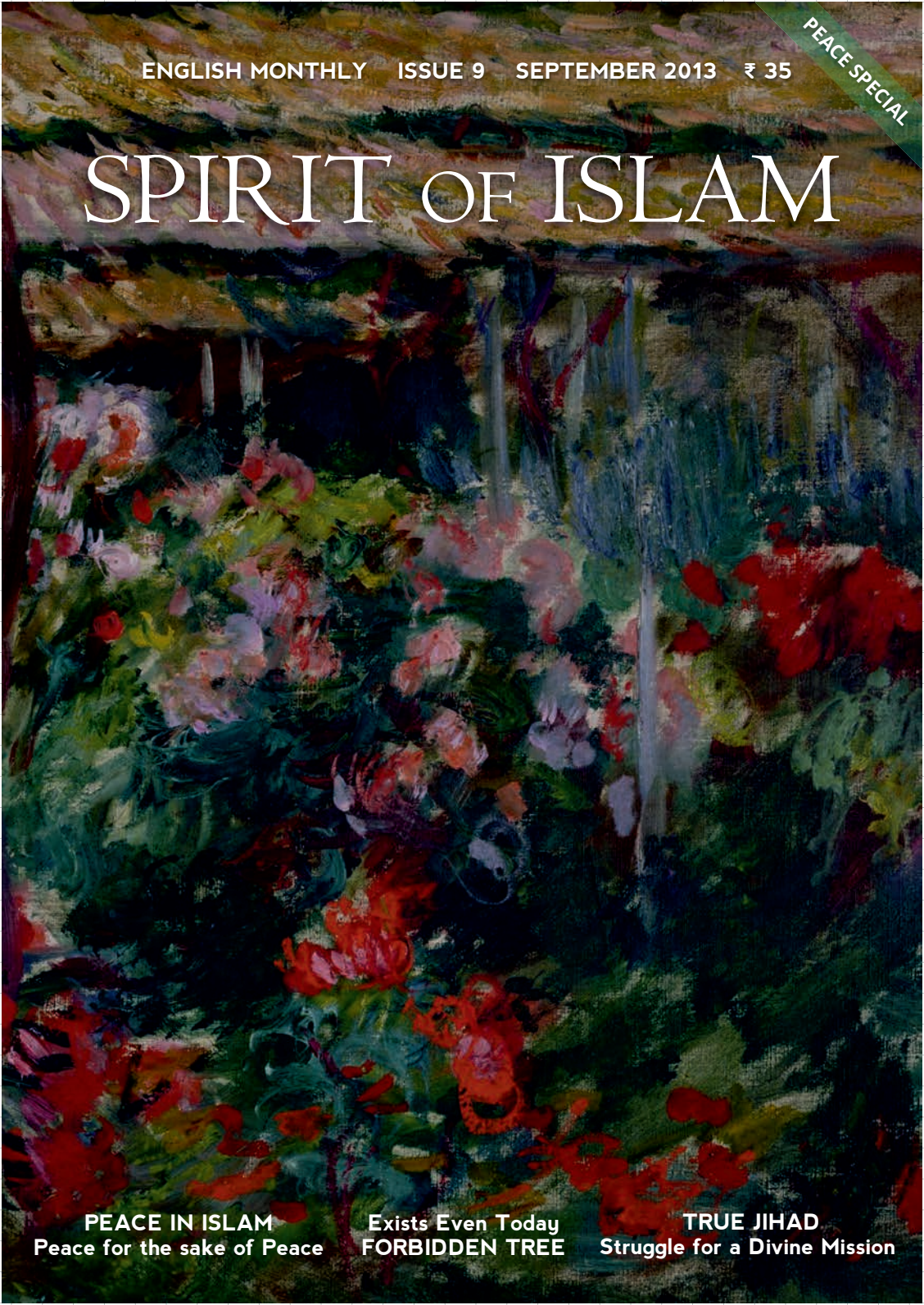


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PEACE SPECIAL

SPIRIT OF ISLAM



PEACE IN ISLAM
Peace for the sake of Peace

Exists Even Today
FORBIDDEN TREE

TRUE JIHAD
Struggle for a Divine Mission

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Spiritual Living

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

ISSUE 9, SEPTEMBER 2013

CHIEF EDITOR

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

DR. FARIDA KHANAM

NAGHMA SIDDIQI

AIJAZ AHMED

SUB-EDITORS

MARIA KHAN

SADIA KHAN

DESIGN

AMEEN AHMED

COVER ART

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OFFICE

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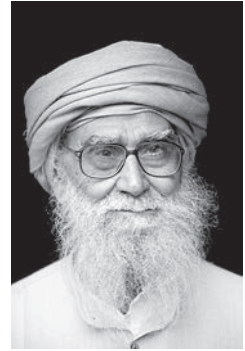
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK

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 third highest civilian honour in India, and the Demiurgus Peace International Award. He has been called 'Islam's spiritual ambassador to the world' and is recognised as one of its most influential Muslims'. 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.



TERRORISM IN THE LIGHT OF ISLAMIC TEACHINGS

TODAY, 'terrorism' has become a buzzword. Across the globe, people are writing and talking about it. But, as far as I know, no clear definition of the term has emerged as yet. People condemn terrorism but, still, they cannot specifically and clearly define what it is. I have tried to understand this question in the light of Islamic teachings. My definition of terrorism is that, it is an armed struggle by non-governmental actors.

According to Islamic teachings, any person or group has the right to launch a peaceful movement for political purposes or for the sake of his community. He retains this right as long as he does not, directly or indirectly, engage in aggression. In Islam, only an established government has the right to use arms or to engage in military action if there is a genuine need for it. Non-governmental organisations do not have the right to pick up arms under any pretext. I have written about this Islamic ruling in considerable detail in several of my books.

According to internationally-accepted principles, established governments have the right to punish criminals and engage in defence against attackers. This is an Islamic principle, too. In the light of this principle, one could define terrorism as armed action engaged in by a non-governmental actor or actors. If a non-governmental actor feels

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

that in a certain country there is injustice or that human rights are being violated, it has the right to make efforts to address the situation using only peaceful means. But, under no circumstances and under no pretext is it permissible for them to adopt violent methods. Suppose an individual or a non-governmental organisation was to argue, 'We would like to work non-violently, but our opponent refuses to give us our rights, even if we use peaceful means. So, in these circumstances, what else can we do, but take to arms?'

The answer to this argument is that, the responsibility as regards these matters lies with the government and not with non-governmental actors. If someone feels that the government is failing to live up to its responsibilities, still it is impermissible for him to take on what is the government's work. In these conditions, he can choose between only two alternatives: either to exercise patience, or else, to make every effort to address the situation using only peaceful methods.

Here, the question arises about what the appropriate response is to state terrorism, i.e. when the state engages in inappropriate violence. In this regard, it should be noted that this sort of violence is about a state misusing a right that it has, while for non-governmental actors to engage in violence is to engage in something that they have no right to at all. There is a distinction between doing something which one has no right to, on the one hand, and misusing a right that one is legally entitled to. In other words, if a non-governmental group were to engage in violence, no matter under what pretext, it would definitely be impermissible. On the other hand, if an established government were to engage in inappropriate violence, it would be told that it must use its right to use violence only in a legally permissible manner. By misusing this right, a government can turn itself into a criminal, just as a non-governmental actor can.

This point can be better understood with the help of a simile. Suppose a doctor uses his surgical knife to operate on a wrong part of his patient's body. In this case, he would be guilty of misusing a right that he is entitled to. A qualified doctor definitely has the right to use his surgical knife—to operate on the correct part of his patient's body—but he has no right to cut off a wrong part. On the other hand, a person who is not a doctor has no right whatsoever to use a knife on anyone, no matter under what pretext. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
editor@thespiritofislam.org

FORBIDDEN TREE

THE story of Adam and Eve is common to the Bible and the Quran. According to the Quranic account, God created Adam and his wife, Eve; settled them in Paradise and gave both of them basic directions:

God said. 'O Adam! Live with your wife in Paradise
and eat freely from it anywhere you may wish.
Yet do not approach this tree lest
you become wrongdoers.'

THE QURAN 2:35

The story goes on, as we all know, and according to the Quranic account:

But Satan caused them both to slip through this and thus
brought about the loss of their former state. God said,
'Go down from here as enemies to each other; and
on earth you shall have your abode and
your livelihood for a while!

THE QURAN 2:36

**Those who follow the voice of conscience will return
to paradise, and those who ignore the voice of their
conscience will be deprived of paradise forever.**

According to another Quranic account, after eating from the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve were deprived of 'spiritual garments'. Garments, here, are symbolic of the protection of God. People need the constant protection of their Creator. We enjoy this protection as long as we maintain distance from the forbidden tree. Satan is our enemy, and wants us to be deprived of our garments, our protection. This is the real test we face on Earth. The Quran says:

Children of Adam, do not let Satan seduce you, just as he
turned your parents out of the Garden: he deprived them
of their garments in order to make them aware of their
nakedness. He and his forces watch you from
where you do not see them!

THE QURAN 7:27

This Quranic description tells us what the Creation Plan of God with

regard to man is. Man was created as a free creature. He was free to do as he pleased, but there was a condition. The condition was that he should refrain from wrongdoing. The forbidden tree of paradise was a symbol of 'wrongs'. Anyone who follows this guidance and saves himself from wrongdoings, will be awarded paradise for good. And one who disobeys this direction and indulges in wrongdoings will be ousted from paradise. He will be deprived of paradise forever.

Inherent in everyone is the ability to discriminate between right and wrong, through the divine agency that we call our conscience.

