

Journal of a Sufi Odyssey:
A True Novel
Book III

by

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There are seven kinds of people ... within and without.

There are those who know and know that they know. These rare dimensions of the Self are spiritually realized, and one should seek them out and learn from them.

There are those who know but don't know that they know. These individuals are asleep and should be woken up.

There are those who don't know and know that they don't know. These souls are able to learn and should be taught.

There are those who don't know and don't know that they don't know. These are the ignorant ones, and they should be avoided.

There are those who know that they don't know but who, for a variety of reasons, attempt to induce seekers of truth to believe that the former know what they do not. These are the charlatans ... and there are many of them amongst us.

There are those people who even when they are shown the truth cannot bear to live with the implications of what has been disclosed and choose to live their lives in various states of denial that become the doorways through which further evil enters into their lives.

There are those who seek the truth and try, to the best of their ability, to act judiciously with respect to what has been realized no matter where such truth might take them ... and who, therefore, also are prepared to accept the possibility that truth might be other - in part or in whole -- than what they believe it to be and, therefore, make accommodation for this possibility through their thought and behavior.

Late November 2002

Since my visit with Baba in early November of 2002 – when Lara and I both made the journey together – many people in the silsilah (at least those with computers and an Internet Service Provider) seem to be spending a great deal of time in the virtual community that Baba has created. Apparently, Baba believes the Internet has great potential as a relatively cost-effective medium for spanning the distances that tend to keep his mureeds separate from one another and from him. In addition, he seems to feel that the on-line community that is being constructed (and this community is only one among many within a much larger virtual city) also provides an opportunity to help his mureeds learn about responsibility, duty, camaraderie, friendship, co-operation, and community.

Almost from the beginning, I have felt somewhat out of sorts with the idea. Much of this sense of discomfort is because of my life circumstances and its ‘up-in-the-air’ quality that colors and shapes much of what I can and can’t do – including having consistent access to the Internet. Moreover, even when I do have access, the connection is dial-up and this speed of transmission is not really conducive to participating in a virtual community that is fairly high-tech and, therefore, moves at a pace with which I find it difficult to keep up except, in many ways, as merely an observer of what is taking place.

However, in addition, I have not enjoyed my experiences in the virtual community. Perhaps, my imagination is overly active, but I seem to sense a palpable divide between myself and many of the individuals with whom I am trying to interact within the on-line community ... almost as if they were keeping their distance from me or limiting the way in which they interacted with me.

As a result, I don’t feel very much part of the community. Nonetheless, I do try to participate, in my own way, from time to time.

Following the trip of November, Baba has asked various people within the silsilah, including me, to draft a constitution of some kind to serve as a set of guidelines to govern some of what transpires in the virtual community that is being developed. After submitting my offering with respect to a proposed constitution, I engage Baba in an on-line discussion at his ‘house’ within the virtual village.

§

Tariq [95]: Good morning, Baba

Baba has joined the group

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: A very good morning

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: Just a few moments please and I will be with you [Block Leader] Baba [4066]: Sorry, I was delayed

Tariq [95]: Wasn't sure you were with us in this world. I hope you don't mind my just dropping in for a few moments.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: It's always a pleasure to see you my good friend

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: I was away to Pennsylvania Friday and Saturday

Tariq [95]: I think you have been visiting elsewhere -- a few of us groupies have been hanging around for a glimpse of you, but alas.LOL

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: We returned late Sunday night.

Tariq [95]: How are the people in Pennsylvania?

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: and then I had the ones from Pennsylvania here for the 26th occasion

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: They have stayed the night, so only now I am able to visit here in the virtual community lol

Tariq [95]: It seems no matter where you go, we won't leave you alone. LOL!

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: LOL, but it's always a pleasure

Tariq [95]: I hope that I didn't go overboard with Sasha the other day ... I was trying to engage him but, at the same time, give some food for thought, perhaps however, I over-did it. If so, I apologize.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: Today was a big farewell party at the Main City Plaza

Tariq [95]: What was the farewell for?

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: I missed it, but I got the info

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: The colony leader Alex stepped down and appointed one of his deputies as the new CL

Tariq [95]: Any particular reason for the step down?

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: I knew Alex. He is from France

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: He is supposed to have said that since he is also in the City Council that takes up much of his time, he just cannot have two responsibilities

Tariq [95]: Well, if a person is active in this, I could understand that.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: It's amazing. These people just do their real life jobs in order to afford the up-keep of their computers to be regular in this on-line community

Tariq [95]: I guess it is a sad commentary that virtual space has more appeal than real space.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: That's because real space has become so full of problems LOL, I guess

Tariq [95]: I fear that we are moving the problems of real space to virtual space -- I guess the common denominator is the human being.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: I met a gentleman the other day who said that all his good friends are only here in this virtual city and after work he spends all his time with them, though they have never met physically

Tariq [95]: Maybe, it is the semi-anonymity of the cyber medium that people find it easier to interact here than in the physical world.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: Yes, I guess so

Tariq [95]: I didn't read any of the other drafts of the Constitution. In the meeting of a week ago, you had just requested Lara to review them before passing them on, and that is what she did.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: Yes, she did pass them on, and I did not yet get a chance to review

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: Tomorrow I will have a look at them

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: Tariq has to be kept in harness LOL

Tariq [95]: Lara has had a few dreams, and I have told her that although she can tell me, if she wants, I wouldn't try to interpret them - feeling this would best be left to you now.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] : before he gets ready to march on to the Capitol

House LOL

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: and I have to pull him back LOL

Tariq [95]: One dream, in particular, was disturbing to her and she is reluctant to tell you about it because of its nature.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: I say this while I read his draft ROFL

Tariq [95]: As for the restraints on me, it is undoubtedly a very good idea. The world needs to be protected from me.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: Ha, Ha

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: No, that's not it

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: The only truth is that I have it in my nature to be rather passive

Tariq [95]: I think it is called discretion and wisdom MON, rather than the brashness and ignorance of activity of some of us. LOL

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: If she wants, then she can 'whisper' (a form of communication that cannot be seen by others) to me here and tell me her dreams, and the one she shies away from may be the most important one

Tariq [95]: She is asleep at the present time, but, I have tried to tell her that dreams are rarely to be taken literally and have symbolic meaning.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: You could, if you want, tell me the one she is worried about

Tariq whispers to Baba: I will write it here because I don't think this will be part of the public record. OK?

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: Yes this is best

Tariq whispered to Baba: She said that in her dream she was in a rather large room with some unidentifiable furniture in it, and the room is lowly lit. She was lying on something -- perhaps a bed -- and she is engaged in a passionate bout of kissing with you, and, then she

reaches down and feels my presence -- in a sexual manner. You get up and have to go somewhere, and she and I continue on with sexual activity, until she hears your footsteps and, then, she says we can't do this anymore because you were coming back.

Tariq whispers to Baba: That was the end of her dream.

Tariq whispers to Baba: Lara has been quite concerned for you, and she was sad you seemed to be in a lonely mood when you returned from Pennsylvania.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: All the dream means is that, now, since she is in my care, she is receiving Grace and Blessings

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: Passion here means that she is spiritually cooperating and is in a rapture

Tariq whispers to Baba: Before she went down, she wasn't sure you were real! But, now, that she has met you, she knows you are real, but it all seems like a dream to her sometimes. She really is thankful for having met you and the other people in Maryland and Pennsylvania. She had nearly given up hope that there were people like you who were alive in the world.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: and since her Shaikh is not a majzoob (spiritually intoxicated), the spiritual rapture is gradually being absorbed

Tariq whispers to Baba: There is no doubt that she loves you.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: Her spiritual build up and success is a dream I have for her, which God Willing will happen

Tariq whispers to Baba : I had a sense that what you have said about her dream was the case, but I felt it should come from you, not me. I wouldn't have been able to give the details in the way you have ... just the general idea.

Tariq whispers to Baba: I pray your dream for her comes true for her, God willing. She is a wonderful person ... although she does not feel this to be so.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: I do understand that usually it takes time for a mureed to realize the true divine love the Murshid has for him or her, but in her case it is surprising that she is picking up real fast

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: I am sure that in time, or maybe soon for her, she will learn and feel to trust

Tariq whispers to Baba: Well, as you said when we were in Virginia, that you have been working on her through my manifestation for quite some time ... and although I often feel I am just in the way, I do believe she has a good intuitive feel for these issues ... better than me in a lot of ways.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: It is very important for the mureed to realize that our love is unconditional and that our lives are meant for them

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: ... which is a fact too

Tariq whispers to Baba: Trust has always been a big problem with her ... for many, very unfortunate reasons -- almost everyone has betrayed her trust in one way or another, and I am amazed she has come through it as well as she seems to have done.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: It is true that from the moment I met her, I have felt her to be very pure and clean

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: Yes, she is strong

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: Though she thinks otherwise, the truth is that she is very innocent, pure and clean

Tariq whispers to Baba: I have encouraged her to trust you, and I feel she does, but she takes awhile to settle down. I also have tried to emphasize the fact that she is a very good, innocent soul who has had to deal with a lot in life, and, yet, she has never broken her essential faith with God ... at least this is what I feel.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: Once she realizes that all her thoughts and inclinations actually are for proximity to the ONE and ONLY she will then start feeling the way she should and stop feeling depressed

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: She now needs a good time, meaning much fun. She needs to do the things she has always wanted to do as a child

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: She was always led to do things she herself never actually liked

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: Not even a day has she been able to spend exactly as her spirit wanted

Tariq whispers to Baba: Well, I will do my best to try to meet her needs. I just want her to be free, happy, and on the train ... no not Sasha's (a community participant who loves old trains) ... yours.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: LOL

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: It is true my good friend, that I feel the pain she has gone through, and I think it's all for a reason

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: Now when the time comes, she will understand the pains and sufferings of others very clearly

Tariq whispers to Baba: I've tried to get that idea across to her ... I've told her -- and I don't know where I heard this, perhaps from you - - that sometimes the only way that certain blessings can come to us is through adversity ... not through prayers and the like, as important as these may be.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: Mureeds come to visit me and, then, go back to their homes, and yes though I love them all, nonetheless, it's the truth that I have never missed anyone as much as I missed her when she left. I felt like a father who sees his beloved child leave

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: Only on two occasions I have wept like a child. One was when Habib's mother left this world, and the second is when you and she left that day

Tariq whispers to Baba : You have called me a warrior with respect to her situation, but, really, I believe it was you who kept the willingness to do battle alive in me, and the feeling that I had is very difficult to explain, but it was for her ... her inner well being that kept me going ... not marriage per say

[Block Leader] Baba [4066] whispers: I felt that I have given you my most precious daughter and given her my most beloved son, friend

Angel2647 has joined the group

Genie: Angel2647 Welcome! Greetings! Please feel at home. This home is always open to you Angel2647.

Tariq whispers to Baba: Baba, with your permission, I should go now.

[Block Leader] Baba [4066]: Greetings Angel

Angel2647 [10]: hi how are you doing?

Tariq [95]: Greetings Angel

Angel2647 [10]: hi

Tariq [95] – no longer whispering -- Baba, with your permission, I should leave now.

§

December 31, 2002

Lara has left on a trip to see Baba. We did not part company on the best of terms.

I was very upset with how she had behaved with respect to both the fatiha we had earlier in the evening, as well as in conjunction with me. I found her behavior and attitude rather inexplicable ... but whatever the underlying causes might be, I felt she was carrying on in an inappropriate fashion.

Maybe my perception of what appeared to be taking place that evening was colored by my feeling hurt that she was going to see Baba without me and that everything connected to the trip was done in such a seemingly secretive manner. On the other hand, I felt I had done a reasonably good job of keeping my disquiet concerning her journey to myself and interacting with her in a fair manner.

Later in the evening – after Lara has left my apartment and after Lara has left on her trip to see Baba – I sit down and write an e-mail to Baba.

§

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

First of all, let me say up front -- so you don't have to say 'I told you so' -- that, yes, you indicated to me, on several occasions, to get out of the situation with Lara. However, there was a method to my madness because I felt, God willing, the best chance she had of extricating her from her situation was, by the Grace of Allah, through your barakah joined together with my blood and guts.

I believe that she exhibited far too many problematic behaviors in relation to me for there really to be love within her for me. My mind and my heart kept telling me this, and you kept telling me this, but, aside from the fact that I loved her, I hung around for three reasons:

(1) to help her get free from Ron (and in this regard she needed constant -- and I do mean constant -- support, encouragement, counseling, protection, empathy, love, assistance, and focus, for this, which, by the Grace of Allah came through you, to be accomplished). I just happened to be the poor fool who was first off the landing craft onto the shores near the Beach at this current spiritual version of the D-day invasion of Normandy. I got pounded by heavy artillery from every direction ... and I didn't just get pounded for a few hours as occurred with the actual D-Day. I got pounded relentlessly for several years. It has not been a pretty sight ... lots of blood and guts, mostly mine, strewn across the beach head in Bamford/Brimley.

No one but Allah, me, and, most likely, you, know what I went through trying to help her. I don't believe she has even the foggiest conception of what I went through for her. She supposes she does, but, in truth, she doesn't because she is still too caught up in denial about all too many things, as well as the fact she is still trying to justify herself in far too many ways that are completely indefensible -- at least as far as I am concerned, and, finally, she really has no substantial awareness of the emotional damage she has done in relation to me.

I don't want public recognition for this and I don't want medals of bravery or a purple heart or a reward. My feeling is more like that of soldiers who risk their bodies, souls, careers, and hearts to serve their country and when they come home, after the war is over, they are treated like dirt by the very people whom the soldiers sought to

protect and defend. What I feel is a deep, deep sense of existential malaise concerning the whole situation.

I am very, very happy God gave me the opportunity to be there for someone in this way. I am happy that through God's help, in the form of your help, I was given the requisite strength, tenacity, persistence, commitment, empathy, love, and courage to stand my ground and bite the bullet. But, it might be quite some time before my wounds heal ... if ever.

God willing, in time, I will get over this, and the issue is not about forgiving Lara for what she has done, for, by the Grace of Allah, I do forgive her and, God willing, I shall continue to pray for her spiritual success and be her well-wisher, but what she has done to me is very comparable to what people in Canada and elsewhere did to you. However, I don't see you hanging out with those people, even though you have forgiven them, and even though you, still, are their well-wishers. I am sure many of those people still believe they were your friend and they loved you ... despite their constant betrayal, lying, manipulations, abuses, cruelty, attempts at exploitation, and so on.

God willing, Lara's relationship with Ron seems to be largely over - at least I, along with you, hope this is the case. However, I do not think it is coincidental that her bout of conscience concerning me and our relationship took place at the same time as she became convinced she was finally getting free of Ron. The timing is just too perfect and convenient.

Apparently, I have served my purpose. Consequently, I am no longer needed and can be dispensed with.

(2) The next objective in relation to Lara was to try to keep open the opportunity for spirituality until the cavalry could arrive. Unfortunately, by the time the cavalry arrived, C-Troop had pretty much been massacred by the local natives.

However, now, by the Grace of Allah, you are there. She is in the best of hands, and, so, the second objective has, God willing, been met.

She believes I am jealous because she now looks to you rather than me, but she tends to forget that, in part, she got to where she is because of my nisbath for you. I was the one who was constantly singing your praises (and in my estimation they are well deserved),

and I was the one who constantly was trying to nudge her in your direction so she would overcome her initial mistrust of you ... which is why I wanted her to make physical contact with you. What happened to her when she met you during our recent trip was what I hoped, God willing, would happen.

She assumes, I believe, that my anger about the situation is an expression of jealousy in relation to her deepening interest in you. In truth, my concern is really about how she just dumped me when it seemed to suit her and, then, didn't even have the decency to own up to the real reasons why she was doing what she was doing.

Instead, she hid behind the dumbest of excuses -- namely, that she had had an attack of conscience about our marital situation and, as a result, came to the conclusion that no sane, rational person would ever accept the arrangement she and I, supposedly, had. Apparently, while creating her rationalization she seems to have forgotten how she considers you to be one of the most: sane, rational, wise, and saintly people she has ever met, and, yet, you were the one who had, with the help of your shaykh, arranged for the whole marital possibility to take place.

A long time ago when I was seven-eight, I was walking with a boy I knew who lived near my aunt and uncle in Ohio. We both were walking to the place where my relatives lived (a fair walk) when someone came along and offered us a ride in his truck. I jumped in and, for whatever reason, the other boy did not, and the truck sped off leaving the other boy behind.

To this day, I regret having climbed onto the back of the truck. I should have stayed with the boy and walked with him the rest of the way even though I didn't have even the foggiest understanding of why the boy had refused the ride from people we both knew.

I've always been taught, and I have tried, as much as possible, to practice this principle -- namely, one should leave with the one who brought one to the dance, and Lara didn't do this. She just left me because she wanted to dance with someone else and was enjoying herself and was dreaming of this and that and didn't want to get tied down to any messy commitments with someone who was the only person in her life who ever stood by her and became a real friend for her.

I have no doubts you are one of the great Kings of the Mystical Ball. Therefore, I am not saying I don't want her to dance with you or I don't want her, with your assistance, to be transported as far as her spiritual capacity might, God willing, take her.

Nonetheless, one shouldn't go to a dance with someone and, then begin to act like the person who accompanied one to the dance is persona non grata or act like whatever was going on before ... well that was a mistake and I'm really not into such things at the present time and why don't you just be a nice, good little boy and run along and not make such a nuisance of yourself ... now that you have helped me, I would like you to know I just want to be friends and everything else was just a big mistake, but thank you very much for all your help ... gee, dude, I'm so appreciative of all the things and stuff, you know, that you did. I mean, like WOW.

I needed a friend, as well, all through the time that the Ron thing was going on, but she found any number of ways to justify jerking me around, betraying me, being indifferent to my situation, hanging me out to dry again and again, and using me to serve her purposes and moods. Friendship for her was: what can you do for me and don't expect me to stand by you if I am not in the mood, or if it is not in my interests to do so. By the Grace of Allah, I was her friend -- the best human friend she ever had until you.

Unfortunately, the reverse was not always true. Apparently, due to all her many problems, no one has ever bothered to teach her what friendship involved. No one can treat someone the way she did me and expect to be able to legitimately say she is a friend to such a person.

I was trying to teach her something about friendship and love through my example. However, she kept interpreting the example in terms of the colors of the lenses through which she views the world and, as a result, she saw whatever she wanted to.

She never really saw me for what I was and what I was trying to do. She just grabbed what was being offered, as someone who is drowning might do in order to save one's life - not really caring who it is that is throwing one the line or what the person who is trying to save them is all about and whether, or not, such people might need a lifeline of their own to be thrown to them.

Were there things that Lara did for me? Yes there were.

When she is in the mood, she can be a very affectionate, loving, warm, friendly, generous, kind, sensitive, empathetic, caring human being. The problem is that oftentimes when she is not in the mood, then look out -- as the comedians say ... "in-coming".

I'm glad she has you as a friend because not only will you, I am sure, be an even better friend to her than I have tried to be, but also because you come at the right time since she has completely used me up. I don't believe I have anything left to give her.

Everything I had, I gave her. Yet, seemingly, she has taken all of this away with her with not so much as a how-do-you-do that reflects any semblance of an accurate understanding concerning the quality, quantity, or cost of what she was given.

She says she has made a mistake, and she says her mistake was she entered into another relationship before finishing off the first one. In truth, this was not her mistake. The mistake was she did not even seem to know the mistake she actually was making ... which was to exploit another human being with, at times, an almost complete disregard concerning that person's feelings, needs, sensitivities, or problematic history.

How odd that someone who was the victim of such extensive abuse and dehumanization in her life should be so blind and impervious to the ways she was dehumanizing someone else through her behavior, attitudes, and treatment. I suppose one of the many horrors of such abuse is how it tends to desensitize one to what one does with respect to others ... one is just too busy just trying to survive ... physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

I suppose, in some ways, I don't really blame Lara. So many people abused, used, exploited, hurt, betrayed, damaged, controlled, and manipulated her. As a result, she might never have been in a position to enter into a healthy loving relationship with another human being. She lived the only way she knew how to live -- which mostly relied on being defensive, mistrustful, depressed, angry, passive-aggressive, and, in her own way, controlling. I just was in the wrong place at the wrong time and became the sacrifice that is necessary for the current objective to be able to have a chance, God willing, of succeeding.

Just as in war time, troops are thrown into the fray knowing they are going to get cut to pieces, so too, I'm not sure that Lara could have been extricated from her situation without blood – mostly mine – being spilled. Such is war, and there is no doubt this has been a war. No one will write about it, and no will care about it, but I know it was real, and I know I was in the jungles when and where that war was fought.

(3) The final objective was, God willing, to bring Lara to a point where she could choose for herself what she wanted to do. I believe this is the place where we now have arrived, and I believe she has made her choice. So be it.

Lara seems to have very funny ideas about friendship, love, and commitment. She appears to believe these things are matters of mood and convenience, and without any dimension of obligation or responsibility.

Some Sufi has said that love has an adab which must be observed, and obligations that must be fulfilled, and contracts that must be honored. The same is true of friendship and commitment.

Whether Lara likes it or she doesn't, there is an aspect of owing that comes with love, friendship, and commitment. We owe God gratitude for the things we have, and we owe gratitude to the loci of manifestation through which God provides us blessings.

If two people claim to love one another or claim that they are real friends, then they owe one another the truth. They owe one another respect. They owe one another decent treatment. They owe one another integrity. They owe one another trust. They owe one another our sincerity. They owe one another out support and help and a certain willingness to sacrifice ourselves for the ones we call friends or whom we claim to love.

Lara never felt she owed me any of these things. In fact, quite the opposite, she resented anything I said that even suggested there was an adab that needed to be observed, or obligations that needed to be fulfilled, or contracts that needed to be honored.

She wanted to be able to depend on my always being there for her. She deeply resented when I wanted to depend on her to be reliable, dependable and trustworthy with respect to me as well.

Out of pathology and twenty-three years of controlling, exploitive, violent abuse from Ron, she felt obligated to give Ron whatever he wanted. She claimed to love me and to be my friend, and, yet, she left me stranded physically, emotionally, financially, and spiritually again and again.

She often thought that I was trying to say she owed me money for the help I had given her. What I was saying was that what had been given to her was free, but there were costs associated with the help she was receiving for which she showed little appreciation.

Among other things, a family is built around reciprocity and everyone being prepared to help out according to his or her capacity and circumstances. You have worked hard to create that kind of family in your house, and anyone who visits with your family finds it to be a very warm, loving, peaceful, caring, generous household.

Lara has been singing the praises of your entire household since our return from visiting you. Your household deserves it because everyone is devoted to helping the rest of the family.

Yet, she apparently fails to understand that everyone in your household does not necessarily give money or material things to contribute to, and promote, the general good. Time, effort, talents, knowledge, love, character, friendship, caring, adab, and so on, are all pooled there for one purpose ... to create an atmosphere that is conducive to the welfare and happiness of one and all, for the greater spiritual improvement of both individuals and the collective household.

I tried to get Lara to understand I was contributing to our 'on-again-off-again' household here in Bamford according to my means and circumstances in a variety of ways that went beyond dollars and cents. However, every time I spoke of this she always interpreted what I was saying as trying to put a price on everything - when, in truth, I was trying to induce her to understand that everything has a cost, and the proper upkeep of a household depends on its members sharing the costs as well as the price of things.

Lara understood the price part of things, and she used to get on my case about it a lot, although she always stated how money wasn't an issue and how she didn't care if I ever worked at a job for another

day in my life. Yet, underneath it all seemed to be a considerable amount of resentment, distrust, and frustration.

However, she never seemed to understand the cost facet of running a household. She wanted my counseling, psychological, spiritual, creative and intellectual expertise at all times of day and night, but she rarely acknowledged the costs that made such services readily accessible to her – almost on demand.

What is very strange about all of the foregoing cost-issue is that Lara often told me one of the reasons why, over the last year and a half, she could never get back together with Ron for very long was because she could not rid her essential being of the costs that had been run up by Ron over twenty-three years through his violence, abuse, insensitivity, cruelty, control, and so on. These costs were indelibly printed on each cell of her body and in every square inch of her consciousness to such an extent that she became physically sick whenever he was around ... even if he was doing nothing particularly offensive at the time.

She had an intimate understanding of the concept of ‘cost’ when it came to her life. Yet, for whatever reason, she was entirely oblivious to the issue of cost when it came to my life ... especially with respect to the role that she played in running up costs in my life, just as Ron had run up costs in her life.

She argued about the issue of price (i.e., who was paying for what), but she never wanted to talk about the issue of cost and how a relationship depended on people looking after the latter as much as the former. The idea of pooling our collective resources, both in terms of covering price and cost, never seemed to appeal to her, and, as a result, she said she lost respect for me because I wasn’t earning an independent income, and that she could never be sure if I really loved her as long as she was paying the bills (as if all the other sacrifices made on her behalf were indicative of something other than love), and that if I really wanted a job I could have got one, and even if I were to get a job, this would not make her inclined to want to marry me, and that there was always some mysterious reason why she wouldn’t have me work for her other than, occasionally, as a proofreader.

She has been holding out this carrot of working with her for more than a year and a half. Yet, every single time the idea has fallen through

because she backed away from it and never gave a reason to me that was worth anything with respect to reasonably explaining what was going on.

This practice put me in very difficult circumstances on quite a few occasions. This is so because not only did her promise tend to stop me looking for other kinds of employment, but I used to budget my money on the basis of her promise to do things in a certain way, only for her to renege at the last moment.

On just one occasion, she had a complaint with the way I did the proof-reading job she gave me. When she first gave me that job, I asked her if it were okay if I delayed doing it for a few days because I was working on something that needed to get done, and she indicated this was all right.

Later, she said one of the reasons why she didn't want to work with me was because I delayed doing work. In truth almost all of the time, I either did her jobs while she waited, or I did them right away and gave them back expeditiously.

On a number of occasions she had promised me work, and, instead, she gave it to someone else who already is employed full time and didn't really need the money. She just left me hanging, and I really needed the money.

She was the one who set my rate of pay and, in fact, at a certain point I wanted her to pay me less, because I thought she was paying me too much, but she insisted on paying me at the higher rate out of consideration for my degrees. Yet, later on when I did a huge proof-reading job for her and I did it right away and worked on it very hard and for quite a few hours and put everything else aside, nevertheless, when it came time for payment, she said I was asking too much -- although I was charging the rate that she had set.

So, I said fine, and subtracted \$2-300 hundreds from the bill. This was all going on when she was getting confused about Ron again, and as often happened, when she got confused, she took it out on me in a variety of ways ... the issue of work being just one of them.

The latest version of the foregoing is she thinks the business idea that we discussed with you during our visit won't work. She gives as

her reason that if I were really interested in doing this job, then, I would have behaved differently when she got the software.

When she got the software, she already had pretty much moved away from my apartment. She asked me for help several times with the new software and I was able to solve several of her problems.

One other time when I tried to help her she got all hyper and anxious and pushed me away (figuratively) from what she was doing in relation to the software. She often doesn't seem to understand how her own hyper, anxious, uptight condition, pushes people away, and, as a result, she projects her own problems on to someone else and blames them ... in this case, me ... for not showing more willingness to participate in learning about the software.

The rest of the time, she was not here. She was over in Brimley.

During this time, she was involved in her usual games of hide and seek, passive-aggressiveness, constant mood changes, and her persistent tendency to change her mind on the same issue again and again and again. To provide just one example of what I mean is the following: I don't know how many times she has switched between: I'm going to get rid of that house in Brimley, and I am not going to be pushed out of that house.

Conservatively, I estimate she went through this house issue swing at least 50 times. Multiply this one issue by a 1000 other things and you have an idea of the revolving door atmosphere into which she introduced me ... one of these issues being her relationship with me.

She was totally disgusted with, contemptuous of, angry with, distrustful of, and had lost all respect for Ron. She said Ron's touch used to make her skin crawl, and, yet, despite all of this, in nearly all cases she protected, supported, helped, defended, made excuses for, and looked the other way in order to accommodate Ron.

She claimed to love me more than her mother and her children. But, her behaviors were largely inconsistent with this claim, and there was a huge difference in how she supported him and how she related to me.

I was sufficiently considerate of her desire not to hurt Ron that I allowed her and my relationship to be curtailed and complicated in a variety of ways by keeping a low profile with her around Bamford. She

was not sufficiently considerate of my feelings to avoid telling Ron, Jane, and her counselor about our relationship without asking my permission and despite having promised never to divulge to anyone the nature of our relationship.

Lara gets all bent out of shape because I told my brother, Bruce's daughter, Lorna -- and I knew Lorna would understand what I was saying and agree with it -- about the marriage in order to ease both Lorna's worries about immorality, as well as to protect Lara's reputation (and I really don't care what people think about me). Yet, according to Lara, this incident with Lorna is what led Lara to her epiphany or revelation about the immorality of what was going on and, thereby, pricked her conscience concerning our relationship.

Unfortunately, she doesn't seem to care in the least that her loose lips have led to the assassination of my character by quite a few people in Bamford -- including Ron. On the other hand, Ron is the one who seems to receive all the consideration, and I am just being so unreasonable when I get upset with the huge inequity and injustice of the whole situation.

If she, finally, has gained control over her capacity to choose what she wants to do, then I am happy and another objective, with which I originally set out with respect to Lara, has, by the Grace of Allah, been accomplished. If she wants something or someone other than me, that's the way the cookie crumbles, but I just wish she would stop the games in which her avowals of love concerning me have become entangled.

She claims to respect me, but she doesn't, and this is especially true in the case of spirituality, and this is true even more so now that she is enamored with you. I have no problem with her being enamored with, or loving, you, but I don't see how she can say this when she shows your khalifah such disrespect ... as she did at the last fatiha we held earlier this evening.

I have asked her to do lots of little things for me, from: take me to certain bookstores to try to promote my book, or come to fatiha on time, or to cook something for fatiha, or to log in for me to increase my experience points in the virtual community that you have constructed, or to run a certain errand, and so on. Unfortunately, all too frequently, if she does anything at all, it is often only when the mood strikes her.

Yes, she has helped out in a number of ways. She also has created problems in a number of ways.

She knew what Jane did with respect to calling the FBI about me and spreading stories to my brother Bruce, but she still insists on talking with Jane and spending time with her from time to time. She knows this is upsetting to me and I wish she wouldn't do it, but she does it anyway.

Sometimes she talks rudely to me. She has verbally attacked me on a number of occasions. She talks back to me, on occasion, about spiritual issues.

When I get defensive or annoyed that she is dumping on me entirely gratuitously, she gets upset with me. Apparently, I should not object to being treated in a dehumanizing manner.

She claims she would never do such things in relation to you. So, why does she do them with respect to your khalifah?

This evening is a prime example. Before fatiha I was upset with her because we had set the time for fatiha nearly a week ago, and she didn't call until 7:13 p.m. for a fatiha that is supposed to begin at 7:30 p.m., and she claims she didn't know, for sure, whether there would be any fatiha.

It is not my responsibility to call her or chase her with respect to fatiha. We already had talked about the day and timing the previous week, and I had done or said nothing in the meantime to dissuade her from coming or to indicate she could not come. In fact, only several days before the date of fatiha, I had called her to see whether she had recovered from her illness and how she was doing.

When I talked to her on the phone prior to her coming to fatiha, she wanted to make sure that if she came there would be fatiha and nothing else. I got upset with her because it was a dumb, unnecessary, disrespectful question, and I told her she didn't have to worry, I would not engage her in any way other than the recitation of fatiha, and she gets annoyed with me because of my response to her attitude toward me.

When she came, she had not cooked anything. She threw down some candy bars and a bag of candy kisses on the table for me to say fatiha over. I asked her if any of the candy had been from something

that had been opened and eaten, in part, by others, and she picks up some of the candy bars and tosses them toward me saying something to the effect that, well, these haven't been touched and she did this in what I felt was a very contemptuous and disrespectful manner.

Because her behavior on the phone and prior to fatiha were upsetting to me, I began talking to her about her attitude toward me and how it was not right, nor appropriate. I told her that if you have respect for Baba, then you ought to have the same respect for me, even if I am not her shaykh.

She wanted to defend herself and she asked to speak and I said no. I wanted her to listen to what I was saying.

I reminded her that when her daughter's boyfriend had strangled Stephanie in a fit of drunken anger and, afterward, when I had suggested I might meet with her daughter and her boyfriend to see if there was something that could be done to help out, Lara's daughter had said their attendance would depend on whether her boyfriend would feel comfortable with the atmosphere at the get together, Lara got into an argument with her daughter because she (Lara) said Stephanie's boyfriend doesn't get to set the conditions. Similarly, I noted, Lara, you do not get to set the conditions of fatiha or what is discussed.

She interrupted me several more times with comments like: "you promised you wouldn't engage me in any way other than fatiha." I didn't make any such promise, but I had given her assurances that I wouldn't engage her in any way independent of fatiha (I think she was afraid I would want to have sex with her or hug her or kiss her, or something of this sort, or try to convince her to change her mind about her decision to go and see you without me).

She didn't like what I was saying about her poor attitude and lack of respect for me as a khalifah and she kept saying: "Can we just say fatiha?" When I asked her if she thought Baba would tolerate things if she acted toward Baba as she was treating me, she dismissed my comments as if they were unrelated to anything.

Finally, after maybe 10 minutes, or so, I began fatiha. Following fatiha, I took two of the candy bars and asked her to bring them to her daughter and her boyfriend. She asked me in a rather dismissive

manner: "Is there any reason for doing that?" I said: "Is there any reason not to?"

She took the candy bars with a resentful, frustrated demeanor. Ultimately, she left them behind.

Maybe she forgot them because of what transpired at that point. I don't know, but I wonder if she would have 'forgotten' them if you had asked her to take the candy bars to her daughter and her boyfriend.

In any event, I gave her a bag with the remainder of her stuff that she had here in the apartment ... which was not much (she had been removing stuff, a little at a time over a period of weeks, and when I pointed this out (as she took her Qur'an and her tasbih back to her house in Brimley) she said she wasn't ending the relationship, and I shouldn't worry just because it appears like she was moving out). She went from the table where the bag was to the bookcase on the other side of the room and wanted to be sure I had put her Rumi book in the package, and said as much.

I found the asking and the checking offensive, although I admit that, perhaps, by this point, I was just overly-sensitive to everything she was doing. I told her I would not hold on to anything of hers, and she knows that, but she got annoyed with me because she didn't like the fact that she felt compelled to ask.

At this point, I told her that until further notice, and unless Baba indicates things should be otherwise, we would hold fatiha at 7:30 p.m. every Saturday night ... at which time she told me she would be away next weekend. I knew where she was going, but she was too interested in being evasive and coy to be open about the matter. I went on to say that if there were a special fatiha I would phone her about the date and time, but other than that there really was no need for us to be in contact with one another about anything else, so, I would appreciate it if she would not contact me.

I added that now she had you, Baba, and all her spiritual questions could be directed to you. I would conduct fatiha and do whatever the silsilah required of me but as far as our (hers and mine) relationship, or lack thereof, is concerned I was going to be stepping out of the picture, since that is, apparently, how she wished her freely given choice to be exercised.

I emphasized about how her behaviors and actions made it very clear to me that she wants me out of the way, and this change in the direction of the relationship was not something I was insisting on but, rather, something she was imposing on things, and so I am going to take a seat on the sidelines in relation to her with the exception of fatiha or whatever else Baba might indicate to the contrary, but I refuse to continue to be the object of her disrespectful behavior ... I don't see that it serves any useful purpose or that it is very Sufi for her to, apparently, feel she has a right to do this with respect to me.

Believe me, the foregoing is only a small sample of what she continuously has been throwing at me for several years. I always had the hope that her behaviors, attitude, and treatment concerning me might change in a more consistently beneficent direction (and, once again, I must acknowledge that, from to time, she has done some very nice, generous, kind, and helpful things).

I always hoped she really did mean what she said in relation to me (i.e., that she loved me), and I desperately wanted to believe her, but I don't think I can do this anymore because there is too huge a gap between what she says and what she does. Consequently, I suppose I will have to settle for the satisfaction that the three goals with which I set out, and discussed earlier, have, by the Grace of Allah, and with your support, been largely achieved, God willing, and like an old soldier I will either die soon or silently fade away, and there the matter seems likely to end.

Do I still love Lara? Yes, despite everything that has gone on, I do.

I don't care for many of her behaviors and attitudes, but I see within her a considerable potential for spiritual good. I have great, great empathy for the life experiences that have led to, and shaped, many of the behaviors that I find distasteful and problematic, and I have great love for the goodness that I sense within her ... and that, despite my complaints, she has exhibited on many occasions.

Reluctantly, however, I have come to realize she likely does not love me, and, therefore, she is not prepared to observe the adab, or fulfill the obligations, or honor the contracts that love and friendship carries in relationship to people. It is a classic case of unrequited love on my part, and I don't think this set of circumstances is ever likely to change.

She might have emotions of one sort or another concerning me, and some of these emotions might be intense. She might be physically attracted to me, but emotions plus feelings plus intensity plus physical attraction are not the same thing as love, although people often confuse the former for the latter.

She committed a similar, but different sort of mistake in relation to Ron. She confused the intensity of pathology in relation to Ron with the quality of love, and in my opinion, there was very little, if any, real love in that entire relationship ... mostly just the hungers of a predator, and the emotions of a emotionally distraught deer whose eyes have been mesmerized by the on-coming lights of a car or truck and is about to be hit. The deer is intensely attracted to the lights, but this is not love, and the sacrifice that the deer makes with her life does not help the car be a better car.

Lara seems to be mixing up apples and oranges in both cases. Given her history, it is little wonder she is confused about the matter, and I am sure that, God willing, you will help her to lose her confusion and discover the true meaning of love, and, maybe if and when that happens then, God willing, there will be some lucky human manifestation of Divinity who will benefit from the earthly pole of her love, but I don't believe this will be me.

From the beginning, she misled me – whether intentionally, subconsciously, unintentionally, out of desperation due to her abysmal marriage, or as a result of a long-standing set of interlocking pathologies, really doesn't matter. I was sincere with her, but she often has not been sincere with me, and now she is trying to say the mistake was ours – our impatience to be sexually intimate. If that had been my weakness and my inclination, I would have sexually taken advantage of the situation from the very beginning, but it was me, not her, who insisted that we try to do things the right way from a spiritual perspective, and, as a result we waited several more months before we were in a position to be able to do things properly with respect to the marriage ceremony.

My mistake was I believed her when she said she loved me. My weakness was I was vulnerable to the idea someone might actually want to love me and, therefore, I did not exercise due care to look before I leaped.

This fault is mine. For this fault, I take responsibility.

But, although things have not turned out personally (i.e., in relation to the issue of love) the way I would have liked, it was not a mistake for me to want to help a person in desperate need of assistance. Nor was it a mistake for me to hang around while I was being trampled by the situation.

I certainly hope someone might be willing to do the same for me. In any event, I am thankful to Allah for showing me that, by His Grace I have it within me to make these sorts of sacrifice for someone else at least once in my life.

Love,

Tariq

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Later in the evening, I and Baba talk on the phone about a variety of things. The next morning, I write another email to Baba.

January 1, 2003 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Just a few added items to follow up on our conversation of last evening ... first, one of the things that has worried me with respect to Lara is the following: for a long time, I have considered her to be on the borderline of either severe emotional disturbance -- possibly even potential mental illness. I had hoped, God willing, that by providing her with love, care, security, and peace, then this sort of environment might be able to help her get over her many, very real problems. However, there always has been the possibility she might slip back into her mental/spiritual breakdown mode of four-top-five years ago.

Because of her extreme mood swings, her suicidal thoughts, her profound bouts of feeling completely alone, the times when she can be quite erratic, her ideational delusions about the nature of certain aspects of reality, her willingness to be in denial about certain basic

facts and pieces of evidence, and, finally, all of the many aspects of abuse that have shaped much of her life (including twenty-three years of marriage to an abusive man), Lara can be, at times, a very, very unstable person. On the other hand, she is a very strong, compassionate, thoughtful, intelligent, and talented individual who, by the Grace of God, has managed, with some help (her counselor's, mine, and yours) to keep walking the narrow road between sanity and falling into some sort of deep emotional quagmire.

I believe this is a very delicate problem we are dealing with here. One of the reasons I have hung around, despite all of her problematic attitudes toward me, is because I know she needs someone to be there for her -- at least until she could get rid of that semblance of a human being who for twenty-three years, called himself her husband. Now, assuming the abuser-crisis might, God willing, be in the process of passing away, her need for me -- at least in terms of the way she sees and understands things -- has shifted, and she seems to "think" that she is healthy and that she is making sane, rational, and sound decisions. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, and part of the problem here is that when the human mind is in turmoil, one often doesn't understand how the mind's judgments cannot necessarily be relied upon to render trustworthy decisions.

Whatever we do, the foregoing must be taken into consideration. She is -- potentially, and sometimes actively -- a very troubled individual, and if we are not careful her situation could, God forbid, worsen.

I have, to the best of my God-given ability, tried to keep a lid on things. Nevertheless, presently, she appears to feel she can get along without me, and, if necessary, I can be dispensed with. Furthermore, she seems to believe that loving me has few, if any, costs, obligations, contracts, or adab connected with it.

Consequently, my position of emotional leverage with her has shifted. I am now being maneuvered to the sidelines, and the time might quickly arrive when I will be completely shoved out of the picture.

Unfortunately, Lara's problems are not something with which she can be assisted by long distance. She needs someone working with her who is close proximity to her.

Secondly, for nearly as long as I have been aware there has been deep emotional turmoil present in Lara's situation, there also has been a second, prominent concern associated with the whole situation, and it has a Satanic angle. You told me some time ago there are certain elements of the dark-side of life that have been hunting for you so that, if they could, they would try to do harm to you and the work of the silsilah.

I told you last night on the phone that for nearly two years I have seen a part of this woman - or something operating through her - seemingly trying to do me harm ... disrupting my life; placing me in financial difficulty; leaving me stranded in various ways; causing me emotional anguish, and, sometimes, engaging me with an almost complete indifference to (or, on some level, maybe, a calculated understanding of) what her actions were doing to me. Now, my life has been thrown into turmoil as a result of my attempt to help her, she -- or the forces that are operating through her -- might be coming after you and your very peaceful household.

I'm telling you, Baba, sometimes the feeling in me about this Satanic angle to things has been so strong, and, yet, because of my love for her as a human being and because, by the Grace of God, of my empathy and compassion for all she has been through, I often have tried to set this aspect of things aside. But, the worry lingers -- especially in light of what you have told me about the forces that are actively seeking you out, and especially in light of what you have said about how there is more occult and magic activity going on in the US right now than in any other part of the world -- and, maybe, even, in history -- as well as in light of my experiences with Dr. Irfan and the huge jinn problems that used to be thrust upon him and those around him, and, how, eventually, he was shown, spiritually, that Iblis, himself, was actively conducting a full-fledged campaign against him in order to get him away from spiritual issues.

I don't believe the Lara situation involves jinn - although, to be sure, I know hardly anything about such matters. However, on many, many occasions, the only thing that seemed to make sense with respect to what was going on was the possibility of there being a very malevolent force working through Lara that was seeking to do not only her, but me, considerable harm. But, of course, all of this becomes very

confusing and murky when one throws Lara's history of abuse problems into the mix.

Then, we can throw in Jane and what she has done with respect to the FBI, along with, apparently, her calling my brother Bruce in order to create difficulties, and in other ways, as well. In addition, we can throw in the way - almost as if by design -- so many roadblocks have been thrown in my way to make my being able to become financially and materially, if not emotionally, stable, here in Bamford almost impossible. Only by God's Grace, your help, and the skin of my teeth have I been able to hang on here, and, even today, nearly three years after coming to this region of the country, my life is, still, very much up in the air in a lot of different ways.

So, I have to wonder if I am not now -- and, perhaps, for quite some time, have been -- an active target of opportunity for the 'other' side. The things that have happened to me are too numerous as well as persistent and consistent for anyone to say this is just your imagination, Tariq ... it isn't. I might not know precisely what is going on, but I do know something is going on and has been, for quite some time, but, maybe, for spiritual, security reasons, I have been kept out of the loop on just what it is that is taking place.

The foregoing, in an odd sort of way, brings me to my final concern, and I wish to EMPHASIZE (and I can't emphasize this enough) that nothing of what I am about to say has any real resentment, jealousy, anger, or any other negative emotion at the heart of it (although, being human, I can't say there aren't issues within me that I have had to keep a close watch on and take to task if necessary). In any event, more than once, I have felt that you and your shaykh have been putting me through my paces either as part of some shake-down cruise before the 'real' stuff begins, or as part of the process of baking and hardening the pot for what is to come, or to help me to face and deal with some long-standing weaknesses and problems of mine, and Lara just kind of fit into that whole scenario.

I am, spiritually speaking, a pretty dumb, naive individual. I can remember when I was in Delhi and at the shrine of Hazrat Qutbudin Kaki (may Allah be pleased with him) and it was near sunset.

I wanted to visit the 'mosque of the jinn' that is nearby but didn't know how to get to it. Therefore, I asked one of the caretakers of the shrine how to get there.

He asked me what I knew -- and I sensed he meant: what did I know spiritually -- so, I said, quite truthfully, "Not much." He told me in that case it might be better if I didn't go because of the time of day, and, consequently, I didn't proceed with my plans.

In any case, I say the following in all innocence and ignorance about anything that really matters. On a number of occasions lately -- and sometimes in a very strong way -- the thought has occurred to me that, maybe, Lara has always been intended to be with you, in one way or another, and I merely had a role to play to help bring the present situation about. Look, if I were willing to try to work with Lara and Ron in order to try to help the situation -- and I really, really am not fond of that man -- then, God willing, I would be willing to work with Lara and you in order to try to help the situation, if this is what is being asked of me -- and I really, really do love and respect you, and I do love Lara and care about what happens to her.

I know God can play very rough at times, and this is not being said in an accusatory or resentful manner. If Divinity can put His Rasul, His Habib, through all that Divinity put the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through, then really, I am pretty small potatoes in the scheme of things. Perhaps, unwittingly, I have become involved in a very rough game of hide and seek with respect to love in the human arena.

If this is the case, then please tell me. I will do my best to get out of the way of things, and put whatever feelings I have on the shelf, as well as try, God willing, to adjust in a spiritually proper manner and, then, move on, insha' Allah, with life. Maybe, what has been happening to me is all just a spiritual term exam that is going on, and, if so, I am hoping that, in one way or another, perhaps, this portion of the exam could come to an end because it is very tiring, emotionally draining, and carries a lot of emotional pain in an area that has been an extremely sensitive and sore spot with me my entire life.

Baba, I love you very much, and to answer the question that Lara, for her own self-serving reasons asked me the other day, there really isn't, God willing, anything that I wouldn't do for you, or for your

happiness, or your peace of mind and heart -- notwithstanding, of course, my many weaknesses and faults. I'm not saying what I am saying because there is necessarily anything on your side of things in all of this in relation to Lara, but, maybe, this is the way Allah wishes things to be, and, really, I don't wish to argue with the Beloved -- in any of His manifestations.

Love,
Tariq

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Tariq my son,
Assalamo alaikum.

Several days ago Lara had informed me of her intentions to come visit and that she has her vacations due. I told her that she could come anytime she wanted.

Then she called and said that she wants to spend the New Year first couple of weeks with me and the family, and that she will be here on the first.

She is here now.

I have not started any discussion, and she too has said nothing. I told her as soon as she settled her things in the guest room that she looks tired and I suggest she rests and has a good sleep, which she did.

Today, she seems well rested and now she has taken her breakfast and is sitting at her computer doing her homework that she brought with her in relation to her job.

I am told that Alice and Peter are coming from Canada to visit me this evening. They intend to return by Saturday or latest by Sunday. I had told Lara yesterday when she arrived that Alice and Peter are coming for a couple of days, and she is looking forward to meeting them.

You already know, and I don't have to say, that I know and understand all that you have experienced in your relationship with Lara.

I am not going to ask her regarding all that went on, only because I have learned through the light of experience that, it does not do any good to do so. At the same time, I am certain that you know me and also know the fact that she-- as a guest -- will definitely be offered as best as is possible teachings of the Sufi way that has gratitude and sincerity to the servant of God that in any way became the manifestation of Love, compassion and help.

In response to all that you have explained in your email, and also in your phone call a few days ago, I want to assure you that I know and understand each and every word you say and write. I am sure you remember what was said fourteen hundred years ago [I feel the suffering as well as the joy that my people go through!] Your feeling and knowledge of your nisbath, as well as my feeling and knowledge of that, brings us to the truth of the final station of all Nisbaths. There no injustice can ever be imagined and from there comes forth all manifestations.

What I am trying to say is that, just the knowledge of the fact that we as a part of the spiritual chain are cared for, nourished and protected by our Reality that needs not any explanation because He knows and understands from Himself. No matter what experiences we go through, the strong clear and distinctive faith that He watches, knows and never tires of watching and knowing, that He above all His manifestations is all Just, Merciful and Beneficent, makes us want to surrender all. What do we have, other than our experiences of: pain, suffering, and joy? Sajda (prostration) here means surrendering our notions of ourselves as well as all these experiences.

I am not in any way saying that what you went through means nothing. I am here saying that all you went through is being required to be surrendered ... surrendered not to any manifestation but to Him the source and origin of all manifestations. The success of the Sajda is always realized through the feelings of the one that does the Sajda immediately after it's done.

I am responding to you through the Truth of all happenings and not through the happenings. That does not mean that the happenings should not be felt but instead it should be felt so that you do have those feelings to offer in your Sajda.

I cannot explain in words how I have felt in seeing my own funeral pass by many a time. All due praise go to the Creator and Real Owner whose complete manifestation I see and realize in my shaykh, who has guided me to the key and secret of wonderful real success, which is Sajda.

You do not lack love and respect my son! No other can or ever will love you and respect you the way we do. No one can destroy or lessen that love and respect we have for you! (By 'we' is meant my shaykh and I)

Do not hold back son. Give to God, what is due and everything we have is due to Him.

All our sufferings and all our Joys! He takes our sufferings and returns the joys many, many times multiplied.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

January 4, 2003

My money is very low. I go to the supermarket and purchase as many of the on-sale cans of cheap tuna as I can carry, plus some plastic containers of lemon concentrate with which to flavor the tuna.

This is going to be my food for the next month, or so - one can of tuna a day. When I squirt some lemon juice on the tuna and heat it up in the microwave, it tastes pretty good.

The walk back from the supermarket is a mile, or more. Even though I rest, from time to time, along the trek back to the apartment, the weight of the bags has strained my arms and, I fear, done a little bit of damage to my muscles since they continue to ache long after I have returned from the store.

§

January 5, 2003

I receive a one or two line e-mail from Baba indicating he called me several times yesterday but without any response. He says he needs my password for the virtual city website in order to be able to re-register me for the change-over which is taking place in relation to that community.

I don't want to call Baba because if Lara comes to find out about the phone conversation, she might think I am stalking her or trying to interfere with things. Consequently, I decide to write an e-mail.

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

First, let me thank you for responding to my long, brain-eating e-mail. The advice you gave was, as always, very appropriate and to the point.

God willing, I shall struggle my way toward doing sajda. I know this is the correct thing to do, and if, God willing, the struggle is successful, I know letting go of everything is to my benefit, as well as to the benefit of others.

Even before you wrote your e-mail, I had been working on doing precisely this, and your e-mail helped give me confidence and direction concerning the process. However, since my capacity is limited and my weaknesses are many, this sort of sajda is likely to take more than just a few moments.

Some days, as well as certain times of the day, go better than others. However, sometimes, another round of being attacked by the forces within, and around, me who seem to wish my destruction rise to the surface, and, the attempt to prostrate to Allah with my entire being and let go of the ups and downs, returning them to their rightful Source, becomes bogged-down.

I pace back and forth or sit reflecting, saying over and over to myself: let go of the anger; let go of the resentment; let go of the sense of betrayal; let go of the hurt; let go of the judgment; forgive; forget; let go. This has become my new mantra, recited many times throughout the day, and even more so when the attacks are at their peak.

Unfortunately, from a spiritual point of view, I think my efforts resemble one of the death scenes in those old-time, corny crime movies where the person who has just been shot takes forever to actually die. He stumbles first left, then right, then teeters forward, bounces off the wall, staggers backward, hangs on to the bureau, almost goes down, and, then shakes his head back to consciousness with respect to his surroundings, grabs his stomach where he has been shot, looks down sees blood on his hands as he takes them away from the wound, stands there, just barely hanging on, wavers back and forth a little, blankly looking at the wall before him, as if in a stupor, takes a step, slides sideways where his fall is stopped by the wall, grabs for the door in order to balance himself, misses, and falls, then tries, unsuccessfully, to get up two or three times, before rolling over on his back, groaning, and clutching his stomach ... becomes feverish, begins to hallucinate and say things like: "is that you Mom", and, then goes through a long process of exhalation, in which there are a few gurgles toward the end, and, then finally, just when we think the guy is dead, he comes to, and ... well, you get the idea.

Insha' Allah, I will try very hard with this process of sajda. I wish I could guarantee you success, but I can't. Perhaps, God willing, I might catch some magic in a bottle somewhere along the line to help the process.

Turning to a different topic, Tariq (my previous virtual nickname) has been slain and stashed somewhere within the virtual city website where he, probably, won't be found, and there is a reason for having done this. Eventually, the administrative grave diggers of the website will come along and find that no one has visited or been home for awhile, and they will give Tariq a proper burial.

Philokalia (my new virtual nick name) is, for the moment, alive. I would prefer his true identity be kept a secret from everyone, and I will try to use him in a way that helps accomplish what you want to do in your virtual community, but we might have to write back and forth a bit so we can develop a plan for how he might fit in with things.

I've already begun to build something of a public persona for Philokalia during the few times I have gone to your residence in the virtual city and interacted with other members of the community. I

will try to keep to character – but it will be an acting job intended to further different goals, purposes, and your wishes.

If you still would like to go ahead with things, the password for Philokalia is mystic99. My e-mail is dtachyon@yahoo.com, but I would appreciate it if no one knows to whom this e-mail belongs. If you have a problem with this, then let me know through either the Inbox for Philokalia or send an e-mail to mystical-quest at netscape.com.

I'm sorry you had to phone three times the other night with no response. I have discontinued my voice mail service, and I have turned the ringer off.

Quite frankly, with one exception, hardly anyone ever calls me anyway. There have been some crank calls and annoying messages recently, and I would just as soon not have to deal with them anymore.

Just as you have made arrangements so that not everyone has access to you, or so not everyone can call you as they wish, I have decided something similar so that at least, for the next 2, 3, 4, or 5 months, perhaps longer, if necessary, I won't be available through external phone calls. I could have gotten a new private listing, but this would have cost me \$36 dollars, and, therefore, it is cheaper and easier to just discontinue my voice mail and turn the ringer off.

My remaining comments are somewhat of a clinical nature. I do this, not because you necessarily need it, or because I will say something that you already don't know, but as a precaution – as a 'just in case'. I readily admit your knowledge, insight, wisdom, understanding, experience, and capacity far exceed whatever I bring to the table, but just in case there is something I might have seen that you have not -- and I really can't imagine what this might be -- I am going to say a few things about my assessment of things -- an assessment that comes from someone who has had a certain amount of training and experience in this area (although I don't believe such clinical insights compare, even remotely, with authentic spiritual insights) -- concerning Lara that might, or might not, be of assistance to you.

There is nothing behind this other than a desire to share information with you about a problematic situation within the silsilah. Essentially, my concerns can be summarized fairly simply: I am seeing

certain things in her behavior that lead me to believe that history might be about to repeat itself in certain respects.

In any event, let's begin. Following a sort of introductory period, shortly after Lara and I first met at the offices of the 'Sufi Center', there was an interval of time in which she and I began to spend a lot of time talking about this, that, and the other thing. It was not long before she was calling all the time, coming over all the time, and staying for very long periods of time.

At a certain point she'd tell me things such as: if I (Tariq) were to tell her to go to Vancouver to live there, she would. She was enamored with me and hung on my every word and sought me out at every opportunity.

Then, she became mesmerized with me ... to such an extent she was overwhelmed with emotions and feelings concerning me. She told me she got muscle spasms from pressing her back into the wall because she wanted to come over and touch me, etc. She accused me (and she was serious about this) of having drugged her or having put a spell on her, and she showed me the book I had written and, initially, had loaned to her, demanding to know where what she was feeling was amidst the 11 stages of love that were talked about in the book

She used to have sexual fantasies about me and spend a lot of time with me in an imaginary world she had created (in order to escape from Ron). By the Grace of Allah, I induced her to spend less and less time in that world and, as well, attempted to re-direct her sexual fantasies into more constructive and appropriate channels.

People who have been sexually abused have a tendency to be sexually exploitive under the right set of circumstances -- sometimes quite aggressively. This sort of acting out behavior began to take place in early June, following the February that we had met.

When this started to happen, I communicated to you what was taking place between Lara and me. From there, the rest is, as they say, 'history', however, the story does not end here.

In the six months prior to the marital arrangement at the very end of July, after we received a package that you had asked someone to send, Lara received a great deal of care from me, via the Grace of Allah. Hundreds, if not thousands of hours were spent with her going over

every detail of her situation ... from: her mother's death, to: the rape by her cousin; the sexual abuse by her uncle; the sexual attacks and abandonment by her father; the alcoholism; the twenty-three years of abuse, control, violence, dehumanization, and degradation perpetrated upon her during her marriage to Ron; being betrayed by her sister; the problems surrounding her search for and finding her estranged sibling -- and the subsequent distancing that took place; to her disillusionment with how little her employers thought of her welfare, to the other problems she was having in her life.

Perhaps, God willing, if you had been here from the start, things might be very different than they are now – or, more particularly, maybe she would have had the chance to become mentally, emotionally, and spiritually healthier a lot more quickly than has been the case. On the other hand, perhaps things have gone on the way they have because this is the way God wished it to be for reasons that I can't even begin to fathom.

However, there is one thing of which I feel fairly certain. Notwithstanding the fact that -- to paraphrase Kipling -- 'you are a far better man than me Gunga Din' and your way of doing things, Baba, is far better than the way I do things, nevertheless, I do not believe Lara could have received any more compassionate, tolerant, patient, forgiving, empathetic, honest, sincere, generous, giving, understanding, and flexible help than she did through me.

Over the last two years, I have lost my temper with Lara on a few occasions – very few. I liken these occasions to when you were angry with Sima on the phone not too long ago when Lara and I were visiting with you in November.

Despite all that was going on, by the Grace of Allah, she continued to be received with: trust, admiration, warmth, love, assistance, support, protection, patience, forgiveness, sincerity, encouragement, tolerance, understanding, empathy, compassion, and almost total, twenty-four hours a day, seven day a week accessibility. At no time was she controlled or threatened or abused or manipulated or made to feel unsafe by me.

So, one of the first questions that needs to be raised is why does she feel she has to run away from me, or what makes her feel she will get substantially different treatment from you than she did from me?

Or, why does she feel I would want to interfere with her relationship with you? Or, why does she believe all of this has to be an either-or situation with respect to you and me?

On a number of occasions, I told her I would be willing to help her to move in three directions: (1) reconciliation with her husband; (2) becoming completely independent of such relationships (including with me); (3) a relationship with me. She chose the third option again and again.

Throughout this entire time she professed a deep, abiding, transcendental, total love for me. She said she wanted only to be with me.

Now, why am I saying all of this? I am not trying to re-travel this path because of the problems it generated for me then and now. Rather, I am going down this road in order to establish a context for what follows.

In clinical terms, Lara has exhibited a variety of defenses as coping strategies for dealing with life as best she could. I understand, to a great extent, why she does what she does, and it has taken several years of very strenuous, detailed, exhausting excavation work to unearth the layer upon layer upon layer of her problems.

To what extent Lara understands what she is doing and why, I am less certain. However, I have written over 500 hundred pages to her that encompassed considerable detail about what I believe I have discovered in these respects.

Now, she has someone new to run to and to whom she can tell her life story. She has told it to her counselor, and she has given me even far more details than she has told her counselor. Maybe, she will tell you her whole life story as well.

Although I have great empathy for, and sadness about, her life story, I get concerned she might be about to embark on another round of this. The fact of the matter is that between her counselor and myself, there really isn't too much about her story that hasn't been explored over the last four-to-five years ... including the six-year old in her who needs to come out, feel safe, and begin to become healthy again.

I consider you to be wiser, more insightful, more knowledgeable, more understanding, more patient, and more empathetic than I am. I

know you handle things better than I do, and your solutions for life-problems are far more elegant, simple, and artful than are mine. Nonetheless, I worry -- for you as well as for Lara.

I consider you to be far more capable of looking after yourself than I am, and I am not trying to be presumptuous in any way or seeking to interfere in matters that don't concern me, but I do have concerns that history might be beginning to repeat itself. For example, I am afraid Lara might be trying to use you as a way to avoid her problems once more ... and telling her story again is one way of doing this, especially because it is very complicated, multi-layered, and interconnected in a lot of strange ways. I fear Lara is going to bog you down in a house of mirrors, at which certain dimensions of her are very adept ... when she seems to make progress only to go in another, problematic direction when it suits her inner emotional turmoil.

She is your mureed and, as far as I am concerned, she couldn't be in any better hands. Yet, I worry she might try -- whether knowingly or unknowingly I really don't know, and sometimes the evidence is quite confusing -- to lead you on a wild goose chase, and I speak with some authority on this issue.

Maybe, you would be able to detect this right away and do whatever was necessary to stop such maneuvers. You have access to a source of insights and understanding that I don't have, and I really have no idea what you see or know ... other than it to be a whole lot more than me, and, consequently, you might easily dodge bullets that I -- only after great difficulty and time-consuming excavation -- have found to be shot in my direction.

Yes, lately, I have become fed up with her behavior and, as a result, have, on a few occasions (the day before she left to visit you being one of them) become more irritable with her. So, she might have some reason to feel she will be safer with you and in a more peaceful, supportive environment with you than she was with me, but she has -- to some extent -- choreographed this whole situation to come out the way it has ... she has distanced herself from me in a number of ways; she has provoked me in a variety of ways through different sorts of demeaning treatment; she seems to have gone out of her way to generate conflict and stress; and her behavior has become increasingly evasive or judgmental and, then, she comes up with excuses for her

behavior such as “no sane, rational person would agree with what she and I had done’, and, proceeds, to run to the very individual who helped such things come about and seek out that individual’s guidance.

I will admit I might have committed at least one error in all of this (and, I am sure, there have been others) -- namely, Lara has felt I have expected something from her, and, in a way, I have, and, therefore, plead guilty on this count. Because of all she has said to me about how much she loves me, I expected her behavior to, more or less, comply with such statements, and I was very hurt when such was not the case ... and, then, when I would talk to her about the situation, she would once again profess her love and, then, proceed to do give expression to the same set of apparent inconsistencies between what was said and what was done.

We all have expectations about how people will behave. If ‘Alia, or Habib, or some other member of your household, began to act against what they say or promise to you, I believe you would be surprised because you had expected other kinds of behavior, and you would note the inconsistency between what was said and what was done.

Lara has said I often act as if she owes me something. True, I have expected her to live in accordance with her words, I have, from time to time, said something about this and she thinks I am saying she owes me something – in truth, I don’t want her to owe me love, I want this to come from her heart, willingly, and when it doesn’t, I know there is something wrong, and I am drawing attention to what is wrong because she claims she loves me more than her mother and her children, but her behavior is quite inconsistent with such a statement.

My expectations have been violated, and, therefore, I am upset. I don’t want her to owe me anything, I want her to be honest with me, and she hasn’t been, and, as a result, things have been thrown into chaos because nothing can be trusted or relied on or depended on ... anything can change at any time.

Now, you are the one with whom she is enamored. You are the one with whom she wishes to be spending all her time. You are the one she thinks about. If she can’t be with you on the Internet, she begins to go into withdrawal. You are the one for whom she says she is willing to go to Vancouver if you asked her to do this.

Like Ron was before, I am now. In other words, she often was irritated with Ron for him trying to get in the way of what she wanted ... which, at that time, was me. Now, she is irritated with me because she thinks I want to get in the way of her relationship with you.

If Lara or other people were to read the foregoing, they might say that Tariq is jealous of Baba because Baba has replaced him in the heart of his 'sweetie'. However, such is not the case.

If she prefers you to me, for whatever reason, there is nothing I can do about it, nor is there anything that I would try to do about it by creating problems for either you or her. Spiritually, she ought to prefer you to me, because you are her shaykh, and I am not.

She, possibly, might prefer you in other ways to me, and, so be it. I've lost out to a better man (assuming you were even interested -- [the situation between the Prophet and his adopted son concerning a woman who first married the latter, and, then later, married the Prophet, does come to mind in this context] -- which you might not be, and assuming this is what God wishes for both of you -- which it might not be -- and I would be happy for both of you even though I would have some work to do to fully let go of my being upset and hurt by everything.

Her current attraction to you might be the real spiritual deal -- and I hope it is. I fear, however -- to repeat a phrase -- history might be repeating itself in certain respects.

Conceivably, recently, she might have had certain spiritual experiences that you know about, and I do not, which have further cemented her sense she is justified in distancing herself from me. (And, when she met you on our recent trip, she told me she knew right away you were, spiritually speaking, a very, special human being). The effect has been to shunt me aside as being spiritually unworthy and something of a charlatan, whereas she feels you are the genuine article (and, you would have to have been present at the last fatiha we had here to get the full flavor of this).

She feels she does not have to pay attention to what I say because everything I say might be tainted with the possibility of an agenda of control concerning her and my relationship with her ... although this has not ever, God willing, even remotely been the case ... but how does

one prove a negative? She believes she only needs to pay attention to what you say because, for now, she doesn't believe you are trying to control her and she perceives you as having given her the freedom to do whatever she likes ... which is very appealing to her and fits in with her desire to distance herself from me as a perceived source of problems for her.

Possibly, she might consider me to be a fallen angel, for if sex is involved, then according to her way of thinking about such things, she might not feel sexuality should have anything to do with spirituality, so, in her eyes, I might have discredited myself by becoming involved with her. It doesn't make any difference that I love her or that I have done nothing to exploit, manipulate, control, abuse, betray, or hurt her ... for, as far as she might be concerned, my sexuality makes me non-spiritual and, therefore, potentially, someone who - given her history of sexual abuse -- can't be trusted.

Lara went through a real long ordeal looking for her estranged sister. When she finally found her, she didn't want Ron around because she felt she would have to constantly see if Ron was okay, and she didn't want anything to spoil the reunion, and so she told Ron she didn't want him to come when she met her sister for the first time.

She said she felt the reunion was something very personal and, for once in her life, she wanted to be able to enjoy something without Ron hanging all over her. She said Ron did not react to this rejection and exclusion very well, and, she claims this was when she began to suspect Ron was not really interested in her happiness ... although, in truth -- but I won't go into all the detail - I believe she knew that Ron didn't really care for her or love her almost from the very beginning of her relationship with him.

Now, we have another situation that, in some ways, is eerily similar to the Lara's sister-Ron-Lara triangle, with me playing Ron's part, and you playing Lara's sister's part. She didn't want to invite me on her current trip to visit with you because she wanted exclusive time with you and because she didn't want to have to worry about what was going on with me, so, she dreams up this ludicrous idea that she isn't really married because "no sane, rational person would accept such an idea."

She moves back to her house in December because she says she is worried about her children – who really are young adults -- and feels she should be there. Now, she abandons those same children for two weeks with little consideration about whether they will be okay.

Things between Lara and me were very good for about ten days to two weeks following our return from visiting with you in November. Nevertheless, she started to spend more and more time away from our apartment.

In addition, she began to be very moody about a variety of issues and seemed to be trying to generate conflict of one sort or another. When her daughter nearly got strangled to death by her drunk boyfriend, she was given the ‘perfect’ opportunity to say she has to be there at the house – as if we were talking about 14-15 year-olds, rather than people who are into their 20’s.

Little by little, she begins moving her stuff back to the house. Just before Christmas, she takes her Qur’an and tasbeeh back ... a sure sign, given past experience, of her moving out for good.

I mention this to her and say, in a very non-accusing, non-threatening way: this looks like you are moving out. She pooh-poohs my concerns and says everything between us is fine.

A few days later she calls me and tells me she has been thinking about things a lot lately, and she doesn’t really believe we are married, and she doesn’t respect me because I don’t have an independent source of income, and she doesn’t know if she could ever believe I love her as long as she was paying the bills (which she was not doing except for some food — the rent, the phone, and everything else was being paid for by someone else ... my brother and Lorna in the case of the rent, and me in the case of the phone – the same phone she used all the time to get onto the Internet to be able to spend time with you when she was here at the apartment.

A few days later she is on her way, alone, to see you. Today, I talked with Lorna, and during the conversation, Lorna wanted to invite Lara and me to her son’s birthday party. I told Lorna that Lara was away, visiting with someone for a few weeks. Lorna asked whether Lara had friends or family where she was visiting, and I said, ‘no’, she had gone to see her spiritual guide.

Lorna asked me if the teacher was the same one she had seen in the picture the night she and her children came to supper, and I said, 'yes'. Lorna said: "You mean she went alone?"

What is wrong with a picture when someone like Lorna - who is only tangentially connected to my relationship with Lara -- right away senses that something is wrong and, yet, Lorna is someone who was genuinely happy for the relationship that Lara and I supposedly had. Yet, Lara is concerned more about her self-image or what others think of her than about what is acceptable to God or accepted by someone like Lorna who is both sane and rational?

I have no idea whether any questions will be asked of me on Monday at the birthday party. I'm not looking forward to the situation because even if nothing is said, I know what will be left unsaid. I feel badly for my brother Bruce and his daughter Lorna because they have really tried to extend themselves in order to help Lara feel comfortable and accepted.

Since I cannot tell any of them what is really going on, I'm going to end up with a lot of egg on my face. Among other things, Bruce might begin to think that, perhaps, there is something to this phone call he apparently got from Jane after all ... the one that supposedly informed him about my alleged penchant for exploiting women for money.

Lara, apparently, has made up her mind she is going to leave Ron. But, now, she wants her independence and, therefore, doesn't want the responsibilities which might go with feeling that, maybe, she should try to live in accordance with what she says ... and she wants her independence because she feels she should be free to pursue spirituality as she sees fit without having to worry about someone else.

Apparently, I have, for historical reasons, become like Ron in her mind and she seemingly believes that, under the present circumstances, I am nothing but an albatross around her neck. Recently, she said one of the reasons why she was distancing herself from me is she didn't want to become involved in another relationship such as with Ron, and, yet, virtually everything that has gone on in her relationship with me has been the exact opposite of her relationship with Ron ... so she is manufacturing reasons to avoid me -- the one she allegedly loves more than her mother and her children.

I am not recounting all of the foregoing in order to bad mouth Lara. I do love her, but I also realize she has very, very, very, real emotional difficulties. In many ways she sounds – and is -- so sensible and rational that people don't take the time to see what is really going on beneath the surface ... and, I'm not saying you wouldn't take the time or you wouldn't be able to have insight into such matters, but, nevertheless, there is no need to reinvent the wheel on this because I've had two years of semi-clinical experience trying to help Lara sort out her many levels of her problems.

There is an aspect in all this that bothers me a lot – not necessarily because of the hurt it causes (which I am working to let go through the process of working toward *sajda* on all this), but because of the implications about how much Lara either does, or does not, have some degree of control over her problematic behavior. More specifically, if Lara were really in severe mental difficulty, I doubt very much she would be able to competently (indeed, more than just competently) perform her present job that is very demanding -- requiring a great deal of skill, focus, and attention to detail, with high levels of stress. She has to get along with all kinds of clients, lawyers, judges and fellow employees, some of whom are jerks and some of whom are very nice.

She knows if she is disrespectful to the people she works with, and for, or if she is unreliable, or untrustworthy, or breaks her promises, and so on, while working with them, she will be out of a job. She knows about patience, because she has to be patient in her job. She knows about right and wrong, although, sometimes, she has very peculiar ideas about such things. She knows about cause and effect, since, for example, the reason why she does her job is because she wants to keep it and to get paid. Thus, when she is sufficiently motivated, she can be completely rational, stable, dependable, reliable, trustworthy, patient, considerate, and so on, for extended periods of time.

So, the question is this: if she can exercise such qualities of character in relation to her job, why can't she do these things with respect to me? What is really going on here?

In any case, as previously indicated, I see a lot of signs in the present situation that suggest she might be trying to repeat her history through you. I don't know if this is the case, and I might be wrong in

some of my judgments, but it is a worry I have, and I wanted to run it by you for your consideration.

I want Lara to get help for her difficulties. I want her to be healthy. I want her to be happy. I want her life to have a purpose to which to become committed. I want her to love and be loved. I want her to become a self-realized individual.

I have no solutions for what I am suggesting in the foregoing pages. If you can't help her, then I don't believe any other human being can do so.

I truly hope none of the foregoing is inappropriate or offensive. It was not meant to be, but I do make mistakes ... many of them.

Love, Tariq

§

January 7, 2003 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

There still seems to be a problem with my registration to your virtual community, and I'm not exactly sure how to interpret it. Maybe, you just haven't had a chance to make arrangements for me, and therefore, I am being barred from entry temporarily, until such arrangements have been completed. I realize you have been busy with quite a few guests and, consequently, might not have had time to do whatever is necessary to complete the subscription process.

Another possibility is that you are uncomfortable or unhappy with what is going on ... and, there might be several sources for such possible unhappiness, and, as a result, you might have decided to withdraw your earlier offer and feel it is better for all concerned if I am not a part of the virtual community ... at least, not under the present circumstances.

In an earlier e-mail, I told you what I was doing with respect to using the name Philokalia rather than Tariq -- and I indicated at the time that if there were any problems with what was being suggested to you by me, then, please e-mail me or drop a message in my Inbox at

Philokalia. Maybe, you were annoyed by my suggestions to such an extent you didn't want to contact me about the matter and just wanted to let the matter drop into oblivion.

However, before recent events, you had contacted me at my residence in the virtual community and indicated that what had been outlined to you by me -- including the anonymity aspect in relation to the true identity of Philokalia -- was okay. When we talked on the phone later, there even had been some joking about which persona I might show up in -- Philokalia or Tariq -- or whether Lara might be able to guess what was going on, but other than that the idea of anonymity seemed to be acceptable to you.

If I continued on with my virtual community persona of Tariq, Lara might feel very uncomfortable with the situation and, therefore, stay away from the cyber community you are trying to construct. I have seen her on the Internet and how she reacts to situations and people she encounters in the virtual community. The two of us got into a conflict because she encountered Sand-Bandito at a time when she was very uncomfortable being around him and felt he didn't like her, and I had told her that in order to not make a bad situation, worse, perhaps she should politely engage him in chitchat for just a few minutes and, then, make excuses and leave rather than running away as she wanted to do and, possibly, hurting Sand-Bandito's feelings.

She got very annoyed with me about the suggestion. She told me to stop telling her what to say.

She doesn't think that the virtual community member with the nickname Senorita likes her, and she doesn't think a number of other people in the virtual community like her. Oftentimes, Lara's tendency is to withdraw under these circumstances. So, I do not want Tariq's presence -- which she knows to be me -- to be prominent in the virtual community and, thereby, possibly, provide her with an excuse to run away from the virtual community.

I've encouraged her to go to the virtual city website. Several times she wanted to abandon the idea altogether and never go on the Internet again, but I talked with her and encouraged her to stick with it.

To be quite frank, I feel very uncomfortable around Lara right now. She has treated me in ways that I just don't understand. She has said many things to me that are untrue. She has created a variety of areas of conflict that are not based in reality.

I do believe that, God willing, as Philokalia I would be able to interact with Lara within the virtual community without, hopefully, any problems arising for you or her. Not only do I know you are there watching what goes on and would be noting whether my attitude with respect to Lara was, or was not, right, but I really have no wish to hurt Lara or embarrass her or 'dis' her or create difficulty for her.

I would like your efforts in the virtual community to succeed. I would like Philokalia to assist you, in some way, in this endeavor. I do not wish to be a source of disruption, and I feel this could best be achieved through Philokalia and not Tariq.

I must admit that I really don't know why you would need me in the virtual community. You do very well with all the people who come to you, and, most of the time, I just feel like a fifth wheel ... an unnecessary element.

You have never made clear to me what you would like me to do in your virtual community. You have mentioned some sort of educational component. But, here again, I don't know what you have in mind.

I do know you once asked me -- relatively recently actually -- in Instant Messaging about whether, or not, I remembered what I had told you one of the guys had said at my Ph.D. orals exam (namely, 'I have never seen a doctoral thesis like this, and I hope to never again'), and, apparently -- based on some of the things that you said -- you seemed to feel the same way about my thesis after you had completed reading it ... which is fine.

My thesis was really about the idea of continuation of thought approached from a very different direction from what you have described to me with respect to some of your writing on this topic. I wanted to explore ways of describing how various kinds of belief, ideas, and epistemological structures might be thought about as a means of coming to an understanding about how the way in which people thought could shape, color, and orient what comes to us from God.

I was interested in what tends to happen to thought after the currents of 'thought' that come to us from God arrive -- how distortion, bias, prejudice, interpretation, and error creep into things because of our failure to use the correct methods for reconciling our experience with that (i.e., God) that makes such experience possible and gives it the character it has. I was interested in formalizing this whole process in a set of qualitative equations that summarized what we do to thought after it arrives to us from Divinity ... without ever being able to use the name of God in the thesis because of the way western academia tends to resist the whole idea of Divinity.

In any event, I'm not sure what you had in mind for me with respect to education and your virtual community. I know you have said various things about my inclination to political activism and you are unhappy with this ... which, in a sense, puzzles me somewhat.

I have tried to remove myself as far from the realm of the public arena as I can. I have not joined anything, or done anything, or tried to enter into political or social issues at all -- not even a letter to the editor of the Bamford paper. But, nonetheless, you have continued to say things -- such as when I was visiting with you in November -- and I really am not at all clear about what you are getting at, but it seems you are unhappy with something I am doing, or not doing, in some way.

This all makes me a little nervous. I don't know what you want from me. I don't know what you want me to do, or not do, and, as a result, I think that if Philokalia's identity is not known to anyone but you, then if I do something that is problematic, you can very easily distance yourself from me without doing your project in the virtual city website any harm, and without doing the silsilah any harm.

I know you didn't care for the fact that Lara was given a Muslim name at the time she was initially initiated through me. You made this clear during our visit in November.

I didn't insist Lara and Jane have such names, and I left the choice to them. I also said they ought not to identify themselves as Muslims to anyone (they both said Shahadah and knew what this meant) and how the Sufi name would be used just amongst us, and whatever they were most comfortable with, we would do that.

God willing, I certainly will not repeat this mistake in the future. Moreover, with the way things are going here, I don't think you have much to worry about in that respect. Through the activities of Jane, Agnes, and a few others (possibly including me, as well), my situation here in Bamford is fairly shaky, if not untenable in a number of respects.

I stashed my cyber persona, Tariq, where he wasn't likely to be found, because I didn't want Lara leaving any messages in his residence in the virtual community.. I had asked her not to contact me, but she has gone back on her undertakings on so many occasions, I just didn't want to be left vulnerable to her whims and moods. I told her I wouldn't bother her, and, God willing, I won't, but I wanted to remove temptation from her path with respect to me.

The thought did cross my mind yesterday about contacting Lara and wishing her a happy birthday. In the end, I didn't for a number of reasons: (1) she has told me she doesn't like such things in relation to her birthday; (2) she gets very moody and temperamental in relation to such occasions, and I did not want to do anything that might cause her to become upset and begin to feel badly and sad, as she often does around such issues; (3) she is probably quite happy where she is and I did not wish to reinsert myself in her life since one of the reasons why she went to visit with you was to get away from me; (4) the less she thinks about me, the better off she will be, I believe, so why remind her of my existence?

I have changed my e-mail addresses for reasons covered in the foregoing. I am not trying to hurt Lara or treat her badly, nor do I hate her, nor am I trying to punish her. I am trying to protect me from her and her from herself.

I regret the phone situation is the way it is, because this is inconvenient in some ways ... although, as I said in the previous e-mail, it is not like I get a lot of calls from people because I don't. With the exception of wrong numbers, telemarketers, the occasional call from my brother Bruce every three-to-four weeks, or so, and a very rare and unexpected set of calls from you the other night (and I don't think you have tried to call me by phone more than three times, or so, in the three years I have been in this area ... which is not a complaint, just a reality), the only person who would call me would be Lara, and the

reason why she called me, for the most part, is because she had, once again, run away from me but wanted support in dealing with the Ron situation ... which I always gave her. But, now that the Ron problem seems to be a thing of the past, there really is no need for her to contact me because she has made it clear, in any number of ways, she would like to distance herself from me, and she does not respect me, and, despite her claims to the contrary, she really does appear to want to argue with the Beloved.

My terminating the voice message and turning off the ringer was not meant to be aimed at you. But, I have no one to screen my calls as you do, and I really don't want to have to wonder what is waiting for me on voice mail, and I don't want calls in which someone professes they love me and can't live without me just because they are in a sad mood, and, then, when they are out of the sad mood, they say they don't want to be married to me and say other hurtful things as well. If there is some other way of doing things, I don't know what it is.

I am not trying to make myself unavailable to you, although, conceivably, in view of events, you might wish to make yourself unavailable to me. In any event, we do have the medium of e-mail through which to keep in touch.

As far as the things I have said about Lara's possible interest in you and what Allah, might, or might not, wish with respect to you and Lara, I am not really saying anything other than this -- if God wishes me to step out of the way for you and Lara, then God willing, that is what I will do.

There is no underlying feeling on my part that this is what you want to happen or that you are even interested in the idea or that you are the sort of person who would interfere in someone's life in this manner. I do know the whole situation is so bizarre and inexplicable in terms of Lara's attitude toward, and treatment of, me, that one of the things that came to mind is that, maybe, just as 'Asma in Canada was meant to sort of baby-sit me until you could get to Canada, I was supposed to baby-sit Lara until you had time to attend to the situation in a more direct manner.

Perhaps, my primary job was to help extricate her from the Ron situation, and things went in an additional direction that, at the time,

was permitted but, now, is being canceled for the sake of all parties concerned. If so, my job is done.

I am in the process of trying to make sajda with respect to the aftermath of this whole situation and, thereby, becoming disengaged in a, hopefully, appropriate manner. If so, then there really is no need for Lara to contact me ... my mission has been completed and from here on it is about her relationship with you ... whatever form this might take.

I do remember you said Lara was beautiful, really beautiful and that she had something inside of her that you hoped I appreciated. I do remember you asking Lara if she had a sister. I do remember you saying you need a wife when you thought that Lara and I were talking about getting you a secretary.

I'm not saying any of the foregoing had anything to do with anything other than you being Baba. My worry is that you are a friend of God, and I'm just a very insignificant part of the universe, and if Lara and you getting together was a marriage made in heaven, then I would like to get out of the way.

I know all of the foregoing possibilities create potential problems with respect to if, and when, Lara returns to the Bamford area ... especially with respect to fatiha. However, if you wish, I will limit my duties to the recitation of Fatiha and, then, Lara will be free to pursue whatever she wishes to do independently of that.

If you wish, I will not discuss her personal or family matters with her. If you wish, I will not discuss spiritual matters with her.

In some ways, of course, this makes for a strained relationship. However, if she understands the purpose of fatiha is fatiha and how fatiha is not meant as a social gathering, then really, the lack of discussion is not meant to be personal, but just a way of focusing on the business at hand, and letting her know that my role is extremely limited and restricted to just the observance of Fatiha and nothing more.

My intention is not to act as if I am angry with her, which once, God willing, sajda is completed, I won't be ... and by the Grace of Allah, a lot of progress has been made in this area over the last several days. But, it is important for Lara not to become paranoid and suppose that because things are limited to fatiha that this is my way of saying that I

don't love her, or care about her, or wish her well, or pray for her. But, I do not want to risk any further problems and, therefore, maybe, the best course of action is for me to be extremely low profile on the whole matter and for us to go our separate ways in the rest of our lives. I don't want there to be a constant undertow of conflict and stress surrounding fatiha, I don't want her to fear that if she comes to fatiha I am going to use that as opportunity to say something to her.

If she doesn't want to respect me, then, God willing, I shall accept this and won't say anything. This, too, is part of letting go and doing sajda.

If something came up and she needed help, then God willing, I would be there if you wanted me to do so. I'm not trying to be difficult about all of this, I just want her to stop doing what she has been doing.

I still am completely confused about whether, or not, she really does love me or was only saying this in order to please me (and she has a deep need to please people so they won't be sad ... her relationship with Ron is a paradigmatic example of this, and now she might have done the same thing with respect to me), or whether she said she loved me because she was in desperate need of a friend and support and felt this was the only way she could get it, but, when any of the crises were over, then the truth might have come to the surface with respect to how she really didn't want to be with me in a marital way but was too embarrassed to tell me the truth and was afraid of the repercussions if she did tell me the truth (e.g., I might no longer help her vis-à-vis Ron) or she was afraid of the image I would have of her for having used me that way ... especially in light of the way she has been used so many times in her life, and, now, here she was doing the same thing to someone else.

Because of my own history and emotional vulnerabilities, I wanted to believe Lara very much when she said she deeply loved me, and she had no other person in her life. So, I kept trying and kept taking her back, attributing her problematic behaviors concerning me to the continuing destructive influence of Ron's effect on her, as well as to all the other difficulties in her life. But, now she is free of Ron -- more or less, or, at least, I hope she is -- and, yet, she still wants to get away from me, and she still does not seem to be telling me the truth about what is going on.

According to my understanding of shari'ah -- which is very limited and shaky -- if two married people are having difficulty, then aside from having parties from both sides attempt to seek an amicable resolution to the problem (and other than you there really are no parties from either side who can intervene in such a way, and from things that you have said, you do not wish to be placed in a situation of having to intervene in such a way), then two of the steps that are open to me to try to get my wife's attention is: (1) to tell her, which I have done, about what I believe she is doing wrong in the hopes she will take this to heart and alter her behavior (and, I would have the same obligation to mend my behavior if she were to tell me what I am supposedly doing wrong but, for the most part, the things that she says are problematic have to do with her just wanting to get away from me and not, necessarily, anything that I am doing). (2) removing myself from her presence as a way of communicating to her that, 'Houston, we have a problem' and do you want to do anything about it ... and, this I have done, as well, through making Tariq's Message Board/Inbox unavailable to her and by making the phone unavailable to her and by changing my e-mail addresses. I have not cut off regular snail mail, and you are still a possibility for some degree of limited communication between her and I ... although you might not wish to have this role either.

I don't know what the answer to any of the foregoing is. I love Lara, but I fear she does not love me and just doesn't know how to tell me the truth without having to ask herself a lot of questions she does not want to face about possible issues of exploitation, manipulation, control, abuse, and self-image. God willing, I am willing to do sajda to all of this, and just let it go, but I don't want the dead to be raised and re-raised if this is what continuing on in a relationship with Lara is going to entail.

I'm trying to be decent about this. The mistake Lara made is not the mistake she supposes she made, but, let's call it a day on all that.

I could be 100 % right on everything concerning her (and I am not saying I am but just stating a hypothetical) and, really, where does this get me ... absolutely no where. Indulging my anger, resentment, frustration, hurt, critical grumbling, hurt feelings, sense of betrayal and embarrassment gets me no further along to happiness even if I were

right, than this would if I were entirely wrong. Indulging the entire emotional spectrum doesn't get me any closer to realizing my purpose in life, but indulging my negative emotions makes me a whole lot more burdened down than I have to be ... so, it doesn't make any difference whether I am right about all of this or wrong about all of this, letting go is the only sane thing to do.

There are several ways to go about this. If Lara is truly interested in being married to me, then she has to let go as well, and let's just move on together under your guidance. If Lara is still interested in being married to me but she doesn't want to let go of anything, then the road ahead is problematic, and I really don't know how many times I can let go without, at some point, saying: 'enough is enough, this is not working and let's agree to disagree and go our separate ways'.

If Lara does not wish to be married to me, then one possibility is we just go our separate ways. Another possibility is we limit our contact to the observance of fatiha and let the rest go. If she and/or you want something more than this, then, I will attempt to do whatever is indicated, but she, hopefully, will take into account that I am a human being who deserves to be treated with sincerity, honesty, trust, and respect and that a two-way friendship really is not possible without this. I do not say she owes me this, but if she is not willing to give it freely, then really, the whole idea of friendship becomes a sham and subject to the ephemeral commitments of moods and whims, that I really don't want.

I have, to the best of my understanding and knowledge, tried to act responsibly and with adab throughout the last two years in relation to Lara. I am trying to approach the present set of circumstances with your guidance concerning sajda uppermost in my mind and heart and engaging that task sincerely.

The dimension of this concerning the possibility of my stepping aside for other people -- whether Ron, you, or someone else, has nothing to do with anything other than my desire not to intrude where God does not wish me to be. And, quite frankly, I'm having a little difficulty figuring where God wants me to be -- other than in sajda, which I am trying to do ... but, just as there are people you wish to avoid, and you have your reasons for doing this without any intention

of hurting anyone, I, too, at least at the present time, have a person whom I am trying to avoid, and, I believe, I have good reasons for doing so and I really am not trying to hurt anyone ... just avoid possible problems and unpleasantness.

I'm open to possibility -- at least, I try to be. But, when too many warning flags go up, my inclination is to withdraw, lick my wounds, and move on with life. By the Grace of Allah, I've done this before, to a large extent, with the situations surrounding my first marriage, and, if necessary, God willing, I will do so again.

I really am not looking to hang on to the relationship with Lara. I just wish to get out of people's way and let them live their lives, and let it go at that, with no hard feelings ... but no hard feelings doesn't mean I have to pal around with people. Everyone should have their own space ... including, me.

The e-mail the other day about the clinical comments was, for the most part, nothing more than that. People who are in emotional turmoil tend to see and understand present circumstances in terms of past history, and I have seen some indications Lara might be doing this again in a variety of ways. I figured into the discussion because I am both part of her history now, as well as part of her attempts to cope with the present.

As I said, repeatedly, throughout that e-mail, my clinical 'insights' might have been entirely unnecessary or not telling you anything you didn't already know. I wasn't trying to question your ability to deal with the situation much better than I have, but I do worry about Lara, and I worry about you ... not that you won't be able to handle the situation, but that valuable time might be consumed through misdirection that my clinical experience has taught me is very prevalent in the present set of circumstances. Perhaps, it was presumptuous of me to even write such an e-mail, and, if so, I am truly sorry. Love, Tariq

Tariq my son,

I have very clearly read all the emails you sent me regarding Lara, and if you remember I told you on the phone too that I have no such intentions of marriage. In fact the truth is that Lara too has not indicated that she has any such inclination.

She asked me yesterday evening if she could do the Fateha on her own, because she feels that this will be better for both of you, and I told her that if she feels that it will be very uncomfortable for her to attend Fateha with you, and if her doing the Fateha by herself will be the best for her, then she might do just that.

While she is here, she keeps herself busy with her work that she brought here as homework of her job during the morning hours, and from time to time she visits the virtual community.

In the afternoon, she is busy with 'Alia and her son, Ra'uf and plays with Ra'uf

In the evenings she watches the TV programs and movies along with the family, till it is dinner time. Then after dinner she again spends time with the family chatting and watching movies etc. She then goes to sleep.

I try to give her time, whenever I can and she discusses Hafiz, Rumi and virtual community matters etc. Neither does she bring up the subject of Ron nor do I ever do. I have also been very successful in not having to discuss with her the present situation regarding her and you.

There is too much hurt in this relationship, and I do not see any good in trying to reunite, because there are things that need to be let go. These are facts regarding Lara.

Now regarding your virtual community account, I am sorry because I had thought that it was done, and I was content but receiving your email I just realized that it was not attended to. I do want you to be there in the virtual community and yes, I do appreciate what you have suggested, and by tonight your "Phil" account will be done. Once it's done, I will inform you through email, and then you could move in to our virtual community and choose a neighborhood of your choice.

Yes, this email way will be a better way of communication, and from time to time I will give you points to work on. I have some good

useful ideas that I will discuss with you regarding what I want done here in the virtual community.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

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January 9, 2003 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Thank you for responding so quickly to all my e-mail traffic your way. I'm sorry so much of your time has been wasted with it, but I do have one further thing to say in response to what you have said.

While I understand Lara might feel more comfortable away from me, and while there is, undoubtedly, truth in her feeling that things, at first, might be difficult, or a little strained for both of us, my basic feeling is this: Yes, there have been some misunderstandings, and, yes, we each have been approaching this situation with a mismatch of expectations, needs, hopes, and ideas, and, yes, it appears things were just not meant to work out between the two of us, but, the major goals with which she and I began this spiritual interaction have, by the Grace of Allah, all been achieved. (1) God willing, to a great extent, Lara has escaped from the control issue vis-à-vis Ron ... maybe, let us hope, completely; (2) she has deepened her interest in spirituality and now has a genuine shaykh to help her; (3) she is becoming free to decide what she wants to do with her life. Missions, God willing, accomplished.

If she fears me or fears being with me, or, fears I will harass her; or, fears I will try to make her uncomfortable; or, fears I will try to get us back together again; or, fears I will be angry with her; or, fears I will have expectations concerning her; or, fears I will be judgmental of her, then perhaps, there is something seriously wrong with me that she would have such fears about the situation. I thought the Sufi path was about the uniting of hearts and about friends having a common

purpose and a shared set of values, and what is being proposed is separation, distancing, and an absence of any sort of reconciliation.

When we were visiting you in November, you said what you wanted to see is people happy when she and I left anybody's home in Bamford. But, apparently, things are so bad between us we can't be in the same room together to say *fatiha*, so what kind of message does that send to anyone ... that, supposedly, we are two people on the Sufi path and we can't even share *fatiha*?

I will admit I was upset at the last *fatiha*. God willing that will never happen again. I have accepted the fact she wants to move in her own direction, and I will honor those wishes.

I will admit there have been a few occasions when I wished I had not said a few of the things that I did. But, if perfection -- at least at the present time -- is what is being expected of me, then all I can say is I never said I was perfect, only that I aspired to perfection, according to my capacity, and while I have a long way to go, I do, by the Grace of God, keep trying to plug away at things in my own meager fashion. God willing, the struggle to complete the *sajda* that is required on this matter shall continue.

I am clear she wants to be free of the marriage and that perhaps she never really wanted the marriage but, out of desperation and need, took the plunge in order to escape her situation. I do understand what it means to have nowhere to turn and feel like everything is hopeless, and, then suddenly, to find a helping hand in front of you ... but, subsequently, things sort got out of hand in a way but went in a direction that was permitted and, perhaps, necessary at the time but, apparently, has outlived its usefulness and purpose.

She feels safe with you Baba and she knows you know about the entire situation and she is willing to spend time with you and look you in the eye and interact with you. What does it say about me that she is afraid to do this with me?

Surely, if she is that afraid, then I must be doing the *silsilah* a great injustice, and, perhaps, it is no wonder that everywhere I go, there are problems and disasters. There is, Baba, something very, very wrong with this picture, and I am not blaming Lara, I am blaming me.

Yes, I have been hurt, but, God willing I shall get over it, and I am working on it, but it is not necessarily an overnight phenomenon ... although, by the Grace of Allah, things are getting better in this respect with each passing day. Apparently, Lara has been hurt in some way too ... perhaps, by the idea that, maybe, I won't want to be her friend, if I am not married to her. I don't know what kind of friends we are going to be, because it does take two to tango, and it takes cooperation and reciprocity and a granting of mutual space or degrees of freedom, but I am willing to try and let the past go.

I am not insisting she come to fatiha. You have given her permission to do whatever she wishes in this regard.

What I am saying is that it appears to be a very sad commentary on me that while, supposedly, I am a shaykh, and your khalifah, nevertheless, your mureeds are afraid of me and wish to keep their distance from me. This is not only true of Bamford, but it was true in other parts of the US and Canada, as well. I'm very sorry, Baba, you have to put up with such a tragic state of affairs ... one to which no one is going to be attracted by what is going on, but, instead, will want to run far away because there appears to be a crazy bull loose in the spiritual china shop in Bamford ... and why would anyone wish to offer themselves up for sacrifice or trampling in such a state of affairs?

I feel terrible ... really terrible. No wonder I have been ostracized to the wilds of the Vermont woods, where, hopefully, I can do only a minimum amount of damage. I am very sorry, and if there a crack somewhere big enough to crawl in, I would do so and pull the top over my head. I am an embarrassment to the silsilah, and the problem is that I really am trying as hard as I can, and the results are pathetic and I don't know how else to go about things other than the way I have been trying ... that is yielding results in which your mureeds want to stay away from me.

I suppose this is why I mentioned the marriage possibility -- not because I thought that was what you wanted or it was something in which you were even interested, but, I guess, I feel so inadequate, so out to lunch when it comes to the Sufi path, and because people do love you but have problems with me, why wouldn't I want them to be with you -- in whatever way -- rather than me?

There is a reason why Lara would be willing to go to all the trouble just to be near you, even if she didn't get to talk with you all that much, and there is a reason why she would go to all that trouble to get away from me. There is a palpable difference between the two of us, and it shows in all kinds of ways, and I am very worried about this because I believe it is adversely affecting the silsilah.

Please forgive me, Baba.

Love,

Tariq

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Tariq my son,

I will not go into any of the things you feel about yourself because it is not what I feel regarding you.

I feel that you are first a very sincere and loyal mureed, then, you are a khalifa also. You are also a very close friend to me personally. In fact the closest ... I have said this to you before too.

As for Lara, I have told you that she has not discussed any details with me about you. The only thing she said was the fact that she needs to do Fateha alone, and knowing the situation I felt that it is better, because there has been too much hurt and pain. If she had not requested to do Fateha on her own, and if I had even a glimpse of a silver lining in the relationship, you know very well that I would do everything to try reconciliation. My sincere advice to you is the same that I have already given, that is "Sajda".

I have told her the very first day when she came that I will not get involved in this, and you already know very well that it is principally wrong for me to get involved in certain matters. Marriage, separation and divorce are some of the things I never get involved in.

The other reason I gave her permission for doing Fateha on her own is, that it is better for her to do that rather than not do Fateha at all.

Now as for the virtual community project, by tonight your name will be added and Inshallah you will be able to login. The delay was

because I was waiting for some confirmation from the virtual city website too aside from waiting for the list of 6 members for a family package.

As I also said that I will surely be letting you know through emails about our agenda for the virtual community, so you will be in a better position to understand and help.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

January 11, 2003 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Attached is a preliminary version of the collection of 50 fictional teaching stories that I have been writing. There might be one or two more stories that will be added, insha' Allah, in the next day or so, but what I am sending you is pretty much the entire set of stories.

I have not, yet, proofread the material, so you might find a few errors and problems, here and there. However, I believe, God willing, the stories should be fairly free from such difficulties.

If you think it is a good idea, perhaps, in a second edition of the stories ... if things, God willing, go well, we might have Sima and Miriam do illustrations for the book ... which would make the book more attractive. Perhaps, some sort of arrangement could be made for paying them a percentage for each book that is sold in order to compensate them for their art work.

Rather than approach a publisher, I would like to try to self-publish through one of those print-on-demand businesses that would keep the costs down, and limit the number of copies that have to be printed in order to save money and storage space ... just print what might sell. I could start modestly in the beginning, and see how things go from there. I believe, God willing, this collection of stories will be very popular with all religious and spiritual groups ... and very thought provoking, as well.

Is there any possibility I might be able to get a little financial backing on this through someone like Sima's uncle? Or, is this something that should even be explored? I'm not looking for a lot of money -- maybe, \$2,000 to \$3,000 -- to help do a small run of books, and to cover living expenses for the next 6 months, or so.

Or, possibly, you might not think the collection should be sold but ought to be given away. I'm not sure how you feel about this.

Let me know, please, what you think about the stories, and let me know, please, what you think about any, or all, of the foregoing possibilities -- from art work to funding.

If you have any problems opening the attachment, please let me know, and I'll see what I can do to send something that you can open.

Love,

Tariq

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Tariq my son,

As you know Uzma's father along with his daughter, Nazia, had come to the US with Alice and Peter, and this was the time when due to my backache I could not travel, so I had them come and meet me in the United States.

Well, Habib saw Nazia for the first time, and liked her very much. I also noticed that Nazia too liked him. So later when they left and went back to Canada, I asked Habib, and he at first was shy but later when the others asked him, he admitted that he liked her. This is the first time that Habib really liked someone and thought of marriage, because before this every time we asked him regarding any girl, he said "No".

Then I made a call to Nazia's parents and made the proposal. It was accepted. They also said that they are not into all the fuss that goes with these days cultural demands etc. So it was decided that it's going to be a simple wedding without all the wasteful additions, etc.

The marriage date was fixed for the end of January at first and then when I suggested an earlier date, it was agreed to be the 17th of January.

The reason I did not inform you earlier was because the marriage proposal nearly ended due to that shia boy who is married to their elder daughter, Baraka. He created some confusion, and both he and his wife said it's too sudden and they should look into other possibilities too. I knew the reason very well. These shia have a mission to marry sunni girls so that the children become shia automatically. So I think that the shia boy might have wanted Nazia to marry some other shia guy.

Anyway, I spoke to them and said that I did my part by proposing on behalf of Habib, and it's their choice now to say yes or no and that it's not a compulsion.

All this went on for some time, and finally today we received the "Yes". So, the date remains the same which is the 17th of January, a Friday.

It's going to be a very simple wedding. We have told them that there are no demands from our side, as is the case usually by the boy's side for dowry etc. We do not want anything from the girl's side.

Since Bashir's house is bigger, he suggested that the Nikah take place there and the walima will be the next day, the 18th, which is Saturday.

I have been involved as an elder before too in some marriages but now it's more of a responsibility in this one.

I know what your situation is now financially and it might not be easy for you to take the journey, but I want you to know that you are very much a family member. At the same time Lara is here and it will be embarrassing to you both.

Habib says that later he will want to bring his wife to you, even if just for a few hours. It's only a ten-twelve drive, and they can stay for the night at a hotel, or just see you and return the same day. So I told him that I will pass on his wish of coming to see you, sometime later after the wedding.

Well this is all about Habib getting married to Nazia.

Now regarding your virtual community account, it has been done and you can login as Phil anytime you want. It was done this evening.

LOVE AND DUA, BABA.

§

January 12, 2003 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Please congratulate Habib on my behalf. He is a wonderful young man, and when I met Nazia I was very impressed with her and found her to be a lovely and loving young woman, and God willing, I pray this will be a blessing-filled marriage for both of them. I consider them each to be very lucky, by the Grace of Allah, to have found one another.

As far as Habib's coming here, while I feel it is very thoughtful of him to consider the possibility of doing so, I would be very uncomfortable with him spending the money and the time to do so. Moreover, I would be very uncomfortable with not being able to be a proper host. I am sure both the money and time could be put to better uses than in relation to me.

I am not saying this because I do not wish to see either Habib or Nazia. Habib is my pir bhai (initiated by the same shaykh) as well as a friend, and Nazia is the sister of my mureeds and the mureed of Momin Shah Baba who also is a friend. Rather, I am saying the foregoing because I do not feel now is the appropriate time, and I feel, God willing, that in time we all will be together again however briefly that might be.

I understand why Habib has made the offer, and I appreciate it, but I think the answer should remain as it is. This is just another part of the sajda that I must do.

I am not financially able to make the trip to your part of the country. However, even if I had the money, I believe I am odd man out in the situation since it seems Lara is planning on staying through the ceremony and I have no wish to embarrass her on anyone else. This is Habib's and Nazia's occasion, not mine, and I feel my presence would only make the situation stressful, and if there is even the remotest chance of this happening, I will not risk it ... better that I be physically absent, although my heart is with all of you. I have a feeling this set of circumstances might occur quite a lot in the future, and I believe the only degree of freedom you have with which to operate is just to leave

me out of things when such occasions arise ... this too is part of the sajda that I must do.

Turning to other matters ... I will not be able to spend much, if any, time in your virtual community – at least, not for a number of days. Although the manuscript for the collection of stories that I have sent you has been completed, there are still quite a few things that have to be done ... such as proof-reading, and a few other things as well. I'm not likely to have much time in this period during which I am trying to finish things up with respect to the manuscript and get it ready for whatever awaits it.

In addition, I think I should delay moving into the virtual neighborhood that you indicated. My taking up residence there so quickly would, I believe, cause some people to wonder, and I really want the real identity behind 'Philokalia' to remain completely anonymous.

Perhaps, in a month, or so, moving will be less obvious and, maybe in the meantime, we can think of some sort of cover story as to why I am making the move from my present virtual neighborhood to your virtual neighborhood. I know Lara well enough to know that if she thinks I am Philokalia, she might say that it does not bother her, but it will, and she spooks very, very easily a lot of the time, and she is likely to stay away from your virtual residence, and I don't want her to do that.

Baba, there is an issue here that is a problem, and, quite frankly, I don't know if there is anything that can be done about it. I'm going to raise it and you might, or might not agree with me, and even if you were to agree with me, you might wish to wash your hands of the whole situation.

Furthermore, it might sound like I'm saying this out of hurt, but I don't believe this is the case. The situation to which I have to do sajda is an extremely complex one, and I am not mentioning complexity in order to avoid doing sajda, because I very much believe that sajda is truly the only sane way to go in this whole set of affairs, and I am working at doing this, insha' Allah, very hard, and in a lot of ways, by the Grace of Allah, progress in this regard has been made, but I have a ways to go yet for the sajda to be complete in all respects.

I am raising an issue because I believe it needs to be addressed quite apart from the marriage issue between Lara and myself. I know the marriage aspect of things complicates matters quite extensively, but, in truth, I believe the issue that I am about to address, is entirely separate from the question or issue of marriage per se.

In any event, here goes: psychologically speaking, Lara is a 'runner' ... that is, she does not like anything that produces conflict, stress, or confrontation, and, often, her tendency in coping with these issues is to do whatever she can in the way of procrastination and avoidance behavior to not have to engage these sorts of circumstances -- especially if dealing with this kind of situation requires her to have to face stress or deal with unpleasantness about anything ... and this is even more true if the stress arises because she has to look into herself and admit what she sees in the mirror of her heart.

Lara is running from me right now, and she has been doing this for quite some time. She says she doesn't understand why, and, maybe, she doesn't, but, in either case, there is a very powerful mechanism in place that is causing her to run from me.

I used to think it was her confusion over Ron that was causing her to leave. Although that, undoubtedly, plays a role, I believe there is something more than the Ron factor that might be underlying what is going on with her.

The reason she gave for why she wanted out of the marriage is the most ridiculous reason I have ever heard. I say this not in order to ridicule Lara, but in order to point out the obvious.

When someone feels compelled to use a ridiculous contention as the basis for an action (and it doesn't get more ridiculous than to say that "no sane and rational person would ever accept the idea that she and I were married" and, then, she proceeds to run to the very person who helped arrange the whole thing and spend two plus weeks with him, seeking counsel about all manner of things, discussing the Sufi path, attending fatiha, and so on - if she really believes what she is telling me or anyone else that will listen that "no sane and rational person would ever accept such a preposterous idea -- and she does consider you to be eminently sane and rational) then it follows that what she is using as a 'reason' for getting out of the marriage is not the truth, but, rather, the truth is too unpleasant for her to want to deal

with, because it, unfortunately, raises a lot of questions about what has really might have been going on for the last year and a half.

I don't want to get into such things, and you don't want to get into such things, but Lara is going to have to get into such things. I believe she might have a very, very hard time admitting to herself, if she doesn't already know, what the actual truth of the situation is without help from you.

All of her life she has been abused, manipulated, mistreated, controlled, hurt, seduced, dehumanized by a whole slew of people ... in fact, most of the people in her family and by others as well. She was always the one who had to try to forgive, she was never the one who needed to ask someone for forgiveness, and she really doesn't know how to do this. She was always the one who had the moral high ground, never the one who had to face the fact that what was being done was not very nice.

