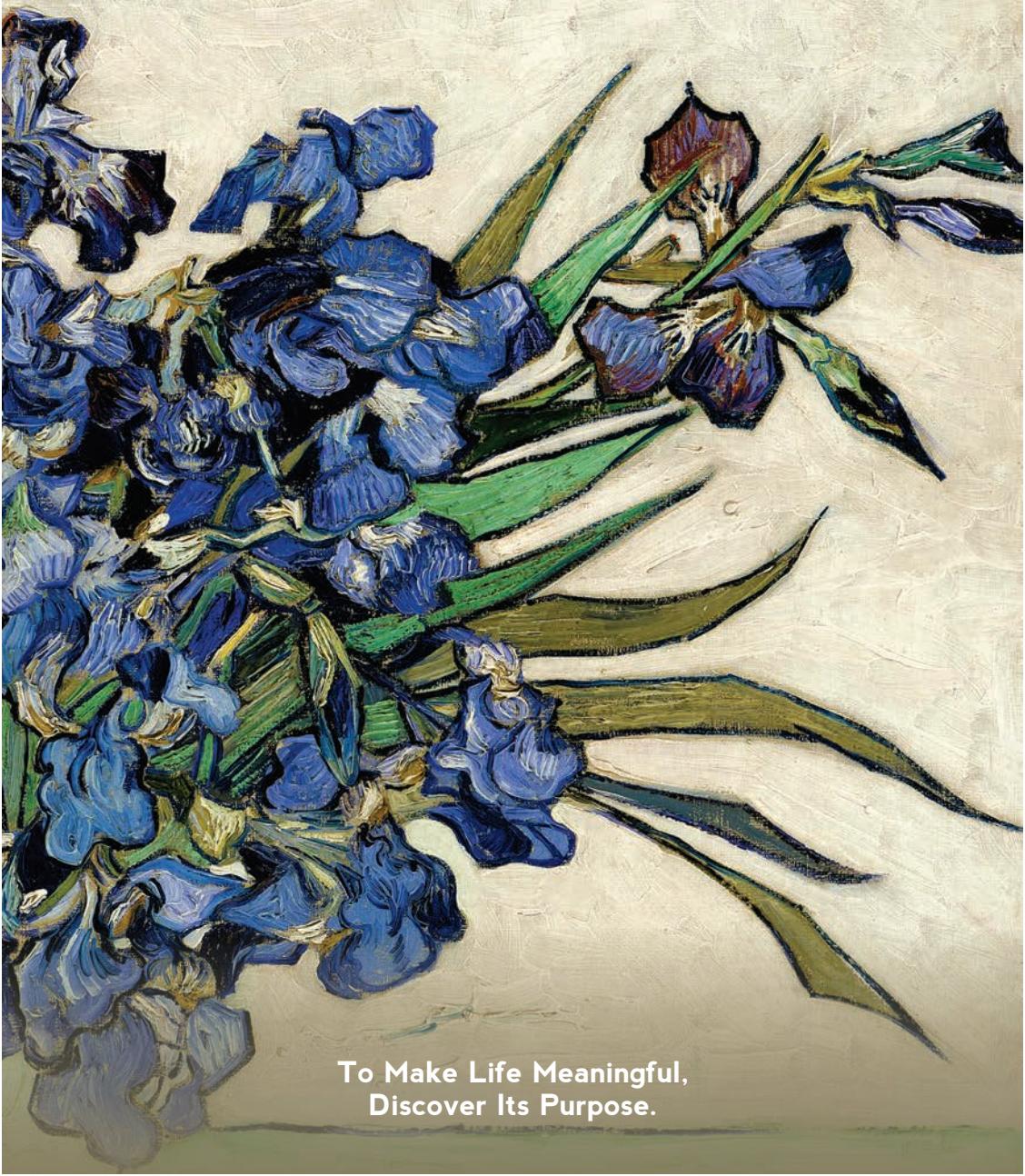


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SPIRIT OF ISLAM



To Make Life Meaningful,
Discover Its Purpose.

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Spiritual Living

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

ISSUE 15, MARCH 2014

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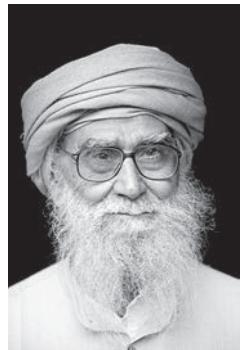
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK

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 Muslims¹. His books have been translated into sixteen languages and are part of university curricula in six countries. He is the founder of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality based in New Delhi.



THE VALUE OF A HUMAN BEING

SUNANDA Pushkar, an Indian woman, died on 17th January 2014 due to a reported overdose of sedatives. She was 52. She was so highly distinguished that a commentator expressed his overwhelming impression of her in these words: 'Sunanda Pushkar: The woman whose presence you couldn't ignore'.

There are thousands of such cases where people become depressed, develop tension and lose their peace of mind. In extreme cases of despair, some of them even commit suicide. It is common for people to turn negative when they undergo an unwanted experience; they forget the 99% positive things they still have in their life and let the negative 1% overwhelm them. Men and women of this kind are of every sort — rich and poor, powerful and powerless, stupid and brilliant, dull and charismatic.

Why this sad state of affairs? The reason is that people know what others are but they fail to discover what they themselves are. The fact is that every person is born as a hero but his pessimistic way of thinking makes him valueless in his own eyes. This is all a matter of one's way of thinking. Change your thinking, and you will discover your true value.

Man is a special creature; unique in the whole universe. He has been endowed with superior qualities by the Creator that no other creature

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

possesses. There are numerous stars and planets in space, abundant species of animals, majestic mountains, vast oceans and so many other forms of creation but no creature can match up to man!

This is one aspect of the human personality. Another exceptional characteristic feature of mankind is that man can think. By applying his mind, he can personalise all the bounties given by the Creator. The Quran observes:

He has subjected whatever is in heaven and
whatever is on the earth to you (man).

THE QURAN 45: 13

This is a matter of great blessing, and modern science has confirmed this by discovering that this universe is a custom-made universe.

There are verses in the Quran that tell man to do *Shukr-e Kaseer* (to express much gratitude to God). This form of *Shukr* (gratefulness) is not in the form of simply repeating certain words of praise or thanks. It is an expression of a certain state of being.

How can one attain this level of gratefulness?

The formula is very simple: first you have to discover the universal bounties of God Almighty upon man, and then you have to reflect on what these mean to you personally. Relate to these divine bounties as if they were created especially for you. Cherish the personal benefits that you derive from them. Personalise them. It is this method of thinking that inculcates the spirit which is mentioned in the Quran as *Shukr-e Kaseer*.

If you personalise all these bounties in this way, you will feel overwhelmed with a sense of enormous gratitude that could be called thrilling *shukr*. It may be so great that you would feel that you have no words to express your feelings, that even all the words of dictionary in every language are insufficient to express your inner feeling of *shukr* or gratefulness. It is this great sense of gratefulness which is referred to in the Quran as *Shukr-e Kaseer*. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
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DESIRE FOR PEACE

A Believer's Pursuit

A BELIEVER is necessarily a lover of peace. In his mind, faith and a desire for peace are so closely interlinked that, regardless of the circumstances, he will strive to the utmost for the maintenance of peace. He will bear the loss of anything else, but the loss of peace he will not endure.

The life that the true believer desires in this world can be lived only in the propitious atmosphere which flowers in conditions of peace. Conditions of unrest breed a negative atmosphere, which to a true believer is abhorrent.

The maintaining of peace requires a certain kind of sacrifice. When conditions become disturbed, the believer should consider positive action instead of reaction.

But if peace is to be maintained, it calls for a certain kind of sacrifice. That is, when conditions become disturbed, the believer should consider positive action instead of reaction. He must suffer all the harm and injustice done to him without making any attempt either to retaliate or to bring the miscreants to book, so that a state of peace will continue to prevail. The believer has to be willing to pay this price so that his pursuance of constructive ends should proceed unhampered.

The believer is like a flower in the garden of nature. Just as a hot wind will shrivel up a bloom and cause it to die, so, too, will constant friction distract the believer from achieving positive goals. And just as a cool breeze will enable the flower to retain its beauty for its natural life-span, so, too, will a peaceful atmosphere enable the believer to fulfil the obligations of worship in a spirit of great serenity. Peace is thus central to the life of the believer.

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

A LESSON FROM PROPHET ADAM

Angelic Method

THE Quran relates that when God created Adam, there were two other creatures present — the angels and the *jinns*. God ordered the angels and the *jinns* to bow down before Adam. The angels obeyed this commandment of God, but Satan, who was the head of the *jinns*, refused to obey this order. And so he became a rebel against God.

This was the first incident of revolt against authority in human history. This political revolt, or the ‘politics of opposition’, is undoubtedly the practice of Satan. To focus on one’s work without confronting the authorities is the method of the angels. And confronting the authorities and agitating and making a big hue and cry, fired by the ‘politics of opposition’, is the method of Satan.

Strangely, this negative politics of Satan has prevailed throughout almost the whole of human history. The direct result of this negative politics is that instead of becoming a history of construction, human history became a long tale of destruction.

The 'politics of patience' is not a politics of defeat.

Why is it that almost the whole of human history turned into a history of this sort of Satanic politics? The reason for this is that the Creator has given man an exceptional capability, and that is the ego. It is actually the ego that provides man a special status in the whole of the cosmos.

