acknowledgment of receipt or anything else. This has happened on at least three different occasions.

Sima -- who, last I knew, was a member of the silsilah -- seems to be treating me as if I am the plague, and the question I asked you much earlier (around the time of the divorce) about why she was acting like she was -- that is, so cold, harsh, and distant about the whole thing as if I were the one who was causing the breakup -- brought a response from her, which you reported to me, that, although unfortunate, was not something I did to her, but, if anything, something (i.e., her borrowing money from her children without asking their permission) which we did to her child, but, apparently, something for which she holds me solely responsible and claims, apparently, that this is one of the reasons for the breakdown of the marriage. Maybe she is married again and doesn't want to talk with me, or maybe she is upset because I said it probably would be best if after the divorce we were out of communication with another for awhile, but whatever the reason, I really don't understand what the problem is or what is going on with her.

If people don't like me, or wish to ostracize me or ignore me, then, I have no desire to impose myself on anyone. I've tried, as best I could - - but Allah knows best -- to be a friend to everyone with whom I've come in contact. I have never tried to tell anyone I was a perfect man, or that I had no faults.

Although some people, by the Grace of Allah, might have helped me out financially, from time to time, I don't believe any of these relationships have been one-sided ... indeed, by the Grace of Allah, for years, these people have been recipients of whatever, I had to give -- whether that be time, energy, talent, information, or assistance of some non-monetary sort, and I do not believe I have been niggardly in what was given or that I asked for any special recognition of the fact ... and a lot of the time I did things -- such as give talks -- which I really was not all that comfortable in doing but did so because people requested it.

I did not come into the silsilah for any reason other than that I knew I still needed guidance and spiritual assistance ... and, as far as I am concerned, I still do. I was not looking for anything when I came to

you except to have a chance to start over again and continue to try to struggle with myself, and for this opportunity I am very grateful.

I really don't know what is going on, but I'm not that happy with it. It is like being in one of the weird stories by Franz Kafka. There just seems to be so much hostility and anger directed at me from so many different directions, and I'm not really sure what it is that I have done to provoke this much unpleasantness.

If my faults are such that I am driving people away, then, either someone should tell me what those faults are so I can work on correcting them ... or just tell me, straight out, they don't wish to know me, associate with me, or interact with me. I really won't hold it against anyone and will be happy to remove, if I can, a source of stress from their lives if this is what they wish.

One final note -- and I don't know if it means anything -- but a few weeks ago I had a dream or a dream-fragment. Since it came in the middle of a lot of rapidly breaking events with respect to Lara and myself, I didn't write it down or remember the day, or time of day, when it came.

In fact, I don't remember much about it except it involved Ajmer and Mecca, and I believe you were present in the Ajmer part of things, but I don't recall anything specific about what was happening. However, throughout the dream there seemed to be a background context of a world at war or in conflict.

In the Meccan portion of the dream, especially, I recall the central theme seemed to have to do with some on-going conflict surrounding the Ka'aba and that people were trying to unfurl a huge American flag down one side of the House of Worship, and there seemed to be scaffolding, of some sort, about it, and some people were climbing up on, or near, the House in order to do this. This is all I seem to recall.

Sorry for, once again, being so long-winded. I hope I have not eaten your brain too much with all of the foregoing.

Please convey my love and Salaams to the people of your household and to the people of fatiha.

Love,

Tariq

§

Tariq my son,

Regarding Lara, since she has decided finally that she wants to go back to her previous husband, all that has to be done is for you to say 2 rakats (cycles) of Nafl prayer and then release her from your private contract, God being your witness in marriage as well as divorce.

Regarding what you have said about Momin mia, I really am surprised, because he has always inquired about you very lovingly. I will talk to him, of course without mentioning what you have said, and ask him if he is in contact with you. Sometime in the past, I remember him saying that he is trying his best not to disturb you, because he feels that you are busy and that you have problems of your own.

Regarding Uzma, I had thought that she is in constant contact with you. On one occasion when Seth called me on the phone, and I asked him about Uzma's welfare, he asked me if I wanted to speak with her and we spoke. I asked her if she was in touch with you and she answered in the affirmative.

To be frank with you, only Amina, Seth's mother, is the one who keeps in touch by phone and sometimes email, and yes Seth's brother and wife is regular in their emails. When Seth calls me again, I could speak to Uzma, and ask her concerning you. She will then have to admit that she is not in regular contact. My questioning her will provoke her to realize that she as a rule should be in regular contact with her Murshid.

Regarding Sima, as far as I know she is not married to anyone now. In fact I do know that she still sincerely wishes you well, because she has repeatedly mentioned to me in her emails that she wants me to pray that you get a good job. Other than that, I think the reason for her not being in contact with you is the way the culture is from which she comes. Among Pakistanis as well as Indians it is the way they are brought up I guess. In that culture once divorce is finalized, they believe it to be a sin to be in contact. There is no other reason for her not being in touch with you.

I am constant in my prayers for you, and I frequently remember you to the people of Fateha here.

Salih is not in very good health. He has been careless in his diet and therefore had very high blood sugar. I had asked him to take it easy and not travel much. But he still traveled on a daily basis. Karachi weather is hot and humid. Also rather dusty. Instead of giving his body rest, he used to leave his home from early morning and visit people of the Silsila that lived very far apart.

On one occasion when he was getting off a bus, he accidentally hurt one of his feet. It pained him much, yet he did not get the foot treated medically, instead he got it massaged by one of the local bone healing non-professional people that made it worse. Now he can hardly walk.

When I told him to get a check-up the doctor said that he needs an immediate operation, but then Saleem Sahib took him to another doctor who is a bone specialist and has his own hospital meant for people who cannot pay for treatments and operations etc. He had to be admitted to that hospital for a week.

He has been informed now that an operation could be worse for his foot, so the only remedy is professional therapy. The therapy has begun. Please pray for him.

As for me, by the Grace and Blessings of God, I am well. If you remember that in the past I had experienced backache, then for sometime it did not re-occur, but since a few days now it came back.

Almost a year ago, when I was getting out of the car I somehow sprained my right knee muscle. There was much pain, and the knee got swollen.

I got it treated by Chinese therapy in New York. The swelling is 50% better, but I still have to be very careful in not bending the knee more than just slightly.

In the beginning I had to use the wheel chair for about two weeks. Now, though I am able to walk, yet I have to be careful, because sometimes by mistake if I put more pressure on the right knee, I feel the pain.

Rabia, Faiz – as well as their two children -- Noor, his wife and their son, all had chicken-pox. I was surprised because I had thought that this virus had been completely removed by the World Health Organization, but it seems that people who come from Asia carry the virus with them and that is how people here get infected. Since these

visiting Asians come here and live with resident Asians or regularly are in contact with them, the virus travels from person to person. People who travel to Asia also could carry this virus, and that is why doctors recommend people to take precautionary vaccinations before they travel.

It is late now, and I will conclude this email.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

May 7, 2002

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

It was very nice to talk with you last night after such a long time -- although I wish the circumstances had been happier. I have sent an update of the new 'Sufi Library' CD to the address that you indicated to me on the phone, and, God willing, you should be receiving it within a day or two, since I sent it by expedited mail. The Sufi section of the CD is pretty much the same, but the 'Food for Thought' section has been greatly expanded and, well, hopefully, provides a lot of food for thought about many, many different issues (physics, psychology, ecology, political science, evolution, and so on) ... many of which are written from a spiritual point of view, but not necessarily in an obvious sort of way -- I wanted people to know that Sufis are interested in a lot of things and people should not suppose tasawwuf is only a narrow little approach to only a certain dimension of life, but, in fact, informs and enlightens everything we do and think about life.

You might not be interested in much that is there. Maybe, however, someone -- somewhere, sometime -- might have an interest.

The following is not very much information, but I have been on the lookout for anything that might add to what we already know about the geographical town of Fatima in Portugal ... which we once talked about in conjunction with the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) whose name is, of course, Fatima but a name that

does not seem to have been in use as a name in Portugal prior to the twentieth century.

In any event, the vision of 'Our Lady of Fatima' took place around May 13, 1917 and involved three children -- Lucy, Jacinta, and Francisca -- who were tending sheep in the vicinity. Lucy is the one who appears to play the key person in all of this.

Fatima is southeast of Leira, southwest of Santarem, and northeast of Lisboa in west-central Portugal. Now, the one piece of information that I found which is kind of odd is this ... when referring to the location of Fatima, some have said the place is located near Cova da Iria which, itself, is just an extremely small village ... so, why use one extremely small village (and the impression I get is Cova da Iria is little more than a group of houses) as a reference to another very small place that is, supposedly, very near to Cova da Iria. Moreover, if the children were tending sheep, were they really near either Cova da Iria or the place that, allegedly, is known as Fatima, so, why call it Our Lady of Fatima, as opposed to Our Lady of Cova da Iria, or Our Lady of the Sheep fields, and so on? As you have indicated, perhaps, the children were saying: 'Our Lady Fatima' -- that is Bibi Fatima -- and, at some point, someone changed this to 'Our Lady of Fatima'.

No smoking gun here, but it does make one think. Love, Tariq

§

May 11, 2002

I have been getting a number of strange non-message messages -- possibly -- on the office voice mail. Someone keeps calling and waits for the voice mail to kick in, and, then, hangs up.

This has happened quite a few times over a number of days. Since I have had the ringer to the phone muted in order not to have to listen to bill collectors demand money from someone who has none, I have not been aware of the calls until after the fact.

I am not quite sure what to make of this. Although, on occasion, someone might ring through to the voice mail and, for whatever

reason, not leave a message, no one has called this many times and done the same thing repeatedly.

§

May 19, 2002

I have spoken with Lara on the phone. I had called her apartment phone number to test out a hypothesis of mine that, perhaps, Lara is the one who had been calling me but not saying anything when the voice mail prompted her to leave a message.

She confesses she has been doing this. She begins to fill me in on the last 7 weeks of her life.

Lara seems to be in a very problematic space. She seems to have deteriorated a great deal emotionally and otherwise during the last month and a half.

Toward the end of the conversation, Lara promises to call me after her appointment with her counselor this coming Wednesday. When she does not call on Wednesday, or for several days after that, I write a further letter to her - one that adds to the three which I sent her six, or so, weeks ago.

§

Dear Lara

You said you would let me know what happened with your Wednesday -- 4:30 p.m. -- meeting with your counselor, but you didn't. If you had, there were a few extra things that I would have said vis-à-vis the present set of circumstances -- so, I am taking the opportunity of doing so now.

I am still trying to make sense of the situation, as I suppose you are. However, there are a variety of things that make me wonder about what is really going on and all of these issues bear upon my deciding what to do.

For instance, I worry about the fact you don't seem to really know what you are doing, but you are taking actions, nonetheless, which are very hurtful to people. I have asked you why you are back in Brimley and you say you don't really know ... that the week leading up to your recent actions are somewhat of a blank to you.

This might be the truth, or it might be a fiction. I really don't know.

If it is the truth, then, this is just one more empirical piece of evidence indicating there is a considerable amount of pathology and toxicity that is present in your life. If it is not the truth, then, it points to another set of facts that are designed, for whatever motive, to keep me out of the picture.

I do know you told me that in the several weeks before Easter you were vomiting a great deal -- nearly every day. In addition, you said you used to do that when you went through your breakdown.

The throwing-up could have been a prelude to a semi-fugue state in which you claim to not remember much of what went on in the following week to ten days. Or, the throwing up could have been an indication of the constant emotional turmoil and condition of intense general anxiety that seem to be characterizing your life more and more at that time. Or, maybe you just had some sort of virus.

I do know you were very erratic at that time and constantly in a state of anger toward Ron. At the same time, you were having a number of very long, involved, and personal phone conversations with Ron at this juncture in which, apparently, all manner of alleged truth-saying went on ... a certain amount of which later turned out to be not so true after all -- that is, you discovered, once again, Ron lied to you about all manner of events.

Things were happening ... I could tell. However, you kept me out of the loop on many things, and just left me hanging out to dry in so many different ways. You could have talked to me about these matters, but you tried to hide everything from me ... even though I knew something was going on.

I was trying to be a friend to you. Unfortunately, you did not seem to be very interested in being my friend.

You were often openly hostile to me during this period of time, which was a change from your stance of frequent indifference or

passive aggressive behavior toward me. In addition, you went out of your way to pick arguments with me as well as create tension between us, and you were quite belligerent on occasion, acting as if I were some bell hop who had delivered your luggage to the wrong room and who really didn't deserve to be treated with even basic human decency.

Within this same time frame, you made a number of accusations or statements or assertions -- or whatever you want to call them -- which indicated you didn't feel I loved you. What you were basing this on, I have no idea, and in fact with, perhaps, the exception of one occasion -- when frustration and anger colored my manner of comportment -- you have been given nothing but love from me.

My actions concerning you are not the result of good manners ... as you have suggested on several occasions. In fact, pretty much everything that I have done with respect to you has been rooted in a deep love and caring for you as a human being ... no one could have gone through what I have in relation to you and survived by good manners alone.

I believe you know this. However, at the time, you were trying to find ways of justifying what you were doing. Moreover, by claiming I didn't love you, you could legitimize to yourself that which you were about to do ... and you did know what you were about to do.

I find it very ironic -- as well as mystifying -- that you would try to argue I (who have spent thousands of hours listening to you, supporting you, comforting you, befriending you, consoling you, exploring options with you, empathizing with you, showing you kindnesses, and so on) didn't love you. Yet, on the other hand, you also would try to claim that Ron -- someone who physically abused you, controlled you, made little attempt to understand or accommodate your needs, and did any number of things indicating a substantial lack of care and compassion concerning you -- was the one who really loved you.

The logic -- if there is any -- is very twisted in all this. It is right out of Orwell's *1984* or a Kafka novel

In any event, on a number of occasions, you have alluded to unfinished business with Ron, but when I ask you what that 'unfinished business' is you can't say, or, for whatever reason, you

won't say. There are, however, a number of things that you have said in this regard.

You said: "God knows what's going on". Well, I'm sure God does, but this makes it sound like you know what's going on, as well, but you just won't tell me the truth of the matter because of your fears, or whatever.

About six to seven weeks ago you said you wished you could say why it was so important for you to get through whatever you had to get through with Ron, and you realized this, probably, was all a matter of ego. Again, whether, by the foregoing you meant you knew why it was so important to you, but couldn't (wouldn't) say, or you 'knew' but just couldn't articulate it, is an open question.

Whatever you might have meant your statement points to a very important issue. Your intentions in all of this have not at all been a matter of seeking to do what would be most pleasing to God, for if they had, you would have gone about things in a very different way.

Furthermore, there is nothing you have done in this matter that is in accordance with spiritual principles. What you have done is not about love, peace, forgiveness, tolerance, forbearance, kindness, compassion, honesty, trust, dependence (in the good sense -- such as in 'trusting God by turning your life over to Him), sincerity, and so on -- for these all have very recognizable 'tastes' and signature signs ... none of which seem to be present in what is going on with you and Ron.

What you have done is shrouded in anger, resentment, fear, hostility, jealousy, confusion, pathology, toxicity, poor judgment, vacillation, and ignorance. Although you have not gone into details on all that has happened since you returned to Brimley, what little you did say is that your lives are beset by a constant series of conflicts, explosions, hostilities, arguments, issues of control, and so on.

If you loved Ron -- I mean really loved him in the proper sense of this word (as something that is constructive, inspiring, transforming, positive, open, noble, given to reciprocity, and so on) -- one might be able to put what is going on in perspective and say: 'Well, that's the way things are.' However, for nearly a year and a half now, I have listened to you rail on and on about the many terrible things that he

has done with respect to you: from leaving you sixteen times -- even during your first pregnancy (and how you really didn't want him back toward the latter part of this coming and going on his part); to: what he did to you when you were pregnant with your daughter (and for which you did not kiss him on the lips for 20 or so years); to Ron's coming on to your sister, to refusing to sit at the dinner table (despite your asking him), to showing little regard for you as a human being in so many other ways. In addition, I have heard you tell me many times that if you had it do all over again, you would not choose him ... that you have increasingly lost respect for him ... that you have come to realize he has been lying to you about a number of things over the years ... that you do not trust him ... that you do not like him. Well, you did have a chance to do things over again, and you ended up back in Brimley.

Why? What is this unfinished business? What are you trying to prove, and to whom are you trying to prove it, and why?

Certainly, the business, whatever it might be, is not of a spiritual nature. Moreover, unfortunately, it is not about love. Your actions (and his) prove the first is not the operative issue, and your statements and actions (as well as his) prove the latter is not the case.

You have indicated to me that your marriage counselor knows the situation between you and Ron is not at all good and has a very poor prognosis. Your regular counselor, in her own way, also has told you this.

You have said that even if things were to work out as well as they could in relation to Ron, the most you could hope for is that you and Ron would not be immersed in constant conflict and turmoil ... and just sort of get on okay. Is this the unfinished business ... a kind of tolerable, Mexican stand off?

Is this what is so vitally important and for which you are quite prepared to sacrifice your relationship with your shaykh, the silsilah, God, your essential Self, and me? I don't think so, but if this is, it becomes about the dumbest thing I have ever had the misfortune of witnessing.

Another candidate for accounting why you have done what you have done comes from something else you said relatively recently.

More specifically, you said you felt that by leaving Ron, you would be doing to him -- i.e., abandonment -- just what you felt had been done to you with respect to your mother.

First of all, we don't know what your mother did. Nobody does, except God.

Your mother's death could have been an accident, or a stroke (or some other natural cause), or murder, or suicide. Yes, that she died at such an early age is tragic -- all in itself, quite independent of causes ... tragic for her, and tragic for you and your siblings.

Nonetheless, you are being presumptuous to claim you were abandoned by her. Maybe, you could say this of your father ... but not with respect to your mother.

However, let us suppose you did, and do, feel you were abandoned by both of your parents, and that this lost love -- especially in connection with your mother -- has played a major shaping role in your life. Even given this assumption, there are quite a few differences between your situation -- in relation to your mother -- and your situation with Ron.

First of all, Ron has abandoned you many times over the 23 years of your marriage ... and I am not talking just about the sixteen times he left you in the first part of your relationship. He has abandoned you -- on a consistent basis -- emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually.

His recent activities -- both in late April/2002, as well as last Fall -- indicates he does not feel abandoned ... however much he might regret the fact you left. He was prepared to move on with his life ... but you wouldn't let him.

First, you said you were afraid of his potential for violence, and this was the reason why you wanted to put off getting a divorce. No violence was forthcoming, but there were lots of attempts to control, harass, and stalk you.

Then, you said, the reasons for putting off getting a divorce was because you just wanted to make sure that he was going to be okay. When it turned out he was going to be okay and he began to be in the company of women -- even before he asked if it would be alright with you if he were to do so -- you went berserk.

Oddly enough, despite your professed hatred concerning all of this control, harassment, and constant tension -- with respect to which (among other things) you were suffering from post trauma stress disorder -- you went right back to it, despite the fact that, for the first time in your twenty-three years of married life, you had been able to remove yourself from that situation. You recently have told me that although the form of the control has changed -- it is now less violent and, maybe, less intense, in some respects, than it had been -- you also said in some ways it is worse than ever.

Your counselor has seen what I have seen. She describes it as having lost a lot of energy from where you had been when you were living at Dotard Square, and I see you as sounding and acting much worse than you were when I first met you a year and a half ago.

When you initially moved away from Ron, you had become more relaxed, more peaceful, less vigilant (although that was still there because Ron wouldn't leave you alone), less anxious, more confident, and more in control of your life. Now, you have given all of that up -- plus much more -- and re-immersed yourself in a situation that, even now, you are characterizing as filled with issues of control, conflict, arguments, lack of peace, and so on.

What is the nature of the unfinished business that would make you feel so panicky and push you into acting so totally irrationally, that you would abandon what you said you wanted and return to what you said you loathed and hated? How can you be worried about an issue of abandonment -- in terms of what you believe you owe Ron -- with respect to someone who has abandoned you over and over again in so many different ways? ... unless, of course, the issue of abandonment is really not about Ron at all but about you.

This might be so, in several ways. One possibility, here, involves your desire to continue to be able to justify your own feelings concerning abandonment. In other words, if you have a deep rooted sense of having been abandoned, and, then, you turn around and, seemingly (more on this shortly), do the same thing with respect to someone else, then, you are going to have trouble justifying to yourself your own feelings on this issue ... especially, if for whatever psychological/emotional reason, you wish to hang onto such feelings.

You are not Ron's mother. Ron was an adult when you met him, not a six year old.

Furthermore, Ron had the benefit of a long, constructive relationship with his father. His father did not abandon him, and whatever problems Ron might have had with his mother, they were not abandonment issues

You have stayed with Ron for 23 years despite tremendous provocation and reason not to do so. You were with your mother for only six years, and whatever the cause of her death might have been, you did not give your mother any reason to abandon you (although all children tend to believe that whatever 'bad' things are going on around them is because of them).

In addition, a mother might feel responsible for a child throughout the life of a child, but at some point, the mother must let the child go and fend for himself or herself. A mother who holds onto a kid when the time has come to let go is being pathologically controlling.

Another possibility concerning the abandonment issue is that you might be playing out your problems through Ron. At a very deep level you have identified yourself with Ron and part of you might feel that to leave Ron is to be abandoning yourself all over again.

Remember -- as I am sure you do -- your relationship with Ron started out, and was steeped in the issue of abandonment ... namely, he abandoned you again and again and again, ad nauseam. Even after he finally settled down with you, he abandoned you again on the issue of the third child ... and in so many other ways, since then.

I feel fairly certain one of the reasons why you stayed through all of this degrading treatment is because of your own unresolved issues on abandonment and your great, intense need not to be abandoned again. Allah knows best whether Ron exploited this vulnerability knowingly or unconsciously or not at all and, was, instead, just a very unloving and uncaring person concerning you during this time.

Ron is always trying to hold on to you through the promises you allegedly made to him, or his father, and, in doing so, he doesn't seem to understand that if there is little, or no, real love underlying the relationship, then, it becomes worse than pointless to try to invoke formalities as the reason why you should remain obligated to him ...

especially, when Ron has -- at his convenience and whim -- forgotten all about his duties of care toward you.

Ron is also trying to force you -- through a fait accompli of renewing your vows or buying a house or getting another mortgage on your present house -- into staying with the relationship because he has recognized, for quite some time, that what should hold the relationship together -- namely, love -- is not there. Again, he is using empty legalities and formalities to try to hold you to a relationship in which -- if love was ever present -- has long, since departed.

These various ploys to bind you to him are not about his fear of abandonment. They are all manifestations of his desire to control you ... and to do so in any way he can despite his knowledge that love is not present.

It is palpably obvious that if someone knows love is not present in the person one wishes to control but proceeds to seek to control the target in any event, then, the controlling activity is not about love. It is about control, and little else.

You have said that in the last four weeks Ron has been putting tremendous pressure on you to buy a house and how he has gotten very angry when you have told him you would not feel comfortable in doing this. His anger is not about abandonment, it is about thwarted control.

In fact, Ron shares a mind and heart set in relation to you that demonstrates: an uncomfortably close affinity with the way the Taliban go about their business with respect to woman. He might not have you covered up with a veil, but he seeks to control your life in the same total manner, and, in fact, he seeks to cover your existence as if he, himself, were the veil.

You have said, on occasion, you feel you owe Ron something or are obligated to him. Maybe this is because he was present when God took you by the hand and got you off booze (not Ron, but God, did this -- and, incidentally, for you to believe Ron is responsible for getting you off booze is not only contrary to the spirit of AA, but, from the Sufi point of view, constitutes a form of polytheism or shirk in which you are ascribing partners to God and giving them -- in this case, Ron -- credit that belongs to God alone), or because of what you said to his

father, or because of certain things you might have said to him early on in the marriage.

If Ron's father knew all the things Ron has done to you, his father would be the first to tell you to kick the jerk out. If Ron's father is even half the man you have described him to be, then, he would be terribly hurt and outraged that his son had conducted himself in such a shoddy, inconsiderate, selfish, and hurtful manner with respect to you and your children, nor would Ron's father be so inhumane and unjust as to insist that you stick by his son no matter what he did.

For Ron to try to remind you of things you said in this regard (in the way of being promised "forever") while he does whatever he pleases is sheer hypocrisy. Any arrangement of the sort to which he alludes presupposes that both parties will be observing their respective duties of care to one another.

No court -- legal, moral, or spiritual -- would seek to enforce a 'contract' in which only one of the parties was required to observe the conditions of the arrangement, while the other party was free to violate the substance and spirit of that arrangement, again and again and again. Why you should feel an obligation to be faithful to something that even God does not require of you, is a mystery -- and, in fact, might say more about your stubbornness and desire to thumb your nose at God (in effect, you are saying that what you believe and want is more important than what God knows and wishes) than it does about what is right, moral, and just.

Indeed, your desire to hang on to this pretext as, perhaps, a reason, to stay with Ron is really just camouflage. There are much more powerful psychological and emotional dynamics that are at work here than the proffered morality.

In any case, returning to the issue of abandonment, one of the reasons why you enable Ron in the ways you do, and constantly are excusing his bad behavior and not holding him accountable, or turning a blind eye to what he does, or are so emotionally traumatized whenever you feel you do anything to upset him, is because you are playing the role of the 'indulgent mother' who is over-compensating for her own problematic childhood and, as a result, trying to bend over backwards -- even to the point of emotional breakdown -- and not abandon her child -- i.e., Ron -- in the way you feel you have been

abandoned. If you will recall, you have said to me many times how your caring for Ron is more like that of a mother for her child than of a wife for her husband ... and, here, again, this all seems to point in the direction of your working out issues with your own mother through your relationship with Ron.

This abandonment issue also rears its head with respect to something that you said to me about why you are back in Brimley. You said that if Ron died, you would be okay with this – although it would upset you -- but if I died, you didn't know if you could handle this, and you began to cry.

I remember several times, earlier on, when you were doing your best -- whether unintentionally or otherwise -- to make my life miserable, nonetheless, when I indicated that, perhaps, the best thing to do was for me to move somewhere else since you, obviously, did not want me here, you became upset. Here, again, is the abandonment issue ... although in this case, even though you, yourself, were acting in such a way as to be forcing things in that direction, your vulnerabilities in this area are such that you are very sensitive to the issue.

The truth of the matter is, however, that in all of this time, I have never abandoned you, but you have abandoned me on five or six occasions. Even now I have not abandoned you, but you are the one who has abandoned me.

One of the reasons why you keep doing this with respect to me -- and there probably more than one causal factor involved – is, perhaps, because of the way such behavior serves as your way of trying to beat me to the punch, so to speak. In other words, in order to avoid the potential pain of abandonment from someone else, if you abandon that person first, then, you not only avoid the pain but you are able to exercise control over the situation in a way that was not possible in relation to your mother and father.

Dependency is a four letter word to you for a number of reasons. However, one of these reasons is because of your abandonment fears and not wanting to depend on someone who is only going to abandon you ... or, so your deep-rooted childhood fears tell you.

Much of your experience with Ron has reinforced these fears, and this is also one of the reasons why you are both dependent (in a

pathological way) toward him, as well as angry at him for your feelings of dependency ... especially since he keeps abandoning you and, therefore, re-opening the same deep wound in your soul. The fact you put up with Ron's coming and going thirteen times as he went back to another woman indicates just how deep your vulnerability goes, and how you had invested a considerable amount of emotional and psychological energy in trying to convince yourself that Ron was someone who would not abandon you ... he was after all, the great 'truth' teller.

You have told me that before he finally came back to stay the last time in his thirteen departures, you didn't want him to come back. But, you took him back anyway because you desperately needed someone to fill the deep hole within you in relation to the abandonment issue (this was, also, one of the forces underlying, and maintaining, your drinking behavior). You were dependent on him, but you were angry at him for this ... especially given how humiliating his treatment of you was during all of this time.

Be this as it might, your relationship with your mother and Ron, has, absolutely nothing to do with the realities of our relationship. Yes, we all are going to die some day.

Maybe I will die before you, or vice versa ... this is up to God in the form of our rizq (that is, how much time each of us has been allotted.). However, relationships do not exist just in this world.

They exist in pre-eternity (which is why we have met in this material life). They also exist in the after-life. What starts here does not need to end here.

In effect, your previous comments concerning death is like running away from something just because at some point there will be a brief hiatus, and this is like saying that you are never going to kayak because you really enjoy doing it and since there are times when you will have to go without it, due to work and other responsibilities, then, you are going to deprive yourself altogether. As a coping strategy this might make a lot of sense to someone who is sensitive to abandonment issues, but, in both the short term, as well as the long term, such a coping strategy doesn't really work to your benefit, and it is not a very constructive or healthy approach to life.

Besides, during your times of running away from me and abandoning me, you have proven to yourself that you can survive without me. On the other hand, the purpose of life is not merely to survive, but, rather, for the Self to be realized -- something that cannot be done without love ... love of self, love of spouse, love of family, love of shaykh, love of the Prophet, love of the Truth, and love of God.

There is something deeply disturbing about your present course of action. You have returned to a situation that is filled with tension, conflict, argument, anger, frustration, distrust, unhappiness, hostility, and lying, and are giving indications you intending to choose that over peace, love, reciprocity, friendship, trust, happiness and honesty.

No one chooses a life of pain unless there is some other over-riding consideration that serves as a payoff, so to speak. You, yourself, have said that the issue is not a matter of love, but of something else ... of some form of unfinished business that you don't know what it is, or if you do, you are not telling me. In addition, your 'reasons' (?) for returning are not spiritual in nature because you did not do what you did with a clear and sincere intention to serve God or in order to fulfill your obligations to Him, or to your shaykh, or to the silsilah, or to the Prophet.

You have said you don't know why you went back and that much of the week to ten days leading up to the transition is a blank. Furthermore, if your reasons were to have been spiritual in nature, then, you know very well you were bound by a number of other spiritual considerations that you simply turned your back on ... one cannot claim to being doing something of a spiritual nature when what one is doing is in essential violation of spiritual principles and precepts, for the latter obviates the former.

So, what is this over-riding consideration? Why would you go to a life of conflict, anger, distrust, hostility, and unhappiness, when something quite the opposite was, and is, available to you ... and you admitted understanding this even after you went back to Brimley?

One possibility is the following. The prospect of concentrating on Ron's short-comings, rather than focusing on your own problems, seems more inviting to you and less arduous.

If you will recall, it was quite a shock for you to come to the realization that once you were relatively free of Ron, you were beset with a whole new set of problems concerning your own behaviors, attitudes, and so on. So much of the last twenty-three years had been spent in defining yourself in terms of being against what Ron was doing to you that you didn't seem to understand there was another villain waiting for you -- namely, your own nafs -- that was standing in the way of you becoming You.

One of your favorite authors -- Tolstoy -- once said that 'everyone wants to change the world, but no one is willing to change oneself'. You want Ron to change, but you are not willing to change yourself ... and both of you need to change.

Like an ostrich, you want to stick your head back in the sand of ignorance and lack of spiritual guidance, and suppose that everything is going to be okay because you can't see what is going on within and around you or how the future is bearing down on you, whether you like it or not. Soon, the proof will come for you -- and for all of us -- that we are not in charge of things but are, instead, mere servants who must come and go as the Master bids.

A woman once came to a shaykh. This woman was experiencing a great deal of difficulty on the path and her nafs was giving her a lot of trouble.

The woman asked the shaykh to bless her so her spiritual struggles would bear fruit. The shaykh replied he had, and would continue, blessing her efforts, and, in fact, the entire silsilah was blessing her efforts, but she had to bless them too.

You have got the addiction two-step down to a science. If someone points out the fact your behaviors are unacceptable, you withdraw, and if someone does not comment on your bad behaviors, then, you use the absence of comment as a license to enable you to do whatever you please.

Consequently, no matter what anyone says or does not say, you will stay right where you are with your bad behaviors. Moreover, you will feel justified in doing so ... as do all addicts who wish to persist in their bad behaviors.

Alternatively, you use other ploys to resist making the decisions that your spiritual well-being depends -- remember *The Parliament (or Conference) of the Birds* by Attar (may Allah be pleased with him) and how all the birds had different excuses as to why they could not undertake the journey. One of your excuses, and it is not the only one, is that you must attend to certain, unspecified, unfinished business -- the identity of which you are not really sure -- with Ron. You say this is very, very, very important ... in fact, it is so important that you are prepared to live a life of unhappiness, conflict, and all the rest of the accompanying negatives, in order to serve that purpose -- whatever it might be.

The fact of the matter is, you have unfinished business with God and that takes priority over your so-called unfinished business with Ron. You have had this unfinished business with God since you came into this world, and at the rate you are going, that business looks like it might still be unfinished when you leave this world ... which only means it will have to be completed in the next world in a much, much more unpleasant way when your excuses will no longer work, and your tactics of passive-aggressive behavior and avoidance will no longer be capable of being inserted between you and God.

You -- the nafs part of you -- might think you are very clever by the way you avoid God and your essential Self. However, the nafs will not have the last laugh, and you -- the spiritual part of you -- can either embrace this truth, or you can have it thrust upon you when all of your opportunities in life have been used up and you get called to account for your deeds and misdeeds.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) once said each of us is accompanied to the grave by three companions. These companions are our names (and fame), our possessions (including our families), and our deeds (and misdeeds). Only one of these three companions will go into the grave with us and that is our deeds and misdeeds.

You once alluded to me as being a bitter 60 year old. You couldn't have been more wrong in your assessment of things.

Like most people, you look at me as an out of work, poor, indebted, individual who is struggling just to stay alive, and whose worldly prospects are fast disappearing -- if they have not already departed.

Nevertheless, by the Grace of Allah, pretty much everything that I have set out to do in life has been accomplished.

There really are only a couple of areas that have not panned out very well -- namely, (1) having money (although by God's leave I, somehow, have made it through 57 years which means I have received enough, in the way of money and material possessions, to survive intact; and, (2) marital success. God knows that I have struggled mightily in both cases, and I only pray that he forgives me for whatever mistakes I have made -- both knowingly and unknowingly -- in these areas of my life.

I have worked my way through undergraduate and graduate degrees. In each case, I have gone against the grain and fought what I feel has been the 'good fight' and, by the Grace of Allah, have been able to overcome a variety of obstacles that were placed in my path.

I have traveled the world and seen the real treasures of Earth in places such as Mecca, Medina, and Ajmer. Some of these treasures I have had the good fortune to visit more than once.

I have spoken -- via radio -- to more than a million people about Islam and the Sufi path through CBC and BBC radio on five, different occasions, lasting a total of more than an hour. God willing, some good has entered the world through such efforts.

By the grace of Allah, I am nearing completion of a compilation (God willing, this should be finished in about a month's time) of much of literary work that has been written over the last 40 years. Indeed, I have been using these last six-to-seven weeks to work on this, pretty much full time, and have given The Sufi Library CD an overhaul -- both externally as well as internally.

I don't know whether, or not, anyone will make use of this material, but I have tried to do my part in things ... indeed, since the material is one of the ways in which I have tried to bear witness to the fact that there is no reality but God and that Muhammad peace be upon him) is the messenger of God, then although my nafs might be somewhat saddened that more people aren't making use of the material, the fact of the matter is that the only Witness Who matters has been listening to me regurgitate what has been inspired in me to say in this respect.

During the last 35-40 years I have been involved in many projects – both with my first shaykh, as well as with my present shaykh -- that have, by the Grace of Allah, directly and indirectly touched the lives of thousands of people ... both Muslim and non- Muslim. Through Allah's Grace, spiritual opportunities have been offered and, by the Grace of Allah, opportunities have been accepted and brought to fruition through such projects ... my many faults and shortcomings notwithstanding.

I can't point to a house, or car, or investment portfolio or possessions because I don't have these things, and it is just as well, for none of these can come with me into the next world. The one thing I do have is deeds, and I am hopeful God will accept the ones that might be good and forgive the rest.

I have had the great good fortune to spend time under the canopy of two extraordinary spiritual guides. Whatever there is about me that might be of value I owe to the way in which God has helped me through these two individuals. I would not exchange what has come through these people for all the money, possessions, and power that exist on Earth.

Yes, by the standards of the world, I am a failure, and because the world works the way it does, there are people who are only too eager to remind me of this fact. Sometimes even I get caught up in, and confused by, such propaganda and, as a result, I feel badly that I have not succeeded by worldly standards

Life, however, was not meant to be about achieving arbitrary standards of worldly success ... something that I need to remind myself about or be reminded by others about from time to time ... because I forget this. Rather, life is about God's purpose and the extent to which one does, or does not, realize that purpose.

This is not my personal, private opinion. This is a truth that has been established, across thousands of years, by every, single authentic form of mysticism that has become manifest in the history of human kind ... from: the Vedanta to Taoism, and from: Native spirituality to the Sufi path.

Jesus (peace be upon him) has said it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter into

heaven. Why should I regret the way my life has turned out? ... for although I do not know what my ultimate fate (vis-à-vis God) will be, I have been given a variety of spiritual opportunities, and, by the grace of Allah, I have sought to embrace those opportunities with pretty much everything I have to offer. My only regrets are that I did not do this sooner or better than I did.

You say you love me, but many of your behaviors toward me do not give expression to very much love ... in fact, quite the opposite. I have told you that although I forgive you for what you have done, as well as what you are doing, that nevertheless, what you are doing is very hurtful to me ... yet, you persist in doing it.

There comes a certain point in such matters when if a person continues to hurt someone despite being told that such is the case, then, intention or not, there is something very wrong with what is transpiring. Whether -- to use language from your world -- this pattern of behavior has been done with malice aforethought or just through depraved indifference and moral turpitude really is neither here nor there, since whatever the reasons, the person who is hurting others needs to understand that it is their responsibility to stop the hurtful behavior.

Of course, one of your stock responses on some of these occasions is to say something to the effect of: 'well, if all I (i.e., you) can do is hurt other individuals, then perhaps, I (i.e., you) should be alone'. And, the counter-response to that is: 'no, what you should do is alter your behavior and start observing your duties of care to those whom you claim to love.'

You keep thinking the way to cope with life is to continue to run away from your duties of care. This is not what spiritually healthy, mature people do.

You want Ron to change because he is hurting you and not showing you proper respect, and so on. Yet, when exactly the same situation exists with respect to you in relation to someone you are hurting, then, all of a sudden the moral ground shifts and you claim you should not have to be held accountable for the same sorts of things that you wish to hold others accountable ... you can't have it both ways.

Another of the gambits of your nafs is to keep going back to how you are damned and unworthy and undeserving of the Sufi path and so on. I will agree with part of your statement -- you are unworthy and undeserving of the Sufi path -- but, then, that is true to say with respect to all of us ... as the Qur'an indicates 'if it were a matter of deserve, there would not be one of you left on the face of the earth'.

We exist by God's grace. We have life by God's grace. We have talents, intelligence, and opportunities by God's grace. We have spirituality by God's grace. We run away from God's barakah by 'virtue' of the grace of our own nafs or ego.

What is the unfinished business with Ron? Are you trying to prove your independence from one and all by ruining relationships at the turn of a hat, or are you trying to prove that you can forgive Ron, no matter what the cost to you (and others), or that you can be with him even though you don't want to be (your own personal form of walking over burning coals or will power from the one who thought she could cope with anything until she had a breakdown) or are you trying to prove that you can destroy yourself or are you trying to prove how unworthy of God's grace you are?

How can you say you don't like Ron, don't enjoy being with him, don't trust him, don't respect him, and are very unhappy with him (and according to your accounts, the feeling is relatively mutual ... which is the wrong kind of reciprocity), and, yet, you continue to choose to be with him? Just what are you proving, and to whom, and at what cost to yourself, Ron, and the rest of your family?

Just as importantly, how am I to interpret what you say you feel toward me when, apparently, you would rather be stuck in a problem-filled relationship that, at best (according to you) will be nothing more than your getting along together in a relatively peaceful atmosphere? If you really mean what you say with respect to me, then, why would you do that?

Are you trying to save me from a fate worse than death? If so, that is really not your call to make, and you should stop being so controlling of other people's lives, as well as be more gracious in accepting the kindnesses that God is trying to bestow upon you.

You recently said that you wanted an independent opinion and that is why you wished to speak with your counselor about various possibilities with respect to freeing yourself from your addictive behavior in relation to Ron. However, you have been getting independent guidance all along since everything that you have been told through me -- and, for the most part, the way you have been treated -- is in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an, the counsel of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and the advice of our silsilah.

What was done on the 31st, has been done not because I said it was okay but because this is what we discovered was permissible. In fact, if you will remember, initially, I was of quite the opposite opinion about what was, and was not, possible in these matters concerning our personal relationship.

Besides, the whole issue of wanting independent counsel in these issues is just a straw dog. We haven't been playing on a level field with a fair and impartial application of rules and principles for months on end ... and especially now that you have permitted yourself to re-enter a relationship where you are being controlled anew -- albeit, somewhat differently.

I have asked you: when is enough going to be enough? How much pain do you two have to cause everyone concerned by butting your egos against each other like so many mountain rams, testing which of you has the most testosterone?

Neither one of you is right in this matter. You are both doing things that are logically, morally, and spiritually indefensible.

You seem to be waiting for something to happen. Either you know what that something is, or you don't.

If you do know, then, you ought to share what it is. What are your intentions? What are you trying to accomplish? Where are you trying to get to, and why?

If you don't know what it is you are waiting to happen, then, you really are just forcing your whims, caprice, and moods down everyone's throat and claiming innocence with respect to the harm that is done. Violence is more than just a matter of what is physically done ... there is moral, emotional, and psychological violence as well --

and they are all equally reprehensible, although you have singled out physical violence as somehow being worse just because it permits you to be violent in other ways and still have a clear conscience.

Incidentally, if the purpose of your Brimley exercise is to prove you can forgive Ron, then, you are going to have to do with him what I am doing with you -- not only forgive him for what he has done, but what he is doing, and you are going to have to start loving him in a complete and unreserved manner ... with total devotion, as well as no whining, moodiness, therapy, or bad behavior. If you really, really love him -- as I, by God's leave, love you -- then, you will be able to do that without any adverse psychological consequences to yourself ... either short term, or long term.

If you will recall, I told you nearly a year ago you had three broad options in front of you. One of these was that if you truly wanted to stay married to Ron you would have to do what I am telling you now -- and if that is what you choose to do it, so be it, but you have caused an awful lot of damage (to yourself, to Ron, and to me) getting to a decision that could have, and should have, been made a year ago.

If, on the other hand, what you have been telling me all these months concerning Ron and your feelings toward him are true, then, whatever is going on in your relationship with Ron and your recent return to Brimley, this is not about love ... either with respect to your feelings for him, or his feelings for you. There is so much pathology, toxicity, naifs, confusion, anger, and ignorance swirling about your relationship with one another, that, quite frankly, I don't see you being able to resolve things without significant help from God ... Someone from whom you have turned away -- hopefully, only temporarily -- by your very behavior in going to Brimley.

I will say you have hurt me more deeply than anyone else in my life. Perhaps, this is because I am more vulnerable, in some ways, than I have ever been, or, perhaps, this is because I shared things with you in a way I have not done previously and, therefore, had opened myself more to you than anyone else. Or, maybe, this is because my heart went out to you for all you have been through and just when it seemed that you were beginning, by the Grace of Allah, to extricate yourself from the whole mess, you sabotaged things and acted very badly with

respect to me, your shaykh, the silsilah and God, and I found this very hurtful that you would seem to have so little regard for these things.

In any event, by the Grace of Allah, I am thoroughly committed to the Sufi teachings that indicate one should always be ready to embrace one who returns to the path ... no matter how hurtful their behavior might have been. In addition, I believe in the Golden Rule -- 'Do unto others as you would wish them to do unto you', and would always wish I could give a person another chance, because this is what I would hope for myself ... and, indeed, what God has done by showing me the Sufi path and putting up with and, God willing, forgiving all my bad behaviors over the years.

The irony of the foregoing is this. By returning to Brimley, you might have thought you were avoiding having to struggle on the Sufi path ... instead you might have been thinking that if you could make things livable and relatively peaceful, without conflict and hostility and control issues ... then you would settle for that. However, if this is so, then, in truth, about the only way that something like your 'livable settlement' is going to happen is if your attitudes, opinions, moods, and behaviors become spiritually transformed -- and this you cannot do on your own, although you might suppose otherwise ... this is especially so if you are the only one who changes and Ron remains the same.

If you returned to Brimley in order to get Ron to be the one who says he has had enough so that you will be able to dump the guilt you have been feeling and move on with your life relatively unencumbered, you have gone about things in an entirely inappropriate manner. In fact, whatever your reasons might be -- to the extent that they can be articulated -- by not discussing such a step with the one who has been entrusted with your spiritual welfare, you have made a fundamental mistake.

Moreover, if your reasons for returning to Brimley were the foregoing -- that is, to have Ron be the one to quit the marriage so you could feel you had the moral high-ground in this matter -- then, you should know you lost all claim to the moral high ground in anything when you went back to Brimley in the way you did. Yes, what Ron has done and is doing is very wrong with respect to you, but are you really any different in this regard with respect to me?

You might believe that, due to longevity, your obligations to him -- whatever these might be -- precede and trump all other obligations. Such a belief -- if you have it -- is not well-founded.

You have knowingly -- without being forced or coerced to do so -- taken several oaths before God ... oaths that were explained to you concerning their meaning and the duties of care that they entailed. One of these was when you became initiated, and another one was during a subsequent occasion, some 3-4 months later.

An oath before God has, to say the least, a slightly different standing than saying a few, relatively non-committal words with an entertainer who happens to be sanctioned by the state to perform marriages. In truth, there is no comparison between the two, but you are approaching the situation as if the latter were more valid and binding than the former.

Iblis is damned because, after he refused to bow as God had commanded, he did not seek repentance for his actions. In other words, God did not damn Iblis ... Iblis has damned himself by refusing to take the remedy for his sin -- namely, seeking God's forgiveness and making the sincere intention to not return to such wrong doing again.

You are not necessarily damned by Allah for what you have done ... either now, or in the past. If, God forbid, it turns out you are damned, this is because of what you have done to yourself by, among other things, not making use of the mercy and forgiveness that is there for anyone who makes a mistake.

As long as one has a breath in one, one can reach out for God's forgiveness. If one cannot even be bothered to reach out and grab hold of the compassion that is being extended, then, whose fault is this? Surely, this is not God's fault.

If you do not want me in your life, then okay. I try my best not to impose myself on anyone ... but if this is what you really, really want in your deepest heart, then, you should have enough respect for me, and yourself, to tell me what is actually going on within you and stop playing all these games of hide and seek.

I was your friend, a year and a half ago, and I am your friend now. If you do not wish to be my friend, then be honest about it. I will not

hold this against you, and, God willing, I will continue to pray for you and your family.

However, if you want to be my friend, then, you should start treating me like one. If you wish to claim you love me, then you should try being loving toward me. This chasm between what you say and what you do is unseemly ... it is not in your interests, or in anyone else's interests, for it to continue.

You are living a lie now. Can anything constructive come from continuing to do so? And, what will be the costs that you will force upon everyone, including yourself, by insisting on your presumptuous right to do so or your unfounded fears about doing otherwise?

God has given you very clear guidance in the matters at hand. The signs were within you and around you, and you even had a spiritual experience to confirm what was going on within you.

Unfortunately, you seem to have chosen to side -- at least for the moment -- with your anxieties, moods, panic-disorder, confusion and the dictates of your nafs. Nothing good comes from rejecting guidance, and your life in the last six-to-seven weeks, if not longer, has shown you that ... but if you will not accept what is there before you on a daily basis, what can anyone do except sigh and feel badly for you.

If you want the life that opened on July 31st of last year, then, you should tell me so. I am prepared to try to afford you an opportunity to gravitate toward that life, and, in the process, extend a few degrees of freedom in order to make the transition. However, for you just to keep things up in the air so that they might blow about in whichever way your moods are inclined on a given day, or to be indefinitely open-ended, with no rhyme or reason to it, is really not very loving, fair, given to reciprocity, or spiritual on your part.

You have given me a lot of stories over the past year and a half. Some, or all, of these stories might be true, but what I need from you now is the truth, and not in the form of a story, excuse, or avoidance behavior ... and whatever you tell me should be said in a way that is believable beyond a reasonable doubt, and without a lot of lacunae present that raise more questions than are answered. If you know what you are doing, then, you should be able to do this in a clear and straightforward manner.

If you really don't know what you are doing in Brimley, then, you ought to remove yourself to your apartment and work hard on trying to decide on what is the best thing to do with your life. But, if you want to make your decision independently -- as you indicated when you said you wanted to see your counselor -- then, do so, and that means free from Ron's constant pressure on you to do what he wants, and, as well, I will not interact with you ... as I have not done for the past six-to-seven weeks.

There is one last possibility to discuss. Potentially, this links back up with the abandonment issue discussed earlier.

The issue starts with a question. Why were you so jealous when Ron began to do exactly what, all along, you claimed you wanted him to do - namely, to move on with his life and find new female companionship?

You literally went crazy those last few days. You were carrying on and babbling like a person who has taken leave of her senses.

One interpretation of all this is the following. Ron came along at a juncture in your life when, because of your vulnerabilities involving abandonment and alcohol, you were open to the possibility that your vulnerabilities could be attended to and healed through your relationship with Ron. As a result, you developed a deep bond with Ron that was fueled by your vulnerabilities.

Part of this bond might have involved love for Ron and the promise that he, potentially, represented to you. Whatever it was, it was very intense and deep.

Yet, within a very short time after the beginning of your relationship, you came to realize Ron did not care for you in the way that you cared for him, and, as I am fond of saying -- behavior never lies, and you had plenty of Ron's behavior to prove to you that this was so.

Over the years, things really didn't get better, they got worse. In more and more ways, Ron was proving -- through his behavior -- that he really didn't care about you in the same way you cared about him.

More and more, you were the one who had to make all the sacrifices. More and more, you were the one who had to make excuses for him in order to avoid facing the obvious ... that he didn't care for

you in the way you cared for him. More and more, you were the one who had to make accommodations for Ron, while accepting the fact that Ron was not prepared to make accommodations of reciprocity concerning your needs and feelings.

More and more, you were getting hurt. Until, finally, you couldn't take it anymore and you snapped.

One part of you is filled with the knowledge that came through years of experience that Ron did not, and does not, care for you in the way that you had hoped for -- and counted on -- when you first started your relationship with Ron. Part of you is filled with the needs and emotions of a six-year old to not be abandoned and to be rescued by a knight in shining armor. Part of you is filled with an unrequited desire for being loved and the hurt that comes from realizing, more and more, that there is a serious disequilibrium in your relationship with Ron that is never likely to be sorted out.

When you left Ron -- at least, physically -- although an aspect of you was leaving in order to just escape, emotionally and psychologically, from the cruel tyranny of Ron's Taliban-like regime, another dimension of you was doing it in order to strike back at Ron for the hurt and disappointment that came from his continual abandonment of you over the years. You cared for him, you had sacrificed for him, you had endured humiliation and threats to your being through him, you had forgiven him over and over again, but no matter what you did, it was obvious that Ron did not care for you in the way that you cared for him and in the way that you had wanted to be cared for by him.

So, you wanted to hurt him ... maybe not in a conscious, overt way, but the desire was there. However, guilt was also present, and every time you hurt him, although part of you felt you had struck a blow for freedom, independence and revenge, part of you felt badly you were doing to someone else what had been done to you all of these years, by a variety of people -- for the issue of abandonment keeps coming up, in different ways, with your mother, father, uncle, Ron, your sister, your brother, and others.

Every time you hurt Ron, you experienced guilt and remorse because you were hitting a nerve that has shaped the core of your identity and existential stance toward the world for 35 years. You

were, and are, so sensitive to the issue of hurting Ron not just because you cared for him, but because every time you did so, you were attacking the very foundations of your own identity that had been shaped by the issue of abandonment for such a long period of time.

Yet, when Ron began to meet women, go out, dance, have a good time, become sexually involved, you became jealous. However, the part of you that was jealous was not the part of you that had come to realize, through many bitter experiences, that Ron did not care for you in the way you cared for him ... the part of you that was jealous was the six-year old who was terribly vulnerable, insecure, and with a deep void that longed to be filled.

This part of you reacted to what was going on by feeling that others were getting what really ought, by rights, to belong to you. This part of you believed others were being cared for by Ron in the way you had wanted to be cared for across all those many years.

Of course, the truth of the matter is Ron was just continuing to be Ron and none of these woman were being cared for in the way that the six-year old in you assumed was the case. Ron's confession to Wanda is very telling in this regard for although he told her he would always love you and, at best, Wanda was a diversion intended to fill a sexual desire, you know from many years of bitter experience that Ron has not loved you and, perhaps, because of his own demons, cannot love you -- care for you in controlling sort of way ... yes ... but not really love you as you need to be loved.

Furthermore, although, for a time, after you returned to Brimley, you were appalled that the tables had turned and, now, you were the one who was controlling, rather than Ron -- because you were still in the thrall of the jealousy of a six-year-old -- nevertheless, within a relatively short period of time, the more jaundiced, experienced part of you (*vis-à-vis* Ron) began to realize nothing really had changed. Ron still did not care for you in the way you cared for him, and your jealousy was replaced by 'business as usual'.

For twenty-three years you have held out the hope Ron was going to have an epiphany of sorts and come to his senses by beginning to care for you in the way you cared for him. For twenty-three years you have indulged him and made excuses for him and looked the other way

and enabled him because you felt that, sooner or later, Ron would give you what you had sought for so long.

For twenty-three years Ron has disappointed you. However, due to your various unresolved pathologies from earlier in your life, as well as your addiction in relation to Ron, along with habit, inertia, learned helplessness, and poor judgment, you continue to hold onto the hope of a six-year old, despite all manner of evidence to the contrary.

There is a tremendous amount of ego entailed by your emotional investment in Ron. You don't want to admit that twenty-three years ago you showed poor judgment in selling yourself on the idea that Ron was the answer to your problems -- especially given your stated inclination to not want to accept Ron back after he had departed for the sixteenth time. Moreover, you don't want to admit you have been making the same, precise mistake for twenty-three years, or that you have, once again, made the same mistake by returning to Brimley.

Many times I have seen you come to the same point when in spite of reviewing a huge pile of overwhelming evidence concerning Ron's bad behaviors toward you, yet once again, nonetheless, when reaching this point, you pause and say: 'You know, I think somewhere in there, Ron really does love me.' This is the faith of a six-year old that does not trust her own counter-veiling experiences because she has a deep psychological and emotional need not to.

You have been whistling past the cemetery for twenty-three years. And, this whistling has haunted you for the same amount of time. Perhaps, it is time to lay the dead to rest, for this is what your marriage has been for a long time ... that is, dead, but your six-year old inside is into voodoo and keeps trying to resurrect the dead -- which, by your own admission, will be little more than a zombie.

The little six-year old in you has been throwing a tantrum for quite some time now. That six-year old is deeply offended that her needs have not been met, or that her injuries have not been attended to or healed by the one who the six-year old settled on to do this.

For twenty-three years that six-year old in you has been pounding on the same square block to fit into the round hole, and has become enraged, as little kids do, when things are not working out the way the

six-year old wants. But, rather than learning from experience, the six-year old is stuck in the hurt and vulnerability of years of neglect, and, instead, -- to change metaphors -- insists on picking at the same scab, over and over again ... as if, one day, quite magically, the act of picking at the scab will suddenly lead to healing.

There is pathology in what you are doing. Addiction is also present, as are elements of learned-helplessness, the Stockholm syndrome, habit, immaturity and naifs.

At the same time, there is considerable spiritual foolishness that is shaping your current circumstances. The six-year old is not who you are, but she is the one to whom you have ceded effective control of your life.

The irony of the situation is there is someone whom you know who, God willing, is the answer to the prayers of your six-year-old, and as such, serves as a means, if God wishes, of helping you to struggle toward healing, emotional well-being, psychological health, and spiritual fulfillment. Unfortunately, the six-year old who has been left in control is so busy throwing her tantrums and being outraged at the injustice of it all, she has not bothered to stop whining and take the hand which is being offered to her -- a hand that will not abandon her ... but such are the ways of little children.

Your recent actions have dissipated all the spiritual capital you might have accumulated through having to endure the hurt and wrongs done to you by your father, cousin, your uncle, your sister, Ron, and your brother. Now, you have done, in a similar manner, to someone else all the things that have been done to you -- the exploitation, betrayal, deceit, manipulations, broken promises, control, violence (remember, violence is not just physical in nature) and hurtful things that have been done to you, you have now done to another person ... and, in some ways, what you have done is worse than what was done to you because having been on the receiving end of things, you should have had a better appreciation of just how much these things hurt and how much damage they can do.

Yet, I still am prepared to trust you when you say you love me, or when you say you think about me all the time, and when you tell me how much you want to be with me. Why am I willing to do this despite all that has happened?

I have seen your behaviors at their worst. I have seen you in ways even Ron has not seen you.

But, none of this comes as a surprise to me, because I know you, like me, and every other human being, has a nafs that, if let loose, as you have done, is truly a miserable creature. I have seen my own nafs on its own rampage in earlier days -- before the Sufi path ... so I know exactly what the nafs is capable of and how much misery it is inclined to generate -- for itself and others -- if permitted to have its way.

However, I also see something else in you -- a desire for: God, Truth, peace, harmony, emotional health, love, and spiritual transformation ... however dimly these might be shining through at the present time. I see your spiritual potential and believe this dimension of you is worth taking some risks for, and, indeed, I have been taking risks all along in order to provide you, as best as is possible through me, with an opportunity to nurture your own spiritual potential.

Despite all the pathological and toxic crud that is present in you, I see something else in you that has spiritual potential and which, if realized, would have immeasurable worth. I believe in you ... the essential you, not your unredeemed nafs and its six-year old playmate.

Saint Paul has said words to the effect of: 'when I was a child, I thought as a child, I spoke as a child and I played as I child, but when I became an adult, I put away childish things.' The time has come for you to put away childish things.

The Qur'an speaks about the fact that every year we will be tested. Some tests are more difficult and strategic than others.

You are now immersed -- in fact we both are -- in different, but related ways, in such a test. The magnitude of this current test is huge in relation to its potential ramifications for us, both spiritually and in a variety of other ways.

You cannot run away from this test, for, running away is, itself, your response to the test and will be counted as such. Moreover, you cannot avoid making a decision concerning this test, for the failure to make a decision is, itself, a failure and will be counted as such.

Whether, or not, you like it, you are being tested by Allah. What you decide now will shape and color the remaining years of your life

on Earth, and, as well, what you decide now will carry over to shape and color what happens in the life to come.

The test is being thrust upon you. But, what you do, or do not do, is entirely within your control.

You need to stop using Ron as your excuse. You need to stop trying to divert attention away from the problems that your own nafs is creating by trying to blame everything on Ron, and I think some of the realizations that you have come to, over the last 8-10 months have brought the truth of this home to you with varying degrees of clarity.

To be sure, Ron has his own sins for which he must answer. Nonetheless, your primary problem -- as much as it might seem this way -- is not Ron. Your primary problem is in you, and that is what your recent dream was trying to tell you ... the one about trying to play the Guldasta (a spiritual poem set to music) and, then, seeking in the dream to place the locus of the responsibility for your inability to do so in the keyboards (an external agency) rather than within you.

You have had a year and a half of experiences with me to know I have kept all my promises to you, I have continued to be your friend when doing so might have seemed counterproductive, if not injurious, I have not lied to you, I have not abandoned you, and, by the Grace of Allah, I have continued to love you in a sincere fashion - at least as best as I am able to do at the present time.

I see you as you are. You do not have to hide from me.

I know -- perhaps better than Ron, your counselor, or even, in some respects, yourself -- what is within you. This includes both the good and the not so good, potentials that are there.

I have not turned away in disgust. In fact, I look to what is within you with hope and faith.

However, I cannot do this thing alone. I need your co-operation and help ... I need your blessing, as well as my own.

If what you have told me leading up to July 31st of last year is true, if what you have told me since the 31st is true, then, despite the problems that have arisen, I believe there is something very real and true within both of us with which we can work and, God willing, through which we each might be able to prosper in a variety of ways -- emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually. But, as Lao

Tzu (I think) has said: 'The journey of a thousand miles begins with but a single step.'

Tariq

§

May 21 2002 (e-mail)

Hi,

I don't have time to respond to your letter right now, but I will tomorrow. My schedule has been crazy. Thank you for being patient. I love you.

Lara

§

May 21, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

On my way home from work, I stopped at the apartment and received your letter. I quickly skimmed it because I didn't have much time. I had an appointment with my counselor at 4:30. Right now I don't have much time either, but I will try to figure out how to send e-mails from work. In order to get out on the phone lines at work, you have to dial 9 first, and I'm not sure how to tell my computer to do that.

I hope you don't mind me writing to you this way, but I know that nobody can get into my computer, and I need to have some type of contact with you if it's okay. I miss you.

I've been having some pretty bad nightmares again. The other night I had a dream that was very complicated and intense. I won't tell you the whole dream right now because I don't have time. In the latter part of the dream, I was very frightened and was rushing to lock three doors. The locks looked like the question marks on the Sufi center logo, like hook locks. I was trying to lock the evil out of the room I was

in. In the dream, Ron was not listening, and I was very upset. (Probably the six-year-old in me)

I'm sorry I didn't call. I know, sorry doesn't cut it anymore. I am very confused and scared and lonely. I know I have decisions to make that I am avoiding. I have very little time to myself. Ron is at a meeting right now, otherwise I couldn't even do this.

You really don't deserve anything that's happened, and I know that. I truly have not meant to hurt you. I care more about you than I can ever tell you. I miss you more than I have ever missed anyone, except perhaps my mother. I miss the Sufi path. I tried to use the CD you gave me of the Sufi Library, but I'm so bad with computers that I couldn't figure it out. Can you tell me what I need to do?

I bought this computer so I could go online and communicate with you if you will allow it. If you don't want me to, please tell me and I won't.

When I went to see my counselor last Wednesday, he said I can't have everything I want, that I am not a baby. I guess what I want is to have things my own way, which translates into no pain for Lara, no uncomfortable feelings for Lara, no fear for Lara, no potential losses for Lara. Meanwhile, I'm losing you, the best thing that's ever happened to me. I miss the peace I had when I was with you. I miss the respect and care you showed me at all times. I miss having a wonderful man -- a respectable man --- in my life, in my apartment, and in my bed. I miss you everywhere, and I think about you all the time. And, no, it's not a matter of wanting what I don't have. I never missed Ron this way. I don't even miss my sister or my children the way I miss you.

So what am I doing? I talked with my counselor about that tonight. He thinks if things don't change I'm going to get real sick, real fast. I know it's true, and I still can't seem to do anything different.

I saw you today at lunchtime. It made me feel good just to see you, even though I couldn't be with you. It makes me feel good just to know you're still there, anywhere.

I had a dream last week that Ron and I lived in a tall building on the 7th floor. You lived on the 2nd floor. Ron left. As soon as he was gone, I rushed to the elevator to go to you. When I got off the elevator on the 2nd floor, I could see Ron walking back towards the building in

the parking lot. I panicked and rushed back up to the 7th floor so he would not know I had left. He came in with a baby. I asked whose baby she was, and he said she was our daughter's baby. I held her. She had been burned down her chest and on her back by some hot raspberry filling. It was not intentional. My daughter had been careless and it was an accident. I held the baby very gently. It made me so sad to see this beautiful baby burned and in pain. I was very careful not to touch the burned places. I woke up feeling very sad.

I know I treated you 2nd when you should have been first, before Ron.

I don't know all the reasons why, and I don't know what I'll be strong enough to do with all of this mess. I need a shaykh. I need help. I need to stop hurting you and me and Ron. I know this. I'm just not sure I can do it.

My dreams are full of panic and anger and frustration. I haven't had a good one since I moved to Brimley that I can remember.

Tomorrow, when I have time, I will write a much longer and detailed e-mail. First I will read your letter in the privacy of my office at work, which is the only place I seem to have any privacy anymore. Please write to me soon. I miss you so much. You are a beautiful, wonderful person.

I read your horoscope today, as I do every day. It said you would find love if you joined a group to save the planet. Tell me where the group is and I'll go.

I love you madly, even though it doesn't seem that way to you. If you can see beyond all the garbage I'm full of up to my eyeballs, you already know that, but I need to tell you anyway.