She considers herself to be a very moral person, and in her own way, she is. Her self-image (what other people think of her and what she thinks of herself) is very important to her, even though she has lots of difficulty with issues of very low self-esteem because of what has been done to her ... and I believe this is one of the reasons why she reacted so negatively to the fact I told Lorna about the actual nature of the relationship between Lara and myself ... she couldn't stand the idea other people might think about her as being an immoral person -- she wasn't -- but the pathological side of her has convinced her that what went on was immoral, just as the pathological side of her has convinced her that she does not deserve the Sufi path and that she does not deserve to be happy or loved by anyone who is not a predator or a child-molester.

By the Grace of Allah, I have been someone who has been 'there' for Lara - really, for the most part, I am the only genuine human friend she has ever had, until you and the only one who would stand by her despite all the things she has done to that friend ... and, again, I am not complaining here for there is a difference between the facts of the matter and my emotional attachment to those facts, and it is in relation to the attachment that I must let things go, and it is to the way things have turned out that I must do sajda and be content with Allah's purpose for me and for Lara and how the two do not seem to be

destined to be conjoined, at least not in marriage. In any case, as much as I have been the best of friends for Lara during this period in which she has been trying, God willing, to regain control of her life, I have also been a very unpleasant reality for her to have to live with, because some of the things that have been done to her, she has done to me ... and, again, I do not say this out of hurt, but this is, unfortunately, what has gone on.

Do I want to point a finger at her? No. Do I want to say that it is all her fault? Not really. Do I want some sort of revenge? No. Do I want her to suffer? Absolutely not ...

Am I demanding an apology? Apologies that are not heart-felt are very over-rated, and even 'IF' she owed me an apology, this is not why I am saying what I am saying. I would rather her behavior change in a constructive manner that was to her spiritual advantage quite independently of issues of apologies.

Is this about my need to be right? No, and, in fact, I do believe that having a sense of being right just fuels the nafs sense of justification in holding on to negative emotions such as anger, resentment, and so on, and I really don't want any of this, and I will be very happy when, insha' Allah, complete sajda is done and all of this is removed from off my back.

What I'm saying is not primarily about me. It's about Lara and how her mind operates, and how her psychological make-up tends to operate, and how her history has shaped her to operate.

Lara is running from me because she can't face the situation. More specifically, I believe she is running from me because she has gone on record with so many people and on record with me on so many occasions that she is madly in love with me and how she loves me more than her mother and children, but, in reality, her emotion toward me might be largely a matter of: (1) what psychologists call positive transference (which is an enormously powerful phenomenon and one of the reasons why so many therapists end up sleeping with their patients ... it is a very real phenomenon and it can be felt by both therapist and client and can be very confusing to all concerned). I believe I genuinely fell in love with Lara, and that most of what I felt was not a matter of the positive transference phenomenon, but with Lara, on the other hand, what when on within her might largely have

been a function of positive transference; (2) Lara has never had a real friend before, and she was intoxicated by the idea someone would actually care that much about her, and, on her side, this got out of hand, and she became confused about things; (3) as I explained in an earlier e-mail, people who have been sexually abused as children, tend to be very sexually aggressive under the right circumstances, and this phenomenon might have manifested itself with Lara in my case, and this just further confused her

I kept trying to bring to Lara's attention the discrepancy between what she was saying and what she was doing ... not to beat her up with it as she thought I was trying to do, but to bring to her attention that there was a real problem present that was not being properly addressed or explored -- namely, if she really loved me, she would not have been doing those things .. even when one factors in the Ron component.

She was doing those things precisely because she didn't love me. However, she couldn't tell me (or herself) the truth because I was her only life-line at the time. She desperately needed my help, and because she desperately needed a psychological force that would help her to be able to motivate her to make the huge leap away from her pathological relationship with Ron, she clung to me and she had to convince herself what she felt was love because the actual reasons were too painful for her to face ... in other words, that, in certain respects, she was doing unto another human being, precisely what had been done unto her.

I don't blame her for this. Her mental, emotional, and family history really had never taught her any other way of doing things.

She has no coping skills per se. When she gets in social and emotional trouble, she goes to defense mechanisms, not to constructive solutions to problems ... something that is probably true for most human beings.

The foregoing scenario might be why Lara has been saying she feels I am trying to say she owes me something. Nonetheless, this is not what I feel I have been trying to do.

What I have been saying is that willing reciprocity is a central part of loving someone, and all too often Lara doesn't want to give -- on any level -- to me, and she doesn't want to have to examine the reasons for

her reluctance in this respect, and, so, it is easier to say the problem is that I expect something of her or that I am claiming she owes me something, when, in truth, I am pointing out there is a problem underlying her reluctance to willingly, freely, happily show me real love. She can't give what she doesn't feel, and, apparently, she doesn't feel love, and that is why we keep ending up with the problems we did and continue to have.

Lara often gave when she was ready to dump me again or leave me again, and she did this, in part, because she wanted to feel okay with herself about what she was actually doing. Giving me something as a going away present helped her to do this ... helped her to keep the guilt at a distance, to some extent. In addition, she wanted to re-affirm her self-image of someone who is a caring person.

Now, she is a caring person. However, she confuses her moods of giving as being the same thing as love and they aren't. There is an entirely different dynamic at work.

She felt irritated with me because she thought I was never satisfied with what she gave, but my problem was always with the intention with which she gave things. Even though to me the intention behind her giving something of a material nature to me often seemed to be other than love, she interpreted my unhappiness with the way she did things in relation to the material or financial or emotional side of things, per se, as being a criticism of her as a person, when, I was really, for the most part, pointing out that something very important was missing from what she was doing. Many of her intentions concerning me did not appear to be sincere or from the heart because she didn't love me, and I think she knew that on some level, but couldn't admit it to herself or to me for fear of the consequences.

I believe in her heart, Lara is a very decent, good, spiritual person. I believe that what is in her heart finds what has gone on between her and me to be deeply upsetting and confusing and something for which she doesn't want to have to deal with. However, I believe that, sooner or later, she is going to have to face this truth, or else she is never going to get well.

I desperately wanted to believe Lara. This was my mistake.

Lara desperately wanted to believe what she was telling me. That was her mistake. Together, things really couldn't have turned out other than they did ... a disaster.

She needs to know I don't harbor any grudges against her. I do believe that I understand what went on and why. She needs to understand how circumstances forced her into desperate measures and she doesn't have to feel guilty or ashamed about what went on. And she doesn't have to feel guilty or ashamed about the things she did because Allah sent someone into the firestorm to help her back to safety ... and Allah knew the right person had been sent, God willing, to do that job, and now the job, by the Grace of Allah, is done, and she should move on with her life and be happy and free.

From the beginning, I have only wanted her to be healthy, happy, free, and on the spiritual path. At a certain point, I did hope something more might be possible, but, apparently, this is not in the cards.

She is a caring person, and she feels she ought to care about me, but, really, things are over, and she has a new best friend. In fact, her Best Friend has been there all the time.

She needs to stop running away from the situation ... to understand the dynamics of what was going on during the last year and a half ... to accept that ... to not feel badly about that because it was probably the only way she was going to be able to get free of Ron. She needed me, and I am glad to have been of service, but she should move on with things and not get hung up on what transpired because, insha' Allah, I'm not going to get hung up on it.

I don't want this continuous tension between her and me spilling over into the silsilah, and this is exactly what is happening now because this is why you have written the kind of email you have written to me trying to avoid a problematic situation at the up-coming wedding, and Habib is even prepared to go way out of his way, financially and temporally, in an attempt to compensate for what is going on currently, and everybody is worried about me showing up and an embarrassing situation arising

In addition, Lara is running away from saying fatiha with me because she is afraid to face me. This is not because I would be uncomfortable with the situation but because she would be

uncomfortable with the situation for the reasons outlined above and below.

I believe a time might come in the not too distant future when she is going to want to refer other people to you because of her wanting to continue to run away from me. I don't care how people get to the silsilah or who their shaykh is, and in fact, I have told you many times I feel they would be better with you than with me ... so, wanting spiritual things to go through me here in Bamford is not really the issue ... what is at issue is that quite quickly things are becoming very complicated and entirely unnecessarily so, in my opinion, because the only reason it is happening is tied to Lara's need to continue to run away from something she has no need to run away from.

I forgive her for whatever went on. For the most part, by the Grace of Allah, I am not angry with her, nor do I resent her, nor am I holding onto a sense of injustice about the situation. I will admit there are some residual pockets of difficulty, but I am aware of these issues and I am working -- every day -- on doing complete sajdah.

But, she also should understand that I was alone before she came along, and I will be alone after, God willing, she moves on with her life. I have got used to being alone, and, quite frankly, in a lot of ways I prefer being alone because there was hardly a period of days when our relationship was conflict and stress free ... and Lara didn't even realize most of the time -- although I contributed my own share of problems from time to time -- that she was the one causing the conflict so she would feel justified in running away.

The romantic fool in me keeps thinking that someone out there might love me and want to marry me out of love and not for other reasons. But, in reality, I think the door has just about closed on that possibility.

I am getting too old for this sort of thing, and life is far too short to spend it in painful conflict and tension. I don't want that for Lara, and I don't want that for myself.

However, with respect to Lara, other than silsilah-related issues such as fatiha, there really is not much of a need for contact. I am your khalifah here, and she should understand and respect that, and really, nothing else is required. I want to ensure that silsilah work here is not

going to be adversely affected just because Lara wants to continue to run away from me (and herself) because she feels -- either consciously or subconsciously -- very bad about what has gone on and whatever role she has played in the whole matter.

She should concentrate on all the many positives that have come out of the last two years, and forget about the rest. Furthermore, if she really wants to make amends about things, then God willing, she should alter her behavior and just not do to anyone else what she has been doing in relation to me.

I don't care whether things were consciously done or subconsciously done, because, in either case, I don't think she could help herself. She has been, and continues to be caught up in emotional turmoil, but the only way I see her becoming emotionally healthy is for her to admit to herself why she has been running away from me and from herself and for her to realize that: I understand what went on Lara, and it's okay ... but it's over now ... move on with your life ... be happy ... be free ... live your life ... realize your potential, and for once in your life, let go of the emotional torment you beat yourself up with. This is the opportunity you have been given, by the Grace of Allah, in the last couple of years, now grab hold of it, and run for spiritual daylight and don't look back.

Baba, I believe she needs to be told the foregoing. This would not be interfering in the marriage, one way or the other. You are not advising her what to do about that issue ... you would be talking to her about what she needs to do psychologically and emotionally in order to be free of the pain she is causing herself unnecessarily.

I'm not asking for the marriage to be saved. I'm not asking for you to be my advocate or hers in this matter. I'm asking you to help her complete what she and I began two years ago ... which was not about marriage, but was about getting free, regaining control of her life, and journeying toward spirituality. But, I do not feel -- from a purely therapeutic or clinical point of view -- that she will be able to cleanly take the indicated steps unless she deals with the truth that she is running away from, and, in the process, learns how to stop running from herself.

Just as Lara was overpowered by the force of the positive transference that took place with respect to me in the context of

counseling her, she is now being over-powered by the force of the negative transference that happens when psychological progress begins to be made and an individual starts to have to take a look at themselves and what they are doing rather than looking at what someone else has done to them.

As difficult as talking through the Ron problem has been for her, that problem now pales in comparison with the issue of having to confront her own demons. I have become the lightning rod in this matter of her running from, and facing, those demons.

The reason why this negative transference is coming to the surface now is because if Lara is sincere about her relationship with Ron being over -- at least as far as marriage is concerned -- then many of the forces that drove her toward me, are no longer in play, and her internal emotional dynamics have changed.

Ron is no longer the problem, I am, but for very different reasons.

My worry is that if she is not helped to complete the process that was started several years ago, there is a very real risk she will be vulnerable to either slipping back into her pathological relationship with Ron, or she might be priming herself for another emotional breakdown. A person can't keep these sorts of forces bottled up and not suffer the consequences. This really is about helping Lara and not about helping a marriage.

For your information only -- and for no other reason -- my plan is as follows: I am assuming the marriage is over. However, I am not going to do anything from my side until I am sure Lara does, indeed, wish to move on independently, but has not done so up until now because she has been emotionally unable to deal with the actual reasons concerning why she wants things to be over.

Being told the truth about why something is over is one thing, and God willing, I can learn to live with that. On the other hand, being given a preposterous reason as to why our relationship is over just because she wants to hide from the truth is, in my opinion, not really acceptable ... not just on a purely human level but especially not in relation to the Sufi path. If she insists on maintaining the charade, then I will accept that as well, and, God willing, I will do sajda to the charade being maintained, but I believe maintaining the charade would only be

doing her and other people damage, and I think that needs to come to an end for the good of all.

For now, I am keeping the marriage option open, but I don't really want Lara to know about this because she will feel I am trying to apply a pressure of some sort or that I am expecting something from her or that she owes me in some way, and this is not why I am keeping things open. I want to do whatever I can, so in the end, she will have all her options open to her, and she can choose freely what she wants to do ... and, if I am wrong in my understanding of the psychological dynamics at work (and, while I might not be entirely correct, I believe there is much more truth to what I have said than not), then I'm creating what the native peoples speak of as an opening in the circle through which possibility might enter in.

I am not counting on this, and, in fact, I am proceeding on the assumption things are over. When I am convinced this assumption is correct, I will do what I have to from my side to end things.

None of the foregoing is intended to imply or suggest any criticism of what you are doing. I think it is wise - and you certainly don't need me to tell you that - you are staying out of the marriage issue because, among other things, it keeps you out of the house of cards that she has set up and feels she has to defend in order to save face and be at peace with her decision about the relationship. But, to emphasize once again, there is a difference between what is really going on and what she claims is going on, and I think she needs to deal with this difference in order to become free of her past ... including me.

Changing topics once again ... I believe there are quite a few stories in the new collection of short stories that might serve very well for the kind of plays you have mentioned doing before. One could organize a little theater company that could do a show consisting of anywhere from five to ten skits based on some of those stories, and I think these mini-theater productions might play very well in Peoria ... as some people might say.

Secondly, I also believe there are a number of these stories that would adapt very easily to an illustrated story for children, and, here again, is where Miriam's (Momin's mureed) and Sima's art talent might come in very handy. This would be another way of reaching out to people with a message about the general principles of the Sufi path

without ever mentioning any of the words that are so offensive to all too many people today.

Love,
Tariq

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January 13, 2003 (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Let me first tell you regarding what you asked about Sima and her uncle. You asked me if it will be okay to ask them if they can fund the project you are doing. So since this is not a marriage matter I openly asked her on phone. I told her that I know you are doing a project and is she or her uncle willing to support you financially for this project.

She cried on the phone and told me that she is not willing to do that at all. Yes, since she is my mureed, she is ready to do anything I tell her to do, and I said that I will never tell her or any mureed to do anything against their will. Even in spiritual matters the rule is that there is no compulsion.

To that she said that if there is no compulsion then she is not willing to do that. Regarding her uncle she said that as long as he knew that you were her husband he wanted to help, but now that he has come to know that it is not so anymore, he is upset with her for not letting him know before. I had thought that none of her relatives knew, but now she told me that almost everyone was aware.

She repeated the incident of the \$20 that she had to take from her children's money box. She still feels ashamed of herself for having to do that.

I did scold her on the phone when she said something that she had not previously mentioned. She said that two of her credit cards were completely used up, and she is still having to pay that is making it difficult for her at home, because every time she tells her children that they can't have this or that because nothings is saved from her income, the elder daughter gets very rude with her and complains that she gave all her money to you and made the children suffer.

I did not like this, and I got very upset with her and told her that she had only mentioned regarding the \$20 that she had to take from her children's box in the middle of the night without asking them, but she had never mentioned to me regarding any credit card.

She was here for the 26th Fateha, and she saw Lara. Bashir's wife in innocence told her that Lara is from Vermont. Since she is not regular in coming to Fateha, and I see her at times once in many months, I was surprised to see her on the evening of the 26th Fateha evening.

So under these circumstances and after this conversation on the phone with her I don't think it's advisable to ask her to request her uncle for money, but since Momin is coming to attend Habib's wedding, if you want I can ask him to just mention you to Sima's uncle and see what the reaction is. If he takes interest then Momin could inform him that you are doing a project and might need financial support.

Regarding Lara, I did not say anything to her, because she has not discussed you at all since she came. Only after receiving this email from you, I told her that though it was never and is not, nor will it ever be in the future that I will ever want to get involved, but I think it is better for her to write you an email because there are things that need to be addressed.

She cried and I felt bad that I had gone against my principles to interfere. So I don't know whether she will take my advice to write you or not. She did say she will write.

It felt terrible when she said to me that I enable you to take money from others. She was very frank. Then she said that she knows I have never asked you to do that, but she says that you do it in my name.

I was very hurt with this, and I told her that I have never ever allowed any of my mureeds to take money from others. I also informed her of Mu'in in Pakistan, who does not do a job but he has a store that was bought by him from the money that he had saved from his last job many years ago.

I also told her that there were times when the shop that is run by one of his sons did not make enough profit, he closed the shop and told the son to go get a job. I came to know of this one day, when someone

told me that he saw Mu'in in the fish market, working as a common laborer.

I was shocked at hearing this, and asked his wife who told me that this is because the shop was not doing well and there in the fish market where Mu'in works from 6 am till 3pm, and earns enough daily wages to just buy food for the house. That means he would have nothing left after buying the food, so he used to walk for miles to get to the astana every Friday. Then after a year he opened the shop again and by the Grace of God, now the shop earns enough for him and his family, and, so, he does not need to work in the fish market anymore.

So I told her that I know Tariq too is like that. I have heard that he almost starves the whole day when he has no money, and I have never found him to live off anyone. If anyone wants to help him and gives him a gift then it's ok, but he never demands it nor is he in the habit of taking money. I said all this to her in a rather hard tone because I was very hurt, when she said that, "Baba, Tariq takes money in your name, meaning that he does this under the umbrella of -- I don't remember if she said -- khalifa or silsila.

I immediately did wuzu and went to my bedroom, and in Sajda I asked Allah for forgiveness for going against the principles given to me by my shaykh in never to interfere and get involved in such matters. I deserved to receive this slap in the form of words for having to ask her to write to you, though I knew in my heart that I am not supposed to interfere at all.

Please do not feel my son, that I am upset with you. I say all this because I never keep anything from you.

So you see this is how she feels about you. I only wish, you had listened to me to end this relationship with her as an advice over a year ago.

After today's incident, I very sincerely advise you again to completely let go. It will be a far better thing you do. Every time you will want to address any issue, of the past with her, you will again be getting involved.

She too like so many in Canada, think that I have not permitted you to get a job, whereas God is my witness that I have always asked you to get a job and always sincerely wanted it.

I also know for sure that when you tell me that you have tried your very best, you are truthful. She does not believe that.

I think it is best to change this unpleasant topic, by saying that I am sure, when you start being online in the virtual community that you will be doing much good and will be helping me out too.

I love you son, very, very much!

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Your e-mail is very, very shocking to me ... not because of you but because of what you are being told. I don't know why this is happening, but you are not being told the truth by either Sima or Lara.

I'm going to explain the matter as best I can, and, then, just let it go. I find what is being said to be utterly incredible.

First, there were a few times in which Sima took some money from her children. One of the times was when she was visiting here in Bamford with her children, and I had gone to the bank late at night to put in a few dollars to cover a check I knew was going to be processed soon. When I made the transaction and got the receipt, there was less in the account than I thought would be the case, and I was afraid I was going to be \$20-30 short when the check was processed and, then, I would be hit with a \$25.00 surcharge for insufficient funds ... plus the embarrassment of having to deal with a returned check.

I came back to the apartment and told Sima about the situation and asked if she could loan me the money so I wouldn't worry about the overdraft. She said she didn't have any money but she would borrow some money from the children (who were asleep) which they had brought with them, and she would pay them back later, and she had done this on a number of occasions previously, she told me, quite independently of me.

Once or twice this happened in relation to her when I was in Delaware, but on those occasions, the children were always awake and she would ask them to borrow the money, and the three of them would joke about how their mother owed them money from previous occasions. To the best of my recollection, there was only the one instance (noted above), when any of that 'borrowed' money came to me (although she might have used some of that money for something that we were collectively doing), and she said she would pay the kids back either the next day or shortly thereafter.

As far as the credit card business is concerned, there was once, when I was opening up the office of the Sufi center that I needed a few chairs, several tables, and some office supplies. Because we were still married - although living in different states -- I approached Sima and told her what I was trying to do ... namely, start a business as well as have a place for people interested in the Sufi path to come for discussion sessions.

I asked her if she could help me. She said: 'Have I ever turned you down?'

Now, while what she said is true, most of what I asked her for was when I was sleeping on her office floor or going back and forth between your house and her house and wanted either gas money, or, on occasion, money for the movies, and, sometimes, something to drink or snack on at night when I was staying at her office place regularly.

But, this was never credit card stuff ... it was small amounts of cash -- \$10 or \$20 dollars at a time.

There was once or twice when she helped out with a repair to my car, but these were only two-to-three times, and I don't remember them being huge bills. Moreover, she insisted on doing it, and she made all the arrangements. In addition, here were a few other times when she insisted on buying me a winter coat that I did not ask for, or a few other things that I didn't ask for, or a few books that I didn't ask for -- but that I accepted as her husband ... assuming that it pleased her to give me such things from time to time.

There was the whole importing business fiasco involving that guy from Malaysia. We did go to a couple of Muslim or Sufi conventions

trying to sell the stuff, and, no doubt, Sima got stuck with some bills, but she said she wanted to do this.

She tried to help me sell my first book, and she tried to help me get a course on evolutionary theory going in Thurston, and, consequently, she helped me print some brochures. There were a few other things we tried such as the Internet, and, so, there might have been ISP charges, and I did try to do some e-commerce on the cheap.

I never had access to her credit cards. I never wanted access to her credit cards. I really don't know what she is saying when she indicates her credit cards are all used up with the implication that, somehow, I am responsible ... and that she still is encountering such financial difficulties some three years after we parted company because other than the \$20 I borrowed that night, and other than asking for help with the office furniture that one time (and I think the total ran to \$400 dollars, or so), and, on occasion, some petty cash for gas and the movies (and even here she often would give me money and say go to a movie without my asking), I never asked her for anything.

From time to time, she sent me things here in Bamford. For example, a small fan, or a Sharp vertical air blower, but again, I never asked for these things. Before I came down to the US for a try at things with her, she sent -- entirely unasked for by me or even hinted at -- an IBM computer to me when I was staying in Canada.

When we were married, yes, she spent some money on me in the ways indicated above. She even wanted to rent me an apartment in, or around, Thurston, and we went out looking on a number of occasions, but I always felt she was biting off more than she could chew financially, and, so, I always backed away from going through on any of this ... even though she was quite frantic about the whole situation and felt I should have an apartment.

We took the kids on a couple of outings -- once to the coast and once to an amusement park, but Sima is the one who wanted to do these things. I didn't ask her to do any of this and told her I couldn't afford to subsidize such ventures.

I'm sorry I was an expense to her when I was trying to find a way to establish myself in the United States. But, I really don't know what she is talking about when she says that, apparently, she is in credit

card trouble of some kind because of me. Perhaps, there is something that has entirely slipped my mind, but I don't think so.

Furthermore, when I came down to the United States, I didn't have a lot of money (maybe, \$6-700), but whatever I had was spent on trying to get something going in a business sense or on living expenses (such as gas). When this money was exhausted, Sima began to help me out financially in the ways outlined above and that I thought was her trying to assist her husband.

What Lara appears to be saying shocks me even more than what Sima is claiming with respect to me. I have never, ever, ever used your name or the silsilah name or the Sufi path to try to get money out of anyone. In fact, I was annoyed when Momin Shah Baba once, without really asking my permission, had spoken to Sima's uncle -- the one Habib works for -- before Sima and I were married or before I really knew Sima, and Momin made an appointment for me to talk with her uncle about funding some of my projects, and the man had agreed to fund me by putting me on his payroll as if I were an employee, but nothing ever came of it.

I never once asked Lara for money prior to our marriage. In fact, it was the other way around.

I had been laid off my job working for my brother's company just prior to the time when Lara came on the scene. I had a few dollars saved, and eventually, after getting the run around from the Unemployment Commission, I got some unemployment checks for a couple of months. During this period of time I was trying to find work, and I also was trying to get something going both with e-commerce, as well as through the Sufi center in Bamford.

Lara knew of my financial struggles and she offered to give me \$100 a month because she had just gotten a raise at work. I thanked her for her offer but said I would see how things went, and, maybe, if a real need arose later on, I might take her up on her offer ... but I never did.

From July until December of 2001, I pretty much paid all my bills through one means or another. Part of the money that I used for this was some of the proof-reading jobs that I did for Lara or odd manual labor jobs that I did for my brother, Bruce.

On several occasions Lara promised me work, and then, she gave it to someone she knows where she works who has a full-time job. She knew I needed the money, but she reneged on her promise to me ... and I very specifically remember asking her on several occasions about the forthcoming jobs ... this was around November/December of 2001.

For the last year and a half, Lara has dangled the prospect of working for her on a regular basis, and I don't know how many times we, supposedly, had come to an understanding that we would do this, but she always pulled the rug out from beneath me at the last moment. So, not only did I not have a job from her, but I had not gone looking for any work because she had led me to believe I would be working for her.

This recent work-related software issue is the latest in a long line of broken promises. She delayed purchasing the software again and again and again, always giving one excuse or another, and finally she purchased it, and -- WHAM -- before you can blink your eyes, she is saying, and without any actual evidence to support her allegations that I am not really interested in working for her, and I don't really want to work, and if I wanted to really get a job, I would have got one, and she can never trust that I really love her as long as I am financially dependent on her ... and, the fact of the matter is, I was never financially dependent on her.

There were two occasions -- once early in 2002, before I moved out of the Sufi center offices when I needed to cover the rent at the office and asked if she would help out -- but I did not ask her in your name, or the name of the silsilah or in the name of the Sufi path but because she was my wife ... a few days later she was back with Ron. There was one other time, late last year when I asked her if she could give me \$200 to pay a bill, but once again, your name was never mentioned, nor that of the silsilah ... I did it because I was her husband and needed some help and I was waiting for her to get the aforementioned software package, and I thought we would be working on a regular basis together and once that started, then I wouldn't have to ask her for money any more but would be earning my own source of income.

During this entire year and a half period when we allegedly were supposed to have a marital relationship, she helped Ron again and again and again with thousands of dollars, no questions asked. I asked twice, as indicated above, and neither of these instances had anything to do with you, or the silsilah, or the Sufi path.

The rest of the time I either earned my money from her, or I got money from some other source ... for example: my brother Bruce would often find some excuse for me to help him, and he would give me money in exchange for services rendered; or, for a time I received some money through unemployment compensation, or through the sale of some of my books. Or, when Sima's uncle sent some money (for which I had not asked -- and this occurred a couple of times. For the entire two years the Sufi center was in operation all of the bills, with one exception outlined above, was paid for, by the Grace of Allah, by me ... the rent, the phone, the Internet, the advertising, the website, signs for the office, supplies, as well as a number of other expenses.

With a few exceptions, I never got a dime from either Lara or Jane for any of this, and, in fact, on more than one occasion I have reminded Lara about how ironic it was that I am unemployed and, yet, I was, by the Grace of Allah, subsidizing them through the activities of the office, but those two individuals -- who had full-time jobs -- were not paying anything toward the maintenance of the center even after they had become mureeds ... and when I made the comments about the irony of the situation, I was not demanding they contribute anything to the center --. I was just noting the irony of the situation.

At one point, a woman by the name of Linda who had taken initiation had approached me and hinted she would like me to help her manage her considerable moneys. I turned her down.

On another occasion, that same individual attempted to get me involved in working for her with respect to developing some sort of psychological evaluation software. I told her that I knew nothing about programming -- and even if I did, I didn't want to work with her because of her intentions surrounding the matter (although I did not tell her about the latter aspect of things).

There were one or two times after we were married that I asked Lara if she could help me buy some blank CD's, toner for the printer, and the label materials so I could put all my writings on the CD in the

hope of generating some business through the Internet. She was a beneficiary of this process because she got a free CD out of it. In fact, she got free access to lots of other things from me ... including hundreds of hours of counseling for which I never asked a dime.

There were two large cellular phone bills for which she was largely responsible. I had a cellular phone plan that had 500 anytime minutes per month. She used to call me up all the time at my apartment - before I moved into the office to live - and after she had left her home and moved to Weston Beach. She would exhaust those minutes (for which I was paying, not her) and, then, she would talk for hours longer over the course of the month. She told me she knew the phone bill was being run up, but she said she would pay for it because it was important for her to be able to be in touch with me. None of this involved soliciting funds on the basis of your name, or the silsilah, or the Sufi path.

On and off, Lara has been staying at mu current apartment. All told, I suppose she has spent, maybe, six-to-seven weeks here.

I mentioned to her once when she was staying here that, perhaps, it might be nice if we could pay Lorna and Bruce, say, \$250/month in rent rather than having them subsidize us. She got very annoyed with this idea and asked me what I had done with the money that I had earned from her, and I told her I had paid other bills with it ... but she was extremely annoyed that the subject even got brought up.

On one occasion, I did a really big proof reading job for her. I did it right away, and I worked a lot of hours on it.

Lara was the one who set the rate of pay. I had tried to get her to lower the rate at one point because I thought she was paying me too much, and she said 'no' she wanted to keep it at the higher rate.

So, when I gave her my bill for the huge proofreading job, she complained the amount was too much. However, I merely was using the rate that she, herself, had set.

In any event, I lowered the bill by \$200-250. I told her that if she wanted me to lower it some more, I would.

Never in all of this have I said: she must give me money or that she needed to finance me, or that I was requesting money on behalf of

Baba or the silsilah or the Sufi path. I'm totally shocked she would try to claim otherwise.

She is either delusional about all of this, or someone is filling her head with lies and she is permitting herself to be persuaded by whomever is putting such untruths in her brain. But, whatever is at the bottom of this, there is something very, very, very wrong going on.

I don't know if the foregoing issue has anything to do with her actual motivations for wanting to get out of the marriage, but I will say this: her stated reason for wanting things to stop is entirely without merit. The whole thing just came out of the blue because one day we seemed to be doing okay, and the next she is calling me at midnight, saying she has been doing some thinking and "no sane, rational human being could accept the idea of our marriage."

I'm sorry you got dragged into this Baba. I thought there was a way of trying to help Lara that was quite independent of the marriage ... but apparently, not. I really didn't want you to talk about the marriage aspect of things with her, but I had hoped she could be helped to understand why she was running away from me and how there might be a way for her to resolve her own psychological problems quite independently of marriage issues.

God willing, I will not bring up any of this again. I am very sorry that what has happened has happened.

Turning to other matters, if I can't find financing for this new book, do you think I should approach a commercial publisher? I hate the idea of losing control, but, I don't seem to be doing too well trying to peddle these books on my own - especially since few, if any, people seem interested in helping me.

I gave a sample -- the first twenty-five stories -- to a lawyer I know in Bamford who is interested in spirituality (she comes from a Catholic background), and she absolutely loved the stories ... every one of them. And, I believe, God willing, the next twenty-eight stories are even better than the first twenty-five, but I will reserve judgment until I hear what you think about the stories ... that is, if you get a chance to read them.

In any event, the aforementioned lady lawyer said she might be able to put me in touch with a publisher. She indicated that a relative of hers is a published poet or writer or something like that.

I think the stories have an extremely broad appeal and, God willing, might have good commercial success. I would prefer that we retain control on this, but, as I said, up until now -- with the exception of my first book of essays -- I have not been able to make any headway with respect to getting my other books published or out to readers or making money to pay bills.

Love,
Tariq

§

January 13, 2003

Although I am not spending much time at the message board that has been set up in Baba's virtual community, nevertheless, on one of my visits, I note the following posting by Baba:

Date: Mon, Jan 13th 2003. 8:31:16 pm.

From: Baba

Subject: Greetings!

Allow me to share with you a realization of the wonders of honesty and purity of intentions! An honest person, with good intentions, sleeps well, and his days and nights are spent in peace and satisfaction! There are hard and easy days, but for an honest person, even the hard days are faced with a sense of achievement and pride! To those that live truthfully, their word is more precious to them than dollars, and is more in value than diamonds and gold !

Baba

§

January 14, 2003 (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

The only reason I wrote to you on these matters is because I have never and will never keep anything from you. I know and understand what you say.

Whatever Sima has said, she has only told me, and I have already told her that these misunderstandings occur when people are angry, and she should also do the proper Sajda and let bygones be bygones.

I told her let bygones be bygones because through the light of experience I have learned that arguments never result in removing anger etc. Let me tell you of an incident that took place many years ago.

One morning when I went to pay my respects to my shaykh, I saw his neighbor and another gentleman with him. I heard Sarkar say, "Bashir Sahib, let bygones be bygones and please forgive my neighbor Sultan Sahib". It was said in such a way, that Mr. Bashir agreed to let go whatever the argument was about and shook hands with Sultan Sahib.

We all had tea, and nothing was said regarding the matter and instead they all spoke like friends about other things, laughed and finally Mr. Bashir left.

After the man left, the neighbor told Sarkar, "But you do believe me when I say that he is wrong, don't you?"

In reply Sarkar said that he did believe his neighbor. "Then, why did you not clear matters up and instead said: 'let bygones be bygones'?" the neighbor asked.

Sarkar smiled and said, "My friend there are times when it's essential that the argument stops and is forgotten, as in this case not because you are wrong, but because arguments are never the solution.

Yes, there are matters of business and contract that have written records, and misunderstandings can be solved through presenting the written documents etc, and by doing that too, there need be no arguments, but there also are matters where there are no such written documents. These are the matters where arguments take place.

So you see my friend, this is not the time to prove anything. This is the time to just try your best to let bygones be bygones and carry on your regular lives."

In the same way, I say this to you -- I do believe what you say, even if you had not explained it to me. I know whatever you say is true, and only people who don't know need explanations, and not people who know and understand, but here too in the same way and for the same reasons, I have told Sima to forgive and forget. She has given me her word that she will.

Usually when you tell someone to forgive the other person, the person who has been asked to be forgiven misunderstands. He or she thinks that you too believe that he or she has done wrong and that this is the reason you are asking for him or her to be forgiven, but that is not so. When someone is angry and accuses anyone, it means that he or she believes the other to be wrong and guilty. So, you are actually asking that he or she forgive and in so doing will calm down and let go.

Believe me son, there is no other way. My advice to you is the same as I had given, and that is the "Sajda".

Regarding the short stories though I have not read them all, the ones that I have read are good. As long as there is no indication of any religion whatsoever, I have no problems with it. Just by not giving the name, yet giving very open hints is also not advisable. If that is what God wanted things would be very different.

It is my belief and yours that a good Christian who believes in God and in Jesus, is a better human being than a so called Muslim who is a hypocrite and has no respect for the Prophet, and whose faith in God, too, is shaky. Yes, if the Christian believes that Jesus is the begotten son of God, he or she does so in error, and can be corrected by God, not us.

Please do remember this that no one except Allah -- the one and only, the independent -- changes hearts. Only the prophets have the duty of announcing their faith, the Deen of the time of that particular Prophet that declares and announces. No one else has this as a right or duty.

I remember that once someone had advertised Sufi teaching in the news some 18 years ago, and my shaykh said that it is very wrong, and

there has never been any such example by the Sufis of the way, the Saints.

I also remember, that a friend of mine, who was mureed and Khalifa of a Master known by my shaykh, was stationed somewhere in East Africa by his Murshid. He had written to me and in the letter mentioned, "I do not know why I have been sent here and asked to stay, because I am not attracting people and just waiting for Blessings."

I showed the letter to Sarkar, and he asked me to respond in these words, "I am sitting before my Shaikh and he says " The mere fact that you listened to the advice of your Murshid to go and stay where you are now, Blessings started from the very first step you took to reach there, and continues even today! Unless you are told what to do specifically, just your being there is enough. Your Shaikh does not require you to do anything there, other than the fact of just being there, and while you are there you do not need to advertise or announce your purpose and station, as long as your Master tells you to do such that is most unlikely because only in very rare circumstances is one allowed to do this."

After I wrote back to my friend what was told, I asked Sarkar as to how people would come to such a person if one is not even allowed to advertise or announce. To that Sarkar smiled and said, "This is where the test of your faith in your Nisbath counts. It will be the miracle of your Nisbath that will attract people. All it takes is just one person that will be attracted to you through the miracle of your Nisbath and not through any advertising or announcements etc. This one person will be like a point that spreads. He or she will bring in his or her friends of course through being permitted by you."

So my son this is what was taught me. Habib sends his respects and love to you. I love you, and our love will spread as fruits to the ones that are sincere with you.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

January 15, 2003 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I am preparing a new CD for purposes of sale (I know, I'm being overly optimistic but since no one will hire me, I really have no choice in the matter ... I have to find some way to earn money to pay my keep). This CD is called: World-Making and Mental Maps.

It contains nearly 7,000 pages worth of material ... the vast majority of it being my writings. The CD is not really about the Sufi path, although there is a section buried deep within it (in a folder entitled Mysticism).

At different times, you appeared to say -- or, at least to me, this seemed to be so and I might be quite wrong on all of this, as I am wrong about so many things -- various things at different times about whether, or how, I should be trying to make these Sufi writings available to the public.

On some occasions it seemed to me you were saying it was okay to try to sell the books. On other occasions, you seemed to be saying I should not be trying to sell the books ... although, perhaps, they might be given away. On, yet, other occasions, you seemed to be saying I should not be making these books available to the general public at all.

I'm not trying to suggest what you were, or were not, trying to tell me on any of these occasions. I'm only saying I'm very confused about what I can, and can't, do with respect to the books.

I don't consider the Sufi books to be advertising my existence since I have taken the author indication off of everything on the CD. The copyright belongs to the Sufi center. Therefore, none of the Sufi writings really promotes our silsilah per se as much as they constitute basic information, and, even in the case of the spiritual instruction book that is included in the CD, this doesn't so much promote our silsilah as provide information about how to do fatiha, say a few zikrs, and do prayers.

However, you might consider such books to be a form of advertising, or a form of alluding to spiritual activities and, therefore should be eliminated altogether. I'm still not clear about what the boundary conditions are with respect to such things ... I keep trying,

but I feel I am missing something somewhere along the line, and I return to this same point quite often.

I did ask permission with respect to publishing the two or three talks on the Sufi path that have been given in Bamford over the last three years, and I did ask permission to do the Sufi discussion group ... and you gave your approval to both possibilities. However, apparently, I might have misunderstood what you were saying on those occasions.

I certainly don't have a problem with not doing these things because as more and more events are unfolding, I am feeling more and more inadequate to do anything at all ... whether this involves giving talks, holding discussions, or maintaining relationships. Therefore, perhaps the less people hear from me, or of me, I think the happier everyone might be ... including me.

In any event, as indicated above, the Sufi material is neither the focus of the new CD (it is just there as one kind of information, along with other kinds of information concerning a lot of other topics). Furthermore, the Sufi material is generic (i.e., there is nothing about our silsilah contained in it) and does not get displayed prominently in the new CD (as I said, it is buried).

My basic question is whether the Sufi material should, or should not, be included in the CD? My plans will not be substantially affected irrespective of whether the material is, or is not, included. I just need to know which will be in accordance with your wishes.

Love,

Tariq

§

Tariq my son,

Assalamo 'alaikum.

There should be no Sufi material in the cd that has anything to do with the silsila, I do not advise that there should be anything about Islam either.

As a rule, please be advised that no sale for any material that includes silsila or spiritual guidance should ever be done.

Means of livelihood should be completely different from any spiritual matter.

Is it true that your nephew has some business in the postal service? This was not told to me in relation with you. I came to know this just as a piece of information while I had discussions with Sima when she came back from Bamford after visiting you. Then the same was mentioned some days ago when Lara was telling 'Alia about Lorna your niece, and somehow when 'Alia mentioned that Ahmad had wanted at one time to start a postal service, Lara said that she knows of someone in your brother's family who does that.

Do you think that this nephew of yours would be willing to get you to join him, maybe as a partner?

I believe this can be good, God Willing.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Does this mean that the books that I already have published should not be sold? I'm not sure I understand the difference between providing information and providing guidance.

I can understand why the material about prayers and zikr might need to be excluded, and I can take out the Qur'an, and the collection of sayings of the Sufi Saints, but do my books of spiritual essays come under this category of guidance as well? Are you saying there should be nothing at all about spirituality of any nature whatsoever in the CD?

I'm also confused about the fact that my book of essays has been on sale at bookstores in Canada, New York City, and Bamford, and I had told you about this on a number of occasions. Did I misunderstand something here, and are you telling me that the book never should have been sold at all, just given away?

I also had told you what I was doing with the other website and that I was trying to sell, among other things, my book of essays, but, in addition, I was giving the Qur'an away for free. Maybe, I didn't properly communicate this to you, but I did talk to you about all of the foregoing, and I thought it was okay -- which apparently, none of it was and this greatly distresses me.

I also had told you about the Sufi Library CD, which I sent to you and had even mentioned about the possibility that Sima could join in and take a percentage of the sales, and, as well, I had mentioned this to you with respect to Momin Shah Baba and how a percentage of the sale price could go to the silsilah. I now understand that, apparently, all of this has to stop (none of it really went anywhere in any event because few, if any, people were interested in reading any of the material and, for the most part, I never heard back from anyone about anything).

I wish something had been said directly to me prior to this. Or, maybe, you had said something to this effect and I either wasn't listening properly, or I misunderstood what you were saying. Maybe, this is some of what you have meant when we were visiting you, and you said something about giving Tariq an inch, and he takes a mile.

I also worry about the things that I might not have been told but people assume that I knew. Just to give a simple example, you indicated in your e-mail the other day that you assumed I knew Nazia and her father and come with Peter and Alice down to the United States some time earlier in the new year ... I didn't know anything about this. I didn't know anything about Ra'uf's school shooting trauma, or that Bashir's father passed away, or that Uzma had a baby or quite a few other things as well.

God willing, I really wouldn't have pursued any of the foregoing (whether in relation to the various websites or the books) if I had clearly known it was wrong to do so. I am stupid about a lot of things, but if someone tells me a spiritual principle, then I do try to adhere to the principle as best as I am able.

It is a situation like this that makes me wonder about my capacity to serve in the role of either a shaykh or khalifah. If I could misunderstand or not understand something that is as basic as what

you seem to be saying, then I really wonder if there is any hope for me with respect to more complex matters.

I have tried to keep you informed of everything that I have been doing all along. I have tried to seek permission all along for whatever was being proposed.

But, seemingly, I have been misunderstanding pretty much everything you have been saying. Things like this make me wonder what possible use I could have at anything involving spirituality

I've kept asking you -- what am I doing wrong, what am I doing wrong? Why are things going as they are? Why can't I get help anywhere? Why is there no cooperation anywhere, no matter what I try? Why do all doors seem to be closed to me? Why, even when I try things that have nothing to do with spirituality, the door gets slammed in my face? Why should all manner of people turn their back on me as if I were a rabid dog? Why have I been pushed out and pushed out and pushed out, until I really have no place to go? Why do I have a wife who won't even tell me the real truth about why she is acting as she is toward me ... and, yes, you have said to let the relationship go, and, yet, if you will stand by her spiritually no matter what she does (as you indicated to her when we visited you in November), should a husband do any less?

She has said she has loved me. Others have said they love me, and, yet, I keep ending up alone. What is it that I am doing wrong? Why can't I establish a family life no matter what I do? Am I incapable of being loved ... am I that odious to everyone?

Is all of this happening because of the foregoing book/sale issues, or are there other things that I am failing to understand, and I'm getting hammered because I'm just not listening or obeying or being sincere enough?

As far as your inquiry about Lorna's brother is concerned, he used to have a job related to Federal Express or UPS or something like that. He had purchased a franchise and was contracting work out through that company. He sold the business some time ago.

He asked me to work for him several times when he had the franchise. The first time I wasn't sure I was going to be around Bamford long enough to make it worth his while to take the time to

train me, and I told him it wouldn't be fair to him for me to start and, then possibly, for me to have to be moving on.

A few months later, he asked me again and I accepted. However, I never heard back from him until he had sold the business, and, probably, the reason why I didn't hear back from him was because he was thinking about selling the business during this interim period of time.

Yes, Baba, I am working on doing sajdah to the entire situation. Some days, by the Grace of Allah, this goes well, and sometimes it does not go well.

You said on the phone the other day that my period of spiritual contraction has ended. Yet, things just seem to be contracting more, not less ... although I will admit I am spiritually dumb enough not to know that what seems like contraction, might really be expansion.

This whole thing with the books is both problematic and straightforward. It is straightforward in as much as whatever you tell me, then I will try to do that, but it is problematic in as much as I have been trying to pay attention to what you have wanted, and I have tried to keep you up to date with what I am thinking about doing, and I have been trying to seek your permission about most, if not all, of the things that I have been intending, and, for all of the foregoing to come to the surface now just makes me wonder if this is not just one more instance of what I have been doing wrong all along and one of the reasons why things have been the way they have -- financially, spiritually, socially, and otherwise.

More than anything, I worry that, for whatever reason, you feel you cannot tell me things because you fear I will do something stupid, or you cannot trust me if you tell me, or you feel that I am not strong enough to take the truth, or that I am really a liability and one of the reasons why I am in Bamford is to try to contain the 'Tariq-problem'. I worry I am going along on one set of assumptions, doing one kind of dance, and really the whole silsilah is doing some other dance entirely and I am just an embarrassment to you all. Love,

Tariq

§

Tariq my son,
Assalamo alaikum.

"As a rule please be advised that no sale for any material that includes silsila or spiritual guidance should ever be done." This is what I wrote, and this has nothing to do with your books, because first of all you have not mentioned in the books anything about the silsilah in particular. Most of your books are in a novel style. Yes though the intention is guidance yet nothing direct is mentioned. So it's ok.

These days, I understand that you are going through hard times, and tend to get jumpy and emotional, but please remember that I always love you and respect you for what you are. I appreciate what you wrote in all those books and allowed you to sell them. Its only when you mentioned our spiritual order, that I told you it should not be included.

A book had been written on the life of our great grandfather shaykh by Mustapha Shah Baba, who was the care taker of the shrine of my shaykh's shaykh, and only the cost of the printing was accepted from the Silsila people. Other than that some books were published by him on Sufi poems etc, and that was sold a little more than just the printing cost because nothing was mentioned there regarding Silsila.

Please do understand the intention of what I said. The Quran, the Hadees, and direct guidance are one's that should not be sold. Yes, printing charges might be accepted from those who want them, only because the printer has to be paid. Other than that books that do not have any direct reference to the Quran, Hadees or Sufi teachings are allowed to be sold and made as a means of livelihood.

We are not allowed to use guidance as a means of livelihood. That is what I meant.

The other things you say, regarding your not being informed about affairs of the Silsila people, I stand to be the problem and not them. They are not to be blamed because they all love you and accept you as a Pir Bhai. They are not good at letter writing, and they don't use computers too. I should have been the one to inform you, of those things.

The fact is that even among themselves they do not communicate well. I know for sure that none of them have anything against you in anyway.

Whenever you are mentioned, they always ask how you are, and they all love and respect you.

You say that while you are doing a dance there, the others are doing a different dance here, I do not know what you mean.

I love you too much to think that you are trying to say that I am making it happen, meaning that I am keeping you away from the Silsila. So I will not respond to it, and let's believe you never said that.

You have even said a few things more and I truly believe that you are very hurt regarding the Lara issue, and as a slip of the pen or keyboard it has been written, and not because you have any complaints regarding me.

I love you and I respect you. Your brothers and sisters of the Silsila, according to what I know, have nothing against you.

Please do not entertain any complaints regarding the Silsila. You know very well, how I too have been treated by some of my mureeds in the past, and as you have observed, that I have never allowed myself to have any complaints whatsoever.

Yes, I have always brought all matters to my Murshid, but I never questioned him as to why all this happened, because I knew and know very well, that it would mean that I am accusing him.

You know all that happened with Dr. Irfan. Did he ever write to his Shaikh asking why all this is happening? Informing the Shaikh of the happenings is alright and always should be done, not because he does not know, but because then he could advise on what to do, I love you my son !

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

January 17, 2003 (e-mail)

Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I do not have a complaint against you or the silsilah. I have a complaint against me.

The reference to the "someone" in the part concerning Lara was not a reference to you, but to Allah, and I was not complaining about God but alluding to the fact that, ultimately, Divinity has permitted this to happen for reasons that I do not know and that, yes, I'm going to have to accept this and do sajda. Allah permits a lot of things to happen and I do believe there is no injustice done by Allah to Creation, and I do believe God's Purpose is Good ... although when experienced locally, we humans -- or, at least humans like me -- often get a very distorted view or understanding of the situation.

I was not complaining about the silsilah, but was citing the fact that, maybe, I am a problem for many of you. I am the problem ... not you -- and, maybe, this is why things are going as they are.

Earlier you noted about how the other day in reference to your trying to talk with Lara even indirectly about the marriage -- when you told Lara that, perhaps, she should contact me and about what transpired after this -- how her reaction was sort of like a slap, and, consequently, you, immediately, went and did wuzu and asked for forgiveness ... so, in effect, you seem to be saying there are, or can be, consequences for our mistakes. I'm not saying you did something wrong, I'm just using your example ... and, Baba, I'm not remotely like you, and I do wrong things all the time -- so, if anyone deserves a lot of slaps it is me.

Consequently, what I am saying is that maybe a lot that has been happening to me has been intended as slaps in the face in the hope that somewhere along the line I will smarten up. But, maybe, I'm just not learning.

I don't feel you are the problem with respect to communication. You always have tried to keep me abreast of what is happening with respect to things that are relevant, and I do not expect that you should have to write me about everything that happens.

However, in a lot of ways I feel like I am completely out of things with respect to the silsilah. Perhaps, the reason why this is the case is, maybe, because I have rubbed so many people the wrong way, they tend to shy away from me and not want to have anything to do with me.

There have been a few occasions when I thought that, perhaps, you had to keep me isolated not because you were doing anything wrong or because the silsilah people were doing anything wrong but because there is something seriously wrong with me and it is better for all involved if I am not permitted to contaminate anyone else with my problematic ways. I have been hurt by the behaviors of a few people, but when I think about such behaviors and begin to reflect on why it might be happening, I always end up with a finger pointing at myself.

I'm not jumpy and emotional just with respect to the Lara situation ... the Lara situation comes at the end of a long line of events (going back decades) that have been problematic and very difficult to deal with. All along I have tried as hard as I can to reach out to people and be helpful, friendly, co-operative, accommodating, reliable, trustworthy, but when things keep getting thrown back in one's face, then one has to begin to wonder if the common factor in all this -- namely, me -- is the problem ... that what I believe I have been trying to do is not really what I have been doing at all and, consequently, my problems are the result of my own misdeeds. I'm just trying to figure out what those misdeeds are so I can attempt to correct things ... or, at least, struggle in that direction.

Yes, Baba, people did terrible things to both you and Dr. Irfan. But, I'm not even remotely like you people. I don't consider what is happening in relation to me to be like what happened to you two because you two are friends of God, and God has His own relationship with His friends. But, with me I always have felt things to be the Hand of severe retribution trying to teach me a lesson for my wrong deeds, intentions, behaviors, or lack of sincerity.

As far as the dance reference is concerned, again, this is a comment about me, not the silsilah. I feel like I'm the odd person out, and my life is like it is because I'm doing the wrong dance and the

silsilah is doing the right dance, and I just can't seem to get in step with what is going on.

As a result, although it would hurt you to have to do it, if necessary, the silsilah should be protected, and if this means Tariq's feelings might have to get hurt in order for me to start dancing in the right fashion, well, this is part of what teaching and learning involve sometimes.

You love me, just as you love everyone, and this is why everyone loves you. However, the fact you love people doesn't mean you don't see things we do that are not in our, or anyone else's, best interest.

Whatever people there are who love me, they love me because they see that you love me. The things that were done for me - from: the Sufi-mobile car, to: Barry's financial help, as well as many other things that were done ... none of this was done because these people would have done these things on their own in relation to me, but because you helped lead them to a place that they probably might not have gone otherwise -- and this is not a complaint against them, but me.

All the help that I have gotten from my brother Bruce -- and he might often be scratching his head wondering why he is helping me in all these ways -- is because, as you have told me, your shaykh has put love in my brother's heart for me. If not for that, I don't think some of these things would have been done, and on my own, people tend to run away from me.

You have a very strange way of teaching. I don't mean this in a bad way ... I mean it in a very good way. It is very subtle, gentle, indirect, loving, supportive, and encouraging.

However, sometimes people misinterpret your way of doing things and assume that whatever they want to do is okay ... and I am always afraid the reason why you might not be correcting me or not saying something is because of your way of going about things, and I am just misinterpreting what is going on, and there really is a problem with me, but I am just not picking up on what you, in your own way, have been trying to tell this dumb, would-be Sufi. I constantly am worrying about this, and I worry about it even more in the light of all that has been, and is, going on with respect to Lara, or finding work, or

Sima, or what went on in Canada, or any of the other things that have been going on.

If I find myself being excluded -- such as from Habib's wedding -- (and whether this is because of lack of money or because the potential problems that you fear might result if Lara and I were in the same house really is six of one and half a dozen of another), and, yet, lots of other people are going to be there from the silsilah --, maybe there is a reason why I'm being excluded, and that is not because there is something wrong with you or the silsilah but, rather, with me, and this is the way Allah wishes things to be ... not because anyone else is not doing as they should, but because I am not doing as I should, and it is better for all concerned that I be kept away from such things.

I cite Habib's wedding only because it is a current event, and I also realize I have to do sajda to this set of circumstances because that's just the way things are. Sometimes, however, I wish I had some inkling of what it is all about. Whether, or not, God ever lets me know, I still will have to do sajda and accept things ... but if I am doing things that are wrong, then maybe understanding how this is so would help me to do the sajda with a better niyat, or a more sincere niyat, or a more informed niyat than presently is the case.

In the e-mail I spoke about you having a problem, and I did not mean that as saying there is anything wrong with you, but, rather, your problem might be me ... that is your problem -- me. Some people do get put at a 'distance', of sorts, (whether through not being given your phone number or not being given your location and so on) because of reasons best known to you, and I am not questioning those reasons. However the fact such things do happen makes me quake in my boots that, perhaps, things are happening because of my faults, shortcomings, or the problems that I am creating for you and the silsilah, and, as a result, various kinds of 'distancing' steps have to be taken to keep me in check and protect the silsilah. It would be very arrogant of me to suppose that while such 'distancing' steps might be taken in relation to others, yet, not worry that the same kind of distancing steps couldn't happen to me or shouldn't happen with respect to me.

I remember the story you have told about the two men who pray to God, one of whom is good and the other one who is not very nice.

God answers the good man's prayers telling the angels to do so in order that the man will know God is happy with him and listens to his prayers. God tells the angels to fulfill the other man's prayers so the man will believe God listens to his prayers and, presumably, allows that individual to continue to go astray, believing God is happy with him when such is not the case.

I tend to identify with the latter man ... not because the man is a good role model -- which he is not -- but because, maybe, like this man, I have permitted myself to go about things in a way with which God is not pleased but I have deluded myself about what is actually going on and what it means. Difficulty comes into everyone's life, but, as you have indicated the meaning of those events, like the symbols of a dream, have to be interpreted, and sometimes difficulty is a form of chastisement to give people an opportunity to do tauba, or repent, and turn things around, and sometimes difficulty is what happens to people like you and Dr. Irfan and such difficulty means something entirely different. As I said above, I don't consider myself to be remotely like either of you, so this leaves me with the other possibility mentioned earlier.

As far as the Lara situation is concerned I know that no matter what, I have to do sajda to the whole matter. However, things have been slowed down, so to speak, because I really don't know what the best thing to do is ... for her, or for me, for the two of us, or in relation to the silsilah.

Seemingly, there are a number of ways to let go of this situation. I'm struggling with trying to identify which might be the best one and, then, doing it.

She is a troubled person with a very difficult history. In my opinion, she is not making good decisions about a lot of the things she does ... although, I guess the same might easily be said of me as well.

There are indications in her behavior that she really doesn't think very much of me. There are indications in her behavior that indicate she loves me a lot.

If the bottom line is she doesn't love me or cannot stand to be with me, then the decision is fairly straightforward since I'm not going to force myself on anyone. If she does care for me deeply but because so

much damage has been done to her over the years she is sufficiently mentally and emotionally disturbed sufficient emotional turmoil that she cannot function in any relationship that requires intimacy, reciprocity, or close co-operation, then the decision is of a different nature ... and, there are several ways to go in the latter instance.

As her spiritual guide, your relationship to her is different from mine. But, we both love her and we both are trying to be her friend, and we both want her to succeed spiritually and to be free, and I'm trying not to do anything we all are going to regret a little ways down the road.

You have given some fairly clear indications that, perhaps, I ought to call it a day on certain aspects of my relationship with Lara. I did leave the relationship a year ago when you and I came to the same position at the same time, but she -- not me -- took steps to start things back up again.

I relented then, and on a number of subsequent occasions as well. This time I have discontinued my voice mail and am leaving the ringer off, and I have changed my e-mail, and in addition, I told her the night of fatiha, before she left to visit with you, not to contact me again.

I have told you what my plan is concerning the situation. I am assuming my marriage with Lara is over, but I have left the door of possibility open until such time as I believe the door should be closed, or until such time as the door closes of its own. I have not tried to contact her and, God willing, I won't ... however, the problem of commitment has never been from my side ... she is the one who seems to be confused about what she wants and why and when.

I don't wish to hurt her in any of this. I don't want to do anything that will aggravate the situation. I don't want to do anything that would take away from her opportunities for finally, God willing, getting healthy.

I just don't know how I should try to fit into the foregoing set of circumstances, and I'm trying to approach doing sajda from a vantage point that is rooted in what is the best way for me to do sajda ... and right now, I don't know what that is ... I only know it must be done, and, presumably, the sooner, the better.

Though, from time to time, there is anger there about the situation. Mostly there is not.

Though, from time to time, there is hurt concerning the situation. Mostly there is not ... mostly I just don't understand what is going on, and, maybe, I am never going to understand, and this is how I am going to have to do sajda -- to a situation that is totally unresolved and might never be resolved no matter what I do.

Love,
Tariq

§

January 17, 2003 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I believe I have upset and hurt you very much with some, or all, that I have had to say in the previous e-mails, and I have said two rakats of tauba, and I ask your forgiveness, as well, for my mistakes.

I have done the two rakats of release with respect to Lara. God willing I will do two more rakats next month as well as the month after that in order to complete the process. Insha' Allah, I will just let the whole situation go and accept it, God willing, as the way things were meant to be, without recriminations concerning Lara or anyone or anything else.

As far as the books are concerned, I've decided just to drop the whole idea of doing a CD. Therefore, please do not broach the subject with Momin Shah Baba as to whether he could mention this to Sima's uncle.

There is one aspect of the last e-mail that I would like to amend ... even though I 'm sure there are other problems as well. In any event, in re-reading my e-mail to you, it might seem I was suggesting that you were excluding me from the wedding, and I certainly do not believe this ... after all, you were prepared to have Habib and Nazia come here in order to show me I was included in things. Allah has wished for me not to be present at the wedding, and this is why I won't be there, and

that is the beginning and the end of the matter. If God wished me to be able to attend the wedding, things would have been other than what they are.

I do wish Habib and Nazia the very best of good fortune and happiness together. I am very happy for both of them.

One of the other major mistakes I have been making is really not to accept what you are saying about things - rather than focusing on the fact that you, (at least, up until now) have been satisfied with me, and, therefore, I should be prepared to just let everything role off my back and letting go, I've permitted things to bother me that shouldn't have and I have had doubts about things that I should not have had. Again, I ask your forgiveness for this, and for just being a pain in the head, neck, back, and lower extremities.

Love, Tariq

§

January 20, 2003 (e-mail)

Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum. The books you have written are good, and there is no mistake in selling them.

Yes, I believe what you have said, regarding your love and faith in me and the Silsila. You have never been a problem to me or the Silsila. You do not have to ask for forgiveness because I know your niyat has and is always the best.

I love you !

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA

§

January 21, 2003 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

There is one other aspect of what I have said in the previous e-mails that requires a clarification from me and more I believe. I accept full responsibility for my mistakes.

If my misdeeds get called to account, or my misunderstandings or misinterpretations lead to difficulty for me, I do not blame you or the silsilah or God for that. I blame me.

If I did not properly understand about the books, this is my fault, no one else's. You never would have let anything of the magnitude I was doing just slide by, and I know that, and, God willing, things are being rectified now.

I believed I understood what you were saying with respect to the book materials and how one should not make any money from Sufi teachings or providing guidance to people, but I, apparently, did not. I never would have charged people admission for a talk or asked money for counseling or whatever spiritual guidance was given, and I never asked either Lara, Jane, or Linda to support the Sufi center.

But, in the matter of books, I think I was not thinking about things properly, and, maybe, I haven't communicated to you well enough about what I was up to or what that involved. I don't hold anyone but me responsible for my misunderstandings and whatever, if any, ramifications might have followed from that.

You have done your best with respect to me. My failings with respect to such misunderstandings reflect on me, not you.

In my being upset about my mistakes some of the things that I said might be construed as suggesting I wasn't properly informed, and this is not so. You have been very clear all along that one should not make money from Sufi teachings or from providing people with spiritual help, and I have just not properly understood what you were saying. The error is mine, and stating things in such a way that any other conclusion might be drawn is also my error.

From beginning to end, Baba, the mistakes have always been mine. Sometimes I read into things what I should not read into things, or

miss things that are present, and I do have a tendency to go on about my worries with respect to making mistakes, but in the midst of all this anxiety, I did commit mistakes ... a number of them.

I am very sorry for the pain I have caused you.

And, you won't have to worry about a whole onslaught of e-mails over this. This is, insha' Allah, the last of them concerning such issues.

I knew I made mistakes, and, therefore, I re-read the e-mails hoping to come to some understanding of what those mistakes were. I'm sure there were others, but the material above and in some of the previous e-mails touch upon what I feel are the most significant.

I ask for your forgiveness, Baba, with respect to all of this.

I have feared the possibility of this day for a long time, and it finally has come. And, I am very sick at heart about it.

Love,

Tariq

§

Tariq my son,

My advice to you is to stop blaming yourself too much. Just know that I love you, and as I have always prayed for solutions to the problems, I will continue to do so.

Just remember the fact of ALLAH being Rahman and Ghafoor to such an extent that no fault is greater than his Blessings, Mercy and Forgiveness. It is good to ask Him for forgiveness but it is wrong not to believe that He has forgiven. So please be happy and at peace.

LOVE AND DUA

BABA

§

January 22, 2003 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I have not gone to my e-mail box to see if you have written anything to me. The last time I looked this morning there was nothing, but I wanted to write this e-mail to you quite independently of anything you might, or might not, have said in any, possible, recent e-mail you might have sent.

As usual with me, the following takes a little time to say what it has to say, so I ask for your patience. Everything that is said in the beginning of this e-mail -- as well as what is said further on -- is a prelude to the conclusion of the e-mail.

For almost as long as I can remember, I have always taken lightning storms personally. On the one hand, I loved the sheer power of the light show that was manifested through them, but, on the other hand, I never thought lightening was a random phenomenon.

There was Someone behind the scenes Who was directing things. God always hits what Divinity aims for. Consequently, I often thought that each time a lightning storm passed through wherever I lived then, maybe, this time was the time when God was in search of me.

My whole being would tremble in fear with respect to this modality of Divine Presence. It's funny how, sometimes, one can understand so clearly in relation to some forms of manifestation that God is present and, yet, tend to forget this with respect to everything else ... or to remember it under such circumstances, but only in a vague, very confused manner.

I have always taken all of the events of life very personally. The understanding behind this often might have been distorted or incorrect, but the gut feeling was always there. Life is meant to be personal and in one's face ... whether one likes this or not -- life is the way God speaks to us.

You have introduced to us the idea that the events of life are like the symbols of a dream. They both require interpretation.

Through all that has happened over the last 50+ years, there is one thing that has been pretty much of a constant with me. Whatever was

going on -- however painful, problematic, or confusing it might have been -- none of this ever disturbed, by the Grace of Allah, my basic faith concerning the existence of God, Divine Purpose, Truth, Justice, and the principles -- material, psychological, and spiritual -- through which God gave expression to the Divine Passion Play.

Yes, I have had constant doubts about myself and how I fit into things. However, even if my fate were to end up in the lowest depths of Hell (and I pray this is not the case), this would only confirm the truth of what I felt, not negate that reality.

If the purpose of life is to provide God with ample evidence that I am deserving of chastisement or correction, then, unfortunately, I have given Him such testimony through my behavior, attitudes, ideas, beliefs, and so on. I don't believe this is the purpose of life ... but, nonetheless, the evidence against me is there, and I am the one who has provided it through the way in which I have lived my life.

I know this is God's universe (and I use the term 'universe' to refer to all of Creation). I know I participate in this universe by God's leave, for Divine purposes, according to God's rules and principles. I am God's guest here.

I do not believe God wants me to fail in life's purpose, but this does happen, and, it could happen to me. I have never presumed anything was set in stone just because I have become a Muslim or have been permitted to step onto the spiritual path ... in fact the realization of this possibility of failing at life's purpose has haunted me for much of my adult life.

Iblis, of course, is the paradigmatic example of this possibility. He was raised to the level of angels, permitted to teach them, and, yet, everything was lost in the twinkle of a second of rebellion, heedlessness, pride, jealousy, and carelessness. Over the years, I have seen others fall by the wayside in the same fashion, and I always have feared the other shoe would drop on me some day.

Why? Because I am aware, at least to some extent, of what goes on within me. I am aware of the presence of nafs, and I am aware of the whisperings of Iblis, and I am aware of the call of dunya, and I am aware of the wish of unbelievers for me to join them.

Sometimes this inner chatter is almost overwhelming. However, prayer helps, and reading the Qur'an helps, and zikr helps, and fatiha helps, and fasting helps, and your nisbath with me, and vice versa, helps me, by the Grace of Allah, to resist and quiet the chatter of the unholy alliances within me that seek the destruction of my soul.

Do I have doubts, questions, uncertainties, blind-spots, and weaknesses? Yes, I do ... partly because I was made this way, and partly because this is all part of the struggle that is intended to give expression to the nature and purpose of life ... such forces are, in part, the means through which life gets in one's face -- up close and personal.

Have I ever lied to you about any of the foregoing? To the best of my recollection, I have not, and if I have it was because I was lying to myself at the same time.

The time we were driving down from Canada to the United States, and I told you about these impulses in me to want to hit you ... this was terribly difficult and embarrassing for me, but I told you because dealing with the problem was better than trying to keep things in secret. Besides, whether I tell you or I don't, I'm confident you know what is going on inside of me - I have had a few demonstrations of that from you.

I might not know how it works -- whether, for example, the monitoring on your part is continuous or whether whenever it is necessary for you to help me something is disclosed to you by God as required. But, I know it is real and present, and, in any event, I know that God knows what is going on within me at all times, and this could not be otherwise.

I do believe you when you say that a person's shaykh knows not only whether an ant is crawling up the pant leg of someone, but what the sex of that ant is. I have believed such things ever since Dr. Irfan told me about his experience in Ajmer when he was walking with his shaykh through one of the alleyways leading to the shrine, and they passed by some beggars, and Dr. Irfan thought to himself that such people were healthy enough to work, and immediately his shaykh turned to him and said: "Dear one, some of these people are very great ... very great," and, then, his shaykh turned around and continued walking toward the shrine.

I know you are aware of my concerns, worries, doubts, questions, and struggles with the unholy alliance of forces within me. So, whether I express this, or keep it silent, you still know about such things.

My spiritual condition is such that my nafs has not, yet, surrendered and, as a result, has not been transformed into my ally, rather than the deadly enemy it continues to be. While in this condition, I have the spiritual responsibility to resist the urging of nafs ... I can do little about the presence of its urging, per se ... I can only take steps to try to keep it at bay or contained through the teachings I have been given through you and Dr. Irfan.

If you, or anyone, asks me whether I am ashamed of the presence of such an entity within me – at least, in its present unredeemed condition -- then, I must answer “yes!”. At the same time, I do understand that the nafs has a key role to play in spurring one toward spiritual growth ... for there can be no growth without struggle since this is one of the principles that God has ordained for earthly existence. If you will, the nafs is a necessary evil, and if this evil can, insha’ Allah, be overcome, then it can become a force for good.

But, I can’t deny the nafs is there within me. Nor can I claim I am oblivious to its presence or to its urging.

When Hazrat ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) resisted the urging of his nafs to cut his enemy to ribbons when the latter spit on him, he attended to the greater enemy within, and when the Prophet taught there is nothing inherently wrong with feeling anger, but, however, one should swallow and keep down what one feels, then I know that while hearing the call of nafs might be unavoidable under certain, if not most, circumstances, the important thing is how one deals with this call.

If one reads my earlier e-mail to you, as I have done many times, one sees the whole drama unfold. Sometimes when Tariq is very upset, frustrated, confused, hurt, certain words are said that have problematic undertones, and, yet, in each case, the final action is one of accepting responsibility for the ramifications of one’s own errors, mistakes, and misunderstandings.

I can't tell you that I don't have a nafs, Baba. You know otherwise. Moreover, I can't tell you that Iblis doesn't whisper to me, for, again, you know otherwise.

Over the last ten years or so, nafs, Iblis, dunya, and unbelievers have extended a variety of gambits to me with respect to you, and by the Grace of Allah, I have not accepted and gone with what has been offered. My heart has always voted for you, no matter what reason or nafs or the world or anyone else was saying.

I do not hold you responsible for what is going on in my life, for as the Prophet once said to someone who was trying to blame the woman who had poisoned the Prophet for the pain that the Prophet was feeling - "By Allah, nothing comes to me except by Allah."

Everything in my life has come to me from Allah ... be it enjoyable or problematic. I have never questioned the how or Who of this ... only the why of it, and this why was not asked because I believed God didn't have the right to do this, or because I believed God's Purpose was unjust or not benevolent, but because my nature tends to lean in the direction that if there is something wrong, I am the likely culprit, and I am just trying to find out what it is that I have done wrong and want to take steps to correct it.

I remember reading a story about an individual that had gone into seclusion for 40 days, and when he came out, his wife and children were quite short and angry with him. Consequently, he went back into seclusion for another 40 days because he felt their anger and shortness must be due to some defect in him that had not been purified by his first seclusion.

This is the way I often feel with respect to many of the events of my life or with respect to the way in which people interact with me. I'm not blaming them for what is going on, I figure the problem must be within me, and I am doing something wrong, or my niyat is wrong, or my attitude is problematic, or I am treating people with an arrogance, pride, sense of superiority, or unkindness about which I am not aware.

For the most part, I tend to look at other people as being better than me, and because of that my inclination is to withdraw because I don't want people to have to put up with me and my shortcomings. At

the same time, I do want to remedy whatever such shortcomings might be, so I ask about what is wrong with me.

You are not responsible for my situation, Baba, but I know you well enough -- which might not be all that well because you are like an iceberg, and I only see the top 1/8th, not the bottom 7/8th that lies beneath the Ocean - to know you do know what is going on with respect to me and my life. You have dropped too many 'hints' for it to be otherwise.

You told me when you came back from Ajmer with the group from the silsilah that Allah has been teasing me with respect to the things that had been going on in my life. On another occasion you have told me you don't envy what I am going to have to go through, but you envy the spiritual condition to which, insha' Allah, such things might lead. On other occasions you have said other similar things.

What you know about me and my future, you know through your own spiritual experience and insight, or through what your shaykh has told you. I don't know precisely what you know, and I'm not asking, but I believe you do know.

I know the rules of the 'game' both enable you, as well as constrain you, in relation to what you can do and say with respect to me. You have degrees of freedom that have permitted you to help me in various ways, but in other respects you have had to remain silent ... and this silence is as much for my own good, as it might be a condition that exists for other reasons.

When I have come to you asking what is wrong with me, I have not been asking for secrets. I am distressed about my own wretched condition and seeking to change.

Lying in bed after Fajr prayer this morning much of the foregoing and the following drifted into, more or less, clear focus. For example, among other things, I was excluded from the wedding, but not by you or Habib, but by Allah, and this exclusion was not for any reason that I thought might be the case ... and none of these reasons about which I was thinking pointed any finger at you, but always at me.

I was excluded because events had to unfold as they have, and my attending the wedding would have got in the way of this unfolding. I had spiritual work to do here, and I probably wouldn't have been able

to do that work visiting with you ... and, so, things were choreographed to keep me away -- and whether this involved lack of money, or because Lara was there, or through some other obstacle, really is irrelevant.

The exclusion from the wedding, like the rest of the events of my life had to happen in order to bring me to where I am right now. You have told us about the true meaning of the promise of “yes” on the Day of Alastu Rabikkum (“Am I not your Lord?”) I heard what you said, filed it away, but without really listening with my heart and, thereby, trying to absorb what was being said and put the teaching into practice in everyday life.

I saw a movie on the Science Fiction channel on Saturday night while Habib’s and Nazia’s Walima was probably going on. It was called ‘Control Factor’.

To make a long story short, the hero of the story, Adam Baldwin, an insurance salesman, happens on evidence indicating that he is the subject of a mammoth government conspiracy to control his thoughts and actions by beaming certain signals to him. These same signals can be beamed to other people and, then, these people will say to the hero or do to the hero whatever instructions are given via the signals.

A person’s interaction with the secondary causes of life is similar to this. God is not engaged in any conspiracy -- or, at least, not a malevolent one, but there are many aspects of the Divine purpose that are hidden, for security reasons, in secrecy. People like you, your shaykh, Dr. Irfan, and Yaqub Baba know this Passion Play is going on and how, to a large extent, it works, but you can only say and do certain things to help us along (like the guy in the movie who helps the hero at a certain point of the film) – otherwise the game would be spoiled, or misunderstood, and life’s purpose would not be served ... just as the plot in a movie would be spoiled if one were told how it all works out and how its plot is structured.

Like the government conspirators in the sci-fi movie I saw on the weekend, God beams thoughts to us all the time – your notion of the continuation of thought comes into play here, Baba – and, of course, we, on our end of things, interpret those thoughts according to our own spiritual condition, mental state, personality, emotional inclinations, education, circumstances, and so on. In the process,

people are induced and/or choose to go in certain directions. The degrees of freedom that Allah permits will all serve God's purpose, but we are responsible for how we interact with those degrees of freedom. God does us no injustice and the Divine purpose is nothing but good, but the degrees of freedom that we are permitted by God allow for us to be able to either choose to embrace that Purpose or rebel against it or reject it.

The people who come into my life -- whether you, Dr. Irfan, Lara, Jane, people of the Silsilah, my parents, my brothers, my daughter, my former wives, employers, and so on -- they are all secondary causes in the service -- irrespective of whether, or not, they know and accept this -- of the Primary Cause. As a result of their own reasons and understandings and motivations, they interact with me, but they do so at God's bidding with respect to God's plan for me -- and, of course, the same is true in conjunction with God's plan for everyone else's life.

I was, in a sense (a good sense) set-up for Lara, a long time ago. I helped set myself up.

All my life I have longed to be loved by a woman -- that special someone. All my life this has not worked out.

Sometimes I was at fault for things not happening in this regard, and sometimes other things -- on the level of secondary causes -- were responsible. But, always, the One Who was doing the choreography for this whole sequence of events, was frustrating my life-long wish ... not out of meanness or lack of compassion or anything else, but because it was necessary for, God willing, my eventual spiritual health and happiness.

I recall you once said words to the effect of: 'happy is the man who accepts his fate'. Accepting the events of one's life as God's personal relationship with one is, I believe, at the heart of the kind of happiness to which you were referring.

I remember very vividly the story you told to Lara and me when we were visiting with you in November (and I am never quite certain whether the stories are actually biographical or just made up for our benefit -- certainly the spiritual truths present in them are of great importance irrespective of whether the story is true or invented). This story was about the night before the month of fasting and how, even

though all the other shaykhs present were quite excited about the advent of Ramadan, you were less than enthusiastic about the approach of this month, and after you were prodded into revealing why this was so by a 'mischievous' fellow-traveler of the mystical path, you indicated that although you fasted because this was Allah's wish, nonetheless, you didn't look forward to the month because it was very difficult and, even, painful.

All of life is the month of fasting. Just as in the case of fasting, we go through life because we have chosen to do this (in pre-eternity), and because God wishes us to do so.

Like fasting, life is difficult and painful. If we knew on the Day of Alastu Rabbikum, what we know now in the midst of the trials of this life, I don't know how many spirits would back out and just seek to be returned to Essence, wondering what could have possessed them, while in their fixed form, to cry out to be granted participation in existence.

No one in his or her right mind seeks out pain and difficulty. I remember Dr. Irfan saying that although we must accept pain and difficulty when they come, no one should seek these things out ... no one should try to show bravado in the face of jalali attributes and names, because the focus of Majesty that might be brought to bear on any point of created existence could tear it asunder quicker than a New York second.

What has gone on between Lara and me ripped out my heart. But Who was it that did the ripping and why?

Lara has been one of the secondary causes with respect to this process (I am another one), and she bears responsibility for what she does (as do I, although in her case there might be forces at work that render her actions to have emanated under conditions of diminished capacity in certain respects), and she will have to learn to do whatever is necessary to understand what is going on within, and around, her if she is ever going to be truly happy and free. However, the Primary Cause in this whole melodrama has been God.

Things have been orchestrated from beginning to end, and it really couldn't have been any other way. Whether one understands the

purpose of this orchestration is another matter ... and I am working my way to that ... so, please bear with me.

Do I blame God for what has happened, or do I have a complaint against Him concerning such matters, or any of the other issues in my life? If by blame, one means do I wish to criticize Him for what is going on, or has gone on, then the answer is 'No!' ... even though I believe that God has arranged everything.

God has never done any injustice to me, and, pretty much, I have always known this. Of course, on more than one occasion I have squealed in pain, but the expression of pain is my human weakness showing through, and it is not a squeal of criticism or complaint.

Was my heart torn out arbitrarily? Not from God's side.

He has been teaching me certain things all along. He has used events in my life to do this. You and Dr. Irfan have been among those events ... the most important ones. Lara also is one of those events.

What have these events been trying to instill in me? – sajda ... bowing to whatever happens as God's wish and Divine Purpose in action ... and letting things go as such ... as an act of charity on both sides of the ledger. Any action or choice other than sajda is a losing hand – spiritually, emotionally, mentally, socially, or in terms of marriage. We cannot be happy and content with life or our rizq (apportioned allotment from God) or our fate, if we do not do sajda. We cannot really serve life's purpose if we fail to do sajda as we go along because, if we do not, we are too busy being caught up with events as secondary causes, and, then we lose sight of the presence of the Primary Cause and why things are happening as they are and why they have been choreographed in a certain way, both individually and collectively.

This is why, I believe, you have referred to such sajda as the ultimate expression of nisbath ... one's nisbath not only with one's spiritual guide and the silsilah, but one's nisbath with the relationship between self and Self and how this relationship plays out over the course of life. Sajda is an act of trust and faith on one's part that accepts that whatever has happened is to help one toward realization of the truth concerning one's essential identity and to realize one's unique spiritual capacity with respect to life's Purpose. By the Grace of

Allah, this sajda has now been made – or, at least as much I able to do at the present time – not only with respect to Lara, but with respect to my life in general.

I realize all that has happened to me – all the events of my life ... the good and the problematic – have been needed to bring me (push me?) to the brink of facing the need to have a basic acceptance of, and contentment about, what Allah has ordained for me. God has needed to prod, tease, push, pull, shake-up, frustrate, upset, annoy, move, compel, constrain, shame, induce, and entice me through all of the events of my life to help prepare me for accepting the importance and necessity of sajda with respect to one's life ... that this is the way God has intended it, because this is the way my life has unfolded, and because it did, it couldn't have been in any other way, and this is what I have needed -- even if, I sometimes kick and scream all the way to doing sajda.

I never came to you, Baba, to be a shaykh or be your khalifah or to be the locus of manifestation for the function of qutb (spiritual pole) or the masnad (spiritual throne) or any of these things. My nafs might have been enthralled with such ideas, from time to time, but my inner soul and heart were not. I came for the truth in Sufi teachings. I came because I knew I needed guidance, and by the Grace of Allah, it came to me through you.

Among other things, God had my heart ripped out via Lara, and He took it out and bounced it on the ground a few times, and, then, He put it back in through sajda, and I feel differently as a result. There is a quiet happiness, contentment, peace, and gratitude that is present.

There is an expression on the playgrounds of America when people play basketball in the absence of a referee. When someone gets hit by an opposing player and the damage is not serious, then, they say: "No harm, no foul." Well, this is what I thought this morning about my life ... no harm, no foul. In fact, the hits have, God willing, made me a better player even if I didn't always understand and appreciate this benefit. I laughed for a long time when this came to mind.

I don't know if I will lose sight of what has been shown to me, but I do know that for now, I accept things as they are, where ever and whatever that might be. This, nearly, three week period in which Lara has been with you has been as important for me – perhaps more so – as it, hopefully, has been for her.

I still hope for a woman who will love me (not just any woman, but one who has that special feeling for me, and vice versa). Don't we all?

However, insha' Allah, I will be content if this does not happen ... and it doesn't seem as if that will occur. Nevertheless, the understanding that I have been given is more important than the love of a thousand women ... but one could always hope for both. (smiling)

I read a story about the life of al-Hallaj (may Allah be pleased with him) in which on the Day of Judgment. The account indicates how the saint pleaded in the afterlife on behalf of a judge who had persecuted him greatly and who had pushed for and, ultimately, had Hazrat al-Hallaj (may Allah be pleased with him) executed. The saint pleaded for this judge be granted Paradise because the saint said that his own spiritual height had been achieved, in many respects, through dealing with the persecution of such a judge and, therefore, the judge ought to share in the reward of what the judge's actions had helped reap, by the Grace of Allah, in the saint. The title of the story was: 'Magnanimity'.

Perhaps, one should feel the same way toward all of the problematic aspects of one's life. Such events serve as the fodder for struggle, and through struggle, God willing, important truths and realizations come to light.

I still love Lara, but I am no longer angry or resentful toward her. I am proceeding on the assumption that things are over, and, so I will continue the process of disengagement over the next several months.

Sometimes, there is a pain within me -- perhaps somewhat like you might feel with respect to certain events in your own life. The pain is bitter-sweet and it only is there a little every now and then ... I suspect, however, that it might linger for awhile.

Lara was the locus of manifestation through which God has brought certain truths to my attention, and I am grateful to her for that. .even if this was not her intention.

However, I won't lie about this. I would not actively seek out taking such a wild ride, again. Once in a life time is enough, thanks.

I remember the story you tell -- I forget who it was about exactly, but I seem to recall it was Hazrat Khawajah Mu'in-u-deen (may Allah be pleased with him) and his shaykh, but it may have been about two other individuals -- about how the individual had the experience of,

first doing sajda in relation to his shaykh, and, then, the shaykh did sajda with respect to the mureed, and, then, they both did sajda in relation to one another, together. I know the experiences being alluded to in your story refer to a much higher sense of spiritual realization than I have, but, nonetheless, the idea of doing sajda to the events of one's life as those events, via Allah's will, do sajda in conjunction with the purpose of one's life ... well, it all seems to be related somehow.

You used to say, and I suppose you still do, how, sometime, Hollywood makes movies that have the Hand of Divinity written in to them even though the makers of the movie don't realize what they are doing at the time. You said this of *The Lion King* when it came out.

There is another movie that I believe this to be true of, and, if you ever get a chance, I hope you will watch it – if you haven't already – and tell me what you think. The movie is called '*The Game*' and it stars, among others, Michael Douglas and Sean Penn.

That movie would seem to capture an important dimension of the Sufi path – at least for me it did. The movie is very violent in certain parts, so, this is not a good one to watch, if you do, while young Ra'uf is up and about.

I am ashamed of the nafs within me Baba. I am ashamed of what it calls me to do, and I am ashamed of having to listen to its chatter.

Nevertheless, by the Grace of Allah, although I informed you about its presence through the words that were written in my e-mail, I did not answer its call, and, consequently, I did, and I do, blame myself, not you, for all my shortcomings and mistakes. I did not betray you, then, Baba, and insha' Allah, I never will.

However, if you say differently, then God willing, I will seek to do sajda to this reality and accept it as an event in my life – a very shameful event – and ask for your forgiveness. In any event, I ask for your forgiveness with respect to the fact that there exists within me a nafs, along with other forces, that seek to have me not only entertain, but, as well, to act upon, all manner of nonsense.

I fear the time when I might be tempted to do something foolish in this regard. Moreover, I am thankful to Allah, through your assistance, whenever I am spared from having the doubts and suggestions of nafs materialize into actual events.

I do not take these problems at all lightly, and I have been preoccupied with their destructive possibilities for much of my time on the Sufi path. On all too many occasions, I have seen, at very close quarters, what happens to too many people when they do more than listen to the call of nafs or Iblis or dunya or unbelievers ... and proceed onto the next step of acting upon that to which they are listening.

Although I would have preferred that the impetus for what has taken place within me over the last several days to be something other than, in part, the words in my e-mail and how they upset and hurt you, the fact of the matter is, I believe that I needed you to be angry with me, and/or upset with me, and/or hurt with me, and/or disappointed with me in order to go where I had to go spiritually. I did not do this intentionally, and I would not have chosen such a possibility if God had come to me and said words to the effect that if you get your shaykh upset with you, this will help you to do sajda, but this is, among other things, what has transpired.

Your being upset with me, plus the frenzied frustration over the relatively recent events of my life, plus my heart being ripped out, plus my being excluded (by Allah) from the wedding, plus my being overwrought with my own sense of misunderstanding and mistakes – these all conspired together to lead me to a certain point of understanding. I pray this insight stays and that, God willing, I can build upon it ... to make it deeper, stronger, richer, and more encompassing. But, I ask for your forgiveness for the manner through which this opportunity arose.

Love,
Tariq

§

January 25, 2003

I decide to write a relatively short piece that is intended to give expression to the understanding that has arisen within me as a result of the three week period during which I struggled with the issue of doing sajda.

§

Staying Focused on the Beloved

There are various ways of referring to that to which the foregoing term “Beloved” alludes. Truth, ultimate reality, essence, Higher Power, source of life, the Great Mystery, Being, God, and Self are some of these ways.

Consequently, wherever the term “the Beloved” appears in the following discussion, the reader might substitute whichever alternative manner of giving expression to the same underlying theme that one wishes. The word selected is far less important than that to which the word alludes.

There are many forces that are resistant to, and rebellious against, the purpose of staying focused on the Beloved. Seeking to successfully struggle against the intention of such forces to disrupt, pre-occupy, undermine, compromise, dissuade, mislead, and/or destroy such focus, is enhanced through observing a few basic principles.

One should never argue with the Beloved. Part of this principle entails learning to accept, and live in accordance with, the Beloved’s purpose with respect to the beauty and goodness inherent in the human potential. This purpose encourages us to struggle toward being as loving, compassionate, kind, empathetic, honest, sincere, charitable, forgiving, peaceful, and tolerant as our inner capacity for good permits us to be. The goodness of the Beloved’s purpose is always being given expression through the active application of such qualities.

Reason should defer to the Beloved in all matters, but one must be careful that what reason is being called to bow to is not the self-love of ego, for the latter is a master of disguise and seeks to pose as the Beloved. Using the cover of this sort of camouflage, the ego seduces reason into deferring to ways, means, and goals that are antagonistic to one’s being open to the presence of the Beloved.

Anxiety, doubts, fears, mistrust, ambition, and suspicion are all playgrounds for those forces that seek to lead one away from focusing on the Beloved. Once these playgrounds are permitted to gain a foothold in relation to one’s attention, extricating oneself from the

activities of these playgrounds can be very difficult. These potential sources of difficulty have the quality of an enormously powerful maelstrom that will suck one deeper and deeper toward the whirlpool's funnel whose undercurrents pull one down into an underworld of darkness and ignorance through which damage to others and oneself is done. Consequently, the best thing to do is to keep vigilance with respect to the gateways of our mind and hearts that offer possible points of entry into those playgrounds and turn away the anxieties, doubts, fears, mistrust, and suspicion that have come to play and make everyone's life miserable.

Anger and one's sense of justification for being angry are the twin engines of a doomed flight. The best thing to do is not to provide the fuel for this flight of the ego to ever have the opportunity to lift off, and one of the best ways to deprive this vehicle of fuel is to continually shut off the valves of hurt, resentment, recriminations, and complaint through which the engines of anger and the need to feel justified in being angry are fueled.

One ought to employ full-time workers of unity who journey about one's mind and heart and constantly scrub clean the residues of negative emotions and thoughts that seek to obscure one's awareness of the Beloved's presence. These cleaners of our intentions should use the cloth of forgiveness liberally to remove the stains of misunderstanding, impatience, intolerance, judgmental attitudes, speculation, and enmity through which jealousy, envy, pride, selfishness, dishonesty, greed, and thoughtlessness creep into our hearts and mind. The constant refrain of these soulful workers should be: "Wipe the slate of the heart clean! Wipe the slate of the soul clean! Wipe the slate of the mind clean -- always, everywhere, Wipe the slate clean."

As long as we live in the past, we cannot live in the present. If we do not live in the present, we cannot focus on the Beloved, for the Beloved is only found in the here and now. The past is where we harbor our hurt, resentment, anger, complaints, accusations, doubts, suspicions, fears, and sense of betrayal concerning life and others. If we lay the past to rest on a continuous basis, the ghosts of the past cannot continue to haunt us in the present. Let go of the past,

concentrate on the Beloved in the ever present now, and the future will take care of itself in accordance with the Beloved's purpose.

Until the Beloved is the sole, sincere commitment of all our thoughts, desires, intentions, emotions, purposes, and activities, we live in a state of separation ... not from the Beloved's side of the matter, but from our side of the issue. The qualities of separation are darkness, ignorance, and weakness tend to characterize many facets of our lives -- except at those points where we have permitted the Beloved to shine through to our consciousness and, thereby, remove some of the distance we have placed between the Beloved and ourselves. In such a state of separation we are inclined to commit errors through which we hurt both ourselves and others. We should strive to remove those interior perceptual curtains that shroud us from the Beloved's presence in all things ... both within and without so that we can move away from our surface potential for error and journey toward our more essential capacity for goodness and love.

The purpose of life is inherently good. Take every opportunity to find ways to serve this purpose and remember that opportunity is a precious commodity that one uses or loses as a result of one's own choices. Be an entrepreneur of goodness. Be an artist who is constantly creating works that give expression to such goodness. Make all of life a canvas upon which the paints of love's palette are used to display life's beauty through the constructive potential of the human soul.

Serve others, and one serves the Beloved. Love others, and one loves the Beloved.

The need to be right is just that: a need. Needs tend to drive us toward: our own destruction and toward: the denigration of others.

The Beloved does not compel but attracts through qualities that our soul, heart, and innermost being recognize as having healing properties for the illnesses that afflict our interior lives. Through the Beloved, we are brought together in a circle of mutual affection and support that has room for everyone. Through the need to be right and judgmental, we bring ourselves together in a space of disharmony and disarray that has room for no one.

Be wary of the forces of projection through which one foists upon others the problems and illnesses of one's own soul. There is a

tendency in human beings to paint others with the colors of one's own inner turmoil because we find blaming others easier to do than having to look at, and struggle with, one's own inner darkness as disclosed in the reflective mirror of events.

If there is a problem in life, one should begin with oneself and seek to determine what role one might be playing in causing or maintaining such difficulty. The only aspect of life over which we have some limited degree of influence with respect to the possibility of transformation is in relation to oneself ... trying to change others is a waste of valuable time, energy and resources.

One of the best assumptions one can make is to acknowledge one's own insignificance in the presence of the Beloved. To do anything else is to be presumptuous because this requires one to fly on the wings of ignorance through the great mystery of life and, yet, fail to understand that what one does not know is far, far greater than what little one might know, and the very character of presumption is to decide on the basis of the latter concerning the nature of one's relationship with the former.

One cannot stay focused on the presence of the Beloved when one is not grateful for, and content with, one's circumstances of life ... irrespective of whether these circumstances are difficult or pleasant. There are always those who have less than one does and, yet, manage to be thankful for the gift of life, and there are always those whose difficulties exceed our own, and, yet, who do not lose faith in the essential goodness of life despite such problems. Happy is the person who is content with the way the events of life unfold.

Return to the first principle noted earlier. These twelve principles constitute a loop of moral being that is to be repeated indefinitely in order to assist and strengthen the quality of our concentration in the here and now until such time as the Beloved is fully present according to the capacity of our consciousness, and one has become one with that presence, and, as a result, the value of such conceptual scaffolding disappears for the home of one's soul has been finished, and one has moved in to live and embrace life through the Beloved.

January 25, 2003

I join Baba's cyber web page called 'Inner Builders' that is, for the most part, an active message board that seeks to emphasize issues of morality, spirituality, encouragement, the building of character, love, and so on ... but from a generic and universal perspective, rather than from any one, specific, mystical tradition or perspective. The nick name I select is 'Stargate', and I hope no one recognizes my actual identity because I am just trying to participate constructively but in a sort of low key way.

My first posting is as follows:

There is only one Friend Who is present, and this Friend comes in many guises. Recognition is not always easy. The Friend hides Divinity from manifestation, and we, the latter, look to distant spiritual realms only to miss the Friend Who has visited in a form we might not like, or of which we disapprove, or with which we quarrel, or whom we try to avoid.

In our ignorance, we distance ourselves from the only One Who is there and here. We suppose the Friend only comes in pleasant, appealing forms, and when we experience other than this we say: "this cannot be the Friend."

We are both right and wrong when we do this, for how can anything other than the Friend be -- whether in here or out there. Yet, we presume the forms of our ignorance and confusion have a truth and reality that exists independently of the darkness of our souls.

Until we treat everyone the same - the teacher as well as the unappealing neighbor or curious stranger -- we will continue to miss the Friend Who is visiting with us in forms that might be alien to our sensibilities. We must learn to love that which is difficult and not just what is easy even though this ease is at home with our comforts and predilections. Doing what comes easily is not necessarily a virtue.

§

Later, Baba writes a notice on the message board that indicates he somehow has lost the posting from Stargate and could that individual re-post the message. I re-post the piece, and, then, I inform Baba, via the instant messaging dimension of the virtual message board service, that I (Tariq) am Stargate, and I request him to keep my 'real life' identity anonymous.

§

January 30, 2003

I post again on the Inner Builders message board. I try to write something that might generate some discussion, as well as offer some food for thought. The general tenor of most of the postings on 'The Inner Builders Message Board' is of this nature.

§

Life speaks to us, but how, and why, and what is said? Life chats with us through the events of our lives ... always chatting, for if chatter is present, this comes from our side of the conversation.

A chat is a warm, intimate relationship in which serious matters are discussed between friends. A chat is educational and life-affirming. A chat might be intense and powerful or it might be as soft as the murmurs of two lovers.

The sunshine on our face in the Fall is one of Life's statements. The rains of Spring speak to us of Life's thoughts as well. The seasons mark changes of topic in Life's on-going discussion with us.

Life speaks to us through the beating of our hearts. Life whispers its sweet 'somethings' through the breezes that keep the night vigil, as well as through the majestic and awe-inspiring events of tornadoes, hurricanes, and icy storms.

Life is our companion but should not be taken lightly. The chats of life have consequences.

Listen ... listen to some of the words of this chat: joy, truth, presence, choice, integrity, birth, death, pain, mystery, difficulty, ease, order, time, possibility, and constraint. What is life saying to us?

Through the confusion of our ideas, beliefs and conceptual systems, the ears of our hearts have become plugged. We hear, but we cannot listen.

Amidst the doubts, fears, and mistrust of our respective playgrounds, we sift the sand looking for clues to Life's speech, as we build sand castles of belief that, like the dunes of a desert, shift with the winds of change that are expelled while Life reaches out to us.

Like children who have, yet, to learn their mother tongue, we see the event-words that Life speaks to our souls, our heart, our most inward selves, but something is missing, for the connection between words and our being has not taken root.

Life longs for us to understand. Life waits for us to respond in kind.

The speech of Life has a purpose. This chat is not a random, idle way to pass the days.

Soon, the chat of this world will end, and the chat of another world will begin. Let us hope we have learned our ABCs by then.

§

Without mentioning me by name, later in the day Baba chastises me on the Inner Builders Message Board for even hinting at something of a religious nature in relation to my first posting ... and which he deleted before posting my second, shorter essay. In addition, for whatever reason, Baba, who has administrative control of the Inner Builders Message Board, has eliminated more than half of my second posting ... just permitting about three or four paragraphs to be posted.

§

Baba's posting on the Message Board is as follows:

Inner Builders

(January 30, 2003 2:30 P.M.)

Baba

In the past, when we did not need any moderation for this Message Board of the Garden of Unique Roses, even lengthy posts were accepted by the server. Changes had to be made due to circumstances, and this resulted in the server being rather moody, LOL!

There is another caution that I need to alert my friends here, and that is the unfortunate fact that the server gets very disturbed at the mention of death and religion! Why? Well maybe because the server wants to live and not die, LOL! The server does not even believe in religion. The server is very sensitive and gets upset even at a hint towards religion! The server wants me to post his/her profile, so in my next post I shall do so.

§

The server's profile in her/his own words:

"I like to be called THE MODERATOR. I love life in all its forms, and I don't like death. I know death is a reality, yet I do not want to hear or read even the word. This is the first and last time that I myself have even spelled it out in writing my profile! I do not believe in religion but I accept the fact that there are religions and everyone has a right to belong to it or not! I believe in truth and goodness! I believe in the inner aspect of the human capacity, not as a dogma but rather as a truth to be explored, and experienced. Thought-provoking sayings and writings that titillate towards goodness in thought, word, and deed are my favorites. On the other hand even hints towards doctrines etc, makes me feel cheated and my freedom abused. Frankly speaking I believe in the capacity of human excellence!

MODERATOR

§

I feel badly about what has happened. I wish to seek forgiveness -- not only from Baba, but from Lara, as well, who still has not contacted me since her return from visiting with Baba ... although, maybe, I am the blame for this because I had told her not to contact me anymore unless it were related to silsilah activities. Consequently, I post another message.

The message is generic, but, hopefully, the two individuals to whom the posting is primarily addressed will read it. Lara is a frequent contributor to this forum and often reads and responds to the contributions of other participants, I write something that I hope will resonate with her because I have not talked with her for more than three weeks. The posting is called 'Forgiveness'

§

I commit errors in a state of separation ... a state of heedlessness concerning an inner truth. I make mistakes in a condition of thinking without thinking or through being aware without being aware. Something problematic is present, and something more important is absent from me even while shining through my being.

In retrospect I might see the mistake, yet, time has passed me by for the shadow of ignorance has prevailed ... passing through me, as damage of one kind, or another, is done. A taste of deep regret rises from the heart as I look into the mirror of my soul and see that an opportunity to go in a different way has been lost.

I think about those few seconds or minutes of critical existence and long for them to return so that I might walk down another path ... a path which that does not bring shame to my use of the gift of choice. But human time moves in a way that, once spent, does not return, and, like night, a sense of loss descends upon me, and my struggle to be found by the sun of redemption begins.

Looking within, I see a place that is not a space but a way of being where those seeking forgiveness and those who need to forgive

reunite in a manner such that everything is wiped clean with a cloth of love that heals both the one who has wronged another as well as the one who has been harmed. I do not deserve this alchemical touch, but I reach out for that which is needed for wholeness and balance to return ... seeking to forgive hands that might turn me away because I know the fault is mine.

With all my heart I yearn for a stirring of change in that space without space that I feel so intensely within me. I have no control over what might, or might not come, for I am at the mercy of that which is beyond me as well as the locus through which the healing touch must pass.

While waiting for uncertainty to take the concrete form of manifestation, I reflect upon my life and feel sorrow for the many times I have been forced, by intentions gone awry, to appear in this sanctuary of hope to keep vigil and live with the pain of my mistakes. A desire arises within me to struggle to a station where the purity of compassionate love enables the one who has committed errors to abandon such a way of misery, while, simultaneously, assisting the one who has been harmed to forget, move on, and become lost in love's embrace that alone can heal wounds.

When this occurs, the circuit is complete, and what started in ignoble darkness is transformed into a radiant light of redemption through an act of charity for all concerned. Love's harmony has been restored to a sector cast apart, and the ripples of error and hurt have disappeared into one another and nothing remains but the deep blue sea that has no memory of what has come and gone.

Until, then, I can only meditate on the harm I have done to other beings and hope for a time when they might sense the sincerity of my heart's tears and, thereby, be open to the possibility of forgiveness flowing through. I do not wish to live in separation from that inner truth that has been veiled by my deeds. I do not wish to live in separation from the ones I have wronged.

When my posting appears on the Inner Builders Message Board, more than half of it has been left out. There have been quite a few other postings on the message board that have been roughly comparable in length to my three postings, so, whatever the reason might be for the editing of my posts, I do not believe length is the primary consideration.

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January 28, 2003

About a week has passed since Lara returned to Brimley from visiting with Baba. There has been no contact.

There have been indirect contacts with Lara, via my virtual nicknames, Philokalia (within the virtual city) and Stargate (The Inner Builders message board). However, I am not sure whether she knows to whom these nick names belong ... especially since I have asked Baba, and he agreed, to keep my real identity anonymous ... and, yet, several remarks of hers during a few of the group virtual chat sessions suggest she might know who I am.

The whole exercise of trying to appear, virtually speaking, as someone else is tiring. I would like to be myself and just interact with other people within Baba's virtual community in a normal manner, but I fear if my real identity were to become known that this might frighten Lara away or annoy her, and since she seems to be really enjoying her new found friends in the cyber community and the Inner Builders Message Board that Baba has developed, I don't want to do anything to create problems for her.

Some of the reactions that I have experienced in conjunction with other members of Baba's virtual community are very strange. Sometimes quite a few people with whom I interact in that virtual space appear to be suspicious of me or distrust me in some sense. The precise nature of the 'evidence' that leads me to such ideas is very hard to put my finger on, but, nevertheless, this feeling persists.

In any event, perhaps things with Lara are really through. I have decided to write one last snail mail to her and try to bring to

completion a variety of loose and unresolved threads to our relationship of several years.

We started our relationship several years ago at about this time of the year. Maybe, it is appropriate for us to observe the anniversary by seeking closure, of some kind, at this time of the year.

§

Dear Lara,

This is going to be a difficult letter to write because there is a lot to say, but what is said needs to navigate a tricky path that attempts to balance a variety of considerations. More than anything this is a letter that seeks to bring some sort of resolution to what began nearly two years ago.

First of all, there is something that should be said straight off. This is not a letter of anger, resentment, finger-pointing, or recriminations.

At certain points, I do tell you what is on my mind and in my heart in a very direct fashion, but I always have done this with you. Hopefully you will not read into any of what is said -- even when I am being very blunt -- and suppose there is some underlying hostility toward you that is being expressed through this letter, because this just isn't so ... and, I hope you eyes come back to this paragraph often if you should feel that I am trying to attack you.

You tend to spook very easily. You often allow your anxieties, fears, mistrust, and doubts rule the life of your heart and mind, often leading to your running away either literally or metaphorically. More than anything, I hope you read this letter as the words of a friend ... the best friend you have ever had, and I put myself right up there with Baba in this regard, and if you disagree with this, then I believe that your sense of disagreement is only because you don't really understand what has been going on for the last several years.

Baba has told me to do sajdah to not only our situation but to a number of other things that are going on in my life, as well. Sajdah, if you don't already know, is when a person bows before God and with as much of one's being as, God willing, one can muster, one accepts,

without regret, resentment, or complaint, whatever happens as having been God's wish ... returning the joy and the sorrow to the Source from which they originally came and to the One Who owns them. Sajdah is an acknowledgment that nothing in life belongs to us and God gives and takes as Divinity pleases for reasons best known to Divinity.

By the Grace of Allah, now, I have done sajdah -- or, at least, as much as my capacity permits -- with respect to our situation. I don't hate you, resent you, think evil thoughts concerning you, or feel a sense of betrayal concerning the situation.

I continuously seek blessings for you and your family. I pray for the welfare of you, your family, your mother, and your grandmother five times a day ... as I have been doing for over a year and a half now. I prayed for you throughout your trip to see Baba ... that it would be a peaceful, joyous, happy, blessing-filled, time for you and that you would be given safe passage throughout your journey wherever you might go, and my prayers would appear to have been answered.

You might believe the foregoing, or you might choose to disbelieve what has been said. What you believe in this regard is really irrelevant ... it was my sajdah not yours, and God knows what did, or did not, happen in this regard with respect to me.

You were having a very wonderful vacation with Baba (and I am not being sarcastic here), and I was engaged in a very difficult spiritual exercise throughout that time. My experience was, probably, nowhere as enjoyable as yours was, but spiritual progress is rarely made through what is pleasant ... although the joy of being in close association with someone like Baba is what helps sustain one when the hard days come, and if you go very far spiritually, such days will come and there is no escaping this fact. God encompasses not just jamali qualities but jalali qualities as well, and one cannot be brought to realization without experiencing both sides of the ledger.

Love is forged on the anvil of adversity. Only after one has been pounded by the Beloved on such an anvil for as long as the Blacksmith wishes, and, in the process, one places oneself at the pleasure of the One Who works the shop of life without looking away or wishing for something else, can one say real love might have come to fruition in the heart, soul, spirit, and beyond.

Being driven by love is not the same thing as being driven by nafs. The niyat is different in each case, and life on the anvil removes the residues of the dross portions that resist the forging process.

Having said the foregoing, nonetheless, there are a number of things that need to be said. They need to be said for your sake, not mine.

If you like, you can consider this letter the last installment on the process that I began with you almost two years ago. I believe what is said in the following pages is very important for your emotional, spiritual and mental welfare.

I hope you will not just scan the letter and, then put it aside. It deserves to be read a number of times with a great deal of reflection and honest searching of the soul.

However, I will warn you now, some of what I have to say is very blunt. The bluntness of my words has nothing to do with trying to make you feel bad or trying to hurt you or trying to get back at you in some way. Again, by the Grace of God, I have done sajdah to all of this, and there is a difference between trying to talk about the truth of a matter and talking about such things through the veils of emotional attachment and personal hurt ... for me, by the Grace of God, the latter emotional themes have evaporated.

I have always been honest with you even when I have told you things that you didn't want to hear but that you later have often told me were true and helpful. If you suppose that my niyat or intention concerning you is anything other than constructive love, care and concern for your well-being, then, you have totally lost sight of who I am (if you ever, at all, did see me -- the inner me) and how, by the Grace of God, pretty much everything that has been done for you through me was for your advantage and, quite frequently, even when this was to my disadvantage (and broaching the subject with Baba about you and Ron possibly getting back together and, perhaps, all of us coming down for a visit is just one of many examples that could be cited in this regard).

When the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was first called to be God's Prophet and had been permitted to speak openly about his calling, one of the first things he said to the people of Mecca

was about his truthfulness ... that he was trustworthy and had never lied to them. I am not the Prophet, and I have no calling, but I will say to you please try to remember that I have never lied to you and I have never given you any reason to mistrust the sincerity of my intentions concerning you.

Yes, you have had your doubts about me and whether, or not, you believed I really loved you. However, as a simple exercise, then in your own mind put forth whatever real evidence -- as opposed to speculation -- that impugns my honesty, trustworthiness, or sincerity concerning you and see what you come with up ... I don't believe there is anything substantial in this regard to which you can point that would satisfy a condition of even a 'preponderance of evidence' let alone beyond all reasonable doubt.

The other thing that I'll say before getting started is once this letter is sent, this is the last time any of the issues mentioned herein will, insha' Allah, ever be mentioned by me. After this letter, the book will close on the past, never, God willing, to be opened again.

One of the problems that you and Ron had with one another is that neither one of you knew how to close the book on things. As a result you both have spent the majority of your lives living out of the past rather than the present, and I'm not going to do that with you.

This letter is the last chapter in the book of our past, and it has become necessary in order to tie up a variety of loose ends. God willing, the past needs to be put to rest and permitted to lay in peace without being dredged up all the time to add fuel to the fire of life.

