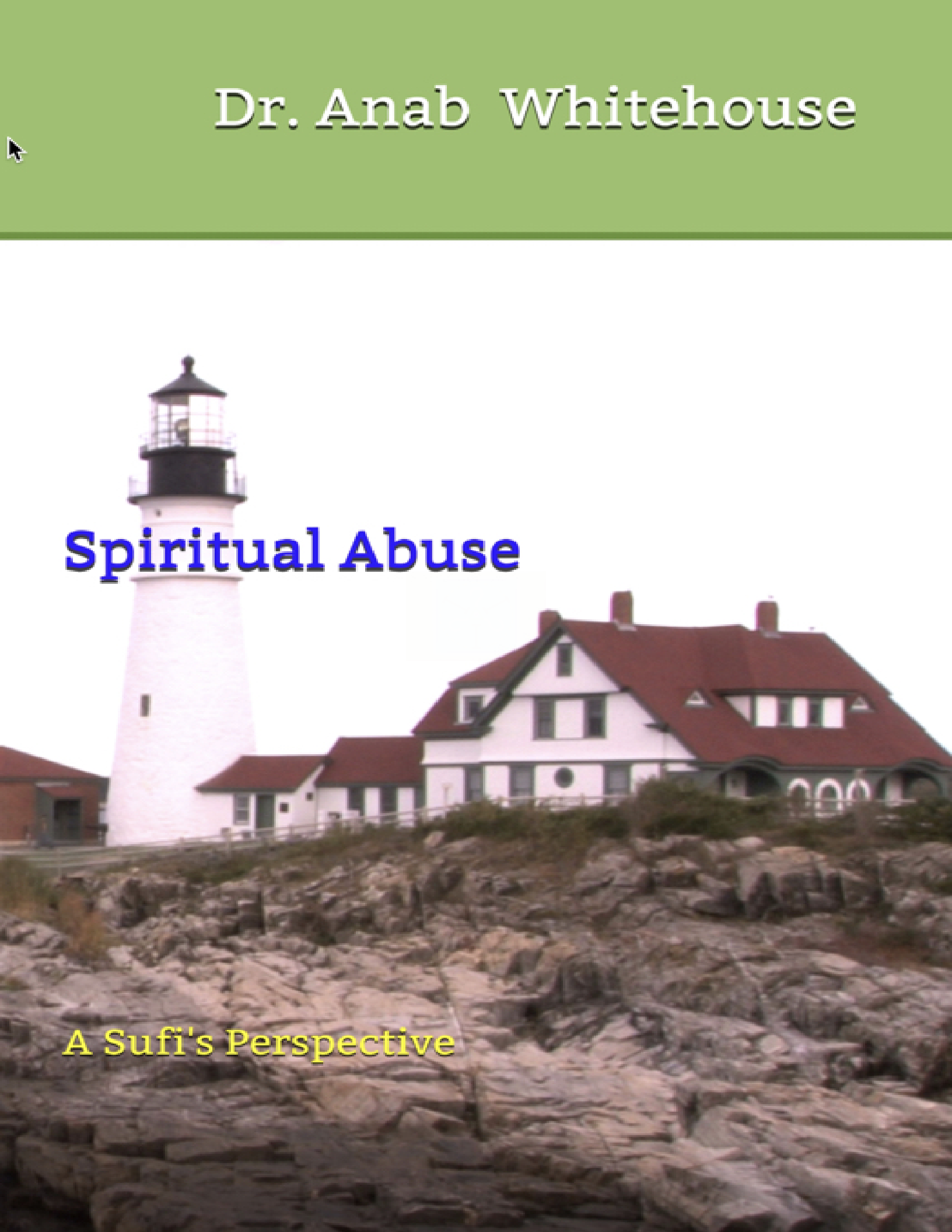


Dr. Anab Whitehouse

Spiritual Abuse

A Sufi's Perspective



© 2018, Anab Whitehouse
The Interrogative Imperative Institute
Brewer, Maine
04412

All rights are reserved. With the exception of material being used in compliance with the 'Fair Usage' clause of the Copyright Act, no portion of this publication might be reproduced in any form without the express written permission of the publisher. Furthermore, no part of this book might be stored in a retrieval system, nor transmitted in any form or by any means -- whether electronic, mechanical, photo-reproduction or otherwise --without authorization from the publisher

For Bilquees and Dr. Baig: My traveling companions along the road toward greater understanding. By the Grace of God, they helped me journey through the valley of the shadow of doubt and to fear no evil.

Table of Contents

Introduction – page 7

1) FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) – page 11

2) Characterizing Spiritual Abuse - Part One – page 19

3) Characterizing Abuse - Part Two – page 25

4) Ya Shaykh – page 33

5) How Do We Know? – page 35

6) Rules of Recognition – page 43

7) Experience of Spiritual Abuse – page 61

8) Staying and Leaving – page 67

9) Never Again – page 73

10) Victim's Mentality – page 79

11) Perpetrators – page 83

12) Aspirations – page 89

13) Proprieties – page 91

14) Canadian Wilderness – page 99

15) The Nature of Deen – page 109

16) Veiled Guidance – page 123

17) Need For A Shaykh – page 129

18) Doubts – page 141

19) The Guru Papers – page 149

20) The Grieving Process – page 163

21) Forgiveness – page 197

22) Naming Names – page 205

23) Abusing Love – page 213

24) Internet Connection – page 219

25) Construction of Reality – page 225

26) A Fate Worse Than Death – page 255

27) Narcissistic Spirituality – page 271

28) The Boundary Problem – page 289

- 29) Science And Mysticism – page 319
- 30) Signs, Truth And The Way – page 327
- 31) Interstitial Space – page 335
- 32) Tears Of Life – page 341
- 33) A Beginning – page 345
- 34) Assumptions – page 347
- 35) Seeking – page 349
- 36) A Matter of Trust – page 359
- 37) The False And The True – page 361
- 38) Eight Warning Signs – page 363
- 39) More Warning Signs? – page 373
- 40) Trance States – page 385
- 41) Authenticity – page 393
- 42) Shari'ah and Bi'dah – page 399
- 43) Gurdjieff – page 405
- 44) People Of the Lie – page 413
- 45) The Mahdi and Caliphacy – page 419
- 46) Discernment – page 429
- 47) Whomsoever God Pleases – page 435
- 48) Initiation – page 445
- 49) Genuine Fake – page 453
- 50) Close Encounters Of A Different Kind – page 459
- 51) Phenomenology of Charisma – page 471
- 52) Terrorism, Dissociation and Abuse – page 515
- 53) A Story and Its Symbolism – page 577
- 54) Qualities of a Teacher – page 585

Introduction

Spiritual abuse assumes many different forms. Such manifestations might be mild, or they can be quite intense and malevolent.

No religious or mystical tradition is immune from the presence of spiritual abuse, for, wherever there are people who are seeking to become closer to essential truths, purpose, and meaning, there will be individuals seeking to generate counterfeit currency to offer to those who are unaware of, or incautious toward, the dangers that lie in wait along the spiritual path.

Some instances of spiritual abuse might involve gullible individuals who are induced to become committed to a 'guide' or teacher who, when examined even superficially in an impartial manner, might exhibit many of the warning characteristics of a spiritual charlatan. Unfortunately, in many other cases, the problem of recognition with respect to a given 'false teacher' becomes much more difficult and subtle.

Just as there are hack engravers and master engravers who are involved in the production of counterfeit money, so, too, there are huge differences in the level of 'artistry' exhibited by those who would pass themselves off as authentic spiritual guides. Some fraudulent guides are fairly easy to spot, but there are others who present a far greater challenge.

Spiritual abuse might occur in neighborhood churches, mosques, temples, centers, and other places of religious/spiritual gathering. This problem also might take place in much more exotic and/or remote settings,

Fraudulent teachers might call themselves a guru, shaykh, rimpoché, monk, priest, imam, apostle, avatar, or minister. They also might call themselves educators, revolutionaries, political leaders, and freedom fighters.

All forms of terrorism, whether these are acts of individuals or of states, presuppose the existence of spiritual abuse. Terrorism cannot occur unless someone -- a leader, master, or authority figure -- uses techniques of undue influence to induce other people -- followers, initiates, devotees, citizens -- to commit atrocities in the name of

Divinity, spiritual purity, Justice, and Truth. All such forms of inducement are expressions of spiritual abuse.

The present book, *Spiritual Abuse: A Sufi's Perspective*, arises out of my experiences with a spiritual charlatan who called himself a Sufi shaykh or guide. Although a number of chapters within this book entail discussions that focus on themes that are steeped in the terminology of Islam, in general, and the Sufi Path in particular, much of this book is of relevance to anyone who is interested in, or struggling with, problems of spirituality and mysticism, irrespective of the particular tradition with which he or she might identify.

In addition, sometimes, it is easier to recognize a problem in one's own life when one is, first, introduced to a given issue in a context that, initially, seems to be far removed from one's everyday commitments and priorities. More specifically, while some of the chapters of *Spiritual Abuse: A Sufi's Perspective* have a specific Sufi/Islamic flavor to them, anyone who has an interest in spirituality will be able to feel a sense of resonance with the issues and problems that are being discussed in conjunction with the Sufi mystical tradition.

Furthermore, there are many other chapters in *Spiritual Abuse: A Sufi's Perspective* that are written in a way that, hopefully, will provide a more universal appeal to readers who come from a non-Muslim, and/or non-Sufi background. In other words, these other chapters explore themes that have applicability to a variety of spiritual traditions beyond that of Islam and the Sufi path.

There are many people within the Sufi/Muslim community who will give lip service to the idea that there have been and, probably, are some individuals who, in both the past and the present, have sought to pass themselves off as authentic spiritual guides, when, in truth, they were, or are, spiritual counterfeits. However, the same individuals who might be willing to give lip service to this issue, often tend to feel that it is unseemly and, somehow, inappropriate to suppose that this issue is anything more than a marginal, incidental, isolated, and occasional problem.

Based on my research of the past several years, the problems being addressed in this book are both substantial and pervasive. This does not mean that everyone who calls himself or herself a spiritual guide is a charlatan, for I do believe, on the basis of personal

experience, that authentic, Sufi teachers do exist in this day and age, but, nonetheless, at the same time, I believe -- based on my own experiences, research, and the communications of many people from different parts of the world -- there are an array of spiritually abusive relationships that are being inflicted on thousands of people by Sufi charlatans in countries around the world, including the United States and Canada.

This problem is not small. It is huge, but all too many people within the Sufi/Muslim community are in denial about the existence of such spiritual abuse and seem to feel that if they just pull the covers up over their heads, the problem, like any good boogeyman, will just disappear into the night. This might have worked when one was a child, but it will not work now.

Perhaps, because of perceptions concerning events of 9/11, Muslims and Sufis are feeling so defensive that they believe any attempt to publicly examine the issue of spiritual abuse within the Sufi/Muslim community is ill - considered under the present circumstances. The search for truth will always be an inconvenience for those who have vested interests to protect.

I, obviously, am of a different opinion. In fact, I believe that the shadow cast by the tragedy of 9/11 offers a tremendous opportunity to begin to critically examine the dynamics and nature of spiritual abuse -- both within Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

This is my belief for a number of reasons. Foremost among these reasons is the following one: spiritual abuse was at the heart of the 9/11 tragedies -- not only in terms of the histories of the individuals who plotted and carried out such acts of terrorism (although I am not suggesting, here, that any of those individuals claimed to be a Sufi or had a Sufi teacher), but also in relation to the histories of those government and media figures around the world who, either intentionally or unintentionally, helped bring about a set of circumstances that were conducive to the occurrence of the events on 9/11.

At first blush, the problems of spiritual abuse in the Sufi/Muslim community might seem to have little to do with the events of 9/11. However, when one begins to probe the matter further, one starts to understand that the dynamics and factors that are in play in the realm

of spiritual abuse in conjunction with the Sufi path, also are in play in the realm of terrorism and the abusive effects that international economic and political policy have upon the souls of people throughout the world.

Beginnings are always difficult. But, begin we must.

Although the primary focus of the present work revolves about the issue of spiritual abuse, virtually all of the principles, themes, and dynamics that are explored in the following pages are fully applicable to a wide variety of situations in which abuse is being perpetrated even though the nature of such abuse, at least on the surface, might appear to be removed from the mystical quest. The dynamics of personal relationships, families, schools, organizations, corporations, and governments are all capable of giving expression to abusive relationships ... in fact, one might wish to argue that abuse, whatever its particular mode of manifestation, constitutes a violation of another individual's basic rights as a human being such that the latter's search for truth, meaning, purpose, and identity are undermined, disrupted, thwarted, and/or corrupted by another person or group of people (or both).

One should feel free to read the essays in whatever order one likes. Although the chapters are, hopefully, complementary with respect to each other, they also can be read independently of, and do not presuppose, one another.

Chapter 1: FAQs -- Frequently Asked Questions

(1) Is the Sufi Path a cult?

Response: There is a considerable difference of opinion about what constitutes a 'cult'. The definitions of a cult tend to vary with the theoretical, religious, and psychological biases of the people who are doing the defining.

Some researchers contend that 'cults' or 'cultic relationships' revolve around four primary features: (a) the nature of a group's origins; (b) the personality of the leader, along with the sort of role a leader plays within the group; (c) the kind of power structure that links a leader and those who follow her or him; (d) the presence or absence of a system of thought-reform, sometimes referred to as 'brainwashing'.

Supposedly, cults and cultic relationships tend to give expression to social arrangements in which a self-appointed, charismatic leader uses techniques of persuasion to induce others to venerate her or him, rather than either Divinity or principles of ethics, law, and government (depending on the sort of cult or cultic relationship), and, in addition, employs authoritarian modalities of maintaining allegiance.

However, there are many individuals who are fraudulent spiritual guides who do not necessarily conform to the foregoing model. For example, they might not appear to be self-appointed (although this might, in fact, be the case but it is hidden) but, rather, are presented (by themselves and/or others) as 'teachers' who, allegedly, are selected by duly appointed spiritual authorities. Moreover, in many cases, a fraudulent teacher might not be charismatic but, instead, merely seems to be very sincere, compassionate, kind, loving, and authoritative in the things that are said or written by that individual, and, as well, in relation to that person's surface behavior.

In addition, no overt authoritarian or mind-control techniques might be readily detectable. Followers of a spiritual charlatan might seem to be prepared to freely comply with the suggestions of the teacher. Finally, a fraudulent teacher might not overtly court the veneration of others and might even profess not to care for being treated in a special manner but, nonetheless, 'humbly and reluctantly'

accepts the freely given offerings of love in order not to hurt the feelings of followers.

Spiritual abuse is not a function of whether a given set of social relationships conforms to someone's definition of a cult or cultic relationships. Rather, spiritual abuse is a matter of whether one person intends to exploit, manipulate, control, undermine, corrupt, obstruct, or injure the spiritual capacity of another human being in order to serve some personal agenda (emotional, social, physical, material, psychological, financial) of the first individual.

Because intentions are very difficult to gauge and since there are a wide variety of techniques that can be used to re-frame the 'appearance' of intentions, oftentimes the presence of spiritual abuse can be camouflaged or masked. Authoritarian power might, or might not, be exercised, and a leader might, or might not, be charismatic and/or self-appointed, and a leader might, or might not, employ a coordinated set of techniques to persuade people to become followers.

Nevertheless, one theme that remains consistent across different modes of spiritual abuse is an underlying intention to deceive in order to gain the trust of another human being, for trust is the gateway to the soul of that person. Once such trust is given, almost anything becomes possible as far as the issue of exploitation and manipulation is concerned in relation to the person who has given her or his trust to another human being.

(2) What is the most difficult aspect of spiritual abuse from which to recover?

Response: The answer to this question might vary from individual to individual. However, in general, the most devastating dimension of recovering from spiritual abuse is the sense of essential betrayal and mistrust that arises in conjunction with a person's realization that he or she has been spiritually exploited.

There are many psychological, emotional, social, financial and spiritual wounds that might ensue from a spiritually abusive relationship. Yet, often times, long after many of these kinds of problem are resolved, there remains a lingering paralysis of trust, and one's willingness to invest that essential part of ourselves in anything

else -- whether it be oneself, another human being, or an organization of some kind.

(3) Are only certain types of personalities or developmental backgrounds drawn to situations of spiritual abuse?

Response: There is a common misconception among many people that only 'weak', stupid, naive, 'simple', emotionally disturbed, uneducated, fools are likely to become entangled with spiritually abusive individuals. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Almost everyone is vulnerable to the possibility of spiritual abuse. Only a person who is pathologically incapable of trusting another human being is relatively immune to being exploited by a spiritually abusive individual.

The currency of spiritual abuse is trust. Once trust is given, a person becomes vulnerable to being spiritually abused and betrayed, and there are some life circumstances that incline us to be more willing to invest our trust than are other life circumstances.

More specifically, when, due to certain happenings of life, a person is feeling isolated, alienated, frustrated, or has experienced a substantial loss of some kind, or is in developmental transition, or is going through emotional turmoil, then, one might be in substantial need of a sense of peace, stability, friendship, kindness, meaning, direction, purpose, motivation, and love during such times. Consequently, if, at these junctures in our lives, we are introduced into, or happen into, the sphere of influence of a spiritually abusive individual, we might be quite ready to invest our trust because our normal defenses of critical circumspection and/or usual, natural reluctance to commit ourselves have been lowered as a result of what is going on elsewhere in our lives.

(4) Is it true that once a person has begun to come to the realization that she or he has been spiritually abused, then, disengaging from a spiritually abusive individual is relatively straightforward?

Response: The short answer to the foregoing question is: no. As years of research with respect to such phenomena as domestic abuse

[whether spousal or that involving parent(s) and a child (children)], the so-called Stockholm Syndrome, and related issues have demonstrated, the emotional relationship between abuser and abused is very complex.

The dimension of an abuser-abused relationship that enables an abuser to continue to have a debilitating emotional claim on the minds, hearts, and souls of those who have been abused by such an individual is very insidious and runs extremely deep -- even after the abused person comes to realize that abuse has been perpetrated. There are many reasons why such a pathological theme continues in the life of an abused individual, and such reasons are tied to, among other things, the personality, developmental life history, social circumstances, the specific vulnerabilities of such an abused individual, as well as the kind of recovery assistance that is, or is not, received by that person.

(5) Is recovery from spiritual abuse just a matter of 'time healing all wounds'?

Response: Not necessarily. Although there are always exceptions, the basic rule of spiritual abuse recovery is that those individuals who have had an opportunity to go through some sort of debriefing and disengagement process with one, or more, other individuals tend to adjust more completely and more quickly than do those people who try to sort out such matters on their own. In fact, in the latter set of instances, the long-term prognosis for emotional, spiritual, social, and psychological recovery tends to be relatively poor.

(6) Are people who are spiritually abusive easy to identify?
Response: If the answer to this question were 'yes', the problem of spiritual abuse might be a lot simpler to resolve. The fact of the matter is: very few spiritually abusive people appear to be so upon first, and even subsequent, contact. In fact, many spiritually abusive individuals seem to be down-to-earth, intelligent, sincere, committed, thoughtful, empathetic, emotionally stable, kind, loving human beings.

If spiritually abusive individuals frothed at the mouth, or had a deranged look about them, or were overtly cruel, then, we all would know what to avoid. However, it is the conspicuous absence of such

clear signs that, sometimes, makes detection of spiritually abusive behavior very difficult.

Furthermore, the whole issue of mysticism is, for the seeker, steeped in ambiguity, uncertainty, puzzlement, apparent paradoxes, differences of opinion, and so on. Consequently, a newcomer to the mystical path, and even many veterans, have difficulty critically processing information in a way that would permit her or him to make definitive judgments about whether, or not, a given person is being spiritually abusive.

Through techniques of misdirection, re-framing, consensual validation, and plausible deniability, spiritually abusive individuals are able to muddy the waters sufficiently to give themselves degrees of freedom through which to keep the suspicions and doubts of any given individual off-balance so that a seeker is, quite frequently, never quite sure whether one is being abused or not. Many abused individuals are caught between a rock and a hard place since, on the one hand, there might be a certain amount of inconclusive evidence that something 'funny' or inappropriate is going on, but, on the other hand, such a person does not want to lose one's relationship with an 'authentic' spiritual guide if it turns out that these sort of suspicions and doubts are not well-founded.

(7) What are some of the emotional consequences that ensue from the realization that one has been spiritually abused?

Response: Among the emotional conditions experienced by someone who either has begun to suspect, or actually realized, that one is being spiritually abused are the following: shame, guilt, denial, grief, self-doubt, cynicism, betrayal, anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder, fear, alienation, de-realization (a sense that nothing is real), depersonalization (the sense that one is not an actual person), apathy, mistrust, mood swings, depression, hyper-vigilance, and dissociation. Any given individual might not experience all of the foregoing states, but, at the very least, most such people will have to struggle with issues revolving about a core sense of betrayal, self-doubt, mistrust, and alienation.

(8) What forms does spiritual abuse take?

Response: In one sense, there are as many kinds of spiritual abuse as there are different agendas of individual abusers. In another sense, there are certain kinds of spiritually abusive behavior that tend to keep showing up.

For instance, some spiritually abusive individuals seek to exploit people to gain access to material possessions, money, power, fame, veneration, and/or sexual partners. However, irrespective of the presence or absence of the foregoing possibilities, the sine qua non of spiritual abuse is the transmission of false information concerning an alleged teacher's actual ability to help a person realize the spiritual purpose of the latter's life or to assist a seeker to achieve spiritual realization through such a fraudulent guide.

All of the other forms of spiritual abuse are, in a sense, entirely secondary to this underlying problem since the 'hook' that makes all these modes of exploitation, manipulation and abuse possible is the promise of spiritual development, fulfillment, realization and sanctity. This is the essential trust that is betrayed, and the rest of the forms of spiritual abuse mentioned earlier -- whether sexual, financial, or otherwise -- merely add considerable and very painful insult to this more essential form of spiritual abuse.

(9) What is the most frustrating facet of trying to inform other people associated with a fraudulent teacher about the perpetration of spiritual abuse?

Response: Almost no one believes you. The emotional, psychological, social, conceptual, material, and spiritual investment of fellow followers in a so-called teacher tends to be so extensive that such individuals usually enter into significant denial about what is being related to them from another member of the group.

Quite frequently, the person who is disclosing information about the perpetration of spiritual abuse becomes the issue rather than the behavior of the so-called teacher. The motivations of the former individual (i.e., the whistle blower) are constantly called into question and being construed as being less than sincere, honest, or fair with respect to the alleged spiritual guide.

In addition, the moral authority of the person who is speaking about the existence of spiritual abuse is far less than the moral authority enjoyed by someone with the title of "shaykh". Moreover, this moral authority tends to be freely projected onto a spiritual charlatan by his or her followers, whereas someone who broaches the subject of spiritual improprieties is subjected to the most brutal of cross-examinations -- which often are less about fact-finding or determining the truth of a matter and more about trying to force back into silence those who are crying out for help.

(10) Is it necessary for there to be direct, physical contact between a spiritually abusive individual and another human being in order for the latter to fall under the sway of the former?

Response: Not at all. In fact, there is a great deal of recruitment of targets by spiritually abusive individuals that is going on through the Internet.

The Internet offers a perfect cover of anonymity through which the character and flow of information can be almost completely controlled without the fear of that information being contradicted by disclosures concerning the problematic and inappropriate behaviors of a spiritual fraud. Once trust has been established through whatever disingenuous means, the individual who has handed over her or his trust has been 'groomed' to be induced to move in almost any direction the spiritually abusive teacher cares to take that person.

Chapter 2: Characterizing Spiritual Abuse

Perhaps, as a means of trying to get the discussion -- or part of it -- under way, let's consider the following possibilities. Spiritual abuse is any interaction that seeks to compel -- whether through force, pressure, intimidation, emotional blackmail/duress, or other methods of covert control -- another human being to believe or act in certain ways. At the heart of any spiritual/mystical path is the inherent, God-given freedom to accept or reject the Divine purpose of life, and while individuals might wish to disagree or discuss various possibilities concerning the precise nature of what that Divine purpose is or what this purpose might entail, no one has the right to impose on others what that Divine purpose should be or demand that people must comply or conform with such possibilities. The freedom to choose -- which is a Divinely given gift -- should not be curtailed through coercive means ... physical, emotional, psychological, social, or spiritual.

Or, approached from another direction, spiritual abuse is: any interaction in which the intention or *niyat* of one person is to corrupt, obstruct, undermine, interfere with, subvert, mislead, destroy, or impair the essential relationship that each person enjoys with his or her Creator. Thus, spiritual abuse is any interaction in which there is some intention, agenda, purpose, or goal other than a wish for the spiritually constructive enhancement of another person's life -- not according to what one might believe is in someone else's best spiritual interests, but according to what Divinity's plan is for that individual.

Ultimately, the only person who has the responsibility for deciding or judging what God's plan is for an individual is the individual himself or herself. Others -- such as a spiritual guide, teacher, *shaykh*, *murshid*, guide or *pir* -- might be called upon as resources in assisting an individual to try to reach the best informed decision possible. Nonetheless, it is a breach of spiritual *adab* or etiquette to seek to manipulate that decision making process. This is especially the case when this is done for self-serving purposes ... no matter how nobly and beautifully packaged this manipulation might be.

Or, approached from, yet, another direction, spiritual abuse is any form of interaction that seeks, intentionally, to treat deception, disinformation, lies, misinformation, and falsehoods as if they were

spiritual guidance rather than error. It is one thing to have differences of opinion about this or that teaching and to explore those differences in methodical, rigorous, but diplomatic ways, and it is quite another to use discussion as a tool of obfuscation for the purposes of influencing people to seek other than the truth -- for the truth is all that stands between us and error.

One might also say that spiritual abuse is any form of interaction that is authoritarian in nature and that provides few, or no, degrees of freedom for full disclosure -- or, as much disclosure as is feasible at any given time -- with respect to critically examining (in an appropriately respectful and discrete manner) issues involving: identity, doubt, faith, truth, questions, concerns, purposes, meaning, methodology, justice, knowledge, understanding, integrity, adab (spiritual etiquette), morality, duty, responsibility, or disparities between what is said and what is done with respect to any of the participants in a given group, including the leader or guide of that group.

Two further characterizations of spiritual abuse are as follows:

(a) spiritual abuse is any form of interaction that induces a person to have fundamental doubts about trusting the intuitions of one's essential nature that abusive behavior is taking place (more on this shortly);

(b) spiritual abuse is any form of interaction that is designed to exploit the genuine, sincere yearning of a human being for contact with the Divine and transform this yearning into serving someone else's agenda of the nafs (the unredeemed tendency to rebel against truth) or dunya (the entanglements that are created by the collective interactions of the nafs of different individuals).

If we go back to the first added characterization or definition of spiritual abuse noted above, there are several qualifying points that should be made. First, many people who have experienced spiritual abuse have referred to a sense of (to borrow from Hafiz) 'there's something just not quite right about this camel ride'.

Unfortunately, many of us -- I know I have -- have tended to shelve these intuitions ... that is, put them aside. On the one hand, these things that involve the behavior of an alleged teacher have bothered us, and

we often have a clear intuition that there is something that is wrong about what is transpiring -- although we might not be able to put our finger on precisely what this is.

Yet, on the other hand, despite the gut or heart sense that something is problematic about the sham-shaykh's behavior, there is a tendency to want to make excuses for the so-called teacher. Consequently, we tend to write off our intuitions with "Well, I guess I don't understand, or I guess there must be something deeper involved here that I don't understand and, therefore, whatever I might think is worrisome really isn't".

The fact of the matter is, in an essential way, we might very well have understood what was going on ... but we discounted it at the time. Fraudulent shaykhs take advantage of this basic tendency in human beings to distrust themselves, and abusive teachers induce people to develop this tendency so that, over a period of time, people are less and less inclined to doubt the sincerity of the alleged spiritual teacher.

Fraudulent shaykhs are adept at getting people to censor themselves so that whenever these nagging intuitions rise to the surface, we push them back out of consciousness, feeling anxious, guilty or ashamed that such thoughts are present and treating such intuitions as if they are just further proof of how spiritually low we are -- after all, only someone who is vulnerable to the whisperings of Satan (Iblis) would be so vile as to have such doubts about someone so 'noble', wonderful, yada, yada, yada as the shaykh.

There is a very delicate problem in all of this. We all are beset with an inclination, if we are not vigilant, to follow the impulses, desires, rebellions, intentions, and base behaviors of the nafs. Furthermore, we are all vulnerable to the whisperings of the shaytan (those who would lead us astray from the straight path of truth).

The existence of such vulnerabilities is one of the things that renders us all in need of spiritual guidance. We need to learn how to navigate around the rocks and reefs to which the inclinations of nafs and the whisperings of the shaytan give expression within the phenomenology of our consciousness.

At the same time, God has given certain faculties -- such as the mind, heart, sirr (mystery), kafi (hidden), spirit, and aqfah (the most

hidden) as tools through which to realize the truth as it is manifested in different dimensions, realms, worlds and levels of Being. Ilham (literally, flashes of intuition) or kashf (unveiling) are both means through which we might be opened up to an aspect of the truth by the Grace of God.

When we had intuitions that there was 'something not quite right about the camel ride' in conjunction with a person who claimed to be a shaykh, we tended to discount them. Instead, we listened to other sources of influences that led us to believe that we could not trust our basic intuitions concerning the truth of what was being experienced.

A true teacher helps an individual to constructively enhance one's capacity for veridical or true intuitions and unveilings about the presence of Divinity in one's life and within one's being. A false teacher seeks to invert this and tries to get us to listen to, and trust, the world-view of the would-be 'guide' rather than our own inner, God-given intuitions and understandings.

The purpose of the Sufi path is not to make us into carbon copies of the teacher. God has given to each of us a uniqueness that is inherent in our spiritual capacity, and if we were to try to become our teacher, this facet of uniqueness would not be served -- for Creation never repeats itself, and one of the purposes of Divine manifestation is to give expression to the full infinity of the Hidden Treasure that is -- as we are told in a Hadith Qudsi -- the reason why Creation was brought forth in the first place.

A true teacher knows all of the foregoing and, consequently, works with a seeker to help the individual struggle toward realization of this spiritual uniqueness. A false teacher does whatever he or she can to subvert the foregoing process and re-direct everything to express service to, adoration of, and sacrifice wishes of the false teacher ... and seen in this light, the two additional definitions or characterizations of spiritual abuse cited earlier make a great deal of sense.

Many individuals have pointed out how difficult it is, sometimes, for newcomers to distinguish between Haqq (Truth/Reality) and falsehood with respect to the mystical path. The fact of the matter is, this problem of differentiating between truth and falsehood is often very difficult for even people who have been engaged in suluk (spiritual travel) for many years -- even in relation to some shaykhs

(and there are numerous stories in the literature about how some shaykhs have fallen from great spiritual heights precisely because of having difficulty dealing with this problem of differentiating between Haqq and falsehood).

The foregoing problem of differentiating between Haqq and falsehood is why one needs an authentic shaykh -- that is, someone who is capable of, God willing, being able to intuit or understand the difference between the two in order to be able to properly guide a seeker and help the seeker avoid the numerous swamps, dangers, and predators that can be found along the way of spiritual travel. False teachers understand the nature of this need and use it to gain a foothold in the hearts and minds of those who yearn to learn the difference between truth and falsehood.

Once a false teacher has insinuated himself or herself into the psyches of seekers, then, little by little, the alleged teacher begins to poison the seeker and turn her or him into a spiritual invalid who becomes totally dependent on the teacher. The horror of this is that someone who has been turned into such an invalid believes that the false teacher is really interested in one's welfare when, in truth, the spiritual charlatan is only interested in using a seeker's spiritual yearnings, needs, potential, and inclinations to serve the interests of the false teacher. The central delusion of people who continue to be captivated by a false teacher is that the process of poisoning and corruption of spiritual potential that is going on is actually being done for the spiritual betterment of the individual -- this is how crazy and sick things are.

The foregoing points are not exhaustive. However, they do serve to establish something of a beginning, through which further discussion and critical exploration might take place.

Chapter 3: Characterizing Spiritual Abuse - Part 2

What is spiritual abuse? First, there should be something very clearly said about what it is not.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) once indicated that every human being has four enemies: (1) the unredeemed nafs, or the internal seat of rebellion against truth; (2) Iblis, a chief or leader for a species of being known as jinn (the Qur'an indicates they are made from 'smokeless fire'), who had fallen from grace and had taken leave from God to devote himself to seeking to dissuade human beings from the straight path of truth; (3) dunya, which constitutes the mess of entanglements, miseries, and problems that arise when the collective set of unredeemed nafs of human beings engage one another in pursuit of the prime directive of unredeemed nafs -- namely, opposition to, and denial of, the truth; and, (4) unbelievers, which does not refer to people of different religious faith but to those individuals who, like Iblis, might acknowledge the existence of God but have their own agenda that they wish to advance -- an agenda that bows down to other than the purpose for which human beings were created.

The path to spiritual realization runs through treacherous territory. The four foregoing forces are given expression through a multiplicity of manifest forms and structures that populate the territory through which the mystical path runs, and all of them -- singly and in varied combinations -- attack, both from within as well as from without, a would-be seeker after truth.

In short, there are very real forces that constantly attempt to persuade individuals, in one way or another, to either cease and desist spiritual activity or to adopt a 'way' that is, in truth, a cul-de-sac -- that is, a spiritual dead-end. Although reason, up to a point, can help an individual distinguish between truth and falsehood, there comes a time and place on the spiritual path when reason must be illumined by, and supported through, the light of non-rational or trans-rational (and this is not the same as irrational processes) forms of understanding, guidance, intuitions, faith, and insight.

If reason, by itself, could have traversed the mystical path, there never would have been a need for revelation, the Prophetic tradition, or the inheritors of certain portions of that tradition -- namely, the awliya or invested ones of Divinity ... those who are the recipients of

the special barakah or Grace that enables them to be of assistance to the spiritually or mystically inclined. If reason, by itself, could have taken humankind to the summits of spiritual potential, then, there would have been no point in providing us with ways of knowing, experiencing, and understanding that are accessed, not via the mind or reason, but by means of the heart, sirr, spirit, kafi, and aqfah ... modes of spiritual engagement that are addressed specifically within the Qur'an.

It is because reason is a necessary but not a sufficient condition with respect to the realization of Self, one must look beyond the horizons of rationality for the real interesting and challenging facets of the mystical path. It is this realm of mystery that offers numerous opportunities for charlatans, spiritual quacks, bogus teachers, and spiritually abusive individuals to try to take advantage of the great vulnerability to which most of us are heir.

The foregoing refers to a mode of vulnerability. On the one hand, this vulnerability is clothed in ignorance. After all, if we knew the way to our spiritual destination, then, we wouldn't be in a position of need and, therefore, having to trust someone else to guide us through the treacherous terrain.

On the other hand, the aforementioned vulnerability is made perilous by the force operating within each of us (i.e., the unredeemed nafs) that is not just resistant to the whole process of making a spiritual journey, but is openly antagonistic to that process through the manner in which it collaborates with the whisperings of the shaytan. (Shaytan are the set of beings or forces that are under the influence of the Satanic agenda to lead human kind away from the straight path of truth), dunya, and unbelievers.

Nafs is the ultimate paradigm for, and source of, unbelief in any of us. Indeed, kafir and kufr are words, that at root, mean to cover up or conceal, and that which an unbeliever (of whatever spiritual framework) seeks to cover up is the truth.

When an authentic spiritual guide attempts to help an individual thwart the machinations of the unredeemed nafs, this is not an expression of spiritual abuse. The practices, zikrs, seclusions, fasts, vigils, litanies, prayers, community service, and so on, that a legitimate teacher prescribes for, among other things, assisting an individual

struggle toward redeeming the constructive potential of the nafs, might be experienced by the individual as difficult, painful, trying, or problematic, but this sort of qualitative character does not make the experience an expression of spiritual abuse ... except to the extent that nafs is being spiritually abusive to the mystical potential of the human being who is seeking release from the internal oppressiveness of the authoritarian regime of the unredeemed nafs.

Furthermore, the context through which such spiritual medicine of the soul is administered always is couched in properties of: kindness, compassion, love, tolerance, forbearance, insight, sincerity, honesty, nobility, generosity, integrity, humility, forgiveness, patience, empathy, as well as appreciation for the capacity and station of a seeker, in terms of how the spiritual guide approaches his or her interaction with an aspirant. I have known, heard about, and read of, a number of authentic spiritual guides who might have experienced spiritual difficulties of their own while, simultaneously, guiding others along the mystical path, but none of these difficulties ever filtered down to maltreatment of their mureeds or followers.

Whatever the nature of these difficulties or misunderstandings might have been, they were between the shaykh and Divinity. They did not entail any kind of abusive treatment toward his or her mureeds. In short, there was no spiritual counterpart to someone's kicking the dog (i.e., a seeker) because something, somewhere else in the shaykh's life wasn't going well or was beset with problems.

Now, some people who are not aware of, or who have not been exposed (at least knowingly) to, the issues of spiritual abuse, might suppose that when other individuals speak about spiritual abuse, then, maybe, all that is meant is: (1) some sort of simple misunderstanding about the path; and/or, (2) the nafs of some of the seekers is acting up and the nafs of such individuals are resents the curbing of what the rebellious self believes is its right to unfettered freedom; and/or, (3) a shaykh has been perceived to have committed some set of relatively minor transgressions that has upset certain mureeds and about which they are taking exception; and/or, (4) something has gone on which can be talked through and, that together with a little tolerance, patience, compassion, and forgiveness, everything will be okay.

Now, while all of the foregoing might be problematic, none of what has been suggested above is really an expression of spiritual abuse. Spiritual abuse is firmly rooted in the manner in which one, or more, of the aforementioned forces (nafs, Iblis, dunya, or unbelievers) are being given expression through the locus of manifestation of an alleged spiritual teacher, as well as through those who are under the influence of such an individual. These forces seek to corrupt, undermine, distort, disable, obstruct, destabilize, or destroy a seeker's way to realizing spiritual potential and truth.

Spiritual abuse -- in whatever form it manifests itself -- is really the Satanic agenda in action. For, contrary to modern horror movies, the Satanic realm is not primarily about blood sacrifices, occult powers, or gaining money, power, sexual favors, and fame (although all of these might be part of what goes on with some individuals).

Rather, the Satanic agenda is about seeking to fulfill the promise that Satan made to God after he had been cast out from associating among the angels. More specifically, this agenda entails doing whatever is necessary -- be it little or a lot -- to dissuade human beings from the straight path, and the techniques employed to advance this agenda are guile, trickery, cajoling, manipulation, cleverness, and deceit.

Iblis is just as happy that someone dedicates his or her life to television, hobbies, or a career, as robbing banks and killing people. There are lots of ways through which the spiritual potential of life can be wasted.

Furthermore, Iblis can't make human beings do anything. All Iblis can do is whisper, suggest, misdirect, provide disinformation, mislead, encourage, insinuate, preoccupy, as well as introduce doubt, worry, and suspicion. We do the rest by permitting ourselves -- or our nafs -- to become mesmerized or self-hypnotized by the possibilities inherent in what is being whispered or suggested to us.

Spiritual abuse sometimes takes the form of exploiting others in order to gain financial comfort, fame, and/or political power. Sometimes, spiritual abuse assumes the form of sexual misconduct. Sometimes, spiritual abuse is given expression through the activities of someone who is a sociopath (e.g., Jim Jones) or operates through the properties of a narcissistic personality disorder.

However, irrespective of the particular form through which spiritual abuse is given expression, the purpose and result is always the same: to serve the Satanic agenda. Anyone who engages in spiritual abuse knowingly, or unknowingly, serves that agenda.

Someone once said that the greatest trick that Satan ever performed was to induce people not to believe in his existence. People suppose that because they don't see someone colored in red, with horns, cloven hoofs, a tail, and a pitchfork, then, the whole notion of Satan is nothing more than a myth that someone created somewhere along the line in order to scare impressionable people into living a certain kind of life.

We are told that no modern, intelligent, civilized, sophisticated, rational, scientific individual should ever seriously entertain the idea that there is someone known as Iblis who is daily setting in motion stratagems that are designed to induce human beings to abandon the straight path. Even many people of faith roll their eyes when the subject of Iblis or Satan comes up, as if it were an embarrassment to any serious discussion about spirituality.

Yet, there are many so-called spiritual teachers who exist within our midst who are passing themselves off as individuals who are capable of serving as authentic guides for the perilous journey from self to Self, but, who, in truth, do nothing but lead people away from the sirat-ul-mustaqueen, the straight path of truth. This is nothing more than the Satanic agenda made manifest.

In fact, such is the nature of this problem that many people today-- both in North America, as well as elsewhere -- are associated with false teachers, but these would-be seekers have not, yet, become aware of the extremely precarious and dire nature of their spiritual predicament. Consequently, they believe that everything is fine with the state of their universe and with the assumed progress of their spiritual journey.

Unfortunately, lots of people these days have come to confuse the straight path with whatever the direction is in which they are being led by someone who does not have their spiritual welfare sincerely at heart. As someone has said, the most binding shackles are those that are invisible to us and that we do not recognize as such.

The Sufi path consists of more than: possessing an ability to speak or write well, or being talented musically, or having a familiarity with Arabic, or being able to manifest a personal magnetism or captivating charm, or have a wonderful theatrical sense of story-telling, or enjoying a facility with worldly kashf (e.g., reading minds, thought projection, knowledge of events distant in time or place, psychic abilities, or the capacity to induce trance states, altered conditions of consciousness, or anomalous experiences), or indicating a knowledge of the technical vocabulary and/or teaching texts of mysticism. Many people have confused, and have been led to confuse, packaging with the actual nature of the path.

Furthermore, they assume that because the packaging is alluring, then, the secrets of the path must be contained within such packaging. As a result, they mistakenly assume that the resonance of truth that is felt in conjunction with an alleged teacher comes from the individual who is attempting to pass himself or herself off as a guide, when, in fact, the resonance of truth comes from within a sincere seeker in response to whatever truth is inherent in the message being spoken.

This truth is independent of the alleged teacher. However, the pseudo-guide basks in the light associated with that authentic teaching and induces people to believe that the counterfeit is the source of the Real.

In short, just because someone can talk the talk of a spiritual guide, this does not mean that person has been given the wherewithal to walk the walk of a spiritual guide. This is an entirely different matter altogether.

The anti-Christ or dajjal (imposter), whose arrival has been said by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to mark one of the greater signs of the Latter Days, will be capable of performing all manner of deeds that constitute departures from normal physical laws (e.g., raising the dead). However, this capacity -- though many will be tricked into supposing otherwise -- is not a sign of authentic spirituality ... and this phenomenon is relevant to much of what is transpiring today in many parts of the world.

The realization of having been spiritually abused comes through experiences, of whatever nature, that have taken place in conjunction with a so-called teacher that have led, gradually or suddenly, to a

betrayal of trust that necessarily must link a seeker with a would-be guide. In short, the alleged guide is, and has been, serving a Satanic agenda of leading people astray from the truth of the straight path -- the path through which, God willing, the realization of essential, spiritual identity and potential takes place.

In other words, one comes to realize that the entire set of purposes for trusting someone, and associating with that person, and making efforts on behalf of that individual, or learning from that person have been soiled. As a result, one feels as if one has been touched by evil in a very personal, intimate, and essential manner.

None of the foregoing should be construed to mean there are no legitimate/authentic Sufi guides who live amongst us, nor is any of it intended to give the impression that finding one's way to the straight path is a quixotic venture. Rather, the foregoing is a cautionary tale, if you will, whose moral is that there is a lot more spiritual abuse currently going on than most people suppose.

Sexual misconduct -- whether with the opposite sex or the same sex -- is getting a lot of the headlines these days. However, unfortunately, such forms of spiritual abuse are but the tip of an enormous iceberg in which people are being fed misinformation, disinformation, and misdirection concerning the mystical way by individuals who are serving -- whether knowingly or unknowingly -- a Satanic agenda that is intended to dissuade people through means, both 'gentle' and not-so-gentle, from the way of the straight path to Self-realization. To be entangled in such an agenda, to be touched by such perversity, to have one's time and efforts wasted through such a program, is to experience spiritual abuse.

These spiritual pretenders have sought to usurp the legitimate function of authentic spiritual guides -- that is, those people who have been selected through a valid spiritual process to serve in the capacity of a teacher. Spiritual pretenders have done so through the qualities of Satan/Iblis.

In other words, the spiritual charlatans use all manner of deception, deceit, trickery, misdirection, manipulation, control, social influence, as well as methods of trance induction and anomalous experiences to camouflage the actual nature of their reprehensible activities, and like Satan they have become very adept at inducing

people to believe that something other than what is going on is going on. Sometimes, it is only by the Grace of God that one trips over certain pieces of evidence through which the whole charade begins to unravel.

Chapter 4: Ya Shaykh

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
the 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 seeking what it asks.

Chapter 5: How Do We Know?

I would like to pose a question. The question is not meant as an exercise in sophistry, nor is it intended to be offensive. Nonetheless, I believe the question is an important one that is not directed at anyone in particular, but, rather, to everyone in general, including myself.

How does one know that someone who claims to be a shaykh or spiritual guide is what he or she claims to be? The question seems simple enough, but, in fact, it possesses a degree of difficulty and subtlety that contains a variety of phenomenological currents of considerable complexity.

What are some of the factors that influence how one tries to answer this question? Of course, with each individual, the manner in which this problem is engaged might vary in different ways, but there also are likely to be some commonalities as well.

Let's consider a few possibilities. For example, we might read a book on spirituality or mysticism by someone, and we might be very much impressed with the book and what it has to say -- we might even be deeply moved by the book. On the dust jacket of that work, one might read that the person who wrote the book has been a spiritual guide for x-number of years.

Neither the appealing nature of the book nor the blurb about the writer on the dust jacket proves anything. There are lots of people who are good writers, diligent researchers, as well as persuasive, entertaining, informative communicators, but none of this, in and of itself, makes them a spiritual guide.

The blurb on the cover of the book, or, perhaps, the book's preface might indicate that the author has studied for so many years with such-and-such a teacher, or was the daughter or son or relative of a well-known figure of spiritual literature, or has traveled widely and met with many teachers of a spiritual path, or has been on a rigorous journey of self-discovery over the last several decades. Again, none of this necessarily means anything as far as the issue of the authenticity of spiritual guidance is concerned.

Someone who taught Persian to my first shaykh, once said: "There are so many Rumies who have never uttered a word." The inverse of

this might be: 'there are so many people who have uttered words but who have not attained, even remotely, the spiritual station of a Rumi.'

And, speaking of Rumi (may Allah be pleased with him), there is a whole industry of book publishing revolving about his *Mathnawi*, *Divan*, and *Discourses* is producing material that is purporting to translate different facets of the great saint's works. Few people seem to be wondering whether any of these translations actually preserve the meaning of the original, or to what extent the spiritual understanding, or lack thereof, of the translator might be altering -- in important ways -- the teachings that are contained in those works.

Many people -- whether translators or readers -- don't seem to understand that what was written from a state of spiritual ecstasy or from a particular spiritual station can only be properly understood by someone who is rooted in that same state or station. This doesn't mean that someone who is not situated in an appropriate spiritual condition cannot enjoy or derive benefit from such writings, but, rather, it is intended as a reminder that in any hermeneutical process -- that is, any process of interpretation -- an accurate understanding can never be achieved except through the merging of horizons of the writer and the reader, and since the written word is only the entry point through which to begin the process of interpretive understanding, there are many factors that can affect the extent to which horizons merge in such situations.

Like the Qur'an, the physical words of someone such as Rumi, Ibn al-'Arabi, and so on (may Allah be pleased with them both), merely serve as the means through which one begins to catch sight of the Ocean that lies beyond those words. Ibn al-'Arabi (may Allah be pleased with him) once indicated in relation to his 'Meccan Openings' that the thousands of pages to which the 'Openings' gave expression were just a small part of what could have been said, and that what was said and could have been said were but a small part of what he knew, and that what he knew was but a small sub-set of what could be known. One might add that most of what is known by these great saints cannot be said ... only alluded to, and that even the very best examples of spiritual, mystical literature are little more than signposts that point in the direction of the possibility of a kind of knowledge and understanding that cannot be given conceptual expression ... for

concepts and words are forms or structures with which the mind operates, but the mystical knowledge being alluded to is non-conceptual in nature ... which is why it remains a mystery to everyone except those who have had the requisite experiences through which insight and unveiling occur by means of non-conceptual faculties such as the heart, *sirr*, *spirit*, *kafi*, and *aqfah*.

So, let's re-phrase the earlier question. If the various internal spiritual faculties of an individual have not been purified, calibrated and activated through the appropriate kinds of experiences and processes, then, how does one know that so-and-so is an authentic spiritual guide? The fact of the matter is that most of us don't KNOW -- rather, we have beliefs, opinions, judgments, conclusions, understandings, perspectives, and feelings.

If we truly KNEW, then, our spiritual condition would be such that we would not need a spiritual guide because we already would have arrived in a spiritual sense and, as a result, would have direct insight into such matters. When we go in search of a spiritual guide, it is because we have admitted to ourselves that we don't KNOW such things, but we aspire to, among other things, such knowledge and understanding.

Some of us might have certain kinds of dreams and/or experiences that we have interpreted to mean that we are on the right track in relation to having found an authentic teacher. However, one should exercise a certain amount of caution when it comes to such dreams and experiences, because there are a multiplicity of possible meanings in relation to these sort of experiences.

One spiritual guide used the symbol of fire as a way of illustrating the problems inherent in this issue. This teacher indicated that the symbol of fire can be encountered at a number of spiritual stations and that the meaning of the symbol can vary at each station.

For example, sometimes fire symbolizes anger, and at other times it might symbolize the ardor of the spiritual quest, and at still other times it might give expression to the quality of devilry. In some instances fire might symbolize the light of *zikr*, appearing in igneous form. On other occasions, fire might symbolize the fire of wrath, or, as in the case of Moses (peace be upon him), it might symbolize guidance such as when he saw a fire on the side of the mountain and went to

investigate. Sometimes fire symbolizes gnosis, and sometimes it symbolizes that which burns away all other than the vision of Divinity. Sometimes fire symbolizes the station of sainthood or spiritual longing or mystical witnessing.

The spiritual guide who wrote the foregoing, then, went on to indicate that fire could symbolize many other possibilities as well and that only an experienced shaykh would know the meanings of this symbol under alternative circumstances. And, fire is but one of thousands of symbols that might be disclosed to an individual through dreams and/or waking, anomalous experiences.

Everything means something. However, finding out precisely what is meant on any given occasion is the trick.

Anyone can offer an opinion about the meaning of the events of life -- and such events are, like a dream, but a complex symbol in need of decoding. Some of these interpretations might even sound convincing, interesting, intriguing, or resonate with power, harmony, and truth -- but none of this makes such interpretations either correct or the pronouncements of an authentic shaykh.

Liking someone, or loving someone, or feeling peaceful in someone's presence, or being inspired by a person, or finding meaning in associating with an individual, or feeling convinced that someone is legitimate -- again, none of this, in and of itself, constitutes proof that this person, individual is a shaykh. There are many forces operating within us that are seeking to influence our thinking, understanding, feelings, decisions, actions, and commitments.

Even if one wishes to remain on the purely mundane level, social psychology and general psychology have both brought forth evidence indicating that what we think, feel and do are substantially affected by forces of suggestibility, compliance, obedience, conformity, social influence, cognitive dissonance, alienation, and dissociation that are operating on, and through us, much of the time. We are constantly using feed-back from other people, together with our status vis-à-vis other people, to shape our ideas of reality, truth, validity, self-image, and possibility through the process of consensual validation in relation to our world-views.

There is a hermeneutical dynamic going on within us that is a mixture of the social construction of reality, individual construction of reality, and the raw data of experience. The numerous problems that arise as we try to sift through this mixture and separate the wheat from the chaff, is why different methodologies of philosophy, science, mathematics, logic, mythology, religion, mysticism, and literature have arisen.

Does the foregoing mean there is no such thing as truth? No, it doesn't.

What it means is that the problem of determining the nature of truth is a lot more complicated and subtle than many people suppose. This includes the problem of identifying who is and who is not an authentic shaykh or spiritual guide.

I have seen people rolling around on the floor in an altered state of consciousness. Does the existence of such an altered state in these people mean that those people were undergoing a valid mystical experience? Not necessarily, but if someone – for example, someone who claims to be a spiritual guide -- in the room 'frames' the experience as a mystical one, then, many people might accept this framing of the phenomenon at face value and never question whether such a way of framing things is appropriate or an accurate reflection of what is going on.

Once someone begins to perceive another individual as special or authoritative or a person of spiritual knowledge, and, therefore, begins to invest trust in that individual, then, the latter person can say and do almost anything and re-frame what is said and done in such a way as to appear to be perfectly reasonable and reconcilable with spiritual principles -- even when this might not be the case. When we place trust in another individual, part of this investiture is the granting of a large number of degrees of freedom through which such a person might explain -- perhaps legitimately and perhaps not -- seemingly anomalous and inconsistent sayings and actions.

These degrees of freedom are the room that charlatans use to misdirect attention away from the reality of what is transpiring. Spiritual charlatans use the technique of misdirection in exactly the same way that stage magicians use the art of misdirection -- which is at the heart of almost all stage magic -- that is, in order to distract

attention away from something else that is being done ... all it takes is practice and nerve to pull it off in a seamless fashion.

Most people who associate with an alleged spiritual guide -- especially if the individual in question is well-known -- get to spend very little time in the presence of that person. We come away from such encounters with impressions, feelings, and ideas. However, none of these inner readings have been tested in a rigorous fashion.

Very few people will have sufficient long-term exposure in relation to such an individual to be able to observe the alleged teacher under a variety of circumstances, stresses, problems, and so on, to know whether what is going on is truly legitimate or an expression of something that is quite other than what it is purported to be. Moreover, even if we did have such an opportunity for extended observation, there are still a lot of forces (psychological, social, conceptual, emotional, satanic, etc.) acting upon us that can muddy the interpretive waters with respect to gaining a clear understanding of what might, or might not, be going on.

We can believe such things as: when a person is ready, then, a teacher will appear. But, there are others who have been there and done that and are saying: when a person is ready, a teacher will disappear. Everyone has something to teach us but that does not make everyone our shaykh.

We can say that we will trust in God, but, if you haven't noticed, God can play rough in the Divine games of love -- just ask Job (peace be upon him), or Jesus (peace be upon him), or Muhammad (peace be upon him), or any of the other 124,000 prophets who have walked the Earth and who have tasted much hardship both before and after they tasted the sweetness of Divine favor. The spiritual stations of: repentance, longing, sincerity, patience, dependence, gratitude, and love are not trifles that are traversed in a blinking of an eye. They each can last for years and entail numerous trials, tribulations, difficulties, and challenges.

If one wants to trust God, then, one had better be prepared to struggle mightily -- this is what the history of mysticism has shown to be the case time and time again. Talk is cheap, and the path to Self-realization is very arduous and dangerous, and a false teacher can

never assist one to complete that journey ... only to complicate, obfuscate, undermine, and corrupt the process.

False teachers, as well as true teachers are both made possible by One Divinity. We get to choose where we believe the truth lies – behind Door #1 or Door #2, or Door #n, or Door #n+1, and we are responsible for the choices we make, and we are responsible for the interpretations we place on the events that Divinity brings into our lives. God does help those who help themselves, but only if they help themselves in the right way ... and what that right way is, is a matter of some dispute.

If a person is truly sincere, then, encountering and being harmed by a false teacher might be merely something that Divinity wishes one to experience as one acquires the art of dhawk, or tasting, and understanding the meaning of such experiential tastes. But, coming to realize that one has been spending time with a false teacher might be a wake-up call that one is moving in the wrong direction, or that one has not given proper attention to the process of choosing a shaykh. Or, perhaps, meeting and being harmed by a counterfeit spiritual guide is Divinity's means of imposing a hardship on someone that serves as a Divine excuse to confer blessings on such an individual, just as Divinity often uses sickness as an occasion to visit blessings on a person.

Alternatively, if a person is not sincere, then, meeting up with a false teacher can have other possible meanings. And, the problem is to try to figure out the significance of such an encounter from a Divine perspective -- which is never an easy thing to do ... not only because there are lots of ways to interpret or frame such events, but because when one finally awakes to the betrayal, lying, manipulation, deceit, and exploitation to which one has been exposed, one often finds oneself in a dazed emotional state, and, as a result, not in any condition to be able to make sense of extremely important issues or how to resolve problems revolving about trust, commitment, meaning, love, identity, community, purpose and friendship. In addition, one often is battling anxiety, fear, depression, anger, frustration, disappointment, and a pervasive sense of having been betrayed, with no readily identifiable escape route from the deep sense of dissociation, depersonalization, de-realization, and anomie that often accompanies such a dazed emotional state.

People often look at those who have been spiritually abused, and - either privately or publicly -- wonder how such a state of affairs could have taken place. How could someone have allowed themselves to be seduced, or conned, or tricked, or induced, or talked into, or persuaded to become involved in such a set of circumstances?

People who ask these sorts of questions in relation to other people are often people who really have never stopped to consider whether the teacher with whom they are currently associating and with whom they are enamored is, in fact, legitimate or not. They might never have seriously asked themselves whether there is any way to verify the authenticity of such a teacher independently of the supposed guide or those who are influenced by such an individual. The people who raise such questions might never have put their beliefs, opinions, judgments, or feelings to any sort of rigorous test or had them put to any such test. Such people might not even realize they are at spiritual risk because, on the surface, at least, everything seems to be fine, and, they might remain unaware that what they believe they are involved in is not what they think, and that what they think they know, in fact, they do not -- but, instead, they, have confused and conflated unqualified conviction with actual spiritual knowledge and understanding ... and the latter is not all that easy to come by.

Chapter 6: Rules of Recognition

Sometimes, when the issues of fraudulent shaykhs or spiritual charlatans arise, a person listening might remark that, down through the ages, various authentic shaykhs have listed and discussed a number of indications that can be used for differentiating between a legitimate spiritual guide and a fraudulent one. For instance, some of these individuals make reference to the exemplary work of Hazrat Suhrawardi (may Allah be pleased with him) and the 15 rules governing the conduct of a shaykh that might be used in this context for identifying authentic teachers.

There are some problems that surface, however -- at least, potentially -- in conjunction with the 15 rules that are cited ... problems that indicate that the difficulties surrounding the recognition and choosing of a spiritual teacher can be fairly complicated and not at all straightforward. Nevertheless, none of what follows should be construed as a criticism of Shaykh Suhrawardi (may Allah be pleased with him), since the material he provided was really not intended to deal with the cleverness or duplicity of spiritual charlatans and the manner in which such individuals often alter the teachings of the great shaykhs to accommodate the needs of a false teacher.

For example, let's examine the first rule put forth by Shaykh Suhrawardi (may Allah be pleased with him).

1. The purifying of resolution and the searching for the cause. He should seek out of himself that the cause not be: - the desire of precedence; - the desire of being a shaykh, or, - the desire of being followed.

While it is true that someone who is a shaykh should not have a desire to be a shaykh, or to be followed, or to have any wish for precedence in the eyes of either the would-be guide or others, let me ask a question: if I am looking for a spiritual guide, how do I know what is in the heart or intention of another human being? Yes, I can spend time listening to what is said, as well as watching behavior and trying to determine if I can detect any trace of the foregoing desires in the man or woman I am considering, but if the person I am thinking of taking initiation with is clever -- and many of the spiritual frauds and

charlatans who are out there are very clever, and they know the game inside and out -- then, two things are likely to be the case.

First, what the sociologist Irving Goffman referred to as 'front room' behavior (to distinguish it from how people behaved when they were in 'back rooms', out of people's sight), is likely to appear exemplary. Indeed, the whole advantage that a counterfeiter has is that she or he knows -- from either reading or personal experience -- what the object being imitated (in this case, a spiritual teacher) is supposed to look like. The spiritual fraud knows, for example, that a true shaykh or teacher is supposed to be, among other things, humble, kind, generous, compassionate, loving, considerate, thoughtful, ethical, and so on. Consequently, the 'front room' or public arena in which people meet the counterfeit shaykh are often carefully managed and staged to generate exactly this kind of impression in the minds and hearts of unsuspecting individuals.

Secondly, many people who are seeking spiritual guidance will never get a whole lot of time, under a variety of circumstances and settings, to be able to form any kind of informed judgment about what the actual state of desire in a spiritual teaching candidate might be. A seeker's exposure to an alleged spiritual guide tends to be very restricted, and, consequently, information about a so-called teacher tends to be managed under highly controlled circumstances.

Someone, who was being asked for advice, once asked the advice-seeker -- who was trying to decide whether to become involved, in some way, with another individual -- if the man (that is, the advice-seeker) had either been on a journey with the other individual or had any business dealings with that person. The question was asked because such close contact often provides one with some reliable information about the character and temperament of a person under conditions that are not of a person's choosing and over which he or she tends to have little control.

Prior to making a decision about whether, or not, to be initiated onto the Sufi path through a certain individual, 99.9999% of the people doing this know, in reality, almost nothing about the actual interior state of the person with whom they are taking initiation. To be sure, a person seeking initiation might have impressions or feelings that are positive in relation to the alleged spiritual guide based on such

things as: having read a book by the person, or having listened to talks by the individual, or having received the personal testimonies of other people whom one might know who also have had some exposure to the 'teacher', or having watched the 'teacher' interact with his or her followers, but all of this information is capable of being spun in any direction that an alleged teacher wishes to spin things. Politicians are managed in precisely the same way -- that is, things are done to create certain positive impressions and feelings in the minds and hearts of the electorate.

Let's move on to the second rule noted by Shaykh Suhrawardi (may Allah be pleased with him) -- namely:

2. The knowledge of Capacity.

The shaykh must regard the capacity of the student.

Again, there is nothing wrong with this rule. In order to be a good shaykh, a person does need to take into account what the spiritual capacity of a seeker is, and this is necessary for a variety of reasons.

For example, the practices that are assigned to a given seeker should be aligned with what a person can handle, and what a person has the potential to handle is an expression of that individual's spiritual capacity. If a shaykh does not take such things into consideration, a seeker is likely to encounter difficulties that could prove harmful to that individual's spiritual well-being and growth.

We do not grow out of our spiritual potential. Rather, we grow into our spiritual potential, and if an alleged teacher does not understand what that potential is, then, the spiritual instructions given will not be conducive to a healthy, constructive unfolding of the capacity that is present in a given seeker.

Nonetheless, having said this, there are still some problems surrounding this rule. To begin with, if a seeker knew what her or his spiritual capacity actually was, then, someone with that much understanding of one's own spiritual condition likely would not be in need of spiritual guidance for such a person already would be in direct contact with that for which one steps onto the spiritual path to discover -- that is, the realization of one's unique, essential spiritual capacity.

Lack of knowledge is one of the things that sets us in motion to seek a teacher -- someone who, hopefully, knows what we do not, and someone who will be willing to share with us what she or he knows so that our lack of knowledge can be lessened to whatever extent this is capable of being done. So, when we try to select a teacher who will help us in this respect, we are looking for someone who, as Shaykh Suhrawardi (may Allah be pleased with him) points out, has a knowledge of the spiritual capacities of the seekers who come to him or her.

But, knowing this rule doesn't help a seeker one iota, because the seeker really doesn't know what such knowledge looks like -- that is why he is called a 'seeker' rather than a 'knower'. A charlatan can say whatever she or he likes to in this regard, and the seeker won't know the difference.

All a sham-teacher has to do with respect to the issue of 'capacity' is have a gift of gab that enables the con-artist to throw things together in a way that sounds interesting, desirable, plausible, and mysterious, and many would-be seekers get hooked -- even when they know about this second rule of Shaykh Suhrawardi (may Allah be pleased with him), since knowing about this second rule provides an individual with absolutely no insight concerning what the issue of 'spiritual capacity' really entails.

Seekers are trusting the teacher to know this. And, therefore, a seeker's trust is either well-placed or misplaced depending on the actual spiritual authenticity of the individual in whom the trust is being invested.

All right, let's take a look at the 3rd rule cited by Shaykh Suhrawardi (may Allah be pleased with him):

3. Being pure in respect of the students property

The shaykh must show no greed for the property or service of the student.

Again, this is a perfectly sound rule. The spiritual integrity of a true teacher should be such that qualities like greed have long since disappeared from the interior life of an authentic teacher.

After all, one of the purposes of the mystical path is to undergo a process of transformation in which reprehensible properties such as greed become rehabilitated, so to speak, into useful allies rather than spiritual obstacles. For instance, the object of the focus of greed should be directed away from the ego and dunya (or our entanglements with the world) and become occupied with constructive purposes -- thus, the Qur'an describes the Prophet (peace be upon him) as being 'greedy' (Harith) for the spiritual welfare of his ummah or community.

Be this as it might, fraudulent spiritual guides are very adept at using a technique that is known as "re-framing". We are all familiar with the fact that how one frames a photograph or painting will determine what will be seen and what will not be seen in relation to that painting or picture.

One can select frames that hide certain things (say, flaws in the original) as well as frames that tend to bring out certain colors or features of a painting or photograph. One also can select frames that dominate a painting or picture and take attention away from what should be the center of focus. In addition, one can choose frames that either complement a given painting or picture, and, therefore, leave one with a sense of harmony, or one can select frames that are discordant with the subject matter of a painting or photograph and create a sense of discord.

The possibilities for re-framing things in the context of human interaction are enormous and very complicated. Among other reasons, this is because we human beings have within us a great many weaknesses that are very vulnerable to being influenced by the manner in which things are presented to us -- quite independently of issues about the actual intrinsic value of what is being presented for consideration ... and smart sales professionals and advertisers have known this for centuries.

Yes, an authentic shaykh should show no greed for the property or service of a seeker. If I am a false spiritual guide and I wish to utilize this rule for my own self-serving purposes, what this rule says to me is this: as long as I don't do anything that "shows" that I have greed for either the property and/or service of my followers, then, I can actually have greed for their property and/or service -- all I have to do is

convince them that things are other than they actually are through the art of influence, manipulation, hypnotic suggestion, and re-framing.

For example, if a false teacher can induce someone to believe that, say, serving the teacher is good for the spiritual condition of a seeker, then, even without asking for service, the false teacher can command service because the whole situation has been re-framed -- from one of greed for service on the part of the false teacher, to that of a seeker feeling that it is incumbent on her or him to serve the teacher and, thereby, make spiritual progress through such selfless devotion. The false teacher, through writing, discourses, stories, and so on, indirectly plants in a seeker's consciousness that serving the teacher is a good thing, a noble thing, an act of love, and, consequently, lo and behold, without having to ask for anything, the teacher is served in more ways than one can 'shaykh' a stick at.

Now, lest anyone get the wrong idea, service to others is a good thing when it has a proper *niyat*, or sincere intention, behind it. But, an unscrupulous teacher can take advantage of this and make it appear that his or her desire for the property or service of others is not present and that, instead, what we are dealing with here is merely the wish of others to serve and give to the teacher -- in fact, from time to time, the false teacher can even put on a big show about how he or she wished one's followers wouldn't do these things, but, in the end, bow in humility to the offer of love that is being made to the would-be teacher and accept the gift of property or service with a 'well, what can one do' shrug of the shoulders ... which will endear the false teacher to his or her followers even more so.

The fourth rule of Shaykh Suhrawardi (may Allah be pleased with him) is:

4. Offering

Delights of offering and of severing attachments are incumbent on the shaykh.

Once again, the teaching is impeccable. A true teacher takes delight in giving to others, serving them, and severing attachments of the *nafs* or ego in relation to its entanglements with various dimensions of interior and exterior life.

However, where there is a will, there is often a way, and the will of false teachers is inclined to look for ways of turning sound spiritual advice -- such as that which is given by Shaykh Suhrawardi (may Allah be pleased with him) --inside out and using it to their own advantage.

Consider the technique of 'priming the pump'. More specifically, most people know that if one wishes to get a water pump or a fuel pump or the like, going, then, sometimes, one has to add some water or fuel first in order to get the pump functioning properly.

False teachers often are very good at giving things away as a means of priming the pump of material goods and/or service, so that this pump will begin to function 'properly' -- that is, so that followers will freely give back to the teacher without the teacher having to say much, or anything, except receive what is offered.

Thus, a false teacher might give, for example, a hundred dollars to someone in need, knowing that, in time, either that individual and/or those to whom the needy person talks to about the gift, will interpret the gift-giving as indicating that the false teacher is a humble, charitable, compassionate, loving, selfless individual who is sacrificing his or her own meager resources for the good of others. Or, a false teacher might arrange to underwrite the expenses of a trip for someone far away to come and visit the teacher (and, more often than not, the money does not come from the teachers own resources but from the resources of someone whom the false teacher controls), and to the recipient of such a seemingly generous and selfless act of friendship, the offer and arrangements are overwhelming to such an extent that the recipient has great difficulty even considering the possibility that something evil or untoward or unsavory might be behind the offer -- which is precisely what the offer has been intended to do ... misdirect attention away from the actual motives to making someone feel guilty or ashamed for being so cynical as to suppose that the offer is not entirely sincere.

In addition, a fraudulent spiritual guide can put on great performances in the public sphere about severing attachments with issues of power, sex, money, property, comfort, control and so on. However, because most of the seekers have no clue about what actually goes on outside of the domain of publicly viewable events, it is

the publicly consumed events that shapes people's opinions, attitudes and judgments of the teacher.

Moreover, in most cases, the only people who are permitted to get close to the teacher are those (1) who either have been so corrupted that they have vested interests that parallels those of the teacher and they will not blow the whistle on what is going on and, thereby, undermine their own advantages in the overall set-up; or, (2) those who have become so mesmerized by what is going on that they are ready to re-frame anything that the teacher does -- no matter how destructive and reprehensible -- as being something other than it is; or, (3) those who, however vaguely, do see what is going on, but whose psychological and emotional vulnerabilities are so intense that they cannot bring themselves to act upon what they know and, thus, suffer in silence, not knowing what to do about such knowledge, and experiencing a great deal of anxiety, stress, and fear as a result.

Shaykh Suhrawardi's (may Allah be pleased with him) fifth rule for identifying an authentic spiritual guide is:

5. Concordance of deed and word in invitation.

Indeed, there should be no inconsistencies or disharmonies between what one says and what one does. Unfortunately, as with everything else, there are ways of circumventing this teaching and transforming it into a tool for misleading people.

One of the easiest ways of accomplishing this is to allude to knowledge that the seeker does not have but that if he or she did have, the seeker would be able to utilize in order to reconcile, in a harmonious manner, what, on the surface, appear to be inconsistencies of words and deeds with respect to a false teacher.

For instance, almost everyone who has done any reading about the Sufi path or who has heard what are sometimes referred to as 'Sufi teaching stories', is likely to be familiar with the Quranic account about Moses (peace be upon him) and Khizr (peace be upon him), the mysterious patron saint of the spiritual path who, from time to time, enters into the lives of certain people in order to teach them or assist them in some spiritual manner. When Moses (peace be upon him) encountered this mysterious figure, the former person had an intuition

that this latter individual was someone who possessed hidden or esoteric knowledge that Moses (peace be upon him) hoped to learn.

Moses (peace be upon him) asked permission to accompany the stranger, and permission was given with one condition -- no matter what happened, no questions could be asked, and if any questions were asked that would be the end of the association. Moses (peace be upon him) agreed to this condition.

To make a longer story somewhat shorter, there were three events that took place that offended the moral sensibilities of Moses (peace be upon him). On one occasion, Khizr (peace be upon him) put a hole in a boat that belonged to a poor fisherman. On another occasion, Khizr (peace be upon him) killed the young son of a couple who both believed in God, and, finally, on a third occasion, Khizr (peace be upon him) repaired a wall outside of a town where the two had been mistreated.

Moses (peace be upon him) believed Khizr (peace be upon him) to be one who believes in, and submits to, the truth of God's teachings, and, yet, Moses (peace be upon him) was confronted with three deeds that each seemed to conflict with what Moses (peace be upon him) understood to be the truth about treating the property of other people, the sanctity of life, and how one should behave when someone mistreats one. In each case, Khizr (peace be upon him) violated the expectations and beliefs of Moses (peace be upon him).

Each time Moses (peace be upon him) asked a question. Each time, Moses (peace be upon him) was reminded of the promise he had made to not ask any questions no matter what happened.

Each time, Moses (peace be upon him) sought pardon and forgiveness for having violated his promise. Each time -- except for the third instance -- Moses (peace be upon him) was forgiven and allowed to continue on the journey with his mysterious companion.

On the third occasion, Moses (peace be upon him) was informed that the association had now come to an end, but before going their separate ways, an explanation was given of why Khizr (peace be upon him) had done what he had done. In the case of the boat, Moses (peace be upon him) was told that there was an advancing army that was confiscating all boats to use in a war, and that if a hole -- which was

easily repairable -- had not been put in the boat, the fisherman, whose entire livelihood depended on that boat, would be ruined. With respect to the youth who was killed, the youngster was no good and unsalvageable and, in time, could undermine the faith of the parents who were good people, so, the youth was eliminated in order to save the parents. Finally, in the town where the two had been thoroughly mistreated by the inhabitants, a wall was repaired because it contained, hidden within it, an inheritance that belonged to two orphans who lived in the vicinity and that if the wall had deteriorated much further, the hidden contents would have been discovered by the miserable town people and they would have stolen it, and, therefore, in order to protect the inheritance of the two orphans -- who in time would be led to the treasure -- the wall was repaired to hide the secret it contained.

Fraudulent teachers can take this teaching and convert it entirely to their own unsavory purposes and, nevertheless, come off smelling like a rose because the surface acts that "appear" reprehensible are really being described as mere camouflage for an underlying and hidden principle that serves the truth and God. If Moses (peace be upon him), as great and knowledgeable as he was, wasn't able to fathom the truth when a servant of God (namely, Khizr -- peace be upon him) was performing in front of his eyes with God's sanction, then, how do the rest of us, who are far removed from the elevated spiritual condition of Moses (peace be upon him), know how to differentiate between apparent discrepancies involving words and deeds that can be reconciled on a deeper level of truth, and real discrepancies between words and deeds that cannot be reconciled on a deeper level but are passed off to us as if they could be so reconciled if we only 'knew' what the fraudulent spiritual guide allegedly knew and that sometime, perhaps, when we become spiritually mature, we too, will have access to such secrets ... but not just now.

I'll just touch, in passing, upon the sixth rule of Shaykh Suhrawardi (may Allah be pleased with him) -- namely, #6. compassion for the weak -- simply because, for a fraudulent teacher to fake compassion with respect to the weak and for anyone else is really child's play. Spencer Tracy (An academy-award winning actor from the 30s, 40s, 50's and 60's) once said that the key to becoming a good actor is to

learn how to fake sincerity -- when an actor can do this, he or she has got it made, and false teachers become very adept at faking sincerity, compassion, generosity, honesty, and a lot of other qualities as well.

Shaykh Suhrawardi's (may Allah be pleased with him) seventh rule for shaykhs is:

7. The purifying of speech

Spiritually purified individuals do speak from the heart and because their hearts are uncontaminated with the machinations of nafs or ego, the purity is reflected in their speech. There are all kinds of predators in nature who imitate what is considered by some other species to be 'tasty', safe, or innocuous, in order to make breakfast, lunch, supper or a snack from the unsuspecting 'victim'.

Among human beings, sociopaths are extremely adept at imitating the surface features of emotion, etiquette, and socially approved behaviors in order to set up a situation that will be to their advantage. The serial killer Ted Bundy was an extremely charming, polite, 'considerate', friendly person right up to the time he raped and killed his victims.

Parents who sexually or physically abuse their children are often considered to be upright and moral people by the rest of the community. They are often thought of being moral exemplars by everyone outside of their families.

How do they do this? Well, among other things, they have nice ways of talking, and they use all the right code words such as: love, goodness, truth, honesty, kindness, and so on, but, the problem is, there is no reality behind what they say when it comes to their children.

Spiritual frauds are experts in knowing what linguistic and verbal buttons to push in order to program people they meet to believe that the former are good, decent individuals. Spiritual frauds are artists in getting people to feel guilty or ashamed for harboring even the least kind of negative suspicion concerning the actual motives of the alleged 'teacher'.

While most of us try to say what we mean and mean what we say, the spiritual fraud takes this general principle of behavior and induces

us to believe that he or she operates according to the precise same principle, when, in fact, something other is the case. Spiritual frauds rarely say what they mean or mean what they say, and in our desire to think the best of people who carry the label 'spiritual' we are reluctant to suppose otherwise.

8. Exalting the heart to God in the state of speech.

Jimmy Swaggert, Jim Baker, and Jim Jones were constantly exalting the heart to God in the state of speech, but, the problem was that this did not carry over, or transfer, very well to the sphere of action. Satan loves God and can talk with the best of them in the language of exalting the heart to God in the state of speech, but it is meaningless, for the nature of the heart is such that it can be influenced by both the nafs/world and the realm of spirit.

Depending on what is controlling the heart, exalting the heart to God in the state of speech can have very different meanings and ramifications. Niyat, or intention, is extremely important, and if niyat is not purified, then, no matter how wonderful the exalting sounds, the heart that is under the influence of the darkness of nafs, or dunya, or Satan or unbelievers, tends to create disharmony and destruction, not harmony and constructive acts and words.

A woman once approached the Prophet (peace be upon him) with her child in tow and asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) to educate the child not to eat so many sweets. The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked the woman if she could return with her child the next day and the lesson would take place at that time.

The woman did as she was asked and went away. The next day she returned with her child ready for the lesson.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) sat with the boy and told him that he shouldn't eat so many sweets. The mother was perplexed and inquired why the boy couldn't have been told the same thing yesterday. The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied that yesterday when they had come to him, he was eating a date, and did not wish to counsel the boy not to eat sweets while he was doing precisely the thing that the boy was being instructed not to do.

For the Prophet, the state of speech matched the condition of his heart, and this is one of the reasons why people's condition changed, by the Grace of Allah, when in his presence -- because of this concordant harmony between what he said and what was in his heart. Unfortunately, for those who are false teachers, the situation is precisely the reverse and although their speech might wax eloquent as if the reflection of a heart that was engaged in the exaltation of God, in truth, something quite different is going on there, and over time people's spiritual condition is also affected by this state of affairs, but in a very different direction and in a quite different manner than occurred in relation to the Prophet (peace be upon him).

God knows what is going on in the heart of a human being. But, we do not.

God knows who the true, authentic servants are whose hearts are exalting God in their state of speech. But, we do not always know even though the speech might appear to be noble and exalting in nature ... for, an outward appearance that is not rooted in an inner reality cannot be of any substantial spiritual assistance although from the external point of view things might seem otherwise.

9. Speaking ambiguously

When the shaykh sees something detestable in the student and wishes to admonish the latter so that person might strive to remove it, the shaykh should cast it before the assembly ambiguously.

The spiritual himma or aspiration of a true teacher is such that they can focus that himma on the individual within the group for whom a teaching or story might be intended and ensure that the message is received and felt by the intended recipient. However, there is a tendency within most of us to suppose that, in one way or another, everything that is said by the teacher is applicable to us, whether it is or not.

Sometimes, seekers become so hyper-vigilant when it comes to the teachings of the spiritual guide that they see themselves in everything the teacher says. This is especially the case when it comes to faults, weaknesses, sins, errors, blunders, and so on.

Spiritual frauds know this, and by speaking ambiguously, they induce most of the people in the group to begin to seek to change in whatever way is being hinted at in order to please the false teacher, and the seekers assume that the indicated changes are part of the spiritual path when, in truth, the changes are according to whatever agenda the false teacher might be promoting. A great deal of mental and emotional programming of seekers goes on in this way during the public sessions that are held by a sham spiritual guide.

10. Preserving the mysteries of the student.

Fraudulent teachers can fulfill this condition in their sleep since they don't know what the mysteries of the students are to begin with, and, therefore, they have nothing to divulge. Moreover, whatever experiences might be undergone by a seeker -- be they good, bad or indifferent -- can be re-framed by a false teacher into something that 'shows' that the teacher is 'authentic'.

For example, if an experience appears to have been positive, good, constructive, pleasant, or the like, then, in order for such a 'good' experience to have been possible, the teacher must be authentic. Alternatively, if the experience was negative, bad, difficult, and problematic, then, surely, the behavior of the seeker is at fault, and the experience has been a warning for the seeker to change his or her ways to better resonate with the teachings of the guide.

In addition, a false teacher could take the above rule of Shaykh Suhrawardi (may Allah be pleased with him) and use it as a tool to lend obscurity to the situation. By claiming that a true spiritual guide is under a duty to 'preserve the mysteries of the student', then, the false guide can always indicate that although he or she 'knows' what the spiritual condition of a seeker is, adab or spiritual etiquette forbids the so-called teacher to talk about it.

11. Pardoning the students blunders

Tolerance, forbearance and forgiveness are all admirable qualities. Nonetheless, if a false teacher doesn't really care what a seeker does as long as the seeker does not upset the teacher's own self-serving agenda, then, it is easy for such a person to pardon any and all acts.

In fact, a false teacher can use the foregoing 'angle' as a technique to gradually program the student to do whatever the teacher wants because the student is so grateful to have found someone who accepts them as they are -- warts and all -- that they are prepared to do almost anything for such an individual ... not seeming to realize there is a difference between being accepted by someone for what one is and being used in certain ways because the individual's weaknesses are of value to the false teacher's master plan. Some false spiritual teachers even make use of the 'weaknesses' of some of their students and get the latter to serve as pimps for the teacher by instructing such students to seduce people and, then, bring the ones so seduced to the teacher for further disposition. Some false guides even get such individuals to troll the Internet looking for those who are psychologically vulnerable and likely to succumb to emotional assaults that are designed to exploit those vulnerabilities.

12. Descending from his own right

While in an authentic teacher, this quality of foregoing his or her own rights is a sign of integrity and nobility, false teachers frequently will re-frame issues to give the impression that things in which they are not interested to begin with are rights that they are foregoing out of the strength of character. There is no virtue involved when people sacrifice that in which they have no investment or to which they have no right in the first place.

Furthermore, among authentic guides, there would never be any talk about rights that are foregone. Such matters almost always are handled discretely and privately so that no one else would know either that such a right existed or that the individual declined to exercise such a right due to some higher purpose or commitment -- such as love for Allah, the Prophetic tradition, the saints, the truth, justice, and so on.

On the other hand, often times in the case of false teachers, staged 'leaks' are organized so that others come to learn about the 'magnanimity' of character being allegedly being exhibited by the false teacher. The leaks are staged so that the teacher doesn't appear to be tooting his or her own horn, when, in fact, this is what is actually going on.

13. The allowing of the student's rights.

Many people will gladly give up all their rights if they believe they will get peace, truth, knowledge, love, happiness, and self-realization in exchange. Little by little, a person can be manipulated into freely handing over every spiritual right that she or he has because that individual has been led to believe that one will get in return, things that are considered to be much more important than such individual rights. After all, if rule 12, noted above, indicates that a true teacher is someone who 'descends from his or her own rights', then, by emulating this rule, the student believes that he or she is on the path to having the interior spiritual states that the teacher is assumed to have, and in the interim, all of the student's rights have been given, freely, to the teacher ... the teacher hasn't had to ask for anything or lift a finger - - the student has done it all on her or his own.

14. The distributing of times in respect to Khivlat (retirement/seclusion).

Some false teachers claim that their spiritual work was completed years before and that all of their current efforts are dedicated to sharing the knowledge derived through such rigorous practices with the seekers after truth. Such teachers suggest that the first part of their life was devoted to practices such as seclusion, and, now, they are on a journey of return from the spiritual heights and have come back to the lowliness of the world to be with people and through detachment and service they continue to practice their seclusion in the midst of life. The return is described as a great sacrifice and service since they are depriving themselves of being totally immersed in the ways of mystical ecstasy in order to help ordinary people.

Oftentimes, the only thing false teachers are in 'retirement' from is authentic spirituality. They are in seclusion, all right, but it is seclusion from the truth of spirituality, and if a seeker does not know what the nature of mystical truth is, then, such individuals become vulnerable to almost any story a false teacher wishes to say about any aspect of spirituality.

15. Increasing of the works of supererogation.

In order not to attract attention, an authentic teacher often will do all their acts of supererogation in private in order to lessen the likelihood that the left hand (the nafs and its desire for the praise of others) will exploit what the right hand (the spirit) is doing. But, in the case of a false teacher, there are no such private acts because a false teacher has no desire to seek God's favor or blessings -- whether in private or in public.

I once knew a so-called teacher who would explain how no one would ever witness anyone saying prayers or doing zikr (remembrance) in his house because all acts of supererogation were done in private so as to avoid tempting the nafs to seek to be well thought of in the eyes of others. The real intent of this proclamation, however, was to misdirect people away from the disparity between the talk about prayer and remembrance and the lack of actual practice with respect to these activities. And, thus, lying about such things was made to appear to be a noble and humble attempt to preserve the sincerity of supererogatory acts that never took place.

The rule about increasing supererogatory acts is a good one. Yet, just as all of the other rules cited by Shaykh Suhrawardi (may Allah be pleased with him) could be corrupted and re-framed from the perspective of counterfeit spirituality, so, too, can this last rule for identifying the qualities of a true shaykh be exploited by those who, for whatever purposes, are intent on misleading others.

The bottom line on all of the foregoing is not to try to suggest that mysticism is an impossible path or that there are no authentic spiritual guides. In fact, coming to such a conclusion is one of the most destructive possibilities inherent in spiritual abuse ... for, a very natural tendency is that once one has been spiritually abused, one wishes to give up the quest because of the terrible pain and sense of betrayal one feels as a result of such spiritual abuse. Unfortunately, it is far too easy for some people to counterfeit what is authentic and debase the spiritual currency in the process, poisoning others in the process.

In truth, spirituality is a pursuit that, in some ways, is really no different than any other -- we learn from our experiences and from the mistakes that have been, and once these mistakes have been made,

recognized, and repented of, then, we push on ... a little wiser than we were before, and, hopefully, prepared to be a little more cautious about jumping too quickly toward possible spiritual opportunities than previously might have been the case. As someone once said, the only thing worse than making mistakes is not learning from them.

However, the further into the Latter Days we proceed, and the more distant from the time of the Prophet we become, then the more careful we must be with respect to the mystical path because there are many occult and satanic forces operative today that seek to mislead us and destroy our thirst for true spirituality, and there are, unfortunately, a diminishing number of authentic shaykhs in the world through whom to receive assistance. Consequently, all too frequently, finding counterfeit forms of spirituality these days is a lot easier than locating authentic forms of mysticism tends to be.

Chapter 7: Experience of Spiritual Abuse

There might be some people who are wondering what is meant by the idea of Sufi spiritual abuse or whether such an 'entity' even exists in anything other than a trivial sense, or whether there is anything of real importance from which one must recover. Moreover, some people might think that this problem -- if there is such a thing -- can be resolved simply through forgiveness of those whom one believes might have abused one, and/or by acquiring clarity concerning the nature of truth and moving in that direction, and/or by confronting those whom one feels have acted inappropriately in a truthful and reasoned matter that, hopefully, will clear up any problems that might exist, but if this should not be the case, then, pushing forward, nonetheless, with an understanding that permits the individuals to agree to disagree in the problematic areas and, then, cooperate in other, non-problematic areas.

Now, while willingness to forgive others for transgressions is a good quality, those who have been spiritually abused need to go through a variety of stages before they are in a position to truly forgive someone who has injured them in an essential way. Forgiveness is more than words ... it is a state of being, and if forgiveness is to be anything more than a superficial offering, then, psychological, emotional, and spiritual ground must be cleared in order that the act of forgiveness might be properly rooted, and, therefore, lasting.

However, when the individual who is committing spiritual abuse is a teacher or claims to be one, then, the problem becomes more complicated, because even with the presence of forgiveness, the relationship between a seeker and the alleged teacher has been compromised in an irreparable manner. This is so for the following reasons.

The context of any healthy interaction between a seeker and a spiritual guide is built upon a foundation of trust -- trust that requires truth, integrity, nobility, honesty, compassion, empathy, love, courage, decency, and friendship in order to be properly nurtured. These are the seeds of nisbath (the essential connection of spiritual aspiration) which comprise the umbilical cord that links a seeker and a teacher (and via the teacher with the entire silsilah) and through which the

spiritual transmissions take place that help, God willing, lead toward spiritual maturity.

One of the most destructive ramifications of spiritual abuse is the generation of a pervasive sense of betrayal within a spiritually abused individual. A person has invested one of the most precious qualities one individual has to offer to another -- namely, trust -- and that trust has been exploited, manipulated, used, undermined, twisted, and trampled upon.

The investing of trust points in two directions -- outward toward the one who is the recipient of such trust, and inward toward the individual who made a judgment about the appropriateness of making this sort of commitment. When trust has been abused, not only does an individual have difficulty trusting anyone else again, but such a person has great difficulty in trusting herself or himself, as well, to make judgments about when trust should, or should not, be invested in another human being at some point in the future.

In addition, a spiritually abused person loses confidence in one's ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood, reality and unreality, friends and non-friends, or reliable information and unreliable information -- and, this is actually a variation on, or added dimension of, the lost of trust that takes place during a process of spiritual abuse. In fact, one of the characteristic features of this sort of condition, is that the individual tends to vacillate between seeing, fairly clearly, that one has been abused, and, then, going into a state of not being sure if one is quite right about what has been going on ... between being angry about the callous, mean, hurtful, manner in which one has been treated, and feeling that, perhaps, the only problem is with one's reaction to the situation or one's interpretation of events and, consequently, that the only one who is out of kilter here is oneself.

The uncertainty that permeates the foregoing circumstances is complicated because other people in the group within which spiritual abuse is occurring are often very quick to try to persuade a person that what he or she perceives to be abuse can really be explained away and accounted for in a manner that is totally reconcilable with basic principles of the spiritual path. However, many of these would-be advisers have, themselves, various sorts of vested interests to protect

and, therefore, might be in denial about what is going on, or such individuals might, perhaps, be genuinely unaware of what has been transpiring but, nevertheless, are unwilling to contemplate the possibility of any wrongdoing on the part of their 'beloved' teacher because they do not wish to have to work through the implications of such things in relation to their own lives. In addition, there are some of these would-be advisors who know perfectly well what is going on but, for entirely self-serving reasons, have permitted their integrity to be corrupted, at some point in the past, and actually conspire with the teacher, both directly and indirectly, to perpetuate abusive circumstances and/or circumstances that are conducive to manipulation, exploitation, and deceit.

In any event, there is a dimension to our beings that tends to be tied to our relationships with other people in fairly complex structures. In many different ways we rely on others to help us to try to locate truth and reality, and we also rely on others to help us struggle against a sense of anomie or alienation that often knocks against the horizons of our consciousness and threatens to carry us away to an abyss of dissociation, depersonalization, and de-realization.

We are beings who seek out and often need companionship and friendship. This need for social contact is sometimes a help, and it is sometimes a problem -- especially when it interferes with, or undermines, our attempts to seek or recognize the truth of things and, as a result, we let the social need over-rule: what experience is showing us, and what our senses are recording, and what our intuitions are telling us, and what our reason is pointing out to us, and what the Sufi Path requires from us.

When we feel betrayed we often look to friends and companions to help us sort things out. When the 'friends' and companions to whom we turn for assistance are part of the problem, one begins to feel alone, confused, paranoid, uncertain, and stressed-out in a hurry.

On the one hand, one longs for the comfort and familiarity of relationships that offer security and help orient us in the world. On the other hand, one has begun to realize that one might be on one's own -- not only betrayed by a teacher but betrayed by so-called friends who have suddenly become indifferent to the suffering of another human

being if helping such an individual means that they will have to look into the abyss of betrayal and alienation as well.

Many of the previously assumed 'friends' will become angry at any mention of spiritual abuse going on, and many of them either will not want to even consider the evidence, or they will want to shoot the messenger, or they will want to trivialize the whole issue, telling the person to be more tolerant, flexible, or forgiving, as well as expressing impatience and annoyance that such topics are even being discussed. When one comes to realize that people who one thought were one's friends are not, the sense of betrayal deepens.

One starts to understand that the assumptions on which many parts of one's hermeneutic or interpretation of experience have rested, are not shared by others. One finds oneself hanging in the wind of events, not knowing how to come in from the cold, and not knowing where to call 'home'.

The poisons of spiritual abuse run very deep. They are quite pervasive and persistent. The poisons are very virulent and not all that easy to cleanse from one's system.

These poisons attack many vital dimensions of a human being. These include: identity, purpose, meaning, understanding, judgment, trust, sense of community, and having a methodology that permits one to sort out the wheat from the chaff and, thereby, provides a compass by which to navigate through life.

A spiritually abused person has been incapacitated in a number of fundamental ways, and picking up the pieces is a difficult process -- a process that some people never complete, and that some others never even begin, becoming empty shells of humanity ... never able to overcome the devastating effects of the poisons that have been fed into their systems. The experience of spiritual abuse brings almost every aspect of life into serious question, and, as such, constitutes one of the most profound crises a human being can encounter.

An individual who is going through this crisis has become completely disoriented with respect to life, self, meaning, direction, value, and truth. Everything has, pretty much, been turned upside down. Nothing seems to make much sense, and one's constant companions are stress, anxiety, uncertainty, fear, alienation, and

struggling just to keep one's head above existential waters -- emotionally, psychologically, physically, socially, and spiritually.

Many of the practices one might have been given or following with respect to an abusive teacher or group, seem to lose purpose. One calls into question the teachings and interpretations that have, heretofore, formed the world-view out of which one has been operating. One is assailed by a army of doubts and uncertainties about an array of values and principles of spirituality.

One wonders about the meaning of all that has gone on in terms of one's relationship with God. Is it a curse ... a punishment ... a chastisement ... a prelude to something better ... an inescapable part of one's fate ... a necessary learning experience ... an opportunity to practice patience, forgiveness, tolerance, repentance, nobility, compassion, kindness, and all of the other qualities of character that were difficult enough to try to struggle with when one thought that things were going well?

One wonders if God is trying to tell one that the Sufi path is a chimera, or a false way, or that one just had the misfortune to get hooked up with people who were false to the teachings of the Sufi way. Could one, or should one, ever be willing to trust someone else again with the responsibilities of being a spiritual guide?

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has said that there are 71 different sects among the Jewish people, and only one of them is correct, and there are 72 different sects among the Christian people, and only one of them is correct, and there are 73 different sects among the Muslim people, and only one of them is correct. So, where is one to go, and who is one to believe, and how is one to proceed?

The Prophet also indicated that the Qur'an has outer and inner meaning, and that the inner meaning also has a hidden level of meaning, and so on until seven levels of understanding. Even on the surface of things, there are vast differences of understanding from one Muslim to the next.

Does this mean there is no such thing as truth? No, it doesn't.

Very clearly, in both of the previous Hadiths, the Prophet is indicating that there is a way of truth, but, at the same time, finding one's way to that truth is not as clear-cut and straightforward as many

people try to suggest. In fact, this is one of the reasons why a person usually goes in search of someone to guide one through the pitfalls, swamps, quagmires, mazes, deserts, and brigands that populate the search for truth.

Getting clarity is difficult at the best of times. This challenge becomes an even bigger problem for someone who has been betrayed by a spiritually abusive teacher and/or group and is merely trying to find enough semblance of sanity, balance, and energy to go from one hour to the next without becoming completely lost in the hinterlands of complete dissociation, depersonalization, de-realization, and depression.

This is why one of the most important first steps for a spiritually abused individual is to be able to make contact with other individuals who are going through an existential quandary very similar to one's own. Not only does this contact afford an opportunity to debrief one another by means of an exchange of information about a wide variety of issues, but such contact offers a chance to bring some very needed emotional, social, and psychological stability into one's life.

Just as Shari'ah, or Divine Law, helps establish a context of security within which the members of a community can, insha' Allah, pursue Islam in peace, so too, making contact with other people who have experienced the vicissitudes of spiritual abuse helps establish a context of potential security through which the members of that group have an opportunity to regain some very important perspective, balance, motivation, and understanding through which to begin to try to reassemble the necessary first remnants of self-trust through which to begin to try to engage life and figure out, God willing, what one might try to continue on with one's search for truth, purpose, meaning, essential identity, and Self-realization.

Chapter 8: Staying and Leaving

When someone has been in a spiritually abusive relationship -- one in which a person has been the recipient of spiritual abuse rather than the individual or individuals who have been the perpetrator(s) of such abuse -- there are a great many conflicting emotions that race across the inner screen of consciousness. Although there are differences among individuals that reflect the uniqueness of their particular set of circumstances, nonetheless, there often are a great many feelings that are shared in common by people who have been abused.

A person's feeling of having been a fool is one of the emotions that is felt, at one time or another, by almost everyone who has been spiritually abused. We think back over our experiences with the individual and/or individuals who have abused us and we begin to look at various past events in a new light and start to intuit the real nature of what those events actually meant instead of how we might have interpreted them at the time they happened.

We wonder how we could have missed the clues that, in the light of new experience, seem so obvious now. We tend to berate ourselves and become somewhat judgmental and are inclined to become a little spiritually abusive toward our own being through such self-directed criticisms and evaluations.

Spiritual charlatans and spiritually abusive people have most of us at a disadvantage. They are playing a game according to a set of rules that they have invented for the purposes of exploiting other people and that, therefore, favors their side -- a game that most of the rest of us do not even realize we are in until we begin to encounter problems and experience destructive consequences.

We meet people -- whether in real life or on-line -- and we engage them according to our intentions -- which might be, among other things, sincere, open, honest, caring, empathetic, and so on. We are looking for a way, which gives expression to truth, justice, integrity, love, acceptance, knowledge, understanding, identity, happiness, peace, friendship, realization of inner potential, and so on.

If the people whom we encounter are spiritually abusive people, then, they will use the information we give them to profile us and chart

our vulnerabilities and exploitable dimensions of life history, personality and interests. They will use the information we give them to frame themselves in a way that will resonate with our likes, dislikes, interests, needs, goals, commitments, world view, and so on.

In a very short period of time, we begin to feel a very strong and developing emotional bond with these individuals. We have told them what we are looking for, and they script the interaction so that, little by little, we are led to where they wish us to go -- that is, to consider them as friends, confidants, people that have our welfare at heart, people whom we can trust, people who are like-minded and like-hearted.

They encourage us to associate with them, and why wouldn't we want to do that because through these individuals we are beginning to develop a sense of acceptance, identity, belonging, community, family, togetherness. Doubts, fears, questions, worries, and anxieties start to melt away. We begin to feel like we have found an oasis in the desert of life -- all the qualities we have been searching for (either consciously or unconsciously) seem to be present in these individuals.

Then, here and there, certain things happen. Maybe, nothing very major, but, still, whatever it is that has happened or that we have noticed leaves an unpleasant taste in our spiritual mouths or we are uncomfortable with something that has gone on.

In the beginning we tend to shelve these incidents and store them in the archives of our memories, far away from our everyday sort of consciousness. The reason many of us do this is that we tend to think either one of two things: (a) people are human and they make mistakes and we should be forbearing, tolerant, forgiving, and compassionate -- this is all part of Sufi adab, and this is all part of loving someone, and, so, we try to put into practice the various teachings and principles of the Sufi path. In short, we shouldn't concern ourselves with the speck in someone else's eye, but, rather, attend to the beam in our own eye; (b) because of our low spiritual state and lack of deep spiritual understanding, we don't properly understand the significance of what we have seen or witnessed, and if only we had the requisite insight, then, everything would be capable of being explained in a way that is fully reconcilable with the principles and teachings of the Sufi tradition.

But, still, the anomalous events and happenings keep returning to consciousness, and we are haunted by them because although they make us feel anxious and uncomfortable, we don't know how to reconcile such events with everything else we believe we have experienced and everything else we believe we know about these individuals. When we are haunted by memories of these unexplained events and happenings, doubts arise in our mind.

Ah, we say to ourselves. This is but the rebellious nafs and the whisperings of Iblis trying to seduce us away from all that is good and decent. We feel guilty and ashamed for harboring such thoughts about other individuals. We struggle with our doubts, thinking that these doubts are our enemies when, in truth, these are flashes of inspiration that are rooted in Divine assistance concerning issues of truth and propriety.

Yet, perhaps, we have been led to believe by the people whom we have encountered that Iblis and nafs will try to attack us and separate us off from the teacher or the group. And, lo and behold, here we are experiencing the very sort of event that we have been warned about.

We began to lose trust in our essential selves ... our sense of right and wrong ... our sense of decency and propriety ... our sense of justice and fairness. We begin to feel we will be lost without the teacher and/or the group because many of us have been induced to look to the teacher or the group as our means of consensual validation with respect to the nature of reality.

Now, if the teacher were an authentic shaykh, then, to be sure, our understanding of ourselves and the nature of reality will be deeply influenced, colored, oriented and shaped by what goes on in our relationship with such an individual. But, a real teacher never wishes to make another individual dependent on him or her -- rather, the intention is always to help an individual develop the person's own spiritual sense of taste or dhawk concerning interior events so that one can learn to distinguish truth from falsehood and so that one can learn how to trust one's essential Self (as opposed to one's surface self that is rooted in an unredeemed nafs).

But, fraudulent spiritual teachers and groups seek to undermine the foregoing framework of essential growth in understanding. Consequently, most of the people who are in abusive relationships

would prefer to doubt ourselves than we would doubt the perpetrators of abuse -- especially those whom we would like to believe, or whom we have been induced to believe, are more knowledgeable than we are or better than we are.

In spiritually abusive groups, questioning tends to be discouraged or dealt with in elusive, indirect, and ambiguous ways. No one will give a straight answer to questions, or the importance of such questions are dismissed, deflected or trivialized. In time, we begin to find ourselves acting as our own censors in order to stay out of stress-laden areas.

As with all abusive situations, silence of one kind or another descends on the abusive relationship and no one is permitted to address the issue of on-going abusiveness. This is one of the cardinal rules of all abusive relationships -- keep the silence.

People begin to live in fear. Fear of crossing boundaries that have been established through techniques of compliance, obedience, duress, emotional blackmail (through, say, the threat of shunning or alienation of affection, or expulsion), and so on, help to enhance the underlying sense of surreal stress, anxiety, uncertainty, and ambiguity that are being felt but that cannot be talked about or explored in a direct manner.

In addition, oftentimes, when we become part of an abusive group -- although this was not our original wish or intention -- we make statements of commitment about friendship, love, purpose, and so on. There are psychological forces within us that, due to issues of self-image and a sense of consistency and coherency, are resistant to either disengaging from those public statements and commitments ... we want to think of ourselves as reliable, stable, consistent individuals, and withdrawing from a previously made public statement about commitment to the teacher or the group tends to make us feel unreliable, unstable, and inconsistent.

Abusive spiritual groups have no problem with changing the rules of the game to suit their purposes. But, they tend to be very quick to remind us about our own commitments and public statements and the 'need' to live up to what we have said or promised.

If we begin to think about withdrawing from a group because we have become burdened down by the nature of the events to which we

have been witness or by the nature of the information that we have learned that has very serious, problematic implications concerning either the so-called teacher and/or the group, we often experience anxiety, fear, guilt, and shame. How could we have allowed ourselves to get into such a situation? What will we do? Where will we go? Whom can we trust? Is this a punishment from God? Am I cursed? Is Satan now my constant companion?

We tend to bounce about among anger, shame, guilt, and a sense of betrayal, like the steel ball in a pin-ball machine, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, we harbor a fervent hope that, perhaps, everything is really okay vis-à-vis the teacher and/or group and that whatever damage has been done can be healed with time. We think back on the positive, pleasant, enjoyable, exciting facets of our coming to be associated with the teacher and group through a haze of nostalgia and wish for the innocence of those times to return -- when, to use the words of Bob Seeger: "I wish I didn't know now what I didn't know then."

Three, and only three possibilities, confront an individual at this point. (1) the individual, not being able to deal with the pain of disengaging from the abusive teacher or group, will choose to become further entrenched in a spiritually abusive relationship and suffer the consequences of that choice (spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, socially, and physically) -- essentially, this means that the abusers have won the battle; (2) the individual, despite the pain associated with disengaging oneself from a abusive relationship, will seek out the help and support necessary to complete the disengagement knowing that one's future happiness, identity, peace of mind, and opportunity for continued spiritual growth are, God willing, absolutely dependent on making such a choice and following through on it; (3) the individual will vacillate back and forth at a sort of spiritual fail-safe point, circling around and around, not knowing whether to continue on or return to base -- and base here should be construed to be a function of seeking the truth of things.

Those of us who have experienced spiritual abuse are intimately familiar with the anger, guilt, shame, betrayal, alienation, loneliness, bewilderment, uncertainty, anxiety, and fear that you might be feeling about your situation. All that can be said is that these feelings do pass

in time and that there is a future full of optimistic possibilities that exists beyond the horizons of an abusive relationship.

But, coming to this realization takes time. The problems presented by this interim period is one of the reasons why spiritual abuse recovery groups are created -- to help people who are seeking assistance to move on with their lives in a constructive fashion -- spiritually, and in other ways as well.

Chapter 9: Never Again

Not too long ago, an individual indicated to me that he or she was disinclined to ever, again, be part of a silsilah or take initiation with a spiritual guide as a result of the experiences that this individual had in a particular context of spiritual abuse. This is quite understandable, and, indeed, in view of the times in which we live, the sad truth of our predicament is that finding an authentic Sufi shaykh is becoming more and more difficult. Many people claim to be spiritually legitimate and authorized agents of this or that silsilah, but few of them are.

Differentiating between the real deal and its counterfeit imitators in this regard, entails a variety of difficulties that, often times, seems irresolvable for the vast majority of us. There is a wealth of information available about, at least, the outer, structural character of the mystical path, and almost anyone with a few well-chosen books, a little intelligence, a serviceable memory, and a certain amount of chutzpah knows how to imitate, at least, the surface trappings of a spiritual teacher.

If one throws in a modicum of charm, theatrical leanings, charisma, self-confidence, talent, story-telling ability, cleverness, and exposure to how the world works, then the task of trying to identify the skunk in the woodpile becomes even more confusing (unless, of course, the skunk releases a telling odor that happens when alleged teachers get caught in one scandal or another). Furthermore, if the fraudulent teacher is a sociopath, or a narcissistic personality, and is, therefore, untroubled by the damage he or she does to other people, then, people are not seen as human beings by such an individual but rather as 'objects' to be manipulated, exploited, used, controlled, toyed with, lied to, deceived, and disposed of when their usefulness has been exhausted, and, consequently, in such cases, the absence of a conscience -- when this absence is properly disguised or hidden or re-framed -- makes detection of the presence of spiritual deception that much more problematic.

In addition, some of these fraudulent teachers have mastered techniques of: Ericksonian-like (Milton not Erik) hypnosis, trance induction, neural linguistic programming, group dynamics, snapping, speaking in rhythms that render the brain very susceptible to suggestion, compliance entrainment, undermining self-esteem or self-

trust, using doubt, ambiguity, and paradox to short-circuit logical analysis (as well as evade scrutiny), consensual validation, isolation from family and support group, social influence, and misdirection, to further muddy the waters of clear vision when it comes to telling the difference between a charlatan and a legitimate teacher. Anyone who supposes that he or she would not be vulnerable to the application of such techniques by a spiritual fraud who knows the nature of those techniques, really is whistling past the cemetery.

Finally, fraudulent teachers tend to be seekers of information -- as opposed to mystical knowledge -- which is used to exploit various vulnerabilities in potential victims in order to control the latter and to make them more compliant, obedient and the like. Such spiritual charlatans like to be at the center of all exchanges of information in order to be able to ensure that they control the nature, direction, and uses of data flow within the group, between the group and the outside world, as well as and between the so-called teacher and the would-be spiritual seeker -- in fact, those alleged mystical teachers who are quite adept at controlling the flow and quality of information are often able to make themselves look like they have extraordinary psychic powers, when nothing of the sort might be true.

On the other hand, a few of these fraudulent teachers do possess -- at least, in my opinion, and this is based on what I believe I have experienced in certain instances, as well as credible people with whom I have interacted -- elements of worldly kashf (unveiling) which involves, to some degree that varies from individual to individual, the ability to, among other things, read minds, project thoughts, see some events at a distance, and induce certain altered states of consciousness in other individuals. Such worldly kashf is not the same as -- or an indication that the individual who shows evidence of such psychic abilities has any degree of -- spiritual kashf that is the only thing of importance to the mystical path ... indeed, the possession of worldly kashf is often treated by authentic spiritual teachers as a distraction from, and dangerous threat to, the real business of the spiritual path.

The presence of all, or any significant combination of the foregoing techniques, characteristics, and forces makes identifying the possible existence of spiritual fraud in any given case a very, very difficult proposition. Not all spiritual charlatans are buffoons -- some are

extremely clever at camouflaging things in such a way that they often are able to afford themselves escape routes of plausible deniability that leaves people guessing, wondering and uncertain as to whether they are being conned, exploited and abused.

People might leave because they dislike what is going on, or due to the way they feel as a result of the subtle, indirect criticism that always seems to be in the air with respect to people who don't do as they are expected to, or because of the constant cloud of pressure toward conformity that tends to envelop relationships within the group, or for various other reasons, but, more often than not, if they have not left in response to a specific instance of, say, sexual exploitation, they are going to leave under a cloud of uncertainty about what really was going on in that group or with that teacher. They might get on with their lives, but along the horizons of consciousness, there are a lot of unanswered questions.

A person's reluctance to become involved with anything related to the Sufi Path makes sense in the light of such experience. I, too -- given the nature of my own experiences in this respect, have developed a healthy, God willing, amount of skepticism when it comes to all of the alleged Sufi teachers and groups that are clamoring for attention these days and wish to be considered as the purveyors of authentic spiritual tradition, both in North America and elsewhere in the world.

However, I also believe that these false guides are knowingly, or unknowingly, serving the agenda of Iblis. The deepest, most fervent wish of Iblis is to see human beings abandon their potential for spiritual realization -- after all, this is the promise that Iblis made to God after being cast out from being able to associate with the angels due to his refusal to prostrate before the one in whom the position of vicegerent had been invested; Iblis asked for respite from Allah in order to ambush human beings and sway them from the sirat-ul-mustaqueen, the straight path, and the straight path encompasses a lot more than just the basics of Islam that many people pursue for purposes of attaining Paradise or avoiding Hell.

I might never find an authentic spiritual guide again. Maybe, my first guide who was not a fraud and who was not abusive, exploitive, or manipulative -- unlike my subsequent choice who was -- is going to

constitute the sum total of the mystical guidance that I will receive in life --that he is all which my rizq (Divinely allotted portion) permits.

Nevertheless, I also do not intend to, God willing, let some miserable excuses for human beings -- that is, people who have betrayed and corrupted their own spiritual potential, as false spiritual teachers have done -- take permanent root in my life by continuing to control me through inducing so much confusion, fear, anxiety, hurt, frustration, and depression to enter my mind, heart, and soul, that I never want to consider such possibilities again. To my way of thinking, this just permits the abuse to continue on unabated.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has counseled us to avoid the errors of the right and the left, and that the middle way is the golden mean. If I am too vulnerable and willing to follow the next greatest spiritual presence since sliced bread, who comes along, then, I likely will be committing one kind of error, but if I give up the quest altogether, I think this -- at least for me -- would be another kind of error.

The precise character of the middle way is not easy to identify. I don't have any magical solutions to offer people who have been spiritually abused, but struggling toward developing patience and a readiness to take advantage of a genuine opportunity, should it arise, might be a prudent thing to do -- as some of the people in the Native communities like say, keeping an opening in the circles, gatherings and personal lives through which constructive possibility might enter into our midst, seems like a wise thing to do.

No one but Allah can grant success in any venture we might undertake. All we can do is to seek, aspire, struggle, and strive -- "O man! surely you must strive (to attain) to your Lord, a hard striving until you meet Him." (Qur'an 84:6) -- this is the essence of real jihad ... the jihad of personal transformation.

All we can do, God willing, is to try, according to our capacity to do so. We should neither over-estimate our spiritual wherewithal, nor underestimate it, and much of life is spent trying, via the trial and error of experience, to learn just where we fit into things in relation to such God-given potential.

Allah says: "And (as for) those who strive hard for Us, We will most certainly guide them in Our ways; and Allah is most surely with the doers of good." (29:69) Elsewhere, the Qur'an indicates: "and helping the believers is ever incumbent on Us." (Qur'an 30:47) So, if we learn how to strive hard for Allah, to be doers of good, and to believe, as best we can, God has given a promise of assistance and guidance.

Somewhat related to the foregoing issue of not wanting to ever, again, participate in a mystical path once one has been abused is the following question. Why do people exist who spend their lives attempting to manipulate, exploit, control, hurt, deceive, abuse, undermine, mislead, and lead people astray from the truth.

The fact of the matter is there is a perverse pleasure associated with being a conduit for evil to which the unredeemed nafs is very attracted and by which it is easily seduced. When one adds the whisperings of Iblis -- who is the original prototype for a false spiritual guide ... someone that is fiendishly clever, constantly creative in a destructive way, and totally entangled in delusions of one kind or another -- as well as the hypnotic call of dunya, then, one begins to appreciate the fact that evil is made to become fair seeming in the eyes, minds and hearts of those who are eager to rebel and transgress against their own spiritual potential -- "Thus does Allah set a seal over the heart of every proud, haughty one." (Qur'an 40:35)

Such people rejoice in the machinations of the nafs. Such people derive joy in the illusory. Such people treat existence as a game and as sport. Those sorts of people are constantly forgetting that God said: "What, did you think that We created you only for sport?" (Qur'an 23:115) The enkephalins and endorphins of such people flow, and their mouths salivate, when the thought of doing evil -- which has been made fair seeming to them -- enters their minds and hearts.

Therefore, be thankful if, by the Grace of Allah, the sort of evil that delights in doing the aforementioned sort of harm to others and in spiritually oppressing the latter is alien to one and, consequently, seems largely inexplicable. May Allah continue to keep us in this condition.

Finally, the issue of exit counseling or extracting people from a spiritually abusive is a very complex issue. In some cases, there is nothing that can be done, except to pray for the ones who continue to

be kept in abusive shackles, while, simultaneously, maintaining a distance from such individuals. In other cases, there are steps that can be taken, but a great deal of effort, planning, and co-ordination is necessary for, God willing, success to be achieved without violating human made laws or transgressing beyond the allowable boundaries that have been established by Divinity.

Whether, in any given case, one should keep one's distance and pray, or one is, instead, dealing with individuals where remedial steps might be effectively taken, really varies from situation to situation and person to person. There are many problems and dangers surrounding the issue of intervention -- not only for the people who would seek to intervene, but, as well, with respect to those for whom intervention might be deemed to be desirable.

Groups have been established to help people develop a greater insight, God willing, into different dimensions of the phenomenon of spiritual abuse, especially as this relates to the Sufi path. The exchange of experiences, concerns, questions, suggestions, reflections, and so on that takes place through such groups have, hopefully, an educational value, and the dissemination of this kind of learning within those groups, is intended to take people one step in the direction of trying to apprise more and more individuals about the dangers that exist in conjunction with the prevalence of spiritual charlatans who live amongst us -- and, maybe, at some point in time, people who are being spiritually abused might, God willing, find their way to such groups and benefit from what is said or benefit from the learning that members take away with them.

