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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

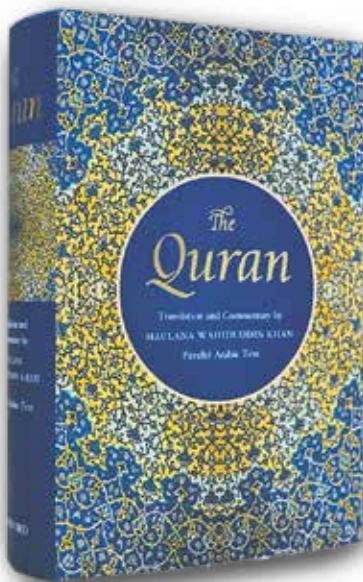


**Abstinence from sin is more essential
than the cultivation of virtues.**

The Quran

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY
MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN
PARALLEL ARABIC TEXT

This commentary on the Quran is a concise, easy-to-read guide that enables today's readers to understand the deeper meanings of the Quran and to reflect upon its relevance in the present world. It focuses on the main themes of the Quran, such as God-realization, enlightenment, closeness to God, remembrance, prayer, peace and spirituality. It lays stress on the fact that through reflection, deep thinking and contemplation, divine lessons can be learnt from the signs of God scattered across the world.



This commentary thus explains the meaning of the Quran in such a way as to give readers a clearer understanding of the message of the Quran and helps them in finding their own way of making it relevant to themselves.

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Spiritual Living

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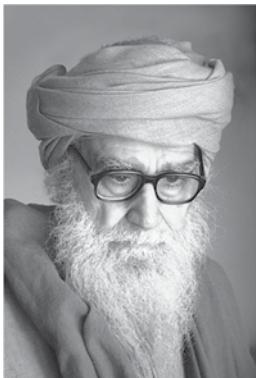
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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.

UNAWARENESS OF MUSLIMS

THESE days violence committed by Muslims has become a daily news feature. Referring to this, commentators generally observe that the case of present-day Muslims is a case of terrorism. However, such comment is based on face-value. If we go deeper we would realize that this way of looking at the phenomenon is not right.

To my way of thinking, the case of present Muslims is not one of terrorism, in fact, it is a case of unawareness. Present Muslims are victims of misunderstanding about the present age.

These Muslims are obsessed with the historical glory of Islam. They want to re-establish the political empire of Islam, which according to their notion was successfully established in the past. Their actions are a result of this conditioning of theirs. What is required is deconditioning of their minds. De-militarization of Muslims can be achieved only through de-conditioning of this political mind-set.

The modern age is an age of globalization. Modern opportunities have made it possible for every group of people to establish an 'Empire' of their own. The political empires of the past cannot be brought back. However, building non-political empires is possible for any group in this age. There are various scopes for work in the non-political field.

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

In today's age one can build, for instance—educational empire, industrial empire, media empire, as well as spiritual and ideological empire. The making of peaceful empires has become so much possible today that if any group uses wisdom and right planning, it can certainly create an empire for itself.

In the Makkan period the tribal chiefs of Makkah once asked the Prophet what he required of them. The Prophet replied: "Only a *kalima* (word), which if you adopt you will become masters over the Arab and non-Arab world." This prophetic saying was about the coming age. It means that the advent of Islam was to initiate a new process in history, which would usher in such developments that it would become possible for a group to attain global supremacy, provided it remained completely peaceful.

De-militarization of Muslims can be achieved only through de-conditioning of their political mindset.

Present Muslims are unaware of this reality. They want to build a political empire of Islam. In the present age of nationalism this has become totally non-workable. Muslims should make the ideological empire of Islam their target, which is as much possible as the making of a media empire.

Make Muslims aware of the present age and their "Terrorism" will automatically disappear. □

Maulana Wahiddudin Khan
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Learn from All

*The spirit for learning in man should be so great that
he should learn from every individual around him.
Words and behaviours which affect us in a negative
manner must provide us with positive lessons.*

*Thus we can develop the capability to
learn from every instance in our life.*

PEACE OF MIND—FOR WHAT?

Personality Development

PEACE of mind means a condition that is characterized by the absence of anxiety. It is good to live with a peaceful mind. But, what is the purpose of this peace? Generally, people believe that peace of mind is essential because it makes us tension-free, helps us lead a joyful life, makes us do our job or business in a better way, gives us good health, and so on.

It is true that a peaceful mind gives us all these things. But, it is an underestimation of the blessing called a peaceful mind. A peaceful mind is another name for a positive mind. In truth, it is this peaceful mind that makes us capable of living life at its highest level.

The fact is that our mind is a continuously-thinking machine just as the heart, which beats constantly. It is very important to give our thinking a positive direction. If we fail to do this, our thinking process will start moving in the opposite or negative direction. After this, the entire creative ability of the mind will be affected.

Only a positive personality can achieve the bounties of nature.

We are living in a world of challenge and competition. Everyone is free to act according to their own will. This state of affairs creates all sorts of social problems which people generally give the name of 'Social evil'. It means that the happiness of one person may be the displeasure of another. So, practically speaking, in society one disturbs the happiness of another to achieve one's own happiness. In this situation, it is natural for a person to think negatively. Every person's thinking process has a tendency to turn in the negative direction.

This situation leads to the greatest loss for every human being. The loss being the inability to develop oneself as a positive personality. Only a positive personality can achieve the bounties of nature. A negative personality will be deprived of such bounties. People with negativity live in frustration and die in frustration without achieving the high goal for which they were born.

Given this situation, the first and the most important task before every human being is to give a positive direction to their thinking which in other words refers to continuous intellectual development.

There are three major sources of intellectual development—study, observation and discussion. All three are related to the mind. Only a peaceful mind will be able to take the right lessons from these sources. If the mind is not peaceful, it will not be able to draw the right lessons from anything. Mind is the only door to all kinds of personality development.

Wisdom is the product of a healthy mind which in turn is a product of positive thinking.

Everyone knows that for good health, one needs to take care of one's body. Similarly, for one's personality development one needs to take care to keep the mind free from all such thoughts which disturbs its thinking process. The mind is an engine. If the engine gets de-railed, then it is impossible to reach the destination.

Wisdom is the greatest asset of every person. It is the ability to judge or discern what is true or right. Mind is the source of all wisdom. The source of physical energy is a healthy body while a healthy mind is the source of wisdom.

Whoever fails to preserve the mind, will be deprived of wisdom. To be deprived of wisdom is to be deprived of all good things. Wisdom is the product of a healthy mind which in turn is a product of positive thinking. □



Look Around

We are often overwhelmed with our share of sorrows and miseries, failing to realize that everyone around us is immersed in a similar plight. We accentuate negativity when we overlook the other person's suffering.

PROGRESS IN THE LONG HAUL

Enthusiasm and Perseverance

IN 1782, an Englishman arrived in Glasgow with a wooden printing press. With paltry resources he began to publish a newspaper entitled the Glasgow Advertiser. The newspaper was later renamed the Glasgow Herald. Two centuries later its daily circulation had risen to 200,000 copies.

What saved John Mennons, the founder of this newspaper, from succumbing to unfavourable and adverse circumstances was his limitless enthusiasm. His enthusiasm compensated for his lack of resources. The newspaper is still going strong after two centuries, in spite of serious differences between partners which arose from time to time. It was fortunate that these could always be settled amicably without the work being disrupted.

The newspaper, which was started on a wooden press, is now being printed entirely on automatic machines. The letters are neither composed nor do they undergo the process of metal infusion: They are projected on the plates by laser beam. It is printed and folded automatically. Then it is wrapped in polythene and taken to the despatch department. The whole process is computerized.

It was only because of its continued publication that it could benefit from all the new improved techniques which were developed at different stages. If it had ceased publication after a period of time, all the techniques would have existed, but it would have failed to utilize them.

