

February 18, 2009

Wednesday

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Title: [Conscious Passive Resistance](#)

DVD title: Obedience v/s Conscious Passive Resistance
The Model of The Lives of the Anbiya

Dinner blessing: O Allah, we need very much to find confidence in ourselves and maintain confidence in this path, and to focus the Divine attributes You have seeded throughout humanity in the qualities of the *'ālam al khalq* to form a new union of minds and hearts, and to make our *jihad* against negativity, against the culture of 'no,' and to affirm Your will and Your *madad*. We ask You, Allah, to have pity and mercy upon those who are struggling in this world, as You have protected us so far. We are grateful for Your protection. We ask You to offer Your mercy and compassion, love and sustaining power to those who sit at tables that are empty and have no roof over their heads, or fear losing it; or have to think about divesting themselves of their possessions, and to make this a lasting lesson in the hearts and minds of people. Let there be a real shift in mentality. And rid us of these miserable, miserable politicians who fight and struggle against all that is good. *Amin*.

Suhbat: *Asalāmu aleikum*. When we look to the lives of the *anbiyā*, we find that the trust in Allah Swt is so great that for the most part, there is a strong determination on the part of the Prophet (sal) and other prophets who came before him to avoid conflict. To the degree one can say they are virtually pacifists. We know that for the first 13 years of the Prophet's message this was certainly true. For a short period of time when there were

battles, one can say that pacifism was attenuated by some other circumstances. Then he returns again to that model in the final return to Mecca, actually, the year before in Hudabiyya.

This willingness to not even defend one's physical well-being; to find *sabr* in the midst of persecution, and to engage fully in dialogue and put forth another perspective is a characteristic that is an underlying narrative or story not only in the life of the Prophet but the teachings. The world we live in today also demands a kind of patience or pacifism. The Prophet (sal) insisted on people being free with their opinion and points of view, and listened to various points of view. At the same time, understanding that by insisting on this kind of freedom of opinion, one might have to bear other consequences. The decision to be more of a pacifist, to allow freedom of discussion, and to tolerate various beliefs and attitudes is still a goal in the world we live in today, 1430 years later.

The environment in which such an attitude prevails is one that is established where there is less pollution. It can be a room, an institution, an environment, or common ground that people meet on. It's a place where one can have the integrity of their belief or their intellect. [It's a place] where a courageous person will put forth their opinion, understanding the consequences that may result from that, and the principles upon which such freedom is founded. When the goals are other than this, when the goals are material, when the goals are couched in nationalism or fear, greed or power, it becomes very corrupted. Though the principles of freedom of opinion and speech and peace are espoused, there is no doorway to realize them; no way to achieve them. In a sense, one can say the prophets who had this attitude, ultimately, though they are teaching obedience and submission to Allah, they are teaching disobedience to their followers in the sense of passive resistance like Gandhi taught.

There is an irony in that: disobedience and pacifism, and obedience and violence. The armies or the insurgents or the terrorists—whatever name you call them depending on your political inclination and goal—trained their soldiers to obey: to implement and facilitate the orders without any objection, to obey. The costs are great, as we see in the world we live in today: the war in Iraq, the genocides around the world. In Torah and Qur'an we are told that the son of Adam who kills his brother gets overwhelmed with loss and regret. This is the same disease that affects the obedient soldier who participates in conflicts that are criminal. In the same way that when we abuse the environment, we create pollution, the pollution in turn destroys the environment and people. When we abuse our souls, and our ethics and morality in war, the same thing happens.

I was watching a portion of a movie Mitra will use for her class about a Marine who gave up the Marine corps after being in Iraq and started working for Al Jazeera. I saw a young man on the news today. He was asked about why he was speaking out about his time in Guantanamo. He said that every day he relived his experiences in Iraq there, and the only way he can deal with it is to speak out about it. These are examples from our world today. The post traumatic stress disorders which we began to realize existed after Vietnam, and the occasional morality that comes in the ranks of people like the resignation of the French defense minister during the Gulf War, and the refusal of certain Russian generals to fight in Chechnya are attestations to the profound and deep results of going against the inclination, and seeking other ways of justice and affirm morality.

Yet you find, especially among the people who don't engage in the direct acts themselves, but who send others to engage in those acts (like politicians), that 3-4 million years after

the advent of the erect Homo Sapiens, we are still fighting the same battle. In the Qur'an, we are shown that all the prophets/*anbiyā* are determined to share the attitude of Abel, and to withstand the harm and practice *sabr* in the face of persecution that was inflicted upon him and others by their own people, and to refuse to inflict harm back on others. They called out and tried to engage in a kind of dialogue, understanding they would have to endure certain consequences for that, affirming not to regress back to violence. For people like these (in our own times: the Gandhis, the [Martin Luther] Kings), it's not just an ethical principle. To engage in violence is to defy God. That's why we find that most of these people have a very practical aspect upon which they affirm their spiritual basis.

