

THE COST OF SILENCE:

The Urgency of Action in the face of Oppression.

It is human nature to want easier tasks, seek pleasure, strive for comfort, and avoid hard tasks and discomfort, as well as anything that brings pain. Sigmund Freud, the great psychologist, himself believed that humans are driven by the pleasure principle. This is a fact; there's no need to deny it. However, this had me thinking deeply about my country's situation. We've been oppressed for a very long time—since before I was even born. We always hope and pray for a better tomorrow tirelessly because we are a people of great faith. We believe God can do it for us. We have this faith. But things keep getting harder and worse. We hope each day that a new president will change things for the better, but our hope and optimism are always misplaced. Thus, we keep on praying harder; our religious clerics see to that. I mean, there's nothing wrong with this, given that they faithfully believe that God can and will do the job for us, so they're not misleading us.

God can do the job, but will He? That's the question we all should ask ourselves every day. I know this sounds a bit controversial and blasphemous; however, let's consider this: God has already provided us with brains, life, health, strength, and time. It's ridiculous and absurd to think God will do everything for you when He has provided the means for you to do it yourself. Consider this: If you've provided everything your child needs for school, and yet he asks you to study for him, would you? You can, but would you? God will not send down angels, armies, and fighters to fight your battles, will He? He would help only when you show up for it, when you prove you really want it.

That being said, our situation keeps getting worse because we strive for ease and comfort. Because we don't fight for our rights. Because we stay silent. Because we are afraid. I know it's hard to believe that the situation keeps getting worse because we strive for ease and comfort. One might ask, "Do we get anything easy these days?" or "Are we comfortable?" Well, to understand this, we might have to go back to human nature. Freud, Maslow, Jung, as well as Peterson, have proved that it's human nature to want the easy, the comfortable, and to avoid pain. Therefore, we are driven by pleasure. This is in our unconscious and instinctual. It is easy to not do anything. It feels good to have your tasks done by somebody else. It is easier to prefer your current suffering, because of the comfort it holds, to facing another unfamiliar suffering to change the current suffering. This desire for pleasure, comfort, and dislike for pain has made it easier for us to resort to just prayer for our bad situation to change instead of standing up for ourselves and making change. It is easier to pray than to fight for your civil rights. It is easier to pray than to speak the truth. It is easier to pray when our rights are affected than to stand up for ourselves.

As I already stated, God will not send down an army to fight our battles, and we've already found out why. The Holy Prophet himself fought for his civil rights and freedoms when they were threatened. He engaged in wars and battles. Well, you could say that God commanded or asked him to do that; however, isn't what he did what we should copy and learn from? God didn't fight his battles alone; He didn't send an army to do that. Instead, He told him to fight, and then He helped him win the war. Who are you to sit in your house or mosque and pray for God to fight for you and expect Him to do just that? You have to first stand up, and only then will God help you.

Those tyrants and dictators do not need anything from you but your silence, fear, and blind obedience. The moment you stay silent, resorting to just prayer, you feed those dictators. The moment you obey them blindly, you've shown your ignorance; therefore, they'll treat you as their puppet. Getting your freedom and rights back is not going to be easy, as anything of value is not either. Those dictators and tyrants would stand up for themselves and fight to preserve their source of income, which is YOU. They've tasted it. They know how good it feels and tastes. They are not willingly going to give that up. They would kill, burn, cut, and shoot anyone who threatens to take that away from them. That is why it is a hard choice to choose to fight those individuals. That is why it takes great courage to fight them for your rights and freedom. It is understandable to fear those dangerous individuals. But they feed on our fear. The more we fear them, the worse this escalates. It is understandable to stay silent given how dangerous it is, and thus easier to just pray than to put up a fight, but in the long run, the result will not be admirable. This oppression—we need to push it back. We need to stand up. We need to speak up, despite the danger. If we stay silent in the moment to avoid conflicts, it will deteriorate, which it already has given the kind of life we are facing now. I mean, kidnappers have emerged, scammers have emerged, bandits have emerged, gunmen have emerged, and terrorists have all emerged. Political theft has escalated. Everything has become politics; it's who you know and who knows you, all because you stayed silent to avoid necessary conflicts. Do you like how things have turned out?

