

*Reflections on My Experiences  
with a False Sufi Shaykh*

A.A.S

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I once knew a fake-sufi-shaykh who was speaking to a few of his female murids. Three of them were lighter skinned and one was darker skinned--all Arabs. He said to them [paraphrasing in English here]: "You are like my daughters, and you are all beautiful, even this one" (pointing at the darker skinned one).

Some people still call him the Qutb.

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I pray it never happens to you, but IF you are ever betrayed by someone at the deepest level and you discovered that they were a highway brigand and skilled fraud, you might find that you never just 'get over it' and 'move on.' Over one year later and the anger and pain remain. So no, it's not so easy to just 'forget about it' and 'move on.'

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While we're at it, let's talk about magic (sihr). In 2015 there was a mutiny in the zawiya of the fake-shaykh I mentioned earlier. Many of the murids--dedicated to the fake-shaykh for years, some even since childhood--questioned why the recently constructed zawiya paid for by western murids was listed as the fake-shaykh's personal property and not as a waqf. There was a lot of drama and people were kicked out, and yes, some of those murids behaved immaturely, but their grievance was legitimate.

Fast forward a week or so and another murid--a loyalist to the fake-shaykh--has a dream. He relates his dream to the fake-shaykh and tells him that he dreamed of a beautiful flower that had the fake-shaykh's face in the middle. He thought, perhaps, that the fake-shaykh would be happy to hear about this dream. Instead, the fake-shaykh told the servant (khadim) of the zawiya, along with some others, to go out to the front of the zawiya and dig around the flower bed. They dug around it and, lo and behold, they found a stick with string wrapped around it. Apparently, it was some sort of magical object used to cast a spell on...who knows.

It was made to seem that the magic device was placed there by the disgruntled former murids.

Fast forward three years when the fake-shaykh found out that I had written about him and reached out to dozens of people (or more accurately, dozens reached out to me first when news spread of what was going on). We were speaking to one of the locals about this story. He was taken aback and, shocked, told us that around that time in the summer of 2015, he personally witnessed the fake-shaykh along with his servant go out and dig up around the back of the zawiya (near the home of some friends) and bury something on the side of the lot. He decided that he would look for a good opportunity and go and dig around the area to see what was buried.

Literally one day later, as he was looking for the best time to sneak over to the lot and dig around without anyone else noticing, we get a call from one of our friends who was quite worried, because they were looking out of their window near that very lot and saw the fake-shaykh drive up (in the expensive SUV purchased by his western murids) and get out to inspect around the exact area where he and his servant has buried something three years prior.

Coincidence?

I personally feel that the magic object "discovered" in the flower bed was planted by the fake-shaykh and the whole thing was a ploy to garner support.

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If one of the main virtues of your Shaykh is that he has helped so many people deal with jinn and magic issues, and magic problems are a common issue among the murids, it's time you ask yourself if he is offering you the poison and the antidote to keep control over you.

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If the main thing your Sufi group does is sing songs and hold hadras and there is little to no learning and actual tarbiya, you should consider whether you are in a defunct path.

One of the muqaddams of Mr. fake-shaykh was a skilled munshid, and quite full of himself too. Once, while on a road trip, someone from another tariqa wryly observed, "All you guys ever do is sing qasidas!" The muqaddam, with his characteristic tone, replied, "Am I not worthy of reverence?"

[#fromtheirfruits](#)

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After the zawiya mutiny of 2015, one of the elders left Mr. fake-shaykh. This elder was a Quran teacher in the local area. He voiced his objections to the mishandling of money and highhandedness of Mr. fake-shaykh and his western-murid-funded fiefdom. A month or two later, this elder Quran teacher was arrested and charged with child molestation. The fake-shaykh loyalists saw the arrest as a divine sign of what happens to people who wage war against His Awliya'; however, when the case finally went forward, the judge exonerated the Quran teacher, declared him innocent, and announced that in the investigation they discovered that rogue elements had fabricated the charges under bribery. He was freed without charge.

To this day, the family believes it was orchestrated by Mr. fake-shaykh, who has connections with the police.

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Once, many years ago, a murid of Mr. fake-shaykh was walking with him and his main muqaddam in the old city of Fez. The azan for Maghrib was called, but Mr. fake-shaykh continued with his business in the market and did not pray. Time was running out and it was getting close to 'Isha time. the murid voiced his concern to the muqaddam, who replied, "The Shaykh is just testing you."

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Some murids of Mr. fake-shaykh were once sitting together and sharing stories of Mr. fake-shaykh. One of them shared some stories his early years. One shared that he (Mr. fake-shaykh) used to be a teacher and would headbutt unruly students and slap others. Apparently he got a reputation for his nonsense headbutting brutality. It is beyond me how it is a spiritual virtue to headbutt teenagers outside of the battlefield.

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Some British Muslims of Pakistani descent were once picking up some furniture they purchased near the zawiya. The furniture was in an apartment managed by Mr. fake-shaykh. He was looking at them suspiciously as he carefully checked over the itemized list of what they purchased. He wryly told one of the local Moroccans who came to help them move the furniture, "I have to watch out, because the British steal; they colonized half the world." Those

British Muslims understood Moroccan darija and were broken hearted and upset that he would speak of them in that manner and accuse them of being possible thieves.

[#whatakhlaq](#)

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How, you ask, does a person stay with Mr. fake-shaykh for so long despite all these huge red flags and clear violations of the Shariah? The short and easy answer is that most people in the west only see him for seven or eight gatherings over a span of a month and a half or two months. Scripted, performative gatherings of limited contact and exposure to the day-to-day interactions that offer a more accurate picture of who he is.

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The most frustrating, upsetting, and demoralizing thing that can happen when leaving a fake shaykh is not the betrayal. It is the blind murids who KNOW what has happened, who have seen the behavior themselves or heard of the behavior from people they trust, yet they go into cult mode and ignore the evidence before them and sever their friendships with those who got out. And some of these people still go around delivering lessons on 'aqida, fiqh, tasawwuf, and play lip service to respecting the sanctity of the Shariah.

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\*Letter from a former murid of Mr. fake-shaykh\*

Salam Alaykum Sidi,

Hope all is well.

I'm very saddened to hear of all this. You are right that I was with \_\_\_ for some time, although my leaving did not have anything to do with this sort of thing. I gave bay'a to him\_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ initiated me and after a while put me into khalwa. I did feel that I benefited from him despite never really feeling at ease with him, which I put down to the hayba that great men can inspire. But after a time things started to degenerate - a lot of this was more to do with \_\_\_ and his relationship with \_\_\_\_\_. I was back in \_\_\_ by this point finishing my studies, and meanwhile \_\_\_ was going through something of a crisis that ultimately boiled down to his lack of confidence in the shaykh. In such

situations it is hard to know what is well-founded and what is paranoia - a fact that some know all too well and will use to their advantage, a\_\_\_\_\_ obviously tried to do with these ladies.

... In any case, \_\_\_\_\_ began to have misgivings about what exactly a Shaykh is, and whether or not \_\_\_\_\_ was truly one of them....He was spending a lot of time with the shaykh and had begun to notice little things that made him uneasy. I can't remember all of them now but a lot of them seemed innocuous enough, at least individually. One of the more significant ones was to do with the shaykh's ijaza from Sidi Ali - he showed it to \_\_\_\_\_, apparently with the intention of setting him at ease, but this backfired because it didn't really seem like an ijaza at all. As I recall, it used the term murshid dini and did not mention the tariqa or the Supreme Name. More damning was \_\_\_\_\_'s admission that Sidi Ali had given it to him at his own request, which seemed very strange to us. "This matter of ours is not given to those who request it." It was hard to shake the feeling that Sidi Ali had given\_\_\_\_\_ this bit of paper to mollify him, not to appoint him as his heir. Now I know that there is a dispute about whether an ijaza is required at all to make a person a qualified shaykh, but it seems to me that this dispute is immaterial when someone produces a document and calls it an ijaza when that is not what it is....

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When news reached the crew that I left Mr fake-shaykh, one of them (Mr. 'Do I not deserve reverence') angrily told others, "we taught him everything he knows."

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\*The Majdhub Man\*

Alright, let me preface this story with a huge disclaimer. The spiritual path is about suluk, i.e., spiritual wayfaring. For that reason, among others, a murid is discouraged from keeping the company of majadhib. I won't go into detail about that here; you can find numerous discussions about this in the books of the Folk. A majdhub lacks the necessary qualities that allow people to commit to suluk under them, and because the veils are lifted from them so forcefully, many of them are not "all there" and some are not even accountable because of their state. There are, of course, degrees of jadhb, and some might be overcome with jadhb \*states\* while not being fully majdhub in the conventional sense, and some majadhib are still able to function--more or less--in society.

