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SPIRIT OF ISLAM



A principled person treats the weak with the same deference as he does the strong.

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Spiritual Living

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

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the hospital of Saint-Paul (May 1890)*
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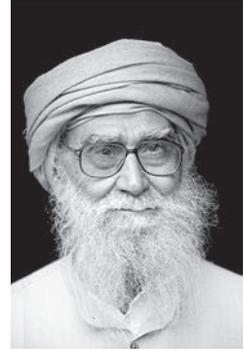
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK

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.



SEVEN BILLION ISSUES!

DIFFERENCES are a part of nature. By birth itself, every man and woman is unique and different from everyone else. If people think and act in different ways, it is but natural that it ends up creating problems for their immediate neighbours — and even for their distant neighbours, given that in the modern electronic age, every person is another's e-neighbour. This means that every person is a potential problem. This state of affairs creates constant conflict in society. Because of this, one can say that if the world has seven billion people, it has seven billion issues that are a potential challenge to peace. It is this fact of each of us being different and unique in our ways of thinking and behaving that creates almost all sorts of problems, whether in the family or in the wider society, and even at the national and international levels.

But this difference is not really an evil in itself. It is, in fact, a challenge — a peaceful challenge. Effectively facing this challenge using positive thinking is a way to develop your personality.

In ancient times, when people travelled on foot or rode on horses or camels, there were no traffic rules. But when the age of automobiles set in and mechanical modes of transportation were invented, the management of vehicles on the roads became a major challenge. This challenge necessitated the formulation of traffic rules. All developments

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

in human civilisation have arisen, whether directly or indirectly, as a result of similar challenges. Differences create challenges. Challenges lead to new thinking. And new thinking results in progress and development.

It is an obvious fact that every human being thinks in a different way. So, if there are seven billion individuals in our world, there are seven billion different thinkers. If you meet someone who thinks and behaves differently from you, do not become negative. Do not take this encounter as a problem. Rather, consider it as a challenge and try to meet it through positive thinking. Think anew and try to find new solutions. This kind of thinking is bound to activate your mind. And when your mind is activated, your creativity will be enhanced, leading to further development and progress.

If our world has seven billion issues to handle, then in terms of results these issues can potentially be seven billion intellectual supporters. This is the greatest blessing of nature. Without this, the world would have been reduced to a dull place. Instead of intellectual awakening, intellectual stagnation would have set in and the process of development would have come to a halt. Do not try to eliminate differences. Rather, take them as an opportunity for your development and avail, with a positive mind, of the opportunities that they provide. The only thing that is required in this context is to maintain peace at any cost. Peace means normalcy, and where there is normalcy, there are opportunities for everyone to avail of.

In his book, *A History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874), John William Draper refers to the conflicts and differences between the Church and the scientific community. This is a negative aspect of that phenomenon. But there is also a positive aspect of this difference. It was these differences that triggered the minds of scientists, setting off a new intellectual process, which, consequently, ushered in the age of science.

Differences are a part of nature, and anything that is a part of nature is unalterable. We have to accept it without trying to change it. Do not try to eliminate differences. Rather, learn the art of 'difference management'. Try to manage differences in the right way, and very soon you will discover that they are not an evil but, rather, a blessing in disguise. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
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THE JUNGLE OF FORBIDDEN TREES

On Earth as in Heaven

GOD created the first man, Adam, and initially inhabited him in the garden of Paradise. He was told that he could live in Paradise with full freedom but with only one condition. In Paradise he was forbidden from approaching a particular tree or eating of its fruit. (THE QURAN 2: 35)

This was the original forbidden tree of Adam's motherland. However, according to the Quran, Adam was unable to remain patient, and he ate from the fruit of the forbidden tree (THE QURAN 20: 121). He failed the 'test' that God had given him in Paradise. As a result of this action, he was banished from the garden of Paradise and sent to live on earth.

**In Paradise there was only one forbidden tree;
in this world there is a jungle of 'forbidden trees'.**

Nevertheless, as far as the test for man is concerned, it remains the same here on earth also. The difference between the two is that in Paradise there was only one forbidden tree, and in this world there is a jungle of 'forbidden trees'. The return to Paradise for man will only be on the condition that he does not partake of the fruit of the forbidden trees. Now, for man to fulfill this condition, he has to be extremely cautious, because while originally he had to avoid only one tree, here it is necessary for him to refrain from a jungle of forbidden trees.

An account of things which are forbidden can be found in the Quran and *Hadith*. In the present age, the list of such things which lead man astray from the straight path has become very extensive. Such a comprehensive list of forbidden things cannot be compiled. Man has to now live very cautiously in this world. Whenever he comes across something that is a distraction from the straight path, he should immediately recognize it and shun it completely.

In this world, all such things take the place of a 'forbidden tree' that make man forget God and neglect the accountability of the Hereafter. Only the one who examines his life and continuously introspects will be able to save himself from these 'forbidden trees'. □

THIS NUMBER DOES NOT EXIST

Connect with God

IF by mistake you dial a wrong number on your telephone, your call will not reach the desired person. Instead of hearing the voice of that person saying 'Hello', you will hear a recorded message from the telephone exchange, announcing 'This number does not exist'.

In this material example lies a great spiritual lesson. And that is, if someone wants to establish contact with God, but due to his wrong thinking he comes to hold someone as god who is not God and starts calling out to him, he will meet the same fate. Instead of receiving any answer from God, he will hear a voice saying to him, "This god does not exist".

The urge for finding God is inter-woven in human nature. Everyone wants to find God. But, it has always happened in human history that people have made the mistake of giving someone other than God the status of God. Establishing contact with the real God is the greatest blessing for a person. Anyone who manages to do this will receive the light of guidance and will progress spiritually and intellectually. But, as opposed to this, if he gives the status of God to a non-god, he will be groping in darkness forever.

Establishing contact with the real God is the greatest blessing for a person. Any man or woman, who manages to do so, will be the recipient of the light of guidance in life.

These days, many people take the name of God, according to the status of divinity to something or the other. But just because people assign divinity, it does not necessarily mean it exists in the real sense. They have adopted a non-god as God. They are making telephone calls to some such non-god or the other. And the answer they receive from all of them, albeit in silent language, is that the number dialed does not exist; that the object of their call is fictitious. The god whom they are calling has no existence in reality, and that is why their call will never be answered.

The first and foremost responsibility of a person is to discover the real

God and then find out the way to establish contact with Him. Without this discovery, human life is not only incomplete, but it is also certainly going to meet with destruction.

It is the discovery of higher truth; and the establishing of contact with God, that makes human life meaningful. Without this discovery, life has no meaning.

This is man's greatest objective — the greatest target of human struggle. It is what makes human life meaningful. One whose life is bereft of this discovery is indeed the poorest of all, even if he may have gathered all kinds of worldly, material things around him.

To discover God means to discover the highest Truth. It is this discovery of the highest Truth and the establishing of contact with It that makes human life meaningful. Without this discovery, life has no meaning. □



Success Through Nature

*The Creator has placed necessary safeguards within nature itself.
The only thing we should do is to learn of these things
provided by nature and apply them in our lives.*

The way of nature is silent communication.

*Those who can understand this language of silence
will be able to listen to the voice of nature,
and, benefiting from it, will lead
successful lives.*

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN *MADRASAS*'

Role and Importance

IN the early period of Islam, wherever Muslims spread, they established large centres of learning in the form of *madrasas*'. This opened up a new chapter in the history of humankind, inspired by Islamic teachings, for the Quran stresses education for all. If the Quran is studied with an open mind, it is evident that it places great emphasis on knowledge and education. It can be claimed, without any exaggeration, that the Quran was the first book to remove restrictions on the acquisition of knowledge beyond a narrow class of priests and to make it available to all. It was thus the first to present the concept of mass education.

The Quran was the first book to remove restrictions on the acquisition of knowledge beyond a narrow class of priests and to make it available to all.

The first revelation to the Prophet, in the year 610 C.E., was the instruction to 'read' (*iqra*). It is said that the Angel Gabriel asked him to 'read', but he replied that he did not know how to do so. The Angel Gabriel asked him to read a second time, and again he gave the same reply. When the Angel Gabriel instructed him the third time, he recited the Quranic verse that the Angel Gabriel had delivered as the first divine revelation to him.

In this respect, Islamic culture can be termed as an '*iqra* culture' or what can be called an 'educational culture'. This makes education and learning an integral and central part of Islamic culture.

The *Madrasa* Movement in Nineteenth Century Colonial India

After the British captured India, for a while Muslim leaders believed that the British must first be ousted from the country, and that only after that would Muslims have the chance of engaging in any religious work. The Revolt of 1857 was a product of this thinking, but it failed in its objectives. This led the *ulema* or Islamic scholars to realize that it was pointless to seek to counter the British through military means. The only practical way out, they came to realise, was to avoid conflict and confrontation, and to engage, using peaceful means, in constructive activity, focussing particularly on the education of the community.

Consequently, numerous *madrasas'* were established across India in the second half of the 19th century. This soon assumed the form of a mass movement for Muslim educational awakening.