There are two aspects of the ego — the positive and the negative. In collective life, be it within the family or in the wider society, it always happens that people face experiences that hurt their egos. On such occasions, if a person can control himself — if he can properly handle the issue of ‘ego management’ — he would have used his ego, as it were, in a positive or proper manner. But if when his ego is provoked he lets it affect his entire personality, he will create immense problems for himself, and for others, too. He will have failed in the art of ‘ego management’ by allowing negativity to overcome him.

This issue of managing the ego when one is faced with some provocation or the other is something that everyone has to deal with. When this

problem occurs in the political sphere and one fails to manage one's ego properly, it triggers off what is called the 'politics of opposition'. This is what challenging the political authorities is about. Because most people fail in the examination of 'ego management', almost the whole of human history presents a picture of deadly political destruction.

Confronting the authorities and agitating, fired by the 'politics of opposition' is the method of Satan.

The solution to this problem is explained in the Quran and *Hadith* in terms of what can be called the 'politics of patience' or *sabr*. The 'politics of patience' is not politics of defeat. It is but another name for political status-quoism — that is to say, to accept, in practical terms, the status quo as far as the issue of political power is concerned, and without confronting the political authorities, to avail the opportunities present in the non-political sphere.

It is this formula that is expressed in a *Hadith*, according to which the Prophet indicated: God grants to non-violence what He does not grant to violence. □



Restraint in Adversity

Patience is the exercise of restraint in trying situations.

It is a virtue, which enables the individual to proceed towards worthy goals, not deflected by adverse circumstances or repeated provocations.

If he allows himself to become upset by opposition, taunts or other kinds of unpleasantness, he will never reach his goal.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

A Proof In Creation

WHEN a human being exists, why cannot God exist? When air and water, trees and stones, moon and stars exist, why should the existence of their Creator be doubted? The truth is that the existence of the creation is proof of the act of creation. And the presence of man is proof of the fact that there exists such a Creator as can see and hear, think and bring things into existence.

God, of course, is not visible to the naked eye. But there is no doubt that many of the things existing in this world cannot be seen either. Then why is it necessary to see God, physically, in order to believe in Him?

The presence of man is proof of the fact that there exists such a Creator as can see and hear, think and bring things into existence.

The stars twinkle in the sky. The layman thinks that he is looking at the stars, whereas, strictly speaking, from the scientific point of view, this is not true. When we are looking at the stars, we are not actually looking directly at them, but at the light which emanated from them millions of years ago, and which has only now become visible to our eyes.

The same is true of many things in this world. All those things which man 'sees' in this world are viewed by him indirectly. There is little that man can see directly, because of his present limitations.

When all the things of this world are accepted on the basis of indirect evidence, why is it that the presence of God should not be accepted on the same basis?

The fact is that God is as much a proven fact as any other phenomenon in this world. Everything in this world is proven on the basis of indirect evidence. Everything in this world is known by its effect. Precisely of the same nature is the existence of God.

It is true, of course, that God is not to be seen directly with our eyes. But God is certainly visible through His signs. And, undoubtedly, this is enough scientific proof of God's existence. □

THE ISLAMIC WAY OF LIFE

Worshipping God and Doing Good to Man

THE Islamic way of life is, to put it briefly, a God-oriented life. The greatest concern of a Muslim is God Almighty. The focus of his whole life is *Akhirah* (the Hereafter), which is the ideal world of God. He obeys divine injunctions in every aspect of his life. His life becomes a practical expression of this Quranic verse:

We take on God's own dye. Who has a better dye than God's?
We worship Him alone.

THE QURAN 2: 138

Taking on 'God's dye' means being of a 'godly character' in all aspects of one's life, personal as well as social, exemplified in one's thoughts, words and deeds. This 'godly' character is personified in a Muslim individual whose words and deeds in family matters, or dealings with other members of society or with regard to earning a livelihood, always seem to be distinguishably 'dyed' in the divine hue.

A believer sees all of humanity as his family and the entire universe as his abode.

IMAN (Faith)

By accepting *iman*, one enters the fold of Islam. But *iman* is not simply the verbal recitation of the *Kalima*, the creed of Islam. According to the Quran, it is *ma'arifah* (THE QURAN 5: 83), that is realization. Realization of truth is the door to Islam. When one discovers that Islam is truly God's religion and that it is the same truth that one has been seeking all along, one undergoes a unique experience of realization which is known in Islamic terminology as *ma'arifah*.

Making any kind of discovery revolutionizes a person's life, but when this discovery is of the realities of our existence leading to an intellectual transformation, it becomes synonymous with the emergence of a new life for the individual.

This kind of intellectual revolution is no simple event. It turns a man into a superman, and gives him the greatest mission of his life. It regulates his life in such a way that no part of it remains unaffected. He

begins to see all of humanity as his family and the entire universe as his abode. Such a discoverer becomes a maker of history, rather than a product of it.

This is the stuff of *iman*. And it was this *iman* which enabled the Prophet and his companions to produce, as one historian remarked on the expansion of Islam, "the most miraculous of all miracles".

IBADAH (Worship)

Ibadah, or worship, is not simply the observation of a set of rituals. It is a profound kind of religious experience. In fact, it is the physical and spiritual expression of the human personality on a higher plane of consciousness.

Islamic morality is based on the formula of unilateral and unconditional positive conduct: 'Do good to others, even if they are not doing good to you.'

Addressing man, the Quran says, "Prostrate yourself in adoration and bring yourself closer (to God)" (THE QURAN 96: 19). The Prophet Muhammad was once asked 'What is the essence of *ibadah*?' He replied: 'The worship of God as though you are seeing Him. Or if you are not seeing Him, He is seeing you.'

There are two kinds of worship in Islam. The first kind of worship has been prescribed at specified times — these include the five daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan and pilgrimage or Haj. These forms of devotion are among what are called the 'pillars of Islam'. Then there are other forms of worship, consisting of *dhikr* and *fikr* (THE QURAN 3: 191), which means to remember God with feelings of fear and love. This second form of worship aims at mental activation of the human soul so that one may be enabled to see God's signs in everything one comes across in one's daily life. This is the worship which is obligatory for every Muslim at all times.

MORALITY

What is morality? It is to live among one's fellow men according to the moral teachings of Islam. The essence of Islamic morality is set forth in a *Hadith* report as follows: "Behave with others as you would like them to behave towards you" (Al-Bukhari). By nature, everyone knows of what

sort of conduct he approves and of what sort he disapproves. So, to follow this generally accepted moral criterion in relation to others is essentially Islamic morality.

Islam differentiates between social manners, on the one hand, and social character, on the other. Social manners are based on the principle 'Do as they do'. But Islamic morality is based on the formula of unilateral and unconditional positive conduct: 'Do good to others, even if they are not doing good to you.'

If one is good in relation to other human beings, it will serve as evidence that one also is good in relation to God.

The Quran portrays Muslims as individuals who 'repel evil with good' (THE QURAN 28: 54).

Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad advised a Muslim to 'do good to those who harm you' (at-Tirmidhi). The Prophet Muhammad was the true embodiment of the finest moral character. Addressing the Prophet, the Quran declares: 'Surely you have a sublime character' (THE QURAN 68: 4).

Such great importance has been given in Islam to moral character that it has been set up as a criterion by which to judge all other Islamic virtues. If one is good in relation to other human beings, it will serve as evidence that one is also good in relation to God.

The Prophet Muhammad puts it thus:

One who is not grateful to man cannot
be grateful to God either (Al-Bayhaqi).

SOCIAL RELATIONS

Individual Responsibility

To preserve society from instability and to keep it in a perpetually reformed state, Islam has given a basic commandment, which has been mentioned at many places in the Quran. One such Quranic verse reads: "(Believers are those)... who enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil" (9: 112). The same point has also been repeatedly made in a number of traditions of the Prophet, such as the following: "A believer ought to open the gate of good and close the door of evil" (Musnad Ahmad).

This commandment has been misrepresented by certain self-styled advocates of Islamic revolution as being political in nature. But this is not so. It is entirely non-political. It only indicates that every member of society should have a strong sense of responsibility towards society. No one should remain indifferent on seeing the perpetration of evil or injustice. He should feel the pain of others in his own heart. When one sees someone engaged in calumny and slander of others, he should attempt to stop him from doing so.

Every member of society should consider the upholding of virtue to be an essential duty. The greatest concern of every individual should be to see that goodness flourishes in society and that evils are uprooted from it. This task of enjoining good and forbidding evil has to be performed with utmost gentleness and well-wishing, not with harshness and violence. That is why this social responsibility has been linked with acts of worship in Islam.

Family Life

A sane society, from the Islamic point of view, is but an extension of a sane family. Human society at large is nothing other than a single family gradually extended throughout history. That is why Islam has greatly emphasized the significance of family life being disciplined and well-organized so that it may play its part in maintaining social stability.

The task of enjoining good and forbidding evil has to be performed with utmost gentleness and well-wishing, not with harshness and violence.

A family begins when a male and a female decide as members of society to live together under one roof. However, Islam does not allow such a relationship between a man and a woman, unless it is based on a legitimate marital contract, which is basically meant to be a guarantee of a lifelong partnership of rights and duties, and not merely a temporary entertainment. Hence, there is no room in Islam for what is known as pre-marital or extra-marital affairs between the two sexes.