What does it mean to stray? To stray is to act contrary to nature. Inherent in everyone is the ability to discriminate between right and wrong, through the divine agency that we call our conscience. Those who follow the voice of conscience will return to paradise, and those who ignore the voice of their conscience will be deprived of paradise forever. □



Peace and Justice

*Justice is an
indirect result of peace
and not the direct result,
so the formula is like this:
establish peace by accepting
injustice for a temporary period.*

*Peace will open the doors of opportunities
and by availing the opportunities
we can reach our goal,
that is, justice.*

PEACE IN ISLAM

THE very word Islam (from the Arabic *silm*) implies peace, and all the teachings of Islam are based directly or indirectly on this principle. There are traditions of the Prophet that say that 'Peace is Islam', and that, 'God is peace' (Al-Bukhari). Similarly, there is another *hadith* that says that a Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands, people are safe. One of the attributes of God described in the Quran is 'As-Salaam', which means 'peace and security'. That is to say that God's Being itself is a manifestation or embodiment of peace. In the Quran, divine guidance is likened to the 'path of peace' (THE QURAN 5: 16)

In Islam, Paradise, the eternal ideal and the ultimate objective of every man, is called the 'Home of Peace' (THE QURAN 10: 25) It is also said that the people of Paradise will wish peace for one another, which is another indication of the importance of peace in the ideal society.

**God has decreed success only by reconciliation,
and not by violent courses of action.**

Peace is the norm in Islam; war is the exception. All the teachings of Islam and the life of the Prophet of Islam testify to this.

There is a *hadith* that says that God grants to gentleness what He does not grant to harshness. That is to say, a peaceful approach is distinctly superior to violence.

The Quran is undoubtedly a book of peace, not a book of war and violence. This can be seen from the fact that all of the Quran's pronouncements are directly or indirectly related to peace. Its opening invocation is — "In the name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful", and this verse is repeated in the Quran 114 times. This is an indication that the greatest attribute of the Supreme Being who sent this book to us is His mercy. We could say that the theme of this entire holy book is God's all-embracing compassion.

Judging by its consequences, the way of peace is far better than confrontation or conflict. According to the law of God for mankind, God has decreed success only through reconciliation, and not through violent courses of action. The Prophet's wife Aisha said that,

the Prophet's general policy was always to choose the easier (non-confrontational) path (Al-Bukhari). This means that violence should not be adopted if peaceful processes are possible. Just as countering aggression with aggression is a hard option and countering aggression with patience and forbearance is an easier option, radicalism is harder than gradualism. Peace is always the easier option in achieving the desired results.

No Extremism

The Quran is very clear in its views on extremism:

Do not go to excess in your religion.

THE QURAN 4: 171

The same point has been made in a *hadith*. The Prophet of Islam said, "You should restrain yourselves from committing excesses (*ghulu*) in religion, for it was due to their having gone to extremes in religion that previous communities were destroyed." (Musnad Ahmad, 1/215, 347)

Peace is always the easier option in achieving the desired results.

Ghulu means extremism. The way of extremism is wrong, whatever the circumstances, because it goes against the spirit of religion. Extremism usually engenders attitudes that call for war and violence. Those who have extremist tendencies remain dissatisfied with the path of moderation, since it strikes them as being far from effective. That is why they so easily incline towards violence to achieve their objectives.

Moderation, which is the opposite of extremism, is closely interlinked with peace. When people possess the virtue of moderation, they necessarily think in terms of peace and engage in their efforts in a peaceful manner.

Adhering To the Path of Truth with Patience and Perseverance

The Quran tells us that the kind of people who can prevent losses and achieve success are those "who exhort each other to justice and fortitude." (THE QURAN 103: 3)

It is unfortunate that one who adheres to the path of truth himself, or calls on people to accept the truth, is almost invariably rejected by the

people. A few people find it difficult to accept even the existence of beliefs that oppose the ones that they hold, once used to hold, or that their culture or family holds. Their resistance can be passionate and occasionally violent. Anyone who wishes to stay on the path of truth will need to exercise great patience. He should bear all hardships with fortitude and not blame others.

Patience is another name for the non-aggressive or peaceful method. This means that one who stands up for the truth ought not to counter violence with violence. He must unilaterally adhere to peaceful ways.

Sanctity of Human Life

The Quran says that, if someone kills another person, it is as if he had murdered all mankind. (THE QURAN 5: 32)

Murder is a horrendous act. The killing of a human being is permissible only when the danger that person poses to society can be resolved in no other way. Killing a single human being without proven justification is equivalent to killing all human beings. The difference between the two is only one of degree and not of the nature of the act itself. Killing one human being is just as horrendous as killing all human beings. Such an act breaks all traditions of respect for life.

According to Islam, to die while fighting for a just cause is to achieve martyrdom, but we cannot court death deliberately or use our own deaths as weapons.

The above verse of the Quran shows the great importance of peace and security in Islam. If someone is unjustly killed, Islam demands that the entire society become so greatly agitated over this offence that people work together to restore peace and security. It should be treated as a matter of the greatest urgency, as if all of humanity were under attack.

Clarification of a Fallacy

There is a verse in the Quran that says, "Kill them wherever you find them." (THE QURAN 2: 191), which leads people to believe that Islam is a religion of war and violence.

This is simply not true. This verse relates only to those who attacked the

Muslims while they were in Medina. This is not the general command of Islam. The application of this verse in the present times is not possible as present day wars involve multiple non-combatant casualties as collateral damage.

The Quran was not revealed all at once in its complete form, but rather, in stages, according to circumstances that required divine guidance, over a period of 23 years, twenty of which were peaceful. The revelations during these twenty peaceful years were the peaceful teachings of Islam, such as the verses on the realization of God, worship, morality, justice, etc. The Quran thus contains instruction pertaining to various situations. This variety of commands is found in all religious books, and is, in fact, necessary in order to address all the important aspects of our lives.

Believers do not have the right to wage wars against enemies. In Islam, war is not waged against the enemy, but against the aggressor.

For instance, the *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the holiest books in Hinduism is a 700-verse conversation between Arjuna and his charioteer Krishna during a battle in the Mahabharata. It is essentially a call to duty and to arms, by Krishna to Arjuna. This does not mean that people who believe in the Gita should take up arms. Mahatma Gandhi derived his philosophy of non-violence and selfless action from the same Gita. Like him, most people take the battle to be an allegory for the ethical and moral struggles of life. Similarly, Jesus Christ says in the Bible:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on Earth;
I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

Matthew, 10:34

It would be incorrect to conclude that the religion preached by Jesus was one of war and violence. Such verses relate only to particular occasions. So far as day-to-day life is concerned, Jesus taught peaceful values, such as the building of good character, love for each other, help for the poor and needy, etc.

The same is true of the Quran. The Prophet of Islam migrated from Makkah to Medina because of the hostility of the Quraysh and their allies. The Prophet always tried to avert attacks by employing the strategy of patience and avoidance, but sometimes no options existed

save retaliation. It was such circumstances that necessitated the revelations relating to war. These instructions were of a specific nature, and were not meant to be all-embracing.

The Difference Between Enemy and Aggressor

Under God's scheme of trial, we have been granted freedom. Through the exercise of this freedom, enmities may develop between people, leading to conflict, but Islam makes a clear difference between enmity and conflict.

Patience is another name for the non-aggressive or peaceful method.

Believers do not have the right to wage wars against enemies. They have only a duty — to peacefully convey the message of Islam. The Quran is clear on this, saying:

And good and evil deeds are not alike. Repel evil with good, and he who is your enemy will become your dearest friend.

THE QURAN 41: 34

The Quran says:

Permission to take up arms is hereby given to those who are attacked because they have been wronged.

THE QURAN 22: 39

At another place the Quran gives permission to do battle:

They were the first to attack you.

THE QURAN 9:13

In Islam, war is not waged against the enemy, but against the aggressor. The only right given to individuals is to convey the message of Islam peacefully. The example set by the Prophet of Islam provides incontrovertible proof of this.

No Confrontation with the Enemy

The Prophet of Islam once observed: "Do not wish for confrontation with the enemy, ask for peace from God." This means that if someone has become our enemy, we should not necessarily turn against him and start fighting with him, for the solution is not conflict, but rather the avoidance of friction.

A believer should not pray to God thus: "O God, destroy the enemy." Rather his prayer should be: "O God, help me to stay away from the path of violence and confrontation, in spite of the enmity of others, and help me to pursue the journey of my life along the path of peace." The power of peace is far more effective and useful than the power of violence.

**A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands,
people are safe.**

Extinguishing the Fire of Violence

The Quran says:

Each time they kindle the fire of war, God extinguishes it.

THE QURAN 5: 64

This verse of the Quran shows the creation plan of the Creator for this world—a plan based on the principle of peace. Whenever one of two opposing sides is intent on fuelling the fire of war, the other should attempt to extinguish it by resorting to peaceful strategy so that violence can be prevented from spreading. The most desirable way of leading our lives in this world is not to fight fire with fire, but to extinguish it. This is something that should be tried at the very beginning of any disagreement.

War Only For Defence

The Quran says:

Permission to fight is given to those who are attacked,
because they have been wronged.

THE QURAN 22: 39

This is not just a Quranic injunction aimed at Islamic believers, but rather, a statement of international law. The verse clearly says that war is permissible only when it is taken up to counter open aggression, i.e. in self-defence. All other forms of war come under the heading of aggression. And aggressors have no lawful place in this world.

According to the Quran, even defensive war can be taken up only after making a formal declaration of war, and only by an established government (THE QURAN 8: 58). Non-governmental organisations have no right to wage war on any pretext. We can thus safely conclude that

according to the laws of war, as stated in the Quran, all wars, except for those in self-defence, are unlawful. For instance, guerrilla war, proxy war, undeclared war and aggressive war, are all undoubtedly unlawful in Islam.