In any event, let us begin. Shortly after you came down to the small office on Garbo Street and began to meet with me on a regular basis, I made a four-part promise to you. The initial promise preceded the other three by a few months, and the first promise came in response to a question that you asked me concerning what would be the nature of our relationship, and I told you I would be the best friend you ever had.

By the grace of God, I have lived up to this promise. The following is said not out of seeking recognition, thanks, acknowledgment, gratitude, or to try to create the impression you owe me something (and I will say a few things a little later about your perception that I

was acting as if I feel like you owed me something ... which I never did, but what I did feel in relation to this issue, you, apparently, totally misunderstood).

I know what I did. Baba knows what I did ... indeed, why do you suppose he said a number of times in your presence, when we visited with him in November, that I had been a real gladiator with respect to you? He said this because he knew the beating I took in relation to you, and despite that beating I stood by you and would not give up on you even though many, many times withdrawing from the situation might have been the wiser, more prudent decision for me to pursue.

So, the following is not about getting respect from you. I have respect from the only person from whom I need it, and that is Baba.

The statements below describe what you, by the Grace of God, were given through me, and there is nothing anyone can do to alter the truth of what is being said here. The statements below are about a promise made to you and a promise kept.

I never lied to you. I always was sincere with you. I was your constant counsel and support. I never betrayed you. I never disclosed your secrets to anyone except, by your permission, in conjunction with Baba when I was seeking ways to better assist you. I always tried to help you constructively resolve any, and all, of your problems.

I constantly affirmed your worth as a human being. I believed in you when even you did not believe in yourself. I never tried to control, manipulate, exploit, or abuse you. I never played mind-games with you. I was straightforward with you at all times.

I offered you continuous kindness, warmth, understanding, compassion, tolerance, and empathy. When you went away, I never bothered you. When you came back, I did not berate you. I didn't ask you to account for your time.

When you were upset, I comforted you. When you were angry, I helped you work toward calmness. I always was your advocate and defender. I was prepared to take risks -- and did -- to assist, as well as to protect, you irrespective of what this might cost me emotionally, mentally, physically, or socially.

I gave you respect when few others did. I honored you when almost no one else would. I treated you with integrity and was

conscientious about your feelings, anxieties, doubts, fears, and concerns.

I never gave you mere lip-service on anything. Whatever promises I made to you I kept.

There were many times after things stopped being enjoyable for me that I continued to hang on and struggle to help you keep your options open. I would not give up on you as a person even though our July 31st relationship was floundering badly. Even when our prospects were rapidly diminishing, I stood by you through the panic attacks, anxiety meltdowns, mood swings, surliness, anger, the constant running away, as well as your constant doubts, wariness, and mistrust concerning me.

I have even told you on several occasions -- whether, or not, you remember is another matter -- that I stayed committed to you, not because I was going to get something out of this (e.g., a committed marriage partner), but because you needed me to, God willing, help steady your ship and keep it afloat and steer it clear of the treacherous waters that were swirling all about and within you. What came to you through me was, by the Grace of God, altruism, not self-interest, and if you will look into your heart of hearts, you will know what I am saying is true.

I stayed with you through all of the difficulties, problems, tears, pain, and confusion until you were delivered safely into Baba's hands. And, then, you brought things to an end, not me, and you brought things to an end for reasons that you might, or might not understand - and, I'll say more on that in a minute.

Through all of the foregoing, and despite considerable provocation from you, I only got angry a couple times, and both of these occasions were in the last week before New Years (there are a couple of things that will be said about this a little further on). There were a couple of other times in which I was upset or annoyed or hurt with what you were doing, but other than an occasional word here or there, these times passed by quickly and I didn't hold any grudges against you for what went on. As they say, I just picked myself up, dusted myself off, and started all over again ... or, at least as much as you would let me -- which at times, was not very much.

There was one time I was sarcastic with you for about 15 minutes when you lived in Bamford. However, this sarcasm, which I do regret, was nonetheless, in response to the constant games you were playing with me at the time when you were going to return to Ron and you just were not forthcoming about what was happening at that time. I knew you were playing games but you just wouldn't stop, and, so, I was sarcastic with you and picked apart the stories you were telling me ... and that's what they were -- stories.

Out of hundreds, if not thousands, of hours spent with you in one of the most difficult, tension-packed, topsy-turvy, jolting, heart-wrenching, dangerous and aggravating rides I have ever taken in my life, there were only three or four times I have been angry about what was going on and the way I was being treated. There might be a few other people out there who could have managed it better than, by the Grace of God, I did ... but very, very few I feel.

God was smiling on you from the time you called me up on the phone and came over to pick up my book of essays. This is not braggadocio. This is a truth that has been shown to you again and again over the last two years.

Consequently, I can say, without any reservations whatsoever, you got the very best of care while you were in my charge -- both spiritually and otherwise. I did nothing to hurt you in any fashion, and, by the Grace of God, there were lots and lots of things that were done through me, by God, to help keep you going in the right direction.

If you want to hold me hostage to the few times when I reached my emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual limits concerning the difficulties of the situation, then, be my guest. However, what you are doing is comparable to expecting Babe Ruth, Ted Williams, Hank Aaron, or Willy Mays to hit home runs every time they came to the plate and feeling they have let you down if they don't.

By any measure you might care to use, I have hit more home runs for you and come through for you in the clutch more than anyone in your life has ever done. And, I did this out of love for your inner spiritual being and for no other reason ... including sex, money, or a desire to control you.

Early on, there were three other promises that I made to you in addition to the previous one (i.e., that I would be the best friend you ever had). These other promises were: (1) to help free you from a controlling, abusive, pathological relationship with Ron; (2) to help you work toward an emotional and psychological weigh-station where you would be in a position to choose freely what you wanted to do; (3) to keep you open to spirituality and the mystical path.

You once reacted with anger when I listed the foregoing promises because you thought I was treating you as some kind of “project” (your word said at Bamford the same day as my bout of sarcasm). You were never treated as a project, and you were always treated as a human being who is deserving of: freedom from oppression; the right to choose free from someone else’s controlling, abusive, and manipulative agendas, and the opportunity to realize one’s spiritual potential.

By the Grace of God, over the years, I have gone to great lengths to help many people besides you. They were helped because they were human beings and they needed help, and, by the Grace of God, I was given the means and chance to do something about such situations. None of these people were helped because I considered them projects and neither were you.

By the Grace of God, all three of the aforementioned promises have been kept. These promises were all made prior to anything else happening with us and, in fact, were honored despite what went on, and not because of it.

Long before you went for your nearly three week vacation with Baba, you had received loving, tender, kind, thoughtful, attentive, sincere, friendly, heart-felt support and assistance through me. You received all of this for far longer than 2 ½ weeks and under far more adverse and difficult circumstances for the one through whom it came.

What you experienced with Baba was not new to you. One of the reasons you were permitted to be with Baba at all (and please try to keep in mind there are a number of people in the silsilah who, for reasons best understood by Baba, are not even permitted to know where Baba lives, or visit him or to know his phone number) is because of the very loving care you received through me for several years before you ever set eyes on any of those people, Baba included.

In fact, if you will recall, for quite some time, you were struggling with the issue of whether, or not, these people -- such as Baba -- were even real. For nearly two years, the only reality in this regard in your life was me.

Through me, the very possibility of the reality of these people was kept alive. Through me, the idea was kept alive of going and visiting with them ... an idea that you fought right down to the day we actually went. Through me, by the Grace of Allah, your interest in pursuing spirituality was nurtured. Through me, you were introduced to Baba and those other people.

Until you went down to visit Baba and saw, for yourself, that what I had been telling you, for nearly two years, with respect to Baba and the others was all true, the only exemplar that you had for any of this was me. And, you were the one who told me on several occasions that I had spoiled things because after me, you began to want and expect more from relationships than previously had been the case in your life and you missed that quality when I was not around ... this is your testimony, not mine.

You had been receiving such treatment through me for nearly two years ... and, was it not you who was the one who said to Baba: "You haven't been loved until you have been loved by a Sufi". In fact, the 'Sufi' to whom you were alluding in your comment and who is the person that is writing this letter to you was the only Sufi you knew prior to meeting Baba, and, then, spending 2½ weeks with him on your own.

Occasionally, when time permits, I drop by the Message Board of Inner Builders. On one occasion, I noticed you indicated there how sad you were to come home to Vermont after leaving such wonderful people ... and they are wonderful people. But, you, apparently, forgot who stood by you through all your dark nights of the soul, by the Grace of God, to put you in a position to be able to enjoy such a great vacation with such wonderful people.

I am not being sarcastic in the foregoing, they are all wonderful people. I am extremely happy for you that you got the opportunity to spend so much time with them, especially at such an auspicious time as that of Habib's and Nazia's wedding and being able to meet with all

of the other wonderful people who came from Canada, the United States, and elsewhere in the world to attend such an occasion.

Apparently, however, that person in Vermont -- who, by the Grace of God, helped introduce you to Baba and all the wonderful people there -- was so (and, here, I resort to hyperbole for dramatic effect) terrible, unpleasant, devious, ignoble, putrid, disgusting, abusive and vile that at your request, I am told, you requested permission from Baba so you would not have to endure the great discomfit and agony of being in the same room with such vermin for the purposes of saying fatiha. Surely, you would not have acted in such a way toward the people in Baba's household and told them that you wanted to say fatiha in another place from all of them (and knowing what you are likely to think at this point, I didn't do anything to you either), but I get treated in a very different fashion from the people of Baba's household. They are all wonderful, but I am pushed to the side as someone who is deserving of no respect or consideration.

I have done nothing but help you. So why is there so great a difference in treatment with respect to the others and myself? Seemingly, things are such that it is as if I am not part of the same silsilah as all of the other wonderful people of whom you have such fond memories in relation to your visit with Baba.

I would not have kept you from fatiha when you came back no matter what you wanted to do with your personal life. I have proven this to you over the last several years on many, many occasions ... whenever you abruptly disappeared and, then, reappeared. I never turned you away on any of those occasions -- even when you had gone back to Ron ... and, in addition, I told you Baba would not permit me to turn you away from fatiha or to treat you shabbily because of anything you might have done -- and, in truth, I didn't ever treat you with anything but respect, compassion, and kindness on any of those occasions.

Moreover, if you behaved yourself -- and you did not behave yourself at the New Year's Eve fatiha (before you left to visit with Baba) -- I would do nothing except say fatiha and let you go your own way (and I proved this many times, so, this is not just verbal lip gloss). In your heart of hearts you should know this, and if you don't, then you haven't been paying very close attention to what has transpired in the

last 24 months vis-à-vis my treatment of you under what have been, for me personally, very emotionally trying circumstances.

None of what was said by me, either by phone, or at the fatiha on the night of December 31st was being motivated by any underlying agenda concerning your trip or your wanting to run away or you wanting to be on your own. Everything unpleasant that transpired that evening took place because you showed tremendous disrespect to me on at least eight different occasions during that evening.

Baba is your shaykh. By the Grace of God, and through the permission of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him.), as well as through the agreement of Baba's shaykh, Baba, and the rest of the silsilah, I am Baba's khalifah.

Baba loves me, and you know that. He was the one who said during our visit that 'if Tariq were a woman, I would want to marry him.' I remember you joking about this to me on several occasions so I know this fact is in your memory banks.

If you show disrespect to me, you show disrespect for the one who loves me and the ones who selected me, by the Grace of God, to serve in the capacity of Baba's spiritual deputy. Just because Baba doesn't call you on the carpet for any of this, do not suppose this means he doesn't know about what is going on, or what went on (quite apart from my telling him), or that he approves of what you did.

Baba has his own way of going about things. What you know and understand about Baba is but the tip of a very substantial spiritual iceberg.

I will say the following. When I was in Canada at the Astana (spiritual center) we had, Baba instructed me to do the weekly fatiha while he was in another room talking with various visitors.

At one point, he told me that various people within the silsilah in Canada were coming to him with complaints about me ... such as: the fatiha is too long, or there is too much zikr, or my selection of Qawwali music was not to their liking, and so on. However, he told me he was happy with the way I was conducting fatiha, to keep up the good work, and not to worry about the complaints for he would deal with those issues in his own time and in his own way.

I'm not trying to be your shaykh now. Moreover, if you will remember it was I who said that I wouldn't interpret your dreams anymore and, in addition, you should get your instructions from Baba, not me. Nonetheless, as Baba's khalifah, I have certain duties and responsibilities to perform whether you like it or not, and I will leave it to Baba to look after the fallout from this in his own way.

If you don't like me or how I go about things, that's your business. That dislike, however, doesn't give you the right to show disrespect to Baba and the rest of silsilah by treating Baba's khalifah in the truly poor display of spiritual etiquette that you displayed on the night of the 31st of December.

You don't owe me an apology. Instead, you owe Baba and the rest of the silsilah an apology, and you should seek their forgiveness.

I will only mention one of the eight, or so, problems of adab that night. More specifically, why you would both question and object to my wanting to share fatiha with your daughter, Stephanie, and her boyfriend is beyond me.

Then, you had the poor judgment to leave the gift for them behind. You compounded that mistake by not returning to get what you knew you had left behind.

You didn't have the right to question what I very kindly offered with absolutely no ulterior motive. You didn't have the right to deprive Stephanie and her boyfriend what had been offered to them through me.

None of the foregoing events of the night of December 31st had anything to do with 'you-me' issues. They all had to do with your attitude toward the silsilah and your apparent presumption that because Baba is your shaykh, then you don't have to observe or respect or comply with any of these other things.

It is not your place to question how things are done with respect to silsilah activities ... including fatiha. If I choose to point out the shortcomings of your attitude toward the silsilah, then that is between Baba and me. If I fail in some respect with any of this, then Baba is the one who will correct me, not you.

On the phone prior to the fatiha of the 31st you wanted to make sure nothing other than fatiha would go on. Aside from the fact you

were presumptuous to suppose you even had the right to raise such an question, and, thereby, cast aspersions on my character and the one whom Baba appointed to be his spiritual deputy, the fact of the matter is nothing else but fatiha did happen, for part of fatiha is the responsibility of trying to bring to the attention of those who have a problematic niyat concerning fatiha that the benefits of fatiha are compromised by the presence of such attitudes. But, you thought you knew better.

I did not talk to you about 'you and me' issues. I did not talk to you about your trip. I did not try to talk you out of anything. I did not talk to you about your midnight epiphany of a few days earlier that "no sane and rational person would believe we are married" ... and just a few short hours later on the next day, you were winging your way to spend 2 ½ weeks with the very "sane and rational person" who had made our July 31st arrangement possible and who told us how to do it ... now, of course, you didn't mean to refer to Baba as an 'insane and irrational' man did you? No, we all 'know' that I am the only insane and irrational person in the building because, silly, me I believed what Baba told me about the validity of the 31st arrangement.

All the warmth, kindness, happiness, co-operation, empathy, friendship, and joy that you were so willing to share with the people in Baba's circle, why have you decided that I, alone, of all the people in the silsilah deserve to be treated in some way other than the way you joined in with the people down there? What, exactly, is it that I have done to you? How have I betrayed you? How have I failed to keep my promises to you? How have I been derelict in my duties as your friend or your spiritual tutor? How have I been remiss in trying to help you? Where have I been abusive, exploitive, manipulative, or controlling with respect to you?

Was it not Baba who said -- when we were both there -- that he was very impressed with the preparation that had been given to you through me? Do you think he doesn't know what went on here in Bamford and what I did, or did not do, with respect to you? Do you think he is special in that he only knows amazing things about you but not about me or about the spiritual work that was done in Bamford in relation to you?

Why do you suppose I was so upset on the night you called near midnight, or a little after, with your new revelation that sought to bring into question the legitimacy of our relationship? I remember you saying to me on several occasions: "Tariq, listen to yourself" when I tried to discuss the matter with you.

I was upset for a very obvious reason. Whenever someone feels compelled to offer so palpably absurd an excuse for why things shouldn't continue on as far as the arrangement of the 31st (and which was renewed again, if you recall, in exactly the same fashion a number of months ago), this is only because such a person does not want to cite the real reasons for why one is doing what one is doing and, instead, elects to hide behind the absurd ... as if mere conviction in such a possibility was the same thing as the truth of things.

I was angry because I you couldn't be bothered to treat your allegedly best friend (and, if you will recall, you called me this several times during that phone conversation) with the decency that even a stranger -- who has no connection to you whatsoever -- deserves. You couldn't treat me with decency, compassion, empathy, or friendship. You had to concoct a story. You betrayed the marriage and the friendship with one fell swoop ... not because you wanted out of the marriage but because you didn't treat me or trust me as a friend.

Seemingly, all the time we had spent together meant very little to you ... and please don't protest about the foregoing statement because if you did consider me a friend, if you did love me, if you did care about me, you never would have allowed yourself to treat me in this fashion. Friends tell one another the truth, and you have been hiding the truth from me on a great many occasions.

The things you were keeping from me were issues that were directly impacting on my welfare. You were depriving me of information that was vital to helping me make prudent judgments and decisions about how to proceed in my life.

Part of your secrecy was fueled by your confusion and constant vacillation with respect to what you wanted to do. Part of your secrecy was because of your fears of what would happen to your support system -- namely, me -- if you were honest and open with me about what was going inside of you. The part of you that was steeped in: anxiety, fear, doubts, and mistrust made an assumption -- one that has

never been true although you have perceived me through the colors of that assumption on many occasions – namely, that I would never stand by you if you told me the truth. And, because you projected this assumption onto me and created me in your own image, you withheld crucial information that might have assisted me to approach things differently with respect to us and, thereby, might have been able to help both of us conduct ourselves more efficaciously ... as well as encounter fewer problems and frustrations all the way around.

I knew there was something missing with respect to the way you were interacting with me. I knew you were dealing with me through an array of veils that, for a variety of reasons, were intended to keep your intentions hidden from me.

Whenever I mentioned these sorts of things to you, you would get angry with me and charge me with trying to say you owed me something. I never said you owed me something, and this expectation was never a part of how I interacted with you ... your unsubstantiated allegations notwithstanding.

In point of fact, I was trying to bring your attention to the absence of something in our relationship. When someone says he or she loves someone, and keeps saying it, and writes it again and again in e-mails, and makes statements about how one loves someone more than one's mother and children, and, yet, the behavior of the person who is proclaiming such love doesn't match the words, then something is not owed, something is absent, and there is a problem with the relationship.

You mistook my pointing out the latter as if I was trying to say the former, and this was never the case. However, you had your own motives for conveniently confusing and conflating these separate issues in such a fashion.

You, yourself, knew there was something wrong with our relationship. You, yourself, were the one who was procrastinating and avoiding dealing with issues because of your numerous confusions, doubts, and anxieties about many things. You, yourself, were the one who was resisting committing yourself to our relationship. You, yourself, were the one who was constantly running away from things.

You knew all these things. Yet, when I brought such things to your attention, you charged me with claiming you owed me something, when all I was doing was holding up a mirror to what you were doing and that you knew you were doing.

You resented me for holding that mirror up before you which reflected your behaviors. In order to avoid having to deal with the guilt and shame surrounding all of this, apparently, it was easier for you to charge me with something I was not doing (trying to say I owed you something) just so you would not have to deal with the reality of what you, not me, actually were doing.

If someone doesn't love someone, there is nothing one can do. One can't demand love. One can't compel the love. One can't create an ordinance that places someone under a legal obligation to love another human being. One can't say that someone owes me love.

You were given many, many opportunities to come clean about this, but you just kept playing your games. In fact, just a week or ten days, or so, before you called me with your midnight revelation near the end of December, you took your Qur'an and tasbeeh from the apartment, and I said to you: "Don't read anything into what I'm going to say, but this looks like you are moving out," and you swore to me you had no such intention, but you have had thoughts of doing this all along ... in fact, in one of your conversations with Baba, when I was with you, you openly talked to him about whether or not I would still care for you and pray for you if you were to go your own way.

All your resistance to me, the delays, the dragging of feet on so many issues, the latent hostility, the unwillingness to file for divorce, the anger you displayed through all of your passive-aggressive tactics with respect to me, and your lack of co-operation on so many things -- even simple things like: driving me to bookstores when I asked you to do this, or signing me in at the virtual community so that my virtual money account and experience levels would rise -- were all indicative of what was going on. However, whenever I would point this out, you would get angry with me and start an argument of one sort or another in order to misdirect attention away from something going on in you with which you did not want to deal.

In a similar way, you recently tried to entangle me in the 'mistake' concerning the rush for sexual intimacy, but this was not my mistake.

If sexual intimacy were my aim, then I could have satisfied that on the momentous Thursday in June ... and you have informed me on several occasions you would have gone along with things if they had been taken further in this direction that, by the Grace of Allah, did not happen.

I was sexually attracted to you, but I loved you -- the inner you -- quite independently of your body. I agreed to the Thursday tête-a-tête because I wanted to show you that not everyone was interested in sexually exploiting you ... that you could trust me ... that I wouldn't take advantage of you – and I didn't, although things went further than I would have liked. And, all of this I confessed to Baba.

My mistake was in being very vulnerable to the idea someone might actually, sincerely love me. I had told you in graphic detail about the problems with some of my earlier relationships and how I had been looking my whole life for a woman who would love me for me.

On numerous occasions, you led me to believe the person for whom I had long sought was you. In order to test the impression that you kept leaving me with in this regard, I gave you the same set of options many times.

I would be willing to help you: (1) reconcile with Ron; (2) become independent of any such relationships – including you and me; (3) develop our relationship. Time and time again you opted for (3).

If you will remember we discussed the possibility many times of whether you were entangling me in your history of sexual abuse and whether your feelings concerning me were really just the clinically typical sexual aggressiveness of someone who has been through one or more episodes of sexual abuse in their younger years. Through all of these discussions, you kept saying that what you were feeling was far more powerful than anything like the sexual aggressiveness associated with sexual abuse ... although you did admit such thoughts had crossed your mind a number of times.

No, the feeling you said you had for me was so powerful you wanted to know if I had drugged you or cast some kind of spell on you. Neither of these considerations was true.

There is another possibility here, and it links up to other things that were going on in our relationship -- especially toward the end, but

such things were present, I believe, all along the way. The phenomena of ‘positive and negative transference’ are not myths. They are very real occurrences.

Moreover, they come in a variety of sizes and strengths. There is no: ‘one size fits all’ set of circumstances.

On the basis of what you have told me over the last several years, you seemed to have a relatively mild case of positive transference in relation to your regular social work counselor. You might have had a far, far bigger case of positive transference with respect to me.

I am putting forth the following possibility as a possibility to consider ... not as something that is cast in stone. If one takes an intense case of positive transference, mixes in some sexual aggressiveness from a history of sexual abuse, then adds the fact that the ‘client’ has never had a real friend who would go to the mat for her and risk his life for that individual and would hold nothing back to help the individual in trouble, and, suddenly, such a friend enters a troubled person’s life, and, if finally, we throw in the tremendous desperation of your situation with respect to Ron, then perhaps, under the collective weight and force of all the foregoing, you became confused about what was going on in you with respect to me.

Although you wish to argue otherwise, the fact of the matter is you often have entangled the intense emotions of pathology with the nuances of actual love in many facets of your life ... to such an extent that it takes you considerable work to try to tell which is which. Now, you realize that what your uncle felt for you was not love. Now, you realize that what Ron did in relation to you was not love ... but, earlier on, you did not realize such things and, as a result, pathology and love were quite confusingly entangled within you.

You are now less certain about your feelings for each of those people. Was it love, or was it emotional turmoil manifesting itself as love, or, perhaps, a little of each?

As school teachers are fond of saying, we’ll leave that as a homework exercise. However, on any given day, you would go back and forth on this issue in both cases, and remember, I have been along for the ride, and I have seen you swing back and forth on this matter many times.

Up until Baba and me, you really haven't had a lot of positive role models in your life for you to be able to develop a clear idea of what love actually is. Love is a lot more than just intense emotion and sexual intimacy.

Your relationships with your sister and brother don't bring a lot of clarity here either. You claim you love your sister, but you hold grudges and anger concerning her (and others) for far too long ... the presence of love tends to melt such hardness -- not preserve it as is often the case with you.

You claim you love your brother but you exhibit a great deal of mistrust and wariness concerning him. There is nothing wrong with being cautious, especially in light of what has gone on previously in that relationship, but I am mentioning this only to underscore the fact that you have a very confused, problematic, layered, complex relationship with the issue of love, and you often don't know what you actually feel at any given time with respect to a lot of people as your mind gets caught up in the undercurrents of a very difficult life history.

Did you ever love me? I really don't know, and, at times, I don't think you do either.

Your emotional, mental life is like one of those chaotic chemical phenomena that changes back and forth between radically different phase states almost as if there was no transition between the two states. You have often told me and others that it is like you have two different beings in you, pulling you back and forth between antagonistic poles, and your inability to break free from the undertow of this set of circumstances has led you to believe you are addicted to being unhappy.

You are not addicted to being unhappy. Your struggle between your nafs (and all of the pathological history that has been foisted on you by others have created a very complicated set of forces dedicated to keeping you in misery) and your spirit (the locus of love in human beings) is the same struggle that goes on in all of us.

One of the names of a dimension of the heart is 'qalb' -- which means 'that which turns'. Your heart is the battleground between, on the one hand, the forces of nafs, Iblis, dunya, and unbelievers, and, on the other hand, the forces of the realm of spirit.

Baba said right from the get-go that one of your essential problems is you have to choose what to do with your life, and although you have been choosing, you have been choosing to stay in this limbo of indecision and vacillation that is the valley of all your unhappiness. By the Grace of Allah, I have been aligned with the forces of spirit that have been trying to help you go in the direction of truth and happiness. Ron and a number of the other people in your life have been aligned with the interests of your nafs and the problematic history in which your nafs is embedded.

When you were with Ron, your spirit called out to be with me. When you were with me, your nafs, and associated forces, called out to be with Ron and your old, familiar life.

This is not rocket science. At the heart of your problems is the same issue that is at the heart of any of our problems -- with which set of forces are you going to align your heart ... those of the spirit or those of the nafs.

This issue of vacillation will never end until you commit yourself to one or the other side in the matter. This requires you to make your choice each and every day of your existence ... there is no such thing as a magic switch that will suddenly take this quintessential aspect of the human dilemma away from you. You must choose, and not choosing ... vacillation ... is itself a choice -- a choice not to take the constructive, difficult steps that are necessary to extricate you from your unhappiness.

You want happiness the impossible way -- the way many people do. You want happiness without having to: struggle, or choose, or have to deal with the issues that arise from such struggle and choice ... and, this will never happen. This is a spiritual law written into the fabric of created reality.

There were times when I thought you had chosen to become committed to loving me. My sense of such times, however, was under constant attack due to your many behaviors concerning me that went contrary to such a possibility.

I wanted to believe in this possibility very much, but my hopes kept getting dashed by the manner in which events unfolded between us. This is not me complaining or griping about it, this is the reality of

our history together whether we like it or not. I don't have to be emotionally attached to history to see it for what it is, and I don't have to hate that history or resent it to see it for what it is.

In any event, if the hypothesis that I am outlining here is true, you could have come to me and said that a wicked case of positive transference, together with your sexual history, along with your desperate situation with Ron, as well as the exhilaration of having a friend who really cared and loved me -- all of this came together in a huge synergistic ball of emotion and you got carried away with it all. I would have understood, although, yes, this would have been difficult for me because I genuinely love you and always have.

You were in a terrible emotional, mental, and marital place and you desperately needed help, and God gave you that help in the form of my manifestation. I would have forgiven you, and if this is the case, then I do forgive you. You had nowhere else to turn, and you reached for the one that was being extended to you.

But, if the foregoing is the case, you never treated me as a friend who had enough character and integrity to say to you: Lara, I understand. It's okay. I forgive you.

Now, in addition to issues of positive transference, there is also the dark, shadowy, destructive, negative dimension of the transference phenomenon. This force is so powerful that Carl Jung nearly died as a result of what went on during his struggles with this phenomenon in conjunction with one of his clients.

Just as positive transference is the constructive force that provides motivational assistance to enable an individual to break free from certain facets of emotional turmoil, so too, negative transference usually comes into play when a patient is brought into touch with areas to which an individual is resistant. In the early part of our relationship most of the attention was focused on the external threat that Ron constituted in your life ... he was slowly killing you -- physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

Through the positive transference phenomenon, you were enabled to develop the necessary motivational impetus to try to break free from Ron's controlling gravitational force. This was a long difficult struggle, with many relapses, but, now, by the Grace of God, you do

seem to have broken free -- or, at least, that is what you had promised Baba ... that the marital aspect of your relationship with Ron is over.

However, as you began to break free from Ron, the focus of our relationship turned more and more to the many ways in which you have been trying to sabotage our relationship. The game-playing, the constant running away, the themes of resistance, anger, antagonism, and so on which were increasingly present in our relationship all indicated that things between us, at least from your side, were taking a definite negative turn ... all possible indicators that the time of positive transference had gone into decline and the bad moon of negative transference was fast rising.

For instance, if you never thought we were really married, and if you were never really committed to this idea of marriage -- as your December, midnight epiphany suggests -- and, yet, you knew I believed the arrangement of the 31st to be legitimate and, in addition, that I was committed, then really, what does our relationship become to you except an affair in which you exploited me for sexual purposes with no real intention of carrying through on any of the responsibilities and obligations of a marital relationship, and when you were done, apparently, with the sex part of things, you took off with a very, very lame excuse in order to hide what actually was going on.

Is exploiting someone's innocent love for another human being -- and my love for you has always been innocent -- really any different at 9 or 10 than at 40? Innocence is innocence, and there is no need to try to do the innocence-measure counterpart to figuring out how many angels are dancing on the head of a pin versus the head of a tack. Is manipulating someone in order to maneuver that person into a bed where such an individual would not otherwise go, any different than feeding someone a date-rape drug and having one's way with that person?

What was the late December midnight epiphany all about if the foregoing is not the case? What did your saying that the arrangement of July 31st was a mistake of sexual impetuosity mean if the foregoing is not true?

Even if the foregoing is true, you should know I forgive you unconditionally. I hold nothing against you, whatever your reasons or

motives or intentions or needs might have been in respect to such things.

On the other hand, if the foregoing is not true – and I am sure you were shaking your head (inwardly or outwardly or both) all the way through the paragraph on the exploitation of innocent love and the date-rape analogy – then really, what has been going on? Do you love me or don't you? Are you willing to stand by me, as I have stood by you, or aren't you? Are your verbal professions of love true, or aren't they?

Love is an either/or phenomenon. It is either there or it is not. You can't have it both ways and say that, well, yes, love is there, but truth demands such love should not be given active expression.

Being human, we all come up short with respect to the high standard of real love, and, consequently, we all make mistakes in this regard. We do things that undermine the love we feel.

But, our relationship is not about a few gaffes and misadventures here and there. There has been a real, concerted effort by part of you to destroy our relationship and keep you from committing yourself to us ... again, the possibility of negative transference rears up its ugly head.

You professed to be upset with what I had told Lorna when she and her daughter came over for supper. However, when telling people about us suited your purposes, you went ahead and told both Ron and Jane about the marriage aspect of things, and then you proceeded to tell your counselor as well as, Carol, your brother, and a few other people about our alleged love relationship – none of which, by the way, I gave you permission to divulge ... and, yes, I do have something to say about this in view of the fact that we had made a solemn agreement with one another never to tell anyone else about the details of our relationship.

When Jane's nafs was all hot, bothered and consumed with jealousy concerning you and me, she questioned me very closely about the precise character of my relationship with you. I protected you, and I honored our agreement.

You tell seven people before I even tell one person. Yet, you are the one who gets upset about things, long after you, not me, had let the

cat out of the bag and helped create circumstances that were causing people to gossip and cast aspersions upon us.

I never even told my brothers about anything that was going on. I let them think whatever they wanted to about me, and I protected you by saying that nothing immoral or illicit which was going on – all of which was true, and when Bruce pressed for more information, he got nothing from me.

Even now, I have protected your image with Bruce. He came over one day recently and wanted to know what was going on. I told him that, seemingly, things between Lara and I were not going to work out, including in relation to the work idea.

When attended the birthday party for Lorna's daughter -- when you were away visiting with Baba -- I knew (because of your absence) that the topic of you and I would come up, and all I said was that you were away visiting with your spiritual guide. Lorna asked if this was the same man whose picture I had shown her the night when she had supper with us, and I said yes ... but this is all that has been said, and this is all, insha' Allah, I will say.

In any event, let's return to the issue of negative transference. All along you have been projecting onto me your own doubts, anxieties, mistrust, worries, and fears. None of what you have projected onto me is true, but the nature of projection is such that the person who is doing it doesn't care about the truth of the process, just as long such projection successfully shifts responsibility away from a variety of things that the person doing the projection doesn't want to have to deal with or think about or work on.

I'll give you a few concrete examples. You said you had lost respect for me because I didn't have an independent income, and, yet, you were one of the major reasons why I didn't have a job because you kept renegeing on the agreements that we had reached on at least five different occasions.

All the time I was waiting for us to get going as a team, you were busy fooling around with this or that issue according to your convenience. I trusted you, and you let me down every time on these permanent job arrangements to which we supposedly had reached agreement.

Now, if I am waiting for you to get your act together with respect to agreements we have made, and, then, you renege on the agreement, it becomes very difficult for me to have a job because you have used up all the time that I could have been using to look for a job by being required to wait on you to fulfill work promises that you had made to me. This is a very neat game ... you get to say to me that you lack respect for me because I don't have any job, and, simultaneously, you play a major role in my not looking for a job. You can't have it both ways.

Two Christmases ago, I specifically asked you if I could do several big proofreading jobs that were on the horizon for you. You promised them to me on several different occasions.

The next thing I know you gave them to someone else without telling me. And, of course, at the time you were enthralled with the idea of getting back together with Ron again.

Recently, when you also were planning on running away, you came up with the lame-brained story that I really wasn't interested in working with you. You said if I were really interested, then I would have shown more interest in working with the software you had purchased.

There were exactly two occasions at the apartment when the software issue came up. On one of those occasions I helped you set it up, and on the other occasion you chased me away because you were getting nervous with someone looking over your shoulder when you were very moody about the whole thing.

The rest of the time you were over at your house with the software and were saying you had to learn the stuff first before we could do anything with it. Having had quite a few experiences with you in which you backed out of an agreement with me, and knowing how you feel about being pressured and controlled, discretion took the better part of valor, and I left you alone until you might be willing to teach me how to operate the software.

Even here there was another agenda going on because your stated reason for returning to the house was to keep a lid on things and make sure that your daughter's boyfriend didn't try to strangle Stephanie again. A few weeks later, you are spending 2 ½ weeks with Baba with

the apparent confidence that as long as you didn't have to be with me, the kids were okay by themselves ... what you say and do in relation to me does not compute with the other things that you do in your life.

You also have told me that as long as I don't have a job, you couldn't trust me to love you for you. Please, this is just so much projected BS.

When I asked you in late December, after your denigration of my character in relation to your professed lack of respect for me as a person, and subsequent to your midnight epiphany, if I were to get a job with an independent source of income would this satisfy you with respect to the sincerity of my love for you, you hedged and said "not necessarily". What kind of dog and pony show are you running?

First you attack me and say certain things are the reason why you can't trust that my love for you is genuine and sincere. But, when I talk about removing such putative obstacles, your battlefield and plan of attack shifts to: the ambiguous, the vague, the unstated, and the merely alluded to.

I am the central character of a Franz Kafka novel orchestrated by you. I am being accused of crimes that are never specified, and when they are specified and countered by me, I am told such matters are not the real reason for the outstanding charges, but I am never told what my actual sins are.

As far as the so-called dependency allegation is concerned, the fact of the matter is that for the overwhelming amount of time that we have known one another, I haven't been dependent on you for anything. Yes, after the occasion of July 31st, there were a couple of times you helped out financially, but you were not paying for my rent, food, phone, or office space when I lived at 'the palace', and you weren't paying for my rent, food, phone, Internet Service Provider, website or anything else in the larger office ... although there were a couple of times you helped out -- once in November and once in January or February.

You are not paying for my expenses here at Lorna's. You paid for absolutely none of my expenses prior to the July 31st arrangement ... even though you offered to give me \$100 a month from your pay raise -- an offer that I declined.

I did work for you, and I got paid for that work. I was no more dependent on you than you are on the government for paying your salary. When one person contracts out to another, this is called gainful employment ... it's not called dependence.

So, where does this big concern of yours come from that I am dependent on your money or on you providing for me? The evidence does not back up your projection ... not even remotely.

Everything that comes to me comes from God. It was this way before you came along ... it was this way while you were with me, and it will continue to be this way if we go our separate ways.

Please do not make the mistake of confusing yourself with God. If things come to me through your locus of manifestation, then it is my duty to be appreciative of, and grateful for, the effort and work that has been necessary on the part of such a locus of manifestation to enable the doorway to be opened to me for what God has sent via you. But, the Source of my rizq is always Allah, my Provider, and it cannot be any other way, just as the job you have, and the house you own, and the car you drive, and the food you eat, and the clothes you wear, and the computer you use are all from the same Source ... although you have had to put forth effort in the way of a job to enable such things to be able to flow to you by God's leave, and all of this can be taken away by God's leave, no matter what you might think about the matter -- and this is being told to you by someone who has a lot more direct experience concerning this dimension of having things take away than you do.

You have had to invent one story after another to justify in your own mind that what you were doing to me and how you were treating me was fully justifiable. I was the one who couldn't be trusted. I was the one who didn't really love you. I was the one who didn't deserve respect. I was the one whose motives should be questioned. I was the one who betrayed you. I was the one who was ungrateful. I was the one who was fractious and prone to creating disturbances of the peace. Therefore, you are right -- so say your projections -- to have doubts, suspicions, anxieties, fears and mistrust concerning me and my 'real' motives.

None of the allegations are true, and there is no evidence to substantiate any of your charges concerning me. But, the nature of

projection is to foist onto someone else what the subconscious is feeling toward itself, and, thereby, escape the unpleasantness of having to look at what one is really doing in the mirror of behavioral events.

You have accused me of fermenting arguments, yet, you have been the instigator in many – but not all -- cases. You claim to like the Home and Garden channel because nothing happens there which is ever bad, but your surface plea for peace and calm is often belied by the ways that you, yourself, are constantly agitated and agitate those around you.

Is all the foregoing said in order to hurt you? ... Actually, no! I always have loved the inner potential that I have seen in you. I love the glimpses I see of the goodness within you that are manifested through the many good things that you do.

I don't love you for your nafs. I love you despite the presence of your nafs.

I don't like my own nafs. Unredeemed nafs is a mean, cruel, vicious, selfish, inconsiderate, hurtful entity ... whether this is my redeemed nafs or your unredeemed nafs or anyone else's unredeemed nafs.

I didn't hang around you because I enjoyed your moodiness, surliness, distancing, passive-aggressive behavior, anger, or attacks upon my character and the sincerity of my intentions concerning you, or the fact that you ran away from me all the time, or that you were projecting onto me your own problems, or because I really got off on your lack of empathy and compassion for my situation even as your fretted over poor Ron's situation despite the fact he had a full-time job and had no major expenses. I hung around you because there were just enough flashes of your inner self to give me a hope that things might change in the future once we got the Ron thing behind us.

Although, by the Grace of God, we did, pretty much, get the Ron thing behind us, unfortunately for me, at this point you told me 'sorry Tariq' ... "no sane or rational person would ever accept the idea of our marriage" ... even though God did, and Baba's shaykh did, and Baba did, and I did, and even Lorna did. However, we must all be insane and irrational I guess.

You have always held the moral high ground in your relationships with your cousin, your uncle, father, sister, brother, and Ron. You were always the one who had been wronged and done 'dirt'.

The foregoing fact has had an enormous shaping influence on your perception of life. This fact has had a tremendous impact on your relationship with me, because there is an extremely ferocious element within you that insists on seeing me as no different from the rest of the bozos who exploited, controlled, abused, hurt, and betrayed you.

There is not one iota of evidence that you can point to -- other than the existence of your unsubstantiated anxieties, fears, doubts, and so on in this regard -- which validates the desire of your nafs to catalogue me as more of the same as the other sources of problems in your life.

Now, however, with me, a very, very new theme has entered your life, and it is a theme with which you are extremely uncomfortable and for which you have no coping mechanisms with which to engage other than through your defense mechanisms (such as projection, denial, passive-aggressive inclinations, reaction formation, and so on). With me, you no longer occupy the high, moral ground -- a ground that has been one of your few sources of comfort in life and that deep down has helped you to weather a lot of storms because you knew the essence of your problems with respect to the people who abused and exploited you was not you but them.

However with me, you are the one who has exploited, controlled, manipulated abused, betrayed, and made-up stories, not me. This is probably the major reason why you have continually run away from me – and it is important for you to read this over very carefully because you have asked yourself and me the same question again and again ... if I really love Tariq, then why am I constantly running away from him?

Your defense mechanisms have suggested to you that the answer to your question is this: there is something wrong with Tariq, and your intuitive feelings in this regard are warning you through your worries, anxieties, doubts, fears, and mistrust concerning my alleged insincerity of my underlying niyat concerning you. But, your defense mechanisms will not permit you to assess the relevant evidence in an impartial manner, for an independent evaluation would show that the 'feelings

of warning' that your intuition is supposedly sending to you with respect to me cannot be substantiated ... not even remotely.

The truth of the matter is: you have continually been running away from me because you don't want to face up to the very painful fact you have, in certain respects, become, in relation to me, everything that you have spent your life hating and being angry toward, and resentful about, and feeling betrayed in relation to, with respect to the denizens of the deep who have been molesting you, in one way or another, all your life.

This is the answer to your aforementioned question about why do you keep running away from me. This is an answer that is consistent with all the facts, and the answer supplied by your defense mechanisms has absolutely no resonance with the facts of our relationship.

I didn't do anything to you but continued on loving you. I tried to point out to you what was going on, but, then, the negative transference phenomenon kicked into play full-time, and you began painting me as the bad guy because I was trying to get you to take a look at what you were doing with respect to me and our relationship.

Of course -- and you have said this to me on a number of occasions -- you claim (despite a pile of evidence to the contrary) that I couldn't possibly love someone like you with all the hurtful things that you have done in relation to me. Nonetheless, I am telling you that as far as your above claim is concerned, you don't know what you are talking about. I have always loved you, I still do love you -- not because of your behavior that is frequently, annoying, childish, selfish, belligerent, and moody -- but because of what I can see in the way of potential within you and that, from time to time, comes to the surface and shines in a beautiful way.

Baba sticks with you. Why?

Because your present condition is that of a self-realized human being? Please!

Like me -- in fact, better than me -- Baba sees the jewel within you. That is what he wants to come out on a permanent basis.

He doesn't want you to stay like you are. He wants you to become what God gave you the potential to be.

But, Baba's method of teaching is very subtle and complex. Many people have assumed, quite incorrectly, that just because he might not say anything directly that, therefore, everything is okay.

For the most part (although the incident with Sima on the phone when we were there is an indication of other possibilities), Baba's method is not to tackle things head on, but, rather, he often approaches things from an oblique angle so that the nafs will be taken by surprise and doesn't know what has happened until it's too late and a teachable moment for the heart has arisen. He is very patient, supportive, encouraging, dialectical, and wise in the way he does this, and, really, it is wonderful to behold ... as we all know.

What I am seeking to finish off now is not primarily spiritual in nature. I'm not trying to be your shaykh.

Instead, what I am trying to do is to tell you about some more aspects of your emotional turmoil so you will be in a position to take advantage of Baba's teachings more effectively and, perhaps, with fewer difficulties. Until you get by the problem that my presence represents in your life, you are, I believe, always going to be running away from things ... and if things ever get rough, then maybe, this trend will continue even with respect to Baba ... and believe me, spiritual trouble almost always arises from what one can't see rather than from what one can see.

I do not consider you now, nor have I ever considered you -- despite your projections onto me in this respect -- to be a (to use your word) "sicko". You are in emotional turmoil and you have been for quite some time, and there are very good reasons why you are experiencing emotional turmoil because a lot of not very nice people have done a lot of terrible things to you, and you know this, and this is why you have been seeing your regular counselor all this time and why you have to take medication. Why belabor or quibble about the obvious?

Emotional turmoil usually follows from such circumstances. Being in emotional turmoil is not a character defect. Rather, it is a sign that man's inhumanity to man has put someone's life at risk.

I want to tell you I have seen very clearly -- up close and all too personal, if you will -- what you have been doing with respect to me

and us, because I have been at ground zero for most of the on-going circus. I also want to tell you I forgive you for all of this ... I do see clearly what has been going on, and I have accepted that, and I have done sajdah to that, and I have, God willing, let it all go.

Maybe, you should have the strength to see what I have seen and do something constructive with what you see instead of running away from it. Eventually, God willing, you are going to see that much of what I am telling you is the truth, and you are going to have to ask Allah's forgiveness for this, and you are going to have to ask your own forgiveness for what you have permitted yourself to do and become in relation to me ... but the one thing you won't have to ask for is my forgiveness since I have given this to you - and I give this now -- freely and without any ulterior motive.

The other day, I stopped by the Inner Builders Message Board and read your poem about the Heart. I liked it and thought it was a very nice, well-done poem, but in writing the poem you might have overlooked the fact there was someone very close to you who already has done what you are only talking about.

To do sajdah is to die to oneself and to the heartaches of love. I loved you with all my heart and soul, and through my love for you, my heart was ripped out, and, by the Grace of Allah and with Baba's spiritual assistance, I bowed to Allah and acknowledged that ripping my heart out is God's right and Divinity might do with me as Divinity pleases.

God is the Source of all love, and what comes from God, returns to God. Love is the only thing worth dying for, and I have been dying for you on a regular basis for quite some time.

You once asked me: "Is there anything I wouldn't do for Baba?" As far as legitimate, permissible things are concerned, the answer, so far, has been, by the Grace of Allah, no, and I have been put through many tests regarding this. However, you have not been put through such tests yet in relation to your alleged willingness to do whatever he asks of you.

Let me alter your question slightly: "Is there anything you wouldn't do for me in the same way that there has been nothing that I have not been willing to do for you?" You have tested me on this issue

many, many times over the last several years, and, by the Grace of Allah, all of your tests have been passed ... I have come through for you under all circumstances.

What about you? Are you not required to run through the same gauntlet of love for me, as I have done for you? Why should my love be the only issue being contested?

I have not tested you in this regard, but Allah has, and there are a great many of these tests with respect to me that you have not passed. Your realization of this has led you to run away from me again and again because I am a constant reminder to you that in our relationship you have not put your money, so to speak, where your mouth is except in a very inconsistent, vacillating, problematic way ... and I mean this largely -- although not entirely -- in a metaphorical way -- not in a literal sense.

Am I any less deserving of sacrifice and dying for than is Baba? Do you suppose God is telling us -- one can only love one's shaykh, but all other forms of love are a desecration of the love that one should have for one's shaykh?

Why do you refer to your shaykh as a locus of manifestation for Divinity but seem unwilling to extend this same idea to others? If I, or you, or others are not loci of manifestation for Divinity, then what are we, and how do you reconcile such a sentiment with the fact that Baba teaches, as do all Sufi masters, that Divinity is one, and Creation is a manifestation which gives expression to that Oneness?

Should we not be willing to die for love in relation to anyone, and not just one's shaykh? There was, and is, nothing that I was not willing to do for you, and there was, and is, nothing that I have not been willing to do for my two shaykhs. And, there is nothing that I would not try to do, God willing and according to me capacity to do so, for anyone I loved.

If a person cannot endure the rigors of love on the purely human level, what hope does such an individual have to endure the far more demanding rigors of love on the deeper spiritual levels? In fact, God says if we love Him, then we should love creation first, and one of the reasons for this, aside from the fact God doesn't need our love, is that

love of creation is the necessary precursor through which we learn about the ups and downs of what loving Divinity entails.

Was not Baba the one who told us when we visited him that he doesn't trust people who say they love Divinity as an abstraction, divorced from manifestation? We only have the capacity to love Divinity in the context of concrete manifestations. We have no capacity to love Divinity apart from manifestation ... indeed, what would we even mean by this?

Are you running away from me because I am not Baba? Baba was the one who told us that he and I were one. Yes, I have no doubt Baba's spiritual capacity is far greater than mine, but what has this got to do with the issue of love?

Do we love someone for their capacity, or do we love someone because the individual gives expression to a Divine presence and because God has placed love in our heart for such individuals ... a love for which we have a responsibility to nurture, protect, and serve? Are you saying God did not place any love in your heart for me and, therefore, all the things that you have been professing to lots of people in this regard really aren't true?

What exactly have you been saying? What do you mean?

One of the major problems we have had is that, quite frequently, you don't mean what you say, and you don't say what you mean.

You get so preoccupied with your anxieties, doubts, mistrust, fears, confusions and a very difficult life history, and you are so inclined to go with the mood and emotion of the moment, that a poor simple fool like me has trouble following what you are up to. I have tried to take you at your word, but, unfortunately, your word goes in a lot of different directions ... often simultaneously.

You have expressed to me a number of times that you feel like whatever you try to give in relation to me, this is never enough, and the implication is that I am ungrateful. I always have acknowledged, or tried to, the things that you have done for me or the gifts that you have given to me, and I am appreciative of such things, but what I often have objected to is the way and the circumstances through which you have given things to me.

Each of the last two Christmases, you brought things for me – things that I appreciated and things that I explicitly told you I appreciated, but on both of those occasions, the giving was a prelude to leaving. Was there caring involved in this giving? Yes, I believe there was, but there was also a sense of guilt that was present as an intention associated with the giving because you knew what you were thinking of doing at the time you were buying things for me ... and each time you did just that.

The giving of the bed – which was, supposedly, to us – became, by a default, a gift to me. This is because about a week later you left me once again ... and before you even left for California or before you even talked with Jane and permitted her to poison your mind and feed your defense mechanisms concerning my intentions concerning you, you were already well on your way to leaving our relationship once again.

Was there a caring in the buying of the bed? Yes, there was, but this aspect of the giving was tainted by other things that were going on in you and with you in relation to me.

There have been several other occasions (a year ago, last November, and a year ago this January, being two cases that come to mind) when you helped me out financially to grease the skids with respect to leaving our relationship. Was there a caring for me associated with this giving? Yes, there was, but there also were some other motivations present that indicated something other than a caring for me was underlying the giving of gifts.

You have said you harbor many doubts about whether I really love you, or whether I am drawn to you merely for what you give to me. Number one, I never asked for, or expected, you to buy anything for me at Christmas time or with respect to the bed. These were your ideas entirely and I was quite content to, for example, continue sleeping on my little kid's bed, and I would have preferred that nothing be brought for me at Christmas because it is embarrassing and uncomfortable not to be able to reciprocate.

I asked for your help financially several times. To your credit, you did help me on these occasions, but you were also resentful and resistant toward me with respect to this giving and these emotions were very palpable, and you never gave me the help with the same

enthusiasm and caring that you displayed toward Ron when he asked for your help.

Your giving to me has often been couched in a context of your leaving me and the help or gifts that you offered to me came almost as a relief for you because they enabled you to feel like you really cared about me, even as you were running away from me and feeding me stories out of both sides of your mouth ... one set of stories about how much you loved me and the other set of stories about why you had to leave.

The *niyat* with which you gave things to me often -- but not always -- was entangled in psychological and emotional currents that were not about caring for me, but were quite the opposite. There often was this double message of ambiguity surrounding the giving that left me wondering where I actually stood with you.

Was it all an act? Was I being used? Did you genuinely love me but were confused by so many things that the love got lost? Were you giving to me to help assuage the guilt and ambivalence you felt about our relationship?

The irony of all this is that your giving to me actually helped fuel your own suspicions concerning me with respect to whether I really, truly loved you for you or for what you could give me financially and materially. Like your brother's wife, you have become a prisoner of your own anxieties and doubts about people's intentions, and in my case, your anxieties and doubts concerning my *niyat* have never focused on what I actually do, but rather have been preoccupied with what you think I am doing.

The vast majority of what you have given me, I never asked for. The things I did ask for could not possibly be construed as showing I cared for you merely because of what you gave me.

On the one hand, most of the time you gave such help to me just before you already had decided to run away from me, yet, again. (And, if you will remember, on one of the first two occasions that you went away, one of the last things you said to me as you were walking down the hallway away from the big office on Garbo street was for me not to worry ... that you would give me some money to help me out, and I told you I didn't want your money, and no money ever changed hands at

that time between you and me.) Moreover, on the other hand, the total amount of money you actually have given to me was but a small part of the total cost of my expenses in the two years I have known you. So, how do you conclude from this that I was attracted to you because of your money and not because I loved you?

Once again, the goblin of negative transference makes an appearance. Your defense mechanisms project onto me things that cannot be reconciled with the facts of what went on between us. However, as noted previously, the purpose of such projections is served because you were able to feel justified with respect to why you felt you needed to run away from me and, thereby, you would never have to confront the fact that your extreme discomfort about our relationship was not about what I was doing but was a function of your having lost the moral high ground with respect to your problematic interactions with another human being because such difficulties were the result of your doing and not the actions of the other person with respect to you. This set of circumstances runs contrary to almost your entire life history, and you just don't know how to deal with this reality, and, therefore, your tendency is to run away from it and to run away from the individual - namely, me -- who is an unpleasant reminder of this unfinished business in your psyche.

A little while ago you told me you were feeling pulled apart by your feelings for, on the one hand, Ron, and, on the other hand, your feelings for me. Conceivably, you might feel the only fair thing to do is to say no to both of us.

Although I don't doubt that such a solution would alleviate your considerable sense of approach-avoidance with respect to Ron and me, nevertheless, I don't really think fairness has much to do with such an idea. Such a scenario might be easier for you, perhaps, but it would not really be a matter of fairness.

You haven't been fair to me for almost the entire length of our relationship. This is not a complaint or a recrimination, but, it is, instead, a statement of fact.

On some of those occasions when you have been with me, you have said to me that if I think you are being unfair with me, there is someone across the bridge - namely, Ron -- who would like to be in my position right then. Well, if all the guy across the river cared about was

having sex with you, then maybe you might be right, but sex was never the issue with me ... as much as I might like engaging in that activity under appropriate circumstances.

Even when you were with me you showed more commitment to Ron than you ever showed to me. You might have been with me physically, but you were often thinking about Ron and many aspects of your behavior proved this ... from: constantly talking about him (did you constantly talk about me when you were with him? I doubt it), to: constantly checking for his phone messages (and when you were with him, you didn't have to do this with me because I left you alone and didn't bother you or try to interfere with your life), to: being worried about his finances (and you were not equally concerned with my finances), to: being worried that he not be sad, to: wanting him to find someone who would be good for him, to: constantly being in a tizzy over him, to: wanting to go back to him despite all the stuff he had pulled and even though you were not actually happy when you did go back, to: being obsessed with what he was, or wasn't doing, and so on.

You once said you thought of Ron and me as sort of the bad boy and the good boy and that your heart went out to the bad boy because he needed help more. However, you never seemed to understand how the so-called good boy had a heart and that you were constantly breaking it, but he was too much of a gentleman to try to hurt you for what you were doing.

Do you really think people like me don't need to be loved ... that we have no needs of any importance and that we can just be shuffled off to Buffalo ... that we have no vulnerabilities ... that we have no history of emotional difficulties ... or a dysfunctional family ... or issues of loneliness ... or that we don't want or need a healthy family life ... or that we don't have dreams or desires for intimate, human companionship ... or that we have feelings which are okay to trample upon ... or that it is okay to play games with our lives because, after all, we are good little boys and, we will come out of things okay without anyone having to be kind, compassionate, empathetic, supportive, encouraging, friendly, constant, reliable or loving with respect to them?

Where is your proof of this? You just made all kinds of assumptions concerning my life, and you never really seemed to see

that there is a breathing human being before you who loved, and loves, you and who has a heart that can be ripped out and that this hurts ... no matter what the person might be -- 'good' or 'bad'.

If you want to be fair, then take into consideration all of the evidence, and reflect upon this in the context of the purpose of life, and your participation in the silsilah and where you need to go and what you need to do, and what you can do for whom and under what circumstances, and the actual state of your heart with respect to me, and whether choosing not to be with either one of us is an expression of fairness or an unwillingness to commit yourself to the risk of plunging full speed ahead into the unknowns of the ocean of love.

I don't know where this letter will leave us. I do know I no longer wish to be made the scapegoat for your problems.

I did not cause them, I did not maintain them, and I have done nothing except try to help you find ways to overcome them and struggle to be a better, happier, more emotionally peaceful individual.

None of the things that you have accused me of are true. I think you should look to yourself for the source of the things that you have been projecting onto me, and I know you dislike me for putting things back in your lap ... but, really, that is where such things belong -- with the one who is the source of many of our problems.

The foregoing is, I believe, one of the major reasons why you don't want to say fatiha with me. There is a part of you that knows what has gone on between us, and you are feeling both guilty and ashamed of that. At the same time, you harbor a lot of hostility, anger, resentment, and hurt toward me, because you don't like the fact I am the mirror that, sometimes, reflects your nafs back to you.

You feel, perhaps, I have betrayed you because I told you I would be the best friend you ever had and look at what has happened. But, what you conveniently seem to overlook is that I really didn't bring any of this about ... you did.

I didn't keep running away from you. I didn't turn my back on you, but you turned your back on me continuously because you didn't want to have to live up to the responsibilities of what a friend is ... you wanted to run away from me whenever you liked and do whatever you wanted, and if someone were to say anything about the idea of

reciprocity in love or a friendship, you would take that as saying someone is trying to control you or that someone is trying to say you owe that person something.

Well, none of this is the case. I am a human being, and I would like to be treated with all the respect, courtesy, consideration, kindness, compassion, empathy, sincerity, warmth, integrity, care, concern, and love with that any human being deserves to be treated.

If you are not prepared to do any of the foregoing in relation to me, then really you do operate with a double standard ... one for Baba and the people in his household, and one for me, and I would like to know what you feel justifies doing that?

I am a member of the same Silsilah as they are. I have the same shaykh as they do and you do.

I am sure you offered all of the foregoing qualities to the people you met during your visit. Yet, none of those people have extended themselves for you in anything remotely resembling the way I have done for you. Does all of this extending that I am alluding to entitle me to anything more? ... No, but it surely doesn't entitle me to anything less either.

If you can treat them with warmth, kindness, consideration, and so on, then you should be able to do the same for me. And, if you are not prepared to do this, then really, what is the point of my carrying on a relationship with someone who does not wish to extend herself for me except as the mood moves her?

I know the problematic nature of some of the behaviors of which you are capable. The people down there, with the exception of Baba, don't ... although indirectly, I suppose, we all know what we are capable of doing because we all have seen our respective nafs in action.

I love you despite what I know. Please don't punish me just because of what you, due to a lot of unfortunate circumstances, have had to disclose to me, whether by word of mouth or behavior, and merely because God induced me to have compassion and empathy for your situation, and seduced me to fall in love with you, and enticed me to be inclined to help you out of a difficult, desperate situation.

Do I want a job from you? No, I don't. Do I want your money? No, I don't. Do I want your house or car? No and no!

Do I want to be married to you? Not if you don't have any reciprocal sense of devoted, loving commitment to me and us, and not if you don't have a sincere willingness to be prepared to move on together constructively and co-operatively with respect to the spiritual path while leaving the past where it belongs ... in the past.

Do I want your friendship? That depends on whether you are going to be a real friend or just a pain in the ass that keeps projecting her psychic world onto me. Insha' Allah, I will always be your friend, I will always pray for the welfare of you and your family. But, I'm not going to play odd-man out in your own version of three-card Monte.

I would like you to be honest with me. If you don't love me, then tell me that, and I will understand and let it go, and we won't have to ever live with the pretense again ... you will be free, and so will I. If you do love me, then tell me that and let us see what can be done with respect to such love.

You once told me if Ron passed away, you would be sad but you could deal with that, but if I passed away, and we were together, you didn't think you could bear that. My response was: "This is why I want to introduce you to Baba and the others in the silsilah, so, if I should pass away before you do, then, you would be looked after by friends and people who love you and care for you."

Now you have spent time with these people, you know, possibly, what I meant when I said the foregoing. Your relationship with the silsilah does not begin and end with me, and I never wanted this to be the case. You were the one who resisted going down and meeting Baba and the others, and I was the one who had to keep gently nudging you in a direction that I believe was in your best interests.

Are you afraid of committing yourself to me because you fear I am, or will be, a repeat performance of your past relationships with your cousin, uncle, father, or Ron? You know that everything in the last two years refutes such a fear, and it is only your inclination to choose your doubts, anxiety and mistrust over me that leads you away from the inescapable conclusion that I am not like anyone in your past history ... especially Ron.

Ron often blamed you for holding him accountable for the sins of the people who exploited, abused, and hurt you early in life. He conveniently overlooked his own substantial contribution to your problems and difficulties.

You have, however, tried to hold me accountable for things that happened to you before I came along and with which I have had nothing to do. Yet, unlike Ron, and by the Grace of God, I have not contributed to your problems ... and your two-plus weeks with Baba is the whipped cream, cherry, and nuts (although I know you don't like the last two but added them to complete the analogy) on the sundae that, by the Grace of Allah, has been given to you through me during the last several years.

Please stop punishing me for the guilt you might feel over what has transpired between us. I don't hold any of what has gone on against you, I don't resent you for it, I am not angry toward you in relation to it, and all of the things of this letter have been said as one last attempt on my part to try, without recriminations (but with blunt language as I deemed appropriate and fitting) to set the record straight on what has been happening, and to add a variety of, what seemed to be, necessary clarifications.

Are you afraid of committing yourself to me because the whole idea of being consumed by love is too psychologically and emotionally near to your direct experience of the way pathology has consumed much of your life? Well, as you, yourself, said in your Inner Builders poem concerning the heart, the only thing worth dying for is love. Therefore, by implication, pathology is not worth dying for, and, indeed, pathology is what you have been so valiantly striving to become free of for quite a few years now.

But, if love is worth dying for, then why not start with me? If you don't love me, then of course, you can't die for that which you don't feel.

However, despite all the games, problems, evasions, complications, pressures, confusions, vacillations, veils, uncertainties, running away, and doubts that you have thrown at me over the last several years concerning our relationship, I do believe there is, deep within you, an abiding, sincere love for me that has been trying to get out but has been prevented by circumstances and other facets of your

being from establishing itself in any consistent fashion. I also realize the foregoing might only be more a matter of my wish than the reality of things. Only you can tell me which is which.

Have I been upset with some of the things that have gone on. Yes, but please don't hold me to the standards of angelic behavior, for I have not been created from pure good as angels have been.

I am a human being with all the vulnerabilities and weaknesses this implies. By the Grace of Allah, I have done the best I could with respect to you – and better than many others might have done under similar circumstances (and with respect to sheer volume of letters and e-mails to you, there is really no contest in such matters -- in this area I am the champion of the world -- well, Vermont ... well Bamford ... well a certain street and house in Bamford).

I don't want you to answer the foregoing question because of what you believe will please me or Baba, or because of what you feel is being expected of you, or because of the fears you might have about the implications that such an answer might have for your self-image or self-esteem, or because you are feeling trapped into an answer, or because you are feeling indebted to someone, or because you are feeling someone believes you owe them something, or because you are feeling guilty about this or that, or because you assume no one could really love you after what has gone on . I want an answer that comes from your heart and to which you are prepared to be committed, come hell or high water, and, we will proceed, in whatever direction(s) from there in a way that is mutually agreeable.

Whatever your answer might be, I truly hope you understand I am ready to close the book on things. By the Grace of God, I have done sajdah, and, therefore, the past on this whole issue is, God willing, buried ... I have moved, and am moving, on. This letter brings things full circle, but with an important difference from where we began.

I think you have to do sajdah as well. If you do this, then it would entail a letting go of all the doubts, anxieties, fears, mistrust and defense mechanisms that have been muddying the waters of our relationship for far too long. I want what is best for you and me, and doing sajdah is the only way to become clear enough and free enough to be able to be open to what God is trying to tell us to do with respect to where to go and how and with whom.

Now, by the Grace of God, you are a relatively freer person. Choose whatever you want to do with this new-found freedom, but whatever you might select, choose that for reasons of love and not out of pathology. Stop making the same mistake you have been making your whole life.

God has given you a wonderful opportunity. I hope you don't foul it up.

I also hope you will have the courage to tell me really what is going on within you with respect to us, This would constitute information that, irrespective of its nature, can help us both to move on -- together or apart -- in an appropriate, fruitful and constructive direction. I do not think I am being unreasonable or unfair in making the foregoing request.

Love,
Tariq

§

January 31, 2003

There has been no response from Lara in relation to my letter. I fear she has either not received it, or, worse, she did receive it but has thrown it away. I decide to try to contact her in the virtual community to determine which might be the case.

I go on line, enter the cyber community, and discover that Lara is present. I contact her through the community's IM software, which is too limited and cumbersome for a conversation, and ask if she will chat with me in my residence in the virtual community that Baba has created.

After some hastily written IM exchanges and some confusion, she agrees to talk with Philokalia. I have had an intuition for some time that Lara knows who Philokalia really is, but I am not certain whether this is so.

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The following is the chat log from that interaction.

01/31/0317:29:18 GMT

<http://www.virtualcity.org/cgi-bin/virtualcity/property?ID=0104070806010303&ac=4D&IF=x.bxx>

Desert Mysteries, welcome to Desert Mysteries. Please note that visitors can only watch the chat!

Philokalia [185]: Hello Lara

Philokalia [185]: Do you know who I am?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I will only know who you are if you want me to.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Man without a country

Philokalia [185]: This is Tariq

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Did you think I wouldn't know you?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Please . . .

Philokalia [185]: I sensed that you knew my identity, but I wanted to be sure

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Why this silliness?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Why not just be yourself?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Not that it's any of my business.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Never mind. You have your reasons, I'm sure. Sorry for even asking.

Philokalia [185]: Because you seem to want to ignore me in real life -- I felt my presence in the virtual world as Tariq might make you uncomfortable, and I did not want to scare you away from the on-line community

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I have no reason to be uncomfortable. Therefore, I am not.

Philokalia [185]: Then, why do you seem to ignore me?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: The only thing that makes me uncomfortable is deception. You must know that by now.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I just answered the question.

Philokalia [185]: Are we friends?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I'm not going to pretend.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I will always consider you my friend.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Unless you act like an idiot.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Then I will consider you an idiot.

Philokalia [185]: Why can't we say fatiha together?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Because you are not my teacher any longer.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: And you did not seem to understand that the last time.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: And I will not let you beat me up with your words.

Philokalia [185]: In Canada, there are mureeds of Baba, but they still stay Fatiha with Momin

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Does Momin beat them up with words?

Philokalia [185]: When they don't observe the etiquette of fatiha, things are said, yes

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I will not argue.

Philokalia [185]: I'm not trying to argue

Philokalia [185]: Perhaps we both have been acting like idiots

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Speak for yourself.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I will do the same.

Philokalia [185]: Why the anger?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I expect more from you, I guess.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683] : Sorry.

Philokalia [185]: Than what?

Philokalia [185]: You expect more from me than what?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Than what you are doing and have done.

Philokalia [185]: What am I doing now?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Nothing.

Philokalia [185]: What have I done, then?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: You cannot stop being Tariq any more than I can stop being Lara.

Philokalia [185]: If change is not possible, then the Sufi path is an illusion

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Well, time will tell if that is so.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: for me anyway.

Philokalia [185]: I will admit I have lost my temper. But, will you not admit you have done things to hamper our relationship?

Philokalia [185]: Many things have been said, and, quite frankly I am confused and I need help from you

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Just because you want an admission doesn't mean I have to give one.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: What kind of help do you need from me?

Philokalia [185]: Lara, I need you to be a friend, and friends don't carry on like this? They forgive one another. They try to understand one another! They try not to hurt one another. I know I have hurt you, and I have been confused by some of the things you have said

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: You are asking for help with confusion from the confused.

Philokalia [185]: Yes, who better to help another confused person?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: You know the answer to that question.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: And it's not me.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: You more than anyone knows that.

Philokalia [185]: Baba will not interfere in this issue. This is between you and me

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Please don't say that word here.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: He would not like it.

Philokalia [185]: What word?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683] whispers (not for public viewing): Just say 'him' and I'll know who you mean.

Philokalia [185]: OK, he will not interfere in this issue. This is between you and me

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Yes, I know. But your confusion is a different matter altogether.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I cannot help you there.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I have tried that and failed miserably.

Philokalia [185]: I don't think so, because I am confused about what the nature of our relationship is

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I thought you knew that.

Philokalia [185]: I know what my problems are on the spiritual side

Philokalia [185]: No, I don't, this is why I need clarification

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I will always consider you a friend, Phil. I have already told you that.

Philokalia [185]: Look, I am not trying to force any admission from you. But your words about why you wanted to end the marriage really don't make sense

Philokalia [185]: If you want to end it, OK, but please tell me the real reasons

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I have ended it.

Philokalia [185]: For what reasons

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I will think about whether or not I want to respond further.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: And I will let you know.

Philokalia [185]: I ask for your forgiveness

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: For what?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: There is nothing to forgive as far as I'm concerned.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I'm not angry.

Philokalia [185]: For the fact I have hurt you enough that you are angry with me and call me an idiot

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I]m not saying you are an idiot.

Philokalia [185]: I know you well enough to know when you are angry with someone -- it comes through in the way you respond

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: But if you act like one, I will probably think it.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: But you don't know me well enough to know that I would never harm you?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Only want what's best for you?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: If you don't know this, you don't know me at all.

Philokalia [185]: you speak very warmly about your friends in the virtual city and Inner Builders, but you are not responding that way with me

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: They don't try to control me.

Philokalia [185]: When have I tried to control you?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I speak warmly about you too.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: In case you haven't noticed.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Stargate

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: "the latter" gave you away immediately.

Philokalia [185]: Look I was not trying to practice deception. I asked "MON" -- you know 'him' -- since I can't use the 'B' word here -- if this was okay -- and he said yes when I told him I was afraid of making you uncomfortable

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Why is everything always 'MON's' responsibility?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: You hide behind him.

Philokalia [185]: Not his responsibility -- but he gave permission

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Does he ever deny permission for anything?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I have not yet seen it.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: And I have watched very, very carefully.

Philokalia [185]: No, not even for bad behavior on the part of a lot of us

Philokalia [185]: That is his way

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Guidance does not contain the word no.

Philokalia [185]: neither does friendship

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Sometimes it does.

Philokalia [185]: well, how about establishing boundaries then

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: When the other is acting like an idiot.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: What for?

Philokalia [185]: Look are you going to continue to beat me up with this idiot thing

Philokalia [185]: If you want me to say I am an idiot, then I am an idiot, and I ask for your forgiveness for that

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: It's just my favorite word the past few days. I haven't yet gotten the Unity thing ... still in dualities.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I forgive you for acting like an idiot.

Philokalia [185]: Do you forgive me for losing my temper?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I hope you will forgive me too.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Yes, I do.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: All is forgiven on both parts I hope.

Philokalia [185]: But, I do -- I always have -- and I have told you that many times about different things

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Yes, I know.

Philokalia [185]: If we forgive one another, can we really put this in the past and not have either of us dredge it up?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Yes.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Let go or be dragged.

Philokalia [185]: I agree

Philokalia [185]: but, there are still some unresolved issues

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: What?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: You're putting that comma after the conjunction again. LOL

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: That I may never be able to forgive.

Philokalia [185]: the real reasons why things happened as they did -- I don't want to argue, I just want to try to understand -- you said you loved me, and, then, you ran away ... long before I lost my temper at that last fatiha.

Philokalia [185]: I'm trying to understand why -- what I did wrong

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: You didn't do anything wrong.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: We have wiped the slate clean, remember?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: There is nothing to forgive.

Philokalia [185]: I really didn't try to control you ... Yes, we have wiped the slate clean ... there is no anger, there is no resentment, there are no negative emotions, but there are still things that seem to be fuzzy between us

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Like what?

Philokalia [185]: you said you loved me but you keep running away from me, why?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: You know why.

Philokalia [185]: I haven't tried to control you ... I have let you go whenever you wanted to go.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: But not without arguing.

Philokalia [185]: There has been argument on both sides

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Yes, but there only be any longer.

Philokalia [185]: what?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: (Read line above.)

Philokalia [185]: I did but it doesn't make sense to me

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: If I'm not there, we won't argue.

Philokalia [185]: If you're not here, we can't be friends either

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Well, maybe we can't be friends then.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I'm sorry for that.

Philokalia [185]: Why not?

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Because you won't just leave this alone.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: And that is what I want.

Philokalia [185]: leave what alone

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Reasons for everything.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Reason bows to love.

Philokalia [185]: I don't feel loved by you -- I feel anger and annoyance from you

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: I have to go back to work.

[Block Deputy] Lara [1683]: Bye.

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Following the brief discussion with Lara, I reflect on a few things. Among other things, I am surprised Lara knows that Philokalia and Stargate are me. I have tried to keep a low-profile through both virtual identities, but, apparently, not low enough ... although Lara is a very intelligent and intuitive individual.

§

January 31, 2003 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

As the line in a song goes, "I feel I'm in the middle of something which I really don't understand." I believe I have given you much cause to be disappointed with me of late, and every time I try to sort out my mistakes, I believe I commit new ones to just compound matters.

I have tried to be what I considered to be a friend to people, but, apparently, whatever it is I have done, does not constitute friendship. I have tried to be friendly, accommodating, helpful, empathetic, compassionate (or, at least, what I felt these things entailed), but somewhere I seem to be missing the mark, because I find myself pretty much alone.

I am a human being who has faults. I have never tried to hide that from people or from you.

I have tried to work on the faults of which I am aware to be a better person, but I guess the work that has been attempted is just not good enough, because I find myself alone -- apparently, not fit to be in human company ... for if I had become a better person, then why am I still alone?

Seemingly, whatever it is I have done, or am doing, is so aggravating, annoying, upsetting, or whatever, people are inclined to keep their distance from me. If this were not so, then why are people keeping their distance from me?

I have tried to be a loving human being with respect to people, but again, whatever I might have done in this regard seems not to have been what other people considered loving. I have been alone pretty much all my life ... from childhood right through high school, university, graduate school, and after; perhaps, there are good reasons for all of this isolation has occurred since there seem to be things that I am doing, of which I am not aware, that push people away.

I have tried to be honest with people, and, yes, maybe, I am too blunt on occasion, and people don't like this. But, lots of time, some people are not honest with me ... even when I ask them to be, and, as a result, things seem to get lost in games of one kind or another to such an extent that I really don't know what is going on, and, consequently, I don't know what else to do but withdraw and try to let the situation be.

I always hope such withdrawal will help the cause of healing. But, somehow, the healing never seems to take place, and I wonder what it is I am failing to do that might help the healing along.

I have tried not to make demands on people, but, maybe, whatever I have said or done indicates I am, nonetheless, being demanding in

ways that I don't understand. I have tried not to impose myself on people and have tried to accommodate myself to whether or not they appeared to want me around, and if I felt that, perhaps, they didn't, then, I stayed away.

I have tried to reach out to people, but, maybe, people don't like the way I reach out to them. Perhaps, there is something I'm doing that is putting them off. People (and this is not a reference to you) use terms in relation to me like love, friendship, forgiveness, kindness, warmth, hospitality, and so on, but so much has happened over the years, that I just feel adrift in a sea of indifference and I really don't know what people mean any more when they use these terms.

I try to respond according to my understanding, but, apparently, my understanding of things is wrong or defective somehow. I see people respond to you, and I see that you are loving, empathetic, kind, sincere, compassionate, and a friend to them. I have tried to follow your example as best I can ... but, evidently, there is something major missing here in my attempts to emulate you, because people are not responding to me, no matter how hard I try and no matter how I might try to extend myself, accommodate them, or assist them with this or that problem ... or, maybe, people are responding to what I do, and, as a result, sooner or later, they all seem to run away.

This was true where I grew up in. This was true, in many respects, even in my own family ... and I am not trying to blame anyone here but in a variety of ways my family was dysfunctional.

The running away was true, for the most part, when I lived in Canada, and Delaware, and Vermont. This is tearing my heart out. I obviously am doing something wrong, because, why else would I continue to end up alone? Why do people keep running away ... not just marital partners, put people of all kinds.

I see people in the world who are not necessarily all that nice who appear to have warm, close, devoted, intense friendships. Yet, even when I try my level best, I end up alone.

Have I made mistakes along the way? Yes, I have, but apparently, the sorts of mistakes that I have made are not the forgivable kind, or I am not the forgivable kind, or something of that nature.

Last night I cried my heart out to Allah. I begged for His forgiveness. I begged for relief from this ache in my heart ... not in conjunction with anyone in particular, but in relation to life in general.

I guess, if I am alone, then in one sense, this is as Allah wishes for things to be. Things are this way by God's permission, although I might be being doing things that, with God's permission, keep leading me back to where I am now, and not because this is where Divinity necessarily wants me to be.

I don't see how I can serve the silsilah or be a proper khalifah for you, when I am having the apparent effect on people that I am having. I am not a beacon that is attracting people, but, rather, I seem to be quite the opposite ... I repel people. I don't wish to do this, but this seems to be what is happening.

If I can't write a simple essay - such as in Inner Builders -- that is in compliance with your wishes, then maybe, there is something seriously wrong with my nisbath with respect to you. I love you (at least I believe I do), and want to be with you, and miss you, and think about you all of the time, and try to do things to please you, but I just seem to keep missing the mark in one way or another.

I feel there are all kinds of people in your virtual community who understand what you are trying to do and what is going on, in general, far better than I do. I feel I am a complete failure as a khalifah and everything associated with this.

I made contact today with Lara through your virtual community's Instant Message Unit and, eventually, she came to my cyber home in that community for a chat. She has known all along that the virtual nick names, Philokalia and Stargate, belong to me ... as I suspected and as I told you during one of our virtual chats.

I asked for her forgiveness for whatever I have said and done, and she professes there is nothing for me to ask forgiveness about, but the distance, anger, and hurt come through in almost everything she says, and she is very upset with me for what went on in the fatiha session the night before she left for her extended stay visiting with you.

Were there some things that I said which I regret? Yes, there are a few things I regret very much, and I apologize to you and her for

having said those things ... and as your khalifah I am ashamed I lost my temper as a result of my frustration over what was going on.

I tried to separate out issues of the proper etiquette of fatiha from my own personal problems with her, and in some respects, I didn't do a very good job of this. But, there were other issues that were entirely independent of her-me issues that concerned fatiha specifically, and I did say something about that ... these were things that I don't feel you would have tolerated at your fatiha and are things that you would have spoken to someone about it if they did these same things ... but, maybe, I am wrong, and, maybe, I shouldn't have said anything at all even if she might have been wrong in what she was doing.

I am asking for clarification here about whether or not I should be saying anything to people under such circumstances ... not, necessarily, with respect to Lara in particular, but in general. I remember what you indicated went on in Canada when someone tried to tell Momin Shah Baba that what he was saying is not what Baba believes ... or words to this effect, and the impression I had from what you said about the situation was, perhaps, something should have been said by Momin Shah at the time to the person in question, and problems might have been created because nothing was said by him on such occasions.

On the other hand, maybe, I am too quick to say something. I do try to let a lot of things go before taking any action or saying anything, but I felt Lara was stepping way over the line on the night before she left to visit with you. The way I tried to handle it might not have been the best or even right, but I didn't feel that what was going on should be left unaddressed ... especially, when it kept persisting both before and after fatiha.

However, I always feel very uneasy with such things and worry that I might have overstepped boundaries in a manner that is not pleasing to you. She is your mureed, not mine, and I am not trying to be her shaykh, and, in fact, I was the one who told her, despite her initial misgivings and lack of trust concerning you, she should take all her spiritual problems to you, along with her dreams ... that I was not the person who should be doing this anymore.

I asked her why she doesn't want to attend fatiha with me anymore, and she said she doesn't want to do this because I am not her

shaykh. I pointed out that there are mureeds of Baba's in Canada who attend the fatiha given through Momin Shah Baba, and she asked me if Momin beats people with their words like I did with her on the night before she left to visit you, and I said if someone is behaving inappropriately with respect to fatiha, then, yes, something is likely to be said.

She also told me that I should not use your name, Baba, in my own home in the virtual community that you created, because you wouldn't like it. Although I wouldn't use Baba anywhere else within the greater virtual city beyond our community, and although I wouldn't use the name 'Baba' if there were other people around other than Lara within my home in your virtual community, I really think it rather unusual that I can't say such things in the privacy of my own home ... but if this is what you want, then I won't do this even in my home, and I stand corrected.

Lara apparently feels I am spiritually confused about things because this is what she said at one point during our chat. And, while I will admit I am having my own share of problems getting things done in your virtual community and message board in a style, and with the words and concepts, that you seem to want - for example, without the religious implications that you do not want -- and while I will admit there are many things I either do not know or do not understand (and such ignorance might help lend to my confusion at times), and while I will admit I am having my own share of problems trying to come to an acceptance of everything in my life being the way it is (and I have done -- or tried to do -- sajdah with respect to some of these issues, and I still am working on doing sajdah to other aspects), I guess she seems to feel she understands things a lot better than I do -- and, maybe, she does -- to be able to refer to me as being spiritually confused.

I did not argue with her about this allegation and just let it pass. Moreover, I did not argue with her claim that you did not want me to mention the name Baba even in the privacy of my own virtual home.

I tried mostly to work toward her and I being able to put things behind us. I did ask for her forgiveness a number of times, and Lara said she has forgiven me and the slate is wiped clean, but she doesn't feel we might be able to be friends.

If I am spiritually confused in ways other than those alluded to above, I would ask for you to help me with this. If I am not spiritually confused in ways other than what has been indicated above, then I guess I would appreciate something being said in this regard as well.

Because the emotional atmosphere between Lara and myself seems so strained and uncomfortable these days, I am not prepared to automatically trust my sense that her comments about spiritual confusion and using the name Baba in my own virtual home might be the result of her own misunderstanding concerning things. If I am wrong about this, then let me know, and I will try to make whatever adjustments are indicated.

In any case, I have left the ball in Lara's side of the court. I won't bother her.

One last item ... I made e-mail contact with Momin Shah Baba the other night. I sent him a PDF attachment containing the book of short stories and indicated that if anyone were interested in the material to let them have a copy of the file that I sent to him. If I should not have done this -- and I am only going on the basis that you had said the stories you had read were good -- then let me know, and I won't send any more things to him. I really don't want to do what you don't want me to do ... although my behaviors might seem to indicate otherwise at times ... this is not my intention, but my weakness and misunderstanding, and I sincerely ask for your forgiveness for both ... having a PhD doesn't mean one is smart, Baba, just that one has survived a certain process ... a process that is very stupid in many ways, and, therefore, something with which I tend to fit right in sometimes.

I do love you Baba,

Your prodigal son ... in so many ways, Tariq

§

Tariq my son,
Assalamo alaikum.

It seems that I misunderstood that you are done with Lara. Anyway, what can I say? It is entirely her decision and yours.

You did a good thing by giving the short stories to Momin.

I don't think it is necessary to respond to the other things you have mentioned in your email because those are all repeated matters.

Your short stories are very good, and I am sure children as well as adults can benefit from them.

My prayers, for your good health, happiness and peace of mind always be with you.

It is now two weeks that Habib and Nazia married. It is interesting to see the two gradually adjusting. By the Grace and Blessings of Allah they are both very happy and contented. Nazia has adjusted very well with the family, Mahshallaah.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

§

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

I'm not sure exactly sure what you mean when you say: "it seems I misunderstood that you (i.e. me) are done with Lara." I had indicated to you in a previous e-mail what my plan of action was with respect to Lara. I said I had done the first of three prayers of release. I intend to do the second, in middle-to-late February, and, then I will wait for a further month to see if there is any change in things before either closing the door on possibilities myself or having the door closed for me ... which might already be the case -- although this remains to be seen since one of the problems is that, all along, Lara has swung back and forth on what she seems to want to do about anything.

You had informed me on several occasions when I inquired about the technical aspect of things that a marriage was not over until the

two rakats of release had been done three times. You also had said on one occasion that human beings are the ones who make it hard on themselves, and Allah, in His Mercy, has provided opportunities to reconcile, heal, and re-establish harmony by virtue of the way shari'ah has been set up to permit people to reconsider a situation rather than suffering by rushing to judgments that they only might regret later.

Sometimes Lara really seems to want to be with me, and other times she does not. I am willing to try to accommodate whatever sort of relationship she wishes as long as the boundaries are drawn up so that she has the degrees of freedom she needs, but I, as well, should have my equivalent degrees of freedom.

At one point when Lara and I visited you last November, you indicated that if it were not for lizards and a few other things you had talked about the possibility of, maybe, something working out between you and a 'Little-Paradise', one of the members of your virtual community ... as long as you both could have your degrees of freedom. In any event, all along I have been trying to discover a way that might permit Lara and me to be together but would still give her the freedom she needs to feel free from issues of control and other matters.

I have seen her vacillate on something so, seemingly, simple - as, for example, whether or not, to sell her house to Ron or, instead to stay at the house herself -- so many times, that her vacillating on something much more complex like human relationships -- especially given the problems of her personal life history -- comes as no surprise.

She needs time to heal, and I have been struggling to do what I can all through the past two years to help her have the time and support she needs to do that. Now, something has happened since meeting with you, and she is not at all clear about what is going on, and she intimated to me on several occasions that she is very confused about things in certain respects, and she doesn't know what to do about it.

She keeps talking to me about not arguing with the Beloved and that I should permit reason to bow to love, yet, she continues to argue and insist on holding on to her anger, and she insists on being right about everything while holding on to her reasons and interpretations of what everything means.

Am I just supposed to give up on relationships because of difficulty? I had always thought we were supposed to forgive (really, and not just give lip-service to it) and, then move on ... to try to do better with our lives -- to be more loving toward one another, to accept one another, to co-operate with one another, to be in harmony with one another, to be more supportive of one another, to help one another work toward achieving the purpose of life.

Whatever my faults might be, I do sincerely believe in the foregoing with all my heart. And, whatever my shortcomings might be, I try to do whatever I can to put these principles into practice in my everyday life.

Lara is not just a possible partner of one kind, she is somebody who is in the silsilah and someone who lives in the same area as me and someone who is part of your virtual community and the cyber message board known as 'Inner Builders'. Every day I see her postings on Inner Builders and she talks about love, friendship, trust, warmth, and so on with respect to all of the other people in your virtual community and Inner Builders, but there seems to be a problem for her with translating that into something more than a virtual, cyber set of principles when it comes to me in real life.

I have done Sajdah with respect to the situation vis-à-vis Lara ... at least to the degree that I understand that process and to the extent of my current ability to do so. As I understood and understand things -- which might not be correct -- the process of sajdah is intended to wipe the slate clean as far as resentments, anger, recriminations, any sense of feeling betrayed, and so on with respect to another person and to accept, as well, what has happened as being from Allah, and that everything, the joy and the sorrow should be returned to the One from Whom such things came originally.

Perhaps, part of the problem here on my side of things is I really don't know what has happened. I am trying to accept whatever it is that God wishes, but, I will be quite frank with you, I don't know what that is.

I have seen my relationship with Lara go back and forth many times. There is no doubt there is an approach-avoidance issue there with her concerning me.

Although, ultimately, it is by Allah's permission that she is your mureed, and she is in your virtual community, as well as being an active participant in Inner Builders, the fact is that at one point she did not even want to meet you, and she was wary of you (you commented on this by making a reference in a phone conversation you and I had before we came down ... about whether she thought that you were 'some kind of monster or something', and she didn't want to participate in your virtual community, and she kept running away from the Sufi path. Presumably, your comments to me that occurred several times -- when she and I were both visiting with you -- about my being a real gladiator in relation to her is because I kept battling for her and believing in her and doing whatever I could to help, God willing, keep her heart pointed in the direction of spirituality and you.

You even wanted me to give up on things and said as much to me several times. In fact, you seemed to be upset with me because I kept singing your praises to her and telling her what a wonderful person you are, and I am nothing compared to you.

If you will remember, I was the one who originally broached the subject to you about her spending time with you in order for nisbath to be enhanced through physical proximity to you and so that she would get out of the Bamford/Brimley area for awhile ... especially with respect to Ron, but, in addition, she really desperately needed a vacation from everything. However, if you will recall, I also indicated there were some other concerns about that trip, and I expressed these to you via phone and e-mail.

She resisted going down to visit with you for a long time because she once admitted to me that she didn't even believe you people were real and she felt like you were all just figments of my imagination. Even right up to the day we actually visited you in November, she was terribly undecided about whether to go ... right down to the last moment.

If I had taken her vacillation and indecision on anything to be the final word on things, she never would have come to visit with you. Obviously, Allah did wish her to come to see you, and one of His ways of bringing about what He wished was to keep pushing me to stand by her and continue to stand by her no matter what she did.

I might not have the strength to give total unconditional love all the time in all circumstances, but I do believe she got about as close to receiving unconditional love through me during the last two years as one can get through someone who is not a Prophet, saint, or the like. I continue to try to do this, but, yes, I needed to do sajdah in order to get rid of all the hurt, anger, resentment, and so on that was beginning to accumulate.

On different occasions, you have told me different things with respect to Lara, and I am not saying there is anything contradictory in what you said or that you weren't trying to be a friend to me in both cases or that there was anything wrong in what you were saying. However, on several occasions, you have told me how much Lara loves me, and on other occasions, you have told me I should be done with her (and her remarks to you about me when she was visiting with you by yourself and that you related to me in an e-mail while she was there were cited by you as an example of what she really thinks of me ... which, apparently, is not very much). So, I am faced with these two poles of my dilemma, and my problem is ... which should I go with, and regardless of which I go with, I still have the problem of what to do about it.

She has done things with respect to the purely spiritual side of things -- like in relation to her behavior in fatiha -- which I am pretty sure you would never tolerate at your fatiha, and that if someone were to do those things in your fatiha, then something would be said to them. Your conversation with Sima on the phone in front of Lara and myself is an indication that although you really don't like having to do such things -- and you said as much to both of us -- nonetheless, sometimes this becomes necessary.

The night before Lara left to go and visit with you, she really went way over the line in a variety of respects. I said a number of things to her about her behavior and attitudes and, she began arguing with me about it.

This is not the first time I have had to say things. And, she did not say on those other occasions I was beating up on her with words, and, moreover, I really wasn't beating her up with words this time either, but, rather, it might have felt like this to her because she had another understanding in mind and what I was doing did not fit with her ideas

about things on that occasion and, so, she talked back and argued ... which I don't think you would have tolerated either in your fatiha.

There was one statement in that ten minute period prior to fatiha that I regret saying, not because there wasn't a point to it but because it just should not have been said and I made a mistake in even mentioning it. However, the rest of the things were said that were said by me were, to the best of my recollection all warranted, and they were not motivated by the personal relationship that we had at the time.

Baba, there have been many times in which she left me and went back to live with Ron, and I never turned her away from fatiha, and I never berated her when she came to fatiha, and I didn't harass her when she came to fatiha. I said fatiha and let her go on her way although there might have been a brief period of spiritual discussion following fatiha, when, oftentimes, I would read Sufi stories or some such thing -- and she often said she found these stories very nice and helpful -- and, then, we might discuss the principles inherent in those stories.

Right now she has locked on to, with considerable tenacity, what was said at that last fatiha (i.e., the night before she left to visit with you). But, there is nothing that went on at that fatiha that was really any different from what went on before, and she has her own reasons for why she wants to hold on to the idea that she is justified for feeling the way she does with respect to that evening ... and this is, I believe, because holding on to such attitudes makes it easier for her to feel justified and right in being angry toward me in relation to other things she is doing.

When Lara wants to distance herself from something, for whatever reason, she will hold on for dear life to some idea, no matter how ridiculous, and beat someone over the head with it. You might not think much of my comments about the issue of "negative transference" that I told you about in a previous e-mail, but this is a very real phenomenon.

During the last several years, I have done a lot of therapy/counseling with Lara. When the focus was on Ron, she had a lot of positive transference going on with respect to me and this helped her, by the Grace of Allah, to serve as positive source of

motivation to break free from Ron's gravitational pull and the pathology of that relationship.

But, in every counseling relationship there comes a point when the focus begins to switch to the ways in which a person contributes to his or her own problems quite independently of what anyone else is doing, or has done, to that person. As more and more, by the Grace of Allah, she was able to put Ron behind her, her own behaviors concerning me (or us) and the problems that she was creating there came to the forefront, and she has not been able to cope with this very well I think.

She kept asking me and herself this question: if she loved me (and she has been professing this to me for over a year and a half now (via phone, e-mail, in person, and to others), then why would she keep running away from me. There is a simple answer to this question, although the ramifications of this answer are extremely complex.

In the process of negative transference, whenever a person does not want to have to face his or her own contribution to one's problems in life, a defense mechanism, called projection, kicks in, and the person begins to attribute things to a counselor or therapist all of the client's own psychic world. Whatever anxieties, doubts, fears, anger, resentments, complaints, recriminations, and so on that are active in a person's psychic life tend to get heaped upon the counselor or therapist.

That person -- the counselor -- becomes the bad guy in everything. Under such circumstances, a client begins to feel justified in being angry, resentful, hateful, and mean to the counselor because, in the mind of the person who does not wish to look at certain things within him- or herself, it is easier to project the source of one's problems onto another human being than to accept responsibility for the way in which one's behavior is being driven by unresolved internal issues.

You have experienced this phenomenon of negative transference many times as a shaykh. What happened in Canada and elsewhere very likely might have been because those people didn't want to have to look at themselves and found this too painful and hard to do, so, they took the easy way out and projected everything on to you and made you into evil incarnate.

Lara has been projecting onto me in a similar fashion for quite some time now. She is a very proud person, and her self-image is very important to her, and she has great difficulty in saying she is sorry about anything because to say one is sorry is to have to admit one has been at fault, and this is very difficult for her to do ... as it is for many of us.

There is a very crucial aspect of our relationship that is connected to the foregoing. Lara has always held the moral high ground in her life with respect to all the terrible things that have been done to her.

Now, in conjunction with me, because of the desperateness of her situation, because of her pain, because of her confusion, because of her vacillation among alternatives, she has done things to me that really are repeats, to some extent, of what others have done to her. All the things she has been, and continues to be, angry, hurt, and resentful about with respect to the way others have treated her, she has sometimes treated me in a similar fashion, and she is very resistant to the idea that any of this is going on ... she feels she has done nothing to hurt me and she could do nothing to hurt me -- and although I know she is sincere when she says such things, the fact of the matter is that what she says in this respect is not always true.

I am not saying any of this out of hurt – since, by the Grace of Allah, I have wiped the slate clean on this as I have done a number of times in the past -- but because I have been there with Lara as everything unfolded, and I do know what I have experienced and what has gone on. Lara, I feel, cannot do this clearly because she has a blind spot in all of this since she really doesn't want to have to face any of these issues.

I have said what I could in this respect to her in the last letter that I wrote to her. That letter was not about us getting back together again ... although that door was left open. Among other things, my letter to her was merely intended to outline to her what I felt was going on with respect to this issue of negative transference and how it works and how it might be playing a very important role in complicating our lives together.

That letter is the last of that kind that I will write to her. I gave it a shot, but I also recognize that facts, evidence, and reason are not going to change much of anything in relation to Lara ... real change is always

through emotional or spiritual understanding, and those dimensions are where the necessary motivational tools are going to have to come from, God willing, if any change is to be effected with her -- and, my prayer, is she will obtain this through you ... and right now she is very much loving her relationship with you, and I hope, insha' Allah, this continues and grows.

Whatever the forces are at work with Lara concerning me, there is no doubt there is a very powerful side in her that wants to see me, and there is a very powerful side in her that does not want to see me. This approach-avoidance dance of hers with respect to me has been going on for quite some time.

I will agree with her on one of the things that Lara indicated during her Internet chat with me the other day ... she said she is disappointed in me because she thought I was better than whatever it was she saw, or thought she saw, that night before she left to visit with you. I will agree that if I were a perfect human being, then yes, maybe some of the things that have happened over the last several years might not have taken place because I would have had the requisite patience, wisdom, insight, courage, strength, tolerance, compassion, and so on to not have made mistakes, and, therefore, if she wants to feel this way, then, I am prepared to take full responsibility for all of the problems.

I don't care about who is right or wrong anymore. I don't want to live in the past. I don't want to carry on in life with endless battles about who did what to whom and why. I don't want to hang onto hurt, or anger, or resentment, or recriminations, because these things just don't solve anything and don't make anyone happy or solve any problems.

Although I am sure there are many reasons why your shaykh told you to stay out of marital issues -- and, I am not asking you to intervene now -- I am sure one of these reasons is that by becoming involved the shaykh gets caught up in things that interfere with, damage, or undermine, the health of the spiritual relationship between a shaykh and his or her mureed -- and that relationship, not the marital one, is of paramount importance.

I understand this, and I appreciate and accept such a reality. I am stating things in this letter in order to inform you about what is going

on with me and to raise the question of whether, or not, there is anything that I am doing which is problematic and, therefore, ought to receive more of my attention ... and not because I am seeking your assistance with respect to whether Lara and I might stay together or should decide to part company, or so that you might resolve the problems that are going on between Lara and me.

Lara likes virtual reality because there are no face-to-face, real life issues that go on there. She can be anonymous; she can come and go as she pleases; there are no real obligations there -- and the duties of being a block deputy are not at all the same as having to live with the obligations that come with interacting with another breathing, living human being who sleeps in the bed, house, or town.

I do agree that teaching about issues of obligation and so on, have to begin somewhere. I also agree with the idea of trying to create a virtual community of spirituality -- as you are doing -- that provides people with opportunities -- within a non-threatening low-stress, life-affirming, supportive environment -- to begin to develop life skills and interpersonal skills that a person might not have had the chance or opportunity to develop anywhere else.

The big challenge, as I see it however -- and this is not a criticism but an issue of concern or uncertainty within me -- is the following: how much of what is learned in cyberspace will transfer into real life? I will take one and only one example, because this is the only situation that, to some extent, I know something about -- namely, Lara, and this is not meant as criticism of her or anyone, but it presents a problem for me, personally, and with respect to whatever my role might be with respect to the silsilah.

Every day I go to Inner Builders and read things by, among others, Lara. I like all the things she says.

I believe she has a good heart. I believe she has many wonderful qualities. I love her. I have compassion and empathy for her. I want her to succeed on every level.

I want her to have friends (and I kept encouraging her with respect to your virtual community -- even when she wanted to run away from it and quit the virtual community and she didn't want to have anything to do with its various members). I am very happy she

has these new friends in her life. I am happy she has something in which to believe and to which to be committed.

The one problem in all of this is that, on the basis of personal experience, I know she doesn't do any of these things with the one person who, by the Grace of God, played an instrumental role in helping her to be in a position to do, and be a part of, all this. She is not angry toward the people in your household or in the virtual community or Inner Builders, but she is terribly angry toward me. She is not disrespectful toward any of the aforementioned individuals, but she is sometimes disrespectful toward me. She is very loving and warm toward all of those people, but she is not that way toward me. She is very supportive to all of those people, but she is not that way with respect to me. She would be willing to say *fatiha* with all those people, but she would not do so with me. She is willing to forgive all those people in the virtual community and Inner Builders, but there doesn't seem to be any real forgiveness for me.

I am part of the same virtual community and the same Inner Builders message board, and the same *silsilah* as she is. I have the same *shaykh* as she does.

This is not just about a man-woman, husband-wife situation. This is about how one human being should be treating another human being, but there is a real difference about how she interacts with everyone else in cyberspace and how she comports herself with me in real life as well as in cyberspace ... and I say the latter because the cyber chat I had with her the other day was very difficult to take because there was so much hurt, animosity, anger, name-calling, and accusations going on - way, way, way out of proportion with anything I have done.

After I wrote her the recent letter I told you about, I contacted her via the message box in order to talk with her. When she finally came to my house in the virtual community I tried to do whatever I could to placate her. I really didn't argue with her. I was willing to admit to having made mistakes. I asked for her forgiveness. I asked if we could be friends ... and, yet, I seemed to be berated from every side.

I would like to participate more fully in your virtual community, but there just seems to be too much anger present within her toward me. Since I don't want her to feel uncomfortable, I tend to stay away

for the most part from either your virtual community or the message board for Inner Builders.

She says she is not uncomfortable about my being there. However, I believe she is, and she frequently leaves at the earliest opportunity whenever I am around.

I have no wish to force myself on anyone. I have no wish to hang on to anything. I have no wish to try to control Lara (although she is claiming otherwise). If Allah does not wish me to be married to Lara I will, God willing, accept this.

I wrote her one letter recently. I did this to try to tie things up as much as they could be under the circumstances.

Moreover, I have had one relatively brief conversation with her in the virtual community since she returned from visiting with you. However, beyond these two instances, I have little contact with her.

I do not phone her at home; I do not leave messages in her Inbox in your virtual community. I do not e-mail her. I do not go to her house in Brimley. I do not go to her place of work. And, now, I will not come to the virtual community or to Inner Builders because every time I am there she might feel like I am stalking her or trying to control her or trying to interfere with what she is doing – even though none of this is true ... but, if she does feel in any of these ways, I have no control over her perceptions concerning me or her projections onto me. And, every time I am there, I feel I can sense how she actually feels and how she is not prepared to interact with and treat me on an equal footing with everyone else.

It is not with hurt or anger or resentment that I will be staying away from the virtual community and so on. Yes, there is sadness in my heart about the whole situation, but it is not a complaint against her, or you, or God or anyone else.

Since doing sajdah, I have continued every day to continue to work on keeping the slate wiped clean. Every time any thought or feeling or intimation of hurt, anger, or the like makes an appearance I notice this and tell myself to wipe the slate clean.

In response to the, apparently, problematic, 2nd essay that I posted to Inner Builders -- the one that you chided me for although you cut off

from the view of others what I had actually said -- Lara has said that the answer to my question was "live".

I agree with her, but she doesn't appear to want to do that with me. I would love nothing better than to live life with Lara and enjoy one another's company, and be happy and content with one another, and to share our lives with each other and those around us, and to do things together, and to love and support and encourage and help one another and to be the very best of friends with one another.

I am willing -- truly -- to forget all about the past. If she wants me to accept responsibility for all that is wrong with the relationship, then I'll do that. If she wants to set down ground-rules and boundaries for our being able to live our lives both together and apart, then I have always been prepared to do this, and I have told her so many times.

Nonetheless, I can't do what she is not prepared to let happen, and I also realize I can't force this to happen, and I really haven't tried to force it with respect to whenever she has gone away from me, I have let her go and have not bothered her. She talks about 'living' with respect to cyberspace, but in real life she doesn't appear to want to do such 'living'.

She talks about not arguing with the Beloved, but she wants to continue to argue with me -- which, means, I guess that I am not the Beloved ... or even a locus of manifestation of the Beloved. She talks about reason bowing to love, but she doesn't want to let that happen unless we are just talking about my reason and not her reasoning. She talks about love, friendship, trust, and forgiveness, and the rest, but she is not willing to apply that to us.

So, what have I decided to do with respect to all of the foregoing -- what I said above and what I had said elsewhere -- I will bring things to a juncture where I am at a fail-safe point concerning our relationship and wait, for a certain amount of time, to see if there is any change in her condition concerning me, and to see if there is any sort of real forgiveness present that would allow us both to move on and just leave the past behind.

Lara's and my relationship has never really had much of a chance. Between her pathological relationship with Ron, along with all of the gossiping and poison that has been spread about me or us, as well as

the constant pressure of having to keep low profile and out of peoples' sight in a small-town environment, plus all of the other emotional problems she has had with which to deal, there has not been much room for any sort of healthy relationship to grow.

I don't agree with Lara's midnight epiphany that said there was no real marriage between her and I, but I do agree with an earlier statement that she made when she said that her mistake was to become involved in a second relationship before she was properly disengaged from the first. This all too real fact has caused us both many problems even while I believe it was fully necessary in order to help her get free of the first relationship ... without the motivational impetus of the second relationship – the one between her and me – I'm not sure she ever would have been able to extricate herself from a deeply problematic relationship with her abusive captor, Ron ... but Allah knows best.

If there is something that you know that makes all of my intentions with respect to trying to be patient with Lara (and you had once said to me, when I asked you what I could do, is to try to be more patient than I have) to be ill-conceived or which indicate that what Allah wishes is for us two to not be married, then please tell me. I am not trying to hang on to something that is not supposed to be, and if God has something else in mind for Lara, then I will get out of the way.

Your telling me such things would not, God willing, undermine my spiritual relationship with you. But, the dilemma for me is I have seen rather conflicting indications from you, Lara, and the surrounding circumstances that make it very unclear – at least to me – as to what might be the best way to proceed.

I really don't know how to read the events of life because they seem to support multiple interpretations. I just don't know what God is trying to tell me through such occurrences.

By Allah's Grace and with His permission, I have fought for Lara and served as a locus of manifestation through which she was moved to a much better situation than previously existed for her. Promises were made to her, and, by the Grace of Allah, promises were kept ... even when everything and everyone seemed to be against this.

If the arrangements that were made possible by Allah a year ago last July were intended as nothing more than a temporary arrangement to assist Lara to become extricated from a seeming cul-de-sac, then please let me know. I will step aside. I entered this arrangement with the belief that what we were entering into was something that, God willing, would last for the rest of our lives. I am no less committed to Lara today than I was back when we went through that ceremony. The question has always been to try to figure out the nature of that to which Lara is committed ... to try to determine what she really wants ... and you indicated to me a long time ago that her problem is that she has to choose, and her essential difficulty is that, for a whole lot of reasons, she has been avoiding having to make such choices.

I'm not trying to be stubborn, difficult, hanging on, or controlling with respect to any of this situation with Lara. But, I do genuinely love her very much, and I see indications – from time to time -- that there might be a similar love for me, but for a variety of reasons, this love – if it really is there – appears to be having a very hard time getting out into the open on any consistent basis.

Maybe, what is there in the way of love for me will never come to the surface in any permanent way. Maybe, I am just wasting my time waiting to see if there might be a change in this regard.

At some point, I am going to have to decide when I have waited long enough. At some point I might come to the realization, perhaps, that nothing is really ever going to change between us.

Part of my problem is Lara has difficulty expressing her feelings in this regard simply because she is so confused about everything. Maybe, if she were given time and space and freedom, some of this confusion might, God willing begin to disappear and she would clearly see what she wants to commit herself to, and, of course, I would hope this would be me, but, I also know there is no guarantee.

However if our marital relationship has been pre-ordained to terminate, and if the state of our relationship is all beyond our ability to do anything about it, then really, waiting and patience in relation to hoping for what is impossible becomes a foolish exercise.

No matter what happens in this regard, the other matters that I talked about above are on-going issues that, in my opinion, affect things vis-à-vis the silsilah. When you encountered what I have labeled 'the negative transference' problems in Canada, you were able to disengage from those people who were projecting all of their own negative psychic contents upon you, go somewhere else, and, then, continue life independently of those people.

You did not have to deal with them in cyberspace or in relation to Inner Builders, nor in the aftermath of those difficulties did you constantly have to engage with people whom had anger, resentment, hurt, and so on concerning you. You were their well-wishers, and you prayed for them, and if they were to have a change of heart you indicated you would take them back to continue on from there.

My problem is different from yours. Lara is an active part of the silsilah. She is an active participant in your virtual community and in relation to Inner Builders.

So, unless you indicate otherwise, I will try to be more patient. I will wait for some, undetermined period of time to see if there is any clearing of the air or any change of heart, or any willingness on her part to just wipe the slate clean and really begin things anew without what has gone on in the past affecting us.

If she does not love me, or does not love me enough to want to 'live' life with me as she claims when she responded to Stargate (and, apparently, she knew who she was responding to), then, there is nothing else for me to do but to go my own way and let her go her own way. I do not want to try to struggle with what has no hope of changing, but by the Grace of Allah many times over the last two years I persevered with respect to Lara and, by the Grace of Allah, the result, I believe, has been wonderful for her in all kinds of ways -- from freedom from Ron, to: her participation in your cyber projects, many new friends, and a developing, spiritual relationship with you.