Through the institution of marriage Islam aims at building a society free from anarchy, instability, indecency, violence and crime. Marriage, when conducted and maintained on the lines laid down in the Quran and the *Sunnah*, provides an organised unit in the form of a home. In this way, successive generations are brought up and nurtured physically, morally

and mentally in a healthy atmosphere and under the supervision of loving and concerned parents. This training at home helps children enter society equipped with a deep sense of responsibility, respect for human values and other qualities, such as sincerity, which are essential for the better construction and development of any social system. A society composed of such homes or training units where these values are embodied will never suffer from the chaos and destructive instabilities from which modern societies are suffering nowadays.

To attain inner peace and real happiness, one has to remain content with what one has been able to earn independently and lawfully.

Guidelines for a healthy, happy and meaningful marital life, along with the rights and duties of parents and other members of the family, occupy considerable space in both the Quran and *Hadith*. A few references in this regard are given below:

1. And your Lord has commanded that you should worship none but Him, and show goodness to your parents. If either or both of them attain old age with you, show them no sign of impatience and do not rebuke them, but always speak gently to them and treat them with humility and tenderness and say: 'O my Lord! have mercy on them as they raised me up when I was little' (THE QURAN 17: 23-24).
2. No parents have ever given to their children any gift better than a good moral education (Al-Adab al-Mufrad).
3. Live with them (spouses) in accordance with what is fair and kind; if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike something which God might make a source of abundant good for you (THE QURAN 4: 19).

Legitimate Livelihood

Many social evils can be directly attributed to some members of society having an insufficient means of livelihood or others having an excess of wealth. Islam urges that one should earn one's livelihood by all possible but lawful means, so that one's essential needs are properly met and one does not remain dependent on others. According to the Quran and *Hadith*, traits like greed and the desire for more, niggardliness, holding money back to centralize it in one or a few hands, are the main roots of criminal and destructive tendencies in human society. That is why

virtues such as contentment, moderation, simplicity, altruism, charity and sharing one's happiness with others are highly recommended in Islam. Conversely, vices like extravagance, selfishness, monopolistic practices, exploitation, usury and all unfair means of money-making are strongly condemned and prohibited.

How is one to earn a livelihood in accordance with the Islamic way of life? The answer to this question may be summed up in the following points:

Avoidance of transgression: God Almighty has declared in the Quran:

Eat of the good things we have given for your sustenance, and
do not transgress with respect to them.

THE QURAN 20: 81

Self-reliance: One should try one's utmost to earn one's daily bread by one's own efforts, without being dependent on anybody else. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said repeatedly: "The best food one has ever had is that which one has earned with one's own hands" (Abu Dawud).

Charity, and avoidance of niggardliness: When one is fortunate enough to earn more than it takes to meet one's own needs, one should not be parsimonious with one's earnings. Instead, one should extend a supporting hand to less fortunate or destitute members of society. Otherwise, one's wealth will become a curse for oneself rather than a blessing.

Contentment: To attain inner peace and real happiness, one has to remain content with what one has been able to earn independently and lawfully. The Prophet says in this respect: "Indeed he has attained eternal success and prosperity who accepted Islam, and God has filled his heart with contentment towards whatever he was given". He also said: "A little that suffices is much better than a surfeit that causes disturbance" (Al-Bayhaqi).

Simplicity: Last, but not least, an important Islamic principle concerning one's livelihood is simplicity. The Prophet's own life style was a unique example of simplicity. In one of his sayings he has even considered it one of the signs of true faith (Ibn Majah). In another *Hadith*, he warns his companions: "Stay away from the luxurious life. For the servants of God do not indulge in luxury" (Musnad Ahmad). □

LEARNING FROM NATURE

Dealing With Opponents

ANIMALS face two very big challenges: finding food, and defending themselves. Animals have enemies in the animal world, and so every animal has to arrange for its protection. The diverse methods that animals use to protect themselves hold great significance for human beings, because these methods are natural methods, bestowed by God. Nature teaches these methods to animals directly. It is as if they are students who have received this training in the school of Nature. Their ways of acting and reacting are lessons that Nature has schooled them in. These methods testify to the Creator who made them.

Consider some examples in this regard.

Elephants and tigers are among the largest of animals. If an elephant and a tiger clash, it can cause the death of both. They both are well aware of this, and so they always try to avoid each other. It is very rare that they allow themselves to enter into a conflict.

A war in which the contending parties do not have the power to eliminate each other always ends in mutual destruction. Tigers and elephants know this, and they act accordingly.

One of the best responses amongst mammals before danger from a more powerful enemy is to run away. Rabbits, deer and many other mammals use speed as a very effective means of escaping predators. Thus saving themselves, they are free to carry on their constructive activities.

Another common defence mechanism amongst animals is camouflage or protective coloration. By blending with the environment these animals avoid detection from their predators.

The opossum has an effective method of protecting itself from harm. It feigns death when threatened; it collapses to the ground, drools as if very ill, and then remains motionless, with its mouth open and teeth bared.

Insects such as the millipede curl up and freeze motionless on touch. This is the primary defence mechanism it uses to protect itself from its enemies. Even some mammals such as the pangolin when threatened

coil into a ball so tight that it is almost impossible to unroll.

Animals that live in burrows constantly face the threat of enemies entering their homes. That is why such animals construct their burrows with a second tunnel opening which they can use to escape in emergency situations such as when they find a predator has entered their homes.

The diverse methods of protection that Nature has schooled animals in hold important lessons for humans.

These diverse methods of protection that Nature has schooled animals in hold important lessons for humans. For humans, too, the best policy to adopt vis-à-vis their opponents is to save themselves from directly clashing with them, and, instead, to try to move ahead by avoiding confrontation. One's opponent should not get the opportunity to feel that one is interfering in his domain. If one happens to confront one's opponent, one should appear to be inactive, in this way saving oneself from his aggression. Or, one can keep oneself carefully confined to one's own domain, and, in this way, convince one's opponent that one will not cause him any harm.

Animals did not invent these above-cited methods of protection by themselves. It was God who taught these to them. These methods have Divine sanction. They are not a form or expression of cowardice. Rather, they indicate a very necessary pragmatism. They teach us humans that we, too, should avoid unnecessary confrontation with others, and, instead, should focus on our own growth.

Some animals roam about in search of fodder; others in search of their mates. Some busily run around building their homes. Some hunt for food for their babies. While engaged in these and other such tasks, they may suddenly confront an enemy. If they enter into a fight with them, the work that they had set out to do would be completely disrupted. That is why all animals abstain from direct confrontation with their enemies, unless they find themselves in a situation where they feel absolutely compelled to do so. In order to continue their own constructive work, they simply avoid conflict and move ahead.

Animals use this wise approach to dealing with opponents on the basis of instinct. Humans must use the very same approach, but based on conscious choice and awareness. □

FROM THE SPIRITUAL TREE

There is a tree beside my house. I call it the 'Spiritual Tree'. I derive spiritual inspiration from it. A tree is an ever-growing being that was initially a seed possessing the potential of becoming a full-grown tree. A seed takes food from the universe around it and then grows into a tree. The same is true with spirituality, the desire for which is intrinsic to, and an integral part of, the very nature of, every human being. To realize this spirituality, Man must derive spiritual food from the universe around him. A tree converts carbon-dioxide into oxygen; a spiritual person is one who can take positive lessons from negative situations. From this perspective, a tree is an embodiment of a spiritual personality. — Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



INTROSPECTION

If from a vessel containing water a single drop is found to be brackish, it means that all of the liquid is undrinkable. We need sample only of one drop to know with certainty what the rest will be like. Much the same is true of the human personality. It is like an over-brimming vessel, which keeps on shedding drops for other people to savour, to find sweet or brackish as the case may be. Small instances of an individual's behaviour and quite short interludes in his company are generally sufficient to tell us what his overall personality is like.

**It is only he who has learned the art of
moral introspection who will, in the long run,
prove himself a person of inviolable integrity.**

A thoughtless remark, an unfair manoeuvre, a failure to give much-needed sympathy or support, a devious transaction — all these are the plain indicators, like those brackish drops of water from the larger vessel, which indicate the lack of integrity or callousness of the person you are dealing with.

The human personality has the same homogeneity as water. A single human weakness cannot therefore be considered in isolation, as if it were an exception. It has to be looked upon as being representative of the entire personality. If an individual proves unreliable in one matter, he is likely to evince the same unreliability in other matters; if he is guilty of untrustworthiness on one occasion, the chances are that this trait will show up time and time again.

There is only one kind of person who is an exception to that rule, and that is the one who subjects his own behaviour to constant re-appraisal, who is continually scrutinizing himself for weaknesses and faults and who, once having found such faults, wastes no time in rooting them out.

If an individual proves unreliable in one matter, he is likely to evince the same unreliability in other matters.

A man who has made a mistake can completely erase the marks of what is an unfortunate experience for others by admitting his mistake and begging forgiveness. Some people are pricked by their consciences, but do nothing to assuage the ruffled feelings of others, thinking that to do so would be sheer weakness and would mean a loss of face.

Such people can never have healthy social relationships and can never win the respect of their fellowmen. They do not realize that a man displays his true mettle when he sees his own wrong actions for what they are, and humbly asks forgiveness.

It is only he who has learned the art of moral introspection who will, in the long run, prove himself a person of inviolable integrity. □



Adjustment

The right approach is to inculcate the mentality of adjustment, for it is this quality of adjustment which makes a person capable of surviving with all kinds of people.

BLESSING IN DISGUISE

Differently Abled

LOUIS Braille (1809–1852) was born in France as a 'normal' boy. He is famously known as the inventor of Braille, a system of reading and writing used by persons who are visually impaired.

At the age of three, while busy toying with the tools at his father's workshop, Louis met with an accident when a tool struck him in one eye. He was attended by a local physician, but the treatment did not help and the wound developed an infection, which gradually spread to the other eye. By the age of five, Louis Braille became completely blind in both eyes.

There is no end to opportunities in the world of nature.

After losing his vision, Louis Braille used to recognise things by touching them with his hands. During this experience, he discovered the power of touch, which is inherent in the finger-tip. He was able to identify things by touching them with his finger-tips and recognising them. This triggered his mind and he started thinking and experimenting tirelessly till he invented what is called the Braille System. Braille is a tactile system in which the user can read by touching the embossed representation with a finger-tip.

Braille is now an internationally recognised system. It is a unique blessing for visually impaired persons. It gives them a new hope, enabling them to read books. There are millions of blind people who acquired a new hope from this system that was developed by a person who himself was totally blind.

This incident tells us a great fact about nature — that nature has endless opportunities. There is no end to opportunities in the world of nature!

Previously, such persons were referred to as 'disabled.' It was believed that they had become impaired for the rest of their lives. But recent research has disclosed that 'disabled' persons are actually 'differently-abled'! What can be better than this message from the Creator! □



THE GOAL OF MAN

Defining Human Life

DR. Alexis Carrel was born in France in 1873. After receiving higher education in Science (Medicine) in France, he went to the United States in 1905 to join the staff of the Rockefeller Institute of Medical Research in New York. He remained there for 30 years. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1912 for his contribution to the field of medicine. He died in 1944 in France.

Dr. Carrel's book titled, *Man the Unknown*, first published in 1935 and reprinted on several occasions, was his most popular work. A commentator aptly says of it: "This book sums up much of his experience of man and his life, seen from the purely scientific aspect."

But, as we learn from his 312-page book, Dr. Carrel failed to discover the reality of human life. That is why he titled the book, *Man the Unknown*. A study of this book tells us that, so far as man as a subject of scientific study is concerned, he was to a great extent 'discovered' by Dr. Carrel. The question then arises as to why he gave his book the title he did. This apparent confusion stems from the fact that although Dr. Carrel had 'discovered' man, his study did not lead him to any certain knowledge of man's destination. He felt that a 'known' man was heading towards an unknown destination. Hence, a more apt title for his book might have been 'Man's Goal — the Unknown'.

This is not a problem that was faced by Dr. Carrel alone. The same has been, and still is, true for all other philosophers and thinkers. Although man has appeared to be a known entity, these scholars have remained totally ignorant of his ultimate destination.

The mistake made by philosophers and other thinkers is that they seek the human destination in the present world, whereas it does not exist in this world at all. This world is an imperfect one, while man, by nature, wants a perfect existence. Man wants an eternal life, while in this ephemeral world, it is quite impossible for any individual to have this wish granted. Man wants a life of happiness, but in this world, all kinds of unfavourable circumstances are obstacles to his achieving this end. Man wants an ideal world, but here he is compelled to live in a world that is far from ideal. By birth, man is a perfectionist. He wants a perfect world, but despite all his efforts, he is fated to realize that finding or building a perfect world on earth is impossible.

The truth is that what is unknown is not man, but, rather, man's destination — in other words, a world that is the realization of human dreams; a world free from all contradictions; a world where man may lead his life with a sense of total fulfilment.

This apparently intractable issue becomes fully resolved when the study of man is made in the light of the Divine scheme of things, that is to say, when efforts are made to understand the will or plan of the Creator along with an understanding of His creatures. This is the only possible method which is of any relevance. When we approach matters from this angle, we realize that this problem confronts us only because we attempt to understand man without keeping in mind the creation plan of God. Man is a creature; he is not the Creator — just as a machine is made by an engineer and is not its own maker.

**Although man has appeared to be a known entity,
scholars have remained totally ignorant of
his ultimate destination.**

This being so, if we want to know the reality of man, we shall have to learn the creation plan of the Creator. Just as without the knowledge of the engineer's plan we cannot explain the machine, similarly, without knowledge of the creation plan of the Creator, it is impossible to explain man. This is why, without keeping this creation plan in view, the meaningfulness of man's life escapes us, whereas when we keep this creation plan firmly in view, everything becomes fully comprehensible. Everything then falls into place.

In accordance with His creation plan, God created this world as one half of a pair. This world, in which we pass our lives after birth, is that first part. And the other world, the other part, is the one where we live after death. In this way, there are two parts to human life — the pre-death period and the post-death period. The Creator of man has created him as an eternal creature, but He has divided his life into two stages — terrestrial existence and the life after death.

The world before death is designed as a testing ground, while the world after death is designed to be a world of reward or punishment. Since the present world is made to serve the purpose of man's test, everyone here has been granted freedom to make his own moral choices. It is as if the present world is a kind of examination hall where all the provisions have been made that are needed for this test. But

the perfect, ideal things needed for building a happy life do not exist here, for everything here is in an incomplete and limited form. Seeking happiness here is like a student wanting to build his desired life inside the examination hall! He will ultimately be overwhelmed with a sense of frustration. This same state of frustration is faced by all those who want to build the world of their dreams in this world of trial.

So, what must men and women do in this pre-death world in order to find the world of their hopes in the post-death world? The answer is that they must exercise their freedom in accordance with the will of their Creator.

For the life after death, God has made a perfect world which is called Paradise. This Paradise is an ideal and perfect world in every respect. God wants such men and women for this world as are worthy of inhabiting it. From this present world, only those who qualify according to the divine standard will be lodged in this ideal world of Paradise.

Who, then, are these men and women who measure up to the divine standard? They are the ones who, by using their intellectual capabilities, attain the realization of God. They are those who will discover the truth by tearing asunder the veil of mental confusion; who abandon all other forms of worship in favour of the worship of God; who are willing to surrender themselves to divine discipline, in spite of having been granted full freedom to flout it if they wish; who develop a positive outlook even in a negative situation; who treat others as they themselves would like to be treated.

These are the criteria by which to earn Paradise according to the Divine creation plan. Such men and women who come up to this standard will be ushered into the eternal Paradise after death, while those who fail to do so will be cast into eternal hellfire, where they will have nothing in store for them but eternal deprivation and frustration.

The people who will fill Paradise will be those who availed of the opportunities of this present world to do good, while the people who will fill hell will be those who failed to avail of such opportunities. Theirs will be a case of missed opportunities. As the saying goes: 'Opportunity only knocks once.' This saying is wholly true in the matter of eternal success. For, the chance to succeed is not going to be given to anyone twice. The situation of those who will be adjudged to have properly availed of opportunities here on earth will endure to their benefit for all eternity, just as the situation of those who will be adjudged to have missed their opportunities will be one of unending perdition. □

RECOGNIZING THE TRUTH

Within or Without

MR. Ram Ratan Kapila has a refrigerator business in Delhi, and Mr. Moti Ram Sarraf is a jeweller of the same city. The two are great friends. They usually go out for a walk together in the morning, and then return home together.

One day the two were walking in an area of Delhi. Mr. Ram Ratan Kapila saw something shining in a spot by the side of the road. He thought it was a piece of glass, and, just for the fun of it, picked it up.

After their walk they returned home. Mr. Ram Ratan Kapila went to the basin to wash his hands, and thoughtlessly put the object to one side.

A lover of truth is one who recognizes truth wherever it is; whether it lies within his own circle, or outside it.

Mr. Moti Ram Sarraf then went to the same wash basin to wash his hands. He caught sight of the object, and as soon as he saw its glitter, he recognized it as a diamond. He picked it up, washed it, and took it to Mr. Ram Ratan Kapila. His friend was astonished to hear that it was a diamond. "I thought it was only a piece of glass," he said. "It's just as well that I didn't throw it away."

Mr. Ram Ratan Kapila was not ignorant of diamonds. He had a diamond necklace at home, which was kept with great care in a special cupboard. But he was not able to recognize a diamond lying on the road.

Both men were familiar with diamonds. The difference was that Mr. Moti Ram was a jeweller. He could recognize a diamond wherever it was. But Mr. Ram Ratan Kapila only knew the diamond on his own, familiar necklace. He did not know how to recognize a diamond that lay outside the necklace that he was familiar with.

A real jeweller is not just one who recognizes a diamond when it is on his own necklace; a real jeweller is one who recognizes a diamond wherever he sees it. In the same way a lover of truth is one who recognizes truth wherever it is; whether it lies within his own circle, or outside it. □

SECRETS TO A SUCCESSFUL LIFE

Qualities Required

BUILDING one's life is not like setting up a child's play house, which can be put together in a matter of hours. It is a matter of putting down roots and toiling patiently ever upwards.

Man is in constant need of guidance, and God's ways of guiding him are manifold. Everywhere in the world of nature around us He has set His signs for us to read.

There is the creeper which, in a mere matter of months, grows, spreads, bears its flowers and its fruits, and then dies. It is a thing of beauty, a source of nourishment, and, as such, is a joy to man. But it does not last forever, and when it dies, it so withers away that it might never have existed. There is no sign of it left. In contrast is the tall fruit-bearing tree, slow of growth, taking even centuries, and never failing to provide man with its shade, its flowers, and its luscious fruits.

Man is in constant need of guidance, and God's ways of guiding him are manifold.

These examples are God's silent messages to us; they are His way of guiding us towards the right course of action in life and steering us away from what will ultimately lead us to failure.

When it comes to the building of a whole nation, we should not attempt to spread fast like the creeper in the hope of quick results. Instead, we should emulate the tree, which may take years of anxious waiting to grow to maturity, but which sends down its roots deep into the soil (there is as much of the tree below as above the ground) and which endures the ravages of the seasons and the passage of generations.

