

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



Fasting inculcates self-discipline and promotes duty-consciousness.

ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

Spirit of Islam is a monthly magazine which is now in its Eighth year of publication. The aim of this journal is to present Islam in the contemporary idiom, while at the same time the contents are of universal appeal and of interest to a wider circle of spiritual seekers. It is our desire to help Muslims rediscover Islam, focusing on its message of peace and spirituality as derived from the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet, and in general we strive towards religious understanding for bringing about greater harmony.

Another purpose of this magazine is to assist its readers to deal with life's challenges, deriving positivity even from negative occurrences, gaining in spirituality and developing themselves intellectually so that they may contribute constructively to society.

The magazine's regular readers will appreciate that the entire thrust of its articles is directed to the individual—a collection of intellectually prepared individuals being the sole foundation on which a peaceful and harmonious society can be built.

As the subtitle indicates, *Spirit of Islam* is working towards enlightening people on the subject of global peace and regularly addresses relevant contemporary issues. The articles on peace based on the teachings of the Prophet of Islam offer us an ideology of peace—principles which lay down how peace may be established between conflicting groups, controversies resolved and conflicts defused. We believe that violence begins in the mind and so an effective ideology of peace needs to be presented to counter its influence.

We hope and pray that God helps us in this noble endeavour and grants us His special blessings!



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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

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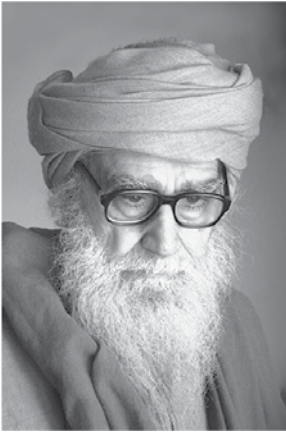
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, born in 1925, in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, is an Islamic spiritual scholar who is well-versed in both classical Islamic learning and modern disciplines. The mission of his life has been the establishment of worldwide peace. He has received the Padma Bhushan, the Demiurgus Peace International Award and Sayyidina Imam Al Hassan Peace award for promoting peace in Muslim societies. He has been called 'Islam's spiritual ambassador to the world' and is recognized as one of its most influential Muslims¹. His books have been translated into sixteen languages and are part of university curricula in six countries. He is the founder of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality based in New Delhi.

THE DOHA PACT

FEBRUARY 29, 2020 witnessed a breakthrough event. After a war that did not seem to end, the US finally decided to leave Afghanistan. In a landmark peace deal known as the Doha Pact, the US and NATO forces agreed to withdraw their military from Afghanistan in 14-months' period provided the Taliban uphold the deal. American military intervention in Afghanistan lasted for about 19 years. The US invaded Afghanistan weeks after the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre. More than 2400 US troops and more than 150,000 Afghans have been killed in this conflict. In the process, the US spent about two trillion dollars, almost 1000 times more than Afghanistan's GDP.

The present-day so-called Islamic terrorism is the result of an ideology. An ideology can only be countered with another ideology.

Muslim militancy has arisen from a political interpretation of Islam. The need now is to present Islam as it is, without the interpolation or interpretation of later thinkers. In the wake of the rise and spread of Communism, the US countered it by presenting the ideology of Capitalism. The market was flooded with anti-communist literature.

1. The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims 2020, Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, Jordan.

This approach proved successful in the long run. Now, Communism in a very distorted form is restricted to just a handful of countries. The challenge of Muslim militancy should also have been faced with an ideology of peace. The US, confident over its great military prowess, entered Afghanistan, only to suffer loss after loss.

The Doha Pact is a reiteration that the age of war is long gone. Even if you are a superpower, you cannot endure the use of violence as a strategy. With the advent of modern-day, advanced and lethal equipment of warfare, war has become destructive for all sides. In the words of Jake Fulton, "There are no winners of war, only survivors." The

The peace-loving person first thinks and then acts. The violent person first acts and then thinks.

There is hope in peaceful action from start to finish.

In violent action, however, there are false hopes to begin with, which are soon followed by frustration.

Doha Pact is one of the most important events of recent times. It is a glaring example that shows that violence as a means to achieve an end is counterproductive. No one, not even a superpower, can afford war. The only way to resolve conflict is through peaceful negotiations. The strategy of peace is the only viable formula for conflict-resolution in this world. A US citizen working for wounded veterans put it aptly, "Peace in any way, shape or form is a good thing." (*The Times of India*, March 1, 2020)

Peace is the result of planned action, while violence is purely an aggressive response to any kind of provocation. The peace-loving person first thinks and then acts. The violent person first acts and then thinks. There is hope

in peaceful action from start to finish. In violent action, however, there are false hopes to begin with, which are soon followed by frustration.

Islam is a religion of nature. It advocates peace at all times. The Quran says, "reconciliation is best" (4: 128). Why is reconciliation taken to be 'best'? It is because a situation of conflict halts constructive activity. The benefit of agreeing to reconciliation is that one is thereby spared the need to waste one's time, strength and resources on useless confrontation, so that one can focus on constructive efforts instead. A course of action that is opposed to reconciliation is always and inevitably a course leading to destruction. The Prophet of Islam is reported to have said, "God is gentle and He loves gentleness. He rewards for gentleness what is not granted for harshness and He does not reward anything else like it." (*Sahih Muslim*). God loves kindness

and gentleness in all matters, so we should manifest these qualities even when we face abuse and cruelty.

It is now better late than never for both parties concerned, especially for Afghanistan. Afghanistan should now utilize this period of respite to rebuild their war-torn and ravaged nation. □

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*The aim of fasting
is to weaken the
material aspect of man
and strengthen the
spirituality
in him.*

FROM THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Prof. Farida Khanam is an author, editor, translator, public speaker and former professor of Islamic Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Among her books are 'A Simple Guide to Sufism' and 'A Study of World's Major Religions'. She has translated into English many books authored by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan. Currently the chairperson of CPS International, she is a regular contributor of articles to various publications. Prof. Khanam has edited Maulana's English translation of the Quran and has also translated his Urdu commentary of the Quran into English. She can be reached at hub@thespiritofislam.org

RAMADAN: A MONTH OF RIGOROUS TRAINING

THE Prophet Muhammad called the month of Ramadan a month of patience. The Quran states that fasting during this month has been prescribed so that man may become God-fearing. These two qualities are required of us every month of the year. Why is it that they have been so particularly mentioned in connection with the month of Ramadan?

The reason for this is Ramadan is the special period of the year during which these qualities are to be cultivated. Of course, the exercise of patience and piety is required of every believer every day of the year and every year of his life. These are principles to which he must at all times adhere. But in this one particular month, special stress has been laid on this so that these two attributes become an integral part of one's character. This is done by laying down a certain discipline, so that much as people may want to do something, they will then refrain from doing it if it is an action displeasing to God. If they wish to eat or drink something, no matter how strong their desires, they will not do so if Divine law prohibits it. They will follow the will of God irrespective of the circumstances and regardless of any difficulties they may encounter in the process. Even if it means leaving behind, or abstaining from, that which they hold most dear, they will not abandon the way of God.

Ramadan is a kind of "crash course" aimed at inculcating in people a truly religious spirit and making them conscious of their responsibilities to God. For one month in the year, people spend all of their time in

worship. All of their days and nights are spent in prayer and fasting. In this way, people are trained to perform every action in the divinely appointed way. Their waking and sleeping, their eating and their abstinence, their actions and their inactions; all must be in accordance with the commands of God. This is how a true servant of God should behave, not just on special occasions, but every day of the year. For one month, certain habits are enforced as part of a certain discipline, so that for the rest of the year, the person will have no difficulty in exercising the same control over all of their actions.

Ramadan is a kind of "crash course" aimed at inculcating in people a truly religious spirit and making them conscious of their responsibilities to God.

Thoroughly imbued with the qualities of patience and piety during the month of Ramadan, one is able to maintain the same high standard of conduct through the rest of the year. □



Fasting awakens in man the feeling of gratefulness. It also serves as a method to increase the efficacy of worship.

POLITICAL SOVEREIGNTY

Not a True Goal

POLITICAL power is not the goal of Islam. However, God does grant political power to people as a means by which human beings are tested. Just as they are tested when bestowed with wealth. With the same objective, political authority is granted to every nation one after another according to God's wisdom. This passing on of power from one nation or group to another is intended so that God might observe how people conduct themselves when they attain political power. (10: 14)

This political dominance, according to the Quran, is granted only by God. He bestows it upon whoever He wishes, and withholds it from whoever He wishes. The Quran says:

The political dominance, according to the Quran, is granted only by God. He bestows it upon whoever He wishes, and withholds it from whoever He wishes.

Say, 'Lord, sovereign of all sovereignty. You bestow sovereignty on whom You will and take it away from whom You please; You exalt whoever You will and abase whoever You will. All that is good lies in Your hands. You have the power to will anything.' (3: 26)

Accumulation of wealth is not the purpose of life. Similarly, attaining political supremacy is not the goal of the Islamic message. It is against the Divine plan that a community should make attainment of political dominance its sole purpose and then strive to realize this objective.