One could say that the *madrasas'* shifted the struggle of the community from violent conflict to peaceful educational activism. This represented the choice of a peaceful option over a violent one. The *ulema* reviewed their position, and, without terming it as such, issued what can, in some sense, be called a *fatwa*: declaring, as it were, that India should be considered as *Dar ut-Ta'leem* or 'abode of knowledge/learning' and that now all Muslims must get involved in the field of education. This was an extremely important decision.

One could say that the *madrasas'* shifted the struggle of the community from violent conflict to peaceful educational activism.

After considering India as what can be called *Dar ut-Ta'leem*, a vast number of *madrasas'* and other educational institutions were set up across the country, the result of the efforts of literally thousands of dedicated *ulema*. They sacrificed themselves so as to keep the community alive and to maintain the tradition of religious knowledge, surviving on meagre incomes and leading simple lives without expecting worldly rewards. The *madrasas'* they established provided free education, which helped the poor particularly. The *ulema* decided that they would depend on community donations, and not on government funding, so that they could retain their autonomy. They thus faced numerous hurdles, including financial, but yet they carried on with their work with a sense of mission and dedication.

Peaceful Methods of Educational Activism

This world runs on the basis of certain fixed laws. One of these is that non-violence is more powerful than violence. This is illustrated in a tradition attributed to the Prophet according to which he is said to have declared that God blesses gentleness with that which he does not give to harshness. This relates, in fact, to all actions, including the sphere of social or collective action. Problems always come along with opportunities. The correct approach is for us to ignore or not be intimidated by the hurdles in one's path, and, through peaceful means, to make use of the available opportunities.

This wise strategy was also adopted by the *madrassa* movement. The 19th century *ulema* who led this movement could have thought of first removing the major hurdle that they faced — British rule — by seeking to militarily destroy it and also by uprooting the British system of education, in the belief that only after this could they establish a system of education of their choice. Had our *ulema* thought in this way, the movement that they launched would have died out shortly after it was spawned, and it would have produced no positive results for the community — as was the case of numerous violent movements before this.

However, God provided the *ulema* with the vision to adopt the right course. They avoided the useless path of destruction and focused all their energies on constructive activities, using entirely peaceful means, mainly by setting up *madrasas'* and other related institutions. These institutions were able to sustain themselves in the long-run and to expand vastly in number. They had a very positive impact on society, which could not have been produced by short-lived violent movements.

The Missionary Role of the *Madrasas'*

Ideally, Islamic *madrasas'* should prepare scholars who, once they graduate, should engage in *dawah*, communicating the message of God to others, besides providing religious guidance to Muslims. This is what *madrasas'* used to do in the past. However, over time, this *dawah* orientation of the *madrasas'* was overtaken by a polemical approach. Because of this, *madrasas'* have become ineffective in doing any practical work as far as *dawah* is concerned.

Every year, our *madrasas'* produce thousands of graduates, but they are not in a position to fulfil the requirements of *dawah*. *Madrassa* students are trained to engage in some sort of missionary work, but this training is entirely on polemical lines, not on the lines of *dawah* or invitation to the faith, as correctly understood. Consequently, *madrassa* graduates can become good polemicists, but not good missionaries.

The past was an age of polemics, a product of the 'age of the sword'. He who was victorious on the battlefield was regarded as successful, while the one who was defeated was regarded as having failed. It was in that particular milieu that religious polemics emerged. Fiery polemics were a common phenomenon in the past. But this is the age of scientific exploration and investigation, not polemics. Hence,

the place of polemics has been taken by serious dialogue. This shift demands that *madrasas'* suitably modify their approach and system. They must prepare their students for scientific discussions, instead of heated polemics.

The crucial difference between polemics and dialogue is that in the former case, the other party is regarded as an enemy. There is no concern for the welfare of the other party in the polemicist's heart. He seeks more to defeat him than to improve or reform him. And this is why polemics generally become a sort of battle, characterised by hard-hitting arguments bereft of gentleness. Indeed, often the polemicist is not concerned with what is right and what is wrong: his only concern, like that of a skilled lawyer, is to defeat his opponent.

It was due to the setting up and expansion of *madrasas'* that today Muslims in India can be said to have a vast and strong non-political religious and communitarian foundation.

This, however, is not in accordance with the practice of the prophets. In contrast to the polemicist, the aim of the ideal missionary of Islam is to appeal to the heart of man. Hence, it is very necessary to institute necessary changes in the *madrasas'* in this regard so that their approach comes to be based on the Quranic principle of conveying the divine message, instead of engaging in polemics.

***Madrasas'* and the Transmission of Islamic Learning**

Through the medium of *madrasas'*, the tradition of Islamic learning is carried on and transmitted to future generations. This is one of the major contributions of the *madrasa* system, and it is indispensable for the community to stay alive.

The case of Muslims in medieval Spain is instructive in this regard. It is often thought that in 1492, when the 800-year-old Muslim political rule in Spain came to an end, the Muslims of the country were also wiped out — that they were all killed or forced to flee. But in actual fact, even after Muslim rule ended, several thousand Muslims remained in the country. What happened was not that Muslims suddenly disappeared from Spain, but, rather, that the tradition of Islamic learning and its transmission to the future generations was destroyed. It is a matter of

common knowledge that education was actively promoted in Muslim Spain, but this was done under the patronage of the Muslim rulers. Hence, when Muslim rule came to an end, so too, did the educational system that the Muslim rulers had supported. Because of this, future generations of Muslims were cut off from the tradition of Islamic education. Over the years, they gradually lost their identity, so much so that they even forgot that their ancestors had once been Muslim.

Ideally, Islamic *madrasas'* should prepare scholars who, once they graduate, should engage in *dawah*, besides providing religious guidance to Muslims.

In the 19th century, when Muslim political power in India collapsed, the Indian Muslims were faced with the same danger. Here, too, the educational system had been under the direction and patronage of the rulers. Fortunately, at this delicate juncture, the *ulema* stood up and decided to establish a system of religious education for Muslims that would not depend on government assistance, but which, instead, would be funded by the community. With the grace of God, this project was successful, so much so that in a few years a large number of *madrasas'* were set up across the country. It was because of this that India was saved from meeting the same fate as Spain. It was due to the setting up and expansion of *madrasas'* that today Muslims in India can be said to have a vast and strong non-political religious and communitarian foundation, which is more important, useful and meaningful than political power was once in the past.

All this happened through the use of peaceful and constructive means that focused on institution-building. Modernity made this possible, because modern developments have relegated political power to a secondary status. Today, the real concentration of power is in institutions, and through them much more can be done than was possible in the past through political power. Political empires are formed on the basis of military power, while non-political empires are based on institutions and organizations. While political empires serve the interests of individuals or small groups, such non-political empires can serve the entire community. Political empires are based on subjugation of others, while non-political empires can, through community-based institutions, work for the welfare of the whole of humankind. □

MIRACLES OR SIGNS OF GOD

Phenomena in Nature

THE signs that the prophets of God demonstrated to their people are commonly known as miracles. But this is not a true Islamic understanding. The Quran and *Hadith* refer to these prophetic examples not as miracles, but as signs. Calling such instances as miracles presents them as prophetic phenomena, whereas referring to them as signs shows them to be natural phenomenon.

Moses was a prophet of God. He was born in ancient Egypt in the 16th century B.C. The Egyptian ruler of the times, Pharaoh II, challenged him in a contest where, on the demand of the ruler, the Prophet Moses demonstrated a sign. When he threw his wooden staff to the ground, it instantly became a moving serpent. This event was witnessed by many people, some of whom were so affected by this event that they immediately accepted the divine message of Prophet Moses.

This incident was not just a lesson for the contemporaries of the Prophet Moses. In reality, it was an eye-opening sign for the whole of mankind. There is a great lesson in it for people of all times. In fact, Prophet Moses had demonstrated to people a universal and common law of God. This is the law of conversion. With the help of God, Prophet Moses had shown that a piece of wood could be changed into the shape of a serpent in the same way that everything in nature is being converted from one form into another. The event that Prophet Moses demonstrated to the people was in reality this law of conversion — the act of changing something from one form to another.

In the order of nature this act of conversion is universal and all pervading. It is a proof of the existence of God and of His power.

There are several references to this natural law of conversion in the Quran. The Quran says that in this world nothing is being converted into something (THE QURAN 52: 35). In the same way, it is mentioned that a non-existence is converted into an existence (THE QURAN 76: 1).

Prophet Moses was born in the 16th century B.C. and died in the 15th century B.C. This was the pre-scientific era, when such signs

could only be shown to people with the special intervention of God. With the advent of modern science, it has become possible that such natural phenomena can be explained through human intelligence. This scientific revolution that was to come had been predicted in the Quran (THE QURAN 41: 53).

Conversion proves intervention, and when intervention is proved the intervener is also proved. God is only the other name of this intervener.

There are countless and diverse things in the universe. Study shows that all these things are a result of conversion, that is, a change from one form to another. In Prophet Moses' time, what happened was a thing that was not a serpent was changed into a serpent; matter was changed into a different form of matter. This is the same phenomenon that transpires with everything else in this universe. Here, solid is being converted into liquid; liquid to solid, gases into liquids and vice versa, and gases into other gases. Energy is being converted into matter; matter is being converted into energy. In the same way, a tree grows out of a seed, a fruit comes forth from a flower, a chick emerges from an egg, and a butterfly is metamorphosed from a chrysalis. Change or conversion is everywhere.