With that out of the way, let me introduce you to a Majdhub man in Fez. His actual name is Sa'ud Muhammad, but everyone refers to him as "Ahadun Ahad" (One, One), because that is the invocation he is known to make all of the time.

I don't know a lot about Ahadun Ahad other than the fact that before he became majdhub he worked at the post office. By all accounts, he was an ordinary religious Moroccan man who liked to do dhikr. At some point, the divine pull of the dhikr was so strong that he received certain openings and became effectively Majdhub.

Several people would tell me stories of their strange encounters with Ahadun Ahad, and while they were interesting, I had no desire to seek him out or spend time with him. During my time in Morocco I never ran into him.

A few weeks after we learned of the scandals with Mr. fake-shaykh I spoke with a brother who would spend a lot of time with Ahadun Ahad (again, I don't think that is a good idea, but to each his own). He told me that when he was visiting Ahadun Ahad he expressed a desire to visit the zawiya of Mr. fake-shaykh. Ahadun Ahad said, "O, you want to visit him; sure, I'll take you." Here's, the thing: when you go on little trips like this with Ahadun Ahad you have no idea what sort of weirdness is going to come out of it. The brother went along with Ahadun Ahad to the zawiya, and the brother said that he experienced two things:

1. As the people were gathered around and eating, a poor person from outside came to the door and asked to join but was turned away.
2. After the meal, he was able to greet Mr. fake-shaykh. The very first thing Mr. fake-shaykh asked him was, "What does your father do for a living?"

After they left, Ahadun Ahad asked him, "Did you find what you were looking for?" The brother realized then and there that Mr fake-shaykh was a fake-shaykh.

About six months later, as I was sitting down and doing some work, I received a phone call on WhatsApp from an unknown Moroccan number. Paranoid, I didn't answer. Whoever it was kept calling every hour or two and I continued to ignore it.

Until they left a written message.

"Salam 'alaykum. This is Ahadun Ahad."

Now that he revealed who he was, I replied back and called him.

I was still reluctant to call a majdhub person like Ahadun Ahad because I didn't want his du'as (he could say "May Allah draw you near" and then catastrophes would rain down...).

After exchanging greetings I listened to him "ramble" with ecstatic utterances. I reflexively said, "Allah yaftah 'alayka" (May Allah grant you openings), to which he immediately replied, "Allah has granted me openings!"

Some moments later he asked me about myself and my time in Morocco, whereupon I shared with him that I was affiliated with someone who turned out to be a fake-shaykh.

Then he dropped it on me.

"Ahhh. I know \_\_\_\_\_. He once insisted that I give him the sirr (divine secret), and I gave it to him, but he was a munafiq and so Allah exposed him. He begged me for du'a for him to get the property for his zawiya and to get a big car, and I made the du'a for him.

There were other things he shared with me, they will stay with me.

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Alright then, yesterday took an unexpected turn and one thing led to another and I set about writing multiple posts about our misadventures with a Mr. fake-shaykh. (For the record, I'm not hesitant to mention him by name, and if you've been following along and reading the comments you will know by now who he is; it's just that I don't care to mention his name directly.)

I don't usually talk this freely; I'm reluctant enough to not post too much about my personal life here, and even when I do, it may still have an impersonal air about it. For this I apologize and offer only the excuse of temperament and upbringing.

But it seems that my more-personal-than-usual posts about Mr. fake-shaykh have struck a nerve--judging from the response and the deluge of personal messages I've received and am still receiving.

What was a simple musing and reflection on a memory sparked something larger and the \*hal\* (spiritual state) was there to keep going...and remains. But



before that, allow me to answer some questions that have come from some of you on private messages. Some of the questions received are completely or partially answered in a semi-internal document released in the winter, and some are written now.

1. \*Do you have a personal agenda in all of this? Why talk about this stuff?\*

Unsurprisingly, some of the loyalists, instead of addressing the issues, sought to redirect and frame my speaking out as a vendetta and personal agenda. My reply is:

If personal agenda means hidden motive, no. My intentions are:

- To seek answers
- Make others aware of very real problems that will affect them in their spiritual life
- Demand accountability
- Stand up for the victims who are slandered and shunned
- Affirm truth for truth's sake, out of loyalty to Allah and His Messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace).

I was contacted by \_\_\_\_\_ in May of 2019—one year after moving from Fez to the US. When I was contacted by \_\_\_\_\_ and verified what they were saying, I had to make a decision: Do I ignore what they shared and pretend those things never happened, or worse, entertain the far-fetched interpretations and blame the sisters for being “problematic,” or do I acknowledge the painful truth out of loyalty to Allah and His Messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace)? Al-Hamdulillah, I chose the latter and thank Allah for preferring truth over illusions. I have nothing to gain or lose for speaking the truth and demanding accountability.

2. \*“Why didn’t you just leave in silence?”\*

This was put to me by the main heir (khalifa) of Mr. fake-shaykh. Instead of addressing the very real problems he told me that I “need a break” and should “leave in silence”. My reply:

I will not keep silent on abuse of authority, non-consensual kissing and physical contact with females, and deceptive behavior when those who know turn a blind eye to it all and shut down any discussion.

3. \*‘‘It’s between the Shaykh and Allah. We should be hiding people’s sins. Why the need to broadcast this?’’\*

Yes, everything we do is between us and Allah. But let’s be accurate in our language here: These incidents are between the Shaykh and the victims. Human beings make mistakes. We are all sinners, but the responses to these incidents have been nothing short of appalling. We must demand better as a community, otherwise these sorts of actions will continue to repeat themselves and we will do more damage to those who have suffered from abuse (and let’s not kid ourselves, this is abuse, plain and simple, and no lukewarm quasi-mystical interpretations will change that).

Victims often under-report incidents and have difficulty standing up to their abusers; many remain in abusive relationships. Is it any wonder why they do that when so often their abuse falls on deaf ears and they are shunned? The response of community leaders often alienates the abused and saps from them any strength they may have to seek help and justice.

4. \*‘‘Why can’t these sisters just move on and get over it?’’\*

He [Mr. fake-shaykh] only conveyed an apology to one of the sisters and did not reach out to the others (directly or through a muqaddam) to simply acknowledge that he was wrong and that he is sorry. A simple ‘‘I’m sorry’’ is rarely enough. Victims need to know why one is sorry and what they are going to do about it. Can the one seeking forgiveness empathise with what the victim went through? Or do they suffice with a trite apology and expect the victim to ‘‘move on,’’ while blaming them for being hurt? Does he have any idea the pain and suffering he has caused others?

Now, to respond to a question I received this morning from a concerned brother. He wrote:

Salaams bro

Hope and pray u r well.

Someone just sent me a pm asking if u r alright since u been posting some tings up on your FB page. I know it's your page and u can post whatever u want. After reading your posts I understand y u wrote them but I think you are far more cooler than that.

Iny opinion and I may be wrong, it makes you look like a lover who was in a dysfunctional relationship with 'a crazy'.... And hasn't got over it... There are many that can't help falling in love with ' a crazy' they are blind to her faults... And most others are not interested...

Reply:

Wa ‘alaykum salam.

I appreciate the concern. It’s totally okay for people to PM me directly if they have any questions or concern. Yes, al-hamdulillah, everything is alright. There is nothing “going on” behind the scenes that precipitated these posts—at least nothing obvious that triggered them.

I question the implication that it’s not cool to write about these things. Are they negative? Sure, insofar as they speak about negative experiences of individuals with a fake-shaykh, but they are cautionary tales. That, I believe, makes them positive.

Do I look like a “lover who was in a dysfunctional relationship with ‘a crazy’ and hasn’t gotten over it”? If I look that way to you then what can I say? If you haven’t noticed, very little of what I have shared has to do with me directly. Sure, there have been some experiences—red flags, highly questionable behaviors, and downright rotten actions—but I’ve always been reluctant to mention them because murid loyalists tend to reframe those experiences as proof of one’s personal agenda or disgruntlement instead of looking at the behaviors themselves and weighting them on the scale of the Shariah. So no, I’m not the crazy ex-lover.

Next story: Mr. Explosive Poopy Pants.

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\*Mr. Explosive Poopy Pants\*

Apologies for the crudeness, but it is what it is.

