

May 2, 2009

Saturday

Title: [Choice is Designed into the System to Make us Aware](#)

DVD title - Article: Peace, Brother/Sisterhood and Islam
Q&A - Choice is Part of the Plan: Syncing our Qadr with Allah's Plan

Dinner blessing: Allah (Swt) help us to remember You through the signs You give us, through Your 'āyāt. Let us truly become aware the ocean of Your presence and the love that flows over us from above. O Allah (Swt), we are immersed in the ocean of Your love. Shower us with Your Divine Presence. Keep our tongues wet with Your Name. Keep our hearts filled with that wetness and the beauty of Your Divine Love. *Amin*

Swami Omkarananda asked me to write an article and it is still quite unfinished, but I thought I would read it to you. I called it, "Peace, Brother/Sisterhood and Islam: three (or four) words, one meaning."

**PEACE, BROTHER/SISTERHOOD, and BELIEF:
Three Words, One Universal Meaning**

Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid

The Prophet Muhammad (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) emphatically stressed the lesson of brotherhood when he said: "None of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." (Sahih Muslim)

My Dear Brother Swami Omkarananda and friends of Badarikashrama:

In the name of Allah the Compassionate and the Merciful:
Asalaam Alaykum. Peace and Blessing upon you.

I will begin at the ending and end at the beginning; please bear with me on this journey of words that attempts to capture the meaning of the reality of being a Muslim: one who is in submission

to the Creator, a believer (*mu'min*) and one who truly lives Islam, the way of Peace and trust in Allah.

The Prophet Muhammad said, "No child is born but in Fitra (as a Muslim in a state of essential goodness). It is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Polytheist." (Sahih Muslim, Book 033, Number 6426).

A Muslim, as you see from the quote, is one who, like a baby, is totally submitted. The name comes from the root word *salaama*, the word for peace in Arabic, but it also means safety and security. It applies to all newborns, from the beginning of time, not just the followers of the religion of Islam. In time, hopefully, the Muslim becomes a *Mu'min* a believer. What are the characteristics of a believer? The word will tell us; it comes from the root word '*amuna*' or '*aman*': faithful, reliable, trustworthy, to be safe, feel safe to have ones' mind at rest... and significantly, one who has been given the '*Amanat*'...the trust for this creation.

Brotherhood and Sisterhood are key concepts in Islam and understood by a true *Mu'min*. The Arabic word: '*akh*' or *ikhwa'* *akhawat'* refers to brother/sister, but it carries also the meaning of fellow man and implies trust worthiness; one who has truly achieved the state of being a Believer, a *Mu'min*. So, with a little contemplation, one can easily see the potential relationship between all sincere seekers. **"The Believers are none else than Brothers. Therefore make peace between your brethren and observe your duty to Allah (God) and happily you may obtain Mercy"** (Qur'an 49:10).

As we look toward our purpose in life as it relates to our Creator, what is most important is our understanding of the essential goodness that been placed, by our Creator, in the hearts of every human being and it is this goodness that enables true brother/sisterhood. It is this *Fitra* that one sees manifest in the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the life of Jesus and the Buddha and the great saints and servants of Allah (Swt) and all living beings.

Allah has placed human beings at the nexus of Creation; the interstices of the inner and outer. We are the expressed intention *niyyat* (*sankalpa*) of the Divine Presence (*Paramatma Purush*). We have been created and named as the *Khalifahs* (regents) of Allah. We have been taught the names (reality) of everything in creations and hence are responsible for sustaining this creation. It is through these names and attributes, such as The Compassionate (*ar-Rahman*) The Merciful (*ar-Raheem*), The Peaceful (*as-Salaam*), The Just (*al-Adl*), and 95 other Beautiful Names/Attributes, that we can know each other, our self and Allah. It is the reflection of these attributes in us that enable us and empowers us to act humanely and humbly. It is from these attributes / names that life has meaning and form. In Sanskrit you recognize this as: *Nama tensi rupa, rupa tensi nama*...the name and the form are One, the form and the name are One.

