
SEARCHING FOR A WAY OUT

“History is a dream -- the dream of reason. As long as man believes in this dream and seeks to acquire an historical identity, he remains unconscious of the fact that he is a bridge between the cosmic realms of heaven and earth. Within the dream man’s hopes will always focus on a future utopia that is progressively realized as Kakatopia, a psychotechnological intensification of hell on earth. His only escape from this fatal circle is to wake up from the dream and to realize a cosmic, mythic and fundamentally timeless identity”¹

Waking up from the “dream” of Western “Civilization” is not easy. It is a dream that dithers between the active and passive nihilism of the dominant ideology *and* the alternatives of heresy with the dim promise of a lost spiritual teaching. This dream has already become a global nightmare. Never before have any culture’s self-destructiveness threatened to destroy the whole earth. This “kakatopia” is different in both quality and quantity

1. Jose Arguelles; TRANSFORMATIONAL VISION

from all other tyrannies man has imposed on himself. It has a virulence which is amazing and which continues to intensify beyond all bounds, consuming the earth in a frenzy. But the most amazing thing is that -- we are it! We are the people who are out of balance, reeling toward destruction, taking every creature on the planet along with us. What we call “civilization” is the “psychotechnical intensification of hell on earth.” The urgent question that faces us is whether there is any escape route from this impending disaster in which we ourselves are intimately bound up. Because the global disaster will also be a personal disaster, it is no altruistic urge that pushes us to search for a way out of our dilemma -- it is our own urge for survival.

Many others have diagnosed the disease, some even calling it Technosis, and pointing out the symptoms which are in fact clear to almost everyone. Here instead of cataloging the ills of global technological society, a concerted effort will be made to go to the root of this deep miasma and propose a homeopathic cure. This is a radical attempt at self understanding -- and self therapy. This document might be thought of as a sequel to Morris Berman’s Coming To Our Senses. In the sequel the intensity of reflection will be increased, but the same fundamental questions are at the heart of this investigation: How do we avoid global self-destruction

through self-understanding and by changing our behavior based on that understanding? Berman discovers that the will to suicide actually arises in the cultural distinction between the Wild and the Tame which is man's attempt to deal with Otherness.

Suicide, whether on the political, environmental, or personal level, is the ultimate (and most effective) solution to the problem of Otherness, a "problem" that should never have become one in the first place.²

Berman traces the tendency toward suicide in the body politic to the politics of the body. He maps out the history of de-sensualization within world civilization and the intensification of the Wild/Tame dichotomy. He says that "...nuclear holocaust is really a scientific vision of utopia, in which the world is finally expunged of the messy, organic, and unpredictable by being wiped out -- 'purified'," and this cultural tendency to desensitization is lived out by each of us in our every day life. Knowing the history of our colonial approach to our own bodies is an excellent first step in understanding our current baffling suicidal situation. It suggests that the root causes are not far away, but very close at hand -- in fact, in how each of us relates to themselves as inhabiting living bodies -- *being* those bodies. However, I believe that this

2. COMING TO OUR SENSES by Morris Berman

is not the whole story. We need to look even deeper and attempt to understand the factors that are unique to and deeply embedded in the roots of Western culture itself.

Berman begins his book by telling us of his own family experience to which, perhaps, all of us can relate:

Some of the earliest childhood memories I have involve family gatherings, when members of the extended family would assemble for some sort of holiday or celebration, or when a few family members would come over to our home simply for the purpose of getting together. As a child, I often enjoyed these gatherings; there was usually a lot of warmth and reassurance in them. Looking back, however, one thing that strikes me about much of this socializing was marked absence of silence. As is frequently true of such get-togethers, the talking was almost constant. I am sure there were some exceptions to this, but they do not stand out in my mind. As a family we rarely, if ever, sat around just “being” with each other; that never seemed to happen. The unstated rule seemed to be that empty space was uncomfortable, and that it was necessary to fill it up. Silence -- was apparently, and I believe unconsciously, seen as threatening. It was though something potentially dangerous would emerge if

the talking were to stop for anything longer than half a minute or so.

I suppose this situation is typical of almost all gatherings, not just family ones. The dinner party is the most obvious example. It is as though silence could disclose some sort of terribly frightening Void. And what is being avoided are questions of who we are and what we are actually doing with each other. These questions live in our bodies, and silence forces them to the surface. If such questions ever get openly asked, the family often falls apart, and the dinner party usually breaks up in a strained and embarrassed way.

It is these types of situations that lay bare the nature of a culture most profoundly, for they go down to the root of our existence. They echo the lessons learned in our bodies from childhood, in a daily and repetitive way, and they are microcosms of our entire civilization. My family experience, in one form or another, was probably not very different from your own; and this despite the fact that there are many cultures on this planet for which silence is a comfortable fact of life rather than a difficulty. The difference may finally be one of embodiment, for if you are in-corporated, if you are in your body most of the time, the Void is not so threatening. If you are out of your body,

on the other hand, you need a substitute feeling of being grounded. Much of what passes for “culture” and “personality” in our society tends to fall into this substitute category, and is, in fact, the result of running from silence, and from genuine somatic experience.

