

Despair Not of God's Grace

A Message to People of Faith

By Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah
Translated by Hamza Yusuf

This is a talk that world renowned Islamic scholar Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah gave shortly after September 11, 2001 at a meeting in Rome in which many world religious leaders participated.

IN THE NAME of God, the Merciful and Beneficent. Praise be to the Possessor of the heavens and the earth, the Living, the Sustaining, the Omnipotent, the Overpowering, the Merciful, and the Gracious. With these Names and Attributes, He revolves day

and night, encompassing everything with His Knowledge and Mercy. Benedictions and solace be upon our master Muhammad, the prophet and final messenger of God, and upon his brothers, among the many prophets and messengers before him.

My friends and brothers, I greet you and express heartfelt gratitude for your generous invitation during this particular time of pain and sadness we all share for those innocent people of varying faiths that were killed by an evil hand in New York and Washington. We particularly appreciate and highly value the position that the highest Church authorities have taken during this crisis concerning attempts to use this tragedy as a *Trojan Horse* in order to attack the civilization of Islam and to condemn Islam and Muslims, forgetting history as well as the rights of ancient neighbors from both the Christian and Muslim civilizations.

We all share in our condemnation of this heinous act of terror that no sacred tradition sanctions, especially the religion of Islam. Reason itself rejects this act of madness. It is nihilistic to kill oneself and to kill others unjustly; thus, two grave wrongs were perpetrated on that day according to Islam. While there are still ambiguous aspects to this affair, and the realities of what took place have not all been made apparent, we make it clear to you, in no uncertain terms, that if the accusations are in any way true, then the Muslim jurists are the first to demand the most severe punishments for these acts.

The Islamic faith considers the murder of one soul on a par with

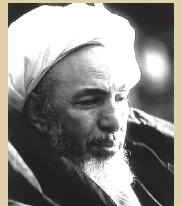


PHOTO: PETER SANDERS

killing all of humanity: the Quran states, “Whoever kills one soul unjustly, it is as if he has killed all of humanity” (*Maidah*: 32). This is because a solitary soul represents all of humanity in the beginning of creation and in its re-creation as God says, “Your creation and your resurrection is as one soul” (*Lugman*: 28).

Furthermore, the sacred law of Islam prohibits killing animals and cutting down trees without right. Our Prophet, peace be upon him, mentioned a specific person who was punished in hell for torturing a cat by locking it up and starving it to death. The Prophet, peace be upon him, prohibited killing ants, bees, and frogs. Tell me, how then could he permit the killing of a human being, whom God has ennobled and dignified over the rest of His creation? “And verily, We have given the children of Adam their human dignity. We have carried them safely over land and sea and provided them from the good things of the Earth” (*Quran, Isra*: 70).

Islam is a message that enjoins spreading peace toward those one knows and those one does not know as mentioned in the prophetic tradition. We are here to extend to you goodness, virtue, and love based upon our own Quran’s injunction: “God has not prohibited you from displaying all forms of goodness and equity toward those who do not persecute you or drive you from your legitimate homes” (*Mumtahinah*: 8). The conditions set down here are not biased or unfair. The first relates to the freedom of religion and the second, the right to live in security in a person’s own land. There is an interesting point this verse highlights, and that is the idea of treating all human beings with equity. Qadi Abu Bakr, a scholar from Spain from the 12th Century, explains that

THE PROPHET, PEACE
BE UPON HIM,
PROHIBITED KILLING
ANTS, BEES, AND
FROGS. HOW THEN
COULD HE PERMIT THE
KILLING OF A HUMAN
BEING, WHOM GOD HAS
ENNOBLED AND
DIGNIFIED OVER THE
REST OF HIS CREATION?

equity in this verse means “sharing with equitable non-Muslims a portion of one’s wealth as a response to their good character and treatment of the Muslim.”

In the Quran, God says, “You will find the closest to the believing Muslims in love are those who call themselves Christians. That is because from among them are priests and monks, and they do not behave haughtily” (*Maidah*: 82). These are beautiful qualities that God has described the true Christians as possessing. The Quran says, “God commands you to act justly” (*Nahal*: 90). Our relationship with you is one of peace, virtue, and justice. That is the position of Islam

yesterday, today, and tomorrow. It is a principled position that has no relationship to the shifting balances of power.

There is no denying that we bear the burdens of a shared history of past troubles and the weight of today’s problems, and if God does not receive us with His Grace, we fear greatly the dark possibilities of our future. Moreover,

there are biased interpretations and views that some groups adopt in every faith and religion which may reach extremes. It is, nonetheless, possible for us to invoke the relevant injunctions from our sacred scriptures that are the closest to a global spirit of cooperation and peace within the frame of a culture of peace.

Our friends on the other side of the Mediterranean must also help us with one concept only, and that is justice. *Justice* is a precious word to each of our faiths as well as the rest of humanity in every time and place. According to our faith, one of the Names of God is *The Just*. We have a sacred tradition in which God speaks to all of His creation saying, “O My servants, I

have prohibited for Myself oppression, and I have prohibited it for you also, so do not oppress one another.”