We are given the means to turn inward and understand, see and utilize those attributes or names of Allah in our daily life, and ultimately in the discovery of the self. But it is a choice, how we develop and refine our consciousness will determine if we truly can walk the path or journey of

knowing of oneself and knowing of ones Lord. **“Know your self and you will know your Lord”** (hadith qudsi).

The unique gift of consciousness, self reflection, must be supported in the outer by proper and good relationships in an environment created for such a journey. It is a journey in Eternity, not from anywhere to anywhere, but one of awakening to who and where and why we exist. Eventually, it leads to the ultimate Peace and unity of Love. What you may call *nirvakalpa Samadhi*, we call it *baqa*. For the Sufi, for the *Mu'min*, this journey is endless and filled with awareness and bliss...*sat chit ananda* and it is made greater by the company of noble souls.

It is through *suhbat* (keeping the company of noble people) and selfless service, as well as awakening to the reality that **‘Wherever you turn your gaze there is the countenance of Allah’** that we begin to understand not only our purpose but also the incredible truth that Allah (God) (i.e. Compassion, Mercy, Love, Justice, Tolerance, Patience, Perseverance, Protection, Truth ...) is present; is our companion on this journey of life, hence, the importance of brotherhood and sisterhood. Companionship of people of like mind and heart, service to one another, the sacredness of the journey among brethren is essential for our awakening.

Muslims have the opportunity to be reminded of this five times a day by praying in congregation. [Though] part of each prayer is separate, the obligatory prayer is standing shoulder to shoulder in a group, reminding us that our relationship with our Creator is dynamic, personal and collective. It is here, in prayer, that one begins to see the form of brother/sisterhood. The reality of companionship in our life is manifest through that selfless service, compassion, empathy, dedication, sense of inter-relatedness and love that comes naturally from a person who believes.

A true ‘muslim,’ one who has surrendered to the Divine Presence, by whatever name ‘He’ is known; one who has learned to see that they are swimming in the Ocean of Divine Love, Energy, Light; such a person is a brother/sister of everyone. Such a person is one who seeks Peace and understanding for him/her self and enjoins others to do the same by their example. Such a person lives the life of a worshipper, a servant, a lover of Truth (Allah). Such a person creates with the creative energy of the Creator.

Dear Ones, we live in a time when there is little brother/sisterhood, less Peace and little real faith; and when Islam (in the comprehensive sense: submission, safety and security) is hard to find, despite the fact that over 80% or more of the people in the world consider themselves and call themselves ‘believers.’ Whether we are Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, or any other religious group, the real test of being a ‘believer’--as defined by and exemplified by true believers, true servants like the Prophet Muhammad (sal), the Prophet Jesus (as), the Buddha, great saints of India, and countless Masters of true Wisdom-- lies in the commitment to strive for inner peace, harmony, wisdom through self reflection, worship and living it in daily life.

We live in a time when our attention must be on brother/sisterhood, mutual responsibility, putting an end to bigotry, prejudice, intolerance. [We live in a time] when we must join together to address the needs of humanity, as we are one family, one brother/sisterhood, created to be the

overseers, the trustees of this creation, and to see this as the means to attaining eternal peace in the Hereafter. We must strive to end poverty, food insecurity, affirm the rights of women, minorities and the disenfranchised. We must preserve our environment, strive for justice, affirm our mutual humanity and, most of all, find the time to worship that Creator/Reality, Allah; reflect, meditate upon the Divine Presence from the core of our heart; and live in the space between the outer and the inner.

My Dear Brother Swami Omkarananda, I commend you on over 40 years of striving, service, exemplary living and 25 years of outer service, sacrifice, love, inner and outer harmony that has proven all that I have written. We have, my brother, known each other for 40 years. In the early years we traveled to the far corners of India together, worshipped together in Viharas, Masajid, Temples, Gurudwaras and Churches; we have sat in deep meditation in the caves and ashramas along the Ganga-Ma, listened to the wisdom of walis and mahatmas, felt the love of the Quwwalis through their songs at the tombs of great auliya, heard the admonitions of Shankaracharya's at the Mutts and the wisdom of the Shaykhs. We have attended the sacred rites in Bodh Gaya and Varanasi, and found purpose in the service of the common man and woman, children and seekers of truth. And through this, even though Allah (Swt) has separated us over time and space, we have maintained a brotherhood in faith across that time and space, and we have affirmed as best we can: *Ekam Sadivipra Bahuda Vadant*; Truth is One, many its Names.