There is a brother. He was never a murid of Mr. fake-shaykh, but some of his friends and associates were, and some of them were really eager to pull him into the circle of murids. Owing to this influence, this brother agreed to travel to Morocco to visit Mr. fake-shaykh.

During his visit to Morocco, he stayed in the house of Mr. fake-shaykh. “I didn’t have a good time,” he said. “he and I did not meet eye to eye.”

He continued, “I had really strange dreams there, and after three days I took off from his house. I went to Meknes and hooked up with this group of Pakistani guys from England and we were at this big zawiya [the zawiya of Shaykh Muhammad b. Habib] where they were having a big gathering. I didn’t know

what was going on. It was a big gathering; hundreds of people there. In the bunch of people that were there, one man walked in, stumbled across a bunch of people there, and kinda rudely was walking around people and fell right at my feet. When he fell at my feet he started defecating in the zawiya. So, from his pant lining, pounds and pounds of feces was coming out. It was so abnormal how much feces was coming out! And he smelled. He smelled horrible. And the whole group of people made space and got away from him, but I sat right there. And then these other Sufis showed up and started doing some weird voodoo type stuff and started throwing water over the guy and doing this and that—and then they started doing it with me; they started doing it to me, and gave me a piece of paper, and that was the end of it.\* They pulled that guy out of there and rolled up the carpet and tossed it out. But ever since then things got weird. Afterwards, one of the muqaddams [of Mr. fake-shaykh] encouraged me to join them. I took the dhikr from him and stayed indoors for three days and tried to lock myself up from all these things, but then s\*it got weird—I had girls all over the place. I had girls knocking on my door to come inside and sleep with me those three days. It was the weirdest thing.”

\*Most likely they were trying to remove whatever sihr was done.

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\*More Sihr\*

This morning someone reached out to me with their own story of Mr. fake-shaykh. Some of the names have been redacted to protect identities.

'This happened in late \_\_\_\_ when I was in Morocco with \_\_\_\_\_ visiting \_\_\_\_... I went with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ for a funeral and [Mr. fake-shaykh] was there sitting near me. He started asking me about myself and saying he wanted me to come visit him at his Zawiya in Fez. Then we got up to do a hadra and while I was doing the hadra, I went into an altered-trance-state that wasn't typical of a Zikr or hadra state that I was used too, then one of \_\_\_\_\_'s muqaddams came and pulled me out of the hadra and "snapped me out of it" because I was not there, and then he told me that I had expanded in size and became "huge" in the hadra and was levitating at one point, and that people noticed that. Then I went back to where I was sitting and noticed that [Mr. fake-shaykh] was staring with strange eyes at me and whispering something under his breath. Not long later the hadra finished, and \_\_\_\_\_ was responsible for putting the 'imama on the deceased shaykh's son, and reminding him of the 'ahd, as the inheritor of his father. I don't remember who the deceased Shaykh

was, but if I remember correctly, he had been living in Europe, and was a well known Sufi shaykh. Anyway, after that [Mr. fake-shaykh] came over to me and he asked me to carry his shoes and follow him to his car, so I did that, and I felt like I was being pulled by a string and somewhat in a trance. Then the same muqaddam of \_\_\_\_\_ came back to me again and said you need to come with us now, and he took the shoes from me and handed them to one of [Mr. fake-shaykh's] murids I believe because [Mr. fake-shaykh] was talking with someone and I was standing behind him. The muqaddam then pulled me away, and led me to the car where \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ were. While we were walking there he told me that he believed that there was Sihr or Jinn on me, and indicated that it was from [Mr. fake-shaykh], and that he was trying to "take me" or control me. While he said that I started to have a severe panic attack and I couldn't control my breathing, emotions or heart beats. Then we got into the car and I started crying in fear and \_\_\_\_\_ started reading ruqya on me and held my hand, and said that one has to beware of magicians in Morocco because there were many of them, but he didn't talk about [Mr. fake-shaykh] and I didn't ask him. I did ask him if I had been possessed by a jinn and he said no, and then I calmed down. That wasn't the first time I had asked him about that because I had previously had a very scary encounter/exorcism with a Shaykh in \_\_\_\_ that had left me scarred and fearful that I was possessed by jinns. Later that night I had a lot of strange dreams, but I don't remember them very well, especially since I was having a lot of dreams during my time in Morocco and they have all kinds merged together. That was the scariest thing that happened to me during my time in Morocco, though I did have some other interesting experiences with a couple of majadheeb, among other things.'

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\*Another Account of the Majdhub Man 'Ahadun Ahad'\*

Someone else messaged me last night:

I kept a lot of company with Ahadun Ahad in 2014. I was still a novice and had no idea of how that could go bad. But alhamdulillah I knew that one should not take tarbiyya from a majdhub so I never asked him for instructions or asrar. He used to be a regular in the zawiya, although he was always a little condescending when talking about [Mr. fake-shaykh]. He told me at the time that [Mr. fake-shaykh] had visited him at his house to ask him for du'as that Allah give a car to the zawiya. The car came and we know what it turned into: [Mr. fake-shaykh's] family car.

Ahadun Ahad visited the zawiya regularly until the 2014 mawsim. At the mawsim, he was brutally treated by one of the visiting shuyukh (which I saw with my own eyes) and after that he hardly, if ever, came back. I can attest to him being a man completely devoted to Allah, who trusted Allah to give him and his family sustenance and who, when gifted large sums of money, would go around the medina distributing it to the poor, especially the poor majadhib. At times he would enter into deep contemplative states and not leave his room for days. And he was regularly contacted by people at the king's palace asking him for du'as for the king himself. When a friend got into trouble with the police due to immigration issues Ahadun Ahad was the one that got him out of prison thanks to his contacts (in the occasion, a high-ranking police officer from Casablanca).

At a certain point in time Ahadun Ahad became really insistent in keeping company with me and I saw he wanted me to become a sort of disciple. At the time he did mention something about the Shaykh's lack of spiritual qualifications, but I put it down to the ramblings of a majdhub. At last I stopped taking his calls, and after that I only saw him a few times, in which I visited him at his place taking some friends with me, as well as my son.

As I see it he is a true man of God, may Allah preserve him.

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\*Response of a Mr. fake-shaykh Loyalist and More Sihr\*

One loyalist, after reading a message I wrote about Mr. fake-shaykh, replied last year:

'My thoughts and prayers are for you in this trying time. May Allah shield you and your family from every harm and evil.

Certitude is not removed by doubt. I have kept company with [Mr. fake-shaykh] for almost \_\_\_\_\_ years, and I have never seen anything inappropriate regarding his ruqya practice. I remember years ago seeing his hand on the head-covering of the daughter of \_\_\_\_\_ and on the head on \_\_\_\_\_ simeotaneously, reading for hours until they both vomited blood before my very eyes and until the sihr making them ill was broken.

[Mr. fake-shaykh] performed ruqya on \_\_\_\_\_ in my presence until \_\_\_\_ had vomited multiple times breaking the sihr that was ailing her for many years. I

have seen multiple jinn, who were guarding the sihr, speaking to us and leaving \_\_\_\_ that evening, one by one. \_\_\_\_\_ had also been affected by sihr and through [Mr. fake-shaykh's] blessings, multiple evil spirits left and he returned to \_\_\_\_ normal self, al-hamdulillah....

...May Allah forgive him for his sins, and us for this transgression.'

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When more and more murids of Mr. fake-shaykh found out about what he did, of those who acknowledged it and left, only ONE person asked about the welfare of the victims before asking about themselves and what they should do. That's not to say no one cared about them, but it is amazing that one person put the victims welfare as the top priority.

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Charlatans, abusers, and fake-gurus thrive on "social proof," whether it is in the form of guest appearances by respected Shaykhs and teachers or pictures taken with saintly figures and the like. The tides will turn when more and more people realize that most of that "social proof" is utterly worthless. When that happens, people won't feel hesitant to name the Hamdis, Haddads, and Zulfiqars, etc. of the world.

They would prefer that people keep them as pseudonyms because it keeps things murky and offers them plausible deniability.

They can easily downplay or discredit one or two people who mention them by name, but eventually, as dozens and dozens mention them by name and demand answers, they won't be able to hide behind relative anonymity or the adab card.

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Alright, I promised some stories about enablers, muqaddams, and adab-card-dealers but things got busy.

When I learned of the actions of Mr. fake-shaykh toward a handful of sisters and verified their accounts from multiple people, including some muqaddams, I reached out to a senior muqaddam to tell him I was leaving Mr. fake-shaykh and advising him deal with the issue and take ownership.