Allah Swt asked Prophet Mohammed (sal) to tell the whole world about Nūh (as). Who said, **“O my people, if it is hard on you that I should stay with you and remind you of the signs of Allah, then to Allah I commend my trust. Get you then in agreement with each other about your plan, and among your partners, so that your plan be not to you dark and dubious, and then pass your sentence on to me and give me no respite.” (10:71)** The Prophet Nūh/Noah (as) is talking to humanity. He insists on fulfilling what Allah Swt has called him to do, no matter what his people do to him. He wants to and does address their minds, or the greater knowledge, not forcing them with physical coercion. Of course as a result, he suffers harm, but doesn't harm them in return.

The Qur'an tells a similar story about Shu'eyb, who stands by his own principles when the people of the town would drive him out. The arrogant among the leaders said, **“O Shu'eyb, we will certainly drive you out from our city. And those who believe with you, else you have to return to our sect.”** He said, **“What? Even though we detest it?” (7:88)** It goes on and he says, **“We would have concocted a lie before Allah if we**

had returned to your sect after Allah has rescued us from it. Nor could we, by any manner of means, return to it.” (7:89) The Qur’an says that is what all the prophets say, **“We would have concocted a lie against Allah if we had returned to your religion.”** Where is that attitude now?

We see the terrible results of war, and the psychological effects of greed. Today it was the Russian financial minister who predicted the US would collapse by 2010. Yet on one side, we don’t pay any attention to the cost—not the dollar cost only, but the mental cost of these destructive forces of war. So we sat here for 8 years or 16 years, going back to the first Gulf war, or go back to Vietnam, when only a small percentage of our population was affected by conflict and confusion, by not understanding what was happening but participating, being obedient. So we learned obedience. We learn to be dumbed down. Now the war came to our shores, not in the form of 3000 innocent people dying on 9/11. That was just like the introduction to the novel. But what is happening today [is] the war against imminent poverty and loss, and the impersonal way in which the government is going about trying to solve that problem. I’m not addressing the sincerity or lack of sincerity of the leaders of the country today. I don’t question the President’s sincerity at this point (note the caveat).

Just as the nervous system and consequently the mental state of the combatant soldier is affected, so to it is as if the whole nervous system of humanity now is being affected across the world. People are afraid. And in their fear, having been obedient before, [they remember] if they were quiet, everything was okay. They had money in the back. Most people had a job. Of course there were poor [people], but they were either far away or being taken care of in the neighborhood in some way. They were of a different color or

nationality in some distant place, Africa, usually. Now it's here and rapidly moving toward a crisis in faith. The nervous system is a very delicate system. When you misuse it, or it's abused, or overloaded, it manifests its fragility. We take these obsolete, useless, barbaric means (war, primarily) which has no function, no viability, no meaning and use it today to engage people on principle to preserve, we say, "a way of life." Then when you turn the camera around to the "way of life," we see that way of life is destroying the people. It is being destroyed by the non-combatants.

It used to be said that the military-industrial complex would save the economy through war. The war industries would be geared up. That's when there used to be a pass through: people would work, get paid, and buy products. All the rest of the economic philosophy would follow. Now all the profits are in Antigua, or wherever it's buried. The world wants a combatant to be like the weapon he or she carries: having no choice but to act in the way it was constructed, subject to orders whether they are right or wrong without any right to object to it. If you go to war, you might not get killed. But if you don't go to war, we'll kill you. That's what the Pharaoh told those who objected to his way: **"Be sure I will cut off your hands and feet on opposite sides, and I will have you crucified on the trunks of palm trees." (20:71)** But they decided to stand (as Hazrat Adam's son stood) and confronted his threats with, **"Never shall we regard you as more than the clear signs that have come to us, or other than Him who created us. So decree whatever you decide to decree, for you can only decree the life of this world." (20:72)**

Rebellion is important, obviously. Jefferson thought that. And the premise here is that a spiritual person, a person who bases their life on the lives of the *anbiyā*, is someone who

has a much deeper *himma* for peace than they have for war. The *anbiyā* understood and grasped the reality. They directed their call to humanity in general. You can make the analogy and say the President is running around the country, especially to the Red state areas directing his call to the people as opposed to the politicians. It's not quite the same because what the Prophets are saying is you have only one master you should obey, and you have to decline anyone and resist anyone who calls you to return to the laws of violence. As it says in the Injīl, one cannot serve two masters.