Since I left the apartment, I haven't been doing the special night time zikr you gave me. Maybe that's why the nightmares are back. Maybe it's just because my dreams always tell me the truth. I think of you at night and hope you can feel what I'm thinking and feeling about you.

Take good care of yourself please. I need you. I'll read your letter and write again tomorrow.

Love, Lara

§

May 20, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

Please write me just to say goodnight. I need to have contact with you, even if it's just one word.

Love,

Lara

§

May 21, 2002 (e-mail)

My Dearest, Darling Lara,

Since no one can read this but you, I feel that, perhaps, I can begin to say to you the 'sweet nothings' I have always wanted to say but which the crowd (i.e., Ron, Jane, your fears, circumstances) never seemed to permit.

I love you, and I have loved you for a very long time with the kind of intensity that makes me always wish you were with me and by my side. Only the help of the Sufi path and, by the Grace of Allah, my shaykh's love and support for me has helped make all of this bearable.

I miss your smell, your touch, your voice, your kisses, and other things that shall go unmentioned. My heart aches for your presence. The fact I have had this work on the CD to do has helped numb the pain somewhat, but, still, at the end of the day, it is another day without you ... another precious day lost.

It has taken 57 years to get here, and there have been a lot of misadventures, but I know you are the one with whom I have always been meant to be with. I have fought hard in order to help you try to understand I am the one with whom you are meant to be with, as well ... and, God willing, I shall continue to struggle for this 'cause'.

Escape from your present situation is very possible, and although this will take some effort on your part, it might all be easier than you

suppose and fear ... if you will truly place your trust in God and the ones whom He has appointed to look after your affairs.

Time is slipping away in so many ways. We can't afford to waste something so valuable on things that are really not important ... and, in fact, things that seek to serve as obstacles to making progress on the Sufi path.

If you want me and love me as much as I want you and love you, then, let us work together to free you from your prisons ... both within and without. And, let this work begin right away and not be delayed, for with each moment of delay, your situation becomes more precarious and dangerous in so many different ways.

I have waited for you, because 'something' within told me that, if I would be patient, then eventually, you would do what you have, now, done ... that is, make your true feelings and wishes known to me. I could have done otherwise than wait ... I could have ended matters (and Baba had given me instructions on how to do this) and that would have been it forever, but I wanted you -- problems and all -- and I wanted to give you time to realize what, hopefully, you are beginning to realize.

You have done the right thing, because you do need contact with me ... I am like the hair of Samson for you ... by the Grace of Allah, you draw strength through me, but when you cut me off, your strength goes ... for Samson, his foolishness was named Delilah ... your foolishness is called Ron, and irrespective of name, both serve the same purpose -- to interfere with a person's relationship with God and to keep one away from the people who truly love you and care about you.

Please, don't be afraid about anything. If your intention is to move toward being with me and getting back on the Sufi Express, then, know that whatever happens, the Prophet said we die in the state in which we live (at the moment of our death) and we are raised up in the state in which we die. And, as you know, our intentions play a very fundamental role in shaping how we live and die -- so, focus on maintaining sincere intentions toward me and the path ... this will be of great help, God willing.

I'm sorry I didn't write this e-mail sooner, but I don't use the Internet very much these days, and it was only by 'chance' I checked for e-mail before saying prayers.

I love you so very, very much. My insides haven't stopped dancing since I received your e-mail.

With much love and affection and many thoughts of you, I look forward to your next e-mail.

Love,

Tariq

§

May 22, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq

As soon as I could this morning, I checked my mail, and there was the e-mail from you I was hoping for. Did you see me yesterday on Garbo Street? Your e-mail was sooooo sweet. I love the intellectual Tariq, but the Tariq that wrote this most recent e-mail is the Tariq I miss the most. I miss your shoulder. I miss your constant showers. I miss your sleepy face in the mornings. I miss you.

Unfortunately, I have to go to work, and I'm running late. I'll write later with more substance, I promise.

I love you,

Lara

§

May 22, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Madam (i.e., Lara),

Since you are an occasional friend of the court, I would like you to report to the authorities that someone has stolen my heart. There have been reports that this close associate of Professor Moriarty -- that arch enemy of Sherlock Holmes -- has been seen on Garbo Street yesterday,

but I did not notice anything out of the ordinary. However, as you, undoubtedly, know, these fiends travel by stealth and disguise so their presence is often hard to detect.

Nonetheless, I do have a bit of a description of the 'perp'. Consequently, I would appreciate it if you would have the sketch artist draw up a rendering for posting and possible reward.

She was tall with raven hair, cut in a way that invites one to run one's fingers through it. Her body was the kind one feels very comfortable touching and leaning against -- inviting in the same way as her hair ... maybe more so. Her lips are delicious and begged to be kissed again and again.

She is a notorious hugger and she has been known not to be able to keep her hands to herself ... although, I must confess, there might have been a certain amount of aiding and abetting in all of this. She lingers in the memory and has great potential if she can overcome her addictions.

On a less serious note ... if you really are prepared to put your life in my hands both literally and metaphorically, be ready to move quickly on things -- very quickly. I have been putting together an escape plan and all it needs is some co-operation from you. I have no wish to control your life, but I do want to remove you from influences that make it very hard for you to overcome your vulnerabilities in these matters, and I want you to trust me on this ... and I do not believe that I have given you any reason to doubt my concerns are only with what is in your best interests.

Your counselor, Ron's counselor, and I all see the same thing. Your sanity, health, life and soul all depend (in the good sense) on you understanding that you need to leave your present situation as quickly as possible. I know this will not be easy for you, but the alternative of your continuing to stay with someone who is toxic for your entire being is really unacceptable ... for both of us.

You need help in this matter, and in your more lucid moments, I believe you know this. There is no shame in knowing one needs help and getting it from someone who is more than willing to offer it without thinking any the worse of you ... the shame is in needing help but not availing yourself of what is being offered to assist you to

overcome a situation over which you are -- in many ways -- quite powerless and through which you lose energy, focus, rationality, and purpose.

Please trust me, and be ready to do what I will ask of you without reservation, resistance, or guilt. Your present and future opportunities for peace, love and happiness depend on you giving your blessing to this whole thing and being ready to help me to help you.

Despite some temporary setbacks, you have come too far to turn back now. In turning back, you will only find bitterness, anger, hostility, conflict, and disharmony ... as I know you have discovered since returning to Brimley.

Your life with Ron has demonstrated this over and over and over again. You very much need to move in a different direction now ... let us both leave the past behind and move, together, toward the future and, more importantly, toward God.

If you agree to the foregoing, write me back that you understand and despite anxieties and some fears, you are prepared to trust me, and you will do what is indicated. If you do this, then, I will outline what I have in mind. We can make whatever slight adjustments to the plan that might need to be made upon discussing the matter, and, then, we act ... no avoidance, no delays, no regrets.

With much love, affection, as well as virtual hugs and kisses ...

Love,

Tariq

§

May 22, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq

Just got out of work. I have just an hour alone. It is so hard to find any time to myself. I received instructions to go to Hartford next Tuesday, which is a two or three-hour drive. As soon as I told Ron, he insisted that he would drive me. I was actually looking forward to the six hours alone.

I still have not had time to really thoroughly read the letter you sent me yesterday, but I read and re-read your e-mail from this morning. Please write to me as much as possible. I miss you so much.

My mind is full of the day's mundane tasks I have to find time for. My present job project should end tomorrow, God willing. Maybe then I can think without being asked by Ron "What are you thinking about?" I can't even go inside my own head these days without getting into a problem with him.

He has gone to see his counselor now. I walked out of our counseling appointment Monday night about halfway through. I just couldn't sit there and listen to Ron. I felt like I was going to lose my mind if I heard even one more word.

I'm glad you've been able to accomplish so much of what you wanted to do. Does that mean if we're together again you will spend all your energy loving me? I know. I'm being childish and selfish again.

I wish you could ride to Hartford with me, but I'm afraid I wouldn't be able to keep my hands off you. You know how little self-control I have when you are near.

Friday I have the day off, and I will have some time alone. In the meantime, I will write to you more than you will be able to stand.

Tonight I will do my zikr and see if I start to feel better again and more focused. I just feel tired all the time.

Dr. Kasey put my daughter on Lithium. She doesn't feel very well, She was here at lunchtime today, so I came over to see her.

I wish I could tell you for sure how things are going to end with this situation. I know what I want. I know what I need. So do you. Whether I can do it or not is another matter.

I need to say a lot of prayers now. I hope you will say some for us, too.

Please write soon. How many e-mails have you received from me? This is the 4th one I have written ... two last night, one this morning, and this one.

Can you tell me how to load the Sufi Library?

I'm back to my imaginal world again. I know it's not a good thing. I'm out of practice. When you told me a year ago not to go there, I

understand why. The difference is that today the only person or thing or event going on there is me being with you. Is that still bad?

I'll try to write more later.

Oh, I've just noticed that I have mail! It must be you. You're the only one who knows my e-mail address. I will read my mail and try to respond soon.

I love you madly,

Lara

§

May 22 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Lara,

For whatever reason, although I got one of your e-mails from this afternoon, the other one wasn't delivered until just a little while ago -- that was the one where you had an hour and you were waiting for Ron to get through his session with his counselor. Quite frankly, your email was terrifying to me because it revealed just how bad your situation is. Your predicament is far more precarious and dangerous than it was a year ago, and Ron seems to have more control over you than ever.

What Ron is doing is not just immoral, unspiritual, inhumane, and abusive -- he is permitting himself to be a conduit for pure evil.

We can't wait for Friday ... Ron's control of, and influence over, you is such that he is constantly applying pressure on you to get inside of your mind so he can control you all the more. You might not be able to hold up through the next two days with the plan at hand.

I'm going to actively intervene. I am going to come to your work place tomorrow, and I want you to leave with me when you are through with work. If you want I will go to Hartford with you on Tuesday, or you can go alone, but you must leave Ron as quickly as possible -- for your own sanity, well-being, and safety ... I can't emphasize this enough. You are in extreme danger.

He has you as a prisoner. In fact, your condition is worse than that of a prisoner, it is more like torture and brain-washing.

You're situation is -- in all honesty -- like that of women in Afghanistan under the Taliban ... you have no rights, no freedom, no peace, to space of your own, and you are constantly under close watch, supervision and correction from the warden of your house.

You seem to have deteriorated tremendously in the last 6-7 weeks. Your counselor is very right when he says you are going to get real sick, real fast if you don't change things ... indeed, you appear, unfortunately, to be well on your way to that.

If you can walk out of a meeting with Ron before your marriage counselor, if you can manage to go to work, if you can manage to call me, if you can manage to get e-mail in order to be in touch with me, then, you can manage to come with me, when I come for you tomorrow. I pray that you understand how if set of actions is possible, then so too is the other set of actions also possible

I am not afraid of Ron, nor of his friends, nor do I care what anyone thinks about this. I am not going to sit around and watch the woman I love go down the tubes, and if you really love me, trust me, want to be with me, want to be healthy, want to be free, want to seek God, then you will come with me when I come for you tomorrow.

This is America. You have a right to assemble with anyone you please, and to speak your mind, and to leave your home if you desire, and to have freedom of religion, and to be free from cruel and unusual punishment, and to have your civil rights protected against infringement by tin-horn dictators like Ron. Even slaves are treated better than you are by Ron.

There is absolutely no reason for you not to come with me tomorrow. I don't know what sort of arrangement Ron forced upon you, or to what extent he harassed you until you caved in (and although I haven't heard the full story yet, I am sure this is what went on with respect to you telling him about us), but if he has said anything of a threatening nature with respect to you or me or what he would do if you came back to me, let the pompous little arrogant rooster crow all he wants ... let him do what he likes, I don't care what he says, does, or thinks.

Quite frankly, most people like Ron who are controlling and abusive toward women are complete cowards. If someone stands up to

them, they cave in like the moral weaklings their behaviors clearly reveal them to be.

This is not male bravado on my part speaking. This is my outrage at the iniquities that Ron is perpetrating under the pretext that he loves you.

Your obligations -- to the extent you think about these things at all -- are with God, your shaykh, the silsilah, and me. If what you have been saying is not just a lot of emptiness, then, you will come with me to save yourself.

I do not believe in harming others for my beliefs, but I am prepared to die for them if necessary. So, let Ron take his best shot, he might be very surprised about what transpires ... this is not about me doing anything dumb with respect to Ron, but he might find, God willing, that Divinity does look after the people in our silsilah in a very thorough, beautiful, and rigorous manner.

I will say this much. If you want Ron to come out of this intact, then, you have to understand this is not about just Ron, you, and me. God is involved in this as well.

Ron is constantly doing spiritual damage to himself by conducting himself in the way he is. You are helping him to destroy himself spiritually by not removing yourself from out of the way of his temptation to control, abuse, and hurt you.

If you really don't want to see Ron end up on the wrong end of things, then, you must bring things to an end, because he is out of control. You do far more harm to him by staying with him than you will ever do by leaving him, because by staying you are greasing the skids for him to do the things that will destroy his chances for salvation.

Please don't resist me on this, or think up excuses. You just need to leave him, and it is that simple (as simple as going to work), and I am prepared to come and take you by the hand, if need be, to show you the way to freedom and truth ... and I do think this is necessary because you are sounding very, very, very weak right now.

Put your trust in God and take this step. The plan remains the same, except you need to be removed from Brimley before proceeding with the rest of the plan.

Write me about all of this if the tyrant gives you enough space.

Love,

Tariq

§

May 22, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

What's the plan? Please tell me soon.

What a nice e-mail. You are such a romantic.

What you do to me when you write such things cannot be described in an e-mail or else it might be considered some other form of Internet communication that might be unlawful. Besides, I'm modest so I'll leave it to your imagination.

Write soon.

I love you.

Lara

§

May 22, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Lara

Meine kleine liebchin (My little loved one),

The following is not about hurting Ron, but, rather, is about, God willing, saving you ... although, undoubtedly, Ron will be hurt in the process. However, there will be more hurt if you both continue on with the way things are going between you two ... in fact, if what is transpiring between the two of you is permitted to continue, that relationship well might lead to tragedy for, one or the other of you, or both of you, as well as your family. You must weigh the hurt that you and Ron will feel if the following plan is implemented, against the far greater hurt and damage that surely will ensue if the plan is not put into action as quickly as possible.

I wish there could be some other way but there isn't, as far as I can see. We tried things your way and, by the Grace of Allah, it almost worked except you lost heart, focus, and spirit during the process and slipped back into the morass from which you had just begun to extricate yourself. And, quite frankly, it was precisely this part of things with which I was most worried since, as you known, abused women often keep allowing themselves to be manipulated and controlled to the point of re-entering a relationship that they know is fraught with toxicity and danger ... and that is what happened with you.

Now, please, let us -- in the light of the bitter experience we both have had -- try things another way. You are almost powerless with respect to Ron ... almost but not entirely, and it is this little window of your resistance to Ron that, God willing, is the opportunity that we need to work with, for, among other things, it is what was given expression in your getting hooked up with the Internet and e-mail, despite your previous bad experiences concerning the Internet with your sister. Recognize present circumstances for what they are -- namely, though you are very vulnerable to Ron's controlling ways due to your own history, your willingness to take a chance with the Internet again, as well as to keep letting me know that you were trying to make contact, are signs that within you is the knowledge you must escape your situation ... or you will die, go crazy, hurt someone else, or, at very best, live a very unhappy life.

I would hope that parts of this plan might begin tomorrow -- Thursday. These parts include three, possibly, four steps ... most of which you should be able to do at lunch time and/ or during your breaks, and, if necessary, finish up on Friday.

Open a new bank account in your own name and withdraw whatever money you feel is fair and appropriate from your joint account. However, don't close the joint account now ... that can come later.

Change your phone number and keep it unlisted, and, obviously, this time, don't give it to Ron. Make arrangements with either Betty or April or whomever you want -- but I would not recommend either Carol or Jane -- to take whatever emergency calls from your children --

but not from Ron -- which means you have to make it clear to your children that the number is for them only.

Get a parking space -- for a month -- at Grant Circle. Pick a level and a location that gives your car the least visibility from outside the facility.

Take as much clothes with you tomorrow as will not arouse suspicion -- as if you were going to take things to the dry cleaners. You should have enough to last you for four-to-five days, minimum. Arrangements can be made later to pick up the rest of your clothes in a safe way.

The following step should be done by no later than Friday -- and the earlier, the better. Write a letter to Ron ... be brief with no recriminations or explanations. Simply state in the letter that it is obvious your relationship with Ron is not working and has not been working for years.

You came back to give it one last try but nothing -- in essence -- really has changed from before. Now, it is time for both of you to move on with your respective lives.

Stipulate you do not want Ron to contact you in any way -- whether by phone, mail, in person, or through third parties. This also means you do not want him to come to your apartment, nor to your place of work.

Indicate you want the extra set of keys to your car back. Tell him that these should be given to some third party -- whomever you want to entrust with this.

Inform him that you have begun to institute proceedings for divorce and the papers will be served as soon as they have been completed. Tell him this decision to proceed with the divorce is final and not open to discussion. Outline whatever arrangements you want to make about the house and your retirement package that will be equitable for Ron and in line with Vermont state law.

Write two very short letters to your children. Tell them you are going to be out of touch for a while and for them not to worry. Give them the phone number, if you have it (or tell them you will send it to them when you get it) for emergency purposes. Tell them of your plans to file for divorce, and this is happening not because of anything they

have done but because your relationship with Ron has become untenable.

Either: Friday after work -- if you are working -- or before Ron is through work on Friday, you should come here to the office. For the next week to ten days, you need to stay with me, and this is necessary for a variety of reasons.

However, before you come to the office, take your rings off -- including the one from Ron's father -- and keep them off ... in fact you should give them to someone for safe keeping. This is not about my jealousy -- which, by the Grace of Allah, there is none -- but, instead, you need to get rid of anything and everything that ties you to, or reminds you of, Ron, because all these things make it much harder for you to emotionally let go and move on with your life.

In any event, my place is far more secure than your apartment is. During the day, the office is far more public -- that is, there are a fair number of people who roam the halls down here.

On the other hand, whether at day or night, no one comes to see me or call upon me, and even if they do, I don't open the door. The coverings on the windows, together with keeping the lights out in the other rooms, makes it seem from outside the office as if no one is here.

Usually, on most days, there is no one working in the lower level after 6:00 p.m. and sometimes as early as 5:30, and, therefore, the security door at the foot of the stairs can be closed and constitutes a formidable barrier. Sometimes the Tanning Salon across the hall stays open until 6:30 p.m., but not very often, and occasionally, the religious groups down the hall have gatherings, but, again, not very frequently ... and besides, I leave those people alone, and they leave me alone.

Because the place is public and private and not your apartment, Ron is very unlikely to come here ... although he might send a proxy in order to gather information. Even if he does, I have removed the Sufi center signs downstairs, and he is not going to know which office is mine, and even if someone tells him, I am not going to answer the door should he come seeking to see what is going on.

If he finds out, somehow -- and I don't know how he would do this as long as you don't say anything to anyone about the arrangement of your staying here. The fact of the matter is, given his past record of

harassment, control, stalking, and abuse, there is absolutely no one with any sense who would not understand why all of the foregoing precautions are necessary.

He doesn't know I live here. In fact, almost no one does, including the people in the other offices. Furthermore, if he thinks you are staying with me, he is likely going to assume that I still live at the 'Palace' or that I have moved somewhere else about which he does not know.

There is a back entrance to my office space. Leaving the building is completely undetectable -- especially given there are two directions in that you can go ... either toward Willow Street, or in the other direction that brings you out at the side of the store next to the trophy shop. We can make our own arrangements about letting you in from outside by your phoning, say, from, work, when you are ready to come, and, then, you could take which ever route seemed safest at any given time -- although, personally, I think the trophy shop route gives you the best visibility about who is around and who is able to see you before you turn in there.

It is extremely important -- and I can't emphasize this enough -- that you can have no contact with Ron ... not because of me, but because of you. You have an addiction problem in relation to him and you have got to understand you need to go cold-turkey in order to build up your emotional, spiritual, psychological, and physical strength to be able to resist him on your own much further down the line.

From time to time, we might improvise a little and, maybe, late at night go to your place and take a shower. One can take little mini-baths using the sink at the office, but I haven't tried out the shower gizmo that I got, so I don't know how that arrangement might work. You should get a few things from your apartment in the way of your coffee maker, a pillow, and some bedding, plus whatever else you think you will need for personal hygiene and so on.

If I could afford to take you somewhere for a month or two, I would, but I can't and this is about the cheapest way I can think of to keep you: out of sight, out of circulation, and with someone who will protect your interests ... including your desire to work against your own best interests. You need the time and the space to be able to break free of Ron -- or, at least, get a good head of stem and momentum up to

work toward doing so ... emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and physically.

Every contact you have had with Ron -- whether by phone, by 'accidental' meetings, going over to Brimley, or during the suppers you would have with him, or after the Friday night meetings – has made you worse and worse, weaker and weaker, until, finally, you don't even know what you are doing. And, remember, you were the one who told me about not remembering very well, if at all, the ten days before you returned to Brimley recently.

There has got to be zero tolerance on contact with Ron ... again, not because of my jealousy or any desire of mine to control you, but because you can't help yourself and you become self-destructive in what you permit yourself to do under his influence. If you do not break free from your captivity, then, there will be no more us, and if that is something that you hold as important, then, for your own sake, I hope you understand that zero tolerance here is just like zero tolerance when it comes to alcohol.

They are both addictions, and the only way, God willing, to overcome them, is through total abstinence. This is not a control issue, it is a health issue.

Furthermore, I'm not going to go through again, what I have been through during the past 6-7 weeks. I love you, and I want you, and I have forgiven you, and I have waited for you ... but I'm not going to be stupid about this. Either you love me and want me or you don't, and, if you do -- which you have said you do -- then, from, now on, Ron cannot be a part of things in any way, shape or manner.

The guilt, worry, anxiety, fear, and obsessing you do in conjunction with Ron is, by and large, rooted in pathology, and it is destroying you. You have got to disengage from the toxicity in order to have, God willing, any chance of regaining your health and working toward spiritual self-realization.

I no longer want to live in the past. I want us to live in the present, together, loving one another as best as we are able, and caring about one another, and helping one another, and working for the silsilah, and helping others, and being as happy as we can and having gratitude to

Allah, and to our shaykh for giving us this second chance. Let's not foul it up.

Whatever time we have left -- whether it is a week, a month, a year, or more -- let us be thankful for that time and embrace it and use it constructively, without regrets about the past or what could have been or might have been. What is between us today is the way Allah wished it to be, so let us love one another with all the love, sincerity, commitment, intensity, and integrity we can muster.

I love you very much, and, God willing, I always will. Let's move forward.

We can reassess the situation in 7-10 days and see where things stand, and go from there.

Next week -- perhaps Tuesday or Wednesday -- you should file for divorce. Any delay or vacillation is only going to prolong everyone's pain and anguish. This is something you have to do for yourself, as much as for us.

With much love and affection, and thinking of you always,
Tariq

§

May 23, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

This morning I slept until 11:15. Jane called at 9:30 or so but I was unable to talk because I was very, very tired. It was just a few moments ago that I was finally able to sit down and read your e-mail of yesterday because Jane called again, and we talked for quite a while. Susan is really, really dying. This weekend is the AA Round-Up out to Camp Washington. Jane is going to care for her out there. Susan's been told she only has a few weeks left. I would like to go out and spend some time with her, but I have a really hard time watching her boys go through this.

I'm such a coward in so many different areas. Yes, I need to learn how to reach out and take your hand.

Everything you said is true. My real challenge is just as you stated, whether I can take the hand of whatever Divine manifestation is there and accept God's grace back into my life. If I can't take your hand, I will not contact you again. I have saved all your e-mails, and I can read and re-read them as often as I need to. I also have all of the letters you have sent me. I will never be able to part with them.

I am not asking you not to write to me. In fact, I welcome it and encourage it. But it is not right for me to contact you if I can't take any real steps towards taking your hand and not just looking at it and hoping it never goes away.

I love you and want the best for you always.

Lara

§

My options seem fairly limited. I'm not about to go to Lara's house in Brimley with guns blazing ... indeed, I feel that Lara has been subjected to enough life situations where coercion, of one kind or another, has been perpetrated with respect to her. On the other hand, I'm not sure that anything I am saying is actually getting through to her or is likely to make any difference with respect to our current situation ... none of what I have said seems to have made much of a difference up until now.

However, Lara is encouraging me to continue to write to her. Maybe my writing serves the same sort of purpose as does the conversation of people who speak to loved-ones who are in a coma ... loved-ones who weeks, months, or years later indicate that they had heard everything that had been said – even though they couldn't respond – and that just having someone who was by their side speaking with them was very important ... that it comforted them somehow, or eased the pain of their circumstances, or lessened their sense of isolation, or gave them something for which, and with which, to struggle.

I keep hoping that my letters and e-mails might help Lara. I keep changing my approach ... my arguments ... my metaphors ... my logic ... thinking that if one thing doesn't work, maybe another way of doing

things will serve as a sort of 'magic' elixir that dissipates the toxins which are circulating in her consciousness. At the same time, I'm rather uncertain as to whether Lara is at all receptive to arguments, logic, or metaphors.

Maybe, what I say or how I say it is less important than that something is communicated to her. My arguments might be worthless, but, perhaps, the caring that, hopefully, is being communicated through those various stratagems might be of value to her ... maybe she needs to know that she is not being abandoned ... that someone loves her ... that someone is pulling for her to break free of her demons - both the external and internal ones.

So, once again, I leap into the vortex. Not knowing what else to do, I try to speak from the heart and soul ... addressing various issues that come to mind with whatever passion I am able to gather for the task.

§

May 23, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Lara,

Why are you so worried about doing right in the area of e-mail contact when you do not seem to be worried about doing the right thing with anything else? Your writing to me might be a small thing, but it keeps alive, at least, the possibility of acting on bigger steps, because you have to do something to write an e-mail, and you have to think about what you are saying.

I am sorry to hear about Susan and how she only has a short time to live. Unfortunately, I (and your counselor) have told you that you might only have a short time to live, as well -- spiritually and emotionally -- but you don't seem to understand your circumstances might be even more tragic and near at hand than Susan's.

I am not fooling when I say my situation on Garbo street is very precarious. If I have to leave, I very likely will be leaving the Bamford area forever and there will be no way to contact me for no one will know where I have gone.

I am not saying this for dramatic effect or in an attempt to put pressure on you. These are just some of the possible scenarios.

In fact, unless something happens to change things, I might be losing phone and e-mail in the near future. This would make things with respect to us even that much more problematic.

However, there are many things you say and do, as well as what you don't say or do, which suggests there is a part of you that would be very happy if I have to leave Bamford or go out of communication with you, because, then, the Taliban side of you (both internal and external) would be free of my presence and you wouldn't have to bother with the fact I am still around.

Indeed, much of your whole present stance toward me seems to be vintage passive-aggressive behavior ... where you say all manner of accommodating and loving things, but your behavior goes in quite a different direction. If we were in the Old West, native people might say you are speaking with a 'forked tongue'.

There once was a great shaykh and saint who would travel from town to town. Wherever he went, throngs of people would mill about him professing how much they loved him.

One day the shaykh led the crowd to the outskirts of town and began to walk up a small sand dune while the rest of the crowd followed a respectful distance behind. As the shaykh walked up the hill -- and while his back was still to the people -- he unfastened his pants in the front and began to urinate while walking up the hill.

The people were all horrified, and began to run away. As they were leaving he said, your love for me isn't worth even a stream of urine.

I remember a made-for-TV movie that Dick Van Dyke did maybe 20 years, or so, ago. As you might, or might not know, he is an alcoholic.

The movie was about a man who had a family that loved him and whom he loved very much, but the man had a drinking problem that grew progressively worse, until he ended up on skid row drinking out of a bottle wrapped in a paper bag, all alone, shivering in the cold ... having lost everything including what he professed to love most, and that is how the picture ended.

In the *Days of Wine and Roses*, the picture ends after the Jack Lemmon character tries one last time -- after sobering up -- to get the Lee Remick character to come with him to an AA meeting . He had been the one to introduce her to alcohol, then, they got married, and, then, their whole marriage became one lost weekend (which alludes to another movie in which Ray Milland stars) ... and, then, entire lost weeks, months, and years.

It is obvious the Lee Remick character still cares for the character played by Jack ... it shows in her eyes during these last scenes together, but she refuses to go because there is something else she loves more -- the booze. Some people, by the Grace of Allah, are able to free themselves from their addiction, and some, by the grace of their own nafs, are not.

Whether one is talking booze, drugs, or addictive relationships, the story remains the same. There is part of you that embraces what is happening to you just as the Dick Van Dyke and Lee Remick characters did ... otherwise you would not be staying where you are. If your external Taliban lord and master is not using force or blackmail or threats to keep you in Brimley, then, it is because you want to be there -- despite everything you say that protests about what is going on.

Your counselor can read or tell you all the things that she wishes to about the concept of 'consent' and how what is going on between you and your Taliban keeper is being done without your consent due to unequal power arrangements, potential threats of violence, emotional pressure and so on. However, the fact of the matter is -- and this is something that neither your counselor nor you seem to understand -- what is going on is going on not only with your consent, but with your blessing, because it serves the purposes of your internal Taliban cobra.

No one does that which they do unless something in them believes one's purposes and interests are being served in the process, in one way or another. And, this is so even if one has to endure some pain in order for those purposes and interests to be served.

This is one of the reasons why you lie to your Taliban mentor about what really went on between you and me -- and for how long it went on -- for if you were to tell him, your purposes and interests would, in all likelihood, no longer be served. Instead, you tell him just

enough to keep him hooked without pushing things too far and putting you in a position of not being able to play the game with him of: "I'll continue to complain about what you are doing, but I want you to continue to do it, because if I really wanted to put an end to this, all I would have to do is walk out but that would not serve my purpose."

There is part of you that seems to love the degradation and destructive quality of the whole thing. This is obvious because you keep going back to it and seeking it out more and more.

People do not do painful, self-degrading things unless there is a payoff in it somewhere. This is human nature ... as twisted as this might be.

You said in your e-mail you know the issue is that you have to be willing to let Grace back into your life. The fact you are not doing this indicates you wish for the self-destructive and degrading process to continue.

Any person that knowingly refuses to allow Grace to come into his or her life is an extremely self-destructive individual who is baiting God to finish them off. Some poisons are fast acting, and some poisons take time for their deadly qualities to take effect. However, if the objective is death -- whether emotional, psychological, physical, or spiritual -- the whole thing comes down to one's choice of poisons and your relationship with your Taliban lord and master is one of your choices concerning poisons.

By seeking to destroy yourself -- emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and familial -- you have reached a point that is the exact antithesis with respect to the reason you have been created. You are seeking to destroy your potential for self-realization, rather than to actualize that potential.

Your inner-Taliban side is using your external Taliban keeper to advance your own cause. As bad and pernicious as the behavior of your anaconda friend (i.e., Ron) is the fact of the matter is that you are using him for your own purposes, and these purposes seem to be manifestations, of one kind or another, involving attempts to punish or destroy yourself. Your Taliban side is using Ron as an excuse so that you won't have to let Grace into your life. You are using him as a shield to prevent anything from reaching you that might really give you a

chance, God willing, to turn your life around ... because, seemingly, you don't believe you deserve such a chance.

You, probably, will continue to go see your counselor in order to have someone to whom to complain with respect to your Taliban lord and master. Your counselor, probably, will make comments, from time to time, about what you are doing, and you will nod your head in that passive-aggressive way of yours and agree while you persist in doing what you are doing.

From your days of hitting yourself with the crowbar following abusive and exploitive sexual encounters by your uncle, you have been seeking to punish and destroy yourself out of shame, guilt, your sense of having been abandoned, rebelliousness, pain, anger, resentment, and confusion. Your attraction to drinking was, in part, a more effective way of punishing yourself than was the crowbar, and, then, you switched methods and took up company with your Taliban host, and this has provided you with a great deal of the desired pain and destructiveness that you have sought through which to punish yourself.

The fact you responded to the Grace that came through your school teacher friend about whom you told me, and the fact you have continued to see your counselor all these years, and the fact you sought out the Sufi path, and the fact you offer, at least, some token amount of resistance to what your Taliban master is trying to do to you, indicates there is something in you that does not want to be destroyed, but this 'something' seems to be getting smaller and smaller, possessing less and less strength.

All you would have to do is take a few steps, and measures could be put into play that ensured you had no contact with the American representative of the Taliban (i.e., Ron), but you won't do this because it serves your purpose not to. It is not your external Taliban master who keeps you where you are. Rather, it is nothing other than your internal Taliban master who is doing this and who also wishes to punish or destroy you in the process.

You say you love me, like you have loved no other, and, yet, your love for me is so great that you are not prepared to take even the simplest of steps to remove yourself from your situation ... and, apparently, you will not permit yourself to do this because your love

affair with self- destruction seems to be far greater than whatever love you might have for me.

Your external Taliban leader is not your problem. Your problem is your internal Taliban dictator who is working day and night to keep you turning away from Grace so its purposes and interests might be served.

You turned away from me when you were at your apartment in Bamford because I did not serve the interests of your internal Taliban master's grand design for your self-destruction. You went back to Brimley and you stay in Brimley because this does serve the plan of your internal Taliban tyrant.

Your external Taliban master is just a smoke-screen that is being exploited by your internal Taliban directorate in order to sap the energy and spirit ... as well as take up the time, attention and resources and, thereby, deprive that little, tiny spark in you, which has almost flickered out ... to keep that little part of you occupied with the diversion, while your internal Taliban operator works on closing down all of the options that might afford the aforementioned small part of you an opportunity to escape from destruction.

You do not wish to be with me, you wish to be in Brimley ... not because of your external Taliban's horrifying attempts to obtain control over you (and he does want to do this because of his own internal demons) -- but because of the horrifying control that your own, internal Taliban forces have over you. Your behavior is in accordance with the desires of whatever side of you is in control ... that is why you do what you do and stay where you stay -- because the Taliban side of you is firmly in control, and behavior does not lie.

The Taliban side of you knows that what it is doing is hurting me and, therefore, will continue to do this because this serves the master plan ... if you hurt me deeply enough and for long enough, then, maybe I will just go away, and the threat I represent to helping your spiritual side escape from its clutches will be gone. The Taliban side of you takes secret delight in hurting me, and if this were not true, you would stop doing it, but you don't because to hurt me serves your purpose and interests ... which is to give expression to the hurt, pain and anger your hamzat feels by manipulating this to do violence and damage and hurt to others as well as to your spiritual side.

Your internal Taliban agent uses your external Taliban agent to keep distance between us. This permits you the advantage of being able to point a finger at someone else (your external Taliban fall-guy), profess your innocence, while all the time doing tremendous violence to your spiritual self, me and the spiritual side of your external Taliban comrade.

Your internal Taliban knows that by staying where you are, you can problematically affect three lives: mine, yours (the spiritual side), and Ron's. I have told you that by persisting in what you are doing, you are hurting Ron spiritually because he will never be able to stop himself from doing what he is doing because he doesn't have any understanding of the game he is caught up in or how – as odd as this might sound – he is being manipulated by your internal Taliban forces. Your internal Taliban tyrant is playing Ron like a violin so he doesn't know whether he is coming or going because he can't figure out why you would come back if you don't intend to give things a 'fair' chance by forgetting the past.

The problem is not forgetting the past. The problem is there is that there is another force running the show and controlling the external Taliban 'wanna-be' ruler (i.e., Ron) and getting him to persist in his behaviors, so the purposes and interests of your internal Taliban ruler might be served. As indicated previously, these purposes and interests seem to be a matter of trying to inflict as much damage as is possible -- but in a very clever, subtle, indirect, and not-overtly physical manner (which, on the one hand, goes against the principles of the spiritual side of you) while, nonetheless, also heightening everyone's level of tension, conflict and frustration at having to deal with the Taliban side of you... you can play both sides of the street by, on the one hand, expressing a genuine abhorrence toward issues of violence, abuse and control, while, on the other hand, permitting your Taliban side to conduct itself in an emotionally, psychologically, interpersonally, and spiritually violent or destructive way all the while.

In addition, the idea seems to be to inflict as much punishment as is possible before the final self-destruction comes. And, all of this is in order to use the hurt, pain, fear, and anger of your hamzat to fuel these ends of hurting others and destroying the spiritual side of you, for, it is in the nature of one's hamzat to react blindly due to the hurt, pain, and

emotional turbulence that governs the inner dynamics of your hamzat – about which Baba informed me, and I passed this information on to you.

Ron is responding in the usual, dumb animal way of many men. He figures if he can just exert more force and pressure and control and violence, then, the problem will be solved, but he doesn't understand that all of this plays right into the hands of your inner Taliban ruler.

That internal master criminal of yours is counting on Ron to continue on in just the way he is. Your internal ruler wishes destruction -- for one and all -- such is the anger, hurt, resentment, pain, and hostility that is present in your hamzat and that can be manipulated by your internal Taliban ruler.

This is why Ron can't be told the truth about what is going on -- either with respect to your relationship to him or your actual relationship with me -- because to do this would be to, potentially, upset the game plan in a variety of ways. Better that he thinks the reason why you have come back is for him -- despite all the problems - - rather than he should come to know that your internal Taliban is using him to further its ends.

Why would someone stay with a person that he or she does not like, trust, respect, love, and whose very touch makes one's skin crawl, because it serves the purpose of the internal Taliban. What the external Taliban – i.e., Ron -- has done in the past, as well as the present, is terrible ... no one should do what he has done to anyone and no one should have to be the recipient of such cruel abuse. But, that external Taliban leader is reaping what he has sown because he, too, is too caught up in his own nafs to realize what is going on and how he is being played by another manifestation of the Taliban mentality that is a great deal smarter than he is ... for you are a very intelligent person, but your internal Taliban (i.e., your nafs or ego) has corrupted that and is using it to its own advantage.

Your intense relationship with me has two layers ... one that comes from the real you, and one that comes from the Taliban side of you. The latter side of you sought to seduce, exploit, and destroy me through sexuality ... but the plan hit a snag when, by the Grace of Allah, I wouldn't be seduced. I might have bent a little, but by the Grace of

Allah, I did not break and did not permit to happen what the Taliban side of you was trying to do ... namely, get into my pants.

Your Taliban side of you was trying to destroy me because of many things from the past that were being projected onto me, but none of these is the primary reason. Your Taliban side wanted to destroy things because the spiritual side of you had fallen in love with my spiritual side, and this just wouldn't do. It was your Taliban side which contacted me that Thursday and sought me out with the intention of, in one way or another, upsetting the apple cart, and seducing me that would either serve as evidence for your spiritual side that I was not so spiritual after all, or getting me entangled in several triangles of conflict - namely, (a) you, Ron and me; (b) your spiritual side, your inner Taliban, and me; (c) your hamzat, your spiritual side, and me, all of which would culminate, sooner, or later, in your breaking off the relationship in order to serve the purposes of your internal Taliban

After the Thursday ploy did not work, and several further efforts did not have the desired results, the only way around this was what happened on the 31st - that is, we got married. The Taliban side of you, of course, doesn't really believe in such things, but it was the only option available through which to keep your inner Taliban's master plan in play. The Taliban side of you admitted it was not looking forward to the whole thing of the 31st, and was quite happy when things got delayed several times, while waiting for the package from Baba. It knew what the implications of marriage might mean, and how uncertainties, as well as various unpredictable twists and turns, could come into play through this event might introduce things that were beyond the control of the internal Taliban's capabilities.

Now, one of the things that was happening with which your inner Taliban was not happy was the fact, as previously indicated, that the spiritual side of you did fall in love with me and is still in love with me, and this is the part of you that misses me, wants to be with me, wants to escape, and thinks about me all the time, and knows my spiritual side is the best thing that has ever happened to her and the only source of consistent, sincere, non-self-serving love she has received in her entire life. Consequently, very shortly after the 31st, your inner-Taliban (your nafs) began to implement plans that led to behaviors on

your part that were designed to destroy what was happening between your spiritual side and my spiritual side.

I told you your whole manner of behavior changed after the 31st. You became distant, you hardly ever visited me anymore, the passive-aggressive behavior became more and more prominent, along with large degrees of indifference to what was happening in my life, and, for good measure, your inner-Taliban side threw in a certain amount of hostility, belligerence, and conflict, of one sort or another.

Even the whole set of things that was going on with respect to working with you was being affected by the two sides of you. The spiritual side of you wanted to find ways for us to work together on the proofreading, but your inner-Taliban side kept withdrawing the offers and breaking promises that had been made by the spiritual side of you.

I, being the naive person that I sometimes tend to be, was mystified by all that was going on. In time, I began to feel that, perhaps, one of the reasons I was being put through all of this by Allah was because of its potential value as a training and learning exercise about the nature of nafs -- my own and that of others (e.g., your inner-Taliban ruler). It has taken me time -- since I am not all that bright -- to unravel the layers of what seems to be going on and has gone on between us.

Of course, my spiritual training was not the only reason we were brought together. We were also brought together for your benefit and for your spiritual training, as well as to provide each of us with an opportunity for the 'man-woman' sort of love that we each need. And, yes, you do need this man-woman relationship very much despite the wish of your internal Taliban and hamzat to be totally independent of anything and everyone.

But, eventually, by the Grace of Allah, the truth has surfaced, little by little. All of the things that I have said in the previous letters to you are true -- the issues of addiction, your external Taliban's cruel role in all of this, the theme of abandonment, the problems arising out of sexual abuse, and the behaviors of your sister, brother, and others -- all of these have played their roles in shaping your life. But, the missing piece that I felt I was not grasping has just fallen into place with this e-mail ... although it was staring us both in the face all along.

A very large part of your very deep identification with your external Taliban's (Ron's) emotions and feelings is because your hamzat recognizes the pain, anger, resentment, and violence that is present in his hamzat. Your internal Taliban uses that to bind you to him so you won't be tempted to go and do something foolish like try to escape and struggle toward the spiritual side of yourself.

This is one of the reasons why you -- the hamzat side of things -- often feels so guilty ... as if it is abandoning someone -- namely, your external Taliban's hamzat (that is, Ron's own injured hamzat), and your internal Taliban (your nafs or ego) plays on this a great deal to keep you where you are.

Your Taliban side of things had to sabotage our relationship because it realized that something serious was going on between our spiritual sides. The intense anxiety, panic, guilt, irrationality, throwing up, and fugue-like state that you experienced was the way your nafs used your hamzat to pressure your spiritual side to go back to Brimley.

Now, your spiritual side needs to understand that primary responsibility rests with the spiritual side for letting what happened, happen. It is the weakness and cowardice of the spiritual side of things that has permitted the external and internal Taliban allies to gang up on the spiritual side and have their way with your essential Self, and it is to that spiritual side of things to which this e-mail is being directed and with the hope that what is being said here might help her to rally sufficient energy to step away -- permanently -- from what is happening in Brimley.

Your persistent calls to me when you hung up without leaving a message served two sides of you at the same time. Your Taliban side was served because it wishes to stir things up (in a problematic way) with me, your spiritual side, and your external Taliban master, as part of hamzat's blind flailing about due the pain it was in. On the other hand, the spiritual side of you was served through those calls despite the fact that they really were weak, feeble calls for help.

This same logic is reflected in the case of your making arrangements to establish e-mail contact with me, and this is why your last e-mail message was left the way it was ... namely, that it was okay for me to contact you, but it just wasn't 'right' for you to contact me. The part of your e-mail that wanted to maintain contact was the

spiritual side of you, but the part of you that wanted to place conditions on that contact was the Taliban side of you.

The conditions were placed, again, in order to generate difficulties for our situation. The Taliban side of you enjoyed the pain these restrictions might cause to me and also enjoyed the way it might curtail your spiritual side's participation in the whole matter to, at most, reading, without being able to respond or be active and, thereby, possibly, undermining some of the control that the Taliban side was exerting.

I also find it very telling that your Taliban side would want to limit your participation in things ... not after the four earlier letters that, each in its own way, revealed another facet of the truth -- but after the last e-mail that got to the heart of the matter ... namely, the way in which your internal Taliban's control of things has caused you to distance yourself from Grace and will not permit -- so far -- your spiritual side of things to assert enough control to do what must be done to, God willing, to bring about any spiritual transformation and/or change in the on-going dynamics of our situation.

Your Taliban side of things is using all manner of stratagems to keep you away from close contact with me. It is continuously working on the fears, pain, rebellion, anger, confusion, resentments, panic, and identifications of your hamzat to shape all of your behaviors, feelings and thoughts.

This is why the issue with your external Taliban ruler plays such a key role. The only real thing keeping our spiritual sides apart is the way your internal Taliban master is using your external Taliban master to keep your spiritual side in check. If your spiritual side finds sufficient courage and strength to walk away from the external Taliban titular ruler, then, your internal Taliban realizes that its rule might be in serious jeopardy and, as a result, a spiritual revolution might lead to its overthrow.

Just as you have begun to understand a little of why it is important to have zero contact with Ron -- although this e-mail is, I believe, explaining the real problem here and not what your counselor supposes is true (namely, your lack of consent to a controlling relationship) and how it is not your spiritual side but your hamzat side that is entirely powerless before Ron because of its addiction to him ...

an addiction that your internal Taliban side uses for its own ends -- so too, your Taliban side of things knows the more contact you have with me, the stronger your spiritual side gets, and, therefore, the more likely its rule becomes threatened.

One of the reasons why your internal Taliban forced you back to Brimley is because it thought this would bring the foregoing threat to an end. There was nothing there with the external Taliban ruler that was worth returning to, and it was not because of love, but because your internal Taliban thought this would stamp out the rebellion and I would turn away from you and abandon you and, then, your hamzat would be hurt further, and your internal Taliban would use that to gain further control over your life.

Your inner-Taliban ruler – your nafs -- had not expected that the spiritual side of either you or I would persist in the matter. And, in fact, the internal Taliban – as is true with most tyrants -- is not as smart as it supposes, and there have been a great many blind spots in its assessments and calculations.

There are three sides of you that are resistant to your external Taliban would-be ruler. There is your hamzat side, which despite its deep identifications with the external Taliban guy's (Ron's) hamzat, resents the way the external ruler's hamzat seeks to control you and squeeze the spiritual life out of you for its own purposes.

There is the inner-Taliban side of you that will use the external Taliban (i.e., Ron's nafs) when the former finds this convenient to do but that, on the other hand, also becomes annoyed and angry when the external Taliban ruler (Ron) forgets his role and place. Finally, there is the spiritual side of you that recognizes you have nothing in common with the external Taliban leader (Ron) and that you really love someone else (me) who does truly care for you and wishes your well-being.

When you returned to Brimley, and the external Taliban guy (i.e., Ron) began doing his primitive war dance once again -- the same old, same old -- then after a short amount of time of having to live with this 'same old, same old' routine of the external Taliban leader and after the jealousy and control issues of your hamzat had quieted down (which is the part of you that goes and sees your counselor and wishes to be relieved of the pain, anger, and resentment it feels), what was

happening in Brimley also began to bother your spiritual side that began to understand – however dimly -- that its very existence was being threatened and its love for another was in jeopardy of being lost forever ... and that spiritual side began to increasingly understand how it was being controlled by -- in addition to your own internal Taliban (who is one of the villains in all this (as it is the villain in all of us) -- by someone (namely, Ron) whom your spiritual side did not like, respect, trust, and whose very touch was beginning to make your skin crawl again, then the spiritual side -- weak as it was -- began to act in little but significant ways.

So, the calls started, and the plan for the e-mail contact was devised by purchasing a new computer, and, then, the e-mails themselves that began to express, in part, your true feelings. However, your internal Taliban side was still trying to use this to its advantage and manipulate things so there would be contact but not too much, and, finally, the internal Taliban side ended up with a compromise with which it could live for now ... that is, I can continue to write to you -- the spiritual side -- but your inner-Taliban leader (your nafs) will not let your spiritual side respond and, thereby, has sought to cut off real communication that is expressed through active, mutual reciprocity ... something your internal Taliban does not want.

Our escape plan -- if it is to work -- needs assistance and co-operation from the hamzat side of you. As long as the hamzat side of you continues to be used by your internal Taliban master in order to keep you in Brimley by manipulations of the fears, anxieties, anger, resentments, addictions, and sense of abandonment that your hamzat side feels, then, the chances of your escaping would seem to be very slim -- but Allah knows best.

Your spiritual side of things needs to focus on the sufferings of your hamzat and let her know there is a real way for her injuries and hurt to be healed, that she (the hamzat) is just being used by your internal Taliban tyrant for the latter's purposes and that, as well, your inner-Taliban ruler has no intentions of ever letting your hamzat heal or become healthy ... because a healed, healthy hamzat is not in the interests of either your inner-Taliban forces that are at work against you (in effect, the Taliban loses its chief ally, the ground forces it has

been rallying to fight its proxy wars with the external Taliban ruler, your spiritual side of things, and me).

Tell your hamzat all of its hurt, pain, and injuries can be healed through the soft, gentle, merciful help that, by God's leave, comes through our silsilah. Talk with your hamzat on an emotional level -- in a way that carries beyond words, and that is direct and intense ... letting the hamzat know what the spiritual side of you already knows - - that our silsilah and I can be trusted with the well-being and care of the hamzat, as well as, God willing, the spiritual well-being of your soul.

You cannot dislodge your inner Taliban by a direct assault. It is, at the present time, too well entrenched, and you, on your own, have neither the resources nor the strength to deal with it on your own.

However, your inner Taliban can be sufficiently displaced to permit, God willing, the little room you need to make good your escape and come into permanent contact with me and, through me, the silsilah. The way to do this is, as I said, converse with your hamzat at a very elemental, emotional level that is all the hamzat understands (hamzat does not operate by logic or reason or insight), and, in addition, have your hamzat focus on me -- not in the way that is going on in your fantasy space, but in spiritual space -- permit your hamzat to, God willing, draw strength from that focus with which to resist the manipulations of your internal and external Taliban antagonists. In addition, do your zikrs as much as possible -- especially 'la ilaha illah Lah' ... there is no reality but Allah.

Do write me through e-mails and call me on the phone, and, if you have enough courage, visit with me ... e-mails might help you, but they are no substitute for actual contact, any more than reading Rumi can serve as an equivalent substitute for being in his actual presence ... I am no Rumi, but the operative principle is the same in both cases. All of this contact strengthens you, and if your spiritual side of things is really interested in thwarting the plans of the internal and external Taliban forces seeking to destroy you, then, you will be very serious about everything that has been said in the foregoing, and take it to heart, and begin acting on it right away.

Your external and internal Taliban foes are the real villains in this, with your internal Taliban being a greater villain, perhaps, than your

external Taliban. However, they both are not acting as doorways of spirituality but as gateways for destructiveness. Your hamzat is an unwitting and unfortunate victim in all of this since her pain, anger, and hurt are being exploited by both inner and external Taliban-like forces.

There is only one player in all of this who can do what is necessary to create the space through which to escape, and this is your spiritual side. You have got to focus on your love for my spiritual side and use this love to convince hamzat that leaving Brimley is the only road to salvation and healing.

I have given you the escape plan and all of the reasoning behind it. But, if you will not act on it, then, I fear that the spiritual side of you might become sealed over, as God has indicated in the Qur'an and that, sometimes, is the fate of those spiritual beings who refuse to accept the Grace that Allah offers ... Grace that comes in many forms, and this is a constant refrain of the Prophets in the Qur'an and of Sufis across the centuries. If you truly hear what I am saying to you -- the spiritual side of you -- and if that side of you acts on what it is receiving by implementing what has been said (that is, talking to your hamzat, convincing, in an emotional way, your hamzat concerning the nature of what is going on, using your love to focus on me and getting hamzat to focus on me, doing the zikrs as much as possible, keeping in contact with me through e-mail, phone and in person) then, there might be a small window of opportunity here through which, God willing, you might break free. But, if you do not hear and respond appropriately and effectively, then, your fate might well be sealed and your internal Taliban will have won the battle while losing the war ... a truly Pyrrhic victory in which what has been gained by your internal Taliban will not be able to compensate for what has been lost to your spiritual side ... and all the pain and suffering that your hamzat and spiritual side have been enduring since you were six years old will have been for nothing, and you will have lived a life whose real value has been squandered.

If you want real independence and freedom, then, you will not find these through the moodiness of hamzat, or the machinations of your internal Taliban, but only through spirituality that in your case, is the Sufi path. Furthermore, if you suppose there is some other way to real

independence and freedom, then, you simply do not understand the nature of the war zone in which you currently are located.

Your situation is extremely precarious and there are hazards all about you, but if you have any real love for God, the Prophet, the silsilah, your shaykh, me and your spiritual side, then, you will have the courage to fight the good fight against your internal and external dictators. If you don't have this love -- even a little bit of it -- then, you might become, very soon -- although Allah knows best -- a casualty of war, a prisoner of war, or MIA.

I wish I could tell you a more pleasant story, but this is life, not fantasy. You either deal with life as it truly is, or you will be chasing phantoms around within your imagination for the rest of your life. If the latter happens, you will always be unhappy, angry, resentful, moody, hurt, lonely, addicted and feeling as if you have been abandoned, and, as well, you could run the risk of slipping into serious mental difficulty ... the getting 'real sick, real fast', that your counselor told you about.

The choice is entirely yours. Which side of you controls this choice will, by Allah's leave, determine the direction your life might take from here on out ... toward the light, or deeper into darkness.

Of course, although this e-mail is being directed to your spiritual side, your inner Taliban has been listening into the conversation all along and beginning to devise strategies of resistance to what is going on. This resistance will be channeled through your hamzat where you are most vulnerable, and this is precisely why your spiritual struggle is really the battle for control of hamzat and its emotional intensities. Know that the resistance you are experiencing is due to the way your internal Taliban is seeking to enslave your hamzat to do the biddings of the former and not permit your spiritual side to have any persuasive influence with hamzat.

Love,
Tariq

§

May 24, 2002

For a short time, I visit with Lara outside her place of work. I am startled and shocked by her appearance.

All the time we are talking, she is showing many signs of vigilance and PTSD. She keeps shading her eyes and scanning the horizon to see if Ron is cruising by or watching her talk with someone. She almost seems to be on the edge of panic or hysteria.

After the meeting, I write an e-mail to Lara.

Dear Lara,

Although in one way it was very nice to see you today and to be with you, in another way it was truly heart- and gut-wrenching. You were like a caged animal all the time I was talking with you ...eyes constantly darting here and there, quite uncomfortable with me, fairly eager to get rid of me.

As I said to you when I saw you today, your condition is far worse than when you first started to come to the office a year and a half ago. You have deteriorated a great deal -- emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually -- in just six-to-seven short weeks. You asked me if the problem was that, perhaps, you just wanted to be miserable. No, this is not the problem.

I do believe you when -- from time to time -- you have indicated you do want happiness, peace, love, harmony, and so on. Unfortunately, with you, there are a variety of things that made you unhappy all the time when we were together (constantly obsessing over and worried about Ron and feeling a deep sense of guilt about being away from him) ... forces that led you back to Brimley and that are keeping you there despite your recognition that you are a prisoner whose keeper is not only like a giant poison spider who slowly, slowly is sucking the life out of you, but who -- like in Robert Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters* and Colin Wilson's *Mind Vampires*, -- is taking control of everything you do and, then, exerting more and more pressure in order to seep ever more insidiously into your mind ... your soul ... and control your very thoughts, desires, and feelings.

In defense, and as you have indicated to me, you have, once again, started to go to your world of imagination. The fact you say I am there

-- or a virtual likeness of me -- is rather ironic, and also a very disturbing sign.

The irony is you would prefer a virtual likeness of me -- something that is, most assuredly, not me -- than the real thing which is yours for the taking. The disturbing side of your retreat into a world of fantasy is that it is one of the signs of impending psychosis. When people spend more and more time in a fantasy world in order to escape the pain of the real world or to escape from themselves, then, a point might come when they lose their way and don't know how to re-establish contact with reality or to distinguish between fantasy and reality. This is the risk you are running as you have started to retreat into the place you have told me about.

Now, while people are under the control of the aforementioned *Puppet Masters* and *Mind Vampires*, the victims feel the horror of what is going on and, yet, more and more give over control of everything ... piece by piece ... to the insatiable appetites of these monsters. In fact, such victims even begin to say and think these beings are not so bad after all.

You don't like, trust, respect, or enjoy your keeper, and, yet, more and more, you have given yourself over to him ... piece by piece. You keep drawing lines in the sand and saying that if he crosses the line, then, that's it ... that's the test, and, then, when he crosses it, you retreat and establish another line that is the next litmus test of your relationship, and, then, when that is crossed, you withdraw further, until, eventually, you will have no space at all -- outside or inside -- and, then, that will be the end of you as a human being ... whether you continue to live will be irrelevant, because, in truth, you will be dead ... there already is something of the zombie about you.

You can't think straight; you are irrational, a lot of the time, in what you say and do; you don't learn from experience; you are in deep danger and part of you knows it but you persist in your behavior anyway; you have great difficulty resisting complying with anything that your keeper wants, and even when you do resist, you are filled with guilt, and, in addition, you have great fear for when, next, you will find yourself giving him another piece of yourself.

Yet, your keeper is a decent guy -- you have said so, yourself. Your flesh crawls at his touch, but what a wonderful fellow.

He knows that you don't want to be with him, that you love someone else -- or, so, you have said to him -- and, yet, he wants to control your life more and more and know what you are thinking all the time and harassing you until he gets his way and not willing to consider your needs ... but he is a great guy.

He abuses people, but he is a great guy. He controls people, but he's a great and wonderful human being.

He has poor anger management skills, but hey, he took a course in this stuff, and, now, he only flies off the handle every other hour, and, did I tell you what a great guy he is. He lies, but what a wonderful liar he is.

He continually pressures, harasses, and stalks people, but he's really a great guy. He pouts and sulks and throws childish tantrums, but what a great guy.

He puts people in a constant state of fear, but, you know, he is really a great guy. He blames everyone but himself for what is wrong, but this is only because he is such a great guy.

And, even though you don't respect or trust him, he is, after all is said and done, just one heck of a guy. He imprisons people, and is self-serving in pretty much everything he does, but he sure is one great dude.

He sexually molests a little girl, but what a guy he is. He does things that make people not want to kiss him on the lips for more than two decades, but don't try to tell me that he is not a great guy. He abandons people again and again -- emotionally and spiritually -- but what else would you expect from such a great guy.

You let something slip today in our face-to-face conversation ... probably because you were more interested in pointing out yet another instance in which your Taliban keeper was not concerned with your feelings or needs and didn't seem to remember who you were talking to. You said that when you went over to the apartment to pick up your microwave, you were sad when you left the place because you were going to miss it ... obviously, this is the direction in which you are going, even though you claim you don't know where things will end up and even though you say, with very little credibility, that

you are going to get out of this thing, even as you permit your anaconda keeper to tighten the coils with each passing day and breath.

That's how they work you know -- anacondas that is. They coil about their prey and wait for the poor stupid creature to exhale, and, then, just before the inhale comes, the coils tighten, so the one in their clutches has less space in their lungs with which to take in oxygen. That is what your keeper is doing to you, and it shows in everything you do and say.

With respect to why you are permitting what is going on to continue -- under the pretext that you have some unfinished business with your Taliban master -- one could mention your history of sexual abuse, your resultant low self-esteem, self-hatred, and tendencies toward self-destruction, and that allowing your being to be consumed by the local version of Mullah Omar (i.e., Ron). One also could mention your various vulnerabilities to the issues of abandonment and how you have identified with your anaconda friend. One could speak about the post traumatic stress disorder that has been engendered through the loving embrace of your Taliban slave lord, and one also could mention anxiety-disorder, learned helplessness, immaturity, poor judgment, and a few other things along this line.

However, the real reason for you being where you are is your failure to be sincere with the Sufi path or with those who were entrusted with helping you. Moreover, the reason for this failure is summed up in three letters: e-g-o.

When you were trying your best to be sincere with us, your life was changing in every way for the better. You were -- by the Grace of God, and through the help of our silsilah, and with the kindness of your shaykh -- able to break away from the American Taliban. For a time, you became calmer, less anxious, clearer thinking, less stressed, more positive and self-confident, as well as happier.

When you began to be less sincere with us, all that had been given to you was gradually taken away until you find yourself where you are today. Just as there are physical principles like gravitation, there also are spiritual principles, and when these principles are violated, one has results similar to what happens when a person jumps off a cliff and enters into free fall ... until this ends in tragedy.

The issue is not about what Ron is, or is not, doing. The issue is what you have done to your relationship with God and our silsilah and how you have treated the servants of Allah.

The very first principle of the Sufi path is to follow the instructions that are given to one by the shaykh. When a person does this with an authentic shaykh, he or she succeeds, God willing, and when a person does not do this, then, he or she fails -- unless saved by God's Grace so that the person's fall is broken through the cushion of sincere repentance ... which means one acknowledges one has transgressed against one's own soul, and swears to God not to commit that transgression again.

You have taken the great compassion, kindness, mercy, and love that had been bestowed on you through the silsilah by Allah's leave, and you have treated that in a tawdry fashion by apparently deciding that your ego knew better about what was true, right, just, honorable, and fair. You were told from very near to the very beginning of things concerning what your Taliban leader was all about, and, this was one of the reasons why what was permitted to happen between us, happened, but, you knew better ... or, so, you seemed to feel and think. Unfortunately, you might have outsmarted yourself.

You were told very early on that your nafs and hamzat were at the source of your problems. However, you did not act in accordance with such guidance.

History might color and shape things this way and that, but the source of everyone's problems starts with nafs and its rebellion against following Divine guidance. Unfortunately, you indulged your rebellion in this regard by beginning to distance yourself more and more from everything that had, by the Grace of Allah, brought you out of your darkness into some sunlight.

One of the principles of spirituality is that when the nafs expands, the spirit contracts, and vice versa. In the beginning, when you were trying to follow guidance, your nafs began to contract, and your spirit was expanding, but, then, when you let your desire for independence, isolation, biases, and rebellion dominate, the reversal began and, soon you found yourself back in Brimley and you don't even know what happened ... what happened is what I am telling you.

As is true with most of the rest of us, there is an unbeliever in you - a part of you that doesn't really believe in all this 'mumbo jumbo' about God, heaven, hell, Satan, truth, morality, rules, principles, spiritual duties, and so on. The evidence supporting this claim is really very palpable with you, for if you truly believed in what you have been told through me, your behavior would have been different and, yes, behavior never lies.

When the part of you that does believe -- at least a little bit -- in these things was permitted to influence what was going on, you enjoyed the many benefits that came with this. When this part was permitted to be veiled and squeezed out by your nafs, you lost all of these benefits.

This is all very simple and straightforward. You don't have to look to trauma, childhood, therapists, emotional history, addiction, control, or any of these things in order to explain what went wrong, and is wrong, with you.

Of course, all of these other things might have provided vehicles through which nafs could shape your thoughts, feelings, and actions. However, the long and short of the matter is that you turned your back on the Divine gifts that had been given to you quite freely and graciously, and, as a result, you experienced your fall from Grace up close and personal.

You might hear what God, the Prophet, your shaykh, or I tell you, but you don't listen and pay proper attention to what is being said to you. Instead, everything said to you is being drowned out by the noise that is being made by the incessant chatter and babbling of your ego.

Something of great potential beauty and joy was given to us -- namely, our intense inclination toward one another. But over time you systematically abused this in a very cruel, heartless manner, and now little more is left to what was given to you except your own empty promises and words that are almost entirely devoid of actions that give expression to what the promises and words supposedly were intended to convey.

How easy it is to say you love someone when one doesn't have back-up what one says with sacrifice, discipline, compromise, reciprocity, actions, kindness, honor, trust, sincerity, truth, or decency.

What kind of love is it that would permit one to hurt someone again and again despite the fact of being told that what one is doing is very hurtful and painful? Do you think forgiveness means there is no pain involved ... no broken heart?

Why do you think that despite having the means to finish the 31st business between us - that is to divorce you -- I have not done this ... even though, at times, you have been very uncaring in what you have done and are continuing to do? Although Allah knows best, there is a very good chance that I might be your last outpost of mercy though which you might repent and once again, God willing, work toward the true purpose of life.