In the order of nature, this act of conversion is universal and all-pervading. It is a proof of the existence of God and of His power. What is meant by conversion in the universe is actually intervention. Things that come into existence by conversion prove an intervention. And, when the act of intervention is proved, then the existence of the intervener is also proved.

Conversion proves intervention, and when intervention is proved, the intervener is also proved. God is only the other name of this Intervener. □



Learn from others

Learning from others' mistakes is the easiest way of not repeating that kind of mistake yourself.

PEACE IN PLURAL SOCIETIES

Reflections

AFTER a long struggle, in August 1947 the Indian subcontinent won independence from the British. This independence came along with the Partition, which was on the basis of the so-called 'two nation theory'. It led to the partition, not just of territory, but of entire communities as well. Far from solving the problem of communal conflict between Hindus and Muslims, it only further exacerbated it. Prior to the Partition, the conflict was between two communities that lacked political power. With the Partition, it now became a conflict between two sovereign countries.

No matter what name it is called by, the result of the effort to manufacture and impose a single culture on people remains the same — useless.

Mahatma Gandhi had, from the very first day, perceived how sensitive this situation was. And so, he stressed that Hindus and Muslims should learn to live together in peace and harmony. He said that he would give up his life in order that this should happen. However, shortly after India became independent, he was shot dead. This was undoubtedly a very big tragedy. Because of this, India lost its tallest leader who was committed to peace and unity.

The Partition was accompanied by horrific communal violence on both sides of the newly-created border. This violence continued unabated for many years thereafter. In order to address the issue, the first Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, called a national-level conference in New Delhi in October 1961. At this conference, it was unanimously decided to set up the National Integration Council to deal with matters related to communal harmony.

The second conference of this Council was held in June 1962. Speakers delivered their speeches on the occasion, suggesting various measures to promote communal harmony. Yet, no action was taken on their suggestions. Moreover, no more meetings of the Council were held during the rest of Jawaharlal Nehru's life.

The third meeting of the Council was called by Indira Gandhi in

Srinagar in 1968. It called for making it a cognizable offence on the grounds of promoting hatred between communities. Some other steps were also mooted. A few laws and rules were also passed. But still, nothing practical came out of this. And so, even today, the situation in the country is about the same as it was in 1947 as far as the issue of communalism is concerned.

The fact is that religion in itself is not a problem. Religion is an important part of human life. It is the political exploitation of religion by some opportunist people that is the problem.

What was the reason for this failure? The basic reason is that this issue of communal conflict has been treated simply as a law and order problem. However, the nature of the issue is actually quite different. It is not essentially a law and order problem. Rather, it has essentially to do with the lack of intellectual development and social awareness. To solve the problem, what is basically required is to properly educate people and promote proper thinking and discernment. People should know what to do and what to abstain from. They should learn to think before acting. Only this sort of an 'aware' society is one where communal harmony can flourish.

Religious Differences

Some basic issues that relate to the vital question of properly educating people about the issue of communalism need to be clarified. One of these relates to the issue of religious differences. There are, in fact, obvious and clear differences between the different religions. For instance, some religions believe in Monism, and others in Monotheism. Some religions preach the discovery of truth by oneself, while others believe that such truth is revealed by God through messengers.

Some people think that these religious differences are themselves the root cause for communal conflict. They believe that communal harmony can exist only when these differences are somehow destroyed. 'Bulldoze them all!' they demand, but of course this is so completely impractical that it is not even worth talking about.

Faced with the reality of religious differences, some people seek to somehow or the other try to 'prove' that all religions are, actually, one

and the same. One such person was the late Dr. Bhagwan Das (1869–1958). After a detailed study of all the major religions, he wrote a book, running into almost 1000 pages, titled *Essential Unity of All Religions*. He claimed that all religions teach the same things and so are one and the same.

But to seek to prove that all religions are one by extracting portions from different scriptures is like culling out portions from the Constitutions of different countries and publishing them together in a single book and then claiming that all the Constitutions of the world are the same and have the same rules and clauses and provisions! This sort of imaginary universal Constitution may greatly please the author of such a compendium, but it will not be acceptable to even a single country. The same holds true in the case of those who have compiled books like Dr. Bhagwan Das' about religion. Books of this sort may give their compilers great pleasure, but they cannot be acceptable to the followers of different religions.

The fact is that just as there is diversity in everything else in the world, so also are there differences between one religion and another.

A detailed study of this issue will show that the claim that all religions are one does not correspond to reality. In actual fact, the different religions differ so greatly from each other that it is impossible to practically prove them to be one. For instance, one religion says that God is one. Another religion talks of two gods. A third religion says there are three gods. Yet another religion claims that there are 33 or 330 million gods. Some religions insist that the number of gods is simply beyond counting.

In such circumstances, to consider the teachings of all the religions as one and the same is simply wishful thinking that has no basis in logic and reality. And then, even if, by some means or the other, it could be argued that the scriptures of the different religions are indeed the same, the problem of differences will still remain unresolved because there are multiple and conflicting interpretations of each of these scriptures, as a result of which each religion is further divided into numerous sects.

The fact is that such difference or diversity is not just a religious

phenomenon. The entire world is based on the principle of difference and diversity. These differences are so pervasive that no two things or people are wholly identical, without some difference or the other. As someone has very rightly said, 'Nature abhors uniformity'.

When differences are themselves a law of Nature, how can religion be an exception to this rule? The fact is that just as there is diversity in everything else in the world, so also are there differences between one religion and another. We have not thought it necessary to do away with differences in other matters, but, instead, have agreed to disagree. We should adopt this very same practical approach and principle in matters of religion as well.

Here, too, we should accept diversity and differences and seek to promote unity despite them, instead of searching for an imaginary unity by trying to do away with them. There is only one way to solve the issue of religious differences, and that is: 'Follow one, and respect all'.

Cultural Differences

The issue of cultural difference is also a vexed one. Social groups are characterised by cultural differences. Some people regard these differences as the root of conflict. They argue that to end conflict, these differences should be wiped off and a single, common culture should be imposed on everyone, so that 'cultural unity' can thereby be promoted.

This proposal, too, is impractical. Culture cannot be made or destroyed by individuals at will in this way. It cannot be prepared by someone sitting in an office. Rather, it is a product of a long, historical process.

In the wake of the Second World War, numerous ideologues in different parts of the world began calling for the establishment of a mono-cultural society in order to promote national unity. This mono-cultural approach was promoted, for instance, in Canada, but it proved impractical and was soon abandoned. Now, Canada has abandoned mono-culturalism and has officially adopted multiculturalism as its policy.

The same happened in the USA as well. After the Second World War, a movement to promote what was called 'Americanisation' emerged, which sought to impose a single culture on all Americans. But this failed, because people realized it was impractical. And so, it was abandoned, and now in America, too, multiculturalism is the recognised policy.

The fact is that cultural differences are not a matter of differences only between two communities. Such differences are to be found among, and between, different sub-groups in each and every community, too. It is impractical, indeed impossible, to do away with these differences. That is why it is not necessary to change religious teachings in order to promote unity and harmony between different religions. For this, the only necessary thing is to promote among the followers of different religions the understanding of 'Live and Let Live'.

Some people still advocate an experiment that has already proven to be a failure: what they call 'Social Engineering'. Through this, they seek to respond to the fact of cultural diversity among different communities by calling for the restructuring of the communities' cultures so that the wider society is free from cultural differences and all citizens of the state have one and the same culture.

There is only one way to solve the issue of religious differences, and that is: 'Follow one, and respect all'.

No matter what name it is called by, the result of the effort to manufacture and impose a single culture on people remains the same — utterly useless. It is tantamount to nothing less than what could be called 'cultural bulldozing'. No matter what it is termed — 'social engineering' or 'cultural nationalism' or whatever — it remains thoroughly impractical and unrealistic. And to pursue anything impractical from the point of view of natural laws is simply a waste of time.

In this regard, my difference with the 'cultural nationalists' or 'social engineers' is not on an ideological, but, rather, practical basis. I do not say that their aim is wrong, but, rather, that what they want to bring about is simply impractical and impossible to achieve. Supposing it becomes possible for everyone in the country to start speaking one language, to follow one culture and to have the same traditions and way of life, I would say, 'Yes, it should certainly be so.' But the fact remains that in line with the laws of nature and history, this sort of uniformity is simply impossible. It has never been possible in the past, and nor will it be possible in the future. Cultures develop according to their own logic. It is simply not possible to sit in a cabin and invent a culture of your liking and then go about imposing it on every community in the country.

So, in this regard, we should do exactly what we generally do with regard to all other divisive issues — that is, to solve the problem on the basis of the principle of tolerance. One should deal with the matter with methods that accord with reality, rather than through confrontation. Using confrontation and violence in this matter will only further exacerbate the problem, rather than solve it.