One does sajdah to difficult things in life. But, is there any reason why one shouldn't do sajdah to good possibilities as well? ... and among these good possibilities, I can't think of anything better than love -- whether love for a fellow human being, or one's spouse, or one's shaykh, or the Prophet, or Creation, or the truth, or Allah.

You know I am an incurable romantic. I know, from personal experience how such romantics tend to get burned a lot, but if I am afraid of trying and failing with respect to love, then I might as well curl up into a ball and give up on life entirely -- and, I don't think this is what is meant by loving life ... the pleasant things as well as the less pleasant aspects.

I believe in Lara. I believe in her inherent goodness. I believe in her capacity for love. I believe there is love in her for me. I am hoping, God willing, I will still be around if she decides she would like to commit herself to permitting me to share in what she has to offer with respect to the living of life ... which I feel is a lot.

But, if I am wrong in all of this, please tell me. My thinking on any of the foregoing has not changed over time.

I started the process of marital disengagement and will continue to do so to arrive at a point where, if, for example, she finds someone she wishes to marry, but that individual is not me, then I will be able to quickly get out of her way. But, my intention has always been to work toward my marital fail-safe point and hold at this point until such time as I feel there is no point in holding at that point any longer. If there is something problematic or wrong with any of this, please let me know.

Love, Tariq

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February 6, 2003

Lara calls me. The time is around nine or ten at night.

Apparently, her laptop has gone the way of 'the screen of blue death' - that is, it no longer works. Since her computer has crashed, her Internet connection also has disappeared

She is very, very emotional ... very sad. She cries on and off, like ocean waves that roll in and, then, retreat back into the sea.

She mentions many times how much she misses Baba, Habib, 'Alia and the other people who come to Baba's for fatiha. She misses her friends in the virtual community and since her computer seems to have died, she is not able to chat with them.

She is feeling very alone and isolated. She doesn't know if she can bear to be without such contact.

The missing she feels is like a grieving of sorts. Lara says she has never felt anything like this before.

Her memories are constantly flooded with images from the wedding, the walima, fatiha, and her time visiting with Baba. Lara feels a deep sense of loss at having had to return to Vermont.

We talk for some time. Finally, she is quite tired and needs to go to bed.

Lara says she will call again. She also indicates she might visit with me sometime if that is okay.

§

I don't know if, or when, Lara and I might meet again. The fact that she said she would call me late or that she might drop by doesn't necessarily mean much. There have been quite a few times when Lara says she will call or meet with me, but such things, for whatever reason, have not taken place.

However, there is something that I feel I must do. Consequently, I sit down to write something and, in the process, ask for Lara's forgiveness. I'll worry later about how to give this to her.

§

Dear Lara,

There are four apologies I would like to make, and I ask for your forgiveness in each case. First, I agree with you concerning something you said during our brief chat the other day with respect to how you felt disappointed in me when you thought I was better than what I am and discovering otherwise. I am constantly disappointed in myself, and all I can do is try not to commit the same mistakes again and seek to improve as a human being.

I told you from the very beginning I was not perfect, and I make mistakes. I also said I try, to the best of my ability, to both keep the number of mistakes down and to try to correct those mistakes that I do commit and about which I become - or am made to become -- aware.

Nevertheless, none of the foregoing can be offered as an excuse for committing errors, and I accept responsibility for my weakness, the shortcomings that arise out of such weakness, and the errors that are allowed into the world through my actions due to such shortcomings. The fault is entirely mine.

One of the implications of my confession, if you will, is that if I were a better person, then maybe, some of the difficulties of the past might have been averted. If I were more patient, compassionate, thoughtful, empathetic, noble, kind, and so on, then, perhaps, there might be things in life, including with respect to you, that might have turned out better than they did, and I apologize to you for not being a better human being and, thereby, short-changing you in the process.

If you wish, I am quite prepared, in all sincerity, to accept responsibility for everything that went wrong. If I were a better person than I am, and have been, maybe, many of these things might have had a different outcome, and I ask for your forgiveness for not being better than whatever my current condition is, or my past condition has been. The fault is mine.

Secondly, I agree with you that, maybe, one of the biggest problems we might have faced was due to our entering a different kind of relationship before you had extricated yourself from the other one. I do think that by being in this second relationship you were enabled to free yourself from the gravitational pull of the other one with Ron, but notwithstanding this, I think the tremendous pressures surrounding this second relationship -- which came from a variety of directions -- was just too much for us to handle. So, I apologize to you for whatever role I played in complicating your life and adding stress to your already extremely stressful life. The fault is mine.

Thirdly, if there were things in the recent snail-mail letter that I sent to you which you found objectionable or with which you disagree, then I apologize to you for those mistakes as well. I said what I felt and

thought, but the fact I felt or thought such things doesn't necessarily make them correct. God knows which is which, and often I do not.

Whatever the correctness or incorrectness of anything said in that letter might have been, all of the issues and events with which the letter was pre-occupied, are now dead and buried. I have no desire or wish to re-visit any of those matters, nor to let their ghosts haunt my present or future, nor the present or future of anyone else.

I really don't care, anymore, who was right or wrong. I am tired of the battles, disagreements, and tensions.

Arguments never do anything but lead to further arguments somewhere down the road. Arguments never solve any problems but just serve to help people hold on to their anger and feelings of justification concerning such anger, which further fuels one's sense of justification about feeling angry.

Finally, there was one statement made by me the night of fatiha, before you left for your visit with Baba that should not have been made. This statement was about morality and you.

Although the statement alluded to your children in passing, the statement really was directed to you and was not about them. However, in making this clarification I do not seek to justify my words.

What I was saying to you cannot possibly apply to them because our children are innocent of the mistakes that we make as adults in relation to them. Nevertheless, irrespective of the foregoing distinction, I was wrong to make the statement at all no matter whom the words might have been about. I deeply regret having said it, and I deeply regret having hurt you through those words.

Below is the full text to the short essay on 'Forgiveness' that I posted to Inner Builders. Apparently, Baba is cutting down on longer things, so, only the first half of the essay was published. The essay was directed to more than you, but you were one of the primary people for whom it was written.

[Text of the 'Forgiveness' essay that I posted to Inner Builders is attached]

February 5, 2003

Lara calls and asks if she can come over to see me in the evening. I say yes, of course.

When she arrives, I give her the apology that I had written the previous night. She thanks me for it, begins reading it a little, and, then says she will read it later.

Lara is concerned about my weight. She says I have wasted away to nothing since she has last seen me.

I tell her I have been on a diet of canned tuna fish and lemon juice. I am surprised she thinks I have lost weight because I don't think I have, but, then again, I don't have any mirrors or scales to test out my beliefs in this matter.

We begin talking about this and that. She talks about Baba in a sort of strange way, giving me the impression she feels that Baba cares for her in a man-woman sort of way.

I am afraid for Lara ... not because she obviously cares for, if not loves, Baba, but because based on what Baba has written to me and said to me on the phone, Lara's thoughts would seem to be rooted more in fantasy than reality. Yet, she persists in talking as if Baba is interested in her as a woman, and not just as a mureed.

I try to drop hints here and there that seek to induce Lara to reflect on what actually is going on in her relationship with Baba. However, every time I do this Lara is both somewhat mysterious and evasive in her responses, as well as consistently indicates she is not imagining things.

One of my fears for Lara is that she might end up with no one if she continues to persist with her romantic ideas concerning Baba. If she ever comes to the realization that, maybe, things are not as she supposes them to be in relation to Baba, she might be in need of a friend to rescue her from an emotional crash landing.

Throughout the discussion, Lara keeps dropping hints of her own all of which point in the direction of whether, or not, I have been doing -- or am doing -- everything that Baba wants me to do. When I ask her about this, she doesn't reply in a straightforward way.

She asks me why I wrote her the long snail mail of a week, or so, ago. She asks me whether, or not, when I did that, I really understood what Baba had been telling me.

Lara begins talking about sajdah. She wants to know if I have done this, or if I truly understood what Baba was talking about when he told me to do sajdah.

I am perplexed by all of these questions. Lara seems to be getting at something, but I don't know what that is.

I assure her I have done sajdah. I tell her I have written, in some detail, about this to Baba.

Despite what I say, Lara seems unconvinced by what I am telling her. She seems privy to some form of information or knowledge about which I am not aware because she seems quite definite in her sense that I either have not done sajdah or I have not done it in the way Baba wished.

The conversation keeps coming back to this issue. Yet, when I inquire for more details, Lara is somewhat evasive and, eventually, goes silent on the matter.

§

February 8, 2003

Lara visits me. During the course of our conversation, I become very much aware of the fact that although Lara still cares deeply for Baba, she also is conflicted about the relationship and, as well, she seems to have a lot of doubts about what her three weeks with Baba mean.

She is uncertain whether he cares for her now, or whether Baba ever cared for her. Lara believes he did care for her, but, the whole situation seems to be ensconced in shadows.

Lara keeps saying to Baba -- 'just give it to me straight', 'just tell me the truth'. Yet, somewhat like a greased pig, the reality of what is going on seems to slip away, and she is left wondering about what, exactly, is going on between the two of them.

I am still worried that Lara is misinterpreting things. However, because I don't know what went on during her visit with Baba, or what is being said within any e-mails they may be exchanging, or what might be transpiring within the virtual community, I really have not - both on the phone and through e-mail -- about how he had no intention of marrying anyone.

§

February 13, 2003

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Apparently, today is being celebrated as 'Eid in much of the world, and, therefore, I wish to extend to you my love and best wishes that today will be a very happy occasion for: you, your family, and household, as well as a time filled with many blessings ... not only today but throughout the coming year. Please convey my love and Salaams to everyone there and to all who attend fatiha. I miss you all very much.

Love, Tariq

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Tariq my son, (e-mail)

Eid mubaarak to you, also, from me and the family. We all wish you the best! LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

§

February 19, 2003 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Just a short note to let you know I can no longer afford to stay on-line. This e-mail will be the last action I take before canceling my AOL service. I'm sorry I have disappointed you in so many ways with respect to your virtual community and in other things as well. Please give love and Salaams to your family, household, and the people of fatiha.

Love,

Tariq

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Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

You know I love you very much, and please don't say things like this that you have disappointed me. We all make mistakes Tariq, and that is what is known as, being "Human". Only the Prophets, are innocent and without blemish. We as humans do make mistakes, but we correct them and we try our best. Trying one's best is the only perfection a human being can achieve.

LOVE AND DUA,

BABA.

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February 20, 2003 (e-mail)

Dear Baba,

Wa 'alaykum As-Salaam!

After I wrote to you yesterday, I contacted my Internet Service provider with the intention of canceling my service. For whatever inexplicable reason, they wanted to give me two more months of free

time. At this rate my Internet connection is likely to last longer than my phone connection.

You have mentioned several times about there being things in the virtual community that you wish me to do, but these things have never been specified. Is there some way I might be able to help out or contribute through a sort of background, non-public way? Moreover, you have indicated there might be something connected to education that I might be associated with in the virtual community, but I don't know what this would be or what you have in mind in this regard.

I am looking for a job in the real world, and I have made a number of applications. I went to a job interview for a support staff position at a place called Pine Lodge. This is a teenage transitional facility for youth with mental and behavioral problems.

I'm kind of rusty on doing such interviews, and although some parts of the interview process seemed to go quite well, there were other aspects that didn't seem to go all that smoothly. The interview ran for about an hour, and there were lots of questions about a variety of different issues, and many of the questions were directed toward very specific legal points about which I have not given a whole lot of thought prior to the interview.

I will continue to look, but the job market is fairly bleak in Vermont as a whole, and especially around Bamford. The mill where my brother Jerry works declared bankruptcy just after Christmas, and there is a question whether the mill will start up again or just be sold off in pieces ... leaving thousands of people without work, including my brother Jerry.

In any event, thank you for writing to me.

Love, Tariq

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Tariq my son,

Assalamo alaikum.

I am pleased to know that your ISP has been kind and that they have given you two more free months.

Regarding the virtual community, at the time when we started it, the situation was such that I thought we could make a difference, but I had no idea that once it becomes a pay site, it will start seeming like a ghost town trying to recruit with no success. That is why, at the moment it's just a matter of survival there now. In fact, if what I hear is true, then it could get worse. My feeling, now, is just to enjoy ourselves a little there.

Regarding your applying for jobs, I am praying and hoping that you succeed in getting it. Yes, I understand when you say that the interview did not go very well. It is because that is a very specific profession and one needs much experience in handling in accordance with their legal mandate etc.

I would say, keep applying and God willing you will get one of the ones you apply for.

LOVE AND DUA,
BABA.

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February 21, 2003

Lara comes for a visit. Somehow the conversation gets around to the issue of our saying fatiha together.

I ask Lara why she told Baba that she didn't want to say fatiha with me. I acknowledge that while the night before she left to be with Baba was a difficult one for both of us, she has had substantial demonstrations from all the times when she went back to Ron that I would not harass her when she came for fatiha ... so, why is she acting this way now.

Lara seems to be struggling with whether, or not, to say something. After some time, she says the decision not to do fatiha with me was not hers but Baba's.

I am nonplused. This is not what Baba had told me, and I am debating about whether to show Lara some of the e-mails I have received from Baba.

In some ways, I feel that showing her such emails shouldn't be done. However, there is something else at work within me that is fairly substantial ... something that has grown stronger over the last four or five years that there is not, and has not been, something 'right' about many things that have been going on with respect to my relationship with the silsilah.

Finally, I decide to show Lara the e-mail to me from Baba in which he specifically says that Lara has asked Baba if it is okay to do fatiha on her own.

Lara seems puzzled by my claim. I go to the computer and bring up the folder containing all of my correspondence with -- both to and from -- Baba.

After a bit of searching, I locate the e-mail in question. I get out of the chair and invite Lara to sit down to read the e-mail.

She spends some time reading the e-mail. Next, I show her the e-mail that I sent to him which voiced my concerns about the implications of two people (i.e., Lara and me) not even being able to say fatiha together ... what kind of impression does this give of the Sufi path – a path that is supposed to unite hearts, not separate them? In addition, I show her his response to my concerns.

After finishing the e-mails, we talk some more. Lara still seems to be struggling with whether, or not, to tell me something.

Although part of me is quite nervous, even reluctant, about pursuing these matters, there is something of an intuitive feeling within me that indicates we need to follow these issues wherever they might take us. I encourage Lara to tell me whatever she wants and that I will not be upset with her ... no matter what she has to say.

Lara says she is not ready to do this. She says she wants to tell me, but she is embarrassed by certain things ... perhaps, she might be able to tell me a little later.

Lara stays the night. When we are in bed together, she asks me to hug her, and then, she begins to tell me about what she has been struggling with over the last ten days or so.

The very first night that Lara spent at Baba's, Baba came into her room around 4 in the morning and got into bed with her. They had sexual relations.

I am stunned and, yet, strangely, not actually shocked. I believe what Lara is telling me ... in fact, the thought never crosses my mind or heart that she might be inventing a story.

I know Lara fairly well. What she is saying to me, and the way she says it, has the unmistakable ring of truth.

At times, Lara might not be forthcoming with the whole truth surrounding some given issue. However, Lara has never lied to me ... she has never told me an untruth ... in fact, she has provided me with a great deal of information over the last several years that tend to underline that Lara is essentially opposed to the idea of lying to someone, and she is quite disturbed and hurt when she discovers that someone has been lying to her.

Somewhere, deep within me, there is an understanding that does not find what she is saying to me concerning Baba to be a surprise. For a number of months I have had a vague, intuitive sense that there was something problematic going on, and, now, the amorphous intuition is being given a face.

In a number of my e-mails to Baba, I castigated myself with respect to the idea that there must be something wrong with me because of the way things were going within the silsilah, in particular, but with life, in general, as well. To be sure, I do have many shortcomings, but, apparently, what I have been experiencing and sensing over a number of years with respect to my relationship with the silsilah has not been just my imagination ... the distancing that I have been sensing might be all too real – not just in relation to other members of the silsilah, but in relation to Baba as well.

Not only does a budding realization of the enormity of Baba's betrayal concerning me begin to settle in for the winter, but I also realized something else. Every single person in Baba's household had betrayed me as well ... because, on the basis of our November visit, they all knew the nature of my relationship with Lara, and, yet, apparently, none of them had lifted even so much as an eyebrow to inquire: 'what about Tariq? What happened to him and Lara?'

A lot of dots begin to become connected. A lot of things that have gone on during the last ten years start to emerge from the shadows.

In a number of my recent e-mails to Baba -- as well as in several emails to him that I had written a few months ago -- I had given Baba every opportunity to tell me what was going on. I had told him that, if necessary, I was prepared to step aside ... I had told him that I only wanted Lara to be happy and free ... I had told him that, perhaps, God had only needed me to help Lara to become extricated from the abusive character of Ron's relationship with her and, now, God wished for her to be with 'the better man'.

I had poured out my heart and soul to him on these matters. Yet, Baba's response to all of the foregoing was to not only lie to me about various things but to remain silent on crucial matters that could affect the silsilah in important ways ... something he told me he would never do ... that when it came to the silsilah, he was under a spiritual obligation to tell me everything because of my alleged role and status within the silsilah.

He had told me the foregoing 'principle' on many occasions. He also told me -- and others -- on many occasions that he never lies.

Although I am hurt that Lara has done what she has done with respect to Baba, I also feel that she is someone who, because of a past filled with sexual and physical abuse, is all too vulnerable to a set of abusive forces into which -- quite unknowingly -- I have led her.

Feeling somewhat like a 'Judas goat', I fear that I have helped lead Lara to the slaughterhouse. After all, I was the one who kept raving to her about Baba ... how great he was ... how much better he was than me ... what a spiritual giant he was ... how honest, compassionate, wise, and noble he was.

My intentions might have been good. However, in this particular instance, such good intentions seem to have been laying down a load of tar that was paving a road to Hell for Lara.

For more than 40 years, Lara has just been trying to survive in a world of predators. She does what she does not out of animus or malevolence or a desire to hurt anyone ... in fact, within the context of how she understands the nature of the universe, she always tries to conduct herself with integrity and honesty. Despite some of these outward appearances, and despite some of her missteps along the way, I have always found Lara to be a very moral human being

There might be those whose minds, hearts, and souls are so filled with theological goop that, as a result, they wish to judge Lara through the prism of such goop in relation to Lara's behavior with Baba. However, I feel that Lara has always acted out of a kind of confused innocence ... that she acted out of a desire to do right by people even if her intentions to do right might be entangled in considerable confusion about matters.

Lara had very little exposure to church, religion, or spiritual training when she was growing up. Most of her ideas about God were based on reading she had done, along with her own reflections on the matter in a context that had been shaped by a series of horrendous abuses that had been, and were being, perpetrated against her.

On the other hand, I believe Baba should have known better, and he should have acted better than he did. Supposedly, he had gone through decades of spiritual training (and no one could have known as much as he did about the Qur'an, hadiths, spirituality, and the Sufi path without having had such training since his understanding seemed to go beyond mere book learning), and, yet, seemingly, despite such training ... despite such extended exposure ... he is willing to lie to people or to betray them or to exploit them.

§

February 22, 2003

Lara and I continue the conversation of the night before. There are many startling revelations

First, Lara tells me that Baba was the one who had invited Lara to come to visit with him. This had not been her idea.

He had been on the phone with her for more than seventy hours throughout the month of December. Although many things were discussed during those phone conversations, a constant thread of those interchanges revolved around the issue of Lara spending some time with Baba.

Lara tells me she can prove this by showing me her phone bills ... she says I will recognize the phone numbers. In fact, the calls started

from Baba's side of things fairly shortly after Lara had returned to Brimley to supervise the situation with her daughter and her boyfriend. Things went into high gear after that.

She tells me she had been in the virtual community visiting with Baba at his cyber residence, and he 'whispered' to her. He asked if it would be okay if he called her at home.

Lara further says that while much of what Baba said during all of these hours of conversations during the month of December is something of a blur, she does remember, quite distinctly, a number of items. For instance, she remembers Baba telling her that just as soon as the door closed to Baba's house after our visit in November, Baba turned to the other members of the household -- 'Alia, Habib, Habib's father Siraj, 'Alia's husband, 'Umar, and said: "She's mine." Lara informs me that when she got down there, this story is recounted by Baba in front of the other members of the household, and they all agree this is what happened immediately after we left in November.

There were many things about Baba's personal life that were related to Lara during their many hours of phone conversation. Among other things, Baba confides that while his family - i.e., the members of his immediate household -- don't believe he worries about things, in fact, he does.

Lara remembers Baba telling her he had never been married and, as well, that he had never had sexual relations with a woman. Baba tells her he has some sexual dysfunction because of diabetes.

However, he also informs her he has been to the doctors, and they have told him there is no reason why he can't perform sexually. Lara tells Baba that none of what he has said matters to her.

I interrupt the narrative at this point and tell Lara that what Baba is saying is not true. Again, I have e-mails from Baba indicating he had married several times before ... although, apparently, none of them worked out.

Lara continues on with her account of things, and relates to me how there were many times during their phone conversations in which Baba kept telling her he was a coward. Baba constantly was saying how he didn't want any problems in relation to Ron, or Tariq, or anyone else.

Baba tells Lara over the phone to refer to him as Joseph, not Baba. He asks her if she could love him as a man and not just as a shaykh.

Baba informs Lara during one of the phone conversations that he needs a mother for his mureeds. Baba is quite clear about the identity of whom this mother is to be – namely, Lara.

On another occasion – prior to her visit -- Baba asks Lara for a photograph of her. Although Lara doesn't like having her picture taken, she has her daughter, Stephanie, take a shot of her, and, then, Lara sends the photo to Baba via an e-mail attachment.

Lara talks to Baba about me during one of these phone conversations. Lara feels she and Baba should tell me what is going on.

Baba tells her I won't be able to handle such a revelation. Lara disagrees with him and says she believes I can deal with the truth, and they should be honest with me.

She tells Baba about a short story I have written that appears in the collection of stories I have written recently. She says anyone who could write that kind of story in which a person is willing to sacrifice himself for the woman he loves will be able to handle whatever Baba and she might disclose to him.

Lara sends Baba the story. However, even after reading it, Baba insists to Lara that I could not handle the truth about what is transpiring between Lara and Baba.

I inform Lara that I was the one who told Baba what I thought was going on before she even went down for her New Year visit. I had told him both in a December 31, 2002 phone call, as well as in a follow up e-mail the next day that I would be willing to step out of the way if what God wishes were for a relationship between Baba and Lara. I even referred to a historical precedent in which the Prophet married the wife of his adopted son after the latter two got divorced.

At some point, Lara tells Baba about what a good lover I am. Baba says, "I know, I have seen you."

I am disturbed by this admission. If, somehow, what he said to Lara were even possible – through worldly kashf (unveiling) or the like – then I would feel that my privacy had been grossly violated. If, on the other hand, he were just telling stories, then such a 'tale'

constitutes more evidence of his willingness to lie when it suits his purposes.

Lara remarks to Baba how she was surprised when Baba permitted the marriage with me to go forward. Baba dissembles somewhat and, then, re-frames the issue in a way that Lara doesn't quite understand but which seems to suggest that the marriage was necessary at the time.

This is something that I, myself, had suggested to Baba as a possibility several times in earlier emails to him. To paraphrase somewhat, 'imitation might be the most insincere form of flattery'.

§

February 24, 2003

Our discussions of the previous two days continue on concerning the things that transpired in December/02 (during the hours of their phone conversations) and January/03 (when she visited him). Lara tells me that during her phone conversations with Baba, he begins to press her for detailed information about how much money she has spent on me since she has known me.

He starts to insinuate that I don't love Lara. I am just interested in her for her money. He keeps harping on this theme with her - namely, that Tariq doesn't love you.

Baba tells Lara that if he had known it would have cost her money to have me work for her, he never would have approved of her buying the software that had been discussed when Lara and I were visiting him in November. Lara purchased this software in early December based on her understanding of the discussions the three of us had in November.

As she is telling me such things, I am wondering how Baba supposed that software is going to be purchased without spending money. When Lara and I were visiting with him in November, she went through the details surrounding the purchase of such software ... and the amount was not just a few dollars - rather it was hundreds of dollars.

After listening to Lara's presentation concerning the job idea that involved me, Baba gave his blessings to the proposed undertaking and said that the whole idea, if it were successful, would take a huge load off his mind in relation to my being able to finally be able to earn a living. During his December phone calls with Lara, however, he is claiming that if he had known that the software was going to cost money, he never would have approved of the idea.

She remembers that somewhere around mid-December Baba first brought up the idea of visiting with him. Initially, Lara was resistant to the idea, but Baba kept calling and he kept coming back to the idea of Lara coming down to visit with him.

She also recalls once when -- toward the end of December but prior to her trip -- Baba got all of the other members of the household to come to the phone, one by one, to implore Lara to come down for a visit. Even the seven year old Ra'uf was included in this semi-conference call. They all asked: "When are you coming?"

During the foregoing conversation, Lara asks Baba if she can speak with Habib for a moment. When Habib gets on the line, Lara says to him 'You have got to be the voice of reason here and help me with this. This is insane.' However, after some discussion, Habib -- as did the others before him -- indicates that Lara should come and visit.

Finally, Lara begins to warm to the idea and says certain things. She remembers Baba saying to her: "Don't tease me with saying you are going to come if you really aren't going to come down."

Baba tells Lara that she can't tell anyone where she is going. No one should know where Baba lives, and, moreover, she cannot give out his phone number to anyone --not even to her children for emergency purposes.

He does say, however, that Lara can phone her children as often as she wants when she is down there. Consequently, Lara purchases a phone card for such a purpose.

Before Lara went down to visit with Baba, he had informed Lara that he had forgotten to formalize his relationship with her as her shaykh when she came to visit him (with me) in November. Lara asks Baba who will be her shaykh if her shaykh is not going to be Baba. He says that his own shaykh will be her guide.

Baba further adds that because his shaykh is now going to be Lara's murshid or spiritual teacher, this will enable Lara and him to be together as husband and wife. Lara indicates to me that Baba says this in a manner that suggests he is trying to make it seem that his oversight in November was merely part of the Divine plan that would bring them together in January ... how nicely everything works out ... a Divine sign, if you will, that Allah is blessing their relationship.

Lara says she was worried about who would be her shaykh. The answer that Baba gave to her on the phone didn't make sense to her since she didn't know how Baba's shaykh had become her shaykh. However, she wasn't able to follow up on this aspect of things because the conversation rapidly moved on to other issues.

What Baba left out of his story to Lara is that he already had given me specific instructions on how I was to make a transfer of spiritual authority from me to him in relation to Lara prior to the marriage ceremony of July 31st. He said this needed to be done before Lara and I could marry.

Baba told me that when Lara took the oath of spiritual allegiance to Baba, she should have the image of Baba clearly in mind. Lara should focus on Baba's image throughout the process of initiation.

Therefore, there was no need for any formal process of initiation between Baba and Lara when she and I visited with him in November. This formal process already had taken place in accordance with Baba's instructions.

Consequently, not only did Baba lie to Lara about his having forgotten to make the transfer of spiritual allegiance during the November journey, but, in point of fact, according to his version of the silsilah rulebook, he was preparing to enter into a relationship with his own mureed when he ought not to have been doing so because he was her shaykh. This would be true even if Lara didn't have a marital relationship with me, and, since she did have such a relationship, this made what Baba was contemplating doubly wrong.

The third mistake that Baba made was to say his shaykh would be Lara's spiritual guide. Lara had never taken ba'yat with, and never had a niyat or intention to take ba'yat with, Baba's shaykh.

At the very least, Baba should have told Lara what he told me before Lara and I got married. More specifically, he should have said to her that before we (that is, Lara and Baba) could come together as man and wife – and let’s just leave out for the moment that there was a little matter of Lara’s and my relationship that needed to be addressed -- a transfer of spiritual allegiance would have to occur in which Baba would no longer be her shaykh and, instead, that role would be taken over by Baba’s shaykh who had passed away a number of years ago when I was in Canada.

Baba seemed to be making things up as he went along. Apparently, he would say whatever served his agenda.

During December, when Lara is not on the phone with Baba, she is spending a lot of time in the virtual community chatting with different people, including Baba. One of the people she chats with is a mureed of Baba’s whose virtual nickname is Sand-Bandito.

Lara recalls one occasion -- before she went on her trip -- when Sand-Bandito tells her: “If Baba loves you, I worship you.” Before this time, Lara says Sand-Bandito has been kind of distant and standoffish with her.

On another occasion when Lara is spending time in the virtual community, Momin Shah from Canada -- whom Lara has never even met -- tells Lara how she already has made a significant difference in his life, and how he enjoys her presence. He says she is very warm and loving.

Lara is getting the idea everyone in the virtual community is sharing some sort of secret concerning her. It is all rather bewildering to her.

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February 25, 2003

The nights of revelation continue. Lara and I get together, once again, to discuss the events of December/January.

Lara tells Baba she is uncertain about how to solve some of the logistical problems surrounding the possibility of taking a trip to visit

with him. Among other things, she has just had a vacation in November -- when she and I went to visit Baba -- and she is reluctant to ask for more vacation at this time.

In addition, normally speaking, one has to put in a request much ahead of time to secure vacation time. So, how is she supposed to get time off in January?

Baba tells her what to say to her boss. Baba tells Lara to go in to work on Monday and ask her boss one, simple question: “Mary, do you want me to be happy?” When she says ‘yes’ as Baba is sure she will, then Baba instructs Lara to inform Mary that Lara needs several weeks of vacation time right away.

When Lara approaches her boss and asks the question, her supervisor, Mary, says: “Of course, this is all I have ever wanted for you.” A few minutes later, the details of the vacation have been worked out between Lara and Mary.

This all takes place on December 30, 2002, two days before Lara is to leave to visit with Baba. Lara prepares to go on her trip and one day before Lara and I are to have our ill-fated *fatiha* on New Year’s Eve when, among other things, we had our altercation about the proper etiquette of *fatiha*.

Lara tells me that, initially, Baba was going to send a car for her, to pick her up in Brimley. Eventually, some sort of compromise is worked out in which Lara will drive to a certain hotel near Logan Airport in Boston. This proposal seems rather awkward and will take her way out of the way with respect to where Baba lives, but, nevertheless, this is what is decided.

When Lara arrives at the specified hotel at Logan, no one is there to meet her. She waits in a lobby area that, oddly enough, seems to have a very strong Persian, motif.

Given the role that Logan Airport seemed to play in the 9/11 tragedy, Lara finds it somewhat odd that a hotel at this airport should have a décor that tends to resonate with things Islamic. However, nearly a year and a half have passed since then, and, perhaps, some of the sensitivities surrounding those events have lessened with time.

As I listen to Lara, I remember the story about 9/11 that Baba told to Lara and me when we visited him in November – the one that involved relatives of his mureeds who had gone for a job interview in New York only to become entangled, apparently, in some very strange events concerning a possible prelude to the attacks of 9/11.

Why did Baba select the particular hotel he did at Logan – one with a Persian motif? Did he know the décor of the hotel when he selected it? Why did he want to first meet with Lara in such an out-of-the-way place – a place that took Lara hundreds of miles away from a more direct route to where Baba lived? Did Baba have connections with anyone who was associated with the hotel? ... a lot of questions and no answers.

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I return attention to Lara’s account of her journey to visit Baba. After quite a long time has passed while waiting in the lobby of the hotel near Logan airport, Lara goes to the front desk and inquires as to whether anyone has seen a party of people looking for someone, and Lara gives a description of the people in the party. The desk clerk indicates he has seen such a party, but they went to a nearby bar.

Lara tells the clerk she doesn’t think this is the same group of people. The people for whom she is looking don’t drink.

Finally, Baba and company show up. Baba apologizes for being late and says ‘Khalil, the idiot’ -- a teenager whom Lara met when she visited Baba in November -- got them lost.

They leave the hotel. Lara rides with Baba and Khalil. Musa, Habib’s brother, follows, driving Lara’s car.

Several hours into the journey, Khalil needs to take a restroom break. When the youngster leaves the car, Baba leans over and kisses Lara.

During the trip, Lara says Baba seems very nervous. A number of limousines are passing them, and Baba seems almost frightened of them.

He is smoking cigars, but in a lot of ways, he appears like a little boy who is on his first date. Baba seems to be out of his element.

He sings several times on the way back to his house. At a certain junctures he stops singing and tells Lara different things ... such as about father's death, when Baba was just three years old. After his father died, he often would hear his mother crying the whole night long. Lara feels these experiences might have had a big impact on shaping Baba's personality.

Baba also speaks about a 'Brother Timothy' during the ride to Baba's home. Baba knew Brother Timothy, who is Catholic, when he -- Baba -- was going to school in Pakistan.

When they arrive in the town where Baba lives, Baba instructs everyone to go to a big discount store in the area. He wants to buy Ra'uf, Momina's little boy, a gift.

When they are in the store, Baba holds Lara's hand as they walk about. Khalil seems to be enjoying the whole spectacle, but Musa appears to be rather edgy about what is going on. Lara just feels plain odd with respect to everything that is unfolding.

They arrive at Baba's residence around 10, or so, at night. They were supposed to meet in Boston between 1 and 2 in the afternoon. Lara feels she could have driven the distance in a lot less time if they had just let her come down by herself as she wanted to do.

'Momina meets them at the door. She is very happy to see Lara. She is like a school kid. 'Momina tells Lara not to worry about anything, she tells Lara: "You're with Baba now."

At some point, Lara is told that when Baba left for Boston he told the members of the household that he was going to pick up his bride. Other members of the household confirm this.

Lara tells me the sheets on the bed where she sleeps -- the same bed in which we slept when we were visiting Baba in November -- are very elaborate, with lots of fine embroidery. She indicates they are not at all like the sheets that were on the bed when we there in November.

Lara intimates to me that Baba is very rough, crude, and insensitive in the way he goes about having sexual intimacy with her. She is too embarrassed to relate to me the things he says and does when he is with her.

Lara tells me that when Baba is in bed he is either totally disgusting or he acts like he is traumatized or really uptight. Lara says with respect to the latter possibility that it was almost as if he were in pain when she touched his face.

Baba tells Lara he is a spiritual man, and he hates having to descend to the physical level in order to have sexual relations. He thought he was beyond this. On another occasion, Baba tells Lara he says sex makes him angry because he can't perform.

At some point, Baba says he was sexually molested by nuns when he was attending school in Pakistan. Among other things, he indicates the nuns made him watch as they engaged in various sexual acts.

I break in at this point and tell Lara that I have my doubts about the truth of what Baba is relating to her. I say it is more likely that Baba knew the issue of sexual molestation and abuse would strike a resonant and sympathetic note with Lara because of her background ... especially given that I, with Lara's permission, had told Baba all about Lara's history. I feel Baba just told a story about his alleged past in order to induce Lara to empathize and identify with him.

On the other hand, Baba's residence had a whole gaggle of nun-avatars that were always milling about his residence. Perhaps, those avatars are a remnant of some past experience of sexual abuse on the part of nuns ... or, perhaps, it is just a remnant of Baba's fantasy life that became active when he attended a Catholic school in Pakistan - a place where a number of the teachers were nuns.

Lara counters with something to the effect of: 'he seemed very sincere' and that what he said 'seemed to have a quality of authenticity' to it. And, I respond with: 'Baba is a very good actor, and, apparently, he was quite accomplished at it during college, where, by his own admission, he took drama.'

Moreover, there is something about Baba's story that doesn't quite sit right with me. How did the nuns make Baba sit and watch them go through their sexual routines? Why was he forced only to look and not participate? How did the whole process begin? How old was he? Where did these incidents happen? When did they happen? Over what period of time did they happen? What were the circumstances of their termination? What Baba told Lara might be the truth, but there are a

great many details that are missing – not the nitty-gritty details, but the details of a context within which such nitty-gritty details allegedly took place.

Moreover, although sexual abuse of youngsters by teachers in religious institutions seems to take place across all spiritual traditions, this usually – but not always -- involves males, not females. In fact, outside of Aldous Huxley's *The Devils of Loudun*, I can't think of many cases in which nuns were mixed up in sexual misbehavior with adults, and this might be even rarer with respect to children ... although I have heard of quite a few cases in which nuns physically and emotionally abused some of their charges.

I am sure there might have been some nuns, somewhere, who might have been seduced by their dark side – something that we all must seek to resist -- and sought to induce their young wards to participate in some fashion, or other, with respect to various kinds of sexual misbehavior. However, my feeling is that Baba's story concerning the nuns is more likely to be fabricated than real ... intended to exploit Lara's past history of abuse, as well as to evoke her sympathy ... but Allah knows best.

In any event, Lara goes on to describe how badly she feels for Baba when he makes his disclosures concerning the sexual abuse. At the same time, Lara indicates Baba does not seem to be upset by what he is telling her in relation to the sexual abuse ... an indication that if the sexual abuse did take place perhaps Baba has dealt with the matter and moved beyond it, or, it might be an indication that Baba is still trying to come to grips with the issue but has compartmentalized his emotions concerning the alleged abuse, or it could be an indication that the incidents at issue never took place at all and, therefore, there is no emotion to feel concerning the matter.

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At another juncture during her visit, Baba says he would like Lara to dress up as a nun, and, then, he would like to have sex with her. Lara finds this thought disturbing.

Later on in the trip, there is some sort of group gathering. During this gathering, Baba tells everyone he sometimes fantasizes about “having romance with a nun”. Others in the group might frame this statement as one of innocence, but Lara knows differently.

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These latter two incidents, together with the strange alignment of nun-avatars in Baba’s cyber residence, lead me to believe that if Baba had been sexually abused in the manner indicated by him, he has not properly resolved the issue. He is still obsessing about it. On the other hand, the latter two instances, plus the cyber avatars at his virtual residence might merely mean that Baba has been fantasizing about such matters for a long time and that not only were there no real-world events that took place with respect to nuns in his past but that Baba might be using the alleged sexual abuse scenario as a way to justify fantasizing about things in the way he does.

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On and off, as Lara is relating these incidents to me, I think back to Baba’s e-mail to me that described Lara’s arrival at his house. There was nothing in his e-mail about his picking her up at Logan Airport ... there was nothing about his kissing her in the car on the trip back to his house ... there was nothing about holding hands with her as they walked about the discount store ... there was nothing about his coming into her room in the early hours of the morning and engaging in sexual intercourse ... there was nothing about the ‘she’s mine’ story that was recounted in front of everyone in the house and with which they all concurred No, in his e-mail to me, he merely mentioned that when she arrived, she appeared to be tired from her journey and, therefore, she retired in order to get a good night’s sleep.

It is a good thing that Baba has told me – in front of Lara during our November trip – how I am his best friend. I would hate to think what he might be willing to do to me if this were not the case.

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Lara notes how Baba never knocks when he enters her room. This bothers Lara.

She also describes how there is one occasion when they are in bed together. A package is delivered to the house, and the package is addressed to Baba.

He immediately gets out of bed and either makes sure someone else in the house receives the package. Or, perhaps, he might have signed for the package himself.

Apparently, such packages came for Baba on a number of occasions while Lara is visiting with Baba. He always drops whatever he is doing in order to receive those parcels ... as if they were very, very important.

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Baba tells Lara about a trip he and Khalil took last summer to visit 'Brother Timothy' whom Baba knew when he was a college student at St. Simon in Pakistan. He relates how they were just driving about somewhere in the countryside, and they stopped to purchase some items at a roadside stand.

Baba relates to Lara how he told the woman at the roadside stand that he would pay her \$100 to kiss Brother Timothy. According to Baba, she takes him up on the offer, and as he finishes the story, he gets 'Umar to confirm that this is what occurred.

Baba tells Lara that during the aforementioned trip out West he informs Brother Timothy that the 'Brother' has been 'had' by the Catholic church with respect to the celibacy issue. Baba later shows Lara a picture that he received from Brother Timothy in which the latter is dancing with a woman. Baba is amused by this.

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The foregoing information, along with the nun fantasies – whether rooted in reality or not – suggest that Baba might have a great deal of hostility toward Catholicism. The fact that Baba is amused with the picture of Brother Timothy dancing with a woman is somewhat strange since the dance might have depicted nothing more than an innocent, social interaction, but Baba’s amusement might indicate that Baba’s aforementioned words and actions in relation to Brother Timothy, might have had a hand in inducing the man to pursue women in some, inappropriate way.

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One night, while they are in bed, Baba tells Lara that Habib is his successor. The news comes as a surprise to me because this is not what he had said to me many years earlier.

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After Lara is done disclosing her revelations for the evening, I continue to think about things while lying in bed, waiting to go to sleep. I recall – and although, I believe, it was sometime within the first several years after I met Baba, I do not remember the precise time of receiving the following information – but ‘Asma (the woman who had come to the Sufi discussion sessions in Canada and kind of babysat me until Baba came to Canada) once said in passing that the reason why Baba had to leave a certain city in Pennsylvania was because some sort of charges of sexual impropriety had been leveled against him with respect to one of the women in the silsilah.

The details about what exactly happened in Pennsylvania were sketchy. I didn’t know the people who were supposedly involved, and I had no way of confirming or disproving such allegations.

‘Asima had told me at the time that, apparently, there was nothing to the allegations. However, Baba supposedly moved away from the

city in order to remove himself from the unpleasantness of having to deal with people who were accusing him of such behavior.

When 'Asima and her husband came to talk with me about what had happened with her daughter and her school friend in relation to Baba, she apologized to me about having covered up, to some extent, some of the details surrounding the sexual allegations that arose in Pennsylvania. She felt that if she had been more forthcoming at the time about some of what had transpired in Pennsylvania, maybe none of us would be faced with the situation that was now enveloping us.

As 'Asima and her husband were telling me their account of what they believed Baba had done with respect to their daughter and her female friend, I found many problems with what I was being told. When I tried to become clear about these issues, 'Asima and her husband became verbally abusive toward me, and this led to the termination of the interchange.

Given how raw and betrayed they must have felt at the time, it is understandable why they became angry toward me when I didn't immediately accept what they were saying to me concerning Baba. On the other hand, perhaps, they should have understood just what a masterful job of framing things Baba had been doing with respect to me behind their back.

From time to time over the years, Baba - indicating that he was under a spiritual obligation to not withhold any information from me that concerned the silsilah - would tell me things about, for example, 'Asima and her family ... how dysfunctional they were ... how they couldn't stand one another and how they were always arguing and making one another miserable ... how their eldest daughter was caught up in delinquency, drugs, gang wars, knives, school problems, and bringing boys into the family home when her parents were away. Some of the information might have been true, but, in retrospect, I believe Baba was framing the situation in such a way that I would begin to develop a certain impression of the family and its alleged problems ... that is the whole function of 'framing' something - to be able to leave out parts of the full picture, while bringing attention to other features, in order to affect the perceptions of the person who is being presented with the 'framed' picture.

Consequently, when 'Asima and her husband come to talk with me about what has been going on in their household, their words were likely be filtered through the portrait of the family that Baba has framed for me during a series of previous discussions about the silsilah. Many of the difficulties that I feel were present in the 'story' that 'Asima and her husband were telling me concerning their daughter were a direct result of the framed picture of the family that Baba already had presented to me quite some time ago.

In the light of what Lara is now telling me, I understand that many of 'Asima's daughter's delinquent actions – even if true – might be an expression of the kind of acting out that occurs sometimes in relation to young people who have been sexually abused. If this is so in the present case, then, 'Asima's daughter's delinquent behavior – if actual - - might, to a certain extent, be one of the results of her having been sexually abused by Baba rather than being an expression of her sexual misconduct that she, according to Baba, is now trying to blame him for in an attempt to avoid responsibility for having engaged in sexual relations with some fellow delinquents from her high school.

Baba has framed the daughter as troubled and delinquent. He has framed the family as dysfunctional and as being at fault for having let their daughter's misbehavior get out of hand. By doing so, Baba has undermined the credibility of just about every member of that family so that if, and when, their story should get out with respect to what they might claim Baba has done, then, the tendency of people will be to discount the story ... as I did at the time – especially when they became verbally abusive toward me – which, in retrospect, is quite understandable but very counterproductive as far as helping me to become an ally of theirs in the matter.

The process of framing the family – in both senses of this word – has also paid other dividends for Baba. For instance, when I am called in by the individual who was Baba's immigration lawyer in Canada – one of the top guys in the country in this area of legal expertise – and probed about the allegations of sexual misconduct, Baba has created a credible witness – namely, me – who is prepared to be an advocate for Baba and a witness against the complainants ... all as a result of the tactic of framing concerning 'Asima's family that he has done in relation to me over the years.

Framing situations is all about emphasizing or inventing some features of a situation while ignoring or de-emphasizing others. The purpose is to manipulate how people feel about or perceive such a situation.

I now realize that Baba has been framing a great many things for me -- and for others -- in order to be able to exploit people in a variety of ways. Indeed, I begin to suspect that much of what might be behind the manner in which people within the silsilah have been distancing themselves from me over the years might have to do with how Baba has been faming me to others within the silsilah.

Overtime, I have seen Baba frame a great many people in one way or another. I didn't realize it at the time that this is what was taking place, but, now, I am beginning to understand some of what has been going on and why some things are the way they are.

When you trust someone, then, whatever they tell you, you tend to accept as true. Problems, however, begin to surface when, on the basis of hard evidence – the sort with which Lara was providing me as well the kind of anomalous data that I had collected over the years but didn't know what the significance of such evidence was – and one begins to find substantial reasons for not trusting such an individual ... then their litany of framing efforts begin to become deconstructed and seen for what they are and have been and how they have been used to manipulate and exploit people.

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Another possibility comes to mind. Just prior to the time that Lara went to California for a job-related conference of some kind, we had trouble because Jane had told Lara that she had heard from a relative of mine – someone who was married to my brother, Bruce's, son – that Tariq (i.e., me) was in the habit of exploiting women for money and, then, abandoning them. This rumor was enough to spook Lara and feed into her insecurities concerning my 'real motivations' toward her, and, as a result, when Lara returned from California, she went back to Brimley rather than to me.

I had always been puzzled about how and why the foregoing rumor got started. None of it was true – although there certainly have been times when a few women (namely, Sima and Lara) gave me money ... usually of a fairly limited nature. However, none of this was a matter of exploiting women for their money.

At some point, following my divorce from Sima, I came to learn from Bruce and his family that Sima had been calling them from time to time. My family was never very forthcoming about what transpired during those conversations, but I found it odd that Sima was contacting them at all because this tends to run counter to the cultural mores in which she is thoroughly rooted.

Recently, Baba had disclosed to me that Sima had issued complaints against me to him concerning her credit cards and how they are now maxed out and she can't afford things for her children and that, somehow, the implication of all this is that I am the reason Sima is in debt. In the same email Baba gives details about how, Lara too, has complained to Baba about me and feels that I am using her for monetary purposes.

Suddenly, the proverbial shoe drops. Perhaps Sima is the source of the rumor about me exploiting woman for their money.

Nonetheless, if she is the source of the rumor, she did not do this on her own, and if she did pass on certain 'information' to my family, she did not do it without, first, having been manipulated through considerable framing concerning me by Baba.

Baba has been lying to me for awhile about a number of issues. Obviously, his interest in Lara certainly figures prominently in all of this, but I believe there is more to this than just Lara since I have been feeling the distancing process going on in relation to me with respect to the rest of the silsilah's apparent attitude toward me, and I, now, believe that Baba has been framing me in a variety of ways to other people in the silsilah for quite some time ... after all, if he can frame other people for me, he, certainly, will be prepared to frame me to other people.

Organizations are created through the silsilah, and I am a mere afterthought in their creation – although, supposedly, I should be informed about everything that is going on in the silsilah because of

my alleged spiritual status within the silsilah. Virtual villages are constructed by the silsilah membership at a cost of thousands of dollars, and I know nothing about what is going on. My mureed is pressured into becoming married but -- for the most part -- I am kept out of the loop in the matter. I write to members of the silsilah, but they do not reciprocate. Momin tells me that Baba has told him that I have strayed from the path with respect to my relationship with 'Amina from Africa, and when I call Baba about this, he merely says that Momin is agitated because Baba's shaykh has been yanking his chain a little - an apt metaphor whose significance I did not understand at the time. Sima and I explore ways to keep the marriage together, and soon, thereafter, she is coldly insisting that I send signed divorce papers back to her.

I feel that Baba might have induced Sima to call my family and plant the idea that I exploit women for money. I can think of no other way for such an idea to become so hot a topic of conversation within my family that the heat of the 'scandal' would be leaked out to Jane who is friends with my nephew's wife.

Lara has had little contact with my family - except with me at a Thanksgiving dinner and with me when we entertained Lorna, Bruce's daughter, and her children for a single supper ... the supper at which Lara got angry with me for telling Lorna about Lara and myself even though Lara had told seven or eight people long before I said anything to Lorna. Furthermore, Lara is not the sort of person who would spread such rumors ... it is against her code of ethics, and earlier, when a variety of people in the Bamford/Brimley AA community began spreading rumors about her she was very hurt and upset that people she considered to be 'friends' would do such things..

Apparently, Baba is seeking to undermine every relationship I have. Why he wishes to do this, I don't really know, but it started long before he became interested in Lara - which was November of last year when Lara and I visited him. What is going on with Lara is merely a continuation of what seems to have been going on for quite some time -- maybe from the very beginning - of my 'relationship' with Baba.

With each new disclosure by Lara, I am becoming increasingly able to place into proper perspective the events surrounding the ill-fated fatiha on the New Year's Eve prior to Lara's trip to see Baba. For nearly a month -- through nearly 80 hours worth of almost daily phone conversations, as well as through numerous interchanges and whisperings in the virtual community -- Baba has been working on Lara. Among other things, he has tried to poison her mind and heart against me, telling her over and over again things such as: I don't love her, or, that I can't handle the truth concerning them, or, that I have exploited Lara for monetary gain.

No wonder she behaved so badly on that occasion. Baba had been agitating the situation from behind the scenes and encouraging Lara to have a certain kind of attitude toward me ... an attitude that, unfortunately, was in full display prior to, during, and following the indicated fatiha.

I remember writing to Baba following that fatiha, as well as speaking with him on the phone, and telling him, with the incidents of the recent fatiha fresh in mind, that I was fearful of the turmoil that Lara might bring into his life. She seemed to be possessed and, as such, she might be a conduit for satanic forces to be brought into Baba's life. I felt badly about this.

Lara was possessed alright. However, what I did not understand at the time is how Lara had been inducted into a trance state by Baba. Lara was not a portal through which satanic or satanic forces would enter Baba's life as I feared might be the case, but, rather, Baba was the portal through which satanic or pathological forces were entering Lara's life ... something for which I felt responsible.

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February 26, 2003

The story continues. Lara tells me that while she is visiting with Baba, Miriam, Peter, Uzma's father, Salman, and his daughter Nazia come from Canada for a visit. They arrive on a Friday.

The visitors are to stay with a mureed of Baba's in another nearby state. Baba wants Lara to go with him to meet them, but Lara doesn't want to have to stay overnight in the house of strangers. Therefore, Baba tells Peter and the others to drive, instead, to Baba's house during a snowstorm.

At some point following the arrival of the group from the next state, food is served. While at the dinner table, Baba announces there is only one woman he has ever loved, and, if she were free, he would tell everyone who that person is, but out of respect for her, he won't reveal her identity.

During the same session Baba begins talking about how oysters are supposed to be an aphrodisiac, and he should get some. Everyone is giggling.

Apparently, during the meal, Nazia, from Canada, is helping 'Momina with bringing food to the table. Baba tells her that she might as well get used to helping out because she is going to be living in the house.

Lara tells me that Miriam seems to be mesmerized by Baba. Eventually, he induces her to sign up for the virtual community.

Afterwards he begins to talk to her about starting a cookie business. Baba says he has a \$1000 to invest.

He indicates he has an import/export business of some kind -- apparently involving clothing, including underwear, but the business is seasonal. As a result, he wants to find additional ways of augmenting his income.

While Lara is talking about the business story, I remember Baba having once told me in an e-mail that there are three fundamental rules that his shaykh had emphasized to Baba with respect to setting ground rules in relation to what a shaykh should not do when interacting with mureeds or initiates. One of these basic principles involved not going into business with one's mureeds.

According to what Lara is now telling me, however, Baba is proposing to invest money in a possible business venture with someone - namely, Miriam -- who is his mureed. As I am thinking about this, I recall Baba's phone conversation - or argument - with Sima [the one that Lara and I overheard (at least in part) when we

visited in November] -- that too involved a thousand dollars, or so, that Baba had given to Sima for the purposes of starting a business together ... and Sima was also his mureed.

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At some point during the visit by the group from Canada, Lara tells me that Baba begins to discuss the AIDS issue. He puts forth the idea that AIDS/HIV is caused when a woman has sex with two different men.

According to Baba the men's sperm competes, and this is what causes AIDS/HIV. Everyone in the gathering is buying what Baba says except Peter (who has a background in biological sciences), Miriam, and Lara, but none of the latter three say anything.

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On another occasion Baba is speaking to a group of mureeds who are visiting with him. He says, in truth, there is no evil, but he can't say this to "just anyone" because many people would misunderstand what is being said.

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Initially, Lara thought that Nazia -- who is about 18 or 19 and has come with her father from Canada -- was going to get married to Khalil. However, it turns out that Baba is pursuing the idea of Nazia becoming married to Habib.

According to Lara, the only time Nazia and Habib interacted was when they played Scrabble with Ra'uf. She says she never saw any interest being expressed by either one with respect to the other ... although she did feel that Khalil and Nazia had expressed some interest in one another.

After the visitors leave in order to return to Canada, Baba forwards a marriage proposal to Nazia's family. He indicates that Habib has his own businesses, and he earns over \$17,000 a month.

Lara is witness to these conversations. She is also witness to the fact that by phone, Baba begins to put pressure on Uzma, Nazia's sister and my mureed, who also lives in Canada, to work on her parents to get them to agree to the marriage proposal.

For the next ten days, or so, there are lots of phone calls between Baba and Canada concerning the proposed marriage. Many of these calls involve Uzma.

Eventually, an agreement is reached between Baba and the parents with respect to the marriage. However, just a few days before the wedding is slated to take place, the parents call the whole thing off.

The parents feel that the wedding should not be rushed into, and they want to delay the whole process. Baba tells them that if the wedding doesn't happen now, it won't happen at all.

The parents relent. The marriage is back on track and will take place on January 17, 2003 ... that is, just a week from the time that a marriage agreement had been reached.

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Among other things, I am disturbed that Baba has decided to use one of my mureeds to pressure her parents to comply with the idea of the marriage. I think it is inappropriate that pressure of any kind is being employed, and I feel it is inappropriate for my mureed to be involved in the whole process. If I had been asked about the matter – which I wasn't – I would have recommended that everybody step back from things and take their time deciding how to proceed.

Furthermore, it bothers me that Baba was willing to employ tactics of issuing an ultimatum involving time constraints with respect to the family from Canada. This is the sort of manipulative tactics that are used by sales people to close deals by the application of stressful, psychological maneuvering.

When Baba wrote to me about the marriage issue involving Nazia and Habib, he said that the whole idea nearly got derailed because of the way in which a Shi'a boy who was married to Nazia's sister supposedly was trying to convince Nazia's parents to not agree to the marriage proposal because the boy wanted Nazia to marry a Shi'a man rather than Habib. Now, however, I am of the opinion that whatever the motivations of the husband of Nazia's sister might have been, Baba had his own agenda in the matter. The scenario he wrote to me was intended to hide what actually was transpiring in the marriage discussion – especially given that Baba never said a word in his e-mails about how he used Uzma to help bring about his wishes in the marriage negotiations.

The tactic of pressurizing a discussion about marriage seems to be quite reminiscent of what might have taken place when, several years ago, Uzma was being hounded by a variety of people to marry some guy in the silsilah. Among the people who applied pressure to Uzma – my mureed – was Momin Shah. I had written several letters about the matter at the time.

One of those letters had been to Uzma. In that e-mail I never told Uzma who she should marry, but I did run through a whole litany of factors that she might want to consider as food for thought concerning the issue of marriage in general. The other letter that I wrote at that time had been to Baba in which I indicated how I was greatly distressed and upset that pressure was being applied to Uzma concerning the marriage issue and that, in addition, how the attempts to influence Uzma were being done without asking my opinion with respect to a matter that concerned my mureed, and, as a result, I felt that adab or spiritual etiquette was being breeched in a variety of ways.

Seeing the pressure that Baba was applying in the case of Nazia and Habib, I wondered about whether, or not, Baba's hand might also have played a major role with respect to getting Uzma to agree to marry the guy from our silsilah. No sooner did this question arise within me, then I knew the answer ... nobody does anything in the silsilah unless Baba gives the go ahead.

I also began to wonder about my marriage with Sima. Although Baba claimed that he never interfered with marriages, he was the one

who suggested that, perhaps, I should move back to Vermont when things between Sima and me were not going well.

In one way, his suggestion was an eminently practical one. However, at the time and despite the logistical difficulties surrounding things, Sima had never given any indication that she was unhappy with me or that she wanted the marriage to end.

When I finally did move back to Vermont, we got together on a number of occasions to see if things could be worked out. Sometimes I would travel to where Sima lived, and sometimes she traveled to where I lived – including one time when she brought her children to visit me in Bamford.

In addition, we corresponded via e-mail a fair amount. From time to time, we also spoke over the phone ... and, all the time we were trying to keep the marriage alive somehow.

When the end to the marriage was near at hand, Sima and I tried to work out a way in which the marriage could sort of be put on hold with the hopes that, in time, something might change that would permit us to get back together again. However, Baba nixed the idea and said that under the circumstances a formal divorce should take place.

A point came when Sima seemed to want things concerning a divorce to happen very quickly. One day we are writing to one another in very loving ways while discussing various possibilities about how to keep things alive in the marriage, and then a relatively short period later, I receive a note via snail-mail from Sima with no 'as-Salaam-alaykum' and no 'Dear Tariq' – just words to the effect that she would appreciate it if I would sign the divorce papers right away and send them back to her.

The tenor of the atmosphere had changed abruptly. The nature of the change was so un-Sima like, and I have always wondered what might have been behind that shift in phase state.

She had been in touch with Baba during the foregoing negotiations – after all, she had taken initiation with him some time after I came to Vermont ... something that I never placed pressure on her to do. Sima told me during our back-and-forth that she had been seeking Baba's advice concerning certain technical aspects of the divorce issue.

Sima indicated to me at the time that the idea of having Shaykh Shams (the individual who had married Sima and me) draw up the papers of divorce had been rejected by Baba. Baba also said as much in one of his emails to me about the matter.

Another religious figure was going to be approached by Sima to arrange for the necessary documents. When this didn't work out, Sima went to Shaykh Shams to get the required documents rather than looking for another individual to provide what was being sought.

Sima wouldn't have done any of this without asking Baba's permission to do so. So, I wondered why there seemed to be such a rush to finish matters with respect to the divorce – even to the extent of going back to someone – namely, Shaykh Shams -- whom Baba doesn't consider to be a shaykh and about whom Baba has said, from time to time, some rather uncomplimentary things ... further instances of framing, perhaps.

All of this left some unanswered questions in my heart. I felt that what had transpired during the final days of the marriage with Sima – especially in relation to how quickly the tenor of the interaction seem to change during that stage of things -- seemed, at least to me, to be rather odd.

Now, in the light of reflecting on what Lara is disclosing to me concerning the Nazia/Habib marriage issue, and recalling how Baba's hand imprint was all over the Nazia/Habib relationship, as well as how Baba very likely might have been entangled, in one way or another, with the pressurized conditions surrounding Uzma's entry into marriage, I wonder how much Baba might have had to do with the direction that my marriage to Sima took.

I also wonder if, perhaps, something happened in relation to Sima and Baba that also happened in relation to Lara and Baba. There were elements of manipulation and framing taking place in both instances, and, moreover, in both of those cases, I seemed to be the one whom Baba wanted to remove from the picture.

I recall Baba's argument with, and chastising of, Sima during their phone conversation when Lara and I were sitting at the supper table with him in November. At the time, the whole incident was startling and discomforting – despite Baba's way of framing things that he hated

doing such things, but sometimes they were necessary for the good of the mureed. In retrospect, however, I feel there might have been a facet of the incident in which Baba intentionally picked a fight with Sima in order to have a pretext for keeping her away not just from fatiha, but, more importantly, away from Lara and myself – that, perhaps, Baba was afraid Sima would let something slip which might raise certain kinds of questions in my mind and start me wondering what was going on.

In addition, I recall what Amina – the woman from Africa to whom I once proposed – had once complained to me when things were breaking down in that relationship. She had said that she believed Baba was interfering in our relationship ... and she also said that Baba had made a pass at her.

At the time, I had dismissed Amina's complaints as mere 'stories' that were being generated as a result of her feeling disgruntled with what was going on between her and me. Now, I am not so sure that what she was saying at that time were merely 'fictions' intended to impact on me in ways that might be advantageous to her approach to our relationship.

Slowly, I am beginning to realize the many ways in which one's perceptions of people can be framed by information that we do, or do not, have, as well as by the assumptions with which we operate when trying to assess the meaning of some given event or piece of information.

When I consider someone – for instance, Baba -- to be an authentic shaykh, then, various information and data about which I learn might be interpreted in one way or such information might merely be marginalized/discarded. However, if the question arises as to whether someone – say, Baba -- actually is an authentic shaykh, then, the events of life that arise in conjunction with that individual might come to be understood in quite a different way ... and that which previously might have been discarded as unimportant might be brought in from the cold for a second, more considered examination.

Questions concerning Baba's authenticity are couched in murky shades of gray. Everything that Lara has been telling me all indicates that Baba is a charlatan ... but, if so, then he is not a common run-of-the-mill spiritual imposter.

For years I have listened to Baba talk with people – all kinds of people, both Muslim and non-Muslim ... all kinds of Muslims – from: fundamentalists, to: those who were interested in the Sufi path, as well as those who had traveled on the Sufi path for a while. All of these people came away impressed, if not deeply moved by what was transpiring ... and I know this because I talked with many of those individuals.

Baba rarely repeated himself. He had a considerable knowledge of the Qur'an, hadiths, Sufi history, and esoteric teachings. He could relate interesting, humorous anecdotes until the cows came home ... and not just any anecdotes, but, rather, the ones he related were directly applicable to whatever question was being asked of him or problem that was being presented to him. Baba could talk both about the intricate details of the 'higher' teachings involving advanced states and stations, as well as about practical, everyday issues ... and he could do all of this in several languages for hours on end, in front of either just a few people, or in relation to thirty, or more, people from varied backgrounds – in several languages.

However, things go beyond merely talking about things. Baba seemed to have a special sort of insight into a great many matters. There have been numerous experiences that I have had, or that others whom I know have had, with respect to this facet of things – too many to be merely swept aside as irrelevant 'happenings'.

Perhaps everything is merely a matter of an elaborate series of framings that has had the effect of shaping and coloring people's perception of things. Perhaps, Baba is just an amazing magician who, like many good magicians, has the gift of gab to help in the very necessary process of misdirection that takes people's attention away from where the 'action' is going on which makes the 'magic' possible. Perhaps, however, something else is going on ... something that is very subtle and difficult to understand ... something – as people from AA are inclined to say – that is 'cunning, baffling, and powerful' ... something that is satanic and diabolical in its manifestation ... something that is very, very slippery and elusive ... something that is very dangerous wrapped in an exterior of apparent wisdom, compassion, insight, understanding, and integrity.

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During the time when the people from Canada are visiting Baba, Lara remembers an instance when a number of people, including Baba, are sitting around the table eating. Baba makes an announcement concerning a future marriage between Khalil and Ra'bia. Ra'bia is very young, and Lara asks: "How old is he?" (The girl is 15)

Everyone's head snaps around to look at Lara. They all seem to be saying via their looks: 'how dare you question what Baba proposes'.

Baba breaks the tension. He says: "Well, they can get married a year from now." Lara thinks this is still too early for Ra'bia to be married.

Some days later, when a public announcement concerning Khalil's proposed future marriage is made, Lara recalls looking over at Khalil's parents, and Lara seems to feel that they are looking quite unhappy or uneasy with what is being proposed.

§

February 27 2003

Lara calls. We talk about various issues related to what she has told me over the last four or five days, and, then, she provides me with more information

When Lara is visiting with Baba, she accompanies him many times to a large discount store that is in the area. These trips to the store – which is open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week -- always happen in the wee hours of the morning.

During these excursions, Baba is always touching things -- especially shiny objects -- with his cane. Then, he will pick the objects up and say he wants it, and a purchase is made.

Apparently, 'Momina does the same thing with all these purchases of Baba's that she does with her son's unused toys. She packs them up and stores them, since they seem to be completely forgotten by Baba once the purchase has been made, and the item is brought back to the house.

On one trek to the same discount store, Baba insists on buying Lara something. He keeps selecting items and asking her 'what about this?', and when Lara declines he goes on to another item.

He comes to a jewelry case in the store. Because of the hour, the case is closed.

Baba goes to various store employees to try to get them to open the case. No matter what he says or what ploy he takes, he gets turned down.

Baba is annoyed with this. Apparently, he also is getting annoyed that Lara won't settle on any item in the store so that he might purchase it for her.

Finally, in order to bring the whole ordeal to a close, Lara selects one of the matching bracelets that Baba shows to her. Afterwards, they return to the house.

On another such shopping excursion, Lara describes how Baba picks up a cheap, toy harmonica and asks which is better -- this one or the one that Sima just gave him for his birthday ... and Sima had purchased a very nice harmonica for Baba's birthday. Lara is not sure what Baba is getting at, but something about this bothers her ... the thought crosses her mind that, maybe, he suffers from some form of dementia.

§

On the night of fatiha, Lara sits with the women. Baba is unhappy with this and says words to the effect of: "not you, too?" ... as if to criticize Lara for going along with the practice of nominally separating men and women that usually occurs during fatiha. However, Lara remains with the women.

§

Baba and the rest of the family want Lara to spend a lot of time with Ra'uf. She begins to wonder what they want her for ... possibly, as

a sort of a nanny to Ra'uf, or a full time English teacher, or for some other such purpose.

Ra'uf is never permitted to go outside and play. His only ventures outside are when the family goes out shopping late at night.

Lara also notes that in the three weeks she spent at Baba's, she never once saw Ra'uf and his mother doing any home schooling. Yet, this had been an almost nightly ritual when she and I were there in November.

Ra'uf is very frightened whenever he hears sirens as police cars or fire trucks rush to some emergency somewhere in the vicinity. On such occasions, Ra'uf often asks for the sound of the television to be turned up in order to try to drown out the sounds he dislikes.

Lara is told by the family that this is a residue of the school shooting incident about which Baba told Lara and myself during our November visit. They say Ra'uf is still going to a counselor concerning this, but Lara never sees Ra'uf being taken to such counseling sessions.

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'Momina won't let Lara help out with any of the meals or housework. She keeps telling Lara that she is with Baba, and this wouldn't be right.

One day, very late at night, Lara is awakened by very loud voices. The voices are not shouting, but the conversation is very animated.

Baba, apparently, is speaking with Habib. Baba is extremely angry and upset with someone ... apparently related to a business of some kind.

Lara tells me she has never heard such swearing in all her life. She says Ron could work up quite a swearing storm, and often did so, but, despite her exposure to that kind of language, she is totally taken aback by what she hears Baba saying ... practically every other word involves a crude cuss of some sort.

The swearing fit disturbs Lara. She feels there is a real disconnect between: on the one hand, the persona of goodness that Baba presents to the world (or which others present on his behalf) for public

consumption, and, on the other hand, the very crude and crass behavior she heard on the night in question.

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On a number of occasions, Habib, Musa, and ‘Momina all confide in Lara. Apparently, they each find Lara both easy to talk to and quite empathetic ... something that I know to be true of Lara in both instances.

Habib tells Lara about how Baba never told Habib that his mother had died. Habib says he didn’t find out about her passing away until he was on the plane and unknowingly accompanying her body back to Pakistan.

Lara says that Habib seems quite angry that Baba didn’t tell him earlier. Lara finds the whole story -- including Habib’s anger -- to be upsetting.

Habib also confides to Lara that there is box in Baba’s closet that contains approximately \$20,000 in cash. Habib says Baba does it out as Habib requires money.

Musa, Habib’s brother and the one who drove Lara’s car from Boston, tells Lara about his grandfather and how much Musa loved him. He discloses a variety of other personal matters as well.

‘Momina tells Lara how she came to live in the United States. She was in the shower one day in Karachi when the phone rings. Baba is calling her and asks her if she would like to get married to such and such a person.

‘Momina tells Baba to tell ‘Umar -- the one who is making the proposal – that the answer is ‘yes’ ... but with one condition. She will marry ‘Umar only if she can live in the same house as Baba.

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February 28, 2003

My crash-course detailing the recent events of January is continued. Lara describes how Momina has approached Lara with the idea of saying something to Baba in Urdu. ‘Momina has even written a transliteration of the words on a piece of paper and given this to Lara to study. Later on, Momina encourages Lara to say the Urdu words to Baba in front of other people.

Lara thinks she is just saying ‘I love you’ – which is the translation that Momina has written on the same piece of paper. Later someone in the virtual community tells Lara that, actually, Lara is saying something with a much different sense than what she believes she is saying. More specifically, Lara is saying: ‘I am in love with you’ – “May tumsay mohabat kerty hnoo.”

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At different junctures during the visit, ‘Baba tells Lara that they will either buy a bigger house or add on an extension to the present house in order to be able to provide Lara with her own space. Baba emphasizes that Lara’s room will have a complete vanity set with brushes and so on ... thinking this will be of interest to Lara, which it isn’t.

On other occasions Baba introduces the idea that Lara could have a house in the town next to the one in which Baba lives. He says he could visit her.

He also says Bamford is not all that far. The implication seems to be that Lara could continue to live in Vermont and, from to time, Baba could visit with her.

Lara tells Baba she would not be happy sleeping alone. Lara informs Baba she would miss having someone close to her ... but she doesn’t mean this in a sexual way

‘Momina asks Lara if she could get a job somewhere near where Baba lives. Lara feels the rest of the household would really like her to come to live with them.

Baba says if Lara were to get a job near to where he lives, he would not want her to earn less money than is now the case with her present job. He would like her to be able to earn more money than she currently earns.

Lara does apply for one job while she is visiting. However, there have been a hundred other applications, plus Lara is working under the disadvantage of not being able to give a phone number or address on the application since Baba doesn't want anyone to know where he is.

Lara is getting confused about exactly what the nature of her relationship with Baba will be. One night, she asks him: "If God were to ask you what your relationship with Lara is, what would you say?" Baba answers: "Why, she's my woman." However, Baba says he will never sign any papers concerning such an arrangement.

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March 1, 2003

The revelations of January continue to descend as Lara provides me with further excerpts from her journey. On one occasion, Lara is in the kitchen in Baba's house, and Sima, my ex-wife is there as well.

Baba has told Lara she should not discuss Tariq with Sima. He says he feels bringing up the subject of Tariq will only make people uncomfortable – although, as I indicated in an earlier journal entry, in retrospect, I believe there might be more delicate reasons for not bringing up the subject of 'Tariq' with Sima

Sima asks Lara where she is from. Lara just says: Vermont, but the answer seems to disturb Sima, and the conversation ends abruptly.

An hour, or so, later, Sima comes back into the kitchen and asks Lara where in Vermont does she live. Lara says Bamford, and Sima seems stunned ... as if someone hit her over the head.

Afterwards, Sima asks Lara how she came to meet Baba. Lara says: 'Tariq'.

Sima says: 'Oh, you know Dr. Knecht ... not Tariq -- the person to whom she was once married -- but Dr. Knecht.

Sima follows up with a question inquiring about how Lara knows me. Following Baba's instructions concerning the matter, Lara does not let on that she knows Sima used to be married to me, nor does Lara say anything about what my relationship with Lara might be, but, instead, Lara provides Sima with an expurgated version of how Lara and I met.

Later in the week, Sima comes with her two children to visit Baba. Lara had been playing Scrabble with Ra'uf, but because Baba is in his bedroom resting, Lara begins to talk with Sima.

Among other things, Lara and Sima talk about art. When Sima begins to discuss art with Lara, Sima really comes alive and is very animated. She is smiling a lot during the conversation.

As they are talking, Lara can see down the hallway to Baba's bedroom. The door is open, but the lights are off.

During her interaction with Sima, Lara notes that Sima's children - - who are maybe, ten and thirteen years old, respectively -- walk down the hall into Baba's darkened room. Apparently, they have gone to Baba in order to massage his legs ... something that almost everyone in the silsilah does, at one time or another (although I have never done this), but, usually, such massaging is done in the living room when Baba is sitting down.

Sima talks to Lara about her mother who is in a hospital. Sima describes how she visits with her mother nearly every day.

About an hour later, Baba comes out of his room, accompanied by the children. When Lara tells Baba that she and Sima have been talking about art while he was sleeping with the children -- and she meant this innocently -- Baba overreacts. He angrily says he has not been sleeping with the children ... they were just massaging his legs.

After Sima and her children leave, Lara and Baba continue to talk. At one point, the discussion touches on Sima.

Baba is derisive of Sima's interest in art. He says she doesn't have any talent.

I know this is not true. I have seen samples of Sima's work, and, in my opinion, she is very talented and very knowledgeable in matters of art.

In fact, I had tried to interest Sima in an art project involving the ninety-nine names of God. Unfortunately, although we began work on this – and Sima had even done a preliminary version of one possible treatment of one of the Divine names -- we were never able to make very much progress because of a variety of problems ... including our divorce.

Baba refers to Sima as “that gawking woman”. Apparently, Sima becomes transfixed when looking at Baba, as many of his mureeds do, and, as a result stares at him a lot in a transfixed sort of manner ... which Baba has labeled ‘gawking’ in relation to Sima.

Baba says he won’t let Sima massage his legs. Whenever she does, Baba says she goes too high toward his crotch area.

Lara recalls the day when Sima came to deliver some presents for Baba’s birthday ... some peach-colored roses and a nice harmonica. Baba receives the gifts and comments how he doesn’t like cut flowers ... this makes them seem artificial and unnatural.

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March 2, 2003

Toward the middle portion of her trip, Lara is kneeling beside Baba in his room as he is writing an e-mail to me. He keeps trying to get Lara to sign off on something that he wants to say to me about how Lara is feeling concerning her relationship with me.

However, Lara is uncomfortable with the words Baba seems to want to put in her mouth. She keeps saying that what Baba wants to write to me is not how she feels.

Baba writes something, and says how about this. Lara says no, and, so, Baba deletes what he has written and proceeds to write something else, with which Lara also disagrees. Baba is getting frustrated that Lara won’t agree to any of the things he wants to write to me with respect to how Lara supposedly feels.

On another occasion, Lara had shown Baba the poem, ‘Invitation’, that I had written for her at her request. She is trying to provide Baba with evidence that I care for her and love her.

She hands the poem to Baba. He looks at it for a second, and, then, throws it on the floor. He says ‘anyone can write poetry’.

The combination of events is upsetting to Lara. She begins to cry.

I remember the e-mail that Baba sent to me about Lara crying. The explanation he gave to me for her crying is not the same as what Lara is now telling me about what actually went on.

After Baba finishes his e-mail to me, he begins telling Lara about all the money that Sima spent on me. He also tells her about the time Sima took money from her oldest daughter when they were visiting me in Vermont in order to help me put some money in the bank to cover an upcoming bill. He tells Lara how her daughter screamed at her mother and complains she is spending all their money on Tariq.

Baba informs Lara that I have a case file on her. He says I have written hundreds of pages to him about her, but he never tells Lara about, or shows her anything of, what I actually have written.

Baba tells Lara, “He’s stalking me”. Apparently, he says this because I have been writing many e-mails to him.

On another occasion, Baba and Lara are sitting alone in the living room. He asks Lara if she has a picture of Ron.

Lara retrieves a photo of Ron that she has on her computer. This is a picture that she took during the May weekend when they were at Camp Washington for the AA round-up.

Baba studies the photo. He asks Lara how she feels about Ron and me.

Lara begins to cry. She tells Baba that she will try to do whatever he wants, but she pleads with him to not ask her to go back to Ron.

Based on various things that Baba is saying to her, Lara gets the feeling Baba is hinting that she should get back together with Ron. This prospect is very upsetting to her.

Earlier, shortly after Lara arrived for her visit, Baba had told Lara to whom the virtual monikers: ‘Philokalia’ and ‘Stargate’ belonged – namely, me. In addition, Baba requests Lara not let me know that he has given her this information.

Thus, despite my request to Baba for my real identity to be kept secret and despite his agreeing to my request, he broke the confidence

and disclosed my identity to Lara. This knowledge is something that, subsequently, leads to a number of problems between Lara and myself ... which is probably the reason why Baba divulged my virtual monikers to her in the first place ... so that tension, stress, and problems between Lara and me might heighten and, as a result, bring about the sort of distancing between her and me that he seemed to want.

Lara tells me how Baba, during one of their phone conversations in December, asks her a question in reference to her choice concerning me and him: “Why would you want the moon, when you can have the sun?” Without even thinking about it, my immediate response to Lara is: “Because the moon has substance and is nearby while the sun is far away and just a bunch of inflated, hot gas.”

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On another occasion, Lara recalls that Baba told her: “The part of Tariq you like comes from Baba, and the part of Tariq that you dislike comes from Tariq.” Actually, Baba is quite wrong in what he says ... and this is so in several respects.

First, whatever might be good about me is by the Grace of Allah. Whatever is problematic about me is due to my own shortcomings.

Baba can do nothing on his own. He is merely a locus of manifestation.

A fundamental error is committed with respect to Sufi teachings when someone – in this case Baba – confuses, if not conflates, Divinity with a mere locus of manifestation. While attesting to the most basic pillar of Islam requires one to commit to the idea that there is no reality but God, nevertheless, creation – all levels of creation – are merely loci of manifestation that have been made possible by God and are not synonymous with Divinity ... Islam, in general, and Sufi teachings, in particular, reject the idea of pantheism. As such, while the loci of manifestation to which creation gives expression reflect the Names and Attributes of Divinity, and while such loci do not exist independently of God, nonetheless, one cannot reduce Divinity down to such manifestation.

Divinity transcends all such manifestation even as Divinity makes such manifestation possible. Such loci are but thoughts in the mind of God and the Thinker of those thoughts falls beyond the horizons of those 'thoughts'. Even as there is a relationship between the 'two', there is, in reality, only the One.

Secondly, Baba would have been much closer to the truth of things if he were to have said to Lara that everything she liked about me came through Professor Irfan, and not Baba. My primary, formative, spiritual development came under the guidance and care of Professor Irfan, not Baba ... moreover, Dr. Irfan would never have tried to take credit for any of the spiritual good that might have begun to manifest through me ... Dr. Irfan would also have assigned credit where credit is due -- namely, to God.

§

Lara informs me that when we were visiting Baba in November, Baba kept telling her that I was his best friend. However, when she visited with Baba in January, he kept referring to a European college student, Sasha -- who was helping Baba out with programming the software for his virtual community -- as being his best friend.

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Lara finishes up this portion of her recounting of what took place during her visit to Baba with the following anecdote. At some point Baba is sitting around in the living room, and Baba indicates how he has been reading about a shaykh who was going through a certain spiritual station and had light emanating from his forehead.

Baba tells people to look closely at his forehead because there is light coming out of it. He says he was in the bathroom when he first noticed something.

Everybody who is present agrees there is light coming from his forehead ... everyone but Lara. Baba is making Lara feel very uncomfortable because he continues to ask her to look at his forehead

to see the light. However, is not willing to lie about what she is not witnessing ... The Emperor's Clothes anyone?

§

March 3, 2003

During the week leading up to the wedding between Habib and Nazia, lots of preparations are being made, some of which involve the purchase of new clothes. 'Momina asks Lara what she will wear to the wedding.

Shortly thereafter, 'Momina disappears downstairs. She reappears with a bag of clothes.

'Momina tells Lara she has been trying to throw the clothes away for quite some time because they don't fit anyone ... the clothes are for a tall person. Baba has not permitted 'Momina to throw the clothes out ... he keeps telling 'Momina that the woman for whom they are intended is coming.

'Momina gets Lara to try the clothes on. They are a perfect fit.

§

On the day prior to the wedding, Lara accompanies Baba and 'Umar to take some clothes and other things to Bashir's house – the place where the actual marriage ceremonies are going to take place. Bashir lives in a city close to the border of a nearby state.

By the time Baba, Lara and 'Umar leave Bashir's house in order to return to Baba's house, it is very, very late. On the way back, they stop off at a hotel where a number of the wedding guests are staying.

These guests have been at Bashir's house. When Baba leaves Bashir's place, these people also leave, and Baba follows them back to the hotel where they are staying.

At the hotel there is some sort of problem at the desk. There are a lot of people in the party and only two rooms have been rented. The

people who are renting the room are requesting that additional beds be brought into the two rooms to accommodate the extra people.

The hotel employees at the reservation desk are being resistant to the sort of things that are being requested of them. In fact, they appear to be quite suspicious of what is going on.

While people are trying to sort this out, Lara talks with Momin from Canada.

Eventually, my name surfaces during the conversation. Momin has all kinds of nice things to say about me.

Since the problems at the reservation desk are not any closer to being resolved, Baba steps in and does his ‘magic’ – whatever that might be. Immediately, the whole atmosphere surrounding the interaction between the hotel staff and their customers begins to change fairly quickly. The people at the desk seem mesmerized by Baba, and the problems are quickly sorted out.

§

Baba, Lara and ‘Umar arrive back in the town where Baba lives around 5 a.m. in the morning. Baba wants to go to the large, local discount store to buy a gift for Ra’uf.

Lara is exhausted. She is not used to keeping such hours. Furthermore, she has developed an infection in her eyes because her contacts have been in for too long.

When they finish shopping and get back to the house, Lara finds that all the different rooms in Baba’s house are lined with wall to wall people who are all sleeping on the floor. Throughout her visit, Lara has been sleeping in her own room, and now she not only has no room in which to sleep, but she must sleep among complete strangers.

Lara is alone in the kitchen, and she has a panic attack with respect to the situation. She feels very alone, and she begins to cry.

‘Umar comes into the kitchen, and Lara tells him she wants to leave the house. If her car had not been blocked by other vehicles, Lara would have left the house straight away.

'Umar says she cannot leave without getting Baba's permission. He disappears and goes to inform Baba about the situation.

Baba calls her in to his room and asks her what is wrong. Lara explains.

Baba says she can sleep on his bed. Lara is reluctant to do this because she worries what other people in the house will think ... she is not concerned about herself, but she worries about Baba's reputation.

Baba tells her not to worry about that. However, Lara is uncomfortable with this solution, so, Baba tells her to go to sleep in 'Momina's room.

When she lies down on the bed, Lara falls apart and starts crying uncontrollably. Baba sends in Ra'uf, a seven-year old child, to stay with her.

Lara feels like one of the shiny trinkets that Baba purchases at the discount store and, then later on, when Baba has tired of his new toy, Momina stores it away, never to be seen again. Now, little Ra'uf has been appointed as the guardian of the newest trinket ... before the time comes for the newest trinket to be discarded into some, out-of-sight storage bin.

§

On the day of the wedding, a woman from Canada who is attending the ceremony, comes up close to Lara and asks where Lara's husband is. Lara describes the woman, and I believe she is the mother-in-law of my mureed, 'Uzma.

When Lara tells Baba about this, he refers to the woman as a Paki-bitch. Moreover, he instructs Lara to inform the woman that she should mind her own business.

Lara has a feeling Baba put the woman up to asking Lara this question. However, she has no proof of this ... except based on what she has seen of the general way events seem to take place since she has arrived. Among other things, on several occasions, Lara has been a witness to how Baba tends to try to induce third parties to approach other people in order to either: get information from a subject of some

given unknown exercise, or to pass-on certain kinds of information to the object of some exercise or other.

Lara recalls one instance during the wedding week in which 'Momina -- at Baba's request Lara believes -- approaches Lara to induce her to ask Miriam about when the latter person is leaving. Lara feels uncomfortable about doing this, but, nonetheless, does it, and because this has happened to her, Lara has some insight into how communication sometimes takes place in relation to Baba's wishes.

§

Lara recalls how she has never seen a more unhappy-appearing group of people in her life than were present at the wedding. The bride, Nazia, seems especially unhappy and sad – but her parents seem very down as well.

After the completion of the marriage ceremonies, there is some music and dancing. 'Arif -- who lives in the mid-West -- is dancing like a man possessed, bouncing off one wall after another. Lara is afraid he will go through one of the windows in the house.

§

The walima, or reception, takes place the next evening at a restaurant with a lounge attached to it. Baba tells Lara there is a bar in the next room, and she can have a drink if she wants. Baba says he is having ginger-ale so people will believe he is drinking beer. Lara has the sense that Baba, for some reason, would like her to drink.

Lara is seated next to Baba. She gets to share the special food that has been prepared for Baba – allegedly for his diabetes -- while everyone eats from the buffet.

Even when Baba eats at home, he gets special food. Everybody else eats food of a substantially lesser quality.

At some point, Momin Shah asks Lara to dance. After the dance, they sit down.

Baba has been dancing with a group of women. Now, he comes over to Lara and invites her to dance. While they are dancing, he opens his cloak-like coat and pulls Lara in toward him, wrapping the coat around her. Lara kisses him on the cheek. Lara hears ‘Umar say: ‘Way to go Lara.’

A little later Baba does the same thing in relation to Lara, which leads to a congratulatory result from the viewing audience that is similar to what occurred earlier. After the dance, Lara says to Baba: ‘You set me up ... you knew I would act as I did when you did what you did.’ Baba smiles and says, ‘yes, I did’.

Someone at the walima loses their keys. They look everywhere for them, again and again.

Eventually, they come to Baba with their problem. Baba tells them to look in their pockets.

They do, but they find nothing. Baba tells them to look again, and this time they find their keys. Everyone cheers and is amazed.

The time comes for Baba to test his blood sugar. The whole celebratory proceedings come to a halt as he does this in a very public manner. When the results of the test prove to be a very good number and this is announced, nearly everyone in the room cheers.

Toward the end of the reception, Baba gives a big ‘God bless America’ speech. Lara feels the talk is sort of out place at a wedding reception.

Throughout the proceedings, Baba is very much the center of attraction. The groom and bride are pushed into the background ... everything seems to be about Baba rather than focused on the reason the occasion is occurring in the first place.

§

At one point during the reception, Lara talks with my mureed, ‘Uzma, who is from Canada and is a sister of the bride. Lara tells me that ‘Uzma peppers her with questions concerning me and wants to know how I am doing and various other things about what is going on in my life in Bamford. Lara indicates that ‘Uzma’s entire demeanor

during the conversation is one of expressing nothing but fondness And liking for me.

§

After the walima is through, Baba gets in a van and is preparing to return to his house. Momin Shah Baba is in tears near his vehicle because he is returning to Canada and will not be seeing Baba again for some time.

Later, Baba tells Lara that someday she will go past the restaurant where the walima was held. He says she will cry when she does.

Lara tells me that on the evening following the walima, or reception, she is with Baba watching a video of those proceedings. When they come to the section of the video when Baba gets Lara to dance and what goes on goes on, Baba asks her: ‘I wonder what your boss, Mary, or Tariq would think about this? Would they be surprised? Lara responds by saying: ‘No, I really don’t think they would be.’

Lara remarks how the whole wedding and walima were put together within a very short period of time – perhaps a week at most. Yet, there were people attending the wedding who came from Pakistan, Texas, Missouri, Florida, New York, Rhode Island, Canada, and elsewhere ... she wonders how some of the people could even have gotten travel visas in such a short period of time.

§

Lara informs me that she had taken a Qur’an with her on the trip to Baba’s house. This is the Qur’an that was given to Lara by me when she was initiated.

Circumstances permitting, Lara tries to read the Qur’an a little each day. One day, toward the latter part of her visit, Lara notices that her Qur’an is missing from her room.

She asks ‘Momina about this. ‘Momina indicates that whoever took it must not have realized it belonged to Lara, and ‘Momina says she

will try to find out what happened and return the Qur'an to Lara as quickly as possible.

A day, or so, later and still there is no Qur'an. Lara raises the issue again with 'Momina.

'Momina promises to locate the Qur'an and give it to Lara. The Qur'an does not surface ... no one knows what happened to it.

After Lara returned to Brimley following her visit, she sent an e-mail requesting that her Qur'an be returned to her. She never received any reply to her request.

§

During the last few nights of Lara's visit, different members of the household come to Lara individually. They each ask her when is she coming back and why does she have to leave?

§

The night before Lara is set to leave for home, Baba wants Lara to get plenty of sleep. In the morning Lara finds Baba asleep in a chair in the living room. Miriam, who is from Canada, tells Lara that Baba had told her -- Miriam -- he didn't want to miss saying goodbye to her.

Baba scurries about the kitchen preparing different things for Lara's trip home. He includes three cigars in the package.

Baba instructs 'Umar to accompany Lara up to the Vermont state line. As she leaves, Baba gives her a hug and insists she call him from her sister's house -- which Lara is planning on visiting before returning home -- or to leave a message in his Inbox at his residence in the virtual community.

§

As Lara is relating the foregoing information to me, I find it odd -- although not really -- that in the matter of Lara's coming down to visit

with Baba, he had made elaborate plans to meet with Lara near Logan Airport in order to escort her to his home. In fact, Lara had told me earlier that Baba wanted to come all the way to Brimley to drive her to his house, but, because this would have left Lara without a car to be able to come and go as she wanted or needed to do, she was reluctant to accept Baba's offer, and, eventually, a compromise was reached - namely, to rendezvous at the hotel near Logan Airport.

Now, when Lara is ready to leave, Baba can't be bothered to escort her to the state border. Instead, he makes a show about going to great, 'self-sacrificing' lengths to ensure that he would not miss her departure back to Vermont.

Lara told me that she was touched by Baba's gesture - especially when he began scurrying about the kitchen and preparing things for Lara to eat on her trip back to Brimley. I am now looking at Baba's gesture in a quite different light from the way in which Lara perceived it - at least, at that time.

Even before Lara arrived at Baba's house, she was treated like a queen. As the visit unfolded, Baba, first, spoke about building on extension to the house so that Lara could have her own room ... then, he began to push the idea that, perhaps, Lara, could live in a nearby town ... then, he began to broach the idea that Lara - against her wishes - should go back and reconcile with Ron.

Finally, in the end, Lara was left with no room of her own and, in addition, was prevented from leaving the house. Apparently, Baba was so preoccupied with playing his role of king that he couldn't be bothered to spend time with his queen ... and, the next day, he merely dispatches one of his underlings to accompany her to the state line.

All along Baba is engaging in a process of distancing himself from Lara just as, previously, he had been distancing himself from me. Yet, all of this distancing is wrapped in pretty packages of 'thoughtful gestures' and seeming kindnesses.

March 4, 2003

Upon returning to Brimley, Baba keeps pressing Lara to find him some sort of work profession or occupation. Whenever Lara suggests some possible occupation, he would say he couldn't do that because it involved helping people, and he wasn't permitted to receive money for helping others.

Lara replies that, in one way or another, every job involves an element of helping others in the form of a needed or desired product or by providing customers/clients with some kind of a service. She goes on to say that the only kind of job which doesn't involve helping others or providing a beneficial service is being a crook.

Baba gets really upset with her for saying this, even though Lara is not pointing fingers at anyone. He asks her whether she is saying that he is a crooked person?

At some point Lara following her return, Lara tells Baba that she is going to drive me to a job interview that I had with respect to a counseling job at Pine Lodge. Baba expresses unhappiness at this prospect because the job involves helping people for money that, according to Baba, I am not supposed to do ... yet, just a few weeks earlier, Baba had written me an e-mail saying he was praying that I get precisely this job.

Lara tells me that when she was visiting with Baba in January, plans had been set in motion for inviting Sasha (he was a student from Europe who had done a lot of programming work in helping Baba to get his cyber community up and running) to visit Baba for three weeks, or so, sometime in July/03. Lara is supposed to write a letter of invitation and send it to Sasha.

Lara informs me that Baba also assigned her the task of pouring over pictures of the walima and wedding. Baba wants her to find pictures that contain no traces of Muslim culture, so these can be forwarded to Sasha – Baba is putting a lot of pressure on Lara with respect to the assignment.

Lara spends hours on Baba's task. She not only has trouble finding the pictures that she snapped during her trip and stored somewhere in her computer, she also doesn't know how to send the pictures as an

attachment because she is not very literate with certain facets of computer and Internet operations.

Baba wants Lara to show him her selections before anything is sent to Sasha. He keeps pressuring her to find appropriate, non-Muslim looking pictures so he can forward them to Sasha.

She e-mails Baba possible candidates from among the pictures she has selected, and he rejects them because there is some hint of Islam or being Muslim in the pictures. Lara becomes frantic about the assignment because Baba is applying so much pressure for her to find what he wants.

Baba wishes for all traces of Islam and Muslims to be absent from the wedding/walima pictures because he has been telling Sasha a variety of lies. Among other things, Baba has lied to Sasha about his (Baba's) name, where he lives, his religion, and so on.

Baba has told Sasha that he is a Christian. Consequently, Baba wants the wedding pictures he intends to send to Sasha to reflect the story he has been telling the young man from Europe for quite some time.

§

Lara shows me an e-mail that she wrote to Baba early in February, together with Baba's response. The e-mail is written at a time when Lara is very confused about what is going on.

On the one hand, she feels Baba really loves her and cares for her. On the other hand, she is getting a lot of mixed messages.

Included among the mixed messages is the following. From the time Baba first started talking with her on the phone in December, he reassured Lara at every turn that he was with her no matter how she decided to proceed in life ... she was free to make whatever choices she deemed to be appropriate and Baba would support her and not abandon her.

Yet, when Lara indicated to Baba that she was thinking about reuniting with me, she says that his whole demeanor seemed to change in both his virtual community, as well as in his e-mails to her.

In addition, whereas previously she had ready access to Baba via the phone, there came a point when he would no longer accept her calls ... Lara would always end up talking with someone else ... Baba was never available when Lara called to speak with him.

§

Lara's e-mail to Baba plus his reply are given below.

February 7, 2003 (e-mail)

Dear Joseph -- (this is the invented name that Baba now wishes to be called by),

I am trying my best to understand what it is I'm supposed to do. There is so much I do not understand.

You once told me a story, and I wanted to know the ending, but you would not tell me. I don't even feel like I know the story sometimes any more.

Possible scenarios I have thought of are these:

You decided while I was there that I was not what you wanted for a variety of reasons I will not write about here, and you did not want to hurt my feelings by telling me.

You wanted me to get my life straightened out and then see what happened.

Now you won't talk with me because you are: a.) Upset with me, b.) Cannot interfere, c.) Are not upset with me but cannot interfere. d.) You still want me to be with you some day.

Tariq and I had a long talk last night, and he told me that he had told you he thought I wanted to marry you before I left to visit with you. I was surprised but not surprised because I know him very well.

I owned up to my own feelings about everything and was honest with him about that. I told him there was only one man in the world that I would do anything for that was within my capacity to do and that I would go to you in an instant if I was sure that was what you wanted. I told him that I love you.

It was a very involved conversation, and he knows nothing about anything else other than how I feel. He did, however, tell me some things that were surprising to me.

He is just as I knew he would be. The music story I sent you from his book of stories means exactly what I believed it meant. He knows that I will care for him forever, but he knows that I love you.

He loves you, and he loves me, and he is struggling with this, but he smiles, too, because he loves us both so much. I told him that I did not know what your true feelings were, and that is the truth because I do not.

Last night in the virtual community there was something said by a friend of ours, and I did not answer the question at that time, but the answer is, and has always been, that I choose you -- not that person -- but you! But it is not up to me.

I know that it is only God's will in this matter that means anything at all, and I don't know what that is. Whatever happens, I want it to be God's will and not Lara's or Tariq's or even -- do I dare say? -- yours.

I believe that your will is exactly the same as God's will, and I'm pretty sure that Tariq's will is in line with that, as well. It's me that bears watching.

I do know this. I know what I want, but you know from things I've said in the past how I feel about wanting anything.

Please forgive me for not understanding things correctly. I'm still new to this, Joseph, and I am trying my best.

I love you with all my heart,

Lara

§

Baba's response:

You called twice and I was sleeping. You chose to leave Tariq, and now you chose to go back to him. That's how I see this, and I don't have to repeat that I told you, the first time I met you that I do not interfere

with choices, and that's not what I ever do. I also told you that since you are not anymore Tariq's mureed, you are directly spiritually under me and you do not need Tariq for spiritual reasons anymore, and my connection with you is direct.

You then left him when you returned, and came to spend your vacation with me and my family.

Now you have decided to go back to Tariq. Well, leaving him was your decision and going back to him was your decision. I stand by what I said that these decisions of yours will be yours to make and I shall not interfere.

So what is it that you want to know? All this is clear. If you are thinking that I am upset with you, then you are wrong in thinking that, because I am not upset with you. Why would I be upset with you for anything? I already made it clear to you that your spiritual relationship with me has nothing to do with either your choosing to be with Ron or Tariq.

So please understand that I am true to my word and I always stand by it.

Yes, as far as Tariq is concerned, it is a different story, because I had asked him to do Sajdah, and it seems he has not been able to do it. Well, that too is human weakness and I forgive him for that as I always forgive no matter what any mureed does or does not do.

I remain always your friend, no matter what. I just want you to be happy.

If you are both happy with each other, then I pray that you remain happy, and I wish you both all the happiness, health and success. God Bless you!

LOVE AND PRAYERS,

JOSEPH

§

Among other things, Baba, seemingly, has forgotten how he previously had told Lara, when she asked about this, that her shaykh

would be Baba's shaykh. Now, however, he is saying that Lara's spiritual connection is directly with him

By transferring Lara's spiritual allegiance to his own shaykh, that, according to Baba would enable Baba and Lara to come together as husband and wife. Indeed, Baba is the one who detailed the nature of this transference process to me when Lara and I were to be married in 2001.

Currently, however, Baba is bouncing from one idea to another pretty much like 'Arif, according to Lara, was bouncing off walls following the wedding ceremonies in January. Unlike 'Arif, Baba is not just bouncing off walls, he is crashing through the windows as well.

The problem with some people who lie is they do it so much they, sometimes, can't tell the difference anymore between lies and the truth. This is not Baba's problem.

He knows the difference between when he is lying and telling the truth. Unfortunately, he seems to prefer lying to the truth, and he uses lies to further his own ends in an artful, calculated way.

To lie is a potential of being human. Apparently, Baba delights in exploring this dimension.

Lying is an evil because it rebels against the truth. Baba rebels against the truth just as Iblis rebelled against the truth, and Baba is ensconced in this evil.

For example, one of the things that Baba's e-mail top Lara fails to note is that he does interfere in people's decisions. He interfered in Lara's decisions concerning me because he methodically worked on Lara -- for more than 80 hours on the phone during the month of January and, then, continued to do so in during his encounters with her in the virtual community, as well as through e-mails to her -- in order to confuse her about life, commitments, and spirituality.

In ways in which, perhaps, she still has not, yet, fully understood, Lara is extremely vulnerable to issues of: compliance, pleasing people, control, exploitation, manipulation, co-dependence, and abuse. She was not completely recovered from her twenty-three years of abuse at the hands of Ron when she was induced to enter the lair of, yet, another wolf ... an even more vicious predator than Ron.

Through phone calls, e-mails, and personal visits, I had given Baba -- with Lara's permission -- all the information he needed in order to attack Lara's vulnerabilities. And, this he proceeded to do on a variety of fronts.

Sometimes Lara gets caught between wanting to think of herself as someone who is perfectly healthy while simultaneously sensing just how much damage has been done to her by her cousin, uncle, father, sister, brother, and first husband, Ron, over a period of nearly 34 years. Lara is not crazy; she is not psychotic; she is not stupid; she is not out of touch with reality, Nonetheless, she has been deeply wounded time and time again, and these wounds have left her in a weakened and, therefore, vulnerable condition with respect to predators like Baba.

On the one hand, she would like to approach life as if she has sustained no emotional, psychological, or spiritual injury from all the abuses that have been directed her way. On the other hand, the reality of her situation is that she must live life through the filter of the tremendous stresses that have been inflicted upon her ... mostly by other individuals, but, to some extent, by herself as well, whenever she selected poor coping strategies for handling the way many others have abusively treated her and continue to treat her so.

Lara did not phone Baba first. It was Baba who phoned her. From the beginning, he was tampering with Lara's choices, and he continued to do this by phoning her again and again and, as well, encouraging Lara to phone him.

Throughout December Baba was framing me as a person who did not love Lara and who was attempting to exploit her for financial purposes. He was seeking to alienate Lara from me.

By his own self-congratulatory admission to Lara when she got to his house in January, he told her what he had said to the rest of his household after Lara and I left from our November visit – namely, that: "She's mine!" He then proceeded to spend all of December helping to sever ties between Lara and me ... even to the extent of advising her that she should go back to Brimley to supervise what was going on between her daughter and her boyfriend, and, then, using that opportunity to undermine her relationship with me.

Of course, Baba tries to blame everything on me. In his e-mail to Lara he says that I failed to do what he had instructed me to do ... that I failed to do sajdah.

However, the fact of the matter is that I did do sajdah ... I did let go of the pain and suffering. I was prepared to step aside and let what ever happen, happen, but I also told Baba that I wanted some clear indication from Lara that she wished to terminate our relationship – at least, the marital side of that relationship..

She, apparently, was prepared to do this, but Baba prevented her from doing so. Lara told me that she was willing to give up everything for Baba – her house, job, everything, but when she wanted to tell me about what was going on, Baba told her that I would never be able to handle the truth of things – even when I was the one who told him in an e-mail what I believed to be the case with respect to Lara’s feelings for Baba -- something about which I was correct and, even, when I told him that I was prepared to step aside if what Allah wanted was for Lara to be with Baba.

Baba never mentioned the issue of sajdah to me until after he had spent the entire month of December seducing Lara away from me and until after she arrived for her visit with him, entered her bedroom in the wee hours of the morning, and did whatever he did. My doing sajdah was intended to set right, post facto, those wrongs that Baba already was doing.

When Baba discussed the issue of sajdah with me it was about giving all the joys and sorrows that I was experiencing back to the Source from which they came and, thereby, releasing the problematic hold such emotions had on my life. However, in effect, what Baba told Lara is that I was supposed to do sajdah to Baba’s wishes concerning Lara and, thereby, get out of his way so he could feel free to do whatever he wanted.

Baba, however, was too caught up in his games of manipulation. He outsmarted himself.

Everything was being handed to him on a silver platter, but he was too stupid and too self-absorbed and too arrogant to understand what had been placed before him. Instead, once he got what he thought he

wanted – that is, Lara – he proceeded to discard her as he does with all his shiny trinkets.

The problem was not that Tariq had failed to do as Baba had instructed him to do with respect to sajdah – at least, not in terms of the manner in which Baba had described the process of sajdah to me. The problem was not that Tariq couldn't handle the truth.

The problem was that Baba is not a very nice human being. He is, instead, someone who seems to have a deep-rooted need to lie to people, to manipulate them, to toy with them, and to pressure them into helping him get what he wants when he wants it ... and, then, to assist him to dispose of such items when he no longer is interested in them.

Many years ago, Baba told me that one can be a shaykh even if one has no followers. He informed me that being a shaykh meant that an individual has mastered himself or herself with respect to controlling the urges of nafs, resisting the overtures of Iblis and dunya, as well as committed to serving God through realizing the purpose of life.

According to the very criteria that Baba outlined to me in relation to what being a shaykh involved, Baba is not a shaykh. In fact, he is precisely the opposite of what he described to me – he is someone who has many followers but has failed to even remotely master himself in the requisite ways.

Baba can claim to stand by what he says all he wants with respect to the idea of not interfering in people's lives and leaving decisions to them, but his claims are devoid of substantive value. He has been interfering in people's lives for a long time, and he knows this, and I am beginning to discover this -- and he continues to do this anyway because this is part of the nature of his evil ... to enjoy playing God with the lives of people who invest trust in him.

Furthermore, Baba has ways of punishing people who do not comply with his wishes. This, too, is a way of interfering with people's choices because although his mouth says I am with you no matter what you choose to do, the truth of the matter is that if you do not do what he wants, then he ostracizes you and talks about you behind your back to other people so that they begin to shun you as well.

All of this creates stress, conflict and pressure in an individual's life. The purpose of doing this is to induce people to 'get with his program' even as he has plausible deniability with respect to how he never interferes with people's choices.

How self-serving liars are. They speak the language of decency and spirituality even as they seek to destroy people's lives through the corrupt intentions that underlie the attractive surface language.

Baba is a real life version of Oscar Wilde's fictional character Dorian Gray. The public sees an alluring, charming, soft, loving, kind, gentle exterior, but the reality -- hidden away in a secret room of his soul -- is a grotesque, hideous, evil, odious, entity who has lost sight of his humanity through the deeds that he is doing and has done.

Baba is not interested in the happiness of either Lara or me. In fact, he did his level best to bring unhappiness into both of our lives.

However, the nature of Baba's toxicity is such that one tends to interact with him in accordance with some lines from Tim Hardin's song 'A Reason to Believe'. "If I listen long enough to you, I'll find a way to believe that it's all true. Knowing how you lied straight-faced while I cried ... still I look to find a reason to believe."

Did Lara's actions hurt me? Yes, they did, but in many ways, I know she is as helpless as a deer caught in the lights of an on-coming vehicle.

She is still trying to work through the many complications that have arisen from years of abuse, exploitation and manipulation at the hands of other people. She is very vulnerable to someone like Baba, and, unwittingly, I have helped put her in harm's way.

The essential goodness of Lara is manifested in her desire to seek to reach out to people like her uncle, Ron, and Baba ... to want to love them back to health. The emotional turmoil within Lara is manifested through her failure to understand that people like her uncle, Ron, and Baba are not receptive to being healed through love, but, rather, are only interested in seeking to control others for their own pathetically narrow, self-serving interests.

There are people who prefer evil to goodness. There are people who choose the former and shun the latter.

Such people are not emotionally disturbed, nor are they mentally ill ... at least not in any conventional sense of these terms. Such people are inclined to evil, and the form of calculus that they use to navigate their way through life is predicated on axioms of evil -- that is, a set of principles and understandings that are resistant to, and rebellious toward, the truth inherent in the realities of honesty, nobility, kindness, charity, compassion, empathy, courage, love, sincerity, humility, gratitude, friendship, and generosity.

Baba had rejected all of Lara's suggestions concerning possible occupations that he might pursue because he claimed that he was not permitted to get remuneration for helping people. Well, true to his word, Baba doesn't take money for helping people ... rather, he finds ways to hurt them ... and he does it for free.

In fact, Baba is a professional thief. He steals the truth from people ... something that is most essential to human beings.

Every time that Baba withholds information from someone, he steals the truth. Every time he seeks to manipulate people, he steals the truth from them because his intentions are other than he pretends them to be, and, yet, he fails to disclose to those people that such is the case. Every time he tells someone that he is a shaykh - or lets others say this on his behalf - he steals truth from people because he is not someone that has mastered himself and, therefore, he cannot really assist people to satisfy their holy longing. Instead, he just engages in counterfeit transactions with people that end up wasting - and, therefore, stealing -- people's time. Consequently, in effect, he induces people to squander that precious, finite resource so that it cannot be spent on taking truly constructive steps to satisfy their essential holy longing and spiritual thirst.

Lara was only partially correct when she said in her e-mail to Baba/Joseph that she believes God's will and Baba's will are one and the same. More specifically, she is right in as much as everything that happens is by God's leave and, as such, gives expression to the Divine will. However, God has the wisdom to know how to use manure to grow beauty, but God's knowledge and will does not stop manure from being manure, or evil from being evil ... although it is all part of the nature of 'Creation'

§

February 26, 2003

Baba posts some comments on the message board in his virtual community. Knowing what I know about the duplicitous manner in which Baba operates behind the scenes, the sentiments being expressed by Baba are both amusing and disturbing ... amusing because of the disconnect between words and reality ... disturbing because people in virtual space don't really know with what they are dealing and some of them are becoming entangled in Baba's web of deceit.

§

Date: Wed, Feb 26th, 2003. 4:25:32 pm.