My biggest worry with respect to you is not that I will lose you -- which I do not want to do because I truly do love you in spite of everything that has gone on -- or that I very likely will never marry again or find someone with whom to make the spiritual journey together and, thereby, allay some of the loneliness. No, my biggest worry is about what might happen to your soul should I close the ledgers on the arrangements of the 31st -- especially since you seem to be too dominated by your own nafs to appreciate what you are doing and have done.

I can't emphasize strongly enough that what is going on with you has little to do with your external Taliban keeper. It has entirely to do with your relationship, or lack thereof, with God, and if I leave, you cannot assume that whatever little light you have now will continue to shine.

If you are not prepared to honor God, God might permit dishonor to come to you. If you will not respect God, God might allow disrespect to be directed toward you. If you are insincere with God, God might give leave for all manner of insincerity to enter your life. If you will not be just with God, then, God give might give permission for all manner of injustice to rain upon you. If you will not be bound by Divine principles, God might let you become entangled in the laws of the world (dunya) and nafs.

By staying in Brimley, you are not honoring God, nor respecting God, nor being sincere with God, nor being just with God, nor committed to Divinity. Look at your life now, and see what you have brought upon yourself ... you are becoming more and more

imprisoned by your Taliban anaconda who does not honor you, nor respect you, and is not sincere with you, nor just toward you, and you have become thoroughly entangled in the web of nafs and the world. You are reaping exactly what you have sown.

A person who wishes to serve as his or her own lawyer has a fool for a client. A person who seeks to be his or her own shaykh has an idiot for a mureed and Satan as a counselor.

You have but one way out of this mess ... and you are not going to do this on your own, and if you really think you are -- your ego's arrogance and stubbornness, notwithstanding -- then, I have some bridges in New York that I would like to sell you along with some swamp land in Florida. You must sincerely repent, ask God's forgiveness (remember, my forgiveness is not sufficient although it is present), stop what you are doing, and turn back to God, and if you do not do this, then, although Allah knows best, the prognosis for you might be extremely poor ... irrespective of whether things with your Taliban lord and master do, or do not, improve.

The foregoing is not self-serving for me to say because you were told all of this long before the present events transpired. All I am doing is reminding you what had been said previously and to what you had signed off on when you took initiation and, in addition, made other vows before God ... and, moreover, all of what I am saying now is very clear in the works of, among others, Rumi, Hafiz, and Attar (may Allah be pleased with them all) - all of whom you have read, enjoyed, and been inspired by.

I have done absolutely nothing for which you should have mistrust concerning me. I have been your friend and advocate since day one and have fulfilled all my promises to you.

Your subservience to, and solicitousness toward, your external Taliban lord is built on a foundation of lies. Even now for example, you not only lied to him about how long you had been in a relationship, but, as well, about what the precise nature of that relationship was. In addition, he knows nothing of the e-mails that have been going back and forth of late and what they contain and what the implications of that content might be.

Your external Taliban lord and master claims that you are not giving the relationship a fair chance ... that you are still living in the past. What he does not know, and what you might not even understand, is that if what you have been saying in your e-mails to be is true, then, the problem with your relationship with him is that it can never be given a fair chance to succeed, and this has little to do with the past, but is entirely a reflection of the present.

If your intention in returning to the side of your Taliban mentor was to try, anew, to succeed in your relationship with him, your intention was doomed before it ever was given expression in concrete actions, because now, both the past and the present are standing between the two of you, and how or why you think it is possible to turn things around in such an environment is anybody's guess. This is especially the case since you seem so convinced that you have what it takes to do this and do not appear to understand that you are fast approaching vegetable status and are losing all logic, energy, strength, courage, and control.

You are not winning the war of attrition, because your passive-aggressive strategy of alleged non-violence (which, in truth, is extremely violent toward all concerned, including yourself) is in retreat all along the war zone. You are the one who is caving in at every turn. Whenever and where ever you resist, and, say, no, he launches an offensive that does not let up until he gets what he wants and you surrender yet, another piece of yourself ... either in giving up something that you never said you would give up, or by giving away something else that, nonetheless, cuts down your options and just emboldens him to be more and more relentless in his pursuit of realizing his Taliban-like idea of Paradise -- one in which women are completely destroyed and have become little more than repositories in which the Taliban lord and masters might deposit his virility ... or one in which women have become little more than producers of chattel about whom the men might crow unless, of course, the 'product' happens to be a girl -- in which case she must be covered up, shut away, and prevented from developing the intelligence and talent that God gave her.

The only way you are going to open up enough space to, God willing, provide yourself an opportunity to free yourself from captivity

is to follow the escape plan that I have laid out for you and with which you said you were in complete agreement. And, the only way this is likely to happen is if you allow me to take you by the hand and physically stop you from going back to Brimley ... for as long as you are in Brimley, you have almost zero chance -- although Allah knows best - - of breaking free and turning back toward Allah. You still seem to be in denial about the fact that you got out of Brimley the first time by God's Grace and not by your own devices ... your contribution was to not resist the Grace that was being bestowed on you and to allow that Grace to take you to Weston Beach and, then, to your apartment in Bamford.

You are deep in the throes of an insidious addiction, and the potential for this addiction preceded your love affair with the bottle, or your Taliban form of methadone that allowed you to replace one addiction with another. You have within you your own Taliban tyrant who will not permit you freedom and is actually allied with your external Taliban lord and master to keep you in your prison whose walls are closing in on you -- your spiritual self -- from all directions at an accelerating rate.

You say you love me. There is one way you can prove this -- accept, work with, and do not resist the escape plan. If you love me, you will, if God wishes, be able to take this step, just as you have contacted me by phone, and arranged to get e-mail, and said all the things that you have in those e-mails.

I can't force you to do this -- although if I had a country estate somewhere in a rural, sparsely populated area, I might be tempted to kidnap and let you detoxify far from the maddening crowd of your external Taliban prison. All addictions require co-operation from the one is beset by the addiction.

Your love for God might seem a very distant thing to you right now, and you might suppose that God's love for you seems to be even more remote under the present set of circumstances. But Allah's love for you is shining through my intense inclination, caring, and friendship for you ... you must understand where this love is coming from and what it really means. In addition, although you might not recognize it as such, if you have love for me, this is an expression of

your love for God because what you love in me is a reflection of the Divine.

This is one of the reasons why God has made men and women the way God has. God is infinite and beyond our grasp, for the most part, but we feel God's presence when we fall in love with someone, for it is only by the Grace of Allah that such a love can exist ... although we, through our ignorance, foolishness, and rebellion, might veil and marginalize that love.

If you wish to love God, then, use your love for me to help catapult you toward Divinity. By turning your back on our love, you are turning your back on the love that God has for you and that serves as one of the primary means through which one can begin to truly, and sincerely, work toward self-realization and closeness to Allah.

If you are not able to take the step and actively work and cooperate with me on the escape plan, then, there is a very good chance that despite whatever emotions you might feel, it is not love, for love is not an empty, action-less, entity ... real love moves us and opens us up to spiritual transformation -- it is not content with just writing e-mails.

You don't have forever on this. My situation on Garbo street is very precarious in a number of different ways, most of them financial. If I have to leave, I am very, very much afraid of what might become of you.

The ego is such that it will accept no other as master other than itself. This is why your ego resists your external Taliban lord and master, but it is also why you are resistant to God and unwilling to allow yourself to be dependent (in the constructive sense) with anyone, no matter how sincere the latter's intentions might be.

I love you very much, and I try to show this in lots of different ways, but I need you to love me as well in an active way ... and a good beginning would be to put the escape plan into operation as soon as possible.

Love,
Tariq

§

May 25, 2002

Lara says me a virtual postcard, and, I send one back to her using the same virtual postcard service. The text of my postcard reads:

My wish is: for you to be happy; for you to be surrounded by peace and love; for you to be free of tyranny, both from without and within; for you to long to be with me so badly you will have the courage to do what you know is right and let me take you by the hand on our journey toward God; to accompany you on your trip to Hartford; for you to understand that you are not helping Ron by staying with him, but hurting him because you are permitting him to continue to act in ways that are not pleasing to God; for you to seek to please God and honor that which Divinity has given to you as a kindness and a mercy (namely, the Sufi path and me); for you to be willing to sacrifice your nafs on the altar of love, and let the past go; for you to be with me and love me all the days of my life -- not from a distance, but near ... so, very near; for you to wish what I wish; for you, by God leave, to make my wish come true.

§

May 25, 2002

Lara and Ron -- at Ron's urging -- have bought a new camper. They have taken it out to Camp Washington for an annual, AA event.

§

May 25, 2002 (e-mail)

Dearest Tariq,

Finally I was able to get my postcard from you. It made me cry. I love you so much. I hope I can do it.

I love you with all my heart -- I just wish my nafs would go away and leave me alone. Wishing doesn't help, I know, but perhaps prayer will help.

I love you.

Lara

§

May 25, 2002 (e-mail)

You are probably tired of receiving e-mails from me -- especially, long ones like the one I sent to you not too long ago. However, I promise to be brief -- or, relatively so.

By all means, do pray, and I am praying, as well. But, you should understand Allah already has given His blessing to you by granting you both: initiation with respect to the Sufi path as well as marriage to me. What has been missing from all of this is your blessing.

God wants what your spiritual side wants, but you have to be willing to lend a helping hand to this. This is part of what is meant when God instructs people in the Qur'an to be 'helpers of Allah'.

How can we be helpers of Allah? ... by embracing what God sends to us in the way of opportunity and Grace. We are helpers of Allah -- or not -- through the intentions that, God willing, we have with which to receive what is sent to us by Divinity and through how the manner of our receiving what is sent leads to behavior of a kind that is pleasing to God.

When the intentions are sincere, this is helping Allah, because we have done our part, and, if God wishes, action follows that is colored and shaped by those intentions. If the intentions are not sincere, then, behavior gets colored and shaped in another way.

It is not enough for God to want what we want, we must want what God wants for us, and we must prove we want this in a sincere way by intending in a harmonious, resonant fashion with what God wishes for us. How do we know whether our intentions are sincere or not, by the taste of the behaviors that come from them -- which is why behavior never lies ... for it cannot hide the sort of intentional origins out of which those actions arise.

Nafs corrupts the sincerity of intention. If you concentrate on allowing the sincerity of your spiritual side to shine through and God willing, to carry the day -- and to do this, you must stop the ways in which nafs is corrupting your sincerity through, among other things, its working in collusion with your external Taliban master (i.e., Ron), as well as your wounded hamzat -- then, God willing, you will find your prayers and my prayers will, by God's leave, be answered ... for you will be helping Allah through the sincerity of your actions to overcome the death-grip your internal Taliban (i.e., your nafs) now has on you -- and the behaviors resulting from this will not lie either.

Yes, pray, but remember another level of meaning of your recent dream about trying to play the Guldasta, is that you already know what to do and how to do it, and what is stopping you from doing this is not because of the need for something you perceive to be external to yourself (i.e., the keyboards, or God) to intervene and make playing the song possible. God already has given you everything you need in order to play the Guldasta ... in your dreams and in real life. All you have to do is let yourself play ... but because of having given control of your life over to your nafs, you have stopped yourself from bringing to fruition what God and your spiritual side, as well as your shaykh and me already are actively wanting. All that is missing is your sincerity of intention that, God willing, will lead to the behavior -- your leaving Brimley -- which we all want ... including you.

Yes, pray, but, first work on the sincerity, and struggle to work toward realizing that sincerity in the ways that I have revealed to you in the earlier, longer e-mail, sent earlier today.

Love,
Tariq

§

May 25, 2002

Lara has sent me a picture of the full moon that she was looking at while at Camp Washington. She says that she wishes I were there with her to share the beauty of the moon, and she indicates, again, how intensely she misses me.

In response, I send the following e-mail:

Dear Lara

Thank you very much for the picture of the moon -- knowing you were there looking at it makes me ache, as well, and I wished I could have been there with you, lying down someplace that was peaceful and who knows, doing a little embracing, kissing, and looking at the moon as well.

There is a hadith or tradition concerning the Prophet in which one of his Companions reported that one night the Companion was sitting with the Prophet, and there was a full moon. The Companion kept looking at the moon, and, then, the Prophet, and he couldn't decide which was more beautiful: the full moon (which in the desert can really be quite something to behold) or the face of the Prophet.

The soul has been described as, like the moon, the last outpost, in the night of ignorance, which reflects the rays of the spirit or Sun. We are naturally drawn to the full moon because of its symbolic resonance with metaphysical truths.

I hope all I have written to you has not been too much. I have tried to address pretty much every aspect of what is going on, and I have tried to offer something of value to all facets of your being: for your spiritual side, your hamzat, your nafs, and for your capacity to reason and reflect ... all as food for thought and consideration. All the answers and directions have been given to you. All that is needed is for you to recognize, when the time is ready, to make good your escape -- from your inner and outer Taliban jailers.

I love you, and you are constantly in my thoughts, heart, and prayers. You are with my memories in other places as well, but, God willing, I shall have to keep that aspect of things safely tucked away or else I might end up having to take a lot of showers ... and the arrangements here are not all that conducive to taking showers.

Please focus on me in your heart and try to draw strength, courage, and resolve from the love you have for me and that I have for you. And, please do continue to speak gently and lovingly to your hamzat about us and our mutual love for her and our concern for her wellbeing and happiness.

I hope you go on your trip to Hartford alone. You really do need some time to yourself to think about things, and six hours alone would help you in this regard. In fact, one of the primary reasons why Ron wants to go with you is to make sure you don't have too much time to think ... because thinking can be dangerous and might lead to very unpredictable and uncontrollable ramifications.

Part of the tactics of control is to crowd people and pressure them so they have no opportunity to escape from the pressure and crowding that is coloring so much of what is going on. Going to Hartford alone would be like your escaping from him ... in fact, it would be a sort of mini-escape, and he doesn't want you having time to yourself to think for yourself ... he needs to occupy as much of your time, resources, energies, and thinking as possible ... because if they are not entangled with him, who knows where they might be directed?

Remember, you have the capacity to say "no". The locus of control is with you, not Ron.

Ron doesn't come with you to your job every day, and he doesn't have to come with you on your job-related task in Hartford. Yes, you will have to deal with the unpleasantness that arises from your hamzat, along with the unpleasantness generated by his nafs and hamzat, because of your refusal, but six hours to yourself would be a vacation these days ... something you very much need.

Isn't the state motto of Maine -- or one of the New England states - - "Don't Tread on Me"? This is a direct reference to the fight against tyranny and oppression that our forefathers and foremothers fought several centuries ago. That fight continues today, whether against tyranny in different parts of the world or against the terrorist with whom one is living.

Please be careful in your driving. Don't become so preoccupied with your situation in conjunction with Ron that you forget to pay attention to what you are doing.

With all my love,

Tariq

§

May 25, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Lara,

This will be a very brief message -- relatively speaking -- but it is important. Although you experience your consciousness as one field, there are many streams emptying into that field ... and all of these streams have their own properties, qualities, characteristics, interests, inclinations, and so.

Everything that is going on in you sends ripples to your consciousness and leaves signs of their presence. One of these signs is the taste of different shaping forces of your understanding and awareness.

Your hamzat has her taste. Your nafs has its taste, your spiritual side has her taste, the world has its tastes, and Iblis has his taste.

Examine the contents of your consciousness -- your ideas, feelings, motivations, inclinations, fears, goals, purposes, hopes, resistances, attractions. Try to begin to identify the tastes these contents have, and begin to identify the players who are vying for control of your understanding, consciousness, intentions, and actions.

By 'taste' I mean this. Dreams have a certain quality about them that allows one to distinguish between dreams and waking reality. This quality or set of qualities is the taste of a dream.

Similarly, thinking and feeling both have different sorts of characteristic properties that, for the most part, permit one to distinguish between thinking and feeling, and the experiential differences between the two are their tastes. In short, taste has to do with the various qualitative characteristics that color and shape different facets of the phenomenology of experience along with that which permits one to distinguish between one kind of experience and another kind of experience within the field or phenomenology of awareness.

Learn to distinguish among hamzat, nafs, spirit, the world, and Iblis by grasping the nature of their tastes and the variety of flavors that such tastes can have. When you are able to do this, then, you will know what players are seeking to assert themselves within consciousness and then, God willing, you might be able to direct or

influence the flow of focus, energy, motivation, intentions, beliefs, ideas, values, and so on that transpire in consciousness.

In the language of the courts, the foregoing is like testing the credibility of witnesses by examining their backgrounds and the factors that might be slanting their testimony in one way or another. Don't just accept what comes into consciousness. Inquire into the character and motivations of the forces that are presenting 'evidence' by depositing their testimony into your consciousness.

Once you realize that not everything that appears in your consciousness is from your spiritual side, then, you have an opportunity to reserve judgment on the wisdom of what you are being urged to do by any of the witnesses appearing before you in consciousness until you have had time to ask some probing questions about the intentions, character, reliability, and credibility of those witnesses or players who are within you and trying to influence your judgment in any given matter.

Identify the taste of your spirit ... and be careful in this affair, because both nafs and Iblis will seek to throw counterfeits at you who pose as your spiritual side, but are quite the opposite. Your spiritual side is the only part that will tell you the truth all the time and do so sincerely -- that is, with your best interests and well-being as the number one priority for doing so. Right now, your spirit has at least one flavor with which you are familiar -- her love for me, and you know what such love tastes like (and it is different from lust, need, attraction, liking, addiction, compulsion, obsession, and so on).

If things are happening within you and you are not certain of the identity of the player, look for this taste of love. If it is not present, then, know you are not dealing with spirit but with some other player.

Nafs, hamzat, and Iblis are not capable of love, although each -- in its, her, or his own way -- tries to offer something that simulates love. With nafs, the qualities of greed, lust, envy, selfishness all have a quality of intense attraction about them, but they lack the reciprocity, selflessness, or sincerity of love, and, therefore, all of the foregoing qualities of nafs have tastes that are different from love.

In the case of hamzat, there is a deep intensity of emotion, but this has to do with such things as emotional attraction, addiction,

compulsion, desire, empathy, and identification in relation to an object, idea, cause, or person. These qualities all have their own taste, and with experience and reflection, they can be differentiated from love and nafs.

Iblis uses guile, whispering, deception, lies, and various kinds of pressure to try to convince you that something -- say, a feeling or emotion -- is love, or that a certain motivation springs from love, but upon close examination, one sees there is an agenda of some kind involved. Love has no agenda other than to be what it is ... something that reflects a certain dimension of Divinity.

Love is constructive, transforming, healing, sincere, trustworthy, noble, honest, generous, peaceful, inspiring, given to reciprocity, joyous, only interested in the welfare of the other, non-demanding, and free of coercion, pressure, duress, or expectation. If one reflects on these qualities, one begins to see clear lines of taste demarcations among the ways in which: spirit, nafs, hamzat, and Iblis conduct themselves respectively.

One cannot only detect these differences in oneself, but one begins to be able to detect these differences in what comes to one from other people. Acquire a taste for the different flavors of your consciousness. Become a discerning connoisseur with respect to the quality of experiential tastes.

Love,

Tariq

§

Since Lara is away for the next several days, I decide to write a number of e-mails addressing various aspects of her and our situation. I am not expecting any replies -- at least, not right away -- but I am trying to provide her with things on which to reflect ... food for thought for different dimensions of her being.

The first piece I write is about AA and the mystical path. I have been reflecting on this issue over a period of time, and it is based on a variety of discussions that I have had with Lara and other members of AA in conjunction with a saying well known in AA circles – ‘And more will be revealed’.

§

One of the primary reasons why the twelve steps are couched in the language of a 'Higher Power' that reflects an individual's own beliefs is in order to provide alcoholics with as inclusive an entryway, or starting point, as possible so that people who are suffering might not be unnecessarily hindered from becoming open to a process that is designed to help them resolve one of the sources of that suffering -- namely, their loss of control over the role that drinking plays in their lives. In addition, many of the people who come to AA -- whether they stay or leave -- have had very negative experiences with organized religion and related theologies, and while they might retain some sense of there being Something or Someone Which or Who is responsible for the Universe and one's having existence, they tend to shy away from doctrines, rituals, and frameworks that are to be imposed from without rather than chosen from within the heart of that individual.

The first affirmation of an alcoholic's heart is that she or he has lost control of life and that, instead, behaviors -- no matter what one's intentions might be -- are governed by the inexorably relentless, destructive forces of addiction. The second affirmation of the heart of an alcoholic seeking to regain control of his or her life is that only a Power greater than the individual's addiction could possibly restore any sense of sanity to that person's life. The third affirmation of the heart of an alcoholic seeking to restore some semblance of sanity in her or his life is the recognition of a need to turn one's life and will over to such a Power. The fourth affirmation of an alcoholic's heart is that the third affirmation only becomes a possibility through the Grace of that Power that was acknowledged by the second affirmation of an alcoholic's heart when confronted with the bitter realities of her or his first affirmation.

What does the individual know who has been opened up to the fourth affirmation of the heart noted above? First, he or she knows there is, indeed, such a thing as Grace. Secondly, she or he knows that accepting Grace requires struggle and discipline. Finally, such an individual knows that whatever his or her personal concept of a

'Higher Power' might be, this was far less important than the reality of the experience of that 'Higher Power's' intervention in her or his life.

On the basis of such experience, and irrespective of whatever the individual's conceptual starting point might have been, there tends to be a certain clarification of understanding concerning the nature of the 'Higher Power'. One might not know if the ultimate character of this 'Higher Power' is a 'She', 'He', 'It' 'Spirit', 'Power' 'Entity' 'Being', or some other manner of Reality, but one does sense that Divinity has a personal interest in one's life ... that Divinity is not indifferent ... that Divinity cares what happens to us ... that Divinity has compassion and love and forgiveness for us, despite our mistakes ... that Divinity wishes to offer us opportunities for redemption and salvation ... that Divinity intends something more for us than being drunk ... that Divinity wishes to help us end the suffering and destruction that has entered our lives, and, therefore, the lives of other people ... that Divinity not only listens to our cries for Mercy, but responds, as well ... that Divinity is kind, generous, compassionate, and a friend.

The foregoing clarification of understanding is not based on philosophical reflection or exercises in the metaphysics of theology. That clarification is not based on being a member of this or that church, mosque, temple, synagogue, or place of worship, or subscribing to this or that set of religious doctrines.

Instead, the clarification of understanding is rooted entirely in the personal experience of Grace having entered one's life and moved it in a different direction -- a direction that is away from addiction and, therefore, toward a direction that just a few short days or weeks previously, seemed impossible. One's faith in the 'Higher Power' was increased due to personal experience and not as a result of conceptual musings.

One did not think one's way to the fact of Divinity's compassion, kindness, generosity, forbearance, forgiveness, friendship, support, and help. First, these qualities entered one's life, and, subsequently, one's understanding of Divinity was clarified and refined as a reflection of that experience.

Although some people in AA do not wish to engage Divinity beyond the blessing of sobriety, there are hints in the twelve steps that suggest there is more to spirituality than the gift of sobriety, and there

are those in AA who have been seeking this dimension of 'more'. Unfortunately, other than the tremendous force of change that comes into an alcoholic's life as a result of the transformation arising out of the transition from drunkenness to sobriety, there often seems to be little opportunity within AA for the sorts of profound, personal experiences that will transport the rest of one's life in a similarly intense fashion to the shores of complete spiritual fulfillment.

Yes, there are the established institutions of religion and some people do become committed to finding their spiritual answers from within these traditions. Yet, there are all too many people in AA who are spiritually thirsty and who desire to realize the deeper spirituality to which the 12 steps allude but, who, for whatever reasons -- good or bad -- are reluctant to commit themselves to these sort of institutions, and, so, for such individuals, where do they go, or to whom do they go, in order to continue their spiritual quest?

There is one possibility -- or, more precisely, a set of possibilities -- which might serve the needs of this group of spiritually displaced refugees. This involves the mystical path.

Someone has described the relationship between exoteric traditions (the religions of salvation, rites, rituals, and theology) and the esoteric way (the traditions of essential, spiritual Self-realization) as like that of the relationship of the rim of a wagon wheel with the central axis of that same wheel. More specifically, when one looks at things from the perspective of the rim, then, the spokes connecting the rim with the center seem very separate from one another ... as do the various religious traditions when viewed through the glasses of their respective theologies, rituals, and so on. However, when one reaches the center of the wheel, where all of the spokes come together, then, one appreciates the principles of unity that govern the functioning of the wheel despite the apparent disparities of the individual spokes, and, similarly, when one is opened up to the mysteries of Self-realization, then, one experiences, in direct fashion, the unity that underlies and glues together the apparently disparate aspects of life ... including seemingly different exoteric, religious traditions.

Mysticism or spirituality -- unlike traditional, exoteric approaches to existence --- does not require one to believe in little other than the possibility that there is something more to life and our being than

appears on the surface of existence. One does not have to accept a particular theology, eschatology or metaphysics ... instead, one starts from where one is and on the basis of personal experience -- not concepts -- one works toward a clarification and refinement of a person's understanding concerning one's relationship with Divinity.

The model in AA is that one seeks out a sponsor ... someone who herself or himself has gone through the ups and downs of the quest for sobriety and, therefore, has some insight into, and experience with, the problems, danger zones, temptations, and issues of such a quest. The model in mysticism is similar ... one's spiritual quest is aided through the insight, experience, wisdom, and understanding of someone who has journeyed along the ups and downs of the mystical path under the guidance of her or his own spiritual sponsor ... sometimes referred to as a guide, teacher, mentor, or master.

To remain on the path to sobriety within AA, one requires discipline and struggle. Reality is not whatever we would like it to be, and one cannot act in accordance with whichever whims and desires happen to surface within one at any given moment in time and assume that sobriety will be maintained under such circumstances.

Similarly, to remain on course for the possibility of mystical or spiritual Self-realization, one needs discipline and a willingness to struggle. For the would-be mystic, Reality is not whatever she or he would like it to be, and he or she cannot act in accordance with whichever whims and desires are manifesting themselves at any given moment in time and still expect to remain on the path.

Just as AA is an on-going process of recovery, so, too, the mystical path is an on-going process of purification. Just as AA emphasizes principles over personalities and organizational issues, so too, mysticism gives emphasis to principles over personalities and organizational issues. Just as the goal of AA is to provide people with a safe place within which to pursue sobriety, so, too, mysticism offers individuals a safe haven within which to pursue spirituality. Just as AA stresses the importance of anonymity, so, too, mysticism calls the individual to the anonymity of an ego-less Self-hood in which the lower self is transformed and becomes immersed in, and at one with: the Void that is full, Reality, Truth, the 'Higher Power', God, Divinity,

the Great Mystery, or whatever other label one prefers for the Absolute Being that makes all things possible.

AA is a path of Grace that bears the gift of sobriety for some of those who struggle to keep faith with that Grace. Mysticism, too, is a path of Grace that bears the gift of Self-realization for some of those who struggle to keep faith with that Grace.

Why do some people succeed in AA, while others fail, or why do some people succeed on the mystical Path, while others do not? The answer to each of these questions is steeped in a mystery whose answer remains known only to Divinity.

However, one thing is certain. Unless one tries to struggle with the way of AA or the way of the mystic, failure is pretty much guaranteed in both cases.

There is a teaching story among the mystics that talks about the four kinds of people who exist. (1) There are those who know and who know that they know ... these are the spiritual guides, so learn from them. (2) There are those who know, but do not know that they know ... these people are asleep, and need to be awoken. (3) There are those who do not know and know that they do not know ... these people can learn, so teach them. (4) There are those who do not know and do not know that they do not know ... these people are the spiritually ignorant, and one should avoid them.

When first hearing the foregoing, I thought the story was about four different kinds of individual. Over time, I was brought to the realization that all four of the foregoing types of people reside within one.

Within each of us is the capacity for a true understanding and knowledge of our relationship with Divinity. However, in order for that dimension of one's being to be activated, one must learn how to avoid the spiritually ignorant dimensions of one's nature, and the only way to do this is to learn from those who have either achieved Self-realization, or are well on the way to such realization, and to use what we learn from such individuals to awaken ourselves, God willing, to our true, essential nature.

There is one interesting difference between the path of AA and the mystical or spiritual way. The central purpose of AA is to provide an

opportunity for alcoholics to seek sobriety by abandoning intoxication, whereas among the mystics, one seeks to become intoxicated with the Presence of Divinity on the way to a sobriety that integrates the intoxication of a loving spiritual ecstasy with a profound humility toward, awe of, and gratitude for, the Divine Presence.

The alcoholic has experienced intoxication and mistook a fleeting, illusory, shadowy experience for another kind of reality that is neither: fleeting, illusory, nor shadowy. Spiritual intoxication is essentially transforming, constructive, and liberating for our core being, whereas the intoxication of alcohol is essentially limiting, destructive, and enslaving of that spiritual core.

The following pages outline the 12 Steps and Traditions of a process called AAMP (Addictions Anonymous Mystical Potential). The idea is offered as a possibility for, among others, those who are seeking to explore spirituality more but who are not able to do so either through the regular meetings of AA, and who, for whatever reasons, are seeking an alternative to traditional exoteric approaches to spirituality.

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Twelve Steps of AAMP

1) Alcoholism is but one symptom of a more pervasive, underlying disease of the soul that manifests itself through many kinds of addiction and dysfunctional behaviors, and we admit that our spiritual potentials are being held prisoner due to the addictions of our lower selves and, as a result, our lives have become spiritually unmanageable.

2.) We believe that only through escape from these addictions of our lower selves will true spiritual: equilibrium, knowledge, love, justice, peace, and happiness enter into our lives.

3.) We recognize the need to exchange our habituation to worldly desires and entanglements for commitment to a higher spiritual purpose through which our addictions might be healed and our lives transformed.

4.) In order to be receptive to the presence of spiritual opportunities for changing our lives, we understand that gaining insight into the dynamics that maintain our imprisonment might be of value to us -- for, through such knowledge we develop an appreciation for the things that can hinder or advance our spiritual quest.

5.) In order to develop spiritual maturity, we acknowledge that we have responsibility for our addiction and, consequently, we have a duty of care with respect to ourselves, others, and the One Who has made our lives possible to begin to take steps to become spiritually free from bondage to our lower selves.

6.) We have faith that: if we struggle to seek Divine support for our spiritual quest, then not only will Divinity extend a helping hand, but that our very faith itself is a sign of the presence of such assistance.

7.) We know that no spiritual change is possible through our own unaided efforts and that the Presence of Divine Grace is the means through which we spiritually struggle, move, and become transformed.

8.) We feel the spiritual quest actively begins with our willingness to sincerely forgive all the wrongs that have been done to us, as well as with our need to be forgiven for all the wrongs we have done to others while operating under the influence of the addictions of our lower selves.

9.) While approaching Divinity according to our concept of the Divine marks the place where, of necessity, we all begin, we maintain that the Divine transcends all concepts, and, therefore, part of spiritual struggle involves a readiness to let go of those ideas concerning Divinity that prevent us from becoming fully open to the Divine Presence as a living Reality at the core of our being.

10.) We are committed to the principle that spiritual transformation is not possible without sincere, persistent efforts on our part with respect to seeking escape from the shackles of our lower selves and that acting on such a commitment is the best way to demonstrate sincerity of purpose.

11.) We agree that the likelihood of spiritual transformation might be enhanced through the use of such spiritual tools as: prayer, remembrance, chanting, meditation, contemplation, retreats, fasting,

fellowship, community service, celebrations of gratitude, and discussion.

12.) We submit that the key to spiritual awakening is to realize the potential of the essential Self ... for the essential Self is not only the gateway to personal communion with Divinity, but, as well, the medium through which the unique spiritual gifts that have been entrusted to us by Divinity might become manifest. As such, spiritual realization of the essential Self is the reason why we have been created and, therefore, gives expression to the purpose of life.

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Twelve Traditions of AAMP

1.) The purpose of AA is to help people achieve sobriety through a spiritual framework, but sobriety is not an end in itself -- merely an opportunity for, among other things, seeking further spiritual ends, and, therefore, while AA, by the Grace of God, serves its function very well, it stands in need of a complementary, but completely separate, spiritual doorway through which those people in AA, and others of kindred spirit, who are so inclined might pursue the aforementioned 'further spiritual ends' -- this complementary but separate doorway is known as AAMP ... Addictions Anonymous Mystical Potential.

2.) Spirituality is not a matter of religions, dogma, theologies, doctrines, rituals, philosophies, organizations, or systems of thought -- rather, spirituality is the potential inherent in human kind for engaging, bearing witness to, communicating with, loving, worshiping, knowing, and serving the Divine Presence through the experiences of struggling toward, and God willing, achieving Self-realization.

3.) There is no compulsion in matters of spirituality and, therefore, each human being is free to pursue, ignore, or reject the possibilities entailed by spirituality and, in addition, each human being needs to recognize the right of others to freely choose in this respect, as well.

4.) A spiritual community is only as good as the sincerity of the individuals who are its members. A spiritual community that becomes authoritarian, dogmatic, judgmental, oppressive, controlling,

manipulative, and static is such because its members have permitted their lower selves to corrupt that community.

5.) The purpose of AAMP is not to provide people with either spiritual answers or a spiritual path but to serve as a forum through which those people in AA, and others of kindred spirit, who are so inclined might be introduced to, learn about, explore, and discuss spiritual possibilities that extend beyond the horizons of the purpose for which AA exists.

6.) The spirit of AAMP should -- with certain differences -- be like a New England town meeting in which people come together as equals in a safe, inclusive environment for exploring and discussing any and all issues of potential relevance to the matter of spirituality ... the differences would be: (1) nothing that is discussed or explored in these meetings is binding on any of the participants; (2) there should be no authority structure except what is needed to conduct an orderly meeting (and this supervisory or chairperson role should change from one meeting to the next in accordance with the general consensus of the people in attendance) so that no one individual or group of individuals is permitted to dominate the proceedings and all perspectives have an opportunity to be heard.

7.) The chairperson who is nominated and elected, via an open vote, at the end of any given AAMP meeting, is responsible for starting things off at the next meeting, and this might be done through a reading, relating of personal experience, a short talk, introducing a spiritual theme for consideration, or inviting a guest speaker or demonstration, and in the latter case, one of the primary points of emphasis should be to provide participants with an opportunity to engage guests in dialogue and an exchange of perspectives.

8.) The focus of meetings should always be on issues of spirituality, and this should be done in a way in which the exploratory process, itself, is conducted in a spiritual manner -- involving kindness, sensitivity, compassion, generosity, forbearance, patience, friendship, and sincerity -- so that none of the participants feels under attack or the object of ridicule. In addition, participants should be free from any pressure that seeks to induce them to move in one spiritual direction rather than another ... there is a difference between, on the one hand,

the honest exchange of perspectives during a process of spiritual exploration and, on the other hand, proselytizing or evangelism.

9.) The only requirement for AAMP membership is a desire to overcome the addictions of the lower self in order to struggle toward spiritual Self-realization ... which means that although AAMP might begin within the AA community, nonetheless, people outside of AA are free to attend if they share the same intention as do other participants of AAMP.

10.) No one, spiritual community should dominate AAMP meetings, and, therefore, contributions should be sought from: Buddhist, Hindu, the Vedanta, Native, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Taoist, Sikh, Zoroastrian, and other spiritual sources -- however, there is a distinction to be drawn between the occult that is primarily preoccupied with the acquisition of various powers and/or control of forces, and the spiritual or mystical that is primarily preoccupied with the realization of the essential Self's potential, and AAMP is concerned with the latter, not the former.

11.) All AAMP groups are autonomous (and, consequently, responsible for their own expenses ... usually limited to meeting space and, possibly, refreshments) but might co-operate with one another in the exploration of spirituality, and share resources for that purpose, as is deemed appropriate, feasible, and convenient by a general consensus of the AAMP groups involved.

12.) No AAMP group might be used for: (1) political purposes; (2) to serve the worldly, commercial, or personal interests (other than that of spirituality), of any of its participants; (3) endorsing, recommending, promoting, contributing to, or serving the interests of any particular spiritual tradition, group, or organization.

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After completing the piece on mysticism and AA, I decide, for a variety of reasons, to put off forwarding the material to Lara. Instead, I begin to write an e-mail.

May 25, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Lara,

This is a bit of a clarification on something said several e-mails ago (the longer one). Although nafs will be listening to everything I have told you -- the spiritual side of you -- concerning what to do and how to do it, and as a result, will interpret the instructions as a threat to its continued rule over you and take steps to disrupt and undermine what is going on by trying to call on the intense feelings of your wounded hamzat to pressure you to do what the nafs wishes, nevertheless, there is something in all of this that is beyond the capabilities of nafs, vis-à-vis hamzat, to grasp.

More specifically, although nafs understands emotion, desire, pain, anger, lust and so on, the unredeemed nafs cannot speak the language of love. In fact, love is to the unredeemed nafs what garlic is to the mythical vampire -- something that is offensive, painful, threatening, and mysterious as to the source of its power over the vampire.

This is why if your spiritual side communicates with your hamzat with love, the nafs will not be able to understand what is going on or the influence that such love has with respect to the hamzat. You will be like the Navajo Indians during the Second World War -- the 'wind talkers' -- who passed on important messages in their native tongue that could not be decoded by the Germans or the Japanese.

Rather than wasting your time in your fantasy space, create a place of love within you through which you can whisper softly to hamzat's heart. I will be in that place with you, and together we can reach out to hamzat. Moreover, you will find your way to this place by calling, with love, to hamzat within yourself, and you will feel her presence through her sense of being wounded, her pain, her hurt, and in that meeting place make your oasis of love.

As I have indicated to you previously, hamzat is rooted in intense emotion and knows nothing of logic, reason, argument, evidence and so on. But she does understand emotion and communicates with you that way.

Indeed, the reason why you often are not able to articulate what you are feeling is because what you are feeling is from hamzat who deals only with feeling and emotion. In addition, she (your hamzat) has the capacity to recognize and be influenced by the presence of love, even if she is not able to fully comprehend what the nature of the force of love is all about. Unlike the unredeemed nafs that is repelled by the presence of real love -- often responding with sarcasm, criticism, skepticism, and cynicism -- hamzat is drawn to love and enjoys its presence in a way that can be felt but which is very difficult to put in words ... the presence of love brings an intense joy to the hamzat.

Speak the language of love. You can convey this to your hamzat by focusing, from your spiritual side, on your hamzat through your love for me, so you are focusing on hamzat, using me as kind of a prism -- a prism of love that radiates different colors of kindness, compassion, friendship, caring, and so on and combines with your love to produce a strong, clear signal.

Tell hamzat (by concentrating on her through your love for me) that we understand her deep pain, her hurt, her injuries, her wounds that have been done to her by so many people. We understand her feelings of having been abandoned and wanting to be loved and treated with kindness, compassion, and gentleness.

Tell her we understand she is fearful, and anxious, as well as deeply stressed, and that this constant battle with life tires her terribly. Tell her we understand her resentments about having been used and exploited by people she trusted and liked. Tell her we know of her deep anger about having been mistreated in so many ways.

Tell her we love her and wish to comfort and console her ... that we wish to take her in our arms and give her rest and peace and protect her from further hurt. Tell her we know there are tears deep within her that have not been cried because they are too painful to bear.

Tell her we understand she is afraid to trust anyone after all she has been through. Tell her we know of her loneliness. Tell her we understand she feels like the sun is never going to shine again and that her life seems like nothing but a ship being tossed about by stormy seas and on the verge of sinking at any moment.

Tell her to turn her attention toward us and to feel the radiation of love for her, the tenderness, the caring, the sorrow for her pain, the warmth, the friendship, the empathy and sympathy for all that has gone on within her and around her during her life. Tell her we have heard her deep cry of anguish and despair. Tell her safety is near at hand and all we ask is that she feel what we are sending her and to know that what is being sent is sincere. Tell her to feel the soothing waves of mercy wash over her, caressing her wounds and injuries ever so gently. Tell her there is no end to the mercy that is there for her, and all she has to do is feel its presence and she will be able to taste what that presence is about.

If you -- the spiritual side -- will concentrate on her with your love for me and my love for you, then, hamzat will listen to you and respond to your call. Do not try to reason with her or persuade her or tell her about the deceptions and manipulations of nafs, or what this or that person is doing or has done.

Speak to her only through the language of love. Let her feel our warm inclination for her. Let her feel the lack of judgment concerning her, and just that she is accepted as one would accept a daughter whom one loved and cared for without conditions and without reservations. Let her know she is part of a family of lovers who have nothing but good wishes for her well-being and health. Tell her neither the past nor the future matter, only the love that is here now, and if she will reach out and just touch us, then she will feel an ocean of love wash gently across her shores.

Tell her -- not in words -- but through a love that understands all of the foregoing in a very intimate way. Feel these things with your love for me and my love for you, and as you feel them, hamzat will know what you are telling her.

Every so often say 'la ilaha illallah' and let hamzat benefit from the dimensions of this which resonate beyond words and in a way that hamzat will understand and enjoy. Let her weariness rest on the shoulders of our Lord.

With all my love,

Tariq

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May 25, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq

Your last e-mail was the most moving thing I have ever read. Of course, I'm self-centered and love that you wrote it to try to help me. It made me cry. I'm glad you wrote it, because I can't do battle any longer because I am tired. If that would work, it would have worked before this because I have tried very, very hard to do this with you. You mean more to me than even my mother and children have. I love you.

I will try it this way and see what happens.

Just so that you know, this morning Ron and I had another go-round. He said he didn't want to give up himself in this again (this relationship). I responded that I have never asked him to. What did he think I was asking him to give up? We ended this discussion by me telling him that I have given up a lot to be in this relationship because I love you and I have given up my friend and supporter. He said I shouldn't have said that. I did not nor will I ever, no matter what happens, take that back because it is true. I have hurt you, I know, in many ways, but I will never, ever lie about the fact that I love you.

I'll write soon. Thank you so much for all you've said.

Love,

Lara

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May 25, 2002 (e-mail)

Your spiritual side should not give into your nafs' inclination to cast you as a victim of Ron's attempts to control you. This is very important.

Yes, more and more Ron's nafs and hamzat are trying to control every aspect of what you think, feel, and do. However, for your

spiritual side to think of herself as a victim displaces the essential issue to the wrong locus of control.

You have now, as you always have had, the capacity to walk away from things. You did this before, but there was a relapse when your spiritual side allowed nafs and the pain of hamzat to listen to the whisperings of Iblis that were being given expression through Ron's incessant pressure on you, especially the part -- namely, your hamzat - - which he knows is vulnerable, sensitive, and addicted to his hamzat.

Just as in political scandals one is often told to follow the money if one wants to uncover what is actually going on, so too with respect to the scandal that is going on now in your life, one needs to follow the dynamics of the relationships to grasp what is happening. One of the biggest keys to the dynamics of your relationship with Ron revolves around the relationship of your respective hamzats.

They both have been seriously injured through past events, and both are in considerably pain. But, the responses of the two hamzats to the hurtful events of life are radically different.

In your case, one of its primary responses -- especially with respect the Ron's hamzat -- is for your hamzat to have identified with the pain of his hamzat, and due to issues such as abandonment, addiction, and so on, your hamzat has tremendous empathy for the pain in Ron's hamzat. This deep empathy of your hamzat for, and identification with, the hamzat of Ron is the primary motivating and shaping force in your almost -- but not quite (since both nafs and your spiritual side over-ride this from time to time) -- total inability to resist the pressures that Ron's nafs and hamzat place upon your hamzat, and why even when, for whatever reason, you are able to resist the pressure -- at least for a time -- your hamzat feels guilt, anxiety, sadness, panic, depression and so on.

The response of Ron's hamzat to its pain, however, is totally different from the way your hamzat operates. Ron's hamzat is terribly angry, violent, controlling, and predatory. His hamzat has not identified with the pain of your hamzat. Rather, his hamzat is aware of the presence of the pain and injury in your hamzat, and as is true with all predators, his hamzat is very adept at smelling or sensing or feeling the presence of such vulnerability, for this identifies that which is likely to be very susceptible to attack and, therefore, an object that will

be a suitable candidate over which to seek to control, as well as a 'natural' recipient for the venting of the anger, hostility, and violence that his hamzat feels in a very deep way ... as deep, maybe even deeper than the way your hamzat feels empathy for Ron's hamzat.

Look at the women in Ron's life. His first, second, and third wives all had vulnerabilities that Ron's nafs and hamzat sought to exploit. He physically attacked his first wife, and nearly went to prison for so doing so. He was locked in mortal, violent combat with his second wife, but she proved to be scarier than he was and precisely because her injured hamzat seems to be a lot like that of Ron's hamzat -- namely, angry, hostile, and violent (although I lack a lot of information here with respect to her).

He has had the longest relationship with you because your hamzat was exactly the kind of prey his hamzat was seeking ... someone who was hurt, frightened, anxious, confused, needy, inclined to hamzat addiction, and compliant. Pretty you're your entire relationship with him has been one of his nafs and hamzat applying more and more pressure by using terrorist tactics, of one sort or another, to increase their sphere of influence over you via your hamzat.

Your nafs has, for its own reasons, thrown up resistance to the relentless onslaught of Ron's nafs and hamzat, and, as well, your spiritual side also has offered a certain amount of resistance, but, perhaps, to a lesser degree, due its weakened condition. But, more often than not, your hamzat's deep identification with, addiction to, and empathy for the hurt in Ron's hamzat has generally trumped any form that your resistance might take.

Look at the other cases of women in Ron's life. There was the little matter of rape early on in his life that Ron claimed he was not an active participant in, but even if we accept his story at face value, the fact he was involved at all and did nothing to stop or prevent what was going on says a lot.

As has been well-established, rape is not a crime of passion, but of violence and anger ... something -- that is, violence and anger -- to which the hamzat of Ron is inclined and drawn, and, to some extent, addicted as well. And, the fact you have had your own encounters in which he sought to force himself sexually on you and didn't want to take no for an answer, or gets very angry if you say no, all serves as

corroborating evidence here to the violent, angry dynamics of his hamzat and nafs.

His coming on to his previous wife's daughter -- who was vulnerable, young, and, probably messed up -- as well as his coming on your sister (whose life has had its own walk along the dark side) as well as his selection of women in his most recent escapades (especially Tanya and Wanda - the latter whom you thought was relatively okay and, then, you found out she was not all that stable emotionally and mentally) ... these incidents all indicate certain kinds of people were being singled out for attack by Ron -- people who his hamzat sensed or felt were vulnerable in one way or another and suitable candidates for the attempts of his nafs and hamzat to control them in order to satisfy his desires with respect to control and sexuality.

You were profiled by his hamzat and nafs when the relationship was just getting started. You were groomed during the early stages of the relationship when he left all those times and did a variety of other things, and when you were ready and he was ready, he began to coil about you and been tightening the coils every time you exhaled ... for twenty-three years.

You almost got away once, but Ron's nafs and hamzat knew that if they could work on, and pressure, and harass, and stalk your hamzat long enough, and make her feel sufficiently guilty and bad, then, eventually, what would happen, would happen. Your hamzat's vulnerable condition, pain, and injuries could be played upon to cause it to go into a state of panic, anxiety, jealousy, fear, and complete compliancy ... which is what occurred and why you remember so little of what went on during the time you went back to Brimley -- because your awareness was largely dominated by the feelings of hamzat that is not given to logic, reason, language, or analysis.

Ron's actions -- at least, what I know of them -- indicate he never really cared about any of the aforementioned women ... including you. Rather, like Ted Bundy, he was seeking warm bodies on whom to prey (whomever was receptive or vulnerable to the pain in his hamzat and whose identification with that pain could be manipulated to the advantage of his hamzat and nafs) ... and, remember, in your own case, you have spent a year and a half detailing all the many, many ways in which Ron had shown you, again and again, that he really didn't care

about your welfare -- especially that of your hamzat ... because he kept hurting your hamzat over and over and over again, yet, he did so with the confidence born from the understanding of his hamzat that your hamzat was so under the influence of his hamzat she would never run, and, for a long time, she never did, until the evidence became palpably obvious to even your hamzat, and your nafs realized its own survival was at stake (especially after the breakdown), and your spiritual side fell in love and seized the opportunity, provided by Allah, to escape that had been afforded – to some extent -- by your nafs' dislike of the constant control being exercised by Ron, and your hamzat's disillusionment and sadness concerning the additional pain that was coming at the hands of the very thing -- i.e., Ron's hamzat -- with which your hamzat deeply identified.

The near panic I recently saw in your eyes and demeanor outside your place of work, the great anxiety, the constant looking for, and fear that you saw, Ron's car, the stress and conflict to which you were giving expression at that time, where all signs of just how terrorized your hamzat had become due to the campaign of terror being conducted by Ron's nafs and hamzat. One of my worries is that your spiritual side will permit your hamzat to become completely dominant with respect to your internal affairs, and in doing so you might actually totally surrender to Ron's nafs and hamzat. If this happens, you will be, for all intense purposes, a dead person walking around in a live body, whose life has become largely limited to the very narrow confines of a deeply wounded, stressed out, fearful, anxious, depressed, and terrorized hamzat.

Just like Ron's hamzat is relentless in its pursuits, so, too, your hamzat is just as relentless, but in another way. So, intent is your hamzat on serving its feelings of identification with, addiction to, and empathy for the pain of Ron's hamzat, she will put tremendous pressure (through guilt, anxiety, panic, fear, depression, etc.) on your spiritual side to not interfere with her deep feelings and to do things in accordance with those feelings.

Your spiritual side's relationship with your hamzat is akin to that of a very young child who is acting out and out of control and if efforts are made to curb the behavior, then, tantrums, of one sort or another (guilt tantrums, panic tantrums, fear tantrums, anxiety tantrums,

abandonment tantrums, and so on) generally follow, and these are very unpleasant things with which to have to try to deal. This is especially so, since in the case of a mother she can, say, spank the child and tell the child this hurts me, more than it hurts the child, but, in the case of your spiritual side, any forceful attempts to alter the behavior of hamzat really will lead to a great deal of psychic pain that will be experienced directly by your spiritual side.

If you really are interested in escaping from your situation and being with me, then, you have to understand the kind of opening for which you are looking. This opening is likely to be only a small window of opportunity -- which if not acted upon as soon as possible -- might close and be lost ... possibly, forever. The dynamics of that potential window of opportunity are as follows.

First, your hamzat must feel one of two things. Either, she must feel that the one with whom she identifies with, is addicted to, and has empathy for, has betrayed her - and, this is a very difficult place for your hamzat to reach, because she has a deep-seated need to emotionally explain away and repress anything that would appear to threaten her identification, addiction, and empathy for Ron's wounded hamzat. Or, the pain that comes from being wounded again and again by Ron's hamzat and nafs must be perceived to be greater than the pain that would be felt by leaving him.

There were elements of each of the foregoing in your escape of last summer.

Love,
Tariq

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May 25, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Lara,

Every time I think the last thing that could be said has been said or believe I have exhausted possibilities, something else comes to me. However, it is important for you understand this sense of "comes".

I might be the locus of manifestation through which the information, ideas, thoughts, suggestions, instructions, cautions, reminders, and so on, that are being e-mailed to you, and, therefore, this material is colored by my personality, spiritual capacity. Nevertheless, please do not, for a moment, think what you are receiving is just from me.

My shaykh, the silsilah, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) -- incidentally, I observed the anniversary of the Prophet just a few days ago -- and, naturally, Allah, are directly responsible for what is coming to you. I have not abandoned you because they have not abandoned you.

They love you because I love you, and the love I have for you is from them, running through me, which forms a sort of collective love-in directed toward you. You have felt the strength and intensity of all of this before ... although at the time you thought you were being drugged or bewitched, and you are feeling such love now in a very intense way, as well ... in a way that says you have more love for me than you have for your mother and children -- which you have said to me.

Baba and others have taken an active interest in you and your situation ... partly because of me and partly because of you, and entirely because they are all loving, compassionate, kind, generous, noble, and accepting. They actively have been providing support, help, counsel, wisdom, and so on, for you all along, and, therefore, you shouldn't think spirituality is something that is remote from you ... it is something that is with you day and night, but, our problem is that we tend to be oblivious to its presence.

Many people just want God to snap the Divine counterpart to 'fingers' or wave a magic wand and make everything easy as pie. God could do that, and by God's leave, Baba has the spiritually realized stature, that, if God so wished, Baba could end all of your problems and my problems right now. However, this is not how the spiritual world works, and, indeed, in the long run it would not be to our spiritual benefit ... for, as the Prophet indicated, nothing that God has ordained comes except through struggle.

It was you who answered "yes" in pre-eternity when God asked the spirits "Alastu bi rabikum? - "Am I not your Lord. And, nobody

comes into this world except those who have answered "yes" to the foregoing question.

We come into this world to prove the sincerity of our answer of pre-eternity to God. If this is done successfully, then if God wishes, one works one's way through the various stages of spirituality, and this is the best and highest way in which Allah's aforementioned question can be answered sincerely.

So, we have to intend. We have to struggle. We have to choose. We have to sacrifice. We have to make efforts. We have to endure the pain of separation, until, by God's leave, the separation ends, and we return to our Divine origins. We have to be willing to open ourselves to God's Grace or barakah. We have to reach for God's hand. We must grab hold of the rope that he is extending to us. We must learn how to be helpers of God by helping ourselves.

Of course, even to be able to do all of the foregoing, we cannot do them on our own. We need God's help and assistance. Yet, we must sincerely intend to try to do the things that are necessary for us in order to be able to demonstrate that we did mean what we said to God on the 'Day of Alastu bi rabikum'.

I have told you before that the nature of guidance on the Sufi path is always, ultimately, from Divinity. It comes to us through this or that manifestation -- some of which are holier than others (for example, the Prophet, the Qur'an, Baba) -- but the guidance is from Allah and for whomever is receptive to it ... that is, one must want to hear what is being communicated and one must want to try to act on what one has been received as best one is able to under a given set of conditions.

I have been typing up a storm recently because I have been moved to do so by the spiritual currents coming to me from Baba, the silsilah, and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). None of the torrent of material in the last few days was my original intention, but I have been directed and encouraged to say the things I have and, therefore, please do not look at these writings as just coming from me ... for I believe they come from a much more spiritual origin than me.

The second topic of this e-mail is pathology. You asked the other day if the problems you were facing were just because you wanted to be miserable.

Nobody chooses misery intentionally, if one could, just as easily, choose happiness or peace.

However, we do make choices that lead us in certain directions and without wishing to do so, find our choices have brought us to a cul-de-sac (i.e., dead end) from which there seems to be no escape ... or from which there might be various means of escape, but we don't want to have to pay the price that such routes might cost us ... or because all of the ways seem to force us to make choices that involve pain for ourselves and/or others that -- if we had our druthers -- we would rather not have to do.

Being human, we like solutions to be simple, painless, straightforward, quick, and immediately rewarding, but this is not, for the most part, the way existence has been set up by God. Life, no matter what choices one makes will involve struggle, pain, difficulty, and choice. Only the world of fantasy does not involve these things and there is a price to be paid for choosing the way of a fantasy world -- so, even here the underlying principles of how life operates are in effect.

Nobody gets out of life alive. As the Buddha indicated - life is suffering, and the way of the mystics is a method for finding solutions for developing coping strategies to help deal with such suffering in the quickest and best manner possible -- for ourselves and for others.

The suffering you are going through is a direct reflection of the pathology and toxicity in your relationship with Ron ... and both of you contribute to creating and maintaining this pathology and toxicity. As the Buffalo Springfield said in their song 'For What It's Worth' -- "Nobody's right, if everybody's wrong" and in the matter of you and Ron, you are both 100% wrong, although how you each are wrong is different in your respective cases.

You said in your e-mail the other day that during one of your go-a-rounds with Ron you had said you gave up a lot to be in the relationship with him. Leaving aside the issue of what you chose to give up, the fact of the matter is you really don't know why you are in a

relationship with Ron, for from every angle it defies logic and common sense -- and, you, yourself have admitted this ... many times.

You don't like him all that much; you don't trust him; you don't respect him; his touch makes your skin crawl; he causes you to be constantly in a state of anxiety, tension, conflict, and stress; there is no peace with him, no joy, no reciprocity; there is one argument after another; his control is suffocating you and pushing you in the direction of another major breakdown.

You are not in that relationship because you love him or because he loves you. There are none of the signature tastes of love that are present in your relationship with him. There is no: peace, harmony, joy, inspiration, reciprocity, generosity, constructive transformation, mutual rootedness in God, kindness, real truth, freedom, well-being, realization of potential, affirmation of life, nobility, humility, trust, dependency in a positive sense, sincerity, gratitude, and so on.

All there is in your relationship with one another is: tension, conflict, arguments, disharmony, lack of peace, destructiveness, selfishness, essential dishonesty, arrogance, pride, anger, hurt, and a constant struggle to control the situation according the likes and dislikes of your respective nafs. Why are the foregoing qualities present? This is because your relationship is not about love, and, quite possibly, it never was. Lara, you are back in Brimley because your spiritual side permitted your nafs and hamzat to drive you there.

Your judgment in returning to Brimley was not carefully considered in the light of guidance from Allah and the wisdom of the Prophet or the teachings of the Sufi path, or even on the basis of common sense. Your return to Brimley was conceived in a state of fear, confusion, jealousy, anger, ignorance, forgetfulness, deception, pressure, anxiety, stress, pain, and an almost complete lack of rationality.

You returned to Brimley because your spiritual side couldn't, and wouldn't, resist the incessant internal babbling of your nafs, the constant whisperings of Iblis, and the persistent cries of pain, anguish, fear, guilt, and anxiety of your hamzat. You went to Brimley in the hope this would all stop, but it has not. It continues on unabated ... although the direction and character of your internal phenomenology might have shifted slightly in this or that direction.

You were not going to something positive and constructive, but you were running away from something -- yourself and the Sufi path ... and you are running away in the attempt to bring an end to the pain that your hamzat was feeling due to her identification with, empathy for, and addiction to Ron's hamzat.

Your hamzat does not love Ron. The hamzat is not capable of love ... although it can sense the presence of love.

Love only comes from the spiritual dimension of the heart and from certain dimensions of the spirit. And, this is not where your relationship with Ron is rooted ... it is rooted in your hamzat.

You are confusing -- and have done so for a long time -- the intense identification, empathy, and addiction of your hamzat as being the same thing as loving Ron. However, the two are not the same. Your deep caring for Ron -- and this is, to a large extent, a pathological caring -- is an expression of your hamzat's entanglement with Ron's hamzat.

Your hamzat -- and the hamzat is not to be blamed for this -- is compelled to care for Ron. There is no choice in this.

Your identification with, empathy for, and addiction to Ron's hamzat is at the center of your inability, for the most part, to do other than what he wants. Through the influence of your hamzat, you are driven to do these things ... and there is no joy, peace, intimacy, or satisfaction in any of this.

This is a pathological state over which the hamzat has no control. Due to its history of injury, hurt, and vulnerabilities, it is forced to operate in the way she does. She cannot be other than fearful, anxious, terrorized, stressed, hurting, and wracked with guilt for not attending to whatever Ron wants ... even as she feels anger and resentment at the same time, for having her own injuries and hurts unattended and uncared for.

Rationally, you can recite the litany of evidence that indicates Ron does not love you, but you don't act on this knowledge because, for the most part, hamzat is very impervious to learning from experience. She is a repository of, and generator for, emotions of certain kinds, and once these emotions are present, they tend to have an inertia all of their own that resists change in the light of evidence ... and to

whatever extent she does change, this is because she gets opened to a qualitatively different source of emotional experiences that, God willing, heal the older emotions and help move the hamzat in a better direction of well-being and health.

If not for your hamzat's injured condition, and leaving aside your spiritual side, your nafs would have left Ron a long time ago. The fact your nafs was no better able to deal with your hamzat's pain than was your spiritual side. In fact, your nafs attitude toward hamzat is sort of like that of a brother who considers his sister a brat and cry baby, but, nonetheless, has to find ways to get along, and, if necessary, control the sister in order to have any hope of getting some peace. Essentially, this merely means that nafs got dragged along in your hamzat's relationship with Ron, and out of that has come a whole set of other issues that are plaguing your relationship with Ron ... and, these are steeped in pathology and toxicity as well.

In short, you are in your relationship with Ron not because you want to be, but because you have to be. It is a matter of compulsion and being driven to do so. You are in your relationship with Ron, not because of love, but because of addiction. You are in your relationship with Ron because the pain and guilt experienced by your hamzat for not caring for the pain of Ron's hamzat is too much for your hamzat to bear, and not because you are free to come and go and, therefore, do what you do out of choice. You are in your relationship with Ron because of pathology and not because that relationship serves, and gives expression to, your emotional, psychological, spiritual health or well-being.

You have said many times that if you did have a choice, you would not choose Ron. The fact you are with Ron, indicates there are some very powerful forces at work within you placing severe constraints on your freedom to choose what is best for you.

Your relationship with Ron will never work -- at least, not under the present conditions -- no matter what you do, or how much counseling you get, or how many discussions you have, or how much you try to work things out. And, the reason why it will never work is because your respective pathologies prevent any constructive movement from taking place since the two pathologies are holding one another to a stand-off.

Ron's hamzat is driven and compelled just as yours is, but the nature of the driven character of his hamzat is different from the dynamic of your hamzat. Ron's hamzat is not codependent with your hamzat, it is parasitic upon your hamzat, and that is why the direction of the exchange between you two is all in one direction. In the process, Ron is destroying you -- the host -- but he can't stop his hamzat from being what he is.

Ron can't love you because his hamzat won't permit it. His hamzat needs to be violent, controlling, angry, predatory, just as your hamzat needs to be addicted, compliant, and self-sacrificing, no matter what the costs, and this is also why you can't love Ron, because the wounded condition of your hamzat is resistant to making the changes that would have to be made to turn pathology into health and, thereby, permit love to develop.

You indicated in your e-mail that Ron said he was not prepared to give himself up again. We both know Ron never did this in the first place, because he is pathologically incapable of doing this in the context of your relationship.

Ron has said you are not giving the relationship a chance. However, what he means by this is that you are refusing to completely surrender yourself to his nafs and hamzat. You are resisting his attempts to control you, and, therefore, you are not playing the game as he feels it ought to be played from the perspective of his pathology.

If you were head over heal in love with Ron, and vice versa, the underlying pathologies would have either disappeared a long time ago, or they would have been greatly attenuated and moved in the direction of health and well-being. It is precisely because there is no love in your relationship that your respective pathologies have not gotten better -- in fact, they have gotten worse, for there is nothing present (such as some remnant of authentic love) to buffer you from the toxicities produced by your respective pathologies and, as a result, be able to constrain or dampen their effects on your lives.

In effect, you have nothing of a positive, constructive nature that is available to you both and through which to work to improve your situation. Talk, reason, discussion, and counseling might help here and there but the real pathology of your relationship with one another will never be dealt with in any fundamental or essential sense.

If either of you really cared for the other or had any moral courage or compassion for one another, or any basic decency concerning one another, you would end the relationship. But, because each of you is driven, things are at something of an impasse, and the air is just filled with the toxicity of your respective pathologies.

For the most part, the potentials of hamzat are under the control of nafs and are used by nafs either for good (in the case of the spiritually redeemed nafs), or for evil (in the case of the unredeemed nafs). Your nafs should be under the regulation of the spiritual side, but this is not so with you.

Never forget that your spiritual side chooses, each and every day, to give into the demands of your nafs and pains of your hamzat. You are miserable because your heart chooses misery over happiness; oppression over freedom; conflict over peace; pathology over health; pain over joy; addiction over love ... remember, one dimension of the heart is called 'qalb' in Arabic, and the meaning of this word is: 'that which is capable of turning'.

When this dimension of the heart is turned toward the influence of nafs, hamzat, dunya (the world created through the entanglement of our collective egos or Iblis, then we tend to turn away from spirituality. When, on the other hand, the aforementioned dimension of the heart is turned toward Divine guidance or the influence of the saints or the potentials of the spirit, then, our lives become oriented in a proper way toward truth.

Your spiritual side has been given responsibility by Allah for governing your inner kingdom. If that governor permits all manner of thugs, thieves, and dysfunctional children to run the affairs of government, one should not be surprised if the result is misery for one and all.

What you have given up by going back to Brimley is your essential Self. What you have given up by going back to Brimley is any chance for your hamzat to be healed. What you have given up by going back to Brimley, is your responsibility for being in control of your own life.

Ron's hamzat and nafs -- by preying upon the vulnerabilities of your hamzat's identification with, empathy for, and addiction to his hamzat -- is intent on compelling you to continue to give up your

essential Self, as well as to continue to give up the opportunity for your hamzat to get well, and your spiritual side's responsibility for being a proper sovereign in her own kingdom. This is the only sense in which you two are co-operating, and, unfortunately, it is completely destructive to both of you. But, you continue to choose to destroy yourself.

