

ENGLISH MONTHLY ISSUE 29 MAY 2015 ₹35

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

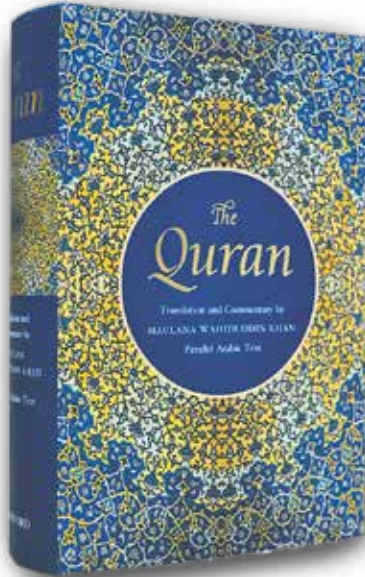


A patient person avoids retaliatory activities in spite of provocation from others.

The Quran

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY
MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN
PARALLEL ARABIC TEXT

This commentary on the Quran is a concise, easy-to-read guide that enables today's readers to understand the deeper meanings of the Quran and to reflect upon its relevance in the present world. It focuses on the main themes of the Quran, such as God-realization, enlightenment, closeness to God, remembrance, prayer, peace and spirituality. It lays stress on the fact that through reflection, deep thinking and contemplation, divine lessons can be learnt from the signs of God scattered across the world.



This commentary thus explains the meaning of the Quran in such a way as to give readers a clearer understanding of the message of the Quran and helps them in finding their own way of making it relevant to themselves.

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Spiritual Living

ISSUE 29, MAY 2015

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COVER ART

Majolica Jar with Branches of Oleander, 1888

VINCENT VAN GOGH (1853-1890)

PRINTER AND PUBLISHER

FATHIMA SARAH

OFFICE

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

002, HM WIMBERLY, 6, BERLIE STREET CROSS

LANGFORD TOWN, BANGALORE 560025, INDIA

PRINTED AT

COSMOS PRINTERS AND PUBLISHERS

450, 3RD CROSS, WILSON GARDEN, BANGALORE 560027

ACCESS ONLINE AT

www.spiritofislam.co.in

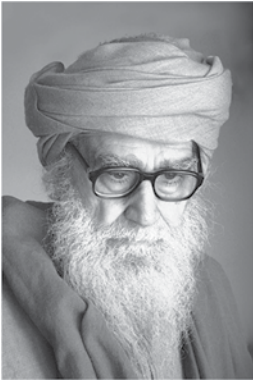
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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 third highest civilian honour in India, and the Demiurgus Peace International Award. He has been called 'Islam's spiritual ambassador to the world' and is recognised 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.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF ONE'S ACTIONS

US President Barack Obama blamed former President George W. Bush for the rapid rise of Islamic State terrorists, and said the terrorist group is a consequence of the Iraq war. "ISIL is a direct outgrowth of Al Qaeda in Iraq that grew out of our invasion, which is an example of unintended consequences which is why we should generally aim before we shoot," Obama said in an interview with VICE News, referring to the Iraq war launched by Bush. (VICE, March 17, 2015)

**A person's greatest weakness
is his overestimation of himself.**

During the time of former President Bush, America began its invasion of Iraq with great military might on March 19, 2003. A year and a half before when there was news that the US may invade Iraq, I had given an interview to *The Times of India*, in which I had warned beforehand that the "U.S. aggression would be counter-productive", (*The Times of India*, September 16, 2001). Later events showed that this was what really happened.

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

This example is not only true of the United States, but perhaps is the story of every person in history. Every human being, whether he belongs to the political or any other field, takes such steps which lead to counter productive or negative results.

A person's greatest weakness is his overestimation of himself. Due to this nature, he takes such steps which do not fulfill his expectations. It would be right to say that human history has been either a history of defeat or a history of Pyrrhic victory. Perhaps, there has been no victory which could be called an all-out victory.

A wise person is one who takes into consideration all available factors before drawing up his plan of action and then takes an objectively well-thought out step.

The fact is that different kinds of factors exist in this world. Some factors work in our favour and others go against us. The phenomenon of 'unintended consequences' or unwanted result is because of the fact that people are aware of their ambitions, but they do not take into account the external factors which may go against their plans.

A wise person is one who takes into consideration all available factors before drawing up his plan of action and then takes an objectively well-thought out step. If a person does not fulfil this condition, then he will have to face unintended consequences. This principle holds true, both for superpowers and for individuals. □

Maulana Wahiddudin Khan
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Peace—A Code of Conduct

*Violence and peace both have wide connotations.
Violence includes everything from hatred to war.
Peace includes everything from tolerance to love.
Both violence and peace are the
results of human thinking.*

THE GALAXY SPEAKS ABOUT ITS GREAT CREATOR

Wonders of Creation

ACCORDING to a new study, the Milky Way is at least 50% bigger than commonly estimated. The research conducted by an international team at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in the US established the presence of a bulging ring of stars beyond the known plane of the Milky Way. The findings show that the features previously identified as rings are actually part of the galactic disk, extending the known width of the Milky Way from 100,000 light years across to 150,000 light years. (*The Times of India*, March 13, 2015)

The Creator is truly great, He made such a vast universe, of which our galaxy is only a tiny part.

Our galaxy, the Milky Way, is a unique astronomical phenomenon. The solar system is a tiny part of this galaxy. If a person is far away in space and has a telescope with which he can view the entire Milky Way, then there will appear before him a mind-boggling scene. He will see that there is a magnificent starry galaxy in the vastness of space. The solar system is situated on one spiral arm of this galaxy. The planet earth is part of this solar system, which along with other planets are continually revolving around the sun.

The person will only be able to exclaim in wonderment: 'The Creator is truly great, He made such a vast universe, of which our galaxy is only a tiny part!' □



Capability and Alertness

Capability and alertness are two qualities that are required for any kind of work. They are indispensable if one wants to achieve one's goal.

JIHAD, OR EXTENSION OF TRIBAL CULTURE?

Cultural Conditioning

DURING the early period of Islam, Makkah came under its fold in the year 630 A.D. Thereafter, the Arabian tribes began entering the fold of Islam in multitudes (THE QURAN 110: 1-2). This was a phenomenon of what is called 'mass conversion'. According to Jabir bin Abdullah, after this incident the Prophet is reported to have said these words of historical significance: "People have entered God's religion in multitudes, and they will soon, in the future, turn away from it in multitudes." (Musnad Ahmad)

Jabir bin Abdullah, the narrator of this *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet) report, was a well-known Companion of the Prophet. He died in the year 697 A.D. In the battle of Siffin, Muslims were divided into two groups. One group was led by Ali, the other by Muawiya. This resulted in a bloody civil war, the first in Muslim history. It is said that some 70,000 people died in this war.

The Prophet of Islam wanted people to resolve their natural differences through peaceful discussion.

A neighbour of Jabir bin Abdullah's relates that when he returned from a journey, Jabir came to meet him. He mentioned to Jabir the civil war that had torn apart the Muslims. Thereupon, Jabir began to weep and narrated the above *Hadith*. Why is it that divisions and strife began to appear shortly after the Prophet left this world?

It was not because people's intentions were corrupt or that they had lost their sincerity. The only reason for this was because of the phenomenon known as 'conditioning'.

An Arabic saying succinctly expresses what conditioning is about: 'That which you grow up on is precisely what you grow old on, too.' This means that the environment that conditions you when you are young remains with you until the end of your life.

This fact is expressed in the form of another *Hadith*: "Every child is

born on pure nature; it is then his parents that make him into a Jew, a Christian or a Zoroastrian.” (Bukhari)

The massive corruption and strife among Muslims after the Prophet left this world, owed in large measure to this fact of conditioning. Mass conversions brought large numbers of people into the fold of Islam. In this period, which was much before the invention of the printing press, there was no system of mass education and training. This resulted in many people entering the fold of Islam by simply reciting the *Kalimah* (testifying that they believed in one God and accepting the Prophet). However, due to the absence of an appropriate system of training, their cultural deconditioning could not happen. In terms of religion they identified themselves as Muslims, but in terms of culture they remained largely as they had been before, clinging on to their ancient cultural values, norms and practices.

There are numerous *Hadith* reports that mention beforehand that degeneration would soon set in among Muslims. This degeneration or perversion is generally thought to be arising from anarchy and disorder in society, but in reality its cause was the phenomenon of conditioning. That is to say, people continued to remain under the influence of their ancient mindsets.

