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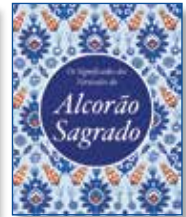
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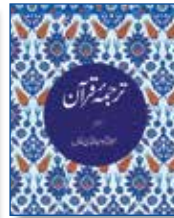
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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

ISSUE 46 OCTOBER 2016

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002, HM WIMBERLY, 6, BERLIE STREET CROSS
LANGFORD TOWN, BENGALURU 560025, INDIA

PRINTED AT

COSMOS PRINTERS AND PUBLISHERS
450, 3RD CROSS, WILSON GARDEN, BENGALURU 560027

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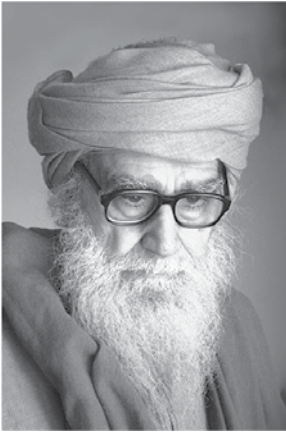
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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

THE AGE OF OPENNESS

I WAS born in the second half of the 20th century, and now find myself in the first half of the 21st century. During this period I have had many opportunities to participate in religious seminars and conferences and have found on these occasions that they have taken place in an environment of complete openness. The representative of each religion was given the unrestricted opportunity to present the teachings of their religion without any reservation.

For instance, I was recently invited to a seminar to speak in detail about the essence of the religion of Islam. The participants—adherents of all of the major religions—gave my discourse their full attention. Not one member of the audience responded negatively. This led me to quote the well-known maxim: “It is in comparison that we understand.”

I reflected that, 500 years ago, organizing seminars of this kind was an impossibility, given how rigid the thinking was on religious matters. At that time people of different faiths considered the method of debate as a means of discussion. Debate only established the superiority of one's own religion while trying to prove the inferiority of other religions. But, today, we live in a different age. The culture of debate has been

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

replaced by discussion. The watchword is that freedom of expression is supreme. Just as I have the right to present my ideas, similarly others also enjoy the right to present their ideas as they are. This is the spirit of the age. This spirit has become the universal norm. It has become an internationally accepted right for all. There is no doubt that modern democracy has played a great part in ushering in this development.

The important aspect of modern opportunities is religious freedom. The ensuing benefit is intellectual development by means of free discussion.

Today there is universality of opportunity. Every religious person has an equal chance to freely avail of the opportunity provided by the modern age to express oneself. And one can rightly presume that others will hear with objective minds and without any bias, will present their viewpoint in a peaceful manner. The important aspect of modern opportunities is religious freedom. The ensuing benefit is intellectual development by means of free discussion no lesser in value than the other benefits of the age. But wherever there still exists an environment of inflexibility, the

result is intellectual stagnation, whereas in an environment of open discussion, the kind of creative thinking comes into play which increases one's conviction.

This openness, without doubt, is a great blessing of God that every religious group may avail, provided they think in terms of free discussion rather than debate. People should sincerely pay equal respect to one another so that the scientific temper is cultivated in the true sense. And the greatest advantage is that people will attain spiritual development to the degree that it is possible to say: "I am right, you may also be right."

This does not mean that participants in discussion will ultimately emerge from their deliberations in a state of uncertainty. It means rather that adherence to this principle will enable people to proceed with self-confidence, knowing that human dignity will ultimately be respected. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
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HISTORY OF REACTION

No Positive Results

THERE are so many revolutionary leaders and there have been many revolutions. But most of these were coups, not revolutions. They successfully brought an end to an 'unwanted system', but failed to bring in the system which they had set as their goal. After every unwanted system, a new unwanted system emerges and the politics of reaction continues unabated.

What is the reason behind this sad state of affairs? Thinkers who spearheaded revolutions were unaware of the law of nature that evils are an integral part of human society. All the leaders and reformers were obsessed with an evil-free ideal society, while according to the law of nature the ideal cannot be achieved in this world. They wanted to establish an evil-free society, and it is impossible to completely eliminate evil from society. One evil replaces another, a fact which history has witnessed.

The truth is that 'evil' is the wrong name for 'challenge'. What people call a society full of evils, refers in fact to a society full of challenges. This is why reformers and leaders should have considered evil as challenge and looked for a solution to manage the challenge.

For example, some people are born in poverty. Our reformers tried to eliminate poverty from the world, but failed. The reason is that poverty is nature's creation and, serves as an incentive to work hard. Without poverty in the world, there would be no incentive, without incentive there can be no development.

All parents aim at providing material comforts to their children, this being their greatest concern. But this thinking is against the scheme of the Creator. The right way is for the parents to create the spirit of hard work in their children so that they stand on their own feet.

What we witness in society is contradictory to the scheme of the Creator. Many People who attained success by their own hard work at times indulge their children in luxuries. This is the reason why most youngsters of hard working parents live a pampered life and do not accomplish anything great in life.

According to the law of nature ideal cannot be achieved in this world.

The above attitude of individuals highlights the importance of incentive for development and success. The same concept has to be extended towards the development of the society to get the right results. For example, in the primitive age, man used to walk on foot and get tired. So, to overcome the problem of tiredness he discovered the horse for riding. But travelling on horses had its shortcomings. Man then invented the wheel for conveyance. Improving on this, he discovered steam power, harnessing it for transportation. Then when faced with newer problems, man developed the motor car. It was the continuous challenges which led man to build the aircraft for travel thereby giving us the conviction that necessity is the mother of invention.

So, reacting without giving consideration to universal truths is a negative response to a situation; while a non-reactive and well thought out response within the framework of realities will bring in positive results. □



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.

FAMILY CULTURE

A Narrow Outlook

MANY people—and this is particularly so in the East—know only one sort of culture. This is what can be called ‘family culture’. This ‘culture’ is all about earning money and meeting the insatiable demands of family members. For many people, this is their only purpose in life.

The greatest damage that this ‘family culture’ causes is that it severely narrows people’s vision. Their interest and concern is limited just to their families. The only thing that they think about is how to satisfy the material desires of their families. They don’t ever consider it necessary to think beyond this. Not many of them will, for instance, spend time reading or meeting people other than their relatives and learning and intellectually benefiting from them. If they step out of their homes, it’s generally to go to their workplaces or to entertain themselves or to go out shopping. They have no interest in doing much else. Intellectual development is the farthest thing from their minds.

From the materialistic point of view, people stuck in the morass of this narrow ‘family culture’ might appear to lead a comfortable life, but they are victims of intellectual backwardness. If you try talking to them on any serious topic, you will immediately discover that they have no intellectual depth.

They know little, if anything at all, of the realities of the world and the fundamental problems of life. They may look like humans, but they are actually just well-dressed animals.

Ideally, family life should be structured in such a way that it helps people in their intellectual development, and not be a continuous obstacle in this regard, as is often the case. □

From the materialistic point of view, people stuck in the morass of this narrow ‘family culture’ might appear to lead a comfortable life, but they are victims of intellectual backwardness.



FAITH AND REASON

Wholesome Combination

IT is through reason that man justifies his faith. Rational justification strengthens his convictions. Rational argument is thus an intellectual need of every believer. Without this he would not be able to stand firmly by his faith. It is reason which transforms blind faith into a matter of intellectual choice.

History shows that man has employed four kinds of argument to find rational grounds for his faith. Each of these reflect different stages in his intellectual development.

Natural Argument

The first kind of argument is one based on nature. That is, on simple facts or common experiences. This has been the most commonly used argument since ancient times. Some examples of this kind are found in the Quran, one of which relates to the Prophet Abraham. It is stated as follows in the Quran:

Have you not heard of him (Namrud) who argued with Abraham about his Lord because God had bestowed the kingdom upon him? Abraham said, My Lord is the one who gives life and brings death. He answered, I (too) give life and bring death! Abraham said, God brings up the sun from the East, so bring it up yourself from the West. Then the disbeliever was confounded. God does not guide the wrongdoers. (2: 258)

The truth is that, without a belief in God, the universe remains as unexplainable as the entire mechanism of light is, without a belief in electromagnetic waves.

