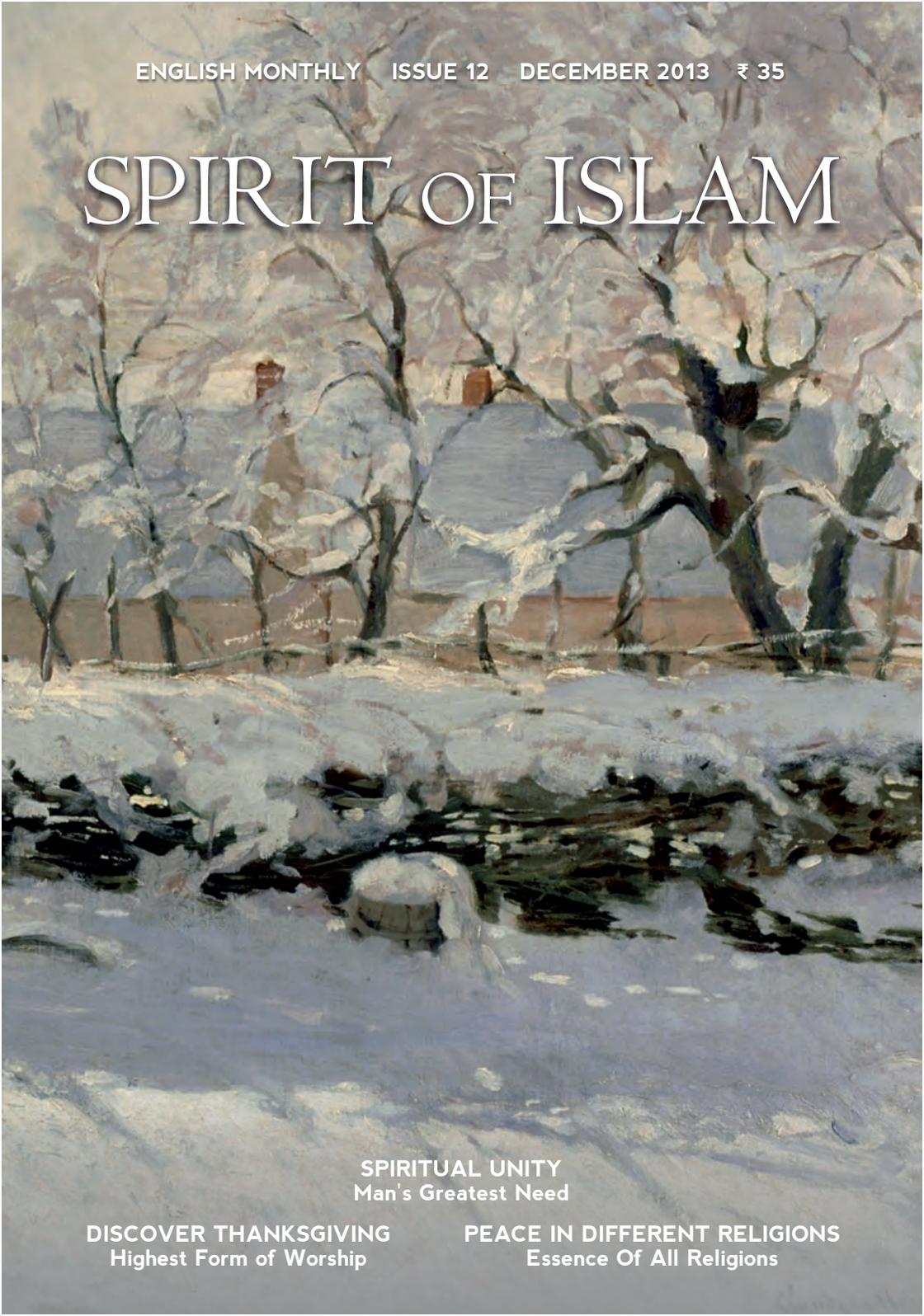


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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

A painting of a winter landscape. The scene is dominated by snow-covered trees with intricate, dark branches. In the background, a small building with a red roof is visible. The foreground shows a snow-covered ground with some dark, possibly frozen, patches. The overall style is impressionistic with visible brushstrokes.

SPIRITUAL UNITY
Man's Greatest Need

DISCOVER THANKSGIVING
Highest Form of Worship

PEACE IN DIFFERENT RELIGIONS
Essence Of All Religions

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Spiritual Living

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

ISSUE 12, DECEMBER 2013

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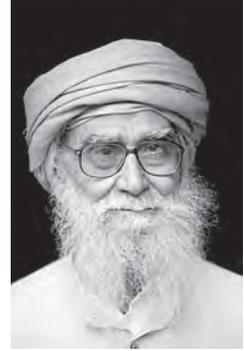
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK

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



MAKE IT A STARTING POINT

ON October 13, 2013 a Malaysian appeals court upheld a government ban against the use of the word 'Allah' by Christians. This verdict has nothing to do with Islamic teachings, however. It was the result of a demand from some extremists.

Historically, the word 'Allah' has never been the monopoly of Muslims. This word was prevalent among the idol-worshippers of pre-Islamic Mecca. The Quran itself certifies this fact, as the following Quranic verse indicates:

If you ask them who it is that has created the heavens and the
earth and subjugated the sun and the moon,
they will certainly say, 'Allah.'

(THE QURAN 29:61)

If early Muslims were right in adopting this word from the pagans of the pre-Islamic period, the Christians of Malaysia, too, are justified in using this word.

This ongoing issue need not be seen as a problem for the Malaysian Muslims. Rather, they can take it as a good opportunity. They can use it as a starting point for dialogue with their Christian countrymen.

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

They can tell their Christian fellow Malaysians that 'Allah' is not simply a name; it involves a whole religious culture, that is, the culture of *tawheed* or monotheism. And so, with reference to this event, they can introduce to them the Islamic teaching of *tawheed*.

This wise approach was also adopted by the Prophet of Islam. Addressing the Prophet, the Quran presents this principle:

Say, 'People of the Book, let us come to a word common to us
that we shall worship none but God.'

(THE QURAN 3:64)

The willingness on the part of Christians in Malaysia to use the word 'Allah' for God actually gives Muslims a common ground (*kalima e-sawa*) with them. In this case, the Malaysian Christians have themselves provided this common ground. Malaysian Muslims should welcome it and avail it as an opportunity for spiritual exchange. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
editor@thespiritofislam.org



I Will Do It

*Those who are conscious only of their own rights
will always make demands upon others.*

*Their slogan is:
"Others have to give to us!"*

*The duty-conscious person will always think
in terms of self-construction.
He will always try to fulfil his own duty.*

*The slogan of a rights-conscious person is:
"They must do this for me!"*

*A duty-conscious person, on the other hand, will say :
"I will do it!"*

DUA, ACCORDING TO THE QURAN AND THE BIBLE

ACCORDING to a *Hadith* report, *dua* or supplication to God, is the essence of worship. In fact, *dua* in reality is worship. This point is expressed in different ways in the Quran, the *Hadith* and the Bible.

It is natural for *dua* to be a genuine form of worship, because when Man discovers God through his absolute attributes, he also discovers that, in comparison to God, he has no significance at all.

He realises, "God is the Master, I am His slave. God is the Giver, I am the recipient. God is All-Powerful, I am helpless and totally dependent."

When someone realizes this, it makes him immediately turn to God in supplication. *Dua* is the strongest relationship that connects human beings with their Lord. *Dua* is a means to reach out to God. Through *dua*, we get whatever we seek. The aim of all our actions should be to make us turn always to God in supplication and then receive from Him. The Quran says:

When My servants ask you about Me, say that, I am near.
I respond to the call of one who calls, whenever he calls to Me:
let them, then, respond to Me, and believe in Me,
so that they may be rightly guided.

(THE QURAN 2: 186)

Jesus says the same thing in the following words:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find;
knock, and the door will be opened to you.
For everyone who asks, receives; the one who seeks, finds;
and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

(Matthew: 7-8)

Dua is not a mere utterance of some words. Rather, it is the greatest action. Real *dua* is never without its results. When someone beseeches God in genuine *dua*, it is as if he were making his issue into God's issue. And when something becomes God's concern, then there is no one who can stop it from being fulfilled. □

PRINCIPLE OF SALVATION

The Quran says:

The believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabaeans
— all those who believe in God and the Last Day and
do good deeds — will be rewarded by their Lord;
they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.

(THE QURAN 2: 62)

FOUR communities are mentioned in this verse: Muslims, who are the followers of the Prophet Muhammad; Jews who follow the Prophet Moses; Christians, who follow the Prophet Jesus; and Sabaeans, who adhered to the teachings of John the Baptist (Prophet Yahya). The last-mentioned sect resided in Iraq in ancient times, but is now extinct. They were people of the Book, and offered their prayers facing the Kabah in Makkah.

