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Saturday

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: [The Hidden Lesson in Natural Disasters: Haiti Earthquake](#)

DVD title: Blessings and Lessons Hidden in Natural Disasters  
A Mentality of One Humanity, rather than God is Punishing Us

*Dinner blessing:* O Allah, it's almost to the point where we are ashamed of all that we have, almost to the point where we are humiliating ourselves with the bounty You have showered on us. All we can ask is that You please share some of the bounty You have bestowed upon us upon your children in Haiti, and of course in other places in the world. We forget all those other places, too, at times like this. There is so much poverty in Afghanistan, Pakistan and throughout Asia, and Darfur and other parts of Africa. People are struggling just to stay alive with no means for their survival but what is in their own hands. Could this possibly be an awakening call for the compassion of humanity? We ask You to forgive us for our greed. *Amin.*

*Suhbat:* *Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm.* It behooves us as Muslims to look for the hidden blessing in the horror and terror of natural disaster. The question could arise, if you look at the people and their responses, is Allah a terrorist? Sometime it takes the shaking of the earth to remind us that we are all one humanity. You see how the world is responding to this tragedy: from all over the world, people immediately come running. You have to ask why, really. It wasn't always this way, either. It's hard to look for progress at times like these, politically and socially; but there has been some kind of progress. There have been times in human history when the disasters of one people would just be opportunities for others. Of course, there were always people who would help those in need, certainly, from the earliest times.

I think the lesson that has to come out of this tragedy is that we are all one people, one humanity, one *ummah*. That's what we have to look at. Maybe some of us have to ask ourselves why we are not on a ship or plane to Haiti. We are leaving it to other people to do that. If that is what we are going to do, then we had better triple or quadruple our efforts in the work that we do to make the world a better, safer place; where there is more knowledge and education, more standards and certifications, where buildings can't be built the way they were built, and where people have to have jobs. Sometimes we wonder, there must be an end to employment somewhere. You realize what percentage of the resources we use and what percentage of the seas we fish... we can pollute a lot more than we can use, obviously. There is a lot still to be accomplished.

I think we have to work very hard to make sure that there is a response that is *a'faq*, over the horizon, not just an immediate response to this recent suffering we find in Haiti. Allah says in Qur'an: **"Whenever affliction touches a man, he prays to Us. But as soon as We relieve his affliction, he walks away as if he had never prayed."** (10:12) That's certainly something to contemplate. I think the point is, we should never walk away from another human being's suffering. We mustn't walk away from another human being's suffering.

We should always follow the advice of Rasulallah (sal) who chastised a follower who said, *"O Allah, bestow your mercy on me and on Mohammed only, and don't bestow it on anyone else."* The Prophet (sal) said, *"You have limited a very vast thing: Allah's mercy."* These earthquakes, or the tsunamis, or the floods of Katrina, they cause terrible catastrophes, terrible suffering for human beings, for animals, for plants. They also result in enormous destruction of property, equal or more to what you see in war. In addition, they cause stress, psychological, mental, physical distress, pain and suffering. The reminder of these terrible disasters remain for the whole of a person's life. An American young lady lost her foot yesterday; she'll never forget.

The issue of these natural disasters and human suffering is a very confusing subject between the subject of science and spirituality, as well as other areas of life, psychology and human sciences. Every time a disaster like this one hits, it gives rise to questions that are not only immediate and have practical importance, but they also have a kind of epistemological and philosophical significance. People want to know: what is the real cause of this death and destruction that comes out of nowhere occasionally and viciously? Is it the result of, people want to say, God's anger? The question comes: do these calamities have something to do with the bad attitude or the moral turpitude of the people who were killed by it? This is just ridiculous. Does it have to do with the way the buildings were built, or the administration, the rulers? Certainly, we can't blame Allah.

If we want to try to rationalize and understand the natural calamities that occur on the basis of religion or any system of knowledge, I think we have to differentiate between the disasters that occur due to natural events and all the misfortunes that are caused by people who act contrary to the moral and ethical laws of Allah. Unless we can distinguish between those, how are we going to understand the real cause and the real relationship, as we reference it to these calamities? If the cause and effects are not correctly seen, there is a chance there is no way to remedy that which can be remedied, or that which can be addressed. Those things you could change won't ever change.

