

## From Protest to Engagement

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Shaykh Hamza Yusuf  
23rd February 2007  
Central Hall, Westminster,  
London  
[Opening Dua]

People have been here a long time, we lost some people, they just either had to go and catch the tube, or they had something on the tube they wanted to watch or something, I don't know.

I wanted to make a few remarks. First of all, I want to address a few issues that I think are important and perhaps not for most of the people in the room, but for other people and I would like you to convey this to the other people. There are people that have been talking about the work that is being done by Fuad Nahdi, by Abdul-Rehman, by Fareena and by the other groups that have been involved in this effort; that this is a government propaganda; that these are stooges of the government of England. I'm sure some of you have heard some of these things, so I want to say a few things about them.

First of all, there's a verse in the Qur'an that is very interesting to me, and probably to most of you, [verse in Arabic] 'If people incline towards reconciliation, incline with them' Wa tawakal alAllah 'and trust in God' inahu Huwa Samiul Aleem. [Arabic verse] When they want to incline towards peace, you incline towards peace; and if they want to deceive you, if there's some hidden ulterior motive, God is enough for you. Don't worry about that, that's not your concern. Peace is so precious, that anybody who reaches out for peace, you should reach out with them for peace.

And there is another thing I want to say about this government – who do you think this government is? They are called civil servants. Who do you think pays their money? Where do you think this money is from that the government has? It's from the pockets of the British people, who pay taxes. There are 2 million Muslims in this country paying taxes; they don't want a little refund?

No seriously, I mean, I'm just amazed at this. Abu Hanifah said, [Arabic] The wealth of the non-Muslims, if they want to give it to you, it is permissible to take it.

Now, I'm going to be honest with you – I did not want to come here. I was in California; my wife is a brilliant cook. Really. There's no hotel food that compares to her food. It's not why I married her, she learnt to cook after I married her; but she's a brilliant cook. Her food is very good. It's nourishing, I feel good when I eat her food. And she cooks it with love. You can't get that in a restaurant. I can taste the anxiety in their food, I can taste the anger of the cook. My cells feel it.

And I also have really good tea. I come to England, I buy the tea and I take it back. I have a big supply. My tea is much better than the tea they give at any hotel I've ever stayed at in England. I learned how to make tea from Abdul Adheem Sanders, excellent tea-maker. If anybody has ever had his tea, they'll know what I mean.

So, why leave the comfort of my home? Because my Shaykh, Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah, asked me to. He said this is an important thing, so come. So I came. I'm tired, and whenever I get tired I become more open, because my defences are down.

I'm going to tell you some true things. I used to not like the English people. Seriously, I thought they were cynical. You know, the English people, the way they roll their eyes, there's a certain way; there's a smirk that comes on their mouths when you say something. Really very subtle things that you notice about the English. You know there's a cynicism that's particularly Anglo-Saxon in its nature and it's really interesting. But I'll tell you something - I have come to love these people, and for a number of reasons. I want to talk about this because it's very important for all of you who are living here. This country is an amazing country. It has done many wrongs, and we could bring an Irish person here tonight and they could talk for hours about what this country has done wrong. We could bring Welsh people, they might not be as eloquent as the Irishmen, but they could also talk for several hours about what the English have done to them. And, you could bring some of my tribe, from Scotland, really, you could bring some of them down, and they could give you with a nice brogue, they'll let you know what the English did. From Edward Longshanks on, or even before that. They'll tell you about the English. But each one of these people has been challenged to learn to live with the English. Really. The Scots are very civil; some of them want independence, quite a number of them, but how are they going about gaining that independence? They are not blowing up things. They have other ways of doing it. The Welsh de-evolution, it's been a long time. They say the Welsh are the Irish who couldn't swim. You know it's been a long time since the Welsh have been occupied. Much longer than Palestine. But the Welsh are a gentle people. I love the Welsh and I love the Irish. But it's taken me a while to really appreciate the subtleties of these different cultures.

And so I really want to say, there's two ways that you can live in your life; one is the way of husn dhann – having a good opinion; and the other way is the way of su'a dhann. Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah doesn't tolerate ghiba; it's one of the things that I love about his majlis. You can't say anything about anybody, even people that you should say things about, he won't let you say anything about them. Years ago, we were at a gathering and somebody mentioned something about Jamaludin al Afghani, who died a long time ago, two centuries ago. So somebody said something

and Shaykh Abdullah said something I have never forgotten. He said [Arabic] 'Have a good opinion of the dead, we've tried having bad opinions, we've tested it as a way of being in the world.' Our Prophet, Salallahu alayhi wa sallam, had the best of opinions. Whenever the Quraish reached out for him, he reached out for them. Mu'awiyah (we know in the Arabic tradition they call it Sh'ar Mu'awiyah, the hair of Mu'awiyah) is one of the most brilliant politicians in human history. He is a case study. The leadership secrets of Mu'awiyah would be a bestseller. Mu'awiyah said. 'If there was a hair of a relationship between me and somebody else, if he pulled on it, I would release; if he would release, I would pull. A hair of relationship; just to keep that opening there, that potential.'