I sent the muqaddam an email and got a non-answer reply a few hours later. Some weeks went by and I had reached out to a few people outside of the Tariqa--Shaykhs and scholars who I hoped might be able to give sound advice. That was a disappointment; it turned out that one of those shaykhs whom I thought would help was upset at me for reaching out.

A few hours later I get messages from the muqaddam, "SubhanAllah, sent to Shaykh \_\_\_\_? Why? He is furious with you."

After I told him that I felt Shaykh \_\_\_\_ should know, he said, "What legislated methodology are you using?"

This was not an Usul class. We were not reviewing legal maxims. What was my "legislated methodology"?

This question was a smokescreen. Instead of answering very direct questions, he asked a non-question.

“Legislated” refers to what is canonically established through the Quran and Sunna and elaborated by the mujtahid imams and codified within the four legal schools. There are different standards and methodologies of verification between qada’ (court judgment), ifta’ (delivering formal legal verdicts), and zann (speculative matters of varying degrees of preponderance that come to one’s attention outside of a formal criminal or jurisprudential setting).

Was he asking if I was using a methodology appropriate for qada'?

Was he asking if I was using a methodology used for ifta'?

Who was looking to prosecute or give a fatwa?

When pressed repeatedly, the most I got was "I have known the Shaykh to cover the faults of mureeds and take the blame for mistakes."

That is a roundabout way of saying that it was the sisters' fault--they did it, and he was taking the blame for THEIR mistakes.



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Here is a translation of an interesting poem written by Mr. fake-shaykh's daughter, presumably about me. A blue eyed wolf Zindiq bereft of iman...

*Bleating sheep abound. May Allah hurl lightning bolts at them!  
In every age and region, you will find that they are zindiqs [people who mask their  
disbelief while claiming to be Muslim]  
You will come to know them by their features: they hail from a fugitive folk.  
The lineages are scattered, their pedigrees shorn.  
They are blue-eyed, reddish complexioned, like lecherous wolves.  
Bereft of lineage, transmission chain (sanad), or knowledge—except from phony  
devils.  
Their inner secrets were exposed, and so they maligned the honor of their intelligent  
masters.  
They have brought tribulation to the righteous and their light with their disreputable  
horns.  
The so-called iman in their hearts is counterfeit.  
You will know them through their manner of speech—their souls are hypocrites!  
Fame is their aspiration, at the expense of penitent hearts.  
They became hypocrites due to their intense rage against the Folk [the Sufis].  
Through pretense they took on the hue of the deen with an eloquent English and  
Arabic tongue, and so they put the believers through tribulation—they are the  
sprouts!  
They carried their sins and the sins of those whom they've caused to suffer tribulation  
—and so the divine curses upon them are successive, uninterrupted!  
O how far they are from the mark! Their souls are trembling!  
May Allah curse them for as long as the invocation (dhikr) of the Folk is uttered!  
Allah has blotted out their hearts, and so they have become utterly destroyed, spoiled.  
May they be encircled with obliterating evil from Allah!  
Be on guard against them, O you possessed of insight and loftiness!  
I will divulge to you all my secret: they are the non-Arab Orientalists  
This is my decisive word on the matter for every spiritually wayfaring soul.*

\*\*\*

\*GET OUT\*

Yesterday, someone who wishes to remain anonymous sent me a message (I've known him for some years and he is known and respected in the community he serves in). He gave me permission to type out a transcript. The relevant parts are here and slightly edited for clarity.

Make of it what you will.

"So I sent the picture of [Mr. fake-shaykh] to one of my Shaykhs and, al-hamdulillah, he's the kind of Shaykh that Allah has given the gift of, you know, it's more than just kashf (spiritual unveiling)--from looking at a person he sees everything. So I had sent him the picture of [Mr. fake-shaykh]; and I had sent him the picture of other people before, of people who are trying to be murid and stuff, and he gives me very detailed answers. He gave me the history of [Mr. fake-shaykh] basically. He gave me the breakdown, and he said: 'The Shaykh started off good but then went off on the wrong path. There are a lot of Shayatin and jinn around him; he does use them; he does use some form of sihr (magic) or control of the jinn to control the murid. He went off the right path. We should pray for Allah to guide him, because if he does not come back from that then his ending will be bad. If he's truly 'Alawi (of the family line of Imam 'Ali), if he's truly of Ahl al-Bayt then in sha' Allah he'll make tawba, he'll come back before the end of his life. But if not, then it is feared he will have a bad ending.'"

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Last year, when I was sitting with Shaykh Muhammad Kabir Toure (Allah have mercy upon him), we were speaking about the abuses of Mr. fake-shaykh, whom he knew. He said, "Some time ago, he and I were sitting and talking, and in the conversation he said some very disrespectful things about Sidna Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani (Allah be pleased with him). I told him, 'You will soon see the consequences of your words.' So now you see."

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\*The Fake-Shaykh Agent?\*

When we were dealing with the fallout from all this \*stuff\* (basically everything I've been sharing this week), there were SO MANY people reaching out. One of them was a murid of Mr. fake-shaykh who called me to share his story. We spoke for nearly three hours.

He shared how, some years back, he innocently asked Mr. fake-shaykh about the income that comes for the upkeep of the zawiya. That enraged Mr. fake-shaykh. As a result, Mr. fake-shaykh cut him off and essentially kicked him out of the tariqa and left him high and dry. It would take eight months for him to re-admit this brother into the tariqa.

He carried on as a murid and occasional translator for Mr. fake-shaykh, and was privy to many of the private conversations murids would have with him, and he had also witnessed some incidents of Mr. fake-shaykh touching sisters in ruqya. As we spoke about all of this, he told me that he had enough and was leaving Mr. fake-shaykh for good.

Six months later another former murid reached out and shared with me that no, the aforementioned brother was not "out"--in fact, he was still affiliated as a murid of Mr. fake-shaykh.

Does that mean he entered, was kicked out, then readmitted, then left, and then entered again, or was he a fake-shaykh agent gathering intel? Who knows? It's a wacky world.

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I pray it never happens to you, but if you ever have to "Get Out" and leave a false Shaykh, DO NOT keep any of his personal items given to you. Break and dispose of the sibhas, or whatever else you received from him directly or indirectly. Get rid of their pictures and other effects.

But do NOT get rid of emails, texts and other documentation.

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## Muslamic-Sufic Gaslighting towards Victims or Witnesses of Spiritual Abuse

1. 'Sidi, you are having su' al-zann (a bad opinion).'
2. 'Sidi, you are being tested or punished; consider your own state and why you might be experiencing this.'
3. 'Sidi, if you see evil, it is because it is a reflection of yourself.'
4. 'Sidi, you know nothing of the haqiqa.'
5. 'Sidi, how dare you question the integrity of your brother/sister!'
6. 'Sidi, you are affected by jinn.'
7. 'Sidi, you are affected by magic.'
8. 'Sidi, you are bad for questioning so-and-so's intentions.'
9. 'Sidi, did you look for seventy excuses?'

### Quick Responses:

1. Some zann is sin, not all. Su' al-zann is when a person entertains a bad opinion of someone when their actions accept a positive (meaning a near, not farfetched) interpretation. If someone deliberately punches you in the face, it is not su' al-zann to say 'He punched me in the face!' If you say after an uppercut to the chin, 'Because of his sincere love and concern for me, he vigorously tried to remove a grain of rice from my beard,' don't be surprised if you keep getting punched.
2. Classic misdirection, a diversion meant to avoid the issue and subtly put the blame on the victim. It might be a test or punishment, but that does not absolve the abuser.
3. There is a lot that can be said regarding this one, but if this is deployed any time an evil is witnessed, enjoining the good and forbidding the evil will be cancelled out entirely. Furthermore, the idea that when one sees evil it is but a reflection of himself implies that one can ever see evil. There is no munkar, no bad, no immorality. And if this is a bad state to be in, the one noticing from the observer it is also seeing his own mirror (according to his own argument), which makes him...?
4. This is a long discussion. Suffice to say that Sayyidina Musa was commanded by Allah to respond the way he did to Khidr. We are ordered to interact with others according to the objective standards of the Shariah. A judge cannot rule in favor of a claimant based on his dreams or unveilings even if they are true, likewise we cannot do whatever we want to people in the name of haqiqa when it contravenes the agreed upon standards of the Muhammadan

Sacred Law. Even if one knows nothing of haqiqa, their Shariah-based rights cannot be violated. If you catch a burglar in your house, do you let him go with your property if he says it is haqiqa?