The question of this earthquake is: was it caused so much destruction because it was exacerbated by human action comes? Everybody says it was because of the deforestation of Haiti. You have social calamities and natural ones. The natural ones are physical and biological: earthquakes, floods, hurricanes. Then there are the diseases, epidemics and pandemics that we were worried about this year, and biological calamities. Now you can say there are individual, man-made ones like weapons of mass destruction. We know that the social calamities, the social disasters are caused by things like corruption, injustice and moral disintegration, opportunism, political oppression, and things like that. The accidental ones, from the point of view of a human being, we see are because of

negligence. A pilot makes a mistake. Some accident happens at sea, in the road, or in the air.

Certainly because there are so many sects of so many religions, you have a lot of people trying to answer the question in their own way. There is never going to be one answer. How many people, unfortunately, see natural disasters as God's displeasure towards human beings? They see earthquakes and tsunamis as indications of the wrath of God. Most of those people live in eastern Virginia. It is a generalized attack against stupidity and the misuse of religion. But for Muslims and Christians and Jews, there is a tendency to look at these natural disasters in the context of the Torah, the Injil, and the Qur'an. There is a history of discussion of natural disasters in these texts. Some people of all these three faiths look at these as punishments for the affected people from Allah. But that's not what the Qur'an really supports. It's a kind of cultural bias. All you have to do is look at the Qur'an, the stories of the Prophets, and you will see that Allah has never punished a people unless he first sent a messenger to them to convey a message and warn them of their wrongdoing. I don't think there was a prophet sent to Haiti, though I might have missed him.

It's only when people willfully and intentionally oppose the will of Allah, only when they purposefully reject the Prophets of Allah does this chastisement come to them in the form of the flood of Noah, for example. Allah says in Qur'an, "**We would never chastise any community for the wrong they do before We had sent an apostle to them.**" (17:15) Then in Sura al Qasas: "**Yet with all, thy sustainer would never destroy a community without having raised in its midst an apostle who could convey unto them Our Messages. Never would We destroy a community unless its people were wont to do wrong to one another.**"(28:59) Also, there is another aspect of Divine Law. There is always a differentiation between the believers and the opponents of Allah's prophets. There have always been opponents to prophets. There is not one quote from Qur'an that

could be construed to mean that a believer would fall prey to that kind of punishment. Yet you see that Haiti was full of believers, pious people.

It is described in Qur'an in a number of places, including Sura al Hud, Allah swt says, after narrating the story of Shueyb: “ **And so when Our Judgment came to pass by Our Grace, We saved Shueyb and those who shared his faith. Whereas the blast of our punishment overtook those who had been bent on evil doing, and they lay lifeless in their very homes on the ground.**” (11:66-67) According to Qur'an, Allah's punishment falls on a people when they turn against a prophet and willfully reject the message of Allah; and secondly, only on the opponents of the prophet without harming the believers. On the basis of Qur'an, it is really not correct to think of any ordinary natural disaster as an act of punishment. There is no way you can think that, as a Muslim. Allah created the universe out of truth, and with a purpose and meaning. All the phenomenological events and changes are governed by that Divine Intention and Will, *Irāda*.

Allah is all powerful and all knowing; therefore, no decisions are arbitrary or accidental. Since it is really not correct to think of Allah in some anthropomorphic way, because that is a way of containing and demeaning Allah, we can't think like this “wrath of God” theory that makes people fear Him as if He will turn on you like some despot or terrorist would. This goes against the All Merciful, All Knowing, All Wise Creator and Sustainer of the universe. The laws of the universe are operated by His *Niyyat*/Intention, His Will. The laws of nature according to the Qur'an are the means for allowing to happen what happens on this earth, but there are lessons to be learned from these disasters and calamities. Any person who thinks should learn the lesson, because it reminds us of our temporalness, our fragility, and the limits of our existence on this world.