A nation, therefore, should grow with this same steadfastness and stability, for expansion without these qualities is like building a house without foundations.

What applies to the nation applies equally to individual human lives. If you want to live your life meaningfully and develop a structure and constitution that is solid and long lasting, you will have to be like the tree — patient and willing to engage in hard work.

In this process of building one's life, one needs to develop the attitude of being realistic; to stay calm and composed and learn to conquer oneself. Let us understand these with the help of the following examples.

Realism

If you happen to be in an open field when it starts to rain, you hasten to find shelter. This is not cowardice. This is realism. Similarly, when there is an earthquake, you immediately rush out from your home and look for an open space. This, too, is not defeatism, but an acknowledgement of the reality of nature. Where some difficulty arises between man and nature, the solution to the problem lies only in acknowledgment of the issue, and not in confrontation with it.

If you want to live your life meaningfully and develop a structure and constitution that is solid and long lasting, you will have to be like the tree — patient and willing to engage in hard work.

The system of rains and earthquakes is part of the scheme of God. Man cannot change this. Man only has it in his power to devise strategies to save himself from their harm. The only way to do so is to adopt the principle of avoidance and thereby save yourself from trouble. That is why in heavy rain, you head for a sheltered place, while during an earthquake, you rush into an open space.

Patience and avoidance are not signs of cowardice or a defeatist mentality. They are simply realistic approaches. This is necessary because the Creator has given man freedom for the purpose of putting him to the test. Man sometimes makes the right, and sometimes the wrong, use of his freedom. Even if you start fighting everyone, you cannot snatch away their freedom, because this freedom is given to them by the very Creator of the universe. Efforts to deprive others of their freedom are futile and will result only in your own suffering.

In such a state of affairs, there is only one possible sensible response. And that is known as patience. That is, even when faced with bitterness and unpleasantness from others, you must continue your life's journey by avoiding getting embroiled in reaction and conflict.

You should never feel that it is only up to others to practice patience

and avoid friction. Patience and avoidance of strife are the social duties of everyone without exception. It should never be forgotten that while patience makes it possible to continue with life's journey, impatience will ultimately prevent you from reaching your chosen destination.

Staying Calm

The most delicate and dangerous part of space journeys is the point at which the spacecraft returns into the earth's atmosphere. Take the case of the Apollo-8 spacecraft, for instance. Before the capsule touched down on December 27, 1968, it had to negotiate a precipitous return to the earth's atmosphere. Because of the earth's gravity — seven times that of outer space — the speed of the spacecraft soared, reaching an astronomical 39,000 kilometres per hour. Because of its extraordinary speed, the heat of the spacecraft rose to terrifying proportions. Air friction had started heating up the space vessel as soon as it entered the earth's atmosphere. Soon, it became literally 'red hot', reaching a temperature of 3,300 degrees Celsius.

No animal can survive at such a temperature. How was it, then, that the three American astronauts aboard the craft were able to remain unaffected by the blazing inferno that had built up around them and return safely to earth? The reason that they were able to do so was that the spacecraft in which they were travelling had been so constructed that its interior would not be affected by the severity of external conditions. In spite of the incredible heat on the outside, the temperature inside of the craft was just 21 degrees Celsius. Imagine! 3,300 degrees on the outside and 21 degrees inside!

Patience and avoidance are not signs of cowardice or a defeatist mentality. They are simply realistic approaches.

This event from the realm of space travel has an important lesson to teach us for our lives here on earth. Time and time again, we run into highly charged situations in life, when it seems impossible to go on. There is only one way to survive under such conditions. And that is, by not letting ourselves be inwardly affected by one's outward situation; by suppressing our emotions and keeping our feelings under control. Only then will we be able to maintain our composure. We will not be able to survive crises in life if we let our inward condition become as highly charged as the outward situation that we are confronted with.

If you remain inwardly calm and composed at all times, you will be able to survive the heat of any external circumstances, and then you can safely reach your destination. If you face someone's hate and anger, you must not let it get under your skin. Instead, you should try to feel forgiveness in the depth of your heart. Even if the whole world wishes you evil, you should still have only good feelings for others. There is no other way of succeeding in life. If, on the other hand, you adopt the same negative feelings as prevail in your outside environment, the challenges of life are sure to be more than you can bear.

Conquering Oneself

Edmund Hillary, born on July 2, 1919, in Auckland, New Zealand, showed an early interest in mountaineering. He started by climbing mountains in his own country, and later, in 1951, attempted, along with a team, to scale the heights of Mount Everest, a 29,028 foot high peak in Nepal. This attempt was not successful. Then, for the second time, in 1953, he again set out to climb it with a British team. His guide in this venture was a Nepali, Tenzing Norgay. Reaching the summit of Mount Everest on May 29, 1953, he became the first person to set foot on the highest point of the globe. He immediately became famous all over the world, and received a knighthood on July 16 of the same year.

We will not be able to survive crises in life if we let our inward condition become as highly charged as the outward situation that we are confronted with.

He subsequently wrote a book on this mountaineering exploit, published in 1955 under the title, *High Adventure*. One of the lessons of this book is: "It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves."

This sounds very simple, but it is a remark of great profundity. It would be true to say that every victory in this world is the result of conquering one's own self. Each conquest necessarily entails a hard struggle. But, first and foremost, the aspirant to success must prove himself equal to that initial struggle, and then he must show his unflagging determination to reach his ultimate goal. Only then will the world acclaim him as a conqueror.

Be it mountaineering or any other exploit, man has first to pass the test of a hard struggle. He must then prove that he is capable of exercising patience and restraint. The day a man furnishes proof of this ability is

the day that he will stand victorious on the highest pinnacle of success for the world to see.

Perseverance

Waking up in the morning to the noisy chirruping of the birds a man noticed a broken egg lying on the ground. It had obviously fallen from a nest built by sparrows just under the ceiling of his modest dwelling. Wearily, he removed the broken egg. Then noting with disgust, the straw which had littered his floor, he stood up on a chair and swiped the nest out of its niche. After that, he spent quite some time and effort cleaning up the whole place.

In all circumstances, persevere steadfastly in constructive activities. In the end, you will emerge victorious.

The very next day, he found more straw dirtying his newly-cleaned floor! Looking up, he saw that the birds were again building their nest under his roof. He felt he was going to go mad with their chirruping and the perpetual mess they made! So, he destroyed the new nest before it was even half-completed. That way he thought he could drive them away forever.

But the tragedy of the devastated nest only spurred the birds on to greater efforts. Showing great daring, they worked faster than ever. They did not waste a single moment on lamenting their loss. Nor did they go away to collect a whole flock of birds to come and make a united attack on the house-owner. They simply flew to and from the home, quietly and incessantly picking up fresh straw and fixing it in position. They did not waste a single moment.

This very same story was repeated from day to day, for over a month. The man would angrily destroy their home, and moments later, the sparrows would reappear with straw in their beaks to begin their labour all over again. Their efforts seemed fruitless. Their incessant gathering of straw was apparently futile. But regardless of consequences, they went on steadily with their work. It was the birds' answer to the unmitigated hatred of the man. Yet, although he was the stronger, they always seemed somehow to foil him.

Finally, the birds' silent endeavours gained the upper hand. The man realized that his resistance was futile, and he stopped destroying the

nests. And so, the birds completed their nest and successfully laid and hatched their eggs. Their chirruping no longer incensed the man. He simply ceased to mind them, for they had taught him a priceless lesson — never to hate anyone.

In all circumstances, persevere steadfastly in constructive activities. In the end, you will emerge victorious.

Positivity

The owner of a transport business once found himself in a weak and vulnerable position because, for technical reasons, he once had one of his vehicles registered in the name of another person several years before, and that person still held its licence. The licence-holder decided one fine day that he would take possession of the vehicle himself and that its real owner would have to make do with a paltry sum of money in exchange. The owner naturally felt that the most dreadful injustice was being done to him. Greatly incensed, he was determined to have his revenge. Night and day he lived in frenzy, thinking of ways and means to eliminate his enemy.

Efforts to deprive others of their freedom are futile and will result only in your own suffering.

For six long months, he lived in this state of morbid preoccupation, losing all interest in his home and his business, and becoming, finally, like the ghost of his former self. Then, one day, he had an experience which changed the course of his life. As he was pacing up and down a street, lost in black, vengeful fantasies, he heard the unmistakable sounds of someone making a speech before a large gathering. Curious, and for once drawn out of himself, he approached the gathering of people and began to listen to the speaker. He was suddenly struck by what the man was saying: "Think well before taking revenge, for you, too, shall suffer the vengeance of others!"

It was as if a shaft of bright light had suddenly penetrated his mind. With each example that the speaker gave to drive home his point, he felt himself turning into a new person. He decided, there and then, to give up his negative way of thinking, in fact to forget the whole sorry episode, and to devote his time and energy to his family and his business.

The full realization had come to him that it was on himself that he had inflicted suffering, not on his enemy, and that it was best to leave such matters to God. In beginning to think in this way, he found that, bit by bit, he was once again able to take a constructive approach to things. Not much long after, he became more successful than he had ever been. In pursuing positive ends he had also attained peace of mind — and that, for him, had been the most important thing of all.