In Sūratu-n-Nahl, it says, **“Serve Allah and eschew (turn from) tyranny.” (16:36)** The *anbiyā* realized that there is a blessing in knowing the difference between right and wrong, good and evil. A person who truly understands the difference between good and evil becomes incapable of doing evil, or even responding to the call of evil. Allah says to enjoin good and forbid evil. In Genesis in the Torah it says, *“The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.”* This is a very important point. The first step is to remind people to withdraw from what is evil and continue on the path of good. This takes great courage. One cannot be arrogant and bombastic because they have power, but they lack courage. People are afraid today. Even if they have money, they don't want to invest it or buy anything. We all have that fear. I need a new pair of glasses, but I've been resisting buying it. Not because I don't have the cash to buy it; I have the mentality.

That soldier I told you about, who knew the difference between good and evil, made himself useless. A soldier who knows the difference between good and evil is useless. You wouldn't buy a gun that could decide whether or not it wanted to fire. If you created artificial intelligence that would guide missiles, and someone programmed into it that if there was a 1/100 chance it might kill a civilian it won't blow up, no one would buy it. It

would be a great scientific discovery and a great use of artificial intelligence, [but] no one would buy that armament. Those huge swords the Prophet (sal) and Ali and Uthman used had the capability of killing so many people. But they had no capability but in the hand of one who wielded them.

The goal of the prophets and warners, messengers and *shuyukh* is to creating thinking individuals, to establish a new way, the way of the Adamic reality which says, “I know what is good and what is evil. I know what is beneficial to humanity and what is not. I know this is the way Allah would have us live, and I am not going to live by the law of ignorance or the law of the jungle. You can kill me, but you cannot make me into a killer. You can persecute me, but you cannot make me into a persecutor. You can oppress me, but you cannot make me into an oppressor—not in the name of a nation, or a power, good or evil, or a religion.” I quote a revelation that said, “*This land is mine for an eternity.*”

It’s as if Abel was saying to Cain, “You can kill me, as I am going to die anyway even if you don’t kill me. But I’m not going to make my death in any way give any value to killing. So I’m going to deny you the benefit of killing me, by deciding not to enter the battle of bodies with you, because if I defend myself, you will believe in the effectiveness of killing. Whatever benefit you may think there is in killing me, I’m going to remove it and make it distasteful even in your eyes.” (referencing 5:28-29) And he succeeded. Cain said to Allah, “*My punishment is heavier than I can bear.*” Allah said to him, “What have you done? Your brother’s blood is crying out to Me from the ground.” In the Qur’an, Allah says that Cain becomes full of remorse and regret. (5:31)

There is no heroism in the combat. You can call all these people heroes, but where is the

heroism in the combat with one who is not armed? The killing of those who don't defend themselves is just murder of the worst kind. To resist passively is actually very economical. It costs much less to kill someone who doesn't defend themselves. You have to use fewer weapons and ordinance. If we decline to defend ourselves, we render the killing criminal and remove the awe from it. What does it mean today? Does it mean we should be passive in light of what has happened in the economic world today? Maybe in principle we should be, but we just don't have the confidence that there is enough morality and ethic left in the world that anyone would recognize that passivity to be courage, or they would have any regret as they rolled over us.

Like Shaykh Nooruddeen was quoting, "The times they are a -changing." There must be something like a conscious passive resistance, a vocal one—one that unites people around a principle, once again, that is greater than the lies and forces that try to keep people dumb, ignorant, and obedient. There must be a means of creating disobedience. We are going to hear about it over and over again as you Twitter and blog and raise the consciousness of people. Is there a parallel to this from another time in another age? Sure. Jesus spoke to the multitudes. Prophet Mohammed (sal) spoke to the people and spread the message far and wide. The words were memorized and passed on from one person to another. His actions were in some way counter-intuitive. They went against the principles of the time.

We have to revive a time when there is a great deal of respect for human consciousness, to the point where once again we can call people to love their enemies and be responsive to the *rahmat* of Allah, and even feel compassion for those who oppress and persecute. The Qur'an says, it doesn't order Prophet Mohammed and his companions to love their

enemies, but states that they already love them. Jesus said, “*Love thine enemy.*” The Qur’an says, “**You are those who love them, but they love you not, though you believe in the whole of the Book.**” (3:119) We have to approach this call to loving one’s enemies on the level where it removes them from the realm of near- insanity, post traumatic stress disorder, which we all are about to have a little taste of in the world we are living today as we join the ranks of the semi-insane. We have to remember that we are born in *fitra*, and have to come back to that. We have to hope and pray that Allah Swt, in all of this teaching through loss and denial, keeps us from taking the path of evil.