I hope we can celebrate together the 50th Anniversary of your work and share in the joys of making life a meaning full journey toward Eternity. I ask you and your chelas to remember me/us in your prayers as we enter our 40th year as a community of seekers. I am with you all, as always, in the core of my heart, the memories of a love that still lights my heart and a hope for a better future here and Hereafter.

Peace (Om Shanti/ Ya Salaam) to you, Brother/ Sisterhood to all, in the Ocean of Mercy of the Almighty.

Shaykh Ahmed abdur-Rashid (formerly Vasudevadas)

Shaykh asks for questions:

Student: Asalaam aleikum. Last night you stated in your *dars* that all and anything that can be manifested by people has already been thought of or conceived of by Allah as a system. My question is why would Allah plan anything that would be self-detrimental such as bad energy from the total resources, such as fossil fuels and an extension of that, what does it mean that we have choice in a realm where everything is self government

and ruling?

Shaykh Rashid: That is an easy question to answer. Just listen to my discourses on *tadbīr*. You were there. Of course, that is the question that everybody asks—the second part of it. The answer is NRA. Guns don't kill. People kill. Fossil fuels aren't bad. It's just when you use them as fuel that they are bad. Excess. Don't attribute human qualities to Allah. Listen, it is natural to attribute human qualities to Allah (Swt) because we are all spiritually dyslexic. That is, beginning with Genesis, we are told that God creates man in His own image when in reality man is constantly creating God in his own image. So to attribute human attributes to Allah (Swt) is natural because that is the way we relate to things, just as Paradise is described in terms that we can basically visualize and understand, though it may not be at all rivers of milk and streets of gold—whatever religion you want to quote. It is rather a state of peace and contentment and understanding.

Everything that is created by Allah (Swt) is not created by a being busy in his workshop, creating things like Mr. Geppetto carving out Pinocchio. But when we begin to remind ourselves and grasp something [like this, it is like] trying to hold water in your hand, and you only end up with a wet hand. We try to understand this reality, which we attribute the name to Allah (which is the compilation of all the Ninety-Nine Names of Allah and more) when we think of Allah (Swt) as present, as a dynamic reality, as a manifestation of those attributes that are always present. As long as there is creation, those attributes are present, without which we could not do anything because nothing would have a name, nothing would have a form. Hence, the world with Angels is formless and it is nameless.

When Allah (Swt) created the creation, as we say it in that term, when the creation takes form by its attributes and names, it has to also acquire other characteristics and qualities, like time, for example, and space. But the qualities themselves are timeless and

spaceless. It is just that when they are manifest in what is called the physical world, they have to take on these qualities and attributes, these characteristics. Compassion, for example, is timeless. Right? You cannot find it. But if something happens, you can find it. It is here. It is in this room. If someone trips and falls over this wet bucket and gets covered with water, and they hurt themselves, we are going to feel compassion. It comes. It manifests in us. It takes form in us. It is there. Present. But it takes its expression in us. So we say, "Oh, that person is compassionate." Like you say, "That person is blond." It takes form in us.

Now, those attributes and those qualities, along with that, Allah, in this dynamic reality that we call physical universes... this dynamic reality is dynamic because every second it is different. Every nano second it is different, and it is moving in some way, linearly in time but also vertically in time. In other words, you can say that when you have a thought in your mind that you are aware of, you seize that thought. You seize that moment; otherwise, it would just be there. You wouldn't see it. You wouldn't realize it. So the whole apparent reality of recognizing it is consciousness; and what you do with it, because we are created as active, dynamic beings with choice, has to do with choice. So Allah (SwT) gives us choice. But when I say that Allah gives us choice, please remember that I am not talking about a person, but in the system itself, there are choices. In the dynamism of this reality that we call life, or the world or *dunya*, there are choices.