It shows how the accomplishment of any great work requires two things in particular: Limitless enthusiasm and perseverance. Obviously, great work can be brought to fruition only with the help of boundless energy, enthusiasm and perseverance. Without the long and arduous labour which is essential in any such enterprise, the survival of this paper would have been impossible.

Make the most of your experience: Don't impose suffering on yourself but when it comes, make the most of it. A thought provoking remark of another achiever sums the above points beautifully.

"What about suffering?" Someone asked Bernard Malamud, the award winning American author. "I'm against it," he replied, "But when it occurs why waste the experience?" □

THE MOSQUE

House of the God-fearing

WHAT is the role of the mosque in Islam? 'Masjid', or mosque, literally means 'A place for self-prostration', that is, a place formally designated for offering prayers. According to a *hadith*, the Prophet of Islam observed: "The *masjid* is a house of God-fearing people." This means, in effect, that it is a centre for the inculcation of reverence, where individuals learn what is meant by piety and are thus prepared for a life of devotion to the Almighty.

The *Masjid* is built so that people may visit it to read the Book of God, to remember their Creator, silently in prayer, and to hear His commandments on how they should lead their lives, that is, how to conduct themselves according to His will.

The most important of all these activities is saying of prayers, a ritual to be carried out five times in a day as prescribed by Islam. This act of worship, the greatest means of instilling a sense of awe in the devotee, may be carried out at any place, but ideally, is performed in an organized manner, in congregation, within the mosque. Inside, the worshippers range themselves in orderly rows behind a single prayer leader, the Imam. (The acceptance by the group of just one individual to lead the congregation avoids any dissension, which might arise from there being more than one.) The number of the worshippers may be ten or ten thousand: All have to stand in rows behind the Imam. This teaches the lesson of unity. Nevertheless, *namaz*, in essence, is an individual action. Everyone recites his own prayer and is rewarded on account of its innate rectitude and sincerity.

The mosque is a centre for the inculcation of reverence, where individuals learn what is meant by piety and are thus prepared for a life of devotion to the Almighty.

The prayer begins with ablution, that is, with the washing of the face, hands and feet. This bodily cleansing is a symbolic reminder that the Muslim should lead his life in this world in a state of purification of the feelings and the soul.

What is recited during prayer consists either of verses from the Quran or *dhikr*, remembrance of God, and *dua*, invocation and supplications. All

of this is aimed at bringing about a spiritual awakening which will induce the worshipper to renounce his life of ignorance and heedlessness in favour of leading a life inspired by Islamic moral values.

Throughout the prayer (*salat*) the phrase, 'Allahu-Akbar', 'God is great,' is repeated several times. Implicit in these words is the idea that the person uttering them is not great. Their frequent repetition is a lesson in modesty, designed to rid the worshipper of arrogance and egoism, and turn him into a humble servant of God.

The acts of kneeling down and self-prostration are also repeated several times in the course of the prayer, in symbolic submission before God. In this way, the worshipper is conditioned by *salat* to surrender himself to his Maker in all humility.

The various postures in the *salat* climax in the act of self-prostration—the ultimate demonstration of submission. Real proof of this submission to God will only become manifest, however, in subsequent dealings with other human beings, in which it is clear that self-glorification has been replaced by glorification of the Almighty, and that feelings of superiority have given way to profound humility.

The *salat* ends with each worshipper turning his face sideways and uttering these words: "May God's peace and blessings be upon you." Every day, all around the globe, Muslims perform this rite. It is as if they were saying to their fellow men all over the world: "O people, we have no feelings for you but those of peace. Your lives, property and honour—all are safe." It is this spirit with which worshippers are enthused before they return to society.

The acts of kneeling down and self-prostration are repeated several times in the course of the prayer as symbolic submission to God.

Besides the five daily obligatory prayers, there is a weekly Friday prayer, which is necessarily offered in the mosque. In practice and content it is just like any other prayer, but since a larger number of people gather on this occasion, a sermon (*khutba*), giving religious guidance, is also preached by the Imam before the prayers begin. In so doing, he reminds worshippers of their accountability to God, of the commandments pertaining to Islamic character and of the proper way to deal with others in society. In this way, the Friday sermon refreshes the memory on religious commitments. The mosque, initially intended as a place of

worship, has come to be built to serve other related purposes, such as housing the *madrasa*, library, lecture hall, guest house and dispensary etc. According to a *hadith* the Prophet advised the building of mosques in a simple style, so that there should be no dissipation or dilution of the true religious and spiritual atmosphere.

Implicit in the words Allahu-Akbar (God is great), is the idea that the person uttering them is not great.

All mosques (with the exception of three) are of equal religious standing, whether large or small, plainly conceived or architecturally magnificent. The three mosques, which have a greater degree of sanctity because of their historical and religious associations, are the Masjid-e-Haram in Mecca, Prophet's mosque in Medina and the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. □



Gratefulness

From our birth onwards, all factors of life are made available to us in a perfectly balanced manner.

It is heedlessness to fail to ponder over and appreciate God's greatness.

Success and Failure

To successfully perform any action, one needs to have prior knowledge. Without proper insight one often becomes a failure and blames circumstances and other individuals for the disastrous outcome.

MAN, KNOW THYSELF

Purpose of Life

IF a group of people were asked what the most important issue for mankind was today, different people would have different answers. Some would say the proliferation of nuclear weapons, some the population explosion, while others might say that the production and distribution of wealth were of paramount importance. Such diversity of opinion shows that people in general do not properly recognize what they themselves are. If they did, they would all agree that the most critical issue facing mankind was man's disregard of his real nature, and his persistence in ignoring the inescapable fact that one day he must die, and be called to account before his Maker. If we were to become aware of the reality of existence, it would be to the afterlife rather than to this world that we would direct our attention.

Today, most people do believe in God and in the after world. It is not as if they deny these things; but their actions bear no relation to their beliefs. In practice, all people are concerned about worldly success. If our research laboratories were one day to declare that the earth's gravitational pull had ceased to exist, and that the planet was being pulled towards the sun at a speed of 6,000 m.p.h., then panic would strike the whole world, for such news would imply that within a few weeks all life would be obliterated from the face of the earth.

The most critical issue facing mankind is man's disregard of his real nature, and his persistence in ignoring the inescapable fact that one day he must die, and be called to account before his Maker.

This globe, however, is perpetually facing a peril much greater than this, yet no one feels the need to become anxious about it. What is this peril? It is the peril of the Last Day which has been destined for the world since the creation of the universe and towards which we are careering at a reckless speed. As an article of faith, most of us accept this reality, but there are few indeed who actually feel compelled to give it serious thought.

If you stand in a busy shopping-centre during the evening rush-hour and observe what people are hurrying towards, you will realize what

today's human-being has chosen as his fundamental issue. Why do you think there is an endless stream of traffic in the streets? Why has the merchant decorated his shop? Where are the crowds of people coming from and going to? What is the main topic of people's conversation and the true purpose of their meetings with one another? What interests them most? To what use are their finest talents and resources put? What has this exuberant person obtained that has enthralled him so, and what has that dejected face been deprived of that it has so stricken a look? What have people taken with them, from their homes, and what do they intend to return with? If you can answer these questions,—judging from the nature of people's preoccupations, the sounds they emit, their agitation and quiescence—you will also be able to deduce exactly what it is that mankind has chosen to base his life on, and what he is endeavouring to achieve. It is plain for all to see from the constant procession of people to and from the towns and their continuous movement on the crowded streets that today's human being is simply running after the satisfaction of his own desires.