**No community is inherently superior to any other.
Only true belief and righteous actions
are rewarded with salvation.**

Here, the Muslims have not been mentioned separately, but have been grouped with other communities associated with prophets. This means that all ethnic groups are equal in the sight of God; no community is inherently superior to any other. Only true belief and righteous actions are rewarded with salvation. This is the rule that applies consistently to every community. No one, whether he calls himself Muslim, Jew, Christian or Sabaeans, is exempt from this rule. Belonging to a particular community gives no special status in the eyes of God. God elevates to a high rank only those who have sought to mould their own lives according to His divine scheme.

The lives of those who associate with a prophet during his lifetime are based on true belief and righteous actions. At that time certain people hear the Prophet's call. Their spirits are moved by his message: an intellectual revolution takes place within them, filling them with new resolve. Their whole pattern of life changes. Where previously they had been guided by personal desires, they now

base their lives on the teachings of God, and may truly call themselves followers of the prophets; these are the ones to whom the prophets gave good tidings of eternal blessings in the next world.

The situation changes, however, as time passes. For the generations that follow, religion becomes a kind of national heritage. Tidings which had been given on the basis of faith and righteous actions come to be considered to be the result of ethnic affiliations.

People reckon that they have a special relationship with God that others do not enjoy: one who belongs to a particular community is sure, they begin to think, to be saved, notwithstanding the standard of his faith and deeds. Paradise is for us, hell for them, they think. But God does not have a special relationship with any particular community. He has regard solely for man's thoughts and deeds. In the Hereafter, people will be judged according to their deeds and character, and not on the basis of the group to which they belong. □



Ignore Initial Hurt

*Usually the best way of avoiding great harm
from mischief-makers
is to put up with initial hurt.*

*For, if one does not,
it will set off a chain reaction
in which things will go from bad to worse.*

*Instead of having to bear
a relatively small hurt, one will then be
subjected to much greater suffering.*

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

ISLAM provides for full freedom of thought and expression. In fact, it is Islam that, for the first time in human history, wrought a revolution that gave every person this freedom. Prior to Islam, the world laboured under a system of coercion and human beings were deprived of intellectual freedom.

Freedom of thought is no ordinary matter. In actual fact, all human progress is linked to this freedom. It enables moral progress based on fear of the Invisible. That is to say, one voluntarily acknowledges God, rather than being forced to do so because of external compulsion, and leads life on the basis of the fear of God. In the absence of this complete freedom of choice, one can neither experience the spiritual joy beyond description that comes from fear of God, and nor can one get the credit for performing noble actions.

All human progress and creativity is linked to freedom of expression.

Freedom of thought saves one from hypocrisy. Human beings are thinking creatures. The human mind necessarily thinks and forms opinions. This being the case, if people are deprived of the right to free expression, it will not stop them from thinking, but it will certainly stop them from expressing their thoughts. An institution, community or country that takes away the right to the freedom of expression will finally be full of hypocrites. Sincere people can never flourish in such an environment.

In the same way, freedom of thought is directly linked to creativity. Creative people will emerge and flourish in a society that enjoys freedom of thought. In contrast, a society that does not allow this freedom is bound to fall prey to intellectual stagnation, because of which creative minds will not emerge or flourish therein.

The right position on the issue of expressing differences or criticism is for people to put an end to their unnecessary 'sensitivities' in this matter, rather than to try to end differences or criticism. This is what Islam demands, and reason, too. □

JOURNEY TOWARDS FINAL DESTINATION

THE well-known American evangelist Billy Graham (born 1918) narrates one of his life's experiences. Once, he received an urgent message from an American statesman who wanted to meet him at the earliest. On receiving this message, Billy Graham cancelled his appointments and immediately set out to meet this man. When he arrived at the statesman's palatial home, he was immediately taken to a room, where Billy Graham and the statesman sat on chairs facing one another. Then, in a serious tone, the statesman said to Billy Graham:

"You see, I am an old man. Life has lost all meaning. I am ready to take a fateful leap into the unknown. Young man, can you give me a ray of hope?" (*The Secret of Happiness*, Billy Graham, 1955, p.2)

This is a common question. Every man and woman — consciously or unconsciously — has this question in his or her mind. This is the first concern of every human being. To find the real answer we have to try to understand the Creation Plan of God. God is the Creator of this world. And only by gaining an understanding of the Creator's Plan can we get the right answer to the question.

Man and the present world: a mismatch?

The Quran, the preserved book of God, gives an answer to this question. According to the Quran, man is born as an eternal being, but his life span is divided into two parts: the pre-death period and the post-death period. The pre-death period is very short, and the post-death period is eternal.

Everyone feels that they have enormous desires, but they are not able to fulfil them. The reason is that the present world is an imperfect world with many kinds of limitations.

This means that there is a contradiction between man's nature, which seeks fulfilment of his desires, and the world, which is incapable of fulfilling man's desires. Man, by nature, wants a world where his personality can find total fulfilment, but the present world fails to provide such fulfilment.

Sir James Jeans in his book, *The Mysterious Universe*, has rightly pointed out this fact in these words:

'It appears that man has strayed into a world
that was not made for him'.

According to the Quran, the present earth is not a habitat for man forever. Man's eternal habitat lies in the world Hereafter. In accordance with this divine plan, man must develop his personality in the pre-death period, so that he is selected as a deserving candidate for this habitat, or Paradise in the post-death period.

How can one gain entry into Paradise?

Man is born with total freedom. The only requirement for finding entry into Paradise is that he should use his freedom responsibly and avoid any kind of misuse of this freedom. It is the divine criterion that will decide whose case was one of proper use of freedom and whose was that of misuse. As the Quran tells us:

We have indeed created man in the best of mould, then We cast him down as the lowest of the low, except for those who believe and do good deeds—theirs shall be an unending reward! What then after this, can make you deny the Last Judgement? Is not God the greatest of the judges? (THE QURAN 95:4-8)

It means that while man is born as a complete personality, his present abode, planet Earth is incomplete. Because of this disparity, man's condition on Earth becomes like that of a fish out of water. The disparity between man's nature and the inability of the present-world to fulfil all his desires arouses the need in man for a real habitat. This habitat is Paradise. Only those men and women will find entry into Paradise who qualify as deserving candidates for it. Planet Earth is a selection-ground for this purpose. The Quran tells us about Paradise in these words:

Therein you shall have all that your souls desire,
and therein you shall have all that you ask for.

(THE QURAN 41:31)

The Quran mentions all aspects of Paradise in detail and then guides man in these words

For the like of this, that all should strive.
(THE QURAN 37:61)



GOD-CENTRED RELIGION

WHAT are the things that people live for... Money? ... Power? ... Fame? The goals vary with the individual, some being immediate, frivolous, and easily interchangeable, while others appear as remote possibilities, difficult to attain and to be struggled towards over a long period of time, with an unwavering sense of urgency and commitment. In the latter case, whatever the actual goal, and no matter whether pursued in a spirit of egoism or altruism, the whole-hearted dedication of oneself to its attainment is akin to undertaking a religious mission.

The man who derives immense satisfaction from the simple fact of having grown a very beautiful rose is no less dedicated than his neighbour who strains every fibre of his being towards becoming a millionaire. The opportunists and profiteers of this world are no less dedicated than the philanthropists who uplift the downtrodden and give generously to the poor.

**No goal should ever be so placed above religion
that the Godhead becomes eclipsed.**

A man's whole life is conditioned by the goal he sets for himself. It becomes the pivot of his ideas and emotions, his actions and preoccupations, his dealings with friends, family and the rest of society. No aspect of a man's life remains unaffected by it, and he clings fast to his 'religion' all twenty-four hours of the day, be he conscious of this or not.

The point which is missed by so many people nowadays is that whatever our goals in life, and whatever the zeal with which we pursue them, our ultimate goal should be to prostrate ourselves before God. No goal should ever be so placed above religion that we forget God. And no matter what kind of religion we choose for ourselves — God-centred, pantheistic or Godless — we should never lose sight of the fact that in this world we are all on trial. There is a common but erroneous belief that a Godless religion coupled with material success should be the be-all and end-all of existence.

But success achieved without God being an all-pervasive factor is a

trivial, ephemeral matter, related only to life on earth, and will not support one into the Life Hereafter. When death finally overtakes a man, all his material possessions and all his worldly successes fall away from him, and he is left alone, and empty-handed, to stand before God, who will arise before him in all His might and majesty. Then will come the moment of trial. And it will avail him little to talk of his worldly prowess at that awesome moment, for honour and success are hollow, worthless concepts when achieved without the framework of a God-centred religion. Success gained in this way will condemn one in the life after death to eternal failure.