We find another example of the argument based on natural reasoning in the Quran:

Thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, so that he might become a firm believer. When night overshadowed him, he saw a star. He said: 'This is my Lord'. But when it set, he said: 'I love not those that set.' Then when he saw the moon rising, he said: 'This is my

Lord.' But when it set, he said: 'Unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray'. Then when he saw the sun rising, he said: 'This is my Lord. This is the greatest.' But when it set, he said: 'O my people! I disown all that you worship besides God.' (6: 75-78)

Argument of this kind may appear to be simple, but they are invested with deeper meaning. For this reason, they have been engaged in today as much as in the past.

Philosophical Argument

The second kind of argument was first propounded by Greek philosophers. Based on pure logic, it was so popular in the medieval ages that Jews, Christians and Muslims all incorporated it into their theological system. Commonly known as First Cause, it may be summed up as follows:

The world man observes with his senses must have been brought into being by God as the First Cause. Philosophers have argued that the observable order of causation is not self-explanatory. It can only be accounted for by the existence of a First Cause. This First Cause, however, must not be considered simply as the first in a series of successive causes, but rather as the First Cause in the sense of being the cause for the whole series of observable causes.

The Prime Mover or First Cause theory although obviously very sound, has constantly been under attack from secular circles, and critics have raised a variety of objections. To begin with, they say that it is only guesswork, and not an undeniable fact. Some critics also object that the actions or free will of subatomic particles are uncaused; so, why not also the world as a whole? Moreover, even if all things in the world are caused, this may not be true of the world itself, because no one knows whether the whole is sufficiently like its parts to warrant such a generalization.

Now, according to modern developments in science, one can safely say that religious tenets can be proved on the same logical plane as the concepts of science.

This is why some people think that the faith of Islam is not based on rational grounds. They say that Islamic belief can be proved only through inferential argument and not through direct argument. They assert that in Islam there is only secondary rationalism and no primary rationalism. But modern science has demolished this notion, as will be shown in the last part of this chapter.

Spiritual Argument

Yet another argument is that which is based on spiritual experience. Some people, who engage in spiritual exercises and have spiritual

experiences, say that when they reach the deeper levels of the human consciousness, they find an unlimited world which cannot be described in limited language. They insist that this limitless, unexplainable phenomenon is nothing but God Almighty Himself.

The critics say that even if this spiritual state is as real as is claimed by those who enter it, it is still a subjective experience; that it conveys nothing to those who have not experienced the same spiritual state.

The existence of God, as a designer (cause) was presumed to exist because His design (effect) could be seen to exist.

All the above arguments are in one way or another inferential in nature and not of the direct kind. In view of this fact, the critics hold that all faiths, including Islam, have no scientific basis. They contend that Islamic theology is not based on primary rationalism, but on secondary rationalism.

However, these contentions appeared to be valid only up to the end of the nineteenth century. The twentieth century has closed the chapter on all such debates. Now, according

to modern developments in science, one can safely say that religious tenets can be proved on the same logical plane as the concepts of science. Now there is no difference between the two in terms of scientific reasoning. Let us then see what modern scientific reasoning is all about.

Scientific Argument

Religion, or faith, relates to issues such as the existence of God, something intangible and unobservable, unlike non-religious things like the sun, which has a tangible and observable existence. Therefore, it came to be held that only non-religious matters might be established by direct argument, while it is only indirect or inferential argument which can be used to prove religious propositions.

It was believed, therefore, that rational argument was possible only in non-religious matters, and so far as religious matters were concerned, rational argument was not applicable at all. That is to say, that it was only in non-religious areas that primary rationalism was possible, while in religion only secondary rationalism was applicable.

In the past, arguments based on Aristotelean logic used to be applied to faith. By its very nature it was an indirect argument. Modern critics, therefore, ignored such arguments as unworthy of consideration. That is why religion was not thought worthy of any attention by rational people. This state of affairs presented a challenge not only to other religions but to Islam as well.

About five hundred years ago, with the emergence of science, this state of affairs did not change. All the scientists in the wake of the Renaissance believed that matter, in fact the entire material world was something solid which could be observed. Newton had even formed a theory that light consisted of tiny corpuscles. As such, it was possible to apply direct argument as an explanation for material things. Similarly, even after the emergence of modern science, this state of affairs prevailed. It continued to be believed that the kind of argument which is applied to apparently tangible things could not be applied in the case of religion.

But by the early twentieth century, specifically after the first World War, this mental climate changed completely. The ancient Greek philosophers believed that matter, in the last analysis, was composed of atoms. And the atom, though very tiny, was a piece of solid matter. But with the breaking of the atom in the twentieth century, all the popular scientific concepts underwent a sea change. The theories about faith and reason seemed irrelevant only while science was confined to the macrocosmic level. Later, when science advanced to the microcosmic level, it underwent a revolution, and along with it, the method of argument also changed.

So far, science had been based on the proposition that all the things it believed in, like the atom, could be directly explained. But when the atom, the smallest part of an element, was smashed, it was revealed that it was not a material entity, but just another name for unobservable waves of electrons.

This discovery demonstrated how a scientist could only see the effect of a thing and not the thing itself. For instance, the atom, after being split, produces energy which can be converted into electricity. Electricity runs along a wire in the form of a current, yet this event is not observable even by a scientist. But when such an event produces an effect, for instance, lighting up a bulb or setting a motor in motion, this effect comes under a scientist's observation. Similarly, the waves from an X-ray machine, are not observable by a scientist, but when they produce the image of a human body on a plate, then it becomes observable.

Now the question arose as to what stand a scientist must take? Should he believe only in a tangible effect or the intangible thing as well, which produced that effect. Since the scientist was bound to believe in the tangible effect, he had no choice but to believe in its intangible cause.

In view of the recent advancement in scientific reasoning, a true faith has proved to be as rational as any other scientific theory.

Here the scientist felt that direct argument could be applied to the tangible effect, but that it was not at all possible to apply direct argument to the intangible cause. The most important of all the changes brought about by this new development in the world of science was that, it was acknowledged in scientific circles that inferential argument was as valid as direct argument. That is, if a cause consistently gives rise to an effect, the existence of the intangible cause will be accepted as a proven fact, just as the existence of the tangible effect is accepted because it is observable. In modern times all the concepts of science held to be established have been proven by this very logic.

After reaching this stage of rational argument the difference between religious argument and scientific argument ceases to exist. The problem faced earlier was that religious realities, such as the existence of God, could be proved only by inference or indirect argument. For instance, the existence of God, as a designer (cause) was presumed to exist because His design (effect) could be seen to exist. But now the same method of indirect argument has been generally held to be valid in the world of science.

Reason and faith are now standing on the same ground. In fact, no one can legitimately reject faith as something irrational, unless one is ready to reject the rationality of scientific theories as well.

There are numerous meaningful things in the universe which are brought to the knowledge of human beings, for which no explanation is possible. It has simply to be accepted that there is a meaningful Cause, that is God. The truth is that, without belief in God, the universe remains as unexplainable as the entire mechanism of light without a belief in electromagnetic waves.

Thus, the option one has to take is not between the universe without God and the universe with God. Rather, the option actually is between the universe with God, or no universe at all. Since we cannot, for obvious reasons, opt for the latter proposition, we are, in fact, left with no other option except the former, that is, the universe with God.

In view of the recent advancement in scientific reasoning, a true faith has proved to be as rational as any other scientific theory. Reason and faith are now standing on the same ground. In fact, no one can legitimately reject faith as something irrational, unless one is ready to reject the rationality of scientific theories as well. For, all the modern scientific theories are accepted as proven on the basis of the same rational criterion by which a matter of faith could be equally proved true. After the river of knowledge has reached this stage, there has remained no logical difference between the two. □

GIVING AS GOD WILLS

Not As We Will

MAN'S life and property are gifts of God. He owes everything he possesses to God alone. The only way to give thanks for these innumerable gifts is to dispose of them as God wishes. Such expenditure of one's wealth is symbolic of one's complete trust in God.

Man owes whatever he earns in this world to the fact that God has given him hands and feet to use for this purpose. He has endowed man with eyes and a tongue with which to see and speak. He has blessed him with an intellect which enables him to think and plan. At the same time, God has made the world subordinate to man. If the world and all that it contains had not been placed at man's disposal, his physical and mental capabilities alone would never have enabled him to derive any benefit from the world around him. If the wheat grain had not grown in the form of a crop but had stayed lying on the ground like a pebble, it would have become impossible for man to harvest grain from the land. If the powers of nature had not performed their specific functions, electricity could not have been produced, and vehicles would not have been able to move. Whatever man earns in this world is a direct favour from God. In return, man should spend his earnings in a way which would meet with God's approval. He should use his God given wealth to help the poor and in the ways specified by God.

Real charity is that which is given for God's sake alone, not for fame, self-esteem or worldly reward.

Real charity is that which is given for God's sake alone, not for fame, self-esteem or worldly reward. Wealth saves one from worldly hardship; that which is given away for God's sake saves one from the hardships of the life after death. □



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.

THE STRAIGHT PATH

Deviation is Deprivation

A TRAIN which runs on its tracks will have no trouble in reaching its destination. But should its wheels slip off the rails—no matter to what side—its journey will come to a sudden and disastrous end. Man's journey through life is in some ways on a parallel. If he goes off the rails, it will spell catastrophe. But if he continues to travel along the straight and narrow path which leads directly to God, he will safely reach his destination.

Many examples of human aberration—a 'going-off-the-rails'—can be cited: the satisfying of one's own selfish desires to the exclusion of all else; total absorption in the greatness of some human individual, living or dead; aiming, by preference, at unworthy objectives; obeying impulses of jealousy, hate and vindictiveness; dedicating oneself to any nation or party on the assumption that it is supreme. All of these paths are crooked and diverge from the true way. No one who chooses such a path can ever hope to reach his true goal in life.

It is a sad fact that one tends to stray from the straight path whenever one is obsessed with some thing, person or idea other than God. Whenever one's efforts are directed elsewhere, one is embarking on a detour which can never bring one back to God. Such deviation from the true path can cause man to go totally astray.

It is a sad fact that one tends to stray from the straight path whenever one is obsessed with a thing, person or idea other than God.

The only sure way to spiritual success is to focus one's attentions and efforts on God alone. This is the straight path and involves total attachment to God and a life lived out in complete accordance with His will.

Any path which is not directed towards God is a wrong turning, and will never lead Man to his true destination. □



God's mercy

God's mercy to us is many times more than that of a mother to her child.

TAZKIYA OR PURIFICATION

Calls for Sacrifice

THE attainment of *tazkiya* is no simple matter: it always requires some sacrifice, which is psychological rather than physical in nature. This sacrifice is to completely renounce those things that run counter to acquiring purification. It is a principle of nature that in order to achieve something, one has to let go of some other thing. This is an important requirement of *tazkiya*.

One of the things to rid oneself of is bad habits. Due to environmental influences, people get accustomed to certain habits which are detrimental to the attainment of purification. It is absolutely necessary for a seeker of *tazkiya* to totally rid oneself of such habits. Some of these include speaking excessively without thinking, busying oneself with the demands of one's family, taking a lot of interest in eating and clothes, pursuing the culture of entertainment, speaking to others of someone's negative points or shortcomings, going for shopping and outings, spending extravagantly instead of limiting oneself to needs, having superficial tastes, becoming angry at criticism and feeling happy when praised, being greedy for material things, not restricting oneself to one's needs and preferring affectations to simplicity.

The price for attaining *tazkiya* is abstaining from everything that goes against achieving this goal. A person who wants to attain *tazkiya*, but is not ready to give up all that which are obstacles in attaining it, such a person should be considered as not being serious in this quest.

A person who is serious in the pursuit of purification will realize things which are favourable to it and those that are not. It can never become a reality if the seeker is of a non-serious temperament. A frivolous mentality and *tazkiya* do not go together.

One's sincerity will compel one to pursue whatever is favourable to it and refrain from anything which goes against it. Sincerity is a guarantee that a person will certainly reach the stage of purification. □

A person who wants to attain purification, but is not ready to give up all that which are obstacles in attaining it, such a person should be considered as not being serious in this quest.

BELIEF IN GOD

Rational

THIS world has one God. He is its Creator and Master. The greatest proof of God's existence is the existence of the world itself. Spread around us in all its vastness and complexity, it bears witness to the existence of a great God who, in His infinite power, controls it. If we have no choice but to believe in the world, we have no choice but to believe in God as well, for the world would be meaningless if we did not accept the existence of a Maker and Master along with it.

Look at how exquisitely the world has been fashioned. How can it be that it has no Maker? Look at the perfect order which it maintains. Could it really be that no one is controlling it? The answer, of course, is that it could not. The truth is that, just as man is bound to believe in the world around him, so also is he bound to believe in God.

Now, just think for a moment that the earth we live on is revolving around the sun whilst spinning continuously on its axis. Yet we move around on its surface, and live our daily lives. It is the miraculous force of gravity that makes this possible.

The Creator of all light, God Himself is the most resplendent of all beings. He is the light of the Heavens and of the earth, shedding His radiance on the personalities of all who discover Him.

Another miracle is the atmosphere that extends for miles above the earth surrounding it that provides the oxygen for us to breathe and carbon dioxide for the plants while protecting us from harmful radiation and providing a blanket of warmth for us to live in comfort.

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

On all sides of us, a whole world of miraculous diversity and proportions stretches out before our eyes. Moreover, at every instant, a great variety of life forms are continually coming into existence, quite unaided by

man. Yet if all of the human beings in this world were to come together, they would not be able to create even one tiny grain of sand. All this amounts to a miracle of such amazing proportions, that words fail us when we have to describe it. When we try to do so, we only degrade it, for we are unable to do justice to it with mere human words. All we can do is look on in wonder, and ask ourselves: "Besides God, who could have made manifest such a miracle?"

Everything in this world is made up of atoms. In its final analysis, every object is a collection of these tiny particles. Yet by some strange miracle, when these atoms come together in certain proportions, they form the dazzling globe of the sun, and when the same atoms accumulate elsewhere in different proportions they flow in cascades; in yet other places, they take the form of subtle breezes or are fashioned into fertile soil. All these things may be made up of the same atoms, but the nature and properties of each separate object are widely different.

This miraculous world provides man with endless resources, which he puts to good use whenever he learns how to tap them. Massive supplies of whatever he needs in life are constantly being accumulated, and man himself has to do very little in order to avail of them. Take, for instance, the food that he eats. He has but to stretch out his hand for the huge quantities of valuable nourishment which, as part of the order of the cosmos, have been made available to him. Once he has it in his possession, all he has to move are his hands and his jaws so that the food should reach his stomach. Then without any further effort on his part, the food is absorbed by the body providing nutrition for growth. Where food keeps the human body going, petroleum, another great earthly phenomenon, keeps his activities going. All man has to do is to extract it from the ground, refine it, put it into his machines and astonishingly, this liquid fuel keeps the entire mechanism of his civilization running smoothly. Countless resources of this type have been created in this world, and there is enough of everything to meet man's needs. Human role in bringing these things into being, or in changing them into some useful form, is a relatively small one. Therefore, with the minimum of effort, one has one's need of clothes, housing, furniture, machines, vehicles and all the other components and accessories of one's civilization fulfilled. Are such occurrences not sufficient to prove that there is indeed a Maker and a Master of this world?

A man who has truly discovered God will blissfully savour the essence of the experience.

But we must not forget that there is another side to all this. Nature has provided us with a pure and beautiful world, yet what have our own actions made of it? We may have refined petroleum and made machines out of iron and steel, but we have also filled the land and sea with corruption. We have converted the world into an arena of smoke, noise, pollution, vandalism and war. We have taken these things to such extremes that quite frequently there appears to be no solution to the man-made problems surrounding us. Very little has been accomplished in our factories, and indeed, in the whole field of technology. The world around us accomplishes much more than we human beings do. No problems are created by the works of nature, but man's work is constantly bedeviled by problems.

The earth rotates unceasingly on its own axis and in orbit around the sun. But it does not create any noise in the process. A tree goes to work in the way of a great factory, but it does not emit any smoke. Daily, innumerable creatures are dying in the sea, but they do not pollute the water. The universe has been running in accordance with the divine order for billions of years, without ever having to reorganize itself, for everything about the way it is organized, is perfect. There are countless stars and planets moving around in space; they keep their set pace. All these are miracles of the highest order. They are far more wonderful than anything that man can create, and they happen every instant in this world of ours. What further proof do we need that the power of a great God lies behind this world?

Man has only to think of the nature of his own being to understand the nature of God.

When we look at the different life forms, we witness an astonishing spectacle. Certain material objects come together in one body, and there comes into being a creature like a fish swimming through water, or a bird soaring in the skies. Of the great variety of creatures, which abound on the earth, the

one of greatest interest to us is man. In ways that are a mystery to us, he is moulded into a well-proportioned form. The bones within him take on the meaningful shape of the skeleton, which is covered with flesh and sealed in by a layer of skin, out of which sprout hair and nails. With blood coursing through channels within this frame, all of this adds up to a human being who walks about, holds things in his hands, who hears, smells, tastes, who has a mind which remembers things, accumulates information, analyses it and then expresses it in speech and writing.

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

Man has only to think of the nature of his own being to understand the nature of God. The self, the ego in man, has an individuality of its own, which is quite distinct from that of others of his kind living here on earth. The ego in man is absolutely sure of its own existence. It is the part of man which thinks, feels, forms opinions, has intentions and puts them into practice. It also decides for itself which course of action to take. Every human being is thus a separate personality with a will and power of his own. Since our experience of such a being is an every day matter, what is astonishing about the existence of God, who also is a Being wielding personal power, although on a scale far greater than ourselves? Believing in God is a very similar mental process to believing in one's own self.

No problems are created by the works of nature, but man's work is constantly bedeviled by problems.

People demand some miraculous proof before they will believe in the truth of God and His message. But what further proof do they require when they have the miracle of the whole of the universe, which has been functioning perfectly for millions of years on the grandest of scales? If the doubter is not prepared to accept such a great miracle, then how is he going to shed his doubts when he sees lesser miracles? In truth, man has been provided with everything he needs to enable him to believe in God, and then to place himself at His service. If, in spite of this, he does not believe in God, and fails to acknowledge God's power and perfection, then it is he himself who is to blame.

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

If one eats an apple, but detects no flavour in it and receives no nourishment, then it might be considered of the person not to have eaten an apple at all, but only something which looks like an apple. The same is true of one's realization of God. A man who has truly discovered God will blissfully savour the essence of the experience. Anyone who claims to have discovered God without this accompanying sense of elation has certainly made no such discovery. He has only discovered something which he mistakenly thinks is God. He is like the man eating a fake apple and deriving no satisfaction from it.

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

When we eat delicious fruits, we get a great sense of enjoyment. When we hear beautiful music we are quite entranced by it. When a handsome child is born to a couple, their joy knows no bounds.

Discovering God who has made this world means filling one's heart and soul with the radiant glow of divine light and opening one's mind to incredible beauty.

Then what of our experience of God, who is the source of all beauty, joy and virtue? On discovering Him, can one remain unmoved? This is hardly imaginable, for such a sublime experience—like coming close to a source of dazzling radiance—must surely leave its mark on one.

Having endowed things with their unique qualities, God Himself must have qualities that His discoverers' may savour. To discover Him, therefore, is to experience Him like a

fragrance, a taste which excites, a texture which is a joy, a melody which touches the heart. To come close to Him is to live in an everlasting garden of brilliant colours and delicate fragrances. It is to hear such music that one might wish its enchantment to last forever.

The Creator of all light, God Himself is the most resplendent of all beings. He is the light of the Heavens and of the earth, shedding His radiance on the personalities of all who discover Him. His is the greatest treasure house of all true wisdom. He is the greatest repository of all

true strength. His discoverers' are so fortified by His strength and so enlightened by His wisdom that no flood or hurricane can carry them away. They cannot, once having known Him, do other than evolve into superior human beings. □



Peaceful & Friendly Relationship

Dawah work is similar to doing business. A friendly atmosphere is essential between a businessman and his customer. So is the case of dawah. Performing dawah work requires a normal environment and peaceful relationships between people. This is a precondition of dawah. Muslims must be aware of this principle.

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PROPHETIC MODEL VIS-À-VIS HISTORICAL MODEL

Choose the Right One

TODAY, Muslims find themselves in a state of degeneration. It is time for the Muslim community to experience a revival. But for this to happen there has to be a proper model. If a wrong model is adopted, this revival can never happen, despite a thousand years of effort.



There is only one proper model, for the revival of the Muslim community, the prophetic model. This model is fully preserved in the form of the *Sunnah* or the Prophet's Method. We should study this Prophetic *sunnah* (method) from the relevant texts, and drawing wisdom from these, make efforts for the revival of the Muslim *ummah*.

The Prophet left this world in 632 CE. After this, a long period of Muslim history unfolded, extending for over a thousand years. Unfortunately, every Muslim intellectual has harped only on this history. Books that were written after the Prophet, all present a highly exaggerated picture of this history of the Muslim *ummah*. As a result, consciously or unconsciously, this historical Muslim model impressed itself in a very grand way on the mind of most Muslims obscuring the Prophetic model.

A movement can be successful only with God's help. And God's help is only for efforts that are based on the Prophetic model.

Because of this, today, people who seek to engage in the revival of the Muslim *ummah* may take the name of Islam, but, in actual fact, they only seek to revive Muslim history. Every movement ostensibly working for the revival of the Muslim community is doing just

that. Some talk about reviving the period of Muslim rule. Others aim at reviving Muslim culture. Some see the enforcement of *Shariah* laws as the secret of Muslim revival. Others are engaged in spreading a culture of violence in the name of *jihad*, imagining that in this way they are reviving the Muslim *ummah*.

In modern times, movements of this sort have emerged and become active on a massive scale in different parts of the world. But, despite their loud, fiery and sensational efforts, they have proved to be unsuccessful. There is only one cause for this failure. And that is, these

movements did not receive God's help. The cause of this was that all these movements emerged on the basis of the Muslim historical model. Not one of them was based on the Prophetic model.

There is a stark difference between the Prophetic model and the Muslim historical model. The former is based on inviting people to God. In contrast, the latter is based on politics, culture and communalism. A movement can be successful only with God's help. And God's help is only for efforts that are based on the Prophetic model. □



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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



PRINCIPLE OF MERCY

Chapter 4 of the Quran has the following verse in relation to the laws of inheritance in Islamic Shariah.

If other relatives, orphans or needy people are present at the time of the division, then provide for them out of it, and speak kindly to them. (4: 8)

THIS verse implies that at the time of the division or distribution of the deceased person's property, possessions and wealth, should such people be present who are not entitled by law to any share of the inheritance, then something should also be given to them from the inheritance. They should not be returned without receiving anything.

This verse appears to be one regarding the laws of inheritance laid out in the Quran, but we can find an important point of reference here for our prayers and supplications. When a believer reads this verse, he will be overcome with emotion and can call out,

'O Lord, this is a similar situation for me regarding Paradise. I do not have anything or any deed that will make me deserving of Paradise. But in this verse of inheritance, You have declared Your

principle that if those who are not deserving of the inheritance are present at the time of distribution, some amount should also be given to them as a mercy.'

There is tremendous solace in this verse of the Quran for a true believer. Taking this verse as a point of reference a believer can plead with God:

'Lord, I am a totally undeserving person. But this verse of Your book shows that Your mercy is so overspreading that it covers even those who are undeserving. Lord, this very mercy of Your's is a beacon of hope for me. With respect to this very principle established by You, I beseech You, that You grant me a portion of Your mercy in spite of my total ineligibility; that to one as undeserving as me, You grant a place in the Paradise that You have made exclusively for the deserving. I acknowledge that by Your laws of *Shariah*, I am not deserving of Paradise, but by Your law of mercy, I beseech You grant me entry into Your Paradise.' □

*A believer's prayer
'Lord, I acknowledge
that by Your laws
of Shariah, I am not
deserving of Paradise
but by Your law of
mercy, I beseech You
grant me entry into
Your Paradise.'*



Waste of Time

In this world, time is extremely limited. We cannot afford to spend this precious commodity on revenge or retaliation or other such negative pursuits. The price we have to pay for such futile engagement is in terms of our own progress and development coming to a halt.

UNLIMITED REWARD OF PATIENCE

For Patience Unconditional

Say: 'My servants who believe, fear your Lord. Those who do good works in this life shall receive a good reward. Allah's earth is vast. Those that endure with fortitude shall be requited without measure'.

(39: 10)

IT may seem extraordinary that God should give an unlimited reward for any action. But it is only one action—that is, patience or *Sabr*, that is so singled out.

The root of *Sabr*, means 'to refrain from privation'. There are two kinds of actions: in one, certain limits, are observed; in the other, no such restraint is shown. For instance, if someone is good to you, he receives good treatment from you in return. Most people behave in this way without feeling it necessary to exercise any patience or forbearance. Even the adherents of a religion which does not demand any personal sacrifice are unconscious of the need to practice restraint.

One inclined to embark on the journey of patience is required to adhere strictly to religious guidelines which enjoin restraint always, whether the circumstances be favourable or unfavourable.

However, one inclined to embark on the second kind of action is required to adhere strictly to religious guidelines which enjoin restraint, and he must do so whether the circumstances be favourable or unfavourable to him. This is the path of patience.

That is, even when someone is unkind to you, you are good to him. Even if he adopts a provocative stance, you remain moderate in your behaviour. Even if observance of the truth will be detrimental to your interests, you continue to adhere to the path of truth and justice. Even if the adoption of an unprincipled stand appears advantageous, you continue to be a man of principle. It is the practitioners of such aspects of religion that demands patience who will be 'requited without measure'. □



A BELIEVER

One Who Submits to God

ACCORDING to Islam, a believer is one who submits to God totally. He is like a small infant who owes everything to his parents and his life revolves around them. A believer's life should reflect and revolve around God. He should fear and love God alone. He should do everything for God's sake. He should have absolute trust in God; his Guardian and Protector.

Usually, people live for mundane things. That is why they never find contentment. They either live for personalities or for worldly splendour. Either their families mean everything to them, or they have made prestige and wealth their ultimate goals in life. Some are obsessed with hatred. Some live to thwart, humiliate or ruin others. All these ways of living are based on false notions. They place total reliance on things which are ephemeral and out of place in God's cosmic order. These things can never give man true peace of mind. They do not allow one to proceed along the divine path, which is the only road to salvation.

A believer will strive utmost to maintain peace. He will bear the loss of anything else, but never the loss of peace.

A startling transformation takes place when a person starts living for God. He finds silence more gratifying than speech. He is happier to obey than to rebel, to forgive than to hold grudges, and he tries to cover others' faults. He is unassuming and self-effacing. He is not interested in occupying a privileged position. His life will be an example of simple living and high thinking.

A Believer's Attitude Towards Wealth

Wealth is useful only when it can solve the problems of life. True believers are concerned about the next world and consider real wealth to be that which will be of use to them there.

People see wealth in gold and silver, but a believer's wealth is God. That which brings him nearer to his Lord and makes him eligible for God's blessings in the life to come is of supreme importance to him.

A Believer is a Kind Person

God's attribute in the Quran is said to be 'The Compassionate', 'The Merciful'. That is, very kind and sympathetic. Similarly the Prophet of

Islam has been called 'a mercy to the worlds' meaning, the Prophet of Islam has been sent as a blessing to the whole world. The most prominent quality of the Prophet is his being the instrument of universal mercy.

A true believer therefore will be patient and compassionate in his dealings with others, treating others with sympathy and kindness. He will not return unkindness for unkindness, but continues to behave sympathetically with unconditional characteristic kindness. Believers exhort one another to patience and compassion.

A Believer Sacrifices

One of the qualities of the believer described in the Quran is the readiness to sacrifice his interests for that of another; holding the needs of others to be above his own; taking the trouble to help others; giving preference to others while occupying a back seat for oneself.

A startling transformation takes place when a person starts living for God. He is happier to obey than to rebel, to forgive than to hold grudges, and he tries to cover others' faults.

This willingness to sacrifice, is a superior human quality. Almost every day such occasions arise when one feels the necessity for one kind of sacrifice or the other, to recede into the background and leave the path clear for others to go forward; to suffer oneself in order to give comfort to others; to cut down one's expenses and help others; to suppress one's personality so that others may come to the fore, to remain silent and allow others to speak; to direct one's conveyance to one

side and give room for others to go ahead to their destinations. Such sacrifice is a form of altruism. According to the Quran, true believers are those who possess this quality.

A Believer Restrains Anger

The Quran defines believers as those who "when angered are willing to forgive." (42: 37)

When a believer is confronted with such a behaviour as makes him angry, he does not retaliate, but rather returns forgiveness for anger. By adopting the path of avoidance, he nips evil in the bud. Instead of becoming embroiled with his antagonist, he engages himself in his own constructive work.

Once a man came to the Prophet of Islam and said to him: "O Prophet of God, give me some advice which I may follow all my life. And let this advice be brief so that I do not forget it." The Prophet replied, "Do not be angry."

Anger never surfaces without reason. It always bursts forth when provoked, when someone ill-treats you or says something which hurts your ego. Anger is a reaction. It generally manifests itself when you are faced with some unpleasant experience.

One way to deal with this is to react, by returning tit for tat. But this is not the teaching of Islam. Islam teaches that when someone or something angers or provokes you, you remain undisturbed.

A believer's conviction is that if he remains patient in the face of trouble stirred by others, he will be amply rewarded by God. This conviction generates unfathomable peace of mind within, so that he is no longer disturbed by any antagonism. This spirit of faith converts his anger into forgiveness. Provocation is disregarded. He even derives food for modesty and humility from the very things which are designed to destroy his peace of mind.

A Believer has the Desire for Peace

A believer is necessarily a lover of peace. In his mind, faith and a desire for peace are closely interlinked and regardless of the circumstances, he will strive utmost to maintain peace. He will bear the loss of anything else, but never the loss of peace.

The life that the true believer desires is possible only in the propitious atmosphere which flowers in conditions of peace. Conditions of unrest breed a negative atmosphere which to him is abhorrent.

But if peace is to be maintained, it calls for a certain kind of sacrifice. In disturbed conditions, the believer must overlook both the misdeeds leading up to this situation and the identity of the wrongdoers. He might suffer at their hands but will make no attempt to retaliate, so that peace may prevail. The believer should be willing to pay this price, so that his pursuance of constructive ends can proceed unhampered.

The believer is like a flower in the garden of nature. Just as a hot wind will shrivel up a bloom and cause it to die, so will constant friction

A believer's conviction is that if he remains patient in the face of trouble stirred by others, he will be amply rewarded by God.

distract the believer from achieving positive goals. And just as a cool breeze will enable the flower to retain its beauty for its natural life-span, so will a peaceful atmosphere enable the believer to fulfil the obligations of divine worship in a spirit of great serenity. Peace is thus central to the life of the believer.

Today's turbulent times place the additional responsibility on all true believers to actively participate in peace efforts. It is not about participating from a comfort level but doing it with dedication and complete devotion.

Islam is a religion of peace and peace is a universal law of nature. That is because God loves the condition of peace, and disapproves of any state of unrest. God's predilection for peace is reason enough for the believer also to love peace. In no circumstances will the true believer ever tolerate the disruption of peace. □



Wise Approach

Every person lives between two things—his desires and the external situation. By simply running after your desires you cannot achieve your goals. One must know the external situation, circumstances and opportunities. You can achieve your personal target only by taking into consideration these external factors. It is this realistic approach that is the wise approach.

WITHOUT RESERVATION

Through Hard Work

ONCE, somebody remarked, “Reservations are really necessary for Muslims in India. Without reservations, they cannot progress in this country.”

The answer to this remark is, “Be it India or any other country, everywhere there is just one unshakable law of nature. According to that law, reservations are not a means for any community’s progress.”

In fact, reservations are counterproductive, being an obstacle to progress. They sap the competitive spirit in people. Some people may get some ordinary benefits from reservations, but they cannot produce any great progress. If you don’t grant someone a favour, you actually grant him something bigger—and that is, an incentive to work hard.

When someone is not granted a favour, he realizes, “I am not going to get anything from someone else’s generosity. And so, I have just one option—and that is, I must work hard and develop merit.” This thinking provokes a compulsion in him to work hard. His latent talents are awakened. If earlier he was a man, now he can become a superman, and can attain great success.

If you don’t grant someone a favour, you actually grant him something bigger—and that is, an incentive to work hard.

Someone who progresses through hard work develops other qualities too—such as self-confidence and a realistic approach. He loses the ever-complaining mentality. He becomes a good example for others. He is very careful with his time and money. He contributes positively to society. □



Victory

The best way of turning defeat into victory in every walk of life, is to learn from one’s mistakes.

RITUAL MUST ARISE FROM THE SPIRIT

Meaningful Devotion

ALL religions, through rituals and ceremonies, give a definite form to the act of worship. Islam too has specific rites but emphasizes the spirit in which these are carried out. It does not conceive of divine worship as a dichotomous proposition of two equal parts, form and spirit. Form is an external manifestation of the spirit—the vital and indispensable element of every sincere religious act, the former being a mere ancillary.

A *Hadith* on fasting shows how this act must be illumined by spirit: “One who did not forsake telling lies while on a fast, God has no need of such a person forsaking food and water.” Numerous statements in the Quran and *Hadith* make it clear that ritual practices and spirit are not equal constituents of worship. One is crucial and the other, a subordinate element. Each act of worship may or may not—depending upon its nature and circumstances—have an external form, ritualised or otherwise. What is truly important is the zeal which inspires it.

While rituals serve partly as palpable identifiers of religious acts or of worship, and partly as physical reinforcements or prompters to religious ardour, the essence of Islam is the inner spirit, eternal and unassailable, unlike its outer forms. When this reality is lodged in the

The true value of an act in Islam depends entirely upon the spirit in which it is carried out, and not the trappings of outward form.

recesses of the individual psyche, its effects are outwardly reflected. Sincerely performed ceremonial acts are but material expressions of the incontrovertible inner truth. Towards the end of his life, Prophet Muhammad went on his pilgrimage and laid down specific ways of performing Hajj. More than 100,000 of his Companions went with him. The Prophet seated himself in the courtyard of the Kabah while his Companions queried him on the procedures of this important part of worship, especially concerning rites and their proper

forms. (Hajj involves the performance of a series of rites, and since this was the first proper Hajj, there was uncertainty about their correct order.) The Prophet allayed their fears, saying: “There is no harm. There is no harm. Real harm lies in the dishonouring of a person.” This saying throws light on how form relates to spirit in Islam: the spirit is the essential factor, while the form or ritual is a matter of externals.

If the believer is not lacking in spirit, any deficiency in the form of his worship is tolerable.

The converse of this is illustrated by a tradition set down in the books of *Hadith*. Once the Prophet was seated in the mosque in Madinah when a worshipper came to meet him after performing his ablutions and saying his prayer with full observance of their ritual. The Prophet sent him back to say his prayers again as he said, *he had not said his prayers*. Here, a distinction was made between form and spirit. The Prophet sensed that this worshipper's performance of the rituals of prayer had been mechanical and not imbued with religious fervour. Indeed, the true spirit of *salath* (prayer) is modesty. But this individual's behaviour showed that while he was praying, modesty was far from his mind.

However punctilious the worship in form, without the true spirit, the performance of the ritual is worthless. The mere observance of form does not make worship, and is unacceptable in the eyes of God.

The word "ritual" has the same connotation as "form". The difference is that "form" is a generic term, and "ritual" has become a religious term.

The essence of Islam is the inner spirit, eternal and unassailable unlike its outer forms.

One *Hadith* tells us that the value of an act depends upon the doer's intention. A practice must be evaluated on the basis of motivation; for example, the Prophet's migration from Makkah to Madinah, known as the *Hijrah*. This emigration to uphold Islam, when people abandoned hearth and home for the sake of God was an act of great religious significance.

However, one of the emigrants was not pure in intent. He left Makkah for Madinah with the ulterior motive of marrying a Madinan girl who had agreed to marry him on the condition that he migrated to Madinah. The Prophet told his Companions that since this individual had migrated for his own private benefit, the migration would not be considered as migration for the sake of God.

This makes it clear that rituals are of relative value in Islam. The true value of an act in Islam depends entirely upon the spirit in which it is carried out, and not the trappings of outward form. □



MERIT CULTURE; CONTACTS CULTURE

A Third Option

DEVELOPED countries enjoy what can be called a 'merit culture'. In underdeveloped countries, a 'contacts culture' exists. In contrast to these two, a divine society is one where a 'tazkiya culture' prevails, or a culture based on purification of the soul.

In a society characterized by 'merit culture', all importance is given to how competent a person is. In such a society, a competent person is given the position he is thought to deserve, while someone who is not competent is rejected.

In a society characterized by 'contacts culture', everyone is busy seeking to build contacts with influential people. They do not bother about trying to improve their own abilities. Instead, day and night, they are hard at work seeking to build their contacts with powerful people. A general belief prevails that one is able to get one's work done through one's contacts, not through one's personal abilities.

In a divine society, every person's concern is one's own purification—that is, to reform oneself and to make oneself such as to be eligible for God's blessings.

A divine society is different from these two. In a divine society, every person's concern is one's own purification—that is, to reform oneself and to make oneself eligible for God's blessings and to develop a purified (*muzakka*) character in order to become the sort of person selected for entry to Paradise in the Hereafter.

In other societies, people's focus is on people—that is, they do all they can to try to make themselves appear capable in relation to others or acceptable to them. In contrast, in a divine society, the focus of people is entirely

God. In such a society, people try to view themselves in the same way as their Lord views them. They gauge success in terms of the Hereafter, not in terms of this world. In such a society, a successful person is one who gains entry into Paradise, and an unsuccessful person is one who is deprived of this. □



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.



MUSLIM SEPARATISM IS UN-ISLAMIC

IN many countries where Muslims form a minority, Muslim groups are fighting for independence in areas where Muslims are in a majority. Muslim groups living in these areas consider the non-Muslim states they are fighting against to be illegal occupying forces. Much blood has been spilt in the course of these conflicts, but there has been no positive fall-out at all. These conflicts have only made the situation worse for all concerned groups, including, and especially for these Muslim groups themselves.

The justification given for these violent conflicts aiming at separation or independence is that non-Muslim majorities are allegedly destroying the Islamic identity or culture of these groups. Hence, they claim that, their demand for independence is legitimate in order to preserve their faith and Islamic identity.

This politics of separation undertaken by Muslims in different countries is however, totally un-Islamic. It has nothing to do with Islamic teachings. Politics of this kind is derived from a modern concept called 'self-determination'. Modern political theory says 'self-determination' is the right of a nation or people to determine its own form of government without influence from outside. In other words, the right of the people of a given area to determine their own political status. It is this political concept that Muslims have sought to induct into Islam.

This politics of separation undertaken by Muslims in different countries is however, totally un-Islamic. It has nothing to do with Islamic teachings.

It is totally wrong to claim that a particular country or nation is trying to destroy Muslim culture, and use this to justify violent conflicts. Today everyone is free to adopt their own culture. After having travelled all over the world, it could be said that, in no country are efforts being made to destroy the Muslim identity. It is a baseless allegation.

Sometimes, this struggle for independence and separation by Muslim minorities from a non-Muslim majority state is sought to be justified by claiming that these states are calculatedly working to reduce Muslims to a minority. Hence, it is argued, that it is legitimate to seek separation and independence from non-Muslim-majority states.

This argument too is completely wrong. Islam never enjoins upon Muslims to establish a separate state or to strive for political independence. According to Islam, the political system is a matter of social conditions. It is quite un-Islamic to launch a movement to establish a political system based on some self-styled model and to say that any particular country is planning to reduce areas of Muslim-majority into Muslim-minority territories. To launch violent struggles to separate from existing states is intolerable for every country, even for a Muslim country. So, what is happening in such places where people are being killed in large numbers in the wake of violent movements for separatism, is the price that Muslims are paying for their wrong policies. What these countries are doing is as defence and not as offence.

Conveying the message requires universality and tolerance, while separatism kills the universal spirit.

The Muslims' duty in every part of the world is only one, that is, *dawah* work, inviting people to God's path. Muslims must do peaceful *dawah* work, and leave all other things to God. *Dawah*, naturally, demands close interaction with people of other religions—and excellent and very natural opportunities for this exist in countries where Muslims live with people

of other faiths. When Muslim ethnic groups in non-Muslim majority countries demand separation and independence they are themselves harming prospects for *dawah*.

The politics of separatism kills the universal spirit. This policy is a political innovation and has nothing to do with Islam. It is instructive to note that Sufis did not have this sort of ghetto mentality, and, instead, actively sought to interact and even live among non-Muslims. They presented Islam before non-Muslims positively. Those in favour of separatism have no justification from Islam; it is their own self-styled

thinking. The political and cultural separatism that they advocate is a major barrier to conveying the message of God.

Separatism, both political and cultural, is wrong. Islam does not enjoin these kinds of separatist policies. This politics of separation is a sin, not a virtue. Due to this, Muslims are being deprived of God's help. Their activities are proving to be counterproductive as they are against the Divine scheme of things.