It might surprise you, but I place the primary responsibility for what is going on in Brimley with you, not Ron. Ron cannot change what he is because he, at least at the present time, is closed off to real spirituality, and, therefore, he cannot be other than what he permits his nafs and hamzat to make him ... a predator and a parasite in relation to you. But, you do have the capacity to be different, but, instead, you won't let go ... you won't permit your heart – your qalb – to let go of its fears and lack of confidence, and you won't let go of your hamzat's compulsion to give service to the predatory and parasitic nature of Ron's hamzat and nafs.

You have the capacity to resist your nafs and your hamzat's vulnerabilities, but your heart – or, more precisely, the qalb-dimension of your heart -- chooses not to exercise its capacity to turn in a different direction. It is only because due to your unwillingness to exercise this capacity to choose in a responsible fashion that prevents you from resisting Ron, and in failing to do so, you provide him with an opportunity he can't resist -- to exploit you for the benefit of his own nafs and hamzat. It is only because you choose not to take your nafs and hamzat in hand and do what is necessary with respect to them (constrain the one, and heal the other), that Ron becomes enabled to let his dogs loose in the land.

Ron can't help himself. You can, but you don't.

Every argument you have with him -- and it really doesn't matter whether, or not, you are right in whatever is being argued about -- you are having that argument because you chose not to step away from a relationship that is pathological. Every issue of control you have with him -- and it really doesn't matter that Ron shouldn't be doing those things -- is happening because you're your qalb chooses not to discharge its responsibilities properly.

No one put a gun to your head to force you back to Brimley. You went back because you chose to vote in favor of pathology rather than

embrace spirituality. You chose to endure the pain of pathology rather than the pain of spiritual struggle.

Every day you make choices. You cannot avoid doing so ... through what you do, and you don't do.

Now, when you are sad, or angry, or miserable, or stressed out, or in conflict, or depressed, or compliant while you are in Brimley, it is because your qalb chooses to let the unqualified sides of yourself run your life. There is only one player in Brimley who has the capacity to change the way things are unfolding over there -- and that is your spiritual side.

Neither your nafs nor your hamzat have the resources, abilities, understanding or love that is necessary for transformation and change. Ron's nafs and hamzat are in the same, bereft condition.

Ron's spiritual side is shut down -- whether temporarily or permanently, Allah knows best. Only your spiritual side is active -- however faintly this might be -- and the reason I know your spiritual side is active is because of the presence within her of love for me ... not just a little love, but a lot of love.

However, rather than learn how to use such love in a constructive fashion that can help your situation, your spiritual side keeps that love a prisoner and will not let it out, and, in the meantime, you let nafs and hamzat aid and abet you in this '*Prisoner of Zenda*' or '*Man in the Iron Mask*' routine. If you would allow yourself to be caught up in that love, it would transform you, and energize you, and lend you courage and strength ... but, so far, you have chosen not to do this.

All the solutions to your problems are within you. Ron has no choice, at the present time but to go on being as he is. You, however, do have the capacity to choose in a way that is other than what is currently taking place.

With courage, energy, strength, understanding, and discipline that can be drawn from your love for me -- if you only will see your way to opening yourself up to the love that is there and overcome your fears of doing so -- you will be able to hold your nafs in check, as well as pacify and console hamzat long enough to -- at least -- escape, if not much more. But, this process of opening yourself up to the love for me

that is within you, and the love for you that is within me, you also have chosen not to do.

You are not Ron's prisoner. You are in your own self-constructed prison, and you merely have appointed Ron to be your jailer.

The same one within you who hired Ron to be a jailer by failing to take responsibility for her life, can fire Ron from that position. Ron is very unlikely ever going to willingly remove himself from his position as 'jailer' because his nafs and hamzat seem to have an avocation to do that sort of work, and, therefore, he is happy in his work (he is just frustrated and unhappy with the results of his efforts, to date) but you can let fire him if you chose to be the spiritual sovereign Allah has given you the capacity to be -- and, in doing so, you would be giving Ron an opportunity to find a way out of his pathology ... which he will not do as long as you are around to enable and accommodate his pathologies.

You are growing weary of all the conflict and arguments and stress that never get you anywhere. But, in this, you are like the guy who is growing tired of running and doesn't seem to understand he can stop anytime he chooses to do so.

You survived years of abuse from Ron with your basic humanity and spiritual potential intact. You survived several years of mental/spiritual breakdown. You survived all the quacks using you as an experimental subject for their prescription fetish with respect to drugs about which they have almost no understanding of what goes on within people when those drugs enter their systems. You survived leaving Ron the first time, and this time if you were to leave Ron, you do so with a far better understanding of the dynamics of the pathology that is at work and how to take steps to stay away from that which triggers the pathology.

Surely, you can survive putting up with the unpleasantness that comes from your hamzat and nafs. Nobody enjoys these things, but you are placing all kinds of additional obstacles in your way ... as if you were trying to do battle with Muhammad Ali in his prime with both of your hands tied behind you. Your present approach to things is just not giving you a chance, because you are not using the two shields of protection you have at your disposal - choice and love.

With all my love,

Tariq

§

May 26, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

I have so much to tell you but not enough time right now. Tomorrow I am going to Hartford. I spent the afternoon with Susan. She's in a place she's trying to tell me about but is having trouble finding the words. She says "You'll know." I'll write more soon. Did you like my moon? Can we go into my cave and stay there until we die and never come out? Please?

Love,

Lara

§

Dear Lara,

Yes, we can go to that cave -- in fact, that is what I have been trying to get you to do -- but the Cave is a Sufi one in which we are shielded from all outside and inside hurtful influences ... like the story in the Qur'an about the ones who slept in the Cave and, then, awoke to find that things had changed.

Remember, Plato's allegory of the Cave, where there are shadows on the wall from the fire and the individuals gathered around the fire take those shadows to be reality? In the Sufi cave, one becomes the Reality, and, in so doing, one leaves all of the shadows behind ... the shadows of nafs, hamzat and the world, and one becomes embraced by the Joy, Light and Love of Truth from which the Sufi cave is constructed.

The Sufi cave really is meant to seal out the world and to permit us to concentrate on only the important things in life ... love for others, love for our shaykh, love for the Prophet, love for God, as well as journeying toward self-realization -- everything else is but a shadow.

I love you!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Tariq

§

May 26, 2002 (e-mail)

My Dearest Lara,

I do apologize (sort of), yet once again, for all of the e-mails. However, since I don't know when I might be losing the phone line, I'm trying to get in as much as possible before I get shut down.

The first thing I would like to do is to provide a clarification for the last e-mail. At one point in that email, I was talking about the fact that, at the present time, and, possibly, in the future, as well, Ron does not seem inclined to seek out God and truly turn his life over to Divinity. I said he was unbeliever because his life is nafs-centered, not God-centered, and, currently, he seems to have no interest in trying to find out what God requires of him or attempting to accommodate himself to those requirements.

There is an unbeliever in most of us, and that is the unredeemed nafs. To the extent one is under the control of one's nafs, then, to that extent one is under the control of the unbeliever in oneself.

You have a nafs, and, there is much that is going on in your life right now that is run by nafs. To that extent, you are being controlled by the unbeliever within you.

The difference between you and Ron is that you have sought out God, and you have tried to find out what Divinity wishes from you and you have tried to do what you can to comply with at least some of what is indicated as being our spiritual responsibilities. More specifically, you have come to the Sufi discussion meetings, you have taken initiation, you have done zikr, you have read the Qur'an, you have read about the Prophet, you have attended fatiha, you have asked for, and received instructions concerning the Sufi path, you have struggled as best you could do stay free of your addiction to Ron's hamzat, you have actively read a number of books about the Sufi path, and you have

given money and resources to try to help out. None of the foregoing acts are small considerations.

Yet, all during this time -- at least, up until recently, when you told Ron what you told him, and, as a result, his view of me and the Sufi path took a sharp left turn -- Ron never made any attempt to do anything ... although he had told you once he wouldn't mind having a spiritual guide. He didn't take any active steps to realize his desire.

In fact, he stayed far away from me, and I have told you what Baba said -- namely, I could judge people's love of the Prophet by how they reacted to me. He kept his distance from me, which means he has little, or no, love for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Your spiritual side fell in love with me, and that also tells me you have great love for the Prophet, even though recent and present circumstance have put some kinks and knots in things. The Prophet has said a person will not become a believer until such an individual loves God and the Prophet more than they do their mothers and fathers and family. You have said your love for me is greater than your love for your mother and your children, and, therefore, your heart is in resonance with the above tradition of the Prophet, for whatever there is of spirituality in me, it comes from the Prophet, via the kindness of my shaykhs, and your love of me gives expression to your love for the Prophet even though you do not recognize it as such.

So, yes, currently, much of you is being controlled by the unbeliever in you -- namely, your nafs. Nonetheless, as I have indicated previously, you do have a spiritual side, and that spiritual side is inclined toward Allah, and you have taken active steps to struggle to realize something of your spiritual potential.

Therefore, in terms of active spiritual inclination, there is a huge difference between you and Ron. This is why I have told you that, despite the current problems, there is something definitely worth salvaging in you, whereas in the case of Ron, his heart appears to be sealed over, and he is not receptive to the spiritual side of things ... not now, and, perhaps, not at any time in the future.

The fact there have been mistakes that you have been made, or that the spiritual struggle might not have gone as well as you would have liked, is less important than the fact you have tried to listen, hear,

and obey within your capacity to do so. You should never take the setbacks as indications you have failed or are damned or no good or that you are an unbeliever in the sense in which Ron currently appears to be.

This reminds me of an anecdote about Winston Churchill. He was at a party and pretty drunk when a woman came up to him and began to criticize him for his drunkenness. After listening to her for a bit, Churchill is reported to have said: “Yes, madam, I am inebriated. However, in the morning I will have sobered up, but you still will be ugly.

Your condition, like Churchill's, is something that is, God willing, changeable. But, Ron's condition, like that of the woman in the anecdote, might well be the same tomorrow as it is today.

Although Allah knows best, it seems unlikely that, spiritually speaking, Ron will ever change. In any event, the Sufi path is a long one, with many ups and downs, and sometimes it seems like there are a lot more downs than there are ups ... especially in the beginning.

I have been struggling with my nafs for more than thirty years, and that struggle, still is not easy. I have made many mistakes and failed many times, but, by the Grace of Allah, I continue to learn from these mistakes and failures. Fortunately, the love, compassion, and generosity of the shaykhs of our silsilah are such that when we make mistakes, they – to paraphrase a song -- ‘pick us up, dust us off, and encourage us to start all over again’.

There are accounts about some of the Sufi orders in the Soviet Union which indicate that things often were so oppressive that showing public, or even covert, acts of spirituality could lead to a great deal of trouble for an individual. Everything was under the thumb of tyranny. Many Sufis in the Soviet Union, however, would do their prayers by going through all the positions in their minds, while saying the appropriate verses of the Qur'an silently as they went through the various physical positions of prayer within themselves.

When oppression and tyranny are loose in the land, or in the household, then, one does what one can. All of the things that I have given you recently can be done internally without ever having to express things publicly.

Indeed, it is possible to do spiritual things right under the noses of tyrants without them ever knowing what is going on. Just keep trying as best you can to keep focused in your heart on me ... and know I am with you there and concentrating on you.

And, do keep communicating with your hamzat in the way I have outlined to you previously. Among other things, she is very frightened, tired, anxious, lonely, and confused right now.

She needs to know she is loved, has not been forgotten and, God willing, shall not be abandoned. In time, by the leave of God, she will understand there are things she can do to help her spiritual sister -- your soul -- and she is not the useless entity that all too many people have perceived her as ... that she has tremendous value and beauty which, God willing, shall manifest itself, in time, when she has a chance to heal from her hurt and injuries.

Now, I am going to tell you something else for which some would call me crazy for doing. I am prepared to wait for you forever. I will not perform the act that would sever our arrangement of the 31st ... something that I could do any time.

If you do not want me, then, say so. If you do not want my love and friendship, then, tell me this. If you have no intention of ever wanting to be with me, then, let me know now.

Be honest with me, I will not hold it against you. Do not be afraid you will be injuring me by telling me the truth. Yes, what you have to say might be painful, but I am a grown-up, and, God willing, I can live with whatever you have to say ... just be honest, open, and forthright, that is all I ask.

My love for you is unconditional. It is not based upon hamzat, or need, or addiction, or dependency, or nafs, or expectations, or rewards ... it is from my heart and is sincere.

Insha' Allah (God willing), I will never abandon you. I'm not going to interfere in your life, although I will continue to provide you with spiritual counsel if you wish this. But, if you are not interested in God, or the Sufi path, or spiritual self-realization, then, please tell me the truth.

My forgiveness for what you are doing is open-ended and *carte blanche*. I'm not going to tell you it doesn't hurt, but *insha' Allah*, I will be given the help necessary to live with this pain.

If I have to leave Bamford, but you want to know where I am, then, you should tell me you want this information so that if you are ever able to escape, I can be there for you and do whatever I can to assist you. If you don't care where I go, or what I do, then, tell me this, but please don't ask for information out of idle curiosity or because you think it is expected of you.

I am going to trust you that what you have to tell me is the truth. However, I also realize that maybe you are so messed up you really don't know how you feel about anything and that you have been telling me the things you have because you think I am like Ron and I can't bear to face the truth, or your *hamzat* is being compliant with me in the way it is compliant with Ron, or that all of what you have said is just another manifestation of your tendencies toward passive-aggressive behavior when you say one thing but tend to feel and do things quite differently, or that everything which I have said is one big scam or game of *nafs*.

One suggestion that I would make is given that you already have told Ron about us, then maybe you should be talking to your counselor about the situation. You probably should leave the 31st part out of it since I don't think he would understand that part of things.

The fact of the matter is, you are really tying your counselor's hands in a lot of ways by not telling him the whole story, because right now she thinks things are a certain way, and, that is not entirely true, and the new information might provide her with opportunities to help you in ways that you hadn't anticipated. Furthermore, it might be a big load off your mind and heart just to be able to have someone to talk to about the situation and to be able to explore the various dynamics of the whole thing.

I realize there is a chance your dimension of *qalb* might never stand up to *hamzat* and *nafs* and tell them who is boss ... and, yes, I do believe your spiritual side has permitted your *nafs* to manipulate your *hamzat*'s vulnerabilities in order to implement *nafs*' usual agenda, and I do believe that, despite all of his shortcomings, Ron has become entangled in a game about which he is not aware and through which

he, himself, is being controlled in certain ways in order to advance the agenda of your nafs.

One of the many unknowns in all of the foregoing is that the dynamics have become so layered, nuanced, intricate, and, potentially, explosive, that both: your nafs and Ron's nafs, as well as your hamzat and Ron's hamzat, might be headed for a real tragedy. It is a very dangerous game that is being played, and the stakes -- and costs -- might be far higher than either your nafs or Ron's nafs can understand or afford (emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, or health-wise).

In any event, I will wait for you -- the spiritual side -- if that is what your spiritual side wants. If your spiritual side is never able to stand up to your nafs and hamzat -- for that is what is keeping you in Brimley.

Yes, Ron is controlling, and his nafs is being very ruthless, relentless, cruel, and heartless in the pursuit of its goal to make you submit to it -- he really does have a Taliban mentality toward you, and he knowingly is exploiting the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of your hamzat that is why I have referred to him as a predator. Nonetheless, the way in which your spiritual side has chosen to deal with the whole situation is what is at the heart of your problems.

More specifically, your spiritual side has abdicated the throne and left: a thug (Ron's nafs), a collaborator (your nafs), a wounded, six year old court officer (your hamzat), and a thief (Iblis) in charge of things. If your spiritual side ever becomes so exasperated with the insanity of what is going on in your relationship with Ron that she becomes able to forget, or overcome, her fears for even a brief period (long enough to escape), then, perhaps, the thug can be dethroned and cast out, the collaborator can be chastised and purified, the wounded court officer can be treated and healed, and the thief can be shackled and humbled ... and, if so, then, know I will be waiting for you with open arms, a warm heart, forgiveness, and a great deal of love.

From your side, your nafs might exploit what I am doing, and if that is what is to be, then, that will be between you and God for your having permitted that to happen. From my side, the offer is made with sincere love and in the hopes God will be pleased with what is being done.

I believe, very strongly, that what I am doing is the Sufi thing to do in this case, even though I realize there are risks to the arrangement. Nevertheless, I am willing to take those risks for the love of your spiritual side.

With all my love,
Tariq

§

May 26, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

I am at my apartment writing this e-mail. I don't have long, but I'll say a few things. I still have not had time to read your e-mails of the last few days. Rather than have someone looking over my shoulder, I decided I would bring this computer with me tomorrow to Hartford and read them then and respond while I am away. You have written so much. Thank you.

Do you want to go with me tomorrow? I am taking a huge risk if I do this. If you want to, be outside at 6:00 a.m. and I'll come by. I'm afraid I'll be followed though. If you're not there, I'll just go on without you. We'll have to be careful though. Ron really wanted to drive me down there.

Don't worry too much. He's being on his best behavior. This weekend was the AA round-up at Camp Washington. I went to Brother Joe's healing service last night and didn't care about any of the losses in my life except the one I'm experiencing right now -- you. I miss you. I know it's wrong to ask you to go tomorrow. I'm afraid to -- not so much because of Ron but I just don't want to hurt you.

In scanning your e-mail, you asked if I wanted you to wait for me. Yessssssssssssssssss. You asked if I wanted to know where you were. Yess. You asked if I was not telling you that I didn't want to be with you for the same reasons I can't tell Ron. Nooooooooooooooooo. I'm telling you the truth. I do love you. I do want to be with you. I can't imagine my life without you. Do I know how this is going to turn out? No. Am I asking you and God and some

stronger side of me for help? Yes. I promise you that nothing you have written will go unread. I will read everything over and over and over. I will save them forever. I have saved every letter you have written. I bought a lock box, and they are with my journals now in a safe place.

There is so much I want to tell you. Maybe tomorrow if I dare. If I don't come by, it's because it's not safe. If you're not there, I'll know that it's for a good reason.

Take care. I love you madly and always will.

Love,

Lara

§

Lara picks me up at the designated place early in the morning on her way to Hartford. She is very concerned that Ron will see us, but she has had the courage to take a chance so that we can be together. She is in court most of the day, but we talk during the journey to and from Hartford.

§

May 28, 2002

Dearest, Beautiful Tariq,

It was difficult coming back here last night. Ron was angry because I hadn't called. I ignored him. Luckily, a friend of his came after a few minutes. Then Jane came to go to the women's meeting. Once we got to Sutton, we just sat in the car and talked. Then Carol came along. We decided to go out for coffee instead of going into the meeting.

Carol expressed her concern that I have not been in contact. She said it seemed as though I was slipping backwards into the old stuff. I told them both that I love you and I'm not happy with my life with Ron; that it was a mistake to think I could force something that was just not supposed to be. Jane thinks I should be with you. Carol thinks I need to spend time alone for a while. Jane explained to Carol that you don't

suffocate me; that you respect my choices; that you want me to be happy, and that is a good thing. Carol seemed to understand. I told them both that being with you makes me smile; that being with you makes me want to sing and dance and laugh. You bring me joy.

When I got home, Ron asked what was going on. I told him I'm just not happy here. He was very upset. I insisted on going to sleep and not discussing it further.

Everything you have said and written is true. I know it. I will do what it takes to live my life in an authentic and spiritual way.

My phone should be connected soon. I plan on going to my apartment to work for a while this afternoon. I'll call you.

My lips have been ravaged, but not by you. Last night my cat was walking on my face and one of his rear claws sliced open my lip. There was some blood. When you see me, you'll probably think someone punched me in the mouth.

So what are we going to do for the rest of our lives? Tell me another nice story, and then we'll make it come true.

I love you. Even my bug bites are pleasurable today because I got them while being with you.

Your bug-bitten, bloodied-lip student of love, Lara

§

May 29, 2002

Dear Tariq,

Ron and I had a talk when he came here for lunch. He asked me again what was going on. I said I'm not happy here. He said it was because I'm angry at AA people and that I've been working too hard and I hadn't gotten enough sleep. I asked him if he knew I was unhappy would he want me to stay. He said no. He's upset. I told him I came back for the wrong reasons -- because I was jealous, my pride was hurt, I was playing God, and I was afraid he wasn't going to love me anymore. I said it was a mistake. He asked me to please give it some time, that he loves me ... that he wants me to stay through my vacation. I did not agree or disagree. I couldn't speak at all. I told him

I've been cruel to him, attacking the things he loves, attacking him, and then he started in on Jane (like she has anything to do with this!) I said it had nothing to do with Jane, it was me, that I'm just not happy ... that we hurt each other. He said he is very happy and thinks I will be again, too, if I just give this a chance. Now I just feel like going to my apartment and taking a nap. Call me there if you're awake.

I love you.

Lara

§

June 1, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

I'm home now if you want to call. Having a weird time ... thoughts coming in from everywhere. What are you doing?

Talk with you soon. I'm just trying to keep my mind occupied so these thoughts will get a busy signal instead of an open line.

Love,

Lara

§

June 2, 2002

Dear Lara,

By the Grace of Allah, you are a light in my life -- the light of a soft-glowing candle with a scent that fills the air and caresses my being, enveloping me in your embrace ... a light that gives comfort and invites intimacy in the darkness of the night ... a gift from Allah with whom to share the journey along the shores of the Divine Ocean until, God willing, we have the courage to dive in and let the undertow take us where God wishes.

With much love and affection, romantically yours,

Tariq

§

June 2, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

It was so sweet of you to write me to tell me what I already know with certainty. I hope I am worthy of all you have given me.

Love,

Lara

§

June 3, 2002

Lara phones me. During the conversation, financial matters arise, and she adopts what appears to be a very indifferent, distant attitude toward what is being said.

I try several times to explain, but each explanation is met with an attitude of resistance. So, I write a fable for Lara, hoping this will make my perspective somewhat clearer.

§

Dear Lara,

I am like the enchanted frog who in his present form is unsightly to most people. There are all kind of offensive-appearing warts upon my oily skin in the form of poverty, bills, and difficulties, along with a lack of social status, career, and a permanent, or even temporary, job. Those who do not simply reject me outright tend to be suspicious of me and my motivations because they judge me according to how they think and feel about things and not in accordance with what is the truth concerning my condition and how I think and feel about things.

My enchanted condition is not due to some curse that has been placed upon me, but because the King wishes to put people to the test.

The King has devised a plan to test people's sincerity toward the King and is using the enchanted frog as the bait.

The King requires the frog to say to certain people that "I am a prince, although I realize my present appearance gives no evidence for the truth of what I am saying. Nonetheless, I am a prince, and the King has ordered me to appear in this form and to say the things I do in order to see if people will look past surface phenomena, to the underlying reality. In addition, the King has given me certain powers I am free to exercise, and my requests will be honored by the King, but truth would be better served if these gifts remained unexercised and I manage, instead, to have the patience, strength, courage, and faith necessary to just carry on as a frog until such time as the King ends the test and allows my princely dimensions to shine forth, for one and all to see."

"Now, most people don't believe what I say, because they perceive the world through their own ignorance of things, and treat their darkness as if it were light ... never having known what real illumination is since they have been prisoners within a cave for most, if not all, of their lives ... a place in which vision is a very indirect and limited affair of shadows, illusions, fantasies, and dreams that leaves them totally unaware of the worlds that lie beyond their prisons."

"I try to tell people who come by my little pond something of the truth concerning life, but most people react with contempt and ridicule -- saying 'What can this poor, stupid frog know of life ... why, he has no money, or house, or car, or job, or 401 K plan, or stock portfolio, whereas we have all these things, and, therefore, we must be better than this frog, and smarter than this frog, and closer to the King than this frog, for, surely, all we have are signs the King is pleased with us, and the lowly, destitute, humiliating status of this frog is because the King is not pleased with him and has exiled him to such a bereft status in life.'

I tell these people - "If you will help me, I will return your kindness and generosity many times over with treasures that are far beyond your capacity to understand. Yes, my present status is very low. Nonetheless, this will not always be my condition and you should not mistake that which is temporary for what is more enduring and more essential."

Still, few people believe me. I am just a frog to them who has this amazing ability to talk instead of ribbiting.

The people who pass by often like what I have to say, and they feel there is truth, solace, guidance, and help in what comes through those words. Yet, after all is said and done, I am just a frog to them ... a frog who has the delusion he is enchanted and a prince.

'Why', they say, 'if you are really a prince, then, why don't you pay your own way instead of sitting there on your Lilly pad and asking for our help?' I tell them the King has arranged things this way and it is part of the test ... for me, and for the people who pass by.'

Unfortunately, few, if any people, accept the truth of what I have to say. They suppose I am just trying to con them, or manipulate them, or maneuver them into helping me out and that this is my only concern with their affair.

Of course, when asked, these people never are able to produce any evidence to back up their suspicions and allegations concerning my motivations. However, people being people, they suppose that because they have suspicions, then, those suspicions must be right ... for where there is smoke, there must be fire, and, besides, why should they give up their unfounded suspicions when everyone in the Realm of Dunya knows that suspicions, doubts, and innuendo run the world -- not truth or justice.

I try to tell people that what they have is not theirs, but has been loaned to them in order to test them to see what they will do with that which has been leased out to them. However, because most people suppose they deserve what they have and that what they have is entirely due to their own good nature, hard work, and impeccable character - surely all signs of the King's beneficence -- they ask themselves - 'Now, why should I share what I have with those who are less fortunate than I ... if those dregs of society want something, then, let them go out and earn it as I have done in so noble a fashion ... and, surely, these dregs of society are really only interested in me for what I have and not because I am lost, unhappy, without purpose in life, and in need of friendship and solace.'

So, I continue on with the telling of my story, going from place to place, but few are the people who believe I am enchanted frog who, by

leave of the King, will soon become a prince, and such people prefer the company of their own comforts, suspicions, and doubts, than they do of a poor frog who, seemingly, has little to offer them -- but, in truth, has been placed in the pond to see who is sincere.

There was even one person who walked by my pond who said he would help by providing an opportunity to work with him, and I could help him and help myself in the process.

I agreed to this on a number of occasions, but in each instance the job offer was withdrawn because the person felt that I simply was trying to take advantage of him and was only interested in his ability to provide employment ... after all, even though he would be getting something that he wanted done to be performed, nonetheless, according to his way of looking at things, there was something inequitable about giving cash for services ... even though that is how he earned her own money.

I used to spend quite a bit of time with this person - giving him gifts, helping him out, listening to his problems, offering assistance of different kinds, providing friendship, peace, solace, comfort, and love. However, I was told by him that all of these things were merely means to get money from him ... that my desire to get things from others was just a part of my motive for why I 'seemed' to do things for others.

"Oh, sure", he said in act of generosity and courage, "I don't say your whole motive is a selfish and manipulative one, but, surely, it must be part of why you act as you do -- I mean, what else could it be -- everyone else I know operates in this fashion - therefore, what is true of them must also be true of you."

I tried to tell him that he was wrong in his assessment of the situation, but nobody ever listens to a frog, and, surely, as one of my brethren has said: it is hard to be green ... especially, as in the present case, when green means something other than money.

Ribbit

Tariq

§

June 3, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

Today I went to Hastings and picked up a few things for you that I said I would get. I also want to send you some money.

I do wish you'd honestly ask yourself who gets the most triggered when it comes to money, me or you, because it feels like this is not a big deal to me but it is to you. It's only a big deal for me when I can't help you in the amount you need because of my own responsibilities that I had prior to meeting you.

I'm sorry if I just don't get it when it comes to this issue, but you get so, so upset and reactionary around the issues of work and money. I don't care if you work or not. I never have. I don't care whether you ever work for money again in your lifetime. That's not the issue for me. The issue for me is that it would make me (selfish as usual) happy if I knew you would be okay no matter what. I just don't understand why you will accept help from me and no one else. Is that not pride? Please explain it to me because I just don't get it. I don't care whether you accept help from anyone, but I do care that you're okay. That is my only concern.

It would make me happy to know you're going to be okay and not hungry or homeless, but I can't make the decisions I have to make about my life based on whether you can or will take care of yourself. If everything comes from Allah, what difference does it make who the person is that actually hands you the food or money or provides a place for you to stay? I know that you have provided more to me than could ever be measured in dollar bills, and the word "mooch" is a word that has never, ever come from me. That is a word that's inside of you for one reason or another. You react so badly that I just can't help wondering who has used this money/employment thing against you in the past. All I want to do is understand because it is a huge trigger for you.

I know I keep hurting you. Please let me help you the best I can. You are still free to make whatever choices you have to make for your own sake. If that means you never want to see me again or hear from me, I will respect that. Yes, it would make me sad, but I will respect whatever you say. No matter what happens, I love you, whether you

are a prince or a frog or a figment of my imagination or anyone else. You are Tariq to me, and I know what that means to me, and I will help you in the ways that I can.

For some reason all my Sufi folder ended up in the recycle bin. I don't know how that happened. The only thing left was the folder itself with no files.

I'm sorry about the misunderstanding last night. I know -- I'm not very good at apologies.

I will write to you later unless I receive word that you don't want me to.

Love,

Lara

§

There are very few phone conversations between Lara and myself. The few that occur are, usually, very brief. In some of these conversations, Lara gives hints that she is thinking about giving up her apartment when the lease ends and moving back to Brimley with Ron.

§

June 3, 2002

Dear Lara,

I have received your e-mail about the money thing and I might either respond to it later in this e-mail or in another separate e-mail. But, just after I got done sending you the last email, a few extra thoughts came to me.

First of all, I recall what you said with respect to what Ron said to you about why he had not been more sensitive and vulnerable acting all of these years ... he said, in effect, it was your fault because he was afraid you would exploit his vulnerability and sensitivity. What he is saying is a lie -- he is lying to himself, if he really believes that, and he is lying to you.

The proof of what I am saying lies -- sorry for the pun -- in the fact he has absolutely no evidence to back up what he says with respect to your behavior toward him ... in fact, quite the contrary. Without trying to make you into a saint, the fact of the matter is you were in many, many ways very gentle, forgiving, tolerant, forbearing, compassionate, caring, and supportive of him despite his many faults, and whatever distance arose between the two of you was due to his violence, insensitivity, lack of caring, anger, desire to control you, and pulling stunts like he did when you were pregnant with your daughter.

But, once again, you let him get away with lying, and in doing this, you help entrench his pathology and yours. In fact, you let him get away with lying every time he tries to blame you for his own inadequacies.

Take the Wanda issue. He says you are the blame for his going to bed with her, and that really the responsibility was yours to stop him from doing this, and you could have done this, but you didn't, so the fault is yours not his. This is the most self-serving alcoholic bull-shit I ever heard.

He blames you again and again. While I am sure there might be facets of your relationship with him for which you should take responsibility in that regard, one of the things for which you don't take responsibility is refusing to hold Ron accountable for the lies he is continually telling as he tries to shift responsibility away from himself and on to you.

You might think I am being very hard-nosed about Ron while you are being very compassionate. In truth, the opposite is the case, for by holding the mirror of truth up to what Ron does and says, he has, at least, a chance for changing himself, whereas your misguided compassion just excuses and enables him, as well as shackles him more deeply to his pathology while letting you feel good about yourself as you cater to your own pathology.

A second afterthought has to do with Ron's claims you haven't been giving your relationship with him a fair chance. There is only one person in this whole mess who has a legitimate right to claim this and that is me with respect to you. You really have not been fair to me throughout this last (almost) year. You have trampled on my feelings

again and again throughout this time and been very insensitive and heartless toward me on an on-going basis.

It shouldn't be Ron who is saying give me one more month and I will show you things can change. It should be me saying to you, forget Ron for a month and commit yourself to me -- as you said you were going to do on the 31st -- and let me show you, God willing, the changes that will take place, not in me, but in you.

I can honestly say that if you are not, God willing, happier, more content, more peaceful, less anxious, more relaxed, better focused, less depressed, more embracing of life and more thankful to God you are alive, then you are free to go back to Ron and pick-up where you left off and I will get out of your life forever. You have been fighting me -- at least your nafs and hamzat have -- for the last ten months, and despite all of their resistance, indifference, and insensitivity toward me, and even though all of this time you showed preference to Ron in just about everything you did -- from money to sensitivity and time (I always got you, for the most part, when it was late, you were tired, and you already were exhausted from dealing with Ron -- either in person or on the phone -- earlier in the day) -- despite all of these disadvantages, inequalities, and injustices concerning our relationship, in the end it was not Ron whom you missed, but me. Only your own pathologies and fears prevent you from fully committing yourself to us.

Ron had twenty-three years to get it right and he fouled up royally -- to the point where he drove away and helped make seriously ill the best thing that ever happened to him. He had another eight weeks to get things right. Yet, once again, he helped make you into a nervous, anxiety-ridden, hyper-vigilant, unhappy, angry individual who was losing energy, focus, rationality, and her soul.

Now, he wants to have a further chance to do something and, hopefully, get it right. If you have any sense of fairness in you, if you have any sense of justice and decency in you, you should think about trying to do right by me for a change.

Any person who would claim that 23-plus years of opportunity to get things right was not being given a fair chance is a person with serious problems of being out of touch with truth, integrity, honesty,

reciprocity, and justice. He asked for another chance and he was given it. Now, he wants another chance.

What about me? Do I not have a right to a fair shot at things ... one in which Ron is not imposing himself upon us and intruding into our relationship through your vulnerabilities and pathologies?

If he is so convinced you love him and God has destined that you two should be together forever, then, let him put his money where his mouth is and leave it to God to put in your heart what is the proper thing to do ... except both you and he know what God has put in your heart and both of your pathological sides are uneasy with God's wishes in this matter. So, you each cheat in order to get things to go the way your respective nafs and hamzats want things to be.

Did I interfere with your life in Brimley? Did I constantly call you, or pressure you, or play on your weaknesses, or harass you, or stalk you, or try to control you or lie to you when it suited my purposes?

You claim to be so concerned with being fair to Ron, but what about fairness to me? You claim to love me more than your mother and children or anyone, then why not prove it to me by treating me in a way that reflects your alleged love ... words -- as we well know from Ron -- are cheap.

A third afterthought concerns your hamzat. Are you continuing to communicate with her in the way I outlined? This is very necessary for the injured condition of your hamzat -- along with the machinations of your nafs, along with lending an ear to Iblis' whisperings, and permitting yourself to be controlled by the lies and empty promises of an unbeliever like Ron – is what inclines you back toward Brimley. If you have any evidence to put forth or arguments to offer that what I am saying is not true, then you should be writing me about these and telling me how what you are doing is rooted in something other than pathology -- as Jane said in the Hollins meeting, if you can't say no, then your 'yeses' are meaningless and you stayed with Ron for twenty-three years because you couldn't say no and you became sick because all of your yeses were actually worse than meaningless ... they were like weights around your neck that were suffocating you and drowning you in your own anxieties, PTSD, panic-disorder, hyper-vigilance, depression, and learned helplessness.

You are inclined to return to Brimley now because you can't say no, and your yeses are meaningless except to serve your pathology and Ron's pathology. If what I am saying is not true, then as Bill O'Reilly might say: 'show me where I am wrong here'.

You are beginning to succumb to the same cycle of vulnerability to Ron you displayed during the period between July 2001 and March 2002. No matter how much evidence is before you, you refuse to acknowledge it ... or you acknowledge it but refuse to act in accordance with it, and you are aware that your being drawn back to Brimley is sick, totally without merit, not something that you, in your heart of hearts wants to do, something that is at best is going to make you a very unhappy woman, and, at worst, is going to destroy you, and something that is thoroughly rooted in pathology.

Twice, now, God has intervened in your life and brought you back to safety and relative sanity. But, if you turn your back on God's Grace once again, there might be no further reprieve.

You know there is only one way to break free of your pathological addiction to Ron's hamzat and that is to stay away from him completely and be with me on the spiritual path. The fact you won't do this indicates to me you have a very deep-rooted desire to self-destruct and you know you will get your wish by going back to Brimley. If that is what you truly want to do -- that is, destroy yourself -- then like any other form of suicide, there is nothing anyone can do since you are so intent on accomplishing your purpose.

But, God has come into your life with another solution. He is saying notwithstanding what has happened to you in relation to: your mother, your cousin, your uncle, your father, alcoholism, your sister, Ron, your brother, and so on, I want you to know I have great love for you and for you having weathered the storms that have been sent your way, and the silver lining in your currently dark life-cloud is the Sufi path and Tariq ... please embrace them and love them, and I will shower blessings upon you all the rest of your days.

The decision you have to make is not between Ron and me. The decision you have to make is whether you wish to proceed with your program of self-destruction concerning your spiritual potential and the opportunities that God graciously has bestowed on you through

the Sufi path ... or whether you are going to affirm life and embrace what has come into your life during the last year and a half.

If you want to continue to destroy yourself, then, by all means return to Brimley. If you want to reach out and grab hold of the hand of friendship that God has extended to you, then, come and take my coward's hand and let us proceed on as best we can, in the time that is left to us, to learn how to serve God and struggle toward self-realization.

Love,
Tariq

§

June 3, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Lara,

You are going to have to believe me, or not, when I tell you that although -- yes, I did bring up the fact that my situation is very precarious financially speaking – that this was not brought up for any purpose other than to let you know that if I have to leave the office, then this might have consequences ... for you, for me, and, possibly, for both of us. However, shortly after bringing the issues of finances up, you said that you feel part of the reason why I want you is motivated by money ... that is, your money. You have done this on two or three other occasions. You have questioned the sincerity of my love for you as well as my integrity by expressing the fact you have doubts about some of my intentions with respect to you.

In fact, the other day when you got up and walked out on me by using your need to take a shower as a pretext (and I am not questioning the fact you had to take a shower ... only that you had to do it right then), the exchange that put you in a huff was after you said you don't believe that people are necessarily motivated by just one thing and different motivations can play a role in why they do things, I said 'please, don't get cute with me' because you were trying to attribute something to me in your comment that was not there and it was presumptuous of you to suppose otherwise.

I have been working since I was seven years old. With one or two relatively brief exceptions, I always have been able to find work of one sort or another and, for the most part, I have, by the Grace of Allah, paid my own way. It is only the last seven-to-eight years that really have proven problematic as far as getting jobs is concerned. I have tried lots of different things to try to generate revenue, and I have not let pride interfere with the sorts of jobs for which I have applied.

Have I always tried as hard as I could? Well, if by this, one means: have I put in a lot of time and effort trying to secure gainful employment, the answer is yes. But, if by this, one is asking whether I have tried as hard as I could with respect to finding work out in the world, the answer is sometime yes and sometime no ... but I always have been trying, and I really have not been looking for anyone to bankroll me. If I could, I would like to work under the same illusion most people work under when they believe they are earning their keep when, in truth, it is really God's generosity and kindness that provides them with an excuse -- that is, a job -- through which God channels money to them.

In any event, there have been a number of times in which you have made comments about what I am doing, or trying to do, or not doing with respect to the issue of work and money that were not my imagination ... comments that were neither supportive nor encouraging nor very understanding -- all things that you likely would have extended to Ron without thinking about it twice.

We could have cut expenses four-to-five months ago if you had not dragged your heels on the divorce issue. Furthermore, and I suppose your hamzat's regard for Ron's hamzat was behind the following, but I don't know how many times you have offered me work, only to renege on the offer later on.

I feel embarrassed telling my brother Bruce that it looks like something is working out with the proofreading thing, only to see him again a few weeks later and have to tell him the proofreading idea didn't pan out after all. In fact, it was during one of those occasions when my situation was fairly desperate, and you and I had -- I thought -- reached an agreement about how to proceed and, then, you became preoccupied with the situation in Brimley for a month, or more, that I had to go to Bruce and tell him that because a business deal had fallen

through (i.e., that between you and me ... although I didn't tell Bruce this) I needed to 'borrow' \$4-500 dollars no questions asked, and I told Bruce that, quite possibly, I wasn't going to be able to pay him back ... at least, not for awhile.

By the Grace of God, although I could tell that Bruce dearly wanted to give me a lecture about life, money, work, and the Protestant Ethic - he bit his lip and gave me the money and has never mentioned it since. However, I told him at the time that I was only going to be asking this once, and I intend to keep my word.

When you went back to Brimley, I am sure you remember that, just prior to your going back, you had promised me the proof-reading jobs for several big contracts that you had. You called me up on the phone to confirm if I wanted to do them, which I affirmed, and that was the last I ever heard of them. I could have used that money ... although you did give some to me some money a day or two before you knew you were likely going back to Brimley since when I said that maybe next month you would get lucky and not have to contribute anything to me, you cried.

I wrote to Jerry (my other brother) during this period when you were in Brimley and told him I had an income tax check and a security deposit from US cellular that were forthcoming but wanted to know whether would he front me the money now and I would pay him when the money came in. He agreed and sent me a check for \$350.00, however, my situation has not improved and I had to tell him I needed the money that eventually came and wouldn't be able to pay him back as I had hoped and planned, and he said he wasn't worried about the money ... but, here, again, I do not intend to ask him for further help, not because of pride but because it wouldn't be the right thing to do ... if he wants to offer something on his own, then, this becomes another matter.

Although Bruce had been kind enough to offer to pay my rent at his daughter's place, they were not forthright in their approach to this, and, in addition, there were certain dimensions of the offer -- which I won't go into -- with which I felt uneasy, and told Bruce, long before the actual offer came that even if Lorna did buy the place, I, probably, would not take them up on the offer ... but I appreciated the offer very much.

Last month, when nothing broke on the job front I went to the woman in Canada, whom I have told you about, who used to be married to the alcoholic guy in our silsilah. Over the last several years she has, on three or four occasions, offered to help me out financially, but I have always turned her down, hoping God would find me some other way to get things done, but when nothing happened, and the end of the month had arrived and I still hadn't paid the rent, I phoned her and asked her for some financial help and she agreed.

Now, we come to us. I have never questioned the fact you have other financial obligations to look after, but the time you told me my credit card bills were my own, you were quite nasty about it and said it in a very contemptuous and condescending manner ... this is not my imagination; you did do that. You might have come across more aggressively than you intended, but, nonetheless, you were not very nice about it at all -- and, yet, I really don't disagree with you -- that is, the fact of the matter is that these are my bills, not yours.

At the same time Ron was running up all kinds of credit card bills - you even showed these to me -- and you were quite happy to pay those ... even though he was not part of the arrangement of the 31st, and you, supposedly, were disengaging yourself from your marriage to him. The differences in how you responded to his credit card bills and mine were very palpable to me, and this was not my imagination or some sort of hang-up that I brought to the table.

Our problem is you have abandoned me so many times -- quite apart from your going back to Brimley -- that I have some appreciation for how you must have felt when Ron kept leaving you during the first couple years of your relationship to him. The fact of the matter is I have never been able to rely on you -- and not just in terms of money but in terms of anything -- from one week to the next, let alone from one month to the next. Promises are made and, then, broken, and I don't even know if we are going to be together from one day – or hour -- to the next. The situation has been very, very volatile ... not because of me, but because of you.

Have you given money to me? Yes you have, and, to be sure, not all of this has been in conjunction with money that I have earned from you, but the bottom line is you are unreliable with respect to our

relationship, and, therefore, it has given me considerable cause to question the sincerity of your feelings for me.

We have had a relationship because --- for the most part -- I have fought for it ... not out of pathology, but because I have a genuine love for you and I am truly worried about the future of your soul. I am very clearly focused about why I am trying so hard to maintain relations with you despite the fact your nafs and hamzat are trying so hard to find ways of destroying yourself, while being aided and abetted by Iblis and Ron.

So, when you begin to question my motives about our relationship, you are directing your doubts at the wrong person, and, yes, I resent this a great deal, for it adds insult to injury. Not only do you mistreat me, but you pull a Ron and try to blame me for what is going on by insinuating one of my motives is your money. This has not happened just once, but a number of times.

Am I overly sensitive to this -- maybe, I am, but I don't think you realize how your behaviors have hurt me during the last 10 months, and even now, despite everything, you are seriously contemplating getting back with Ron yet once again while just leaving me out in the cold ... but you seem to want to assuage your guilt at doing this by throwing money at me and saying how much you love me, and respect me and, desire my welfare. If you really do love me, respect me, and desire my welfare, then how about living up to your commitments of the 31st, and if you are not prepared to do this, then, why would I want to take money from someone who has learned the art of talking out of both sides of her mouth from the AA king.

If pride was my problem, I would have left you a long time ago. I have tried to find ways of working with you on proof-reading and other job possibilities but you keep coming up with excuses, of one sort or another, about why these things didn't happen.

I believe you when you say money is no big deal to you and you didn't care if I never worked again. And, this is part of the problem. You are prepared to give me what means little to you -- namely, money -- but you are not prepared to give what does mean something to you -- namely, your commitment.

If I couldn't find work, but you were committed to me, then I would know that because of the way you feel about money, you were glad to share what you had and what you could -- given your other obligations -- and I would be willing to accept that money from you because I knew there was sincerity in your relationship with me ... something that is very important to me.

If I worked for you, then, I would have no problem taking money from you because I would be providing a service in exchange for cash. But, if you are not prepared to commit yourself to our relationship, then I simply do not feel right in taking money from you because your failure to commit yourself means you really don't believe in me, your shaykh, the silsilah, or the guidance and grace that have been extended to you. If you are not prepared to commit yourself to our relationship, and, prefer, instead the pathologies of your relationship with Ron, then I really don't want money that comes out of such pathology.

Yes, everything does come from Allah, but there are permissible ways and impermissible ways of accessing such money. If a person robs a bank, then, the money they get comes from God, but the means they have used to acquire the money is impermissible, and they have committed a sin thereby.

When I asked Baba about whether I should accept money from an ashram for a talk I had given, he said if the money is given with love and sincerity of *niyat* or intention, then, it was permissible for me to accept the money. If these dimensions of love and sincerity were missing, then it was not permissible for me to accept the money.

When I took money from my two brothers and the woman in Canada, there was love and sincerity in what they were offering. But, where is your love and sincerity with respect to me? Furthermore, such money would not be an expression of that love and sincerity because money is no big thing to you.

You say you love me but you keep running away from me because of your pathological entanglements with Ron. You say I should accept your intentions as sincere, but you treat your shaykh, the silsilah, the Prophet, and Allah, badly because you turn your back on the guidance and grace you have received from them, and, instead, you have decided, apparently, you really do know best and your opinion is superior to theirs, and, apparently, you believe it is better to be

unhappy, dysfunctional, addicted, and increasingly ill with a guy who is a complete and utter jerk, than it is to go with the Grace that has been extended to you through the Sufi Path.

Now, you tell me where the love and sincerity is in all this? For, I really don't understand how you can say the things you do about your alleged feelings for me and, then, do everything within your power to hurt and injure me in exchange for a person who has made a mess of his life, your life, and who knows how many other lives.

Money is not enough to convince me of your love or sincerity. Under the present circumstances of your unwillingness to commit yourself to our relationship is like your inability to say no to Ron, your yes doesn't mean anything. You give money to me, not because you really believe in what I am about and what God has given you, but because you don't want to have to live with the feeling that your willingness to give money in lieu of a spiritual commitment to our relationship is really about feeding your comfort zone, not mine -- I am purely a secondary consideration in this little affair.

You shouldn't be asking me whether it is my pride that is getting in the way of things, but, rather, what is standing in the way of you acting in concordance with your professed love for me. The fact you will not do so despite having absolutely no good reason for not doing this indicates there is a problem with the sincerity of your niyat or intention concerning me and our relationship. Under these conditions, then, I feel the money you are offering is impermissible because it lacks the requisite conditions of love and sincerity, and, as indicated above, the reason it lacks these conditions is that your inclinations to return to Brimley and turn your back on the commitments of the 31st is a clear indication you are rejecting the grace that has been extended to you -- and anytime that offered Grace is rejected, this is a sign there is a serious problem with sincerity of intention.

If you are offering the money because you also are inclined to commit yourself to our relationship and the Sufi path and you want to help me stay around to provide yourself with the time you need in order to take the steps necessary to make good your escape so we can be together, then this is another matter. But, if you offer me the money by saying that the foregoing is your motive, but, then, really, underneath, you are leaning strongly toward going back to Brimley,

then you would be lying to yourself and to me if you were to say the real motive for your offering the money was to help me stay around so you can be in a position to commit yourself to our relationship ... and if this were the case, then saying misleading things of this sort is always an expression of insincerity, and, therefore, would make the offer impermissible.

Niyat -- or intention -- and adab -- or spiritual etiquette -- are extremely important on the Sufi path, because everything is rooted in such processes. You might think it is no big deal that you have money to give, but your niyat might be incorrect and, therefore, this renders the money impermissible to me. The problem concerning the money does not lie with me, it lies with you, because it is your niyat and adab that are the determining factors here ... not any 'thing' that I have with respect to money.

When we have been together and our relationship seemed to be developing somewhat, despite problems, I did take money from you ... money that was above and beyond what I earned from you. When you left to go to Brimley, I did not accept any further money from you.

When you came back to Bamford, I did accept a little money from you, but now you are thinking about going back to Brimley -- contrary to all evidence and despite clear spiritual guidance against such an action -- then, there is, once again a potential problem surrounding your offer of money. The problem here is one of the sincerity of niyat and what is permissible and impermissible from the perspective of spiritual adab.

I have acted toward you fairly consistently across all of these months because I have been clear about my niyat and the principles of adab governing things. You have been fairly inconsistent across all of these months because you have been confused about your niyat as well as the principles of adab which govern your relationship with me, your shaykh, and the silsilah.

The problem in all of this is not with me. You need to look in the mirror and ask yourself what in the hell you are doing and why are you doing it and in accordance with what principles of spiritual etiquette.

Things are actually very simple when you get right down to it. Unfortunately, you have made things very complicated and hard upon yourself because of your reluctance to live in accordance with the teachings of the Sufi path.

I hope the foregoing helps answer some of the questions that you have had, and don't hesitate to ask further questions if there are further issues.

Love,

Tariq

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June 3, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Lara,

Once, again, just as I think the e-mail hotline to you will cool down because there is not much more to say, then, along comes other thoughts for consideration. And, the first thing with respect to your situation is you need to read everything I have sent you again and again because, God willing, it might help you to put things in perspective and defend you against yourself and against Ron. You need to read it all again because you have told me a number of times that all of it -- or most of it -- is true and, yet, you are now toying with the idea of going back to Brimley and, therefore, going against everything you have said is true about you, Ron, your relationship with him, and your relationship with me.

You have said there is a problem with you with regards to Ron, and aside from the problems already discussed and that won't be repeated here, you are a lot like your Grandmother's current condition. In other words, just as she seems to have no short-term memory, and will tell the same story again and again and do the same things again and again -- as if they never happened at all -- you are doing the same thing in relation to Ron.

Just ten days ago, your emotional, psychological, and spiritual health was deteriorating rapidly. I was shocked by your condition when I saw you on the steps outside your office.

Your regular counselor has told you in his way. Your marriage counselor was telling you, and you were telling you, but, now, ten days later, you are acting as if none of that was ever true, and this is all about giving Ron another chance.

This willingness of yours to give Ron more and more one-last-chances would be noble if it weren't so pathologically motivated. We would all like one more chance to turn our lives around, and, so, it seems like it should be the thing to do ... give the guy one last chance to turn his life around, but let us take a look at intentions and behavior.

For example, Ron sounds very fair and caring when he says that if you will give him just one more month, he will show you he can be caring, sensitive, fair, non-controlling, vulnerable, respectful, honest, and so on. But why is he willing to do this?

Is he doing it for God? Is he doing it for you? Is he doing it for the family?

No, he is doing it because he is jealous of me and you -- both separately and as a couple -- and because he continues to seek to control the situation. He is putting his intentions in the guise of something acceptable and good to throw you off balance and to confuse the issue.

If a person is doing something with the intention of serving God, then, the sole purpose should be to serve God quite independently of getting something in return for it. Or, stated slightly differently, virtue is its own reward, and if Ron truly were interested in turning things around instead of manipulating the situation, he would be prepared to change in a better direction because it is the right thing to do with respect to God and with respect to Ron's essential nature.

In fact, Ron is doing something quite the opposite. He is not saying he will change for the sake of God, or truth, or justice, or life's purpose, or fairness to his family. Rather, he is saying he is going to change if you will stay with him and, then, he will show you evidence of such capacity to change within one month's time.

Now, Ron might put a lot of effort in to changing his life around, and he might even be successful, to some extent -- although Allah knows best -- but it really doesn't matter whether, or not, he changes,

because his intentions for doing so are corrupt, and corrupt intentions can lead to nothing but corruption of the soul ... his and yours.

Let me give you just one example of this. Consider Ron's AA work and the deep divide there is between how he acts -- and, acting is the operative word here -- with the people in AA and how he acts with you. If Ron's public personae were truly sincere, then, he would have been doing in private with you what he has been showing publicly all these years to the people in AA, and the fact he has not done this proves he is a phony because the reasons why he does what he does in public is not about truth, honesty, justice, compassion, fairness, integrity, or God ... it is about Ron's ego and his need to be thought of well by others.

I believe Ron is like those people I told you about the other day in a hadith or tradition of the Prophet that I had mentioned. That was the story of the educator, jurist, and theologian who all died and were each asked the same question: why should you be admitted to paradise, and they each listed all of the great deeds they have done and how they have helped so many people in the service of God, and when they get done, they were called liars by God because each of those people served his own nafs or ego when doing the things that they did ... just as Ron appears to be doing.

The fact goodness might come through Ron's actions is neither here nor there for such goodness was destined to come into those people's lives quite independently of what Ron did. He was merely the locus of manifestation for that rizq or destined portion to enter into these people's life, and this was God's doing, not Ron's. Ron has been given the opportunity to get things right again and again in this regard, but pretty much everything he does in AA is a function of his nafs at work and not spirituality ... and if what I am saying were not true, he would have been treating you differently all these years, and you would not have noticed how important Ron's public image is to him, or how many inconsistencies there are between what he says to others and what he actually does in his own private, personal life.

In Islam, a hypocrite is someone who publicly professes one thing, why privately doing and believing something else. Ron seems to be a hypocrite.

You have seen the evidence for a long time, and when you get angry enough, you have thrown this out at him. In fact, although part of your anger toward AA people might be due to the jealousy that your nafs and hamzat feel because others are getting what you would like to get, part of your disgust with things AA is because of the sheer hypocrisy of it all.

Is it good people stop drinking and, as a result, do less damage to themselves and others? Yes, it is! Is it good people be given at least the opportunity to move to a spiritual life? Yes, it is!

Are there people in AA who, by the Grace of Allah, accomplish this? Yes, I believe there are ... although as you know, this number is likely to be very, very small.

But, whatever good is done in these respects is not because of Ron's self-sacrificing service on behalf of the people of AA. Ron does what he does -- for the most part -- because of what his ego gets paid in return in self-esteem, enhanced public image, thinking well of himself, and the adulation of others.

Your comment about Matt's dances -- which I believe entirely even though I have never been to one of them -- is that they are like a bar room without the booze with all that this implies with respect to bad behaviors, bad intentions, and an almost total absence of spirituality.

But, much of AA is like that, and you have told me as much when you say you all joke about it and because AA's etiquette requires you to be tolerant of people to give them a safe place for sobering up, and keeping sober. In truth, however, a lot of bad intentions, behaviors, and ignoring of even simple principles of spiritual adab or ethical orientation with respect to one another goes on in AA.

There were a few people who remembered you and wanted to support you in however minor a fashion when you separated from Ron, but one of the things that has bothered you when you went back to Brimley is how phony many of these AA people have been in how they are acting toward you when you returned, as opposed to when you were on your own and were in need of support. When you were on your own almost none of them were there for you.

If Ron were truly sincere in what he is doing, he would work in complete anonymity and in a way that nobody was aware of his

actions and what he was doing, and this is why both the Bible and the Qur'an counsel us to not let the left hand know what the right hand is doing, because when this happens, intention or niyat becomes compromised and corrupted and one begins doing things for all the wrong reasons ...which is what Ron is doing and why I have little respect for what he does because it is not in the service of God, although I acknowledge God is using Ron -- in spite of Ron -- not because of him and in a way similar to the manner in which God uses Iblis ... that is, for Divine purposes and not because Iblis is doing things for the right reasons but because God's plan is such that no one can interfere with it no matter how bad a person's intentions might be. You have seen all of this, and you have known all of this, but, unfortunately, you turn a blind eye to it and excuse his hypocritical behavior to serve your own pathological agenda and needs -- except when you get really angry and you begin to point out some of this hypocrisy

One of the reasons why AA is often like a bar room without the booze is because, for the most part: either people are not being held accountable (even in private) for their bad behaviors or people ignore such teachings. One of the reasons why AA works is precisely because of the absence of accountability, and one of the reasons why many people never progress beyond sobriety (if even that) in AA is because of people's unwillingness to take to heart the real meaning of the third step and, thereby, to be willing to change their lives by turning their lives over to God ... I don't care how many times Ron reads the St. Francis prayer or mouths God's name, if he is not prepared to act on what he reads or says as God wishes it -- and not as Ron's nafs wishes it -- then what he reads and says would appear to be without spiritual value or purpose.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has said faith consists in three things: (1) profession of the tongue; (2) verification of the heart; (3) action of the limbs ... at best, Ron is stuck in (1) -- and even there this is not done with the best of intentions.

He does not, and has not, used his heart to verify the truth of what he says and reads, and, as a result, all of his actions are without spiritual merit because his intentions do not come out of a transformed heart, but they come instead, from nafs, and, therefore,

although he acts, because step (2) is almost entirely missing, his actions cannot possibly be correct from a spiritual perspective, no matter what others might think and no matter what Ron might think.

Ron is thinking all about his legacy and what kind of a funeral he would have and how many people would come and testify about the good Ron did, and every one of these people -- including Ron -- are committing shirk or associating partners with God when they think and act this way. Ron's primary intentions in AA are not to serve God, but to serve his own nafs. Ron's motivation for helping others is not primarily a matter of spirituality and genuine love, kindness, compassion, and generosity for those people, but, rather, he serves those people because his nafs is being fed in the process. And, if this is true of Ron's relationship with AA -- the thing that he claims to love -- then what of his intentions concerning change with respect to you.

Again, let us take a look at his recent behaviors -- during precisely the same time he professed to you he was going to change completely and be all the things you wanted him to be. He was asked by you not to contact him, and he heard the voice mail message because he asked you to take it off since others likely were hearing it as well.

Has he done this (i.e., not contact you)? No, he has not respected your wishes, and, quite the contrary, he has called you again and again and again and again. You, of course, had a role in this because you, too, promised someone not to speak with Ron, and, yet, you went with your own pathology and did as your nafs and hamzat dictated, and in allowing Ron to repeatedly violate your wishes, you enabled his pathology to continue to behave badly.

He stalked you at the Hollis AA meeting. You know it and so does Jane and Carol. He saw you three riding together, and although Carol has never ever seen him at those meetings, lo and behold, clever hunter that he is, he shows up. And, what did you see him do before he came in -- he rode back and forth trying to see if he could see the vehicle in which you came.

If his intentions had been sincere he would not have done this. Instead, independently of seeing you three, he already would have been planning on attending that service, but this did not appear to be what was going on.

So, here is someone who out of one side of his mouth is telling you that he is going to change, and out of the other side of his mouth continues to act in precisely the same way as he has for twenty-three years. Yet, you permit him get away with this, and, so, you continue to help him maintain his pathology.

This is why you two must be kept apart because you just enable one another ... again and again and again. This is why you are not doing him any favors when you are contemplating going back to him.

It is pathology driving him, and it is pathology driving you. Consequently, claiming that you both are turning your lives over to God via the third step of the AA twelve-step program is just the way you two can try to feel noble about what is going on because turning your lives over to God is not what is going on ... either in the way of intention or in the way of behavior.

Next, what happens at the Hollis meeting? Ron is asked to chair the meeting, and despite the fact there are 30-40 other people in the room, he gets you and Jane to read certain traditional parts of the meeting -- to which you can't say no -- and, in so doing, he has taken you all hostage and controlled your behaviors (i.e., now, you cannot leave the meeting) in a way that, on the surface, seems all very nice, but his underlying intentions stink to high heaven.

The foregoing sorts of things are coming – in the present and not in the distant past -- from the guy who is promising you he will change. Yet, even as he is making these promises, he continues to act in the old manner ... and you continue to let him do so and do not hold him accountable.

Next, he uses the chair position to serve his own agenda and holds the rest of the people at the meeting hostage to that agenda -- even while he, seemingly, is being so honest about how he is publically acknowledging to the audience that he has held you hostage for twenty-three years. The sheer hypocrisy and moral effrontery of what he did at that meeting -- to supposedly publicly confess to such bad behavior (hostage taking and control) while continuing to do precisely that in front of everyone, including you -- makes me want to throw up.

And when Jane called him on it, what does this man do -- this man who is so sincere about changing -- he gets angry at Jane for telling the

truth. Yet, once again, you let him get away with it ... oh, yes, you noted the inconsistency between what he was saying and what he was doing, but you excused his behavior -- or what is even worse, like your Grandmother, five minutes after it was over, it is like it has never happened, and you have, once again, wiped Ron's slate clean and refused to hold him accountable.

In doing so, you serve your hamzat and nafs as well as Ron's nafs and hamzat, but you are not serving God. Your intentions in this matter are just as corrupt and compromised as are Ron's ... although the nature of the corruption is different in each case and, therefore, has a different smell to it.

Next, although Susan's father, Phil, is in the audience and his loss should have been uppermost in Ron's mind and heart, does Ron attend to that loss -- I mean Susan is not even buried, yet, and Phil has just come through an ordeal with his daughter's illness – but does, that magnificent servant of AA (Ron) serve the needs of the people in AA? No, in a completely cruel, selfish, insensitive and boorish manner, he tends to his own pain, needs, moods and desires, rather than the needs of people like Phil.

Yet, once again, you let him get away with this, and in so doing, you dishonored Susan's memory, and the nature of your pathology is such that you will continue to let Ron do this to other people, to you, and to your family, and you will try to justify it all by saying you are trying to give him another chance when the real motivation is you want to give your hamzat another chance to continue on in her addiction to his hamzat. Unfortunately, your thinking and intentions have become so corrupted you won't allow yourself to see what you two are doing and how anything and everything gets sacrificed to your respective pathologies ... even Susan's memory.

Next, after the Hollis meeting, Ron announces to you his big ambiguous threats about this being a final good-bye ... knowing how you would interpret what he says (as a veiled suicide threat) and knowing how vulnerable you are to this issue (because of the circumstances surrounding your mother's death), and knowing how you can be manipulated through his pushing the buttons of your hamzat. In making his ambiguous pronouncement, he is playing one of the ultimate control cards.

Yet, you let him get away with it once again. In doing so, your pathology was once again bowing down before the great 'god' Ron and, once again, your pathology is offering your essential self up for sacrifice to this noble person who is so intent on changing but who continues to do the same things ad nauseam. You do all this because your hamzat is busy wiping the slate clean so she has the chance of continuing to be pathological.

Moreover, your qalb lets all of this go on, as if God's purposes are being served by your willingness to forgive ... which is not really forgiveness at all but just a pathological need to wipe the slate clean so your respective diseases can continue to manifest themselves. However, while you might dress the pathology up in the clothes of forgiveness -- since this has such a nice spiritual ring to it -- yet what is actually going on is very dank, smelly, and devious.

Ron has admitted to you very clearly that if he were a man -- which he is not and this is not me speaking but Ron speaking -- then, he would let you go and be happy, and, as a result, he would be happy you are happy. If I thought you and Ron would be happy together -- that you really loved him in a non-pathological way ... that your respective spiritualities would be constructively enhanced by getting back together again -- then, God willing, I would step out of the picture right now, and you know this is not idle talk on my part.

I have seen the damage he has done to you in just eight short weeks. You saw the damage he did to you in that same short period of time, and you were not only feeling the effects of that damage, but you were manifesting the damage through your being for anyone to see who at all cared about you. Your regular counselor saw the damage being inflicted on you. Your marriage counselor saw the damage you were inflicting on each other.

When are you going to get it through your head, heart, and soul that you two are totally destructive toward one another ... that what is going on is the antithesis of spirituality and almost all of your respective intentions are rooted in pathology and are not serving God nor helping your essential selves to become realized to some degree.

