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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



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

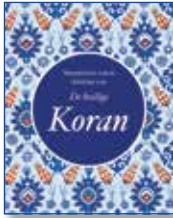
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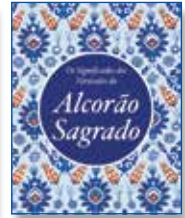
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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

ISSUE 54 JUNE 2017

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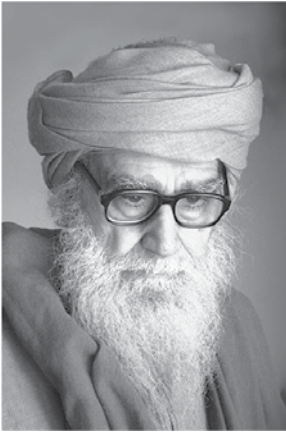
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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.

NO THOUGHT CRIME IN ISLAM

ON 9 May 2017, the Christian Governor of Jakarta was jailed for two years for blaspheming against Islam. Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, popularly known as Ahok, reportedly told fishermen in the Thousand Islands province in September 2016 that his opponents were using Chapter Five (*Al-Maidah*) of the Quran to deceive them into not voting for him. Some interpret verse 51 of *Al-Maidah* to mean that Muslims should not be led by a non-Muslim ruler. Ahok subsequently apologized but the comments were seized upon by his political foes and conservative Islamic groups that had long argued that Jakarta should not be led by a non-Muslim. The five-judge panel of the North Jakarta District Court ordered the arrest of Ahok, saying he had been found convincingly guilty of blaspheming against religion. Ahok's supporters had hoped he would be acquitted or given a light sentence after prosecutors concluded he did not intend to insult Islam. ("Jakarta's Christian Governor Ahok jailed for two years for blasphemy," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 May 2017).

Punishment for blasphemy is surely not a teaching of the Quran or the *Hadith*. It was the Muslim jurists of the later period who made these

1. The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims 2012, Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, Jordan.

laws. This is why this law is in itself controversial: it has no authentic basis in the religion of Islam. The making of law in Islam is solely the right of God and His Prophet, and not of any jurist.

The second point here is that the remark given by Jakarta's Christian Governor was certainly not on a verse from the Quran, rather it was on a self styled interpretation of that verse by some Muslims. For this reason, the matter cannot be called a case of blasphemy, but rather it is a case of difference of opinion. According to Islam, difference of opinion is a right of every human being. One's difference of opinion can be addressed only through reason and logical argumentation: it is definitely not a matter of punishment.

Difference of opinion marks every phase in the history of Islam. In Muslim literary history, there have been numerous instances of differences between scholars with regard to the interpretation of the Quran or *Hadith*. Difference was never made a matter of punishing the person who expressed his opinion, rather it was always a matter of discussion between the parties involved. This is why if some Muslims of Indonesia had differences with the opinion of the above Christian Governor, they should have presented their argument explaining why they differed with him. No court or judge has the right to issue a verdict declaring the person who has expressed difference as a criminal liable for punishment.

It is with reference to such cases that the British author and evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins has said in his book, *The God Delusion* that Islam believes in the concept of thought crime. However, this is a completely unfounded assertion. There may be some Muslims who hold beliefs and ideas to be punishable, but there is no such injunction in the Quran or *Hadith* that enjoins Muslims to punish people simply for the opinions they express.

During the life of the Prophet, there were some opponents who would often pass negative remarks about the Prophet and his mission. But the Quran never laid it down that Muslims should punish such persons. Instead one of the Muslims of the time, Hassan ibn Thabit, was given permission by the Prophet to respond in a literary method to the opponents. This shows that in Islam words are responded to by words, and not by sword.

Those Muslims who are involved in the above case are themselves engaged in distorting the image of Islam. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
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WRONG GENERALIZATION

Giving Short Measure

SOME years ago, I was travelling by a plane. The service was excellent, but I had one 'complaint'. I was served food, but there was no toothpick along with the meal. I requested two members of the flight staff for a toothpick, but they perhaps forgot, and so I didn't get one.

After this, for a while I thought, "This airline company is really bad. They don't even stock toothpicks for their passengers!" But at once I felt that to think so would be against justice. There were 99 things that were available on the flight that were excellent, and there was just this one thing that was not in accordance with what I wanted. Given this, it would be very wrong if I took this one little lack and declare that the service of the airlines as a whole was awful. That would be wrong generalization. Declaring the entire airline company as awful would be a great injustice.

The Quran refers to this as 'giving short measure' (83: 1).

Generally speaking, when people comment on others, they commit grave injustice. They take one minor complaint that they have about them and make a huge generalization. If they are pleased with somebody, they focus on one good quality of his and ignore his 99 bad qualities. And if they are upset with him, they obsess about one bad quality of his and forget completely about his 99 good qualities. This way of thinking is inhuman, and Islam being a religion of nature abhors everything that is inhuman. This is not the way God wants us to think.

The right approach in this matter is that when we describe something, we should do so, just as it is. To exaggerate something or to underplay it are both wrong. And they are both very harmful as far as our own character-building is concerned. □

To obsess about one bad quality of a person and forget completely their 99 other good qualities is wrong.

To exaggerate something or to underplay it are both wrong.



DEVELOPING ONE'S PERSONALITY

Positive Thinking

No! Their own deeds have cast a veil over their hearts.

(THE QURAN 83: 14)

THIS verse refers to those who deny the revelation of the Quran indicating a psychological issue concerning those people who are stubborn and heedless. This issue is described in a *Hadith* as follows: "When a person commits a wrong deed a black spot appears on his heart. If he abandons the wrong deed, seeks forgiveness and repents, then the black spot will be erased from his heart. But If he returns to the wrong deed, the blackness increases until it covers his entire heart." (*Ibn Majah*)

This *Hadith* relates a psychological fact in symbolic language.

Whenever a person does something wrong but then quickly becomes conscious of what he has done and develops the desire in his heart not to engage in the bad deed again, his heart becomes pure. But if he keeps committing one bad deed after another and does not introspect and

neutralize their influence on his heart, then, gradually, his heart becomes insensitive. He begins to live in evil, and truth will have no influence on him.

Today, most people are drowned in negative thinking. Even if someone seems to be talking positive things, it is almost always only at a very superficial level.

Modern psychological research has shown that there are three major parts of the human mind. They are part of the human mind since birth.

These three parts are:

1. The conscious mind
2. The subconscious mind
3. The unconscious mind

Experience and research tell us that once a thought enters our mind, it becomes a part of the mind forever. As is known, our mind is actually another name for our personality. This means that once a thought enters our mind, it becomes a part of our personality, so much that if we try to separate it from our personality we cannot do so. Modern psychological research has further clarified this. It is no longer a mysterious belief and has now become a known fact. It has become understandable for us at the intellectual level too.

When a thought, whether positive or negative, enters our mind, it, first of all, becomes part of our conscious mind. This is also called our conscious memory. After this, when we go to sleep at night, following a natural process, the thought travels by itself from the conscious mind and enters the subconscious mind. When this happens, we have only 50% conscious control remaining over that thought. 50% is now beyond our conscious control. After this, the next night that we sleep, the thought travels further and enters our unconscious mind. When this happens, the thought gets completely out of our conscious control and becomes the source of moulding our personality according to this thought.

It is the everyday thoughts that enter our minds first into the conscious, then to the subconscious and lastly get stored into the unconscious that build our personality continuously. Therefore as our thoughts are, so is our personality. Positive thoughts create a positive personality. Negative thoughts create a negative personality.

Today, most people are drowned in negative thinking. Even if someone seems to be talking positive things, it is almost always only at a very superficial level. If you discuss with this person in greater detail and seek to know the inside of his mind, you will find that his inner personality is as negative as anyone else's. In this way, today every single person lives in negativity, without even being aware of it. And in this aspect there seems to be perhaps no difference between religious and secular people.

Experience and research tell us that once a thought enters our mind, it becomes a part of the mind forever.

It is a fact that the worst sort of personality is a negative personality and that the best personality is a positive personality. Given this, the question is: How can we build a positive personality?

If you reflect on the issue in the light of both Islamic teachings and findings of psychology, you will find a clear practical way to do so.

By following the practical method discussed in the next few lines one could overcome this problem. Whenever a negative thought enters one's mind, at the very first instance one should try to resolve it by converting it into a positive aspect. For example, if you are angry with someone, forgive him at once so that your anger does not assume the form of revenge. Or, if you are unhappy at someone's progress, look at it as a good news that, hard work will bring in good results and

feel motivated to work more for your own progress. This way you will prevent a feeling of jealousy which is a very harmful trait.

You should practice this method with every negative thought that enters your conscious mind, and make use of the consciousness completely to convert it to your advantage. If you delay in doing this, the thought will travel into your subconscious mind, and then, after some time, enter your unconscious mind. And when it enters your unconscious mind, it will become such an integral part of your personality that no matter how much you may try to separate it from yourself, you will not succeed.

Whenever a negative thought enters one's mind, at the very first instance one should try to resolve it by converting it into a positive aspect.

Generally people do not practice this. And they pay a terrible price for it—this being the negative personality behind every seemingly beautifully attired person.

If you want to save yourself from this terrible end, you must adopt the method outlined above and make it an integral part of your daily life. Other than this, there is no method to solve this issue. □



Tolerance

Tolerance means, to give consideration to others. A pious man should be a man of principle as far as he himself is concerned, but should be tolerant towards others. He should judge himself in the light of the ideal but in the matter of his fellow men he should show tolerance and broad-mindedness—this being inseparable from human gentility and nobility. Islam aims to produce this fine human quality of gentlemanliness by preaching tolerance.

THE MONTH OF CONTEMPLATION

Patience and Self-Control

RAMAZAN is a month of restraint and worship, of caring and thanksgiving, repentance and piety. The multitude of benefits of Ramazan inspired the Prophet to exclaim: "Welcome to the one who purifies!" There is a very special connection between the Quran and Ramazan, for Ramazan is the month in which the Quran was revealed. The Quran makes special mention of this, while making the fast obligatory for its followers. In the words of the Quran: *"The month of Ramazan is the month when the Quran was sent down as guidance for mankind with clear proofs of guidance and the criterion by which to distinguish right from wrong. Therefore, whoever of you is present in that month, let him fast; but he who is ill or on a journey shall fast a similar number of days later on."* (2: 183-185)

The Quran is specially recited during this month so that believers may reflect upon it, understand its deeper meaning and make it a guiding force in their lives. At night the Quran is also recited during the *Tarawih* (extra prayers during Ramazan) prayer.

In the month of Ramazan, the fasting person abstains from food and drink from dawn till dusk. It is only after sunset that he satisfies his hunger and quenches his thirst. In this way he learns the art of desire management and so builds up his self-control. By exercising restraint for one month in a year, he is able to lead a life of self-discipline in all matters for the rest of the year.

By exercising restraint for one month in a year, a fasting person is able to lead a life of self-discipline in all matters for the rest of the year.

The main aim of fasting is to lessen a person's dependence on material things and strengthen his spiritual resolve, so that he may enter the higher realms of piety. Fasting is thus a stimulus for spiritual and intellectual development. Once made aware of his own helplessness, he connects to God with sincere prayer.

The practice of fasting is also largely aimed at saving a person from distractions. It produces sincerity in him. It draws a person's attention away from the external world and into the internal world. Hence fasting prepares him for the study of the Quran. And when a person studies the Quran with a well-prepared mind, he can understand the teachings of the Quran in greater depth.

The equivalent of spirituality in the Quran is *rabbania*, that is, a God oriented life. This expresses what the Quran means when it refers to spirituality. Spirituality, according to the Quran, is that mental state in which God-oriented thinking can develop in the individual. Such thinking reflects in his overall personality; his behaviour with others becomes God-oriented and his daily life becomes infused with divine hues. Thus Ramazan provides a framework within which devotees may improve themselves. Ramazan thus becomes a month of spiritual activism.

The main aim of fasting is to lessen a person's dependence on material things and develop a God-oriented thinking which will strengthen his spiritual and intellectual development.

The fasting person repeatedly reads in the Quran that God is the Sustainer, that is, while man is the taker, God is the Giver. Everything that a person receives in this world, right from his existence and the oxygen he inhales to stay alive to the sunlight necessary for his survival, everything is God's gift. When a

person starts to think in this way, he experiences a tremendous change within. He begins living in society as a giver-member. He becomes a creative member of society.

Fasting inclines one to become a student of the Quran and, by seriously studying the Quran, one discovers those principles by which one may develop one's personality and become a positive thinker in the full sense. □



Trials & Tribulations

In this world the aspirants to wealth and fame do not meet with success throughout their careers.

Many are the trials and tribulations through which they must pass before they can savour the fruits of their endeavours.

MAKE YOURSELF ELIGIBLE

Being Beneficial

THE Quran reveals the secret of a successful life. And the secret is: Be beneficial to others. In this world, only people or communities who prove to be beneficial to others earn their respect. The world rejects those who are not beneficial to others.

This principle of life is referred to in the following Quranic verse:

He sends down water from the sky that fills riverbeds to overflowing, each according to its measure. The torrent carries along swelling foam, akin to what rises from smelted ore from which man makes ornaments and tools. God thus depicts truth and falsehood. The scum is cast away, but whatever is of use to man remains behind. God thus speaks in parables (13: 17).

Using an analogy, this verse expresses an important principle of life. In a flood or when something is subjected to intense heat, useful substances remain, while unwanted substances get separated.

The same holds true in the case of human beings. People and groups gain a position of respect if they prove to be useful. In contrast, those who lose their usefulness are dumped into the dustbin of history and the world moves on.

The whole of human history supports this Quranic declaration. For instance, around the mid-20th century, various European colonial powers were forced to relinquish their control over most of Asia and Africa. But when the former European colonies in Asia and Africa won political freedom, they discovered that they had no one to man their educational institutions. And so, many of these countries invited 'experts' from the very same European countries that they had earlier been colonized by. Things went to such an extreme in some cases that political independence soon turned into technical servitude. Today, Western countries control these states by controlling their economies and through their domination in the field of science, in just the same way as they once controlled these states politically.

People and groups gain a position of respect if they prove to be useful. In contrast, those who lose their usefulness are dumped into the dustbin of history and the world moves on.

Like Muslims, there are many other minority communities who are flourishing in society. If you study them closely you will find that they are contributing positively to society in the form of services, in the field of health, education and many other types of social work. Their institutions serve people from all walks of life. In comparison to this Muslims fall short of providing such services to their own community, leave alone serving others.

This situation is completely against the law of nature. In such a situation, the biases or discrimination that Muslims complain about are actually in accordance with divine laws, and not, as they allege, a result of discrimination by perceived oppressors.

God has created this world. In this world, whatever God wants, happens. God has made water to quench thirst. He has made petrol so that people can use it as fuel for vehicles. And so, your success lies in availing of God's bounties in the appropriate manner—by using water for quenching your thirst, and using petrol for your car, for instance.

Success comes through proving oneself capable, not through making demands, protesting and stirring up a big hue and cry.

But, if you behave contrary to this and try to quench your thirst by drinking petrol or try to drive your car on water, you are, needless to say, bound to fail.

God has made this world as a world of competition. Here, everyone enjoys freedom of choice. Everyone is trying to move ahead, through hard work and skill. This principle of competition has been established by God Himself. You simply cannot destroy it. And so, you have just one choice: that is in the

field of competition, you need to prove your capability and win your place. If you want that the world should stop functioning on the basis of competition, and that, instead, it should start running on the basis of your demands on others, you are living in a fool's paradise, because this can never happen. If you want to lead your life by simply protesting and demonstrating against others and demanding things for yourself, you will have to make a different world of your own other than this world of God's, for this simply cannot happen in this world.

God has made this world a testing-ground. Here, everyone enjoys freedom of action. This is the reason why the world is characterized by constant competition between individuals and communities. This environment of competition can never come to an end. Now, there are two ways of thinking and responding in this regard. One way is by

being overwhelmed by the conditions one faces. The other way is by rising above these conditions. Because this world can never be free from unfavourable conditions, people whose thinking is overwhelmed by the unpleasant conditions they face always think in terms of complaints. They have a complaining mentality. Their thinking is reactionary, because they always react—negatively—to unfavourable conditions. Instead of working positively, to help themselves and their communities, they simply engage in completely useless agitations and demonstrations against other people and communities, foolishly imagining that in doing so they are doing great work.

In contrast to this, people who rise above the conditions they are faced with and exercise their minds soon realize that unfavourable conditions and factors that they sometimes face are actually in accordance with the law of nature, rather than a result of other people's oppression or discrimination. This realization makes them realistic. They accept reality as it is, and then make realistic plans for their lives. Instead of ranting and raving against others, they try to succeed on the basis of hard work.

The Indian Muslims have become habituated to thinking in terms of 'discrimination'. That is why they have developed an extremely narrow and confined ghetto mentality. But if, instead, they start thinking in realistic terms, they will experience a profound sense of freedom. They will realize that they do not want to continue to blame others for their woes. While in the first case, they are led to view all roads as blocked, in the latter case they will find vast vistas opening up all around them.

If Muslims start thinking in realistic terms, they will experience a profound sense of freedom. They will find vast vistas opening up all around them. Instead of ranting and raving against others, they will work hard and succeed.

Take for instance, the case of the Urdu language. Muslims complain that the Urdu language is being discriminated against in India. But if you study the matter deeply, you will realize that the problem of Urdu is actually because of the limitations of this language, rather than a result of it being discriminated against. In other words, it is an internal, rather than external problem. The actual problem lies in the fact that the Urdu language has failed to establish its importance in the contemporary world. That is why even the most passionate advocates of Urdu think it necessary to send their own children to English-medium schools.

Before 1959, the Russian language was given hardly any importance in America. But when in that year Russia sent a rocket into space, travelling at the speed of 7000 miles per hour and reaching the moon in a little more than 30 hours, all of a sudden the Russian language acquired great importance in intellectual circles in the West. This rocket signified that Russia had surpassed America in space technology. It led American experts to believe that their knowledge of space technology was incomplete until they had read all the available literature on the subject in Russian. This engendered a sea-change in attitudes towards the Russian language in America. America began to arrange to obtain Russian scientific journals and to translate them into English. All important scientific treatises in Russian were rendered into English.

Because this world can never be free from unfavourable conditions, people whose thinking is overwhelmed by the unpleasant conditions they face always think in terms of complaints.

This sudden importance that the Russian language acquired in America was not a result of any group staging demonstrations or making demands. Rather, it was because the language was able to prove that it was useful and, therefore, deserving of such attention.

The same is true for the Japanese language today. Till the mid-20th century, not many people in the West cared to learn Japanese. But today, scientific treatises written in Japanese are quickly translated into Western languages and enjoy great respect and popularity in Western countries. This is because of Japan's

amazing progress in the field of electronics. Western scholars realize that their understanding of electronics will remain far from complete unless they are able to read the latest research being conducted in this field in Japan. This is one reason why there are so many scholars of the Japanese language in the West today. By proving its importance and usefulness, the Japanese language has won for itself a very respectable position in the West, one that it did not enjoy before.

The actual problem with Urdu is that the corpus of Urdu writing consists largely of just two genres: one is poetry, and the other is religious sermons, written in a preachy mode. In today's scientific age, these two genres have lost their importance. There is now no area of research where high-quality books are being written in Urdu, books that people think that if they do not read, they will not be able to get a complete and proper understanding of their subject of interest. In any discipline, be it philosophy, history, sociology or technology or whatever, there are no

books in Urdu which are impossible to ignore if one wants to gain such an understanding. In a climate of such utter intellectual poverty, the 'inheritors' of Urdu themselves cannot give it adequate importance, leave alone others. And so, to expect others to give it importance is simply wishful thinking.

According to the Quranic verse cited earlier (13: 17), the key to a successful life in this world is to be beneficial to others. Here, the giver receives. Here, success comes through proving oneself capable, not through making demands, protesting and stirring up a big hue and cry. This principle, according to which the world functions, has been devised by God, the Creator of the world. People who refuse to accept this God-ordained principle, on the basis of which His world runs, can make an imaginary world of their own if they want to.

They need to remember, however, that in this world, success can only be achieved by abiding by God's will, not by following their own. □

People who rise above the conditions they are faced with and exercise their minds soon realize that unfavourable conditions and factors that they sometimes face are actually in accordance with the law of nature, rather than a result of other people's oppression or discrimination.



Life's Experiences

Life's experiences for both the spiritual and the non-spiritual are like the grasping of a rosebush. On each branch are beautifully shaped and coloured blossoms whose scent refreshes from afar the weary in body and spirit. But also on each branch are the inevitable thorns. The spiritual individual will carefully avoid the thorns in order to take possession of the blossom and even if accidentally his hands are pricked by the thorns he dismisses it as a trivial matter.

MAN'S UNIQUENESS

Responsibility and Privilege

ACCORDING to scientific research, there are around 1 trillion living beings in the world. Among all of these, human beings have a special status. All other living creatures fully comply with the law of nature. In the whole world, human beings are the only creatures who have been given full freedom. They can choose their actions based on their own will. This concept is mentioned in the Quran as appointing man as successor on earth (2: 30) and giving the trust to man (33: 72). On the basis of this feature, human beings can earn the reward of eternal Paradise in their next phase of life.

The test for man is for him to bow down before God despite the freedom that he enjoys. Despite this freedom, he must obey God.

In contrast to other living beings, man must do something unique—and that is, to live in self-discovered truth. Man must, through his own choosing, walk on the right path. Through his own will he must lead a life based on self-control. Through his own decision he must adopt a life of submission to his Creator.

This is man's uniqueness. But there is always a responsibility that comes along with every gift. And so, along with man's uniqueness

a certain responsibility is also present—and that is what is called a test. The test for man is for him to bow down before God despite the freedom that he enjoys. Despite this freedom, he must obey God. Despite this freedom, he must save himself from defiance and deviance. He must stand firm in self-discovered truth and adopt the method of self-imposed discipline. This disciplined life is termed in the Quran and Hadith as doing something for the sake of God. This conduct that is desired of man is so important that for this the Creator has assured the greatest reward—eternal Paradise. □



Status Quo

Accept the status quo and try to achieve your goal by peaceful planning. In this way you will certainly achieve success.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Purification of the Soul

TAZKIYA, or purification, is a Quranic term. The Quran tells us that *tazkiya* is the means for human salvation (91: 9-10). According to the Quran (20: 76), only those people will be admitted to the world of Paradise who have purified themselves in this world.

The literal meaning of *tazkiya* is 'purification'. Just as iron ore passes through various difficult stages and finally acquires the shape and form of a useful machine, a human being's character passes through difficult stages and emerges as a purified soul.

What are these difficult stages?

These stages are when we are faced with unwanted conditions. These unpleasant conditions are the situations that we need to pass through in order to develop our character.

When our ego gets a beating and yet we remain firmly established in justice, when we feel angry but control our anger, when we get some position of honour but still remain modest, when we feel the fire of revenge burn within us but douse out the flames inside, when we experience hatred towards someone but still retain concern for his wellbeing, when we acknowledge others even though we are not compelled to, are a few examples of situations that serve to purify us. These are opportunities for our *tazkiya*. They build within us a lofty character.

Unpleasant conditions are the situations that we need to pass through in order to develop our character.

Such opportunities cannot arise in normal conditions. They arise only in abnormal situations. According to the Quran (41: 35), in this examination only those people succeed who are patient. □



Wrong-doing

Anything that proves to be harmful to one's fellow men is wrong-doing.

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.



COMMUNAL EGOS AND INTER-COMMUNITY CONFLICT

A FATHER who was very strict constantly scolded his children even on small issues. No one had ever heard him speaking kindly with them. His children were so terrified of him that they did not have the courage to even open their mouths in front of him. As soon as he entered the house, they would fall silent and run away.

One day, the man climbed up to the terrace of his house. When he got there, he saw, to his shock, one of his sons perched high up on an electric pole. The boy's kite had got stuck on the electrical wire and he was trying to get it down by climbing the pole. As soon as the boy saw his father, he was terrified. But, instead of shouting at the boy as he normally did, the man spoke to him very gently.

"Son, what are you doing there?" he asked. Then, very lovingly, he requested the boy to slowly get down the pole.

Later, the man related this incident to somebody, explaining, "I smiled and spoke in a very gentle manner with my son because I feared that if at that delicate moment I scolded him, he would fall down and injure himself. This delicate situation compelled me to speak to him sweetly, contrary to my habit."

This example has valuable lessons, not just at the individual level but also at the social level. It applies to entire communities too, just as it does to individuals. If you are conscious of the sensitiveness of a situation and are careful and concerned about it, your awareness, care and concern will compel you to exercise tolerance, rather than to get

agitated and angry. It will impel you to avoid confrontation, and in this way you will be able to move ahead. Instead of getting stuck in a debate about who is 'right' and 'wrong', you will focus on trying to solve the problem you are confronted with.

If however, you are not conscious of the delicateness of the situation you are confronted with, you will start screaming at seeing your son perched atop an electric pole, as it were, even if this means that because of this he will fall down and break his bones.

The whole of human history testifies to the fact that if a person is sincere about something, his approach and behaviour will be different, totally contrary to that of a non-serious person. Only a sincere person will be willing to realize the significance of the issues he is faced with. Only such a person will be able to properly appreciate the delicateness of a situation that he finds himself in. In contrast, an insincere man will refuse to accept any evidence or argument that does not suit his way of thinking. He will use every means to rebut this evidence, raising all sorts of unrelated and irrelevant debates in order to obfuscate matters. If someone convincingly answers his arguments, he will set off a new debate, simply in order to refuse to change his stance. Such a person is unwilling and unable to see things as they are.

Some days before, a small inter-communal riot had erupted in a town. Based on the experience about such issues the Muslim community was advised to act with patience. But the men said, "In our town, Muslims did not do anything provocative. It was people from the other community who unnecessarily started fighting with us."

On further enquiry the following truth came to light. A temple and a mosque were adjacent in this town. When the loudspeaker in the mosque announced the call to prayer, the bells of the temple rang. Just as the call to prayer was heard by everyone in that area the sound of the bells could be heard inside the mosque. But the people from the mosque objected to the ringing of the bells and when it was not complied with, the riots took place out of anger.

In this episode the pertinent question is, what *Shariah* rule is it to insist that during the Muslim prayer-time a non-Muslim should not ring a bell in his place of worship? Such a thing is mentioned neither in the

It is only their own egos that instigate and provoke some Muslims against other people, people who they should be inviting to God instead.

Quran nor in the *Hadith*. Neither have any of our scholars of Muslim jurisprudence made any such claim. In fact, not a single Muslim ruler ever issued a command that when it is time for the Muslims to pray, non-Muslims cannot play their trumpets or ring their bells in their places of worship. This being the case, why should one get so agitated about this matter? If someone rings a bell, he has a right to do so just like you are using your right to call others for prayer on a loudspeaker. This explanation was not accepted by the people.

In India, most communal riots are triggered off by such small incidents. What is the reason for this? When the Islamic *Shariah* has not ordered us to stop non-Muslim processions passing by our mosques with their music and singing, and when it has not commanded us to prohibit non-Muslims from ringing bells in front of our places of worship, why do Muslims want to do so?

The reason for this is entirely communal, not religious. As a result of the politics of a hundred or more years, Muslims have turned such things into a supposed symbol of their communal honour. They have made them a question of their honour. If a non-Muslim procession playing

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music passes by their mosque, they take it as a personal insult. And if they manage to stop the procession, they imagine they have boosted their community's prestige.

This is an entirely un-Islamic approach. God and His Prophet certainly do not prescribe this. It is only their own egos that instigate some Muslims to behave in this manner. Their egos want to provoke them against other people, people who Muslims should be inviting to God. These Muslims' egos stoke the fires of communal hatred and make sure that they can never relate to others as Muslims should, because when Muslims and others are divided by intense suspicion and hatred,

the task of *dawah*—inviting others to God—which Muslims should engage in, can never happen. Needless to say, far from being rewarded by God for stoking communal conflict, it is very much possible that by giving their communal foolishness a so-called 'Islamic' label, such Muslims will be punished by God. □



THE SENSE OF REPENTANCE

Seek the Mercy of God

THE Creator has placed a special feature in man's psyche—and that is what is called 'repentance'. This special feature is particularly prominent in people who have firm faith in God. Repentance is a wonderful means of mercy for human beings. This is referred to in the Quran (25: 70) in these words:

God will change the evil deeds of such people into good ones.

The transformation that this Quranic verse refers to, with reference to the people of faith, takes place because of the sincere repentance that wells up inside them after they do something wrong. A positive aspect of repentance is that it engenders a strong determination in a person to reform himself, and after having done something wrong, to firmly walk on the path of goodness thereafter. It is this positive enthusiasm that follows from repentance that, in line with law of nature, changes an evil deed into a good one.

A positive aspect of repentance is that it engenders a strong determination in a person to reform himself, and after having done something wrong, to firmly walk on the path of goodness thereafter.

After doing an evil deed, one can choose to continue in the same path. In this case, this deed makes a person even more inclined to evil. On the other hand, after committing an evil act, a person can choose another alternative. He can engage in introspection and then make up his mind not to engage in evil again. He can decide that he will determinedly walk on the path of goodness thenceforth. If he does this, the evil deed that he has done becomes a factor that leads him to goodness. It is this quality that converts the evil committed by a person of faith into something good. □



Self-discovery

If someone speaks ill of you, then make that a source of self-discovery.

KNOW THE WORLD AND HEREAFTER

Save Yourself

WE are born into this world. We spend our short lives here. The journey of our life in this world passes through different and varied experiences. Because of these experiences, consciously or otherwise people begin to think that this present world is for us the real world. In contrast, they feel that the world of the Hereafter is an imaginary world. On account of what appears to be this difference between these two worlds, people's thinking process functions at the level of this present world. In practice, no real room is left in their thinking and planning for the Hereafter.

This is the biggest issue facing human beings. From the point of view of larger consequences, it is for us to develop Hereafter-oriented thinking, not this-world-oriented thinking.

To save ourselves from going astray in this regard, God has arranged that this present world be a world of problems. These problems serve for speed-breakers for us. The problems and difficulties of life help us to understand that this world is not our permanent abode. They are reminders for us to lead our lives in the light of the Hereafter.

The biggest issue facing human beings is their lack of planning for the Hereafter.

This reality of life is explained in the following verse of 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. (2: 155)

The role of patience in the examination of life is that it keeps us steadfast under any and every circumstance. It prevents us from deviating from the right path and going astray. Patience keeps us established in a principled way of life, no matter what the conditions we might face. It is impossible to pass the examination of life without patience. □



RIGHT STARTING-POINT

Address the Individual

WHEN the Prophet Muhammad was in Makkah, before his migration to Madinah, the chiefs of the Quraysh of Makkah offered to make him the ruler of the town. They said to the Prophet: "If it is political power that you desire, we will make you our chief". The Prophet replied: "I do not desire to have political power over you". (*Al-Bidayah wan-Nihayah*)

From this reply of the Prophet we learn an important principle of an Islamic movement. And that is, that the goal of an Islamic movement is not government or political power. Instead, the real focus of an Islamic movement is bringing about change in an individual's character. It is the re-engineering of the mind of individuals.

The principle of an Islamic movement is based on two points: bringing about a change in individual character and *status quoism* with respect to the political system.

This is the natural sequence that should be followed by an Islamic movement. If this sequence is changed—for instance, if the movement begins by trying to change the existing political system, then even after a struggle of a hundred years no positive result will follow.

It might be possible to arrive at a change in the political system if one started by trying to change the individual. But if the starting point is to change the political system, this sort of movement will not succeed. It will bring about nothing but further destruction.

If a movement begins by bringing about inner change in individuals it will immediately obtain a positive start. But if a movement begins by trying to change an existing political system, it will finally land up in a blind alley, surrounded by complete darkness. □

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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



THE PRICE OF A PRINCIPLED LIFE

A BELIEVER or a person of faith is a man or woman of principle. The price that a person of faith has to pay for leading a principled life is the test of one's faith. In this regard, reflect on the following Quranic verses:

Do you think that you will enter Paradise without having suffered like those who passed away before you? Affliction and hardship befell them and so shaken were they that the Messenger and the believers with him would exclaim, 'When will God's help come?' Surely the help of God is near. (2: 214)

Do people think that once they say, 'We believe,' they will be left alone and not be put to the test? We certainly tried those who have gone before them, so God will certainly distinguish between those who are truthful and those who are lying. (29: 2-3)

This test does not fall upon the believers like rain from the sky. Instead, it appears in their everyday lives, in general or ordinary conditions. People of faith must recognize these tests and face them with patience so that in God's eyes they succeed.

The ancient age was an age of religious persecution. That is why the tests that the believers then faced took the form of violence directed against them. The present age is an age of religious freedom. And so the tests that the believers will face today would take a different form.

The tests that people of faith would face today would be mostly in the psychological sense—that is, conditions that threaten to provoke the ego, inflame feelings of hate, cause people to stray from the path of Truth, make people resentful, and many more such trying situations. In the face of such conditions what one should do is to save oneself from negative thinking and remain firmly established in positive thinking no matter what the circumstances may be. □

The price that a person of faith has to pay for leading a principled life is the test of one's faith.

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THE QURANIC CONCEPT OF HISTORY

Creation Plan of God

No just estimate have they made of God, such as is due to Him. But on the Day of Resurrection the whole earth will lie within His grasp, while heaven will be folded up in His right hand; Glory be to Him! Exalted is He above all that they associate with Him. (THE QURAN 39: 67)

THIS is one of the most important pronouncements of the Quran. A tradition recorded in the *Sahih Bukhari* further elaborates it as: *God will hold the earth in His hand and will roll up the heavens in His right hand and then will say: "I am the King, where are the kings of the earth?"*

These two quotations make it clear that God is the Supreme Omnipotent Being, the One and only God. Human beings have failed to grasp this truth.

Not making a true estimation of God implies moreover, an underestimation of Gods' creation plan. This has led to the adoption of a self-styled plan for daily living by many people, instead of adhering to God's scheme of things.

We learn from the Quran and *Hadith* that in human history it is God, the Lord of the universe, who is at the helm of affairs. It is true that when God created this world, He gave it an environment of freedom, but this was only so that the world might be used as a testing ground for mankind. With everyone having the liberty to do as he pleased, it would become clear as to who had made proper use of his freedom and who had misused it. This situation is to continue until Doomsday, so that the actions of every individual, both good and bad, may be accurately recorded and then each human being will find the place in God's court which befits his actions on earth.

When God created this world, He gave it an environment of freedom, but this was only so that the world might be used as a testing ground for mankind.

God will appear on the day of Judgement and declare that what was required in reality was to live one's life in accordance with His creation plan, rather than that self-styled

rulers should establish their own will on earth. It should be borne in mind in this instance that neither the Quranic verse nor the quotation from the *Hadith* is to be taken in any political sense.

Since time immemorial, man had deprived man of religious freedom. But as time went on, circumstances changed until, in the seventh century, the Prophet and his Companions found the opportunity to put an end to the monarchical system, in the process throwing open the doors of religious freedom to all men and women. At present, history is passing through this phase of freedom.

According to the creation plan of the universe, man is not destined to be the master of history. Man is only the manager of his own person. He should not try to become the controller of events. Man is responsible only for controlling his own self: his principal objectives should be to remain on monotheism and see to it that he is just in all his dealings with other fellow beings throughout his life. This is religion (*ad-Din*) and following it in one's life is to uphold religion (*Iqamat-e-Din*).

In ancient times, the kings tried to control the course of history. But this went against God's creation plan. Therefore, God brought the institution of monarchy to an end. The present age is thus one of freedom and democracy, a situation which could not have come to exist without the intervention of God.

The Muslims of the present age have failed to understand this divine creation plan. According to their self-styled interpretation of God's religion, they have come to regard their duty as being to establish their own rule throughout the world. It is as if once again they are attempting to become the controllers of human history.

This is indisputably at variance with the scheme of the Almighty. It has never been the will of God that human beings should be allowed to carry such intentions into effect. On the contrary, the responsibility of Muslims is, first and foremost, to become subservient to God, rather than become the managers of human history. This is why the self-styled *jihad* of present times has become a total failure. All that the self-styled *jihad* of Muslims has done, far from putting them in control of history, is to reduce them as a community to a state of ruination. □

According to the creation plan of the universe, man is not destined to be the master of history. Man is only the manager of his own person.



LAILATUL QADR (THE NIGHT OF DESTINY)

A Long Arduous Search

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

We sent it (Quran) down on the Night of Destiny. And what will make you comprehend what the Night of Destiny is? The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months; on that night, the angels and the Spirit come down by the permission of their Lord with His decrees for all matters; it is all peace till the break of dawn. (QURAN 97: 1-5).

THE 'Night of Destiny' falls towards the end of the month of Ramazan. The Prophet's wife Aisha, asked Prophet Muhammad what she should do if she finds the Night. Prophet Muhammad said she should pray:

O God! Certainly, You are the One who grants forgiveness for sins. You love to forgive, so forgive me. (*Sahih Bukhari*).

The act of seeking forgiveness is so significant because by doing so, a believer realizes the smallness of his being and the greatness of God. He realizes that God alone has the power to forgive, and none else.

Common belief is that the Night of Destiny can be found in the final phase of Ramazan. This is wishful thinking. Similar to scientific discoveries, finding is the result of a long and arduous process of seeking.

To belittle scientific discoveries, some say these are serendipitous occurrences. But such accidents happen only to scientists! 'Finding' is an outcome of long preparation and search. A scientist spends years studying the subject and researching it, and after a long, gruelling effort, he makes that one discovery. Similarly to find the Night of Destiny one must prepare the mind. This involves years of effort and *dua* (supplication), at the end of which a believer is able to realize his insignificance and the supreme greatness of God.

To receive the blessings or knowledge from God, a believer must be a positive personality in the ultimate sense of the word.

The prayer that Prophet Muhammad advised Aisha, represents the gist of life. Muslims think that staying awake an entire night would ensure finding the Night of Destiny. This is a

far-fetched idea. A believer has to spend a lifetime to attain a prepared mind and then hope his prayer will be accepted by God.

According to another *Hadith* report, Prophet was in *etkaaf* (seclusion practices in the final phase of Ramazan), then he came out of *Masjid-an-Nabawi* (Prophet's mosque in Madinah) but went back again. He later told his Companions that an angel had come to pass on the knowledge about the Night of Destiny. When the Prophet came out to inform the believers, he saw two men quarrelling with each other. Instantly, the knowledge of the Night was taken away from the Prophet's mind. This incident has a great lesson for the believers. The fight was not an armed battle; the two believers were merely arguing, but even fighting with words is enough to have the divine knowledge taken away. Those who adopt the path of suicide bombing and violence can never become the recipients of divine blessings.

A believer is required to spend a lifetime so that such a prepared mind comes into being, only then can he be hopeful of his prayer being accepted by God.

To receive the blessings or knowledge from God, a believer must be a positive personality in the ultimate sense of the word. Else the blessings may be showered, but not on him. Positivity is the most important trait that makes a man worthy of receiving God's blessings. A positive mind will not engage in conflicts and would remain free of revenge, hatred, lust and negative thoughts. □



SUCCESS

Success is a matter of cool decisions, without constant wavering and changing of the mind. It requires acute observation, initiative, and unremitting attention to a vast number of petty details.

KNOWING THE KNOWN

Discover Your Creator

ISAAC NEWTON was the first to discover the gravitational pull of the earth. He published his well known work titled: '*Principia*' in 1687, in which he described the universal law of gravitation. The world was then made familiar with the phenomenon of gravitation.

The gravitational force of the earth is a great blessing of the Creator to man. It is due to this that we enjoy stability on the earth, and can remain here on this planet. All the features of the earth, including modern civilization, is a direct gift of the earth's gravitational pull. Before Newton, it existed, but no one was aware of this natural phenomenon.

This example shows how it is that things exist but people are unaware of their existence.

Man has a habit of taking things for granted. God has bestowed numerous blessings, which are enjoyed by all human beings. They utilize these blessings but they never try to understand them in any deeper sense.

Man has a habit of taking things for granted. He seldom tries to find out anything about them. This is a common human weakness. God has bestowed numerous blessings, which are enjoyed by all human beings. They utilize these blessings but they never try to understand them in any deeper sense. This unawareness of man is nothing but ignorance. They avail of all this natural bounty without acknowledging their Giver.

This ignorance of man is a genuinely serious problem. Due to this, man has failed to realize the existence of the Creator. He has failed to develop the spirit of modesty, to understand the need for a sense of accountability. Due to

this, man has failed to discover the purpose of life, and to discover his relationship with God. □



The Wise

The wise don't follow a collision course at a time of strife or controversy, but move away from the point of conflict.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS

Nurturing

ACCORDING to a *Hadith*, which deals with responsibilities of parenting, the Prophet said: "There is no better and superior present that a father can give to his children than cultivation of good morals." (*Sunan at-Tirmidhi*)

In this *Hadith*, by good morals is meant the best way of leading life. It is about how one's son or daughter should live in this world so that when they have grown up they can be truly successful and do not become a liability to their family and society. It is about nurturing them to become 'giver' members and an asset to their families and society.

If parents pamper their children, they give them the worst possible gift. But if they teach them the way to lead a successful life and prepare them for that, they give them the best possible gift. For instance, they should train them not to complain about others and instead to always look for where they may have made a mistake or gone wrong and rectify it, and in this way make themselves better people.

They should nurture them in such a way that they develop modesty, not pride or a superiority complex. They should help their children to always hold themselves responsible for their mistakes, rather than holding others responsible.

They should teach them to spend their energy and time in useful activities.

Parents must help their children learn that if they do something wrong, they themselves must pay for it and that no one else can do that.

Children must learn that they must not complain about others and that doing so is simply a waste of one's time. They must learn to think positively and save themselves completely from negative thinking. They must abstain from bad habits. Moreover, parents should make their children duty-conscious, not rights-conscious. □

Parents should nurture their children in such a way that they develop modesty, not pride or a superiority complex. They should help their children to always hold themselves responsible for their mistakes, rather than holding others responsible.



WHAT IS A CONSPIRACY?

Cowardly Opposition

A CONSPIRACY is a negative activity. It is secret planning for some harmful purpose. This method has been used throughout human history. Opponents of any mission always adopt one of the two methods. One method is to openly engage in hostile activities against the mission. The other method is to do silent planning aimed at destroying the mission.

There are examples of both methods being used against the Prophet Muhammad. The Quraysh of Makkah openly opposed him. The Jews of Madinah were also opposed to him, but their opposition to him took the form of silent activities.

Conspiracy is actually another name for cowardly opposition. Conspiracies are always the handiwork of people who are hypocritical.

Conspiracy is actually another name for cowardly opposition. Conspiracies are always the handiwork of people who are hypocritical—that is, externally, they appear to be good and nice, but on the inside they harbour malice. Driven by malice, they silently engage in negative activities. One who is engaged in negative activities gives the appearance of being a good person, but he quietly indulges in negative planning.

The Quran (35: 10) says that the method of conspiracy never succeeds in this world. This is because the conspirator, due to his enmity for a mission, is unaware of the weakness of his planning, while other people, who are free of enmity, judge what he says on the basis of reason and logic. When they find that there is no logic in what the conspirator says, they refuse to accept it.

One who has become an enemy and conspirator of a mission is unable to see the illogic of his stand on account of his enmity. But those who have no enmity, because of their unbiased mind, can easily see the lack of reason in the position adopted by the conspirator.

Because of this law of nature, the conspiracy of the conspirator is practically rendered ineffective. □



STUDY OF THE QURAN

Intellectual Food

ACCORDING to Abdullah ibn Abbas (Companion of the Prophet), the Prophet of Islam once said that the one who reads the Quran will not reach old age in an abject state (14: 35).

In this tradition, reading the Quran means studying the Quran. One who undertakes a profound study of the scriptures will continue to receive intellectual food from them. This intellectual food will be an unending source of energy which will result in his not being mentally impaired in his old age. His mind will be continually active. His body may become old, but his mind will not grow old. Research shows that there is a difference between the mind and body of the human being. Purely biologically, the body grows old, but the brain does not. If one saves one's mind from negative thinking, one will become a positive thinker, then one's mind will not age. Anyone who makes a thorough study of the Quran, will never experience intellectual starvation. His mind will forever be active. It will continually be filled with creative thoughts.

The way material food gives strength to the body, in the same way intellectual discoveries give a man energy. For a man, the greatest thrill is the experience of discovery.

The way material food gives strength to the body, in the same way intellectual discoveries give a man energy. For a man, the greatest thrill is the experience of discovery. One who analyses the Quran in depth continually has this kind of experience. This creative experience for a person ensures that when he reaches old age, he will not become inactive. □



True Reform

No reform work is truly such, unless it is confined to the sphere of peace and humanitarianism. Any work, even if it is carried out in the name of reform, is to be condemned if it disturbs the peace, or worse, results in the loss of lives or the destruction of property.

PRAYER FOR GOOD HEALTH

Importance of Well Being

ACCORDING to a *Hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad is said to have remarked: "For whomsoever of you the door of supplication is opened, for him the doors of mercy have been opened. And in God's eyes praying for good health is dearer to praying for anything else." (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*)

In this world, people have been given freedom, but the truth is that man's share in controlling the affairs of life is extremely limited—less than even 1%—while God's share is more than 99%. It is because of this that it is very important and necessary for human beings to supplicate to God. One who discovers this fact and faithfully acts accordingly will certainly come in the fold of God's mercy.

By birth, man is a weak creature. He cannot tolerate even a minor disturbance of his health. A person who does not enjoy good health cannot do anything properly.

In this world, for human beings faith in God is most crucial. The next most important thing to have is *afiyat*. By *afiyat* is meant what is ordinarily called 'good health' or 'well-being'.

By birth, man is a weak creature. He cannot tolerate even a minor disturbance of his health. A person who does not enjoy good health cannot do anything properly. That is why one should engage much in *dua* (supplication) so that one becomes capable of fulfilling all of one's responsibilities in the right way. But *dua* is not simply repeating some Arabic words that one has memorized. The true *dua* is one that is based in and emerges from *marifat* or God-realization. It is the *dua* that emerges from the depths of one's heart, and not simply something that is repeated mechanically on the tongue. It is this sort of prayer that definitely reaches God and is accepted by Him. □



Convert

If someone says something that goes against what you think, then convert it into a point of discussion.

THERE IS NO ENEMY

Rule of Self Interest

IN the past, people had both friends and enemies. But times have now changed. Today, nobody is anyone's friend, and nobody is anyone's enemy. Every person is now just pro-self. Everyone has now just one concern—and that is what is perceived as their own interest. People today are so deeply embroiled in their own perceived interests that they have no time at all to think against others.



What is the reason for this?

In the past, opportunities were very limited. A certain privileged class had control or virtual monopoly over opportunities. Today, in principle, this situation no longer exists. All opportunities are now open for everyone to avail of. This is why everyone is running after what they think is their interests. In this frantic pursuit of what they regard as their interests, no one has the time to think against others. They simply don't have the time to plot or conspire against them.

The fact is that the word 'enmity' has for all practical purposes, been removed from the dictionary of the modern world. Today, if someone becomes somebody's enemy, it happens because he throws a 'stone' at him and thereby provokes him. If somebody adopts the politics of inviting a raging bull to attack him, thereby provoking it, the bull will definitely attack with his horns.

There is a *Hadith* of the Prophet that has particular relevance for the present day: "*Fitna* is asleep; may God curse the one who awakens it." (*Kanz al-Ummal*) *Fitna* means a state of discord, turbulence and strife.

If you lead your life with wisdom, you will not face enmity from anyone nor will any one conspire against you. □

All opportunities are now open for everyone to avail of. This is why everyone is running after what they think is their interests. In this frantic pursuit of what they regard as their interests, no one has the time to think against others.



ISLAMIC SPIRITUALITY

An Achievable Goal

THERE is nothing mysterious about spirituality in Islam. It is rather the direct result of the kind of intellectual development that takes place when a believer ponders over the Creator and His creation: he gains something in the process that may be termed spirituality. The source, therefore, of Islamic spirituality is perusal and reflection rather than any sort of mysterious exercise.

That is why the Quran rejects asceticism (monasticism), referring to it as a *bida'a* (innovation) in religion, which God did not prescribe for people. (57: 27)

From the Quran we learn that, in the very creation of the universe, the signs of God lie hidden all around us. A person who is in a state of keen awareness when he reflects upon the things of the world, comes to see the Creator in the creatures. The meaning of the creation of the universe is laid bare before him. Ultimately, the universe becomes a permanent source of spiritual inspiration. He is continuously nourished by it during his worldly experience, and his observation of the universe awakens in him latent divine qualities.

The result of this observation and contemplation of the universe does not result in his shunning normal life. Far from withdrawing from the world, he lives in it, participating in all its activities; yet despite his involvement, he remains aloof. That is to say, although he fulfills all his duties and responsibilities, his heart is not attached to worldly affairs. He appears to live in the world, but he stands apart from it. Thanks to this state of his heart, he acquires tremendous spiritual gains. The Prophet Muhammad says of such individuals:

“God plants wisdom in the heart of one who shows
disinclination for the world.”

Only through spirituality can man rise to that higher level to become a ‘real man’.

So, we can say that the concept of spirituality in Islam is based on the principle of God-realization. God is the treasure house of all virtues. And when man’s contact with God is established in the world of his feelings, at the psychological level, an unseen, inner revolution is brought about, which is called spirituality. In this matter the relationship between God and man can be likened to an electric wire and the powerhouse. When

the wire is connected to the powerhouse, electricity is produced, and the place is lit up. In this way, spirituality is the result of the connection to the power house of God.

Human nature is like an inflammable element. When an inflammable substance like petrol comes near a fire, it is ignited. Similarly, human nature is awakened when it comes in contact with God.

This finds expression in the Quran in these words:

God is the light of the heavens and the earth. The metaphor of His light is that of a niche in which there is a lamp, the lamp inside a glass, the glass like a brilliant star, lit by a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would well-nigh glow forth even though fire did not touch it. Light upon light! God guides to His light whom He wills. And God sets forth parables to men, and God has knowledge of all things. (24: 35)

This is a compound simile. 'Light' here means the guidance of Almighty, 'niche' means the human heart and 'lamp' denotes the capability to receive divine inspiration. Glass and oil elaborate upon this receptivity.

'Glass' shows that this receptivity has been lodged in the human heart; protected from outside influences, and clear oil indicates that this receptivity is very strong and is eagerly waiting to receive inspiration.

This verse makes it clear that, on the one hand, is God, the source of inspiration, and on the other, is the consciousness of spirituality (God-consciousness) with which man is born. In this way when these two things come together, Islamic spirituality comes into existence. This is indeed another name for the awakening of God-consciousness. When it reaches its highest stage, the believer's realization of God comes to that point where he begins to feel consciously in his worship that he is seeing God and if he is unable to come to this stage then he consciously feels that God is seeing him. If the first type of experience is called direct spiritual experience, the second type may be termed indirect spiritual experience.

Simple living means limiting one's worldly requirements to the minimum, assiduously avoiding comfort and luxury.

As the Quran tells us, "Prostrate yourself and draw near" (96: 19). For God is always close to us—closer than the life-blood in the jugular vein (50: 16). By total surrender to God, the soul can realize nearness to God.

These spiritual experiences cannot be explained in words. Everything in the universe seems to convey a divine message. The leaves of the tree become a thrilling experience. A waft of air gives a message of truth. Divine music can be heard in the waves of the river and the chirping of the birds.

Due to this high state of receptivity, man reaches the stage where the wavelength of God and man becomes one. And he is enabled, in the words of the Prophet: *"to see with God's eye, to speak with God's tongue, to walk with God's foot, to hear with the ear of God."*

Then all limitations vanish and his day and night are spent in God's neighbourhood. All this can be felt, not described in words. This can be explained with the example of a child who has limitless love for his mother. He knows it himself in the full sense but he cannot fully describe it in words. The same is true of spirituality.

When an individual attains spirituality, his state becomes like a lamp lit all of a sudden. He undergoes spiritual experiences. His heart becomes an ocean of spiritual waves.

When a person is linked with the source of spirituality, he undergoes such spiritual experiences as he himself fully understands, but has difficulty in conveying to others. He may describe some external signs but he cannot describe inner reality.

Although it is difficult to describe the inner reality of spirituality, its method of attainment can be described to a certain extent and followed by others.

To attain spirituality first of all man has to free his mind from confusion. It is difficult for a confused mind to undergo spiritual experiences. The basic reason for confused thinking is that man is not able to differentiate between the real and the superficial, the relevant and the irrelevant, rational thinking and superstition, logical and illogical statements. One who thinks thus will always remain in a state of mental confusion. He will never be able to find the straight path. As a result, his spiritual journey will never be started.

On the path of spirituality a believer cannot be his own guide. And one certainly needs a guide. This guide is the Quran. It is an authentic and carefully preserved book of God. That is why the Quran can be trusted as a guide by the spiritual traveler. After making the Quran one's guide, one can set one's spiritual journey on the right track.

This spiritual journey demands a change in lifestyle. This lifestyle for a spiritual traveler may be put briefly in these words:

'Simple living and high thinking.'

Simple living means limiting one's worldly requirements to the minimum and assiduously avoiding comfort and luxury. That is why the Sufis used to wear coarse clothes as a symbol of the simple life. It helps the traveler in his spiritual journey. High thinking means that his thoughts are not embroiled in material things. By engaging one's mind in higher realities, one becomes a recipient of divine inspiration. This inspiration of divine light comes to his mind uninterruptedly, igniting his whole existence.

The Quran attaches great importance to contemplation, reflection and serious thought. There are a number of verses in the Quran that indicate that innumerable signs of God are extant in the heavens and the earth. The observance of God's signs is the greatest source of spirituality.

According to a Hadith, 'Worship God as if you are seeing him' (*Sahih Bukhari*). When man engages himself in true devotion; he is linked with God at a sensory or psychological level. He comes close to God. Through an invisible cord he comes in contact with God; God's light passes through him. His entire existence comes to be pervaded by this indescribable feeling, which is called spiritual experience. This is called *Rabbaniyat* in the Quran (Be people of the Lord) (3: 79). *Rabbani* means one whose thinking, and whose actions are God-oriented, who has placed God at the centre of his attention. When an individual attains spirituality, his state becomes like a lamp lit all of a sudden. He undergoes spiritual experiences. His heart becomes an ocean of spiritual waves. He appears to live in this world, but he has found another far superior world for himself. □

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EID THAT BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER

Reminder of Life in Paradise

ACCORDING to the Islamic tradition, there are two festivals observed by Muslims every year—*Eid-ul-Fitr* just after Ramazan and *Eid-ul-Azha* in the month of Haj. *Eid-ul-Fitr* literally means ‘festival of breaking the fast’. Like other festivals, *Eid-ul-Fitr* is a symbol of an important article of faith. It reminds one of an Islamic belief in the form of social practice.

Muslims believe that human life is divided into two parts: the pre-death period and the post-death period. One who follows divine commandments in the pre-death period will be rewarded in the post-death period. Just before *Eid-ul-Fitr*, Muslims keep a fast throughout the whole month of Ramazan. Fasting symbolises life in the present world in which Muslims follow God’s commandments. *Eid-ul-Fitr* denotes the reward that will be given by God Almighty in the Hereafter in return for our good deeds.

Eid-ul-Fitr denotes the reward that will be given by God Almighty in the Hereafter in return for our good deeds.

Fasting in the month of Ramazan is not simply giving up food. In fact, it symbolises abstinence from all kinds of practices that are unlawful in Islam. The Arabic word for fasting is ‘*sawm*’ which means abstinence. Abstaining from food and water in the daytime during Ramazan reminds Muslims that they have to lead their lives with a sense of responsibility. They have to remind themselves that, in the present world, they have to adopt a life of abstinence, taking something and leaving

something. This is the true spirit of Ramazan.

Then comes the festival of *Eid-ul-Fitr*, a symbolic reminder of the fact that one who leads a responsible life in this world will be rewarded with a life of happiness in eternal Paradise. *Eid-ul-Fitr* also has a social connotation. On this day Muslims go out of their homes, offer a congregational prayer, meet their neighbours, exchange good wishes with other people and enjoy special food. All these activities are reminders of life in Paradise.

Eid-ul-Fitr may be a Muslim festival, but Muslims, like other communities, live in a society, in a neighbourhood. This makes *Eid-ul-Fitr* automatically a social festival. Therefore, Muslims meet not only with their religious

brothers, but also with neighbours of other denominations and with their colleagues at work or in business. It is this social aspect of *Eid-ul-Fitr* that has led to the practice of *Eid Milan*. Muslims observe *Eid Milan* (get together on *Eid* day) by inviting their neighbours and others to spend some time with them. In this sense *Eid-ul-Fitr* promotes social harmony.

Like other festivals, *Eid-ul-Fitr* cannot be observed in isolation. It is but natural that the festival begins as a Muslim tradition but, in practice, it turns into a social festival. During their preparation of *Eid*, they are bound to meet their fellow brethren. Then when they leave their homes to go to mosques, they again meet other members of society. Thus, every activity of *Eid-ul-Fitr* automatically turns into a social activity. In this sense the observation turns into a human festival rather than a Muslim festival, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly.

If Eid-ul-Fitr is observed in its true spirit, it will energise the whole community, bringing people together in harmony and gratitude.

Eid-ul-Fitr has a form, but at the same time there is a spirit inherent in all the festivity. In terms of form it may seem to be a limited festival, but in terms of spirit it is a universal festival. If *Eid-ul-Fitr* is observed in its true spirit, it will energise the whole community, bringing people together in harmony and gratitude. *Eid-ul-Fitr* therefore truly means *Eid-ul-Insaan* or a festival of humankind. □



Conscious Decision

Willingness to keep the peace—a matter of conscious decision making—is a noble human quality. For peace, man has to curb his anger and be forgiving. He has to control his feelings of hatred and project feelings of love for others.

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 610 and 632 CE. It is a book that brings glad tidings to mankind, 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**

We have tied the fate of every man about his neck; and We shall produce a book for him on Resurrection Day that he will find spread open. It will say, 'Read your record, today there will be none but yourself to call you to account!' Whoever chooses to follow the right path, follows it for his own good; and whoever goes astray, goes astray at his own peril; no bearer of burdens shall bear the burdens of another. Nor do We punish until We have sent forth a messenger to forewarn them.

(17: 13-15)

In ancient times superstitious people tried to predict their fate by observing the flight of birds or the revolution of stars, or through different charms. In the present day, even those who do not believe in such superstitions, attribute their fate to some mysterious cause or the other. They think that it is some external factor which truly influences their destiny.

God, however, says that the human fate is not linked with the birds or the stars: neither is it connected with any external thing; indeed, the fate of every man hangs upon his own deeds. Whatever a man thinks or does is being recorded throughout his existence. On the Day of Judgement, therefore, man will find his life history written in the shape of a diary, which contains all matters, both great and small.