5. Obvious diversion and victim blaming.

6. Easy cop out. This is the Muslim aggressor's way of saying 'You are crazy.' Classic gas lighting.

7. See #6.

8. The standard is behavior, not intentions, to which we have no access anyway.

9. Not a hadith to begin with, so while it is a useful reminder to seek reasonable excuses, it is not a religious command and does not apply to farfetched ta'wilat requiring us to willfully create a state of cognitive dissonance.

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Last September, during a Q&A session, someone asked a very prominent and well-respected Shaykh a question about the events we've been discussing. I'm not at liberty to disclose his name just yet, but hopefully the permission will be forthcoming. (Please do not ask me who it is. Let's just say nearly everyone reading this knows of the person).

\*EDIT\*

Permission has been granted. This was stated by Habib 'Umar b. Hafiz of Dar al-Mustafa

\*Question:\* if a person claims that he is a Shaykh and Murabbi while at the same time doing certain actions contrary to the Shariah such as touching or kissing women claiming it to be ruqya, openly in front of his students and mureeds, how do we deal with this person? Do we have a good opinion of him? Is it considered backbiting if we mention him and his action in front of others?

\*Answer:\*

\* Such a person is غير مأمون على الشريعة و لا على أسرار الشريعة (cannot be trusted with the Shariah nor the secrets of the Shariah)

\* What is our \_husn al-dhann\_ of him? It is only that we hope that he will

make tawbah and stop these actions

\* Can we mention his actions in front of others? If there is no necessity, then don't mention it. The necessity exists if there is a danger that someone may be harmed by it in his deen, then it should be mentioned to him so that he is upon insight (بصيرة) and caution (حذر)

إذا كان شخص يدعي أنه شيخ ومربي، وفي نفس الوقت يعمل أشياء غير شرعية مثل لمس وتقبييل نساء بدعوى الرقية مجاهرا بذلك أمام طلبته ومريديه، كيف نتعامل مع هذا الشخص؟ هل نحسن الظن به؟ هل يعد من الغيبة أن نذكره ونذكر أعماله أمام الآخرين؟

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"The reality is that Jalal is the essence and well-spring of Jamal, because it is the latter that emerges from the former. As such, when Jalal intensifies and remains in one's life it readies him to receive complete and perfect Jamal. This is especially true when the majority of a person's life is filled with Jalal. Oh, what glad tidings are in store for him when his spirit leaves this realm! He shall reside eternally in the Hereafter and find it entirely Jamal...But beware: should someone claim that he has attained unto Jamal without having endured the rigors of Jalal you should call him a liar and declare, 'Your jamal is Shaytani in nature, not Rabbani!' For the sweet-smelling roses of Jamal only grow from Jalal. Jalal is the root and Jamal is its branch..."

—Shaykh Muhammad al-Qandusi (Cipher of the Spirit)

\*Jalal\*: Divine rigor, privation, intensity.

\*Jamal\*: Divine beauty, expansion.

\*Shaytani\*: Satanic, of devilish origin.

\*Rabbani\*: Lordly, of Divine origin.

I preface this final installment with the above quote from Shaykh Muhammad al-Qandusi because it invites us to reconsider the so-called negative experiences in our lives and see them as net positives—provided we see their source.

What was a somewhat random musing on Monday morning led to a series of posts on some of the Jalali experiences I and others had with different individuals, particularly an elder we trusted that turned out to be a false-shaykh.

In light of the above passage, those "negative" stories are also positive stories, as they enabled us to see truth as truth and falsehood as falsehood. The Prophetic du'a of "O Allah, show us truth as truth and enable us to follow it,

and show us falsehood as falsehood and enable us turn away from it," when answered, can be very PAINFUL, as your illusions are shattered and the divine sword of TRUTH slices through your own delusions and what you thought was truth regarding a matter or a person.

I'm sure there are people who have read these stories and glibly and so self-confidently said to themselves, "It is all so obvious! How could anyone fall for such a person?" And maybe there is some truth to that; maybe some of us are naïve and have to experience certain things; maybe Allah destined for some to attain haqq al-yaqin (certainty born of true experience) in these matters instead of 'ayn al-yaqin (certainty born of seeing).

There are regrets over actions, but no regrets over experiences that have been the real "Shaykh" in all of this, as Imam 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani said in al-Bahr al-Mawrud.

Framed in this manner, ALL of the experiences shared this week are positive.

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\*I Need To Speak With You\*

"Abdul Aziz! Come in my office. I need to speak with you about something very important regarding X, Y, and Z."

That is a paraphrasing of what Mr. fake-shaykh said to me one day after prayer in the zawiya. There was a sense of urgency in his order, as if something had happened and he had to divulge it to me. Little did I realize he was going to do divulge people's private business to me (as he did to others prior to and after that, including private matters concerning me). Unsure of what he was going to say and responding out of loyalty, I shut the door behind me and sat inside his office, waiting to hear what he wanted to say.

Now, to protect the identity of those involved I can't divulge the particulars (as the kids these days say, "Those who know, know). It was about X, Y, Z, and their alleged nastiness and disloyalty.

I was floored. X, Y, and Z were family friends whom my family and I knew before we knew Mr. fake-shaykh. They were kind, loyal, known in the broader community for their volunteer work and dedication. These were people of Deen: people who were raised to study hard, work hard, and be good to people. That's not to suggest that any of them were perfect, but I was taken aback by

Mr. fake-shaykh's vitriolic rant against them. It was like he needed a sounding board, someone to listen to his backbiting (of course, divulging the business of murids was never seen as backbiting; in fact, there was never such a thing as haram backbiting when it came to him (and some others in the inner circle) talking about murids or local figures affiliated with other tariqas or orientations, but that's another story for another time...)

X is this, that, and the other. X did this, that, and the other. X is kicked out of the tariqa.

Y is this, that, and the other. Y did this, that, and the other.

Z is rude and screamed at me that he will call the police and have me arrested if I return to Canada!

It was over an hour of hearing lurid details of X, Y, and Z's private lives: their family issues, their faults, their secrets, and how rotten they apparently were. It was very clear that Mr. fake-shaykh was disclosing all of this to me because he wanted me to take them as adversaries. Out of loyalty to him, of course.

How do you process scandalous information about your friends when it's conveyed by someone you have taken as a spiritual guide, whom you trust—among living humans—more than anyone else? As difficult as it may be to process it, you ACCEPT the information as true because it came to you from what you consider an unimpeachable source.

We distanced ourselves from X, Y, and Z. I wouldn't answer the phone or reply to their messages. Astaghfirullah, I even confided in some fellow murids that they too should keep their distance because, as Mr. fake-shaykh so vividly described them, they were out to destroy him and everything he stands for. They were the worst of hypocrites.

X, Y, and Z were passive aggressively shunned. The inner circle attacked them behind closed doors. One of them, in his oh-so-sufi way, said when speaking about them, that he welcomes everyone to the zawiya, including munafiqun! X and Y didn't come to the zawiya much any longer, but Z would still come for the Dhikr. The inner circle considered Z a spy who came to see who's there and relay the information back to the others.

What we learned later was that X was once spit on by Mr. fake-shaykh's poetess daughter, and she physically assaulted Z in a masjid. The latter incident was witnessed by many people, and when one of the muqaddam's was approached by a murid who witnessed what happened, he refused to get involved and



advised the same person to stay out. When the muqaddam was later contacted by the police (after Y filed a police report), he did not return their calls. (The entire incident is recorded in the Police Incident Report and I have a copy of it along with copies of the emails between the victim and the police constable who shared that they called the muqaddam repeatedly but received neither an answer nor a call back).

...

Let us fast forward one year later, after all of the details of abuse came out. Soon after I processed what was going on and saw the dishonesty as clear as day, my thoughts returned to X, W, and Z. Perhaps X, Y, and Z know something that others don't know, and they were vilified because of it. I owed it to them to reach out.

I called. We spoke. I shared with them what Mr. fake-shaykh had confided in me in his office that day about them, and they told me of their experiences over the past decade. Much of what Mr. fake-shaykh said about them were lies. Now our friendship has returned to what it was before Mr. fake-shaykh poisoned it. In fact, it is even stronger now as we have shared experiences of pain—though the pain and betrayal they have suffered is immensely worse than what we experienced. May Allah give them healing and justice, amin.