As far as the believers are concerned, political dominance is something which has been promised to them. It is not something that believers should set as their goal. In other words, it would not be right for the believers to start a movement aimed directly at the acquisition of political authority. What they must endeavour to do instead is to cultivate within themselves strong consciousness of Islamic faith and fulfil all practical obligations of faith pertaining to themselves. Those who do so are promised by God thus:

God has promised to those among you who believe and do good works that He will surely grant them power in the land as He granted to those who were before them; and that He will surely establish for them their religion which He has chosen for them.

He will cause their state of fear to be replaced by a sense of security. Let them worship Me and associate no other with Me. Whoever still chooses to deny the truth is truly rebellious. (24: 55)

Political dominance or an ideal and righteous socio-political system is not something that will materialize out of thin air. In this world, righteous individuals are always needed to establish a righteous system. In the absence of righteous people, a righteous government cannot be established. This is exactly according to rule of action and consequence. Aiming for a harvest of fruits, one must pass through the rigorous stage of planting seeds. No one can ever relish the taste of fruit without doing the necessary work of planting the seeds in the field.

The same principle is at work with regard to the establishment of a socio-political system. Those who seek political glory need to first instil a higher level of faith in the people. They should first try to build a lofty moral character in the people. They should prepare such individuals who deal with people rising above all kinds of psychological stimuli, who have the capability to remain modest even after attaining power, who are not lured away when the treasures of the Earth fall into their hands, who stick to the principle of justice even after their ego has been hurt. Such individuals establish a righteous system. Without such people, raising the slogan of political rule is in fact a cause of corruption in the land, not a positive result-oriented action. □

Those who seek political glory need to first instil a higher level of faith in the people. They should first try to build a lofty moral character in the people.



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UPRIGHT SYSTEM OR UPRIGHT INDIVIDUAL?

True Islamic Ideal

AT the end of the nineteenth century, the communist outlook spread. The first Communist system was established in the Soviet Union in 1917. Then, the Communist propaganda began to rapidly spread, in a much more organized way. At that time, the ideology of Communism spread so much that Professor J K Galbraith said, "Never in the world has a theory been so much promoted as the idea of Communism".

Just as people at large were swayed by this intellectual environment, many Muslim scholars were also influenced, for example, Maulana Hasrat Mohani, Maulana Muhammad Hifzur Rahman Seoharwi, Dr. Mohammad Iqbal, Gamal Abdel Nasser, etc. Influenced by this environment, Maulana Abul 'Ala Maududi began to describe Islam in terms of a socio-political system. He claimed that Islam is a complete socio-political system, and that it is the solemn duty of the Muslim *ummah* to establish this ideal human system in the world. For them, according to Maulana Maududi, the purpose of *jihad* was to defeat man-made socio-political systems and replace them with the superior system of Islam.

The commandments given in the Quran are mostly individual in nature, not only in the matter of faith and the practising of good deeds but also in other mundane matters.

But the fact is that this concept was born in response to Communism. It was like an Islamic edition of Communism. The Quran provides no basis for such an interpretation. Even in the time of the Prophet of Islam and the Pious Caliphs, there was no such 'standard system'. If the purpose of religion is to create a standard social system in the world, then this target has never been fulfilled in the time of any prophet in history. On both the theoretical and the practical fronts, this

concept is still unproven as well as impractical.

The commandments given in the Quran are mostly individual in nature, not only in the matter of faith and the practising of good deeds but also in other mundane matters, e.g. *remain steadfast in religion* (42: 13), *act in all fairness* (57: 25), *enjoin what is good, and forbid what is evil* (3: 110). These directives are in essence addressed to the individual. These are not meant to be enforced by a government.

It is true that the Quran contains some laws and provisions which deal with government affairs, for example, theft, adultery, drunkenness, false accusation of adultery, murder, etc. But such orders are few. The purpose of laying down these rules is not to create a standard society, but, rather, to maintain a necessary level of order in society.

One proof of this view is that there is no specific instruction in Islam regarding many of the most important components required to establish an ideal society, such as how to appoint a ruler of a state. After the Prophet's death, there were five such heads of the Muslim state, including Umar bin Abdul Aziz (died AD 720), who are unanimously known as the Pious Caliphs. But the appointment process for all of them was different. Similarly, there was no specific system or structure of the parliament in the early days of Islam to serve as a model. After the emigration of the Prophet of Islam to Madinah, even the Prophet followed the old political system of Madinah until the conquest of Makkah.

The main goal of Islam is that every individual attain God-realization, everyone become a rabbani person—a devoted servant of God in worship and in ethics.

The present world has been created in order to put man to the test. To meet the requirements of the test, there will always be unfavourable conditions. According to the creation plan of God, the ideal world will be created in Heaven. In the present world, man's task is to prove himself worthy of gaining entry into the next ideal world (Paradise). Trying to create a standard and ideal social system in the present world is like trying to build Paradise in the present world, which according to God's plan is not possible at all.

The concept of Islam regarding social system is that if a system exists that does not pose a problem for the believers to practice their religion, then it should not be challenged. By recognizing this in practice, Islam will be followed at the levels of individuals and institutions. Following the same principle, the Prophet Joseph did not oppose the polytheist king of Egypt, because under him, Prophet Joseph could live up to the requirements of monotheism. In similar fashion, the Prophet Muhammad's Companions emigrated from Makkah and went to Ethiopia. It was then ruled by a Christian king named Negus. The Prophet's Companions did not clash with him, as he granted people religious freedom.

The notion that Islam is an ideal socio-political system and that it is the duty of the Muslim community to establish this system in the world is against the real goal of Islam. This approach goes against the very target of Islam. The main goal of Islam is that every individual attain God-realization, everyone become a *rabbani* person—a *devoted servant of God* (3: 79) in worship and in ethics. Islam desires that individuals should make success in the Hereafter their main goal. A person who interprets Islam in terms of an ideal system makes this present world his target, rather than the Hereafter. For such a person, preparing for the Hereafter makes way for the pursuit of worldly glory. Islam asks a person to lead a God-oriented life and become a devoted servant of God, but the political interpretation reduces Islam to a material and political religion.

The main purpose of Islam is that man should discover God. He should build a spiritual personality within himself. He should begin to see the higher truth in his daily affairs. He should consider the life of this world to be a mere temptation and the life of the Hereafter to be truly

As far as the task Islam entrusts the believers is concerned, the real target of Islam is the moral and spiritual development of individuals, and not the establishment of social and governmental structures.

desirable. For a person with this bent of mind, establishing an ideal socio-political system in this world is akin to a passenger of a train who starts to make his desired home on a railway platform!

While mentioning Paradise, the Quran says: *It is for the like of this that all should strive* (37:61). The Prophet said: "There is no life worth living except the life of the Hereafter." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*)

The Quran and the corpus of *Hadith* abound with similar teachings. The mind that develops from these teachings is incompatible with the concept of Islam as a socio-political system. It would then be fair to say that the 'political

system' approach makes a Muslim a kind of 'Islamic Communist'. It does not really build an Islamic personality.

The terms *Rabbani* (spiritual) *Islam* and *Political Islam* can be used to explain this difference. *Rabbani Islam* fosters the spirit of God-realization in man. It cultivates a sense of accountability and introspection within man. Such a person begins to live in anticipation of Paradise. His days and nights pass in the blissful cogitations of the Hereafter. Worldly success is unimportant to him, while the success of the Hereafter

becomes all-important. He makes use of the world out of necessity while possessing a boundless passion for the Hereafter.

Starkly opposite to this is the thinking that develops under the ideology of *Political Islam*. The mindset of a person who harbours such an ideology becomes totally political. Issues of politics and government become the focus of his attention. Things of a political nature consciously or unconsciously become the top priority for him, and things of the spiritual nature are practically relegated to the backseat. In matters of worship, he is content with the observance of outward form. His moral behaviour is subject to political considerations. Things like piety, fear of God, modesty and humble prayers become alien to his temperament. If you sit in the assembly of such people, you will most likely hear political talk, not the talk of God and His Glory.

The purpose of Islam is not to establish a social and governmental system, but, rather, to develop individuals. In a society where a considerable number of people are thus spiritually prepared, this will certainly show its impact on the social level as well. But as far as the task Islam entrusts the believers is concerned, the real target of Islam is the moral and spiritual development of individuals, and not the establishment of social and governmental structures.

While embarking on an academic study of Islam it is necessary to accept the above principle. If this principle is not accepted, then the mission of all the prophets would seem inferior and unsatisfactory, both theoretically and practically.

The study of the Quran shows that the real purpose of the Prophets' mission was to prepare people of such lofty and noble character who would be considered worthy to settle in the eternal Paradise of the Hereafter. The purpose of the teaching of the prophets was not to create a world for people in this world, where they could have a 'paradise' to live in before the Hereafter and the Day of Accounting. □

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BLESSINGS OF GOD

Taken for Granted

Sunday Times of India, February 16, 2020 carries the following article under the heading 'To breathe is a luxury'.

