

14<sup>th</sup> March 2024

## Reciprocating

**"There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm."**

Abu Saïd Saád bin Malik bin Sinan Al-Khudri

*The Sunnah and the Science of Health*, by Imam Yahia bin Sharaful-Deen An-Nawawi

Reflecting on the theme of choices from yesterday, some words of Jesus stuck in my head: *You have heard it said ...* They're from the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus is offering a new way of living. Here is the transition, from a learned, Old Testament theology – *You have heard it said* – to a different, New Testament focus – *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*.

"You have heard it said," Jesus taught, "'you should love your neighbour and hate your enemy'." Good, and familiar, Old Testament teaching. "But," he continued, "I offer you a new way: love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." And again, Jesus taught, "You have heard it said, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.'" Traditional thinking for his hearers. "But," he went on, "there's another way. Don't respond to evil with evil. Learn to turn the other cheek." Goodness! What a difference!

*You have heard it said* that you can combat violence with violence, force with retribution, harm with reciprocating harm. But, what then? The perpetuation of destruction, and misery, and pain? So ... there's a choice. Didn't you know that *another* way is possible? And it *isn't* reciprocating!

In one of Aesop's Fables, the Wind and the Sun are arguing over who is the stronger. They see a traveller coming down the road and decide to settle the argument. Whoever can get the traveller to take his coat off, will be the winner. The Wind blows as hard as it can, but the traveller tightens his coat up even more. Then the Sun softly shines its rays on the passer-by. The traveller suddenly feels hot and finally removes his coat. The Sun wins! And the moral? Persuasion is better than Force. A gentle manner can win out when strength and power cannot.

Choices! In personal relationships; in communities; between opposing ideologies; in international conflicts; among religions ... there is a choice. It's not always an easy one, but surely there are more options than force and violence to settle complex situations. Might we learn to find a new way, and move on from reciprocating harm?

### **A prayer for today**

*A new way, different from my natural instincts and learned behaviour?*

*May that Way also be mine. Amen*