You have said to me that you have survivor's guilt and that you just want Ron to have what you have been able to garner through me. However, you both flunk the sincerity test in this regard.

If Ron were really sincere in wanting to change and to change for the right reasons -- that is, to serve God better by becoming a better human being -- then he would do so whether you came back or not. I told you what the test for Ron's sincerity is -- let him come to me or to any legitimate spiritual guide and submit himself to God without any pre-conditions or expectations or riders being attached.

Let him truly turn over his life to God and let whatever happens, happen, not to serve his desires, whims or needs, but because the transformation that is being sought is what God ordains ... and let Ron be happy with that. But, Ron is not interested in doing this.

Instead, his actions and intentions are very different. He says to you -- I know you are happy with Tariq, that you are peaceful, loved, respected, honored, and have a spiritual path, but I really don't care about that. I only care about me and my happiness and my wants and desires. He tells you that he wants you to sacrifice all of that and in doing so let him exercise control over your life -- yet, again -- in order to be better able to control with whom, where, and how you might be happy.

If you do as he is urging you to, you will be sacrificing yourself for the wrong reasons -- that is, for pathological reasons, not spiritual ones -- and you will be allowing yourself to be controlled in, yet, another way. Furthermore, you will be serving the desires of his nafs with respect to his jealousy toward you, me, and us because it is jealousy, among other things, which wishes to call you away from what you love, enjoy, and are happy with. His nafs will be very happy with you for bowing down and prostrating yourself before his jealousy and its wish to deprive you, me and us of the happiness we have together ... so, by returning to Ron, you help to serve his worst tendencies, not his best, and you continue to enable his worse tendencies, and in so doing, you help to destroy him and yourself in the process.

I have told you that if what you really are interested in is Ron's spiritual well-fare so he is better than okay and if what Ron is really interested in is changing for God's sake and not in order to control you in, yet, another way, then, let him take me up on my offer to work with him but without any conditions or expectations on his part concerning you. If you say you believe he would make a better mureed than you would because he has the capacity to apply himself to the path whole-

heartedly, then, let him put his money where his mouth is and make the changes for the sake of God and for the sake of becoming a better person to serve God. If he has the capacity you think he has, then, he will be able, God willing, to do this on his own without any conditions whatsoever.

A person gets sober not because of family, or jobs, or career, or friends or self-esteem -- all of which the alcoholic was quite willing to sacrifice when it served his disease to do so. An alcoholic gets sober because she or he has come to understand deep within his or her being -- in a very existential, inarticulate way -- that to continue means madness, death, and complete self-annihilation. An alcoholic gets sober, by the Grace of God, because he or she needs to, not because she or he wants to ... because wanting to get sober is never enough.

Similarly, if Ron wants to stop being addicted to his own predatory pathology, he must come to realize, deep within himself -- in an existential, inarticulate way -- that he is going to change not for you, or his family, or AA, but because he needs to -- because his very soul depends upon it. You cannot do this for him, and picking up with married life with him again is not going to help him do this. The surrender to God must be unconditional and unequivocal, and it must be done on his own, just as a person must, by God's leave, become sober on one's own.

You don't have to be married to him in order to be in his support group, any more than a sponsor has to be married to the one being sponsored in order to lend support to that person's efforts to become and remain sober. Consequently, for him to set conditions on his willingness to change or his readiness to change has a smell to it that undermines his claims of sincerity in these matters.

Ron has told you that if at the end of one month's time he hasn't shown you significant improvements in behaviors that he would let you go -- another control issue because he is the one setting the conditions of release, and what you want or would have to give up really doesn't really figure into the matter. He has said that if he hasn't changed within a month, then, if you wanted to, he would be willing to move out of the matrimonial house so that you and I could be together there.

This all seems very considerate and generous until one realizes you already have told him that if you go back to Brimley, then you very likely might lose me forever. Therefore, his offer might be somewhat disingenuous because he will never have to do what he promises since I will not be a part of things any more, and at the end of the trial period of a month, you will have been co-opted, compromised, manipulated and controlled, once again, to do as he has wished all along, and his agenda will have been served because his object -- to disrupt your happiness, my happiness, and our happiness -- will have been realized.

You have said the goal is not for Ron to become me, and I agree with that although not in the way you both are thinking of this. Moses Maimonides once said his job was not to become the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) but, rather, his task was to realize the potential of Moses Maimonides, and this is the challenge before every human being ... to become who she or he has the potential to be. Ron's potential -- whatever that might be and however limited or great it might be -- has got nothing to do with you and is an entity unto itself ... just as your spiritual potential has nothing whatsoever to do with Ron and is an entity unto yourself.

Ron must struggle to unlock that essential potential on his own, and there is nothing you can do to help him in this task. That issue is between Ron and God.

Similarly, Ron cannot do your spiritual struggles for you. You must undertake these through your own efforts.

Spiritual guides, teachers, pirs, shaykhs -- or whatever name you wish to assign them -- have been appointed by God to serve as loci of manifestation through which spiritual help from God is channeled to an individual. They have been specially chosen, trained and supported for just this function.

Helping Ron in this way is not your job, it is ours. However, he has to be willing to do this without conditions being placed on the process, and, even more importantly, he must cleanse himself of his corrupt intentions concerning God, himself, you, and others.

Until his intentions become sincere in this regard -- until turning his life over to God is the sole motivation for doing what he is doing -- his efforts to change will begin at no beginning and work toward no

spiritual ends. In fact, one of the worst things that could happen to Ron is that he makes an intention to change his life but does so for the wrong reasons ... because if he were to become successful in this, he would become more entrenched in his nafs than ever before.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) once said the movements of nafs are so subtle that it is easier to detect the movements of a black ant, on a smooth rock in the dead of night than it is to detect the movements of nafs. By not being honest with himself, by continuing to live in the aura of his own pathologies, by claiming he can change -- but for all the wrong reasons -- and by not purifying his intention to change by rooting it solidly in God, spirituality, and essential nature, whether Ron's behaviors change or not doesn't really matter since his essential spiritual purpose will not be served ... he will become like a drunk who has sobered up enough, and, as a result, some of his destructive behaviors might change, but not enough to make any real difference to why he is on Earth, and if the latter purpose is not served, it really means very little that a person is less destructive than he was before.

Mysticism is not about intending to become a little better. It is intending to become whole and complete irrespective of whether one ever becomes fully spiritually realized. Mysticism involves an intention to struggle with one's nafs, Iblis, dunya, and unbelievers each and every day, and, if necessary, die trying to serve this one purpose. This is the true meaning of 'jihad' -- the inner struggle toward God and away from our lower inclinations and unpurified intentions -- and this is the true meaning of martyrdom ... to sacrifice one's lower self for the higher Self.

If you think you are helping Ron by going back to him so he can be a little or even a lot better, yet, his essential self gets lost in the process, then, you are selling him short and you are letting him settle for less than what either he or you should be willing to accept. Neither of you should be willing to settle for anything less than sincerely seeking total and complete freedom from the influences of nafs, Iblis, dunya, and unbelievers.

Life is not meant to be lived by half-measures. You either risk everything, or you risk nothing at all.

If a person is content with only being a little better and not in serving God's purpose, then, that person is still serving himself or herself and not God. The task is not necessarily to realize oneself in this life. Rather, the task is one of being committed to trying to do that ... success is in the continued willingness to struggle, not in whether one becomes self-realized in this life that is really only by God's Grace and discretion -- as is the intention to even try to do this.

We don't have to be Prophet's, and we don't have to be saints, and we don't have to be Hafiz or Rumi or Baba or Dr. Irfan. But, we do have to be committed to being ourselves in the best sense of our potential -- whatever that might be. However, what you are saying is Ron should be content with being other than who he really is. You are wrong in feeling this way and so is he.

And, what of your intentions in all of this -- aside that is, from the previously noted pattern of your continuing to serve Ron's pathology and your own by enabling him to continue on in the way he does? You are a liability to his desire to change, not an asset, and this is something that neither he nor you seem to understand.

You are not serving spiritual ends in being inclined to go back to Brimley since you already have been given clear spiritual counsel that to do this would be spiritually injurious to yourself and to Ron, as well. You cannot claim to be doing something spiritual while at the same time violating the number one principle of spirituality ... to follow the guidance you are given.

You might feel what you are doing is a good, noble, loving, compassionate, and forgiving thing – namely, to give Ron another chance to turn things around. But, none of these intentions is really what is moving things with you, and the proof of this is you won't listen to, or act in accordance with, the guidance you have been given ... guidance that you have acknowledged to me and to yourself, on numerous occasions, is quite correct and necessary for your salvation as well as giving Ron such an opportunity. If your intentions in all of this were sincere, you would stop listening to, and complying with: Ron -- who at the present time is an unbeliever in the way I have outlined in a previous snail-mail letter to you; Iblis, who is constantly urging you to return to Brimley and who is pursuing all kinds of your emotional buttons to achieve this; the pathological urgings of your

wounded hamzat; the manipulative agenda of your own nafs; or the counsel of dunya that has no use for spirituality whatsoever and would give you advice that is not in your best interests or the interests of Ron.

If your intentions in all of this were sincere you would accept the spiritual guidance you have been given, as well as the clear experiential evidence you have been shown -- both with respect to how you feel when you are with me and how you feel when you are with Ron. Your resistance to doing this all goes to prove that despite an overwhelming body of evidence showing you the truth of what is going on, what is motivating your inclination to return to Brimley is entirely insincere and pathological and has nothing whatsoever to do with serving God or realizing your own spiritual potential or helping Ron to work toward doing so for himself.

If you want to help Ron to be better than okay, then stop pretending you know what you are doing and let experts handle the issue, because your interference in this matter is not helping either Ron or you. If I were to walk into a court room one day -- say, when Judge Nance was presiding -- and pushed the court reporter out of his or her chair and said I was going to serve as court reporter, not only would you be upset at the arrogance of someone who was totally ignorant in such matters and was trying to meddle where he didn't belong and in a way in which he was totally incompetent to do, but you also could predict the terrible damage that would be inflicted on the trial proceedings and society by my trying to do something for which I was totally ill-equipped, and you would feel justified in suggesting that some court officer throw me out and let the professionals do what they have been trained to do before any further damage is done.

However, your continued resistance to the idea of staying out of matters for which you are not trained and are not qualified to do, is like me putting up a fight in a court room for my 'right' to continue to make a mess of things. Moreover, under such circumstances, one would have to conclude that my motives and intentions in continuing to resist efforts to remove me were rather pathological in nature and an embarrassment to anyone who understood what was going on.

Stop embarrassing yourself before God by meddling in things that are beyond your ability to deal with, help with, or resolve.

Furthermore, if you continue to persist in this fashion, then you will be just as responsible as Ron is for the tragedy that is very likely to ensue ... although God knows best.

If you want to help Ron, then recuse yourself because you are not capable of dealing with the situation in a judicious, unbiased, non-pathological, and constructive manner. Moreover, if you will not recuse yourself in this matter and remove yourself from seeking to influence the outcome in an illicit fashion -- that is against spiritual counsel -- then your intentions and behaviors in this matter will be as corrupt as that of any judge who uses his or her position to influence the outcome of legal proceedings due to self-interest, ego, pathology, or being controlled by the mob.

If you think you can go back to Ron and continue on in your spiritual pursuits with me, then think again. The problem surrounding such a scenario would not be because I am unwilling to do what I can to assist you, but rather, the problem is because many of your intentions would have become corrupted, confused, compromised, and disease-ridden due to your pathological attachment to Ron.

All spiritual transformation requires the self -- that is, the unredeemed nafs -- to be sacrificed. You are being tested by God right now to see if you are willing to work and struggle toward doing this -- that is, to determine if you are willing to struggle toward sacrificing your moods, likes, dislikes, opinions, interests, needs, biases, habits, and so on. If you fail this test and return to Brimley, do you think that the nature of the test will become different on the other side of the river?

If you are not prepared to listen now, you likely are not really prepared to listen later on, and you will continue to place your ideas, opinions, wants, desires, moods, and pathologies above God, and you will continue to prostrate before them as an idol worshipper. You will not be in a better position to engage the struggle if you return to Brimley, you will be in a worse position to do so, because you already will have betrayed yourself, Ron, me, and your shaykh, by having sacrificed us all on the altar built by your nafs, hamzat, Iblis, dunya, and the unbeliever (in Ron and you).

You tell me how you propose to be sincere about spirituality if you are operating out of such a mind and heart set? You tell me how you

are serving God by imposing your ideas on how things should be rather than accepting the evidence that God has been giving you not only every day for twenty-three years, but, even more importantly, through the evidence with which he has provided you in the time you have been absent from Ron and permitted yourself, even a little bit, to become free from his pathologies and your own while listening with your heart and soul to what has been coming to you through me, by God's leave, and the support and kindness of your shaykh and our silsilah.

The only thing pulling you back to Brimley is pathology. The only thing keeping you in Bamford is spirituality.

The choice is yours. You are fully responsible for that choice, and you will be held accountable. You will not be able to claim on the Day of Judgment that you didn't know or understand the nature of the problem, because all of these things have been made very clear to you again and again and again.

You do not have your Grandmother's disability. She can't help herself ... she has no choice in the matter, but you do.

If you persist in your inclination to wipe Ron's slate with each and every passing day, this is because you -- out of the intentions of an unredeemed nafs and a wounded and pathological hamzat, and with the advice and consent of Iblis, dunya and the unbelievers -- have chosen to deliberately ignore the spiritual advice that has been given to you through all these letters, e-mails, phone conversations, the books of poetry by Hafiz and Rumi, and your own considerable bitter experience -- both recent and past -- in this regard. Do this once, then, shame on Ron, but do this again and again and again, then, shame on you.

Love,

Tariq

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June 4, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

Thank you for the e-mails. I am not in Brimley. I slept in my own bed last night -- alone, and that is what I am doing again tonight. My head is getting very sore from banging it into a brick wall. The questions from Ron began, and I have refused to respond to any of them. Our marriage counselor said this afternoon that he can't promise that even if Ron learns the things he needs to learn and I learn the things I need to learn that either of us will end up with a "companion." I know what he means, but this seemed to go right by Ron.

I will not have sexual relations with Ron. He is already quite frustrated with that, but I don't care. He can go out and have sex with anyone he chooses -- if they are willing. I am not limiting him in any way.

Ron told our counselor that he (Ron) wants me not to talk to you or see you for now. However, he said that he knows I will not stay away from you as my spiritual advisor or friend. He knows this because I told him I did not think I would agree to that -- that I would end up resenting him for taking away someone who has been so wonderful.

You seem to be saying that would not be possible because, if I can't take your advice now, I would not do it then. I understand what you are saying, and I will not make any decisions about enlarging the scope of my relationship with Ron until I make this final choice. I do have some understanding -- limited as it might be -- about what I would be giving up by doing this -- not only you as my life partner but the Sufi path as well. This is very serious, and I am acutely aware of the seriousness of the situation.

Why did you not respond to my e-mail? I guess it's none of my business really. There are more important issues right now, and my focus should be with these major decisions and not with my lack of understanding of what's going on with you. If you want to let me know, I'm sure you'll write.

Otherwise, I won't bring it up again.

I know I'm violating the spirit of the GROUND RULES Ron has set, but I guess I just don't care right now. He just hasn't thought to add NO E-MAIL contact. I will not have any sexual contact with him unless and until I decide to give up the Sufi path and you forever.

Tomorrow, when I'm not so tired, (I stayed up way too late last night) I will read your e-mail messages again and respond more specifically. I will check my e-mail often.

I am alone tonight and will remain so.

I love you.

Lara

§

June 5, 2002

Dear Lara,

The first order of business is you should be certain that although I have been forthright with you -- sometimes, perhaps, too much so for you -- and I have told you exactly what is on my heart and in my mind, you should never think that any of my forthrightness means I don't love you ... in fact, all of this is an expression of my love for you and that I care passionately about what happens to you. If you read everything carefully you will see that sometimes I am disappointed with you, or upset with you, or angry, or frustrated, but these sections are balanced -- I hope -- by other sections that are supportive and tolerant and understanding of things.

The second order of business is this. I am really tired of Ron getting to set all of the ground rules about what can and can't be done, so, I have some counter-proposals to make, and I hope you will consider them seriously and, if you agree, go along with as many as you can.

To begin with, you have given several indications in your previous e-mail that you are not all that happy with the ground-rules that Ron has set down. I don't know if you had any input to all of this or he just said this is what he wants, and, in some ways, it doesn't really matter which is the case, because I think that even if you had opportunity for

input, you are not in any emotional or psychological condition to look after yourself sufficiently well to be proactive for the conditions that you might really want and need to impose.

In any event, you said that because Ron had said nothing about ruling out e-mails among his ground rules as a means of communicating with me, you are going to take this avenue of keeping in touch with me. You also indicated to me that although Ron stipulated that he didn't want any contact between you and me, he also realized he might not be able to stop spiritual counseling and so on ... and he is right for the constitution guarantees you freedom of religion and assembly.

So, first of all, I propose you attend both the weekly fatiha (on Saturday or whichever day is best for you), as well as any extra fatiha that might take place with respect to special spiritual anniversaries and the like. I also propose you attend the weekly (again, if you are agreeable, let us pick a time and day that will be easy for you) sessions of the Sufi discussion group in which sections will be read from different Sufi writers and we will explore those ideas.

Thirdly, I recommend that, at least, once a week (time and day of your choice) you have the opportunity for a spiritual counseling session that is to be directed toward helping you align your life with spiritual principles. I also would like you to try to do your zikrs on a regular basis, and to read a little bit of the Qur'an every day even if it is only a few verses, and, as well, when you can, read about the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and if you like, I'll trade books with you so you can read the Martin Lings version that is, I think, easier to read and not so academic. Note down whatever questions you have and when we get a chance -- perhaps during the discussion sessions -- we can discuss these.

Now, if you want to go to AA meetings with Ron, then do so. Or, if you wish to attend counseling sessions together with Ron and your marriage counselor, then, feel free to do so. In this way, Ron gets his AA meetings and counseling sessions with you, and I get my Sufi meetings and counseling sessions with you.

In addition, I have no objection to your staying in your apartment by yourself while you are trying to make up your mind and heart about things. In fact, I believe this should be encouraged because it is a safe

place for you and you have a buffer zone against being pressured or harassed. However, I believe it would be unfair for you to go and stay in Brimley even if you don't have sex with Ron.

I like your regular counselor's idea that nothing should be permitted in other matters -- such as phoning, personal contact, eating together, going to movies, etc. -- unless you initiate such activity. All I ask is for the treatment to be equal ... for if you are really trying to decide what to do, then, you cannot possibly make a responsible, fair decision in the matter before us unless both candidates either have equal access to you or unless you decide you prefer the company of one person rather than the other, and, then, this becomes your choice.

I also believe all questions about what you are thinking, or about your personal life, or about the situation, or about how your decision process is coming along should be off-limits to both Ron and me. However, by suggesting this, I do not mean that it would be okay for Ron and/or me to pepper you with questions, and, then, you just don't have to answer what is being directed toward you in this regard, but, rather, the questions should not be asked at all ... which I believe was your counselor's original idea.

If you wish to share information with either Ron or me, then, this becomes your choice. Other than this, your inner world should be your own.

The fact you are willing to violate the spirit of the rules that Ron has set up indicates you really are not committed to what he has proposed. If you were so committed, you would not be looking for, or taking advantage of, loopholes through which you might continue to communicate with me or keep in touch.

You have spoken of the rules as Ron's ground rules. If there are going to be rules governing the situation, then, they ought to be either your rules or rules that you had a hand in constructing or rules that serve your purposes in a constructive fashion and not in a co-opting manner as appears to be the case now.

I don't feel bound to play by Ron's rules -- although I will try to play by yours. This means that if you want to see me, or talk with me -- quite independently of fatiha and the discussion sessions -- then, you

should have the right to do so, and I don't think Ron has anything to say about the matter.

Ron wants to arrange the whole thing so it becomes a fiat accompli for what he wishes, and, consequently, he appears to be setting things up in order to be able to limit your options, choices, and so on. I'm saying -- and this is in the spirit of what your counselor was proposing -- is that you should have the right to determine who you get to talk to, as well as when, how, and where.

I'm willing to live with this and place my trust in God that if we really are meant to be together, then, this is what will, by the Grace of Allah, take place. You might, for pathological reasons -- and, you have indicated to me on many, many occasions that you do not love Ron and that you cannot stand to be with him -- ultimately choose Ron, and if you do, there is nothing I can do about this and, insha' Allah, I will move on with my life.

One of my primary concerns, however, is that during the process of making your decision is that you have as much freedom and as little pressure as possible so you might have some opportunity to negate your pathological inclinations and, thereby, give you a chance to make an intelligent, constructive choice for yourself. I believe the only way for this to happen is for the locus of control in this matter to be in your hands ... not those of Ron or even mine.

There is one other proposal that I will make. I am willing to accept whatever money you wanted to send me if you will agree to go away with me for 10 days to 2 weeks and visit with Baba -- and if the foregoing rules are in effect Ron has no right to know about this or to even ask. God willing, I will be a perfect gentleman and will even try to arrange for us to sleep in separate places.

The reason I would be willing to accept your money under the foregoing conditions is that your willingness to go and spend time with Baba, myself, and the other mureeds would be a good indication of your genuine sincerity in trying to treat our relationship and the silsilah in a fair, respectful manner, and your willingness to come away with me and see Baba also would indicate there is love present and that you are trying to find a way to that love in a more direct manner -- namely, by spending time with our mutual shaykh. If possible, and if you are agreeable, I would like this to be when your vacation comes up

in July, and I would like to be able to let Baba know that we are coming -- if we are -- so arrangements could be made for us to stay there.

Committing yourself to the foregoing need not mean you will eventually end up with me rather than Ron. However, what it does mean is by going to see Baba, then, maybe, you haven't shut the door on our relationship or the spiritual path either and that you still are sincerely trying to decide what to do by fairly weighing all of your options.

Furthermore, don't worry, you won't be kidnapped and whisked off to a deprogramming center, nor will you be brainwashed. Baba is an extremely easy person with whom to talk, and I would like you to have at least one opportunity to sit down and be in the presence of a real shaykh and bask in the glow of that light, love, wisdom, compassion, and generosity.

I am quite willing to let God decide the matter. All I ask is you give our side of things a fair shot, and I believe the foregoing set of rules does that. On the other hand, if you wish to add something or amend something, then, let's talk about it, and you can talk about some, or all, of such possible rule changes with Ron as well.

Finally, if you are not prepared to treat things fairly between Ron and me with respect to your future direction of travel, then, I think you need to re-think many of the things that you have said with respect to how you claim to feel about me. I am not asking you to be unfair to Ron, I am asking you to stop being unfair to me. I have been operating under a huge handicap throughout the last ten months, and if you want me to believe you are being sincere when you say the things you do, then, I think the least you can do is be fair and let the chips fall where they might on a level playing field.

Love,
Tariq

§

June 5, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Lara,

I have a suggestion for the new ground rules -- if they are adopted. Why not carry a journal-log with you. You could use it so that you could note whatever observations you care to concerning: behavior and violations. Rather, than arguing with anyone or getting into conflict, be like one of those referees in the world cup who have a notebook with them and they jot down infractions for later implementation during penalty time and so on.

Ron claims he can change significantly in four weeks. Well, why not tell him you intend to judge this for yourself -- according to your standards -- whether, or not, there is a change, and if there is change, whether, or not, the change is significant, and if significant, whether, or not, the change would be enough to work with and provide you with the information you need to make a decision one way or the other.

You don't have to tell him, or me, what you are writing. In fact, you could use this process as a way of placing a sort of buffer between you and whatever situation is transpiring by writing things down instead of becoming actively involved in some sort of conflict.

If Ron's behavior doesn't change, then, you will have a record to prove that. Moreover, the fact Ron knows his behaviors are being recorded -- especially, if he starts doing things and the book comes out while he doing whatever he is doing -- this might give him pause to think before acting and an opportunity to reflect on what he is doing, or about to do, and, if so, then by keeping a log, you might be able to help him to control his behavior somewhat if he knows it is being actively monitored ... so, either way, this new journal/log keeping rule would seem to be a win-win situation for you no matter what happens.

Barring an epiphany of some sort, this really is the last e-mail of the night -- ah, morning.

Love,

Tariq

§

June 6, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

You know, it occurred to me that just as I put up with Ron's pathological behavior even when it hurts me time and time again, you do the same with respect to me -- hopefully, for your sake and mine -- this will not go on forever. What would be even better than you not putting up with it would be for me to stop this sick behavior altogether.

Your e-mails of last night -- or early this morning, I should say -- are very helpful to me. Now is the time to see what Ron is capable of, not when it's too late.

I know it's too late for this situation not to have hurt you again, but I'm trying extremely hard not to be impulsive about this in any way. What's the rush?

Ron is not patient, but he's trying to be. The GROUND RULES were thrown at me during counseling. I should have asked to think about them before responding.

I think your suggestions for ground rules are fair and constructive and serve as a protection of sorts for all of us. The journal is a great idea. Of course, before even beginning such an undertaking I already know what the outcome will be: Violations by Tariq: Zero. Violations by Ron: 1,000,000 or more. I'll do it.

The trip to Baba I have to think about. How to open up the topic of different ground rules is a problem since I don't dare to talk with him - - at least in person -- about this ... maybe on the phone. That way if he flips out I won't be in the same room with him. Let me think about it. I certainly can't say it was your suggestion because he doesn't know I'm e-mailing you, and if he did, he might very well throw me or my computer or both out the window.

I just did it again. I'm as bad as Ron. I make myself a promise that I won't complain about Ron anymore, but I did it again. Maybe I'm just like him but in a different sort of way that doesn't seem quite as bad but really is. It's the same behavior -- impulsive, et cetera. I make a promise, but I don't keep it over and over. I really make myself sick.

I'll write more, later. Thank you.

Love,
Lara

§

June 5, 2002

Dear Lara,

I'm not exactly surprised the 'ground rules' came up in counseling or that they were thrown at you or that you didn't really have much, if any, participation in their formation. I'm certainly not surprised at Ron for wanting them structured in the way they are, because they are entirely self-serving for him. What I am surprised at -- although I guess not really -- is that your marriage counselor would have permitted it.

Apparently, although the marriage counselor sees there is not much hope for you two -- even if you iron out things sufficiently well to live together peaceably (about which he is very doubtful) -- he really doesn't seem to have any insight into the pathology that is going on. If he did have such an understanding, then he would have a good appreciation of quite frequently, you are not capable of defending yourself against Ron's predatory behavior and that your acceptance of the 'Ground Rules' -- which you, in your heart, did not accept (that is why you are writing to me) -- is just another form of your pathology in action. Does the marriage counselor not understand what is going on and how even he is being controlled by Ron?

Actually, the joint counseling sessions should not be with the man who is serving as a marriage counselor. Rather, those sessions should be with a woman counselor, who is experienced in domestic terrorism and assertiveness training.

Of course, Ron is terrified of people like Jane because he won't get favorable treatment (although he might get equitable treatment), and the discussion would turn to areas with which he feels very uncomfortable. You ought to try suggesting in counseling that you would like a woman present who has expertise in cases of domestic abuse.

I'm pretty sure Ron would be against the idea, which is just another indication how he wants a rigged game not an equitable exploration. If the marriage counselor expressed resistance to the idea and began to mention things like Ron's need to feel safe, and so on, then you would know the game really is rigged because the judge -- in this case -- the counselor has no intention of being fair to you ... under such circumstances, he would just want the appearance of fairness.

I suggest you either: call the marriage counselor and tell him you want a woman present at the counseling sessions who has the foregoing qualifications, and/or that you want to open up the 'Ground Rules' for discussion since your emotional trauma did not permit you to defend yourself while in Ron's presence. Quite frankly, the marriage counselor should have known better.

As far as the new 'ground rules' are concerned, I could type them up for you, or you could type them up for you, and you could send them by mail, or you could write out an envelope with Ron's address on it, and I could send it to Ron. If you're even afraid to bring this topic up in person, it shows the extent of the problem about ever having an equitable discussion of matters that affect both of you ... and the marriage counselor and your regular counselor either need to be made aware of this, or they need to deal with it in a better way than is presently the case.

Another possibility is for you to approach one of the women's shelters or domestic abuse centers and to ask for their assistance. I really don't think the marriage counselor on his own is going to be able to help both of you - and the fact he allowed those 'Ground Rules' to be put in place is proof that he really doesn't know what is going on, or that he doesn't understand what is going on, or that he is not very sensitive to what is actually one of the central problems in your relationship with Ron ... whatever the reason, he never should have let happen what he let happen in the session during which the 'Ground Rules' were introduced.

Another issue is as follows. You say Ron says he can be different. Time starts right now.

If you are not free to do what you want, go where you want, when you want, and with whom you want because of your fear of Ron's anger or the tension and conflict that would be created by your being

free to be yourself, then, -- to borrow one of your phrases -- "Then, let me ask you this": where is Ron's sensitivity, openness, respect, compassion, love, honesty, kindness, understanding, and patience ... where is this new Ron that he promises will be there in one month's time? Is it going to magically show up at the end of the month, and from now until then, he can continue to act in the same controlling, insensitive, uncaring, unloving, selfish, and self-serving way that he always has?

No, time begins right this very second. And, if you permit anything else but full accountability from day one, then, you begin at no beginning, and you work toward no end. The whole arrangement becomes completely fraudulent.

If he claims he needs time to become this new man, then, remind him he is the one who promised he could show you he could be different if you gave him just one more month to prove this to you. Well, time starts not in one month's time but right now. Ron is proving nothing if you are under house arrest and have to live by his rules from day one such that none of the arrangement is fair to you.

Ron's claim that he can be different as long as you are being made to live life as a Taliban captive is like someone saying he can live a good life while being protected from reality by living in a monastery somewhere. Being good in a monastery is not the test of goodness ... being good in a world of corruption and temptation is the appropriate test of morality.

If you want a true test of Ron's resolve, then his trying to be patient while he holds you hostage under Taliban rules is not really a test of patience at all. A true test of patience is for patience to be tried under real world conditions ... which means you should have the right to go about life as you see fit.

Moreover, patience is not the only test of the new man that Ron has promised to become. The new man must be sensitive to your needs. The new man must be prepared to give you space in which you can feel free and safe to be yourself. The new man must be understanding and tolerant and caring and forgiving. The new man must be completely free of tactics of terror, pressure, coercion, emotional violence, harassment, stalking. The new man must be supportive and encouraging of you being you.

Ron needs to do what, by the Grace of God, I have been doing all of these many months ... despite the fact that, for the most part, the deck has been stacked against me. By the Grace of Allah, I have had to be patient, tolerant, forgiving, understanding, sensitive, loving, compassionate, kind, supportive, encouraging, and not controlling or given to pressuring you relentlessly.

If you say, and if Ron says, that he cannot be Tariq, then, just what is this new man Ron has promised to be supposed to look like? Is he going to be: tolerant but controlling ... caring, but, insensitive ... kind, yet, cruel ... understanding, but, blind ... loving, yet, hostile ... patient, but, angry ... authoritarian, yet, supportive ... spiritual, but, immoral ... honest, yet, manipulative?

His whole notion of becoming the 'changed man' is far too ambiguous and ill-defined. Ron could do little, or nothing, in the way of changing and, still, try to point to this or that little thing as proof he had changed

In any event, this is not what he promised. Moreover, for him to keep coming back to you and saying if you just give me another month, I will show you -- this was not what he promised.

He said he could give you everything you had with me in relation to qualities of: caring, sensitivity, patience, understanding, respect, honesty, support, tolerance ... this is not a matter of being sort of sensitive, or sort of patient, or sort of understanding, or sort of respectful, or sort of honest, or sort of supportive, or sort of not-controlling. He is either going to be a moral grown-up or he is not. I think the time has come for everyone -- including you and Ron -- to stop saying it is okay for Ron to be anything less than this.

He doesn't have to be a Sufi shaykh. He doesn't have to on a spiritual quest. He doesn't have to be me – whatever that might mean. What he has to be is a moral man of integrity who does not seek to control, abuse, terrorize, or inflict damage on other people ... who is sensitive to their needs ... who is not hypocritical with respect to his public and private modes of operating in relation to such people ... who doesn't blame others for what are clearly his responsibilities.

If you or Ron or the marriage counselor thinks it is okay for Ron to be a little boy for the rest of his life and, therefore, that he should be

permitted to throw tantrums when he doesn't get his way and who is so self-centered that everything must be about his wants, needs, desires, whims, and moods, then you all are doing him a great disservice and a tremendous injustice. If this is going to be your collective standard of excellence for him -- that he should be told he doesn't have the capacity to be a man or be moral or have integrity, and that, gee, you know, Ron has had to deal with so much in his life, then you all are keeping him shackled to his own pathology.

Morality, integrity and being a man have nothing to do with intellect, education, being able to read, or the like. Morality and maturity are about having heart, honesty, and courage to struggle with the problems of life in a just and reasonable manner.

It is not that Ron doesn't have the potential for the foregoing sorts of qualities. Rather, his nafs prevents him from the sacrifices that are necessary -- indeed, are the only way -- for real transformation along the foregoing lines to be able to take place. No pain, no gain, and this is true for all of us

What Ron is doing is a joke. What the marriage counselor is permitting is a joke. They are little boys pretending to live in the real world and all the time insisting on conditions that are not in the least bit realistic.

If Ron cannot be held accountable from day one for being required to live in accordance with the conduct of the new man he has promised to be in one month's time, if you are not free to be yourself during this time, if the counseling sessions do not protect your interests in this matter during this period, then the whole exercise is an exercise in futility. None of you are proving anything except that if you work in accordance with the old way of doing things, you are going to end up with the old way of doing things at the end of the month, and none of your problems are going to be resolved ... instead, once again, those difficulties just will be papered over -- with all of the toxicity and pathology present underneath to continue to do its damage.

Ron has promised to be able to give you all the things you have with me. "I don't think so Tim", as someone on *'Home Improvement'* might say

Moreover, if you make excuses for him by saying Ron will have passed the test if he is marginally better at the end of the month in some ways, and that, after all, one can't expect Ron to really be a grown-up after one month can we? My question is: why not?

That is what he has promised. He said he was going to show you he could give you all the things you are getting from me, and the only reason he hadn't done so sooner is because he was afraid you would exploit his vulnerability - I've been around enough alcoholics to know an alcoholic shell game when I hear it.

In other words, Ron is telling you he has all these qualities that you find attractive and appealing. However, out of his fear of being exploited by you, he just hasn't let them show through before now. Well, now is the time for him to let them shine through if he has them ... let him prove to you he was not just engaging in empty rhetoric.

If he says that by letting you be you is what he meant by being afraid of having his vulnerability exploited, then, what kind of double-talk is this? What he is saying is something along the following lines: if you will permit him to continue to control you and to, thereby, prevent you from being yourself -- to go where you want, when you want, with whom you want -- then you will see that he can be a very sensitive, caring, loving, understating, forgiving, sort of guy. And, if this is what he means by becoming the new man, and if this what he means by vulnerability, then really he is talking about being the same thing he always has been, but he is now referring to himself as Ron the vulnerable, and Ron the sensitive, and Ron the caring.

You have made the observation that I am being tolerant of your pathological behavior just as you are being tolerant of Ron's pathological behavior since, seemingly, the two of us are acting in the same way. Actually, you couldn't be further from the truth.

You are acting out of pathology. I am not. I am trying to operate through spiritual intentions, and you are not. My goal is to help you get better, and you might say that your intention is to help Ron get better, but, the reality is that while this might be so on the surface, in terms of behaviors and actualities, neither of you is going to get better if you permit things to continue on as they are.

I am worried about the future status of your soul, you are not worried about the future status of Ron's soul, or if you are, you are not permitting that concern to shape any of your behaviors with respect to him. I am not making excuses for you, but trying to hold you accountable as we go along ... or, at least let you know that I believe there are problems in relation to what you are doing, but you, for the most part, are making excuses for Ron and letting any semblance of accountability fly out the window.

I really don't know why you are participating in that whole charade with Ron, the marriage counselor, and the reconciliation process anyway ... and it is a total charade. In your heart of hearts you are not committed to being reconciled with Ron so you can live together - you are participating in the reconciliation process so your pathology and Ron's pathology can continue on un-interrupted.

Why do I say that in your heart of hearts you are not committed to the process? Consider the following.

You tried to go back with Ron and you, apparently, even had it in your mind you, probably, would never see me again, so I had no contact with you, did not phone you, did not see you, and you spent all of your time with Ron (and you resented the way he micro-managed your life). So, Ron had you all to himself, and what was the result - anger, tension, conflict, anxiety, panic, PTSD, depression, loss of energy and focus, and your sleeping more and more, but feeling less and less rested or peaceful. All of these symptoms were telling you, you did not want to be reconciled with Ron, but your pathology, with considerable pressure from Ron's pathology - forced you to continue.

Although you knew Ron would not be happy if you talked with me, eventually, you did cry out for help and you did your S-O-S with the phone messages and silent messages. Although you knew Ron would not be happy if he knew you were e-mailing me during the earlier stages of our re-establishing contact, nonetheless, you made arrangements for buying a computer so you could e-mail me. Although you knew Ron would be very unhappy if he knew you had invited me to Hartford, you did invite me despite being concerned about the risks that were involved.

Although you know Ron would be very unhappy if he understood: how you think about me a lot, and how I am the one you want to be

with, and how I am the one you want to hug, and how I am the one who helps you to feel safe -- these are all things you have said to me, not things I am inventing -- nevertheless, you continue to feel and think about such things. Although you know Ron would be extremely upset if he knew you had given the key to your apartment to me rather than him, nevertheless, you gave the key to me, and even when I offered you a chance the other day to re-acquire the key, you gave it back to me again.

Even when I was upset the other night and wanted to know if you would like to end things, you had the chance to do so and you didn't, and you knew what you were doing and you know that if Ron knew what you were doing, he would be very angry with you; Even though you understood that if Ron knew you were trying to help me out financially he would be extremely upset, nonetheless, you made the offer and were prepared to write me a check;

I don't know if you put the rings from Ron back on, but at least, for a time, you took them off and kept them off. This is something that you did and not which I asked you to do -- and this is another indication, slight though it might be, of what is in your heart of hearts.

You might not have the strength or courage right now to make good on your final escape -- and you might never reach escape velocity -- but the fact of the matter is, there are all kinds of indications that you do want to escape, and you have told me as much and shown me this in a thousand different ways ... but you also feel trapped by your own pathology;

When you left Ron the first time, you showed what you really wanted, but, eventually, your vulnerabilities pulled you back. A little later on you were able to break free again, and, now, although your vulnerabilities induced you to comply with Ron's 'Ground Rules', you still are resisting and fighting things. You know what you want, but, you also have said that, up until now, you haven't had the courage to act on what you want ... except in your guerilla warfare style of trying to struggle for freedom and independence through various acts of insurgency.

While the fact that there are continuing setbacks with our relationship and with your relationship with the Sufi path, please understand that I am encouraged by all the little ways you try to let me

know you love me and that you are continuing to try to struggle to keep our relationship alive - in fact, let me revise something that I said the other day about the money issue.

Perhaps, I came across as too cut and dried or black and white or rigid. Although I did leave some room for you to assess the nature of your love and sincerity concerning me and the silsilah, I also asked the question of where was the evidence of your love and sincerity as long as you were continuing on in your captive relationship with Ron, and I think in asking this I might have given you the impression that the acceptable actions that might prove the presence of love and sincerity were more than you could give at the present time.

Last night, or early this morning, I came back with a counter-proposal and said that if you would go on a trip with me to see Baba, then, I would accept money from you, because your willingness to go on that trip would be proof of your love and sincerity.

And you said you would have to think about the trip aspect of things, and I realize that it could pose a major problem or risk for you to take such a trip, and, as a result, could have unpleasant consequences for you to have to deal with both before and after the trip. Of course, if Ron really became the new man in a month's time that he has promised to be, such a trip would be a piece of cake for him ... the sensitive, caring, understanding, tolerant, forgiving guy that he had become or finally let shine through.

However, during the process of writing this e-mail, I realize I have been a little harsh with you with concerning the issue of your having to demonstrate your sincerity and love. Yes, it is disappointing to have to put up with the whole charade that is going on -- and I realize part of you is helping to keep this charade going, while another part of you has been fighting very desperately and courageously and as best she can under the toxic and pathological conditions that exist to let me know in a lot of different ways that she loves me and is trying to be as sincere with me and God as her present circumstances permit ... however little that might be sometimes.

You have been like a secret agent who is in enemy territory and although being in such an hostile environment constrains what you can and can't do sometimes, nonetheless, you keep carrying out these operations that lets those who are outside the battle zone know that

the freedom fighter is still alive and kicking and doing whatever she can to fight the good fight. I really wasn't properly appreciative of what you have tried to do and the significance of your actions because I was impatient for the war to be over and for us to be re-united in a final, permanent way.

One last thing ... if there are no new 'Ground Rules' that are fair and equitable to all parties concerned and that provide you with a means of being able to make a truly free decision in the matter at hand, then, I am telling you now that I will not be bound by Ron's rules. I will play in accordance with my own set of principles.

These principles are, God willing, non-violent and non-confrontational in nature. Nevertheless, I am not going to let Ron tell me who I can see, or whom I can call, or where I can go. I will not impose myself on you, and I will not try to exploit the situation, but I am under no obligation to serve Ron's pathology.

If there are no new 'Ground Rules', then, within the bounds of propriety, I will not permit Ron to prevent either you or me from exercising our first amendment rights -- either with respect to religion, or speech, or right of assembly. You have every right to meet with me, and speak with me, and exercise your religious freedoms.

Ron wants to cut off all contact with me because he knows my presence is undermining his attempts to control your life. He doesn't want you to be free to choose. He already has said he doesn't care whether you are happy with someone else. He has made it very clear in all he does and has done that his concept of fairness is for everyone to bow down to him and submit to his form of cruel dictatorship.

I want you to trust me in this. My only concern is for you be free to make your own choices ... to ensure that all of your first amendment rights are protected.

I will continue to fight for you in my own indirect way without having a direct confrontation with Ron, and this has nothing to do with my being afraid of him ... which I am not. All I want from you is your assent that you do trust me, and you will let me continue to fight for you and that you agree Ron has no right to take away our first amendment rights.

Please write back soon, if you can.

Love,
Tariq

§

June 6, 2002

Dear Tariq,

One day without seeing you or being able to hear your voice is really hard for me. It was nice to see you yesterday, even though it was just a short while ago. You mean so much to me. I do not have words that can adequately convey my feelings about you and everything you do and are and mean to me.

I am going to bed now. If you get this, please call me and say goodnight. I don't care if you wake me up. I miss you already.

I love you,
Lara

§

June 6, 2002

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

The first, and most important issue, is I miss you very much. I miss being in your physical presence and being able to listen to you and, God willing, benefit from your wisdom. I miss the joking and discussions and just being able to look at you. I miss seeing how you interact with people -- including me -- and help them with their questions, doubts, and shortcomings.

I know you are with me, and you are aware of what is going on with me -- and probably cringing or shaking your head -- yet, nevertheless, I am fond of your physical aura and basking in the light, peace, love, compassion, truth and friendship that is manifested through you. I miss these things ... and other qualities of yours, as well.

You can delete the AOL email address since the free trial period ends in a few days. By the Grace of Allah, and quite unexpectedly, I received two free months of Internet service through another provider ... why, I have no idea. In any event, this free period that I have used in a number of ways, comes to an end on the 19th of June. If my phone service goes -- which it could any day now -- then the Internet service might end sooner.

The restaurant upstairs was advertising for kitchen help. I have known the people who run the restaurant for several years and got on quite well with them in a sort of casual sort of way.

I asked the woman -- who, with her husband runs the place and whom I know a little better than the man -- what duties would the kitchen help they were seeking have to perform, and she said, washing dishes, cleaning up, and helping to prepare the salads ... this sort of thing. I said in that case I would like to apply for the job.

She seemed to be interested in the idea -- although somewhat surprised -- but her husband, apparently, didn't seem to care for the idea at all. So, I got turned down.

I have been looking in the papers for jobs but there is not much that seems to fit either what I could do, or my qualifications, and so on. There are a couple of possibilities that I'll be checking into soon, but if one of these doesn't pan out, my situation might become pretty desperate very quickly.

The last issue raises a lot of questions for me -- about me, the Sufi path, the duties of a shaykh, the nature of forgiveness, compassion, kindness, fairness, love, and the relationship between husband and wife. This issue concerns Lara.

When you earlier passed on to me the means of bringing the arrangement between Lara and me to an end, I was still pretty upset at the time. Initially, my motivation was that I didn't want to do anything while I was emotionally distraught, so I put off following the procedure that you outlined and, instead, worked on, God willing, swallowing my sense of being injured and hurt at what had happened and how it happened.

By the Grace of Allah, although there were unexpected surges of emotion here and there, I was beginning to calm down and to be

resigned to what had taken place. In fact, I calmed down so much that, by the Grace of Allah, I reached a point where I forgave Lara for all she had done and began, for the most part, to feel at peace with the whole thing ... although, as I indicated earlier, there were, from time to time, upsurges of negative emotion that indicated there was still a problem, and so I continued to work on things in this respect.

During this period -- which lasted, maybe, six-to-seven weeks -- I reflected a lot on the ideas of love, forgiveness, salvation, tolerance, being given second, or third, or fourth chances. I also thought a lot about what you said should be my response if Lara decided she wanted to come to fatiha at some point, as well as the way a shaykh should be willing to accept someone who had strayed but expressed a desire to return to the path. In addition, I thought about how I would want someone, say you, to respond to me if I really went astray and did a whole bunch of crazy and sinful deeds -- which I hope I have not done - - and how much, even under the best of circumstances, I do depend on your constant forgiveness for my lowly condition -- even if I have not lost my way entirely ... which I pray that I have not done throughout any of this whole matter.

To make a long story short, I began to think and feel in the following way. As far as performing the release procedure is concerned, I really wasn't in any rush because I wasn't going any place and didn't need to clear the decks, so to speak, for, say, a new marriage.

Furthermore, no one can put a limit on how much, God willing, I have the right to forgive anyone, no matter what they do. Of course, the matter between that person and God is another matter, but since God is the One Who is giving me whatever capacity for forgiveness I have been feeling toward Lara, then if God wished, God could forgive her much more easily in relation to whatever her transgressions against Divinity might be, than I could forgive her for what was happening in relation to me. Of course, God is under no obligation to do this, but I do believe there is nothing -- with the exception, perhaps, of someone's dying in a condition of major shirk or associating partners with God -- which God cannot forgive if we turn to Divinity and believe in God and are as sincere as we can be in our repentance.

What she did was hurtful to me, but I also felt that if one day she came to her senses, she was going to need someone to love her and be her friend and I was prepared to try to be there for her if that should happen. I would want to be given another chance, and I wanted to do unto her what I would want to be done unto me in similar circumstances.

So, I waited and put off doing the release procedure and made a firm intention that I would forgive her for whatever she was doing in the meantime. I really had no reason to believe anything would change, but one thing that gave me a little bit of hope was that she hadn't given up her apartment despite going back across the river to Brimley for a time.

I didn't call her, or try to contact her, but early on -- within the first week, or so, of our separation -- I did write her three very long letters that commented on various aspects of the situation and were written with the intention that they might help her try to understand what was going on with her psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually. I didn't ask her to come back, or try to persuade her to take this or that course of action. Instead, I was trying to discharge what I felt were my final responsibilities as a friend, spiritual tutor, and counselor.

One of the more remarkable aspects of this whole thing -- and surely a gift from Allah -- is that I didn't feel even one iota of jealousy toward Ron throughout these several months, and I still don't. The absence of such an emotion certainly made things easier for me to deal with as far as trying to keep my own nafs in check was concerned.

In any event, I told myself that if I saw evidence she had abandoned her apartment -- I walk past her place on the way to the supermarket -- then, I would perform the rite of release and move on with my life. If the apartment went empty, I would assume she had worked out some sort of reconciliation with the guy, actually loved him, and was willing to work on whatever problems stood between them.

In the meantime, I hoped I was not doing anything wrong by continuing to forgive her, and somehow making things worse for her spiritually. I prayed a lot during this time, and was constantly asking God to forgive her and to help her -- not necessarily to come back to me, but just to assist her to struggle with the problems that her nafs

and hamzat were creating for her and with respect to which her spiritual side had abdicated responsibility for taking these matters in hand and dealing with them in a spiritually appropriate manner.

About two weeks ago, I began to get messages on my voice mail that indicated someone was calling me, waiting for the time when a message could be given, and, then, hanging up ... as if to let me know that someone was trying to get in touch with me but, for whatever reason, did not want to leave a message. I receive hardly any calls at all -- except from bill collectors and they leave detailed messages concerning what they want to talk with me about -- so the former messages were a bit puzzling and they began to happen with greater frequency.

I had been keeping the ringer off, for the most part, because the only calls that were coming through -- until these mysterious messages -- were bill collectors, and since I was getting tired of telling them the same thing all the time, I just left the ringer off and would follow up on whatever messages seemed appropriate. One day, after receiving one of these mysterious messages, I dialed *69 to find the identity of the last caller and it turned out to be Lara's apartment number.

Eventually, I called and contacted her and asked her if she had been calling a lot lately, and she indicated she had. She said her situation with Ron was very bad and that although the manner of control had changed somewhat, nonetheless, in some ways, she was under more control, stress, and scrutiny than she had ever been.

She called me on a few occasions after that and the news she had was all rather distressing. But, then, she stopped calling for a time, until one day she left a message saying she wanted my e-mail address ... which I left on her voice mail when I called back. She began to e-mail me and relate how she really felt but had been too afraid to do on the phone.

She indicated she wanted to escape but didn't know if she had it in her to do this all over again because in a lot of ways she felt weaker than she had the previous time. She had been sleeping more and more and was more and more anxious, as well as hyper-vigilant about Ron's constant control of her life, but she felt unable to break free. I outlined an escape plan for her and told her I would be willing to help but she

had to follow the plan to the letter or else -- although God knows best - - I didn't believe the escape possibility would have any chance of success.

She wrote back indicating she didn't disagree with anything I said, and she also wrote some things that alarmed me a great deal and suggested her condition was far worse than I had imagined. So, I wrote back and told her I was going to come to the place where she works and speak to her directly about what was going on.

Her condition when I saw her seemed to be far worse than when she first started to come and see me a year and a half ago. I was shocked at how bad she looked and she said her counselor had told her that she had lost a lot of energy and focus in the past six-to-eight weeks since she had returned to her old place across the river.

Again, to make a long story much shorter, one thing led to another -- apparently, the two (Ron and Lara) were arguing on an almost continuous basis pretty much during the whole period she was over there -- and she returned to her apartment. Prior to this time, I had written another long snail-mail letter about what had come to me about what was going on inside of her with respect to her internal dynamic of nafs, hamzat, Iblis, and her spiritual side ... both in the present as well as going back into her past. I don't know if what I was saying to her was correct, or not, but it seemed to come to me all of a sudden and I felt like I had insight into the situation that had not been present previously, and the understanding appeared to fill in some major gaps that had been puzzling me previously.

I told her, in person, much of what was in the letter and at that time I told her that the heart of her emotional problems with Ron -- the spiritual issues were related but different -- was that her hamzat was overly identified with, addicted to, and empathized with the hamzat of Ron in a totally pathological way. Moreover, aside from the foregoing, one of the major reasons why she had such difficulty in saying no to him about anything was because she told me that she couldn't handle the pain her own hamzat felt when she perceived he was in emotional pain due to something she might have done or not done ... in other words, the problem was not Ron's pain but her perceptions of her own pain in response to Ron's manifesting some sign of emotional distress and/or displeasure with which she couldn't bear to deal. I wrote a lot

more about all the signs of addiction in her with respect to Ron's hamzat, plus the issue of abandonment that has played a prominent role in her life, and, as well, I indicated she had permitted her spiritual side to abdicate responsibility when it came to managing what was going on within her, and, essentially, had turned control of her life over to an addicted nafs and a wounded six year old.

In addition, I said Ron's relation to her was that of a predator or parasite and he, knowingly, had been exploiting her vulnerabilities for the twenty-three years of their relationship. On the other hand, her vulnerabilities and inability to say no to him were serving to enable Ron's pathological behavior toward her.

Now, aside from how accurate any of the foregoing analysis of her and Ron's situation is (and please remember, I have compressed numerous pages of single-spaced writing down to just a few short paragraphs) this is where I begin to wonder about the things that I am thinking or feeling. Without wishing to put words into your mouth in the sense of having you say things that you never did or never meant in the way that I am saying, I seem to recall that when I first contacted you about Lara's situation and how I might fit into things, you appeared to indicate that the other guy was an unbeliever. I took this to mean that just as Iblis is an unbeliever -- not because he doesn't believe in God's existence, but because he was not prepared to act in conformity with Divine guidance -- so too, this guy (i.e., Ron) is an unbeliever and didn't seem to have any inclination to seriously pursue a spiritual path.

I have surmised -- although I could be wrong on this -- that if there had been any chance of the guy's becoming legitimately interested in the spiritual path, you never would have given the permissions you did to proceed in the manner in which I did ... and, here, I am talking only about the contractual side of the marriage issue. I believe that if there had been some real hope for this guy as far as spirituality is concerned you, probably, would have advised me accordingly and told me what to do to help things in that regard without disturbing or interfering in the guy's relationship with Lara.

The reason I raise the above point is somewhat involved but I will try to summarize things. Once Lara finally left Ron a second time, by the Grace of God, and returned to her apartment, I told her I was

prepared to begin anew with her without, God willing, any hard feelings on my part and leaving the past in the past, but that she had to promise not to go back to Brimley (which she did), and if she did, then, that would be it as far as she and I were concerned ... in other words, I would observe the rite of release, and we would go our separate ways, because I was not going to become a yo-yo in this thing, to be strung out and pulled back at someone's whim. Either she is going to have a seriousness of purpose about her commitments, or she is not, and if it is the latter, then I really have no interest in continuing things in that way ... but I did want to give her one, last chance with respect to me.

I also told her that for her own emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being she cannot have any contact with Ron because she permits herself to become like a zombie in his presence, and he just goes on controlling her. I told her we had tried things her way before -- against my better judgment -- and we both had a bitter experience with the results of that approach, and nothing but pathology, toxicity and problems would enter if she permitted herself to maintain contact -- however indirect -- with him.

Although she promised to do this, a number of things have happened ... some of them due to her weaknesses, and some of them by accident, and some of them because Ron is stalking her, harassing her and won't leave her alone because he understands that if he can exert enough pressure, sooner or later, she caves in. In any case, the contact she has had with Ron has confused her sufficiently that she is toying with different ideas -- some of which seem to put me, as a man, and my spiritual responsibilities on a collision course with one another.

Before anything began happening between Lara and me, I had told her that I was quite prepared to meet with Ron if he were interested in doing so. Because of her fears that he might agree to the proposal just to be able to keep tabs on her and crowd her space, I assured her that if he were interested in my offer I would keep him away from fatiha and the weekly discussion groups until I had an opportunity to try to get a feeling for his motives and sincerity of purpose.

Because of her fears, Lara never passed on my offer to him. On the other hand, Ron easily could have contacted me on his own, but he never bothered to do so or showed any interest whatsoever.

My assessment of their situation is that they are very unlikely ever going to be happy together ... although Allah knows best. They are not compatible, do not really love one another -- although there is a caring, of sorts, present -- and, most importantly, they are destructive in relation to one another due to their respective pathologies. I have told Lara her leaving is not to hurt Ron, but so they can stop hurting each other and enabling their respective pathologies of destruction with respect to one another.

I have told Lara she is not going to be able to save or cure Ron, or vice versa, and the only chance either of them have to become healthy people is to be away from one another and to get not just psychological counseling but spiritual help. I have told Lara that in spite of the many problems she has and mistakes she has made, nonetheless, I believe she has legitimate spiritual potential, but she has to become committed to struggling to do her part in helping God.

I also have told her I do not believe Ron -- at least, at the present time, and, perhaps, always ... but Allah knows best -- has much of an aptitude for, or inclination toward, the spiritual path. I have told her that while she has good spiritual instincts, but lousy worldly judgment, Ron does not appear to me to be drawn to spirituality much at all, and, therefore, while she offers something -- in a spiritual sense -- to work with, unfortunately, at least, at the present time, Ron does not appear to have much of anything to work with spiritually.

Baba, I only have met the man once -- very briefly outside a restaurant when we shook hands. I am going on the basis of what I feel, but I am not sure if my feeling is warranted or justified because all of my evidence comes indirectly through Lara, and although I'm sure that she sometimes puts her own spin on events, nevertheless, by and large, and without wishing to excuse the role that Lara has played in creating some of her own problems in relation to Ron, I feel Ron's behavior has been quite reprehensible throughout almost their entire 23 years of marriage.

Just, yesterday, Lara was toying with the idea that she could sort of stay in her apartment and be separate from both Ron and myself but that Ron could be introduced to me and we could, then, proceed to see how he does on the Sufi path. Presumably, in time, if Ron did okay, then she might consider going back to him. Another variation on this

theme was she might go back to Brimley but continue on with me on the spiritual side of things.

I was not very receptive to any of these ideas. I told if she wants to go back to Brimley, do so, I won't stop her, but I also told her she is going against the advice of both her shaykh (you) and her spiritual tutor (me), and that in my opinion there was very little, if any, good which that is likely to occur by her returning to a situation from which she had 23 years of negative evidence and in which she was not happy, and was becoming more and more sick -- possibly heading for another breakdown in the not-too-distant future -- and from which she had been begging to escape from just a few short weeks ago.

Now, Ron is asking for just one more chance to prove he can be a great guy --sensitive, caring, loving, attentive, thoughtful, compassionate, non-controlling -- despite the fact he couldn't do this in the previous 23 years and despite the fact he was given another 8 week chance and managed to botch things up even more than they had been botched up previously.

Moreover, he proposes to make this transformation in just four weeks and all without spirituality of any kind. Yet, everything he has done recently just reinforces the fact his behavior is totally insensitive, controlling, abusive, self-centered, angry, and childish and that instead of providing actual behavioral evidence that he can change, he continues to stalk, harass, control, and apply pressure on her to return ... even while he is promising all these grand things and he doesn't seem to understand how ludicrous his promises are in the light of his ongoing behaviors.

Regrettably, Lara doesn't seem to see how absurd all of Ron's promises are as he continues to do the same things he has been doing for 23 years. As things stand now, Ron does not appear to be interested in Lara being happy, peaceful, respected, or treated in a loving manner because he is concerned only about what he wants and not what she enjoys. He has said to her that if he were a man, he would let her alone, and just be happy that she is happy, but his actions indicate he neither is prepared to leave her alone, nor is he prepared to be happy that she has found happiness.

I do not believe Ron can do what he says, but I do believe he will say anything to get her to go back to him -- not because he loves her

but because he doesn't want her to be happy with someone else ... but Allah knows best. I am quite certain that, God willing, if the tables were reversed and Lara was happy with someone else, I would be happy for her and, insha' Allah, keep my pain to myself.

Baba, I know Lara has to make her own choices, and I have done everything I can to inform her of the facts of the matter, the risks she is running, her vulnerabilities and pathologies, her spiritual responsibilities, and the prospects of Ron being able to prove good on all his promises about changed behavior. I also, as indicated earlier, have told her what I think of Ron's likelihood to sincerely find his way to any spiritual path, let alone the Sufi path. In addition, I have told her I have serious doubts about her own ability to sincerely pursue the Sufi path if she goes back to Brimley, and this is so for the following reasons -- namely, she has been provided with clear guidance: that neither her interests nor Ron's will be well-served by her going back to Brimley; that the chances of the two of them ever becoming healthy while together are very slim; that Ron does not appear to be inclined to spirituality, and, therefore, the chances of his behavioral transformation taking place -- when he didn't and couldn't do anything in the previous twenty-three years is very unlikely -- although Allah knows best ... yet, despite being told these things over and over again, she insists on doing things her own way and not listening to the guidance she is receiving. If she cannot adhere to the guidance she is receiving in conjunction with her relationship with Ron and keeps putting her own opinions, likes, dislikes, and moods above that of God, His Prophet, her shaykh, and her spiritual tutor, then, just what part of the Sufi path does she believe she is going to pursue under such circumstances?

I know there have been times when you have not permitted people to communicate with you because of mistakes they had made and that this is part of the discipline and training which becomes necessary for some people. There might be other things you do that mureeds find difficult but that are necessary for the long term spiritual good of that person.

Consequently, one question I have is that although you have said no matter what happens between Lara and I, on a personal basis, she cannot be barred from fatiha, does this mean she can do anything she

wants, including not listening to what is being said to her, and no steps should be taken to try to show her the right direction in which to go ... such as by making myself unavailable to her for a time if this is warranted, or by not taking her phone calls, or by not returning her calls, and so on?

Another question I have is should I be expected to encourage the idea that it is all right for her to go back to Brimley and that I have no rights or say in the matter and if she and Ron claim they want spiritual guidance, then, I should make no judgments about their sincerity or how much trouble they might cause me, themselves, or others, and I should just leave myself open for whatever they wish to do?

She claims to love me -- in fact, the primary reason for her leaving Ron the second time, was because she was missing me intensely and was angry all the time at Ron for inducing her to come back to him - even though this was her choice to allow Ron to control her that way and to such an extent. Indeed, the danger here -- which I have told her a hundred different ways -- is that the more contact she has with Ron, the more likely she is to allow herself to succumb to the pressures applied by him ... and between her alleged love for me and her addictions and pathologies in relation to Ron, I don't know if I stand much of a chance here -- although Allah knows best.

I remember what you told me Baba when she left the first time and that although the decision was a personal one, I should keep in mind what had happened before, should she decide to return. I have kept that in mind, but I also wanted to give her one more chance, knowing the risks I was taking and knowing this might only lead to more heartache, but I put off observing the rite of release for two reasons -- I do love her and care about her, but, even more importantly, I feared for the safety of her soul should someone not be there to help her when she needed it.

However, I'm not a saint, and I only can go so far in this. I am not prepared to go through this whole cycle again, and feel, at some point, she is going to have to take responsibility for her decisions and accept the consequences of what she does and that expecting to get everything she desires is not necessarily in her best interests ... in any event, I have run with this as much as I feel I am able, and I only have

been able to do that by the Grace of God ... this I know to be so very definitely.

But, all of this raises questions -- how much love, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, and so on should I have in this case? I know there is no point in trying to remain committed to Lara if she really has no interest in committing herself to our relationship, but am I supposed to actively encourage the dissolution of that relationship in order to support Lara's relationship with a person whom I feel is not only toxic for her but very well might be -- although Allah knows best -- the instrument of her own destruction ... emotionally, physically, and spiritually? I can't live Lara's life for her, but am I supposed to actively work against my own interests and Lara's own interests if I do not believe either those interests or those of Ron will be served by that sacrifice? Sacrificing one's own interests so the interests of others can be better served through that sacrifice is one thing, but sacrificing myself for nothing at all -- in fact sacrificing myself so that others can go about making their lives miserable, if not destroy themselves, seems a rather questionable activity ... but, maybe, not.

Lara knows my financial situation is extremely precarious and that I might have to leave -- for who knows where -- in the very near future. She has proposed we live apart until she files for divorce, but in the meantime she wants to send me some money.

I asked her does she plan to go through with filing for divorce, and she said she is not sure. I told her if she is not going to file for divorce, then, I don't want the money even though I am in desperate need of it. She asked me if I was letting my pride get in the way, and I told her, no, I wasn't, for if she was going to return to Brimley, then, her offer lacked sincerity, and the reason it lacked sincerity was because her going back would indicate she had no real regard for the guidance that had come to her from us concerning such an action, and, therefore, the money offer seemed to lack real sincerity as well because, obviously, she did not have the right *niyat* toward her shaykh, the *silsilah*, the Sufi path, or her spiritual tutor, and, consequently, I did not feel right in accepting the money.

When she left the first time, she wanted to give me some money and I told her the story about the time that the people at the ashram wanted to give me money for my talks, and I called you about it, and

you said that if I felt the offer was done from sincerity and love, to go ahead and accept the money, but that if I did not feel these elements were present, then, I should refuse, and, so, I refused her offer the first time for these reasons, and I am refusing the money this time as well if she decides that she is going to return to Brimley. However, if she stays and does file for divorce I told her I would accept the money, but I don't know if my actions or thinking is right in any of this.