FROM struggling in the past few years, Maneesha Ramakrishnan (50) has progressed to liking her feeble, hoarse voice. Her presence at home is marked by her breathing through a tracheostomy tube (for oxygen) on her neck. "To breathe is a luxury. Now, children laugh as they hear me breathe. My voice sounds funny to them and that's joy for me", she says.

When you suffer some kind of damage, either internally or externally, keep your patience. Be empty-minded for a while. If you give this chance to your mind, it will soon release a strong energy and this energy will provide you the help required in any untoward situation.

She is one of the survivors of the Carlton tragedy that shook Bengaluru ten years ago, on the 23rd February afternoon. She was working in a private company on the seventh floor of the building. The toxic fumes she inhaled changed the course of her life. "My vocal folds and windpipe got stuck to each other. The larynx was affected equally. I lost my voice. That's why I struggle to speak," says Maneesha, whose smile is still infectious. Her courage can be felt from the following words, she says "I don't call myself a victim. I have braved it all through. I was never depressed".

The story of this braveheart teaches us some great lessons. Human beings possess the ability to bounce back from seemingly gloomy predicaments. This ability is known as resilience. Resilience is a law of nature. It

means the ability to recover quickly from illness, change, or misfortune. It is found everywhere—in the plant world, the animal world and the human world.

Resilience in physics refers to the ability to return to the original form after being bent, compressed or stretched. Dr. Bruce McEwen, Head of Laboratory of Neuroendocrinology at the Rockefeller University has researched this subject and has concluded: "The human brain is very resilient. Give it a chance and it will make every effort to repair itself."

To realize this potential, one must demonstrate the quality of 'patience'. When you suffer some kind of damage either internally or externally,

keep your patience. Be empty-minded for a while. This is what Dr. McEwen has called giving the mind a chance. If you give this chance to your mind, it will soon release a strong energy and this energy will provide you the help required in any untoward situation.

Studies show that the mind has enormous potential. And that potential can be tapped by the power of resilience. In a normal situation, this potential remains dormant. When one has any kind of unusual experience, the brain becomes active and starts unfolding its hidden energy. And if it is given a chance, it will certainly recover all the losses. The only condition is that you should not disturb or hinder its natural process by some unnatural activity.

Another lesson from this is to remind ourselves of the untold blessings that we enjoy. If this fact were not so often lost sight of, people would never become victims of negative thinking or take to constantly complaining. In their thinking, they would always be positive, and positive thinking is undoubtedly the source of all kinds of good things.

There are no less than seventy-eight organs in every human body. All these organs work in perfect coordination. This is why a person is able to perform his innumerable activities so smoothly. If one or more organs were to fail, normal life for human beings would become almost impossible. Moreover, these organs of the human body function involuntarily and unflaggingly. If these organs had to be operated in the way that a machine has to be, man would never be able to do any other work. He would be too busy making all these organs function.

Resilience is a law of nature. It means the ability to recover quickly from illness, change, or misfortune.

This realization makes us conscious of great blessings of the Creator. We realize that our Creator has bestowed us with the capacity to overcome the challenges that are thrown our way. The Creator has equipped us with the necessary means to address our problems. Hence, we should cultivate a feeling of gratitude for the Creator. The realization of being endowed with such great blessings makes a person a positive thinker in the complete sense of the term. In this way he will become a healthy member of society. □



TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE

We often talk of peace in the context of war. But this is a very narrow and restricted notion of peace. Peace is deeply linked with the entirety of human life. Peace is a complete ideology in itself. Peace is the only religion for both—man and the universe. It is the master-key that opens the doors to every success. Peace creates a favourable atmosphere for success in every endeavour. Without peace, no positive action—small or big—is possible.



THREE AGES OF WAR

MAN is by birth an egoist. He wants everything to happen his way. He wants the whole world to be just as he wants it to be. Acknowledging the rights and interests of others is against his instinctive way of thinking. It is this feature of man that is the fundamental cause of various forms of social conflict. When these conflicts assume a violent form, they become what is called 'war'. Because of this mind-set of man, war has been a basic aspect of human history down the centuries, with history being characterized by a pervasive climate of war. Hate, violence and war—all these are different manifestations of man's egoistic nature.

Studied from this angle, history reveals itself to have passed through three periods of war. The first is what can be called 'Political War'; the second, 'Class War'; and the third, 'Ideological War'.

The long period of the ancient past was the Age of Political War. Political wars were basically waged in order to conquer territory.

In the 19th century, in the name of Communism a new concept of war came into being—Class War. Communist thinkers developed a theory according to which there is one basic cause for every sort of evil, and that is, social divisions based on economic class. They claimed that by putting an end to these divisions and establishing a classless society, a society free from all evils would become a reality. This theory won considerable support among people. In 1917, the Communists got the opportunity to establish their first government—in Russia. Later, this

regime expanded, and soon it became a 'superpower' in the form of the Soviet Union. Following this, the world witnessed the confrontation of two warring blocks, one represented by the Soviet Union and the other represented by the USA. The conflict between these two blocks ended in 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, class war, too, came to an end for all practical purposes. But influenced by the Communist movement, a new ideological age came into being, which can be called the Age of Ideological War. Ideological war did not get much support at the global level. But among Muslims it did obtain widespread popularity. The 20th century witnessed the emergence of several Muslim ideologues who invented a political interpretation of Islam, which was geared to fuelling ideological wars. This political interpretation of Islam gained widespread acceptance among Muslims across the world.

Put briefly, the political interpretation of Islam projects Islam as a complete socio-political system. According to proponents of this theory, it is the religious duty of the Muslim *ummah* to establish this system over the entire world. These people believe that all systems other than the 'Islamic system' that exist in the world are evil and false. They contend that the *raison d'être* of the Muslim *ummah* is to put a complete end to every sort of what they call these 'evil' systems, no matter what the cost, and to replace these systems with the 'Islamic system'.

In the 20th century, a number of powerful movements emerged among Muslims in different parts of the world fired with this objective. These movements began disseminating their ideas through writings. But when they saw it was not possible to do away with the dominant forces through simply publishing and disseminating literature, they tried to topple the dominant forces by participating in elections in their respective countries. But they failed to achieve their objective this way too. After this, they began violent wars against dominant forces in different parts of the world. But here too they failed to obtain any success. Despite enormous efforts, it proved to be impossible for them to remove the dominant forces from power, establish their own political dominance and march towards their dream of global 'Islamic government'.

After this, these movements moved into a third and very deadly phase, which is generally called 'suicide-bombing'. Their followers were now ready to kill themselves in violent attacks in the hope of thereby destabilizing their supposed enemies and breaking their power.

This Age of Ideological War in the name of Islam still continues, in the 21st century. The devastating attacks of 9/11, when some Muslim youths killed themselves and destroyed the World Trade Centre in New York, are just one manifestation of this age of ideological war.

Here the question arises as to why, despite its utter failure in achieving its goals, the popularity of the ideology based on the political interpretation of Islam has not come to an end in the same way as the popularity of some other ideologies, such as Communism, was ended when they proved to be impractical. Why is it that the ideology based on the political interpretation of Islam continues even now even though it has proven itself to have failed in practice?

The reason for this is the proponents of the political interpretation of Islam have made this out to be, allegedly, a cardinal tenet of Islamic faith or belief. In ancient times, war always took place for worldly purposes, such as disputes over territory. But the rise of Democracy and the formation of the United Nations made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for one country to conquer and control for long another country's territory. And so, the Age of Political War came to an end. Likewise, the two World Wars proved that class conflict as a fundamental feature of humankind was only a hypothesis and that the ideology that was based on this hypothesis was not a practicable one. As a result of this, the Comintern (Communist International), which sought to promote class conflict all across the globe, ended, and along with it the theory of class war.

According to the proponents of the political interpretation of Islam, Islam is a 'complete system', in the sense of an alternative socio-political system. But they go even further than this and claim that the issue of a Muslim's eternal salvation depends on this 'system'. They argue that a person's success in the Hereafter depends on his role in establishing this 'system' in this world. They claim that if a person strives to establish Islam as a 'complete system' on Earth, he will get eternal Paradise in the Hereafter after death, while if he does not make such efforts, he will face eternal Hell. Hence, according to the ideologues of the political interpretation of Islam, Muslims have just two choices: either they realize the goal of the global 'Islamic system' in practice or else they keep up with their confrontation and conflict until they achieve this goal. According to them, a third option is simply impossible.