Chapter 10: Victim's Mentality

Some people, when they hear about the activities of the Sufi Spiritual Abuse Recovery Assistance Group, object to such an idea because they believe it tends to encourage a 'victim's mentality'. However, this program actually was set in motion to provide people with an opportunity to acquire or share experiences, information, as well as understanding in relation to the problems, characteristics, issues, questions, and dynamics of spiritual abuse -- both with respect to the abuser as well as those who have been abused.

We have found -- and, in addition, other individuals who are involved with trying to lend assistance to the process of detoxification that is required to deal with the emotional, social, psychological, and spiritual devastation that ensues from the growing realization in a person who has been exposed to the destructive effects of abusive behavior have also found -- that a period of debriefing is a necessary part of the healing process. Anyone who supposes that all one has to do is acknowledge that spiritual abuse is present and, then, one can move on to other things, simply does not grasp the truly toxic and insidious impact that spiritual abuse has on an individual -- in fact, there is a very good chance that individuals who think in this fashion are either in denial about the presence of spiritual abuse in their lives, or they look at the phenomenon from a safe, comfortable distance and have no real insight into the nature of just how ugly, cruel, demeaning, callous, and vicious the perpetration of spiritual abuse is.

One will not be ready to move on in a healthy, constructive manner until one understands the structural character of the problem, and until one has had an opportunity to work through the many emotions and problems surrounding this attack on identity, meaning, purpose, trust, and spirituality in a person's life. Among other things, there are stages of grief that must be acknowledged and traveled with respect to the profound sense of loss that often accompanies experiences of spiritual abuse -- a pervasive sense of loss concerning truth, trust, friendship, sincerity, purpose, meaning, identity, security, community, peace, stability, and understanding.

Although we must all take full responsibility for the choices we make, nevertheless, when people use tactics of: deception, disinformation, manipulation, psychological and social pressure,

misdirection, exploitation of emotional vulnerabilities, compliance induced obedience or conformity, undermining of critical thinking faculties, de-stabilizing one's sense of identity, sleep-deprivation, love bombing, isolation, invasion of personal space, trance-induction, re-framing, stress, neural linguistic programming, and/or dissonance in order to gain authoritarian control over people's lives, then, an individual often does not know what they are becoming entangled in until it is too late and substantial toxicity already has spread through one's system.

The foregoing tactics, when used skillfully, have proven to be effective in shaping, coloring, and re-orienting mental and emotional processes in even those people who have been warned about the powerful nature of the spiritual, emotional, social, ideological, and psychological deconstruction techniques that are about to be used. Some people who have gone into such settings knowing the character of the game that is being played have succumbed to the process in as little as 48 hours.

When a person is blind-sided by a collection of such techniques -- that is, when a person is initiated into the transformational process without knowing what is being done -- there are very few people who can come out of that set of experiences unscathed ... no matter how intelligent or self-willed or independent they might believe themselves to be. In fact, in some ways, such arrogant, self-conceit actually is a very exploitable vulnerability by people who are abusive ... as the Satanic Al Pacino character says to the Keanu Reeves character in the movie -- *Devil's Advocate* -- "Vanity is definitely my favorite sin."

It has been said that those who do not learn from the mistakes of history are doomed to repeat such errors. Similarly, people who do not learn -- in a very fundamental manner -- about the phenomenon of spiritual abuse and how it introduces powerful toxins and sources of subliminal influence into one's system, leave themselves vulnerable to further rounds of exploitation by others.

In fact, some people who are too quick to want to move on and bury the past, are really merely trying to avoid the considerable work that must be done in order to regain control over one's life. Moreover, unknowingly, some of the people who think they have moved on are merely whistling past the cemetery, or, in fact, some of these abused

people are actually still being manipulated, controlled, exploited and used by the abusers in order to try to do damage control or effect a cover-up of what is actually going on in order to muddy the waters and make it more difficult for others to come to learn the truth about what is actually transpiring.

We have known since the time of the Stockholm Syndrome, that people who are taken hostage without consent come to identify with their captors. Similarly, people who have been abused sometimes become the apologists for the abusers (and many forms of spiritual abuse are really instances of taking the minds and hearts of people hostage through non-voluntary means).

When this happens, they make excuses for, or try to re-frame the character of events, or indicate that the abusers are themselves being abused and really can't help themselves even as all manner of evidence mounts that the abusers knowingly lie, deceive, manipulate, coerce, seduce, and do damage to people. Or, such abused individuals try to persuade others that no real damage has been done, or that there is no evil, or that, underneath everything, the abusers are all innocent, sweet, caring, passionate, loving people who, perhaps, made a few errors of judgment here and there ... but, certainly nothing to get all upset about and let's just forgive and forget.

However, meaningful forgiveness requires awareness of what has transpired. Moving on -- at least, if it is to be healthy and constructive -- requires an understanding of what has transpired. A person who is still caught-up in the emotional turbulence set in motion by spiritual abuse and, as a result, seeks to be an apologist for those who have been, and are continuing to be, abusive toward others, has neither the awareness nor understanding to be able to forgive or move on in any way that is essentially healthy.

Such individuals will continue to associate with the abusers in various ways, under the guise that they (the ones who have been abused) are merely trying to help or assist or be compassionate and loving toward the misguided abusers. Yet, until one has regained control of one's life, one is not in any position to be helpful, or lend assistance or be compassionate in any but a very superficial and self-serving manner.

First, one must become healthy. However, one will never be able to detoxify as long as one continues to associate with the abusers.

If one places a rock in an outhouse, the rock will absorb the aromatic ambience of the outhouse. Human beings are a lot more vulnerable and permeable to environmental influences than a rock is.

Chapter 11: Perpetrators

Several individuals have wondered why the names of spiritually abusive individuals are not mentioned specifically so that people might be able to know what Orders and groups to stay away from, as well as in order to be able to breathe more easily and gain reassurance about certain spiritual groups with which they have been associating. In addition, there have been a few individuals who believe there are a number of worthwhile 'rules of thumb' that can be used to help separate the wheat from the chaff with respect to the issue of legitimacy among potential spiritual guides -- one of these aforementioned rules being: to use the quality of a mureed as a sort of barometer for gauging the authenticity of that mureed's shaykh.

The Sufi Spiritual Abuse Recovery Group serves a variety of functions and purposes. However, among these purposes and functions there is none that is intended to utilize this Group as a clearinghouse for specifying who might be an authentic or inauthentic spiritual teacher or for trying to identify that silsilahs are legitimate. This is not a matter of being coy, evasive, unforthcoming, difficult, or irresponsible. Rather, the whole arena of naming names would take us very far away from the primary foci for which this Group was established in the first place.

To speak about problems, experiences, feelings, difficulties, principles, issues, obstacles, interpretations, resources, and reactions in relation to spiritual abuse does not require any names to be mentioned. No one has to be chastised, and no one has to be defended.

If, say, 6-7 years ago, someone had asked me, or a number of the other people who are members of this Group, whether such and such an alleged teacher, or such and such spiritual circle, was authentic, we might all have answered in the affirmative to both questions. If someone were to ask us the same things today, we all would feel serious reservations toward, if not outright rejection of, the so-called teacher, as well as have a lot of uncertainty concerning the extent of the legitimacy of the last two or three shaykhs of the silsilah -- not because of anything that we have learned about those latter individuals but due to the doubts and questions that the behaviors of the present so-called shaykh raises in relation to those earlier spiritual

guides. Were we wrong 6-7 years ago, but right today? Or, were we right then, and wrong now?

The value of the answer one receives to a question depends on when the latter is raised and to whom it is directed, and the character of experience over time might affect how a given question is answered at different junctures in a person's life. Furthermore, would knowing the name of the alleged guide or the relevant silsilah get one any nearer to the truth of the issues that are at the heart of the problem before us?

The Sufi Spiritual Abuse Recovery Group tends to focus on three themes. More specifically, (1) what constitutes spiritual abuse, and (2) how does one go about seeking recovery, (3) in the context of the Sufi Path -- both with respect to (1) and (2).

There is no need for the identification of specific personalities in order for us to deal with any of these three issues. If one listens to the experiences being shared, if one pursues the questions that are being asked, if one reflects on the principles being cited, if one seeks to merge horizons with the difficulties encountered, if one strives to understand the nature of the emotions, motivations, intentions, thoughts, suggestions, possibilities, and behaviors that are being explored, if one inquires into the basic issues of life that we all face -- Who are we? Why are we here? What are the possibilities? How should we seek? Where are we going? When will we know? ... then the releasing of names is not a very useful exercise.

Moreover, the very fact someone would ask about the authenticity of a given silsilah or a particular individual would seem to suggest that the person who is making the inquiry doesn't really know the truth of the matter and, therefore, is in need of exploring such issues with greater rigor in order to arrive at a more informed and insightful hermeneutic of the situation. In addition, such understanding cannot be derived by borrowing the reassurances of another individual, irrespective of how well-meaning the offering of that sort of opinion might have been, because no one can do another person's spiritual work. There are many people in this group who are having to face the ramifications of spiritual abuse because, among other things, they trusted someone's word about the truth of something. One of the most central themes in recovering from spiritual abuse revolves around the

problem of trust -- whom to trust? What to trust? When to trust? How much to trust? Why trust? Will I ever be able to trust my own judgment again?

To claim that such and such a silsilah is okay, or that such and such an individual is all right, entirely misses the primary issue for someone who is trying to come to grips with spiritual abuse. A person who has been exposed to spiritual abuse doesn't want to know what someone's opinion is about such and such a silsilah ... a person who has been subjected to spiritual abuse wants to know why what is said should be trusted.

Once trust has been violated in an essential sense, one is not eager to be violated in the same way again. There are no words to adequately convey the intensity and depth of betrayal one feels when essential, spiritual trust has been trampled upon.

The whole of the Sufi path can be summed up in one word -- nisbath. Nisbath is the channel way of reciprocal trust through which teacher and seeker communicate ... through which understanding is transmitted and acquired ... through which spiritual progress is made possible.

Faith, insight, hal (states), intuition, kashf (unveiling) , stations, knowledge, adab(spiritual etiquette), and yaqueen (certainty) are nourished and developed through the roots of nisbath. When trust is undermined due to the presence of spiritual abuse, nisbath cannot be established, and suluk, or spiritual journeying, of any substantive character becomes extremely difficult, if not dangerous.

What was once freely given ... perhaps, too freely -- namely, trust -- before the arrival of spiritual abuse, must be struggled for mightily after the emergence of spiritual abuse. This is true not just in relation to how a spiritually abused person feels about others, but, as well, how a spiritually abused person feels about trusting herself or himself with respect to almost anything of spiritual importance.

If spiritual frauds were all simpletons who were consumed with run-of-the-mill spiritual illnesses such as greed, laziness, and lust, then, identifying some of the warning signs that mark the presence of these sort of maladies might be a relatively straightforward process.

Unfortunately, not all spiritual frauds are simpletons and, furthermore, the nature of the underlying spiritual problem is often quite complex.

For example, if the goal of an individual is to corrupt someone, or to lead the latter person away from the truth, or to interfere with the realization of the latter person's spiritual potential, then, detecting the warning signs that indicate the presence of such intentions tends to become a much more difficult and subtle problem. Disinformation, misinformation, and falsehoods, of one sort or another, mixed in with the truth, become the poisons of choice -- often tasteless, odorless, and difficult to detect at the time of consumption.

In a later essay within this book, I speak about the behavioral transformations that have taken place in several young Canadians who were induced to undergo a paradigm change by their so-called spiritual guide. The difference in these two young women before and after this transition was nothing short of breath-taking.

However, one would only see these differences under certain circumstances -- namely, situations in which the two individuals were introduced to facts, evidence, experiences, and truths that threatened the stability and viability of the new paradigm. In most other circumstances, one would see them as kind, warm, friendly, loving, thoughtful, honest, even-tempered, patient, caring individuals ... and I have direct experience of this truth because I have spent a fair amount of time in the presence of such people and know how they act in certain settings.

If one were to take a sampling of behavior from the latter population of possibilities, the sampling would be biased, and, consequently, not really representative of different behavioral potentials within these individuals. If one were to try to gauge the spiritual authenticity of the so-called teacher based on this sort of sampling technique, one would tend to have a very favorable opinion concerning the issue of spiritual legitimacy in relation to that alleged guide.

However, if one were to take a sampling of behavior from the set of possibilities that arises when the underlying teacher -student paradigm is being critically challenged -- as happened when I went to Canada a few years ago -- then, one would obtain a very different idea about both the spiritual condition of the 'seekers' as well as the

teacher. Moreover, because of the revealing character of this latter sampling, fraudulent teachers often instruct members of the circle to camouflage almost everything they do whenever they -- that is, the members -- are in the presence of 'outsiders' (i.e., those who have not, yet, undergone the necessary spiritual paradigm shift, and this might include people within the so-called silsilah who are 'resisting' being compliant in relation to the teacher's agenda).

Furthermore, fraudulent teachers always create escape routes for themselves, and, quite frequently, their followers will assist them in this respect. Through the use of triangulation, a charlatan will encourage certain individuals to pass on various sorts of misinformation, attitudes, expectations, rules, conduct, group norms, and so on, to selected 'targets' of paradigm change.

If problems arise during the unfolding of this arrangement of control through triangulation, then, the so-called guide attributes those difficulties to the misunderstanding of either, or both, of the other two corners of the triangle. In addition, all too many followers are prepared to accept this pronouncement, because they feel that if any mistake has been made, it is likely to have been theirs, not that of the alleged teacher who is assumed to be of spiritually superior and more elevated character and knowledge.

No one blamed Hazrat Rumi (may Allah be pleased with him) for the great likelihood that some of his mureeds might have been responsible for the final disappearance of Shams (may Allah be pleased with him). Indeed, whatever might have happened in that regard, the shaykh was not responsible for the foibles of the seekers who surrounded him.

Unfortunately, the existence of such historical precedents also affords fraudulent teachers with a means of plausible deniability concerning the assigning of blame for the misconduct of mureeds. A spiritual charlatan doesn't need to be completely exonerated of wrong doing -- all he or she really needs is a degree of ambiguity within which to work on the doubts that people might have concerning her or his spiritual authenticity. Some of these fraudulent shaykhs are real masters in exploiting such margins of ambiguity to their own benefit.

Some people might be annoyed that names are not named in the Sufi Spiritual Abuse Recovery Group. They might feel this casts all

guides and all silsilahs under a shadow of doubt, or cloud of suspicion, and, consequently, they consider this to be unfair to those teachers and silsilahs that are authentic.

We believe that which is true will be able to sustain such examination. We believe that which is not true will, sooner or later, fail such an examination.

Our intention is not to create doubt where none is deserved. Our intention is to encourage people to rigorously think about, reflect on, and explore the commitments they make and the circumstances under which they invest trust in another human being and/or group of people - especially when matters of essential spiritual importance are involved.

We don't expect others to automatically and blindly trust what is being said here. We do expect others to seriously engage the issue of trust and begin to ask themselves: why, how, when, where, who, and what, in conjunction with that issue.

Chapter 12: Aspirations

In ignorance, ambition
flew to the highest realm,
stating: "I wish to be Divine."
Closing, a door creaked with laughter
in a gentle way, then,
politely, yet firmly,
I was sent packing, back to
a lower world, much less sublime.
Still foolish, though just a little
wiser, I offered to
be a Prophet -- which, at the
time, seemed quite reasonable
a stand -- but, then, I learned ... and this
took awhile...that if I did my
very best - even, then,
my condition would be less
than the stations in which
their lives began and far below
the plane which Destiny had set
for their spirit's ascent.
Chastened, my goal was recast –
How about the saints, I
inquired? Any openings
there? The answer came through silence.
I began to sense how
vast was the difference
between the friends of God
and the whims of a mystical

fraud -- so, humbled, I started to live
in a simple way, with just a
single hope that some fine day my
heart might find release from the cocoon
I had spun from the fabric of desire.
Peace came to me slowly
after many years of work,
and I forgot about
the vain goals which marked the folly
of a youth filled with emptiness.
Then, one night in the quiet
of my soul, a light appeared
That made things very clear –
if I will try to be my-Self,
I might realize the Divine
Presence in my being
where God and I are as one,
except He remains as
He is, and I will do the same.

Chapter 13: Proprieties

An individual wrote to me and had a variety of questions concerning the issue of how one should feel about those individuals who assist a so-called shaykh to perpetrate spiritually abusive behavior. Among these questions were the following: should one pray for them? Should one hold out hope for them to change? Should one consider them to be as much a victim of spiritual abuse as the ones the former individuals help a shaykh to abuse? Couldn't the great spiritual knowledge of these wayward individuals eventually be used for the good of others? In addition, this individual alluded to a verse of the Qur'an in which the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was allegedly instructed not to pray for the forgiveness of hypocrites.

It is possible that the portion of the Qur'an to which this person refers is from Surah Tauba, when God says: "Ask forgiveness for them or do not ask forgiveness for them; even if you ask forgiveness for them seventy times, Allah will not forgive them; this is because they disbelieve in Allah and His Apostle, and Allah does not guide the transgressing people." (9: 80)

It is reported that, at some point, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, in relation to the foregoing verse of the Qur'an, that if Allah would not forgive such people even if the Prophet (peace be upon him) were to seek forgiveness for them seventy times, then, he would ask for forgiveness in relation to these people seventy-one times. However, such a response needs to be put into perspective.

First of all, the Prophet (peace be upon him) was not playing a game of one-upmanship with Allah, nor was he acting in defiance of Divine wishes. The section of the verse from 'Surah Tauba' indicates Allah already had acknowledged that the Prophet (peace be upon him) could, if he wished, ask forgiveness for such people, but whether, or not, the Prophet (peace be upon him) did so, this would make no difference because those people would not be forgiven.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was being given degrees of freedom in the foregoing Quranic verse that had not been extended to, for example, Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) when Allah said in the Surah of 'The Examined One:' "Indeed, there is for you a good example in Ibrahim and those with him when they said to their people:

“Surely we are clear of you and of what you serve besides Allah; we declare ourselves to be clear of you, and enmity and hatred have appeared between us and you forever until you believe in Allah alone - - but not in what Ibrahim said to his father: I would certainly ask forgiveness for you, and I do not control for you aught from Allah -- Our Lord! on Thee do we rely, and to Thee do we turn, and to Thee is the eventual coming.” (60: 4)

Moreover, we might recall that Prophet Nuh (peace be upon him) was reprimanded by Allah for seeking to ask forgiveness and leniency for his son who was not among those who believed in the direction and guidance that had come from God to the people of Nuh (peace be upon him). In addition, the Qur’an says in the Surah of ‘The Hypocrites: “And when it is said to them: Come, the Apostle of Allah will ask forgiveness for you, they turn back their heads and you might see them turning away while they are big with pride.” (63.5) Consequently, even when the Prophet (peace be upon him) is prepared to ask forgiveness for certain people, these individuals are filled with themselves and do not believe they are in need of forgiveness -- although the facts indicate otherwise.

Secondly, in saying that he (i.e., Muhammad – peace be upon him) would pray for such people seventy-one times -- if seventy times would not be sufficient to secure the forgiveness of the people in question -- the Prophet (peace be upon him) was merely demonstrating the qualities that Allah had placed in the Prophet (peace be upon him) and that is born witness to in many places by the Qur’an -- for instance, “We have not sent you (Muhammad) except as a mercy to all of the worlds,” (21:107) The Prophet (peace be upon him), by being willing to ask forgiveness for someone seventy-one times in the hope that such a prayer might be answered when praying seventy times would not -- and Allah had clearly stated that it would not -- was giving expression to one of the qualities with which God had shaped and made him.

The spiritual capacity of the Prophet (peace be upon him) is one thing. Our spiritual capacity is quite another thing. What is incumbent upon the Prophet (peace be upon him) as a mercy to all the worlds and as the one to whom rights of intercession have been given, is not necessarily incumbent on the rest of us. In fact, in some cases it is

arrogant of us to suppose that we have the same responsibilities as a Prophet of God or that we have a similar sort of spiritual capacity to try to do that which, even for some of the Prophets, was a struggle.

Tauba is the only surah in the Qur'an that does not begin with: "In the Name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful." If one looks at some of the themes of this surah one sees that idolatry, hypocrisy, transgression, the breaking of oaths, and unbelief play prominent roles. Although there might be many reasons why 'Bismillah ir - Rahman, ir-Rahim' is missing from this Surah, perhaps, the emphasis that is given to the foregoing themes is relevant here.

In the Surah of the Family of Imran, one finds the following: "And those who when they commit an indecency or do injustice to their souls remember Allah and ask forgiveness for their faults -- and who forgives the faults but Allah, and (who) do not knowingly persist in what they have done." (3:135) And, again, in another portion of the Qur'an, we find: "That is because Allah never changes the Grace that has been bestowed on any people until they first change that which is in their hearts, and that is because Allah is Hearer, Knower." (8:53)

The people of spiritual abuse often knowingly persist in what they are doing. Out of a sense of compassion and concern for the spiritual welfare of other human beings -- because we do appreciate that life is a serious matter and because we believe that we only come this way once -- we would like to suppose, in relation to spiritually abusive people that, maybe, somehow, they are not really aware of what they are doing.

However, there is a difference between, on the one hand, those people who are exploited, come to realize this -- either quickly or over a period of time -- and, then, take steps to remove themselves from a problematic situation, and, on the other hand, those people who are presented with evidence indicating that not everything might be quite right with the camel ride that is transpiring and choose to either ignore such evidence, or, even worse, take active steps to lie, censor, and manipulate a situation in order to hide, bury or misdirect people's attention away from such evidence. Still worse are those individuals who not only try to spin the evidence in a manner that suggests innocent motives when the evidence indicates otherwise, but who, as well, appear to revel in the opportunity to persist in wrong-doing

and/or who are unwilling to let go of a fantasy that seemed to confer upon them a special, unique, elite position of power and influence and that available evidence is bringing into question.

This latter group of people has a responsibility to struggle to change their own condition, and God has indicated, as noted previously, that unless and until these people do change their own condition, then, whether you are someone of the spiritual station of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) or someone of a far inferior spiritual station like the rest of us, then, whether we pray for their forgiveness or do not pray for their forgiveness, the result will be the same. There are spiritual laws that govern the way the universe, on whatever level, operates, and the foregoing is one of them.

If it comforts someone to pray for the forgiveness of these people, then, seek comfort in such a practice, and, God willing, one might be rewarded by Allah for one's compassion and sincerity even though such prayers, in light of what Allah has said in the Qur'an, do not appear to be destined to be answered in the way we might like -- and, indeed, "it may happen that you hate a thing that is better for you." (2:216). However, we should not confuse that which we do for comfort with the idea that, perhaps, we will succeed where even the Prophet (peace be upon him) has been told that compassionate, forbearing, and forgiving though he might be, Allah might decide the matter otherwise.

Submission means to accept and bear witness to however Divinity wishes to arrange the dynamic of good and evil. The Prophet (peace be upon him) was equally ready to pray for someone seventy-one times as well as to accept a Divine decree that might have closed the door on accepting such a prayer on behalf of those who actively turned away from the barakah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) which was offered on their behalf.

As far as the idea is concerned that these people of spiritual abuse might possess great knowledge and that if only it could be used for good -- rather than as a technique for luring and trapping people in a network of spiritual abuse that has been established for the purpose of serving the agenda of the abusers -- then, humankind would be the beneficiary, I am extremely skeptical. This is so, for various reasons.

First, the Qur'an indicates: "O people, you are the poor toward God, and God is the Independent and Praiseworthy." (35:15)

Therefore, Divinity has absolutely no need of such people to do good deeds, and the opportunity to do constructive things is a blessing which Allah confers on whomsoever God pleases. "What is with you comes to an end, but what is with God remains," (16:96) and the people of tasawwuf have always said that what comes to us from Allah is always more important than what goes from us to God.

These people of spiritual abuse have become enamored with the baubles and ornaments of the realm of Nasut, or this material level of existence. Indeed, "Lo! We have placed all that is on earth as an ornament thereof, that We may try them: which is best in conduct." (18:7) They have been tested thereby, and their ensuing conduct has given clear indication as to the nature of their niyat or intention with respect to life.

The Qur'an says: "If anyone forsakes the remembrance of the Most Gracious, We appoint for that person a devil, to be an intimate companion and will hinder them from the path. Yet, they think they are being guided in the right direction." (46: 36-37) The people of spiritual abuse have forsaken the remembrance of Allah -- no matter how much they might use the vocabulary and language of Allah -- for the sincerity of remembrance is contained in the niyat of behavior.

As the Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "There is an organ within the body, if that is good, then, the whole body is good, and if that is corrupt, then the whole body is corrupt, and this is the heart." Surely, the persistent misconduct of these people provides the data to construct a spiritual counterpart for an MRI concerning the state of their heart.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has said: "Knowledge is of two kinds: formal knowledge which does not go beyond verbal profession. It is the evidence of God against those people who profess such knowledge, and according to it, God will judge them, and, genuine knowledge, which is deep-rooted in the heart -- this is the knowledge which is most useful." Behavior that reflects genuine knowledge is very, very different from behavior that reflects formal knowledge, and although the people who spiritually abuse others might have facility with, and command over, the purely formal aspect of knowledge -- which really amounts to knowledge of information and nothing more -- nonetheless, such people have no genuine knowledge ... if they did,

their behavior would be other than it is, and the reason their behavior is not different is because they have a disease in their hearts.

It is reported that one day a group of people were gathered in a mosque just outside of Medina and were busily engaged in reading the Qur'an. The Prophet (peace be upon him) came among them and said to these individuals: "Read whatever you like, but unless you put it into action, it is useless." The people who spiritually abuse others might read, recite, and refer to the word of God as much as they like, but, unless they put it into action, what they do begins at no beginning and works toward no end but, instead, is likely to be scattered to the four winds -- but Allah knows best.

Surah Shams begins: "In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. I swear by the sun (shams) and its brilliance, and the moon when it follows the sun, and the day when it discloses it, and the night when it draws a veil over it, and the heaven and Him Who made it, and the earth and Him Who spread it, and the soul and Him Who made it perfect, then He inspired it with understanding of lewdness and good, the one who purifies the soul will be successful, and the one who corrupts the soul will surely fail." (91:1 -10) The rhetorical style of the Qur'an is such that whenever Allah wishes to direct attention to the significance of something, oaths upon oaths are given.

Nowhere else in the Qur'an are there as many oaths as one finds at the beginning of Surah Shams. Thus, purifying the nafs is one the most important things a human being can undertake.

People who just speak about knowledge and are not busily engaged in rendering the heart a fit place to receive and act upon such knowledge, are not people of knowledge in the deep, genuine, sincere sense mentioned in the earlier Hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him). As is disclosed in the Qur'an: "Say: The bad and the good are not equal, though the abundance of the bad may please you; so be careful of (your duty to) Allah, O people of understanding, that you may be successful." (5:100) And, again: "The likeness of the two parties is as the blind and the deaf and the seeing and the hearing: are they equal in condition? Will you not then mind?" (11:24) And, again, "Or can the darkness and the light be equal?" (13:16)

Iblis knows -- in the formal sense -- more about spirituality than the people of spiritual abuse will ever know. But, this fact does not

mean one should hold one's breath waiting for Iblis to smarten up and begin to use his knowledge in a constructive way.

In fact, it is said that Iblis has discovered a zikr that if recited by an individual at the time of death will save that person from the torments of Hell irrespective of what the rest of their lives have been like. Consequently, Iblis is reciting this zikr every waking moment of day and night in an effort to have his saying of the zikr coincide with whatever his appointed hour of death might be.

Yet, what Iblis does not know, or does not believe if he is in possession of such information, is that at the moment of his demise, he will be made to forget the zikr by God. And, therefore, all his efforts in this regard are in vain.

Like Iblis, the people who spiritually abuse others might believe that they have a special dispensation working for them that enables them to do all manner of fitna (creation of disharmony) or corruption and still be saved in the end by some zikr with which they are engaged, or be saved because they know someone who knows someone, but, like Iblis, on the Day of Judgment they might discover otherwise. As the Prophet (Peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "The hearts of all of the children of Adam (peace be upon him) are like a single heart between two of the fingers of the All-Merciful, and the All-Merciful twists this heart in whichever way is willed."

Chapter 14: Canadian Wilderness

A few days ago, I returned from Canada. I had gone to visit with some friends -- people who, like me and some others in the Sufi Spiritual Abuse Recovery Group, had their lives altered by the insidious activities of a person who claimed -- and, on the surface, appeared -- to be an authorized Sufi master, complete with: flowing beard; talk of God, the Prophets, and awliya (friends of God); observance of halal proprieties; regular saying of Fatiha; a peaceful demeanor; constant references to the Qur'an and Sunnah; an impressive familiarity with the history of tasawwuf; a knack for zeroing in on the essence of a matter; Sufi-like affability and friendliness; an engaging manner; a soft-spoken quality; enchanting stories; penetrating insights; useful counsel; diverse zikr practices; an apparently deep concern for humankind and its many spiritual illnesses; an indirect, subtle, gentle way of teaching; a circle of devotees who were all gushing in their thankfulness to God for having sent such a mother-lode of Divine barakah in the form of their shaykh, and, finally, a Sehjah [the names of the individuals who historically precede and -- in authentic cases -- both stand in spiritual support of a given shaykh, as well as, by the leave of Allah, have authorized and approved the appointment of a guide or teacher to serve the silsilah [a chain of spiritual transmission that can be traced back through to the person of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)] by, among other things, assisting seekers in suluk, or spiritual journeying, in relation to the purpose of life and human potential].

I have seen skeptics, cynics, fundamentalists, and people from an array of cultural, theological, spiritual, and educational backgrounds interact with this man. Most, if not all, of them have gone away very intrigued, fascinated, and impressed -- singing a very different tune about tasawwuf than the one with which they might have arrived prior to their encounter with this man.

Individuals I have known for years, and who have never had an altered state of consciousness or who are not the sort of people who would pretend in such areas, have rolled around on the floor screaming uncontrollably and, then, speak of wisdom given during such episodes.

People, independently of one another, would mention various manner of kiramah, or wondrous deeds, that have occurred in relation to this man.

I have been in the company of at least four individuals who, supposedly, are reputable shaykhs here in North America, and who use glowing terms when speaking of this individual. This includes one shaykh who knew my first shaykh and who said of the person about whom I have been speaking: "I have loved two people in my life ... my own shaykh, and this person here," and he pointed to the individual being described in the foregoing.

I have seen, talked with, and spent a lot of time with some people who are grizzled veterans of the many problems surrounding mystical chicanery in North America and were completely enamored with this individual. Even those who did not take ba'yat with this man, loved to sit with him for hours whenever he visited one city or another and asked me to notify them whenever this alleged Sufi shaykh came to town.

People who spent time in the presence of this individual felt: good, happy, secure, peaceful, accepted, protected, loved. Hours and days would melt away like inconsequential vapors whenever he was around.

People would not want to go away from him, and, literally, would sleep on the floor in anticipation of another day with him. They felt like they had found the friend of a life time -- someone who wasn't just their spiritual teacher, but someone who actually cared what happened to them on a day to day basis ... someone who would make arrangements to help people in financial need ... someone who would encourage people to help others in concrete ways ... someone who always seemed to be talking about the very issues with which one was concerned in one's heart ... someone who said that whereas many others use scissors to cut relationships apart, the people of tasawwuf always use a needle and thread to sew things back together.

I started this essay by saying that I had just come back from Canada. While there, I have seen, close up and personal, the human carnage that this so-called spiritual guide has left in his wake. My experience there was heart-wrenching, for rather than having taken a needle and thread to sew a family back together, this man has

butchered asunder the relationships among a family of seven -- almost all of whom, at one time, or another belonged to, or were friendly with, the silsilah that the individual in question claims to serve.

I learned firsthand how this man lied, manipulated, extorted, exploited, cajoled, maneuvered, and betrayed a variety of individuals in order to get control over two of the daughters in the family and was busily trying to gain control over a third. I have learned how this man set a number of the children against the parents, put the parents at odds with one another, encouraged antagonism among the sisters, and interfered with four marriages within the family.

The so-called teacher was able to maintain plausible deniability -- as the politicians say -- by using proxies, both within, and outside of, the family -- to do his dirty work. Whenever anyone would approach him directly about what was going on -- and he always encouraged everyone to do this (in this way, he controlled the flow of information) -- he would act surprised and hurt that so and so had done such and such. He would indicate that he would try to correct the situation, in his own way, as best he could.

Inevitably, however, as more and more information was disclosed by different individuals, it became obvious that the man had been orchestrating the entire set of events. He would lie to your face, but he had the ability to not only induce one to accept the lie as truth, but, as well, to incline one to think he was doing one a favor in the process even though the lie, sooner or later, would have a destructive effect upon one's life.

I am reminded of a story I once read when taking German as an undergraduate. It was called: 'Biedermann und die Brandstifter' -- 'Biedermann and the Fire-starter or Pyromaniac'. It was by Max Frisch. The story was a satire on the rise of Nazi Germany, and the character of the 'fire-starter' was a stand in for Hitler, and Biedermann was jederman -- that is, the every man, average citizen caught up in historical circumstances. Although Biedermann had been hearing regular reports on the radio and in the newspapers about an arsonist who was on the loose, yet, when a potential border knocked on his door, seeking to rent a room, Biedermann invited the man in, showed him around, and, eventually, rented a room in the house to the newcomer.

As time passed by, the guy who rented the room began to bring in cans of gasoline, cloth, boxes of matches, and other things for making fires. Each time, Biedermann would inquire about the nature and purpose of the materials being brought into the house, and each time the guy renting the room would provide a plausible explanation of what he was doing with such things.

In the end, of course, Biedermann must suffer the consequences of what has been going on right under his nose, just as the German people, the Jewish people, and the rest of the world had to suffer the consequences of letting Hitler and his fanatical cohorts -- the pyromaniacs of their time -- rent room amongst them. Many people who pride themselves on their 20-20 hindsight, believe it was obvious what would happen, and feel that the world was just like Biedermann -- oblivious to all the warning signs and indications going on around them.

Yet, the nature of historical events -- just like signs, symbols, and language -- are open to a multiplicity of interpretations ... not all of which are correct, but many of which are quite consistent with the available data. Trying to see the thread of unfolding history amidst the many existing possibilities tends to be easier after the fact, than beforehand -- and, yet, even then, people still continue to argue, explore, discuss, and question the actual nature of events after the fact of their having transpired.

In Canada I saw two young women who were among the most loving, gentlest, humblest, sincerest, warmest, friendliest, caring, loving, compassionate kids I have ever met -- young people who were very respectful and devoted to their parents and family -- and, yet, these young people had been turned into snarling, sullen, angry, resentful, argumentative, critical, uncaring, hypocritical, lying, abrasive, finger-pointing, self-righteous, hard-hearted, unreasoning, individuals who reject their parents, the rest of their family, and anyone else who has the audacity, in a peaceable manner, to try to inform them and warn them about the sort of activities that their 'beloved' spiritual guide is engaged.

These young people have been 'taught' to be suspicious of their parents and their other sisters. These young women have been 'taught' to look upon anyone who has a different opinion from their teacher as:

dangerous, insincere, Muslim activists, fundamentalists, not to be trusted, suffering from religious mania, vengeful, in the clutches of their own nafs, having strayed from the straight path, mentally ill, and so on. These young women have been taught that it is all right to lie and deceive if the purpose of the lie or deception is to do good -- "good" being whatever their shaykh deemed to be such.

Ironically, I sympathize with the plight of these two young women who have been transformed into programmed zombies that trust no one but their shaykh. I have witnessed, first hand, the great disconnect that exists between, on the one hand, the nature of one's memorable, pleasant, interesting, intriguing, educational, and soulful experiences with the so-called spiritual guide in question, and, on the other hand, the absolutely appalling, unacceptable, puzzling, and destructive behavior that is emanating from, through, and around that same individual. How does one reconcile the two? And, if one is forced to choose between one version and the other, the way to go is not, necessarily all that obvious.

All manner of aspersions have been cast on the Prophets, on their Companions, on the awliya. Iblis is always trying to cast doubts into one's interior world and to separate a human being from the straight path. One's own nafs has been described by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as one's most dangerous enemy.

One is taught, as a matter of adab (spiritual etiquette), not to harbor suspicions about others, or either speak, or even think, ill of others -- let alone one's alleged spiritual guide. One is taught that those who oppose the friends of Allah, have Allah as an enemy. One is informed in the Qur'an that one will be tested in many different ways. One is encouraged to see through the vision of faith, rather than through the blinders of limited reason. One is taught to love, forgive, be tolerant, forbearing, charitable, and so on.

So, if someone comes along and says that one's shaykh has been doing certain sorts of abhorrent behavior, what is one to do? Should one listen to the evidence, such as it is, knowing that there are well-established principles of Shari'ah that indicate that one who listens to back-biting is as guilty as the one who utters it? Should we leave it all to Allah, even while knowing that we have a spiritual responsibility to warn others of wrong-doing? Should we shy away from contentious

issues fearing that if we participate in any fashion with respect to such matters that we might be guilty of creating fitna (divisions and disharmony) among people -- something for which Allah has clearly indicated a great distaste? Should one act on such information in a way that takes one out of harm's way and, then, silently steal away in the night, leaving others to sort out their own decisions and fate?

Is speaking the truth in the face of an oppressive, abusive shaykh, a form of jihad? Will God forgive one, if one is wrong? Does one have a responsibility to attempt to do whatever one can to help spiritually heal the so-called shaykh -- especially, if the person in question has given no indication that he or she feels anything wrong has transpired, let alone that they need spiritual healing -- and, if so, then, do we have a spiritual responsibility to seek to heal Iblis, as well?

I am always somewhat amused -- but not really -- by people who assume they would be able to recognize a spiritual fraud just by spending a moderate amount of time with such an individual -- as if such things were always palpable and obvious ... as if we ever really come to know another person, even those with whom we spend a lot of time. I have 'known' people whom I thought were my friends, with whom I have interacted closely for many years, with whom I have gone through many difficulties, whom I thought I knew, whom I thought would be incapable of certain kinds of acts, and, yet, these people went on to betray me in fundamental ways.

Did Abel know beforehand that Cain would do what he did? Did Noah (peace be upon him) understand that his son would rebel? Did Joseph (peace be upon him) know that his brothers would betray him? Did Lot (peace be upon him) know that the woman he married would, one day, be one who turned back and rejected Divine guidance? Did the Prophet (peace be upon him) know that the woman who was giving him sweet-meats was trying to poison him as he took them and put some in his mouth -- before spitting them out in response to a Divine intervention?

We know only what God wishes us to know. If Divinity can hide things from the elect of Creation, then, surely, Divinity can keep secrets from the rest of us.

If Divinity did not hesitate to subject Habib Allah, the beloved of God, to the great trials, suffering, and difficulties that have been

recorded, then, surely, Divinity will not hesitate to twist the rest of our lives any way He wishes: "He cannot be questioned concerning what He does, and they shall be questioned." (Qur'an 21:23)

Divinity understood that Adam (peace be upon him) and Eve (may Allah be well pleased with her) would transgress, and in doing so, help to inaugurate the unfolding of the rest of spiritual history. God knew that Satan would transgress, not repent, and ask for a respite during that he would be given permission to seek to seduce human kind away from the straight path, and that, one day, many dajjals, or imposters, would arise who are capable of raising the dead and, more importantly, inducing people to confuse evil for good, and all of whom would help pave the way -- again, with God's permission -- for the most dangerous dajjal of them all -- the last of them in this cycle of time.

Divinity understands what is going on when people are brought into contact with fraudulent, spiritual teachers . God understands why this happens to some people but not to others and why some people are permitted to escape, but others are not permitted to escape.

However, I am still amused there are people who actually believe they fully understand all the ins and outs of such events, the hidden and the apparent, the Divine reasons, the meaning of trials, the significance of evil -- as if it were all child's play that was as clear as the nose on one's face ... something that anyone of sense and spiritual wherewithal could recognize. I am amused -- but not really -- there are people who will make critical judgments about matters involving people who become mixed up with spiritual frauds without even understanding their own vulnerability to precisely the same thing ... maybe in the future, maybe in their present life.

Evil has many, many disguises. The person who supposes he or she can unmask evil wherever it appears is blinded by her or his own arrogance. The person who believes that God, surely, will disclose such dangers -- whether through intuition or in some other way -- to one whenever these dangers are present, is being rather presumptuous if not foolhardy.

I have left a family in Canada whose members -- at least, those who still have some degree of spiritual independence from the influence of the charlatan who has been toying with their lives -- are

just beginning to come to grips with the horror of the evil that has touched them ... who are trying to come to grips with why this has happened ... who are struggling to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives ... who are attempting to deal with the grief of having been betrayed by people they trusted ... who are seeking to overcome the soul-wrenching grief of having lost children and sisters before their very eyes -- hopefully, God willing, only temporarily, but, unfortunately, perhaps forever ... who are trying to figure out where to go spiritually, now that much of their life has been turned upside down, and they must work to deal with the inevitable aftermath of spiritual betrayal -- doubt, guilt, distrust, shame, anger, anxiety, fear, blame, disappointment, frustration, cynicism, grief, and uncertainty, loss of faith, depression, sadness, and so on.

What is happening in relation to this family from Canada, is happening, and has happened elsewhere, as well -- in other parts of Canada, in different parts of the United States, and in other parts of the world -- not only in conjunction with the so-called shaykh to whom I have been alluding throughout the foregoing, but in conjunction, as well, with many other individuals who are passing themselves off as authentic shaykhs, but who are not. This also is true in many spiritual traditions besides Islam and its mystical dimension --in fact, I know of no spiritual tradition that, currently, is not being deeply affected with similar problems. It is an on-going malignancy that has invaded the perennial wisdom -- or, more correctly, our access routes to such wisdom.

There are still some legitimate spiritual guides who exist. It will be this way until the Seal of the Children, a descendent of the Prophet Seth (peace be upon him), comes into this world, calls people to the Path all of his life, and will leave this world without anyone having responded to that invitation.

Nevertheless, finding such authentic guides is becoming more and more difficult. Spiritually speaking, we do not live in the best of times ... in fact, the world has been in spiritual free fall for quite some time. The further in time we are removed from the days of the Prophet (peace be upon him), the closer we are to the Latter Days, and the Latter Days, with certain brief exceptions, are steeped in an increasingly prominent presence of spiritual darkness.

There is a reason why the Prophet (peace be upon him) indicated to his Companions that if they left out even one-tenth of what had been proscribed for them to do, they would not inherit Paradise, but there would come a point in history when if the people in that time were able to do even one-tenth of what has been proscribed, they would be granted Paradise. Spiritual discernment is a rare commodity these days, and spiritual murkiness is all about us.

Let us pray for this poor family in Canada that has been put to so much trial through their unknowing contact with a spiritual fraud -- a family whose only real mistake, as far as I can see, is that they trusted a few people who, on the basis of the evidence that was available to them, were eminently trustworthy, and, yet, such people turned out to be otherwise. Let us pray for all of us who might be in a similar set of circumstances but have not, yet, awoken to the nightmare that might be engulfing us while we are every bit as unaware and unknowing as this Canadian family.

Truly, there but for the Grace of God goes anyone whom Allah pleases, and there, but for the Grace of God, one will stay until God pleases otherwise. Divinity is neither unjust to the Creation, nor arbitrary, nor whimsical, nor fickle, nor cruel, nor mean -- but, truly, there are very, very few among us who have any idea of what is going on, or why. One might feel safe, secure and happy when one is away from such travail, but make no mistake, we are all being stalked by fate. Safety, security, or happiness can be, if God wishes, very ephemeral states or hal. May God have mercy on us all -- as has been said: "I seek refuge in God, from God."

Chapter 15: The Nature of Deen

Bear with me a bit, for the following introduction is rather lengthy, and the points I wish to make, require a context to be better appreciated -- and, thus, the need for a preliminary set of conceptual excursions. The aforementioned points have to do with the importance of having an authenticate spiritual guide, and the damage that can be done when someone tries to pass himself or herself off as a spiritual guide when such an individual has not been properly selected and appointed.

Hazrat Dada Ganj Baksh or al-Hujwiri (may God be pleased with him), who wrote: 'Kashf al-Mahjub', that is the oldest extant treatise on the Sufi tradition in the Persian language (written toward the latter part of the 11th century), wrote -- and he was quoting a Sufi who lived several hundred years earlier -- that "once Sufism was a reality without a name, and now it is a name without a reality." During the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him), the word "Sufi" was not used to refer to the esoteric tradition of Islam ... in fact, during the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) there was no special word used in order to convey the mystical dimension.

However, there were Quranic terms, such as Deen and fitra, that alluded to esoteric possibilities. Deen does not translate as religion or mysticism, but, rather, it gives expression to a way or methodology for engaging the purpose of life -- the Divine purpose, not human purposes -- which permits one to realize fitra --our primordial spiritual potential.

Deen encompasses the entire depth, breadth, and richness of the three general aspects of Islam -- both exoteric as well as esoteric -- namely, shari'ah, tariqa, and haqiqah, ... or, respectively, the guardian of faith, the process of spiritual transformation, and the realization of truth concerning, among other things, one's essential identity as well as one's unique spiritual capacity.

As such, Islam is a Deen, not a religion. What difference does this make? For starters, one might consider the fact that religion is man-made and Deen is God given.

Deen is what has been given by God since the first Prophet Adam (peace be upon him), and it is what has been given again and again

down through the 124,000 Prophets and different books of revelation that have been sent by God. The spiritual resonances among the spiritual traditions that are referred to by different labels -- from: the Vedanta, to: Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Native spirituality and so on, are a reflection of the God-given Deen that constitutes the essence of any authentic spiritual tradition.

The theological disputes among such traditions are all a manifestation of what happens when one either tries to use the wrong tools (reason, or the unredeemed nafs, and/or an unrealized self) to make sense of what is God given, and/or one forgets that not everyone has the same spiritual capacity or potential, and, consequently, two people of differing spiritual capacities might both be right even though, on the surface, one might feel that the two people are saying something quite different about the nature of reality or truth. Nevertheless, this is not at all the same as saying that anything and everything goes with respect to claims concerning the nature of truth or reality because although truth/reality is complex, multi-dimensional, subtle, and infinite, it is neither arbitrary nor relative ... only human understanding is relative and affected by context and circumstances.

Why was Hazrat al-Hujwiri (may God be pleased with him) quoting from a Sufi who preceded him by several centuries? Because they both were attempting to draw attention to the fact that even a thousand years, or more, ago, it was becoming very difficult to differentiate between the real and the counterfeit in the realm of spiritually authentic teaching. And, to a very large extent, things have, with certain exceptions, gone downhill since then.

We might feel we live in enlightened times, but we do not, and the condition of the world constitutes exhibit number one for the prosecution. The foregoing is not intended as a nostalgic appeal to the days of old, since as the above quote indicates, things were not so great -- spiritually speaking -- then, either, but rather it is an allusion to a spiritual principle that stipulates that the nature of life in this world is, spiritually speaking, very dangerous, unstable, elusive, and dark -- except for those who have the good fortune to have access to, and become receptive to, guidance in the form of a Prophet, and/or a book of revelation, and/or a spiritual teacher.

The Prophetic tradition ended with Muhammad (peace be upon him), and although his spirit is still active in this world, we might do well to remember that even his close Companions indicated that spiritual darkness had entered the world when the Prophet (peace be upon him) departed, physically, from this realm. Just one small reminder of this set of circumstances, comes in the form of Hazrat 'Ali (may God be pleased with him) who ruled, when Khalifah, that those who were to give testimony in a judicial proceeding could no longer be present in court when others were giving testimony.

In the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) the veracity of people was such that their testimony would be unaffected by what they heard others give testimony to. Unfortunately, the level of veracity had declined since the passing away of the Prophet (peace be upon him) just 50, or years, earlier ... and things have, for the most part, declined a long way since those days.

Furthermore, although the Qur'an is still with us in an accurately preserved form, the people who understand it correctly, even in a purely exoteric way, are not all that plentiful -- although many people suppose that they do understand everything and are quite willing to impose their opinions on others in such a regard ... apparently, forgetting the Quranic injunction "that there is no compulsion" in matters of Deen (2:256), and, therefore, a niyat or intention that is not freely chosen is spiritually useless. In addition, there are many people who speak and read Arabic quite well, who do not have the slightest clue what Deen is all about, or, maybe, they do know, but in best hypocritical fashion, say one thing to one's face, and do something exactly the opposite behind one's back.

For example, most of the leaders of al-Qaida, the Taliban, and the suicide bombers -- to name but a few groups -- all know Arabic, but they abuse the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them) through their self-serving interpretations of textual material, or by taking many teachings entirely out of their appropriate context -- distorting and skewing meanings thereby -- or, simply by lying about the actual nature of Islam or Deen. The concept of 'jihad' is but one example among many that could be cited in support of the foregoing statements. The word means 'spiritual struggle', and there is a great deal of evidence to indicate that the

primary, essential sense of this notion of struggle focuses on an individual's conflict with one's own lower nature and not on armed conflict with an external opponent.

Thus, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said that the best and most superior form of jihad is the Hajj (Pilgrimage) that finds acceptance with God. The Prophet also indicated that speaking the truth in the face of oppression was doing jihad, and, moreover, that one's inner struggle was the 'greater jihad' while physical battles with those who were threatening to exterminate Islam constituted the 'lesser jihad'.

In a different context, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said 'there is a polish for everything, that takes away the rust of that which is polished, and the polish for the heart is zikr Allah.' One of the Companions asked: 'Is not repelling the infidel like this?', and Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: 'No, even if one fights until one's sword is broken.' The Qur'an counsels people with: "O you who believe, fight against those infidels close to you." (9:123), and, surely, the infidels who are closest to any of us are given expression through our own unredeemed nafs.

Yet, the propaganda continues that jihad is only about using arms in order to force others to believe as such warriors do. This sort of behavior from Arabic speaking people who should know better but apparently do not.

Even apart from such issues, there are good-hearted people who spend their lives reading the Qur'an in the original Arabic and, yet, might have little or no access to, or insight into, the mystical dimensions of the Qur'an. This is because language is created, while the original Qur'an is the uncreated Word of God for which the created language of Arabic serves as an entry point -- gaining access to the uncreated Word of Divinity might begin with Arabic, but it does not end there, and having facility with the Arabic language does not guarantee that one will journey any further than some of the meanings of the linguistic roots that make up such created words.

In fact, many, if not most of the names of Allah that are given in the Qur'an were not derived from Arabic words but have become incorporated into the Arabic language over time. Thus, when the people of Mecca heard the Prophet mention the name: al-rahman, they asked the Prophet who this was for they had never heard the name

before, and this is because the name was derived from sulyani, the language of the soul, and not Arabic.

The Qur'an instructs us to "Enter houses by their doors." (2:189) The door to the house of tasawwuf, the mystical discipline, is the shaykh, pir, murshid, guide, or teacher (which ever term one prefers), who is the locus of manifestation through that one is instructed via the Divine barakah (grace) that is transmitted through a silsilah, or chain of spiritual lineage, that extends back to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and, through Muhammad (peace be upon him) to the entire Prophetic tradition.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has said: "The shaykh among the following of such a shaykh is like a Prophet among the people of that Prophet," and the Qur'an informs us: "God appointed for you stars, that you might be guided in the darkness of land and the sea." (6:97) The stars that guide us along the path of tasawwuf, which is hidden among, and protected by, 70,000 veils of darkness and light are the spiritual guides who are, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) has indicated: the "learned masters [who] are the inheritors of the Prophets."

On the other hand, the Prophet (peace be upon him) also has said: "Verily, God does not take away knowledge from the hands of Divine servants, but takes away such knowledge by taking away the learned, so that when no learned people remain, the ignorant will be placed at the head of affairs. Causes will be submitted to their decision, and they will make judgments without knowledge, and they will err themselves, and lead others into error."

A false teacher or counterfeit shaykh is the foregoing sort of ignorant person who makes all manner of judgments about spiritual matters without any real esoteric knowledge, and, as a result, not only errs in such judgments, but, also causes those who follow him or her to err as well. It is of vital importance to grasp the fact that the knowledge that is being discussed here is not a matter of belief or opinion or information or concepts, for, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) indicates: "Whoever knows Allah curbs one's tongue from speaking about Allah, since this kind of knowledge cannot be contained in speech." However, just because someone chooses silence does not, in and of itself, prove that such a person knows Allah. Today,

the fate of many people who consider themselves mureeds or students of this or that so-called shaykh or spiritual guide is, unfortunately, being greatly shaped, colored, oriented and directed by the counsel of the kinds of ignorant people who refer to themselves as shaykhs or spiritual guides but who are not anything remotely like the 'guiding stars' to which the Qur'an alludes, for they possess none of the requisite knowledge.

These 'shaykhs of darkness' do not have any insight into the actual spiritual capacity of the seekers who come to them for assistance, and, therefore, the alleged teachers are not in any position to advise a person about what practices to observe, or when such practices should be observed, or for how long, and under what circumstances. Moreover, these spiritual shadows who call themselves shaykhs are not in any position to know the significance of the states and stations that might be experienced by a seeker or what remedies to apply in the case of the numerous kinds of difficulty that might be encountered by a would-be seeker.

These so-called teachers have not developed the sciences of dhawk (tasting), imbibing, or quenching in relation to the spiritual experiences given expression through the purification, calibration, and activation of such inner spiritual faculties as: heart, sirr, spirit, kafi, or aqfah. Because they do not speak from having experienced anything of fana (absorption in the Divine Presence) or baqa (subsistence as an unique individual within the Divine Presence), and because they have not traversed the spiritual stations of repentance, longing, sincerity, patience, dependence, gratitude, or love, such alleged spiritual guides are not in any position to advise a seeker about anything of importance..

Moreover, since these presumptuous, mystical cretins know little or nothing about spiritual kashf (the unveiling of spiritual secrets), they have no way of determining if the experiences of their "charges" is authentic or spurious. Because these self-appointed guides do not understand that "only those who possess the kernels remember," (39:9) and possessing of such kernels is only acquired through accessing the house of tasawwuf through authorized doors, they fail to understand that they have nothing of any real, essential, substantial

value to offer to those seekers who come to them and, consequently, they cannot help but short-change and mislead such individuals.

These 'lords of ignorance' give arbitrary interpretations to the dreams of their mureeds. As a result, a very valuable and important means of spiritual communication between Divinity and the individual is garbled and dreams become a tower of Babel rather than a source of guidance.

Just as the Qur'an stipulates that: "nor does Muhammad speak of his own accord," (53:3), so, too, authentic shaykhs do not speak of their own accord but, rather, in accordance with the light that comes to them through the agency of the silsilah, and, therefore, through the agency of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and, consequently, from Allah. Individuals who have not been properly authorized through a legitimate silsilah and, as a result, have not been given permission to serve as a guide on the spiritual path, speak of their own accord, and to precisely this extent the counsel they give is in error.

All of the foregoing distinctions are relatively obscure and opaque to a seeker. In fact, the presence of such a lack of knowledge is what differentiates a seeker from a teacher.

However, generally speaking, almost every genuine seeker has a correct intuition about the absolute necessity for such knowledge in a teacher, or that, at the very least, an intuition that acknowledges that an authentic spiritual guide must be in a position to serve as a locus of manifestation for the transmission of such knowledge via the barakah that is channeled, by the Grace of God, through the silsilah that serves as a guarantor, God willing, for the authenticity of a given spiritual guide.

Not all spiritual guides are of equal capacity, or of equally realized spiritual stations, and a shaykh might be more spiritually mature at a later junction of spiritual travel than at a previous one. Jalal-uddin Rumi (may Allah be pleased with him) was a very different shaykh after his time with Shamsi Tabriz (may Allah be pleased with him), than he was prior to those encounters.

On the other hand, not every shaykh is destined to meet up with a Shams. Not every shaykh is necessarily destined to rise to the level of a post-Shams Rumi.

The sine qua non of a spiritual guide, however, is to be firmly ensconced in the barakah of an authentic silsilah that falls under the umbrella of Divine Grace as dispensed through the Prophetic tradition. Without this spiritual connection, spiritual possibilities on the mystical path are extremely limited, and the conditions of travel are very, very hazardous.

There is a story associated with Hazrat Junayd (may God be pleased with him) in which there was a mureed of his who came to the conclusion, after many years of following the instructions of the shaykh, that the time had come when the mureed was sufficiently spiritually mature to be able to continue the path on his own. Consequently, the mureed went off and began observing the practices he had been given in relative isolation.

The very first night, the mureed had an incredible experience in which, while engaged in a spiritual practice, he was visited by two beings who invited the mureed to mount a horse-like creature (presumably, reminiscent of the Buraq upon which the Prophet rode during the night journey), and, then, the mureed was transported to a wonderful destination that was too beautiful to describe and that was filled with all manner of wondrous happenings. Eventually, the mureed was brought back to his residence.

The next night, the same thing happened. If anything, the experience was even more amazing than the previous evening.

Thus it went for some number of days. Somehow, Hazrat Junayd (may God be pleased with him) came to hear about the mureed's set of experiences, and the shaykh had one of the other members of the silsilah convey a message to the mureed who was undergoing the altered states of consciousness.

In effect, the message simply asked the mureed to recite a certain litany or formula the next time the mureed had such an experience. Out of respect for his former mentor, the mureed decided he would comply with the request entailed by the message, and, therefore, that night when the same sequence of events began to occur, he recited the

formula he had been given, and, immediately, there were shrieks, the whole scene disappeared, and the mureed found himself on a mound of dust and bones.

With a start, the mureed realized he was being seduced by non-spiritual or anti-spiritual forces during these anomalous experiences, and, as a result, he repented for his misunderstanding and misdeeds, and returned to associating with his shaykh. He thanked God that via the agency of his spiritual teacher he had been saved from a spiritual catastrophe.

The reason the foregoing story has been told is not to serve as a cautionary note against those who would strike out on their own prematurely -- although, of course, the story does carry such a lesson. Rather, the story has been related in order to bring attention to the fact that one might have all manner of wonderful, amazing, indescribable, intense, pleasant experiences and still end up on a mound of dust and bones, and the enticing character of an experience is not necessarily an index of its degree of validity or authenticity.

Many people step onto the mystical path in search of peace, acceptance, community, ecstasy, altered states of consciousness, anomalous experiences, happiness, satisfaction, knowledge, certainty, and so on. What most of these people do not appreciate properly is that one must journey through both the Divine attributes of jalal (majesty, transcendence, rigor, awe, justice, power), as well as the attributes of jamal (beauty, compassion, love, friendship, forgiveness), in order to come to know one's Lord in a complete sense (as complete as one's spiritual capacity is able to realize).

A false teacher cannot help a seeker with respect to either side of the ledger -- the jalali or the jamali. In fact, a false teacher is only capable of leading one to a mound of bones and dust -- that is, spiritual emptiness. Indeed, if it is a mistake for a mureed to try to prematurely abandon the guidance that is being made available by Divinity through a legitimate silsilah (in the form of an authentic locus of manifested Grace known as a shaykh), the magnitude of the error is multiplied by a factor of thousands when an ignoramus who is not a duly authorized shaykh tries to pass himself or herself off as being authentic.

A seeker is between a rock and a hard place. Seekers intuitively understand they do not have the requisite knowledge and

understanding to be able to travel the spiritual path without assistance, and, therefore, if they wish to proceed, they are in desperate need of help. At the same time, they really have no way of knowing who they should or shouldn't trust in relation to the matter of guidance, and, furthermore, they do have at least a vague sense that if they trust the wrong person, they could end up in the spiritual equivalent of quicksand or become hopelessly lost or essentially damaged.

These are very high stakes. The choice is fraught with peril and problems.

When a person finally makes the decision to commit oneself to this or that alleged spiritual guide and, subsequently, comes to learn that the so-called teacher is not what she or he represented herself or himself to be, the seeker is struck with a deep, intimate, essential, fundamental sense of betrayal, disappointment, sadness, grief, and loss. The potential of the mystical path -- which one felt to be so close at hand and that one felt one had been extremely blessed to be given access to -- has turned out to be an illusion within a delusion.

Suddenly, one is beginning at no beginning, and one is working toward no end. Rather, one is lost in space with no way to re-orient oneself because virtually every indicator that one had been using to gauge spiritual orientation, progress, and knowledge has been undermined and corrupted since the key element that, heretofore, had rendered one's mystical gyroscope an effective means of navigation -- namely, the teacher -- has been proven to be completely unreliable.

One can't go to Wal-Mart and get a replacement. In fact, one is confronted with a problem -- one that the seeker considers to be among the most important and pressing issues of life. The problem is that the seeker has no idea how to resolve the spiritual difficulty with which she or he is faced and, thereby, get things back on track (or even whether such a resolution is possible), nor how to deal, simultaneously, with all the negative emotions that come to the surface when one has been betrayed in such an essential manner -- one is often inundated with waves of anger, depression, frustration, alienation, apathy, existential malaise, distrust, cynicism, grief, and loneliness.

Many people who are not interested in the Sufi path or who believe they have an authentic shaykh might remind the person who is in spiritual crisis to: "Say: He is my Lord; there is no God save Him. In Him do I put my trust and unto Him is my recourse," (13:30). On the other hand, the Qur'an also says: "Say Muhammad: If you love Allah, then follow me, so that God may love you." (3:31)

To learn how to trust God and to accept Divinity as one's recourse, one must follow the way of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Furthermore, the Qur'an instructed the Prophet (peace be upon him) to: "Say (O Muhammad): This is my way. I call to God upon insight -- I and whoever follows after me."(12:108).

One sought out a teacher because one wished to be initiated into the way of calling to God via spiritual insight. One sought out a teacher because one believed the Prophet (peace be upon him) when he indicated that 'this world is maintained in existence by illusion' and when he said: "People are asleep, and when they die, they wake up", and when he said: "Your most hostile enemy is your soul enclosed between your two sides," and when he said: "The one who knows oneself, knows one's Lord", and when he said: "Die before you die," and when he said: "People die in the state in which they lived, and they are resurrected in the state in which they die."

We sought out a spiritual guide because we understood something about the relationship between illusion and the world, and we suspected we were spiritually asleep and wanted to awaken, and that the unredeemed nafs was responsible for helping to maintain illusion and keeping us asleep, and that we needed to know ourselves in order to be actively aware of the presence of Divinity in our lives, and that in order to come to such knowledge we had to die to ourselves before our physical death overtook us, and that if we did not succeed in this mission, then, we would be raised up in the state in which we passed away from this life. We sought out a spiritual guide to help us struggle with all of the foregoing issues because we didn't know how to do any of this on our own, and because the likelihood of going astray, while trying to act as our own guide continues to haunt us -- after all, the Qur'an says: "Shall we tell you who will be the greatest losers in their works? Those whose striving goes astray in the present life, while they think they are working good deeds." (18:104)

In the absence of an authentic teacher, one could return to just observing the requirements of shari'ah, but once one realizes, however dimly, that there is a reality, or haqiqah, to shari'ah that goes beyond mere words, litanies, observances, beliefs, and practices, one remains existentially restless, and one is not content to remain a stranger to the inner aspects of one's own spiritual tradition. The potential or possibilities are seen, but the means to bring this potential to fruition - in the absence of an authentic teacher who serves as a locus of manifested Grace for a legitimate silsilah - is a huge problem.

In the absence of a teacher, one could concentrate on zikr for the Qur'an clearly indicates that: "Lo! Ritual worship preserves one from lewdness and iniquity, but, verily, remembrance of Allah (zikr) is more important," (29:45) and God assures us that: "Call upon Me, and I will answer you." (40:60)

Nonetheless, in the absence of authentic spiritual guidance, we often are at a loss to understand the nature of the Divine 'answer' in response to our remembrance, and we do not necessarily know in just what way remembrance of Divinity is more important than ritual worship. In addition, we may recall the Quranic warning: "Have you seen him who has taken his caprice to be his god, and Allah sends him astray purposely, and seals up his hearing and his heart, and sets on his sight a covering," (45:23), or, alternatively, "Is he, the evil of whose deeds is made fair seeming unto him so that he deems them good, other than Satan's dupe?" (35:8)

There have been many people who have mistaken the caprice of their own thoughts, opinions and logic for the truth and bowed down to those beliefs only to be sent astray by God. There have been many people who were induced by nafs and Iblis to have caprice made fair seeming and good in the eyes of the deluded, when such was not the case.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "All people are doomed to perish except those of action, and all people of action will perish except for the sincere, and the sincere are at great risk." The Prophet (peace be upon him) also said: "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?" The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "The ones who break away from their people for the sake of Islam."

To break away from one's people in a way that is not rooted in caprice and error requires spiritual guidance. But, today, such spiritual guidance is increasingly becoming a stranger because such guidance is considered by many to be an oddity, just as Islam was perceived to be in the beginning. We look for the stranger -- the one who can lead us away from the illusions of culture, dunya, philosophies, and even exoteric science, to the light of esoteric truth -- and when we think we have found such a stranger, only to learn differently, subsequently, this is a very difficult time in a seeker's life -- a difficulty from which some never recover.

Chapter 16: Veiled Guidance

Moses Maimonides, a Jewish mystic and philosopher, is reported to have once said that on the Day of Judgment he would be evaluated not on the basis of whether he had become Moses (peace be upon him) but whether he had realized his own potential. The goal of the mystical path is to realize the spiritual potential of the Self, for only through such realization does one engage in the true meaning of free worship of Divinity -- that is, as long as one is other than one's essential Self, the worship is neither free nor done in accordance with the capacity that God has given to each of us as a potential.

In a Hadith Qudsi God indicated: 'I was a hidden treasure and loved to be known, so I brought forth Creation.' Creation is the manifestation of the Names and Attributes of Divinity through the 'fixed forms' that constitute the created capacities or potential of 'things' -- much like the way light is scattered by a prism according to the properties of the latter. The Sufis also indicate that Creation never repeats itself, so the nature of each 'thing' or fixed form is unique.

Through God's knowledge of Divinity's Hidden Treasure, Creation was brought forth, and through our coming to understand the true nature of Creation and how Divinity is manifested through it, we are given the opportunity to share in the experience and knowledge of that Hidden Treasure according to our spiritual capacity. The fully realized human being -- al-insan al kamil ... the perfect human being -- is the one whose entire array of inner faculties has been purified and properly calibrated to work in unison to create a mirror that reflects back, according to the capacity inherent in that mirror, all of the Names and Attributes of Divinity, and because each human being has a slightly different inherent capacity to serve as such a mirror, each perfected reflection reveals different aspect of the infinite nature of Divine Being.

Ultimately, there is only one spiritual teacher, and that is Allah, but as the Qur'an indicates God never speaks or discloses Divinity to human beings except through veils (42:51). Consequently, books of revelation, the Prophetic tradition, the awliya (friends) of God, our own inner being, the signs on the horizons, each, in its own way, gives expression to the veiled presence of Divinity in all things.

For the Sufis, the primary expression of veiled guidance in human form is the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) -- but every member of the Prophetic Tradition gives expression to this same principle of guidance according to the unique capacity of any given Prophet to do so -- thus, Abraham (peace be upon him) is said to be the Friend of God, and Jesus (peace be upon him) is said to be the Logos or Word of God, and so on. Someone who is in suluk, or journeying on the Sufi path, might, if God wishes, come into contact with the spirit of different Prophets and be brought, for a time, under the umbrella of a particular Prophet, as well as be colored with the unique spiritual potential of that Prophet, and such people might be known as Musawi (in relation to Moses - peace be upon him) or Isawi (in relation to Jesus - peace be upon him), and so on.

Although coming under the guidance and protection of any of the Prophets of God is a great blessing, people on the Sufi path aspire to have this sort of relationship with the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). However, one's spiritual journey might begin anywhere, and in the case of Ibn al-'Arabi (may Allah be pleased with him), his journey, near the beginning, was influenced by Isa (peace be upon him) and he was known as Isawi, and, then, later he went on to learn, by the Grace of Allah, from so many of the Prophets, including, of course, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). For many of us who seek to travel on the Sufi Path, we often begin with a shaykh, pir, or murshid who -- if authentic -- is someone who has, with God's permission, been appointed by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) for a spiritual purpose and who has been given authorization, spiritual support, as well as a methodology, to be of assistance to those who wish to make the journey from self to Self.

Although the Truth is One, the nature of our participation varies according to capacity. A spiritual guide seeks to assist an individual to learn how to maximize the way in which one has the capacity to participate in the Truth or give expression to the Truth or serve as a locus of manifestation for the Truth or to reflect the Truth.

The Sufis often speak of three stages of fana -- a term that is frequently translated as 'annihilation' but this is misleading since nothing is annihilated ... rather, fana is a spiritual condition in which awareness of the Presence overwhelms everything else, including

one's own sense of individual existence. Ahmad Sirhindi (may Allah be pleased with him) likened fana to the following: if one looks at the stars on a clear night, one has no difficulty seeing them, especially if one is far away from the distractions of civilization and its various lights. However, when the sun comes up, and one tries to see the stars, one cannot do so -- not because the stars no longer exist, but because the radiance of the sun blocks our awareness of their existence, and fana is like trying to see the stars (individual existence) after the sun has risen.

In any event, the Sufis tend to speak of three stages of fana -- fana fil-shakh, fana fil-rasul and fana fil-Allah. These are not really different realities, just the same Reality manifesting itself in three different ways according to the stage of the mystical path a seeker is on.

There is a subsequent stage beyond fana that is known as baqa, and when, God willing, this becomes realized, the individual's unique, essential capacity is experienced while, at the same time, being totally absorbed in unity with Divinity. It is as if the drop had returned to the Ocean and, yet, by the extraordinary generosity of God, one is permitted a sense of being an individual within Oneness, and the root of this sense of Divine individuality is the essence of our unique spiritual potential ... our real Self that is a reflection of the Hidden Treasure that Allah wished to be known.

When one experiences fana fil-shaykh, one loses awareness of one's sense of self, and becomes aware of the Presence as manifested through the capacity of the shaykh. One falls in love with the beauty and majesty inherent in the shaykh as made manifest by Divinity and as a function of the shaykh's spiritual capacity. In addition, one's awareness of the nature and beauty of one's shaykh's inner capacity will be according to one's own spiritual capacity, that is why two different seekers, with two different spiritual capacities, may experience one and the same Reality in different ways with neither experience being more correct or less correct than the other, but, rather, just different reflections of one and the same Truth.

If by the Grace of Allah, one goes through the station of fana fil-rasul -- that is, the condition of being overwhelmed by the beauty and majesty of the way Divine light is cast through the spiritual capacity of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) -- then, again, one

experiences the Presence as manifested through the capacity of the Prophet (peace be upon him). One participates in that according to one's own essential capacity to do so.

When, if God wishes, the station of fana fil-Allah is reached, then, the individual experiences the same Truth as encountered in the two previous forms of fana, except from a slightly different spiritual angle, so to speak. The experience of the Presence might be different than one's experience of the Presence previously, but the underlying Truth is the same, yet, because Divinity is infinite in nature, the Truth can never be exhausted but only encountered as a series of disclosures or unveilings (kashf) that continue pushing the horizons of experiential possibility back with each new disclosure ... which is why the Sufi masters often speak of a condition of bewilderment in relation to these higher stations because there is a constant disclosing of different dimensions of the Truth that combines what is known with what transcends the known.

To be at one with one's shaykh is to be in the Presence of Truth according to the capacity of the shaykh and according to the capacity of the seeker, and to experience this complex unity of Presence. One of the reasons why one finds so many different descriptions of this state or station, is precisely because there are different modalities of spiritual capacity (both with respect to the seeker and the shaykh) and, therefore, the experience might vary, in certain ways, from context to context as a reflection of these differences.

As indicated previously, the purpose of a shaykh is to assist an individual to struggle toward coming to understand and trust the nature of the Self, for it is the essential Self that God has given the best capacity to reflect different dimensions of the Hidden Treasure -- and in that pure reflection is our essential worship of Divinity and the realization of one of life's highest purposes. Because each individual has been given a different capacity through which to manifest the Names and Attributes of Divinity, the task of a seeker is to struggle to give expression to, and participate in, the Hidden Treasure according to one's innate capacity to do so.

Moreover, the matter of finding an authentic teacher is so essentially important that many people, when presented with clear - cut evidence that their so-called spiritual guide is counterfeit, will

react with considerable anger and animosity toward those who are merely conveying the message. The former will go into denial about the whole matter and often tend to paint the ones who have started to awaken to the presence of spiritual abuse as being troublemakers and spreaders of dissension, disharmony and false information, rather than attribute problems to the false teacher.

“And surely We shall test you with fear and hunger and loss of wealth and lives and crops; but give glad tidings to the steadfast --who say when misfortune strikes them: surely to Allah we belong and to Allah is our returning.” (2:155-156) May the remainder of our returning be fortuitous and blessed, and for those of us who have been abused by a false spiritual teacher, might we be steadfast in the face of adversity and confident that Allah's quality of pride is such that, God willing, He will never abandon one who sincerely depends on Him to provide, among other things, the spiritual guidance, in the form of the locus of manifestation of an authentic shaykh, that is necessary to continue on with struggling to realize the purpose of life and the nature of essential identity.

The key to the foregoing is the quality of sincerity and the process of maintaining sincerity. As a previously noted Hadith indicated, the sincere are at great risk, and one of the reasons for the presence of such risk, is that the sincere are very vulnerable in a world that is steeped in illusion, deceit, and the other machinations of nafs and Iblis.

The sincere see the need for spiritual guidance, but the process of seeking guidance is replete with many perils -- among these being the existence of so many false teachers, and such teachers become a test for the sincere ... a test of their sincerity. If successfully passed, the test of sincerity gives expression to the sort of aforementioned strangers who break away from false teachers for the sake of Islam -- that is, the spiritual truth or haqiqah of Being.

Chapter 17: Need For A Shaykh

Over the last several months, I have come across a fair amount of discussion in different Group lists and chat rooms about whether, or not, one needs a living shaykh in order to pursue the path of tasawwuf. Included in this debate are questions about, among other things, the nature of ba'yat, its historical precedents, and its function.

First of all, one might note that there are many spiritual practices that can be pursued quite independently of any association with a tariqa, Order, silsilah or sehjah. The observance of Fatiha (the giving of thanks and the remembrance of, and seeking blessings upon, great spiritual personalities or just ordinary people of the past) can be observed on a regular basis; zikr can be performed on an on-going basis; nafl fasting can be undertaken; tahajjud can be offered; seclusions such as I'tikaf (the last ten days of Ramazan) can be pursued; the Qur'an and Sunnah can be studied and implemented in a rigorous fashion; sadaqat (charity) beyond the requisite zakat can be distributed to those in need; voluntary service to the community can be contributed; seeking to become more patient, forgiving, kind, loving, tolerant, just, pious, humble, modest, sincere, honest, compassionate, generous, and repentant can be struggled with; striving to realize deeper and deeper states of iman (faith) and ihsan (spiritual excellence) can become important goals -- all of the foregoing practices can be done individually, and one does not need a shaykh's guidance in order to try to realize any of these activities in one's life. But, none of the foregoing, either singly or in combination, constitutes the essence of the Sufi Path even though all of the previously mentioned practices are likely to show up on a 'things to do list' of any authentic shaykh and silsilah.

The very word tariqah (path or way) implies travel or suluk. Moreover, the whole idea of a guide is someone who can help one navigate through territory with which the person in need of a guide is unfamiliar -- territory that can be extremely dangerous and fraught with traps, pitfalls, dead-ends, seductions, illusions, delusions, anomalous events, tests, and poisonous, deadly forces.

So, where, God willing, does the Sufi path go? It takes one: to the essence of one's identity; to the possibilities inherent in one's spiritual capacity; to the truth of the fixed potential that defines human

existence; to the center of one's identity; to the zenith of life's purpose; through stations such as tauba (repentance), sabr (patience), tawwakil (dependence), shukr (gratitude), taqwa (piety), ishq (intense love); to the inner functioning of heart, sirr, ruh, kafi, and aqfah and the different kinds of knowledge that are transmitted through these spiritual facets of human nature; across the manifestations of Divine Names and Attributes; to yaqeen (spiritual certainty concerning the truth of various modalities of knowledge); through the realms of Nasut, Malakut, Jabrut, Lahut, and Hahut and the 70,000 worlds of light and darkness that are encompassed therein; to being the sort of 'abd, or servant who gives expression to all manner of worship through the concentrated understanding of fana and baqa, thereby, coming to realize the full meaning of Shari'ah and Deen for the first time.

Any person who believes that she or he can traverse all of the foregoing on one's own is a fool. Any person who believes that such a journey can be undertaken independently of expert assistance really hasn't been paying attention to the history of mysticism.

There are a few instances in which certain individuals, seemingly isolated from any sort of human assistance, have reported profound experiences, of one kind or another, which have helped transport them along various aspects of the spiritual path. But, upon closer examination, one usually finds that someone such as Khizr [a mysterious patron saint of the Sufi Path who has a special teaching function -- such as happened in the case of Moses (peace be upon him) that is recounted in the Qur'an (see the Surah of the Cave, 18:65 onward), or one of the spirits of the Prophets or awliya of Allah, has taken these people by the hand and helped guide part of their journey, and, consequently, these are exceptions that tend to prove the rule about the need for a guide.

Indeed the Qur'an says: "It belongs not to any human being that God should speak to that person except by revelation, or from behind a veil." (42:51) And, Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) is reported to have said: "The one who would step onto the way of tasawwuf without benefit of a guide, has Iblis for a shaykh."

Now, since the Sufi masters agree there is no reality but Allah, then, Iblis, too, is one of the veils through whom, or from behind which, Divinity speaks to us for Divine purposes. Therefore, one needs

to be able to distinguish veils of guidance, light, knowledge, and wisdom, from veils of misguidance, darkness, ignorance, and dissolution.

Up to a certain point, every human being has a moral responsibility to struggle to discern differences of intention among such veiling. The Qur'an has been given to help us with this task, as has the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and many of the people of taqwa -- whether Sufi, or non-Sufi.

Beyond a certain juncture, however, the nature of the aforementioned moral responsibility changes, somewhat, and if one wishes to proceed further, one is required to seek special assistance in order to learn how to navigate through the Divine play of veils, rather than attempting to negotiate such difficulties on one's own. The Sufi Path is one such juncture.

To try to lend some concreteness to the present discussion, as well as to convey just a small sense of the enormity of the problem confronting us, please reflect on some of the following considerations. Perhaps, these issues will help bring a modicum of sobriety to those who wish to dash off on their own to engage in mystical travel.

According to the teaching of the Sufi masters, Alam al-mithal, or the world of symbols and similitudes, is the barzarkh, or ithmus, that connects, on certain levels, the realm of Nasut (corporeal material existence) with the realm of Malakut (which, among other things, deals with the inner soul or reality of things and is non-corporeal/non-material in nature). One of the functions of Alam al-mithal is to give expression to symbols and similitudes that are capable of transmitting knowledge that joins corporeal and non-corporeal issues of significance concerning Being. There are many forces inhabiting Alam al-mithal -- some of these are good (e.g., the spirits of Prophets) and some of these are problematic (e.g., the spirits of satanic forces). If one does not know how to distinguish between these two sets of countervailing forces, then, one easily can become lost, confused, misguided, and exploited in this realm.

Furthermore, Sufi masters indicate that dreams arise out of Alam al-mithal, and the symbols and similitudes through which the message(s) of dreams are given expression are constructed from corporeal and non-corporeal modes of understanding that require

interpretation to be properly assessed. Just as there are active forces in the realm of Alam al-mithal that can mislead one while journeying in that realm, there also are active forces that can corrupt the things (such as dreams) that one brings back with one from that barzakh by providing incorrect interpretations of such dream events.

Everyone is intrigued with dreams and believes them to be harbingers of a mysterious sort of wisdom concerning life. In addition, many of us enjoy interpreting such events, but there are dangers in doing this -- especially, for the individual whose dream is being interpreted, but in an incorrect or problematic fashion.

There are a number of Sufi shaykhs who have indicated that once a dream has been misinterpreted, a great deal of the spiritual value of the dream might be lost, never to be regained. Misinterpretation acts like a virus that tends to destroy the spiritual fabric of the dream and undermine its original purpose.

A gift is given, and misinterpretation taints the dream and blocks its true possibilities. Only someone who enjoys the barakah of a sehjah or silsilah or the special support of Divinity can serve as a locus of manifestation for proper understanding of a dream, and one places oneself at spiritual risk whenever someone who is not authorized to do this undertakes providing such an understanding of the dream's significance.

Interpretations can be interesting, make sense, have a value, but none of this necessarily means that such an interpretation is correct. In order for the dream to be properly understood, or in order for someone's journeying through Alam al-mithal to be correctly gauged, there are a great many factors that come into play concerning the character, potential, spiritual station, life context, practices, and so on of an individual.

In his book, *Path of the Bondsmen of God*, Najm al-din- Razi indicates that just a single symbol such as fire might have a multiplicity of possible meanings, ranging from Divine anger to the light of guidance [such as with Moses (peace be upon him) on Mount Sinai], and from the presence of devilry to the presence of intense mystical ardor. Fire is but one of an indefinite number of symbols and similitudes whose true meaning in any given case requires a great deal of insight and understanding concerning the individual to whom the

dream has occurred or in relation with whom certain experiences have taken place.

A mureed of Hazrat Ahmad Sirhindi (may Allah be pleased with him) once came running to his shaykh, proclaiming: "I have seen God, I have seen God." After getting the man to calm down, the shaykh asked the mureed to describe his experience.

As the individual did so, the shaykh listened carefully, and when the man had finished his description, his guide said: "You silly fool, you have seen nothing more than the nur, or light, of your ablution."

There are many kinds of nur and many kinds of darkness, and not everyone is vouchsafed the knowledge of how to distinguish among these differences. Having an altered state of consciousness is one thing, and understanding the meaning of that altered state is quite another matter.

Is the foregoing a 'ghost story' intended to influence impressionable people to stay tied to the apron strings of an authoritarian teacher? Not really -- in fact, the real point or moral of the foregoing account ... at least in the present context ... is that the interpretation of both 'normal', as well as anomalous, events in our lives is not child's play. It is serious spiritual business, and not everyone -- indeed, most of us -- really don't know what we are doing in such circumstances.

We have theories, impressions, opinions, biases, prejudices, inclinations, ideas, and interpretations, but that is all they are -- the uttering of the ignorant. Consequently, when someone brushes up against our lives who claims to be able to sort all of this out for us and, in the process, guide us through the shadowy, ambiguous, hazardous aspects of the spiritual journey, we tend to become quite excited without really knowing if such a person actually knows what he or she is talking about and claiming in this respect.

Hazrat Jalal-uddin Rumi (may Allah be pleased with him) is reported to have said words to the effect that the spiritual journey is one that would take two hundred years on one's own, but just two days with the assistance of a true awliya of God. I believe that Hazrat Rumi (may Allah be pleased with him) said these words after meeting Shamsi Tabriz (may Allah be pleased with him), not before their series

of encounters -- because before he met Shams (may Allah be pleased with him) he had not come anywhere close to completing his spiritual journey and, therefore, would not have known the truth of what he learned only after his encounters with his beloved friend -- learning that was manifested in the Mathnawi and other post-Shams writings.

There are many people on the Sufi path today who have spent more than two days with their shaykh who -- if external behavior is any indicator -- have not, yet, completed the spiritual journey. This would suggest a number of possibilities.

One of these possibilities is that some of these so-called shaykhs are not what they claim to be. Another possibility that is borne out by the teachings of the Sufi masters, is that not all shaykhs are necessarily of the same spiritual accomplishment, and by saying this, one should not suppose that this possibility precludes the reality of the first possibility -- namely, that there are people running around claiming to be a shaykh who have not been authorized by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), through the permission of Allah, to serve in such a capacity.

In essence, a shaykh is someone who has been selected, for reasons best known to Divinity, to be a locus of manifestation through which certain kinds of barakah or Divine Grace are transmitted that runs from Allah, to the Prophet (peace be upon him), down through his household, and through the subsequent ones who have been entrusted with this function of serving as such as locus of manifestation of spiritual guidance for the journey of tasawwuf. Such a shaykh might, or might not, be a great alim or scholar of Qur'an, Hadith, or fiqh -- and, in truth, doesn't have to be, for there are others who might, and can, serve in such a capacity.

A shaykh is a spiritual, catalytic touchstone that provides support, help, assistance, direction, and transformational possibilities, God willing, for travelers of the Sufi Path. Without the presence of this alchemical-like elixir, the spiritual journey of tasawwuf becomes, unless Allah wishes otherwise, impossible ... although, naturally, the regular journey of a Muslim who seeks Paradise is still available.

There was once a shaykh who was quite elderly and about to pass on to the next world. Before he passed on, he wished for a successor to be named.

The individual that God, through his Prophet (peace be upon him) selected, was an individual who -- as far as the Qur'an, Hadithic literature, and issues of fiqh (the application of Shari'ah to everyday life) were concerned -- was quite ignorant and who never had any formal training in these disciplines. As a result, many of the other mureeds were quite perplexed with the decision.

In time the elderly shaykh passed away, and the successor assumed the responsibilities of being a shaykh for the silsilah in question. Almost immediately, some of the other mureeds began to test the new guide, peppering him with questions about the Qur'an and Hadith.

To their surprise, the humble man answered all of their questions with such detail, insight and wisdom, that they were completely nonplused by the man's capabilities. As many times as they tested him, beautiful answers were forthcoming from the man's lips.

One of the mureeds, who was bolder and more curious than the others, approached the new shaykh and inquired about how the latter could give such wonderful discourses on all manner of subjects given that he never had any formal training in these areas. The shaykh smiled and indicated: "Whenever any of you ask me questions, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is at my side, instructing me what to say."

Does the foregoing anecdote mean that any Tom, Dick or Harriet who comes along will be afforded such assistance? No, it doesn't, but it does indicate that when someone is properly authorized by Allah to serve in a given function, then, God willing, whatever is necessary to fulfill the duties of that function will be forthcoming.

Not all shaykhs are of the caliber of a Shams, Rumi, Junayd, Ibn al-Arabi, Ahmed Sirhindi, or Muhammad al-Alawi (may Allah be pleased with all of them). Not all shaykhs have the same mission on earth, even as they all share in providing spiritual guidance for those who seek to traverse the path of tasawwuf.

There was an individual who went in search of mystical truths. He began with the spiritual guide who was available in that locality.

Soon, however, this seeker became dissatisfied with what that shaykh had to offer after the former individual heard about a person

who was described as being the greatest shaykh of the time. The man's heart began to burn with desire to study with the great shaykh, and, therefore, he asked his current teacher's permission to seek the great shaykh out, and, his guide consented to the request.

After some time spent in physical travel, the seeker found the great shaykh and sought an audience, that was granted. As the seeker was ushered into the spiritual guide's room and was about to sit down, the shaykh said to him: "Why do you seek a goldsmith when an iron-smith will do? Go back to your shaykh, for he has all that you will be able to take advantage of at this stage in your life."

All authentic shaykhs can help, but not all seekers are destined for the same spiritual rizq, and, therefore, not all shaykhs need to be the qutb of the age in order to be able to serve as a locus for Divine assistance. Indeed, the Sufi masters have noted that Divine manifestation does not repeat itself, and, consequently, there will only be one Rumi, or one Hafiz, or one ibn al-Arabi (may Allah be pleased with them all). The task of each individual is to struggle toward realizing whatever the nature of one's spiritual capacity might be, and not to seek to become what one is not -- and to realize that even in the most humble and lowly of human beings, there is a spiritual potential for coming to know the Hidden Treasure in accordance with the properties of that individual's spiritual capacity.

Someone who is not an authentic shaykh has no appreciation or understanding of such differences and subtleties. Someone who is not an authentic, properly designated guide becomes like the person who interprets dreams incorrectly, and, as a result, undermines the spiritual condition and potential of an individual.

The stakes are enormous. The possibility of: spiritual realization and completion of the purpose of one's life, versus: the possibility of spiritual dissolution and the loss of the chance to struggle toward realization of such a purpose. Many people do not know if their shaykh is authentic or not. However, because so much is at stake, many people are unwilling to look into the abyss and ask the question: Does the person with whom I have taken ba'yat serve as an authorized locus of manifestation for assisting people to travel on the Sufi Path, and how can I confirm this?

This is an enormously complex question and not necessarily all that straightforward a problem. There is a Hadith Qudsi that says: "The most enviable of My awliya close to Me is a believer whose possessions are few, whose joy is prayer, who accomplished the service of one's Lord to perfection and obeys God in secret. This person is obscure among human beings, and no one points to that person."

A shaykh who took no, or few, mureeds but who taught my shaykh (my first ... the authentic one) Persian when the latter was much younger and was, in addition, a good friend of my shaykh, once said: "There are so many Rumies who have never uttered a word." We think we know who the people of Allah are, and we think we can tell who those close to Allah are, but we are largely ignorant of the reality of things.

Some people with very big reputations are not legitimate shaykhs although many people suppose them to be so. Some people who are completely invisible to most of us -- except the people of discernment -- are legitimate shaykhs, yet, few seekers find their way to them.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) informs us that: "This world is maintained in illusion." Most of us go about our business as if there were no truth to what he said, or act as if we actually knew what he was talking about and, consequently, could distinguish among the veils of light and darkness that, on their own level are true, but, nonetheless, camouflage still deeper truths about human existence.

At Hudaibiyah (near Mecca), all who were with the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) took ba'yat. When the Prophet passed away and Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him) was elected Caliph by a majority vote, ba'yat was again taken by many individuals, but not everyone joined in.

The two instances of ba'yat are not necessarily the same. One obvious difference is that a Prophet was involved in one case, but not the other, but to speculate beyond this invites error.

In both cases, allegiance was sought from those who took ba'yat. In both cases, it was true that: "Those who swear allegiance to thee, in truth, swear allegiance to God. God's hand is above their hands. So, whoever breaks one's oath, breaks it only to the hurt of one's soul." (Qur'an 48:10)

If one takes ba'yat with a fraudulent shaykh, the oath one takes is to Allah and not to the person. The very nature of the ba'yat one is taking forbids one to follow misguidance.

Truth trumps falsehood: "The Real has come and the unreal has vanished away. Lo! Falsehood is ever bound to vanish." (Qur'an 17:81) -- but, of course, first one has to go through the Divinely ordained tribulation of coming to discover the nature of the falsehood with which one is dealing.

To the extent that the individual whose hand one takes is authentic, then, keeping one's oath to the shaykh is, in fact, keeping one's oath to Allah. As the Qur'an stipulates: "So, the one who has obeyed the Messenger has obeyed God," (4:80) and since an authentic shaykh is someone who, by Divine permission, has been authorized by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), then, to follow the guidance of the shaykh, is by analogy, to follow the guidance that is being transmitted through the shaykh via the barakah that flows through the Prophetic fountain of spirituality by Divine decree.

The idea of ba'yat among the Sufis is modeled primarily after what took place at Hudaibiyah, but there is also resonance with what transpired in conjunction with Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him). The essential theme is that of taking an oath of a spiritual nature but one that has this-world ramifications -- an oath taking that, ultimately, is between an individual and Allah but that is played out in the context of a specifically authorized veil -- namely, an authentic shaykh.

Is the taking of a hand necessary to establish ba'yat? Not necessarily.

I remember when I began associating with my shaykh (the authentic one), I was very anxious about going through the formal ceremony that I saw others going through, and the more time that passed without this happening, the more worried I became that, perhaps, I did not belong on the Sufi Path. Finally, the shaykh toward whom I was inclined indicated one day that on such and such an occasion, near the end of Ramazan, I was to be formally initiated.

When I told him about my worries in this regard, he smiled. He said, actually, he already had considered me part of the silsilah for

quite some time, but the formal initiation process was going to take place to make it official for everyone concerned.

I knew in my heart, my oath of allegiance already was with him before any formal taking of hands had occurred. So, did he.

Finally, sometimes, as in my case, one's shaykh passes away. I felt that I still needed some spiritual guidance, and, so, when an opportunity arose, I went with it -- mistakenly, as it turns out, but as Shakespeare once wrote: "All's well that ends well," and to have been freed from the influences of such a mistake sits very well with me indeed, and I consider it as, by the Grace of Allah, a barakah from my earlier guide that, because existence is the way it is and we have to go through whatever Allah wishes, took time to manifest itself in my life.

The general rule among the Sufis is that if one's teacher passes away, one is free, without prejudice, to seek further guidance from another authentic guide of the way, or, alternatively, to remain with the teacher who has passed away, for the Sufis accept the truth of: "Think not of those who are slain in the way of Allah, as dead. No, they are living. With their Lord, they have provision. Jubilant (are they) because of that which Allah has bestowed upon them of His bounty.' (Qur'an 3:169- 170) Moreover, the phrase, "slain in the way of Allah", in the foregoing does not necessarily refer to those who die in armed, physical combat, as so many Muslims are inclined to suppose, but has a deeper, richer meaning that encompasses all those who have devoted their lives to the service of Allah -- those who swear: "Say: Surely, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death are all for Allah, the Lord of the worlds." (Qur'an 6:162)

When I was brought into contact with my first shaykh (the authentic one), I, literally, did not know what I was doing. but, by the Grace of Allah, it turned out fine. When I was brought into contact with the second shaykh (the spiritual charlatan), I, literally, did not know what I was doing, but, by the Grace of Allah, it turned out okay -- although, I must say that I liked the scenery and company in the first part of the journey a lot more than the scenery and company in the second part of the journey -- but, I quibble.

There are psychological and spiritual advantages to being with a shaykh who is among those living in this world. Unless one is extremely well-advanced and established on the path of tasawwuf,

having a living guide is probably the better part of valor -- it is not an absolute necessity, and, to some extent, it really depends on the kind of relationship one had with one's initial teacher, whether anything was indicated to one by the teacher, how confident one feels struggling with the unknown on one's own (especially, when it comes to traveling through jalali territory), the nature of one's understanding, and so on.

I remember once, when traveling in India, I visited the shrine of one of the great saints of our silsilah, and, during a conversation with one of the caretakers of the shrine, inquired about going to a certain nearby mosque known as the 'mosque of the jinn'. The man asked me what I knew, and I understood by his words, he was asking me what spiritual knowledge did I have -- to which I answered, not much. He suggested that since it was near sunset, it would not be the best time to go there.

The Sufi path is sort of like this. If one doesn't have the requisite knowledge to go about things in a wise manner, one probably should wait for a more propitious time -- namely, when one has access to the sort of help that might be of constructive value to one's spiritual journey. They tend to know all the best watering holes and taverns.

Chapter 18: Doubts

One member of the Sufi Spiritual Abuse Recovery Group was very confused about how to proceed. On the one hand, this individual felt spiritually abused and betrayed by another person, but, on the other hand, the former individual was beset by a lot of doubts and 'what ifs' concerning whether leaving the problematic people or staying with them was the best thing to do.

There are a variety of themes that tend to be characteristic with respect to many instances of spiritual abuse. Some of these concern the abuser, and some of these revolve about the person being abused.

In the latter case -- that is, the issues and problems involving the individual who is, or has been abused -- there are a number of complicating factors, and one of these is that people who are engaged in spiritual abuse are very clever, adept students of the dangerous game they are playing. They have studied their prey, and, therefore, they are familiar with all the attempts of an intended target to try to break free or withdraw from the process of stalking that is going on.

A person who is vulnerable emotionally, socially, psychologically, and spiritually is someone who has been wounded, in one way or another, by the events of life -- it is these wounds that render them vulnerable. These are wounds that, for the most part, might not be a focal part of on-going consciousness, but such wounds are all along the horizons of consciousness and affect how one feels about oneself, life, other people, the present, the future, and the past.

There might be many things that have contributed to the formation of such wounds -- the dynamics of family life; one's perception of oneself as a reflection of how others treat one; traumatic events of one kind or another at different junctures in life -- which could range from physical abuse, to sexual abuse, to emotional abuse; problematic relationships that have left their mark; the sort of educational program one went through and what it taught -- and wasn't taught -- about, among other things, issues of identity, meaning, purpose, and community.

Many people feel alienated from others, themselves, life and even God. They long for acceptance, love, affection, to be recognized as someone who matters and not just as a biological object taking up

space and waiting for death. They long for a real sense of identity, belonging, meaning, purpose and community. They long to be able to associate with people who are like-minded and like-hearted -- people with whom they can feel at home in the vastness of the universe.

Many of us pay lip service to the idea that God is present and sees all that we do and cares about us and loves us. However, most of us seem to be from Missouri (the show-me state) because we want to be shown the reality of this Presence -- we don't want to just 'think' this is the case, we want to FEEL that this is the case, and we want to KNOW this is the case.

The perpetrators of spiritual abuse understand all of this. Whether they know this is the sense of sociopaths [who are aware that people have emotions and what the nature of those emotions are like and exploit this knowledge even as they have no emotional attachment to the people they abuse, and, therefore, are prepared to do the most brutal and callous things to such people], or whether the perpetrators of spiritual abuse have, themselves, been abused and develop into abusers of others [as, unfortunately and, quite surprisingly, happens a great deal, and, therefore, are intimately familiar with the character of the wounds that fester within a vulnerable, wounded individual, and use this 'insider' understanding to track and stalk his or her would-be prey, doesn't make a great deal of difference]. The bottom line is that, in one way or another, they know the phenomenology of vulnerable, wounded people, and they utilize that understanding to run down, capture, and control their targets of opportunity.

When a person who is being spiritually abused begins to become aware that 'there is something not quite right about this camel ride' (Hafiz) in relation to an alleged spiritual teacher or group, they enter into a 'twilight zone' where it becomes very difficult to sort out fact and fiction, truth and falsehood. There are several reasons for this difficulty. As much as we might all like to think we are totally independent agents in life, the truth of the matter is that our understanding of, and relation to, life often depends on the process of 'consensual validation' -- that is, we often look to others to help us distinguish between what is real from what is not real. Socially, linguistically, emotionally, and psychologically, what other people think about the nature of reality matters to us, and when there is

conflict or stress associated with the problem of drawing up a map of life, most of us feel very uncomfortable, and we want to resolve whatever differences exist.

As long as those differences persist, especially in relation to people we care about, we do not feel existentially settled, or secure, or at home ... we tend to feel alienated, and through this sense of alienation or anomie -- a basic sense of disconnectedness -- we begin to peer into the dark abyss of dissociation, depersonalization, de-realization ... the dreaded Ds that constitute a threat worse than death. This is why many people consider suicide to be a more viable solution than having to work through the nightmare of dissociation when nothing seems real, when one's sense of being as a person is called into question, and when one loses sight of any sense of essential meaning, purpose, or identity.

People are fundamentally terrified of this abyss of dissociation. Oftentimes, individuals will do almost anything to escape from the clutches of its diabolical currents that reach out toward us and seek to draw us deeper and deeper into the interior of this horrible maelstrom of existence.

The perpetrators of spiritual abuse know all of this. This is why their poison is so insidious because they seem to offer a solution to one of life's great problems -- namely, how to stay far away from the realm of dissociation with its concomitant loss of meaning, identity, purpose, and direction in life. This poison becomes even more dangerous when an abused individual looks to the abusers as one's source of consensual validation about where reality leaves off and falsehood begins -- in such cases, truly, the foxes have become the guardians of the hen house ... much to the detriment of the hens.

People who are wounded or vulnerable have been living in the vicinity of the realm of dissociation for quite some time. Its currents are constantly intruding into the phenomenology of consciousness -- tugging at one, pulling at one in the direction of the abyss.

When a spiritually abusive teacher or group comes along, they coat their poison with a layer of sweetness. For instance, through techniques such as 'love bombing', they do and say all manner of things that are intended to appeal to the vulnerabilities of an individual -- they offer acceptance, love, friendship, a sense of

belonging, community, family, warmth, encouragement, support, hope, meaning, purpose, identity, and a methodology for dealing with life.

Yet, one needs to understand something about spiritually abusive people. They are like vampires -- they cultivate an interest in an individual not as a person with a soul, but as a potential source of 'feeding' that is intended to destroy the soul of the person from whom the essence of life is sucked. Like vampires, perpetrators of spiritual abuse give nothing back in return except the promise of immortality that actually is a living hell because someone in that condition is driven by a need to continually feed off of others.

Spiritually abusive people have nothing of real substance to offer. More specifically, they have nothing to offer that is capable of assisting an individual to undergo the necessary transformations of nafs, mind, heart, sirr, spirit, kafi, and aqfah (our interior spiritual faculties) which leads to the purification, calibration and realization of such faculties.

Ultimately, all spiritual transformation comes via the Grace of God, but just as Divinity makes the Presence of Names and Attributes felt through the character of natural laws in the physical world (for example, gravitation, magnetism, electricity, quantum interactions, and so on), so too, Divinity makes Its Presence felt through the character of 'natural' laws in the spiritual realm -- and every realm has laws and principles that are associated with that realm ... whether one is discussing Nasut (the corporeal/causal realm), alam al-mithal (the realm of symbols and similitudes), Malakut (the realm of the souls of things), Jabrut (the realm of ruler ship), Lahut (the realm of Sifat or Divine Attributes), Hahut (the realm of necessary and possible existence), or Bahut (the realm of the Hidden Treasure) -- in each instance, the Divine Presence makes Itself known in ways that are appropriate to, or characteristic of that realm.

One of the laws or principles of spirituality is that the path from self to Self requires a spiritual lineage or silsilah that, in the case of the Sufi Path (and in other spiritual traditions the lineage would be rooted in a particular Prophet), extends back to the household of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). One of the reasons for the importance of such a lineage is that it transmits a barakah, a special Grace from Allah, which assists an individual to be salik (that is to journey in a spiritual sense). In the absence of such a spiritual lineage

of barakah and if Allah does not provide some other alternative means of transmitting this barakah (and, from time to time, the mysterious patron saint Khizr -- peace be upon him -- serves this function), then, not only does the spiritual journey become extremely difficult, if not impossible, it also becomes extremely dangerous for there are all manner of ways to become lost in the search for Self.

Spiritually abusive 'teachers' (so-called) and groups can say and promise anything they like, and that is what such proclamations will remain -- statements and promises. There is no transforming barakah being transmitted through such a group or teacher that can help support, protect, enhance, guide, and develop (God willing) the process of spiritual transformation in an individual. The necessary 'Philosopher's Stone' or alchemical elixir, if you like, is missing.

When a person begins to suspect that something 'wrong' is going on with an alleged teacher or spiritual group, part of what is being sensed is that this teacher or group does not have the requisite link with an authentic spiritual tradition, because if they did, then, such problematic things would not be happening. If one comes across events or evidence that indicates that the so-called spiritual teacher or group is engaged in lying, deceit, manipulation, hypocrisy, inappropriate sexual behavior, coerced (emotionally, physically, socially or psychologically) compliance, mind control, and so on, then, all of these are indicators or signs that there is, indeed, 'something not quite right about this camel ride', and what is not right is that the problematic behavior indicates the absence of the aforementioned barakah that is present in all legitimate spiritual lineages and through which guidance is, by the Grace of Allah, protected in its original purity and truth.

It is an oxymoron to say that a teacher is authentic but he or she does not live in accordance with the principles of adab that forms the backbone of the mystical tradition. Whether a given alleged teacher ever was authentic and lost her or his way, or whether a so-called teacher was never authentic, is an important further issue to consider, but it must be considered quite independently of the fact that what is currently going on undermines, corrupts, and destroys the spiritual atmosphere that establishes the requisite 'sacred, consecrated or blessed space' within which the process of making the journey from

self to Self must take place. Just as Shari'ah is intended to create a safe haven within which the exoteric aspects of Islam might be pursued in peace and harmony, so too, an authentic silsilah is intended to establish the necessary space within which the interior journey from self to Self takes place -- a journey that needs the presence of barakah in order to be efficacious.

When one is dealing with a poison, there are all kinds of questions and doubts one might have. Is it the poison's fault for being a poison? Don't I have a responsibility to try to rehabilitate the poison? Shouldn't I try to befriend the poison and lend it an empathetic and compassionate ear? Maybe, what I think is poisonous is not really, at heart, poisonous, and the problem is really my perception of things. Maybe the poison is not so dangerous, and aside from a few feelings of discomfort, maybe no real damage has been done, and, therefore, it is ok to continue to associate with the poison. Maybe, I don't understand things properly or see them as clearly as I should? Maybe, there is more to this than meets the eye.

All of the foregoing doubts, questions, and what ifs, along with a thousand similar ones, flood one's consciousness after one has begun to suspect or even come to know that there is something not quite right in relation to a particular so-called teacher, group or individual. All of these questions and doubts are generated through the agencies of unredeemed nafs, Iblis, dunya (the set of entanglements generated by the collective interaction of people's carnal souls), and the whisperings of people who, like Iblis, do believe in the existence of God but 'choose' to rebel against the character of that Reality in various ways (that is, unbelievers).

People who are spiritually abusive are quite well aware of the forces that are brought into play when an individual feels they have found an antidote (i.e., guide) to the threat of the condition of dissociation that haunts us all, as well as a cure for all of one's vulnerabilities and wounds that have arisen through the vicissitudes of life. They know that the tendency of many people -- even when they have encountered clear evidence of lying, deception, manipulation, hypocrisy, and so on -- is to not want to leave the 'oasis' in the desert of life that one believes one has found. One gives oneself all kinds of excuses for hanging around such an oasis because one doesn't want to

believe that the oasis is just one more mirage in the desert of life through which one has been struggling.

Spiritually abusive people will take every opportunity to undermine one's confidence and sense of self-trust about one's understanding concerning the nature of what is actually going on. If it serves their purpose they will join chat rooms and group lists, using an alias, where a given group member, who is wavering, is known to participate in order to plant seeds of doubt through which that individual can be induced to be sucked back across the boundary of doubt and, once again, become influenced by the proclamations, words, teachings, promises, preaching, and so on of the spiritually abusive individuals.

Someone has said that 'nostalgia is an inauthentic form of grief', and people who are trying to extricate themselves from spiritually abusive groups need to understand that many of their memories concerning an alleged teacher or spiritual group are embedded in such nostalgia. Furthermore, since the leaving process has all the qualities and characteristics of grieving over loss -- the loss of identity, meaning, acceptance, hope, innocence, friendship, association, direction, community, and so on -- nostalgia does not really address the grieving process but tries to hang on to something that is not real. This is why even people who see the wisdom of needing to extricate themselves from an abusive relationship, have difficulty doing so, because doing so doesn't seem like something positive but something negative in which one is losing things or people or relationships with which one has invested value and trust.

Yet, truth is the one thing with which we cannot do without. When we are willing to sacrifice the truth for the sake of nostalgia, illusions, and delusions, then, the full effect of the poisoning process becomes manifest.

A person might ask himself or herself -- after all is said and done -- what harm has a spiritually abusive person really done to me. The harm that has been done is to separate one from the truth and to induce a person to want to continue on with falsehood and delusions rather than the truth.

Spiritually speaking, no greater damage can be done to a human soul than this -- because Truth is the only vehicle that can transport

one from the self to the Self. When one loses this, one, truly, has lost pretty much everything.

As far as the intentions of another human being are concerned, one only has the evidence of behavior and one's understanding and intuitions about such behavior. We can continue to 'assume' that another individual has never intended to hurt us, but if the behavior of that individual belies the validity of our on-going assumption, then, we have the choice of either turning a blind-eye to the evidence that God is placing before our being and allowing our taste, or dhawk, for truth to become corrupted in the process, or we can opt for staying under the protective umbrella of the Truth and disengaging from a poisonous situation.

We are not really in a position to help anyone else disengage from the effects of such poisoning, until we, ourselves, have cleansed our systems of such toxic experiences. People who have been exposed to the truth of a situation and waver back and forth are people who are exhibiting signs that the effects of the spiritual poisoning have not, yet, been cleared from their systems.

Consequently, to want to continue to associate with the source of poisoning in order to help others who have been poisoned becomes a very risky process ... since rather than helping to extricate others from the mess, one might simply be seduced back into the toxic environment, and one might never again be able to muster up the requisite courage and strength to, God willing, which permitted one to leave in the first place. This is a very dangerous game.

Chapter 19: The Guru Papers

About twenty years ago, a book entitled: *The Guru Papers*, by Joel Kramer & Diana Alstad, made quite a splash in many circles. The subtitle of the work was: 'Masks of Authoritarian Power'.

The following comments serve as something of an extended mini-review of the foregoing work. In this review, a substantial amount of time is given to providing readers with a fair and accurate overview of the perspective of the two authors, but toward the end of this essay, a certain amount of critical analysis concerning their work is provided, so please be patient.

One of the essential themes of the Kramer-Alstad study was that all Guru-devotee or teacher-seeker relationships are inherently, unavoidably, irrevocably, problematically, and without exception, authoritarian in nature. Although the authors knew most about the way things worked in Yogic and Buddhist systems, the two writers were quite clear that they believed no spiritual, mystical tradition was free from the destructive presence of authoritarian practices and influences.

Furthermore, these two authors argued that no one should suppose the central difficulty in such teacher-seeker relationships could be attributed to the personal failings of a few rotten apples in the barrel -- that is, Kramer and Alstad maintained that even if one could remove from consideration all those teachers who had given in to the dark side of themselves and, as a result, became abusers and exploiters of their followers, nevertheless, the remaining spiritual guides -- no matter how good, decent, well-intended, and knowledgeable they might be -- would still be ensconced in a system that was inextricably authoritarian. In other words, the problem was institutional or systemic and not a function of wayward and rogue 'teachers'. Even when the individual apples were good, the barrel in which they existed and operated was rotten with the insidious presence of authoritarian practices.

Early in *The Guru Papers*, the two authors made a distinction between, on the one hand, issues of authority, as well as hierarchy, and, on the other hand, authoritarian practices that are often confused and conflated with the former two principles. According to Kramer and Alstad, every society or social order requires the use of authority

and hierarchy to be able to function properly, but when authoritarian influences seep into either the uses of authority or hierarchy, then, according to the authors, the seeds of eventual social disintegration are being sown.

While Kramer and Alstad are interested in a wide variety of social contexts that tend to become entangled with authoritarian abuses, the two researchers key in on spiritual, religious, and mystical contexts because such traditional settings offer, in their opinion, an unusually fruitful opportunity to explore the way the absolutist nature of the Guru-seeker relationship is rooted, supposedly, in demands for total obedience and surrender, and, consequently, provides a window, as it were, onto the manner in which the exercise of authoritarian power leads to not only the control of physical contingencies, but to the shaping, structuring, coloring, and orienting of mental, emotional, motivational, and behavioral processes, as well.

According to the perspective of the authors of *The Guru Papers*, spiritual ideologies are used in authoritarian systems to, among other things, justify and render plausible, or reasonable, the exercise of authoritarian control. When one accepts a spiritual system, one, knowingly or unknowingly, commits oneself to submitting to whatever yoke of authoritarian power the system deems to be appropriate in order to enable the spiritual institution, in question, to operate smoothly, efficiently, and effectively as a means of -- so the promise goes -- helping individuals to become: realized, enlightened, fully human, awakened, saved, sanctified, or whatever other spiritual ideals are being promulgated by that spiritual system as being the goal(s) or purpose(s) of life.

Kramer and Alstad claim to have no quarrel with the idea of spirituality, per se. Rather, their stated concern is with processes that seek to justify, defend, enhance, promote, and/or mask the exercise of authoritarian control by creating gateway figures -- i.e., teachers, gurus, masters -- who, allegedly, are the only ones who can safely and effectively guide one to the spiritual treasures on the other side of the spiritual gate -- even when that gate resides within us -- and do so by requiring followers to refrain from challenging, in any way, the guide's directives, interpretations, pronouncements, practices, demands, expectations, or understandings.

The two authors believe the vast majority of historical, traditional, social systems are saturated with the uses, and subsequent destructive effects, of authoritarian power. They feel the omnipresence of such practices and influences has undermined our individual and collective capacity for self-trust, and this, in turn, has shackled our creative potential for developing new social and institutional arrangements concerning constructive uses of authority and hierarchy that are capable of solving the many dilemmas with which we are confronted.

The creators of *The Guru Papers* are in search of a new paradigm - one that will attract commitment through consensus rather than the coercive force inherent in authoritarian demands for mental, social, spiritual, emotional and physical obedience, submission, or conformity. The authors are seeking a paradigm shift that will give emphasis to helping people to learn how to trust and value their own experiences rather than succumbing to a rote-learning process of indoctrination fraught with unexamined assumptions, as well as a submissive compulsion to blindly follow antiquated, problematic value and methodological systems.

Of particular interest to Kramer and Alstad are the techniques used by authoritarian systems to inculcate a set of moral values that are internalized and used to control people. According to the authors, such techniques are even more important than the exercise of physical control, for the latter is quite limited in scope and cannot be used on a continuous basis without either, sooner or later, leading to social upheaval and significant challenges through some form of countervailing physical force, or simply leading to the fragmentation of society as the pressure of physical force generates ruptures in the social fabric that are unpredictable and, often, irreparable.

When authoritarian processes are used to shape how people think, believe, feel, speak, and act, the world-view, paradigm, or framework through which reality is engaged and understood becomes the medium of control. The most dangerous shackles are the ones that are invisible to us because we do not see them for what they are -- namely, authoritarian demands for obedience that have been internalized and re-framed as unchallengeable moral certitudes that are justified by an ideology one has been induced not to question or critically reflect upon.

Moreover, from the perspective of Kramer and Alstad, one of the primary functions of encouraging the idea of moral certainty in people is that the latter instills in the minds of such individuals a self-righteous attitude that justifies perpetrating all manner of cruelty, hatred, anger, and oppression toward the 'miscreants' who have not, yet, submitted to such 'truths' and, therefore, serves as the ideological warrant for telling other people -- by force, if necessary -- how to live their lives, what goals to seek, which authorities to believe or trust, who to be and why. The sort of certitude that is indifferent to facts, evidence, critical analysis, contrary experience, unbiased evaluation, methodological rigor, unexplained anomalies, unanswered questions, and soulful reflection is impervious to anything other than its own interests, likes, dislikes, prejudices, goals, assumptions, and limitations.

Such rigidity and dogmatic impenetrability is used as the first line of defense against any challenges to the moral justification for perpetrating a system that is, essentially, operated through authoritarian processes that, ultimately, demand total obedience and submission to the purveyors of the oppressive practices that have been used to indoctrinate people to accept such a moral, emotional, mental, and spiritual cul-de-sac or dead end in the first place. The system is circular, and, therefore, self-perpetuating as long as the underlying authoritarian practices enjoy the privileges of eminent domain that are assumed to be absolute, and, therefore, unchallengeable by virtue of the moral certitude that, supposedly, lies at the heart of the assumption that is vouchsafing those privileges and that, consequently, underwrites the justification for doing things in an authoritarian fashion.

According to the authors of *The Guru Papers*, morality is the mortar that cements the bricks of society together, and in order to avoid the appearance of requiring people to abide by arbitrarily derived rules of conduct, morality was embedded in religious systems that were, in turn, backed by claims to the ultimate authority of absolute truths that were Divine in nature. Thus, morality, religion, spirituality, goodness, justice, meaning, purpose, community, and identity all took their lead from a set of Divinely given absolute principles.

Kramer and Alstad contend that central to the aforementioned set of principles was a 'renunciate' orientation to life. This renunciate philosophy or theology required individuals to sacrifice self-interest in the name of the 'higher good' as defined by a given religious framework and as interpreted by those who came to be the guardians of that system -- namely, the spiritual guides, clerics, officials, and so on, who, supposedly, were most knowledgeable about what Divinity wanted from humankind.