**The environment that conditions you when you
are young remains with you until the end of your life.**

For instance, there is a report which appears in several books of *Hadith* wherein the Prophet warns: “Do not return to disbelief after me, by striking the necks of one another.” (Bukhari)

In this *Hadith* of the Prophet the verb, “to return” appears, which indicates reverting to one's earlier condition. This earlier condition was the pre-Islamic tribal culture which the people practiced before entering the fold of Islam. In this tribal culture, every man carried a sword and there was no room for peaceful disagreement. People conditioned by this culture knew only one way to solve their differences—by wielding their swords.

In the pre-Islamic Arab society, it was not that fighting ever solved people's conflicts. Instead, it only further exacerbated them, because the vanquished burned with the desire for revenge. That is why this

tribal society was characterized by continuous war, or chain war. The Prophet of Islam wanted people to resolve their natural differences through peaceful discussion. He strongly sought to dissuade them from letting their differences become an excuse to fight with one another under the influence of tribal conditioning.

History shows that vast numbers of people who began entering the fold of Islam did not, however, go through the process of deconditioning this deep rooted pre-Islamic tribal conditioning. There was no appropriate system for mass de-conditioning in those times. So, all sorts of pre-Islamic cultural norms, customs and practices, including internecine war, infiltrated Muslim society through converts who recited the *kalimah* but retained their ancient, pre-Islamic mental attitude. This proved to be the case with many new converts to Islam not only in Arabia but in several other parts of the world where mass conversions to Islam later took place.

This phenomenon of returning to the past assumed various forms—for instance, the emergence of hereditary monarchies among Muslims after the age of the first four Caliphs, the emergence of a completely ‘form-based’ understanding of Islamic worship and the writing of Muslim history solely on political lines.

The most undesirable form that this phenomenon took—as mentioned in the above *Hadith*—was a return to violence and war after the Prophet left this world, violence and war began to tear apart Muslim societies. This phenomenon continues even today. It is essentially due to the deep rooted cultural conditioning that continues to remain unaddressed. Put simply, it is all about the extension of ancient, pre-Islamic tribal culture in the name of *Jihad*. □



Success

Just as a small plant uses all the resources from nature and grows into a big tree, similarly a person can attain success in all his endeavors when he utilises the qualities bestowed on him by God.

HAPPINESS IS A STATE OF MIND

Positive Thinking

EVERYONE wants to live in happiness. But, everyone is deprived of happiness. Why? This is because the criterion of people for achieving happiness itself is unrealistic. They are trying to find it in those things in which it is not present.

Deeper analysis of this issue tells us that people are constantly trying to eliminate those things that, according to their belief, go against achieving happiness. However, this way of thinking is unnatural.

People are in a state of constant unrest arising from a feeling of inadequacy. The truth is that inadequacy in life is not a problem. Instead, it is a challenge. There is a positive purpose of this natural challenge. Nature wants to unfold one's inner qualities and there is no other way except what may be termed 'shock treatment'. Inadequacies are like shock treatment meant to unfold a person's inner treasure.

**Inadequacies are like shock treatment,
meant to unfold a person's inner treasure.**

The fact is that life is full of differences. Everyone tries to achieve their goals. This state of affairs leads to competition. It is this competitive situation that leads to human problems or social problems. One cannot abolish people's freedom. So, one cannot even abolish the present situation that appears to be unwanted.

Then, what is the solution? The answer is very simple: take the differences as a challenge. When one takes problems as a challenge, one would try to meet the challenge. This will activate one's mind, motivate and unfold one's inner capacity. The challenge will give a person a new target and inculcate in him positive thinking. All these things are the result of challenges of life. If one takes the situation as a problem, one will only become negative. But, if one takes problems as challenge, then one will become totally positive.

Happiness and unhappiness are both states of mind. Unhappiness is

the result of negative thinking and happiness is the result of positive thinking.

The following points explain the above mentioned concept more clearly. When one takes things as challenge, it will help in one's intellectual development. It is a fact that in this world the greatest thing a person can achieve is intellectual development, which is the capability of 'high thinking'.

**Negative thinking brings unhappiness,
and positive thinking brings happiness.**

Happiness is the result of high kind of thinking. High thinking makes one a positive thinker. It is positive thinking that makes one happy in the true sense of the word. Happiness is not simply a joyful state, it is rather an explanation of things at a rational level. A positive mind is able to explain things at the rational level. If one cannot explain things at a rational level, one becomes unhappy. While, if one can explain things at the rational level, it will give one happiness. □



Different Temperaments

*The temperament of every person is different.
This is a natural phenomenon. Differences do not surface
when people are mere acquaintances. Differences start
surfacing only when they start their lives together.
If couples were to accept these differences as a part
of nature, they would learn to look beyond them
and work towards a meaningful relationship.*

LIFE AND HEALTH

Fragile Existence

DR. Shehzad Ali of Meerut (U.P.) died on February 6, 2009 at the age of 45. During his first visit, he appeared quite healthy but later he developed cancer.

In spite of treatment, the disease only became more complicated. Finally, he was bed-ridden. During his last days he was reduced to a bag of bones. His digestive system had so deteriorated that he could not even take simple food. Even drinking water had become difficult for him. In those days when anyone came to see him, he would say, 'Don't think about me. Think about yourself. Thank God that you have a healthy body. Thank God that you can eat and drink and walk on the earth. All these things are God's blessings. He can take away all these things and then you will be left without anything.'

A successful man is one who thinks more of death than of life, who regards everything as the gift of God Almighty.

Man has been granted a healthy body. When he is born, he is already in possession of this healthy body. He therefore takes it for granted. He never stops to think that this healthy body is wholly a gift from God. So in acknowledgement of this gift, he should surrender himself to God. The same is the case with life. As long as man is alive he thinks that his life will last forever. He never thinks of his death. This is undoubtedly the biggest mistake.

Herein lies the test for every human being. A successful man is one who thinks more of death than of life, who regards everything as the gift of God Almighty. This is the man who is successful in the test. On the contrary, one who does not acknowledge God and is oblivious of death is the one who has failed in the test. Eternal Paradise awaits the first type of people and eternal Hell awaits the second type of people. □



PHENOMENON OF A TROUBLED MIND

De-stressing Explained

CONSIDER a situation where you have suffered a loss. You become disturbed. In the first instance you feel that the experience is unbearable. But the next day you return to your normal self. You are able to manage your affairs as usual. These kinds of experiences are common in the daily lives of all human beings.

How does this miracle happen? How does yesterday's abnormal person become today's normal person? Its a miracle of the mind. The mind has enormous capacity for diffusing things. Every mind is a large factory of de-stressing. Due to this mental faculty, we enjoy a normal life. Otherwise, our society would have become fraught with unsound people.

Those who are believed to be masters in the art of de-stressing are only taking false credit. What actually happens is a result of the mind, but people wrongly attribute it to some master of de-stressing.

The mind has enormous capacity for diffusing things.

The mind is a unique natural gift to every human being. Then, why do we see people still living in stress? The phenomenon of stress is so common that perhaps no one can be exempt from this problem. Everyone feels that they are living in stress and that all kinds of methods of de-stressing have failed to make them completely stress free.

The fact is that there are two different domains in this regard: the known world and the unknown world. When the problem pertains to the known world, our mind gets activated and soon de-stresses us. Loss of a job or loss in business, occurrence of a road accident, death of a relative, etc., are examples of the kinds of stress that are related to the known world. The mind knows the reason for stress and easily finds a solution to it, sometimes by forgetting it or sometimes by resolving it.

But, there is a region that is unknown to the human mind. Here, the mind, consciously or unconsciously, believes that it does not have the information or data by which to explain and normalize the situation. The mind always acts according to the available data. If the data is not available, the mind becomes troubled.

This problem is in need of an explanation. Man is born with an explanation-seeking nature. But, he is bound to live in an unexplained world. It is this contradiction that troubles the mind. This trouble then develops into stress or uneasiness. The mind automatically tries to find an explanation, but due to absence of data, it fails. This phenomenon occurs at the psychological level. That is, although in the external world, man does not experience any problems, at the level of his psyche he feels troubled.

What is this unknown area? It is related to the deeper questions of life, such as who is my Creator, who settled me in this world, what is the purpose of my life, why do I have to die after seventy years or so, what is going to happen to me after death, and so on. All these questions require an explanation. But, the mind realizes that it has no data to rationally explain these questions. No one is able to solve these questions on their own. So, everyone is bound to live with these unsolved questions and die in this state. It is this inherent problem that troubles every human mind.

**Divine revelation gives us the authentic framework
through which we can explain life.**

History tells us that all philosophers and thinkers were engaged in trying to find answers to these questions but they have all failed. Every thinking mind begins his life with great enthusiasm, but in the end everyone dies in frustration. The reason lies in the failure to explain the questions of the mind in a satisfactory manner.

There are two options before every human being. The first is to live with an explanation-seeking mind in an unexplained world. Albeit an unwanted situation, the majority of people have taken this position. No one would agree that this is the right stand. The other option is to seek out and find an explanation to the dilemma.

Now, there are two available methods that could lead us to a solution-which is reason and revelation. Experience shows that thousands of years of rational exercise have failed to give a satisfactory explanation to this question. This state of affairs shows that finding a solution to this through reason is not possible. Had it been possible, it would have happened through the efforts undertaken during the past several thousand years.

After the failure of reason, the only other option available to us in our quest for a solution to the dilemma lies in revelation.

The British philosopher Julian Huxley in 1941 published a book, *Man Stands Alone*. In response the American scientist A. Cressy Morrison wrote a book in 1964 entitled, *Man Does Not Stand Alone*. These were not just two books, rather they symbolized a very important fact. That is, in the quest for an explanation to the unexplained world, the era of reason has come to an end and we are in the age where revelation is our only resort.

The solution lies only in divine revelation. The Quran is an authentic book of revelation. The Quran declares a fact in these words: "You (man) have been granted but little knowledge." (THE QURAN 17: 85) With reference to the present problem, it means that man's mind can understand the things of this limited world. However, apart from this limited world, there also exists an unlimited world the understanding of which is beyond human capacity.

Another relevant verse of the Quran gives us a clue for explaining this situation. "Those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of God." (THE QURAN 13: 28) It means that the satisfactory explanation of life is in God-oriented living. That is, discovering the creation plan of God and explaining things in accordance with it is the only way to reach the right solution.

Divine revelation gives us the authentic framework through which we can explain life. Only after knowing this, is it possible for an explanation-seeking person to live in a world which is completely explained to him. Herein lies the only method of de-stressing that can give us a stress-free mind. □



After Making Mistakes

In this world almost everyone makes mistakes. However, after every mistake certain opportunities arise through which one is able to rectify matters--thus saving oneself from the evil consequences of the mistakes.

ISLAM AND THE MODERN MAN — Part I

Nourishment for the Soul

THE problems that confront man in the present age can all be traced, directly or indirectly, to one underlying cause: the separation of man from God. In this modern age, man has acquired many material comforts, but he has lost his faith in God. Material progress has provided man with plenty of physical nourishment, but it has left his soul to starve. The soul is essential to the life of the body. If it is separated from the body entirely, then the body dies; and if it is deprived of spiritual nourishment, then it starves in the same way as the body does. It is this spiritual nourishment, which the Quran describes as 'better and more lasting' (THE QURAN 20: 131). This is what the Prophet Jesus was referring to when he said, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God' (Matthew, 4: 4).

The problems that confront man in the present age can all be traced, directly or indirectly, to one underlying cause: the separation of man from God.

The greatest asset that Islam has to offer man today is this belief in God. All religions originally preached the true concept of God, but as time passed, none of them were able to preserve the concept of God in its original form. Some groups turned God into a national fetish. Others took to worshipping a variety of objects in the name of God. In some religions the concept of God was turned into an abstract philosophy. However Islam has preserved the true concept of God in a pure and complete form. It is in Islam that modern man will find the God he so desperately needs (THE QURAN 3: 85).

Spiritual Starvation

It is thanks to modern civilization that man has been deprived of God and his soul has been left to starve. It is this spiritual starvation that has driven some young people in Japan to say: 'Our culture is a merchant culture, and a merchant culture does not fully cater to man's needs.' The phenomenon of the hippy culture is also an expression of modern man's hunger for true faith in God.

The case of a youth, seen walking down the streets of Delhi, illustrates this point. He was dressed in simple eastern clothes. He wore beads around his neck, rings on his fingers, and bracelets on his wrists. In his hands he held a tambourine. He was from Canada. 'There I had my own house,' he said, 'my own car, a good wife, a suitable job... Here I have no house. I sleep wherever I feel sleepy, even if it happens to be on the pavement. I have no car, no job. My wife has left me.'

'But why did you leave all these comforts in Canada and come to India to rough it on the road?' someone asked him.

'There I was comfortable physically, here I am comfortable spiritually,' he answered thoughtfully.

Modern civilization has provided man with countless material benefits. But these things have brought comfort to only one half of his being; they afford no comfort or satisfaction to the other half. Modern man's loss of inner peace—the result of this contradiction in technological civilization—finds expression in boredom, unrest and frustration.

The soul is essential to the life of the body. If it is separated from the body, then the body dies; and if it is deprived of spiritual nourishment, then it starves in the same way as the body does.

The late Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), the renowned Swiss psychologist, made a correct analysis of this modern spiritual malaise when he wrote: "Over the last twenty years people all over the globe have consulted me about their psychological problems. All of my patients who were in the latter stage of their lives, that is, over the age of thirty-five were, in the last analysis, suffering from one thing alone: lack of religious belief. One can truthfully say that each one of them was suffering from a lack of the very thing that present day religions have provided their adherents with, throughout the ages. These people could only be cured by a renewal of their faith in God."

The Process of Separation

Philosophy places emphasis on total knowledge of things. It seeks to delve beneath the external nature of things into their inner essence. For almost five thousand years, particularly in the period when Greek

philosophy dominated human thought, philosophers had been attempting, with no success, to achieve this aim.

But in the 16th century, when scientific research began in Europe, scientists found it to be in their interests to separate the reality of things from the properties of things. They divided knowledge into two categories: Knowledge of things and Knowledge of truths.

They came to the conclusion that it was not possible to achieve absolute knowledge of truths, for truth is of a subtle nature and cannot be weighed and measured in the scales available to man. (THE QURAN 17:85) Unlike the philosophers, they came to the conclusion that man has been given, as the Quran points out, only a 'little knowledge.' Science is determined to put this 'little knowledge' to practical use, rather than delve into a knowledge of truth that could not be uncovered. It concentrated on properties, and eliminated realities from its field of study; it dealt with quantity, not quality; it answered the question 'how' but left the question 'why' unanswered; it limited its study to fields in which absolute knowledge could be obtained.

Modern civilization has provided man with countless material benefits bringing comfort to only one half of his being; they afford no comfort or satisfaction to the other half.

This way of thinking continued to gain ground. For the first time, in Galileo's day, the fragrance of a flower was separated from its chemistry. Scientists then studied the chemistry of flowers, but not their fragrance, which could not be analysed. Descartes (1596-1650) took this principle of dualism one stage further by applying it to his study of the human being. He studied the body and ignored the soul. The spiritual part of man was thus separated from his material being.

This dualism was not apparently harmful when applied in the field of science. One does not have to know the reality of a magnetic field, for instance, to be able to utilize it in the production of light and motion; knowledge of the properties of a magnetic field is sufficient for this purpose. But when this same principle of dualism was applied to man, it did irreparable damage.

Why was it that a method, which was so successfully applied to the lifeless objects of nature, was harmful when applied to man? The reason for this is that man cannot be analysed in terms of dualism in the way that inanimate matter can.

This can be understood from a simple illustration. If a stone statue is confined to a small dark cell, it will remain unaffected. But man is a psychological being; if one were to confine him to the same cell, he would die. Statues will not react if they are deprived of their freedom, but if man is deprived of his freedom, it will adversely affect his whole personality.

So, matter was separated from its meaning and body from its soul. Such were the precepts upon which western thought came to be based, and these were the precepts, which later led to the separation of man from God in the western world.

People can only be cured of their psychological problems by a renewal of their faith in God.

Differences Between Islam and Christianity

Until the 15th century, science had flourished in the Muslim world, with important centres of research in Spain and other Muslim countries. There had been no clash between religion and science when science was based in Muslim countries, because there is no clash between a true religion and true knowledge. The God who has revealed His religion in the scriptures has also created the universe which science explores. How, then, can revelation and knowledge (science) come into clash with one another?

But when the work of scientific research shifted from Muslim Spain to Italy, France and Britain, a third party soon came in the way of scientific activity. This third, hitherto disinterested party was the Christian Church. When Christianity was disseminated from Syria and Palestine into Europe, it came into contact with Greek thought. Instead of resisting it, the Church moulded its whole theology according to Platonic logic. Eventually, after a few hundred years, the Christians came to revere Greek philosophy as sacred. Later, when scientific research exposed Greek thought as baseless conjecture, the Church felt that if science were to become popular, the whole foundation of

Christian belief would become suspect. Instead of admitting its own mistakes, it determined to suppress science by force. At this time the Church was a mighty power in European affairs and it perpetrated dreadful oppression and tyranny in its attempt to eradicate science. However, they were unsuccessful.

The fact that Christianity and Science clashed, whereas Islam and Science did not, is explainable in terms of the difference between the two religions.

Here is an example that illustrates the difference between Islam and Christianity in this matter. The ancient Greeks had two theories concerning the revolution of the sun and earth. One was the theory of Aristotle, (384-322 B.C.) according to which the earth was stationary and the sun revolved around it. The other was theory of Aristarchus, (2nd century B.C.) according to which the earth revolved around the sun.

Science concentrates on the properties of matter, eliminating realities from its field of study; it answers the question 'how' but leaves the question 'why' unanswered; it limits its study to things concerning which absolute knowledge could be obtained.

The theory of Aristotle became very popular with the Christians. According to his geocentric theory, the earth was of prime importance, and it seemed more appropriate to the Christians, who believed in the divinity of Christ, that the centre of the solar system should be the planet where the Lord Jesus was born. At the time when Copernicus (1473-1543) put forward his heliocentric theory, churchmen reigned supreme in Europe. To preserve their belief, they suppressed Copernicus's views. The portrayal of the place of the Lord Jesus's birth as a mere satellite was a crime, which Christianity could never tolerate.

It was Christianity in its changed form, which was an impediment to scientific progress, not divine religion in its pure sense. The Muslims, not having deified their Prophet, had no scruples about accepting the very reasonable theory that the sun was the centre of our solar system. The question of rejecting it on the basis of religion did not arise. In this connection Professor Burns, in his book entitled Western Civilization,

writes: "In no subject were the Saracens further advanced than in Science. In fact, their achievements in this field were the best the world had seen since the end of the Hellenistic civilization. The Saracens were brilliant astronomers, mathematicians, physicists, chemists and physicians... Despite their reverence for Aristotle, they did not hesitate to criticize his notion of a universe of concentric spheres, with the world at the centre, and they admitted the possibility that the earth rotates on its axis and revolves around the sun."

Changes in Christianity

When Christianity made its way into Europe from Syria and Palestine, Greek philosophy dominated European thought. In order to facilitate the spread of their religion, Christian theologians presented the faith of Jesus in a manner which would fit into the intellectual framework of the day. In the words of the Quran, 'They imitated the sayings of those who disbelieved before them.' (THE QURAN 9: 30) The Greeks, for instance, worshipped Zeus and considered him to be the only son of Saturn, the oldest divinity. The Christians imitated this by calling Jesus the only son of God. They also adopted prevalent theories in the fields of geography and physics as explanations of the Holy Scriptures. These theories were then incorporated into their religious books.

There is no clash between a true religion and true knowledge. The God who has revealed His religion in the scriptures has also created the universe which science explores.

The conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine to Christianity provided the Church with a welcome boost. Constantine presided over the mighty Roman Empire for more than thirty years (306-337), and under his imperial influence the Christian faith spread throughout Europe. But the people who entered the Church during his reign did not do so because of any deep-rooted intellectual conviction. They became Christians without changing their thoughts and attitudes. For most of them, faith was a matter of expediency, not conviction. They started moulding Christian beliefs according to their previous, non-Christian beliefs. Eventually a religion with little relation to the teachings of Jesus came into being. The historian, Adolf Harnack, has quite rightly pointed out that 'by the 4th century the living Gospel had been masked in Greek philosophy.' (Adolf Harnack, Outline of the History of Dogma)

Anything that is associated with a religion for a long time becomes sacrosanct. So, after a few hundred years, this altered version of Christianity came to be revered as sacred. What had initially been adopted on the grounds of expediency came to be considered as a genuine part of the religion taught by Jesus. The Greek sciences, which had no evidence to support them, came to be known as Christian Science. Subjects such as 'Christian topography' came into existence, which in fact were only a new expression of old Greek ideas.

The Separation of Religion from the Rest of Life

When decline set in amongst the Muslims, modern research into these subjects started in Europe and these 'Christian Sciences' were proved to be mistaken in their notions. There was indignation in religious circles in Europe when modern scholars made new discoveries in the fields of Astronomy, Geography, and Physics. First, these scholars were excommunicated. When this measure failed to hold them in check, Pope Innocent III (1160-1216) gave special orders for the establishment of courts of Inquisition in Spain and other Catholic countries. It is estimated that about three million people had to face these courts. Severe punishments were meted out to them. Approximately 30,000 people were burnt at the stake, even famous scientists such as Galileo Galilei and Giordano Bruno had also to face the wrath of the Church.

The separation of religion and science is a division between religion and life itself.

This sparked off a conflict between the Church and Science, which eventually became a conflict between religion and science in general. Because of inordinate insistence on the sacrosanctity of certain hypothetical beliefs, people received the false impression that religion and science were opposed to each other, and that progress for one meant inevitable decline for the other. Knowledge, according to the Quran, should draw one closer to God (THE QURAN 35: 28), but as a result of Christian interpolations, knowledge came to make one, more distant from the Lord.

The conflict between Christianity and scientific knowledge continued for about two hundred years. Then, in 1859, Charles Darwin published his famous book *The Origin of Species*. The Church was bitterly opposed to this book, but by now the Church's power had waned. Compromise

was reached in the form of secularization. Religion and Science were separated from one another. Religion came to be considered as a private matter. In all other walks of life man's right to freedom was accepted: that he should be allowed to do what he liked and carry out research into whatever he deemed fit.

Religion: An Appendix to the Rest of Life

This was not simply a division between science and religion: it was a division between religion and life itself. The Church did not get rid of those unrevealed thoughts and ideas, which had been incorporated into Christianity. Despite the irrationality of these additions, the Christians insisted on treating them as part of their religion. This meant that religion could not even find a place in the life of a thinking person. Man is a rational being. To believe in something, he has to be able to understand it. The inevitable result of the separation of religion from knowledge was that religion became nothing but a ceremonial appendix to the rest of life. It ceased to play a vital part in human activities.

The inevitable result of the separation of religion from knowledge was that religion became nothing but a ceremonial appendix to the rest of life.

It is stated in the Quran that 'God has not put two hearts within one man's body.' (THE QURAN 33: 4) This means that two incompatible concepts cannot occupy an equal place in one person's mind. Anything which does not come up to rational and intellectual standards may be an appendix to a person's life and it cannot become an integral part of his existence. It will remain ineffective. For religion to survive, even on a personal level, it has to conform to reason. Religion that does not come up to accepted standards of knowledge can be compared to an obsolete piece of machinery, which no longer serves any useful purpose.

The Need of Human Nature

As a result of the soul being separated from the body and God being separated from the rest of life, man was confronted with a new problem: despite his worldly affluence he still felt as if something within him was lacking. Modern man has been given everything in life, but he shows no

signs of true happiness. Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) begins his book, *The Conquest of Happiness*, with these words: "Animals are happy so long as they have health and enough to eat. Human beings, one feels, ought to be, but in the modern world they are not, at least in a great majority of cases."

The reason for this is that modern civilization, despite its impressive achievements, has been able to provide man with only half of what he is looking for. It has been able to provide for his body, but it has been unable to provide for the needs of his soul.

Man desires a world full of meaning, but modern civilization gives him only a piece of stone with no meaning attached to it. Man desires life, but modern civilization gives him only a replica of life. Man seeks peace of mind, but modern civilization places him in a mobile machine, which cannot convey him to his destination. Man wants to know the Creator of the universe, but Science can acquaint him only with creation. Man wishes to throw himself at the feet of his benefactor, but he cannot find his benefactor anywhere in the world of science and technology. Unable to find the true God, he bows down before false ones, but they cannot satisfy him any more than a plastic doll satisfies a childless mother. According to the Quran, they are only 'names,' not realities.
(THE QURAN 12: 40)

Two incompatible concepts cannot occupy an equal place in one person's mind.