This means according to the political interpretation of Islam, the issue is fundamentally an ideological one. Their opponents may wage war against them and kill them, but after that, those of them who survive

may be determined to continue on the very same path, because they believe it to be nothing less than a matter of religious belief. According to them, death in this supposed 'holy war' is not merely being killed, as is understood conventionally. Rather, they believe that dying in this war will bring them instant entry into Paradise. They believe that death in such a war gives them the status of 'martyr' and dispatches them to Paradise, their desired destination. □



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A GLIMPSE OF HEAVEN

Open Your Eyes

IF one were able to observe the universe from a distance, one would be dumbstruck at this unique phenomenon. To one's great amazement, one would find unfathomable space, blazing stars and dry rocks flying at a great speed in the vast universe. The only exception in this inconceivably vast space is our small planet, called Earth. In the whole universe known to us, the Earth is the only planet that supports life; where there is water, greenery, flora and fauna, where man has been endowed with the unique ability to see, think and plan, the rarest phenomena in the universe.

The very fact of settling man on such an exceptional planet indicates that God wants to bestow on him some gift of an exceptional nature. That is, to create a unique world in the universe that will be called Heaven, in which all forms of pleasure will be brought together. That world will be free of all disadvantages and limitations, an everlasting manifestation of God's perfection.

Now the question arises, who are those fortunate souls worthy of such special treatment by God? The present world provides us with the answer: The present world is a model of the heavenly world, the world of God's choice. The perfect world of Heaven will be inhabited by those souls who are blissfully free of worldly considerations, who can lead their lives like a green tree which bears its fruit and spreads its branches to give shade to friends and foes alike. Heaven is for those who can sing, like birds, the praises of their Lord, even when He remains invisible. It is for those who can derive sustenance from the manifestations of the Lord in nature.

The very fact of settling man on an exceptional planet indicates that God wants to bestow on him some gift of an exceptional nature.

God's silent message has never ceased to be relayed throughout the universe. The true preacher of God, his mind being attuned to this Divine communication, becomes a recipient of this divine message. He can then join in chorus with the birds and trees who are perpetually singing hymns to God. A

preacher has to rise above this mundane world. People who are lost in trivial issues can never be fit to communicate God's exalted message. It is even more important that a preacher should attain to a higher moral standard than his listeners. Without this, he is not worthy to communicate the message of God. □

IDLENESS

The Devil's Workshop

THE Second Caliph, Umar ibn Khattab, often expressed his sense of disillusionment with people he had come to like, when on further acquaintance with them he discovered them to be idle. His feelings have been expressed in this saying: "On learning that he does not work, he appears to me of no value [he has debased himself in my eyes]".

Whichever way you look at idleness, there is no gainsaying the fact that it is a great evil. It causes one to fritter away one's best talents and leaves one unqualified to face life. A student who is too lazy to study cannot ever hope to acquire knowledge or have his critical faculties sharpened in any way. His failure in his examinations will leave him without the qualifications required to obtain a good job. Without the necessary groundwork, he will find himself leading a vacant existence, simply drifting from pillar to post. Even people who have managed to qualify themselves suitably cannot afford to rest on their laurels. When their period of formal education is over, it is equally necessary to be consistently hardworking.

Sometimes, one inadvertently slips into idle ways because there are no economic pressures in life. Those who inherit legacies or have property or investments which bring them some return are an easy prey to idleness. But this is no existence for a human being. Anyone who allows the poison of idleness to creep into his system might as well be dead.

A person with no sense of commitment is only living on the fringes of existence. He is out of touch with reality and will soon lapse into utter degeneracy.

One must opt for a regular job which brings one a suitable income and keeps one mentally healthy, so that he never becomes a financial or emotional burden on anyone else. Or, if one is financially independent, one should turn one's attention to higher things, pursue noble ends, serve worthy causes and keep oneself fruitfully occupied every day. A person with no sense of commitment is only living on the fringes of existence. He is out of touch with reality and will soon lapse into utter degeneracy. No really superior being has ever been found among the ranks of the idle. As the old saying goes, the devil finds work for idle hands. □

GUARANTEE OF GOD'S SUCCOUR

Patience and Piety

THE greatest and surest guarantee for the protection of the believers in this world, according to the Quran, lies in their adherence to the path of patience and piety. The Quran has made this quite clear at various places. On one occasion, while referring to the opponents of Islam, the Quran speaks in absolute and conclusive terms:

If you persevere and fear God, their designs
will never harm you in the least. (3: 120)

The greatest and surest guarantee for the protection of the believers in this world, according to the Quran, lies in their adherence to the path of patience and piety.

There is nothing mysterious about the point made in this verse. This is a simple and natural truth, which is illustrated by everyday events.

If you stand by truth and justice, no adversary will be able to oppose you. It is against human nature and conscience to oppose truth. The voice of his conscience will speak out against such opposition precisely because it is directed against a truthful person. An antagonist will indulge in negative activities against you only so long as haughtiness and wilfulness prevail over his conscience, thus producing in him an abnormal state of mind. The moment his

thinking returns to normal, he will lose the courage to act against you.

Adherence to the path of patience (restraint in the face of another's injustice) and piety (humility and modesty before God's greatness) form the best formula to bring an antagonist back to a reasonable frame of mind.

The possession of these two virtues is the surest guarantee of keeping one's opponents cool. When faced with this superior code of ethics, they will soon lose their arrogance and ill feelings and will return to a normal state of mind. It is this return to normalcy which makes it possible for human nature to provide effective checks to the perpetration of injustice. Once this correct psychology has been established, there is no further need for the police or the army to enforce the laws. □

RAMADAN AND PROPHETHOOD

A Veritable Proof

The month of Ramadan is one of fasting in Islam. In its injunctions for this month, the Quran has this to say:

O believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil. (2: 183)

In modern times, all the religions of the world have been subjected to a thorough study. This study shows that no major or minor religion of the world is without the concept of fasting, of one type or another. A western sociologist has observed: 'It would be difficult to name any religious system of any description in which it is wholly unrecognized.'

However, in the Arab tribes of ancient times, there existed no practice of fasting. Philip Hitti, author of *History of the Arabs* writes:

We have no evidence of any practice of fasting in pre-Islamic pagan Arabia.

In view of this research, we learn that the pronouncements of the Quran on fasting are more than just an expression of religious obligation: they also carry the proof of prophethood. Fourteen hundred years ago, prior to the age of communication and information, it was not generally known that the practice of fasting was to be found, in one form or the other, in all the religions of the world. This serves as a proof that the Prophet was a messenger of God, since none but God could tell him of this reality, till then existing only outside his society. □

In modern times, all the religions of the world have been subjected to a thorough study. This study shows no major or minor religion of the world is without the concept of fasting, of one type or another.



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FROM THE SPIRITUAL TREE

There is a tree beside my house. I call it the 'Spiritual Tree'. I derive spiritual inspiration from it. A tree is an ever-growing being that was initially a seed possessing the potential of becoming a full-grown tree. A seed takes food from the universe around it and then grows into a tree. The same is true with spirituality, the desire for which is intrinsic to, and an integral part of, the very nature of every human being. To realize this spirituality, man must derive spiritual food from the universe around him. A tree converts carbon-dioxide into oxygen; a spiritual person is one who can take positive lessons from negative situations. From this perspective, a tree is an embodiment of a spiritual personality. —Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



SPIRITUAL LIVING

THE majority of anti-human activities in society result from the clash between people over material interest. But if, by obeying one's spiritual proclivities, one can go beyond such interests, the result is entirely positive. One who does so will become a healthy member of society, and a society which is largely composed of such members is bound to emerge as a peaceful society.

Spirituality is a culture of nature, a demonstration of which is given to us by nature in a variety of ways. Take the example of a rose plant. The rose plant is a combination of two quite opposite elements: flowers and thorns. Both flowers and thorns live together on the stem of a rose plant, but there is no clash between the two. It is this feature that makes the rose plant a very beautiful and thought-provoking thing to behold, in that it is symbolic of how we should live in society without there being any friction between disparate elements.

There is spirituality of a purely internal nature, and then there is spirituality which reaches out to others. Spirituality of the internal kind makes one a good human being, while 'applied' spirituality ensures harmonious interaction between the individuals, which society is made of. If society is a tree, the spiritual person is its flower.

Spirituality makes the individual a true human being. But this does not suffice. A person's spirituality must impinge on his environment. His elevated spiritual values must become evident in his dealings with others, and he must take the course of peaceful adjustment when a clash is imminent. At all events, he must clearly demonstrate his capacity to turn negative experiences into positive ones. Positive people are spiritual gardeners, who, in their conduct towards others, turn society into a spiritual garden. 'Applied' spirituality means bringing into play a multiplicity of spiritual values. This is beneficial to both the spiritual person and their neighbour. It makes them a happy individual and ensures that their environs will remain free of societal problems.

Spirituality of the internal kind makes one a good human being, while 'applied' spirituality ensures harmonious interaction between the individuals, which society is made of.

Simple Living Brings Positive Results

He who believes in simple living creates problems neither for himself nor for others, and one who engages in high thinking becomes a truly selfless person.

Spirituality has two facets: internal and external. The internal facet is positive thinking. The external facet is living in peace. Spirituality is in no way a kind of ecstasy, as is often believed. Indeed, it is a non-material culture, which means giving more importance to values which are non-material rather than material. In essence, it promotes the philosophy of simple living and high thinking—the moral mainstay of humanity.