You should be thankful to have people like Mockbul Ali inside the Foreign Office. I have a good opinion of that young man. He's a bright young man and has good intentions. He's there representing your community. You live here, you pay taxes, this is your government. This is not Rawalpindi; this is not Karachi; this is not Cairo. This is not some funny place off in the middle of the Muslim world where if you say anything against the government, suddenly you're in chains, being dragged away. No. This is a country that you are citizens of; [Arabic verse] 'I swear by this land and you are a lawful citizen of this land.'

You are citizens; this is not subjection; you are not subjects. The British are citizens and subjects, but this is something superficial. The Queen can't just arbitrarily send you off to the prison. We should be wary of some of these laws being passed as they are against the essential nature of this country, and we have to remind the English - 'You are the people of the Magna Carta; you are the people of Habeas Corpus; this is your tradition – you gave this to the western world. You are the people of John Locke and you are the people of John Wesley, who this glorious hall is named after, one of the greatest reformers in western civilisation, who worked with William Wilberforce.'

I want to tell you about William Wilberforce. This was a man, who from the early twenties was with a group in Clapham. One day, 132 black Africans were thrown overboard on a ship called the Zong. It was a slave ship coming from West Africa to the Americas. It was an English ship. 132 black people were thrown into the ocean and drowned, and this was considered legal by the laws of the land. This group of young people, who still had that spark of hope, recognised how despicable this act was, how unacceptable this act was, and they started a small group of abolitionists, to end the slave trade. At a time when almost every single Member of Parliament was supported by the slave lobby. Things haven't changed all that much. But Wilberforce did not give up. He worked day and night - he was an incredible connector; he connected with people all over the country, got people to sign things and he brought these in as a Member of Parliament. He worked with beautiful people like Hannah Moore.

Several years ago I suggested to the Muslim women in this country to start up a Hannah Moore Benevolence Society, because you should know Hannah Moore. You should know who Hannah Moore is. She's a beautiful Englishwoman. She was stunningly beautiful in her looks. When she came to London, she took everybody by storm. She was a playwright, she was a literary figure, she was a poetess, she was all of these things, but in the end she had a spiritual conversion and she became one of the staunchest anti-slavery spokespeople in this country. She started night schooling – one of her greatest contributions.

This is England to me. England is not the tyranny of Ireland; that's the worst of human nature that you find in any civilisation. That's not England to me. England to me is these incredible ideals embodied by people like Florence Nightingale. I love Florence Nightingale. I have studied and read all of her works. I told my wife – you're the only woman I know who is jealous of a woman who died over a hundred years ago. I fell in love with Florence Nightingale. Florence Nightingale said England needs to go to the Sufis. She wrote this in her book. She said England needs to go to the Sufis. Florence Nightingale entered the Sultan Hassan Mosque, where Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa gives the khutbah, and she said for the first time, she found what she was looking for. She said, I never found this in the churches of England. She said, I found equality, and that there was a place for women in this religion.

You know, they chased her out with a stick, and yet, she said, I don't blame them. She went to Al-Azhar, she was struck by the spirituality, and she says in her diary, 'I've heard in my heart something telling me turn to Mecca, face Mecca, face Mecca, all of humanity is one, we are all under One God, and there is salvation for all of us. I kept hearing in my heart there is no God but God, believe in the One true God.'

She was a Unitarian, she was not a Trinitarian. This is Florence Nightingale, one of the great icons of the British people. This was a woman who was given a Qilada, this extraordinary medal by the Sultan Abdul Majid of the Ottoman Empire because she came and served the Turkish soldiers that were victims of the Crimean War as well as she served the British soldiers, because she didn't differentiate between people. This is England to me. This is the England I want to see. This is the England I want to remind these people of, who they are. They've forgotten who they are. These are the people of the great reforms of the western civilisation, and we of all people should be reminding them. We share these things with you. You've forgotten who you are like we've forgotten who we are. This is the age of senility. We're all in spiritual dementia. This is the old age, the dotage of humanity, and we need reminders. We've got collective Alzheimer's Disease, and some of us have "sometimer's" disease – we forget and then we remember. This is England to me, and it flows in my blood; I have ancestors from this land, this is my qawm. Ya qawmee - this is what every prophet (saw) said to his people, Oh my people. They weren't following his way, they were fighting and they were opposing him. Ya qawmee, [Arabic] He didn't say [Arabic]. 'No you're wrong, I want good for you [Arabic] I just want to help, as much as I'm able to.' This is our teaching, to go out and to engage these people.