The problem of hollowness, then, of a-Voidance, is really one of secondary satisfactions, the attempt to find substitutes for a primary satisfaction of wholeness that somehow got lost leaving a large gap in its place. The British novelist John Fowles calls this emptiness the “nemo,” which he describes as an anti-ego, a state of being nobody. “Nobody wants to be a nobody,” writes Fowles. “All our acts are partly devised to fill or to mark the emptiness we feel at the core.”³

Here the concept of “being” with ourselves in silence is contrast to talking and avoidance of silence. Being with our selves in silence allows suppressed questions to come to the surface. Being with ourselves in silence allows us to experience our own sensuality and incarnation. It holds the key to the experience of wholeness, instead of the usual hollowness that most of us avoid. Yet do we know what the act of “being” really is? Why are we caught in the dialectic between wholeness and

3. COMING TO OUR SENSES by Morris Berman

hollowness? Is accepting our embodiment enough? Understanding the suppression of bodily sensuality in our culture is important. But we must seek to understand the state we seek as much as the one we are attempting to get out of by reinhabiting our bodies. Could it be that the state of being whole is also culturally defined as the opposite of hollowness? That by seeking embodiment we are only moving within a pair of opposites which are intrinsically related. Being hollow and being whole are perhaps two faces of the same thing. In which case, by becoming “whole” we are not really becoming different but only striving for a preprogrammed goal which goes hand in hand with hollowness. If reaching wholeness could only be defined by the opposite of hollowness, then we would have a good indication that our tentative escape to wholeness is really no escape at all -- it will only ultimately lead back to hollowness.

The obvious way out of this impasse, if it were shown to be the case, would be to jump out of our own culture into another culture for which this dilemma did not exist. As Berman suggests, there are perhaps other cultures for which silence is not a “problem.” This was my first inclination. When I was in high-school, I, along with many others, discovered Zen Buddhism, and thought that it offered an excellent escape route. I did one of my majors for my Bachelors degree in East Asian Studies at

the University of Kansas, taking over sixty hours of classes, attempting to understand all aspects of Chinese and Japanese culture. The radical difference of these cultures seemed to offer a good alternative to my own culture. However, in my Japanese language class I had a young Japanese instructor. When I mentioned my interest in Zen Buddhism, he responded with surprise. He said that Zen Buddhism to him represented the most conservative aspects of his own society -- just the part he was attempting to escape from by coming to the West and learning our culture. For a moment I had the experience of standing before a cultural mirror. Both of us were attempting to escape our cultures, and saw in the culture of the other, possibilities shut off within our own. Neither of us could really escape totally our origins, nor fully understand the other's culture. I began to suspect that jumping through the cultural mirror was not the way out of my dilemma.

Later I began to realize that I could not really understand another culture until I fully understood my own. I noticed, as I studied Western philosophy, that many interpretations projected on Chinese and Japanese culture were really restatements of the assumptions of Western culture. I began to see that those who studied these cultures merely projected aspects of their own culture onto them. Of course, much of this had to do with the

nascence of Buddhist Studies in America. However, I became suspicious. Eventually I realized that if I were to avoid doing the same, I must study my own cultural history. Thus, instead of going to Japan, I decided to go to London, England to study Western Philosophy. I spent the next eight years in the British Museum reading Philosophy and studying Philosophy of Science from the point of view of Sociology. I became fascinated by these studies and all but forgot about my interest in Zen Buddhism and Oriental Philosophy. My bias toward Eastern thought, as the framework for understanding Western thought, gave me a different perspective from those who come to Western thought thinking that it is the only way of thought there is. I discovered to my surprise that Western thought has some depth too, and is intrinsically thought provoking, if for no other reason than the fact that it is a clear expression of who we as Occidentals are.

In the midst of these studies that eventually led to my completion of my Ph.D. under the title: “The Structure of Theoretical Systems in Relation to Emergence,” I had an exceptionally fortunate turn of fate occur to me. I met a man who changed my life completely. I had been sitting in a tea shop in Hampstead with my future wife talking about, of all things, Aristotle’s theory of four elements. I left her there to finish her paper while I went

to study. In my place another man sat who consequently struck up a conversation with my wife. He began talking to her about traditional medicines and mentioned also the four element theory. My wife took note of the coincidence and decided we should meet. It turned out that this man, who was, by the way, an American Indian by descent, had many interesting things to say which I had never heard before. For a long time he would not tell me from where his unusual perspective on things derived, but in the things he told me I began to see the solutions to many of the problems that I was studying including many of my own personal dilemmas. Eventually he revealed that he was a Muslim and a Sufi. He kept this from me at first because he thought that the only way I could hear his message was if I had my cultural categories disarmed. This was wise on his part because I had a low opinion of Sufism and Islam from my cursory reading on the subject. However, the kinds of things he told me did not appear in the books by Orientalists which had, until that moment, been my only source of orientation. So I did hear his message with an ear already steeped in the problems of modern philosophy and a bias toward Eastern philosophy but without prior cultural judgments to protect me from “hearing”. And what I heard was extraordinary. It turned out that his Shaykh (spiritual master) was Scottish, and he took me to meet him. That Shaykh was named Abd al-Qadir al-Murabit (also known

as Ian Dallas). From the ensuing course of events, that had such a profound impact upon not only my understanding, but my very self, I too eventually became a Muslim and a follower of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir for four years. From this man, and his followers, I have learned all the things I consider really worth knowing.