Mind Science

Spirituality is a science, a science of the mind. It is the greatest source of positive thinking, positive taste, positive habits and positive behaviour. A positive person is a blessing for his home, for society and for his country. In secular terms, spirituality is positive thinking, and in religious terms, it is divine discipline. □



FORMULA FOR COEXISTENCE

Avoidance and Patience

LIFE is a series of different kinds of experiences, both good and bad. We are overjoyed when we have a good experience, but how do we respond when we face some bad experiences? The Quran gives us a very simple answer: Avoid any unpleasantness by remaining noncommittal. This principle is set forth in the chapter '*Al-Muzzammil*' (The Wrapped One) of the Quran. When the Prophet of Islam started his mission in Makkah in 610 CE, the situation was highly unfavourable. Often he faced unwanted situations, and at that juncture this verse was revealed in the Quran: *Bear patiently with what they say, and ignore them politely* (73: 10). In such a predicament, patience is not a passive attitude; it demonstrates great wisdom. When you keep your patience, you are saving your time and energy. Being patient in a difficult situation means that if you sense that the other party is not in a responsive mood, you should adopt the principle of avoidance, give them a polite reply and then proceed with your own affairs. It is only if you see that the other party is listening to you in earnest that you should present your point of view to them. This principle is very important in social life.

Trying to establish uniformity is like trying to make the impossible possible. In such a situation, adopting the above formula, 'Live and let live', which is based on a practical principle, is the only sensible solution.

Society is a combination of different kinds of people and the way we live our lives in society is very often determined not by our own choices but by the will of others. If you try to convince all the members of society of your wish to prevail, you will seldom succeed. Therefore, practise the art of doing

what is possible and leaving aside what is impossible. This is a sign of maturity. The mature person remains even-tempered in situations which are impossible for him to change. If it is possible to bring about a change in the situation, then try to do so, but when change is not possible, simply adopt the formula of adjustment. You should live by your own principles and let other people live by their principles. This is maturity; this is adjustment; this is the positive way of life. This formula is important not only in the wider society but also within one's family. In the domestic sphere, there are always occasions when you feel that you cannot convince other family members of the rectitude of your

views. That is when you should follow this formula: *for you, your way of thinking, and for me, mine.*

Difference is a part of life, everyone has a different mindset, everyone sees things from a different angle, and everyone has different tastes.

It is impossible to bring about uniformity among people. Trying to establish uniformity is like trying to make the impossible possible.

In such a situation, adopting the formula, 'Live and let live', which is based on a practical principle, is the only sensible solution. When the Quran advises, 'Ignore them politely' means deal with them in a positive manner. If the questions put to you are of a contentious nature, respond to them in an indirect way or simply change the subject. To change the subject is also a polite way of answering. This kind of answer shows maturity and a disciplined mind. Moreover, it is the sign of a strong personality. □

Practise the art of doing what is possible and leaving aside what is impossible. This is a sign of maturity.

**WE LOOK FORWARD
TO YOUR FEEDBACK**

Dear Readers,

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ESSENCE OF ISLAM

Discover God through His Signs

EVERYTHING in the universe—the sun, the moon, the stars—have all completely subjugated themselves to God’s will; they cannot make the slightest deviation from the path that God has ordained for them. Similarly, all other elements in nature function in obedience to the laws of nature laid down for them by the Creator. The entire universe has surrendered to God, the Lord of the Universe.

But there is a difference between the status of man and that of the physical world. The physical world has been given no option but to submit to God, whereas man has been given free will, so that he may opt for either good or bad ways. To this end he has been given a thinking faculty, and a conscience with which to make moral judgements for himself. He has the ability to accept and follow certain principles in life or refuse to do so. He is not bound by fixed laws like all other created beings. He has been given freedom of thought, option and action.

It is through this freedom of choice that man is being tested. But after being given a thinking faculty, a conscience and an ability to judge between good and bad, man was not just left to his own resources. God did not leave man in a world where there was no way to find the Truth. Divine provision for him went much further. To see how God gave His guidelines to humankind, we have to go right back to the beginning of creation. God created Adam, the first man—whom He had made not just an ordinary mortal but also a prophet—and taught him everything that He wanted from man, so that human beings would not be left without proper direction or guidance. From time to time thereafter, God sent prophets to the world—the last of these being the Prophet Muhammad—so that human beings, who tended to stray, could be recalled to the path of virtue.

Belief in God

“Islam” is an Arabic word which means “submission, surrender and obedience to God.”

Suppose we placed a pebble on a potter’s wheel, and then spin the wheel around very fast. The pebble would, of course, fly off, even though a potter’s wheel can hardly reach a speed of 25 miles an hour. Now, just reflect for a moment on the fact that the Earth we live on is also revolving, but at a much faster rate than the potter’s wheel. Yet we do not fly off. The Earth spins continuously on its axis at a speed of

1000 miles an hour—much faster than the average passenger plane—yet we move around on its surface, and live our daily lives without any fear of being thrown off like the pebble from the potter’s wheel. What a miracle this is! The explanation scientists give us is that the Earth pulls us with great force from underneath, while the pressure of the atmosphere from above pushes us firmly to the ground. A force attracting us from below, and a five hundred mile thick blanket of air enveloping us from above are miracles enough in themselves, and to say that they explain our not flying off into space is to lend even greater credence to the miraculous nature of our entire world.

Everything in this world is, in fact, a miracle. Just think what happens when we put tiny seeds into the ground. The soil in which they are planted is uniform in constitution, but they bring forth a vast array of plants—radishes, carrots, turnips, guavas, mangoes, mustard plants—everything from the humblest blade of grass to the mightiest oak! Each plant has its distinct appearance, taste and fragrance, and, according to its species, gives certain benefits to humankind.

On all sides of us a whole world of miraculous diversity and proportions stretches out before our eyes. Moreover, at every instant, a great variety of life forms are continually coming into existence, quite unaided by man. Yet, if all of the human beings in this world were to come together, they would not be able to create even one tiny grain of sand!

This amounts to a miracle of such amazing proportions that words fail us when we have to describe it. When we try to do so, we only degrade it, for we are unable to do justice to it with mere human words. All we can do is look on in wonder, and ask ourselves: “Besides God, who could have made manifest such a miracle?”

God did not just leave man in a world where there was no way to find the truth.

Divine provision for him went much further than that.

God created Adam, the first man—whom He had made not just an ordinary mortal but also a prophet—and taught him everything that He wanted from man.

Miracles All Around Us

Everything in this world is made up of atoms. In its final analysis, every object is a collection of these tiny particles. Yet, by some strange miracle, when these atoms come together in certain proportions, they form the dazzling globe of the sun, and when the same atoms accumulate elsewhere in different proportions, they flow in a cascade

as a river, in yet other places, they take the form of subtle breezes or are fashioned into fertile soil. All these things may be made up of the same atoms, but the nature and properties of each separate object are widely different.

With the minimum of effort, he has his clothes, houses, furniture, machines, vehicles and all the other components and accessories of his civilization. Are such occurrences not sufficient to prove that there is indeed a Maker and a Master of this world?

This miraculous world provides man with endless resources which he can put to good use if he learns how to tap them. Massive supplies of whatever he needs in life are constantly being accumulated, and man himself has to do very little in order to avail of them. Take, for instance, the food that he eats. He has but to stretch out his hand for the valuable nourishment which, as part of the order of the cosmos, has been made available to him. Once he has it in his possession, all he has to move are his hands and his jaws so that the food can reach his stomach. Then, without any further effort on his part, the food is absorbed by the body and is turned into flesh, blood, bones, nails, hair and other parts of the human body.

Where food keeps the human body going, petroleum, another great earthly phenomenon, keeps his activities going. All man has to do is to extract it from the ground, refine it, put it into his machines and, astonishingly, this liquid fuel keeps the entire mechanism of his civilization running smoothly. Countless resources of this type have been created in this world, and there is enough of everything here to meet man's needs. Man's part in bringing these things into being, or in changing them into some useful form, is a relatively small one. And so, with the minimum of effort, he has his clothes, houses, furniture, machines, vehicles and all the other components and accessories of his civilization. Are such occurrences not sufficient to prove that there is indeed a Maker and a Master of this world?

The Earth rotates unceasingly in two ways—on its own axis, and in orbit around the sun. But it does not create any noise in the process. A tree goes to work in the way of a great factory, but it does not emit any smoke. Daily, innumerable creatures are dying in the sea, but they do not pollute the water. The universe has been running in accordance with the Divine order for billions of years without ever having to reorganize itself, for everything about the way it is organized is perfect. There are countless stars and planets moving around in space. They

keep to the same speed, never lagging behind, and never exceeding their set pace. All these are miracles of the highest order. They are far more wonderful than anything that man can create, and they happen every instant in this world of ours. What further proof do we need that the power of a Great God lies behind this world?

Signs of God

One who has found God has found everything. After the discovery of God, no further discovery remains to be made. God, for him, becomes a treasure which he cherishes, and it is to Him then that he has recourse for all his worldly and eternal needs.