Finally, I feel like I have been walking a spiritual tight rope for the last 15-16 months. Ever since Lara walked into my office I have taken risks during this period ... risks that I felt, at the time, were bending the rules -- sometimes considerably -- but that, by the Grace of Allah, did not -- I feel -- end in crossing the clear lines of prohibition, while, simultaneously -- or, so, I told myself -- were, God willing, providing a troubled person with a chance for escaping her past and present, as well as providing her with an opportunity to step onto the spiritual path.

I really don't know how Lara is going to decide things. I can see them going either way. Irrespective of how she chooses, I really wonder if the course I have pursued with respect to her has been spiritually appropriate for our situation.

I really don't know to how much risk one should expose oneself in order to try to help other people -- especially, when, quite frequently, not only do these people not appreciate the risks that have been taken on their behalf but, quite often, the whole thing just blows up in one's face, and one wonders whether the reason why things have gone awry is because of the course traveled and that, perhaps, the risks taken overstepped the bounds of propriety. I have felt uneasy about certain aspects of what has gone on during the last 15-16 months, and I do not know if taking the risks were justified or ill-advised. I would not take such risks at the drop of a hat, and, in fact, have not done so for most of my life as a Muslim, but, maybe, I should not have taken these risks during this last year and a half -- for my sake, the silsilah's sake, or even for the sake of the person for whom the risks were run.

This issue becomes especially murky when one throws one's own personal interests into the mix and, as a result, one has to wonder about the sincerity of one's motives for doing what one has done. I'm

sorry if all of the above is so sketchily and hurriedly written, but I was hoping you might respond to the foregoing ... in part, or in whole.

Please convey my Salaams and love to the people of your household and to the people of fatiha.

Love,

Tariq

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Tariq my son,

Of course I miss you too, and you know that. Well, regarding all that you have said in your email about Lara, all I can say is that it is all up to you.

Where-as she is concerned, it has been proved that she is not in a condition to make any decision, and till she goes through a complete medical therapy I think she might remain like this or even get worse. You can of course do nothing about it unless she gives you permission. That can only happen if she were to be your official wife. As her official husband you would be allowed to proceed in seeking medical help for her, but now the way the situation is, according to others you have no rights. Under God's Mercy you have all rights, but under "Society rules" you have no rights.

Things are so-so now, but if her condition gets worse, you might have to decide whether or not you are prepared to carry on.

Anyway son, whatever you decide, might God give you the patience and strength.

I am sure that soon you will be in a position to realize what should be done under the circumstances.

God is with you at all times!

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

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June 6, 2002

Lara desperately wants to say certain things to Ron that will explain to him how reality looks from her perspective ... especially in conjunction with Ron. She does not feel she has the strength to carry through with this in person or by phone because Ron, likely, would switch to his 'sad, vulnerable persona', and Lara would not be able to continue ... she would begin to feel badly for Ron as a result of his little-boy-hurt routine, and she would want Ron's pain to stop, and, so, she would not be able to finish what she had started.

I suggest Lara write something to Ron. Lara likes the idea. However, she doesn't believe she could bring herself to put down on paper the things that need to be said -- things that she feels very deeply and intensely.

She believes the process of writing all this out would be too painful and emotionally draining. Lara doesn't feel she has the energy, strength and courage to do this ... although she would like to be able to do this.

I make a counter-proposal. What if I write the letter, and, then, Lara can change whatever she considers necessary.

Lara agrees. I sit down and based on what Lara has said to me during the last year and a half, I write a letter to Ron for Lara.

§

Dear Ron

I'm writing to you in order to try to help you understand what has been, for a long time, going on in my mind and heart but that often meet with considerable obstacles in reaching you ... sometimes because of me and sometimes because of you. There are several reasons why I have decided to put things in writing rather than do things through a conversation.

First, in the past, I feel you have been very resistant to hearing what I have to say about our relationship or my needs. As a result, usually, as soon as I tell you about my feelings or thoughts, these get

lost somewhere within you, and we end up talking about what is important to you, or what you want, or how you feel, or what you believe, or about your hurt ... but what is important to me gets largely, if not completely, ignored.

Recently, you told me you were attempting to save the marriage. In truth, however, you have only been trying to save your idea of what the marriage should be, and by putting my feelings and thoughts in writing, I am hoping that, resistant or not, you won't be able to ignore what is in black and white and, therefore, my words might be less likely to disappear just because I have stopped talking, and, hopefully, through this letter, you might come to see that there is another point of view -- namely, mine -- that is quite different from yours.

A second reason for writing to you about my feelings and thoughts, rather than talking to you directly, is that I am sick and tired of the endless arguments, conflict, shouting, swearing, pressuring, and badgering that take place whenever we talk about our problems. I do understand you feel very strongly about what you think, feel, want, or believe, but the fact you feel strongly about things doesn't give you the right to insist that all discussions end up the way you wish, with a result that you want.

So, Ron, you have to understand that what I'm saying here is not open to discussion. In all likelihood you will not like what I'm going to say and I believe what is said here will be upsetting to you, but no amount of arguing, discussion, or joint counseling is going to change the way I feel, and, therefore, by writing things, I'm just trying to head off the arguments that are likely to arise if I were to tell you these things in person.

Thirdly, whether you believe this or not, I do care for you, now, and, in fact, I always have cared and always will care for you. However, since I know you will be hurt by what I have to say, and because I will be upset you are hurt by what is said, and because I have difficulty keeping things in proper perspective when I know you are hurting, then saying things in a letter is easier for me than it would be if I had to tell you in person ... although I have tried on many occasions to tell you in person how I feel about what is, and has been, going on.

Perhaps the best way to begin is to take a few examples from your own life that you might be able to relate to in order to try to explain to

you what is happening within me. For example, all those times when you were going back and forth between your second wife and me, you told me how you couldn't bring yourself to be with your second wife physically -- that your body stopped you.

Your mind kept sending you back to her. Yet, no matter how many times you went back, you couldn't get around how your body felt about the relationship ... it was something that was just there, and you didn't have any control over it, and you might not even have understood why it was there ... it just was.

Or, take how your body responds when you feel threatened. Whether you feel threatened by something I am doing or not doing, or whether you feel threatened by what someone else is doing or not doing, your body automatically goes into an extremely defensive, aggressive, intense, angry, combative way of interacting.

You have been this way our entire marriage. I know you were this way before we met.

You don't think about becoming this way. Your body, mind, and heart are wired to respond this way -- as a habit ... as an automatic, emotional response to whatever is going on that upsets you. It's the first line of defense your body and emotions use to protect you against things that you feel are threatening in some way to you. You often don't have much control over this way of responding. It is so ingrained, so habitual, so deeply rooted, as well as so close to the surface that your body just takes over and tends to go its own way, whether you want this or not.

Finally, consider the time after your brother's death when your mother told you she loved you. You told me how your whole being just sort of froze-up and was paralyzed because you were caught between what she was saying to you and how she had treated you all those years and your feeling was that it was too little, too late

Deeply felt emotions, hurts, anger, and resentment toward your mother rose up and took control of you. Whether you wanted things to be this way or not, this is what happened.

Now, I'm not mentioning these three examples in order to criticize you. I am talking about them in the hopes you will be able to take such experiences of your own and use them to develop some degree of

appreciation for what happens -- and has been happening for a long time -- in me with respect to our relationship.

You often have told me my problem is I can't forgive you for the things that you have done to me. Unfortunately for both of us, the situation is not that simple.

For years and years I have tried to forgive, forget, and push past the things that have taken place in our relationship ... and, I would not have stayed with you for twenty-three years if this were not true. Again and again, I have turned the page on our history and tried to start afresh, yet, each time I have done this, new problems have arisen in our relationship that have continued to eat away at the sense of trust, respect, warmth, love, faith, and security with which I began our relationship.

I am not interested in itemizing all that has gone on, or rehashing such events, or dredging up the past, but the cumulative effect of all that you have done over the years has left my emotions, body, heart, and soul in a deeply wounded, vulnerable, irritable, and highly sensitized condition that runs very, very, very deep. This condition runs so deep that it is beyond my conscious control, and even if I wanted it to be other than it is, I can't overcome the deep anger, resentment, hurt, betrayal, and distrust that I feel toward what you have done and continue to do ... this goes to the very core of my being.

Just as you can't help how your body felt with respect to your second wife, or how you respond when you feel threatened, or how you responded to your mother, I can't help the way an important part of me feels concerning you, and this goes way beyond the issue of forgiveness ... for, in my heart and mind, I have done the best I can to forgive you for what you have done. However, I just can't get past, or around, how your cumulative behaviors have seeped deep into my being and taken up permanent residence there in the form of intense feelings of anger, resentment, betrayal, and mistrust concerning you, any more than you can get past how your body responded to your second wife, or your mother, or to being threatened.

Your behaviors have made me afraid of you. There was a time -- very early on -- when you were the one person in my life with whom I felt secure and safe. However, your behaviors have changed all that into a completely opposite set of feelings.

Your anger frightens me. Your potential for violence frightens me, and all it takes is a few acts of violence on your part toward me to make me constantly wonder if, or when, you, once again, will be violent toward me, our children, or others.

Your constant emotional intensity frightens me and tires me out, and you are this way even when you aren't angry or upset. Your emotional unpredictability frightens me.

The way you constantly badger and pressure me is frightening to me. The way you treat me -- as if I don't have the right to my own feelings and thoughts -- frightens me.

The way you stalk me frightens me. The way you watch everything I do and feel threatened with everything I do that doesn't involve you frightens me. The way you hold me hostage in my own home frightens me.

The way in which you don't seem to understand how what you have done and are doing to me has such destructive consequences for both of us also frightens me. The way in which you feel the solution to our problems rests with my forgiving you rather than with your changing your behaviors and attitudes frightens me.

Your constant attempts to control my feelings, my thoughts, my body, and my movements frighten me. I am especially frightened by your intense, angry, hurt reactions to me whenever I try to break free from your deep need to control everything I do, as I try to struggle to be a person who is in charge of her own body, emotions, thoughts, and actions.

Each and every day I go around in a dazed, fearful, anxious, uptight, unhappy, angry, resentful condition because of the intense, angry, defensive, controlling, pressuring, hurt, combative, self-centered way through which you interact with me. This has been going on for 24 years. I am afraid of you, and even if today you were to change everything about which I am afraid with respect to you, my deep-rooted fears concerning you still would be there within me.

Although there are a number of reasons for my anxiety attacks, my PTSD, my panic- disorders, my muscle spasms, and my depressions, nonetheless, you play a very central role in having helped to create and maintain all of these conditions. I'm not saying you are the blame for

all of this ... what I'm saying is you are, very definitely, part of the set of forces that have led to such problems and that continues to help inflame and maintain these problems.

This is not about giving you, or us, another chance. My body, heart, and soul have no more chances to give ... I have exhausted my resources. I have come to the end of myself with respect to you. I can't put up with these things any more ... the toll on my body, mind and soul has become too great.

Every day my body, heart, and soul are telling me I have been running on empty for many years now. Every day my body, heart, and soul are telling me I cannot ever get over my fear, anger, resentment, and mistrust of you as long as I am in your presence. Every day my body, heart, and soul are telling me I cannot ever get healthy with you. Every day, my body, heart, and soul are feeling the deep pain and despair that result from forcing me to continue to live with the conditions of a relationship that, for me, are intolerable and have been so for many, many, many years.

You can say that I just have to be willing to let the past go. But this really is not for you to say.

This is my body, my heart, my soul we are talking about -- not yours. You have your own problems to solve, and you should busy yourself with such problems rather than trying to tell me how I should feel, or think, or act, or be.

You do not have to live with what you have done to me in the way that I have to live with what you have done to me. Like an airplane pilot who drops bombs, you might experience some of the discomfort of the shock waves that are set in motion from the exploding bombs that you have released, but you do so at an emotional and physical distance ...while I have been living at ground zero and have had to deal with the full effects of your bombs -- emotionally, physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually.

You often appear to think your struggle to forgive yourself for what you have done has pretty much the same degree of difficulty as my struggle to forgive you for what you have done -- as if the task of forgiveness of the pilot (concerning himself) and the task of the ones

upon whom he dropped the bombs are really pretty much the same, However, the two tasks are not the same ... not even remotely.

Please do not try to control how I should feel about what you have done. Please do not try to control how I should try to overcome the effects of what you have done with respect to me. Please do not try to control the conditions under which I seek to become healthy again. Please do not try to control the way in which I seek to regain control of my own life.

I need for us to be apart. I need for you to leave me alone and stop trying to pressure me to keep something alive that, in truth, has been dead for some time. I need to get healthy -- in fact, the only chance I have of doing so is -- away from you.

I need for you to accept that the marriage is over and that there is nothing there to be saved. I need for you to understand that our marital and relational problems started long ago -- and we both have talked about this on a number of occasions during the last five years -- and, therefore, this is not something that just happened or came out of nowhere.

I need for you to move on with your life. I need for you to put out of your mind any hope that our marital relationship will be revived in the future. Nonetheless, I do, and always will, care for you and do not wish you any ill-will.

I want you to be happy, but I want happiness too, and because of what has gone on and how intensely hurt, afraid, angry and betrayed I feel deep within the core of my being with respect to you, I know that neither can I, ever again, bring myself to love you in the way you want to be loved, nor can you love me in the way I need to be loved; neither can I, ever again, bring myself to show you affection in the way you would like, nor can you show me affection in the way I need; and, finally, neither can I, ever again, be intimate with you in the way you want, nor can you be intimate with me in the way I need.

What has gone on over the last twenty-four years between us has left wounds and problems that run too deep to ever be capable of being fixed. As was true with respect to Humpty Dumpty, all the kings horses and all the kings men can't put back together again what has broken in our marriage.

There is nothing left to argue about. There is nothing left to discuss. There is nothing left to be saved.

There is no reason for us to continue to hurt one another by keeping something going that should have been ended years ago. We both need to have enough common sense to know when enough is enough and to understand that for us to continue on is just going to lead to more of the same conflict, disharmony, arguments, tensions, pain, and unhappiness that have been going on for years, now.

For you to insist we can do this ... that the marriage can be saved ... that all it needs is one more chance ... that all I need to do is forgive and forget -- all of this just demonstrates you have not understood what I have been trying to tell you for a long, long time. The present problem is not about what you think, feel, want, believe, or wish ... rather, it is about what I need in order to become healthy again and to be able to recover control of my life -- and what I need in order to be able to do these things is to be free from our marriage.

I want the end to be amicable. I want to settle things financially in whatever way that is going to be best for both of us. I want things to be done in a way that is fair to us both. But I do want the marriage to end as quickly as possible ... for your sake, my sake, and the sake of everyone else.

Lara

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Lara is amazed with the letter. She says it captures, precisely, her feelings, attitudes, and thoughts about so many things.

She wants to change a few parts so that the words will reflect her way of speaking, rather than mine. She makes the changes and sends the letter to Ron.

§

June 19, 2002

I have sent Baba some material that develops the idea of a general spiritual program that is, to some extent, a variation on some of the principles of the AA twelve step program. The idea has been developed by me because Baba has often expressed an interest in finding ways to help people spiritually without, necessarily, requiring them to become Muslim, or even Sufi, but which would be rooted in, and approached from, an authentic mystical perspective.

He replies to the material by e-mail:

Tariq my son,

What is the meaning of AA?

By the way, I saw my shaykh last night, telling me that he has put much love and respect in your brother's heart and in time, he will understand you. All your brothers and especially one of your brother's daughters was standing next to my shaykh serving him tea. My shaykh looked at her lovingly and apologized for your not accepting her offer, and said, "You might not realize it now, but you are Baba's daughter and in time you will realize this very lovingly and strongly!" Then he looked at me and said that "Tariq should accept her offer, and she is capable of keeping secrets hidden. He also said that I have arranged a job even for Tariq, and this is not just a job, because Tariq can look after this as his own business."

I was very, very happy to see my shaykh and hear this good news. In fact I had seen this sometime ago, and waited for your message knowing that definitely what has been said has been done and you will know about it and let me know, but I heard no news from you regarding this. Then last night, I again saw this. The only addition was that my shaykh was apologizing to your niece. I just wanted you to know.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

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Baba's e-mail stuns me. I never told anyone about the offer of an apartment which my niece made to me through my brother Bruce.

I hadn't wanted to bother Baba with the matter, because I already had been bothering him with so many other things. So, I had said nothing about the offer or my declining of it.

I reply to Baba-s e-mail:

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

The meaning of AA is 'Alcoholics Anonymous' -- an organization that began back in the 1930s through the work of a variety of people, but especially the work of two people by the names of Bill W. and Dr. Bob ... no last names are ever used in their meetings. AA has a thoroughly spiritual foundation, but these principles are stated in very broad terms as having to do with a 'Higher Power' in order to be as accessible and as inclusive as possible to people whose lives have spun out of control through the influence of alcohol and who become sober by turning their lives over to this 'Higher Power' as best as they are able to do. There is no leadership, officers, positions, elections, or promotion involved in AA, yet, by the Grace of Allah, there are now more than 8 million people belonging to chapters of AA in many countries in the world where people can go seven days a week and listen to the stories of other individuals whose lives have gone from the dumps to being manageable by becoming sober, as well as get support and help from others who also have had their lives redeemed by Divine Intervention through the manifestation of AA.

The very general way of referring to Divinity in AA is, I believe, because many people have had very bad experiences with organized religion. Because of such experiences, these individuals tend to be wary of anything that appears to have something to do with religion even though many of these same individuals thirst for a drink of real spirituality.

As far as the offer to which you refer in your dream, several months ago my brother Bruce approached me with the idea that his daughter was buying a few apartment houses, and that, if I wanted, his daughter was going to make the basement apartment in one of the

places available for me. Bruce said that the apartment wasn't much, but it was better than where I lived now in the basement office.

However, at the time, his daughter was going back and forth about whether she was actually going to buy the building complex. Moreover, at the time, things were up and down with respect to Lara and what was going to happen in relation to her and me, and, as a result, at least in part, I felt if I moved, the contact might be broken and Lara would be left without any support or help ... at least, on a human level.

In addition, the location of the proposed apartment is further away from things than where I am presently, and without a car, this added distance makes getting around that much more difficult. For example, what is, now, a fifteen minute walk to the supermarket would become a thirty minute to 45 minute walk ... and carrying groceries that distance at my age is not an easy thing to do.

In any event, in addition to Bruce's daughter vacillating on whether, or not, to buy the apartment houses, once she actually made the purchase, she was approached by a couple of local gay developers who were willing to pay her \$30,000 above her costs for purchasing the buildings. And consideration of this new offer also went on for a bit of time.

About six-to-seven weeks ago, Bruce called me up and said his daughter finally had decided to keep the buildings and wanted to pick me up and show me the basement apartment. So, I said okay.

We went and the apartment is quite all right. However, on the ride back, I told Bruce that although the offer was very kind and generous, I was going to decline.

One reason had to do with my personal circumstances in relation to Lara -- and even if those straightened out, there would still be the problem of trying to explain to Bruce and his daughter with respect to what my relationship with Lara was all about ... for in their eyes that relationship is likely to be viewed as just an illicit, immoral extra-marital affair. Bruce's daughter is a very committed Christian, while Bruce and his wife are likely to look upon that relationship with a jaundiced eye, as well - especially, in the light of everything that is going on now in the world concerning Islam -- such as the recent

controversy of one of the previous leaders of the Southern Baptist Leadership Conference and his very derogatory remarks concerning the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

There was also the previously mentioned location problem relative to shopping and so on. In addition, they said I could sort of help pay my own way by mowing the grass during summer and shoveling the driveway during winter. However, the driveway is huge and at nearly 60 years of age, I'm not sure I can manage the work since I used to get exhausted just cleaning off snow and ice from the sidewalk in front of Bruce's office when I worked for him ... and that is a far, far, far smaller surface to clean than is the driveway at the apartment place that actually goes down a hill and around a corner to open up into a rather large parking area for all of the tenants of the two buildings.

The final kicker in all of this is that after I politely refused the offer, Bruce had his daughter call me later in the evening, trying to persuade me to take the apartment. I wasn't available to take the call, but she left a message.

By the time I got the message I felt it was too late to call back that evening, so I tried to call Bruce's daughter over the next several days, but she was never home and she has no voice mail. So, I let it go.

However, in her message to me, she said that Bruce was planning on paying her the rent on my behalf so that no one would be out anything, and I shouldn't feel badly about things. Ironically, what she said did make me feel badly.

I didn't come to Bamford so I could live off my brother. He has -- through the influence of you and your shaykh, by the Grace of Allah, and through the quality of his own character -- been very kind to me and helped me out in a lot of different ways -- especially financially, from time to time -- and his hiring me to work for him was just part of this.

There was just once that I asked him to loan me some money, and I told him I would never do so again, and this occasion was as a result of having been left hanging because someone reneged on a business arrangement with me. He was kind enough to do this, and he was even

kinder because he wanted to lecture me but he zipped his lip and said nothing.

I'm tired of taking money from other people. I'm tired of borrowing money that I can't pay back. I'm tired of running up bills just trying to survive.

Whether anyone believes me, or not, I have tried very hard over the last seven-to-eight years to find gainful employment of some kind ... whether generated through my own efforts or working for someone else. Everyone seems to be on my back about this and has been for years now, but I can't force other people to hire me, and I can't force people to buy what little I have to offer in the way of books, CDs, services, and so on.

Yes, there was that one job with Sima's uncle that was sort of offered and, then, taken back, and it was, probably, entirely my fault the whole thing fell through. But, aside from this, I have tried, and tried, and tried everything I can think of to find a job, and have received little, or no co-operation from anyone -- except for the year, or so, that I worked for Bruce.

I have not sought high-paying, prestigious jobs. I have been willing to try almost anything -- as long as I felt I would be able to do whatever job it was that was required. For nearly a year now, I have had an on-again/off-again sort of business arrangement with Lara concerning proofreading and, possibly, some other related work, but this keeps getting fouled up in one way or another.

I've tried to keep my life separate from Bruce's in some ways ... such as not being dependent on him to look after me financially. This is for several reasons -- one being that I really don't want to have to live the rest of my life with, possibly, someone looking over my shoulder and either approving or disapproving of what I am doing just because I am receiving financial help from them. Secondly, I am not feeling all that great about myself these days, and feel I am not all that spiritual, and I don't have all that much to say or offer people. I have taken risks I, probably, should not have taken, and I have extended myself in ways that, probably, should not have been done ... and, now, I am left with little more than trying to survive from day to day - spiritually, financially, socially, and every other way.

Are there people who are worse off than me in the world? Yes, I know there are -- many of them -- which make matters even harder to take because God has treated me with, relatively speaking, kid gloves, and I still can't manage things.

Am I feeling sorry for myself? I don't think so -- at least, not for the most part. Mostly, I just am not very happy with me or my spiritual failings, weaknesses, errors, mistakes, inadequacies and incompetence ... and having to be in a position where I am forced to take handouts just seems to make the whole situation worse.

I really don't know if the apartment is still available. It has been 6-7 weeks since the offer was made to me, and Bruce's daughter might have decided to rent the place to someone else. There is also the problem of what to do about the office where I am staying now because I signed a lease ... and although the guy might let me out of it, he might not.

If you want, I will inquire about the both of these issues. At the time, I believed I was doing the right thing, but, obviously, you are telling me I was wrong -- not only wrong, but your shaykh was put to the trouble of having to apologize on my behalf, and this appears to be just one more indication that if I were at all spiritually attuned to anything, then, the right decision would have been made in the first place, rather than what has gone on.

I had written to you earlier about whether it would be okay if Lara and I came down for a few days in July. Since you haven't written back about this, perhaps, it is a bad idea for me to even raise the matter.

Since Lara is not all that keen on staying with people she doesn't know or with eating things outside of a very narrow range of foods, I thought we would try to make our own arrangements for lodging and food quite apart from your place, and I did not wish to impose on you or your household. Furthermore, I certainly have no desire to put you or anyone else in your household in an embarrassing position.

However, whatever little I could do for Lara in a spiritual way, I have tried to do. I feel that she is in need of making physical contact with someone who actually knew what he was doing, spiritually speaking, and, insha' Allah, she would be able to take away from a meeting with you what so many others have been able to do, by the

Grace of Allah, and thereby have her life improved as a result. But, if, for whatever reasons, this is not a good idea, then just tell me, and I won't raise the matter again.

Love,
Tariq

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June 21, 2002

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'aalykum!

The day after I received your e-mail about your dream and without waiting for your reply to my e-mail concerning your dream and your question about AA -- since the dream seemed pretty self-evident as to what was being said -- I called my brother's daughter, apologized for not having gotten back to her -- although I indicated I had tried without success (I just didn't try hard enough) -- and told her that if the offer was still open, I would like to take her up on it. In fact, the way it worked out was quite strange because I had called Bruce's house thinking I would leave a message for his daughter through him, and the person who picked up the phone was his daughter ... which almost never happens although she spends a lot of time at her parent's house.

In any event, she was very happy to hear from me and was very happy to say the offer was, indeed, still open. I told her it might take me a week to 10 days to work out some of the logistics and arrange the move.

The situation with Lara might have taken some strange new twists, and, quite frankly, I really don't know what the final disposition of the matter is going to be. I have tried to approach the situation in a way that, God willing, might bring the most benefit to the most people -- spiritually speaking -- and I am trying to put my own personal interests in this somewhat to the side ... although I have not abandoned them altogether.

The situation -- to make a long story short -- is now this. As little as a week ago Ron indicated that he had enough and couldn't go on with the way things were between Lara and him. More specifically, Lara had, once again, moved out and was living in her apartment. However, as a result of some joint-sessions they were doing together with a counselor, Ron's controlling behavior were being addressed and, among other things, he was not permitted (by the counselor) to ask Lara any questions about anything, and Ron was not supposed to initiate anything ... everything had to be initiated by Lara.

Yesterday, Ron and Lara had another long talk. One of the reasons why Lara left Ron again was because, according to Lara, she was missing me terribly, and since Ron was, once again, micro-managing her life, thereby, leaving her absolutely no space for herself, they were fighting a lot over the fact that Lara did not want to give up her friendship (I mean this in the true sense of the word and not as a euphemism for a sexual relationship) with me, and she had told him she would hate him forever if he forced her to do this. This theme was at the core of a lot of their fighting and arguing, along with the control issues.

In any event, Ron has now come back with a counter-proposal saying that if she would come back to him, not only would he permit her to be with me as often as she liked and continue on with her spiritual interests concerning the Sufi path, but he has expressed some interest in the Sufi path as well ... especially after listening to the essay I wrote concerning a mystical potential proposal in relation to AA. Even after he learned I had written it, he really liked the idea and was interested in participating ... and you should know that Ron has been sober for 25-26 years and does a great deal of work in AA and recognized that my proposal was addressing an issue that was compatible with, and complementary to, the spiritual framework of AA but was offering something that is not present, for the most part, in AA as it is currently observed.

Recently, he has made some interesting statements -- one of which is his willingness to meet with me about the spiritual side of things despite his knowing that Lara and I have had a 'relationship' (and although Lara had promised not to say anything about the nature of our relationship to anyone -- especially to Ron -- when she went back

to Brimley a few months ago, he was relentless in his badgering of her until she, finally caved in, and told him about the nature of that relationship ... but she didn't tell him the full truth -- either with respect to how long it had been going on or about its contractual dimension.

Although he got over this news, he was very angry at me for awhile and called me all kinds of names and, among other things said I had conned Lara into a pseudo-spiritual path in order to exploit her and that, as well, I was a hypocrite because I was being untrue to what I supposedly professed as a spiritual way of life and was carrying on with someone in what he believed, at the time, to be an immoral way.

Lara -- despite all the bad behaviors of Ron over the last 24 years - - does seem to have genuine caring for Ron quite apart from her emotional problems concerning him and quite apart from the pathological aspects of their relationship. She also cares for and loves me, and she has said that if she had met both of us for the first time today, she said it would be no contest as to whom she would want to be with ... me.

However, the problem is she didn't just meet both of us, and she has a history of twenty-four years, several children, and a home with Ron. Plus, she genuinely does not want to hurt him, and she is interested in his welfare -- emotional, physical and spiritual -- and she does not want bad things to happen to him ... which she feels might happen if she leaves him for good. So, her heart, mind, and emotions are, constantly, being pulled in several directions.

I have told her a few times that the things in which I am most interested are these: (1) for her to be able to choose whatever she wants to do in a completely free way -- without pathology and without fear of how I or Ron might react to what she decides; (2) even more importantly, I don't want her spiritual side to be lost in the shuffle so that if she returns to Ron she will give up the spiritual path.

I have told her I am a human being, and she can't expect me to have no feelings or heartache about what is going on or how things might turn out. At the same time, I have told her I have spiritual duties that take priority over my personal interests and that if necessary -- and although I might have my own difficulties with adjusting to things -- I have told her I would continue to be her friend and do whatever I

could to assist her spiritually ... including meeting with, and, if I can and God permits, try to help Ron spiritually as well as, maybe, even help the two of them to have a better life together.

I also have told Lara that as I see things the only way she is going to have a clear mind and heart with respect to how to proceed and whether there is going to be any future for her and Ron -- or her and me -- is that she is going to have tell Ron everything and see where the chips fall ... not only with respect to her relationship with Ron but, as well, Ron's possible relationship with spirituality. Up until now, Ron is working on certain assumptions about what has gone on between Lara and me because he was not told the entire story by Lara, and if he did learn the entire story, he might go in several directions ... ranging from: being extremely angry about things, to: never trusting Lara again, to: eventually accepting what he was being told and coming to understand I didn't do anything wrong, nor did Lara ... although from a societal/cultural point of view, what went on between Lara and me probably might not be accepted by a lot of people. If the latter response were to take place (that is, he came to accept the full story about things) -- and providing the control issues could be addressed properly (and Ron has been trying in this respect by having begun to see a counselor about his behaviors, together with participating in an anger management course, as well as doing joint counseling with Lara in conjunction with a social worker) -- Lara has indicated she, probably, would go back to Ron.

There are a number of things that Ron has said that indicate there might be something to work with here. For one thing, AA is a spiritual path of sorts -- whose main objective is, with the help of God or a 'Higher Power', to get people sober -- and although Ron always has sensed there is something more to things spiritually, he has been afraid to do much investigation because he has been brought up by his father (who was very active in AA and, himself was a recovering alcoholic), as well as many of the AA old timers, to believe that if anyone leaves AA, then quite frequently, sooner or later, such a person loses his or her sobriety.

Ron has never been one to attend church. Although there does seem to be a certain spiritual thirst in him, he claims that he has just

never known what to do about it other than to continue on with the AA work and framework.

Secondly, recently Ron said to Lara -- and this was after the initial round of revelations several months ago about Lara and me -- that he couldn't hate a man who probably had saved his wife's life -- physically, emotionally and spiritually. I believe Ron is giving credit to the wrong individual in all of this. Nevertheless, his foregoing remarks indicate there might be a capacity for appreciating the nuances of a complex situation ... and those remarks indicate that there might be some degree of openness to change and acceptance in relation to a difficult issue.

Although Ron's willingness to meet with me even under the present circumstances of not having the full story might be just a case of his being willing to promise anything in order to get Lara back and, then, things could change once he gets what he wants, at the same time, in its own way, his willingness to meet with me about spiritual issues under the present circumstances, says something for him. Maybe, if he reacts well to the full truth, he might be prepared to pursue spiritual things -- according to his capacity -- in a serious fashion, and if this were so, then maybe, my sacrifice with respect to Lara might be worth it ... and who knows what other possibilities might arise out of this given that Ron carries a lot of respect within the AA community.

Moreover, as indicated earlier, despite the situation, Ron reacted very positively to my essay about the mystical path and AA that Lara had read to him. In addition, Lara has shown the essay to a few other people in AA and all, with one exception (who was my mureed but left and, then, did some things she ought not to have done), have really liked the essay and were interested in pursuing it further ... and even the one who had a negative reaction thought the underlying idea was a good one.

Two other things with respect to Ron's most recent counter-proposal to Lara about their getting back together again might be of importance here. Not only did he say he would not object to her being with me as often as she liked, as well indicated a willingness to meet with me himself, but he said he would be prepared to give me the apartment that is attached to their house in Brimley and even would

pay the bill for the satellite dish that is hooked up to the apartment. Moreover, he has encouraged Lara to buy the software necessary that would permit me to do more advanced proofreading work in relation to Lara's job.

I have told Lara that although there would be a certain amount of hurt and heartache for me, and that, probably, there always would be a hole in my heart if she were to return to Ron, I would not stand in her way if this is what she really wants to do and as long as she is not going to become entangled once again in control issues. However, once I perform the rite of release, then that is going to be it as far as the contractual side of things between her and I is concerned, and it can't be taken back, so whatever she decides she better be prepared to live with it for the rest of her life.

As far as the trip to your place is concerned, Baba, the early July dates are not cast in stone since starting in the second week of July, Lara has 3 weeks of vacation and things, probably, could be arranged to fit in to the schedule of your coming trip with some of your mureeds. The only twist on all of this is that instead of me and Lara, the members of the visiting caravanserai could involve a third party -- namely, Ron -- who might be coming if this were okay with you -- and, I am sure they, likely, would feel more comfortable staying in a motel together than staying with a family there ... however, you might have to put up with me somehow.

Love,

Tariq

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Tariq my son,

I am very pleased to know that you have finally accepted the offer your niece proposed, because under the circumstances and in relation to what I saw, my shaykh will be very pleased.

Regarding Ron I am not ready to meet with him, and I would be grateful if I am not mentioned to him at all. I do not want him to know that I am here at all.

The other matter about all this is that as far as you are concerned, I think you have done everything possible to help the lady, in fact you have done what no man would ever do. If she had decided once and for all that she will come back to you, then it seems alright for you to carry on trying to work things out, but unfortunately what I gather in your email is the fact that she certainly has decided, and she is going to stay with Ron rather than you. Only with one addition, and that is, that you too remain as her bunny rabbit.

Now that is what I call, "Love Abuse". Your love for her is being abused. All throughout this tragic story, there were glimmers of hope of her finally coming back to you, but now she has not left any stone unturned to conclude the story.

I am not saying this as a Murshid, but I am also your very best friend, and in my capacity as your friend I suggest you think it over before accepting this very strange offer Ron is making. It has been proved many times that both of them are not in any position to make any decision that they can maintain. The irony of their situation is that they continue to keep making decisions and always going back the opposite way.

I understand how you feel. There is no other relationship that makes people endure humiliation, yet carry on, other than the relationship of love. It is not an easy thing to do, that is to think about situations like this as a second person, while you are involved, but if that is possible and if you do it, then you will surely realize that it's time to quit.

Yes, you will be a stronger person, a much more unique Master if you allow them to carry on without you. Let them be together, and then decide what they want. If God wills, and if these two have in their destiny to make their lives better spiritually, then they might return to

you as good friends. On the other hand if it is not in God's plan and if they go back to their old ways, then, too, it will be better for you not to be involved.

Please do forgive me for suggesting all this, because you know that I have always gone along with your views, and rightly so, because your intentions have been of the purest in nature, but even the purest of nature needs friendly advice at times such as these.

I again reiterate that I am very pleased that you have spoken to your brother's daughter and have accepted her offer. I know that by accepting your niece's offer this might have been felt by you as if you were taking poison, but poison becomes medicine sometimes and in certain situations plain sugar turns to poison as in cases of people who have diabetes.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

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June 23, 2002

Tariq my son,

I am sorry for the delay in replying. It was my mistake in thinking that this email is one of your sent emails that I have read and it's about the Hadees, and therefore I had it saved, but now when I realized this to be an extra according to the numbers of emails I received, I opened and found that I had not read it. Well, you see even I at times make mistakes. (Smiling)

The dates that you give regarding your wanting to visit are such dates that I had kept for the family's vacation. 'Umar will be taking his annual vacation and he and his wife, Momina, want to go out of State for a few days, and they have requested me to go along with them. They had told me this a few months ago. Anyway, the good news is that the dates have not been fixed, but though the vacation is due, things depend on which day the vacation begins. So let's see, maybe we can still get both done. If he gets the dates earlier, then I will let you

know when we will be back, so that if it is possible you could make it. Of course it will be just wonderful to see you. It has been a while!

Please do not think this as a no, because definitely that is not what I mean. It is only that after so many years that 'Umar, Momina and their son, Ra'uf are getting an opportunity to go on vacation and they had requested me to accompany them. I am sure that if Allah wills, something can be worked out that, I could go along with them and keep my word, as well as receive you.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

June 26, 2002

This has been an extremely difficult day. Lara has taken exception with something I have said.

One event leads to another. I feel I have reached my breaking point.

I return Lara's key to her by slipping it beneath the front door of her apartment. In addition, I leave a few items that are hers -- that I have borrowed from her -- in a plastic bag ... hanging the bag on the door knob to her apartment.

I return to my office/home, do ablution, say two rakats of nafl. I follow this with the words that release Lara from our arrangement of nearly a year ago.

After several attempts, I finally get through to Baba and speak with him on the phone about what has been going on and what I have done. We talk for about 40 minutes, and, then, I hang up.

It is late – or very early in the morning -- but I check my voice mail for messages. Lara has tried to get in touch with me.

The initial sound I hear on the voice mail is like that of a deeply wounded animal. Then, she asks me where I am, and a few more things are said before she ends the message.

I call her apartment, but there is no answer. I am worried, so, I walk over to her place, but there is no one home.

She does not call the rest of the night. I check on her residence several more times, but she is not there.

I stay up the entire night. Before the sun rises, I say fajr prayers.

After fajr prayers I begin to cry ... not a little, but a lot. I can't seem to stop ... it is as if tears have been accumulating for 60 years and are just, now, beginning to flow

I have not cried like this in decades. Eventually, the tears stop falling ... but not for a very long time.

I wash up and sit down at the computer. I write an e-mail to Lara.

§

Dear Lara,

Don't worry, you will not be stalked by me through the Internet or in any other way, but there were a few things that I wanted to say that might not fit into the time permitted by your voice mail. This is likely to be the last you will hear from me, unless you wish it otherwise, and you know that if I say I won't be pestering you, then, God willing, I won't.

You might feel I have abandoned you, but I have not. I have only abandoned a contractual relationship to which you were never really committed in the first place.

There was a reason why Allah, through Baba, permitted things to proceed in the way they did. And, there was a reason why things were brought to a close, and I think you will have to admit it has been a wild roller coaster ride for the past year and a half in which we both have been through a lot and, hopefully, learned a lot, and God willing, this will be a source of blessings for us both, despite the missteps that have been taken, here and there by each of us in our own ways.

Try to remember you are Baba's mureed, not mine, and even though Baba knows the contractual side of things is at an end, he did not say good riddance to you, but, merely, that, perhaps, God willing, this is best for all concerned ... and who knows, maybe something

miraculous will come from this somewhere down the line if this is what God wishes.

Baba still considers you his spiritual daughter, and you should know he was not opposed to you going down with me but there were some logistical problems that might have conflicted with the dates I had discussed with you. I am not saying this for any other reason than to let you know that although you might feel like you have been kicked out of things, this is not the case, and you should never feel this way.

I hope if you get a chance and if you have an inclination you will do, as best you can, some of the spiritual practices that have been indicated for you. Don't put pressure on yourself, but I hope you will not forget them either, for I believe they will provide you with spiritual help, and now that I am not around, maybe you will feel like going back to them somewhat.

One of the reasons we came together was, without doubt, for you to have the blessings of initiation and, as well, to become Baba's mureed that is much better than being my mureed. He is a very loving, kind, generous, understanding and forgiving servant of Allah, and, you might not realize it, but it has been your great good fortune to be brought under the spiritual canopy of our silsilah. You might make mistakes, but please don't ever recant on your oath of initiation, and do what you can to live in accordance with what is easy for you to do.

Another reason why we have come together is, by the Grace of Allah, so you could be given an opportunity to take back control of your life. If Ron really does get it now and is prepared to not control you or is prepared to sincerely work in this direction, then all of the twists and turns of the past year will have been worth whatever the sacrifices might be because from the very beginning I have wanted this for you. But, if Ron really doesn't get it, then, I hope you will have the strength and courage to live alone or, God willing, be able to have someone else come into your life who will have honor, respect, love, and care for you -- for, from the very beginning, I also have wanted these things for you.

This morning, after fajr prayers, when I was doing my prayer of petition and remembrance, I broke down and cried like I have not done in years. I couldn't stop crying. My feelings for you go very deeply, and all that has gone on has left its mark upon my soul, but

what happened is what Allah wished to happen, and although there might be melancholy in each of us because of this, there is a sweetness, as well, for, now, neither one of us has to continue being a donkey like the three people in the story I told you about who stood up in a meeting of shaykhs and admitted they had never been in love ... really in love.

You should know I will always love you and have deep, deep feelings for you, and I will always consider myself your friend irrespective of how you might feel toward me. If you are ever in need of help, please do not hesitate to contact me, and I will do whatever I can to assist you -- since I don't know what the address at my new place is, or how long I am going to be there, for the next three months you could reach me through P.O. Box 1276, Bamford, Vermont or, I suppose, you could ask Bruce's son, David, how to get in touch with me if it was an emergency. I don't expect you will do this, and I, certainly, hope you don't have to, but I wanted you to know I am there for you if you need me.

When Adam (peace be upon him) was in the Garden of Eden, and Eve (may Allah be pleased with her) was brought forth, what a lot of people don't understand is that Eve (may Allah be pleased with her) was the inner spiritual beauty of Adam (peace be upon him) made manifest ... she was a reflection of the Essential Self of Adam (peace be upon him) that was given expression through the material locus of manifestation of Eve (may Allah be pleased with her) ... and the same was true with respect to Eve's (may Allah be pleased with her) attraction to, and love for Adam (peace be upon him) --- the love of both were flip sides, so to speak, to the same Essential Self.

Also, please remember the mistake they both made was a doorway for something very important to come through ... namely, history and the rest of human kind. If not for their mistake, we might not be here, and, therefore, mistakes can have a very constructive result under the right circumstances. So, do not necessarily look upon any mistakes you might have made as being the end of things ... rather, when approached in the right way, they can be the beginning of good things and a source of blessings that God wishes to confer on us by means of the spiritual struggle that goes on in relation to such mistakes.

You were concerned from the very beginning that what was happening was not the reason why you were interested in the Sufi path. However, in truth, what was happening was why you came to the Sufi path -- and why anyone comes to the Sufi path -- even if they don't understand that this is why they came ... namely, to be consumed by love and to have that love transform their lives, and although we each have some more changing to do, I think you will agree both of our lives have undergone considerable transformation during the last year and a half, and neither of us is the same as when you first walked into my office in February of 2001.

Our story is also like that of Joseph (peace be upon him) and Zuleika. If you will remember, Zuleika fell madly in love with Joseph (peace be upon him), and, eventually, she was cast out by her husband to live on the streets and on the fringes of society, because her love made her do strange things that were not tolerated in her culture.

Many years later, when Joseph (peace be upon him) met her on the streets and proposed to her when he found out she was no longer married, she refused saying she, now, understood, that her love for Joseph (peace be upon him) was merely a reflection of the One Who is the source of all beauty and attraction, and that, earlier, Zuleika had confused the two ... thinking that a single locus of manifestation -- called Joseph (peace be upon him) -- was the same as that which stood behind all loci of manifestation ... which is not the case, although the two are related.

We are both Zuleika who fell in love with the mirror reflection of Joseph (peace be upon him) who is our Essential Selves that was being manifested in one another. Although each of us might have contributed our own dust that marred the quality of the reflection, there is no doubt that what we each have experienced is rooted in the Essential Self.

You and I were opened up to a dimension of the Essential Self that was being manifested through one another and to which we both were attracted, but that we both, in our own ways, interpreted according to our respective, limited understanding of things. Now, you have been opened up in this manner please don't settle for the reflections of the moon when only being engulfed by the Sun, Itself, will permit you to realize the purpose of your life.

The issue is not about loci of manifestations known as Ron, or Tariq, or Lara, but about the Source out of which these manifestations arise. Don't settle for the surface waves, when the Ocean depths are waiting to embrace you and drown you with intoxication through the Divine Presence.

For each of us there is pain because of the separation that is going on. This is the bad news, and we each will have to endure this as best we can, and there is really nothing anyone can do to eliminate that pain for it goes with the territory of love and is part of the price that must be paid ... whether we wish to do so, or not. The good news is the love we have felt does not have to be lost but can serve as a launching pad that, if God wishes, can take us to the highest reaches of our spiritual natures.

Human beings have love for one another, and although God wants us to love one another, God wants even more for us to understand how all of this is part of a Divine Passion play in which sacrificing the lower self leads to the resurrection of the Essential Self so that it might become manifest in our everyday lives and through which we might experience and live with, and in, and through the Presence of God.

Yes, your attitude toward: our silsilah, your shaykh, your spiritual tutor, and God have often not been all that great during the last 18 months. Nonetheless, I still believe in you and your essential goodness, and I believe you have good spiritual instincts even if your judgment is often quite terrible.

You like the line of poetry from Hafiz (may Allah be pleased with him) about how people should not be so religious, and this shows there is a proper resonance between your spiritual instincts and that to which Hafiz (may Allah be pleased with him) is trying to draw our attention. Nonetheless, spirituality has duties that must be served, and an adab that must be observed, and a love to which we must offer up for sacrifice our likes, dislikes, whims, biases, ideas, moods, and so on. You often seem to think the Sufi path can be anything you want it to be and that in the end whatever one believes, then that will be the Truth. However, this is not what Hafiz, Rumi (peace be upon them), or the other poets of love and ecstasy are saying.

They are saying that we must become Love, and in becoming Love all our personal, individual whims, desires, moods, and so on are

consumed. As long as we are attached to the latter we can never become Love.

Many of us find some of the restraints of Islam to be limiting and confining, and we tend to chafe against its requirements because it forces us to begin to struggle with our lower inclinations. Most people do not like to swim upstream when it would be so much easier just to float downstream on the currents of fantasy, whims, desires, and so on.

Hafiz (may Allah be pleased with him) began writing poetry at the command of his shaykh because, among other things, Hafiz (may Allah be pleased with him) had become caught up in an amorous adventure of a worldly nature ... in which a locus of manifestation was taken to be more than it was. But, before Hafiz (may Allah be pleased with him) began to write his poetry, he had to submit to the discipline of the path, and if he had not done this, there would have been no poetry of the quality that came through him.

He might have said 'don't be so religious', but this is not because he was undisciplined and did whatever he liked, when he liked. He went through rigorous training of a very demanding nature in order to be in a spiritual position where such a line could surface in him.

So, please don't be too quick to assume that what Hafiz (may Allah be pleased with him) is saying is that there is no need for the principles of Islam. He was not saying that, nor was Rumi (may Allah be pleased with him) saying that, nor were any of the great Sufi saints - - whether poets or those who had never uttered or written a word of poetry, but knew,, nonetheless, the secrets that come with spiritual struggle ... a struggle that came through engaging Islam and using that form to work toward That which is beyond all forms ... yet, one will never get to the latter without going through the former.

You are right to be suspicious and wary of religion. However, you are not suspicious and wary enough of the religion that you, yourself, bring to the table in the form of the 'cult of the nafs' and the 'order of dunya', and the 'procession of the unbelievers', and the 'Path of Iblis'.

Hafiz (may Allah be pleased with him) is not only telling the mullahs and fundamentalists of the world to stop being so religious. Rather, Hafiz (may Allah be pleased with him) is telling anyone who is devoted -- in a religious sort of way -- to something other than the

Truth, to stop being so religious. One doesn't have to go to church to be involved in a religion that is dominated by one's own dogmas, arbitrary practices, and meaningless rituals to which one has become habituated ... or a theology of interpretation that casts everyone and everything in the light of judgments that are fashioned out of ignorance and desire instead of spiritual understanding or wisdom.

Our intense relationship has been something of a wake-up call for each of us. You have experienced something more powerful than anything that has gone before it, and I pray you do not permit yourself to go back to sleep and become caught-up in the dream that we call worldly life.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has said that in the next life we will be with the people that we love. I hope you will come to love Baba -- but in a purely spiritual way -- for the shaykh is also a reflection of the Essential Self, and this is what the shaykh-mureed relationship is all about. This is how Rumi (may Allah be pleased with him) was brought to Self-realization through his spiritual relationship with, and deep love for, Shams Tabriz (may Allah be pleased with him) -- who like Eve (may Allah be pleased with her) came into the life of Adam (peace be upon him), and why Joseph (peace be upon him) was the locus of manifestation through which the Essential Self came into the life of Zuleika.

The contractual side of our relationship is done. But, the essential side remains ... or, at least, this is the case with you. I pray you will not abandon the Sufi path, for the Sufi path has not abandoned you.

As one last piece of 'food for thought', please do reflect on the amazing dream that Baba has had -- not once, but twice -- concerning the offer that Bruce's daughter made to me and about which I never told him. He did not know of Bruce's daughter's existence, and he did not know of the offer, but he was informed by his shaykh that Tariq should have taken the offer of his niece and something good was indicated to be in her spiritual future with respect to Baba in which she would be a very loving and devoted mureed ... and, I felt quite some time ago that Bruce's daughter had this potential although I never mentioned this to Baba.

I ask you reflect on this because it serves as one of those pieces of evidence that helps inform and strengthen faith ... for, how could Baba

have known such events had taken place unless he were given this knowledge from a locus of manifestation who is a servant of Divinity and who does serve as a channel-way for Divine transmission of guidance, wisdom, knowledge, and so on. If one thinks about this dream, one knows there is no other way to explain the dream except as a manifestation of Divine Presence that has come to teach me -- and you -- about the way things sometimes take place on the spiritual path.

I had my own reasons for not wanting to take the offer, but I was wrong, and although, in some ways, it does feel like taking poison, I have been told, instead, that accepting the offer would serve as a necessary medicine that will help to heal me in certain ways. None of us likes to take medicine because of the unpleasant taste of swallowing the pill or liquid, but spiritual guidance can be exactly like this ... something that appears to be bitter to the nafs, but is, actually, good for the soul if we will just co-operate.

I hope you will co-operate with Baba within yourself and open yourself up to his presence, because he is aware of you even if you are not aware of him. And, I realize that in the present world and historical situation, the idea of Islam and being a Muslim leaves a very unpalatable taste in one's heart and mind, but please do remember that what many of the fundamentalists and terrorist are doing is not Islam.

Although I have made mistakes concerning you, I believe you have gotten a taste of the real Islam, and the actual nature of the Sufi path, through, by the Grace of Allah, my treatment of you. Nevertheless, being in a position and/or condition to do this has taken me thirty years of hard work to accomplish ... and I still have a distance to go that, insha' Allah, will be traversed.

You might not like the rigor of my strictness about certain things and the importance of treating things that are sacred with proper niyat, adab, and commitment, but by the Grace of Allah, one of the reasons I am still traveling on the Sufi path whereas hundreds of others with whom I have come into contact appear to have fallen by the wayside is because I have learned, at the feet of my two shaykhs, about the importance of having a proper regard for the sacred, and I have tried with all my heart and soul -- despite making many mistakes -- to keep this sense of the sacred close to my heart and to act in

accordance with it to the best of my capacity. I hope you will learn to do this as well.

There is a Sufi story about a sultan who was showing the members of the court one of his most prized possessions -- a fabulously bejeweled vase. And, one by one, he asked each of the members of the court to take the vase and, then, when it was in their hands, the sultan would tell them to throw the vase on the floor and break it. However, none of the courtiers would dare to do such a thing with something that was so dear to, and prized by, the sultan.

Finally, the sultan came to his favorite servant of the court and did the same with him as the sultan had done with the others. This servant of the court threw the vase to the floor when commanded to do so by the sultan.

The sultan inquired why the servant had been so willing to destroy such a valuable piece of property. The servant answered that he valued the sultan more than he did the vase and he preferred to do as the sultan wished rather than to risk his disfavor.

Sometimes, what the shaykh asks one to do seems rather strange, or problematic, or difficult, or humiliating. But, if one trusts the shaykh, then, one has confidence that wherever the command of the shaykh leads one, this will be toward the good, and not toward the bad.

You should stop being so religious about holding on to your mistrust of other than your ideas about things. Although you have fought me most of the way, I believe you will have to admit you have not been brought to a bad place, but, instead, you have been transported to a place of opportunity for you ... more opportunity than you have had in your whole life with respect to your inner self. I pray you take advantage of what has been given to you and not just abandon it.

I have deleted your e-mail address from my e-mail system. After this message, it will be safe for you to go back into the waters without fear of being accosted by wayward e-mails from this part of your past.

I truly and sincerely wish you the best of everything, and I do want to thank you for the kindnesses that you have extended to me ... whether this is in the form of jeans and a shirt, or turkey sandwiches

at the sandwich shop, or the Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan CDs you have brought for me, or the office supplies you have purchased for me, and for the times you helped with the rent, or helped feed me. Whatever the problems might have been, do not suppose I have not noticed, nor appreciated, the many kindnesses that have come through you to me.

Love,
Tariq

§

June 27, 2002

Dear Tariq,

Please just be my friend. I have this incredible urge to say zikr tonight and pray. Will Allah forgive me for my stupidity? Will you? The thought of no contact with you leaves me feeling very lonely and sad. Is it better for you if I just leave you alone? Please tell me the truth. I don't want to hurt you anymore.

My office is here in Brimley now. It's very nice, but I'm lonely. I feel like I'm going to cry forever. What is wrong with me? Don't answer that. You already have, and I do remember everything you've told me.

Please don't feel like you have to respond to this. I just have to send it so I don't feel so alone. If you want, just delete any e-mails I send without even reading them. I know you only have a short while left on-line. I can't promise I will write to you via the postal service. If you need to contact me after the phone in the apartment is disconnected, please call me at work, and they'll give me the message. I won't be there for quite a while though. I'm glad you have your post office box for a while.

I'm so sad.
Your friend, with love,
Lara

§

June 27, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Lara,

Do try to pray whenever you can, and do whatever zikrs you can. All of this will help you.

The Qur'an says: "Do not despair of the Mercy of Thy Lord." Know there is a reason why Allah is called the Oft-forgiving, and He really does forgive all sins, as long as we believe in Him and believe in His capacity and willingness to forgive us, and that our fortune rests with Him alone. All God asks is for us to turn to Divinity in our hearts and form a sincere intention with respect to the goal of not trying to commit those same errors again and that we are prepared to try to struggle against the tendencies of our lower self to commit transgressions against our own souls.

Al-Ghazali (may Allah be pleased with him) has said that God's inclination toward forgiveness is such that if human beings suddenly all became saintly so they committed no sins, then, Allah would create another species of being who would sin so God could forgive them. This is not a license to sin but is intended to give us assurances that God is, indeed, ready -- even anxious -- to forgive us our sins if we just turn to God and ask for forgiveness and help.

We all commit stupid mistakes. Do not think you are alone in this. But there is only one thing worse than committing a mistake and that is not learning from the mistakes we commit.

If Ron is truly sorry in what he said when he believed you lost your friend, then tell him there was a mistake in communication and that you have never lost your friend and that your friend wishes for you to attend fatiha and to engage in other spiritual activities. If you or Ron think Sufi shaykhs abandon those who have been entrusted to their care because of mistakes, then, the Sufi path would have died out a long time ago because every mureed commits mistakes.

If Ron was genuine in what he was offering before, then he should have absolutely no problem with allowing me back into your life as a spiritual mentor. On the other hand, if he does have a problem with this, then his niyat, or intention, was not sincere in the first place, and you should take note of this.

Rumi (may Allah be pleased with him) has said that if one demands perfection in one's friends, then such a person is likely to have very few friends. However, if you want to be my friend, then trust me when I tell you things. If you want to be my friend, then treat me with the respect and trust that friends should be given. I have never led you astray about anything, and, by the Grace of Allah, your life -- when you listened to me and tried to follow what was indicated -- has always moved in a positive, healing, constructive, and liberating way.

Don't stay away due to your thinking I think you are a fool or stupid or immoral, because I don't think any of these things ... although, yes, sometimes your behavior is foolish, stupid and immoral, as is anyone's behavior -- including mine -- when it transgresses what God has ordained through such behavior being a function of unredeemed nafs rather than our higher selves.

I love you and always have, and I wish nothing but what is in your best interests. Stop fighting me on this and have some humility and gratitude toward God for bringing the silsilah into your life through me. These things really are sacred and they deserve our respect and appreciation ... not our contempt and disbelief.

Repent to God for what has gone on and, then, move on, setting about to correct the problems that have led to the mistakes being committed in the first place. We all commit mistakes in a condition of forgetfulness of God's presence, and repentance helps to re-establish our awareness that God is, indeed, near and watching over us, and concerned for us, but we have to make efforts.

God helps those who try to help themselves. No one is capable of ascertaining or reaching or realizing the Truth on one's own. We all need help. Don't try to be your own shaykh, for when you do this, you end up with Iblis as your guide, and you have recently had a close encounter of the worst kind with the truth of what I am saying.

You will have to tell me your work number, because I don't believe I have it, and you said you are going to be away for a long time. Are you going somewhere? If my e-mail closes down, then send me the phone number at the post office box number.

Concentrate on me in a spiritual way. Know that Baba is with you. He has instructed me to tell you that you will know him through my

manifestation, so, think about me in your heart, and when you can, do the zikr of 'la ilaha illah Lah' when doing this.

Don't worry. Insha' Allah everything will be all right.

Your friend has never left you and your friend would never abandon you. Indeed, if you knew what I know, then you would know this without any doubt ... but not everything can be the way that you want ... what is the AA saying "Let be, and Let God"?

Well, you have been too busy asserting your nafs to let God do much of anything in your life even though God has been using me as a door knocker to get your attention. I wish you would pay attention and answer the door, because my head is beginning to hurt -- |: >).

If you want to write by snail mail, but feel this is too much, then, just write to me on your e-mail program, copy the letter to your word processing program, and print it out. I'm told the post office will even mail this for you if you put it in an envelope and affix a stamp of the proper amount.

Love,
Tariq

§

June 27, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

Thank you for the e-mail. I wish I had read it before you called me. I'm sorry. I have done things in the past few days that I said I would never do -- to myself -- but hopefully I can turn things around.

My only wish for you is for peace and to continue to fulfill your spiritual capacity. I'm sorry for all the things I have done to hurt you. You have been my friend, and I will never forget you.

I have not spoken a word of the past few days to anyone. Ron does know about your message about no social contact, and he said to me, "I'm so sorry you have lost your friend. I know how much you love him and how much he means to you."

But, as I have learned by my experience with my mother, I do not have to see someone to love them.

I love you and always will,

Lara

§

June 27, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

The following is pretty much of a soap opera, but there really are some very important questions that are rooted in all of this ... questions that raise issues that go beyond Lara and myself, but, questions about Lara and myself, as well, and, I beg your indulgence for what follows. Nevertheless, there are still things that need to be worked through here.

In addition, there are some potentially tragic dimensions to this whole mess about which I have not told you. In fact, I only came to discover them today during a second phone conversation I had with Lara after I had begun to write this email and following an earlier conversation with her today that initially prompted me to want to write to you.

Apparently, Lara is very upset and disappointed with me for various reasons. The key aspects underlying her feelings of dissatisfaction toward me seem to revolve around several things.

First, there was a message that I left on her voice mail on Monday after I had talked to her earlier in the day and said what I was prepared to do in response to her having gone back to Brimley to try, once again, to work things out with Ron. However, before I get to that voice mail message, I should just outline what I had said to her during the earlier phone conversation. Essentially, I told her the following (and I will comment on some of this, later in the e-mail):

(1) if you haven't filed for divorce within two weeks from Monday (the day of the phone conversation), then I will release you from the

contract of the 31st and I will slide the key beneath your door at that time so you will know what has been done;

(2) if you do file for divorce, there should be no social contact between us until the divorce is final, and if you are not interested in remaining in the contractual arrangement of the 31st, then there will be no social contact at all;

(3) if you stay with Ron, then we won't be working together (as in proofreading) and there will be no social contact whatsoever -- no movies, no suppers out, no drives, no e-mails, no phone conversations of a non-spiritual sort, no walks, etc (I will comment on these things later -- but, basically, I told her if Ron is that important to her, then she should devote all her efforts to making him happy ... this is her spiritual duty);

(4) you (Lara) will be permitted to attend fatiha, and the only other contact that will be permitted is for purely spiritual issues, and how this will be handled -- whether in person or by phone -- will be at my discretion, not yours;

(5) if Ron becomes interested in the path, then I would be prepared to see him and talk with him about things;

(6) if Lara decides to stay with Ron, and it doesn't work out, none of the above will change;

(7) I told her that I was not going to enable bad behavior by doing things just because she wanted them done, and I did not wish to help her continue on in a bad marriage by serving as a social crutch;

(8) Finally, I indicated that the foregoing conditions were being set down because I wanted her to understand that the exercise of freedom has costs and consequences, and I was spelling out what those costs and consequences would be.

(9) I asked her if she understood everything I had said and whether she had any questions. She said she did understand what was being said, and she didn't have any questions.

Now, some time after talking to her and relating the foregoing information, I got to thinking a bit more about things, and I phoned back the next day and left a message on her voice mail.

Among other things, I said that although I had told her on previous occasions what I was about to say, I felt, nonetheless, I should mention again that because of the contractual arrangement of July 31st, last year -- which was still in force at the time -- and because she had accepted Islam and was a Muslim, Ron really wasn't permissible to her under the circumstances ... and although I didn't know what she wanted to do about that, since it was a spiritual issue, I would be glad to discuss it with her either over the phone or in person.

Now, if she would have talked with me, I had no intention of telling her she was living in sin. What I had in mind was something along the following lines.

If Ron – given that he had promised Lara, as a condition of her returning to him, that he would be willing to let her be with me as much as she liked, and if he were willing to let me have the apartment attached to their house, and if he were to let me work with her in a business sense, and if he were prepared to meet with me about spiritual things -- if he was willing to do all these things, then why not have him consider becoming a Muslim and, then if he did this, then he could get married to Lara in a proper and permissible way, and, spiritually, this would be the best thing for them both.

Well, I don't know whether she would have talked to me about this or not, but she did call, but when she didn't reach me, she left a message that said she had received my message, and she would do as indicated, followed by this quote: "And, I won't be to fatiha on Saturday."

When I got this message, I knew she was angry about my even bringing up the issue about the idea of marital permissibility concerning Ron or having to discuss it. She felt she should be free to do whatever she wanted to do ... although this same healthy dose of the spirit of American independence never seemed to be able to penetrate her dealings with Ron

Now, Baba, for 99.999999 % of the time, I have not told either Lara, Jane or anyone else they have to do this or that. Most of the time, I am trying to provide basic information, tell Sufi stories, relate about my own experiences with you and Dr. Irfan, discuss people's problems, and the like.

Nevertheless, some of the time, I do feel I have an obligation to remind people that the Sufi path cannot just be a matter of doing whatever they want, anytime they want. There is a reason for the existence of discipline.

There is an adab, and there are spiritual responsibilities, and whether we like it, or not, there are principles to be observed for our own spiritual good. Naturally whenever these sorts of things are said, most people don't like it, and Lara tends not to be an exception in this respect.

During the last year when -- on and off (mostly off) -- I have been living with Lara, I have never told her that when, for example, I would get up for fajr prayers that she, therefore, had to get up and say prayers ... although she often was the one who told me the alarm had gone off. I have given her zikrs to do, but, with the odd exception and just in an off-hand sort of way, I don't ask her what she is doing. When I fasted during Ramazan, I didn't tell her she had to fast as well, and I tried to keep the fasting as low profile as I could. Additionally, I haven't told her she must read the Qur'an.

There was only once when I sort of insisted on something -- and this I only mentioned several times after a long time of saying nothing concerning it. More specifically, I had given her a naksh for her anxiety and smoking. Although she wore it for a while, the chain broke, and she didn't bother to get the chain fixed ... she just kept the naksh in her purse.

On several occasions, I told her if she wasn't going to wear the naksh, then she should pay whatever charity she had decided upon at the beginning -- when the naksh was given to her -- and, then, she should dispose of the naksh in the river that runs through Bamford. I had indicated on several occasions that to just keep the naksh lying about and not treat it with the proper adab, or not operate within the guidelines that had been outlined when she was first given the naksh -- and the naksh was something she had requested -- that none of this was showing very much respect.