When I became acquainted with Shaykh Abd al-Qadir and his community, I was impressed by the fact that they were a people attempting to resurrect a way of life that was disappearing throughout the Muslim world. And they were doing this in the midst of the Western world which was actively sponsoring the eradication of this traditional way of life in economically colonized countries. What was interesting to me was that this pattern of living was truly different from the Western “way” I had learned from childhood. Also, this way of life could, in fact, be reconstituted because there existed a vast literature of Hadith (oral traditions and observations of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace) which related the pattern for living which he advocated 1400 years ago. Thus, the American and English Muslims that I meet were exploring this opus of teaching together with their experiences in various Muslim countries, intelligently recognizing not only what remained intact of this existential wisdom practice, but also seeing where and in what ways that path had been

deviated from and lost, as the handbook for reconstituting this traditional life pattern. Seeing this valiant attempt of Western born individuals to change their behavior patterns to embody a different way of life was very impressive for me. It was just as impressive for the many eastern Muslim travelers that passed through our community as well. Many times I have seen them weep, saying that this way of doing things was what they remembered from childhood, but has long since disappeared from their countries. It is important to note that in no way did any of this imply a taking on of an ethnicity that was foreign and contrary to whom we were. Slowly, I realized that here was a completely different way of looking at life which offered a genuine opportunity for change. A change not just in beliefs, but in behavior as well. As I began to attempt to imitate this way of life myself, I realized it was harder to change my behavior than I thought it would be at first. However, I also saw people around me who were able to take that leap and were utterly transformed. Seeing this transformation in people, and also experiencing an intense community life in which people shared each other's fate as a group, convinced me that Islam was a true path. As an academic used to years of book learning which did not transform me, I was happy to become immersed in a different kind of learning received directly from other people which concentrated on learning a

behavior pattern as well as a doctrine that gave those forms of behavior meaning. I am still sustained today by what I learned in those four brief years. It has given me a perspective on existence and life that I find invaluable.

Under the tutelage of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir I began a study of the relation between Islamic prophetic knowledges and Chinese Taoist philosophy. This proved to be the most fascination study I have ever undertaken. During that period I helped with the publication of The Meaning Of Man by Sidi Ali al-Jamal⁴ by contributing some summarizing diagrams. Comparing the work of Sidi Ali al-Jamal, a Shaykh of the Darqawi Tariqa (Sufi lineage) who lived 200 years ago, with the Tao Te Ching and I Ching led to many valuable insights, which along with the teachings of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir, proved to be a strong foundation for all my further research. Essentially, Sidi Ali al-Jamal has exactly the same view of reality as that expressed in the Chinese Taoist classics. These parallels have been expressed well by Isutzu in his studies of the two traditions. However, Isutzu's work centers on the baroque works of Shaykh al-Akbar, Ibn al-Arabi. Shaykh al-Akbar's thought is well explained in a recent book by Chittick called The Sufi Path Of Knowledge. There are, however, many other sources in which the same doctrines are expressed, such as the

4. Darqawi Press

letters of Shaykh ad-Darqawi, which are much more accessible. What is astounding and little talked about is the fact that all the Shaykhs of the traditional Tariqas have exactly the same model of reality even though it is expressed in various ways by different men at different times. In the work of Sidi Ali al-Jamal, and his disciple Shaykh ad-Darqawi, this model is presented in a brief and bare form which is very similar to how it is presented in the Tao Te Ching. The fact that the model of reality is the same when the possibilities of cross-cultural influence is improbable, as well as the fact that this model is the same for all the genuine Shaykhs of the tariqa for the last 1400 years, is very important. The prime difference between the Buddhist intellectual tradition and the Western intellectual tradition is the fact that the Eastern tradition is based on the experience of enlightenment, not on everyday experience. This gives Eastern philosophy a depth and unity which is unequaled in the West. It turns out that Sufic thought has a similar depth and unity. This is not to say that Buddhism (or Hinduism) and Sufism are the same. In fact, I will argue that they are very different in the course of this book. However, the basis for thought, being a spiritual experience, and the unified model of existence are similar, giving greater depth to thought overall. They are both in essence critiques of everyday experience, whereas Western thought is basically an apology for abstracted everyday experience.

Shaykh Abd al-Qadir gives a summary of the Sufic model of existence derived directly from Islam as follows:

Allah ta'ala set up creation through a dynamic interplay of opposites. From the One come the two, and they are opposites. Twoness is a dynamic closed system, for the One cannot be associated with any form or organism or personality arising from the complexifications of forms. But He declared, on the tongue of His Prophet, that He is the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden. Thus the reality of the outward is its inwardness, and the reality of the inward is outwardness. Outwardness is manifestation of His power.

Properly speaking we are materialists. That is, we are materialists by our inward knowledge. However, by our outward knowledge we have discovered that the phenomenal world in turn is not, properly speaking, there. Its "thereness" is itself illusion. Things are not "kathif," thick, but rather they are "latif," subtle. And He is the Latif. "Do not curse "dahr" -- time/space -- for it is Allah.