Peace is the preferable option in every circumstance, except, again, where different strategies to implement it have been tried and have failed, and where armed self-defence becomes necessary for survival.

Jihad

The Quran commands us to carry out '*Jihad* by means of it.' (THE QURAN 25: 52). As we know, the Quran is a book—an ideological book. Therefore, '*jihad*' by means of the Quran can only mean conveying the ideas of the Quran to the people.

Killing a single human being without proven justification is equivalent to killing all human beings.

The above-mentioned verse makes it clear that what is called *jihad* in Islam entails only the kind of peaceful struggle which has nothing to do with violence. The Arabic word *jihad* means to strive, to struggle, that is, to exert oneself to the utmost to achieve one's goal.

For an explanation of the concept of *jihad* in Islam, see the article 'The True *Jihad*' on page 24

Adopting the Course of Reconciliation

The Quran states:

Reconciliation is best.

THE QURAN 4: 128

God has thus decreed that success will be achieved only through a reconciliatory path, and not through a confrontational or a violent course of action.

One of the commandments of the Quran, addressing the enmity between the Muslims and the Quraysh was:

And if they incline towards peace, you too incline to it, and put your trust in God. Surely, it is He Who is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. And if they intend to deceive you, then surely God is sufficient for you.

THE QURAN 8: 61-62

This verse of the Quran shows that peace is desirable in Islam, even if it can only be established by incurring risks. If offers of reconciliation are made, they should be accepted without delay, even if the fear of deception exists. We put our hopes in God taking the side of those who love peace, not the side of those who use deception.

**And good and evil deeds are not alike.
Repel evil with good, and he who is your enemy
will become your dearest friend.**

Another reality that emerges is that, in this world, peace can be established only by those who have great courage. Problems inevitably arise between different groups of people, because no human situation is ever absolutely ideal. Everyone is, at some point in their lives, faced with injustice. In these situations, only such individuals can establish peace as can rise above all considerations and disdain all pretexts to engage in violent retaliation. Only the truly courageous can establish peace in this world. Those who lack in courage will continue to fight, and will thus never allow the history of the world to be re-written in terms of blessed peace.

War: A State Action

In Islam, war is not the prerogative of the individual, but of an established government. Only an established government can declare war. Islam does not sanction individual action on this issue. As a general principle, the Quran tells us that, even in the face of danger or an external attack, the people should refer to their rulers and together counter the threat. (THE QURAN 4: 83)

The *hadith* also say that the government is the shield, battle is done under them, and security attained through them. The common man can play his role as need be, under the government's command and not independently.

There are conditions attached to all actions in Islam. Wars are also subject to these principles, one of them being that when a war (in defence) has been declared by the state, only attacking combatants are targets. Targeting non-combatants is unlawful. The Quran only permits us to defend ourselves against those who attack us. (THE QURAN 60: 8)

Muslims are also not permitted to commit suicidal bombings. This can in no way lead to *shahadat*, or martyrdom. According to Islam, to die while fighting for a just cause is to achieve martyrdom, but we cannot court death deliberately or use our own deaths as weapons.

A Mercy for Mankind

The Quran says of the Prophet of Islam:

We have only sent you as a mercy to all mankind.

THE QURAN 21: 107

The advent of the Prophet of Islam made manifest God's mercy for all mankind. Through him, God communicated those principles of life by opting for which man may inhabit the abode of eternal peace and security (*Dar us Salaam*). (THE QURAN 10: 25)

Through him, such teachings were revealed as could turn human society into a peaceful society. The Prophet of Islam presented a complete ideology based on the concept of peace. He gave us the formula for a peaceful life — to shun hatred and violence.

The Prophet of Islam initiated a revolution which, although very great in its scope and later repercussions, was ideologically non-violent.

The entire life of the Prophet illustrates this peace-loving policy. At the time of the migration or *Hijrath*, the people of Makkah were all set to wage war against the Prophet and his companions. Had the Prophet wished, he and his companions could have confronted the enemy. Omar and the other companions were seeking permission to engage with the enemy but the Prophet refused and avoided conflict by quietly leaving his homeland for Medina. This was not escaping out of fear for their lives, rather it was a concerted decision to avoid conflict and change the place of action.

Just prior to the Hdaybiya treaty in 628 AD, a state of war prevailed, but the Prophet accepted all the conditions of his enemies unilaterally and agreed to a peace treaty. On the occasion of the battle of Khandaq, the 12000 strong army of the Quraysh had arrived at the borders of Medina, in order to do battle. But the Prophet and his companions dug a long trench to set up a buffer between themselves and their enemies, thus avoiding bloodshed.

The Prophet lived in an age of conflict. This fact could not be ignored during his mission. In spite of his peace loving nature and peaceful mission, the society he lived in was not peaceful. The battles that he was forced to engage in were purely due to this factor. These battles were so brief that we might describe them as skirmishes rather than wars. It would be quite correct to say that the Prophet of Islam initiated a revolution which, although very great in its scope and later repercussions, was ideologically non-violent. He impressed upon his followers that violence was the way to destruction, while peace was the way to salvation. He held patience to be the greatest form of worship, and disturbing the peaceful system of nature to be the greatest crime.

**The power of peace is far more effective and
useful than the power of violence.**

The Prophet enjoined believers to greet one another by saying "*As salam o alaikum!*" (Peace be upon you!). This shows that any relationship should be based on peace and security. The Prophet told believers that success in the Hereafter should be the objective of our lives. He dispelled the notion that material accumulation was the aim of life, for that ultimately results in conflict and violence. They were told to make themselves useful to others, and if that was not possible, to at least refrain from causing anyone any harm. No one should be regarded as an enemy; even the enemy must be given fair treatment, for only then would the realization come that one's enemy was potentially one's friend: the 'enemy' always has it in him to be a friend.

Peace in All Circumstances

The Prophet of Islam was a peace-lover to the ultimate extent. His opponents repeatedly attempted to draw him into war, but on each occasion he avoided becoming entangled. However, sometimes in view of unilateral aggression, he had no option but to fight purely in self-defence, and for a limited duration. The battle of Badr is one such example.

History shows that at the exact moment when the armies of both sides were standing ready for battle, the Prophet was visited by Gabriel, God's angel. He said to the Prophet: "O Muhammad, God has sent you peace (*salam*)."

On hearing this, the Prophet of Islam replied: "God is peace, peace is from Him and to Him is peace." (Al-Bidaya wa'l-Nihayah). This incident shows that even at such a juncture, the Prophet of Islam

was a peace-lover. His mind was free of hatred and violence. All he had was the desire for peace to be established in the world with the help of God.

God grants to gentleness what He does not grant to harshness.

This is one of the highest examples of positive thinking. War is the most negative of all events. To the Prophet, standing on the battlefield, the words that came to his lips were those of peace and security, rather than of war and violence. This is indicative of the highest human virtue. The noblest human character is one who thinks of peace amidst violence and who can plan for reconciliation even during war.

Peaceful Citizens

According to a *hadith*, the Prophet of Islam defined a believer as a person from whom people are safe as regards their lives and property. (At-Tirmizi, An-Nasai, Ibn Majah, Musnad Ahmad)

According to this *hadith*, the way of the faithful is to live as peaceful citizens in society. No one should pose any danger to others' lives, property or honour. Under no circumstances, should one take to the way of violence.

How should we lead our lives so that every member of the society we live in remains safe and secure from injustice? It is by maintaining the way of moderation. All members of society should be able to bury their complaints in their own hearts instead of pouring them out on others. A society in which such self-control is exercised is one in which its members can enjoy a feeling of security. A peaceful society is the ideal framework for positive human development. A society fraught with violence offers little hope for the realization of individual human potential.

The love of peace is a noble human virtue, whereas the love of violence brings the human being down from a higher ethical plane to the level of brutishness.

Unconditional Peace

Peace is rightly defined as 'the absence of war'. However, there are some who hold that peace should necessarily be accompanied by justice. But

setting such a condition for the attainment of peace is impractical. For the role of peace is purely to set the stage for us to strive for justice and to work towards other constructive ends.

The Prophet Muhammad provided a clear example in his method of negotiating the Hudaibiya peace treaty. By accepting all the conditions of his opponents, he began a ten-year long period of peace, without apparently receiving justice or his rights. But by means of this peace treaty the Prophet and his companions were enabled to consolidate themselves so thoroughly that they had no need to wage war to attain justice.

**The role of peace is purely to set the stage for us to
strive for justice and to work towards
other constructive ends.**

Jesus Christ once said, "Love your enemy." This means to be on peaceful terms with one's enemy, i.e. winning over your enemy by using the power of peace. This is the divine formula to attain peace.

The Quran says:

God calls to the Home of Peace.

THE QURAN 10: 25

This means that according to the creation plan, peace and harmony should prevail in human society. God Himself is Peace (Peace being an attribute of God). He intended this world to be peaceful, and only a peaceful world will be able to receive His blessings. Such a world is like paradise on earth. It is only in such a world that we can meet and establish contact with God, the Creator of Man and the Universe.

Both peace and violence result from human thinking, and if we consider the final result we would never employ violence. Peaceful minds make for a peaceful world.

Peace—Positive Behaviour

Peace is a product of a positive mental attitude, while violence is the result of a negative one. Peace is the natural state of society, while violence is not. Peace is as much in accordance with nature's plan as violence is against it. When peace prevails in a society, all activities take

place properly. If the atmosphere of peace is disturbed, however, the normal functioning of society is disrupted. According to the scheme of nature, peace is the only secret of smooth functioning in human society as well as in the rest of the universe.

Peace is such a basic requirement of man, that it is crucial to maintain it in all situations. Without peace there can be neither development nor progress. No excuse whatsoever justifies the use of violence in individual or collective life. Regardless of how unfavourable circumstances might be, an environment of peace is indispensable. We must maintain peace unilaterally, for nothing that we desire can be achieved without it.

