

Prof. Dr. Hugh van Skyhawk
Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz
Germany

The Cup of Suffering and the Courage of Lovers

Worthy Excellencies,
Esteemed Colleagues,
Dear Friends,
Beloved Children,

Having served as professor of comparative religions at the Quaid-i Azam University in Islamabad in the years from April 2007 to April 2013, having witnessed again and again up to the present day the aftermaths of attacks by terrorists whose misdeeds can never be justified by the teachings of Muhammad (S.), the Holy Prophet of Islam, I know very well that the strongest weapons of all against terror are not drone bombers, sarin gas, secret agents or secret payoffs, hit men or torture chambers but courage plain and simple and the readiness to stand up for humanity against inhuman crimes, to carry the load for one's brother or sister, to take the bullet so that others may live.

From the beginning of my time in Pakistan (August 1989) up to the present day I have always been aware not only of the horrendous suffering of victims of terror but of the awe inspiring deeds of the martyrs of humanity, the defenders of Muhammad Ali Jinnah's Pakistan.

Some were first responders cut down in the prime of life by bullets and bombs, some were politicians true to their oaths of office and their duties, some were men and women of God who were called home to their Almighty Lord (s.w.t.), some were professors and teachers whose last lessons were to save their students by throwing themselves as human shields between them and their attackers, some were dedicated electrical engineers bravely trying to give light to villages that lived in darkness after sunset. The list is long, the roll call of departed heroes would last for hours.

For a time it seemed that the sacrifices of this legion of departed heroes were in vain. Terrorist attacks increased, the terrorists dictated terms to the government and not *vice versa* as it should be. Minorities continued to be persecuted and killed, liberals kept their heads down and their mouths shut and hoped and prayed that they and their families would be spared.

The attack on the brave Pakhtun schoolgirl, the later Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai, in Mingora, Swat, on 9th October 2012, the attack on a bus for women students of the Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University in Quetta on 16th June 2013, in which 25 women teachers and students were killed, eleven sadistically killed later in hospital beds where they had been taken for treatment of their injuries, the attack on the Pakistan Army school in Peshawar on 16th December 2014, in which 150 students and teachers died for trying bravely to give and get education, and the attack on the Bacha Khan University at Charsadda on 20th January 2016 in which 29 students and professors died --- some in vain attempts to sacrifice themselves to save their fellow classmates and students!

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And then the Shaitan turned again to target the Sufis. Throughout the history of Islam the relationship of the Sufis to the *mullahs* of the *ulema* has seldom if ever been a relaxed relationship. But in recent months the Sufis, together with the Shia and the Ahamdiyya, again became preferred targets of the Taliban, the al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State (IS) in Pakistan.

On 22nd June 2016 in Karachi the famed *qawwali*-singer and Chishti Sufi, Amjad Fareed Sabri (23 December 1976 – 22 June 2016), son of the legendary Ghulam Farid Sabri (1930-1994) was shot down by target killers in a drive-by assassination in Karachi. Thousands followed his funeral cortege through the streets of Karachi singing hymns to his *namaz-i jinaza*, where his young son choked and sobbed while singing his father's funeral prayer. The nation heard that sobbing and recoiled in revulsion.

Five months later followed the attack on the shrine of Shah Noorani in Khuzdar on 13th November 2016 in which 52 died and 100 were injured and on 17th February 2017 the bombing of the *dargah* of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar at Sehwan Sharif in which 88 Sufi pilgrims were killed and 250 seriously injured. But the *dargah mutawalli* bravely beat the gong to end the *dhamaal* in time for Morning Prayer standing barefoot in the blood and gore of the aftermath of the terrorist suicide bombing.

But, at that point in time, the cup of suffering was finally full. Voices began to be heard in the media and on the internet and social networks in Pakistan condemning the assassinations, the shrine attacks, and the bombings of the Taliban, the al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State (IS), some calling them the evil deeds of foreigners intended to destroy the culture of Pakistan.

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On 15th November 2017 an official spokesman of the Pakistan Army declared that the future policy of the army would include the protection of Pakistani cultural property and traditions, including the peace-loving traditions of the Sufis.

Toward this noble goal my contribution to the present conference was conceived.