It is one of the proofs of the wisdom of simple trust in the Prophet, blessings and peace of Allah be upon him, that Muslims held to this truth when

it lacked the confirmation we now have from high-energy physics that material reality is not in any significant sense otherness after all. Time/space as the locus of solidness has been discovered to be non-located subtlety. It has also been found to be bi-located elsewhere. For everything, Allah ta'ala has said, there has been created an opposite. Everything is paired. In the realm of our learning process knowledge is dominated in the human science by two great opposites: "shari'at" and "haqiqat." The road and the reality. By the road, the "shari'at," we mean the parameters of the social nexus that is permitted within the Muslim community in accordance with the divinely ordained teaching of the revelation of the Generous Qur'an. This term has undergone profound and at times dangerous alteration in the natural history of various human communities in their attempts to live up to and grasp, or to reject, the prophetic social pattern. At times we ourselves (the Muslims) have devalued and revised the initial meaning of the term. More significantly perhaps, the dominant "kafir" culture now ruling the Northern world has made serious inroads into its definition, and there has been an undisguised attempt to discredit it by the most familiar of all imperialist doctrines, that of claiming superiority of "civilization" of Western

legal models. Thus we read that it is “uncivilized” to cut off the hand of the thief and “savage” to stone the adulterer. Unless we are simply to be intimidated by the arrogant force of these propagandist positions, we must arrive at a more profound understanding of what the shari’at is. We do no help to the Muslim cause by gnawing away at the bone they have flung us, begging to be accepted as “civilized” and “developed.” Islam is not in question to us. What must be placed in question by the thinking Muslim is the validity of the current dominant culture to speak with authority on any social, and thus moral, issue in the world today. Once we have examined in depth the Islamic shari’at, we will find that the whole statist bureaucratic apparatus of co-ercion and totalitarian power that it wields over its people from Moscow to Washington is, according to our vastly superior and profoundly human pattern of social justice, utterly haram [forbidden, harmful] and criminal. We will return to the meanings and directional patterns inherent in the term shari’at, but first we must clarify its opposing term -- it is by this that we realize that no social structure can permanently solidify into a tyranny in Islam, for our leader, blessings of Allah and peace be upon him has said, “My people cannot go astray.”

Haqqiqat means the Reality. This derives from the Divine Name, the Real. The “Haqq” is both the Essence of Allah, and, because He is One in His Acts and Attributes and Essence, also that from which the whole phenomenal world manifests. Existent reality is by the Haqq. The Real. Haqqiqat is the non-spatial reality on which the time/space dual zone is dependent. Man is the interspace or the “barzakh” between these two realities.

Man has access in outwardness to the universal realities of the cosmos. In inwardness he has access to his own reality in the unseen worlds. What Qur'an unfolds is the secret that man's outwardness is the cosmos, so that the total cosmic reality is one identity, one selfhood, one organism, while the inwardness of man is what contains the plenum of cosmic outwardness. It is the cosmos you understand by going inward while it is the self you understand by going outwards. Unity of these two knowledges is arrived at by pushing the central “locus” of awareness out of dimensionality, until locus itself is shattered. This happens by going beyond the universal unitary reality into the void, the original void which was/is before the cosmic Big Bang. Until man makes the inward journey, he does not understand the cosmos. Sidi Ali al-Jamal says: “It is easy to

know Allah. It is difficult to know the creation.” Beyond the “void experience” lies the gift of Allah ta’ala on the seeker by which he wins his unity, tawhid, and understands that He is indeed the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden.

This knowledge planes into the great discovery of what self-hood is. Here a special language is used both to avoid the ignorant confusion of “shirk” and the “zindiq” position of imagining there is any other than the Real. Thus “haqiqat” is the access to the meaning of what the Real indicates in inward contemplation to the humble seeker who desires to reach unitary experience and is not content to rest with unitary information. This knowledge about the nature of consciousness and, therefore, man himself is a simple matter in itself, but its access is nevertheless guarded. It is guarded precisely by the shari’at. In other words, there is no way to Allah, glory be to Him, except on the path of the shari’at. It follows that if you hold to and pursue the way of shari’at, it must confront you with the un-reality of phenomenal existence, except as veiling and illusion, and lead you to your own self and therefore to knowledge.

The muslims are ordered to knowledge.....”⁵

5. *Jihad: A Groundplan* (Diwan Press)

This gives just a taste of a very different view of reality that I have become immersed in through the teaching of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir. It assumes that the Islamic perspective, on existence, is correct and utterly opposed to the Western perspective. If you desire an alternative perspective on existence from that of the dominant culture, this one certainly is that. It is an uncompromising position with a rock solid foundation in revealed texts and a historically documented teaching of a great prophet of the rank of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Thus, the dilemma presented in the previous chapter of being caught between the alternatives of the ruthlessly totalitarian Christian tradition on the one hand and heresy on the other was with one stroke overcome. One is either caught between the mithraic active nihilism of colonial aggression or the passive nihilism of the crucified Christ which represents resentment; *or* one is either caught between the prophets of doom with no solution or the gnostic Jesus, all of whose true spiritual inheritors have been destroyed and the teaching obliterated. Upon realizing the significance of Islam as a prophetic teaching the veil of fourfold contradiction is lifted like a mist to reveal a new clarity. These four horns of the dilemma are avoided when one accepts that the tradition was renewed by another prophet after Jesus and that this tradition has both outward and inward aspects of the same previous teaching intact. In the Islamic tradition