From: Baba

Subject: The Virtual Community

"We are Together!" is this community's slogan! Our vision is to promote love, peace and harmony among all citizens of this web site. Let us go forth hand in hand, towards the sweet smell of success! Remember my good friends, that real success, will come when we all rise above the desire to possess, and stop thinking that this is mine and that is yours: Let us rise in brilliance as one community, loving and respecting each other!

§

After reading his posting in the light of what I come to know about how he truly operates, I have difficulty taking anything he says very seriously ... other than the fact that the manipulation and exploitation to which such postings give expression are, indeed, very serious matters. Out of one side of his mouth, Baba talks about freeing ourselves from the idea of 'yours-and-mine', while out of the other side

of his mouth he is saying to members of his household after Lara and I leave in November that “She’s mine” – that is, Lara belongs to him.

§

Although from time to time a new piece of information is added by Lara with respect to what took place during December and January, Lara has largely finished her process of debriefing me concerning those events, There is one thing, however, that I have wondered about which Lara has not mentioned ... although, in many ways, the issue I have in mind is not all that important.

More specifically, Baba’s virtual community used to have the occasional ‘party’ for which different games and activities would be arranged. One of the games involved a version of ‘Jeopardy’ in which Habib served as the Hood’s version of Alex Trebek.

What struck me as strange about the game was that Lara was giving answers that I know are in topical areas that are not part of her forte. For instance, one of the questions asked was: What does SCUBA – as in water SCUBA gear -- stand for? Almost right away, Lara answers: “self-contained underwater breathing apparatus”.

Now, on the one hand, I am very impressed. On the other hand, I find it a little odd because this is not the sort of trivial information that Lara knows.

Lara is extremely intelligent and talented. Nonetheless, being privy to this sort of information is not resonant with the sort of person she is. When the same kind of thing keeps happening on a fairly regular basis, I begin to become a little suspicious.

I, unlike Lara, have a facility with respect to trivia which strongly suggests that I have wasted way too much time and way too many brain cells in developing such a facility. Consequently, I am holding my own despite the slowness of my dial-up connection in ‘hitting the buzzer’ so that I have a chance to answer the question before other participants.

Furthermore, during the game as I am inching closer to Lara – who is leading the completion – something strange happens. Momin begins

to ‘whisper’ to me and wants to talk about how I am supposed to have done something within the virtual community that was disrespectful toward Lara.

The whispering is persistent. I don’t wish to be impolite to Momin, but couldn’t he have picked some other time to broach this issue with me?

Nonetheless, I try to answer Momin’s queries. But, the conversation goes on for a while.

While it is going on, I am not free to participate in the game. Lara and others are getting further and further ahead.

Finally, the whispering stops. I return to the game.

I begin to make a late charge. However, time runs out before I can make up the distance.

Lara wins. I come in 3rd or 4th.

Now, I ask Lara about the Jeopardy game in the virtual community. She tells me that someone was whispering some of the answers to her – not all of them, but some of them. The SCUBA question was one to which someone whispered the answer to her.

There was nothing at stake in the game. No money changed hands, no material prizes were given ... although there were some virtual prizes that were handed out.

Lara was having a good time, as was everyone else who attended the ‘party’ and she just went along with things. I know Lara, and she would not have cared in the least whether, or not, she won. I also know that Lara is not the sort of person who cheats at anything, but in the spirit of what was taking place at the party, Lara just went with the flow of things – thinking that Baba was up to some sort of ‘mischief’ in the way he was arranging things ... it was all good-hearted fun.

Baba’s fun is never good-hearted. He is always working the room. He is always pushing his agenda or getting someone else to help him push it.

My feeling is that because Baba knew about my facility with trivia, he wanted to rig the game so that someone besides me would win. Baba wanted to elevate Lara in the eyes of the community, and he didn’t want anything to occur at the party that might cause people to

look at me in any other manner than he wished. He wanted me marginalized in every way possible.

Because I was doing okay despite the fix, Baba had to think of something else to slow me down. Enter Momin and his whispering.

I don't believe that Momin was in on the fix. He was just being his usual loyal subject of Baba.

In any event, somewhere along the line, Baba probably whispered to Momin to go and whisper to me about some issue that, supposedly, constituted a very grave violation of adab that had to be dealt with immediately ... it could not wait. Momin knew that I was participating in the game, but he would do whatever Baba told him to do, and it is very much in keeping with Baba's way of doing things to get some third party to bring about the kind of result that Baba wanted – in this case, to slow me down with respect to the on-going game.

The foregoing anecdote is about trivial matters. Nonetheless, even in relation to trivial matters Baba is always manipulating things.

§

March 9, 2003

I begin to talk to Lara about trying to find some way to extricate different people from Baba's mesmerizing grip. One of the first people about whom I think with respect to such a possibility is Momin Shah in Canada.

Momin and I have had a fairly long history together. He and I were both introduced to the Sufi path through Dr. Irfan. I used to travel the three or four hundred miles between our respective homes on a fairly regular basis either to give talks at one of the several universities on some aspect of Islam or the mystical path, to help out, in some way, with this or that spiritual celebration function that he would hold.

He and his wife had permitted me to stay in their home for about six months during one of the periods when, from the perspective of employment and finances, things weren't going too well for me, and I was fairly destitute. On several other occasions, he also had helped me out financially.

From almost the very beginning, Momin and I seemed to have good chemistry. I liked him and considered him to be a friend, and I always felt that these sentiments were reciprocated.

§

March 11, 2003

An opportunity arises for Lara to communicate with Momin in the virtual community in order to try to clear up a problem concerning the way Philokalia – that is Tariq (me) – seems to be excluded from participating in Baba’s cyber community. The following is taken from the chat log of that conversation.

§

Lara meets with Momin in his residence within Baba’s virtual community

Lara: Nice work you’ve done here, Momin. Nice to see you

Momin573: I had some help.

Lara: Well, whoever helped you did a very nice job helping you.

Momin573: I am happy to see you ... very happy

Lara: What’s up, Momin?

Momin573: I was busy writing to you when you came on line

Lara: Oh?

Momin573: I feel very badly that a big misunderstanding has been created.

Lara: Yes, me too.

Momin573: I feel responsible and want to clear it up

Momin573: That is why I am especially happy to have this opportunity.

Momin573: InBoxes can create more misunderstandings.

Momin573: May I explain?

Lara: Mm-hmm. I prefer face to face meetings.

Lara: Of course.

Momin573: Believe me please that I am not excluding anyone

Momin573: I am not being influenced by the “leadership”

Momin573: You know Baba very well.

Lara: Yes, I do.

Momin573: I want to make it clear that he has not asked me to exclude anyone

Momin573: Do you believe me?

Lara: Momin, I really, really, really want to believe you. You have no idea how much I want to believe you.

Lara: But, I know that Tariq was excluded from the virtual community.

Momin573: Not in this neighborhood.

Lara: And so when all of this started, I was not surprised.

Lara: Disappointed and upset, but not surprised.

Momin573: Can I explain my part?

Lara: Of course. LOL

Momin573: Lara, I want to reassure that I am not excluding Tariq.

Lara: Someone is though.

Momin573: Why would I want to do such a thing to my dear friend.

Lara: I don't think that you would want to, Momin.

Momin573: He knows that I would not

Lara: Are you in Canada, Momin?

Momin573: We have a long history together

Lara: Yes, I know.

Lara: He has a long history with Baba, as well.

Momin573: Tariq and I have shared good and bad times together

Momin573: We have been open and frank with each other

Momin573: Tariq has been direct with me

Momin573: Firm yes, but always kind

Lara: Can Tariq call you tonight if he wants to?

Momin573: It is better if I call him.

Lara: Are you at Baba's real life house, Momin?

Momin573: Yes, I am here.

Lara: I thought as much.

Momin573: But I have a calling card and can call him

Lara: And I assume you will be telling Baba all of this. You don't even have to explain, Momin.

Lara: I know more than you think.

Lara: Give my regards to Baba.

Momin573: I will. Are you not in touch with Baba yourself?

Lara: No, Momin, I'm not.

Momin573: He has not been around the virtual community much because he is busy

Lara: Baba is not my shaykh.

Momin573: Tariq told me that you entered the silsilah through him.

Momin573: I hope I have not confused you with someone else.

Lara: Yes, but before Tariq and I were married, there was a transfer at Baba's direction.

Momin573: transfer?

Lara: to Baba, and, then, later on to Baba's shaykh

Momin573: ok

Lara: Baba was told about everything and was consulted at every step.

Momin573: Lara, you have made me privy to a lot of things that are new to me

Lara: Well, I don't always understand why things have to be so secret.

Lara: I have come into this just wanting to do the right thing, looking for spirituality and love, and things have been very confusing lately.

Lara: Tariq is a better man than any other man I have met.

Momin573: You are a kind and good hearted person. So is Tariq.

Lara: More honest, caring, and understanding than anyone has given him credit for.

Lara: I have found this to be true, especially lately.

Momin573: I hold him in high esteem for his honesty and integrity.

Lara: He has had to swallow a lot

Lara: from me

Lara: And he has done it with dignity and compassion.

Momin573: You are helping him to be even better!

Lara: ROFL

Momin573: It is a fact

Lara: Nice quote from Baba.

Momin573: Bigger the man, bigger the challenges

Lara: LOL. And he has had a challenge with me!

Momin573: I believe you

Lara: I have an appointment at 4:30, Momin. It's been wonderful talking with you.

Lara: Give my regards to Baba and family

Momin573: I will. Bye for now.

Lara: bye, bye

§

March 14, 2003

Because Lara has discovered that Momin currently is visiting with Baba, she and I talk about going to meet Momin in Rhode Island, where he has relatives ... maybe we even can speak with Sima at the same time. Another idea is to go to where Baba lives and speak with Momin.

Another possibility is to try to arrange a meeting with Momin somewhere in Massachusetts since this would be sort of be roughly equidistant between Momin and us and, as well, such a venue would constitutes neutral territory.

No final decision is reached. We keep going over the pros and cons of different scenarios.

Momin contacts Lara and indicates that he would like to chat with her again in at Lara's residence in the virtual community. Arrangements are made.

§

Lara: Good evening, Momin.

Momin573: Hello Lara

Lara: We can either chat here or I could call you at Baba's.

Momin573: Let us try here in case it ties up the phone for the family.

Lara: Very well.

Momin573: If it is private, we can use the 'whisper' mode.

Lara: That's fine. It's just us. I wanted you to know that I did pass on our discussion to Tariq.

Lara: He said that if he does talk with you, he would want Sairah to be present for the discussion.

Lara: He is very busy these days writing a book, a novel.

Momin573: Sairah? My wife, or Ahmad's wife?

Lara: Your wife.

Momin573: Did he say why?

Lara: No.

Momin573: ok

Lara: He has outlined the book to me.

Lara: It is about spirituality.

Momin573: Yes

Lara: On the basis of what he has told me about the book, it is going to knock the socks off a lot of people. It's a real shocker.

Lara: Based on true events.

Lara: I'm sure he will send you a copy when he's finished.

Momin573: shocker?

Lara: Yes.

Lara: He's been doing a lot of research on mind control and spiritual abuse as well as deprogramming.

Lara: I think it will be his best work yet.

Lara: Hopefully his financial woes will be a distant memory soon.

Momin573: That will be great.

Lara: In the existing climate in this country right now, this is going to go over very well.

Lara: Yes, great.

Lara: Anyway, I've kept you long enough.

Momin573: Lara, why is Tariq not communicating directly with me?

Momin573: It is unlike him.

Lara: As I said before, he said as long as you are visiting where you are and under the influence of that place, he thinks having a fruitful discussion will be very difficult. But, of course, you are always free to call him.

Lara: He's home most of the time.

Momin573: What does Tariq mean by 'under the influence of that place'?

Lara: I'm not exactly sure what he means, Momin.

Lara: Ask him.

Lara: I told him you were there visiting with Baba.

Lara: and that is what he said.

Momin573: I visit here

Lara: Mm-hmm. I did too.

Momin573: I also have relatives in Rhode Island.

Lara: Yes, I hope Sima is well.

Lara: Please tell her I said hello.

Lara: I really liked getting to know her.

Momin573: OK

Lara: I hope she can get back to her art sometime soon.

Momin573: yes

Lara: It brought a smile to her face just talking about it.

Lara: I like to see people smiling.

Momin573: Did you not enjoy your visit here?

Lara: I enjoyed my visit very, very much.

Lara: I had the time of my life, Momin.

Momin573: Great.

Lara: I was treated like a queen.

Lara: Yes.

Lara: You know the treatment.

Momin573: Lara, since you seem to becoming the messenger for Tariq

Lara: I don't mean to be.

Momin573: Please tell him that I feel hurt that he is not communicating directly with me.

Momin573: Even a short message

Lara: This whole virtual community exclusion thing has bothered me much more than Tariq.

Lara: He takes things in stride these days.

Lara: And he feels that there are much more serious issues than whether, or not, he is excluded from the community.

Lara: It's me that's hurt to see him excluded here.

Momin573: Maybe that is why I have not heard from him.

Lara: But Tariq really doesn't care whether he's excluded from this or not. It's spirituality that he's most interested in.

Momin573: This is more like the Tariq that I know.

Lara: Yes.

Lara: He's busy with his novel.

Momin573: I am glad that you explained because

Lara: Tariq does not wish to hurt you. In fact, he is very concerned about you.

Momin573: I thought that he was the one who was upset and hurt and was expressing himself through you.

Lara: His connection with you is apart from his connection with Baba because it predated it.

Lara: Oh, no. I'm sorry if I have given you that impression.

Momin573: It's not your fault.

Lara: Besides, he has faith in your inherent goodness, Momin.

Lara: I know this because he has told me this.

Momin573: I created the impression wrongly

Lara: Well, these misunderstandings occur sometimes when we can't meet face-to-face.

Lara: It's difficult to chat like this.

Momin573: I am happy this important point got clarified.

Momin573: I agree with you.

Lara: Yes. He's fine, Momin. In fact, he's better than I've ever seen him.

Lara: Less worried.

Lara: Less rigid.

Lara: More focused.

Momin573: I am happy to hear that

Lara: More understanding and compassionate.

Lara: But he keeps talking about you.

Lara: And he is worried about you.

Lara: And he is dancing a lot. LOL

Momin573: Please tell me more why he is worried about me?

Lara: Maybe you could call him from Sima's or when you return home.

Momin573: Ok

Momin573: That will be best

Lara: I don't feel comfortable expressing those things for fear of creating misunderstandings.

Lara: I've probably said too much.

Momin573: I inquired because you mentioned it.

Lara: Yes, of course.

Momin573: It is best to be direct

Lara: Always.

Lara: That's my way of doing things.

Momin573: face to face

Lara: But, then again, I'm not a coward.

Momin573: dancing together?

Lara: Yes.

Momin573: lol

Lara: We had fun, didn't we?

Lara: I told Tariq and he smiled

Momin573: I remember fondly the dance with you

Lara: I showed him the pictures, and he wanted me to print one of you and your wife on my photo printer.

Lara: He has it up in his office at his apartment.

Lara: He looks at it and smiles

Momin573: Please give him my love

Lara: I will, Momin.

Momin573: He is very dear to me

Lara: yes, and you are very, very dear to him.

Lara: As is your wife.

Lara: He speaks of her with great affection.

Lara: As well as 'Uzma and her sisters.

Lara: I printed a picture of 'Uzma for him as well.

Lara: I showed him all the pictures.

Momin573: My wife is the one that fed him the baked potatoes.

Momin573: lol

Lara: It's too bad he was discouraged from coming to the wedding.

Lara: We could have had a lot of fun together.

Momin573: really?

Lara: Yes, I know about those potatoes.

Lara: I would have been fine with everyone being together.

Lara: including Sima.

Lara: I know all about their prior relationship.

Lara: He told me everything, and I was anxious to meet her.

Lara: If he loved her, I know I would too.

Momin573: What about Sima, does she know?

Lara: About Tariq and me?

Momin573: yes

Lara: She knows we know each other and that Tariq introduced me to Baba.

Lara: But I was discouraged from telling her the truth.

Lara: Not by Tariq.

Lara: He didn't mind.

Lara: I have nothing to hide.

Momin573: I thought that you told me when we met that you were married to someone.

Lara: Yes.

Momin573: I assumed that was to someone other than Tariq.

Lara: Well, legally, yes.

Lara: We've been apart.

Lara: getting a legal divorce.

Momin573: ok

Lara: We were told to proceed in the way we did by Baba.

Lara: But it was not legal.

Lara: in the state sense.

Momin573: Oh

Lara: So, I guess you can say I am married in two different ways to two different men.

Lara: With Baba's blessing.

Momin573: Was it your idea to marry Tariq or Baba's?

Lara: Actually, it was Tariq idea to marry me! LOL

Lara: I was shocked.

Lara: But the suggestion originally came from Baba.

Lara: I have seen the e-mail.

Momin573: suggestion from Baba to Tariq to marry you?

Momin573: Tariq must surely have approached Baba.

Lara: Tariq told him the whole situation, and Baba said the way to proceed was to marry me.

Lara: I have read it myself, Momin.

Lara: Tariq was under the impression that he could never marry a mureed.

Lara: Baba gave the solution.

Momin573: As alternative to living together?

Lara: We still don't live together.

Momin573: oh

Lara: Someday -- perhaps soon.

Lara: Someday you'll read all about it in his novel.

Momin573: I know Baba well.

Lara: Yes.

Momin573: He does not get involved in marriage making.

Lara: So he says.

Momin573: he provides solutions to problems that people present to him.

Momin573: He does not decide who gets married to whom. The people do.

Lara: Well, there's more than one way to skin a cat!

Lara: There was another solution

Lara: Just say no.

Lara: Tariq didn't ask Baba if he could marry me.

Lara: Baba was the one who suggested it.

Momin573: In your case it was you and Tariq who decided to marry each other.

Lara: Not true. We did it, yes.

Lara: But Baba suggested it.

Lara: I have seen all the e-mails back and forth.

Lara: Tariq went to Baba for advice on how to handle the situation and was surprised at the response.

Lara: I remember.

Momin573: You mean to say that you married each other because Baba suggested it and not because you two wanted it.

Lara: Plus, just recently he showed me all the e-mails.

Momin573: I have a hard time believing this.

Lara: I'm sure you do, Momin. Imagine how shocked I have been.

Momin573: You are both grown up mature people.

Lara: Yes.

Lara: We are responsible for our own choices.

Lara: I'm not blaming Baba.

Lara: Neither has Tariq.

Momin573: Both with experience of previous marriages.

Lara: But the fact is, the suggestion of marriage came from Baba.

Momin573: Why would he suggest that if it was not initiated by Tariq?

Lara: Tariq has saved every e-mail he's ever written to Baba and the replies.

Lara: Tariq told him that both of us had strong feelings for one another.

Lara: The first I knew that it was reciprocated was when Tariq asked me to marry him after receiving a reply from Baba.

Lara: I was shocked.

Momin573: It is clear that you and Tariq started it by expressing your feelings for each other.

Momin573: Why blame Baba?

Lara: Tariq had never told me how he felt about me.

Lara: I'm not blaming Baba. Tell him I'm not blaming him. I know he is listening to all of this, Momin.

Lara: Nothing to blame

Lara: Just the facts, sir.

Lara: He provided the way.

Lara: I have no regrets about anything.

Momin573: ok

Lara: I do not regret the past, nor do I wish to close the door on it.

Momin573: You seem to be implying something about Baba and I am reacting to that

Momin573: You are not being open and direct.

Lara: There is no implication here. Really, I'm just telling you the facts.

Lara: Yes, I am being open and direct with you.

Lara: What have I said that is blaming Baba?

Lara: We are adults.

Lara: So is Baba.

Lara: He makes his choices. So, do I.

Momin573: yes

Lara: Do you think I'm saying something disrespectful, Momin? I'm not.

Lara: It's the way it happened.

Lara: I don't blame him for anything I have done or Tariq has done.

Lara: I'm not unhappy about it either.

Lara: It's what happened.

Momin573: How do you and Tariq feel about Baba?

Lara: I'll let Tariq speak for himself.

Momin573: You said that I will read about it in that book.

Lara: Yes, you will read all about it.

Momin573: Is the foregoing content that you mentioned above a sample of what will be in the book?

Lara: How I feel about Baba is between Baba and me. No one else

Lara: He always knows.

Momin573: yes

Lara: Maybe someday Baba will communicate with me instead of through you, Momin.

Lara: He is acting like a coward.

Momin573: He is not communicating through me.

Lara: LOL

Lara: ROFL (Rolling on floor laughing)

Momin573: You are calling him a coward?

Lara: Yes.

Lara: He will be the first to admit it.

Lara: Ask him.

Momin573: You said that your feelings were private then

Lara: Yes.

Momin573: You start mentioning these things

Lara: It is open and apparent for anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear

Lara: But he is honest about that.

Momin573: Nobody is more courageous than he is

Lara: Oh, my.

Lara: Well, the word “coward” in reference to him is his word, not mine, Momin.

Momin573: We can agree to disagree.

Lara: Yes.

Momin573: I was giving you my perception.

Lara: Yes.

Lara: And I thank you for that, Momin.

Momin573: We have different perceptions

Momin573: Thank God for that

Momin573: It would be dull otherwise

Lara: I thank God for everything, Momin. Even the things that are painful

Momin573: yes

Momin573: Lara, as you requested I will not mention your marriage to anyone. I will speak with Baba, however, because his name has come up

Lara: I knew that you would.

Momin573: I will not mention this to my wife

Lara: Please don't forget the coward part.

Momin573: please explain

Lara: It's already been explained.

Lara: Just show him the chat.

Momin573: ok

Lara: I have nothing to hide.

Momin573: ok

Lara: Much to be ashamed of, but nothing to hide.

Momin573: ok Lara: Have a good dinner.

Momin573: Thank you

Momin573: Love and best wishes to you and Tariq

Lara: You too, Momin.

Lara: Bye for now.

§

Lara and I go through a debriefing process with respect to her chat with Momin. We come to the conclusion that as long as Momin is visiting with Baba, we are not likely to be able to break through all of his assumptions, biases, defenses, and denial concerning Baba. In addition, even if we were, by the Grace of Allah, able to penetrate to his heart in relation to these matters, he would simply return to Baba, tell him what was said, and Baba would proceed to re-frame everything in a blizzard of lies, duplicity, manipulation, half-truths, and misdirection.

In addition, both Lara and I strongly suspect that if we were to meet with Momin now – even at some neutral site -- Baba will likely send Khalil to accompany Momin on the trip because Baba knows that Lara has a soft spot in her heart for the young Khalil. She really enjoyed chatting with the youngster in the virtual community as well as when she was down visiting Baba in January.

Lara believes that seeing Khalil might flood her with a lot of associated events and render her vulnerable to many forces. She does not feel strong enough to deal with these right now.

I decide to write an e-mail to Momin.

§

Dear Momin Shah,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum

My intention had been to try to meet with you face-to-face this weekend, but certain information has come to my attention that strongly indicates that, at this time, such a meeting would not be productive. I am privy to a lot more sources of factual information than you -- or those presently around you -- might suppose. In fact, I am quite certain that the people with who I currently am in touch, and who are in contact with me, might be very surprising to you and to others.

Whatever I have said to you previously has been honest, sincere, and forthright. Moreover, the many details of the extremely serious matters to which I have, on occasion, alluded in a recent on-line chat -- but about which, for very good reasons, I have not, yet, shared with you -- would have been relayed with the same degree of honesty, sincerity, and forthrightness if we had met face-to-face. Unfortunately, the tenor of my outreach has not been reciprocated for there has been misinformation, evasion, lack of sincerity, and manipulation directed back toward both Lara and me during such recent interchanges.

I am very disappointed with you Momin because you have been induced, both knowingly and unknowingly, to be party to things that would not have been endorsed by either Dr. Irfan or the Prophet. As long as you are operating under the influence of the town where you are visiting, I believe your capacity for objectivity will be impaired considerably ... although the colored spectacles with which you have been fitted in order to view and interpret events might lead you to believe otherwise. I feel Sairah would be more open than you are at the present time and more able to recognize the truth when she hears it.

Love,

Tariq

§

Dear Tariq, (return e-mail)

I am sorry that we will not have an opportunity to meet. I was looking forward to it because it has been a while since I have seen you ... also you had indicated an urgency for our meeting.

I am very puzzled and confused by what you say. You are talking in generalities, and the details are missing. Nevertheless I respect your decision not to meet and will wait for an appropriate opportunity to learn more.

We have always been honest and forthright with each other. I am sure that we will be able to clear up any misunderstandings and resolve any problems. I look forward to the opportunity.

In the meantime, let me wish you and Lara all the best.
Momin.

§

March 15, 2003

I am at my apartment. I have just returned from a walk to a nearby store.

I pick up the phone receiver to see if there have been any calls while I have been away. There is the familiar dit-dit-dit-dit indicating that I should check my voice mail.

When I pick up my messages, I have one from Momin that says he is in Bamford, and he is on his way to see me. He says he got my brother's phone number from the Internet, and when he called my brother, Bruce told him how to get to my apartment.

I am stunned with this news for a number of reasons. Just yesterday, I had e-mailed Momin that I was not prepared to meet at this time. Momin acknowledged receiving this message, and he said that he respected my decision not to meet at the present time -- so, why was he here?

Secondly, I doubt very much Momin got my brother's number from the Internet. I'm pretty sure he got it from Sima or from Baba.

Thirdly, I am upset with my brother, Bruce, for disclosing my location to Momin. He knows I do not want anyone to know where I am.

Moreover, if Momin is such a friend of mine, then why doesn't Momin already know where I live? Why didn't Bruce understand that the story he was being given didn't actually hold up. Finally, why didn't Bruce phone me first and ask me if it was alright to give my address out to someone who was calling him about it? If the guy on the phone was so close to me, then, why didn't he have my phone number?

As I am thinking about these things, Lara comes in the door. She says that as she was walking up the path from where she parked her car, she saw Khalil drive past the house where my apartment is and start to slow down.

We rapidly discuss whether we should even answer the door. We both strongly suspect Baba is behind all of this, and he is trying to force the issue.

On the basis of many years of interacting with Momin, I know that if he had been permitted to act according to his way of doing things, Momin would have respected my decision to not meet at the present time – as he had said he would do in his last e-mail to me. Baba, however, in his inimitable way of pressuring people to do what Baba wants when he wants it, obviously has been working on Momin to take a long trip (about twenty hours round trip) in order to create difficulty for everyone involved.

In passing, I recall Lara’s comment about how Baba would make sure that Khalil was present in there were to be any meeting with Momin. Lara has a soft spot for the teenager, and Baba has sent Khalil to accompany Momin in order to put emotional pressure on Lara ... to upset her by bringing a variety of emotional crosscurrents into play.

I suggest to Lara that perhaps she should go into the bedroom and close the door. I’ll try to see what Momin is up to and, then, make a determination about whether, or not, having both of us present to talk with Momin seems to make sense.

While Lara is retreating to the bedroom, the doorbell rings. I answer and both Momin and Khalil are standing there.

I ask Momin if there was something about my e-mail he didn’t understand. He says, yes, he understood everything but thought he would come anyway ... so much for respecting my clearly stated wishes.

Momin tells me that he only can stay for an hour because he promised Khalil’s mother that he would not delay returning her son to him. I smell Baba trying to set the rules of engagement ... most likely he does not want Momin to be exposed for too long a period of time to the truth because this might have problematic ramifications for him.

Baba doesn’t want for there to be a lot of discussion. He wants to create a stress-filled, conflict laden, hurried atmosphere in which there will not be sufficient time to really explore the truth of things.

In a sense, Baba is using the session to inoculate Momin with Baba’s version of a live but substantially attenuated dose of the truth.

When Momin returns to Baba for purposes of debriefing, Baba will be able to further weaken whatever effect exposure to the truth Momin has had by reframing any interchange that might take place between Momin, Lara, and me.

Reluctantly, I let the two visitors into the apartment. I embrace both of them.

Momin doesn't bother to take off his shoes. This is a breach of basic adab among both Muslims and Sufis, but I say nothing.

Khalil says he is going to wait in the car. I shake hands with Khalil for whom I have always had a fondness. I do not harbor any negative feelings toward him because he is a kid caught up in the games of someone - namely, Baba - who I believe is either a narcissistic sociopath or an evil individual ... the former condition is an expression of a pathology over which an individual might have little, or no, control while in the latter case - that of evil -- someone does destructive, hurtful things both knowingly and freely.

When Khalil leaves, Lara comes out of the bedroom. We all sit down in the living room.

Momin wants to get to the issues that are at the heart of the mission on which Baba has sent him. I am not sure whether, or not, I wish to discuss the matter under such forced, rude circumstances.

Finally, Momin gets all emotional and says the only reason he is here is because of our long-standing friendship, and because I have expressed concern for his welfare, and because he is worried about me. I believe part of what he is telling me, but I know there is more to this than what he is overtly expressing because, on his own, the Momin I know would never have visited another person when he had not been invited to do so or with respect to which he had not been given permission by the host.

For Momin to simply barge in, unannounced, is out of keeping with his normal demeanor. This radical departure from what I know about him is a clear indication that Baba is pulling the strings of his surrogate ... it is a clear indication which of the sorts of undue influence to which Lara alluded during her chat with Momin in the virtual community just a few days ago.

I look over at Lara, trying to assess how she feels about the situation. I am conflicted about things, but the soft spot in my heart for Momin wins out ... as I am sure Baba knew it would. I begin to try to discuss the situation with Momin.

From the beginning, Momin is argumentative, accusatory, and not really interested in what I have to say. He acts as if he is in a court of law rather than in the living room of someone who once used to be his friend.

He keeps interrupting me. He tries to put words in my mouth. He misconstrues what I am saying. He is very impatient with me.

I try a number of times to explain to him what is going on. He resists everything that is being said and attacks at every opportunity.

Clearly, much of Momin's sense of identity and reality is tied up with the conversation because of the implications it has for the actual nature and identity of Baba. Momin seems to be like a person fighting for his life and treating every disagreeable possibility as a sword to be parried.

At a certain point in the 'discussion', he demands to see the e-mails that Lara told him about in her chat with him. He says he has a right to those e-mails, and he wants me to make him a computer CD of all these e-mails.

I already had considered showing Momin one or two of the e-mails and had been at the computer trying to find certain ones when Momin's aforementioned demand is proclaimed. I withdrew from the computer and tell him that he has a right to nothing and I am not going to make any CD for him with respect to such e-mails.

I suspect that Baba has put Momin up to demanding the e-mails. Baba wants the material so that he can reframe them in a light that will be favorable to him while casting Lara and myself in soiled shadows. No one will see those e-mails except in a way that Baba wishes – which means that he wants only a considerably redacted version of those e-mails to be made available to anyone who might inquire about them – including Momin.

How has the sweet, unassuming, polite Momin that I used to know become metamorphosed into the person who is sitting before me? Strike that from the record, I already know the answer ... Baba.

As we proceed along in the discussion, Momin has taken out an envelope and begins to write things down as I say them. I ask him why he is doing this.

He says his memory is not very good, and he wants to have something with which to refresh his memory later on. I reply by saying that we have held hundreds of conversations over the years, but this is the first time I have ever seen him take notes.

I know why he is taking notes, and it has to do with Baba. Whether Momin is taking down notes per Baba's instructions or because Momin knows, at some point, that he will have a debriefing session with Baba, I am not sure – but in either case, Baba is the reason the notes are being taken.

Momin says that if I want him to, he will turn over the notes to me at the end of the meeting. However, when the meeting finally ends, he does not follow through on this.

When both Lara and I have said whatever we have to say in relation to Baba, Momin admits that if what we are saying were true, Baba would, indeed, be an evil man. However, Momin says that he does not believe us.

Momin wants to know if I am planning on trying to take over the silsilah. I can't believe what I am hearing.

I inform Momin I have no intention of trying to take over the silsilah. I have no interest in such things. Again, I suspect that the idea is one that Baba has put into Momin's head as a way of trying to discredit anything that I might say about Baba

He wants to know if I am quitting the silsilah ... if I still consider myself a member of the silsilah. In addition, he inquires about whether I consider myself a shaykh or if I consider Baba to be my shaykh.

I tell Momin I am not quitting the silsilah – at least, not at the present time. The silsilah consists of more than Baba. I tell Momin that, in fact, it was Baba's shaykh who had instructed Baba to bring me into the silsilah and appoint me as a shaykh ... that it was Baba's shaykh who gave the masnad (the spiritual throne made of sheep skin) to Baba with the instruction that the sheep skin should be passed on to me.

Momin responds with: "I have met Baba's shaykh, and you have not." I don't know what such a reply has to do with anything, but I do remember Momin telling me about his visit to see Baba's shaykh, and the first thing Baba's shaykh said to him was: "What are you doing here?" Obviously, permission to visit with the shaykh had neither been sought, nor given. Then, as now, Momin was an interloper.

In relation to Momin's earlier question of whether I consider Baba to be my shaykh, I say that I do not consider Baba to be my shaykh. I indicate that if Baba ever was a legitimate shaykh, he has brought disgrace to himself and the Sufi path through, among other things, the manner in which he manipulated and exploited so many of his mureeds.

I indicate to Momin that although I might be willing to forgive Baba for what he has done with respect to me and others, I could never trust him again about anything. The shaykh/mureed relationship is rooted in trust. As long as there is no basis for trust between a shaykh and his or her mureed, then, there can be no constructive nisbath between the two ... and without such nisbath, then there can be no effective teaching relationship concerning spirituality.

Momin is worried about my not having a shaykh. He reminds me of a saying of Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) of which I am fond -- namely, 'the one who seeks to step onto the path but does not have a shaykh, such a person has Iblis for a shaykh.'

I tell him that I am not just stepping onto the path. I stepped onto the path a long time ago, and I have received a great deal of training in this regard through Professor Irfan.

He wants to know if he would like him to help out and put me in touch with the fellow in Canada - Munir -- who, following the passing away of Dr. Irfan, dreamed himself into becoming a shaykh. I politely decline.

I ask Momin if he remembers the night we both received the document that identifies us as a shaykh in our silsilah. He says yes.

I further ask if he remembers what Baba said -- namely, the spiritual authority that is being given will never be withdrawn, no matter what happens. Momin says yes he remembers that but, then, in a derisive tone he says: 'First, you denigrate Baba, and, now you are

trying to claim him as your authority for being a shaykh ... you can't have it both ways.

I try to explain to Momin that it is not Baba who makes these decisions. When such decisions are made ... if they are made, then, they come from nowhere but Medina and by the permission of Allah.

Baba has got nothing to do with it. To whatever extent the authority that is given is valid, Baba is merely the locust of manifestation through which permission to teach is given ... and, in addition, the permission was first made manifest through Baba's shaykh and not through Baba.

Momin appears to only be interested in arguing. Furthermore, he begins to belittle Lara ... the same Lara who just a few days ago in his chat with her had referred to her as a good and kind hearted individual ... someone who is making Tariq an even better person than he has been ... "this is a fact"

When this occurs, I tell Momin to leave. He is stunned by the abruptness with which I have terminated the conversation.

I tell Momin I appreciate all the things he has done for me over the years. Momin is very emotional ... almost crying. He says I have done more for him than he has ever done for me.

I say we should part with an embrace and let things go at that. We do this.

As Momin leaves, Lara notes he is crying. He seems to be caught between conflicting emotions.

After Momin goes, Lara says she feels it is obvious Baba does not care for Momin at all. Baba has forced Momin to take a twenty hour, or so, round trip, and pressured Momin to act in the way he did with an old friend.

She feels Momin is uncertain about what he is doing in relation to me (Tariq). The presence of tears are an indication of this as are the words that he says just before leaving, but she also knows the effect Baba can have on people, and, therefore, she understands the sort of pressure under which Momin must have been operating.

Lara and I talk about the last hour for much of the rest of the evening. Throughout the discussion, I feel a deep sense of sadness.

Seemingly, Momin has forgotten the first time that he went into a state of ecstasy when he was rolling around on the floor of our astana or meeting place, crying out. When Momin finally began to regain his senses, he came over to me – before speaking with anyone else – and he began telling me about some of what had been revealed to him during his altered state. He told me how his and my spirit went back to pre-eternity and that we had been destined to be close friends.

I think about all the things we did together ... the lectures ... the spiritual functions ... the different projects ... the camaraderie ... the hospitality of both him and his wife concerning me ... their many kindnesses to me over the years. All of that reflected the Sufi path, but what Baba has pressured Momin into doing is the antithesis of the Sufi path. I feel very badly for Momin, and I feel badly for me that I seem to have lost such a friend.

Later in the evening, Lara decides she is going to phone Baba ... just to see what he will say. She lets me listen in on the conversation.

She tells Baba she feels that what he did to Momin was very cruel. Baba dismisses her criticism with: “Momin will be all right.”

Throughout the conversation, Baba is trying to work Lara. He is probing for weaknesses to exploit. A number of times during the conversation, Baba discloses to Lara: “There is something Divine about you.”

Toward the end of the phone call, Baba leaves Lara with one further assignment. He says: “Your job is to help Tariq forgive me.”

§

March 16, 2003

I decide to write an e-mail to Baba letting him know exactly how I feel.

§

Dear Joseph (or whatever else you call yourself these days)

As-Salaam-u-‘alaykum!

Lara indicated to me that she phoned you yesterday following both the totally shocking intrusion into my home by Momin Shah as well as his presumptuous imposition upon my brother to usurp directions to my house in order to force himself upon me irrespective of how I felt about such a meeting. I very clearly informed Momin Shah via both his virtual community Inbox, as well as via e-mail (both of which he responded to) how I did not feel that talking about issues at this time would prove to be very productive since he really was not capable, at this time, of being objective and, therefore, the proposed meeting on Saturday in Boston or Worcester (for which no time or place had been fixed) should not take place. Nevertheless, despite my clear indications to him that I did not wish to speak with him at this time, my wishes and sentiments were completely disregarded. However, in the light of how you have conducted yourself of late, I shouldn't be surprised that those who are under your influence should exhibit such lack of consideration for the sensibilities of other people.

Among the things that Lara related to me that was a part of your phone conversation with her on Saturday evening concerned an e-mail that I sent to you around January 1, 2003, the day of her arrival at your house. I indicated to you that I felt Satanic influences might be working through her and, out of concern for you and the other people in your home I thought that you should be apprised of my worries for you all.

How silly of me to do this, for it turns out that the source of the Satanic influences that were operating on, and through, Lara -- and I was not wrong about this -- were none other than those that were emanating from you as you worked on Lara, without my knowledge -- via phone for more than 80 hours, as well as through the virtual community and e-mails -- in order to induce her into a state where she couldn't identify what was truthful, real or in her spiritual interests due to all of the manipulation, lies, thought-projection, innuendoes and techniques of control you were exercising in relation to her. Once again, by mentioning to Lara, the contents of my January 1st e-mail to you, you were seeking to interfere in a marriage (which we all know you NEVER do), but fortunately by the Grace of Allah, I am not like you, and I am honest with the people I care about, and I already had shown Lara the e-mail in question before you even began trying to spin your

re-framed story to her. Now, she fully appreciates there were Satanic influences operating on, and through her, before she went to visit with you, and while she was there, and when she returned home, and these were all being manifested at your behest.

You really are a piece of work. As Native Peoples say of those who speak out of both sides of their mouth and who are not sincere with the truth, you speak with a forked tongue.

In addition, during your recent phone conversation with her she said you suggested to her that she should help me to forgive you. Well, you seem to be operating under a misunderstanding, because I really don't need her help to do that.

The problem that exists is not about forgiveness since the manner in which you betrayed my friendship by, in a most ignoble way, deliberately interfering with my relationship concerning Lara, is entirely forgivable. And, by the Grace of God I do forgive you for that -- what God does with this situation in relation to you is another matter altogether.

No, the problem that exists is you have disgraced yourself and rendered yourself an untrustworthy human being through the many lies you have told to both Lara, me, and others. As such, you have destroyed your own spiritual office with respect to us.

According to shari'ah, when a person has lied, that individual's testimony is no longer acceptable in court proceedings because testimony from such an individual does not constitute reliable evidence. You have lied repeatedly to both Lara and myself during the last several months, and, consequently, you are not competent to give reliable witness to anything ... especially spiritual matters, in relation to either of us.

More importantly, on the Sufi path, when a murshid betrays his fiduciary responsibilities to a mureed, it is the murshid who has abandoned the silsilah, not the mureed who has abandoned the murshid. I have always been sincere and honest with you, but, unfortunately, you have not reciprocated and, as a result, you have committed a mistake that, although forgivable, is very likely incapable of being repaired because you have introduced a very insidious poison into the spiritual process that has contaminated the issue of nisbath.

The responsibility for removing this poison and repairing the damage is entirely yours. However, I have serious doubts as to whether you are up to this rather daunting task since this challenge will require the sort of courage and integrity that seem to be in rather short supply with you these days, but, whatever the truth of this might be, the burden of making complete amends to all parties involved in this matter rests entirely with you, not anyone else.

The relationship between a murshid and a mureed depends on trust (and I tell you this because your recent behavior suggests you don't seem to understand the principle involved here), since the life and soul of the mureed is being placed in the fiduciary care of the murshid. When the murshid, through his own actions, subverts the basis of trust, then, a spiritual relationship involving guidance becomes largely, if not wholly, untenable.

The lies you have told (you have said, again and again, you never lie), as well as the way you have used both Lara and myself (you have said, as well, again and again, you never use people), along with the fact you have failed to keep your spiritual duty to inform me of everything affecting the silsilah (and I can't think of anything that affects the silsilah more than a duplicitous shaykh who acts completely inappropriately with respect to a person who is both a female mureed as well as the wife of the shaykh's supposed khalifah) ... all of this has become the nafs-based acid that has shredded the fabric of trust that is necessary for spiritual instruction to be viable. How can a mureed receive reliable guidance through a locus of manifestation that is given to lying and cannot be believed from one moment to the next as to whether what is being said is true, sincere, and honest, or an expression of falsehood, deceit, or prevarication?

Fortunately, Islam does not begin or end with you, and barakah does begin and end with you, and the silsilah does not begin and end with you, and spiritual progress does not begin and end with you, and nisbath does not begin and end with you. Indeed, the goal is Allah as this is realized through the capacities of the essential Self ... not as realized through a treacherous locus of manifestation such as yourself.

The following is either true or it is false. You were the one who told me that: your shaykh was the one informed you about me, and your shaykh was the one who told you to take me into the silsilah, and

your shaykh was the one who made me a qutb, and your shaykh was the one who told you to deliver the masnad to me, and your shaykh, along with the other elders of the silsilah, were the ones who indicated that there was some sort of spiritual role for me to play at in the future.

If the foregoing is false, then nothing at all is lost because I never came to you in search of any of the foregoing items, and I am quite prepared to accept the fact there is nothing special about me. Quite frankly, I really don't care whether I am a shaykh or qutb or whether I have any spiritual role to play in things.

You seem to have projected on to me your own anxieties and appear to believe I have some fear of being an ordinary man -- and if you will recall that in your phone conversation with Lara you told her to pass on to me that now, I would have to be satisfied with being just an 'ordinary' man. However, I know that in my heart of hearts I do not harbor any sense of having a special place in the scheme of things -- though you have done your best to flatter me into supposing otherwise.

I am quite happy with being ordinary, and you don't know the first thing about it -- either with respect to me or yourself. After all, we both know that you can't stand to be away from the cooing of those who are constantly praising you -- whether this is on-line or in the real world.

You claim to live in order to serve people, but, quite frankly, I have never seen much evidence of anything but people catering to your whims and idiosyncrasies. Why don't you massage people's legs and back? Why don't you fix people Paan and place it in their mouth? Why don't you cook the meals or clean the house. If the Prophet could do housework, I see no reason why you should be exempt.

Furthermore, I have never known a shaykh who, unlike you, tried to draw the attention of others to a light shining from his forehead -- irrespective of whether, or not, a light was present ... which in your case I think it was not -- at this is what I believe on the basis of a reliable witness with whom I have spoken recently. Nor, have I ever encountered an authentic shaykh who was so willing to tolerate, if not encourage, constant praising from others as you do in your virtual community and at your home.

Dr. Irfan always put a stop to such things very quickly. You, on the other hand, can't seem to get enough of it.

If the statements five paragraphs back are true (the ones that you have related to me about what your shaykh allegedly said concerning me), then what is important is what your shaykh and the rest of the elders of the silsilah have in mind for me, and if the foregoing is true, then, all of this will be made manifest according to their direction, not yours. In the meantime, I will continue to do, as best I can, that which I have been doing for the last 30, or more, years -- do prayers, keep the fast, recite zikr, say fatiha, read the Qur'an, live frugally, work on purifying myself, and try to help whomever I can.

By the grace of Allah, these activities were pursued before you came along. Moreover, God willing, these things will continue to be done now that you have betrayed your spiritual responsibilities concerning the issue of serving as a reliable source of guidance.

Your failure to observe your spiritual fiduciary responsibilities with respect to both Lara and myself is your problem. But, you have created a mess that has spilled over into the lives of many people ... most of whom have no idea of your spiritual duplicity in these matters.

At this point in time, I have absolutely zero faith in you, and this state of affairs you have caused through your own weaknesses, poor judgment, and incessant manipulative, abusive, and controlling game playing. However, I have abundant faith in: Allah, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the great saints of the Sufi path in general, and such spiritual luminaries as Professor Irfan, in particular.

I am fully confident that if I am sincere with the God, then God will be sincere with me, and this has been proven to me over and over again. After all, God has shown me your true colors, and I am thankful to Allah for this.

Perhaps, this is why you have selected the name Joseph. You are a person of many different colors, but, unfortunately, none of these are at all reflective of the true nature of the coat worn by Prophet Joseph (peace be upon him). You have inverted everything for which that man of God stood.

Despite the great obstacles that you and others have tried to throw in my way, nevertheless, by the Grace of Allah, suluk (spiritual

journeying) -- however slow -- continues, and the 'race' to Self-realization does not always go to the swiftest. Conduct such as yours does not destroy my faith but, rather, just becomes another challenge to be resolved that, in time God willing, helps strengthen and deepen my spiritual condition.

Moreover, just as the Ocean can absorb contaminated water without the purity of that Ocean being affected adversely, then so too, can the deep, rich waters of spirituality withstand the contaminants that your behaviors and intentions have spewed into things without the purity of spirituality being adversely affected. You might assume -- and others might assume -- that you know and understand what your role in all of this is, but the ignorance of your actions concerning, among others, Lara and myself, suggests otherwise.

Quite possibly, your recent modes of conduct were well-known to your shaykh and to the other elders of the Silsilah. Out of their own God-given wisdom and compassion, they might have wished for you to play a role in things despite what they knew of your future. In fact, they might have made the whole process tamper-proof so that although they knew you would fail in the way you have, nonetheless, God's purpose still would be served in spite of you ... and not because of you.

You have spiritually betrayed me, and you have spiritually betrayed Lara, and you have spiritually betrayed your own shaykh -- since, I do not, for a second, believe your shaykh or the elders of the silsilah think your conduct of: seduction, interference with other people's marriage, lying, manipulation, or spiritual duplicity is acceptable, honorable, or anything but reprehensible.

You are always very judgmental about telling people how you are not 'THAT' kind of Muslim. Well, I have no wish to be your kind of Sufi if that means feeling comfortable with betraying friends, lying to people, using them, manipulating them, controlling them, and seeking to make idol-worshippers of them. Your conduct during -- at the very least -- the last several months symbolizes everything that progressively, in the worst possible way, has helped tasawwuf to become a name without a reality over the years, and, as such, I am sure Iblis wishes to extend to you a big 'thank you' for your considerable contributions in this regard.

Lara had a dream about you the other night, and without disclosing the entire nature of the dream, the last part of the dream is very appropriate. This facet of the dream revolved around a statement that summed up the dream -- more specifically, the statement said: "such a big name should never have been given to such a small child".

I don't feel anger toward you Baba. I feel pity for you.

I don't hate you, but I do realize you have considerable rage within you that you hide behind a facade of loving gentleness. You claim that you never get angry, and, yet, both Lara and I, on separate occasions, have seen and/or heard you fly into childish temper tantrums.

Moreover, you either have no conscience about what you do in relation to people such as Lara and me, or you must have learned how to live with a considerable degree of self-loathing. Whatever the case might be, you are emotionally and spiritually disturbed, and, therefore, you ought to seek help for your very real problems ... spiritual, emotional, developmental, and psychological.

In addition, you were a sexual predator with respect to Lara. We -- that is, she and I -- entrusted you with information concerning her history and her vulnerabilities. Unfortunately, rather than use such information to help Lara, you exploited this information and used it to take advantage of a woman who was in no psychological or emotional condition -- especially so soon after extricating herself, by the Grace of God, from an abusive, controlling relationship with Ron -- to resist the kind of psychological and occult techniques you applied against her.

I was witness to the altered state of consciousness that you had induced in her by the end of December 2002 through your techniques of mind-control and suggestibility. I just didn't know, at the time, you were behind it all.

I saw her in exactly the same kind of state many times in relation to Ron. Furthermore, I have seen evidence of the same state of ultra-compliance and zombie-like condition in others upon whom you have operated.

I loved you and, until now, trusted you, but, by the Grace of God, I was never vulnerable to your techniques in the way others -- including Momin Shah -- apparently have been. Perhaps, this is the reason why you gradually have been pushing me aside over the years, as well as

why you have chosen to be so cruel and hateful toward me in relation to the manner in which you have sought to interfere and undermine my relationship with Lara.

There are reasons why you have not gotten married all of these years or why the few times you did get married, the relationship fell apart so quickly. There is also a reason why the Prophet said marriage is half of Deen. In order to be married, one has to be capable of emotional intimacy and honesty with another human being, and you seem to be unable to do any of this, and this inability spills over into how you treat your mureeds.

I wonder to myself: how could someone who, allegedly, was given so much, could foul up so royally? I am embarrassed for you, and, perhaps, it is good that someone should be embarrassed for you since you don't seem to have enough on the ball to be embarrassed for yourself.

You have told us we are all the authors of our own stories. Why anyone would write a story that contains such ignoble, duplicitous, insincere, dishonest, unloving, uncompassionate, hurtful behavior as a central part of one's narrative at such a late stage in one's life in the way you have done with respect to your recent conduct involving, among others, Lara and me is a real puzzle.

Momin Shah asked me if I was leaving the silsilah. My response was: why would I do that when I haven't done anything that would indicate such a course of action is the proper thing to do?

Momin Shah also asked me that: given that I have no intention of leaving the silsilah, and given that I felt you, through your own actions, had recused yourself as being a worthwhile spiritual guide for both Lara and myself, then Momin wanted to know whether this meant I intended to try to take over the silsilah? I thought this to be a very dumb question since the silsilah - to the extent that it is an authentic silsilah is already in very capable hands quite independently of you, Momin Shah, or me.

I know you don't know what you are doing, for if you did, you wouldn't have done the things that you have in relation to, among others, Lara and me ... things that are entirely antithetical to the fiduciary responsibility of a murshid toward his mureeds. I know

Momin Shah doesn't know what he is doing because his current allegiance is to idolatry concerning you and not to the truth.

I might be ignorant about most things, but this I know: by the Grace of Allah, I know how not to betray a friendship; I know how to be sincere and honest with people; I know how to love someone and not abuse them; I know how to let those who really do know (and, under the present circumstances, you are not among such individuals) look after the important things in life and not worry about petty people who try to hurt others for their own sense of self-aggrandizement; and, finally, I know that, sooner or later, justice will be done, truth will win out, and God's purpose will be served despite the conduct of those who show a total lack of love and consideration for those they claim to love and respect.

You are the loser in all of this -- not Lara and not me. We both loved you and were willing to be your friend as a human being, quite independently of your being a so-called shaykh, and we were willing to do almost anything for you until you proved yourself to be a spiritual chameleon who, according to various self-serving needs of the moment, changed your story to serve an agenda that did not do justice to the spiritual needs and interests of those with whom you allegedly had been entrusted by God.

You really are a fool. You know the price of everything, and the value of nothing ... especially friendship, trust or love.

I continue to have great concern with respect to the spiritual, psychological, and emotional well-being of those who love, trust and serve you. I believe all of these people are at great risk given the way you continue to abuse whatever worldly kashf you might have acquired along the way and use these powers to unduly influence people -- i.e., you are a narcissistic control freak -- to do your bidding even when this is contrary to the psychological, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of such people.

You say you are everyone's well-wisher, but the evidence indicates otherwise. You say you love everyone, but I question your capacity to love anyone ... even yourself.

Both Lara and I forgive you. Both Lara and I love you. But, neither of us is ever likely to trust you again, and you have no one to blame for this state of affairs except yourself ... WTG (way to go) Baba.

Tariq

§

I show the letter to Lara. She thinks it is very good, but I can tell she has some reservations.

I try to probe what is going on. She feels it is too soon to send the e-mail. She feels I should put it away for awhile and see what develops.

She seems to feel there is too much anger being vented in the e-mail. She is afraid Baba will just use the e-mail to convince other people how Tariq is just an angry individual and, as such, will play into Baba's way of re-framing past events.

I'm not sure I understand what she is getting at. There is such a thing as righteous anger, and, besides, I feel that whatever other kinds of anger might be present in the letter, such remnants are relatively tame. In addition, there are many other emotions present in the letter – emotions that I feel are quite appropriate to the situation.

I feel Lara might be trying to protect Baba somehow, just as she sought to protect her uncle and Ron, despite what they did in relation to her. However, there also be a valid point to what Lara is saying, so I decide to put off sending Baba the material.

§

March 21, 2003

I receive notice in the mail that I have been turned down for the job as Pine Lodge. The letter contains the usual spiel about how there have been lots of quality candidates who have applied for the position, and the human resource officer believes the center's needs will be

better met, at this time, by going with another applicant. Thank you for your interest in Pine Lodge.

Going through the want ads of the local paper, I come across a job with an agency that is focused on issues concerning the elderly. Among the programs is one indicating that as people get older finding employment becomes increasingly more difficult, and they have a variety of packages intended to assist individuals who find themselves in such circumstances.

They provide a number of clerical positions -- paying minimum wage -- that are intended for older people experiencing problems securing employment. Some of these jobs last a year, or more, and they often lead to other full-time positions within the agency.

I call the number listed in the advertisement. When the woman answers, I outline my background, including the fact I have a doctorate but, nonetheless, that I am experiencing considerable difficulty obtaining employment.

I tell her I am quite prepared to do clerical work. I have done it before, but I am really just looking for a job ... something that will help get me going economically.

The woman describes some of the programs that are still available. She encourages me to come in and fill out an application.

I do this during a late-winter snowstorm. Fortunately, the agency is within walking distance – although it is hardly just down the street - - from my apartment.

§

April 3, 2003

I try to contact Sima by e-mail on a number of occasions. Since I do not get back any e-mail demon-mailers in relation to these attempts, I am fairly certain that Sima is getting my e-mails. However, there is no response from her.

The e-mails I send do not contain much concrete information. Mostly, I am asking for an opportunity to speak with her.

After several more tries at e-mails with nothing to show for it, I decide to call Sima's office. I use the number that is the direct line to her private office -- not the general line for the business.

I call three or four times, at different junctures of the day, on different days of the week. On each occasion I am informed by someone that Sima is not in the office and would I care to leave a message?

If I leave a message, there is a chance Sima will discuss the whole situation with Baba and, as a result, the call will never be returned. Consequently, on each occasion I decline the invitation.

Possibly, Sima is in the office during such times, sees that the call is coming in from Vermont, and just doesn't want to talk with me. On the other hand, I also know that Sima often is out of the office while she is running different business-related errands for her uncle, who is her boss.

When my direct efforts with Sima fail, I think about an indirect possibility. Shaykh Shams and his wife, Ruth, are, I believe, still friends with Sima. I look for the business card that Shaykh Shams once gave me that has the number for his organization on it, as well as the website url that is associated with that group. After ten or fifteen minutes of searching, I locate the card.

I enter the url into the appropriate space on my web browser and hit 'Enter'. The web site comes up and following a brief tour of the site, I find what I am looking for -- an e-mail address and several numbers for Shaykh Shams and his wife.

First, I send an e-mail. I write about a few shared experiences from the past, and, then, indicate there are some very important issues that I wish to explore with Shaykh Shams. By mid-evening, there is no response, but I also remember Shaykh Shams telling me that he hardly ever uses the Internet or checks for e-mail.

So, I go to plan B. The first phone number on my list that I call draws a blank. Apparently, no one is at home.

I try the second number, and after, four or five rings, Ruth answers. The first few minutes are spent reminiscing about old times.

Eventually, I get around to the reason for my call. Without going into a lot of detail, I tell Ruth that I am concerned for Sima and her two

children. I feel they might be in some danger because the so-called spiritual teacher they are with is, among other things, a sexual predator.

After some discussion back and forth, Ruth asks, in sort of a frustrated tone: “What do you expect us to do?” I reply with: “Be a friend. Make contact with Sima and try to assess how she is. Try to determine if she is depressed or anxious or uptight or preoccupied, and, if this should be the case, then, see if there is anything you can do to help her and her family.”

Ruth indicates there is a social function of some kind coming up in the near future that both she and Sima will be attending. She says that at that time she will try to get a sense as to whether, or not, there is anything troubling Sima.

Ruth adds that Sima tends to confide in her. So, Ruth feels if anything is wrong, then, Sima will tell her.

Toward the end of the conversation, Ruth asks me if I would like to speak with her husband at some point. She says he is away on a speaking engagement right now ... ever since 9/11 things have been very hectic for each of them, and they both have been doing a lot of outreach into the non-Muslim community.

She alludes to someone that called from Vermont just the other day and who was looking for a speaker from the Muslim community. She asks me if I am willing to speak if such opportunities arise in the future.

I tell her I am open to such possibilities. After a few more moments of chitchat, the conversation ends.

§

April 13, 2003

Baba has been using his virtual community to recruit people into his sphere of influence without such people realizing they are being so recruited. He has established the Inner Builders web site, as well as the virtual community, for such purposes.

Lara has told me that Baba has instructed people within his circle about how he does not want the words 'Sufi', 'Muslim', or 'Islam' to appear in any of the chats or Message Boards that are within his virtual communities. In fact, Baba doesn't want any postings to those groups that are likely to raise red flags of concern in the minds and hearts of visitors to his virtual community ... this is especially true with respect to the public message board in his virtual community.

For several months prior to Lara's revelations of the last couple of weeks) Baba has continued to encourage me not to join his new, virtual neighborhood He tells me he is encountering a great deal of resistance from the leader of the Hood where Baba initially took up virtual residence within the on-line community.

Apparently, there are a lot of hard feelings because a certain leader of one of the virtual neighborhoods believes that Baba is stealing quite a few residents from her Hood. She believes Baba is inducing people to leave her Hood and join his.

At the same time as this fighting, complaining and bickering is taking place with respect to the theft of residents, Baba tells me that he is not trying to induce anyone to join his new virtual neighborhood and of which he is, now, the Neighborhood Leader. Nevertheless, what can Baba do if people want to be with him rather than the other Hood Leader?

I know that the suspicions of Baba's former Hood leader are well-founded. I have seen and heard some of the chatter from Baba's side of things on this while all the difficulties have been taking place, and I know that he is having great fun in his game of trying to out-manuever the person who is complaining about Baba's tactics of undue influence with respect to residents in other virtual neighborhoods within the website.

This issue of stealing residents from other virtual neighborhoods within the large virtual city is not a trivial matter. There are hundreds of people occupying different Hoods in the virtual city, and Baba is trying to extend his influence within the larger city as much as he can. This is not a matter of a small group of individuals but, rather, hundreds of people might be affected by what Baba is trying to do within the virtual city.

§

Although everyone else in the silsilah – at least anyone in North America that possesses an Internet connection – has moved into the new neighborhood that Baba has created (and for which he has paid a great deal of money so that it could be brought into existence), Baba asks me to stay in the old Hood. He maintains my leaving will just cause further problems with the other Hood leader, and he is requesting that I help keep the peace by staying behind.

Following the nights of revelation that came from Lara, I begin to realize how, despite his words to the contrary, that Baba never really wanted me to be an intimate part of things in his virtual community and, in fact, for several months, now, he just has been jerking me around with phony excuses and reasons to hinder my move into his virtual community. In the light of what Lara has been telling me, I decide to move into his virtual colony without his permission – I am concerned with what is transpiring in Baba’s Hood, in particular, within the larger virtual colony, and I also am concerned about the residents in his Hood who are unsuspecting candidates for Baba’s brand of undue influence ... however, if either Lara or I are too direct in what we say within that virtual community, our postings are likely to be censored.

Behind the scenes, Baba can say whatever he likes about Lara and me. However, on the public message board, he must be careful about what he says ... among other things he has to be worried about the possibility that the security forces for the overall website might begin to take an interest in what might be going on within Baba’s virtual community – especially in light of the complaints by some of the other Hoods about Baba’s poaching activities.

The truth of the matter is that Baba is too much of a coward to discuss anything with Lara and myself in a straightforward fashion. Since Lara’s revelations have begun to flow and since the brief e-mail correspondence between: ‘Joseph/Baba’ and Lara have taken place, Baba’s presence within his virtual communities has been spotty ... to

the point of almost complete absence. As usual, Baba gets other people to serve as his surrogates.

§

When I join the virtual neighborhood, Lara posts a welcome message on the Hood’s main message board. This is standard operating procedure for any new member to the virtual community.

Someone promptly deletes the message, This ‘someone’ has executive programming privileges within the Hood, and, therefore, has both the authority and the security clearance necessary to, among other things, delete postings from the message board.

Lara brings this issue of censorship to the attention of various people within the neighborhood executive, including Momin. She is told the disappearance of her posting is just a technical glitch and nothing personal is meant.

Subsequent events tend to prove otherwise. Recently, Sand-Bandito (a virtual nickname) -- the (ND) Neighborhood Deputy who is in charge of ‘security’ for the neighborhood -- censors another posting of Lara’s that is Lara’s response to a quote posted by another member of the virtual community. Lara’s censored posting is as follows:

“Misleading people is always wrong, no matter who does it. When there are consequences to pay for telling the truth, usually it is due to the cult-like behavior of the listeners who will only believe what their leader tell them is okay to believe. There is another form of bullying where I come from, bullying by the leader and stupidity on part of the lemmings who believe only what their leader tells them. If the truth is scary, then it is time to change one’s behavior, not reinvent history. Take care.”

Lara’s foregoing posting is generic and does not mention to which leader she is referring, but many of the people within the virtual community are edgy with respect to what is going on due to various kinds of stories that Baba is telling them about Lara and me. Lara’s

comments leads to a flurry of post-riposte message-exchanges ... mostly involving Lara and Sand-Bandito, but, at times, both I, as well as other individuals, wade into the fray. With the exception of Lara and me, almost all of the contributors are under Baba's influence.

At some point during the on-going discussion, Lara indicates that Sand-Bandito had informed her during a private chat how Baba had told him (that is, Sand-Bandito), as well as other people within the silsilah, not to bother Tariq. Baba says that Tariq is in a state of *jazb* -- or an ecstatic condition of Divine attraction -- and that my state should not be disturbed.

For many years I have felt, for whatever reason, that I was being marginalized within the silsilah. However, whenever I would ask Baba about my sense of things in this respect, he would always re-frame events in another way.

Sand-Bandito, quite unintentionally, has provided some concrete evidence concerning my persistent – yet, vague -- feeling that I was being marginalized within the silsilah and, consequently, my disquieting sense of things in this regard are not necessarily figments of my imagination. For reasons that – at the time -- I didn't really understand, Baba had been manipulating things in order to separate me from the rest of the silsilah, and vice versa ... thereby keeping us out of contact with one another – even as he denied that this was going on.

During the same, aforementioned chat, Sand-Bandito indicated to Lara that all the things that had been occurring in my life during the last five or six months were, according to what Baba had told him, merely tests of one kind or another. According to Sand-Bandito, such tests are a part of the life of every shaykh.

Lara replied to Sand-Bandito's foregoing words with: "And is Baba's climbing into bed with the wife of his khalifah and alleged best friend also part of this test?" Lara says there was a delay in Sand-Bandito's response to her remarks, and Lara got the distinct impression that the delay might have been an indication that she had given Sand-Bandito some food for thought that got stuck in his mental equivalent of a throat ... since, normally speaking, Sand-Bandito is as speedy as a Tasmanian Devil when it comes to writing things quickly in chats and on message boards.

Eventually, Sand-Bandito says something to the effect that if the act was consensual, then something or other is the case. Shortly, thereafter, Sand-Bandito withdrew from the private chat.

§

In any event, the foregoing set of exchanges is, in turn, replaced by another set of communications. This further message board sequence is given below, and clearly, the tenor of the responses that Lara and I are getting back from some of the residents of the Hood is colored in the hues through which Baba has framed for each of those individuals with respect to how Lara and I are not well-wishers of Baba's and that Lara and Tariq should be taken to task for whatever they might say.

Baba, of course, doesn't explain to anyone exactly what the supposed crimes are that Lara and I have committed. We are just described as people who are trying to hurt Baba and who are not his well-wishers ... and we know this because both Lara and I have chatted with some of the people to whom such allegations against us two have made.

However, what is truly remarkable is that just a few short months ago – and I know the following information because I was a silent witness to it all in the guise of Philokalia and Stargate -- Lara was the toast of Baba's virtual worlds. People chatted with her and praised her postings and clearly indicated that they enjoyed her company within the virtual company. Lara used to spend a lot of time on-line interacting with, and getting on well with, all of the people who are now about to silence her.

The residents of Baba's virtual colony – which consists of a number of different Hoods – all knew that Lara was a favorite of Baba's. In fact, Sand-Bandito once said to Lara: "If Baba loves you, I worship you." This is the same Sand-Bandito who recently deleted several postings by Lara, including one that merely extended a welcome to me as a new resident of the virtual colony owned by Baba.

The reason for Lara's 'fall from grace' is that she done something that is extremely upsetting to Baba. More specifically, she told me the truth about what took place in relation to Baba not only during her

January visit but all through December as well ... and Lara has shown me the bills that list the eighty hours of calls both to and from Baba's residence (and, I recognize his phone number) during the month of December.

As a result, Baba now wishes to ostracize both Lara and myself. We are the viral agents who must be flushed from the system ... because the lethal malady from which we each suffer - namely, an inclination to try to tell the truth - might be contagious ... something that Baba finds to be deeply disturbing and a direct threat to possibly unmasking his spiritual charade.

As usual, Baba doesn't do the dirty work himself. He gets other people to do his bidding.

§

Date: Sat, Apr 12th, 2003. 11:36:54 pm.

From: Lara

Subject: Clarification

After reading Sienta's message about being "sad," I decided that, although I did not intend to upset anyone, clearly some people are having a difficult time with my postings. When I sent the original post, I had no idea several people would find it upsetting. Recently I left a group that had some cult-like qualities such as people being bullied, exploited, manipulated, and lied to. I found the situation very disturbing, but, by the Grace of God, I was able to see the truth about this group.

§

Date: Sat, Apr 12th, 2003. 11:41:16 pm.

From: Lara

Subject: Re: Clarification

Therefore, to answer Omega's question, I did have some experience with a cult-like group, and I wouldn't want my friends in

this Hood to ever be in a similar set of circumstances. That is one of the reasons I responded to Smiley's quote the way I did. The manner in which this was handled by the security staff here worked out perfectly because now even more attention will be given to exactly the part I wanted emphasized. Thank you, Sand-Bandito. As always, I've enjoyed my time here tonight and hope others will benefit from our exchange of ideas.

God Bless freedom of speech.

§

Date: Sat, Apr 12th, 2003. 11:56:53 pm.

From: Sand-Bandito

Subject: Re: Clarification

If you are content in your new block and Hood, and you had a terrible time in this Hood, then you shouldn't even look back here, let alone keep posting messages here. I don't know what you want? Satisfaction can never be attained by expecting others to vindicate you. This is acquired within by knowing your conscience is clear. Nuff said.

§

Date: Sun, Apr 13th, 2003. 12:06:05 am.

From: Lara

Subject: Re: Clarification

Oh, Sand-Bandito, so sorry you got the wrong impression. I have not had a bad time here in this neighborhood. Whatever would give you such an idea? It's been a blast. I moved from this Hood to another one for purely personal reasons, not because of any "sufferings" here. As my favorite poet Hafiz has written, "Have fun, my dear. My dear, have fun." I take his advice to heart and have greatly benefitted from his wise counsel. Take care for now.

Also, Sand-Bandito, I am not publicizing my personal bad experience to the world. I consider everything that takes place in my

life a learning experience, just another interesting opportunity for growth, and whenever life deals me lemons, I always enjoy making lemonade. I have no idea what the head of security for this Hood has to do with any of this. Perhaps in the frenzy of your postings, you have misunderstood what I've said. Take care. Lara :)

§

Date: Sat, Apr 12th, 2003. 11:56:08 pm.

From: Sand-Bandito

Subject: Re: Clarification

Well, I don't know really what to make of it. If people have had bad personal experiences in life, why are they announcing it to the whole world - especially within this virtual community -- about their personal problems? If someone has been wronged, they should contact the website security or seek other means to get vindicated for their "losses" or "sufferings"

§

Date: Sun, Apr 13th, 2003. 12:21:08 am.

From: Sienta

Subject: Re: Clarification

so what are you complaining about? if you want to warn people of some "dangers", secretly inbox them. it will have better effect on them rather than keep dragging this further.

Sienta

§

Date: Sun, Apr 13th, 2003. 12:30:07 am.

From: Lara

Subject: Re: Clarification

“... Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it.” -- Pres. Abraham Lincoln

I'm not complaining, Sienta. I took the quote Smiley posted to heart, and, "to the end" I dare to do my duty as I understand it. Thanks for a pleasant, thought-provoking evening.

§

Date: Sun, Apr 13th, 2003. 01:04:38 am.

From: Philokalia (Tariq)

Subject: Re: Clarification

Sienta, Lara doesn't appear – at least to me -- to be complaining. Like all people who post to this virtual message board, she is trying to share her experience and understanding with others. Each and every day, people -- whether, or not, they are residents of this Hood -- stop by to post various quotes, poems, anecdotes, thoughts, values, suggestions, recommendations, and so on. All of this is done in the hope that others -- within this public forum -- will benefit from such postings and will have ideas to discuss and upon which to reflect through this sort of free-flowing dialogue.

§

Date: Sun, Apr 13th, 2003. 01:12:55 am.

From: Philokalia

Subject: Re: Clarification

I want to thank you, Lara, for sharing your thoughts about the issue of cults. I, too, have some friends who have become trapped in such groups, and it is very sad to see the effects that spiritual abuse

has had on them as individuals. Many of these people go about in a zombie-like state with little ability to distinguish reality and falsehood. They often profess to be very happy, but I observe little but unhappiness in their lives. In addition, what is called "moral behavior" often is nothing but spiritual abuse hiding within words such as 'love', 'friendship', 'compassion', 'empathy', and so on. Thanks, again.

§

Date: Sun, Apr 13th, 2003. 01:30:01 am.

From: Sienta

Subject: Re: Clarification

although you have moved somewhere else, you really haven't moved from here in your mind because you seem to be more interested in what goes on here than where you have moved to. Hardly any messages are posted there from you two on those MBs in your new residence (people can go check themselves).

§

Date: Sun, Apr 13th, 2003. 01:31:35 am.

From: Sienta

Subject: Re: Clarification

There must be some serious unresolved or lingering matters still there for you guys to keep coming back and flood our MB with so many messages.

No matter how many posts you will make, it will never be enough to satisfy you unless you come to terms with things within yourselves. We, in this virtual Hood, pray for your peace and happiness. Good luck

Sienta

§

Date: Sun, Apr 13th, 2003. 01:59:04 am.

From: Philokalia

Subject: Re: Clarification

Actually, Sienta, I have posted on the MB both within my Block and in my Hood, as well on the individual MB of fellow residents. In addition, I travel to different parts of this website - of which this Hood is but one small part -- in order to pursue a variety of issues as they might arise.

There are a number of people from outside this neighborhood who post to the MB here, and, on occasion -- very few -- I am among these individuals. I find it rather amusing that people should go running around trying to see what MB I post on. The residents of the greater virtual community are free to post wherever they like, and I find it rather odd that you, or anyone, should take exception with this.

§

Date: Sun, Apr 13th, 2003. 02:08:13 am.

From: Philokalia

Subject: Re: Clarification

As far as the alleged issue of "flooding" your MB is concerned, if your ND (Neighborhood Director) had not taken it upon himself to censor and delete someone's contributions to the MB, none of this interchange would have been necessary. It was the totally inhospitable treatment of your ND that created the present sequence of postings through his being unable and unwilling to let people share simple ideas with others and, in the process, he kept adding insult to injury with his repeated postings that tried to justify his heavy-handed and unwarranted censorship. Such behavior is, in my opinion, entirely against the spirit of this virtual website.

§

Date: Sun, Apr 13th, 2003. 02:16:40 am.

From: Sienta

Subject: Re: Clarification

the messages he deleted, as clearly depicted by the one included in the attached link in another post, deserved to be deleted. Certain messages that are not appropriate must be deleted, and I am glad he deleted it.

§

Date: Sun, Apr 13th, 2003. 02:18:05 am.

From: Sienta

Subject: Re: Clarification

If you question San's judgment, then complain to higher authorities. He is the ND and he is responsible for making such decisions. Those who have entrusted him with this duty can correct him if they deem this to be necessary.

If you have issues with his decisions, go report to Colony Staff. That should be your best course of action rather than to flood this MB with your plea for help from the audience in this virtual Hood.

Sienta

§

Date: Sun, Apr 13th, 2003. 08:20:27 am.

From: stameena

Subject: Re: Clarification

oh my why do you need to give clarification Lara when once you have used words that are surely not decent then of course they will hurt and having fun in ridiculing others was not what Hafiz wanted to say, and if you have any point to make, then this Hood message board is not that place ... by the grace of God , we have been able to see the real truth of you, and whatever San did it was his duty to do so, why

are u being so offensive (u don't need to answer this, just give the answer to urself)...any ways, what the truth is we all have seen

stameena

§

Date: Sun, Apr 13th, 2003. 09:26:25 am.

From: Lara

Subject: Re: Clarification

Stameena, I understand why you feel this way, and I would never want to censor you from stating your beliefs. Everyone is entitled to see the situation in the way they choose. Best wishes, Lara

§

Date: Sun, Apr 13th, 2003. 03:21:42 am.

From: Sienta

Subject: Re: Clarification

To go about doing anything and saying anything is not "freedom of speech". Individuals who wish for good, should do good in their acts. Like not using the Hood MB for your complaints and instead going to the concerned authority just as our ND suggested. It would have been a better practice of "freedom of speech".

Sienta

§

April 23, 2003

There are many word battles that are taking place on the public message board of Baba's Hood ... battles that are along the lines of the previous excerpts from the message board logs. Baba appears to be orchestrating a small group of people to try to force Lara and myself to

stop posting on the message board ... even though many of our posts are nothing more than poems or quotable quotes of different individuals concerning issues involving spirituality, love, knowledge, truth, courage, and so on.

Lara is determined to stick things out. She will not stop posting to the message board in Baba's Hood until she is ready to do so and not because other people are trying to force her out.

So, Lara and I, each in our way, continue to make contributions to the public message board in Baba's Hood. Most of these posts are quite universal in their content, or our postings come in the form of replies to interesting quotations submitted by other message board participants. The vast majority of the people who are posting to the message board do not respond to the postings that Lara and I make, but we are quite sure that people are reading what we post because various individuals are trying to counter whatever we might be making comments that concern the issues within our posts but without referring to, or responding to, such posts directly.

In February and March, Baba was a frequent contributor to the message board. Now, however, Baba is nowhere to be found not at his virtual residence in his own virtual Hood, not at the public message board for that Hood, and not at his other virtual community -- namely, the 'Inner Builders' website. This is a pattern that has been going on for nearly a month now.

Another example of the sort of exchanges that are taking place on the public message board is the following excerpt from the log for the message board:

§

Date: Sun, Apr 20th, 2003. 08:05:12 am.

From: waterwings

Subject: @};-

Whoever realizes the reality of Death and Life after Death, redirects his/her life to a sin-free path. And what is sin and what is not,

it is very clearly etched in the BOOK of code of conduct. Whoever takes God's forgiving nature for granted, is heading for self-destruction.

§

Date: Sun, Apr 20th, 2003. 8:54:08 pm.

From: Morgan

Subject: Re: @};-

Hi Water :)

I enjoyed your post :)

When you refer to the BOOK of code of conduct, do you refer to the Bible? Thanks for your post :)

§

Date: Sun, Apr 20th, 2003. 9:05:51 pm.

From: Sand-Bandito

Subject: Re: @};-

Yes Morgan, I think she means the bible as she is very strong and dedicated in her faith. However, any book/sacred scriptures of any religion/faith contains the code of conduct that is the best for humanity and offers beautiful guidance and information for people to benefit from.

§

Date: Sun, Apr 20th, 2003. 9:08:32 pm.

From: Sand-Bandito

Subject: Re: *sigh*

Yes Morgan, I agree. This virtual community and its residents welcome and respect everyone's views and opinions and none is undermined. If anyone experiences such things, please let me know.

§

Date: Mon, Apr 21st, 2003. 10:14:41 am.

From: Lara

Subject: Re: *sigh*

LOL @ Sand-Bandito.

§

Date: Tue, Apr 22nd, 2003. 2:10:35 pm.

From: waterwings

Subject: Dear Morgan

Sorry Morgan, i missed your question. No i wasn't referring to the Bible. i was referring to the Book of my faith. I respect Bible equally, and believe it gives the same code of conduct as my Book. God wants me to respect Torah, Bible and Qur'an, and since i love to love God, i do what He wants me to.

Lots of Love and good wishes Morgan :)

§

Date: Tue, Apr 22nd, 2003. 2:24:21 pm.

From: Sand-Bandito

Subject: Re: Dear Morgan

Sorry, I must have been unaware on that matter. I apologize.

§

What makes the foregoing exchange of interest is that Sand-Bandito is in charge of security for Baba's Hood (among other things

this means being willing to censor anyone who posts something that is not in line with Baba's agenda for the virtual community), and, consequently, he is one of the people whom Baba has entrusted with monitoring communications and evaluating them in the light of Baba's policy of wanting to exclude anything that might suggest that Baba has anything to do with Muslims, Islam, the Qur'an, or Sufis. However, Sand-Bandito knows the individual with the virtual nickname, 'waterwings', extremely well and he knows -- as does Lara -- that she is Muslim, and consequently, he knows the Code book that 'waterwings' is talking about is the Qur'an.

Sand-Bandito admits as much when he refers to 'waterwings' as someone who "is very strong and dedicated in her faith". Why would Sand-Bandito say this if he didn't know who 'waterwings' was or if he didn't know what she believed?

He attempts to head-off problems by re-framing the discussion and suggesting that the Code Book in question is the Bible. Apparently, he hopes 'waterwings' won't respond and will just let Sand-Bandito's reply stand.

Unfortunately, for Sand-Bandito, 'waterwings' does respond to 'Morgan' query a few days later. As a result, Sand-Bandito has two choices. He can dissemble in some manner, or he can censor the response of 'waterwings'.

If Sand-Bandito decides to delete the reply of 'waterwings', he faces several problems. First, other people might notice this deletion and wonder why postings are being censored, yet, again. Secondly, if Sand-Bandito were to delete 'the reply of 'waterwings' to Morgan, 'waterwings' might realize something of what Baba and Sand-Bandito are up to -- which is to mislead people about what is going on in Baba's virtual community.

Consequently, Sand-Bandito chooses to dissemble. He apologizes for apparently "being unaware on that matter" even though he is fully cognizant of the spiritual beliefs of the person in question.

What Sand-Bandito has done in the foregoing message board sequence is typical of the tricks he and other Baba 'security forces' continue to seek to do within the virtual community. On a regular basis, they censor, ridicule, or undermine whatever postings even hint

at the possibility that Baba's virtual community is anything other than a quiet, cyberspace for seeking peace, happiness, joy, harmony, and community.

Sand-Bandito did the same sort of thing during the earlier noted excerpt from the message board. On that occasion, he was busy deleting potentially embarrassing postings about the generic idea of spiritual abuse ... embarrassing, that is, to Baba who IS spiritually abusing people. Consequently, Sand-Bandito is trying to re-frame the message board discussion by attacking Lara for even mentioning the issue of spiritual abuse ... even though Lara had accused no one within Baba's virtual community of being spiritually abusive.

In effect, one of Sand-Bandito's assignments from Baba is to try to silence Lara and, in addition, to mislead people by insisting that complaints should be handled privately. In other words, issues that are potentially dangerous to Baba should be pushed to the margins, out of the light of the public message board so that visitors to the message board will not glean any hint of what actually is transpiring within the virtual community.

The guilty mind tends to see potential problems and threats everywhere. Consequently, Baba has Sand-Bandito constantly monitoring the message board – or as frequently as Sand-Bandito can since he also has a day job -- to either eliminate any 'unpleasantness' or to circumvent and re-frame issues that might pose a problem for Baba's duplicitous, evangelical agenda in relation to cyberspace.

Baba's intentions with respect to the virtual community is also another reason why Lara and I continuing our cyber word-war. Baba has people like Sand-Bandito and Momin trolling various Internet chat rooms for new members to lure into his virtual community.

The unsuspecting participants of those chat rooms do not understand the nature of that to which they are being invited. Quite a few members of Baba's virtual community already have been recruited in this fashion.

Both Lara and I feel that people have a right to make informed choices. Consequently, she and I seek to maintain our presence within the virtual community, if only on the message board, in order to

provide visitors with some ‘food for thought’ on which to reflect ... but we do so without making any overt accusations concerning Baba.

§

April 28, 2003

Lara and I are talking about the local school shooting incident about which Baba informed us when we visited with him in November. Suddenly, we both stop talking and begin, almost simultaneously, to give voice to something that has been on the horizons of our respective minds for quite some time ... in other words, we wonder if Baba was telling the truth about that alleged event.

We each confess to one another about how there have been a number of occasions in which the idea bubbled up to the surface that, maybe, Baba wasn’t telling the truth when he related how little Ra’uf was traumatized by being an eye-witness to a school shooting at his primary school.

I go to work on the issue. First I search the Internet and obtain the number for both the police station in the town where Baba lives, as well as the phone number for the public library in that town. Next I locate the phone number for the library in the very little town that is not too far away from where Baba lives. Finally, I search for the number of the closest barracks to these two towns with respect to the state police.

I talk with people at each number that I call. Although I encounter a little resistance and suspicion along the way, the answer I get is basically the same in each instance ... during the last three years, there have been no school shootings in the greater school district of which Ra’uf’s school is a part ... a period of time that includes an interval which is likely to encompass a time prior to when Ra’uf might have first attended school, as well as include the first several years of Ra’uf’s school life.

After obtaining the foregoing information, I do an online search for the school district that I learned about during previous trips to visit with Baba. Fortunately, the school district has a web site that includes minutes of school board meetings for the district going back four

years. No mention is made in any of the minutes about a school shooting, or beefing up security, or taking greater precautions to hire mentally sound security guards, or grief counseling in relation to traumatized students and teachers – either with respect to that school board district or with respect to any near-by school district.

Obviously, Baba has lied to us once again. Both Lara and I believe Baba has lied to us because he worries we might be wondering about why Ra'uf is not attending school.

This question didn't occur to either Lara or me until Baba lied to us. After discussing this issue for several hours, we come to the conclusion that, perhaps, Baba wants Ra'uf kept away from authorities of any kind ... authorities who might ask the wrong question at the wrong time and get information from an innocent boy with respect to something Baba, or others, might be doing in his house that is not so innocent in one way or another.

This might explain why both Lara and I have witnessed Ra'uf go into a near-panic mode whenever he hears a siren. Perhaps, he has been induced by Baba and/or his parents to be afraid of police or people in authority for some self-serving reason of the so-called adults in the house.

Both Lara and I shocked at the sick character of Baba's story. We are even more disturbed when we reflect on how Baba told this lie to Lara and me during our November trip – namely, in front of other members of his household ... people who confirmed what he said. Clearly, Baba has guided the members of his household to become 'people of the lie'.

§

April 28, 2003

Almost a month has passed since talking with Ruth about the possibility of her getting in touch with Sima to see how Sima and her children are doing in relation to Baba. Moreover, Ruth's husband, Shaykh Shams, has not called, and I don't believe he will return my call even though I clearly indicated to Ruth, when I spoke with her on the

phone, that the issues I wanted to discuss with him were quite important.

Apparently, Shaykh Shams is too busy doing reconciliation work with non-Muslims. He doesn't seem to have time to undertake any outreach and reconciliatory efforts in conjunction with a Muslim, a Sufi, the person whose marriage he conducted, and, theoretically, a friend of his.

I still have heard nothing back in response to my application for the job openings that are to be run through a state-run elderly care center dealing with unemployment issues concerning older individuals. I am trying to stay positive about the application, but my experience during the last several years does not give me much reason to be optimistic about what might happen in relation to my application.

§

April 30, 2003

Lara has begun chatting with various people both within, and outside of, Baba's virtual community. On the basis of what has been transpiring in relation to the word-wars on the public message board within Baba's virtual community, there are some people who are beginning to realize that there could be more to things than meets the eye, and, as a result, they engage Lara and want to know what is going on.

One of the individuals with whom Lara chats is a woman from Turkey. During the chat, Lara discovers that this woman was first approached in cyberspace by Sand-Bandito, and, then, through Sand-Bandito, she was introduced to Baba at his residence in the virtual community. This Turkish woman tells Lara that Baba told the woman he was born in Nova Scotia, Canada.

I find this piece of information both surprising and amusing since I was with Baba when he went to a top-flight immigration attorney in Canada and set the paperwork in motion for migrating to Canada.

The fact of the matter is that – at least for Lara and myself – there is a bit of mystery surrounding exactly where Baba was born ... although I know it wasn't Nova Scotia. Some indications point to Pakistan ... some indications seem to involve Iran ... and still other indications suggest Azerbaijan.

The Turkish woman with whom Lara chatted said that over a period of time there were a lot of e-mails and virtual chats that took place between the woman and Baba. At some point, Baba apparently proposed to her, and the matter went to the point where photos were exchanged and various possibilities were being entertained.

The woman also tells Lara that, somehow, she found out about some sort of sexual impropriety that supposedly took place in relation to Baba with respect to the sister of a wife of one of Baba's mureeds in the United States. Evidently, the Turkish woman with whom Lara chatted talked, at some point, with the wife of Baba's mureed and was given such information. However, at the insistence of her husband, Baba's mureed, the allegations of his wife's sister were hushed up and denigrated.

Lara shares some of her own past with this woman from Turkey. After a certain amount of discussion that took place over a number of days, the woman is convinced that Baba is a spiritual charlatan and disengages from Baba's virtual community.

§

May 3, 2003

I have decided to change the programming for the virtual bot that greets visitors to my cyber house in Baba's Hood. Initially, I had programmed the bot to respond to certain key phrases that might be spoken by a visitor when I was not present at the virtual residence. Thus, whenever a visitor types, say, 'hi' or 'hello' within the space provided for chatting, my bot says:

Welcome. If you listen carefully, you can hear the voices of the desert winds that are swirling about outside this humble home.

In relation to other, appropriate keywords that are likely to be part of a sentence that is typed in by a visitor who wishes to engage the bot in 'conversation, I program the bot to say the following sorts of things:

'Well, as you can see in the box below, my name is Pilgrim.'

Or,

'I will try to be a companion for this part of your life journey. This is my way and my sacred duty as one who seeks the truth and wishes to share this journey with others.'

Or,

'Mysticism is the science, in the fullest sense possible, of self-realization. It is a way of developing a faith that is not blind but, rather, is rooted in an understanding that comes from direct experience of different worlds, dimensions, states and stations of spirituality. It is learning to trust the truth that is one's essential nature and, thereby, fulfilling one's unique spiritual destiny.'

Or

'It is very nice of you to say that, but, I must warn you, appearances can be deceiving, and I come equipped with all the expertise in martial arts that might be necessary to handle any situation ... if you catch my drift.'

Or,

'There is not much going on right now. You could help put a little excitement in my life by clicking on me with your cursor and, perhaps, I will relate some things that might be of interest to you.'

Or,

'Sometimes, I have to think about something for a long time before I am ready to give an answer. Oftentimes, I find that giving due consideration to someone's question is one of the best ways to show that person that you care enough about them to take time to give an intelligent, thoughtful response. So, please be patient with me.'

Or,

'I don't have all the answers. I like to meditate on these sorts of issues. As someone once said, philosophy, like life, and the search for meaning, is a process, and is not always a matter of ends or goals. If

you don't enjoy the process and you don't get the outcome you want, then you lose all the way around. But, if you enjoy life and searching for truth and meaning, then however things might turn out, if one has gratitude for life and uses that opportunity to help others, then, one is a successful person.'

Or,

'I have enjoyed your company very much. It gets lonely here on occasion, and your presence here has been like an oasis for me amidst the many tasks that I must perform while my master is away. I want to thank you for your time, care and consideration. I like you and hope you will come again.'

When properly activated, the foregoing responses are given in a voiced format. If a visitor's computer does not have a sound card, my virtual bot's responses, when prompted by an appropriate keyword, appear as written words in the space set aside for text chatting.

The set-up was not foolproof. However, the arrangement only was intended to offer visitors a certain amount of entertainment and information during my absence from the virtual residence – which was most of the time.

When the aforementioned war of words begins to heat up, I reprogram my virtual bot so that the following responses will be given (either in a voice or text form) when the appropriate keywords occur in someone's typed question or comment (obviously if the right keywords do not occur in a question or comment, then a visitor will encounter silence or no words will appear in the text box, and in the case that more than one keyword is typed in, the first keyword will determine what is said or heard.).

§

(Keywords: hello, hi, howdy, greetings)

Welcome to the Center for Treating Abuse. If you are here, this might be because you, or someone close to you, has been abused by people who feel they have the right to control, manipulate, deceive,

mislead, lie to, and hurt other human beings who are vulnerable to being exploited because the latter are in need of assistance. Spiritual abuse is a lot more prevalent than many people suppose. In fact, the source of such abuse might be as close as the person or people next door. How might I help you?

(2.) (Keywords: why, motivation, motive, how, intention)

There are a variety of motives for why one person seeks to spiritually abuse another individual. Some of these abusers are sociopathic personalities and have no conscience concerning the damage they do to others. Some of these abusive individuals give evidence of narcissistic personality disorder in which other people are the source of narcissistic supply that those exhibiting this disorder seek from such people in the form of obedience, praise, adoration, and so on. There are other motives for such behavior, as well.

(3.) (Keywords: tell, more, further, power, exploitation, sex)

Some of those who spiritually abuse others have lost the battle, perhaps, temporarily or, maybe, even permanently, with their lower self that is the seat of rebellion against truth. Such people use spirituality as a cover story to hide their real desire that is to sexually exploit people, or to gain power, or to acquire money and a comfortable, material life. They believe the sole purpose for which other human beings exist is to satisfy the worldly desires of the abuser.

(4.) (Keywords: trust, betrayal, betrayed, damage, mistrust)

Perhaps the most destructive facet of spiritually abusive behavior is the manner in which it leaves its victims with a deep, pervasive sense of having been betrayed in a very intimate and essential way. Once a person has been damaged in this fashion, such an individual is quite reluctant to trust other human beings, even those who might be genuinely trying to help. An abused person tends to feel very alienated, alone, and inclined to being cynical toward, as well as being suspicious about, the motives of almost everyone.

(5.) (Keywords: phony, guide, identify, false, teacher, charlatan,)

Although there are some authentic spiritual teachers who are accessible in various parts of the world, there are many more individuals who are counterfeit or false guides, and, consequently, people who are seeking legitimate guidance are faced with a real

dilemma: namely, how does one go about differentiating between authentic and inauthentic mystical teachers? As is true among those who counterfeit money, false spiritual guides have become very adept at imitating many of the surface features of an authentic teacher.

(6.) (Keywords: symptom, problem, indicator, diagnosis, emotion)

There are a number of emotional, psychological, and physical symptoms associated with spiritual abuse. Some of these are: anger, depression, alienation, grief, dissociation, anxiety, fear, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, irritability, depersonalization, de-realization, inability to focus or concentrate, difficulty in organizing one's life, moodiness, apathy, sexual dysfunction, a substantial increase in distrust of people in general, negative self-image, becoming quite judgmental of others, and problems with intimacy.

(7) (Keywords: warning, signs, signals, clues, behavior)

There are a number of warning signs to consider. For example, spiritual frauds often are extremely authoritarian, or either do not permit anyone to question them or get very defensive or annoyed when critical questions are raised about the teachings, or they use tactics of emotional and social pressure to bring about compliance, or they encourage people to become dependent on the teacher, or they charge money for spiritual assistance, or they are unnecessarily secretive about many things that do not involve secrets of the mystical way.

(8) (Keywords: Internet, cyber chat, chat room, chat, virtual)

Many false teachers are using the Internet as a means of trolling for potential victims. These abusive individuals make use of the anonymity of virtual reality, along with nicknames, and false information to hide their true identity. They lie to people about where they live, or who they are, or what their purposes are, and some of these false teachers get their trusted associates to serve as pimps by visiting various chat rooms, and seduce vulnerable, lonely people in order to entangle such unsuspecting individuals with a cult.

(9) (keyword: lie, interfere, truth, dishonest, true)

Oftentimes, these abusive, false teachers will lie about almost anything even when there is no need to lie. I know of one false teacher who used to say to people all the time: I never lie, or I never interfere

in marriages, or I never use people, or I am your well-wisher, and, in reality, this person lied all the time, and he interfered in people's marriages, and he continuously used people for his own ends, and his behavior was the opposite of a well-wisher because he enjoyed hurting others.

(10) (keywords: bye, adios, good-by, auf wiedersehen, ciao, so long, later)

I have enjoyed your company very much. Before you go, let me tell you about this false teacher I know who even lied about how a young boy in his household had witnessed a school shooting, was traumatized by the event, and even was taken to a psychologist, and the man proceeded to give an elaborate account of the trial that was televised. When a check was made with the local police, library, and school board, they all confirmed the shooting never took place. The man is a gratuitous liar.

I post an invitation on the public message board in Baba's Hood requesting that they visit my humble virtual abode and chat with my virtual bot. I indicate in the invitation that I am sure they will find the experience very educational, if not amusing.

I am not sure how well my virtual bot will perform. There are, after all, a lot of opportunities for problems to arise in any given instance of communication - especially when one side of the conversation is automated. However, the bot seems to work well enough that the 'leadership' in Baba's Hood is not amused by what I have done.

§

May 7, 2003

I decide to try to get through to Momin Shah one last time. We have had a friendship for too many years for me to just give up on him altogether. Consequently, I write an e-mail to him.

§

Dear Momin Shah,

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Since I don't know if either of your other e-mails is operative, I have sent the same e-mail to all three e-mail addresses. I hope, God willing, one way or another, this e-mail finds its way to you and into your heart.

If you have ever considered me as a friend or if you have ever had love for me, then I plead with you to read the following in its entirety. If you have ever had love for the example of Dr. Irfan, then I urge you to read the following -- all of it. If you have love for the truth and for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), then I request you to read the following to the very end ... carefully, with due reflection.

Recently, I have discovered a few things that might, or might not, be of interest to you. What I am about to say does not involve testimony from Lara – whose credibility you question -- so the issue with which you will have to grapple is whether, or not, I am telling the truth and whether, or not, I have some agenda here other than telling the truth, and, therefore, which might compromise the credibility of what I have to say.

When I was visiting Baba last November, I was told by Baba – in the presence of 'Molina, 'Umar and Habib (and they all heard and confirmed Baba's story) -- that the reason why Ra'uf was being kept home from school was because he had been witness to a school shooting in which a security guard went crazy in Ra'uf's school and killed a number of children and that Ra'uf saw the whole thing and had been so traumatized by the incident that he is only now just beginning to recover. In fact, I was informed that, at one point, Ra'uf had been taken to a counselor or psychologist to assist him to deal with the trauma.

When Baba was asked by me whether anyone in the household had attended the trial or what had happened to the security guard, I was told that they all watched the trial on television. The security guard had been declared mentally incompetent and was shipped off to a mental hospital.

Furthermore, on several occasions, ‘Momina and Habib indicated that only cartoons should be on the television when Ra’uf was around. Supposedly, this was so Ra’uf wouldn’t, inadvertently, be reminded of the school violence through the news or a drama of some kind.

In addition, there were a number of occasions in which Ra’uf was taken on an after-dark excursion to a shopping mall to buy him remote control vehicles (large toy cars) as a way to help Ra’uf get over his trauma by being able to enjoy himself within the house ... the reasons for such excursions were explained to me on several occasions. Finally, there was at least one time during my stay at Baba’s that sirens were heard during the night and Ra’uf became upset and wanted the television to be turned up in order to try to drown out the noise of the siren, and I was told by Baba and ‘Momina that this anxiety was part of the aftermath of the shooting incident.

Almost every night that I was visiting with Baba, ‘Momina and Ra’uf would huddle together and go over various lessons as part of his home schooling program. I am not a fan of public school, but I do believe in the value of home schooling.

In fact, I once published an e-zine on the Internet that featured articles and discussions that were critical of the public school process, as well as which featured articles favorable to home schooling. I forwarded copies of these articles to Baba at the time I was writing them, and this was long before I went to visit with him last November.

While visiting with Baba, I had a number of discussions with ‘Momina about home schooling. Over the years, I have had a number of conversations with Baba and the rest of his household that clearly indicated I am in favor of home schooling ... more on this point shortly.

When I returned from visiting Baba in November of last year, I, along with Lara, purchased a book on ‘Nature’ and sent it to Ra’uf. The book was intended to serve as a useful reference for someone of Ra’uf’s age and to assist ‘Momina in her lessons.

There are many things that I have found out during the last three months – things that are independent of what I have found out from Lara. I have learned about certain things through people with whom you are, or have been, familiar in the virtual community ... people that you know, like and respect, but who, for the time being will go

unnamed in order to protect them (for I have seen what happens with those who go public with such information).

As a result of what I have discovered recently quite independently of Lara, and due to a fairly strong intuition that something was not quite right about the shooting incident that Baba related to me, I decided to investigate the story. I have been in contact with the police department in the town where Baba lives, as well as the public library there, the state police, the public library in the little town next to the town where Baba lives, and I have read through most of the published reports of the board of education for Ra'uf's school district (which are quite detailed about business and issues discussed concerning both high school, middle school, and elementary school).

The results of the foregoing inquiries indicate one thing: there has been NO school shooting incident anywhere in the area in, and around, Baba's home town over the last three years. I was lied to by: Baba, 'Momina, 'Umar, and Habib concerning the school shooting incident. They also lied to me about the trial, its being on television, their watching it, the psychological counseling for Ra'uf, and I was lied to about the fate of the alleged shooter.

Since I am a proponent of home schooling -- and the people in Baba's household have known this for many years as a result of the discussions that I have had with them on this subject and that were alluded to above -- there really is no need for anyone to feel that they have to justify to me why they are keeping a child out of the school system.

Therefore, for such a story to be invented, for a supposed best friend -- as well as a: Muslim brother, member of the silsilah, and khalifah of the silsilah -- is inexcusable. This was not a story that was made up on the spur of the moment. This was a story that was planned in advance.

I have done nothing prior to November that would warrant being lied to in such a way. This is not a white lie said to spare someone's feelings, but, rather, it is an egregious, elaborate lie involving a group of people undertaken in order to deceive another human being -- namely, me.

I have also found out that Baba told several people in his virtual community – and this is prior to my finding out anything about the Lara issue – that Philokalia (one of my virtual nicknames) could not be trusted and, therefore, people should stay away from him. Baba told another person that the reason why he didn't want me to play an active role in either of his virtual communities is because he didn't want me thumping them with religion -- something that I have never done inside of, or outside of, cyberspace.

You might not wish to accept Lara's testimony about what transpired at Baba's when she was there in January. However, Tronquail's (Sand-Bandito's wife) sister also has brought allegations against Baba with respect to sexually inappropriate behavior.

Furthermore, although, at the time, I dismissed the report because I just thought that 'Amina (the woman from North Africa in whom I had been interested as a possible marriage partner) was upset with me and was trying to create problems between Baba and myself, 'Amina once told me that Baba had made a sexual pass at her when she, Barry, and I were visiting with Baba a number of years ago. Was she telling the truth? I don't know.

This I do know: there have been allegations concerning sexual impropriety involving Baba that have occurred in Rhode Island and Canada, as well as in relation to Lara, 'Amina, and Tronquail's sister. 'Asma (in Canada) had reportedly seen, with her own eyes, Baba in bed with a young 16-17 year old who is a friend of her daughter, so her testimony is quite apart from that of her daughter's account of Baba's sexual misconduct.

Up to a point, I had been willing to cut Baba some slack and give him the benefit of the doubt with respect to the Rhode Island situation (which I know little about) and the Canada story (which I knew a lot more about).

I don't know if 'Amina was lying and I don't know either Tronquail or her sister, so, I don't know what her character is, but I do know Lara, and irrespective of whatever else her faults might, or might not, be, she doesn't lie about such matters.

I do know, now, that Baba does lie. I don't care how he wishes to spin the school shooting story or how he wishes to try to justify his

“reasons” for lying to me and getting other people to lie to me in such an elaborate fashion. There really is no excuse for this, and it is not at all in keeping with the teachings of the Prophet, or the teachings of the Qur’an, or the teachings of the Sufi path.

Baba once said I was his best friend (and I have the e-mail to prove it), and he has consistently said he hides nothing from me because of my alleged “importance” to the silsilah (and he has told me things about that role which, supposedly, are secret), as well as my role as one of his khalifahs. I also am a Muslim brother and member of the silsilah that he claims to serve. Yet, Baba lied to me about something for which there was absolutely no reason to lie, and he got other people to do the same thing.

I have since discovered that Baba has lied about me to other people -- including, I believe, to Sima in Rhode Island. I also have discovered Baba sought to distance other people from me both within, and outside of, his virtual community – and this was all long before the Lara issue came to the surface.

Baba also has talked behind the back of many people and told critical stories about them that might, or might not, be true concerning such individuals. These people include: (1) you; (2) Miriam in Canada; (3) Sima; (4) Sima’s mother (Baba said to me the reason why Sima’s mother was suffering was because of her role in opposing the marriage between Sima and myself -- which is, actually, quite incorrect (that is, Sima’s mother didn’t oppose the marriage, but, rather, she was trying to help in a variety of ways) I find his remarks deeply disturbing and suspect); (5) Lara; (6) Barry’s (in Canada) bride to be; (7) ‘Sand-Bandito’; (8) ‘Tronquail’s’ sister; (9) ‘waterwings’, and others. I find his telling tales out of school, so to speak, very unseemly conduct for an alleged realized being to do on such a regular basis, and if this is what being realized involves, then I really don’t want anything to do with it.

If one has to lie to be a servant of God, then I guess I will never make a very good servant. If one has to seduce the wives of one’s mureeds in order to be an exalted shaykh, then I do not wish to be such a shaykh. If the price I have to pay in order to be someone’s khalifah is to learn to cover up the lies, sexual misconduct, and un-Sufi like behavior of an alleged shaykh, then I do not wish to be a khalifah.

If you wish to condone such behavior and hide behind the blanket excuse that Baba is a realized being and, therefore, whatever he wishes to do is okay, that is your business. But, the Prophet did not lie to his Companions, and he did not seduce the wives of his Companions. Dr. Irfan did not lie to his mureeds, and he did not seduce their wives. And, I know of no prominent Sufi in the history of tasawwuf who lied to his best friend, mureed, and khalifah, or who seduced the wife of that alleged best friend, mureed, and khalifah.

When you were here in Bamford, you made a remark concerning Lara that I did not appreciate. You indicated that since your wife and your daughter had not been touched or approached by Baba, then, everything was okay, and that the problem, whatever it might be, was somehow Lara's fault and due to her lack of character.

Because you insisted on only staying an hour when you came, we did not have a chance to go into the full details of all that has transpired over the last several years. If you had stayed for more than an hour, then, among other things, I would have told you that Lara has been the victim of a variety of terribly traumatic abuses for nearly thirty-six years, beginning when she was six years old. Moreover, I would have told you I have worked very hard with her to help her free herself from the terrible repercussions of such extensive abuse. In addition, I would have told you that with Lara's permission, I related these facts to Baba with the intention that he might be able to help Lara in some fashion. Furthermore, I would have told you that Baba used this information to take advantage of Lara when she was in no condition to be able to defend herself from her own vulnerability to the sort of manipulation process that Baba exposed her to beginning when she and I went down there together (and I saw with my own eyes the beginning of his seductions and attempting to put obstacles between Lara and myself when we visited with him in November), and continuing intensively all through the month of December and into the beginning of January, 2003.

I have seen her when she was in an altered state of consciousness as a result of the sort of controlling techniques that Lara's previous husband used on her. I have seen her in a fugue state as a result of the anxiety-attacks and post traumatic stress disorder that she developed in relation to all she has gone through over the years.

I saw Lara the night before she left to visit with Baba on the first of January, and she was in such a manic, hyper state that she was acting in a way that reminded me of how she responded to the effects of pressurized control by her previous husband. This time, however, the control was being exerted from another source, and I wasn't the source of that control, Baba was.

When I phoned Baba about this and about my intuitions concerning why Lara was going to visit him – intuitions that were, subsequently, confirmed -- Baba lied to me about the situation. And, I knew, then, that he was lying even though I had no evidence, at the time, to substantiate my intuition of what Baba was doing.

Since Lara returned to Bamford from visiting with Baba, we have had a chance, gradually, by the Grace of Allah, to go through a debriefing process. There is no doubt in my mind that Lara's psychological condition was the result of undue, uninformed, exploitive, and manipulative techniques of mind control that were perpetrated upon her by Baba with the intention of taking advantage of Lara's condition of psychological vulnerability.

I have many years of clinical experience in a variety of settings – from: mental hospitals, to: juvenile detention centers, drop-in centers, university counseling services, and private counseling. I have taught courses on trans-personal psychology and abnormal psychology in both university and community colleges. I am familiar with the techniques and conditions of “snapping” or mind-control, and, in fact, I used to have a regular section on this issue whenever I taught introductory psychology.

All of the foregoing knowledge, understanding and experience has been called upon to try to assist both Lara and myself recover from what Baba put her and me through. You can play 'blame the victim' if you wish, but I know who the perpetrator is here, and it is not Lara, and it is not me.

There is a very innocent girl from Canada who now is ensconced in Baba's household. That girl is your mureed, and you had a role in placing her in that house.

Even if nothing sexually untoward happens in relation to her while she is in that household, I fear for her. I fear for her because she is in a

household where substantial lies are being told to people who trust such individuals ... and, one must remember that more people than Baba have lied to me, in a very elaborate manner, vis-à-vis the mythical school shooting.

If he can get you to take a 20+ hour ride for a one-hour, forced, intrusive conversation with me that involved denigrating my wife and required a fleecing of information from my brother and entangled him in something that he ought not to ever have been pulled into, in order to serve Baba's agenda and purposes, then Baba can get people to lie if this will serve his purposes and interests.

Moreover, there is another lie that you glossed right over when you were here, and it had to do with Baba's claim that he never interferes with marriages, and he does not do this because his shaykh had instructed him not to do so. All of the attention of your discussion with me was focused around whether Lara was telling the truth about what had transpired when she visited Baba in January and whether, or not, this constituted an instance of his interfering in my marriage with Lara.

Lost in the shuffle of our little conversation is the incontrovertible fact that Baba did interfere with the marriage of Lara to her previous husband, Ron. You do not have to rely on Lara's testimony to verify this fact - I am telling you Baba assured me it was perfectly all right for me to marry Lara and, thereby, interfere in that marriage.