It is the material world rather than the afterlife which he is eager to obtain. His happiness hinges on the fulfilment of his worldly ambitions, while his grief stems from the fact that this seemingly eludes him. The everyday concept of success is the immediate acquisition of commodities, and the enjoyment of leisure and popular acclaim, while failure, to them, means to be deprived of these things. This is what the whole of humanity is chasing. No one cares about tomorrow; everyone becomes frenetic about getting his share now, today, this very minute.

**Most people do believe in God and in the after world
but their actions bear no relation to their beliefs.**

This state of affairs is prevalent not only in our big cities but even in the tiniest human settlements; wherever one goes, people seem to be similarly obsessed. Male and female, rich and poor, old and young, urbane and rustic, even the religious and irreligious—all are running in this same direction. What man is most pre-occupied with is grabbing whatever he can in this world. This is what he considers to be worthwhile and this is what he spends his precious time and talents on. This is what obsesses him night and day. No sacrifice, however dubious in character is too great if it brings him these temporary possessions. He is even ready to sacrifice his faith and his conscience for them at

the altar of worldly gain. His struggle is for worldly ends alone, and he cares not what this struggle entails. No compromise is too base for him.

Every success gained in this way, however, is trivial and mundane and will be of no avail in the afterlife. He who is concerned with consolidation of his worldly position at the expense of the afterlife is like the young man who does not care to save up for his old age. Eventually the time comes when his limbs fail him and he becomes unfit for further toil. Suddenly he realizes his predicament: He is without food, clothes and shelter. He is no longer able to provide for himself. In rags, he lies down in despair in the shade of some wall where the dogs bark at him and boys throw stones. Though we witness with our own eyes the plight of those who have not 'Saved up' for the afterlife, we are still not galvanised into action. All of us are too concerned with the consolidation of our present positions. No one gives a thought of tomorrow.

It is plain for all to see from the constant procession of people in the streets that today's human being is simply running after the satisfaction of his own desires.

When the air-raid siren sounds in wartime and proclaims in its chilling wail: "Squadrons of enemy bombers are approaching to blast this city to eternity. To the air-raid shelters at once!" everyone immediately takes the quickest route to the shelters and, in an instant, the busiest of streets are deserted. Anyone who does not react in this manner is considered idiotic and mentally deranged. The same applies to any material hazard, no matter what it may be. There is another danger, however, even more terrible and inevitable, concerning which the Lord of the Worlds has given us due warning, proclaiming his imperatives through his prophets: "Mankind! Worship Me, fulfil your obligations to one another and live in accordance with My will. I will punish those who fail to do this in a way that cannot be imagined. They will writhe forever in a torment from which they will never be able to free themselves." Every ear has heard this declaration and every tongue acknowledges it in one form or the other, but the general attitude is to treat it as a matter of no consequence. In order to avail themselves of worldly advantages people perpetrate every form of misdemeanour. In this way, life's caravan is proceeding heedlessly towards a point of no return. People start in response to the siren screeching out from the military head-quarters, but no importance is attached to the danger

signal which the Lord of the Universe sounds for mankind. Far from hastening at the sound of it, no one even alters his pace.

What could the reason for this anomalous state of affairs be? It is simply that the danger about which the military headquarters' siren warns us is of this world. Everyone perceives this and knows that its effects will be immediately felt. The danger which God has cautioned us about, on the other hand, will be felt in the afterlife. The wall of death stands between us and its realization: The eyes of the world cannot penetrate it. Neither its planes, nor its bombs, nor its engulfing fire and smoke, are apparent to us. Although people immediately respond to the air-raid siren, they remain unaffected and dispassionate upon hearing of the calamity of which God has given us ample warning. The news does not impress upon them the absolute certainty of their doom and, this being so, they do not feel spurred on to atone for their sins, or to begin leading righteous lives.

God Most Sublime, however, has given us not only our two eyes with which to perceive the external world, but also a third 'Eye' which can scan the invisible realities which lie beyond the horizons of perception. This third eye is that of the intellect. People remain in a state of doubt because they do not use this third eye. They reckon that reality is what they see before their own two eyes, whereas, if they were to ponder over the matter, they would become even more certain about what remains unseen than about what is visible.

It is the material world rather than the afterlife which man is eager to obtain.

What is the one reality that everybody acknowledges? Death must be the unanimous answer to this question. Death is a reality to which everyone, big or small, has to reconcile himself. Everyone realizes that death can overtake one at any time, but whenever the thought of death occurs to people, all that concerns them is: "What will happen to my children after I die?" Before death, thoughts of life dominate their minds, but if they project their thoughts beyond death, all that claims their attention is of a domestic nature. Most of their lives are spent safeguarding their children's future, but no efforts are made to insure themselves for the life that lies ahead. It seems from their attitude as if only their children will survive them, and that they themselves will be non-existent and so have nothing to prepare for.

People behave as if they are totally unaware of the fact that there is a life after death, whereas, in fact, the real life only commences after death. If they only realized that when they enter the grave, rather than being buried, they were being ushered into another world, they would be more worried about themselves than about their children's future. The fact is that most people whether religiously or agnostically inclined, expect to discover some form of life after death. They also believe that this afterlife would be more consequential than the present one.

Two factors cause one to have doubts about life after death. Firstly, on dying, every human being turns into dust and all traces of his body are effaced. How then can he subsequently be revived? Secondly, the life after death is not visible to us. The world of today is an observable phenomenon, but this is not the case of the afterlife. The question arises that if the afterlife is not observable, how then can we place implicit trust in its advent?

Let us analyze these points in the following paragraphs.

Life After Death

"When I am dead, will I then be raised up again?" This question may hover on the periphery of the consciousness of even those who do not have any deep convictions of the reality of life after death, but the fact remains that very few people give any direct attention to the question of the afterlife. The plain truth that tomorrow's life is not willingly and eagerly contemplated in the present world is surely an indication of conscious or subconscious doubt as to its existence.

The everyday concept of success is the immediate acquisition of commodities, and the enjoyment of leisure and popular acclaim, while failure, means to be deprived of these things.

If, however, we give serious thought to this reality, it becomes easily comprehensible. God, wishing to put us to the test, has not divulged the secrets of life after death to us, but has spread His signs throughout the world which, if pondered over, can lead us to a true realization of the essence of all things. This universe is a mirror in which we can gaze upon the image of the next world.

It is common knowledge that human beings have not always existed in their present state. Man is derived from a formless substance, which gradually takes on the form of a human being as it grows in the mother's womb. This process continues until, in the outside world, it develops into a full-fledged human being. The metamorphosis of an insensate, valueless substance, imperceptible to the naked-eye, into a six-foot tall human being, is an everyday event, so why should there be any difficulty in understanding how the minute particles of our bodies, after being scattered in the ground, will once again take on a human form?

Every individual, one sees walking around is, in fact, an accumulation of countless atoms, previously dispersed in unknown dimensions throughout the earth and atmosphere. Presently, the forces of nature brought these atoms together in one meaningful, sensate pattern, so that we are now able to observe these same scattered atoms in the form of a human being capable of thought, feeling and movement. The very same process will be repeated when, subsequent to our death, our particles are diffused in the air, water and earth. Afterwards, at God's command, they will be reassembled and once again assume the form of a human-being. What is so extraordinary about the re-occurrence of an event which has already happened once before? Even in the world of matter there are indications of the practicability of a repetition of life. Every year, in the rainy season, vegetation flourishes and greenery spreads in all directions. Then the summer pronounces its death sentence and the earth dries up. Where flowers bloomed, only a barren plain can be seen. Thus a fully-fledged life expires. But when it rains again, that very same vegetation is revived and dry land once again becomes a meadow. In this very same manner man will be raised to life after his death.

**Man's struggle is for worldly ends alone, and
he cares not what this struggle entails.
No compromise is too base for him.**

Let's look at it from another angle. Doubts occur concerning life after death because our imagination is formulated in terms of our present physical existence. We consider the mobile figure outwardly apparent to us to be the essential human-being, and wonder how this form can be refashioned and raised up again once it has rotted away and mingled with the earth. We observe that when death strikes, an animate human-being becomes silent; his motion is halted and all his faculties cease to

function. Afterwards he is buried in the ground, cremated or thrown into a river depending on the customs of the people concerned. A few days later, the body has been reduced to tiny particles and mingled with the earth in such a way as to be undetectable to normal vision. We witness daily, the extinction of live human-beings in this manner and find it difficult to comprehend how a form so totally obliterated can possibly be revived.

The fact is that the word "Man" refers, not to any such bodily form, but rather to the soul which inhabits the body. As far as the physical frame is concerned, we know that it is composed of tiny particles called living cells. The position of cells in our body is like that of bricks in a building. The bricks of our physical structure, or cells, are continuously destroyed in the course of our daily lives and we compensate for this loss by taking in food. Food, once digested, produces various forms of cells which counterbalance this physical deficiency. Likewise the human body is constantly being eroded and altered. Old cells are destroyed and new ones take their place. This process continues daily until eventually total renovation of the body occurs, usually within a period of ten years. To put it another way, nothing whatsoever remains now of the body you possessed ten years ago. Your present physique is an entirely new one. If all the parts of your body severed from you over the last ten years were to be gathered together, then another human being identical to yourself could be constructed. If you are a hundred years old, then ten "You's" could be formed which, despite their exact similarity to you in appearance, would be no more than inanimate lumps of flesh for "You" do not dwell within them. "You" have abandoned these old bodies and moulded yourself into a new frame.

Every success gained in this world however, is trivial and mundane and will be of no avail in the afterlife.

So the saga of construction and destruction is constantly being enacted within you without any evident change occurring. That entity which you call "Yourself" remains as it was. If you had entered into a contract with someone ten years ago, you would continue to admit that "You" committed yourself in this manner, although your previous frame is now non-existent. Neither the hands which signed the contract papers, nor the tongue which testified to it, are any longer attached to your body. Nevertheless "You" still exist, and "You" acknowledge the fact that this ten-year old contract was your own and continue to abide by

it. It is that inward human-being at work which, far from altering with bodily transformation, survives countless physical changes absolutely intact.

This proves that the word "Homo sapiens", rather than being a label attached to a certain physical form, which is erased with its death, is a separate entity which remains intact even after the diffusion of the body's composite parts. The fact that the body alters whereas the soul does not, is conclusive proof of the transitional nature of the body and the eternal nature of the soul.

Some misguided people consider life and death to be the accumulation and subsequent diffusion of multitudinous particles of matter. This theory has been expounded by an Urdu poet, Chakbast, in the following words:

*What is life? Elements arranging themselves in order,
And death? Their diffusion.*

This, however, is a statement which is not borne out by fact. If life were simply "Elements arranging themselves in order", then it follows that it should survive only so long as this orderliness endured, and it should conversely be possible for an expert scientist to create life by an accumulation of these elements; obviously, both these propositions are ludicrous.

He who is concerned with consolidation of his worldly position at the expense of the afterlife is like the young man who does not care to save up for his old age.

We observe that it is not only those who have been torn limb from limb in some accident, who die. In every condition and at every age people are passing away. Sometimes perfectly healthy human beings suffer sudden heart-failure and no doctor can provide an explanation. We may regard a corpse as an "Orderly, elemental manifestation", but the soul which inhabited it has departed. All elements are arranged in the same order as they were a few minutes beforehand, but they are utterly lifeless. This shows that the organization of elemental matter does not create life, rather life is an entirely separate entity.

A live human being cannot be produced in a laboratory, though such

a physical form can readily be formulated. We have ascertained that the particles which compose a live body consist of normal atoms. The carbon in it is the same as that found in charcoal, its hydrogen and oxygen are the same as that which constitutes water, its nitrogen exactly the same gas as that which accounts for most of the atmosphere, and so on. But is it true to say that a live human being is a specific collection of ordinary atoms which have been arranged in an extraordinary way? Or is it something else besides this? Scientists admit that although we know that the body has been fabricated of certain material particles, we are still not in a position to create life just by combining these same particles. In other words, the body of a live human being is not just a conglomeration of inanimate atoms; rather it is a combination of life and atoms. After death the conglomeration of atoms remains visible to us, while life departs for another world.

People reckon that reality is what they see before their own eyes, whereas, if they were to ponder over the matter, they would become even more certain about what remains unseen than about what is visible.

Clearly, life is not something which can be eliminated. When we grasp that it is something with eternal properties, we can appreciate just how rational and natural the 'Life-after-death' theory is. The facts cry out that life does not consist merely of what can be seen prior to death. There must be a life after death also. Our intellect accepts the transient nature of this world, but man is a being which survives it. When we die, we do not pass into oblivion, rather we retire to reside in another world. The present world is nothing but a tiny interlude in our never-ending life span.

The Other World

Think for a moment what this other world must be like. God's prophet has stated that heaven and hell exist there, and that everyone who dies must eventually find his eternal abode in one of the two. Those who are obedient to God in this world and act in a virtuous fashion will be rewarded with a place in paradise, while those who are evil and rebellious towards God will be cast into an excruciating fire.

It is important to understand that human actions fall into one of two categories. The first comprises everyday routine matters, in which no

moral choice has to be made, and also purely accidental happenings whose outcome, whether good or bad, cannot be judged from the moral standpoint because they contained no purposive element. The second category is very different in nature because it covers a wide and complex range of actions the rights and wrongs of which have to be scrupulously considered before being carried out. This is known as the ethical category.

Imagine a broken branch precariously hanging from a tree. You walk under it, it falls, hits you, and you find yourself badly injured. Do you strike the tree and bear a grudge against it? Of course not. But suppose a man picks up a stone, throws it at you with the intention of injuring you and actually does so, won't you become enraged and feel an urge to retaliate in like manner? You would be perfectly justified in feeling that this wrong should be punished because the act was intentional. Here it is a question not just of some random happening, but of right and wrong action, good and bad intentions, in a word, of "Ethics".

**Death is the one reality that everybody acknowledges.
It is a reality to which everyone, big or small,
has to reconcile himself.**

The examples chosen to clarify this point are of a simple nature in that the outcome of the action is immediately apparent and, moreover, in the second case, it is possible to make an instant moral judgement. But there are other much more complex situations in life where wrong-doing goes undetected, its effects may be hidden or delayed for long periods, and the culprits may never be brought to book either by the moral condemnation of society or in a court of law.

Sometimes evil-doing is, of course, perceived as such, but the miscreant is so clever and resourceful that he is able to escape punishment, or the human resources required to inflict punishment are lacking and so the evil-doer goes scot free. Crimes are often repeated for exactly these reasons. But the perpetrator of evil should not congratulate himself too soon on the success of his schemes or on his ability to escape, as it is exactly this type of action for which he will be called to account for by his Creator on the Day of Judgement. Everyone, no matter from what walk of life he hails, will be required to stand before his Maker and lay his life absolutely bare before Him. On the basis of the actions which fall into the ethical category, where moral precepts, scruples, are of

overriding importance, he will either be ushered into paradise or cast down into the flaming pits of hell. If all this was kept hidden from him in this world, it was because it was God's plan to put man on trial.

The afterworld is where man will reap the full consequences of his deeds according to their moral nature. Every action has some consequences for the perpetrator, and every state that he finds himself in precipitates a favourable or unfavourable reaction. He then makes or breaks himself by the manner in which he employs his faculties.

The Afterworld

The question arises at this juncture as to the actual existence of this afterworld to which he is destined. In what way can it be perceived? In what way can it be made intelligible to us?

Take sound, for instance. Everyone knows that sound is the name of waves which cannot be seen with the naked eye, and in the case of human utterance, resulting from the motion of our tongues and larynxes. It then forms a kind of invisible pattern in the air. Whenever anybody speaks, his voice is so indelibly imprinted on the atmosphere that, according to scientific theory, any sound uttered by a human-being even thousands of years ago, still exists in wave-form, though we do not hear or see these waves. If, however, we possessed the apparatus to detect them, they could be replayed exactly, in their original form, and many would be the historic discussion upon which we could then eavesdrop.

**People behave as if they are totally unaware of the fact
that there is a life after death, whereas, in fact,
the real life only commences after death.**

Just as we are enveloped by a blanket of air on which, every word of ours is engraved, even though we see neither the air nor the inscription, so the other world is also enveloping us on all four sides and constantly recording our intentions and designs. Our actions are being imprinted upon its folds, and after death, they will be there for all to read. Imagine a record revolving mutely on its turntable. As soon as the needle falls into its groove, the silent disc bursts into music as if it had just been waiting to express the sounds recorded on it. In the same way a record of all our deeds is being prepared, and when the Lord of the Universe

utters the word of command, the whole record will be played back to us. On hearing it people will involuntarily say, "What sort of a book is this which has omitted neither the smallest nor the gravest of matters?"

(THE QURAN 18: 49)

A Last Word

Just think over everything described above for a few minutes. You are destined for an extremely long and unbroken lifespan. Death is by no means the termination of this life: It is the commencement of a new era. Death is simply the dividing-point between the two stages of our life. Take the farmer's planting of a crop as an example. He invests his capital in it and cultivates it, until such times as the crop ripens and dries up. Then he harvests it so that he can use the grain and store it up for his year's requirements. Harvest is the end of one phase in the crops' development, during which time planting and cultivation had taken place. Before the cutting of the crop there had been only toil and expense; it is afterwards that he will enjoy the fruits of his efforts.

God, wishing to put us to the test, has not divulged the secrets of life after death to us, but has spread His signs throughout the world.

Such is the case with our life also. In this world we are investing in and cultivating our afterworld crop. Each one of us owns a field which is either being cultivated or left barren. We have used a seed which is either productive or mediocre. After sowing our crop, we have either attended to it or neglected it. Either we have cultivated thorns, or else flowers and fruits have blossomed in our garden. We have either expended our energies on the improvement of our crop, or we have wasted our time in unnecessary and irrelevant occupations. The period of preparation of this crop lasts until death. The day of our death is harvest-day. When our eyes close on this world, they will open on the afterlife, and there, the crop which we have been busy cultivating all our lives will appear before us.

Remember that the person who does the farming is the one who does the harvesting, and he will reap only the crop that he has sown. Likewise in the afterworld, everybody will reap the harvest he had prepared for himself prior to his death. Every farmer knows full well that he will take as much grain to the granary as he has grown, and that the crop can never

be other than the one he has sowed. Likewise, in the afterworld man will be recompensed according to the nature and ardour of his efforts in the world. Death is the final announcement of the termination of the time allotted to him for struggle and endeavour, and the afterworld is the final place in which he will be able to experience the results thereof. After death there will be no further opportunity to struggle, and it must be borne in mind that the afterlife will never terminate. What a critical matter this is! If only man could come to a mature understanding of this before he died, because his later realization will be of no avail. Becoming aware of the truth only after death is too late. There is no time then to consider the gravity of one's errors, no time for repentance and certainly no time for expiations.

The fact is that the word “Man” refers, not to any bodily form, but rather to the soul which inhabits the body.

Mankind is oblivious of his destiny, while time is conveying him with utmost speed towards the harvesting of his crop. He is busily engaged in procuring paltry worldly profits, and considers himself worthily occupied, whereas, in fact, he is just frittering away his precious time. He has before him a superb opportunity to ensure a prosperous future for himself, but instead, he chooses to occupy himself with bagatelles. His Lord is calling him towards paradise, a place of endless honour and bliss, while he, in his ignorance, is immersed in ephemeral and delusive pleasures. He reckons that he is saving, but in fact he is squandering. While constructing his worldly mansion, he is labouring under the illusion that he is “Building for his life”, while in fact, he is erecting walls of sand which will crumble away to nothing.

Man! Recognize yourself! Know what you are doing and what you ought to be doing! □

Contented Heart

*We must differentiate between the necessary
and the unnecessary. We must never amass
such commodities as will bring with
them new problems and new complications.
We must learn to live in contentment.*

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



THANKFULNESS

MAN is never satisfied with what he has; he always seeks more. As a result, he never ceases to be discontent. God has favoured everyone in some way or another, but man is more concerned with what he does not have; he pays scant regard to what he has. People who have this attitude cannot be moved to offer thanks to God. They are lacking in that priceless virtue which is essential for admission into paradise.

The greatest offering that anyone who wishes to earn a place in Paradise can offer his Lord is a thankful heart.

No one can be absolutely happy on earth. That is the way the world has been made. If cold climates have their drawbacks, so do hot climates. If low-income groups encounter difficulties, so do high-income groups. If the weak have a hard life, neither is it easy for those who wield power. There is no end to the problems of this world, but man should persevere in spite of all the difficulties he encounters, for he is being tested in this world. He should concentrate on earning God's pleasure,

and not on achieving a trouble-free life, for that is something, which can only be achieved in the next world.

The greatest offering that anyone who wishes to earn a place in paradise can offer his Lord is a thankful heart. The only way to cultivate a feeling of thankfulness is to rise above the difficulties and problems of life. The price of heaven is gratitude; only those who have paid this price will enter heaven. □



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PROBLEM OR CHALLENGE?

Unfounded Conspiracies

MUSLIM intellectuals generally depict the fate of the community in a negative light. According to them, Muslims are becoming victims of conspiracies and fake propaganda organized against them by other communities. They claim that Muslims are living in siege, not only in India but everywhere in the world.

However, this claim is so unfounded that *prima facie* it stands rejected. The Quran clearly maintains that conspiracy does not have a bilateral effect; instead it is unilateral in nature. A person is free to conspire against another, but in terms of the result, he has no power to make others a victim of his conspiracies. This is the law of nature and no one has the power to change this law. If a person suffers from something, then it is the price of his own shortcomings. There may be conspirators, but no one has the power to make another the victim of one's conspiracy. According to a *Hadith*, the Prophet of Islam has said that even if the entire world conspires to harm them, the conspiring forces would not be successful in their efforts.

There are dozens of verses in the Quran which maintain that a person always pays the price for his deeds. A person's good deed would yield good results, while his bad deed would yield bad results. The Roman philosopher, Cicero (106 - 43 B.C.) said: 'As you have sown, so shall you reap.'

The need of the hour is for Muslims to express their gratitude to God instead of complaining against others.

This is not only the saying of a philosopher, it is rather an eternal law of nature set by God Almighty. The Quran tells us that a big conspiracy was once hatched against a prophet (*THE QURAN* 71: 22), but it turned out to be a total failure. The Quran contains many verses which tell that it is not conspiracy which is the problem, but rather the real problem is the failure to adopt the right strategy in response to it.

God has given freedom to human beings. As a result of the misuse of freedom by some persons, there is always a challenge created before others. What some Muslim intellectuals refer to as conspiracy, is in

reality a challenge. Muslims must understand its nature and make efforts to meet this challenge. Challenge is not meant to be complained against, but to be faced with right planning.

The condition of Muslims can be assessed through a simple exercise. Visit any Muslim home at random and ask them about their family's economic status fifty years ago in comparison to what it is today. The sure answer you will get from every family would be that their present condition is far better than what it was fifty years ago. In such a situation, the need of the hour is for Muslims to express their gratitude to God instead of complaining against others.

**A person is free to conspire against another,
but in terms of the results, no one has the power
to make others a victim of his conspiracies.**

Forming an opinion about Muslims through the news which appears in the media is not correct. This way of forming an opinion cannot inform one of the actual situation of Muslims. The media is an industry of sensational news and thus it always selects hot news from wherever possible. This is the media's approach towards every community, and not specifically Muslims. Media gives partial news, as and when a particular issue arises. The correct way to understand the reality calls for an analysis in the light of all the facts where the period of time is also an important factor to consider. In doing so, one will find that Muslims are flourishing everywhere—within India as well as outside of India.

Our age is an age of de-monopolization. The opportunities present today are open to all. Every person receives his share from the opportunities according to the efforts he puts in. If someone receives less, he should revise his method of work and re-plan instead of complaining against others. □



Purposeful Life

*It is when one has a great and over-riding
mission in life that no task seems too
difficult, no hardship too great.*

VIOLENCE IS NOT AN OPTION

Choose the Easier Option

IN a tradition, Aisha the Prophet's wife reports about the general policy of the Prophet of Islam: "Whenever the Prophet had to choose between two options, he always opted for the easier course of action rather than the harder course of action." (Bukhari). It is very clear that the option of peace is the easier option, so the Prophet always tried to take the peaceful option. He never opted for war by choice.

Upon reflection on the Prophet's life, one can find that for the Prophet, offensive war was out of the question. During the life of the Prophet, there has not been a single event wherein the Prophet opted for aggressive war. According to Islamic teachings, there is no such thing called justified violence. The Prophet never engaged in war except under compulsion. Also, this involvement was very limited. Another important point one should understand is the difference between defensive war and engaging in war under compulsion which is created by the attackers. For the Prophet, defence was not an excuse to engage in war. The Prophet always tried to avoid violence. There are examples of occasions where the Prophet tried to avoid war. There are some occasions where he was compelled to opt for a limited war. One such example is the Battle of Hunayn.

**Violence and war are not options.
Peace must be established at any cost.**

The wars that the Prophet engaged in, lasted only for a day. It is true that the battle of Khaybar lasted up to twenty-five days. But it was not a battle or war—it was a siege. It is true that some verses of the Quran seem to legitimise defensive war. But it was totally in the temporary sense of the word. At that time, a tribal culture was prevalent in Arabia. God Almighty wanted to bring an end to the tribal culture. Therefore, for a temporary period, the Quran allowed some limited kind of defensive war. But in a true sense, it wasn't defensive war. Rather, it was compulsory war. This temporary phase of war put an end to the tribal cultures of the age that allowed violence.

Today, we are living in the age of peace which was envisaged by the Quran. In the present age, Muslims don't need to take part in any war

or engage in violence. They enjoy complete freedom and all kinds of opportunities. Their human rights are secure, and even as far as politics is concerned they are living in the age of democracy. All these factors have made war and violence outdated. The so-called *jihads* we see in Muslim countries are not *jihad*, but what can be called *anti-jihad*. There is no true justification for these violent activities.

At the time of the Prophet there was a need for compulsory defence. Here the choice was not between peace and violence. The choice was between defending and perishing. Therefore, Prophet was compelled to engage in war sometimes, as he had no choice.

In every such occasion he tried his best and utmost to first avoid war by negotiation or some other strategy. Then, he tried to limit the war. Due to this policy there was no full-fledged war during the Prophet's time. All the wars in his time were skirmishes, and not wars in the true sense of the word. Now, in the present age we have a reliable option for peace, that is, to refer the conflict to the United Nations. In Prophet's time there was no such body as the United Nations, so one had no option other than to take decisions on one's own.

In every situation of war or attack, there exists the easier option of compromise.

There is, a guiding principle in the Quran: *As-sulh khair* (THE QURAN 4: 128). It means that peace is the best option. According to this verse, self-defence is not an option. War was permissible only in the face of compulsion created by the other party. This also after exhausting all efforts to establish peace and make compromises. In other words war being the only way available to settle the matter.

The concept of unilateral attack is another meaningless term. All attacks occur after some provocation. If one abstains from provoking others, then there will be no attack. But, if, in a rare case, there is an unprovoked attack, then the immediate and available solution is to select between two evils. Opting for defence is opting for the greater evil (keeping in mind the destruction which a modern day war causes), while opting for compromise is choosing the lesser evil. In such situations, the question is not why you shouldn't opt for defence. The problem is that in the name of defence, you are opting for a greater evil. If the choice is between greater evil and lesser evil, then it is wisdom to opt for the

lesser evil. One party accepting lesser evil is bringing about greater good for the entire mankind.

At the time of attack, people generally know of one option, that is, of defence. But in fact, in every such situation, there is one more option—that is, of compromise. In such situations, compromise means opting for the policy of buying time. After making a compromise, you get the opportunity to re-plan your strategy. The example of the Prophet of Islam shows that this kind of policy always leads to new success. The Hudaibiya Agreement at the time of the Prophet was based on this wisdom. The Prophet opted for compromise by accepting all the conditions of the other party. Apparently, it was a case of surrender, but it was actually opting for a policy of buying time. Thus, after finalising this agreement, the Prophet availed the situation to reorganize his energies and re-plan peaceful work, of calling people towards God with the result being great success.

**According to Islamic teachings,
there is no such thing as justified violence.**

According to the Quranic principle of *As-sulh khair* (THE QURAN 4: 128), in terms of results, peace is always the best. The Islamic strategy is always based on the ensuing results. If experience shows that war—even defensive war—leads to more loss than gain, then it is better to opt for compromise rather than for defence, except in extremely compelling situations. During the Prophet's time, the Battle of Hunayn was an example of this. It was an entirely compulsory option for the Companions of the Prophet. If there is no such compulsion, one should opt for compromise rather than taking the option of defence.

There is a *Hadith* report in Sahih al-Bukhari which says: "Don't wish for confrontation with the enemy. Always ask for peace from God." It means that violence and war are not options. You must try to establish peace at any cost. □



MIND-BOGGLING UNIVERSE

Custom-made for Man

A TEAM of international astronomers has discovered a black hole of almost unimaginable proportions. At 12 billion times more massive than the sun, it challenges current cosmological thinking, reports Reuters.



Time Magazine reported this news in its February 26, 2015 issue titled, "Scientists Find a Black Hole 12 Billion Times More Massive Than the Sun."

According to this report, scientists at Peking University, China and Australian National University have discovered the largest black hole till date—as big as 12 billion times more massive and 420 trillion times more luminous than the sun. Not only is the black hole the biggest ever seen but also it's at the centre of the largest quasar ever discovered. (Quasars are the brightest and most powerful objects in the universe, with this one emitting huge amounts of energy and light as matter is ripped apart by the black hole at its core.) The black hole is 12.8 billion light years away—the most luminous object ever seen in such ancient space.

The greatness of a machine is a demonstration of the great engineering mind that prepared that machine. So is the case with the Universe. The Universe is so great that even the most advanced telescopes cannot fathom its expanse. This mind boggling greatness of the Universe is undeniable evidence that there is a Great Creator who created it and is sustaining it in the most perfect manner!

Such scientific discoveries impart two lessons. On the one hand, they strengthen the conviction that this Universe has an all-powerful Creator. On the other hand, they highlight that this all-powerful Creator is so Merciful that within this custom-made universe He created planet Earth perfectly designed for mankind. This realisation inculcates modesty in man, which is a destroyer of all kinds of evil within man.

Science is not a branch of religion but certainly such discoveries are so favourable for religion that they can be called supporting factors for religion. The study of science promotes scientific thinking and a realistic approach in man which is key to his personality development. □

ISLAM IN HISTORY

Ideological Power

AT the time of the advent of Islam fourteen hundred years ago, the entire world was dominated by superstition at the ideological level and kingship at the political level. Today the world has been set free from both these things, the credit for this goes to Islam. For the first time in human history Islam set a process which culminated in the cessation of the age of kingship and superstition.

In older times nature worship was the direct result of superstition. It was this nature worship which placed an obstacle in the path of man exploring natural forces and harnessing it for the benefit of humanity. Islam, put an end, all over the world to the worship of everything save one God.

Something, which is an object of worship cannot be at the same time an object of investigation. That is why nature worship served as a mental block for all kinds of progress. When Islam displaced nature from the pedestal of worship and declared that, "Have you not seen that God has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth and has completed His favours to you, both seen and unseen?" (THE QURAN 31:20)

Only then the door of discovering nature and exploiting it in their favour was rendered possible.

Islam started a process which culminated in the cessation of the age of kingship and superstition.

This line of thinking was set off in Makkah, from where it travelled on to Madinah. Afterwards, on its way to Damascus and Baghdad, it reached Spain and then it spread on to the entirety of Europe.

This process continued in history for about a span of one thousand years until the emergence of the scientific or technological revolution. Islam is responsible for the emergence of this new age, and the end of kingship.

In ancient times the whole world was dominated by kingship. It was a system of absolute dictatorship (coercion) which had put an end to

all kinds of human freedom. Religious persecution was one aspect of it, which was pervasive everywhere in the olden times. The end of this age of kingship and tyranny too came in the wake of the emergence of Islam.

There were two great empires in the world in those times. They were the Roman and Sassanid empires. They represented the system of absolutism. The followers of Islam encountered those empires. This encounter was apparently one like of an ant and an elephant. But with the succour of God, the followers of Islam were successful in dealing a death blow to the system of absolutism which brought about the age of human freedom for the first time in human history. In the Bible we find predictions about the advent and the mission of the Prophet of Islam. One of the chapter of the Bible describes the Prophet of Islam and his companions in these words:

"He looked and startled the nations. And the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual lulls bowed. (Habakkuk 3: 6)"

People accepted Islam due to the ideological quality of Islam, and not because of its political power.

The battles fought in the first phase of Islam were aimed at exterminating the system of coercion in order that the doors should be opened to human progress. By his very nature, man wants to gush forth like flowing water towards progress. By his very instincts he wants to go on making progress. So progress is an automatic process which cannot be stopped, except by an external barrier.

The ancient political coercion was a severe obstacle of this kind. By removing this obstacle, Islam opened the doors of progress for humanity.

At the time of the emergence of Islam, there was only one person who adhered to it, that was, the Prophet himself. But today, there are more than a billion people all over the world, who adhere to it. The general propagation of Islam has nothing to do with battles or the sword. The entire propagation of Islam took place on ideological strength. In the initial stages the historical team of Islam was comprised of mostly Makkan and Madinan people. But we know that no offensive war was waged with Makkah and Madinah. Later on, the believers went to other

countries and in those countries a large number of people entered into the fold of Islam of their own volition, the political and military powers had no role in this. The battles that took place in those days were concerned only with the army of those respective rulers and were strictly confined to the battlefield, far from the general population to affect them.

People accepted Islam due to the ideological quality of Islam, and not because of its political power. The well-known Egyptologist, Sir Arthur Keith has rightly observed. He writes:

'The Egyptians were conquered not by the sword,
but by the Koran.'

(Sir Arthur Keith, a New Theory of Human Evolution, London, Watts & Co., 1950, p. 303)

Similarly Islam spread in the sub-continent on a large scale, but this is attributed to the internal virtues of Islam. This reality has been acknowledged by non-Muslim scholars also. For fact, Swami Vivekanand writes:

'It is nonsense to say that the Hindus were converted by the sword.' (Letters of Swami Vivekanand, p. 95)

Another extraordinary incident took place in the 13th century in the history of Islam. The Mongol hordes coming from the mountains entered the Muslim world. They devastated the Muslim civilization right from Samarqand to Aleppo.

The spread of Islam in the sub-continent is attributed to the internal virtues of Islam.

The Muslims thus lost their political glory in the 19th and the 20th century. They were in no position to achieve any objective by using force. Yet despite this position of subjugation the spread of Islam has been going on uninterrupted. Even today, people are entering the fold of Islam based on their own findings about its veracity. It would be true to say that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the entire world is faced with an ideological void. This void can be filled by Islam like it did, in the past.

Here it would be quite appropriate to quote a reference from Time Magazine. In 1990, Time magazine published a special report about the failure of communism. Its caption read: "Karl Marx makes room for Muhammad." This is a factual statement. Islam's ideology has the potential to give solutions to the problems of the world. To bring this potentiality into reality the need of the hour is to present Islam before the world as it is from the original sources. □



True Reform

*The legal system and the administration have their limits.
Genuine reform will come about only if the spirit of
reform is generated among the people concerned.*

Simple Living

*Simplicity is that state of living in which man has realized
the purpose of his life and given it the utmost importance,
while regarding everything else as secondary.*

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LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE

Love, Despite Hatred

Sir Thomas Carlyle, a well-known and celebrated British writer once wrote:

A loving heart is the beginning of all knowledge.

THIS saying is extremely meaningful but its meaningfulness cannot be properly understood unless these words are added to it, 'Loving, despite there being a cause for hatred', for in this world the factors of hatred are always present. No one can love other human beings without demonstrating that they are broadminded enough to love people despite experiencing their hatred and ill-will.

Thomas Carlyle's life itself serves an example. The crusades as hatred between Muslims and western nations, with the result that the latter failed to recognize the Prophet. For centuries they held the Prophet to be an evil person. But Thomas Carlyle rose above the cloud of hatred in the wake of the crusades and studied the life of the Prophet objectively. He became so impressed that he held him to be the hero of all the Prophets, acknowledging the worth of his personality with the highest of praise in his book *Heroes and Hero worship*.

**To develop a heart within one, which may love
despite hatred amounts to taking oneself
to the height of morality.**

To develop a heart within one, which may love despite hatred amounts to taking oneself to the height of morality. This high morality is the only ground on which the plant of knowledge grows and develops into a lush green tree. □



Change Yourself

*Adjustment is based on the formula: 'Save yourself'.
When you are not in the position to change others, change
yourself. It is this behaviour that is called adjustment.*

BELIEF IN GOD

Source of All Goodness

GOD is the source of all goodness. He can be seen everywhere in the universe. His power is evident in the form of light and heat. He converts matter into greenery and flowing water. His glory is made manifest in colour, taste and fragrance. Gravity, motion and magnetism in nature are a demonstration of His power.

Belief in a God of such perfection is more than just a dogma. It illuminates man's soul and enraptures his heart. If one relishes a delicious fruit, and goes into ecstasy on hearing a melodic tune, how then can one fail to be moved by the discovery of God, who is the fountainhead of all goodness.

Belief in a God of such perfection is more than just a dogma. It illuminates man's soul and enraptures his heart.

When one truly discovers God, He becomes like a fragrance which one savours, a delicious taste which one relishes, a spectacle, which captivates one's vision, a melody which never ceases to thrill. God has created all these exquisite delights: His being is their treasure house. Drawing close to God is like entering paradise. It is like dwelling in a garden of exquisite beauty and fragrance, or being in the neighbourhood of the source of all light. □



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RELINQUISHING POWER FOR GOD

Unforced Submission

ALL power in this world belongs to God. No one else has any strength. Nevertheless, God has granted man freedom in this world so that he may be tested. Man is the only creature free to exercise his will in a world which is otherwise entirely subjugated to the will of God. God wants to see how man utilizes the power and free will with which he has been endowed. If he is realistic, he will submit to God. Otherwise, deluded by his apparent freedom, he will continue in his rebellious ways.

