

ENGLISH: *THE RUGMAKER OF MAZAR -E-SHARIF*

In any conflict only the strong survive

Statement of Explanation

I have chosen to explore the prompt 'In any conflict only the strong survive' through an expository interview based on the ABC's One Plus One program. Using this approach I tried to utilise my knowledge of Najaf's character and tone of voice to unpack the ideas relating to the prompt. My initial response was changed when I began to take on a different view, the view of a person who had witnessed and survived the atrocities of war. Najaf was a perfect example. I was able to access his first account impressions of conflict in his book *The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif*. My initial view was in agreement with the prompt as I considered strength to be physical, emotional and moral. However, when considering the Taliban's stronghold over Afghanistan and their apparent victory in outlasting soldiers from western countries, I began to realise that although their motives were immoral, they were the strong ones and they were the ones that survived. (In the context of war, I count those who live as the survivors). To share this perspective I wanted to incorporate the voice of Najaf in my response. This interview is in response to Najaf's latest book release and is targeted at Australian adult audiences or students studying *Encountering Conflict as Context* in the VCE. Through an interview, the audience is able to more easily connect with the guest and gain greater insight into issues associated with the struggles and type of strength needed to overcome conflict. The interview format also gave me a platform to convey my ideas in a conversational manner, making it easier for the audience to relate to. I have employed a strong use of voice to represent how Najaf would respond in this context. The conversation starts off light-heartedly to allude to Najaf's tone and naivety, which I became familiar with after reading his autobiography. I have also incorporated humour, once again to reveal Najaf's character. Throughout the interview I have integrated many of the events that he describes in his book to add authenticity and create, what I would imagine to be, a more accurate response to the prompt. I have also intertwined some philosophical views that I imagine Najaf would hold to hint to his Afghani upbringing. In the last paragraphs I have used the recurring metaphor of training for an event to highlight the type of strength needed to overcome conflict, this creates a lasting image for the audience.

In any conflict only the strong survive

Hutcheon: On this edition of One Plus One; conflict, strength and survival.

theme music

Hutcheon: Hello and welcome to One Plus One, I'm Jane Hutcheon. Najaf Mazari is no stranger to conflict. He is a survivor of the war in Afghanistan with an extraordinary story to tell. With the upcoming publication of his new book "The Honey Thief", we caught up with Mr. Mazari to discuss what it takes to be a survivor in a world punctuated by conflict. Najaf Mazari is speaking with Tom Tilley.

Tilley: Mr. Mazari, welcome to One Plus One.

Mazari: Thank you, thank you, I'm so happy to talk with you Mr. Tilley.

Tilley: We've read in your first book *The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif* of your extraordinary escape from the war in Afghanistan and the conflicts you encountered on this journey. It seems as though conflict infiltrated every aspect of your life. How is it that you were able to overcome what so many others could not?

Mazari: I do not know. Can you tell me? "Too many Afghans have not been blessed in the way I have been blessed...It is a puzzle that can never be answered."

Tilley: Certainly your inner strength and fortitude, which are highly evident in your book, contributed to your survival. Is it fair to say that in any conflict only the strong survive?

Mazari: Well, my dear brother Gorg Ali was a man of resilience, patience and faith in God; a man of physical, emotional and mental strength. His life was ended by a single bullet. No one is protected in conflict, in war; it is fate that must determine your existence, your survival. However sometimes I think to myself, Najaf, you can fool fate by telling it where you want to go. I think the Taliban know this too. I believe the power to survive depends on your passion and determination to make life how you want it to be. It is all about the inner passion or strength.

Tilley: So you believe the Taliban are strong in this war because of their inner strength?

Mazari: Yes! And I believe that they are winning too! They are firm in their passion for power which makes them strong, although their motives are anything but admirable. Any man who wants something so desperately within their heart will always be the survivor. These are men with dangerous passions, yet fate has granted them strength for survival, as they have displayed remarkable determination. They are men “who would be prepared...to commit themselves and a hundred generations of their family to battle, from now until the end of the world.”

Tilley: So what are your opinions on America and Australia’s recent withdrawal from the war in Afghanistan?

Mazari: Sadly, I think their presence never had any hope of restoring peace in Afghanistan. I am very thankful for this country’s concern for my homeland however “western countries with soldiers in Afghanistan do not really understand what ‘a long time’ means”. For Afghanistan, even a hundred years is not a long time. The Taliban fighters have only one mission. Victory.

Tilley: In your first book, you describe your capture and torture by the Taliban. Remarkably you escape death and do not give into pressure to confess your allegiance. Does the cost of denying one’s values for survival outweigh the threat of publicly upholding your values, even in the face of death?

Mazari: In my eyes, no. The men who confessed to something they did not do only confessed to hasten their death, they saw no future ahead of them. “Even when I had no faith left in the power of the truth” I refused to confess. It may have been my stubbornness, but more likely it was my ingrained passion, my dream for a better life. Some of my dear friends in that room lived their lives with honour and integrity, however in the face of conflict they were not fit to look death in the face and refuse their fate. In a way I had been exercising for this moment my whole life. I had encountered many conflicts before to prepare myself for this grand event. The rockets in the night. Running from army recruiters. The shrapnel embedded in my leg. The death of Gorg Ali. I see now that God had been preparing me for this moment, lighting the fire of hope and determination I needed for survival.

Tilley: Conflict is inevitable, even in Australia. Have your many experiences of conflict strengthened you for your next encounter with another difficult situation? Did you feel empowered after your successful journey here?

Mazari: “I had survived the rocket attack, I had managed to keep out of the hands of the militias enlisting men and boys in their armies, I had come back from the dead after falling into the hands of the Taliban”, I made the dangerous journey to this land and survived. You would think that after all of this I would feel invincible. This was not the case. When I was finally granted a permanent visa I did not rejoice as you would expect a free man to rejoice; I was exhausted. Every shred of strength and hope I had within me was used in these years of terror. I am a survivor of the war in Afghanistan, but I am a survivor with enduring scars. I have a family and business in Australia. All of my inner hopes and dreams are focused on my beautiful daughter Maria now. In Afghanistan it is very important to continue the family line. If fate should choose to test us again, Maria has the

strength to survive. I can see it in her eyes. She has Gorg Ali's resilience and patience but she also has my fire and passion, the power to direct fate.

Tilley: Thank you for your time Mr. Mazari. We wish all the best for you and your future endeavours.

Hutcheon: That was Najaf Mazari speaking to Tom Tilley. Next on our program...