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Corridor of Shadows

Further Sufi Chronicles

2nd EDITION



*Tis light makes color visible at night
Red, green, and rusted vanish from thy sight.
So to thee light by darkness is made known;
All hid things by their contraries are shown.
Since God had none, He, seeing all, denies
Himself eternally to mortal eyes.*

*From the dark jungle as tiger bright
Form from the viewless Spirit leaps into light.
When waves of thought from Wisdom's Sea profound
Arose, they clad themselves in speech and sound.
The lovely forms a fleeting sparkle gave,
Then fell and mingled with the falling wave.
So perish all things fair, to readorn
The Beauteous One whence all things were born*

Reality and Appearance
Mawlana Rumi

“If you cannot hear my gentle whispers then let the harsh lessons of life teach you.”

A warning from the Shaikh

MOUND OF LEAVES

Not a leaf doth fall but with His knowledge.
(Qur'an 6:59)

“John Greene filed his complaint,” should be the words that begin the first chapter of your next book,” the Shaikh said as we drove along a street in Pine Crest, the southern village where he lived at that time. “Do you realize how many people just like him are suffering throughout the entire country?” He asked.

“I am sure there are millions,” I answered. But John Greene was unique for the reason that he complained about being treated unfairly because he was black. One may ask where the uniqueness is. Many black people and others of various nationalities and colors are treated unfairly. Yes. But no other person of color had ever lodged a complaint about racial discrimination in that particular southern village before. It is likely that John would never have done it either had he not been awakened by the Shaikh.

It was late winter when John Greene's story began to unfold within my own story during one of my trips to visit my guide. Accompanied by another disciple, I came to the Village in order to be in retreat with the Shaikh and to be available for *hizmet*, or service. After driving all day, we arrived late at night. We entered the Shaikh's home with sighs of relief. It was good to be there. No matter how chaotic things became within or in the world around me, there was always peace in the Shaikh's presence. I often wondered what I would do without him in my life. In the past he had reminded me and other *murids* that he was already a dead man: dead to needs for power and reputation; dead to desires to fulfill every whim and inclination; and dead to desires for fulfillment by this world. But also, he had assured us

that we would experience our connection with him more strongly when he had crossed over into *akhirat* or eternity.

Looking at myself, I saw that I was still very much a prisoner who only hoped to be free. I felt gratitude for having escaped the narrow cell of a few of my *nafs*; a few longstanding egoistic desires and demands. Unlike the Shaikh, I had not yet achieved complete liberation. Even though I was out of the cell, I remained in confinement. I still sought a means of escape to a greater and more complete freedom beyond my personal prison walls.

Two *murids* (disciples), who departed just before we arrived, left a note behind. The noye conveyed greetings of peace (*salaams*) and informed us of messages that had come for the Shaikh who was away. We enjoyed some fruit and tea then said our prayers and took rest for the night. The following day, we kept busy with minor household repairs and cleaning. Just as the time of the Sunset prayer (*salat al-maghrib*) was ending, the Shaikh called. My heart leapt when the phone finally rang. In that moment, I realized that I had spent the entire day anticipating that call. The Shaikh conveyed salaams to us with his usual warmth, inquired about our journey and what time we had reached his apartment. He asked if we knew our way to the airport. I answered that I did not but that I could use a map or easily ask directions.

“Good,” he said. “It will take you about forty minutes. I will see you soon, *insha’Allah* (God willing). Bring my mail too, if you don’t mind. I would like to read it in the car.”

We arrived at the airport and found the Shaikh easily enough. He looked well but it seemed he had a great deal on his mind. He called salaams again, as he sat his briefcase on the car’s back seat, while we exchanged the fraternal greetings of the dervish circle.

“Why are we here?” He said with a sigh, taking the mail into his lap, just as I started the car. “Why are *you* here, Hajji Muhyiddin? Did the Prophet’s journey to Tabuk have any point?”