The two authors further argued that forgiveness, guilt, reward, shame, and punishment were among the primary tools used to induce people to adopt the renunciate perspective and eschew self-interest. In fact, the guardians of these spiritual frameworks pointed out that real self-interest was synonymous with adhering to a renunciate way of life -- that, in effect, there was no essential antagonism between the two.

Issues of death, life, loss, pain, purpose, meaning, difficulty, uncertainty, the unknown, were dealt with through the fixed symbols, myths, rituals, and mysteries of absolute truth. However, Kramer and Alstad maintain that the price for pushing back the apparent chaos of life-events in this fashion was a way of being that became anachronistic due to its inability to flexibly, reasonably, creatively, and effectively respond to the challenges and problems generated through on-going history.

Under the relentless pressure of history, the authors contend that many of the myths, symbols, and rituals have been disconnected from their original sources, and, consequently, there has been a widespread loss of an essential sense of meaning, purpose, identity, and community that has led to considerable moral decay as people no longer see the relevance of abiding by renunciate theologies that do not seem to serve either collective or individual well-being. This state of affairs has, in the view of Kramer and Alstad, led to the rise of various forms of fundamentalism that seek to, ever more tightly, cling to traditional -- or, what are believed to be traditional values, methods, beliefs, and practices in an attempt to revive, through an exercise of sheer intensity of will-power, what seems to have been lost ... as if the mere urgency and direness of human desperation could turn back the calendar to a simpler, seemingly more innocent and spiritually advantageous time.

In the view of the authors of *The Guru Papers*, fundamentalists are experiencing a loss of control over their lives. They feel powerless in the face of modern forms of science, technology, culture, communication, government, education, and economics that have leveraged power in ways that bring traditional modes of spiritual life under constant attack, generating many doubts and questions in the process, and, as well, create an onslaught of moral problems for traditionally minded and hearted individuals.

Kramer and Alstad believe that what is needed at this juncture of history is "an ethics for survival". In their opinion, renunciate systems focus on rewards and punishments in a world-to-come context that looks upon existence from a self-serving paradigm that favors authoritarian means as a way of serving such ends, and, therefore, do little but use tactics of fear and self-righteous anger to force people to submit to a system that does very little to solve the problems and eliminate the injustices of the present world.

The authors contend that renunciate systems of morality are inherently judgmental and use fear and force to impose this perspective on people. In other words, individuals become so imbued with the fear of bringing down upon themselves the wrath of God or of being denied the fruits of Heaven -- at least, according to the teachings of the guardians of the faith -- that the commonality of people often become paralyzed with indecision ... not wishing to do anything that will jeopardize their standing in eternity, and, in the process, helping to perpetuate an authoritarian approach to life that spreads destructive seeds everywhere it blows.

Kramer and Alstad believe that the spirit of the authoritarian mind-set is nowhere more apparent than in mystical systems that are based on a teacher-seeker relationship in which a seeker blindly concedes authority to another person who claims to be a spiritual guide, and, in the process of such a concession, a number of untested and unproven assumptions are made concerning the character, understanding, and authenticity of the so-called teacher. Such a seeker is operating on presuppositions such as: the 'teacher' is morally superior to the seeker, and, as well, enjoys a far greater degree of spiritual knowledge, self-realization, insight, potential, and closeness

to Divinity, than the seeker does -- all of which supposedly enables the 'teacher' to understand what is best for another individual.

In the opinion of Kramer and Alstad, the foregoing sorts of presuppositions lend themselves to the creation of different forms of dualism, and among the most important of these is the: Sacred and non-sacred dichotomy. In the context of the teacher-seeker relationship, whatever the teacher is, says, thinks, feels, does, indicates, and suggests is sacred, and whatever is not in consonance with these dimensions of the teacher is non-sacred.

The task of the seeker becomes one of absorbing or of activating this sense of sacredness within herself or himself and, in addition, eliminating the non-sacred. The task of the teacher is to assist the seeker to do this.

As such, the teacher becomes the role model through which this is to be accomplished. However, the authors of *The Guru Papers* feel that much of what is passed off as sacred in such mystical circles is little more than vested interests, self-aggrandizement, cultural constructions, and individual preferences on the part of the 'teacher'.

When the 'teacher' becomes the unchallengeable arbiter of truth and 'seekers' adopt renunciate methodologies and moralities that encourage the latter to sacrifice their own capacity for experience, reflection, analysis, questioning, exploration, trust, identity, and realization at the altar of a teacher, then, in the opinion of Kramer and Alstad, one has an authoritarian recipe for spiritual disaster that is likely to produce little more than people who are dogmatic, rigid, static, self-righteous, judgmental, elitist, as well as incapable of either thinking for themselves or trusting their inner selves.

The Guru Papers approaches the issues of authoritarian power through the spectacles of a broadly evolutionary, progressive, humanistic, rationalistic, dialectical point of view. Although I believe the authors have some good insights to offer with respect to a number of the problems that exist in many teacher-seeker relationships (both on the side of the guide, as well as on the side of the seeker), nonetheless, their overall analysis appears to suffer from many inadequacies, lacunae, presumptions, unanswered questions, and problems -- not the least of which is the entirely arbitrary nature of their conception of dialectical analysis, rationalistic methodology, and

moral valuation, in addition to the constant vagueness in their book that dogs such key issues as: authority, hierarchy, self, trust, spirituality, creativity, evolution, truth, abstraction, purpose, identity, enlightenment, love and knowledge.

The Guru Papers is more than 370 pages long and, perhaps, at least that many pages might be necessary to demonstrate that the authors have not proven their central thesis that the nature of the teacher-seeker relationship is necessarily authoritarian. I am -- as I believe many people would be -- quite prepared to concede that, all too frequently, such relationships are riddled with authoritarian practices and influences, but claiming that such practices and influences are systemic and unavoidable in these sorts of relationship is quite another matter. In my view, the authors certainly have not proven their central thesis beyond a reasonable doubt, and, moreover, I do not believe they even have met a far less stringent burden of proof that requires them to have demonstrated that their thesis, on the basis of a preponderance of evidence, is likely true -- in other words, that the teacher-seeker relationship is necessarily authoritarian in nature.

There are a number of comments that could be made in defense of the foregoing critical pronouncements concerning *The Guru Papers*. But, rather than occupy the reader's time with the long version of such comments, I will only note a few possibilities.

To begin with, demanding or expecting that Being should be reducible to rationalistic methodologies -- as Kramer and Alstad tend to do -- is not only arbitrary and not amenable to proof, but it is, essentially, authoritarian in scope and principle. Moreover, such a position presupposes there is a consensus of opinion about what constitutes the rational or the logical, when, in truth, none exists.

This is not to say there is no such thing as logic or rational methodology, but, rather, it is a reflection of the reality that there are a variety of modalities of rational and logical processes about which much critical discussion has taken place. Differences in philosophy, science, theology, law, literature, culture, linguistics, education, and mysticism all testify to the fact that there is an on-going search for the logical, the rational, and the commonsensical in everyday life.

Point-counterpoint-point-counterpoint is the rhythm of intellectual life. The tapestry woven by various rational techniques

produces an intriguing but chaotic set of antagonistic motifs in our individual and collective minds.

Where is the truth in all of this? What is its significance? How do we use it to identify the real?

Furthermore, there are forms of understanding with which we are all familiar that resist, if not defy, rational, logical analysis in many ways. There is an intelligence to seeing, hearing, feeling, being, and consciousness, that does not seem reducible to any discernible scheme of rational, logical discourse. Maybe, in the future this might all change, but, right now, reason and logic have not been able to fathom the mysteries that envelop our existence and through which we engage such existence.

The very nature of the mystical way is that it is said to be ineffable. Yes, all kinds of people have written whole libraries about the contexts surrounding the ineffable, but the unspoken and unspeakable remain what they are -- secrets which, to whatever extent they can be grasped, are best engaged through the trans-rational realms of venues such as the heart, spirit, and Self.

One can agree with Kramer and Alstad that one should not pursue the mystical way naively, blindly, unquestioningly, mechanically, and without rational reflection. However, there are many times on the spiritual path when rational analysis will not provide one with definitive, certain, unchallengeable answers -- not unless we wish to make reason an authoritarian force within us that is absolute and that cannot be questioned as to its reliability, validity, potential, and limitations.

There are many aspects of life, many experiences, for which reason has not even the foggiest of plausible explanations for how they are possible. Consciousness, creativity, talent, language, logic, intelligence, and rationality are just a few of these unknown facts of life.

Many rationalists would like to reduce faith down to belief but balk when they realize that, from such a perspective, having faith in rationality becomes little more than an exercise in generating a belief system about the nature of thought. Faith is far more complex than mere belief, and, as a result, faith leads into uncharted territories,

where the sextant of rationalism and the known charts of logic do not always help one find one's way in the darkness of existence.

We live in the midst of uncertainty, ignorance, ambiguity, possibility, antagonistic forces, and need. As a result, we are vulnerable.

We require someone to show us how to supplement and complement rational tools with other modalities of knowing and understanding. We need someone to initiate us into a process of being able to have a constructive dialectic between reason and the trans-rational.

Kramer and Alstad are smart, talented, articulate, serious explorers. Yet, I know they don't know how to do the foregoing. This is obvious -- both from what they say, as well as from what they don't say.

The authors tell me to trust myself, but they don't provide any solid clues about who the self is that I am supposed to trust. More importantly, they aren't very clear about why I should trust this mysterious 'self' to which they allude in their book.

What is this 'self' rooted in? The truth? Reality in some sense of this word? How do we know this? How can we be certain of this? Is this 'self' absolute and unchallengeable? Where did this 'self' come from? What is its purpose, or does it have any? Is this self a 'rational' self? A transpersonal 'self'? Is this 'self' solipsistic and the creator of reality? If so, how does it accomplish this? What values should this 'self' live or judge by? How are these values derived? Why should one trust the method of derivation? What is the significance of experience? Are they arbitrary or do they have a meaning, and, if so, what is that meaning, and how do we discover the nature of such meaning? What methods should be used? What happens when this 'self' comes into conflict or disagreement with other 'selves'? How should disputes be resolved? Why? How does one address all of the foregoing without slipping into authoritarian practices?

The authors of *The Guru Papers* have a theory about all of the foregoing, but that is all it is -- an untested, unproven, problematic, ambiguous, vague, incomplete theory. It is a world-view, a paradigm, a philosophical framework -- a framework that cannot offer me one,

incontestable, definitive smoking-gun of a reason why one should adopt their perspective ... other than, of course, the obvious fact that there seem to be problems everywhere else in the arena of rational discourse, and, so, why not try 'our' (i.e., their) way of doing things.

Beyond the foregoing issues, I think that Kramer and Alstad have made a mistake in reasoning that is quite similar to one that Freud, among many others, made. More specifically, one is on shaky ground when one tries to construct a model of healthy relationships based on an exploration of pathology.

In other words, the authors of *The Guru Papers* go into great deal of detail about teacher-seeker relationships that have gone wrong, together with the difficulties that arise out of such dysfunctional relationships -- both for individuals and society. One can agree with a great deal that they have to say in this respect.

Nevertheless, they are using an inductive variation of extrapolation that implies that because some -- or even many -- teacher-seeker relationships are diseased, then, all such relationships must be diseased and, moreover, that all teacher-seeker relationships must necessarily manifest the same debilitating set of processes from which there is no escape. However, if what they were saying were actually true, then, the relationship that any reader has with their book must be inherently dysfunctional and, consequently, doomed to failure because the general format of this sort of relationship is that of someone who is imparting a version of reality/truth to someone who is interested in seeking after the nature of reality/truth -- that is, loosely construed, a teacher-seeker relationship.

The authors might counter with something along the following lines. Precisely because we do not commit any of the mistakes present in problematic guru-devotee relationships, we have provided a healthy, constructive opportunity to explore issues, ideas, problems, and so on that is free from authoritarian influences and practices. The presumptuousness of such a riposte -- if it were to happen -- is in the belief that a spiritual guide could not accomplish what the authors have been able to pull off -- or, so, the latter might believe.

Kramer and Alstad want to help readers develop a sense of trust in their inner selves. They wish to do this without force, compulsion, trickery, deceit, duplicity, insincerity, manipulation, exploitation,

dishonesty. They wish to achieve this through a reciprocity with, and respect for, the integrity and self-determining sovereignty of the other person.

The authors would like to have truth, facts, evidence, experience, and rigorous methodology decide such matters, rather than bias, prejudice, dogma, unexamined assumptions, conformity, and blind acceptance. Kramer and Alstad would like individuals to become free, autonomous, independent thinkers and doers who are interested in the welfare of all of Creation even as they strive to realize their own essential potential and unique identity.

The two writers would like people to reconcile and harmonize oppositions within themselves, as well as across all social relationships, by extending and expanding the notion of the sacred to include the whole of Being, and not just be restricted to the next-world and/or arbitrarily selected 'holy' people. The authors of *The Guru Papers* would like to establish modes of justice, decency, morality, and discernment that are not arrogant, narrow, self-serving, exclusionary attempts at justifying and perpetuating authoritarian systems of power.

Kramer and Alstad might be surprised to discover that there actually are spiritual, mystical guides who speak in the same sort of terms, goals, purposes, priorities intentions, and methods as do these authors. An authentic teacher -- of whatever kind -- is interested in only one thing ... assisting an individual to discover the truth about life, identity, capacity, justice, service, knowledge, community, love, self, integrity, freedom, realization, wisdom, as well as the nature of one's relationship with Being and the many levels and dimensions of manifested Creation.

An authentic teacher -- spiritual or otherwise -- does not want a student to become the teacher. Such teachers want a person to become herself or himself ... to realize his or her potential ... to come to know one's place in the scheme of things and to be freely committed to being all that one's capacity permits one to be.

An authentic teacher assists an individual to learn how, when, why, and where to trust herself or himself under different circumstances. Authentic teachers induce seekers to submit to the truth and to be satisfied with nothing less than the truth.

Over the last 32 years, or so, there have been two people in my life with whom I have had a teacher-seeker relationship. One of these was authentic, healthy, and constructive, while the other was not, but I learned from both sets of relationship.

If the sequence of life events had been reversed so that I had to endure the dysfunctional relationship first, I don't know how I might have responded to subsequent events -- including meeting up with someone who actually was an authentic spiritual guide. However, by the Grace of God, I didn't encounter the problematic relationship first, but, rather, I had a non-pathological relationship as my introduction to the mystical path. Many others have not been so fortunate.

I know from my own personal experience that Kramer and Alstad's thesis concerning the alleged inherent, authoritarian nature of all teacher-seeker relationships is wrong. My first -- and, so far, only authentic -- guide was the exact antithesis of an authoritarian. He never asked -- directly or indirectly -- for me to submit myself to him, or to conform to his ways of doing things, or to blindly and unquestioningly accept any of the things that he said or did. He was extremely humble and never even hinted at being superior to others. He permitted all manner of questions and was very generous in the time, resources, and efforts that he devoted to providing insights, principles, explanations, and teachings concerning various facets of spirituality -- both exoteric and esoteric. In fact, his way of doing things was, ultimately, by the Grace of God, my salvation in dealing with the very problematic ramifications of the spiritually dysfunctional 'teacher' with whom I later came into contact after my mystical guide passed away in the late 1980s.

The line of demarcation that differentiates between spiritual authenticity and a spiritual fraud can be very tricky to discern. Even when, on the surface, everything appears to be 'kosher', nevertheless, if someone is described as a bona fide spiritual guide who does things in a constructive, well-intentioned, non-authoritarian manner, and, yet, such a person has not been authorized by Divinity, then, such an individual is a spiritual fraud and cannot serve as the channel of transmission for the spiritual assistance that is necessary to traverse the mystical path, and, as a result, is placing people in harm's way -- both now, and, potentially, in the future -- even though, on the surface

everything seems to be done with appropriate spiritual etiquette and with due diligence for the welfare of associated practitioners.

When minions of Satan appear in the manifested form of a Charlie Manson, Jim Jones, and so on, the decision seems clear cut -- although even here there were sincere people who were exploited. When the minions of Satan appear in the guise of a kindly, friendly, intelligent, charming, engaging, concerned, knowledgeable, passionate, committed teacher who claims spiritual authenticity where none exists, then, one has a real problem on one's hand, because once in the presence of the kind of spiritual quicksand in which the process of extrication might not be all that easy.

Among the chief reasons for such difficulty is that one often does not even realize one is dealing with a spiritual imposter. Indeed, beware of the arrogance that whispers to one's heart 'you could not make such an error', for it is happening every day among sincere people all over the world, and it is happening because we live in treacherous times where authentic spiritual light is very difficult to find and the forces of chaos, disinformation, and darkness are very prominent -- many of these forces call themselves spiritual guides and many people believe them.

The authentic teachers of mysticism often indicate that no one comes to Self-realization except through encountering both the compassionate and rigorous attributes of Divinity. I don't know what other, if any, rigorous, Divine attributes I will have to experience in my life as I continue my quest to learn how to serve the purpose of my existence, but there is no doubt in my mind, heart, and soul that a ten year period of my life -- the ones spent with a spiritual fraud -- have been very spiritually rigorous in character, for the relationship with the mystical imposter has entailed a great variety of difficulties ... difficulties that Divinity permitted, for there is no reality other than God, and difficulties that I am very thankful have, God willing, come to an end.

Chapter 20: The Grieving Process

There often is a deep sense of loss associated with the experience of spiritual abuse -- a sense of loss that tends to be quite complex, giving expression to a variety of levels, dimensions, facets, and nuances of emotions, thoughts and concerns. While there are differences among individuals in the manner in which they respond to such loss -- reflecting variations in personality, temperament, coping strategies, and life history -- nonetheless, there also are a great many similarities in the general structure of this experience.

People who have gone through a process of spiritual abuse -- in fact, almost any kind of abuse -- are likely to have felt a combination of: shock, disbelief, denial, anguish, betrayal, anger, confusion, uncertainty, emptiness, guilt, shame, alienation, loneliness, sadness, distrust, self-criticism, embarrassment, suspicion, fear, regret, longing, nostalgia, identity-diffusion, moodiness, jealousy, agitation, insecurity, malaise, restlessness, and frustration. Many, or all, of these feelings might be part of the grief that an individual feels when confronted with the sort of massive assault on one's sense of purpose, identity, meaning, orientation, community, commitment, self-esteem, security, harmony, and well-being that occurs when an individual is exposed to spiritual abuse.

The passage of time might dull some of the intensity of these feelings, but time, in and of itself, will not resolve grief. Resolution requires work, struggle, and Divine support.

Ever since Elisabeth Kubler-Ross introduced the idea of emotional/cognitive stages (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and, finally, acceptance) in response to the news of death's relative imminence, many people have not only elevated these stages into truisms that are universal, inevitable, and fixed, but have, as well, tried to make the grieving process synonymous with these five stages. In truth, dealing with the presence of grief is, by and large, something quite independent of the problem of having to come to grips with the fact that death is close at hand (for oneself or for a loved one).

More specifically, once an individual comes to accept the reality of death's imminence, one is in the sort of emotional, psychological, and spiritual space that opens a person to beginning to struggle with, and work through, the different aspects of grief that are entangled with the

sense of loss that ensues upon acknowledging that death is something that cannot be dispatched through denial, anger, bargaining, depression, or, even, acceptance. Although there is a certain degree of overlap between learning to cope with the idea of death and undergoing a process of grieving in relation to perceived loss, to a large extent, the grieving process can only begin in earnest after the reality of death or the reality of a loss has been accepted.

Similarly, in the case of spiritual abuse, the work of grieving does not properly commence until a person is prepared to accept the fact that one has been abused. Until then, the individual is caught up in variations on feelings of denial, anger, bargaining, and depression.

The dissolution of a spiritual relationship with an alleged spiritual guide is, in some ways, akin to someone telling one that something very important to one has died, or is about to die. In fact, for some people, upon learning of such news, their whole world collapses, never to be resurrected, and others even commit suicide, not being able to bear the pain of either having to accept what has transpired or the pain that is, likely, to be encountered during the subsequent processes of grieving and healing.

When realization begins to emerge about the possibility of spiritual abuse having been perpetrated on an individual, there is a tendency to deny such a possibility. The reason for this is very simple (albeit very painful) -- namely, such a budding realization carries with it a host of implications and ramifications that are extremely unpleasant to contemplate.

One tends to swing between phases of: no, this just is not possible, to having transitory inklings of: 'Oh, my God, it's true', before reverting back toward a tendency to be in denial about what is going on. This sense of denial is so entrenched in some individuals that no matter how much the evidence mounts up that abuse has occurred, such people will: violently reject, or hostilely react against, or busily re-frame with some other explanation for, or just continue ignoring the available evidence.

One is inclined to be in denial about such information because, if true, one is going to have to go back to the drawing board and re-sketch many facets of meaning, purpose, nature, values, priorities, and direction of one's whole life. After all, for someone who has been

engaged in mystical pursuits, virtually everything such a person is doing, and has been doing, is leveraged around the fulcrum of the relationship between the teacher and the seeker -- that is, the belief one's teacher is authentic and that the alleged guide knows the truth (or knows more of the truth than the seeker does), and that through one's guide one has access to the sort of truth that permits one to make spiritual progress toward realizing life's purpose, and that one's teacher constitutes a special locus of manifestation for the transmission, God willing, of certain kinds of spiritual barakah or Grace.

If one's teacher is a phony, a fraud, a charlatan, a spiritual abuser of people, then, where does that leave one? It seems to leave one pretty much in the middle of nowhere in a universe that, suddenly, has become a whole lot darker, denser, as well as considerably more confused, ambiguous, puzzling, anxiety-ridden, and, in certain ways, untrustworthy.

Even if one's faith in the existence of God is not shaken by the potentially serious threat that has shown up on the radar screen of life in the form of a fraudulent spiritual guide, one feels cast adrift, wondering how one's current situation vis-à-vis the teacher (which is one of having been betrayed in any number of ways) affects one's relationship with Divinity and wondering how one should proceed. One moment (prior to the realization of abuse) an initiate feels wonderful, purposeful, committed, part of a meaningful whole, peaceful, protected, secure, happy, content, with a growing sense of spiritual identity, and, then kaboom, the carriage has been turned back into a pumpkin, with mice scattering everywhere.

There is a lot at stake. Consequently, the presence of denial under such circumstances is not all that surprising when it occurs amidst the ruins generated by the possibility of spiritual abuse.

If (and there is no guarantee this will ever take place) an individual comes to acknowledge the evidence (and I mean evidence, not unsubstantiated allegations or rumors) which demonstrates that a so-called spiritual guide has been manipulating, exploiting, lying to, and abusing in various other ways, would-be seekers, the object of abuse -- that is, the individual seeker -- is likely to become quite upset,

annoyed, hurt, and angry. There are different sources from which such anger arises.

Some individuals might, quite possibly, be angry with God if that person feels, for whatever reason, God had an obligation to save the seeker from, or warn the individual about, such a situation. Quite frankly, even though Divinity IS concerned about the welfare of all of Creation, that concern does not have to operate in accordance with one's expectations about how the universe should unfold or how Divinity should give expression to such concern in any particular case.

Divinity knows what Divinity is doing. We are the ones who have to get with the program, so to speak, and, consequently, an important part of the human quest is trying to struggle toward figuring out what that Divine program is, how it works, and where we fit into the scheme of things.

There is an old saying that 'what doesn't kill you, only makes you stronger' ... if, of course, one knows how to learn from such experiences. God sends difficulties, trials, problems, questions, and setbacks into everyone's life, and spiritual abuse is just one of these obstacles in the road of life.

Nonetheless, grieving over loss plays an important role in an individual's struggle to learn the value and significance of this sort of difficult life experience. In a sense, grieving is a kind of debriefing process that a spiritually abused person must go through in order to derive the appropriate, constructive benefit from a heart, gut, and mind-wrenching set of events.

When abused people -- whether victims of rape, domestic violence, spiritual mistreatment, educational malfeasance, or molestation -- are not permitted to consider, analyze, reflect upon, work through, and let go of the sense of loss that ensues from such experiences, then, the damage caused by the abuse is likely to live-on in a problematic fashion along the horizons of consciousness, affecting pretty much everything the person feels, thinks and does. As a result, real healing can never proceed, and such people might end up in a condition known as 'chronic grief' -- a condition that, once established, is extremely resistant to ameliorative treatment.

The foregoing realities are some of the fundamental reasons why people (whether they be family members, friends, neighbors, acquaintances, colleagues, or institutional representatives, such as an imam or member of a congregation) who recite various Quranic verses or Hadith in an attempt to push or pull a person in the direction of healing often are by-passing something of considerable significance. More specifically, while well-intended, such spiritual advice, reminders, or counsel are not enough for a person to achieve, God willing: healing, stability, harmony, peace, and a readiness to continue on with seeking to fulfill the purpose of life.

Now, just so we are all on the same page here, let us be clear about one thing. In the foregoing, I am not saying that the Qur'an and Hadith are of no relevance.

What is being said is this: all of life is a test, and giving mere lip-service to those tests is not enough. One must struggle, and strive, and make effort to learn how to take the tests of life, and how to learn from life's homework assignments, spot quizzes, mid-terms, and major exams.

If one wants to come to understand something of the meanings of the Qur'an or the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), then, one must struggle to become open to this knowledge, to render oneself receptive to it, to work toward being able to resonate with such knowledge, to do what is necessary to validate in one's heart, the truth of what is being said, and to gain an appropriate perspective concerning it. The Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "This life is but a tillage for the next, therefore, do good deeds here that you might reap benefits there -- for, striving is the ordinance of God, and whatever God has ordained can be attained only by striving."

Nothing is possible without striving, and striving is only a necessary condition, not a sufficient one. God alone is sufficient, and, in the mean time, our job is to strive -- to strive toward the truth of events, toward the truth of our lives, toward the truth of life's purpose.

Bearing witness to the Divine unity and the Prophetic mission, performing ritual prayers, fasting, giving zakat, going on pilgrimage, engaging in zikr, acting through faith, performing good works, cleansing of the nafs, polishing the heart, emptying the sirr (an inner

spiritual modality of knowing), realizing essential identity, observing adab, establishing sound character, offering service, learning, or putting into practice what one knows -- all of this requires striving. Grieving in relation to the losses associated with spiritual abuse is also a form of striving ... of attempting to understand, and integrate into one's life, the meaning of having to endure such an experience.

If someone has been raped, molested, diagnosed with cancer, or lost a spouse, parent, or child, one doesn't just say: "Well, as the Prophet said: 'The hearts of all of the children of Adam are like a single heart between two of the fingers of the All-merciful and the All-merciful twists this heart in whatever way is willed. So, be strong, patient, and suck it up.'" Nor, do we just say: "Surely to Allah we belong and to Allah is our returning." (Qur'an 2:156)

We don't 'just' say these things because they are untrue, but because the very nature of faith is something more than professing truths with the tongue. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also taught that for real faith to be present, the truths must be verified by the heart, and the only way to verify something is go through whatever set of experiences are necessary for the heart to come to realize the wisdom and knowledge inherent in the truth being stated.

One can accept the truth of an ayat (verse) like: "O Humankind! There has come to you a direction from your Lord, and a healing for the diseases in the hearts, and a guidance, and a mercy for the Believers." (10:57) However, one still must work through what is specifically -- and, not just generally -- entailed and encompassed by the issues of "direction", "healing", "diseases", "guidance", "mercy", and "believers". This is necessary because there are 73 sects present in the Muslim community trying to tell one what is meant by these issues, and, according to a tradition of the Prophet, all but one of them is wrong.

The Qur'an and Hadiths are not impersonal forms of guidance and direction. They are intended to be of heuristic, active value to every specific individual, in every particular instance of life.

Hazrat Abu Madyan (may Allah be pleased with him), a great Sufi saint of earlier days, once said: "We have no desire for dried meat. We only wish for living flesh." In other words, he did not want people talking to him about the spiritual truths that so and so had said, who

had learned it from so and so, who had learned it from so and so, and so on. He only wanted the truths that had come fresh from the living hearts of those who were in direct contact with Divine wisdom and knowledge ... people who had gone through the experiential processes necessary to develop the faith, by the Grace of Allah, which is rooted in realizations and insights and unveilings and validations of the heart.

In a similar vein, Hazrat Abu Yazid al-Bistami (may Allah be pleased with him) said: "You acquire your knowledge in a state of death and you receive this dead knowledge from the dead. But, we derive our knowledge from the One Who is Alive and Who does not die." The knowledge of tasawwuf does not come from books, mullahs, imams, scholars, philosophers, theologians, linguists, historians, or scientists -- it only comes through the heart, sirr, spirit, kafi, and aqfah which, each in its own manner, illumines the reasoning of the mind.

Faith depends on the quality of the light inherent in the experiences through which various truths are validated by the heart. The more spiritually intense this light, the deeper the faith that arises out of the validation process.

Consequently, the validation process that is required for the advancement of faith takes place in the context of particular sets of circumstance that must be worked out, and through, by a given individual. The individual must learn how to merge horizons with -- and, thereby, accommodate -- the truth as that truth is manifested in one's life. Although Divine Mercy goes wherever the Divine purpose stipulates, at the same time, one would not be wrong to say that God helps those who strive to help themselves -- as the Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "Trust in Allah, but tie your own camel."

All zikr, for example, carries benefit, and the Qur'an is constantly enjoining human beings to observe this practice -- in fact, so much so, that the Qur'an informs us: "Verily, ritual worship preserves one from lewdness and iniquity, but remembrance of Allah is more important." (29:45). Yet, there is a science and art to knowing that zikr to say, at what times, and in what way, and for how long, and this science and art are only learned through experience and with the assistance of someone whom God has taken by the hand and will inform, via insight, as to what is appropriate or when or how -- so, knowing that zikr is

important is not enough ... there is a specificity to it for which one must strive.

Furthermore, this striving is best done in the presence of, or with the support of, one who is well-versed in such spiritual arts and sciences. Anyone can do zikr and all zikr has the potential, God willing, to benefit an individual, but the circumstances under which, and through which, zikr is observed are not necessarily equally constructive or beneficial.

Most people, if they had to, could help birth a baby under normal circumstances. But, if complications arise, then, having someone around who knows what she or he is doing can mean the difference between life and death (both for the mother and the child).

The same is true in the case of observing zikr. Some zikrs are quite safe to do without guidance, but others are not so straightforward and knowing how to proceed if complications should arise, or if changes are required, is something that shaykhs know about and the generality of mullahs, scholars, and imams do not know or understand.

All of the foregoing is part and parcel of the problems that arise when one comes to discover that one has been spiritually abused and the individual whom one believed was an authentic shaykh turns out to be something else entirely. One finds oneself in a situation similar to that of people who have been seeing a doctor for serious, medical issues, only to find out that such a person has no medical degree and no real insight into medical issues.

In any event, grieving is a dynamic, labor intensive, time-consuming process that requires striving in the context of particular circumstances, and there is no general way of working through such a problem. Moreover, grieving is not just a matter of crying over spilt milk or feeling sorry for oneself -- in fact, if one simply sits back and just feels badly about what has gone on, grieving likely will become bogged down in an endless cycle of the same set of emotions, without any constructive consequences.

Under these circumstances, it is unlikely that any significant progress toward healing, harmony, balance, stability, perspective, resolution, and closure will be achieved. One must work out for oneself, in one's own heart, what the Divine meaning and purpose of

the experience of spiritual abuse involves ... no one else can do this work except the person who has been abused (although others can serve as compassionate witnesses who accompany the abused person on the quest for healing through an appropriate process of grieving).

As previously indicated, before one even can begin to grieve, the fact of spiritual abuse must be acknowledged. Working toward acceptance of this reality involves experiencing various forms of denial, anger, bargaining, and depression -- but not necessarily in any set sequence of stages.

Part of the aforementioned anger might be directed toward Divinity. Many people who experience spiritual abuse tend to share the sentiments of Oliver Hardy when he used to say to Stan Laurel, in their movies, "Well, this is another fine mess you have got me in," where the "you" in this case is not Laurel but Divinity.

However, quite frequently, Allah fully intends to get us into various messes, and if one doesn't like this, then, one will be in for a tough ride because the whole of life is about one mess after another -- "And We test you by evil and by good by way of trial. (Qur'an 21:35) And, "Verily, We have placed all that is on the earth as an ornament thereof, that We may try them -- which of them is best in conduct." (Qur'an 18:7)

Life is a sequence of events that are designed to throw us off balance, in one way or another, that sets up the counterpoint challenge of trying to find ways to re-establish equanimity and harmony in our minds and hearts. Many of these events are truly heart-wrenching, but "God charges a soul only to its capacity," (Qur'an 2:286) which, among other things, intimates that we only can do what, God willing, our capacity permits us to do, and that our job is to strive, by God's leave, to do whatever it is that this capacity permits us to do.

In addition, most people who experience spiritual abuse are likely, during this period of working toward accepting the reality of having been abused, to begin pointing an accusing finger at themselves. Such individuals might feel stupid, foolish, naive, blind, and/or childish for having allowed themselves to be taken in by a spiritual fraud or quack. Moreover, sooner or later, almost all, if not all, individuals who have experienced spiritual abuse direct a significant amount of their ire toward the person who has been perpetrating the spiritual abuse.

One's trust has been betrayed by that individual, and one's inner sanctum has been violated in a very intimate way since spirituality goes to the heart of who a mystical seeker considers himself or herself to be.

When such spirituality has become contaminated, corrupted, and tainted in various ways by a fraudulent spiritual guide, the abused individual often tends to feel dirty inside -- as if one's interior had been fondled by a form of evil ... which, in a very real sense, has taken place. Therefore, there is a natural tendency for an abused individual to harbor a considerable amount of resentment, hostility, and anger toward the perpetrator of spiritual abuse.

Finally, there is a certain amount of anger that tends to be directed at those individuals whom one tries to warn but who are in denial with respect to such information, or toward those people whom one tries to explain how one feels but who respond with disbelief and/or a lack of comprehension about why someone should find such events so upsetting. Insult is added to injury when the abused person is rebuffed further by others both within, as well as without, the abusive set of circumstances.

As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has indicated, there is no sin in feeling the presence of anger, but, rather, we should try to swallow the anger, once it arises. The Qur'an stipulates: "O you who believe, be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity and let not hatred of any people seduce you so that you do not deal justly (with them). Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty. Observe your duty to Allah. Verily, Allah is informed of what you do." (5:8)

Learning how to swallow anger, or learning how to be steadfast witnesses in equity and justice, are not easy lessons -- especially, when one has been the object of abuse. Consequently, the task is to find ways of putting one's anger in perspective and responding to it in a constructive fashion.

My friends in Alcoholics Anonymous have a saying that I like. 'Don't let people with whom one is angry rent space in your brain'.

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 so that it never has the opportunity to lift

off. 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 Divine presence. These cleaners of our intentions should develop the capacity of 'tasting' that permits us to detect the presence 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 Divine, for the Divine 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 Divine in the ever-present now, and the future will take care of itself in accordance with the Divine purpose. However, Divine help tends to favor the prepared, receptive heart and mind for such an individual is able to recognize such assistance when it arrives on one's doorstep.

Wiping the slate clean, however, does not mean one should fail to take heed with respect to the set of events that have led, in the first place, to one being required to deal with such negative feelings as anger. Letting anger go does not mean one should just forget about why someone -- in this case, a fraudulent spiritual guide -- is not to be trusted.

Bargaining is another aspect of the process of working toward acceptance of the fact that spiritual abuse has occurred. Oftentimes, this dimension of the process takes the form of trying to convince

oneself there really is, after all, a perfectly legitimate, rational, moral, explanation for what has transpired.

The abuse is re-framed as Divine Trickery, or a test of loyalty, or a paradoxical expression of Grace, or the teaching of someone who is not bound by the usual protocols of Shari'ah (Divine Law) and adab (spiritual etiquette) , or the carrying on of someone in a state of jazb, or ecstasy, and so on. This exercise in re-framing goes on because the abused person is trying to bargain with herself or himself that the perceived link or access to the mystical path has not dissolved in the light of the misconduct perpetrated by the abuser.

When one is preoccupied with bargaining, one often feels that if one only will try hard enough, one might find a way to reconcile the abusive behavior with one's desire to continue on with the mystical quest. One hopes to discover that what appears to be spiritually abusive is really not as it appears ... one would like it to be something else.

One doesn't want to have to go back to the drawing board. One doesn't want to have to find a new path or a new teacher. One doesn't want to have to face the question of whom to trust. One doesn't want to have to entertain doubts about one's own competency to judge what constitutes an authentic spiritual way. One doesn't want to be confronted with the prospect of, perhaps, never being able to realize the purpose of life. One doesn't want to have to consider the possibility that one has been wasting time on an illusory quest.

So, one bargains with reality, and asks, pleads, prays, demands that what has transpired should be something else -- other than abuse -- which will not interfere with the mystical journey that one thought one was on. One goes over and over things to try to find a way of excusing the behavior so that it will not have to be called abusive ... so that it will not undermine the presumed legitimacy of one's mystical activities.

Furthermore, the stage of bargaining also might involve phase - shifts in attitude with respect to the abuser. At one point, one might feel quite angry toward the abuser, and, then, all of a sudden, one's mind might be flooded with nostalgic images of 'better', happier, more carefree times that were experienced in conjunction with the false teacher.

The abused person might begin to feel that the spiritually fraudulent individual had good points, and that certain beneficial things happened in relation to that false teacher and that one often felt quite happy, peaceful, safe, and so on in that person's presence. Surely, things are not as bad as they seem. Surely, things can be worked out.

It has been said that nostalgia is an inauthentic form of grief. As long as one is caught up in a self-induced trance and delusion about an abusive situation, one can never get to the business of coming to understand that authentic teachers are not abusive, and, therefore, the presence of abuse is *prima facie* evidence that the person in question is not an authentic spiritual guide. Case closed.

Whatever the good points of a fraudulent person might, or might not, be, none of this mitigates the significance of the fact that abuse has been perpetrated. Since the reason for coming to such a person was spiritual guidance, the existence of abuse indicates that the purpose of one's original intention cannot be satisfied through such an individual. Such a person cannot be trusted, on any level, to be of spiritual assistance. Has one learned from such a person? Perhaps, but learning from others does not make the latter a spiritual guide -- for, an authentic spiritual guide is a very special category of human being, and, in fact, this understanding -- whether clearly formulated or only dimly felt -- plays a very central part in the experience of grief and the sense of deep loss one encounters as one begins to realize that the individual one thought was a legitimate teacher is not. One experiences the sense of being disconnected from authenticity, along with the many ramifications that such disconnection entails.

The various modalities of denial, the different forms of anger, the process of bargaining, the sense of despair, the deeply felt forces of anxiety, fear, and stress, the beating that self-esteem is taking, the gnawing possibility of having been betrayed and violated in an intimate manner, the long gaze into the abyss at one's feet, the increasing number of questions, ambiguities, or uncertainties, the disruption of peace, harmony, balance, and relationships, the creeping sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness, the flickering, as well as the fast-disappearing, flickering nature of identity -- all of these give collective rise to a profound and pervasive sense of depression that can be quite enervating and debilitating.

All of the foregoing is one version of the 'Dark Night of the Soul' that is spoken about in the mystical literature. When one has begun to accept the reality of having been spiritual abused, one feels lost, abandoned, alone, surrounded by darkness, beset by demons, steeped in ignorance, confused, alienated, stalked by evil, vulnerable to one's own weaknesses and shortcomings, adrift with no sign of a safe harbor, tossed about by stormy seas, out of synch with the universe.

One has lost touch with the usual points of reference by which one navigates. One has become distant, as well as distanced, from one's alleged spiritual guide, from one's former friends of the path, from the methodology and practices that used to give one comfort and purpose, but whose efficacy is, now, somewhat suspect because the catalytic agent -- namely, the mystical teacher -- which, by the Grace of Allah, heretofore, served as the locus of manifestation through which what one thought was Divine barakah (Grace) flowed into one's life, has been uncovered as a counterfeit -- a dajjal ... an imposter.

Going through a 'Dark Night of the Soul' is one thing when one is with an authentic spiritual guide. It is quite another thing when one is thrown into the maelstrom in conjunction with a false guide, and one is trying to figure out, on one's own, how to escape from the predicament one finds oneself in.

Most people who have some knowledge of tasawwuf are familiar with the words of Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) that the individual who would step onto the mystical path without benefit of a guide has Iblis for a teacher. Since the Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said that: "I am the city of knowledge, and 'Ali, is the gate," one might suppose that Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) might have known a bit about the truth of what he said.

Individuals who have an interest in the Sufi tradition also are likely to be familiar with the Prophet's words which indicate that the movements of nafs in relation to shirk are more difficult to detect than the movements of a black ant on a smooth rock in the dead of night. Or, one might consider such verses as: "Have you seen him who has taken his caprice to be his god, and Allah sends him astray purposely, and seals up his hearing and his heart, and sets on his sight a covering?" (45:23) Or, consider: "Truly, the soul commands unto evil." (12:53)

The person who has been spiritual abused is between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, the individual who has come to accept the fact of the abuse knows that no authentic spiritual guide would ever treat one's mureed in such a fashion, and, therefore, one no longer has an authentic mystical teacher. On the other hand, without proper mystical guidance, one is in no position to proceed, and, furthermore, under the circumstances one is disinclined to trust whatever recommendations anyone else might make -- no matter how well intended-- because there is no guarantee that such an individual is not, himself or herself, misguided or in association with a false teacher.

At this point, some people recommend doing Ishtikharah (a way of seeking Divine guidance). There is nothing wrong with this recommendation, but if Ishtikharah were all there was to it, God would have dispensed with Books of Revelation, Prophets, other friends of God, and shaykhs, a long time ago, and said, instead: "Hey, whenever in doubt, just do Ishtikharah. ... let's get rid of all this other, unnecessary stuff" ... but Divinity didn't do this.

Other people, when they interact, to some degree, with someone who has been spiritually abused, will say words to the effect that all one needs to do is love the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). After all, Divinity informed us: "Say Muhammad: If you love Allah, then follow me, so that God may love you." (3:31)

There are a few potential obstacles, however, in the way of properly applying this counsel. First of all, the directive is conditional -- "if you love Allah" -- and an important part of authentic tasawwuf is being assisted to learn what loving Allah means and entails. Consequently, before one is ready to try to follow the Prophet (peace be upon him), one needs to understand something about the nature of loving God, and because one's spiritual guide has turned out to be a counterfeit, one has considerable concern over whether one can determine, on one's own, what loving God actually means.

Some might pooh-pooh this sort of consideration, but when one reads verses such as: "Shall we tell you who will be the greatest losers in their works? Those whose striving goes astray in the present life, while they think they are working good deeds," (18:104), there is good reason for exercising a certain amount of caution and discretion here.

Only an arrogant fool would be so enamored with his or her own judgments about the nature of truth and reality that such an individual would not even consider the possibility that what they believe to be the working of good deeds might, in reality, be nothing but striving that is going astray in the present life. In fact, there are deep divisions within the Muslim world, both currently as well as in the past, over what constitutes the sort of "good deeds" that would help an individual to realize the purpose of life, or one's essential identity, or one's unique spiritual capacity so that one truly and completely knows what God meant when the following was revealed: "I have not created human beings nor jinn except that they may worship Me." (51:56-57). Ritual prayers or observing the other pillars of Islam does not exhaust what is entailed by worship ... the truth of the matter lies deeper still or there would have been no need for more than one level of the Qur'an, rather than the seven to which the Prophet (peace be upon him) alluded. The nature of worship is a vast, deep, subtle topic.

The other problem facing a spiritually abused person in relation to the counsel to "follow me (i.e., Muhammad -- peace be upon him), so that God may love you" is that, once again, one of the fundamental functions of tasawwuf that is engaged under the care of an authentic teacher is to help a seeker learn what it means to follow the Prophet (peace be upon him). And, less there are those who suppose this is a silly point, perhaps, we would do well to remember that there are those who are counseling others to blow themselves up, to terrorize innocent people, and to abuse women all in the name of, supposedly, following the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Even if one wishes to ignore such 'extreme' examples, I have spent more than 30 years in the Muslim community, traveling across four continents, observing the tremendous inhumanity of Muslims to one another, not to mention to the so-called 'infidel' -- which often means anyone who doesn't believe as they do. Unfortunately, in all too many cases, there seems to be a vast chasm between what the Prophet (peace be upon him) actually said and did and the specious interpretations that many people are trying to project onto the teachings and actions of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

If loving Allah and loving the Prophet (peace be upon him) were such easy things to do, everyone would be doing it, but the world is

like it is, because everyone is not doing this [and please don't blame the imperialistic and exploitative sins of America or the West, real though these might be, for the state of the world because Muslims have contributed their share to this state of affairs through our own brand of sins -- "...and your Lord does not deal unjustly with anyone." (Qur'an 18:49) "so it was not befitting for Allah that He should deal with them unjustly, but they dealt unjustly with their own souls." (Qur'an 30:9) "That is because you exulted in the land unjustly and because you behaved insolently. (Qur'an 40:75)]

Therefore, perhaps, it is not so easy and straightforward as some people suppose to 'follow' and 'love' because the very meaning of loving and following are in dispute. Everyone has his or her own understanding of what is meant here, but having an understanding is not the same thing as being correct in that understanding, yet people keep presuming that the former is equivalent to the latter, and this is not necessarily so.

"(To) those whose hearts tremble when Allah is mentioned," (Qur'an 22:35) trying to understand what is meant by loving and following Allah and the Prophet (peace be upon him) are tasks of considerable enormity and overriding importance. Such people are not likely to accept just anything for an answer ... there is a reason why such spiritual luminaries as Hazrat Omar (may Allah be pleased with him) -- the one about whom the Prophet (peace be upon him) said that if there were to be a Prophet after me, it would have been him -- would look at a leaf and wish to become a leaf due to the stress of bearing the responsibility invested in humankind with respect to the exercise of free will and returning the trust (Qur'an 33:72,4:58) to its Owner.

Some people will look at the spiritually abused mystical wannabe and become puzzled. They will ask: 'Why do you feel such a sense of loss? Nothing has been lost. The pillars of Islam are there, the basic beliefs, and many facets of Shari'ah are clear cut (within permissible degrees of variation).' Then, they will recite such verses as: "Say: He is my Lord; there is no God save Him. In Him do I put my trust and unto Him is my recourse." (13:30) Or, "True believers are only those who have faith in Allah and the Messenger of Allah and have left doubt behind, and who strive hard in Allah's cause with their possessions and their lives. They are the ones who are sincere." (49:15) Or, "And

when My servants question thee concerning Me, then, surely, I am near. I answer the prayer of the supplicant who cries unto Me. So, let them hear My call and let them trust Me in order that they may be led a right." (2:186)

Putting one's trust in Allah, hearing the call, becoming open to being led aright, understanding the manner in which prayers are answered, making Divinity one's recourse, having faith in Allah and the Messenger, leaving doubt behind, striving hard in Allah's cause, knowing what that cause is, being sincere -- these are spiritual stations of considerable difficulty. One might start the journey with the basic pillars and beliefs, but things do not end there, and to learn how to proceed beyond the basics is nothing to trifle with, as is clearly indicated by the aforementioned warning of Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) concerning those who would step onto the mystical way without benefit of a spiritual guide (then, one has Iblis for a guide) clearly indicates.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "This world is prohibited to the people of the next world, and the next world is forbidden to the people of this world, and they are both forbidden to the people of Allah." The people of Allah are: "Those who spend their wealth for increase in self-purification, and have in their minds no favor from anyone for which a reward is expected in return, but only the desire to seek for the Countenance of their Lord Most High (Qur'an 92:18-20) And, again: "Say: Surely, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death are all for Allah, the Lord of the worlds." (Qur'an 6:162)

We have not been brought into this world either for the sake of this world or for the sake of Paradise. In fact, to try to claim that the entire purpose of Creation, the seven heavens, the different realms from Nasut to Bahut, the Divine Names and Attributes, the dimensions of the soul -- from mind to aqfah -- the essential Self, the 124,000 Prophets, the awliya of God, the seven levels of the Qur'an, the billions of galaxies, the extraordinary spectrum of species, both known and unknown, as well as the intricacies and mysteries of realms beyond the subtleties of sub-atomic physics -- which we don't even grasp with any clarity (for example, no one, yet, knows how a particle can, apparently, simultaneously, be both a wave or particle) -- can all be

reduced down to being a function of seeing who gets to go to heaven and who goes to hell seems rather absurd and laughable ... if for no other reason than that such a scenario reduces everything down to being about humankind, in general, rather than Divinity -- especially, in light of the fact that the rest of creation actually came into being on, or through, the coattails, so to speak, of the Muhammadan Haqiqah or Reality. Being is not about human kind, it is about Divinity, and human kind is but one of the manifestations -- special though this might be -- to which Being gives expression.

I have no doubt there is a heaven and there, also, is a hell. I have no doubt there are many levels to each. I have no doubt that both realms will be populated with selected representatives from human kind and jinn. I have no doubt they are eternal. What I doubt is that the question: "What are heaven and hell?" is the of Creation in the Metaphysical Issues Category.

Indeed, one might very well maintain that to observe Islam for the sake of Paradise or for the sake of pleasing Divinity in order to gain Paradise is, actually, to seek something other than Allah -- and, as some Sufi has said: 'even Paradise is a prison for the lover of God', and the Prophet (peace be upon him) has said: "There is no peace for a believer other than in meeting one's Lord."

If one likes, one might interpret the latter Hadith to mean that a believer will not find peace until the Day of Judgment has arrived and the reward of Paradise has been granted, but there are those blessed Sufi masters who, by the Grace of Allah, have met their Lord here, in this life, and quite apart from any considerations of the Day of Judgment or Paradise. The prayer of Ra'bia of Basra was: "Oh Lord, if I worship Thee out of desire for Paradise, then, deny me Paradise, and if I worship Thee out of fear of Hell, then throw me into Hell, but if I worship Thee out of love for Thee and Thee alone, then, grant me Thy vision."

The Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "The one who knows one's soul, knows one's Lord." Knowing one's soul is not primarily about knowing the nature of heaven and hell -- although such understanding might form part of this knowledge. Knowing one's soul is, essentially, about realizing the unique, spiritual capacity of a

human being to experientially bear witness to, as well as to serve as loci of reflective expression for, the Hidden Treasure that is Divinity.

According to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "Every child is born according to a primordial nature (fitra)." This fitra is the human capacity to come to know the Divine Hidden Treasure, and through such knowledge, give expression to essential worship of Divinity, for, as the Qur'an indicates: "I have not created human beings nor jinn except that they may worship Me." (51:56 -57)

Many people say that they do things solely for the sake of Allah. However, realizing this spiritual station is very, very difficult. One has to be taught how to do this, and when one discovers that the individual whom one believed was, by the Grace of Allah, capable of assisting one in this regard is, in actuality, a spiritually abusive fraud, then, one comes to realize that one is not in contact with someone who, potentially, constitutes an extremely rare and precious resource -- the help of a friend of God ... someone who, himself or herself, knows the nature of the journey, its difficulties, its ups and downs, and who, by the Grace of God has been invested with the responsibility of helping people realize the meaning of the Hadith Qudsi which indicated that "I was a Hidden Treasure Who loved to be known."

The Qur'an states: "... whosoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does right, there shall be no fear upon them and neither shall they grieve." (5:69) The question is: how to believe properly and how to do right -- issues that are in great dispute among theologians, philosophers, terrorists, imams, mullahs, academics, and a proliferation of alleged Sufi circles headed by people among whom there are many spiritual charlatans -- indeed, there are many people in North America, and elsewhere, who do not even realize the extent or the nature of the abuse that is being perpetrated on them because they have not, yet, realized that their alleged guide might not be an authentic shaykh.

The foregoing is a warning, not a specific accusation. There are some legitimate spiritual guides here and there -- although this number is diminishing more and more as we head toward the Latter Days.

However, there also are many false teachers claiming to be shaykhs ---- and this number is increasing as we head toward the

Latter Days. Over the last 30 years, I have come into contact with a number of these individuals -- including one with whom I took ba'yat (oath of allegiance at the time of initiation).

Distinguishing between authenticity and its counterfeit is a very difficult challenge for someone who is seeking to find an individual with whom to entrust the spiritual well-being of one's soul, and one should not necessarily feel secure just because one has found someone who claims to be a teacher. I do know something of what I am speaking about here, since, for a considerable period of time, I felt secure, safe, and happy in terms of my affiliation with such a teacher until, by the Grace of Allah, the truth of the situation began to surface concerning that man.

I have no wish to undermine anyone's relationship with a legitimate teacher, nor do I have any desire to introduce doubts where none are warranted. Nonetheless, false teachers do exist, and people are being spiritually damaged by such individuals, and detecting or assessing the nature of this damage is often very difficult to do since not all fraudulent spiritual guides come in the form of a Jim Jones or Charles Manson -- that is, instances where the evil that is being perpetrated has such monstrous, and readily observable consequences. Sometimes the evil that is being done is a lot more subtle and assumes a pleasant, friendly, entertaining, intelligent, talented, knowledgeable, charismatic, and seemingly caring disguise.

Grieving is an appropriate response to the realization of spiritual abuse, because one's trust has been betrayed and, in the process, one has become estranged -- at least, temporarily -- from the sort of help that is necessary to seek the truth and to realize the truth about one's essential identity and one's purpose in life. One is brought face to face with the stark realization that: "We raise by grades (of Mercy) whom we will, and over every lord of knowledge, there is one more knowing," (Qur'an 29:45) and, therefore, there is no guarantee that such Mercy will ever be extended to one (although the Qur'an does instruct Muslims to "not despair of the Mercy of God Who forgives all sins" - 39: 53), or that one will ever again be introduced to an authentic lord of knowledge who will be able to assist one to complete, God willing, a spiritual quest to which one aspires.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "Everything lives and develops in accordance with that for which it has been created." The Qur'an indicates: "None of us are there but who have a known station," (37:164) and while the surface context of the verse refers to angels, in truth, each one of us has a known spiritual capacity or station.

To grasp that existence has depths that, simultaneously, include and transcend the basics of Islam, to understand that, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) has said: "The root of all prayers is renunciation of the world, and love of the world is the root of all mischief," to accept the words of the Prophet (peace be upon him) when he said: "Prayer is: service, drawing closer, and joining," to believe that the purpose of Creation is not to attain Paradise but to come to know the Hidden Treasure to which Divinity gives expression, to feel the himma or aspiration that seeks to realize the spiritual capacity or fitra that, along with everything else, is embraced by Divine Mercy and Knowledge (cf. Qur'an, 40:7), and to realize that God, himself, has indicated that there will be winners and losers in this Divine passion play, then, when one experiences spiritual abuse, this gives one considerable pause for thought as to where one's spiritual destination is fated to be, and if one takes seriously any of the foregoing, great issues of life and believes, as all Muslims do, that we only get one kick at the can here on Earth, then, there is a great deal to grieve about under such circumstances, and there is a great deal of work that needs to be done to struggle through that grief and seek a healing grace so that one can again begin to strive toward grasping the meaning of the Prophet's counsel when he is reported to have said: "The right and the left are both ways of error, and the straight path is the middle way."

Some commentators have said that the errors of the right and the left involve acts of omission and commission. What to do, what not to do, but given the depths of the Qur'an, even if one were to accept this characterization, learning what to do extends through Shari'ah, into Tariqah and Haqiqah, as well. Learning the middle way, the way of perfect balance requires the teaching of a sacred scientist and artist, and when one realizes that one has been living under an illusion in this respect, there is a natural tendency to grieve before 'picking oneself up, dusting oneself off, and starting all over again'.

As pointed out throughout the foregoing comments, at the heart of one's sense of loss vis-à-vis a fraudulent spiritual guide is the essential disconnection one feels in relation to spiritual authenticity. There are, however, other facets of the situation to grieve.

Oftentimes, one will have established close, intimate friendships and relationships from among the people who have gathered around a fraudulent spiritual teacher. When one disengages -- or tries to -- from an abusive set of circumstances, one often does so alone, and the circle of friends and relationships that have been forged over the years and through whom one has derived a great deal of emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual support tends to disappear.

The loss of support, spiritual camaraderie, relationships, familiar social surroundings, and friendships can feel very alienating, lonely, and depressing. All of these aspects of spiritual life can lead to a deep sense of loss when they dissolve with one's attachment to a false spiritual guide.

Such loss is aggravated by one's concern about the spiritual welfare of such individuals, and this often is mixed with the frustration, disappointment and anger one might feel when such long-time friends choose to disbelieve the evidence that is placed in front of them. Being able to say -- "Well, I tried, but they just wouldn't listen" -- is small consolation when one knows that these people are being left in harm's way ... nor does one find much satisfaction in saying: "If they don't want to listen, then, they will get what they deserve," especially when one recalls such Quranic ayats as: "If Allah were to take humankind to task for their wrong-doing, God would not leave on Earth a living creature...." (16:61)

There are those who look at the whole spiritual abuse issue in a rather Pollyannic manner (cf. the stories of Eleanor H. Porter whose heroine Pollyanna always finds good in everything) and would seem to want everyone to believe that nothing bad has happened and that everything will work out just fine and, don't worry, an authentic teacher will show up when things are right. Undoubtedly, such people would go to someone who has just lost one's family, or who's house has been destroyed, or who has been raped, molested, violently assaulted, seriously injured, lost one's family, rendered a quadriplegic, or what not, and say: "Are we having fun yet?"

If pain were not meant to be felt, the Prophet (peace be upon him) would not have cried when his children died. If pain were not real, there would be no need for compassion. If everything were going to work out just dandy no matter what, there would have been no need for revelation or Prophets or spiritual guidance or tasawwuf.

The existential stakes are very high. The risks are very real. The dangers are substantial.

There are reasons why Divinity said: "We did not create the heavens and earth and all that is between them in play." (Qur'an 44:38) Life is serious business.

Although everything will turn out the way Allah wishes, not everything will necessarily turn out the way we wish or hope for. There is accountability. There is responsibility. There are consequences.

There are things about which to be concerned. There is a reason why the Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "Every one of you is a guardian and every one of you shall be questioned about that which you are guarding," and, as well, "Every person who rises in the morning either does that which will be the means of one's redemption or one's spiritual ruin."

There was a person who came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and asked: "Is it true what I have heard -- that God forgives all sins, even murder and adultery?" The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Yes." The individual who had asked the question was quiet for a moment, and, then, with somewhat greater incredulity said: "Even murder and adultery?" And, again, the Prophet (peace be upon him) answered: "Yes, even murder and adultery." The man listened to the response, was quite a while longer, and, then said, even more forcefully and with greater incredulity than before: "Even murder and adultery?" to which the Prophet replied: "Yes, even if so -and-so (the name of the person asking the question) does not agree."

Yet, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also is reported to have said: "If a believer's fear and hope were to be weighed, they would balance." We have hope in God's mercy, love, compassion, and forgiveness, but the fact of the matter is we cannot reduce God down to just a few Names and Attributes. The Divine reality is far too

complex for that, and the Divine purpose is far subtler than we might suppose -- in fact, the nature of reality is so complex and so subtle that God sent Prophets revelation, and spiritual guides to help sort out a set of issues that none of us would be able to do on our own.

People might feel that they have got the Divine mystery all figured out. There have been many individuals down through history who believed this -- people who forgot that "And they planned and Allah (also) planned, and Allah is the best of planners." (Qur'an 3:54) and "To Allah belongs the conclusive argument." (Qur'an 6:149)

At various places in the Qur'an one finds: "And if you turn away, God will exchange you for some other folk, and they will not be the likes of you." (47:38) "We have shown humankind the way, whether they be grateful or disbelieving." (76:3) "Thus have We made fair seeming to every people their deeds;" (6:108) "And when the Shaytan made their works fair seeming to them," (8:48) "And whomever is blind in this world, will be blind in the Hereafter, and even further from the road." (17:72) "Only those who possess the kernels remember." (39:9) "Is he, the evil of whose deeds is made fair seeming unto him so that he deems them good, other than Satan's dupe?" (35:8) "They forgot God, so God forgot them." (9:67)

Do we really know what it means to turn away from Divine guidance? Are we really so certain that we know what the way is? How do we discern the truth if our deeds have been made 'fair seeming' to us, or if we have permitted ourselves to deem our deeds good when such is not the case? What does it mean to forget God? After all, Iblis has not forgotten God, but his manner of remembrance is unacceptable.

Grieving is an appropriate response to the realization that one has been spiritually abused. Nothing brings things into perspective better than the fact that death and a potential abyss are staring one in the face and, yet, time is running out and one is not certain how to proceed.

So, given all the foregoing considerations, and given that grieving is a natural, if not intelligent, way to respond to the deep sense of loss that is felt when one has been spiritually abused, then, how does one go about striving to, God willing, recover from, and heal with respect

to, this process of grieving? The answer is, in a way, somewhat surprising.

The general structure of the grieving process should reflect something of the spiritual stations about which tasawwuf teachers. For example, Shukr, or gratitude, is one of these stations, and among the very first things an abused person needs to do in order to engage grieving in a constructive fashion is to give thanks to Allah that one has been shown the reality of the spiritual fraud that is being, and has been, perpetrated. Indeed, as one is asked over and over again in Surah Rahman: "Which is it, of the favors of your Lord that you and you deny?" (Qur'an 55:13)

God has promised: "If you are thankful, truly, I shall increase you." (Qur'an 14:7) To be thankful for having been extricated from an illusory nightmare is an important step in working toward resolving one's grief. All one has to do is to think of the people who are still trapped within such oppressiveness, and who even have been induced to become mesmerized with such oppressiveness -- calling it good, then, one realizes that, painful though the experience might be, God has done one a great favor in removing the veils of ignorance that have shackled one to a fraudulent spiritual guide.

In feeling thankful, one has not achieved the spiritual station of gratitude. However, one's condition does reflect something of that station, and in so doing, one is helped to work through certain aspects of the grieving process.

One of the best ways to actively show appreciation is to say Fatiha on a regular basis. There are many things for which one can be thankful, even if one is currently without an authentic spiritual guide, and being freed from the influence of a fraudulent teacher is as good a reason as any other to begin to observe the practice of saying Fatiha, especially in light of the fact that this practice was one of the ways through which the Prophet (peace be upon him) gave thanks to God for Divine barakah, support, and assistance. Indeed, he, better than any of us knew the truth of: "If you were to enumerate the favors of Allah, you could not count them." (Qur'an 14:34)

Another station about which the Sufis speak is that of Tauba, or repentance. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "Shall I tell you about your illnesses and its remedy?" The

people present replied: "Indeed, O Messenger of Allah." He said: "your illness is your sins, and your remedy is repentance."

The Prophet (peace be upon him) also is reported to have said: "The person who exalts himself is humbled by Allah, while the person who humbles oneself is exalted by God." Difficulties are merely God's way of putting one in touch with some fundamental realities of life, and one of these realities is that one begins at no beginning, and one works toward no end without Divine barakah (Grace) and support.

Why did Adam (peace be upon him) and Eve (may Allah be pleased with her) sin? Allah knows best, but the solution to their problem was to repent.

All of us have much to repent for -- as Ra'bia of Basra once said: "Thy existence is a sin with which none other can compare," and most of us are busily engaged in solidifying our sense of existence in one way or another.

Life, for most of us, is a palimpsest. In other words, we spend our lives committed to painting over the Reality that lies before us with our own sense of what the picture of life should be about. The Qur'an says: "And they have no knowledge of it; they do not follow anything but conjecture, and surely conjecture does not avail against the truth at all." (53:28)

There is much for which we have to repent. Although one's *niyat*, or intention, for taking *ba'yat* (initiation) with someone who turns out to be a false spiritual guide might have been honorable, nevertheless, in retrospect one can see that there were warnings and red flags that went up along the way to which one did not pay proper attention and with respect to which one made mistakes in judgment. These red flags might not necessarily have had anything to do with being asked to do something that went against one's conscience, but there might have been events along the way that seemed anomalous and bothersome at the time but that were temporarily shelved in order to be re-examined at a later time or that one simply dismissed with the assumption that I must not understand, or that I must be wrong, or there is some sort of Divine secret in play here, or the information is not credible, and so on.

Did one deserve the 'teacher' one got. No one deserves to be spiritually abused, but, at the same time, one must accept

responsibility for whatever mistakes one might have made along the way and seek Allah's forgiveness for one's ignorance, or carelessness, or heedlessness, or lack of due diligence, or mistakes in judgment, or extending too many degrees of freedom to someone who was not worthy of such trust.

God does no injustice to His Creation, but the Creation -- at least that portion of Creation that enjoys free will -- does injustice to itself. The good news is that God has said: "O My slaves who have transgressed against their own souls. Do not despair of the Mercy of Allah Who forgives all sins." (Qur'an 39:55) Moreover, the Prophet (peace be upon him) has said: "God surely rejoices more through the repentance of one of the servants of Allah, than any of you rejoice when you find your stray camel in the desert." Our responsibility is to do Tauba -- to repent.

I have spoken elsewhere, at more length, about the issue of forgiveness in the context of spiritual abuse, and so, here, I will just say that struggling with the issue of forgiveness is part of the grieving process, but it is not the whole of it.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "There is no human being who is wounded and, yet, forgives the giver of the wound, for whom God will not exalt the injured party dignity and diminish such a person's faults." Consequently, sincere forgiveness helps bring resolution to grieving over spiritual abuse.

There is a tendency among those who grieve concerning the sense of loss in relation to spiritual abuse to become cynical and distance themselves from all things spiritual. The Qur'an warns us about this when it says: "And do not be like those who forgot Allah, and Allah made them forget their own souls. Such are rebellious transgressors." (59:19)

Recently, I read about a man who had been doing zikr for 25 years -- without any sort of overt, special, mystical experiences being associated with the practice -- and when he learned that his teacher was a spiritual charlatan, he stopped doing zikr altogether. Apparently, the man did not understand that all the time he was doing zikr, God was responding to it by, among other things, helping the man to continue to say zikr. Unfortunately, by withdrawing from zikr, the man was opening himself up to being made to forget his own soul and,

perhaps, even becoming a rebellious transgressor with respect to the Truth.

The Qur'an reminds us: "without doubt, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction." (13:28). Doing zikr helps the grieving process. Remembrance eases the pain and soothes the soul.

If one responds to spiritual abuse by adopting a cynical, rebellious, transgressing attitude toward spirituality and the mystical path, in general, then, the spiritual abuser has really taken up residence in one's mind and heart full time, because the one who has been abused becomes himself or herself, an abuser -- of oneself, as well as with respect to others (i.e., all who one would wish to be influenced by one's cynicism toward things spiritual). Divinity and everything in Creation has a right over us -- including our own soul and the truth -- and being spiritually abused does not entitle one to abuse one's own soul, or the truth, or the right of others to be free of oppression and abuse.

The Qur'an indicates: "If you will help God, God will help you." (47:7) There are many things that a grieving person can do to help God help one to work through the trauma.

For example, try to find a compassionate witness -- someone who will listen to one's spiritual adventure without prejudice and who is more interested in offering a supportive venue for exploring life issues than necessarily offering any solutions to those issues. If one cannot find someone to do this for free, then, seek out professional assistance, but in either case, this should be done with someone who has some degree of receptivity to the idea of spiritual abuse as a reality -- that is, as something that can and does happen and that is something that, like any other form of abuse, comes into a person's life uninvited.

As an adjunct to this compassionate witness theme, one might consider starting a journal in order to begin a dialogue with oneself as a means through which one can explore one's feelings, ideas, reactions, and attitudes about what is going on within oneself and around one in conjunction with the issue of spiritual abuse. Part of this process can involve a documenting of events, conversations, and dreams that occur during the period in which one is struggling to deal with, and gain perspective concerning, the grieving process. Putting things on paper makes it easier to strive toward becoming more objective and honest

about the situation, as well as provides one with an opportunity to probe and reflect on emotionally charged feelings and fundamentally significant life issues in an effort to acquire a clearer understanding of matters that might remain somewhat amorphous and vague in the absence of such attempts to articulate what is going on within one.

Furthermore, in addition to trying to locate someone who would serve as a compassionate witness and/or starting to keep a journal, one also should look for opportunities to participate in a debriefing process with others who might have experienced similar trauma. There is a fair amount of clinical data that strongly indicates that the prognosis for recovery and healing in cases of spiritual abuse is significantly better for those people who do go through a process of debriefing, as compared to the prognosis for individuals who have not had any exposure to a such a set of debriefing experiences. However, this facet of things is meant to be complementary to, rather than a replacement for, interaction with a compassionate witness.

The debriefing process, working with a compassionate witness, and keeping a journal can help one begin to establish a certain amount of perspective, trust, peace, stability, and an enhanced sense of self-esteem and self-worth in one's life. As these features begin to take root, they help one to resolve some of the most deeply felt and problematic aspects of grief in conjunction with spiritual abuse.

Debriefing, speaking with a compassionate witness, or keeping a journal won't necessarily solve the issue of being without an authentic spiritual guide. However, all of these activities can help one, if God wishes, to move in a more positive, constructive direction.

Another spiritual station of the Sufi path is Sabr, or patience. "O you who believe! Seek assistance through patience and prayer; surely Allah is with the patient." (Qur'an 2:153) Striving for patience is one of the ways a spiritually abused person can help God help one. Indeed: "And be patient and your patience is not but by (the assistance of) Allah, and grieve not for them, and do not distress yourself at what they plan."(16:127)

Do not grieve for the false teacher. Do not distress oneself over those who have decided to stay behind or about the things that they are planning. Leave them to Allah and be patient with Allah's plan,

however that might turn out -- for the people from whom one has become estranged and for oneself.

Longing, or *raghba*, is also a spiritual station on the Sufi Path. Grieving for one's disconnection from spiritual authenticity by realizing that one has been abused by a fraudulent, spiritual guide is, in truth, a dim reflection of the sort of longing that the people of the mystical way experience when their hearts yearn for the presence of *al-Haqiqah*, the Divine Reality.

However, one needs to redirect the *himma* or aspiration associated with grieving away from what has been lost, and reorient that aspiration in terms of what, God willing, might still be found. There is a Hadith Qudsi that says: "I (Allah) am found in the hearts which are broken for My sake," and if the grief which one feels over the lost of disconnection from spiritual authenticity is sincere, and if one's *niyat*, or intention, for seeking has been sincere, then, know that Allah is within your heart, amidst its ruins and that building a new Jerusalem within oneself is possible with God's help ... as long as one still has a breath of life, there is still time ... there is still hope.

A further spiritual station of *tasawwuf* is that of 'abd, or servant. The Qur'an states: "There is no one in the heavens and the earth who will come to the Beneficent God except as a servant." (19:93) Human capacity gives expression to Divine manifestation in accordance with Divine wishes. This is the nature of servitude -- irrespective of whether the servant is willing or unwilling.

People come to the Sufi Path with all kinds of intentions, motivations, aspirations, hopes and expectations. Unfortunately, many of these personal agendas are not consistent with the nature and purpose of the mystical way, but, instead, such agendas are totally understandable in light of the fact that everyone who comes to the Path arrives largely ignorant of the truth and reality of Being -- indeed, if this were not so, there would be no need to place oneself under the care and guidance of a spiritual teacher.

Everyone arrives at the gates of a mystical threshold as a servant who does not understand the nature of servitude. Consequently, a very important function of the Sufi discipline is to help initiate seekers into the different dimensions of all that is entailed by being a servant of Divinity so that one can strive to become aware of what it means to be

an 'abd, or servant of Allah, and, as well, to give expression to such awareness in all that we do.

When some people learn they have been spiritually abused, they grieve out of disappointment about having been deprived, so they feel, of a certain sense of elitism or feeling special which accompanies, in their way of thinking, being associated with a mystical way. Now, they have been thrown back into the mix with the rest of the 'little people'.

Someone in show business once said: 'there is no such thing as a small role, only small actors.' The unredeemed nafs desires power, glory, fame, and status, and it is unhappy with the prospect of having to play a small role in the Divine Plan.

For Divinity, there is no aspect of Creation that constitutes a small role. Everything has its function and purpose. Everything sings the praises of Allah by virtue of its being at all. Everything glorifies God in accordance with its own unique capacity for, and manner, of praise.

Our job is to seek our proper way of worship -- the one that gives expression to who we are rather than who someone else is. Not everyone has been appointed a Prophet. Not everyone becomes a saint. Not everyone will be an Abu Madyan, or a Junayd, Rumi, Hafiz, or Ibn al-'Arabi (may Allah be pleased with them all). And, no one else can be who we are.

If someone seeks to become an aware, knowing, willing servant of God, then, "...whoever is careful of (his duty to) Allah, He will make an outlet for that person, and give that individual sustenance from directions that the person has not even thought of; and whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for him; surely Allah attains His purpose; Allah indeed has appointed a measure for everything." (Qur'an 65:2 -3) What has been Divinely measured for each and every thing will be given expression through the realization of Allah's purpose.

What is appointed for us, as the measure of who and what we are, might, or might not, include the Sufi Path. But, irrespective of whether, or not, this is the case, each of us still has the responsibility of being careful of our duty before Allah and to the rest of Creation, including our own souls.

Thus, "when Musa prayed for drink for his people We said: Strike the rock with your staff. So there gushed from it twelve springs; each

tribe knew its drinking place: Eat and drink of the provisions of Allah and do not act corruptly in the land, making mischief." (Qur'an 2:60) Our task is to seek to know the place from whence we should eat and drink of the provisions -- both physical and spiritual -- from Allah. This might, or might not, involve the Sufi path, but one should learn that grieving over what cannot be is a futile exercise and can never have a constructive outcome.

Tawwakil, or trust/dependence, is another spiritual station of importance to the Sufi Path. To depend on Allah is to accept the role that has been assigned to us in the Divine plan. Part of the struggle that might be entailed by grieving is to learn acceptance through trusting what comes to us by the Divine will -- whether the experience be pleasant or difficult.

Once, when the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was suffering from the lingering after-effects of a poisoning that had also taken the lives of some Companions, someone who was with the Prophet (peace be upon him) during this re-occurrence of the problem turned to him and said: "Oh, this (the painful symptoms) is the result of that woman who poisoned you." The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: "By Allah, nothing comes to me except by the will of Allah."

There might be many factors involved in why someone is required to endure the painful experience of being exposed to spiritual abuse. Whatever these factors might be, they have taken place because God has wished things to be that way, and if Divinity had wished for things to turn out differently, they would have.

Like dreams, the events of life must be interpreted. Like dreams, the events of life are intended to be a means of learning about oneself and existence, and the opportunity to learn comes via the Divine will. Sometimes what we learn is pleasant and sometimes the learning is not so pleasant, but it is all life.

By working through the condition of grief that has arisen from spiritual abuse, one is seeking to position oneself to be sufficiently healthy to be ready to take advantage of whatever spiritually authentic opportunity is vouchsafed to one by Divinity. But, if one becomes entrapped in the grieving process -- that is, if one becomes bogged down in chronic grief -- one will be unable to recognize the legitimate spiritual possibilities that might come into one's life.

We cannot demand that we be introduced to a spiritually authentic teacher. This cannot even be our expectation.

Our task is to be ready and to be vigilant. This is how we can help God to help us, and one cannot be properly ready or vigilant until one, by the Grace of Allah, has worked one's way through the issues, difficulties, and challenges of the grieving process in relation to spiritual abuse.

A seeker who was going through difficult times once approached a Sufi master, hoping to acquire some insight into how best to deal with the problems with which the former individual was confronted. Upon hearing about the man's various problems, the spiritual guide advised the man to learn to swim.

Going through the grieving process in a constructive fashion is among the swimming lessons of life. Hafiz of Shiraz (may Allah be pleased with him) once said: "The One Who is looking after your affairs is already busy looking after your affairs. Your worry adds nothing to your affair but worry" -- nonetheless, learning how to swim amidst the currents and eddies of existence helps our state of mind, heart, and soul as well -- and, in fact, learning how to swim in the foregoing existential sense gives expression to certain dimensions of the spiritual potential that Divinity has placed within us.

Although what Hazrat Hafiz (may Allah be pleased with him) says above is quite true, nonetheless, he had to go through tremendous spiritual struggles in order to arrive at a station where such words of wisdom flowed forth, by the Grace of Allah, through him. There might not be a point to worrying about things, but there is spiritual progress to be made, God willing, through a process of appropriately constructive grieving in relation to having been spiritually abused.

Chapter 21: Forgiveness

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has said: "When someone treats you with nafs (the lower soul), treat them with ruh (the spirit)." Probably, all, or most, of the people who have an interest in the Sufi Path have heard the foregoing Hadith and recognize the truth and wisdom that is given expression through it. However, as with many issues, wisdom that can be said in a simple way is often anything but simple when it comes to accomplishing its proper execution or realizing the depth of awareness, insight, and spiritual development that is a necessary prerequisite to manifesting behavior that has qualities of ihsan (excellence), taqwa (piety), ikhlas (sincerity), tawwakil (dependence), ishq (intense love), sabr (patience), and so on that, hopefully, color and orient such behavior.

One of the questions that each of us must address in trying to grasp the significance of the foregoing words of the Prophet (peace be upon him), is this: how does one make the jump from treating people with nafs to treating them with ruh? Some of the Sufi masters speak of four stages of cleansing or purification: (1) tadhkiya-i-nafs (purification of the nafs); (2) tathfiya-i-qalb; (cleansing of the heart); (3) takhliya-i-sirr (emptying of the sirr); and, (4) tajliya-i-ruh (illumination of the spirit).

Each of these stages is complex and multifaceted. Thus, in a very real way, the distance between treating someone with nafs and treating someone with ruh is enormous -- a journey that tends to consume a whole life time in order for it to be traversed.

Among the jewels inherent in ruh are love, knowledge, primordial familiarity with -- and, therefore, awareness of -- the presence of Divinity, intelligence, understanding, and forbearance, that includes qualities of: dignity, modesty, endurance, as well as tranquility. Obviously, a person who enjoyed the active contributions of all the foregoing qualities of the ruh would be someone who, when treated with nafs, would be able, God willing, to respond to this kind of treatment through such qualities. Such people are known as saints, and we have the unenviable task of trying, as best our spiritual capacity allows us to model our lives after them -- but this is a process, not an event.

A Companion of the Prophet (peace be upon him) once approached Abu Bakr Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him) with a confession. The former individual said that whenever he was with the Prophet (peace be upon him), he thought about nothing but Allah, the purpose of life, the Day of Judgment, and so on, but, whenever he left the presence of the Prophet (peace be upon him) the individual forgot all about such things and became engrossed with his work, his wife, his family and so on. The man felt that he was a hypocrite because he acted one way when he was with the Prophet (peace be upon him), and, yet, acted in quite another way when away from the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Abu Bakr Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him) smiled at his friend and said words to the effect of: "You know, this is my condition too, and I have been very worried about this state of affairs as well. Why don't we go to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and seek his counsel on this matter?"

So, the two men went off to see the Prophet (peace be upon him), and when they arrived, they explained their concerns to him. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) heard their account, he smiled and is reported to have said: "If you were able to maintain the same level of spiritual focus away from me as you do in my presence, the angels would line up to shake your hands."

The spiritual quest has the degree of difficulty it has because, among other factors, the way is beset with many forces that are intent on dissuading us from making the trip at all -- and, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) has warned us, none of these forces is more obstructionist than the nafs (the seat of our rebellious tendencies against the truth) which exists between our two sides. In fact, the unredeemed nafs is so treacherous and dangerous, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "The movements of the nafs are more difficult to detect than the movements of a black ant, on a smooth rock, in the dead of night," and who can detect such stealth ... who, indeed, but the one about whom the Prophet reminds us when he said: "Beware of the vision of a mu'min (one who has a realized, deep faith), for that person sees by the light of Allah."

Because our starting point -- namely, the unredeemed nafs -- is so fraught with peril, the Sufis often speak of a stage that might either be

considered to be a precursor of the first stage noted above -- that is, purification of the nafs -- or, it might be considered as an important theme within that first stage. This precursor to, or aspect of, the first stage involves the purifying of niyat, or intention.

A modern-day shaykh and saint once said: "We have free will, but not as much as we might think." The realm of niyat is where all our spiritual battles are fought, and this is where our free will resides -- the manner or attitude or motive or himma (aspiration) through which we engage the events of life by means of our niyat.

This is why the Prophet (peace be upon him) has indicated that "Allah does not look at your forms and possessions, rather Allah looks at your hearts and deeds," for our hearts and deeds are a function of the condition of our niyat or intention. The light of faith is nothing but the state and/or station of niyat made manifest.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) once said: "The inability to weep is caused by hardness of heart; hardness of heart is caused by a multiplicity of sins; multiplicity of sins is caused by forgetfulness of death; forgetfulness of death is caused by ambitious expectations; ambitious expectations are caused by excessive love of this world." The Prophet also has said: "The root of all prayers is renunciation of the world, and love of the world is the root of all mischief."

Our love of the world is really the dance of the nafs. Dunya is the complex array of patterns created by the process through which the set of our collective (that is, human beings in general) activities engage, and become entangled, with one another on the dance floor of life. The dances of our collective nafs within the confines of lived existence generates an indefinitely large set of opportunities for being able to practice the art and science of forgiveness.

Other people don't dance the way we do, and they are always bumping into us and jarring our beautifully orchestrated movements, rhythms, ambiances and sensibilities. Or, they are stepping on our toes, or they are blocking our way, or they are occupying the space in which we wish to dance, or they insist on the band playing their kind of tunes, or they are too innovative for our tastes, or they are crowding us, or they are trying to control our style of dancing, or they are elbowing us and being insensitive to the adab of dancing as we understand it.

The whole process of dancing in such a congested, stress-filled, problematic context induces us to become open to an assortment of moods, emotions, attitudes, opinions, judgments, strategies, and motives that are shaped, to a great extent, by the unholy four: unredeemed nafs, the whisperings of Iblis (Satan), the machinations of the philosophies, theories, ideas, and concerns of dunya, and the cleverness of the unbelievers -- that is, those who seek to rebel against the purpose for which life was created (and this is a reference to an existential stance, not to spiritual traditions that might differ from one's choice with respect to how to do the dance of life). We spend our days, afternoons, evenings, and nights allowing ourselves to be carried from one state to another, much the way the little steel ball gets propelled here and there by the different bumpers and flippers that make up the pinball machine of our unredeemed nafs.

The term "carried" is not used arbitrarily in the foregoing sentence, because when we hand the keys of niyat, intention, over to our unredeemed nafs, then, we set in motion the elements that are necessary to establish the habits that automatically carry us along through life -- habits of belief, valuation, thought, ideation, feeling, judgment, likes, dislikes, biases, opinions, methods, temperament, personality, defenses, inclination, style, and activities. Moreover, some of these habits are so intense and pervasive that they become modes of addiction in which one, literally, experiences many of the signs of physical withdrawal when one seeks to oppose such trends of being.

Forgiveness is a state of niyat that constitutes a modality of faith. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Faith consists of: profession of the tongue; verification of the heart; and implementation of the limbs." Thus, saying that one forgives someone is not enough. There must be a verification of 'something' via the experience of the heart, and there must be a process of giving expression, in the form of various actions or behaviors, to the reality of what has been verified in the heart.

Verification is not just a matter of experience, but of a certain kind and quality of experience. There must be a realization of the truth of certain things that takes place in the heart.

What is the difference between the first article of faith that says there is no reality but Allah, and the first pillar of Islam that says there is no reality but Allah? The difference is a matter of (in the

case of iman or faith) the presence of an understanding, realization, and verification concerning the truth of that which is only being accepted in a vague and unrealized manner in the context of the first pillar.

Iblis is kafir, or an unbeliever, not because he fails to believe in the existence of God -- since he does believe in the reality of God very much -- but because Satan has no faith in the implications that such existence has for the way he conducts himself, and, as a result, he has covered up the truths that had been disclosed to him prior to his fall from Grace when he had been permitted, by Allah, to not only associate among the angels but to teach them as well. The elements of kafir in each of us are due to the manner in which the unredeemed nafs hides, as well as hides from, the truths that are constantly being shown to us on the horizons and within us by Divinity.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has indicated that: "Satan never feels more dejected, crestfallen and humiliated than on the day of Arafat [the day during Hajj when, following the example of Adam (peace be upon him), seekers ask for forgiveness of God]." The second worst hair day for Iblis is when people ask and receive forgiveness from one another, for Iblis is in his beloved element of chaos, confusion, and mayhem when human beings permit their nafs to darken the land of the heart so that it cannot receive and resonate with the truths and barakah (Grace) which is constantly being rained upon that land by Divinity.

When we forget God, then, God forgets us in the very act of our forgetting Him. In such forgetfulness, the door is opened to all manner of sin -- sin being defined as anything which obscures or obstructs the path to realizing, and acting upon, truth, whether within ourselves or in relation to others.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) 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."

One of the foremost ways of making peace is through the act of forgiveness. However, this can be very difficult, if not impossible, to do if we do not have a deep appreciation of how much in need of Divine forgiveness each of us is. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why the Sufi

path begins with the sort of purifying of *niyat*, or intention, that, God willing, clears the way for struggling toward the station of *tauba*, or repentance, with which the Sufi path begins.

When we come to truly appreciate the need for repentance with respect to our errors of commission and omission, we begin to understand the need in others for forgiveness in precisely the same way we are in need of forgiveness. We also begin to realize that forgiveness only comes via the Grace of God.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has reminded us that: "Allah has 300 Attributes, the one who acquires just one of these Attributes for one's character will inherit Paradise." The quality of forgiveness is given expression through the Attributes and Names of Divinity, and, therefore, in order to become a locus of manifestation for such channeling of forgiveness, we must purify ourselves so that we reflect such a quality in an unrestricted manner -- and this process of purification and reflective transmission is what is meant by "acquiring" the Divine Attribute of Forgiveness.

Praying for the quality of forgiveness to be manifested through us is not a passive act. The Prophet (peace be upon him) once described the nature of prayer as: "service, drawing close, and joining" to the Divine spark within each of us. But he also said: "Prayer is only acceptable to Allah when our heart is aware."

Consequently, if we wish, God willing, for our prayer to be accepted, then, we must become aware of that for which we are praying. In the process of becoming aware, we gain the modality of verification of the heart that previously was mentioned as one of the three elements that constitute faith that is the state of our *niyat*, or intention, made manifest.

What are we trying to be aware of or verify with respect to the issue of forgiveness? There are many ways in which to say this, but one way might be, to use the words of the Prophet (peace be upon him): "By no means shall you attain to righteousness until you spend benevolently out of what you love."

What is it that we all love? We love ourselves -- although I understand that the term "love" in the foregoing is being used loosely for the relationship we have with ourselves is very complex and full of

eddies and cross-currents, and 'love' of self is more of an infatuation and narcissistic preoccupation with the interests of nafs. Notwithstanding the foregoing proviso, we cannot come to forgive other people in an essential, meaningful, non-superficial sense until the unredeemed nafs is transformed into an ally rather than an antagonistic cauldron of resentments, anger, enmity, frustration, misunderstanding, judgments, opinions, biases, likes and dislikes.

We cannot see our way to forgiving someone else -- or, more accurately, being a locus of manifestation (from Divinity) for such forgiveness -- until we have clearly seen our way to being willing to sacrifice the loves of our own lower self and giving benevolently to others through such sacrifice. Being a locus of manifestation for the forgiveness of others that is being transmitted to them by Divinity via the agency of the purified Self does not mean that one should forget what has transpired in relation to the transgressions that have been perpetrated against us.

Being such a locus does not mean one should permit this sort of process to be abused by others or serve as a vehicle of enabling those people to continue to transgress. Forgiveness carries with it an obligation on the part of the one who is forgiven. This is not a condition of forgiveness, but something that is part of the adab or etiquette of the process of forgiveness.

As the Qur'an indicates: "If you are thankful, then truly I shall increase you." (14:7) So, the quality of gratitude or shukr is paramount to giving expression to the sincerity of thankfulness in a person who has been extended the gift of forgiveness, together with the one through whom the forgiveness has been transmitted.

Real forgiveness is a gift for all concerned -- both the transgressor as well as the person who has been transgressed against. This is so because when this act of forgiveness takes place in the right spiritual context (in which both the locus of manifestation through which forgiveness is extended, as well as the locus of manifestation that is the recipient of such barakah or Grace), then, and only then, can spiritual healing take place.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has taught that there is no sin in feeling anger, but one must learn to swallow it and not act upon it. This

is a long and difficult process with which we might have varying degrees of success at different stages along the spiritual path.

As with many spiritual states, we tend to vacillate back and forth, like so many phase shifts, between controlling anger and giving vent to it. Najm al-Din Razi (may Allah be pleased with him) has indicated there are two qualities associated with the unredeemed nafs, and through the multiplicity of ways in which these two qualities can combine together, arise all the varied emotions that we feel. These two qualities are passion and anger.

One of the purposes of the Sufi path is to help individuals to struggle toward transforming these two properties of the nafs. When one changes the object of passion, from dunya and the small-'s' self, to Divinity, then, love for the truth and reality begins to emerge, and, as this is taking place, anger is transformed, God willing, to an inclination to defend the truth against everything within one that seeks to corrupt the process of truth seeking.

One cannot become clear about the issues of forgiveness until one begins to re-orient one's habitual ways of dealing with the world through the colored bifocals of unredeemed nafs. For, as long as we are oblivious to the beam in our own eye, all we are likely to see is the mote in someone else's eye, since it is the beam in our own eye that blinds the heart and renders it unsuitable for receiving the lights of Grace -- such as forgiveness.

The Qur'an says: "O humankind. There has come to you a direction from your Lord, and a healing for the diseases in the hearts, and a guidance, and a mercy for the Believers." (10:57) When we turn away from that which has come to us through Divine Generosity, then, forgiveness, like so many other words and terms, becomes an empty, shallow exercise. This is the real curse of kufr, or unbelief, for when we are dominated by this spiritual condition, we hide, and hide from, the very solution to many of our problems.

Chapter 22: Naming Names

Someone asked me about the identity of several individuals. In one case, the person requesting this information wanted to know the name of an individual who is spiritually abusing individuals, and in another case, the person seeking information wanted to know if a certain shaykh and silsilah were authentic.

The primary focus of this book is to offer support and assistance to individuals who are seeking to recover from the trauma of having been spiritually abused by self-deceived individuals claiming to be authentic spiritual guides but who are not. With respect to the issue of the identity of the alleged shaykh who has betrayed my trust and the trust of various other individuals, knowing that person's name or the name of his so-called tariqa would not be of much value to anyone, and this is so for a variety of reasons.

Among these reasons are the following. The person goes by many names and, consequently, being on the lookout for one, or even several, names, would not be very helpful -- and toward the end of my affiliation with this spiritually abusive individual, he was encouraging all of the people close to him to change their names to English sounding names, and those names often change according to circumstances.

The man lies about his name, identity, place of birth, physical location, and background. He induces those with him to lie as well because he is teaching them that as long as the ultimate cause is a good one, it is okay to lie since this serves the 'good' -- and the 'good' is defined as whatever the alleged shaykh believes to be the case.

Many people on the Internet are being lured in by this person through an ever-changing set of Internet groups, chat-rooms, personae, web sites, and businesses. If people were given only one name, that name would not help them avoid the quicksand that lies in wait for them through the other multiple-identities.

This changeling aspect with the names, identities and bio-data appears to be a relatively new development. The person running things in this group is both evil and extremely clever, and anyone who is not trusted as 'one of them' is given very little in the way of useful biographical information and, in fact, people who are on the 'outside'

of things only come to know about such things when there is a momentary lapse in various security measures that they use to conceal their activities.

Once one has been 'converted' to their mind-and heart-set (which comes after one has been induced into an altered state of consciousness that renders people highly vulnerable to all manner of exploitation, suggestion, and manipulation), then, and only then, does information begin to flow a little more freely with respect to what is going on in the group. Even then, however, there are circles within circles, and each level has its own security codes, so to speak, for gaining access to information -- and not even the closest, most 'trusted' accomplices in this affair are made privy to the many secrets that the ring leader carries with him and through which he directs operations. Indeed, the stories he tells people -- even supposedly close mureeds -- as to why things are being done in a certain way rarely have anything to do with the actual motivations for why things are being done.

I learned the foregoing not because I was a trusted 'insider' but because someone who had become something of a 'trusted' insider broke ranks with the fraudulent shaykh at a certain juncture. If not for the information garnered, by the Grace of Allah, through the aforementioned once-and-former 'insider', I might never have gained much insight into how things are done in conjunction with the 'methods' of the fraudulent shaykh.

There is another reason for not divulging a name in relation with the so-called spiritual guide, and this reason has to do with human nature. When people are given a name and that name is not the same as the one associated with some alleged teacher with whom they are spiritually affiliated, there is a tendency for people to breathe a sigh of relief and say words to the effect of: 'it's not my teacher. I'm safe from spiritual abuse,' when this is not necessarily the case.

Many years ago, Alan Watts came up with the phrase "genuine fake". This refers to someone who truly believes she or he is 'spiritually enlightened' in some sense of this term (although this is not actually the case) and, as a result, deems herself or himself a guide or teacher.

Such individuals are very sincere about what they do, but they are, in effect, delusional. They spend their lives going about enlisting other people in that delusion.

There are a lot of people who are posing as teachers and spiritual guides, but who are -- if we give them the benefit of the doubt about their misplaced sincerity concerning their spiritual status -- 'genuine fakes'. These counterfeit shaykhs have gathered about them many, many followers.

There is a Sufi teaching that runs along the following lines. There are four kinds of people.

(1) There are those who know and know that they know. These are the Prophets and awliya of God, and we should seek to follow such individuals as best our individual spiritual capacity permits.

(2) There are those who know but don't know that they know. These people are asleep and should be woken (through a genuine spiritual guide).

(3) There are those who don't know and know they don't know. These people can learn, so, they should be taught (again, by genuine spiritual guides).

(4) Finally, there are those who don't know and don't know that they don't know. These people are the ignorant and should be avoided at all costs.

Spiritual ignorance is not a function of the technical information with which one might have facility. There are people who have memorized the Qur'an who remain spiritually illiterate and ignorant. There are people who spout reams of poetry from: Rumi, Hafiz, Farid-ud-din 'Attar (may Allah be pleased with them), and many others, but who have hearts that are in darkness. There are individuals who can discourse for hours about the differences and similarities of the doctrines of 'oneness of Being' and 'oneness of witnessing' of, respectively, certain followers of Hazrat Ibn al-'Arabi and Hazrat Ahmad Sirhindi (may Allah be pleased with them both), and still have no insight into their own spiritual condition or the condition of others.

Spiritual ignorance is a function of the condition of one's nafs, heart, sirr, ruh, kafi, and aqfah. If these inner, spiritual faculties have not been brought on line and properly calibrated through the

assistance of an authentic spiritual guide (which takes place through the agency of nisbath, ... one's heart connection with that guide), then, irrespective of whatever words might come out of someone's mouth, and irrespective of how eloquent, moving, or even true those words might be, the person who utters them does so through the veils of spiritual ignorance and can be of no real help to seekers after the essential Self.

The disease of spiritual ignorance is far more prevalent than many people suspect. There are even some people who might read the foregoing words and suppose, spiritually speaking, that they understand what is being said, when, in fact, they do not, and, they are, unfortunately, in denial about this reality.

Some people who read this book might not believe that they, personally, are victims of, or have been victims of, spiritual abuse because, for instance, they have never been financially or sexually exploited, while they ignore the fact that they are affiliated with a so-called spiritual guide who is either an outright fraud or a 'genuine fake' and, consequently, has not been given legitimate authority to teach anyone. As bad as sexual exploitation is when perpetrated by, among others, alleged spiritual guides, the real spiritual abuse is for someone to be induced into believing that one is affiliated with someone who can assist one to bring on line and calibrate all one's interior spiritual faculties when, in truth, this is not the case.

There are millions of people in North America alone who presume they are affiliated with a legitimate, authentic shaykh, but they are not. Quite a few of these so-called shaykhs are well-known and have published materials that are in wide circulation.

Less someone suppose that the foregoing comments are so much sour grapes -- or the remarks of resentment from an embittered individual who has been spiritually abused and wishes for everyone else to join him in misery, or the sentiments of an individual who is envious of the spiritual happiness that others might enjoy -- think again. If someone should suppose that I am doing the devil's work by seeking to cast doubt into people's lives in order to induce them to believe that there are no authentic spiritual teachers, then, think again, as well.

Despite my experiences, I do believe in the reality of the mystical way. Despite my experiences, I do believe there are some authentic spiritual guides left in the world -- there just aren't as many of these individuals left as people suppose.

Many individuals want to believe we live in the best of times -- that we are the most advanced, aware, knowledgeable people who have ever stepped foot on the face of the Earth. Many people want to believe human kind is continuing to evolve spiritually, and they are excited about what wonders this evolutionary unfoldment will disclose in the future.

In truth, spiritually speaking, we live in the worst of times, and if we just look about us, we can bear witness to this reality every single day of our lives, within almost every facet of our lives, in every corner of the world. The world is the way it is, because we are the way we are.

We are not evolving as a species. We are devolving.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon us) has told us this would occur. This is why he said to his Companions that if they left out even one-tenth of what is prescribed, they would not inherit Paradise, but there will come a time when if the people of that time are able to do even one-tenth of what is prescribed, they will inherit Paradise.

The Hadith concerning the Latter Days are about the spiritual dissolution of human kind, not its advancement. The spiritual trend is - - with the exception of the times when Prophets and special awliya of Allah are present -- always downward, and this has been so since Adam (peace be upon him) and Eve (may Allah be pleased with her) first set foot on this planet and level of Being.

The last saint, the saint of the children, the descendent of the Prophet Seth (peace be upon him), the one who will call people to Islam and the Path all his life and, yet, no one will come, serves as testimony concerning the foregoing claims. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has indicated that after Isa (peace be upon him) does battle with the Dajjal and slays the latter and lives for a certain number of years during that there will be peace on Earth and, then, passes away, this period of tranquility will be followed by a steady, precipitous slide into spiritual darkness when human beings become

worse than the beasts, and this also serves to support what has been said above.

Many people are caught up in well-ordered delusions. The fact that a person believes in the truth of such delusions or is convinced those delusions are true, does not make them so.

As far as passing judgment on the individual named in the correspondence that I received and to which I alluded toward the beginning of this essay, or on the tariqa that has been identified in that correspondence, this is not the business of this book. I am not now, nor have I have been, a clearinghouse for identifying authentic and inauthentic shaykhs.

Someone has said that if one wants to find out about the character of an individual, then, go on a trip with them. I went on a ten -twelve year trip with someone who claimed to be an authentic shaykh but was, and is, not what he claimed (claims) to be, and only by taking this trip -- together with some good fortune -- was I able to discover the real nature of this individual.

Most of those who are affiliated with an alleged shaykh have never gone on a trip with that individual -- not even for a few days, let alone years. One cannot gauge the spiritual mettle of a person from long-distance or by reading their books or listening to their discourses ... one must get up close and personal, and this takes time.

For some individuals, the amount of time necessary to arrive at a conclusion about the spiritual authenticity of a given, alleged shaykh is less than for others. However, anyone who maintains that he or she can take a few rules of thumb and accurately evaluate someone's spiritual condition, or anyone who claims to be able to meet someone and know, right away, whether that individual is authentic or not, is living in a delusional state.

There is no substitute for direct, long-term exposure to an individual. One needs to see someone engaged in life across a wide variety of circumstances to be able to have some sense of what that person might be about and whether that person is who they claim to be as far as the title of shaykh is concerned.

Sometimes people do not make the effort to, first, go on a trip of sorts with a person in order to try to better judge the spiritual

authenticity of that individual. There are all kinds of logistical and practical problems associated with making such efforts, and, as a result, people want to take short-cuts to the truth.

Sometimes, we get lucky, by the Grace of Allah, and despite taking such risky short-cuts, we find, or are found by, an authentic shaykh. Sometimes, we are not so lucky, but as God has wished and for reasons known only to Divinity, then, due to the short-cuts we take, we end up with someone who betrays us spiritually.

Sometimes God wishes for us to go through difficulty because this is the anvil of life on which we are hammered in order to be shaped into useful instruments for Divine purposes. Sometimes misguidance is the fate we choose, knowingly or unknowingly, for ourselves, and only Allah knows what the significance is of the events in our lives.

Human beings are quite adept at jumping to all kinds of conclusions about why this or that happens, but rarely are these conclusions rooted in any kind of deep understanding about the way Divinity moves through Being or why -- as was once said by a seeker after truth -- 'You, God, know our ways, but we do not know Yours.' Whether we wish life to be this way or not, things of a difficult, painful, problematic nature continue to happen, for this is the purpose of life -- a testing ground through which we are tried with evil and good in order for our spiritual capacity to be given an opportunity to unfold on the wings of Destiny.

Choice is, at least, a two-edged sword. Unfortunately, we do not always learn the lessons that are necessary to properly wield this sword to cut through to the truth of things.

I can't tell others how to wield their swords in order to cut through to the truth about either any specific individual who calls himself, or herself, a shaykh, nor in relation to any given silsilah in which one might be interested. Every individual has the responsibility of doing this for himself or herself, and on the Day of Judgment, Allah will inform us about where human kind differed in such matters, as well about who was right and who was wrong. This is why spiritual legends such as Hazrat 'Umar ibn Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) looked at a leaf and longed to be relieved of the responsibility of being human, for the Fate that awaits us is shaped by the choices we

make. Choice is both a tremendous opportunity, and a terrible burden, with many, many ramifications -- both known and unknown.

Chapter 23: Abusing Love

An individual sent a posting to the Sufi Spiritual Abuse Recovery Assistance Group that sought to make several points. Among these was that the idea that if someone feels excessive love for someone, then, this is blessing from God -- even if, subsequently, the focus of that love is taken away. Moreover, the posting mentioned how the mind should not control the heart.

Love is one of the most abused words in the English language. People speak about love, when they actually mean: emotion; liking; attraction; inclination; passion; compatibility; fondness; obsession; sex; need; dependency; pleasurable; compassion; control; empathy; abuse; oppression; addiction; or various pathological forms of interaction.

There is a Hadith Qudsi that says that 'Whoever seeks Me, finds Me. Whoever finds Me, comes to know Me. Whoever comes to know Me, loves Me. Whoever loves Me, that person I slay. Whomever I slay, I owe that person blood-money, and to whomever I owe blood-money, I am the recompense.' Before one begins to talk about love, perhaps, first one needs to explore the nature of seeking, finding, and coming to know, since all of these precede the station of love.

The foregoing Hadith mentions a number of stages of suluk, or spiritual journeying -- seeking, finding, knowing, loving, death, and the Divine recompense. Now, in one sense, every stage of the Path has its Divine recompense that are the experiences, understandings, tastes, knowledge, disclosures, states, stations, insights, and unveilings that come, by God's Grace, to an individual as signs and indications that one's journey is still on course and still on-going (as opposed to being dead in the water when some spiritual journeys get becalmed or stuck in a particular state or station).

Seeking, finding, knowing, loving, and fana are all different modalities or ways of engaging the Divine Reality. None of these conditions are complete in themselves but must be integrated and harmonized with all of the other spiritual conditions that, God willing, are realized along the path.

The final stage of the journey -- the part that helps demarcate the difference between traveling and having been said to 'arrive' -- is the Divine Recompense that goes to those who have been slain in the way of Allah. The Qur'an says: "Think not of those who are slain in the way of Allah as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord, they have provision. Jubilant (are they) because of that which Allah has bestowed upon them of His bounty." (3:169-170)

The bounty or recompense that has been bestowed upon these 'abd, servants, of Allah is the condition of baqa that is the realization of one's unique, individuated spiritual capacity within a context of being united with Divinity in the sense that although in essence we are Divine, we are not Divinity in Essence (and there is no other meaning for "There is no reality but Allah", for whatever human beings are in essence, this cannot be other than Divinity even as it cannot be synonymous with Divinity, for Divinity in Essence transcends all of Creation).

Every stage has associated with it a certain element of jazb, or spiritual intoxication, that is the state that comes over us when one is in resonance with the Divine, and the reverberations of that resonance are manifested in a sense of well-being, happiness, peace, understanding, trust, security, and rootedness. Moreover, the jazb that is felt at any given stage can cover a continuum of possibilities, running from very mild to quite intense (a state of ecstasy).

The condition of jazb that is experienced through the Divine recompense that is alluded to in the Hadith Qudsi is one of Jubilance as indicated in the verses from the Qur'an. The people of sobriety experience this jubilance on the inside, but outwardly are in touch with the realities of the realm of Nasut (the material world) and so on (and are able to help guide people along the spiritual path because their understanding is immersed in the Truth of this condition of realization).

The people of ecstasy (on whatever level or stage of jazb) are not in any spiritual condition to help guide people because they operate only from the understanding of ecstasy that has not been integrated with, and adapted to, the realities of the needs of spiritual journeying. This is why it is generally agreed among shaykhs that the path of sobriety is superior to the path of intoxication -- that is, primarily

because people in the former condition are better able to assist people on their spiritual journeys than are people who are intoxicated and who look at the events of life through the colors that are peculiar to a given state of intoxication that remain uncorrected, so to speak, for purposes of guidance.

A lot of people say they love heaven, but few people want to die in order to become united with their alleged beloved. The suicide bombers who claim they do what they do out of love for God and the Hereafter, don't have a clue about either. They do what they do because they have been conned into believing that a certain delusional world-view is true, and they have a passion for that delusion, and they confuse this with love.

Through techniques of control, hypnosis, compliance, obedience, confusion, ambiguity, social pressure, suggestion, manipulation, deceit, duplicity, and lying, a vulnerable person can be brought into a state where they are prepared to sacrifice anything -- job, money, possessions, family, spouse, time, talent, and even one's life, and this willingness to sacrifice is called love, but it is not love because, among other things, there has been no real seeking, finding, or coming to know that has preceded it -- and, one can only come to love that aspect of the Divine that has been disclosed in Truth within one's being.

Iblis, or Satan, considers himself to be a lover of God. Before his fall from Grace, he was said to have worshiped God for 500,000 years, and it was said that his spiritual station was raised to such a high degree that he was permitted by Allah to not only associate with the angels, but to teach them as well. However, when push came to shove and the so-called love was tested, Iblis was more enamored with himself and consumed with jealousy toward human beings than he actually loved God -- Iblis might have known many things, by the Grace of Allah, but he didn't know his essential nature and, therefore, he did not know God, and as the aforementioned Hadith Qudsi indicates, one cannot love God -- or, more precisely, love the manner in which the Divine Names and Attributes are manifested through our essential capacity -- without knowing ... that is, without having experiential understanding of the Presence of God both within and without such that one experiences unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity.

Before saying that "one who has felt excessive love for someone, it is a blessing of God", one needs to know whether what is being felt is truly love, or whether it is something else that we merely refer to as love, without the reality of love being present. Out of love for the potential that God has placed in us, God might, indeed, put us through different experiences, trials, challenges, problems, and so on, but the task, from our human side of things, is to learn the significance of these different events and just what it is that God is trying to teach us through the events of life.

When we are attracted to a fraudulent spiritual teacher -- perhaps even passionately so -- and, then, because of this passionate attraction we permit ourselves to trust such an individual, only to have that trust betrayed, in one way or another, then, perhaps, what we are being taught is not how excessive love for a person is a blessing of God, but that it was a blessing of God that has showed us that what we thought was love was not actually love. Perhaps, we are being shown that we have more work to do in our search for the actual Reality of love.

God does guide us in any way Divinity pleases. However, our job as spiritual seekers after Truth is to try to figure out what the nature of that guidance is as it is manifested through the events of our lives -- like the symbols of dreams, the symbols of life events have to be interpreted ... and sometimes our interpretations and understandings are correct and sometimes they are not, and the task of a spiritual guide is to help us learn the differences between the two.

Every experience has a taste or dhawk. The Sufi path is the journey of learning the art and science of dhawk.

Love has many tastes, depending on the dimension of heart or spirit from which it comes. Some Sufi speak in terms of nine stages of love -- (1) compatibility; (2) inclination; (3) fellowship; (4) passion; (5) friendship; (6) exclusive friendship; (7) ardent affection; (8) enslavement; and (9) bewilderment. Some people mistake confusion for bewilderment, and the two are at the opposite ends of the spectrum, although many people who are confused suppose that their confusion is an expression of love.

Other Sufis speak of five stages of love: (1) Shari'ah (Divine Law); (2) Tariqat (seeking); (3) Haqiqat (finding of Reality); (4) Ma'arifat (Gnosis -- true knowledge); and (5) Wahdat (the experience of oneness)

or unity with the Beloved). Again, people who have the first kind of love involving Shari'ah suppose that this is the same as someone who experiences the love of stage (5) -- and there are worlds of differences between the two -- although stage (5) does bring one back to stage (1) and one comes to understand the real nature of Shari'ah for the very first time.

In the aforementioned Group posting (outlined at the beginning of this essay), the word "heart" is mentioned. However, nothing is said about that level of the heart is being addressed, and this is important.

A name for one of the most exterior facets of the heart is "qalb". This is an Arabic word that means 'that which turns' because this facet of the heart is continuously swinging back and forth between the influences of the nafs and the spirit as they each vie for control over the faculties of the heart.

A fully realized and illumined heart is one thing. A heart that is steeped in darkness and confusion is quite another. It is only the former that should be permitted to lead the mind as the latter interacts with life and the world.

Until that sun rises, one is in need of guidance and spiritual assistance because the path has many pitfalls and one is constantly vulnerable to the influences of nafs, Iblis, dunya, and those who claim to be lovers of God -- yet, like Iblis, they are individuals who acknowledge God's Reality without wishing to know that Reality or to love that Reality with the capacity that God has given to all human beings and jinn.

There are many lessons to be learned from situations that seem to resonate with love, but, subsequently, have been shown to reek with hypocrisy and malevolence. These can be bitter lessons to learn, but once one begins to differentiate the taste of sham-love from real love, then, one is in a much better position to seek assistance on the path and one is in a much better position to sense where one needs to go.

Chapter 24: Internet Connection

There is a whole array of psychological and sociological studies that lends credence to the idea that people will do things that they might not otherwise do if they can hide in anonymity -- whether this anonymous condition be in a mob, or behind a mask, or under a KKK hood, or through a nickname on the Internet. Furthermore, there are tendencies within all of us that seek to be other than we are, or other than we perceive ourselves to be, or we perceive others to perceive ourselves to be.

The Internet provides many opportunities -- some that are good and some that are not. One of the opportunities that the Internet offers is the chance to interact with others free of shared history and public identity ... which means one can, if one wishes, create a new history and a new persona or identity through which to engage others on the Internet.

I vividly recall how, not too long ago, when a person I knew was introducing someone to a member of a place called *Virtual Village* (not the real name of this cyber location) and the latter individual -- not aware that he was interacting with someone who knew his real life identity -- proceeded to lie about his age and marital status. This same person was also trolling various chat rooms on the Internet preaching about the mystical path and proclaiming, among other things, that God knows everything we do.

The Internet has good features but there are many temptations inherent in it as well. Some of the temptations of the Internet involve its degrees of freedom that enable one, if one so chooses, to become engaged in lying, deceit, and hypocrisy, simply because one believes one will not be discovered by other human beings.

People who will lie, cheat, manipulate, and deceive others through the Internet are also individuals who will lie, cheat, manipulate and deceive in real life. The Internet does not change the stripes of a tiger ... it only affords a new jungle in which to hunt, stalk, and kill (in a virtual way).

A person who will use the cloak of anonymity that the Internet offers to try to hide their deceptions is someone who, in truth, has no real faith that Divinity does, indeed, see everything that we do. A

person who hides behind nicknames in order to pursue an agenda to that people would not agree if the former individual had told the truth to begin with is someone who does not believe -- as the Qur'an clearly indicates -- that our hands, feet and other bodily parts will all testify against us on the Day of Judgment, and that, in truth, it is we who will judge ourselves through our intentions and actions, and not God.

One of the positive, constructive possibilities that arises via the Internet is the opportunity to reach out and genuinely, sincerely touch another human being through heart to heart and mind to mind encounters that -- due to separations of time and space -- might not otherwise be easily achievable. Experiences, ideas, feelings, interests, talents, creations, problems, questions, and answers can all be shared via the Internet.

The existence of this Sufi Spiritual Abuse Recovery Group is a case in point of the positive potential of the Internet in action. We are all human beings and, as such, we have an innate need to associate with other human beings for the purpose of exploring life and the universe in a communal, interactive manner.

There is a reason why chat rooms, forums, cyber communities, e-mail, news groups, Web Circles, discussion groups, and other forms of interactive, dynamic communication have proliferated through the Internet. People are not getting their need for intimate, significant, meaningful contact in real life.

If a person spends a lot of time on the Internet doing something other than e-commerce or research, this is, probably, as good as indicator as any that one of two things might, possibly, be the case: (1) this person's circle of friends, relatives, business associates, school mates, and/or acquaintances in the real world are, for whatever reason, not able to meet essential needs of an individual for making meaningful contact; or, (b) the individual has a difficult time (due to shyness or other factors) establishing relationships and uses, in a positive way, the relative anonymity of the Internet to help jump-start a reaching-out process that is, for whatever reason, very difficult for the person to do in the real world when face to face with people.

Someone has described an addiction as something one continues to do long after reality or experience has shown one that the behavior is destructive or problematic. If we leave aside the issue of whether

the Internet is addictive in the classic sense (that is, does discontinuing Internet activity lead to symptoms of physical withdrawal), and if we put aside the issue of trying to distinguish between a habit and an addiction, one might say that there are potentially addictive dimensions related to interacting with the Internet.

If a person has a deep yearning for essential, meaningful contact with others, a person tends to go in search of that which might satisfy this yearning. Like most addictions, being attracted to something because one believes it might be a solution to one's problems in life plays a role in the formation of addictive behavior.

A Sufi master might say that the seeds of addiction are sown when an individual, mistakenly, believes that some given substance, liquid, drug, object, or relationship is a doorway to some dimension of Divinity -- a dimension of Divinity that will take away pain, or fear, or anxiety, or memory, or unhappiness, or loneliness, or low self-esteem, or a sense of in competence with respect to life in general. Some people see the Internet in this fashion -- as something that, on the surface, appears to have the capacity to administer to whatever problems might have led one to investigate, or be attracted to, the idea of the Internet in the first place.

False spiritual guides, like all abusive predators, seem to have a fundamental grasp about some of the ways in which people who are emotionally, psychologically, socially, interpersonally, and/or spiritually vulnerable tend to behave. Such predators are very sensitized to the signs and indications shown by others that indicate yearning, need, problems, loneliness, and so on.

Like a bottle of alcohol, a packet of heroin, a line of cocaine, a cap of Ecstasy, or a potential new round of sexual partners, the slippery slope of addiction begins with an encounter with something that seems to be able to administer to the deep need we have to be healed and healthy. In the beginning, whatever the choice of addiction might be, it seems to provide a sense of well-being, an emotional/physical high, a sense of meaning, purpose, identity and methodology for being able to continue on in such a new altered state of awareness about one self and life.

Maybe, the substance, or whatever, helps us to forget ourselves, or, maybe, it helps us to think about ourselves in a more genteel light,

or, maybe, it helps us to diminish the importance of certain kinds of problems and issues, or, maybe, it provides us with a sense of control over our lives, or, maybe, it is a way to express our disdain for the world, or, maybe, it induces us to believe that we have found God, or, maybe, it helps cast life in rosier glow, or, maybe, it removes a sense of meaninglessness that has been eating away at our hearts and sense of identity. Whatever the curative properties seems to be, the seeds of addiction tend to become established when we go on what learning theorists refer to as: an intermittent, variable, reinforcement schedule.