Now why would there be choices if Allah had planned everything? That is the essence of your question. What is the need for choices? Well, the need for choices is that choice is part of the plan. Choice is part of the plan. That is to say that the human being is born pure but without cognitive clarity. A baby is born and you watch, like Adbi or Ahmed and they start to put things together. "Bapu. Hat." So you see the cognitive process is happening. But when they are born, they are born in *fitrah*, born pure. So Allah has created this dynamic reality that we call Allah. This interplay between these names and

attributes are designed for the human being, as I have said in this letter and I have said many times, that stand at the cross-roads between the inner and the outer, between the seen and unseen world. You may say, “Well, we exist in the seen world.” But no. You also exist in the unseen world because it is like when you go to sleep at night, you dream. You may not see what you dream. You might not remember it. You dream or you drift. You sit in meditation and we drift/*ghunoodgi*.. And we can know that we are drifting but we don’t know what that drifting is.

So we have choices. Those choices are, in a sense (using the word as a double entendre), designed in the system by Allah. In the system, these choices are designed to make us aware of our own consciousness, aware of our own place, aware of that dynamic force, that *fā'id*, that energy that we attribute as Allah or God or Truth or Compassion or Mercy.... Why? This is the means. We don’t know all the answers. We can’t say. We know what the result of it is. We know that we can determine the purpose. We can determine the means, and we can see the results in individuals, but we don’t necessarily understand all the why of it. Just like we can use electricity and we can say that it is made of electrons and protons and neutrons. We know they exist because we can measure them and we can see the result of them, but we don’t necessarily understand how they exist or what sustains them.

When we say “Allah Swt” we have to train ourselves, over and over and over and over again, and that is why I say it over and over again, not to anthropomorphize God. But to understand that we are in the midst of this dynamic process, this reality, which is reflected again and again, internally at the sub-atomic level, and externally in the universe. Allah has placed us right in the center of it by our physical being. Our physical being is made up of those particles and our consciousness is not. So He has placed inside the human being, or He has made the human being which is made up of these physical particles and something called consciousness, which is of the *ghaib*, of the unseen world.

They come together in the human being, and that human being has been empowered with choice to pay attention to the outer—all the mysteries and all the excitement of it, all the thrills of looking at the universe as an astronomer, or as a physicist like your sister, or a micro-biologist like Dedeh, or as a computer programmer like Abul Hasan, in symbolic language, or as a spiritual teacher, like I do. There are many examples here.

[The human being is empowered] to see it in that way [in the outer] and also to pay attention to our inner state. When we pay attention to our inner state, Allah makes clear to us that there are lenses through which we can see things, just as your sister uses an electron microscope, it is very different than just using a physical microscope, and you can increase the power. So you increase the power of your seeing by being aware of your *latā'if*, the subtle organs of perception. In other words, even in our spiritual practices, we are being told to look exponentially at the things around us. If I look with my eyes, I see the wall and the curtains and you and everything else. If I look with my intuition, I can interpret your behavior. I can interpret your expressions and I can put them against a history of experiences and my intuition. If I look with my *latā'if*, I can see into your future. I can see your potential. I can see where you are headed and whether or not there are needs for correctives. Sufism is about correctives.

You need to be a Sufi to really understand this. No Muslim can understand, no Jew, no Christian, nobody can understand this without the eye of the *latā'if*. You can't. You cannot understand it; but when you have the eye of the *latā'if*, it is like having the eye of the electron microscope, or a Hubble telescope, or to the tenth Hubble, because you read the *'āyāt*, the signs. So then why Allah has created this? We can't really answer other than to say that it is created and we sit at this point, at this nexus between the inner and the outer. We have these capabilities, and when you use them, you see with different eyes and you hear with different ears. That is what Allah said in the Qur'an, and so it is proven to us. Now, people have said that there is a *daif hadith* that says, "**I created**

humanity. I was lonely so I created humanity so that they could come to know Me.”

Again, it is attributing to Allah human characteristics, but there is the reality of the evolutionary process.