I was on an airplane, and this man came up to me, and he said, 'Brother, I love your work!' I said, "Masha'Allah, thank you so much." He said, "No, no, really, its just so amazing what you did, it's incredible...Let me ask you one question." I said sure, and he said "Why did you give up singing?" So after I sang him a few bars of Peace Train, one of my favourite songs, I told him I lost my voice. No, I said that's Yusuf Islam! We have the same name. There's three Yusufs tonight, it's Yusuf muka'ab, Yusuf to the third power.

But I want to end with a story about one of my favourite people. Who can tell me, and not from the Ulema, who can tell me who Sayyidina Umar's favourite poet is. People say "Sayyidina Umar liked poetry?! Didn't he just listen to the Qur'an?" The favourite poet of Umar ibn al Khattab was Zuhair ibn Abi Sulma. Who is Zuhair ibn Abi Sulma? He is the father of Ka'ab ibn Zuhair, the man who wrote the Burda (The Poem of the Cloak). He is also the father of Ka'ab's younger brother who became Muslim before Ka'ab. Zuhair did not meet

the Prophet, he died one year before. But I want to tell you a little bit about why Zuhair wrote his mu'alaqa and I want to use this as a metaphor for what we need to do.

The Arabs call something ayam al arab. Ayam al arab are the days of the Arabs. That's why Allah changed ayam al arab to ayamillah. [Arabic] because the Arabs had their days, Allah has His days. The days of the Arabs were momentous things that happened to them, they say [Arabic], they used to write their history in their poetry.

There was a war called harb ud Dahis. You know who Dahis is? It's amazing we know his name. Dahis was a horse. It's called the War of Dahis, the Horse. And Dahis was owned by a man named Zuhair ibn Uqais al Absi. He had a friend who was from the Dhibyan tribe – Hudaifa bin Malik, who had a horse called Ghabra. Now, Hudaifa was very jealous of Dahis, the horse of Zuhair, so he asked him to race. So the two horses, they decided they'd race a hundred arrow shots – they shoot one time, two times, for a hundred times and then they race. Well, the horses started out, and Ghabra was winning, but once it got into the heavy sand, Dahis took the lead. There was a group of Dhibyanites who were hiding in ambush, and they ambushed Dahis and stopped him from winning the race, so Ghabra won. So what was the bet? A hundred camels. So Hudaifa said "Give me a hundred camels because you lost." And then the Abs people said "No, we saw the ambush, he didn't lose. You lost; you cheated, give us a hundred camels." They kept on and on and on.

Finally, Zuhair ibn Qais got so angry, he killed the brother of Hudaifa. He threw a spear at him and killed him. That started the war between 'Abs and Dhibyan. You know how long that war lasted? Forty years – over a stupid horse race.

Much later – after many many people were killed from ghatafan, to the point where you know what Zuhair ibn Qais ended up doing? He went to Oman, became a Christian and spent the last days of his life weeping over the war he started. Because he said he could never look at anybody from his tribe, because he had caused so much suffering and bloodshed amongst these people.

So, what happens? There was a man, Al-Harith Al Absi, Harith ibn Awf. This man asked his cousin, Kharijah bin Sinan, "Which tent of the Arabs do you think would not let me marry his daughter?" And she said, "Definitely Aws Atta'i – he would never let you marry his daughter." So what does he do? This is a typical male problem. He gets on his camel and he heads for this guy's tent to ask for his daughter. Of all the things he can't get, that's the thing he wants – this is a human problem. So he gets there, and this man Aws comes out and says, "Good morning. What are you doing up here, ya Sayyid al Arab?" Al Harith said "I want to marry your daughter." Aws said "Get the hell out of here." I mean really, that's pretty much what he said! This made Al Harith furious and he left.

So what does Aws do? He goes into the house and his wife asks him "What happened, who was that?"

He says "It was Al Harith bin Awf, As Sayyid al Arab."

"What did he want?"

"He wanted to marry one of my daughters."

She said, "If he is the Sayyid al Arab, why didn't you marry one of the daughters to him?"

He said "That's a good point, it's just that he caught me off guard and I was angry."

And she said, "Well go make amends."

He said, "I can't. What's done is done."

She said, "What do you mean what's done is done? You mess everything up and then you're not going to go fix it? Go out there!"

And he says, "What do I say?"

"Just tell him you got him in a bad mood. And tell him to come back and we'll work things out."

So he goes, and Al Harith initially is angry, but he comes.

What does Aws do? He says, "I want you to choose one of my daughters. I have three daughters."

The first one comes out. She says, "I don't want to marry him." Remember, Arab women had no rights.

He says, "Why not?"

She says, "First of all I'm not that good-looking, I'm not his cousin, and he's going to take me far away and he'll grow tired of me, divorce me, and then what?"

So he says, "Good point. Bring the second daughter."

She comes. "I want you to marry this man. What do you say?"