Flexibility

A man once came into a shop, intent on buying some cloth. Choosing a suitable piece was no problem, but fixing a price was; for in some countries one usually has to bargain before buying anything. This time, the bargaining was tough. Neither the shopkeeper nor the customer was willing to budge from the originally quoted price. Finally, after holding out adamantly for half-an-hour, it was the shopkeeper who gave in, coming right down to the customer's price, thus clinching the deal.

A friend of the shopkeeper was in the shop at the time. After the customer had left, he asked, "Why waste so much time over the price, when you were ready to give it at the customer's price all along?"

"You missed the point," the shopkeeper replied. "That was my way of clinching the deal. Why, if I had agreed to the customer's price straightway, he would have thought, 'Oh, I might be able to get the cloth even cheaper somewhere else', and gone away. Anyway, I wanted to know how far he was willing to go. When I realized that he was not willing to budge even an inch, I saw that I was the one who would have to budge. And so, I sold him the cloth at his price!"

Adjustment or adjustability is the key to success in life, both for individuals and for nations.

So it is with any contest in life. Quite naturally, each party wishes to settle the matter to his own satisfaction. It is only sensible, then, for a person to press his demands. But, at the same time, common sense requires him to know what his limits are, i.e. how far he can go without losing anything himself or sending his 'customer' away dissatisfied.

Here we have a basic principle of life. It can be said in one word —

adjustment. Adjustment or adjustability is the key to success in life, both for individuals and for nations.

We can define adjustability as taking into account the needs of others besides one's own. In this world, success comes the way of one who is able to see both sides of a picture; to one who can look at matters from another's point of view as well as from his own. Those who know what they want and go all out to achieve it irrespective of others' needs, will find their path through life strewn with obstacles and pitfalls — and it will be little wonder if they come to grief. □





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SPIRITUAL ROLE OF WOMEN

by Dr. Farida Khanam

STUDIES show that women have been specially gifted by nature with such qualities as fit them for the role of bringing about peace and harmony in society in times of conflict. These qualities are gentleness, selflessness, compassion, mildness and, above all, a spiritual approach to life. A study of history tells us that women have always played this role, albeit mostly on the home front.

It is a matter of common knowledge that women have always contributed greatly to normalizing conditions at home by relieving tensions and resolving conflicts. The softness of their approach to problems and their marked capacity for pacifying are clearly attributes which will eliminate stress.

Women have been specially gifted by nature with such qualities as fit them for the role of bringing about peace and harmony in society in times of conflict.

When we look at Islamic history, the first instance we find of such positive feminine influence is that of Khadija, the wife of the Prophet. When the Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation from the angel in the cave of Hira, it was a totally new experience for him, and he trembled in fear of what he had seen and heard. He immediately set off for his home after the disappearance of the angel. When he had regained his composure, he related the incident to Khadija. She did her best to assure him that no harm would come to him as he always spoke the truth, helped the poor and those in distress, and invariably treated others with respect. With these reassuring words, she successfully calmed him down, employing all her natural gifts of gentleness, sympathy, understanding, and, above all, selfless love.

After the Prophet of Islam left this world, great differences arose among Muslims in many matters. During his lifetime, all such issues had been referred to him for a solution. But after the demise of the Prophet, it was now left to his wife Aisha, who had been under his training for many years, to play the very positive role of guide and mentor. Having become fully imbued with the spirit of Islam, she used to give guidance

to both male and female companions of the Prophet. In this way, she successfully resolved such differences.

However, in those days there was no platform from which her example could benefit the general public, nor was there the media — such as we have nowadays — to cover such roles and place them on record. In most of the cultures in ancient and medieval societies, women remained indoors and played their role within the confines of their own homes. That is why we know so little about the contribution of women in this arena.

The most prominent name of a woman within the Sufi tradition is that of Rabia Basri (713-801). She was born in 713 C.E. into a poor family in Basra, Iraq. She devoted her life to worshipping God and serving others. She lived a life of extreme asceticism, and a large number of disciples gathered around her. Her mystical sayings have become proverbial.

The spiritual role of women has never been properly realized because of the failure to institutionalize their role in society.

In Rabia Basri's times, Muslim society was rent with great religious differences. But her strong spiritual personality exerted such a powerful influence that people eventually forgot their doctrinal differences and rallied around her. She laid emphasis on pure divine love, which alone could minimize all these differences.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed:

"Men and women are two equal halves of a single unit."

Teachings to this effect in the Quran and *Hadith* ushered in a new age of gender equality. With this new-found freedom, women were able to play a great role in society, particularly women who belonged to royal families. They were highly educated by the standards of their times, and, in royal circles, with greater social exposure, they had better opportunities to exert their influence.

One such woman was Maryam Makani, the mother of Akbar, the Mughal emperor of India. Once, Mullah Abdun Nabi, Akbar's teacher, insulted the emperor before the entire court. Akbar was enraged and wanted

to punish him. This could have meant even the death sentence for the offender. But Akbar's mother intervened and successfully managed to calm him down. She told him that his pardon would go down in history, that history would remember that 'an emperor, having all the power at his disposal, forgave an offender'

Such incidents abound in history, but because the central figures were usually either a mother, like Maryam Makani, or a daughter or wife of an emperor — women who were already famous because of their royal kinship — people failed to perceive how their roles could go beyond this framework and become applicable to general situations in society.

Both biological and historical studies show that women have been specially gifted with qualities required for the establishment of social harmony. In the Muslim case, this potential of women has never been properly realized because of the failure to institutionalize their role in Muslim society. Had Muslim women been trained to perform this task, they would have been able to play this role far more effectively, and on a far greater scale. The need of the hour today is to institutionalize this role and give proper training to women so that this capability with which women have been so abundantly endowed by nature may be fully harnessed.

Once this feminine potential has been realized, the world will definitely be a better place for all to live in. □



Perseverance

*This world has been devised by God
so that man may succeed — but with a struggle.*

*One who is too faint-hearted, too lacking in determination,
or too impatient will give up the struggle sooner or later,
and that is what will ultimately spell failure.*

*He shall have to pay the price of
his own shortcomings.*

COMMUNITY OR HUMANITY?

Human Empowerment

If you read the Quran, you will find that the Quran addresses all of mankind. In the very first chapter of the Quran, *Allah* (God) is called *Rab ul-alamin* (Lord of the Worlds), not *Rab ul-muslimin* (Lord of the Muslims). The Quran uses terms such as *al-Insan*, *al-Nas*, *Bani Adam*, etc. All of these words address all of mankind.

The Quran tries to bring about a universal mind in its readers. According to the Quran, our world is *Dar al-insan*, the world of human beings. Terms like 'Muslim empowerment', 'the Muslim identity', and 'fighting for the Muslim cause' are all alien to the Quranic scheme.

The Quran gives Muslims a global mission — spreading the word of God among all of mankind. This mission requires a mind that is open to all peoples. Without this kind of positive mind, Muslims cannot discharge their duty.

**Human empowerment includes Muslim empowerment,
while Muslim empowerment is narrow-minded
and bound to fail.**

Thinking negatively or engaging in activities such as protests and violence against supposed injustice is not in accordance with the Islamic spirit. No excuse whatsoever is acceptable in this regard. Muslims must adopt the policy of peace on a unilateral basis. This policy is stated in the Quran in these words:

Do not yield to those who deny the truth and the hypocrites;
ignore their hurtful talk and put your trust in God;
God is your all-sufficient guardian.

THE QURAN 33: 48

All the prophets, including the Prophet of Islam, adopted this culture of *sabr*, or patience. The Quran affirms this fact in these words:

We will, surely, bear with patience all the harm you do us.
THE QURAN 14: 12

This policy of unilateral patience adopted by all the prophets was not passivity, but a high sort of activism. This policy ensures a positive

environment, peace, and normalcy. This kind of environment is crucial for any kind of constructive work, including conveying the message of Islam. This is the law of nature. We have no option but to follow this natural law. The Quran observes:

And follow the nature as made by God, that nature in which He has created mankind. There is no altering the creation of God.

THE QURAN 30: 30

Muslims of today need to work towards education, economic progress, communal harmony and intellectual pursuits. All these things can be carried out only in an atmosphere of peace, and peace can be established only on a unilateral basis. This cannot be made possible without adopting the policy of unilateral patience.

People speak of Muslim empowerment. But the real objective that should be adopted by Muslims is human empowerment, which includes Muslim empowerment; while Muslim empowerment is narrow-minded and bound to fail. □



True Spirituality

Real spirituality or contemplative spirituality is that which has the power to address our minds.

Any kind of spirituality attained at a level lesser than that of our minds is not true spirituality.

All forms of ecstasy are just reduced forms of spirituality.

PARADISE

An introduction

MAN has unlimited desires. He spends his entire life in trying to fulfil his desires, only to finally discover that he could not fulfil them. Man is destined to remain unsatisfied, both before the fulfilment of his desires as well as after their apparent fulfilment. This is the case for everyone, rich and poor.

The reason for this is that man's desires are unlimited, while the present world is a limited world. This makes it impossible for anyone to build the castle of his desires in the present world. Every such castle is destined to ultimately prove to be a graveyard of desires. However, human desires do have a positive role. These desires are actually an introduction to paradise in advance. These desires are indicative of how beautiful the world of paradise will be, where all beautiful desires will be completely fulfilled.

Man, can gather all types of pleasures around him, but it is impossible for him to cross the barriers of his limitations which come in the way of unlimited enjoyment.

The secret of success in the present world is 'desire-management'. The quest for desire-fulfilment will remain unending and fruitless. The present world is not for man to create his paradise here. This world is only for man to prove himself worthy for an entry into paradise, by his righteous deeds. If these desires are understood positively, they will prove to be a great incentive for deeds that will earn him paradise.