In this context, there is an important issue that needs to be clarified. Some people claim that India belongs to the Hindus, and that their loyalty is to this country. They claim that this is different with the Muslims of the country, whose centres of devotion — for instance, Makkah and Madinah — are located outside India. That is why, they allege, Muslims cannot be loyal to India.

I see this issue differently, however. Suppose a Hindu is devoted to the temple of Somnath, this does not mean that he cannot be devoted to a temple located elsewhere, too. If a person loves his mother, it surely does not mean that he has no love for his father. Similarly, if an Indian Muslim has an emotional bonding with Makkah and Madinah, it does not mean that he has no such bonding with India. To think otherwise is to underestimate his innate humanity.

Any person, be he or she Hindu or Muslim, is an expression of nature, and nature has made every human being with enough inner spaciousness to contain within him or her multiple loves and loyalties. This is such a basic fact of life that every person can testify to it personally. Every man and woman knows this from his or her own experience. As a Western thinker very aptly put it, 'I am large enough to contain all these contradictions'.

Religion and Politics

Religion is very often invoked in communal conflicts. Repeatedly, political and communal controversies are turned into so-called religious controversies. And then, people's passions are roused, leading to confrontation and violence between communities. Because of this, many people have turned against religion itself. They say that human beings have no need for religion at all, and that, hence, religion must be destroyed. Only then, they contend, is societal unity possible.

This, however, is an extremist response to an extremist stance, a secular extremist reaction to religious extremism. It is neither possible nor useful. The fact is that religion in itself is not a problem. Religion

is an important part of human life. It is the political exploitation of religion by some opportunist people that is the problem. Hence, it is the exploitation of religion, rather than religion itself, that needs to be eliminated.

Religion has two dimensions: personal and collective. The personal dimension of religion denotes beliefs, worship, morality and spirituality. The collective dimension of religion includes its political and social rules. The right approach would, in general conditions, be to focus on the personal dimension of religion and on promoting the spirit of religion.

As far as the political and social rules of religion are concerned, they should not be taken up until such time as the entire society is prepared for them. These rules can be established only through the voluntary and collective consent of the entire society. That is why no practical steps should be taken as far as these rules are concerned as long as the collective consent of the society is not in favour of this.

This can be termed a practical division between religion and politics. That is to say, while considering, at the ideological level, politics to be part of religion, in the face of reality, the practical enforcement of the political rules of religion can be delayed or postponed. This is a wise approach. In this way, the demands both of religion and of politics can be met: those of religion, in the present, and of politics, in the future. On the other hand, if this pragmatic policy is not adopted and both aspects of religion are stressed, the result will be that the demands of both religion and politics will be left unfulfilled.

With regard to communal harmony, there are some issues that need to be looked at. Ordinarily, if a Muslim does something wrong, Hindus speak and write against him. In the same way, if a Hindu does something wrong, Muslims speak and write against him. This method is, from the point of view of reform, completely useless. It only pleases one particular community, but it has no positive impact whatsoever on the other community.

Contrary to this, the beneficial approach is that if a Muslim does something wrong, Muslim scholars and intellectuals should speak and write against it. Likewise, if a Hindu does something wrong, Hindus should speak and write against it. It is just as when a child does something wrong, his parents are the first to scold him, if necessary.

His parents do not wait for their neighbours to come to their house and scold their child. In any case, even if these people do come and scold their child, it will not reform him, though a parent's admonishment might.

It is a psychological reality that one generally takes the critique or admonishment of people whom one considers one's own in a positive way, and, accordingly, reforms oneself. On the other hand, one generally takes the criticism of people one does not know or whom one considers as the 'other' as an insult to one's honour, and so it does not have a positive impact. With regard to the issue of communal harmony, it is very necessary to keep this bit of practical wisdom in mind. □



No need to speak aloud for God to hear

*People asked the Prophet:
"Is our Lord close? Can we address Him softly?
Or is He distant? Should we address Him loudly?"*

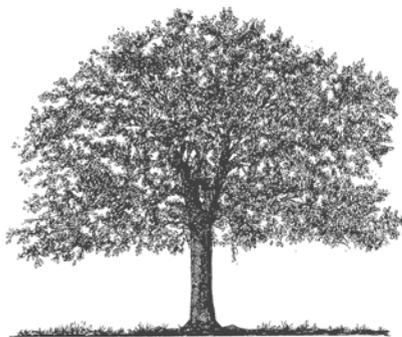
*Then this verse of the Quran was revealed:
"When My servants question you about Me,
tell them that I am near.*

*I answer the prayer of the suppliant
when he calls to Me."*

*Abu Musa says that when some people
raised their voices in prayer during a journey,
the Prophet said, "Control yourselves, for you are
not praying to one who is deaf or absent: you are
praying to one who hears and is close.
He is nearer to you than the
neck of your mount."*

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



HEAVENLY PERSONALITY

Abu Hurairah reported that the Prophet of God said:

'Such people will go to heaven whose hearts
are like those of little birds.'

(Musnad Ahmad)

SMALL birds possess a unique feature which is absent from all other animals. That is, the birds are free of feelings such as hatred and vengeance. All other animals have an instinct of attacking when threatened, but birds are completely free of such instinct. Looking at a little bird, you will immediately recognize that it is an embodiment of sweetness, tenderness and innocence. That is why the dove has been universally declared a symbol of peace.

According to the above quoted *Hadith*, this is the heavenly quality that every individual who is desirous of Paradise must have. A heavenly personality is one that is completely free of all negativity. A bird has this positive quality by virtue of its instincts, whereas a heavenly personality has this quality as a conscious choice.

A heavenly person is one who has moulded himself in such a way

that his heart is completely devoid of feelings such as hatred and vengeance; who is able to control anger; who does not react negatively to situations; who can respond with love despite hatred from others; who can do good to people selflessly; who is able to live amongst people while considering all of them as his brothers and sisters; who averts all evil, seeking out the company of angels; who patiently bears all complaints; who carries out his duties and asks his rights from God — these are those superior qualities which will make a person deserving of entering Paradise. □



Second chance better than the first

Sir Isaac Newton (1643–1727), the well-known British scientist, was born in a farmer’s family. Initially, his mother wanted him to pursue the family vocation of farming.

She started him on the job to learn the techniques of farming but he failed. Later, Newton was sent to school where he started his education, excelled and soon emerged as one of the greatest champions of modern science.

This story has a great lesson. And that is, if you are not successful at first, it should not dishearten you; because there may be a second chance waiting for you that may prove to be better than the first.



No Need for Disappointment

*Recognition always comes after rejection.
It is a law of nature.*

*If you find that one door is closed for you, don’t stop your journey,
try to know the other door. And, you will happily find that
there was one who was ready to receive you.*

SENSE OF INCOMPLETENESS

Find the Divine Scheme

AN Italian writer, Luzia A Costa, penned an article titled: *The Feeling of Incompleteness and Inability to be Happy*. In this article, he refers to the fact that man always lives with lack of satisfaction. He says that human beings by their very nature suffer from a feeling of incompleteness.

The Italian writer rightly alluded to this nature of man. But he failed to give a rational explanation of this phenomenon. The right answer is given in the Quran in these words: "Those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of God — surely in the remembrance of God, hearts can find comfort." (THE QURAN 13: 28)

Being unaware of the creation plan of God makes one dissatisfied, and awareness of the plan instantly makes one satisfied.

It means that those who have discovered God have also discovered the creation plan of God. This discovery gives them the right explanation of nature. And when they realize this right explanation, automatically they become satisfied. Being unaware of the explanation makes one dissatisfied, and awareness of the explanation instantly makes one satisfied.

It is a fact that everything in the universe except for man lives in satisfaction. The material world and the plant and animal kingdoms all live in a state of satisfaction. It is strictly a human phenomenon that man lives with the sense of dissatisfaction or incompleteness.

The reason is that man is born as an idealist or perfectionist. This is the nature of every man and woman, but the world in which we live is imperfect or less than ideal. It fails to fulfil the requirements of human nature. Every human being lives with this sense of incompleteness, and in a very short while, dies without experiencing the fulfilment which had been his cherished goal.

This sense of incompleteness was not created by man himself. Rather it is a creation of God. When we observe that, except man, all creatures

of the universe are living with a sense of completeness, we realize that this phenomenon is not any sort of defect in creation. It gives us a clue to the fact that, the divine scheme of things regarding man, is different from that for other components of the universe. That is, all other creatures of the universe are born with their complements for fulfilment. However, man lacks this complement in this world and hence is unable to find fulfilment.

Every man and woman is born as an idealist or perfectionist, but the world in which we live is imperfect and less than ideal.

The Quran tells us that man's complement was also created by God just as He created it for other things, but in the case of man, this gift requires eternity. That, is, man's complement for fulfillment exists in the eternal world of the Hereafter and not in this limited world.

The Quran says that when man shall enter into Paradise, the angels will announce: "Rejoice in the [good news of the] Garden that you have been promised." (THE QURAN 41: 30)

Here, the word "promise" includes the natural urge of human beings. The natural urge in this regard is a silent promise made by God: 'Wait for some time and you will be provided with all those things that you want. God has created a world, that is, Paradise, where you will find total fulfilment.'

