

## Interview with Anwar Awlaki

This interview has been doing the rounds recently, gives a nice insight to the ever-positive attitude of Anwar Al Awlaki.

Imam Anwar al-Awlaki is a Muslim scholar of Yemeni heritage, born in the United States. He earned his Masters Degree in Educational Leadership from San Diego State University and served as an Imam in San Diego, and later in the Washington, D.C. area, where he headed the Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Center. Imam Anwar was also the Muslim Chaplain at George Washington University. He is the author of many audio lectures, including the popular series on the "Lives of the Prophets";

In 2004, he returned to his native Yemen and was banned from re-entering the U.S. despite having American citizenship. According to reports, he was illegally detained by Yemeni police at the behest of the U.S. Imam Anwar was released from custody on December 12, 2007, having spent a year and a half behind bars. In this interview with InFocus, Imam Anwar spoke from Yemen, reflecting on his past, and talking about the present and future.

InFocus: It's been nearly a year now since you were released from custody. Upon being released from custody, you called the time you spent in detention a "great blessing from Allah." Why do you feel that way?

Imam Anwar: It was a chance to review Quran and to study and read in a way that was impossible out of jail. My time in detention was a vacation from this world.

IF: Have you taken a moment to reflect on that whole ordeal? What did you take away from it?

IA: I still see my detention as a blessing and I believe that I am still enjoying the fruits of those blessings until this moment.

IF: Do you have an even greater appreciation for things that we all maybe take for granted?

IA: Yes, everything is a blessing from Allah. For example I never really liked beans. However in prison I would have beans for breakfast and dinner and they just tasted wonderful. Another example, in my cell the light was on 24 hours a day so when the light bulb went off it was such a blessing to be in darkness for a few days until the bulb was fixed. Even darkness is a blessing we take for granted

IF: What were the conditions like for you in prison?

IA: In general, they were okay.

IF: My understanding is that you were actually just being "held" during the entire time in prison. You were never even charged with a crime, let alone convicted of one, yet you still served time in prison. Is that accurate and if so, do you even now wonder exactly why you were imprisoned?

IA: Yes that is true. I was taken into custody without any explanation and released without any explanation.

IF: You're an American, born in New Mexico, but according to numerous reports, your detention was ordered by U.S. officials. Do you believe that?

IA: Yes, I believe that I was held at the request of the United States government.

IF: You've said in your lectures that the U.S. government has made false accusations against a number of Muslim leaders in America, so you're not the only one. In your opinion, why does the U.S. feel threatened by Muslim leaders?

IA: The US has taken Islam as its enemy just like Abu Jahl did and for the same reasons. I do not see much of a difference between the US on one hand and Pharaoh, [the] A'ad, Thamud, and the people of [Prophet] Noah on the other. They're one and the same.

IF: One of your most recent lectures is titled "Battle of the Hearts & Minds," in which you talk about lies and propaganda. Would you briefly summarize the point of this lecture for our readers?

IA: There has been a plethora of reports from governmental and non-governmental sources on how to defeat what they perceive as the Islamic danger. For example RAND Corporation, which is a think tank affiliated to the Pentagon, has issued a couple of reports on this. They have openly stated that they are unhappy with the way Islam is and want to change it. They then proceed to delineate the characteristics of their version of Islam and how to promote it. They also describe the type of Muslims that they think might be willing to prescribe to this "Rand Islam." Because they understand that the masses in the Muslim world have lost trust in the US, they state that the US hand in this effort should be hidden and that their Muslim stooges should be in the forefront.

IF: What tips would you give to Muslims living in the U.S. to win this battle of the hearts and minds?

IA: Muslims need to be able to tell the difference between the real Islam and the RAND Islam and they need to know who their enemy is. Living in the West, they also have a responsibility of refuting such attempts of changing the religion of Allah.

IF: Please talk about another recent lecture you delivered, "The Dust Will Never Settle Down." Was it your response to all the recent attacks on the character of Prophet Muhammad? It caused quite a bit of controversy &ndash; so much so that you had to address many questions about it on your blog.

IA: Yes that lecture was in response to how the West has been dealing with the great person of Muhammad lately. As you stated, it did cause some controversy and a lot of responses. Some were staunchly in support of what I have said, while others were angrily against. I have backed up everything in there with solid evidence from Qur'an, Hadith and statements of scholars and I stand behind every word in it.

IF: What can we look forward to from you in the near future, insha'Allah (God-willing)?

IA: I am currently working on the last part of the Seerah of Muhammad. Insha'Allah it should be done within a few months. For a long time I have wanted to do a series on the Crusades and on al-Andalus so these are some ideas for the future.

IF: Are you allowed to travel outside of Yemen? If so, do you have any intention to return to the U.S. ?

IA: There are no official restrictions on my travel. However, I do not intend on doing any travelling at the moment.

IF: You must know by now the outpouring of support during your incarceration and since your release. How does that make you feel?

IA: Alhamdulillah I am very grateful to my Muslim brothers and sisters for that. I was also amazed by the amount of email that I received after my release. I thank all my brothers and sisters and ask Allah to reward them abundantly.

IF: Is there anything else you would like to share with our readers?

IA: We need to take our religion more seriously. Islam is not something that we use to fill in the spiritual compartment of our life while we leave everything else to our whims and desires. Islam should rule over every aspect of our life.

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