**A man may have religion or any material props
he chooses, but in moments of real crisis,
it is to God that he calls out for help.**

Only God-centred religion is real and in harmony with man's nature. But this truth does not occur to man until the hour of crisis and peril is upon him. A man may have any religion or any material props he chooses; but, in moments of real crisis, it is to God that he calls out for help. Such an experience, which we all go through at one time or another in our lives, is a clear indication that a God-centred religion is the only true one. As such, it should pervade man's entire existence. Any religion other than this will fail him in his hour of need — in the Hereafter — just as the ordinary everyday means of support so often do in moments of crisis in this world.

Man's experience of today is a pointer to the fate he will encounter in the everlasting world of the Hereafter. Only those who heed the message now and shape their lives accordingly will prosper in the world to come. □



Contentment

*Contentment is the only viable formula,
which can give everyone peace and tranquillity.
If you live a simple life, it will give you lasting happiness.*

NEGUS, THE KING OF ABYSSINIA

IN the early period of his mission, when the Prophet was in Makkah, the oppression of the Quraysh became so severe that the Prophet advised believers to leave Makkah and migrate to Abyssinia, modern-day Ethiopia. Abyssinia, he told them, was ruled by a Christian king Negus, who did not persecute anyone based on their beliefs. The Prophet asked believers to stay there till God showed them an alternative solution to their problem.

And so, more than 100 of the Prophet's Companions left their homeland and went to Abyssinia. When the Quraysh of Makkah learned of this, they discussed the matter among themselves and sent two of their men, Amr ibn Al-As and Abdullah bin Abi Rabia, to Abyssinia. When these men got there, they met with the king's courtiers and gave gifts to them so that they would put in a word in their favour before the king. After this, this delegation from Makkah entered the court of Negus, the king of Abyssinia. They told Negus that some 'foolish' people of their town had left their homeland and were living in his kingdom and that they had come on behalf of their families and relatives to take them back to their homes. They sought his permission for this, and asked him to hand over these people to them. Negus' courtiers also supported their appeal.

It is a form of oppression to listen to only one party's version of the story and then pass a judgement.

The Makkan delegation wanted that the king should hand over the believers to them on their request. They did not want the believers to be questioned by the king. When they made this plea in front of him, Negus was displeased. He replied, 'By God, never! I will never hand them over to you, unless they are called before me and I speak to them, and find out what is the matter with them.'

After this, the King ordered that the Makkan believers who were living in his land be brought into his court. When these believers were presented before the king, contrary to the local custom, they did not prostrate before him. Negus was a Christian ruler. And so, he believed that Jesus was the son of God. But during the course of his conversation

with the believers, when Jesus was mentioned, the representative of the Prophet's Companions, Jafar Ibn Abi Talib, said that Jesus was a prophet of God.

After ascertaining the truth about the whole affair, Negus gave back to the Makkan delegation their gifts and told them to return to their land. He said that he would not hand over the Muslim believers to them. The Muslims, he said, could stay on in his land for as long as they liked. (Seerath ibn Kathir)

This is the true method of dispensing justice. Justice is not a one-sided process. Rather, it entails examining both sides of a matter and then arriving at a just decision. According to the Prophet's direct testimony, King Negus' manner was an exemplary model of just behaviour.

Whenever a conflict appears between two parties, it is not just; but, rather, a form of oppression, to listen to only one party's version of the story and then pass a judgment. This is wholly improper behaviour for anyone, no matter how high a position he holds in society.

Justice is not a one-sided process.

In this matter, Negus was not influenced by the gifts of the Makkan delegation. Nor did he accept the advice and recommendations of his courtiers and people who were close to him. In fact, he did not even bother that the Muslim believers did not observe the customary form of paying respect that he was used to, thereby perhaps dishonouring him in the eyes of his courtiers. In addition, they had denied and critiqued some of the religious beliefs of the king and his people, asserting them to be wrong.

The King did not bother about all this, and focused only on the issue of justice in this entire affair. He completely ignored all other aspects, personal as well as other. He heard both parties and impartially investigated the affair. And then he gave his decision, which was in accordance with the demands of justice.

The greatest form of piety is when man decides a matter justly, uninfluenced by pressure and by the possibility that a just decision might go against one's ego and its interests. These are the exalted souls who, in the hereafter, will find a place in Paradise. □

THE GLORIOUS GOD OF A GLORIOUS UNIVERSE

STUDIES in astronomy show that the number of stars in our Universe is as numerous as all of the sand grains on all the sea-shores of our planet. Many stars are vastly greater in size than our sun, some even being of such enormous girth that they could accommodate hundreds of thousands of suns inside them and still have room to spare. There are many other mysterious objects in the Universe more massive than a millions suns. Studies also show that our Universe is not static, but is expanding at an incredible rate, every moment in all directions. Man has yet to comprehend the vastness of the Universe.

Research has found that the laws of nature within our Universe are perfectly 'fine-tuned' for life on Earth. The meaning and significance of the Universe, the planning behind it and the incomparable design within it, all point towards the existence of a supremely intelligent God who created the Universe and who controls, sustains and cherishes it.

Our Universe does indeed declare the glory of God. When we ponder about the realities of our existence and the glorious Universe around us, two intense emotions develop within us:

1. The emotion of gratitude and indebtedness
2. Humility and the acknowledgement of our helplessness

In this glorious Universe, is Man an orphan child with boundless, feelings of devotion, who finds no Being, to appease his desire?

By nature, Man's condition demands that there must be a benefactor for him in this Universe. If we were to open our eyes and observe the incredibly vast Universe around us, we would find that we are an extremely insignificant and helpless creation within it.

In such a Universe, when Man observes his own petty self, he feels totally helpless; more helpless than the ant that struggles to save itself when caught between waves in an ocean. Man involuntarily desires someone, who can be a benefactor for him in this vast Universe; he seeks the refuge of a Being more powerful than the powers of the Universe so that he could come under His protection and feel safe and secure.

In the present day, nationalism, political power, ethnicity and other such affiliations are nothing but different projections presented to satisfy this innate desire of Man. But this is just like presenting a statue to someone to satisfy his or her desire of a life partner.

Man is in search of one such Being who has power and control over the entire Universe. To be the focus of his affections, man desires only such a Being who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. By nature, Man desires an absolute and complete God.

By nature, Man desires an absolute and complete God.

A child weeping for its mother can be consoled for a short while by giving it a toy, but the child can never be satisfied completely. Although God does not appear before us, His creation in the form of this glorious Universe is spread all around us. We can see it; we can experience it. In such a case, Man can only be satisfied with a God so exalted that this glorious Universe testifies to His glory: a God who in reality is found to be the Creator and Lord of this glorious Universe. A God any lower in stature than this can never appeal to the mind of Man. Until and unless Man finds such a God, his search will continue. Nothing else can ever satisfy this desire.

Man has disconnected himself from God, due to which he faces a sense of deprivation in the midst of abundance; Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) begins his book, *The Conquest of Happiness*, with the following lines:

Animals are happy so long as they have health and enough to eat. Human beings, one feels, ought to be, but in the modern world they are not, at least in a great majority of cases.

This is because that modern civilisation with its grand successes has only been able to garner a small portion of what Man desires. It has accumulated the requirements of the 'body' but has failed in garnering anything for the 'soul'.

Man seeks meaningfulness, but modern civilization can only offer him material structures made of steel and stone. Man desires life, but modern civilization can only give him a lifeless statue in the mould of a man. Man desires satisfaction for his heart and mind, but modern civilization places him in a soulless, mechanical vehicle. Man desires to

meet the Creator of this Universe so that he could prostrate before his Benefactor, but nowhere can he find this Benefactor in the world that modern science and technology has created. Not finding his true God, he bows down before imaginary, fabricated gods.

Man's need for a supreme God is so intense that it is acknowledged by even those intellectuals who do not approve of the existence of God and religion. For example, Bertrand Russell writes:

If life is to be fully human it must serve some end which seems in some sense outside human life, some end which is impersonal and above mankind such as God or truth or beauty.

— Principles of Social Reconstruction

This is an acknowledgement of the innate urge for a God that is embedded in human nature. By denying the existence of God, modern Man has forsaken his Creator. His salvation now lies only in once again finding God, his Creator. The concept of God is interwoven in Man's nature. The instinct for eating grass in a goat and eating meat in a cat cannot be suppressed; in the same way, God cannot be detached from the nature of Man.

Man's life has been fashioned in such a way that he continuously lives in a feeling of dependency. This feeling of helplessness persists in every human being. It forces Man to clutch onto a support that is more powerful than him; one that can deliver him from his weakness. It is this feeling of helplessness that drives Man in his search for God.