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\* Equivocation, Limp-wristed Condemnation, and Prevarication \*

Today is supposed to be the final installment and conclusion, but to be honest I don't feel things have "concluded". People are still hurt, victims continue to be slandered, and many are still blinded by misplaced loyalty.

A couple of days ago I wrote:

"The most frustrating, upsetting, and demoralizing thing that can happen when leaving a fake shaykh is not the betrayal. It is the blind murids who KNOW what has happened, who have seen the behavior themselves or heard of the behavior from people they trust, yet they go into cult mode and ignore the evidence before them and sever their friendships with those who got out. And some of these people still go around delivering lessons on 'aqida, fiqh, tasawwuf, and play lip service to respecting the sanctity of the Shariah."

What follows are various responses over the past year. There are several others but these stand out at the moment.

[1]

A sister who was inappropriately touched by Mr. fake-shaykh in a so-called ruqya went and questioned a muqaddam about the lawfulness of what he did. The muqaddams conceited response:

“Oh, so we are experts in the Shariah now, are we?”

(Apparently, if you are not an expert in the Shariah—and this muqaddam is emphatically NOT an expert in the Shariah—then you have no business complaining, no right to question what happened to you. Just shut up and leave it alone)

[2]

A well-known Shaykh in the “Traditionalist” scene in North America called me last year and said [paraphrasing], “Just as you have your reasons for leaving, they have their reasons for staying.” He cautioned me that enjoining the good (al-Amr bi al-Ma’ruf) must be done in a way that is also ma’ruf (good), and that, in his view, that is through the main muqaddam taking over and dealing with this privately. (But how can one “take over” when (1) authority is not ceded, and (2) even if it is, the authority isn’t even real, since the ijaza—that was given after asking for it—is as a “murshid dini,” a generic “religious guide” with no mention of taslik, talqin, etc.?)

(To be clear, this Shaykh was not justifying what Mr. fake-shaykh did. He acknowledged that it was wrong and that people should leave. His response points to one of the underlying conflicts we seem to have concerning what should be the proper manner of dealing with cases of abuse, specifically when things are brushed underneath the rug and people are bullied into silence and warned against “causing fitna”. That is a broader conversation that we must have.)

[3]

Others reached out and said, “I maintain a good opinion of [Mr. fake-shaykh] due to the healing he’s done towards myself and my family. Nothing will change that, even if the Shaykh slips.”

As Sidi Hasan Awan said the other day in a comment:

“It is an issue and challenge of trust, and the need to maintain one’s sanity in an insane world. Such cognitive and heart dissonance creates two apparent choices: either leave the situation and potentially not be Guided and even fall from ‘where you are’ on the Path, or deny it altogether, and when need be, re-direct the blame. The latter option is usually chosen with the add-on thought: this is an initiatic trial for me, and I am being asked by Life to choose my Shaykh amidst the doubts and confusions and fitna, in the context of my certainty of how Real he has been for me, all these years...There is a third option: step away, suspend judgement, and pray for help (maddad). This will usually Guide one to where they need to be, and will be just as painful as the first two options for those who actually KNOW but wish to believe themselves out of this KNOWING by direct experience (ma’rifa).

[4]

When I began writing about these issues last year cryptically, without mentioning names or even dropping clues as the identity of the person, one of the muridas of Mr. fake-shaykh reached out to me and asked me about what’s going on. Without mentioning his name, I described what multiple survivors were sharing, to which she replied, “[E]veryday [sic] that passes by I can’t thank Allah enough for [Mr. fake-shaykh]...Subhan’Allah, I guess I just don’t get how anyone can let that happen like as women we have such a strong radar to flee.”

When she found out that the perpetrator was Mr. fake-shaykh, she unfriended me. Till this day, her and her husband are still with him.

[5]

A few individuals in the Tariqa, with whom I’ve traveled and spent time, found out what was going on and called me to be “debriefed”. We spoke for hours and unpacked everything that had been going on. They were understandably disturbed by the revelations. After a couple of weeks, they unfriended me on Facebook and cut off all contact. I later learned that they contacted the main muqaddam, who spoke with them about the matter after making them swear an oath of secrecy. He reeled them back in by saying who knows what.

[6]

When all of these details came out, the initial response was that it was a ruqya for problematic sisters. What made them problematic you ask? According to

one muqaddam, it was because one sister smoked and another owned a dog (or dogs).

[7]

One prominent Shaykh who called me told me that he had previously spoken with a main muqaddam about what was going on. That muqaddam indicated to him that one of the victims was hyper sensitive and overreacting because, as he said it, she had been sexually molested by her father. When I reached out to the victims/survivors/fighters directly (I prefer to call them survivors and not just victims), I was able to verify that NONE of them had been abused by their fathers.

[8]

At first, it was a ruqya for their problems. It was “to purify them”—apparently of their smoking and love of dogs.

Then it was a slander made up to bring down the “Shaykh”.

Then it was the “Shaykh” admitting to the acts as a way of taking the blame off of the sisters.

Then it was a slander again.

Then, as of December of 2019, the “Shaykh” has no recollection of what happened at all.

Now, it’s back to being a slander.

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September 14th, 2001

I was living in Maryland at the time. Three days prior, as I was walking into the teacher's lounge (called the "planning room") after first period, we saw on CNN the first plane strike the tower, followed shortly by the second plane.

We were soon outside and could hear the jets flying overhead from Joint Base Andrews nearby. Many of us were unable to call our families because the phone lines were down. We were twenty minutes from the Pentagon. (One of my colleagues who lived five minutes from the Pentagon told me, after speaking with his wife, that she could feel the vibrations in the house after the plane crashed.)

By Friday the attacks were pinned on OBL and Muslims quickly became objects of wide suspicion. This was especially true in the DC/Maryland/NOVA area. In fact, a couple of the hijackers withdrew money from a teller machine just a couple minutes drive from our masjid and school. It was a crazy time, but I don't want to get into all of the particulars here.

That Friday I called my father. I should say before going any further that our relationship at the time was not that great. Without going into details, he saw my embrace of Islam as a disappointing move away from what he hoped his son would become—one who followed in his father's footsteps and took a similar path in life. Nevertheless, we would speak and visit each other in the times I would return to the US in between my studies.

But things were very different now. My father was justifiably angry with what happened on 9/11. (Oh, and if you are reading this and think it was a conspiracy, a hologram, or that it was done by Mossad, reptilians, or any other loony phantasm, or worse, if you think it was deserved and justified, please get a grip.) I won't relate the details of our conversation, but let's just say he was not happy that his son was a Muslim given the religious affiliation of those named as the perpetrators.

In the anger, fear, and toxic environment of post-9/11 America, my father cut me off. In hindsight, I should have been more proactive in reaching out to him despite the tension, but in many ways it was mutual and I had a lot of growing up to do, too.

That was 2001.

We didn't speak again until 2016.

Sure, between 2001 and 2016, for the sake of Birr al-Walidayn (filial piety) I would email him now and again in attempts to reconnect and hopefully repair the damage to our relationship. And he would occasionally respond, but it was always brief and limited, and any further attempts to reconnect were unsuccessfully met with silence.

Finally in 2016 we spoke on the phone. The last time I heard his voice was in our angry phone call in September of 2001.

My father is quite the stoic. He doesn't wear his emotions on his sleeves. When we spoke to each other after fifteen years of silence it was as if we only missed a week—he talked about his land and the work he was doing on it, his recent hunting trips, and his business. Typical dad stuff. He also talked about some of his recent health problems.

But both of us avoided the elephant in the room. Neither of us talked about the fifteen-year gap and why it took so long.

After that phone call I sensed that there was still underlying tension, but my family and I were about to travel overseas and I was unable to visit at the time, so the conversation was paused once again.

(Upon reflection I should have taken more initiative to apologize and make things better.)

There were a couple of emails sent between 2016 and 2019, but never addressing the tensions. The pain was very real. He felt hurt. I felt hurt. And as flawed men, neither of us were willing to take the initiative to address it.

In late December 2018 I got a message from my stepmother—my father's wife of over twenty years. Shortly after he retired, he was feeling quite ill and when he went to the hospital he was diagnosed with Hepatocellular Carcinoma—stage four liver cancer.

After a few weeks of hospital visits, testing, and consultations, he had a choice to make: either get chemotherapy and suffer the side effects in hopes of living an extra four or five months at best, or go into hospice care and be with family and friends.

He chose the latter.

Once he decided to go into hospice care, I quickly booked a ticket and flew down to Georgia and drove to the hospice care facility.