When we look at the different life forms, we witness an astonishing spectacle. Certain material objects come together in one body, and there comes into being a creature like a fish swimming through water, or a bird soaring in the skies. Of the great variety of creatures which abound on Earth, the one of greatest interest to us is Man. In ways that are a mystery to us, he is moulded into a well-proportioned form. The bones within him take on the meaningful shape of a skeleton, which is covered with flesh and sealed in by a layer of skin, out of which sprout hair and nails. Blood courses through channels within this frame. All of this adds up to a human being who walks about, who holds things in his hands, who hears, smells, tastes, who has a mind which remembers things, accumulates information, analyzes it and then expresses it in speech and in writing.

The formation of such an amazing being from inert matter is more than a miracle. The particles of which a man is composed are the same as that of earth and stone. But have we ever heard a piece of earth talking, or seen a piece of stone walking around? The word 'miraculous' is barely adequate to describe the capabilities of man. But what else is there to this walking, talking, thinking, feeling man which distinguishes him from earth and stone? This factor—life—is still a mystery to us. There must indeed be a superior Being who has imbued inert matter with this quality, thus accomplishing a unique feat of creation.

One who has found God has found everything. After the discovery of God, no further discovery remains to be made. God, for him, becomes a treasure which he cherishes, and it is to Him then that he has recourse for all his worldly and eternal needs.

Man has only to think of the nature of his own being to understand the nature of God. The self, the ego in man, has an individuality of its own, which is quite distinct from that of others of his kind living here on this Earth. The ego in man is absolutely sure of its own existence. It is the part of man which thinks, feels, forms opinions, has intentions and puts them into practice. It also decides for itself which course of

People demand some miraculous proof before they will believe in the truth of God and His message. But what further proof do they require when they have the miracle of the whole of the universe which has been functioning perfectly for millions of years on the vastest of scales?

action to adopt. Every human being is thus a separate personality with a will and power of his own. Since our experience of such a being is an everyday matter, what is astonishing about the existence of God, who also is a being wielding personal power, although on a scale far greater than ourselves? Believing in God is a very similar mental process to believing in one's own self.

People demand some miraculous proof before they will believe in the truth of God and His message. But what further proof do they require when they have the miracle of the whole of the universe which has been functioning perfectly for millions of years on the greatest of scales? If the doubter is not prepared to accept such a great miracle, then how is he going to shed his doubts when he

sees lesser miracles? In truth, man has been provided with everything that he needs to enable him to believe in God, and then to place himself at His service. If in spite of this he does not believe in God, and fails to acknowledge God's power and perfection, it is he himself and not anyone else who is to blame.

Discovery of God

God's world is a collection of atoms. In its elemental form, it all consists of one and the same type of inert matter; but God has moulded this matter into countless diverse forms: light, heat, greenery, flowing water and so on. He has also invested lifeless matter with the properties of colour, taste and smell; and everywhere, He has set things in motion, having carefully controlled this motion by gravity. Discovering the God who has made such a world is much more than just acquiring a dry creed. It means filling one's heart and soul with the radiant glow of Divine light and opening one's mind to incredible beauty and delicacy.

When we eat delicious fruits, this gives us a great sense of enjoyment. When we hear beautiful music, we are entranced by it. When a child is born to a couple, their joy knows no bounds. Then what of our experience of God, who is the source of all beauty, joy and virtue? On discovering Him, can one remain unmoved? This is something which is hardly imaginable, for such a sublime experience—like coming close to a source of dazzling radiance—must surely leave its mark on one.

Having endowed all things with their unique qualities, God Himself must have qualities that His discoverers may savour. To discover Him, therefore, is to experience Him like a fragrance in the nostrils, a taste which excites the palate; a texture which is a joy to caress; a melody which touches the heart. To come close to Him is to live in an everlasting garden of brilliant colours and delicate fragrances. It is to hear music so enchanting that one wishes it would last forever.

The Creator of all light, God Himself is the most resplendent of all beings. He is the light of the Heavens and of the Earth, shedding His radiance on all who discover Him. His is the greatest treasure-house of true wisdom. He is the greatest repository of true strength. His discoverers are so fortified by His strength and so enlightened by His wisdom that no flood or hurricane can carry them away. They cannot, once having known Him, do other than evolve into superior human beings. □



WATER AS SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT

Respect Nature

WATER is a great boon for life. And the greater the boon, the greater the conservation required. Without water life could not exist on Earth. Without water, there could be no development of a civilization. In the absence of water, the Earth would become barren like other planets in the solar system and beyond. It is this reality towards which the Quran points the reader when it asks: *'Have you considered if your water were to sink into the ground, who could then bring you flowing water?'* (67: 30)

The importance of water cannot be overstated. Up to 60 per cent of the body of an adult human comprises of water. The Quran says that God has made every living thing out of water (21: 30). Abdul Rahim Khan-e-Khana was an important minister and poet during the Mughal rule in India. A line from one of his poems is: *Rahiman pani rakhiyo bin pani sab soon*—O Rahim, preserve water, as without water there is nothing!

Water is a symbol of the virtues of peace, tolerance and the giving spirit, traits that human beings need to develop. If a spiritual culture is fostered in human society, its every member will take great care to not waste water.

It is a fact that water is a great bounty bestowed by the Creator on us. If we look at it in this perspective, we realize what a great source of spirituality water is, as it reminds us of the merciful Creator. This important natural resource evokes the spirit of gratitude. Human life is so very dependent on water that our reliance on it repeatedly brings to mind the Creator. According to Islam, the quality most desired in a person is his willingness to acknowledge the Creator. If a person truly

discovers the value of water, he will see it as a source of spiritual nourishment. Water is a symbol of the virtues of peace, tolerance and the giving spirit, traits that human beings need to develop. If a spiritual culture is fostered in human society, its every member will take great care to not waste water. Such people will make sustainable use of this precious resource. The realization of the importance of water will tell one how to manage water properly. The Prophet of Islam laid great emphasis on conserving water. He once observed someone using water extravagantly and advised him to be very cautious in its use. The person in question asked if we needed to be meticulous even while using water. The Prophet replied: "Yes, do not waste water, even if

you are on the banks of a flowing river.” There are many verses in the Quran that make such references to water. When studied in the light of modern scientific data, one will realize that the oceans on Earth are not only reservoirs of water, but also oceans of spirituality.

Water is made by the coming together of two gases: hydrogen and oxygen. Two elements which are individually gaseous in nature, combine to produce liquid water. Nature has gathered this water in the seas and the oceans. At least 3.5 per cent of this seawater consists of salt, which acts as a preservative. Because of its salty taste, we cannot drink it or otherwise make use of it. But by the workings of the laws of nature, the water in the oceans and seas rises up into the atmosphere as water vapour, being separated in this way from the salt content. This water vapour then collects together to form clouds, which bring rain. Rainwater is fresh water that we can put to use for our various daily needs. This entire process, known as the hydrological cycle, takes place on a global scale. If one were to ponder over this phenomenon, one would become extremely thankful to God.

Spirituality is only another name for this thankfulness. This spirit becomes a disincentive to squandering the crucial blessing of water. A person who is truly grateful to God for the blessing of water will ask himself: ‘If I cannot create water, how can I waste it?’ □



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THE CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUS MIND

A Divine Arrangement

THE human mind is divided into two parts: the conscious and the unconscious. These are an integral part of every individual mind. The conscious mind is that part of the mind which deals with everything that is within the realm of our awareness, whereas the unconscious mind deals with all those thoughts which the individual is unaware of but nevertheless influence his behaviour.

The human body is a highly complex organism. In it, there are numerous functions at play at all times, such as seeing, hearing, digestion, respiration and different kinds of movements. Almost all these functions are governed by the unconscious mind. Little effort is required on the part of the conscious mind for all these bodily activities to function smoothly.

Truth is the reality of life. We must try to know the secret of life, the purpose, the real goal of life, to know what is right or wrong, what is good for the individual and what is good for society.

The conscious mind, with its unlimited capacity for thinking and analyzing facts, is an exceptionally important part of our personality. But if, according to the Divine plan of creation, so much is placed in the charge of the unconscious mind, what is the role of the conscious mind? The conscious mind is free to involve itself largely in the great quest for truth, which should be the prime goal of every human being.

Truth is the reality of life. We must try to know the secret of life, the purpose of life, the real goal of life, to know what is right and what is not, what is good for the individual and what is good for society.

The answers to these questions are not written on a mountainside. It is our duty to discover all these things in order to gain knowledge of the truth. Since to know truth is so important, the Creator has consigned our bodily affairs to the unconscious mind. Now, a person, or his conscious mind, is completely free to discover these truths of life.

Often, people live in a state of frustration. Tension and stress are the greatest psychological diseases in our world. The reason lies in people's failure to find the truth.

Everyone is a seeker by nature, but everyone lives his life without knowing its real purpose. As a result of the ensuing sense of aimlessness, people live in a state of confusion, full of contradictions. They yearn to find something, without knowing what it is. A tension-free mind is one that can function positively despite contrariety. People work, but find no job satisfaction. They earn money but experience no inner satisfaction. They live by the formula 'Enjoy life', but they don't know what real enjoyment is! It is a paradoxical situation. Everyone is living in this state of self-contradiction.

This is a self-created problem. When the Creator has given you a mind and made you free to use it, you should make use of this opportunity. Activate your thinking capacity. Discover reality. Read what is hidden in nature in an unwritten form. This is the only way to extract yourself from this psychological chaos.

The consciousness of truth is interwoven in your nature; it is very easy, therefore, to discover the Truth. The only condition is to shun distraction, to follow the well-known principle of simple living and high thinking. If you want to save yourself from going astray, activate your thinking faculty. Think, think and think! You will surely reach the gates of Truth. □



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INTELLECTUAL REBIRTH

A Sign of Maturity

The Prophet Muhammad has set down in this *Hadith* the words of Almighty God:

“When I put My servant to the test and he remains patient, never uttering a word of complaint to anyone he meets, I free him from My hold and put new flesh and blood in him. He then sets about his work with renewed vigour.”

A man's first birth is that which brings him into this world when he is born of his mother. But there is a 'rebirth', a birth in a man's lifetime, which is brought about by the individual himself. Anyone who has not experienced their new birth is just an ordinary human being, subject to everyday influences of family and environment, as he goes about his work. On the other hand, one who has been born anew is an ever-progressing, ever-developing human being. The revolution which has taken place within him has made a new man out of him.

How is it that a new man of this nature comes into existence? It is in response to the situations which confront a man in life that such an event takes place. In the normal course of existence, one perforce comes face to face with all sorts of adverse circumstances. There are two ways of reacting to them. Either one may fall to complaining and become embittered, or one may display courage and patience at all times, retaining one's mental and emotional poise. In the first case, the habitual complainer becomes such a prey to his own negative sentiments that he can never proceed beyond this point on the journey of life. He is like the gramophone needle, stuck at one place on the record and, doomed forever to remain in the same repetitive groove.

However, the man who remains patient and uncomplaining in the face of adversity, does not allow himself to become a prey to hatred or jealousy, and does not, therefore, lose his peace of mind. He may be besieged on all sides by cruelty and oppression, but this does not make him show anger or even exasperation. For such an individual, unfavourable circumstances are what cast him in a new mould, from which he emerges as a being of a finer temper and of a higher moral calibre. It is by virtue of his patience in the face of adversity that he develops into a fully mature human being. □

WAYS OF SELF-CORRECTION

Character Building

A STORY in chapter 99 of the Quran, *Al-Zalazalah*, (*The Earthquake*) gives us a great lesson. It is said that once a man came to the Prophet and after some discussion, he accepted Islam. Then the Prophet said to him: "Stay with Ali (one of Prophet's Companions) for your further training."

A few days later, the Prophet asked Ali about the man who had come to him. He replied that he had stayed with him for a while and then he had gone away, and that now he had no knowledge of his whereabouts. The Prophet said: "Anyone who meets him, bring him to me." After a few days the Prophet was able to meet the man again. The Prophet said to him: "I asked you to stay with Ali for your further training, then why did you leave?" He replied, "You asked me to take training, I did so, and then I went away."

Further, he said that Ali had taught him Chapter 99 of the Quran, which says, "Whoever has done the smallest particle of good will see it; while whoever has done the smallest particle of evil will see it." (99: 7-8)

The man said that from these verses, he had found the complete message. Therefore, there was no need to stay on. The Prophet asked: "How did you find the complete message in them?" He replied: "These verses tell us that man is accountable to God and every deed of man will be evaluated by God. Now I always keep this in mind. I always do what is good and I always refrain from what is bad for me."

This story explains very beautifully how the Quran develops a self-correcting mechanism in every person. The Quran wants everyone to be on their guard all the time. This concept is bound to make everyone conduct himself properly. It is the basis of a character-building system. □

The Quran wants everyone to be on their guard all the time. This concept is bound to make everyone conduct himself properly. It is the basis of a character-building system.



THE FINALITY OF DEATH

Every Moment Could be the Last

The Quran mentions the eventual demise of every human being in its inimitable way.

Every human being is bound to taste death. (3: 185)

It means that every human being will certainly die. Man goes about relishing the flavours of the world, but in the end, the taste destined for him is the taste of death. The taste of death is so bitter that it destroys all other flavours. This is reiterated in a *Hadith*: "Remember death often. It is the destroyer of all tastes." (*Kitab Al-Zuhd, Tirmizi*)

The word 'taste' mentioned in the *Hadith* is used in a broader sense here. Man is a pleasure-seeking being. He savours everything that he does: eating, wearing good clothes, building a good home, travelling for pleasure, attending fun-filled meetings, occupying the seats of fame and power etc.

Man immerses himself completely in worldly delights. But if he truly realized that all these delights will suddenly be ended by death, his life would change completely.

In all such things man finds immense pleasure. He immerses himself completely in these delights. But if he truly realized that all these delights will suddenly be ended by death, his life would change completely. For example, when a person finds faults in another person, he unconsciously gets the pleasure of imagining that he himself is flawless. When a person humiliates someone, it gratifies his ego. A person who unjustly seizes someone's property and gains satisfaction from this, considers it as due to the virtue of his supposed intelligence.

A person can experience happiness and pride on performing many actions of this nature. All this may cause him to believe that as actions of a successful human being. But if he realizes that the angel of death can come at any time, and will suddenly end his life, he will feel that his death has already occurred before his actual death. This realization would destroy these false beliefs that he has about himself. □



SPECIAL OFFER

Ramadan: Month of the Quran

THE month of Ramadan is the month when the Quran was sent down as guidance for humankind with clear proofs of guidance and the criterion by which to distinguish right from wrong. (2: 185)

Ramadan, the month of fasting, is a special and blessed month. It was in this month that revelations of the Quran began to be made to the Prophet Muhammad. Ramadan is a month of spiritual activism when believers endeavour to awaken their spirituality. All the basic tenets of spirituality, ethics and peaceful behaviour are laid down in the Quran in very clear terms.

It is a solemn duty of believers to spend much of their time in Ramadan in reading, studying and reflecting on the message of the Quran. The Quran makes us aware of the Creation plan of God. It informs us why God created this world; what the purpose is of settling man on Earth; what is required from him in his pre-death life span, and what he is going to confront after death. The purpose of the Quran is to make man aware of this reality, thus serving to guide human beings on their entire journey through life into the after-life.

The Quran exhorts its readers thus:
Do they not ponder over the Quran? (4: 82)

How can we ponder over and reflect upon the message of the Quran if we do not understand it?

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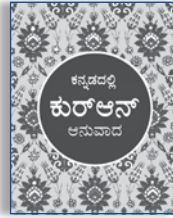
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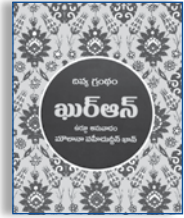
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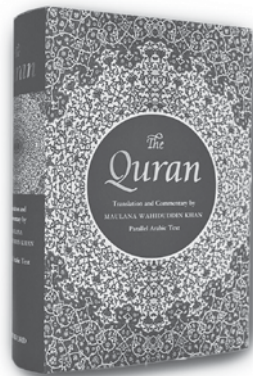
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THE WORD OF GOD

From The Scriptures

The Quran is the book of God. It has been preserved in its entirety since its revelation to the Prophet of Islam between AD 610 and 632. It is a book that brings glad tidings to humankind, along with divine admonition, and stresses the importance of man's discovery of the Truth on a spiritual and intellectual level.

Translated from Arabic and commentary by
Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



Believers! Shall I guide you to a profitable course that will save you from a painful punishment? You should believe in God and His Messenger, and strive for God's cause with your possessions and your lives. That will be better for you, if you only knew—and He will forgive you your sins and admit you into Gardens with rivers flowing under them. He will lodge you in fine dwellings in the Gardens of Eternity; that is indeed the supreme achievement. He will give you another blessing which you desire: help from God and imminent victory. Give good tidings [O Muhammad] to believers! (61: 1-13)

In trade, a man first invests and then receives a return on his investment. In the struggle for Faith also one has to invest his strength and his possessions. From this view point, this is also a sort of trade. But one receives the profit from worldly trade in this world, while in the religion-oriented trade, one receives the profit with further additions only in the Hereafter.

Believers, be God's helpers, as Jesus, son of Mary, said to the disciples, 'Who will be my helpers in the cause of God?' The disciples said, 'We shall be God's helpers.' Some of the Children of Israel believed in him and some denied the truth; We supported the believers against their enemies and they triumphed over them. (61: 14)

'Be God's helpers' here means calling people to God (*dawat ilallah*). Since it is a task which is seen as desirable by God Himself and is performed by servants of God, it is, therefore, called 'helping God'. This is an exceptional honour which is granted only to a true believer. The believer must of his own accord follow the commands of God relating to worship, morality and dealing justly with people. With this the

believer proves his servitude and becomes eligible for God's rewards. But the case of the task of spreading God's word is different. According to the Quran, it is performed so that humankind may have no excuse or argument against God (4:165). Due to the exigency of putting man to the test, God wants this work to be given special priority. This is a divine mission which is carried out by individuals, on behalf of God, and they are, therefore, rewarded for it by God in the Hereafter.