This fact has been mentioned in the Quran 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 sense of incompleteness in human nature is in itself a good tidings. It tells us that a day will come when man will surely enjoy the experience of completeness, that is, in eternal Paradise. □



MORE THAN LEGAL RIGHTS

Not by Demand

SATYENDRA Nath Bose (1894–1974) was an Indian physicist who specialized in mathematical physics. He is best known for his work on quantum mechanics. He was known to be a very hardworking student.

One of his stories from student life has a great lesson for us. While doing M.Sc. at Calcutta's Presidency College, he once performed so well in a mathematics exam that he was unusually awarded 110 marks out of 100! He was given extra marks because he solved some complex problems by more than one method!

All those who are engaged in what they call 'rights activism' have a better choice to adopt; that is, 'opportunity activism'.

This incident illustrates a great lesson — and that is, if a person proves himself competent enough, he will be awarded more than his legal rights. In our world, there is no place for complaints or protests. All those who are engaged in what they call 'rights activism' have a better choice to adopt — that is, 'opportunity activism'. They must tell people: 'Don't press for your rights, but, rather, do better, and you will certainly receive more than your legal or constitutional rights.'

Every man and woman is born with a divine gift in the form of an unlimited potential. Discover this divine gift and avail of it by converting your potential into reality and you will emerge as a super-achiever. You can shape your future on your own. Make yourself a 'giver-member' of the society rather than a 'taker-member'. Asking for your rights is a kind of begging. When you have such great potential, why do you prefer to beg? There are many so-called 'empowerment' movements — movements in the name of Muslim empowerment, women empowerment, economic empowerment, and so on. But the greatest empowerment is self-empowerment.

Choose self-empowerment, and you will certainly achieve more than what you had expected from others. Every man can emerge as a super-man, every woman, a super-woman, provided they discover this potential and apply it to their own lives. □

BLAMING OTHERS

Unacceptable to God

MIKHAIL Kalashnikov, inventor of the well-known firearm AK-47 or Kalashnikov, died on December 23, 2013 at the age of 94 in Udmurtia, Russia. The AK-47 — *Avtomat Kalashnikov* — is the world's most popular firearm, favoured by guerrillas, terrorists and insurgents. An estimated 100 million AK-47 guns are spread worldwide. The ruggedness and simplicity of the gun are exemplary: it performs in sandy or wet conditions that jam more sophisticated weapons. The Kalashnikov suitability for jungle and desert conditions has made it ideal for killing from a distance.

There are only two proper options for a person: either he commits no wrongdoing, or when he commits a wrongdoing, he should repent and ask for forgiveness from God.

The AK-47 assault rifle has killed more people than any other firearm. Even though it has wreaked such terrible havoc, its inventor often said he felt personally untroubled by his contribution to bloodshed:

"I sleep well. It is the politicians who are to blame for failing to come to an agreement and resorting to violence."

(AP, December 23, 2013)

This is a very striking example of what can be called the 'blame others' culture. People constantly blame others even for their own wrongdoings. The other formula is 'blame thyself', but rarely can one find a person who is ready to adhere to this principle. 'Blame thyself' is the most unpopular principle. Even many so-called religious people are not ready to admit their mistakes.

In the Quran, there is a story of Satan. At the time of the creation of Adam, a dialogue happened between God and Satan. During this dialogue, Satan said: "My Lord, since you have misguided me, I shall make the path of error seem alluring to them on the earth and shall mislead them all." (THE QURAN 15: 39)

God is absolutely right and good, and one of His attributes is *Al-Hadi*, which means one who guides. Therefore, it is not possible for anyone to

blame God. Thus, what Satan said was based on totally false grounds. This Quranic reference tells us that the 'blame others' culture is a Satanic culture. Anyone who follows this culture is a brother of Satan.

One who commits a wrongdoing and then blames others is choosing a path which is not acceptable to God.

The 'blame thyself' culture is the culture of angels, while the 'blame others' culture is the culture of Satan. There are only two proper options for a person: either he commits no wrongdoing, or when he commits a wrongdoing, he should repent and ask for forgiveness from God. But one who commits a wrongdoing and then blames others is choosing a third option, which is not acceptable to God. □



***Do not be
slave to your desires***

*It is a fact that the
human mind is full of desires.*

*But, at the same time, it is also true that
man's mind has the capacity for logical thought.*

*When you find that your mind is overwhelmed by desire,
examine that desire in the light of reality.*

*Assess it in terms of its potential results, and find out
objectively whether it is feasible or not to fulfil it.*

*Then, after examining it completely,
if you are satisfied that its results will be
beneficial, fulfil your desire.*

KAFIR AND KUFR

Who are Kafirs?

MANY people who do not have much knowledge of Islam have at least heard of the words *kafir* and *kufr*. The generally-held view is that those who are not Muslims are *kafirs*. This notion is a continuing barrier to national unity and global peace.

The literal meaning of *kufr* is 'denial', and so a *kafir* is a 'denier' or 'one who denies'. The word *kafir* has never been used in the Quran to mean either an unbeliever or an infidel. It is important to note that the word *kafir* denotes an individual, rather than a certain race or community. It is in no way an appellation for a group.

The word *kafir* has never been used in the Quran to mean either an unbeliever or an infidel.

According to Islam, the fact is that those who are not Muslims are simply non-Muslims. We must look at them as such, rather than classify them as *kafirs*. The right way, according to Islam, is to call each community or group by the name it has adopted for itself. For instance, people from America should be called 'Americans', rather than *Kafirs*, and America should be called 'America', and not the 'land of *Kufr*' or *Dar-ul Kufr*.

There are a number of examples in the Quran of references to communities or groups in which the names they themselves had adopted were used. Not once was the word *kafir* used for them. In the Makkan period, certain verses of the Quran were revealed which mention non-Muslims living outside Arabia. For instance, at the beginning of Chapter 30, the Quran mentions the Byzantines, who had then been conquered by the Persians. The Byzantines were at that time Christians, but the verses do not say 'the Byzantine *kafirs* who have been defeated'. Similarly, Chapter 105 of the Quran mentions the non-Muslim ruler of Yemen, Abraha, and his army, who came mounted on elephants to attack the Kabah in Makkah. It does not refer to them as '*kafirs*', but, rather, as the 'People of the elephants'.

The Prophet Muhammad received prophethood in 610 C.E. In the early stages of his prophethood, all people other than him and a few others were non-Muslims. Whenever he addressed these non-Muslims to convey his message he never said, 'O *kafirs*', but, rather, 'O man,' or

'O people'. He continued to use this form of address throughout his life. He addressed groups or communities with words such as 'O people of Quraysh', 'O Children of Abdul Muttalib', etc.

The Prophet of Islam spent the first 13 years of his prophet-hood in Makkah. After this, he migrated to Madinah and remained there till the end. The first period is known as the Makkan period, and the second period as the Madani period. Chapter 109 of the Quran begins with these words. "Say, O you *Kafirs* (deniers of truth)". After this address, the chapter goes on to say that 'You will never worship the one who I worship'.

The act of *kufr* is related to the question of intention, and only God knows what a person's intention truly is.

This chapter was revealed during the Makkan period of the Prophet's life. The above address was specifically directed at the people of Makkah of those times. History shows that about eight years after this, Makkah came into the fold of Islam and all the people of Makkah accepted Islam. This is the event that is mentioned in the Quran in these words "When God's help and victory come, and you see people entering God's religion in multitudes." (THE QURAN 110: 1-2)

The question arises that when all the people of Makkah were going to become believers and Muslims, why were they addressed as *Kafirs* in the Quran and why was it said that 'You will never worship the one God', although God the All-Knowing was fully aware of what was to happen?

The reason for this difference was that in this chapter of the Quran, the usage of the words is not in legal terms but, rather, in the language of admonition. This style of expression cannot be taken in a legal or definitive sense. Here, the stress is on the severity and seriousness of the issue. In reality, the words were a warning that if they — the people of Makkah — did not follow the Prophet, they would be deniers of truth in the eyes of God, and the result of such denial will be hell.

It was a call to faith in a very intense language, rather than a declaration of them being *kafirs*. If it was a declaration of their *kufr*, then after Makkah came under Islam these people could not have entered the fold of Islam in multitudes.

Another issue to consider is: Is it permissible to call an individual a *kafir*? From the Islamic view point, there is always a great risk involved in calling anyone a *kafir*, a sinner or a hypocrite, for hardly anyone but God can claim to know a person well enough to make such a pronouncement. That is why the *Hadith* gives us stern warning regarding such acts.

The Prophet of Islam said: 'Whenever one person accuses another of being a *kafir* or *fasiq* (sinner), then surely, this accusation applies to the accuser if the second person was not so.' (Musnad Ahmad)

This is a law that God has established in nature. It can be compared to the boomerang — the harder and faster you throw it, the faster and more violently it comes back at you. If somebody speaks ill of another or accuses him of being a *fasiq* or *kafir*, he is doing it based on his personal feelings. The accuser considers it as a one-sided matter under the assumption that the whole issue is only about the accused and that it has nothing to do with himself. This is a dangerous misconception because if the other person is not as the former has perceived him to be, his accusation falls back on himself. He will be guilty of what he had been accusing the other person of.