"Look, my first sister is better looking than I am, I don't have any talents, and I don't want to go far away from you because who is going to protect me if he gets feisty with me?"

"Good point."

Finally the hope is on the last daughter, the little one, Buhaysa. She comes in, and he says, "Listen, Al Harith wants to marry you. What do you say?"

She said, "Well, given that I'm the most attractive of my sisters, I'm extremely talented, and I have a most distinguished father, I don't see how he could refuse me, and then if he treats me badly, God will definitely let him have it!"

So he says great, and they get married. As they're moving out, they set up a tent next to the house, he goes in to consummate the marriage (that's a nice word for things people do on their wedding night). So when he gets in there, she says, "What kind of a woman do you take me for? We're right next to my father and my brothers. Let's go." So they ride off and a little way out, he tells his cousin, "Listen you go up ahead, and I'll catch up with you later." He stops by the side and sets up the tent. She says, "What kind of woman do you think I am? This is the way people who take women in wars behave! Take me to your home, slaughter sheep, make a big festival!"

He thinks, "This is a high minded woman." So he takes her and then his cousin says, "Did you do what you wanted to do?" He said no, and explains to him. So they get back, and he does a big festival. When it's all done, he comes in, "How's things now?"

She said, "I want to ask you one question. What kind of a man are you? I thought you were a man of honour but I want to ask you one question: How is it that you can delight in women

when there are people, Arabs, right now killing each other over a horse race? If you want me as a wife, go out and spread peace amongst these men, and end this bloodshed.”

He goes out and tells his cousin, and the cousin says, “This is a high minded woman, and she will give you great sons, so let us go and do this.” They went out and got the Abs and the Dhibyan to agree that if they were to count all of the dead, whoever had the most killed, these two men would pay 3000 camels from their own wealth - to end this war.

And this is when Zuhair wrote his mu’alaqa in praise of these two men, for what they did. But I think it’s Buhaysa that he should have written a mu’alaqa about, because that is where it has to come from. It’s the women in our homes – they are the one who can change this situation more than anybody else. Our women need to be like Buhaysa and get our men squared away. I really mean that. You are the vicegerents of God.

Extremism is here to stay folks. This is the most extreme society, and I’m talking about the whole globe right now. We’re in the most extreme conditions in human history. We’ve got extreme eating. When I grew up, small was like this, medium was like that, and large.....Now, that’s medium! That’s extreme eating. I used to eat with 10 people around a plate. And now people are walking around, unable to control themselves anymore. They are having to take out Victorian seats in the theatres of England because the American fat behinds can’t fit in them anymore. This is our reality – we’re extreme. We’re eating extreme.

Look at the extreme sports in this country. You know what Sky Television says? It says ‘If your religion is football, then worship with us.’ They call us idiots because our community kill people over what somebody said about the Prophet (saw) and yet they kill each other because some football team beat another football team.

There are sufaha everywhere, but really, what is more stupid, to kill over a stupid football game or to kill because the greatest person in your life has been desecrated, denigrated? They’re both wrong, but don’t call our people fools and not call your own people fools. This is extremism at its worst. Look at the pornography that they have, the denigration of these poor women. You know, the word in Arabic for oppression is related to the word for prostitute, because prostitutes are the most oppressed human beings on the planet. And there’s sexual slavery all over this planet. Some of the biggest downloads in the Muslim world, on Google, according to their own statistics, is pornography.

What’s happened to people? Really – think about this. We’re in extreme conditions. We need the abolition from our nafs. The Arabs say, [Arabic] The free man is a slave as long as he desires other than God, and the slave is a free man as long as he is content. This is real abolition. This is what William Wilberforce is about – his movement needs to be resurrected, but we need liberation from our own egos.

Jazakumallahu Khairan. It has been an honour. I love you, I love this country. I want to see good for this country. Really. And this Government – there’s much to say about the bad things of this government, and you know my criticism. I’m against the war in Iraq. I want the war to end. I want these British troops home. I don’t want them over there. I don’t want the American troops over there. I am against this – I have always been against it. Really, I am completely against it, on both sides – they’re both unacceptable. It’s terrorism on both sides. They’re both terroristic conditions. You’re terrorising people in their homes, using cluster bombs in Lebanon. Really, this is terrorism, and it needs to be condemned as terrorism. And I condemn it. We all condemn it. So we need to recognise that.

But this Government has much good in it, and our teachers teach us, [Arabic] If you’re in a blessing, watch out, you better guard it, because once you lose it, it’s gone, and disobedience is what causes it to be lost. And the Arabs say that Allah (Most High), He said that, [Arabic]

A ni'm, if you don't recognise them, [Arabic] Losing your blessings is what teaches you your blessings, so before you lose them, count your blessings. [Arabic]

Jazakumallahu khairan. Wasalaamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu.