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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



Remembering death is the greatest source of wisdom.
It guarantees that one's planning will be realistic.

A MAGAZINE FOR THE JOURNEY OF LIFE

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- ▶ Enlightens people on the subject of global peace
- ▶ Addresses contemporary issues
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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

ISSUE 98 FEBRUARY 2021

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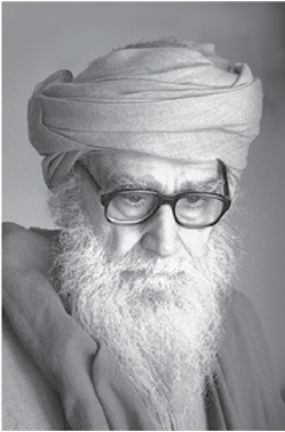
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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.

A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

ERIC MORECAMBE, a famous English television personality and comedian, died on May 28, 1984, of a heart attack. His death occurred just hours after he had told an audience at the Roses Theatre in Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, how grateful he was for a new lease of life.

For years Eric Morecambe had been haunted by a heart disease. This had led him to ease the punishing workload which had previously threatened his health. His daughter, Gail, said after his death: "Dad had made every effort to look after himself, and had vowed to take it easier. He told me he planned to enjoy all the things he worked for and spend more time with his family. We have been cheated." (*The Times*, London, May 29, 1984)

People think that they are being "cheated" by death, but in fact death is the ultimate and most inevitable certainty of our lives. Death cheats no one. It is man that cheats himself. The plans that he should be making for the world after death he makes for this life; only to find that death awaits him, to put an abrupt stop to all his dreams.

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

If man were to set his sights on the next eternal world, he would find there the fulfillment of his heart's desire in full measure; but instead he aims for fulfillment in this world, where there can be no fulfillment in the first place, and even if it is achieved, it can only be for a very short time. If he were to seek reward for his work from God, God would never let his efforts go wasted; but instead he seeks reward on earth where any reward is scant and, once given, is sure to be taken away again.

If man were to seek reward for his work from God, God would never let his efforts go wasted; but instead he seeks reward on earth where any reward is scant and, once given, is sure to be taken away again.

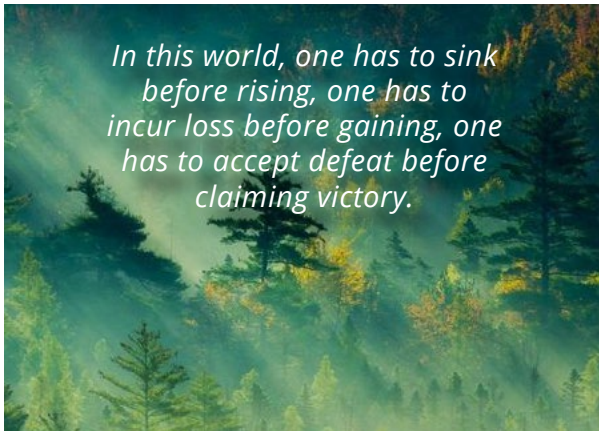
Man pins his hopes only on the present world. Death is to him, then, a cruel blow, removing him from the land of his dreams. But if he were to see the world beyond death, he would realize that it is an eternal world of infinite blessings that should be worked for. What "new lease of life" can there be when the spectre of death lies in wait? Those who seek new life will find it only in the world that lies beyond death. □

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(The Times of India)



In this world, one has to sink before rising, one has to incur loss before gaining, one has to accept defeat before claiming victory.



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.

COPING WITH DEATH

TWO books, published in the US, look from a scientific angle at the human side of death. One of them, *On Children and Death*, is written by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who drew material from her work with the families of dying children. The second book is co-authored by Colin Murray Parkes, a senior lecturer in psychiatry at the London Hospital Medical College, and Robert S. Weiss, a professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts. Titled, *Recovery from Bereavement*, the book grew out of work done over ten years ago by the Harvard Bereavement Study. It looks at the way widows and widowers under 45 mourn their losses, and asks the question: Why do some get over their grief, while others do not? Both books, then, are the result of entirely scientific research, and aim to provide solace to the bereaved families through scientific approach.

Do these books succeed in their aim of offering consolation to those who have been robbed of their near and dear? Suzanne Fields, reviewing both works in the *Washington Post*, thinks not. These two books by these priests of science and reason, she writes, address the griefs and protocols of dealing with the dead and dying. Well-meaning books both, concerned with offering practical psychological advice as well as solace, they nevertheless—perhaps inevitably—are useful but not elevating, sensible but never soaring. Grounded in the earth of observation, they are offered to wounded spirits that crave not advice but inspiration." (*Guardian Weekly*, January 1, 1984)

It is only by realizing that death—far from being the end of life—is the beginning of real life that we can begin to cope with the distress and suffering that death leaves in its wake.

The reason for the failure of these books is that they attempt to tackle scientifically a problem that can only be dealt with by religion. It is only by realizing that death—far from being the end of life—is the beginning of real life that we can begin to cope with the distress and suffering that death leaves in its wake. We have been allotted a short while in this world so that we may be put to the test. We are required to realize here that, though we seem to have power, we are in fact helpless before the will of God; though we seem to have possessions and attachments,

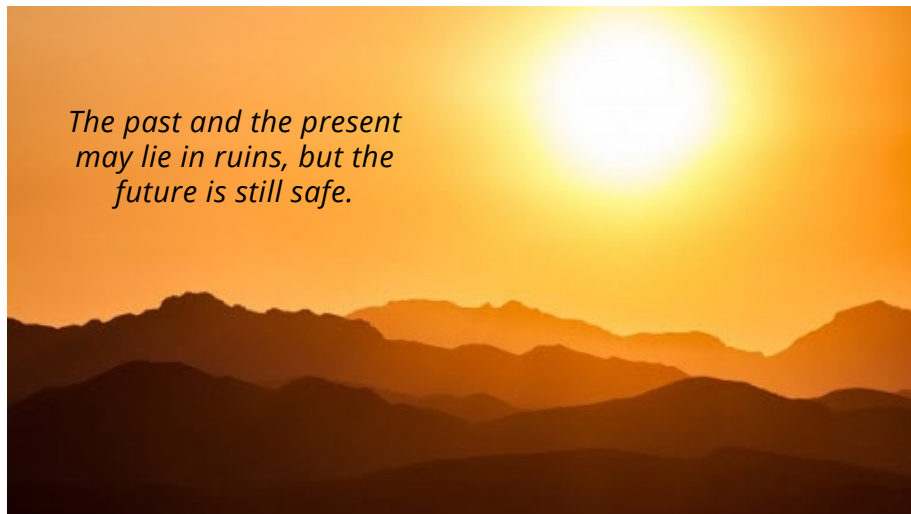
everything belongs to Him. It is only those who feel they own something who fear its loss. If one believes that everything and everybody is owned by God, then what is there to lose and lament? □

Prof. Farida Khanam

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*The past and the present
may lie in ruins, but the
future is still safe.*



ALL ARE EQUAL IN THE EYES OF LAW

Everyone must Stand Trial

AN Egyptian once came to the second Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab. "O Commander of the Faithful," he said, "I have come to you to seek shelter from oppression." Umar told him that his request was granted.

"I had a race against Muhammad ibn Amr ibn al-Aas, the son of the governor of Egypt," the man protested. "I overtook him and he got angry. He started whipping me, telling me at the same time: Take that, I come from a noble family." When Umar heard this, he immediately wrote to Amr ibn al-Aas, directing him to bring his son to Madinah at once. When they arrived, Umar called the Egyptian, gave him a whip and told him to whip the young man. Umar kept on saying: "Take that, member of a noble family," as he was whipped. When he had finished whipping Muhammad ibn Amr ibn al-Aas, Umar told him to whip the boy's father as well, for the son had only acted because of his father's authority. "I have whipped the one who whipped me", the Egyptian replied. "Now I don't need to whip anybody else". "If you had whipped him, we would not have stopped you," Umar told him. "But if you let him go yourself, that is another matter." Then, addressing Amr ibn al-Aas, he said, "Since when have you enslaved people who were born free?"

***Man would do well
to remember that
prince or a pauper,
everyone is under
trial in this world.
Everyone will be held
accountable before
the Lord.***

This statement was echoed in the words of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains." Man would do well to remember that prince or a pauper, everyone is under trial in this world. Everyone will be held accountable before the Lord. One must be ready to receive the same treatment that he has meted out to others. □



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CLEARING THE ROADBLOCK

Find the Alternative Ways

WHEN a road is under repair, a notice bearing the words 'Road Closed' is put up to warn unwary travellers. But this does not mean that the path to one's destination is irrevocably barred. There are always other highways and byways. It is just a question of looking around for them. Sometimes one can reach one's destination just as well by zigzagging through narrow lanes and alleyways. The only difference is that this takes somewhat longer, and one has to keep one's wits about to negotiate narrower roadways and sharper turnings. But arrive one finally does.

Life's journey is very often like this. One would like to proceed by broad straight routes, moving fast and reaching one's goal in the most direct possible way. But, so often such roads are blocked, and achieving success begins to seem a very difficult matter. However, for every major route which is blocked, there are always several minor roads which are open. It is just a question of having to go about things in a roundabout

When in one particular field there seems to be a discouraging lack of opportunities, one can certainly search for and find opportunities in some other field.

way. This is particularly true if you meet with an adversary and feel that you are unable to confront him head-on. It is then that you must find some indirect means of dealing with him. Often compromise or adjustment is the best solution.

When in one particular field there seems to be a discouraging lack of opportunities, one can certainly search for and find opportunities in some other field. When you fail to find a place for yourself in the front row, you can always make do with one in the rear until a place up ahead finally falls vacant for you. When you

cannot find people to extend a helping hand to you, press on fearlessly and strike out on your own. When you need things from people to help you on in life and no one seems ready to be generous, stop thinking of how deprived you are and try instead to earn God's blessings.

For every closed door, there is always another which is open—but only to those who have the eyes to see it, and the courage to march through it. □

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.



THE HUDAIBIYAH REVOLUTION

SINCE time immemorial, people have believed that war is the most powerful means of attaining one's purpose. Some people even think that the only way to end war is to wage a war in return! They talk about 'war for peace', insisting that if you want to attain peace, you must go to war! They argue that the only way to establish one's power is with a sword or a gun. A Persian couplet says: *One who wields the sword, controls the commerce.*

But the experience of history proves the opposite; that no positive result has ever been attained through war. It has always been the case that the vanquished have refused to accept defeat. And, the fire of revenge burns in its heart. It reassembles its forces and initiates a war of revenge against the victor. This sort of thing has happened repeatedly in history creating a vicious cycle of war-defeat-revenge.

This has been the case in Muslim history too. Early Islamic history reveals that the Battle of Badr took place in the year AD 624. The battle resulted into a decisive victory for the believers. The defeated Quraysh suffered 70 casualties, but the matter did not end there as they were now fired with the thirst to exact revenge. Returning to Makkah, they started to prepare for a new war. The next year, they attacked Madinah and the Battle of Uhud took place. In this battle, the believers had to face defeat and at least 70 of them were killed in the fighting. At the end of the battle, the leader of the victorious party, Abu Sufyan, stood atop a hill and loudly declared, "Today, we have avenged Badr!"

Experience tells us that in the whole of human history, leaders have been unaware of the fact that the psyche of revenge is a major obstacle in gaining any positive objective through war. Since nothing positive can be achieved through revenge, the only practicable solution is to adopt the method of reconciliation. Reconciliation leads to an atmosphere of peace between opponents. In this way, it becomes possible to discover and avail of hidden opportunities making best use of the circumstances. Success is thus entirely possible through this conciliatory policy, as availing of opportunities is the only other name for success.

Divine Planning

To give man right guidance in this regard, God decided to intervene and manage history. This happened through the Prophet Muhammad in the first half of the seventh century CE. It began with a dream of the Prophet when he was in Madinah.

Reconciliation leads to an atmosphere of peace between opponents. Then, it becomes possible to avail of hidden opportunities making best use of the circumstances. Success is thus entirely possible through this conciliatory policy.

In conformance with the dream, in the month of *Dhul Qadah* in AD 628, the Prophet along with his Companions set off from Madinah towards Makkah. Several events took place during this journey. Finally, after a series of negotiations, a treaty was agreed upon between the Muslims and the Makkan opponents of the Prophet, known in history as the Treaty of Hudaibiyah or the Hudaibiyah Agreement.

This Agreement was based on several conditions. But its fundamental requirement was just one—that for a period of ten years there would be no war between the two parties. The words of this requirement in the agreement read as follows: *This is the agreement made between Muhammad ibn*

Abdullah and Suhayl ibn Amr. Both agree that there will be no fighting between them for the next ten years.

The Hudaibiyah Agreement was actually a ten-year no-war pact. As there had been a climate of enmity between the two parties for some time, an agreement of this sort had seemed impractical. This seemingly impossible agreement was accomplished only when the Prophet unilaterally accepted the harsh and unjust conditions of the opposite party.

For example, one condition of the Agreement was that if an inhabitant of Makkah embraced Islam and came to Madinah, he would have to be sent back to Makkah. In contrast, if an inhabitant of Madinah went to Makkah, the Makkans would have the right to detain him. Similarly, there was another condition, that in the year of the Agreement, the believers would return from Hudaibiyah to Madinah without entering Makkah for the *Umrah* or Minor Pilgrimage.

The Hudaibiyah Agreement was written on a parchment. Ali ibn Abi Talib was the scribe. Under the instructions of the Prophet, he wrote the first sentence as: *This is binding on Muhammad, the messenger of God.* The representative of the opposing party, Suhayl ibn Amr, objected to this. He said that they did not accept Muhammad as God's messenger and insisted that only 'Muhammad ibn [son of] Abdullah' be written instead. Thereupon, the Prophet instructed Ali to erase the term '*Rasul Allah*' ('Messenger of God') and to write 'Muhammad ibn Abdullah' in its place. Ali declined to delete the words '*Rasul Allah*', and so, the Prophet himself erased these words from the agreement.

After the finalization of this Treaty, the Prophet and his Companions returned to Madinah. Prior to the Treaty, a state of war had prevailed between the two parties. As a result, the *dawah* mission (calling people to God) of Islam had to be abandoned. But after the Treaty, a state of complete peace was established between them. The Prophet and his Companions now made a new plan for *dawah* work. They started with *dawah* work in an organized manner in the surrounding areas of Madinah. Delegations were despatched to the various tribes settled in different parts of Arabia. *Dawah* delegations were also sent to the nations outside Arabia. The treaty allowed the Muslims who were still in Makkah to practise Islam publicly. The Muslims of Madinah could now once again interact with their relatives in Makkah, and the call of *tawheed* (monotheism) spread in Makkah.

As a result of these *dawah* activities in a peaceful atmosphere, a large number of people began entering the fold of Islam. This happened on such a large scale that in just two years, the numerical strength of the believers was enough for Islam to be victorious without the need for any war. Then, it happened that the Quraysh violated a term of the Treaty. Under a confidential plan, the Prophet Muhammad together with 10,000 of his Companions marched towards Makkah and without any fighting, Makkah was overpowered.

The voice of *tawheed* is the voice of human nature. In a climate of normalcy, peaceful *dawah* alone is enough to overwhelm people's

hearts. It is said that when suddenly one morning the Makkans saw that the Prophet with 10,000 of his Companions had entered Makkah, their leader Abu Sufyan announced: O people of the Quraysh, this is Muhammad who has entered Makkah in such a manner that you now have no power to overcome him.

This historical event that occurred as a result of the Hudaibiyah Agreement is referred to in the Quran (110: 1-2) in these words:

Peace could be established through a unilateral truce, and then, through wise planning, the resulting opportunities could be availed in the best possible manner.

When God's help and victory come, and you see people entering God's religion in multitudes [...].

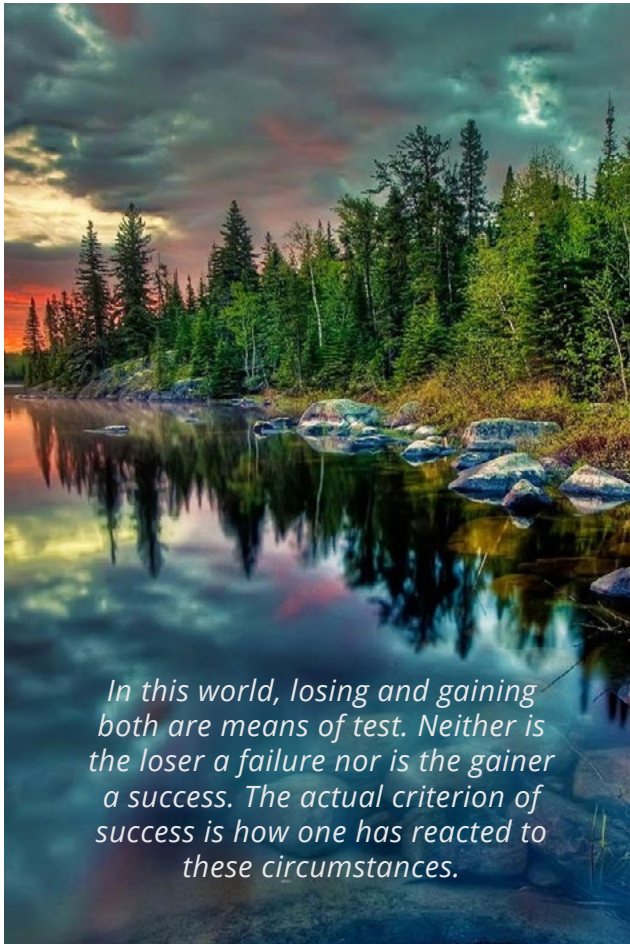
'Help of God' in this verse is the same as referred to elsewhere in the Quran as 'God's mighty help' (48: 1-3). The words '*people entering God's religion in multitudes*' refers to the victory over Makkah that resulted after the Treaty of Hudaibiyah. People entered the fold of Islam in such large numbers that their numerical strength itself was sufficient reason for victory.

Wisdom of Hudaibiyah

From times of old, man was aware of only two options in dealing with conflict—war, or retreat. But this notion was based on dichotomous thinking. In accordance with the law of nature, in reality there was another option, which man remained unaware of. Peace could be established through a unilateral truce, and then, through wise planning, the resulting opportunities could be availed in the best possible manner. In other words, by abstaining from both confrontation and retreat, and using the power of peace for quiet planning. The historical event of Hudaibiyah was a practical demonstration of this wisdom arranged by God through the Prophet and his Companions.

But it is a strange tragedy of history that despite the successful demonstration of the wisdom of Hudaibiyah, both Muslims as well as others remained unaware of this great truth. Throughout history, the wisdom of Hudaibiyah has been only used once—neither before it, nor after it. Man has always thought about how to attain peace, the study of peace being an academic subject known as Pacifism. A vast number of books have been written on the subject. There is even an *Encyclopaedia of Pacifism*, but thus far, a practicable ideology of peace has not been developed.

The Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy (d. 1910), wrote a famous book on peace. It is titled *War and Peace* and is considered a classic of world literature. It was first published in 1865 and was translated into many languages. In this book, Tolstoy suggests that peace can be established only on the basis of universal love. But this book was only a novel, a book of fiction. And a work of fiction cannot be a practicable guidebook for real life. □



A MERE TEN WORDS

Fruits of Consistent Efforts

MAULVI LUTFULLAH was born on November 4, 1802 in the ancient city of Dharanagar, in Malwah (Madhya Pradesh). His autobiography, *Autobiography of Lutfullah, Mohamedan Gentleman; and His Transactions with His Fellow-Creatures*, written in English, was published in London by Smith, Elder and Company (3rd edition came out in 1858), though he had never set foot in an English school. He lived the life of an ordinary tutor, teaching Hindi, Persian and Marathi to British employees of the East India Company. He had over a hundred students, and contact with them over a period of time kindled an interest in him to learn their language. He soon embarked on a course of intensive self-instruction and, in a matter of eight years, gained a mastery of the English language.

He writes:

... I learned the English alphabet, and enabled myself to make out the words from dictionaries, and read Hindustani and Persian fluently in the Roman character. From this time until the end of 1829 I never went to bed without learning ten words of English by heart, and reading a few pages of the eminent Dr. Gilchrist's grammatical works with full attention by myself. Thus, after the hard labour of full eight years, I learnt English, the most difficult language in the world. (p. 166)

***Ten words a night
may seem very few,
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they were sufficient
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into a writer of the
English language who
could elicit praise
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and critics of the
English language.***

Ten words a night may seem very few, but spread over a period of eight years, they were sufficient to turn him into a writer of the English language who could elicit praise from native writers and critics of the English language. Edward B. Eastwick, writing the preface of the books concludes: The reader will no doubt accord to Lutfullah some praise for composing so long a work in the, to him, foreign English language, with so much general accuracy.

How did Maulvi Lutfullah develop the talent to write such a book? The answer lies simply in his sheer determination and unstinting hard work. □

THE TASK OF GLOBAL DAWAH

Raison D'etre of Muslims

GOD sent prophet after prophet to every community to inform them about God's creation plan. The Prophet Muhammad was the Last Prophet in the series of prophets. God revealed His guidance to Prophet Muhammad through the Quran. After the Prophet, it is the responsibility of those who believe in his message to convey the message of Quran to humankind.

Blessed be He who has revealed the criterion [the Quran] to His servant that he may warn the nations. (25: 1)

This Quran has been revealed to me so that through it I may warn you and whoever it reaches. (6: 19)

The task of spreading the word of God on a global scale has been made possible and easy in this age of technology. Muslims have now at their disposal the technology and means of communication with the potential of realizing this task of global *dawah*. The Muslim community was given a long opportunity by God to convert this hidden potential into reality and discharge its global responsibility with respect to the Quran. But the Muslim leaders were unable to recognize this potential nor did they avail of the opportunity. They endeavoured in many fields, but they totally failed to fulfill the global requirements of *dawah* (calling people to God).

The task of spreading the word of God on a global scale has been made possible in this age of technology. Muslims have now at their disposal the technology and means of communication with the potential of realizing this task of global dawah.

Thereafter, the *sunnah* (way) of God came into force; referred to in the Quran thus: If you turn back, He will bring in your place another people, who will not be like you. (47: 38) If one group fails in performing a divine task assigned to it by God, then it will be replaced by another group. In present times, the age of communication developed by western nations is the outcome of this "replacement" by God.

Support through Secular Nations

A number of predictions of the Prophet of Islam have been recorded in the books of *Hadith*. One of these predictions is: "Certainly, God will

reinforce this religion through the secular folk (*fajir*)". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*) *Fajir* here means a secular person. This *Hadith* means that when the Muslim community fails to discover and use the means and methods to discharge their duty of *dawah*, then God would raise secular people to perform this task. Where a religious incentive is ineffective, God would raise another group with a worldly incentive who would perform this task. These secular people will recognize the potential hidden in nature through research and investigation and develop the means and methods that can be used in *dawah*. This would be a supporting role played by the secular people towards the Muslim *ummah*.

In present times—particularly in the 19th and the 20th centuries, the discoveries made by the West in the field of science and technology are of this nature. Through these discoveries God has arranged for 'external support' to perform this divine *dawah* mission.

The Failure of Muslim Leadership

There was nothing religious about the support of the western nations towards the divine mission. This was done purely under their material and national interest. It was only natural that without any personal or worldly incentive, they could not have made these discoveries that could be used to further the divine mission. Furthermore, it was natural that these great discoveries of science would lead them on to a position of global dominance.

Western nations brought with them the immense blessing of modern communication that was awaited by history itself for the past thousand years, and which would be most beneficial to the religion of Islam.

Together with a major role in the development of civilization, comes power. Both are inseparable. Not only did these western nations gain material benefits from these discoveries but also directly or indirectly they gained political power. This was a reward for their supporting role. Without this reward they could not have performed their supporting role to the divine mission.

Unfortunately, the Muslim leadership of the present times failed to understand this concept. They were unable to differentiate between one thing and another. They were not wise enough to embrace the relevant and discard the irrelevant.

When these western nations, equipped with modern scientific resources, entered Asia and Africa, they soon acquired political

domination and rule over many of the Muslim nations there. However, there was another aspect of their domination that has been overlooked. These nations brought with them the immense blessing of modern communication that was awaited by history itself for the past thousand years, and which would be most beneficial to the religion of Islam. But the Muslim leaders could not recognize this fact and rise above worldly considerations to ignore the political problems, and avail of the opportunities provided by these modern means for *dawah* work. Every purported Muslim problem of the present times is a result of this lapse in wisdom.

Many Muslim scholars considered colonialism, orientalism, etc. as responsible for the problems faced by the Muslim community. Due to this wrong thinking, Muslims have been engaged in fighting the supposed 'obstacles' for the last 200 years. However, the result has been totally counterproductive.

The truth is that the fear of these so-called 'obstacles' was unfounded. Rather, according to the *Hadith* of the Prophet, their position was that of 'supporters of Islam'. Through great effort and sacrifices, they had made the discoveries of science that brought modern communication into existence. Although, they had developed these means of communications for their own requirement, there is no monopoly on these methods. These means are available to all and are considered as global means of communication. Had Muslim scholars and leaders not chosen the path of collision and confrontation against them, and instead adopted peaceful methods, then undoubtedly, they could have made full use of these means of communications in their favour. By doing so they could have fulfilled the plan of global Islamic *dawah* that was awaited for over a thousand years.

A Historical Reference

Professor T. W Arnold (1864-1930), a distinguished British orientalist, wrote a book on Islamic missionary activity after a thorough study of the subject. This book is titled *The Preaching of Islam*.

This book presents a detailed analysis of the spread of Islam in different countries over a thousand years beginning from the 7th century CE. For instance, with reference to a report from Africa, he writes:

Christian missionary reports: "When I came out in 1898, there were few Muhammadans to be seen below Iddah. Now they are everywhere, excepting below Abo, and at the present rate of progress there will scarcely be a heathen village on the riverbanks by 1910." (p. 326)

Professor Arnold wrote this about the settlements on both sides of the river Niger in West Africa. The river Niger is about 4,180 kilometres long and flows through five African countries—Guinea, Mali, Niger, Benin and Nigeria. This example illustrates the rapid spread of Islam in those times and it can be assumed that it was similar in many other countries as well.

This spread of the Islamic message of God came to a standstill in the 19th century at the same time when the discovery of the printing press and modern means of communication had opened the doors to the large scale global dissemination of the *dawah* message. The reason was that these new possibilities in the 19th century coincided with an alleged “problem”, that is, the domination of the western nations (western colonialism) over Muslim countries.

All dawah opportunities are being wasted while Muslims are engaged in a futile communal and political battle. The time has come for Muslims to totally abandon all such offensive activities and dedicate themselves totally to the true Islamic work of dawah.

At that time, the entire Muslim population succumbed to negative reaction. They began a hostile campaign against western civilization and western colonialism. Some involved themselves indirectly in this communal campaign through their speeches and writing directed against the West, while others directly engaged in a violent and armed conflict as a self-proclaimed *jihād*.

This state of affairs remains till today. All *dawah* opportunities are being wasted while Muslims are engaged in a futile communal and political battle. Now, the time has come as a final warning for Muslims all over the world to totally abandon all such offensive activities and dedicate themselves totally to the true Islamic work of *dawah*. □



A PURPOSEFUL LIFE

Understand God's Creation Plan

TUMADHIR BINT AMR (d. AD 646) is the best-known female poet in Arabic literature. She is usually referred to as al-Khansa. She was born into a noble family. Her father was the chief of the Banu Saleem tribe of Muzar. She had lost her two brothers, Sakhr and Muawiyah, in a war fought prior to the advent of Islam. Their deaths were a great shock to her. Before this tragedy, she would compose just two or three couplets at a time, now, after her bereavement the verses simply flowed from her heart as the tears flowed from her eyes. The elegies she wrote in memory of her brother Sakhr, were particularly heart-rending. She continued to compose and lament until she went blind in both eyes.

After the fall of Makkah in AD 630, she came to the Prophet with her tribe and accepted Islam. It is related that when she read out some of her verses to the Prophet, he was very moved and asked her to continue reading.

In her youth, she had been unable to bear the tragedy of her brother's deaths, but she derived such strength from Islam in her old age that she sacrificed her own sons in the path of God. She had four sons, all of whom she persuaded to fight in the battle of Qadisiya. They all fought bravely and were finally martyred. When she received the news of the deaths of all of her sons, she neither wrote elegies, nor did she bewail their passing. Instead, she heard the news with great calm and fortitude, and said: 'Thank God who has awarded me the honour of their martyrdom. I hope God will bring us together in the Hereafter.' Islam gives a sense of purpose and meaning to life. Islam makes one realize the creation plan of God. Once this grand plan is realized, it becomes easy to bear the hardships with equanimity and to play one's part in it. □

Islam gives a sense of purpose and meaning to life. Islam makes one realize the creation plan of God. Then, it becomes easy to bear the hardships with equanimity and to play one's part in it.



DUST UNTO DUST

An Illusory Asset

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE (1769-1821) started his career as a military officer. He distinguished himself by seizing opportunities when they came his way. He succeeded in attaining the throne of France, and had himself proclaimed Emperor of France in 1804. Then he set out to conquer the world. Soon he had conquered the whole of Europe except for England. He married a French lady, Josephine, but later divorced her, as she had failed to bear a successor for the Emperor of Europe.

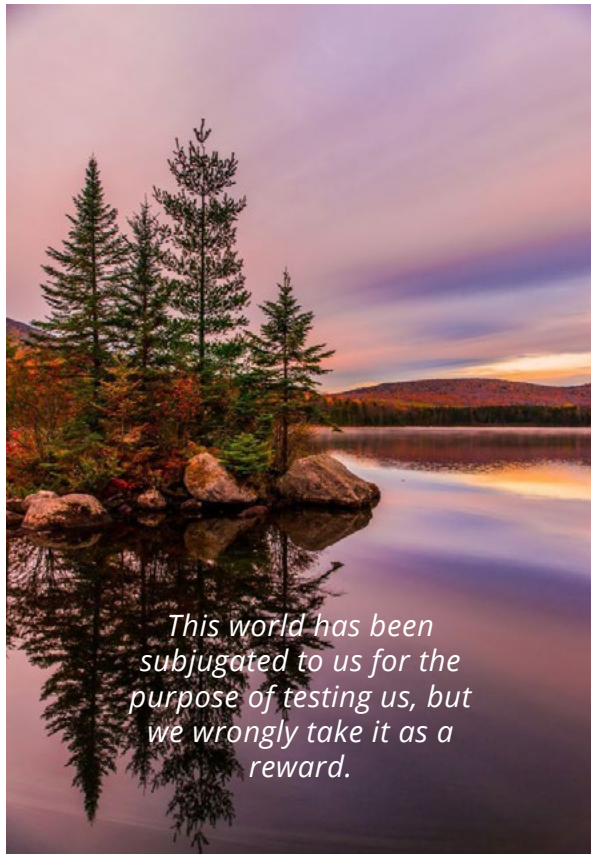
People dream of glory and splendour not only for themselves but also to pass on even to their children, blissfully unaware of the fact that before long they themselves are to be divested of all glory.

Afterwards, Napoleon married Marie-Louise, daughter of the King of Austria. She bore him a son in 1811 who was named Francis Joseph Charles. Napoleon was happy that he was to be succeeded by a crown prince who would continue the monarchy. Before long, however, his excessive political greed had led him to clash with Russia. Although Russian armies failed to counter him, the Russian climate came to their rescue.

Napoleon's armies, not accustomed to the harsh winter climate of Russia, could not bear up when the snow started falling. Napoleon was compelled to retreat in such a state of disarray that the major part of his army perished on the way. This occurred in 1812. Later events saw him in greater trouble. With his greatly reduced army he was defeated by Germany at Leipzig in 1813 and abdicated in 1814, when he was exiled to the island of Elba. He escaped and returned to power only to suffer a crushing defeat at the hands of the British at Waterloo in 1815. He was taken captive and was sent off to the island of Saint Helena, where he died in imprisonment in utter desperation in 1821.

People dream of glory and splendour not only for themselves but also to pass them on to their children, blissfully unaware of the fact that before long they themselves are to be divested of all glory. Each day, in this world, one 'Napoleon' or the other disappears, but no one takes heed.

In the present world, man is offered limited opportunities, man's ambition knows no limits, and he plans his life in the most incautious and unrestrained manner. Yet, at the end of it all, personal glory is simply buried in the dust. Those who watch the demise of 'great' men do not learn any lesson from their passing. Everyone sets out to write the same story, blaze the same trails, and climb the same mountains as his predecessors. No one thinks that it is all going to end in the same way, and that no trace of glory can accompany one into the Hereafter. □



PATIENCE VS IMPATIENCE

Winner Takes All

WHENEVER one faces a problem, one may either accept the responsibility for it, or attempt to lay the blame on others. The first course results from patience, the second from impatience.

There can be no positive human psychology without patience. The patient man tries to understand the nature of the challenge confronting him, and then attempts to meet that challenge to the best of his ability. He channels all his time, energy, and strength. He puts every particle of his resources into constructive action. Awakened by the shocks of an adverse situation, he makes a supreme effort to overcome all obstacles and to compensate for any previous failures. In this way, he emerges far more successful than ever before.

The patient man tries to understand the nature of the challenge confronting him, and then attempts to meet that challenge to the best of his ability.

The behaviour of the impatient man, as a result of negative thinking, is in direct contrast. He spends all his time complaining and protesting. Instead of putting all his resources into self-construction, he uses them in destructive activities directed against others. Instead of trying to make up for his own shortcomings, he throws himself into proving that others are in the wrong. If, prior to this, he was denied his due because of his own inaction, he now becomes the greater loser because of taking a wrong course of action.

Patience is a sine qua non for a well thought-out action. Impatience can only give rise to inconsiderate decisions. Patience permits planned action, while impatience leads to acting in excessive haste. The patient man will attempt to solve problems only after making a proper assessment of the situation, and with a view to consequences. The impatient man will jump into the fray without any calculation whatsoever and—a prey to his own seething emotions—will remain blind to any adverse consequences. A very important aspect of the patient man is that he will take the trouble to acquaint himself with the standpoint of others, while the impatient man will consider only his own whimsical claims. □

SEEKER OF PARADISE

Necessary Traits

IN a *Hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad, the following words have been mentioned for the seeker of Paradise: I did not see anything like Paradise, whose seeker is asleep. (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*) From this statement, we realize that Paradise is for one whose entire personality gets bathed in the intense desire for Paradise, who discovers the reality of Paradise to such an extent that Paradise is personified in his longings, who sleeps and wakes up in remembrance of Paradise. Paradise is for one who vexes himself with these questions: if God did not grant him Paradise, what would happen to him? If he is deprived of Paradise in the Hereafter, how much worse it will be for him? What a tragedy life will be for him?

The seeker of Paradise is one who begins to see Paradise without seeing it, one who becomes a real seeker of Paradise before entering it. The image of the seeker of Paradise is described in a verse of the Quran as follows: He will admit them into the Garden He has already made known to them. (47: 6) In this verse, the knowledge of Paradise is attributed to God, but it is the attribute of a believer. The believer is the one who discovers Paradise in such a way that Paradise becomes his intense longing. This does not mean that people have been told in advance what Paradise is. Rather, it means that the believer increases his knowledge of Paradise to such an extent that Paradise becomes a known thing to him in advance.

Paradise is for one whose entire personality gets bathed in the intense desire for Paradise, who discovers the reality of Paradise to such an extent that Paradise is personified in his longings, who sleeps and wakes up in remembrance of Paradise.

The fact is that Paradise is a desirable target, which, by its very nature, is a counterpart to the seeker of Paradise. It is by nature a known abode of man as if Paradise is made for man, and man for Paradise. But the mere desire for Paradise is not enough to prove oneself worthy of entering Paradise; one is required to make the necessary preparations. □



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



THE VEIL OF SATAN

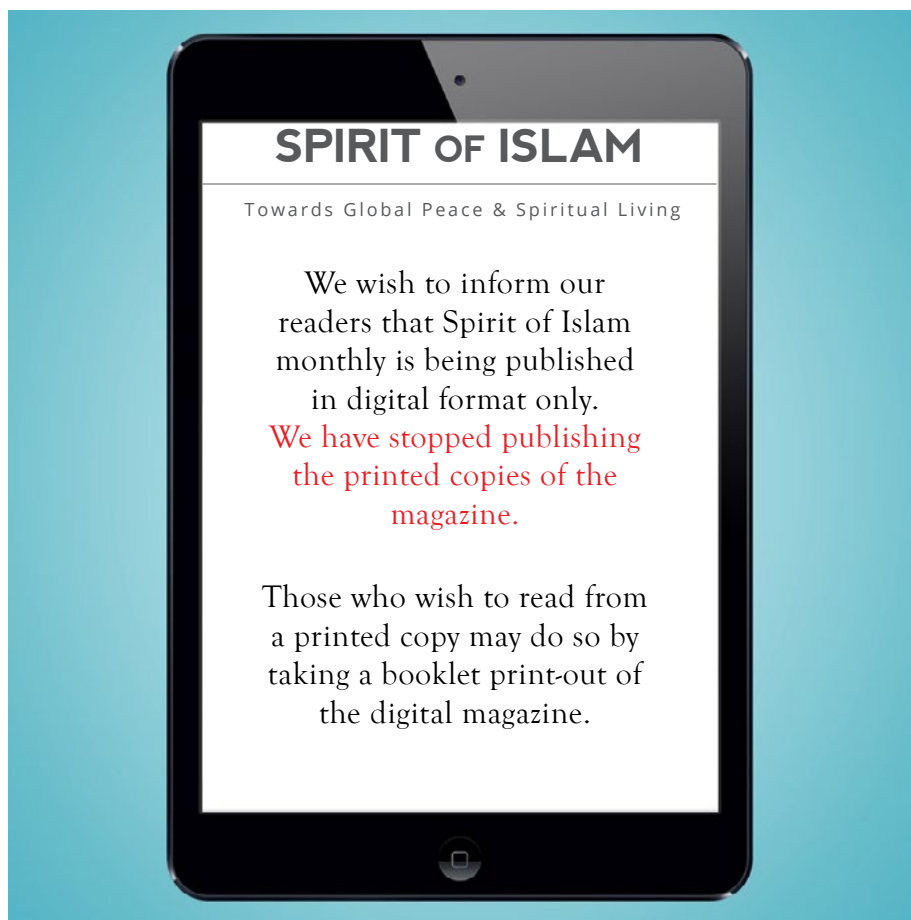
THE following is a part of a long *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet): “Satan keeps hovering over the eyes of human beings, so that they may not reflect upon the divine signs scattered all over the earth and the heavens. Had it not been so, they would certainly see divine marvels.” (*Musnad Ahmad*)

The universe around us is called nature in scientific terminology. Man comes across numerous events or phenomena in this vast world of nature. He sees and experiences them without learning any lesson from them. The following verse of the Quran applies to those who do not pay heed to signs of nature: “And there are many signs in the heavens and the earth that they pass by and give no heed to.” (12:105)

These events scattered in the universe are in fact divine signs. They serve as an introduction to the Creator in the form of His creation. If a person were to see with open eyes, he would observe the marvels of nature in these signs. But Satan puts such thoughts in man’s mind as prevent him from seeing those events of nature from the right perspective. It is Satan who puts the thought in a person’s mind that all those signs of nature are the result of the laws of cause and effect,

happening automatically, rather than the result of divine power. Satan tries to stop man from looking at these events from the point of view of deriving lessons from them. He strives to make man look at them purely from the point of view of material gain. Satan tries to make man take everything around him for granted and not ponder or reflect upon them. It is these Satanic whisperings which deprive man of the right realization of God and reality. □

It is Satan who puts the thought in a person's mind that all the signs of nature are the result of the laws of cause and effect, happening automatically, rather than the result of divine power.



THE PRIVILEGE OF PARADISE

Follow God's Creation Plan

HERE is a verse from the Quran: God has a reward in store for them: Gardens of eternity, through which rivers flow; they will dwell therein forever. God is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him. Thus shall the God-fearing be rewarded. (98: 8)

What is the meaning of the mutual contentment mentioned in this verse? In this verse, the story of the people of Paradise is told in such words that they are the ones who are pleased with God. God's servant being pleased with God means he lived his life according to the creation plan of God. The servant was content and pleased with the creation plan of God. Then God was also pleased to open the gates of Paradise for such a servant as He had promised.

A person, who is satisfied and content with the creation plan of God, will start following the pattern of life established by God with complete contentment. This way of life is possible only for those who fear God alone.

For human beings, Paradise is not a commodity of purchase, but it is a reward for being pleased and content with God's plan. It is God's great mercy that He declares Paradise to be a matter of mutual contentment. In reality, granting someone Paradise is a reward from God, but in order to increase man's status, God has made it a matter of mutual contentment. This is the meaning of God and His servants being pleased with one another.

A person, who is satisfied with the creation plan of God, will start following the pattern of life laid down by God with complete contentment. This way of life is possible only for those who fear God alone. The only incentive to adopt this way of life is fear of the Lord. A person who is devoid of fear of the Lord will not adopt such a way of life. Therefore, such people are destined to be deprived of eternal Paradise as the final destination of their journey. □



THE QUEST FOR IDEAL SOCIETY

An Unnatural Pursuit

ARISTOTLE, one of the greatest thinkers of the world, is known as “The First Teacher”. His philosophy had a profound influence on the history of thought. Aristotle believed that man has been created with many attributes and abilities. Initially, these abilities exist only as potential in the human personality. In order to convert these potential abilities into reality, a favourable socio-political system is necessary. Alexander the Great (d. 323 BCE), was a student of Aristotle. With Alexander’s support, Aristotle desired to establish an ideal socio-political system in Greece. Despite Alexander’s leadership, this desire could not be fulfilled and Aristotle died in a state of despair at the age of 62.

According to Aristotle, human accomplishment is possible only through a virtuous socio-political order. He presented this argument in the language of philosophy. In other words, he philosophized this theory. He remarked, “The legal system alone saves people from their own savagery”. Many centuries later, Karl Marx (d. 1883) expressed the same idea, using economic terminology. In other words, he secularized the same theory. The global communist movement and the Soviet Union (USSR) that came into being on the basis of the Marxist ideology completely failed in bringing about this ideal socio-political system that was envisaged.

Political confrontation is no minor matter. In terms of its results, it necessarily divides people into two rival camps.

After this, the same way of thinking developed amongst Muslims as well. Some Muslim scholars, consciously or otherwise, introduced this theory into ‘Islamic’ thought. They propounded a political interpretation of Islam. They declared the establishment of an ‘Islamic’ socio-political system as imperative for Islamic life.

Looking back at history, one can now see how Aristotle had prepared a philosophical edition of the concept of an ideal socio-political system. Marx invented a secular edition of this concept. And later, Muslim scholars devised an ‘Islamic’ version of it.

History reveals that during the last 2500 years or so, beginning with Aristotle, this concept has never been realized. Never and nowhere has

it happened that any collective or socio-political system as devised by any such reformer was established in practice. History tells us that the flag-bearers of this concept and the ideology based on it, all died in a state of despair and frustration. They all failed in bringing about the socio-political system of their dreams.

An even more bitter aspect of this issue is that all these so-called social reformers emerged in the name of constructive revolutions, but in practice they only gave the world a gift of destruction. Aristotle's student Alexander unleashed wars against the entire world. In the name of establishing the ideal social system of their dreams, the followers of Marx killed millions of people in Russia alone.

The Creator's target is the individual—the preparation and selection of the individuals, not the establishment of any ideal society. It is simply not possible for an ideal collective system to be established in this world.

Why did all these movements for collective reform and social transformation meet with the same negative end? The answer lies in the fact that a collective order or socio-political system is directly related to the issue of political power. So, whenever some people try to establish a collective system of their dreams, they will necessarily come into conflict with those who at the time hold the reins of power in society. As a result, the idea of establishing a social system, from its very outset, becomes synonymous with confrontation and conflict.

Political confrontation is no minor matter. In terms of its results, it necessarily divides people into two rival camps. In the words of those who propounded the political interpretation of Islam, one group is regarded as *taghoot* (evil or falsehood), and the other group is considered its polar opposite. This latter group launches its movement in opposition to an established government. To start with, the initiative begins in a peaceful manner. But when peaceful efforts seem to fail, gradually violent activism begins against the established government. Then, when through violence the desired success is not obtained, terrorism and suicide-bombing is resorted to. In its final outcome, this 'collective social revolution' only turns into 'collective devastation' for all.

The cause of this devastating failure is that the concept of social revolution is in itself an unnatural concept. It is against the creation plan of the Creator. And it is a fact that in this world, no concept or

ideology that is against the creation plan of the Creator can produce any positive result.

The Creation Plan of God

The Quran, being a preserved book, is a reliable source to know God's creation plan. A study of the Quran informs us that the plan according to which God created human beings is not based on any assumed social system. It is based entirely on the notion of individual reform. In order to put into effect His scheme in the world, the Creator sent prophets in every age to instruct man. The target of the call of all the prophets was always the individual, and not any sort of socio-political system. According to God's creation plan, the establishment of an ideal social system at the collective level in the world is of no real concern. The Creator's target is the individual—the preparation and selection of the individuals, not the establishment of any ideal society. It is simply not possible for an ideal collective system to be established in this world.

An ideal system or ideal society can be established only in Paradise. The status of the present world is of a selection ground. God's will is that, in the present world, such righteous individuals be selected who would be deserving of being settled in the eternal Paradise of the Hereafter. To further understand this matter, we should study Chapter 2 (*The Heifer*) of the Quran.

The relevant verses from the Quran (2: 30-31) tell us:

When your Lord said to the angels, "I am putting a successor on earth," they said, "Will You place someone there who will cause corruption on it and shed blood, while we glorify You with Your praise and extol Your holiness?" [God] answered, "Surely, I know that which you do not know." He taught Adam all the names, then He set them before the angels and said, "Tell Me the names of these, if what you say be true."

When God created man as a free creature and decided to place the earth in his charge, the angels expressed the apprehension that with the free will, man would create strife and corruption on earth and would shed blood. This apprehension of the angels was not unfounded. The Quran itself verifies that this is indeed what happened. In the first quarter of the seventh century CE, when the Quran was revealed, God included this verse in it: Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of the evil which men's hands have done. (30: 41)

Here, the question arises that when the phenomenon whose apprehension the angels had expressed actually occurred, why did

God create Adam and his progeny and give them the opportunity to live on earth?

From the birth of Adam to the first quarter of the seventh century when the Quran was revealed, in every community and nation, messengers were sent by God. Despite this, the majority among the later generations of Adam's descendants proved to be corrupt, so much that the whole of history was one of strife and corruption. In such a situation, the

From the Quran, we learn that the purpose of God's creation is the selection of 'righteous individuals'. It is not the intention of God that a social system of justice and welfare be established on earth for the whole of humankind.

question arises: Why did God create man? The answer to this question is found in the above-mentioned verses of the Quran (2: 30-31).

From these verses of the Quran we learn that God taught Adam the names of his progeny. Here, 'names of progeny' meant the knowledge of the 'selected names from humankind'; 'names' meant 'named individuals' or 'selected persons'. It must be noted that the progeny of Adam that was presented before Adam and the angels on that occasion was not the whole of humanity or the entire offspring of Adam. If all of humankind was revealed, the apprehension expressed by the angels could not have been alleviated; rather such a

demonstration would only have confirmed their fears. As affirmed by the Quran, a major portion of all of humankind would practically prove themselves corrupt.

Contemplating the matter from this perspective, it can be understood that it was not the entire progeny of Adam, but only the selected few individuals who were presented before the angels. These 'selected individuals' were those referred to at other places in the Quran as "the messengers, the truthful, the witnesses, and the righteous" (4: 69). This demonstration was not exclusively for the angels, it was also addressed indirectly to those individuals who desired to understand the creation plan of God.

Further proof in this regard is present in verse 67:2 (*The Kingdom*) of the Quran:

He created death and life so that He might test you, and find out which of you is best in conduct. He is the Mighty, the Most Forgiving One.

From this verse and from other verses of the Quran we learn that the purpose of God's creation is the selection of 'righteous individuals'. It is

not the intention of God that a social system of justice and welfare be established on the earth for the whole of humankind.

In line with the plan with which God created man, an ideal social system was simply not possible at all. According to this creation plan, every human being was given full freedom. Every person had complete freedom of choice. It was absolutely natural, therefore, that people would misuse their freedom and in this way the majority of them would become corrupt. On account of this, God chose an attainable target, i.e. to establish His creation plan based on individuals, not on the principle of a collective community. According to this plan, there is an atmosphere of complete freedom on earth. People are born here, one after another. Among them, some individuals use their freedom in the right manner, while others use their freedom in the wrong manner. At the same time, in accordance with an unseen system of record-keeping, the angels are compiling a complete record of every person. This record will be presented before God on the Day of Judgement. The events of that day have been foretold and explained elsewhere in the Quran. For example, it has been said (42: 7):

.....warn them of the Day of Gathering which is sure to come: when some will be in the Garden, and some will be in the Fire.

According to this understanding of creation, in the Hereafter, from among the whole of humanity, only the righteous individuals will be selected, i.e. those who had given evidence by their deeds that despite their freedom, they did not use their freedom wrongly. Despite their freedom, they led a principled life and saved themselves from going astray. In this way, they proved that they were worthy of being settled in the ideal society of Paradise. In the Hereafter, these selected individuals from the whole of human history will be settled in Paradise. □



TYPES OF THE PEOPLE OF PARADISE

Importance of God-realization

THESE words are mentioned in chapter *Iron (Al-Hadid)* of the Quran while describing Paradise: *Vie with one another for your Lord's forgiveness and for a Paradise as vast as heaven and earth.* (57: 21)

In another verse, these words are mentioned in the language of the people of Paradise: *And they will say, 'Praise be to God who has fulfilled His promise to us and made us the inheritors of this land.'* (39: 74)

This statement of the Quran suggests that Paradise will be a world that is open to all. A person in Paradise will be able to make his abode in this vast world wherever he wants. Everyone will have equal freedom in terms of choosing their residence or habitat.

A person who has reached a particular level of God-realization in the life of this world will be able to enjoy the blessings of Paradise to the corresponding degree.

Other Quranic verses and a number of *Hadith* reports prove that there will be a difference in rank in Paradise. Some people in Paradise will have a higher rank in Paradise than others. For example, according to the Quran, some of them will be those who excelled in good deeds, and some will be those who kept half way between right and wrong (35: 32). The question now is what would be the basis of this difference? Pondering over it, we understand that the basis of this difference will be the capacity of a person to enjoy the

blessings of Paradise. Paradise will probably be the same for everyone in terms of its appearance, but the matter of relishing the blessings of Paradise will not be the same for everyone. Some will get more from the blessings and amusements of Paradise, and some will get relatively less.

This difference in the capacity of amusement will be based on the difference in the level of God-realization. A person who has reached a particular level of God-realization in the life of this world will be able to enjoy the blessings of Paradise to the corresponding degree. It is as if all the people of Paradise are equally involved in the abode of Paradise in terms of residence, but the person who is consciously at a particular level of God-realization will be able to enjoy the blessings of Paradise to a commensurate degree.

To understand this matter, read the following *Hadith*. A noted scholar of *Hadith* literature *al-Bayhaqi* has narrated a *Hadith* in these words: Abdullah Ibn Rawaha, a Companion of the Prophet said to one of his friends, "Come, let us believe for a moment." His friend said, "Are we not believers?" Ibn Rawaha said, "Yes, but when we remember God, we increase our faith." (*Shuab ul-Iman lil-Bayhaqi*)

This *Hadith* suggests that there are two types of believers. One is a person who, after proclaiming the verbal creed of monotheism, thinks that he has become a believer, has got the faith he was supposed to have. He has nothing more to gain of faith or belief. In contrast, the other person is the one who remembers God again and again. He meditates on God. He continues thus to increase his faith, his faith continues to grow consciously.

This example shows that the believers have different ranks or degrees in terms of God-realization. Some are at a higher level of God-realization and some are at a lower level. This difference in the realization of God will make a difference in terms of enjoyment in Paradise.

One kind of a believer is one who reads the words *Alhamdulillah* in the Quran, i.e. praise be to God, the Lord of the universe, then he accepts this fact without any doubt or hesitation. He accepts it with absolute conviction. The second kind of a believer is one who reads *Alhamdulillah* in the Quran, and such deep meanings of God's creation are visualized in his mind that a state of thrill arises in him. He is filled with the spirit of praise to God.

In the same way, a believer is one when God is mentioned before him; he accepts it as a truth. For example, if a person says *Alhamdulillah* when he sneezes, then on hearing this, these words will come upon the hearer's tongue: May God have mercy on him. In contrast, the other believer is the one when God is mentioned before him, due to his increased consciousness, he gets in such a state of mind that the hairs of his body stand on end with the feeling of God's greatness. His heart leaps at the thought of God's greatness, as mentioned in the Quran: True believers are those whose hearts tremble with awe at the mention of God, and whose faith grows stronger as they listen to His revelations. They are those who put their trust in their Lord. (8: 2)

Similarly, a believer is one who recites the following verse in the Quran: It is God Who gives me food and drink. (26: 79) The reader understood this verse in its literal sense and words of thanks came on his tongue. The second type of believer is the one who reads this verse and innumerable facts come to his mind. He thinks that innumerable

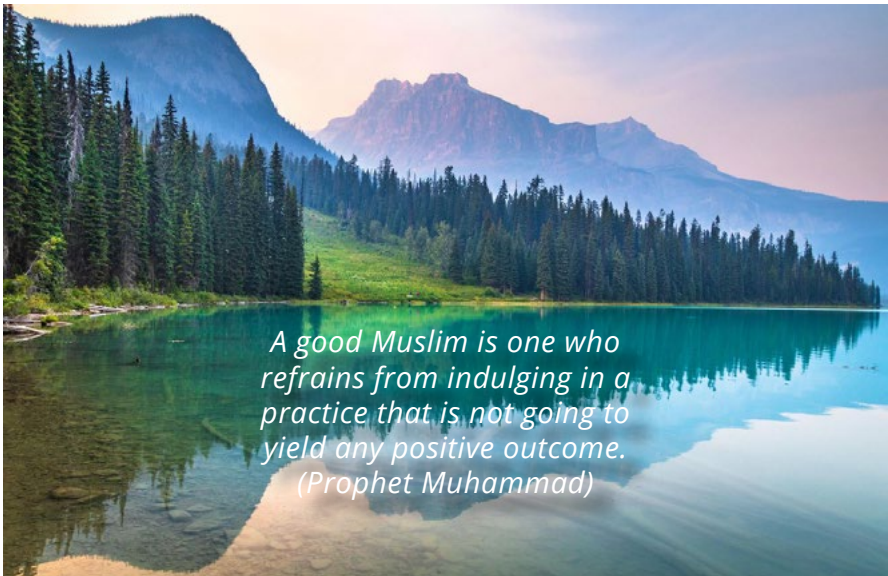
activities take place in the heavens and the earth. After that, it becomes possible to materialize what we call food and water, which are essential for the survival of life. With this thought, his heart is filled with the acknowledgement of these great boons of the Almighty. This intense gratitude finds vent through his eyes in the form of tears.

The highest level of faith is that which progresses with the journey of knowledge. This is obtained by immersing oneself in the divine ocean.

Both types of believers possess the feeling of praise for God, but in terms of the level of realization, there is so much difference between the two that it is not possible to describe in words.

The Quran and *Hadith* prove that those who believe with a sincere heart, whose intentions are right, those who obey the commands of God as much as they can, will enter Paradise. But this is the primary level of faith. The highest level of faith is that which progresses

with the journey of knowledge. This is obtained by immersing oneself in the divine ocean. There is no doubt that Paradise is destined for both types of believers, but in the matter of enjoying the blessings of Paradise, the difference between a believer and another believer will be the same as that which existed between the two in terms of knowledge and realization of the truth. □



A POSITIVE CONCEPT OF DEATH

Preparatory Period for Unending Rewards

IF you look up the word 'death' in the dictionary, you will find 'death' described as: Permanent cessation of life. This literal definition of death presents a negative picture of death. This means that a person is born as a perfect human being, but after living for a short period of time, his existence ends forever. All his desires and all his abilities are destroyed in such a way that it is not possible for these desires and abilities to come into existence again.

Islam, on the other hand, offers a positive outlook of life. According to Islam, death is not the end of life. Death marks the beginning of the second phase of human life.

According to Islam, a human being is created as an eternal creature, and then his lifespan is divided into two parts: pre-death period and post-death period. The pre-death period is a place of preparation and the post-death period is a place of reaping the permanent rewards, according to the kind of preparation. According to this creation plan, a person should consider the life before death as a preparatory period and spend it perfectly and completely for preparation. It is because in the period of life that will come after death, one will not have any opportunity to act, but only to reap the rewards of one's deeds. Death, in fact, gives a message of life, and this message is—do what you have to do today, because there will be no time left to do anything tomorrow. □

Death gives a message of life, and this message is—do what you have to do today, because there will be no time left to do anything tomorrow.

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BREAKING THE BONDS OF TIME

Through Keeness and Enthusiasm

A part-time employee in a busy institution also worked as a sub-editor of an English newspaper. Keen and well educated, he managed to carry out both sets of responsibilities with the utmost efficiency. When asked how he found the time to do so much work, he replied, "Time is nothing but a function of interest."

Performance ratings, based on time and motion studies, have definitely shown that the successful completion of any given task is dependent not so much on the time factor as on interest. Quite simply, it is a man's keeness which is the spur to greater achievements. The time taken to complete a task is actually shortened by the performer's enthusiasm and dedication. If, however, the element of interest is lacking, even the most generous time allowance can prove to be insufficient.

Once a person received an offer of employment from abroad, which meant his leaving India in three weeks' time. Foreign travel involves cutting through a great deal of red tape, which can take weeks, or even months. It, therefore, seemed unlikely that he would be able to

The constraints of time can easily be overcome by keeness and enthusiasm, but that where these elements are lacking, even the least time-bound of ventures are likely to fail.

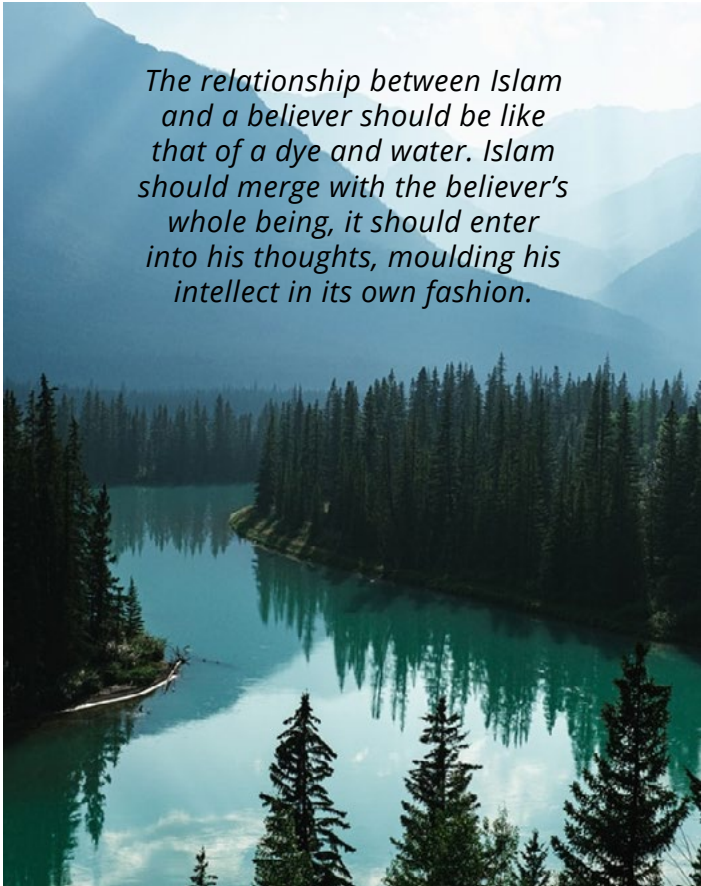
leave on time, particularly since he did not even have a passport. Yet, in spite of all kinds of obstacles, he managed to complete the required formalities, and boarded his plane as per schedule.

Another person, who had two whole months before he left on a foreign assignment, wrote from his village to a relative in town, requesting him to make his travel arrangements and to attend to any other formalities. Having dispatched a sum of money to cover all likely expenses, he was content to wait in his village while his relative did the needful. He was

quite complacent about the whole affair because two months seemed quite long enough for the completion of all formalities. It was this complacency on his part which caused him to miss his chance of going abroad. While he imagined that his relative was taking all the necessary steps, nothing of the sort was happening. Had he subsequently written to him to emphasize the urgency of the situation, had troubled to go to town himself to take some personal interest in his own affairs, he

would have been able to leave on time. As it was, he missed one of the greatest opportunities of his life, because at the crucial moment he showed a lack of interest and enthusiasm.

It is clear from the contrast in the attitude of these individuals that the constraints of time can easily be overcome by keenness and enthusiasm, but that where these elements are lacking, even the least time-bound of ventures are likely to fail. □



The relationship between Islam and a believer should be like that of a dye and water. Islam should merge with the believer's whole being, it should enter into his thoughts, moulding his intellect in its own fashion.

HORTICULTURE THERAPY

A Healing Touch of Nature

TREES are vital to the existence of human beings. In a treeless world any form of human or animal life would be well-nigh impossible, quite apart from any consideration of aesthetic appeal. Trees absorb noise, give off precious oxygen, clean the air of pollution, reduce glare, act as coolers and air conditioners and also serve as emotional tranquilizers—trees are vital in any city, howsoever developed it may be.

In hospitals, schools, prisons, and drug rehabilitation centres, it has been found that trees act as a form of therapy, helping to heal mental, physical and social disabilities, where trees have been properly landscaped and planted with an eye to beauty of form, colour and denseness, they can ease stress, contribute to healing and provide an environment where relaxation is possible. This therapy is known as Horticulture Therapy.

The role human beings play in the cultivation of plant life is minimal as compared to the colossal amount of support provided by nature. This support system of nature set in place in order to bring about plant life is mind-boggling. No one except God could make this system function seamlessly.

Horticultural therapy is a professional practice that uses plants and gardening to improve mental and physical health. It focusses on the people-plant connection. It uses plants and plant-related activities for physical, mental and social well-being. It is based upon the idea that interacting with plants can bring about well-being, whether it's tending a garden or just having plants in your home.

Many studies have found that just being in nature—such as taking a walk through a garden, a park, a forest—can improve not only your state of mind but your blood pressure, your heart rate and your stress hormone levels and, over time, can lead to a longer life. Plants bring peace and tranquility to troubled hearts. A beautiful landscape, a wooded park, can do more for the human soul than all the chemical tranquilizers of the world.

“Plants,” says an eminent horticulturist, “are non-threatening and non-discriminating. They respond not to race, intellect, wealth or physical capacity but to the care given to them. Plants ease anxiety and tension, give a sense of tranquility.”

The role human beings play in the cultivation of plant life is minimal as compared to the colossal amount of support provided by nature. This entire system of nature set in place in order to bring about plant life is mind-boggling. No one except God could make this system function seamlessly. This is mentioned in the Quran thus:

Who created the heavens and the earth and sends down water for you from the sky, by which We make luxuriant gardens grow—you could never make such trees grow in them—is it another deity besides God? (27: 60)

The life-giving world of plants is a proof of the existence and benevolence of God. Man would do well if he emulates the plant world and becomes a helper member of the society, and acknowledges the blessings of God. □



*Pray to God with fear and
hope, God's mercy is close to
those who do good.
(The Quran 7: 56)*



NUGGET OF WISDOM

Failure is not Permanent

THE events from the life of the Prophet Job are described in the Quran in brief, and in the Bible in vivid detail. An entire book is dedicated to his life in the Bible. It is named *Book of Job*. Thomas Carlyle was so impressed with *Book of Job* that he wrote: I call the book of Job, apart from all theories about it, one of the grandest things ever written with the pen. (...) I think, there is nothing in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit. (*On Heroes and Hero-worship*)

The Prophet Job was born several hundred years before Jesus Christ in the plains stretching from Syria to Palestine. In the Bible, his birthplace is called Uz.

This world is so designed that here no loss or deprivation is final. One can always overcome misfortunes and be the gainer once again, provided one remains patient and perseveres in one's struggles, never losing hope of God's succour.

According to the Bible he possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys. In addition, he had a very great household. Thus he was the greatest of all the men of the east.

After some time, such misfortunes befell him as left him impoverished, yet Job was the epitome of patience. In the words of the Bible "...Job arose, and tore his robe. He shaved his head, and then he threw himself down with his face to the ground. He said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'
(Job 1: 20-21)

Then again the circumstances changed after some years. Job again came to possess all kinds of wealth and resources, even more than he had before. According to the Bible:

The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning; for he had 14,000 sheep, and 6,000 camels, and 1000 female donkeys.
(Job 42: 12)

The Quran ends the tale with:

We restored his family to him, doubling their number as an act of grace from Us, and as a reminder to all who are endowed with insight. (38: 43)

Although given very brief mention in the Quran, this incident makes the very important and lesson-giving point that one should never despair when afflicted by misfortune or loss in life. God, being All Merciful, has devised the system of this world in such a way that here no loss or deprivation is final. Here, one can always overcome one's misfortunes and be the gainer once again, provided one remains patient and perseveres in one's struggles, never losing hope of God's succour. □



Patience gives the strength to restrain one's emotions in delicate situations and to use one's mind to find a course of action along result-oriented lines.



THE PROPHET AND HIS COMPANIONS

An Introduction to the Sublime Attributes

THE following is a selection from the books of Islamic history portraying the desired traits of a believer's life.

Embracing true faith nullifies past sins

While emigrating from Makkah to Madinah, the Prophet of Islam came across two men in the mountain pass of Rakooba. He invited them to Islam, and they accepted the invitation. He asked them their names, and they said they belonged to the tribe of Aslam. They were bandits, they told him, and for this reason people called them "Muhanan", or "The Two Despicable Ones". "No," the Prophet said, "you are two honourable ones." (*Musnad Ahmad*)

Unity under all conditions

Hold fast to the cord of God and let nothing divide you. (3: 103) The Prophet Muhammad has likened a community with the human body. According to him, a community is like one body. When even a single part of the human body suffers for any reason the restlessness is felt in all parts of the body. The stress that has been laid upon unity among the members of a community makes it compulsory for all to respect and care about the comfort of their brethren.

I want to be able to present a clean sheet of my life to God. If I owe anybody anything, which I forgot to repay, or have physically or mentally harmed anyone without my knowledge, then I request him to accept compensation or forgive me. (Prophet Muhammad)

Be a giver member of society

The Prophet said. "For every limb of man's body, for every new day, there is an act of charity to be performed. To judge fairly between two people is an act of charity. To give someone a hand climbing on his mount, or taking luggage off it, is an act of charity. A good word is an act of charity. To remove any obstacle from a path is an act of charity." (*Bukhari and Muslim*)

Become deserving of God's love

A few of the Companions were sitting with the Prophet. So silent were they that it was as if there were birds perched upon their heads. No one was saying a word. Some people came

up and asked: "Who does God love most among His servants?" "The one with the best character," the Prophet replied. (*Tabarani, Ibn Habban*)

Paying back what one owes others

A few days before he passed away, the Prophet delivered an unusually long speech. He concluded by saying: "I want to be able to present a clean sheet of my life to God. If I owe anybody anything, which I forgot to repay, or have physically or mentally harmed anyone without my knowledge, then I request him to accept compensation or forgive me." The Prophet finished speaking and waited a while, but no one spoke up. He then performed the afternoon prayer, after which he repeated his request. A man rose and said: "Prophet of God, you owe me five dirhams." The Prophet gave instructions for him to be repaid, there and then.

Forsaking this world for the next

Aisha (wife of the Prophet) says that one of the Companions came to the Prophet and said to him, "I have two servants who persistently deceive, betray and disobey me. I beat them and scold them in return. How do I stand in relation to them?" The Prophet replied: "Their disobedience, perfidy and deception will be weighed up, and so will the reprisals you take against them. If your reprisals are equal to their crimes, then the two will balance one another out. Nothing will be left owing to you, and you will not owe anything. And if your reprisals are less than their crimes, then you will be paid the balance. But if the reprisals you took against them are weightier than the crimes they committed, then they will be repaid from the grace that was previously yours." The man started crying in front of the Prophet. "Why, have you not read the Book of God?" the Prophet said to him: "We shall set up scales of justice on the Day of Resurrection, so that no soul can be in the least wronged. Actions as small as a grain of mustard seed shall be weighed. We are sufficient as a reckoner." (21: 47) "O Prophet of God," the man said, "I think it would be best for me to free them. You are witness to the fact that I have freed them all. (*Musnad Ahmad*)

Being just to all, whether weak or strong

Muawiya Ibn Abu Sufyan asked Dhirar to tell him about Ali (the fourth Caliph). Part of Dhirar's description of Ali's qualities went like this: "He lived among us like one of us. No one who was in the wrong would have any hope that Ali would side with him, no matter how powerful he was, and no one who was weak would have cause for despair of being treated justly by him." □



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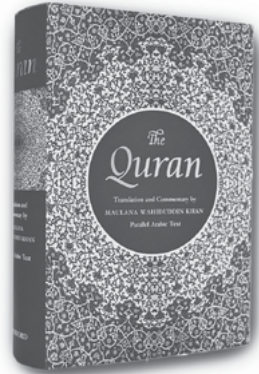
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- ▶ Quran

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 CE 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



—A True Understanding of Death from the Quran—

We shall certainly test you with fear and hunger, and loss of property, lives and crops. Give good news to those who endure with fortitude. Those who say, when afflicted with a calamity, 'We belong to God and to Him we shall return,' are the ones who will have blessings and mercy from their Lord: it is they who are on the right path! (2:155-156)

Every human being is bound to taste death; and you shall receive your rewards in full on the Day of Resurrection. (3: 185)

No soul shall die except with God's permission and at an appointed time. (3:145)

No soul knows in what land it will die. Surely, God is all knowing, all aware. (31:34)

How can you disbelieve in God when you were dead (lifeless) and He gave you life? He will let you die once more, then bring you back to life again, whereupon you will be returned to Him. (2: 28)

He gives life and brings about death, and to Him you shall all return. (10: 56)

On the death of a loved one, one goes in a state of prayerfulness, deep thinking and contemplation. The experience reminds him that there is very little time at his disposal and that at any moment death can come calling.

However, we are so involved in worldly things that we never stop to think about the day which is fast approaching us. The Prophet Muhammad said, 'People are asleep, they will wake up only when they die.' All of a

sudden, death will bring you standing face to face with God, at which time you will be held accountable for all your deeds.

That will be the moment you realize that what you were doing was one thing and that what you should have been doing was quite another. The Prophet Muhammad once said that on the Day of Judgement, a man's foot would not move unless he had answered four questions: Where he earned his money from, and where he spent it; how he spent his youth and how he used his knowledge.

The Creator has divided human life into two parts: the pre-death and post-death periods. The pre-death period is very short (like the tip of an iceberg) in comparison to the post-death period, which is eternal. The pre-death period is the preparatory phase in which you prepare yourself to become eligible to enter Paradise in the post-death period.

This worldly life is a 'test' for everyone, whether poor or rich, powerful or powerless, strong or weak. Man is required to pass in all these tests and trials by leading a need-based life rather than a life based on desire and greed, so that in the life Hereafter, God will allow him to enter Paradise, to live there forever in close proximity to his Creator.

On the death of a loved one, one should not go into a state of mourning. The Quran gives us great hope in moments of grief and loss: It says that God will reunite all the righteous members of the family in Paradise.

Moreover, if a member of the family has reached a higher level of Paradise, all the righteous members of that family will be 'upgraded', so that they may all enjoy eternal bliss and nearness to God. This idea gives great solace and it acts as an incentive and encouragement to do good work, and lead a pious and righteous life.

The Prophet Muhammad said that when a man dies, everything connected with him is cut off except three things: Continuous charity, knowledge from which benefit is derived and virtuous children who pray for him. □



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.

I have read some books on world history and the commentaries of some historians. Reading them, it felt like the whole of human history was a history of rebellion and unrest. There are very few moments in history when man has had the opportunity to live in a calm and temperate environment. With this view of history, some people doubt the existence of God. They say that if God is just, then why is there so much corruption in the world He has created? Please shed some light on this question.

This question about the world arises when it is viewed from the point of view of human beings. If, however, we look at the world through the eyes of the Creator, we can easily find the answer and believe that what happened should have necessarily happened.

To understand this, we must know what God's creation plan is for the present world. According to the Quran, the creation plan of God is based on the principle of test. In the present world, God did not create man to enjoy life here. The life of luxury will be given to man in the Hereafter according to his deeds. The whole system of the present world is built in such a way that every human being and every group could undergo the test.

Experience has shown that in normal conditions, the true nature of a human being remains unknown. People hide themselves in enchanting words and beautiful clothes. In such a situation, in order to expose people, it is necessary to bring disturbance in their lives. This can be understood by likening human being to an egg. From the top, every egg looks good. Only when the eggs are broken do you know which egg was good and which egg was bad.

What God wants most in this world is that the condition of test should always remain, and for the test, extraordinary circumstances must be encountered. Therefore, extraordinary circumstances are repeatedly produced in the life of each individual and group to find out what they really were. A person may either be a true believer in the true sense of the word or he had only apparently put on a showy shell of truth.

I am a student of philosophy. I have a natural inclination towards philosophy. I often have doubts about many things. As soon as one kind of doubt is removed, another kind of doubt strikes me. Do you have to give up the study of philosophy to deal with this situation? Most people advise me that philosophy is not a practical discipline, it is an intellectual discipline. They also tell me that getting into intellectual complications is a waste of time. I am often warned that such pursuits not only fail to develop our mind along positive lines but also rob us of faith and belief in religion.

This question has been successfully answered by some eminent philosophers themselves such as the great British philosopher Bertrand Russell. If you read his book *Human Knowledge*, you will find the answer to your question.

The fact is that philosophy has been active in the search for truth for at least 5,000 years, but it has not been able to discover the truth. On the contrary, science has made great strides in modern times. The secret is that the aim of philosophy was to reach the ultimate level of knowledge and that was not possible in the present world. Science discovered this fact and became content with partial knowledge. This is the reason of the stupendous success of science.

An example of this is when a man is standing in front of an X-ray machine and the switch of the machine is pressed on, an internal picture of the man appears on a film. Now the philosopher would like to know why this happened. Since it is not possible for man to reach this knowledge due to his own limitations, philosophy will be forever entangled in it. In the end, a philosopher will gain nothing but confusion. In contrast, science separated the question of 'why' and concentrated itself to the question 'what'. In this way, science succeeded in giving a precious gift to human civilization.

The point of realism in this matter is that man should be content with partial knowledge. He should be satisfied with the knowledge of the part. He should not run after every other aspect of knowledge. The same fact is stated in the Quran in answer to a question: You have been granted but little knowledge. (17: 85) □



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