

Anwar Al-Awlaki: The New Jim Jones

An Exposition For His Followers

As a Muslim, let me say this loudly and clearly — Anwar al-Awlaki is a servant of evil and a traitor both to Islam and to the Muslims. He is intent on misleading the world by spreading the lie that Islam permits the killing of civilians. It does not.

Prophet Muhammad forbade the killing of non combatants and reacted with horror when he heard of civilian deaths on the battlefield. In order to expound his own political agenda, Al-Awlaki is defaming the Prophet and the global Muslim community, which rejects terrorism. And in the process, he is revealing himself to be a modern Jim Jones – a narcissist creating a death cult.

In 1978, Jim Jones led 900 of his devoted followers to mass suicide by forcing them to drink cyanide mixed in a fruit beverage. The term “drinking the Kool-Aid” has since become synonymous with people who blindly follow their leaders to their doom. And it is clear that al-Awlaki’s followers are very much drinking his brand of Kool-Aid.

Indeed, the alleged Fort Hood shooter, Major Nidal Malik Hasan, was apparently a follower of al-Awlaki before he turned on his fellow soldiers in an orgy of murder. Like Jim Jones, al-Awlaki has remarkable charisma and uses it to lead his followers down a very dark path.

I say all of this with great grief. Al-Awlaki was once a highly regarded Muslim who taught a message of peace and brotherhood. But his story is like that of the archetypal villain of the movie *Star Wars* – Anakin Skywalker, a defender of justice, who devolves into Darth Vader, a monster who cares only for his own twisted quest for power.

I have never met al-Awlaki, but those who have tell me that in his early days as a preacher, he espoused a moderate Islam based on appreciation for Muslim history. Yet after the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, al-Awlaki began to change. He began to see the world in a binary “us versus them” outlook – one of the hallmarks of extremism.

After being detained by the Yemeni government in 2006 (apparently under American pressure), he appears to have left his moderate past behind him and embraced a dark vision of Islam at perpetual war with America – and became its most passionate advocate.

Al-Awlaki’s story could be dismissed as the sad tale of a good man who became lost. And yet his personal moral decline has greater consequences. For he built up a widespread and devoted following among Muslims in his heyday – and is now in a position to brainwash many of his followers into following his own descent into darkness.

When I have publicly criticized al-Awlaki, I have received emails from his devotees saying that he is being “set up” by the US government. And yet when I ask them what they mean by this, there is always pin-drop silence. His followers seem to want to believe that the good, charismatic man that they adore is somehow being falsely portrayed in the media as a villain as part of some “Psy Ops” manipulation game. And yet when I ask if someone else is posting his increasingly radical and extremist sermons through his website (a CIA agent posing as al-Awlaki, let’s say), there is more silence. It is as if his followers want

to keep clinging to the man he once was and selectively ignore his recent calls for the murder of civilians in the name of Islam, the same Islam which his followers love and cherish.

Like Jim Jones, a personality cult has formed around al-Awlaki. It is a personality cult that is blinding his followers into a series of non-sequiturs and conspiracy theories that allow them to overcome the cognitive dissonance of reconciling the good teacher they once knew and the deranged and hateful man he has become.

There is a word for that kind of personality cult in Islam – idolatry. If there are any Muslims out there that believe that a man should be followed unquestioningly, even when his words violate basic Islamic teachings, then they have committed *shirk*, the worst sin in Islam – ascribing a partner to God. They have given their devotion to a false god, a fallible human being rather than the infallible Creator, the Merciful and Compassionate, the Lord of the Worlds, whose moral commandments cannot be rationalized away by men.

I was sickened and outraged by al-Awlaki's recent video, where he rationalized terrorist plots to blow up airplanes, saying that the deaths of civilians are just "a drop of water in the sea." Similar rationalizations were used by pre-Islamic Arabs who practiced female infanticide, burying their newborn baby daughters alive. Such innocent lives were also simply "drops in the sea" for a pagan culture obsessed with male progeny. But when the Noble Qur'an put an end to this barbarism, it said that on the Day of Judgment, the innocent girls will rise from their graves and confront their murderers, and God will ask on their behalf: "**For what crime was she killed?**" [81:8-9] And then the murderers' excuses will vanish and they will be flung into Hell.

The God of the Qur'an is the God of life, of mercy, of justice. A God that says "**no soul shall bear the burden of another**" [53:38] when confronted with moral relativists that believe in "guilt by association" and collective punishment. If Muslims wish to find a true example in their history of a noble warrior, they should turn away from this false teacher al-Awlaki and look at the example of Salahudin, the great Muslim leader who conquered Jerusalem in 1187 C.E. Despite calls for collective punishment against the Christians of Jerusalem for the crimes of the Crusaders, Salahudin showed mercy to the populace. He let the Christian population remain unmolested and gave them freedom of worship and pilgrimage to their holy sites. When Richard the Lion Heart led the Third Crusade to expel the Muslims, Salahudin treated his enemy with stunning generosity. When Richard fell ill, Salahudin sent his personal doctor to tend to the enemy king. When Richard's horse was killed in battle, Salahudin sent his personal horse to his adversary as a gift. Salahudin's acts of honor and wisdom single-handedly shattered the negative image that many Christians held of Muslims. And for this, he is lauded by both Christian and Muslim historians as a true statesman and moral leader.