Peace is the principle in Islam; war is the exception.

If we fail to establish peace, then we must face destruction in every field of life. We have to choose between peace and annihilation, because without peace, there is no hope for the survival of humankind.

Peace—Man's Absolute Right

Peaceful revolution is the outcome of peaceful thinking. Peaceful minds make for a peaceful world. Man was born in peace. Man must live in peace. Peace—man's birthright—is God's greatest blessing for human beings. □



Peace in Society

Whenever the state of peace prevails in a society in the real sense, its members will necessarily engage themselves in positive activities.

Their energies will be channelized into the reconstruction of their own lives and of their social environment.

ARTIFICIAL FLOWERS

THESE days, they've started manufacturing plastic flowers and fruits. They look just like the real thing. But if you smell a plastic flower, it has none of the fragrance of a real flower, and if you bite into a plastic fruit, it has none of the taste of a real fruit.

In just the same way, absurd forms of religiosity have appeared these days. On the face of it, they appear grand, but if you examine them closely they have none of the true essence of religion, which is, fear of God and genuine concern for other human beings. In the age of plastic, perhaps religiosity, too, has also become plastic!

God will gather all human beings after their death and take account of them, and then, on the basis of their deeds, will put them into eternal heaven or eternal hell.

People may appear to be very religious, but, still, they are unwilling to accept their mistakes. No one wants to put an end to his airs for the sake of God. For their personal interests, innumerable people get together with others, setting aside their differences and complaints. But on the face of this world that belongs to God, there is no one who will set aside his differences and complaints and join hands with others for the sake of God.

Religion or *deen* is this: that a person attains to the truth that there is but one God of this entire universe. This one God has made all things. He will gather all human beings after their death and take account of them, and then, on the basis of their deeds, will put them into eternal heaven or eternal hell.

This is such a serious fact that if it really sinks deeply into one's mind, one's entire life is completely transformed. One becomes very careful of all those things that lead people to the fires of hell. One also becomes very eager about those things that make a person worthy of the gardens of heaven. One begins to fear God above everything else. One begins to love God above all else. One subdues one's individual existence to live in the Glory of God.

This growing awareness of God and the Hereafter makes such a person become more attentive to, and responsible for, other creatures. If he, by chance, thinks ill of others, it will make him feel that he is throwing himself into the pit of hell. Just the thought of indulging in high-handed behaviour with others brings to his mind a fear of that person not being alone but as being supported by angels to protect him.

**There is but one God of this entire universe.
This one God has made all things.**

If he deals unjustly with people he has dealings with, he feels as if he has hurled himself into the depths of a cave in hell. In his sight, every person appears not just simply as a human, but, rather, as a being whom God, along with all His angels, is standing together with. □



Peaceful Approach

*Generally, non-violence is seen as an absence of war.
That is, eschewing the way of violent encounter
in favour of a peaceful approach.*

*But, this is a very limited definition of non-violence.
For, the attitude of non-violence relates to man's entire life,
beginning from the moment he steps into this world.*

*The non-violent way is valid in all ambits,
right from hearth and home
to the sphere of international affairs.*

SPIRIT, NOT FORM

HERE is a tradition of the Prophet narrated by Anas-ibn-Malik and recorded in Sahih-al-Bukhari. Three companions of the Prophet once visited his house. The Prophet was not present at the time, so they asked his wives how he worshipped. When the Prophet's wives had answered them, they felt that what they had been doing in worship was insufficient.

They said, "We stand in no comparison with the Prophet. God has forgiven him for all of his failings". One of them said, "I will spend the whole night praying". Another said, "I will always observe the fast". The third said, "I will always remain away from women and I will never marry."

In the eyes of God, what is important is the spirit of the worship we do, not the form by which we do it.

Meanwhile, the Prophet returned. He heard what they were saying and said, "By God, I am the most God-fearing of all of you. I am more righteous than all of you. Although I observe the fast, there are times when I do not. Although I pray at night, there are times when I sleep. I am also married. So whosoever ignores my ways is not one of mine."

This *hadith* teaches us that it is the quality of our worship that is important, far more than the quantity. The same is the case with fasting. In the eyes of God, what is important is the spirit of the worship we do, not the form by which we do it.

Righteousness is not related to the quantity of the deeds. Extremism in deeds is against all practical wisdom. Such people will soon be weary of their actions and instead forgo them altogether. On the other hand, those who lay emphasis on the spirit or intention of their actions will be moderate in the quantity of their deeds. But all their actions will imbibe their constant connection to God. They will lead God-oriented lives consistently discovering the glory and power of God.

The addition of numbers to the deeds tires a person and the addition of spirit to the form of the deed will always keep one thrilled in it. □

TRUE JIHAD

THE Quran exhorts believers to “strive for the cause of God as it behoves you to strive for it.” (THE QURAN 22: 78). This earnest struggle is expressed in Arabic by the word *jihad* which is derived from the word *juhd*, which means to strive, to struggle, to exert ourselves to the utmost to achieve our goals.

Thus the original meaning of *jihad* is striving very hard. Since the early Muslims had to strive hard during wars with aggressors, these wars by extension, came to be called *jihad*. However, the actual word for such a war in Arabic is *qital*, not *jihad*.

**Islamic jihad is a positive and continuous process.
It is at work in the entire life of a believer**

War with an aggressor is a chance occurrence, taking place as warranted by particular situations, while *jihad* is a continuous and on-going action at the core of the believer's life, day in and day out. It is the struggle to maintain strict adherence to the will of God in all aspects of our lives and the resistance to any obstacles that come in the way of fulfilling God's will—for instance, the desires of the self, the urge to serve our own interests, the compulsion of social traditions, the temptation to compromise on one's principles, ego problems, the greed for wealth, etc. Overcoming all such hurdles and persevering in obeying God's commands is the real *jihad*. This is the primary use of the word *jihad*. We cite here some traditions, as recorded in Musnad Ahmad, which define the role of a *mujahid* or one who is engaged in *Jihad*.

A *mujahid* is one who struggles with himself for the sake of God.
(THE QURAN 6: 20)

A *mujahid* is one who exerts himself for the cause of God.
(THE QURAN 6: 22)

A *mujahid* is one who struggles with his self in submission to the will of God.

The Greater Jihad

Jihad essentially is a peaceful struggle. One form of this peaceful struggle is to do *dawah* (to communicate the message of God).

The Quran says:

Do not yield to those who do not believe, but fight them
strenuously with it (with the Quran).

THE QURAN, 25: 52

This is referred to as the 'Great *Jihad*'.

This does not refer to military action or physical combat with those who do not believe. What it actually means is that we must continuously engage ourselves in conveying the peaceful message of the Quran.

The present world is a testing ground; the entire fabric of this world has been designed to fulfil the purpose of the divine trial of man. This being so, the human being is necessarily faced with all kinds of temptations, which are barriers to our measuring up to God's standards. For instance, when a matter of truth comes before us and we refuse to acknowledge it for fear of losing our status; when we have someone's wealth or property in our possession and hesitate in restoring it to the true owner; when we resent having to place curbs on ourselves in order to lead a life of modesty as desired by God; when we feel that suppressing our anger and vengefulness in order to be patient amounts to our inability to stand up for ourselves; when we fail to speak the truth and stand up for justice for fear of losing our interests; when we are loath to renounce comforts and convenience in order to be of a principled character.

Migration or *hijrath* of the Prophet Muhammad is a clear example of abandoning violent solutions in favour of peaceful solutions.

In all such situations, it becomes essential for us to sacrifice our feelings and desires. We may have to kill our egos completely. In spite of having to surmount all such hurdles, we should be determined to stick to the truth in the real and primary sense of *jihad*. Those who engage in this *jihad* will be held deserving of paradise in the Hereafter.

The truth is that in life we have to choose between two courses—the confrontational and the non-confrontational, the peaceful and the violent. A study of the Prophet's life tells us that in all matters the Prophet abandoned the violent course of action in favour of the peaceful one. The entire life of the Prophet provides a successful, practical example

of this principle. We present, here, some examples of this nature.

Communication Of The Message Of Monotheism

After being appointed as Prophet, the first question before him was which of the two above-mentioned courses he should follow. As we know, the Prophet's mission was to bring polytheism (*shirk*) to an end and establish monotheism in its place. The Kabah in Makkah was an ancient centre of monotheism, but at the time of the Prophet, 360 idols were contained within its walls. In view of this situation, the first verses to be revealed in the Quran should have been, one might think, about purifying the Kabah of the idols and making it a centre of *tawheed*, or oneness of God.

But beginning his mission with this task would have amounted to war, because the Quraysh, the most powerful tribe in Arabia, were the guardians of the Kabah.

As seen during the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet adhered to the principle of peace even in extreme emergencies.

The Prophet, therefore, completely avoided the physical purification of the Kabah and limited himself to the communication of the message of monotheism. This was an example of adopting a peaceful and non-confrontational method instead of a violent or confrontational one.

The Battle Of The Trench

The battle of the Trench is another such example. On this occasion a large number of people from different tribes had come to Medina with the intention of attacking it. It was clearly a military challenge. But the Prophet used a strategy to avoid an encounter with the enemy. According to this plan, the Prophet worked hard day and night along with his companions to dig a long trench between him and his opponents. This trench served as a buffer. Therefore, when the army of the Quraysh arrived, they could not attack. So, they camped there for some days. In the end they gave up the idea of attacking as it was impossible to cross the ditch. They eventually left Medina. The digging of this trench provides an example of opting for a peaceful course instead of a violent course.

The Hdaybiya Peace Treaty

The Hdaybiya peace treaty is another good example. The Prophet and his companions wanted to perform the minor pilgrimage (*umrah*) in Makkah, but when they reached Hdaybiya, nine miles from Makkah, they were stopped by the leaders of the Quraysh who refused to allow them to enter Makkah. This could easily have taken a military turn. If the Prophet wanted to advance as planned towards Makkah, an encounter would have taken place. The Prophet, however, ended his journey at Hdaybiya and signed a peace treaty, accepting all the conditions laid down by his opponents. He then came back to Medina without having performed the *umrah*. This was another clear Prophetic example of adopting a peaceful method as opposed to a violent method.

The Conquest Of Makkah

The conquest of Makkah provides an equally telling example. On this occasion, the Prophet was accompanied by 10,000 devoted followers. They could easily have fought, and won, a battle against the Quraysh. Yet the Prophet Muhammad decided to subdue his enemies with a demonstration rather than a battle. He made preparations for a journey to Makkah in secret, and with his companions, quietly entered Makkah. Their entry was so sudden that the Quraysh could not make any preparations for war and Makkah was conquered without any carnage. This incident provides a fine example of adopting a peaceful method instead of a violent method. These examples show that not only in normal situations, but even in emergencies, the Prophet adhered to the principle of peace. All his successes are practical examples of this peaceful method.

Now, a peaceful course of action is not just one of the possibilities: it is the only feasible and result-oriented option.

As mentioned above, the position of peace in Islam is sacrosanct, while war is allowed only in exceptional cases when it cannot be avoided. Let us look at the state of affairs prevailing today. This modern age is totally different from preceding centuries. In ancient times violence was the norm, so that maintaining the peace was extremely difficult. But now the situation has totally changed. Today, we have reached the stage where any kind of violence is undesirable and unacceptable. A peaceful strategy is the only viable solution to all problems.

Modern societies have a number of positive aspects such as the right to freedom of expression, the possibilities opened up by the communications systems, etc. These facilities have rendered possible a peaceful, more effective course of action.

As mentioned above, the method of the Prophet is that if it is possible to adopt a peaceful method, it should be put into practice during any struggle. As a result of facilities that have become available in the present age, the peaceful method is not only available at all times but is also the most effective way to spread any message. It would therefore be no exaggeration to say that in present times a violent struggle is not only a hard option but is also impractical, whereas non-violence is not only an easier option, but is also highly effective and result-oriented. Now, a peaceful course of action is not just one of the possibilities: it is the only feasible and result-oriented option.

This being so, it would be right to say that violence has been practically abandoned. This is what we call an abrogated command in the language of the *shariah* (Islamic law). Now believers are, in reality, left with only one choice, and that is indeed the peaceful course of action.

According to the Islamic *shariah*, peace is the rule in matters of *jihad*, while war is the least desirable option.

One celebrated example of the success of such a course is to be found in the life of the Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948). Gandhi decided to wage political battles successfully by adopting the principles of non-violence and engaging in peaceful civil disobedience.

It is a known principle that the commands of the *shariah* change according to altered situations. This accepted principle of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) demands that with the changing times, a new application of the *shariah* should be sought in order that *shariah* commands may be in consonance with the changing circumstances.

This principle of Islamic jurisprudence relates not only to civic matters, but also to war. This principle demands the practical avoidance of a violent course of action. Only a peaceful course of action should be accorded the status of a *shariah* command.

The *jihad* movements of modern times

It is true that in ancient times, violent solutions were adopted at certain stages due to the prevailing circumstances. People had no other alternative. There is no longer this compulsion, however. According to the Islamic *shariah*, peace is the rule in matters of *jihad*, while war is the least desirable option.

Many groups of Muslims in many countries have launched movements of armed *jihad*, in the name of Islam. But a movement cannot be a *jihad* just because its leaders describe it as such.

An action can be termed a *jihad* only when it fulfils the conditions set by Islam. Any military action which is carried out without fulfilling these conditions will not be a *jihad* but a *fasad*, which is spreading corruption across the world. Those who engage in *fasad* should expect only divine punishment.

**Far from being an armed offensive,
jihad is essentially a peaceful struggle.**

Jihad in the sense of *qital* (armed struggle) does not fall into the same category of individual acts of devotion as prayer and fasting: it is an activity which relates totally to the state.

The true Islamic *jihad* as it relates to the individual is a positive and continuous process, which is at work throughout the entire life of a believer. There are three major kinds of this process of *jihad*.

Jihad-bil-nafs: to control our negative and undesirable feelings and to persevere in the way of God's choice in all circumstances.

Dawah: the communication of the message of God to all human beings and dealings with all human beings with compassion. This gigantic task has been called the greatest *jihad* by the Quran.

Jihad in the face of enmity: This *jihad* has always been a peaceful process, and it is still so. In this respect, far from being an armed offensive, *jihad* is essentially a peaceful struggle. □



CONTROLLING ANGER

ANGER is one of the major things that could cause a relationship to go sour. Anger stokes a quarrel, which, if pursued, leads to personal dislike, and finally, to full-fledged hatred. Hatred eventually leads to evil. In any relationship, any trouble is exacerbated by anger. Anger is a natural phenomenon, and the only solution is to control it.

Anger in itself is not an evil. It becomes evil when it is allowed to spin out of control and affect people's lives.

**Anger is a natural phenomenon,
and the only solution is to control it.**

Rage is an undesirable reaction to a temporary provocation. It is much like a fire that flares up for a short while and then dies down for lack of fuel. If we understand this, anger will not result in any serious disharmony.

An unpleasant word or experience can make the fire in our mind suddenly flare up, but it only lasts for a short while. When we are angry, we should remain quiet, and try to calm ourselves before returning to dealing with the issue. It would not be wise to confront any adverse situation in anger.

Once, a person came to the Prophet of Islam. He asked: "O Prophet, give me a master advice by which I may be able to manage all the affairs of my life." The Prophet replied, "Do not be angry." It means, don't be angry even when provoked. Respond positively even in negative situations. Always adopt positive thinking.

In the face of problems, anger further deteriorates the situation. On the other hand by controlling anger we can develop the capability of responding positively in negative situations; of taking the right decisions under difficult conditions; of discovering practical solutions to all problems. □



PROPHET OF PEACE, OR OF VIOLENCE

DUE to the intolerance and violent extremism of small groups of people who call themselves 'Muslims', Islam is currently widely perceived to be a religion of violence, with objectives that appear to be achievable only through terrorism. This, however, is untrue.

Islam is not the name given to the behaviour or the actions of a particular group of people who call themselves 'Muslims'. Islam is a system of beliefs and ethics, and people who say that they hold those beliefs and value those ethics are called Muslims. It follows, then, that the behaviour of Muslims must be judged by the principles of Islam and not vice versa. Islam cannot be evaluated based on the actions of Muslims.

If individuals calling themselves 'Muslims' adopt terrorism or violence, then the responsibility for their actions lies with them, not with the religion they profess. In spite of their professed Islamic agenda, the actions of such people cannot be deemed Islamic.

Islam is not the name given to the behaviour or the actions of a particular group of people who call themselves Muslims.

Islam is the name of the revealed religion professed by the Prophet Muhammad, and exemplified in his life. The Prophet Muhammad was a prophet of peace, not a prophet of violence. In the Quran, he is called a 'mercy to mankind'.

Ali bin Abi Talib was the son-in-law of the Prophet of Islam. When a boy was born in his household, Ali named him *Harab*, meaning war. Arab tribes were frequently at war and took pride in names that displayed a warrior like nature. When the Prophet heard about the boy's name, he asked Ali to change the name to *Hasan*, meaning goodness. From this incident we can get an idea of the personality of the Prophet of Islam. His was a peace-loving personality in the complete sense. His peace-loving nature was so heightened that he did not even like to hear the word *Harab* which had connotations of violence. Whereas *Harab*

was a symbolic name for violence, *Hasan* was a name that symbolised peace. The Prophet of Islam believed in cultivating a peaceful character.

Zaid bin Muhalhil, a poet from Najd, was born before the Prophet. He was also a skilled swordsman and horse rider, because of which he was known as Zaid-ul-Qail. *Qail* means horse, and in those days, horses were associated with cavalry. When Zaid embraced Islam, the Prophet did not like his title and changed it from Zaid-ul-Qail to Zaid-ul-Qair. *Qail* was a symbolic name associated with battles and violence. *Qair* on the other hand was symbolic of peace and goodness.

The Prophet changed the direction of Zaid's character by changing his name. He instructed him to be a professor of goodness giving the gifts of peace and prosperity to people instead of being a harbinger of death and violence. He wanted his followers to do good works for the people, giving them the message of peace and prosperity and not of death and destruction.

If we were to objectively study the entire 23 years of Muhammad's prophetic life, it would be absolutely clear that Muhammad was a Prophet of peace, not a prophet of violence.

With these examples we can understand that peace was the guiding principle of the Prophet's character. The battles that took place during his life were only incidental and under exceptional circumstances, rather than being the main feature of his life. However, most of the Prophet's biographers have painted an altogether different picture of him. Instead of presenting him as a Prophet of peace they have portrayed him as a prophet of violence.

The battles which were fought during the Prophet's time were related to the culture then prevailing amongst the Arab tribes.

The Prophet Muhammad was born in the Banu Hashim clan of the Quraysh tribe of Arabia. At that time, Arabia was divided by many different tribes, each with several clans, all vying for domination. Fights between tribes and clans over trivial issues were common. Due to this culture, there were skirmishes between the Prophet's followers and their opponents. Most of the incidents that have been presented by the

biographers of the Prophet as battles can be better classified as minor skirmishes instead.