The usage of the word *kafir* in the Quran is not in legal terms, rather it is in the language of admonition.

Fisq and *kufr* are matters related to a person's heart, and only God knows what is in a person's heart. The act of *kufr* is related to the question of intention, and only God knows what a person's intention truly is. Making a claim about someone being a *kafir* is trying to enter the domain of God. Every person who fears God will be extremely fearful in using such words for others. If he sees some wrong in another person, he will counsel him with the utmost well wishing manner, but he will definitely not use words of contempt such as *fisq* and *kufr* to address him. He will leave this matter to God, realizing that his responsibility is only to the extent of advising others with beauty and wisdom.

According to the teachings of the Quran, the right thing for people to do is to follow God's commands, and as far as other people are concerned, they should never issue edicts against them. Rather, as their well-wishers, they should consider it their responsibility to convey God's message to them peacefully, till their last breath. All else relates to God, not man. □

POLITICAL REALISM

Egypt: A Case in Point

IN reports contained in the books of *Hadith*, the Prophet instructed the *ummah* — his followers — not to engage in conflict with the political authorities under any circumstances. He advised the *ummah* that if they noticed any political degeneration or corruption, they should avoid it, and, instead, should carry on with work in the non-political sphere. These reports can be seen in the chapters titled *Kitab al-Fitan* in the books of *Hadith*.

This guidance of the Prophet is based on great wisdom — and that is, in accordance with the law of nature, no perfect or ideal political system can come into being in this world. Every political system in this world will necessarily and definitely be less than ideal. This being the case, practical wisdom demands that people should agree to settle with a less than ideal political system. If they refuse to do so, it will lead to ceaseless political conflict. And then it will be impossible for peace, harmony and balance to be established in society — factors which are absolutely essential for any constructive work.

The Prophet instructed his followers not to engage in conflict with the political authorities under any circumstances.

An example of this in recent times is provided by Egypt. During the first half of the twentieth century, in the name of fighting ‘political degeneration’, self-styled ‘champions of Islam’ launched a movement against the country’s ruler, King Farouk (1920–1965). In 1952, with the help of the Army, they succeeded in overthrowing him in a coup forcing him to flee the country. General Muhammad Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser were the leaders of this coup. After this, General Muhammad Naguib was made the country’s President.

But he, too, had to face stiff opposition and was soon stripped off his powers and placed under house arrest in 1954. Following this, Gamal Abdul Nasser became Egypt’s President, but self-styled ‘Islamic’ leaders continued to oppose him. He died in 1970, at the age of 52 while in office.

He was succeeded by Anwar al-Sadat, who was assassinated in 1981.

After Sadat, Hosni Mubarak became the President. He, too, faced stiff opposition from 'Islamist' forces, with vast numbers of people being killed in the violence that rocked Egypt in the confrontation between Mubarak and his allies, on the one hand, and self-styled Islamists, on the other. Finally, he was forced to step down. He was succeeded by Muhammad Morsi, another self-styled 'Islamist' leader. But soon, in July 2013, a year after he came to power, he had to step down.

Some 60 years of so-called Islamic politics have given Egypt nothing but destruction. □



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SURAH AL-ASR

History Bears Witness

Surah Al-Asr is a small chapter in the Quran. It has just three verses. The chapter reads:

I swear by the passage of time, that man is surely in a state of loss, except for those who believe and do good deeds and exhort one another to hold fast to the Truth, and who exhort one another to steadfastness.

(THE QURAN 103: 1-3)

THIS chapter can be said to be a summary of the entire Quran. Imam Shafi remarks in this connection that had God revealed just this chapter alone, it was sufficient in order to guide people (Safwat al-Tafaseer by Al-Sabuni). This point is undoubtedly true. But the benefits of this chapter of the Quran cannot be fathomed unless one ponders on it. All the deeper meanings of the Quran open up only to those who intensely reflect on it.

Man should determine the purpose of his life in the light of God's creation plan.

The word *Asr* in the title *Surah Al-Asr* denotes Time. But here it is used in the sense of History. This chapter of the Quran tells us that history bears witness to the fact that mankind is in a state of loss, the only exception being those who provide evidence of faith and good works and who exhort others to hold fast to the Truth and remain steadfast.

What is expressed in this chapter in terms of faith, good deeds, truth and steadfastness is the need for man to understand God's creation plan. Man must discover this plan in such a way that it becomes an integral part of his consciousness. He must build his personality on the basis of this plan, adopting it in his own life and exhorting others to do so.

If you reflect on it more deeply, you will realize that this chapter of the Quran tells us that God has created mankind as potentially successful beings. But history bears witness to the fact that man has not made

proper use of this potential. On the contrary, mankind has taken to the path of loss. This happened not because God fated it to, but because man has not understood God's creation plan. Instead of following this plan, he developed his own road-map of his life by himself. And because of this self-created problem, he fell into loss and ruin.

God has created mankind as potentially successful beings.

Man should determine the purpose of his life in the light of God's creation plan. He should make God, who is his Creator and Lord, his sole concern. He should reserve feelings of love and fear only for God. He should worship God alone. He should abide by the ethical principles laid down by God. He should model his personal and collective life on the basis of the plan set by God. He should understand the world to be a testing ground. He should make success in the Hereafter his target. He should desire for Heaven and greatly fear Hell. This is what is desired of man.

But history tells us that most people have failed to become the desirable beings that God wanted them to. Instead of leading their lives in a way which would have made them acceptable to God, they failed miserably and fell into great loss.

This chapter of the Quran is a warning. It warns man to save himself from the blunder of not becoming the sort of person who is desirable in God's eyes. It tells man that he should become among those fortunate people for whom the doors of Heaven will be opened in the Hereafter. □



Disunity

Disunity stems from everyone putting themselves first and wishing that their utterances be given supremacy, no matter what the circumstances.

If no one considered themselves superior, what would there be to quarrel about?

DIVORCE IN ISLAMIC LAW

Disliked, but Permitted

ISLAM allows for only one sort of physical relationship between men and women, and that is in the form of marriage which is announced and publicly known. It is but inevitable that differences will arise between the spouses. According to Islam, the way out is not by seeking to wipe out these differences but, rather, to accept them, or to seek to reconcile them or for the spouses to continue to live together despite their differences.

Yet, it sometimes happens that the spouses are unable to properly manage their differences and so decide to go in for a divorce. Divorce has been accepted in Islam as something that can be resorted to in extreme circumstances. At the same time, Islam frowns upon divorce. According to a *Hadith*, although divorce is permissible, God does not like it.

Islam allows for only one sort of physical relationship between men and women, and that is in the form of marriage which is announced and publicly known.

Very often, divorce is resorted to in anger, and this is why Islam has devised a method to control it. The Quran says that a man can give two revocable utterances of divorce, after which he can retain his wife and stay together on equitable terms or else leave her in kindness (THE QURAN 2: 229). This is the prescribed method of divorce as laid down in the Quran. Accordingly, a man who intends to divorce his wife should issue the first utterance of divorce in the first month, and the second utterance in the next month. After this, he can revoke his divorce pronouncement if he wants. But in the third month, if he issues the third utterance of divorce, it is irrevocable and the two can no longer be considered husband and wife.

This method of divorce over a period of three months was devised so that if the husband, in a fit of anger, wants to divorce his wife but later, when his temper cools down, changes his mind and wants to carry on with the marriage, he can do so. If his utterance of divorce is not out of anger, but is a planned step where all possible means of reconciliation have proved futile, and with all sincerity thinks that divorce is the only option left, then he has to wait till the third month in order for it to

take effect. This pragmatic method of divorce was followed in the early period of Islam. But towards the end of the period of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, some men, out of anger, began issuing three utterances of divorce in one sitting. At this time, this practice was an exception, but by the time of the latter half of the period of the Caliphate of Umar, the second Caliph, it had become increasingly common.

Divorce has been accepted in Islam as something that can be resorted to in extreme circumstances. At the same time, Islam frowns upon divorce.

In the face of this, and in his capacity as Caliph, Umar decided to take action against this misuse of the law. And so, in the case of some men, he accepted their issuing three utterances of divorce in one sitting as constituting an irrevocable divorce. But, along with this, he also arranged for these men to be punished.

However, this method of divorce remains fairly widespread today, especially in the Indian subcontinent. Men arbitrarily utter the word *talaq* three times in one breath, often in anger. This is a misuse of *Shariah* laws, and is a grave sin on the part of the husband. This practice has become very common today, and it urgently demands that the position of the *Shariah* on the matter be clarified.

One way out of this dilemma is to consider that the utterance of the word *talaq* three times by the husband in a fit of excess emotion or anger to be equal to just one utterance. If the husband was not serious about the divorce, then he can revoke it soon after. And, if he actually wishes to divorce his wife, then he should do it according to the method prescribed by the Quran, over a period of three months, as explained above. □



Finest gift of nature

Conscience is a moral watchdog. It is the finest gift of nature. One who goes against one's conscience is making a self-destructive choice.