Writing this, I remember having a brief chat with a woman named Maryam Muhammad Sani on Facebook in a comment section. She sounds like a wise and sophisticated woman given her vocabulary and the way she talked. We were talking for a moment about how staying

silent about electricity problems could result in losing it for good. I emphasized how our silence could mean the government could take away electricity, and we would not say a word. That wise woman discovered the root of the problem, which could take me weeks, maybe months, to figure out. She implied, in her sophisticated use of words, that this is how we, northerners, are raised. We are taught and preconditioned to think and believe that silence is a virtue. Like, it is a sign of honor to keep and stay silent even when you are oppressed and taken advantage of. She suggested that if you are the older child in the house, it is always highly expected of you to stay silent when you are being taken advantage of or when you spot a potential problem. She brought up a great analogy. She used modern northern marital life. If a woman is oppressed and taken advantage of by her husband, she is expected not to care or say a word. To them, that's a sign of a good wife. She said that some women wouldn't take it up with their parents about a problem because they were already taught to stay silent. Parents think they are doing their daughters a favor by teaching them this when they are really making things worse for her, her kids, and society as a whole. The problem is that you are feeding that tyrant (her husband) with lies. As we already know, tyrants feed on lies. Your silence is a lie when you have something to say. Instead of the problem going away by being silent, it escalates. Once you let oppression, aggression, violence, and injustice slide, you indirectly show that those behaviors are okay and acceptable, or at least tolerable. Therefore, people will keep pushing until they see your limit, or, to put it best, until they see how much you can tolerate.

The same can also be said of our government. The more we tolerate their oppression and tyrannical rulings, the worse it will escalate. No amount of hopes, wishes, or prayers could change that. We have to dare to be dangerous and violent. We have to show them that we, too, are

dangerous and capable of great violence. If a husband is confronted violently for what he did to his wife, showing that his action or behavior isn't tolerable in any way, he would think twice next time he intends to do it again. Thus, controlled use of violence prevents further use of violence. The same can be said of our government. You can't just pray for that husband to change without standing up for yourself first, just like you can't pray for our country to dramatically change for the better without willingly standing up, speaking up, and fighting for change.

Those tyrants and dictators were created by us. They became who they are because of us, because we let them, because we let all their wrongdoings slide, because we stayed silent, and because we were afraid to stand up and speak up for ourselves. We refused to make use of our potential for controlled violence.

Having talked with Maryam Muhammad Sani has led me to a realization that we were taught to fear the tyrants from the day we were born believing they are untouchable and unquestionable, that we were taught to stay silent and resort to just prayer because we were taught to believe that is the highest of virtues. We were taught to believe and think that any kind of violence is unacceptable and is a form of sin, except for self-defense when you are about to be killed.

If you believe that Maryam's finding was wrong because you think that childhood experiences do not constitute what is currently happening in the country (society) right now, here's a question as Peterson put it: "If society is corrupt but not the individuals within it, then where did the corruption originate?" In other words, if you are afraid to stand up for yourself, speak up for yourself, fight for your civil rights, and are unwilling to make use of your potential for controlled violence, wasn't that learned in your childhood from your parents by

making you think and believe that silence and unnecessary tolerance is a virtue? You grow up to adapt this unnatural trait because it is easy and corresponds to your drive for seeking pleasure. That's understandable; however, it is not excusable.

