

## Showing Up

*Bread for myself is a material question:  
Bread for my neighbor is a spiritual question.*  
Nikolai Berdyaev

Toward the end of year three at the University of Spiritual Healing and Sufism, I was uncertain as whether to continue with year four. While I was benefitting deeply from the teachings and practices, I was holding back and not fully committed to what I was doing.

Yes, I was praying five times a day, and yes, I was doing tawba, and yes, I was giving and receiving healings, and yes, on holy days I would even pray into the wee hours of the morning during khalwa, and – blah, blah, blah – *inwardly, part of me was saying no*. One day, while wobbling about with my indecisiveness, I asked my beloved guide if I should continue with year four. In the five years I had known Sidi, he rarely answered that type of question – usually he rebuked me by casting the question back in my direction, saying, “You know what to do.” On this occasion, to my surprise, with a clear directive he said, “You must complete year four.”

Although it was the answer I hoped for, Sidi’s outer response/guidance was yet another way in which he was prodding me to make an inner course correction. Yes, it would be good to complete the program, but what Sidi was really pointing to was my need to wholeheartedly *show up*. To truly move forward, it was essential that I anchor in my *commitment* to Allah, to life, and to the concreteness of my daily activities by trusting that (in one sense) everything I did *mattered*.

It matters. With a small team of medical professionals and alternative healers, I spent several months tending to a beloved’s wife who was diagnosed with colon and liver cancer. Initially I saw Lisa twice a week offering healings and prayer. She was a competent and lively woman with an eclectic approach to spirituality and religion. As an interfaith minister, she spent the last ten years helping others celebrate their successes and navigate life’s challenges. Now faced with her own mortality, the avenues she used with clients seemed inadequate and she was finding it hard to reach the deep security and peace that she longed for. As she tried with greater effort to manage her fear and anxiety, her anger came to the surface. This served as a starting point for healing.

In her own life, Lisa used sound/resonance in a transformative and playful manner, so we began our time together reciting qualities. Sometimes we recited particular qualities by way of experimentation and other times by way of guidance. Although initially resistant to Sufi prayers/healings, Lisa loved this process and soon began doing recitations on her own. As her trust grew, our recitations deepened and, in the midst of her anger and frustration, things began

to open - Alhamdulillah. From melodious and peaceful to illuminating, powerful and wildly intense, the recitations often took on a life of their own. There were times that they became borderline funny and irreverent. Ya Allah Ya Nuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuurrrr... Kathy would roll out the sound like a love dog crying for its master. Although I was a bit hesitant with some of this movement, I felt it was a form of holy irreverence and simply followed the guidance that dropped in. At a deep level I sensed/trusted that Allah's purifying light was winding its way into areas of Lisa's life that had been turned aside for a long time. In truth, these recitations were easy and I was prodded to let go of my idea of what a healing looked like.

In addition to the *healings*, hope abounded for a complete *cure* as Lisa worked at clearing her heart of the anger and separation that occurred over the course of 57 years. After the first month, her situation worsened (physically) and I began to see her several times a week. On a few occasions, Yusuf, her husband, snuggled up in bed with her while I was reciting the Invocation Healing. Afterwards they expressed the deep love, holiness, and healing that they experienced... Alhamdullilah! As Lisa engaged more fully in the healing process, I began using stronger healing methods, including the Unity Healing, the Prophetic Healing, the Shaytanic points healing, and Hizbu-L-Bahr. For all involved, there were days of ease and hopeful expectation and days of feeling utterly helpless.

As I grew closer to Lisa, it became evident that her fluctuation between hope and fear, between life and death were a mirror for me. This either served to drive me into despair or to deepen my surrender – subahana-llah, the latter almost always prevailed. When I felt myself slipping into doubt, out of love for my sister, I would recall these inspiring words from Salima: *Keep the faith – keep on keeping the faith even when you are struggling, so that those with little faith are afforded the courage to keep walking; and; Endeavor to keep a high spiritual outlook and truth in your heart so that those who aren't feeling it can at least glimpse this experience.* So, to a degree, I would contain my fear and helplessness, not out of any desire to hide my “shortcomings,” but truly out of a longing to be a clear vessel for my sister.

She was traveling; this was her time, not mine. I was there for her, but curiously (as often happens in healings), she was teaching me to bow. I would contain her feelings for her as she swam through her fear and anger into a state of peace and security. Initially these states of peace were short lived, but as time went on, Lisa dove deeper into the pain and deeper into Allah's healing light and love. I have never seen anyone move so quickly, I have never witnessed anyone jettison pictures and fear so courageously in such a short amount of time. She inspired me by her desire to both live and surrender to whatever God was making for her (including her passing). Out of a willing necessity, she was purifying and beautifying her being while simultaneously letting go of her attachment to outcomes.