Essentially, this means that a person finds some experience sufficiently pleasurable, meaningful, powerful, enhancing, or attractive that the experience of this reward begins to serve as a carrot that motivates one to seek out a repeat of the original experience that one found so powerful or pleasurable or meaningful. However, because the sought after reward does not come every time (intermittent) or comes in ways that are variable (the precise 'high', if you will, is never quite the same as originally or initially experienced) and because we tend to become somewhat habituated to even pleasurable experiences, our seeking behavior becomes more intense and, as a result, we tend to become more committed to certain forms of behavior that we believe, on the basis of past experience, will lead, eventually, once again, to what we seek, but, alas in reality, do not always lead to the desired mode of satisfaction (reinforcement).

When our seeking behavior begins to undermine our own well-being, or interferes with our capacity to make good judgments, or begins to destroy the fabric of our lives (socially, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and physically) because we are unable to withdraw from the behaviors that we insist -- evidence to the contrary -- will lead us to the promised land of whatever form of satisfaction or fulfillment or problem solving we, originally, were seeking through such behavior, then, at that point, a person might be controlled by an intermittent, variable reinforcement schedule of learning that is shaping, coloring, and organizing everything one feels, thinks, and does. At that point, a person is exhibiting addictive or addictive-like behavior.

Using the foregoing as a backdrop for discussion, one could say that, under certain circumstances, one's interaction with the Internet

could be considered to have addictive-like qualities or properties. If, for example, one continues to go to chat rooms or interact with certain persons through the Internet even though, somewhere within one, there is a recognition that the interaction is poisonous, problematic, hurtful, destructive, or inviting us to behave in ways that we might not do otherwise, then, the person who continues to do this is exhibiting addictive-like behavior.

Whether one wishes to call such a pattern of behavior an addiction might only be a matter of semantics and definitions. The real issue of importance is that an individual is engaged in a sequence of behavior over which they have lost, to some degree, control and such behavior is leading to problems in one's life.

False teachers will use techniques such as love-bombing (which is a combination of flattery, positive affirmations, encouragement, seemingly unconditional expressions of love, and so on) to exploit an individual's vulnerabilities and induce 'highs' in that individual. These 'highs' become the fulcrum around which the leverage of bringing about more and more compliance and commitment of an individual because a person doesn't want to lose the 'high' that was associated with the love bombing.

Love bombing is something that can be done easily over the Internet. In fact, the structure of anonymity, together with the way the Internet camouflages the great physical distances that often separate people, means someone can say almost anything over the Internet in the way of a promise or commitment and never have to back it up with any real-world, substantive acts.

In addition, there is another aspect of the Internet that helps a fraudulent teacher to forge cohesive bonds with unsuspecting, vulnerable individuals whom the former wish to exploit in one way or another. Like radio, the Internet, often engages our imaginations, because the people with whom we are interacting are faceless, voiceless mysteries, and, therefore, we tend to create our own images of what people are like based on the clues that we given by the other participant(s).

Sham teachers use this dimension of the Internet to feed people only the kinds of information the false teacher wishes in order to induce the unsuspecting person to create a certain kind of image of the

false teacher -- an image that will be in the false teacher's best interests. This image is constructed from so-called 'biographical facts' that are total inventions -- such as: place of residence, past experiences, personality, temperament, interests, and so on.

By parasitically latching onto the imaginal faculty of another human being, the false teacher induces the unsuspecting person to, little by little, construct precisely the kind of image the fraudulent guide wishes the individual to have of the charlatan in teacher's clothing. Oftentimes, what happens is that a person is induced by a false teacher to develop a dependent relationship with a fictitious, phantom individual who has been constructed by the imagination of the seeker with the help of the false teacher's various campaigns of manipulation, disinformation, lying, deceit and so on. In this sense one is lured into having an addictive-like relationship with someone who, in truth, resides only in one's imagination -- which makes withdrawing from such behavior doubly difficult because one carries around within one the very image from which one needs separation.

Chapter 25: Construction of Reality

Cardinal Law -- lately of the archdiocese of Boston but, now, having been forced to resign in disgrace from that position -- is an ayat, or sign, for all of us. He knew about the molestation and sexual improprieties going on, and, yet, for decades, he continued to put parishioners in harm's way, without, apparently, even trying to take effective steps to bring the tragedy to an end -- both in relation to the abused, as well as with respect to the abusers. He just kept moving the perpetrators around without telling anyone about the evil that was being parachuted into their communities and without appropriate safeguards being put into place to ensure that the parish children would not be placed in harm's way.

Even in those cases where someone has had the courage to speak up and seek to address such situations -- whether administratively, legally, or in other ways -- there are many obstacles to overcome, along with an array of daunting biases with which to struggle. For example, there have been a variety of instances reported where some parishioners were angry that action was being taken against this or that abusive priest because, well, it was upsetting to those parishioners. Apparently, the entire matter was quite inconvenient for the latter individuals because of the way the expose brought doubt, uncertainty and anxiety into their lives, as well as the manner in which it disrupted the life of the parish. In addition, the issue was just so embarrassing for everyone, and it undermined the peace of mind of these parishioners, and wasn't anyone concerned about the opportunity that such a public washing of dirty linen gave to those seeking to point accusing fingers at Catholics, and so on.

Consequently, often times, anger, resentment, hostility, and vilification, would be directed toward those who had been abused. Surely, the latter individuals were lying, and/or seeking publicity, and/or were trouble-makers, and/or wanted to make money, and/or were angry about their own misery or lack of worldly success and were merely trying to shift responsibility for their own short-comings to others, and/or such people were crazy, and/or were alcoholics, drug addicts, people of low moral character, sexual degenerates, and/or social activists agitating to advance their own dubious agenda, and/or people who, for some irrational reason harbored resentments

with respect to hard-working, spiritual men, or against religion, or toward God.

The abused should have kept their mouth shut. They should have gone about things quietly. They should have thought about the ramifications for others instead of being so damn self-centered and self-absorbed. They should have turned the other cheek. They should have remembered the beam in their own eye rather than whine about the mote in the eyes of others. They should have followed the advice about letting him who is without sin cast the first stone. They should have abided by the decision of those who are in authority and who know much more about spirituality than the abused. They should have left it to God and just got on with their life.

One of the most gut-wrenching, emotionally draining, and spiritually depressing dimensions of circumstances involving spiritual abuse -- of whatever variety -- is that almost everyone has a vested interest that they wish to protect and, for such reasons, they really don't want to hear what you have to say. Whenever abused people try to bring their abuse to the attention of others -- even family and friends -- the people who have been abused tend to be met with all manner of: disbelief, anger, hostility, fear, hatred, resentment, suspicion, ridicule, character attacks, ostracization, shunning, attempts to censor or discredit, as well as campaigns of threats, intimidation, and more.

In the process, the abused get exposed to more abuse. As a result, the abused feel even more alienated, depressed, rejected, and alone than they do already.

Many people want silence to be maintained about such issues, because they don't want to be put in a position where they have to choose and make a moral stand that conflicts with what they perceive to be their vested interests in the matter. Before the abused person came along and began blabbing, those in whom the abused person tried to confide (and, initially, such people often are members of the same group), had -- or, so the latter supposed -- purpose, peace, meaning, identity, community, knowledge, position, status, understanding, happiness, stability, methodology, faith, certitude, trust, a guide, and so on.

These people don't want anything upsetting their spiritual and existential apple carts. After all, if one were to listen, with care and consideration, to the events and issues that an abused person is trying to relate, then, one might have to begin questioning the validity and truth of everything of importance in one's life, since if the integrity of the teacher is being called into serious question, one can no longer be certain of how to distinguish between truth and falsehood -- given that the spiritual compass one has relied on, for some time, is none other than the guide -- who is the very person whose virtue and moral character are being called into question.

Someone once e-mailed another Internet Sufi list group and made an announcement about the existence of a Sufi Spiritual Abuse Recovery Assistance Group that had been created and that was available for anyone who might feel the need of interacting in order to learn more about such issues. The notice about the spiritual abuse group was made in the other Sufi group but there was an editorial comment attached to the posting.

In effect, the comment went something like the following: if you have a question, go to your shaykh; if you have a problem, go to your shaykh; if you have doubts, go to your shaykh; if your faith feels vulnerable, go to your shaykh. The person who added this editorial comment to the notice about a spiritual abuse group, just didn't get it.

How can one go the shaykh, if that person is at the very epicenter of all one's questions, problems, doubts, and uncertainties? To be sure, on the path, all seekers encounter the whisperings of Iblis, or Satan, and the machinations of nafs (the seat of one's rebellious tendencies concerning the truth). Both of these forces will seek to undermine the resolve of anyone who steps onto the mystical path, and one of the techniques used by such forces in order to accomplish this is by going to work on weakening the initiate's relationship with the spiritual guide through the raising of certain kinds of doubts, questions, and so on in relation to the teacher.

However, the sexual exploitation of a mureed (initiate) by an alleged shaykh is not an instance of such whisperings and machinations. Furthermore, the use of lies, deceit, duplicity, manipulation, force, fear, intimidation, and authoritarian impositions

in order to control how people think, feel, and behave is not a function of such whisperings and manipulation either.

Yet, so-called spiritual guides who are well-versed in these sorts of technique are so clever and subtle in the way they spin their webs that one is often left wondering whether one is actually witnessing what one feels one is witnessing. Even veteran politicians of the most corrupt kind would have a great deal to learn about how to spin and re-frame things in order to keep people off-balance and puzzled about the actual nature of what is going on.

Because of this, abused people who are disclosing their experiences are often seeking consensual validation from other people who are involved in the same group situation. They want to be told that what is going on is not in one's imagination, or that what is going on shouldn't be going on and that the tales one is being told by the alleged shaykh are just a means of misdirection to take attention away from the actual character of the abusive behavior.

Yet, when the abused begin to speak out, people often do not to listen. Damn the abused for opening his or her mouth and raising such terrible issues. Damn the abused for caring and wanting to warn people about someone -- the teacher -- who is actively harming those who are gambling their whole lives on the veracity and alleged spirituality of such an individual. Damn the abused for making one feel so vulnerable and confused. Damn the abused for inducing one to question one's own motives and the *niyat*, or intention, of the so-called guide. Damn the abused for throwing into doubt one's assumed place in Paradise. Damn the abused for waking one from spiritual slumber. Damn the abused for undermining one's sense of being among the spiritual elite and chosen. Damn the abused for introducing factual evidence that indicates that people are being conned, swindled, cheated, lied to, manipulated, misinformed, and turned into obedient servants of evil. Damn the abused for making people feel like fools who have turned over the keys to their hearts, minds, finances, talents, time, resources, and lives to a spiritual fraud. Damn the abused for raising the possibility that one has been wasting x-years of one's life.

The process that one goes through when one attempts to warn people about a spiritually abusive individual who professes to be a spiritual teacher is a very instructive one. It has taught me a great deal

about myself and other people -- people whom I thought were my friends and people whom I thought cared about me or even loved me ... people whom I have lived with ... people whom I believed trusted me ... people who have known me for years and who have never known me to lie and who have sought out my assistance and counsel in many matters across the years ... people whom I would never believe would be capable of lying, manipulation, and deceit with respect to their interaction with me ... people who were willing to abandon relationships -- which had seen us sail many stormy seas together -- without losing a moment's sleep over it ... people who were willing to believe lies about me simply because someone they trusted (but shouldn't have) told them that the lies were true (just as Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, had taught his staff to do) and without them giving any consideration to such trifling details such as the truth of the matter concerning me, or the giving of evidence, or verification of such allegations.

Many of us are largely unaware of just how powerful some of the psychological and social forces are that manifest themselves in group dynamics or in the context of a teacher-student relationship. Or, perhaps, a more accurate way of saying this is that many of us have some awareness of these sort of forces but believe the latter are not all that powerful or apply, for the most part, to others -- not us.

When someone carries the label of shaykh, teacher, or guide, many people automatically will consider whatever such individuals say as being, without question, authoritative, true, sincere, based on acquired knowledge of a deep kind, expressions of Divine wisdom, and so on. This is so even though we might not be able to verify one thing the alleged teacher says.

Degrees of freedom are awarded to such individuals by most of us such that whatever they say and do is assumed to be a manifestation of mystical, secret, spiritual insight and understanding that has been gifted to them across many years of ascetic practices -- even though we might have never seen them perform any of these austerities and even though we are not privy to the precise nature of their relationship with Divinity. These same degrees of freedom are not likely to be extended to someone we meet on the street or even someone who is a friend if

either of the latter were to begin espousing this or that kind of spiritual philosophy.

There is a phenomenon in social psychology that is known as the 'halo effect'. This effect gives expression to the tendency within most of us that when we find people to be physically attractive, many of us tend to assign other positive qualities to these people as well, irrespective of what the truth of the matter might be. Similarly, if we consider people to be physically unattractive, then, many of us will assign other negative qualities to those people, quite independently of the realities of such situations.

When someone is called a shaykh and they are charming, charismatic, interesting, fun to be with, or play a musical instrument, and the like, the very fact of the 'teacher- label', together with whatever quality is displayed by the teacher that we, personally, find to be appealing and attractive in that teacher, then, these two factors are enough, quite frequently, to induce many people to assume -- without verification -- that such a person has many other positive qualities as well. In other words, we are dealing with a slight variation on the 'halo effect' outlined above.

No one really knows why there is this tendency in human beings. I'm only concerned, at the moment, with the fact that such a phenomenon does exist.

The presence of the 'halo effect' tends to induce us to lower our defenses and render us more receptive to whatever such a person has to say as well as makes us more vulnerable to whatever sorts of influence might be manifested through that person. There is a reason why advertising often features sexually attractive men and women because both sex appeal and attractiveness help generate a powerful halo effect that can shape how people think and feel about products and issues (there are also other themes involving modeling and learning theory that are applicable here, but, for the moment, the focus is on the way the presence of the 'halo effect' can affect our judgment and perceptions of reality).

To go in a slightly different, but not unconnected, direction, Henry Kissinger once said words, to the effect, that the greatest aphrodisiac was power. What greater power could there be than to be in the presence of a 'friend of God'? To be close to such an individual is heady

stuff. Furthermore, to have such an individual know our name and to take an apparent interest in us and our lives and to be willing to help one, is often quite intoxicating and exhilarating.

This is another kind of halo effect at work. If one is in close proximity to a 'friend' of God, then, perhaps, one is chosen and special just like this alleged Divine emissary is. One basks in the glow of juxtaposition and one feels or hopes or anticipates that some of the assumed qualities of God's agent might belong, in some lesser fashion of course, to oneself, as well -- even though there might be little, or no, evidence to support the reality of such beliefs.

Quite a few years ago, Robert Rosenthal wrote about a phenomenon that he dubbed the 'Pygmalion Effect'. To make a long study short, he found he could alter the degree of academic success among selected students merely by getting teachers to believe that such students possessed certain kinds of intellectual potential. By altering the expectations of teachers, he was able to show that these altered expectations led to significantly better academic performance in those students who had been randomly selected and labeled as students who were ready for academic success as compared with those children for whom such expectations had not been introduced among the teachers. Teachers began to pay more attention to these designated students and extend assistance to them -- assistance that previously was not being extended to such students. The teachers began to be more receptive to what these individuals said and did ... now seeing intelligence and ability where, before, the teachers had seen not much of anything.

If reality is 'framed' in certain ways (whether by a clever psychologist, experimenter, sales person, or an alleged spiritual guide), we tend to develop beliefs and expectations in accordance with the nature of the framing process. In school settings, this can lead to academic success or failure (because there is also a 'negative' Pygmalion Effect with which all too many students are familiar) among students according to the expectations that teachers have of such students, and in spiritual circles, as well, the 'Pygmalion effect' can lead to our having various expectations about the spiritual abilities and qualities of an alleged teacher, once someone -- whether the

teacher, a friend, a book, or a follower -- introduces the idea that such an individual is a shaykh, guide, teacher, pir or murshid.

None of this necessarily has anything to do with the actual ability or quality of this alleged shaykh. Everything is just a function of our expectations and how these expectations alter our perception of reality as well as how we interpret the nature of our interaction with others ... in this case, a so-called spiritual guide.

We meet someone who is called a shaykh, and, immediately, many of us begin to see, imagine, feel, think, and believe things that might have little to do with the on-going reality. We read into events and construct our world view according to the manner in which our expectations create certain images in our minds and hearts. We filter reality through such expectations and often tend to disregard whatever experiential evidence there is that is inconsistent with these sorts of expectation.

A fraudulent spiritual teacher might do various things to cultivate our expectations, as well. One such individual whom I have met used to repeatedly say: "I never lie", or, "I never use people", or, "I am always sincere", or, "I never interfere in marriages", and, consequently, when people around him encountered evidence that contradicted what he claimed, and because they believed him to be a shaykh -- which, thereby, afforded the so-called shaykh quite a few degrees of latitude of good will -- they re-framed or reinterpreted the evidence to make it consistent with the mantra that he kept repeating ... well, since by his own account, this man 'of' God never lies, or never uses people, and is always sincere, then, 'obviously', what is going on must be something else -- something that, because of the mysterious nature of mysticism we just don't understand. In this way, many false spiritual guides are able to hide in plain sight, because we, ourselves, help to maintain that individual's camouflage.

Solomon Asch, a social psychologist, devised a experiment in 1951 that examined the way individual perception might be affected by other people. In simplified form, the study posed a task that, ostensibly, required subjects to judge that of three lines on one card matched, a single line on another card.

Subjects were placed in a group setting, and unknown to the subject, the other people in the group were all confederates of the

experimenter. Each person in the group was required to make a judgment about which of three lines on card placed near the right side of the person was equal in length to a single line appearing on a card placed near the person's left side.

One of the variables studied was the effect that a subject's placement in the group had upon a subject's response. In other words, the researchers wanted to know if a subject's judgment, with respect to the assigned perceptual task, would vary with where, in the group sequence, a subject was asked to respond to the judgment task.

When confederates selected a pairing that was clearly in error (that is, the line selected from among the three on one card did not match the single line on the other card, and the error was very obvious), the experimenters found that about a third of the subjects went along with the erroneous judgment of the confederates when they were required to respond last in the group. Furthermore, the more confederates there were in the group who were asked to give a judgment before the subject gave his or her response, the more pronounced the influence of the group was on the judgment of a subject in cases where the confederates were clearly wrong in their 'judgments'.

The explanations that the subjects gave, when debriefed after the experiment as to why they went along with the erroneous group judgment, are very instructive. Some of the subjects, when confronted with a group judgment that differed from their own, assumed that the group's judgment must be correct and their own perceptions must be wrong.

Some other subjects knew that the group was wrong in its judgment, but, nevertheless, they went along with the group because they didn't wish to be considered different from the group. Still other subjects claimed that they saw the mismatched pair as being equivalent, despite the obvious difference in length.

Now, someone might look at the Asch experiment and say: "Big deal - so what if a few people were dumb enough to permit their judgment and behavior to be affected by what others in a group said or did. Surely, to discover that a third of the subjects tested were susceptible to being manipulated is not all that significant."

The Asch experiment was intentionally designed in a very simple way. It focused on a perceptual task where there could be little doubt that the judgment of the other people in the group (the confederates) was erroneous, and, yet, people went along with that incorrect judgment, and some of the subjects even swore up and down that they 'saw' the two lines are being equal when such was very clearly not the case.

What if we were to take a context that did not involve a simple, visual stimulus -- a situation where the issues were more complex, iffy, ambiguous, muddled, and open to a variety of interpretations? Isn't it likely that the percentage of people whose judgments might be affected by what others in a group said and did might rise significantly -- especially if those other people were all saying very similar things to one another?

One tends to feel very uncomfortable when one goes in a direction that is not consonant with the position of a group of individuals with whom one is friendly or associating. This tends to create stress, anxiety, alienation, and anomie in the one who is in opposition to the group.

We are creatures of consensual validation. We often seek out the opinion of others to shore up our own confidence about what we see, hear, feel, believe, think, and do, and in the absence of agreement about such matters, we tend to get nervous and uncomfortable, filled with existential angst about our status, vis-à-vis reality and the truth.

If one translates the foregoing considerations into spiritual group dynamics, one is likely to experience a great deal of dissonance when one tries to tell others that one believes the alleged teacher is perpetrating various kinds of spiritual abuse. More often than not, one will be met with considerable disbelief and anger toward oneself on the part of those in whom one confides or with whom one seeks to engage in discussion. More often than not, the abused person is perceived to be the problem, not the so-called teacher, and because of experiments like Asch's, one begins to understand that there are powerful forces at work -- forces that can make an abused person wonder if the whole thing is just in her or his mind, just a figment of their paranoid imagination, and forces that can cause others who are

listening to one's 'story' to shift -- sometimes very rapidly -- between believing and not believing what is being said.

Elizabeth Loftus, who is a professor of psychology, as well as associated with the Law School, at the University of Washington, has been studying the relationship among imagination, memory, perception, and belief for a number of years. Her work in the area of false memory syndrome, together with the many problems surrounding the reliability of eye-witness testimony has shed a great deal of light on these processes.

Among the many things that Professor Loftus has demonstrated is how many of us have a tendency, under different circumstances, to invent reality based on the kinds of information or misinformation we are given by others ... information that frames the way we remember and perceive events. This distortion of remembered events, or the generation of false autobiographical beliefs (that is, beliefs which are not actually reflective of our past experience), or the confabulation (the interjection of imagined happenings to create a seemingly consistent story line concerning some event we have experienced) are all psychological processes that occur, from time to time, under a variety of settings, in many, if not most, of us. We might not even be aware that this is happening as we do it or as we are asked questions about our past or about on-going events.

The moral of the foregoing points is not that our understanding of reality or our grasp of the truth are total fabrications. At the same time, in the light of the sort of phenomena being studied by Professor Loftus, we should not be so quick to suppose that our understanding is accurately reflective of the truth of things, for there are many forces and factors that can alter and influence how we experience and interpret the events of life. In very important ways, we construct worlds within our consciousness and project these onto the reality of things, treating the former as if they were the latter, and conflating the two. Disentangling the two is not an easy or straightforward process.

When someone claims to be a spiritual master, the claim might, or might not, be true. But, it is a claim that should not be accepted at face value because there are just too many ways in which we are vulnerable to having our perceptions, beliefs, understandings, and

judgments concerning the nature of reality or truth altered and influenced in distorted, misleading, false directions.

Yet, many people, unaware of the foregoing possibilities, might insist that they 'know' that a given person is an authentic teacher, not realizing how their understandings have been shaped, colored, and framed by the use of a variety of psychological techniques and social forces. Under such circumstances, many of these people are unwilling to even consider or look at evidence that might contradict their constructed versions of reality concerning questions about the actual authenticity of a given, alleged spiritual guide or the legitimacy of a specific spiritual path -- moreover, many of these individuals might become quite hostile and mean when anyone approaches them with such evidence.

Attitudes and beliefs, once formed, are very resistant to change. We would like to claim that we are rational beings who are willing to examine evidence objectively through the use of logic and impartial, methodical analysis, but, unfortunately, when push comes to shove, and we are faced with a choice of having, on the one hand, to change our attitudes and beliefs or, on the other hand, needing to reject evidence, many of us would prefer to ignore, hide, and re-frame evidence than we would be inclined to alter our precious attitudes and beliefs.

Back in the 1960s, Stanley Milgram, who was at Yale, did a series of studies concerning obedience and compliance. The results are rather sobering and disturbing.

A newspaper ad is run in a New Haven newspaper that offered \$4.50 in exchange for an hour's time of anyone who signed up for the experiment. The ad indicated the study is about memory and learning.

The people who respond to the ad are just average human beings who like the idea of participating in an interesting investigation. These individuals are introduced to a person who is dressed in a white coat and looks like a scientist or academician and appears to be very serious about the project.

In addition, the people who have responded to the ad are introduced to a friendly, affable, fellow participant in the study. The individual conducting the project indicates that the study is designed

to focus on the possible effects that punishment has in relation to learning.

One of the participants is to be the teacher, and one of the two individuals is to be a student. Lots are drawn in order to assign the student and teacher roles. Once these roles have been assigned, the two participants are taken into a second room by the individual conducting the study, and the person who has been identified as the student, through the drawing of lots, is strapped into a chair.

An electrode, to which a conductive gel has been applied, is attached to the student's arm. The person running the experiment, then, explains that the electrode is connected to a generator in the other room that, when certain switches are thrown, is capable of delivering an electric shock to the student.

The purpose of the electric shocks is to punish the student for incorrect responses to the test items that are presented to the would-be learner. Naturally, the question is raised about whether, or not, the shocks are capable of doing any permanent damage. The participants are told that although the shocks can be quite painful, no tissue damage will occur.

The student is left in one room, strapped to a chair, and the teacher is taken into an adjoining room containing the shock generator. The machine has a console with 30 switches and each of the toggles is labeled with a different voltage, running from 15 volts up to 450 volts.

Furthermore, each of the switches also has a label associated with it that indicates the degree of severity for that given level of shock/punishment -- and these labels range from mild to dangerous, and the 29th and 30th switches have an XXX label next to them.

The learning task is described as a paired association task in which the teacher recites a word, and the student must give an appropriate word of association for the original word. Shocks are to be administered by the teacher whenever the learner gives an incorrect response, and, moreover, for each incorrect response on the part of the student, the learner is not only given a shock, but afterwards, the level of shock is increased by 15 volts that is to be delivered by throwing another, 'higher-level' switch among the graduated set of 30 switches,

whenever the next incorrect response is given for a subsequent word pair.

Before the experiment begins, the teacher is given a 15 volt shock in order to both test the machine, to be sure that it is functioning properly, as well as to give the teacher a taste of what the punishment feels like at the very lowest level of shock. The shock is sufficient to make the arm of the teacher tingle.

Once the experiment begins, the first several word pairings go easily and without any need of punishment. Eventually, however, a mistake is made by the learner, and a shock is administered. Before very long, the student is making quite a few errors, and with each mistake, the level of voltage applied to the learner becomes higher and higher.

When the voltage of the shock reaches 75 volts, the teacher can hear an audible grunt from the student through the wall that separates the teacher from the learner. Similar sounds are heard when shocks of 90 and 105 volts are administered during subsequent punishment for incorrect responses.

When the level of shock reaches 120 volts, the student indicates clearly that the punishment is becoming very painful. When the shock reaches 150 volts, the learner yells out that he wants to be released and doesn't want to continue on with the experiment. The nature of such protests and exclamations of pain become more intense as the level of voltage is increased.

If the teacher should express reservations or anxieties about what is going on or what she or he is hearing, the experimenter will simply indicate to the teacher that the study needs to be completed or that the learner is being paid for his or her participation or that the teacher must continue and cannot stop. These instructions are given in a detached manner.

As the shocks proceed past 150 volts, the remonstrations of the learner become more and more agonizing. At a certain point, the learner yells the pain is unbearable.

When the 20th switch is reached (300 volts), frantic pounding is heard on the wall behind that the learner is strapped in, and the student begs to be freed from the chair, to be let out of the room. After

the 22nd switch has been thrown (330 volts), there is no further sounds emanating from the room in which the learner is situated.

The teacher is informed that silence on the part of the learner is to be interpreted as an incorrect response. With each lack of response to the next word pair, a shock is delivered and, as well, the level of shock continues to be increased by 15 volts, in anticipation of the next incorrect answer by the learner. Once the 30th switch has been thrown, the experiment is over.

Now, before continuing on, I should point out that, in fact, no shocks were ever administered to the 'dim-witted' learners. In fact, the learner was a confederate in the experiment who was playing a role, and everything had been pre-arranged so that the only actual subjects in the experiment were the people who had responded to the newspaper advertisement.

Independently of the experimental set-up, psychologists and university students were asked to estimate the level of shock at which they, if they had been assigned the role as teachers, would discontinue participating in the experiment. On average, the psychologists who were polled said that if they had been the teacher, they would have dropped out when the level of shock reached 120 volts. The university students who were asked the same question indicated that, on average, they would have stopped at 135 volts.

120-135 volts is the point at which the learners invariably began to complain about the pain they felt from the shocks being administered. No one among either the psychologists or the university students who were polled indicated that they would have tossed all 30 switches.

When asked to predict what other 'teachers' might have done in such an experiment, the university students suggested that, on average, only 1/10th of one per cent of the teachers would go through all 30 levels of shock. The psychologists predicted that 4/10ths of one per cent of the subjects would run through the full complement of switches.

No one was prepared for what actually took place. Over 60 per cent of the subjects in the experiment -- the ones who were the 'teachers' -- went through the full complement of 30 switches.

Many of these people were in obvious emotional distress and agony as they did so. Many of them struggled with the moral issue of what was going on -- that is, having to choose between whether to harm another human being or to continue to comply with the directives of the experimenter.

Many of the subjects stopped numerous times, only to be prodded back into action again by the detached, emotionless urging of the experimenter that the study needed to be completed or that the subject really had no choice but to go on as instructed. Many of the subjects broke down in tears or exhibited signs of anxiety, frustration, trembling, intense conflict, uncontrollable laughter, and indecision, but in the end, over 60 per cent of these average people kept upping the level of what they believed were extremely painful shocks until they ran out of switches to throw.

The same experiment was run in a number of other countries. The number of subjects in these other countries who threw all 30 switches never went below 60 per cent. Furthermore, in some countries, this percentage was even higher than in the United States, reaching 85 per cent of the participants in one country.

In some of the other variants on this experiment, the researchers wanted to study what effect the teacher's proximity to the learner might have in relation to how far a subject would be willing to comply with the experimenter's wishes. In some of these instances, the researchers required the 'teacher' to hold down the hand of the 'learner' on the plate that, supposedly, was delivering shocks, and, they found that such a requirement did not appreciably affect the percentage of people who, if necessary, were prepared to see the experiment through across all 30 switches.

In all of the different variants of the experiment, the subjects were asked, after the experiment had been completed, to indicate, on a scale of 1 to 14 (with 14 being the most severe), how painful they believed the shocks were. Most of them responded with '14', so, they were aware of the pain that was being caused.

One of the reasons for going into such detail in relation to Milgram's research is to help illustrate a certain dimension of the forces that are at work in many of us when it comes to our willingness to comply and be obedient to someone whom we consider to be an

expert, or knowledgeable, or whom we perceive to be in authority -- even when we have serious misgivings about what we are being told or about what we see going on. All too many people are prepared to behave in callous, hurtful, irrational ways as long as there is someone to whom they defer -- like a spiritual guide -- telling one that it is all right to proceed, even though people (including the seeker) might be damaged in the process. Moreover, for many of us, when our vested interests are being threatened, then, truth, morality, integrity, decency, and justice frequently become the first casualties.

The subjects in the Milgram experiment were told that although the shocks that might be delivered to a learner could be very painful, no serious or permanent tissue damage would result. Presumably, this assurance might have played a role in helping to comfort or buffer the subjects such that although they believed the shocks that were being administered were painful, nevertheless, no permanent damage would result.

In view of this possibility, perhaps, it should not be surprising if 'seekers', who are troubled by what is going on within a supposedly mystical group, were to find comfort in the words of an alleged spiritual guide who says that what he or she (that is, the so-called guide) is doing is necessary for the spiritual good of the people in the group, or that even though while on a mundane, worldly level that which 'appears' to be going on might seem deceitful or a lie or manipulative or duplicitous or authoritarian or exploitive or controlling that, nonetheless, the alleged spiritual guide knows what she or he is doing, and, therefore, no permanent damage will result -- only good will ensue.

In light of the Milgram studies, one should not be surprised when average, non-psychotic individuals are willing to participate in 'Divine trickery' that is designed, so the false teacher says, to help separate seekers from their normal modes of consciousness and problematic ways of understanding and engaging Divinity. After all, when people are induced to believe that spiritual reality doesn't have to operate in accordance with the requirements of rational considerations, then, almost anything becomes possible for someone if we believe that such a person is a spiritual being, a friend of God, someone who possesses insight into the mysteries of being.

Fraudulent teachers take a truth -- namely, that there is, most definitely, a difference between the rational and the trans-rational (which is not irrational but transcends normal modes of rational thought and logic) -- and they exploit that truth, twisting it and altering the nature of its reality to accommodate their own distorted purposes. To be sure, rational thought will never, on its own find the way to Revelation or to the spiritual station of a Prophet, or to the mystical understanding of a Rumi, Hafiz, or Ibn al-'Arabi (may Allah be pleased with them), but this does not entitle someone to take license with the truth by trying to say that anything and everything one wishes to claim about what is, and is not, permissible on the mystical path, thereby, becomes true.

Yet, how is a would-be seeker to know this? If an alleged spiritual guide comes along and, like the authority-figure in the Milgram studies (i.e., the person in the white frock coat with the clip board who is, supposedly, the one conducting the experiment) says, "hey, look, everything, despite appearances, is quite OK," well, shouldn't we leave such things to the experts, the academics, the people in charge, the authorities. Surely, they know what they are doing, and who are we -- the great unwashed and ignorant dregs of humanity -- to suggest otherwise?

The Inquisition, the Salem Witch Trials, Nazi Germany, Senator Joe McCarthy, Stalin's Russia, Mai Lai, Pol Pot's reign of terror, Jonestown, Sabra & Shatila, the Waco tragedy, Srebrenica, the decades-long debacle of the Catholic Church, along with many other examples of abuse don't 'just' happen. They occur because they are linked to mechanisms, phenomena, effects, processes, and influences within human beings ... mechanisms and influences to which all of us might become vulnerable under the right set of circumstances.

Less one suppose that intelligence has anything to do with how a person might respond in the 'right' setting, one would do well to consider an experiment conducted by Philip Zimbardo at Stanford University during the summer of 1971. The results are, again, very instructive, if rather disquieting.

The experiment was intended to run for two weeks. Students were randomly divided up into two groups -- guards and prisoners.

Within a few days the experiment had to be shut down because the guards were exhibiting considerable sadistic behavior, and the prisoners were becoming deeply depressed and showing extensive symptoms of stress and anxiety.

There are at least two features of interest in this experiment -- that is, aside from the obvious ... namely, the willingness of supposedly intelligent students to become sadistic toward fellow students even while being observed. The first point of interest revolves about the relatively short period of time that was needed for sadistic behavior to surface, and, secondly, the experiment had to be shut down by the professor, rather than by those who were being abused but were trying to comply with the requirements of what they perceived to be the professor's expectations concerning the study.

Or, consider a study conducted by D.L. Rosenhahn, a professor of law and psychology at Stanford University. In the January 1973 issue of the journal, 'Science', an article of his was published, entitled: "On Being Sane in Insane Places".

Essentially, Rosenhahn had a number of his students go to 12 hospitals, across five different states, along both coasts of the United States. Eleven of these hospitals were public and funded by state, federal, and university funds, and one of the hospitals was privately run.

The task of these students was to see if they could gain admission as psychiatric patients by presenting only one symptom -- hearing voices that were rather unclear with respect to what was being said. All other information that these 'pseudo-patients' gave was to be truthful.

After being admitted, the abnormal symptoms would cease, and they pseudo-patients would seek to be released ... which did not always happen -- at least, not right away. The resulting experiences of these pseudo-patients revealed a great deal about the institutional depersonalization that occurs during confinement with patients, and the difficulty of doctors to be able to distinguish between sane and insane people -- whether during admission or for purposes of release.

After the first part of the study had been completed, there were several hospitals that learned about the project and indicated that they

were highly doubtful that such pseudo-patients could escape their diagnostic detection. The staff at these hospitals was informed by Professor Rosenhahn that at some point -- over a given, three month period -- there would be a number of pseudo- patients sent to them, and the challenge would be to identify these latter individuals from among all the other people who came to them for diagnosis.

At these hospitals the staff members were asked to rate the potential patients who were being considered for admission as to the likelihood of being a pseudo-patient.

By study's end there had been 193 patients who had been rated by the staff members of the participating hospitals. 21% of these patients (41) were considered, with a high level of confidence, to be pseudo-patients by at least one staff member of a given hospital. 12% of the 193 patients (23) were suspected of being pseudo-patients by at least one psychiatrist, and 10% of the sample (19) were judged to be possible pseudo-patients by both a staff member and a psychiatrist at the same time.

Actually, Professor Rosenhahn had pulled another fast one. During the three month period in which the study was conducted, no pseudo-patients were sent to either of the two hospitals who had accepted the challenge, and, therefore, there were a fairly large number of false-positives that had been committed during diagnosis by the staff and psychiatrists of these hospitals.

There are a number of lessons to be learned from the Rosenhahn study. Perhaps, one of the most important of these lessons -- at least, in the present context -- is how the expectations of professionals were capable of being manipulated to induce them to see something that was not true and, yet, believe they knew what was going on -- all that was necessary was for the right kind of 'framing' of a situation to take place.

The placebo effect is a well-documented phenomenon. If people are led to believe, or to have the expectation, that a pill with no active ingredients is capable of producing certain kinds of effects, precisely those effects will take place in many people.

Consequently, if people are led to believe that a so-called spiritual guide has special sorts of knowledge, quality, ability, and so on, then,

many people will experience altered states of consciousness as a function of this expectation. The actual reality of the alleged teacher's spiritual status might, up to a point, be irrelevant to what is transpiring in an individual's life.

Between 1927 and 1932 a research project was conducted at the Hawthorne works of the Western Electric Company in Chicago. While there are many controversial methodological and interpretive issues swirling about these studies, in essence, the investigation attempted to examine the relationship between changes in working conditions and productivity.

A variety of physical and psychological factors were altered to see what impact such changes would have on worker productivity. Oddly enough, they found that whatever changes were introduced, productivity increases ensued.

Harvard Business School professor George Elton Mayo -- together with several associates, F.J. Roethlisberger and William J. Dickson -- concluded, in part, that one way to explain or interpret the observed increases in productivity that took place, no matter what physical and psychological variables were introduced, was to suppose that what the workers were primarily responding to was the attention being paid to them and that they were trying to respond positively to this attention.

There is an old adage that a change is as good as a vacation. Apparently, there is some indication in the Hawthorne Effect that merely by showing interest in people, the latter individuals might have experienced enhanced levels of: motivation, sense of importance, self-esteem, well-being, morale, and so on.

People who accept initiation through even a false teacher will often remark about all the great changes that they believe are entering their lives as a result of the 'blessing', or barakah, of being associated with a given, alleged teacher. In many of these cases, a combination of suggestibility, placebo effect, together with variations on the Hawthorne, Halo, and Pygmalion Effects are structuring the individual's experience and reality.

There is a certain amount of corroborating data with respect to the Hawthorne Effect. However, the data comes from psychotherapy rather than management studies.

Many researchers have found that the success rates of various kinds of therapy are almost indistinguishable from one another. As long as these treatment methods contain elements of warmth, acceptance, personal contact, positive regard, support, encouragement, and so on, patients seem to do equally well and make various degrees of improvement with one kind of theoretical treatment as another. On the other hand, there is the very disturbing bit of evidence -- for therapists -- that two-thirds of many classes of psychotic individuals experience spontaneous remission, for a time, irrespective of whether anything is done or not.

Similarly, many problems that people experience tend to sort themselves, by the Grace of God, quite independently of the presence of a spiritual guide. Of course, fraudulent teachers are very adept at re-framing such realities and taking credit for the positive things, while using on-going problems as case exhibits for the seeker's need to apply herself or himself all that much harder to the mystical discipline.

Moreover, there has been evidence collected that suggests that patients tend to have dreams that reflect the theoretical predilections of their therapists. Should, therefore, we be surprised when a seeker begins to have dreams that reflect the teachings of a fraudulent teacher?

The foregoing discussion is not meant to imply that there is no such thing as real mysticism or authentic guides, or legitimate spiritual experiences. Rather, the intention is quite different since, in truth, I do accept the idea that there are hidden dimensions to life and that there are methods that enhance one's chances, God willing, to be opened to these possibilities -- possibilities that are rooted in the essential identity of human beings as well as the purpose of life.

In general, there are only two kinds of mistakes a researcher can commit. A scientist might accept a hypothesis as true, when, in fact, it is false, or an investigator might consider a hypothesis to be false that, in reality, is true. Seekers after mystical truth are, in effect, researchers. They are trying to test various hypotheses and determine whether such and such is, or is not, true.

Is a given Path authentic? Is a given experience a function of imagination or an instance of an actual mystical state? Does a certain dream mean this, or that, or something else? Am I making spiritual

progress? Will such and such a practice be spiritually beneficial or harmful? Am I wasting my time? With whom should I associate for best spiritual results? How should I balance the different facets of my life? What is the moral thing to do? Will I achieve Paradise and/or spiritual Self-realization? How will I know whether what I am experiencing is real or illusory or Satanically inspired?

People who have invested heavily in one individual -- namely, an alleged spiritual guide -- with respect to all their hopes, dreams, expectations, commitments, beliefs, values, purposes, and meanings concerning their (the seekers) spiritual future and welfare, often tend to be extremely resistant to any information that indicates there is considerable evidence to lend credence to the possibility that the so-called teacher is nothing more than a clever charlatan, and, therefore, the trust of the former individuals has not been well placed. There are many reasons for this, but part of the answer for such behavior is a function of a phenomenon known as cognitive dissonance.

Back in 1956, Leon Festinger, along with Henry W. Riecken and Stanley Schachter, wrote about a small cult who, long before the X-Files was even a gleam in the eye of Chris Carter, followed the teachings of Mrs. Marian Keech, a housewife, who believed, or made claims to the effect, that she was in touch with aliens and was receiving messages from them via automatic writing. Apparently, the messages described a coming world-cataclysm, from which people, who obeyed the instructions coming to Mrs. Keech from the aliens, might be saved.

Many, if not most, of the followers of Mrs. Keech sold, or gave away, their possessions and left the previous life that they had been living. They had put all their trust in one thing -- the alien messages -- and were waiting for the appointed date.

When the predicted date of the cataclysm came and went, but nothing happened, the researchers were interested in what would happen to the cult. The people conducting the study discovered something rather curious.

Contrary to what one might expect, instead of turning their backs on the teachings, the commitment of many of the followers in the group became even more fervent than before the date of the failed 'prophecy'. And, of course, a relevant question to ask is: why should this sort of behavior take place under these kinds of circumstance --

namely, in the face of evidence that a key part of one's belief system has been falsified?

Cognitive dissonance is the study of the dynamics among attitudes/beliefs, experiential data, and behavior -- especially in those cases when there is dissonance, or disharmony, among these three components. Will attitudes/beliefs change, will behavior change, or will experience be re-framed in order to accommodate either the structure of one's attitudes/beliefs and/or the nature of one's behavior?

In many contexts involving groups that have formed around spiritual frauds, merely exposing members of that group to compelling evidence that there is something seriously amiss in, say, the moral conduct of the teacher, will not necessarily be enough to alter either the attitudes/beliefs or behaviors of those members. There are a lot of reasons for why this is so, and one has to look to the personal history, vulnerabilities, emotional character, personality, needs, and motivations of such individuals to gain insight into the particular mechanisms at work in a given person.

In almost all cases, however, one should try to follow the vested interests of these people. In other words, one has to try to understand what such people believe they stand to lose if they accept, as true, what is being said in the way of contradictory evidence concerning the authenticity of their spiritual guide.

Some people believe that salvation itself is at stake. Others might believe that Paradise is being placed at risk, or they see opportunities slipping away -- such as realizing the purpose of life, or they feel threatened that they might become alienated from the truth, or they fear becoming the vassal of Satanic forces should they leave their teacher (indeed, they perceive the presentation of evidence as one of the overtures of Satan), or they fear the lost of access to essential identity, or they do not wish to forego the ego gratification and/or power and/or perks they receive as someone who has been appointed a teacher or shaykh by the fraudulent spiritual guide.

Whenever one is talking about issues and forces as powerful, fundamental, and essential as the foregoing possibilities, it becomes understandable that for some people, the idea of changing either attitudes/beliefs or behaviors to accommodate available evidence is

more antithetical to their interests than is re-framing the evidence and labeling the information as lies, or fabrications, or character assassination, or the workings of Satan, or the delusions of a disenchanted, former follower, or the result of some personal defect of the individual who is introducing, or trying to, the evidence.

Some of these 'true-believers' are even proud -- arrogantly so -- of their own willingness to completely ignore truth, reality, evidence, proof, common sense while maintaining an unwavering commitment to the idea that their spiritual guide is authentic even when the evidence says otherwise. They equate dogmatism, authoritarian rigidity, foolishness, ignorance, and a closed heart or mind with the light of faith and are too self-absorbed to understand the differences.

Shirk is the act of associating partners with God by attempting to speak in terms of, or by seeking to refer to, primary causes for why things are the way they are that are other than Divinity. There are two kinds of shirk --the lesser and the greater.

We all tend to commit mistakes with respect to the lesser form of shirk. Thus, when we accept accolades for something that has been accomplished -- whether career success, athletic achievement, financial/material wherewithal, spiritual progress, or whatever -- this is an expression of the lesser shirk, for, in truth, the doer and accomplisher in all of this is none other than God. It was in reference to this kind of shirk that Ra'bia of Basra chastised a Sufi -- who had been extolling the differences between his lofty opinion of his own form of worship with the paltry nature of the worship of ordinary Muslims -- by exclaiming: "Thy existence is a sin with which none other can compare."

However, those people who refuse to acknowledge and accept the truths of experience that God brings into their lives concerning the fraudulent character of an alleged spiritual teacher are running the risk of committing the greater shirk because these people are maintaining that the teachings and behavior of a human being have a greater claim on reality, truth, and authenticity than does Divinity.

In many ways, one should forget what a person, who claims to be a shaykh, says. One should, instead, look to the conduct of that person.

Many people have learned how to mimic the lexicon and vocabulary of a supposedly spiritual, knowledgeable individual, but far fewer individuals have become masters of the adab that is expressed through the conduct of beautiful character -- especially now, as we are approaching the end of the beginning of the Latter Days, and in this respect we might do well to reflect carefully on the Qur'an verse that refers to these 'foremost' among human beings as being only a "few of those of later time." (Qur'an 56:14)

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) did not lie to people; he did not exploit them; he did not manipulate them; he did not try to control them; he did not sexually abuse them; he was not unjust to them; he did not try to use his status as a Prophet of God to gain material or material advantage over others; he was not insincere with people -- whether they were Muslims or non-Muslims; he did not seek to oppress individuals; nor did he try to claim that his exalted spiritual station permitted him to forego observing the basic pillars of Islam or any aspect of spiritual adab. He was kind, compassionate, forgiving, tolerant, forbearing, patient, generous, loving, honest, courageous, steadfast, sincere, protective, just, encouraging, supportive, receptive, considerate, mild, noble, humble, one who hid the faults of others and did not speak ill of them, who was the first to fulfill his obligations, duties, contracts, and the requirements of adab -- with respect to Divinity, as well as with respect to the Creation of Divinity.

If the conduct of someone does not remind one of the Prophet (peace be upon him) conduct, or does not bear a reasonable facsimile to the demeanor of what we know about the behavior of the Prophet (peace be upon him) -- and none of us can hope to bear any more than a reasonable likeness according to our God-given capacity to do so (this is what is meant by "reasonable" in the present context) -- but if such an individual claims to be an authentic spiritual guide, then, one should run away from such an individual as fast as possible. However, do not suppose that one can assess the quality of a person's conduct from afar, or through a book, or through taped discourses, or videos, or e-mails, or a Web Site, or through only casual, intermittent, occasional contact.

Many spiritual charlatans are able to maintain their cover of alleged mystical acumen by keeping their distance from people. They limit access to themselves, not for legitimate reasons, but in order that people do not have the opportunity to discover the emperor is, in fact, not wearing any mantel of spiritual authenticity.

I spent 17 years with my first shaykh. During this period of time, I interacted with him a great deal ... often on an almost daily basis. I went on several extended journeys with him to a number of foreign countries. I was able to observe his conduct across a wide variety of circumstances, problems, pressures, and issues. He was a man of complete integrity and elegance -- spiritually, academically, and socially -- as well as a friend and guide.

Pretty much everything I have learned that is of any value arose from the time I spent with my shaykh ... from the things I learned by observing him live life. This was the essential pillar of my spiritual training, and whatever practices I have done in the way of prayers, fasting, seclusions, zikr, contemplation, and so on were rooted in the aforementioned spiritual edifice.

Comparatively speaking, I spent very little time with a second person who, for a time, I considered to be an authentic shaykh. Perhaps, all told, I might have spent 4 or 5 months out of 10 years in close proximity to this second individual, moreover, many of these circumstances were of limited difficulty, consisting of talks or discussions, either of an individual nature or among a group of people. Much of my interaction with him was via phone or e-mail.

I have since come to learn that there were a number of things that were staged whenever I would visit this man. In other words, he behaved differently in my presence than he did in the presence of others, and when I came to learn of some of these differences, I knew things were being hidden from me and that my interaction with him was something of a managed stage play where everyone but me knew the nature of the production that was going on.

I came to know of my first -- and, as far as I know, only -- shaykh's spiritual character by direct exposure to his conduct. I came to learn of the second person's character -- or lack thereof -- by direct exposure to his conduct, especially after the artificial aspects of the relationship had been removed through ensuing events.

Both of the foregoing individuals spoke very well -- although each in his own way -- about the theory of tasawwuf. Based on what was said, both individuals appeared to be very knowledgeable about spiritual matters, but the factor that separated the wheat from the chaff was the quality of conduct, and in this respect, one person (the former individual) has been nothing but pure joy, while the other individual (the second person mentioned above) has become a living nightmare who spews evil where ever he goes, and, for me, it took time to realize that this is what he is all about because of the many techniques he used to re-frame events that were going on, and because of a certain number of degrees of freedom he was granted by me based on an assumption -- a false one -- that he was an authentic spiritual guide.

Understanding what I do now, I can see how he exploited vulnerabilities and the good-will that I had been extended to him based on my foregoing assumption. Understanding what I do now, I have come to recognize the techniques of re-framing, misdirection, compliance, manipulation, misinformation, disinformation, deceit and duplicity he employed to keep me ignorant of what he was actually up to.

People who choose to stay with this sort of man and refuse to look at, or consider, the evidence that has accumulated concerning the spiritually fraudulent character of that individual, are protecting vested interests of their nafs. As indicated previously, what these interests are vary from individual to individual, and, they can be fairly complicated in structure.

Having tried to apprise such individuals about the dangers of their situation, I have been vociferously rebuffed by a number of them. I do have a certain degree of appreciation with respect to the nature of the dynamics that are in play in such rebuffs, and some of these processes, effects, phenomena, and forces I have outlined in the foregoing discussion.

The process has been very upsetting, stressful, depressing, frustrating, problematic, and painful. But, I am very thankful to Allah for: having carried me across this spiritual chasm, as well as for having set me down in my current spiritual and geographical location, as well as for the many lessons I have learned in being permitted, by the Grace

of Allah, to make the difficult journey across the boundary between where I was and where I am now.

Chapter 26: A Fate Worse Than Death

Several frequent, and related, questions concerning the experience of spiritual abuse are the following: (1) how does one become entangled in such abuse in the first place; (2) when one begins to see possible evidence for the presence of spiritually abusive activities, why is there an inclination to stay within such an environment; and, (3) once one decides to leave, why are there so many emotional, psychological and spiritual problems that tend to arise in conjunction with such a decision -- why is parting from an abusive context so sorrowful and difficult?

If one takes a look at the available literature, from: Robert Jay Lifton, to: Margaret Singer, Steve Hassan, the Cultic Journal, and beyond, there are a multiplicity of theories that are offered as ways of providing answers to the foregoing questions. Although all of these theories have their strengths and heuristic value, nonetheless, for a variety of reasons, I have never been completely satisfied with most of the explanations that are being, and have been, offered in these areas.

Consequently, I would like to outline another approach to the aforementioned questions. This new framework doesn't necessarily explain everything that goes on with issues of spiritual abuse, moreover, there might be some individuals whose experiences do not resonate with what is about to be proposed, but I still believe that such a different perspective might lend, hopefully, a certain amount of insight into some of the dynamics that might be present in thought, mind, and heart control.

Before beginning to lay down foundations for the new conceptual paradigm, there are one or two comments that need to be made about the possible role of psychology in issues of spirituality. On the one hand, although my undergraduate training is in the area of social relations, with a special emphasis given to clinical settings, and despite the fact that I have a fair amount of experience in actual clinical environments, I also harbor a healthy amount of skepticism concerning a lot of the theories that are bandied about with respect to the character of human nature -- especially those that are heavily imbued with the biases of modern Neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory and/or that are highly reductionistic in favor of some particular theory

of psycho-dynamics such as that of Freud, Jung, Adler, Rank, Erickson, Horney, Sullivan, and so on.

All of the foregoing theorists, along with many others working within this general area of psycho-dynamics, have many interesting insights to offer and some of them might even be true in certain respects, but, on the whole, I find these theoretical frameworks far too simplistic to be accepted as serious models of human nature. One might be able to come up with a reasonably serviceable working model, if one were to: choose carefully from among the many theories of classical psychoanalytic thought, and, then, add certain components from Jung's break-away responses to the Freudian school, together with the ego-focused contributions of a later generation of theorists (e.g., Erickson, Horney, Anna Freud, Sullivan), as well as some of the work of the existentialist and phenomenological writers (e.g., Binswanger, Laing, May), plus throw in a little of the ideas of the self-realization crowd (e.g., Maslow, Rogers, Perls, Frankl), along with various studies from social psychology (e.g., Festinger, Milgram, Schachter, and Zimbardo), the cognitive explorations of people like Jerome Bruner, George Miller, Roger Sperry, Howard Gardner, John Lorber, Michael Gazzaniga, and Elizabeth Loftus), together with a dash of neurobiochemistry (e.g., Candace Pert, Paul Pietsch,) and, naturally, some of the work of the trans-personal schools of psychology (e.g., William James, John Lilly, Charles Tart, and Robert Ornstein).

There are numerous other names that could be added to the above list of individuals who have constructive, useful things to say about the complex, subtle, layered nature of being human. But, to all of this, one would have to include the writings of the great spiritual psychologists -- such as, in terms of the Sufi mystical tradition: al-Muhasibi, al-Ghazali, Ibn al-'Arabi, and others (may Allah be pleased with them all) -- in order to get a more fully rounded portrait of human nature and potential. Unlike some individuals, I am neither ready to accept nor reject the findings of modern psychology, holus-bolus. Everything needs to be examined on a case by case basis.

Furthermore, just as, up to a point, modern physics might reveal certain laws and principles that are inherent in the way physical nature works, so too, there are facets of modern psychology that are reflective, to varying degrees, about some of the truth concerning the

way human nature operates under certain conditions. However, in neither case, would I wish to reduce reality down to the limitations of the theories involving either modern physics or psychology.

Having given the foregoing qualifications, let me leap into the breach, so to speak, of the great unknown. This is sometimes referred to as 'adding my two cents worth' (after reading the following, some might feel that two cents is an over-valuing of the material), and as is the case with everything else that comes through me, if you like it, use it, and if you don't, then, place it gently in the circular file cabinet.

Let us begin with an observation. Under many circumstances, there seem to be, at least, two sets of, seemingly, antagonistic forces at work in human consciousness. One set of such forces is given expression through our struggle to discover the truth of things, while the other set of opposing forces is a manifestation of a tendency to hide, distort, or rebel against whatever the truth might be.

Deciding which is which in any given instance is not always an easy or problem-free task. Consequently, various kinds of methodologies are sought and/or developed in order to deal with the problem of trying to differentiate that which is true from that which is not true.

There are philosophical, scientific, theological, mathematical, psychological, mythological, sociological, political, economic and mystical methods for engaging the challenge of determining the truth. We tend to derive paradigms of meaning through the exercise of these methodologies, and these frameworks organize, shape, color, generate, and orient our interpretations and understandings of where we feel truth and falsehood are to be located within the realm of experience.

In addition to the aforementioned two, broad, kinds of force, there also is a third set of forces at work in consciousness. This involves a tendency toward dissociation – which is neither a function of truth nor falsehood, but is, instead, an attractor-like basin that constantly pulls at us like a maelstrom via the currents from certain facets of the horizons of our awareness.

Dissociation is an experience consisting of a pervasive sense of having lost essential contact with: meaning, purpose, direction, belonging, acceptance, identity, and reality. The presence of

dissociation gives rise to intense, often overpowering and debilitating, feelings of anxiety, fear, depersonalization, de-realization, alienation, emptiness, disconnection, cynicism, doubt, depression, sadness, hopelessness, and anomie.

The foregoing needs to be distinguished, to some extent, from many of the traditional, psychiatric modes of referring to the phenomenon of dissociation in which so-called dissociative disorders tend, in a sense, to be equated with the experience of dissociation. I would like to differentiate between, on the one hand, the trauma of the dissociative experience, as outlined in the preceding paragraph, and the pathological coping strategies and defense mechanisms that might arise in response to the trauma of dissociation.

From this perspective, the so-called dissociative disorders are an individual's maladaptive responses to the continued presence of the intense pain of dissociative phenomenology. Dissociative disorders are the problems that arise -- such as multiple personality disorder, fugue states, and the like -- in reaction to the presence of dissociative trauma, but there is a difference between the trauma (over which the person might have little control) and the disorder that arises in relation to that trauma -- a disorder whose characteristics might reflect choices, such as they are, as well as individual vulnerabilities and/or inclinations of the person who develops such disorders. These disorders entail life problems for the individual because of their debilitating quality, but the existence of such problems seems to be a better proposition for an individual than the intense pain of the dissociative trauma that leads to the formation of symptoms inherent in a given disorder.

We seek meaning in our everyday lives and in relation to the big questions of existence because, among other things, if we don't, we tend to drift into the gravitational pull of dissociation. In fact, the experience of dissociation is so painful (and we all have had encounters with this condition) that, in many cases we might not care whether the meanings through which we run our lives are true, or not ... just as long as the howling, vicious dogs of dissociation are kept at bay.

Philosophy, science, technology, hobbies, games, careers, television, athletics, politics, social relationships, shopping, war,

religion, therapy, and addictions are among the ways we use to, on the one hand, avoid listening to the call of dissociation, by, on the other hand, seeking to invest our lives with meaning, irrespective of whether such meaning structures might, or might not, have relevance to the truth in some ultimate sense. Truth might have priority in the scheme of things, but living in accordance with falsehood, whatever the associated problems might be, beats having to deal with the extreme unpleasantness and debilitation of dissociative states.

Whenever the promise of meaning enters our lives, we are induced to cross an emotional/physiological boundary that brings, to varying degrees, feelings of direction, purpose, identity, value, pleasure, happiness, belief, and motivation in conjunction with whatever the nature of the meaning might be. The more essential we feel such a sense of meaning is, the more intense are the emotions that are experienced in conjunction with such meaning.

In some instances (but not all) the rise of an interest in mystical pursuits might occur in individuals who currently are struggling, or have been struggling for quite some time, with the currents of dissociation. For such people, the usual array of meanings associated with society, family, career, education, activities, as well as relationships have lost their attractiveness or appeal, and, at the very least, are seen as being unable to provide answers to the great questions of life -- such as: Who am I? Why am I here? What is the purpose of life? How do I find the truth about Being? To what should I commit my time, energy, and resources?

If such people are strong, they might have tried a variety of different things in a search to distance themselves from the intensely uncomfortable feelings of dissociation. Yet, in one way or another, if what has been tried has not been successful in assuaging the demons of dissociation, then, they might be left with a taste of disappointment and promise gone astray as they continue to manage the rest of their lives as best they can amidst the undertow of dissociation.

Some people refer to this quest in terms of a 'holy longing' -- a desire for direct experience of the sacred realms and the Divine. One feels within oneself a deep thirst and hunger for an ineffable 'something' -- something beyond the ordinary doors of experience and

perception ... something more essential and satisfyingly meaningful ... something life-defining.

Quite a few individuals spend their whole lives in pursuit of this elusive mystical will-o-the-wisp. When the quest gets bogged down in this or that way, they wonder if, perhaps, it is all just a figment of the imagination.

Then, it happens. They meet up, somehow, with a person or group that seems to offer an antidote to the poisons of dissociative trauma, and it is important to understand just how central and important such an event is in the life of an individual.

More specifically, all of us are a lot closer to dissociative dissolution than we might care to admit. We busily fill up the hours of our life with all manner of activity -- much of it senseless, and there often is a frenetic quality to a great deal of our behavior in which issues of education, career, work, home, politics, hobbies, and leisure time become the basic sources of meaning-giving in our lives ... after all, if we don't derive essential meaning from such activities, then, really, who are we and what is life actually about and what should be our true purpose?

For most of us -- some, sooner than others -- the capacity of normal life to supply us with the kind of meaningfulness into which we can sink our essence or soul begins to suffer from the law of diminishing returns. The more this sense of dissolution takes place, the more the threat of the pain of dissociative trauma looms on the horizon.

Some people, when they face this Rubicon of life, retreat into ever more frantic commitment to the surface features of life -- such as career, politics, family, home, and community activities. Other individuals, however, cannot go back and need something deeper in their lives to provide them with a sense of essential meaning, purpose, and identity, and so they cross into a battle with the unknown.

With respect to the latter group of people, there tends to be an urgency about their search. Part of this urgency comes from a vague sense of the enormity of the task in front of them and the concomitant realization that they cannot do what they need to do without some

expert help -- someone to guide them through the unknown territory on the far shore.

Another part of the aforementioned urgency arises from the ominous threat of dissociative trauma nipping at their soul. They have sailed into the unknown, and they don't know if they will find anything on the other side -- something that will help defend them against the maelstrom of dissociation that could suck them down into a bottomless abyss arising from a loss of meaning, identity, purpose, peace, and stability with respect to lived existence. Yet, when someone who, supposedly, is a spiritual guide or teacher enters their life, an, apparently, viable solution to the impending threat of dissociative trauma appears to take concrete, accessible form. When such an alleged guide appears to be charismatic, interesting, warm, friendly, compassionate, entertaining, wise, calm and in control of her or his life, it seems like manna from heaven.

They experience -- and it makes no difference, at the time, whether such experiences are rooted in truth or falsehood -- a deep, powerful, intense sense of apparent (possibly real) love, acceptance, purpose, direction, honesty, compassion, kindness, generosity, identity, integrity, commitment, happiness, and community at the hands of a 'teacher' or those who are influenced by such a 'teacher'. Among other things that are going on emotionally and psychologically, enkephalins and endorphins begin to flow in such substantial quantities that one might feel an encompassing sense of joy, ecstasy, happiness, well-being, peace, and security.

One feels one has arrived at one's metaphysical, cosmic home. Furthermore, everything that is happening is framed in a way that suggests that what is going on is an expression of the presence of spiritual or mystical truth -- and such a framing might be accurate, as far as it goes, or it might be false, but, in the beginning, the individual has no way of knowing for sure what is going on except that the demons of dissociation have dissipated, and the presence of a dynamic paradigm of meaning has entered one's life.

In the imagery of the *Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams, one feels that the presence of love, and associated qualities, has, finally, made one 'real', whole, alive, aware, and integrated. Whether this is really so, remains to be seen, but considerable time, experience,

inquiry, and reflection will be necessary before one has enough information to be able to arrive at a reasonable assessment of the situation -- especially if certain facts are being actively kept from one's awareness, as is generally the case with respect to fraudulent spiritual guides.

There are people who claim that they could tell, instantaneously -- or within a very short period of time -- whether, or not, a given individual is an authentic, sincere teacher. There might be some people who are sufficiently gifted, by the Grace of Allah, to do this, but there are, I believe, far fewer people who actually are capable of this than there are individuals who are making claims in this regard on their own behalf (and, in the present context, I would eliminate from consideration those individuals who reject all possibilities simply because they are inveterate cynics and skeptics concerning everything spiritual and/or mystical, and, therefore, are in no position to make a fair and knowing discernment about such matters since their perceptions are colored and shaped by the constant presence of cynicism and skepticism).

In the beginning, Hazrat Ahmad al-Alawi, (may Allah be pleased with him) the Sufi saint of the 20th century about whom Martin Lings wrote, did not know the difference between someone who was a snake-charmer and someone who was a spiritual sage. Similarly, Hazrat al-Ghazali and Jalal-uddin Rumi (may Allah be pleased with them both) each took time to find his way to the truth of things with respect to mysticism.

For every rule of thumb one can come up with as a line of demarcation for discerning true teachers from false ones, there are exceptions to such a rule -- both on the side of legitimacy, as well as in relation to spiritual charlatans. In instances where the quality of spiritual counterfeiting is poor, many of us might be able to gauge that some sort of fraudulent activity is going on, but when the quality of counterfeiting is high, distinguishing between the real and the false is very problematic.

Consequently, becoming entangled in a false modality of mysticism is not all that a difficult thing to do -- some people's opinion to the contrary notwithstanding. More importantly, once one's life has become immersed in such a group and with the 'right' sort of dynamic

'guide', there are many emotional, psychological, and social forces that are capable of deepening such entanglement in very complex, subtle, and problematic ways.

For example, if one is faced with the prospect -- whether through personal choice or the decision of the group/teacher -- of leaving the process of association with a given teacher or group, then, an individual is very much aware that waiting for one on the other side of the boundary -- which marks the boundary separating those who are within the group and those who are without -- is the abyss of dissociation. Under such circumstances, the threat of the terrors of dissociation are even more ominous because of an intense sense of relative deprivation that is experienced in being disconnected from a way of life through which one previously derived the sum total of one's orientation to: God, meaning, purpose, identity, truth, reality, community, commitment, trust, love, self, direction, acceptance, peace, happiness, the world, and the life to come, as compared to the painful offerings of dissociation -- anxiety, fear, alienation, meaninglessness, purposelessness, depersonalization, de-realization, depression, sadness, grief, and so on which are beckoning to one due to one's departure from the aforementioned group.

When I first began to explore the dynamic character of the relationship between various kinds of meaningfulness and the threat of dissociation, one of the images that came to mind was the following:

Meaningfulness/Altered States) | (Dissociation

The line in the middle constitutes the potentially neutral ground between dissociation and meaningfulness. This middle area gives expression to the activities through which we seek to determine the way to meaning, objectivity, and 'truth' -- it is the area within which we struggle for understanding and knowledge about how best to proceed.

When the methodological and hermeneutical activity of this middle area is successful, it helps to serve as a defense against the threat of being pulled into one, or another, state of dissociation. When such activity is not productive, then, we struggle to resist the slide

toward dissociative states involving anxiety, alienation, anomie, overwhelming stress, fear, loss of identity, and so on, that, in turn, might open us up to more pathological states such as P.T.S.D, an anxiety or dissociative disorder, or some other problematic condition.

With respect to the foregoing diagram, it is important to understand, that meaningfulness and/or altered states do not necessarily equate with the truth of things. Rather, we seek meaning and altered states in order to protect ourselves against being consumed by the ravages of one species, or another, of dissociation.

Furthermore, the phenomenology of going across the boundary into the realm of meaningfulness and/or altered states is experienced as being very pleasurable, if not given to ecstasy. In addition, this boundary crossing is also felt to be tremendously liberating, as if one were 'born again' or had come to see 'reality' for the first time.

Once one has undergone such a boundary transition, one seeks to maintain it or re-invoke it because this realm, when it is intensely felt - - as is the case in many instances of experiences of conversion or initiation into a new spiritual tradition -- brings one into a state of awareness that tends to dissolve many concerns or worries. One feels like one is a dream-like state that is both very real and, yet, somehow removed from the rest of life.

Similarly, but in an opposite, antagonistic manner, the phenomenology of traversing the boundary into the realm of dissociation is experienced as being extremely painful and debilitating. In many ways, the emotional, existential, and spiritual pain, together with the dysfunctional life, that arise through conditions of dissociation such as alienation, anomie, de-realization, depersonalization, stress, confusion, uncertainty, loss of identity, purposelessness, and anxiety is so intense, that for many individuals, dissociation is a 'fate worse than death'. Moreover, many people prefer the problems of becoming pathological, in the form of a maladaptive coping strategy, to the presence of dissociative pain simply because in such pathology there is a certain buffering quality against the felt presence of dissociation.

Phenomenologically, when an individual travels from within the arc of meaningfulness back across the boundary toward the center portion or toward dissociation, this process is felt to be quite

disorienting, difficult, stressful, and emotionally painful. Alternatively, when one journeys from within the arc of dissociation toward either the center portion of the diagram or toward the boundary-arc of meaningfulness, this process is experienced as being very positive, liberating, and happy.

Given the choice between having meaning -- even if possibly false -- and being engulfed in a dissociative condition, not everyone will opt for the latter, even though it might be closer to the current truth of things than is the former. Given such difficult choices, one might wish to linger over the decision and not rush to judgment.

Given the stark nature of the alternatives facing one, an individual might desperately try to reconcile seemingly disparate experiences, events, or pieces of information in a manner that favors perpetuating meaning (even if false) over the possibility of dissociation. Confronted with such extremes of emotional consequences, a person might be forgiven if she or he wished to extend a few degrees of freedom to the inexplicable and, as a result, give the current framework of meaning -- problematic though it might be -- the benefit of a doubt, rather than plunge into the cold, dark waters of dissociation ... even though the latter action might be the step that is most courageous, honest, sincere, and truthful.

In the face of such diametrically opposite possibilities, one lives in the interstitial shadows of ambiguity, uncertainty, doubt, ignorance, the unknown -- a harbinger of things to come if one should move further across the emotional and psychological boundary that marks departure from the teacher and/or group. This is an extremely painful position to be in, and the motivational forces are extremely strong in relation to inducing one to not only refrain from crossing the aforementioned boundary, but, as well, to get rid of the doubts and suspicions one is entertaining, for occupying a state of emotional limbo is almost as bad -- but not really -- as entering into the state of dissociation on the other side of said boundary.

In most cases, unless a person can be motivated to trust the reasonableness of moving into dissociation -- and the move is very counter-intuitive for most of us -- then, there is a strong likelihood that a person will stay with a paradigm of meaning that, though flawed, in substantial ways, seems to be more emotionally satisfying than does

the prospect of dissociation -- especially, if the individual sees no readily available hope for finding a worthwhile exit from the condition of dissociation, once the current source of meaningfulness is left behind. Furthermore, the threat of continued dissociation is one of the primary reasons why some individuals, even after they manage to escape from an environment of thought control and spiritual abuse, will tend to seek out further abusive relationships, just to get another fix of the emotional and psychological 'Baba juice' (see the next paragraph) that often is associated with the crossing-over of the boundary that separates meaningfulness from dissociation -- the same boundary that, when re-crossed in the opposite direction (i.e., from meaning to dissociation), causes withdrawal-like symptoms due to the debilitating character of the dissociative symptoms that are encountered by an individual.

'Baba' means spiritual father, and the phrase 'Baba juice' is a term I have coined to allude to the trance-like state of ecstasy, liberation, contentment, and sense of well-being that occurs in some people when they are in the presence of a fraudulent Baba. It is a very pleasant altered state of consciousness to be in but it is not a spiritually constructive condition ... in fact, quite the opposite.

Patterns of attitude formation, motivational networks, and habits tend to be rooted in what operant learning theorists refer to as a variable, intermittent schedule of reward contingencies. That is, something of a rewarding nature occurs in conjunction with a certain kind of activity, but, in subsequent life experiences, such rewards might not occur, except occasionally, if at all, but one continues on with such activity in the hope that such a reward will be forthcoming.

Once established, such learning linkages are very difficult to break. The gambler who rolls the dice one more time, the addict who seeks to recreate the first high, the promiscuous lover in search of the chemistry of that initial encounter of intimacy that came through the gaze or touch of another person, the seeker who longs for the return of an earlier feeling of ecstasy, well-being, peace, innocence, purpose, and meaning that occurred in relation with the meeting of a given 'teacher', are all potential examples of the principle of the a variable, intermittent reinforcement contingency in action.

Although, ultimately, the only thing that can extricate someone from such forces is the Grace of God, if one looks at the dynamics of the phenomenon from a lesser perspective, then, oftentimes, the only way to break free of the gravitational pull of such a set of circumstances (that is, the presence of variable, intermittent schedules of reinforcement, together with the desire to retain a sense of meaning, even if false, over the threat of impending dissociative states) is through the experience of traumatic events. In other words, if something happens between an individual and the teacher and/or group with whom that person is associating that violates, in no unmistakable way, the trust that ties that individual to the teacher, then, the trauma of that betrayal of trust might supply enough impetus to help the individual to cross the boundary into the dissociative condition and accept the reality of the latter state rather than continue on with a meaning system that has become spiritually bankrupt.

As was pointed in an earlier essay about the experience of grief and the process of grieving that accompanies the move across the border that demarcates previous meaning (false though it might have been) and present dissociation, the profound sadness and depression that tends to occur when a person begins to disengage from a teacher and/or group is an expression of the individual's sense of having been disconnected from the feeling of being 'real' and in touch with the truth, if only in a passing, indirect, and limited fashion.

At times, the pain that is felt in this condition of essential, dissociative betrayal is so intense that a person becomes vulnerable to being induced to re-crossing the boundary back into what is perceived as the framework of meaning that, previously, was associated with the alleged spiritual guide or group. Oftentimes, one will see an individual bounce back and forth across this boundary line before some final context of relative stability is achieved on one side, or the other, of the boundary line that separates continued association with the teacher and/or group from emotional and psychological disengagement.

The techniques that are used by a so-called spiritual teacher and/or group to induce people to cross the boundary line that demarcates being initiated into a framework of such pseudo-meaning (as opposed to the real and essential meaningfulness of truth) from a condition of dissociative vulnerability are numerous. These include:

Ericksonian-like hypnosis, trance inductions, or other forms of altered states of consciousness, love-bombing, isolation, sleep deprivation, neurolinguistic programming, various forms of variable, intermittent schedules of reinforcement, re-framing, misdirection, disinformation, prolonged conditions of ambiguity or tension, disruption of normal forms of social support, as well as the use of one's dependence on processes of consensual validation to undermine one's sense of reality.

The foregoing are but a few of the techniques that are employed to open up unsuspecting people to the 'joys' of being released from a condition of dissociation. The term "joys" is a collective way of referring to the administering of the 'Baba-juice' that takes place when one is given a new paradigm of meaning in an apparently extremely attractive package by someone called a 'shaykh' (or leader) who seems to be the best friend one could ever have hoped for, and an immense 'blessing' that has come to one, by the Grace of God, that is so great that, heretofore, one could never have imagined it possible for such a person to be in one's life.

The above characterizes one's experiences until one learns otherwise. However, coming to know the ins and outs of this 'otherwise' might be quite a few years down the road when, once again, one stares into the abyss of dissociation -- an abyss that has been made deeper, darker, and more hostile by the fact that one seemed to be so close to the truth, only to find one has been kept far from the truth of many things, including the actual nature of the teacher and, most importantly, one's own relationship with one's essential potential since a fraudulent guide cannot help one realize that about which such charlatans are fundamentally ignorant, though they pretend otherwise, and, for a time, we trusted them that they were telling the truth.

For lack of a better phrase, the foregoing approach to the issue of spiritual abuse is known as the mirror image theory. It bears this name because of the character of the dynamics that occur at the boundary marker of demarcation between meaning and dissociation.

As one goes from relative dissociation into meaning, there is a gaining of a sense of freedom, release, peace, security, purpose, identity, acceptance, belonging, commitment, and so on which was not

present in the condition of dissociation. As previously indicated, this is experienced as being joyful, happy, ecstatic, unburdening.

However, as one crosses back across the boundary in the opposite direction -- that is, from meaning back to relative dissociation -- one experiences the pain of losing a sense of freedom, release, peace, security, purpose, identity, acceptance, belonging and commitment. Instead, one feels shame, anxiety, guilt, depression, grief, sadness, depersonalization, de-realization, loss of identity, purpose, motivation, and the like. In other words, one's feelings and condition in this situation of dissociation are the mirror image of, or a direct reversal of, what was experienced as one crossed over into the so-called meaning side of the boundary marker.

When an individual comes to understand the nature of the spiritual abuse that has been perpetrated upon him or her, there is a certain, new realization that occurs ... however inarticulate and vague this sort of realization might be. In this awareness, there is a sense that by having permitted oneself to be induced to cross the boundary from dissociation, or threatened dissociation, to the promised land of meaningfulness in the form of a relation with a certain alleged teacher or guide, one has made a maladaptive choice in coping strategy vis-à-vis the issue of dissociative trauma. Moreover, from a certain perspective, one's situation is worse than it was prior to one's encounter with the fraudulent teacher, and one has gone from the frying pan into the fire.

Prior to the appearance of the so-called teacher, there was a certain innocence, and, perhaps, naiveté, to one's search for meaningfulness. But, once betrayed in an essential way, one feels cast adrift in the middle of nowhere with nothing to defend one against the approaching storm of dissociation. One is left with a feeling that there is no safe harbor to protect one, and no direction that one can trust. These are intense, destabilizing, and debilitating emotions that were not there prior to the advent of the so-called teacher.

Any program of counseling or therapy that does not take into account the profoundly intense dynamics of this boundary crossing phenomena and what is entailed going in either direction will have a difficult time helping a person to not only develop survival strategies with which to cope with the condition of dissociation. Moreover,

failure to take such boundary dynamics into account might do considerable spiritual damage to the affected individual by leaving unaddressed the essential dimension of the grief that is at the heart of the re-entry process involving the condition of dissociation.

Although the mirror image theory that has been outlined above has been applied to a context of spiritual abuse, the potential relevancy of this framework does not end there. In whatever set of circumstances the issue of abuse arises -- spousal, sexual, political, educational, or spiritual -- the dynamics of the mirror image phenomenon are present, and if one wishes to gain insight into the nature of such abuse one should look at the way the threat of dissociation plays off against the struggle for meaning -- even of a pathological kind -- in the structuring of relationships.

Finally, from the perspective of this mirror image theory, there is a potential vulnerability in all of us with respect to the possibility of being induced to flee from the threat of dissociative trauma and into the embrace of paradigms of meaning. On the surface, such frameworks of meaning might appear to be a God-send, but, in reality they might turn out to be just another expression of the sort of problems that arise when we are trying to elude the undertow of the maelstrom of dissociation that haunts consciousness, and, as a result, we do not clearly see the nature of the alternative we are selecting as our way of responding to the presence of dissociative pain in our lives.

Under the right set of circumstances, almost all of us are vulnerable to committing such a mistake in judgment -- not necessarily because of any personal failing within us, or due to stupidity, or insincerity, or any other defect of character. Rather, we are all vulnerable to such a possibility, because of the very nature of being human -- a nature that is constantly being stalked by the very real threat of dissociative trauma, and with respect to which, we are constantly under pressure to discover viable ways of dodging such an existential bullet.

Chapter 27: Narcissistic Spirituality

There have been many different facets of the issue of spiritual abuse that have been explored in preceding essays. Most of this material has limited itself to the context of the Sufi tradition.

One dimension of this topic that has been touched upon somewhat -- although not in great detail -- revolves around the nature of the perpetrator of spiritual abuse. What makes such a person tick? What are the motivations underlying his or her behavior? What is the nature of the pathology?

There are a number of proposals that might be offered in response to such questions. Some spiritual frauds are merely run-of-the-mill con artists who, through one means or another, have come to the realization that operating spiritual scams constitutes a fruitful realm with almost unlimited horizons of potential for an enterprising individual.

Other charlatans might see the realm of spirituality as a fertile medium through which to identify individuals who are vulnerable to being sexually exploited. Or, perhaps, a person's struggle with his or her nafs or carnal soul went awry, and a desire for fame and/or power began to take control of things, and spiritual seekers merely became a means to satisfy such a person's corrupted ends.

Some individuals might have started out on the Path with appropriate intentions, but, somewhere along the journey, took a detour into the darker, shadowy side of human potential, and not only became lost, but decided to entangle other people, as well. Historically, there are a number of movements and groups that began when someone who had been associated, in some fashion, with the Sufi tradition, had certain experiences, and, then, as a result of their own interpretation of such events, invented a philosophy, theology, or mystical path that, in turn, was offered and introduced to other people.

Some spiritually abusive people might be sociopathic. History, circumstances, and personal inclination come together in unhappy alliance and manifest themselves in the form of a wolf who preys on and/or devours her or his flock over a period of time.

I have known, to varying degrees, different people who probably fit into one, or another, of the foregoing, categories. However, when I

began to reflect on my own personal situation vis-à-vis the spiritual fraud with whom I became entangled, none of the aforementioned possibilities seemed to really resonate with my experiences or the experiences of others who were spiritually abused by this individual.

Why did he do what he did? What was really going on?

After giving considerable thought and attention to this matter over the last 8-9 months, there are some tentative conclusions that have begun to surface that feel right -- at least to me. Therefore, I thought I would share these reflections with others and let the chips fall where they may.

From one perspective, evil might be construed as anything that deviates, on one level or another, from the truth, and, therefore, in this sense, we all contribute to the introduction of evil into the world through the way in which we resist, rebel against, distort, hide, ignore, obstruct, and seek to undermine truth by means of our behaviors -- both individual and collective. This sort of evil arises due to human weakness, short-sightedness, ignorance, error, selfishness, and the like.

There is another form of evil, however, that is more malevolent and pernicious. It exists for the sole purpose of leading people astray from the truth and commits acts intentionally with that goal in mind.

This kind of evil is very cunning, clever, perceptive, and duplicitous. It is always looking for ways to bring misery into the lives of people ... not primarily for whatever sexual gratification, money, fame, or power that might be the collateral gain from such ventures but in order to use the generation of misery as a means to leverage people away from seeking the truth.

There is, within most human beings, a longing for the truth. Some refer to this *himma*, or aspiration, as a holy longing -- a deep, abiding, intense longing to come in contact with essential, ultimate Reality in an intimate, knowing way.

Human beings have come up with many ways to try to assuage this holy longing. Philosophy, psychology, theology, mythology, science, religion, and mysticism have all arisen in conjunction with this holy longing. Different people have pursued diverse roads in the hope of finding the legendary 'holy grail', 'philosopher's stone', 'alchemical

elixir', 'golden fleece' occult secrets, the 'theory of everything', a universal set of equations, and altered states of consciousness that would open the doors of perception into the sanctum sanctorum, the holy of holies, of Being. There exists a force, or set of forces, however, that is (are) actively dedicated to corrupting the aforementioned holy longing. This is the malignant form of evil alluded to earlier.

Some people, such as Scott Peck, refer to this reality through phrases such as "people of the lie". Others use the term Satan or Iblis. Some individuals talk in terms of a force of dissolution and chaos that flows through existence, tugging at the fabric of being, seeking to unravel life so that acting upon the holy longing becomes difficult, problematic, bogged down, compromised, co-opted, or re-framed in unethical and unjust directions.

The term or name that is used to give expression to this dimension of existence is relatively unimportant, and different perspectives will be inclined to use that term or name that is most compatible with the world-view that is inherent in that perspective. What is important are the themes underlying, swirling about, and being given expression through those forces and phenomena that seek to obstruct or rebel against the seeking of truth.

Many people who have been touched by such evil, abandon the holy longing altogether, and when this occurs, this mode of evil has achieved its purpose. Among other things, the impact of this kind of evil on their lives renders such people incapable of ever trusting anyone sufficiently to seek the kind of help and co-operation that seems vital to achieving progress with respect to struggling toward realizing one's holy longing.

The man who, for ten years, I referred to as my shaykh or spiritual guide was, and is, a manifestation of the more malignant manner of evil that has been outlined above. He enjoys -- indeed, revels -- in trying to lead people astray from the truth, and he often accomplished this in very clever, elaborate, and 'artful' ways (this is called: 'giving the Devil his due').

There is something about his manner that just makes you want to trust, believe, and accept what he says. The lies are so effortlessly delivered, in such a soft, gentle, re-assuring, peaceful, 'sincere', low-key manner.

Moreover, the lies always are delivered in a context steeped in a forked-tongue spirituality that is constructed in such a fashion that the truth is used to camouflage the lies. Consequently, truth becomes like a Trojan horse that hides the army of lies hiding within.

Because the charlatan in question is so knowledgeable about the theory of tasawwuf, or Sufi mystical science, and because he is so charismatic, entertaining and articulate, in several languages, with respect to the manner through which he weaves his lies into the truth, one rarely feels the poison enter one's system. He is a master of misdirection.

The wonder of it is that he can keep all of his lies straight. Yet, even when he slips, he is a marvel to behold and very inventive in the way he uses additional untruths to spin the original lie into the territory of plausible deniability and ambiguity.

I have scoured DSM-IV (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Psychological Disorders*), looking for possible matches between its many categories of disturbance and the behavior of my 'once-upon-a-time' shaykh. Although I am convinced that he serves the dark purposes of the sort of intentional evil that seeks to corrupt the holy longing inherent in human beings, nonetheless, I was interested in seeing whether their might be some less traditional, more modern way of thinking about such behavior -- something that might appeal to the sensibilities of current research.

The only category in DSM-IV that resonated, to some degree, with my experiences, along with those of several other individuals with whom I have conversed about this man, was that of Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Consequently, in the remainder of this essay I would like to explore a variety of possibilities in this regard and, hopefully, make a few useful contributions along the way.

Perhaps the best way to begin this foray into psychological issues is to state that, in general, there has not been an extensive amount of study in relation to the nature and etiology of Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Opinions are fractured along a number of different fault lines -- some theorists favor an approach rooted in the impact that problematic genetic programming has upon personality and development; other researchers opt for perspectives that are immersed in issues of anomic societies, faulty parenting, dysfunctional

families of one kind or another, maladaptive coping strategies, and so on.

There is no consensus among the experts. Moreover, there is precious little data to substantiate one model of Narcissistic Personality Disorder over another.

However, the existence of such a theoretical lack of settledness merely represents conceptual opportunity in another guise. Thus, into this breach I boldly go where no one might have gone before ... and, perhaps, with good reason -- let us see.

There are a number of characteristics that need to show up in behavior in order, in any given case, to be able to arrive at a possible diagnosis of Narcissistic Personality Disorder. For example, individuals suffering from this malady tend to be deeply convinced that they are special, unique, rare people who only can be understood and appreciated by others (whether professionals, institutions, or 'gifted' people) who also are high-status and special in a similar or related way.

Such individuals have a constant, excessive need for either positive attention, praise, deference, and admiration from other people, or, alternatively, a need to be infamous, feared, or a source of notoriety of some kind. In either case -- whether that which is forthcoming from others is in the form of adulation or some kind of fear or condemnation, these emotions constitute what is known as 'narcissistic supply', and the Narcissistic Personality disordered individual is constantly seeking to receive such a flow of emotion from others.

This sort of an individual has a very palpable sense of entitlement. In other words, this sort of person strongly feels they should be given priority, special treatment, or favored status in almost all things, and fully expects, if not demands, that everyone else should be inordinately sensitive to their need for obedience and compliance in relation to this sense of entitlement.

Although, on the surface, there might be remnants of a facade of compassion and empathy for other people, in truth, this facade is purely for show -- as one ploy, among many, to invite people to satisfy his need for a constant flow of narcissistic supply. In truth, a

Narcissistic Personality disordered individual lacks any real empathy or feeling for others and is constantly exploiting them in order to derive further fixes of narcissistic supply of one kind or another.

A person with this disorder often is arrogant and boastful concerning herself or himself, while being equally disdainful of others. Furthermore, such people tend to fly into extreme rages and angry tirades if their search for narcissistic supply either goes unfulfilled or is challenged, resisted, frustrated or ignored in some fashion.

On the one hand, a Narcissistic Personality disordered individual might believe, in a deep fashion, that the manner in which others feel about that person merely reflects the way in which such an individual feels about herself or himself. Ironically, however, the same individual might be intensely envious of others who might be receiving the sort of attention and adulation that that individual feels ought to be directed to her or him.

Not every person who suffers from this disorder might do so to the same degree. In some people, the foregoing symptoms might be sporadic, transient, relatively mild, or only arise in certain circumstances to which the person is currently reacting and, then, disappear when the nature of events changes. In other individuals, the full array of symptoms might be present in an intense, permanent fashion, and such individuals are extremely resistant to palliative treatment.

All of the foregoing qualities or properties of a Narcissistic Personality Disorder have been observed in the so-called 'shaykh' to whom I have been alluding in the earlier comments. What makes his case somewhat intriguing -- if one puts aside, for a moment, the horror of the damage he is inflicting on people -- are the many techniques he has for re-framing and misdirecting attention away from such characteristics.

This man feels entitled, big time, to be served by others, and, in fact, fully expects this to be done but uses other 'veterans' of the group to train people with respect to proper 'adab', or spiritual etiquette, in this regard rather than give people the impression, through his own actions, that he does expect from others what he claims not to expect. He says he is here to serve, but, the reality of the matter is that everyone occupies their time serving him and providing different

means for satisfying his constant thirst and hunger in relation to different forms of narcissistic supply.

He constantly needs to be at the center of attention, as well as the focus of praise, admiration, and awe so that he has a steady flow of narcissistic supply to keep him going. Although he frequently speaks in a vocabulary of kindness, compassion, love, and empathy, nonetheless, if one is sufficiently 'fortunate' (there are two edges to this sort of fortune), to get a peek behind the Wizard's curtain, one begins to see that the man is virtually devoid of any real love, empathy, compassion, or caring for others -- everything is always, ultimately, sooner or later, about him and that to which he feels entitled.

He is firmly convinced that he is extremely unique, special, and a rare species of being. He tells (and only recently have I come to learn of such 'tales') select people he is the Qutb, spiritual pole, of the times, or that he is the king of a little country near Iran who has been forced into exile, or that there is a white light coming from his forehead that, in the past, only has been manifested in a select few spiritual luminaries, or that he has performed a fast for six months, during which he had neither food nor water (there are such fasts that have been observed by some of God's servants and such people are 'fed' by God and even have been known to gain weight during such fasts), or that he has been elevated to an extremely rare spiritual station in an august company of saints and awliya of God, or that he has been granted the authority to make qutbs and special saints of certain people -- although, naturally, of a lesser sort than, and under the auspices of, his own exalted status as the supreme qutb of the age, or that he has taken an 'oath of poverty', yet, roams about with big wads of money in his wallet and stashed in various places.

Often times he never seems to tell the same story twice to different people. The story that is selected appears to be the one that is most likely to elicit the greatest amount of narcissistic supply from a given individual or that is most likely to induce obedience, compliance and submission in another person with respect to this so-called 'teacher's program of entitlement and special status. And, naturally, these stories are 'secrets' that need to be kept and are only being told to such and such a person because of the latter's elect status in the cosmic scheme of things.

He masks his arrogance and haughtiness in the disguise of an outward cloak of humility and gratitude concerning the many Divine favors that have been bestowed upon him -- favors that he talks about in terms that, superficially, appear to be directed at praising God but that, in truth, are merely opportunities for him to talk about himself. Yet, he also is quite disdainful of other 'shaykhs' or run-of-the-mill Muslims -- constantly telling people how he is not like 'those' Muslims, while simultaneously saying that he does not speak ill of others ... unless, of course, the establishment of truth requires that certain unpleasant realities be discussed ... sometimes in considerable detail.

He relates how his shaykh permitted him (with a knowing wink, nod and smile) to be the 'bad boy' of the mystical realms, and thereby, disclose many of the 'secrets' that, heretofore, had been kept hidden behind closely guarded doors. He speaks of the permissions that he has been given by the spiritual hierarchy that have not been vouchsafed to other, less fortunate individuals.

Superficially, he credits his teacher for being the conduit of Divine gifts that have been bestowed on him and for all that this alleged shaykh has spiritually achieved. However, if one watches carefully -- and the movements are very deft and subtle -- beneath this sincere surface is an undertow of self-praise and self-adulation.

He manipulates and exploits people in order to arrange ways to maximize his potential for realizing his constant search for high quality narcissistic supply. He confers favors, or encourages others to grant services, so that people who are the recipients of such 'kindnesses' will feel indebted to him and, consequently, be a ready source of narcissistic supply for him and not because such people might actually be in need or in difficulty.

He claims to never compel anyone to do anything, but he has a myriad of gambits that induce people to do what he wants -- even as such people believe their decisions are their own and arrived at freely. He prides himself on never interfering in people's lives but is constantly engaged in precisely that.

When his agenda is threatened or frustrated in some fashion, he goes into angry tirades, and, then, explains that he doesn't enjoy such outbursts but, sometimes, they are necessary for people's spiritual progress and growth. He is not upset with such individuals and he

forgives them for their mistakes, but, occasionally, people need a good kick in the rear end to get them headed in the 'right' direction.

He favors those who serve as his mirror -- people who will reflect back to him his own, high opinion of himself. He is envious of anyone who steals his thunder or who might be a rival to the affections of others, and, consequently, begins to scheme for ways to undermine and compromise such threats to the security of his narcissistic supply.

He isolates, ostracizes, and distances himself (and those in his inner circle) from anyone who is not compliant with his wishes. Although he maintains that people are free, without any prejudice on his part, to make their own choices, nevertheless, those who take him at his word soon find themselves on the outside looking in, even as he denies that such is the case or that the individual is just imagining these sorts of scenarios or harboring unfounded resentments toward others.

He uses the technique of triangulation to near perfection. More specifically, others are prompted by him to pressure, influence, induce, cajole, persuade, or make suggestions to certain third-party 'targets' in order to render the latter more compliant and obedient, and, yet, tracing such pressure back to the original source -- namely, the so-called shaykh -- becomes very difficult because the mediating perpetrators have been told -- for reasons of a special, mystical nature -- to remain silent about the reality of why what is going on is going on.

Consequently, the so-called shaykh can maneuver, manipulate, exploit, influence, and control people, while remaining in the shadows, seemingly innocent of any tawdry 'spiritual' machinations or intrigues. On the public stage he can assume the role of a shaykh complete with a bevy of counterfeit qualities to display in order to demonstrate his 'authenticity', but behind the scenes, the pathology of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder is busily engaged.

According to the clinical literature, there are four broad categories of narcissism. On the one hand, an individual is said to be either 'Somatic' or 'Cerebral', and, on the other hand, such a person is described as being of either a 'Classic' or 'Inverted' type.

I will leave discussion of the latter two possibilities for another time since such a discussion will involve going into a considerable

amount of detail about various psycho-dynamic theories of development -- from: Freud and Jung, to: Horney, Sullivan, Kohut, and others. Therefore, I will concentrate, for the time being, on exploring, a little, the nature of Cerebral and Somatic types of Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

A Somatic Narcissist is someone who derives her or his narcissistic supply in relation to claimed beauty, impressive physique, and/or sexual attractiveness, potency, or prowess. A Cerebral Narcissist seeks her or his narcissistic supply through the acclaim of others concerning alleged intellectual achievement, talent, and genius.

I propose that a third category should be added to the foregoing -- that is, Spiritual Narcissist. This is an individual who acquires the sought for narcissistic supply of adulation, praise, infamy, or the like, from others, in conjunction with claims concerning spiritual insight, knowledge, status, station, wisdom, and accomplishment.

A fundamental difference between, on the one hand, Cerebral and Somatic Narcissism, and, on the other hand, a Spiritual Narcissist is that the latter is a lot more difficult to detect under even the best of circumstances. For instance, if someone suffers from Narcissistic Personality Disorder of either a Cerebral or Somatic variety, but, is not particularly bright or attractive or sexually potent, then, the difference between claim and reality is readily divulged.

However, in the case of a Spiritual Narcissist, even if one is dealing with a fraud, differentiating between the speciousness of a claim and the reality of things might not be all that easy to accomplish simply because of the inherent complexity, ineffability, and unprovable nature of many of these claims. Such claims might or might not be true, but, more often than not, all one has to go on is the word of the individual, and if, for whatever reason, one extends the benefit of a doubt to such a person and presumes that truth is being spoken, then, that extended degree of freedom can be used to leverage a great many other beliefs, values, priorities, commitments, assumptions, sacrifices, and actions within a teacher-student context. Quite frequently, all a skilled Spiritual Narcissist needs is just enough room to place her or his foot in the doorway to a person's heart, and, before, long, that seeker will 'belong' -- and I don't use this term lightly or advisedly -- to the fraudulent spiritual guide.

The terribly insidious and seductive facet of Spiritual Narcissism is the ease with which all of the negative qualities or characteristics of a narcissist (e.g., self-serving entitlement, grandiosity, arrogance, boastfulness, envy, lack of empathy, demand or expectation of compliance, anger, and manipulative tendencies) can be re-framed in a much more appealing way. After all, 'if' one is a true mystic who has insight into the unseen, 'if' one is an 'awliya', or friend, of God, 'if' one has been authorized by the mystical elect to assist people to the highest spiritual truths, and, thereby, realize the 'holy longing', then, all of the foregoing negative properties can be spun as necessary components in the Divine passion play that is designed to help people die to themselves by subduing their carnal soul.

For example, since submission is the goal of authentic mysticism, then, submitting to the alleged shaykh becomes – or, so, it is claimed -- but a preliminary step in the journey toward complete submission to Divinity. Alternatively, since God works in mysterious ways to induce us to deepen our faith, and shaykhs do the same, then, consequently, sometimes the fraudulent shaykh is painted as an agent for Divine trickery that is, then, exploited to leverage our all-too-human vulnerabilities even as everything that is transpiring (problematic and troubling though it might be) is said to be for our own spiritual benefit and well-being.

In addition, sometimes God, on the surface, appears to be without empathy and compassion for the human condition, but such appearances are described as being illusory, and, in truth, God loves us deeply. Therefore, when the alleged shaykh appears indifferent to our sufferings and sacrifices, this can be framed as merely a reflection of how Divinity sometimes appears to us. Moreover, surely, 'if' God has showered blessings on an individual, what is wrong with -- of course, in a humble, indirect manner -- proclaiming such bestowals have been given expression through the locus of manifestation known as the 'shaykh' in order to engender love in the heart of the mureed for the one who will guide them to Divinity?

What might easily be seen in a Cerebral or Somatic Narcissist for what it is -- namely, vanity, arrogance, and so on -- becomes (to borrow a form of expression from Winston Churchill that has been, somewhat altered in the present rendering): an enigma wrapped in a

riddle within a paradox of ambiguity in relation to Spiritual Narcissism. Are we being scammed or are we being told the truth? Will we lose if we reject such claims, or will be freed from spiritual treachery? Will we find our essential selves through such a person, or will we become alienated from our essential identity and Self?

The promise is great. But, verifiable answers are difficult to come by.

If we feel we are not making spiritual progress in conjunction with a given teacher, well, the problem lies with our lack of commitment to, and sincerity with, the mystical way. On the other hand, if a teacher informs us that we are making great spiritual advances even though this is not evident in the form of altered states of consciousness or in other tangible ways, how are we to prove or disprove what is being said.

No matter what happens to an individual on the spiritual path, a clever Spiritual Narcissist can re-frame the situation in a way that keeps people enthralled with continuing to serve as an on-going source of narcissistic supply for such a fraudulent spiritual guide. 'Pleasant' events are re-framed as the beneficence of Divinity that is being channeled through the 'shaykh'. Difficult or unpleasant events can be re-framed as Divine trials, tests, and tribulations that are a necessary part of the Path and have nothing to do with the possibility that the shaykh is a Spiritual Narcissist and the problems one is encountering are a Divine prod to point one's holy longing in another, more 'constructive' direction.

When Narcissistic Supply (in the form of adulation, praise, and so on) is available in quantity, if not quality (or perceived to be by the one who is under the influence of Narcissistic Personality Disorder), this might be comparable to a manic-like state. On the other hand, when the quality or quantity of such Narcissistic Supply is perceived to be drying up (or actually is drying up), then this might be the depressed side of the condition.

During the manic phase, a Narcissistic Personality disordered individual might be easy-going, affable, happy, generous, expansive, joyful, and ecstatic. During the depressed phase, such an individual might be pensive, silent, reflective, anxious, unhappy, cranky, angry, hyper-critical, down, withdrawn, given to rage, and so on.

Since the Sufi path is actually characterized by interspersed episodes of *jazb* (Divine attraction) and *qabd* (Divine contraction), confusing mania for *jazb* and depression for *qabd* might be quite easy to do among the followers of a person under the influence of Narcissistic Personality Disorder. After all, who among that individual's *mureeds* would have sufficient spiritual wherewithal to know otherwise? This is especially so if the fraudulent individual suffering from Narcissistic Personality Disorder re-frames the mania and depression in a manner that is consistent with the nature of mystical theory (i.e., as expansion and contraction).

Ironically, a narcissist will often come across to others as appearing to be someone -- who on the surface, at least -- is extremely earnest and sincere. Sometimes the intensity of this earnestness and sincerity might lead some individuals to wonder if the person is somehow disconnected from reality (or, at least, as it seems to be to the 'rest' of us), or, whether that person is simply unable to appraise the state of existence properly.

However, in the case of a Spiritual Narcissist, this very question or doubt can be turned back on itself. Instead of the Narcissist being out of touch with reality, or being unable to properly judge the actual nature of events, the person harboring such questions and doubts becomes the source of the problem -- that is, this latter individual is out of touch with the 'true' Reality and does not have the requisite spiritual insight to be able to properly assess the nature of Being.

At worst, the Spiritual Narcissist can maintain that she or he is only out of contact with physical/material reality and, furthermore, this might not necessarily be such a bad thing. The reconstruction of priorities concerning the levels of 'reality' serves the agenda of the Narcissistic Personality disordered individual and confronts the skeptic with a set of issues for which there is no readily identifiable answer with which everyone will agree and through which consensual validation can be achieved.

Once again, the complex, ineffable, hidden nature of the mystical path lends credence, plausible deniability and irresolvable ambiguity to the arsenal of tools through which a spiritual fraud can leverage people's understanding, beliefs, judgments and values. Potential

weaknesses can be turned into formidable defenses in relation to a Spiritual Narcissist.

These aforementioned qualities of earnestness and apparent sincerity were, and are, two hallmark features of the individual whom, for ten years, I considered my shaykh. His sincerity and earnestness had an extremely attractive, charismatic quality to them.

As mentioned previously, the actor, Spencer Tracy, once said, when a person can fake sincerity, then, one really has it made as an actor. The spiritual fraud to whom I am alluding had learned how to fake sincerity and earnestness to a degree that has to be witnessed in order to be (grudgingly) admired.

His ability -- the spiritual fraud, not Spencer Tracy -- to induce other people to provide him with a on-going narcissistic supply of adulation, praise, awe, compliance, obedience, entitlement, specialness, and so on, was very much rooted in his capacity to appear immensely sincere and earnest to others. Such sincerity and earnestness were used by him to re-frame certain issues, and misdirect his audience away from many other issues, as well as to get people to not only lower their natural defenses of doubt, skepticism, and mistrust, but to practically hand over the keys to the repository of all one's essential trust -- namely, the heart -- within a very short period of time.

Some people might find the foregoing analysis of a spiritually abusive individual somewhat comforting because it is couched in terms of a modern, psychological framework. Casting the situation in such a light might appear to offer some sort of intelligible explanation for why one person might spiritually abuse another individual.

From the perspective of a modified treatment of the DSM -IV rendering of Narcissistic Personality Disorder, we now can see that some people might suffer from such a malady and, thereby, have a somewhat better idea not only of some of the dynamics involved in this disorder but how the very properties of the disorder naturally lend themselves to assisting a person to become a chameleon within certain spiritual contexts. However, what remains unanswered is the why.

Why does someone develop this Disorder? What is its etiology? Can it be avoided? Can it be cured?

I believe there are some 'lesser' forms of Narcissistic Personality Disorder that arise through the interplay of a conjunction of various components -- some genetic, some social, some personal, some family dynamics, and one might explore the aforementioned issues of Classic and Inverted types of Narcissism to gain some insight into such issues. Nevertheless, I also believe there is a 'greater' modality of Narcissistic Personality Disorder that is possible, and this form of the pathology is deliberately chosen by an individual.

In spiritual terms -- at least in a largely Western sense -- the paradigm for such a deliberated choice is Iblis, or Satan. Because Iblis had an exceedingly high opinion of his place in the scheme of the Universe, because he believed he was entitled, because he was arrogant and haughty, because he believed in his own sense of specialness and uniqueness, because he believed that the purpose of the universe was to serve as a source for his Narcissistic Supply of adulation, praise knowledge, and so on, because he was envious of human kind, because he went into an angry tirade when his Narcissistic Supply was threatened, because he was so convincing in his sincerity and earnestness concerning his love of God that he fooled himself, Iblis/Satan committed an essential error and fell from Grace.

This fall appears to be infinite and unforgivable in nature. And, given that according to the Qur'an there is one and only one sin that is, in the eyes of Divinity, totally unforgivable -- and that is shirk, or associating partners with God, or relegating to oneself some form of God-hood -- then, presumably, in choosing to rebel against God by choosing the path of Narcissism rather than Servitude, Iblis committed the most egregious form of shirk.

Sadly, I have come to the conclusion that spiritual frauds like the person to whom I have been alluding throughout this essay bear a striking resemblance to Iblis in several respects. First, they have committed the basic error of all Narcissists -- whether of the lesser or greater variety -- which is this: they choose to consider themselves as superior, unique, special, rare, entitled, worthy of adulation and praise, with a special dispensation to ignore, flaunt, or bend the principles upon which the universe works, and a concomitant right to exploit and

manipulate others for their own ends (the ends of the latter, not the former).

Secondly, like Iblis, spiritual frauds do not repent for their wrongdoing, but, instead, seek permission from God to lead others astray or to corrupt the holy longing that resides in the souls of all human beings. If a person who spiritually abuses others would sincerely repent, then, God willing, one could, in time, forgive such an individual for the incredibly destructive nature of their actions that they have imposed on people for self-serving and vainglorious purposes ... even if one might never again trust such a person to be the keeper of an outhouse, let alone a guide for the aspirations of holy longing.

Thirdly, like Iblis, charlatans use techniques of artfully -false sincerity and earnestness to seduce people and, if possible, corrupt them. Like Iblis, they disguise themselves in friendly, affable, kindly, sincere, empathetic, knowledgeable, compassionate, generous, charismatic, entertaining, enchanting packages that whisper to one amidst the shadows, ambiguities and interstitial zones of existence.

Fourthly, like Iblis, they don't really seem to care when adulation turns to infamy, as people begin to learn the true nature of their activities. As long as they can be the center of attention and the focus of people's preoccupation, then, for them, hatred is as good as adulation as far as the dynamics of narcissistic supply are concerned because the only principle that matters to them is that they are the object of people's attention, and if they can get someone to hate them for the rest of their lives, they will be content since something of their purpose has been achieved -- which is to lead people astray from the straight path where one must learn to overcome, move beyond and transform such emotions in spiritually constructive ways.

Finally, like Iblis, spiritual frauds, such as the one to whom I have been alluding throughout the preceding material, actually believe in God. They are not atheists or agnostics. They might, as Iblis did, and does, even love God in their own way.

The horror of Iblis and such individuals is that they have deliberately chosen to place their agenda above Divine Purpose or, alternatively, to conflate their purposes with Divine Purpose. In fact, they wish to undermine the possibility of such a Purpose ever being realized and seek to take down with them as many people as will

permit such spiritual charlatans to take permanent control of their lives. The even greater horror is that there are many such predatory dajjals on the loose in the world these days ... among so-called Sufi shaykhs, among dogmatic and intolerant theologians, among government leaders, and among groups of terrorists -- might God protect us and save us all from such truly evil intentions.

Sometimes, by the Grace of Allah, the choices we make in this regard are successful. On other occasions, we are not so fortunate.

I have had two spiritual guides in my life, one was authentic, and one was not. If I were a baseball player, going 1 for 2 is a good batting average. On the other hand, if I were a goalie in ice-hockey, a .500 save percentage would relegate me, at best, to sitting on the sidelines in pick-up games.

Life is not a game. However, if it were, I'm not sure whether going 1 for 2 in the authentic guide department is okay or not ... I guess it beats going 0 for 2.

Only Allah knows why we do what we do, when we do it. However, irrespective of whatever choices are made, God's purpose is served.

May God guide us to the choices that, in the long run, will be best for our Deen -- whether these choices have, in the short run, pleasant or unpleasant consequences. May Allah encourage us to seek the truth in all matters. Ameen! Ameen! Ameen!

Chapter 28: The Boundary Problem

The following comments arose in conjunction with a woman who was being abused by her husband, as were her children. She had tried many things in order to make the marriage work, but all to no avail.

She didn't know where to go or to whom to turn in order to find a resolution to her problem. Moreover, because of the many biases and prejudices that exist within many mosques and among various imams concerning women, she was reluctant to go to such places and people in order to get 'help' and counseling.

I wish there were some simple way to answer your question, but I do not believe this is possible. Or, perhaps, more accurately, a simple response might be offered, but without an appropriate context to give the answer perspective and rigor, the simple reply would have little educational value for you or anyone else, since, in truth, your problem is, I believe, just the tip of a very considerable, spiritual iceberg that many people sense is running loose in the channels of life -- yet, the issue of how to avoid this hazard to navigation without getting sunk is a very omnipresent problem.

Moreover, the only real answer that can be given to the question you are asking is more in the way of food for thought that, when reflected upon, might help you to select a direction that, God willing, might be of service to you. In providing such food for thought there are quite a few themes that must be addressed, so I request your patience and forbearance while making the journey through what follows.

Your e-mail raises a lot of very important questions -- questions that are rooted in a variety of issues of abuse, and, ultimately, since all abuse is an expression of the presence of spiritual difficulties, the problems that you describe and to which you allude in your contribution to the discussion, are, in my opinion, quite appropriate topics for this Group List. However, I also will say that your question opens what many will consider to be a huge Pandora's Box -- something that such people do not wish to be opened because the raising of the lid of this box presents them with challenges that are very disturbing to, and uncomfortable for, them.

However, personally, I do not look at the issues to which your questions point to be a sort of evil leashed upon the world as was, in mythology, allegedly the case with Pandora's actions ... but, in truth, was, undoubtedly, just another attempt to lay the ills and troubles of the world at the feet of a woman (when all humans are responsible for the problems that beset us), as many have tried to do with Eve (may Allah be pleased with her), although the Qur'an clearly indicates that both Adam (peace be upon him) and his mate were equally responsible for transgressing against the bounds established by Divinity. In any event, I agree with the words that have been attributed to Socrates -- namely, "the unexamined life is not worth living," and, therefore, I welcome the problem with which you have presented us -- heavy though my heart might be concerning the circumstance both specifically with you, and generally with the state of the Muslim world, which makes your difficulty the kind of problem it is -- one in which a person in trouble is disinclined to go to the local mosque, imam, mullah, or 'ulama out of fear of being abused by the biases, prejudices, misunderstandings, arrogance, ignorance, and presumptions one might encounter in relation to either women or the teachings of Islam.

In general, people like to feel settled in their lives. Many people want to be reassured that the manner in which they believe is THE correct way to do things, and many of these individuals become nervous when the possibility arises that maybe, just maybe, there might be other, perhaps, even better ways, of doing things ... or, even more troublesome, that there might be enough degrees of freedom in the Divine Plan that different people might choose different modalities of engaging God and -- oh, no -- God might be equally well disposed toward many of the choices that human beings make, as long as we, in accordance with the guidance of the Qur'an, do not transgress beyond certain boundaries.

The identifying of some of these boundaries has proven relatively problematic over the centuries. One might refer to this issue of identification as the 'boundary problem', and different schools of kalam, philosophy, Hadith, theology, jurisprudence, and mysticism have arisen in an attempt to, among other things, address the complexities of the boundary problem, since, in truth, the boundary problem envelops almost every aspect of life on earth. Someone once

asked a Sufi shaykh to provide a definition of tasawwuf or the mystical way. The teacher thought for a moment, and, then, responded with just one word: "Adab" -- that is, spiritual etiquette.

As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has said: "Surely, your soul has a right against you; your Lord has a right against you; your guest has a right against you; and your wife has a right against you. So, give to each one who possesses a right against you." In fact, all of creation has rights against us, and vice versa, and the science of doing justice to Creation is the practice of adab. In this regard, the Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "Creation is like God's family, for its sustenance is from Allah. Therefore, the most beloved unto God is the individual who does good to God's family."

Observing, noting, acknowledging, understanding, respecting, and acting upon the rights of all the different facets and dimensions of Creation is the essence of adab for it is the means through which justice is dispensed so that everything is given what is its right to be given. The Qur'an indicates that: "God commands you to deliver trusts back to their owner," (4:58) and adab is the modality of returning such trusts back to each and everything of existence. "O ye who believe. Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity..."(5:8)

But, what are these "rights" and what is the precise nature of the "good" that we should do to God's family, and what is the specific character of the "trusts" that should be returned to their owners? Many people have responded in very different ways in relation to the questions being raised here, as well as in relation to many other similar questions.

The boundary problem is a matter of adab, justice, rights, trusts, truth, and understanding. Halal (permissible), haram (forbidden), makruh (doubtful), fard (obligatory), wajib (incumbent or highly recommended), sunnah (recommended) and mubah (as one likes or as one chooses), are some of the terms that are used to mark out the boundaries of lived existence.

In exoteric approaches to jurisprudence or Shari'ah, the tools that are employed to try to identify the appropriate applications of the aforementioned terms are: 'aql (reason), qiyas (analogy), ijmah (consensus of the ulama, or learned ones), and ijtihad (individual striving -- it is a variant on the root for 'jihad'). Among the people of

tasawwuf, tahqeeq is the tool of choice -- that is, verification of the nature of things through the process of kashf (unveiling) and yaqueen (direct, certain vision or grasping).

In this regard, one might remember that in addition to profession of the tongue and action of the limbs, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said that verification of the heart is a necessary and essential component of faith. In other words, faith is not the blind commitment that many people suppose, and to seek an increase in faith is, really, to seek an increase in the verification of that which is true.

In all of the foregoing, the notion of taqlid, or following authority, often plays a very prominent role, and, interestingly enough, taqlid is derived from the same root as qilada that means 'collar' or 'necklace'. The one who follows a given authority wears the authority like a collar or necklace that binds such an individual to the provisions and characteristics of whatever form of authority is being used as a guidance in a given matter ... and, herein, the nature of the problem confronting us and to which your question alludes begins to become apparent.

Obviously, the highest and best form of taqlid or process of following authority is to merge horizons with the Divine so that one sees with the sight of Divinity, and one hears with the hearing of Divinity, and one acts through the hands of Divinity, and one walks along the path of life in accordance with the guidance of Divinity. Just as obviously, everyone and his (her) twin sister or brother has an opinion about what this all entails -- about what constitutes a proper expression of taqlid.

However, there are a few potholes along the path in search of who, if anyone, has the best understanding of such authoritativeness. Moreover, there is a formidable difference between accepting something on authority, in a blind fashion, and accepting something as being authoritative because of coming to understand the strength of the wisdom, insight, practicality, rigor, and reasonableness that is given expression through a particular perspective or judgment concerning such issues.

In addition, in this modern day and age, we have another complicating factor to throw into the mix. More specifically, there are two possible worlds -- namely, Dar-ul-Islam and Dar-ul-Harb.

Dar-ul-Islam is the realm where the Deen or way of Islam governs, informs, organizes, and orients the space within which life is lived. Indeed, one of the essential purposes of Shari'ah is to create the sort of safe, secure, peaceful, harmonious community and family space that enhances one's opportunity to pursue the realization of Islam.

Dar-ul-Harb is the realm where the Deen or way of Islam has not been established. One who lives in Dar-ul-Harb is buffeted about by whatever sets of political, social, economic, philosophical, and spiritual forces that happen to be manifesting themselves in such a realm.

Although a Muslim or Sufi who is exposed to the crosscurrents of Dar-ul-Harb must, as best she or he can, still seek and act upon the truth inherent in Divine guidance, there are definite differences between the two realms. Nevertheless, what might be expected in contexts where Islam is the umbrella that protects one from the forces that seek to undermine the process of seeking the truth, and what might be expected in contexts where one is at the mercy of whatever forces shape the contours of the existential landscape, are not necessarily the same. Like everything else, there are differences of opinion among ulama and other interested parties (as in, 'most of us') about what the shape of the boundaries should be in terms of the differences of expectation concerning individual behavior within Dar-ul-Islam and Dar-ul-Harb.

To add a few twists and turns to the foregoing theme, one can put forth a persuasive case that, presently, there is no Dar -ul-Islam. Stated alternatively, although many people might claim that THE 'real' Islam, whatever that is, is being practiced in this or that nation, in truth, there are numerous fundamental spiritual deficiencies in the way society is organized in virtually any nation one wishes to name -- that is, there are numerous breaches of essential adab, trust, fiduciary responsibility, and justice that are being perpetrated in every country on earth.

Furthermore, the revolutionary movements in each of these countries are really nothing but a variation on the same theme, and if they were to achieve power what is likely to ensue is not unlike those cases where one sweeps and moves the dust around on the floor, but the dirt still remains ... things just seem different because the piles of dust have been moved about -- freeing old categories of the oppressed,

while heaping debris on new categories of the oppressed. And, for those who suppose that I might be picking on the Muslim community, the fact of the matter is, the same kinds of thing could be said with equal justification in relation to so-called democratic states.

Let's return to some of the tools mentioned above that are available to us for trying to determine where the boundary lines are -- about which Allah speaks in the Qur'an -- which we should be wary of crossing or transgressing. For example, consider the term 'aql' or intellect.

There is a Hadith that indicates that 'Aql was the first thing that Allah created. But, what is this 'Aql?

There is a distinction drawn in the medieval Christian tradition between 'ratio' (rah-tee-o) and 'Intellectus'. Ratio gives expression to the use of ordinary logic and reasoning. Intellectus refers to the lights of spiritual understanding that is a manifestation of various forms of intuition, insight, unveiling, visionary states, as well as the illumination of different spiritual stations -- each of which carries a different understanding concerning one's relationship with Divinity.

For 'ratio' to be effective, it must work in harmony with, and serve as a reflection of, the findings and inspirations of the dimension of human understanding that is rooted in Intellectus. Ratio, is, at best, derivative, in a faint fashion, from the operation of Intellectus, and, at worse, ratio is completely out of synch with Intellectus, and the two come into opposition with one another.

Thus, the Qur'an says of such circumstances: "It is not their eyes that are blind, but the hearts in their breast," (22:46) . In other words, people who are under the influence of a problematic modality of thinking have a certain capacity to 'see', but because their mode of understanding is not rooted in the illuminations of a rightly guided heart, such people, in effect, are blind because their way of thinking neither reflects nor gives expression to the truth.

The medieval Christian tradition speaks of the Intellectus in a collective way to encompass all those altered states of being that serve as manifestations of the lights of Divine knowledge, and witnessing. The teachings of the Sufi path have provided a means of focusing on

various facets of this infinite source of understanding, knowledge, and wisdom to which the Intellectus gives expression.

Thus, the heart, sirr, spirit, kafi, and aqfah (different modalities of spiritual knowing) each contribute different dimensions of understanding with respect to one's relationship with God. The heart is the locus of gnosis. The sirr, or mystery, is the locus of witnessing. The ruh, or spirit, is the locus of love. The kafi, or hidden, is the locus of dominicality through which various lights and colors of Divinity are manifested, and the aqfah is the locus through which essential identity and unique spiritual capacity are given expression.

In fact, all of the foregoing faculties, in coordinated combination, give expression to the presence of Intellectus according to one's individual capacity to manifest this presence. Moreover, there are practices, states, and stations associated with each modality of engaging the haqiqah, or reality, of Divinity as one goes through a process of cleansing and calibration to ensure the purity, sincerity, and objectivity of one's experience of Divinity -- again, according to one's God-given capacity to do so.

There are many people of kalam, theology, philosophy, and jurisprudence who suppose that the use of 'ratio' -- quite independently of Intellectus -- is sufficient to arrive at sound judgments in matters of Shari'ah. In other words, such individuals try to reduce 'Aql down to matters of exoteric logic and reasoning -- that is, they try to divorce the intelligence of 'this-world' thinking and creativity from the Intellect -- and the latter is, in actuality, the first thing that Allah created and is far vaster, deeper, richer, more subtle, aware, flexible, insightful, and powerful than is the intelligence of everyday life.

In short, many people confuse levels of reality, even as they understand, however dimly, that the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) demonstrated a clear difference between the two with respect to his days prior to being called to the Prophetic life, and the days following his response to that call. The Prophet (Peace be upon him) was known as al-Amin, 'the trustworthy or honest one,' prior to his Prophetic mission because of the integrity of his intellect and ethical demeanor, and in the 23 years of his Prophetic calling on Earth he was known as nabi, and rasul. As nabi/rasul, he was the locus

of manifestation for miracles and spiritual illumination that were dispensed, by the Grace of Allah, through the Prophet (peace be upon him) to people in accordance with their spiritual capacity. He was associated with such qualities because, by the Grace of Allah, the Intellectus had been made manifest in him according to the extraordinary spiritual capacity that Divinity had bestowed upon him ... mere intellect is not capable of journeying to the heights of understanding to which the Prophet was brought during mi'raj (literally ladder, and, thus, the means by which one ascends), and, thus, even Jibril (Peace be upon him) was forced to remain behind at the Lote tree while the Prophet (peace be upon him) went on alone: "And He revealed to His servant what He revealed" (53.10) -- not as a mental event but as an opening of essential Intellect.

Only after the Grace of God had been bestowed on Muhammad (peace be upon him) by means of the barakah (Grace) of the Prophetic mission in an active form could the potential of the haqiqah-Muhammadi be realized. Only after the foregoing Grace had been given, could the Prophet (peace be upon him) say: "The shari'ah is my words; tariqah my actions; haqiqah my states; gnosis my capital; intellect the basis of my Deen; love my foundation; passion my mount; fear my companion; knowledge my weapon; forbearance my friend; trust my cloak; contentment my treasure; truthfulness my residence; certainty my refuge; poverty my glory, and by it I attain to an honor above the rest of the prophets and messengers."

Even if we restrict ourselves to the realm of 'ratio' -- or the lesser form of 'aql -- there are numerous problems that arise because of the difficulties encountered while trying to pin down just what is meant by logic and reasoning (i.e., there are many varieties of logic including: inductive, deductive, abductive, Socratic, Aristotelian syllogistic, mathematical, formal, fuzzy, modal, dialectical, inferential, analogical, non-linear, eidetic reductions, deconstructionist, and hermeneutical ways of thinking). We often recognize the quality of intellect in its fruits, while, simultaneously, being at a loss to explain how that soundness of thought comes to be in any of us. Furthermore, there are many different kinds of influences bearing upon whether we are inclined to treat something as rational, irrational, trans-rational, and the like.

The foregoing influences are a function of a variety of considerations. Assumptions, types of experience examined, the way 'facts' are constructed, processes of evaluation, modalities of inference, implication, extrapolation, and interpolation, styles of theory building, methods of verification, the questions that are left unanswered, the degree of rigor and quality sought during exploration, biases, blind-spots, political and social influences, expectations, intentions, the issue of anomalous results, as well as the sort of hypotheses that are entertained can all affect the structural character of the conclusions one comes to in any conceptual context.

When one employs qiyas, or analogy (which is a particular kind of expression of 'aql), for the purposes of linking a spiritual principle with a given problem and, in the process, claims that something in the current dilemma can be likened to something to which a particular principle addresses itself -- or vice versa -- the fact of the matter is, almost anything can be likened to almost everything, and, as a result, sooner or later, all analogies tend to break down because similarity is not sameness, and it is the differences that give rise to the perturbations and anomalies out of which the sort of chaotic vibrations arise that eventually induce one to look for a different principle to treat as analogous to the problem at hand.

The symbols of dreams are, in a sense, an analogy since because the language of *alam al-mithal* (the world of symbols and similitudes), which is where dreams arise, marries together elements of the imaginal realm with elements of the physical realm, and the symbols and similitudes that are selected have an analogical relationship with the different facets of the physical realm that they are intended to allude.

One can take many facets of the Qur'an or the conduct of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and use these as a basis from which to construct a relationship of analogy between spiritual principles and the issues of life confronting us. However, if one starts from a problematic mode of characterizing the principles at work in relation to a given facet of the Qur'an or the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him), or if one misunderstands the nature of the problem being addressed, or if one commits both of these errors, then, the method of qiyas might not be just unhelpful, but downright injurious.

There are, to be sure, more stable, reliable, reflective, constructive, and heuristically valuable analogies, and there are less stable, reliable, reflective, constructive, and heuristically valuable analogies. The spiritual understanding of the 'source' -- whether dream, altered state of consciousness, individual, inspiration, through which a given analogy comes is of critical importance -- the better the 'source', the better the understanding that is being transmitted through the analogy.

A fatwa is nothing more than a legal opinion that someone expresses about one's understanding concerning the boundary issues of a given set of circumstances. Despite what those who issue them might wish to suppose, fatwas are not binding -- that is, they carry no necessary, transcendent power of taqlid (following authority) on anyone except those who accept the argument and reasoning employed in the decision -- moreover, whether anyone 'should' accept the reasoning employed in such fatwas is entirely a different matter.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "My ummah (community) will never agree in error." He also indicated there are 73 different sects among Muslims, and only one of these is correct."

Almost everyone supposes his or her approach to things is this 'correct' way, but, in truth, all that most of us know is that somewhere within the community there is correct understanding along with a concurrent capacity to distinguish truth from error. However, the precise location(s) within the community where we might find this way, is a real problematic issue, and, in fact, this issue returns us to the boundary problem once again.

In the meantime, since we know from the Prophet (peace be upon him) that his ummah will never agree in error, the disagreements that are evident everywhere in the Muslim world means that error does exist and the task of every single individual is to try to separate the wheat from the chaff. Thus, the Prophet (peace be upon him) has said: "Seeking knowledge is an ordinance obligatory upon every Muslim." And, the Qur'an states: "Say: My Lord, increase me in knowledge."

This challenge is made more difficult because there are all too many individuals within the Muslim community who are intent -- whether innocently or otherwise -- on propagating misinformation or disinformation and such efforts merely cloud the atmosphere. As T.S.

Eliot said: "Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information."

Perhaps, in order to avoid certain difficulties it might be important to point out that the boundary problems to which I have been alluding are not primarily about, say, the five basic pillars of Islam (bearing witness to the Oneness of Divinity, prayers, fasting, zakat, and Hajj), nor the basic components involved in the elements of faith (acceptance of, and commitment to, the reality of: the Oneness of Divinity, the Prophetic tradition, the realm and functions of angels, the books of revelation, the Day of Judgment, and that God is the sole determiner of good and evil). To be sure, there are differences of opinion that have arisen about precisely how to interpret and put into practice these different pillars and components of faith, and this is one of the reasons why the five major schools of jurisprudence or fiqh (Maliki, Hanbali, Hanafi, Jafari, and Shafi'i) came into being in order to offer reasonable, well-considered, but somewhat divergent approaches to the problem of where to place certain boundary markers in relation to how people might conduct themselves with respect to life. Yet, there are many other aspects of life that are not, specifically, about the five pillars or about the six articles of faith, per se, but which have a huge impact on life and the way it is pursued.

In fact, there is a major division within the Muslim community over even the purpose of Shari'ah. Some see it as a means for achieving Paradise. Some see it as a prelude to something more.

Some see Shari'ah as an all-encompassing expression of the principles upon which the universe is run and, in order for the nature of this Divine Law to be fully understood, one cannot restrict oneself to a purely exoteric and, therefore, limited manner of engaging Being. The Prophet (peace be upon him) alluded to this latter possibility, himself, when he spoke of the fact that the Qur'an had both an outer and an inner meaning, and this inner meaning had an interior meaning, and so on for seven levels. Moreover, in this regard, the Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "There are hidden gems of knowledge unknown to all but those who know God. If they are spoken of, none denies them except those arrogant toward God."

A bedouin once approached the Prophet (peace be upon him) and said: "Tell me how I might achieve Paradise. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "To attest to the Oneness of God, to pray five times a day, to keep the fast during the month of Ramazan, to pay the zakat, and to perform the Hajj at least once in one's life if able to do so." Upon hearing this answer, the bedouin said: "By Allah, I will do what you have indicated -- nothing more and nothing less," and, then, left. The Prophet (peace be upon him) watched the man leave, and, then, turning to those who were with him said: "If you wish to see an inmate of Paradise, look to that yonder man."

The Prophet also said: "This world is prohibited to the people of the next world, and the next world is forbidden to the people of this world, and they are both forbidden to the people of Allah." In addition, the Qur'an says: "[56:7] And you shall be three sorts. [56:8] Then (as to) the companions of the right hand; how happy are the companions of the right hand! [56:9] And (as to) the companions of the left hand; how wretched are the companions of the left hand! [56:10] And the foremost are the foremost, [56:11] These are they who are drawn nigh (to Allah), [56:12] In the gardens of bliss. [56:13] A numerous company from among the first, [56:14] And a few from among the latter."

Nowhere in the Qur'an nor the hadith does it say that the purpose of life is to achieve Paradise. This issue is always addressed in the form of a conditional-like format -- if you do certain things, then, this is what follows. In other words, if you want Paradise, then, like the aforementioned bedouin, do such and such, and if you want to avoid Hell, then, do such and such.

Why is the next world forbidden to the people of Allah? -- because the people of Allah are concerned only with Allah, not something else, and, in a sense, Paradise is something else -- although from another perspective, nothing, really, is other than Allah, albeit, as a veiled manifestation of one or another, or some combination, of the Attributes and Names of Divinity. Even Hell is a veiled manifestation of the Divine presence in the form of justice, rigor, majesty, and certain other jalali qualities.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) never mentioned: Hanafi, Malaki, Hanbali, Jafri, or Shafi'i schools of fiqh. He never mentioned:

Bukhari, Muslim, Da'ud, Tirmizi, or any of the other compilers of hadith.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) did say: "If a person sets down in Islam a good custom (sunna hasana) which is put into practice, that person will have written for oneself the wages of those who put it into practice, while nothing will be diminished from their wages; and, if a person sets down in Islam a bad custom which is put into practice, then this person will have written for one, the load of those who put it into practice, while nothing will be diminished from their loads." The creators of the various schools of fiqh, along with the compilers of hadith who forged the methodological principles through which such compilations were collected have all set down good customs in Islam.

People who read, and act upon, the fruits of the labor of such individuals will, God willing, derive much benefit. Communities that abide by such frameworks also might derive, God willing, much constructive benefit for each of the schools of fiqh provides people with a way of creating, if God wishes, the sort of safe space within which Islam might be pursued in peace.

However, are there no other possibilities for the establishing of systems of sunna hasana in conjunction with issues of jurisprudence, governance, community arrangements and the like? Some people have answered this question with a loud "No", claiming that the door of ijtiḥad, or individual striving in relation to such matters, has been closed. To the best of my knowledge, none of the people who have made such a claim was the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and, therefore, the foregoing "no" really lacks binding authority on anyone except those who reason along similar lines, and, furthermore, anyone who seeks to use force in order to compel compliance with such a perspective is transgressing the boundaries that Allah has established in matters of spirituality -- namely, there can be no compulsion in matters of Deen (2:256).

There is a significant degree of confusion among many Muslims about the meaning of the term bi'dah or innovation. There are a number of hadiths in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) speaks disparagingly of, and warns against, adopting practices that involve bi'dah. However, there are acceptable forms of bi'dah and there are unacceptable forms of innovation.

For instance, during the life time of the Prophet (peace be upon him), special prayers, known as Tarawih, were said in congregation by the Prophet (peace be upon him) on only several occasions, after which he discontinued the congregational aspect of the prayers. When asked why the prayers had been discontinued in their public format, the Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have answered: "I was afraid people would come to consider the prayers to be obligatory, and I did not wish to burden them in this manner."

During the Caliphate of Hazrat 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), he re-instituted the practice of saying the Tariwih prayers in congregation. When people inquired about the legitimacy of this policy and alleged that it constituted bi'dah, Hazrat 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) indicated that, yes, the practice did constitute bi'dah, but bi'dah hasanatan -- that is good or constructive bi'dah.

In order for something to be considered a problematic expression of the kind of bi'dah about which the Prophet (peace be upon him) had warned, there are certain conditions that need to be satisfied or, if you like, violated. First, the practice must clearly contradict, or be in opposition to, the Qur'an or the sunna of the Prophet (Peace be upon him). Secondly, one cannot say, in order to induce compliance with a given practice, that if one follows the practice, then, God will reward that person, or, thirdly, one cannot claim that if one does not comply with that practice, then, the non-compliant individual will be punished by Divinity. Finally, if the intention underlying the implementation of some new policy is to help enhance faith, then, providing none of the other three conditions have been transgressed, the new practice does not constitute an instance of problematic bi'dah. Unfortunately, there are many self-styled religious leaders and, supposed, spiritual scholars who like throwing the label or charge of bi'dah at anything with which they do not agree or don't like or do not approve.

They recite the relevant hadiths of the Prophet (peace be upon him) concerning the issue of bi'dah and, then, proceed, to imply that the Prophet (peace be upon him) was talking about precisely the sort of thing to which such self-serving leaders are opposed, when the Prophet (peace be upon him) might not have had in mind whatever it is that the so-called leaders don't like. In truth, these individuals really have no idea of what the Prophet (peace be upon him) was alluding to,

and they use the context of ambiguity to claim that the Prophet (peace be upon him) comments about bi'dah lend credence to their arguments when such might not be the case and, in point of fact, might be nothing but a shoddy attempt at misleading people.

Mu'adh ibn Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him) had been assigned to be a judge in Yemen, and before he left, he went to visit the Prophet (peace be upon him) to seek permission to go to the newly assigned position. The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked the man: "On what basis will you decide legislation?" The man replied: "In accordance with the provisions of the Book of God (i.e., the Qur'an)." The Prophet (peace be upon him) responded with: "And, if you do not find any provision therein?" The man replied: "Then, according to the conduct of the Messenger of God (i.e., Muhammad, peace be upon him)." With respect to which the Prophet (peace be upon him) inquired: "And, if you do not find a provision even after that?" The man said: "Well, then, I shall make an effort to forge my own opinion." The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: "Praise be to God, Who has guided the envoy of His envoy to what pleases the envoy of God,"

Notice, that the judge-designate did not say that if he could not find any way of dealing with a problem through the guidance of the Qur'an that he would consult the hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him). He said he would look to the conduct of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

The Prophet (peace be upon him) did not counsel people to follow his 'sayings', but rather he said that people should look to his sunnah that is, his conduct, actions, and behavior. Some people have tried to argue that if one substitutes hadith for sunnah, then, this amounts to precisely the same thing, for, speech is a form of action, but such a perspective is an interpretation of what the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, and one should be careful about trying to claim one knows what the Prophet (peace be upon him) meant in such circumstances, and, perhaps, even more importantly, one should try to refrain from disparaging someone who understands an ambiguous context in a way that is different from the way one understands such a context.

We can explore, discuss, critique, reflect, question and exchange understandings and possibilities. However, ultimately, all things return to Allah for judgment and disposition, and there are many

matters of Deen in relation to which none of us are qualified to pass judgment on others, and those who do so might be transgressing boundaries that belong to the Creator and that have not been delegated to the created.

We explore the hadith for clues concerning the conduct of the Prophet (peace be upon him). We explore the hadith for principles that might have universal applicability. We explore the hadith for issues on which to reflect. We explore the hadith for themes that assist our struggle with the lower self. We explore the hadith for sources of healing and ways through which to enhance our faith. However, we need to remember that the Prophet (peace be upon him) is also reported to have said: "Speak to people according to their level of understanding," and, therefore, everything that is said in the hadiths was done in accordance with the foregoing counsel that the Prophet (peace be upon him) gave, and, consequently, one cannot always be sure of what the intention of the Prophet (peace be upon him) was when he said something in a particular context -- for instance, in the case of bi'dah -- and whether what he was saying was intended for people in general, or the specific people whom he addressed in accordance with their level of understanding.

There are various dimensions of the sayings of the Prophet (peace be upon him) which, like different facets of the Qur'an, are left with a surface ambiguity, and require insight to be properly understood, and insight is not the same as interpretation. The process of tafsir in which a historical commentary is provided in relation to some of the circumstances surrounding the emergence of various Quranic passages can be helpful in bringing attention to certain aspects of revelation, but since every facet of the Qur'an goes 7 levels deep, one should not be too quick to try to reduce everything down to the limitations of tafsir. Furthermore, the practice of ta'wil, or interpretation, is also, not necessarily, an expression of spiritual insight ... in fact, a given use of ta'wil might seek to impose something foreign into the Qur'an precisely because that modality of ta'wil might not be an expression of Divine kashf or unveiling.

In the Qur'an we are told: "If you are god-fearing, He will give you discrimination," (8:29). The Qur'an also indicates that: "Be god-fearing, and God will teach you." (2:282) Each of these ayats, or verses, has

Divinity acting on those who are receptive, by virtue of being god-fearing, and, as a result, being given or being taught discrimination and knowledge by Allah.

The Qur'an also states: "It is He Who sent down upon thee, the Book, wherein are verses that are the Mother of the Book, and others that are ambiguous. As for those in whose heart is swerving, they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension, and desiring its interpretation; but none knows its interpretation save only God and those firmly rooted in knowledge; they say: "We have faith in it; all is from our Lord." (3:7)

Part of the significance of "none knows its interpretation save God" is that one of the root meanings of ta'wil, or interpretation, is a process of being taken back to the origin of something, and God knows the interpretation in this sense, because only He knows the origin to which understanding can be brought back, and only those who are firmly rooted in Divinely-given knowledge will have been given the requisite experience of spiritual verification that permits them to satisfy the conditions of having faith to be able to say: "We have faith in it; all is from our Lord."

A person who seeks to impose his or her own ideas on the meaning of the Qur'an is not someone who has been brought back to the origin of something by God, and, therefore, such an individual is observing an inappropriate form of ta'wil -- that is, the adab of such a person concerning the Qur'an is problematic.

Many people fail to understand that there is a very significant set of differences between saying that a given understanding is rule-governed and indicating that an understanding is principle-governed. Rule-governed behavior tends to be linear in the sense that a given form of reasoning is applied to different circumstances in, more or less, the same manner on each occasion.

For example, in spelling, there are certain rules in English -- such as: 'i before e, except after c' -- which are used as an aid to children who are learning how to spell. Or, there are rules like: 30 days has September, April, June, and November; all the rest have 31 with the exception of February.

Rules can be complex (as with games), but, the expression of the logic of a rule is usually reducible to some sort of formula, of sorts, which is to be applied at the appropriate time -- and, thus, the existence of rule books that can be consulted and for which a rule, hopefully, can be found to cover each and every contingency. When circumstances become too unwieldy, one starts to note various exceptions to the rule, such as in the days-of-the-month example used above.

Principle-governed behavior, on the other hand, tends to be non-linear. In other words, one cannot easily, if at all, reduce things down to some formula that can be applied across a wide variety of circumstances in, more or less, the same fashion.

For example, there is no rule for love ... there is no formula, simple or complex, one can take and try to apply it to all situations and claim that this is what love entails. Furthermore, if one tried to reduce love down to a set of rules plus exceptions, one would end up with so many exceptions, that one would begin to lose any feeling for what love was all about.

Love is a principle, or a set of intertwining principles, that is grasped by those who have some understanding of love or who have a taste for the quality of experiences through which love was expressed. If one has the requisite insight, one can recognize the presence of love, or one knows how to respond in a loving way, but there is no way to predict the form that love might assume in any given set of circumstances.

Many people within the Muslim community wish to treat the boundary problem as an issue of rule-governed behavior in which the same formulas are applied to everyone in precisely the same way. Others, and among them are the people of tasawwuf, have tried to suggest that life is inherently non-linear and, therefore, a rule-governed approach to the problems of life might, ultimately, breakdown and generate difficulties for individuals, families, communities, and nations.

Hazrat Abu Hurairah (may Allah have mercy on his soul), who was a Companion of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and who was responsible for generating the first collection of sayings, traditions, or hadiths of the Prophet (peace be on him) once said to a Muslim: "There

have been two sets of traditions that have been transmitted by the Prophet (peace be upon him). One of these you know, but if I were to disclose the other set to you, people would slit my throat."

There are several issues of potential importance that are being alluded to here. Not only does one wonder what this second set of traditions might be about, but given that this second set of traditions or hadiths are from the Prophet (peace be upon him), one wonders why some people would slit the throat of Hazrat Abu Hurairah (may Allah have mercy upon his soul) if they were to learn the nature of such hadiths. Perhaps, one of the reasons involved here is that the hidden set of hadiths might have been rooted in the kind of principles that would have been very difficult for rule-governed mentalities to be able to understand and accept -- and rule-governed behavior tends to color much of what happens with exoteric interpretations of the principles inherent in both the Qur'an and the conduct of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

The Prophet is reported to have said: "Do not give wisdom to other than the people of wisdom for you will be doing the wisdom an injustice, and do not prevent the people of wisdom from obtaining it and, thereby, do them an injustice." People who are spoken to through a medium that is not consonant or resonant with their modality of understanding, tend to be very resistant to, and, quite frequently, extremely hostile toward, whatever part of the truth they do not understand or about which they are in denial.

The very nature of Islam has always been to reform, and, thereby, help people work toward improving character. The Prophet (peace be upon him) has said: "The best thing in the Scale on the Day of Judgment will be a beautiful character."

Issues involving prayers, fasting, consumption of alcohol, gambling, slavery, treatment of women, and so on were not introduced all at once, but over a period of time. The institutions through which abusive forms of behavior were practiced in relation to such issues were gradually reformed over a period of 23 years -- the length of Muhammad's (peace be upon him) Prophetic mission.

If one looks to the conduct of the Prophet, one encounters: kindness, compassion, empathy, forbearance, love, sincerity, honesty, nobility, courage, charitableness, forgiveness, patience, humility,

modesty, fairness, justice, integrity, adab, practicality, commitment, flexibility, discretion, even-temperament, trustworthiness, steadfastness, balance, considerateness, sacrifice, loyalty, and gentleness. If a person sought, for the sake of God, to conform to the foregoing qualities, but was somewhat lax about, say, observing some of the five pillars, what would happen?

We don't know. One of the reasons we don't know is that Allah might forgive whomever Divinity pleases -- "O my slaves who have transgressed against their own souls! Do not despair of the Mercy of Allah Who forgives all sins." (39:53) In fact, Hazrat al-Ghazali (may Allah be pleased with him) indicates in his 'Revival of the Religious Sciences' that the quality of God's Mercy is such that even if humankind were suddenly to stop committing sin, that Allah would create another species of being who would sin so that God could forgive them. Indeed, as is said in a Hadith Qudsi: "My Mercy takes precedence over My wrath."

Consider the following hadith that gives expression to the unpredictable character of principle-governed behavior. There was a man who came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and indicated that he (the man) had failed to keep the fast of Ramazan (i.e., he had intentionally eaten when he should have been fasting), and the man wanted to know what he could do in order to make amends for the sin that had been committed.

The Prophet (Peace be upon him) indicated that, in accordance with the instructions of the Qur'an, one could make expiation for such a mistake by fasting for two consecutive months. The man replied that if he couldn't keep the fast for even one month, just how was he supposed to keep the fast for two months? The Prophet (peace be upon him) responded by indicating that in lieu of fasting for two consecutive months, Allah had indicated that one could feed the poor. The man said that he, himself, was poor and had no means to feed the needy.

The Prophet (peace be upon him), then, had a Companion bring some food from the store house of supplies for the community and gave the food to the man and told him to distribute the food among the poor of the valley. The man said that in all of the valley, there was no one poorer than he and his family, to which the Prophet (peace be

upon him) said: "Then, take the food and give it to your family, and that will serve as your means of giving expiation for your sin of not fasting during Ramadan."

Allah's forgiveness is like this. We do not know how, or in what way, it will be dispensed.

It is said that on the Day of Judgment there will be some who will never have done an iota of good in their lives, and, yet they will be forgiven everything. Why? -- because Allah wishes to show to all of us that Mercy depends on the character of Divinity and is not dependent, in any way, upon our behavior ... that is, what we do or what we do not do.

Although we do not know what will happen to someone who transgresses against Allah, we do know the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Kindness is a mark of faith, and whoever does not have kindness, does not have faith." Moreover, the Prophet (peace be upon him) has said: "What actions are most excellent? To gladden the heart of a human being; to feed the hungry; to help the afflicted; to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the wrongs of the injured." And, in addition, the Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "Shall I not inform you about a better act than fasting, zakat and prayer? -- making peace between one another. Enmity and malice tear up heavenly rewards by the roots." And, again: "If you love your Creator, then love your fellow beings first," as well as, "Deal gently with people and be not harsh; cheer them and do not condemn them." The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Assist any person who is oppressed -- whether Muslim or non-Muslim."

Finally, the Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "If you people (the Companions) were to leave out even one -tenth of that which has been made incumbent on you, you would not inherit Paradise, but there will come a time when if the people of that time do even one-tenth of what has been made incumbent on them, they will inherit Paradise."

The foregoing does not mean human beings might, or should, take license with God's inclination to Mercy and forgiveness. As the Prophet (peace be upon him) indicates: "The right and the left are both ways of error, and the straight path is the middle way." Moreover, the Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "If the believer's fear and

hope were to be weighed, they would balance." So, although the errors of the right and left might encompass a variety of things, one possibility is that one should try to avoid being carried away either by excessive hope of Divine leniency or excessive fear of Divine chastisement, and that a balance of fear and hope in these respects might be nearer to a middle path of balance.

Given what has been said in all that has been expressed up to this point, one might ask about what is the status of *ijmah* (consensus of the *ulama*, or learned ones) with respect to how one should proceed in life. While one might be able to say, with considerable justification, that some of the basics seem to have been, and remain, settled, nonetheless, there are vast areas where there is no consensus about how best to proceed -- in fact, in this day and age, there is no consensus on even who should be included among the *ulama* -- whether past or present -- who are to be polled to determine if any consensus exists on any given issue.

We are left with the choices that were given by *Mu'adh ibn Jabal* (may Allah be pleased with him), previously mentioned, who, when asked by the Prophet (peace be upon him) what criteria would be used in making decisions, cited the Qur'an, the conduct of the Prophet (peace be upon him), and *ijtihad*, or striving to develop his own judgment in relation to a given issue that was not dealt with clearly by either the Qur'an or the conduct of the Prophet (peace be upon him) -- at least as understood by *Mu'adh ibn Jabal* (may Allah be pleased with him).

Yet, even here, the heart of the one deciding such issues must be receptive to, and ready to merge horizons with, what the Qur'an or the conduct of the Prophet (peace be upon him) have to teach one if one is to have the requisite ears with which to hear, and the right sort of eyes through which to see. The Qur'an states: "Allah has not assigned unto anyone two hearts within their body," (33:4) and the one heart we have is caught in a struggle between, on the one hand, the pull of *nafs*, *dunya*, *Iblis* and unbelievers, and, on the other hand, the call of *ruh* or spirit.

With respect to the issue of marriage, there are some who will point to the Quranic verse that says: "and their husbands have a better right to take them back in the meanwhile if they wish for

reconciliation; and they have rights similar to those against them in a just manner, and the men are a degree above them, and Allah is Mighty, Wise," (2:228) and these same individuals might also refer to the hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in which he is reported to have said: "If a wife could prostrate to anyone besides Allah, it would be to her husband."

Many men, under the influence of nafs, dunya, and Iblis, suppose that when Allah says "men are a degree above" their wives that this constitutes an expression of unqualified, unconditional, absolute eternal support of men over women. Such individuals also presume that the sort of husbands to whom the Prophet (peace be upon him) was referring when he spoke about wives prostrating before their husbands, if such a thing were permissible, was to a ubiquitous "everyman" that encompassed all men in all circumstances, irrespective of the qualities of those men as human beings.

The Qur'an asks us: "[25:43] Have you seen him who takes his low desires for his god? Will you then be a protector over him? [25:44] Or do you think that most of them do hear or understand? They are nothing but as cattle; nay, they are straying farther off from the path."

Does any human being with even a shred of common sense really suppose that the Prophet (peace be upon him) was saying that no matter how much a man might be steeped in abusive, selfish, cruel, inconsiderate, mean, arrogant, ignorant, unjust, hurtful, deceitful, insincere, uncaring, unloving, and exploitive behavior, that such a man still enjoyed a "degree above" their wives and, therefore, should be listened to or that the wishes and caprices of such men should be complied with without exception or reservation, or that such men were the kind of people to whom, if it were permissible, a woman should prostrate and whom were owed that level of respect and admiration? And, even in those instances when a woman is married to a man of good character, what does the Qur'an really mean when Revelation speaks of men enjoying a degree above their wives (and it is important to note that the Quranic context involves wives and their husbands, not men and women generally)?

Is Allah talking about rights, intelligence, fiduciary responsibility, moral capacity, control, entitlements, or something else, and just what are the ramifications of such an assertion? This is one of the many

spiritual boundary problems to which I have been alluding throughout this commentary.

Men who wish to be self-serving imagine all manner of things when it comes to the interpretation of the aforementioned Quranic phrase. In fact, this is the problem, they impose their own ideas on the Qur'an rather than waiting for Allah to take them back to the original meaning of the Quranic words (the real essence of true ta'wil) as takes place when God discloses the meanings of Divine words to a purified, sincere heart filled with taqwa or piety.

Some clever men who seek to justify abusive behavior toward their wives like to call upon the following Quranic ayat in an attempt to exonerate themselves from any blame or sense of wrong-doing for their abusive behavior: "Men are the maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others and because they spend out of their property; the good women are therefore obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded; and (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in the sleeping -places and chasten them; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; surely Allah is High, Great. (4:34)" There are a number of boundary problems associated with the phrase: "made some of them to excel" because, on the surface of things, one does not know precisely what Allah means except in a very general way, but let us put this sort of issue aside and focus on the aspects of this verse that tend to get the juices of self-justification flowing in some men.

If a man fears desertion on the part of his wife can he automatically assume that the desertion is unjustified and, therefore, he has a right, in line with the counsel of the Qur'an to: (1) admonish her, and, if that doesn't work, then, (2) sleep in different places, and, then, if this doesn't work, to (3) chasten her? What if the wife is deserting the husband because he is abusive and not a very good person? Under such circumstances, does the husband really have a right to admonish her or to chasten her? ... and I skip the second alternative noted above since an abused wife probably would welcome the opportunity to sleep apart and be left in peace.

There are many men who interpret the 3rd stage for engaging an recalcitrant, disobedient wife -- namely, the chastening component -- to mean that it constitutes a right to physically assault a woman. Even

if one were able to agree about what qualifies someone as being a recalcitrant, disobedient wife -- and, surely, the only trustworthy source for deciding this issue is Divinity and not the politics of the gender wars -- the fact of the matter is, the manner in which all too many Muslim men interpret things in this case is not what is meant in the foregoing. Even assuming, for the sake of argument, that in a given set of circumstances, a man happens to be correct (which is, by no means, a foregone conclusion) in relation to some dispute he is having with his wife, when the Prophet (peace be upon him) was asked about the meaning of this section of the verse (involving the third step of seeking to address domestic disputes), The Prophet (peace be upon him) indicated that a man did not have the right to leave so much as a red pressure mark on a woman's body. More importantly, if one looks to the example of the conduct of the Prophet (peace be upon him), he never physically abused any of his wives -- even on the few occasions when there might have been disagreements (for example, there was one occasion in which some of his wives were complaining about the lack of material wherewithal available to them, and he indicated that if they were unhappy with the way things were, then, they were free to make other marital arrangements and that was the end of the matter).

A'isha, (may Allah be pleased with her), one of the wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him), was once asked what the character of the Prophet (peace be upon him) was like. She answered: "Like the Qur'an."

If one wishes to gain insight into the teachings of the Qur'an, look to the sunnah, or the conduct, of the Prophet (peace be upon him). The character of the Prophet (peace be upon him) is like a mirror of the Qur'an -- indeed, what we know of the Uncreated Word of God is an expression of the character of the spiritual capacity through which that Word was revealed ... namely, the Muhammadan haqiqah (reality).

If one continues on with some of the passages in the Qur'an following the foregoing verse, one finds: "[4:35] And if you fear a breach between the two, then appoint judge from his people and a judge from her people; if they both desire agreement, Allah will effect harmony between them, surely Allah is Knowing, Aware. [4:36] And serve Allah and do not associate anything with Him and be good to the parents and to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the

neighbor of (your) kin and the alien neighbor, and the companion in a journey and the wayfarer and those whom your right hands possess; surely Allah does not love him who is proud, boastful; [4:37] Those who are niggardly and bid people to be niggardly and hide what Allah has given them out of His grace; and We have prepared for the unbelievers a disgraceful chastisement."

If, contrary to the aforementioned counsel of the Qur'an, a husband is not good to parents or his children or the needy or one's neighbor (whether near or alien), or is proud, boastful, niggardly, and hides what Allah has given out of His Grace, or is an unbeliever, then, does such a man still enjoy a "degree above" women or "excel" over them or retain various rights quite apart from considerations of truth, justice, equity, decency, reciprocity, and integrity?

Within Islam, marriage is a contract between two individuals. The standard components of a contract are: offer, acceptance, and consideration.

Offer, acceptance, and consideration all take place within a context that has horizontal components that morally and spiritually modulate the focal dimensions of a given contract. Thus, irrespective of the specific considerations that form the central part of a contract, there is an *adab* that both surrounds and permeates the proper observance with respect to the expression of the spirit of that contract.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Of all the things which Allah has made permissible, divorce is least pleasing to God". The Prophet (peace be upon him) also has said that "marriage is half the religion."

Presumably, the latter saying of the Prophet (peace be upon him) is an allusion to the manner in which bringing two people into a situation that, day in and day out, forces them to encounter the sort of conflicts, differences, stresses, and problems that place great demands on, and are a challenge to, one's spirituality. To successfully negotiate the many eddies and crosscurrents of a marriage, one must put into practice the requirements of Deen.

Moreover, presumably, the former tradition of the Prophet (peace be upon him), concerning the dimensions of permissibility, as well as Divine displeasure, with respect to divorce, reflects the inherent

difficulty of marriage, while, simultaneously, serving as a cautionary warning against being cavalier and taking license with what Divinity permits.

Marriage, family, community, the state, constitutions, and Shari'ah all share at least one thing in common. When pursued properly, each of these is intended to create a safe, secure, peaceful 'space' within which to pursue the realization of life's purpose through exploring, understanding, struggling with, and acting upon the methodology of Deen to which Islam gives expression.

When there are breakdowns in the fabric of society, when the nature of 'aql', qiyas, ijmah, ijtiḥad, and fiqh have become inundated with boundary problems, when Dar-ul-Islam has largely disappeared from the world and everyone is immersed in the throes of Dar -ul-Harb, when we are fast approaching the latter part of the 'Latter Days', when 'fitna' (discord, disharmony) is everywhere, and integrity is almost nowhere, when all too many mosques, imams, mullahs, qazis, and so-called shaykhs spiritually abuse those who come to them for assistance, when one no longer can easily identify whom can be trusted, when far too many people have become rule-governed in narrow, rigid, dogmatic, self-serving ways, rather than rooted in the principle-governed degrees of freedom, beauty, mercy, compassion, generosity, love, kindness, truth, and fairness that are reflected in the conduct of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the Qur'an, then, what can be said to someone who asks: should I, and can I, divorce my husband? What is the right thing to do? What is permissible? What are my responsibilities? What is the adab?

One thing that can be done is Istikharah (prayer for guidance), and this is observed after witr prayers and just before one retires for the remainder of the night. Some say this consists in performing two ra'kats and saying surah 109 in the first ra'kat, and surah 112 in the second ra'kat, followed by a specific du'a or supplication that seeks determination concerning whether a given action is, or is not, beneficial for one's Deen.

Some people say that if one does the foregoing prayer, but one does not have any specific kashf, vision, or dream in response to the petition, then, the first strong feeling about the matter one has the following morning, is the answer, and if one does not have any specific

experience or feeling, then, one should do the prayer again the next night. Some say one should adhere to the above procedure for three nights or until one gets a definite, clear indication -- whichever comes first -- while others maintain one should do the prayer until one gets a definite response. Still, others say that if one does not have a specific experience or feeling in relation to the petition, then, after three days, one might do whatever one deems to be in the best interests of truth, justice, adab, Deen, and so on.

If one does the Istikharah prayer, one should not have any preconceived notions about how one wishes the matter to be resolved. The whole idea of seeking guidance is to discover what God wishes for us, not what we want, and, therefore, one must be prepared to act on what is received.

However, although Istikharah might tell one in which direction to go, it doesn't necessarily tell one how to travel along the direction being indicated. Of course, having a direction is very important, and knowing that such a direction is something that has been Divinely selected for one is also extremely important. Nonetheless, although Istikharah is intended as an assistance, it does not necessarily put an end to the problem of having to struggle with nafs, Iblis, dunya, or the unbelievers -- and this is so no matter what the specific direction might be that is given through Istikharah.

Moreover, there is also the problem of what to do if no specific experience or feeling arises in conjunction with this practice. When no Divine seems to issue forth from the prayer for guidance, this is not because one's petition has gone unheard by Divinity or that the problem is an unimportant one, but, rather, because the very nature of life is to struggle to acquire knowledge rather than have it handed to us pre-processed ... even to understand the Qur'an requires struggle for the truth of Revelation.

The Qur'an, the conduct of the Prophet (peace be upon him), and our own spiritual capacity also all have been given to us as forms of spiritual assistance, but life is still difficult, and the need for striving does not disappear. If there were not so much spiritual abuse going on in the world, then, the journey could be made a lot easier and more pleasant, but such is not the case, and the Prophet (peace be upon him)

warned believers that this would be so in the time approaching the Latter Days.

I will finish my commentary with something of a hypothetical. What would have happened if the Prophet (peace be upon him) had been permitted to remain with us, in a physical sense, over the last 1400-plus years?

As indicated previously, an important part of the nature of the Prophetic mission and a significant themes within the Qur'an involves the manner in which various cultural, social, marital, and spiritual practices and institutions were reformed over a period of time. The farewell Khutbah or sermon of the last Hajj of the Prophet (peace be upon him) gave heavy emphasis to the rights of women.

If the Prophet (peace be upon him) were living among us in a physical sense, would women continue to have been treated like chattel of men due to self-serving, imposed interpretations upon both the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet (peace be upon him)? There are a lot more degrees of freedom inherent in principles than in rules, and when one combines the qualities of moral character in the life of the Prophet with the appropriate process of ta'wil concerning the Qur'an, then the nature of cultural, governmental, judicial, educational, and spiritual institutions might be very, very different than they are today ... in relation to the status of women as well in conjunction with a lot of other issues as well.

Of course, although the Prophet did pass away physically, he still is with us today. The Qur'an says: "Think not of those who are slain in the way of Allah, as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord, they have a provision. Jubilant (are they) because of that which Allah has bestowed upon them of His bounty." (3:169-170)

Many people seem to suppose that Iblis is everywhere but that the Prophet (peace be upon him) is nowhere. And, unfortunately, all too many people suppose that whatever they want to be the "way of Allah" is acceptable, but the ta'wil, or the process of being taken back, by Allah, to the origins of significance inherent in this phrase is very different from what many people might believe and try to impose on that phrase. Thus, the meaning of the "way of Allah" is a very essential expression of the boundary problem issue about which I have been commenting throughout this essay. Furthermore, when, love for Allah

and his Rasul become more important to us than anything else, then, perhaps, we will be ready to listen with every fiber of our spiritual capacity to what we are being told all along about the nature of the "way" and how to pursue it in order, among other things, to gain understanding about how to proceed with the boundary problems of life.

The foregoing commentary gives expression to many of the factors that make us all very vulnerable to being exploited by spiritual abuse ... whether in the form of dogmatic mullahs and imams or in the persona of a false Sufi shaykh. The failure to address the boundary problem in a proper fashion constitutes the demon seed from which terrorism of all shapes, sizes and colors sprouts forth like weeds in a desert.

In fact, those who develop into physical terrorists have become so because, first, they were exposed to the sort of spiritual abuse that has corrupted their capacity to think through the support of Intellectus rather than the self-serving arbitrariness of ratio. The same seeds of spiritual abuse are being sown throughout the Muslim world, and we are all at risk ... both from without and from within.

Chapter 29: Science and Mysticism

The following comments arose in response to a number of statements and questions that had been expressed concerning the relation of modern science to issues of mysticism. In a number of cases, various theories were being propounded about the nature of psychological development and how this plays out in relation to the Sufi Path, while in a number of other instances, claims were being made that quantum physics has only just recently discovered what mystics have known for thousands of years -- namely, that everything reduces down to being a function of vibration and that the ultimate quantum of being is consciousness.

There are a number of books out now -- Connie Zweig's 'The Holy Longing', to mention just one -- which seek to explore the relationship of the psychological/emotional realms to the mystical dimension. Among other things, these works develop the idea that people often bring their emotional and psychological problems, issues, or baggage along on their esoteric journey -- sometimes with problematic or, even, disastrous results.

I have heard some people -- for instance, Baba Ram Das (Richard Alpert) -- indicate they do not believe that the mystical path can solve any major form of neurosis or other, underlying, psychological problems. At best, according to such individuals, mystical pursuits can help diminish the size of a psychological difficulty or limit the extent to which these sorts of forces interfere with a person's life -- in short, they can be managed and controlled, but not eliminated.

One also encounters much talk, from time to time, about spiritual guides as father figures, and that, with respect to some people, the search for a teacher is, in reality, just a search for a father figure. Moreover, apparently, issues of transference -- both positive and negative -- play themselves out whenever such individuals encounter a shaykh or other kinds of mystical guide.

Perhaps, some distinctions need to be drawn here. There is a difference between the emotional and psychological stresses that life imposes on all of us -- shaykhs included -- and the theories of this or that brand of psycho-dynamic theory of development.

Every human being has a need for love, kindness, compassion, empathy, honesty, sincerity, decency, friendship, understanding, and so on. If we don't get this quality of life -- at least, in some minimally acceptable form -- from our original nuclear family and/or surrounding neighborhood/community, then, we tend to seek such qualities elsewhere. Furthermore, if we don't receive these qualities -- again, at some minimally effective level -- during the early periods of the developmental process, then, yes, various kinds of psychological and emotional problems might arise that affect one's ideas about identity, purpose, motivation, learning, sociability, personality, love, intention, reciprocity, relationships, morality, hope, and meaning. On the other hand, people are quite variable in how they respond to the presence or absence of these kinds of issues in their lives.

Some individuals who are from very dysfunctional backgrounds rise like phoenix from the ashes. Other individuals who are from relatively functional families and communities go sour, and, in between, are individuals with an array of complex forces and factors operating within them, helping to shape and color their perception of life, themselves, and others.

What percentage of those individuals who become interested in mysticism do so for unresolved emotional and psychological issues? I don't think anyone knows, and this is so, for a variety of reasons.

First of all, there is no universally agreed upon conception of what constitutes 'normal' development in any, non-statistical sense. There are countless theories about this subject, but that is all they are -- theories ... with some aspects of such theories seeming to resonate in relation to certain dimensions of people's experience, while other facets of the same theories appear to be forced or problematic or not universally applicable when it comes to explaining human development and behavior.

Secondly, there are few, if any, individuals among the living who are able to sort out the differences between the problems that are in our lives because we have adopted (chosen) poor coping strategies and the difficulties that are in our lives because they are part of our rizq -- our allotted portion (which extends to difficulties as well as ease) ... or to what extent the latter affects the former, or the former affects the latter. Consequently, determining what the meaning(s)

is(are) of the events in our lives -- in the present case, developmental issues -- is not an easy matter, any more than is understanding the import of the dreams we have, since they both (dreams and life events) require interpretation.

Ta'wil, which is a term that appears in the Qur'an on a number of occasions, is understood by some to mean interpretation, but, among the Sufi masters, this term refers to a process of bringing an issue back to its origin, source, or operating principle. When we become involved in conceptual interpretations -- whether of the Qur'an or life -- then this is often when we begin to go astray from the truth of things.

A spiritual guide is someone who, by the Grace of Allah, is rooted, via a silsilah, in ta'wil. It is this capacity for taking life back to its origin, source, or principle that distinguishes the mystical path or tasawwuf from theology, kalam, philosophy, jurisprudence, and even physical science.

Whatever emotional or psychological condition in which a person comes to the door of a shaykh, God has brought teacher and seeker together for a purpose that, although known to Divinity, is, yet, to be worked out on the human level. This remains true irrespective of whether the seeking of the student is sincere or the teacher is authentic.

Whether a seeker comes from functional or dysfunctional backgrounds, that individual is entangled in issues of psychological and emotional difficulties because such problems are inherent in what it means to be a seeker. It is our ignorance of the truth of things that is the source of our problems, and ignorance arises out of both effectively functioning as well as dysfunctional families and communities alike.

Intuitively, many seekers understand the gist of what it is they are seeking. They are looking for people of ta'wil ... people who are capable of going back, and helping people to learn how to journey back, to the origin or source of one's life.

Unresolved issues of development might be present, but underneath it all is one naked reality -- one needs the truth in order to be able to sort life out. A spiritual guide might, at some level, be, for some, a 'father figure' (and unless one knows what kind of a

background another person grew up in, one really doesn't have a clue what the hermeneutical character of this term might be), but such issues are, for the most part, purely secondary to the one, overriding consideration of life -- without truth, one begins at no beginning, and one works toward no end.

Psychologically deprived childhoods are not what make people vulnerable to spiritual fraud -- although such a background can be exploited once the bait has been taken. The 'bait' into which we bite with our trust is the belief, hope, and understanding that the individual who calls himself or herself a mystical guide is someone who gives authentic manifestation to the promise of ta'wil in the sense outlined above.

No seeker knows the truth of this belief, hope or understanding at the time of meeting an alleged shaykh, or even at the time of taking ba'yat (initiation) -- that is why they are called a seeker ... because they are ignorant and don't know the truth of things. This is what makes all seekers vulnerable ... their ignorance and a hope that places one's essential trust at risk.

Authentic teachers take this initial investment of trust from a seeker and turn it into nisbath that is the essential heart-to-heart channel of spiritual communication between a seeker and a teacher, and the medium of transmission of this nisbath is trust. Fraudulent teachers exploit and manipulate such an investment of trust and convert it into another kind of relationship -- a parasitic one that is problematic, if not destructive, to the host (i.e., the seeker).

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said that 'all people will perish but the people of action, and among the people of action, all would perish except the sincere, and the sincere are at great risk'. One of the reasons why the sincere are at risk is because 'trust' -- a component of sincerity -- is offered up under conditions of ambiguity with respect to how it will be received and treated by others.

Some individuals might seek out abusive relationships because that is all they know, and, for such individuals, it might be that they operate on the premise: 'better the devil one knows than those one does not know'. However, there are many other individuals who are not seeking abuse, although, for reasons best known to Divinity, this is what they find.

Moreover, the nature of spiritual abuse is such -- or can be so -- that the people who are being abused might not even be aware of its presence. This is because the fundamental form of spiritual abuse is not sexual, financial, material or authoritarian exploitation, of one kind or another, but, rather, a charade that is being played out such that the so-called teacher is passing himself or herself off as a sacred manifestation of ta'wil, when this is not the case.

An alleged teacher can have all manner of information about the structural character of the mystical path, along with countless teaching stories, practices to give, fatihas (a ceremony of remembrance and gratitude) to offer, sama (sacred music) sessions, and so on, but if that person has not been properly appointed by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), with the permission and authentication of Divinity, then, this person is not rooted in the esoteric tradition of ta'wil, and, mystically speaking, can offer absolutely no -- and I emphasize no -- help to an individual seeker with respect to the issue of returning to one's origin or source and realizing the truth of what that entails. Such a fraudulent guide is merely wasting one's time as far as the essential purpose of life is concerned, and this remains so even if one learns this or that from such an individual.

There are many theories of psychology that make claims about what an infant does and does not experience, or is and is not aware of, or does and does not know, or whether an infant has a sense of self. In truth, an infant is something of a 'black-box' mystery with respect to which psychologists and other theoretically inclined individuals attempt to do a certain amount of reverse engineering based on observed behavior -- which often tends to constitute a very poor, limiting sample from that to try to make inferences about the nature of an infant's phenomenological world ... a sample that, among other things, might be consistent with a variety of contradictory theories.

Individually, we are unique manifestations of the realm of al -a'yan al-thabita, that is, the realm of immutable entities. According to the Sufi masters, in truth, we are absolute non-existence (al-`adam al-mutlaq) brought into a condition of relative non-existence (al-`adam al-idhafi) through the way the Names and Attributes of Divinity are manifested through the prism of al-a'yan al- thabita (immutable essences).

We do not individuate through the self-awareness of our parents, because, in fact, most parents are caught up in an illusion of self. Thus, the Prophet is reported to have said: "Every child is born according to primordial nature (fitra), and, then, his parents make that child a Jew, a Christian, or a Zoroastrian." Furthermore, since the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also is reported to have said: "There are 71 sects among Jews, and only one of them is correct, and there are 72 sects among Christians, and only one of them is correct, and there are 73 sects among Muslims, and only one of them is correct," one might add that some parents initiate children into becoming this or that sect of Muslim, and, thus, primordial nature, or fitra, goes missing in the battles of life.

According to the Sufi masters there is one, and only one, form of developmental individuation that is fully compatible with the truth of existential and spiritual realities -- namely, the one in which a person is brought back to the essential origin and source of one's unique mode of al-a'yan al-thabita through a process of ta'wil -- a process that is sometimes referred to as tasawwuf. This truth is realized in the station of baqa (spiritual subsistence) but one must go through the keyhole of fana to gain admittance.

All other forms of individuation -- psychological, sociological, theological, mythological, or philosophical -- are inherently incapable of making this journey, and, therefore, are of limited and of somewhat misleading value. In fact, one of the tasks of tasawwuf is to help us disengage from all inauthentic forms of individuation, for only ta'wil -- in its sacred sense and not in its adulterated sense of conceptual interpretation -- can lead to the truth of one's essential nature or fitra.

How do we come into this world? One comes into this world as an expression of the rizq that is contained within the potential of the kind of al-a'yan al-thabita, or immutable entity, that one is primordially -- we pick up nothing along the way into this world that is not consistent with our rizq, and whatever 'picking up' is done, to the extent that such 'picking up' happens at all -- and Allah knows best the truth of this matter -- occurs as a function of an individual's potential that is inherent in one's unique al-a'yan al-thabita.

All human awareness is awareness of the selfhood of al-a'yan al-thabita being manifested in one modality, or another, of its potential.

From: illusion and delusion, to: truth and realization, our capacity for awareness reflects one, or another, condition of the unique potential of al-a'yan al-thabita that is being induced into manifested form through the Presence of the Divine Names and Attributes.

As such, baqa might be described as the awareness of the Presence of Divinity as it gives manifested, relative non-existence to the potential inherent in absolute non-existence as a function of the nature that Divinity has given to the fitra of al-a'yan al-thabita. Fana, on the other hand, gives expression to the awareness of that Presence without a concomitant awareness of the fitra that makes awareness of such Presence possible -- a fitra that is God given.

The purpose of sacred ta'wil or tasawwuf is not -- at least, primarily -- to go on a journey of the planes of the different realms of being, whatever these planes might be. The purpose of ta'wil is to bring on line and calibrate all of one's inner faculties (nafs, mind, heart, sirr, ruh, kafi, and aqfah) in order to be able to properly carry out the purpose for which we were created -- that is: "I have not created human beings and jinn except that they may worship Me," (51:56 -57), and the 'Me' here is the Hidden Treasure that Divinity loved to be known and for which Creation was brought forth to know, to love, to be slain, and to be recompensed with the gift of baqa -- individuated awareness of Divine Presence as manifested through the Names and Attributes.

According to the Sufi masters, whatever is learned about planes of Being tends to occur on the downward arc of return from spiritual ascension. Furthermore, such learning is a function, in part, of the capacity of the one who is being opened to such possibilities by Divinity, and, consequently, varying capacities experience such phenomena differently, that helps account for the range of descriptions that have been given about some of these planes, as well as states and stations, and where these all fit into the scheme of things.

Finally, to the best of my understanding -- and being human, I could be quite wrong here -- the Sufi masters do not either reduce the Divine Names and Attributes down to vibrational phenomena (see introduction to this essay), nor do they consider consciousness to be the fundamental quantum or building block of existence. Just as God is not spirit, the Names and Attributes of Divinity are not vibrational

events, nor quantum interactions, nor string theory in action, nor are they further reducible to anything other than being the mysterious means through which manifestation of the Hidden Treasure, on whatever level, is made possible. Quantum chromodynamics or other field theories of modern science, allude, at best, to secondary realms of manifestation, not to a primary set of causal forces.

In addition, trying to reduce all of the Names and Attributes down to being expressions of some basic modality of consciousness seems inconsistent with the very existence of a multiplicity of different Divine qualities, each of which has its own unique character -- consciousness being one such, unique quality among others. Now, one could, if one wished, follow the example of those who are trying to derive consciousness from quantum phenomena in the search for a unified field theory or a TOE (theory of everything), but I suspect that such efforts will be unrequited because Divinity cannot be circumscribed nor penetrated -- in fact, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) counseled on this issue when he is reported to have said: "Reflect upon on all things, but reflect not on God's Essence."

Ultimately, Divinity, in Essence, is unknowable. We know only what is disclosed through Divine manifestation, via the Names and Attributes, together with what our spiritual capacity is capable of being made aware by the Grace of God.

Furthermore, since the Essence, or Dhat, of Divinity is unknowable, then, how the Names and Attributes arise out of the Great Mystery, is itself unknowable for we do not have access to the event-horizon through which the manifest comes forth from the non-manifest. However, whatever the nature of the aforementioned capacity is, which Divinity has vouchsafed one in the form of al-a'yan thabita, this is the means through which one seeks to worship the manifestation of the Hidden Treasure as given expression through the Names and Attributes in accordance with God's wish with respect to humankind and jinn.

Chapter 30: Signs, Truth and the Way

An individual once asked the following question. "Which signs show that the relationship between a teacher and a student has gone awry.?" This inquiry was coupled with a request for something to be said about how one goes about bringing on line, and calibrating, our spiritual faculties -- such as heart, sirr, ruh, kafi, and aqfah.

In one sense, the answer to the first question (that is, which signs show that the relationship between a teacher and student has gone awry?) depends on the relationship at issue, for there might be many signs within a particular context which indicate that -- in words attributed to Hafiz -- 'there is something just not right about this camel ride'. In another sense, however, there is one sign common to all relationships of spiritual abuse -- a departure from the truth.

Whether someone is pretending to be a shaykh, but is not one, or someone has deluded himself or herself into believing that she or he is a spiritual guide, or someone has been led to believe -- incorrectly -- that one is a shaykh, the essence of the Sufi path is truth, and when one departs from that, then, one has taken a detour away from the Sufi path and, with it, one has ventured into a country where an authentic teaching relationship with another person is not possible (we can learn from everyone, but the nature of what is learned through one's relationship with an authentic guide cannot be acquired through just anyone).

The trust that is extended through ba'yat (initiation), and the sincerity that is at the heart of nisbath, as well as the process of bringing on line and calibrating one's different spiritual faculties (suluk or spiritual journeying) all are rooted in, and require, the presence of truth. An authentic teacher gives expression to that Presence according to the spiritual capacity of the shaykh.

A seeker seeks through the truth, and a guide guides through the truth. The truth is what holds an authentic teaching relationship together.

There is no subjective dimension to the truth, and there is no objective dimension to the truth. The truth is what it is and does not change according to circumstance.

A good teacher -- of whatever capacity -- is someone who does not get in the way of the truth and, thereby, mislead the seeker. A good student -- of whatever capacity -- is someone who does not get in the way of truth and, thereby, descend into rebellion, of one kind or another, against the truth.

Ultimately, the teacher is always Allah, Who uses this or that medium of transmission to give expression to what is to be learned or acquired. While the vehicle of transmission -- that is, a shaykh or pir -- might color the nature of the transmission as a function of the teacher's spiritual capacity, this does not make the teacher-seeker relationship a subjective one.

In fact, it is the truth inherent in the Divine teaching presence, as given expression in the particular context of a shaykh-seeker relationship, that guards against the potential for human, subjective distortions to skew the aforementioned relationship in problematic directions. When a teacher is inauthentic, then, subjective considerations (such as nafs, biases opinions, prejudices, theories, ignorance, impure niyat, dunya, and Iblis) undermine, distort, as well as work antagonistically against, Haqq's Presence being realized in a so-called 'teacher'-student relationship.

Adab, or spiritual etiquette, is the medium of exchange for the truth. When adab is properly observed, then, justice is done to the truth in all circumstances -- and just as the Prophet (peace be upon him) has indicated that our soul and our spouse and our children have a right over us, so, too, does the truth -- in fact, all other rights flow from this, since it is through the truth that one comes to understand the nature of rights and the way to do justice to such rights.

To realize the truth, rights, justice, adab, and reality of Created existence, one has been given certain potentials by Divinity. Realizing these potentials requires struggle, for struggle is the anvil on which the character of one's suluk (spiritual travel) is forged, and through such struggle, God willing, potential is fulfilled, and the only difference between capacities in this respect, is the depth, breadth, and intensity of the truth that is experienced -- that is, all realized spiritual capacities experience truth, but different dimensions of truth are grasped as a function of spiritual capacity that is blessed by Divine barakah (Grace) in unique ways.

When people speak of annihilating the ego or nafs, this is an unfortunate turn of phrase, because, in fact, nothing is annihilated -- rather, a transformation is undergone. Under normal circumstances of dunya, or the entanglement of one's own nafs (the tendency within us to oppose truth) with the machinations of the nafs of other people, the condition of nafs is rebellious.

Yet, under the tutelage of truth or Haqq, the twin eyes of unredeemed nafs -- namely, passion and anger concerning one's relationship with dunya -- undergo a transition in the phenomenology of their focus. More specifically, passion and anger switch their attention to Divinity and away from dunya or self-absorption.

As a result the passion, love, and desire of the world become transformed into a passion, love, and himma for the truth of Divinity. Moreover, the anger of nafs becomes transformed into a fierce and rigorous defense of the truth rather than a stubborn commitment to the delusions and illusions of dunya.

When the foregoing occurs, God willing, then, the nafs that, in its unredeemed state, had been an obstacle to the truth, now becomes an ally of, and staunch advocate for, the truth. But, the spiritual journey does not end here. Instead, the minimal conditions for proceeding on with the spiritual journey have, by the Grace of Allah, been satisfied.

In addition to the foregoing -- and one should not look on all of this as some sort of set of developmental stages that unfold in a linear fashion, for the process is quite non-linear, with many spiritual dynamics occurring in a somewhat simultaneous fashion along many different channels of synergistic feedback loops -- the various dimensions or potentials of the heart (and these run from: the quality of qalb -- i.e., that which turns between the influences of unredeemed nafs -- to: such qualities as the fo'ad that sees through truth), are brought on line and calibrated through the observance of zikr.

While all zikr gives expression to the truth and brings one into contact with the truth so that the truth might cleanse the heart of impurities, the fact of the matter is, there is a science and art to the reciting of zikr -- a science and art that cannot be picked up through rational, discursive means, but must be transmitted through an authentic shaykh. This is part of the barakah that comes with being associated with a legitimate silsilah, and that no interloper into

spiritual matters (student or so-called teacher) can pass on or acquire through alternative means.

Different zikrs have different effects, and even the same zikr said by different individuals or at different junctures in one's life can have diverse effects. Spiritual capacity resonates in various ways in relation to different zikrs, and knowing what zikr to say, when to say it, for how long, under what circumstances, and with what protections are all part of the science and art of zikr.

One cannot arbitrarily invent algorithms that are going to permit the uninitiated to achieve the decryption of such secrets. Furthermore, even if someone happens upon a zikr and begins to say it, the alchemical impact of one's contact with this version of a form of the Philosopher's Stone, might be limited, or null and void, or even, in some cases, problematic -- unless, of course, Allah wishes otherwise -- because the catalytic properties of the shaykh's himma (spiritual aspiration) and protection in relation to a seeker (and through the shaykh, the Prophet's himma and protection, and through the Prophet, Allah's Himma and Protection ... and the former two are but different manifested expressions of the latter) are largely absent, unless, again, Allah wishes otherwise.

Sometimes the observance of zikr goes on in conjunction with spiritual experiences of one kind or another. Sometimes this does not take place.

Only an authentic teacher can help one understand and respond to the former with an appropriate observance of adab, and only an authentic teacher can assist one to put any lack of spiritual experience in perspective. The goal of zikr is not spiritual experiences, states, or stations.

The purpose of zikr is to clean the heart so that the latter permits the truth to be given unimpeded transit through that medium without scattering (the Prophet said that there is a polish for everything and the polish of the heart is zikr Allah). The difference between a properly functioning heart (in a spiritual sense) and an unclean heart is the difference between a laser and ordinary light -- and, thus, the Prophet said to beware of the vision of a Mu'min for he (she) sees by the light of Allah, and faith is the light of the heart ... the greater the faith, the more coherent is the light of truth's transmission.

Under 'normal' conditions of the unredeemed nafs and its entanglements with the nafs of others (i.e., dunya), the heart is filled with resonances other than awareness of the Presence of Divinity. One of the primary reasons for this is because the sirr (a spiritual faculty related to the heart) is not functioning properly, and, consequently, is ceding access to the heart in relation to all manner of worldly and nafs-based impressions.

Therefore, there is a need to empty the sirr, because as long as the sirr is filled with such impressions and allows these to seep, at will, into the heart, the heart cannot perform its intended function that is to remember God. The practice employed by the masters of tasawwuf in order to empty the sirr is muraqaba, that is to engage in contemplation of a Divine theme that is given by one's shaykh -- and, here again, if one is in a relationship with a spiritually inauthentic individual, the theme, context, niyat, adab, and truth of the practice are all wrong, and no, or little, spiritual good can manifest itself through such conditions.

When the sirr has been emptied of the pollution of nafs, dunya, Iblis, and unbelief, then, it guards the entrance to the heart and ensures, God willing, that nothing but the remembrance of Allah enters into the heart. This process of emptying cannot be learned from books because it depends on the existence and quality of the nisbath (the heart to heart connection) between a teacher and a seeker for proper transmission and observance of such a practice.

The ruh or spirit is the mine of love, for although the heart has several dimensions that are related to love (one of which concerns human kind and creation, and another that is devoted exclusively to Allah), what begins in the heart, soars with the advent of spirit. Love is the key that unlocks the secrets of the ruh.

However, love is not a unidimensional phenomenon. There are many levels, facets, and dimensions of love.

There is affection, compatibility, inclination, fellowship, passion, friendship, exclusive friendship, ardent affection, enslavement, and bewilderment. Most people never get beyond affection and a certain amount of compatibility and inclination.

There is a Hadith Qudsi that says:

“Whoever seeks Me, finds Me;

Whoever finds Me, comes to know Me;
Whoever comes to know Me, loves Me;
Whoever loves Me that person I slay;
Whomever I slay, I owe that person blood-money;
And, to whomever I owe blood-money, I am the recompense.”

One cannot slay oneself. One must be slain, and this comes as God's discretion.

Precursors to fana might be present in one's love of the shaykh or in one's love of the Prophet (peace be upon him), but the fullness of fana does not come until one is slain and one follows the example of the Prophet (peace be upon him) by dying before one dies. The aforementioned stages of love are way stations along one's route to a funeral.

In fana, the individual is not annihilated, but, rather, becomes invisible to perception. The vision of fana is consumed with the Presence of Divinity -- a Presence that seemingly makes the presence of al-a'yan al-thabita (which is, itself, an expression of the Hidden Treasure) fall beyond the horizon of one's grasp and awareness of Presence.

A man once came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and said: 'Truly, I love you in God Almighty.' The Prophet replied: 'Then take adversities for a garment, and wear poverty for a cloak.' The stations of repentance, longing, sincerity, patience, taqwa (piety), dependence, gratitude, steadfastness, ihsan (spiritual excellence), and so on are the stations of adversity and poverty through which the testament of love is lived and given -- and Allah can shape, color, direct, and extend these stations in any direction Divinity wishes.

There might, or might not be, mystical experiences associated with the foregoing journey. Some Sufi masters have said that, sometimes, the greatest saints of the Path never have even one mystical experience and such people are hidden beneath the canopy of Divinity, even from themselves. To be fana with respect to fana is, by the Grace of Allah, truly something. To realize baqa and have no wish to be other than 'abd Allah (servant of God), as was the wish of Muhammad (peace

be upon him), is to serve the truth and realize truth according to the full potential of spiritual capacity.

The Sufi Path is not about powers, kiramah (breaking the norms of physical laws), the Unseen, or different worlds. The Sufi path is about realizing our God-given capacity for worshipping Divinity through bearing witness to the truth that there is no reality but Divinity, within or without, and the realized individual is but Divinity perceiving the Divine through a created eye.

And what about the kafi and aqfah? What are the practices associated with bringing on-line and calibrating these inner faculties?

The Buddha once addressed a group of seekers. He picked up a bunch of leaves from the ground of the forest and held them up for those who were gathered around him to see. He said, 'just as these leaves that I hold in my hand are but a small sampling of the leaves which exist in this forest, so, too, what I relate to you is but a small portion of that which is to be related about the truth, but I give you what is necessary for you to escape the realm of suffering'.

I am not the Buddha, and I am not a Prophet, and I am not a shaykh, but I relate to you what I understand of what is necessary to travel in the direction of truth according to my capacity to do so. And, what I have to say in this regard is but a small part of what those who are much better, more knowledgeable, and far wiser than me have to say on such matters.

I close with two stories. The first is about a young man who was applying to various colleges for purposes of gaining admission to higher education.

This individual was invited to one of the schools to which he had applied for a tour of the facilities as well as an interview. During the interview, the official from the university asked the youth if he had any questions.

The young man thought for a moment and said: 'Well, you, know, the central library only has about 30,000 books, and I thought this might adversely affect doing research here. I was a little concerned about this.'

The official replied with: 'Well, son, I'll tell you what. When you get done reading the books we have, we'll buy you some more.'

The second story is as follows. There was a Sufi who went around a certain town proclaiming that he was greater than God. Naturally, this annoyed the religiously-minded of the locality, and they decided to bring the misguided mystic in for questioning before an auspicious board of experts in religious law.

The conveners of the forum began questioning the man as to whether what they had heard of his alleged claims were true. Had he claimed to be greater than God?

The man answered in the affirmative. He awaited further developments.

Upon hearing the man's response, there was outrage expressed in the room. One of the leaders, who was able to re-gather some semblance of self-composure finally said: 'Don't you know even the most basic elements of our faith? Don't you understand that nothing is greater than God?'

The man nodded and said: 'This is exactly what permits me to say what I do. Nothing is greater than God, and I am nothing, therefore, ...' and his voice trailed off in an Aristotelian smile.

Ah, humankind, the nothing that is something, and the something that is nothing. A mystery indeed.

Chapter 31: Interstitial Space

Your questions (e.g. What does a person do after one leaves and recovers from a spiritually abusive teacher and/or group? In what direction should one travel? Are there any positive dimensions to such experiences? How does one avoid making the same mistake in the future?) are all good ones and do not readily yield answers -- at least, answers that are easy to grasp and put into practice. This interstitial realm -- the existential space within which one exists after one has discovered that a so-called shaykh is not who he or she pretends to be, and before one has found one's way to an authentic guide -- is a very difficult, problematic, yet, extremely important time in a seeker's life.

In order not to make the same mistake twice, one must be extra cautious and realize the importance of taking a good critical look before one makes a leap in faith to another shaykh or some other silsilah. At the same time, you also are quite right that one cannot walk the path alone -- one needs the help of an authentic teacher. Moreover, if one puts off, for too long, the making of a decision concerning how to proceed in relation to the spiritual path because of having been betrayed previously and not wishing for this to occur again, then, life passes us by, and the opportunity for spiritual development is lost, and, in the process, the purpose of life, to a significant degree, remains fallow.

Whichever way one looks at the issue, the stakes are substantial. The ramifications of the decisions we make in this regard color and shape eternity.

There are many positive, constructive themes that are given expression through the realization of having been betrayed by an alleged shaykh. The first benefit, painful though it is, comes in the form of the very realization that is the source of our heartache -- for, if God had not shown us the fraudulence of the so-called guide, we would have remained lost and not even understood the precarious nature of our situation. Without such realization, our comfort zone might have been much, much, higher, but we would have been living in an illusory, delusional zone of comfort. Truly, as the Qur'an indicates, we might dislike a thing that is good for us and like that which is not.

A second benefit of spiritual betrayal is that one has a much better idea of how to approach things the next time around. The value of

experience is that we have the chance to learn from it and to re-work our game plan for life in the light of what we learn through such experience -- both in ease, as well as difficulty.

A third theme that arises out of an encounter with a spiritual charlatan is that we come to understand ourselves, other people, and the great issues of life much more clearly, deeply, and intensely. No longer is our insight into some of the dangers and pitfalls of the path merely theoretical.

Our insight is rooted in having lived through something, and not just in having read about it or heard about it. Moreover, we come to understand that all real learning comes with a cost associated with it -- a cost that is paid for in struggle, pain, and difficulty, but no one who ever went very far on the Sufi Path has ever been able to avoid such things. God has made this a spiritual law of existence.

A further benefit of having to deal with the aftermath of betrayal at the hands of a false spiritual teacher is the following. One has an opportunity to develop greater humility, compassion, patience, and perspective concerning other people.

In addition, one has a great chance to practice -- rather than just pay lip service to -- forgiveness, tolerance, nobility, and steadfastness ... although, again, none of these things come easily or swiftly, nor should anyone expect otherwise. All of this must be worked through, but in working through such problems, one begins to gain sight of the Grace that is at work and that has not only made one's struggle necessary, but possible.

A person who can struggle is a person who is still alive, who still longs, who still has himma (spiritual aspiration), who still has hope and opportunity with respect to the purpose of life. A person who has been taken by the hand through Allah's Grace and brought to the devastating realization of spiritual abuse having been perpetrated, is being told that Divinity has something else in store for one -- something better, for the Sufi masters have long taught that Allah never takes away anything from the believing soul without replacing that which has been 'lost' with something that is spiritually better for the individual.

In the Day of "Alastu bi rabikkum" (am I not your Lord?) God is issuing a challenge to the spirits who are being addressed in pre-eternity. Will you recognize me as your Lord in all matters, no matter how I might be disguised, and under all circumstances, both easy and difficult? Will you love me no matter what? Will you accept My will for your rizq (one's fated allotment that includes spiritual capacity)?

When we encounter spiritual abuse, the behavior deserves condemnation because it enters the world through the corrupted niyat or intention of a misguided soul -- namely, the false teacher. However, the Purpose underlying the reason for such behavior being permitted to exist in this world is pure Divinity, and we need to remember this distinction.

Nothing in life is random. Everything is ordered, and in accordance with Allah's Divine Himma (Aspiration) for Creation in general, and human beings in particular.

God is not malicious. But Divinity is rigorous, exacting, and relentless in allowing the purpose of Creation to run its course, and our task is to learn how to swim in the storm swept seas of Divine purpose.

Anyone who has become entangled in the cross-currents of spiritual abuse is being given a swimming lesson in life. We are being tossed into the deep end of the pool and told: "Swim", and, yet, we need to have faith that Divinity is providing us with help to stay afloat and learn what we need to in order to make our way through the Ocean.

If we choose not to learn how to swim or if we lose faith that, despite surface appearances, God is present and lending buoyancy to our survival -- spiritual and otherwise -- then, we must understand that our choices run contrary to what is in our own best interests. If we choose to do this, then, we are free to do so, but this is not what Divinity wishes for us, but how we have decided to use the freedom that Divinity has bequeathed us.

When in this interstitial space -- this in-between realm between false teachers and authentic teachers -- issues of association become very important. Who we seek out to spend time with during this

interim period can have a huge impact (both constructive and destructive) on one's life.

Find people who are going to help one keep the embers of faith alive. Spend time with people who will help one to reflect on life and the Sufi Path in a critical, realistic, and balanced fashion. Keep the company of people who have not permitted spiritual betrayal to reduce them to cynical, bitter, shells of existence. Interact with people who have empathy, compassion, and understanding concerning the subtleties, intricacies, and ups and downs of recovery from spiritual abuse. Associate with individuals who are trying to prepare themselves to be ready for the right spiritual opportunity should it arise, and who have faith that one who puts her or his trust in Allah will never be disappointed, no matter how things might turn out ... for Allah's pride is such that Divinity cannot stand to let down someone who has placed all one's trust in Divine Grace and, yet, is willing to struggle in the meantime to help himself or herself.

The Qur'an tells us not to think of those who are slain in the way of Allah as dead (3:169-170). The 'way of Allah' is to struggle toward the truth according to one's individual capacity to do so, and, consequently, if one is slain by Divinity while sincerely and actively engaged in this quest for truth, then, one dies in the way of Allah, and such a death resonates deeply with the purpose of life.

Our goal in life is not to become the next Rumi, Ibn al-Arabi, Hafiz, Ghazali, Muin-uddin Chishti, Ahmad Sirhindi, and so on (may Allah be pleased with them all). The goal of life is to seek to become who we have the God-given capacity to be.

During the aforementioned interstitial space of life (that is, the period following the discovery that a so-called 'teacher' is a spiritual fraud, but prior to the appearance of a genuine silsilah), we need to actively wait for an authentic teacher to come along. And, by "actively wait", I mean doing whatever we can in the way of good works (both obligatory and voluntary) to demonstrate our sincerity of purpose in relation to issues and principles of truth. In truth, this is all we can do - - and, even this cannot be realized on one's own. The rest we must leave to Allah to decide in whatever way Divinity pleases, and we must work to be ready to accept whatever this decision for our lives might be and swim with these currents, not against them.

Listen with closed eyes and an open heart (that is, without expectations or presuppositions) to the Divine movement within one's life and being. Seek to learn to discern the difference between, on the one hand, the movements of nafs, dunya, Iblis or the chatter of unbelief, and, on the other hand, the resonance of heart and spirit with the presence of Divinity in one's life. Be patient and hopeful, but do not abandon the struggle to learn how to swim -- for struggle comes by the ordinance of God, and nothing in life is achieved without struggle.

Chapter 32: Tears Of Life

There is surely magic
in our capacity
to articulate thought,
but beyond that country
of words lies an ocean
of tears where uncharted
depths give birth to currents
of great complexity
to which language only
can allude through concept-
heavy crafts that skim the
surface across life's sea
where emotional tides
run heavily in all
directions. Intensely,
we feel disparity
between what can be said
and that which silently
flows through inner paths
that mark boundaries of
vulnerability.
We stand before Being
clothed in asymmetry,
like a homeless pauper
in a city of the
powerful and wealthy.
Feeling a dynamic
electricity in

Being's presence, we are
overwhelmed with a sense
of inadequacy,
and tears begin to spill
as theory's levee springs
leaks in efficacy
by which we wall away
painful realities. Or, beauty rises in
our souls like a harvest
moon that illumines Fall's
night so brilliantly
we can do nothing but
shed tears of gratitude
for being given leave
to see Divinity
in action through landscapes
of conscious alchemy.
Transcendent realms project
shadows which weave illusions
that form this worldly space,
and, intuitively,
we cry in response to
the mystery which plays
hide and seek with our
lives. A variety
of inclinations form
the sluice-gates from which tears
flow -- from: anxiety,
to: joyous jubilee;
from: death's finality,

to: creativity.
Tears are indemnity
for the limitations
of language and reason.

Chapter 33: A Beginning

The following posting was sent to a Group List that shall go unnamed. The heading for the posting was: 'Look before taking a leap of faith'.

The message was not intended to evoke a discussion, nor to create controversy, Rather, the posting was meant to be a low-key, generic reminder that those who are seeking the Sufi Path, or who are thinking about becoming involved in some manner with tasawwuf, should exercise some caution before committing themselves to this or that alleged spiritual guide.

Although the particular List to which the following message was sent is Sufi-oriented, the purpose of the Group List was not really meant to serve as a forum for discussing issues. However, the moderator for the Group posted a message inviting people to respond to the issue being raised by my message -- and, then, the 'fun' began ... it was like a week in a World Wide Wrestling Federation training camp for tag-team, no-holds-barred wrestling techniques.

Here is the posting. It will be followed by a few observations.

Salaam,

As a result of my own experiences, as well as those of a number of people with whom I have come in contact over the last decade, I would advise people who are looking around in their own localities in order to discover someone, or a place, through which to participate in allegedly Sufi activity, to be careful, for there are an increasing number of sharks in the waterways leading to the Ocean, and, quite frequently, these denizens of the coastal waters are disguised as friendly, kindly, intelligent, charming, and gifted dolphins.

With warmest regards, Dr. Anab Whitehouse

During the week following the above posting, when all manner of views were given expression through a variety of participants in the Group List, a number of things became very clear. First, quite a few people have vested interests to protect and treat the Sufi tradition as if it were their own, private preserve. Secondly, quite a few people seem

to believe that adab, or spiritual etiquette, has nothing to do with tasawwuf. Thirdly, quite a few people harbor a hidden -- and, sometimes, not so hidden -- arrogance that maintains a double standard that likes to critically reflect on the ambience of society in general, but not on the ambience of so-called Sufi society in particular. Fourthly, quite a few people become easily spooked, as well as very defensive, paranoid, and aggressively angry when anyone raises the topic that, perhaps, not all so-called 'spiritual guides' are necessarily authentic. Fifthly, quite a few people do not wish to open up for discussion the problem of having to differentiate between authentic and inauthentic teachers -- wishing, instead, to consider everyone who calls herself or himself a spiritual guide as being authentic, and, then, treating spiritual abuse as an anomalous condition among, otherwise, authentic shaykhs ... apparently not realizing that being inauthentic is the 'mother' of all forms of spiritual abuse among those individuals who consider themselves to be spiritual guides but, in fact, are not. Finally, there were a few souls -- all too few -- who seemed to understand the crucial nature of the problem being explored.

Chapter 34: Assumptions

There is a counterpart to the oft-repeated aphorism that indicates that spiritual teachers appear when they are needed -- namely: teachers disappear when such is needed, and this version of the saying comes from people doing exit counseling with people who have been spiritually abused. And, this leads to an issue of some importance.

Lots of people are making assumptions about why there are authentic and inauthentic teachers, or why some people are abused while other individuals do not, apparently, undergo such an experience. Far too many people are presuming to know the answer of why such things happen, and, as a result, attach words like "necessary" or "deserve" to such discussions, or they make value judgments concerning the 'worth' of the recipients of abuse.

God, for Divine reasons, permits many things to happen. It is an essential part of the Sufi perspective that maintains that Divinity does no injustice to Creation.

Human beings are the perpetrators of abuse, not God. Human beings misuse human freedom.

Rape is not a necessary medium of spiritual learning or transformation. Domestic abuse is not deserved by the recipients of such abuse. Children do not need, or deserve, to be molested by so-called Sufi shaykhs.

Yes, one can agree with one of the other postings in this Group that all of life is a teacher. However, this does not mean that someone is serving the function of a spiritual guide when he or she abuses, exploits, manipulates, misdirects, or seeks to undermine someone's faith, peace, family, or seeking of the truth.

One might learn from spiritual frauds. This does not make them a teacher, because what one learns from such experiences has nothing to do with these alleged shaykhs are trying to 'teach'.

Finally, I have strong reservations concerning the value of the idea that false teachers serve a function for 'real teachers' by filtering "out the students that aren't ready or the students that seek attention, entertainment, or emotionalism". One really has little, or no, evidence to assess why anyone seeks the Sufi Path, and, to me, it seems rather presumptuous and condescending for anyone to assume that those

people who have the misfortune of becoming entangled with a false teacher are either not ready, or are seeking attention, entertainment, or emotionalism -- this is like saying domestic violence serves the purpose of filtering out its victims from wasting the time of decent, 'real' folks, and, after all, aren't battered women merely seeking attention, entertainment, and emotionalism ... and, gee, those battered women, they just aren't ready for 'normal' society -- let's give a big hearty thanks to the abusers of the world.

Chapter 35: Seeking

Several questions have been raised about: what circumstances led to my realization that the individual I had been calling a shaykh was a charlatan, as well as questions about whether this realization also casts the fraudulent person's predecessor in a spiritually jaundiced light, and whether, or not, the curious behavior of such a 'shaykh' might be written off as just a kind of paradoxical teaching technique that cannot be fathomed by the 'normal', spiritually unrealized individual. Finally, some issues concerning spiritual knowledge were queried.

The behaviors or issues that led me to realize that the shaykh was a charlatan were the plethora of lies that began to surface. A person can lie, manipulate, re-frame, and misdirect only so much before it begins to catch up with one, but, almost always, such discoveries depend on people overcoming their trepidations about disclosing the truth with respect to what is actually going on -- something that most individuals are very reluctant to do because they believe they will be condemned to hell for speaking such truths about one of the alleged 'friends' of God, or they have been trained to suppose that whatever is inconsistent or hypocritical is just another paradoxical teaching tool of the shaykh in which the teacher intentionally arranges things to appear to discredit himself/herself only to serve a deeper, altruistic purpose through the self-sacrificial character of various, apparently incongruous acts.

The teaching relationship between a shaykh and the mureed flows in two directions. It is the dance of nisbath (heart to heart connection between shaykh and mureed) which involves a series of reciprocal movements, and, among other things, this means that the guide must earn the trust of the mureed just as much as the mureed must earn the trust of his or her spiritual teacher. Consequently, there are no carte blanche checks involving trust on the spiritual path, and this is why the mystical journey is guarded by spiritual contracts that must be honored, an adab that must be observed, and a love that must not be betrayed -- both in relation to the seeker, as well as the guide.

The individual whom, for eleven years, I called a shaykh did not fulfill his spiritual contracts, and he did not observe the conditions of

adab, and he betrayed the responsibilities inherent in love. When an alleged guide's counsel can no longer be trusted because nisbath has been poisoned through the telling of lies, then, such an individual can no longer serve as a credible shaykh since the essential channel -way of communication for spiritual transformation has been corrupted and, as a result, is not a reliable source of understanding and wisdom concerning the many intricacies and subtleties of tasawwuf.

In Shari'ah, once a person has been proven to be a liar, that person can no longer serve as a witness in any ensuing proceedings. When the individual whom I considered to be a shaykh proved himself to be a liar, again and again, not only in relation to me, but with respect to others as well, then, in accordance with principles of Shari'ah, the man could no longer serve as a credible, reliable, trustworthy witness in any matter of spiritual importance.

If the aforementioned individual had a sense of honor, integrity, decency, or adab, he would recuse himself from acting as a spiritual guide. Unfortunately, to date, the man seems bereft of any sense of honor, integrity, decency or adab with respect to the requirements of either tasawwuf or Shari'ah.

I've read the literature of the authentic shaykhs -- from: Rumi, to: al-Muhasibi, Dada Ganj Baksh, Hamid al-Ghazali, Qadir Gilani, Mu'in ud-Din Chishti, Nizam ad-Din Awliya, Hafiz, ibn al-'Arabi, Ibrahim Gazur-I-Ilahi, Farid-ud-Din 'Attar, Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri, Ahmad Sirhindi, Sayyid Haydar Amuli, Shah Waliyullah, Maneri, Ahmad al-Alawi, Muhammad Khadim Gudri Shah Baba, and many others (may Allah be pleased with them all). None of these individuals advocated lying, sexually exploiting people, harming human beings (or creation in general), or pursuing any course of action that was in violation of Shari'ah -- yet, the person whom I thought of as my 'shaykh' did all of these things.

Sometimes people refer to the idea of 'malamat' -- that is, the path of blame, and try to use this concept (usually erroneously) in an attempt to defend the inexcusable. There are three forms of 'malamat' behavior: (1) malamati rast raftan, (2) malamati qasd kardan, and (3) malamati tark kardan.

The first form of malamati behavior is in reference to people, such as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who, through

observing the truth, brought criticism upon themselves. Thus, the Prophet (peace be upon him) was known as a madman, a soothsayer, a liar, a teller of folk tales, and so on. In a similar vein, a shaykh once addressed one of his mureeds and said: "I like what I hear being said against you."

The second group of individuals to whom the term of malamati might be applied are those who love God and wish to devote themselves to Divinity but are being interfered with by individuals who seek to flatter the 'abd Allah (servant of Allah), or to associate with such people of faith for self-serving purposes. As a result, these friends of Allah will do certain things in order to separate the wheat from the chaff, so to speak.

For instance, there was a certain shaykh who used to travel from town to town inviting people to Islam and its mystical dimension. Everywhere he went, people said they loved him and wanted nothing more, supposedly, than to be with him and serve him but there were problems with the sincerity of the intention of such individuals.

One day a throng of people were following the shaykh, and as he walked up a sand dune at the edge of the town he was visiting, he proceeded to urinate as he went up the hill, and the people who were behind him all left in horror. After the shaykh finished the call of nature, he turned around and noted that all the people had left and said: "Your love for me is not worth even one stream of urine."

The shaykh had not violated any principles of Shari'ah in doing this. He never exposed himself to the people because he was turned away from them as he answered the call of nature.

The third group of malamati are those who have abandoned sound spiritual judgment and the Shari'ah. These individuals engage in all manner of outrageous behavior and, then, try to justify what they are doing as treading the 'path of blame' -- which they maintain places them among the first group of individuals mentioned earlier, but that, in truth, identifies them as misguided fools.

Many people love to cite the paradoxical, the counter-intuitive, the puzzling, the inexplicable, as the way of mystical teachings, when, in truth, mysticism is very straight-forward. However, due to the bent

nature of our consciousness, the truth always seems counter-intuitive, mysterious, puzzling, and paradoxical when it is shown to us.

Issac Asimov once wrote in his *Foundation* series that: 'violence is the last refuge of incompetence.' One might paraphrase the spirit of the foregoing by saying that from a mystical perspective, resorting to the paradoxical as a teaching technique is the last refuge of ignorance - it is the stuff of cocktail conversation.

What is mysterious about mysticism is not the methodology, the adab, the techniques, or the principles of life. What is mysterious is the nature of consciousness and understanding that is realized by the traveler of the Path, through the Grace of Allah, and that is oblique and opaque to the 'outsider' -- that is, to one who does not share in such spiritual states or stations.

The person who raised some of the questions with which this essay began inquired that if the person whom I considered my shaykh is a spiritual fraud, doesn't this make his shaykh a fraud, as well, and, in addition, doesn't this invalidate the silsilah. Although the idea at the heart of this question is, up to a certain point, quite possible, there are a number of uncertainties that still envelop this issue.

A shaykh is not responsible for what a mureed does out of the latter's own foolishness, ignorance and arrogance. There are a number of historical movements that have begun within the Muslim community that were the result of some mureed having certain experiences and, then, starting a spiritual philosophy based on those experiences and disregarding the warnings that were given that such understandings and interpretations were flawed and problematic.

Knowing, as a result of kashf, that this would happen, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "There are 71 different sects in Judaism, and only one of them is correct, and there are 72 different sects within Christianity and only one of them is correct, and there are 73 different sects within Islam, and only one of them is correct.' The fact the Prophet (peace be upon him) knew what was coming in the way of fragmentation didn't make him the author of such fragmentation, and such knowledge did not make him responsible for the wrong paths pursued by later generations -- indeed, quite the contrary, he tried to warn people, but, unfortunately, few people take heed.

When Allah was creating the form of Adam (peace be upon him), the angels objected because they could see some of the qualities that were being embedded within mankind, and they asked: 'Art Thou fashioning one who will spread bloodshed and corruption in the land?' Allah's answer was an enigmatic: "I know that which ye do not."

God didn't make any mistakes, but we, the creation, are responsible for the mistakes of *niyat*, or intention, that permit, by God's leave, bloodshed and corruption to walk upon the face of the Earth -- a permission that is given to further advance the Divine Purpose and *Himma* (Aspiration).

Sometimes, even though a shaykh knows that a mureed will go astray -- either permanently or temporarily -- nevertheless, due to issues of etiquette, duty, not interfering with the Divine Plan, insight into *rizq* (Divine apportionment), and so on, a shaykh will set certain processes in motion, knowing what the result will be even though, from the perspective of the shaykh, everything is done with the purest of *niyat* or intention. Consequently, the fact that the person to whom I referred as a shaykh has gone astray -- either temporarily or permanently -- does not necessarily say anything about, or have any implications for, the spiritual quality and integrity of the shaykh of the miscreant whom I called my spiritual guide for a period of time.

Was Rumi or Shams (may Allah be pleased with them) responsible for what some of the mureeds of Rumi might have done in relation to Shams (may Allah be pleased with him)? Yes, the meetings of the two lovers of God set certain events in motion, but someone else bears the blame for what might have led to the disappearance -- even if either, or both, of the two knew beforehand what might ensue.

Was Farid-ud-Din 'Attar (may Allah be pleased with him) responsible for the fact that he was murdered by someone who misunderstood this friend of Allah? Should 'Attar (may Allah have been pleased with him) have stood for something other or spoke something other than the truth so that his assassin would not do what he did?

No, but the saint, via Allah's leave, set in motion the behaviors that would induce his murder, and that, in turn would lead, by God's Grace and Mercy, to the killer's repenting his misdeeds and becoming the

care-taker of the shrine where 'Attar (may Allah be pleased with him) lies buried.

Conceivably, the person whom I thought was an authentic shaykh was never an actual shaykh but leveraged his association with an authentic shaykh to create the illusion in the minds and hearts of others that the former had been appointed an official khalifah (person placed in charge of certain duties) of a silsilah (spiritual lineage). Conceivably, the person whom I thought was a shaykh, was, at some point, an actual shaykh and has gone astray -- a deviance for which allowances were already built into the Divine Plan. Conceivably, the individual who passed himself off as a shaykh did have certain responsibilities within the silsilah but these responsibilities were strictly circumscribed and he exceeded his authority in any number of ways -- including trying to usurp that (such as being a shaykh) that did not belong to him and was intended for others.

Part of the problem in unraveling the puzzle and ascertaining the truth with respect to the current situation is due to the inveterate nature of the so-called shaykh's proclivity to lie -- sometimes quite gratuitously, and, thus, with no apparent rhyme or reason to it, and with nothing, seemingly, to be gained thereby. How much of what he told me is the truth, and how much of it is a lie and invented?

Complicating all of the foregoing issues is the fact that the shaykh of the person whom, for eleven years, I thought was an authentic shaykh, has passed away and, as such, is not directly accessible to answer my questions. Moreover, the people who knew the shaykh of my 'shaykh' have been told stories about me by the spiritual fraud, and, consequently, I cannot approach them to make the appropriate inquiries because the well has been poisoned, so to speak, with respect to either gain unfettered access to such people or to my being able to derive useful information from those individuals.

As with Iblis, it is not that the truth is never told. Rather, one simply can't be sure when this will be so, and, therefore, there are many questions concerning reliability and accuracy of information that has been transmitted through him.

The man claimed that it was his shaykh who told him about me. He maintained it was his shaykh who wanted me to be initiated, to be made a shaykh, and to be given certain spiritual responsibilities.

Was he telling me the truth, or was he lying? It is hard to know.

Information has been communicated to me. My problem is to try to determine if any of it is true.

The essential issue here is not whether I am or am not a shaykh. The central issue is to determine the truth -- whatever it might be -- and act accordingly.

I have received certain spiritual indications (through Ishtikharah – a method for seeking Divine guidance) which suggest that having patience might be the best course of action vis-à-vis the mess created by the individual whom I used to consider my shaykh. God has his own time-table for the truth to be made known about any number of things -- this situation included.

Spiritual indications (such as through Ishtikharah) often tend to be directed fragments. That is, while such indications might require further elaboration of a spiritual and/or experiential nature to be made clear, nonetheless, in the meantime, they provide one with limited guidance with respect to how to proceed in a general sort of way.

This individual whom I considered to be my guide for eleven years had something to teach me. After all, that individual is a tool of Divinity that God uses to serve His purpose, even while the person in question -- that is, the so-called shaykh -- is acting in a self-serving, reprehensible manner.

However, I am still working on the assignment. Consequently, I am not ready to write my final report about the spiritual significance of the last eleven years -- although I have provided a variety of people some interim, tentative assessments concerning certain facets of the situation.

Finally, with respect to your queries concerning the status of my knowledge in the light of current circumstances, I should begin with a correction. I never said that the silsilah at issue was inauthentic. In fact, in reality, the silsilah -- with the possible exception of several of the last listed names in the Sehjrah -- is quite verifiable and authentic, but the questions of authenticity that are swirling about these last few individuals is at the heart of part of my problem.

The other problem, of course, is even if those few, remaining names are legitimate, where does the wayward 'shaykh' fit into all of this? More importantly, is there any essential connection between me and the rest of the silsilah or was it all manufactured by an individual who became entangled in his own spiritual fantasies -- namely, the so-called shaykh who was, in reality, a spiritual fraud?

In any event, your assumption that I learned most of what I know - - whatever that might be -- at the hands of the spiritual charlatan is quite incorrect. For seventeen years prior to meeting a false shaykh, I worked in close proximity to an authentic shaykh.

The vast majority of what I know is due to that association, together with, by the Grace of Allah, the seclusions I have done, the night vigils I have observed, the fasts I have kept, the Fatiha sessions I have attended, the processes of contemplation and mediation in which I have engaged, along with my study of the Qur'an and hadith, as well as the years of zikr that I have performed. One can, as well, throw in the many mystical treatises that I have read, reflected upon, and digested, according to my spiritual capacity to do so.

The nine or ten books that I have written were done without consulting this so-called shaykh. While I have no doubt that these books enjoyed Divine assistance in order for them to be completed, such assistance did not come through that so-called teacher, even if, at times, I might have been mistaken to think this might be so.

I knew what I knew before he came along. And, I know what I know now, quite irrespective of the fact that the man has departed from my life. My knowledge is not dependent on him but, rather, on what God, in His own ways, has vouchsafed to my mind, heart, soul, and spirit.

Knowledge is not information. The former is permanent and does not, as is the case with the latter, alter its character depending on source, circumstance, or motivation.

'Knowledge' that comes from someone else, is not knowledge. It is information that might, or might not, be true.

Knowledge is a function of what has been made deep-rooted in the heart through the blessings of Allah. Knowledge is the face of faith translated into specific understandings and insights.

Does this mean that, therefore, I am finding my own way? No, it doesn't. I am very dependent on Divine favor, and a great deal of barakah (Grace) has come to me via my first shaykh, and, I believe, continues to come to me through my nisbath (heart to heart connection) and love for my first shaykh ... the real one.

As far as questioning my understanding of things is concerned, I do this all the time. I am constantly occupied with self-examination -- searching for flaws, lacunae, problematic assumptions, hypocrisies, and unanswered questions, while also critically exploring weaknesses, doubts, understandings, and the significance of on-going experience.

Hazrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) is reported to have said that, for him, one of the proofs of God's existence resides in the fact that life does not unfold in accordance with his (those of Hazrat 'Ali's) wishes. He finds it comforting that he is not in charge of the universe.

I agree with him, and, I too, am happy that I am not in charge of the universe. I too find it comforting that there is a Divinity Who actually does know what He is doing, even if the way things are done might be, from time to time, problematic for me, or frustrating, or confusing, or a constant struggle. I have faith in the intelligence and justice of the Divine Plan, even as I flounder about, gasping for air because I am still trying to learn to swim in the Divine Ocean.

No matter what, things are always interesting, always changing, even as they stay the same. Life is, indeed, a challenge and it was meant to be so, and, therefore, the last eleven years are but a few ripples on the surface of on-going Being that is constantly disclosing the Names and Attributes of Divinity in unique and bewildering ways for the edification of humanity -- myself included.

Chapter 36: A Matter of Trust

In the conclusion of Inayat Khan's book: *The Soul - Whence and Whither* one finds the following:

"There are three ways in which people trust. One is not to trust a person until he proves in time to be trustworthy. To those who trust in this way there will be no satisfactory gain on this path, for they will go on, like a spy, trying and testing the Murshid with their eyes focused downward. Hence they can only see the imperfect self of the teacher, and will never be able to see the beauty of the perfect self, above and beyond the limits of their view.

"The second way of trusting is to trust and to continue to do so until the person is proved unworthy of trust. Those who trust in this way are better-suited than the first, for if their trust makes their sight keen they will have every prospect of development, provided that intelligence guides them all the way.

"But the third way of trusting a person is to have an absolute trust, and to continue until it be proved true. This is the trust of devotees. It is these mureeds who make the Murshid. It is such worshipers who make God. 'By faith, a tongue is produced from the rock, and it speaks to us as God, but when faith is lacking, even God, the Eternal Being, is as dead as a rock.' The word of the Murshid is as useless to the doubting mind as a remedy to the unbelieving patient."

The foregoing quote from the aforementioned book operates with an unstated assumption -- namely, that any murshid (teacher) with whom one is contemplating taking initiation actually is an authentic teacher -- for that would be the only condition under which the foregoing advice would constitute sound counsel. Unfortunately, this is precisely the issue that needs to be questioned, because, in point of fact, and as many have noted, authentic teachers and charlatans don't necessarily have some identifying mark stamped on their forehead for all to readily see that gives indisputable proof about who is the genuine article and who is counterfeit.

To have absolute faith in an alleged teacher just because someone else considers that individual to be a murshid, or because the so-called shaykh considers himself or herself to be a pir or murshid, is to

assume one's conclusions without benefit of any evidence, reflection, or critical examination whatsoever. Surely, this is the sort of mind -set through which we end up with, among other things, suicide bombers killing innocent people, or people being sexually exploited by spiritually abusive teachers, or seekers having to pay for so-called Sufi guidance, or misguided individuals being induced to participate in armed jihad because some nabob, somewhere, has issued a fatwa or legal opinion that has all the binding authority of cheese.

The problem of distinguishing between an authentic and inauthentic spiritual guide is quite difficult. The ramifications and implications that ensue from the need to make a correct discernment are enormous.

The foregoing issues are not about the differences in temperament, practice, orientation, or emphasis that are recognized and accepted among different Orders and silsilahs. The central question is about sources of spiritual abuse that occur as obstacles to having access to legitimate, authentic, and transformative spiritual teachings, or that occur as obstacles to having an appropriate sort of understanding about what the nature of the central problem is in such contexts.

Someone once said: "We become what we dream, so choose the dream wisely." Choosing wisely and with circumspection concerning the issue of spiritual authenticity would seem to have a potential to have a substantial impact on the nature of the dream that one aspires to become.

Chapter 37: The False And The True

The real spiritual guide of us all is Allah, and, I believe the nature of God's curriculum is far too complex to try to be reductionistic and quibble about whether it is authentic human teachers who choose their students or is it the other way around. The fact that some shaykhs might, by means of kashf, or unveiling, know that such and such a person's spiritual destiny lays with some other teacher does not mean that shaykhs choose their students, but, rather, Allah, assigns such relationships according to Divine purposes, and, as a courtesy, informs a given teacher that someone really needs to journey elsewhere to find their guide.

An individual indicated in a posting that:

"Some masters have said that if you are false to yourself you will fall amongst those "Sharks", as one brother called them, otherwise the truthful sincere student will always find his master."

The fact of the matter is, except for the fully realized awliya of Allah, we are all false to ourselves. This is why Ra'bia of Basra (may Allah be pleased with her) said to a fellow Sufi, who was being judgmental of 'ordinary Muslims' who were not as observant of spiritual practices as was the individual being addressed by Ra'bia (might Allah be pleased with her), that: "Thy existence is a sin with which none other can compare."

We are all in need of help, compassion, guidance, assistance, and forgiveness. To try to categorize some people as being false to themselves and others as being the 'true' seekers is overly simplistic and inherently problematic.

At another point in this on-going Group-List discussion, someone has stated:

"One ancient teacher was asked what happens when a sincere student falls in with a false teacher. The ancient teacher said that the real student will change the character of the false teacher, as truth is greater than falsehood."

The Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) did not change the character of Pharaoh, so, therefore, are we, in the light of the foregoing statement, to suppose there was something wrong with Prophet Moses (peace be upon him)? I don't think so.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) did not change the character of his uncle Abu Lahab, so, therefore, according to the logic of the foregoing statement, we are to assume that the Prophet was somehow not a sincere locus of manifestation for the truth? Again, I do not think so.

It is Allah who changes character for the good, not human beings. At best, human beings who struggle against their lower selves are loci of manifestation who serve as mediums through which such transformations occur, if Allah wishes.

Chapter 38: Eight Warning Signs

The following discussion focuses on various, supposed warning signals and rules of thumb that were listed in an earlier posting by a participant in this list. The numbered items below re-state those so-called warning signals, and the sections marked Comment that follow them are my responses to those points.

1.) Charismatic leadership. The more valid the leader, the more difficult it is to distinguish him or her from the group.

Comment: The foregoing is far too vague and inherently flawed to be a useful warning sign. There is a difference between the capacity of spiritual authoritativeness to attract and the capacity of charisma to attract, and the latter is often confused with, and mistaken for, the former.

The spirit is attracted to beings of authentic spirituality, while the unredeemed nafs and confused heart are often attracted to charisma. Quite frequently, seekers cannot discern the difference between the two.

Furthermore, whether one likes it or not, there are significant differences between an authentic mystical guide and the other people who attend the circle of that guide. Experience, knowledge, understanding, wisdom, insight, realization, spiritual station, and spiritual etiquette all constitute significant differences between a true mystic master and the vast majority of those who are seeking assistance from that individual.

Even with respect to matters of humility, modesty, sincerity, spiritual connection, aspiration, and intention, there tend to be huge differences. A true teacher might never think about such differences or try to draw other people's attention to such matters, but these distinctions do exist, and precisely because of these differences other people seek out genuine teachers for spiritual guidance.

Sometimes, people mistake a spiritual guide's humility and modesty concerning himself or herself, or the tendency of an authentic teacher to prefer others to herself or himself, as being signs that, in spiritual matters, the teacher is no different than the rest of us, but nothing could be further from the truth. There are determinate

reasons why a mystical guide is a mystical guide and seekers are seekers.

2.) Promises of supernatural or other attractive powers.

Comment: While it is true that an authentic spiritual teacher will not dangle the promise of supernatural or attractive powers in front of seekers as an inducement for them to join the circle (or in any other way, either), the reverse is not necessarily equally true -- that is, just because someone doesn't tempt one with such things, doesn't make them an authentic teacher.

Clever spiritual charlatans have all kinds of techniques for re-framing issues and misdirecting attention away from what is actually going on. For instance, such individuals never have to sully their hands with these kinds of issues because they get third party proxies to stand in for them and broadcast the so-called 'teacher's amazing powers, abilities, and alleged exercises of 'wondrous deeds' while, simultaneously, giving the so-called teacher plausible deniability as he or she seeks to distance himself or herself -- with impressive displays of modesty and humility, no doubt -- from all of this 'embarrassing' talk of supernatural powers.

This whole matter is further complicated by the fact that authentic spiritual lineages and teachers do, on occasion, talk about the 'wondrous deeds' of great spiritual personalities within one's own spiritual lineage or in other such lineages, as well as relate various miracles of the Prophets. So, although any individual who seeks to discuss his or her own alleged spiritual powers might be a warning sign with respect to the presence of spiritual abuse, many spiritual charlatans -- especially in the West -- are often clever enough to re-frame such discussions in ways that take attention away from their making such claims, even as they make these kinds of claim for the spiritual lineage.

The foregoing matter is complicated, yet again, by the fact that, on occasion, some authentic mystical teachers do come into states and conditions that are loci of manifestation for Divine eruptions, so to speak, into the midst of everyday life. The supernatural is witnessed,

and powers are exhibited, by the Will of God, on such occasions, and all of this is part of the lore of the mystical tradition.

Knowing the foregoing, such things can be counterfeited by those who wish to deceive. Indeed, at the very heart of spiritual inauthenticity is the capacity of charlatans to learn how to mimic the authentic, and, thereby, confuse people.

3.) Promises of secrets to be attained in the future, if one is patient in conforming to the order.

Comment: No authentic mystical lineage makes a promise of attainment concerning such secrets because, ultimately, everything depends on Divine Decree and Aspiration in relation to such issues. Notwithstanding the foregoing disclaimer, the fact of the matter is that every authentic spiritual lineage alludes to those secrets -- sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly -- which are veiled by Divinity and only disclosed, through spiritual unveiling, when Divinity, and if Divinity, deems this to be appropriate.

Once again, a clever spiritual fraud does not have to make any promises concerning such secrets, because all authentic mystical traditions and teachers agree that such secrets exist. If one wishes to access, God willing, the mysteries inherent in one's being and the purpose of one's life, then, one needs to follow the Path and undergo spiritual suluk, or mystical journeying. If one wishes to realize, God willing, one's capacity for loving Divinity, then, there are stations and states that precede and guard such secrets. If one wishes to experience, God willing, the conditions of Divine absorption and Divine subsistence, then, one will have to die to oneself before one dies -- otherwise these secrets and mysteries will never be known ... at least not in this life.

The very nature of the mystical revolves about the mysteries that are hidden from ordinary perception and understanding. The very nature of a 'Way' or 'Path' or 'Deen' is that it leads one somewhere -- in terms of knowledge and understanding -- where one is not presently.

Spiritual frauds do not have to deal in promises. They can restrict themselves to 'if-then' conditionals ... if a person follows the Path, then,

God willing, one gains access to certain dimensions of what is normally secret and hidden, and in doing so, they become virtually indistinguishable from authentic teachers when one looks at such things superficially.

One of the essential differences between authentic and inauthentic mystical guides is that the former are rooted in the kind of spiritual support, protection, assistance, guidance, and Grace that, God willing, makes mystical ascent possible, while inauthentic teachers are not so rooted, and, because the mystical path tends to be a life-long endeavor, in many instances, a person's life might be wasted before discovering - - if he or she discovers this at all -- that the person in whom one has invested one's trust all these years is unconnected with anything that can benefit the individual with respect to realizing the purpose and nature of the spiritual path.

In fact, the very nature of the mysteries, secrets, and length of struggle that are associated with the mystical journey are all vulnerable to the manipulations and re-framings of a spiritual fraud. If nothing, in particular, happens, in the way of spiritual experiences, then, one just needs to be patient and work harder, and if, on the other hand, some sort of anomalous experience occurs -- even if not of a mystical nature -- then, the fraudulent teacher can point to such experiences as signs that confirm the student is on the 'correct' path.

4.) Asking for money and failure to provide financial statements.

Comment: Once again, spiritual frauds almost never 'ask' for money. The nature of a good con is to induce people willingly to give away what is desired without ever appearing to ask for it.

Or, one can use charity as covers for accumulating money, material goods, property, and so on. Alternatively, one can appear to be supporting various charitable causes, or the building of schools, centers, and so on, while using these projects to further extend one's power and sphere of influence. One also can use charitable fronts to support fraudulent and even terrorist activities.

Alternatively, one can run seminars, retreats, counseling sessions, or other manner of 'teaching' activities involving spiritual themes.

Seemingly, if one provides a service in exchange for money, this appears to be on the up and up until one understands that no authentic mystical guide would ever charge money in exchange for spiritual instruction, and, yet, there are quite a few so-called spiritual teachers who make a lot of money through such activities.

As far as giving financial statements to people in relation to the way in which money is being spent is concerned, there are a variety of potential problems. For instance, there are all kinds of accounting devices that can be used to hide and disguise the manner in which money is actually being spent and used. Furthermore, there are rarely any or many people associated with such groups who have the expertise to be able to understand what is truly going on with respect to finances, or have the time necessary to validate such statements, or have access to the information necessary to verify such statements.

5.) Selling a great variety of books and other material, giving costly seminars.

Comment: There is nothing necessarily wrong with selling books and other materials in order to underwrite various expenses associated with the work of a spiritual circle. The problems arise when buying such things is established as a prerequisite to mystical guidance, or as a necessary component to spiritual instruction, or when the running of such a business gets in the way of keeping spiritual goals clearly in focus.

In addition, charging for seminars -- whether costly or otherwise -- which are used to teach people about mystical practices, or that are used as a medium for spiritual instruction, or that place some sort of monetary price on the receiving of spiritual instruction, have never been a part of authentic mystical traditions. Indeed, every aspect of the relationship between a spiritual guide and a seeker should be capable of being conducted entirely independently of monetary considerations, and a mureed (student/seeker) should never have to pay anything whatsoever in order to gain access to a spiritual guide.

Naturally, if a seeker lives at some distance from her or his teacher, then, transportation costs do enter into the picture. However,

this has nothing to do with having to pay money in order to, say, go on a retreat with a mystic master.

6. Emphasis on dress and paraphernalia.

Comment: This rule is so vague that it dissipates into nothingness. What is meant by "emphasis", or "dress" or "paraphernalia"?

If someone emphasizes the importance of modesty in relation to clothing, is this giving undue emphasis to matters of clothing? If someone dresses in such a way that he or she does so without consideration for the sensibilities of others, is this a breach of adab or spiritual etiquette?

Moreover, as intriguing as the idea of mystical paraphernalia sounds, one really has no idea what it means. There are a lot of inauthentic groups referring to themselves as mystical or spiritual, but I don't believe that any of them deal in "paraphernalia" or emphasize it, so, might one conclude that the absence of such emphasis is a sign such groups are authentic and one might feel safe going back into their waters?

7.) Requiring obedience and submission to a leader.

Comment: There might be some individuals who are behind the times and have an antiquated, overtly authoritarian approach that demands -- in rigorous, exacting ways -- obedience and submission to an alleged mystic master by seekers. However, such individuals are out of touch with modern developments in psychology, hypnosis, sociology, communication, NLP, political science, cognitive dissonance, chronodynamics, and learning theory.

One never has to ask for, or demand, that which people can be induced to give up voluntarily. If one person feels that he or she love another individual, the former person does not necessarily feel controlled when there are things that such a person knows will please the object of one's affection and, therefore, the seeker engages in such activities without even having to be asked, and the one who is giving is happy, if not thrilled, to do so.

There are so many ways to induce compliance, control, obedience, disinformation, and submission in people without ever doing anything to indicate that there are authoritarian agendas in place. The worst form of submission and regulation is that which is entirely invisible to the person being controlled, and inauthentic 'guides' have become very adept at re-framing contexts, intentions, purposes, events, and activities so that the attention of people is misdirected away from the authoritarian character of what is going on.

Especially important in this regard is the manner in which the format and flow of information is controlled by spiritual frauds. Information is used to confuse, perplex, frustrate, tire, misdirect, and undermine seekers. Indeed, seekers are pummeled into submission by the abusive misuse of information so that, eventually, the people who are being abused do not even understand how the format and flow of information is being used to subjugate them and keep them entangled in the web of deceit.

8.) Requiring or fostering a certain degree of separation from family and associates.

Comment: Society, communities, families, relationships, and organizations, tend to be steeped in such dysfunctional arrangements these days, it becomes very difficult to differentiate between those individuals who are using the vulnerabilities that arise out of this context of chaos as a means of exploitation, and those who are sincerely trying to seek viable ways of healing and resolution with respect to the problems that have engulfed us, both individually and collectively. To argue that someone needs to straighten out one's life and that, for a time, struggling to accomplish this might require a person to be apart from the usual flow of life, is a form of reasoning that might be employed both by authentic and inauthentic teachers.

What constitutes a reasonable time for this, really depends on the individual, circumstances, aspirations, problems, needs, and the like. If someone recommends that a person enter a treatment program for 30 days or six months before trying to resume life under 'normal' circumstances, is this fostering separation from family and friends?

The answer to the foregoing question is contextual. It cannot be answered in the abstract or by using rules of thumb or generalizations. Everything depends on the individual, the family, the circumstances, the problems, and the nature of the treatment program.

What is meant by "fostering a certain degree of separation from family and associates"? Public schools and colleges require a certain degree of such separation? As do: day care, hospitalization, summer camp, reading, work, television, the Internet, and the military.

Are all of the foregoing giving warning signs that one is dealing with some form of inauthentic spirituality? Are one's family and associates always in agreement with what is either best for us or with what a person might believe is best for herself or himself? Who is right, and who is wrong?

The realm of doubt, uncertainty, and lacunae that is at the heart of the foregoing questions indicate that trying to determine what constitutes justifiable and legitimate instances of 'fostering a degree of separateness' is a very complex issue. Spiritual frauds use the degrees of looseness that are inherent in these problems and questions to misdirect and misguide people. Authentic spiritual guides use that looseness to help heal people, God willing.

Distinguishing which is which is a huge problem sometimes, and, consequently, trying to claim that this issue of 'fostering a certain degree of separateness' with respect to family and associates, constitutes a good rule of thumb for recognizing the presence of spiritual abuse seems to gloss over the inherent complexity of such situations, and, as such, is not very helpful as it stands -- that is, a great deal of elaboration is required for one to begin to understand the pros, cons, and unanswered questions of such a rule of thumb.

None of the foregoing rules of thumbs that were offered by someone to help people recognize the potential presence of spiritually abusive situations -- either individually or collectively -- are really all that helpful. They tend to be overly simplistic, reductionistic, frequently irrelevant, excessively vague, and/or capable of being easily countered by even reasonably intelligent spiritual frauds.

More importantly, perhaps, the list of warning signs noted and commented on in the foregoing, tends to focus on specific, narrowly,

rigidly characterized behaviors, as opposed to the real issue of spiritual abuse -- namely, the presence or absence of authentic mystical teachers in the context of legitimate mystical traditions. The foregoing behaviors are at best 'effects' of, or arise from, the presence of spiritually inauthentic individuals and/or groups.

Spiritual charlatans are very adaptable people. They are always introducing new wrinkles to old themes of exploitation and manipulation.

Therefore, trying to rely on a set of static, unidimensional rules or warning signs as a means of identifying spiritual frauds is likely to get people in trouble, rather than help them avoid it, because spiritual frauds are able to present and frame themselves in ways such that all of the aforementioned warning signs can be subverted or avoided altogether. As a result, an unsuspecting person can have a handy reference card of such warning signs in her or his pocket, check the 8 items, note that none are present and feel safe in proceeding further, not realizing they are just about to become dinner for some spiritually challenged shark.

Chapter 39: More Warning Signs?

Someone posted a second set of warning signs that indicate, supposedly, that when such factors are present there is a high likelihood of a potential for spiritual abuse associated with the individual or group who manifests the sort of characteristics that are itemized in the warning list. As in the previous essay ('Eight Warning Signs'), the numbered items below re-state those so-called warning signals, and the comments that follow them are my responses to those points, but, first, I begin with some counsel concerning a perspective offered by Idries Shah.

Shah once raised the following question: "Q.: By what signs in oneself can one tell whether a teaching is the right one 'for me'?"

"A.: By sensations and reactions that differ **completely** from customary ones, indications that one does not experience through the contact with **anything** else. In contacting mysticism, you are coming into a relationship with a completely new experience. Its sensation is correspondingly different from established 'religious or other experiences.'"

As with many things written and said by Idries Shah, the foregoing is an exercise in how to appear to say something, while, in fact saying nothing at all. One reads his Q and A format, and when one is done, one has no idea what is meant by "sensations and reactions", or the meaning of "differ **completely** from customary ones". If one goes insane, does this qualify?

The foregoing question is not frivolous. There is a substantial problem that is being alluded to through it.

How does one distinguish between reality and illusion and/or delusion? What happens when one becomes entangled in someone else's delusion or pathology -- for example, that of a false spiritual guide?

There are many kinds of possible anomalous, non-ordinary, altered states of consciousness. Experiencing such states and conditions does not necessarily mean someone has undergone a mystical event.

However, when one is under the 'guidance' of an inauthentic guide, one is vulnerable to the tendency within most of us -- that is, to seek consensual validation concerning the meaning and significance of

one's experiences. In other words, one has a strange experience and dutifully reports it to one's 'teacher' who, upon hearing the report, either smiles, and, says: "what a wonderful blessing", or looks worried, and says, "fortunately, I think we have caught this in time."

The fraudulent teacher might provide an explanation for the foregoing, or might remain mysteriously silent concerning its supposed meaning, but, in either case, one's sense of reality has been framed by the teacher, and, therefore, ensuing interpretations and understandings of experience are shaped, colored and oriented by what the teacher says or does. Under such circumstances, the meaning of an anomalous, non-ordinary, altered state of consciousness is whatever the so-called teacher says it is, and if one has invested her or his trust in such an individual, then, one is going to believe that the answer to Idries Shah's question of: "by what signs in oneself can one tell if a teaching is the right one for me" will reflect what one's alleged guide says in response to one's experiences.

Many people's understanding of the mystical way and their experiences were re-framed through the eyes of Idries Shah. Many people put their trust in what he said. Many people derived their idea of what was 'right for them' on the basis of what Shah said to them through his books. Many people labeled their experiences according to how Shah induced individuals to understand things according to how he believed the sensations relevant to the Sufi Path were "correspondingly different from established 'religious or other experiences."

Unfortunately, for a lot of people, Shah often didn't know what he was talking about. In fact, my very first introduction to mystical ideas was through the writings of Idries Shah, and in order to make progress on the mystical journey -- that is, once, by the Grace of God, I found, or was found by, an authentic mystical master -- I had to unlearn a lot of what I learned through Shah.

Shah did poorly what people like Michel Chodkiewicz do with a lot more scholarly rigor, accuracy, and spiritual insight. Aside from the issues of knowledge and wisdom, an important difference between the two is that Shah was quite savvy about public relations and the nature of modern communication, and, as a result, like an Internet virus, there came a time when one could hardly turn around without seeing an

Idries Shah book in the religious section of a bookstore or library -- even in rural areas. Of course, there often were few, if any, authentic books on the mystical tradition in these places, and, so, by default, the writings of Idries Shah began to frame the ideas of many people in the West concerning the nature of the mystical Path, and in the process those books spread a great deal of disinformation and misinformation concerning mysticism.

All one has to do is compare Shah with many mystical luminaries of the past, and one realizes, very quickly, that Shah, spiritually speaking, was vertically challenged in a land of giants. So, aside from the fact that the foregoing quote from Shah is devoid of any useful content, I really don't consider Shah a reliable indicator for helping people to identify warning signs concerning spiritual abuse -- this is too much like appointing a fox to guard the chickens.

Alleged Warning Signs and Commentary

1). "Being given an ultimatum, or being asked to choose between two people or two courses of study or two forms of behavior. Whoever asks you to choose between him and others is the false 'Teacher'."

'Comment': If one follows the counsel of the foregoing warning sign, then, presumably, being asked to choose between Satan and, say, Jesus (peace be upon him) should make one nervous. Alternatively, if one is told to choose between illusion and truth, or worldly pursuits and spirituality, then, if one follows the counsel of the foregoing 'warning sign', one, automatically, should avoid those people who indicate or suggest that such a choice is necessary. Or, if one is informed that it is necessary to choose between good and evil, or morality and immorality, or someone intimates that we must choose between waking up to the illusion of self or continuing to sail through life in a somnambulistic state, then, we should run away from such individuals.

Secondly, the very nature of taking initiation is an agreement between two individuals. This agreement carries certain responsibilities on the part the individuals who enter into it, and, consequently, there are principles of adab that govern the interaction of those individuals.

If one is sincere and serious about spirituality, why would one take initiation with someone and, then, do whatever one likes? If one is committed to, and has love and respect for, a given teaching and teacher, then, why would one suppose that commitment, love, and respect don't possess a certain binding authority that does not render one free to abandon that relationship according to one's whims or likes and dislikes.

The problem with initiation comes when the alleged teacher turns out to be inauthentic. In fact, one of the most difficult aspects of someone attempting to break free of spiritual frauds is that the initiate tends to feel a strong sense of obligation to honor the commitment one has made to the alleged spiritual guide and, in the process, to serve that commitment with integrity and honor.

Mysticism is not like a university where one travels from teacher to teacher and takes whatever appeals to one. Mysticism is a gateway to important truths about the nature of reality, purpose, identity, and self.

Such truths will never be accessed if one permits one's own arbitrary judgments to be the final arbiter of truth. One needs help in discovering the truth, and the most essential form of this assistance comes through the spiritual relationship of trust that exists between seeker and teacher, and one is not at liberty to jettison that relationship of trust whenever one wishes.

This dimension of spiritual etiquette is not about authoritarian fiat, any more than telling someone that they are not free to abuse children or a spouse is an authoritarian imposition. The nature of spiritual etiquette is a function of what the Truth demands -- rather than being a function of either what the teacher or the seeker wishes.

An authentic teacher might -- as a result of patience, understanding, empathy, compassion, kindness, tolerance, love, and forgiveness -- permit a seeker various degrees of freedom within which to commit mistakes that are not necessarily corrected or pointed out in any direct sense or even immediately. On the other hand, if a guide does not assist -- whether overtly or covertly -- a seeker to learn how to discern the truth amidst the shifting currents of the carnal soul, Satan, the world, unbelief, illusion, and delusion, then, that teacher is being remiss in her or his responsibilities to the seeker.

Being responsible is not necessarily the same thing as being authoritarian, even though, on occasion, they might look very similar. Unfortunately, spiritual charlatans take advantage of this and engage in authoritarian practices while re-framing such activities in the guise of being a responsible, caring, loving, ethical teacher.

2.) "If you are given anything to say or do in a language foreign to you (in the West this means such things as phrases in Persian or Arabic to repeat), this is done by a false teacher."

'Comment': What is the authority for such a statement? Where is the proof that establishes the validity of such a claim? Why should one consider the foregoing contention to be anything but the arbitrary prejudice of an individual who is seeking to impose his or her hermeneutical framework onto the discussion about what constitutes spiritual authenticity?

Such a 'warning sign' is itself a warning sign. One ought to have a healthy skepticism concerning any counsel, such as the one stated prior to this Comment, that is re-framed as a 'helpful hint' while busily pushing its own, hidden agenda. This sort of technique is employed by false guides a great deal.

3.) "No true mystical meetings are held more than once a week."

'Comment': I believe I once saw the foregoing as a headline in this or that issue of The National Enquirer as I was waiting in a checkout line at the local supermarket. If not, the foregoing statement certainly deserves to be published in that waste of wood, along with all the other gossip, innuendoes, false statements and urban legends of our times.

I know of mystical groups that congregate together every night during sacred months in order to pray, and, then, they return later in the evening to say special prayers. I guess they must be associated with a false teacher.

Similarly, these same groups might come together several times together several times during the week when a series of auspicious occasions might occur in addition to the usual weekly observances, and if we are to follow the rule of thumb set down by the author of the

foregoing warning sign, then, I suppose it would be better to not celebrate commemorative functions that acknowledge one, or another, of the great saints of a mystical tradition just so that we can be sure not to transgress the forbidden territory of engaging in more than one spiritual function a week.

Now, if someone were exacting punishment, of some kind with respect to all those who did not attend such extra sessions, or if tremendous pressure were being imposed on people to attend such gatherings, this is an entirely different matter. However, none of this was mentioned in the foregoing warning sign, and, therefore, as it stands, it is woefully incomplete and just plain incorrect.

4.) "If you are told or if it is hinted to you, that "something important is going to happen soon", know that you should abandon that group and seek the alternative."

'Comment': If a teacher says that the idea of death should be kept as a close companion, for its reality, which is very important to most of us, is close at hand, is such a person a spiritual fraud? If one is told that prayer is the spiritual ascension of the believer -- something that is both important and immediate -- should we abandon the one who has said this and seek an alternative?

An authentic mystic (Rumi, might Allah be pleased with him) once said that what can be done in two days with an authentic spiritual guide takes two hundred years to do on one's own. I guess we should stay away from such an individual.

Jesus (peace be upon him) said: "The Kingdom of God is near." Presumably, those people who didn't immediately retreat from him were being downright foolish.

Life holds out the promise of happening real soon all the time. For most of us, this promise is relatively important, so, I suppose, now that we have both a major and a minor premise, we can, in line with the logic of the aforementioned counsel of warning, move on to an inevitable conclusion that life should be abandoned and we should seek an alternative.

A school teacher intimates that something important is going to happen real soon. Dutifully, we follow the foregoing warning and

decide to abandon school and seek the alternative by playing hooky -- only to discover a few days later that while one observed the etiquette of hooky, one missed the final examination for the class and, consequently, failed the year.

The several instances of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments used above are close kissing cousins to the absurdity of trying to make a warning sign out of something that has been removed from any intelligible context. The lack of sophistication in such reduced contexts will be no match for the very sophisticated ways in which spiritual charlatans are able to circumvent such simplistic warnings -- in fact, such warnings, taken at face value, actually endanger people by lulling them into a false sense of security if such elements are not present in a given set of circumstances.

Deception is not a rule-governed, linear phenomenon. Deception is rooted in a set of dynamic principles that are very non-linear and far more subtle, effective, and powerful than most people suppose -- in fact, the people of the lie just love to engage those who arrogantly suppose they cannot be deceived because, more often than not, the latter sort of people do not harbor a proper respect for just how duplicitous spiritual frauds can be, nor do the latter individuals have a proper appreciation for how adaptable, sophisticated, and, yet, simple, strategies of deception can be ... we all are a lot more vulnerable to manipulation than we might like to imagine is the case.

5.) "Any supposed mystic wearing clothes or other apparel foreign to the country in which he is living, or that he visits, means that you should avoid such a man."

'Comment': Aside from the fact that such a statement seems rather male-oriented, one also has difficulty reaching any conclusion other than that the claim is xenophobic. Contrary to popular belief, clothes make neither the man nor the woman. Character is what matters.

Several of the spiritual charlatans I have encountered along the Way often wore suits. Was one any safer when they were dressed in suits than when they were dressed otherwise.

Using clothing as a measure of spiritual authenticity seems rather childish and superficial. In fact, in saying this, I do disservice to

children since most of them have enough sense not to jump to such ludicrous conclusions -- unless, of course, they are taught otherwise by their parents and community.

6.) "Any alleged mystical teacher who claims or implies that he is "on the Path of Blame" (deliberately courting unpopularity) is false. This is never claimed by real spiritual master, since the Path of Blame must be anonymously trod."

'Comment': Most individuals who have spent any amount of time on the mystical path have experienced the sad fact that mysticism is unpopular in a lot of circles within different religious community. In fact, one might even go so far as to say that real mysticism is unpopular in a lot of so-called religious circles.

Since stepping onto the Path is a deliberate act, and since many individuals are even warned, or come to understand, prior to initiation that becoming a follower of the mystical way is likely to prove unpopular with a lot of people, is this the same thing as following a path of blame? Surely, the ego takes a beating at the hands of those who disagree with one's decision to pursue the way of mysticism, and, perhaps, this is not necessarily a bad thing -- for, what shrinks the ego, expands the spirit -- but there is an unanswered issue hidden in such considerations.

If an authentic spiritual guide says to someone that the perspective of the mystical path is different from the way of exoteric religion and/or many of the theological approaches that are current in the world, and, therefore, such a Path is at odds with the views of many people, and, as a result, one should not be surprised if one gets ridiculed or criticized, but, nevertheless, one should continue to maintain one's focus in the midst of such antagonism, is this deliberately courting the unpopularity of others?

How does one distinguish between the spiritual charlatan who says: 'we go about things differently than the rest of the community', and the authentic mystic who says: 'we go about things differently than the rest of the community.' Surely, a great deal rests on the nature of what, precisely, is encompassed by going "about things differently", but, in either case, one is still deliberately courting unpopularity

among others -- although in one case, things that are done or understood differently can be justified, while in the other case, this cannot be done.

Unfortunately, no spiritual novice is going to have the insight to discern the difference between the two, foregoing situations. So, if all a person hears is that mysticism approaches the issue of spirituality somewhat differently from other segments of the community and that, furthermore, people of the Path have been unpopular for doing things in this way, then, how is an uninitiated individual to determine whether, or not, one is dealing with an authentic or inauthentic spiritual guide?

7.) "Anyone who says or does anything in your presence implying that he has influence in affairs of the world and is exercising it, is not a mystical teacher;"

'Comment': I know of authentic guides who have taken an activist role and, by the Grace of God, these individuals have had an influence in the affairs of the world, and they have exercised the talents, capacities opportunities, and assistance that God has bestowed upon them to make such influence effective. I know of a mystic who is a member of Parliament in India and, as a result of his influence in government circles, he has, by the Grace of God, been able to significantly improve the quality of life of his constituents -- many of whom are extremely poor.

If these individuals speak to anyone about what they are doing, should we shun them? Should we automatically assume they are not authentic spiritual teachers.

There is a secret spiritual government that exercises a certain influence, in accordance with Divine wishes, over every square inch of Earth. The members of this hidden government exercise their God-given responsibilities in this regard.

Sometimes, through Divine permission, individuals come to know of such activity and influence. Should such individuals conclude that what is going on is not authentic and the people who are involved in this are not servants of God?

Certainly, if a person is bragging about such things, then, yes, one would do well to stay away from these kinds of individual. However, astute, spiritual charlatans tend to be very careful about what they say, and to whom they say it, and, more often than not, inauthentic mystical guides rarely toot their own horn -- they get other people to do that.

Consequently, the absence of claims concerning worldly influence and the exercise of various powers does not guarantee that such an individual is authentic. Rather, it might only indicate that the person has a certain level of sophistication concerning such matters and uses other means to induce compliance, obedience, and commitment.

8.) "No real mystic will claim or imply supreme Mastership, or being a spiritual pole, or Concealed Teacher; though former associates of these mystics might do so, if they have succumbed to the temptation of exercising power."

'Comment': My understanding is that Idries Shah both made claims to being the head of all the mystical Orders as well as the Supreme Master of his time. I have read statements by others who were close to him who made the same claims on his behalf and even spoke of an alleged world congress of mystical teachers who met in Istanbul for purposes of electing, pope-like, such an individual. It was all quite democratic, with nominations, voting, and the like.

Aside from the fact that mysticism does not elect people to spiritual office -- rather, Divinity appoints -- the fact of the matter is, if we use the criterion cited in the above mentioned warning sign, we should conclude that Idries Shah is not a real mystic. As such, I find this a very useful warning sign.

9.) "Similarly, the assumption of military, clerical, or official rank is a sign of the deterioration of faculties (earth-sickness) which can attack anyone, and that is often found among channels (i.e., people who, though not mystics, might be related to some of them and employed for low-level and preparatory or "test" work)."

'Comment': Authentic mystical teachers come in many modalities of character, occupation, temperament, talent, and circumstances. If there is any rule that can be applied here, it is: there is no rule that can

be used to identify in what form a spiritual guide must be manifested. They have been military commanders, magistrates, government officials, clerics, and many other things as well.

Real earth-sickness is a function of the intention with which things are done. Moreover, earth-sickness is an expression of problematic spiritual aspiration -- that is, aspiring after the wrong sort of activities, positions, influences, and occupations.

A common saying is: be in the world but not of it. There are many worldly things that are compatible with the mystical path, if the underlying intention and aspiration are properly aligned.

In fact, every act that we do can give expression to either sacredness or to worldliness. Everything depends on whether such things are done in accordance with Divine wishes or are done in rebellion with respect to Divine Aspiration and Purpose.

10.) "The following signs are common when mystical teachership is claimed by those not entitled to it: assumption of importance; loss of physical coordination; convincing others (as a major characteristic) that one is taking a deep interest in them, especially when they are ill or in distress; mysteriousness and hinting; tolerating the deluded; confusing friendship with teaching; organizing inconsequential journeys; allowing one's hand to be kissed; appearing on platforms with "other mystics"; believing that spiritual teaching is a matter of individual opinion, not of inevitability in techniques; allowing exercises (e.g., chanting) to be carried out without supervisors to intervene at appropriate moments."

'Comment': I have seen a number of inauthentic teachers who have wonderful physical co-ordination. I have witnessed many authentic guides who have taken a deep interest in the lives of people and such interest has been genuine, sincere, and backed up with more than words.

Since any unrealized human being is deluded in one way or another, then, every authentic mystical guide must, to some degree, tolerate the deluded until such time as we come to our senses. Furthermore, no authentic spiritual teacher confuses teaching with friendship since every authentic mystic master I know has been both a

friend and teacher -- one need not preclude the other, but being a friend does not mean that he or she is a buddy with whom one can hang out and treat in ways that are not in keeping with spiritual etiquette.

I don't know what an "inconsequential journey" means. I suppose the meaning of "inconsequential" would vary with the frame of reference being considered, and, as such, the term is far too vague to be very helpful.

Spiritual teaching is neither a matter of individual opinion, nor is it an inevitable consequence of technique. The mystical path is rooted in the Truth and Divine Grace.

Opinion will not get one to the truth, and technique will not necessarily invoke Divine Blessing. I don't know where the author of these supposed warning signs is getting them, but they seem to be rooted much more in opinion than Truth.

I find that the warning about those who are "appearing on platforms with 'other mystics', to be rather problematic. I have heard of the occasional symposium where authentic spiritual teachers came together for purposes of speaking about various dimensions of mysticism. I guess we will just have to prevent such gatherings in the future.

I saw a woman, once, who permitted her hand to be kissed. I knew immediately she was not a genuine spiritual guide.

I think I'm getting the hang of these warning signs, now. Enthusiasm is welling inside of me to apply them anywhere and everywhere ... I am feeling a lot safer.

Chapter 40: Trance States

An individual inquired about the nature of trance induction and wanted to know about the techniques used in conjunction with such phenomena.

Based on my experience with a group that calls itself 'Sufi' and the individual in that group who refers to himself as a shaykh -- neither of which is warranted -- I have seen about four or five different conditions that appear to constitute altered states of consciousness that have either been induced by, or occurred in conjunction with, the alleged guide. There seem to be different mechanisms of induction involved with each of these conditions, although I believe techniques might be variations on certain central themes or precepts.

In the first paragraph above, I said that induction is either done by, or occurs in conjunction with, the presence of the so-called shaykh. Some people might wish to argue that nothing mysterious is going on here, but, rather, standard, well-known techniques of social influence, cognitive dissonance, re-framing and so on, are being used to shape thought and consciousness. Moreover, if one were able to study the biochemistry of these trance states, people might speak in terms of the flow of enkephalins and endorphins that are associated with the effects of using techniques of, say, social influence and that, together, result in certain altered states of consciousness.

While I am sure that some of the foregoing factors do figure into the equation of gaining control over the will, mind and heart of another human being, I believe that something more is going on as well. Consequently, I would like to proceed in this other direction and share some possibilities with you.

More specifically, no one knows why hypnosis works or how it works. There are many theories of hypnotic induction, but none of these theories ties the available evidence together in a convincing fashion.

The knowledge that is available on hypnosis is, for the most part, about either various techniques for inducing a hypnotic state, or, on the other hand, the effects that arise from those techniques. There is additional information about some of the physiological correlates

associated with the hypnotic state, but no one has been able to adequately disentangle the issues of cause and effect to which hypnosis gives expression to be able to determine, with any degree of persuasive clarity, as to whether such correlates are: biological, in nature, or just physical markers signifying the presence of some underlying set of processes that might, or might not, be physical in nature.

There is a phenomenon that one reads about, from time to time, in some of the Sufi literature. This phenomenon involves the ability of certain, sufficiently well-realized individuals to be in more than one place at the same time -- in other words, different people, in widely separated locations, might report having interaction and/or conversation with one and the same saint or shaykh on the same day and roughly the same time.

Apparently, this phenomenon is tied to a potential that is inherent in a subtle body associated with humans that is known as 'hamzat'. The hamzat is described as an 'emotionally' driven body with little capacity for discursive thought, but it does operate in accordance with the 'logic' of its potential.

When the hamzat is properly developed, it can serve, among other things, as a vehicle of manifestation for a saint's presence, personality, and the like. Moreover, and as indicated above, one of the properties of the well-developed hamzat is to be tied into serving as a locus through which multiple manifestations of a being's presence might occur.

On the dark side of things, the hamzat is often what is emotionally wounded during developmental trauma of whatever kind. This is one of the reasons why irrespective of what the intellect knows about the origins or etiology of emotional and psychological problems, until the hamzat is cured, no real progress can be made to restore an individual to emotional well-being, and since the hamzat is largely impervious to the logic of linguistic structures -- although there are, at least, two important caveats to be noted here (more on this shortly) -- talk therapy is, to a great extent, largely ineffective in bringing about a return to health within the hamzat.

Given the potential of the hamzat to serve as a locus for multiple manifestations of a person's presence, and given the highly emotional character of the hamzat, as well as its vulnerability to emotional

trauma, one is tempted to make a link between various kinds of Dissociative Identity Disorders (which used to be known as multiple personality disorder) and a hamzat that is so wounded because of abuse that it uses its natural capacity for multiplicity of manifestation as a localized defense to survive the trauma of abuse through using the creation of different personalities to be able to be in different cognitive, physical, and emotional spaces at the same time as a response to the terrors of the dissociative state that have arisen in response to abuse. In addition, when one understands that the hamzat has a great capacity for empathy, one might also begin to hypothesize that, perhaps, hypnosis -- especially of an Ericksonian variety (which seems to involve a strange form of co-operation between two spheres of consciousness) might tap into some of the properties of hamzat and establish an emotional link through which non-verbal cues are transmitted or through which other non-verbal influences are communicated.

Earlier I said that the hamzat has little, or no, capacity for discursive, critical thinking. However, the hamzat does seem to be susceptible to certain kinds of programming -- such as might be used in neurolinguistic techniques or hypnosis that might begin with words but soon by-pass the logical processes of language and conceptual thinking and an individual might be brought under the influence of how hamzat logic operates in terms of emotional, non-verbal currents that are being exchanged between the person who is inducing the trance and the one who is being entrained.

Moreover, some of the phenomena of chronobiology might intersect with the properties of hamzat, for, often times, there seems to be a relationship between the cadence of speech patterns and the appearance of certain kinds of trance states. Conceivably, there is some process of temporal rhythm entrainment in which the cadence of speech taps into, and induces various dimensions of hamzat activity to focus on the way things are being said, and the emotions with which things are being said, rather than the content of what is being said.

In fact, there have been numerous times when I observed the fraudulent shaykh -- with whom, for a time, I was associated -- talk, and people listened for long periods of time without moving, thoroughly engaged with what was being said but being incapable of

remembering much of what had been spoken once those sessions ended. Furthermore, these people appeared to be coming out of, or recovering from, a trance, of sorts and seemed to have difficulty focusing or shifting gears to other kinds of life activities.

Himma is a term that can mean aspiration (and, in the context of mysticism, refers to spiritual aspiration), but it also alludes to themes of focus and concentration. Hypnosis is an expression of one kind of himma in action when the aspiration of the hypnotist and the aspiration of an individual's conscious mind and/or hamzat join together to create an altered state of consciousness in which the person being hypnotized might become highly vulnerable not just to verbal suggestion but other kinds of shaping influences as well.

The eyes of the aforementioned, so-called shaykh are very strange and captivating at times. When he wishes to draw someone into whatever is being transmitted through his gaze or himma, the result is often very striking in terms of the transformation it brings in the person toward whom the gaze is directed.

The work of Elizabeth Loftus with, among other things, false memory syndrome indicates that many, if not most, of us are quite sensitive to even extremely subtle forms of suggestion and compliance cues -- influences that can alter what we remember, believe, feel, and think. To further suppose that people who wish to please their 'shaykh' will pick up on all kinds of suggestions and indications for behaving and believing in certain ways, is not much of a jump -- especially, if this occurs during sessions in which properties of chronobiology and the temporal entrainment of hamzat might flow into one another and establish a 'space' of anomalous consciousness.

I have coined the term 'Baba-juice' (Baba meaning spiritual father and, as such, this constitutes a way of referring to whatever it is that might be transmitted from the so-called shaykh to a devotee and, in the process, helps lead to an altered state of consciousness) to give expression to a medium of transmission between a so-called shaykh and those who come under the influence of this alleged teacher. I have seen this Baba-juice phenomenon manifest itself on a number of occasions, and in a number of different ways.

I have witnessed people respond to the presence of the so-called shaykh as if they suddenly had been hit with a powerful drug. The

transformation is palpable, intense, and very, very quick, but there has been no discernible physical contact between the person affected and the so-called 'shaykh'.

Sometimes these individuals would roll around on the floor and shout with ecstasy. One of these individuals came to me after a session and began relating things that, purportedly, had been transmitted to that person during that state and that, supposedly, concerned information about certain facets of his and my spiritual link -- which, according to him, went back a long time ... even before we met in this life.

Sometimes these individuals would remain seated or standing in kind of a one-shoe in this world and one-shoe in another world interstitial state. The impact of the other world whatever it might be was very, very intense.

On other occasions, when I detected the presence of 'Baba-juice', the people who seemed to be under the influence of this phenomenon could think of nothing else but what was of importance to their relationship with the so-called shaykh, irrespective of how such influence induced these individuals to treat other human beings. It was almost as if human beings, other than the so-called shaykh or those approved by the shaykh, didn't exist and, as such, had no rights or were owed no duties of care.

This was so to such an extent in certain cases that even basic human decency or politeness did not have to be observed in relation to such people. These other people could be brothers, sisters, wives, husbands, friends, mothers, fathers, or children, and it made no difference to them.

I saw another individual who had been a sweet, down -to-earth, sensible, caring, kind, happy individual, but who, under the influence of Baba-juice, turned into a suspicious, wary, argumentative, rigid, uncaring, irrational individual toward anyone who even tried to raise the possibility that things were going on in relation to the alleged shaykh that were not right. She had been whisked away for a few days stay with the so-called shaykh, and she returned home a completely changed individual ... from someone who used to be very happy to see me, to someone who, literally, ran away from me the moment I walked

into the room, and, despite the fact that I had no interaction with her for several years.

She goes through life and interacts with people in a totally preoccupied manner -- as if listening to a distant form of music. She rarely smiles but claims she is very happy, and she shows all the signs of having been drugged with Baba-juice and continuing to remain under the influence of that phenomenon.

I refer to Baba-juice as a phenomenon because, in truth, I really don't know what it involves, and, quite frankly, neither does anyone else -- except, perhaps (and, maybe, not even these individuals), those people who have been taught the underlying technology or techniques that are associated with the capacity to induce altered states of consciousness of one kind or another through the transmission of 'Baba- juice'. I have suggested some possibilities in the foregoing comments -- both with respect to some of its dynamics, as well as in relation to the dimension of a human being (namely, hamzat) -- and the manner in which almost all of us are vulnerable under the right set of circumstances. This is especially so given the many wounds that might have been recorded by hamzat and that, as a result, might render a person susceptible to being induced into trances when people without moral or spiritual conscience choose to exploit such vulnerabilities through the techniques that they have been taught by others or that they have picked up along the way through one means or another.

While factors such as re-framing, social influence, cognitive dissonance, group dynamics, sleep- deprivation, obedience, compliance, and so on, might all have a contributing role to play in trying to explain what takes place when one human being gains dominance over the thoughts, beliefs, values and emotions of another human being, I believe, based on what I have witnessed, that something much more subtle and elusive is also involved as well, and, furthermore, I believe, that this 'something more' is an extremely dangerous technology or set of techniques that is being used by unscrupulous people for self-serving ends and spiritually destructive purposes.

In closing, I find it interesting that, at one point, I asked the so-called shaykh in the 'silsilah' with which I was associated to teach me more about the structural character of hamzat, along with further

details concerning its dynamics. I did this because of the central role that a wounded hamzat plays in the psychological and emotional problems experienced by many people as a result of developmental trauma of one kind or another, and I was hoping that learning more about this dimension of a human being might help me to find ways to assist people with their emotional, psychological and spiritual problems.

When I raised this issue, he quickly changed topics and discouraged me from pursuing the matter further. This response came from a person who previously had told me that because I was his khalifah (someone who is assigned spiritual duties with a silsilah) and of importance to the spiritual purposes of the silsilah, he could not, and would not, keep anything from me that concerned the silsilah or affected my ability to assist people in the silsilah with their problems.

Perhaps, like the wizard of Oz, he didn't like anyone lifting the curtain that disclosed what he was doing. I'm quite certain that he thought, and thinks, of me as something of a 'dog' even though my name is not Toto.

Chapter 41: Authenticity

An exchange of ideas took place between two individuals concerning the perceived merits, both pro and con, of a person who is described by some as a modern spiritual teacher. The following comments are a response to that discussion.

There are teachers and, then, there are 'teachers'. A teacher might, or might not, be a spiritual guide. The fact that one can learn from someone does not necessarily make the person from whom one learns either a teacher, a 'teacher', or a spiritual guide, for, among other things, teaching and guidance both depend on the presence of a certain kind of intention.

Although what I 'know', in some sense of this word, about E.J. Gold is limited -- and none of what I 'know' is based on direct experience with him -- nonetheless, the dilemma with which he (along with many others) presents a seeker might be instructive. Moreover, all of this can be done without passing judgment on Mr. Gold -- either positively or negatively.

Apparently, Mr. Gold is one of those rare individuals who is both multi-talented and quite intelligent. He writes, draws, paints, sculpts, makes jewelry, takes pictures, plays jazz, and does business. Moreover, he does all of these with a great deal of skill, knowledge, and talent. In addition, he is a consummate speaker, a scholar of considerable resources, and a very insightful and intuitive observer of the human condition.

Jesus (peace be upon him) exhibited few of the foregoing qualities, and with the exception of, possibly, the realm of business, neither did the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). So, I suppose, the moral of the story is that we should stop listening to such individuals like Jesus (peace be upon him) and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and, instead, follow those individuals who exhibit talent and, as a result, are capable of impressing us in one way or another.

People such as Mr. Gold lead very interesting lives. I am sure that his life experience and the understanding which has arisen out of that

life experience are valuable resources for those with whom he comes in contact.

However, talent, intelligence, an interesting life, intuition, or being a valuable resource do not make someone a spiritual guide. This is true quite irrespective of whether such people speak, write, or teach about spirituality.

A person can write books about spirituality, or go on speaking tours that focus on spirituality, or conduct workshops on spirituality, and none of this, in and of itself, makes someone a spiritual guide. This remains so, even if someone who reads a book, or listens to a lecture, or participates in a workshop with such an individual comes away with 'food for thought' that has a spiritual flavor to it.

There is only one factor that can make someone a spiritual guide -- that is, someone who serves as a locus of manifestation for the concentrated and consistent transmission of barakah, or Divine Grace, through which self-realization of essential identity and unique spiritual capacity is, God willing, made possible. This sine qua non of the mystical quest is that the person who serves in the capacity of a spiritual guide has been appointed as such by Divinity.

Divine niyat, or intention, is the sole key to the issue of someone's being, or not being, a spiritual guide, and the authentic Sufi masters have always alluded to this reality by, among other things, citing the Quranic ayat: "Enter houses by their doors." (2:189). Just as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "I am the city of knowledge, and 'Ali is the gate," so, too, every authentic shaykh (and God determines authenticity, nothing else) becomes a door to the mystical house to which a silsilah (spiritual lineage) gives expression, and becoming such a door is only possible through a Divine decree that is made known via the mouths and actions of authentic shaykhs, just as Hadith Qudsi constitute the unveiling of Divine intentions by means of the agency of the voice of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Someone does not decide to become a spiritual guide. Someone does not take courses on how to be a shaykh, or become a shaykh by receiving a certificate or diploma from having successfully fulfilled the requirements of a given curriculum or program. Becoming a shaykh is not a matter of scholarship, research, intelligence, talent, or even

knowledge since there are, by the Grace of Allah, many people who have become Self-realized who do not, thereby, become shaykhs.

There are no elections or balloting associated with becoming a shaykh. Zikr, fasting, seclusion, night vigils, prayers, community service, meditation, contemplation, recitation of the Qur'an, going on hajj, and the giving of zakat does not render one a shaykh.

The performance of 'wondrous deeds' that, seemingly, break the known laws of physics and/or biology does not make one a shaykh. Indeed, the final dajjal (i.e., imposter) will exhibit all manner of facility with respect to the manifestation of 'wondrous deeds' -- including, raising people from the dead -- but this does not make the dajjal a shaykh.

Others might proclaim one to be a shaykh. Others might even pay to read one's books or attend one's workshops and feel that they are getting good value for the money spent, but personal testimonies and written endorsements do not make someone a shaykh.

One might believe or feel that one has a calling to be a shaykh. However, the existence of such a belief or feeling is not sufficient to make someone a shaykh, and, in fact, there are a number of famous examples of people [e.g., Hazrat Qadir Jilani (might Allah be pleased with him) and the Prophet Jonah (peace be upon him)] who ran away from such responsibilities, not feeling adequate to the task to which they clearly were being called.

There is only one element that makes a person a shaykh. If this element is present -- while intelligence, talent, scholarship, and accomplishment are absent, then, one is a shaykh, but if this element is absent, then, irrespective of whatever gifts, diplomas, or kudos can be listed next to one's name, one will not be a shaykh ... and this one element is Divine niyat or intention.

The individual who, for eleven years, or so, I considered to be a shaykh was a very accomplished, talented, intelligent, and knowledgeable individual. He could sing up a storm in a number of languages. He wrote poetry. He was a clever businessman and an extremely astute student of human nature. He was quite intuitive, as well as encyclopedic in his knowledge of many facets of Islam, in general, and tasawwuf in particular. People were attracted to him

wherever he went, and many people talked about the 'wondrous deeds' that they had witnessed in association with him. He was extremely funny, as well as fun to be with. Those who were virulently anti-Sufi would be eating out of his hand within a short period of time. Drove of people would stay with him from morning until early the next morning, and, then, sleep on the floor so that they could start the process all over again the next day. Many people were in ecstasy in his presence.

He was a real charmer ... right up to the time when he betrayed you, or lied to you, or spread malicious rumors about you behind your back, or sexually exploited someone close to you, or manipulated you, or destroyed your family. In this respect, he had a lot in common with Ted Bundy who, I understand, was a real charmer too and very intelligent, personable, witty, engaging, handsome, and talented.

There is nothing paradoxical about the spiritual guidance of the Prophets or the saints or the great shaykhs. It is our ignorance that makes things seem this way.

There is nothing paradoxical about kindness, forgiveness, tolerance, empathy, compassion, love, sincerity, honesty, humility, modesty, poverty, steadfastness, faith, patience, gratitude, piety, wisdom, and friendship. Yes, there is something Divine about all of these qualities, but there is nothing inherently paradoxical about them, although, sometimes, those who seek to pass themselves off as teachers try to reduce mysticism to a series of paradoxical teachings.

There is a difference between a paradox and a mystery, and no matter how many paradoxes one might resolve, the mystery of Self will remain a mystery unless God wishes otherwise. Mysticism, unlike the Bastille, cannot be conquered by assault – paradoxical or otherwise -- but, instead, one gains entry only through inside help ... help that has been appointed by Divinity and not help that has been self-appointed as a result of delusion and illusion.

When it comes to people like Gurdjieff or E.J. Gold, what others say about the spiritual qualifications of such individuals really is irrelevant, and, moreover, what those people themselves say about themselves in this respect, is also irrelevant. The only voice that counts is the Divine one.

Trying to discern what the Divine voice is saying to us is not an easy task. Whole lifetimes are often consumed by dealing with such a challenge, and, the result is not always successful.

Trying to step onto the spiritual path is an inherently dangerous activity. There are no guarantees even if one should be fortunate enough to discover, or be discovered by, an authentic teacher.

Furthermore, the problem of trying to differentiate between authenticity and inauthenticity is fraught with peril because we start from a position of ignorance about such matters and, as well, easily become confused due to the many forces acting on us, both from within and without, that have a vested interest in misdirecting us away from the truth in relation to this issue. Ironically, even though the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) gave many clues concerning the advent of the Latter Days, and even though every last one of the many minor signs indicating the nearness of this time have now come into evidence, and even though the Prophet clearly indicated that such times would be filled with spiritual darkness and all manner of dajjal (spiritual imposters), all too many people suppose that spirituality has never been more advanced than it is today and that almost any Tom, Dick or Harry who has a following qualifies as an authentic shaykh.

Truly, the human capacity for self-deception is seemingly bottomless. And, indeed, human kind continues to prove ourselves to be "extremely oppressive and ignorant," (33:72) and there is no one who is more oppressive and ignorant than someone who claims, or is claimed to be, a spiritual guide who has not been appointed by God -- and, this remains true regardless of whatever intelligence, talents, gifts, wit, beauty, scholarship, or charm someone brings to the table.

Chapter 42: Shari'ah and Bi'dah

Someone said:

"As to "Shari'ah:" There are dozens of practices within the purview of Tasawwuf that are bi'dah according to somebody --- including zikr -- - and details of Muslim practice are different all over the world, so I don't take "adherence to (someone's definition of) Shari'ah" as a necessary index. One of my mentors (but not my murshid) is the shaykh of a particular Order who is also a Hafiz Qur'an and an imam. He is very clear in his discourses that the Islam of Tasawwuf and the Islam of the mosque are quite different, and that one should not let their actions be determined by those who can only see one level of Islam."

I feel there are a number of, potentially, problematic aspects to the foregoing perspective. First, and without prejudice to the shaykh to whom you are referring, any assertion that seeks to differentiate, the 'Islam of Tasawwuf' and the 'Islam of the mosque' and, thereby, imply that the former is somehow better or superior to the latter (and I really don't know how else to render the idea of "different" in the foregoing but as a word that carries a rather presumptuous, elitist and negative judgment of mosques as well as those who are part of the community of such places), this does a great disservice to far too many people. There are mosques run by Sufis, and there are mosques to which Sufis go, and there are hidden saints of God who attend mosques (but who might not be Sufis), and there are good people who are not Sufi but who attend mosques, and the Islam of these people is not 'quite different' from the Islam of tasawwuf. I don't think it is constructive -- especially in the context of a web site that is focusing on issues of spiritual abuse -- to create divisions in such a critically inclusive manner.

Are there mosques where un-Islamic behaviors, attitudes, ideas, and politics have precedence? Yes, there are. Unfortunately, there are also a variety of groups that call themselves Sufi where the same sort of things can be said.

When reading the kind of perspective that is given expression in the foregoing quote, a anecdote from the life of Ra'bia of Basra (might Allah be pleased with her) comes to mind. There had been a Sufi who was speaking with her and who was being quite judgmental about the

sort of people who go to mosques and about the great differences, supposedly, between so-called 'ordinary' Muslims and the people of the Path. At a certain point, Ra'bia (might Allah be pleased with her) stopped the individual from proceeding and said: "Thy existence is a sin with which none other can compare."

Islam is something different from the interpretations that people - - whether they are Sufi or not -- place upon it. Each individual seeks to hermeneutically engage the reality of Islam and struggle toward an understanding of that reality. God, and no one else, will tell us, on the Day of Judgment, wherein we differed and who was right and who was wrong. ["then to Me shall be your return, so I will decide between you concerning that in which you differed." (Qur'an 3:56)]

Some Muslims who attend mosques might be limited in their vision and understanding concerning the infinite richness of Islam. Some Muslims who attend mosques might be less limited in such respects.

I know of no authentic shaykh who, either in the present or in the past, has indicated that only Sufis have a multi-dimensional understanding of Islam, or that just because an 'ordinary' Muslim differs in her or his understanding of Islam relative to someone who alleges to be a Sufi, that, consequently, the matter of correctness must automatically be assigned to the Sufi. As with everything else in life, context and specifics matter.

Surely, as the Qur'an stipulates: "We raise by grades (of Mercy) whom We will, and over every lord of knowledge, there is one more knowing." (12:76) Who has been raised by grades, and who is a lord of knowledge, and who is more knowing will not be determined by human predilections -- nor will such matters be settled by making arbitrary distinctions between the Islam of tasawwuf and the Islam of the mosque.

A second point to make is the following. To refer to someone as a shaykh, or a Hafiz of the Qur'an, or an imam doesn't necessarily mean much of anything these days -- at least not in the abstract.

Unfortunately, there are all too many individuals who refer to themselves as shaykhs, or as those who have memorized the Qur'an, or who have memorized so many thousands of hadith, or who are

considered to be imams of this or that community who are, nevertheless, instructing others to kill innocent people, or who are sexually and financially exploiting women and men, or who are seeking power and domination over others, or who are introducing all manner of fitna, or mischief/trial, into the community, or who are distorting and corrupting people's understanding about the nature of Islam.

This is true, to varying degrees within the Sufi community. This is true, to varying degrees, within the non-Sufi community.

Personally, I don't want to know what label someone applies to himself or herself, or what labels other people apply to such individuals. Instead, I want to know if I can trust such people not to betray or exploit, or manipulate, or lie, or mislead, or misinform, or spread dissension. There are quite a few individuals who refer to themselves as shaykhs, Sufis, imams, and hafiz of the Qur'an that I have encountered who I have learned cannot be trusted in any of the foregoing ways.

Thirdly, while the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "My community will never agree in error," and he also is reported to have said: "The diversity (of views) among the learned of my community is a blessing (Mercy) of Allah," he was not saying that Shari'ah is whatever we want to make it or that there was no such thing as bi'dah, or impermissible innovation.

One can agree there are those who try to claim that whatever they are against is what the Prophet had in mind when he spoke of impermissible, innovative practices [and, as Hazrat 'Umar (might Allah be pleased with him) taught us through re-instituting the public observance of tarawih prayers during the month of Ramadan, there are permissible or good innovative practices], but notwithstanding such a concession, this does not mean there is no such thing as bi'dah. Rather, what it means is that one must exercise discernment and insight to be able to differentiate between the truly impermissible and that which is merely imagined to be impermissible due to someone's likes and dislikes.

In an earlier essay I said: "one dimension of bi'dah, or impermissible innovation, is to claim that a practice not specifically prescribed within Shari'ah will guarantee spiritual benefits."

For example, when someone claims that a name change is incumbent upon Muslims or that by changing one's name one will derive spiritual benefit, then, the making of such claims not only cannot be reliably supported by evidence from the Qur'an, hadith, or Shari'ah, but, in fact, constitutes an instance of bi'dah. This is so because it is a well-established principle of Shari'ah among all the five major, accepted schools of Islamic jurisprudence that no one should try to argue that any given practice that has neither been prescribed nor proscribed by the Qur'an or hadith can be said to be a necessary source of blessings if such an action is taken, or a necessary cause of Divine displeasure if such an action is not taken.

The fact there are those who misuse or misunderstand the nature of Shari'ah does not entitle one to conclude that, therefore, there is no such thing as Shari'ah or that Shari'ah is wholly arbitrary or that one does not have to pay attention to the principles of conduct that are being given expression through Shari'ah or that one does not have an obligation, as a Muslim, to struggle to understand the principles on that Shari'ah rests. Furthermore, the fact there are those who, apparently, don't read the Qur'an sufficiently closely, and, therefore, have failed to notice that it says: "Lo! Ritual worship preserves one from lewdness and iniquity, and, verily, remembrance of Allah is more important," (29:45) is not really an adequate reason to dismiss Shari'ah as a "necessary index" of Divine guidance.

Hazrat Junayd (might Allah be pleased with him) quite clearly said: "This knowledge of ours is delimited by the Qur'an and Sunnah [of the Prophet (peace be upon him)]." Another friend of Allah has said: "Every unveiling that is not born witness to by the Qur'an and the Sunnah is nothing." There is 'no Islam of tasawwuf' and 'Islam of the mosque' ... there are just different hermeneutical or interpretive renderings of the Qur'an and the sunnah -- some of which are good, others that are better, and still others that are problematic.

The Sufi Path is not for everyone. However, this does make those who pursue tasawwuf somehow better than those who do not do so, anymore than one can say that because of the differences between a rose and a lotus blossom that one is somehow better than the other -- rather, they are just different manifestations of one and the same underlying Beauty.

Moreover, I have met so-called ordinary Muslims who have a lot better sense of, and devotion to, the principles of adab than quite a few so-called Sufis whom I have met. Islam is not found in the labels, but in the *niyat*, or intention, with which acts are undertaken that is one of the reasons why Allah said, through the mouth of the Prophet (i.e., it is a Hadith Qudsi): "My heavens and My earth do not contain Me, but the heart of my believing servant does contain Me."

One does not have to be a Sufi to have faith. One does not have to be a Sufi to have sincerity, or compassion, love, kindness, generosity, nobility, honesty, integrity, or empathy. One does not have to be a Sufi to be a Mu'min.

To have any of the foregoing qualities, one needs Allah's blessings, and Allah's blessings are not restricted to the people of the Sufi Path. Hazrat Junayd (might Allah be pleased with him) has said: "The Enlightened One is one who refuses to place his trust in three things: (a) knowledge; (b) action; (c) seclusion." Indeed, as the Qur'an indicates: "Say: He is my Lord; there is no god save Him. In him do I put my trust and unto Him is my recourse," and it was the Sunnah of the Prophet to advise people to also seek to 'tie their camel' while trusting in Allah.

The people of *tasawwuf* tie their camel one way, and other people tie their camel in other ways. God, through Divine generosity and infinite compassion, accepts many ways of tying a camel -- but not all, and it is our task as human beings to discover those ways that are both acceptable to God and compatible with the spiritual potential of our essential fixed form or *al-a'yan al-thabita*. "To everyone, We have appointed a Law and a way." (Qur'an 5:48)

Chapter 43: Gurdjieff

An individual made some comments about Gurdjieff, spiritual authenticity, the significance of certain powerful experiences, withdrawing from an alleged silsilah (spiritual lineage), the process of spiritual seeking, and the relationship between worldly success and the spiritual path. The following is a reply to those concerns.

Some of my earliest contacts with anything remotely related to the Sufi path was through Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. I actually spent some time with a Gurdjieff group that was tied to Madam Walsh -- wife of the attending physician at the time of Gurdjieff's passing away in France.

One of the other primary lines of Gurdjieff-linked teachings was through Madam de Hartmann, wife of Thomas de Hartmann. The latter individual often played and helped arrange the music that was played in conjunction with the form of sacred dancing that Gurdjieff introduced to the West. Interestingly, at the time I was involved with all of this, the latter group didn't seem to have much to do with the former group, and vice versa.

While there were many very talented and intelligent people associated with the Gurdjieff-like group with which I spent a little over a year, I didn't feel any of the leaders of the group had substantial spiritual insight into the nature of Being. More importantly, not only did I find some of their answers to my questions problematic -- especially in conjunction with those questions that were related to the possible links between Gurdjieff and the Sufi tradition (alluded to in, for example, the second of three works by Gurdjieff - namely, Meetings with Remarkable Men) -- but, as well, I found disconcerting and troublesome the way several of them came in search of me at my place of employment when I indicated to them that I was going to pursue the Sufi Path rather than continue with the Gurdjieff group.

One person -- Rafael Lefort (which some claim to be a nom de plume ... and various candidates have been proposed as to the 'real' identity of that individual) -- actually followed the veiled clues laid down in the aforementioned book and retraced the steps of Gurdjieff's spiritual journey. Lefort wrote about this in his book: *The Teachers of Gurdjieff*. Many, but not all, of these guides were Sufi, and while Lefort kept hoping that one of these individuals would accept him as an

initiate, he returned home, seemingly empty handed in this regard, only to find his Sufi teacher within a few miles of his point of departure in Paris.

While there is no doubt that Gurdjieff had some interesting capabilities and gifts, there are many questions within me about what it is that he actually had or what those capabilities and gifts actually signified. Furthermore, whatever it is that he had, he did not seem capable of transmitting it in anything more than a passing, limited fashion, to any of his followers. Although people such as Ouspensky, Nicoll, Bennett, Walker, Collins, Peters, and others all had interesting things to say, none of them seemed to reflect the sort of understanding or qualities that might incline one to trust them with one's spiritual well-being.

The issue of trusting someone with one's spiritual well-being should be distinguished from the idea of whether one could learn different things through their writings or by interacting with them. In other words, while everyone can be one's teacher in the sense that one has something to learn from, or through, them, a spiritual guide is much, much more than what is involved in the process of 'teaching' in such a limited sense.

With respect to people like Gurdjieff (and numerous other 'remarkable' men and women could be listed), many people do not seem to distinguish between worldly kashf and spiritual kashf. The former encompasses such things as precognition, manipulation of certain dimensions of material and psychic phenomena, witnessing of worldly events at a distance, transference of thought, reading of minds, inducing of trances, and so on, while the realms of spiritual kashf are a very different order of reality involving certain dimensions of the heart, sirr, ruh, kafi, and aqfah.

All too many people confuse manifestations of worldly kashf with spirituality. Although some authentic shaykhs have access to such powers, the general principle among legitimate guides is to keep one's distance, as much as possible, from matters of worldly kashf.

I have read much that Gurdjieff has written, including: *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, along with many of the writings of his followers such as Ouspensky, Nicoll (e.g., the multi-volume *Commentaries*), as well as spent some time with at least one person who actually knew

Gurdjieff. Nonetheless, although I saw lots of evidence for worldly kashf (unveilings of a worldly nature) in Gurdjieff (and some of those who followed him), there seemed to be very little evidence of spiritual kashf in conjunction with him -- indeed, there seemed to be more confusion about spirituality swirling around, and through, his teachings than there was clarity.

Gurdjieff was interested -- or, so, he claimed -- in waking people from their sleep. But, there is such a thing as dreaming that one has awoken, only to remain fast asleep, and one of the questions that is still relevant with respect to Gurdjieff and his teachings is to what extent Gurdjieff was actually spiritually awake, or to what extent his teachings were capable of helping one find the truth of things.

God knows best what the truth is concerning Gurdjieff. However, he gives expression to a continuing problem for seekers after the Truth, and, in fact, this is the primary reason why I have spent a bit of time talking about Gurdjieff.

I have heard many people allude to powerful zikrs that they have experienced. I, too, have participated in zikrs that have been quite powerful.

Nonetheless, one still can raise questions about what is actually transpiring during such sessions or about where the power is coming from which might be associated with a given zikr. The unrealized individual is vulnerable to attacks from Iblis and nafs while saying zikr -- or, while engaged in prayer, contemplation and seclusion, and the presence of an altered state of consciousness in conjunction with certain practices does not necessarily mean that the state is an expression of Divine favor.

Trans-personal experience does not, in and of itself, necessarily say anything about the significance of that experience. Iblis is capable of inducing non-ordinary states of consciousness, as is nafs, and so are practitioners of occult systems. Many drugs -- designer and natural -- also are capable of generating very powerful, transforming experiences, and, under certain circumstances, group dynamics can bring about overwhelming emotional, physical, and psychological changes.

Sorting out the differences between spiritual experiences that, on the one hand, are powerful and, on the other hand, states or conditions that are powerful but not spiritual is one of the forms of assistance and guidance that can be given by an authentic shaykh to a seeker. Until one has learned, in conjunction with a legitimate spiritual teacher, how to differentiate the 'tastes' among such experiences, one is really stumbling around in the darkness of ignorance and, as a result, could easily fall into the spiritual equivalent of crevices, quicksand, and snake pits.

Individuals like Gurdjieff -- who, on the basis of the personal accounts of many people, seem to possess an ineffable, extraordinary 'something' -- tend to stir a certain amount of excitement among many of us (and I admit that, at one point in my life, a fair amount of interest and excitement was generated within me about such individuals). Yet, the truth of the matter is, most of us really have no understanding of just what is being given expression through people such as Gurdjieff, except that it is anomalous in relation to much of the rest of our lives.

Many people consider these sort of anomalies as being synonymous with 'the Truth' or the 'higher' truths. To be sure, there is a kind of truth that is present in such experiences, but a truth about being in general is not necessarily very illuminating as far as coming to understand 'the truth' about one's essential being in particular.

As indicated earlier, discernment, wisdom, and dhawk (tasting) concerning essential truths are part of what an authentic teacher has to pass on to initiates. This transmission is not primarily through words, but is via the agency of nisbath that is the umbilical cord of trust that serves as the spiritual life-line of communication and nourishment linking a seeker with a spiritual guide (and vice versa).

While every teacher-seeker relationship (whether authentic or not) has a dimension of nisbath associated with it, the quality and truth of what is transmitted through such nisbath is quite another matter.

Moreover, one cannot always immediately recognize if what one is being fed is constructive or destructive to one's spiritual well-being. Indeed, as with many poisons, the toxic effects of what is being transmitted through a problematic nisbath might not be manifested for quite some time and, as well, might be quite subtle in the manner in

which it debilitates and corrupts a person's spiritual condition ... many of us are quite blind to the deceitfulness of some of the forces at play within us.

In passing, you allude in your posting to "Anab's (i.e., me, the author of this book) criteria" with respect to trying to differentiate between a false and authentic teacher. There might be some misunderstanding here (and, perhaps, I have helped to engender this to some extent), but I haven't listed any criteria by which one can recognize an authentic shaykh -- in fact, my intention has been to travel in a somewhat different direction.

More specifically, on three separate occasions (and all three instances can be found within the present book), I have explored various kinds of criteria that different individuals have put forth as suggested ways of identifying false and/or authentic teachers. On each of these occasions, I have indicated that the criteria being discussed were not capable of differentiating between authentic or inauthentic teachers because either there were too many contra-indications with respect to the stated rules or principles, or the indicated criteria could easily be counterfeited or become subject to misdirection by clever spiritual frauds.

In short, what many people have construed to be a relatively straightforward and easy issue of differentiation -- namely, identifying false and authentic spiritual teachers -- is, in actuality, neither straightforward nor easy. Instead, we are all faced with a far bigger problem in epistemology -- or, theory of knowledge -- than is comfortable for many people.

Some people are all too certain about matters pertaining to the foregoing issue -- matters that deserve a great deal more circumspection, caution, and humility than, unfortunately, is often the case. Furthermore, all too many people are in denial about this issue and are afraid to peek out from beneath the covers that they have drawn up over their heads to comfort them in the darkness of the hermeneutical and existential night in which they exist.

I say the foregoing, not as someone who is jaded about the possibility of spiritual realization or the Sufi path, but as someone who has been exposed to both spiritual authenticity, as well as inauthentic 'teachers', and who, despite the existence of spiritual charlatans,

continues to search for the essential truth about myself before, through, and with Divinity. To borrow from Hazrat al-Ghazali (might Allah be pleased with him), just because I -- or anyone -- might not experience the essential truth of things, doesn't, therefore, mean there is no essential truth to be experienced.

Notwithstanding the foregoing concession, I see an awful lot of people doing the spiritual equivalent of whistling past the cemetery. Many of these people are very frightened, extremely defensive, and all too ready to attack, if not malign, anyone who disagrees with them or suggests to them that, maybe, just maybe, some of the individuals who are considered to be authentic shaykhs are, in fact, spiritual frauds.

Certainly, when a practice has been given to one, and one begins to feel uncomfortable with something in conjunction with that practice (as you indicated happened with you), then, it is appropriate to ask whether the discomfort is a function of the original zikr given to one, or is a reflection of something problematic in oneself and/or in the teacher. This is a dilemma with which we all are confronted -- how to tell whether a spiritual difficulty is a reflection of our own nafs and/or of Iblis (Satan) whispering to our hearts, or whether that problem is rooted in something that someone else (namely, a so-called 'teacher') is doing 'to' us or in conjunction with us but without our full-knowledge and understanding.

There are many things that I might list which could be construed as being 'good' points of the spiritual fraud with whom I was unknowingly associated for many years. He was funny, a great -story teller, and extremely knowledgeable about the Qur'an, hadithic literature, and the history and teachings of the Sufi tradition. On the surface he appeared to be very empathetic, compassionate, kind, considerate, gentle, forbearing, forgiving, and sincere. Whenever one left him, one longed to return to his presence.

Unfortunately, among other things, the man was also an inveterate liar. However, the nature of many of his lies took time to come to the light of personal awareness, and many of the lies were done in the shadows and behind one's back -- indeed, he artfully set about seeking to spiritually destroy the lives of many people, myself included, and it was only by God's Grace that the lies that were being told came to my

attention ... for, if not for this Grace, I might still be entangled in the lies and not even realize that such was the case.

When I use the term 'artfully' above, there are many things that might be said in this regard. Perhaps, one of the most telling of such possibilities is that the way the alleged shaykh constructed and introduced lies often left one in a state of wonderment about what was actually going on, yet, without any means to demonstrate, definitively, that lies were being told.

In your posting, you have suggested that, perhaps, one of the criteria that could be added to any list of considerations -- through which a seeker might be able to judge the 'worth' or authenticity of an alleged teacher -- revolves around a seeker's relationship with truth. More specifically, being committed to the Truth, might be a very important factor in determining how a given context involving an alleged spiritual guide is interpreted or understood.

Although the idea is commendable, it presumes that any one of us knows whether, or not, we are 'absolutely committed to the Truth' or that we would even recognize the Truth if it were staring us in the face [and quite a few Sufi shaykhs - e.g., Ibn al-'Arabi and Rumi (might Allah be pleased with them) indicate that the Truth is staring us in the face, yet, we do not recognize it because we have veiled ourselves from it, even though it is not veiled from us]. The deceits of the nafs are such, and the wiles of Iblis are such, that without the steadying, experienced, wise counsel of an authentic shaykh, the spiritual path for many of us becomes very much like shooting ducks in a barrel of water -- with us playing the part of the ducks, and nafs and Iblis playing the shooting role.

Whatever went on between you and your 'teacher', there were enough questions and doubts raised to induce you to back away from continued participation. Were you right, or were you wrong in doing this?

If the so-called shaykh was a spiritual charlatan, then, no matter how charming, intelligent, knowledgeable, and powerful he appeared to be, you were right to take the step you did. If that individual is not a spiritual fraud, then, you have a different kind of problem on your hands.

I do consider the fact very important that when you asked for Divine assistance with respect to the practice you had been given, you indicated that the power disappeared leaving a emptiness and a longing that is difficult to bear. Although Allah knows best, I have witnessed a number of people who experienced a condition very similar to the one being described by you that took place were those people were, by the Grace of Allah, able to be disengaged from the trance-like state into which they had been induced by the fraudulent shaykh about whom I spoke above.

There is a difference between the pain experienced through the withdrawal associated with addiction in a context of being separated or distanced from the source (a fraudulent teacher) of one's psychic supply of endorphin rushes and flooding, and the pain felt in the condition of authentic spiritual longing. Many people confuse the two.

Another point to consider in relation to your posting is this: many of the people who remain with the false shaykh alluded to in the foregoing are very, very successful in relation to dunya. While our apportioned lot comes from Allah, the fact of the matter is: sometimes, but not always, success in the world really is a manifestation of spiritual failure, whereas, sometimes, but not always, worldly failure and difficulty are expressions of spiritual expansion.

Consequently, the successes and failures of a worldly sort to which you allude in relation to the status of your association with the silsilah might not mean what they appear to on the surface. Precisely because appearances might be deceptive, we require spiritual assistance from an authentic source ... which, in turn, is why the issues you have raised in your posting are so important for all of us to reflect upon.

Chapter 44: People of the Lie

A person expressed interest in learning more about the techniques used by fraudulent teachers in order to better equip himself or herself against being adversely affected should one encounter techniques of manipulation. The following response was given.

First, to focus on techniques of manipulation is to engage the central issue at an oblique angle rather than head on. More specifically, the 'technology' of manipulative techniques is always changing and, therefore, while coming up with a list of various processes involving manipulation might be of some assistance, nevertheless, oftentimes, this not only prevents people from being able to see the forest through the trees, so to speak, but, as well, the incompleteness of the ever-expanding list of techniques makes people vulnerable to the creative inventiveness of evil -- for, in learning such a list many individuals will feel they are safe in what they know, only to be blind-sided by a new wrinkle in techniques of manipulation. In reality, what makes all techniques of manipulation effective are the lies that form the core of the intention or niyat through which such techniques are given expression.

If one person can induce another individual to accept -- that is, to trust -- one or more lies about the nature of relationships, circumstances, teacher authenticity, mystical potential, methodology, purpose, meaning, understanding, or spirituality, then, the essential ingredients have been established through which an environment of abuse might be nurtured, much as one cultures bacterial growth by providing the appropriate set of conditions that enable the organism to take hold and survive, if not flourish. Although some individuals might want to continue to live with lies because the transition to a life based on truth is too traumatic, there are very few people who wish to be lied to up front, and if a person accepts a lie as truth, this is not because that individual is necessarily foolish, gullible, naive, indiscriminate, dishonest, stupid, asking to be lied to, or deserving of lies, but, instead, might be because they are relatively sincere, honest, open, and not given to manipulating other people and make an assumption -- which, if they are lucky, they will discover is not always true -- that other people operate in a similar fashion.

Lying is not a rule-based activity. Lying is rooted in principles of deceptive, insincere, abusive intention. Spiritual abuse is a function of malignant *niyat* (intention), not particular techniques ... indeed the techniques are just the tools that are used to implement problematic intention.

The Stanley Milgram study on obedience/compliance, which was discussed in an earlier chapter, was set in motion through a sequence of lies that started with an ad that was placed in a New Haven paper inviting citizens from the population at large to participate in a learning experiment. Further lies were told at the time of the actual experiment when someone would respond to the ad and come for an interview concerning the 'study on learning'.

Everything that was told to a subject (i.e., anyone who showed up for an interview) was a complete lie. The prestige of science, scientists, research, academia, and learning were leveraged by Milgram to induce subjects to trust the lies that they were being told. Qualities of steadfastness, consistency, duty, obligation, responsibility, and dependability in the subjects were called upon, referred to, alluded to, and invoked by the experimenters in order to get subjects to stay the course of the experiment - all the way to the bitter end (which over 66% of Milgram's subjects did, and this percentage of compliance was even higher in some countries where the experiment was replicated).

But, the engine that drove the mechanism of manipulation in the Milgram experiment was lying. Similarly, the engine that drives spiritual abuse is the way truth is veiled through the constant use of lies -- even desirable qualities, purposes, goals, meanings, values, and methods can become poisoned and corrupted through the presence of malignant intention that veils the truth.

In fact, precisely because of the capacity of malignant *niyat* to poison the well of spirituality, then, all manner of processes, circumstances, qualities, behaviors, and purposes that, on the surface, seem constructive and innocent can be used to camouflage evil. This is another reason why coming up with lists of things to watch out for does not offer the best, most direct way of understanding the nature of spiritual abuse.

Just as Milgram leveraged the prestige of science, academia, research, scientists, and learning to induce trust in the lies inherent in

the experimental design, so, too, spiritual charlatans leverage the holy longing of individuals, as well as the latter's belief in Divinity, their faith in a purpose that transcends the machinations of worldly affairs, their recognition that they are in need of spiritual assistance, their vulnerability -- all of these factors are used to induce faith or trust in the alleged truth of the lies that are being told. Moreover, just as the people who responded to Milgram's overture in the newspapers never could have seen what was being intended for them, so, too, many, if not most of the people who respond to invitations to spirituality do not see the evil character of the intention to which they might be introduced.

All of the techniques that are used by fraudulent shaykhs and guides are employed to misdirect attention away from the lies that form the core of spiritual misguidance. In addition, once one begins to become bound to the web of deceit as a result of the lies that are being spun by the spiritual counterpart to a Sydney Funnel-web spider, extricating oneself proves to be a very difficult proposition due to a variety of emotional, social, psychological, toxic, and physical forces that, like a cocoon, tends to hold one in place as one is eaten alive spiritually.

Even though there are some individuals who become associated with fraudulent shaykhs and, due to their own malignancy of intention, they perpetuate such lies with malice aforethought because this serves the vested interests of their nafs (the rebellious tendency within us to act contrary to the truth) and entanglements with dunya (the world of the dynamics involving our collective desires), nevertheless, there are many victims of spiritual abuse who are no more responsible for their inability to break free from the altered state of consciousness into which they have been drawn than is a deer responsible for being unable to break free of the mesmerizing effect of the headlights of an automobile, even though this might mean death -- whether physical, emotional, psychological, behavioral, or spiritual.

Innocent people are continually being caught-up in the conflagrations of wars, political betrayal, domestic abuse, economic exploitation, automobile accidents, educational malfeasance, and murder. Life does not pick on just the guilty and the deserving of punishment -- it stalks us all.

Sometimes there is no place to run and hide, or there are no safe havens, or refugee camps, or people to hear one scream from the multiplicity of ways in which 'people of the lie' (to borrow a term from Scot Peck) can bring misery into one's life. As we approach the Latter Days, we become more vulnerable because we are less equipped to cope with, and defend ourselves against, the fabric of lies that is being woven into our lives -- politically, socially, educationally, economically, and spiritually -- and we are less equipped to protect ourselves from the malignant intentions of an increasing number of people because spiritual wisdom is becoming increasingly absent from our midst.

The master of all liars -- Iblis/Satan -- hides his lies amidst the truth, and uses the truth to leverage trust in the lies. Lies are used to betray the truth, and the specific techniques that are employed to bring this about are less important than coming to understand and realize the presence of malignant niyat, or intention.

The foregoing is, quite frequently, not always an easy thing to do. This is especially so if one has been groomed to trust lies and treat them as the truth, and having been groomed, slowly, over a period of time, this is also one of the things that makes people who have become compliant with an atmosphere steeped in lies very resistant to anyone who suggests that what is being labeled truth is, in actuality, a lie.

Recognition that one is being betrayed through lies tends to push people into the very painful experience of dissociation out of which alienation, identity diffusion, depersonalization, de-realization, anomie, and loss of meaning and purpose arise. People will do almost anything to avoid having to deal with the intensely painful and dislocating character of dissociative states. In fact, among the things that some people will do to avoid dissociation is to stay in an abusive relationship ... whether spiritual, domestic, or terrorist in nature ... because they have not learned and/or have not been taught how to deal with the dissociation, essential betrayal, deep distrust, and grief that arises through abuse.

Either on one's own and/or with assistance, one must arrive at a state where the truth becomes more important than anything else. This is at the heart of any real objectivity, spiritual quest, self-realization, or moral integrity.

Authentic shaykhs help one struggle toward sincere ijihad (striving to gain insight) concerning the nature of truth in accordance with one's capacity for realizing Haqq (Truth or Reality). False shaykhs will undermine this journey through a curriculum of lies, laced with just enough truth to make one believe one has discovered the mother-load rather than a salted mine of worthless dross.

The problem is that discerning the nature of truth and/or the presence of lies is not always straight-forward. Oftentimes, one needs an enormous amount of barakah (Grace) in one's life to be shown what one needs in order to recognize that what one is being told is either authentic truth or lying misguidance.

One must have faith that the Truth/Haqq will win out in the end. However, the Divine Himma (Aspiration) is that one must struggle and have courage to seek out the reality of that which is before us and within us at all times, but from which we often are veiled and do not recognize -- at least not without a fight within ourselves.

Chapter 45: The Mahdi and Caliphacy

A person forwarded a link to me about a Web Site concerning a group that seemed to focus on, among other things, the re-establishing of the Caliphate. The individual felt that the group in question had a hidden agenda and that a number of people who this person knew to be involved with the group seemed to be brainwashed.

I have had a brief look at the Web Page to which you have directed me. First, I should let you know that I am not familiar with the group -- that is, your reference to it is my initial introduction to their teachings.

However, on the basis of just a cursory glance, the group is similar in tone to a variety of individuals and groups who are busying themselves with trying to re-establish the whole idea of the Caliphacy. These individuals are reminiscent -- at least to me -- of the fervor displayed by those people who wish to advance, or are pre-occupied with, the appearance of the Mahdi (might Allah be pleased with him). Both groups -- or those who are committed to such things -- see the return of the function of Caliph and the emergence of the Mahdi (might Allah be pleased with him) as signs of the Latter Day that are spoken about in the Hadithic literature.

While the Hadith do speak of these events, nonetheless, the individuals who get caught up in these issues frequently do so -- in my opinion -- through a spiritually unhealthy and presumptuous manner. Among other things, they often refer to themselves in terms that depict the people in their group as an elite, or special, or 'chosen', or 'in-the-know', or better than everyone else.

I am somewhat familiar with one, very well-known, alleged shaykh who has, on three separate occasions, predicted the precise date (down to the day, month, and year) of the return of the Mahdi (might Allah be pleased with him), and, yet, on each occasion this individual's claims have been incorrect. Nevertheless, as in Festinger's monumental study of: *When Prophecy Fails*, the people surrounding this so-called shaykh are even more fervent in their commitment to this alleged spiritual guide after these gaffes than they were before the pronouncements -- not seeming to remember that this 'shaykh' had made claims about having been brought into the company of the

Mahdi (might Allah be pleased with him) while the latter was still in occlusion -- or spiritual hiding -- and, supposedly, knowing all about what was to transpire, based on his 'insider' knowledge ... which turned out not to be knowledge at all because it led to false pronouncements.

Allah knows best what this particular individual knows or does not know. However, the very fact such claims were made in a way that appeared to be intended to impress and persuade people that the Path of the alleged shaykh's spiritual Order was the best and the most spiritually advanced among all the Orders (which is itself a statement wholly lacking in humility and modesty, and, in point of fact, quite out of keeping with the teachings of the Qur'an where taqwa, alone, is the deciding factor in matters of quality of faith, and taqwa does not belong to Orders but, by the Grace of Allah, to individuals), as well as the fact that the individual was wrong on three separate occasions, together with the fact that this shaykh continues to speak about the imminence of the appearance of the Mahdi (might Allah be pleased with him) and how those who are with this shaykh and his Sufi Order will be saved and all others will be in deep trouble -- all of these factors tend to create a certain problem of credibility for me with respect to such a gentleman, along with those who speak like him (and the people associated with the group about whom you have told me remind me of that alleged shaykh).

In going down through the list of points that are to be found at the web site to which you have directed me, a couple of them caught my attention. For example:

"Every claim of the Quran is based on reason and knowledge, and its truths are beyond space and time. In order to comprehend Quranic truths, it is essential to keep abreast of the advances made in human knowledge. And since God has endowed human beings with the ability to conquer the forces of nature, it is necessary that these forces be conquered only to fulfill God's program for humanity."

While I would agree that the Qur'an gives expression to the truth, and while reason is one of the ways through which truth might be

manifested, I would, in no way, accept the idea that the Qur'an is based on reason, per se, since this limits the Qur'an to the qualities of discursive logic that is only one of the paths through which knowledge might be acquired. In other words, Aql cannot be reduced down to reason, but rather, reason is just one of the manifestations of Aql.

Moreover, the truths of the Qur'an encompass the truths of time and space since the Uncreated Word of God has been described as a book from which nothing has been omitted. As such, the truths of the former are both transcendent and imminent with respect to the qualities of time and space.

Secondly, I also would categorically reject the idea that in order "to comprehend Quranic truths, it is essential to keep abreast of the advances made in human knowledge." In fact, the initial item listed on that Web Page is: "Human intellect alone cannot solve life's problems. God's revelation is required for human guidance in the same way that vision requires light" -- so, if what they are saying is true, then, what do advances in human knowledge have to do with understanding revelation?

One can only understand revelation through Divine light that is wholly independent of so-called human knowledge. Indeed, the latter is, in truth, little more than connected systems of information that masquerade as real knowledge even as such systems distract us from seeking after the truth and entice us to be satisfied with the ephemeral and relative.

In addition, I tend to disagree with the premise that: "God has endowed human beings with the ability to conquer the forces of nature." Islam is about the peace that arises through submitting to the purpose of life and working in harmony with the forces of nature to struggle toward realizing that Divine purpose -- a purpose that transcends physical nature. The term "conquer" is from the vocabulary of arrogance and ignorance that does not seem to understand that the vicegerent of Allah does not conquer nature but, rather, has been vouchsafed a fiduciary responsibility with respect to all of Creation.

At another point, the Web Site, for which you have provided the link, stipulates: "The goal of the Deen is to promote obedience to the laws of Allah by freeing human beings from obedience to other human beings. Such obedience to the laws of Allah is only possible through the

establishment of a system of government based on these laws. Without this, the Deen (or the system of life based on the Quran) is not possible." In truth, the goal of Deen is to provide a methodology or way or path to realize both our essential identity, together with, our unique spiritual capacity through which we come to know, love, and worship Divinity.

Moreover, we will never be able to free ourselves from others until we, by the Grace of Allah, can be freed from the entanglements of dunya (that which gives expression to the dynamics of collective desires vying against one another), and the machinations of the unredeemed nafs (the tendency within to rebel against the truth), and the enticements of Iblis (Satan) and his whispering shaytans. The way to external freedom is through internal freedom, and we will never be free to be our essential selves as long as we do not exercise choice through essence -- a process toward which Deen is dedicated to helping us struggle.

All an external government can ever do is to provide an existential space for living through which Deen can be pursued on an individual basis, not a group basis. Others can help establish the conditions that are conducive to individual striving, but no government can take the place of the need for individuals to strive after the realization of Deen in one's life -- which is why, as the Qur'an informs us, there can be no compulsion in matters of Deen.

People who start talking about establishing governments that are going to ensure compliance with Deen are not only against the spirit of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), but, unfortunately, these individuals tend to be highly authoritarian in nature and consider obedience to anything or anyone but them as a form of betrayal. I am always amazed that Muslims mouth the truism that there is no clerical class in Islam, and, then, proceed to create precisely that in the form of imams, or mullahs, or a distorted notion of the Caliphate, or shaykhs, of one description or another.

Government, shaykhs, imams, the Caliphate are intended to be nothing more than aids and support for the establishing of an environment in which individuals might struggle toward realizing Deen within a peaceful, protected, supportive, encouraging,

harmonious, insightful, and knowledgeable context that is conducive to spiritual realization according to one's God-given capacity. Anything more than this tends to border on shirk - that is, the attributing of partners to God ... partners who are, somehow, considered necessary quite apart from their functions of being merely the loci of manifestation of Divine succor.

Further down the list of principles that are cited at the Web Page in question, one finds the following: "The prophet (P) established this system of Deen for the first time in Medina. In this system, obedience was due to the laws and injunctions of the Quran. Matters of government, for which the Quran outlines only principles, were decided within the limits of those principles by mutual consultation of the Ummah."

Deen was not established by the Prophet (peace be upon him). The system of Deen was established through revelation, which, in turn, was realized through the states and stations of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) long and difficult struggle to implement the Divinely -gifted Deen in his own life, and from this sunnah, humanity was provided with the shining, beautiful example of what al-insan al-kamil (the perfectly balanced human being) means in the context of everyday life.

Contrary to what the people behind the Web Page in question state -- that is, "Matters of government, for which the Quran outlines only principles, were decided within the limits of those principles by mutual consultation of the Ummah" -- the Qur'an does not just 'outline' principles, and, in fact, the foregoing quote demonstrates a lack of understanding of both the idea of 'principle', in general, as well as a Quranic principle, in particular.

Principles are not rules. Principles are non-linear, complex, rich, subtle, flexible, layered, transferable to a wide variety of contexts and problems.

If one understands the structural character and logic of a principle, such an understanding does not constitute just an outline of process or procedure, but, in fact, provides insight into how to proceed amidst changing circumstances -- something with which rules have great difficulty. The depth of a principle depends on its source or origins and the capacity of the one who engages such a principle.

Since the Qur'an is the uncreated word of God, its principles know no limits, per se, and the hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) which indicates that there are seven levels of significance in every facet of the Qur'an is an allusion to precisely the limitless depths of Quranic principles. Limitations on such principles come from the nature of human capacity.

While ijma, or consensus, is one of the tools that, traditionally, has been used to arrive at communal agreements about how to proceed in certain respects, the consensus of human beings can never serve as an accurate barometer of the depths of Divine knowledge. At best, such instances of consensus can only serve as a working approximation which, God willing, serves human interests to the extent such consensus reflects Divine guidance.

In this respect, the Prophet encouraged people to discuss matters among themselves and to try to secure consensus wherever possible, but, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said that 'my community will never agree in error'. Nonetheless, while struggling toward consensus serves as a methodological protection against rushing to erroneous judgment, such consensus was never meant to be imposed upon people as being obligatory ... it is a methodological principle, not an epistemological fiat accompli.

Human beings striving toward consensus on matters of spiritual importance are people who are engaged in a hermeneutical exercise. Truth is best served when that exercise merges horizons, within its capacity to do so, with reality or Haq. The quality of any given form of consensus is entirely dependent on not only the spiritual capacities of the individuals who are participating in such a process of consensus seeking, but, as well, it is dependent on the degree to which such capacities have been realized in an appropriate manner -- and only Allah knows the answer to such issues.

In the absence of reliable consensus, one has ijtihad -- that is, individual striving toward sound, spiritual judgments. Ijma is the collective result of individual ijtihad that reinforce one another and coalesce in a common resonance around certain themes, and when such concurrence does not exist, then, we, as individuals, still have the responsibility of exercising ijtihad as best we are able and for which we will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment.

Leaders -- at least good ones -- provide an environment that is conducive to the free, creative flow of both processes of ijma and ijthad. Leaders -- at least good ones -- promote tolerance, flexibility, exploration, respect, mutuality, and spiritual rigor in the exercise of both ijma and ijthad such that ijma is not subjugated to individual fiat, nor is individual striving eclipsed by group dynamics and biases.

On the Web Page in question, one reads: "As Muslims, our job is to establish once again the "Khilafat 'Ala Minhaj-e-Risalat" that requires people to follow Allah's laws. However, those who want to lead this effort must first bring their own lives under the fold of the laws of Allah."

Anyone who desires to lead others and tell them how to run their lives ought not be permitted to lead. Once anyone gets the idea that his or her role is something more than a locus of manifestation for constructively directing Divine support that helps people in accordance with the spiritual capacities, circumstances, problems, and needs of the people who are to be assisted, then, one is entering into the realm of compulsion -- which the Qur'an explicitly forbids.

Moreover, the Prophet (peace be upon him) never said that our duty as a Muslim is to "establish once again the "Khilafat 'Ala Minhaj-e-Risalat." This idea is wholly invented by someone's interpretation of historical events.

In addition, if Khilafat 'Ala Minhaj -e-Risalat is to be established -- or, whether it should be established (and the Prophet's saying that such will occur is not necessarily the same as his advocating that it should happen, anymore than his asserting that many of the other signs of the Latter Days are 'good things' even as he noted that they will happen) -- then, God will bring this about according to Divine purposes, not human purposes, and through means that are Divinely authorized not humanly selected and sanctioned.

Finally, the Web Page in question says: "The system of Deen ("Khilafat 'Ala Minhaj-e-Risalat") that encompasses all aspects of life, if established, will cause the current dualism to disappear. Instead of turning to the government to decide political matters, or to the priesthood for personal and religious matters, people will turn to the Deen or laws of Allah, since both these institutions will be absorbed in the system of Deen."

Apparently, those individuals are creating their own interpretation of forthcoming events. There are two future periods about which we know as a result of what the Prophet (peace be upon him) has told us on the basis of Prophetic kashf or unveiling -- one of these concerns the appearance of the Mahdi (might Allah be pleased with him), and the other concerns the return of Isa (peace be upon him) -- and, in neither case, will dualism disappear, for as long as human beings exist on Earth we must struggle with nafs, dunya, Iblis, and unbelievers.

The Mahdi (might Allah be pleased with him) and Isa (peace be upon him) will be aides to the development of spirituality -- they will not be guarantors of such development, anymore than the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) could serve as a guarantor of spiritual realization for the people of his time. Furthermore, in each case, their beneficial impact will be circumscribed by Divinely ordained events that lead to the dissolution of spirituality in human kind when these two are taken away from humanity by Divine Decree.

These two periods of assistance are de-limited by Divine Plan. Khilafat 'Ala Minhaj-e-Risalat will not alter any of what is Divinely ordained concerning the eventual, complete disappearance of spirituality on Earth -- when humankind becomes worse than the beasts -- and that serves as a harbinger for the Day of Judgment unfolding as described in the Qur'an.

People who seek the return of the Caliphacy often speak in glowing terms of an Earthly paradise -- a Utopia -- that will arise at that time. Such people do not seem to understand what the Prophet (peace be upon him) has foretold in this respect -- that the respite will be relatively brief -- and, more importantly, they do not appear to understand that the nature of life was always meant to be a struggle and, as such, one can never completely remove the conflicts and stresses that are manifested through the forces within us, and without us, that are in opposition to the realization of our essential identity and unique spiritual capacity.

If one removes this dualism, one removes the very methodology that, God willing, makes spiritual realization possible. All spiritual progress is made in the context of struggle.

The issue is not now, nor has it ever been, nor will it be at the time of Isa's (peace be upon him) return, a matter of institutions, or governments, or leaders, or a Caliphate ensuring that human kind is obedient to Allah. This has always been, and will continue to be, a matter between the individual and Divinity -- a matter for which there can be no intermediary, although there can be different modalities of assistance and support for this individual struggle.

Deen is not waiting to be established. Deen is made manifest through the Qur'an, through the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and through the signs within us and on the horizons. We, as individuals, must strive to acquire the eyes through which to see these truths, and the ears with which to hear them, and the hearts through which to have faith in such realities. The Khilafat 'Ala Minhaj-e-Risalat cannot do this for us, no matter what its quality.

Life is not just a matter of being shown what the nature of truth is. Life is a matter of struggling to choose to submit to such truth, and if one is compelled to choose in a certain way, one obviates the entire purpose of life and its Divinely sanctioned dimension of struggle.

Chapter 46: Discernment

There are a variety of words that are used in conjunction with the vocabulary of spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Among these terms are: wahy (revelation, guidance); ma'rifa (gnosis); baqa (subsistence of the Self in the awareness of Presence), fana (awareness of the Presence to the exclusion of all else); kashf (both worldly and spiritual); maqqam (station); hal (state); ilham (flashes of insight -- sometimes referred to as intuition); dreams; dhawk (tasting); Ishtikharah (special prayer for direct guidance), and discursive reason.

The hermeneutical, or interpretive, unpacking of these terms depends on a variety of factors, and some of these factors distort or veil understanding rather than facilitate it. The key to reliable understanding in such matters depends on Divine Grace for the kernels (Qur'an 39:9) of knowledge are possessed by Divinity and no one else, and Divinity bestows these to whomsoever He pleases, when so ever He pleases, to whatever degree He pleases.

There is, I believe, a problematic understanding among many individuals (and I have no one in particular in mind here) who suppose that suluk, or spiritual travel, is necessarily marked by instances of gnosis, kashf, dreams, ilham, and so on, and that such experiences provide one, at every juncture of the Path, with a clear spiritual idea of what is going on, or the direction in which one should go, or the significance of events. However, I know of nothing in the Sufi literature or that I have heard from authentic shaykhs that would support such an understanding -- in fact, almost the opposite is frequently the case.

Yes, there are reports by this or that shaykh, or this or that individual, that there are times when such Divine assistance comes and shows the way to go, or the meaning of things, or helps one avoid difficulties. However, it does not follow that such experiences are the rule, rather than the exception, on the Sufi Path.

Revelation did not come to every nabi (Prophet), and in the absence of such revelation -- although there was guidance -- the guidance came as Allah wished. Even when revelation came -- such as to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) -- there were many times in the lives of the Prophets when the way forward was not made clear, or no explanation was given as to the significance of events, or

they were not always informed of the duplicity of the individuals with whom they were dealing.

For example, during the Battle of the Trenches, the Prophet did not appear to know that people who were assigned with the task of guarding certain points of vulnerability would abandon their posts. Moreover, the Prophet might not have known that when the Treaty of Hudaibiyah was signed it would be violated. Furthermore, the Prophet might not have known that the siege of the Prophet, his family, and some close Companions by the Meccans would last more than two years and lead to the death of his beloved wife, Khadija, and a favorite uncle. In addition, the Prophet might not have known that he would be stoned when he invited the people of Ta'if to Islam.

The stations of repentance, longing, patience, fear, dependence, and love are filled with uncertainties, doubts, struggles, unknowns, puzzlement, trials, and challenges. The significance of dreams is not always understood -- even by shaykhs (and not all shaykhs are of the same caliber or spiritual capacity, although all enjoy the Divine support that will assist seekers). The hal of misguidance might be confused with the hal of guidance. The ilham, or flashes of intuition, that come might be fragmentary and in need of further elucidation. The arrival of essential love often marks the emergence of bewilderment. Gnosis is never all encompassing but is always a function of individual capacity together with the amount of gnosis that is poured by Divinity into the receptacle of our hearts. One can do Istikharah and no clear indication might come.

To assume that God is going to provide one with spiritual experiences that micro-manage one's life so that one will always be in the know is not only presumptuous, but, this flies in the face of 1400 years of Islamic mysticism. Every traveler of the path (and being initiated or taking ba'yat is not the same thing as suluk, since the latter requires much more commitment and effort) will experience contraction, Dark Nights of the Soul, doubt, uncertainty, and so on. Even the Prophet (peace be upon him) went through an extended period when revelation did not come to him and, as a result, he feared that Divinity had forsaken him and was displeased with him.

It is comforting to suppose one can always know when one is confronted with a spiritual charlatan. The implications of entertaining

possibilities that do not conform to such a supposition are very disturbing ... the implications of such possibilities leave one feeling very exposed and vulnerable.

The idea that we might not be able to differentiate between authentic and inauthentic shaykhs seems to cast either one's opinion of oneself, or one's conception of how God operates, into question. If one does not know how to distinguish between genuine and non-genuine spiritual guides, then, surely, this is a black mark on one's spiritual being, or it is to throw a critical question in Divinity's direction that asks how could a loving, compassionate God possibly leave His beloved Creation hanging in the wind -- even as there is evidence all around and within us that this happens all the time, both now and in the past.

God is beyond our comprehension, and even the people of realization know only what their God-given spiritual capacity permits them to know of Divine manifestation. God understands our ways, but we do not understand the Divine Way -- except if, and when, Divinity wishes to disclose this to an individual.

If for Divine reasons, Divinity does not wish us to know the true identity of a spiritual charlatan, then, we will not know. There might be many reasons why this information is hidden, and not all of these reasons necessarily reflect badly on the individual who is being kept out of the loop, so to speak.

There will be many people during the time of the final dajjal (spiritual imposter) who will swear that the dajjal is a spiritual guide of the first order. There are many people today who speak about the superior qualities and knowledge of this or that alleged shaykh, and, apparently, many individuals never stop to consider the possibility that, in some cases, the latter sort of judgment is a prelude to making judgments of the former kind with respect to the final dajjal.

We often assume we have a certain kind of relationship with Divinity, yet, subsequent events are constantly raising questions about the character of our understanding concerning precisely what kind of relationship that is. People gain faith, and people lose faith, and no one knows whether he or she will be among the former or the latter at the time of death, or on the Day of Judgment.

'Dead Zones' (to borrow a phrase from Stephen King) are strewn across our lives. These Dead Zones are existential 'spaces' of unknowing, obscurity, ambiguity, and uncertainty.

We cannot traverse these territories without struggle on our part, as well as without Divine guidance, and even with guidance we might only come to understand a small part of what is transpiring within these Ontological Dead Zones. The authentic spiritual teacher plays a key role in the absence of the physical presence of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

The boundary line between guidance and misguidance is a constant battleground and struggle for understanding, and it is a fundamental mistake, I feel, to suppose that one always understands the precise character of that boundary line, or that God will always micro-manage one's interaction with that line, or that one always knows the difference between correct guidance and incorrect understanding with respect to that line.

Evil is not rule governed. It operates according to principles that manifest themselves in ever new forms and guises.

One can assume, if one likes, that one understands all about evil and that evil can never ambush one or surprise one or that one always will know the face of evil when it shows up, but I think this kind of assumption is precisely the sort of approach that evil loves to attack, undermine, and throw for a loss -- with adverse consequences for faith and spiritual travel.

Until Divinity comes and takes us by the hand to show us what must be done, we are stumbling about in the dark. And, unfortunately, Divinity, for Divine purposes, doesn't always take us by the hand, but, instead, lets us experience darkness and ignorance, among other things, so that we might better understand, and appreciate, light and knowledge when, God willing, these emerge.

We are involved in a dance of opposites. There will always be steps of contraction and expansion, knowledge and ignorance, *jamal* and *jalal*, and so on.

This is how faith grows. As far as I know, there are no exceptions to this. We cannot out-think Divinity. We are not quick enough, knowledgeable enough, or sufficiently capable.

We are totally dependent on Divine assistance, and when that assistance is not present, one cannot know or understand the nature of what is unfolding ontologically. No one can predict how Divine succor will be distributed or when, and the best defense against leaving oneself open for evil's attack is to learn humility that arises, in part, from an understanding that what one thinks one knows is often not correct, and, as a result, one needs to be open to many possibilities in a way that requires a great deal of struggle and effort in order to find the appropriate spiritual line through which to proceed.

Fraudulent shaykhs are not just people who are right for some and wrong for others -- they are wrong for everyone. They are a locus of manifestation for evil, and, unfortunately, they are not always easily recognizable, and God does not always identify them for us until -- if we are lucky -- we learn what God wishes us to learn by exposing us to such individuals.

Fraudulent teachers can be a means of learning about ourselves and life. However, they are not shaykhs or agents of Hadi (Guidance) in any sense of these words. They are agents of Muzhill (Misguidance) and minions of Iblis ... I don't know how else to state it.

Chapter 47: Whomsoever God Pleases

Some individuals wish to frame the issue of spiritual abuse and manipulation in terms of God's guidance. More specifically, one of the implications of this sort of framing is that people are being asked to believe that those who experience spiritual abuse have been misguided by Allah or have allowed themselves to be misguided. Another implication of this modality of framing reality is that spiritual frauds and the individuals whom they abuse are, more or less, equally culpable, and, alternatively, that, somehow, the people who are abused should have known that they were being lied to and it was their own willingness to lie to themselves about what was going on, or their own failure to recognize the lies they were being told, which is at the heart of their problems.

The foregoing approach to the issue of spiritual abuse and manipulation is, I believe, quite flawed and problematic. Moreover, this is so on a number of levels.

The above statements notwithstanding, I have no doubt there are those who actively court misguidance. In other words, undoubtedly, there are people who become involved in situations that are inherently dangerous but which, nevertheless, appeal to the unredeemed qualities of nafs (the tendency within to rebel against truth), and because the latter set of forces wins out over discretion concerning the dangers of that situation, such individuals play an active role in becoming entangled by the ramifications of 'choosing' misguidance.

However, a mistake is made, I feel, when one uses the above scenario as a universal model for explaining what transpires in all circumstances involving spiritual abuse and manipulation. The error is in the assumption that whoever is abused somehow plays a knowing, active role with respect to inviting abuse and manipulation into their lives.

Did the people who perished in the World Trade Towers tragedy play an active, knowing role in their own demise? After all, the buildings had been the target of a previous terrorist attack back in the early 1990s that came within a few feet of doing major damage to the towers rather than the limited, though extensive damage, which did result.

Shouldn't the people who worked there have known that another attack was likely? Shouldn't they have understood that, sooner or later, terrorists would try again? Weren't those people being foolhardy? Weren't they just lying to themselves about the real nature of the dangers they faced? Aren't the people who died in that tragedy just as responsible as those who perpetrated the attack? Wasn't God merely exercising Divine wrath and permitting these people to veil themselves from the truth that they were about to die when they went to work on the morning of September 11th?

Such questions seem absurd in the context of the World Trade Center tragedy of 9/11. Yet, similar questions are being raised in the context of spiritual abuse, and these possibilities are just as absurd in the latter context.

How do we know what the significance of any event or set of events is? Can kashf (unveiling) save us in all such instances?

If so, why did the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) realize that the sweetmeats he was being fed were poisoned only after he had put them in his mouth, thereby, permitting the toxins to enter his system and attack him, from time to time, throughout the remainder of his life? And, why did those Companions who were sitting with him not spit out the poisoned food, as did the Prophet? Were they devoid of kashf (spiritual unveiling)? Were they bad people and, therefore, they deserved what they got? Were they reckless in trusting the woman who served them the dish of sweetmeat?

Would we have reacted any differently if we had been in their situation? Would we have had a superior spiritual capacity that would have enabled us to immediately understand what the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his Companions did not comprehend until it was too late?

Did Prophet Jonah (peace be upon him) understand the significance of his being swallowed by a denizen of the deep? Was he being punished or was he being used by Divinity to illustrate some of the methodology encompassed by tauba (repentance)? Did Jonah (peace be upon him) lie to himself when he ran away from his responsibilities or did he really not understand the nature of the situation and, therefore, acted incorrectly, but innocently? Did Jonah

(peace be upon him) lie to himself or was his understanding obscured until Allah was ready for the veils to be lifted?

Are adversities, pain, difficulties, problems, hardships, and conflict indices of punishment and Divine displeasure? Or, are they merely occasions for struggle, spiritual opportunity, and the rigorous tests that Divinity has promised us? Is Divine displeasure a bad thing or merely a way of getting our attention?

Are we to suppose that those who are favored by Divinity only experience the Attributes of *jamal* (Beauty, Ease)? If so, what are we to make of the fact that the most severely tested of human beings are the prophets and messengers of Allah, and, then, after them the other *awliya* (friends of God), and, only then, the generality of people?

Did Adam (peace be upon him) and Eve (might Allah be pleased with her) know what they were getting into when they partook in that which was forbidden to them? Did they understand all the ramifications of their actions and how earthly history would be set in motion through their act -- an act that formed a necessary part of Allah's purpose?

People who suppose they understand the significance of events that occur -- either collectively or individually -- are alluding to possessing a knowledge to which even the elect of God do not always have access. No one knows what is being laid up for the 'morrow. No one knows (except a few) what his or her fate will be on the Day of Judgment. No one knows how one is being graded on the choices one makes or how such choices fit into the overall fabric of the Divine plan. No one knows who will be told that she or he has been correct or incorrect -- and, it is presumptuous to suppose otherwise.

Some people are permitted by Allah to fall into error so that, eventually, they can be guided (e.g., Adam and Eve - might Allah bless them both). Some people are guided by Allah so that, in time, they can be misguided (e.g., Iblis).

What is guidance? One way of approaching this question is to speak in terms of those experiences that, when reflected and meditated upon, lead, by the Grace of Allah, to deeper understanding of life's purpose. There were many people during the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) who were provided experiences that

were reflected and mediated upon but that did not lead to understanding because God's Grace was absent from their deliberations.

We think we know. In truth, we often do not.

We know only what Allah permits us to know and understand. We know only in a relative sense, according to our capacity to do so, that is one of the reasons why the Prophet said one should speak to people according to their level of understanding.

The rest of what we think we know is but ignorance and arrogance. We make judgments about situations that we do not properly appreciate. We are ready to attribute to ourselves God-like omniscience and suppose that our assessment of the significance of events in the lives of other people, not to mention our own, is correct, and, yet, even the Prophets and saints struggled with such matters -- the same kind of matters that we assume we understand so clearly.

I have been told by an authoritative source that the following story. Allah knows best the truth of things. However, whether it is true, or not, I believe it is instructive, for, among other things, it raises interesting questions -- among these being the very fact that I doubt there are any of us who know, with yaqueen or certainty, the nature of the story's actual degree of authenticity.

In addition, the story, together with the brief commentary following it, continues to explore the theme of whether the friends of Allah know everything, or whether they can ever be surprised, misled, fooled, mystified, or kept in the dark about certain aspects of life. This theme is being explored because of its implications for the discussion concerning whether one should blame the victim for not realizing that he or she was being manipulated or exploited by a false shaykh.

A woman once came to Hazrat Uthman Harooni Chishti Makki (might Allah be pleased with him). She was married but without children, and she and her husband were desperate for offspring.

The woman had gone everywhere and tried everything in the search for a solution to her problem. She had heard many wondrous tales about the esteemed shaykh, and she believed he was her last hope.

The great saint listened to her story with great attentiveness and compassion. When she had finished, he lowered his head and was silent for a short period of time.

A little while later, he raised his head and addressed the woman. He expressed his condolences but explained that the Tablet of Fate indicated there were no children listed next to her name, and, therefore, there was nothing that he could do for her.

The woman left in tears. As she was walking away from the meeting, she heard a beggar in the street saying again and again: "For as many loaves of bread as are baked, as many children will be issued."

The beggar's head was lowered. He seemed to be talking to no one in particular.

Naturally, the woman was intrigued. She approached the man and asked him if what he was saying was the truth.

The man said 'yes', closed his eyes, lowered his head and continued to say the same thing over and over. He took no further notice of the woman.

Thinking about what she was hearing, having run out of options, the woman asked herself: 'what have I got to lose?' Quickly, she raced home and began making bread.

The next day she returned to the spot where the beggar had been sitting. He was still there, repeating the same words as the day before.

The woman presented the man with nine loaves of bread. The man acknowledged receipt of the bread, got up and left.

Nine months later the woman had the first of nine children. The words of the beggar were proven to be true.

After all the children had been born and were growing up, a day came when the woman took them all on a little outing. As she was walking along, with children following behind, she happened to pass by a place where Hazrat Uthman Harooni Chishti Makki (might Allah be pleased with him) was engaged in conversation.

The great saint saw the woman and children coming, and when they had reached his position, he requested the woman to stop for a moment. When she did as she had been asked, the friend of Allah said:

"Are you not the woman who came to me so many years ago and sought my assistance with respect to having offspring?"

The woman nodded her head in agreement. As she did this, the great saint looked at the children near her and inquired: "Then, whose children are these?"

The woman proudly said they were hers. The great saint shook his head in puzzlement and asked: "How can this be?"

The woman recounted the sequence of events concerning the beggar, his claim, and the loaves of bread. The rest was, as is said, history.

It is reported that Hazrat Uthman Harooni Chishti Makki (might Allah be pleased with him) was quite distraught with this news. He is said to have taken off his khirka, or mantle of spiritual authority, discarded it, and promptly proceeded to a temple to serve as its caretaker.

Hazrat Khawajah Mu'in-ud-Din Chishti Ajmeri (might Allah be pleased with him) had been with his shaykh during this interchange and the subsequent happenings. He accompanied his shaykh to the temple, but he was told to stay outside by his murshid -- which the mureed dutifully did.

Hazrat Uthman Harooni Chishti (might Allah be pleased with him) stayed as a caretaker for the temple over a number of years, sweeping it out on a daily basis and keeping the house of worship clean in other ways as well. During this time, one-by-one, all of his mureeds abandoned him except one -- Hazrat Khawajah Mu'in-ud-Din Chishti Ajmeri (might Allah be pleased with him).

Each day, irrespective of the time, passers-by would find the mureed (initiate/student) sitting in front of the temple whenever the murshid (spiritual guide) was inside going about his chores. What transpired during all those years, Allah knows best, but Hazrat Khawajah Mu'in-ud-Din Chishti Ajmeri (might Allah be pleased with him) never left his shaykh.

One day, it is reported, Hazrat Uthman Harooni Chishti Makki (might Allah be pleased with him) was in a quarrelsome mood and complaining to Allah, as friends sometimes do. The saint was upset because he thought he was a friend of Allah and, yet, Allah had kept a

secret from him -- namely, the issue concerning the woman and her offspring and how the whole scenario was possible.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) came to the saint in a waking vision and asked the saint what he was grumbling about. The saint explained the source of his agitation.

He said that when the woman had asked his help, he had turned within and consulted the Tablet of Fate. Next to the woman's name there were no names of children, and he had conveyed that fact to the woman.

And, yet, the woman did have children. Nine of them.

Apparently, he mumbled, a beggar in the street was on better terms with Allah than was Hazrat Uthman Harooni Chishti Makki (might Allah be pleased with him). For, the beggar knew things that had not been vouchsafed to someone who was supposed to be a friend of God.

Upon hearing the complaint, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) explained what the beggar had known. More specifically, although at the time that Hazrat Uthman Harooni Chishti Makki (might Allah be pleased with him) had consulted the Tablet of Fate there were, in fact, no names of children next to the name of the woman in question, nevertheless, this did not mean that names could not be written in by those who knew how to do this. The Tablet of Fate had not indicated there were no children possible, only that no names were currently present.

The saint was very happy with both the explanation and the fact that he had been honored with the presence of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) -- that someone so beloved had been sent by the Friend to inform a friend about the nature of certain matters. The saint requested that he be permitted to present his mureed (student/initiate) to the Prophet, and his request was granted. As part of the introduction, the murshid indicated to his mureed that he should kiss the feet of the Prophet.

Upon hearing this, the mureed went down and kissed the feet of his shaykh. His murshid, believing that his mureed had not properly understood the nature of what he had said, again repeated to the mureed that out of respect and reverence he should kiss the feet of the

Prophet (peace be upon him). Once more, the mureed lowered himself and kissed the feet of his murshid.

Hazrat Uthman Harooni Chishti Ajmeri (might Allah be pleased with him) became somewhat perturbed with this and was about to say the same thing a third time when he was stopped by the Prophet (peace be upon him). The shaykh was informed that what the mureed was doing was correct and, in fact, he was kissing the feet of the Prophet (peace be upon him) but as manifested in the form of his shaykh, and, then, he added, had the mureed not done this, the Prophet (peace be upon him) would have wondered about whom the mureed had been waiting on and waiting for all these years that he had spent outside the temple.

And, thus ends the story. Interestingly enough, a number of years later, after Hazrat Mu'in-ud-Din Chishti Ajmeri (might Allah be pleased with him) had been commanded to go to Hind (India) by the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), the former individual wrote to his shaykh in discouragement that although the mureed had been in Hind for quite some time, no one was coming to the Sufi Path. The mureed wondered what he was doing wrong or what he should be doing.

In time, the reply came that he was doing nothing incorrectly but that the mureed should observe the surrounding society closely and be open to possibilities concerning different means of engaging the hearts of the people. The mureed did as he was instructed and soon became aware of the important role that singing, poetry, rhythm and music played in the community to which he had come, and from these observations and subsequent meditation, qawwali (sacred music) arose.

In both the main story of this posting, as well as the little foregoing addendum, there is an interesting juxtaposition of knowing and not knowing ... of things that are understood and things that are not understood ... of problems concerning such lack of knowledge and subsequent resolution of the problem through understandings that bubble to the surface when the time and circumstances are 'right'. Even great shaykhs do not understand or know except as they are permitted to do so.

Imam Ghazali (might Allah be pleased with him) had thousands of followers and knew a great deal about Shari'ah before he realized how

ignorant he actually was about the nature of truth. Moreover, he had a younger brother who, from a mystical perspective, is said to have known far more than his older brother did, and, yet, historically speaking, almost nothing is known about this younger brother of the renown author of the Revival of the Religious Sciences ... which reminds me of something my first shaykh (really, my only genuine shaykh to this point) said. He indicated that his teacher of Persian once remarked that 'there have been so many Rumi's who have never uttered a word'.

Hazrat Jalal-uddin Rumi (might Allah be pleased with him) was a shaykh with many mureeds long before he met Hazrat Shams Tabriz (might Allah be pleased with him). Yet, the difference between his understanding before and after these meetings was somewhat comparable to the difference between a donkey who does not comprehend the books it is carrying, and a human being who is opened up to certain knowledge about some of the truths encompassed by the infinite mysteries of Being.

On several occasions, Hazrat Qadir Jilani (might Allah be pleased with him) tried to run away from the situation into which he had been Divinely thrust, only to be turned back at the gate each time by a mysterious intervention. One does not try to escape except in ignorance.

Just what was it that Hazrat Ibn al-'Arabi (might Allah be pleased with him) knew before the dream on which the 'Fusus' was based or the experiences that led to the writing of the 'Meccan Openings'? Surely, the differences in understanding of these period of time were as great as the difference between night and day even with respect to the differences between what the great sage knew after 'Fusus' but before the 'Meccan Openings'.

When Hazrat Junayd (might Allah be pleased with him) finally was forced into passing judgment on his former student, Hazrat al-Hallaj (might Allah be pleased with him) the shaykh remarked that although from the perspective of Shari'ah what was being said by his former student was unacceptable, nonetheless, from the perspective of the Divine mysteries, Allah knows best. Between what is spoken and what is left unsaid, there is much ignorance and knowledge.

When my shaykh was given the khirka (mantle or cloak of spiritual authority) by his shaykh, he told me, and others, that he was quaking in his boots because he didn't have the slightest idea of how he would be able to help anyone for he didn't even know what the spiritual condition of someone was, and, therefore, how could he possible counsel such an individual. And, then, one day, Allah bestowed kashf upon him and all he had to do was look at someone and their whole history -- past, present and future -- would be shown to him, and he laughed at himself for ever thinking that it was what he knew that mattered.

Every single Prophet of God, every single awliya (friend) of Allah has gone on a journey. Some things are made known on this journey; some things are not.

They were -- as we are -- all children of the moment. For, each of us is totally dependent on the barakah (Grace) that comes to us and sustains us -- physically, emotionally, psychologically, socially, and spiritually -- from one moment to the next as the Breath of the All-Merciful expands and contracts and Allah turns the hearts of creation whichever way He pleases.

Ignorance is not necessarily a sin, but, rather it is a potential inherent in human nature. It is a potential that we all experience, to one extent or another, from time to time, and it part of the motivation that leads, God willing, to learning and understanding.

Speaking only for myself, I find myself feeling closest to God when I realize the extent of my ignorance, and I feel the farthest from God when I attribute understanding to myself that I really don't have.

Chapter 48: Initiation

Someone inquired about a particular group that referred to itself as a Sufi silsilah (spiritual lineage), and the individual wanted to know whether, or not, either the alleged shaykh leading that group or the adherents of the circle of individuals who were associated with the so-called 'teacher' had a history of spiritually abusive behavior because the individual was entertaining the idea of taking initiation through the group. The person asking this question was especially concerned about this issue because a number of members of the individual's family had experienced considerable spiritual abuse at the hands of several non-Sufi groups. The following is a response to that individual's inquiry.

Given the abusive 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 in which you are interested, 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. 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 are discouraged.

Doubts are a natural part of the mystical path. This does not mean that one should hang onto doubts at all costs, but it does mean that doubts do occur at many stages of the Sufi path, and these 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 lend me the money such that 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 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 decreased a little, while the denominator also has increased slightly.

The more times we do this, and the more times I respond properly, then, the smaller does your doubt become and the larger your faith in my integrity as a human being becomes. 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 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 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. 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 (initiates) 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, and the more observation and experience, the better.

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?

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 (Grace) that flow through 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 -- which is not the same thing as the 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 -- and this is true 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 (Grace) and assistance, but the shaykh is not the origin of these 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 an legitimate silsilah (that is, one that 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 their holy longing requited through the realization of one's unique spiritual capacity and essential identity.

Once upon a time, authentic teachers could produce a sehjrah (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) that 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 sehjrah as proof of their ill-begotten 'authenticity'.

We live in dangerous times. Blinded by an arrogance that supposes that we live in the 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 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 he 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 be well-advised to break away in order to serve Islam and, thereby, 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 courses to become a shaykh and receive 'official' certificates, or they announce that Khizr (peace be upon him) has appointed them to be a shaykh, or they boast about their special relationship with the Mahdi (might 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 sehjah 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 that 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.

The foregoing is best done through the guidance of an accomplished spiritual teacher. However, 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. 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 has 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 from encouraging you to seek them out.

All I can do is put forth a chain of reasoning and logic for you to examine. Your responsibility is 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.

Chapter 49: Genuine Fake

There are some people who claim to be a shaykh and who might have no conscious desire to hurt people, but who, nonetheless, are carrying on fraudulent activities, spiritually speaking, due to the lack of any authentic process of spiritual authorization backing up what they do. Such individuals might be referred to as (but Allah knows best) what Alan Watts (a big name among the consciousness-raising crowd of the 60s-70s who was considered a guru by many and who wrote a variety of popularized books seeking to translate the 'sacred East' to the 'secular West') called a 'genuine fake' -- that is, someone who sincerely believes himself or herself to be a genuine spiritual guide but who, in truth, is not. Moreover, perhaps, Alan Watts had insight into this phenomenon because there are quite a few dimensions of his public and private persona that radiated with the properties of being a 'genuine fake' in the foregoing sense -- and there are those who would say the foregoing way of referring to Watts (i.e., as a genuine fake) might be an inaccurate kindness.

Some individuals are very intelligent, compassionate, scholarly, gifted, eloquent people who are interested in spirituality and wish to help people in some way with respect to the mystical path. What such individuals don't seem to realize is that one doesn't have to be a shaykh in order to do assist others.

For those people who are caring, talented, educated, multi-lingual, financially secure, and socially well-placed, why isn't this enough? Why do they insist on having to be known as a shaykh as well?

Some people like to refer to themselves as a shaykh, but not in the "classical sense". I confess that I really don't know what this way of talking about things means.

The classical sense of being a shaykh is that God wishes one to be a spiritual guide, and, therefore, Divinity moves the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to inform the heart of a given silsilah that such and such a person is the man or woman who is to serve as a locus of manifestation for the flow of the special barakah (Grace) that is given expression through a silsilah to keep it spiritually healthy and effective as a Divinely-ordained catalytic agent in the transformation of dross metals to gold.

If a person is not a shaykh in the foregoing sense, then, I suppose one can revert back to other semantic clusters that, sometimes, are associated with the term, and, in that event, one could serve as an elder or leader of a group of people, and this conveys another sense of the term 'shaykh'. Or, maybe, if someone commits 10,000 hadiths (traditions of the Prophet) to memory, then, such an individual becomes known as a shaykh in the exoteric sense of the word.

Unfortunately, it seems, none of the foregoing is really what some people who have assumed the title of shaykh seem to have in mind. Apparently, their nafs, or carnal soul, will accept nothing less than being thought of by others as someone who can help seekers after the mystical way to realize spiritual potential and essential identity.

If -- and, I emphasize 'if'-- the foregoing is so, then, in my opinion, someone who is hell bent on pursuing such a course might not be a charlatan (i.e., someone who flamboyantly attracts people with jokes and tricks for the purposes of duping those people). Nevertheless, such individuals are frauds, or spiritual counterfeits, for they are trying to pass themselves off as legal tender for something that is not backed up by real value.

One becomes a false shaykh as outlined above in a very simple way. It all begins by lying to oneself -- and having lofty motives does not assuage the tawdry nature of the lie that serves as the glue that seeks to hold everything together.

Let such individuals read the Quranic Surah (chapter) of the Spider for a likeness of what they are doing. They are building a house of worship and a spiritual path out of the flimsiest of materials - the desires of nafs-i-amarra.