In other words, human beings are created with potential. And though their destiny is written, it can be adjusted. It can be adjusted. It can be adjusted by the degree you submit and trust in Allah, not to the degree that you control it. *Tadbīr*—to the degree you give up, that is how you get. We have these expressions in the English language: the more you give, the more you get. We are created but we are given potential. And that potential is to realize and to fulfill our *taqdīr*, our destiny, our *qadr*. What is it? It is what you make it to be. It is either inconsistent or consistent with the Plan of Allah (SwT). If it is inconsistent, then you are out of sync. And when you are out of sync, you are not in resonance. When you are not in resonance, you are in a state of disturbance and confusion. But when you are in resonance, when you are in resonance, you are absorbed. You are in tune. So that is the purpose. That is the why of it.

Does that answer your question? It was a good question. Don't feel bad that a lot of people have that question. It is the type of question that is like water that slips through the fingers. Because life is such that we always say, "How can I avoid this happening?" or "Why does this happen?" Then the answer, some pious person says to you, "Well, you know, just trust in Allah." You say, "Okay. That's good. I will just trust in Allah. *Alhamdulillah!* But I still have these emotions. I still have these fears. I still have these anxieties. I still have these worries." "What is going to happen to my son?" Your mother and father worry. "How is my son going to be? How is he going to grow up? What is he going to do? Is he going to be a good Muslim? Is he going to be a Sufi?" We are concerned about that. And you can say, "Well, Dad, just trust in Allah and everything will work out." But part of trusting in Allah is the taking of the blessings, the Names and Attributes of Allah, and working with them and using them.

Well, what are those? Patience. Yes. Perseverance. That is right. But there is also love. There is also leadership. There is also power—many, many things. You have to use them. You have to use them in the right time, at the right moment for the right reason. How do you do that? You learn how to make those choices. How do you do that? You pay attention to what Allah (Swt) has given us. You study the Qur'an. You study the *sīrah* of Nebi Muhammad (sal). You listen to the *shuyukh*, to the Shaykh. You live your life not thinking, “I know best,” but rather thinking, “I know very little;” therefore I have to stay awake and I have to stay attuned. I have to look for the answers and I have to do things—in what context?—in the context of *suhbat*, in the company of good people, in the context of being selfless, in the context of being patient and kind, in the context of being noble, in the context of having high values. That is my template.

If your sister goes into the laboratory, she has a template she has to follow. She has to have protocol. If she has no protocol, she cannot do her experiment, because she has no base line. How is she going to know, especially if she is doing a double blind study? She doesn't know until she goes over the data. But she has to gather that data based on certain protocol; otherwise, how do you know? So the protocols are the Qur'an and Hadith, and the examples of Rasulallah (sal), and the teachings of our *shuyukh* and the requirements of a *murīd*. That gets into a whole other story, because the *murīd* has the opportunity to be a Muslim. Very few Muslims take the opportunity to be Muslims. They are born Muslim. But a *murīd* has an opportunity to be a Muslim, to be in submission, to obey, to trust, to look at themselves, to understand things, to, as we say, be like the corpse in the hands of the body washer. That tunes you to yourself. That tunes you to your ego. That tunes you to your own abilities.

Well, everybody thinks they can do it on their own. But, you know, it would have been very hard for your sister to get to her conference in Hawaii if she had to swim there. She

needed the assistance of a plane and a pilot. If she had started off on foot, then she would have to get on a boat. That would need the assistance of a boat builder and a captain and a navigator and a navigating system. Nobody does anything on their own, nobody—except screw up their own life. That you can do on your own. You can screw up your own life—secondarily, with the help of somebody else. I mean you could go out and buy a lot of booze and get drunk and drive a car and go out and kill somebody. Or you could get drugs and do that. But in reality, we all need guidance and examples. Sometimes, even, we need bad examples, because like most teenagers would say, “Kids who are good examples are sort of boring.” You need a bad person around. So this is the story. How is that? Got it? Now that you have heard it once, you do not need to pay any attention to it. *Asalaam aleikum.*