How does one account for this marked tendency for Muslim separatism across the world? Sometimes it takes the form of wanting a separate, Muslim-only or Muslim-majority country. When this is not possible, it takes the form of Muslim ghettoism, with Muslims wanting to live in exclusive Muslim-only spaces, to have social interaction limited to themselves as far as possible, to send their children to Muslim-only schools, to make friends only with Muslims. What is the reason for this?

The answer to this is in the modern age, Muslims have developed a flawed concept of identity, and wish to preserve this so-called identity. They have become extremely identity-conscious. This unnatural identity-consciousness is creating Muslim ghettos everywhere: ghetto country, ghetto colony, ghetto institutions, ghetto society, etc.

The contemporary Muslim separatism is a new phenomenon. It has nothing to do with Islam. Muslims adopted a political policy during the 19th and 20th centuries that was un-Islamic and unrealistic and this naturally failed. This failure has led to a defeatist mentality among Muslims and has given rise to the phenomenon of Muslim ghettoism.

According to Islam, the political system is a matter of social conditions. It is quite un-Islamic to launch a movement to establish a political system based on some self-styled model.

Unlike what some Muslims may believe, there is no sanction for this in Islam. You cannot find a single reference for this in the Quran or *Hadith*. You cannot find any example of this kind of politics in the biographies of the Prophet or in the accounts of the lives of the Prophet's Companions.

Some Muslims think that this sort of ghetto and separatist thinking, whether cultural or political, is justified in the name of the unity of the global Muslim community and Muslim brotherhood. But this is false. In fact, this kind of separatism has created more differences among Muslims themselves. □

THE PATH OF MODERATION

A sensible path

*"You should adopt the way of balance and moderation."
The Prophet of Islam said to his Companions. (Musnad Ahmad).*

BALANCE and moderation apply to every aspect of our lives. When we walk and speak, we should observe balance and moderation. So, too, in our worship, in our expenditure and in our help to others.

Balance and moderation are a hallmark of a mature person. They indicate that one is free from wild emotionalism and superficiality.

In the same way, if we develop differences with someone, we should maintain our balance. We should try to sort out our differences through respectful dialogue. If we resolve the issue in this way, it is well and good. But if that does not happen, we should seek to maintain good relations despite our differences. We should agree to disagree.

Balance and moderation are a hallmark of a mature person. They indicate that one is free from wild emotionalism and superficiality and that when one speaks or acts, one does so only after carefully thinking about the matter. Such a person's behaviour is controlled by reason, not by emotions. □



Meet the Challenge

Without challenge man becomes stagnant, and with challenge he becomes dynamic. It is challenge that motivates people to go ahead and achieve on their own what they did not receive as inheritance.

GOODNESS IN EVERY SITUATION

Win Win Situation

Strange are the ways of a believer, for there is good for him in every situation. And this is not true for anyone except for a believer. If he has an occasion of happiness, he is grateful, thus this happiness becomes good for him. If a difficulty befalls him, he keeps patience over it, and so the difficulty becomes good for him (Prophet of Islam).

THE conduct of a person other than a man of faith is very different. If he experiences an occasion for happiness, he is filled with pride. On the other hand, if he faces a difficult situation, he falls prey to despair. Both the conditions are equally unwanted. In contrast to this, if a man of deep faith experiences joy, his heart is filled with gratitude. And if he is faced with a difficulty, he accepts it, regarding it as God's Will.

In the light of this *Hadith*, reflect on this Quranic verse (89: 15-16):

As for man, when his Lord tests him, through honour and blessings, he says, My Lord has honoured me, but when He tests him by straitening his means of livelihood, he says, My Lord has disgraced me.

In this world, what is truly important is not whether the circumstances of your life are good or bad. What is of real importance is that no matter what the conditions, you should draw sustenance from them for establishing a close bond with God. Every experience in life should become a means for you to grow closer to God. You should continue to draw divine food from every situation. You should discern God's glory in every observation of nature and the universe. Every pleasant experience of life should remind you of God's mercy, while every undesirable experience should lead you to grow in God-consciousness. Failure should lead you to remember God, and success should take you closer to Him. □

State of Mind

*Happiness and unhappiness are both states of the mind.
Unhappiness is the result of negative thinking, and
happiness is the result of positive thinking.*

THREE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

For Eternal Success

The people are like mines of metal—gold and silver; the more excellent of them in the 'the days of ignorance' are the more excellent of them in Islam if they attain knowledge and develop understanding—The prophet of Islam.

THIS *Hadith* refers to the stages of intellectual development in man. The first stage is the nascent stage on which one is born. The second stage is that in which man develops his intellect by dint of his own efforts. The third stage is that of the realization of God (*ma'rifat*). On reaching the stage of *ma'rifat*, one arrives at the final destination of one's intellectual development—that is, the stage that is called 'Islam'.

Each and every negative experience should teach man a valuable lesson. He should, under no circumstances, become the victim of despair.

In this context, human beings can be likened to metal. Iron is extracted from the ore in the mines. After this, it is smelted in furnaces where the impurities are removed and it is transformed into steel. Finally, after undergoing a number of industrial processes, it is converted into a functioning machine. It thus goes through three stages. The first stage is that of iron ore; the second stage is when it becomes steel; and the third and final

stage is when it turns into a machine.

The same is true of man. When man is born, it is as if he comes out of nature's mine—in a pristine, natural and unrefined state. Then he grows up in the world, and learns to use his powers of reasoning as he receives his education and training. This considerably refines him in intellect and spirit. Then he reaches the age of maturity. After this if he uses his powers of reasoning to the best of his ability, he can arrive at the stage of *ma'rifat* or realization of the truth. This is the summit of human perfection, or the stage of being a person who has realized God.

These three stages of development may be categorized as follows:

Born personality

Developed personality

Realized personality

The 'born personality' is bestowed by God. At the level of the 'born personality', every human being is more or less identical with only marginal differences. In terms of capabilities, there are always differences between people. But despite these natural differences, all human beings have the same potential capacity. This fact is indicated in the following *Hadith*:

A strong believer is better and more pleasing to God than a weak believer, and there is good in everyone. Seek that which is beneficial for you, and ask for help from God and do not lose heart. If you face something unpleasant or unwanted, do not say: "If I had done so and so, I would not have had to face this situation."

But rather say: "This was according to God's divine plan." Because saying such things opens the door to Satan. (Sahih Muslim)

In this *Hadith*, it is man who is referred to as the believer. This means that if anyone becomes conscious of some shortcoming, or feels that there is something lacking in him in some respect, he should never despair, for he might possess some particular quality in greater measure than others do. Therefore, man ought to discover that God-given quality with which he is blessed and proceed to construct his life full of hope. In the course of life's struggle, if he suffers any setbacks, he should feel certain that there is bound to be some positive gain even in that negative experience. Each and every negative experience should teach man a valuable lesson. He should, under no circumstances, become the victim of despair.

In this way, he can continuously build his personality. By introspection, he can continue to rid himself of any wrong conditioning and, by awakening his consciousness, he will nurture such a personality as has the capacity to accept the truth—a personality which is fully in consonance with the spirit of a prayer of the Prophet: "O God, show me the truth in the form of the truth, and give me the ability to follow it, and show me falsehood in the form of falsehood and enable me to abstain from it, and O God, show me things as they are." (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Ar-Razi*)

This sort of person is a 'developed personality'. Wise is the individual who moulds himself along these lines. So far as the 'born personality' is concerned, every man receives this on an equal basis along with others

Those who engage themselves continuously in self-purification are the ones who, by the grace of God, will succeed in discovering the truth and wholeheartedly accept it.

as a gift from the Creator. But developing a personality which is well prepared for life's contingencies calls for much striving on the part of the individual himself. Ore may be a gift of nature, but the turning of this ore into steel and machinery is carried out in factories set up and operated by human beings.

It is on this act of self-preparation that the next developed stage depends. People must realize their God-given abilities and continue to introspect objectively. Those who make an effort to find out their shortcomings, those who are ready to pay any price for truth and work on converting their "ore" into "steel", those who sedulously refrain from all negative emotions, such as egoism, arrogance, greed, jealousy, anger and vengefulness—all the things which are dangerous obstacles to the building of one's personality—in short, those who engage themselves

Man should discover that God-given quality with which he is blessed and full of hope he should proceed to construct his life.

continuously in self-purification are the ones who, by the grace of God, will succeed in discovering the truth and wholeheartedly accept it.