Baba lied about the school shooting, and he lied about not interfering with marriages -- both with respect to Ron and me, and he has lied about other things as well. Such a series of events is not an isolated set of minor, unrelated mistakes, but, rather, they constitute a trend, and, perhaps, even more importantly, they indicate that Baba is quite prepared to betray the teachings and instructions of his own shaykh (in fact, Baba has contravened at least one other instruction of his shaykh - namely, that he is not supposed to enter into any kind of business dealings with his mureeds, and, yet, Baba is trying to do start up a cookie business with Miriam in Canada, and Baba was trying to do start some sort of business in Rhode Islam with Sima, and he gave each of those women a thousand dollars with which to begin the respective businesses - and I was present at his house when he berated Sima on

the phone for failing to make any money for him and for wasting time with the thousand dollars Baba had left with Sima.

Maybe you can look in the mirror and say everything is fine, but I have trouble sleeping at night knowing that 'Uzma's sister, Nazia, is in Baba's household, and she is being subjected to the same techniques of mind control as Lara has been, and as others have been. I also have trouble sleeping at night knowing how Sima has had her mind and will subjugated to the whims of Baba, and that, among other things, she is letting her children go into a dark room with Baba in order to massage him. I have trouble sleeping in relation to these events because I know Baba has lied to me as well as about me, and, therefore, he cannot be trusted in any way.

Cardinal Law, formerly with the Archdiocese of Boston, repeatedly turned a blind eye to all of the evidence indicating that a variety of priests were engaging, and had been engaging for quite some time, in sexually deplorable behavior with young parishioners. If you wish, you can choose to be like Cardinal Law and continue to look the other way as the evidence concerning Baba mounts up, or you can choose to look into your heart of hearts and acknowledge the fact that the Sufi path has never demanded or required any of its adherents to blindly acquiesce to substantial breaches of adab on the part of someone who claims to be a shaykh.

Baba is either a very emotionally disturbed individual (possibly manic/depressive, or more, probably, prone to Narcissistic Personality Disorder, or, conceivably, even a sociopath, because he has symptoms indicative of all of these possibilities -- although NPD might be the best fit), or he is an evil, spiritual charlatan who preys on people's vulnerabilities, or he is someone who once was on the Sufi path but has been seduced, at some point, by nafs and the whisperings of Iblis ... or some combination of all of the foregoing. Whatever the case might be, he should recuse himself from the duties of being a shaykh, because, under present circumstances, he really is not spiritually competent to serve as a shaykh since he considers his own welfare and sense of entitlement to be far more important than the spiritual welfare of those to whom he owes a fiduciary responsibility and whom he should be serving.

The measure of a Sufi shaykh is not a function of the worldly kashf which that individual might “enjoy”. And, I have no doubt Baba has some degree of worldly kashf because, like you, I have seen the instances of mind-reading, thought-projection, and other assorted parlor tricks that Baba has done in various circumstances.

I also know that people with worldly kashf can induce others to go into pseudo-states of ecstasy, as well as other conditions of altered consciousness. Your rolling around on the floor in Canada, or your rolling around the floor at the astana, are not proof Baba has spiritual kashf to any appreciable degree.

By his own admission, Baba has had an inclination to indulge the exercise of worldly kashf, and by Baba’s own admission, his shaykh took those powers away for a period of time because Baba abused them. By his own admission, Baba has said a shaykh should keep a considerable distance between oneself and the use of worldly kashf, and, yet, Baba continues to indulge himself in this regard -- what happened at ‘Habib’s wedding in relation to the lost keys might be but another example of this.

Furthermore, much of the message that Baba teaches is nothing more than what Ibn al-‘Arabi (may Allah be pleased with him) taught, and all of this was explained to Baba by his shaykh. Just because someone can talk the talk, doesn’t mean they can walk the walk ... especially since the latter requires that one put one’s money, so to speak, where one’s mouth is.

Alan Watts was considered by many to be a great Zen Master because he could write and speak brilliantly about the subject, but, in fact he was reported to have been a womanizer and a drunk. Such behavior tends to suggest that Watts really might not have known or understood anything concerning the reality of satori ... which is a form of detached enlightenment from the appetites of the nafs.

Indeed, one of the indices for determining the presence of spiritual kashf is the behavior of an individual. People who lie, on an all too frequent basis, and who encourage others to lie, as well, do not exhibit the necessary character for someone who professes to be not only a shaykh but the Qutb for our times (he told Barry in Canada that he -- Baba -- is THE Qutb). And, people who are willing to lie to their alleged best friend, mureed, and khalifah, and who are willing to get other

people to lie to that person, then such a person is also willing to lie, among other things, about sexually inappropriate behavior.

Tell me ... how do you KNOW, with yaqueen – with certainty -- what Baba's spiritual station, if any, is? The fact is, you don't know. 'In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king, and since the people Baba deals with are, for the most, totally blind, he doesn't have to have very much on the ball to trick such individuals into believing he has 'special' vision ... especially when such individuals either don't pay attention to his behavior or offer excuses for it, since to do otherwise would be too terrible a possibility to contemplate given that it carries with it some implications that tend to raise some very uncomfortable questions that most people surrounding Baba do not want to have to face.

You speculate, or you fantasize, or you imagine, or based on what experiences you have had, you extrapolate and interpolate as to the meaning of all this, but you don't even know where your experiences come from or what their significance is ... other than that Baba controls all information about the meaning and significance of anything that you tell him .. and if Baba's word is shown, through his own behavior, to lack credibility and trustworthiness, then, you -- we all have, including Baba, -- a problem.

Lara has never lied to me. Baba has lied to me – on more than one occasion (although I have just found this out in the last several months and from a number of different sources). I have seen Baba lie to other people, and I have seen him ask me to lie.

So, when it comes to believing what Lara has to say about what went on during December and January, and believing what Baba has to say about went on during that time, I choose to believe the one who does not lie to me. In shari'ah, once someone has lied in giving testimony, the testimony of that person can never again be accepted and be given any credibility -- and Baba has, through his own prevarication, undermined his credibility with respect to anything he says.

If you wish to believe someone (namely, Baba) who lies to someone whom you once claimed was your friend (i.e., namely, me), rather than believe that friend, then so be it. If you wish to believe it is perfectly okay for a so-called Sufi shaykh to sexually exploit someone

who was, and is, very emotionally vulnerable to issues of control and manipulation and who is still suffering the after-effects of thirty-six years of trauma at the hands of other people, then so, be it. If you wish to believe there is nothing wrong with a Sufi shaykh seducing the emotionally traumatized wife of his khalifah and if you wish to believe that such actions are nothing more than the manifestation of an isolated instance of human frailty that is eminently excusable as a passing fit of passion rather than a calculated plan, implemented over the course of several months, which was done with the intention of hurting people, then so be it. If you wish to believe that the people in Rhode Island, as well as 'Asma, Miriam, Tronquail's sister, "Amina, and Lara were all lying and Baba would never lie, then so be it. If you believe that as long as your wife and daughter are not touched, then everything is right with the universe and what happens to other people in the silsilah is not your concern, then so be it. If you believe one must blindly believe that a shaykh can do whatever he feels entitled to do and that whether, or not, this hurts or adversely affects other people is immaterial as long as you get to continue being a shaykh and get hopped up on Baba juice from time to time, then so be it.

But, if you believe all of the foregoing, then I will say to you what you once said to me because of what you were incited to say by someone due to my relationship with 'Amina (even though nothing inappropriate was going on in Canada other than my being alone with her in a room or in a car) – namely, "You have strayed from the Path." And, if there is nothing in you that is able to resonate with, and recognize, the truth of anything that I have said in the foregoing, then unfortunately, it really seems that Allah might already have sealed up your heart due to your idol-worship of Baba and, yes, I do know the difference between treating one's shaykh with the respect and deference that a true locus of manifestation of the sacred deserves and blindly bowing down, due to ignorance and misunderstanding, in relation to the caprice of someone who is a master of spin, control, manipulation, exploitation, disinformation, misdirection, and self-serving agendas.

According to Sima, your son might be smarter than both of us. Apparently, some time ago, when he was trying to get a job in Rhode

Island, he was telling anyone who would listen there that Baba was a fraud and charlatan. Perhaps, he has been exposed to certain behaviors of Baba that have afforded him the insight that, unfortunately, I am only gaining now and that you might never acquire ... although I pray that you do.

None of the foregoing precludes the issue of forgiveness. The matter of forgiveness concerning what Baba has done is quite distinct from the issuing of his being a shaykh in whom one could ever, again, have confidence.

I can forgive Baba for all he has done, and I pray he gets the assistance he needs to be able to desist from the kind of behavior that is destructive not only with respect to the silsilah and other people, but with respect to himself as well. However, none of this has anything to do with the fact that he (not me) has torn asunder the spiritual covenant that binds a shaykh to a mureed and that he, not me, has conducted himself in such a way that his counsel no longer is reliable, trustworthy, or credible.

The locus of manifestation through which guidance comes must not sully, distort, undermine, corrupt, soil, or hinder such guidance in any way. To have access to a locus of manifestation that does transmit spiritual truth without interference or corruption and does so in an entirely trustworthy way, such access is, indeed, a great blessing, and Baba's actions have demonstrated that he is not such a blessing.

A very great Sufi was once asked: What is the Sufi path all about? The Sufi shaykh answered: adab.

Based on Baba's behavior in relation to me and Lara, not to mention others, there is no doubt in my mind and heart that Baba lacks this essential dimension of the Sufi path in fundamentally important ways that affect his credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness. This is most unfortunate for Lara, myself, others, and Baba ... however, most of all, this is unfortunate because he is betraying his own shaykh, the silsilah, the Prophet, and God.

There is an old saying: fool me once, shame on you ... fool me twice, and shame on me. How many times are you going to let Baba fool you before you realize the problem you really have is not Baba but yourself and your willingness to be a co-conspirator with him in his

manipulations, lies, mind-control, deceptions, and ill-advised uses of worldly kashf because you refuse to examine and acknowledge the evidence that is before you which indicates that he is betraying his duties as a shaykh, misleading many individuals, hurting people without regard for their welfare, lying about what he does, and, in the process, he is ruining the silsilah. This is not Deen – from either an esoteric or an exoteric perspective, and for Baba to try to argue otherwise shows great disrespect for all that is sacred.

Please convey my love and Salaams to your wife and children.

Love,

Tariq

§

May 10, 2003

Lara and I have a brief argument in the early morning. Virtually the only time we have differences is in conjunction with some aspect of the whole Baba conflagration. The emotional sensitivities of each of us are still pretty raw when it comes to that subject and related issues.

She goes back to her house. An hour, or so, later, I go online and see, via my instant message friends list that she is online as well.

I contact her via IM. She tells me she has started an Internet group that will focus on matters entailed by spiritual abuse.

I join. A short time later I receive a welcoming e-mail with respect to the Internet group.

§

May 20, 2003

Other than me and Lara, no one has joined the spiritual abuse group. We are not certain if this is because no one knows about the existence of the group, or because there is no need or interest in such a forum.

Lara continues to talk with a person by the name of Sasha that Lara knew and liked when she spent time in Baba's virtual community. Sasha continues to be a member in Baba's community ... in fact Sasha has contributed a tremendous amount of technical work and volunteer help in an attempt to make Baba's virtual community a success.

Sasha, apparently, likes Lara a great deal, and they have fun chatting. For whatever reason, Sasha seems to keep his distance from me.

I've tried to engage him in chat on a number of occasions. Unfortunately my efforts in this respect never seem to go anywhere.

He is always polite. Yet, at the same time -- in a way that is hard to explain -- there does seem to be a certain degree of coolness emanating from him concerning me.

I have encountered this same phenomenon with a fair number of other people whom I have met within Baba's virtual community. Some of them are far less polite than Sasha is.

Sasha is a young university student from Europe. Quite obviously, he is very intelligent, and he has an abiding passion in all manner of things concerning real world trains ... especially older ones.

When I first came to Baba's virtual community, Baba had said that Sasha used to drive Baba crazy with all Sasha's talk and interest involving train technology.

On the few times this subject has come up in any conversation or chat session in which I have been involved, Sasha has proven himself to be someone who is extremely knowledgeable about the subject of trains ... both new and old. Yet, I have never found him to be pushy about, or obsessed with, the subject.

Whatever Baba thinks about the issue of Sasha and trains, nevertheless, in almost all other aspects -- especially in conjunction with the administrative and technical dimensions of the virtual community -- Baba seems to rely on Sasha a great deal. Apparently, a considerable friendship has arisen between the two of them.

Sasha seems to be really taken with Baba. Sasha spends a great deal of time chatting with Baba, e-mailing him, and, engaging him through various modes of instant messaging ... or, at least this is the impression I have gotten from what Lara says concerning Sasha.

Since late February, Lara has had a number of long chat sessions with Sasha on the subject of Baba. She has told Sasha a great many things about the sort of individual Baba is.

Lara is spending a great deal of time talking with Sasha about these issues because she feels somewhat responsible for Sasha in a number of ways. First, she considers Sasha a friend and does not want any harm to come to him and, secondly, because she – at Baba’s instigation – has worked for many hours to find photographs from the wedding in January that had been cleansed of all hints of Baba having anything to do with Islam or Muslims, and, therefore, she feels she has had a hand in helping to mislead Sasha concerning who Baba is and what he is.

On the one hand, Sasha is reluctant to believe what Lara is saying. On the other hand, he seems fascinated -- in a horrified sort of way -- with what is being said to him.

I have participated in several of these chat sessions and contributed a few things to the discussion. However, because I feel that, for whatever reason, Sasha does not trust me, I try to stay clear of these chats and just let Lara handle things.

The sessions are a little frustrating for Lara. Every time she feels she is making progress with Sasha, Orb will say something that seems to indicate he doesn’t understand what is being said or doesn’t believe it.

Given that English is not Sasha’s native language, there is some possibility that this language barrier might be playing a role in their periodic breakdowns in communication. However, both Lara and I have found that, with the exception of a few oddities of expression here and there, Sasha speaks – or, more accurately, writes -- very good English.

A month, or so, ago, Lara told me that when she was visiting with Baba in January, plans were set in motion for Sasha to come to visit with Baba for three weeks sometime in July or August. Baba had given Lara the task of writing an official invitation to Sasha in order to help assist Sasha with securing a visa that would permit Sasha to enter the United States.

Lara never actually got around to writing the letter because of subsequent events that overtook that assignment. Nevertheless, Lara feels badly that she had any role to play in a process that might end up with Sasha actually coming to America and visiting with Baba.

Baba keeps saying he has big plans for Sasha. Both Lara and I fear this might be true.

Baba uses people to advance his own ends. We believe Baba intends to use Sasha -- although we don't how -- and we are afraid that Sasha will be hurt -- perhaps substantially.

To someone who has never met someone like Baba, then some of the things that are being communicated to Sasha might sound like the crazed mutterings of an individual's paranoid delusions. Sasha sometimes gives the impression that he will be able to look upon the face of the Gorgon and not turn to stone.

Youth is often this way. When we are young, we believe we are immune, somehow, to the laws and principles that are at work in the universe.

We believe we are smart enough, or strong enough, or quick enough to get out of whatever trouble we might get ourselves into. A lot of young people spend the rest of their lives suffering the consequences of such early bravado.

Sasha is roughly the age of Lara's son, Tyler ... maybe a little younger. She feels protective toward Sasha even while she really likes Sasha as a person.

Lara wants to keep Sasha out of harm's way. She hopes someone would do the same for her son under similar circumstances.

§

June 6, 2003

A series of messages have been left in the Inbox of Sasha's virtual house with respect to recent posting activity on the public message board in Baba's virtual colony. These communications are being sent in the hope of influencing Sasha to make a decision favorable to Baba in the matter -- that is, to induce Sasha to distance himself from Lara

and myself, as well as to try to get Sasha to censor our postings to the message board.

None of the people around Baba do anything without, first, getting Baba's approval, and if they should do some undertaking without Baba's approval, then those individuals usually get reprimanded for their 'initiative'.

Sasha has forwarded these Inbox messages to Lara and me in an e-mail attachment. He wants to keep us up to date about some of the things that are happening in Baba's virtual community.

§

Date: Wed, Jun 4th, 2003. 11:18:50 pm.

From: smiley93

Subject: Hello sir Sasha

I am leaving you this message because i was a bit concerned that our Hood is not more active, as far as I'm concerned I'm not active because of Philokalia and Lara. I have stopped coming because of their disrespect to Baba and our Hood. I'm sure u have seen their postings on the MB. They left our Hood, but they still keep posting messages against Baba. You might not about what is going on, but all of us know -- like Momin, Sand-Bandito, Tronquail. We all Love and Respect Baba, he's my very good friend and i don't like people disrespecting him. You are the NL. Can't you stop them from putting these kinds of messages on our MB? Today I'm telling you the reason why we all are staying away. Baba always tells us to keep the virtual community alive. He always encourages us to keep it active, but how can we do this? I thought you should know all this

§

Date: Wed, Jun 4th, 2003. 11:37:18 pm.

From: smiley93

Subject: cont

I heard that you will be visiting Baba and all of us in July ... can't wait. But I need to ask you a question. Did you tell Lara about ur visit? If she's coming to visit you at the airport, this will be a problem for us. I am looking forward to meeting you, but I don't want to meet her because Lara has caused so many problems. You don't know. However, all of us know this to some extent, but, mostly, Momin knows. I'm not imposing just asking you this, Please don't mind my asking. It's not you. We know you are a good person and are looking forward to your visit. It's only because we all love and respect Baba, and whoever disrespects him is no friends of ours or this virtual community. I believe that very much. This is my explanation. I'll do anything for this virtual community. Baba always says that I should play an active part here, and I try to do that but since this problem has begun to occur, I stay away. Please let me know how I can help.(THANKS).

§

Date: Thu, Jun 5th, 2003. 2:48:13 pm.

From: smiley93

Subject: Hello sir Sasha

Please don't mention my name or that of others. This was just in reference to Lara and Phil

Thanks

§

The very first message to Sasha from smiley93 that has been given in the foregoing sequence of postings begins with a gambit. Baba and everyone else in Baba's virtual colony knows how hard Sasha has worked on making the virtual community a success and, in addition they all know that Sasha is very concerned about, and interested in,

keeping the virtual community going. Consequently, the attack begins by mentioning something that is very close to Sasha's heart ... the activity level of the virtual community.

Smiley93 also offers a solution to the problem. The only reason the activity level is low is because of Lara and Phil. If they weren't present, then activity within the virtual community could return to its earlier levels.

In addition, when considered collectively, the three postings of smiley93 give expression to a variety of strategic maneuvers that are typical of Baba's approach to many problems. More specifically, there is: (1) a use of third parties (in this case smiley93) to manipulate another person's behavior (i.e., Sasha); (2) a request to keep things secret; (3) an attempt to force Sasha to make either/or decisions (i.e., you must choose them or us); (4) a rhetorical device of claiming that one is not trying to impose anything but, then, ask a question and, in the process, the individual who is doing the asking is actually seeking to induce -- and, therefore, impose upon -- Sasha to pursue a certain course of action; finally, (5) alluding to problems concerning the allegedly disrespectful messages that are being posted by Lara and Phil that no one -- including Sasha -- can understand as such unless they have information to which only Baba and Momin are privy to ... these are all characteristic stratagems that are employed by Baba.

§

June 13, 2003

I post a poem in the section of the virtual community that is reserved for such creations. The poem applies to almost any spiritual tradition in which someone has been betrayed or abused by an individual that has been entrusted with the guidance of the betrayed person.

§

The Guru

Horizons seem to expand
into lands that dreams are made from
as past disappointments fade
toward forgetfulness.

Possibilities fuel my
heart's soul with high octane hope
that helps me cope with doubts that,
like vampires, feed off the night.

Moonbeams lead down a strange way
to spaces where some say light
of the sun may rise in reflected,
human form.

Ready to abandon all
that preceded this moment,
a sought-for future calls me
to embrace uncertainty.

Yearning haunts the halls of time
where I have learned to deal with
problems through which real men taunt
my desire to transcend.

Shallow surfaces deceive;
misdirection is a key
to the magic that is spun
around one's eyes, ears, and mind.

I only ask for the truth
But they are ruthless with words
which wrap events in pretty
packages like bait on hooks..

My fate wobbles in between
what is said and done by those
fully mesmerized with one
who remains a mystery.
"We write our own stories,"
he said, which makes me wonder
why someone would betray
essence in such calculated
ways. "I never lie," is a
phrase that falls from his lips like
quips of a politician
who rarely speaks with honesty.
Wishing that the myth had been
more than an empty promise,
my heart spins on with the task
of answering what it asks.

§

June 15, 2003

Finally, some people are beginning to join Lara's Internet group that focuses on various issues surrounding spiritual abuse. A number of these new members have been abused by people claiming to be Sufi masters.

There are other members, however, who seem to have their own reasons for being part of the group. Some of these other individuals want to play 'blame the victim' and, more or less, say in their postings, that people get what they deserve or these other members of the group attack the intelligence and sincerity of someone who has been abused by arguing that any person who is sincere or has any understanding at all about spirituality would immediately be able to distinguish between a false and an authentic shaykh.

There are other participants in the e-group who wish to protect their own self-serving interests. They are uncomfortable with the attention being drawn to the fact that not everyone who calls himself or herself a Sufi teacher is authentic and, thereby, might not be authorized to provide, God willing, spiritual guidance.

Such individuals have joined Lara's group to monitor what is going on. They often try to steer the discussion in a direction that will advance their self-serving agenda – or protect it -- and such individuals don't care if they have to abuse other people in order to accomplish their hidden agenda.

Lara and I also have a strong suspicion, based on various pieces of evidence, that one or two of the people who have joined the group are in contact with either Baba or some of those who are Baba's lieutenants. If so, they likely are making regular reports about what is transpiring within the group.

However, what such people fail to understand is that neither Lara nor I care if this should be the case. We are trying to give voice to certain realities and truths concerning the presence of spiritual abuse in the Sufi community. Conceivably, some of these truths might register with any spy or spies who might be lurking within the e-group and if, then, if this does happen, then this would be a good thing.

All one can do is plant seeds. God willing, some of these seeds might come to fruition in the hearts of those who are participating in the group.

Below are a few of Lara's postings:

§

In discussing the nature of love with a friend today, I recall thinking how much I loved the fraudulent teacher I came into contact with last winter. Now I understand that the person I thought I loved was actually a person I did not know. I only knew the person he wanted me to see.

I am very clear on one thing. No matter how sincere I was with that person, he did nothing but give me one lie after the next. I have

confirmed that these were lies, and they were not "little white lies." They were major ones

For instance, he told me he had never been married. It turned out that he had been married at least twice in the past. He told me there had been a school shooting at the elementary school in his town. He gave many details about what had happened in this shooting, right down to how many children had been shot in front of a little boy who lives in his home. It has been confirmed by officials in the town and the state this "shaykh" lives in that the incident never occurred. I could go on and on and on.

Now I ask myself, did you love this man? How could I? He was not the man I thought he was.

When it comes to reciprocity, there was none. He had no love for me. He loved that I loved him, but that is not love.

Did he make me feel good? Absolutely.

Did I have fun with him? Absolutely.

But had I known the true nature of things -- that he was a fraud and a liar, I would not have loved him. It was the man I thought he was who I loved, not him. I loved an illusion.

I still care for the man behind the illusion as a human being and hope that he will come to learn the nature of the harm he causes others and himself by perpetuating his acts of exploitation, but I would never trust him again. He needs serious psychiatric help.

When it comes to forgiveness, my understanding is that if you forgive someone before that person has repented, and if that person continues hurting people, it is as if you become a partner in the fraud, and you enable that person to continue to harm others.

Many people enjoyed the company of Ted Bundy and loved him. What they did not know was that he was a serial killer and a sociopath. He was, according to some reports, very "likeable." I wonder what the women he killed would have to say about that.

Lara

§

Dear members,

Thank you for the poems. I have a poem to share with you that came to me when I first really started to become aware that the "teacher" I had been following was a fraud, and I wrote this poem to him.

Of course, the poem made him angry, although he did not even know at the time that his actions had inspired the writing of the poem. That anger should have been yet another clue or piece of evidence that this "great shaykh" had some work to do on his nafs before he could be trusted to act in the best interest of his mureeds. Here is the poem:

THE FOOL

I have faith in this:

Those human beings we
put our faith in are fools.

Their control exists solely
due to the love and worship
of the faithful ones."

[Lara Exits Stage Right.]

My good friend Tariq has taught me that no matter what an alleged teacher does with the sincerity and love of a seeker of truth, it is the love and sincerity of the seeker that is important and will be rewarded, insha' Allah. Thank you, Tariq, for imparting that message in a way that has helped me through these difficult times.

I hope you all have a pleasant day, full of wonder and gratitude for the gift of clarity we have received. Whenever I start to feel cynical about human beings and the tremendous destruction they are capable of, I always come back to the feeling of gratitude for having been shown the truth about the particular charlatan I was exposed to.

Take care, Lara

§

Dear Sally!

Actually, in some ways I have been fortunate, while in other ways I have been very unfortunate as far as the issue of fraudulent shaykhs is concerned. Some people spend many years with a false shaykh and don't know it because of the skillful manipulation and dishonesty of the fraud. But the experiences I had with this man were so obviously not the behavior of a real Sufi, much less a shaykh, that there was little room left for doubt.

One of the things that man told me was that when he was in college, he was very involved in the theater and stage productions. It turns out that he is a very good actor and has fooled many people. Perhaps he should have stayed with acting. He could have entertained people and not harmed them the way he is doing now.

Do real shaykhs try to turn people against their family members (other Muslims and Sufis)? Do real shaykhs lie to get their own way in worldly matters? Do real shaykhs sneak into the bedrooms of their mureeds' spouse or children? The list goes on and on and on. If this is acceptable behavior of a Sufi shaykh, then I want no part of that!

In my case, the "silsilah" was, in fact, a cult of a most devious kind. People who were once honest, upright, decent people have become corrupted just by being under the charlatan's control.

There is guidance, and then there is control. This man controls people and entire families.

The people being controlled are not uneducated people. These are intelligent people who have turned their minds and hearts over to a person who does not have their best interests at heart. Sadly, they think he will bring them closer to God, when, in reality, they are being duped. He is like a master chess player, and his mureeds are his pawns.

The only pawn I want to be is a pawn in the Divine game of Allah. It is my sincere belief that I was brought into contact with that man I used to call "Baba" not for his self-centered, self-seeking purposes but for other purposes. My only wish is to handle this experience in the way that is most pleasing to Allah.

Thank you for sharing with us, Sally. Your contributions are always appreciated. Lara

§

Dear Iqbal,

The man you asked about calls himself a shaykh and lives in the United States. He claims to have mureeds in other parts of the world, including Pakistan, Malaysia, as well as some other places.

My reasons for becoming part of this group do not include naming names here, so, I do not feel comfortable saying his name on the message board. The people who are his mureeds and have come to me to find out why I no longer associate with this group have been told the truth.

Other than those people who were at least open to hearing the truth, I have chosen to just remove myself from the situation. It has been my experience that people who derive meaning from associating with this man are violently opposed to hearing anything other than what they want to believe, and they can be quite closed-minded and angry when the truth is spoken in relation to his very un-Sufi-like behavior. In fact, they go to great lengths to maintain the delusion that hides what this man is really about.

By doing so, they are actually not helping him come to grips with his problems, and I do believe he has serious mental health problems. Otherwise, he would not be willing to do the things he does.

I can certainly understand why people would want to know who this man is. However, if you read the messages of some of the people who have been in contact with him or his mureeds -- and one in particular who might have even visited our group and posted a few messages under an alter-nickname (although I have no way to verify that, and even if I could confirm this, he would be welcomed here until or unless he began abusing people -- you would recognize the fraudulent teacher to whom I am alluding if you come in contact with him. This shaykh is very flirtatious with women, very charismatic, appears to be very "spiritual", until you look behind his words at his behavior, and he says things like: 'I never lie'. 'I never interfere in marriages'. 'I never use people'.

I have learned through my experiences with this man that the very statements he makes about what he doesn't do are exactly what he

does do. This is called misdirection. When the evidence of his lies, manipulations, and interference in marriages become clear, automatically his mureeds say to themselves, but he says he never lies, never interferes, and never uses anyone. Therefore, I must not understand what is going on.

Well, you know the old saying: If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and looks like a duck, it's probably a duck. Sadly, though, these people who depend on this shaykh for spiritual guidance and love continue to want to see a swan.

One of his mureeds, who is also a shaykh himself and lives in Canada, told a friend of a friend that even if this man did all these things with which he is being charged, the person in Canada doesn't care. It is the sad truth that this is what associating with this man brings people to -- not caring how others have been: harmed, exploited, used, controlled, and manipulated. In fact, without the knowledge of the person in Canada, the false guide about whom I am talking might be doing the same thing with the Canadian individual ... although perhaps in a different way than he did with me.

The "shaykh" in question (and I use that term very loosely here) left Canada some years back in the midst of a scandal involving a teenager who claimed to be pregnant with this man's child. The man lived with the girl's family, and they loved him.

No one in the silsilah believed her or her family at the time when they told the story. Of course, the shaykh never denied that he had done this, but he said things like: "We should forgive them." But having seen him operate up close and personal, it appears as if the foregoing story by the teenager might have had much more validity than people gave either the girl or her family credit for.

A friend of mine who has been on the Sufi path for over 30 years has told me: God does no injustice to his creatures. There is Divine justice, and it is not my responsibility to do anything other than speak the truth. Allah knows best what to do with the situation.

Lara

§

Dear Sara,

Welcome to the group! One of the reasons this group was started was because we realized that when people leave a Sufi silsilah or group, one of the things that happens is such people feel very isolated. The people they trusted and called friends are often told untruths about the person or people leaving, and the people still in the group might be told to "stay away" from such people in order to minimize the damage that personal accounts of their experiences within the group might cause to the group's sense of security. It is very well understood by such so-called shaykhs that if people were to begin to wake up from the delusions that have been so carefully constructed, their comfort, security, and power would be threatened and diminished.

Narcissistic personalities require a constant "fix" of adoration from their followers, and anyone who questions them is a threat to their next fix. The adoration from their followers is like a drug is for a drug addict, and we have all heard stories of what occurs when people interfere with the drug supply of an addict. If one adds to this mix the fact that a so-called teacher or "shaykh" might be financially and physically supported by his mureeds, then the stakes become even higher, and, as a result, intensified efforts will be made to isolate those members who leave while, simultaneously, controlling the people who stay behind.

The present e-group was created to: first of all, give support and refuge to people who have had this difficult life experience, as well as to provide education on the issue of spiritual abuse. We try our best to never name names here of the people who are involved in such things. The intent of this group is not to expose people who are perpetuating spiritual abuse but to expose the issues and problems associated with the abuse so we can move beyond those painful events while sharing our experience, strength, and hope with the membership all the while - - hopefully maintaining faith in the unseen nature of things and that everything that happens is part of the divine plan that, in the end, depending on our course of action, is for our spiritual benefit.

I know how difficult it has been for me when I was feeling isolated and alone, and this was so even though I had another person to talk with and who gave me constant, unwavering support. I cannot imagine

how difficult it would have been if I had been alone when I left the silsilah I was a part of.

It is my hope that there will always be a safe place for people to go when facing these life challenges. Personally, I believe in the expression: "When life deals you lemons, make lemonade." This group is our version of making lemonade.

I'm glad you are here. It is my hope that others who are still experiencing these problems will find their way out of their difficulties, too. We can pray for them and tell our truths.

Another expression that I have always taken to heart is: "My gift is my story." If your story or my story or anyone else's can help one person out of a harmful situation, then that story can be one of the most valuable gifts we can possibly give to another human being.

Lara

§

Dear Terri,

I do not see myself as a victim at all. In fact, I feel quite fortunate to have found out the truth about those people before I spent any more of my life with them.

When someone lies or betrays another human being -- especially while deceiving others into believing that he is a Sufi shaykh -- such an individual is doing harm to himself as well as victimizing himself. However, one would be in total denial to try to suggest that one is not hurt by these people of the lie.

Stating facts exactly as they occur from as an objective point of view as possible is not, in my view, treating myself as a victim. I thank God every day for being shown the truth.

Unfortunately, the ones who continue to associate with people who will lie to them and lead them away from God are the victims. It is them who I will continue to pray for.

Lara

§

Dear Paul,

You raise some interesting and important questions. Just now I was talking with a friend of mine about this very topic. Then I checked the postings, and I saw you had written. How's that for synchronicity?

I think that to understand the history of a person who is abusive and to feel compassion for that person is a good thing. Unfortunately, a truly abusive person who has not sincerely repented for her, or his, actions is likely to use the very compassion a person feels toward the abusive individual to the latter's advantage. Even then, I believe that feeling compassion for such people is appropriate. I believe we can forgive the harm, release the anger (and this is a process, not an event), and make an intelligent, informed decision as to whether to associate with that person in the future.

I have been told that forgiveness is the byproduct of healing from abuse, not a prerequisite. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean continuing on as before. The old saying is: If nothing changes, nothing changes.

I hope others will post and share their thoughts on this important topic. Lara

§

Dear Simah,

Please do not feel reluctant to post whatever you want here.

Postings will not be censored in any way. The posting of the quotes you submitted were an excellent opportunity to discuss issues of some importance. There is a lot of information out there, and sometimes the things that we learn are exactly what causes confusion later on when a situation like spiritual abuse occurs.

I will share an example from my own experience. I belong to a group which teaches that it is harmful to hold resentments and that forgiveness is always the best course of action. Although I believe these things to be true, people who abuse others and who also have

this sort of information will often use these very concepts to enable them to continue on with their abusive behaviors.

I know a man who on occasion would physically abuse his wife and threaten her very life. Rather than change his criminal behavior, which caused extreme distress in his wife, whenever she would suggest he get counseling for his "problematic behavior," he would tell her that the problem was that she would not forgive him.

For 20+ years she tried to forgive him until the damage was so great and the children of this family were so emotionally hurt that she left him. The results were this: The woman was extremely traumatized and so were the children. The man in question continued on about his life in exactly the same manner as always, proclaiming that the woman who left him was just not prepared to really forgive him.

A person who will abuse another will do it with whatever tools or opportunities he/she has -- whether this be their fists, their tongue, the concept of forgiveness and unconditional love, or even the Bible and Qur'an.

Your posting of the quotes from the book were an excellent opportunity to discuss such issues. The only time a posting will be deleted is if someone asks me to delete their posting or if a posting is abusive to other members in the group.

Thank you once again for the posting.

Lara

§

Dear Tariq,

Thank you for writing and posting such a well-thought-out and concise explanation of the effects of spiritual abuse. Many of the things you wrote about in the posting I have experienced in one way or another and at various times in the past several months.

Some of my close friends are therapists, and I know a little bit about the process of overcoming and integrating difficult experiences. One thing I have read about and been told is that it is simply not

enough to say: I forgive so and so. It is not enough to be willing to forgive. That is called "cheap forgiveness."

Before one can accept a situation for exactly what it is and in order for that acceptance to move one closer to forgiveness, one first must acknowledge to oneself -- and preferably to God as well as to another human being -- exactly how one has been emotionally and/or spiritually hurt, and -- in the most extreme cases -- physically hurt. This process of acknowledging how one has been hurt is a something that many people seek to avoid.

It seems like it would be easier and less painful to "just forgive." There are problems in this approach, however, and this message board might be a good place to explore some of those pitfalls in the future.

The stages of grief, when we experience a loss, follow a predictable process. If they are not experienced, some people develop what is called "chronic grief." The grief is always lurking in the background, unresolved and exerting influence in one's life in terms of our actions and perceptions.

A similar process must be worked through when one has experienced spiritual abuse because the feelings of loss can be very strong. The last thing that I want to happen is to remain stuck in feelings of chronic grief from my experiences of betrayal with an unethical spiritual teacher.

There has been some discussion about whether one's perceptions or impressions about a situation have any validity when trying to determine whether one has been spiritually betrayed or exploited. No one can answer some of these questions for another human being.

All another person can do is label certain behaviors. Some people who experience physical abuse in an intimate relationship make excuses for the batterer's behavior.

Understanding and excuses are two different things. It is the behavior that is damaging to others, and understanding where a person is coming helps one to see how such a mind-set leads to the abuse of others. However, while such understanding might help one to make sense of what led to such abusive behavior pattern, it does not change the destructive effects of that abuse on the one being abused.

Within this group, it is the damaging effects of spiritual abuse and the various ways of overcoming these effects and moving beyond them that I would like to focus on for, 'insha Allah, that is where the hope lies for me in proceeding on with a spiritual path that will be unblemished by the destructive actions of a few.

I'm looking forward to exploring some of these issues.

Lara

§

Dear Anne,

Thank you for the nice quotes from the book. Love and trust are two different things. Without trust, there can be no positive relationship between a teacher and student. I can love another human being and at the same time keep my distance from the harmful effects of their dishonesty -- and that is true whether we are talking about Sufi shaykhs or other people in life.

I don't associate with thieves ... not because I'm afraid I will begin stealing but because if those thieves will steal from someone else, they also are likely to steal from me. You know the old saying: Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.

If I know a person is a thief and leave my checkbook on the table and leave the room and come back and the checkbook is gone, well, "God does no injustice to his creatures." If I know a self-proclaimed Sufi shaykh is a liar and a womanizer, and I think that the person has something of lasting value to teach me, well, I get what I deserve. The only thing I will learn from him is what not to do.

In the meantime, there are decent, honest people in the world who I prefer to associate with. Life is hard enough without associating with people who do not hesitate to harm others.

I will continue to hope the abusive people will change, and I will continue to do what I can, with God's help, to become a better person. Nonetheless, in my view, becoming a better person does not include being foolish enough to enable people who are dishonest and are prepared to spiritually abuse people who love and trust them. I would

then, in that circumstance, become part of the problem, not part of the solution.

Lara

§

June 19, 2003

I have been trying to locate ‘Asma, the woman who told me many years ago about how her daughter had been sexually abused and exploited by Baba. I would like to find out how they are doing, but, mostly, I want to make contact in order to apologize to her for not believing her and her husband when they came to me and discussed the Baba situation.

I use the Internet to try to locate her. There are five or six of numbers that I find which belong to ‘Asma, but when I try these numbers, none of them is the right one.

Eventually, I recall the name of a close friend of hers. That friend also had been a mureed of Baba.

I have a vague recollection of the street address for this individual. Consequently, when the various possible matches for the search I have conducted show up, I am able to pick out the most likely candidate fairly quickly.

I phone. The man who I am trying to contact answers the phone ... I recognize his voice right away.

I identify myself and tell him why I am calling. He won’t give me ‘Asma’s number, but he says he will pass on my message to her.

We chitchat for a bit of time. Then, we bid our farewells to one another.

Within ten seconds of hanging up, my phone rings. Although no one answers when I pick up the phone, the caller ID indicates that someone is seeking to authentic, or verify, that the phone from which I am using belongs to me.

I suspect that the person I just spoke with wonders if Baba is playing more games with the man and his family. Hopefully, the area

code that is displayed for him during the authentication process should assure him that I am not calling from Baba's house.

§

June 19, 2003

I e-mail Barry in Canada. I figure the time is right to approach him about Baba.

Baba has not been in touch with Barry, who is Baba's mureed, for several years. Although Barry used to visit with Baba at one of the places where Baba lived over the last 14 years, and although Barry had been in phone and e-mail contact with Baba from time to time, nevertheless, there came a point when Baba cut Barry off and hid his whereabouts from Barry and refrained from passing on the new phone number or e-mail address to his mureed.

Why this is Baba did this, I am not sure. Maybe, this is because Barry is a very intelligent and inquisitive sort who likes to ask questions about why certain things are the way they are.

My e-mail to Barry leads to a phone conversation. This chat lasts quite a while.

Even though Barry has been out of contact with Baba, Barry still feels a fairly strong link with the man. He has had a few experiences of some kind -- including one in which he was rolling around on the floor in the basement of 'Asma's house when Baba was upstairs.

Barry is somewhat resistant to what I am saying, but he is trying to give what he is being told a fair hearing. He asks a variety of questions, and I try to answer them as best I can.

We talk about the time when Barry is sure that Baba is telling him that I should get a job, and I am sure Baba is saying something else. When all three of us are together, Barry asks Baba about which understanding is correct, and without skipping a beat, Baba sides with me.

However, now, I have no doubt that Barry did not misunderstand what Baba said to him. The problem is that Baba told each of us two

entirely different stories and, then, told each of us not to talk about what they had been told with anyone else.

Barry raised the foregoing issue with Baba at a time when Baba is staying with me and, for the most part, has nowhere else to go – at least, not easily. Consequently, since he knows where his self-interest lies, he tells Barry that Barry must have misunderstood what Baba had been saying in relation to me. You can be sure that if Baba's self-interest were better served by coming down on Barry's side of the matter, he would have told me that I must have misunderstood what he was trying to tell me ... and, then, he would forgive me for having made such a mistake.

I also point out to Barry that he has been put in cold storage for quite a few years. Baba: has not permitted Barry to visit with him; has not told Barry where Baba currently lives; has not shared his phone number with Barry, and has not given out his e-mail address to Barry. In addition, Baba has told me not to let Barry know these pieces of information.

Of course, Baba can always frame these requests in any way he wishes. The spin he gives to such matters is usually some variation of: 'I know what I am doing, or the individual's spiritual circumstances requires this, or so and so is being put through a test, or Baba can't trust a certain person with this information because that individual might disclose it to others, and Baba has learned through long years of bitter experience to play it safe in such situations.'

I tell Barry that Baba did the same thing with Alice, Ken, and a number of other individuals about whom I know. I ask Barry what sort of spiritual teacher keeps people away from the guidance they are seeking ... and does this for years.

I urge Barry to phone Momin and listen to his version of things -- which I assure him will be quite a bit different from mine. In addition, I say to Barry that I hope he asks as many questions of Momin as he did of me.

Barry tells me he probably will call Momin. He requests Baba's number, as well.

I tell him: "Ask Momin for this and see what happens." I know Momin will not give Baba's phone number to Barry, and this, in and of itself, should tell Barry something.

However, I am reluctant to give Barry Baba's phone number. I am worried because I have found Baba to be quite dangerous when it comes to the manner in which he wields his many tools of undue influence in order to undermine people's sense of reality, themselves, and the truth ... it is like Baba has a black belt in Satanic aikido and is able to use the ideas, intentions, goals, and behaviors of people against themselves. I don't want this happening to him ... besides if, after all is said and done, Barry wants to stay with Baba then he can use Momin as his conduit to Baba -- not me. My days of being a Judas goat are, God willing, over.

I encourage Barry to contact 'Asma whose family has been put through the wringer when Baba repaid their hospitality by impregnating their daughter, as well as by making use of one of the up-stair bedrooms to be intimate with one of their daughter's neighborhood and school friends. I give Barry the number of the person whom I called recently when I was trying to find 'Asma's phone number, and I tell him what happened in relation to this attempt, and, then finally, I make a request and ask Barry that if he is able to contact 'Asma, would he please tell her I also would like to speak with her.

Toward the latter part of the phone conversation, Barry asks if it is okay to discuss these things with Alice and 'Ali who live not too far away from Barry and who also are mureeds of Baba. Like Barry, neither of the two people he mentions has been in touch with Baba for three, or more, years.

I indicate to Barry that it is probably okay to let 'Ali know about things, but I ask him to hold off with respect to Alice. By the Grace of Allah, Alice has been able, finally, to extricate herself from an abusive relationship at the hands and mouth of her husband Ken.

On the basis of my phone conversations with her over the years, Alice feels the zikr that Baba gave to her to recite has helped free her from Ken's abusive treatment of her. She also has been saying some of the daily prayers, as well as reading the Qur'an on a regular basis.

I don't want anything disclosed to her - at least, not at this particular point in time -- which might disturb or disrupt the practices that Alice is observing. Moreover, I am also concerned about what impact the information about Baba might have on Alice relapsing and returning to her abusive husband.

Every time I talk by phone with Alice she asks whether I have heard from and/or seen Baba. Nevertheless, Baba has kept her at a distance for a number of years and something that I have done, but this also is something about which I have felt badly.

I never understood why Baba was shutting out Alice, Barry, or 'Ali ... along with a few others individuals about whom I know who live in Canada. I didn't feel that it constituted much in the way of compensation, but this set of circumstances is one of the reasons why I have tried to stay in touch with the three from time to time ... succeeding better with Alice and Barry than with 'Ali who has a somewhat delicate home situation.

For a time Alice attended the weekly fatiha. However, because of her age and some of the medications she was taking, she needed to go to bed fairly early in the evening, and, therefore, she discontinued going to the fatiha at Barry's place because they started too late in the day to fit in with her schedule.

In most respects, over the last six-to-seven years, I have been Alice's primary contact with the silsilah. Every two or three months, we speak with one another and bring each other up to date on what has going on in our respective lives.

From time to time during these conversations, she will ask about some spiritual issue. I do the best I can to reply to her queries.

If I thought there was any imminent threat of Baba re-entering Alice's life, I would tell her about what has been really going on in relation to such matters. Given the improbable nature of this possibility, however, I do not want to run the risk of Alice abandoning the spiritual practices she is doing simply because Baba is a fraud, and, just as importantly, I do not want to risk the possibility that if Alice does come to accept the idea Baba is a spiritual fraud that she might begin to entertain the idea that, perhaps, she should get back together

with Ken who has abused her considerably over the years ... something that I have tried to counsel her about for years.

I have interacted with Ken when he is on one of his drunks. I also have been the object of some of his drunk-induced fits of abusive behavior, so I have a fair amount of empirical data to underwrite my worries concerning Alice in this regard.

In addition, I know -- based on my experiences with Lara and Ron, as well as my recent experiences with various mureeds of Baba -- that a person who is part of an abusive relationship often has a great deal of difficulty breaking free of the gravitational pull of the abuser. Once the subject of abuse is able to break free, the situation is very fragile ... and it doesn't take much to cause the subject of abuse to go running back to his or her abuser.

I have come to appreciate the fact that although none of this might be very logical, there are reasons why it happens. The reasons might be pathological in nature, but pathology is often a substitute for constructive coping strategies that are absent from an abused person's repertoire ... which is the reason why such an individual might have been vulnerable to the gravitational pull of an abusive person in the first place.

Sometimes we go with what we know best ... even when this means that what an individual might feel most 'comfortable' with happens to be pathological in character. Becoming a competent, fully functioning adult is hard work, and, oftentimes, pathology – despite its drawbacks – seems, at least on the surface of things, as if it is an easier solution.

For all the foregoing considerations, I have asked Barry to put off saying anything to Alice. I know, however, that I will keep revisiting this issue in the future because on the opposite side of the ledger is my belief that people have a right to make informed choices – even if, all too frequently, the choices that are made with such information might be bad ones. The blessing of having the capacity to choose -- as well as the burdens that are entailed by such a blessing -- goes to the heart of what it means to be a human being. I don't want to deny Alice this dimension of her human birth right, but I am hoping to find the 'appropriate' time – whatever that might be – to tell her the things that need to be revealed about the situation.

§

June 26, 2003

'Ali calls from Canada and indicates he has spoken with Barry about what I previously had related to Barry with respect to Baba. He raises slightly different questions than Barry did.

After we talk for awhile, he recalls how the person who was primarily responsible for helping him spiritually over the years was me -- especially in conjunction with the weekly Sufi discussion sessions in Canada. At the same time, 'Ali feels there is something special about Baba, and 'Ali is reluctant to back away from his ba'yat with Baba.

Lara asks me if she can speak with 'Ali. She wants to tell him part of her experiences in a direct fashion instead of having them mediated and filtered through me.

By the end of the conversation with both Lara and me, 'Ali seems to be leaning toward becoming disaffiliated with Baba. However, he says he will have to think about things some more. Perhaps, this is the most for which we might hope -- ultimately, the decision is for 'Ali to make.

§

June 27, 2003

Both Lara and I have continued to chat, on and off, with Sasha for a number of weeks. Always, the central theme of these interchanges returns to Sasha's possible, forthcoming trip to the United States in order to meet with Baba.

In the meantime, Baba has been applying different kinds of pressure upon Sasha in order to get him to censor Lara and myself within the virtual community. One of the tactics used by Baba is to instruct his underlings to withdraw from the virtual community altogether and, as a result, not be around to render any assistance to

Sasha in the administrative and operational tasks involved in the running of the virtual community.

Sasha has done a tremendous amount of programming and art work to create a first-rate virtual, community environment. Baba knows this and in, essence, is indicating to Sasha in different ways that all your work, Sasha, is coming to nothing as long as you continue to be friends with Lara and Philokalia and as long as you are not compliant with my wishes that those two individuals be silenced.

Sasha and his friend Jonathan make extensive preparations for putting on a party for Baba's virtual community. The two individuals prepare a variety of games and prizes for participants.

Baba tells Sasha he will try, if he can, to come to the party, but Baba does not attend the party. He stays away, just as he has been keeping his visible distance from his own virtual community for months now. Baba does not dare run the risk of meeting either Lara or me within the virtual community and true to form, he runs away from things that are a threat to him or that require any moral courage.

Sasha sends Lara and me a recent e-mail of his to Baba, together with Baba's response.

§

Sasha3571 wrote:

Hello!

The jubilee party was wonderful. It was only sad that you didn't come :(

Regarding summer I wanted to ask you if I need to take elegant clothing (suit) with me. I don't know what all you have planned, but otherwise I think summer clothing is ok, LOL.

It would be wonderful if you have some time and we can discuss a few other things via instant messaging or to chat in the virtual community. Today I've deleted 'waterwings''s house and finally closed down one of the Hoods in your virtual colony.

I have also hired a new Events Neighborhood Director – Jonathan was a big help preparing the party. It was also nice to see Sand-Bandito after such a long time again.

Maybe you know and can tell me when the servers on which our resources are stored (e.g., BL report forms, images, style sheets and flash tools), will be online again, because I don't have enough web space on my internet service provider's server to be able to move all of the virtual community's files on :(.

Then we have another problem with inactive residents: Atooba, Stameena and FreshPedal have not logged in for several weeks :(. If you have their mail addresses or instant messaging IDs, I would like to have you contact them or give me their emails so that I can try. It's very important and I don 't want to lose more residents :(.

And last, but not least, I got an inbox from 'smiley' today. She said she has to leave the virtual community because she can't afford to continue paying the fees!? I thought she had received a free account.

If not, I want to ask if it's possible to make it available for her, because she is a great SBD and the virtual colony needs her very much. It would also be a big human loss if she has to go.

I miss you and would love to talk with you soon. With best regards,

Sasha

§

Greetings!

I am sorry that I could not reply sooner! The reason is that I was away on a vacation and I am still away. I used to take my laptop whenever I go anywhere, but this time I do not have my laptop with me, and I am using a friends computer ... lol! Today, for the first time after a whole month I am checking emails.

Sixteen more days for your arrival here! Yes, I am excited!

I have already explained to you regarding Phil and Lara, but I think that you might not have fully understood, so please let me explain in a

little more detail. They are not friends anymore. When you come, I will explain the reason.

Momin, Sand-Bandito, smiley, as well as Tim and his family have actually left because of those two. I have tried to tell them that they should not leave the virtual community. Believe me I have tried my best, but they are all very upset.

There are things Phil and Lara has done and said that I do not want to repeat here because as you already know that it is my nature not to say or think negatively regarding anyone, even if they have harmed me. All you have to know is that it is no longer possible for me to be in the virtual community as long as they are there.

I am not perfect. I am just a human being. I also like others make mistakes, but when someone makes a mistake or hurts me, I always forgive and try my best to forget the hurt, but unfortunately some people are different and they do not forgive or forget.

No matter what Lara or Phil have said and done, I have forgiven them and I still respect them. I have never said anything against them and never will, but please try to understand that, now it is not possible for me to be in the virtual community. As a friend I request you to please understand my problem, and please do not say anything to Lara and Phil. If they ask you about me, then please say that you have no information.

I hope that you have not made any plans of seeing them when you come because, then, this will be very difficult for me. Momin told me that you might want to meet some others whom you have met in the virtual community. I have no problems with that. In fact if you tell me where these people live, then I can even help you to see them.

But please understand that I have nothing to do with Lara and Phil, and I am sure that you will understand. If you still do not agree with me and want to see Lara and Phil or if you have told them your schedule, then please let me know.

By the way, sometimes the weather gets cool even in summer so, if you like, then you can bring a sweater or jacket. Other than that just summer clothing. TLion and family are on their vacation and they will be in Switzerland by Friday. I do not know which hotel they will stay in.

I have your address and phone number, but I did not give it to them because you might not want anyone else to call you. They could even come and see you, but they have no way to contact you LOL.

They will return from their vacation on the 6th or 7th of July. In any case, you will see them when you come.

This is the address you will need to give when you come: 1286 Riverknoll Ave. Hartford, Connecticut. The phone number is 203-425-XXXX and the name is Khan.

TLion (Sal Khan) and I will be there at the airport to receive you. I request you as a friend, please do not inform Phil and Lara of your coming.

Joseph

§

Baba has instructed all, or many of, his mureeds to adopt westernized names. Baba is Joseph; Khalil is Sal; Habib is Adam Fischer; Momin is Leon Rose; and so on.

This is all part of the facade that is being constructed by Baba in order to lure unsuspecting people into a web of deceit. Baba has been lying to Sasha about many pieces of Baba's biographical data -- such as name, geographical location, and religious affiliation.

§

June 30, 2003

Via e-mail attachment, Sasha sends Lara and me the log for a chat he had with Baba.

Sasha3571: hello

Baba: LOL,

Baba: I miss you very much

Sasha3571: wow, it has been a while

Baba: Yes

Sasha3571: how are you doing?

Baba: I am well, thank you

Baba: Now, I know why you could not reply. It was due to your exams

Sasha3571: I got your mail, but could not reply

Baba: Yes, due to your exams

Sasha3571: but now this semester is nearly finished

Baba: Sal and family will be in Switzerland on Friday or Saturday.

Sasha3571: yes I heard that

Sasha3571: I've never been there

Baba: King Plaza Hotel. The address is 43 VOIE DE MOENS Geneva 1223

Baba: The toll free number there is 008-008-224-XXXX

Sasha3571: ok, but I don't think I will call them, LOL

Baba: Ok

Sasha3571: but I would love to talk with you

Sasha3571: last time Jonathan and I tried this voice chat feature, LOL

Baba: We can talk now here if you have the time

Sasha3571: but my integrated notebook microphone makes problems

Baba: I know that you are shy so let us just type messages LOL

Sasha3571: I have another professional one

Sasha3571: but first I need to change some settings, LOL

Sasha3571: hopefully it will work next time

Sasha3571: last time it worked, but you could hardly understand anything - it was so noisy and silent

Baba: What did you want to discuss before coming?

Sasha3571: I have a few questions

Sasha3571: I only want to take as much clothing as I really need with me

Sasha3571: do you think I will need something exclusive too?

Sasha3571: like a jacket or so

Sasha3571: LOL

Baba: Well, here even in summer, sometimes in the evenings it may get just a bit cool. So, just one jacket is enough. Other than that, summer clothing is best because it is warm

Sasha3571: I don't know to which other exciting places you will take me, LOL

Baba: Well, there are many places, and since you will be on vacation I am sure you will want to go to Disney world too LOL

Sasha3571: ROFL

Baba: LOL

Sasha3571: roller coasters can make me sick LOL

Baba: My only problem will be if you will want to see some people who are not my well wishers

Baba: No, there is much to see other than roller coasters. There are Disney shows

Sasha3571: regarding my former question, I rather meant if I should take a suit with necktie and this stuff with me, LOL

Baba: No lol, no neck tie or suit

Sasha3571: ok great

Sasha3571: then I have another problem

Baba: I wear jeans most of the time

Sasha3571: last time I spoke with Momin about the journey

Baba: Yes, he told me

Sasha3571: he gave me the phone number of TLion again

Sasha3571: but I still don't have yours

Baba: Can I ask you a question?

Sasha3571: sure

Sasha3571: I saw that Sand-Bandito, too, is online

Baba: If I have a friend, and my friend tells me that someone is not a well wisher and wants to harm him. Do you think I should be friendly with my friend's ill wisher?

Sasha3571: I think you want to address Lara and Phil with this question

Baba: LOL. I am sure you know me by now and you know very well that I would never say this unless it is very serious.

Sasha3571: my attitude is ...

Baba: I am always the forgiving type, and I try never to stop anyone from being a friend to others, but this situation is very different

Sasha3571: it's not my business what is between them and some of you

Sasha3571: but I for myself have a good relationship with them

Sasha3571: and don't see any reason why I should cancel contact

Baba: I know what you want to say. I too am like you, but this situation is different. I have nothing against them, but they have done and said many things, and I have forgiven them. But they have tried to harm me

Sasha3571: these days I am even very grateful that Lara became BD of the Round Table Hood. After smiley has left the virtual community, we had to find a follower

Baba: I understand what you say. Why should you keep away from them since they are your friends? I understand this. I am not asking you to sever contact with them. All I am requesting you is that you not mention me when you are with them

Baba: I just wanted to let you know. Whatever your decision is that is ok with me. I will always respect you

Sasha3571: ok

Sasha3571: can I ask you a favor?

Sasha3571: it's regarding smiley

Baba: Yes

Sasha3571: well, she has left the virtual community but she did not officially confirm this

Baba: She is on a vacation to California

Sasha3571: and if she still has the opportunity to login, I want to ask her to remove the BD label from her house name

Sasha3571: she did not reply to my mail

Baba: She and some others are not listening to me. I have told them many times that Lara and Phil are against me, but smiley and the other people should not leave the virtual community because of that. But smiley and the others say that they just cannot be there when Lara and Phil are there. They were approached by Lara and told many things against me. I told smiley and the others that I have forgiven Lara and Phil. But they are hurt

Sasha3571: to me 'smiley' said she cannot afford to pay anymore ... and that was confusing,

Sasha3571: because I thought she got a free account

Sasha3571: I have a problem with Atooba and Stameena too

Sasha3571: both have been away for nearly 2 months

Sasha3571: and if their reason is the same, then I really have a problem

Sasha3571: I want to be fair to other residents who are still frequently there, want to keep the Hood active and, therefore, I cannot keep the virtual residences of the non-active people open forever

Baba: Yes

Sasha3571: do you have any contact with Stameena or Atooba ?

Baba: The payment thing is not the real reason that smiley left. The real reason for her and the others leaving is what I have told you

Baba: Sand-Bandito has contacts with them more because they came to the virtual community through him

Sasha3571: ok so I will ask him

Sasha3571: because I need to get in contact with them

Sasha3571: as NL I am worried about anyone who disappears silently

Sasha3571: what would you do in my position? I can't keep their virtual houses open forever

Baba: I don't think they are coming back

Sasha3571: ok

Sasha3571: but even if they don't come back to the virtual community, I still want to keep in contact with them

Baba: I will ask Sand-Bandito to talk to them and let you know, but Sand-Bandito had told me that they are not coming back

Sasha3571: if they wish to contact me, feel free to forward my mail address

Baba: I will ask Sand-Bandito to ask them to contact you

Sasha3571: but I only want to "hear" something from them

Baba: Yes, Sand-Bandito has your email address and he can forward it to them

Sasha3571: there is also another problem with Tronquail and Annison

Sasha3571: they too have become inactive

Sasha3571: and because they are Bloc Leaders, this is a big problem

Sasha3571: they did not send the last reports

Sasha3571: they don't login, and they don't respond to my emails

Sasha3571: and now I have to do their job because they don't come

Baba: I understand all that, but my friend, believe me it hurts me most to see all my friends leave the virtual community. So much hard work and money has been put for it

Sasha3571: yes it's sad

Sasha3571: This is especially so because in the last two months, there have been many great updates to the virtual community

Baba: Yes, Lara and Phil. The two greatest updates. LOL

Sasha3571: I meant the designer homes and much more, LOL

Baba: and it is funny because I paid for them and I brought them into the virtual community

Sasha3571: but now that you said it ...

Sasha3571: the fact is, Lara and Phil were a big help

Sasha3571: they helped to increase the activity in our hood

Baba: It seems that I paid for them and brought them just to harm me. rofl !

Baba: Well, I am a good Christian and I wish them well. No matter what they think of me, I still wish them the best of everything

Sasha3571: since they come back to our Hood, I have not noticed anything that they have done which would harm others

Baba: In real life they have done much to harm me

Baba: My friend, you keep saying that it will be fun if everyone comes back, but you are not giving us any surety that the trouble makers will be excluded lol

Baba: and if they continue logging in, then since you are the NL, you will have to decide what to do. Please don't do it because I am asking you to do that. You should do it only if you yourself decide that this is best

Baba: My good friend. The first thing is to decide whether you, in your heart, really feel and believe that they have created mischief. If you really believe in your heart believe that wrong has been done and must not continue ... only then should you decide what to do about it if it happens again.

Baba: You are the Neighborhood Leader. You should decide on your own, and not because I or anyone else tells you

Sasha3571: please understand that although I really would love to finish this and other 3D worlds, nevertheless, without motivation, it's hard to keep working on these projects

Baba: Yes, I understand that, but we should wait and see if the trouble is over in our virtual Hood first

Sasha3571: what would you do if you were in my position? Would you travel to see you in the United States ?

Baba: If I were Sir Sasha and if I were still a very sincere friend of Baba, I would first realize how my friend Baba has been hurt by all those gossips and slanders. Then I would wait till my friend heals

Baba: Then I would also realize that no one will look after me as well as my friend Baba will. I would also realize how much Baba loves and respects me and how sincere Baba is. I would definitely know that no one else really wants me to come to the United States due to friendship. The others want me to come only because of politics and to use me

Baba: Then, I would truly in my heart weep for misunderstanding my friend Baba. Then I would wait for his wounds to heal

Baba: If I were you, I would realize that Baba accepted me as his own brother and that Baba could never even dream or imagine that I could misunderstand his intentions. Baba's friends would be my friends, and those that hurt Baba can never be my friends

Baba: Please do not think that I am saying these things to influence your thinking. No that is not my intent. Since you asked me what I would do if I were you, I have told you the truth

Sasha3571: I understand

Baba: It is not fair and wise to want the oppressed to be in the same place as the oppressor. My friend, don't you realize that you were actually asking me to come to the virtual community and keep getting hurt?

Baba: You knew all that was being said and posted, and, yet, you wanted me to come

Baba: In fact the truth is that if I were you, then I would be the one to tell you never to come to such a place where you are being insulted

Sasha3571: at first I did not understand your serious reasons to leave

Baba: My friend, what was posted remained the same. If you did not understand those posts, then you would not have understood them even now, but you yourself said that when you re-read those messages you understood that they were not good messages and you deleted them

Sasha3571: which posts do you mean now?

Baba: Anyway, my good friend. All I want to say is that I still am your sincere friend. Hurt but still sincere. Wounds take time to heal lol

Sasha3571: I am sorry

Baba: I mean all those posts that were posted by them against me, and very insulting posts

Sasha3571: none of them are still on the board

Sasha3571: but why did you not contact the virtual community security first?

Baba: I was surprised that the virtual community security allowed these postings for so long. Those posts were against the regulations of the virtual community. The virtual community regulations forbid any such posts. I cannot believe that the virtual community security did not see those posts. Those security people are supposed to be well informed about all that happens in the virtual community

Baba: Anyway, it's over now, and it's not good to remember all that

Sasha3571: I have to ask you a serious, awkward question which makes me feel rather bad

Sasha3571: what about Fizzy, Annison, tronquail and bk? They are still staff, but they don't keep contact with me or do any of their Hood duties

Sasha3571: I can't keep grant them access forever

Baba: Fizzy is like my son. Don't you realize my friend, how hurt he was also?

Baba: The contract for the virtual community is in Fizzy's company name

Sasha3571: ok, please don't think I am heartless, but it's impossible for me to work with staff members that won't keep contact with me

Sasha3571: maybe it's really the best solution if I resign

Baba: The others all used to read those posts, and, at first, they wanted to respond, but I stopped them and told them that if someone throws a stone that does not mean that we should also do that. Then they saw that you are not taking any action against those posts

Sasha3571: because if I continue as NL I can't handle this situation anymore

Baba: My good friend. I don't think it is because they don't want to keep contact with you

Sasha3571: and it's indeed unfair against the others (Sun, Earth, Sky, ..) who spend so much time in support of this virtual community

Baba: The only reason why they don't come anymore to the virtual community is because of what I have explained.

Sasha3571: I understand what you have said about why they don't come to the virtual community, but why have they stopped contacting me?

Baba: Other Hoods also have lost many people. But their NLs are still there trying to recruit new people

Sasha3571: yes but other hoods aren't in this precarious situation like our hood

Sasha3571: about two thirds of our houses are dead!!

Sasha3571: and I have problems with respect to deleting those house (I really don't want to, but I am also want to keep the hood interesting for the people who remain)

Baba: Yes, because in other hoods no one ever was allowed to create such problems for the rest of the residents.

Sasha3571: and so I think it's best to resign

Baba: In other hoods do you see anyone slandering and hurting?

Baba: Only in our hood have people been allowed to post such terrible things. Please don't misunderstand these people that left

Baba: You have been in the larger virtual community even more than I have, and did you ever see in any hood, such hateful and dirty posts?

Baba: Sand-Bandito tried to stop them, but they became more violent. Then Sand-Bandito spoke to you. But when he realized that you have no objection to those posts, he too was very hurt

Baba: Anyway, please let us not continue about the posts lol . Now let us only talk of pleasant things. Let us forget all that

Sasha3571: yes

Sasha3571: it's too sad to speak about these 'things'

Baba: Yes, lol

Baba: What is done is done LOL

§

There are many things in the previous chat that are worth reflecting upon. One aspect of the discussion is that Baba has referred to himself as a Christian. There is nothing necessarily wrong with being Christian, but prior to the virtual community, Baba has identified himself as a Muslim and as Sufi for years. Consequently, he is seeking to mislead Sasha about who and what Baba is and what he believes.

Another interesting feature is that Baba tries to create the impression that terrible slanders and untruths have been perpetrated against him on the virtual community message board, and, yet, Sasha told him that he had read the posts and found nothing problematic about the postings – to which Baba replies that Sasha’s failure to understand the nature of the posts is only because Sasha doesn’t really know what is going on ... and, therefore, understand what the posts really mean. When Baba says that those posts have now been removed, Sasha expresses puzzlement about which posts Baba is referring to that have been removed.

A few posts had been removed because Sand-Bandito was the one who did that. However, the vast majority of the posts have remained because they were not abusive, slanderous, or the like.

The vast majority of the posts were merely famous quotes, poems, or ideas about spirituality, love, and the like. However, to be sure, many of the things that were said in Lara and my posts were often at right-angles to the sort of evangelical agenda that Baba’s minions were trying to advance. Nonetheless, such posts were not so much argumentative with respect to the postings of Baba’s followers, as much as our posts were simply putting forth an alternative perspective as food for thought for anyone who might visit the message board.

In addition, Baba fails to note that, in point of fact, when the word wars were going strong, security representatives from the larger virtual community had visited the message board for Baba’s Hood on the basis of rumblings that they are had heard, in one way or another,

and when they actually came and read the posting, they saw nothing objectionable to any of the posts that were being made.

Now, of course, it is true that when I posted something like ‘The Guru’ poem, Baba would construe such a poem as being dirty, slanderous and abusive because it served to unveil the nature of what happens in relation to false spiritual teachers – something that Baba wished to keep hidden. Anyone who did not know about what Baba had been doing would see the poem as anything but a poem about a certain subject.

Baba is at a disadvantage however. He can’t go into the details of anything because the facts all go against him. Consequently, he only can talk in generalities about how some posting, or other, is dirty and slanderous, hoping that such generalities will be enough to induce someone – maybe Sasha – to stop what is going on.

In addition to ‘The Guru’ poem, I also posted the words to Bob Dylan’s ‘Positively 4th Street’ – a song that I felt captured everything that I wanted to say to Baba without actually saying that the song’s words were a dedication to Baba. The opening line for the song is: ‘You got a lotta nerve to say you are my friend. When I was down, you just stood there grinning.’ Another line runs: “You say you lost your faith but that’s not where it’s at, you had no faith to lose, and you know it.” Or: “I know the reason that you talk behind my back, I used to be among the crowd you’re in with.” Another line says: “Do you take me for such a fool to think I’d make contact with the one who tries to hide what he don’t know to begin with.” Yet another line in the song that resonates deeply with me is: “No, I do not feel that good when I see the heartbreaks you embrace, if I was a master thief, perhaps I’d rob them.” And, finally, the coup-de-grace: ‘I wish that for just one time you could stand inside my shoes and just for that one moment I could be you ... you would know what a drag it is to see you.’ But, every verse of the song reflects a facet of my relationship with Baba.

Baba knows what I am saying, but anyone else who reads the words will not realize what is being said. Baba wants it to stop, but what can he say? He is caught.

Smiley and the others didn’t leave the virtual community on their own. They left because Baba told them to do so. I have been around Baba for long enough to know that nothing happens without his

approval. His telling Sasha that Baba has tried to keep the people in the virtual community but that they are not listening to him leaves me ROFL because I know the reality of his relationship with people.

Another point of interest to note is how Baba keeps saying that he is not trying to influence Sasha's decision. Yet, all the while he is doing precisely that – through his various arguments within the chat, and through his getting people to leave the community and not help Sasha out, as well as through Baba's telling the people who leave that they should be in contact with Sasha and they should not respond to any of Sasha's efforts to contact them.

Finally, Baba indicates on a number of occasions that it is not his way to say anything bad or negative about people. Then, he proceeds to indicate how Lara and I are hateful, slanderous, hurtful, abusive individuals.

Baba tells Sasha that Baba has forgiven us. However, at the same time he keeps telling Sasha that he must heal ... and the fact of the matter is: real forgiveness is not possible until healing has been completed – even if Baba actually had anything of a substantial nature for which to forgive us – other than our making efforts to warn people, in our round-about way, about Baba's true character and actual agenda.

§

June 30, 2003

Sasha has forwarded to Lara and me the chat log for a conversation that he just had with Momin:

Momin: Hello Sasha

Sasha3571: hello Momin

Momin: How are you?

Momin: Are you able to chat?

Sasha3571: yes

Sasha3571: I'm fine, thx

Sasha3571: I even have been chatting with Baba

Sasha3571: since a long time, LOL

Momin: That is great

Momin: I am sure that you are happy about it

Momin: Have the details of your visit worked out now?

Sasha3571: not yet, I have to talk with Lara again

Sasha3571: and with 'small'

Sasha3571: but I've solved the adapter problem for my camera charger, LOL

Sasha3571: so I can take it with me

Momin: You realize that it will make it very awkward for Baba and myself if you decide to visit Lara

Sasha3571: yes, but I won't involve you

Sasha3571: a long time ago Lara has already invited me to come

Momin: There are two things to consider

Momin: One is your friendship with Baba

Momin: His feelings will be very hurt if you give preference to Lara and put him in an awkward situation

Momin: Secondly she is about seven to eight hours traveling distance by car from Baba's house

Momin: How will you get there and back?

Sasha3571: I need to arrange that with Lara

Momin: Have you decided that you will go and see her?

Sasha3571: I have not decided anything finally yet

Momin: Ok

Momin: Would you like my sincere advice?

Sasha3571: I am grateful for any advice

Momin: You are a close friend of Baba

Momin: You have been friends for a long time

Momin: It has been a sincere friendship between you and Baba

Momin: Baba is making all the arrangements for your visit

Momin: You have to give a lot of consideration to his feelings

Momin: if his friendship is important to you

Momin: then I advise you not to do things that are embarrassing for him

Momin: You are coming as his guest

Momin: If you choose Lara over his feelings, then he will feel very hurt

Momin: He will not say anything to you

Sasha3571: I will consider everything before I make my decision

Momin: Mon will not stop you from doing anything that you want

Momin: Neither will I

Momin: My sincere advice is that you give all your time to Baba because of your friendship with him

Sasha3571: sorry for my delayed responses

Momin: Discuss possibilities with Baba but make him feel that you are coming to see him first and foremost

Momin: Baba is your friend and a sincere one

Sasha3571: I have to go soon. Can I quickly talk with you about some stuff related to the virtual community?

Sasha3571: it regards the Neighborhood Deputy assignments

Momin: yes

Sasha3571: if you agree, you will now take care about Sherwood Forest and Silver City

Sasha3571: because Jonathan is BL/ND in Emerald City

Sasha3571: you don't need to move

Sasha3571: but I just wanted to ask you for help:

Sasha3571: Tronquail and Ulysses make me worried

Sasha3571: they did not send the last two reports and are not online for a week

Sasha3571: as Bloc Leaders, they should know that this behavior is not appropriate

Sasha3571: for you it's easier to get in contact with them

Momin: I suggest that we have a detailed talk when we meet

Sasha3571: in the virtual community?

Momin: In real life

Sasha3571: well if their absence has something to do with Lara or Phil ...

Sasha3571: as BL they nevertheless can't be away so long without notice

Momin: You are right in terms of their duties

Momin: They should let you know

Sasha3571: if they don't want to look after their blocks, they could resign any time

Sasha3571: but as long they are BL they have duties

Momin: People may have lost interest

Sasha3571: sorry that I bother you with these problems, but I don't understand the residents anymore

Momin: Here is my understanding

Momin: It is based on my own thinking

Momin: I have not consulted anyone

Momin: People were very hurt by the posts of Lara and Philokalia

Momin: There were personal comments

Momin: They have made all kinds of accusations

Momin: People do not want to respond

Momin: They prefer keeping quiet

Sasha3571: sometimes I think it would be best if I resign as NL too

...

Sasha3571: it would save a lot of time and work

Momin: I am staying on only because of you

Momin: I have to be honest

Sasha3571: but there are still a few that love to be in the virtual community (me too)

Sasha3571: and for those individuals, I need and want to be there for them

Momin: I do not want to hurt your feelings

Sasha3571: you don't

Momin: So I remain in the virtual community but my heart is not in it anymore

Momin: I participate as a courtesy

Sasha3571: but I hope you know that staff member should be an example for the others

Momin: yes

Sasha3571: that makes the situation with Ulysses and Tronquail so difficult

Momin: It is difficult to be an example when there is no longer any interest

Sasha3571: yes

Momin: To be honest, I do not feel that I am a good example any longer

Sasha3571: but during the past weeks the situation seems to have become better (in my eyes)

Sasha3571: Jonathan, for example, is very motivated

Momin: Yes

Momin: You have some good people

Sasha3571: and he came with a couple of new ideas

Momin: yes

Sasha3571: I understand if Ulysses and Tronquail won't change their behaviors, but in that case, I need to find two other BLs

Momin: Yes

Momin: I am also prepared to give up my staff position if you can find appropriate people

Sasha3571: such people are rare

Momin: I will be very happy just to be a resident

Sasha3571: and I still believe in your abilities

Momin: You are a very kind person

Momin: I have high regard for you

Momin: I have no other interest in the virtual community any longer

Sasha3571: I have no wish to try to influence you ...

Sasha3571: I think you need to make your own decision

Sasha3571: if you don't want to be an ND anymore, you can resign any time

Sasha3571: but this would result in a big loss for the Hood

Momin: My strong preference would be just to be a citizen if I cannot be a good example as a staff member

Momin: I am doing less and less as a staff member

Momin: Partly because I am busy with other things

Momin: Partly because my interest in the virtual community is not the same as before

Sasha3571: today I had the impression that you felt better as BL

Momin: Let me explain if you have a few minutes

Sasha3571: ok

Momin: I was very disturbed with what Lara and Phil were doing

Momin: I drove many hours to see them

Momin: I was not treated well

Momin: I have nothing against them

Momin: but do not want to associate with them

Momin: I will never speak ill of them

Momin: I wish them all the best

Momin: but I do not want to associate with them.

Momin: It is a personal decision

Momin: I have not mentioned this to anyone except you

Momin: I wanted to let you know so that you will understand

Momin: They have made accusations against friends that are hard for me to accept

Sasha3571: sometimes it's hard when one is deceived by others

Momin: You have a good relationship with them

Momin: I do not wish to influence your relationship

Momin: but I must tell you how I feel

Sasha3571: yes, for myself, I am happy that they came back and offered their help to rescue our virtual community

Momin: If you give me permission, I will resign as ND and be a resident

Momin: You are the NL and I respect you very much

Sasha3571: it's up to you, but please take enough time to consider it

Momin: As I mentioned, I do not wish to hurt your feelings in any way

Momin: You have been so good to me

Sasha3571: without you it will be hard to serve this community

Momin: I do not want to let you down

Momin: At the same time I have to be honest and tell you how I feel

Sasha3571: if you really want to resign, then maybe you might want to continue on as BD?

Momin: My strong preference would be just to be a resident

Sasha3571: ok

Sasha3571: whenever I lose a staff member it's a sad day for this virtual hood

Momin: That is why I have been reluctant to resign

Sasha3571: but I respect your decision

Momin: I know how you feel about such things

Sasha3571: your own contentment has priority

Momin: You are always so respectful

Sasha3571: yes it's a hard time

Momin: I appreciate your understanding very much

Sasha3571: smiley's resignation was also a sad incident

Momin: yes

Sasha3571: but I am happy that Jonathan found a new BD

Momin: yes

Sasha3571: especially because he holds the BL and Events ND jobs in tandem

Momin: I am sure that you will find other good people

Momin: It is time to refresh

Sasha3571: I won't find anyone else with your abilities here

Momin: You are very kind

Sasha3571: it's the truth

Momin: Let me assure you that I have the highest regard for you

Sasha3571: thank you, it means a lot to me

Momin: I will always keep this regard for you.

Momin: I have nothing against anybody

Momin: Interests change

Momin: Friendships last

Sasha3571: but I hope that you won't become like most of the others who have just silently disappeared from the hood

Sasha3571: ... the virtual community

Momin: With your agreement, I will revert to being just a citizen

Sasha3571: it happened with Baba

Sasha3571: ok

Momin: but I will be around to support you as best as I can

Momin: I appreciate your understanding

Sasha3571: so your decision is final?

Sasha3571: but I want you to know that you are always welcome if you ever want to "comeback"

Momin: I think that being just a resident is best.

Sasha3571: ok, I won't change anything today, so I will ask you again when we meet next time, or you can leave me a message

Momin: Ok

Sasha3571: I need to go now

Momin: I wish you all the best

Momin: Good night

Sasha3571: it was the worth the work if you were happy

Sasha3571: bye for now, good night

§

There are many things worth noting in the foregoing chat. Momin spends a fair amount of time trying to make Sasha feel special -- for example, when Momin speaks about how the only reason Momin is hanging around in the virtual community is because of Sasha.

On the one hand, this technique is a form of love bombing in which an individual seeks to make another person feel special and, therefore, render the latter person vulnerable to certain kinds of manipulation. On the other hand, there is an aspect of seeking to make another person feel special in which one seeks to instill a sense of obligation in the other person ... that is, to induce a tendency in another human being to want to reciprocate in ways that will be acceptable to the individual who is trying to exploit a relationship for some other purpose, while, simultaneously, attempting to create a craving in the other person with respect to continuing to be the focus of such positive attention.

Momin tells Sasha that he -- Momin -- is going to tell Sasha something that Momin has not shared with anyone else. Momin says he is not going to associate with Lara and Philokalia anymore.

In truth, Momin had made this decision more than 3 ½ months earlier, following his March trip to Bamford in which, at Baba's instigation, Momin barged in on Lara and myself uninvited – in fact, in opposition to my clearly stated wishes to Momin concerning the matter of meeting. Many other people knew about Momin's decision not to associate with either Lara or myself long before Momin told Sasha.

Momin tells Sasha he (i.e., Momin) was not treated well when he traveled to Bamford in mid-March to see me. What Momin conveniently leaves out of his account – facts that would not support Momin's contention that he was badly treated -- are the following

items: (1) He knew I did not want to meet with at that time; (2) Momin knew if he called and asked to come to Bamford, he very likely would not have gotten an invitation from me, and, therefore, he snuck-around behind my back and got my address from my unsuspecting brother; (3) he never bothered to take off his shoes when he came into my house; (4) he insisted he would speak with me for no more than an hour because he had promised Khalil 's mother he would return her son home as quickly as possible (and, really, if Khalil's mother were so concerned, then, why let Khalil go in the first place on a 20+ hour trip?) (5) he was very crude and rude during his interaction with Lara and myself, not giving any indication he wanted to listen, with an open mind and heart, to what was being said, but, rather, he wanted to act as a prosecutor for his monarch (namely, Baba); (6) he demanded things be given to him to which he was not entitled (e.g., all my e-mails to and from Baba); (7) he made totally ludicrous accusations concerning me, claiming that I wanted to take over the silsilah; (8) both upon inviting him into my apartment, as well as when he left, I was the one who said that we should hug as a token of friendship.

During the foregoing chat, Momin -- as is the habit of his mentor, Baba -- is constantly trying to influence Sasha's decision, and, yet, Momin says he is not trying to influence what Sasha does In addition, Momin tells Sasha that if Sasha chooses Lara over Baba, then Baba will be very hurt by this, but, Baba would never inform Sasha of this ... and, yet, this is precisely what Baba is doing by using Momin to convey Baba's possible future sentiments to Sasha.

I have seen Baba use this same technique on a number of occasions. He will get someone to say something to someone else, but, Baba will also instruct his messenger not to mention that Baba has spoken to the messenger about the message that is about to be communicated.

Baba has instructed everyone, including Momin, to withdraw from the virtual community. Baba knows how much the virtual community means to Sasha ... both in terms of the virtual community's future possibilities, as well as in terms of past commitments and hard work with respect to that same virtual community.

Most of the people who have left don't even have the courtesy to inform Sasha they are leaving, despite the fact Sasha has done yeoman

service to their virtual community by helping Baba to get the virtual space operating as an attractive, artistic, and well-programmed piece of cyberspace. Baba tells such people to leave, and that is what they do ... with little concern for the feelings of Sasha and even less concerned for what Sasha has done for them or their so-called shaykh.

Sasha did what he did in the virtual community out of friendship. Sasha did what he did out of a desire to bring happiness into people's lives – something to which Sasha alluded just before his chat with Momin ended.

Momin is telling Sasha that he -- Momin -- wishes to become just an ordinary citizen of the virtual community, without any authority or responsibilities. What Momin is not telling Sasha – although Sasha might well suspect that such is the case – is that Momin has no intention of being a citizen, ordinary or otherwise, either. Momin is going to silently disappear just like all the others have done ... including Baba.

Momin informs Sasha that Momin was very disturbed by the behavior of Lara and Philokalia, but he doesn't say what there is about such behavior that is disturbing. He says Lara and Phil have made inappropriate postings to the public message board of the virtual community, but Momin doesn't explain to Sasha what the precise nature of the inappropriateness is with respect to such postings. Momin says Lara and Phil have made accusations against friends of his, but he doesn't say what those accusations are, or who the accusations are directed toward, or whether there is any truth to what is being said. Momin tells Sasha about how he -- Momin -- was treated very badly by Philokalia and Lara when Momin traveled so many hours to meet with them, but Momin doesn't specify in what way he was treated badly.

Momin says to Sasha that he -- Momin -- will not speak any ill of Lara and Tariq/Phil. However, Momin does proceed to speak ill of us but, like his master, Baba, Momin frames things in such a way so as to enable him to say bad things without making it seem like he is speaking ill of someone.

July 2, 2003

Barry calls. He says he has talked with Momin about the situation.

Barry indicates that, naturally, Momin tells a different version of things than the account that I gave during my last conversation with Barry. However, Barry says there is one thing that he found of considerable interest in what was related to him by Momin..

More specifically, Momin told Barry that Momin doesn't believe Lara. But, Momin adds, "even if what she said were the truth, this wouldn't matter to Momin and this wouldn't alter his nisbath with Baba."

Barry feels that what I have told him has the ring of truth to it. At the same time, he is concerned about how to go about finding a new spiritual guide.

We run through various possibilities among the alleged shaykh about whom we both are aware. There are problems in each case -- which is not to say such people are not authentic shaykhs but, rather, that there are certain counter-indications in each instance that give expression to a variety of questions that cannot be definitively answered ... at least answered with sufficient resolution that one would be willing to place one's soul in harm's way despite the existence of such doubts.

I ask Barry if he has talked with 'Ali anymore about this issue. Barry says he has and, for the time being, 'Ali is inclined to stick by Baba.

§

July 7, 2003

I have been worried about 'Uzma for quite some time. I also have been worried about her sister who now lives in Baba's house. I do not know Uzma's phone number, but, even if I did, I'm not sure, under the circumstances, whether any of the other people in her household -- who are all staunch defenders of Baba -- will let me speak with her,

any more than the people in Baba's household would let me speak with 'Uzma's sister.

Uzma did have a virtual residence in Baba's cyber community. Earlier, I left a message in her Inbox, asking her to contact me, but to no avail.

I phone the house of Uzma's parents in Canada. I speak with her mother a little, and, then, I indicate that I would like to get in touch with 'Uzma, but I don't have the phone number for the house where she is living – which is with the family of her husband.

Her mother gives me the number. We talk a little more, and, then, we say good bye.

As soon as I get off the phone with 'Uzma's mother, I punch in the number she gave me. After a few rings, one of the women in the house answers. I ask if I can speak with 'Uzma.

Following a brief delay, 'Uzma comes to the phone and says hello. I don't want to say too much to her, but, rather, I am trying to gauge her attitude and feelings toward me.

I keep the conversation general. I ask her about her husband, their child, family life, what she is up to these days, and so on.

I can't detect any signs of tension, conflict or problems in any of the answers that she gives. I tell her I might be contacting her in the near future, and we give farewell salutations to one another.

Over the next several days, I talk to Lara about the conversation. Eventually, for a variety of reasons, I decide to write 'Uzma a short e-mail, asking her to get in touch with me. I find an old e-mail address for 'Uzma, but I am not certain it is valid. I decide to give it a try. However, I try not to leave any hints concerning the nature of the information I wish to communicate to her because she might not be the first one to read her messages, but it is difficult not to raise a few red flags.

Salaam-u-'alaykum!

Dear Uzma,

Salaam-u-'alaykum!

I realize you are not in the habit of checking your e-mail very much, but if you would contact me as soon as possible and let me know you have received this e-mail and that you are ready for a further e-mail, I would appreciate this. In fact, it would be even better if you were to phone me (802-349-XXXX) and just let me know you have received this message (if I don't answer, you can leave a message through voice-mail), and, insha' Allah, then, I will write you further.

There are some important issues that I need to discuss with you. However, please do not discuss this e-mail with anyone else until we have had a chance to talk ... either via e-mail, or phone. Sorry for the cloak and dagger nature of this message, but there are reasons for it that I shall try, God willing, to explain to you at some point in the near future.

Love,

Tariq

§

July 7, 2003

Walaikum Asalaam,

The last time I had spoken to you on the phone I mentioned it to Momin Shah and he told me that he had spoken to you, and he told me everything that had happened. He also told me that he even went to visit you. And I have decided that of my own free will I am requesting that you do not contact me anymore through email or phone. I don't want contact with you anymore. This is the decision that I have made please respect it.

'Uzma

§

The starkness of her e-mail reply surprised me. I had spoken on the phone with her just recently, and the conversation had been quite amicable and easy-going.

In addition, Uzma's e-mail mentions some sort of conversation that I, supposedly, had with Momin. This facet of things is puzzling unless she means by conversation, the one that I had with Momin in March

Prior to our phone chat of a few days ago, the last time I had spoken with 'Uzma was around the time of her wedding. She wanted me to attend her wedding, and she said it was very important to her for me to come ... she wanted her shaykh to be present at her wedding. In fact, as it turned out, for some reason her father had disappeared at a critical time during the wedding ceremonies, and I was drafted to give 'Uzma's hand away in marriage.

She knew that I was about eight-to-ten hours away, but she wanted me to come. When I told her that I would love to come but, unfortunately, my current financial situation would not permit me to do, she sent me enough money to cover the basic costs of the trip.

Before Uzma's wedding was finalized, Momin had tried to exert some pressure on me by telling me it was my duty to induce 'Uzma to marry a certain young man in the silsilah. I told Momin this was not my duty, nor should it be anyone else's duty.

I told Momin that 'Uzma should be free to choose whomever she wanted. There should be no pressure imposed on her to marry, either in general, or to marry someone in particular.

I had written a long e-mail to 'Uzma discussing such points and a great many others. I didn't try to tell her what to do, but I gave her some things to think about as she worked her way toward making her own decision concerning the marriage proposal to her. Later, I was informed by her that my e-mail had played an instrumental part in helping her to reach a decision.

The general format of 'Uzma's most e-mail reply - or, at least, one that I believed was from 'Uzma -- bothered me somewhat. 'Uzma and I had exchanged a number of e-mails over the years, and the sentence

structure in the current e-mail didn't appear to reflect what I knew of the way 'Uzma wrote English ... but maybe not.

Furthermore, there was no: Dear Baba Tariq, with which her communications to me were usually started. In addition, there was no "Love", or khuda hafiz, at the end of the e-mail that also tended to be present in her communications with me.

Finally, there was a coldness that was reflected in the e-mail. She was breaking off all communication with me. Why? ... although I suspected that either Momin, acting alone, or Momin acting at the behest of Baba was behind her rapid change of attitude toward me. 'Uzma didn't want to hear what I had to say about anything ... she just wanted no further contact with me.

In addition, the phrase: "of my own free will" struck me as rather odd. The presence of the phrase was almost as if someone had instructed her to say that so that I would think the phrase was being said to demonstrate to me that what was being stated really gave expression to 'Uzma's heartfelt, personal decision without being influenced by what anyone else might have said to her. If so, this was kind of foolish because just before the aforementioned phrase she indicated that Momin had told her everything that had happened, and, quite obviously, whatever she had been told had influenced her decision-making process rather substantially.

When Lara came back from visiting Baba in January, she told me that 'Uzma had been asking all kinds of questions about me and wondering how I was doing. Lara said that the questions had been asked with great fondness and friendliness ... 'Uzma's eyes and facial expressions were lit up with happiness to be talking with someone who knew her shaykh.

§

July 8 2003

Sasha has had a chat with Momin concerning Sasha possible trip to the United States and to visit with Baba. He sends Lara and me a copy of the chat log.

§

Momin: Hello. I am back

Sasha3571: wb (welcome back)

Momin: I have talked with Baba twice since I chatted with you

Sasha3571: maybe he misunderstood something, because in his email he did sound like he thinks that I ´m gonna meet with him and Lara at the same time

Momin: He told me that he had sent you an E Mail

Momin: Here is the way things are now

Momin: I told him of your plans to visit with us as well as with Small and Lara

Momin: Baba has no problems with Small

Momin: He likes her a lot

Sasha3571: but currently I am not sure if that plan with Small will work – there doesn’t seem to be enough time to arrange things properly

Sasha3571: and now tickets are expensive

Momin: There have not been any difficulties with Small

Momin: With Lara and Philokalia the situation is very different

Momin: They are against Baba

Momin: They have done a number of things that I will not mention

Momin: There is no need to mention such things except to make clear that we do not have anything to do with them any longer

Momin: Baba and I have nothing against them and wish them well

Sasha3571: yes I understand

Momin: Baba and I understand that your relationship with them is different

Sasha3571: and that’s why I made this suggestion: they will pick me up from such a meeting point that you’ll not see them

Momin: We do not want to interfere in any way

Momin: Baba is big hearted and generous

Momin: Baba has thought a lot about what you have suggested and decided

Momin: It is very awkward and embarrassing for Baba

Momin: This is probably hard for you to understand.

Sasha3571: I ´m sorry, but I can ´t avoid that

Momin: Nevertheless Baba has decided that he will not be available to host you

Momin: It was a hard decision for him

Sasha3571: what does that mean

Sasha3571:?

Momin: It means that he will not be available to see you

Sasha3571: oh

Momin: You are free to make your plans as you like

Sasha3571: I still don ´t understand what this has to do with Lara

Momin: As I said, it is hard for you to understand the situation

Momin: Both Baba and I have tried to explain as best as we could

Momin: Your perspective is different, and we respect that

Momin: and want to let you make your plans according to the way that you think best

Sasha3571: hmm

Sasha3571: that´s really surprising

Momin: You can freely decide who to see for how long. That is the best.

Sasha3571: so we won ´t meet in RL (real life) then

Momin: You will not see Baba

Sasha3571: nor you, Momin, I think

Momin: For me the difficulty is that I have no transportation or place to host you in the United States

Sasha3571: can I ask you one question?

Sasha3571: why did Baba send you to tell me this?

Sasha3571: and why is not Baba the person who tells me this?

Momin: I had mentioned to you that he had authorized me to make all the plans on his behalf. He told me that he has sent you three E-Mails

Sasha3571: yes you told me, but it 's just strange

Momin: I realize that it does come across as such. I talked to Baba by phone

Momin: He explained his decision to me

Momin: I told him that I had arranged to talk with you, and I offered to let you know

Sasha3571: ok

Momin: It is extremely awkward for Baba

Momin: He told me that it is the hardest decision that he has made in his life

Sasha3571: I can understand him

Momin: He feels that it is the right thing for him to do

Momin: He has not stopped me from seeing you

Sasha3571: ... because I know more about him than you or he might think

Momin: That may be true because I do not know what you know.

Momin: I know him from my own perspective

Momin: You have always spoken very highly of him

Momin: As a great person and your friend

Sasha3571: yes, and I still am happy to know him

Momin: You have always shown great regard for him

Momin: I was touched when you said that you could not delete his virtual residence and wanted to keep it as a memorial

Momin: From my experience of him, he is a great man and a great friend

Sasha3571: I said that because I meant it: I will never delete it

Momin: You are an honorable person.

Momin: I have the utmost respect for you.

Sasha3571: so if I understand things correctly, he doesn't wish to make contact with me anymore

Momin: At this time, he is not able to act as your host if you decide to come to the United States I have not discussed with him about future contact

Sasha3571: anyway it was very interesting to meet him

Momin: I feel badly about this

Momin: You have missed a great opportunity

Sasha3571: you don't need to feel badly ...

Sasha3571: if someone has to, then it should be me

Momin: I understand

Momin: It is a major turn of events for you

Sasha3571: not much

Momin: A big surprise.

Sasha3571: I've already considered this possibility after I heard about your difficulties with Lara

Sasha3571: however, I am very sad that someone else needed to tell me the whole truth about that story ... until I understood

Momin: I am not sure if I understand what you mean. Please explain

Sasha3571:?

Sasha3571: I think you understand very well

Sasha3571: there are some facts that you and Baba did not tell me

Momin: what facts?

Sasha3571: the whole truth

Momin:?

Sasha3571: I first was confused about the strange things going on in the virtual community ... you know, many residents have become inactive

Momin: yes

Sasha3571: will you now leave the virtual community too?

Momin: I am seriously thinking about it

Momin: I will let you know as soon as I decide

Sasha3571: ok

Sasha3571: If you decide to go, I will understand

Momin: TY

Sasha3571: I do not regret that I have known Baba, and I won't feel disappointed about his decision

Momin: I am happy to hear that

Sasha3571: I am grateful that I got this lesson

Momin: You are a very understanding person

Sasha3571: I am only worried about the future of the virtual community

Momin: Yes. It does not look bright at the moment.

Momin: Most people were there because of Baba

Momin: Once it is known that he has left

Momin: They will be gone too

Sasha3571: yes I understand, especially now more than before

Momin: ok

Sasha3571: it's only upsetting that sometimes I've not been told the truth about what's going on and about some facts

Momin: For my part, I do not recall telling you anything but the truth, what I understood

Momin: I tried to be sincere

Momin: You seem to think otherwise.

Momin: I regard you as a totally sincere person

Sasha3571: sometimes you too have not told me the whole facts

Momin: like what?

Momin: You need to tell me what I have not told you

Sasha3571: sorry, I thought you could look through me

Momin: look through you?

Sasha3571: I've been told some things that I first could not believe

Momin:?

Momin: told by?

Sasha3571: I won't feel upset about what I've not been told, but a few things that were said were not true

Momin: like?

Sasha3571: for example, that Baba and most of you are not Christians (well I don't have any problems with that, but, several times, Baba told me he is a Christian)

Momin: Do you believe others more than you believe Baba?

Momin: How do they know what his faith is?

Sasha3571: two months ago I would have said no, but now my answer is: YES, I do believe others more than I believe Baba

Sasha3571: I've seen some very interesting photos

Sasha3571: of the wedding

Momin: yes

Sasha3571: I am very sad that Baba told me a lie

Sasha3571: and the one about the wedding was not the only one

Momin: You believe what Lara has told you more than Baba

Sasha3571: yes

Momin: ok

Sasha3571: I not only believe her but she can prove what she says

Sasha3571: Despite what I know, I still wanted to meet with Baba in RL until you told me his decision today

Momin: I suppose that you consider me a liar too.

Sasha3571: no, I like you very much, ...

Sasha3571: and I still like Baba ...

Sasha3571: but I am deeply disappointed

Momin: You are accusing him of lying while also saying that you like him?

Momin: This is a very serious accusation

Sasha3571: yes and as sad as it is, it's true

Momin: Ok

Sasha3571: well, I first thought you made a joke with me

Sasha3571: but, then, I heard that I was not the only one who was told lies

Sasha3571: I had an interesting talk with some of those who have left the virtual community, and I finally, with some luck, I was able to make contact with them at another website

Sasha3571: I wished that this all were not true

Sasha3571: but it's so sad that it is

Momin: You are convinced that Baba is a liar.

Momin: You have also implied that I have not told you the truth

Momin: You believe others more than you believe us

Momin: What basis is there then for any friendship?

Sasha3571: what other options do I have?

Sasha3571: the images in the wedding photographs speak their own language

Sasha3571: yes that's a good question!

Sasha3571: because a long time I thought that we are friends

Momin: me too

Momin: I still feel that you are a very good and sincere person

Momin: You are interested in serving others

Sasha3571: I feel the same and believe Lara when she says that you, Momin, are being "used" too by Baba

Momin: It has been my good fortune to work with you for about a year

Sasha3571: I don't regret any day that I have known you

Momin: Me neither

Momin: So let us part on good terms

Sasha3571: but now I think this might be our last talk

Momin: My thoughts and best wishes are with you

Sasha3571: I can understand if Baba doesn't wish that you keep up contact with me

Momin: He has not told me to not keep contact with you

Sasha3571: it 's also so upsetting that he didn't even tell me his real name

Momin: You will not believe this, but Baba said that he has no objection with me meeting you if you come to the United States

Sasha3571: it's sad that he did not talk with me about that and needs you to speak with me

Sasha3571: I feel very sorry for him

Sasha3571: really

Sasha3571: it 's a tragedy

Momin: You do not need to feel sorry for him or for me.

Sasha3571: please let him know that I am grateful for this lesson

Sasha3571: in the future I will be more careful in trusting other people that I meet through the internet

Momin: Ok

Sasha3571: this is the saddest day since I came to this virtual community

Momin: Well, you say that you have learned a great lesson

Momin: You had asked me earlier

Momin: If I will leave the virtual community

Momin: After this conversation, the answer is yes

Momin: You will not trust what I say

Momin: So there is really no point

Sasha3571: I can understand your decision

Momin: Thank you

Sasha3571: I will miss you, but maybe it's better this way

Momin: In closing, let me wish you all the best for your future

Sasha3571: I want to wish you the same

Momin: Like you, I have no regrets

Momin: only happy memories

Sasha3571: please feel free to contact me anytime via email if you wish to

Momin: You have been very good to me

Sasha3571: yes it was a great time I had with you, Baba and the others

Momin: I appreciate it very much

Sasha3571: especially the big party in February. I will never forget that

Sasha3571: it was so much fun

Momin: brb telephone

Sasha3571: hb

Momin: back

Sasha3571: welcome back

Sasha3571: I still have to ask you a question

Momin: yes

Sasha3571: what will now happen with the virtual community?

Sasha3571: it's the property of Habib

Momin: Honestly, I have no idea

Momin: I hope that you believe me that I do not know

Sasha3571: I still want to be there for those who remain

Momin: Yes

Momin: It is great that you want to do that

Sasha3571: and what will happen with Habib and the others?

Momin: Again I do not know

Momin: I have had no discussion with any of them

Momin: Do you believe me?

Momin: It is funny talking with you now that I know that you do not trust what I say

Sasha3571: believe me, I feel very bad about continuing my work in the virtual community

Momin: I understand

Sasha3571: yes you are right, as sad it is, it's hard for me to trust any one of you anymore Momin: There is really no basis for a

relationship once the trust is not there. Momin: So I will not promise to keep in touch

Sasha3571: yes

Momin: I will not be in the virtual community any longer

Sasha3571: I also know that you cannot trust me anymore

Momin: You have the authority to do whatever you feel is right.

Momin: I have only happy memories that I will treasure.

Momin: I am so happy that our paths crossed

Sasha3571: I too will keep the happy moments in my mind

Momin: Who knows about the future. LOL

Momin: Please do

Momin: I wish you much happiness and joy

Momin: I am not sure what you have decided to do about your trip

Sasha3571: and please send Baba my best wishes, I am happy that I've met him and that I could learn something for later life

Momin: I could arrange for a ride for you from the airport to the train/bus station if you like

Sasha3571: thank you, but I don't want to bother you with that

Momin: ok

Sasha3571: if this should have been our last meeting, then I want to wish you "Lebewohl" which is German and means farewell!

Momin: Farewell to you too Sir Sasha

Momin: Good bye and God Bless

§

July 9, 2003

Sasha sends Lara the latest chat log concerning the interaction between Baba and Sasha. A variety of topics are covered that overlap with many of the themes of the previous chat log sent to us by Sasha.

§

Baba: Sorry, I was away from computer

Baba: How are you?

Sasha3571: I am well, thanks

Sasha3571: I want to be frank ... when I heard some things recently I was really shocked

Baba: What things?

Sasha3571: I think Momin told you about his and my chat last Sunday

Sasha3571: but I am not upset anymore

Baba: I don't understand

Sasha3571: and I have made my final decision

Baba: You were upset about what?

Sasha3571: I was upset that you and Momin did not tell me the truth about some things

Baba: Like what?

Sasha3571: do we really need to play this game again? LOL

Sasha3571: Momin told me that you don't want to host me anymore

Sasha3571: it's ok for me

Baba: I really do not know what this thing is that I and Momin hid from you

Baba: Believe me, Momin only told me that you have your program to visit Lara and that you have been told that we will not be able to host you

Sasha3571: ok

Baba: But you said that you were upset because I and Momin did not tell you something. I don't understand what it is.

Sasha3571: you told me that you are Christian

Sasha3571: but I saw some photos of the wedding

Baba: I did not lie to you my friend.

Sasha3571: well, I don't mind what beliefs others may have, you could have told me

Sasha3571: but why did the women wear a veil then?

Baba: What did you see in the wedding pictures?

Sasha3571: a good friend sent me those pictures

Sasha3571: as I said, it doesn't matter to me what beliefs you and anyone else may have

Sasha3571: but I was disappointed that I've not been told the truth

Baba: Your friendship to me has always been of a sincere and very loyal one

Sasha3571: but I hope that we can still be friends

Sasha3571: did Momin tell you my new plans?

Baba: I am always and will always be a sincere friend to you

Sasha3571: I've spoken with Small

Sasha3571: and we are now trying to arrange a visit

Sasha3571: but unfortunately she won't have time for me in July

Sasha3571: so I asked the airline if it's possible to delay the flight

Baba: Momin called me twice but I was not home. Even last night he called. So today I will call him. I think he may have called to tell me

Sasha3571: I wanted to ask if you still want me to come for a visit

Sasha3571: I will understand if not

Sasha3571: if that should be the case, I will consider spending some, or maybe all, of the time in Wyoming

Sasha3571: and to explore Rhode Island in the last 2 days

Sasha3571: however the airline wants a fee for the ticket change, I'm gonna pay

Sasha3571: I will fly on August the 7th then

Baba: The only reason that I had asked Momin to explain to you that it will not be possible to host you was that you were going to see Lara and Phil though I kept telling you that they are not my well

wishers. They have tried to harm me. I still have nothing against them. My heart is clear

Sasha3571: ok

Baba: It was not easy for me to explain this to you. My friend please understand this

Sasha3571: this is what Momin told me:

Sasha3571: "Nevertheless Baba has decided that he will not be available to host you"

Sasha3571: "It means that Baba will not be available to see you"

Sasha3571: so what shall we do now?

Baba: When you come, then there are things I will explain to you and I am sure you will understand what harm has been done to me. I am a Sufi. There are Sufis that are not in any religion, and I am that kind of Sufi, but we are at heart Christian.

Sasha3571: ok

Sasha3571: I have no problems with that

Baba: Phil is an activist muslim. This is what I did not ever want to tell you

Sasha3571: oh

Sasha3571: and what about Lara?

Baba: The pictures of the wedding you saw were in a restaurant that belongs to a community called "Sikhs" They wear turbans. The owner and his family do not wear turbans, but the musicians there do

Sasha3571: I see

Sasha3571: please understand my feelings I had when I saw the pictures, because the ones that you sent to me there was nothing "strange"

Baba: I was introduced to Lara by Phil. Phil told me that Lara is a married woman and his student. They have a relationship. As a friend I advised that if she loves Tariq and wants to marry him then she should be free from her husband

Sasha3571: hmm

Sasha3571: can I ask you an important question?

Sasha3571: because I want to pay Small a visit, I have asked the airline if I can change the flight date yesterday ...

Baba: Then he wrote me very long emails and explained that she is a mental patient. He explained that this cannot be observed by people who do not know. Only when you are with her for a few days can it be noticed

Sasha3571: oh

Baba: He then brought her and introduced us.

Sasha3571: but why did you never tell me this? It caused a lot of misunderstandings

Baba: I am saying all this because you did not understand when I kept telling you that there is a reason why I say that they are not my well-wishers and that I am not in the habit of talking bad about people

Sasha3571: Small said she has time in August

Sasha3571: so she won't mind that I am coming to her in August

Sasha3571: however the airline told me they need to confirm the ticket change with the person who bought the ticket

Sasha3571: and I think that is either you or one of your friends from that travel agency you told me about

Baba: The only reason I have not said these things is because I thought that you had become a good friend to Lara and you may disclose to her what I say. They have already harmed me much, and I was afraid

Sasha3571: I really thought she was a good friend of yours

Baba: I also thought that

Sasha3571: but please understand that I still need her as BD because 'smiley' has decided to leave the virtual community

Sasha3571: the lack of staff is a big problem

Baba: My heart has no ill feelings for her or Phil. I always forgive. But they have harmed me. Is it my fault that I protect myself?

Sasha3571: no

Sasha3571: I did not know the whole set of circumstances

Baba: My friend, I have never lied to you. Only I did not tell you in detail this situation with Lara and Phil because it was something that I did not want to tell anyone

Sasha3571: I can understand

Sasha3571: but what will now happen with us?

Sasha3571: Momin told me that it's no problem if I'm gonna visit Small

Baba: Nothing can come between my friendship with you

Baba: It was the most difficult thing in my life to tell you that I am sorry I cannot host you. I cried that day when I asked Momin to tell you

Baba: I never intended to finish our relationship

Sasha3571: I've left Momin a message yesterday

Baba: But please tell me that now you understand. I trust you. I have always respected you, and I know that you will never tell me what is not true.

Sasha3571: yes I am happy that you told me this today

Sasha3571: I think otherwise I would have led to a big problem

Baba: I also want to know that since you were so determined to see Lara and Phil even after I told you that they are not my well-wishers, then how have you suddenly decided to see Small

Sasha3571: I'm sorry for that, but I have to confess that after Lara showed me the photos, I had problems trusting you any longer

Baba: I never spoke anything against them to you. I kept telling you that my heart is clear. It is they who have harmed me.

Baba: They wanted to make the virtual community a platform for Islamic reasons, and I did not like that

Baba: Did you not realize that?

Sasha3571: yes I can remember some strange message on the boards

Baba: Yes

Sasha3571: but I never understood them at all

Baba: That is why I kept telling you that please understand me when I say that they are not my well-wishers. They only want to harm people

Baba: I was surprised that you are not realizing what pain and suffering I have gone through even though we never met but you have known me in the virtual community

Sasha3571: I understand that now, it must be hard for you to trust ME any longer

Sasha3571: maybe I should try more to serve the needs of individuals and not those of the hood in the future

Baba: If I was not sincere to you, then why do you think that I asked you to stay back in and join our virtual community? If you will remember, I had even told you that you are the main reason I did not leave the virtual community

Sasha3571: hmm

Baba: I just need to know one thing, and I know that you will tell me the truth.