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**

Say, 'Shall I tell you of those who will lose the most through their actions? They are those whose efforts have been wasted in the life of the world while they thought they were doing good. They are those who deny their Lord's signs and the meeting with Him.' So their works are in vain, and We shall give them no weight on the Day of Resurrection. Hell will be their reward, because they denied the truth, and made a jest of My signs and My messengers. (18: 103-106)

Man strives in this world and observes that, as a result, he gains wealth and honour. He does not see his work marred in any manner, therefore, he considers himself a successful man. But, this is highly irrational. In the plan of God, the criterion of a successful life is in terms of the life of the Hereafter.

Therefore, to consider success in this worldly life as real success amounts to taking a view of life which omits the life hereafter altogether. This is tantamount to substituting our own plan in place of God's plan and obviously those who do so can never be successful in the life hereafter.

God reveals His signs. But these signs of the life hereafter have no effect on those whose minds are preoccupied with the thoughts of this world. God discloses His arguments, but the arguments of the life hereafter do not appeal to those who are lost in the affairs of this world. Such people fail to accept guidance, even though they may be standing next to a guide. If they do not give any weight to God's word, how can they expect God to take their candidature into account for any divine consideration?

Those who believe and do good works shall have the gardens of Paradise for their abode. They shall forever dwell in the Gardens of Paradise, desiring no change. (18: 107-108)

To lead a life of faith and piety in this world is to give proof of tremendous sacrifice. It amounts to renouncing an apparent and visible heaven for the sake of a hidden, invisible heaven. This also means succeeding in the most difficult of tests, i.e. when man recognises the Truth on the strength of abstract arguments and then he turns his life in that direction, though there is no pressure on him to do so.

Those who exhibit such awareness (of truth) and perform such actions truly deserve to be admitted to gardens of eternal comfort and pleasure.

Tell them, 'If the ocean became ink for writing the words of my Lord, surely the ocean would be exhausted before the words of my Lord came to an end — even if We were to add another ocean to it.'
(18: 109)

Those who do not accept God's message are in fact denying the most established of all established facts. It is so established that pens made from all the trees would not be sufficient to write God's words and the ocean turned into ink would become exhausted. But, what a pity that, in spite of all this, man fails to recognise the truth and does not mould his life in accordance with it.

Say, 'I am only a human being like yourselves. It is revealed to me that your God is One God. So let him who hopes to meet his Lord do good deeds and let him associate no one else in the worship of his Lord.'
(18: 110)

The prophet is neither God nor angel. He is a human being just like any other human being. His only distinguishing feature is that he receives God's revelation through invisible means. In other words, a prophet is an individual who, outwardly, is a human being but who inwardly is a representative of God.

Because of this only those can recognize a prophet who can recognize his merit. Arriving at the Truth is possible only for one who can recognise reality in its essence, i.e. who is capable of recognising a 'prophet' at the level of a 'human being.' □

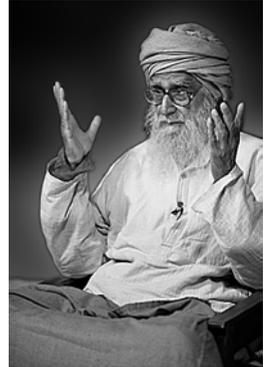
ASK MAULANA

Your Questions, Answered

On **Madrasa Education** and the **Ulema**

How do you look at the madrasa system? There is much talk about the need for reforms in the system?

Unlike some others, I am not critical of or opposed to the *madrasas*' as such. Muslims need both types of education — religious as well as secular. Muslim children should have knowledge of both their religion as well as secular subjects. There is, of course, no need for all Muslim children to go to full-time *madrasas*' to train to become *ulema*. However, some children must do so in order that the tradition of religious learning can be carried on. We need *madrasa*-trained *ulema* who have knowledge of the Quran, *Hadith*, Islamic jurisprudence and Arabic.



As far as the question of *madrasa* 'reforms' is concerned, I really don't believe in this talk of 'modernisation'. You certainly cannot 'modernise' the Quran and the *Hadith*. So, I think the word 'modernisation' in this context is uncalled for.

While on this subject of 'reforms', I must say that the 'modern' schools and universities are also in urgent need of reform, a point often neglected by vociferous advocates of *madrasa* 'reform'.

Some people argue that *madrasas*' teach some outdated centuries-old texts on Greek philosophy and logic and hold that against them. But we must also note that departments of English in universities also teach English classics, written centuries ago, which have no value in the outside world. For me, these texts are a minor issue. The basic issue is the need for good, committed teachers.

So, are you arguing that madrasa students must not be made familiar with basic 'modern' subjects?

No, I am not saying this at all. What I am suggesting is that separate institutions can be established where some *madrasa* graduates can later enrol to learn 'modern' subjects, particularly different languages

such as English. I myself received a traditional *madrasa* education and learnt English and 'modern' subjects on my own, after I graduated. I feel that if *madrasa* students are forced to study 'modern' subjects in addition to the subjects in the existing *madrasa* curriculum, it would be too much of a load for them to bear. It might destroy the very fabric of the *madrasas*'.

In recent years, a small number of these specialized institutions for madrasa graduates that you refer to have been established in India. How do you look at this phenomenon?

I think this is a very welcome development. However, it needs to be done in a more organized way. What many of these institutions lack are good teachers motivated by a missionary zeal. It won't do to have just professional tutors. I strongly feel that more important than the curriculum are the teachers. In my days in the *Madrasa tul-Islah* in Azamgarh, we had teachers who worked with missionary passion. They instilled in us the spirit of enquiry, which is the mother of all knowledge and without which you cannot progress. This tradition must be revived. Presently, we have no institutes for training *madrasa* teachers. They need to be trained in pedagogical techniques, child development and so on. I think this is one issue that Muslim organizations must focus on.

How do you think the rigid dualism between the madrasa trained ulema and the 'secular' university-trained Muslim intelligentsia can be bridged?

In my childhood, this dualism was not so apparent. At that time, the secular educational system did not lack ethical or moral values, but today the situation is very different. I suppose this is a result of wider social changes. You cannot create an institution like an island. Neither *madrasas*' nor secular schools are islands, cut off from the outside world. They are both influenced by the wider society.

A feasible way to overcome this educational dualism is by promoting greater interaction between students and teachers of *madrasas*' and those of schools and colleges, including both Muslims and others.

In the past, there was this sort of interaction. Many Hindus used to study in *madrasas*', but not so now. Presently, there is very little such interaction between the *ulema* and products of secular educational institutions, and that is one reason why there is such a glaring lack of understanding between them.

Some ulema might argue that the sort of interaction that you advocate may have a negative impact on the faith of madrasa students. What would you say?

I don't agree. Interaction, based on a spirit of scientific enquiry and learning, is a major source of change and progress. Through interaction with others, based on the quest for knowledge, you can refine your morals and learn to recognize and respect others as fellow human beings. This is precisely what Islam teaches us.

To enable *madrasas'* and their students to interact with others and for them to come out of the four walls of their seminaries the best way is to inculcate in them the *dawah* spirit. For this, *madrasas'* can arrange seminars and conferences, to which they can invite people of other faiths as well as Muslims and others from colleges and universities. This sort of interaction will be a great means of promoting knowledge on both sides and will go a long way in dispelling mutual misunderstandings.

Take my own example. Every day, I interact with people, of various social and religious backgrounds. I consider this a blessing. It provides me knowledge, sensitivity to the humanity of others, rich experiences and moral values.

Would you recommend that madrasas' also teach their students about other faiths?

Yes, *madrasas'* could also consider teaching their students the basics of other religions. This will enable them, as would-be *ulema*, to relate more comfortably with people of other faiths. It will also assist them in their *dawah* work.

The teaching of other religions should aim at providing students an objective understanding of these faiths. The earlier approach, of denouncing other religions, must be given up. You must learn to objectively and truly understand your neighbour, even if you do not agree with him. I think bitter polemics are against the ethos of Islam. So, for instance, in my case, when I visit Hindu, Sikh, Christian shrines and other places of worship, I try to empty my mind of prejudices. I have learnt a lot from this. My intention in visiting such places and meeting people there is to learn, not to debate or to denounce others as inferior.

As I see it, *dawah* is an expression of empathy for others, not hostility.

It has nothing to do with pride based on a misplaced sense of superiority. The Quran asks us to be sympathetic well-wishers of others.

Why is it that most madrasa students tend to come from poorer families? This was not the case in the pre-colonial period.

One reason is that middle class parents would prefer to send their children to 'modern' schools because the jobs that *madrasa* graduates get are not well-paid. The salaries of *madrasa* teachers must be increased. In that way, one may hope that more bright children might prefer to enrol in *madrasas*' and become *ulema*. In the past, *madrasas*' produced brilliant scholars and leaders, but this is not the case today.

How do you look at the sensationalist and distorted reporting about madrasas' in large sections of the mass media?

The media is impelled by profit-making motives and thrives on 'hot' news in order to feed the market that it caters to. It is not interested in 'soft' news, because it is not profitable. So, it thrives on sensational news and selective reportage.