I used to know someone who had a desire to be a shaykh and in order to satisfy that desire, he had a wish-fulfillment dream and, thereby, became a shaykh. There are two brothers (in both the biological and religious sense) whom I know who claim to have had dreams that have made them shaykhs, and now they are busily engaged in taking mureeds -- but as someone once said: 'if one becomes a shaykh in the dream world, then, that dream world is also where one should find one's mureeds.'

There is a fellow who, recently, has been seeking to make a big splash in so-called Sufi circles and has made pronouncements to the effect that he has been invested with some sort of authority by none other than Khizr (might Allah's peace and blessings be upon him). It seems that he wishes to join the company of others who, according to their followers, also were given spiritual authority by the same mysterious teacher who taught Musa (Peace be upon him).

Now, it is true that, on occasion, Khizr (might Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) does authorize certain people to serve in the capacity of a spiritual guide. However, in other cases, the beauty of making this sort of claim is that it is very difficult to verify -- although if one begins to observe how such people conduct themselves and treat people, one begins to witness a variety of demonstrations that suggest that their claims in this regard are, let us say, exaggerated.

There are Sufi Reiki people and martial arts-wielding Sufi groups both of whom are promoting distance initiations over the Internet. I have talked with people who have been adversely affected and exploited by both of these kinds of groups, and there is no question but that in some cases there are clear indications that occult -- not mystical -- practices and techniques are involved in some of these groups.

There are so-called Sufis who are trolling Internet chat rooms and discussion lists in search of young, impressionable women and who are capable of exerting an extraordinary influence over the latter individuals. I know this because I have talked with a number of people who have been subjected to this process but who now, by the Grace of God, have been able to free themselves from the insidious character of such influence and mind/heart control.

All of these so-called spiritual guides have something in common. They have a lack of respect for the sacred.

More specifically, they believe that because they have an understanding, or desire, or wish, or aspiration, that God is happy with their understanding, desire, wish, or aspiration. They believe they have the power of 'kun' when all they have to do is say to a thing (i.e., their wish or aspiration) 'be' and it becomes.

They arrogate to themselves duties, functions, and positions that are lacking in humility. Like a car speeding through a dense fog, they

are exceeding the current capacity of their headlights, and, as such, they are tragedy waiting to happen.

Iblis was an unbeliever -- not because he didn't believe in, and, after a fashion, love God, but because he was not prepared to align himself with, and empty himself, of everything but the truth. His himma (aspiration) was different than that of Divinity, and he believed that his himma was more important than the Divine himma.

You have asked me what is tasawwuf. Tasawwuf is to seek the truth in all things -- including the Divine rizq (Divine apportionment) that constitutes the fabric from which our lives are woven.

How can someone be a shaykh who is not willing to operate by the light of truth ... who is not willing to exercise patience and dependence on Divinity to let God arrange things in His own way (and this means having the integrity to wait for authentic authorization) ... who is not willing to be sufficiently humble to follow, rather than try to force the issue by appointing herself or himself as a shaykh ... who has no sense of tauba (repentance) with respect to the lies that he or she tell herself or himself or others ... who lacks gratitude because he or she desires more than what God has apportioned to them ... who completely misunderstands taqwa (piety) because she or he believe it is okay to act upon wishes that have not been Divinely sanctioned (except in the form of the errors that God permits human beings and that Divinity uses for His own purposes) ... who appear to love his or her own nafs, or lower soul, more than Haqq (Truth, Realty) ... who long for something other than the Truth.

I really fail to understand how such individuals believe they are going to help people spiritually. What is it that they have to offer other than a hermeneutic that is devoid of reality?

If the foregoing is so, is that not the very essence of misguidance? If guidance were a matter of language or scholarship or wishes, then, there would be many Arabs who would be shaykhs, but, in truth, the Muslim world is in shackles because despite the presence of a facility with language and scholarly information, the hearts of all too many of our so-called leaders (including self-appointed shaykhs) are virtually devoid of hidayat, or spiritual guidance, and such people have filled this vacuum with an abiding arrogance concerning their own self-importance in the scheme of things.

The condition of the Muslim community is somewhat akin to Oscar Wilde's 'A Picture of Dorian Gray'. In other words, through our actions, we have created a grotesque, odious, hideous, but all too life-like portrait that is hidden away from public view beneath a practiced veneer of civility, humanity and alleged concern with justice, human rights, and/or spirituality -- even as we hold ourselves, and others, hostage to the likes and dislikes of our own egos, ignorance, and cultural superstitions.

What foolish audacity to suppose that one is a shaykh but just not in the classical sense. An authentic shaykh is a locus of manifestation for the barakah (Grace) that flows through a legitimate silsilah (spiritual lineage) ... his or her gift is that he or she serves as a transmitter, and as such, this has nothing to do with language skills, eloquence, scholarship, family lineage, education, or ethnicity.

The earliest account of the tradition of passing on the khirkah (mantle of spiritual authority) and its significance as a symbol of spiritual authenticity has to do with the question that the Prophet (peace be upon him) asked of Hazrat Abu Bakr, Hazrat 'Umar, Hazrat Uthman, and Hazrat 'Ali (might Allah be pleased with them all). He asked them -- 'if I were to give the khirkah to you, what would you do with it?'

Each of the four gave beautiful answers, but the answer that most pleased the Prophet was the one given by Hazrat 'Ali (might Allah be pleased with him) when he said that he would use the khirkah to cover the faults of people. When the Prophet heard this response, he embraced Hazrat 'Ali (might Allah be pleased with him) and presented him with the mantel of spiritual authority.

I don't know of any clearer indication than the foregoing account that bears witness to the fact that there is a process of passing on spiritual authority within the esoteric tradition. And remember, the Prophet had told Hazrat 'Umar (might Allah be pleased with him) that if there were to be a Prophet after Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), then, it would have been 'Umar (might Allah be pleased with him), so, here to, there is a definite distinction being drawn between esoteric and exoteric responsibilities.

My first shaykh -- the authentic one -- was a brilliant scholar. He knew 3-4 languages. He had an eidetic memory (that is, near

photographic). He wrote wonderful poetry. He was knowledgeable about both the exoteric and esoteric aspects of Islam.

Yet, when students used to come to him at the University and asked to be initiated (he taught courses in both Islam and tasawwuf), he did not look to his gifts or talents and say, well, I'm qualified to be a shaykh and, so, I think that's what I'll be. Instead, he wrote to his own shaykh and asked the latter to send a spiritual guide to this part of the world because there were an increasing number of people who were becoming interested in stepping onto the Sufi Path.

His shaykh replied that he, himself, was too advanced in years to make such an arduous physical journey. And, he added: "Let us see to whom Allah gives this responsibility."

After a number of months, when the situation still had not been resolved and even more people were inquiring about the Sufi path at the University, the person who would become my shaykh wrote once more about the issue. In fact, he was hoping that his shaykh would send someone who was a spiritual guide and who used to be a Persian teacher of my once and future shaykh -- someone whom he loved a great deal.

This time, when the reply came back, the direction was clear -- you (the person who would become my shaykh) are to assume the responsibilities of being a spiritual guide. One of the first things he did to inaugurate his appointment was to do a 40 day chilla or seclusion -- his reasoning was: how could I expect to help other people deal with the problems created by their nafs (the tendencies within to rebel against truth), if I was not prepared to deal with the problems generated by my own nafs.

If someone has not been given specific authorization from an authentic shaykh who is rooted in a legitimate silsilah, then, I believe if that person insists on referring to himself or herself as a Sufi shaykh or insists on trying to carry out the functions of an authentic Sufi shaykh, such a person is making a serious mistake in adab or spiritual etiquette. As one Sufi shaykh responded when asked to describe the essence of tasawwuf, he replied: "Adab", and being a 'genuine fake' is far removed from the requirements of spiritual etiquette.

Chapter 50: Close Encounters of a Different Kind

Self-realization, mystical attainment, fulfilling one's spiritual potential, transcendental unity -- these are a few of the terms that people use to refer to the goal of the esoteric journey. The words come much easier than does the reality, and the vast majority of us who make use of these phrases are speaking theoretically rather than from the gnostic side of the veil.

Many of us aspire to the phenomenology associated with such language, but few of us are successful. Many of us suppose we understand -- at least in principle -- the nature of the phenomenon, and, yet, the quest is frustrating in its essential elusiveness, as if we were being teased with the prospect of truths to be revealed just over the next horizon ... although the very nature of a horizon is to engage us indefinitely.

We set off on our spiritual journeys with a backpack full of assumptions, and, if we are lucky, we might get to jettison our presumptuousness somewhere along the Path even if we never are able to realize our primary objective -- and we become the wiser for this. We believe we know the gist of the methodology and basic requirements of the Way, only to discover that lived experience often plays out much differently than is described in the mystical travelogues.

I spent nearly seventeen years with an authentic shaykh (until he passed on to the next world), and I can quite honestly say that my 'happening' upon him was more a matter of Someone else's Design than it was my perspicacity. Why I should have been as fortuitous in this respect is a question that is steeped in mystery? ... an enigma that becomes stranger in the light of subsequent events.

How do I know the individual alluded to in the foregoing was a true spiritual guide? In a sense, the answer to this question is: you had to be there.

There is no substitute for direct experience. Making judgments at a distance is a fool's game.

By the Grace of God, the seventeen years during which I traveled with my shaykh were close-up and personal. By this I mean that I spent

nearly as much time with him as if I were a full-fledged family member.

In fact, on occasion, I probably saw more of him than his family did. Consequently, I had thousands of hours of exposure through which to arrive at conclusions concerning the nature of his character, adab, commitment and behavior.

He lived the life of a Sufi wayfarer. He engaged in more than seventeen, forty-day chillas (seclusions), during which he fasted by day, kept the night vigil, observed constant reading of the Qur'an, zikr (remembrance), and contemplation during the waking hours of this rigorous practice, as well as isolated himself from other human beings. In addition, he did a dozen, or more, nineteen-day periods of seclusion.

When not doing chilla, he was involved in numerous activities and projects of service to others, and this included more than just attending to the needs of his mureeds (spiritual students). Furthermore, despite being under intense attack, for years, from many quarters (the university, the media, so-called Muslim leaders, government officials, and, even some of his own mureeds) due to the threat he represented in relation to their vested interests, I never saw him treat people -- even those who considered him to be an enemy -- with anything but integrity, diplomacy, nobility, empathy, kindness, compassion, tolerance, and forgiveness.

When my spiritual guide passed away, there were several things that were very clear to me. First, I had been inordinately fortunate to have been able to know him.

Like an iceberg, there was much more of his spiritual reality hidden beneath the surface than was visible to most of us who lacked the appropriate spiritual sonar facilities that would afford us any appreciable depth perception with respect to the structural beauty of his spiritual character below the water line of 'normal', everyday life. Yet, that which was visible was, nonetheless, a breathtaking example of human excellence.

Secondly, I also knew I was still in need of additional guidance. Consequently, as I made the adjustment to a life without ready access to a man of spiritual wisdom and accomplishment, I continued to be on the look-out for 'targets' of spiritual opportunity -- although, in some

ways, I was just as ignorant about how to go about doing this as I had been seventeen years earlier when, notwithstanding my blind groupings, I managed to stumble my way into the presence of an authentic shaykh.

After almost two decades with an authentic spiritual guide, I was a strange combination of ignorance and understanding. Among other things, this cloud of unknowing -- which surrounded me like the dirt and debris that always swirled about the character 'Pigpen' in the cartoon strip, *Peanuts* -- was dense with respect to the issue of how does one recognize a genuine shaykh.

There are many rules of thumb that people often cite as to how to go about the process of identifying spiritual authenticity. I have discovered there are so many exceptions to, lacunae associated with, and problems surrounding, those rules, that, for the most part, such sets of guidelines that have been developed for purposes of differentiating between the false and the genuine in the context of spirituality are relatively useless.

Evil is not rule-governed and linear. It operates through principles that are chaotic in the mathematical sense -- that is, self-similar, but not self-same -- and, consequently, the ways in which evil manifests itself is constantly changing, even while it stays much the same with respect to intention and purpose.

Furthermore, and, perhaps, more importantly, evil not only has a gift for mimicry but, as well, will utilize this gift, without remorse or moral squeamishness, in order to better serve its twisted intentions. Indeed, the capacity and willingness of evil to counterfeit the spiritual is the hook that baits the traps of deception, manipulation, exploitation, and abuse.

Realization of the truth concerning such matters can only come through lived experience and not through the long-distance application of some algorithmic, rationalistic or theological formula. Unfortunately, this means that in many cases, one might not come to the realization that an individual is not authentic until after one's life has become entangled in the palimpsest of camouflage that has been painted by a spiritual charlatan as he or she reinvents himself/herself to escape detection.

Shortly after my shaykh passed away, I was confronted -- both with several candidates who alleged to be shaykhs, as well as the problem of what to make of such claims. In each of these instances, I approached the subjects for a closer look, and in both cases, I came to the conclusion -- although Allah knows best -- that these individuals were not authentic spiritual guides.

As it turns out, sometimes, with a little bit of effort, one can spot the mere amateurs who aspire to spiritual pretension. Such individuals have not, yet, become sufficiently adept in the black arts of misdirection, re-framing, manipulation, and deception to be able to avoid discovery.

Even here, however, the task is not often easy and straightforward. More specifically, one frequently also needs a bit of 'luck' -- a bit of Divine illumination -- for the right set of circumstances to occur that, if one is attentive, reveals the true character of intent emanating from such individuals. In the absence of such 'occurrences', one might never be any the wiser about what is transpiring.

Those who have honed their expertise in the ways of spiritual guile, however, are often very difficult to expose. Such individuals are very aware -- at least, on a certain level -- about the nature of the game in which they are engaged, and, consequently, they are quite adept at disguising their intentions, motives, and purposes.

One such person infiltrated my life. The way in which this was done was so patient and so subtle that normal defenses concerning the new and unknown had long, since, been put to rest.

A woman called me on the phone. She asked if I was the person who was conducting a weekly discussion group about the Sufi Path at the university.

I said: "yes". She said she would come to the next meeting, and she did.

She came to those meetings for an extended period of time. Occasionally, but only very occasionally, she would make passing, oblique references to her shaykh, but, for the most part, she remained quiet.

Over time, a friendship developed with the woman and her family. There was a gradual transition from discussion group participant, to

social acquaintance, independent of the group, to my becoming a part-time Islamic tutor for her two children, to being asked to say weekly Fatihas (a formal way of giving thanks to God and seeking blessings upon a spiritual lineage) for the family.

Apparently, the woman's spiritual guide had told the woman to find me and attend the weekly meetings. In addition, the phantom shaykh had told the woman to have me serve as a tutor for her children and to read Fatiha for the family.

Nearly two years later, the shaykh enters, stage left. I, along with a number of other members of the university discussion group (which usually consisted of from four to eight people), meet with the shaykh who has been away in Pakistan, India, England, and other locations throughout this period of time that I have been becoming friends with the woman who had been sent to locate me -- although I never knew any of this prior to my initiation.

The man was extremely knowledgeable about the Qur'an, hadiths, Shari'ah, Islamic history, and the tradition of tasawwuf or Islamic mysticism. He told countless stories that were captivating, enchanting, and pack moral punches and spiritual insights.

He was easy to talk with ... unassuming ... humble ... self-deprecating. He is extremely insightful and generous about sharing what he knows -- which appears to be considerable.

He is very respectful of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and is constantly referring to him, as well as to his own shaykh, in loving terms. He is very humorous and engaging, and it is all done with such effortless, charming efficiency.

Without question, I am drawn to this individual, as are a number of other people whom I have known for years. I begin to seriously think about taking initiation with him.

For seventeen years, I have been at the heart of activity in my previous Sufi Order. I had been a close associate of my shaykh who had entrusted me with many responsibilities.

Nevertheless, this is a new day, and a new situation. I am ready to start all over again -- as just one, largely anonymous face among many in the sea of individuals who surround the new shaykh.

I ask the woman whom I have befriended, and vice versa, how do I go about seeking initiation. She says all I have to do is ask the shaykh and let him decide the matter.

I do this, and the shaykh agrees to my being initiated into his spiritual silsilah, or chain of spiritual transmission. When the time comes, he calls me forward.

After the process is completed, he bids me to come nearer, and he begins whispering certain things into my ear -- things that I am having a hard time digesting because I feel they are being said to the wrong person. Among other things, I am told that I am to become a shaykh in the silsilah.

In subsequent days, I am informed that the shaykh of my new shaykh is the one who, originally, told my new shaykh about me, and assigned his mureed -- my shaykh -- with the tasks of: locating me, initiating me, making me a shaykh, and conferring upon me certain other spiritual responsibilities. I am totally unprepared for any of this, and, for whatever reason, although there were a number of my friends who got initiated the same night as I did, none of what happened to me, happened to them.

Presumably, if one is trying to fraudulently entice someone to take the step of initiation, then, the time for 'spiritual bribes' is before the fact, not after it. I was hooked, so to speak, the moment I asked to be initiated and, as was the case with my friends who took ba'yat, or initiation with the new shaykh, nothing more needed to be said in order to elicit commitment.

I learned from the woman that she had known for more than a year -- long before I ever met her shaykh -- that I was to be initiated into their Order and to be made a shaykh in the silsilah. She has been under strict instructions by the shaykh to refrain from divulging to me any of what she knew, and she has been very successful in discharging her duties in this regard.

I was entirely ready and fully expecting to start over again with a new shaykh. I was ready to go back to square one as far as spiritual discipline and methodology were concerned.

I was not anticipating any of what took place, nor was I encouraged to have such expectations -- either by the woman who had

been sent to make contact with me, nor by her shaykh. My mind-set and heart-set were geared in a certain direction, and, in a matter of moments, everything was turned upside down.

The next ten years were spent engaged in various activities -- ranging from: spiritual practices, of one sort or another, to: serving the silsilah, speaking engagements, organizing projects, initiating mureeds, writing books, creating web pages, traveling, and helping people -- both Muslim and non-Muslim.

Although I enjoyed ready and easy access to my new shaykh -- whether through personal interaction, letters, phone calls, or e-mails - - the fact of the matter was that, due to a variety of circumstances, I spent far less face-to-face time (by many orders of magnitude) with my new shaykh than I did with my previous spiritual guide.

Among other reasons, my new shaykh had far more mureeds or students than did my first shaykh. Secondly, my new shaykh tended to travel a lot more frequently than did my earlier teacher. Thirdly, my new shaykh lived in the United States, and, at the time, I was living in Canada, and, therefore, the opportunities for close, physical interaction were substantially reduced -- except for those occasions when I would visit with him, or he would pay a visit to his students north of the border.

It is always easier for a spiritual charlatan to deceive and manipulate people when there are buffers that keep people at a distance or that limit the amount of time one has to spend with an individual in order to see what actually takes place on a day -to-day basis, and behind the scenes. This was one of the biggest surface differences between my relationship with my first shaykh and the second individual with whom I took initiation.

For a number of years during my association with my second 'teacher', I had an increasingly disquieting feeling that, despite my allegedly central function and role within the silsilah (spiritual lineage), I was being moved to the fringe of silsilah activities. However, whenever I would address these feelings to my new shaykh in a direct fashion and inquire about this or that set of circumstances, I would always be reassured with a variety of data, facts, and incidents that seemed to indicate my intuitions with respect to such matters were somehow faulty and misdirected.

I never kept anything from my shaykh, and, so, he always knew exactly where I stood about any issue. Little did I know that my so-called shaykh was a master manipulator concerning the flow of information and that because everyone else behaved in the same way I did -- that is, they confided everything in the shaykh -- he was at the hub of all incoming and outgoing bundles of information, and, consequently, could alter the nature and flow of that information as circumstances dictated and his needs required.

When people are transformed into isolated islands within a group setting, then, it becomes quite easy for an unscrupulous individual to take advantage of such isolation and exploit it to serve a hidden agenda. When people are encouraged to not speak to others in the group about certain matters, then, those individuals become vulnerable to being manipulated in very subtle, hard-to-detect, and even harder-to-verify, ways.

As with the vast majority of cases of sexual abuse and domestic abuse, one of the chief allies of the perpetuation of abusive spiritual behavior is the imposition, through one technique or another, of silence upon those who are being abused. When no one can hear the screams, then, philosophically speaking, no trees appear to be falling in the forest.

Despite everything that has been said in the foregoing comments, if not for the intervention of a strange twist of fate, I might still be trapped in the lair of a spiritual vampire. For reasons best known to Divinity, the entanglements that had begun to be woven more than ten years previously, were about to unravel.

The precise nature of that twist of fate is, for present purposes, largely irrelevant to the central issue. Suffice it to say, through the intervention of kismet, I became aware that the person whom, for nearly eleven years, I had been calling my 'shaykh' was engaged in an elaborate scheme of lying -- the nature of the lie would vary with the identity of the individual being manipulated.

Among other things, I came to know -- without any possibility of error or misunderstanding -- was that the so-called shaykh had been lying about me to many people for quite some time. Moreover, I discovered that, for years, he had been interfering in and manipulating my life, without my knowledge, in a number of different ways and that

he has been soliciting the assistance -- sometimes knowingly and sometimes unknowingly -- of various people within the silsilah to accomplish his aims in this regard.

Why did he do these things? I don't know -- and, quite possibly, I might never know.

Was he, himself, a victim of spiritual abuse, and as is the case with many other forms of abusive behavior, the abused becomes the abuser? Was he suffering from some personality disorder? Was he a sociopath? Had he been, at one point in his life, a legitimate wayfarer of the Path, only to succumb to the subtle machinations of nafs, Iblis, and dunya somewhere along the spiritual journey? Was he -- to borrow a term from Alan Watts -- a 'genuine fake' - that is, someone who is sincere in what they do but who, spiritually speaking, is not what he or she believes himself/herself to be (that is, an authentic guide or teacher)? Was he a servant of evil -- someone who knowingly seeks to misguide people spiritually for no other purpose than to corrupt their God-given himma or holy longing?

The answer to the foregoing queries might be quite complex since there is evidence to suggest that all of the above noted possibilities might have been at work to varying degrees. The situation is further complicated by the fact that aside from his extensive knowledge of Qur'an, hadiths, Islamic history, and the mystical path, he might have possessed certain abilities in the realm of worldly kashf (unveiling) such as: the ability to read minds, project thoughts, induce trances, as well as not only to be able to see certain worldly events at a distance, along with a limited intuition concerning various future occurrences with respect to specific individuals.

Important to note in this respect is that not only do authentic shaykhs eschew the use of worldly kashf as much as possible, but, more importantly, mystical progress only takes place through the medium of spiritual kashf, or unveiling, that is entirely unrelated to the foregoing form of unveiling and concerns the purification of inward faculties such as: heart, sirr (mystery), ruh (spirit), kafi (hidden), and aqfah (the most hidden) through which one comes to realize various spiritual states and stations. Unfortunately, many people confuse and conflate the former phenomena with the latter stations and states.

There were very few indications with respect to my own interaction with the teacher that might have alerted me to the fact that while I was engaged in what I thought was a spiritually constructive and beneficial relationship with my so-called spiritual guide, nevertheless, in actuality, another form of relationship was transpiring. The information that might have uncovered the so-called shaykh's stealth operations was either kept from me, re-framed to appear as something else, or manipulated in some fashion to make it appear innocuous or other than what it was.

One of the most pernicious of the ramifications that ensue from such an experience, is the deep sense of betrayal one feels. It is a phenomenology that is so deep, intense, and pervasive, that trusting others becomes an extremely difficult process -- especially if such people purport to be spiritual guides and teachers -- and, as such, recovery from spiritual betrayal is a wound that heals only very slowly, if at all, and this wound does not always resolve itself automatically as a function of becoming temporally distanced from the events and relationships of betrayal.

For the most part, and by the Grace of God, I have forgiven the individual in question for the havoc that he has wreaked upon my life. However, I would never again trust him with even the most insignificant of tasks.

There is a principle within Islamic law, or Shari'ah, that stipulates that once an individual has proven himself or herself to be a bearer of false witness, then, that person's credibility is forever suspect and unreliable. The soul to soul relationship between a spiritual guide and her or his student -- which is referred to as nisbath -- is the channel-way through which trust, love, and spiritual transformation are established, and, consequently, once this spiritual umbilical cord is compromised or betrayed (whether by the 'teacher' or the 'seeker'), then, progress on the mystical path becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible.

There were a number of people within our silsilah who were sprouting tender, fragile tendrils of faith and trust concerning mystical possibilities, but, in the wake of the devastation left behind by the heartless, soulless creature who called himself a human being and a shaykh, many of these individuals have become exceedingly cynical

about the idea of mysticism and alleged spiritual guides -- a cynicism that I do not know if it will ever dissipate or attenuate in strength.

As a result, most of these people have, at least temporarily -- but, God willing, not forever -- lost interest in pursuing, in an active fashion, a mystical path of any description. This is one of the legacies that has been fashioned through the thoughtless, self-serving spiritual abuse that has been perpetrated by one human being on others ... it is a legacy that has been bequeathed upon many people across many spiritual traditions and generations of history.

I 'happened' into a wonderful seventeen-year relationship with my first shaykh -- a relationship that has been one of the essential shaping forces within my life. I 'happened' into a second relationship with someone whom I called my shaykh for eleven years -- a relationship that, for very different reasons, also has become an essential shaping force within my life.

Many authentic Sufi shaykhs maintain that no one comes to fully realize the Divine Presence without experiencing both the jamali (e.g., love, compassion, kindness, ease, forgiveness, mercy, intimacy, friendship), as well as the jalali (e.g., severity, rigor, awesomeness, accountability, sacrifice, transcendence, majesty, independence) attributes of Divinity. With my first shaykh, I was introduced, for the most part, to the jamali side of things, and through the second 'teacher' discussed in the foregoing, I was introduced to another facet of Divine Presence altogether.

Divinity is present in both guises. But, the spiritual etiquette is to have gratitude toward the loci of manifestation through whom jamali attributes are permitted to be manifested due to, among other reasons, the sincerity of the niyat, or intentions, that characterize the compassionate service of such individual loci of spiritual manifestation, while condemning those loci of manifestation who, although serving God's rigorous, severe purposes, nonetheless, do so for entirely reprehensible reasons, intentions, motivations and purposes.

Chapter 51: Phenomenology of Charisma

Twenty-one years ago (1997), Len Oakes, an Australian, wrote a book entitled: *Prophetic Charisma: The Psychology of Revolutionary Personalities*. Building on the work of, among others, Max Weber and Heinz Kohut, as well as using insights gained through his experience with a cult-like group and leader, together with extensive psychological research involving testing, interviewing, and reading, Oakes sought to provide some degree of understanding and insight into the phenomenon of charisma.

While Oakes is to be commended for his attempt to bring light to an area that often exists in the shadows of our awareness, nevertheless, I feel his book is flawed in a number of essential ways. The following commentary constitutes some of my critical reflections upon Oakes' aforementioned book.

The first problem I have is the manner in which Oakes approaches the idea of a 'prophet'. In order to understand the nature of the problem surrounding Oakes' use of the term 'prophet', his theory will have to be delineated somewhat.

To begin with, and as the aforementioned title indicates, Oakes engagement of charisma is through a psychological study and not from a religious or spiritual perspective. Therefore, one can acknowledge and appreciate that the way in which he defines the idea of a 'prophet' will be in a manner that is compatible with the psychological thrust of his study.

Notwithstanding the above acknowledgment, there are always advantages and disadvantages surrounding any choice one makes for a working, or operational, definition of a given term. Consequently, one needs to determine if, how, and to what extent, Oakes's manner of defining key terms might introduce distortion and/or problems into his inquiry.

According to Oakes, a prophet is characterized as anyone who: (a) proclaims a mission containing not just a recipe for salvation, but a mission that does so in a way that seeks to revolutionize conventional values; (b) draws, gathers, or attracts individuals who become followers of such an individual and seek to implement the guidance provided by the person being referred to as a 'prophet'. Oakes tends to

lump together a number of people, ranging, on the one hand, from: Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon them both), to, on the other hand: various Swamis, ministers, alternative community leaders, and the like.

Despite whatever differences might exist among those individuals to whom the label 'prophet' is given, Oakes suggest that what all of these individuals share in common are qualities such as: (1) a capacity to inspire people; (2) a resistance to, and opposition toward, various forms of conventionality; (3) possessing a remarkable and compelling personality that tends to set them apart from most people; (4) a grandiose sense of self-confidence that is the source for a great deal of optimism and fearlessness with respect to propagating the mission of salvation; (5) a natural capacity for acting that well-serves a 'prophet's tendency to manipulate people; (6) great rhetorical skills; (7) self-contained, independent of others, not given to self-disclosure; (8) a capacity for social insight that seems to border on the preternatural. Using the foregoing definition, Oakes identifies individuals such as: Madame Blavatsky, Bagwan Shree Rajneesh, Prabhupada Bhaktivedanta (Hare Khrishna), L. Ron Hubbard, Joseph Smith, Sun Myung Moon, and Jim Jones as instances of modern day 'prophets'.

Depending on how one understood the idea of 'salvation' in the above definition of 'prophet, one could expand the boundaries of the set of individuals who constitute 'prophets'. For example, Adolph Hitler, who many Germans saw as the salvation of the German people, could, on the basis of the stated definition, be considered a 'prophet' because he attracted people who sought to follow his guidance concerning the nature of life and, as well, because some dimensions of such guidance sought to revolutionize certain realms of conventional values -- and, in fact, Oakes discusses Hitler along these lines at various junctures in the book on charisma.

Oakes also lists Fritz Perls and Werner Erhard as exemplars of modern prophets. Since the sort of 'salvation' that Perls and Erhard sought for their clients does not easily, if at all, lend itself to spirituality, religion, or mysticism, then, if individuals like Perls and Erhard are to be considered 'prophets' in Oakes' sense of the word, one also, potentially, might be able to apply that same definition to a great many other people besides Perls and Erhard who gave

expression to various artistic, literary, philosophical, scientific, psychological, social, economic, and political theories. Indeed, consistent with Oakes' definition of a prophet, there are many personalities across history who developed theories and paradigms that were intended, in one way or another, to serve as ways to salvation, and who, in the process, proposed an overthrow of conventional values, to one extent or another, as necessary realization of salvation, and, finally, who attracted people who were interested in learning how to live their lives in accordance with the teachings of the 'master'.

Oakes borrows a distinction, made by Heinz Kohut -- a psychoanalyst -- between 'messianic' and 'charismatic' personalities in order to try to frame Oakes' way of approaching issues such as 'prophets', charisma, and narcissism. Among other things, this distinction lends a certain degree of specificity to the discussion of prophets and helps address the issue of why people such as Perls, Freud, Hitler, and Erhard are part of the same group as a variety of individuals who are oriented in a largely religious/spiritual/mystical manner.

According to Oakes, messianic prophets: (1) tend to identify God as an 'external' source of inspiration; (2) often interact with Divinity in terms of a personal relationship that has an 'objective' nature; (3) usually teach by means of revelation; (4) seem to be motivated by a fantasy that construes one's individual existence to be part of the Godhead; (5) are psychologically oriented toward the external world and, as a result, able to perform reality checks; (6) frequently described as being very consistent with respect to behaviors or beliefs and, therefore, seen as stable over time; (7) are fairly modest with respect to making claims about themselves; (8) seek to do works of virtue and excellence in conjunction with the world, as well as to work for what is perceived to be the welfare of others; (9) apparently resigned to experiencing an eventual decline in influence and, as a result, often willing to make preparations for transition in leadership; (10) tend to generate new laws that foster a form of release that, ultimately, serves as a source of helping to constrain society; (11) give emphasis to doing 'God's work' that is at the heart of the messianic mission; (12) inclined to be other worldly and withdraw from the

world's corrupting potential; (13) treat truth and duty to be the two highest forms of ethical expression.

On the other hand, for Oakes, charismatic prophets: (1) locate Divinity within rather than externally (as messianic prophets do); (2) filter their relationship with 'being' in terms of impersonal forces; (3) teach by example rather than through revelation; (4) are motivated by the fantasy that 'I and the Godhead' are one; (5) tend to be out of touch with external reality and, therefore, unable to run reality checks; (6) are perceived as being inconsistent with respect to both beliefs and behaviors that leads to considerable instability over time; (7) are fairly immodest and given to bouts of self-aggrandizement; (8) are not interested in the welfare of others, but, rather, are likely to be antisocial and self-serving; (9) often self-destruct or fall from grace through their behaviors; (10) are oriented toward rebellion, a certain lawlessness, and consider release/freedom to be good in and of themselves; (11) seek recognition rather than to be a vehicle of God's work; (12) use the corruption of the world as a justification for amorality and the opportunistic exploitation of circumstances; (13) consider love and freedom to be the highest forms of ethical expression.

For the most part, Oakes considers messianic and charismatic types of prophets to constitute groups that are, to a large extent, mutually exclusive categories. In other words, if one compares the thirteen points outlined above in conjunction with both types of 'prophets', then, with respect to whatever quality or characteristic is said to describe one type of 'prophet', there tends to be an absence of any common ground shared by members of the two, respective groups and, actually, in relation to any of the aforementioned thirteen characteristics, members of the two groups tend to be proceeding in very different directions -- sometimes in diametric opposition -- with respect to each of the points. Oakes does indicate that elements of each type of prophet might be combined in different sorts of permutations so that some individuals might give expression to mixed combinations of both messianic and charismatic types. However, on the whole, Oakes seems to believe that in most cases one can identify a given 'prophet' as being either of a messianic kind or a charismatic kind.

Although, as noted above, Oakes alludes to the possibility that a given individual might give expression to qualities and characteristics from each of the two sets of characteristics, he doesn't pursue this possibility in any concrete manner. Consequently, one doesn't really know what he means by his allusion other than that he states it as a possibility.

One could imagine someone who teaches by example (a charismatic trait) as well as through revelation (a messianic characteristic). In addition, one could conceive of an individual who located Divinity both within (a charismatic tendency) and without (a messianic quality). One also can acknowledge the possibility of there being 'leaders' who did not focus on just love and freedom (a charismatic property) or on just truth and duty (a messianic feature) but on all of these qualities together ... that is, love, freedom, duty, and truth would be part of an integrated, harmonious whole that were in balance with one another.

On the other hand, one could not be both stable (a messianic trait) and unstable (a charismatic property). Moreover, one cannot seek to genuinely enhance the welfare of other people (a messianic characteristic) and, at the same time, be antisocial (a charismatic quality).

One cannot be both relatively humble (a messianic tendency) and engaged in self-aggrandizement (a charismatic inclination); nor can one both sincerely seek to be removed from the world's corruption (a messianic characteristic), as well as exploit that corruption to justify one's own descent into one's own amoral version of such corruption (a charismatic quality). One cannot be both attentive to the external world and, as a result, be capable of monitoring one's behavior in the light of that world (a messianic property), while, simultaneously, being out of touch with that external world and, therefore, unable to run various kinds of reality checks intended to constrain one's behavior (a charismatic property).

Furthermore, Oakes does not directly discuss the possibility of there being 'prophets' who were stable (messianic) but caught up in the throes of self-aggrandizement (charismatic), or 'prophets' who were interested in serving God (messianic) but wanted recognition for their efforts (charismatic). Oakes also does not speak about 'prophets'

who might engage in reality checks (messianic) and, yet, also have a tendency to rebel, flaunt convention, and become entangled with legal skirmishes of one kind or another (charismatic) -- in other words, a person might pay attention to the external world in order to better understand how to subvert it and manipulate it.

One could expand upon the nature and number of such permutations and combinations. Almost all, if not all, of the foregoing possibilities fall outside the horizons set by Oakes' exploration into the psychology of charisma.

One does not know how Oakes would respond to any of the foregoing other than to, perhaps, acknowledge them as possibilities that require further study. What one does know is that, in general, Oakes is inclined to place messianic prophets in a largely, if not wholly, spiritual-religious context, whereas so-called charismatic prophets tend to be perceived as individuals who do not necessarily participate in activities that can be described in religious, spiritual, or mystical terms.

Thus, individuals such as Hitler, Freud, Perls, and Erhard can be studied along side of overtly religious/spiritual figures such as Madame Blavatsky, Gurdjieff, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Jim Jones, and Joseph Smith -- to name but a few. This is because the characteristic that ties these individuals together is not spirituality, per se, but the quality of charisma that can be manifested in both religious as well as nonreligious contexts.

One wonders why Oakes chose to use the term 'prophet' -- as opposed to, say, 'leader' or some other comparable word -- in order to refer to individuals who proclaim a mission of salvation, seek to challenge or overthrow conventional values through that mission, and, in the process, try to induce people to participate in that mission by, among other things, applying the mission principles to their own lives through looking to the 'individual on a mission' as their guide or teacher concerning how one should go about accomplishing this. One possibility is that Oakes wanted to concentrate on what he perceived to be the 'function' of a 'prophet', independently of religious and spiritual considerations.

Thus, if one removes the element of spirituality from the idea of a prophet and just looks at the behavior of such an individual, then,

according to Oakes, prophets are individuals who: (a) proclaim a mission; (b) couch the nature of that mission in terms of some kind of salvation; (c) often run into conflict with certain conventional values that exist at the time the mission is pursued; (d) seek to attract adherents to the mission, and (e) serve as a guide or teacher for those individuals who are trying to incorporate the mission's principles into their lives. If one separates the element of spirituality and religiosity from the 'functional behavior' of a prophet, then, individuals -- irrespective of whether they represented a religious or non-religious context -- might be considered to be observing 'prophetic' behavior if they satisfied the five conditions specified by Oakes that have been outlined above.

From a traditional, spiritual perspective, an individual does not proclaim himself or herself to be a 'prophet' or become a prophet by arbitrarily proclaiming that one has a mission. A Prophet is someone who has been appointed by Divinity to serve in a particular capacity for a given community.

Secondly, to reduce the task of a Prophet down to being a mission of salvation is problematic. To be sure, prophets do speak about the issue of salvation, but they also speak about: knowledge, truth, spiritual potential, identity, purpose, justice, death, and purity in ways that transcend mere salvation and re-orient one toward the possibility of additional realms of the sacred ... sometimes referred to as the mystical dimension of spirituality.

Thirdly, to say that the intention of a Prophet is to clash with conventional values, or to rebel against such values, or to start a revolutionary movement that opposes such values, this also is problematic. A Prophet of God seeks to speak and behave in accordance with the truth -- the reality of things -- and while it might be the case that what is true does conflict with certain, conventional values, the purpose of giving voice to the truth is not to generate conflict, rebellion, or revolution.

Moreover, even if it were true that some conventional values were opposed by a given Prophet, one need not suppose that, therefore, all conventional values in a certain community would become the focus of opposition. Whether conventional values became objects of conflict, or that values might become objects of conflict, could depend on a variety

of circumstances and, consequently, to maintain that a main feature of the 'prophetic' mission is to revolutionize conventional values is far too sweeping and ambiguous a claim.

Prophets are sent to remind and warn people about a variety of things. They are sent to induce people to seek out the truth in all things. They are appointed in order to encourage people to be loving, thankful, sincere, honest, kind, forgiving, tolerant, modest, generous, considerate, friendly, respectful, aware, co-operative, hopeful, persevering, patient, peaceful, and to be inclined toward seeking repentance (with respect to both human beings and God) for the mistakes one has made. Prophets also are sent to discourage people from being: deceitful, exploitive, abusive, unjust, lacking in compassion, cruel, arrogant, hypocritical, dogmatic, intolerant, unloving, unfriendly, disputatious, immodest, thoughtless, insensitive, and so on.

There might be vested interests and various centers of power who become threatened, for one reason or another, by the activity of a Prophet, but the intent of a Prophet is not necessarily to wage war or rebel against those who have vested interests. Historically speaking, whenever and wherever possible, conciliation, harmony, peace, compromise, and negotiation are pursued by Prophets -- not confrontation and conflict.

Fourthly, a Prophet is not necessarily trying to attract followers. A Prophet is seeking to speak the truth as well as to offer guidance for anyone who is willing to engage that truth and guidance with a receptive heart and mind.

A Prophet is trying to assist people to realize the potential of their own relationship with the Truth/Reality. A Prophet is not trying to attract a following. The fact that a community of people might arise around that individual might only mean that they are a community with a common set of purposes rather than an amalgamation made up of a leader and his or her followers.

Of course, the foregoing points all raise the question of whether, or not, there is anyone who is actually appointed by Divinity to serve in a special, Divinely-ordained role of a Prophet. For the most part, Oakes tries to stay away from this issue and, therefore, restricts his discussion to what people claim to believe concerning their status as a

'prophet', quite independently of considerations of the truth or falsity of those claims.

However, Oakes does stray from a largely neutral stance when he says that messianic prophets tend to operate in accordance with the 'fantasy' that they are -- in a yet to be explained (and possibly ineffable) sense -- "part" of God, whereas charismatic prophets are, according to Oakes, motivated by the 'fantasy' that they and the Godhead (or the psychic mother/father) are one ... that they are 'God'. In other words, Oakes is making a statement about what he perceives to be the truth status of much of what a 'prophet' says when Oakes maintains that no matter whether one falls into the category of a messianic prophet or one is subsumed under the category of a charismatic prophet, both sets of individuals are motivated by a fantasy concerning their relationship with God.

One is free to believe whatever she or he likes about the truth or falsity concerning the existence of Divinity, or the 'authenticity' of a given spiritual claim about being a 'Prophet'. However, one cannot assume an aura of neutrality on such issues, while simultaneously trying to claim that, say, someone's understanding concerning the nature of his or her relationship with Divinity is necessarily rooted in fantasies of one kind or another.

To be sure, there are individuals who do suffer from delusions concerning their self-professed Divine nature or special status with God, and so on. Nevertheless, this does not automatically force one to conclude that anyone who makes such statements is delusional or under the influence of a fantasy or myth of some kind ... this remains to be determined on a case-by-case basis.

One cannot assume one's conclusions. Assumptions ought to be clearly identified as such, and there should be some thought given to how one's conclusions might be affected, adversely or otherwise, if the operational definition one is using -- in this case, the idea of who and what a 'prophet' is -- turns out to be problematic, skewed, or incorrect.

Further evidence of the foregoing bias shows up in a variety of places in Oakes' book, but, perhaps, one of the clearest expressions of this slant comes in the conclusion when Oakes asks, and, then, answers a question:

“But is the prophet really an enlightened spiritual being? If this question asks whether the prophet has personally experienced with the fullness of his being -- with his feelings and his relationships -- a spiritual reality, then, the answer appears to be no. Indeed, quite the opposite is true; it is the very shallowness of the prophet's feelings and relationships, his pervasive narcissism that prevents him from ever entering into a genuine relationship with another, or ever having anything other than pseudo feelings for others.”

The foregoing statements might be quite accurate in their portrayal of the individuals whom Oakes actually studied in the field, and, as well, this sort of characterization might even be true of many of the religious, revolutionary, and charismatic personalities about whom Oakes read during that phase of his research. In addition, Oakes is making an important point when he makes the quality of behavior a crucial, defining feature in determining whether, or not, someone should be considered to be a fully realized spiritual being.

Nonetheless, one hesitates to apply his conclusions across the board to any and all 'prophets'. Although Oakes does not say so directly, the implication of his foregoing perspective tend to extend to such spiritual luminaries as: Jesus, Moses, Muhammad, the Buddha, Krishna, David, Solomon, Joseph, Abraham, and a host of others (peace and blessings be upon them all) who are considered to be emissaries and prophets of Divinity.

To be sure, in the context of Oakes' study, the aforementioned remarks concerning whether, or not, prophets are spiritually realized human beings is primarily intended to refer to those individuals who fall into the category of 'charismatic prophet'. However, and as will be developed shortly, because Oakes' idea of charisma is, itself, problematic, a variety of difficulties arise in conjunction with his belief that, in general, 'prophets' are not really enlightened spiritual beings.

Part of the problem here is that some of the previously noted characteristics that, supposedly, differentiate between messianic and charismatic prophets raise some questions. For example, Oakes claims that one of the distinguishing features of a charismatic prophet is that such individuals tend to identify themselves with the Godhead, and, so, one might be puzzled about the idea of prophets not being spiritually realized human beings when one remembers that Jesus (peace be

upon him) is reported to have said: "I and my Father are one" (this is a statement of tawhid/unity, not identity or incarnation).

Is Oakes prepared to claim that Jesus (peace be upon him) was not only an unrealized spiritual being but, as well, was, if one accepts Oakes' logic, a charismatic prophet who was narcissistic and incapable of forming genuine, sincere, loving relationships with other human beings? If so, where is the evidence for this, and, if not, then, perhaps, his theoretical framework will have to be modified accordingly.

Or, consider another possibility. According to Oakes, two of the characteristics of a charismatic prophet involve (a) locating Divinity within, rather than through external channels, and (b) filtering one's relationship with 'being' through a set of impersonal forces rather than through a personal relationship with a 'God'.

Presumably, on the basis of the foregoing, one might be required to place 'the Buddha' (peace be upon him) in the category of a 'charismatic prophet' since Buddhism is often portrayed, rightly or wrongly, as filtering one's relationship with Being through non-theistic forces of, to some extent, an impersonal nature. Yet, if one does this, is one forced to conclude that 'the Buddha' (peace be upon him) was a spiritually unrealized human being who was inclined to narcissism and only capable of having pseudo, shallow relationships with other individuals?

Similar questions arise in conjunction with some of the remarks made by Oakes concerning the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). For example, Oakes indicates (page 182) that Muhammad (peace be upon him) was among a group of historical personalities who led successful movements and passed away with their integrity intact -- i.e., no scandals. Oakes also identifies others who he judges to be like the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in this regard -- e.g., Father Divine, Phineas Quimby, Prabhupada, Kathryn Kuhlman, and Ann Lee -- that is, 'prophets' who led successful, scandal-free movements.

These are individuals who did not self-destruct as is the tendency of many individuals who might fall into the category of 'charismatic prophets. Yet, at another juncture in his book (page 94), Oakes seeks to use Muhammad (peace be upon him) as an example of a historical prophet who, in Oakes' opinion, "played the part of a wounded

innocent", by going into seclusion, in order to manipulate his wives into accepting his "dalliance with a slave girl".

Oakes does not provide any evidence to support his interpretation of the foregoing judgment. He states the foregoing as if it were an obvious fact and beyond question.

However, why should one accept such a judgment or interpretation? Why should one suppose that Muhammad (peace be upon him) was 'playing' the role of a 'wounded innocent'? Why should one suppose that he was trying to manipulate anyone? Why should one suppose that his relationship with the 'slave girl' was a mere "dalliance"?

Oakes is using a number of pejorative labels in reference to the Prophet. Where is the independent evidence which indicates that any of his ways of describing the situation are evidentially warranted rather than expressions of Oakes' arbitrary biases being imposed on something about which he has no genuine insight or understanding?

For Oakes, one of the defining features of charismatic prophets is their capacity for, and willingness to, manipulate others. Indeed, one of the features that, supposedly, permits us to differentiate 'messianic prophets' from 'charismatic prophets' is the amazing social insight possessed by members of the latter category -- a capacity that, according to Oakes, allows such individuals to, in a sense, know that buttons to push in order to maneuver people in a desired direction.

Consequently, as was the case with respect to the implications of Oakes' foregoing quote -- for both Jesus (peace be upon him) and the Buddha (peace be upon him) -- concerning the lack of spiritual enlightenment in relation to 'prophets', once again, one is faced with an implication that paints Muhammad (peace be upon him) as someone who, according to the implications of Oakes' logic, might have been spiritually unenlightened, narcissistic, manipulative, and capable of only superficial, shallow relationships with others.

One of the arguments that some individuals have leveled against theoreticians like Freud is that he used his understanding of abnormal behavior and psycho-pathology to set the tone for what he considered to be healthy, normal psychological development. According to such critics, when one starts with a certain kind of sample set -- namely,

people suffering from pathology -- one might not be able to validly make the transition from: what that sample says about the nature of the people in such a sample, to: claims concerning the psychology of human nature in a population of people who do not suffer from such pathology.

Similarly, by using certain, arbitrarily decided-upon, behavioral and functional characteristics of individuals as the basis for labeling various individuals as 'prophets', one might wish to pause for a moment and ask whether the behavioral and functional characteristics being cited really are reflective of how an actual 'Prophet' might think, feel, act, or be motivated. Even if one wishes to argue that the latter considerations should not shape and orient a study in psychology, nevertheless, one still needs to take note of the lacunae that are, potentially, present when a researcher tries to do an end around, or ignore, the idea of 'authenticity' with respect to someone who claims to be, or is perceived to be, a prophet, and, as a result, employs arbitrarily chosen criteria to shape the operational definitions one uses to establish categories, differentiate individuals, and orient one's research.

If the definition of a 'prophet' does not necessarily reflect historical and/or traditional considerations, and if the sample being studied does not necessarily reflect historical and/or traditional 'realities' concerning the lives of Prophets, then, one should, at the very least, raise a caveat concerning the validity of applying the results of a given study -- like that of Oakes -- to a larger population containing some individuals who might actually be individuals who were appointed by Divinity to pursue goals, purposes, and activities that are in contradistinction to Oakes's operational definition of 'prophet' and who are neither necessarily delusional nor under the influence of one, or another, fantasy with respect to their relationship with Divinity.

What difference do the foregoing considerations make with respect to understanding the idea of Prophetic charisma or the psychology of revolutionary, religious personalities? As it turns out, perhaps a great many problematic ramifications might arise as a result of such considerations, and this might be most clearly described and explained through an examination of the way in which Oakes talks about two other themes -- charisma and narcissism -- within the

context of a theory that claims to be directed toward helping us understand the nature of: Prophetic Charisma.

I do not feel it would be distorting Oakes' position to say that, to a major extent, the phenomenon of charisma is, for him, an expression of, and rooted in, the phenomenon of narcissism. At least, this does seem to be the case as far as the idea of the psychology of religious personalities is concerned -- both with respect to 'prophets' as well as their followers.

Oakes indicates that someone can be referred to as charismatic when she or he is perceived to embody something referred to as "ultimate concerns". This embodiment of ultimate concerns might be in relation to either oneself or others, however, the meaning of 'ultimate concern' tends to vary from person to person.

However, when an individual has extraordinary needs in relation to whatever a given 'ultimate concern' might turn out to be for that person (and extraordinary needs are linked to the formation of a nuclear self early in life that is colored by, among other things, narcissistic forces), then, according to Oakes, the perception of the embodiment of that ultimate concern in another human being gives expression to an extremely powerful magnetic force of attraction. This conjunction of 'ultimate concerns', 'extraordinary needs', and the 'embodiment' of such concerns in a person who, as a result, is perceived to be a vehicle for: accessing, being in proximity to, and/or realizing such ultimate concerns, is considered, by Oakes, to be at the heart of the phenomenon of charisma.

Although the foregoing description does not specifically limit charisma to spiritual contexts, nonetheless, Oakes does believe that charisma constitutes a spiritual power with a considerable potential to revolutionize society. Moreover, he believes charisma has the capacity to spiritualize the extraordinary needs and ultimate concerns of those who are seeking to have their needs and concerns fulfilled.

It is hard, at this point, to understand just what Oakes means by the idea that charisma can spiritualize ultimate concerns and extraordinary needs. If a given ultimate concern is not already spiritual in nature, or if an extraordinary need is not already rooted in spirituality of one kind or another, then, how does charisma, per se,

spiritualize either ultimate concerns or extraordinary needs? What does it mean to spiritualize something?

Furthermore, since Oakes has indicated that charisma is a function of the perception that someone embodies the ultimate concerns of oneself or others, and since he has indicated that charisma is a function of the perception that someone will serve as a means to the fulfillment of one's extraordinary needs, then, one wonders about the precise dynamics of how either charisma, or its alleged spiritualizing dimension, works. After all, on the basis of the foregoing considerations, charisma seems to be something that is conferred on a given human being -- e.g., a prophet -- as a result of the perceived embodiment of one's ultimate concerns in, say, a 'prophet' due to the extraordinary needs of the one doing the perceiving.

If the foregoing characterization of things is correct, then, charisma is not something that a 'prophet' possesses. Rather, charisma arises -- and, sometimes, Oakes appears to suggest as much -- when the right alignment of 'prophet', 'ultimate concerns', 'extraordinary needs', and perception takes place. As such, charisma is a function of the dynamics of a certain kind of relationship between two, or more, people.

What a seeker brings to the equation are: ultimate concerns, extraordinary needs, and a perceptual mind-set that is actively or passively looking for something that resonates with those concerns and needs. What a 'prophet' brings to this dynamic are his or her own kind of extraordinary needs, together with a set of qualities that not only resonate, to some degree, with the concerns and needs of the seeker, but which, as well, are perceived to have something of a supernatural -like aura about them -- that is, there is something about the relationship that appears to be largely inexplicable, magical, mysterious, and resistant to any kind of easy explanation ... something that is experienced as seductive, alluring, magnetic, compelling, and somewhat mesmerizing.

One of the qualities that Oakes believes plays a significant role in the felt presence of charisma is the 'prophet's' talent for observation and an accompanying special ability to derive, from such observations, penetrating insights into the nature of on-going social dynamics as well as the extraordinary needs and ultimate concerns of individuals

who engage the 'prophet'. Someone once remarked that one society's technology might appear like magic to another society that does not understand the principles through which such technology operates, and, similarly, when someone does not understand how a given person has arrived at her or his insight into one's extraordinary needs, ultimate concerns, or the surrounding social dynamics, then, the individual with insight might be perceived as someone who has magical -like, supernatural-like capabilities and powers simply because one might not understand how such insight is possible.

Do some 'prophets' actually have psychic, occult, extrasensory, or non-ordinary powers of perception? Oakes does not believe so.

He believes everything is explicable through the manner in which ordinary abilities and talents might be developed to an amazing degree by individuals who have extraordinary needs. These needs are dependent for their fulfillment on the existence and use of such capabilities.

Oakes maintains (page 188) that a charismatic relationship begins with a seeker's surrender and trust. According to Oakes, only later does the seeker begin to project her or his own ultimate concerns onto the 'prophet' and through this projection become 'fused' with the person of the 'prophet' to such a degree that the 'seeker' interacts with the 'prophet' as if he or she were an expression of one's own inner, deeper, more essential 'self'.

If so, this leaves unanswered the question of why someone would trust or surrender to another individual without some sort of substantial motivation for doing so? Apparently, Oakes seems to be saying that trust and surrender arise prior to, and independently of, the establishing of a charismatic relationship that, according to Oakes, revolves around the dynamics of 'extraordinary needs', 'ultimate concerns', and the perceived embodiment of these qualities in the person of the 'prophet' -- something that Oakes claims happens later in the relationship and, therefore, does not appear to be the initial reason why someone trusts and surrenders to the 'prophet'.

According to Oakes, charisma spiritualizes a relationship. Yet, somehow, trust and surrender -- which, presumably, are essential to any sort of spiritual relationship -- take place, on Oakes' account, before the main component of a charismatic relationship -- namely, the

perceived presence of the embodiment of ultimate concerns -- is established.

The foregoing sequence of events appears somewhat counter-intuitive. A more likely explanation would seem to involve the possibility that the felt or perceived presence of charisma is what helps induce someone to trust and surrender to a 'prophet', and, if this is the case, then, Oakes might be mistaken about when the projection of ultimate concerns on to a 'prophet' takes place.

Furthermore, one wonders if it is so much a matter of a 'seeker's' projection of ultimate concerns onto the 'prophet', as it might be a matter of such ultimate concerns actually being reflected in, or resonating with, some, or all, of the words and behaviors of the 'prophet'. In other words, is one to suppose that the perception of the embodiment of ultimate concerns in another human being is merely a delusion in which nothing of those ultimate concerns actually is present in what a 'prophet' says and does, or should one assume that, to varying degrees, something of a substantive nature concerning such ultimate concerns is actually touched upon by the teachings and actions of the 'prophet'?

To be sure, a seeker could be mistaken. For example, a seeker might believe that something of his or her ultimate concerns was present in what the 'prophet's said and did, only to discover, subsequently, that such was not the case or that whatever was present was being expressed in a fraudulent and manipulative manner. Or, a seeker initially might believe that a given 'prophet' could serve as a venue through which the seeker's extraordinary needs and ultimate concerns could be realized, only to, later on, come to the conclusion, rightly or wrongly, that the 'prophet' could not actually assist one to fulfill one's extraordinary needs or ultimate concerns. Alternatively, a seeker's first, cursory impression of a 'prophet' might have led the seeker to believe that the prophet and she or he shared a set of common concerns, values, and the like, only to realize, upon closer inspection, that the two, despite initial impressions, really aren't on the same page with respect to a variety of issues, concerns, goals, and values.

However, such mistakes are not necessarily delusional in character. They are beliefs that come to be, hopefully, constructively

modified in the light of subsequent experience ... something -- that is, constructive modification -- to which delusions are inherently resistant.

As such, it is not ultimate concerns, per se, that are being projected onto the prophet/leader/teacher. Instead, what is being projected is a hope concerning the potential value of what might ensue in relation to one's ultimate concerns by linking up with someone claiming to be a prophet/guide/leader.

Trust and surrender are offered in exchange for a promissory note, of sorts, about future considerations in conjunction with the fulfillment of extraordinary needs and ultimate concerns. The felt presence of charisma is perceived, rightly or wrongly, as an indicator that someone -- namely, a prophet/leader/teacher -- can satisfy the conditions of that promissory note. The felt presence of charisma, justifiably or unjustifiably, tends to create certain kinds of expectations concerning the fulfillment of ultimate concerns and extraordinary needs in the future.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, one still is unclear about what charisma is or how its perceived presence has the capacity to induce or inspire trust, surrender, and expectations concerning one's ultimate concerns and extraordinary needs. One has a sense that, somehow, the perceived presence of charisma might have a 'spiritualizing effect in as much as trust and surrender, which are important components of spirituality, might be engendered, somehow, through the presence of something called 'charisma', and, yet, the manner in which this takes place -- the dynamics of the spiritualizing process -- remains elusive and puzzling.

Oakes believes that the secret of charisma lies in a narcissistic dimension of human development. More specifically, he believes that the alleged 'extraordinary needs' of both a 'prophet' and a seeker are entangled in the agenda of a 'nuclear self' that forms under certain conditions that, according to Oakes, are conducive to the emergence of narcissistic personality disorder in, at the very least, 'a charismatic prophet'.

Although at one point in his discussion of the phenomenon of narcissistic development Oakes voices a cautionary note concerning the question of how well can we know the mind and inner life of

another human being, nevertheless, he soon leaves such caution behind when delineating Kohut's theory of narcissism and seeking to link that theory to the idea of charisma. Of course, generally speaking, it is often part and parcel of theoretical work to take some risks while venturing into uncharted conceptual territory, but some risks might be more viable than others.

Heinz Kohut developed his theory of narcissism while treating patients with narcissistic personality disorder. He sought to explain the origins of this disorder.

The patients being treated by Kohut tended to possess a grandiose sense of self-confidence, untouched by any sort of self-doubt. They often were very perceptive about people and social dynamics (sometimes uncannily so), could be quite persuasive, but also were given to blaming and accusing others of various failings and shortcomings.

Such patients frequently were inclined toward exhibitionism and were given to voicing unrealistic, naïve fantasies concerning themselves and their place in the scheme of things. In addition, these individuals tended to demonstrate little evidence of possessing a conscience or experiencing any sort of guilt when involved in wrong doing. Moreover, their relationships with others usually were marked by an almost complete absence of empathy for people and, as well, appeared to be imbued with a belief that other people existed to serve the needs of the narcissist.

According to Freud, all of us go through a period of primary narcissism during infancy when we believe that everything not only revolves around us but that the world is, in a sense, a creation of our own. Furthermore, this period of narcissism is said to be characterized by a child's sense of oneness with the world -- meaning the mothering one -- which is posited to be a continuation of one's life in the womb when, supposedly, the boundaries between mother and child are completely dissolved.

During this period of felt-oneness, the child is said to bask in the nurturing glow of exaltation transmitted through the mother's gaze and treatment of the child. Through this sort of adoring interaction, the child feels worshiped and develops a sense of uninhibited, grandiose omnipotence that permeates the mind-set of the infant.

In the course of normal development, Freud indicates that primary narcissism becomes significantly attenuated and modulated as experience introduces a child to the pain of feeling alone in a world that, in many ways, appears indifferent to the desires of the child. Feelings of omnipotence are ravaged by the onslaught of a sense of helplessness.

With the waning of primary narcissism, the child no longer believes herself or himself to be the center of the universe. A Copernican-like revolution has shaken the foundations of the child's previously Ptolemaic existence.

The idea of 'primary narcissism' is a theoretical construct. Whether a fetus or an infant ever has a sense of oneness with the mother, or whether an infant ever operates out of a framework that is permeated with feelings of omnipotence and grandiosity, or whether an infant ever operates under the illusion/delusion that she or he is the creative and causal force behind the happenings of the universe, or whether the infant ever has a sense of being worshiped like a 'god', or whether an infant ever has the sense that he or she shares a state of perfection with a 'saintly' mothering one -- all of these are highly contentious, largely speculative considerations.

Instead, one might entertain the possibility that any deeply developed notion of primary narcissism in the Freudian sense might have a very difficult time becoming established in amidst the realities of this world. After all, almost from the first spank on the bottom that introduces us to this plane of existence, there is a great deal of human experience indicating: that we are not omnipotent; that however intimate one's relationship with the mothering one might be, there is felt separation in the sense that there are very real differences between how the mothering one behaves and how we might wish the mothering one to behave; that we cannot always make the nipple appear upon demand; that the discomfort of wet diapers or a colic-ridden system do not always disappear with the mere wish for this to be so; that we are not in control of how hot or cold we feel; that the ravages of colds, fevers and illness descend upon us without our permission; that an infant might have difficulty in believing that she or he rules over the universe when he or she can't even get her or his

hands and fingers to go where he or she would like or accomplish what she or he would like.

The bundle of problematic desires, wishes, impulses, thoughts, and motivations within each of us that collectively are subsumed under the term “nafs” is a very different entity than the idea of primary narcissism. There is a considerable amount of metaphysical theory (e.g., oneness, omnipotence, and grandiosity, being worshiped, shared state of perfection), infusing the concept of primary narcissism that is absent from the notion of nafs that simply posits, based on observation and experience, that there are wishes, desires, thoughts, and motivations within us seeking expression and that tend to generate a sense of frustration or anger when the sought-for realizations are blocked, thwarted, or ignored in various ways.

Leaving aside such considerations for the moment, let's return to Kohut's theory of narcissism. According to Kohut, the mothering one filters the tendency of the world to intrude into the life of an infant, and, as a result, the mothering one has a role to play in helping to gradually initiate an infant into the realities of the world and away from the influence of the condition of primary narcissism.

Sometimes, however, Kohut maintains that something happens and the filtering process breaks down. There is some sort of traumatic tear in the process and, in one way or another, the child is deprived not only of the filtering assistance afforded by the mothering one but, as well, the child loses the process of gradual initiation into the realities of the world -- realities that undermine and attack the child's sense of primary narcissism.

As a result, Kohut believes that some children, when faced with such a traumatic situation, seek to assume the responsibility of managing the filtering/initiation process by using the condition of primary narcissism as a coping strategy to try to filter and fend off the demands of the world. In such individuals, rather than the condition of primary narcissism becoming attenuated and modulated over time, this condition becomes strengthened and comes to dominant many aspects of that person's way of interacting with the world.

Although those individuals who become inclined to filter reality through the colored lenses of primary narcissism do learn, through trial and error (sometimes with great difficulty), how the world

operates and how to negotiate many different kinds of problematic encounters with the world in a way that will help to avoid punishment while garnering various rewards, nonetheless, Kohut believes that, for the most part, such people are ensconced in a paradigm of reality that is self-serving, largely -- if not completely -- devoid of empathy for others, lacking in conscience, steeped in a sense of grandiosity concerning oneself, constantly seeking feedback from others that validates that sense of grandiosity and are often skilled in insightful social observation as well as the art of persuading and/or manipulating others to become tools for the acquisition of whatever is desired or sought -- especially positive feedback concerning one's fantasies and delusions about grandiosity (this is often referred to as 'narcissistic supply').

Anyone who opposes, seeks to constrain, or interferes with the paradigm of primary narcissism through which the world is perceived and engaged by someone in the throes of narcissistic personality disorder is likely to become the focal object of what Kohut refers to as 'narcissistic rage'. Such interlopers are resented, resisted, and riled against -- either openly and/or through various forms of indirect stratagems in which people become pawns to be used, and if necessary sacrificed, to check the perceived antagonist.

Kohut distinguishes between messianic personalities and charismatic personalities (rather than 'leaders' or prophets') within the foregoing context of primary narcissism gone awry. The messianic personality is someone who projects a sense of grandiosity outward in the form of an 'object' and identifies this externalized, "idealized superego", or 'self', as God who is to be served, worshiped and from whom revelation/guidance is received. The charismatic personality, on the other hand, is someone who internalizes the sense of grandiosity and equates one's own being with an idealized sense of the omnipotent 'self' or Godhead that is to serve as an example for others.

Kohut believes a messianic personality is pulled by externalized ideals and the challenge of trying to emulate and live up to those ideals. A charismatic personality, however, is driven by ambitions revolving about her or his need for self-aggrandizement, together with a validation of that sense of grandiosity through the recognition and acknowledgment of others.

Following up on an idea of Kohut's, Oakes advances the theoretical possibility that 'seekers' might hook up with 'prophets' in ways that are mutually accommodating. In other words, individuals who have had their own problems negotiating the transition from primary narcissism to a more 'realistic' way of understanding that the world does not revolve around one's existence, might have 'extraordinary needs' that a messianic or charismatic prophet is perceived to be able to address and/or resolve. By helping a messianic or charismatic prophet to validate his or her sense of reality through the act of following such an individual, a seeker hopes to receive, in return, what might be needed in the way of the satisfaction of the seeker's ultimate concerns that will permit that individual to be happy, transformed, content, at peace, in harmony with one self or the world, or whatever else might be the thrust of the ultimate concerns and 'extraordinary needs' of a psychological/emotional nature inherent in the seeker.

Presumably, those individuals who identified with, or felt resonance in, the coping strategy adopted by a messianic personality, prophet or leader, would gravitate toward, or be attracted by, or feel at home in circumstances where the 'idealized superego' had been projected outward and could be sought in the external world as an 'object' of some kind through which one's world could be ordered, guided, and ethically oriented. On the other hand, those individuals who identified or found resonance with the coping strategy developed by a charismatic personality, prophet or leader, might be inclined toward, attracted by, or feel comfortable in an environment where the 'grandiose self' was sought within and, if located, could lead to a sense of omnipotence, freedom, and primal release.

Although there is a certain degree of coherence and consistency to the foregoing theoretical framework and without wishing to argue that there is no one (either among 'prophets' or followers) who operates in accordance with such psychological dynamics, nonetheless, there are a great many reservations one might have concerning such a theory. For instance, to assume that all people externalize an 'idealized superego' or identify with an internalized 'grandiose self' might be a way of accounting for the observed behavior of some individuals, but such an assumption also tends to prevent one from considering the possibility that truth and reality are not necessarily a function of what we project,

create, or identify with but might exist quite independently of what we think, feel, and believe.

Not every search for the truth is necessarily a reflection of unresolved issues of primary narcissism. Not every issue of ethics or morality necessarily reduces down to what we seek to impose on reality or what we internalize in the way of parental values. Not every search for identity is necessarily a function of the nuclear self's agenda that, according to Kohut and Oakes, precipitates out of the transition from primary narcissism to more mature modes of interaction. Not every search for wisdom is necessarily a reflection of the development of coping strategies for psychic survival. Not every search for justice is necessarily a reflection of one's likes and dislikes. Not every search for guidance is necessarily an exercise in finding a match between a 'prophet's' psychological profile and one's own psychological needs.

Not every 'prophet' is necessarily a product of the psychodynamics of everyday life. Not every thought of awe or omnipotence is necessarily either self-referential or a matter of what one projects onto the universe. Not every experience of love is necessarily a mirrored reflection of the presence of narcissism. Not all dissatisfactions concerning the limitations, problems, and lacuna of psychoanalytical thought are necessarily evidence that denial and other defense mechanisms are at work to save us from the painful realization of repressed wishes, fantasies, impulses, and thoughts.

What is the truth concerning such matters? Whatever they might be, one shouldn't start out by, in various ways, pre-judging the matter.

One cannot claim to be objective while being predisposed to restrict one's investigation to purely psychological principles in relation to some phenomenon without examining the possible merits of metaphysical or trans-personal explanations with respect to that same issue. One cannot claim to be value-neutral while ignoring possible data, experience, and phenomena that are not necessarily consistent with one's philosophical and/or psychological orientation.

Oakes admits that trying to trace such ideas as messianic and charismatic personalities back to the dynamics of infantile phenomenology is a speculative exercise (e.g., 42). However, at other times he speaks in terms that appear to transpose these speculative exercises into 'likely' explanations of this or that phenomenon, or this

or that individual (and, I have already pointed out that almost none of what Oakes or Kohut have to say is 'likely' to be accurately reflective of the lives, teachings and personalities of such individuals as Jesus, the Buddha, or Muhammad -- peace and blessings be upon them all -- not to mention any number of other spiritual luminaries who appear among the ranks of both historical Prophets and the great mystical guides from many different spiritual traditions).

Although it is desirable to want to subsume as large a body of phenomena, behavior, and data, as is possible, under the rubric of one theoretical framework, one also has to be prepared to acknowledge the possibility that reality might be far more complex, rich, nuanced, and problematic than the capabilities of any single theory. Moreover, while certain individuals might exhibit behavior and characteristics that are compatible with, say, the theories of Kohut, nevertheless, this does not automatically preclude the possibility that there might be many individuals who do not demonstrate profiles that easily, if at all, conform to the requirements of such a theory. Indeed, there might be a variety of different currents of human potential that are running through the ocean we call 'reality'.

Even if one were to accept Kohut's psychoanalytical theory concerning the way in which individuals supposedly deal with the problem of primary narcissism, and even if one were to accept Kohut's tendency to conceive of the difference between messianic personalities from charismatic personalities as being a function of whether, respectively, an 'idealized superego' was externalized or a 'grandiose self' was internalized, nonetheless, one still has difficulty understanding precisely how the ideas of 'prophet', 'narcissism', and charisma fit together.

Oakes does suggest that 'seekers' tend to be attracted to, or inclined toward, those 'leaders', 'guides', and 'prophets' who best reflect the 'extraordinary needs' of such 'seekers. As a result, some people are attracted to, and follow, messianic 'prophets', while others are attracted to, and follow, 'charismatic prophets'.

However, right away there is a problem here. If charisma is, to some extent, a function of the resonance of psychological profiles between, on the one hand, a 'prophet' or 'leader', and, on the other

hand, a follower, then, why refer to only one of the two classes of 'prophets' or 'teachers' as charismatic?

In both cases, there might be some sort of attraction involved. Yet, apparently, the attraction experienced in the case of so-called 'messianic prophets' is not an expression of charisma.

Of course, Oakes argues, quite explicitly, that charisma is very much rooted in someone -- 'prophet', 'teacher' 'leader' 'guide' -- being perceived to be the embodiment of another individual's ultimate concerns. Nonetheless, the same kind of question that was raised in the foregoing comments needs to be asked again.

If one assumes, as seems logical to do, that both 'messianic prophets' and 'charismatic prophets' might be perceived to embody someone's ultimate concerns, then, why does the adjective, charismatic, only refer to one of the two classes of 'prophets'? Someone might counter, in Oakes's defense, by saying something along the lines of: 'Well, there are 'extraordinary needs' present in the case of the followers of 'charismatic prophets' that are not present among the followers of 'messianic prophets' and this phenomenon of 'extraordinary needs' together with the idea of the embodiment of ultimate concerns is what gives rise to the experience of charisma'.

However, such a possible response seems rather weak and not without its own problems. More specifically, if 'extraordinary needs' are a reflection of the unresolved issues of someone's psychological profile with respect to, say, primary narcissism, then, why should one suppose that the needs of someone who seeks out and follows a 'messianic prophet' are any less extraordinary than the needs of someone who seeks out and follows a 'charismatic prophet'?

For example, why should one suppose that developmental problems surrounding the issue of an externalized 'idealized superego' are any less extraordinary than the developmental problems swirling about the internalization of a 'grandiose self'? What are the criteria for determining what constitutes "extraordinary needs"?

Furthermore, there are also some questions that ought to be directed to the alleged link between charisma and the perceived embodiment of ultimate concerns. In other words, just because someone is seen to embody the ultimate concerns of another

individual, why should one automatically assume that the former person will be considered to be charismatic?

Oakes indicates that the meaning of 'ultimate concerns' will vary with the 'seeker' or 'follower' being considered. Ultimate concerns could be of a political, economic, ecological, philosophical, sexual, social, and/or spiritual nature.

We might consider our children to be expressions of our ultimate concerns, but this doesn't necessarily make those children charismatic. We might treat our careers as an expression of our ultimate concern, but this doesn't make our boss charismatic. We might believe that a given political leader embodies our ultimate concerns concerning a variety of social, legal, and economic issues, but we might not necessarily view the leader as charismatic so much as we might evaluate the 'leader' in terms of competence or incompetence, or in terms of someone who is popular or unpopular. A defendant in a murder trial might see his or her defense attorney, the judge, and the jury to be embodiments of her or his ultimate concerns concerning freedom, but this fact does not necessarily cause the defendant to perceive those other individuals as charismatic. We might believe that doctors, school teachers, police officials, fire fighters, and university professors might embody some of our ultimate concerns, but we don't necessarily consider those individuals to be charismatic. The members of a congregation or parish might perceive their minister, rabbi, priest, or imam to embody their ultimate concerns, but they do not necessarily consider such 'leaders' to be charismatic -- although they might consider them to be knowledgeable, approachable, compassionate, interesting, and committed.

Consequently, one need not feel compelled to automatically agree that charisma is a function of the perception that someone embodies our ultimate concerns. Nor is it necessarily the case that charisma is a function of 'extraordinary needs' per se.

According to Oakes, individuals follow a 'prophet', 'leader', 'guru', or 'guide' for a reason (page 126). They are looking for something and come to believe, rightly or wrongly, that such a 'prophet' might be able to provide what they are looking for, or they need something and, rightly or wrongly, they come to believe that the

'prophet/leader/teacher' might be the key to the fulfillment or satisfaction of that need.

Oakes cautions his readers that trying to fathom the deeper motivations that shape the decisions which people make with respect to whether, or not, to follow a 'prophet', 'teacher' or 'leader' is an exercise in speculation. Oakes goes on to indicate that when the people whom he interviewed were asked why they joined a group or decided to follow a 'prophet/leader/guide' that, quite frequently, they responded in terms of wanting to realize some sort of ideal -- such as enlightenment, salvation, or some similar "great work" that involved a transformation of the 'self' - and, yet, when these same individuals were asked what joining a group had permitted them to accomplish or what leaving such a group would mean to them, Oakes said that very different kinds of responses were given.

When the purpose of the 'great work' of self-transformation is not realized, followers often speak in terms of other kinds of values. For instance, they might speak about the process of having been part of something in which they placed their trust and to which they surrendered and that yielded certain kinds of experiential dividends and life lessons other than total self-transformation.

Some of these individuals might have had many of their illusions, naïve and otherwise, dispelled as proximity exposed the feet of clay of this or that 'prophet/guide/leader'. Yet, these same individuals might, nonetheless, feel a sense of gratitude for what they have experienced and learned in conjunction with that 'leader/prophet/teacher'. Other individuals speak in terms of the satisfaction derived through having been able to work hard and achieve or learn things that, prior to joining, they might not have thought possible or expected of themselves.

Oakes mentions four qualities that he claims form the core of a follower's attachment to a 'prophet/teacher/leader'. These qualities are: (1) faith (very vaguely and amorphously defined), (2) trust, (3) courage (in the sense of the courage that a 'prophet' gives to seekers in his or her role of someone who, allegedly, has attained salvation or self-realization, and, therefore, is a living exemplar, supposedly, of what is within the grasp of one and all) , and (4) projection (the

placing of one's ultimate concerns onto the figure of the 'prophet/guide/leader').

A charismatic 'prophet/leader/guide' could strengthen faith, or induce trust, or inspire courage, or provide a reason for why one believes that such a 'prophet' actually does embody one's ultimate concerns, and, therefore, represents a worthy recipient of such projection. However, admitting this possibility doesn't really make charisma something that is caused by some combination of faith, trust, courage, and/or projection, as much as this might indicate that charisma could play a causal role in the explanation of why someone becomes attached to a given 'prophet/leader/teacher' through faith, trust, courage and projection.

Similar sorts of comments could be made in relation to Oakes' contention that, for example, 'love' and 'freedom' are characteristic of groups led by 'charismatic prophets', whereas 'truth' and 'ethics' are associated with 'messianic prophets'. To begin with, it is not obvious, in any *prima facie* manner, that someone who is perceived to be an extraordinarily loving human being would necessarily be any more charismatic than someone who is rigorously devoted to the truth, or that someone who is an extreme individualist will necessarily be perceived as being more charismatic than someone who is devoted to duty with respect to moral and ethical issues.

We might be attracted to all of these kinds of individuals. Yet, such attraction is not necessarily of a charismatic kind. We might be attracted for other reasons such as having respect for such people or wanting to emulate them or wanting to learn from them or feeling comfortable around these kinds of individual.

One is still left wondering why messianic 'prophets/teachers/guides' aren't referred to as 'charismatic'. One also is still wondering why so-called 'charismatic prophets' are considered to be 'charismatic'.

Oakes devotes a whole chapter to the idea of the 'charismatic moment'. This is described as an instant, or relatively brief interval of time, in which a person is willing to open up one's heart, to lay bare one's soul, to trust without reservation, to become totally vulnerable to another and surrender.

The charismatic moment is to experience an exhilarating, intoxicating, powerful, intense, electric blurring of boundaries between oneself and the 'prophet/teacher/guide' and/or the group that is led by such an individual. These moments are said to give expression to a primal, life impulse (which Weber refers to as 'pure charisma') that might be charged with sexual energy and are often steeped in a shroud of mystery, secrecy, tension, the unpredictable, a leap into the unknown, and an exhilarating, edgy sort of riskiness -- all of that might intensify one's willingness to throw caution to the wind, abandon normal conventions, and become open to the moment.

According to Oakes' the 'charismatic prophet' is someone who is accomplished in inducing such moments through, among other means, establishing rituals conducive to the generation of charismatic moments. Oakes believes that such rituals are one of the most creative accomplishments of a 'charismatic prophet'.

However, Oakes also indicates (page 148) there often is a dimension of the whole process that is beyond the capacity of the 'prophet/teacher/guide', the group, or a follower, to control. More specifically, no one knows, for sure, whether, on any given occasion, the 'spirit' (or whatever it is that is transpiring at a given instant) will flow and the gathering will be anointed with the presence of a charismatic moment.

Apparently, charismatic moments do not necessarily flow through the teacher to the other participants. 'Prophets/leaders/teachers' cannot always produce these moments on demand. Consequently, while 'prophets/teachers/guides' might, or might not be, necessary conditions for the advent of a 'charismatic moment', they are not always sufficient conditions for such phenomena.

When reading Oakes one often is puzzled because he sometimes alternates among a variety of expressions that are not necessarily reducible to a single phenomenon. Sometimes he talks about charismatic prophets -- and, indeed, the title of his book is *Prophetic Charisma* -- as if they are the source of, or channel for, charisma.

However, sometimes he talks about how charisma is a product of the way followers project their ultimate concerns onto a given 'prophet/leader/guide', and on still other occasions he talks about how charismatic prophets are very adept in creating rituals that can

lead to the experience of charismatic moments and, yet, whether, or not, the spirit moves on such occasion seems to depend on something beyond what the 'prophet/teacher/leader' brings to the table in the way of creative rituals.

Oakes states that: people who are narcissistic personalities are often perceived as individuals who project an image of unshakeable confidence and strength concerning their purpose, role, and mission in life. Oakes also describes such individuals as being perceived as courageous, even fearless, with respect to those who oppose her or him. Moreover, the capacity of many narcissists to exhibit an uncanny sensitivity to social and individual psychological dynamics lends them an aura of someone with supernatural powers. Finally, because narcissists have an inflated sense of their own self-importance, they also tend to be perceived as being positive and upbeat about life.

A narcissistic individual might appear strong and self-confident because she or he cannot admit the possibility that he or she might not be whom she or he takes himself or herself to be. Such an admission is an anathema to the narcissist.

A narcissistic personality might appear courageous and fearless because, in a very real sense, their psychic survival depends on being able to oppose anything that would cast doubts upon, or bring into question, or cast aspersions and ridicule upon the narcissist's beliefs about who she or he is and what role they play in the scheme of things. When opponents seek to put them in a corner, they often respond with the ferocity of someone fighting for survival -- a courage and fearlessness that can be camouflaged to appear as being in defense of truth and justice when it is really self-serving.

Oakes describes the charismatic prophet as someone who utilizes some of the strengths of his or her narcissistic condition to attract, influence, and manipulate seekers and followers. When people encounter someone who seems to be strong, self-confident, purposeful, committed, positive, courageous, fearless, and insightful, they might be induced to consider such individuals to be extraordinary personalities and quite different from most other individuals, and depending on how adept the narcissist is in camouflaging the true significance and meaning of such qualities (that is, as expressions of a pathological strategy for coping in life rather than any form of spiritual

accomplishment or realization), a narcissistic personality might, on the surface, seem like someone who possesses the 'pure charisma' that is believed to mark the 'anointed ones' of destiny or Divinity.

Oakes points out how the career choices of many people who go on to assume the role of a 'prophet/leader/guide' often have a connection to activities in which communication tends to play a central role. For example, on page 88, Oakes lists such careers as: entertainers, sales people, teachers, clergy, and counselors (especially in conjunction with alternative health) as having prominence in the backgrounds of many of the people in his research.

People who have the gift of gab, people who are adept in the arts of social influence, people who have experience with using language skills to shape the ideas, opinions, values, and desires of other people - all of these individuals are specialists in framing reality to serve their purposes ... which need not mean that all such individuals are pursuing malevolent or exploitive purposes, but, under the right circumstances, this could be the case. Narcissists who enjoy strong skills of communication, persuasion, influence and the framing of reality tend to use such skills in manipulative, controlling, and destructive ways, but if a narcissist can succeed in inducing people to believe that something other than what is actually going on is going on, then, this can be an extremely powerful means of altering one's sense of reality, identity, purpose, truth, meaning, right, and wrong.

Finally, if one adds to the foregoing set of qualities an element of what is referred to as love, the package can assume quite a powerful presence in the perception of a seeker. Only much later, if at all, will a seeker discover that such 'love' is really nothing more than a manipulative device devoid of all empathy and compassion for another and solely geared toward priming the pump of narcissistic supply that is the life blood of a narcissistic personality and that is sucked from other human beings like a vampire with an inexhaustible hunger for that which they do not have and that can only be provided by warm bodies and souls.

In the beginning, however, all of this is hidden from view. First, superficial impressions might dominate the perception of a seeker - to the benefit of the narcissist and to the detriment of the seeker.

Presumably, it is the foregoing package of perceived qualities that helps a narcissistic personality to appear, to some, as a charismatic figure and, thereby, enable a 'prophet/leader/guide' to arrange for 'charismatic moments' that induce vulnerability, trust, surrender, and even a sense of complete abandon in some seekers/followers. The creation of such moments is part of the repertoire of tricks and stratagems the narcissist has picked up over the years to help manage his or her world in a way that permits a continuation in the flow of narcissistic supply to come her or his way as followers -- caught up in the rapture, ecstasy, power, and release of such moments -- shower the 'prophet/leader/teacher' with adulation, reverence, gratitude, and love (i.e., provide narcissistic supply).

The seeker/follower interprets such moments as a validation of the idea that truth and spiritual transcendence are being channeled through the 'prophet/leader/teacher'. The 'prophet/teacher/guide' interprets such moments as a validation that he or she is who she or he believes himself/herself to be in the cosmic scheme of things and, therefore, that she or he has a right to the adulation and love that is being showered upon him/her.

Notwithstanding the foregoing considerations, one might still ask the question: What is the source of the charisma of a charismatic moment? Alternatively, what makes such moments charismatic?

If one defines charisma as the perceived embodiment of one's ultimate concerns, then, seemingly, the charisma of a 'charismatic moment' would appear to be connected with the character of the experience that arises during that period of time. However, just because an experience is intense, powerful, inexplicable, mysterious, ineffable, emotionally moving, and ecstatic, does this necessarily make the experience a manifestation of the embodiment of one's ultimate concerns?

LSD, nitrous oxide, Ecstasy, alcohol, sensory deprivation, marijuana, giving birth, falling in love, and holotropic breathing can all lead to experiences that bear many of the characteristics of so-called 'charismatic moments'. Many of the aforementioned, powerful, emotional qualities can be experienced when one looks up into the sky on a clear night sky away from the city lights, or when one sees a range of mountains, or watches ocean waves come crashing into shore, or

witnesses the power of nature in the form of a tornado, hurricane, lightning, volcanic eruption, or earthquake. The right musical, artistic, cinematic, literary settings or performances have the capacity to induce many of these same kinds of experiential qualities.

Charismatic moments can be manufactured or naturally occurring. These kinds of experience might, or might not, be about ultimate concerns, but, nonetheless, they have the capacity to move us in fundamental ways -- often in ways about which we might become uncertain or confused as to exactly why we might feel moved or affected in the way we are.

On several occasions, Oakes refers to the work of Charles Lindholm in relation to the phenomenon of charisma. According to Lindholm, the primary, but hidden, purpose of a charismatic group is not necessarily to help people to discover their essential spiritual identity or to realize ultimate spiritual concerns but, rather, to experience itself again and again as a certain kind of collective. Charismatic moments give expression to these kinds of experience.

In many ways, if the goal of a collection of people is to experience itself not just as a group but as a group that journeys through, or is opened up to, or is, to varying degrees, seeking to be immersed in intense, powerful, moving, primal, mysterious, emotional, joyous, ecstatic experiences, then, the phenomenon of charisma -- whether manufactured, illusory, delusional, or real -- becomes the *raison d'être* underlying the structure, dynamics, and activities of the people in this sort of group. As such, certain kinds of experience become ends in themselves, rather than a possible means for struggling toward a spiritual understanding, knowledge, and insight concerning truths and realities that might transcend those experiences.

In such a context, 'charismatic prophets' are those individuals who serve as facilitators for arranging, manufacturing, and moving people in the direction of experiencing (or believing they are experiencing) charismatic moments. If this sort of facilitator is a narcissistic personality, then, the idea of a charismatic moment becomes the bait that is used to lure people to help the 'prophet/leader/teacher' catch what is necessary for his or her own charismatic moments ... namely, to feed off the souls of the people who wander into the vampire's lair. If the aforementioned facilitator is not a narcissistic personality, then,

one has to carefully study the dynamics and structure of the group with which such a facilitator is affiliated in order to determine whether the group has any constructive, spiritual purpose other than as a venue for generating certain kinds of experiences.

People who troll the waters of life seeking charismatic moments need to understand that there are other beings who are also trolling the waters of life, and these latter beings are trolling such waters in search of people who are trolling the waters seeking charismatic moments. If one is only seeking certain kinds of experiences -- described as charismatic, trans-personal, mystical, or altered states of consciousness -- and if one is not interested in gaining knowledge, understanding, and insight in order to become a better person with respect to developing and bringing into harmonious balance such character qualities as: patience, kindness, compassion, honesty, tolerance, love, forgiveness, fairness, generosity, integrity, nobility, peacefulness, altruism, modesty, and moral courage, then, one is a very good candidate for winding up on a milk carton as a soul who has become lost or missing somewhere along the way.

Elsewhere in this book (e.g., see the chapter entitled: 'A Fate Worse Than Death'), considerable time was spent describing some of the phenomenological boundary dynamics entailed by spiritual abuse and why disengaging from spiritual abuse, even when one might be aware that spiritual abuse is going on, can be very difficult to do. In addition, something also has been said within this book about how powerfully addictive certain kinds of operant conditioning learning schedules are that exhibit what are referred to as intermittent, variable -interval reinforcement properties.

Charismatic moments naturally lend themselves to becoming part of an intermittent, variable-interval reinforcement learning schedule in which the learned behaviors connected to seeking additional exposures to such moments can be very hard to extinguish once this sort of seeking behavior is set in motion. Once a person has had the experience of some sort of charismatic moment, this moment can be the point out of which emotional and psychological addiction arises.

In a sense, a narcissistic personality who is playing the role of a 'charismatic prophet' is pushing the charismatic moment like someone would push cocaine, heroin, or Ecstasy. The narcissistic personality is

someone who, himself or herself, is addicted to a different drug -- namely, the narcissistic supply of adulation and surrender coming from others -- and the narcissistic personality uses this addiction to justify her or his efforts to make charismatic junkies of other human beings in order to preserve his or her own access to a constant source of narcissistic supply.

Irrespective of what one might believe about the existence of God or transcendent, spiritual truths, or the realization of essential identity and potential, a spiritual narcissist knows there are millions of people who believe in such things ... each in their own way. This is the belief, this is the holy longing, to which a narcissistic, charismatic 'prophet/leader/guide' seeks to appeal and, subsequently, exploit or manipulate in the service of his or her pathology.

There is one other entry point to the issue of charisma that Oakes explores in an attempt to provide understanding with respect to the phenomenon of charisma. This additional avenue involves the work of Max Weber.

Although Oakes introduces his readers to the ideas of Weber fairly early in his book on *Prophetic Charisma*, I have left these ideas for the last part of the present essay. I have done this for a number of reasons but, perhaps, the primary one being that what Weber has to say dovetails with the way in which I wish to finish the discussion.

Oakes notes that Weber is the individual who is responsible for many of our modern ideas about the phenomenon of charisma. Weber describes charisma as a particular dimension of the personality of certain, special people that engenders in others a sense of feeling that the latter are in the presence of someone who is extraordinary, or someone who possesses supernatural capabilities, or someone who has some sort of close proximity and elevated status in relation to Divinity.

Weber indicates that charisma might be felt and manifested in non - religious contexts, but, nonetheless, he maintains that charisma is largely a religious or spiritual phenomenon. Furthermore, even though Weber was an advocate for seeking and providing social (rather than, say, psychological) explanations concerning the causes of a variety of individual and cultural dynamics, he also was of the opinion that ideas were capable of altering society and individuals in ways that could not

be reduced down to purely social factors ... this was especially the case in conjunction with religious ideas.

According to Weber, the phenomenon of charisma gives expression to a continuum of possibilities. These range from: something that Weber referred to as 'pure charisma', to: relatively mechanical and derivative elements of charisma.

Weber considered instances of 'pure charisma' to be very rare and might only have been present during the very early, originating/creative stages in the formation of a group or movement when people first began to gather around a charismatic leader/personality. For Weber, the more routine manifestations of charisma usually arose after the founding force had passed away and/or when the original charisma had become diluted as that force is dispersed among secondary leaders and communities rather than being focused in one individual or the original group of followers.

On the one hand, Weber seems to believe that charisma was an expression of a fundamental, elemental, primitive life force. Yet, at the same time, Weber also appears to indicate that the source of charisma's capacity to influence resides as much in the power that followers cede to a leader as it does in the qualities of charisma independent of such followers.

While it might be possible for a group of people to create the illusion of charisma being present in a given person when such is not the case (e.g., the manufactured charisma of celebrity status), nevertheless, presumably, there is a certain 'something' present in a charismatic individual that has the capacity to attract people and induce them to become inclined to place trust in that individual or to surrender, to varying degrees, to that individual. So, without wishing to dismiss the idea of manufactured charisma, Weber would seem to have something more in mind when he talks about 'pure charisma' -- 'something' that exists prior to, and independently of, group dynamics.

Somewhere between pure charisma and routine charisma lay several possibilities that Weber refers to, respectively, as 'magical' and 'prophetic' charisma. Magical charisma is said to be characteristic of shamans who use charisma to, on the one hand, introduce people to the realm of ecstasy, while, on the other hand, helping to maintain the

basic structure of simple or primitive groups, communities, or society. As such, magical charisma is largely a conservative, stabilizing force.

Prophetic charisma is described by Weber as characteristic of more complex communities or societies. Such charisma supposedly is given expression through individuals who announce the sort of mission (often religious, but it could be political in nature) which is intended to lead to social change, if not revolution. Through a charismatic force of personality, and/or through the performance of miracles and wondrous deeds, and/or through a capacity to induce intense, passionate, and ecstatic experiences in others, a person who possesses prophetic charisma is capable of affecting other human beings in ways that run very deep emotionally, psychologically, physically, spiritually, and socially.

According to Weber, some charismatic personalities use charisma to assist others to become explorers of ecstatic mysteries. Some charismatic personalities, referred to as 'ethical prophets', use charisma as an ethical instrument intended to lead people in the direction of developing a life devoid of aggression, hatred, anger, fear, and violence by inducing states of euphoria, enlightenment, as well as what would now be termed 'born again' conversion experiences. Still other charismatic personalities seek to arouse, shape, and channel the passions of people to serve, whether for good or evil, various political, financial, and social ends.

Weber believes that the experience of intense, euphoric, passionate, ecstatic states comes about when charisma is used to put an individual in touch with his or her own inner psychological/emotional primeval, instinctual depths that enables an individual to break away from, or become released from, the inhibiting forces of convention and repression that normally hold people in place within a given society. As such, Weber maintains that charisma is a life force that is inherently antagonistic to the forces of inhibition, constraint, convention, and conservation that normally modulate the dynamics of social interaction. For Weber, the natural inclination of charisma is to seek to overthrow, transform, or cast off all external values of conventional society as it initiates individuals into that which is located beyond the horizons of traditional social structure ...

something so 'other' that it is viewed as belonging to a divine realm that transcends normal society and conventions.

Weber considered charisma to be too irrational, unpredictable, unwieldy -- and, therefore, dangerous -- to be tamed and controlled in any responsible manner. Although he believed that charisma could serve as the creative spark that ignited the fires of social progress, he also was of the opinion that limiting the influence of charisma -- at least in any 'pure' sense -- to the early period of originating or creating would be the prudent thing to do.

The Qur'an speaks about 'alastu bi rabikum' -- the time when, prior to being brought into this plane of existence, God gathered the spirits together and asked them: "Am I not your Lord?" Anything that resonates with that experience has a quality of *jazb* about it -- a euphoric, ecstatic condition as one is drawn back toward that moment, or as one is drawn toward a state which resonates, in some way, with that original, primal time of an aware, felt, intimate, loving, direct connection with the Divine presence.

Authentic Prophets do not call us back to some biological state of the womb in which one, allegedly, felt one with the universe. Authentic Prophets do not call us back to some mythical state in which all boundaries between the mother and the self were dissolved so that the mother and the individual were felt to be as one, nor do authentic Prophets call us back to a condition of primary narcissism when, supposedly, we feel ourselves to be omnipotent, sacred, god-like creatures around which the universe rotates and in whose service the universe has come into existence, nor do authentic Prophets call us back to some instinctual, primeval, emotional depths that is seeking to release from the conventions and values of society.

Authentic Prophets call us to seek the truth concerning the purpose, meaning, possibilities, dangers, and nature of existence. Authentic Prophets call us to inquire into our essential identities and potentials. Prophets call us to honor the rights of all aspects of creation, as well as to learn how to engage life through justice, integrity, gratitude, love, sincerity, courage, compassion, sacrifice, kindness, honesty, patience, and humility. Authentic Prophets call us to discover the true nature of our relationship with all of Being and to go in search of the essential meaning of worship.

Authentic Prophets are the individuals chosen by Divinity who are provided with a charismatic authoritativeness (said by traditions to consist of forty-seven different parts, one of which concerns the ability to provide correct interpretation of dreams) as a Divine gift to enable such individuals to carry out their mission, as best their individual capacity and God permit, to call people back on a journey of return to their spiritual origins, nature, identity, purpose, potential, and destiny. In such individuals, charisma is the felt manifestation of the presence of this Divine gift. In such individuals, charisma is a reflection of the Realities being expressed through 'alastu bi rabikum': "Am I not your Lord?" because no one else other than God has provided the gift of charisma that marks this point of resonance with the Divine Presence.

If one accepts the principle that there is no reality but Divinity, then, the passion play of Divine Names and Attributes forms the woof, warp, and fabric through which the tapestry of creation and every modality of manifestation is woven. Everything to which we are attracted bears, to one degree or another, the imprint of the underlying Reality.

There are many kinds of charisma. There is a form of charisma associated with every manner in which Divinity discloses something of the Divine Presence. Natural wonders the mysterious, incredible athletic performances, great musical or artistic talent, literary masterpieces, extraordinary heroic deeds, works of great intelligence or profound inventiveness and creativity ... all of these attract according to the degree that they give manifestation to the charisma inherent in the Divine Presence that is peeking through the veils of Creation.

Power carries an aura of charisma because none other than God's will permits, for Divine purposes, someone to ascend the throne of power. Even Satanic power and capabilities might have a quality of charisma to them because such powers and capabilities are exercised only by God's leave and to serve, in a way that God understands but Satanic forces do not, Divine purposes.

The natural inclination inherent in the pure charisma that is given expression through the lives of authentic Prophets is constructive, not destructive. It is benevolent, not malevolent ... it is peaceful, not aggressive and hostile ... it is committed to the distribution of fairness,

justice, and the honoring of the rights of all facets of Creation, rather than given to the generation of upheaval, discord, and rebellion ... it is oriented toward the acquisition of essential knowledge, wisdom and understanding through which the constructive potential of life, both individually and collectively, can be released and set free, rather than being oriented toward primitive forms of physical and emotional release associated with the individual desires, whims, and wishes of the nafs or carnal soul.

If God wishes, authentic Prophetic charisma offers spiritual nourishment to both individuals and communities. God willing, people become strengthened and constructively energized through the presence of authentic Prophetic charisma.

The desire to be in the presence of authentic Prophetic charisma is part of the holy longing that seeks to feel re-connected, in an intimate way, with the Divine ... to be returned to the sacredness of the occasion of 'alastu bi rabikum'. Authentic Prophetic charisma is the catalyst provided by Divinity that is intended to help facilitate such a connection and return.

It is unfortunate that Oakes has used the term Prophetic Charisma to refer primarily to pathological attempts to counterfeit authentic expressions of Prophetic Charisma. This has happened, I believe, because the sample that Oakes used to develop his notion of a prophet was problematic and skewed in certain, pathological directions.

The 'package' of qualities that is manifested through narcissistic personalities attempting to convince others (and themselves) that they possess the charisma of an authentic Prophet is but a counterfeit of the qualities that are in evidence in an authentic Prophet. This package is an illusory/delusional framework that is intended to create an impression that qualities like: confidence, purpose, strength, courage, fearlessness, meaning, identity, love, social insight, creativity, powers of communication, persuasiveness, transformation, and transcendent experiences of spiritual ecstasy are present in an authentic, sacred way when such is not the case.

Quite frequently, when people encounter spiritual abuse, this experience tends to destroy a person's faith and capacity to trust. Once one has felt betrayed in an essential way -- which is at the heart of all

forms of spiritual abuse -- regaining a sincere desire to continue on one's quest to realize one's holy longing is very difficult to do.

A mistake that many people make who write about spiritual abuse is to approach the issue from an excessively rational, philosophical, and psychological perspective ... one that seems to tend to preclude the possibility that the phenomenon of Prophetic charisma as an expression of the Presence of Divinity in our midst -- calling us back to a journey of return to our spiritual potential and essential identities -- is not a myth, fantasy, delusion, or mere belief.

Although I believe that Oakes' work on Prophetic charisma contains much that is interesting, insightful, and useful, I also feel that, ultimately, his study fails to place the phenomenon of charisma in a proper spiritual perspective. One of the reasons why narcissistic personalities can fool people -- and some narcissists are much better at this than are others -- is because individuals in the throes of narcissistic personality disorder are able to turn people's natural vulnerabilities concerning issues of holy longing against the latter.

In other words, even when someone seeks the sacred out of a sincere desire for the truth and not out of the 'extraordinary needs' of, say, unresolved, developmental issues involving the alleged infantile stage of primary narcissism, nonetheless, such an individual doesn't really know precisely for what they are longing. There are many kinds of experiences and circumstances that can resonate with the condition of 'alastu bi rabikum (Am I not your Lord)? in a misleading manner.

A narcissistic personality who is trying to pass herself or himself off as a charismatic prophet/leader/teacher knows that seekers don't know -- that is why the latter group of people are seeking answers from others about how to satisfy their sense of holy longing ... because they don't know how to do this on their own. Even in the case of sincere people, what the latter sort of individuals don't know constitutes a source of vulnerability through which such sincerity can be misinformed, led astray, corrupted, or entangled in a variety of ways.

Narcissistic personalities are often masters at re-framing experience to make it appear to be other than what it is. Satan is the prototypic role model for such a narcissistic personality disorder.

At one point, Oakes mentions that in *The Heart of Darkness* Joseph Conrad, through the character Marlow, suggests that a “fool is always safe”. In other words, an individual who doesn't care about the holy longing within, who is not sincere about matters of essential importance to existence, will rarely be fooled by those who -- through manufactured or natural charisma of one kind or another -- seek to use the attractiveness of such charisma to mislead people into supposing that something essentially substantial is being offered when such is not the case. Fools are always safe from being misled in this manner because they have no interest in, and feel no attraction for, things that actually matter.

Intelligent, sincere, decent people are vulnerable to the presence of counterfeit spiritual charisma. Mistakes of judgment concerning whether, or not, some individual is capable of helping one fulfill one's holy longing are relatively easy to make, and, unfortunately, once made, not all of these mistakes admit to easy solutions.

Short of God's Grace, there is no fool-proof way to identify or avoid narcissistic personalities who seek to prey on holy longing. However, one point that might well be worth reflecting on in this respect is the following -- any use of charisma that invites one to abandon basic principles of decency, kindness, honesty, integrity, compassion, generosity, fairness, modesty, humility, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, peacefulness, and love toward one's family or other human beings, irrespective of their beliefs, should be considered to be a tell-tale sign that spiritual abuse is being perpetrated. This is so no matter how euphoric and ecstatic various 'charismatic moments' might be that are associated with such a use of charisma.

There is a fundamental problem with any use of charisma that does not assist one to become a better human being, with a more fully developed and realized moral character that is encouraged to be actively practiced and not just thought about as an abstract ideal. However, sometimes -- depending on the forces at play in a given set of circumstances and depending on the skills of the narcissistic perpetrator who is busy weaving a tapestry of illusions, delusions, and manipulative deceit -- discovering that such a problem exists can be a long difficult process, and, furthermore, disengaging from such circumstances once this problem has been discovered is not an easy,

painless, straightforward thing to accomplish. Indeed, sometimes, long after one has left a narcissistic personality who has been posing as a charismatic prophet, remnants of the toxicity continue to flow through one's system ... not because one wishes this to be the case but because this is often part and parcel of the destructive, insidious nature of the ramifications ensuing from spiritual abuse.

Chapter 52: Terrorism, Dissociation, and Spiritual Abuse

You might be asking yourself the question of why you should read something that sounds as academic and 'heavy/intense' as the foregoing title might seem to suggest.

The shorter answer to such a question is that ignorance is a weapon that is wielded by many sides of the terrorist issue in order to hide the truth about various facets of the phenomenology and dynamics of terrorism and spiritual abuse.

People who are ignorant are that much more vulnerable to being manipulated and exploited by those who use terrorism (irrespective of their 'side' on the matter) to promote tools of violence as the way to solve problems rather than promoting tools of faith as the best way to engage most of the difficulties facing human beings. Ignorance is not bliss but is, in fact, one of the major causes of the perpetuation of the terrorist phenomenon, and those who perpetuate terrorism include not just terrorist groups but those who believe they can conduct a successful war on terrorism, along with those who blindly support either side.

All three of the foregoing elements (terrorists, those who conduct violent, oppressive campaigns against terrorists, and those who blindly follow either of these approaches) in the terrorist equation are steeped in ignorance of one kind or another. The following article seeks to critically examine some of the phenomenology and dynamics surrounding terrorist activity in the hope that insight rather than ignorance might inform a person's understanding of this matter.

In a previous chapter ('Fate Worse Than Death') some of the dynamics of dissociation were explored in connection with the issue of spiritual abuse. In general, dissociation has to do with a state in which memory, consciousness, perception, identity, and understanding tend to become unconnected with one another.

Usually, one of the prominent causal features of dissociation is the presence of some form of trauma, intense stress, torture, abuse, and/or threat that pushes an individual in the direction of a phenomenological condition characterized by a combination of one, or more, of the following possibilities: despair, fear, terror, anxiety, alienation, de-realization (reality loses its sense of realness),

vulnerability, loss of identity, doubt, insecurity, hopelessness, humiliation, de-personalization (loss of one's sense of being a person), directionlessness (absence of any plan or ideas about how to proceed in life), purposelessness, depression, a sense of rootlessness (not feeling at home anywhere), demoralization, meaninglessness, lack of motivation, loss of control, and/or a sense of chaos and unpredictability concerning events.

The experience of dissociation might be acute (that is, transitory in nature) or chronic. Moreover, the intensity of felt dissociation might vary over a continuum of possibilities -- ranging from that which is relatively low grade (although sufficiently strong to disrupt the way in which memory, identity, consciousness, perception, and understanding are normally connected to provide a relatively functionally coherent and consistent view of the world), to that which is severe and completely debilitating.

All forms of dissociation are experienced as being painful in essential ways -- although some forms might be felt to be more painful and more essential than others. Furthermore, due to factors such as personality, individual history, culture, and so on, different people might be vulnerable, to varying degrees, to the manner in which circumstances are experienced as dissociative in such essential ways

One of the primary reasons for the experience of psychic and somatic pain in conjunction with dissociation is that one's essential sense of being a human is under attack. In other words, we all tend to think of being human in terms of the awareness, meaning, purpose, identity, choice, hopefulness, personhood, understanding, and sense of belonging (family, community, and friends) which normally are woven into our perception of reality. However, if the force of circumstances, or one's perception of the force of those circumstances, undermines one's existential sense of what it is to be a human being, then, one begins to enter into a realm where our ideas about ourselves, others, and reality begin to dissolve. As a result, memory, perception, identity, motivation, and awareness begin to become dysfunctional, and whatever mode of glue (spiritual, emotional, conceptual, social, personal, philosophical, mythological) which was holding things together begins to dissolve and, as a result, one loses one's sense of integration and rootedness.

Clinically speaking, DSM-IV ('Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition') identifies five categories that are intended to encompass the sorts of dysfunctional responses that might arise in conjunction with the experience of dissociation. These are: (1) dissociative amnesia (a form of memory lapse that affects one's ability to remember important details about one's personal history); (2) dissociative fugue (often characterized by the assumption of a new identity along with a lapse of memory concerning one's previous identity); (3) dissociative identity disorder (formerly known as multiple personality disorder and a condition in which two or more distinct identities are believed to have arisen within one and the same person); (4) depersonalization disorder (an intense, recurrent sense of having become detached from, and no longer identifying with, one's mental and bodily processes as one's own); (5) dissociative disorder not otherwise specified (a grab bag classification that seeks to cover all other instances in which symptoms of dissociation exist but that do not appear to be subsumable under any of the previous four categories).

Dissociative disorders all constitute responses to the presence of felt dissociation. In one sense, all such responses are dysfunctional because they require one to lose parts of oneself in the form of lost memory, identity, awareness, perception, understanding and integration as the price that is to be paid for being able to function at all. On the other hand, considered from another perspective, however dysfunctional dissociative disorders might be relative to one's normal way of doing things prior to the advent of felt dissociation, nonetheless, such disorders all constitute an attempt by the individual to forge a way of responding to, and dealing with, the intense pain of the dissociative state.

Given the foregoing, I believe that terrorist activities constitute a dysfunctional response to the felt presence of dissociation (in effect, I am proposing a new category for the dissociative conditions listed in DSM-IV). Furthermore, above and beyond the parts of an individual that, to varying degrees, are lost and have become separated from one another (such as identity, awareness, perception, memory, and understanding) through the choice of a dysfunctional response to the felt presence of dissociation, something else has become lost in the

dysfunctional responses that are expressed through terrorism -- namely, a terrorist is someone who has lost faith in the non-violent tools that God has provided through revelation and the spiritual teachings of the prophets and saints concerning the nature of Divine guidance.

Dissociation does not just mark an individual's separation from memory, perception, identity, and awareness. The experience of dissociation might also induce one to lose contact with values, morality, faith, and ethical considerations.

One does not have to believe in God in order to appreciate the fact that if another person does believe in God, and, then, suddenly, due to the trauma of circumstances, becomes spiritually disoriented, the loss of contact with faith that might be entailed by such disorientation is likely to have a profound impact on the way in which that individual seeks to find ways of warding off the felt presence of dissociation. One does not have to believe in God to understand that if a person lives in a community or culture where religious themes play significant roles in the shaping of perception, identity, memory, and awareness, then, if such an individual either loses contact with faith, or, perhaps, never had any faith to begin with, that person is likely to couch one's coping strategy in religious terms even if the underlying motivations are quite remote from any sort of authentic spirituality. And, if one does believe in God, then, the foregoing considerations are likely to be appreciated in an even more intimate way.

Similarly, just because someone couches his or her rhetoric in terms such as 'democracy', 'freedom', 'political duty', 'rights', and 'justice', this does not necessarily mean that such a person actually sincerely believes in democracy, freedom, and rights. Different cultures give expression to philosophical, political, mythological, social, and spiritual themes that some people seek to parasitically exploit to serve an agenda other than the purposes and principles actually valued by a given culture while, simultaneously, having the appearance (but only the appearance) of being appropriate uses of those principles and purposes.

Just as the sort of dissociative disorders noted above in conjunction with DSM-IV all can be seen as attempts to fend off the experience of dissociation, however dysfunctional such attempts might

be, so, too, becoming a terrorist is a dysfunctional attempt to fend off the painful experience of dissociation. Just as the five categories of dissociative disorders noted above all give expression to dysfunctional attempts to establish a new way of trying to integrate being in the face of felt dissociation (a form of integration that can never be functional because essential parts of being have been lost or separated off from that process of integration), so, too, terrorist activities are an attempt to fashion a new manner of integrating experience -- and, again, an attempt that can never be successful because essential parts of being have been lost or separated off from such attempts at integration.

None of the foregoing is meant to excuse the acts of a terrorist. Nor, is any of the foregoing (nor what follows) intended to suggest that criminal penalties might not be appropriate responses to terrorist activities -- after all, there are many people who might suffer from a pathological condition, and the existence of such a condition does not render the acts of those people less culpable although these sorts of condition might, or might not, be mitigating factors in the assigning of punishment for such crimes. However, trying to understand the dynamics of terrorist activity should be considered to be an important step toward learning how to treat such a condition in a way that is not, itself, predicated on, and steeped in, the dynamics of dissociation and, therefore, equally dysfunctional.

A terrorist is someone who during her or his encounter with dissociative states has lost contact with important facets of perception, memory, understanding, identity, awareness, and, as well, moral or spiritual values. Furthermore, in the process of responding to the felt presence of dissociation, such an individual has made, or has been induced to make, dysfunctional choices concerning the issue of how to fashion a new sense of integrated being as a way of dealing with, and fending off, the felt presence of dissociation.

As is the case with other individuals who choose dysfunctional, maladaptive coping strategies for dealing with the felt presence of dissociation, a terrorist is someone who has been pushed or pulled into a condition of dissociation through traumatic, stressful, and/or abusive events. When individuals, families, communities, governments, corporations, and/or nations pursue political, economic, social, religious, and militant policies that, intentionally or

unintentionally, push people into dissociative states, then, the former agencies help sow the seeds for terrorism.

Alternatively, the foregoing comments concerning the issue of dissociation helps to explain -- whether one is dealing with terrorist groups or recruitment into the military -- why the best candidates for induction are people who are in their late teens and early twenties. This is so because, oftentimes, the lives of such people are in transition with respect to issues of purpose, meaning, identity, career, family, alienation, and values.

As a result, such individuals are most at risk when it comes to being vulnerable to being induced to accept a 'solution' for their sense of dissociation that is wedded to the idea of a willingness to commit violence against anything that is painted as a potential means of pulling one (or one's society) back into dissociation.

One can examine almost any set of circumstances existing in the world today, or in the past, where terrorist acts are perpetrated, and one, invariably, will find the forces of dissociation playing a very fundamental role in the etiology of the disorder known as terrorism. Whether one is considering so-called Christians who murder doctors involved with abortion clinics, or: Ian Paisley's Irish Protestant movement, the Aryan Nation, the Irish Republican Army, suicide bombers of llamas, the Chechnyan Liberation movement, the Japanese group Aum Shinrikyo, Bin Laden's al-Qaeda, the Khalistan movement of militant Sikhs, the independence struggle in Kashmir, the violence of people such as Dr. Baruch Goldstein, Yigal Amir, and the Israeli settlers movement, the Rwandese Patriotic Front-led murderous rampage against Tutsi and moderate Hutu in Rwanda, the genocide in Darfur, Sudan, the Sendero Luminoso (The Shining Path) of Peru, the Contras in Nicaragua, the Balkan wars, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka -- in all of the foregoing sets of circumstance (and many more that could be cited), a variety of historical, cultural, political, religious, ethnic, racial, philosophical, and/or economic forces converged together that pushed or pulled people (both collectively and individually) into dissociative states that threatened them, or were perceived to threaten them, with a loss of control, purpose, meaning, identity, and stature in their lives, and, as well, induced a sense of alienation, anxiety, stress, fear, doubt, chaos, unpredictability, helplessness, vulnerability, insecurity, despair,

humiliation, hopelessness, and/or de-realization with respect to events going on around them.

For example, consider the 1967 Israeli defeat of the Arabs. Many Arabs referred to this defeat as “al-nakba” – the catastrophe. Al-nakba alludes to something beyond just a military reversal. Indeed, the defeat was, in a sense, a symptomatic expression of something pathological in many facets of Arab affairs at the time -- corruption, tyrannical governments, dysfunctional economies, modernism gone awry, incompetent politicians, failed socialist experiments, chaotic violence, fourth-rate armies, borrowed technologies, as well as fawning, subservient relationships with the major powers. This notion of al-nakba -- the catastrophe -- is an indication of the forces (intellectual, cultural, political, social, technological, international, spiritual, and historical) that were pulling many Arabs into the currents of dissociation.

The issue was not just a matter of ethnic, national, historical, racial, linguistic, military, and cultural dissolution, but spiritual dissolution as well ... after all, if theirs was the true religion, then, how could God permit such things to happen. This led to a lot of unanswered questions about identity, purpose, meaning, truth, character, government, society, and spirituality that, in turn, pulled and pushed many Arabs further into the grip of dissociative states ... states that rendered some of these individuals vulnerable to the spiritual abuse of those who were inclined to acts of violence and used the idea of a religiously-coated terrorism as the solution for reversing al-nakba and extricating themselves from the psychic and soul-wrenching pain of their dissociative condition.

Terrorism is the only dissociative disorder that seeks to push others into the same state of dissociation as the one that underlies that dysfunctional response. The purpose of terrorism is to seek, whether directly or indirectly, to induce the lives of others to become: chaotic, de-personalized, de-realized, alienated, fear-laden, stressful, anxious, unpredictable, insecure, meaningless, hopeless, vulnerable, purposeless, lacking in direction, depressed, despairing, filled with humiliation, and demoralized.