Sasha3571: ok

Baba: Do you know that if I wanted I could cancel the sponsorship of Lara and Phil from the virtual community? My friends asked me to do that, but I said no. It is a joke that they are there and they are not realizing that it is because I have sponsored them

Baba: I will never cancel the sponsorship, because my heart will never allow me to do to them what they have done to me

Sasha3571: I had a look at some old stuff from my virtual community archive

Sasha3571: pictures of you and Small inside my balloon avatar

Sasha3571: we always had so much fun together

Baba: Yes

Sasha3571: and then I remember my problems with HeyJude

Sasha3571: you were the one who convinced me to stay in the virtual community when I wanted to leave

Sasha3571: and I am very grateful for that

Sasha3571: and then you bought this wonderful virtual community hood

Baba: I also stayed back because of you my friend

Sasha3571: and then I thought about what happened in the past months

Baba: One by one, Lara and Phil went after people and bothered them. That is why everyone left. They did not leave because I left. I begged the others to remain and keep the virtual community strong. People left because Lara and Phil sent those individuals messages in their inbox and in emails. Lara and Phil kept talking against me. The people who are my true friends, they know me. They could not bear this anymore, so one by one they left

Sasha3571: I am very sad about the low rate of activity in the virtual community

Sasha3571: and I am so sad that 'smiley', 'Atooba' and 'Stameena' have left

Sasha3571: and many others are getting ready to leave too

Baba: You see now, how even someone like you who is so sensible can be influenced to mistrust. So, now you see how it has harmed me when Lara and Phil contacted people

Baba: When we did not agree with HeyJude, what did we do? We left. Now have you not realized that even though Lara and Phil are not my well-wishers, they are not leaving the virtual community? Why? -- Because they do not have noble intentions. Why else are they not leaving? They know that I have paid for Generations. Others also don't like them. Anyone else in their place would leave

Sasha3571: it's sad that you have spent so much money for the virtual community and now you all are leaving

Sasha3571: you are the first one, I will tell this:

Sasha3571: I am considering leaving the virtual community as well

Baba: Why?

Sasha3571: because I don't want to spend so much work and time in the hood anymore if it is all for nothing

Sasha3571: it was my purpose to serve all our residents when I decided to become ND and to leave the Engineering Hood

Sasha3571: the people in your virtual community were not only residents for me, they were much more. They were friends

Baba: Anger and hate is so bad that it destroys people. It is anger that made Lara and Phil do all this.

Baba: Lara told me that she loves me and is ready to marry me. I told her that I cannot marry her, and that we can remain as friends. She wanted me to invite her again, and I was afraid to do that because she is a married woman, and she also has A relationship with Phil. Then when she was here as a guest I saw that she is not healthy mentally. She gets these attacks of depression and becomes changed and very dangerous.

Baba: She became very angry that I was not willing to invite her again. Phil became angry because Lara told him that she had a relationship with me

Sasha3571: oh?

Baba: These are personal things concerning Lara that I never wanted to tell anyone. Lara and Phil kept saying things against me, and I never said anything against them

Sasha3571: I regret so much what happened in the virtual community

Baba: Even now the only reason I have said these things is because there is no other way to explain to you what all I have gone through. I still say that my heart is clean and I am still a well-wisher of Lara and Phil.

Sasha3571: yes

Sasha3571: can I ask you something?

Sasha3571: do you still want to work on your own chat?

Baba: I never knew that Phil can be so harmful, and I do not blame Lara because she is like this only due to the fact that she is not well in the mind. Even Phil had told me this when he introduced me to her - he said that people will never be able to know that she is mentally ill, because she behaves very normally. It's only when you know her well and when you stay with her all the time, that you can see the truth

Baba: Yes, why not. But I had given up the idea of the chat room only because I thought that you are with them and you will tell them regarding the chat and they will come to that chat also and destroy the peace there

§

Once again, Baba tells a number of lies concerning both Lara and myself, while, simultaneously, professing that he never lies about or speaks ill of people. The fact of the matter is, I am not a Muslim activist and have gone to great lengths to be this way in order to satisfy Baba's wish for me not to become involved in community or political issues.

In addition, the idea that I have any wish to take over the virtual community for "Islamic reasons" is almost too ludicrous for words. Baba has absolutely no proof of any such intentions on my part. He is making things up as he goes along ... he says whatever he thinks might create some sort of tactical advantage for him in the games he plays with everyone.

As for Lara, I never told Baba that Lara is mentally ill. She has never been hospitalized for any mental or emotional problems.

She did go to a counselor for a number of years. She did take medication to help her with anxiety and muscle spasms that were a direct result of the stress and abuse that were heaped upon her, from a number of different directions, on an almost daily basis ... although she also was given other medications that merely made an already difficult situation much worse, but she was taken off those medications quite a few years ago.

Lara is not mentally ill. To be sure, she does suffer from post traumatic stress disorder as a result of, among other things, the twenty-three years of abuse, violence, and control that Ron perpetrated with respect to her and her children.

Moreover, Lara does suffer some problematic emotional aftereffects of having been raped by her cousin when she was eight or nine years of age, as well as suffers some of the emotional aftershocks that arose as a result of several years of sexual molestation by her

uncle. Lara is not psychotic as a result of such abuse, nor has she lost touch with reality, nor is she mentally ill due to these life happenings.

Lara, however, is in emotional turmoil as a result of all of the foregoing events, together with many other forms of abuse that have been thrust upon her by other human beings, within, and outside of her, family, including her father. Emotional turmoil is not mental illness, and I have explained this difference to Baba, both during our phone conversations as well as in a variety of e-mail exchanges.

Contrary to what Baba claims in his chat with Sasha, Lara did not have an attack of depression when she was down visiting with him. She had an anxiety attack when – after being thoroughly exhausted due to the strange hours that Baba keeps, she realized she had been abandoned by Baba in a house of complete strangers, with nowhere private to sleep, and she felt terribly alone.

The only ‘dangerous’ (?) thing that Lara did while in this condition was to cry, and cry, and cry some more. Baba was so threatened by this dangerous woman he sent in seven year old Ra’uf to protect the rest of the house from her angry rampages.

Lara wasn’t angry because, allegedly, Baba was not going to invite her down again. She was upset because she was not permitted to get in her car and go home when she wanted to and because she was being lied to and because they took her Qur’an and never returned it.

Lara did not ask Baba to marry her. Baba was the one who pursued Lara by phoning her again and again in December ‘02, Baba was the one who told the people in his household that “she’s mine” after Lara and I left in November, and he is the one who told his household that he was on the way to pick up his bride when he drove to Boston to meet Lara in January.

This is what Lara told me. Like Sasha indicated in the foregoing chat log, if six months ago, someone would have asked me who I trusted most: Baba or Lara, I would have picked Baba, but, now if this question were asked of me again, I would most emphatically say that Lara is eminently more trustworthy than Baba – not because she is a perfect human being, but because it has been my experience of her that she does not tell lies, whereas Baba has proven to me again and again, unfortunately, that he lies more than a rug.

Lara did not go into a depression when Baba refused to invite her down again. In fact, Lara never asked Baba if she could visit him again even though all the members of Baba's household individually came to Lara and wanted to know when she would be coming back or moving down.

Lara did ask Baba to "give it to her straight" -- that is, to tell her the truth about what was going on. However, Baba never did comply with this request. Instead, he invented requests that she never made.

To refer to Lara as dangerous is laughable. At times, she might be difficult, perhaps, but, then, aren't we all!

Baba claims that he noticed Lara was mentally ill when she visited him in January. One wonders why he didn't pick up on this in November when she and I were visiting Baba and stayed for nearly a week.

Moreover, Baba had spent over 80 hours on the phone with Lara – and I have seen the phone bills that verify this aspect of what Lara told me – and Baba spent many more hours in the virtual community, enticing Lara to visit him so that she could be his bride. He must have been so busy wiping away the drool of anticipation concerning Lara's beauty – which he remarked on in my presence the previous November -- that he completely missed the alleged mental illness when we visited him then.

In fact, when Baba met Lara in November, he remarked very early on that he owed Lara an apology. Prior to her coming, he had believed her problem to be of one kind (which he didn't specify) but, now, that she was in front of him he could see that her difficulties were of another kind entirely (which he also didn't specify).

Baba claims to be a great shaykh, the Qutb of the times. Baba also maintains that an authentic shaykh is so intimately familiar with the condition of a mureed that the shaykh can tell, at a distance, what the gender of an ant is that is crawling on the clothes of that mureed.

I guess Baba, by his own criteria, can't be an authentic shaykh, because when Lara was seated before him in November, it took him to January to see that she was -- according to him -- mentally ill and dangerous, and one might suppose that arriving at an appropriate diagnosis when one spends nearly a week with someone would be less

difficult than trying to identify, at a distance, the gender of an ant that is crawling on the clothes of a mureed.

The only difference between November and January was that in the former month, Lara was not his, but he desired her, whereas in the latter month, Lara proved to become a logistical problem for him. Like the old Soviet system, Baba declares people to be mentally ill (Lara) or political troublemakers (me) who are threats to the hegemony of his fiefdom.

Baba knew what Lara's marital status was when she went to visit with him in January, and, as well, he knew what her relationship was with me at that time. Unfortunately, none of this stopped him from going into Lara's bedroom at 4:00 in the morning the first night of Lara's visit with him.

In addition, he did not advise Lara to marry me when she was done with her husband. He indicated to me that marrying Lara was the solution to the problem that I had related to him, and he said Ron's status was irrelevant because, according to Baba, he was an unbeliever.

Furthermore, Baba has distorted the nature of my anger. I didn't get angry with Lara about her relationship with Baba. I was upset and deeply hurt because Baba had been lying to me about things -- including circumstances concerning Lara -- for quite some time.

Contrary to what Baba says in the previous chat log, I have seen Baba portray himself as a Muslim for more than ten years. Now, if Baba is not a Muslim, then, he has lied to me and others within the Muslim community for more than ten years. On the other hand, if he is not a Christian, then he has lied to, among others, Sasha. He can pick his poison with respect to the type of lie for which he wishes to be known, but, in one way or another, he is a liar about the nature of his spiritual affiliation.

Baba tries to slide around things, by claiming that he is a Sufi, and they have no religious affiliation, but in their hearts they are like the Christians. This is all so much horse poop.

The spiritual tradition of the Sufis is rooted in the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, along with the teaching and example of the 124,000 other prophets who have been appointed by

God, starting with Adam (peace be upon him). The Qur'an proclaims that Muhammad (peace be upon him) and those who follow the teachings of the Qur'an are called Muslim, as was the Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) and those who followed him.

Saying prayers five times a day, fasting during the month of Ramadan, paying zakat or charity once a year on one's savings, going on pilgrimage once in one's life time if one were financially and physically able to do so, and testifying that there is no reality but God and that Muhammad is the messenger of God are things that any Muslim and Sufi are committed to.

One cannot deny such principles and practices and, simultaneously, claim that one is a Sufi. And, as much as this might chagrin Baba, being committed to all of the foregoing makes one both Muslim and a subscriber to the teachings of Islam,

To be sure, Christians [as well as Jews, Sabians (followers of John, The Baptist), and certain other spiritual traditions that are not identified by name in the Qur'an], in their way, seek to submit themselves to the spiritual truth of things. So, while it is true to say that there is a sense in which Sufis, in their hearts, are like the Christians, Baba is just engaging in sophistry to try to say he is not Muslim or associated with Islam - as much as his behavior might indicate otherwise.

I do not have a problem with someone being a Christian because Christians are described in the Qur'an as people of the Book -- that is, people who have been given a Book of Divine revelation that is to be used for purposes of spiritual guidance. I do have a problem with people lying about their spiritual affiliation in order to deceive, manipulate, and exploit people.

Baba misdirects Sasha when he talks about the reason why people were leaving the virtual community. They left because Baba told them to do so.

I have seen Baba conduct business for more than 12 years. No one in his sphere of influence does anything without Baba's direction or permission.

The truth of the matter is that Baba wanted his followers out of the virtual community because he was afraid they might become

contaminated by the truth of what was being said by Lara and me on the message board of the virtual community. Baba claims that they were all upset because of the way Lara and Phil were being so cruel to their revered teacher, but, in truth, Baba was upset because too much light was coming in through the cracks of his virtual cave.

He wasn't trying to protect his followers against Lara and myself. He was trying to prevent his followers from learning the truth about him.

With one exception – which was when I put an e-mail in 'Uzma's Inbox at her virtual residence ... and this was done many months after the war of words on the message board took place -- neither Lara nor I ever approached anyone in the virtual community -- via e-mail or Inbox messages -- who did not first approach us with questions about what was going on. Therefore, Baba's allegation that we were bothering people with hateful e-mails or Inbox messages concerning Baba is nothing but another fabrication of his.

Baba, in order to serve his agenda concerning Sasha, has charged that anger and hatred were the motivations underlying all that Lara and I did in the virtual community. Actually, our primary concern was to stop the manipulation, exploitation, lying, and undue influence that were taking place in that virtual community.

Baba points out to Sasha how Baba paid for both Lara and me to be in the virtual community. He goes on to argue that if he were the sort of individual that Lara and I claim him to be, would he continue to permit us to come to the virtual community even though his many friends are begging him to cancel our subscriptions.

First of all, Baba knows that the cost of the subscription to participate in the virtual community is quite nominal. If he were to cancel our subscriptions, less than a minute would pass before Lara and I would have signed up again and returned to Baba's virtual community.

Originally, Baba had arranged for the entry fee to be paid for quite a few people to enable them to gain access to the virtual community – including Lara and myself. Baba was trying to impress the owner of the larger virtual community that he -- Baba -- could deliver warm, paying bodies to the community. Baba did this to enhance his leverage

while negotiating with the owner for greater, independence or control, as well as to have access to more technical bangs and whistles, in relation to the virtual community that Baba was trying to develop for purposes of exploiting and manipulating anyone who was unfortunate enough to happen into his gravitational pull.

In the previous chat log, Baba tells Sasha that Lara and Phil don't even know that Baba is paying for them to be a part of the virtual community. Once again, the truth takes a back seat to Baba's attempt to manipulate Sasha.

Baba goes on to point out to Sasha how even someone who is as sensible as Sasha can be induced to mistrust others. Baba implies that this is part of the damage that has been caused by Lara and Phil. However, the only one who actually was sowing the seeds of mistrust is Baba by 'virtue' of his own behaviors – he is the one who lied about his spiritual identity; he is the one who never told Sasha his actual name – just referring to himself as Joseph or by some other neutral-sounding moniker; he is the one who pressured Lara to select photos that would not give Sasha any hint of Muslim or Islamic connections, and, then, lied about why some of the people were wearing very different kinds of clothes than what had been presented to Sasha in the photographs that Baba sent to him; Baba is the one who claimed that I was trying to make the virtual community into a launching pad for Islam and that I was a Muslim activist – whatever that means ... and although Baba never explained what he meant by that term, he definitely wanted to give Sasha the impression that this was a terrible, dark secret that he had been struggling to keep Sasha from knowing.

In an earlier chat log, Baba talked about how Lara and Lara had become even more violent toward Baba when Sand-Bandito tried to deal with the situation. What was the nature of this violence? Perhaps to liars, truth always seems rather violent and abusive.

Finally, in the foregoing chat log, Baba presents Sasha with a completely fictional history of Lara, me, and Baba. So many lies are introduced by Baba in such a short period of time that anyone who was intimately familiar with a more objective history of what transpired with Lara, Baba, and myself would have to make sure they didn't break any of the furniture as they were rolling on the floor laughing.

§

July 10, 2003

Lara and I talk about Sima again. We are both worried about her, but we are especially worried about her children who are going into darkened rooms to spend an hour, or more, messaging Baba's legs. Maybe, God willing, nothing untoward is happening, but Baba's track record does not foster hope in either Lara or me that this might be the case.

Lara wants me to call Sima again. But, she says I should phone her at home, rather than at her office.

For a number of reasons, I have been reluctant to do this. However, after considering the matter for a few minutes, I decide to take the plunge.

Sima answers the phone. I identify myself and we engage in small talk before I get down to business.

She listens to me for about half an hour without comment, and, then she asks if it would be okay if she puts me on hold because there is another call coming in that is important. I agree.

I wait for about ten minutes. Finally, the line goes dead. Shortly after I hang up, the phone rings. Sima is calling.

I continue on with what I have to say. Not very long after I start talking for a second time, Sima begins screaming at me - "Don't ever phone here again. Don't ever talk that way about my murshid to me again. You have never cared for me. You were never interested in my concerns, and there is something wrong with that Lara."

I do not argue with Sima. I tell her I am sorry and hang up with her still screaming in my ear.

§

Lara and I talk about my conversation with Sima. We both feel that the in-coming call is likely to have been from Baba, and the ten

minutes that Sima spent on the other line probably involved Sima briefing Baba on what was taking place and, then, Baba 'guiding' Sima with respect to what she should say to me, and he probably gave his 'guidance' in a manner that might have agitated Sima to such an extent that she ended up screaming at me.

On the basis of my experience with Sima, screaming is not something she is inclined to do. Even when she is upset, she often is very polite about things ... however, Baba does have his ways, and over the years, I have seen how he has the capacity to get people worked up about whatever he wishes – and Momin's telling me in heated terms that 'I have strayed from the path' during the 'Amina situation, as well as the way Momin imposed himself on me at my apartment last March in a very un-Momin like manner are but two examples of what happens when Baba decides to agitate a situation and, yet, be left with plausible deniability if anyone should try to place responsibility for what occurs at his doorstep.

§

July 13, 2003

Momin has not answered my e-mail to him, and, probably, he won't respond. I believe if there is anyone who might have a chance of getting through to Momin it is his wife.

I phone her at a time when Momin is not likely to be home. She answers, and we begin talking a little.

She tells me Momin already has told her everything that has gone on. She says she doesn't want to become involved. Momin can do whatever he wants.

She says: "You used to be all for Baba." I tell her: "Yes, but I was wrong."

We talk for a little longer, but what is becoming clear to me is that Momin's wife is giving every indication of having been beaten down by the whole Baba situation. She has resigned herself to the current status of things, and she does not want to have anything more to do with it.

I give my salutations. The conversation ends, and I feel very badly for her.

I know that Momin has not told his wife everything that has gone on. Momin has given her the expurgated, Baba-scripted version, but I also realize that there is not really anything that I can do that is likely to persuade Momin's wife that, maybe, things are other than what she has been told is the case by her husband.

I didn't call Sairah so that I could drive a wedge between her and her husband. I called because I had a deep concern for the welfare of someone who had been a friend of mine for nearly twenty years and because I had a hope that Sairah and her down-to-earth sensibilities might persuade her husband to step back and take a second look at things in relation to Baba.

I am fairly certain that Baba instructed Momin to provide his wife some version of things in order to forestall any end-around that I might try. Baba is very savvy when it comes to such tactical maneuvering.

However, the purpose of such maneuvering is always to protect Baba. He is not worried about how his tactics might affect either Momin or his relationship with his wife or his relationship with an old friend ... as Baba said to Lara in their last phone conversation and Lara told Baba that what he made Momin do by journeying to Bamford to barge in on an old friend was cruel: "Momin will get over it."

§

July 15, 2003

I begin to search for another phone number via the Internet. This number belongs to Bilal who, along with his wife 'Asima - a mureed of mine -- used to be a part of the silsilah. Following a flurry of e-mails between "Asima and myself a few years ago, there has been no contact with 'Asima for several years because this is the way she seemed to want it.

After a few failures, I locate a number for Bilal. I call him up.

We talk for a few minutes. He is on his way somewhere, but he would like to continue on with the conversation the next day on the Internet via instant messaging.

§

July 16, 2003

I tell Bilal my concerns about 'Uzma and her sister, Nazia. We begin to discuss possible scenarios for extricating them from their respective situations.

I feel the best way would be if, somehow, we could speak with both of them at the same time. Otherwise, we run the risk of some sort of 'leak' and, as a result, the whole discussion possibility might get shut down with respect to trying to follow up on things with whomever we didn't make first contact.

We talk some more about various possibilities concerning the idea of talking with 'Uzma and her sister. Bilal says he will speak with 'Uzma other's sister, Samia, who has been trying to help her sisters get out from under Baba's control but is having trouble doing so because she has been semi-ostracized by her family. This is because most of her family is associated with Baba, but Samia had decided to drop out of the Sufi aspect of things some time ago. Consequently, in this respect, she is sort of odd person out within the family.

Bilal says he will contact me the next day. We set a time to get together via phone, and, then, part electronic company.

§

July 17 2003

When we make contact, Bilal informs me that both he and his wife have talked with Samia, and Samia has talked with her parents, and Bilal has talked with the parents as well. The bottom line is that the father wants to sit down with me, face to face, and hear what I have to say.

I tell Bilal that I don't have any money for a trip to Canada. He also says he is going to be leaving the country soon for a trip to Asia, but if I come, then, he would like to be present ... at least for part of what goes on.

After further discussion, I ask whether it would be possible for 'Uzma's father to ask his daughter, Nazia, to come home for a visit from her present residence at Baba's house. Apparently, whenever this idea has been suggested previously, one excuse or another has been given as to why Nazia can't visit with her parents and the rest of the family ... even though Baba had promised the parents that, after the wedding, whenever they wanted Nazia to come home for a visit, then, this would be arranged.

I tell Bilal I will have to talk the situation over with Lara. I don't know whether, or not, it will be financially feasible for me to come. Bilal has offered to try to contribute something to the travel fund, and Samia as well has indicated she and her husband would like to help out financially in some way.

When I talk to Lara about the idea of going to Canada to see if I can help out in some way, she is resistant. The resistance is not about the money -- which, under the circumstances, she would have to be the primary investor for underwriting such a trip. Rather, it has been our experience that every time we try to help someone, the attempt tends to blow up in our face. In addition, she is tired of people pointing a 'holier-than-thou-finger' at us while leaving us to do all the work and take all the risks.

I don't disagree with Lara, but, at the same time, if we don't try to help these people, who will? Eventually, she does agree to bankroll my trip ... which amounts, for the most part, to renting a car for three or four days and paying for the gas needed to make the round trip.

§

July 19, 2003

Barry has written to me and asked if I would be willing to officiate at his forthcoming marriage – at least, the Muslim part of things since he also plans to get married in a way that would be officially

recognized by the province in which he lives. Although in Islam any Muslim can serve as the one who conducts the ceremony of a marriage, I am very reticent to do this for a variety of reasons.

Part of the reason that Barry wants me to come is that both he and his wife want something of a Sufi flavor to the Muslim part of their ceremony, including a brief zikr session. Although I appreciate what Barry would like to do, I respond to Barry's overtures and tell him that I would rather not serve in such a capacity, and I believe that there are likely to be many more qualified people in his locality who would be able to do a much better job than me. I make a few suggestions in this regard.

§

July 22, 2003

As more and more pieces of information are collected -- both from within the virtual community surrounding Baba's Colony and Hood, as well as from without --- through an array of sources that disclose the increasing extent of Baba's: lies, manipulations, exploitations, and abuses, Lara decides to do an homage to David Letterman on the public message board of Baba's virtual community by formulating a top ten list of her own. I respond in kind, and, then, raise the ante.

§

Date: Tue, Jul 22nd, 2003. 12:25:02 pm.

From: Lara

Subject: Top 10 List for Today

TOP 10 CLUES A "SPIRITUAL GUIDE" IS A FRAUD

1) He claims to have Bill Clinton as a student. 2) His "Pupils" act like thugs. 3) You wake up and hear him using vile profanity when he thinks no one can hear him. 4) He lies about how many times he's been married. 5) He refers to someone as his "best friend" when in reality he is doing whatever he can to undermine that person. 6) He claims to

never interfere in marriages while doing his best to arrange them as well as destroy them. 7) He claims he is a king of a small country (unnamed, of course) but immigrates to Canada and becomes a citizen. 8) He is at the center of a scandal involving a teenage girl while living off the kindness of her family. 9) He lies about his name and address to people whom he calls friends. 10) He claims there is no evil.

Lara adds a parenthetical addendum to her 'Top Ten List' (Any resemblance to real people -- or avatar personalities in the virtual community) is purely coincidental)

§

Date: Tue, Jul 22nd, 2003. 12:48:34 pm.

From: Philokalia

Subject: Re: Top Ten List for Today

Lara, I found your posting very: amusing, interesting, enjoyable, scintillating, stimulating, imaginative, remarkable, wise, prescient, truthful, revealing, moving, sad, indubitable, understandable, laudable, vivacious, courageous, honest, telling, sensational, breath-taking, amazing, inspiring, efficacious, succinct (unlike me), revolutionary, thought-provoking, creative, necessary, plausible, titillating, provocative, fun, subtle, infectious, sincere, exemplary, paradigmatic, well-reasoned, helpful ... well, I guess you catch the drift of where I am going with this.

§

Date: Tue, Jul 22nd, 2003. 1:06:03 pm.

From: Philokalia

Subject: Re: Top 10 List for Today

I have it on good authority that since there is no evil, one can say whatever one wants about the identity of Sufis. When evil is thrown out, then lying becomes honesty. I also have it on good authority that there is one special group who call themselves Sufi and who say --

when they are with Christians --- that they, really, are Christian at heart, and, then when these same Sufis are with Muslims, the former say we, really, are Muslims at heart. These Sufis are known as 'The Chameleons' because they try to blend in with surroundings while camouflaging their true nature. In truth, they are just hypocrites because they say one thing to your face and something else when you are not present.

§

Tues, July 22nd, 2003 2:26:32 p.m.

From: Philokalia

Subject: Top Ten - Positively

1) He lies like a rug. 2) He says he is your well-wisher, but he'd rather see you paralyzed. 3) He says good luck, but he doesn't mean it. 4) He says he has lost his faith, but we know it is not like that, since he had no faith to lose to begin with. 5) He has a lotta nerve to say he is one's friend because when people are down, he just stands there grinning. 6) He says he's got a helping hand to lend, but he just wants to be on the side that's winning. 7) We know the reason why he talks behind our back; we used to be among the crowd he's in with. 8) He takes people for such fools that he thinks they would make contact with the one who tries to hide what he don't know to begin with. 9) He says everyone lets him down, but we all know it's not like that, and if he is so hurt, then, why doesn't he just prove it instead of whispering innuendoes in the shadows. 10) We wish that for just one time, he could stand inside our shoes, and for that one time he would be us, then, he would know what a drag it is to see him.

I would like to acknowledge Bob Dylan's 'Positively 4th Street' as the inspiration for the foregoing. People should really listen to that song because it completely captures the essence of a false spiritual guide even if this might not have been the original intention for Mr. Dylan writing such a song.

§

Tues, July 22nd, 2003 4:52:18 p.m.

From: Philokalia

Subject: More Top Ten

Another Top 10 Signs of a Fraudulent Guide

1) He re-frames moral cowardice as discretion, patience, forgiveness, and tolerance. 2) He considers the means of manipulation, exploitation, control, and duplicity to be justified by his ends. 3) He confuses his desires, wishes, and intentions with those of Divinity. 4) He smiles to your face, and, then, proceeds to assassinate your character when you are absent, but explains it away as needing to protect himself. 5) He claims his spiritual teacher told him to never go into business with his devotees but ignores the instruction. 6) He appoints people as shaykhs and says the appointment can never, and will never, be revoked by him, and, then, proceeds to do what he says never will be done ... saying that people misunderstood what he had clearly stated, proclaimed, and written previously. 7) He gets other people to do his dirty work because he says he is too soft, compassionate, and loving to carry out such tasks himself. 8) He says that having to come down from his high spiritual state in order to engage in sexual activity makes him angry, but, then, tries to master his anger by engaging in such practices with different women. 9) He runs away from the many people he has harmed and says he keeps his distance from such individuals because they are not good people, but he claims to remain their well-wisher and he humbly acknowledges that he has forgiven them for objecting to his hurtful behavior. 10) He claims to know where 'Usama bin-Laden is hiding, but he does not share his knowledge with the appropriate authorities.

§

I follow up with a further posting that gives expression to my own style of haiku which, while adhering to the rules involving the 17 syllable distribution, across three lines of unrhymed words, nevertheless, breaks from some of the other traditions of classical haiku:

Vampires, disguised as
Friends, long for dinner.
Vultures circle about truth.

§

July 29, 2003

I have just returned from Canada. It has been an interesting few days.

I stayed with Samia and her husband. Although he and I have had our differences in the past, it turns out that he, along with his wife, provide the most help during the journey -- from: a bed to sleep on, to: food to eat, a few dollars to help subsidize my trip, various forms of logistical support for the big meeting which, by the Grace of Allah, finally takes place, and, finally, serving as allies and advocates during the actual meeting.

Miracle of miracles, Nazia is induced to come from Baba's house for a visit with her parents, and 'Uzma is invited over to her parents' house for a visit, as well, on the same day that I am to be there -- although neither Nazia nor 'Uzma knows I am in the city. A time and day is arranged when both 'Uzma's husband and Momin Shah will be at work.

When, by invitation, I enter the house of Samia, Nazia, and Uzma's parents, 'Uzma sees me and, literally, runs away from me. She seems to be terrified of me, and, yet, there is nothing that I have ever done or said to her that might warrant such a reaction.

This is in total contrast to what Lara told me about Uzma when Lara met her at the time of the wedding in January. Lara told me that when Uzma found out Lara knew me, she was asking Lara all kinds of questions about me ... and, according to Lara, doing so with considerable warmth and animation.

At that time, 'Uzma wanted to know how I was, and what I was doing, and so on. When Lara told 'Uzma about the collection of short stories I had written, 'Uzma appeared to be quite interested in obtaining a copy.

Six months later and Uzma is running away from me and does not want to speak with me or hear anything I have to say. Quite frankly, I am shocked with the manner in which she is acting.

Nazia, her sister, is not happy to see me either. Yet, heretofore, she and I had never had a cross word, and I always had gotten on well with her when I used to visit her parents with Momin Shah.

Obviously, things have been said to them. I doubt that much, if anything, of what they have been told is either true or undistorted. Baba has a gift for taking certain pieces of information and re-framing them to suit his purposes.

The two young women are beside themselves. They are not interested in anything I have to say.

I ask 'Uzma why she is acting this way. She tells me that I do not care for her, and I haven't called her, and I have been unavailable to her ... apparently, 'Uzma has forgotten that she had e-mailed me and told me that she never wanted to hear from me again - but, maybe, it wasn't 'Uzma who contacted me earlier but, rather, someone who was trying to give me the impression that it was her.

I have heard a similar refrain recently from Sima. Moreover, Lara was saying the same sort of things concerning me after her return from visiting with Baba.

Obviously, Baba has been a busy little beaver telling stories out of school about me behind my back. I have encountered similar sorts of things with respect to people within the virtual community, like Sasha, who told me that, for quite some time, Baba had been telling people I was not to be trusted ... that I was a Muslim activist ... that I wanted to destroy the virtual community ... that I wanted to turn the virtual community into a forum for Islamic fundamentalism.

I say something about people having not been told the truth about things. 'Uzma says she has been taught by Baba that as long as the end is a good one, one is permitted to lie.

I am very sad to hear that this is the kind of tasawwuf she is being taught by Baba and Momin. This is not even remotely similar to the sort of spiritual information I shared with 'Uzma before Baba got his hooks into her.

Both Uzma and Nazia criticize me for the recent postings I have made on the public message board in the virtual community that are indirectly critical of Baba. They tell me I have no right to do that.

I tell them I did not make any mention of Baba in any of my postings. What I have said is accurate as far as it goes, but, in truth, I am simply giving back to the young women what they have been giving me -- that is, I have re-framed matters in an advantageous way. We all know who is being referred to in the messages that Lara and I posted, even if no names have been used or mentioned, but I am quite happy to know the two young women -- and others -- have read the material and are, to some extent, conversant with it.

Eventually, a certain degree of calmness descends on the gathering. It is a fragile peace, however, occasionally breaking out into conflict of one kind or another.

All of a sudden, Momin Shah appears at the door. He wants to come in.

Someone has phoned him at work. Momin has left his place of employment in the middle of the day, taken a cab to the house that is at some distance from where he is employed, and wishes to barge in uninvited ... just as he done to Lara and me in Bamford.

I tell the father – who is inclined to keep Momin out of the discussion -- that it is okay if he lets Momin in because there are a few things that I wish to address to Momin. Momin comes in and says he finds it very strange for me to be in the vicinity without notifying him of my presence.

After informing Momin that I am not under any obligation to keep him posted concerning my whereabouts, I share a few thoughts with him about a number of things he has done with respect to me. Momin, who, at his place of work, is used to setting the agenda, wishes to do so here as well.

I am not prepared to let this happen and tell him as much. A peace accord is reached.

I will speak about what is on my mind. After that, people can go their separate ways, no questions asked, no conditions imposed.

I proceed, once again, to provide an overview of what has happened over the last several years ... giving special emphasis to the

last six or seven months. This time there are no interruptions and no snide remarks while I am speaking.

After I complete my part of things, the father indicates he is terribly angry toward, and upset with, Baba and Momin. He feels they have been running roughshod over his family during the last year, and he feels that he and his wife were pressured into having their daughter, Nazia marry Habib.

In addition, he feels Momin and Baba have betrayed his trust. He says he doesn't know if he will ever be able to get over what they have put him and his family through.

I am not sure what will happen, but I do not believe things could have worked out any better than they did. Despite all odds of this happening, Uzma, Nazia and I were in the room at the same time, and I got to say everything I wanted to in relation to both them and to Momin Shah as well.

In fact, Momin's coming has actually given me the opportunity to say what I have to say in a relatively quiet atmosphere. This did not seem to have been possible prior to his arrival.

When I return to the house of Samia and her husband, we debrief about the events of the afternoon. I warn them not to expect any immediate changes with respect to either of her sisters, but, at least, some seeds have been planted.

Later on I learn that somewhere along the line, without my knowledge, Momin took 'Uzma down to visit with Baba in the United States. Samia says 'Uzma was a very different person after returning from her trip.

A penny drops. This is the 'happening' to which Uzma alluded in her recent e-mail to me ... the one that, supposedly, Momin told me all about.

Under Baba's tutelage, Momin has become quite duplicitous. In addition, he has become adept at game playing, re-framing issues, misdirection, and going about things in an underhanded and surreptitious manner.

I do not know if there is any of the Momin left whom I used to know. Baba appears to have succeeded in transforming him into a distorted, and not very flattering, image of his former self.

§

July 30, 2003

After my trip to Canada, I begin to catch up on any e-mails that have been sent to me while I was away. I find several from Lara.

§

Mon, 28 Jul 2003 03:10:13

Subject: I hope this is your last day there

Dear Tariq

I hope things will be wrapped up today. I know for those people it will never be over as long as their daughters are involved with Baba. It must be heart-breaking for them, knowing that they could lose them forever. If they don't recognize that "group" (I refuse to call it a silsilah) as being a cult by now, they never will, and the "they" I am referring to here is Nazia's parents and the sister who are not involved any longer.

I understand that Bilal and 'Asima might be taking a step backwards from the earlier enthusiasm they expressed about helping the girls to come to see the destructive presence of Baba in their lives because interfering in the lives of others is not something to be taken lightly, and this process of trying to free people from cults is still very new to them. Hopefully, after you leave, Bilal and 'Asima will continue, however they can, in their efforts to persuade those young ladies to return to their families and the original spiritual teachings. I, for one, applaud your efforts, but I hope you will keep in mind the limitations you have since, now, you are, effectively, an outsider to that group.

I had a nightmare about Baba last night, and I cannot remember the details, but I awoke with the feeling that he is very, very upset and angry with you and me right now and is trying to hurt us. What else is new?

I look forward to hearing from you tonight as to how it went today. I will continue to hope that these people will see the truth about the matter and will not continue to blame you for their actions.

Until tonight, I miss you and am keeping you in my thoughts.

Love,

Lara

§

Lara's phrase 'blame you' is a reference to the fact that: 'Uzma's parents, Samia's husband, and to some extent, Bilal and his wife, 'Asima, seem to want to hold me responsible for Baba's existence and evil behavior. I made the same sort of mistake as everyone else -- I gave my trust to someone, the same someone as everyone else -- who, in time, betrayed it.

I care about this family, and I have given expression to this caring over the years in many different ways. This includes taking a twenty-hour round trip to Canada to help them try to find a way to extricate their two daughters from Baba's sphere of influence.

§

Monday, 28 July 2003 19:18:27

Subject: My hero

Dear Tariq,

Did you ever know that you're my hero? I just got off the phone with you, and I will sleep well tonight, my dear, because it is the first time since last January that I have felt that perhaps the truth will win out, and I know that Momin has been called evil by his own people and, hopefully, will not get a decent night's sleep for the rest of his natural life until, and unless, he changes his evil ways. We know that the king-baby, Baba, won't lose any sleep over the issue, and probably Momin will not either, but we can always hope.

You are a true warrior. Tonight I will say prayers before I go to sleep, and I will pray that the family's peace will be restored some day very soon. I can't wait to see you home.

I love you,

Lara

§

August 7, 2003

During an instant messenger chat with Bilal, we are informed Baba has been in touch with the parents of 'Uzma and Samia sometime after my visit there. Baba has induced the parents to not only accept his version of things, but, as well, to go to the house of Momin Shah to seek the latter's forgiveness for what they have done.

As far as I know, the only thing they 'did' was to come to their senses in relation to Baba and Momin. This, of course, is a cardinal sin as far as Baba is concerned and, definitely constitutes something for which Baba wishes people to repent.

In best 'Sufi' tradition, Baba does not request that the parents seek his forgiveness. Rather, Baba instructs them to go to their shaykh, and Baba's khalifah -- namely, Momin Shah -- and humble themselves in contrition before the person whom they have 'wronged' through their tasteless behavior in which they acknowledged the truth of what Baba and Momin have been doing to their family ... which is to tear it apart.

I don't know what Baba said to them. However, he must have been in excellent form because he took two people -- who, just a few short weeks back, were very angry and upset with both Baba and Momin ... feeling the latter two had both betrayed the trust of the parents -- and turned things completely upside down.

I have seen Baba perform. He is very good at what he does.

Over the years, I have witnessed quite a few people who -- conceptually, emotionally, and spiritually -- have been turned inside out before my very eyes when Baba does his 'thing'. He's a real charmer ... a very clever charmer ... especially when he gets to work on people in isolation in the shadow-hued corners of life.

§

August 23, 2003

I receive an e-mail from Barry in Canada indicating that he has tried everything to get the sort of Sufi-oriented person that he and his bride-to-be would like in order to oversee the Muslim side of their marriage. However, they have struck out in this regard, and they really want me to come up and help them out,

On the one hand, I still am not keen on going to officiate a wedding. In addition, I really don't have the money necessary to finance such a trip.

On the other hand, Barry has helped me out in a lot of different ways. I feel that, perhaps, this might be one way in which I could give back to him a little of what he has given to me.

I tell him that I am prepared to come, but I also tell him what my financial circumstances are. He says that he will be happy to underwrite the travel costs.

Arrangements are made. The wedding will take place in early October.

§

September 4, 2003

I just posted an announcement in the virtual community about my new web page concerning spiritual abuse. Although Baba's entourage has, for the most part, withdrawn from both the two virtual communities that he created, nevertheless, from time to time, Baba sends someone on a scouting mission to see what is going on.

Consequently, I am sure that, in one way or another, information about the spiritual abuse web site will, eventually, be passed on to Baba. I also am sure that once Baba finds out about the site, he will have someone reporting to him about what is being said on the new web site.

I compose an e-mail and send it to hundreds of different Muslim organizations, a variety of Muslim professors, and to different Muslim individuals. I am hoping that the individuals to whom I am sending the e-mail will begin to explore and discuss the issue of spiritual abuse in the Muslim community.

§

September 23, 2003

I have written a book on spiritual abuse. The material is prepared in such a way that there is both generic, as well as a Sufi-focused, editions of the work dealing with a variety of issues involving spiritual abuse.

I compose an e-mail about the new web site and the related book and mail the announcement out to various Muslim organizations, news organizations, professors, and individuals. Below is a sample of the general form of the e-mail that is being sent to people whom I believe might be interested in the issue:

§

As-Salaam-u-'alaykum!

There are many problems today facing the generality of Muslims as well as those who are interested in pursuing tasawwuf. One area that has received relatively little attention revolves about the issue of spiritual abuse in conjunction with fraudulent Sufi teachers.

This problem is far bigger than most people suspect. In fact, it exists in every part of the Muslim world and makes the task of distinguishing between authentic and false teachers increasingly difficult.

There is a web site that has been established that seeks to address this issue. I hope you will take a look at the material contained within that site. The url for the web site is:

<http://spiritualabuse.edu>

Moreover, if you are interested, I could e-mail you (via attachment) a copy of the book: *Spiritual Abuse and the Sufi Tradition*, for purposes of review.

Despite the title of the foregoing book, this cyber-work is not an exercise in Sufi-bashing, for I remain an ardent seeker of the wisdom inherent in tasawwuf, and this has been the case for more than three decades. Nonetheless, a problem exists that I believe should not continue to be ignored.

With warmest regards,

Dr. Tariq Knecht

§

One of the people that I send the foregoing to is a person I used to know in Canada. We did a few videos together for a television show on Islam he was hosting in conjunction with a guy from the Middle-East who was actually bank-rolling the program. Apparently, somewhere along the line, my acquaintance has been made a shaykh, and he lives somewhere in Ohio where he conducts, among other things, regular zikr sessions.

Although I have located his website – or the website for his silsilah – and have tried to reach him on several occasions through the contact information that is provided on the site, I have never heard back from. I intend to attempt to reach him one last time. If nothing happens, then I will just stop trying to contact this individual.

§

September 29, 2003

I receive an e-mail response from the fellow in Ohio. He gives me his phone number.

I call him up and we begin to reminisce a little about old times. Following this, I bring him up to date on some of what has happened over the last, little while.

He listens to what I have to say and suggests that, maybe, we'll have to "make a little mischief" and shake things up in the Sufi community in North America. I'm not sure what he means by this.

I indicate that Baba is a very intelligent and dangerous person who has damaged many people, and, in some ways, Baba reminds me of how the dajjal has been described in some of the hadithic literature. I tell the person that I feel Baba might be a conduit for evil influences, and this is why I would like to send the person to whom I am talking a free, electronic version of the book on spiritual abuse in the Sufi community that I have written.

Somewhat strangely I feel -- given his position as an alleged 'shaykh' -- the person doesn't seem to want anything to do with the book. He sounds frightened in some way ... but, maybe, this is just my impression of things. In any event, he insists that I must not send the book to him.

He changes the subject and begins talking about some pictures he saw of me on the Internet. He feels, based on what he has seen in the pictures, I have changed a lot since we last saw one another. He senses that I might not be as rigid as he felt I used to be. He says his wife agrees with him

Maybe, the guy and his wife have worldly kashf and, as a result, they can tell about someone's personality and character just by looking at a picture – assuming, of course, that such people are even correct in their assessment of such matters. Nonetheless, irrespective of whether, or not, he enjoys access to kashf, and irrespective of whether, or not, he is correct, I feel that what he is saying is un-Sufi like and, as such, seems to be relatively devoid of any sense of adab or humility.

However, I let his comment pass, and move on to other things. Shortly thereafter, the conversation ends.

October 5, 2003

The time for Barry's wedding has arrived. Lara has decided that she will drive me to the Canadian destination, but she does not want to attend the ceremonies ... not only because she doesn't like ceremonies but, as well, she finds meeting new people difficult and stress-laden. She feels that if we take her car, then this will help reduce some of the costs associated with the trip and, therefore, will represent just that much less for Barry to come up with to subsidize the trip.

I feel this is really a very nice offer on Lara's part. She doesn't even know Barry, and she is trying to save him money. Furthermore, the trip is a very long car ride, and given that Lara really doesn't enjoy driving such distances - especially if big city traffic is involved (which there will be) - she is being compassionate and charitable in offering to do what she is indicating.

We agree to take the trip together. We leave a day, or so, later.

§

We break the trip into two parts. The first night is spent somewhere near the Quebec/Ontario border. The second night we spend in the city where Barry is to be married.

§

At the wedding, I meet a few familiar faces from the past. Among these faces is that of Alice, 'Ali and Stan.

Following the wedding ceremony and the zikr session - which the parents of both the groom and bride find somewhat awkward and strange since they are not Muslim ... although their respective children are - I renew acquaintances with everyone. The situation is a little strained, but everything goes well.

§

Lara and I plan to leave the next day. However, before we get under way for the road trip, I would like to visit the gravesite of Dr. Irfan and say fatiha there.

After a few false starts because I have forgotten my way around the city, we are able to find the cemetery and grave where Dr. Irfan has been laid to rest. I say fatiha, and, then, we just spend a few minutes in silence at the grave side.

Stan has accompanied us to the graveyard. Following the observance, he takes us to lunch.

At the restaurant, I tell Stan the whole story about Baba. Stan had spent a lot of time with Baba and enjoyed his company but, Stan never asked to be initiated.

He had his own path. Nonetheless, he felt like he always learned a lot when he interacted with Baba.

Stan is shocked with what we are telling him, and he asks a variety of questions. Both Lara and I answer his queries as directly and as fully as possible.

The time-frame within which we can talk at the restaurant before Lara and I have to head back to Bamford is too short for Lara and I to determine whether, or not, Stan is accepting what we have to say. All we can do is related to him what we feel is necessary, and, then, the decision about what is said will belong to Stan.

Stan has been a good friend over the years. He has helped me out in a number of ways, and I always got on well with him.

I feel Stan has the right to know what Lara's and my experience has been in relation to Baba. He probably is very unlikely to meet up with Baba again, but forewarned is forearmed – at least as far as exercising discretion is concerned should Stan meet up with Baba in the future.

§

October 23, 2003

People have been contacting me about the spiritual web site. Some of these individuals don't have much to say except they are happy to

see that such a web site exists. Some of the people who contact me provide a brief overview of their own experiences in conjunction with spiritual abuse. Some of the people who contact me are curious and want to know whether I believe there are any authentic Sufi shaykhs still in existence.

In relation to the latter question, I answer most of these e-mails in the same way. Yes, I believe there still are some authentic shaykhs hanging out in various parts of the world ... however, I add that I feel there are a lot fewer of these authentic guides than one might suppose (or hope) and, for the most part, I believe these individuals are not so easy to find anymore.

As far as the e-mails are concerned that deal with the experience of others in relation to spiritual abuse, perhaps the most succinct way of summarizing the information is as follows. The problem is worldwide -- America, Canada, England, France, Italy, Mexico, Argentina, The Netherlands, Cyprus, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Palestine, Morocco, South Africa, Australia, Indonesia, and Malaysia are some of the countries where problems have been encountered and that are being reported to me.

Does this mean everyone from those countries is suspect? No, it does not ... rather it means just what it says ... problems have been reported.

The bottom line here is that people ought to be extremely cautious about whose hand they are thinking of placing their own into for purposes of taking initiation into a Sufi silsilah. Although one cannot automatically assume all shaykhs are false, nevertheless, one cannot automatically presume that just because someone claims to be an authentic shaykh, one is being told the truth.

Below are a few samples drawn from the correspondence that has been sent to me in conjunction with Sufi spiritual abuse ... along with my replies to those individuals.

Tariq

I always thought that Sufi was "IT". How do you feel about the Radha Soami organization from Beas, India-who have recently (since1990) established centers in U.S. and Canada?.They are (like Sufi) a mystical organization clothed in secrecy.

Thanks for your great website.

Sincerely,

R.

§

Dear R.,

I apologize for taking so long to respond to your inquiry. The past several weeks have been filled with issues --- both interesting and difficult -- and every time I thought I was going to be able to free up some space to reply to you, something else happened and upended my plans.

In my opinion, the Sufi path still is "IT", but, unfortunately, being able to differentiate between authentic and inauthentic spiritual guides is becoming increasingly difficult. I feel this same problem exists in every, single, authentic, mystical tradition that exists today.

The issue of secrecy is not necessarily a warning sign of problems. There might be legitimate reasons why certain aspects of a spiritual path are guarded by secretive processes, practices, and/or events.

However, when secrecy is used to camouflage the presence of spiritual abuse -of whatever kind, then, yes, people who seek to do things in secret do so in order to hide their real intentions, and this is a problem for everyone, especially the seekers within such a group.

There are many groups in existence that might qualify as cults according to this or that definition of a cult, or this or that set of criteria. I am less interested in referring to problematic groups as cults, and more interested in trying to focus on whether, or not, there exist elements of spiritual abuse in certain groups or so-called teacher-seeker relationships.

I am a little familiar with Radha Soami. There are quite a few links on the Internet that both endorse, as well as are severely critical, of this perspective.

For the most part, I do not try to identify good groups or 'bad' groups. Rather than serve as a clearinghouse for various groups -- Sufi or otherwise -- I try to concentrate on providing assistance to individuals who have been damaged by spiritually abusive people who refer to themselves as shaykhs, pirs, murshids, and/or Sufi guides.

With warmest regards,

Dr. Tariq Knecht

§

I have been on a spiritual path, I thought, and I was trying to teach myself since I could not find a teacher and I don't believe in paying for one.

I have had lucid dreams and also visions and premonitions but when I set out to tell the truth I ended up homeless and also depressed that turned my visions into horrible hallucinations and also delusions. I think it was precisely because I did not have a guide or I have read the wrong books.

Thanks for your time.

Yours respectfully,

B. R.

§

Dear B. R.,

Your beliefs about not wishing to have to pay for spiritual instruction are well-founded. There should never be an exchange of money between seeker and guide for services rendered with respect to guidance concerning the process of Self-realization.

I also concur with your intuition that an important dimension of your problems might be connected with the absence of proper spiritual assistance in your life. No one can traverse the mystical path unaided ... even the Prophets had guidance, and whenever an individual steps onto the path by himself or herself, that individual is opening oneself up to a legion of potential problems, destructive forces, influences, hazards, and the spiritual equivalent to quicksand.

I am not saying all of the difficulties to which you allude are rooted in not having a teacher because this world tends to be antagonistic to anyone who seeks to speak the truth. On the other hand, this just points to another reason why one must have spiritual support to help guard and protect one if one is called upon to speak the truth about certain matters.

The Prophets and saints spoke the truth, but they enjoyed Divine support in their quest. Furthermore, they were prepared to accept whatever fate God decided concerning such issues, and many of them had to pay a great price, merely for speaking the truth.

Although books -- if they are truly books of knowledge and wisdom -- provide one with some assistance and orientation, nevertheless, one cannot travel the mystical path on the basis of books alone. There are important facets of the spiritual journey that only might be received through direct contact with an authentic guide, and without this latter component one is likely to perish -- either physically, or spiritually, or psychologically, or some combination thereof -- along the way.

Although the foregoing has been written from a Sufi perspective, at the same time, all authentic spiritual traditions have been saying precisely the same thing for thousands of years. We ignore such counsel at our own peril.

I am sorry for the troubled times that you have encountered. God willing, I hope the future brings greater felicity into your life.

With warmest regards, Dr. Tariq Knecht

§

As-salamu 'alaykum,

Brother Tariq

An acquaintance passed along your web site to me, so I had to pay a visit. By way of introduction, I am, like you, closer to 60 than I'd care to think.

It's an involved story, but I became Muslim nearly fifteen years ago after a near-fatal car crash, and during my recovery I had a dream that changed my life. (I'll share it with you, if you wish.)

That led me, like so many "euro-american" coming to Islam, to Sufism. I associated myself with five teachers over a number of years, only one of whom was genuine. The others were sheer fakes. In the case of one, I was expelled because I challenged the authority of the "sheikh," who had openly violated an important Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh).

I must also tell you, I had a background in Arabic language but never used this professionally. And I had always felt that Sayyidna Ali (a.s.) had gotten a raw deal at the hands of partisans of Abu Sufyan (l.a.)

It was during the "stay" with the last "pir" that I decided to drop what I see as a Sufi pretense to love Ahl al-Bayt, and to declare myself Shia, which I did in December of 1992.

But I have to say that there was one legitimate teacher I had -- a Tunisian woman, a Waliyat Allah -- who interpreted a dream of mine to mean it was time to leave her and to seek the path with the direct assistance of Allah's Angels. I see her occasionally, and we remain friends, but the others in her group simply refuse to believe that she sent me off!

Well, this introduction took longer than I intended, for which I apologize.

S. V.

§

Wa 'alaykum as-Salaam,

Dear Brother S,

I would be interested in learning whatever you would care to share about your experiences with false teachers. I'm not interested in names so much as the form of the experience and the sort of difficulties encountered ... to which you have alluded a little in relation to at least one so-called teacher.

As far as your willingness is concerned to share the important dream about which you make mention, while I appreciate the offer, I am of the opinion -- and I know that different people have different views on this issue -- that, perhaps, it would be best not to share it with me ... not because your dream is not veridical, but because, with certain exceptions, such matters are often best left as a private matter that one might share with one's spouse or an authentic teacher, but not necessarily with others.

The issue of Shi'a versus Sunni is not of great interest to me. I regret the excesses on both sides of this on-going tension, and, I believe such conflicts merely distance people from the more important business of seeking to realize one's purpose in life.

I love Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him), as well as the other members of his household. I accept the words of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) when he said: "I am the city of knowledge, and 'Ali is the gate." I accept that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) gave a khirqah, or mantle of spiritual authority, to Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him). However, I also love many other loci of manifestation concerning the Divine truth that have been given expression through the lives of so many awliya, or friends of Allah, who are not inclined to the Shi'a approach to things.

I am happy you have found something through which you are able to continue your spiritual quest. I too continue on, God willing, in my own fashion, and I believe that God in His great mercy, kindness, and generosity, has provided human beings with a multiplicity of ways through which to seek Divine favor and barakah. May Allah help us all to find that which is spiritually felicitous.

With warmest regards,

Dr. Tariq Knecht

§

Subject: How does one find a real shaykh in Virginia

From: Paul

§

Dear Paul,

There was no body content to your e-mail, so I am assuming your Subject header contained everything you wished to say. Going on this assumption, I will address your query in the following manner.

Quite a few people e-mail me with requests to identify healthy Sufi organizations, authentic shaykhs, and so on. At one time, I thought there were a lot more spiritually healthy organizations than there seem to be, but as I came to gather more information about various groups that claim to be Sufi – and this is based either on my own encounters, or the reports of individuals who have direct contact with such groups -- then, with the passage of time, I have become more cautious about recommending this or that group or individual to others.

It would be very easy for me to say: "Paul, try such and such a group or person." But, it also would be very irresponsible of me to do so.

It is not my soul, heart, spirit and eternity that are being placed on the line when you go to this or that group/individual that I have suggested. You are going to be directly affected by anything that I recommend in that respect.

Consequently, for the time being, I am staying out of the recommendation business ... at least as far as alleged Sufi groups and shaykhs are concerned. What I do recommend is that you read all of the material on my web site, and, if you can afford to do so, buy the book on *Spiritual Abuse and the Sufi Tradition* which is available through my web site.

Yes, the latter part of the previous suggestion is somewhat self-serving because I stand to benefit from the sale of a book. On the other hand, I don't think you should sell your spiritual interests short by not trying to find out everything you can about the problem of spiritual abuse before you take the leap into the unknown -- and, therefore, what I am trying to recommend is a win-win situation for each of us.

The material in the book is complementary to, and not, for the most part, a repetition of, the information that is freely available on the web site. There is a small degree of overlap between the two, but there is much information in the book that is not covered in the web site.

I have had both experiences -- that of a wonderful sixteen-year relationship with an authentic Sufi shaykh, and one of an eleven-year relationship with someone who turned out to be both fraudulent and abusive ... although on the surface this latter individual seemed extremely loving, knowledgeable, kind, and compassionate. Please, believe me when I tell you that although the second kind of relationship can lead to considerable amounts of learning about oneself, the mystical path, as well as about the character and integrity of other individuals, nevertheless, try to do yourself a favor and learn everything you can to inform yourself about the potential dangers and problems inherent in making the wrong choice in relation to people who claim to be shaykhs, pirs, masters, murshids, or guides.

Faith is not blind. It is rooted in experience and understanding concerning certain dimensions of the truth that lend a degree of confidence concerning the reliability and trustworthiness of other aspects of the truth with which one might have less understanding.

I have seen people whose faith and lives have been destroyed by making choices that seemed to be sincere from their side but whose sincerity was leveraged by very clever people who knew how to manipulate and exploit the holy longing of those seekers after the truth. By the Grace of God, despite my experiences, my faith remains intact, but I wouldn't wish what I have had to go through on my worst enemy.

You might be inclined to read the foregoing and surmise I don't believe there are any authentic spiritual guides or silsilahs (a lineage of spiritual transmission) still in existence. This would be a premature conclusion.

I believe there are such individuals and groups out there. They are just a lot harder to find than the Internet might lead one to believe.

I regret not being able to give you something more positive to work with. At the moment, however, I am providing you with the best advice I can.

With warmest regards,

Dr. Tariq Knecht

§

Hello Dr. Knecht

I just found your web site, and I am gonna go browsing. I am so excited I found this web site though, in the eight, or so, years I have investigated destructive cults I have found nothing about Sufi cults, one of which I was a member of for seven years..

It has been quite a while since I exited that group though, and life is much better again. The cult I was affiliated with linked itself into a tradition of North Africa. Originally the people who started this tradition were slaves from different parts of Africa who were transported to North Africa and got strongly influenced by Islam in the process. On the other side of that are the slaves from the same area who were transported to South America and became influenced by Catholicism. They are called the Santeria today. My group was based out of Europe though.

I can't believe I haven't seen this web site before though, and I have searched extensively for places that would know stuff about Sufi cults. Did it go up recently?

I am finally reaching the part in my recovery where I am ready to explore my spirituality again, but, of course, I am approaching the subject cautiously and with all my knowledge and my mind intact.

I still find myself quite attracted to Sufi groups, so we will see where that goes. Anyway do you keep a data base of Sufi groups that are destructive? And, I am exploring the following groups -- x, y, and z. Do you have any information concerning these groups ... either negative or positive?

I am not looking for some counseling in relation to this. I truly have plenty of help in my life as it is now. I would like to exchange information though, and maybe even get involved in supporting your work. I am situated in Idaho so any help I give would be long distance.

Warm regards

N.

§

Dear N.,

I will do my best to answer some of your questions ... although on some issues I will have to stay, at least for now, somewhat vague. Experience has taught me that as frustrating as this might be for some of those with whom I correspond, there are good reasons for taking this approach to things.

The easiest question to address is how long the web site has been a going concern. The web site started up last August during the latter part of the month.

I have a little familiarity with Santeria, and my understanding (though this might be incorrect) is that there are good forms of it and not so good forms of it ... the latter meaning that people use some of the occult/psychic powers that might be gained through Santeria practices to harm, exploit, or manipulate people. My understanding of this tradition is also that it tends to adapt to local spiritual traditions and blend its teachings with the teachings of whatever local tradition is predominant in a given area ... which often meant Catholicism.

This leads to several questions that I have for you concerning the tradition with which you were connected for a number of years. Is it really Santeria in Islamic clothing, as Santeria often did with Catholicism? And, if this is the case, is there a component involving the use of spells, talisman, and the like that plays a role in that tradition? If so, was this part of the destructive aspect of the group with whom you were introduced to what was supposed to be the Sufi mystical path?

Well, enough questions from me. You have asked about a number of groups, and, as well, you have inquired about whether I have a data base concerning Sufi groups.

At this point in time, I would respond to your questions about various groups in the following way: 'if it were me, I would stay away from the groups you mentioned. Earlier in my life, when I was with an authentic shaykh (he passed away about 15 years ago) I thought there were numerous authentic shaykhs and legitimate silsilahs.

Approximately 11-12 years ago, I began associating with someone whom I believed to be authentic, and I continued to feel this way for most of the next eleven years ... until incontrovertible evidence came forth to indicate that, among other things, the so-called shaykh, was an inveterate liar. Since then and since the advent of the Spiritual Abuse Support web site, there have been quite a few people who have communicated with me about their experiences with abusive, fraudulent, spiritual charlatans, and this growing data base has raised a lot of red flags concerning groups and teachers whom, previously, I thought might be authentic.

Allah knows best about the authenticity of such groups and people. However, I have become decidedly cautious with respect to the issue of recommending - or warning against - a given group or individual to people such as you.

The best advice I can give is to try to do unto others as you would have others do unto you. Although, like you, I am actively looking for spiritual authenticity and, like you, I would like to continue a journey in the midst of an authentic spiritual environment, I will say that none of the groups or people whom you mention would be capable, based on what I know, of winning any degree of confidence or commitment from me ... but that' just my opinion.

You don't know me, and you have no reason to trust me. Moreover, as I am sure you have discovered through your own experiences at the hands of a destructive group and/or teacher, once spiritual trust is betrayed, developing trust or being willing to invest trust in other human beings -- especially in connection with matters of spirituality -- is one of the most difficult problems with which a spiritually abused individual has to deal in the aftermath of exiting from such a relationship.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, all I can say is what I indicated above: if I were in your situation, and if I were the one who were considering whether to pursue some sort of affiliation or relationship with any of the groups you mention, I would likely continue to look in other directions because there is, for me, serious questions concerning the authenticity of such groups ... although Allah knows best.

I am happy that, by Divine Grace, you have been able to separate yourself from the destructive group with which you were associated. I also am happy that, again through Divine succor, your circumstances are such that you have plenty of support in your life and not in need of counseling.

All I can suggest is that before you make the next leap of faith (and it is a leap of faith because there are never any guarantees that the choices we make concerning spiritual affiliation are going to lead to felicity ... I'm only batting .500 in this respect), is this: not only should you find out as much as you can about the people or groups in which you are interested, but you should try to learn as much as you can about spiritual abuse.

The fact you have been through an abusive experience gives you a considerable leg up on knowing, first hand, about such issues. Nevertheless, I also have discovered that many people who go through spiritually abusive experiences either become so cynical and jaded about the spiritual path that they distance themselves from such issues altogether, or, they are vulnerable to entering into spiritually abusive relationships, yet again, much as those who have been in situations of domestic abuse find themselves in subsequent abusive relationships even when they have been lucky enough to have escaped from such relationships previously.

There is a great deal of free information available on my web site. The book on spiritual abuse that is available through the web site contains a great deal more information on this topic.

However, you decide to proceed, I can only say that people like you and me -- that is, people who have been through a spiritually exploitive, abusive, or destructive relationship either with a group and/or individual but who are interested in pursuing spirituality -- have to try to walk a fine line between, on the one hand, not being so

cautious that we fail to become open to real spiritual possibilities, while, on the other hand, not being so anxious that we rush to judgment and risk making the same mistakes as were made originally.

I know of no easy solution to this balancing act. Something in this respect, however, which you might want to consider is that, God willing, around February 15th, 2004, I am going to open up a private site that is sort of a 'things-to-do-place-while-one-waits-for-Shams-to-appear' ... Shams (may God be pleased with him) being the mysterious spiritual guide who came into the life of Rumi and, by God's leave, help transformed Rumi's life from that of being an ordinary and learned shaykh to an ecstatic and realized individual.

I really have no idea if the proposed site will work, or not. But, I do know that there are quite a few people like you and me who are caught in a sort of in-between twilight zone in which we wish to peruse issues of spirituality but we are not quite certain how to proceed or where to invest our time and energy.

In any event, an attempt will be made to see if something of a learning community can be established. I am not exactly sure what you have in mind with respect to lending support at a distance, but, as one possibility, you might consider joining the proposed private site because it could be a win-win situation in which you get to explore issues of interest to you with other – hopefully -- like-hearted and minded individuals and, therefore, you would have the opportunity to use the private site in a constructive way to help advance your search for authentic spirituality.

With warmest regards,

Dr. Tariq Knecht

§

Someone writes and provides a brief background of how different members of the person's family have been entangled in spiritually abusive relationships. The writer goes on to mention several, supposedly, Sufi groups -- one in which the individual is interested and one in which a friend is interested. The writer wants to know if I would recommend seeking initiation in either of the two groups.

During the e-mail, the individual indicates that people who are affiliated with some of the groups in which the writer is interested have discouraged people from asking questions. As a result, the individual who is writing to me asks a number of questions about this.

§

Wa 'alaykum as-Salaam!

Given the abused-tinged experiences of some of your family members, and given the nature of your own doubts and concerns with respect to the issue of whether, or not, to take initiation through the group you mention, I think there are some questions that you need to ask yourself and issues that you need to address before you proceed any further.

First, although one should observe appropriate spiritual etiquette when doing so, the fact of the matter is, a person has every right to ask whatever questions are deemed necessary in order to arrive at a sound, considered judgment about the advisability of taking ba'yat or initiation with a given shaykh, and if you are being given the impression that to ask questions concerning the authenticity of an alleged teacher is to betray the teacher, then if I were you, I would ask myself whether I wished to be associated with a 'teacher' or group in which asking questions vital to spiritual health and success is going to be discouraged.

Doubts are a natural part of the mystical path. This does not mean one should hang onto doubts at all costs, but it does mean that doubts do occur at many stages of the Sufi path, and such worries and questions should not be swept beneath the prayer rug but, instead, need to be addressed in an artful and constructive fashion.

The transition from doubt to faith is not an arbitrary exercise, nor can it be done by fiat. Faith is not blind but rooted in experience, and the more experience one has with respect to the issues and questions surrounding a particular point of faith/doubt, the stronger the foundation through which to meet the challenge of a given doubt.

If I ask you if you will lend me \$5.00, the fact of the matter is, you don't know me, and you don't know if I will pay you back, so, you will

have doubts about whether, or not, you should consent to my request. But, let us suppose, that you figure, well, \$5.00 is no big deal and you are prepared to take a chance with me and you decide to loan me the money since even if I am scamming you, you will not be out all that much and, in addition, you will find out something that might be worth more than \$5.00 -- namely, whom not to trust with important issues and questions ... i.e., in this case, me.

So, you send me the money. I thank you and tell you that in a week's time, I will repay the loan.

A week later, I give you back the money. This constitutes actual lived experience that you have had concerning me, and a result, the nature of the doubt/faith with respect to me has changed a little.

However, in truth, you still do not know very much about me except that on one occasion I asked to borrow \$5.00 and I paid you back as promised. Conceivably, I could be setting you up for something else, and I am just using the loan re-payment to prime the pump, so to speak.

A month later I approach you and ask for a loan of \$25.00 with the stipulation that I will repay you within 10 days. Now, \$25.00 is five times as much as \$5.00 and just because I paid you back once doesn't mean that I will be fair with the second time around.

Nevertheless, let us assume you are in a charitable mood and, as well, a little curious to see what I will do. Consequently, you send me a check for \$25.00 and go into a 'wait and see' mode.

Nine days later you receive a check from me for \$25.00 and a note of appreciation. Now, you have even more experience with me, and, once again, the nature of the doubt/faith ratio has changed such that the numerator has increased a little, while the denominator also has changed slightly.

The more times we do this, and the more times I respond properly, then the smaller does your doubt become and the larger becomes your faith in my integrity as a human being. Things might develop in such a way that there might even come a time when doubts would never enter your mind if I made a loan request and that as long as you had extra money available you might not think twice about complying with such a request from me.

Given enough experience about such issues, your data base grows, and with this comes a deeper understanding of the possibilities within this aspect of our relationship. Nonetheless, the fact of the matter is that even with all of this experience to fall back on, you might never be completely certain that, at some point, I still might renege on our arrangement and end up disappointing you.

Thus, although you might have considerable knowledge about me and how I behave in certain circumstances, your knowledge is not certain. Rather, it is form of faith -- that is, informed experience and understanding about a particular facet of life -- namely, your relationship with me in conjunction with financial matters.

Now, the issue of initiation is not about someone asking to borrow \$5.00 from you, or even \$10,000. Initiation is about someone offering to be a caretaker of your soul, the most precious treasure you have in your possession.

Not being able to ask questions about the person who is making such an offer is tantamount to my asking you, relatively early in the process of our financial relationship, for a loan of a million dollars, even if this means that you have to mortgage your house, take on three other jobs, and ransom your children in order to raise the money. Now, of course, there is a disparity in the foregoing comparison because the truth of the matter is, my asking for a million dollars is less outlandish than is someone offering to look after your soul for you with no questions asked.

Someone once said if you want to find out about someone, go on a trip with that person. When people are traveling, they tend to be taken out of their usual support system, comfort zone, and familiar surroundings. And, when this occurs, much of the actual character of someone begins to show through as one encounters different difficulties, hardships, setbacks, delays, and so on.

However, in the case of someone who is seeking initiation, the nature of the trip on which one might be embarking is not like a trip across North America, or even a trip around the world. Rather, it is a trip toward eternity, so, the question is this: why should you trust someone as your guide for such a journey when you haven't even gone on the simplest of travels with the individual?

You indicate in your e-mail that a variety of the dervishes associated with the Order that you are thinking about joining have been counseling you about what is required, appropriate, expected, involved, and so on, with respect to a person who takes initiation with the alleged shaykh. In truth, you should not be taking your lead from what they say, but, rather, you should be basing your decision on your direct experience with the person whom you are contemplating taking ba'yat.

Moreover, your decision should not be based on reading books written by the so-called shaykh, or by listening to his or lectures, or watching video tapes of the alleged shaykh in action. Instead, your decision should be based on direct observation of the gentleman's behavior, and the more observations and experiences you have in this regard, the better off you might be.

If you cannot ask questions and if your experiential access to the individual with whom you are entertaining the possibility of taking initiation is extremely limited or non-existent, then you are being asked to make one of the most important decisions of your life based on what? ... someone else's say so? This is little more than product endorsement by someone who is asking you to buy into something without ever having tried the product yourself.

Decisions made in the foregoing fashion are not an exercise rooted in faith, but, rather, in foolishness. When there is no direct, prolonged experience, and when no or few questions are permitted, and when obedience is demanded or expected of a seeker -- even though, in truth, the shaykh should be the servant of those who seek his or her spiritual counsel and assistance (and good, loyal, sincere, committed, conscientious, wise, humble servants are extremely difficult to come by these days, and if and when one comes across such rare individuals they should be treated with the utmost care and consideration lest they disappear or seek to do service elsewhere), and when other dervishes assume the responsibility of grooming someone for initiation or begin to exert various kinds of pressures involving the wielding of subtle social influences that are designed to shape thought and understanding, then really, one needs to ask oneself what one is becoming entangled in.

Being initiated into a Sufi silsilah is not like joining a social club. Furthermore, a silsilah is not an organization.

A silsilah constitutes the chain of spiritual lineage that links a given shaykh with the esoteric teachings and barakah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). When a person takes ba'yat or initiation, the seeker does so with the understanding that the nature of the initiation is a commitment of reciprocity with respect to that silsilah. In other words, a shaykh has as many, if not more, responsibilities in relation to an initiate as the initiate has in relation to ... not the teacher per se, but to Allah.

In addition, if a seeker has sincere love for the truth and is committed to seeking the truth with spiritual etiquette, a shaykh cannot ask more of the seeker than this, and part of this etiquette is to treat the locus of manifestation of truth (namely, the shaykh) with love and respect. However, this is not the same thing as a demand for obedience and submission.

The truth is always authoritative and has no need to make any demands of submission, and those who do not recognize the truth and act accordingly are obedient to something other than the truth. This is so both with respect to the seeker and an alleged teacher.

An authentic shaykh is but the most readily accessible locus of manifestation through which the spiritual barakah, support, assistance, wisdom, protection, and guidance of a legitimate silsilah is given expression. The character, quality, and capacity of the shaykh might color the nature of such barakah and help, but the shaykh is not the origin of such spiritual gifts.

No matter how talented, intelligent, gifted, attractive, interesting, and engaging a person might be, and no matter how many languages such an individual might speak, and no matter how many books she or he might have written, and no matter how many followers the person might have, and no matter how many centers, buildings, and projects the person might have, if such an individual is not rooted in a legitimate silsilah (that is, one which has been sanctioned, by the leave of Allah, with the blessings of the Prophet Muhammad -- peace be upon him), and if such a person has not officially been authorized by a legitimate silsilah to act in the capacity of a spiritual guide, then all of the foregoing assets are worthless from the perspective of someone

who seeks to have her or his holy longing requited through the realization of one's unique spiritual capacity and essential identity.

Once upon a time, authentic teachers could produce a sejah (the list of names that provides the chain of transmission from first (the Prophet Muhammad -- peace be upon him) to last (a given shaykh who is currently living and providing assistance to spiritual seekers) which would demonstrate the legitimacy of a particular silsilah. Now, many spiritual charlatans have illegitimately appropriated such lists, and, with or without amending the document, they offer the sejah as proof of their ill-begotten 'authenticity'.

We live in dangerous times. Blinded by an arrogance that supposes we live in the most spiritually enlightened period in history, we fail to see the signs of spiritual dissolution, ignorance and darkness all about us.

We are very vulnerable. There are very good reasons why the Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said to his Companions: "You see me and hear me, and, consequently, if you were to leave out even 1/10th of what is incumbent upon you, you will be denied Paradise, but there will come a time when there will be a people who will not see me or hear me, and if they do even one-tenth of what is incumbent upon them, they will be granted Paradise."

Moreover, we should take to heart the saying attributed to the Prophet (peace be upon him) that: "Islam began as something strange, and it will revert to being strange as it was in the beginning, so good tidings for the strangers."

Someone asked: "Who are the strangers?" and the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "The ones who break away from their people for the sake of Islam."

There are many groups -- both so-called Muslim and Sufi -- from which one might break away from in order to serve Islam. In doing this, perhaps we would become one of the strangers to whom the Prophet (peace be upon him) gave good tidings.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is also reported to have said: "There are 71 sects among Jews, and only one of them is correct. There are 72 sects among Christians, and only one of them is correct. There are 73 sects among Muslims, and only one of them is

correct.” There are all too many alleged Sufi groups these days who deserve to be listed among the aforementioned sects rather than the one way that gives true expression to the Divine wish for human potential.

These days, anybody who: writes or reads a book on tasawwuf or the Sufi path, is proclaimed, or proclaims himself or herself, to be an expert and adept of the mystical way. These days people dream themselves to be shaykhs, and so they become one, or they take fee-based courses to become a shaykh and receive ‘official’ certificates, or they announce that Kizr (peace be upon him) has appointed them to be a shaykh, or they boast about their special relationship with the Mahdi (may Allah be pleased with him), or they offer spiritual attunements at a distance through the Internet, or they provide a special of the day that combines martial arts and the mystical path, or they get appointed as a khalifah of someone who has proclaimed himself or herself to be a shaykh, or they hijack the sejah of an authentic silsilah, or they create circles of mutual admiration who join forces to lend the aura of authenticity to their activities through their willingness to endorse one another as great spiritual guides, much like the blurbs on the back of a book’s dust jacket comment on the brilliance of some writer quite independently of whether the description is deserved or not.

The very fact you are asking someone whom you don’t know about whether, or not, you should take initiation with a particular group should tell you something. Among other things, it tells you that you do not know enough about your present situation to warrant going further because your doubt to faith ratio is weighted heavily on the side of the numerator due to your lack of experience, understanding, and trust concerning the alleged shaykh in question.

If and when you acquire such experience, understanding and trust, you shouldn’t have to ask someone else what you ought to do. You need to learn, as we all do, to develop a trust in your own capacity to discern the spiritual dhawk or taste of your experiences. This is best done under the guidance of an accomplished spiritual teacher, but sometimes we get thrown into the deep end of the pool and have to learn to swim the best we can through our own efforts until such assistance comes along -- if it ever does.

You need to learn, as we all do, to listen to your heart and differentiate between, on the one hand, the currents of nafs, Iblis, dunya and unbelievers (and there are quite a few so-called shaykhs who are unbelievers even as they speak about Divinity). You need to learn, as we all do, to pay attention to your intuitions and reservations about situations that cause you concern. God has many avenues through which to communicate with us, and sometimes, if we pay attention, we might find that Divinity teaches from the inside-out, not from the outside-in (although one must be extremely careful here because we have within us a variety of fraudulent shaykhs).

You need to learn, as we all do, that trust is something that must be earned by a so-called teacher, not demanded or expected. You need to learn, as we all do, that there are no simple, easy, unproblematic, risk-free answers to the questions you are asking. You need to learn, as we all do, that although the rational mind has its limitations, nevertheless, Divinity had endowed it with a certain capacity for insight, understanding, and rigorous logic that we fail to utilize to our own detriment.

I could respond to your queries about the authenticity of the group in which you are interested with a “yes, they are authentic,” or, a “no, they are a spiritually abusive, illegitimate group.” But, what, precisely would this mean?

You don’t know me. You don’t know on what I am basing such possible replies. You don’t know if you can trust what I say. You don’t know if I have a hidden agenda. You don’t know what my intentions and motivations are. You don’t know if, on the one hand, I harbor various kinds of resentments and biases concerning the group with which you are concerned or, if on the other hand, I have a vested interest and stand to benefit in some way by encouraging you to seek them out.

All I can do is put forth a chain of reasoning and logic for you to examine, and it is your responsibility to try to come to some sort of workable conclusions concerning the degree of reliability that is, or is not, inherent in the chain of reasoning that I have put forth. I have responded to your question in the best and most helpful way I know how to do ... the rest is up to you, but if there are things that I have said in the foregoing about which you have questions, then, by all means,

write again, and we will proceed forward, and, hopefully, constructively, from that point onward.

With warmest regards,

Dr. Tariq Knecht

§

As salaam alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu

I came across your web site ... and was a bit astonished at first. And, then, I thought about it and realized that yes, there are many 'fake shaykhs' out there.

I didn't read through your whole web site ... because it's endless, but I felt the need to ask you your views on Sufism. I did skim through your bio so I understand some. I do understand you might just believe that while the Sufi path isn't wrong, yet, nonetheless, some teachers are fake. I'm just very troubled because your web site at first gives a very, very, bad impression of Sufis and I hope that isn't your intention. I truly believe in the Sufi path as I am a student of Shaykh D. I have found my true teacher and I hope that you will embark on the Sufi path once again under the guidance of a true and sincere teacher 'insha Allah

C. J

§

Wa 'alaykum as-Salaam!

Dear C.

I feel -- although Allah knows best -- that my views concerning the Sufi path are quite evident throughout both:

<http://spiritualabuse.edu>

as well as the web site that, for the most part, has supplanted the former links -- namely,

<http://spiritualwellness.edu>

I had a wonderful, close relationship with my first shaykh -- who was, and is, by the Grace of Allah, an authentic spiritual guide. Unfortunately, when my first shaykh passed away about 16 years ago, I went in search of further assistance and encountered -- although it took more than ten years to discover the truth about things -- a dimension of spirituality that few people wish to talk about or explore because this dimension forces one to have to look into the abyss without losing faith or commitment to the path.

I have seen the way evil -- dressed in the guise of spirituality -- operates from very close quarters. Some of these counterfeit teachers are extremely difficult to detect because they are very well versed in the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the sacred history of different silsilahs.

Only by the Grace of Allah, were facets of the character of the alleged Sufi guide unveiled to me. Without this Divine intervention, I might be, now, still entangled in the machinations of a false Sufi teacher.

The ways of evil can be very, very subtle. The appearance of evil can be clothed in the most traditional of forms, complete with long-flowing beard, trappings of humility, and an apparent deep understanding of both Islam and the Sufi path.

Since the spiritual abuse website began nearly a year ago, I have had contact with quite a few people from around the world, providing me with information about the many, many spiritual charlatans -- who call themselves Sufi shaykhs -- who are at 'work' in the world. The list of prominent names that, quite shockingly in some instances, are among these charlatans is both depressing and enlightening.

While I still believe there are some legitimate spiritual guides of tasawwuf who grace the Earth, this number is not as large as some people might hope. Moreover, this group of authentic guides will continue to decline throughout the Latter Days.

Spiritually speaking, we do not live in the best of times. We live in very close proximity to the worst of times, and all one has to do is look at the condition of the world to witness the truth of this.

Anyone who takes the time to read what I have written will find that I seek to strike a balance between maintaining allegiance to authentic Sufi and Islamic teachings, while, simultaneously, being critical of problematic approaches to spirituality. I realize that what is contained within the aforementioned web sites is extensive, but, then, the nature of Truth is infinite and, consequently, there is a lot to explore, discuss, consider, and to reflect upon.

I am not a shaykh -- although the false teacher with whom I was associated for a period of time -- appointed me as such. Or, considered from another perspective, I am a shaykh in the sense of being someone who has, to a degree, gained some mastery over myself even if I do not feel comfortable in assuming responsibility for someone else's journey, and, therefore, I do not take on mureeds or students for purposes of guiding them toward Self-realization.

However, one does not have to be a shaykh to speak from the heart and to enjoy, by the Grace of Allah, an understanding of tasawwuf. Furthermore, the goal of the Sufi path is not to become a shaykh, but, rather, to realize and act upon, God willing, one's essential identity and unique spiritual capacity. This is the way one gives expression to the purpose of life.

Unless a person has spent years in the company of an alleged shaykh, one cannot adjudge whether the person is, or is not, authentic. I spent 16 years in the closest of proximities to my first teacher, and every day of his life he proved to me the spiritual authenticity of his being. I spent, at most, a number of months, spread out over ten years, in relatively close association with the second alleged teacher, and while, on the surface, this man seemed quite authentic, it turned out he was the vilest of human beings.

It is amazing how much a person can hide from you when one is not around to witness all that is going on. Spiritual charlatans have a ton of tricks to misdirect attention and to re-frame things in a way that reflects well on them, even as they, in reality, are behaving in entirely inappropriate ways behind the scenes.

One cannot take the word or experiences of others as a basis for evaluating the spiritual authenticity of a given individual. One must have extensive, direct, personal experience with such a person, and, sometimes, even then, one needs Divine help to be enabled to see through the deception, lies, and spiritual abuse that is going on.

I have never left the Sufi path even though I have run into a few obstacles along the way. The teachings and example of my first -- and, to date, only -- shaykh continue to point the way to what authentic spirituality entails, and I try to operate out of the framework that he provided for me, by the Grace of Allah, as much as possible.

I hope the foregoing is helpful and, to some extent, answers some of the questions that have led you to write your e-mail. In one way, I am sorry my website causes people to feel uncomfortable, but in another way, the Sufi community is long past needing a severe wake-up call for the many forms of spiritual abuse that are being perpetrated in the name of authentic tasawwuf.

With warmest regards, Dr. Tariq Knecht

§

December 14, 2003

With a few exceptions, the vast majority of the Muslim groups, organizations, professionals, and individuals I contacted with respect to the web site and e-book concerning spiritual abuse in relation to the Sufi mystical tradition do not respond to my earlier e-mail overtures. I'm sure there are many reasons for their failure to communicate with me, but one of the reasons for the absence of any sort of reply is fear.

Just as the so-called leaders of the Catholic church were reluctant to rigorously investigate the allegations of sexual abuse that surfaced in many parts of the world over the last sixty years, so too, Muslims, in general, as well as the Sufi community, in particular, do not want to look into the shadows created by the many dark, troubling questions that are generated through the presence of the many forms of spiritual abuse being perpetrated across an extensive number of Muslim and Sufi communities around the world.

Muslims would rather criticize Israelis for the latter's occupation of Palestine than criticize themselves for permitting hundreds, if not thousands, of honor killings to continue within Muslim communities, or they would rather permit mutilation of female genitalia to be passed off as an ordinance of God rather than a whim of some very sick individuals. Muslims would rather criticize America for its imperialistic and oppressive behaviors than criticize the Taliban in Afghanistan, or the Wahabis in Saudi Arabia, or the many strains of dogmatic, rigid, cruel forms of Muslim fundamentalism that oppress Muslims in many part of the world, and, even now, seek to gain hegemony within American, European, and Canadian Muslim communities through their own fundamentalist brand of imperialism. Many so-called Sufis would rather point a condescending finger at exoteric theologies rather than examine the abuses that are being perpetrated in the name of esoteric possibilities.

Many alleged Sufis do not want the whole issue of spiritual authenticity opened up for discussion. They wish to continue to enjoy their status, influence, and self-image as being not like "ordinary" Muslims, but, somehow better ... more elite ... more in the know ... more self-realized, more in tune with the mystical music of the spheres.

Many so-called Sufi shaykhs do not want their self-serving interests called into question ... whether this has to do with power, prestige, authority, or the sexual and financial exploitation of people who are seeking truth, but encounter a form of truth for which they had not bargained in the locus of manifestation who refers to himself or herself as a mystical master. Many so-called mureeds do not want to have to question whether the path they are on is, or is not, authentic ... or whether they have been wasting their time ... or spending some portion of their lives being deceived and living in blissful ignorance of the real truths that are hidden potentials within a human being.

In a lot of respects, many individuals who fancy themselves to be Sufi have become idol worshipers. They worship their shaykhs as if the latter were the Creator rather than among the created. They worship their own egos as reflections of Divine light when, in truth, more often than not there is nothing but darkness parading as light.

The situation, in some ways, is similar to what is going on in Jerusalem. More specifically, Muslims consider the Dome of the Rock

as being the third holiest place in Islam. It is considered sacred because, among other things, the Prophet is believed to have offered up prayers within the cave that is in the rock with all the Prophets who proceeded him and, then, departed from that location when he went on miraj or ascension, following his night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem.

Jewish people consider the space occupied by the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosque sacrosanct because it marks the location where remains of the two previous temples lie and, as well, the place where they believe they must build the Third Temple. Building the Third Temple is of supreme importance to the religious minded among the Jewish people for a variety of reasons.

To begin with, of the roughly 613 commandments in the Torah, the Temple service accounts for about 240 of these. In effect, many Jewish people believe they cannot fully observe their religious obligations without the reconstruction of the Temple ... first constructed by, Solomon, the son of David, (peace be upon them both)

Secondly, Midrash Tanhuma, which is a compilation of various interpretations of the Torah given by different rabbis over a period of time, indicates that Israel is the center of the world and the Temple Mount is said to be the center of Jerusalem. Moreover, the center of the Temple is referred to as the Holy of Holies, and at the center of the Holy of Holies is the Ark of the Covenant, and the Foundation Stone is in front of the Ark and this stone constitutes the point of Foundation for the world with respect to Divinity.

Jewish people believe the promised Messiah will rule from the Temple Mount, and through this rule, all the pain that has been experienced by the Jewish nation will be removed. The Jewish people believe that this will be the source of redemption and salvation for the Jewish nation.

When, as a result of the Six Day War of June, 1967, Israel gained control over large portions of the biblical territory of Samaria, Judea, Gaza and Sinai, a variety of radical, fundamentalist rabbis began to urge people to settle into these lands in order to hasten on the time for the appearance of the Messiah through whom the Jewish people would be redeemed.

Samaria, Judea, Gaza and Sinai are not necessary for Jews to practice their faith. This land grab is the result of a belief among some fundamentalist Jews who feel they can speed up God's time-table through pursuing actions that are a violation of the Ten Commandments as well as the covenant that was originally made between God and the Jewish people and is at the heart of the Sacred Temple, within the Holy of Holies.

However, the construction of the Third Temple is an integral part of the Jewish people being able to pursue the essential tenets of their faith. Without the Temple, more than a third of the commandments that believers have been enjoined upon them by God cannot be observed. In a way, the foregoing situation is like what the situation would be if some hostile force took control of the Ka'aba and refusing to let Muslims perform Hajj ... which constitutes one fifth of the basic, spiritual requirements of a Muslim.

Unfortunately, just as there are people among the Jewish nation who treat Judea, Samaria, Sinai, and Gaza as if they were idols to be worshiped at any cost, there are many Muslims in Palestine, and elsewhere, who treat the Dome of the Rock as an idol to be preserved at all costs. Yet, in neither instance -- that is, in the case of Jews, Greater Israel, nor in the case of Muslims, the Dome of the Rock -- is any essential religious obligation at stake.

The Prophet did not say -- Muslims must preserve the cave within the Dome of the Rock at all costs ... this is your sixth pillar of faith. The Qur'an does not say all Muslims have an obligation to protect the Dome of the Rock ... what demands this is idol worship.

The First Temple was erected somewhere around 1000 BC. This temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, a Babylonian king, around 586 B.C., when he both enslaved the Jewish people, as well as sent them into Babylonian exile.

Some seventy years later, Jews returned from exile and rebuilt the Second Temple. The Romans burned the Second Temple to the ground in 70. A.D. - and, during the interim period, the Jewish people worshiped at the Temple for centuries.

Between 688 and 691 AD, the caliph Abd al-Malik ordered the construction of the Dome of the Rock. Consequently, in terms of

temporal priority, both the First and Second Temples existed long before the Dome of the Rock or al-Aqsa mosque. Furthermore, in terms of spiritual priority, neither the Dome of the Rock nor al-Aqsa mosque play as essential a role within Islam as does the Sacred Temple within Judaism. Muslims can say prayers anywhere on the face of the Earth -- indeed, this is one of the gifts that has been bequeathed to Muslims, but for the Jewish people the 240 different commandments that are to be observed in conjunction with the Sacred Temple in Jerusalem are an integral part of their faith if the latter is to fully and properly observed.

If the Jewish and Muslim people were truly interested in securing peace -- and, unfortunately, there are many people on both sides of the issue who are driven by dogmatic theology rather than spiritual necessity -- then a deal would be struck in which Palestinians would be given back the land that was taken from them and, in exchange, the Jewish people would be permitted to build the Third Temple on the Temple Mount. If the Jewish people were really sincere and wise, they would try to find some way of incorporating, if possible, the Dome of the Rock -- or, at least, the central cave -- and al-Aqsa mosque -- or, at least part of it -- into the design of the Third Temple, but whether they did this or not, Muslims should be prepared to let go of their idols, just as those among the Jewish people should be prepared to let go of their idols ... namely, the land that they have taken from Palestinians and that is being used to further a dogmatic, radical, fundamental theology which says that by stealing land and abusing Palestinians, God will speed up the process of sending a Messiah to redeem the Jewish nation.

Most Muslims would be shocked and outraged at the suggestion that is being made above, and, yet, I feel confident that if the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) walked the Earth today in physical form, he would be the first to sacrifice mere rocks and buildings for the sake of lasting peace and the cessation of bloodshed. After all, it was the Prophet (peace be upon him) who is reported to have said: "Shall I not inform you about a better act than fasting, charity, and prayer? ... making peace between one another. Enmity and malice tear up heavenly rewards by the roots."

Here, the Prophet (peace be upon him) is clearly indicating there is something more important than three of the five pillars of Islam. And, surely, settling the Palestinian/Israeli internecine hostilities would, God willing, bring peace to a troubled land.

Of course, there will be those who will try to claim such things as: the Prophet (peace be upon him) was only addressing Muslims, or the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not really mean that making peace was better than three of the five pillars ... it was just a way of talking. I have one thing to say to such people ... prove it. Show me that you understand the Prophet (peace be upon him) better than he understands himself. And, then, show me where the Qur'an states that Jewish people are not people of the Book and, as a result, are not to be treated with respect or that it is okay to oppress the Jewish people as they attempt to carry out their spiritual duties.

There are numerous other teachings of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the Qur'an that can be called upon that are completely consistent and resonant with the foregoing Hadith. There is very little - - although there are a few things -- of which I am aware in either the Hadith or Qur'an that might serve as a contraindication to what is outlined in the foregoing.

In legal circles one speaks in terms of the weight of precedence with respect to any given issue. In essence, this means one weighs the principles that support a given action and measures this against those principles that might lend support to some other action.

I believe the weight of precedence is -- by a considerable and substantial amount -- in favor of what has been provided in overview above. Surely, it would be totally in keeping with the spirit of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah when, despite the grumbling of some of the Companions about what a bad deal the treaty was, the Prophet (peace be upon him) considered the agreement to be a great victory because, among other things, the treaty established a peace within which Islam could grow and thrive ... and history has proven the Prophet (peace be upon him) to be correct in his assessment of the treaty.

What is the connection between the foregoing semi-digression and the present state of the Sufi community? In a phrase: "idol worship". All too many people who allege to be on, or interested in, the mystical path of tasawwuf are not prepared to closely examine their own souls

or the behavior and teachings of those who claim to be shaykhs in order to determine whether, or not, idols are being worshiped rather than the Truth, just as neither Palestinians nor Jews are willingly to look critically at their own beliefs in order to determine the extent to which idols have taken over their respective forms of worship, and, thereby, hold peace hostage to dogmatism or to beliefs that have nothing to do with being able to pursue spirituality.

Dream not of lights,
Of marvels, of miracles
For your miracles are contained
In worshiping the Truth;
All else is pride, conceit,
And illusion of existence.

Shabistari

§

December 23, 2003

After a number of failed attempts, I have been able to speak with, 'Asma, the mother of the girl who was sexually molested by Baba some eight years, or so, ago. Having left messages with several people, who know 'Asma, to request that she call me, 'Asma finally gives me a call.

The call does not last a long time. I am primarily interested in seeking forgiveness from Nadia and her husband ... for not having believed them when they related to me the tragic, reprehensible events surrounding Baba's behavior involving their daughter.

'Asma says she fully understands and accepts my apology. She goes on to tell me that, in fact, the same sort of thing happened to them before they ever met me.

A man came to 'Asma and her husband and told them that Baba had seduced his wife. For whatever reasons, 'Asma and her husband did not believe the man, no more than I had believed 'Asma and her

husband when they approached me with their experiences with respect to Baba.

§

Sasha has made an announcement on the public message board of the virtual community that Baba's former, virtual colony is closing down. Although I am sad for Sasha who has put so much work into trying to make the virtual community a success, in truth, this is a great victory.

Baba's intention was to use the virtual community to further his own evil purposes that, among other things, included the spiritual exploitation and manipulation of unsuspecting people. By the Grace of Allah, Baba has been stopped dead in his tracks ... at least as far as that corner of cyberspace is concerned ... and the icing on the cake is that Baba not only had to waste a lot of money (in the thousands) on a plan that, eventually, was foiled, but he also paid the way of Lara, Sasha, Jonathan, Small, myself, and a few others to help accomplish this.

There are a number of people who respond to Sasha's announcement about the closing of the virtual community. One of the individuals who responds to the announcement is Lara.

§

Date: Wed, Dec 31st, 2003. 7:59:55 pm.

From: Lara

Subject: Celebration!

Dear Friends,

I'm on my way out to go dance in the New Year with Philokalia (aka Tariq) but wanted to wish you all a safe, joyous, and peaceful new year! This year has been an incredible learning time for me, and I have met some great people here. I've also met some who challenged my

faith in human beings. But one of the biggest lessons I have learned is that truth does prevail. We're still here and smiling! :)

Take care. Peace and blessing to all,

Lara

§

January 29 2004

I have received – within a couple of weeks of each other some e-mails from people who used to be associated with Munir. The e-mails are very short.

Each of the individuals indicates that they have stumbled across my web site dealing with spiritual abuse. They also express happiness in having been able to locate me after some twelve or thirteen years. Finally, each of the e-mails seems to allude to the idea of needing help of some kind.

I don't know to what extent, if any, these people are in contact with Munir. That link might be very loose, or non-existent, or, perhaps, Munir is launching a probe of some kind to see what is going on in my life or to see what I might say with respect to the allusions to needing help.

I reply to each of the e-mails. My response is also very short.

Among other things, I indicate that I am ready to try to do whatever I can to assist them. I send off the e-mails, and now the ball is in their court

§

February 15, 2004

Several weeks have passed, and I have heard nothing more from the two individuals who contacted me and alluded to needing some sort of help. I am not sure what any of this means, but I feel that if they really would like to make sincere contact with me, they will do so.

I've let them know my openness to being approached about whatever might concern them. The rest is up to them.

§

February 19, 2004

Sasha has invited a few people to come and witness the deletion of Baba's house from the virtual community. Sasha refers to this deletion as the blowing up of Baba's virtual residence, and it comes complete with a countdown.

After the house is deleted/destroyed, there is a chat between Sasha and one of the witnesses, Small, who is another one of the many people whom Baba has reached out and touched in his own inimical, evil manner. Sasha has been kind enough to forward a copy of the log to Lara and myself.

Below is a portion of that log.

§

Small1776: sorry, had to reboot...again!...lol

Sasha3571: never mind

Sasha3571: welcome back

Small1776: ty

Sasha3571: I will never forget this wonderful deletion party

Small1776: great!

Small1776: shall I email Baba and tell him what great joy it was to destroy his place? lol

Sasha3571: you may do that if you want, LOL

Sasha3571: if you wish, I can forward you a short chat log of the party and screenshots

Small1776: I could tell him....Dear Sir, (cuz he liked that so much) This letter is to inform you that your evil essence and all that goes with it has, for once and all, been deleted from the lives of the good people

that you tried to manipulate and control. There will be a ceremony of dancing on the "grave" of the deleted property and if you would like to join, please don't! Love always the good people of your Hood

Sasha3571: wonderful

Small1776: lol

Small1776: well my computer is going crazy again and I'm getting a brain pain so I think I will get off here and clean or something...lol. Please send my love to everyone and have a drink for me when the toast comes to the end of the Baba era

Sasha3571: of course I will

Small1776: great! Take care of you and be safe. Bye for now

Sasha3571: bye, bye

§

April 19, 2004

In September of 2003, Lara finalized her divorce with Ron. They had been living apart for well over a year prior to the formal dissolution of the marriage.

While Lara and I also had, to an extent, been living apart, we are still married from an Islamic perspective. Although such formal niceties are, perhaps, more important to me than to Lara, nevertheless, ever since her trip to visit with Baba in January of last year, Lara has been living independently of Ron and, as much as circumstances permit, Lara and I are pursuing a committed relationship.

She comes to my apartment and asks me if I would like to move into her house that has been granted to her as part of her divorce decree with Ron. I agree, and we begin to move my possessions over to her house.

§

August 8, 2004

Lara and I have a weekly ritual where we go to a piazza place in Sutton on a Saturday evening. While we are waiting for our order to be delivered, we often read the weekend edition of the Bamford paper.

As Lara looks through the classifieds, she notes that a local university is seeking adjunct professors to teach in a number of areas, including psychology. She tells me that she thinks I should fill out an application for the position.

I am somewhat reluctant about doing this because the guy who had turned me down when I first came to Sutton -- and who also was going to be my landlord -- is the head of the psychology department, and if he didn't hire me in 1999, I am not sure why he would change his mind about me now.

However, since it is not as if my career is exactly booming and, consequently, I am required to beat-off potential suitors for my services with a stick, I tell Lara that I will think about doing as she is suggesting. Later on, in fact, I do decide that I don't really have much to lose by venturing down, perhaps, the same path with respect to the head of the psychology department in question. Therefore, I fill out an application and send it off.

§

August 17, 2004

I have received a response back from the head of the psychology department at the private university near Bamford. He would like me to teach a couple of sections of introductory psychology beginning in September.

Thanks be to God. Finally, after so many years in the job wilderness, I seem to be in possession of actual employment.

Lara and I are both very happy and excited about the prospect. Maybe the job won't last for more than a semester, but, on the other hand, perhaps, the job will last beyond the semester and might even lead to other possibilities.

§

September 2004

My two sections of introductory psychology have begun. There are about 40 students in each class – which is rather a high pupil-teacher ratio – but I will see how things go and what the caliber of the students is.

§

October 2004

I have just finished doing the grades for the mid-term. The results are fairly sobering. Many of the students are flunking the course.

I have taught before – in Canada – and I know that I know how to teach. Usually, I use a combination of lecturing and asking students questions about the material that is being focused upon in class and in the accompanying textbook.

I can lecture for hours without referring to notes. I know the subject matter.

However, most of the students seem to be lost. They don't read well and, furthermore, they usually don't. They don't know how to take notes. They are often distracted in class – I can tell by the glazed-over looks whenever I try to make eye-contact with many of them. They have difficulty writing coherent sentences, let alone coherent paragraphs and essays. They don't seem to have much facility with critical thinking skills -- although they do have their opinions about things.

The students are good kids. They are not stupid, but somewhere along the line, the elementary and secondary school systems from which they have graduated seem to have let them down in substantial ways.

There are a few students who are quite bright and don't seem to have any problem with what is going on or in being prepared for class. Unfortunately, this is not the case for the vast majority of the students who are in my classes.

I ask around, and the other instructors have experienced the same sort of difficulties that I am encountering. Clearly, I am going to have re-think what I am doing and how I am going to go about trying to engage these students.

I want to be fair to these students who are paying \$3-4,000 in tuition fees alone. They should be getting something for the money they are paying, and moreover, I do not believe in a ‘Social Darwinian-like’ approach to education in which it is my job to weed out the ‘weak’ from the ‘strong’ – academically speaking.

I am not an agent for the employment market or the economy or even society. I am, God willing, an agent for helping students to learn as best they can.

On the other hand, I am not prepared to let students simply slide through by holding my nose and giving them a good grade. This would not be fair to them, and it would not be fair to the students in the other classes or in other schools who soon will be competing with them for jobs later on and who are receiving grades that might not be inflated.

I phone a friend of mine who is teaching medical school students and, among other things we talk about his experience with students who, supposedly, are among the cream of the crop among the general student population. Surprisingly, he tells me that he is having exactly the same kinds of problems with his so-called ‘elite’ students as I am having with my students.

I don’t know what I am going to do about the problem. Whatever it is going to be, I am going to have to start doing it fairly quickly.

I am using one of the simplest forms of testing that I can (I also grade them on class participation and on written assignments). This is the multiple-choice format.

One doesn’t have to recall information. One simply has to recognize correct information in the choices one has in conjunction with any given question.

My multiple-choice tests are a little more difficult than most such tests. This is because rather than giving people just three or four possibilities to choose from, I often assign six or seven choices to any particular question. Doing this helps eliminate the likelihood that random guessing will produce a good or, even passing, result.

There are a few students who ace the exams, indicating that they have either read the book, or listened in class, or have done a little of both. Unfortunately, most of the students do poorly even with this relatively elementary form of probing with respect to attempting to determine what information, if any, they might have stored in their memory banks relative to the course ... and, moreover, none of the foregoing considerations even touch on the issue of the ability of the students to understand the information they might have stored, much less demonstrate a capacity to critically engage such material.

§

November 17, 2004

I person sends me an e-mail in response to some of the material on my website concerning spiritual abuse. He indicates that he lives in Massachusetts, and he believes that some of the things I am saying reflect his experiences with a fraudulent shaykh – possibly even the same one to whom I have been alluding in some of the essays that I have been publishing on the website.

This leads to an exchange of e-mails in which the person begins to identify people in Baba's household by name – something that lends a degree of credibility to what he is saying. In subsequent e-mails, he begins to relate his story to us in small installments.

Apparently, Baba had manipulated both he and his wife and, in time, sexually exploited his wife. He gives a few of the details surrounding the situation.

Suddenly, the e-mails stop coming. Attempts to revive the contact are unsuccessful.

It is hard to know whether the story we have been told is true or merely a matter of, say, Baba playing a game with us and trying, perhaps, to elicit information of some kind from either Lara and/or myself.. Perhaps, if the individual is authentic, he might try to contact us again at a later time. Or, maybe, the person is authentic but still has not recovered from his experiences with Baba and, has decided to back away from talking further about painful, unresolved memories.

§

December 15, 2004

I have survived the first semester, and, as well, my students have managed to survive me. I have tried to find a variety of ways of tapping into a student's grasp of the course material, including: encouraging them to speak up in class or by asking different individuals questions; testing, and writing/public speaking assignments.

As far as the writing facet of things is concerned, I discover that if I were to grade the papers in relation to grammatical issues, almost all of the students would get a flunking grade – even the relatively good students. Consequently, although I make extensive notations about grammatical errors, sentence construction, paragraphing issues, spelling, and so on, I do not give a mark for this facet of things ... I only grade them on content – which has a whole litany of problems in and of itself in the papers of most students.

I am hoping that the students will take what I have done in the way of grammatical criticism as aides for helping them write better essays in the future. However, while I have my doubts in this respect, I feel it is my duty as an instructor to try to do what I can to help them improve their writing skills.

In addition, I take a frame, or two, out of *'The Groundhog Day'* movie. I provide students with an opportunity to take exams more than once, in the hope that on the second or third go around in the hope that, maybe, they will get things right, and, then, I average the results so as not to disadvantage other students who have taken a test only once and managed to get a decent grade.

In essence, I have reduced this part of the course to trying to help students to become familiar with, perhaps, a hundred, or so, basic facts about psychology. I figure that if this can be accomplished and if can be done in a judicious manner, then maybe everyone – both within my classes as well as without those classes, including in other schools – will be treated in a fair but, hopefully, somewhat effective manner.

I don't believe in learning systems that grade people. I believe that grading becomes a formidable barrier between a learner and the

capacity of someone to assist such a person to learn in an effective manner.

In fact, I don't really even believe in the idea of a teacher – although I do believe that someone can help arrange circumstances that are conducive to help someone to put themselves in a position to learn things. This is what I have tried to do in my classes ... provide people with opportunities to learn.

Unfortunately, we tend to be stuck with schooling systems that are entangled in all manner of things other than learning -- such as politics, economics, the needs of the institution, finances, the careers of teachers and administrators, as well as the requirements of state and federal governments. In a lot of ways, real learning doesn't have much of a chance in such an environment, and, a result, people like me who are way down in the pecking order hierarchy have limited degrees of freedom through which to try to improve the conditions of learning for students.

§

The best student I have is sixteen years old, but I didn't know this at the time she was in my course. She was a special student of some kind, but I was never informed about exactly what kind of special status this entailed.

As I came to learn later, she was being home-schooled. She had applied to take some credits at the university, and one of the credit courses she got was my psychology class.

She is heads and shoulders better than the other students, all of whom had graduated from either public or private secondary school programs. Perhaps this fact was part of the reason for why she was so good. She hadn't been subjected to the usual ways in which formal education tends to destroy or undermine the desire and ability of students to learn.

Only later, when she asked me to provide her with a recommendation to attend the university as a full-time student did I come to discover that she was so young and that she was being home-

schooled. She is a poster child for what home-schooling has the potential to do when it is properly pursued.

§

I tried to personalize the educational experience of my students in a number of ways. One of these ways was through learning their names ... and, by little past the mid-tem marker I had learned all 80 of the names (both first and last) of the students in my classes. This had been my practice in Canada as well.

I attempted to personalize things in other ways as well. However, these efforts are considerably hampered by the fact that I do not have an office to which students come since as an adjunct professor, I am not permitted to do much more than interact with students during class hours.

In fact, contact between the adjunct professors and the rest of the faculty and administration was kept to a minimum. Apparently, there were various sorts of legal issue surrounding the issue of contact.

§

I have been asked back to teach several more sections of introductory psychology in the spring term. In addition, I have been asked to teach a course on multiculturalism and counseling.

Furthermore, I have been informed that next year in the Fall-session, they would like me to teach a section in a 'human growth and development' course that is being offered. My cup runneth over.

§

January 23, 2005

The new semester has begun. Things are a little more challenging with three courses to supervise instead of two. However the 'multiculturalism and counseling' course has a much better student to

teacher ratio of 12 to 1 than do the introductory courses in psychology ... that this term, as well, have around 40 students.

§

February 2005

Every few months Alice and I get together and talk for 45 minutes or an hour via phone. We have been following this ritual for a number of years – pretty much ever since I arrived in the Bamford area.

I feel – with some urging from Lara – that the time has come to tell Alice about what has happened with respect to Baba. I have concerns that when I tell Alice such ‘news’, she will stop saying prayers, stop doing zikr, stop reading the Qur’an, and, perhaps, even re-establish contact with her abusive husband, Ken.

Despite such worries, I feel that Alice has the right to know what Lara and I have to say with respect to Baba. Consequently, I close my eyes and begin to discuss the matter with Alice.

She listens to me. She doesn’t ask any questions.

In addition, I tell her why I have put off telling these things for so long. She doesn’t comment much on what I say in this regard.

However, she seems to accept what I am saying. She is not happy about it, and I sense that she is very disappointed – not only with Baba but, perhaps with me, as well, since I have delayed relating this information to her.

We talk for a while longer about other things. However, Alice’s mood seems fairly subdued.

Usually, I am able to make her laugh when we talk. Whatever laughter there might have been during this conversation seemed to disappear early on.

We say good-night to one another. I am worried about what will happen with Alice because, in many ways, she has few friends and contacts.