I'm being a bit vulnerable here in sharing this story; certain details are obscured and there is a reluctance to describe my emotional state when walking into the hospice care facility to see my father—in that state—after eighteen years.

I'll spare you of the details of what it felt like to walk into that room to see my father lying in bed, sixty pounds lighter, with a dry, raspy voice due to the medication. It was as emotional as you can imagine it when a father and son come together (physically and not on a phone or through email) after many years of separation.

My stepmother, her daughter, and other family friends all left the room. They knew that there was business to attend to between my father and me. We talked, hung out, spoke about all sorts of topics. We addressed the issues we had over the past two decades. I sought his forgiveness. He sought my forgiveness. We had a wonderful few days together.

The hardest part was knowing that I had to leave and return to my family. Imagine speaking to your parent in a hospice facility and having to leave, with certain knowledge that as you walk out the door it will be the last time you see your father alive.

I have no words for that...

Nine days later he passed away.

I returned once again to Georgia to attend the funeral. There I connected with many cousins and relatives and friends of my father. Many of them spoke about how my father would, through the years we were estranged, tell them about me and what I was up to. They described how happy they were that we were able to reconnect and close the gap after all of those years.

This past week I've been posting stories of disturbing experiences with a fake shaykh. You might be wondering why I'm going into this deeply personal story about my father—on Fathers Day no less.

It's quite simple really.

Many people who get involved with Shaykhs have, to put it crudely, "Daddy issues."

It's not a pleasant thing to hear.

Perhaps it will be more palatable if we call it “seeking a father figure and a father archetype” One might consciously or unconsciously seek that out when one’s own father was not there for them, or if he was abusive, or if there were some fundamental needs that one did not receive, or which were disrupted in the father-child relationship.

I’m not psychologist, and I don’t play one on TV. I’m not going to pretend that I’m conversant with attachment theory; and I’m not saying that every theory about parent-child connections is sound. Nor am I saying that all issues with fake-shaykhs can be reduced to parental attachment issues. (Likewise, and this is IMPORTANT to mention: there are plenty of murids under fake shaykhs who do not seem to have any obvious father issues, so it is not a simple equation of “fake-shaykh=has murids with father issues” and “real-shaykh=does not have murids with father issues”.)

However, when reading about the phenomenon, certain things do stand out and resonate—and in talking with several people who have been through similar issues, these things resonate with them, too.

It can be argued that the quintessential “fake shaykh” or “fake guru” represents an archetype in the members’ subconscious minds—that of a wise father. This has a compelling influence on followers who unconsciously project that onto the fake shaykh.

There is a concept in Tasawwuf of the “spiritual father”. I accept that understanding as it is explained by the Mashayikh. However, it, like so many other concepts in Tasawwuf, can be exploited by a fake to serve their own ends.

It is my observation that MANY of the most dedicated murids to fake shaykhs have connection issues with their fathers. For some it is longstanding disconnection since childhood; for others, their fathers passed away when they were young; for others there was abuse; for others their father did not have a strong and healthy masculinity and did not impart healthy manhood (this pertains to men); and for many women, their fathers were cold, distant, or in some cases abusive.

In the words of one of the muqaddams, “May Allah forgive our father...” Another muqaddam, when called by Mr. fake-shaykh, would always reply, “N’am ya Abuyi” (Yes, dear father).



It's not my place to diagnose them or anyone else for that matter—these are simple observations based on what they have shared about their relationships.

This is why I sincerely believe that before anyone thinks of joining a Sufi order they should—among several other things—do the necessary “shadow work” and come with their whole self, and address their traumas and connection issues with their fathers (in particular) and mothers.

If you've read this far, allow me to share with you a revelation that came to me a couple of months after I left Mr. fake-shaykh:

Everything is by the enabling grace of Allah and being shown the truth as truth; however, in the realm of secondary causes and means (asbab), it was VERY EASY to leave this person after my father and I reconnected and repaired what was damaged between us. Al-Hamdulillah, he imparted a healthy masculinity when I was younger, but there was still disconnection as a result of cultural factors, family circumstances, and our own ways of responding to hurt (which are often unhelpful).

Repairing that relationship made it EASY to leave Mr. fake-shaykh. I wasn't seeking any fatherly connection with him.

Do the work. It is worth it.

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Shaykh Buzidi al-Bujrafi (1925-2011), one of the last among a generation of heirs to the way of Shaykh Ahmad b. Mustafa al-'Alawi in Morocco, and a man of tremendous spiritual presence and acceptance among Shuyukh and novice alike, said in a private gathering (as conveyed to me by someone there who shall remain anonymous):

“[Mr. fake-shaykh] has been given a Fath Shaytani (demonic opening), not a Fath Nurani (luminous opening).”

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## WORD ON THE STREET

Morocco has had its own version of WhatsApp before the Internet. The same may be said of most towns and villages in “developing countries”. Whether it is the nosey aunties or the children or village elders, news spreads quickly in so-called third world villages, towns, and even cities.

Generally, the locals KNOW the reality of a person. Even if they haven’t interacted directly with someone, they will know ten people who have, and those ten people will know ten others who have had interactions, and so on. What emerges, therefore, is a general consensus about a person.

(Of course, this is a general rule and there are always exceptions and extraordinary circumstances where people get a bad reputation based on slander.)

This is one reason why one’s honor and reputation are so important, and why preservation of one’s honor (hifz al-‘ird) is one of the overarching objectives of the Shariah (maqasid).

When a neighborhood knows and interacts with someone for many years and that person is seen in a certain light, the people in that neighborhood are mostly accurate in their assessment. Their view of the person is not based on a short visit, a limited interaction here and there, or an affected performance to a small group that one must maintain for a few days or weeks before returning back to normal.

In the context of what I’ve been writing about this past week, the neighborhood in question is actually a number of areas in the part of Fez where Mr. fake-shaykh lives and operates: Ben Souda, Hayy Tariq, and the area around the zawiya.

Ben Souda is the general area and is considered “the hood” (we once watched in horror from our balcony as two guys had a literal knife fight, like a scene out of West Side Story!) ; Hayy Tariq is a short drive away and constitutes the neighborhood where Mr. fake-shaykh lives. The area around the zawiya houses several apartment complexes and shops, and a few older properties and homes.

When we moved to Fez, we settled in an apartment directly across from the zawiya (I could look out our bedroom window and see the zawiya). We soon got our feel for the area after exploring the souq and meeting the locals both in the immediate vicinity as well as the surrounding areas.

The locals knew we were affiliated with Mr. fake-shaykh, and so they were quite guarded when it came to talking about their views regarding him. For the most part they would observe our coming and going to the zawiya and keep to themselves; however, there were some who did not hesitate to share their feelings about him.

What you have to understand is that these locals have been living there for years; they have relatives all through the area, and they speak to each other and have accumulated experiences. But they are not wont to cause conflict, and as a general rule they avoid getting into disputes with people who have influence and connections to people in high places. And Mr. fake-shaykh had connections—to the local police.

Whenever a visitor would come to the zawiya, even if for a short visit of one day, Mr. fake-shaykh would insist that his servant (khadim) take the visitor's passport and make three photocopies of it. One copy would go in a special file kept in his office, another copy would be sent directly to the police station down the road across from the main street, and I have no idea what he would do with the third copy ("Things the Make You Go, Hmm").

The locals kept their mouths shut and went on with their lives and didn't get in Mr. fake-shaykh's way. They were reluctant to speak their mind about him—all but one or two—but over time we would learn what they really felt about him. (I should mention here that, yes, Mr. fake-shaykh also had a number of locals who supported him. They were long standing murids or people who came to his zawiya on Thursday nights, but only a couple of them lived in the immediate vicinity.)

One local had a family with some young girls my daughters' age with whom they would play. He spoke a fair amount of English (and he isn't the only one, so that fact will not put him at risk of exposure) and would converse with us and the children to practice his conversational English.

One day, my eldest daughter came home with tears in her eyes. "Fulan [the person] was saying all sorts of bad things about Shaykh. I can't believe it!"

"What? What did he say?" I asked.

"He said that Shaykh is a fake, and that he is not from the Family of the Prophet [Allah bless him and give him peace]. He said that he is just after money and power and getting rich off of Canadians. He said that they [the

locals] have known him for many years before he had the zawiya and that he is not who he says he is.”

In those days, despite the constriction we were feeling in the zawiya and the incredible incongruity between what we experienced in Toronto and what we were experiencing in Fez, we were still “loyal murids,” so I told her that he is probably just jealous of him and thinks that the large zawiya and SUV is his way of amassing material goods.