Every person imbibes some sort of conditioning from his surroundings. Reflecting his emotional make-up and likes and dislikes, he develops certain habits and a particular mindset in accordance with what he thinks of as his best interests. Often, all these are obstacles to our spiritual progress. To remove

these obstacles, we need to become our own guard. We need to identify our own faults and make efforts to rectify them. We need to subject our own selves to a process of merciless deconditioning. This is a necessary condition for purification of the self. Without this, such purification is no purification at all. Without merciless self-reform you cannot be purified, and without purification, you cannot enter Paradise.

One who journeys through these stages of spiritual development mentioned above and arrives at the Truth is referred to in the Quran as '*an-nafs al-mutmainnah*', or a 'soul at peace' (89: 27). These are the people who submitted to God's Creation Plan. Having moulded themselves in line with this Plan, they have developed the necessary character. It is these people whom God will be pleased with and whom God will bless with a place in the eternal gardens of Paradise. □



LIFE AFTER DEATH

Signs to Understand

GANDHI JAYANTI is celebrated in India on 2nd October, to mark the occasion of the birthday of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the “Father of the Nation”. The United Nations General Assembly has also adopted a resolution declaring 2nd October to be celebrated as the *International Day of Non-Violence*. Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated in January-1948 but his message of peace and non-violence lives on.

Gandhiji’s recorded speeches are available online even today and anyone wishing to listen to Mahatma Gandhi can easily download them from the internet and listen to them as though Gandhiji were speaking directly to them today. By this means it is possible to “be in contact” with the Mahatma.

Man leaves this world, but his voice survives. Man dies but his voice lives on after him. This fact is indicative of the reality that man’s personality is a continuum. It remains in the ‘living’ state long after he has expired.

This is what is apparently alluded to in this verse of the Quran which mentions the last Day and the life after death: that this is true, as true as you are speaking now. (51: 23)

In the form of the voice, a man’s personality continues to survive in part. We directly witness this happening. Now, when it is known that the human personality continues to live in part after death, it is not difficult to understand that the human personality can also continue to exist in its entirety. The knowledge of one makes the other more easily understandable.

The existence of the human voice after death makes the continuance of the whole human personality after death a more understandable concept.

Once the existence of a part is proved, the existence of the whole is proved by itself. The existence of the human voice after death makes the continuance of the whole human personality after death, a more understandable concept.

Our being able to hear now the voice of a person who expired in 1948 confirms that person is still living today, even though he is not visible to us. □



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**

Say, He is God, the One, God, the Self-sufficient One. He does not give birth, nor was He born, and there is nothing like Him. (112: 1-4)

Chapter 112 of the Quran, entitled *Ikhlās* (Oneness), gives us the essence of monotheism. Not only does it tell us of the oneness of God, but it also makes it clear what the oneness of God means. This chapter presents the concept of God, purified of all human interpolation, for, prior to the advent of Islam, tampering with the sacred text had caused this concept of God to be distorted for all would be believers. God is not many. He is only one. All depend upon Him. He depends on none. He, in His own being, is all-powerful. He is above to beget or to be begotten. He is such a unique being Who has no equal or compeer. All kinds of oneness belongs to this Almighty Being. The concept of One God is the actual beginning point and also the only source of Islamic teachings.

God: there is no deity save Him, the Living, the Eternal One. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. His is what the heavens and the earth contain. Who can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows all about the affairs of men at present and in the future. They can grasp only that part of His knowledge, which He wills. His throne is as vast as the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of both does not weary Him. He is the Exalted, the Immense One.

(2: 255) □

Belief in God

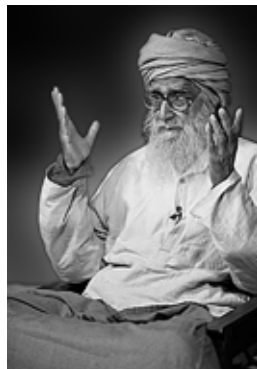
To believe in God is to see the invisible force behind visible objects.

ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan on Muslim violence and negativity

A Muslim friend of mine is very upset about the horrific terrorism that self-styled 'Islamic' groups continue to commit in the name of Islam. Because of what these groups are doing, she has become embarrassed to be seen as a Muslim by her friends from other faiths. When she goes out, she is apprehensive that others might discriminate against her or wrongly look at her with doubt and suspicion just because she has a Muslim name. What advice would you have for her and others like her?



Your fear lies within and has no existence outside of yourself. You should completely free your mind of this thinking. You must be convinced that these terror acts are not truly inspired by Islam but are done by some misled Muslims. I am myself an example of this way of thinking. I travel in India and all over the world and have no such fear because I have completely disowned the violent acts of Muslims. If you do not disown these acts unequivocally, you will have fear.

I think that many Muslims think and talk negatively. Instead of asking God to bless and guide people of other faiths and to bless the whole world (and not just Muslims alone) with love, compassion, peace and prosperity, they ask God to destroy people of other faiths. Why is this so?

This practice by certain Muslims is wholly against the spirit of Islam. This is well illustrated by an incident that occurred in the early history of Islam. In the time of the Prophet in Madinah, some people from a tribe killed Muslims while the latter were unarmed and unprepared. Knowledge of this made the Prophet utter certain curses against those who had murdered the Muslims. But at that very moment an angel from God appeared and admonished the Prophet not to call upon the curse of God on anyone. After this incident the Prophet never called upon the wrath of God upon any person. So, if Muslims are engaged in the act of cursing others, they are doing something that is certainly forbidden (*haram*) in Islam as the Prophet himself was asked not to do so.

It is said that a number of Muslims have been radicalized through the internet. What practical measures do you suggest for countering this, and, more than that, for bringing Muslims to actively work for peace and harmony?

Spread of peaceful literature and dissemination of peaceful ideas on the internet alone can counter the radicalization seen among Muslims today. De-radicalization will take place in the same manner as radicalization has taken place, that is, through the spread of ideas. There can be no other way. Misleading interpretations of Islam have been uploaded on websites on a great scale. A similar pattern will have to be followed with regard to peaceful interpretation of Islam. There is enough matter in our literature for doing this work.

Why is it that many people are more easily swayed by negative propaganda, propaganda directed against others, than by positivity? Why do protest movements—directed against this or that government, country, community etc.—often seem to find more sympathizers than movements working for a positive cause, like world peace and harmony?

The basic reason for this is people cannot analyse events with wisdom. Even educated people failed to provide the right definition for wisdom which is a proof of the above reason. Thus if there exists no definition for wisdom, how can there be a wise analysis of issues? As per my study, the right definition of wisdom is the ability to discover the relevant by sorting out the irrelevant. Negativity persists because what needs to be sorted out is considered as a relevant aspect. This is why people become attracted to negative interpretation of events and happenings. Negativity is the price to be paid for not being able to do a wise analysis of events. Because people cannot analyze the situations that present themselves, they easily become negative about trivial issues and then resort to complaining and protesting. This is a worldwide phenomenon and not specific to Muslims alone. □

Success

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

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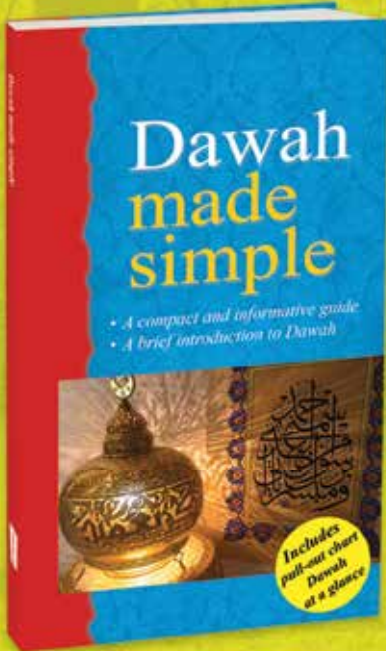
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Spirit Of Islam | Issue 46 | October 2016 | 52 Pages
Licensed To Post Without Prepayment | License No: WPP-284
Postal Regn. No: KRNA/BGE-1101/2015-2017 | RNI No: KARENG/2012/46265
Posted at Bengaluru PSO, Mysore Road, Bengaluru-560026 on 24/26th of every month



Printed, published & owned by

Fathima Sarah, 002, HM Wimberly, 6 Berlie Street Cross, Langford Town, Bengaluru - 560025
Printed at Cosmos Printers and Publishers, 450, 3rd Cross, Wilson Garden, Bengaluru - 560027