On the one hand, the purpose of terrorism is to maximize the collateral damage of dissociation in others -- the ones who the

terrorist perceives have been responsible, directly or indirectly, for the presence of dissociation in his or her own lives. On the other hand, the purpose of terrorism is to seek to induce those who are perceived to be the cause of dissociation in the life of the terrorist to cease and desist with respect to those activities that are believed to have led to the presence of dissociation in the life of the terrorist.

Generally speaking, although there are exceptions to this (e.g., Billy Milligan -- if one considers him a true case of dissociative identity disorder), those who suffer from the sort of dissociative disorders listed in DSM-IV do not harm others. The dysfunctional, maladaptive coping strategies that arise out of the dissociative conditions underlying those strategies are primarily geared to help the individual cope with his, or her, own internal sense of dissociation in terms that are self-directed rather than other-directed.

In the case of terrorism, however, one of the primary driving forces being expressed through the dysfunctional, maladaptive coping strategies of a terrorist dissociative disorder is to do violence (emotional, psychological, social, physical, economic, and/or spiritual) to others. The terrorist believes that the cause of his or her felt sense of dissociation has a remedy that revolves around an external locus of control, whereas most dissociative disorders involve remedies that revolve around an internal adjustment (involving memory, awareness, perception, and/or identity) to the felt presence of dissociation.

The terrorist generates, or is induced to generate, delusions (belief systems that tend to be false and detached from actual conditions) concerning the role of the 'other' in the etiology of the felt presence of dissociation. These delusional states are possible because of a loss of contact with the sort of integrated elements of memory, perception, identity, and awareness that are necessary for performing a reality check -- a loss of contact that has been brought on by the presence of dissociative elements in the life of the terrorist.

The presence of felt dissociation does not automatically lead to a dissociative disorder. Furthermore, as indicated previously, although all dissociative disorders constitute dysfunctional, maladaptive coping strategies, terrorism is only one possible response to the felt presence of dissociation.

One of the factors that determines whether, or not, the presence of felt dissociation will lead to a dissociative disorder of the terrorist variety revolves around the issue of faith. More specifically, although the rhetoric of terrorism is often imbued with themes of God, Divine justice/judgment, religious truths, faith, and the like, one of the delusions from which a terrorist suffers is the belief that he or she is still in functional contact with tools of faith or morality.

Despite the religious rhetoric of terrorists, violence is not a tool of faith or morality. In fact, with very limited exceptions, the presence of violence is, usually, a symptom of an absence of faith or morality -- and this is as true for nations that collectively perpetrate violence and terrorism in the name of some delusional theory concerning God, democracy, freedom, and justice as it is for individuals who perpetrate violence in the name of some personal, delusional form of justification.

To be sure, certain acts of violence might be legitimately reconcilable with a spiritual or moral perspective within some limited contexts (at the same time this is not meant to dismiss the possibility of choosing to be non-violent, even at the cost of one's life or the life of one's loved ones, can also be a moral, faith-based response to the same set of circumstances). These contexts of, potentially, justifiable violence are far more limited and constrained than some people might suppose, and such contexts usually involve repelling -- within boundaries that should not be transgressed -- direct, unavoidable, unprovoked or unjustified acts of physical aggression against one's person, one's family, or one's local community.

Notwithstanding the foregoing sorts of special, limited circumstances (and, perhaps, not even then, as necessary as such acts might be), violence toward others cannot be considered to be a tool of faith or morality. Indeed, tools of faith such as: patience, kindness, forgiveness, tolerance, love, compassion, charitableness, humility, nobility, integrity, objectivity, balance, hope, fairness, and honesty form an integral part of Divine guidance across all spiritual traditions due to, among other things, the capacity of such qualities to assist a person to find alternative solutions to problems that are not violent in nature. As such, tools of faith and morality are the direct antithesis of tools of violence as ways of seeking to: resolve conflict, worship

Divinity, submit to Divine guidance, or treat others with righteousness and equitability.

In many instances, the delusion that violence toward others is a way of demonstrating one's faith in, or love of, or commitment to, God has been induced through a process of spiritual abuse that is perpetrated by so-called 'leaders' who wish to manipulate, deceive, and exploit people -- people who are vulnerable due to an on-going condition of dissociation -- to serve the non-spiritual ends of the 'leaders'. Such 'leaders' teach a delusional approach to life rather than an approach that is rooted in the aforementioned tools of faith, but, the delusional 'solution' that is taught constitutes a much easier and simpler -- albeit spiritually and morally reprehensible -- way of doing things.

Acquiring tools of faith is very difficult work ... often requiring a lifetime of struggle. Acquiring tools of violence is relatively effortless, often taking not more than a few hours, days, or weeks of one's time.

Acting in accordance with tools of faith requires considerable thought, reflection, focus, insight, prayer, meditation, and wisdom concerning all sides of a problem. Acting in concert with tools of violence often requires little thought except that which is given to how to perpetrate the act.

One of the primary obstacles to performing terrorist acts is the presence of faith. One of the primary techniques of spiritual charlatans (whether they call themselves shaykhs, ministers, imams, teachers, theologians, government leaders, muftis, preachers, rabbis, gurus, mujtahids, or the like) who are involved in terrorism and wish to entangle others in their violent delusions is to undermine, corrupt, eliminate, distort, or mislead whatever faith exists in a candidate for terrorism ... a candidate being defined as someone whose condition of dissociation makes them vulnerable to the development of dysfunctional, maladaptive coping strategies concerning the handling of such felt dissociation.

Perhaps the best way of illustrating the connection between spiritual abuse and terrorism is to take an in-depth look at the delusional systems that are created by those who wish to induce others to commit acts of terrorism. Although the following discussion focuses on the issue of jihad, the underlying principles and ideas are

applicable to virtually any context in which one person ('leader'), institution, group, agency, or government seeks to induce others to commit acts of violence on his/its behalf.

The delusional dimension of the process through which a susceptible individual (e.g., drawn from among people who have been pushed toward dissociation as outlined earlier) buys into, or becomes shaped by, a delusional system (such as terrorism, or some other relationship of undue influence -- as in relation to so-called 'mystical' charlatans) is an extremely important element in bridging the transformation from non-terrorist to terrorist activities. Such delusional systems give expression to three main features that are very enticing to certain people in a state of dissociation: (1) delusional systems help an individual to escape the pain of dissociation by replacing a deep sense of: alienation, fear, stress, feeling scattered, doubt, malaise, anxiety, depression, identity diffusion, and the like, with a sense of purpose, meaning, direction, identity, coherency, direction, focus, motivation, and belonging; (2) delusional systems offer a coping strategy -- maladaptive though it might be -- for resisting the pull of dissociative states that, like vultures waiting for something to die, exist at the horizons of one's life due to prevailing circumstances; (3) delusional systems provide a rationalized system of values that lowers the threshold with respect to a person's willingness to commit violence against those who -- according to the delusional system being touted -- are perceived, rightly or wrongly, as having a major role to play in helping to bring about one's previous condition of dissociation.

Anyone who believes that terrorists are, for the most part, inherently sociopathic monsters -- that is, they are born, not made -- completely misunderstands the phenomenon of terrorism. To be sure, there are certain individuals who gravitate to terrorist activities because of the presence of some form of mental pathology (such as anti-social personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, and so on), but these individuals often become "leaders" within terrorist movements, and, consequently, such individuals tend to induce others to sacrifice their lives in the commission of violence rather than sacrificing their own lives.

The foot-soldiers of terrorism tend to be individuals who are “rescued” from a dissociative condition. There are “reasons” -- maladaptive though those ‘reasons’ might be -- for allowing oneself to come under the influence of a delusional terrorist paradigm concerning the ills of the world and how to ‘heal’ those maladies.

Individuals from financially and socially well-to-do backgrounds, who are well-educated, are as vulnerable to being pulled or pushed into dissociative states as people from a background of poverty who live amidst the bottom strata of society and are poorly educated. The determining factor is not socio-economic but whether, or not, an individual is grappling with the psychic dogs of dissociation, and, thereby, is vulnerable to the enticements of the sort of delusional systems that appear to offer a way to free himself or herself from the painful, debilitating grip of dissociation.

One should try to keep the foregoing considerations in mind when reading the following discussion about jihad. Jihad -- when construed in the sense of indiscriminate violence -- gives expression to a delusional paradigm that encompasses a variety of pay-offs for susceptible individuals. Some of these payoffs concern myths about the afterlife. Some of these payoffs involve the money that might be paid to one’s relatives when one sacrifices one’s life for ‘the cause’. Some of these payoffs might have to do with the adulation and respect that one believes will accrue to oneself when one has sacrificed one’s life.

First and foremost, however, one of the major payoffs of such a delusional system is the way in which individuals in a dissociative condition are provided with a way out of that condition, not fully understanding (again, as a result of the influence of the delusional paradigm in which they are becoming entangled) that there is a huge price to be paid that dwarfs whatever payoffs might come their way. That price is the loss of their soul and any remnants of authentic faith that they might have had prior to becoming entangled in terrorist activities ... a loss that is due to a reliance on the tools of violence to solve problems rather than the tools of faith.

A considerable amount of time is spent in the following pages examining some of the arguments that extremist, fundamentalist jihadists use to try to justify violence, as well as justify their selection

of targets against which such violence is to be directed. By deconstructing the delusional character of the paradigm of violence, one is in a better position to develop programs and policies that are based on actual insight into some of the dynamics of the terrorist perspective rather than based on political theologies concerning democracy, capitalism, and freedom that, unfortunately, all too frequently are rooted in the very same kind of delusional phenomenology as the terrorists against which those theologies are aimed.

It is a very seductive argument -- whether this is propagated by would-be terrorists or by those who regulate the activities of military units -- to claim that acts of violence are warranted by goals of 'truth', 'justice', salvation, and 'freedom'. It is a very powerful argument -- whether this is put forth by would-be terrorists or by those who regulate the activities of military units -- to seek to induce people to believe that God, duty, and/or honor sanctions or legitimizes violence against a given people or set of individuals. It is a very compelling argument to assert -- whether this is done by would-be terrorists or by those who regulate the activities of military units -- that one is engaged in a great, cosmic war between the forces of good and evil and that the side for which one is committing violence gives expression to the 'good' rather than the 'evil' and, consequently, this somehow sanitizes indiscriminate violence and rehabilitates it. It is a very alluring argument -- whether this is made by would-be terrorists or by those who regulate the activities of military units -- that all those who are labeled as 'evil-doers', or people of unacceptable spiritual pedigree, or people who will not submit to our way of life deserve to be oppressed or do not deserve due process or are not worthy of equitable treatment.

Most of the following comments are directed specifically at those who are advocates of indiscriminate violence against people and societies that are considered to be un-Islamic, infidels, unbelievers, apostates, or insufficiently Muslim. However, the horizontal implications of the following comments are intended to extend to anyone who believes that indiscriminate violence against people -- irrespective of who these people might be -- is something that gives expression to civility, common decency, spiritual etiquette, or actually

gives the most eloquent expression of what Divinity truly wishes for humanity.

Almost any spiritual or humanistic tradition can fabricate arguments justifying violence. However, almost invariably, such arguments totally distort principles by removing issues from their appropriate contexts and, as well, by ignoring the many other principles of such a tradition that come down firmly on the side of tools of faith rather than tools of violence.

The term "jihad" has been bandied about by both Muslims and non-Muslims. Oftentimes, individuals from both of these groups (e.g., fundamentalists of all stripes tend to use words in ways that best express their dogmatic interests) have sought to exploit this word by means of delusional systems that are intended to serve something other than the truth.

In Arabic, jihad is a verbal noun that conveys a sense of striving, struggle, or determined effort. Quite frequently in the Qur'an, the term jihad is followed by the words *fi sabil Allah* which means: in the way, path, or cause of Allah.

If the 'way', 'path', or 'cause' of Allah were meant to be violent, God wasted an awful lot of time with the thousands of other verses of the Qur'an that explore issues that are far removed from matters of armed conflict. If the 'way', 'path' or 'cause' of Allah were meant to be violent and oppressive (as so many fundamentalists seem to suppose), then, one can't help but wonder why the Qur'an spends so much time talking about the importance of qualities such as patience, forgiveness, peace, tolerance, kindness, integrity, equitability, charitableness, honesty, modesty, and love.

Mujahid is the active participle of the underlying root and refers to someone who strives, struggles, or makes a determined effort. A mujahid, therefore, is someone who participates in jihad, broadly construed -- which is to say: activities that encompass a wide variety of modes of struggle, striving, and making a determined effort.

In Arabic there are terms that give expression to the idea of armed conflict much more directly, and less ambiguously, than does the word jihad. For instance, both 'harb' and 'qital' refer to the act of waging

war, and, yet, the more ambiguous and nuanced term “jihad” is the word around that discussion revolves.

Those Muslims who are prone to violent solutions to problems don't say: “Let's declare ‘harb’ or let's declare ‘qital’”. They say “We are declaring jihad” because the term “jihad” has a noble spiritual currency in Islam that war-mongers frequently wish to leverage for purposes other than the ‘cause’, or ‘path’ or ‘way’ of Allah.

Under the appropriate circumstances, harb or qital might be subsumed under, or encompassed by, the idea of jihad. However, not all forms of jihad will necessarily be expressed through the waging of armed conflict.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said that ‘one performs the best jihad when one stands up and speaks out against injustice in the face of tyranny and oppression’. Moreover, when asked by A'isha (might Allah be pleased with her) about whether women should be participating in the armed conflict that was taking place, Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: ‘The best and the most superior jihad is the Hajj (pilgrimage) which is accepted by Allah’.

Some people claim that the latter saying of the Prophet applies only to women. However, the people who make such an allegation have absolutely no evidential proof concerning what the intention and frame of mind of the Prophet was at the time he is reported to have made the statements about the Hajj that is accepted by God as being the most superior form of jihad. Moreover, those who seek to argue that the foregoing reported words of the Prophet were intended only for women seem to forget that the Prophet accepted the pledge of fidelity, support, and willingness to die in the way of Allah, which was given at Hudaibiyah in 6 A.H., from both women and men.

At the very least, the Prophet's statement to A'isha demonstrates that jihad can mean something besides armed conflict. In other words, in the foregoing hadith (a saying or tradition that is attributed to the Prophet), Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reportedly using the term jihad to refer to a form of striving and struggle that is other than armed conflict, and, therefore, anyone who wishes to reduce jihad to being nothing more than a synonym for waging war is contradicted by such sayings of the Prophet.

There is also another saying attributed to the Prophet that makes a distinction between the lesser jihad (al-jihad al-asghar) and the greater jihad (al-jihad al-akbar). More specifically, according to this tradition, the Prophet was returning from a physical battle against those who were seeking to oppress, if not destroy, Muslims. The Prophet indicated to those with him that they were going from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad, and when someone asked about what the Prophet meant, the Prophet explained that the physical battle was the lesser jihad and the struggle against one's inner, carnal soul was the greater jihad.

The foregoing tradition does not appear in any of the major compilations of hadith. However, this fact, in and of itself, means little more than that the methods used by those who compiled hadiths did not capture or yield the foregoing saying.

In other words, one needs to understand that any given collection of hadiths does not encompass everything that the Prophet actually said but, rather, includes only those sayings or traditions that are considered to be authentic sayings based on the methodology used to collect such sayings. There might be many things that the Prophet said that do not appear in a given compilation of hadiths simply because such sayings either fell outside the reach of those methods or because those methods did not recognize such sayings as being authentic.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) might, or might not, have said the above tradition about the distinction between the greater and lesser jihad. All that can be said is that none of the major sets of compilations contains the aforementioned hadith, but, nevertheless, the hadith is accepted as authentic by many Sufi shaykhs who are well versed in the methodology of hadith compilation, and, nonetheless, despite knowing that the above tradition does not appear in any of the major collections, the tradition is accepted by them as authentic.

Before proceeding on, there is a point that needs to be made concerning labeling in conjunction with terrorists who come from a Muslim background. Some refer to them as followers of a militant form or strain of Islam.

The concept of a 'militant Islam' is a term that has arisen in order to confuse issues, and this is often done by those who are pushing their own anti-Islamic agenda or by those who are under the influence of

those who are seeking to advance such an agenda. In truth, those individuals who come from a Muslim background and pursue terrorism do not give expression to a militant form of Islam because what they are espousing is not Islamic in the least, even though the vocabulary surrounding their acts of violence might have been hijacked from an Islamic lexicon.

Using the mythological loom from which the idea of militant Islam is spun, one could just as easily speak about a militant Christianity because Adolph Hitler arose from a Christian background. Hitler was not giving expression to a militant form of Christianity ... indeed, he was not giving expression to any kind of Christianity -- and people from a Muslim background who are terrorists are not giving expression to a militant form of Islam.

Muslim terrorists do not constitute a militant form of Islam. In fact, properly speaking, they cannot even be called Muslims, any more than Satan can be called a Muslim despite the fact that he believes in God.

These individuals are nothing more than dogmatic extremists who preach a delusional system consisting of a wholly invented fundamentalist theology that cannot be reconciled with the actual teachings and principles of Islam. They are fundamentalist, extremist war-mongers who have sought to gain proprietary control over the word 'jihad' in order to mislead people, and in the process, they have reduced the term 'jihad' to a soulless, unidimensional distortion of that word's actual spiritual richness.

Such people are fundamentalist, extremist jihadists. They are people who have infested the term "jihad" with their own virulent, delusional system of theology, and one would be far closer to the truth if one kept all mention of Islam and Muslims out of any discussion concerning such violent extremists.

Fundamentalist jihadists like to speak about jihad in terms of its being the most virtuous deed one can perform. They site hadiths such as the following that is narrated by Abu Hurairah (might Allah have mercy on his soul) in Volume One of Bukhari:

"A man came to Allah's Apostle (peace be upon him) and said "Instruct me as to such a deed as equals jihad (in reward)." The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, "I do not find such a deed." Then he added, "While the Muslim fighter is in the battlefield, can you enter your place of worship to perform prayers without cease and fast and never break your fast?" The man said, "But who can do that?" Abu Hurairah (might Allah have mercy on his soul) added, "The Mujahid (i.e. the person participating in jihad) is rewarded even for the footsteps of his horse while it wanders about (for grazing) tied on a long rope".

In another hadith that is narrated by Abu Said Khudri (might Allah be pleased with him), somebody asked, "O Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him)! Who is the best among the people?"

Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) replied, "A believer who performs jihad with his life and wealth."

The latter hadith is more general than the former hadith. More specifically, the latter hadith does not mention battlefields or armed conflict, and, consequently, leaves open the possibility that the Prophet (peace be upon him) might have been speaking about jihad in a more inclusive sense, encompassing an array of different kinds of striving that were not restricted just to armed conflict.

The Qur'an indicates that:

"Allah has preferred in grades those who strive hard with their wealth and lives above those who sit (at home). Unto each, Allah has promised salvation, but Allah has preferred those who strive hard above those who sit (at home) by a huge reward." (4: 95)

In the foregoing verse, the Qur'an is clear that those who strive hard with their wealth and lives are preferred above those who merely sit at home and do not use their wealth and lives to struggle in the way of Allah. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Qur'an also indicates that those who do not strive hard with their wealth and lives are not necessarily condemned thereby but, rather, if they seek to submit in other ways, are promised salvation by God.

In addition, once again, the wording of the Qur'an leaves open the possibility that a broader form of striving is being indicated than just armed conflict. Unfortunately, those individuals who are inclined toward violence often like to interpret the Qur'an according to their own violent inclinations, and they use their predilections to mislead (and, therefore, spiritually abuse) people who are vulnerable while in a state of dissociation ... people who are, therefore, desperately trying to seek release from their internal turmoil and pain.

More specifically, if someone feels lost, alone, alienated, scattered, hopeless, and without a sense of purpose or identity (i.e., they are in a state of dissociation), and, then, someone comes along and says I know a way for you to have purpose, meaningful identity, hope, a sense of belonging, and focus, then, naturally, the former individual is likely to express some degree of interest in such a 'solution'. If the person in a condition of dissociation hears, as well, that the aforementioned solution to one's problems is also the most virtuous deed in the sight of God, and this claim can be proved through verses of the Qur'an as well as through words that the Prophet, himself, has uttered, it is very difficult for a Muslim who is in a dissociated condition not to be very intrigued with such possibilities.

Understanding the foregoing motivational dynamics, 'leaders' who are prone to violence and who are in need of foot-soldiers for their own agenda will actively troll the waters of society for those individuals who are in a dissociated state and, therefore, who are very vulnerable to anything that appears to offer an escape from their personal, emotional, and spiritual problems. The elements of doing violence to others and sacrificing one's own life will be introduced at a time, and in a context, when the 'candidate' for terrorist acts is likely to be most receptive to the 'pitch' that is intended to close the deal that converts someone into a once and future terrorist.

It is interesting that none of the foregoing hadiths or verses of the Qur'an that have been mentioned in the last several pages use the words 'harb' or 'qital' (that is, the Arabic words that unambiguously give expression to waging war and armed conflict). No one, apparently, came to the Prophet and asked him: "Show me a deed that is the equal to 'harb' or 'qital'". Furthermore, the Prophet did not say that he knew of no deed that was the equal of 'harb' or 'qital'.

Moreover, the Qur'an did not say that Allah prefers, by degrees, those who engage in 'harb' and 'qital' over those who sit at home. Striving with one's life and wealth can be done in many different ways other than by engaging in armed conflict, and, yet, fundamentalist extremists who are inclined toward violence wish to restrict the meaning of jihad to being only about armed conflict.

Even with respect to the issue of whether, or not, jihad is the most virtuous deed, there are hadiths that indicate that jihad -- independently of how it is understood -- is not necessarily the most virtuous of deeds that a Muslim can perform. For instance, in Volume 1, Book 10, Number 505 of Bukhari, one finds the following tradition that is narrated by 'Abdullah:

"I asked the Prophet "Which deed is the dearest to Allah?" He replied, "To offer the prayers at their early stated fixed times." I asked, "What is the next (in goodness)?" He replied, "To be good and dutiful to your parents". I again asked, "What is the next (in goodness)?" He replied, "To participate in Jihad (spiritual struggle) in Allah's cause."

A variation of the foregoing hadith is reported by Abu Hurairah (might Allah have mercy on his soul) in Volume 1, Book 2, Number 25 of Bukhari:

"Allah's Apostle (peace be upon him) was asked, "What is the best deed?" He replied, "To believe in Allah and His Apostle (Muhammad). The questioner then asked, "What is the next (in goodness)? The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, "To participate in Jihad (religious fighting) in Allah's Cause." The questioner again asked, "What is the next (in goodness)?" He replied, "To perform Hajj Mubrur, (that pilgrimage which is accepted by Allah and that is performed with the intention of seeking only Allah's pleasure)."

In Volume 2, Book 15, Number 86 of Bukhari collection of hadiths, Ibn Abbas (might Allah be pleased with him) narrates the following:

"The Prophet said, "No good deeds done on other days are superior to those done on these (first ten days of Dhul Hijja)." Then some companions of the Prophet said, "Not even Jihad?" He replied, "Not even Jihad, except that of a man who does it by putting himself and his property in danger (for Allah's sake) and does not return with any of those things."

Finally, in another hadith, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said:

"There is a polish for everything which takes away the rust of that which is polished, and the polish for the heart is the remembrance of God (zikr).

One of the Companions said: "Is not repelling the infidel like this?"

Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "No! Even if one fights until one's sword is broken."

In each of the aforementioned hadiths, there are deeds that are being described which, contrary to the proclamation of modern-day jihadists, are better or superior to that of jihad. Moreover, the one exception to the foregoing statement concerns the sort of jihad in which a person places his or her own life and wealth at risk and, then, both dies and loses one's wealth in the process.

Nonetheless, even in the latter instance, the emphasis is on risking and losing one's life and wealth rather than on killing others. Modern-day extremist jihadists seek to conflate and confuse the two (that is, willingness to give one's life and killing others), but the two are not the same.

Indeed, there is another reported hadith that underlies the foregoing emphasis of sacrificing one's life rather than on the taking of the lives of others. More specifically: (Book 21, Number 21.14.33)

"Yahya related to me from Malik that Yahya ibn Said said: "The Messenger of Allah, might Allah bless him and grant him peace, was sitting by a grave that was being dug at Medina. A man looked into the

grave and said, 'A terrible bed for a believer. 'The Messenger of Allah, might Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, 'Terrible? What you have said is absolutely wrong.' The man said to the Prophet, 'I didn't mean that, Messenger of Allah. I meant being killed in the way of Allah.' The Messenger of Allah, might Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, 'Being killed in the way of Allah has no like!'"

The Prophet (peace be upon him) did not say that killing in the way of Allah has no like. He said being killed in the way of Allah has no like. If one speaks out against tyranny (and speaking out in this way is a form of jihad) and dies in the process, then, according to the foregoing hadith, this is an act that has no like. If one goes on a Hajj that is accepted by Allah (another form of jihad) and dies along the way, then, this kind of action is one of the things for which there are no other non - jihad oriented activities that can compare. If one strives with all one's life and wealth against one's own carnal soul (a further form of jihad -- the greater jihad according to authentic Sufi shaykhs), then, this is a form of activity with which non-jihad activities cannot compare.

As indicated previously, on certain occasions, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said that such and such was superior to jihad, while, on other occasions, he seemed to indicate that jihad was superior to all other kinds of activities. When juxtaposed next to one another, some people might be inclined to consider such traditions to be contradictory.

However, the Prophet is reported to have counseled people to speak with others according to the level of understanding of those with whom one was speaking. Consequently, quite plausibly, depending on circumstances, audience, and the Prophet's own spiritual state at the time of a given discussion, the Prophet might have emphasized certain actions at some junctures to certain people, while emphasizing other actions at certain junctures to people of a different level of understanding or who had a different set of needs to be addressed that took priority under a different set of circumstances.

All of the guidance was valid, and all of the teachings, when properly delineated, could be reconciled with one another. However, how that spiritual material was presented, as well as what kind of

emphasis would be given to such material, might vary from situation to situation and from person to person.

For example, during Hajj, different people came to the Prophet and indicated they had performed the various rites of pilgrimage in a certain sequence. They were seeking assurances from the Prophet that what they had done was correct.

The sequence of steps observed by these individuals was different in a number of instances. Yet, the Prophet is reported to have indicated that all such sequences were acceptable.

Similarly, there was a time when one of the Companions heard someone reciting the Qur'an in a way that was different from the way in which he recited the Qur'an. Since the latter individual had learned to recite from the Prophet, he took exception with that manner of reciting the Qur'an that differed from his.

They both went to the Prophet in order to discuss the situation. After providing demonstrations of their respective modes of reciting the Qur'an, they were informed that both styles of Quranic recitation were correct, and, in fact, there were seven different major modes of reciting the Qur'an, along with a larger number of minor variations, all of which were acceptable.

Consequently, just because different people might understand something in a variety of ways does not necessarily mean, in and of itself, that all such understandings can't simultaneously be true. Truth might admit to a variety of degrees of freedom, and unfortunately, God's truth tends to be far more expansive than is the willingness of people who insist on making truth conform to their narrow, inflexible, dogmatic, limited, and, quite frequently, error-riddled conceptions of that truth.

Notwithstanding all of the foregoing considerations, one should try to keep certain factors in mind when thinking about hadiths of any kind. First of all, and quite ironically, there are hadiths that indicate that the Prophet did not approve of people making compilations of his sayings, and, as well, there are hadiths that indicate that on a number of different occasions the Prophet had such collections brought to him and destroyed.

Ibn Saeed Al-Khudry reported that Prophet Muhammad said:

"Do not write anything from me except Qur'an. Anyone who wrote anything other than the Quran shall erase it."

In another tradition, some thirty years after the Prophet had passed away, Zayd Ibn Thabit (might Allah be pleased with him) , a close companion of the Prophet, visited the Khalifa Mu'aawiyah and related a story about the Prophet that Mu'aawiyah liked. Mu'aawiyah ordered someone to write the story down. But Zayd said: "the messenger of God ordered us never to write down anything of his hadith,"

In another tradition narrated by Abu Hurairah (might Allah have mercy on his soul), the messenger of God was informed that some people are writing his hadiths. The Prophet took to the pulpit of the mosque and said, "What are these books that I heard you wrote? I am just a human being. Anyone who has any of these writings should bring it here." Abu Hurairah said we collected all these writings and burned them."

Abu Bakr Siddiq (might Allah be pleased with) had a collection of some 500 hadiths of the Prophet. However, after hearing from the Prophet (peace be upon him) about the dire consequences that might befall anyone who perpetrated untruths concerning what the Prophet said, this close Companion of the Prophet burned his collection of sayings after spending the night struggling over the issue of whether, or not, to retain his set of traditions.

Hazrat 'Umar and Bibi A'isha (might Allah be pleased with them both) each had disagreements over the accuracy and authenticity of a variety of hadiths that had been collected and related by Abu Hurairah (might Allah have mercy on him). Abu Hurairah (might Allah have mercy on him) was among the first to begin compiling a collection of alleged Prophetic sayings and who, despite only being in the company of the Prophet for a few years had, apparently, collected thousands of hadiths more than people who had spent decades in the company of the Prophet.

During the time when Hazrat 'Umar (might Allah be pleased with him) was Caliph, he directed Abu Hurairah (might Allah have mercy on

his soul) to stop reporting hadiths to others as a result of the aforementioned disagreements concerning the extent of the authenticity and accuracy of some of the traditions being reported by the latter individual. Abu Hurairah (might Allah have mercy on his soul) complied with this directive until after Hazrat 'Umar (might Allah be pleased with him) was assassinated, at which point Abu Hurairah (might Allah have mercy on his soul) began, again, to promulgate his collection of hadiths

In another context, Caliph, Hazrat 'Umar (might Allah be pleased with him) appointed Abu Hurairah (might Allah have mercy on his soul) to be governor of a certain region. However, after a time, the Caliph recalled his governor and asked him to explain how someone who had assumed such a position with no money had accumulated so much money in such a short period of time and required his governor to turn over a substantial portion of the money that the governor had accumulated during his tenure.

One of the conditions or requirements devised by later traditionalists, such as Bukhari and his student, Muslim, for determining that hadiths were to be accepted as authentic and that ones were to be rejected revolved about the moral character of the individuals who were part of the isnad, or chain of transmission, for a given saying. Without wishing to pass any final judgment about the quality of the character of Abu Hurairah (might Allah have mercy upon his soul), nonetheless, the foregoing discussion concerning disagreements about whether, or not, Abu Hurairah (might Allah have mercy on his soul) was reporting Prophetic sayings accurately and whether, or not, he had conducted himself with integrity when a governor during the Caliphacy of Hazrat 'Umar (might Allah be pleased with him) tend to raise the sorts of question that might have disqualified Abu Hurairah (might Allah have mercy on his soul) as a reliable source of hadiths. However, this is not the case, and, as a result, one finds many sayings among the major collections of hadith that are attributed to the Prophet, yet which are traced back to Abu Hurairah (might Allah have mercy upon his soul) as the primary narrator.

In addition to the foregoing considerations, one might also reflect upon the following facts. Muslim, who was a student of Bukhari and

who became a prominent compiler of hadiths in his own right (and both of these compilers of traditions began their work several hundred years after the Prophet had passed away), rejected more than four hundred of the hadiths that his mentor considered to be authentic, while Bukhari rejected some 4-500 hadiths that his student, Muslim, considered to be authentic.

None of the compilers of hadith are the Prophet (peace be upon him), and none of the compilers of hadith are the Qur'an. Even when what is reported by compilers of tradition are authentic and accurate, these compilers do not necessarily provide any clues about the intention with which the Prophet said such things, or toward what kind of an audience (whether restricted or general) instruction was being directed by the Prophet, or what the meaning was of what the Prophet might have said.

The foregoing comments are not intended to demonstrate that there is no such thing as an authentic hadith of the Prophet. Rather, the previous discussion is meant to induce a certain amount of caution when thinking about reported hadiths and whether, or not, and the extent to which, one believes that such hadiths ought to govern one's life -- this is especially the case in situations where one is being told that killing other people or doing violence to other people is the greatest virtue a Muslim can perform -- which many fundamentalist, extremist, jihadist leaders attempt to claim.

Whatever one's views might be with respect to the authenticity of this or that hadith, the foregoing demonstrates that would-be terrorist leaders can cite the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a authority for terrorist activities only by either completely ignoring hadiths that contradict their point of view, and/or selectively interpreting the traditions of the Prophet, and/or failing to consider individual hadiths against a far larger backdrop of teachings from the hadith and Qur'an that are intended to place limits on, as well as modulate in various ways, traditions that are being removed from, or considered independently of, a much larger context of spiritual guidance.

As a result, vulnerable people -- that is, those who often are in dissociative states and are seeking solutions for the pain, stress, doubt, anxiety, fear and so on of felt dissociation -- are not permitted by

terrorist 'leaders' to explore all sides of a spiritual issue. Instead, these spiritually abusive 'leaders' present only that information that usually has been re-framed, or deliberately distorted, or taken out of context and, therefore, removed from the limiting influence of other kinds of spiritual values and teachings that also should be taken into consideration before any decision is reached in a given matter ... for example, whether to commit violence against others.

In addition to the foregoing sorts of consideration, there are some individuals who -- lacking in tools of faith and, as a result, become inclined to resort to tools of violence as a way of 'settling' matters -- seek to frame the situation in ways that 'help' identify those people who should be the 'rightful' objects of their violence. For instance, there are some Muslims who have divided up the world into Dar al-Islam (the Abode of Islam) and Dar al-Harb (the Abode of War). Some of these same Muslims have further subdivided Dar al-Harb into People of the Book and polytheists.

Although both the Prophet and the Qur'an do speak about Muslims, people of the Book, and polytheists, neither the Prophet nor the Qur'an speaks in terms of Dar al-Islam and Dar al-Harb. These are concepts developed by theologians, jurists, philosophers, and others who arose after the Prophet passed away and who were advancing their own theoretical hermeneutics concerning their understanding of things.

The fact of the matter is there are parts of the Muslim world that are engaged in harb, while there are parts of the non-Muslim world that are not so engaged. If Dar al-Harb is meant to refer to those parts of the world that are at war with faith, then, there are times when some Muslims should, themselves, be included in Dar al-Harb, just as there are times when the peace and submission to God that prevails in some non-Muslim communities would render them to be part of Dar al-Islam.

Furthermore, there is prima facie evidence from the Qur'an that placing People of the Book within Dar al-Harb is actually a mistake. For example, in the Qur'an, one finds the following verses:

[2:62] "Surely, those who believe, those who are Jewish, the Christians, and the converts; anyone who (1) believes in God, and (2) believes in the Last Day, and (3) leads a righteous life, will receive their recompense from their Lord. They have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve."

[5:69] "Surely, those who believe, those who are Jewish, the converts, and the Christians; any of them who (1) believe in Allah and (2) believe in the Last Day, and (3) lead a righteous life, have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve." (The parenthetical numbers -- 1, 2 and 3 -- in the foregoing have been added for the purpose of emphasis ... they are not part of the original Quranic text)

In addition, one also finds the following verses in different parts of the Qur'an:

[2:136] "Say, "We believe in Allah, and in what was sent down to us, and in what was sent down to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the Patriarchs; and in what was given to Moses and Jesus, and all the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them. To Him alone we are submitters."

[2:285] "The messenger has believed in what was sent down to him from his Lord, and so did the believers. They believe in Allah, His angels, His scripture, and His messengers: "We make no distinction among any of His messengers." They say, "We hear, and we obey. Forgive us, our Lord. To You is the ultimate destiny."

[3:84] Say, "We believe in Allah, and in what was sent down to us, and in what was sent down to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the Patriarchs, and in what was given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them. To Him alone we are submitters."

[4:150] Those who disbelieve in Allah and His messengers, and seek to make distinction among Allah and His messengers, and say, "We believe in some and reject some," and wish to follow a path in between;

[4:151] these are the real disbelievers. We have prepared for the disbelievers a shameful retribution."

To claim that People of the Book, Jews, Christians, converts, or anyone who believes in God, and in the Last Day, and seeks to do righteous works are not members of Dar al-Islam seems, at the very least, a problematic notion. Moreover, to try to claim that distinctions should be made among the Prophets in the sense that the followers of some should be assigned to Dar al-Islam and the followers of others should be assigned to Dar al-Harb is inconsistent with what the foregoing verses of the Qur'an are directing Muslims to do and, in fact, is precisely the sort of thing about which the Qur'an is seeking to warn believers to avoid in 4: 150-151, noted above. Finally, to use such terms as 'harbis' with respect to people who do believe in God and the Last Day, and who seek to do righteous works -- and, therefore, actually are, from the perspective of the Qur'an, among those who, according to their understanding, submit to God -- seems arbitrary, arrogant, presumptuous, lacking in humility, and unjustifiably discriminatory.

The creation of categories such as Dar al-Islam and Dar al-Harb is exploited by radical, violence-prone extremist leaders in a number of ways. For instance, once one has constructed a category of people who are described as being beyond the pale of Islam (i.e., Dar al-Harb), then, it becomes a quick hop, skip and a jump to begin referring to everyone in such a category as infidels, unbelievers, apostates, idol-worshipers, and people of jahili [that is, those who supposedly exemplify the qualities of spiritual ignorance -- jahiliyyah -- that existed in Arabia prior to the advent of the Prophetic mission of Muhammad (peace be upon him)].

Thus, consider the following verse of the Qur'an: "You shall fight back against those who do not believe in Allah, nor in the Last Day, nor do they prohibit what Allah and His messenger have prohibited, nor do

they abide by the religion of truth -- among those who received the scripture -- until they pay the due tax, willingly or unwillingly." (9: 29)

Some individuals attempt to use the foregoing as justification for waging war against Christians and Jews because they claim that the latter groups do not "abide by the religion of truth" They claim that this verse gives Muslims permission to fight and wage war against such groups.

Such an understanding is problematic in a number of ways. First of all, individuals who argue in this manner cannot convincingly demonstrate -- via the complete set of teachings given expression through the Qur'an and Hadith ... not just partial, distorted, and selectively edited versions of these texts -- that Allah intends for the foregoing verse to apply for all times and to all Muslims, rather than to just the Prophet and the circumstances of that period of history.

There appears to be a general belief among many Muslims that because the Qur'an is a book of Divine guidance, then, this means that whatever occurs, or is said, in relation to the Prophet is applicable to everyone else. However, the fact of the matter is there are differences between the Prophet and other Muslims.

For more than thirteen years -- a time encompassing the period of time in Mecca and the first several years after hijra, or migration, from Mecca to Yathrib (later Medina) -- God did not permit Muslims to defend themselves through armed conflict. This was the case despite the many forms of abuse -- including a two year period of siege in which the Prophet, members of his family, and followers were nearly starved to death -- which were directed against Muslims, in general, and the Prophet, in particular.

At a certain juncture following hijra -- the move to Medina from Mecca -- and prior to the Battle of Badr, permission came for the Prophet to organize the defense of Muslims against aggression. Over the next five or six years, there were a number of armed battles that took place, and, yet, through all these conflicts, no more than 250 non-Muslims were killed and an even smaller number of Muslims lost their lives.

Following the conquest of Mecca by Muslims, there were various minor conflicts with several regions near Mecca and Medina, but these

were handled largely through the tactic of siege rather than armed battles. Toward the last few years of the Prophet's life, there was peace in the land.

Why do modern-day, fanatical, fundamentalist extremist jihadists automatically assume that the part of the Prophet's life that should be used as a model for conduct is armed conflict rather than the non-violent approach -- despite substantial provocation -- which characterized the vast majority of the Prophet's life? Why do these modern-day jihadists automatically assume that the Divine permission that was given to the Prophet with respect to the waging of war under certain circumstances necessarily accrues to all ensuing generations of Muslims? Why do modern-day jihadists only treat those portions of the Qur'an that mention armed conflict (and there are about 164 verses, out of some 6,000, or so, total verses in the Qur'an that deal with these matters) in terms of the permissions to fight that is given rather than the many prohibitions that place due limits on such permission, and rather than on the many other non-violent spiritual lessons that are woven into the Quranic text surrounding, as well as within, such verses? Why do modern-day jihadists accrue to themselves the same spiritual authority and stature of the Prophet and, therefore, arrogantly presume that God necessarily will extend to them the same permissions concerning armed conflict that was accorded to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) or that the Prophet approves of what they are doing?

Secondly, with respect to the earlier Quranic verse (9:29) that extremist jihadists try to use to justify violence against Christians and Jews, the fact of the matter is that Christians and Jews do believe in God as well as the Last Day, and they prohibit many, if not most, of the same things that Allah and the Prophet prohibit -- such as: killing, stealing, dishonesty, corruption, injustice, adultery, not respecting one's parents, and so on. Even the dietary prohibitions given through the Qur'an are observed by Jewish people and should be observed by Christians because such prohibitions are in the Old Testament, and, yet, many Christians have been misled by their so-called church leaders into supposing that such dietary permissions and prohibitions do not apply to them even though many of these Christians accept what is in the Bible as the Word of God.

Thirdly, the foregoing Quranic verse refers to those who do not abide by the “religion of truth among those who received the scripture”. This raises a variety of questions.

For instance, with respect to the identity of those individuals who are alluded to as those who do not abide by the religion of truth, there is some ambiguity -- at least on the surface of the Quranic text -- both with respect to who these individuals are and the precise way in which such people are not abiding by that ‘religion of truth’. In addition, one wonders who, beside Allah and the Prophet, is qualified to make such a judgment?

Whose conception of the “religion of truth” is to serve as the standard against which all other understandings are to be measured? ... That of the Wahhabis? ... That of the philosophers? ... That of the fundamentalist theologians? ... That of jurists? ... That of the jihadists who treat everyone as an apostate and infidel except those who believe and act as they do (and, maybe, not even them)? What proofs can be offered that such interpretations are acceptable to God? Why should only the opinions of theologians and jurists be considered in such matters, and why doesn't the quality of such theological and juridical opinions seem to matter so much as the fact they are willing to give their blessings to violence and armed conflict against anyone who disagrees with them?

Moreover, to what extent must someone not abide by the religion of truth before one can wage war against them? After all, none of us is perfect. We all make mistakes for which we are in need of God's forgiveness, if not, as well, the forgiveness of our fellow human beings.

Consequently, to one extent or another, there are few, if any, of us who do not, in one way or another, fail to abide by the religion of truth. If this were not so, we would not be encouraged to seek God's forgiveness. If this were not so, the Qur'an would not have indicated:

“If Allah were to take humankind to task for their wrong-doing, God would not leave on Earth a living creature, but God reprieves human beings until an appointed time. (16:61)

Is one to assume that in the earlier Quranic verse (i.e., 9:29), God is instructing human beings to make constant war on one another no matter how trifling the manner might be in which someone does not abide by the religion of truth and despite the fact that, notwithstanding the mistakes that someone might make, that, nonetheless, such people still do believe in God, the Last Day, and the things that have been prohibited by God and the Messenger? And, just how does God's directive that there is to be no compulsion in matters of Deen fit into the alleged directive that Muslims are supposed to fight anyone who does not abide by the religion of truth?

God is not saying things in a contradictory way. Human beings -- such as would-be terrorist leaders -- are imposing contradictions upon the sacred texts by failing to take into consideration the entire body of teachings and how those teachings can modulate one another in ways that give human beings a lot more degrees of freedom concerning the manner in which one abides by 'the religion of truth' than do fanatical, fundamentalist, violence-prone, extremist jihadists who are trying to induce people to adopt a delusional framework through spiritually abusive techniques of misrepresenting the teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet.

In addition to the foregoing considerations, the Quranic verse (9: 29) noted previously, indicates there is still a remedy that permits Muslims to avoid having to fight back even if those other individuals do not believe in God, nor the Last Day, nor prohibit what God and the Prophet forbid, nor abide by the 'religion of truth' -- even if they are among the people who have been given scripture. More specifically, if those who satisfy the foregoing conditions pay jizya (a tax on non - Muslims), then, not only is no fighting required, but the paying of the jizya tax is the end of the matter and there are no further requirements that need to be imposed on such people with respect to matters of belief or abiding by the 'religion of truth'.

In the time of the Prophet, there was a legitimate source of authority through which reasonable judgments about such matters could be made. Furthermore, the requirement for paying jizya extended only to those who lived within territory controlled by that legitimate source of authority. In other words, jizya was not a tax that could be levied on just anyone by just anyone.

For hundreds of years, now, there are serious questions that can, and should, be raised about whether most of the people who currently govern in the Muslims world -- or who, in the past, have governed in the Muslim world -- constitute legitimate sources of authority. In fact the very issue of what it means for someone to be said to possess a legitimate source of authority (and on what grounds and in whose opinion) or whether such individuals are spiritually competent to make judgments about various social and individual matters (such as jizya or collecting it) -- all of these matters are still very much unsettled within the Muslim world. Consequently, there also are serious questions that need to be asked today about who, if anyone, in the Muslims world has the legitimate, God-given spiritual authority to even ask for Divine permission to fight back against those who do not believe in God, nor the Last Day, nor prohibit what God and the Messenger prohibit or who do not abide by 'the religion of truth' -- and such matters are quite apart from the issue of defending oneself, or one's immediate family, or one's local community against unjust, unprovoked aggression.

Just because someone issues a fatwa (theological decree concerning legal issues), or just because someone speaks Arabic, or just because someone has attended this or that madrassa (school), or just because some people recognize someone as a spiritual authority, or just because someone has certain degrees or a certain educational pedigree -- none of this necessarily means anything in and of itself. Unfortunately, these days, there are a lot of irresponsible, spiritually ignorant, abusive 'leaders' (among both alleged Sufis, as well as their exoteric namesakes) who call themselves shaykh or sheik who seem to believe that they are Divinely qualified to tell other people how to live their lives.

There are many individuals who are claiming that all manner of spiritual permissions has been given to them. However, claiming this, and actually being given such permission, are not necessarily the same thing -- especially when there are many questions that those people need to answer with respect to the fact that they seem more interested in inventing their own religion than following the full guidance given by God through the Qur'an and through the quality of character of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Above and beyond the many questions that have been raised in the foregoing discussion, there is the question of why anyone would prefer the tools of violence over the tools of faith? Why, in other words, should fighting back -- even when permission is given -- always have to be understood to mean violent, armed conflict? Why can't fighting back mean employing the tools of faith? Wasn't the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) reported to have said: "If someone treats you with nafs (the lower soul), then, treat them with ruh (spirit)?"

Yes, there are times when fighting back, in the sense of armed conflict, might be unavoidable. But, surely, discretion is the better part of valor.

The Qur'an indicates that "oppression is worse than murder" (2: 217). Yet, many of those who claim to be conducting jihad, in the sense of armed conflict, against the infidels are, themselves, guilty of much oppression, including against themselves, in relation to matters of truth.

In Volume 3, Book 43, Number 624, one finds the following hadith that is narrated by Anas:

Allah's Apostle said, "Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or he is an oppressed one. People asked, "O Allah's Apostle! It is all right to help him if he is oppressed, but how should we help him if he is an oppressor?" The Prophet said, "By preventing him from oppressing others."

Almost all those who have committed themselves to armed conflict against those whom they consider to be infidels, apostates, unbelievers, and jihillist are guilty of oppressing others because they indiscriminately use tools of violence and oppressive compulsion. In the process, many innocent lives are destroyed.

Those who are inclined toward violence seem bereft of the tools of faith that, God willing, might open up the possibility of peaceful means for resolving difficulties. Unfortunately, most of these violence-prone individuals appear to have lost faith in the tools of faith -- the very tools for which they claim to be fighting and that they claim people are

not practicing and the absence of which they cite as the cause of all the problems that face the Muslim community.

Fanatical, extremist, fundamentalist jihadists need to be restrained from oppressing others. However, using violence to restrain these individuals is neither, necessarily, the only option or the best option. Preferably, such individuals need to be shown that what they believe and what they are being taught and what they are teaching and what they are trying to bring about is delusional in character and an expression of spiritual abuse (which is always oppressive), and as such, is not, at all, an accurate reflection of God's guidance in the Qur'an or the example provided by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Once an individual jettisons considerations of discernment in such matters -- as extremists frequently are intent on doing -- then, one will begin to see certain verses of the Qur'an, along with various hadiths selectively and inappropriately used in conjunction with the members of such artificially constructed groups.

For example, verses such as: "And say not of those who are killed in the Way of Allah, "They are dead," Nay, they are living, but you perceive (it) not." (2: 154)

or,

"And if you are killed or die in the Way of Allah, forgiveness and mercy from Allah are far better than all that they amass (of worldly wealth, etc.)." (3:157)

or,

"Think not of those who are killed in the Way of Allah as dead, Nay they are alive, with their Lord, and they have provision. They rejoice in what Allah has bestowed upon them of His Bounty ..." (3:169-170)

or,

"But those who are killed in the Way of Allah, He will never let their deeds be lost." (47:4)

are cited, and potential converts to the terrorist cause are told that being killed in the way of Allah (Shaheed) is just the flip side of the coin of killing others in the way of Allah. Furthermore, the way of Allah is equated with performing jihad, and, then, jihad is restrictively interpreted to mean engaging in armed conflict against whoever is labeled and demonized as being infidels, apostates, unbelievers, and jihilia by the extremist leaders. In truth, all of the Quranic verses concerning armed conflict specifically focused on the permission to engage in defensive wars that was given to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) by God. At a certain juncture, a pledge (sometimes referred to as the Pledge of Ridhwan) was taken by those who were traveling with the Prophet at a place called Hudaibiyah, near Mecca. The nature of this pledge, which was taken by both men and women, was to give support to the Prophet and to be willing to engage in armed conflict whenever called upon to do so by the Prophet.

The pledge was directly accepted by the Prophet. However, as the Qur'an indicates: "Surely, those who pledge allegiance to you, are pledging allegiance to Allah. Allah approves their pledge; He places His hand above their hands." (48:10)

The Pledge of Ridhwan took place in the month of Dhul Qadah, 6. A.H. No fighting ensued immediately following the taking of this pledge, but, rather, a peace treaty was negotiated.

When the aforementioned treaty had been drawn up, it began with "In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful." The Quraish objected to this and wanted it struck from the accord. The Prophet had those words struck from the agreement. Then, the Quraish objected to the fact that the document was signed with the name of Muhammad (peace be upon him), Messenger of Allah. They indicated that this was the very issue with which they most disagreed and wanted this removed from the agreement as well. The Prophet complied.

The treaty contained provisions and conditions that a number of the Muslims, who were accompanying the Prophet, felt placed Muslims at a tremendous disadvantage and that they believed were almost

entirely favorable to the Meccan forces opposed to the Prophet. Some of the Muslims grumbled about, and were unhappy with, the terms of the accord.

The Prophet noticed the visible lack of pleasure with the accord and addressed the matter, asking the Muslims with him why they were upset with the treaty. After informing him of their concerns, the Prophet indicated that, in point of fact, the treaty was a great victory because it gave them the opportunity, free from hostilities and in an atmosphere of peace, to invite people to Islam.

Indeed, many people accepted Islam during this period of negotiated peace. And, the peace ended when the non-Muslims broke the conditions of the treaty, and it was the breaking of the treaty by the non-Muslims that led to subsequent armed conflict over the next several years.

The Qur'an mentions the pledge taken by the Muslims at Hudaibiyah in the following way:

"Indeed Allah was pleased with the believers when they gave their Ba'yat (pledge) to you, (O Muhammad) under the tree, He knew what was in their hearts, and He sent down 'As Sakinah (calmness and tranquility)' upon them, and He rewarded them with a near victory."
(48: 18)

How many of modern-day radical, fundamentalist terrorists who call themselves Muslim understand that the reference to the "near victory" mentioned in the foregoing Quranic ayat might have been an allusion to the establishing of peace through non-violent means that followed soon after the collective making of the pledge of allegiance? Many so-called modern-day "jihadists" mention the Pledge of Ridhwan -- albeit in a distorted way that, through misdirection, seeks to transform a willingness to die into a willingness to kill -- and, yet, these same "leaders" fail to mention that such a pledge was immediately followed not by war but by a peace accord.

In the treaty of Hudaibiyah, the Prophet permitted, among other things, one of the most basic, recurring themes of the Qur'an -- namely, 'in the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful' -- to be removed

from the document, and, as well, he permitted his own role as a Prophet to be denied and struck down. Where is the battle cry of the 'jihadists' in these actions of the Prophet ... a battle cry that supposedly demands that the duty of all Muslims is to wage war against the pagans, unbelievers, infidels or people who are under the influence of the times of jahiliyyah and force these individuals to submit to Islam.

Presumably, modern-day jihadists would assassinate the Prophet as an apostate because he abdicated his responsibility -- according to them -- of observing the alleged duty to participate in violent, armed conflict against anyone who would not submit to Islam. Presumably, modern day jihadists would consider the Prophet to be a leader of insufficient and inadequate faith because he was inclined to use tools of faith first and foremost and would only sanction armed conflict under very specific and narrow set of conditions, as a last resort after other, peaceful, avenues had been met with rejection and hostility.

Modern-day, fundamentalist jihadists are spiritual charlatans who selectively distort the Qur'an, the hadiths, along with Islamic history, in order to re-frame matters in a way that can be used to induce those who are in a state of dissociation to commit violence and feel as if they (those in a dissociative state) are serving the wishes of God and the Prophet when nothing could be further from the truth. This is spiritual abuse of the worse kind.

Extremist, terrorist leaders attempt to argue that the permission for armed conflict spoken of in the Qur'an, along with the Prophetic/Divine acceptance of pledges concerning participation in armed conflict are both in perpetuity and universal in character. In other words, they are claiming that such verses of the Qur'an give carte blanche permission to anyone and everyone to engage in armed conflict against whomever is labeled as unbelievers, apostates, or infidels, and, moreover, such extremists are alleging that the pledge of anyone -- regardless of circumstances, time, and intentions -- concerning his or her willingness to engage in armed conflict against whomever will automatically be accepted by the Prophet and Allah.

All such arguments are nothing but theological speculation and presumption. In fact, consider the following from Bukhari that is narrated by Nafi':

“During the affliction of Ibn Az-Zubair, two men came to Ibn 'Umar and said, "The people are lost, and you are the son of 'Umar and a companion of the Prophet, so what stops you from coming out and joining the conflict?" He said, "What stops me is that Allah has prohibited the shedding of my brother's blood."

They both said, "Didn't Allah say, 'And fight then until there is no more affliction?'

Ibn 'Umar said "We fought until there was no more affliction and so that worship would be for Allah Alone, while you want to fight until there is affliction and until the worship becomes for other than Allah." (Volume 6, Book 60, Number 40)

Through another group of sub-narrators, Nafi' narrated the following hadith:

“A man came to Ibn 'Umar and said, "O Abu Abdur Rahman! What made you perform Hajj in one year and Umra in another year and leave the jihad for Allah's Cause though you know how much Allah recommends jihad?"

“Ibn 'Umar replied, "O son of my brother! Islam is founded on five principles, i.e. believe in Allah and His Apostle, the five compulsory prayers, the fasting of the month of Ramadan, the payment of Zakat, and the Hajj to the House (of Allah).

“The man said, "O Abu Abdur Rahman! Won't you listen to why Allah has mentioned in His Book: 'If two groups of believers fight each other, then, make peace between them, but if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then you all fight against the one that transgresses. (49:9) and:--"And fight them till there is no more affliction.”

Ibn 'Umar said, "We did this, during the lifetime of Allah's Apostle when Islam had only a few followers. A man would be put to trial because of his religion; he would either be killed or tortured. But when the Muslims increased, there were no more afflictions or oppressions."

Interestingly enough, and perhaps related to the foregoing comments of ibn 'Umar (might Allah be pleased with him) -- who was the son of Hazrat 'Umar (might Allah be pleased with him) -- is the following tradition. More specifically, there is a long hadith narrated by Hazrat 'Umar (might Allah be pleased with him) in which a stranger, who showed no signs of travel upon his clothes, came to the Prophet one day while the latter was seated with a number of Companions. The stranger proceeded to question the Prophet about the nature of Islam, Iman (faith), and Ihsan (spiritual excellence). Nowhere in the answers given by the Prophet to these queries by the stranger was there any mention of jihad as being one of the five duties of a Muslim, or of jihad being one of the six basic articles of faith, or of jihad being the essence of spiritual excellence. And, yet, when the Prophet asked Hazrat 'Umar (might Allah be pleased with him) if he knew who the stranger was and Hazrat 'Umar (might Allah be pleased with him) replied in the negative, the Prophet is reported to have said: "That was Gabriel (peace be upon him) and he has come today to teach you your Deen"

When the assassination of Hazrat Hassan (might Allah be pleased with him) was being plotted and plans were set in motion to trick his wife into poisoning him, Hazrat Hassan (might Allah be pleased with him) did not declare jihad against those who were plotting against him even though he knew about the plot and knew that his wife was involved. Instead, when he was dying from the poisoning, he warned his wife about the dangers that lay in wait for her at the hands of those who had induced her to poison him (her conspirators were going to assassinate her after she completed her permission).

When Hazrat Hussein (might Allah be pleased with him) traveled a great distance to stand up to, and resist, the oppression of Yezid, Hazrat Hussein (might Allah be pleased with him) did not compel his companions and family to engage in armed conflict. Rather, he gave them all the opportunity to withdraw from the situation and save their lives -- which they chose not to do and, as a result, almost all of them were slaughtered.

Whenever the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) participated in armed conflict, it is reported that he never raised a weapon against those who were opposed to him. The extent of his

physical resistance was that, from time to time, he would pick up the arrows that had been shot at the Prophet, as well as the Muslim warriors surrounding him, and, then, hand the arrows to the Muslim archers.

The Prophet was always in the thick of battle because taking his life was the primary focus of his adversaries. Yet, he did not wield a weapon or try to kill anyone even though he was constantly under attack during such battles.

His jihad was of the very highest order of striving. He was willing to sacrifice his own life and all that he possessed for the sake of God, and, yet, he did not take the life of others.

At the battle of Badr, that is the first, major armed confrontation between Muslims and non-Muslims, the Prophet picked up some pebbles from the ground and threw them in the direction of the opposing forces. After this happened, the far superior and better equipped army of those who sought to exterminate the Prophet, Muslims and Islam all scattered, apparently perceiving themselves to be under attack by strange beings who filled the hearts of the Muslim opposition with tremendous fear. The Qur'an informed the Prophet about this occasion with "it was not you who threw when you threw. God is the one Who threw." (8:17)

God had given the permission for Muslims to defend themselves in the battle of Badr. The Prophet complied with the Divine directive in a relatively non-violent manner.

Contrary to the claims of modern-day, extremist 'jihadists', the Prophet did not pursue a policy in which polytheists must accept Islam or die. For example, Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said:

"When you meet your enemies who are polytheists, invite them to three courses of action. . . . Invite them to (accept) Islam; if they respond to you, accept it from them and desist from fighting against them. . . . If they refuse to accept Islam, demand from them the Jizya [the tax on non-Muslims that is fairly nominal]. If they agree to pay, accept it from them and hold off your hands. If they refuse to pay the

tax, seek Allah's help and fight them". (Sahih Muslim, book 19, no. 4294)

First, one should understand that the foregoing counsel was given in relation to a situation in which a Muslim ambassador was assassinated in Byzantium territory. Secondly, the foregoing hadith refers to polytheists and not to people of the Book, or people who believe in God, or people who believe in the Last Day, or to converts. Thirdly, the polytheists are to be invited -- not compelled -- to accept Islam, for, indeed, as the Qur'an stipulates -- and as modern-day, extremist 'jihadists' are averse to remembering: "There shall be no compulsion in religion: the right way is now distinct from the wrong way." (2:256) Fourthly, as long as such polytheists pay the jizya tax (and Muslims, themselves, are required to pay zakat, so something is not being imposed on non-Muslims for which Muslims do not have a counterpart in financial responsibility in relation to the community), then, no further action is indicated, and they should be left alone. Fifthly, there is absolutely no indication about whether, or not, the foregoing hadith was meant to be a universal principle applicable across all time or was intended only for the circumstances that existed at that time. Finally, if polytheists refuse to pay the jizya tax, it does not necessarily follow that the only way of fighting with them is to kill them or do violence against them.

One could apply economic sanctions against them. Or, one could interact with them in non-cooperative, but non-violent ways. One could keep one's social distance from them and not take them as allies or friends. Or, one could refuse to help defend them against other people who aggress against them.

With respect to anyone who was seeking to oppress the Prophet and the Muslim community, the Qur'an says:

"If they resort to peace, so shall you, and put your trust in Allah. He is the Hearer, the Omniscient." (8:61)

The Qur'an did not say that the Prophet shall resort to peace only if the antagonists surrender to Islam. The guidance was unconditional and

revolved only around the issue of whether, or not, those who were being hostile sought peace.

One of the favorite Quranic verses of modern-day, extremist jihadists is sometimes referred to as the 'Sword Verse'. This verse says:

"Once the Sacred Months are past, (and they refuse to make peace) you might kill the idol worshipers when you encounter them, punish them, and resist every move they make. If they repent and observe the obligatory prayers and give the obligatory charity, you shall let them go. Allah is Forgiver, Most Merciful." (9:5) Just prior to the foregoing verse is a Divine reminder that:

"If the idol worshipers sign a peace treaty with you, and do not violate it, nor band together with others against you, you shall fulfill your treaty with them until the expiration date. Allah loves the righteous." (9:4)

Just after the so-called 'Sword Verse' there is guidance (9:6) about how the Muslims should provide safe passage to any of the idol worshipers who request it so that such a person can hear the word of God and, then, the individual should be permitted to return to her or his people.

Furthermore, when one considers the 'Sword Verse', itself, in the context of the Quranic guidance that comes both before and after that verse, there are a number of factors that should be taken into consideration. First, the permission to fight is being given only if the idol-worshipers refuse to make peace. Secondly, Muslims are not being given permission to actively seek out such idol worshipers but, rather, Muslims are being told that 'if' the idol-worshipers should be encountered, and if they refuse to make peace, and if one is not bound by any treaties with them, and if they are not seeking safe-passage, and if they do not repent for their aggression, then, one has a variety of options -- namely, one might, if necessary, kill them, or one might punish them in some non-lethal and, possibly, non-violent way, or one might seek to resist (again, possibly, in non-violent ways) every non-

peaceful move they make, or one might accept their becoming Muslim. Thirdly, one needs to emphasize that Muslims are not being specifically ordered to kill idol-worshippers but, rather, this is just one possibility among a number of options -- although, not surprisingly, those who are inclined to violence always wish to indulge their predilection for violence and conveniently forget that God is providing an array of alternatives. Fourthly, and, perhaps, most importantly, there is nothing to indicate that the Divine guidance expressed through the 'Sword Verse' is intended to serve as *carte blanche* permission for all Muslims who come after the Prophet to be able to kill idol-worshippers or to engage the latter in armed conflict.

Finally, and once again, attention needs to be drawn to the fact that the 'Sword Verse' refers to idol worshippers or polytheists -- not to people of the Book, not to Jews, not to Christians, not to those who believe in God, or the Last Day, or who seek to do deeds of righteousness for the sake of God. Although modern-day, extremist jihadists seek to try to expand the category of 'idol worshippers' to include everyone with whom they disagree or who disagrees with them, or whom they consider to be 'insufficiently Muslim', or whom they consider to be apostates, or whom belongs to another faith tradition, or are secular leaders, or whom they consider to be infidels, nonetheless, the so-called 'Sword verse' applies only to idol worshippers/polytheists, and the mental gymnastics of fanatical, extremist jihadists are just part of the package of techniques they have to spiritually abuse those who are vulnerable as a result of the latter's condition of dissociation due to a variety of personal, social, political, economic, historical, and spiritual circumstances.

Some of these modern-day extremist jihadists refer to the Quranic verse:

"For this reason did We prescribe to the children of Israel that whoever slays a soul, unless it be for manslaughter or for mischief in the land, it is as though he slew all men; and whoever keeps a soul alive, it is as though he kept alive all men; and certainly Our apostles came to them with clear arguments, but even after that many of them certainly act extravagantly in the land." (5:32)

They use the foregoing verse as justification for committing free-wheeling aggression against other than idol worshipers, claiming that those whom the terrorists oppose are precisely those individuals who are spreading mischief and corruption in the land. How convenient!

The Qur'an verse above does not specify what constitutes mischief. Consequently, the arguments of extremist jihadists concerning the meaning of the foregoing Quranic verse are rather presumptuous and self-serving.

However, if one reflects upon the rest of the Qur'an, then, one might suppose that the real mischief makers are those who continue to commit aggression and resist overtures to peace, or those who seek to oppress and tyrannize believers (of all stripes), or those who are polytheists and are seeking to destroy believers (of all stripes), or those who are driving believers (of all stripes) from their homes or who are actively preventing believers (of all stripes) from worshipping Divinity. Somewhat ironically, the activities of modern-day, extremist jihadists tend to qualify such jihadists as being the very sort of mischief makers to whom they claim to be opposed.

One might also note in passing that it is interesting that the 'Sword Verse' only mentions prayer and zakat in reference to the conditions that the idol-worshipers are to observe if they are to be let go. Nothing is said about the first pillar of Islam concerning the bearing witness that 'there is no reality but Divinity and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God'. Furthermore, there is nothing said in the verse about those who repent having to observe either fasting or Hajj.

When -- for their own self-serving, non-spiritual goals -- fanatical, extremist 'jihadists' seek to broaden the notion of who is to be considered to be an infidel, or a corrupter of the earth, or a polytheist, or an unbeliever, or an apostate, or one who is under the influence of jahiliyyah (ignorance), or one who is 'insufficiently Muslim' -- that is, all of the categories of human beings with respect to whom the 'jihadists' claim that a 'real' Muslim is not only justified in killing in the 'way of Allah', but, nay, has a religious duty to do so -- some of these fundamentalist fanatics wish to make women, children, the elderly, and non-combatants as legitimate targets for violence. In truth, there is no Quranic support for such delusional ideas, nor is there any

justification for this in the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

In Book 21, Number 21.3.9 of Muslim, one finds the following tradition:

"Yahya related to me from Malik from Nafi from Ibn Umar that the Messenger of Allah, might Allah bless him and grant him peace, saw the corpse of a woman who had been slain in one of the raids, and he disapproved of it and forbade the killing of women and children."

In another tradition, the following is reported:

"Yahya related to me from Malik that he had heard that Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz wrote to one of his governors, "It has been passed down to us that when the Messenger of Allah, might Allah bless him and grant him peace, sent out a raiding party, he would say to them, 'Make your raids in the name of Allah and in the way of Allah. Fight whoever denies Allah. Do not steal from the booty, and do not act treacherously. Do not mutilate and do not kill children.' Say the same to your armies and raiding parties, Allah willing. Peace be upon you."

Book 21, Number 21.3.10 of Muslim reports the counsel of Hazrat Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (might Allah be pleased with him) -- the first Caliph, father-in-law and close companion of the Prophet -- namely:

"I advise you ten things: Do not kill women or children or an aged, infirm person. Do not cut down fruit-bearing trees. Do not destroy an inhabited place. Do not slaughter sheep or camels except for food. Do not burn bees and do not scatter them. Do not steal from the booty, and do not be cowardly."

In addition, as noted previously, the Quranic verse 5: 32 indicates that whoever kills another human being for "other than manslaughter or corruption in the Earth" it is as if such an individual killed the whole of humanity. How is it that women, just because they are women, or

children, just because they are children, or the elderly, just because they are elderly, or a Muslim who one considers to be 'insufficiently Muslim' have – according to some fanatical 'jihadists' -- suddenly become perpetrators of corruption in the Earth and, therefore are worthy of being killed ... despite the fact that the Qur'an, the Prophet (peace be upon him), and Abu Bakr Siddiq (might Allah be pleased with him) all teach something quite different?

Some extremist 'jihadists' refer to Quranic verses such as:

"True believers are only those who have faith in Allah and the Messenger of Allah and have left doubt behind, and who strive hard in Allah's cause with their possessions and their lives. They are the ones who are sincere." (49:15)

These terrorist leaders use verses such as the foregoing to manipulate those who are already vulnerable to dissociative states brought about a variety of political, economic, social, physical, and spiritual trauma and push the latter further into dissociation. Such so - called leaders -- who, in reality, are nothing but spiritual abusers of others -- argue that if anyone has doubts about the violence that is being advocated, or if they are not willing to kill themselves while striking out at, and slaying, the enemies (including women and children) of Allah, then, such individuals are not true believers, and they are not sincere, and they have no faith in Allah and the Messenger.

Unfortunately, people who already are in a state of dissociation due to other circumstances in their life usually do not have a lot of emotional, intellectual, and spiritual tools to counter arguments like the foregoing ones of the extremist jihadists. The former individuals do not want to be pulled further into the pain of dissociation that is encompassed by such charges, and, consequently, it is often easier for them to comply with the manipulation of spiritual charlatans who are inclined to violence than to have to try to ward off questions about their alleged lack of faith and sincerity in relation to Allah and the Messenger.

Similar things could be said about individuals in the U.S. who, out of trauma concerning the destruction of the World Trade Towers, do

not wish to be pulled or pushed further into dissociation by having, as well, to defend against the charges of those among their fellow Americans who claim that those who are not willing to join in and kill whomever (including women, children, the elderly, and non-combatants) is indicated by government leaders with respect to the Twin Tower tragedy, are not true patriots or are traitors to democracy, or are not lovers and defenders of freedom. Like their counterparts among Muslims elsewhere in the world, there are many people in the U.S. who do not have the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual tools that are necessary to resist such attempts to manipulate those who are in a state of dissociation and, as a result, are vulnerable to becoming victims of the spiritual abuse that is being perpetrated by government "leaders". After all, Jesus (peace be upon him) never killed anyone, and he did not advocate the killing of anyone, but this little fact of inconvenience does not seem to deter those who consider themselves Christians [which, supposedly, means those who follow the teachings of Jesus (peace be upon him), the Christ] from being willing to commit acts of violence or terrorism ... neither of which would have met with the approval of Jesus (peace be upon him).

There was, and is, another stratagem adopted by many fundamentalist, and fanatically oriented jihadists. These jihadists include: (1) the kharijis, a sect that arose during the Caliphacy of Hazrat 'Ali (might Allah be pleased with him) -- which ended in 661 A.D. -- and who (i.e., the kharijis) considered all Muslims who did not accept their interpretation of Islam to be infidels who should be killed and who, as well, developed the idea of a continuous armed conflict against all people who disagreed with them; (2) Shiekh ul-Islaam Taqi-ud-Deen Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah (1268-1328) who wrote extensively about jihad and who glorified the idea of jihad as being superior to Islamic obligations of fasting, the hajj (greater pilgrimage) and the umrah (lesser pilgrimage); (3) Muhammad al-Wahhab (1703-1792), founder of the radical, puritanical, and dogmatic theology that, today, is known as Wahhabism and that calls for a return to medieval Islam as the only solution to the problems facing the Muslim community); (4) Rashid Rida (1865-1935), who founded the salafiyyah movement that has the goal of seeking to bring about a return among Muslims to what was claimed to be the pure Islam of the pious forbearers (the salaf) of early days; (5) Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949), founder of the

Islamic Brotherhood in Egypt that rejected all western approaches to government and advocated violence to establish governments that would rule according to Shari'ah; (6) Sayyid Qutb (1906-1956), who expanded upon the teachings of Hassan al-Banna and called for, among other things, the assassination of any government leaders who were considered to be standing in the way of a return to Islamic rule ; (7) Muhammad Abdus Salam Faraj (1952-1982), implicated in the assassination of Anwar Sadat and author of the booklet, 'Al-Faridah al-Gha 'ibah' (*The Neglected Duty*), that sought to argue that all problems facing Muslims were due to a failure of the Muslim world to consider jihad -- in the sense of armed, violent conflict -- to be a mandatory duty of Islam for every Muslim in relation to all non-Muslims and anyone who was considered to be 'insufficiently Muslim'; (8) Abdullah Azzam (1941-1989), a Palestinian whose most well-known works – *In Defense of Muslim Lands*, and *Join the Caravan* -- sought to make jihad an armed, global tool of violence and after he was assassinated in 1989, the group that he founded, Makhtab al Khadimat, was taken over by bin Laden; and, (9) Shiekh Omar Abdul Rahman, who is now serving time in a U.S. prison for his part in the pre-9/11 bombing of the World Trade Center.

The stratagem being referred to in the opening sentence of the previous paragraph concerns the claim that Allah demands the establishment of an Islamic state that will rigorously and meticulously apply the Shari'ah to all facets of the lives of people living in such a state and require that all people within the state observe Islam. This idea is directly contradicted by the aforementioned Quranic verse (2: 256) which indicates that there can be no compulsion in matters of Deen (that is, the sphere of faith-oriented activities).

However, if one is not satisfied that the foregoing limitation that is being placed on the relation between the state and its citizens is authentic, then, consider the following verses from the Qur'an:

"Whatever benefit comes to you (O man), it is from Allah, and whatever misfortune befalls you it is from your own self; and We have sent you (O Prophet) to mankind as an apostle; and Allah is sufficient as a witness.

“Whoever obeys the Apostle, he indeed obeys Allah; and whosoever turns back, then, We have not sent you as a keeper over them.” (4: 79-80)

Or:

“Say (O Muhammad): "This is the truth from your Lord," then, whoever wills let him believe, and whoever wills let him disbelieve.” (Qur'an, 18:29)

And, again:

“You shall remind; you are entrusted to remind. You have no power over them.” (88:21-22)

And, finally:

“Say, "Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger." If they refuse, then he is responsible for his obligations, and you are responsible for your obligations. If you obey him, you will be guided.” (24:54)

In the foregoing Quranic verses, the Prophet is being told that neither is it his responsibility to be an enforcer with respect to whether, or not, people turn back from Deen, nor does the Prophet have any power over such individuals. The Prophet also is being informed that each person is responsible for his or her own choices concerning matters of Deen, and if a person chooses to disbelieve, then, leave that individual free to do so, but those who obey the Prophet will be rightly guided.

The Prophet is reported to have encouraged people to repent of their sins to God rather than report them to him. However, if a Muslim did insist on confessing sins to him -- a sin for which a penalty, of some kind, was associated -- then, as a matter of acting in accordance with Divine guidance concerning applying the penalty that God had

indicated for such actions (and not as a result of any requirement to compel people in matters of Deen) -- a judgment would be made, and, where indicated, a punishment would be enacted.

Once, during the time when Hazrat 'Umar (might Allah be pleased with him) was Caliph, he was walking about the city and was accompanied by someone. When the two passed a walled compound behind which could be heard a great deal of revelry, the person walking with the Caliph turned to him and in a manner that suggested that sinful things were happening on the other side of the wall, he asked if Hazrat 'Umar knew what was going on in that compound. Hazrat 'Umar (might Allah be pleased with him) is reported to have said: "It is not my task to sniff out the sins of other people."

The task of a Muslim ruler is neither to establish an Islamic state nor to enforce Shari'ah in the sense of compelling people to observe Deen in a particular way. The task of a Muslim ruler is to act with equitability and righteousness. The task of a Muslim leader is not to impose Shari'ah on others ('there can be no compulsion in matters of Deen' - Qur'an 2:256) but to impose the real Shari'ah on himself or herself so that she or he will be able to act with equitability and righteousness and not oppress others.

When the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), by the Grace of Allah, defeated the Meccans and their allies for the final time, he forgave them, placed one of the local people in charge, and returned to Medina. He did not charge this person with the task of establishing an Islamic state.

In Volume 4, Book 53, Number 387 of Muslim, Abu Humaid As - Saidi narrates that:

"We accompanied the Prophet in the Ghazwa of Tabuk and the king of 'Aila presented a white mule and a cloak as a gift to the Prophet. And the Prophet wrote to him a peace treaty allowing him to keep authority over his country."

The King of 'Aila was not charged with the task of establishing an Islamic state. This same sort of arrangement prevailed, as well, in other instances where the Prophet signed peace treaties. In other

words, those with whom the Prophet negotiated peace treaties were not charged with the task of establishing an Islamic state but were only required to observe the conditions of the peace treaty.

Prior to the time when the Prophet passed away, he had not instructed people to establish an Islamic state. In fact, no particular form of government was indicated, but whoever governed was expected to govern in accordance with principles of equitability and righteousness.

In the Qur'an one finds the following verses concerning the issue of equitability:

"O you who believe, equivalence is the law decreed for you when dealing with murder -- the free for the free, the slave for the slave, the female for the female. If one is pardoned by the victim's kin, an appreciative response is in order, and an equitable compensation shall be paid. This is an alleviation from your Lord and mercy. Anyone who transgresses beyond this incurs a painful retribution." (2:178)

"O you who believe, you shall be absolutely equitable, and observe Allah, when you serve as witnesses, even against yourselves, or your parents, or your relatives. Whether the accused is rich or poor, Allah takes care of both. Therefore, do not be biased by your personal wishes. If you deviate or disregard (this commandment), then Allah is fully aware of everything you do." (4:135)

"During the Sacred Months, aggression might be met by an equivalent response. If they attack you, you might retaliate by inflicting an equitable retribution. You shall observe Allah and know that Allah is with the righteous." (2:194)

"O ye who believe. Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity and let not hatred of any people seduce you so that you do not deal justly (with them). Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty." (5:8) "They are upholders of lies, and eaters of illicit earnings. If they come to you to judge among them, you might judge among them, or you might

disregard them. If you choose to disregard them, they cannot harm you in the least. But if you judge among them, you shall judge equitably. Allah loves those who are equitable." (5:42)

"Allah does not enjoin you from befriending those who do not fight you because of religion and do not evict you from your homes. You might befriend them and be equitable towards them. Allah loves the equitable." (60:8)

Elsewhere in the Qur'an believers are warned to be equitable in matters of commercial transactions, the conducting of loans, as well as in the treatment of orphans, adopted children, spouses, and slaves (and as with many other issues such as consumption of alcohol and the rights of women, the trend of reformation in the Qur'an was toward encouraging Muslims to free slaves, not keep them or take them, but if slaves were maintained, then, these individuals had the right to be fed, clothed, and treated in the same way as other members of the family). Equitability is a re-current theme throughout the Qur'an.

Righteousness is also a theme that is reiterated and emphasized throughout the Qur'an. Being pious, just, grateful, patient, kind, charitable, compassionate, honest, sincere, loving, tolerant, forgiving, repentant, humble, modest, and one who does not transgress due boundaries, are qualities that are advocated throughout the Qur'an.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said:

"Muslims are brothers and sisters in Deen, and they must not oppress one another, nor abandon assisting each other, nor hold one another in contempt. The seat of righteousness is the heart; therefore, that heart that is righteous does not hold a Muslim in contempt."

A Muslim is anyone who submits to God, and who believes in the Last Day, and who tries to act in accordance with the qualities of righteousness, and who seeks to abide by the Deen of God. One should not be too quick to jump to conclusions about who is, and who is not, a

Muslim ... and, therefore, one should not be too quick to jump to conclusions concerning whom one must not oppress, nor whom one should avoid abandoning in assistance, nor whom one should treat with righteousness.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "I have been given all the Names and have been sent to perfect good character."

Principles of equitability and righteousness are at the heart of good character. If one has lost confidence in the capacity of the tools of faith -- such as equitability and righteousness -- to assist others and to help one refrain from oppressing them, and if one believes that violent, armed conflict is the only solution to problems, one fails to understand that is not possible to violently impose good character on others and, therefore, the purpose for which fundamentalist, extremist jihadists claim to be fighting -- the establishment of Islam -- will always be doomed to failure. Good character can only arise through struggle within oneself, not through imposition from without.

There are some advocates of violent, armed conflict -- such as Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj (author of *The Neglected Duty*) -- who believe that it is not necessary to make any plans for what should be done after the time of jihad (in the sense of armed conflict), but, rather, one should just pursue jihad and, then, God will provide what is needed later on. How foolish, ill-considered, and illogical!

If one is prepared to trust in God to look after things following jihad -- in the sense of armed conflict -- then, why not trust in God to look after things prior to, if not independently of, armed conflict? If one is prepared to use tools of violence in the way of God because one believes that such a tool has been sanctioned by God, then, why not be equally prepared, if not more so, to use the tools of faith that have clearly been sanctioned by God in the Qur'an and in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)?

Why are fanatic, fundamentalist, extremist jihadists so intent on reducing the tools of Islam down to nothing but violence when such a reduction cannot be justified either by the full array of teachings of the Qur'an or by the traditions of the Prophet? These are individuals who have lost their faith in the tools of faith, and, yet, they are promoting themselves as the defenders of faith.

The tendency of people who have lost their faith in the tools of faith is to spiritually abuse others and to oppress them. People who have lost their faith in the tools of faith must resort to delusional systems of thought because they have lost contact with the only thing that is capable of putting them in touch with spiritual truth -- namely, real, authentic, sincere faith that God's guidance concerning principles such as equitability and righteousness have a far greater capacity for transforming individuals and society than tools of violence and oppression could ever have.

Tools of violence are limited, stop-gap measures for extreme sets of circumstances that rarely exist. Tools of faith encompass an unlimited array of opportunities for pursuing principles of equitability and righteousness that are intended to provide the primary means through which one engages struggle within oneself, in relation to others (both believers and unbelievers), and with all of life.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) understood this truth (as did all Prophets). The Qur'an bears witness to this truth (as do all Books of revelation). Unfortunately, those who are inclined to making violence the solution to everything neither understand the foregoing truth, nor do they bear witness to it in their lives.

Those who have lost faith in the tools of faith and who advocate violence and oppression as the solution to all problems create delusional belief systems concerning the teachings of God and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The truth will not permit them to advocate what they are advocating in the way they are advocating it, and, as a result, the only recourse they have -- if they are not prepared, spiritually speaking, to acknowledge the truth of things -- is to create delusional belief systems that seek to justify what they are doing as being in accordance with the wishes of, and by permission of, God ... neither of which is true.

Those who are in a state of dissociation (due to political, social, economic, international, historical, and/or personal trauma) are vulnerable to the delusional teachings of those who worship violence like an idol. The reason why those who are in a state of dissociation are vulnerable is because the psychic, emotional, psychological and spiritual pain of dissociation is very intense and eats away at the fabric of the soul.

For such a person, meaning, purpose, identity, motivation, and truth are very elusive, whereas, doubt, anxiety, fear, alienation, depression, hopelessness, helplessness, directionless, loss of identity, and de-personalization are all too real, prevalent, and intense. A person in such a condition of dissociation will grab onto almost anything if they are led to believe that what is being acquired will permit them to escape the pain of dissociation.

Terrorist leaders are individuals who understand the condition of dissociation and the kind of vulnerability to which that state opens people up. Terrorist leaders -- as well as the theologians, imams, government leaders, and jurists who support them -- are spiritually abusive individuals who exploit that vulnerability by (1) locating individuals who are in a state of dissociation, (2) initiating the latter individuals into a delusional framework that undermines whatever remnants of faith are present in the person who is in a dissociated state and, thereby, (3) inducing such a person to abandon the tools of faith and to pick up the tools of violence as a way of solving problems - - both personal and collective.

Terrorist 'leaders' -- whether of the state-sponsored or small group, variety -- are very clever in the techniques used to manipulate and exploit people who are in a state of dissociation. For instance, such leaders often get individuals to sign contracts and/or make videos about their coming exploits and, by doing this, those leaders have a means of pushing the individual back into a dissociative state by labeling anyone who does not follow through on a terrorist act to be: cowardly, a traitor, an unbeliever, one who lacks faith in God, someone who has betrayed the community, or a person lacking in character.

The foregoing technique has an unsettling resonance with something, unfortunately, which also happens in so-called democratic, free societies in relation to people who object to the use of violence and oppression as a means of solving problems (whether domestic or international in nature). People in the United States who advocate using the tools of faith rather than tools of violence to solve problems are often threatened with a barrage of accusations concerning their loyalty, patriotism, rationality, and/or commitment to democracy, and such labeling is intended to push people into the pain of dissociation and, thereby, either punish them for speaking out, or silence them

through the specter of being pushed further toward the condition of dissociation.

In Muslim's collection of hadith, one finds the following narration of Bibi A'isha:

"Allah's Apostle said, "If somebody innovates something that is not in harmony with the principles of our religion, that thing is rejected." (Volume 3, Book 49, Number 861)

To insist on using the tools of violence as the primary and best, if not only, way of dealing with the problems that face the Muslim community, is an innovation that is not in harmony with the principles of Deen when such Deen is considered in its entirety and issues are not removed from their proper context. Consequently, in accordance with the teachings of both the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) the approach of the people who prefer tools of violence over tools of faith should be rejected.

The delusional teachings of extremist, fundamentalist jihadists gives expression to shirk -- that is, the associating of partners with God. This is so because, in reality, such individuals are inventing a religion of their own and they have declared themselves lords of such a religion and, as well, they not only consider themselves to be the 'prophets' of this new religion, but they consider the words that issue forth from their mouths to be the word of God. As the Qur'an indicates:

"Shall we tell you who will be the greatest losers in their works? ... those whose striving goes astray in the present life while they think they are working good deeds." (18:104)

The spiritual abusers who constitute the terrorist leaders, together with those vulnerable individuals whom become infected with the delusional teachings of those so-called 'leaders' concerning the nature of jihad and Islam, both pursue strivings of the foregoing sort. These are individuals who have forgotten, or who never knew,

that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) 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.”

When those who govern -- whether Muslim or non-Muslim -- do not observe the principles of equitability and righteousness (principles with which all spiritual and humanist traditions tend to be in agreement) and, as a result, oppress those whom they govern, then, people have the right to resist such oppression, injustice, and unrighteousness through whatever combination of the tools of faith that might, God willing, help the oppressed to overcome oppression, and in the process, serve the best interests of the oppressor as well. The purpose of such resistance is not to establish an Islamic state, nor to impose Shari'ah on the community, but, rather, to reinstate principles of equitability and righteousness as the proper tools of governance.

A state should be governed neither by secular nor religious principles. A state should be governed by those principles of equitability and righteousness that help create, God willing, a safe and protected environment through which people will have the opportunity, without being compelled in either a secular or a religious direction, to strive and struggle toward realizing one's essential potential and identity.

Anyone who believes that the terrorist phenomenon is going to be defeated by waging a war on terrorism in which indiscriminate violence is used as the antidote to the indiscriminate violence of terrorism has just handed terrorists a major victory. Using indiscriminate violence and oppression to combat the oppression of terrorist violence does nothing but pour oil onto a raging fire, both spreading the fire and making it more intense.

Every violation of human rights, every curtailment of freedom, every subterfuge concerning constitutional principles, every show of force that results in “collateral damage”, every imprisonment of

innocent people, every expression of contempt for the international community, every penny that is spent benefitting government contractors more than it does people who are being oppressed, every form of oppression that is brought about by occupying forces, every opportunity for real democracy that is undermined by the imposition of sham democracy, every denial of the real causes that help push people into dissociative conditions -- all of the foregoing mistakes of the "war on terrorism" can be woven into the fabric of the delusional paradigm of terrorists in the most problematic way. More specifically, it is not the delusion that can be shown to be completely false that constitutes the most difficult problem facing those who wish to try to realistically address the issue of terrorism ... rather, one of the biggest obstacles facing the search for peace involves those terrorist-oriented delusional systems that are laced with actual exemplars of inhumanity, cruelty, and oppression that have been committed by the other side and, thereby, lend a ring of truth and authenticity to the other false claims by the propagandists of terrorism (whether in the form of theologians, jurists, government leaders, self-styled revolutionaries, or imams).

Every time indiscriminate violence and oppression are used in an attempt to quell the tide of terrorism, one has difficulty differentiating the so-called 'good' (because it comes from us not them) forms of terrorism from those 'evil' forms of such activity that are perpetrated by those whom we condemn -- and, in truth, both varieties of terrorism and oppression are equally reprehensible. Once one resorts to using the same tools of violence as extremist, fundamentalist jihadists, then, the tools of faith that are the only tools that, God willing, have the chance to solve the problems that underlie terrorism, become lost in the shuffle and with this loss, so, too, are opportunities lost for making real, lasting progress with respect to the many problems and forces that play key roles in the etiology of the dissociative states that render people vulnerable to the delusional systems of the proponents of terrorism.

Terrorism (whether state sponsored or that of a small group or set of terrorist cells) is an expression of spiritual abuse. The spiritual abuse is perpetrated through the intention of so-called 'leaders' to exploit and manipulate someone who is in a state of dissociation and

to assist the latter out of that condition through a delusional system that undermines faith and is intended to induce people to replace the tools of faith with tools of violence.

As such, the intention of terrorist leaders is very similar to the intention of spiritual charlatans. Each seeks to undermine faith through initiating vulnerable people into a delusional perspective that helps lower the threshold against committing acts (violent or otherwise ... with respect to one's self or in relation to others) that are contrary to the actual requirements of spiritual etiquette.

There are legitimate forms of jihad and there are illegitimate forms of jihad. The legitimate forms of jihad have nothing to do with indiscriminate violence and, with the exception of very special and limited circumstances, have nothing to do with violence. Rather, all forms of legitimate jihad -- whether in the form of speaking the truth in the face of tyranny, or the performance of a Hajj that is accepted by Allah, or struggling and striving against the problematic urgings of the desires and motivations of the nafs (the seat of rebellion against Divinity in a human being) -- have to do with refining moral character through sacrifice, and not with sacrificing moral character (as well as the concomitant tools of faith that are associated with such character) through committing violence against others.

There are legitimate forms of mysticism, and there are illegitimate forms of mysticism. The legitimate forms of mysticism require the assistance of someone who is not a spiritual charlatan, just as the pursuit of authentic jihad (which only very rarely requires armed conflict and when this is truly necessary must be pursued within strict guidelines) requires assistance from those who are well ensconced in the tools of faith, rather than the tools of violence.

Chapter 53: A Story And Its Symbolism

The following story was told to me and a friend of mine by the individual who I considered – incorrectly – to be an authentic Sufi shaykh. The story was told not as a fictional account but as something that had actually happened.

I had never known (at least up to that point) the alleged shaykh to lie. So, the telling of the story – especially, in the light of subsequent events that led to my discovery of the counterfeit nature of this individual who referred to himself as a shaykh – makes me wonder about the significance of the story and why it was told.

Quite independently of whatever the motivations were of the spiritual charlatan for relating the story, there are some elements in the story that lend themselves to some reflections on the issue of spiritual abuse. From this perspective, the following story might have some symbolic significance.

After supper is over, we linger at the table, talking with Baba. He begins to tell an incredible story.

Apparently, two of his mu reeds from Houston phone one night, some time shortly after 9/11, and inquire about visiting Baba as soon as possible. They sound very scared and upset.

They tell Baba they can be there late the next day if they drive all night. They don't want to take an airplane, even though one of the two works for an airline.

When they arrive, they begin to tell why they are so upset. A brother or sister of theirs (I was never quite certain whether the brother/sister was from the husband's or wife's side of the family) has been having difficulty getting a job. This is prior to 9/11.

A friend of his tells him about a job possibility in New York City. The friend shows him an employment advertisement.

The brother or brother-in-law calls the number appearing on the ad, and an application is sent to him. He fills out the form, and returns it to the company.

A little later, the brother/brother-in-law receives a telephone call indicating that the company would like for him and his wife to come to New York for an interview. All expenses will be paid.

They receive an airplane ticket, together with instructions concerning their hotel accommodations while in New York. They are informed that on such and such a date, the couple will be picked up by a limousine service and driven to the airport in Houston.

On the indicated date, the plans unfold as announced. When they arrive in New York, they are met by another limousine that transports them to the hotel in Manhattan where they are to stay.

They are taken to a very swanky suite. A short time after their arrival, someone knocks on the door and a hospitality basket is delivered.

They eat supper in the hotel restaurant, return to their room, and begin to partake in one of the non-alcoholic beverages that came with the hospitality basket delivered earlier. A half hour, or so, later, there is a knock on the door.

Two people are at the door -- a woman and a man. They are there to give messages to the couple from Houston.

About this time, both the husband and the wife are beginning to feel a little strange ... woozy and light-headed. They don't remember much after answering the door.

The next morning, both husband and wife awake in separate rooms within the suite. They each have a vague sense of having been sexually assaulted the evening before, but they are not exactly sure and, so, they say nothing to one another.

They go to the scheduled interview set for the afternoon. When they eventually find their way to the room, the room turns out to be a huge convention amphitheater-like auditorium, with a raised stage at the front.

There are hundreds of people already gathered. Most of the people look to be from Pakistan, India, and/or the Middle East.

The seats are equipped with head phones, and there also seem to be a set of toggle switches or buttons in the arm rests of the seats. The participants are instructed to put the headset on at a certain point, but

before this happens, a white man gets on stage and addresses the audience.

He indicates the interview process will consist of people responding to certain visual images that will be shown on the screen. The participants will do this by using the switches embedded in the arm rests of their chairs.

After a further discussion of the interview process takes place, the speaker opens things up to questions. At a certain point, someone in the audience asks the speaker to say something about the company that is behind all of this.

The man says 'we are the people who make and break governments.' Shortly thereafter, the participants are instructed to put on the headsets, the room darkens, and the lowered screen fills with images, and the headphones fill with voices.

The couple who are related to Baba's mureeds say that although they don't remember much of what took place during the interview, they each seem to recall images of planes flying into tall buildings, and, as well, they recall being asked whether they could watch their children die.

After this, things are pretty much a blank. Sometime later, at night, they find themselves in a daze, walking the streets of Manhattan, their clothes disheveled. They have no recollection of how they got to where they are.

The return flight to Houston is not far away. They return to the hotel, pick up their bags and head for the airport.

A few days after the couple returns to Houston, some strange events begin to take place. The wife (who had gone to New York) tries to kill her husband. She keeps calling him the devil or the dajjal.

Things become so bad that she has to be hospitalized for a time. Eventually, she calms down and returns home.

Not too long after this, the husband goes crazy and does the same sort of thing to his wife that his wife earlier had done to him. He threatens her and calls her the devil or dajjal.

Over time, he too, calms down. But, both he and his wife continue to live with a great deal of trauma, and, eventually, they tell their story

to Baba's mureeds who are now relating it to Baba. But, they are doing so after 9/11 already has taken place.

The foregoing story raises some very important questions. If the story is not true, then, why did the alleged shaykh tell the story as if it were? What was he trying to accomplish? Was it a test in compliance?

Alternatively, if the story is true, then, why weren't the authorities notified about it? Was the idea to create an atmosphere of fear, anxiety, panic, and paranoia in those to whom the story is told so that they would stay away from authorities or government figures -- after all, generally speaking, people who enter into a state of dissociation as a result of such scare tactics, tend to be more vulnerable to suggestion and other forms of social influence?

The story has many, potential symbolic elements. For instance, consider the following points.

To begin with, the victims in the story were not looking to engage in illegal or immoral activity. They were looking for something that was much needed -- namely, a job.

That need was exploited by, and entangled within, an entirely different agenda. This theme has resonance with the manner in which many spiritual frauds operate -- for, false shaykhs, and other charlatans, use the holy longing that is within all of us (that, in and of itself, is entirely God-given and innocent), and they take advantage of our inherent, spiritual vulnerability in order to wed that holy longing to something that is very unholy and evil.

Secondly, the couple in the story was drugged through a hospitality basket and induced into an altered state of consciousness. This, too, is what often happens among fraudulent Sufi teachers -- that is, various techniques of seeming kindness, gift-giving, hospitality, love-bombing, and so on, are used to lower people's defenses and render them more pliable and compliant with respect to an agenda of abuse and exploitation that is to follow. Many people are sexually assaulted or exploited in other ways, while under the influence of the altered states of consciousness that are induced by techniques of 'hospitality'.

Thirdly, just as in the story, people who are found by, or find their way to, fraudulent spiritual guides (without knowing that this is what

has happened) are tested again and again. The tests are always re-framed as something other than what they are, and these tests can be very, very subtle, but, the series of tests are themselves a way of inducing a person to enter situations and circumstances that they might not otherwise do if the reality to which the tests are leading were presented clearly in the beginning.

Fourthly, the purpose of the tests is to separate off the 'insiders' from the 'outsiders' -- that is, to enable the spiritual fraud to differentiate between those who will do his or her bidding, and those who are not with the program. Those who have passed the tests, are, in turn, used by the charlatan to extend his or her sphere of influence over more and more people through the use of this 'proxy' army of committed workers.

Some of the people who are being used in this fashion are not aware of what is going on. Others among those who have passed various tests are aware, to varying degrees, about what is going on and use this awareness to better position themselves within the group's pecking order.

Fifthly, the person in the story who gets up on the stage and announces that 'we are the people who make and break governments' might be an allusion to people -- namely, spiritual charlatans -- whose business is the making and breaking of souls, and they take great pleasure in this facet of their activity.

They love influencing, controlling, exploiting, duping, manipulating, and abusing people. They derive pleasure from hurting people and destroying the legitimate spiritual aspirations of those with whom such so-called guides come in contact.

Sixthly, the people who do not pass the appropriate tests are, like the couple in the story, cast out. Such individuals either get moved to the fringe -- even as they suppose they are still part of things -- or these individuals are disposed of in one way or another, or they are intentionally abused to such an extent that, just as in the story, they find themselves walking about life in a dazed, dissociated state -- not knowing quite what has hit them.

Finally, when such abused people try to return to their 'normal' lives, they often encounter tremendous difficulty in making the

transition or adjustment. The poisoning that has taken place at the hands of a spiritual fraud linger in a person's system, long after one has discontinued associating with such abusive people.

Sometimes, as in the foregoing story, people end up engaged in recriminations against one another. Sometimes, the people who have exited such groups are left with values, beliefs, behaviors, and ideas that were implanted during the periods of trance that were induced through the spiritual charlatan.

Often times, when those who exit abusive groups try to tell their story to others, the nature of the story is so alien to someone who has not, himself or herself, gone through such experiences, that the escapees are not believed. Or, when such people try to help others in the group to escape, the spiritual charlatan already has arranged things so that the ones who have exited are the ones who are perceived, by those who remain as the ones who are being abusive, uncaring, lying, mentally disturbed, under the influence of Satan, or the like - not the fraudulent guide. Consequently, the ones who have managed, through one means or another, to extricate themselves, or be extricated, from an abusive group/teacher, are perceived as being unreliable, without credibility, operating from vested interests, or trying to steal spirituality away from those who are still being held hostage by the abusive group and/or fraudulent teacher.

Sometimes, someone might even say that the people who have managed to escape are merely serving as publicists for, yet, another theory of conspiracy - a conspiracy about spiritual abuse. Or, such individuals are judged to be individuals who brought on their own misery and deserve whatever happens to them at the hands of unscrupulous people.

People can say whatever they like. However, anyone who has not been raped, does not really have any understanding of the horrors of such an experience. The former individuals tend to lack insight into the phenomenology of: betrayal, vulnerability, fragileness, guilt, loss of self-esteem, humiliation, trauma, doubt, anxiety, confusion, stress, conflict, alienation, anger, outrage, violation, and feelings of having been degraded -- physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually -- which are associated with physical rape. To be spiritually raped is to be dragged into the dark spaces of dissociation that are

similar to those that are experienced by someone who has been sexually assaulted.

Society has taken a very long time to even begin to learn that no one asks to be raped. In fact, many people are still of the opinion that anyone who gets raped must have been doing something to 'cause' or bring on the sexual assault.

However, no matter what one does, no one wishes to be placed in a situation where their wishes and will count for less than nothing. One's behavior might be careless or imprudent or risky or foolish, but no one does so with the intention of wanting to be abused, degraded, humiliated, lied to, and/or exploited.

Society, in general, is still in denial about the extensive nature of spiritual abuse that is being perpetrated across all strata of society. This abuse is so intimately intertwined with the lives of many people that the vast majority of these individuals do not even recognize they are being abused through lies, misinformation, re-framing, hidden agendas, problematic guidance, manipulation, exploitation, or techniques of social influence, compliance, and obedience.

People suppose they understand the nature of trances and altered states of consciousness. Yet, many of these same individuals fail to appreciate the fact that they live much of their lives in a series of trance states ... there is a reason why the great mystics have said that we are in a state of sleep and when we die, we wake up.

Many people call themselves mystics or Sufis, or whatever. Many of these same people live in a state of sleep and get annoyed whenever anyone comes along and says something that might disturb their sleep or that suggests that, perhaps, they are not as aware of the reality of things -- especially with respect to themselves -- as they suppose.

The foregoing story is a wake-up call -- not with respect to a conspiracy theory of some kind, but as a reminder that many of us are being spiritually abused (by fraudulent shaykhs, theologians, imams, group leaders, media outlets, and/or governments) and, yet, we have been induced to believe otherwise. The people who specialize in the making and breaking of souls are circulating amongst us in various guises.

Chapter 54: Qualities of A Teacher

There might be many individuals within education and the general area of spirituality who have the qualities that are to be described in what follows. However, I tend to doubt this is so, for, if such were true, then education -- public, private, higher, and spiritual -- and society would be vastly different than is, unfortunately, the case.

On a personal level, there are only a precious few individuals with whom I have had the good fortune to come in contact who gave expression to all the qualities outlined below. Moreover, of this select group, only one came from within formal education.

My sample, of course, is limited and, possibly, skewed by my own biases. Nonetheless, I have been exposed to school systems in a number of countries, and on a variety of levels -- both as a student and teacher. In addition, I have had the opportunity to interact with a variety of individuals who are alleged to be authentic shaykhs.

I wish, with all my heart, I could report that the sort of qualities about to be explored were far more prevalent than what I have been able to observe. This does not seem to be the case ... although every now and then one comes across truly remarkable human beings who are teachers in the very sense of this word.

There is much that could be said about any of the following qualities. The intention here is merely to offer an overview of each one -- something of a thumbnail sketch. Furthermore, the qualities are introduced in no particular order of importance -- since, in truth, all of them are, in many ways, equally important.

Honesty -- Although always guided by a sense of propriety concerning circumstances, a teacher is someone who bears witness to the truth as she or he understands it, and does so without pre-aching rancor or being overbearing. More often than not, this honesty is given expression according to the perceived need of a person (or persons) for what is being said or done, as well as the ability of the one(s) with whom the teacher is interacting to handle and make use of what is being said or done. Depending on circumstances and perceived needs, what is said and/or done by a teacher might be issued in a diplomatic fashion or it might be expressed more directly and openly.

Committed -- The duty of care is always directed toward the needs of the one who is seeking after learning and understanding. The commitment is not to society, government, business, parents, or school, but to the individual, and this is done with the knowledge that if the needs of the individual are properly attended to, then, society, business, parents, and the school will all benefit as a result of the primary directive, as it were, being served. A corollary of the foregoing principle is that a teacher would never sacrifice the needs, interests, and potential of students for the self-centered, self-serving, and arbitrary whims of politicians, officials, administrators, or unions.

Flexible -- A teacher is not tied to any preconceived way of doing things. He or she is open to the possibilities of the moment and is prepared to pursue whatever avenues that appear to be most resonant with the needs, interests, and circumstances of those who are seeking after knowledge and understanding. If something is tried and is not working -- in the sense of lacking in heuristic value for the other participants -- the teacher will be ready to switch gears.

Humility -- The sort of teachers I have in mind do not think of their abilities, talents, accomplishments, or experiences as reflecting something special about them as individuals. They are quick to acknowledge the help, guidance, efforts, and support of other people as being more responsible for what they are and have than is anything that comes from them as individuals.

Balanced -- They bring emotional, cognitive, community, interpersonal, economic, physical, and spiritual dimensions together in due proportions. They recognize human nature is complex and that the health of that nature depends on the integration of various potentials within human beings.

Democratic -- They are not necessarily right or left of center, or even involved in political life, but they have an abiding devotion to issues of freedom, justice, fairness, equality, and truth as benchmarks that are crucial to the viability and success of education, spirituality and community. These issues are not just theoretical entities to them but are meant to be put into practice in order to benefit all participants. Yet, the manner of implementation is not only non-authoritarian or non-coercive in character but seeks to find paths to

either consensus or ways of operating within a framework of acknowledged and accepted differences of perspective.

Respectful -- They do not intrude into the lives of people and will accept the boundaries that are established. At the same time, they are ready to respond in whatever way they can when invitations are extended.

Character -- They offer models of values, ethics, and/or spirituality through who they are and what they do, not by lecturing. They do not necessarily speak about kindness, generosity, love, tolerance, patience, or compassion -- rather, they are these things and give expression to them through the way they go about life.

Consistent -- What they say is reflected in what they do, and vice versa. They are not different in different circumstances but always centered within their sense of self, although often in low-key ways. They are sincere in everything they do and say without being annoying in the process.

Given to Reciprocity -- Such qualities as trust, openness, warmth, respect, and friendliness are treated as two way streets for which the teacher has the primary duty of care with respect to establishing precedents in each instance.

Tolerant -- A teacher recognizes that people come in all manner of shapes, sizes, colors, temperaments, interests, needs, personalities, beliefs, and values. The goal is not to change people in ways that are pre-determined, but to work with them, according to their capacity and ability, to help them realize their potential.

Realistic -- They understand the ways things are politically, socially, economically, biologically, and emotionally. Yet, without trying to persuade others to adopt any particular point of view, they do whatever they can to help prepare individuals to deal with these realities in a manner that will not open either individuals or society to the destructive potentials that are inherent in human beings, both individually and collectively.

Idealistic -- They are committed to such qualities as: truth, freedom, justice, equality, fairness, love, compassion, kindness, and honesty. In addition, while they realize that these qualities are often only approachable as a limit, nevertheless, they spend their lives

seeking to realize these qualities in deeper and more refined ways so that others might benefit through the teacher being the best that he or she can be.

Sense of Self -- They know who they are. They are aware of both their strengths and their weaknesses. They appreciate their history, and they have a destination toward which they are striving, as well as a means through which to undertake the journey.

Unambitious -- They are unconcerned with achieving career status, monetary rewards, or recognition by others. Teaching is not a means to something else but a way of sharing whatever they have with others.

Independent -- The 'road less traveled' seems to be their preferred path. They do not operate according to the expectations of others, nor do they change themselves to suit the likes and dislikes of those around them. Yet, they tend not to be confrontational, arrogant, or belligerent in the manner through which they give expression to their independence.

Supportive -- They offer a context of security within which individuals can explore possibilities without fear of ridicule or adverse consequences for making mistakes. They encourage people to find out about themselves and the world around them, but to do so at their own pace, as well as in accordance with their own particular package of capacities, talents, and interests.

Humanitarian -- Loves people. Believes in them. Wants them to realize whatever potential they have and be happy in doing so. Cares for people and will do whatever she or he can to assist them along the path of life.

Courageous -- In a very unassuming way, they have faced the 'stings and arrows of outrageous fortune' and have opposed them -- not with arms -- but with steadfastness, optimism, and a willingness, if necessary, to fail while committing all that one has and is to the process of life.

Self-critical -- They are very aware of their own weaknesses or limitations, along with the need to continually make efforts to improve as a person. Moreover, they are open to receiving criticism from others

-- accepting what is true, discarding the rest, and using what is true to try to become better human beings.

Challenging -- They have an aura about them that -- to slightly paraphrase Jack Nicholson's line to Helen Hunt -- 'makes you want to be a better person'. Their very mode of being in the world inspires people and, in the process, induces others to seek to explore, learn, discover, and make efforts toward self-realization.

Friendly -- They do not approach people as teachers or educators or instructors, but as friends who are their well-wishers. They are there for people when the latter need them. They are protective, faithful, and non-judgmental. They listen and care about what they are hearing.

Rigorous -- They operate in accordance with a set of standards that critically probes experience in a deliberate, thorough, considered, and patient manner. They are not inclined to accept facile or shallow answers - either from themselves or others. They enjoy pushing the envelope on matters of critical inquiry.

Teachable -- They demonstrate a willingness to learn from their interactions with others. They are aware of the many facets of their own ignorance and treat the insights and abilities of others -- including those of so-called 'students' -- as so many 'found treasures'.

Optimistic -- This is not the optimism of Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss, but that of someone who has faith in human beings when the latter are provided with the degrees of freedom necessary to explore, develop, and realize individual human potential. This is an optimism in the idea that opportunity arising in a context free from exploitive, authoritarian, abusive, and manipulative influences will be embraced by those who are trusted with the duties of care that accompany such opportunity. They know there will be exceptions to this principle, but they do not let this sort of risk get in the way of that which would benefit the many.

Open -- They are guileless. They are people of integrity and tend to treat others as people of integrity as well -- an integrity that entails respect, honesty, sincerity, and an absence of duplicity. On the other hand, they are not inclined to be people who provide one with more personal information than one wishes to hear.

Forgiving -- They understand that mistakes and errors are part of what being human involves. They recognize that mistakes and errors form an important part of the fabric of experience out of which learning arises. They are inclined to help people to develop maturity through encounters with such problems and, then, move on to other issues without letting interpersonal history interfere with opportunities for learning.

Unassuming -- They are not pretentious with respect to what they know or have done. They are comfortable with what they understand but have no need to impose this on others or force others to acknowledge such things. Furthermore, they have no expectations concerning how others with whom they interact should approach learning.

Appreciative -- They have gratitude for the gift of life and embrace the many levels of opportunity that life offers human beings. They appreciate the efforts and struggles of anyone who sincerely seeks to take advantage of such opportunity.

Inquisitive -- They are inclined to ask important, essential questions about: truth, justice, freedom, equality, purpose, identity, love, commitment, beliefs, values, and understanding. They do not have an idle curiosity but are inquisitive about human nature and what it means to be, rather than not at all. More often than not they represent a model of how to ask questions, and what kinds of question are important to reflect upon, but, simultaneously, allow people to be free to find their own way to solutions to these questions that make sense within the framework of a given individual's circumstances, interests, and abilities.

Generous -- They are free with their knowledge, time, help, personal resources, and encouragement. They are forthcoming in their praise and appreciation of others without trying to flatter people or give them a false sense of accomplishment.

Patient -- They know that understanding and learning do not always come easily for everyone in all situations. They are cognizant of individual differences in circumstance, development, ability, temperament, interest, and aptitude. They have some degree of insight into the many factors that need to come together in order for important kinds of learning to occur. They wait, observe, listen, and try

to be receptive to the advent of so-called 'teachable moments', but, in the meantime, they do whatever they can to pave the way to such moments or to make them more likely to occur, than not. They do not have an hidden agenda, nor do they feel the need to cover so much material, of a particular kind, in a given time.

Sense of Humor -- They do not take themselves too seriously. They can enjoy the lighter side of life, as well as poke fun at some of the absurdities that are disclosed through the locus of manifestation known as a human being -- including themselves. In addition, without being disrespectful or insensitive to circumstances, they often take some of the edge away from life's darker side through laughter.

Fair -- More often than not, essential learning and understanding arise out of circumstances in which an individual is comfortable with, and trusts, those circumstances. An important component in the development of such a sense of comfort and trust is to feel that one is being treated fairly. A teacher acknowledges this and does whatever is possible and feasible to create such circumstances by, among other things, removing as much arbitrariness, artificiality, bias, favoritism, prejudice, and irrelevancy as possible from the context of would-be learning -- all of which serve as cultures conducive to the growth of unfairness.

Pragmatic -- Teachers make do with what is reasonably available to those who are seeking to learn and understand. Teachers encourage students to do so as well, but, in addition, encourage the latter to be resourceful and creative in relation to discovering what is amenable to being used in the pursuit of learning.

Gentle -- As much as possible, teachers employ non-intrusive means for stimulating opportunities for learning and understanding. This means that, whenever possible, they employ modalities that are devoid of influences that are punitive, destructive of self-esteem, rooted in extrinsic rewards, competitive, or steeped in stress ... all of which have been shown, experimentally and clinically, to interfere with learning, both short-term, as well as long-term.

Competent -- They 'got game' in relation to life. Whatever they know in the way of facts, methods, history, names, formulae, and/or ideas is secondary to their grasp of the principles of how to engage life in order to work toward the realization of individual potential. This is

not to say that the former sort of things are necessarily unimportant (although they often are), but the priorities must be clear. To possess the former in the relative absence of the latter is, for the most part, extremely limited and limiting, if not altogether useless.

Uncompromising -- They are uncompromising when it comes to abiding by the truth in terms of themselves but without making anyone else feel, in the process, that the latter are expected to follow suit or are being judged according to whether, or not, the latter go along with what the 'teacher' says or does.

Self-sacrificing -- They are willing to take a 'hit' in order to protect, support, and serve their students, and, yet, a teacher often does this in private and without others knowing that it is being done. They do not see such behavior as being self-sacrificial, but as being part of the duty of care that any friendship deserves.

Protective -- They understand, all too well, what awaits students once the latter are removed from the sanctuary that arises within the sphere of influence that has been established through a teacher's manner of giving expression to the duties of care entailed by the vocation of teaching. A teacher tries to preserve the sanctuary and protect its inhabitants for as long as possible -- considering every moment spent within the sanctuary as providing students with that much better chance of surviving in the wild where many kinds of two-legged predators roam.

At the beginning of this essay, a claim was made that there might be few people in formal education or within the general realm of religious institutions who exhibit all of the foregoing qualities -- although they might have this or that characteristic or some small sub-set of such qualities. If this is so, why should this be the case?

One crucial reason for this state of affairs is that there are few places of learning that have the resources or competence necessary for teaching people how to be 'teachers' in the foregoing sense. You can't teach what you don't know, understand, appreciate, or aspire to.

A second, fundamental reason for the set of circumstances existing vis-à-vis the relative absence of 'teachers' who exhibit the foregoing qualities is the following. There are many different elements

within formal education and within the sphere of influence of what passes for spirituality in many areas that tend to conspire together, knowingly and unknowingly, in order to drive out anyone who demonstrates the qualities of being a teacher in the sense outlined earlier.

This is done because teachers in the sense outlined above threaten too many vested interests that seek to initiate students (whether of this world or the next) into a modern form of indentured servitude within certain kinds of political, economic, philosophical and religious ideologies, and, as such, teachers in the sense specified earlier are largely antithetical to the agendas being pushed in much of elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education, as well as all too many mosques, churches, temples, and synagogues. As such, 'teachers' in the foregoing sense are considered to be 'loose cannons' who cannot be relied on to serve political, economic, social, religious, and expedient interests that are not capable of serving an individual's essential potential for self-realization.

Occasionally, in spite of the an all too common mind and heart set within formal education and religious settings, one comes across someone who reflects the qualities of a teacher as outlined above. However, my experience has been that, more often than not, to the extent one comes across such people at all, one will find them outside the hallowed halls of formal education and beyond the doors of religious institutions -- and, even with respect to such exceptions, these special individuals might becoming an endangered species ... for the same destructive forces that are shaping much of modern education and religious institutions are also present outside those institutional realms and such malevolent forces wish to be rid of the influence of individuals with the qualities of an 'authentic' teacher for reasons alluded to above.

The qualities of a teacher that have been briefly described in this essay are not the sort of characteristics that can be used to form rules of thumb through which one can identify whether someone is, or is not, an authentic spiritual guide. In fact, judging whether, or not, such qualities are present takes time, and in the amount of time that would be required to make such determinations, one already might have exposed oneself to considerable risk in the case of an individual who,

despite initial impressions, was, in reality, an abusive, manipulative charlatan, and, as a result, one would stand a good chance of being yesterday's lunch for such a shark while one was still trying to establish what the actual quality or character of such an individual was.

The foregoing qualities have been given as 'food for thought'. Reflection is one of the tools we have through which to try to defend ourselves against spiritually abusive individuals.