Man needs such a God before whom he can pour out his feelings of gratitude; on to whom he can entrust all his affairs; in whose faith he will find succour even at times when there is no one to help him. Man desires a God he can trust, who will grant him success after every disaster, who can remove all difficulties from his path. Man's feeling of helplessness can never be overcome unless and until he discovers this God.

Some religions present many Gods; but this runs completely against the natural desire of man. This is because the desire for a God is a desire for such a Being that can be made the focus of his affection; and the focus of his affection can only, and always be, one, not many things.

Some other religions present God in the form of a vague spirit; but man

desires a God who can see a God who can hear and one who answers. Some religions present a man in the form of God; but the God that man desires can only be that God, who is greater than his own kind.

By nature, Man's condition demands that there must be a benefactor for him in this Universe.

The God that the Quran introduces us to is the One God; He is the Lord of all forms of powers; He was always there and will always remain; He has no partners; He alone created the whole Universe; He is the glory of this Universe and He alone controls and supports the entire Universe; He sees, hears and speaks; He is always ready and present to stand by anyone who calls Him; Man can communicate with Him at all times and at all places; Everything is in His power and control; He is the succour for man in his life before death and also in life after death.

Our Universe does indeed declare the glory of God. Now it is for man to discover this glorious God. □



Ignorance as a stepping stone

To know that you do not know is half knowledge itself.

*If an ignorant person is not aware of his ignorance,
he will continue to remain in the same state.*

*But when he becomes aware of his ignorance,
he sets about seeking for knowledge.*

*In this way his awareness of his ignorance
will become the stepping-stone leading
towards full knowledge.*

SPIRITUAL UNITY

MAN'S greatest need today is to be shown the path of spiritual unity. There is no other way to eliminate the disharmony existing in present-day society which has resulted in so many intractable problems. It is generally said that in present times, the world has assumed the form of a global village. But this is only half the truth. Modern technology and communications have, of course, greatly reduced distances across the world. But the closeness thus produced is of a purely physical nature. Modern technology may have bridged certain gaps, bringing the external world closer together, but the task of bringing unity into the internal world of humanity has yet to be accomplished.

What is spiritual unity? Let us take a very simple example. When you live in a crowded settlement, the walls all around give you a sense of limitation. You experience the friction of living in close contact with others and you suffer from mental tension. Later, when you emerge from that dense human settlement into open, natural surroundings you immediately feel that your tension has evaporated and you have once again become serene. You feel that you have joined a limitless universality. The feeling of separateness is replaced by an all-pervasive feeling of unity. You immediately become part of a world where there are no boundaries. A sense of universality prevails.

Without spiritual unity, there is little hope of creating peace and harmony throughout the world.

We have all had this experience at one time or another. It shows us what spiritual unity is. It is, in fact, the raising of one's existence to a higher plane. The moment you achieve this, you feel you are emerging from a limited world to become a citizen of an unlimited world. Disunity now disappears, giving way to unity all around.

Although physically, all human beings appear to be different, spiritually they are one. It is as if spiritual unity between human beings already exists, and that it does not have to be externally imposed. We have only to make people aware of its existence. Once the outer, artificial veils are removed, what remains will be pure spirituality.

In reality, the various sets of circumstances that confront man in this world lead to drawing of different veils over man's natural propensities. For instance, the veil of material greed produces self-centredness; the veil of jealousy causes him to see himself as being separate from others; the veil of prejudice makes him discriminate between human beings, and so on.

These veils, in fact, tend to block man's natural urge towards spiritual unity. What is required is to remove these artificial veils so that the true, inner reality of humaneness can be brought into focus.

All human beings are God's family.

The aim of all religions, basically, is to encourage this spiritual unity within man, and between man and man. No religion is at variance with another so far as this goal is concerned. The language in which this is set forth may vary from one religion to another, but, without doubt, the main concern of all religions is to produce spiritual unity within and between all human beings. Without spiritual unity, there is little hope of creating peace and harmony throughout the world. And where there is no peace and harmony, the dream of human progress will forever remain elusive.

Now, what is Islam's contribution to spiritual unity? The subject is too vast for more than just a few basic points to be briefly touched on.

The Unity of God

The most important factor in Islam's contribution is its concept of monotheism—of there being only one God (THE QURAN 2: 163). According to Islam, God, or the ultimate reality of this universe is only one — called Allah in Islam. It is implicit in the concept of the oneness of Godhead that differences and multiplicity would appear to exist in reality, yet there is an underlying unity.

In this way the concept of divine unity engenders spiritual unity. All human beings are one, because they are the servants of one God. All human beings are God's family. God is indeed the greatest reality of the universe. And when it is acknowledged that there is only one greatest reality, it is but natural that all other creatures should acquire the character of unity.

The Unity of Nature

The Quran states that:

There is no changing in God's creation.

(THE QURAN 30: 30)

According to the Prophet of Islam 'every child is born with an upright nature.' (Al-Bukhari) We learn from this that unity is found among all human beings at the level of nature and creation. Nature forms the common constituent in the creation of human beings, just as the atom forms the common constituent in all the varied objects of nature in the physical world. That is to say that the same unity which exists in the external world at the physical level has existed among human beings at the spiritual level from the outset.

The main concern of all religions is to produce spiritual unity within, and between all human beings.

But man tends at times to be oblivious of his own nature. This is no less true in the sphere of unity. Today people are unaware of their spiritual potential. In such a situation, the easiest way to bring about spiritual unity is to make men aware of that potential. The moment they became aware of it, spiritual unity will come into existence of its own accord.

The Unity of Mankind

The Quran says:

O Men, have fear of your Lord, who created you from a single soul.
From that soul He created its mate, and through them,
He scattered the earth with countless men and women.

(THE QURAN 4: 1)

This shows that men and women have been created from the same substance. Their being physically one, of necessity, demands their spiritual oneness.

Making a similar point, the Prophet Muhammad said that all human beings are brothers (Abu Dawud). This gives rise to the concept of a common brotherhood, and, without doubt, it is this sense of brotherhood which generates the strongest feeling of oneness and togetherness among different people.

That is to say when all human beings in this world are virtually blood brothers, they must, as this concept necessarily demands, live as brothers in spirit, too. Any other way of living is a deviation from reality.

Here is an incident which illustrates this point. In 1893, Swami Vivekananda went to Chicago to participate in the Parliament of Religions. As the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* puts it, his was a 'sensational appearance.' (15/623) On that occasion all the speakers at the conference followed the common practice of addressing the audience as 'Ladies and Gentlemen.' But when Swami Vivekananda took the stage, he addressed his listeners as 'Sisters and brothers of America.' No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the hall resounded with a long burst of applause. Of all the delegates at the conference, Swamiji received the greatest ovation.

Men and women have been created from the same substance. Their being physically one, of necessity, demands their spiritual oneness.

The reason for this was that the form of address, 'Ladies and Gentlemen' produces a sense of alienation and strangeness, whereas the phrase 'Sisters and Brothers' introduces a note of closeness and familiarity.

By using this phrase, Swami Vivekananda touched a chord in the hearts of people of different creeds and colours. Their natural feeling of unity was awakened, and then what ensued fulfilled the best of expectations. All of a sudden, the gaps between them were bridged. They all began to feel themselves what they really were, and for that moment, physical divisions disappeared and were replaced by a rare spiritual unity. □



Realism

A man on the highest pedestal of realism
is one who can think dispassionately
and take decisions objectively,
rising above his own self.

DISCOVER THANKSGIVING

The Prophet of Islam has said:

Man lam yashkur-an-naas, lam yashkur-Allah.

One who fails to acknowledge man,
he will surely fail to acknowledge God.

S *HUKR* (acknowledgement) is a great virtue. If one lacks this virtue, he will be ungrateful towards man, and consequently, towards God Almighty. But *Shukr* is not a ready-made thing. We have to apply our intellect to discover it; otherwise, we will fail to be grateful towards both, man and God.

Here is an example to illustrate this point. When one enters a room and turns on a switch, suddenly, the room becomes full of light. Certainly, this calls for *shukr*; but people generally take it for granted, and therefore fail to acknowledge.

***Shukr* (acknowledgement) is a great virtue. If one lacks this virtue, he will be ungrateful towards man and, consequently, towards God Almighty.**

In ancient times, for several thousand years, there was no electricity. Several Western minds experimented over a long period of time and eventually invented the electric light bulb. Then came Thomas Alva Edison (1847–1931) who invented the first commercially practical incandescent light.

For him it was not an easy task. He worked on about 3,000 different versions of the light bulb before he found the one that would work best. He experimented with more than 10,000 different types of materials to find a suitable one.

However, it is difficult to find a man or a woman who, as they turn on the switch of the electric light bulb, sincerely acknowledge its inventor. And when they fail to acknowledge man, they also fail to acknowledge God and remain ungrateful for divine blessings.

We live amidst countless bounties of God but seldom can we find a person who lives in thrilling *shukr*. Why is this the case? Because, of a failure to acknowledge man, and consequently, a failure to acknowledge God. According to Islam, *shukr* is the highest form of worship. Only those people will find entry into paradise who live in this spirit.

Like the electric light bulb, there are numerous examples in nature as well as in the industrial world that should evoke awe in us. Every moment, we are surrounded by one of these wondrous creations.

Shukr is a response to these divine blessings. It is not just lip service. We must develop the habit of contemplation leading to intellectual development. This will make us worthy of God's blessings, and eligibility to gain entry into paradise, in the world hereafter. □



The Difference

*If one is unmindful of God, one will react
in whatever manner one's own desire and interests demand.*

*If, however, one's faith is strong, each and every event
throughout life reminds one of God; the entire range of emotions
is then concentrated not on oneself, but on God.*

Forgiveness, a full-stop.

*Revenge may set on a chapter of chain reaction;
that is revenge-after-revenge,
while forgiveness ends this chain.*

*Forgiveness implies that you have put a full-stop;
while revenge in this case, effectively means
you have only added commas.*

REVEALED KNOWLEDGE AND SECULAR KNOWLEDGE

REVEALED knowledge is the only source from which to learn how to make spiritual progress, while material progress is based on a knowledge of nature.

So far as success or failure in the Hereafter is concerned, it rests entirely on the revealed knowledge passed on to mankind by the Prophet (2:120). The Prophet Muhammad is enjoined to proclaim to mankind that “God’s guidance is the only guidance.”

Principles of attainment of Salvation are derived solely from divine revelation.

Nevertheless, Islam holds that while the principles for the attainment of salvation in the Hereafter derive solely from divine revelation, the attainment of material progress is influenced by knowledge of the laws of nature as discovered and established by secular scientific research. By reason and by tradition Islam accords to the secular sciences the status of an independent branch of learning.

In fact, the Quran repeatedly urges us to give serious thought to the natural phenomena of the heavens and the earth, as being signs for men of sense — those who remember God when standing, sitting and lying down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, saying:

Lord, You have not created this in vain. (THE QURAN 3: 190).

These verses clearly suggest that we should proceed to our own conclusions on the basis of human reasoning in matters of the world.

The difference between the scientific and the religious approach to practical matters has been made clear in a *Hadith*. Fifty out of the 63 years of the Prophet’s life were spent in Makkah, a desert town where there was no agriculture. Later, he migrated to Medina where agriculture and horticulture were practiced — in particular, the growing of date palms. Naturally, the Prophet had no experience of either farming or fruit growing.

One day, as the Prophet was passing through the outskirts of Medina, he noticed that some people, who had climbed up the date palms, were engaged in some activity. On inquiring what they were busy with, they explained that they were fertilizing the trees. Traditionally, they did this by the artificial pollination of the date flowers, and this ensured a good crop. But when the Prophet asked, "What if you don't do it?", the people, in deference to his judgement climbed down the trees without completing their task. That year the yield was very low.

When the Prophet inquired why the yield was so low that particular year, the orchard keepers replied that the yield depended on the pollination, which they had been carrying out when he had stopped them. On hearing this, the Prophet replied: "Continue doing as you used to, since you know the matters of the world better than I do."

This incident illustrates how the Prophet separated religious knowledge from a practical matter such as horticulture. In fact, the principle evident in this was applicable not just to horticulture, but to all natural matters governed by the laws of nature. The clear inference is that what is demonstrable in nature, yielding itself to research and experiment, will be accepted by Islam as established, empirical knowledge.

Material progress is based on the knowledge of nature.

The same principle may be applied to all other scientific disciplines, for instance, to geology, astronomy, engineering and so on. Islam is quite clear on this point that all of these are the subject matter not of religion but of scientific research.

For instance, if experiment shows that water boils at 100°C, it will be accepted as such without any dispute. Only that will be held valid which has been proved by scientific research and experiment. All discoveries must be verifiable. Nothing will be accepted on the basis of mere speculation.

Historically, this Islamic policy of the division of religion and science is extremely important, as it opened the door to scientific progress for the first time in human history. Prior to the advent of Islam, this policy of division had never been followed, so that science remained the mere handmaiden of religion.

Any attempt at true scientific research was generally hampered or stopped altogether by the forces of dogmatism and superstition. Independent progress was an impossibility.

The division recognized by Islam was epoch-making precisely because it freed secular science from the grip of religion. This opened the way to the open conducting of research and experiment without any fear of interference. This process of liberation continued for a period of a thousand years, until that modern era came into existence, which is now known as the scientific age.

What is demonstrable in nature, yielding itself to research and experiment, will be accepted by Islam as established, empirical knowledge. □



Make yourself deserving of God's help

The notion that God helps those who help themselves means that although man's role is a very minor one, it is nevertheless a very necessary one.

A man must prove his worth to have his due share of God's gifts. We must never, therefore, neglect to make ourselves deserving of God's nourishment.

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NON-VIOLENCE

A STUDY of the Quran and *Sunnah* (sayings and deeds of the Prophet) tells us that Islam is a religion which teaches non-violence. According to the Quran, God does not approve violence (*fasad*). We learn from the Quran that *fasad* is that action which results in disruption of the social system, causing losses in terms of lives and property. This shows that God espouses non-violence.

God abhors violent activity which results in people having to pay the price with their possessions and lives. This is supported by numerous statements in the Quran, for instance, that 'Peace' is one of God's names (THE QURAN 59: 23). Those who seek to please God are assured that they will be guided by Him to 'the paths of peace'. (THE QURAN 5: 16) Paradise, which is the final destination of the society of God's choice, is referred to in the Quran as 'home of peace'. (THE QURAN 10: 25)

The entire spirit of the Quran is in consonance with this concept. For instance, the Quran attaches great importance to patience. In fact, patience is set above all other Islamic virtues — with the exceptional promise of 'reward beyond measure'. (THE QURAN 39: 10)

Patience implies a peaceful response, whereas impatience implies a violent reaction. The word *sabr* exactly expresses the notion of non-violence, as it is understood in modern times. That patient action is non-violent action has been clearly expressed in the Quran. According to a tradition, the Prophet Muhammad observed:

God grants to *rifq* (gentleness) what He
does not grant to *anf* (violence).

(Abu Dawud, 4/255)

The word *rifq* has been used in this *Hadith* as an antithesis to *anf*. These terms convey exactly what is meant by violence and non-violence in present times. This *Hadith* clearly indicates the superiority of the non-violent method.

God grants to non-violence what
He does not grant to violence.

This has very wide and deep implications, embodying an eternal law of nature. By the very law of Nature, all bad things are associated with

violence, while all good things are associated with non-violence. Violent activities breed hatred in society, while non-violent activities elicit love. Violence is the way of destruction while non-violence is the way of construction. In an atmosphere of violence, enmity flourishes, while in an atmosphere of non-violence, friendship flourishes.

The method of violence gives way to negative values, while the method of non-violence is marked by positive values. The method of violence embroils people in problems, while the method of non-violence leads people to the availing of opportunities. In short, violence is death, non-violence is life.

The Prophet Muhammad followed the principle of peaceful activism throughout his life. He always adopted non-violent methods in preference to violent methods. It is this policy which was referred to by Aishah, the Prophet's wife, in these words: "Whenever the Prophet had to opt for one of two ways, he almost always opted for the easier one." (Fath ul-Bari, 6/654)

**By the very law of Nature, all bad things
are associated with violence, while all good things
are associated with non-violence.**

According to the Quran there are two faculties in every human being which are mutually antipathetic. One is the ego, and the other is the conscience, called respectively *nafs ammara* (THE QURAN 12: 53) and *nafs lawwama* (THE QURAN 75: 2). What the violent method invariably does is to awaken the ego, which necessarily results in a breakdown of social equilibrium. On the other hand, non-violent activism awakens the conscience. From this results an awakening in people of introspection and self-appraisal. And according to the Quran, the miraculous outcome of this is that "he who is your enemy will become your dearest friend." (THE QURAN 41: 34)

A great advantage of the non-violent method is that, by following it, no part of one's time is wasted. The opportunities available in any given situation may then be availed of to the fullest extent—as happened after the no-war pact of Hudaibiya. This peace treaty enabled the energies of the believers to be utilised in peaceful constructive activities instead of being dissipated in a futile armed encounter. A great harm done by violent activism is the breaking of social traditions

in the launching of militant movements. Conversely, a great benefit that accrues from non-violent activism is that it can be initiated and prolonged with no damage to tradition. Generally speaking, attempts to improve or replace existing systems by violent activism are counter-productive. The truly desirable revolution is that which permits gradual and beneficial changes. And this can be achieved only on the basis of non-violence.