What is the meaning of helping God or being the helpers of God in this verse? It means giving oneself wholeheartedly to the divine task of preaching the truth. It means joining oneself with the divine plan wholeheartedly in both word and deed, so that humankind might have no argument against God on the Day of Judgement.

The noted commentator of the Quran, Ibn Kathir, explained that when Jesus asked his followers, 'Who will help me in the task of calling people to God?' The followers of Jesus replied, 'We are your helpers in the mission with which you have been sent forth, and we will be your helpers in this mission.' For this reason, Jesus sent them to Syria to the Israelites and the Romans. In the same way the Prophet Muhammad used to go to people during the *Hajj* season and he would ask, 'Who among you will help me so that I may convey the message of God to people, because the Quraysh are stopping me from conveying to people the message of God?' (*Tafsir ibn Kathir*)

The Prophet Muhammad was undoubtedly the messenger of God to the whole of humanity. Through him God conveyed His message in the form of the Quran for all eternity. But he lived in this world for a limited period of time and now the question arises as to how, after the Prophet's death, the prophetic responsibility had to be discharged. In his lifetime the Prophet performed this duty directly. After he had gone, this mission had to be carried forward indirectly by his followers, the Muslim *ummah*. It is incumbent upon the Prophet's followers to carry out this mission from one generation to the next and, in presenting the message of Islam to people of every age and time, bring people closer to God.

This issue can be further explained by a *Hadith*, or saying of the Prophet, which Ibn Hisham has quoted in his biography of the Prophet Muhammad. In this saying, the Prophet mentions Jesus as well as himself. Ibn Hisham puts it thus on record:

'It has been narrated to me that the Prophet Muhammad came to his Companions after the Peace Treaty of Hudaibiya and said, "O people, I have been sent as a blessing for the whole of humanity. So do not

differ with me in the way the disciples of Jesus differed with him." The Companions asked, "O Prophet of God, how did the disciples of Jesus differ with him?" The Prophet replied, "Jesus called his disciples to the mission for which I am calling you." Those disciples whom Jesus had asked to go to a nearby place made preparations for it. But those whom Jesus asked to go to a distant place became unhappy and refused to go. Afterwards, Jesus complained of this to God, so those who were not ready to go because of not knowing the language of that area, miraculously started speaking the language of the people to whom Jesus had asked them to go. Subsequently, the Prophet Muhammad sent his Companions to different kings and rulers with his message.' Ibn Ishaq (the Prophet's earliest biographer) further writes that when the Prophet Muhammad came to the Companions and reminded them of their duty to spread the word of God, he said: 'God has sent me to the entire world as a blessing, so you should carry out this responsibility on my behalf. God will show His mercy to you.' (*Sirat ibn Hisham*)

There could be no greater honour under the sun than to be engaged in a mission which is directly God's own mission. It is like working on behalf of God Almighty. It is indeed so great an honour that no greater honour seems possible. □



ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

The remedy for ignorance is asking questions. (Prophet Muhammad).

The spirit of enquiry is the hallmark of an open society and the above saying of the Prophet aptly illustrates this principle. A culture of curiosity and open-mindedness will foster development in any society by motivating its members to learn enthusiastically and enrich their knowledge. This is because awareness of one's ignorance is half of knowledge, as it becomes a stepping-stone to seeking and finding answers. A questioning mind is like a flowing river that is replenished with fresh thoughts and ideas and continues on its journey.

How should we strive to understand the deeper meaning of the verses of the Quran?

The Quran has its own style. The Quran is not a narration of history nor is it a novel. The truth is that the Quran is a book of wisdom. In the language of wisdom, some things are between the lines or undeclared. Thus, you have to engage in reflection in order to understand the message that lies between lines. For example, at the time of the Battle of Uhud, seventy Companions of the Prophet were killed. A verse that was revealed on this occasion said:

He paid you back with one sorrow after another, so that you might not grieve for what you lost, nor for what befell you. (3:153)

The wisdom behind this verse of the Quran is that after every loss, we need to adopt the attitude of re-planning instead of becoming hopeless or engaging in complaints against others. According to the Quran, the deeper meaning of the Quran can be understood through contemplation (*tadabbur*). Such reading should be done with an open mind, not with a conditioned mind. Only if a person reflects objectively would, he be able to reach the deeper meaning of the verses of the Quran.

What do you think about the verse of the Quran, "The Messenger will say, 'Lord, my people did indeed discard the Quran'?"

This verse is about the Day of Judgement. These are the words the Prophet will say on the Day of Judgement about his community of later times. After the death of the Prophet and the passing of several

generations, the followers of the Prophet went into a state of religious degeneration, thus abandoning the revealed Book.

Today, we see that most Muslims respect the Quran by kissing it and keeping it in 'sacred' places, but they do not really follow its guidance in their lives. Instead of being accessed as source of guidance, it seems to have acquired the status of being an item of display.

This verse of the Quran is an admonition for the Muslim community. They are forewarned that they should save themselves from developing the tendency of simply reciting the Quran while at the same time heeding the dictates of their own desires.

If some verses of the Quran were for only a specific time or age, how can the Quran be meant for every generation?

The teachings of the Quran and every other book have to be re-applied according to changing situations. This is applicable to every book and constitution. In the matter of belief there will be no change. However, in the matter of application there can be temporary modifications.

Can I gift the translation of the Quran to a non-Muslim friend, knowing the fact that he is going to read it without ablutions (wudu)? Can one read the translation of the Quran without ablutions?

Yes, absolutely! The misconception about not reciting the Quran without performing ablutions comes from a misunderstood *Hadith* of Umar ibn al-Khattab (a Companion of the Prophet). According to a teaching recorded in a *Hadith*, when Umar heard his sister reciting the Quran in her house, he went inside and asked for the pages from which the Quran was being read. At this, his sister asked Umar to first perform ablutions (*wudu*) before he could read the Quran. This was a psychological gesture from a sister who requested his brother to clean himself before he read the Book of God.

The fact that one does not need to perform ablutions before reading the Quran is affirmed by another incident concerning Umar. During the days when he was Caliph, he was discussing a verse from the Quran with some people. During the discussion he picked up a copy of the Quran from a shelf and started reading the verse being discussed. One of the participants asked him if he had performed ablutions. At this Umar became furious and strongly condemned it by asking if Musaylima (a false prophet) had given him a *fatwa* (ruling) in this regard? In other words, he meant: 'Which hypocrite told you of this wrong practice?'

When Umar's sister had asked him to clean himself, she said it out of the leverage she had over her brother. We may not have the same leverage over others in our life. Cleanliness is a form of respect a reader gives to God's word. However, imposing this practice keeps people away from comfortably reading or gifting the Quran, and, above all, prevents people from knowing the message of God. □



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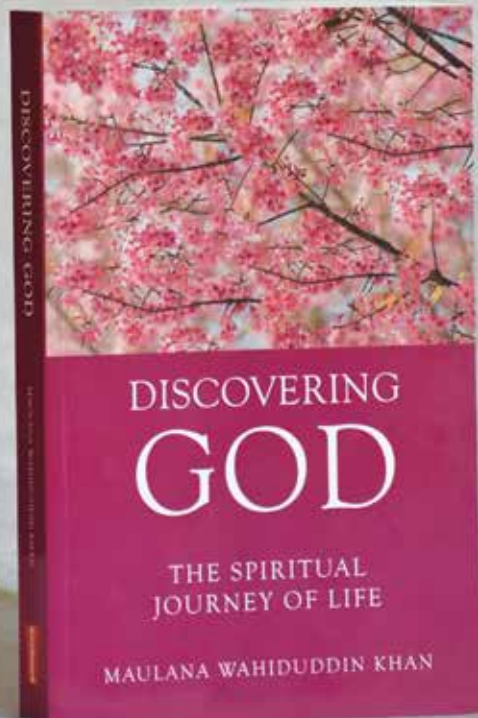
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DISCOVERING GOD

The author, through his study of science, religion, psychology and the experiences of his own life, enlightens about the path to discovery of God through one's journey of life. A discovery of this kind involves pondering on the word of God, converting one's material experiences into spiritual insights, constant introspection, and contemplating on the numerous phenomena of the universe. This kind of spiritual and intellectual endeavor of remembering God and recognizing His majesty and glory in everything around provides nourishment to the soul. Such a person develops strong affection for His Creator, Sustainer and Benefactor, a feeling which reflects in his character and behaviour. Discovery of the noble and merciful God makes a person rise above negative thinking; his heart becomes free of hatred, anger, and vengefulness. He develops the ability to engage in positive thinking even in unpleasant situations. The personality that undergoes this spiritual process is deserving of being settled in Paradise in the Hereafter.



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