Jesus is revered as a prophet and his teachings survive, confirmed by the more encompassing teaching of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon them both. This gnostic tradition has been handed down to the present in an unbroken chain of transmission both in terms of its exoteric (sharia) and esoteric (haqqiqat) teachings. This short excursus by Shaykh abd al-Qadir is a good modern summary of the position of all the major Shaykhs of the Darqawi Tariqa and other traditional Sufi saints. This is a very different picture than you will get from the pseudo-sufis who do not believe they have to become Muslims to follow this way (and so miss half the picture) and from the orientalist who normally intentionally distort it through their strange Western assumptions concerning what Islam is really about. It is even very different, for that matter, from the views of the Islamic apologists (the now outdated modernists) which want to make Islam acceptable to Western colonial powers. Sufism represents a form of living tradition of knowledge that still exists within the greater Muslim community despite concerted efforts to eradicate it. Its affinities with Taoism⁶ and certain features of Buddhism, such as Zen, are well established. Yet it differs from these in that it is politically active in its support of genuine Islamic goals of sovereignty and self-government. It is a tradition which bases its thought on a certain special type of non-

6. See *The Tao Of Islam* by Sachiko Murata (SUNY 1992)

experience in some ways like the non-experience of enlightenment in the Buddhist tradition only even more exalted. One of the major themes of this book is to situate that kind of experience for those who come to it from a Western perspective. It is very different from what you might expect, so hold on to your hats. Yet as the emphasis is on self knowledge, we cannot understand what this special experience is all about until we first understand our own assumptions about the world and what is Real.

Here I would like to say something about my teacher Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Murabit. As I have written this book I have realized how much he had taught me in the four years I spend under his tutelage. Basically I have spent the last twelve years unfolding the aspects of that knowledge he transmitted to me. However, I could no longer stay in his presence due to my own shortcomings and flaws. But I have heard him say many times that sometimes the water at the source of a stream is bitter and that it takes time and distance to make it sweet. I believe I have experienced something of the reality of this in my own forced exile from my teacher. I have lived with his presence every day informing my mundane existence with meanings gleaned from his teaching. And as I have done so I have realized just how profound those teachings are as they derive from a vast and deep tradition of

knowledge and gnosis traceable to the wondrous source of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. Shaykh Abd al-Qadir pointed me back to that source and I have done my best to follow his indication. Shaykh Abd al-Qadir is a man on a journey of discovery. I have done my best to emulate him by going on my own journey of discovery to attempt to find out who I am. In these pages I do not merely repeat his teaching back. There are many divergences between what is said here and his thoughts that appear in his many books. I am attempting instead to push the limits of my own understanding in emulation of the way I see him continuously pushing the limits of his understanding. So few people that I have met attempt to take such a journey beyond their own limits. In fact, I would say that Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Murabit is unique among all the people I have met in his ability to transform himself and his understanding of the world by the sheer tenacity with which he assiduously applies himself to the pursuit of his journey of self-discovery. If I have been at all successful in my own attempt to journey into my own self it has been on the basis of my observation and emulation of his pursuit of his journey of self-discovery. One of the big differences between him and I is scope of questioning. In fact, recently I read his play Oedipus and Dionysius and realized that this entire project I have undertaken could be seen as a footnote to a couple of passages in that play

which I have quoted in the preface to this series of essays. Given my limitations and reduced scope of inquiry on my journey I cannot but be awed by the scope and depth of the journey of my teacher. In fact, as I have written this book I have understood his journey somewhat better. Not since Zoroaster has there been a representative of the prophetic tradition within the Western tradition. If I have found myself an interface between the Judeo-Christian tradition and its modern scientific and technological form, then I see in my teacher a more vast interface between these two traditions. In embodying that interface, my teacher sometimes takes the role of the dark other who is associated with all that is evil within the western tradition. Other times he takes the role of the bringer of light which causes the darkness to dissipate. In other words his roles seem to alternate between the nihilistic opposites of light and dark as he serves as a lightening rod for the identification of the *Otherness* of Islam. As he takes those roles in the many books he has written and in his oral teaching he continuously explores what it means to be a Muslim within the confines of the Western tradition that is antithetical to Islam in every way. I see him as being crushed in the vice grip of contention between these two old enemies. For dualistic Zoroastrianism from which much of our tradition stems there must be the representative of the forces of darkness against which Mithra leads the armies of light. However,

in this case it is the one who is identified with darkness who is the bringer of the light of the prophetic tradition re-affirming the original unitary message of Zoroaster. Whoever engages with the Western tradition is immediately caught up in the dynamic of nihilistic opposites that are projected on everything by our Western tradition. As we will see even Buddhism falls under the spell of nihilism even as it attempts to withdraw from its shadow. Thus my teacher is a unique man in the sense that he has become the lightening rod for the exchange between the West and its opposite which has become more clearly defined since the ideological opposition within the West between capitalism and communism has been temporarily resolved. Due to the observation of this role he has come to play, it has been made clear to me something of the operation of the dynamic of nihilistic opposites as they play around him in every conceivable form. His teaching is obscured by the play of nihilistic opposites that surround him. Many times he acts out and says the very things that embody the *Otherness* of Islam that appears so alien in the Western cultural milieu. My own contribution is to attempt from my own self-imposed distance to present what I understand of that teaching, in my own words and in my own faltering process of self-exploration, so that others might grasp it better, hopefully better than I have myself. The teaching is pure, springing from the mainstream prophetic tradition that stretches