Man's need for a superior God is an established fact. It has even been accepted by thinkers who do not care to believe in any God or Religion. Bertrand Russell's statement in his book, *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, can be cited as an example: "If life is to be fully human it must serve some end which is, in some sense, outside human life, some end which is impersonal and above mankind, such as God or truth or beauty."

This is an admission, by an atheist, of man's intrinsic need for God. The predicament of modern man lies in his loss of God; His salvation is dependent only on rediscovering his God.

In their attempt to understand human nature, anthropologists have studied different societies. They have all agreed that thousands of years

of human history testify to the fact that the idea of God is inherent in man's nature. Just as sheep are instinctively herbivorous and cats instinctively carnivorous, and it is impossible to change these instincts, so the concept of God is inseparable from human nature.

Communist society provides us with a contemporary illustration of this fact. After the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, socialist dogma completely excluded the idea of God. Education and training in every field was based on atheistic principles. Even so, consciousness of God is profoundly embedded in the younger generation of Soviets, who have been brought up in an entirely atheist environment. This is clear from the following incident.

That which does not come up to rational and intellectual standards may be an appendix to a person's life, but it cannot become an integral part of his existence.

In 1973 a Soviet jetliner was flying over the eastern part of India. The engine failed and the plane crashed in Bengal. A special tape recorder, known as the 'black box' placed in the tail end of planes where it is least likely to be damaged, records conversations which usually provide clues as to the cause of any accident. On this occasion, a replay of the recording revealed that the last words that the young Russian pilot had uttered were. 'Peter save us!'

Making Up for Man's Helplessness

The course of man's life on earth is such that he is eternally reminded of his helplessness. The educated and the ignorant, the rich and the poor, the great and the weak—all are equal in this respect.

Physically, man is so weak that even a small accident can incapacitate him. He also has to be in a highly balanced geographical situation to survive in this world; he cannot bear any upset in this balance. Moreover, man sees himself as insignificant in comparison to the vast universe in which he lives. In exploring any academic field one soon apprehends that realities are too immense and complex to be encompassed by the limited human intellect. When one sets about any task, one is often confronted by unknown factors that ruin one's aspirations.

If, by chance, one avoids such bitter experience in life, there is no escape from death. Man is powerless before death. Death will come and shatter all his dreams, leaving them in ruins like a fine city that has been razed to the ground by a devastating earthquake.

Religion that does not come up to accepted standards of knowledge can be compared to an obsolete piece of machinery, which no longer serves any useful purpose.

Every man is plagued by this feeling of helplessness. It compels him to seek the support of something stronger than himself, which can make up for his sense of inadequacy. Consciousness of how powerless one is, makes one turn towards God. Man needs a God to whom he can express his thanks; a God in whom he can trust on all occasions; a God to depend upon when all the other props in life have failed him; a God who can reverse every setback and ease every hardship. The God of Islam provides for all these needs of man. His presence can always be felt. He is All-Powerful and All-Knowing. □



Freedom in Islam

According to Islam that person is most precious who leads his life in this world in such a manner that despite facing all sorts of temptations he succeeds in overcoming them; despite having the power to misuse his freedom, he refrains from doing so despite the possibility of leading an unprincipled life, he chooses of his own free will to be a man of principle. To identify such individuals it is essential that an atmosphere of freedom prevail in the world. This is not possible under any other system.

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



ONE'S OWN FUNERAL PRAYER

Remembering Death

The funeral prayer was being performed for a recently deceased Muslim from Delhi. He was to be buried in the local graveyard after the prayer rituals. When the prayer was about to start, a member of the congregation asked the Imam, 'Is this a *Farz* (obligatory) prayer or a *Sunnah* prayer (practice of the Prophet)?' He was shocked when the Imam replied, 'Consider it as your own funeral prayer!'

The funeral prayer is not just another ritual. It is a reminder of a serious reality—that we are all going to die, just like the person before us who has already died. The truth is that the true funeral prayer is said by the one who sees his own death in the death of the deceased before us. He knows that what has happened to the dead man will also happen to him. When he stands in congregation for the funeral prayer, he trembles at the feeling that what has happened to the other person is going to happen to him tomorrow and his own funeral prayer would be performed in a similar manner.

The event of death is inevitably going to overcome everyone. Furthermore, death does not come after an announcement. It overtakes

man all of a sudden. When the time of death comes, no one has the power to turn it away. Death is an inexorable and unchangeable reality, for one man as well as for another. Man ought to think of his death at every moment. One who is so oblivious of this stark reality—that even after seeing another’s death is not reminded of his own—can be likened to an insensate stone. Apparently, he is a human being but he is as devoid of human qualities as a statue made of stone. Remembering death is a characteristic of a sensitive person, while being oblivious to the death of others is the mark of a heartless person. □



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SECRET OF PROGRESS

Personal Effort

ACCORDING to a report published in *The Times of India*, a survey of the world's 100 richest people reveals that the vast majority of them did not inherit their economic fortunes. 73% of them were 'self-made'. Of these, 18% had no college education, and 36% were children of poor parents. (*The Times of India*, August 18, 2013)

How is it that people who were born into poor families—many of whom did not receive any higher formal education—were able to amass such wealth, and that, too, with no help from the Government or any organization? The answer is that, it was because of their own efforts.

Deprivation leads to a fortitude to acquire whatever one desires to achieve.

This illustrates a basic principle of nature. That is deprivation is not just a deficiency. Rather, at the same time, it is also the possession of a strength; an incentive to overcome the deprivation. According to the law of nature, deprivation leads to a fortitude to acquire whatever one desires to achieve. This inner urge motivates him to additional efforts until he reaches his goal.

To succeed in anything, it is not favourable external conditions that are crucial as is this inner motivation. In fact, it is often the case that favourable external conditions make people complacent and inactive. On the other hand, one who faces unfavourable external conditions develops a certain discontentment, which, in turn can motivate one to extraordinary efforts to achieve success. □

Be Realistic

Do not look at things from the point of view of personal desires and whims, but from the point of view of reality.

FOCUSSING ON THE FUTURE

Wise Planning

ROHIT SHARMA (b. 1987) is an Indian international cricketer. On November 13, 2014 he made the highest-ever individual score of 264 runs against Sri Lanka in Kolkata's Eden Gardens. In an interview to *The Times of India*, he said: "During an innings, I always focus on the ball at hand. I forget about whatever happened in the previous ball." (*The Times of India*, November 26, 2014)

This is good advice for every one. This attitude successfully covers all the fields of human activity. Life is a game in which there will always be success and failure; winning and losing. In such a situation, the best principle for life is: Forget the past and focus on the future.

**The best principle for life is: Forget the past
and focus on the future.**

If you remember the past, your energy will be divided into focussing on two phases of life—the past and the future. This division of focus will go against you. It will adversely affect your activities. You will fail to utilize your total energy for achieving your goal. A wise person is one who completely forgets the past and focusses totally on the future.

If your past was successful and you live in the thoughts of your previous successes, then this way of thinking will develop false pride in your mind, which may not be good for you. If the past has some stories of failure and you keep remembering them, it would mean dividing your energy. What happened before and what will happen ahead. This too, is not a wise policy for anyone.

Success is the result of wise planning. One of the most important aspects of wise planning is to forget the past and focus on the future. □



*Any achievement is a result
of two factors – one's personal planning
and support from the external world.*

DEALING WITH POLITICAL DIFFERENCE

Towards a Peaceful Society

A *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet) report (contained in the collections by Abu Dawud, Nasai, at-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah and Ahmad) relates that the Prophet declared that the best *jihad* is to speak a word of truth and justice in front of an oppressive ruler. On the other hand, in another *Hadith* report (contained in the collections by al-Bukhari, Muslim, and Ahmad) the Prophet is said to have declared that a person who sees something in his ruler that he does not like should exercise patience with regard to that matter. He is also said to have declared that one should obey the ruler, even if he is whipped on his back and his wealth taken away.

These reports seem to talk of two different things. We are told that if we see something wrong with our rulers we should openly speak up against it. We are also told that if we see something wrong with our rulers we should exercise patience in this regard and that even if he oppresses us we should tolerate it.

These two different prescriptions clearly distinguish between announcing something, and taking action on it. It is desirable that if you see something wrong with your rulers, you should state it in the form of good advice and guidance, based on genuine concern for their welfare. But as far as taking practical action to compel rulers to mend their ways or to forcibly change the situation, one should abstain from this completely. In other words, you must distinguish between advice and guidance, and the politics of confrontation. While using your legitimate right to guide and advise your rulers, you must fully abstain from political confrontation.

It is very important to keep this distinction in mind. When people begin to demonstrate and agitate against their rulers, and seek to topple them in the name of 'reform', it inevitably leads to violence in society. However, if they abstain from such conflictual politics and remain satisfied with verbal advice and suggestions, societal peace will remain undisturbed and society will be saved from degenerating into a jungle of violence. □

WHAT MUST BE KNOWN

Pre-Requisites

IN 1970 a certain Indian politician went to France. There he met a French politician who was associated with the ruling Gaullist party. An extract from their conversation appeared in *The Times of India*, July 18, 1983:

“Is there anything in particular you would like to do in Paris?” asked the Gaullist.

“I am a great admirer of de Gaulle,” replied the Indian visitor. “I should like to make a courtesy call on him.”

“But he is dead, sir.”

“What? Nobody told me in India during the briefing.”

“They must have presumed you were aware of it. He died four years ago.”

However reasonable a thing may be, and however well substantiated, if one does not have some prior knowledge of it, it will lie beyond one’s comprehension.

From this example we can see that everything cannot be spelt out in words; there are some things that one has to know oneself. If one already knows half, then one can be told the rest of the story; but if one does not have half of it in one’s mind beforehand, then how can one grasp the whole picture? However reasonable a thing may be, and however well substantiated, if one does not have some prior knowledge it will lie beyond one’s comprehension.

If one says to someone, “So-and-so batsman scored a century”, he will immediately understand that what is meant by a century is a hundred runs in cricket. But if one says, “A century of hard struggle is needed for the development of a nation”, no one will truly understand; for no one can know what it is to devote oneself individually to constructive work for so long a period. □

HIDDEN CAMERA

Unquestionable Evidence

A DRIVER was caught on the camera at the fateful moment when he jumped the stop signal at a traffic junction. The driver was unaware of the hidden camera. These computer operated hidden cameras are activated by vehicles passing over wires under the surface of the road. They take photographs only when the traffic lights are at red, capturing the photograph with the registration number of the offending vehicle.

At the same traffic junction, during the rush hour morning traffic the camera captured the incident of violation of traffic signal light of another ten drivers. All these drivers were caught and fined for their misdemeanor.

This process of convicting the offending drivers was possible based on the evidence of hidden remote controlled camera recording. Although these vehicles had sped away from other witnesses after committing the offence and were out of sight, their action and their details were preserved in the pictures taken by the camera. Through these photographs they were easily identified and charged.

If man were to have the conviction that there is a divine recording system all around him which is recording every moment of his life including every small and big deed then he will dare not transgress.

Such photographic testimony from the hidden cameras was unquestionable evidence of crime, leaving no chance for any doubt of the traffic offence. It was impossible for the offenders to deny their crime. On the basis of this evidence, the traffic control authorities sent a notice to each of the defaulters' to pay a fine and bear the consequences.

According to Quranic teachings these type of events are 'signs of God' for us to ponder about the greater realities of life. The experience from worldly incidents such as these, are a reminder of the scenario in the Hereafter. In the form of human events they are an expression of a forthcoming divine trial. The above incident is an example of the

hidden recording of human actions. A similar hidden recording is being done of every human action by God on a much larger scale. In every path that man treads, there are divine 'wires' and 'cameras' that are continually recording mankind's every deed. Whenever man crosses his limits, God's divine camera system instantly records and preserves his transgression. On the basis of this record, God will proclaim His judgment in the Hereafter.

When man-made systems are able to record such traffic violations with so much precision, then consider God's system of recording human acts. Man-made systems have their limitations, whereas God's recording system is all encompassing. This fact is sufficient for us to understand the difference between the two systems. If man were to seriously ponder over the magnitude of this reality he would stop in his tracks; he would be left speechless; his pen would instantly drop from his hands.

Man takes advantage of his freedom and violates traffic rules as long as he is ignorant of the mechanism of the camera system installed to catch the traffic violators. As soon as he is aware of this arrangement, his attitude changes to one of awareness and thereafter he refrains from breaking any traffic laws.

In the same way, if man were to have the conviction that there is a divine recording system all around him which is recording every moment of his life, including every small and big deed then he will dare not transgress. He will refrain from all misdeeds. He will tread carefully in every act and deal of his life. He will remain a responsible and righteous person.

The corruption of man lies in his ignoring this serious fact. His goodness lies in a strong conviction of this reality. □



Harmony at Home

The best principle for maintaining harmony in the home is the art of difference management. Instead of making futile attempts to eliminate difference, we should learn to adjust to it.

UNLIMITED CAPACITIES

Discover your Potential

ACCORDING to recent research, one can absorb information better by closing one's eyes. This and other such findings indicate that God has blessed human beings with unlimited capacities.

In the past, people who were physically challenged were called 'blind', 'dumb', 'deaf', 'crippled; and 'lame'. These words conveyed the image that those who suffered from such challenges were disabled. But today, after modern scientific research has indicated that such people possess many other gifts, they are referred to as 'differently-abled'.

It is a law of nature that if someone loses one part of his body, he develops new capacities in compensation. Despite his apparent 'disability', he is able to do some really amazing things which he may not have been able to do before.

God has blessed human beings with unlimited capacities.

If you reflect on this phenomenon of nature you may understand the significance of this *Hadith*, (sayings of the Prophet) in which the Prophet is said to have noted: "God says, 'If I put a person to the test and deprive him of his two eyes, and he remains patient, I will grant him entry to Paradise as recompense.'" (Bukhari)

The *Hadith* report uses the term "*ibtala*", which literally means to put to the test. But, in its real sense, the word "*ibtala*" means to experience something. In other words, the above *Hadith* refers to a person who experiences loss of vision, but remains patient instead of giving up hope.

Patience means tolerance. But in this context it means that such a person takes his loss of vision in a positive sense, as a result of which his intellectual capacities are awakened. His hidden potentials begin to unfold.

People with awakened minds are able to enjoy such positive experiences. The law of nature leads their hidden capacities to reveal themselves, and so despite difficulties or handicaps they are able to do great things. □

TURNING LOSS INTO GAIN

True Understanding

THERE are 114 Chapters in the Quran. Chapter 103 speaks of an important aspect of human life. The translation of this Chapter is as follows: "Time is a witness that man is in loss, except for those who believe and do good deeds and exhort one another to hold fast to the truth, and who exhort one another to steadfastness."

Here, "time" refers to human history. This Quranic verse gives a picture of the whole of human history. The verse was revealed in the first quarter of the seventh century, that is, the period before the modern-day civilization. More than one thousand years before this development the Quran gave a sweeping remark that man has been in loss throughout human history. It is very strange that this statement proved to be true. Even the modern developed world is not an exception to this experience.

Loss, mentioned here, is not meant in the sense of physical loss, but in the sense of a feeling of loss. It is a historical experience that every person—rich or poor—does not find fulfilment in spite of achieving all worldly gains.

Why does one have this feeling of loss? It is because man, by nature, has unlimited desires but the achievable things in this world are limited. It is this gap between his desires and achievable things of the world that develops a feeling of loss. But this phenomenon is not an evil, it is rather a great blessing.

If this phenomenon is seen in the light of the Creation Plan of God, it can be explained successfully. Man is born with a high faculty—high taste and high desires. But as faculties do not find satisfaction in this world, it gives us a clue that man's life is divided into two phases. In pre-death life, things are according to man's needs. In the post-death period, things will be in accordance with man's desires.

This situation is not an evil. After understanding this reality, man's frustration gets transformed into hope. It gives one the strength to spend this waiting period as a beautiful period. For instance, if you have a first class air ticket and you are waiting in the lounge at the airport, the short waiting period would be spent pleasantly because you know that in a little while you would be travelling first class in the airplane. This thinking would surely turn your sense of loss into a sense of gain. □

RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

Phenomenon of Degeneration

RELIGIOUS extremism is a phenomenon that emerges when a religious community has degenerated. When a community falls prey to degeneration, it begins to display this tendency. This degeneration occurs in accordance with a natural law and no religious community is an exception to this law.

Today, the Muslim *ummah* (community) is in a state of degeneration. Along with other signs of degeneration, it is afflicted with the disease of religious extremism.

When degeneration develops amongst the later generations of any religious community, then in accordance with natural laws, its members lose their religious spirit. What they are left with is just the external forms of religion. It can be said, then, that religious extremism is but another name for religiosity based simply on form.

Efforts to work with a community that has degenerated have to begin with the reform of individual members, and not in the form of mass movements.

Whenever form-based religiosity establishes itself in a religious community that is in a state of degeneration, it so happens that the external forms of every religious issue is given great importance. At such times, people start focussing on the correct pronunciation of the words of their scriptures whilst ignoring the spirit of the divine message. Instead of trying to cultivate humbleness and submission in their worship, they lay great stress on the external form of their prayers. They debate endlessly about the nitty-gritty of religious laws. They think that religious life is all about maintaining and preserving a sort of community-based identity.

A religious community in the state of degeneration becomes just like any other conventional, materialistically-oriented social group. However, because of its historical traditions, it is not possible for it to cut-off all links with its religion. Its religion now becomes simply an inherited tradition and a source of its communal identity. The history of its religion becomes a source of communal pride. All its institutions

and its activities will be in the name of its religion, symbolically but the spirit will be missing.

Religious extremism generally emerges when all of this happens to a religious community. This extremism manifests itself not in terms of the spirit of faith, but, rather, in terms of the external forms of religion. It displays itself in those facets of religion that have to do with the worldly or material aspects of life.

**Religious extremism is but another name
for religiosity based simply on form.**

Efforts to work with a community that has degenerated have to begin with the reform of individual members, and not in the form of collective efforts. If efforts are made at the collective level in such a community—in the form, say, of establishing an organization or forming a government—they will always prove to be a failure in terms of their results. This is because the members of any institution that is set up in a degenerated community will themselves also be degenerated. Such institutions may appear very grandiose, but in actual fact they would be nothing but grand graveyards. □

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LIVING WITH A STRONG SENSE OF PURPOSE

Secret of a Healthy Mind

A RESEARCH was carried out at the academic centres of Hospitals Mount Sinai St. Luke's and Mount Sinai Roosevelt in New York. The findings of the study were presented on March 6 at the American Heart Association's EPI/Lifestyle 2015 Scientific Sessions in Baltimore. According to the study, having a strong sense of purpose in life may lower your risk of heart disease and stroke. The researchers defined "purpose in life" as having a sense of meaning and direction and a feeling that life is worth living. Those with a low sense of purpose, however, are more likely to suffer cardiovascular problems. (*Psychcentral*, March 7, 2015)

Although, physically human beings are like other animals; the uniqueness of man is that he possesses a mind. It is the mind that governs the whole human life. If the mind is healthy, one can lead a healthy life. If the mind is not healthy, then all of one's activities will be seriously affected.

A strong sense of purpose gives you all those positive things you require to lead a good life on earth.

What is the secret of a healthy mind? It is to have a strong sense of purpose. A strong sense of purpose gives you all those positive things you require to lead a good life on earth.

There are people who have developed a strong sense of purpose in terms of having material goals, such as earning money or attaining a political position, etc. However, experience shows that these people who begin the early years of their life with great enthusiasm and they die in frustration. An example is the American billionaire Bill Gates, who earned a lot of money until his name entered the list of the richest persons in the world. In the beginning he was full of enthusiasm, but later he himself acknowledged that he became frustrated and began to search for an alternative.

It is true that a strong sense of purpose gives a person a healthy life, but attaching the sense of purpose with a material end or a worldly

goal has a limit. After crossing this limit, this kind of goal has no positive role to play for a person and it sometime leads to tension, ill health and other problems. Moreover, a person with such a target becomes a victim of despair and frustration.

There is only one thing that can give man a strong sense of purpose, and that is for man to make the discovery of God as his goal. The search for God has no limit, it may continue forever. God is man's Creator and He is the All-Giver. So, it is but natural that God alone can be the true goal for any person.

Belief in God is not a mysterious belief. The concept of Paradise is associated with belief in God. Paradise is given to a faithful person as reward by God. Thus, to find God means to find the source of total fulfilment in terms of Paradise. This is why having a strong sense of purpose can be applied only to finding God and Paradise. Any other goal cannot be an alternative for a person in this regard.

A strong sense of purpose is good, but it requires a base that is eternal in nature. For example, pursuit of political position has an end. As a political seat necessarily involves both winning and losing, it can never form an eternal basis for a strong sense of purpose. A goal which does not have eternity and comes to an end after a while, cannot offer man a strong sense of purpose. Even if it gives a sense of purpose, it will do so in a temporary manner. Anything temporary can never satisfy a person in the complete sense. □



Restraint: The Noblest Conduct

When man avoids violence and war, although the way of war is open to him, he chooses the noblest line of conduct – restraint.

One must exercise restraint before commenting on any issue. We must never form an opinion without proper verification of facts.

UNTIMELY DEATH

End of Opportunity

PHILLIP JOEL HUGHES (30 November 1988 – 27 November 2014) was an Australian Test and One Day International cricketer who played domestic cricket for South Australia. On 25th November 2014, Hughes was hit in the neck by a bouncer, during a match at the Sydney Cricket Ground. The injury caused a haemorrhage. Hughes was taken to hospital in Sydney where he underwent surgery. However, he died on 27th November—having never regained consciousness—three days before his 26th birthday.

This kind of death is usually referred to as an untimely death. But in fact, no death is untimely. Every death is a timely death according to the Creation Plan of God. Every death is consciously planned by the Creator. The form may differ but in terms of its reality, every death is the same.

Every death gives a message to those alive that they still have their chance and therefore must avail of it.

Every person is born into the world according to a divine plan. Each person spends his life on earth for a limited period. To be born is to be given a chance. During one's life every person is watched by angels, every moment. When a person reaches the end of his destined period, death is decreed for him by the Creator—neither before nor after. The manner of death is irrelevant; the fact remains that the time of death has approached for the concerned person.

Every death gives us a message. One who dies has availed his chance and it does not exist for him any longer. For those who are alive, every death gives a message that they still have their chance and therefore must avail of it. □



ETERNAL CONSEQUENCE

Only one Chance

IN the present world man makes mistakes but he finds that, on each occasion, he is able to rectify his mistakes and save himself from their evil consequences. This happens with everyone. It is a daily experience in one's own life and in the lives of others.

The result of this general experience is that man tends to feel that mistakes or errors can be compensated for. Consciously or unconsciously, this thinking that mistakes are not fatal in the absolute sense takes a greater and deeper hold. Mistakes temporarily do result in some harm but, sooner or later, these mistakes are made up for. Life once again returns to normal. The result of this situation is that man tends to suppose that what happens in this world will also happen in the same way in the hereafter. He thinks that regarding the consequences of mistakes, what ensues in this world will also ensue in the next world. It is this misconception which is expressed in these words:

“The fire is not going to touch us, and [even if it does], it will only be for a few days!” (THE QURAN 2:80).

**In this world, every one must think with an open mind
and discover the real nature of all matters
relating to the hereafter.**

This creates a serious problem for everyone. In this world, every one must think with an open mind and discover the real nature of all matters relating to the hereafter. Every one must know that what takes place in the hereafter is totally different from what happens this world. After death, everyone has to enter an eternal life from which no return will be possible; where man will be all alone; where there will be no way of making amends. After entering into the world of the hereafter everyone inevitably will have to bear the consequences of his actions in this world. When man enters the life of the world hereafter, he will face either eternal paradise or eternal hell. □



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 A.D. 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**

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

Blessed be He who has revealed the criterion [the Quran] to His servant that he may warn the nations. Sovereign of the heavens and the earth, who has begotten no children and who has no partner in His sovereignty, it is He who has created all things and measured them out precisely. (THE QURAN 25: 1-2)

“The distinguisher” is the literal translation of ‘*al-furqan*’, which is the criterion for distinguishing between truth and falsehood. In this context “the distinguisher” means the Quran. God is all knowing and all aware and also the Absolute Sovereign. Revelation of the Book, on behalf of God, has two aspects to it. One is that it is certainly true and there is no doubt about its authenticity. The other is that, acceptance or denial of it cannot have the same outcome.