Our desires give directions to our endeavours; they do not tell us the destination of our endeavours. History shows that this destination is not achievable. The story of everyone's life is one and the same. It is to seek the fulfilment of desires and to die without ever achieving their fulfilment. The fulfilment of any desire requires an enormous number of factors, the gathering of which is beyond human power, even if one lives for a thousand years and controls the world. For instance, a man can build a house, but he cannot prevent the onset of an earthquake.

Man can develop a healthy body, but it is not possible for him to change

the laws of death. Man, can gather all types of pleasures around him, but it is impossible for him to cross the barriers of his limitations which come in the way of unlimited enjoyment. Man can gather around him all types of external things for his comfort, but due to his inability to change the laws of nature, he cannot save himself completely from disease and accidents.

These experiences prove that man only has the power to act, but he does not have control over the consequences of his actions. In such a situation, any person who seeks the fulfilment of his desires proves only that he is utterly unrealistic. And unrealistic thinking can produce no real results in this world.

**Man should recognise that while he can and should act,
the results of his actions are the prerogative
of the Creator.**

Keeping this reality in view, man should recognise that while he can and should act, the results of his actions are the prerogative of the Creator.

According to this law, our pre-death period, spent on this earth, is the period of action for us, and the post-death period is the period of reaping the consequences or fruits of our actions from the Creator.

If you accept this reality, you will have two benefits at the same time. Firstly you can get rid of tension forever. Tension emerges because your actions do not produce the results that you hope for. You do something but fail to get what you hoped for from it, and so you become tense. But if you act while leaving the result to God to arrange for as He pleases, you will automatically save yourself from getting tense.

Secondly, in doing this, you will also secure a certain guarantee; that after death, your deeds will earn their rightful results. You will achieve the desired result of your deeds, and will become the owner of evergreen gardens of happiness. □



THE WORD OF GOD

From The Scriptures

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

Translated from Arabic and commentary
by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Relate to them, the true story of the two sons of Adam. When they both presented an offering, it was accepted from one of them and not from the other. The latter said, 'I shall kill you!' The former said, 'God accepts [things] only from the righteous. If you raise your hand to kill me, I will not raise mine to kill you. I fear God, the Lord of the Universe, and I want you to bear your sins against me as well as your own sins and become an inhabitant of the Fire. Such is the reward of the wrongdoers.' (5: 27-29)

The real reward for the deeds performed for the sake of God will be given in the Hereafter. However, sometimes even in this world certain occurrences show whether human actions have gained God's approval. This happened in the case of Adam's sons, Abel and Cain (*Habil* and *Qabil*). Abel's offerings from his flocks of sheep and goats were accepted by God and he was duly blessed, but Cain's offerings of his agricultural produce were not, and he remained unblessed. Cain then became so jealous of his younger brother that he threatened to kill him. Abel said that Cain's offering had been rejected because Cain had no heartfelt fear of God and should, therefore, reform himself instead of threatening him. But, jealousy and enmity blur the truth and one can think only of how to eliminate one's supposed enemy.

Abel told Cain that he might raise his hand to murder him, but that he would not retaliate, because God had prohibited any fighting between one Muslim and another. Even if a Muslim wanted to assassinate his brother, the brother should not consider it legitimate to kill his attacker. This obviated the mutual clash which was otherwise inevitable, as well as the resulting endless chain of action and reaction in Muslim society. If two Muslims are bent on each other's destruction, the guilt is divided

between the two. But if one Muslim carries out his intention, while the other remains immersed in prayer, the attacker will not only shoulder the burden of his own sin, but also that of any sin which his victim might have committed had he not remained patient and prayerful.

His lower self persuaded him to kill his brother, and he killed him and he became one of the lost. Then God sent a raven, which scratched the earth, so that He might show him how to hide the corpse of his brother. 'Alas!' he cried, 'Am I not able even to be like this raven, so that I may hide the corpse of my brother?' And he repented. (5: 30-31)

Whatever a man receives in this world is bestowed by God. Therefore, one who, out of being jealous inflicts harm upon another who is better situated in life attempts, in effect, to nullify God's plan. Such a person is to some extent given the scope to do whatever he likes in this world of trial, but in the eyes of God, he is the worst sinner. Abel drew the attention of his elder brother Cain to this fact. This created some hesitation in Cain's mind. He realised that if he was bent on killing his younger brother, it was without any justification. But the feeling of jealousy in him did not cool down. He invented excuses to justify his action. Ultimately, his inner struggle resolved itself by returning to his self-devised justification and he proceeded to kill his brother. The voice of conscience is the voice of God. A question arising in a man's conscience about any action of his amounts in fact to his facing a test. A man is successful if he gives a positive response to the voice of his conscience, but if, in taking the shelter of false excuses, he suppresses the voice of his conscience, then he has failed.

It has been recorded in a tradition of the Prophet that transgression and the killing of kindred are sins for which punishment starts right here in this world. The punishment for the unjustified atrocity committed by Cain against his brother was given to him not only in the Hereafter but in this very world where he was immediately plunged into misery. Cain, after committing the murder, was afflicted by his lower leg becoming stuck to his thigh. He remained lying on the ground, unattended and uncared for, until he died in ignominy and distress (Tafsir ibn Kathir).

Cain was instructed by means of a crow how to bury the dead body under the ground. This points to the fact that man was less knowledgeable than the animals about the ways of nature. And, if he follows his emotions, there is no worse transgressor than he. Furthermore, it is implied that if, rather than committing a crime, a man buries the intention in his heart, he will not have to face the shame of it afterwards. A man should

curb and bury his bad intentions in his heart and not allow them to emerge and become a reality. A man, before bringing his evil designs to fruition, has simply to bury the intention. If, not, he will be confronted with the problem of burying the dead body, which, even after burial, will be treated by God as not having been buried.

That was why We laid it down for the Children of Israel that whoever killed a human being — except as a punishment for murder or for spreading corruption in the land — shall be regarded as having killed all mankind, and that whoever saved a human life shall be regarded as having saved all mankind. Our messengers came to them with clear signs, but many of them continued to commit excesses in the land. (5: 32)

When one person kills another, he is the killer of not only one person but of all human beings, because he contravenes the law of respect for human life upon which the lives of all human beings depend. Similarly, when someone saves another from oppression, he is not the saviour of just one person but of all human beings, because he is protecting the principle of respect for life of all human beings, which holds that nobody has the right to raise his hand to another. If one person attacks the honour, property or life of another, it means that abnormal conditions have developed in the society. It is necessary for Muslims to look at even one incident of this nature as if the life, property and honour of all people are in danger. In a society, the tradition of respect for each other's life is formed as a result of a long history, and once this tradition is violated, it will be a very long time before it can be revived. Those who establish the tradition of violence in a society are the worst enemies of that society. □



Exalted Personality

*Try your best to evolve your personality
in terms of spiritual and intellectual development.*

*But as far as your material requirements are concerned,
adopt the need-based formula and not
the greed-based formula.*

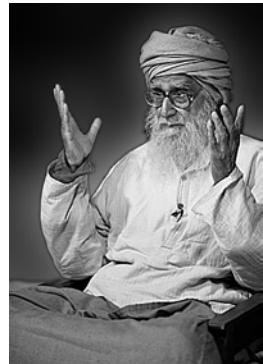
ASK MAULANA

Your Questions, Answered

How can we get clarity of thought?

We are living in a world of thoughts. Every day, numerous thoughts come to our mind and get registered forever. So, we are bound to live in a great jungle of thoughts. This state of affairs requires sorting things out properly. In the absence of this quality, there will be confusion. If you can sort your thoughts out properly, you can develop clarity in your thinking.

To help in sorting out your thinking you must stay away from distractions. Clarity of thought needs the sacrifice of keeping away from all distractions. If you want to develop clarity of thought, you will have to present this sacrifice.



Why do we give in easily to temptations?

Temptation in itself is not bad. It is temptation that motivates us to action. But, we have to control our temptations. Controlled temptation is good, while uncontrolled temptation is bad.

What is the difference between the freedom that is essential for intellectual development and the freedom that the youth run after?

Freedom is everyone's right. It is a God-given blessing, and no one can abolish this blessing. However, you are living in a society where others also live, apart from you. So, you have to be cautious while exercising your freedom. A well-known formula rightly provides the definition for freedom: Your freedom ends where another's nose begins.

Intellectual freedom is key to all kinds of intellectual development. But there are two kinds of exercise of freedom: negative and positive. The positive exercise of freedom leads to intellectual development, while the negative exercise of freedom leads to anarchy.

Man has been programmed by nature to react the way he does. So, if he tries to engage in 'anti-programming', would it not be like going against his very nature? Please explain.

The concept of natural programming is only partially true. There are

some activities of our body that are programmed, like the digestion of food or the circulation of blood. But, thinking in a creative manner is not programmed. Rather, it is something that you yourself achieve. At the subconscious level, we are programmed to some extent. But at the conscious level, we can act according to our free-will.

How do we discover the opportunities at the time of problems as the mind is confused and tensed at that moment?

The human mind has enormous capacity. If a person develops his mind on positive lines, he can save it from confusion and tension at the time of crisis. Learn the art of crisis management, and you will be able to discover opportunities even when you are surrounded by problems.

When we are born with the spirit of submission to God, what makes us turn arrogant and rebel?