She has grown children but they live in other parts of Canada. Moreover, her children have always been annoyed with their mother

because of her relationship with Ken, the alcoholic abuser, and, consequently, sometimes they don't exhibit much respect toward her.

I have asked Barry to look in on her from time to time, but Barry is fairly busy with his work and his own family. Barry does try to do what he can, but this tends to be somewhat sporadic ... and, usually, only after some prodding from me.

§

March 8, 2005

I have received an e-mail from a person in the North American Sufi community. Among other things, this individual runs a fairly well-known website about the Sufi path, and several years earlier, I had e-mailed this person and asked that references to me in the website that indicated I was shaykh should, perhaps, be removed.

Without going into details during this e-mail of several years earlier, I told the individual that I very well might not be a shaykh because there was considerable uncertainty whether, or not, my appointment as a shaykh was legitimate or had been made in an authentic manner. Consequently, I felt that under the circumstances my name should not be prefixed by the term shaykh ... that, perhaps, caution was the better course of action in this particular case.

The aforementioned individual assented to my request. Sometime later, the change was made on that person's website.

Since that initial contact I have had little, or no, direct contact with the individual in question. Today's e-mail breaks that trend.

The gist of the current e-mail is that the writer of the e-mail – who some people believe to be a shaykh, but Allah knows best – has had an experience ... a waking one, in which, supposedly, Dr. Irfan came to him and said that Tariq should be told that whenever Tariq is thinking about writing something and releasing it to the public, then Tariq should try to think about whether, or not, what Tariq is saying would be consonant with Dr. Irfan's wishes. If, after deliberating in this manner, Tariq feels that Dr. Irfan would agree with what is being said, then Tariq should feel free to go ahead with publishing the material.

Recently, prior to receiving the e-mail, I was putting up essays on my website that, among other things, dealt with the issue of spiritual abuse. I have heard -- both directly and indirectly -- that a fair number of so-called Sufis in North America are becoming upset with what is being said in some of my essays – even though no one is being named or directly criticized in those essays. The material being published gives expression just to general principles and general issues surrounding the topic of spiritual abuse ... especially in the Sufi community.

For a variety of reasons -- that I won't itemize -- I have my doubts about the person who is sending me the e-mail. The individual has done some things in relation to both Lara and me that, in my opinion, are very un-shaykh like and very un-Sufi like ... maybe even very un-Muslim like.

I decide not to respond to the overture. I do not sense that the experience being described to me is an authentic spiritual experience. I feel the e-mail is intended to serve some agenda other than a spiritual one ... and to be fair, the person who sent me the e-mail admitted that such things usually are only very rare occurrences in that person's life and, quite possibly, that the whole experience was just a product of the individual's nafs . I tend to agree with the person's description of this part of the 'experience'.

§

April 19, 2005

I talk with Alice on the phone. I discover, as I feared, that Alice has stopped saying whatever prayers she did, and stopped reading the Qur'an, and stopped, for the most, saying any zikr – although she indicates she still does try to do the latter a little bit. Furthermore, as I feared, there have been some discussions between Alice and Ken about getting back together ... she is lonely.

Surprisingly, Alice asks me if there might be some zikr that I could give her to replace the one that Baba had given. She says that she would like to say zikr, but she wants something different to do.

I ask her to let me think about this. I have something in mind, but I might need a day or two to get things organized. She is quite amenable to this.

We chitchat about a variety of topics. When the subject of Ken arises, and she indicates that she might want to try things again, she is afraid that I will be angry with her.

I tell that I understand – perhaps better than she might ever know – about how difficult such relationships are to break free of. However, she is a grown woman, and she needs to make her own decision about things.

I told her that I have said the things I have about their relationship because I am concerned for her. I have seen what happens whenever she lets Ken back into her home and/or her heart – usually a disaster of one variety or another.

I tell her that I am not angry with her. I am concerned for her welfare.

I tell Alice that I will phone her in a few days with something for her to say. She says good-night.

§

April 21, 2005

I phone Alice. I tell about the zikr that I have put together for her.

It consists of five Names of Allah that are jamali in nature. In other words, these Names are expressions of qualities of Love, Compassion, Friendship, and so on, rather than expressions of the more rigorous, demanding, and difficult-to-bare dimensions of Divinity.

I tell her that she can say the zikr as much or as little as she likes. Furthermore, she can say the zikr whenever she likes.

She is very happy with what I have given to her to say. She thanks me, and the phone conversation ends.

I might not be a shaykh, but there is nothing to prevent one person from helping another person. More importantly, although one must be careful with respect to how the jalali Names of Divinity are used in the

form of a zikr – and, really, this is one of the areas where the expertise and insight of an authentic shaykh becomes very important – nevertheless, the jamali names are open for all to use to assist them in various facets of life.

§

June 15, 2005

Alice phones me and tells me that she has to have a serious operation. Apparently, one or more small tumors have been found in some MRI or CAT scans that have been taken of Alice's brain.

The surgery is scheduled for July. Alice is frightened about the prospect of the forthcoming surgery. She is feeling very alone.

I try to reassure Alice in a variety of ways. I indicate that when our time has arrived, this cannot be put off by so much as a second, but until, then, we must do whatever we can to assist our condition in a constructive way.

I ask her if she is doing the zikr I gave her. She says that she is and that she likes doing it.

I suggest that she treat the zikr she is doing as if it were her rod and staff as she is walking though the valley of the shadow of death. The zikr, God willing, will comfort her and help her deal with her anxieties and fears concerning the operation.

§

September 7, 2005

Another semester has begun. I am still employed, and this feels good despite the reservations I have about the process of schooling in general.

The students are going to have to endure the gauntlet to which modern education gives expression irrespective of whether, or not, I teach. I am not happy about the limited number of relatively arbitrary degrees of freedom within which both students and I must operate but

I feel that, maybe, I might be better for the students than many other possible alternatives.

§

September 24, 2005

Alice phones me and tells me that she is home from the hospital. She explains that the whole process took awhile since she had to convalesce in some sort of special care unit following the surgery, but everything seems to fine now. The tumors are gone.

She tells me that saying the zikr I had given her helped a lot. I am happy that she has come through the surgery and that everything seems to have worked out well for her.

§

December 19, 2005

For some time now -- maybe a year or more -- I have had a pimple-like sore on the cheek of my face. Or, I should say that, for a time, we thought it might just be a pimple ... but it wouldn't go away.

I didn't have health insurance, and I didn't have much extra money to pay for a doctor to examine me even though I was working part-time – especially given that I only got paid twice a semester and that by the time a pay check came, it already was earmarked for lots of other expenses. Although Lara was concerned with my situation, nevertheless, since the pimple or bump or sore or cyst or whatever it was did not get any bigger and was not causing me any problems, we kind of let it go.

Finally, Lara had enough of the situation and took me to her doctor. I didn't get to see a doctor but, rather, I was seen by a physician's assistant of some kind.

The person examined me on a Saturday and said that she could dig out whatever was there. She said we could have what was removed biopsied if we liked.

We agreed for her to do out-patient surgery on my cheek. When she had finished sewing me up, she said that she didn't think that the material she removed from my cheek was cancerous, but she said that we could, if we wished, have it biopsied.

The lab costs associated with a biopsy were significant – at least to someone in my financial condition, and I was a little worried about how I was going to pay for it. Lara insisted that I get what had been removed from me biopsied, and she said that she would pay for the laboratory procedure.

A few weeks later, we get a phone call from the woman who performed the surgery and she said: "It is just as I thought. It is cancerous." – even though this is not what she told us at the time of the surgery.

In any case, she told us that the growth was a squamous cell carcinoma. She said that I needed to come in again and have a further out-patient surgery performed so that the remainder of the cancerous material along the edges of the earlier surgery could be removed.

So, I went in again and had another operation performed on my cheek. This time a doctor did the surgery.

Once again, material was sent out for biopsy. However, weeks went by and I didn't hear anything.

In the meantime, I had been talking with a physician friend of mine who I was keeping posted on what was taking place with respect to various trips to the doctor concerning my cheek. When I told him the whole story and informed him that despite calling the doctor's office a number of times, we weren't being told the results of the second biopsy.

My friend offered to call the office of the physicians who, supposedly, were looking after me. He told me that, sometimes, when physicians get other physicians looking over their shoulder, they tend to get nervous and, therefore, can be induced to do the right thing if this is not what has been taking place.

I agree to have him call and gave him the necessary information so that he can make the call. A few days later, I am contacted by my doctor's office staff saying that I need to make arrangements right

away for more radical surgery on my cheek – this time with a dermatologist.

This would be on an out-patient basis as well, but the surgery will be more complicated and extensive. Therefore, this needs to be done by a specialist.

The operation is going to cost five-to-six thousand dollars ... maybe more. I don't have this amount of money, nor does Lara have this kind of money lying around.

Lara suggests to me that we get married in accordance with state requirements. We already are married in accordance with Islamic criteria.

She says that if we act fast, I could be added to the health care policy that she has through her place of employment. Acting fast means that we have to get everything done before December 31, 2005 – less than two weeks away.

There are a number of problems that need to be solved which could hold things up, if not entirely scuttle them. We set about trying to resolve these problems.

Finally, on the last Friday of 2005, we are ready to go to a local official and get married. However, we need to have two witnesses.

We don't know who to get for this because it is in the middle of a work day for most people. While we are discussing the issue, my younger brother, Jerry, and his wife, Irene, show up unexpectedly at the house. We really don't see them all that often because they live at some distance from us.

We ask them if they would like to serve as witnesses to our marriage. They agree although they seem somewhat puzzled by the situation, and we all go dashing off to the a nearby office where one of the shortest wedding ceremonies in recorded history takes place ... something that eminently suits Lara's sensibilities given that she really dislikes ceremonies of any kind.

After the wedding, the 'honeymoon' consists of Lara talking non-stop with the insurance people for several hours to get things straightened away. By 5:00 p.m. I have been put on Lara's policy, and we are in a position to give the okay for the extraction and plastic surgery that are necessary to be scheduled. Since Saturday and Sunday

are the last two days of the year, we have been able to arrange things, by the Grace of Allah, in just the nick of time ... with seconds to spare.

§

January 10, 2006

I go in to the hospital for my scheduled surgery. Following the surgery, I am loopy for most of the rest of the day, but I am allowed to recuperate at home.

§

January 21, 2006

Classes at the university have begun for the second term. I head into my courses with stitches running down my face and the occasional drops of blood oozing through the stitches that are binding my wounds,

My new students don't seem to mind my appearance or ask me any questions about the situation. If they do ask me, I plan to tell them that several masked men drugged me at knife point, cut me, and, then, demanded money ... which is, more or less, the truth of the matter.

§

March 23, 2006

I have been corresponding with someone in France. The individual is associated with a silsilah in North Africa.

We originally had met - sort of indirectly -- in an e-group concerning the Sufi path. When the issue of spiritual abuse came up during one of the discussions, the moderator for the group, -- in a rather heavy-handed, authoritarian manner - refused to let people who had been through spiritually abusive experiences in conjunction with the Sufi tradition to say anything about their experiences.

One thing led to another, and things became rather heated in the group. A number of people had been banned from the group – rather unfairly I thought – as a result of what went on during the ensuing discussion.

In protest, the person with whom I am corresponding resigned from the e-group. We have been in touch, from time to time, since then.

In the past, I have explained to the individual some of what went on in relation to Baba. After some time has passed in our correspondence, the person makes a suggestion that, perhaps, it is time to move and broaches the topic of taking initiation in the silsilah with which the individual is associated.

I indicate that I am not inclined to take initiation at the present time. I am still working through a variety of issues. Furthermore, I inform the individual that if I were to take initiation again, this is likely to be with someone who is geographically near-by and to whom I would have relatively ready access ... something that was, absent, to a great extent (at least in terms of physical proximity) in the case of Baba but that was not a problem with respect to Dr. Irfan and, therefore, I have come to consider this a factor that might have played a problematic role in terms of my not being able to gain insight into the nature of Baba's actual character sooner than I did.

Although the rebuttal to what I have said above is done very delicately and politely, nonetheless, there seems to be an element of pressure involved in subsequent e-mails. The individual is trying to persuade me – gently but somewhat insistently I feel – that I should take initiation despite what I have been saying in my e-mails concerning this issue.

This sort of dance goes on back and forth for a few steps. Finally, I politely indicate that my answer is final. I do not wish to take initiation under these circumstances.

The e-mails stop. I have not heard from the individual since that time.

Apparently, unless I am prepared to commit myself to what this person believes is an authentic, legitimate path, then, there can be no basis for communication. Well, I don't think I really want to be part of a silsilah that approaches things in such a fashion.

Maybe what the individual was doing – both with respect to the offer of initiation as well as in relation to the cessation of contact -- was done on the person's own initiative. However, at a certain point in the exchange of e-mails, I felt that the offer of initiation was not coming from the individual but from that individual's shaykh – that, in some way, the idea of offering the possibility of initiation had been cleared through 'higher' channels within the silsilah ... I guess I will never know.

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April 1, 2006

Lara and I have received an e-mail from Baba, more than three years after the momentous events of January/2003. The message is simple -- he would like us to attend fatiha at his house the following weekend because he has an important announcement to make. There is nothing more included in the message.

We discuss the situation, wondering what Baba is up to now. We explore the pros and cons of such a visit.

After much talk, we decide we will go. Although we have some fears concerning various possible scenarios that have arisen in our mind with respect to Baba's reason(s) for having us attend fatiha, our curiosity takes precedence over the worries that we are experiencing, both individually and collectively, concerning Baba.

Our lives are now, and have always been, in Allah's hands. If Divinity wishes to do us in, then whether we go or stay, our kismet will be the same.

We already have lived through a fate worse than death in conjunction with Baba. We don't believe he can do much more harm to us ... even though we both acknowledge Baba's considerable creative skills when it comes to fooling around with people's lives.

§

At the appointed time, Lara and I knock on the door of Baba's residence. Someone peeks out to see who at ringing the bell. We hear a certain amount of commotion on the other side of the door as identification is made, followed by silence.

We wait for a few minutes, and, then, I ring the bell again. I also knock on the door briefly.

A few minutes later, the door is opened. It is 'Momina. She doesn't greet us with any salutation, or smile, but, instead, she just motions us to come in. Her eyes are averted from ours.

Many others are already gathered for the fatiha. Some of these people I know, and some of them I have not seen before.

Most of the people from Canada are there. This includes Momin, his wife, 'Uzma, several of her sisters, and her parents

Lara and I sit on the floor in the room where fatiha is to be said. No one speaks much. Everyone appears preoccupied with his or her own thoughts.

Approximately five minutes later, Baba enters the room. fatiha begins.

After fatiha has been completed, Baba asks for the food to be distributed among the participants. As preparations are being made to do this, he begins to speak, but he never raises his head or looks anyone in the eye.

"This Fatiha that has just been conducted is my last official act as shaykh of the silsilah. In fact, as of now, I no longer consider myself to be a guide of anyone.

"Over the last year, I have reflected a great deal on my life. I slowly, painfully, have come to the realization that I am not spiritually fit to serve as anyone's mystical teacher.

"I have hurt a great many people. I have damaged the lives of some people and many families tremendously ... perhaps irreparably.

"For more years than I care to admit, I have been pursuing my own self-interests. At one time or another, I have lied to almost all of the people who are present in this room. In addition, I have exploited and manipulated all of you in one way or another ... all to serve my needs ... not yours.

"I have sexually molested young people. In addition, I have seduced older women who were psychologically vulnerable ... who were not in a healthy emotional condition to be able to defend themselves against the techniques I used on them.

"I have set friend against friend, parents against children, and children against parents. I have knowingly, intentionally, spread seeds of discord throughout the silsilah in order to advance my own agenda.

"I have misused certain powers that I have acquired over the years -- powers that have to do with worldly kashf, not spiritual kashf. Through these powers, I have interfered with all of your lives, your marriages, and your careers at one time or another.

"Last week I booked a flight to a destination that shall remain a secret. This locale is not in North America.

"The place to which I am going is very far removed from most of civilization. I neither wish for any of you to try locate me or contact me, nor will I be in contact with any of you. I believe this is very necessary in order to remove temptation from all of us ... including myself.

"My intention is to live at this unknown destination until I die ... which might be soon or a little more removed in time ... I do not know. Moreover, I intend to spend all my time at this location seeking God's forgiveness with respect to the mess I have made of my own life, the life of the silsilah, and the lives of all of you whom are present this evening, as well as with respect to the many ways in which I betrayed both my own shaykh and the Prophet Muhammad ... peace and blessings be upon him.

"I know what I am about to say cannot possibly compensate anyone for the harm I have done. However, I now acknowledge before all of you and God -- and I do so with a deep, intense sense of sorrow, shame, and grief -- that I have wronged you all and myself in so many ways.

"I ask all of you for your forgiveness. I don't expect such forgiveness, but I am in desperate need of it, because as we all believe, God can only forgive the sins that we commit in relation to Divinity ... God cannot forgive us for the sins we commit against one another ...

only the individuals who have been harmed, damaged, and wounded can do that.

“I have acted in shameful, inexcusable ways. I have brought infamy to our Order of Tasawwuf.

“Whatever tasawwuf stands for, I have done the opposite. In fact, I have not only done the opposite, but I reveled in doing such things. I derived pleasure and satisfaction from giving expression to evil.

“I should have done what I am doing now a long, long time ago ... but my nafs, Iblis, and dunya had too much control over me. My soul bears complete responsibility for this weakness and susceptibility to spiritual corruption.

“I have soiled myself. I do not know what will become of me ... either in this world, or the next, but my every moment is now filled with an essential trembling that is rooted in the realization that I will have to face Divinity on the Day of Judgment, and I fear I have given God every reason to throw me into the deepest, darkest, most rank dimension of Hell.

“At different junctures I have intimated to some, if not most of you, that there is no evil. I have used this ploy to enable me to do pretty much whatever I like while planting a seed in people’s mind that all my actions are in accordance with Divine purposes, and, therefore, irrespective of how questionable things might seem on the surface, nonetheless, I am one of the special emissaries of God.

“While it is true that nothing takes place without Divine permission and while it is true that from the perspective of Divinity there is no evil ... only truth, beauty and goodness -- this does not mean that on a human level there is no such thing as evil. Evil arises from our intentions.

“God’s purpose is pure. Our intentions are corruptible.

“God’s knowledge and wisdom are such that Divinity is capable of taking our corrupt intentions and using the evil behaviors arising out of such intentions to weave the pattern desired by Divinity. Yet, despite this, corrupt intentions remain what they are, and we are responsible for the intentions and behaviors that are manifested through us ... and we will be judged for the nature of the intentions and

behaviors that we permit to be manifested through us through the choices we make with the freedom God has given us.

“My intentions have been impure and my behaviors have been evil for a long, long time. My present confession concerning these things is but the very first step that I need to take in order to begin the journey toward repentance.

“The best form of repentance is to sincerely feel the depth of one’s transgression ... against God, against others, and against oneself ... and, then, to commit one’s being to not returning to such intentions, choices, and behaviors. “Part of making amends to those one has wronged is to discontinue doing such evil deeds. There can be no real amends without a cessation of evil intentions and behaviors ... there can be no amends without transformation of the interior life ... there can be no amends until external behavior reflects the character of changed intentions.

“Now, I ask that you all to leave. I called you here because I believe you deserve to hear these things from my own lips ... something that no third party can distort, re-frame, or change.”

Without looking at any of us, Baba gets up and retires to his room. As he does, many of those present are in shock, or in tears, or both. Apparently, no one knew that what just happened was going to take place ... not even the closest members of Baba’s household.

Lara signals to me she wants to leave. We rise, put on our shoes, say our Salaams, and go out to the car.

§

The foregoing event is a fantasy. It did not take place, although both Lara and I wish that, perhaps, someday, Baba would have the courage to make our fantasy a reality.

Whether, or not, Baba understands this, he is in great need of forgiveness from a lot of people – people who might currently be totally oblivious to the idea that they need to forgive Baba. However, he needs to ask for it specifically, and he must give clear indications he has insight into, and understanding of, the evil that he has propagated

through his life and the manner in which he has harmed scores of people.

In his final words to Lara -- during the phone conversation that followed Momin's rude descent upon Bamford more than a year ago -- Baba told Lara that it was up to her to help me (that is, Tariq) forgive Baba. He was wrong ... it is Baba's responsibility -- and his responsibility alone -- to seek forgiveness for himself ... this is not Lara's job.

Baba was seeking cheap forgiveness ... the sort of forgiveness in which there is no pain for him, no work, no struggle, no critical self-examination, no shame, no embarrassment, no essential change, no commitment to not returning to such transgressions again. He was seeking the kind of forgiveness that requires no moral courage on his part ... but only on the part of other people.

By the Grace of Allah, I do not harbor resentments toward Baba. I do not hate him ... although I do find what he has done to Lara, me, and others to be extremely odious, ugly, and distasteful.

However, I would never again trust him with even the most simple of spiritual issues. And, as far as forgiving him is concerned ... he will have to wait until the Day of Judgment to see how that plays out. Earning back my trust might take a while longer.

I doubt if he will lose any sleep over this. But, if he does, perhaps he will put the extra hours of being awake to a good, spiritual use.

§

In Canada, there is a tradition in professional hockey to announce the three stars of a game following the final period of play. The people who I consider the three stars of the game that has been played over the last several years are primarily: Dr. Irfan, Lara, and Sasha. And, breaking with tradition, there is also a special, post-game acknowledgment for Jonathan and Small.

Dr. Irfan is the first star because he -- through his daily example, deep understanding, and constant encouragement throughout the sixteen years of our relationship -- is the one who, by the Grace of

Allah, taught me about the true Sufi path. Time and time again, during the last twelve years with Baba, I drew on my sixteen-year relationship with him to gain perspective on different events in my life. I believe -- although I cannot prove this -- that he has been by my side throughout this entire journey of the last twelve years.

I learned, in an essential way, about the difference between right and wrong through Dr. Irfan. I learned about spiritual discipline through Dr. Irfan through not only his example with respect to fasting, prayers, zikr, night vigils, and seclusion, but through his helping me to learn to do all of these practices as well -- although I was never anywhere as adept or as constant with respect to any of these activities as he was.

What I learned through my relationship with Dr. Irfan probably was the only thing, by the Grace of Allah, that permitted me to endure what I had to endure during my tenure with Baba. My relationship with Baba put to the test all of the learning that I gained through my relationship with Dr. Irfan. Dr. Irfan's training helped prepare me to be able to survive, by the Grace of Allah, my walk through Baba's hell.

I remember an old story about how a person is reviewing his life on the day of Judgment and sees that during his life on Earth the footsteps of God were always accompanying the individual through life, but there is one stretch of life, during which only one set of footprints is visible, and the man complains to God about how Divinity had abandoned him during that stretch of his life. God responds by indicating to the man -- 'No, I did not abandon you. That was the time when I carried you.'

I feel like I have been carried at many points during the last 12 years. Actually, the truth is, God has carried me all of my life and, from time to time, as with little children, Divinity just let me pretend I was walking on my own.

§

The second star of the twelve year contest belongs to Lara. Although she was not introduced into the game until late in the second or early in the third period, her role has been invaluable.

To begin with, without her, I might never have discovered -- although Allah knows best -- the nature of the evil with which I was associating in the form of Baba. The way in which this discovery process unfolded was painful ... but, I believe, necessary.

In addition, much of the space in these journals -- at least the second and third books -- has been about my love for Lara. Whatever misunderstandings and problems arose during our time together are relatively minor compared to my love for her being ... the courage, compassion, empathy, integrity, nobility, kindness, generosity, tolerance, forgiveness, sacrifice, love, perseverance, and devotion to the truth that have been given expression through her life are quite remarkable. One had to be there to truly appreciate these qualities.

Many people -- perhaps including me -- might have become completely crushed beneath the weight of the tremendous adversities that had been thrown into the life of Lara. To lose the focus of her life when her mother died at age six, to be raped at seven or eight years of age by a cousin, to be sexually molested by an uncle for a number of years prior to becoming a teenager, to have endured the problems of alcoholism throughout her teen years ... problems that arose as her self-medicated way of deadening the pain of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, to have one's father make sexual overtures and, then, masturbate by the side of the car, to be physically, emotionally, and sexually abused by a husband for twenty-three years, to be betrayed by her brother, as well as by her closest friend and the people for whom she works ... many people who are dashed upon such rocks of life never recover.

Lara, however, never lost her faith in God. Lara did not permit herself to be jaded by all the things that went on in her life. She embraced life with integrity.

Maybe she didn't always make the choices that other -- more religiously minded -- individuals might approve. However, she usually acted out of principle and she acted with nobility under tremendous stresses -- especially the stresses to which I, unwittingly, introduced her through the persona of Baba.

Yes, Lara does have to accept responsibility for some of the choices she made -- and, in fact, she does. She has never tried to make excuses for anything that she did.

Even when we didn't always agree on things, or even when there was emotional distance between us because of this or that misunderstanding or difference of perspective and understanding, Lara kept trying to help me and assist me in various ways, according to what her circumstances permitted. Even when her heart was drawn in other directions, she always believed in me as a decent human being ... as her best friend ... as someone who stuck with her through the roller-coaster ride that our life together became.

The story Baba is telling many people is that Lara is a mental patient ... that she is mentally ill ... that she suffers from a form of religious mania ... that she is obsessed with Baba and won't leave him alone. He is saying all these things in order to discredit the things that Lara has to say about her three-week visit with Baba.

Baba's tactics remind me of the story he told to Lara and myself when we visited him in November of 2002 ... the story about the couple from Houston who disclosed to him the pre- 9/11 events that took place in relation to their brother or brother-in-law when he met the people "who make and break governments". More specifically, the couple who allegedly told Baba the story indicated that when their relatives failed the interview, those relatives later experienced temporary insanity, making all kinds of wild accusations about the anti-Christ, the devil and so on. The character of Baba's accusations concerning Lara are a little reminiscent of his 9/11 story.

More specifically, Baba fancies himself as someone who makes and breaks people. When people fail his interview -- that is, when they refuse to become compliant to the manner in which Baba goes about 'doing no evil' -- then, they are labeled as being crazy or mentally ill or suffering from religious mania or are labeled as Muslim activists who are intent on taking over the silsilah ... in this way, whatever is said by such people can be re-framed by him as the ravings of a lunatic or of someone who is not quite right in the head or of someone who has some sort of terrorist agenda ... someone for whom Baba remains a "well-wisher", and someone whom Baba, in his magnanimity can forgive, and someone toward whom Baba's heart remains pure and clean ... but someone, nonetheless, whom Baba can trash whenever necessary, even as he tries to make it seem like he is not doing this.

Lara is my hero because she came to see Baba for what he is -- a naked emperor wannabe. Some might feel this was an easy accomplishment, but such people have not spent time with Baba and have little, or no, understanding of just how charming, beguiling, dazzling, and mesmerizing a force Baba can be.

When push came to shove, Lara did not back away from the truth of what was going on -- although there were many inducements to do other than this. Despite the risks, Lara told me the truth -- all of it -- with respect to what went on during her three weeks with Baba.

Despite getting high on Baba-juice for three weeks, she went cold turkey and suffered through the tremendous pain of withdrawal that occurs in relation to those who have to come to care for, if not love, the person they believed Baba to be. Despite such circumstances, Lara came to understand that the Baba image is an addictive illusion from which one must remove oneself or one will lose one's soul to the disease.

I did not tell Baba that Lara was mentally ill. I said she was on the borderline between severe emotional chaos and potential mental illness, and I was afraid that if she were not treated appropriately she might be pushed across the line.

I had pleaded with Baba to take into account what I was saying and interact with Lara accordingly when she visited him. Baba did take what I was saying into consideration.

On the one hand, he used the information I shared with him to attack Lara in ways to which she was vulnerable as a result of events that had been going on in her life for quite some time. On the other hand, when Baba couldn't have his way, he used the information I gave him, re-framed it, and sought to discredit Lara amongst his other followers.

There is, I believe, a very real sense in which if it had not been for Lara, I might never have found my way out of the Baba-maze. In fact, there is a sort of a tit-for-tat -- in a good sense -- between Lara and me, because I also feel that there is a very real sense in which if it had not been for me, Lara never would have been able to free herself from Ron's influence ... but Allah knows best.

We both needed some kind of deep emotional impetus to enter our lives and to lift us out of the gravitational orbits around our respective black holes that were slowly pulling us toward ultimate dissolution. If a powerful love for Lara had not been put into my heart or had not arisen in my heart, if I had not been induced by God into becoming her exit counselor with respect to Ron, I never would have come to learn what kind of a person she was and how fundamentally important the truth is to her, and, as a result, I never would have come to trust what she had to tell me with respect to Baba ... and from the moment she started making her disclosures to me, I never doubted her.

I can't think of another living human being who I would have trusted in that way. She was telling me things that were painful for me to hear and that, on the surface, seemed to take many things away from me. Superficially, nothing that she said to me during the weeks of revelation following her January visit appeared to be to my advantage ... or in my 'self-interest. What she was telling me would require huge adjustments in how I thought, felt and behaved ... but I believed her, and if it had not been for the sense of trust I had been able to develop toward her when it came to telling the truth about things, I am not at all sure that I ever would have come take the steps that I knew within my very essence were necessary for me to take in relation to Baba.

Many people, I feel, will make too much of the sexually titillating aspects of what went on in relation to Lara - whether one is talking about Lara, her uncle, her cousin, her father, me, Ron, and/or Baba. As painful, problematic, and confusing as that facet of things was, nevertheless, in the end, what mattered most was Lara's capacity for truth-telling and my capacity to recognize her essential inclination to tell the truth to me.

Sexuality is a very powerful force in the lives of human beings. However, truth is far more powerful, and far more important.

I am not trying to excuse the sexual aspect of things. I am trying to put it into a proper perspective.

It is far easier for most human beings to open themselves to the currents of sexuality than it is to open themselves to the currents of truth. Lara and I both were able to free ourselves from our respective

quandaries when we put the forces of sexuality to one side and allowed ourselves to become open to the nature of truth.

Getting to the truth doesn't always involve strolling down pristine streets of purity. Sometimes one has to go through messy back alleys that are filled with menacing forces as we, move hesitantly from one point to the next with mistake-filled steps as we try to keep our spirits alive.

We all might prefer the former, but, sometimes, circumstances push and pull us toward a different path to the truth. Our choices might lead us along the latter, broken boulevards of life, and we pray that God will accept our efforts in this regard because it is the truth we are seeking ... no matter how poorly we might go about that process of seeking.

§

Sasha is my third star of the Baba games. Although he lives in another country and has never met either Lara or myself in real life, and although Baba consistently lied to him about many things -- including Lara and myself -- Sasha's basic decency and integrity could not be perverted by Baba or Joseph ... the names by which Sasha knew Baba.

Baba dangled a three-week, all-expenses paid trip to the United States before Sasha. During this trip, Sasha would be taken to Notre Dame, California and other places.

Sasha was induced to believe -- through lies and manipulations -- that Baba, Momin, Smiley, Sand-Bandito, and others were about the nicest, most friendly group of people one could ever hope to meet. Sasha is just a young man ... a poor student ... someone who has never been outside of Europe and who long has dreamed about coming to America.

Baba talked to Sasha about the great plans he had for establishing a virtual community. Baba used Sasha to help him create his virtual colony and hood. Baba had other plans in store for Sasha... some of them unspeakable.

Baba was desperate to get Sasha to the United States where Baba could work on Sasha night and day for three weeks. Although Baba is able to work wonders even through the medium of cyberspace, he really only can get his hooks into a person when Baba has a chance to work on an individual within a closed environment that has been created by Baba specifically for the purpose of inducing someone to become addicted to his brand of Baba-juice.

I have seen this phenomenon many times. I have seen people who are virulently hostile to the Sufi path become tamed and charmed by Baba within a matter of minutes.

If he can do the foregoing in minutes, think about what he can do with three weeks of time. By the Grace of Allah, some people are able to escape, but there are many whose soul remains captive and who continue to be lost somewhere in the deep, dark, seedy places where Baba-addiction is induced ... Momin, 'Uzma, Seth, Nazia, Alice, Peter, Smiley, Habib, 'Momina, Musa, Siraj, 'Umar, Ra'uf, Sima, her two children, Bashir, Aleema, Khalil, his younger sister, Ra'bia, Rashid, Munir, Khalil, and others are just a few of the inmates inhabiting the spiritual counterpart to a crack house.

In any event, although there were many bribes and lies being thrown Sasha's way, his heart sought out, listened to, and recognized the truth when he encountered it during his many conversations with Lara. Sasha is a person of integrity who actively fought against evil when he became aware of its presence, and, in my mind, this makes him one of the stars of the Baba games.

§

Jonathan and Small get honorable mentions. I had less contact with either of them than did Lara, but, nonetheless, on the basis of what I know, they both fought the good fight in relation to Baba.

Recently -- Jonathan, who, like Sasha, also lives in Europe but in a different country than Sasha -- told Lara that Baba had wanted Jonathan to program a small 'vrml' or virtual world. Jonathan indicated that Baba wanted to upload this cyber world to one of the servers that Baba controls so that people would have a place to meet ... and over

which Baba would have complete authority ... something that was absent from the current virtual community in which Baba had arranged for the purchase of a Colony that would be made up of a number of Hoods

Jonathan said he had started to build Baba's cyber-world. However, he stopped cooperating when he learned -- mostly from Lara, but, to some extent, from me as well -- about the sort of individual Baba was and is.

Small, on the other hand, had stared into the face of the Gorgon -- using mirrors -- and, thereby avoided having her soul turned into stone. She had met Baba in real life. In fact, Baba traveled more than half way across the country in order to romance her, but, by the Grace of God, she was able to see through his facade.

At a certain point, she participated in the message board struggle that took place in Baba's virtual community. She had been a good warrior in those word-wars ... a good ally.

§

During one of the last times Baba/Joseph put in an appearance at the virtual community -- after he knew that the truth about him had been made known to me by Lara -- Baba said to Lara that "Tariq will have to be content with being an ordinary man now." The fact of the matter is I have always considered myself to be an ordinary man.

I am not a Prophet. I am not among the awliya, or friends, of God. I am not an ibn al-'Arabi, Rumi, Hafiz, Jili, Attar, Junayd, Jilani, al-Hujwiri, al-Ghazzali, Muin-ud-din Chishti, or Dr. Irfan (may Allah be pleased with them all).

I am someone who loves God, Muhammad (peace be upon him), Jesus (peace be upon him), Moses (peace be upon him), the Buddha (peace be upon him), Krishna (peace be upon him) ... indeed all of the Prophets. I am someone who loves and admires the great awliya of the Sufi and other mystical traditions. I am someone who loves and seeks the Truth ... but I am very ordinary in the ways I go about all of this ... full of faults and prone to making mistakes ... limited in talent and understanding.

However, in God's eyes, no human being is ordinary. Every human being has within her or him a seed of spiritual potential that, if properly cultivated through God's help, has the capacity to be brought to fruition in a truly remarkable fashion that is able to reflect the Divine Names and Attributes. The reason why angels were commanded to prostrate before human beings was because of this potential.

I believe in Allah's mercy. I believe Divine mercy takes precedence over Divine wrath. I believe there is hope for me if I continue to struggle -- in spite of whatever errors I might have committed. This is what my Qur'an tells me ... this is what my Prophet tells me ... this is what the saints tell me ... this is what Dr. Irfan told me ... this is what my faith tells me.

I did not approach Baba with the idea of becoming non-ordinary. I did not approach Baba with the intention of being: a shaykh; a qutb (spiritual pole) of some kind; or, the keeper of the masnad or spiritual throne.

I was seeking guidance, and I received guidance ... just in a different mode of manifestation than I had expected. I was hoping for jamali tajalliyat (disclosures) but, instead, was sent jalali tajalliyat ... or, more accurately, I was guided through severe compassion or compassionate severity -- take your pick.

The essence of shahada – the first pillar of Islam -- is to realize (not believe, but actively realize) there is nothing in existence but Divinity. Dr. Irfan once said that even our sins are Divine manifestations but the etiquette of spirituality is to accept them as our own.

My path of the past twelve years -- in fact, the path of my entire existence has been nothing but a tapestry being woven on the Divine Loom whose woof, warp and strands of cloth are manifestations of different dimensions and combinations of the Divine Names and Attributes. There is no me that is separate from this. As Attar (may Allah be pleased with him) once wrote:

The Sun of My Perfection is a Glass
Wherein from Seeing into Being pass
All who, reflecting as reflected, see
Themselves in Me, and Me in
Them: not Me, But all of
Me that a contracted Eye
Is comprehensive of Infinity:
Nor yet Themselves: no Selves, but
All Fractions from which they split and whither fall.
As Water lifted from the Deep, again
Falls back in individual Drops of Rain
Then melts into the Universal Main.
All you have been, and seen, and done, and thought,
Not You, but I have seen and been and wrought:
I was the Sin that from Myself rebelled:
I the Remorse that toward Myself compelled:
I was the Tajidar who led the Track:
I was the little Briar that pulled you back:
Sin and Contrition -- Retribution owed,
And canceled -- Pilgrim, Pilgrimage, and Road,
Was but Myself toward Myself: and
Your Arrival but Myself at my own Door:
Who in your Fraction of Myself behold
Myself within the Mirror that I Myself hold
To see Myself in, and each part of Me
That sees himself -- though drowned -- shall ever see.
Come you lost Atoms to your Centre draw,
And be the Eternal Mirror that you saw:
Rays that have wandered into Darkness wide
Return, and back into your Sun subside.

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In many ways, the journey of the last 10-12 years has, by the Grace of Allah, been a huge success. I do not know what my ultimate fate will be ... this is in God's hands, but there is one dimension of these twelve years with which I am very happy.

Perhaps, the best way for me to convey something of the flavor of that to which I am alluding can be captured, to some extent, through a story. Interestingly enough, this is a story that I first heard from Baba.

A shipping magnate is having dinner with some of the elite members of society. Suddenly, an assistant of the wealthy businessman appears at his side and whispers into his ear: "Sir, I regret that I am the one who must tell you this, but there was a huge typhoon in the Indian Ocean and all of your ships have sunk. Your entire fortune has been lost."

The businessman listened to what his assistant said. Upon hearing the full message, the shipping magnate was silent for a moment and seemed to be studying something in the distance.

Finally he said: "That is good." He nodded for the assistant to leave and, then, returned to his dinner companions.

Several hours passed. The dinner party was entering the final stages of a multi-course meal.

The shipping magnate's assistant once again approached his employer. He again whispered into his ear: "Sir, I have the great pleasure to tell you that the previous information I gave to you was incorrect. In truth, your biggest competitor lost all of his ships and is now destitute."

Once again the businessman appeared to be closely scrutinizing something in the distance. Eventually, he turned toward his assistant and said: "That is good," and he returned his attention to the dinner party.

Later in the evening, the shipping magnate returned to his suite of offices. His assistant was already there working through various documents.

Upon seeing his boss, the assistant asked: “Sir, when I first reported to you that you had been ruined, you said to me: ‘That was good.’ And, then, when I announced to you your wealth was intact, you again said: “That is good. Would you explain to me why you said the same thing on both occasions?”

The shipping magnate said: “When you told me my ships and fortune were lost, I looked into my heart for a moment to see if there was any disturbance in my faith concerning God, and when I did not see any ripples of discord or resentment, I said, ‘this is good’. And, when you came to me with your second pronouncement, I again looked in my heart to see if there were any signs of disturbance concerning my faith with respect to the news that the fortune was safe, and when I saw no ripples of attachment to this wealth, I again said, ‘that is good’.

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Although the past twelve years have been filled with difficulties, I have looked into my heart many times during this period, and, by the Grace of Allah, there were no ripples of attachment when, for example, Baba told me about me being a shaykh, a qutb, and the one to whom Baba’s shaykh had instructed Baba to deliver the masnad or spiritual throne. Similarly, when all of this was ‘taken’ away through the behaviors of Baba which disclosed that he was a spiritual charlatan and, therefore, whatever he said to me following my initiation was not the case, nevertheless, there still were no ripples of discord or resentment that disturbed my faith in God.

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Academicians talk about spiritual states and stations. A Sufi, if God wishes, lives them.

There is a huge difference between talking about the station of, for example, patience, and living within the station of patience. There is a very substantial difference between talking about tajalli (spiritual

disclosures) and being the locus of manifestation through which such tajalli descends.

During the twelve years I knew Baba, and during the 16 years, or so, I spent under the care and guidance of Dr. Irfan, I have been traveling through different states and stations of the spiritual path. I might not be a shaykh, but I hope I am a Sufi. I might not be the best Muslim, but I aspire to be, God willing, the best Muslim my essential potential permits.

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Despite the spiritual turbulence of the last twelve-plus years, I have a great deal for which to be grateful. I have been freed, by the Grace of Allah, from the sphere of influence of someone who is not only a spiritual charlatan but who is also a very mean human being parading in a costume wove from imitation strands of kindness, compassion, and love.

In addition, I have been given the opportunity to struggle with so many important facets of the mystical journey. The coach might have been a fraud, but the playing field was real, and I learned a great deal from my participation in the very sobering game that unfolded on the playing field of life... I learned a great deal about myself, and I learned a great deal about other people, and I learned a great deal about the path of tasawwuf.

Moreover, as a result of the events that have transpired during the last twelve-plus years, somehow, by the Grace of Allah, I have been able to do a great deal of writing. More than twenty books have been written, and although I might not be making much money, the material is being read, discussed, and reflected upon by a variety of people in many different countries.

In some ways I might have been lost. However, I did not lose or waste time. By the Grace of God, all of the time was all put to very good use ... despite Baba's best efforts to isolate me, undermine me, turn people against me, and, in many ways, destroy my life.

Beyond the books that were written, a number of web sites have been created. Over the years, thousands of people visited these sites

and, by the Grace of Allah, they have derived benefit from the material published via those web sites. I know there is a certain amount of evidence to support the truth of the latter claim because quite a few people have said as much in the e-mails that they sent to me.

In addition, by the Grace of Allah, I have been broadcasting a podcast about the Sufi path for a number of years. There are well over a thousand regular subscribers to that podcast.

Another blessing for which I am grateful is that although gainful employment has been in very short supply for more than a decade, in one way or another, God has always provided a way through for me. When I reflect on the past twelve-plus years, I shake my head and don't know how -- financially -- I have been able to survive or avoid becoming a permanent homeless person ... although I did spend some time as a homeless individual. Yet, here I am -- still among the living, with a roof over my head and food to eat ... truly, I have much for which to give thanks to my Lord.

Finally, I am most grateful for my relationship with Lara. Whatever her faults might be, she is one of the best and most remarkable persons I have ever met.

She and I have slain many a dragon together. We have been on a great adventure, filled with numerous twists, turns, and perilous forces, and although we have had to endure a certain number of wounds -- some of which were self-inflicted, some of which were earned in combat with one kind of dragon or another -- our love for one another shines on, by the Grace of Allah, and we each draw nourishment and sustenance from that love.

Indeed, the events of the last twelve-plus years are but different chapters in a love story. Love of Allah, love of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), love of the truth, love of the Sufi Path, love of the awliya, love of Dr. Irfan, love of Lara, love of Islam, love for the opportunity of life despite the many denizens that populate the waters of life. All the foregoing forms of love have shaped and colored much of what has transpired in my life, and, just as importantly, none of what happened in my life has sullied my sense of love for all of the foregoing sources of love.

Among the many realizations that have dawned on me during my relationship with Lara is one that, in some ways, is somewhat surprising. Notwithstanding all of the psychological, emotional, and spiritual assistance that I sought to give to Lara -- especially in conjunction with the many forms of abuse that were imposed upon her, I never really appreciated the extent of the problems that such abuse creates for another human being who had to live through it for more than thirty-six years.

When Lara said she loved me more than her mother and children, and, then, she would do something that seemed to be totally at odds with such a statement, I -- due to my own insecurities and life history -- interpreted the behavior to mean that, after all was said and done -- she didn't actually love me. I did not properly understand at the time -- although I have a much better appreciation of the situation now -- the extent and depth that being the recipient of abusive behavior -- whether sexual, physical, emotional, or spiritual -- can affect the thinking, feelings, and behaviors of a human being.

Many times Lara did things, not because those actions were her first choice, or the choice that was most resonant with her heart, but because the effects of abuse run very deeply and very, very strongly. Lara is not a perfect person -- none of us are -- and, therefore, she has made some mistakes, and she would be the first to admit this. However, in many cases the mistakes she made were because she was caught up in the terrific undertow of the treacherous currents created by the many abusive events in her life.

Most of us look at abuse from the outside and think we understand. Whatever we understand, we have not experienced the abuse from the perspective of being inside looking out from the receiving end of such abuse, and, therefore, our insights are several times removed from the realities of the many horrors that accompany the experience of prolonged, intense, terrifying, soul-sucking abuse.

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Many questions remain unanswered. Perhaps, the number one question I have is: why me?

This question is not directed at God. It is addressed to Baba.

Baba has damaged many people. I am aware of some of these individuals and their concomitant damages in a, more or less, direct fashion, while others instances of damage are just rumors.

However, there seems to have been a concerted, consistent effort on Baba's part to do me great injury on a variety of levels. In retrospect, there were many pieces of evidence indicating this all throughout the twelve years, or so, that I spent associating with Baba, but the pieces could not be properly assembled because I did not have enough of the right kind of information to be able to see the patterns that were present.

I remember different people going down to visit Baba, and, then, they would return with some kind of attitude toward me. Usually, I would just try to figure out what it was that I was doing wrong that might induce these people to act in the way they did.

Sooner or later, I would bring the subject up with Baba. He would re-frame the problem in a way that would always point in some other direction.

Over a period of twelve years, Baba manipulated things from behind a veil in order to isolate me from the rest of the silsilah. He undermined my relationship with people whom I have known for years, and, at one time, used to consider my friends.

He has interfered with my marriages. He had sought to induce both Sima and Lara to turn away from me.

He has, to some extent, tried to sabotage my career. On several occasions he has actively sought to keep me away from getting a paying job, even as he was telling me that he was praying for me to get this or that job.

He has lied to a wide variety of people about me. Over the years, I have sensed the lies at work during my interaction with many individuals, but I never quite understood why different events were taking place that had been set in motion by the lies, unknown to me, that Baba was spreading in conjunction with me.

In a number of ways, Baba, in his own insidious manner, tried to get me, or used others to do this, to disrupt my regard for, and love of, Dr. Irfan. For example, I remember one incident, early on -- not too

long after I met Baba -- when the subject of Dr. Irfan's marriage to one of his mureeds arose.

Baba said that, of course, different silsilahs do things somewhat differently, but if it had been him, Baba never would have done what Dr. Irfan did ... that is, marry one of his mureeds. This is being said by the person who, among other things, molests children and seduces the wives of mureeds.

At the time Baba related the foregoing idea, what he said bothered me. However, as many of us do, we take such seemingly isolated incidents and put them on the shelf, not knowing quite what to do with them.

There were a variety of other similar gambits that Baba set in motion -- not only with respect to Dr. Irfan, but in relation to, among others, Momin, Sima, Lara, and my brother Bruce. In each case, Baba sought to undermine my relationship with these people.

Baba is very adept at dropping hints, making allusions, using subtle innuendoes, criticizing through indirect means, and employing third parties in order to denigrate someone's character, or to create divisions, or to shape people's understanding. Yet, he manages to accomplish all of this while maintaining a façade of spirituality.

He is like a professional killer whose weapon of choice is a stiletto. He can stab people without them even knowing a thrust -- and, sometimes, a twist -- has been made. Only later is the blood detected ... with individuals wondering how and where the injury occurred.

Why did Baba send 'Asma to babysit me at the weekly Sufi discussion assemblies for so many months? Why was Baba so elaborate in his approach to me, and why did he go to such lengths to tell 'Asma to never even hint to me that Baba's shaykh had, supposedly, sent him to find me, bring me into the silsilah, make me a shaykh, and deliver the masnad?

What did he believe I could do for him? Whatever he might have thought in this regard, he made a huge miscalculation, because for much of my life I could hardly help myself, let alone someone else.

I had no money, no position, no power, and no status. I was extremely limited – if not totally helpless -- in what I could do to help him obtain immigration to Canada.

Although, to be sure, there were a few people to whom I introduced Baba ... mostly mureeds of Dr. Irfan who were unhappy with what was transpiring with Munir who had "taken over" for Dr. Irfan. Nevertheless, I did not know many people in the general Muslim or Sufi community, and, consequently, I could not bring a lot of warm bodies into Baba's silsilah.

Why tell me such an elaborate story about the 'mission' that his shaykh allegedly had sent him on with respect to me? I did not approach Baba for any of these things, and none of these things was dangled in front of me by Baba in order to bribe me into taking initiation with him.

As far I was concerned, whatever my relationship with Dr. Irfan had been, I was starting all over again, with a new shaykh. I was not looking for special treatment, and I did not expect that I would have the kind of close relationship with Baba that I had with Dr. Irfan.

I was just looking for more spiritual guidance. I didn't feel I was ready to continue the spiritual journey without continued assistance in the form of a guide.

If my initiation is all that Baba wanted -- for me to be just another trinket to put on his charm bracelet -- then, he had all he wanted when I sought to take ba'yat with him. Why was there any need for the rest of the story that he told me ... a cover story that he maintained right up until the time the emperor was revealed to be without authentic spiritual clothing?

There seemed to be such malevolence in much of what Baba did in relation to me. Moreover, the malevolence was wrapped up in such an interesting package ... I really don't understand why someone would go to all this trouble.

If I were someone of spiritual importance, then perhaps, there might be a method to his madness. However, I am ensconced toward the opposite end of the spiritual spectrum, and, consequently, none of what Baba did -- and did for such a long period of time -- makes much sense to me.

Questions abound concerning Baba and my situation. Was he always a scoundrel, or did something happen somewhere along the line that sent him in a deviant direction? Was he really on a mission

from his shaykh, or did his shaykh even know of my existence, and even if the former is the case, was his mentor an authentic shaykh?

I saw a video of Baba's shaykh that was taken during a fatiha that was held in Pakistan. The footage is quite amazing but difficult to describe ... one kind of had to see what took place in order to really appreciate, and perhaps even marvel at, what is being said here.

In any event, on the video, Baba's shaykh went into what appeared to be a state of ecstasy. However, the process of going into this condition was like seeing a body from which the spirit is withdrawn in such a way that it is as if the body were made of liquid and pours to the ground as the spirit is set free.

What actually happened? I really don't know, but I do know that I have seen nothing like it before in my life even though I have, on a number of occasions, been present when Dr. Irfan went into a state of ecstasy ...but this latter condition was very different than the former condition of ecstasy. In the case of Dr. Irfan, it was as if a Divine Name or Attribute of 'motion' descended upon Dr. Irfan and gave expression to an incredibly intense, rigorous dance that went on for many minutes ... I'm not sure that even an Olympic athlete could have kept up with him – again, one had to be present at the event in order to appreciate what is being said here.

Is Baba, himself, a victim of abuse – sexual and/or spiritual -- somewhere along the line, and, as so often happens in matters of abuse, the abused becomes an abuser? Is Baba a sociopath or an example of narcissistic personality disorder? Or, is he something beyond psychological categories?

For example, is Baba evil -- not in the sense in which any of us has a capacity to give expression to evil through the ways in which we resist truth. Instead, I am asking this question in the sense of whether, or not, Baba might be a close kissing cousin to Iblis?

Iblis is unrepentant in what he does ... not because Iblis disbelieves in God's existence. After all, the Qur'an indicates that Iblis asked permission from God to continue to seek to sway human beings from the straight path. Iblis is unrepentant because he apparently enjoys being a locus of manifestation for resistance to truth and he

enjoys the way in which such resistance generates havoc and misery in the world among human beings.

There seems to be more than a touch of this kind of unrepentant approach to life in much of what Baba does behind the scenes. Lara feels I might be going a little far afield when I mention such things, but there is part of me that considers Baba might be something of an appetizer for the time when the dajjal makes his appearance.

Many people will consider the dajjal – spiritual imposter, or anti-Christ -- to be a being of great spirituality. Many people will be taken in by this ‘appearance’ of spirituality and follow the dajjal.

People like Baba are scary. They are scary because of the evil to which they so effortlessly give expression with, seemingly, no thought about the damage that is being done ... in fact, the more damage, then, the better they like it.

However, people like Baba also are scary because they might give a foretaste of what many Christians and Muslims – each in their own way – believe is coming with respect to the ‘End of Days’ ... perhaps sometime soon or, perhaps, not for some time. If Baba is but an appetizer for the advent of the dajjal, then I do not wish to be present when the main meal is served.

Lara says Baba reminds her of the character of Victor in Dr. Zhivago ... minus any of Victor’s positive qualities. Anyone who is familiar with Pasternak’s character understands this places Baba’s behavior somewhere in the depths of moral indecency ... even Jaws might be afraid to troll such waters.

Alternatively, she likens Baba and his Baba-juiced addicted entourage as something akin to the Sopranos family on HBO ...although, perhaps, the comparison is unfair to Tony and his merry band of mobsters. In any event she refers to Baba and his gang as the ‘Falsettos’.

Quite a few people with whom I have corresponded, or vice versa, believe they would be able to spot a spiritual charlatan with no problems whatsoever. People such as Baba eat people like that for lunch and spit out the bones without breaking into a sweat.

Baba is not just clever, he is diabolically clever. Baba is capable of inducing people to enter into a trance-like state and do all manner of

things -- even hurt other people ... I have witnessed this with my own two eyes in relation to quite a few people, including Lara, Momin, and many others.

The forces at work in Baba are, in many respects, the same kinds of forces at work among many terrorist groups. Many of the techniques that are employed by Baba are also being used to induce young men and women to be willing to kill innocent people, and, think they are doing something that is pleasing to God ... something that is spiritual ... something that involves a noble sacrifice of the self for Divine purposes.

God's permitting something to happen is not the same thing as God's approving what happens. God's enabling human beings to exercise free choice does not mean God endorses the manner in which such a gift might be abused.

Can people like Baba be helped? Is the right thing for someone to do a matter of trying to help Baba understand that he is hurting people and, thereby, assist him to struggle toward repentance and spiritually transforming his life?

One might as well ask whether Iblis can be redeemed or a cobra can stop being a cobra. Baba is what he is, and whatever that is, no one else can save him. If Baba is capable of being redeemed, he must be the one to take the steps that are necessary to save himself ... no one else can do this for him.

I don't hate cobras, but I do try to keep my distance from them. I know that evil (and cobras, while potentially problematic, are not evil) does exist, and although I believe that God is able to make use of evil in order to serve a greater good, nonetheless, I do not feel under any obligation to hang out with evil and help it mend its ways.

I probably will never discover the truth about what Baba is all about or why I became entangled in his life, and he in mine. I keep hoping some of the people who have been zombified by Baba will, God willing, somehow break free from his mesmerizing influence. Partly, I hope this for their sake, and, partly, I hope this because, maybe, they will be able to provide me with a few more pieces of the puzzle to which Baba gives expression.

Finally, there is the question concerning my own status as an “alleged” shaykh. If Baba were always a charlatan -- rather than, say, someone who was on the path but became lost (and this does happen) -- and if all the things that he told me concerning his shaykh’s supposed instructions to him regarding me were nothing but lies, then, the question before me becomes fairly straightforward. Under such circumstances, I am not a shaykh now, and never have been.

I did not approach Baba with the idea or wish to become a shaykh. Furthermore, I have no wish to put on pretenses -- either for myself, or others -- that I am something that I am not ... in fact, there is entirely too much of this sort of charade going on these days all over the world, and Baba is exhibit number one with respect to proving the existence of such spiritual chicanery.

Yet, at the same time, Baba constitutes a very complex phenomenon. He mixes the truth and falsehood in very intricate ways so that it becomes extremely difficult to sort out one from the other.

He is among the most knowledgeable people (at least, in terms of the theory of tasawwuf) with whom I have come in contact, and I have met a large number of Islamic scholars -- both esoteric and exoteric -- from all over the world. Furthermore, there is no doubt -- at least, in my mind -- that Baba has some degree of facility with worldly kashf ... and the story that Lara told me about the missing keys at the marriage reception of Habib and Nazia are an example of this. I have seen him charm and impress both Sufi shaykhs and those who are hostile to the idea of tasawwuf with equal ease.

Then again, Iblis is one of the most knowledgeable of beings when it comes to the theory of Islam, both exoteric and esoteric. Perhaps, Baba is just a chip off the old block, so to speak, and, as a result, he excels at muddying the spiritual waters wherever he goes by mixing together truth and falsehood in very clever and creative ways until one has great difficulty knowing where one leaves off and the other begins.

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Baba once told me about someone who was in the silsilah who had been assigned various spiritual duties. The individual was supposed to

go to Malta and help establish and/or enhance silsilah activities on the island.

He said that the individual ended up destroying everything that had gone on in the way of silsilah activities on Malta. In retrospect, I now wonder if Baba might have been talking about himself.

On another occasion I recall Baba talking about the difference between worldly and spiritual kashf or unveiling. Worldly kashf had to do with the ability to read minds or project thoughts or to witness worldly events at a distance, whereas spiritual kashf had to do with various kinds of spiritual secrets being unveiled. The basic principle when it comes to worldly and spiritual kashf is that the more spiritual kashf that takes place, the better this is, and the more worldly kashf that occurs, the worse this is.

Baba told a story about a person who had come to him and lamented about his – that is, the person who, allegedly was making the confession -- excessive use of worldly kashf and how the man wished that he had never began dabbling in such things. Again, in retrospect, I wonder if this is Baba talking about himself. This possibility is given some degree of support because on one occasion, Baba indicated that his powers had been taken away from him for a period of time because of inclination to spend too much time making use of such worldly kashf.

Maybe the foregoing is just Baba spinning his stories to have a certain kind of theatrical impact on whoever happened to be in his ‘audience’ for that occasion. Or, maybe, there is something more to what he said, and, perhaps, Baba is talking about himself but in an indirect, camouflaged manner.

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There is an astana or center that serves as the hub of silsilah activities in Pakistan. This is where Baba’s shaykh used to preside over fatiha as well as over other activities related to the silsilah.

Baba’s shaykh passed away in the mid-90s. I have thought about approaching the people who have been authorized to oversee silsilah activities in Pakistan, now that Baba’s shaykh has passed on. However,

I am fairly certain Baba already has poisoned the well there with respect to me, and, consequently, I do not believe I will be able to find out any information that might help me answer some of the questions I have about Baba's shaykh and what, if anything, was said by his shaykh with respect to me.

There is one couple who lives there who might be able to help. They spent a great deal of time with Baba's shaykh during the last year, or so, of his life. In fact, the wife wrote out many of the letters that were dictated by Baba's shaykh and, therefore, is likely to have had an intimate knowledge of what was going on within the silsilah in Pakistan.

However, there are some potential roadblocks to being able to reach this couple. The wife is a long-time, committed devotee of Baba's, and although I have met her, as well as her husband, on several occasions when they came to the United States, we don't have much more than a nodding acquaintanceship. Similarly, although I have talked with her husband a bit more, we are not exactly close friends.

The husband is not a member of the silsilah, but, apparently, he became very close with Baba's shaykh and spent a great deal of time with him in the last year, or so, of the shaykh's life. This married couple has several adult children who live in the United States and whom they come to visit from time to time.

One of these children is in the silsilah and used the virtual nick name of Sand-Bandito within the virtual community. He is the one who deleted a number of our postings to the public message board, and he is the one who lied about the identity of the holy book to which 'waterwings' made a reference in a posting.

Therefore, I also am fairly confident that Sand-Bandito has probably had occasion to say 'this' or 'that' to his parents with respect to me. As a result, I probably have zero credibility with his parents and, most likely, would be rebuffed if I were to approach them via phone, e-mail, or snail mail.

Yet, they might be the only ones who can tell me what, if anything, Baba's shaykh might have said in relation to me. Was I supposed to be a shaykh, or was this all part of Baba's game?

I have done several rounds of Istikharah concerning these questions and a related matter. The indications appear to be somewhat similar on both occasions. In each instance the dreams that come or the signs that are given seem to suggest -- although I might have been wrong in my understanding or interpretation of the symbols -- that patience should be exercised.

I do not have a longing to be a shaykh. I merely wish to proceed with an appropriate intention in relation to the truth of whatever might be the way things are in this respect in relation to me.

If I have spiritual responsibilities involving a teaching function, of some kind, then I should be attending to these activities as best God permits me to do so. If I do not have such responsibilities, then there are other things to do.

One might suppose that if a given individual were a shaykh, then such individual would, somehow, know this to be so in ways that are independent of being told by, say, one's shaykh that this is the case. However, this is not always the way of things.

The shaykh is merely the locus of manifestation of spiritual guidance that comes through the silsilah, back to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and, ultimately, of course from God ... Who is the real guide in all matters. If a burning bush can serve as the locus of manifestation through which Divinity speaks and, yet, not necessarily be aware of this, then, so too, can human beings serve as loci of manifestation through which Divine guidance comes even though the individual might not be aware this is going on -- although the individual might have faith that this is the case.

Nevertheless, uncertain of what my real status is vis-à-vis the shaykh issue, I have informed those people who had taken initiation through me that they are free to go in whatever spiritual direction they like, and they should no longer consider me their shaykh or a shaykh period. I did this in Canada, and I have done this in the United States, and this is how I am continuing to proceed until very clear indications are given that I should do things differently ... and, perhaps, such indications will never come because they were never meant to come, and this will be quite okay as well.

In the meantime, I say my prayers, fast, and observe Islam as best I can. As well, I remember Allah and say Fatiha. In addition, I think about God, and I think about his Prophet, and I think about Dr. Irfan, and I think about the truth, and I think about Lara:

If there were only one thing I could do
It would be to spend life's years just with you
Holding you dear to the core of my heart
Humming songs of love I learned at the start
Of our being in pre-eternity
When, like a vision, you appeared to me,
Through an act of pure generosity
That filled my spirit with your beauty
But left me restless in this lowly space
Called the world to, once again, see your face,
To dream of reaching out to take a chance
That you'd say: "yes", when I asked you to dance.

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January 20, 2007

While the fact that I can never be sure whether, or not, I will be hired for the next semester is somewhat annoying, nevertheless, I continue to be hired to teach two or three courses per semester. The person who had been the head of the psychology department is retiring at the end of the term, and changes are blowing in the wind all across the university.

I'm not sure how any of this will affect me. For now, however, I continue to teach developmental psychology, introductory psychology, as well a course dealing with multiculturalism and counseling to my, collectively speaking, 100 students, or so.

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January 29, 2007

I have been doing a certain amount of distance counseling on line. The clients originate from quite a few different countries.

Even though the people who have sought me out for this service seem to be relatively happy with what has transpired during our sessions, I have decided, for a number of reasons, to bring this facet of things to a close.

The biggest problem is that irrespective of whether one communicates via e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, or via one of the growing number of voice-based internet modes of communication, I feel that one really needs face-to-face, in the room, contact to get a good feel for the nuances of what might be happening with an individual. I miss this aspect of things, and I feel its absence constitutes an important obstacle to helping people.

Another substantial problem is that an increasing number of people are contacting me who need more extensive treatment than I can give them. I do what I can for people, but there comes a point when one has to realize that one might be dealing with problems that are beyond one's pay grade.

By the Grace of Allah, I have been able to help hundreds, if not thousands of people in one way or another. Nonetheless, I feel the time has come for me to try to figure out other – perhaps more effective – ways through which to help some of the damaged souls in the world.

One of the difficulties in all of this is that there are many Baba-like people in the world who are casting more and more individuals into an abyss of human suffering. Unfortunately, there are far fewer numbers of people who are working to help pull such people out of that abyss.

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April 28, 2007

Lara and I have returned from New York where I had been invited to participate in an interfaith symposium that is taking place at one of

the universities in the Manhattan area. I had been asked to give a talk on the central theme of the symposium from a Sufi perspective.

One of the other participants is the individual who claimed to have had an experience involving Dr. Irfan that was counseling me – Tariq – to consider whether, or not, what I was writing would be something that Dr. Irfan would approve before I released such writing to the public. At the time that the foregoing communiqué had been forwarded to me via e-mail, I dismissed that person’s experience as being ‘spurious’ or not authentic ... although Allah knows best the nature of such things.

During the final day of the symposium, the person approached me and asked if I would be willing to go out for a late-night snack after the events of the day had been concluded. I accepted.

When we finally found our way to a nearby bistro, became seated, and had ordered, we began to talk. One of the first things that the individual wanted to talk about was what the person felt might have been some misunderstandings in the past.

I told the individual that we should leave the past in the past and try to live in the present. The food was served, we ate, we talked about this and that, and, then, we parted company.

Lara -- who, in my opinion, had been treated rather shabbily by the person who had invited me to a post-symposium snack -- also had been invited to join us. However, Lara didn’t want any part of it and stayed in the hotel room. She didn’t want, yet, another person in her life trying to re-frame the reasons for why it was deemed ‘necessary’ to treat Lara abusively.

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During the afternoon of the final day of the symposium – at a time when no events have been scheduled – Lara and I decide to take a trip to Ground Zero. We want to see what is going on there, but we also want to pay our respects. One of the ways in which I want to do this is by saying fatiha at the former home of the World Trade Center in order to honor all the souls who lost their lives, as well as to honor those who had lost their loved ones, on that tragic day in September/2001.

As we approached the area, we heard a person playing 'Amazing Grace' on his flute. One had difficulty keeping tears from welling up in one's eyes or to keep a lump from forming in one's throat.

Along some of the plywood siding that bordered the hole where the towers had once stood were some drawings and paintings that were in memory of the events and people of 9/11 - quite a few of the pieces depicted first-responders ... many of whom died trying to save other people. This artwork had been contributed by various elementary schools - mostly, it seemed, from New York.

There were small groups that were constantly forming and re-forming to discuss the events of 9/11. Some of the people were annoyed - if not angry -- that anything was being said against the official theory concerning the events of 9/11, and some of the people wanted to induce people to explore other possibilities beyond the official theory.

Lara and I found some free space near the wire-mesh construction fence that permitted one to look out over the re-construction of the center that was taking place. Various people had stuck flowers in the wire-mesh.

I said fatiha quietly. We stood in silence for a while, and I did a salient prayer asking God to help heal the wounds that had been ripped open on that fateful day more than six years ago ... physical wounds, emotional wounds, psychological wounds, spiritual wounds, and political wounds.

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Because of the course that my life has taken, I was kind of out of the loop, so to speak, with respect to much that went on in relation to 9/11. Other than waking up to radio reports of a plane crashing into one of the two towers at the World Trade Center and, then, rushing to the television to see replays of the second plane crashing into the other tower, I really didn't have much time or means to learn about such things.

For the most part, I was too busy trying to -- barely -- survive myself and trying to help Lara survive to have the luxury of time and

resources to invest looking into the events of 9/11. Of course, my remoteness from such events didn't stop Jane from reporting me to the FBI as, perhaps, a 'person of interest' with respect to terrorism, and, so, without even trying to find out about things, I learned some valuable lessons vis-à-vis 9/11 early on.

I didn't listen to the radio. I didn't watch television. I read the newspapers only fleetingly. The time I spent on-line was mostly directed toward either trying to generate income or trying to procure a job in some way, and, then, at a certain point my online time became focused, to some extent, on the events in Baba's virtual community.

I did catch some portions of the 9/11 Commission hearings – especially when Richard Clarke gave his statement and was questioned, and, then, when Condoleezza Rice gave her statement and was question. From time to time, I caught the Jersey Girls on Chris Matthews going over their debriefing in relation to what was happening during the hearings.

On the whole, however, I was as ignorant about what was going on as, probably, most other Americans were. I heard – in the most superficial of ways -- reports about the hijackers who were considered to be responsible for the attack that, allegedly, had been ordered and planned with the blessings of 'Usama bin-Laden, and I had no difficulty believing that a group of so-called Muslims might be capable of such atrocities.

I had been a Muslim for more than thirty years. I had lived amongst Muslims both in North America as well – although to a far lesser extent – overseas.

I saw the kinds of things they frequently tried to do in relation to Dr. Irfan. I was often a first-hand witness to the duplicity of some of the so-called leaders of the Muslim community.

I knew about the atrocities that were committed by the Shah. I knew about the terror that had been spread by Idi Amin. I knew about the carnage in Indonesia. I knew about the terrible ordeal of the Armenians at the hands of the Turks. I knew a little about the history of Muslims and how all too many of the 'modern leaders' often brutalized one another, their citizens, and other non-Muslims.

I had read about the growing number of suicide bombings. No matter how much the Israeli government tortured and oppressed the Palestinians – and a succession of Israeli governments were, to a great extent, very much a series of governmental bodies and ‘leaders’ that were given to excesses in their horrific treatment of Palestinians – nevertheless, the killing of innocent people can never, ever be justified ... there are no defensible qualifiers to this statement.

Furthermore, I was in the process of recovering from roughly twelve years of abuse at the hands of a so-called Muslim ... a person who thought nothing of manipulating people, sexually exploiting them, tearing families apart, ruining the holy longing of people, and treating people with calculated cruelty. All of this was, supposedly, being done in the name of the Sufi path ... in the name of spirituality ... in the name of God, and, yet, it was nothing but evil running wild in people’s lives.

So, I had a direct insight into just how self-absorbed and self-serving some Muslims can be. When I added in all of the other things that I have learned over the years about certain facets of the Muslim community – especially its so-called leadership – I had very little reason to suppose that things might be other than they were presented by the ‘official’ version of 9/11.

So, in many ways and for quite a long time, I was prepared to accept the idea that some incredibly stupid and self-serving Muslims had deluded themselves into believing that they had the right – if not duty – to take innocent lives. Consequently, I didn’t have the inclination to begin investigating – even in a cursory manner – any of the events of 9/11. In many respects, I felt that 9/11 was just one more instance in which certain Muslims were all too ready to act in un-Islamic ways.

However, as I began to become increasingly clear of the Baba quagmire, and as I my financial situation began to improve more and more, and as my relationship with Lara settled down, I started to look into a variety of issues ... one of which was 9/11. My studies really began when a medical doctor friend of mine – the same one who intervened on my behalf in the cancer saga, and someone who was among the first responders on 9/11 – recommended a few books to me.

From that point onward, I read pretty much everything that had been written on the subject of 9/11. My reading included: *The 9/11 Commission Report*; *The Pentagon Performance Report*; various, successive versions of the NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) reports; the book released through *Popular Mechanics* called *Debunking 9/11 Myths*; a *Scientific American* article/essay on the subject, and much more.

I watched endless videos. I listened to mp3s. I read through material on the Internet.

A lot of the material that can be found on the Internet concerning 9/11 is of questionable value (irrespective of what side of the issue one tends to favor) – but not all of it. However, I have to laugh at the irony of some pundit for, say, MSNBC, or Fox, or ABC, or NBC, or CBS talk in derisive tones concerning those on the Internet who were conspiracy theorists and that one could not trust anything one found on the Internet ... and, yet, each of the aforementioned news organizations has a substantial presence on the Internet – so, if one uses their logic, then, none of them can be trusted because they are all on the Internet.

The Internet is like any other source of information. What is being said – no matter who is saying it – has to be properly vetted ... that is, one must engage everything through a rigorous process of critical reflection.

One should be doing this when one reads a book. One should be doing this when one reads the newspapers or reads a magazine. One should be doing this when one watches television or a documentary. One should be doing this with respect to political leaders and spokespeople for this or that lobby group or government agency. One should be doing this in relation to doctors, scientists, and engineers.

Theoretically, the whole idea of a liberal education is to help prepare students to do precisely this – that is, to learn how to critically appraise material from a wide variety of topical areas, ranging from: science, to: history, philosophy, political science, law, and so on. Unfortunately, there often is ‘many a slip betwixt cup and lip’ when it comes to having reality live up to theory in such matters. The students I have been trying to help in this regard for the last few years are

paradigmatic examples of the problems that exist with respect to assisting students to acquire a rigorous and sound liberal education.

I have gone through first-rate liberal education programs at both the undergraduate level as well as in graduate school. I have gone through two very different kinds of training programs in relation to Dr. Irfan and Baba. By the Grace of Allah, I have come out the other end in all of the foregoing instances being a lot better at the process of critical reflection than when I first ventured into such areas.

The time that I have spent with Baba in particular has honed my sensitivities to the presence of manipulation, exploitation, misdirection, triangulation, and many other tactics of undue influence. Undue influence is the process of seeking to use techniques of re-framing, persuasion, compliance, misinformation, and social pressure to attack someone's emotional and psychological vulnerabilities in order to induce such a person to serve one's agenda or bidding ... oftentimes in a such a way that the person being so induced is not aware of what is actually taking place.

What has all the foregoing got to do with the events of 9/11? Quite a lot I believe – although I wouldn't want someone simply to take my word in such matters, but, rather, I hope that a person would be willing to conduct her or his own critically reflective investigation into such matters.

I am not a conspiracy theorist. I have absolutely no theory about who is responsible for the events of 9/11 ... even while I am quite clear about the identity of the people whom I have been told are the people that I should hold responsible for what transpired on 9/11.

Government officials, and journalists, and television pundits have been telling me for nearly six years that nineteen Muslim terrorists conspired together with 'Usama bin-Laden and Khalid Shaykh Muhammad to attack the United States on September 11, 2001. The problem with this is that, in actuality, such conspiracy theorists have little hard evidence to back up their claims.

If one talks to the FBI, they will tell one – in fact the Director of the FBI has said precisely this – that there is no evidence, and there is no paper trail, tying 'Usama bin-Laden to any of the events of 9/11. The testimony of Khalid Shaykh Muhammad is suspect – and even *The*

9/11 Commission Report admits as much -- because of the torture techniques that have been used in his interrogation along with the interrogation of other, allegedly key witnesses concerning the planning and execution of 9/11.

If one looks at the passenger manifests that have been released for the allegedly hijacked planes on 9/11, one will not find the names of any of the people who have been identified as the hijackers for the events of 9/11. In addition, under a Freedom of Information request, it has been revealed that there are no Arabs among the people who have been autopsied in conjunction with the plane that supposedly slammed into the Pentagon.

The only video footage that has been released that purportedly depicts a plane hitting the Pentagon has been analyzed by a French explosives expert, Pierre-Henri Bunel who served in the first Gulf War with General Norman Schwarzkoph, Jr., and Mr. Bunel concluded that the explosion depicted in the video is not that of a jet fuel explosion but of a hollow charge munitions detonation. In addition, Mr. Bunel has indicated that the famous hole in Ring-C of the Pentagon does not exhibit the properties of damage done by some part of a plane but, rather, shows the characteristics of a hollow charge munitions device.

There are nearly fifteen eye-witnesses -- some of them who work at the Navy Annex, some who work at the Arlington cemetery, and some who are part of the Pentagon police force -- all of whom have indicated that the plane that they saw go toward the Pentagon flew on the north side of the Cit-go (the name has now been changed) gas station which sits about a mile, or so, away from the Pentagon. This is significant because no matter whether, or not, one believes that a plane hit the Pentagon, the 'official' path for the in-coming UFO is on the south side of the aforementioned gas station.

Everything in *The Pentagon Performance Report* and well as the rest of the 'official' story in relation to the Pentagon incident is predicated on the premise that the plane that struck the Pentagon was on the south side of the aforementioned gas station. The description of the damage to the Pentagon all presupposes such a flight path.

However, if the fifteen eye-witnesses alluded to above are correct, then, pretty much everything about *The Pentagon Performance Report*

is incorrect. None of this has ever been properly examined by people who are truly objective investigators.

April Gallop who had top-secret security clearance reports that she was at ground zero when whatever happened at the Pentagon happened. Yet, she walked out of the building in her bare feet, through the hole in the outer ring of the Pentagon, and she reported that there were no fires in the area, and there was nothing that was hot to the touch either with respect to her feet or her hands, and, even more significantly, there was no plane wreckage whatsoever in the area where she was – even though she was at ground zero for the Pentagon event.

Other people in the Pentagon reported smelling cordite – from a detonation – and not burning jet fuel. These were people who had been in combat and knew the difference.

Veterans -- both commercial pilots and combat pilots – have come forth and introduced testimony about why the official flight path into the Pentagon would have been physically impossible to occur. In addition, these same veteran pilots have advanced a litany of reasons why none of the so-called hijack pilots would have been able to do what it is claimed by official conspiracy theorists that those hijackers supposedly did.

The main theory of the NIST report concerning what caused the fall of the twin towers has been disputed by experimental tests conducted by Underwriters Laboratory. More specifically, NIST says – in somewhat simplified terms -- that the floor assemblies failed and, as a result, the exterior walls were pulled inward and this led to a catastrophic failure of the buildings. Underwriters Laboratories, however, has proven that the floor assemblies would not have failed under the conditions that allegedly existed on 9/11 at the World Trade Center.

In addition, NIST has not been able to explain why the collapse of the Twin Towers, or the nearby Building 7 (The Solomon Brothers 47-storey tower), occurred in a symmetrical fashion that at times, took place with speeds approaching that of free-fall and, therefore, in apparent violation of the Law for the Conservation of Momentum. Nor, has NIST credibly dealt with the numerous reports of explosions in the Twin Towers – reports that were verified when the *New York Times*

successfully sued under a Freedom of Information Request to have the reports of first responders released to the public.

Having gone through the final NIST report concerning the World Trade Towers, I know that NIST did not explain the collapse of the respective towers, but, instead, stops at a point that is just short of collapse and assumes the rest. However, NIST has provided absolutely no proof to the public that is capable of matching the actual, real-time collapse of the twin towers -- which practically everyone in the United States has been witness to -- with what the NIST simulation models try to lead readers to believe would have happened if the analysis of the NIST investigators had continued on to the end as it should have, but did not.

Moreover, I also know that at least some of the NIST investigators fudged some of their conclusions by assuming worst-case conditions in the Twin Towers -- worst case scenarios for which they had no real evidence. Among the questionable data in this respect are the experimental tests run in conjunction with fire-proofing and how long such fire-proofing materials would have been able to protect the steel columns in the twin towers.

There is considerable evidence to indicate that multi-ton girders from the Twin Tower buildings were propelled 500 and 600 feet with sufficient force to penetrate buildings. Yet, supposedly the only force present on 9/11 was gravitational in character -- something that could not have generated such lateral propulsive forces.

One looks in vain in *The 9/11 Commission Report* for names such as: William Rodriguez, Colleen Rowley, Sibel Edmonds, Indira Singh, David Schippers, Lt. Colonel Anthony Shaffer of Abel Danger, April Gallop, Barry Jennings, Norman Mineta, Steven Jones, Laura Brown, Michael Ruppert, and Kevin Ryan. Unfortunately, all of the foregoing individuals were prevented, in one way or another, from having their testimony appear in *The 9/11 Commission Report*, despite the fact that each of the foregoing individuals had pertinent information concerning the events of 9/11.

Moreover, quite a few of the foregoing individuals have been muzzled by the government, or they have been fired from their jobs, or they have lost their security clearance, or they have been harassed in various ways. And why were such drastic actions apparently

necessary? ... they all had something to say that went in opposition to the official conspiracy theory concerning 9/11.

One of the primary obstacles preventing the foregoing individuals being properly heard was due to the person who was placed in charge of directing the 'official' investigation into 9/11 for the 9/11 Commission - namely, Philip Zelikow. When Zelikow was being interviewed for the position of director of the 9/11 investigation, he failed to give full disclosure concerning his past ties with many people in the government and, as well, he failed to disclose that he had written a paper whose credibility would be enhanced if *The 9/11 Commission Report* were to come to conclusions that were consonant with assumptions and premises to which he was already committed ... in short, Philip Zelikow could not be an objective, independent investigator in the matter of 9/11 and, yet, he became the director of the whole process.

The foregoing several pages are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the issues of 9/11. One can believe what is said, or not, as one likes.

I do know that much of the data that runs contrary to the 'official' conspiracy theory that is being promulgated by government officials, journalist, television pundits, and a variety of organizations is kept from the public eye by various techniques that are right out of Baba's bags of tricks - misdirection, misinformation, ridicule, marginalization, re-reframing, game-rigging, triangulation, seeking to discredit people's emotional and psychological stability rather than paying attention to the actual nature of the evidence being presented by such people, social pressure of one kind or another, fear, and so on.

Whenever I have asked anyone to present a detailed case for why one should accept the 'official' conspiracy theory, they have been unable to do so. Their whole case tends to be based on misinformation, ignorance, assumptions, biases, unjustified conclusions, faulty logic, sloppy thinking, and an absence of objective, independently derived empirical data.

I believe it is a mistake to try to put forth theories about who did, or did not do, what on 9/11. It also is a mistake to try to figure out how whoever it was did what they did before we become clear about the basic empirical data concerning 9/11. I further believe it is a mistake

when people – on all sides of the issue – become so bogged down in name-calling that the data itself tends to take a back seat.

9/11 is not a political issue or an economic issue. It is not a theological or philosophical issue.

9/11 is an empirical issue. 9/11 is an issue requiring rigorous, critical reflection. 9/11 is an issue that needs to be completely examined with full transparency before the world, and if and when this is done we need to follow the data wherever it leads us and make appropriate determinations and conclusions.

To date, none of the foregoing has occurred. The FBI has not done this. The CIA has not done this. The military had not done this. The Pentagon has not done this. NIST has not done this. The FAA has not done this. FEMA has not done this. The 9/11 Commission has not done this. *The Pentagon Performance Report* has not done this. *Scientific American* has not done this. *Popular Mechanics* has not done this. Most of the media have not done this. Congress has not done this. The White House has not done this. The Secret Service has not done this. The Justice Department has not done this. The National Transportation Safety Board has not done this. The universities have not done this. State governments have not done this.

If the American public were to have been exposed to as much consistent, concentrated, continuous coverage involving a critical, rigorous examination concerning all facets of the evidence entailed by the events of 9/11 as has been devoted to cases like those of: O.J. Simpson, Jon Benet Ramsey, or Natalee Holloway – as tragic as all these cases are – I believe that many people in America might have a very different view of things than is presently the case.

By the Grace of Allah, I have been freed from the abuses of a person like Baba. By the Grace of Allah, Lara has been freed from the abuses of people like Ron and Baba. I believe that the time has come for the people of America to become free from the abuses of all those who would seek to prevent them from becoming aware of the many ways in which the American people are being subjected to techniques of undue influence in order to prevent them from beginning to truly understand the nature of their predicament.

This is not a conspiracy theory because many of the abusers being alluded to above act quite independently of one another. In order to illustrate this point consider the following.

If one were to attend a convention of sociopaths or narcissistic personalities, and one noted that all the people at the convention – with, hopefully, the exception of oneself -- were acting in very similar ways, this is not evidence of a conspiracy involving some coordinated plan of action. Instead, it is evidence that the underlying pathologies that are present at the convention tend to manifest themselves in similar ways across a wide variety of interactional engagements. The similarities in behavioral patterns are reflections of the character of the pathology that is present, and, as such, one has no need to resort to conspiracy theories in order to account for what is going on.

Another way of illustrating the idea that something other than a conspiracy might be involved in the fact that there are a great many forces operating to keep the American people from learning certain truths about their predicament comes from the students whom I have taught over the last several years. I give a test, and most of the students flunk it despite the fact that I have told them, more or less, what is going to be on the exam and what they need to do in order to score well on the test and despite the fact that we have gone over everything in class.

The students have not entered into a conspiracy to do poorly or to thwart my efforts to help them. There are many reasons why things turn out the way they do.

Some students are lazy. Some students are single moms who also are working as well as attending school full time. Some students are uninterested in what is being taught and don't see the relevance of it to their lives. Some students have no idea why they are at the university and are trying to figure out their lives, and tests just get in the way of that. Some students have come to university for the sports and not for an education. Some students want to continue the ways of their high school years and just party and get wasted.

Many of the students have never been taught – or never bothered to learn this if they were taught – how to read well. Many of them have never been taught or have never learned how to study for an exam. Many of them have never learned, or been taught, how to take a test.

Many of the students suffer from test-taking anxiety and even though they might have studied for an exam, their minds go blank as soon as the questions are placed in front of them. Many of the students have been brutalized by their educational experience and have difficulty with school even as they are pushed by circumstances to have to go through the motions of getting a degree that they hope, and that they have been told, will get them a decent job.

Or, maybe, during the week leading up to the test, there have been family problems of some kind. Maybe, some of the students are worried about whether, or not, they are pregnant or are trying to recover from a case of date rape, Or perhaps, the night before the exam, they have had a fight with their girlfriend or boyfriend and just can't concentrate. Perhaps, the day I have selected to give my test, a number of the other professors have also decided to give a test, and by the time they get to my test, they are spent.

Once the test is taken, graded and handed back, many of the students will have grievances about me or the test. They feel that the tests are too difficult or that the exams are not fair in some way, or the tests are too short or too long or have too many options. I might be told that there are too many tests or that there should be fewer tests. I will be told that I should find ways other than tests to evaluate them.

There could be many reasons why students do not do well on an exam. There could be many excuses given as to why a student didn't do well. There could be many forms of complaints when the test scores are generally not very good.

However, despite all of the complex crisscrossing in the currents of life and the way such forces intersect with the giving of, an performing on, any given test, the overall results for the class might be fairly poor. No one has conspired against me to generate such a result, but there are many identifiable forces that have converged together on the day of the exam to give expression to the test results that occur.

Similarly, when it comes to things like 9/11 and the American people, there are many reasons for why things have turned out the way they have. Choices can be made independently of one another, and despite the differences underlying the deliberation process leading to such choices, similar results might ensue.

People have not done their home work. They haven't read the right material. They haven't been paying attention. They would rather party than exercise due diligence. They don't have the time because of work and domestic pressures. They suffer from various forms of learning disability. They haven't learned how to think critically due to a schooling system that is, at best, largely ineffective – and there are many reasons why the school system is the way it is. They are influenced by the crowd they hang out with and have not bothered to do their own thinking ... and so on.

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August 15, 2007

I have been contacted by a professor in Canada. The person is doing a report for the political science department of which he is a member.

The report concerns a controversial political issue in which Munir – the one who dreamed himself into being a shaykh -- has been involved. The nature of the controversy is, as far as I am concerned, neither here nor there, but I am being contacted because Munir has done something that I had asked not to do – namely, he has taken something that I had written – at least, in part – and he has been distributing that document as part of a publicity campaign to influence the government to pursue a certain set of policies.

My contribution to the document in question was actually to talk about some of the problems surrounding the nature of governance in Canada. The material was very general in nature.

Munir then added his own angle to the material in another section of the document. In addition, an editor who wanted to incorporate the document into a journal he produced, then, arranged the material in a manner that suited him.

The end result was an article in a journal that had both my name and Munir's name on it. I hadn't liked the way the whole thing was handled and had an argument with the editor when we meant once at Momin's house.

Now, I have been contacted by the political science professor because he wants to know my reaction to the fact that although, at one point, it seemed like Munir’s campaign was going to work, in the end it was defeated by a vote in the legislative branch of the provincial government. He is contacting me because he believes I have had something to do with Munir’s campaign – after all, my name is on the journal article that Munir has been distributing all over the place.

I explain to the professor some of the history underlying the article in question. I also explain to him that I was never a part of Munir’s political campaign – that he and I had parted company before he even got going on his project.

I had written a report, on which the journal article was, in part, based. However, the report was several hundred pages long, and the part of the report that was related to what Munir later pursued in his own way, was, at most, a page, or so, long. Furthermore, in the larger report, I also had explored the rights of many other groups in Canada besides Muslims – such as Native Peoples, the people of Quebec, and a few other constituencies as well.

I told the professor that I was happy that Munir’s political initiative had been defeated. I didn’t agree with what he had been trying to do. Moreover, I explained to the professor that I didn’t appreciate the way that Munir had dragged my name into the matter – especially given that I had left explicit instructions to not use any of my writings in any subsequent project that Munir might choose to pursue.

The professor asked me if I knew how to get in touch with Munir. I told the professor that I have not been in touch with Munir for roughly seventeen years so that should tell him something about the nature of the relationship that Munir and I currently enjoyed.

The professor promised to send me a copy of the final report. However, if other experiences I have had in similar situations is any guide to what is likely to occur in this regard, I don’t believe I will get the copy that I have been promised.

When Lara hears about my interaction with the professor, she suggests that I should contact Munir and let him know how I feel about what he has done. I indicate that the damage already has been done and my contacting Munir is not going to change much of anything.

§

September 27, 2007

I have been assigned five courses for the fall semester. The department is going through a variety of changes.

Some professors have been terminated. Some professors have retired. The university administration has brought in a temporary chairperson to head up the department for which I teach in order to help sort out the problems. This individual is supposed to help smooth the way for whoever is going to be picked to head up the department.

I have been given five courses because the university is short of people. I'm not exactly sure that what is going on would be approved by the union, but I'm not a member of the union, and I'm not going to be used by the union as a pawn so that the members of the union can arrange things in a way that is conducive to their desires and life-styles.

On the other hand, I am not a fan of management either. I understand that the university administration is giving me the work load because this suits their current situation, but, at the same time, I also know that management doesn't care in the least about me and that they would just as soon let me go as keep me if the former suited their purposes.

Adjunct professors are the migrant farm workers in the world of the university. They get no benefits; they have no office space; their rate of pay is far below what full-time employees of the university get; they have little say about what textbooks, if any, are used or little influence in relation to other aspects of the learning environment; and everyone tries to use them, in one way or another, to suit their respective agendas.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, I am in need of the money that will come with the extra courses. In addition, since the university has begun to advertize for some full-time professors to fill up the empty faculty chairs, I hope that, perhaps, the extra courses might be transformed into a full-time job down the road because I intend to send in an application to fill one of the vacancies.

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Teaching five courses is going to be quite a change for me. I have become accustomed to a relatively leisurely pace of going into the university for a few hours every other day, but now I will have to be there five days a week ... and I still will be without an office because of my adjunct status.

§

November 19, 2007

I have heard nothing about my application for a full-time position at the university. I haven't even received an acknowledgement of receipt.

I talk about this with another adjunct professor who teaches in the same department as I do. She is an older woman who, I feel, is a very good and committed teacher.

She also has applied for a full-time position. She indicates that she too has not been contacted by the human resources department and that receipt of her application has not been acknowledged as well.

§

Bruce has invited Lara and me to come for Thanksgiving dinner. This might be a bit tricky because Lara's family also might be descending on us for Thanksgiving.

I tell my brother that we might not be able to make it for dinner. However, we will try to make it for desert and conversation a little later on.

§

December 15, 2007

The desire to journal is dissipating. The original impetus to write about things had to do with the events that were starting to take place following the time when Dr. Irfan had passed away.

Now, many of those issues have begun to stabilize. I rarely think about Baba, and, moreover, most – but not all – of the difficulties that arose through him, or in conjunction with him, have been resolved in a satisfactory – if not better than satisfactory – manner.

My relationship with Lara is very good. We enjoy our life together.

Much of my time that is not devoted to teaching is spent on writing, blogging, podcasting, and my website. The rest of the time Lara and I find interesting things to do together.

We go and watch plays at a nearby theatrical house. We attend various musical concerts and festivals. We go to some of the area fairs as they occur. When the mood hits us, we travel to a city where non-mainstream but quality films are shown. We go for little trips to the mountains, or the lakes, or the coasts of: Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. From time to time, Lara accompanies me when I am invited to give a talk somewhere -- which is not all that frequently – and when this happens, we try to find something special to do in whatever locality I am being called to.

Life still has its problems. But we have much for which to be grateful to God.

§

April 21, 2008

A publisher in Europe has been trying to get in touch with me. They want to include the article on which my name appears – along with that of Munir – in a book of articles concerning various issues about religion, multiculturalism, and the like.

According to the e-mail I have just received, the publisher has sent me a number of inquiries, but, for whatever reason, the e-mails have been sent to someone whom I know – from the Internet – who lives in Malaysia. The person in Malaysia then forwarded a copy of the e-mail to me.

Apparently, the time for publication is fast approaching, and the publishers need some kind of answer from me about whether, or not, I am willing to have the article appear in the book of readings. The publishers seem to indicate that they really don't need my acquiescence to the request because they have the permission of the journal in which the article was originally published ... although I don't recall signing a release for the journal to this effect. The publishers also have been trying to contact Munir and want to know if I can help them in that respect.

I reply to the publisher's inquiries as follows:

Dear Ms. Trembley,

Part of the problem in my delay in responding to you is because, for whatever reason, your three communications have been directed to someone else. However, since the individual to whom you directed your concerns happens to know me in a sort of distant fashion, he has been kind enough to forward your request to me.

After giving the matter some thought, I have decided to withhold permission from attaching my name to the article. I have gone through many changes since the time

I assisted with the article [which was around 1989], and although there are a number of points within the article to which I

still subscribe, there are a number of other points to which I do not necessarily adhere and, in fact, these latter ideas did not come from me but, rather, from other individuals associated with the article.

There might be nothing I can do about whether, or not, the article is re-printed. However, if the article is reprinted, please do so without my name being included as a co-author and without any indication in the book or the article that I had a connection to the article.

Sincerely,

Dr. Tariq Knecht

§

May 13, 2008

I still have not heard one word from human resources about my application for a full-time position. I decide to check in order to make sure that they did, in fact, receive my material.

When I speak about this issue to one of the senior people in human resources the individual checks into the matter while I wait. The person comes back and says that, yes, my application has been received and it is still being considered.

Earlier I had talked with the other adjunct professor who has applied for one of the several vacant positions. She said that she had received a rejection letter in the mail about a month, or so, ago.

Recently, I have seen several people from outside the university being given the tour of the university facilities. I have been told that these people are candidates for the open positions.

Technically, I might still be in the running, but, usually, when someone is paid to come and see things, the process is fairly advanced and 'the tour' indicates there is an interest on both sides of the ledger concerning the position.

Later on, I discover – through inside sources – that the person who had been given the tour was actually offered the position but turned it

down. From what I am told, the person didn't even have a degree in psychology ... which seems to tell me that the powers that be are not all that interested in treating me as a serious candidate.

§

June 28, 2008

I have received a rejection notice in the mail today. I was not even called in for an interview.

Several new professors from outside the university have been hired. In addition, there will be a new head of my department who is from within the university but whose background is in law, not psychology.

There also is an organizational shuffle. Psychology has been subsumed under the department of Humanities and Social Sciences. Psychology is no longer a department unto itself.

§

There might be many reasons for my rejection notice -- my age ... the fact that I am Muslim ... perhaps some of my public 9/11 comments ... or, maybe, my inclination not to engage in office politics and just try to do the job for which I am being paid. I suppose I will never know.

I look at the C.V.s of the people who have been hired - since the documents were made public at the departmental meeting through which the new appointees were introduced into the university community. I have taught longer than they have. I have published more than they have. My clinical experience is more extensive than theirs. The undergraduate and graduate programs from which I graduated are more prestigious than are the educational backgrounds of the people who were hired. Whatever the administration based their decision on, it is not about competence.

§

July 20, 2008

Despite not wanting to retain me in a full-time capacity, the University notifies me that they would like me to teach a number of courses in the fall and spring. Given that student evaluations of me for the past four years have always been excellent, their wanting to retain me makes sense, but somehow, although they trust me enough to provide the hundreds of students who have passed through my classrooms with a quality education, they don't appear to want to trust me in a more full-time version of doing the same sort of thing.

On the other hand, I believe that whatever the intentions of the administration might have been with respect to my application for a full-time position, those intentions were, in a sense, irrelevant. Nothing comes to me except as Allah wishes this.

§

December 2009

I have just found out that Munir has passed away. Someone that I don't know has taken over as the head of the Muslim organization that Dr. Irfan started, and this person is also the new shaykh. Allah knows best whether, or not, the person is actually an authentic shaykh, but my basic feeling is that spiritual illegitimacy is a natural heir of an illegitimate spiritual parent.

§

Lara and I talk about the Munir situation. I recall what Dr Irfan's wife had said to me many years ago after her husband passed away.

She said it to me in a rather angry fashion. She said that there was something that I should have done when Dr. Irfan passed away, but I didn't do it, and she wouldn't tell me what it was that she thought I should have done.

Upon hearing this, Lara almost immediately says that Dr. Irfan's wife probably thought that you should have taken over as the head of the community organization that he had begun. After all, there was no one in the group who did more work or served that organization better than I did – except, of course, Dr. Irfan.

What Lara is saying makes sense. However, it never occurred to me at the time – that is just not the sort of person I am.

I was never looking to be the head of anything. I never wanted control of an organization. I did not see myself as the successor for Dr. Irfan even in relation to worldly matters.

Furthermore, I feel that if this is what Dr. Irfan wanted when he passed away, he would have said something to me prior to the fact. To me, the instructions that Dr. Irfan were kind of complete and all-encompassing ... nothing of his was to be used in any way by people in the silsilah.

No, it seems that my rizq was elsewhere. I don't know whether, or not, the following incident has any connection with the rizq that was in store for me following the passing away of Dr. Irfan, but I remember a fatiha that took place sometime, I believe, during the last part of Dr. Irfan's life.

The fatiha was a special one because Dr. Irfan was wearing the spiritual robe that had been given to him by his shaykh. At some point when the Qawwali was playing -- following the recitation of fatiha and a zikr session -- Dr. Irfan motioned me over to him and indicated for me to put my forehead on the floor beside him as if in prostration.

He placed part of his robe over me as I was in prostration. His hand was on my head but on top of the robe. This went on for some time.

He never explained to me the significance of what went on that night. I never asked about it either. But, maybe, it was a consolation for what was to come.

January 15, 2010

I have decided to discontinue the journal. In thinking back over the last twenty-some years, a question came to me. What if someone were to come to me with incontrovertible proof that everything Baba had done was somehow spiritually proper – although I must confess that such an individual would have a steep incline to climb and a very heavy load to carry with respect to pulling me over the top on this possibility since I don't believe that God encourages the servants of Divinity to: lie on a regular basis, spiritually exploit those who one is supposed to be protecting and caring for, or betray one's alleged friends.

My foregoing caveat notwithstanding, in one sense what has occurred with respect to Baba is all spiritually proper because it is all part of the Divine plan. We might not understand the nature of that plan, and we might howl in protest at the pain that we experience as we are processed through that plan, but I have faith – and I am not asking anyone else to accept this perspective – that there is a good purpose inherent in the Divine plan. God might play rough at times, but Divinity is not malicious even as God permits people to be so.

Baba was acting in accordance with his role in the Divine passion-play, just as Iblis stays within character in that same play. And, the fact of the matter is that I have learned a great deal through my association with Baba even if the nature of that association was, for many years, not what I took it to be.

I learned even more about life, myself, other people, and the Sufi path when I came to learn about Baba's many betrayals of me and others. So, in a sense, I am grateful to Baba that he has been the locus of manifestation through which so many opportunities for change and learning came into my life. If not for him, I might not be the person I have become ... and I feel I have become a better person than I was prior to Baba, although this is so in spite of Baba and not because of him.

Divinity was the One Who took me by the hand and helped me become free from all of Baba's tricks, manipulations, exploitations, re-framings, and betrayals. However, part of the Sufi approach to adab is that one should always acknowledge the role of the one through whom

God's Grace arrives at one's doorstep – no matter how problematic the nature of that locus of manifestation might be.

I also realize that God is the real Teacher and that God is the one who has been using Baba's locus of manifestation to teach me about myself and life. God is the One toward Who the real praise should be directed, whereas Baba was merely a locus of manifestation who colored, shaped, and flavored the nature of the teaching that was coming my way.

I have implicit trust in God that the right thing will always be done with respect to me. However, even if evidence were disclosed to me that indicated that Baba had been a knowing and willing locus through which this part of the Divine plan was given manifestation with respect to me, nonetheless, I would tell Baba that, in the future, he would have to earn whatever trust might be extended to him by me – my unconditional trust these days is for God alone and not necessarily for any given locus of manifestation.

Furthermore, I would tell Baba that the bar would be set exceedingly high with respect to the issue of trust in relation to him. I have my doubts that he would be able to clear such a bar without knocking it to the ground.

§

The foregoing sort of exercise led to another thought-experiment. What if: someone was to come to me with incontrovertible proof – and I have no idea what this would look like at this point -- that Dr. Irfan was a spiritual fraud. What would I think about this, and how would it affect me?

First, I believe that my faith in God has, to some extent, become independent of Dr. Irfan, just as, in a sense -- to be elaborated upon shortly – my faith in God has become independent of the Qur'an, or the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), or the prophetic tradition, or the awliya (friends) of God. In addition, my faith in God is independent of Islamic and Muslim history.

Even if someone were to come to me today and demonstrate that the Qur'an was not Divine Revelation, and that the Prophet

Muhammad (peace be upon him) never existed, and that the recorded events of Islamic history were mere stories without substantive reality, my faith in God would remain. This is not a blind faith but is a faith that is rooted in more than fifty years of rigorous critical investigation into the many mysteries surrounding: the origins of the universe; the origins of the universal constants; the origins of life; the origins of consciousness; the origins of logic, rationality, and mathematics; the origins of language; the origins of genius and artistic talent; the origins of moral character.

Science, despite its many accomplishments, really doesn't have the slightest credible thing to say about any of the foregoing mysteries. To be sure, science has generated many theories over the years concerning all of the foregoing, but one really only has to study science – and I have done this most of my life -- to understand just how truly impoverished science is when it comes to the most important questions with which human beings are confronted.

Of course, I don't have the answers to any of the foregoing mysteries either. However, I do have faith that God has made it all possible. I also have faith that God is not 'an absentee landlord' as the Al Pacino character roared in the movie: *'Devil's Advocate'*.

I have faith that God is both imminent as well as transcendent. I have faith that God has a purpose for me and for all of creation.

I have no desire to try to induce others to accept my form of faith. This is between me and the Universe and Beyond the Universe.

I know that science cannot disprove any of what I am saying. I know that there is nothing in science that is capable of shaking my faith since even if science were to come up with a unified field theory for the physical universe, science still would have an even more arduous challenge before it in order to be able to show how one could reduce the multifaceted origins issue down to purely physical events.

I don't believe that science will ever be capable of demonstrating any of the foregoing possibilities. However, if science should, some bright sunny day, come up with the answers for every single mystery known to human beings, it wouldn't matter, because I know that this is not going to happen in my lifetime so, really, such considerations are irrelevant to my present mode of faith.

Show me the money, so to speak, in the form of the empirical coin of the realm and, maybe, the nature of my faith will change. Until then, scientists are every bit as much rooted in matters of faith as I am.

Some scientists have faith that the universe is a self-contained, purely physical/material set of phenomena. I have faith that this is not so, and, although I am biased in this respect, I feel my faith is rooted in more fertile earth than their faith is.

Dr. Irfan, the Qur'an, the Prophet, the saints, Islamic history, and even Baba have served as a kind of scaffolding for me, but I do not mean to infer by saying this that I consider them to be merely incidental props in my life.

Scaffolding is very necessary in the building of all kinds of things – including faith. My faith would not have the characteristics, shape, colors, orientation, or inclinations it has if it had not been for the scaffolding that has been given to me through my relationship with Dr. Irfan, the Qur'an, the Prophet, the saints, and, yes, Baba.

Discipline, purpose, intentionality, remembrance, understanding, and modalities of truth all have been built into my life because of the aforementioned scaffolding. Qualities – in varying shades of completeness and purity – of patience, forgiveness, compassion, integrity, honesty, perseverance, humility, gratitude, love, piety, longing, nobility, charitableness, sacrifice, and friendship have been built into my being because of the scaffolding that was arranged for me across my life through my association with Dr. Irfan.

If someone were to show me incontrovertible proof that Dr. Irfan were a spiritual fraud, I still would be grateful to him because of the way that the scaffolding which came to me through him has, in my opinion, made me a better, sturdier, more aesthetically pleasing structure that is capable of withstanding, God willing, intense earthquakes, tornadoes, and hurricanes of the emotional, psychological, and spiritual kind.

I had faith before I met Dr. Irfan – however tattered, weak, and pathetic such faith might have been. Dr. Irfan took me by the hand and helped me to learn how to make whole again that which was tattered, and he showed me how to become stronger, and he helped me to be a better person than I was.

I do not profess to be a perfect human being. However, thanks to God and the manner in which Divinity had Dr. Irfan's rizq and my rizq fused together for a time, the faith with which I came to him was hammered into a somewhat useful metal that is not quite so ignoble and dross as it once was.

Lara once said to me during a private chat in Baba's virtual community that I could not help being what I was anymore than she could stop being what she was. There are, at least, two dimensions to her observation and, at the time, Lara was only looking through the lens of one of these possibilities.

I believe we all have the potential for constructive good and that the nature of this constructive goodness is fixed for each of us in a unique way. This is what Islam refers to as fitra – our essential capacity ... the purpose for which each of us has been created and the purpose for which Deen, or the spiritual way, was given to human beings in order to help each of us to realize the potential of fitra.

At the same time, we all have a potential for destructive evil, and this capacity is manifested through the actions and intentions of the unredeemed nafs or ego. This is the part that, at the time of our chat, Lara was referring to and in which she believed, rightly or wrongly, that I was caught up in.

However, the part of me that couldn't help being what it is in the good, constructive sense noted above was the part of me with which Lara fell in love. Moreover, this part of me that can't help being what it is – and all praise belongs to Allah with respect to this part – is the part of me that stood by Lara through all the ups and downs of our relationship ... and for a long time, there were many more downward spirals than there were upward movements.

All of life is series of engagements with Divinity through a variety of loci of manifestation, each of which has something to teach us concerning the nature of the Divine plan and the nature of our own essential capacity to come to realize and understand that plan. Some of these engagements are expressions of jalali qualities of Divinity ... the difficult, rigorous, painful, heavy, problematic aspects of existence – at least for most human beings. Some of these engagements are expressions of jamali qualities of Divinity ... the loving, compassionate, ecstatic, easy, friendly aspects of existence. Finally, some of the

aforementioned engagements with different loci of manifestation are mixtures of jamali and jalali qualities ... as in the case of learning spiritual discipline and trying to purify one's nafs.

My interaction with Baba, considered as a whole, was a case of severe compassion, with the accent on 'severe'. My interaction with Dr. Irfan, considered as a whole, was a case of compassionate severity, with the accent on 'compassionate'.

My faith is not an intellectual exercise. Rather, my faith is informed by intellectual rigor just as much as my faith informs my rational probing of experience. There is a dynamic dialectic between the two. In fact, among other things, my faith encourages, if not pushes, me to seek to have integrity in all such pursuits.

I feel truths in my heart and soul through the lens of faith every time I pray, or fast, or give charity, or read the Qur'an, or do zikr, or listen to Qawwali, or do service to others. Moreover, every time I engage in these activities, they help me to purify and, thereby, constructively enhance the manner through which I engage the universe - intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

My faith is not predicated on miracles or wondrous deeds or mystical experiences even though I do not deny that such events do and have occurred in relation to me as well as with respect to others. My faith is not dependent on requiring others to understand life in the way that I do, for I believe the truth is sufficiently broad, rich, and deep enough to accommodate many angles of engagement even while, at the same time, reality, by its very nature, establishes principles and criteria through which, if God wishes, one comes to discern the true from the false.

I do have faith that the Qur'an is one of the Divine Revelations that have been sent to humankind, and I am nourished in many ways when I, with God's help, open my heart to what the Qur'an wishes to disclose to me. I do have faith that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is one of the authentic prophets -- beginning with Adam (peace be upon him) -- who have been sent to humankind, and I am opened up to much wisdom by reflecting on his example. I do have faith in many saints from a variety of spiritual traditions, and they all have inspired me, at one time or another, to try to be a better person than I

was. I do have faith that Baba was a false shaykh while Dr. Irfan was, by the Grace of Allah, an authentic shaykh.

Yet, even if, through some strange congregation of events, all of the foregoing sources of spiritual guidance in which I have faith were, suddenly, inexplicably turned upside down and, somehow, were proven to be incorrect, then God willing, I still would have my essential faith in Divinity – the raw faith that God has given me in an act of pure, undeserved Grace that assists me to continuously work toward deepening, strengthening, expanding, and rendering this primitive faith to become wiser than it has been in relation to all aspects of my life, both within and without. May God enable me to increase such efforts, and might God bless such efforts with success in the form of a constructive faith through which I might benefit myself and others.