The Prophet of Islam fully adopted the way of pacifism or non-violence all his life. All his successes were achieved by non-violent methods. There were many issues in Makkah at that time which could have been the subject of clash and confrontation. But the Prophet avoided all such issues, strictly limiting his sphere to peaceful propagation of his message.

In Makkah when the Quraysh leaders were set to wage war against the Prophet, instead of opting for the way of reaction and retaliation, the Prophet secretly migrated to Medina.

Migration, by its very nature, was a clear example of non-violent activism. This peaceful strategy enabled the Prophet and his followers — about two hundred in number — to form a powerful centre of Islam in Medina. Had they adopted the path of confrontation instead of peaceful migration, the history of Islam might have been buried right there in Makkah shortly after its inception.

**The truly desirable revolution is that which permits
gradual and beneficial changes.**

A study of the Quran and *Seerah* (life of the Prophet) tells us that the actual goal of Islam has been, from beginning to end, to change people's hearts. But in accordance with the creation plan, everyone has been given total freedom. It was as a result of this freedom that certain people turned against the Prophet of Islam; some even went to the extent of taking up arms in order to put an end to his mission by force. It was in situations such as these that the Prophet and his companions had to temporarily resort to arms, in self-defence. In this context, it would be correct to say that peace in Islam is the rule rather than the exception.

The Prophet Muhammad lived for 23 years after attaining prophet-

hood. During these 23 years, the Quran was revealed at intervals and according to the circumstances. If this period is divided up under the headings of war and peace, we will find that one part of the Quran, covering a span of twenty years, relates to peaceful teachings on the subjects of faith, worship, ethics, justice, humanity, etc., whereas the verses relating to war were revealed during a period of only three years, when the believers were faced with armed aggression.

There are 114 chapters in the Quran, containing about 6500 verses. There are hardly 40 verses which relate directly or indirectly to war.

This means that the verses dealing with war represent barely 0.6 per cent of the entire text.

This kind of difference can be found in the constitutions of every country as well as in all religious books. For instance, while the Bible enshrines many teachings on the subject of peace, it also includes this saying of Jesus Christ:

I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

Similarly, while the Bhagavad Gita holds forth at length on wisdom and ethics, it also contains passages where Krishna insists that Arjuna should go ahead and fight. It is obvious that these injunctions in the Bible and the Gita are intended to cover only exceptional cases.

One important aspect of Islam as regards its peace-loving policy is that it differentiates between the enemy and the aggressor. According to the teachings of Islam, if a group unilaterally attacks, thus opening hostilities, war can, as a matter of necessity, be waged in self-defence. The Quran states:

Permission to fight is given to those who are attacked.
(THE QURAN 22: 39)

But so far as engaging in combat with the enemy is concerned, the Quran does not allow military action just on account of enmity. There is a verse in the Quran which gives clear guidance in this regard:

And good and evil are not alike. Requite evil with what is best.
Then truly he between whom and you there was enmity,
will become your dearest friend."
(THE QURAN 41 :34)

This verse teaches us not to regard our enemies as objects of everlasting hostility, for a potential friend could be hiding in the guise of an enemy. Discover this friend and turn the potential into the actual. Then you will have no cause for complaint.

It is clear that there are two ways of settling an issue — one violent and one peaceful. When we compare the two, we find that in any controversial matter, opting for violence is the harder course while opting for non-violence is the easier one. The general rule in Islam is that whenever there is any controversy, we have to choose to tread the path of peace rather than that of violence. In present times, when freedom has been accepted as an irrevocable right of man, peaceful methods should invariably be adopted.

It would be appropriate to add here that, during the life of the Prophet, if certain wars of a limited duration took place; such engagement only reflected the conditions of those times. The wars that took place in the first half of the seventh century are explainable in terms of it being an age of religious coercion and religious persecution. The atmosphere of religious tolerance that prevails today was not to be found in those times, so that the opponents of monotheism, by initiating hostilities, forced the Prophet to fight. Today, religious tolerance has become an established right of every individual and every group. That is why the question of going to war to secure religious rights should never arise.

**No enemy is everlastingly hostile.
For in every enemy there lies a potential friend.**

Constructive Islamic activities are possible only in a peaceful and normal atmosphere. The importance of peace in Islam is, therefore, so great that we are commanded to ensure peace by bearing with all kinds of unpleasant situations. Even when countering persecution by opponents, the ways of peace and avoidance must be adopted, and peace must at all costs be unilaterally maintained: that is an important principle of Islam. There is only one exception to this rule, and that is in the case of physical aggression by opponents.

The Prophet of Islam began his prophetic mission in ancient Makkah, where he lived for a period of thirteen years after receiving his prophethood. During this period, his opponents repeatedly indulged in acts of persecution and violence. But the Prophet of Islam and his

companions unilaterally tolerated all such acts of gross injustice. The emigration from Makkah to Medina was also a form of tolerance and avoidance, resorted to by the Prophet in order to avoid clashing with his opponents.

One example of this avoidance of armed confrontation is that of the signing of the Hudaibiya peace treaty. When a pitched battle seemed imminent between the Prophet of Islam and his opponents, the Prophet successfully defused the situation by the initiation of peace negotiations, which continued for two weeks. During these negotiations, which took place at Hudaibiya near Makkah, the Prophet of Islam found the other party clinging obstinately to its demands. Therefore, the Prophet unilaterally accepted all the conditions of the enemy in order to arrive at a peaceful conclusion.

The purpose of this pact was to end tensions between the two parties and to maintain a normal atmosphere in order that the work of peaceful reconstruction might be performed — the actual goal of the mission of Islam. Immediately after the conclusion of the Hudaibiya peace treaty, the atmosphere did return to normal and all the constructive activities of Islam were resumed in full force.

The present world is so structured that conflicts inevitably occur between individuals. On such occasions, Islam tells us not to allow the conflict to escalate to the point of a violent confrontation. This is a policy of patience and avoidance. As a permanent principle, the Quran says:

Reconciliation is best.

(THE QURAN 4: 128)

That is, at the time of mutual conflict reconciliation should be resorted to in order to end the conflict. This is for the simple reason that, by adopting the path of conciliation, we can find opportunities to prevent our energy from being wasted in confrontational actions and to devote all this energy to constructive activities. It is this advantage of a conciliatory course which the Prophet of Islam recommended to his followers thus: "You should not desire confrontation with the enemy; you should ask God for peace." There is a verse in the Quran that says:

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

(THE QURAN 5: 64)

It was in this spirit of Islam that when the Prophet came into power in

Medina he did not start waging war in order to force people to surrender to him. Instead, he negotiated with tribes all over Arabia and ultimately brought about unity among them with a series of peace treaties.

If we make an in-depth study of the teachings of Islam we find that Islam wants to root out all those factors which lead to war. Why is war waged? There are two main causes. One, an attempt to annihilate the enemy. Second, to attain political power. There is no justification for war in Islam, to achieve either of these goals. With regard to the enemy, Islam teaches us to try to eliminate enmity — not the enemy.

The importance of peace in Islam is so great that we are commanded to ensure peace by bearing with all kinds of unpleasant situations.

According to the Quran, no enemy is everlastingly hostile. For in every enemy there lies a potential friend. Therefore, what the believer ought to do is to reach out through unilateral good behaviour to the man hidden within. By requiting good for evil, he should convert this enemy into a friend.

The Prophet of Islam was born in Makkah in 570 A.D and he attained prophethood in 610 A.D. During his 23-year period as a Prophet of God, he spent the first 13 years in Makkah and the last 10 years in Medina. Some verses of the Quran were revealed in Makkah and some verses were revealed in Medina. Now, what were his activities during this prophetic period?

He taught people by reciting verses of the Quran which said: 'Read in the name of your Lord...' and other such verses which were peaceful teachings, being non-militant in nature and ethical in value. He taught people how to pray, and to practice patience and tolerance even in the face of oppression and thus avoid conflict. He was a role model in that he showed that it was possible for a human being to work for the well-being of others without any ill-feeling, in spite of highly provocative circumstances.

All the tasks performed by the Prophet throughout his life were marked by the greatness which comes from always choosing a non-violent course of action. Setting this kind of example formed the greater part of the Prophet's actual mission. □

PEACE IN DIFFERENT RELIGIONS

PEACE being the greatest concern of man, all religions attach importance to it. Indeed, peace is the essence of all religions, the reason being that the objectives of religion can never be fulfilled without peace. The aims of every religion, in principle, are man's spiritual development and the transformation of each individual into a noble personality. This kind of instruction and enlightenment and training can never be imparted without a peaceful atmosphere.