from the prophet Adam through Zoroaster, Abraham, Jesus, and Muhammad on through the Sufic tradition right down to the present day as embodied in the words and action of my teachers and other modern Sufic masters like him. It is a teaching that can bring light to any darkness no matter how intense, even the darkness of the world destroyers who we discover ourselves to be. May Allah pour down his help and protection on my teacher, Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Murabit and continue to give me increase from his teaching as it stems from the Primal Intellect of the Prophet Muhammad. My teacher once told me upon entering Islam that there was nothing in it that would cause the intellect to recoil but that everything in it would only purify and clarify the intellectual understanding of existence. I have found this statement to be true. I recommend this path to others who wish to understand the foundations of existence. I have attempted to push the limits of what is understandable about the Western tradition in this series of essays as a test case of that assertion of my teacher. I leave it to my reader to judge the extent to which I have been successful in formulating the understandings I have been given so that they might be useful for others as well. But from my own perspective I marvel everyday at the wonder of the clarity that Islam brings to my own human existence in relation to a confusing and terrifying world in which Muslims are the brunt of open assault by the true forces

of darkness that are attacking not just Muslims but everyone standing in the way of total world domination by the Western powers.

Upon finishing my dissertation I decided, against the wishes of my Shaykh, to return to the United States and learn a profession. I chose the profession of Software Engineering Technologist. I believe that the highest profession is leaving all professions; but wonder if it is possible to leave a profession if one has not even mastered one. And after ten years of hard work I now feel I have for the most part mastered this new profession despite no prior training. I learned quickly on my return from England that I would not be able to escape from the “real” world into academia. It seems too many of my generation in the sixties had the same idea. So I resolved to take whatever position in Software Engineering that would make it possible for me to learn the most in the shortest amount of time. Therefore, I am not writing as an Academic who might have the time to fully document and research all my findings before they are presented for criticism. Also, I do not claim to be writing from the perspective of an “enlightened being.” In fact, I consider myself to be a casualty of the path to enlightenment. I am merely attempting to convey my attempts to understand what enlightenment might mean in the context of Western culture which because of the ruthless

suppression of the teachings of Jesus is devoid of that experience. Not enough thought has been given to this question. Buddhist enlightenment, or the special experiences of the Sufis, are culturally divorced from our Western milieu. They are conditioned by and embedded in their own cultural web. Whichever one chooses as the ultimate goal, one must jump from one's own culture in order to effect the psychological and spiritual transformation. To the extent that one must leave one's own culture, that experience is no longer self-discovery which can be of benefit to others struggling within the Western milieu. To the extent they depart from self-discovery which can be communicated within Western culture, they are defective. I guess this is a way of saying that in order to really approach enlightenment we must first get a firm grip on non-enlightenment. For ultimately these two human states are intimately intertwined. In fact, all these traditions would tell you that non-enlightenment in reality is enlightenment and vice versa. Thus, this holding to non-enlightenment and attempting to understand what it is really is IS a search for an enlightenment that can even illumine the darkness of Western culture. Entering that darkness fully I have spent the last twelve years mastering the discipline of Software Engineering. However, this has taught me what the technological system is really all about. So many criticisms of the technological system come from

outsiders who do not really understand it fully. I have come to have an appreciation for its inner workings and have written about that in papers concerning “Software Engineering Foundations” and “The Future of Software Process.” These papers attempt to give a philosophical perspective on software meta-technology and posit that software is difficult to produce because its ground in Being is different from other things. This kind of philosophical treatment of software engineering is perhaps unique in the literature. But it is also incomprehensible to most software engineers, because technology has abandoned philosophy. There is a relentless push forward across the cutting edge, but almost no reflection on what it is we are doing on that edge, or why the edge is there.

More recently I have completed a new series of papers called “On The Social Construction of Emergent Worlds: The Foundations of Reflexive Autopoietic Systems Theory.” These papers attempt to present Social Phenomenology and Computational Sociology as a basis for the definition of Autopoietic Sociology. The insights that are presented in these papers stem directly from my participant observation of the engineering work environment as a trained sociologist and philosopher of science and technology *and* as a software engineer. Very seldom do sociologists and philosophers actually venture

into the work environment to explore that realm giving up the safety of their detachment within ivory towers. Very seldom do engineers think about their practice especially based on a training in philosophy and sociology. Bringing these two subcultures together I have been attempted to understand the roots of constructivism, embodiment and enactment as practiced within engineering and informed by autopoietic theory. I have managed to develop a grounded theory of social autopoietic systems which I hope will contribute both to sociology and philosophy. Much of the foundation for my understanding of autopoietic theory presented in these new papers was developed in the process of writing this book of essays. Autopoietic theory is normally presented as a completely new theory without precedents in the Western tradition. In the course of this series of essays we will explore the possible predecessors of this interesting theory which can serve as a link between Western and Chinese scientific traditions. Within autopoietic theory that defines the cognitive and living emergent aspects of existence there is a controversy as to whether this theory describes social systems as well. I have attempted to ground the theory of autopoiesis in general systems theory and extend it to cover social systems. In the process many interesting results that build upon the perspective presented in this book but are much more technical in nature were uncovered. These