It also reminds us of the strength and willpower of human beings, and the will to live. Every one of these circumstances or incidences should strengthen our faith in Allah and

remind us of our duty to our fellow human beings. That's what should happen. But we have to understand that the real cause of death and destruction, of these natural cataclysms lies with Allah. There are some things we just don't understand. It's not just earthquakes that cause the loss of life. The earthquake shakes the earth. You can't call a natural event a disaster; it's only a disaster when it interfaces with something else. These are natural, physical phenomena. They are caused by natural geological realities. Who created those realities, those laws? They are all part of Allah.

Let's not forget, these earthquakes caused the Lake Victoria waterfall and the mountains that we look at, and the rivers that were released from the earth that feed us, and the thermal heating people get in Iceland. Earthquakes opened up volcanoes that created fertile land. We can't just see the earthquake as evil. Everything has a purpose. This process that gave us the earth's crust and shapes the topography of the earth is a beautiful thing. But when people fail to fulfill their responsibilities to the laws of nature, sometimes they do fall victim to otherwise positive and beneficial changes. If we build buildings in order to make more money, put more sand in the cement and don't put the rebar in them, and you know you are living on a fault and gambling with your life and millions of other people's lives, well, that earthquake is certainly going to cause more fatalities, as we see. The social catastrophe, the administrative negligence, the tyranny of greed amplified this calamity. No one doubts it, no one questions it.

Allah (swt) has endowed us all with free will and a certain area of expertise, knowledge, control or power. It might be just your own family. In that realm, where we have responsibility, we are accountable. We are accountable for every rebar that wasn't there, or every extra bag of sand that was put in the cement, for all the exploitation of the people that put them at 80% unemployment, living in the worst of standards. Who is accountable? We are accountable. That substandard, collective, social, political and economic behavior of the community very well may have caused many of the calamities.

When a community stops living according to the will of Allah, living without a commitment to justice, equality, equity, gender equity, rule of law, or love, care, and sacrifice; when a community indulges in wrongdoing, injustice, corruption, exploitation, dishonesty and indecency, the result is not you just have a class of educated people and the rest are ignorant, backward people. But you get to see some of the perspectives you wouldn't normally have seen on the ground. When you are up in the air you get a different perspective. Now it becomes clear what the human needs are, what the consequences are when you have the Tonton Macoutes that they used to have under Papa Doc. You find crime and man's inhumanity toward man; and, ultimately, any kind of order will dissipate and will not hold.

In Suratu-l-Rūm, Allah said: **“Corruption has appeared on the land and on the sea as an outcome of what man’s hands have wrought, so He will let them taste the evil of some of what they have been doing, so that they may return to the right path.”**

(30:41) The corruption of one group of individuals spreads to another group of individuals; consequently, you have a whole infrastructure of corrupt individuals, some with very high titles like president, vice president, prime minister, premier, or speaker of the *majlis*. They have high titles, but they are nothing more than corrupted thugs and thieves who would rob their own mothers. We know that, because they do. It's not that the earthquakes were not foreseen: someone had even written a book on it. Geologists know which regions are moving. But to get the leadership to do anything, that's the hard part. Human generosity is not the hard part. I guess you could say human generosity is needed where there is so little, where there is no law and order. People have to be reminded. They have to be reminded of their history and background, their hopes and fears. *Wa'alahi*, it's a big deal.

This corruption/*fasād* is social, intellectual and political corruption. Why should we be surprised when the environment responds to it? If the environment indeed is a living thing, it seems to me we have to show it some kind of respect. If you don't have the building codes, the rescue codes, the safe buildings where people can go; if you don't have storehouses of food because you know you are living on a fault, and you don't have warehouses for the people... then take it another step and say, who are these people? Is this some kind of zoo? Welcome to the Haitian zoo? For \$2000 dollars you can live at a palatial resort and then go out and look at the animals in the zoo. No, we fail to educate. We fail to organize. We fail to strengthen or empower people so they can face life, work, and calamities in better ways.