I took the questions in combination with the sigh as a signal. I understood that a new *irshad*, another lesson was beginning. I had long since learned that the Shaikh never asked any question simply for no effect. His *irshad* was like a Buddhist koan. Sometimes what he asked was baffling and held absolutely no sense of reason for a logical mind; yes it was always given to help the *murid*. The *irshad* was something to solve like a puzzle or riddle, and like the Buddhist master, the Shaikh was interested in how the disciple answers a question as he was in the content of the disciple’s answer.

The Shaikh’s question almost seemed rhetorical in the moment but I took it seriously nonetheless, as something I should reflect upon. The *irshad* was immense and prophetic. When I read about the events of Tabuk and saw the Qur’anic verses that expound upon what occurred, I began to reflect and understand. But what I understood at first was only the tip of an iceberg.

When the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, announced an expedition against the Byzantines, he began calling together the grandest army he was ever to lead... an army of thirty thousand strong with ten thousand horses. Interestingly, the announcement came at the time when the dates were ripening and the heat was oppressive. Most of the community however, made haste with preparations but some people made excuses. The hypocrites, together with some from among the Bedouin and from among the less devout, asked to remain behind. But also four highly reputed men of good faith procrastinated and delayed until finally, the army left without them.

About ten days after the army had set out, one of the four who had stayed behind realized that he had made a mistake and rushed to join the Prophet and his army. He was welcomed. Finally, the confrontation with the Byzantines never happened. But the expedition exposed people to themselves and to each other. After spending twenty days at the Tabuk the Prophet returned to Medina. The hypocrites who had made excuses approached him and he accepted what they said. But he also told them that God was aware of their secret thoughts. As for the three believers who had not come, they were cut off from the community and orders were given that no one should speak to them *until God decided their case. The three lived as outcast for fifty days.* On the morning of the fiftieth day, after the Morning Prayer, the Prophet announced that Allah Almighty had relented and he told the tree that the revelation had come:

He also turned in mercy to the three, the decision of whose case was deferred. So despondent were they that the earth with all its vastness, and their own souls, seemed to close in upon them. They knew for certain that there was no refuge from Allah except in Him. Then He turned to them in mercy so that they could repent. Surely, Allah is the One Who is the acceptor of repentance, the Most Merciful.

(Qur'an 9:118)

During the time that I was visiting the Shaikh, he invited me to lunch together with John Greene, his wife, and his son. We sat down for the meal at a rather typical family-style restaurant, which had a reasonable menu with hearty home-cooked food. John's son was the center of attention. About seven years old, the precocious child was articulate, alert, perceptive and obviously bright. He was a delightful presence... smiling, cute with dimples, a good appetite and good manners. That lovely child was born among the people who are oppressed but his potential could be clearly seen.

Later, I commented to the Shaikh about *qaumu sahib*, the people who are the rightful owners. The Shaikh had told me that the people who are held low are often the inheritors and that everyone will have his or her day. “The wheel of fortune is always turning around,” he said. “One day the king is over the slave, the next day the slave becomes the king.”

During lunch, I learned that at the time in the mid-1980’s John was earning \$10,000 a year when he needed no less than \$20,000 to support his family. John may have even been better qualified than some who earned more or who were his superiors at work. But color prejudices ran deep in some southern cities and even after the Civil Rights era in the United States, some considered that blacks like John were less than human.

On a completely different level, the Shaikh was oppressed in his work but he never cowered to it. The Shaikh not only inspired John but he directed John and showed him how to address the system that choked him. The Shaikh showed him the necessity of standing up for himself and his family and that he should not be weak and allow the evils of oppression to overtake him. I suspect that the Shaikh also told John that if he made the effort, he would prevail and that he should not be stopped by fear. John was stunned but his face and his wife's face were as open as the blue sky above us that day. They both listened to the Shaikh. I witnessed John’s opening with regard to his predicament. As I looked at him, I could feel him shifting from doubts to stronger belief and confidence in his value, and also courage to fight for more.