Allah says in Sūratu-sh-Shams, “**By the nafs (self) and the proportion and order given to it, He inspired it as to its wrong and its right. Truly he succeeds who purifies it, and he fails who vilifies it.**” (91:7-10) In trying to heal the disease of the human soul, the collective human disease that is endemic in the world today—whether it’s the obvious violence of war or the violence against human values, the greed that catapults people into losing their jobs and their homes, living on the streets and not knowing where their next food is coming from (this is very violent)—we have to consider how we respond to one another. Do we even start at the basis of caring for people who are sick? Do we care about the people who have PTSD from wars? Do we hate the disease and love the people? What would we think of a doctor who would heal the sick by killing them? “You have a disease, and the fastest way for me to get rid of it is to kill you.” Can we say that the people who have sick ideas are sick people? To some degree. We can love them, even if we hate their ideas. But a person who has the diseases of ignorance, or hatred, or greed is no less in need for love and knowledge, because it’s the lack of knowledge that is ignorance, the lack of fear, the lack of repentance and humility that has made them the representative of the Destroyer that they are.

When we see a public official reaching out to the supposed enemies, and we assume for the time being that the person is sincere, and see them being punished for that, we have to ask ourselves very seriously, how do we deal with those people of such ignorance that they affirm evil and the way of destruction? Allah says, **“Repel evil with what is better. Then will the person with whom there is hatred with you become like a friend.”**

(41:34) That’s the hardest thing to do as we see the hypocrisy, stupidity and ignorance of people who would keep others enslaved to obedience and be afraid of their disobedience. When we join in obedience to Allah, and though we may have disagreement with one another, when we strive to obey the higher teaching, the deeper and more profound wisdom, then we can come to agreement at least with something.

We don’t have to justify that we still live in the world of human sacrifices by calling it a war on terrorism or a moral and ethical war. The people who are dying are just human sacrifices. We can’t give up. Now that we, and our neighbors, and brothers and sisters around the world are faced with tremendous challenges, we cannot allow ourselves to get tired. We cannot allow ourselves to give up. We have to persevere, and that means not just in striving to do good or help others, but we have to also strive to be forgiving, and hope and pray that it isn’t too late. Allah Swt is still ar-Rahman ar-Rahīm and al-Ghafur. Again and again we have to understand that human beings are capable of knowing what is good, and doing what is beneficial. Because our physical bodies and mental states are vulnerable to circumstances and the environment, we can only live under very limited conditions. And [we have] to understand that Allah Swt created us to see and to hear and understand. We have to affirm that, and keep knowledge alive, and keep the real truth alive: the truth of balance, resonance, community, and striving.

Allah said in Sūratu-l-Fātir., “**The blind and the seeing are not alike. Nor are the depths of the darkness and the light. Nor the chilly shade and the genial heat of the sun. Nor alike are those who are living and those who are dead.**” (35:19-22) He tells us that goodness and evil are not equal, and we have to repel evil with what is better. We have the role of the Prophet (sal) to follow in that goodness, and to understand that we were born empty, and Allah filled us like a vessel. He gave us hearing, sight, and intelligence and love so that we might be grateful to Allah. Unless we understand this, and it is our default, we will not be able to evolve beyond the corruption and negligence, bloodshed and fear, and the anger that we find all around us today. We won’t be able to bear the responsibility that Hazrat Adam did. We will see that we will be walking on that path of evil and injustice, and we will regress. We had 8 years of evil as a precursor to the challenges ahead of us.

All this is on the macro level, and now just a sentence or two in the micro level. We really do have to practice, all of us and I certainly include myself, among ourselves this kind of disobedience to the way the world is moving, and obedience to the real laws of Allah: kindness, consideration, generosity, thinking ahead, affirming knowledge, speaking out in good words, encouragement in support of those who are good, and those who seem to have still left some brain capacity, some moral and ethical capacity, to change. There may be things each one of us independently cannot outgrow in our lifetime, but we can certainly add to the foundation whatever we have to add to it. Our community can gain new life and new meaning, but this is not the time for torpor or being absent. This is not the time for not knowing nor not seeking out the subtleties, the *latā’if*. This is not the time for taking things for granted, even the food on our plates, even what is in the walk-out on

Tuesday, even if it is very basic. *Insh'allah*, we can learn this.

We have to remember the teachings of the Prophets. Allah says in Qur'an, "**Help you one another in righteousness and compassion and piety. Help you not one another in sin and rancor.**" (5:2) Remember the words of Prophet Isa: "*Verily I tell you that everyone who commits a sin is a slave to that sin.*" We cannot tolerate any more killing in this world. We have to only work very hard for the teaching and guiding of people and giving them knowledge, including ourselves. We have to use the technology we have in front of us, not for our own self-aggrandizement and to see how popular or how smart we can be. We have to affirm the things that are good. If people are listening, because it's *de rigeur* to listen today, then chances are they might hear something. At least that's what it looks like today. That's the view from the bridge that is very near the water, and God forbid a tsunami comes. *Asalām aleikum.*