Submission and arrogance are different types of responses. When you see the external world and discover your extreme smallness or humbleness with regard to it, you become submissive. But, when you forget your position in the universe of nature, you falsely become arrogant. Submission is the realistic response to the situation, and arrogance is the unrealistic response to the situation.

Admitting our mistakes calls for great courage. How can we achieve this great courage?

Apparently, admitting our mistakes is a matter of courage. But, in fact, it is an opportunity to make oneself a realist. When you accept your mistake, you correct yourself and save yourself from living in falsehood. When a person discovers this fact, accepting his mistake will become a very pleasant deed for him. He will never miss an opportunity to admit his mistake, because it helps develop his personality.

What should we do if even after trying very hard we do not achieve what we want?

Achievement is every person's right. When you fail to do something or achieve something, take it as a result of lack of planning. In such a situation, try to re-plan, and you will certainly reach success.

Why is that most people fail to rise above their complexes?

Going beyond your complexes requires a high level of intellectual development. Only less developed minds can fail in this regard. Try to

develop your mind, and you will certainly overcome your complexes.

If we do not react to our opponent, they may trouble us more, and after a certain stage it will become impossible to take any measures to counter their aggression. Kindly comment.

This is a totally wrong perception. If you have an opponent, you are allowed to solve the problem that is presented, but by applying an effective measure. By an effective measure I mean a measure that doesn't cause the opponent to react further. An effective measure is one that doesn't provoke one's opponent. Non-provocative planning is the best answer to deal with this kind of situation. Every problem can be solved. It is wrong planning that fails to solve the problem. □



Ray of Hope

*Just as morning is always followed by night,
so does success inevitably follow failure.*

*However, just as the earth must revolve unceasingly
if morning is to follow night, so must man
be unremitting in his struggle
to reach his final goal.*

The Greater Jihad

I have been asked many times about jihad. The general reply is that there are two types of jihad. One, the other world jihad is the struggle against the forces of evil in this world. The other, inner jihad is the struggle against the evil within ourselves. This article deals with inner jihad.

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Glossary

- Abu Dawud** (817-889); Abu Dawud as-Sijistani; Persian Islamic scholar and compiler of *Hadith*; authored the Sunan Abi Dawud *Hadith* collection.
- Aisha** (612-678); daughter of Abu Bakr, wife of Prophet Muhammad; one of the most intellectual and influential women in Islamic history.
- Akhirah** The Hereafter.
- Al-Adab al-Mufrad** collection of *Hadith* by Imam Al-Bukhari.
- Al-Bayhaqi** (994-1066); Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn Husayn al-Bayhaqi or Imam al-Bayhaqi; Islamic scholar of *fiqh* and collector of *Hadith*.
- Al-Bukhari; Imam Al-Bukhari** (810-870); Muhammad Al-Bukhari; Persian Islamic scholar who authored the *Hadith* collection known as Sahih al-Bukhari regarded as the most authentic collection of *Hadith*.
- al-Insan** Mankind.
- Allah** Arabic word for God.
- al-Nas** Man.
- angel** a living creation of God made from light; Angels have no free-will and are in constant obedience to God.
- At-Tirmidhi or At-Tirmizi** (824-892); Islamic scholar and collector of *Hadith*.
- Bani-Adam** Children of Adam.
- Dar al-insan** Abode of mankind.
- dhikr** to remember or think about God often.
- fikr** Contemplation.
- fiqh** Islamic jurisprudence.
- Hadith** sayings and deeds of the Prophet of Islam.
- Haj** Pilgrimage.
- Hira** or Cave of Hira; cave on the mount Jabal al-Noor near Makkah where prophet Muhammad received the first revelation from God.
- ibadah** Worship.
- Ibn Majah** Ibn Majah; (824-887); Islamic scholar and compiler of *Hadith* *Ibn Majah*; (824-887); Islamic scholar and compiler of *Hadith*.
- iman** Faith.
- Jinn** A living creation of God made from fire; *Jinns* have free-will just like mankind.
- Kalima** The Islamic creed — ‘There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God’.
- Khadija** (555-620); Khadija bint Khuwaylid; first wife of Prophet Muhammad.
- ma'arifah** also *ma'rifat* — God-realization
- Musnad Ahmed** a collection of *Hadith* reports by Islamic scholar Ahmad bin Hanbal (780-855).
- Rab ul-alamin** Lord of the Worlds.
- sabr** Patience.
- Shukr** Gratefulness.
- Shukr-e Kaseer** to express much gratitude to God.
- Sunnah** Practice and teachings of Prophet Muhammad.
- Tafsir ibn Kathir** commentary of the Quran by the famous scholar Ibn Kathir.

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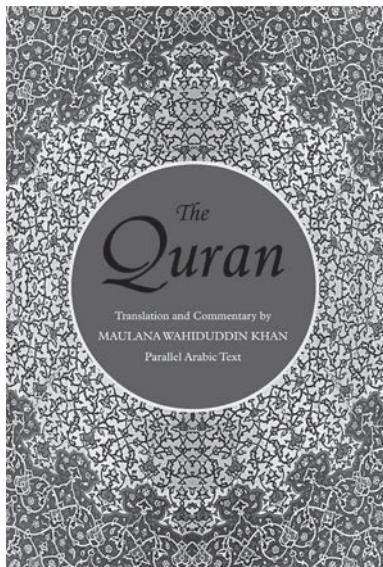
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The Quran

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY
MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN
PARALLEL ARABIC TEXT

This concise, easy-to-read commentary will help you understand the deeper meaning of the Quran and its relevance in the world today. While focusing on the main themes of the Quran, such as God-realization, enlightenment, closeness to God, remembrance, prayer, peace and spirituality, this guide to the Quran will show you how through reflection and contemplation, you can learn divine lessons from the Signs of God that are a part of our world.

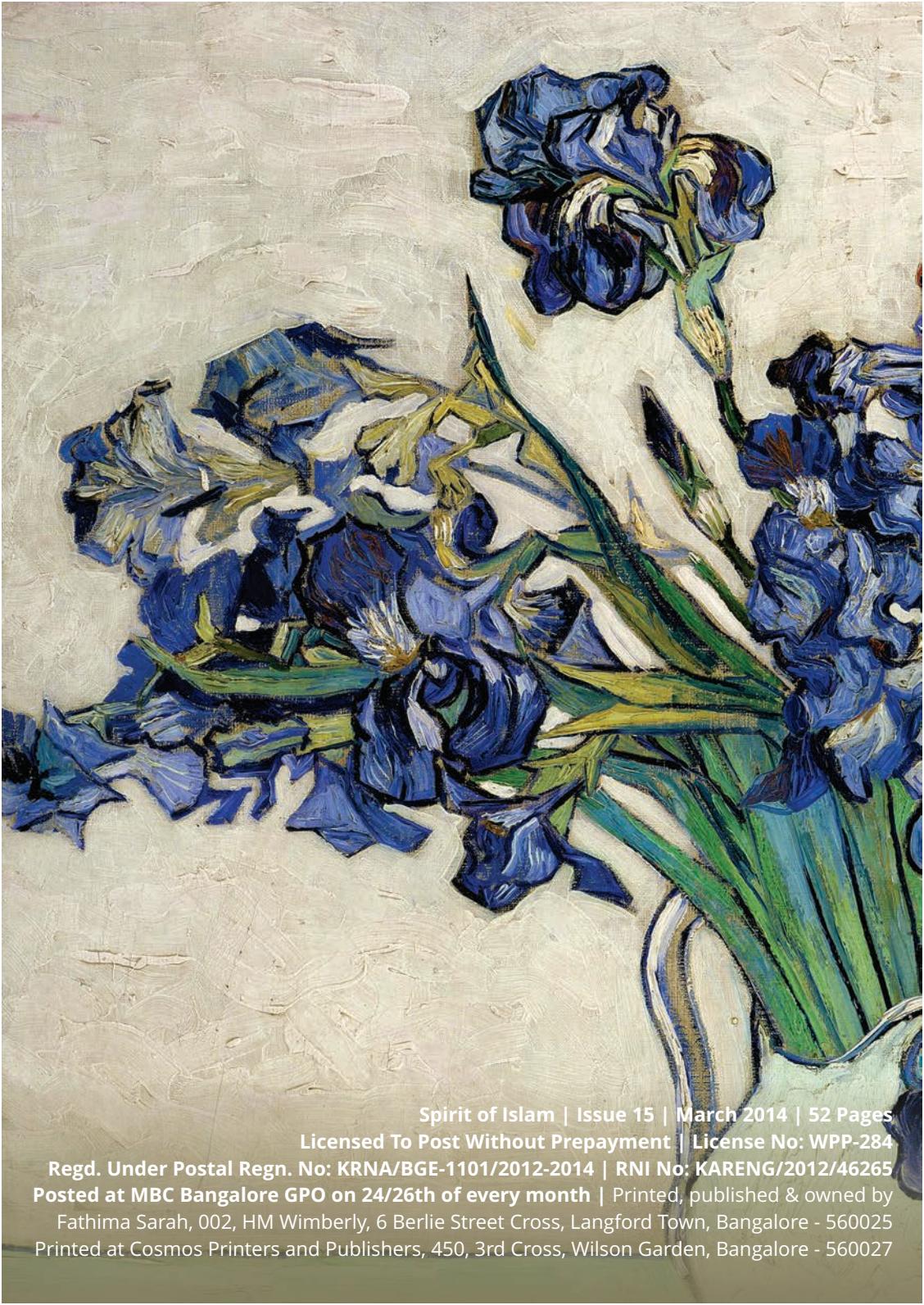


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