God raised prophets among the various communities and revealed the scriptures to them. He did this so that people should be aware in advance of the unforeseeable Day of Reckoning. Now it is for every man to decide what fate he wants to face in the future: eternal paradise as a result of his following the path of guidance, or an eternity in hell as a result of his straying from that path.

When We decide to destroy a town, We command the affluent section of its people, but they transgress therein; thus the word [sentence of punishment] is justified, then We destroy the town utterly. How many generations have We destroyed since Noah's time. Your Lord is well aware of the sins of His servants and observes them all. (17: 16-17)

The conduct of the leading group of a community is the chief indicator of the level of honesty or corruption of the community's members. Only this group has the understanding and resources to influence their inferiors. Only they can bear the cost of leadership.

This is why the reformation of the prominent group amounts to the reformation of the whole community and the corruption of this prominent group amounts to the corruption of the whole community. If a study is made of communities right from the time of Noah to the present day, the history of each community will confirm the correctness of this general principle.

Those leading lights, or elders of the community, who exploit the people to establish their leadership, teach the community emotionalism instead of realism; they teach the community to live in wishful thinking, instead of admitting the truth. In short, instead of making the community attentive to God, they turn it away from God by making it attend to worldly concerns. Thus misleading the community, they bring about its destruction.

When leaders of this kind dominate a community, it is to be expected that God has taken a decision to destroy it. Every event of this type happens by God's will, for no deed or misdeed of any person or community is hidden from Him.

We give whatever We will to whoever desires immediate gains; but then We have prepared Hell for him which he will enter, disgraced and rejected. Anyone who desires the Hereafter and makes a proper effort to achieve it, being a true believer, shall find favour with God for his endeavours. (17: 18-19)

In the present world as man travels towards his ultimate destination, he finds himself standing before a fork in the road. One side leads to the path of immediate gains, while the other is a path on which everything is to be given on merit. One who follows the first path chooses instant benefit (*ajilah*), whereas one who follows the other path chooses the Hereafter (*akhirah*).

On the one hand, man has before him the way of opportunism, which leads him straight to immediate honour and wealth. On the other

hand, there is the way of infinite love of truth, the credit for which man will receive only when he begins his life after death. If a man has a grievance, one way of dealing with it is to become vindictive and vengeful. The other option is to forgive and, offering prayers to God, leave the whole matter in His hands. Similarly, man may spend his wealth in fulfilling his desires and furthering his ambitions, or he may spend it for the cause of God.

Likewise, there are two different ways of dealing with life's contingencies: one is to fulfil one's own desires, while the other is to dedicate oneself to the worship of God. One is to give importance to appearances, the other is to give credence to the reality of the unseen; one is the way of expediency, while the other is the way of principle. The former bears the mark of impatience while the latter makes manifest the virtue of patience.

The first way is associated with temporary gain followed by eternal deprivation. The second way is that of temporary loss followed by everlasting honour and success.

Upon all, both these [who desire the world] and those [who desire the Hereafter] We bestow the bounty of your Lord: none shall be denied the bounty of your Lord—see how We have exalted some above others [in the present life]. Yet the Hereafter shall be greater in degrees of rank and greater in excellence. (17: 20-21)

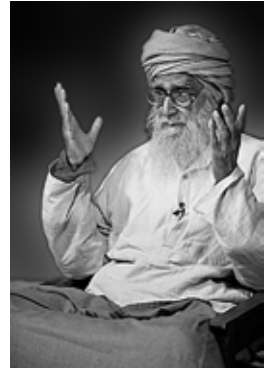
Be it in this world or in the Hereafter, success results from availing of the opportunities provided by God. For those who have made success in the life Hereafter the goal of their lives, God has made such dispositions as will facilitate the spiritual journey leading to that success in the next world.

One can see that in this world some people are ahead of others, while some are lagging behind. Some have more and some have less. These are ways of telling us in the language of symbols, that there is no limit to opportunities in this world of God. The harder one works the more one achieves. Similarly, the more one is involved in Hereafter-oriented activities, the greater the reward one will receive in the Hereafter. Furthermore, whatever one receives in the next world will be eternal, while whatever one receives in this world will be ephemeral in nature. □



ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered



What is the purpose of fasting?

There are two purposes of fasting: to make one cautious in life and to make one thankful to God. (QURAN 2: 183 & 185).

The Quran makes special mention of the month of Ramazan. Is there any particular reason for it?

There is a close link between the month of Ramazan and Quran. In the words of the Quran, *In the month of Ramazan, the Quran was revealed as a book of guidance for mankind with clear proofs and criteria distinguishing right from wrong.* The Quran is a reward to His servants from God and fasting is acknowledgement of the reward. Through fasting man makes himself worthy of being thankful to God.

What is the essence of fasting?

The essence of fasting is to eschew all evil ways throughout the year. The true fast is that from which one learns a lesson.

How does fasting inculcate discipline in a person?

During the month of Ramazan a believer, of his own free will, abstains from food and drink in the day time. It is only after sunset that he satisfies his hunger and quenches his thirst. In this way he builds up his self control. By practicing restraint for one month in a year, he is able to lead a life of self-discipline in all matters for the rest of the year.

Kindly give us one specific point of the reason behind considering Ramazan as a month of patience?

In the *hadith*, Ramazan is called the month of patience. This month is meant to serve as a training course which will enable the individual to lead a successful life in this world by keeping his negative feelings under control. Negative feelings, it must be remembered, present the greatest obstacle to human progress. Fasting is the pious way to solve this biggest of human problems.

What is the rationale behind the period of 30 days of fasting, why not less or more?

The rationale behind fasting for a month is made clear by psychological studies. It tells us that for a habit to be inculcated, thirty days are required. It is not an overnight miracle but a lengthy process. The practice becomes a part of one's personality only when it is observed everyday for at least thirty days and only then it may continue for the rest of the year.

Can you give us a modern equivalent understanding of fasting?

Yes. Fasting is for personality and intellectual development. It could be best described as learning the art of desire management. In fact, not understanding Islamic teachings in an intellectual way and only using traditional explanations have led to practicing the religion only in its outer form with the spirit completely missing. This spiritless worship is the cause of the rise of a culture which is not the Islam as preached by the Prophet and as followed by him and his Companions.

What advice would you give us, as until now we used to see the practices of people around us during this month and conclude that the month of Ramzaan was somehow connected to eating lavishly in the evenings after a full day of fast and shopping for the festival towards the last part of the month and throwing parties?

These practices have nothing to do with Islam. Please do not judge Islam in the light of the behaviour of the Muslims but judge the behaviour of the Muslims in the light of Islam. If you wish to know what Islam actually preaches please refer to the original sources, the Quran and Prophet's life. □

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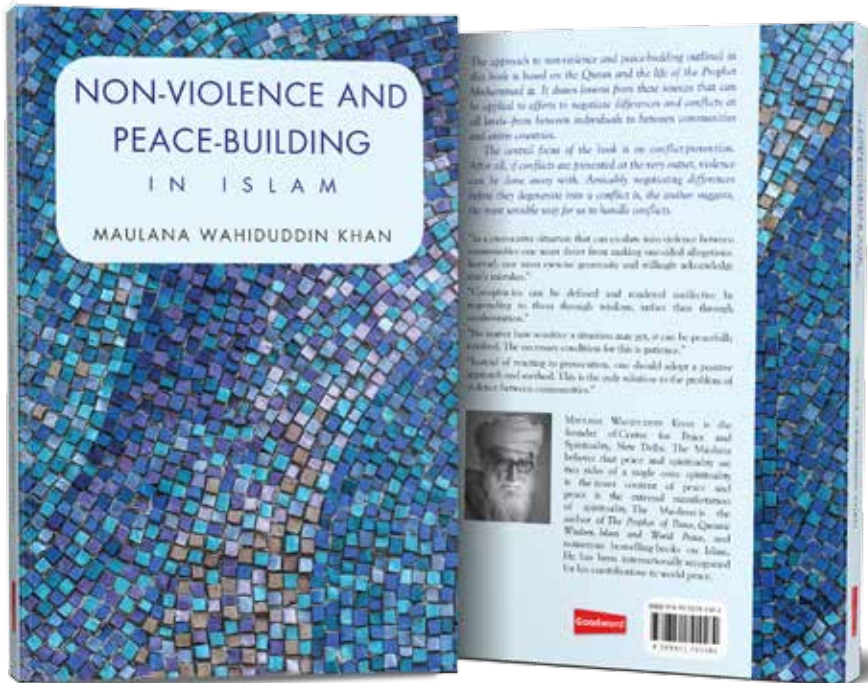
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