As Lisa became increasingly frail, we often said that she was “still holding court.” This may

sound like a lack of surrender, but what I witnessed was Lisa's deep participation in the mystery of stepping back and forth between the worlds. Several days before she passed, an inspired teaching came through her that caught me off guard. One morning at 5 AM, Yusuf called me to come over so he could get some rest; he had been awake all night with his beloved. I had stopped doing healings with Lisa two weeks prior to this; my recent visits consisted mostly of sitting at her bedside holding her hand and silently praying. If she had the energy and was inclined, we would share a word or two. I sensed that Lisa was spiritually healed even though she was physically dying; she was at peace with whatever God made for her. On that morning, it was clear that Lisa was travelling deeper and moving closer to the other side. With half closed eyelids, she acknowledged my presence with the squeeze of my hand. The atmosphere was extraordinarily still and she drifted off to what seemed like some faraway place. About an hour passed when two beloveds entered the room. We fell quite naturally into a triangle around the bed with one of us on either side of Lisa and one of us at her feet. The space had a sublime quality to it. Although I was tired, I stayed for quite a while sustained by the light and love that filled the room - it was palpable. I wanted to step out but was hesitant to disrupt the space - something kept coaxing me to stay put.

Eventually my tiredness overruled the coaxing and I rationalized that it *didn't matter*. Aware of the holy presence in the room, I slowly took a step away from the bed. I waited briefly and then took another step. I made my way to the bedroom door and silently opened it. I looked back and suddenly, Lisa, who weighed all of 50 pounds, sat straight up in the bed, looked me square in the eyes and boldly said, "**Communicate!**" We were all startled by the power of her voice - I was transfixed by her gaze. After a long and breathless moment, I self-consciously blew Lisa a kiss. Wearing an almost imperceptible smile, she frailly voiced the words, "You can go now."

It was humbling and left me with a feeling of bewilderment. Where did that come from? In what little time remained of her life, Allah was working through Lisa, and she was participating. That was clearly a lesson for me. I have been slipping out of things for years – this was a message to stop, to *show up*, to *commit*, to *communicate* and anchor in my intentions, whatever they are. So, who is the healer? At a much deeper level than I had ever realized, I felt the significance of what it means for us to rely on each other, and with that, the need for our true reliance to rest with God. Are we the hands of Allah? Do our actions affect each other? Does it matter if we show up? Does it matter what we do and how we do it? From where I now stand, yes, *it matters*.

With Lisa's husband and a couple of her closest friends, I was blessed to be at her bedside when she passed. Her passing was easy and full of light, and it grew my love and reverence for Allah by granting me a glimpse of the Magnificence of His Creation. As a hospice volunteer, I have been with people in the dying process, but never have I seen the glow of life so strongly as I did with Lisa as she faded from this world. Gratitude continues to fill me.

Increasingly, I feel like the dying person with nowhere to turn, and curiously this is helping me taste the fruit of gratitude. I am grateful for the people who continue coming my way. More than ever, I drink and delight in the gift of who they are. Reflecting on my past, I regret my callousness, arrogance, avoidance, and many missed opportunities; but mostly the regret serves as a course correction, and I hear Sidi's words, "You know what to do." It's often simple and begins with *showing up*. And showing up is no longer an option, it simply is (and in fact has always been). With this perception comes a deep sense of ownership and responsibility that's paradoxically coupled with a longing for surrender. It's my admission of not knowing, and from this place I sincerely cry out to Allah. The rest is my folly, my pretense, my posturing.

Through Allah's grace and the teachings, I'm facing a new direction. I'm no longer running from where I am or chasing after someone else's experience. To some degree I strive with contentment, and gratitude comes to me in simple ways. I often wake with a prayer of gratitude. Sometimes this prayer is heartfelt, and at other times it's flat (and seemingly insincere). But whatever the case, I no longer let this deter me from showing up and trying. As St. Ignatius said, *Act as if ye have faith and faith shall be given ye*. Or, in Rumi's words, ... *If you can't pray a real prayer, pray hypocritically, full of doubt and dry-mouthed. God excepts counterfeit coins as though they are real!* I drink from their encouragement. When I'm graced with a state of gratitude, everyday life becomes luminous. I give thanks for my ability to rise and place my feet on the floor; I give thanks for my ability to navigate my way from the bed to the bedroom door and then through the rest of the house; I give thanks for the light, the water, the air, the food, and the simple and essential gifts that make life possible.

At times my prayer expands and I give thanks for the guidance, the love, the mercy, the truth, the knowledge, the forgiveness, the peace, the strength, the prayers and the practices, the teachings and the teachers, and the mysterious light that wends its way into my heart; I give thanks to Allah for His holy caravan and all the people in my life who support me in ways seen and unseen, known and unknown.

And just yesterday, the gift of my daily prayers, salah, overwhelmed me and spread through my being as a wave of awe and gratitude. In full prostration - my face merged with my prayer rug - I spontaneously started weeping like a child. For a moment, Allah opened my heart and I realized the privileged state I was in that allowed me to simply pray. As "checked out" as I can be while praying, I caught a glimpse of the complex web of life/events/spirit that allows worship to occur *at all times, in all circumstance*. I felt tiny and my ordinary sense of separation seemed silly, and the immensity of what Allah grants us brought me to tears and silence. It was deeply intimate and humbling and it felt like more than enough to sustain me for a long time, and yet I know it was only a drop in Allah's Vast Ocean of Wonders.