Peace in Judaism

The history of Judaism goes back more than three thousand years. According to Jewish traditions, when the Israelites left Egypt and reached the Sinai desert, God gave them the fundamental ten commandments that were to govern their social existence. One of these was:

You shall not kill. (Exodus, 20:13)

This biblical commandment forbids all kinds of violence, whether individual or social, whether directed against one's own community or against another. It was revealed to Moses directly from God. According to Jewish tradition this injunction is in the nature of an absolute command.

There is another injunction of the Torah worth quoting in this connection. It embodies such moral teaching as is common to all religions, although differently expressed. The wording of the Torah is as follows:

What is hateful (or hurtful) to you, do not do to any other man.

In the context of peace, this teaching is very basic. Obviously, we shall not find anyone in this world who would like to be the victim of violence. Violence is abhorrent to everyone. This being the reality, it is essential that man should also abhor the perpetration of violence on others. In no circumstances should he indulge in violent activities against others. Undoubtedly this injunction is general in its application. It is addressed not only to individuals but also to the community as a whole. Just as a standard is set for individual behaviour, similarly a standard is set for social behaviour. Referring to this verse of the Torah, a Jewish scholar, has rightly observed:

“That is the whole of the Torah, the rest is but commentary.”

In the Torah, Isaiah, an Israelite prophet,
describes the world of justice.

In this most desirable world, people shall beat their swords
into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

(Isaiah 2:4)

This verse from the Torah shows that according to the Jewish religion, the ideal human society is one where people destroy their weapons; where war never takes place; where the building of life is done on the basis of peace rather than on violence.

This verse from the Torah is thus explained by a Jewish scholar: “It is not enough merely to keep in mind the negative admonition not to kill, but to transmute human energy and efforts into peaceful and constructive actions.”

Similarly, there is another verse from the Torah which is worthy of mention. It describes the blessed commandments of God:

“The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust
shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt nor
destroy in all my holy mountain,” says the Lord.

(Isaiah, 65:25)

In this quotation we are told in symbolic language what the desirable society of God should be like. It is a society where the weak and the powerful exist side by side without harming one another; where the common man enjoys the same rights as the so-called VIPs. It is a society where people can live peacefully without fearing any injury from others; where people find in others, not violence but peace.

Peace in Christianity

Jesus Christ was born two thousand years ago in Palestine. Today his followers are more numerous than those of any other religion. The teachings of Jesus Christ are enshrined in the New Testament. They show that Jesus Christ laid the greatest emphasis on God-worship, love of human beings, service of mankind, spiritual development, rising above materialism, treating others well, even if they do not reciprocate,

and so on. All these virtues, unrelated to war and violence, stem from the possession of a superior set of values. And all these values can be established in society by persuasion rather than coercion.

The teachings of Christ in the New Testament tell us clearly that peace was so important to him that he enjoined the establishment of peace at all costs. In one of his sermons, Christ observed:

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called the sons of God. (5: 9)

This shows that, according to the teachings of Jesus Christ, the most blessed task is to establish peace in the world, peace in family life, peace in social life, peace in national life, peace in international life. The following observation of Jesus Christ is perhaps a realization of this peaceful world:

Your kingdom come -
Your will be done on earth
as it is in heaven. (6: 9)

In this quotation from the New Testament, what is called the kingdom of God can also be thought of as the kingdom of Peace.

The teachings of Christ attach the greatest importance to love and good behaviour. This is expressed in one of his sayings in the Bible:

But I say to you who hear:
Love your enemies and do good
to those who hate you. (6: 27)

This means that you should love everyone, even your enemies. You should adopt a peaceful attitude towards everyone, even towards those who choose to be physically abusive. It is this unilateral good behaviour which has been thus symbolically expressed:

To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also.
And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods, do not ask them back. (6: 29-30)

Peace in Hinduism

Hinduism is based on the principle of non-dualism, which means that in this world, the Creator and the Creation are not two different entities.

It is rather the same reality which is manifested in different things and different beings in this world. According to this principle, a man and his fellow men are one and the same. There is no difference between one and the other.

This concept produces a sense of fellow-feeling for all living beings. It negates the principle of otherness. Indeed, the feeling of otherness simply disappears. This being so, committing violence or aggression against others is, in principle, like committing aggression against one's own self. It is this concept which is the ideological source of peace in Hinduism. The British historian Arnold Toynbee has called this a 'live and let live' concept of peace. That is, we should give peace to others and in exchange receive peace from them.

In the 20th century too, there is the great example of Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu reformer of world repute, who interpreted the *Bhagwad Gita* in the light of the principle of non-violence, and launched a full-fledged freedom movement entirely committed to this principle. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984) explains the degree to which Mahatma Gandhi was a pacifist: "Gandhi was the first to interpret *ahimsa* positively and in the sense of a social obligation." (13/ 847)

Tolerance is one of the basic principles of Hinduism. This concept of tolerance goes to the ultimate extent of encouraging belief in the truth of all religions. According to the *Gita*, each religious path leads towards the same destination: the truth. When Swami Vivekananda said, 'Every religion is true,' he correctly echoed Hindu belief. In Hinduism each religious tradition can be given equal recognition. Under the heading of 'Hinduism', the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* aptly states:

In principle, Hinduism incorporates all forms of belief and worship without necessitating the selection or elimination of any. (8/ 888)

This general concept of tolerance, in other words, instructs us to live in peace with others. One should not believe in adopting a violent manner towards anyone. Just as we regard ourselves to be right, we should likewise regard others to be right. In principle, violence against any human group is unlawful.

Peace in Buddhism

Unlike other religions, Buddhism does not entertain belief in God as a central concept. Instead, the Buddhist system is grounded on a set

of moral principles. The basis of Buddhism may be called a moral philosophy, or an ethical way of life.

The life of Gautam Buddha (Siddharth Gautam), the founder of Buddhism, is historically not well authenticated, but it is believed that he was born in north India around 560 B.C. When he attained adulthood, he happened to see some scenes of human misery. Since he was a sensitive person, he began to ponder over the reason for pain and suffering. He then set himself the goal of ending pain and suffering in human life. After a long period of deep reflection and meditation, he formulated certain moral principles. Since his chief objective in life was to end human misery, he attached the greatest importance to the fact that man should free himself from all kinds of desires for it is these desires that lead man into all kinds of evils, including violence. The principles he set forth to govern human life are as follows:

One must renounce all desires and all thoughts of lust, bitterness, and cruelty. One must harm no living creature. One must abstain from all killing. One must work in an occupation that benefits others and harms no one.

In principle, there is no place for violence in Buddhism for the aim of Buddhism is basically personal reform and personal reform can come about only by striving hard against one's own self, rather than by committing aggression against others. It would be correct to say that violence is alien to the Buddhist scheme of things. Ideologically, Buddhism has no direct relation with violence.

Peace in Islam

Peace is contained in the meaning of the very word 'Islam' itself. The root of the word 'Islam' is *silim*, which means 'peace'. And so, Islam means a religion of peace. According to a *hadith* report (recorded in the Sahih al-Bukhari), the Prophet remarked that peace is part of Islam. Likewise, the Prophet is reported to have declared that a Muslim is he from whose tongue and hands people live safely. In other words, a Muslim in the true sense of the word is a person who does not harm anyone by his or her words or deeds.

Among God's various names or attributes mentioned in the Quran is *As-Salam*, or 'The Source of Peace'. That is to say, God is Peace. Similarly, in a *hadith* report recorded in the Sahih al-Bukhari, the Prophet mentioned that God Himself is Peace. According to Islam, heaven is

the ideal abode for Man, and the Quran (10: 25) refers to heaven as *dar us-salam* or the 'Home of Peace'. Elsewhere, the Quran (56: 26) says that the inhabitants of heaven will greet each other saying, 'Peace! Peace!' In other words, life in heaven will be entirely peaceful.

'Reconciliation is best', the Quran (4: 128) tells us. This means that reconciliation is, from the point of view of results, the better option. According to the Law of Nature that God has devised, reconciliation leads to successes and achievements that are simply impossible through violent means.

The Quran is, without doubt, a book of peace. It is not a book of violence and war. All the statements of the Quran are, directly or indirectly, related to peace. The very first phrase in the Quran is: *Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim*, which means, 'In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.' In other words, the highest attribute of the God who has sent this book is mercy, and this book is an expression of this attribute of His mercy.

Those who regard the Quran as God's Book can be considered to be true believers only when, abiding by the teachings of the Quran, they become fully and completely peace-loving. Under no conditions whatsoever should they take to the path of violence.