We always wish, pray, and hope for an empathetic and sympathetic president, a governor, a representative, a chairman, or a king who has compassion for and understands us. But sadly, that will never happen. A number of studies have shown that an individual who has experienced a bit of power, even for a short term, scores less on empathy than a normal person. Power can diminish one's ability to empathize with others. Researchers on human behavior and psychologists have shown that people in power are more focused on themselves and their goals than on the people they are leading. **Adam Galinsky**, a psychologist at Columbia Business School, has conducted extensive research on power dynamics. He found that people in positions of power are more likely to prioritize their own perspectives, which reduces their ability to empathize and accurately read others' emotions. In one study, Galinsky observed that powerful individuals often have a “reduced capacity to mirror” others’ emotions, making them less empathetic and responsive. **Dacher Keltner**, in his book "*The Power Paradox: How We Gain and Lose Influence*," explores how power impacts our behavior and relationships, showing how empathy and kindness often help people rise to power but can diminish once they have it. He discusses how those in power tend to focus on their own needs, reducing empathy for others.

For this reason, I think it's a lost cause to wait and hope for a sympathetic leader to bring change out of sympathy and empathy. They would only use that to gain our trust and then turn their backs on us once the power is secured.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that these leaders understand and worry about your pains and suffering; they don't. They don't understand what you feel. They don't empathize with you. They don't sympathize with you. They will always use you to their advantage. They will never allow you to willingly discover your potential of controlled violence to push back against oppression. First, they will succeed by distracting you from knowledge. They need you in ignorance because ignorant people are easier to control and manipulate. They will create problems for you to focus on so you wouldn't think about knowledge. That way, you might never have time to consider their deceit and manipulation, and how they view you as a means to an end. Without time to think and with many things to worry about, you might never understand their deceit and manipulation, and you might never recognize your potential to bring change. They will keep you in ignorance and fear so you will always be easily controlled and manipulated.

It's sad that we're already in this situation. Bandits were created, gunmen were created, terrorist groups were created, obscene inflation was created, and hunger was created—all to keep us distracted from the real problem, which is THEM (the leaders). With hunger, terrorists, bandits, kidnappers, and inflation, it's understandable that almost no one now wants, or maybe feels the need, to send their kids to school. Parents, fathers in particular, always try their hardest to put food on the table. That's their top priority. Like Maryam discovered how we were taught to tolerate disrespect as a sign of honor, I realized that our people were also taught that putting food on the table is all there is to marriage. We believe that. We grow to act on this. Fortunately, change came. We broke the cycle. Fathers and mothers realized that food isn't all there is to marriage. They understood that school is as important as food. They understood that teaching good manners and raising children well is as

important as food. Perhaps that's because they've seen how people they've grown up with had lives different from theirs simply because their parents ensured that they had a good education. Those who had a good education are the ones who control us now. They are the ones who manipulate us. They are the ones who use our young boys and girls to their advantage now. They are the ones who kill us to preserve and maintain their power. They are the ones who make it very hard for us to gain knowledge.

Knowledge is powerful. It is hard to acquire and hard to put into action. I understand why people don't like gaining knowledge. It is hard, and nobody likes the hard. As we already know, we want comfort and an easy life. But that comfort and easy life result in discomfort and a hard life in the long run, as evidenced by our current situation.

Our mothers and fathers have returned to their initial logic and thoughts that putting food on the table is all there is to marriage. That, too, is understandable given the hard economic situation. Fathers and mothers are now more interested in having their 10-year-old kids start making money instead of gaining knowledge. Given the situation, this is very easy to justify. But they are overlooking the fact that satisfying immediate desires, maybe needs, does not lead to long-term fulfillment in life. Those in power will always control you, your children who lack knowledge, and your grandchildren who are very likely to be like your children. Our children will remain in ignorance; therefore, suffering will not cease to exist. They might not discover their potential to push back against oppression and question authority just like us. Is this the life you want for your children and grandchildren? Wouldn't it be better for all of us to sacrifice our time, happiness, money, energy, health, and strength for the next generation? Wouldn't it be better for all of us to sacrifice our hunger and little money for the next generation by teaching

them how to be strong, stand up for themselves, and pay for their schooling, despite the difficulty and danger this entails? Why can't we learn from **history**? History has shown that we are where we are today because our parents' parents refused to allow our parents to study. It's out of love, yes. However, our grandparents failed to adapt to the new era. Are we too foolish to refuse to adapt to this hardship and inflation and let history repeat itself? It is not easy, but, like I said, nothing good comes from easy.

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