God alone is the Possessor of all Powers. Nobody can influence His decision and nobody can intervene between Him and His decisions. This very fact ensures that one who adopts the Quran as his mentor, will be successful, while one who ignores it will find it impossible to save himself from failure, which is the fate ordained by God for one who ignores the Truth.

Yet they have taken, besides Him, deities who create nothing and are themselves created, and who have no power to harm, or benefit themselves and who control neither death, nor life, nor resurrection. Those who deny the truth say, ‘This is only a forgery of his own invention in which others have helped him.’ What they say is unjust and false. They say, ‘It is just fables of the ancients,

which he has had written down. They are dictated to him morning and evening.’ Say to them, ‘It has been revealed by Him who knows every secret that is in the heavens and on the earth. Truly, He is most forgiving and most merciful.’ (THE QURAN 25: 3-6)

Those who denied the truth, used to denigrate the Quran as a false testament, but in fact the target of their allegation was the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet appeared to them as an ordinary man. They were unable to understand how an ordinary man could be the possessor of an extraordinary Book.

The Quran touches upon various topics of a historical, psychological and social nature, etc., but no factual error has ever been pointed out in it. This proves that the Quran was authored by a Being who is aware of the secrets of the universe to the fullest extent. Had it not been so, the Quran also would have been full of mistakes—as are found in other man-made books. This fact in itself is the greatest argument in favour of the Quran being a Book of God.

Those who make baseless statements against the Quran are indulging in undue bravado. Such people will definitely be seized upon by God. However, if they come back to the right path, it is not God’s way to take revenge after their repentance. God looks at the individual’s present and not his past.

They say, ‘What kind of a messenger is this who eats food and walks about in the market-places? Why has no angel been sent down with him to warn us?’ Or a treasure should have been sent down to him, or he should have had a garden from which to eat.’ The wrongdoers say, ‘You are surely following a man who is bewitched.’ Observe what kind of things they attribute to you. They have surely gone astray and cannot find the right way again. (THE QURAN 25: 7-9)

Every preacher giving the call for Truth has had to face the same experience, as that of a Prophet. While his contemporaries looked down upon him with contempt, the people of succeeding ages venerated the preacher like a god. This is so because during his lifetime, a Prophet lives the life of an ordinary human being and his contemporaries therefore fail to appreciate the wisdom he propagates. They see him cast in an overly idealized form, wearing the halo conferred by legend, and therefore, feel obliged to pay homage to him and glorify him in an exaggerated manner.

The minds of succeeding generations develop such deep-seated notions about the extraordinary greatness of the Prophet, that nobody is held superior to or even at par with him. A living Prophet, however, is treated scornfully by the majority of his contemporaries. The few who develop a reasoned understanding of his message are also 'advised' to disassociate themselves from one who is "possessed". Having no rational arguments, the unrelenting contemporaries of a Prophet, resort to unfair vilification of his image so as to curb the preaching of his message. □



On Prayer

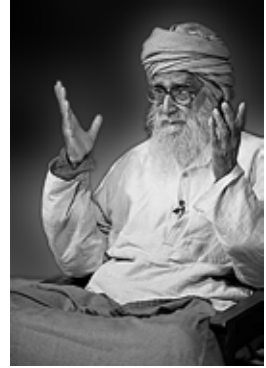
If one prays in the true spirit of prayer, then the prayer will surely fend away indecency and evil. But if one's prayer is devoid of spirit, then it will be no more than a perfunctory action which has no connection with one's real life.

An advertisement for 'Spirit of Islam' featuring a laptop on the left displaying text from 'THE GREATER IQAD'. On the right, the text reads 'NOW ACCESS SPIRIT OF ISLAM ONLINE' with a hand cursor icon pointing to the word 'ONLINE'. Below this, it says 'Download ebook at: www.newshunt.com' and 'www.spiritofislam.co.in' at the bottom.

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ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered



You say that the formula for managing religious differences should be to ‘follow one religion and respect all’.

Can you please explain what ‘respecting’ all religions means in the Islamic context, given that there are several beliefs/practices in other religions that are condemned by Islam—e.g. idol worship and polytheism in popular Hinduism, the Christian Trinity, the Jain and Buddhist denial of a creator God? Since these beliefs and practices in these religions are condemned by Islam, in what sense do you, as a Muslim, respect these religions?

Islam believes in discussion, and not in condemnation. In every field, there is an accepted principle that while giving respect to the other party, there should be scientific discussion on differences. The same is required in religious matters. Mutual respect is a matter of social ethics. At the same time, it is possible for people to hold different opinions. If there is difference of opinion, there should be peaceful dialogue on it. Differences are not an evil. Differences are a means for intellectual development. If there is no difference, there cannot be any discussion, and hence no intellectual development. Both parties must admit this natural fact. Discussion is not bad. But it is certainly wrong to turn discussions into debates.

You give a great deal of stress to intellectual development, and in fact you seem to suggest that it is similar to, or perhaps identical with, spiritual development.

What exactly do you mean by ‘intellectual development’? How is your understanding of ‘intellectual development’ different from how, say, an atheist intellectual or academic would define it?

I believe in mind-based spirituality. So, according to my perception, both spiritual development and intellectual development are one and the same. There is no real difference between the two.

Intellectual development means such sharing between two persons that leads to broadening of their mental horizons. In such a discussion, the two may not necessarily reach an agreement. However, they both can develop intellectually even without reaching an agreement.

This kind of objective discussion is common among scientists. However, this is not seen in the field of humanities. I have adopted the scientific model of discussion in the field of humanities.

There is a difference between the concept of intellectual development of a scholar and that of a religious person. But there is one thing that is common between them. If the two are sincere, they would both become seekers. The only condition for this is that they should be free of bias. If this is so, then they both are journeying towards the same goal, of finding the truth. I consider myself a religious person and at the same time I also consider myself a scholar. You can find examples of this in my writings.

You often quote this phrase that appears in the Quran: *as-sulh khair*, to stress the importance of peace or reconciliation in Islam. But some critics say that this phrase appears in the context of marital dispute (THE QURAN 4:128), and may not be of general applicability in the sense of inter-community peace, as you seem to interpret it.

Further, they might argue that if *sulh-khair* were meant to be of general applicability, and not just for marital disputes, the phrase would have appeared many more times in the Quran and in contexts that relate specifically to inter-community and international relations. And so, they might argue that your interpretation of this phrase is faulty. How would you respond?

All principles of Islam, including *as-sulh khair*, have a particular application and a general application. This pattern is evident throughout the Quran. The way of Islam is to speak of a general principle through a particular reference.

This concept has been used again and again in the Quran with different wordings. For example, in a verse the Quran says, "As long as they act straight with you, act straight with them." (THE QURAN 9:7) Here, "straight" means to be peaceful.

The Quran condemns other communities' wrong religious practices and beliefs. Some critics say that this encourages Muslims to think negatively about other people. How would you respond to their claim?

Present-day Muslims have become negative with regard to political and communal issues. According to Islam, political and communal issues are not issues at all. Making these issues one's concern is a result of communal thinking and not Islamic thinking.

In Islam there is no condemnation. Rather, there is analysis of ideological issues. There is a clear difference between condemnation and analysis. 'Condemnation' is a negative term, while 'analysis' is completely a positive term. Analysis is also done in scientific matters and Islam applies this principle to religious issues. □



Ignorance is not Bliss

*Most of the problems in life are due to ignorance.
Recognize your ignorance, do something about it,
and you will be saved from unnecessary problems.*

30 Seconds Rule

Anger has an upward movement in the first 30 seconds and then starts moving in downward direction. When we maintain silence in the first 30 seconds, we can pacify our anger and save ourselves from losing temper.

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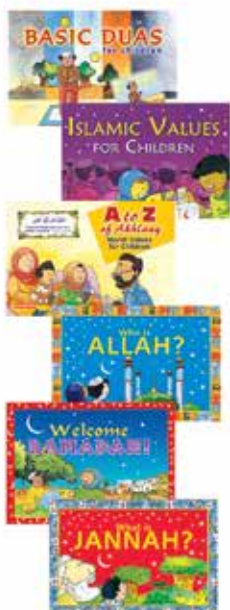
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