I ask any follower of al-Awlaki – which is the greater example you wish to be associated with? The example of your "teacher" who calls you to turn into monsters without empathy? Or Salahudin, who reminded the world that Islam stood for justice and moral restraint, not barbarism and rationalization of murder? If you have any hesitation about the right answer here, then you have left your religion and become the very evil that anti-Muslim bigots have long claimed Islam represents.

The confusion al-Awlaki has created among Muslims is in many ways far more insidious than that of his fellow madman, Osama Bin Laden. For Bin Laden does not claim to be – and is not – an Islamic scholar. Bin Laden's calls for attacking

the West are not steeped in Islamic scholarship, but in a rather crude “eye for an eye” philosophy that says since Americans are killing Muslim civilians, Muslims have a right do the same in return to American civilians. Bin Laden has little understanding of, or interest in, Islamic jurisprudence, primarily because he finds its rules against murdering civilians to be inconvenient. Therefore Bin Laden’s appeal is really based on an emotional bait-and-switch. Get Muslims riled up about all the injustices they have experienced so that they follow him – and not ask too many questions about the justice of his own movement.

But al-Awlaki’s brand of evil is far more sinister. As a trained Muslim preacher, he is an expert in perverting traditional Islamic teachings with strange analogies that have no historical basis, such as his self-serving argument that American and British citizens have elected and pay taxes to a government that kills Muslims, so all are complicit and are lawful targets of revenge. Aside from the fact that this is a nonsensical leap of logic, it ignores what Prophet Muhammad himself did when faced with the opportunity for collectively punishing a population for the crime of its leader. When the Prophet defeated Mecca, he was in a position to unleash vengeance on the city that had driven him out and killed his family and friends. And yet the Prophet, to his enemies’ surprise, instituted a general amnesty and not only forgave the general populace, which under al-Awlaki’s argument was complicit in Mecca’s war against Islam, but also its leadership that organized the war. The lords of Mecca – including the villainous queen Hind, who had cannibalized the Prophet’s uncle as an act of terror – were forgiven and incorporated into the new Muslim state as leading citizens.¹

So I ask the followers of al-Awlaki again – what vision of Islam do you wish to follow? The false Islam of collective punishment claimed by your “teacher”? Or the magnanimous Islam of mercy and wisdom lived by Prophet Muhammad?

Al-Awlaki’s credentials as a former religious preacher are troubling and dangerous. But it should be noted clearly that al-Awlaki does not represent the face of mainstream Muslim preaching. In fact, in his own country of Yemen, there is a remarkable Muslim scholar who has dedicated his life to defeating extremism - Hamoud al-Hitar, a Yemeni judge who deprograms terrorists by teaching them the truth about Islam. Judge al-Hitar is living proof of the power of true Islam to defeat the false Islam of the extremists, of light to overpower darkness. Al-Hitar works with the Yemeni government to counsel Muslim extremists who have been brainwashed by men like al-Awlaki. He talks to them about the Noble Qur’an and traditional Islamic law, and demonstrates to them – line by line, point by point – why terrorism is a violation of Islam’s basic teachings. Remarkably, al-Hitar has deprogrammed over 300 extremists and is said to have even won over high-level Al-Qaeda agents, who have repented and turned on their leaders.

If you still prefer the false words of your “teacher” over the truth of Islam’s message of peace and beauty, then there is no hope for you, any more than

¹ **Note:** There is nothing authentic that proves that Hind bint ‘Utbah chewed or attempted to chew the liver of Hamzah (radiyallaahu anhu). The authentic narration of Ja’far bin ‘Amr bin Umayyah ad-Damree [Bukhaaree no.4072 and others] mentions that Hamzah was killed by Wah-shee and does not mention about cannibalism or attempted cannibalism of his liver. The narration of Moosaa bin Uqbah that mentions that Wah-shee gouged the liver of Hamzah and took it to Hind and she tried to chew it, however she was unable to, is mentioned in Ibn Katheer’s al-Bidaayah wan-Nihaayah (4/43) without an isnaad, and hence it is weak. Further, Ibn Ishaahq narrated in his Seerah 3/133 with a broken isnaad, that Hind was the one who gouged the liver of Hamzah, hence this narration is also weak.

there was for the many misguided souls who followed Jim Jones to their destruction.

With the forces of evil now cloaking themselves in the garb of righteousness, there are two paths before the Muslim community. One of light and one of darkness. And of this moment, the Noble Qur'an says:

"God is the Protector of those who have faith: from the depths of darkness He will lead them forth into light. But of those who reject faith, their patrons are the evil ones: from light they will lead them forth into the depths of darkness. They will be companions of the Fire, to dwell therein." [2:257]

My fellow Muslims, the choice between light and darkness is yours.