We know that *Infinite Justice* is God’s alone. Therefore, we have to analyze three key understandings: *my justice*, *your justice*, and *Absolute Justice*. We need to discuss and come to an understanding of the concepts that are shared and absolute between all of the revealed religions using the tools we have been given, including our intellects and human reason. Indeed, as Aristotle says, “*The intellect is the most equitably divided trait among humans.*”

The explanation of justice that is most shared among us is simply this: an innocent person should not be taken to account for the wrongs of a guilty person. This is a universal principle that none of us can debate. Indeed, it is an Abrahamic principle according to the Quran: “*Have they not been informed of what was in the Scrolls of Moses and Abraham who fulfilled their covenants—that one soul does not bear the wrongs of another and that a human being has only what he strives for?*”

Another principle we all share is that a man is innocent until he is proven guilty. We Muslims call this principle *original innocence* because we regard a human being as basically good unless he proves himself otherwise through vile actions as the Quran states, “*This is the inherent nature that God created humanity upon*” (*Rum*: 30). The Quran also warns us: “*Verify any accusations so that you are not oppressive toward a people out of ignorance, and then have remorse for the harm you caused*” (*Hujurat*: 6).

We must also work together to redress the historical wrongs of the past and of the present by attempting to find the shared

understanding that most approximates the ideal of *Absolute Justice*, even if that might insult *my justice* or *your justice*. For if we do that, we can indeed overcome these trials and deracinate terrorism, religiously inspired acts of insanity, and reactionary extremism within our midst. We must expend our energies and enlist our scholars and sages in coming to a just solution to the question of Palestine so as to prevent the matter from being left to people who have lost their sense of balance or who actually desire wars and conflicts. Indeed, peace is not only the best of what is good for the weak but for the strong as well.

WE CAN INDEED
OVERCOME THESE TRIALS
AND DERACINATE
TERRORISM, RELIGIOUSLY
INSPIRED ACTS OF
INSANITY, AND
REACTIONARY
EXTREMISM WITHIN OUR
MIDST

In addition, we must not allow special interest groups that benefit from wars and their consequences to declare a *war of civilizations*, especially between Islam and Christianity. We prefer peace and conviviality to vying for civilizational superiority. We must also make serious efforts to come to a precise definition of the concepts and technical terms we use, such as *terrorism*.

Unfortunately, a war over terminology can lead to physical violence and actual warfare. Frankly, many Muslims ask, “What do the super-powers mean by *terrorism*?” They want to know on what exactly is war being waged before they board the ship setting sail to wage war on it. In fact, they are afraid that if they get on the ship, the captain might suddenly, in mid-sea, turn and accuse them of being terrorists! Is terrorism killing innocents, destroying property, and threatening people’s security? Or, is wearing a turban, building Quranic schools, reciting the Quran, and teaching people Islam considered terrorism? Is legitimate defense of your homeland and the attempt to rightfully take back what was wrongfully taken from

you considered terrorism by he who has wronged you? These questions need to be answered and should be before any of us gets on board with the captain of the ship.

We should also proclaim this century a century of peace, development, religious tolerance, and culture in order that humanity may enjoy the gifts and blessings of this earth which we share in the shade of our Creator’s dominion until humanity receives our master Jesus, peace be upon him. We wish to be living in peace and prosperity as he descends from his heavenly abode in that wondrous and exalted state that was described by our Prophet, upon him be peace, when he said about Jesus,

He will descend from on high upon the white minaret to the east of Damascus with his hands in the wings of two angels. If he lowers or raises his head, beads like pearls fall from him. Any disbeliever who receives a whiff of his breath’s scent will die, and his scent reaches to where his eye leaves off. The Antichrist seeks him out, and Christ kills him at the gate of Ludd. He then wipes the brows of some of those whom the Antichrist had no effect upon, and he informs them of their ranks in Paradise. He then isolates himself with the believers until Gog and Magog are removed. God then

blesses the earth, and it is said to the earth, “O earth, bring forth your provisions and fruits, and give again your blessings.” In those days, many will eat from one pomegranate and rest in the shade of its shell (related by Muslim, part 18).

Another narration states,

“During Jesus’ reign, such security will exist that a camel will graze with the lion and the beast of prey with cows and sheep. Children will play with snakes, and none harm the other” (Musnad, 406:2).

Thus, peace is described in those days. So let us ask ourselves this: Do we want to greet such days in the shade of wars and conflict or of peace and love?

Finally, perhaps we should listen well and heed the advice of Prophet Jacob, peace be upon him, when he said to his sons,

“O my sons, go seek out Joseph, and do not despair of God’s Grace. For none but people without gratitude despair of the Grace of God.”

Let us then never despair of the Mercy of our Lord.