(I didn’t know at the time that the zawiya was put in his name as his personal property and not designated as an endowment (waqf).)

I told my daughter to avoid that man and to no longer play with his children. A couple of months later we left.

There were various individuals in the neighborhood—some young and some old—who kept a strange silence when Mr. fake-shaykh’s name was mentioned. Some would give us looks of pity. One of them even looked at my wife and said, “Miskina!” (“Poor thing.”)

My Darija (Moroccan dialect) wasn’t that strong—I understood about 50-60 percent of it depending on who was speaking it; we didn’t understand the nuances of the culture that only come with living and absorbing it for years (not just a one year stay without full cultural immersion, as is the case with MOST western students of these Shaykhs).

We would come to find out that there were many people in the area who disliked Mr. fake-shaykh and some of them would—in bad ways, no doubt—do things to get at him as long as they could get a way with it.

One incident comes to mind. He sent a murid (not a Moroccan) to the market to purchase a sheep to slaughter for Eid al-Adha. The murid selected the sheep and paid for it. A few days later he picked it up and took it back to the zawiya. On the morning of Eid al-Adha he discovered that the sheep had been switched with another one. This sheep had a large puss filled boil behind its ear (about the size of a date) and some other sores. Puzzled, the murid called Mr. fake-shaykh to inquire about what he should do. Mr. fake-shaykh indicated that he had some haters who, out of their dislike of him, likely switched the sheep so he would get the one with the blemishes. What did Mr. fake-shaykh do? He told the murid to go ahead with the sacrifice and just cut out the area with the boil.

For the record, in the Maliki school it seems—and Allah knows best—that this would not have been a valid sacrificial animal (udhiya). Imam al-Dasuqi states in his commentary on Mukhtasar Khalil:

قوله: وبين جرب الخ) أشار الشارح إلى أن قيد البينة معتبر في المعطوفات فلا يضر الخفيف من جميعها كما ذكره الشيخ سالم

Khalil said “بين جرب” and jarab is even less of a skin condition than sores with puss. So it would NOT have been sufficient as udhiya animal.

When we found out about all the things that were going on and broke our bay’a to Mr. fake-shaykh, we decided to reach out to the old neighbors and locals in the area. When they found out that we left him they were overjoyed. It was as if they let out a sigh of relief and felt free to speak. As one said, “Ah, now you know his reality!”

They confirmed what the neighbor told my daughter and said they have been putting up with him for so many years, and would like to speak out but they are afraid of him because he has friends in the police.

When we spoke to them, some shared stories similar to what those sisters shared in 2018—only the locals’ stories went back 15 years.

It remains to be seen if they will ever feel safe enough to share their collective experiences.

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## FINAL INSTALLMENT—THE LESSON OF BELLA ‘AZUZ

Alright then, this is supposed to be the final installment in the series that started—quite randomly—last Monday over a cup of coffee. Some of you may be looking for a conclusion that examines the lessons learned, the signposts, the way forward, etc. Those are all worthy topics to explore in detail, and maybe they can be addressed in subsequent posts.

But for this final installment I would like to look at a man named Bella ‘Azuz. But before we learn about him, let’s talk about another person: Qadi al-‘Abbas b. Ibrahim al-Simlali, who is going to tell us about Bella ‘Azuz.

His full name is Qadi al-‘Abbas b. Ibrahim al-Simlali al-Ta’araji al-Marrakushi al-Maliki (d. 1294 AH). He was a Maliki jurist and historian. He was the author

of al-I'lam bi-man hall Marrakush wa Aghmat min al-A'lam, a ten-volume collection on the lives of notable scholars and spiritual and social figures who resided in and around Marrakesh and Aghmat. He spent a total of fifty years completing this work, covering the biographical details of 1649 people.

It consists of an introduction that is divided into four sections, followed by the biographical entries arranged in alphabetical order.

The four sections cover:

- The history of Marrakesh, its founders, and a description of its congregational mosques, public gardens, and wells
- A description of Aghmat and its blessings
- A list of major works written on cities
- A discussion on historiography and related disciplines

We now come to the man named Bella 'Azuz.

But hold on...

Before I cite what Qadi al-'Abbas al-Simlali said about him, I want us to take a quick look at what another biographer said about him. (Don't worry, I know this seems like we are going in circles, but there is a reason for this.)

Let's take a look at Muhammad al-Akhdar's al-Hayat al-Adabiyya fi al-Maghrib fi 'Ahd al-Dawla al-'Alawiyya (Literary Life in Morocco During the Reign of the 'Alawite State) and see what he said about Bella 'Azuz:

“[He is] Abu Muhammad 'Abdullah b. 'Azuz al-Qurashi al-Shadhili al-Marrakushi, known as Sidi Bella. He was a Sufi, a physician, and a well-known jurist...He tread the spiritual path under the guidance of Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad al-Habib al-Lamati, the disciple (murid) of 'Abd al-Salam b. al-Tayyib al-Qadiri, the latter of whom was under the discipleship of the gnostic Shaykh Sidi Qasim al-Khassasi ...Though we are unaware of Ibn 'Azuz's birthdate, we know that he died in the year 1204 AH and was buried—as was the common practice for righteous people—in his home in Bab Iylan in Marrakesh. His grave is well-known and visited till this day. Ibn 'Azuz was a gifted Sufi master who lived a life of privation and self-denial; he would only eat from his own earnings, which he obtained through leather work...Ibn 'Azuz authored several books despite his dearth of formal learning. His works are astounding testaments to his sagacity, and cover the fields of Sufism, medicine, astrology, and the mystical science of letters...”

(Muhammad al-Khidr went on to list the titles of Bella ‘Azuz’s books, all of which remain as manuscripts. Interestingly, Sidi Qasim al-Khassasi was one of the Shaykhs in the initiatic chain of Shadhilis from the line of Shaykh Ahmad b. Mustafa al-‘Alawi. Likewise, Bella ‘Azuz’s maternal uncle was none other than Shaykh Ahmad b. Mubarak al-Lamati, the compiler of the Ibriz and disciple of Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Dabbagh!)

Alright, now lets return to Qadi al-‘Abbas al-Simlali. Remember when I said that he spent fifty years compiling his biographical collection? That gave him ample time to update his work and add additional information as he came across it. This means we find him arriving at certain conclusions early on in his collection, only to find him CORRECTING or AMENDING them when new knowledge came to him.

When we look in his book al-I‘lam, we see that the Qadi first says of Bella ‘Azuz, “[He is] the righteous saint (al-wali al-salih), the virtuous Sufi (al-sufi al-fadil)...”

But when we get to his Bella ‘Azuz’s actual biographical entry, we find that the Qadi said the EXACT OPPOSITE, describing him as “the misguided and heretical innovator”!

What happened? How did Bella ‘Azuz go from being a righteous saint and virtuous Sufi to a heretical and misguided innovator?

Qadi al-‘Abbas al-Simlali was transmitting the information that came to him, and when new and verified information came to him, he changed his judgement concerning the man.

In fact, Qadi al-‘Abbas quoted multiple pages of a scathing refutation against Bella ‘Azuz written by one Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Hadiki.

We know from the available manuscripts of Bella ‘Azuz that he was heavily involved in astrology, magic, and other assorted occult sciences. Al-Hadiki accused him of harboring secret teachings that absolved his inner door students from the obligations of the Shariah.

The most famous statement ever made about Bella ‘Azuz came from none other than Sayyiduna Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani (Radiya Allah ‘anhu).

One of the closest disciples of the Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani, Sidi Muhammad b. al-‘Arabi al-Tazi al-Damrawi, was once a murid of Bella ‘Azuz. When Damrawi

encountered Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani he was so awestruck and taken by the Shaykh's majesty and presence that he sought permission to enter his Spiritual Path.

Following the direct instructions of the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace)—as received through a vision—Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani took him as a disciple.

Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani said:

“By Allah, I have never seen the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) show as much solicitude and care toward someone as much as he did with Muhammad b. al-‘Arabi al-Damrawi and Sidi Hajj ‘Ali Harazim. By Allah, he loves them both as if they were his own children!”

Regarding Sidi Muhammad b. al-‘Arabi al-Damrawi's former “Shaykh,” Bella ‘Azuz, Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani uttered his famous statement:

“The master of existence [the Prophet Muhammad] (Allah bless him and give him peace) said to me: ‘Bella ‘Azuz is a demon within this Umma!’”

There are ample lessons in all of this!