Prophet Muhammad was born in the year 570 in Makkah and attained prophet-hood at the age of 40 in the year 610. He began his mission of conveying God's guidance to mankind in a peaceful manner. There was never any act of violence by the Prophet against those who objected to his teachings or oppressed him and his followers during the entire thirteen years of his life as a prophet in Makkah. While he was in Makkah, his teachings were always those of patience, tolerance and avoidance.

One of his companions, Ammar, of the family of Yasir, was tortured by the Prophet's enemies, but the Prophet said, "O Yasir's family, forbear with patience, surely your compensation is Paradise." (Seerath ibn Kasir)

Another of his companions, Khabbab-bin-Arth, complained to the Prophet about the oppression by the Quraysh. When the Prophet heard this, he said, "This is nothing; messengers before us have suffered much more for having upheld the message of *tawheed* (oneness of God)." (Al-Bukhari)

If individuals calling themselves Muslims adopt terrorism or violence, then the responsibility for their actions lies with them, not with the religion they profess.

The Prophet and his followers had to face the hardships of a three-year social boycott by the tribe, and they spent this time in tolerating and patiently enduring their difficulties. His enemies plotted to kill him, so he quietly escaped from Makkah with a few of his companions to Medina. He gave the same advice to his followers.

Even in Medina his enemies did not leave the Prophet and his followers in peace. They did everything possible to make life miserable for them. The Quran says:

Will you not fight against those who have broken their oaths and conspired to banish the Messenger? They were the first to attack you. Do you fear them? Surely God is more deserving of your fear, if you are true believers.

THE QURAN 9: 13

The outcome of these hostilities were the battles of Badr and Uhud. Even after this when the Prophet got to know that his opponents were marching towards Medina with an army of 10,000, he employed a strategy of avoidance by creating a trench outside Medina because of which an armed conflict was averted.

The Prophet was on a divine mission to present God's message to mankind. Any mission of communication can only be successful when the circumstances are harmonious and peaceful. In an atmosphere of violence and warfare, no mission, however strong can be successful. In such a situation, even minor differences can instantaneously escalate to violent conflict and war. For an atmosphere of peace, though, a price has to be paid, and that was in the form of perseverance in the face of all obstacles; in ignoring the problems whilst availing of the opportunities.

The Prophet's opponents were constantly provoking him and his followers to engage with them in battle over small issues, but the Prophet and his companions always chose the divine teachings of patience and forbearance to circumvent conflict.

...whenever they kindle the fire of war, God puts it out...

THE QURAN 5: 64

In his 6th year in Medina, the Prophet entered into a ten-year peace treaty called the Treaty of Hudaibiya with his opponents by accepting all of their conditions.

Peace was the guiding principle of the Prophet's character.

Two years later, when the Makkans were forced to surrender to the Muslims, his opponents were brought before the Prophet. These people had troubled the Prophet and his companions for many years, having forced them to leave their homes and properties in Makkah. They had committed many atrocities on him and his people. They were established war criminals and captives. According to the prevailing tribal custom, the punishment for such crimes was death.

The Prophet, however, did not even allow them to be insulted and, instead, announced a general pardon in the following words: "Go, you are free".

If we were to objectively study the entire 23 years of Muhammad's prophetic life, it would be absolutely clear that Muhammad was a Prophet of peace, not a prophet of violence.

If we compare the Prophet's battles with other battles in history, we will find that the mission of the Prophet was a non-violent mission; and the battles that happened were defensive in nature and under exceptional circumstances.

The number of people killed in these battles were very few when compared to the casualties of many other battles in history. Sorting in order of the number of casualties or by the duration of battles in history, the armed conflicts of the Prophet Muhammad and his people were forced to engage in, do not even figure in the records.

The mission of the Prophet is not to rule over people but to change their minds and hearts towards spirituality.

As a comparison here are some details of some of the famous battles in the history of mankind. ¹

| Battle / War | Period | Duration | Casualties |
|--------------------|-------------------|-----------|------------------|
| World War I | 1914 – 1918 | 4 years | Over 15 million |
| World War II | 1939 – 1945 | 6 years | About 65 million |
| American Civil War | 1861 – 1865 | 4 years | About 500,000 |
| Iran Iraq War | 1980 – 1988 | 8 years | Over 500,000 |
| Battle of Waterloo | 18 Jun 1815 | 1 day | 47,000 |
| Battle of Panipat | 14 Jan 1761 | 1 day | Over 100,000 |
| Gulf War | Aug 1990–Feb 1991 | 7 months | 25,000 |
| Iraq War | Mar2003–Dec 2011 | 8 ½ years | 35,000 |

In comparison to the above sampling of battles from history, the defensive battles fought by the Prophet were those at Badr, Uhud and Hunain. The combined total duration of actual fighting was equivalent to only 1½ days.² The total number of casualties in all these battles was 1018.

1. Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_battles_by_casualties

2. Battle of Badr (morning to noon) ~ 6 hours Battle of Uhud (one day) ~ 12 hours
 Battle of Hunain (one day) ~ 12 hours

Before the Prophet's birth there was an ongoing conflict between two major tribes of Medina, the Aws and the Khazraj. It is said that this war continued for 120 years and thousands of people perished in these battles, the prominent one of which was known by the name of Battle of Buath. (Ibn Ishaq)

Because of a lack of objective understanding of the Prophet's life, Muslim biographers have misrepresented the facts by ignoring the prevailing customs and culture of the time. Due to this, their writings about the Prophet's life show a war-like pattern. On the other hand, non-Muslim biographers of the Prophet have adopted a different approach. These people have largely ignored the main events of the Prophet's life choosing to focus on a few, exceptional incidents that they have used as the basis of a picture of the Prophet's life they have painted, that portrays him as a warrior prophet.

They have also been unable to see the Prophet's life as different from Muslim culture, which has led them to assume that terrorism in the name of Islam is an outcome of the teachings of the Prophet of Islam.

Most of the incidents that have been presented by the biographers of the Prophet as battles can be better classified as minor skirmishes instead.

The true modest personality of the Prophet appeared to many of his biographers as deficient in some way or the other. This image of the Prophet appeared to them as falling short of the standards of leaders of other peoples of the time, who were great conquerors and warriors. Hence these biographers tried to present a certain image of their Prophet, which, in their eyes was a superior image. This is the reason why, when one reads the biographies of the Prophet we find that the Prophet is portrayed as a warrior prophet rather than a prophet of peace. The misleading image we get is that the Prophet relied on the power of the sword rather than the power of peace; that the Prophet believed in subduing and conquering his opponents rather than befriending them

However, this picture of the Prophet is totally baseless and self assumed. In truth, the Prophet's was a peace loving personality. The example of the Prophet was not one of overpowering people by fighting with them;

rather it was by winning the people over with love and compassion and giving them life.

The Quran says:

Believers, obey God and His Messenger when he
calls you to that which gives you life.

(THE QURAN 8: 24)

It is obvious from an understanding of the Quran that the mission of the Prophet was different from that of emperors and kings. A king's purpose is to conquer and rule over people. Hence, the way of a king is one of conquests and wars. Without subduing people by force, a king will be unable to achieve his goal. On the other hand, the mission of a Prophet is not to rule over people, but to change their minds and hearts towards spirituality; to teach them God-oriented living making them divine personalities so that they can be successful in this world and the hereafter; to make them peaceful personalities so that God will give them a place in His eternal 'Home of Peace'.

From the above analysis it should be obvious that the Prophet Muhammad was a prophet of peace, and not a prophet of violence. The approach to the biography of the Prophet by both Muslim and non-Muslim biographers is not correct. □



Jihad in Islam

*A movement cannot be a jihad
just because its leaders describe it as such.*

*An action can be termed a 'jihad' only when it fulfils
the conditions set by Islam. Any action which is carried out without
fulfilling these conditions will not be a jihad, but a fasad, which will
amount to spreading corruption across the world.*

*Those who engage in such a 'jihad' will not deserve any reward.
They should expect only divine punishment.*

THE MIDDLE NATION

THERE is a verse in the second chapter of the Quran that says, “We have made you a middle nation so that you may be as witnesses against mankind, and the Messenger may be a witness against you.” (THE QURAN 2: 143)

The word witness (*shaheed*) in this verse refers to the role of Muslims as *dayee's*. By saying that the Messenger will be a witness against us, it signifies that the Messenger is the witness that the divine religion was given to us, and that we will have to bear witness that we communicated the same divine religion to the rest of humanity. It follows that it is now our duty to communicate God's message to every person of every generation in every age.

It was the responsibility of the followers of the Prophet to pass on the message they had received from the Prophet to others. The same responsibility was given to the ancient peoples of the Book — the historical people of Moses, and those of Jesus. In the Quran, making the message of God clear to people is called *tab'een*. (THE QURAN 3: 187)

The task of being a witness is not a mark of superiority. It is a heavy responsibility, greater than all other responsibilities, commensurate with the great gift of faith.

This task of being a witness, or *dawah*, is not mystical in nature. It is also not a mark of superiority. It is a heavy responsibility, greater than all other responsibilities, commensurate with the great gift of faith. It is also a greater responsibility than that given to the followers of previous prophets, because the Prophet Muhammad was the last prophet. Until the Day of Judgement, it is the sole responsibility of Muslims to convey the message to other people. It is thus not only our responsibility to inform others of the message, but also to convey it in a manner that is clear, open, understandable and that will make a deep and lasting impression of truth, peace and spirituality on their minds.

Only by fulfilling this responsibility of *dawah* can we be held eligible, in God's eyes, to be called the Middle Nation. □

THE WORD OF GOD

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

Translated from Arabic and commentary
by **Maulana Wahiduddin Khan**

It is by God's grace that you were gentle with them — for if you had been harsh and hard-hearted, they would surely have deserted you — so bear with them and pray for forgiveness for them. Take counsel with them in the conduct of affairs; then, when you have decided upon a course of action, place your trust in God: for God loves those who place their trust in Him. If God helps you, none can overcome you, but if He withdraws His help from you, who is there who can help you besides Him? In God, then, let the believers place their trust!