papers express the culmination of my long effort to attempt to attain mastery of my craft, software engineering, so that perhaps someday I might give up the management of affairs in a true sense and attain the best profession that comes from leaving all professions. But it is clear that in my work and study of my craft I am trapped in an interface between industry and academia which is similar to the interface between Islam and the Judeo-Christian tradition in which I find my self also trapped on a more fundamental level. I entered that more fundamental interface due to my recoil from the leap into the Buddhist tradition back into my own. I had gone to England to study my own tradition more deeply and once I became steeped in its problems I was by the grace of God introduced to the great Other of the Judeo-Christian tradition in a way that allowed me to see in it the solution to the many deep problems that I found in my own tradition. Then upon realizing that Islam was *really* part of my tradition on a deeper level and that my estrangement from it was analogous to the rivalry of brothers in the same family, I knew that I did not have to leave the home of my own tradition in order to find a profound alternative to the sickness of the Western worldview. All that was really needed was to understand Islam through Buddhism and Chinese philosophy in order to gain a proper perspective on its utter differences from the Judeo-Christian branch of the tradition

stemming also from Abraham. Abraham is the prophet of Allah who realized His existence purely by thinking about it and going against his own current idol worshiping culture and the traditions of his father and forefathers. Similarly this series of essays is an attempt to think through the tradition we have been handed using its own tools in order to arrive from out of it at a path toward the what lies beyond the Void.

As I attempted to become proficient as a software engineering technologist, my primary studies of the roots of Western philosophy and the comparison of Islamic & Chinese traditional philosophies continued. For several years I just continued to read on these subjects. I was particularly interested in the question of whether there was a way out of the enchantment of the Western philosophical and technological, and in fact industrial/colonial, system which the Muslims were embroiled in along with all other Third & Fourth World peoples. Also, I was interested in whether there was an alternative to Western science which could be based on traditional prophetically inspired approaches to Reality. Of these two questions the first has always been foremost in my mind.⁷ Unless we can learn to think differently than according to Western cultural premises, whatever sciences we create will only be a reflection of the same

7. I hope to address the second in a separate book called THE PATTERN OF MAN, inshallah.

basic assumptions which are now leading to global disaster.

About two years ago I began to write a book, started many times and given up again and again, to explain the insights I had been granted along my way. In writing that draft I began to have a series of deeper insights into the whole matter that completely reoriented my thoughts on Western ontology. Somehow I feel as if the whole subject has now become completed for me, and I am now attempting to express the new Gestalt. Hopefully, the reader will find it as thought provoking as I have myself. I am very grateful for these insights into a subject that I believe is important to us all. For many years this whole area of study has been very confusing, and many times I have realized that what I thought I knew was in fact all wrong. Thus, although I have found answers that now satisfy me, they are presented here as speculations and tentative conclusions to help others who are similarly worried about the fate of mankind, yet see no way out.

The perspective taken in this work will be very strange to many Western readers. The misunderstanding and even misrepresentation of Islam in Western culture is profound. As a Western Muslim I am acutely aware of the difficulties of communicating with other intelligent, though unavoidably, and unconsciously biased, Western

readers. It is tempting to follow the modus operandi of my first acquaintance who hid the source of his wisdom. However, I cannot justify this course of action as it would obscure my entire argument and jeopardize the trust of my reader. Islam is the “Great Other” for Western culture. It was not for nothing that the crusades were fought and still live on in our imagination. Islam, Judaism & Christianity are religions from the same root. Yet tremendous hatred and misunderstanding between them still exist after more than a thousand years of conflict. The Judeo-Christian origins of Western culture stand opposed to Islam in every possible way. Yet, unlike Chinese culture, there are many things in common between these two cultural traditions. In these times, when with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Islam is identified regularly as the new enemy. There may be some who might want to try to understand the perspective of the Muslims. Those who are not satisfied with the caricatures may wish to go beyond them by seeing how one Western Muslim has struggled with this difference in cultures and their approaches to Reality.

No apology for Islam will be found in these pages. The Muslim, myself included, accepts it as the truth from God as it is. Upon accepting this truth as self evident, the new Muslim is converted from one with many questions seeking an answer to one with an answer seeking to

understand how this answer allows one to comprehend the world. Moving from one side of the scale to the other does not make things easier. In fact, in many ways things become harder. Belief systems need to be experienced and tested in their ability to explain the world. This constant testing does not cease because one decides a belief system is the correct avenue for approaching the truth. Unless there is continuous ever deepening elucidation of experience, then the belief system is sterile. My experience is that Islam provides this fundamental upwelling source of knowledge concerning existence. The confrontation between Judeo-Christian and Islamic perspectives brings both worldviews alive in ways not accessible to those wholly within one or the other. Being Western and becoming Muslim makes the Western Muslim himself an interface between cultures radically different but presumably from the same ultimate prophetic source to the extent they are true to their origins. That source is the Prophet Abraham who all three traditions revere. Chinese culture is wholly different with a completely different source. Moving to Chinese culture is a more radical departure. Yet in this era it is the accepted alternative. Islam, on the other hand, is the only alternative that is not seen as socially or intellectually acceptable by the dominant culture. It is all right to claim to be a Buddhist, but never a Muslim. The totally different culture is less threatening than the “Great

Other” called Islam, the mirror image of the Judeo-Christian, i.e. neo-Roman and ultimately mithraic, tradition.