We all may be prepared to some degree, but prepared to do what? I'm of the mind that any product sold off the shelf should donate 10, 20 cents or some percentage to the impoverished and uneducated people of the world, no strings attached. The propaganda that you get from it is just the fact that you do it. It's the best advertisement and public relations you could have. In the old days, when the word "calamitous" came into being, people thought it had a relationship to straw and reeds. That in itself is saying that when things get difficult, you can turn to your place of bounty, your garden, so to speak. How many of us are planting a garden we can turn to? Not many. I'm of the school that says, if we do our very, very best, even if calamity hits, we will have much better means at our disposal to help others. We will have a way for us to rest and regenerate ourselves. But if we buy into this "God is punishing us" mentality, this is very disrespectful to Allah and to your own self.

These disasters and losses, these misfortunes and calamities are not things we are not going to have experience with in our life—*inshā'a-llāh*, maybe only virtually. Even if it wasn't virtual, we have to monitor ourselves first. We have to make the right choices first. We have to know when to repent, and how to do what the high priests have told us to do. How many *durūd sharīfs*, how many *dhikr*? It's like the priest saying, "Go do 20

Hail Mary's because you were smoking behind the barn at your parents'. Then bring me back a pack of cigarettes." That's the way it works. People don't connect the dots. We are Muslims and Sufis, and we have to connect the dots.

When the system is operating, we see there are these times of great tests and trials. We have to be clear what they are for. Otherwise, we will be walking the streets, looking for our loved ones. It's not like one thing is coming at one time: we have this earthquake, and there are the wars. Then you have water pollution, and deforestation issues. You have the price of oil. It's not like we are dealing with one thing. But in a way, we are. We are dealing with one profound truth. Harold Robles is designing a "health I.D." Think of it as a metaphor. Everything is put in the book, and that's the only thing you can treat. You can only treat the illnesses a people have. You can only address the social issues a people have. You can only address the political issues that govern those people. They don't care, in South Africa, what goes on in Ethiopia or in the United States. Nobody in South Africa is saying, "Give me the right to vote in South Africa, and throw in the right to vote in the following 5 countries." Write your password in twice so we know it's you, and then you can download the solutions you want. That's not the way the world operates. This arbitrariness in what appears to be human response is not arbitrary. There is a response; but it's not that a malevolent God is punishing anybody.

When we are looking at this situation and seeing all this misery and terror, it really behooves us to try to understand it. It really behooves us to see the hidden blessing in it; to realize that obviously the world needed a respite from the political machinations, innuendos, out and out lies, and cavalier attitude toward 30 million people who don't have health care. Now we are going to deal with 3 million people, half of whom might be dead, and the rest of whom are hungry and thirsty. Somewhere inside of me, I don't think there is much difference. Let's make *du'ā* and prayer for those people.

It would be nice if humanity could come together around this and stay together. It has happened on smaller levels. It happened in Aceh. There is no longer the insurrection in Aceh. Everybody came together after the tsunami and the insurrection isn't there anymore. They are actually working together in the government. It happened in our work with Kyrgastan, when we built a coalition between the government and the media, the police force and the NGO's. They met and kept meeting up until the time of the Roe's revolution, which did not have any violence. People attributed this to the fact that these people knew each other, were working with each other, and each took care of their own constituency.

Any questions?

Question: You touched on this [in your dars tonight]. And it brought to mind the verse in the Qur'an about not being given a burden greater than we can bear. [How do we understand this verse] in light of recent events (such as the earthquake in Haiti)?

Shaykh: It's not a complicated quotation. It is saying that a true, sincere believer will be able to cope with whatever Allah gives them because they will have believed that it comes from Allah. It's for a reason, and they have to cope with it. The question is what makes a real sincere believer? The foundation of sincerity/*ikhlas* is *niyyat*. Allah is not saying *human beings* will not have a burden they cannot bear; He is saying it about *believers*. That is the implication of it.

These people in Haiti were very pious people. The situation is the news media goes running to all the people with machetes and to the looters. Though they are doing good work at CNN (gives examples), they also [put a lot of focus on] the looting. Though there are human interest stories, the media is so sucked in to the misery that a good story has a very short life. There is no leadership. *Asalaam aleikum*.