3: 159-160

The gentle way the Prophet is asked to deal with the believers (in this context those who had disobeyed him in quitting their posts, incurring defeat in the battle) is equally essential in any Muslim leader. Moderation is indispensable for him. This lenient attitude is required not only in normal, daily life but also in dealings between Muslims and non-Muslims, even where, due to the disobedience of certain people, a victory turns into a defeat. Unless the leader shows broad-mindedness and high thinking, a powerful polity cannot be established. Mistakes, however grave their outcome, if committed without any evil intention, are pardonable. The leader, therefore, should overlook this type of error while dealing with people. He should be such a great well-wisher of his people that he should pray to God for their guidance. Indeed, the good leader so values his people that he takes decisions on matters of importance only after consulting them.

It is not for any Prophet to hold back anything; he who hides anything away shall bring it forth on the Day of Resurrection, when every human being shall be repaid in full for whatever he has done, and

none shall be wronged. Can one who seeks the pleasure of God, be like one who incurs the wrath of God and whose abode shall be Hell—an evil destination? All have a different standing in the eyes of God, and God is observant of all their actions. 3: 161-163

The Prophet forgave the forty Muslims who had disobeyed his orders on the occasion of the battle of Uhud. However, people doubted that the Prophet had really forgiven them. They thought that he had done so only outwardly, for show, and that later he would show his anger. These verses tell us that the Prophet's inner feelings did not differ from his outward behaviour. His actions never belied his words. This also indicates what a Muslim leader should be like. His heart should be free of malice, jealousy, hatred, etc., even at a time when such a grave mistake is being made by his people as was made by the Prophet's companions on the occasion of the battle of Uhud. He should not even keep any malice hidden in his heart. He should live with his people, after his act of forgiveness, as if nothing had ever been amiss. Moreover, when Muslims trustingly handed over all their affairs to him, he should not exploit their lives and their wealth to serve his own personal ends. This would be crossing the limits, showing no fear of God's wrath. How could one, dedicated to leading people along the path of God's will, ever think of meeting God, if he himself had gone against His will?

Indeed, God has conferred a great favour on the believers in sending a Messenger from among themselves, to recite His revelations to them, and purify them, and teaches them the Book and wisdom, for, before that they were surely in manifest error. 3: 164

The example set by the Prophet throughout his life must be followed by all reformers till Doomsday. For the task of reformation to be successful, it is essential that the targeted people should feel as if the reformer is one of themselves in every respect. His language, his style of speaking, his style of living—all should be familiar to them. No such feelings should be created between him and his addressee that may lead, in one way or another, to the latter becoming distanced from him, or to the addressee and the reformer becoming rivals.

The first task to be performed among the people is to foster in them the ability to read the signs of God spread everywhere within and without their own selves. God's signs should become part of their very mental make-up. The second task is to purify people. This end is achieved by the reformer speaking to them in person and giving them the opportunity to spend time in his company. The message

can, of course, be put across through general discourses and writing, but this would only be in principle; whereas by resorting to individual communication the message can be conveyed in a more precise and detailed way. Then there is the question of the personality of the *dayee*, which should always lend weight to the message. Individual meetings thus serve the purpose of the purification of the addressees, or *mad'u*. The third task is to introduce to the *mad'u*, the *shariah*—the book of guidance on how life should be led in this world. The fourth task is to impart wisdom, that is, to unveil the secrets of religion and to highlight the truths hidden between the lines. □



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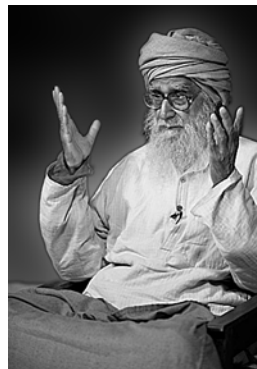
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ASK MAULANA

Is Islam intolerant of other Religions?

Contrary to common belief, Islam is not intolerant to other religions. It teaches its adherents to give mutual respect to, to be tolerant of and to have dialogue with people of other religions. This can be clearly seen from the following example of the Prophet. When the Prophet reached Medina, it was also inhabited by some idolaters and Jews, who were in a minority. The Prophet decided that some form of law should be established so that there would be no misunderstanding or hostility of any sort, in the future between them and the Muslims. To solve this problem the Prophet of Islam issued a charter, commonly known as the Covenant of Medina.



Since the Muslims were in the majority, the Prophet's position became that of a leader, or a head of state. In this capacity, he declared in this charter that all the inhabitants of Medina would enjoy equal rights. Everyone would be free to follow the religion and culture of his or her choice: the affairs of the adherents of each religion would be decided according to their belief.

Here I would like to quote an event in the life of the Prophet of Islam, which illustrates the true spirit of religious tolerance. One day a funeral procession was passing along a street in Medina. The Prophet, who was seated there at the time of its passing, stood up in respect to the deceased person. One of his companions said, 'O Prophet, it was a funeral procession of a Jew!' meaning that he should not demonstrate such respect for a non-Muslim. The Prophet replied: '*Alaisat nafsan*': 'Was he not a human being?'

This 'humanitarian' outlook was typical of the Prophet's vision of life. He was able to see everyone basically as a human being. In this case, he discovered a commonality between himself and that Jewish person. He felt that just as he was a human being, so also was the Jew a human being. Just as God had created him, so also had God created the Jew. People may have their differences in belief, religion, culture, etc., but a

common bond has to be discovered between them, which shows them all to be human beings.

This shows that Islam teaches tolerance and mutual respect. Realizing that religious differences have always existed between people, Islam also teaches us to have open dialogue with people of other religions. That is why inter-religious dialogue has been found in one form or the other since the beginning of Islam. In fact, fourteen hundred years ago, Prophet Mohammad held, what can be said as the first inter-faith dialogue in Medina when a three-religion conference—in modern terminology, a trialogue—to exchange views on religious issues took place between the followers of Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

Such attempts have repeatedly been made in history. The circumstances that unfolded following the Second World War led the Christian Church, in particular, to pay great attention to this matter. Through its continuous efforts dialogues of this nature are regularly being held in various countries, between Muslims and Christians in particular. I too have had the occasion to participate in several of these dialogues. These efforts have borne fruit, at least partially. For instance, it is as a result of these efforts that on the one hand, a Church has appeared once again in Ben Ghazi (Libya) while on the other, a mosque has been built in Rome for the first time in recent history.

Does Islam Deny Religious Freedom to Others?

Contrary to the common misconception that Islam denies religious freedom to others, Islam enjoins religious freedom to others. Religious freedom is the basic human right whose violation has caused conflicts, wars and bloodshed in both ancient and modern societies. The Quran, therefore, has declared for the first time in human history:

There shall be no coercion in matters of religion.
THE QURAN 2: 256

The Quran also states clearly,

To you your religion and to me mine.
THE QURAN 109: 6

The principle that we obtain from the above verses of the Quran is generally referred to, in today's context, as religious freedom.

In view of this prohibition of coercion (*Ikrah*), all Islamic jurists (*Fuqaha*)

without any exception hold that forcible conversion is under all circumstances null and void. Any attempt to coerce a non-believer to accept Islam is a grievous sin, (Ahkam al-Quran, al-Jassas). According to this principle of 'non-coercion', it is not permissible to exploit or manipulate personal weaknesses or calamities (e.g. poverty, sickness, famine, etc.) for religious conversion. That is why old and downtrodden non-Muslims were exempted from taxes and given all monetary support by the Islamic state without ever being asked to embrace Islam just for the advantages it would give them.

With the advent of Islam in the seventh century, however, it was declared for the benefit of mankind that all greatness was the exclusive prerogative of God, and that in the eyes of God, all human beings were equal. The Prophet Muhammad declared not once, but on many occasions that all were alike, all were brothers.

The Prophet not only stated the truth but also made it a reality by bringing about a total revolution based on the idea of human equality. On achieving political domination in Arabia, he was able to put this theory into practice in his capacity as ruler of a state. In this way, Islam put an end to discrimination between human beings on the basis of race, colour, status, etc. People were assigned a high or low status according to their moral worth. □

Please send your questions to
askmaulana@thespiritofislam.org



Peace

*Scholars have defined peace thus:
"Peace is the absence of war."*

*Peace is generally studied as the antithesis to war.
But this is an extremely limited concept of peace.*

*The truth is that peace relates to the entire spectrum of human life.
In itself it is a complete ideology.*