For those curious concerning what lies within this forbidden-city of knowledge⁸ this text may give some insight into what remains under such severe censure. Some may even realize that what is socially unacceptable within a sick society may be the very source of societal health. Many times the sick man rejects the medicine that will cure him. Even honey may taste bitter to the diseased person. Thus, when one considers the legacy of the Western Kakatopia, one wonders what right they have to judge the health of any other culture. Given the current state of the world, traditional cultures of any kind appear to be the sane alternatives given the legacy of the builders of the global slum upon which the pleasure domes of the industrial world precariously float.

This book is not primarily about Islam. This book instead focuses on understanding what the roots of Western consciousness really are. My own transition out of Western culture into Islamic culture is incomplete. I am now caught in the cultural mirror with some view of both sides. Whether it is possible for me to escape totally into the Other is not yet clear.⁹ Yet the view back from within

8. Madina, not Peking.

9. See THE BOOK OF STRANGERS by Ian Dallas

the mirror will possibly be of help to others no matter what their chosen route of escape. Understanding ourselves as Westerners is crucial. We need to understand ourselves in order to stop global destruction of the Earth before it is too late. It seems any insight into the sources of our own destructiveness, from whatever perspective, is valuable to this end. Also, Third World peoples need to understand us First / Second Worlders so perhaps they can stop themselves from emulating us. They may even find a way to stop us if we cannot stop ourselves from committing more acts of global destruction.

Yet, even though the bulk of this book is not about Islam a clear path from within Western culture out to Islam is delineated. This path explores the possibilities of a genuinely Western Islam. If we do not disappear into the Great Other, is it possible to build an Islam on Occidental soil from the debris of Western culture after its deconstruction? The Islamic nation (ummah) has been crushed by Western imperialism. Islam has lost its vitality and the Muslims have for the most part “lost their curiosity.”¹⁰ Perhaps as the Muslims embrace Western culture, it is also time for a resurgence of Islam emanating from the West. In many ways this book explores this possibility. If it is possible to see what is

10. See Ezra Pound Selected Essays

good at the root of Western consciousness, then perhaps that can be purified and serve as a bedrock for building a new form of Islam that is vaccinated against the rabid relativism and nihilism at the root of the Western technological system.

Certainly the only way out of our Western dilemma is from within ourselves. Changing clothes or language or religion or anything external cannot hope to be a means of release. We take ourselves with us wherever we go and still end up having to deal with who we are in the end. External changes only accentuate the difficulty of the problem of dealing with ourselves. Thus this study attempts to go deep into the source of Western consciousness in order to find a way out of the dilemmas manifested outwardly in the world. Finding a way out of these dilemmas from within ourselves is the only real hope we can have for survival.

It is difficult to give a short summary of the present volume because the argument is basically a continued frontal attack on the foundations of Western “civilization” digging deeper and deeper and not letting up until the universal bedrock of spiritual experience has been exposed. The results of this task will be of use to anyone who is interested in situating a spiritual tradition such as Buddhism in relation to the Western tradition.

Once this universal bedrock has been exposed, it is used as a basis for connecting to the tradition of Islam which is distinguished from the Buddhist tradition. Islam is linked to Taoism in China and Zoroastrianism in Persia. It is basically prophetic in nature. The fact that there have been many prophets to mankind over human history is used as a basis for understanding the connection of Islam to other faiths and spiritual traditions.

This is the memoir of a personal journey. It is fundamentally exploratory in nature and is only complete in the sense that a full picture has emerged from years of study. This full picture is presented in the hopes of stirring the interest of Western intellectuals in Islam. It attempts to establish that Muslims not only have a critique of the dominant Western culture, but that this critique goes deep and understands the West better than it does itself. The Muslims approach to the West has been, unfortunately, similar to that of China's, and both of these mighty empires were destroyed. We do not lament that destruction to the extent that it exposed inherent flaws in the structure of the Islamic ummah. What we lament is the destruction of a way of life which had an inherent wisdom and balance. Islam is a young religion which has much vigor left in spite of every attempt to destabilize it by the Western nations. We expect Islam to rise again from the very heart of its enemy. Every

Western Muslim is another piece of evidence that this is indeed a possibility. However, as long as the Muslims labor under inner need to imitate their oppressors and believe that the colonialist masters are right because they have temporary control, the road to this revival will be a long one.

Only by the confrontation of Kufr (covering up of the truth) by Islam can the Muslims be strong again. People have lost their ability to have an alternative worldview and have been saturated by the singular worldview of the West which is not only accepted unthinkingly, but is destroying the earth and the hope of all human life upon it. This state of affairs must stop. Intelligent human beings must lay hold of the Western worldview, and by understanding it, understand ourselves. This may well be the wondrous gift of Islam to the West from the Muslims today. As Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Murabit has said, “People today say they fear Islam and see it as a threat to themselves. yet Islam is all mercy. What the human creature should fear is Allah. Glory be to Him. Creator of the Heavens and the Earth and all that is between.”

May Allah pour down his blessings on the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, who we know so much about, but despite this, find it difficult to imitate him. May Allah bless his companions who preserved and transmitted his

way to us intact. Oh Allah, please have mercy on your slave and forgive my errors. I cannot praise you as you deserve to be praised, so have mercy on my meager efforts. Bless the Muslims who are struggling in your way wherever they are, and let your light be seen clearly by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

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Speculations in an Emergent Onto-
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