One day, I was listening to the Hindi service of a radio station, and a listener called up from Mauritius and asked why the radio station did not give much coverage to Mauritius, which also has a large Hindi-speaking population. The programme presenter replied, half-jokingly, that the media is based on 'hot' news, and that no such 'hot' news ever seems to emanate from Mauritius! 'Create some hot news there', he told the caller, 'and we'll report about your country!'

So, the point is that if you want to change the way the media reports about something, you have to work at changing people's mindsets. □



THE GREATER JIHAD

ISLAM is a religion of peace and brotherhood. It is a religion of love and compassion. It is a religion that teaches us to be kind to our parents, to be kind to our neighbours, to be kind to our fellow Muslims, and to be kind to all mankind. It is a religion that teaches us to be honest, to be truthful, to be just, and to be fair. It is a religion that teaches us to be patient, to be forgiving, and to be merciful. It is a religion that teaches us to be brave, to be strong, and to be courageous. It is a religion that teaches us to be humble, to be modest, and to be lowly. It is a religion that teaches us to be grateful, to be thankful, and to be appreciative. It is a religion that teaches us to be generous, to be kind, and to be helpful. It is a religion that teaches us to be good, to be righteous, and to be pious. It is a religion that teaches us to be happy, to be content, and to be satisfied. It is a religion that teaches us to be peaceful, to be calm, and to be serene. It is a religion that teaches us to be wise, to be knowledgeable, and to be intelligent. It is a religion that teaches us to be brave, to be strong, and to be courageous. It is a religion that teaches us to be humble, to be modest, and to be lowly. It is a religion that teaches us to be grateful, to be thankful, and to be appreciative. It is a religion that teaches us to be generous, to be kind, and to be helpful. It is a religion that teaches us to be good, to be righteous, and to be pious. It is a religion that teaches us to be happy, to be content, and to be satisfied. It is a religion that teaches us to be peaceful, to be calm, and to be serene. It is a religion that teaches us to be wise, to be knowledgeable, and to be intelligent.

THE BASIC aim of Islam is to bring about an intellectual revolution in the minds based on the verses of God.

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Glossary

- Abraha** also known as Abraha al-Ashram was an Aksumite general, then the viceroy of southern Arabia. He later declared himself an independent king.
- Abdul Muttalib** (497–578 AD); also known as Shaybah Ibn Hashim, was the grand father of Islamic prophet Muhammad.
- Abu Bakr Siddiq** died 632 AD; a close companion of the Prophet; also the first Muslim Caliph.
- Abu Hurairah** a companion of the Prophet known for his photographic memory. Died 681 AD.
- Adam** First man and first prophet.
- Al-Asr** The Passage of time; the name of 103rd chapter of the Quran.
- Al-Hadi** One of the attributes of God which means Guide.
- Bhagwan Das** (Jan 12, 1869–Sept 18, 1958) was an Indian Theosophist and public figure.
- Byzantines** The Byzantine Empire was the predominantly Greek-speaking continuation of the Roman Empire during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.
- Dar ul Kufr** Abode of disbelief.
- Dar-ul ta'leem** Abode of learning.
- dawah** communication of the message of God.
- fasiq** transgressor; sinner.
- fatwa** legal opinion; judicial verdict.
- Hadith** sayings and deeds of the Prophet of Islam.
- Imam** One who leads the prayers.
- Imam Shafi** Also known as Idris al-Shafi, he was active in judicial matters and is considered as the founder of Islamic jurisprudence.
- iqra** read
- Kafir** One who denies.
- Kitab al-Fitan** Chapters in the books of *Hadith* that predict certain events which will happen towards the end of the times.
- Kufr** Denial
- Madani** Pertaining to Madinah.
- Madinah** Medina; also called Yathrib during the time of Prophet Muhammad.
- madrasa** centre of religious learning
- Makkah** Mecca.
- Makkan** from or, of Makkah (Mecca)
- Monism** is the philosophical view that a variety of existing things can be explained in terms of a single reality or substance.
- Monotheism** is the belief in the existence of one God or oneness of God.
- Moses** Prophet of God who existed in the 16th century B.C.
- Musnad Ahmed** a collection of *Hadith* reports by Islamic scholar Ahmad bin Hanbal (780–855).
- Pharaoh** is a title used in many modern discussions of the rulers of all Ancient Egyptian dynasties.
- Quraysh** the dominant tribe of Makkah during the time when Prophet Mohammad was born; genealogical ancestry traced to prophets Abraham and Ismael.
- Safwat al-Tafaseer** the commentary of the Quran in the Arabic language by Sheikh Muhammad Ali al-Sabuni (b. 1930, Syria).
- Salah** also *Salat*; the Islamic prayer.
- Shariah** moral code and religious law of Islam.
- Somnath Temple** is the place of worship of Hindus located in the Prabhas Kshetra near Veraval in Saurashtra, on the western coast of Gujarat, India.
- Surah** chapter of the Quran
- talaq** Divorce
- Ulema** also *ulama*; religious scholars
- Umar** also Umar Faruq or Omar bin al Khattab; died 644 AD; a close companion of the Prophet; the 2nd Muslim Caliph.
- Ummah** religious community; followers of a prophet.

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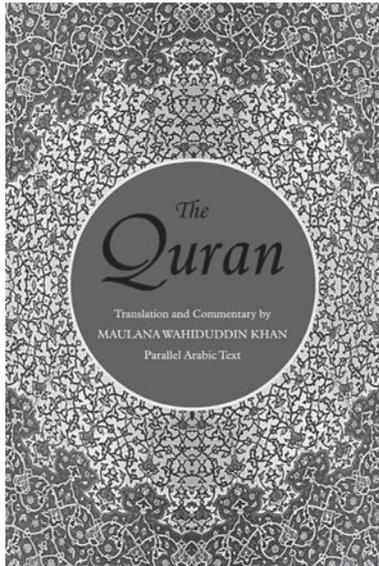
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The Quran

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.

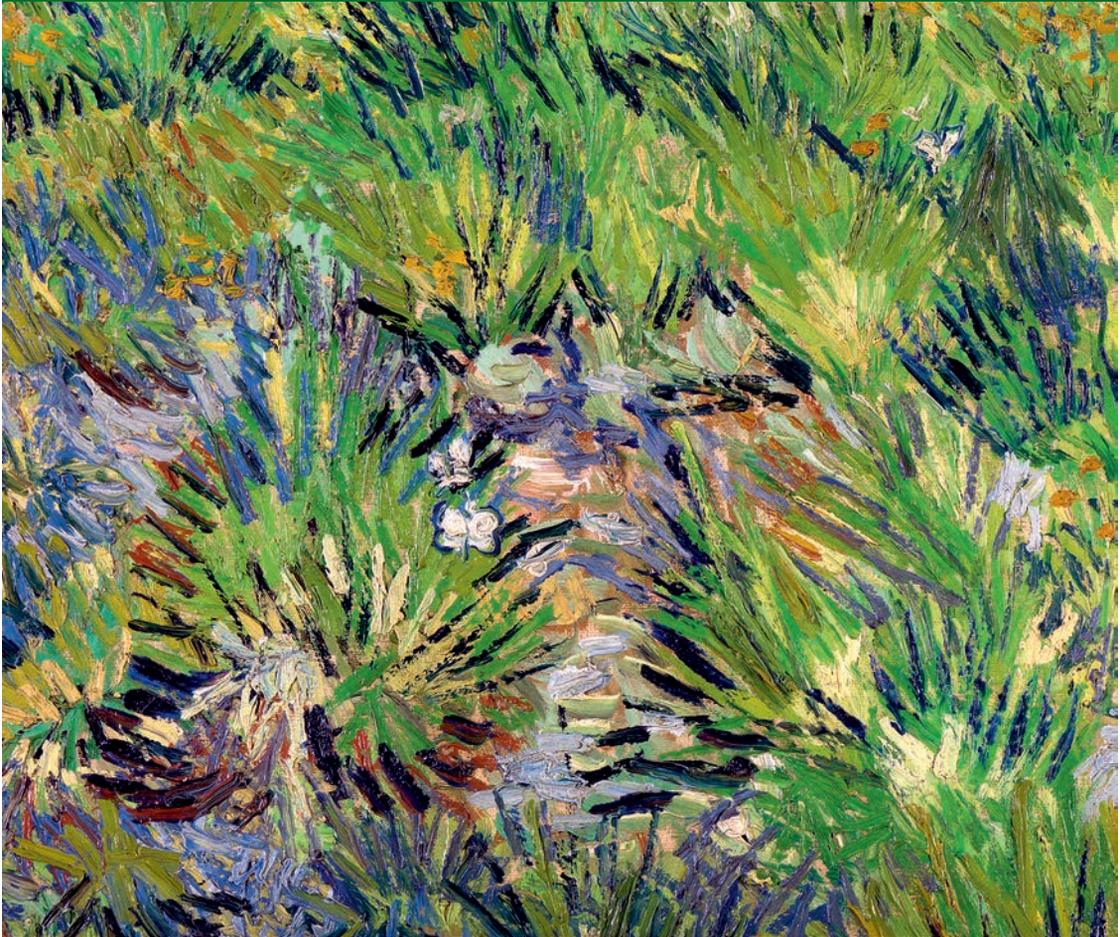


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