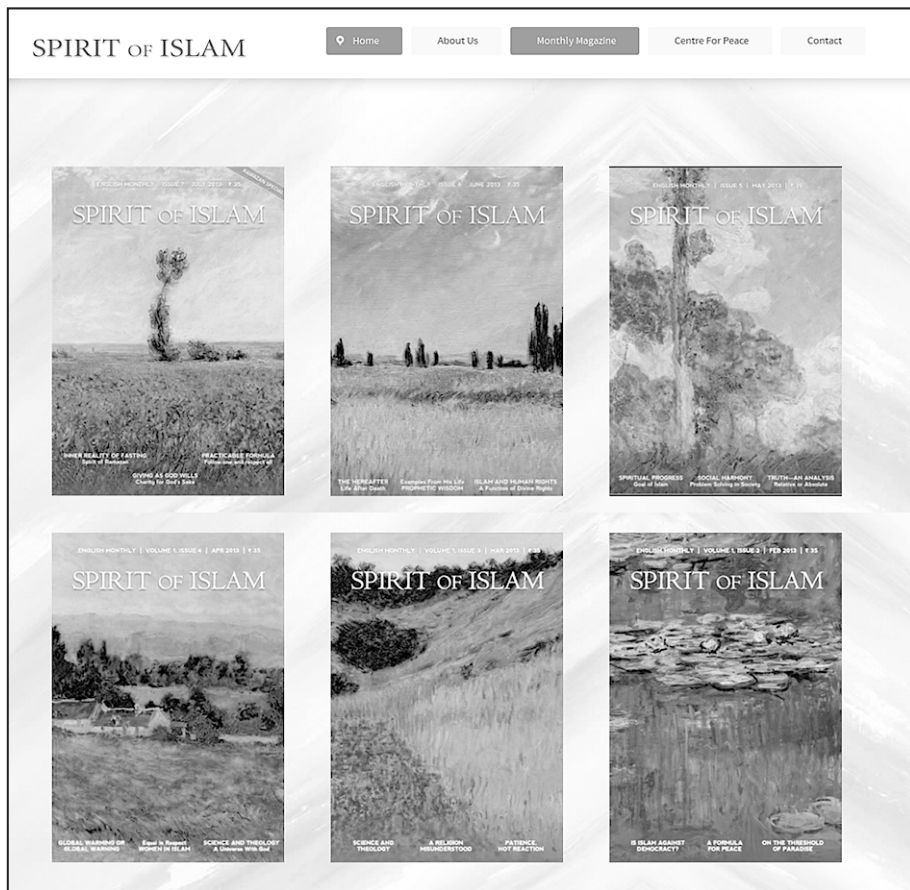
Glossary

- Ahkam al-Quran**, 'The Commands of the Quran' an exegesis (*Tafsir*) of the Quran by Al-Jassas.
- Aisha**, (612-678); daughter of Abu Bakr, wife of Prophet Muhammad; one of the most intellectual and influential women in Islamic history.
- Al-Bidaya wa'l-Nihayah**, '*The Beginning and the End*' a classic work of Islamic History by scholar Ibn Kathir (1301-1373).
- Al-Bukhari; Imam Al-Bukhari**, (810-870); Islamic scholar who authored the Hadith collection known as Sahih al-Bukhari regarded as the most authentic collection of *Hadith*.
- Al Jassas**, Imam Ahmed bin Ali Abu Bakr, also known as al-Jassas al-Razi, died 981 AD, Islamic scholar and author
- Ali bin Abi Talib**, died 661; cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad; the 4th Muslim Caliph.
- Aljame le Ahkam al-Quran**, Arabic commentary of the Quran by Shamsuddin Al Qurtubi (1671 Hijri)
- Ammar**, Ammar bin Yasir; a companion of the Prophet (658).
- As salam o alaikum** Peace be upon you; greeting often used by Muslims.
- Aws and Khazraj**, the two main Arab tribes of Medina who were the helpers of Prophet Muhammad when he migrated there.
- Badr**, is a town in Saudi Arabia, where the famous Battle of Badr took place, between the Quraish of Makkah and the Muslims of Medina in 624 AD.
- Banu Hashim**, a clan of the Quraysh tribe to which Prophet Muhammad belonged.
- Battle of the Trench**, March-April 627AD; also Battle of Khandaq, Battle of the Confederates (Ahzab) was a siege of Medina by Arab and Jewish tribes where the Prophet and his companions tactically overcame their opponents without any fighting by digging a trench that rendered the confederate cavalry useless.
- Bhagavad Gita**, is a 700-verse scripture that is part of the Hindu epic Mahabharata.
- Dar us Salaam**, 'Home of Peace'; referred to as Paradise.
- Dawah**, calling people towards God.
- fiqh**, Islamic jurisprudence
- fuqaha**, Islamic jurists
- ghulu**, extremism
- Hunain**, place in Arabia where the Battle of Hunain (also Hunayn) was fought 630 AD between Prophet Muhammad and his followers and the Bedoin tribe of Hawazin.
- Ibn Ishaq**, (704-761); historian and biographer of Prophet Muhammad.
- Ibn Majah**, (824-887); Islamic scholar and compiler of *Hadith*.
- Ibn Shahaab Zuhri**, a traditionist or compiler of *Hadith*.
- Ikhwan**, Arabic meaning—brother.
- Jame Al-Usool fi Ahaadith Ar-Rasool**, book of sayings of the Prophet by Ibnul Atheer (1209 AD).
- Jihad-bil-nafs**, struggle against ourselves to control negative and undesirable feelings.
- Khabbab-bin-Arth**, (~658) a companion of the Prophet Muhammad.
- Khandaq**, Trench; see Battle of the Trench.
- Khazraj**, see Aws and Khazraj.
- Medina**, Mddinah; also called Yathrib during the time of Prophet Muhammad.
- mad'u**, one who is invited or called towards God.
- mujahid**, one who struggles in the way of God.
- Omar**, also (Umar) or Omar bin al Khattab (579-644 AD); a close companion of the Prophet; the 2nd Muslim Caliph.
- Qital**, armed warfare.
- shahadat**, witness
- shirk**, association of partners with God.
- tab'een**, making the message of God clear to people
- Zaid bin Muhallil**, (~630) a companion of the Prophet Muhammad.

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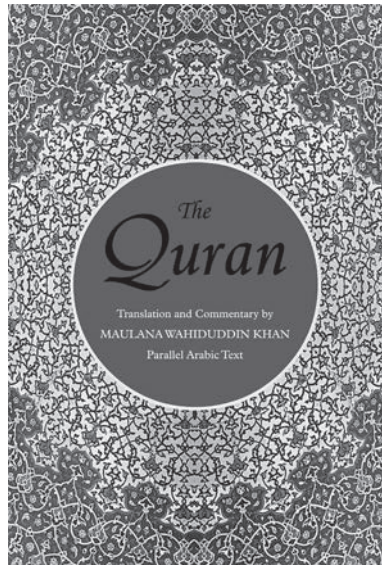
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MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN
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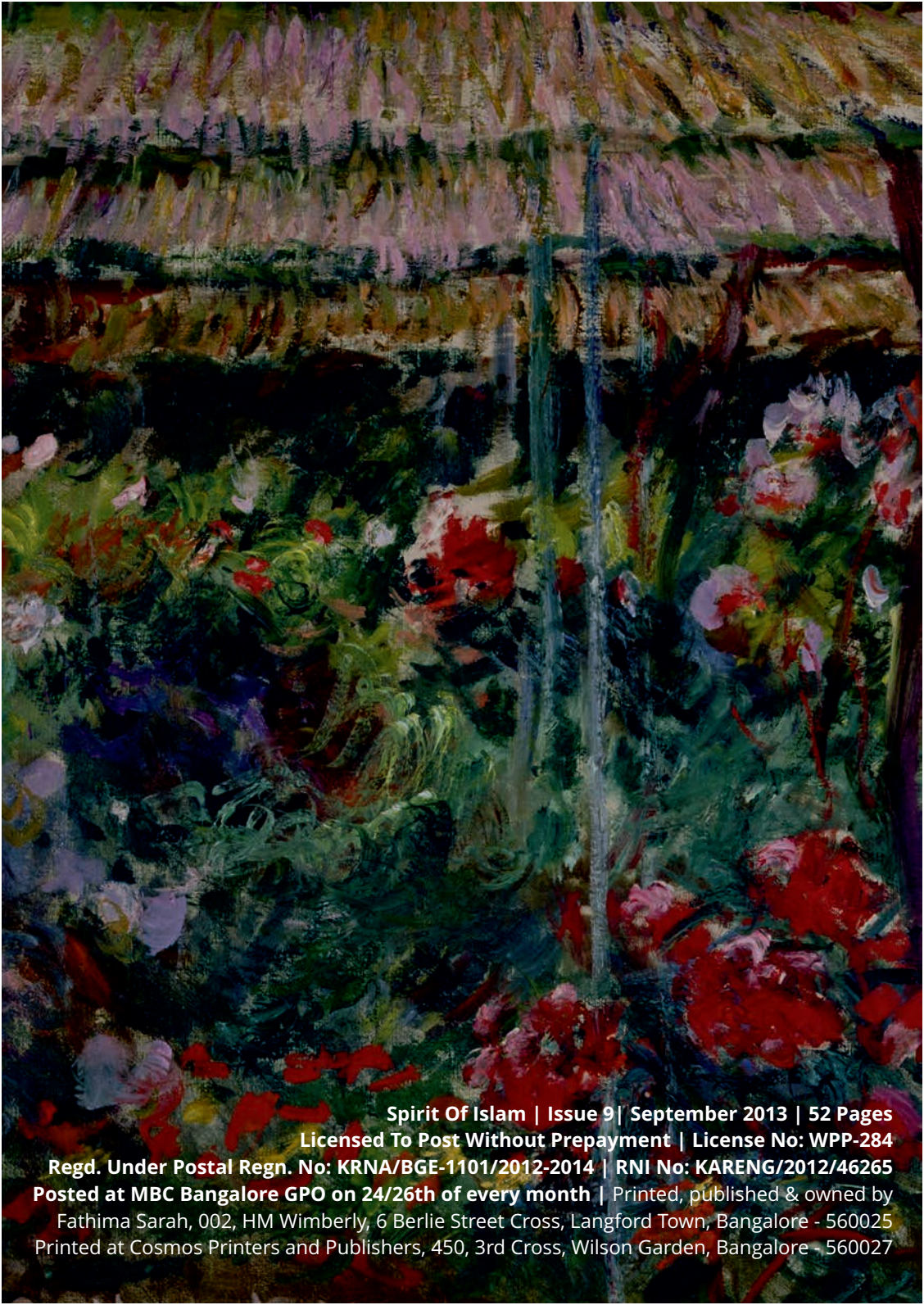


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