There were a number of other times during which Lara expressed a sort of contempt and dislike for some of the principles of Sufi discipline -- most notably, in this respect, was her hesitancy with respect to going along with the ceremony of the 31st since she didn't

believe in it and, as it turned out, was going along with things for her own purposes ... purposes that have come back to haunt her and the relationship on numerous occasions. Although I had begun to suspect as much after the 31st because of what was going on, my worries were not confirmed until she returned from Brimley back to her Bamford apartment and, one day, confessed how in an important sense -- but not entirely -- she had gone along with events of the 31st because that was the way to get what she wanted. She said that while part of her doing things on the day in question were for spiritual reasons nevertheless another facet of her motivations that day had nothing to do with spirituality but was merely a means to her end.

From time to time, I have told Lara, she should not suppose there were not spiritual costs and consequences for the things we do -- for the intentions we have -- when these go against spiritual principles. For instance, although Ron has played a major role in making her life miserable for the last twenty-four years, the truth of the matter is Lara has had a hand in permitting these behaviors to go on, and in doing so, she has helped provide some of the fertile ground in which the seeds of malignant growth have been sown in their marriage, and, as a result, this has led to the bearing of poisonous fruits.

Similarly, although she tries to blame Ron for standing between her and me -- and, of course, Ron has played a major role in this respect through his harassing, abusive, stalking, and controlling behaviors toward her -- the fact of the matter is she continues to enable his bad behaviors and refuses to take the steps that are necessary to rid herself of the spousal disease that has infected much of her life for the last twenty-four years ... even when she is being extended the hand of friendship through which to accomplish the escape. Yet, she often ends up barking at, and biting, the hand of friendship being extended to her ... as if that hand is the problem rather than Ron and her.

I realize, and I have realized for some time, Lara has a problem with much of the discipline side of the Sufi path, and she often gives in to her rebellious side with respect to such things ... as most of us tend to do. At the same time, I also have realized for some time, she is a loving, compassionate, caring, generous, empathetic, kind, and principled individual who, in her own way, is aware that she has faults,

makes mistakes and wishes to repent to God for these errors. In her own way, she is sincere and honest, and very committed to ideals of loyalty ... perhaps, in the latter case -- at least with respect to Ron -- to a fault. If she feels duty bound to do something, then she tries to see that duty through even if it costs her personally. And, she can be very forgiving -- at least, up to a certain point, and, then if pushed too far, although she might forgive, resentments creep in and undermine the forgiveness.

I mention all of the foregoing as a prelude to what follows, for it points to a general problem for me with respect to how I deal with people who come and express an interest in the Sufi Path.

On the one hand, I feel someone like Lara has a lot of good qualities of the heart, and she does have, in her own way, a sincere interest in the spiritual life, and she is willing to listen and try to follow, within her ability, various aspects of the spiritual teachings, and she is open, to some extent, to what the path has to offer. On the other hand, she has problems with issues of rules, principles, requirements, duties, obligations, and so on that she feels are coming from without and she has even greater problems with the possibility that God should have wished there should be such discipline in our lives.

Now, in part, I don't have a problem with Lara's response to the issue of discipline since God has enjoined there should be no compulsion in matters of Deen. Moreover, unless something is embraced from within, then imposing discipline from without makes little sense and, more often than not, is likely to lead to difficulties of one sort or another. However, when one is living with someone who feels she should be able to do whatever she wants, when she wants, according to whims, moods, desires, likes and dislikes, then this presents something of a problem ... and this problem has been exacerbated by the tensions, conflict, stress, confusion, fear, and so on, that are introduced by Ron's presence.

Now, in one sense, everyone's history is special, but I have come to be sensitive to Lara's history in great detail over the last year and a half, and an important part -- but not the only dimension -- of why I have proceeded as I have with her is because she has been through what most of us never -- thank God -- have had to go through. We all

have our problems, but if I lost my mother at six years of age, and my father abandoned me and, then later, did disgusting things with respect to me, and I was raped by a cousin at nine, and, then, for two to three years, molested by the uncle who was supposed to be looking after me, and, then abused by a husband for twenty-three years, as well as betrayed by siblings, friends, and work -- all of which helped tip one into a breakdown for several years -- then really, I don't know in what kind of shape I would be in spiritually when I reached the age of 40. Yet, despite all of the terrible things that have happened to her, Lara is really a very decent, kind, loving, honest, caring, forgiving, compassionate, generous, loyal, and principled person who feels within herself a resonance with things spiritual.

So, what does someone like me -- who has been entrusted with helping her spiritually -- do under such circumstances? More to the point, what does someone like me -- who has fallen in love with such a person do, when I have tried to do everything possible in the way of discussing, listening, empathizing, supporting, helping, counseling, advising, being a friend, and loving her, as best as I am able to do, and, yet, I see her making the same mistakes over and over again ... not because she is an evil person but because she can't seem to help herself due to the emotional turmoil that is present within her as a result of all that has happened to her in her life?

One prays for such a person. To be sure, one does whatever one can to assist such a person, but in the end, if the person runs away from help, or refuses to take the help being offered, or doesn't try to struggle against what is going on, or keeps exposing herself to the source of the problem, then the situation becomes very desperate.

Since the ceremony of the 31st, I believe I have done the best I can do, by the Grace of Allah, to be there for Lara. All through this time, although she has said her love for me was more than she had for her mother and children, and although she has said she has never been treated so lovingly and kindly in her life, and although she feels safe, secure, at peace, and not anxious when with me, nevertheless, she has continued to go back to Brimley and Ron, and she has continued to expose herself to his toxicity. Yet, despite the terrible frustration and helplessness I feel about the situation, there is part of me that doesn't know whether to consider her one of the most loyal, compassionate,

and forgiving people I have ever met, or whether to conclude that there might be little, or no, virtue and nobility involved in what she is doing because she is being driven to do this by her internal turmoil and has little capacity to do otherwise ... or, maybe, it is a combination of the two.

I look at what she is doing for Ron -- who really doesn't deserve any of it -- and, then, I wonder if, perhaps, I really have done all I can for her. Perhaps, I should have been a little more compassionate, or patient, or understanding, or supportive, or helpful than I have been in relation to her.

I am torn between wanting, on the one hand, to be treated lovingly, loyally, fairly, caringly by her and, feeling, one can't have a marital relationship where one party or the other is running off all the time doing whatever that individual wants, and then coming back when the person gets treated poorly elsewhere, and wants acceptance and support because it is convenient to go to someone she knows will treat her with respect, love, care, kindness, and understanding ... until she decides, once again, to go elsewhere and try to be with someone who is doing little but bringing misery into the world with respect to her. On the other hand, if she really wants to be with Ron, then I just want it to be something that will be good for her and will not be the source of her destruction -- emotionally, physically, spiritually, and socially -- and, yet, everything I see, hear, and feel tells me Ron is just poison for her.

Let me return to where this letter began - with outlining the several communications I had with Lara, and why I said some of the things I did. First, it was Lara herself who had suggested I ought not to give her what she wanted and who had said that perhaps we shouldn't be together until divorce papers were filed and/or until the divorce was final. In addition, when Lara came back from Brimley, and we got back together, before going on with things I said she had to promise she would not go back to Brimley and, if she did, then the contractual (the July 31st) side of our relationship with one another would be over, and she agreed to this.

When she did go back again, I was upset for a variety of reasons, So, based on what she had told me and based on what seemed to be the only rational thing to do, I set a time limit (which is on top of the

year and half that she already had to try to work things out) for her to work things out and if she hadn't supplied proof of the seriousness of her intention by that date, then I would release her. I told her I would continue to provide her with whatever spiritual guidance I could and she was welcome at fatiha and if Ron wanted to talk to me about spiritual issues, I would be willing to do this, but there would be no social contact and no business relationship with me if she decided to stay with Ron.

God willing, I would not stop being her spiritual friend, but the idea of going to movies and so on with her just so she could have social companionship when it suited her didn't leave me with a very good feeling. Moreover, I didn't feel such an arrangement necessarily indicated she was really prepared to be my friend ... since in my way of looking at things -- which might be quite wrong -- people who say that they love someone or that they are friends with someone shouldn't do the things she has done to me ... and if such things persist despite the fact a person is told such behaviors are hurtful, insensitive, cruel, controlling, and abusive, then, I have to wonder about the sincerity of the motives underlying the relationship.

Insha' Allah, I would do whatever I could for Lara and Ron from a spiritual point of view, but I did not want to continue on with the social side of things under the circumstances. I really don't know whether, or not, this sort of reluctance is a weakness or flaw in me. Maybe, if I were a more spiritually developed individual, then I would have no problems with continuing on in the way she had in mind, but I felt at the time, as I feel now, that she was asking something from me that was way above and beyond the call of duty, and she should have some degree of sensitivity to this dimension of things and, hopefully, be happy with the fact that I was still her friend in the spiritual sense, and I would be willing to do whatever I could to assist her and Ron in this respect.

In any event, if all I have counseled her about, and written to her about, and discussed with her over the last year and a half made little difference to her, and if her own experiences of twenty-three years concerning Ron did not offer sufficient factual evidence for her, and if she were so ready to sacrifice our relationship on the altar of her pathology concerning Ron, then perhaps she should be given a clear-

cut choice as to where her priorities were. If those priorities were with Ron, then okay, this would hurt, but, God willing, I would get over it, but I just didn't want to be part of things in other than a spiritual way, and, therefore, I really didn't feel like having anything to do with her on a purely social basis ... I don't consider hanging out together with someone for social purposes to be an inherent and necessary part of friendship, and if someone can't see the difference between spiritual and social friendship, then I guess, someone has a problem ... and I don't know if it is me or her or both of us.

Strangely enough, if Lara really loved Ron and if he made her happy and treated her with respect, honor, consideration, sensitivity, kindness, and he was a constructive force in her life, then although it probably would still be difficult to carry through on a social level, I might be more willing to do this social thing. However, this seems next to impossible for me to do when I have almost no respect for what Ron has done, and is doing, with respect to her ... and not when I know there is pathology and toxicity in their relationship ... and not when I know the relationship is not in her best interests no matter what her hamzat might want concerning that relationship. Obviously, if that is what she wanted, then she can have it, but there will be costs and limits associated with it, and I felt she ought to know this.

When I get to this point, then, something in me thinks -- if this is what she wants, then why not swallow whatever pride, anger, resentment, and so on that I feel about the situation and provide her with what she would like ... would it really hurt or kill you to spend some social time with her if Ron permits this? On the other hand, something else in me says -- yes, what this other side of you says might be true, and it might not kill you to do this social thing out of friendship, nonetheless, a more important consideration might be to place limits on someone who doesn't want limits to be placed because it is more important that the spiritual issues be addressed than that social desires be satisfied.

She wants to spend time with me, but in a social way. And, although, sometimes, social occasions can be a vehicle for spiritual association, if she wants to spend time with me, then why not make such association a matter of spiritual interaction rather than purely social interaction. If this were understood, then she would know the

purpose of spending time with a spiritual tutor is to take in spiritual sustenance and not just because one likes being with someone.

I have made a distinction between spiritual friendship and social friendship, and she feels that because I have said no to the latter, then this means I don't want to be her friend, when I haven't said anything of the sort. If she wants spiritual association, if that is her intention, then she should understand what I am saying when I make the distinction between spiritual and social association, and if she does not understand the distinction in question, then perhaps she has forgotten the reason why she came to the Sufi path ... which, presumably, was to find out, among other things, about the truth of things and to gain access to some of the principles that people like Rumi (may Allah be pleased with him) and Hafiz (may Allah be pleased with him) had given expression to in their works of mystical poetry.

Nothing needs to be set in stone here. Initially, I might not want any social contact, and later I might be willing to do this. However, I didn't want to tell her this, because I wanted her to struggle with one of the central issues in all of this – namely, what was she prepared to give up for the sake of something that was not in her best interests, and if she still chose Ron over having social contact with me, then she should be prepared to accept the consequences of her own choices and actions.

Somehow, however, this has all got twisted around in her. As a result, she is claiming that her decision not to have anything to do with fatiha or the Sufi path is because I don't want to be her friend ... that although earlier it was Ron who was keeping her from me and the Sufi path, now I am the one who is responsible for this, because I don't want to be her friend and I don't want to spend time with her.

However, I haven't said what she claims I am saying. All I said is I don't want to hang out with her or do things with her on a purely social level, but I am still her spiritual friend and will help her in that respect in any way that I can. I have told her the only thing that is keeping her from the Sufi path right now is her, but, of course, she doesn't see it that way.

Nonetheless, it does raise some questions, am I being too rigid here? Should I be willing to spend social time with her if this will help her to engage in spiritual actualities? Is this a matter of catering to

people's nafs, whims, moods, and so on, or a sort of bribery to induce people to pursue the spiritual path? Are the limits I wished to impose unreasonable, or unloving, or uncaring? Are the choices I wished to confront her with, inappropriate? Are the questions I wanted her to ask herself the wrong ones or should they have been raised in some other way?

I know you have said one has to use psychology with people to get them to do what is in their own best interests. Well, the problem for me is there are lots of different kinds of psychology to use, and using the right one at the right time takes both wisdom and the talent of an artist in human affairs ... neither of which I pretend to have, but both of which I recognize in you.

I do what comes to me, but I am often not sure I am doing the right thing. Yet, the choices I make in this regard can either help people or push them away, and I am worried about whether, or not, I am doing too much of the latter, and not enough of the former, and, perhaps, the reason, why all of my mureeds have deserted me is due to problems with me, rather than them.

I try to set a good example. I try to be: loving, kind, considerate, compassionate, friendly, sincere, empathetic, understanding, tolerant, forgiving, flexible, accommodating, and, yet, I also try to remind people there is such a thing as adab and spiritual principles that should govern our lives. However, something seems to be wrong in all this ... at least, in relation to the manner in which it is getting implemented through me.

Now, we approach an even more tragic side, potentially, of this whole situation ... the part about that I just learned today. But, before I get there, there are just a few more items of context to provide.

When Lara left the voice mail about how she had received and understood my earlier voice-mail, she ended the message, by saying that "And, I won't be coming to Fatiha on Saturday." If she hadn't said this in such a dismissive manner, I don't think I would have begun to consider to do what I eventually did. However, I really didn't care for the attitude that was being given expression through this aspect of her message ... I didn't care for the contempt it appeared to display toward the Sufi path.

If she hadn't said that, I was prepared to wait for another 12-13 days and see whether, or not, she would file for divorce. I was willing to endure what was going on if the bad behavior was just toward me as an individual, but I didn't feel like putting up with further displays of such arrogance and ignorance from her concerning the Sufi path.

It was at this time I decided to perform the two rakats of prayer and, then, release her from the contractual arrangement of the 31st. There was a thought that passed through my mind that, perhaps, I should wait the full two weeks as I told her I would, but, then, I felt she already had broken her word about going back to Brimley, she had known what the possible consequences were, and she did it anyway, and, I was getting very annoyed with this hostility in her toward the Sufi path, and if she wasn't going to attend fatiha, then really, what was the point of trying to carry on at all.

So, I performed the two rakats when I had finished the maghrib prayer. After doing this, I took the key and a plate Lara had loaned me and went to her apartment. She wasn't home (she was in Brimley). I left the plate in a bag hanging from her door knob, I shoved the key under the front door to rest inside her apartment, and I left.

When I returned to the office, I turned on the computer and went to the Internet where I found your e-mail waiting for me about the same matter. This is when I called you on the phone with the 'great minds and hearts think alike' message that 'Umar passed on to you, and, then, later we talked at some length.

While we were talking, Lara had returned to her apartment after a fight with Ron about something that he had done, and, of course, she found the key and understood its significance. She called here in a very agitated and upset condition and asked for me to call her. When I got off the phone with you, I realized someone had called, and checked the messages and found her message.

I returned her call, but she was not there. And, I became worried about her. So, after doing isha prayers, I took a walk over to her apartment, but she was not there (her car was not in the parking space). Since there was nothing more I could do, I left, but I continued to worry about her.

I stayed up the entire night and waited for fajr prayers. After completing the fard portion and while doing my dua, I began to cry like I have never cried in my life, and for a while I couldn't stop. There was nothing in particular going through my mind other than a feeling of deep sorrow for the whole situation.

Today, I learned that the argument which Ron and Lara had was due to the fact that he had broken a confidence with her and told some other people in the AA community about my relationship with Lara -- although (a) he was the one who had badgered her in to telling him, and (b) he had said he would not tell anyone else what she finally told him after being verbally bludgeoned into submission. The one promise Ron had managed to keep all of these years was never revealing to others what Lara had disclosed to him in confidence, and now he had broken that in a very cruel sort of way ... of course, the irony was lost on Lara about how she had promised me that she would not to tell anyone about our relationship, but when she went back to Brimley the first time, she first told Ron, and, then, Jane, and, then, her counselor --- all without my permission.

After Lara came back to her apartment several weeks ago, and she informed me about what she had told Ron, I indicated to her that, of course, you should know that he will tell people what you have said to him.

Although I don't think she believed me when I related the foregoing likelihood, what I told her did, in fact, come to past. Consequently, she set in motion, some time ago, something that would come back to haunt her in very real way ... in a way she never would have been able to predict when she told him about us. This doesn't excuse what Ron did, but, in a very tragic way, in telling Ron what she did, she was setting the stage for something that would later take place.

In any event, when she had her argument with Ron about his disclosures of what had been told to him in confidence, she had returned to her apartment feeling that Ron had finally broken every commitment he had ever made to her. In addition, she was extremely upset -- albeit a bit belatedly -- not so much about the fact she was being discussed in certain sections of the AA community, but because, now, I was being discussed in that way, as well. In addition, apparently,

Ron had threatened Lara with telling my brothers about what was going on if she didn't do what he wanted.

In any event, she had left Brimley and returned to her apartment, only to find the key and understood its significance. At that point, she felt completely alone.

She phoned me, but I was talking to you. When she didn't get me, she proceeded to go to a store, buy several bottles of hard liquor, went to her house in Brimley, and told Ron that if he didn't like what she was about to do, then he could leave, but she was going to drink in her own house and she wasn't about to leave. She told him you have taken everything else away from me, you might as well have my sobriety too, and she proceeded to drink the contents of the bottles and became so rowdy, agitated and upset that her son, who lives with his wife in the main portion of the house, told her the next day he wants her to get out of the house and stay out ... and, this, was after 24-25 years of sobriety.

She says it was only a one time affair, and this might, or might not be true, but I have real concerns for her physical, emotional, and spiritual welfare. She says none of it matters now, and she has nothing left to lose, and although I tried to tell her that this was not so, she seems to be very depressed.

She feels she cannot go back to AA now because of the stories that Ron has put in play about her, and this might be a problem because I know AA does, by the Grace of Allah, work, and she had been living proof of this for the last twenty-three years. She might feel she can deal with the problem on her own, but a lot of people have lost this battle because it is not a matter of will-power, but of Grace, and if the Grace is not there to support the sobriety, people will not stay sober.

When I asked Lara about the idea of leaving him and just being alone, she says she has to see this thing with Ron through to the bitter end, no matter where it takes her. But, I fear where that might be, and, yet, in another way, I suppose I do understand Ron is a demon who has been plaguing her life and, perhaps, the only way she feels she can get rid of the demon is, in one way or another, for either her to make up her mind to leave him permanently and to be willing to give him no further chances, or for him to leave, and she doesn't feel she will be

free if she doesn't see this through in this way ... but, I fear the costs she might have to pay for adopting such a strategy.

I have asked her about us -- I mean in terms of spirituality and the Sufi path. She says she doesn't know, and she will have to think about it for awhile.

I sent an e-mail to Lara earlier today, and I am including it as an attachment so that you can see what I have said to her since when I spoke to her the first time today, she was very hostile and angry toward me because she felt I was the problem in the whole recent set of developments about friendship. Consequently, I told her about the earlier e-mail that I had sent her and that, perhaps, she should read it.

Well, evidently, she did finally read that earlier e-mail. She called back from her apartment, and she said she liked the e-mail a lot.

Her tone had softened considerably from what it had been earlier in the day. This is when she told me all that had happened since the Tuesday night business, as well as about the future.

I told her at this time about the idea I had in mind concerning Ron becoming Muslim and how this might help the situation. She feels he has little interest in doing this now ... especially since she told him that I am out of the picture. In addition, I addressed something she had said in the earlier phone conversation about my calling her immoral - and what I, actually, said to her was very different.

I don't know if I will hear from her again. I told her how to get in touch with me through the post office box number that I gave to you the other night. I told her that I, probably, would be without phone and e-mail for awhile once I leave my current office space.

There is one further aspect to this that I want to ask about, and don't worry, God willing, I am not going to do anything rash ... and besides I promised Lara I wouldn't tell what, if anything, I learned from you on this matter -- and the reason she doesn't want to know is she feels she has to go through whatever she has to go through with Ron in order to either exorcize the demon from her life or to resolve the matter in an amicable way, and, finally, God willing, get the whole set of issues behind her.

I am not asking the following for any immediate purpose, but I wish to know certain things about shari'ah. If my performing the rite of

release is permanent, then, so be it, and I will try to help Lara in any way I can from that perspective. But, I was wondering if there were any provisions within shari'ah with respect to my circumstances that are comparable to what happens with respect to people who get married before witnesses -- that is, the divorce, in order to be final, has to be done -- at least, under some schools of jurisprudence -- three times in order to take effect, and if the individual takes back the proclamation and tries, again, to work something out with the spouse, then, they can do this, without any sin being involved.

Do I lose these degrees of freedom because I have done things in the way that I have done them – that is, through the private method in which you have counseled me? Or, do the former provisions also pertain to situations like mine?

I know you said once before when Lara and I were having problems and I had said to her words to the effect of "well, okay, I guess that's it, the relationship is over", you had said this was not necessarily binding, and we could continue on if we both reconciled and tried again to work things out. Now, maybe the fact I have said the two rakats of prayer changes the entire complexion of things, and if so, then this is the way things are, but I wanted to know what the principles are in this regard.

Irrespective of what you say, I am not going to say anything to her, because I do believe that, maybe, she does have to exorcize these demons before she will be free to move on with other things. I am willing to forgive her for whatever transpires, and I will pray that Allah will forgive her as well for whatever transgressions might be committed, but I am still very concerned about the future of her soul.

I know she has to struggle with things, but she cannot do this on her own, anymore than I could without, by the Grace of Allah, you now, and Dr. Irfan previously. I know she needs to come to understand that discipline and adab are necessary and should be protected and observed for our own benefit, but I also know she has been through an awful lot of tragedy, abuse, and exploitation in her life, and I also wish to stand beside her and help her if I can.

Yes, she has made many mistakes, but so have I. I don't want her to become spiritually lost.

I know what happens to her is not something over which I have any power but is between her and Allah. Nevertheless, I do have duties of care toward her, and I hope I have not violated those duties in any of the things I have said, or done, or tried to do, or did not do, but should have done, with respect to her.

Maybe, if I said I would be her social friend, we would not be where we are right now ... and, then again, what has happened has happened, and God has permitted it, and, therefore, perhaps, things could not have turned out other than they have, or, maybe, they could have turned out otherwise but fate has been sealed by the actions that each of us took. Whatever the case might be, I am concerned about what negative or destructive role I might have played in this tragic turn of events, and, if so, whether, or not, there is anything I can do to make amends or help restore things to a better set of circumstances?

I suppose the only other question I have in this regard is the rite I observed has closed matters with respect to Lara and I, what are the conditions under which we would become permissible to one another again. I seem to recall that it is something like she and I both would have to get remarried to someone else, and, then, there would have to be a divorce in each case ... and, no, I am not planning on doing any of this, but I am just trying to refresh my memory about what the requirements are.

God willing, I am prepared to try to be her friend under whatever circumstances are permissible. At the same time, I also am concerned about the risks that are there as well -- which is another reason why I wanted to limit the social contacts -- and one of the advantages of being married is that it helps protect one against such risks ... although this is, by no means, a guarantee against problems arising.

I am not a saint, just a human being, who has felt all too human, on several occasions -- one having to do with Lara. I don't enjoy having to engage in this battle all the time, even though, by the Grace of Allah, help and strength and courage have been there to resist going over the line. Now, I have been trying very hard to get and stayed married (smiling), but it seems that, perhaps, no one wishes to co-operate with me, so, I am just trying to find out what all my options are ... well, at least some of them.

I bet if you had known ahead of time how much trouble I would be, you might have asked for the spiritual version of a recount in order to see if you really had to be entangled in such a person's life. In any case, please pray, as I am sure you do, for Lara that she be given what she needs to help her have the courage to struggle against her own lower self and the forces of darkness that are threatening her.

Maybe, although Allah knows best, she has to go through all of this before she learns, God willing, that her present condition is an excellent example of what happens when people try to live life outside of the protection of spiritual discipline. Right now, however, I don't believe she can appreciate the irony that the very thing she currently is hostile toward might actually be the means for her healing, salvation, and escape from her tragic situation.

Incidentally, On Sunday, I will be moving to the apartment building that is owned by Bruce's daughter Lorna.

Love,
Tariq.

§

Tariq my son,
Assalamo alaikum.

Yes, I read the email that you sent and I understand what you say. My answer to you is that God in His Grace and Mercy has always made matters easy for His creation, but unfortunately people make it very hard for themselves and others alike.

I know this for sure that it is permissible for husband and wife to get back together even if they have pronounced the undesirable words, that they divorce each other. That is why a time period is given to reconsider. During that period if they decide to get back, then nothing is lost. Some say that three months are given, meaning that the first month begins with her menses period immediately after the first decision, and if they get together during that time, then they remain husband and wife, and this carries on, which means that even after that if they again decide to divorce then again a three month period is

given. Only if they do not get back together for the whole three month period, and even then they still are determined to leave each other, does the divorce get established once and for all. Now after it becomes a final divorce, only then the woman, not the man, has to marry someone else and then divorce him and get back to her husband and now they will have to get married afresh. Now this is what is translated by the jurists who understand that God in his Mercy forgives human weakness etc.

The other matter about the circumstances, that lead to all this is surely not your saying or doing anything while she was with you, but the fact that you gave the benefit of the doubt, even though you realized that she was in no state of deciding one way or other, and that was because you were in love with her. You know me well by now, that I am and will always be supportive because I know that your intentions were, are, and will always be of the purest in nature. My only advice to you now is to be very careful in whatever you decide, because there has been too much hurt in her life as well as yours, and it is best for both of you not to do anything that will hurt you more.

Yes, you can be practical, in fact be pragmatic under the circumstances and just remain away from all this, or you can still be emotional, since you still are very much in love with her, and go through the risk of being jilted again, which this time could be more hurting and frustrating. Ask yourself, if you have the strength of nerves to take such a risk again, and believe me whatever your decision may be, I do and will always understand.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

June 28, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

Thank you for responding to my e-mail last night. You are my friend and I know that. Bringing up the matter of attending fatiha tomorrow night with Ron is going to be difficult. Could we do it Sunday

evening? I feel more willing to "practice these principles in all my affairs" now than ever before. It is all that remains for me. Perhaps that's the way it should have been all along. Nothing else seems very important.

Last night I was very sad, and Ron noticed it. He is feeling very insecure right now. Maybe if I seem a little more comfortable today, then the topic of attending fatiha might not seem so threatening to him.

It was interesting that you would write that I should do the zikr 'la ilaha illah Lah'. That is exactly what I did last night, and I did not receive your e-mail until this morning. So, you see, all that you have tried to teach me has not been a waste of your time, nor have you wounded your skull, pounding it against a seemingly brick wall, for nothing. Yes, I'm very hard headed, but something has found its way to a place where it can be retrieved with a little willingness on my part. Perhaps my heart is not covered with such a hard shell as my brain.

I very much appreciate your willingness to continue to be my friend and spiritual mentor. I love you.

Later on, I will try to bring this subject up with Ron and see what his reaction is. I will write more as soon as I have something to report.

Love,

Lara

§

June 28, 2002

Dear Lara,

This, insha' Allah (if God wishes), is a most momentous e-mail, I hope you will take it to heart and understand its significance and please note that although the going might be fairly rough throughout much of the e-mail because I am being as direct with you as I can be, there is very good news at the end.

Yesterday, when I talked to you on the phone at your apartment, you indicated you didn't want to hear about any of the possibilities because you felt you had to see the Ron-thing through to the bitter

end, no matter where it led. Well, if you are going to be making decisions that might affect the rest of your life and its quality, then you ought to be making decisions with all of the information, and not be like an ostrich that, when in fear, hides its head in the sand with the rest of the body fully exposed ... but at least not having to see what is going on with respect to that exposed vulnerability.

Everything, with one exception, you wanted when you came to me, has, by the Grace of Allah, been given to you. You came in search of the spirit of Rumi (may Allah be pleased with him), and you found it – although, perhaps, in a greatly attenuated form. You said you wanted a simpler lifestyle, and that was made possible for you. You wanted to escape from your home situation, and that was made easy for you. You wanted your love for me to come to fruition, and that was given to you. You wanted to be loved, respected, honored, treated with care, kindness, and consideration, and that was done for you.

The only thing that was not given to you was for Ron's relationship with you to turn out alright. I told you what I believed and felt Ron was all about more than a year ago, but you were so caught up in your hamzat's idolatry worship concerning him, you would not listen. Your relationship with Ron is precisely the sort of thing that Hafiz (may Allah be pleased with him) was warning us not be so religious about ... and in the case of your hamzat, Ron is a very twisted form of worship, obeisance, ritual, theology, and blind faith that is full of control and authoritarian structures ... and as with the Catholic church, you have been like one of those Cardinals or Bishops who keep moving Ron to a different parish, hiding his sins, so he can continue to do damage to the congregation.

When you told Ron about us, you violated a trust with me, but I forgive you that for I also know you suffer from an emotional turmoil ... an inner turmoil that is tied to a cult figure who, like Jim Jones, has led you nowhere but toward your own self-destruction, and Ron, like Jim Jones, has thoroughly exploited his parishioners – among whom are you.

However, the process through which Ron betrayed his trust concerning you, by telling his girlfriends and whoever else in AA was pure evil. No one forced him to do this; no one badgered him to do this; no one exploited an emotional vulnerability and dragged it out of him.

Instead, he did it because he really has no love or regard for you. I have told you this before, and you have not listened ... I pray you listen now.

If you will remember, I told you many weeks ago that Ron would tell people. I know what Ron is, but you have been too blinded by the practice of your hamzat's cult-religion concerning him, to appreciate what you were being told.

Now, with respect to your drinking on that night -- yes, you have to take responsibility for your exercise in bad judgment (which I also have told you about on many occasions), but, at the same time, what Ron permitted to go on was, again, an indication of the evil that is at work in him. He would rather sit around watching you drink -- thereby breaking your sobriety of 23-24 years -- and, possibly, destroying yourself, then, he would risk losing what he wants ... a vulnerable prey upon which to feed.

If Ron ever dares to step into an AA hall again and tries to tell people anything about the problems of alcoholism, he will have exposed himself as the greatest hypocrite on Earth. This is because what he did was to enable an alcoholic to drink so his own world wouldn't be upset, and he wouldn't be sad. He has absolutely nothing of value to say to anyone about alcoholism for he is the sort of person who helps push people to the sort of despair and depression that makes drinking seem like a reasonable solution to life's problems.

You were exactly right when you said to him that he might as well take your sobriety because he had taken everything else from you. Now, your instincts were right on this, but, as usual, your judgment in following through on the instinct was problematic because the right judgment would have been to leave him forever rather than to take some drinks.

Before the 'Tuesday Massacre', I had been writing to Baba about various, possible scenarios concerning our situation -- some of which involved trying to fit Ron in (against my better judgment) -- and you might be surprised to learn that I tried to put Ron forth in as positive a light as I could ... pointing to some of the things that he had said from time to time in recent days. At one point, I even had mentioned the possibility that, maybe, we might all come down -- you, Ron, and me -- and it might be that you two would be together as man and wife.

Baba wrote back to me and told me he that did not even want Ron to know of his (Baba's) existence or his general location and he wished to have nothing to do with Ron. However, the invitation to you and me remained open ... all that had to be worked out were the logistics of such a meeting.

Now, Baba is one of the most loving, forgiving, gentle, kind, compassionate, understanding, caring, tolerant people I have ever met, and, therefore, when he says what he says about someone like Ron, you know there might be a fundamental problem with that person -- in this case, Ron. I have been telling you this from almost the beginning, and now you have it confirmed from a second reliable source quite independently of the first reliable source ... despite the latter individual being foolish enough to try to serve as something of an advocate for Ron out of my love for you.

For twenty-four years, Ron has been leading you toward destruction. His behavior has been thoroughly evil, and just because, like the devil, one might be able to say, on occasion, something of a complementary nature -- like, he has shiny teeth or whatever -- this does not mean the individual in question, any more than Iblis, will change for the better. However because the religion of your hamzat requires you to have blind faith in the head of your church and to accept whatever he does as virtuous or pardonable, when neither should be so, you have continued to look the other way while Ron continues his life of evil actions.

I told you many weeks ago you should not suppose that if you turn your back on the Divine Grace that is being extended to you through me and my love for you that such behavior would be without its consequences. I warned you about this on a number of occasions.

I did not wish anything bad to happen to you, but I was afraid for you, because I know something about how the laws and principles of spirituality work. Just as a physicist can tell you about the mathematical formulae for the principles at work in gravity and what is likely to happen if one jumps off a cliff due to the forces of gravity, I have been trying to tell you there are spiritual laws, principles, and forces -- which if violated or fooled around with or treated with indifference -- might come back to haunt you, and this is exactly what happened when you went back to Brimley the second time.

To be sure you had a hand in shaping your own fate that Tuesday night because of your unwillingness to listen to anything negative about your church leader and AA guru and due to your showing negligent disregard for the spiritual principles that were in play. However, the even more fundamental issue here involves the principle of what happens to a person when she or he associates with people who have little, or no, regard for Divinity ... namely, oftentimes unfortunately, such individuals might be led to their own destruction. Just as spending time with people of God has a beneficial effect on us, so too, spending time with people who are not of God has a very detrimental effect on us.

The more time you spent with me, then by the Grace of Allah, the better you felt, and the better your life became, and the more peaceful, stable, and positive your life became. The more time you spent with Ron, the worse you felt, and the worse your life became, and the more stressful, anxious, depressed, sad, and destructive your life became.

Please take heed of what I am about to say, and please remember all of the things I have warned you about and told you about have come to pass. If you stay with Ron, you will be destroyed and so will he be destroyed ... and I believe that the absolutely only -- ONLY -- chance that Ron might have, God willing, to turn away from his problematic behaviors is to be on his own ... away from you.

Although your lapse on the drinking was unfortunate, it is one of those kinds of mistake that God leads us to in order to open our eyes and hearts. Ron has been responsible for taking away everything from you ... your sense of dignity, your self-respect, your sobriety, your freedom, your peace of mind and heart, and the list goes on.

You now have been taken full circle by someone -- namely Ron -- who told you 23-24 years ago, if you ever drank again, that that would be the end of the relationship. Yet, a few days ago, the individual who said the foregoing not only sat around and watched you drink but also played a major role in pushing you over the edge, and did all of this because he wants to keep his prey close at hand so he can suck her blood some more and take every last vestige of life from her to satisfy his own twisted needs.

The very best thing I can say about him is that he is a complete and utter AA fraud who should never be permitted to address a group of

AA people again. His behaviors have nothing to do with what alcohol forced him to do, but those behaviors, are, instead, an expression of how he has helped someone lose her sobriety in order to benefit himself.

I told Baba about the entire sequence of events leading up to and including your going on a one-night binge. Toward the end of a very, very long e-mail to him, I asked him about shari'ah (sacred law) -- the same sacred law that you, sometimes, are so hostile toward -- with respect to the rite of release that I felt compelled to perform on that fateful Tuesday night a few days ago. Baba said that even after the unpalatable words of divorce are pronounced, God, in His Mercy and love, has provided degrees of freedom for people to reconsider their decision before it becomes final ... and in our case, although I did perform the rite of release, we have three months to get back together again and continue on as before, or, actually, -- please, if you don't mind -- better than before.

The only unkind and hurtful things that you have done toward me have all arisen out of your attachment to a very violent, destructive, cult-religion to which you belong, with Ron as your guru. Baba knows all about what you have done and what happened, and he is fully with me in whatever I decide to do, and only as a friend, has he advised me to be careful. He has not rejected you, nor does he consider you an immoral, evil person, anymore than I do ... although, yes, what you did was wrong, and you know that already without my having to tell you.

Consider one last sign of the presence of God's hand in all of this. My e-mail should have been cancelled more than two months ago. All of this time when the e-mail airwaves have been burning up between you and me -- as well as between Baba and me -- with all of these important issues, my e-mail has not been disrupted. Surely, this is a sign for all those who have eyes with which to see and ears with which to hear.

Let me re-iterate -- if you stay with Ron, he will lead you to destruction. If you stay with Ron, he will lead himself to destruction. I believe the only -- ONLY-- chance he has to find his way to redeeming himself is, God willing, away from you. If you do not heed what I am saying, there might be more of what happened the other night, if not

worse, and please remember everything that I have warned you about and told you about has come to pass.

By saying the foregoing things, I am not trying to threaten you. I am trying to tell you how things work in the spiritual realm, just as a physicist tell people how gravity or electricity or tornadoes work in the physical realm in order to warn them about various possibilities that could, under the right set of circumstances, take place.

I am telling you I want you to be my wife, and I want you to come and live with me not in your apartment, but in our apartment in the building owned by Bruce's daughter. Leave everything except what you need for work and whatever personal items you might wish, and simplify your life even more than before. I will work with you on your work projects, and we will make our life together.

Please do not turn away from the Grace that is being extended to you once again. Please do not tempt fate to bring you back to where you were a few nights ago, or even worse.

I want you to trust me as your friend -- the best and most loving friend you have ever had (on the human level), and I am your friend because the real Friend has wanted it this way. You should understand that Baba who, by the Grace of Allah, is one of the great mystical shaykhs of our time has told me that he trusts me with his life ... so, I am asking you to do the same, confident that someone of Baba's caliber has no problem with the idea of trusting his life in my hands.

I am not saying any of this would be without problems because life is full of problems, and things can't be any other way. However, let us face these problems together, under Baba's guidance, and through the Mercy of Allah's kindness, and the example of the Prophet.

And, by the way, I would like to discuss with you sometime about whether, or not, Islam (true Islam, not the sham stuff that is being paraded before the world today by various fundamentalist theologians) is as "filled with rules" as you seem to think. You might be very surprised.

I am not demanding or expecting a decision on any of the foregoing possibilities right away. There is still some time.

I will leave you with this reminder ... the more time you spend in Ron's presence, and the less time you spend in my presence, the worse

will be your spiritual condition. This is just one of those spiritual principles in action, and I didn't invent the way these things work. You have twenty-three years of bitter experience in the former case, and 1½ years of mostly pleasant experience in the latter case, to verify that what I am saying is likely to be true.

Will Ron be hurt by all of this? Of course, he will, but Ron needs to be led to his night of awaking just as you were a few days ago.

The only way you can help end his suffering and give him an outside chance of turning things around is by leaving him. He might not turn things around -- this is between him and God -- but the only chance I feel he has of doing this is away from you.

All of these years your loyalty and sense of duty have been misplaced. If you had given to God, what you have given to Ron, you would be saint by now. God is the One Who is worthy of your loyalty and devotion, not Ron ... do not permit your hamzat to be an idolater. An idolater is someone who places other than God on a higher plane than God, and this is what your hamzat has been doing.

God has come into your life through me and the silsilah and told you that the Truth of things is other than what your hamzat is dedicated to in relation to the Ron-cult. Yet, consistently, you have rejected what you were being told, and insisted on treating what Ron wants as if it were more important than what God wants ... and God has shown you the error of your ways by all that has happened during the last year and a half, but especially through what has happened in the last five days.

I want you to commit yourself to me, your shaykh, the silsilah, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and Allah - and, obviously, not necessarily in the foregoing order. But, its time your hamzat gave up its false religion, its time you acknowledge the destructiveness of that religion, its time you accept and act upon the knowledge that your cult-leader is given to self-centered, destructive, malevolent, uncaring, blood-sucking, predatory, exploitive behaviors, and that if you continue to enable him by permitting your hamzat to blindly follow the religion that she has established with him, then this theological system is likely to lead nowhere but to tragedy.

I pray you will read this e-mail again and again until you know what it is that you must do, and that, God willing, you do the only thing that will be capable, insha' Allah, of saving you, and, maybe, in time, if God wishes, saving Ron as well.

Sunday might not be a good day for fatiha because I will be moving on that day to the new apartment as well as trying to settle in there. Please come to fatiha on Saturday, and Ron's insecurities can be damned.

With all my love,
Tariq

§

June 29, 2002 (e-mail)

Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I haven't heard from you so I don't know if this means you won't be coming tonight or if you have given up on me all together. I hope things are okay with you.

May Allah have mercy on all of us.

Love,
Tariq

§

June 29, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq

I will be coming to fatiha tonight. I will call you now to let you know. But if you don't answer your phone, perhaps you will get this e-mail. I will never leave the Sufi path. There is no reality but God, and thank God for that.

Love, Lara

§

June 30, 2002

Dear Tariq,

I do not know whether or not you will get this e-mail. I hope you do. Probably you're moving right now. Ron has gone to help Paul and Agnes move.

I do not want to be around the AA "fellowship" anymore. My new word for AA fellowship is the 'fellowship of betrayal' because that is all I can see right now, and they do it all under the guise of unconditional love and support, and everything wrong anyone does is "just because they're human." Talk about indoctrination.

This is what I have been hearing for years. There's something wrong with me because I cannot forgive. There's something wrong with me because I get triggered by issues of betrayal. I'm just too sensitive.

Since I returned to Brimley the first time, I have seen what a horrible, horrible person I can be. I have been rude, crude, mean, et cetera, et cetera. I never knew I could be this horrible a person. What a weak person I am to not resist being influenced by the company I keep. I should be able to maintain common decency whoever I'm associating with.

It's interesting that I was reading the chapter on 'Betrayal' in your book this morning before I received your two e-mails. I also read the chapter entitled about Fatiha. There is a lot of information there about spiritual association. Then, lo and behold, I read your e-mail.

Ron does want to limit my association with you. He asked me right before he left if I would ask you if you'd be willing to see him on a spiritual basis.

Now I understand why you spend so much time alone. I do not wish to spend time with anyone right now. I'm not strong enough to maintain who I am in the company of others. I'm bad enough when I'm with you -- a good and spiritual man. Imagine what I've been like since I returned to Brimley.

Please try to get in touch with me. I'll leave my phone on over in Bamford so you can call and let me know how to reach you or if I can. I do need you right now -- for spiritual reasons and not the selfish desires that I have had in the past. Just hang in there with me if you can.

I will not, nor do I wish, to receive anything from you except for spiritual direction and help. If anymore happens in the future, it will be done in the right way on my part -- a divorce from Ron. I will keep in mind everything you have indicated about the time frame we're dealing with. A lot has happened even since I saw you last night.

I love you and am grateful for you and the Sufi path and Baba, even though I know him only through you. Take good care of your heart while you're moving and don't overdo it. I need you to keep breathing. Maybe someday I can be there for you as well.

Love,

Lara

§

July 2, 2202 (e-mail)

Dear Lara,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Per usual, just when I thought that all the things which might be said have been exhausted, there are some additional thoughts that have occurred to me overnight that I wish to share with you. Furthermore, although I am going to express these ideas and feelings in a relatively direct fashion, please don't take the directness as an expression of anger, because they aren't -- the state I am in is more like a mixture of concern, perplexity, and a bit of bad taste left in my mouth.

Last night, when we talked, you indicated Ron was thinking about not going back to AA, and you said you don't care what he does. I don't know whether, or not, you realize that the likely reason why he is thinking about not going back to AA has two components to it -- both driven by his nafs.

First of all, I do believe there might be some degree of realization in him -- however small and fleeting this might be -- that what he has done with respect to pushing you over the edge and, then, sitting around and watching you drink (and, in the process, enabling you to do so) and, then, not doing anything (such as acting on his promise of 23-24 years ago and ending the relationship, as he said he would, if you ever drank), is a series of actions that his father likely would find to be completely contemptible and with which his father likely would be thoroughly disgusted, and of which his father likely would be totally ashamed. In addition, Ron might have some small degree of awareness that he has betrayed his father -- as well as the very principles of AA -- by doing what he has done.

His concern here is not that he has betrayed you, but that his relationship with AA has been affected, and he is struggling within himself to try to justify to himself how to continue on with AA work, knowing what he knows about himself and what he has done and that no person in AA should be entrusted to his care again ... not ever. After all, how could he get up in front of the people of AA and tell them he has betrayed everything that AA stands for, and he is an AA fraud, and he has chosen to sell out a fellow AA member (i.e., yourself) rather than risk losing his own comfort zone or that which he believes is his chattel (again, you).

He doesn't want to have to make amends as the twelve step program advocates. He just wants to slip off into anonymity so his reputation and ego won't have to suffer and so he won't have to face himself night after night in front of AA people and try to pretend that he is sincere about what he is doing when he harbors a deep, dark secret that places everyone of those people in front of him at risk ... because if he is prepared to betray you and his father, then there is not one person in an AA hall who is safe from his being willing to sell them down the river when push comes to shove, and his likes and dislikes are at stake.

This is not the first time he has betrayed AA to serve his own interests. He has been doing it for quite some time now.

It has always bothered me that although AA is supposed to provide a safe environment in which people can get the support, inspiration, and help they need to struggle with sobriety, nevertheless,

he has made that environment unsafe for you for several decades. He has stalked you through those meetings, and he has harassed you, controlled you, pressured you, exploited you, and activated your PTSD over and over. In addition, during that meeting in Hollins (after the Memorial Day weekend gathering), as well as in other meetings you have told me about, he has used his speaking privileges to serve his own agenda, not that of AA.

Quite frankly, what bothered me almost as much as what he was doing was the fact that you continued to let him do it, and as far as I know, you did not call him on it and continue to call him on it until he stopped. He was using AA for his own agenda, and you let him do that ... in fact, you encouraged it by not putting a stop to it a long time ago. Like Chamberlain at Munich, you do not seem to have grasped the fact that you cannot appease aggression, as Chamberlain did with Hitler, and expect such aggression is going to stop.

The other reason why Ron is thinking about not going back to AA has nothing to do with his feeling bad about having betrayed your trust by telling certain people in AA about us, and in the process breaking faith with the trust that you thought -- quite falsely -- you had with him about things said in confidence. No, he doesn't want to go back because in the light of your saying that you are not going back to AA, he needs to keep close tabs on you to make sure his chattel is still intact, and what better way to do that than to be around you all the time.

The reason I know Ron doesn't feel bad about having betrayed you is because he is getting upset with you and frustrated that you won't give him more affection. Only a person who was so totally blinded by his own sense of self-importance, selfishness, self-centeredness, desires, likes and dislikes could be expecting more affection after what he has done. The fact he has these expectations is a very clear indication that he has little, or no, sense of shame, regret, or sadness concerning how he has betrayed and hurt you.

No, he doesn't feel bad. He just wants life to go on to suit his moods, whims, and wishes. Given the circumstances, his expectations tend to prove that.

One of the other things that bothers me about what is going on is how you have responded to all of this. Yes, you have told him you are

very unhappy with what has happened, but you also have left an opening for him by saying that although some time in the future you might be happy with him, right now you are not.

In effect, what you have told him is that although betrayal of this most essential, fundamental nature is hurtful to you, in time, you might get over it and, therefore, what he has done is, really, not all that bad and if he waits long enough, then his bad behaviors might, eventually, get rewarded by you. Why should Ron ever bother with changing his behavior if all he is going to have to experience is a period of time when you might be unhappy with him, but, sooner or later, he will be exonerated so that he can do other forms of bad behavior? Ron is being faced with absolutely no disincentive to change his behaviors, because he never risks anything with you other than a period of your being unhappy with him ... and, obviously, your being unhappy with him for a period of time has not worked in twenty-three years, because he continues to do the same things, again and again and

You always have been concerned about Ron's feelings of sadness and how badly you feel when you believe there are things that you are doing, or not doing, which make him feel sad. Has it ever occurred to you that Iblis has feelings too, and despite the fact it might hurt him when he sees us doing things with which he is not pleased (like doing good, submitting oneself to God, and so on), the fact that Iblis is unhappy or sad is no reason to alter what we are doing so Iblis can be happy.

Ron is a companion of Iblis, and he has been working in accordance with the guidance of the former for a long while. This is very evident in pretty much everything Ron has done throughout his life, and, yet, you continue to cater to his feelings. You wouldn't do this with Iblis, so why do you do it with one of Iblis' companions?

I remember an old *Twilight Zone* program in which the entire episode takes place beneath the decks of some sort of prison ship to which a new person -- a sort of guard -- has been assigned. There is a prisoner there who engages this new guard and begins to tell the guard a tale of woe, injustice, unfairness, and cruelty concerning the way he has been treated in life and aboard the present vessel, and this prisoner cries and is sad and is desperate for kindness to be shown to him.

Little, by little -- despite having being warned by the senior guard about the duplicity and cunning of this prisoner -- the new guard feels more and more sympathetic toward, and empathetic with, the plight of the prisoner. Finally, the new guard frees the prisoner because he can't bear, anymore, to hear about the terrible things that allegedly are being done to the prisoner.

The last scene of the episode involves the prisoner walking across the interior of the floor of the ship. As he does so, he walks behind a series of wooded pillars that shore up the ship's upper floors, and as he comes into view again between the previous pillar and the next pillar, his appearance begins to change, little by little, into the form of Satan.

Your story with Ron is very much like the foregoing *Twilight Zone* episode, and just as horrifying. You continue to give aid and comfort to someone who is not your friend, who does not have your interests at heart ... who cannot be trusted ... who will exploit you, and has, done so, again and again ... and who has no real love for you -- in fact, quite the opposite. But, like the new guard in the foregoing story, you allow your own basic decency, empathy, and integrity to be used by a companion of Iblis for his own purposes.

Last night, you said one of the things that bothers you is how every time you go back to Brimley or return to Ron, he makes you feel like a fool. Well, to be honest with you, how do you think it makes me feel when you would choose to be with a man for whom you have little regard and whom you do not trust ... who has hurt you in just about every way another human being can ... who has stripped everything away from while stuffing his own ego ... and for whom you have no respect, and despite all of this, you would choose, time and time again, to be with him rather than me ... someone you profess to love.

You said you have nothing to lose by staying with him in Brimley. I'm sorry, but I don't quite see the logic of that.

What you seem to be saying is that you are better off staying with a man who you revile and who has betrayed you in every conceivable way than with someone such as myself who, by the Grace of Allah, has really treated you, for the most part, with nothing but kindness, love, respect, compassion, understanding, support, and caring. Did I miss something here?

Whatever it is that I might be missing, there is one very big thing that you seem to be missing. I have told you the more time you spend in the presence of Ron, the worse it is for your spiritual condition, and, quite frankly, what is going on within your thinking is a very good example of what I am talking about.

Ron's influence on you has got you so screwed around in how you feel or think about things that you seem to have no sense of the injustices that you are doing to yourself, me, and, most importantly, toward God. His influence is such that you are more concerned with how he has betrayed you than you are concerned with how you are permitting his way of doing things to induce you to betray yourself, me, and God again and again.

You say you don't want to put me through this anymore ... this going back and forth, and that if - IF, IF, IF, IF, IF, IF, IF -- you ever get divorced, then yes, you would like to be married to me. There is something terribly, terribly wrong here when, on the one hand, you would consent to stay in a relationship that, by your own admission, has -- especially now -- absolutely nothing for you and has stripped everything away from you, and has betrayed you to such an extent that you feel there are no further betrayals that can happen, so what does it matter, and, on the other hand, you would continue to keep on hold, and at a distance, a relationship that -- again, by your own admission -- is a source of love, respect, peace, caring, and so on, for you.

You say there is nothing left to lose. What is left to lose is your soul, and Ron, I believe, will be quite happy to help you do this because he seems to have lost his soul a long time ago.

Every second, every moment, every hour, every day, every week, every month you stay in that man's (and I used this term very advisedly) presence, you do spiritual damage to yourself. This spiritual damage is not a theoretical thing, for it is evident in everything you are doing ... the very fact you are willing to stay in such a relationship while something much better, God willing, is waiting for you, would seem to constitute prima facie proof of the presence of Ron's evil influence upon you ... for what you are doing in this respect not only defies any semblance of logic, but it is counter-productive spiritually.

You say you will never give up the Sufi path, and, God willing, I pray this will be so. Moreover, in an earlier e-mail -- just one or two

prior to your saying this -- you said that you feel more ready than ever to begin implementing Sufi spiritual principles in your life, and, yet, you continue to knowingly operate under the influence of, and in close proximity to, someone who is inducing you to do just the opposite because he is causing you to violate one of the most important principles of the Sufi path -- that of spiritual association.

The Qur'an warns us about this. The Prophet warns us about this. All of the Sufi shaykhs warn us about this. Baba emphasizes this issue again and again and again ... namely, we tend to become like the people with whom we associate.

Ron has said to you repeatedly within the last several months: 'you don't want to be here do you?' I asked you last night: "Well, do you?", and your response to me was: "It changes from moment to moment, day to day."

I've got to ask the question: Why would you even entertain the idea of staying with someone for whom you have so little regard ... someone who has hurt you so much, and who has betrayed you in every conceivable way, and who has stripped you of everything? There is something terribly wrong when there still remains -- after all that has happened -- even the slightest vestige of wishing to stay for one second more than necessary in the presence of such a man.

I know there is emotional turmoil in you concerning Ron, but the real operative principle here -- and the one that you don't seem to appreciate -- is that of association. The more time you spend with evil, the more evil seeps into your being and controls what you feel, think, and do.

You can use whatever excuse you wish to, or put what is going on in any sort of conceptual clothing you desire -- for instance, you care for him, you love him, you are concerned about his welfare, you want to make sure he is okay, and so on -- but what is really going on before your very eyes is what happens to someone when he or she is constantly being exposed to, and having association with, evil.

Evil disrupts our capacity to reason or to appreciate the horror of what is being transmitted to one through the presence of evil. Evil undermines the 'gift of moral fear' that normally protects against influences that are injurious to us. Evil lulls us in to believing that what

was done, was not really all that bad, and that it should be forgiven and, better, yet, forgotten, and there is something wrong with you for not forgetting what has been done. Evil exploits our weaknesses and vulnerabilities and needs for its own purposes and, then, one fine day leaves us with nothing -- as has been done with you time and again in relation to Ron, and now, once again, he has betrayed you in a most fundamental way, and he is carrying on as if to say: "What's the big deal?"

It is as if were saying: 'Why have you got your shorts all tied in a knot about this? All I did was betray you and strip everything from you, and you are going on like it is some major crime, or something. I sold you down the river, so what?'

You have been, and still are, afraid to call a spade a spade when it comes to Ron. I am not.

He is an evil influence, and that influence is undermining and corrupting not only your common sense, but your moral and spiritual sense as well. And, the proof of what I am saying is this: you not only continue to associate with him after all that has gone on -- especially in the last little while -- but you still are thinking in terms of 'if - IF, IF, IF, IF, IF, IF, IF, IF -- I divorce him, let's see how things go from here.

You believe you have nothing more to lose, and you will never give up the Sufi path, but he is already making you compromise in all kinds of ways with respect to the Sufi. Just a few short days after saying -- when he felt it would get him what he wanted -- you could spend as much time with Tariq as you like, what occurred last night? You had to ask me how long would things take, and you were in a panic to get back to Ron so there wouldn't be any problems with him.

He is assisting you to compromise on your Sufi principles by inducing you to believe that catering to his likes, dislikes, whims, desires, moods, demands, expectations, and so on, is more important than is adhering to the spiritual principles of making God the most important thing in one's life and living one's life in accordance with what God wants and not what the demigod, Ron, wants. He is influencing and undermining you in all manner of ways that induce you to give priority to him over the principles of the Sufi path ... and this is what being in association with evil does, and this is what is happening to you and has been happening to you for quite some time.

The fugue states you go into sometime when he is around is a sign of the presence of how evil disrupts our capacity to operate in a normal fashion. Psychologists assign this or that theory to such a condition, but in your case, your system is shorting out because of the influence that evil is having upon you as it is being transmitted to you through Ron.

Evil has induced you to think there is no such thing as evil, even as evil does its horse and pony show before your very eyes on a daily basis. It has been said the greatest trick Satan ever performed was to make people believe that he didn't exist and that all of this talk about evil is just a bunch of superstitious nonsense.

Why, the problem with Ron is his childhood. It is the abuse he had to endure. It is because he has not been understood. It is because of 'yatta yatta yatta'.

No, Ron's problem -- and your problem -- is that Ron's behaviors are a conduit of evil influences (and the proof of this is the character of his actions with respect to you), and the reason this is your problem is because you continue to allow that evil presence to operate on you via association with Ron's behaviors and you seem relatively unconcerned about how such association corrupts your thinking and actions, and you feel that I am just being silly Tariq for trying to say these things about Ron's behaviors.

You do not trust what I say, although I have given you absolutely no reason to not trust what I am saying about anything. Yet, you continue to trust Ron because you permit yourself to stay in his presence as if there is nothing more that he can do to you ... even while he is doing this something more right now by getting you to spend more time with him so the evil influences being channeled through his behaviors can continue to play havoc with your thinking, feelings, and actions.

I can understand you not wanting to move from your house again and that it is your home and that you are not going to permit yourself to be pushed out again by Ron. Well, fine, how about telling him that he has to leave? Well fine, how about filing divorce papers and having them served on him? Well, fine, how about you staying in separate rooms from him and interacting with him as little as possible? Well, fine, how about you doing anything you damn well please and

beginning to live your own life out of your home, and tell him to set about pursuing his life without you?

I am concerned because although you speak approvingly about that book by Gavin De Becker -- *The Gift of Fear* -- which deals with, among other things, physical and domestic abuse -- you seem to have no appreciation for, or have not developed an appropriate fear for, the way such abuse insinuates its way into one's life through the presence of people who are monsters in human clothing, and that when these monsters shed a few tears or have a sad countenance, you get caught up in the surface features and forget all about what lurks underneath ... despite the fact that what lurks beneath has surfaced again and again to show you what is really going on -- but it is part of the evil of evil to be able to induce us to think that it is something other than what it is.

I will tell you quite frankly. I would like to work with you in your business, but one of the primary reasons for my backing off from that, as well as from interacting with you socially, if you stayed with Ron, is because I do not want to do anything that would help support and assist a situation that was not in your best interests -- spiritually, or in any other way. In one of my previous voice-mails to you, I was trying to put, in as stark a set of terms as I could, what the costs and consequences might be if you continued on with Ron ... but you got upset with me because you thought I did not want to be your friend, when you were the one who was giving preference to continued association with evil behaviors, over spiritual association. I did not want to subsidize your relationship with Ron by working with you and spending social time with you if you were not going to be bothered to understand that: by spending more time with Ron, by staying in the same house as him, that you were opening yourself up, more and more, to evil influences that were affecting the way you feel, think, and act.

And, all of this has left something of a very unpleasant taste in my mouth. Because despite all Ron has done and is doing to hurt and betray you, you continue to stay with him and away from me. Do you not have eyes with which to see? Do you not have ears with which to hear? Do you not have a heart with which to understand?

With all my love, Tariq

§

July 5, 2004

Lara phones me at the office. As we discuss various matters related to our respective situations, I realize Lara seems to be having a hard time understanding some of the spiritual dynamics that are at play.

I ask her if she would like me to send her an overview of those dynamics. She says she would like this.

§

Dear Lara,

A lot has been written to you over the past few days, as well as before. There is a great deal of information in detailed form, and, therefore, it is not always easy to keep track of -- especially, in terms of what is most essential to bear in mind.

The players in you -- and in everyone -- are always the same: nafs, hamzat, soul, heart, spirit, dunya, and Iblis. This means the same players are operative in Ron.

Although, obviously, God is present in all of this, and although, just as obviously, everything is shaped by Divinity's presence, and God can, of course, arrange what goes on, nonetheless, for purposes of simplifying things, I am focusing on just some of the aforementioned players, along with the dynamics of their interactions.

The two of you (Ron and Lara) relate to one another almost entirely in terms of nafs, hamzat and the whisperings of Satan -- with, maybe, a small amount of soul and heart thrown in, from time to time. The intensity of the bond between the two of you is largely a function of your two hamzats.

Both of you have damaged hamzats that have been, and are, in much pain, about a great many things -- some real, some imagined -- which have gone on in your respective lives. The battles in which you

two engage with one another just add to the pain that both of your hamzats feel ... which is one of the reasons why you both are accusing the other of being hurtful, and why you each spend a lot of your time feeling hurt about further wounds -- real or imagined -- that your respective hamzats feel have been inflicted upon them.

Since hamzat does not operate in accordance with logic, reason, argument, evidence, and so on, it is not open to discussion, or talk. It just knows what it feels and the way in which it hurts and is in pain.

Now, leaving the roles of nafs and Iblis out of the equation for a moment, part of you really doesn't know what is happening ... this is the hamzat part. It is bewildered, confused and fearful with respect to all that is going on, yet, due to its sensitivities, vulnerabilities, and addictions -- as a result of a past history of hurts and pain -- your hamzat identifies with Ron's hamzat, and your hamzat is especially sensitive, up to a point, of the hurt, pain, fear, and confusion that has, and is going on, in his hamzat.

The part of you that can't bear to see him hurt is your hamzat. The part of you that is always worried about whether, or not, things with him are okay, is your hamzat. The part of you that is powerless to resist him is your hamzat. The part of you that can't explain these feelings and forces at work within you with respect to Ron's hamzat is your hamzat. The part of you that is subject to panic-anxiety attacks and throwing up is hamzat. The part of you that is stressed out all the time is your hamzat. The part of you that gets hurt from the things that Ron does, even while she is identifying with his hamzat -- and, this makes the hurt even worse because one is getting bitten and beaten by the very thing toward which one's hamzat is inclined -- is your hamzat. The part of you that goes into fugue-like states is due to the influence of your hamzat. The part of you that is so caught up with the issue of abandonment, and which also is the source of the intense guilt and uneasiness you feel when it comes to trying to break away from Ron's hamzat and that feels this to be a case of abandoning him -- is your hamzat. The part of you that sinks into depression is your hamzat.

One of the reasons -- but not the only one -- why your situation is so resistant to logic, reason, discussion, and counseling, is because hamzat doesn't understand any of these things. It understands only what it knows through feelings of an intense kind.

Why are therapy and counseling such a hit and miss proposition with most people? Why can: positive transference assist a person to heal but negative transference can destroy a therapeutic relationship? All of has to do -- in large part, but not entirely -- with the way hamzat functions and the sorts of influences to which it is, and is not, open, and what happens when the hamzat becomes overwhelmed with the intensity of feelings involved by such emotions as: rage, anger, hostility, resentment, so on.

Why can't anybody in AA explain why someone becomes an alcoholic or addict? Well, one reason underlying this inability is that the problem is a very complex one, involving many facets of a person's biology, history, and so on, and these all collude in the form of a non-linear system that is not random, but has a multiplicity of determinate causes and forces operating within it but that cannot be predicted with any great deal of accuracy. However, perhaps, one of the biggest reasons for the inability to explain what is going on is that nobody in AA understands the role that hamzat plays and how the wounds and injuries -- real and/or imagined -- that hamzat feels often lock a person into a position entirely resistant to logic and reason ... even if other parts of the individual understand how what is going on is destroying him or her or forcing one to lose everything that one loves.

Why can't anyone in AA explain why AA works? Well, again, without trying to oversimplify a complex process that is very sensitive to a great many forces, one fact of the matter is the following one. Only when a given hamzat's hurts are sufficiently soothed by the presence of Grace, is there room for the possibility of sobriety to enter in, and, God willing, stay.

One of the reasons why the people who recover do recover while others do not (and there are different combinations of factors in different cases) is because of hamzat's having become aware of, and open to, the presence of Grace in whatever form of manifestation this might be clothed in ... whether this is in the form of a school teacher, or another drunk, or something else. Ultimately, the primary reason, why people do not recover, or recover only to fall off the wagon, is because they turn away, in one manner or another, from the Grace that has come into their lives.