The fact is that in Islam, peace is the rule. The entire range of Islamic teachings and the practical life of the Prophet testify to this. □



Time

*Everyone's life is like a melting piece of ice.
Everyone is constantly losing his time.*

*In only a few years' time,
we will face death.*

*Everyone should undertake a serious planning of his time
in order to avail properly of his pre-death period.*

INTER-FAITH HARMONY

ACROSS much of the world today, people are faced with what for many is a new phenomenon — of people from different religious backgrounds living together. Consequently, many conferences and seminars have been held on this subject, devoted to discussing inter-faith harmony. But despite the large number of such conferences and seminars, the actual problem remains just as it was. The fact is that conferences and seminars of this sort do little, if anything, to achieve social unity at any level.

The reason for their failure is that their underlying perspective and analysis is itself not proper. The truth is that the problem that they seek to address does not have anything to do with inter-faith harmony. Rather, it is basically about the question of harmony between, and among, people of faith, or believers in different faiths.

The 'unity of faiths' and 'social unity of people of different faiths' are two different and distinct issues.

In other words, the problem is basically social, rather than theological. And so, to solve the problem, we need to discover an appropriate formula for social unity between people of different faiths. The issue of religious unity is a different question, which has no relationship with the issue of social unity.

There is no need for us to invent a new formula to promote unity between people of diverse faiths. We simply need to go back to the time-tested formula of peaceful coexistence. According to this formula, people of different faiths respect each other and unite together for the larger societal interests and welfare.

The fact is that the 'unity of faiths' and 'social unity of people of different faiths' are two different and distinct issues, and inter-community harmony can only be promoted by observing that distinction. □



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**

Believers, spend out of what We have given you, before the Day comes when there will be neither trading, friendship nor intercession. Truly, it is those who deny the truth who are the wrongdoers 2:254

Only one who spends for the cause of God finds God. When he finds Him, he comes into possession of a light which leads him on to the straight and undeviating path to paradise—the final destination of a true believer. On the other hand, one who wants God without paying this price, remains in darkness forever.

'Spending for God's cause' relates here to any kind of sacrifice made for the sake of God, and not merely to spending one's wealth: for instance, devoting one's life to the cause of God; sacrificing one's material interests and considerations to go ahead along God's path. When one accepts an ideology at the cost of sacrifice, it shows that one is sincere about it. Sincerity is a matter of great importance, for, regardless of the issue, it is only when one is sincere that one can delve deeply into the subject; then all its secrets are laid bare before one. It is this element of sincerity that enables a real relationship to be created between the man and his goal. In consequence, all the aspects of that goal are revealed to him.

God: there is no deity save Him, the Living, the Eternal One. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. To Him belong whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. Who can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows all that is before them and all that is behind them. They can grasp only that part of His knowledge which He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth;

and their upholding does not weary Him. He is the Sublime, the Almighty One! 2: 255

There shall be no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error. But whoever refuses to be led by Satan and believes in God has grasped the strong handhold that will never break. God is all hearing and all knowing. 2: 256

God is the patron of the faithful. He leads them from darkness to the light. As for those who deny the truth, their supporter is Satan, who brings them out of light into darkness. They are the heirs of the Fire, and there they will remain forever. 2: 257

Unlike sincere devotees, there are some who never accept religion at the cost of the surrender of their being. They are never serious in matters of religion, and as a result believe that intercession by certain religious seers or the performance of certain rituals or the observance of certain forms is enough to earn salvation in the Hereafter. Due to their insincerity about the Hereafter, they fail to understand that Doomsday is the Day of the manifestation of God's power and majesty. Hoping that the performance of certain superficial rituals might earn them God Almighty's pleasure is indeed an underestimation of God's divinity. This only increases their sinfulness in the eyes of God. The truth comes to one in the form of arguments, and one who is not sincere summarily rejects them. This is one of Satan's temptations. Guidance comes only to those who scrupulously resist Satan's temptations and, recognizing the divine arguments, wholeheartedly concur in them. □



Failure, a greater stimulus than Success

Failure is actually a blessing. It makes you more sincere.

It is an experience which increases your maturity.

Indeed, failure makes you a stronger person.

In terms of intellectual achievement,

failure can be a greater stimulus than success.

It is the gateway to super success.

ASK MAULANA

How should one respond to conspiracies?

THE Quran tells us, 'If you persevere and fear God, their designs will never harm you in the least'. (THE QURAN 3: 120)



This Quranic verse indicates a very important fact of life. And that is that the real issue or concern for individuals or groups is not of whether or not they have enemies who might be conspiring against them. Rather, the basic issue is that they lack sufficient *sabr* or patient steadfastness and *taqwa* or piety or God-awareness to cause any conspiracies against them to fail. If conspiracies can be likened to the rain, then patient steadfastness and God-consciousness are like a strong roof. Those who have not bothered to make a roof over the house will, naturally, get wet in the rain, while not a drop will touch those who have built a roof.

This world runs on the principle of competition. And so, it is but natural that sometimes friction will develop between individuals and groups, which may later assume the form of conspiracies against each other. Whenever something like this happens, one should take it not as an enemy's conspiracy but, rather, as an expression of a basic law of Nature. To think of a conspiracy as an action of an enemy will instigate one to take to violence. In contrast, if we take it to be a result of a basic law of Nature, we will nurture a way of thinking that will help us take wise steps to avoid falling prey to such conspiracies — just as a wise man does not demonstrate against the rain, but, rather, builds a roof over his house to save himself from getting wet.

Why has God given Man freedom?

Unlike any other creature in the Universe, man is free in this world. God has not placed any curbs on him. But this freedom is for the purpose of putting man to the test, and is not meant to encourage him to lead a life of permissiveness, like the animals and then just depart from this world one day. Rather its purpose is that man should lead a morally upright life of his own free will, thus demonstrating that he is of the highest moral character.

One who conducts himself in this manner should be reckoned as God's special servant who, without any apparent compulsion, chose to be a man of principle; who, without being subjected to any external force, did of his own free will what his Lord would have desired. This liberty accorded to man gives him the opportunity to gain credit for being the most superior of all God's creatures.

All the things in this world are God's subjects. The stars and satellites rotate in space entirely at their Lord's bidding. Trees, rivers, mountains, and all other such natural phenomena function according to the unchangeable ways of God laid down by Him in advance. Similarly, the animals follow exactly those instincts instilled in their species as a matter of Divine Will. Man is the only creature who has been given, exceptionally, the gift of power and freedom.

This freedom has opened doors of two kinds for man, one leading to success and the other to failure. If on receiving freedom an individual becomes arrogant and insolent, it will mean that he has failed the test.

But if on the other hand, he remains modest and humble, bowing to his Lord's will on all occasions, he will have made the right use of his God-given freedom: he will, without any compulsion, have bound himself by divine principles. One who chooses this course will succeed in the test of freedom. He will be handsomely rewarded by God as no other creature. Held to be the chosen servant of God, he will remain in an everlasting state of blissfulness and blessedness. □



An advertisement for 'Spirit of Islam Online'. On the left, a laptop is shown with its screen displaying an article titled 'THE GREATER JIHAD'. The article text is partially visible, starting with 'ISLAM is the religion of peace...' and 'The basic aim of Islam is to establish an idealized revolution in the minds of men...'. To the right of the laptop, the text 'NOW ACCESS SPIRIT OF ISLAM ONLINE' is displayed in a large, white, serif font. Below this text is a hand cursor icon pointing upwards. At the bottom right, the website address 'www.spiritofislam.co.in' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. The entire advertisement is set against a dark, gradient background.

Glossary

Abu Dawud, compiler of the sayings of the Prophet Abu Dawud Sulaiman bin al ashath alsajastani (817-889).

ahimsa, non-violence

anf, violence

As-Salam, the 'Source of Peace'.

Bhagvad Gita, a 700-verse scripture that is part of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*.

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim, 'In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.'

dar us-salam, Home of Peace

dua, supplication

fasad, spreading corruption, rebellion, dissension, mischief and disorder across society.

Fath-ul-Bari, a famous commentary of Sahih Bukhari by Shihabuddin ibn Al Hajar al Asqalani (died 1448).

Hadith, sayings and deeds of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam.

Kabah, the sacred house of God built originally by prophets, Abraham

and Ismael.

kalima-e-sawa, common ground

nafs ammara, ego

nafs lawwama, conscience

rifq, gentleness

sabr, patience

Sahih Bukhari, most authentic *Hadith* collection by Muhammad bin Ismail Al-Bukhari (810-870).

Seerah, also *Seerath*; Prophet's biography.

Seerath Ibn Kathir, a book on the life of the prophet written by Abul Fidaa Ismail bin Umer bin Kathir (700-774).

shukr, thanksgiving; acknowledgement

silm, peace

Sunnah, practice and teachings of Prophet Muhammad.

tafakkur, contemplation

taqwa, piety

tawheed, monotheism or, oneness of God.



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