Almost always this fall from Grace is induced by nafs, with the tacit agreement -- if not active endorsement -- by the qalb-dimension of the heart. Nafs exploits the hurts of hamzat in order to be able to generate the emotional intensity necessary to motivate or energize various actions while also serving as a source for ready-made rationalizations -- excuses concerning why what is being done is justified ... at least according to the corrupt logic of nafs.

The time at your apartment in Bamford when you woke up in the middle of the night and rushed out to Brimley, convinced something had happened with respect to Ron and another woman, this awareness came through your hamzat and its deep bond of identification with Ron's hamzat. Modern physicists might refer to such a phenomenon in terms of quantum entanglement.

In some of the great Sufi shaykhs, their spirituality has reached such heights of perfection that they are capable of dispatching their hamzat -- which is, after all, an ethereal body and not, strictly speaking, a physical body -- to be in different places at one and the same time. Moreover, there have been a variety of reports that describe people interacting with such saints at one and the same time.

The hamzat has a variety of properties. Some of these, when properly developed, enable a spiritual being's presence to be manifested in a bodily form in a variety of places all at the same time. Some of the properties of hamzat are receptive to certain resonance with the hamzat of others and things that are happening in the lives of those hamzats elsewhere ... which is what happened to you that night, and, really, there is no other explanation for why you knew what you knew you knew when you woke up that night. You knew by what was being felt by your hamzat through its intense identification or entanglement with Ron's hamzat.

The intense jealousy you felt concerning these other women with whom Ron was becoming involved was courtesy of your hamzat. The deep, almost panic-like concern you expressed to me on the phone soon after you went back to Brimley -- namely, that Ron doesn't love you anymore -- was the hamzat's fear that what she had been identifying with -- Ron's hamzat -- was no longer interested in identifying with her.

One of the problems between you and Ron is your hamzats are linked together in ways that are quite different from the feeling-perspectives of each of your respective hamzats. The ways in which your hamzat is linked to his are not the ways in which his hamzat is connected to yours.

Your history is your history. His history is his history.

Although each of your hamzats has become a repository for many kinds of hurts and injuries -- real and imagined -- your personal histories, individual temperaments, predispositions, personalities, and so on are very different from one another. What your hamzats share in common are the feelings of hurt, pain, anger, resentment, fear, injury and so on.

The etiology of these pains -- that is, how they came to be, is of little importance to hamzat. All that matters is the end-result ... in other words, that which is being felt, in an intense way, especially the pain. Thus, if one person breaks his or her leg while climbing a tree, while another person does the same thing while riding a bike, how they ended up in pain is less important than the fact that both individuals now find themselves in precisely the same condition of pain.

As a result, a certain empathy, sympathy and understanding of the other person's pain is possible between the two ... not because their personal histories are the same, but because they both are in pain. Each of your hamzats finds a certain amount of solace through the hamzat of the other. There is a certain amount of mutual felt-caring, empathy, sympathy, and elemental, shared understanding about the pains and injuries that life has generated for each of you.

This constitutes the primary foundation of the bond that each of you feels for one another. Of course, there is the habit and inertia that twenty-three years of marriage produces, and there is the raising of children that is held in common, especially with respect to the way the feelings of hamzat is woven into so many aspects of having lived together for so long, and having raised children together -- even while these very same things (i.e., living together and raising children) have become avenues for so many additional hurts that have taken up residence in your respective hamzats ... hurts -- imagined or real --

that you have caused one another ... hurts -- real or imagined -- which your children caused each of you, and so on.

Thus, there are several conflicting currents running through each of your hamzats. On the one hand, there is the feeling-bond that comes through both of you having been, and being in, emotional and psychic pain. On the other hand, there is an awareness in each of your hamzats with respect to the personal history through which such pain has arisen – an awareness that realizes the nature of the historical and personal differences that are shaping what takes place in hamzat and why ... an awareness that often places one at odds with the other person in the relationship. Consequently, each of your hamzats has an approach-avoidance relationship with the other individual's hamzat.

Another source of feeling-bonding linking both you and Ron together is that, from time to time, you each have provided the hamzat of the other person with a certain amount of consolation, comfort, and soothing concerning the pain of life injuries that are being felt. However, this facet of bonding has been made problematic because such consolation, comfort, and solace have been very inconsistent and unpredictable. As a result, each of your hamzats has developed a on-going log of the fact that the needed soothing, comforting, and so on has not been forthcoming in a regular, nice manner.

Furthermore, each of your hamzats is on an intermittent, variable reinforcement schedule which means that although the soothing of the injuries of hamzat is not always forthcoming from the other individual and is very unpredictable as to when, or if, it will show up, nonetheless, you each have an expectation that, sooner or later, the soothing of your respective hamzats will be forthcoming. In effect, each of your hamzats is hooked or addicted to the same kind of operant reward conditioning system ... although for different reasons.

All of your arguments, discussions, and joint counseling sessions go nowhere, because none of you understand -- including, perhaps, the marriage counselor -- that the problem is not a matter of communication, but, rather, is a matter of how two lives have become entangled in a downward spiraling dynamic of two entities (i.e., your two hamzats) that pay little attention to verbal communication and for whom discussion, logic, reason, and argument have no value or meaning.

Your sessions -- whether together or with your marriage counselor -- go round and round and round, and no matter how much time is spent, and what is said, you both keep coming back to the same place. Whatever commonalities your hamzats once shared, you each have become the continuing source of pain for the other, as well.

The underlying shared pain of your respective hamzats, and the concomitant identification and empathy that this shared pain engenders, is being buffeted about by your mutual awareness that the other person is generating a lot more pain for, than they are creating soothing comfort for, the feelings of your respective hamzats.

Your hamzats are like people who begin relationships while engaged in some life tragedy such as a plane crash or flood or bank robbery. The bonding that takes place through hamzats under these conditions of stress and pain, are very rarely ever sufficient to maintain a relationship over the long haul.

The problem is – as I have said previously – is that hamzat can't understand any of this. In most cases, the hamzat of someone who is not spiritually realized only understands what it feels. If there is not some sort of intervention from one, or another, manifestation of Divine love, then an injured hamzat cannot let go of the fact that although it is experiencing a shared sense of common understanding concerning life's pain with another hamzat – a common understanding that might have bound two hamzats together -- yet, at the same time, those same two hamzats might be motivating behaviors that are tearing apart the respective owners of these hamzats through the resentment, anger, and mounting injuries that are taking place toward one another in relation to all the pain that each hamzat is causing the other's hamzat -- and because each of their hamzats are in a wounded condition, they each are even more sensitive and vulnerable to further hurt ... much as the case with a person who has been physically injured has something happen to aggravate that injury that already is very tender from the previous hurt.

One of the things you need to understand is your hamzat cannot cure or restore or save the damage of Ron's hamzat any more than his hamzat can cure, restore, or save your hamzat. In this respect, hamzats are pretty dumb, and they will keep banging their heads against a brick wall, thinking that if they just bang long enough, then something

good will happen ... which never happens because constant banging of one's hamzat-head brings nothing but further pain, injury, anger, frustration, resentment, and depression.

Just as is the case in AA, the only thing that will cure, restore, and save someone's injured hamzat is the presence of Grace and the individual's acceptance of that Grace. Sometimes an individual's hamzat is open to this and embraces the Grace in whatever form it manifests itself and, quite independently of whether the person recognizes that it is God's Grace that has entered into her or his life ... in fact, a lot of people give lip service to the idea of God, but in their heart of hearts, they either don't really think about it all that much, or they say 'God' but they really mean something else.

Sometimes, however, the injured hamzat's injuries are so great, it will turn away from any Grace that is being offered -- with a sort of this is too little, too late, or it is not being offered in the way that is wanted by a given individual's hamzat. Thus, in the present case -- namely, your relationship with Ron -- each of your respective hamzats has been rejecting the form of Grace that has been coming into your life to help bring some of your pain to an end and provide you both with an opportunity to find the only real solution to the injuries of your respective hamzats -- namely, God.

Ron, presently, is not inclined in this direction. He is not a believer -- that is, although he might accept the idea that somewhere a Being called God exists, he is not prepared to act on this understanding and, thereby, to get his life to comply with what God wishes, or even to find out what God wishes, or to feel he is duty-bound in any way to serve God.

Much of what he does in AA is not motivated by his love for God but is self-serving and an expression of his ego or nafs. He might read the 12 steps, and he might mouth the 2nd step, but he is not interested in turning his life over to God. AA is his program and although he might be a channel through which God works, God works through him in spite of Ron, not because Ron is a willing, knowing servant of God in that work.

In short, Ron's intentions do not appear to be sincere, and his behaviors reveal this at every turn. As I told you before in one of my previous letters, Iblis is a nonbeliever, not because he does not accept

the reality of God's existence, but because he does not act on that knowledge in an appropriate fashion and, instead, does things in accordance with his own nafs.

This brings us to the next player in the game -- nafs. Nafs is pretty much the same in everyone ... same tendencies, same properties, same capabilities, same modus operandi, same motivations, same weaknesses, same strategies, and so on. Only differences in spiritual capacity, together with the experiences of personal history push nafs in one direction or another with respect to how its range of tendencies will manifest themselves or that sort of weakness will figure most prominently in a given person's life.

You should never think that just because I might go on, at length, sometimes, concerning your nafs, that this means I don't have a nafs and that my nafs doesn't have the same tendencies as yours does. It is precisely because I know my nafs and how it operates and what it is after that I am able to say anything about the problems that your nafs is generating for you. Having been there, and done that, I know the smell of nafs when it is present ... and that smell is the same in all of us whose nafs have not become spiritually redeemed.

In any event, aside from the ways in which you and Ron are tied together through your respective hamzats, you also are tied together by your respective nafs. Nafs has its own agenda – although, as I indicated above, that agenda is pretty much the same in everyone ... an agenda of selfishness, self-centeredness, rebelliousness, hostility, arrogance, pride, insatiable desires and wants, greed, insensitivity to the needs of others, and so on.

Unlike hamzat, nafs is able to plot and plan, for with Iblis, it shares the quality of guile and cunning as tools to use in implementing nafs' aforementioned agenda. Moreover, as I indicated in an earlier e-mail, nafs uses the moods, emotions, and injuries of hamzat to serve its own ends.

Speaking to hamzat through the language of emotions -- which, to some extent, they share in common or are entangled in overlapping ways -- nafs works on the sensitivities, vulnerabilities, and hopes of hamzat to manipulate the latter to assign its energies and influences according to the direction that nafs desires.

Naturally, lying, exploitation, manipulation, deception, and so on are all part of nafs' arsenal of weapons it uses to 'persuade' hamzat to serve nafs rather than soul or spirit. Moreover, the nafs has absolutely no interest in the well-fare of hamzat or whether what nafs is urging hamzat to do will lead to injury for the latter. Nafs likes to consider itself numero uno -- without peer -- and desires to be a completely, independent king of all it surveys. The idea of: servitude or dependence, are an anathema to the nafs -- especially when it comes to God or to someone else's nafs.

The operative principle of nafs is that of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*: namely: "it is better to rule in hell than to serve in heaven". Nafs doesn't care how much damage, injury, or destruction is caused -- whether to itself or others -- as long as nafs gets to impose its agenda on life and do as it pleases, whenever and wherever it pleases.

Like Iblis, nafs is engaged in open antagonism to, and rebellion against, the spiritual, and will only come close to spirituality if this can be turned to its advantage in some way. The unredeemed nafs does not want spirituality to succeed, because this would mean that its rule and independence would have to come to an end and, as a result, it would have to begin serving Divinity's purpose and not its own.

Your nafs and Ron's nafs are locked in mortal combat and have been for some time ... like two mountain-rams butting heads to see who has the most testosterone. You go at each other again and again and again -- for the same reasons ... to advance the agendas of your respective nafs.

Ron's nafs wants to control you according to its likes and dislikes, and you want to control him according to the likes and dislikes of your own nafs. You might be fighting for independence and freedom and not to be controlled, but this is not necessarily so that you can serve God better but so that your nafs will be free to do whatever it wants, whenever it wants to do it.

People like your regular counselor and your marriage counselor will say that you -- or anyone -- should have such freedom and independence and relationships should be built around consent, reciprocity, and an absence of violence. All of this might be true as far as it goes ... but not if the only purpose of doing so is to afford nafs the opportunity to go about life exploiting and abusing that freedom and

independence for non-spiritual purposes. So, when you go and see your regular counselor and your marriage counselor then, within certain limits your nafs has found allies to support its drive for freedom and independence, but the counselors do not see -- and, probably, are not at all interested in -- the uses to which you put that freedom and independence and how it might be used to hurt, exploit, manipulate, and injure others and to run away from God and to rebel against spirituality.

Although both you and Ron approach things from slightly different angles, the purpose is the same. This is to construct a world in the image of the likes and dislikes of one's nafs ... to arrange things in a way that will be comforting and pleasing to the self-serving whims of nafs. You both are primarily interested in gaining control so nafs can be free and independent to do what it wishes.

Your struggles with Ron in this respect are not spiritual. Your nafs doesn't really care about doing the right thing for the benefit of Ron's soul or spirit ... your nafs is not really concerned with whether, or not, what it is doing is injurious to Ron's ultimate spiritual needs.

In fact, your hamzat has more sympathy and empathy for Ron than your nafs does. And, this, in itself, causes conflict within you.

Counseling and therapy might be able to help smooth some of the rough edges of nafs, or help restrain some of the more damaging activities of the nafs, by using one of nafs' own tendencies -- namely, its desire for self-esteem and to be thought well of -- to help bring about the realization that what is going on is bad for one's image and in order to preserve or enhance such an image, then, nafs is going to have to pursue its agenda in a more civilized way. However, counseling and therapy will never, ever, touch the real heart of the problem, unless that counseling or therapy is rooted in spirituality.

The problem with your life and Ron's life is they are not God-centered. They are nafs-centered, and hamzat-centered.

This is why none of your: discussions, arguments, yelling matches, or counseling sessions are going to do much except move the dirt around from one place to another. You cannot move from the Mexican stand-off where you presently find yourselves, because nafs and

hamzat are incapable of doing this on their own. Not only is spiritual help needed but you must want that help and co-operate with it.

Your nafs are banging heads. Your hamzats are banging heads. Moreover, because of the stubbornness, arrogance and pride of nafs, along with the unyielding, illogical nature of hamzat, you will just keep going after one another, creating a great deal of pain and injury in the process, while generating a truck-load of further anger, resentment, hostility, frustration, and sadness.

This is not about who is right and who is wrong, or who is more right or more wrong. You both are totally, 100% wrong because everything you two are doing is a function of wounded hamzats and out of control egos ... there is not even the faintest whiff of spirituality or God or Truth or Justice or Fairness or Compassion or Love in any of what you two are doing to one another.

I have told you many times you are hurting Ron spiritually by not removing yourself from the situation. Unfortunately, this does not alter your behavior because the part of you that is in control these days doesn't really care if this is so or not --- this has the odor of nafs and hamzat.

I have told you many times that you are hurting me by your doing what you are doing, yet, you have taken forgiveness as a license to continue on rather than stepping back and acting in an appropriate manner. Such behaviors have the odor of nafs and hamzat about them.

I have told you your current behavior is destroying you spiritually and emotionally, and, yet, still you continue. Such behaviors have the odor of nafs about them.

Yes, you have gone back to Brimley and you stay there because of your hamzat's inability to understand that, despite its elemental feeling of empathy for Ron's injured hamzat, nonetheless, it cannot save Ron's hamzat and Ron's hamzat cannot save your hamzat. Since all hamzat knows is what it feels, it has no way of getting over, or around, those feelings unless helped by an external agency -- namely, your spirit and the love which is manifested through that spirit toward me, and through my spirit toward you.

However, as indicated in a previous e-mail, you also are in Brimley because your nafs wishes to keep you there in order to keep your

spiritual side away from God, as well as to undermine the love your spiritual side feels toward me, and this is for the same reason -- to keep you away from spirituality since this is what threatens nafs' love for ruling freely and independently according to its moods, whims, and likes or dislikes. As such, your nafs is using Ron and your own hamzat as weapons to keep you from leaving Brimley, despite all the unhappiness, pain, injury, sadness, and insanity that results from your staying there ... not because of any real desire to help Ron, or be with Ron, or do something constructive, or even really to help yourself, but because continuing to stay in Brimley serves the agenda of your nafs ... which is to stay away from spirituality, no matter how self-destructive this might be.

In fact, precisely because of the destructive aspect of what is going on, this problematic dimension appeals to both nafs and hamzat -- although for different reasons. In the case of nafs, self-destruction is appealing because it would rather hope to rule in hell than serve in heaven ... while, in the case of hamzat, the destructiveness is appealing because it feels like this process would end hamzat's pain within the comforting embrace of oblivion -- except oblivion will never become because we are eternal beings.

Then, of course, in the midst of all the activities of nafs and hamzat, are the whisperings of Iblis. Iblis whispers to nafs and Iblis whispers to hamzat because he is a multilingual being, and he knows exactly what chords to play in each case to induce nafs and hamzat to put pressure on an individual's soul and heart (in the aspect of qalb) to engage in that which is not in the soul's spiritual interests. Furthermore, Iblis does this because of his hatred for the spiritual potential of human kind that he wishes to destroy -- due to the injuries in his own hamzat that arose from his failed test -- so, Iblis eggs on nafs and hamzat to participate in such destructiveness by appealing to their respective vulnerabilities.

Finally, there is your soul -- the spiritual side of your soul. In you, this part is in love with my spiritual side but is very weak with respect to having the energy and courage to struggle against the incessant demands of your own nafs and hamzat, along with the constant come-hither of Iblis, as well as the constant barrage from Ron's nafs and hamzat.

The key to your soul's being put in a position to get stronger and take control of the situation in order to have real freedom and independence (from nafs, hamzat, the world, and Iblis) is to break free from the nafs stratagem of keeping you pre-occupied in Brimley chasing your will-of-the-wisp tail that will never be caught. Only God can help you overcome the adversaries that are set up against the spiritual side of your soul.

Your problem is not that you fail to stand up to Ron ... although, admittedly, your hamzat has a hard time with this. The problem is your spiritual side is not willing to stand up to your nafs and your hamzat by showing them who is in charge.

The anger and resentment you feel toward Ron's attempts to control you should be nothing compared to the anger and resentment you ought to feel toward the way your nafs and hamzat are controlling your spiritual side. Indeed, those two are so cruel that even though they know you love someone, they are doing everything in their power to keep you away from that love.

Ron knows you love someone other than him, but does he say - "well, what's the point of our being together if you don't love me?" ... no, he doesn't. He just applies: more pressure and more emotional force, to get you to cave in and serve his nafs and hamzat ... a nafs and hamzat that have no love for you, nor do they wish for your well-being and happiness -- but only for what will placate them.

If I thought you were really happy, peaceful, free and deeply in love with Ron, then I would step out of the picture, and consider that Ron was just more fortunate than I was in this case and God had assigned you two together as part of your destiny. Although this would be painful for me, I could, God willing, live with this because I just want you to be happy, healthy, and working toward God.

Unfortunately, none of the foregoing is true. You are not in love with Ron -- although your hamzat has a certain addiction toward, vulnerability concerning, and empathy for Ron's hamzat ... nor are you happy, peaceful, free, or struggling toward God.

Moreover, you have zero chance for any of this to happen under the present circumstances. What needs to be done is for your spiritual side to assert herself -- not to Ron -- but to your own nafs and hamzat

... then how you handle the Ron problem will follow naturally from solving the first part of your problem – namely, yourself.

Yes, your nafs and hamzat will likely scream, be childish, and angry if your spiritual side should begin to stand up to them. However, God willing, you will discover that the situation might turn out to be somewhat like what happened to your hamzat's jealousy when it found out about the other women in Ron's life ... she got stirred up in the short run, but in the long run she realized that Ron was not only uninterested in helping her, but he was unable to do so ... he couldn't even help himself.

The main obstacles in all of this come from within you, not from without. These obstacles are your nafs, hamzat, and Iblis, not Ron. Ron is merely the excuse used by your nafs, hamzat, and Iblis to keep you imprisoned and away from the one you love, as well as away from the pathway to spirituality and true freedom.

Do follow the instructions that I have given you previously with respect to hamzat. And, don't do it once or twice, but keep at it, and concentrate on me more and more -- this will help you in your spiritual struggle with nafs and Iblis, as well when you converse with hamzat.

With much love and affection,

Tariq

§

July 11, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Tariq,

I wanted to send you yet another junk e-mail. Sometimes, within all the junk in the world, we find a precious jewel, and that's what I have found in you. I love you madly and miss you when I'm across the river.

Lara

§

July 19, 2002

I have not heard from, or about, Lara for more than a week. She is on her vacation. Perhaps she has gone somewhere.

§

July 23, 2002

Around 9:00 p.m. this evening I hear a knock on the door in my new apartment in the building owned by Bruce's daughter. I go to investigate and find Lara waiting at the door, and I invite her in.

She says she and Ron have just come back from the Lake Region. They have been fighting almost non-stop for several weeks.

Ron is so frustrated with things he has sent her to see me, hoping, apparently, that I will be able to calm her down. Lara says she doesn't know where all the anger within her is coming from, but even she is finding the intensity and depth of the anger hard to live with.

She says most of her vacation has been spent either arguing or sleeping. She can't seem to do anything else.

I tell Lara that her anger does not surprise me. I indicate to her that, in my opinion, she is fighting for her life -- physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. The only surprising thing about it all is that it hasn't happened before now.

I add words to the effect of: why should either Ron or Lara suppose anyone will accept years of abuse without, at some point, such anger being vented? Why should either she or Ron expect a person to submit to a pathological situation as if it is business as usual without damage being done?

People who are living in such abusive circumstances and who don't, sooner or later, express anger tend to be people who commit suicide, commit murder, or slide into psychological illness. The anger is Lara's way of trying to find another way of playing the hand she is being dealt by Ron.

Being angry all the time is not a good thing. Sometimes, however, it beats the alternative possibilities.

We talk about things for a long time. Nothing really has changed by the time Lara leaves, but she has been able to spend some time in a friendly port before heading back into the storm.

§

July 26, 2002

Lara calls, and she says she is leaving her apartment in Bamford to go back to her house in Brimley. She has been moving out, little by little over the last several weeks.

Usually, Ron is with her, but for some reason, the warden has given Lara a semi-free pass. Lara wants to know if there are a few things that I might store for her, and, in addition, she wants to know if I will help her move a few things into her car.

When I reach her apartment, Lara is busy cleaning up. I help her vacuum and wash the floors.

While we are doing this, Ron calls and wants to know where she is and why she is taking so long. They have a few words, and there is considerable tension during the conversation.

After the phone call, I talk a little with Lara about what is going on. She doesn't have much to say, but I feel I am witnessing a Greek tragedy unfolding before my eyes in which no matter what my personal feelings concerning the main characters might be, fate seems to be driving what transpires ... moving everyone toward an inevitable, troubled and tragic end.

We carry the last, few remaining items to Lara's car. She takes me to my office, and I remove from her car the things she wants to leave with me.

She leaves. I go downstairs to my office.

§

July 29, 2002

The doorbell to my apartment rings. I look over at the clock radio and it reads 3:38 a.m.. I get up, throw some clothes on, and head for the door. It is Lara.

She says she has been arguing with Ron all night. Finally, she leaves the chaos in Brimley and wants to know if she can stay at the apartment.

I let her in. After some talk, we go to sleep.

§

August 2, 2002

Lara is going to California for some sort of job-related convention. Although she briefly toys with the idea of taking me along with her on the trip, nothing really happens.

As she is packing some things in preparation for the trip, she begins to question -- out loud -- whether I really love her. She also says she has a lot of doubts about my motives concerning her ... she doesn't feel I am being sincere with her.

The discussion goes back and forth a few times. I see an old pattern beginning to assert itself.

Lara tells me she has been told by Jane that Agnes -- who is married to a nephew of mine -- told Jane that she was present when Bruce, my brother, was discussing my alleged past and how, supposedly, my modus operandi is to latch onto women with money and hang on to them until I got dumped by the woman of the hour for not contributing financially to the relationship. I try to counter the allegations, but, Lara seems to have made up her mind that there might be some degree of truth to what Jane, via Agnes, has told her ... it plays into her feelings -- despite a total lack of evidence to back it up -- that the only reason I am interested in Lara is because of her money.

I have the sense Lara will not be coming back here when she returns from her journey. I feel the argument has been manufactured so that Lara can feel justified in doing what she will do upon her return to Bamford/Brimley.

§

August 7, 2002

Even though Lara has said she would call me every day while away, she has not called in several days. Moreover, she hasn't left a number for me to use in order to get in touch with her.

However, based on several clues she dropped before she left – inadvertently or not I am unsure -- I begin to make some calls to a few California resort areas and, eventually, locate her whereabouts. I call her room, and she answers the phone.

She is very distant and subdued ... not very talkative. She tells me a couple of things that have been going on at the convention, but, mostly, she doesn't want to talk.

Lara says she will see me when she gets back. The conversation ends.

§

August 8, 2002

Lara is supposed to be returning today. She has not phoned about her arrival time, flight number, or anything else.

Around 8:00 at night, I get a phone call from Lara. She says she is at the local airport. She is crying, and she has been crying all the way back from California. She says she is going back to Brimley and Ron.

There is not much I can say. I knew this moment was coming even before she left for California.

§

A little later, I call Baba and run through the situation with him. After an extended discussion, we conclude, for a variety of reasons, that, perhaps, the best thing might be to inform Lara that until she can

settle on what she really wants to do with her life, then, perhaps, she should stay away from fatiha and in addition, at least for now, spiritual counseling should be placed in abeyance.

I write an e-mail to letter outlining the conversation I have had with Baba. In addition, I include some general instructions concerning the Sufi path.

§

August 8, 2002 (e-mail)

Dear Lara,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Some General Instructions

Please keep up your initiation – that is, don't verbally, or in your heart recant the initiation that you have taken with the silsilah. The initiation has a certain value in and of itself.

If you do zikr, then do it as best you can, and in accordance with what is easy for you, and when you are doing the zikr, concentrate on Baba in the form of my image. Nothing, however little, that is done with the purpose of remembering and worshiping God in accordance with the teachings of Revelation, the Prophetic tradition, the saints, or the shaykhs of the various spiritual lineages is ever lost, and, perhaps, even if only a little is done, this might be, God willing, enough to make the difference on the Day of Judgment;

If, at any time, you decide to leave Ron and are serious in following through on that commitment, and, as a result, feel you would be in a condition that is free from undue pressure to induce you to behave in ways that are at odds with the Sufi path, then, you would be welcome to return and participate in fatiha and receive whatever spiritual counsel you wish.

Although, to be sure, you have had a hand in choosing and acting as you do, we always have been of the opinion you are suffering from a deep emotional turmoil whose source is, in an important way (but not entirely), due to your relationship with Ron. We are of the opinion that

if you were to be removed from Ron's influence, then you might feel free to work toward struggling to do what you could to narrow the gap between what you profess and what you do with respect to the Sufi path.

In short, although you do have a responsibility, in part, for what is going on, you really are not the primary cause. Rather, Ron has used relentless psychological, emotional, sexual, and physical pressure to exploit your emotional turmoil in order to negatively shape your attitudes and behaviors concerning commitment to the Sufi path ... and Ron is an excellent hunter who knows the ways of his prey and has outsmarted her at every turn she takes to escape from her situation by banging his kettles so the prey will be afraid and run mindlessly toward her own demise, and he has manipulated her emotions to the point where she believes white is black and vice versa, and, now he has pushed her to the point of exhaustion where the hunter knows she will become completely compliant and his for the taking, and it makes no difference that the prey hates the hunter for what he is doing, and has done.

While there is no compulsion with respect to observing the Deen of the Sufi path, this does not mean that if one wishes to travel along this spiritual way, then nothing is required. However, if you do not wish to observe the Deen of tasawwuf, then we accept this as your choice, and we, simply, are saying it makes no sense for you to continue on trying to do something to which you are not committed since your heart is devoted elsewhere.

Let us reassess the situation in a month's time -- say, on September 11, 2002, at 8:00 p.m., here, at my residence. Furthermore, I hope that even if you are going to choose to continue on as you are now, you still will come and speak with me at that time. I do not consider you an enemy but as someone who has fallen under the spell of a sorcerer who cares little for the soul of the one he seeks to possess.

If you are in difficulty or in trouble in some way, then know that you can contact me through the post office box until, God willing, at least until the end of September, and in addition, if the situation is an emergency, then, you know where I live, and, insha' Allah, I will do whatever I can to assist you.

Love,
Tariq

§

October 27, 2002

Lara shows up early in the morning, around 1 or 2. I am still up working on something or other. She asks if she can stay.

She brings me up to date somewhat, on what has been transpiring over the last seven or eight weeks. As before, Ron and she have been arguing almost every day.

On one occasion, Ron wasn't happy with Lara, so, he sat on her and wouldn't let her move. In order to sit on her, Ron had to turn her over, and while doing this, he kneed her in the stomach.

On other occasions, he would keep her up the entire night, railing on about this or that. He wouldn't turn the light off, and he wouldn't let her sleep.

On still other occasions, he would take her for long drives on back roads and make her listen to everything he had to say. Lara was too frightened not to go, and once she went, she was held as prisoner by Ron.

Somewhere in late September or early October, Lara told Ron to get out of the bedroom and to sleep elsewhere. They have been sleeping apart ever since.

The conversation turns to an earlier idea -- discussed months ago - - namely, going to see Baba. Although Lara has resisted this idea previously, she is now in favor of going ... even though she doesn't like going to new places or meeting strange people.

I tell her we can stay at a hotel or motel in the area. We will come home whenever she wants.

I call Baba and probe the idea of coming down. He is receptive and arrangements are made.

Lara has a week, or more, of vacation coming to her in about a week's time. We plan our trip for then.

§

November 10, 2002

Lara has been sleeping in Brimley but not with Ron. She is still worried Ron will find out about the arrangements for the trip to see Baba and cause trouble.

We plan to meet tomorrow, early, and begin the trip. Before we go, however, Lara needs to change her tires.

§

November 11, 2002

The trip down has been smooth and uneventful. I have been serving as navigator.

With the exception of getting lost on Baba's street, the direction has been impeccable. Finally, we locate the right house.

Quite a few years have passed since I have visited with Baba. The street address I remember is incorrect, and the fact that we have been driving in darkness for the last hour, or so, doesn't make things any easier.

We spend 3-4 hours at Baba's. One of the first things that Baba says to Lara is: 'I must apologize to you Lara. Up until I met you, I believed your problem was of one nature, but, now, that I have had a chance to meet you in person, I see your situation is quite different.'

Baba leaves the room for a short while, and, when he returns, he mishears something that is being said (we had been talking about finding Baba a wife). Baba says he doesn't need a secretary, he needs a wife.

He sits down and says: "Tariq, she's beautiful". He asks Lara if she has any sisters.

We laugh and Lara explains that, as a matter of fact, she does have a sister. Unfortunately, the sister is already married.

We begin talking about other things. A little later, I need to use the washroom, and I excuse myself.

When I return, Baba is engaged in a deep conversation with Lara about her mother and what might have happened. Baba indicates there were two men in the life of Lara's mother.

One man loved her mother and was loved by Lara's mother. The other man sought to control Lara's mother.

Baba relates a number of things to Lara in this regard. Lara is quite captivated by everything that Baba is saying.

On a number of occasions, Baba emphasizes to Lara that no matter what the future might hold for Lara and me, or for Lara and Ron, Baba will always be there for her. He indicates how Lara's relationship with Baba is direct and does not have to be mediated through anyone. He mentions this idea a number of times in the ensuing conversation.

At another point in the discussion, Baba informs Lara that when I (Tariq) originally had performed the rite of release late last June, I had cried and cried over the situation. Baba tells Lara 'Tariq loves you so much'. Baba describes me as a warrior for continuing to battle on Lara's behalf, despite the many setbacks.

In addition, Baba tells Lara, quite a few times, how Tariq is Baba's best friend. I feel honored and, yet, wonder why Baba would say such a thing. I can understand why someone might consider Baba one's best friend, but I don't know why Baba would consider the likes of me to be his best friend.

Finally, we inform Baba that we should be getting back to our motel. The day has been long, and we are both quite tired.

§

November 12, 2002

We call the next day and seek permission to visit with Baba. Permission is given.

Baba asks us if we would like to stay at his place rather than the motel. He says the choice is ours, but the offer is genuine and we won't be putting anyone out.

We accept. We pack our belongings and head out for Baba's house.

However, when we get there, Baba is not available. We visit with the rest of the family.

We don't actually see Baba until around supper time. We are invited to eat with the family.

After supper is over, we linger at the table, talking with Baba. He begins to tell an incredible story.

Apparently, two of his mureeds from Houston phone one night, sometime shortly after 9/11, and they inquire about visiting Baba as soon as possible. They sound very scared and upset.

They tell Baba that they can be at his place late the next day if they drive all night. They don't want to take an airplane, even though one of the two works for an airline.

When they arrive, they begin to tell why they are so upset. A brother or sister of theirs (I was never quite certain whether the brother/sister was from the husband's or wife's side of the family) has been having difficulty getting a job.

A friend of his tells him about a job possibility in New York City. The friend shows him an employment advertisement.

The brother, or brother-in-law, calls the number appearing in the advertisement, and an application is sent to him. He fills out the form and returns it to the company.

A little later, the brother/brother-in-law receives a telephone call indicating that the company would like him and his wife to come to New York for an interview. All expenses will be paid.

They receive an airplane ticket, together with instructions concerning their hotel accommodations while in New York. They are informed that on such and such a date, the couple will be picked up by a limousine service and driven to the airport in Houston.

On the indicated date, the plans unfold as announced. When they arrive in New York, they are met by another limousine that transports them to the hotel in Manhattan where they are to stay.

They are taken to a very swanky suite. A short time after their arrival, someone knocks on the door and a hospitality basket is delivered.

They eat supper in the hotel restaurant, return to their room and begin to partake in one of the non-alcoholic beverages that came with the hospitality basket delivered earlier. A half hour, or so, later, there is a knock on the door.

Two people are at the door -- a woman and a man. They are there to give them massages.

About this time, both the husband and the wife are beginning to feel a little strange ... woozy and light-headed. They don't remember much after answering the door.

The next morning, both husband and wife awake in separate rooms within the suite. They each feel they have been sexually assaulted, but they are not exactly sure and, so, they say nothing to one another.

They go to the scheduled interview set for the afternoon. When they eventually find their way to the room, the room turns out to be a huge convention amphitheater-like auditorium, with a raised stage at the front.

There are hundreds of people already gathered. Most of the people look to be from Pakistan, India, and/or the Middle East.

The seats are equipped with head phones, and there also seem to be a set of toggle switches or buttons in the arm rests of the seats. The participants are instructed to put the headset on at a certain point, but before this happens, a white man gets on stage and addresses the audience.

He indicates the interview process will consist of people responding to certain visual images that will be shown on the screen. The participants will do this by using the switches embedded in the arm rests of their chairs.

Before the interview process takes place, the speaker opens things up to questions. At a certain point, someone in the audience asks the speaker who the company is that is behind all of this.

The man says 'we are the people who make and break governments.' Some further discussion takes place, and, then shortly thereafter, the participants are instructed to put on the headsets, the room darkens, the lowered screen fills with images, and the headphones fill with voices.

The couple who are related to Baba's mureeds say that although they don't remember much of what took place during the interview, they each seem to recall images of planes flying into tall buildings, and, as well, they recall being asked whether they could watch their children die.

After this, things are pretty much a blank. Sometime later, at night, they found themselves in a daze, walking the streets of Manhattan, their clothes disheveled. They have no recollection of how they got to where they are.

The return flight to Houston is not far away. They return to the hotel, pick up their bags, and head for the airport.

A few days after the couple returns to Houston, some strange events begin to take place. The wife of the brother, or brother-in-law, tries to kill her husband. She keeps calling him the devil or the dajal.

Things become so bad that she has to be hospitalized for a time. Eventually, she calms down, appears to regain her senses, and returns home.

Not too long after this the brother, or brother-in-law, goes crazy and does the same sort of thing to his wife that his wife earlier had done to him. He threatens her and calls her the devil or dajal.

Over time, he too, calms down. However, both he and his wife continue to live with a great deal of trauma, and, eventually, they tell their story to Baba's mureeds who are now relating it to Baba. But, they are doing so after 9/11 already has taken place.

Both Lara and I are amazed by the story. We all talk about the story for some time afterwards ... about what it means, about whether it is true, and so on.

A little bit later on Baba is talking with Lara and myself about how Habib is working, part time, for an uncle of Sima's. Baba tells us a bit of the history of how Habib came to get the job.

Apparently, at one point, or another, the negotiations for the job were not going all that well or all that quickly. Baba was not happy with this state of affairs and felt the man who might hire Habib was either jerking Habib around or making veiled threats having to do with, possibly, causing Habib some kind of difficulty.

Baba describes how he got on the phone with Sima's uncle and says: "If anything happens to my son, I'll make mincemeat out of you and feed you to the dogs." According to Baba, the man's whole demeanor changed quite a bit after that ... the man was tripping all over himself, trying to apologize to Baba for whatever the man might have done that might have been wrong, and, eventually, Habib was hired to do some work for Sima's uncle.

I note the vehemence and intensity with which Baba relates the story – especially, the key line. I find the story – especially the tone of its delivery -- quite disquieting.

When bedtime arrives, we are in the living room with Baba. He inquires about the kind of sleeping arrangements with which we will be most comfortable.

He says Lara and I can sleep separately from one another, or we can sleep together. Baba says he has told no one about the ceremonies of the 31st, so, if we sleep together, the secret will be out.

He leaves the decision to us. We choose to sleep together, mostly because Lara doesn't like being in strange houses with people she doesn't know.

§

November 13, 2002

When we get up the next morning, Baba is already awake. He is in the living room.

He tells us that the word about Lara and me is spreading like wildfire among the local members of the silsilah. We all laugh.

We tell Baba that Lara and I have been talking about the story that Baba related to us the previous evening. We tell him it will make a great movie and outline our plot line.

He listens to us, and, then, shakes his head. He warns us against doing anything so foolish.

He says, no matter how careful we are to hide the identity of the mureeds or Baba, Baba says the people about whom his mureeds told him are likely to be able to find out ... it is better to be safe than sorry.

Later during the day, I am having a conversation with Momina, Ra'uf's mother. We are discussing home schooling.

Momina informs me she is home-schooling Ra'uf – who is about 6 or 7 years old -- and sits with him at the dinner table every evening, going over his lessons ... something that both Lara and I have witnessed on a number of occasions since we have been visiting with Baba. Momina worries she might not be doing a very good job because of her limited facility with English.

I reply by saying that Ra'uf is an extremely intelligent boy – a lot smarter than I was at his age. I encourage her to continue on as best she can and add that most learning comes through the motivation and interest of the learner rather than through anything that a teacher does – as much as a teacher might like to suppose otherwise.

Intrinsic motivation is far more important than any form of extrinsic motivation – and I explain the differences between the two forms of learning. I further point out that there is considerable evidence to indicate that extrinsic forms of motivation might even be detrimental to the learning process in the long run.

Momina's eyes shine with pride in relation to the compliments that I am directing toward her son. She is very happy with what I am saying.

Baba provides some background as to why Ra'uf is being home-schooled. He tells about an incident that happened to Ra'uf, the child of 'Umar and Momina, who all live in the house where Baba stays. Baba says a security guard in Ra'uf's elementary school had gone crazy and shot a number of children and teachers.

Ra'uf, apparently, had been a witness to this and was completely traumatized by the event. He had to go to a child psychologist for quite some time, and, even now, Ra'uf has not fully recovered. He still gets tense when he hears the siren of a police car or a fire engine.

As a result, the parents have decided to home-school Ra'uf. In addition, they try to keep Ra'uf away from certain kinds of violent images -- such as on the television.

We ask questions about what happened to the security guard. Baba says there was a big trial on television, but the man was found

not guilty due to mental instability and, consequently, was shipped off to a state mental facility.

After supper, we are hanging around the table having tea with Baba. Somehow, we begin talking about my puzzlement concerning how my brother Bruce acquired the idea that I, allegedly, developed relationships with women in order to have access to their money.

I relate to Baba how Jane had once approached Lara and told her that Agnes -- the wife of my brother's son, had disclosed to Jane about a conversation my brother Bruce supposedly once had when Agnes was present along with a few other members of Bruce's immediate family. Apparently, on that occasion, Bruce laid out the scenario that I took up association with women for their money.

I wonder out loud about the mystery of how Bruce could have gotten such an idea. Baba says that Agnes had phoned Bruce about this.

I'm a little confused about what Baba says because Agnes was present at my brother's house during the time the story was related. So, I ask Baba if he means Jane, and he pauses for a few seconds and says: "Yes, Jane phoned your brother."

Given the FBI call that Jane made following 9/11 concerning me, and in the light of some of the other things Jane did in relation to me, I begin to think about the possibility that Jane might have passed on the story to Bruce based on what she believed was going on between Lara and myself. I hope this is not true, but I don't know.

We change the subject and begin to talk about the possibility of Baba getting married. Lara jokes, looking over at me, and says: "You haven't been loved until you have been loved by a Sufi", and we all laugh.

Baba mentions the name of Lorna, Bruce's daughter, as a possibility that someone had suggested to Baba. I inquire about how such an idea arose. Baba says a person whom we (Lara and I) don't know introduced the idea.

The phone rings and Momina answers. She engages in conversation with the person on the other end of the line. She is speaking in Urdu and, after a time, seems frustrated with how the conversation is going.

She tells Baba Sima is on the phone. Momina adds some further comments in Urdu.

Baba thinks for a moment and, then, beckons for the phone and begins to speak with Sima, my former wife. First, he talks with her in Urdu, and, then eventually, he begins speaking in English.

He becomes quite angry with Sima. He begins yelling at her and going up one side of her and down the other.

Among other things, he mentions something about an amount of a thousand dollars that he had given her in order to start a business together, and, yet, she has done nothing with the money. He criticizes her for making promises with respect to all the government officials she knows, but when push comes to shove, she seems to not know any of the people she claims to know and whom she had promised to approach about the business idea that Baba has.

During another portion of the discussion, although I cannot hear what Sima is saying, the interchange seems to have something to do -- based on Baba's responses -- with bringing sweets for fatiha the next evening, and, as well, she appears to be inquiring about whether there is anything she can bring for the family. Baba gets very annoyed with her.

Baba tells Sima he is very upset with her, and he indicates she should stay home. She should not come to fatiha this week.

Finally, after some 10-15 minutes of this same tenor of conversation, Baba hangs up. He says he hates getting angry at his mureeds, but, sometimes, this is the only way they learn.

Baba is very upset by what has transpired. I have never seen Baba this agitated by anything.

Afterwards, Baba says something with respect to Sima that both surprises and shocks me. He informs me that the only time Sima ever phoned me when we were married -- but during the period of time when I was staying with Baba, and before I began sleeping on the floor of Sima's office -- was when she wanted sex.

I don't say anything in response to this. I really don't know what Sima's motivations were at the time, but I find the comment disturbing.

Baba proceeds to talk about some problems that have arisen with respect to another mureed of his - Barry. Baba says he is having to keep both Barry's e-mails and his own responses because, on a number of occasions, Baba has found it necessary to return to previous e-mails and point out to Barry what actually had been said by Baba and what actually had been said by Barry.

Baba informs Lara that one of the many things he appreciates about me is how Baba never has to keep my e-mails since I always remember what Baba has said, and, then, I act accordingly. Baba never has to worry about me not remembering what Baba has told me, and he does not have to remind me about information or instructions that have been given by Baba.

Later, Lara wants to call her house in Brimley and see if her grown children are doing okay or if there have been any problems. We are invited to use the phone in the house, but Lara declines and says she has a few errands to run as well, so, she will use her phone card while she is looking after her other tasks.

When we return, Baba is at the top of the stairs leading down to the entrance to the house. As Lara and I make our way into the house, Baba gives me an envelope and whispers something to the effect of using this to help defray some of our traveling expenses.

I feel uncomfortable. However, Baba insists.

When I retire for the night, I look in the envelope. There is about \$100.00 in the envelope.

§

November 14, 2002

The next day Baba talks to me about certain problems within the silsilah. He tells me that because of my role within the silsilah, he never keeps anything from me, and, therefore, he feels there should be certain things about which I need to be apprised.

Among the information I am given is that Khalil -- a mureed whom I have known for quite some time and who, at one time, had been a neighbor of Baba's, -- has been trying to get at his (i.e., Khalil's)

daughter in a sexual manner. Things are so precarious, apparently, that someone has to be with the daughter, Ra'bia, all the time in order to forestall any problems.

Fortunately, nothing has happened yet. Baba has talked to both the father and the daughter and, hopefully, things are under control, but the situation needs to be monitored on an on-going basis.

In addition the younger boy in the family, 'Uthman, has run into problems with the health class at school. Some of the things that are being taught in the school seem, to Baba, to be inappropriate and 'Uthman, apparently, has been getting some strange ideas concerning sexuality as a result of his exposure to such material.

Now, 'Uthman is being home-schooled in order to avoid such difficulties. In fact, all of the children in the silsilah who live in the surrounding two or three states are being home- schooled.

§

Fatiha is held in the evening. Quite a few people attend.

Baba gives a talk after we eat the meal over which fatiha has been said. As usual, everyone is mesmerized by Baba's erudition -- in several languages -- as well as his deep understanding of the Sufi path.

Hearing Baba again after all these years is extremely enjoyable. I envy the local members of the silsilah who have such easy access to this kind of knowledge.

After fatiha, a meal, the talk, and a break, Baba returns and begins to talk about the virtual city with which he and quite a few silsilah members are affiliated. He outlines some of his ideas for the virtual chat city and discusses some of the current developments.

He begins talking to Lara about the project. When she expresses interest, he begins to show her how to sign up, using his laptop computer.

Currently, I don't have an Internet connection. He says I can join up later, when I go on line again.

Once Lara has signed up and Baba is showing Lara the ropes concerning the virtual community, someone whom Baba knows – one

of his mureeds from another state – begins an on-line chat with Lara, not realizing that Baba is present and showing Lara what to do, as well as where to go within the virtual community.

Baba chats with the mureed without revealing his own identity ... letting the other person believe he is chatting with Lara. Baba tells us that he is going to teach the mureed a lesson.

At a certain point during the conversation, the mureed lies and says he is not married and is in his teens. Obviously, the person is hitting on 'Lara' -- at least he is hitting on the virtual nick name that Lara has chosen for identification within the virtual community ... but, in reality, the mureed is actually talking to Baba.

In the non-virtual world, the mureed is married, with several children, and is in his mid-to-late thirties. Baba toys with him a bit before reeling him in and confronting him with his "bratty" behavior.

Afterwards, Baba tells me who the individual is. I recognize the name and realize I have met him before, on a number of occasions, when he was a college student who visited Baba from time to time.

A little bit later on, Baba says he has some thoughts about how to use my 'expertise' in education in conjunction with the virtual community in which many people in the silsilah -- both in the US and Canada, as well as a few other countries -- are now members. Baba says the virtual community medium is really a very good and inexpensive way of holding meetings, discussions, and helping people develop not just a sense of community, but, as well, a sense of responsibility.

§

November 15, 2002

At some point, during the afternoon, mention is made of Osama bin Laden. Baba indicates he knows where he is hiding, and when I look over at 'Umar -- who has been listening in on the conversation -- he gives a look as if to say 'that's right'.

I don't know what to make of the statement and neither does Lara. The conversation quickly turns to other non-political issues, but before

it does, Baba indicates how ‘those’ kind of Muslims are giving Islam such a bad name. He informs both Lara and me that we need to help teach people in North America how the Sufis are not ‘those’ sort of Muslims.

Later on in the evening we are sitting around having tea. Baba has a Paan fixed for me, and offers it to me, saying, just do it this once, and I will never ask you again.

I do as asked. My opinion about this Pakistani/Indian tradition hasn’t changed over the years. I didn’t like Paan years ago, and I don’t like it now, but I try to be polite, and as I wait for an opportunity to dispose of it -- which doesn’t happen for awhile -- I keep the Betel Leaf, areca nut, and lime paste concoction in my mouth ... Sufi discipline in action no doubt.

In the evening, Baba, who has a great voice and loves to do some of the older North American songs of the ‘60s, begins singing. At a certain point, he is walking about the room singing various selections. He stops in front of Lara - singing ‘You’re a walking, talking, living doll’, before moving on. At some juncture, Baba is chatting on-line with one of the members of the virtual community. The person is from Europe – Switzerland, Denmark, Belgium, or some relatively small country there.

The individual is a young, college student who, among other things, is very interested in trains ... life size ones. Apparently, his knowledge of trains is vast.

Earlier, when Baba had been talking about the virtual community, he mentions a person who is obsessed with trains and is driving Baba crazy with all the incessant chatting about train technology. Baba complains to us, at some length, about the youngster, but, nevertheless, Baba tries to be nice to the youth and accommodate his obsession, to some degree, whenever Baba encounters the young man within the virtual community in which they are both members.

November 16, 2002

We leave today. Baba has Momina prepare all kinds of things for the trip home.

We cut the trip into two portions. We travel on the first day until an early winter storm – nearly a blizzard -- prevents us from going any further.

The past week has been one of the best weeks that Lara and I have had together. We have thoroughly enjoyed the trip and our time with one another.

There were one or two rough spots during the trip that lasted for just short periods of time. However, on the whole, we have been very happy with each other throughout this time away from Bamford/Brimley and its many problems.

The journey has encompassed a lot of firsts for Lara ... from: driving long distances through heavy, multi-lane traffic, to: meeting new people, sleeping in the houses of strangers, and sampling a few exotic foods – all of which she had phobias, of sorts, toward prior to the trip. I am happy for her; I am happy for us, and I am most happy about Lara, finally, meeting Baba and seeming to like him so much and feeling comfortable with him.

§

November 20, 2002

A few days after our return from visiting Baba, Lara asks me to write a poem – just for her. While she is away at work, I set about beginning to select the words and rhythms that will be used to clothe my thoughts and feelings concerning Lara. By mid-afternoon, the offering is as complete as it is going to be.

I have written the poem with a pen that Lara bought for me to use when writing poetry. I convert the handwriting into typed form on the computer and, then, print out a copy.

§

The poem is called 'Invitation':

Come be with me in our dream of waking life
– a state from which we arise when our day
in the sun is done, and we travel to eternity.
Come be with me by my side and let Peace
cover us like a comforter on a cold, winter's night
with ranging wind ... as we snuggle deep within.
Come be with me, you who walks in bright beauty
like newly opened flowers whose fragrance takes away
life's aches and pain, helping me to be whole again.
Come be with me and create gardens beneath which
rivers flow from, and to, and through one Divinity
that gives us a Way to be free servants.
Come be with me, a joyful locus of blessings bestowed
by the Friend who witnessed my loneliness and made
a mate with whom to share life's peaks and valleys.
Come be with me, mystery woman, for I long to know
the treasures that are buried in your essence
by the One Who fashioned you with integrity.
Come be with me, like music that fills my being
with love for your presence, gratitude for your
nearness, and courage to hear what has not, yet, played.
Come be with me, tenderly ... an emissary
of God's great compassion that dissolves
difficulty by shining upon every shadow.
Come be with me since sadly does my memory
Reflect your smile and glowing eyes that hide
a story of longing for love and sincerity.

Come be with me in the Sea of Return
and the waters of pre-eternity, when we
first met and were set to be together forever more.

§

I leave the poem on the desk where Lara works. When she comes home, she finds the poem waiting for her ... as I am.

She reads it again and again. The expression on her face tells me everything. Words aren't necessary. When she is done, she hugs me.

§

November 21, 2002

After returning from our trip visiting Baba, Lara has me help her to write a letter for her daughter, Stephanie, who is in her early twenties. Ron moved out of the house in Brimley while Lara and I were away on our visit. Stephanie has written a note to her mother expressing upset over what is happening between Lara and Ron.

§

Dear Stephanie,

I do understand that what is going on between Ron and me is hard for you -- as well as for Tyler and Hope -- to try to deal with. I also realize almost no one, including you three, truly understands the nature of the problem ... a problem that has arisen over many years and has gotten progressively worse, not better, with the passage of time.

Perhaps, the best way for me to try to explain to you the nature of the dilemma is to use the idea of an allergy ... a severe allergy that is capable of leading to considerable disability whenever a person who has this condition comes in contact with a substance that gives rise to

the reaction. For instance, consider someone who was not born with an allergy to peanuts but due to some coincidence of circumstances begins to develop an intolerance ... not just in relation to the consumption of anything containing peanut products or oils, but breaks out with, say, a bad case of hives -- maybe, even going into anaphylactic shock -- when there is any contact, whatsoever, with peanuts or peanut products.

What the precise set of circumstances were that, first, gave rise to such a malady might, or might not, be known, but in a way, none of this matters. For, once the problem arises, there really is no way to solve the problem other than to stay away from the substance -- in this case, peanuts -- which helps generate the difficulty.

One cannot tell the person with the allergy that if that individual will just try harder, then surely, the allergy will disappear. Nor, can one tell the person with this problem that if he or she will just learn to love peanuts more, then the allergy will go away. Moreover, even if one comes to the understanding that the peanut can't help being what a peanut is and, therefore, forgives the peanut for being the way it is, this won't make the allergy disappear either.

To people who do not suffer from a severe allergy to peanuts, the idea that someone could develop an extreme set of reactions to something like a peanut, seems rather ludicrous, and, yet, nonetheless, such things do happen every day and people sometimes even die from such an affliction. Furthermore, just as the one who suffers from such a problem might not want to blame the peanut for being a peanut, the peanut really has no justification for trying to blame the person who has developed an intolerance for peanuts ... this is just the way things are, and wishing it to be otherwise is just that -- wishing.

I have acquired a severe physical, emotional, and psychological allergy with respect to Ron. Even being in his presence, or hearing his voice, causes me tremendous difficulty.

Among other things, when I have any contact with Ron, my entire being begins to shut down. During these times of contact, I not only lose most of my psychological and emotional energy, focus, initiative, interest, and capacity to enjoy life, but my body immediately feels the very painful impact of having to live with the constant tension, unease, anxiety, uncertainty, and fear that surrounds even the possibility of

contact with Ron ... just as a person who has an allergy with respect to peanuts would be in great distress if she or he had to live on a peanut farm or work in a peanut factory, and, therefore, had to live constantly with the fear of coming in contact with the substance that helps bring on a severe, totally debilitating, allergic reaction.

You have said the house in Brimley is my home and Ron is not angry with me ... that he just wants to discuss his moving arrangements with me. But, what none of you seems to understand is I cannot risk having any further contact with Ron -- even by phone -- due to the severity of my allergic response to such contact.

Interacting with him completely destabilizes me and drains me of life. In addition, I become very depressed and angry about feeling so lousy, and especially about being forced into circumstances where I will have to endure this terrible allergic reaction on either an intermittent or a continuing basis.

I have been trying to get this point across to Ron for years now, but, apparently, with little success. For, rather than leaving me alone, he just keeps pressuring me to be other than I am, and I cannot do this. Lord knows, I have tried and tried and tried -- for twenty-four years -- to do this despite the presence of my allergic reaction to him, and things are much worse now, in this respect, than they have ever been.

This is not about love, forgiveness, letting the past go, or Ron changing, this is about me trying to survive emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually, given that I have developed an allergic intolerance to interaction, of any kind, with Ron. I do not blame Ron for being Ron, and I hope he will not blame me for being me.

I cannot live according to his expectations, wishes, or desires concerning me. I have to live in accordance with my needs for a healthy life based on who I am, not on how he would like me to be or how he, or anyone else, feels I ought to be.

I want Ron to be happy, but I want him to move on with his life, completely independently of me. I, too, would like to be happy, and I have come to the realization that I cannot do this with Ron, nor, in view of my severe allergy concerning him, can Ron be happy with me.

We have become like poison to one another, and, I suppose, Ron has developed his own allergic condition concerning me. The only difference between us is I seem to understand better than he does, at least for the moment, that one cannot make such allergies go away simply by trying to force them to do so. Ron might be prepared to push on with things despite the presence of these allergic conditions, but I am not ... in fact, I cannot, and I hope he, along with all of you, would respect my decision on this.

I have acquired an allergic reaction to his presence and I can no more apologize for the existence of this condition than a person who has developed intolerance toward peanuts can apologize to peanuts for the existence of such a condition of intolerance. The only treatment is to avoid all contact.

I will consider the possibility of moving back home when I can be guaranteed -- and I mean guaranteed, without any exceptions whatsoever -- there will be no contact with Ron -- whether in person, by letter, via the phone and phone messages, or through third parties. This is something that neither you, Stephanie, nor Tyler and Hope can ensure ... only Ron can do this, and, unfortunately, Ron has not been very good at keeping his word to me, since he often has promised many things but few, if any, of these promises have been backed up with consistent, reliable deeds ... and such a foreboding sense of inconsistency and unreliability concerning him have, now, been blended into my allergic response toward him.

I hope you understand the foregoing. If you do, you will know that if I am avoiding contact with the house, this has nothing to do with you, Tyler, or Hope because I love you all. Rather, this is because I simply cannot risk having contact with Ron.

I need to reclaim my life, and I need for Ron to not interfere with my doing this. I will be able to establish better, normal relationships with you, Tyler, and Hope, when I can be sure that the allergy-inducing conditions spoken of previously will not reappear in my life for the foreseeable future, or until I am ready for things to be otherwise -- but never again as a married couple.

Stephanie, I have written this letter to you because of your note to me, but you can, if you wish, share my words with Tyler, Hope, and even Ron.

Love,
Mom

§

November 25, 2002

Bruce invites Lara and me to attend the family, Thanksgiving gathering at his house. He, as usual, will get a kosher chicken for me to have while others have their turkey.

Lara is also supposed to cook up a Thanksgiving spread at her house. The timing will be a little tricky but she feels she can attend both meals.

§

November 28, 2002

My niece comes for a visit. At some point during the conversation, while Lara is in the kitchen fixing something to eat, I tell Lorna that Lara and I are married.

Lorna is a very devoted Christian. I don't want her to feel something immoral is going on as a result of her kindnesses to me.

She seems genuinely happy about the news. I ask her to keep the information to herself, and although she is a little uncertain about why I am asking her to do this, nonetheless, she agrees to keep the secret.

I remember Baba's dream -- especially, the part about Lorna being someone who can be trusted with secrets. This also has been part of the motivation underlying my telling her about some of what is going on.

Later, after Lorna leaves, Lara tells me she has overheard part of my conversation with Lorna. Lara is upset I have said anything.

I respond by asking several questions: Why is it okay for Lara to tell Ron, Jane and her counselor about our relationship, but, I have no right to tell anyone -- even though there is a very good reason for doing so? Is there anything untrue in what I have said?

Lara doesn't say anything. Clearly, however, neither my response nor what I have done sit well with her.

§

November 29, 2002

Lara has been staying with me. She gets a call from Tyler, her son, saying Stephanie's boyfriend has gotten into a drunken fight with Stephanie. Apparently, the boyfriend had tried to strangle her to such an extent that she couldn't breathe for a bit, or something of a similar nature.

Tyler had applied a heavy flashlight on the head of the young man to induce him to get off his sister. The police were called and so was Ron.

When Lara returns from her home in Brimley, she is upset and worried. Stephanie and the boy have been staying in her house, and now that Ron has moved out, there really is no one there, other than Tyler and Hope who live in the adjacent apartment, to keep an eye on things. None of the individuals living there are necessarily all that responsible even they are, nominally at least, adults. Lara is uncertain about what to do.

I encourage her to contact Baba and ask his advice. She is reluctant to do so but, finally, relents.

After some discussion, Baba indicates that, perhaps, Lara should move back to her house to bring some stability to what is transpiring in Brimley. Lara decides to accept Baba's advice.

She informs me she will return only long enough to sort things out and bring a degree of order to the situation involving her daughter and the young man with whom she is involved. When the dust settles with respect to her daughter, she is intending to return to be with me, but she doesn't know how long this will be – a day, a week, or longer.

§

December 3, 2002

Lara calls to bring me up to date on what is happening at her house. She is calling just before she goes to sleep for the night.

§

December 14, 2002

A familiar pattern is beginning to repeat itself. Although Lara usually checks in on a daily basis late in the evening just to say good night and tell me she misses me, I actually see little of her ... except on the day we hold fatiha.

For whatever reason, she seems preoccupied. I don't press her on anything but just believe the situation with her daughter might be a large part of her preoccupation.

§

December 15, 2002

Recently, I have re-acquired a phone line and, therefore, I have access to the internet. I visit the on-line virtual community that Baba has established. On a message board within the community, Baba has posted a statement of purpose, of sorts, for the future of the virtual group:

Date: Sun, Dec 15 th, 2002. 05:33:08 am.

From: Moncanada (Baba's on line moniker)

Subject: The Vision! The Dream! Agenda!

To those who ask "What is your dream, your vision, your agenda ?" It is not my way to impose on you my Vision, my dream and my agenda, because I am your servant! My Vision, dream and agenda is to serve you towards excellence! The fun and joy is in Our Vision, Our Dream and Our Agenda my good friends! A one sided success is in fact a failure! True success is when we succeed together! Our success is the goal! Will it happen? The answer in truth is, "Only if we all want it to

happen!" So come aboard one and all, and let us together, hand in hand, make this happen! Let us not wage a battle of the egos! Let us not be small and quarrel over yours and mine! Let us forgive each other's faults and mistakes! Let us unite and go forth into the light and brightness of sweet success!

§

December 19, 2002

During a late night phone call, Lara intimates she has been spending a lot of time in the virtual community that Baba is creating. I have spent a little bit of time in the same virtual community, but, I am not enjoying the experience since many of the people I meet there seem to be keeping their distance from me ... as if they don't trust me.

Whatever the cause, I know I don't feel a part of the virtual community. I feel very alienated, but Lara seems to be enjoying the experience a great deal.

§

December 24, 2002

Lara tells me she is thinking about going and visiting Baba on her Christmas vacation. The tenor of the conversation is such that she makes it clear she wishes to go alone.

She talks, in an idle sort of way, about how great it would be to move down in the vicinity of Baba. However, once again, she seems to be intimating, without coming right out and saying it, that if she were to make such a move, then, she would like to do so on her own.

I indicate to her I don't understand. She is not very forthcoming with an explanation.

She asks me, somewhat mysteriously, if someone loves someone, then shouldn't one be prepared to make sacrifices. I say a few things that seem to bother Lara.

She tells me I should not be so ready to argue with the Beloved. She says I need to accept what the Beloved wishes.

When I protest I am not trying to argue with the Beloved, she says I am. Her tone makes it readily evident that the subject is not open to discussion.

I am truly perplexed with this development. I am getting the distinct feeling that Lara is in love with Baba ... not just in the sense of the love that a mureed has for a shaykh but in the sense that a woman has for a man.

§

December 31, 2002

Earlier in the week, Lara and I arranged to say fatiha on New Year's Eve. Lara has not shown up.

I call, and she says she thought we weren't going to do it. She tells me she didn't get anything to cook, and I tell her that doesn't matter, just pick up some chocolate, or something, from a store and, then, come as soon as she can.

I tell her she doesn't have to stay around after fatiha if she doesn't want to. However she should attend fatiha.

She seems resistant to the idea of coming to fatiha. When she does show up, she appears to be in an extremely harried, preoccupied, trance-like state.

Lara seems rather rude and ill-mannered in some of the things she does and says while she is there ... seeming to show neither fatiha nor me much respect. I tell her so, and I indicate I am not at all happy with how she is acting ... I spend a few minutes doing this.

She is not interested in what I have to say. She just wants fatiha to be said and, then she has to go because she has a lot to do.

After fatiha is completed, she tells me she won't be coming to fatiha for a period of time because she is going somewhere. I already know, based on conversations with Baba, that she is going to stay with him for several weeks, but her evasiveness about the whole issue bothers me.

The tension, stress, and hostility she is exhibiting toward me seem to be inexplicably high. I am very troubled by this turn of events.

After she leaves, I phone Baba and tell him what happened at fatiha. I tell him I think Lara is on her way down to see him, and I further add she seems to be thinking about Baba in an unmistakably romantic manner.

Baba tells me he has absolutely no intentions of marrying anyone. He says he will talk with Lara about the situation at some point after she arrives at his home.