Paradise is for those who have power, but disclaim all pretence to it; who fear God, though they are in a position to do the opposite; who have the chance to attach importance to themselves, but refrain from doing so, putting God first.

The exquisite world of Paradise is for those who, of their own free will, subordinate themselves to the will of God.

Such people consider that they are directly provided for by God, though such provision is concealed beneath a veil of worldly causes. They have opportunities to oppress and exploit people, but fear of God prevents them from doing so. At times they feel tempted to indulge in anger, hate and revenge, but patience cools their anger, and forgiveness obliterates any hostility or vengeance which stirs in their hearts. Where people are full of praise for them, they are balanced enough to retain their humility. God may have endowed them with abundant wealth, but they spend their wealth as God would wish. It is not personal satisfaction that they seek; their only desire is to please their Lord. They do not live for themselves; they live only for God.

The exquisite world of Paradise is for those who, of their own free will, subordinate themselves to the will of God. It is reserved for those who adhere to God's path, though they have been given free rein to stray from it if they so desire. It will be the reward for those who, though not compelled to do so, obeyed God's commandments. □



THROUGH FIRE AND WATER

Profit from Loss

The people who ultimately succeed are those who are undaunted by disadvantageous circumstances, who waste no time in lamenting over them and who give their attention instead to overcoming whatever difficulties they are faced with.

AS Dale Carnegie—the most pragmatic of modern thinkers once remarked: "The most important thing in life is not to capitalize on your gains. Any fool can do that: The really important thing is to profit from your losses. That requires intelligence; and it makes the difference between a man of sense and a fool."

It is seldom in this world that aspirants to wealth and fame meet with nothing but success throughout their careers. Many are the trials and tribulations through which they must pass before they can savour the fruits of their endeavours. The people who ultimately succeed are those who are undaunted by disadvantageous circumstances, who waste no time in lamenting over them and who give their attention instead to overcoming whatever difficulties they are faced with.

The truly successful person is one who is prepared to battle through fire and water right to the very end.

The idea of profiting from one's losses may seem paradoxical, but it is something definitely worth aiming for, whether it be an individual, a group or a nation whose welfare is at stake. It is not, after all, the one who has never had to face any difficulties whatsoever who is necessarily the most successful in life. The truly successful person is one who can carry his ambitions into effect no matter what hurdles he has to leap over. He is the one who will arrive at his destination no matter what obstacles are strewn in his path. He is the one who is prepared to battle through fire and water right to the very end. □



INDIVIDUAL REFORM, NOT 'PROTEST ACTIVISM'

Beginning of True Reform

SOME people argue that social problems can be solved only through 'social activism', particularly through demonstrating against the state, against what they call the 'ruling class', against what they term as caste oppression, class oppression, imperialism, patriarchy, the oppression of this or that community or ideological system, and so on.

This kind of activism is nothing but 'protest activism'. Experience has shown that 'protest activism' is completely futile in terms of its results. Islam believes in result-oriented action. If we consider protest activism in terms of the results it produces, we will find that it always ends in the wastage of money, time, energy and loss of life.

Protest oriented activism is completely futile in terms of its results.

Social movements based on this sort of protest-oriented 'activism' may be good for their leaders, but not for the society at large. Experience indicates that these so-called social movements produce only negative thinking. As a matter of fact, negative thinking is destructive thinking, and no destructive thinking can lead to any positive end. Reform requires a very sincere kind of positive effort. No amount of negative criticism can bring about reform.

Protest-oriented 'activists' focus only on what they see as problems around them. They spend their lives demonstrating against this or that. This problem-oriented thinking is 'unnatural'. This means that people who think and act in this way are thinking and acting against the law of nature. The fact is that problems are an inevitable part of life in this world. In every system and every society, there have been, and there will always be, problems of different sorts. But, at the same time, it is also a fact that in every situation there are also opportunities. According to the law of nature, no problem can entirely eliminate the opportunities that also exist simultaneously, not even in what seems to be the most difficult situations. So, the best practical formula is to ignore the problems and avail the opportunities that are available.

Those who think negatively and engage in protesting and demonstrating against others become negative by nature. Such persons are a liability to their society, not an asset to it, contrary to what they imagine about themselves. Those who constantly point out others' faults and blame others for various problems and social ills are, in fact, not doing anything useful. Their activities are simply destructive.

According to the law of nature, problems are not problems as such, but, rather, challenges. Problems are only an unpleasant name for challenges. Problems create competition, and competition increases people's creativity. This process consequently leads to progress and achievement. Life is based on challenges. Without challenges, there is no development.

Arnold Toynbee formulated the true principle of challenge-response mechanism. According to this formulation, all problems are challenges, and all challenges are stepping-stones towards progress.

No problem can entirely eliminate the opportunities that also exist simultaneously, not even in what seems to be the most difficult situations.

Given this maxim, people who go around protesting constantly in the name of 'social activism' and 'reforming society' are simply going against the law of nature. Those who do so create a two-fold evil: For themselves, this course is akin to committing psychological suicide; and for others, it leads to even more problems.

Such persons are themselves problem-members of society. The best way to examine their efforts is to judge their actions in terms of the results of their protest-oriented 'activism'. Analysing this, you will find that these people are problem-creators, rather than problem-solvers. Their theory is based on the concept of "we and they". This kind of theory only inculcates negative thinking among people and exacerbates existing conflicts.

Social problems are, in fact, individual problems. Educate individuals, and social problems will be solved by themselves. Education refers to formal and informal education. The concept of education also includes training the individual that is, making people positive-minded and realistic. Real reform begins with educating individuals, and not by

criticizing the authorities. This is the Islamic approach to solving social problems; there is no social activism in Islam. Islam believes only in individual activism, and not in social or political activism.

If individuals are reformed, society will also be reformed. The right focus is to reform one's own self, and other individuals, too. But people who focus on 'social' change while neglecting individual reform (which means beginning with their own reform) turn the whole thing upside down. For example, the philosophy of Marxism or Socialism was focused on 'society', and in it the 'individual' and 'individual reform' lost all value. That is one reason why Marxism miserably failed.

Is it possible, or even desirable, someone may ask, for one to develop a proper balance between social reform and individual reform? Trying to strike a balance between the two is not a right approach. The root cause of all kinds of both good and evil is the individual. So, if you want to make an evil-free society, you have to focus on individual reform. The concept of 'social activism' or 'social reform' is based on a wrong diagnosis. The root cause of all kind of problems lies in individuals. And so, all talk of 'social reform' instead of individual reform is useless. And it is a fact that when the diagnosis is wrong, the prescription will go in vain.

The best practical formula is to ignore the problems and avail the opportunities that are available.

Can individual reform lead to social reform, you might ask? Is individual reform sufficient to solve immense social problems? To answer these questions, you need to be clear as to what 'society' really is.

Society is nothing but a collection of individuals. So, when individuals are reformed, the whole society will, as a consequence, be reformed. But if you focus on trying to reform society instead of yourself, all your efforts will be wasted. If one truly wants to bring about reform in society, one must devote oneself to educating individuals. When you focus on reforming individuals, you are focusing on real entities. If, instead, you focus on trying to change society as a whole, your focus will be blurred, because society is nothing but an abstract concept that denotes a collection of individuals. Because society itself has no existence apart from the individuals who constitute it, efforts to reform society without reforming individuals, starting with oneself, are all in vain. □

UTILIZE YOURSELF

Nature's Gift to Everyone

ACCORDING to biological studies, every human being has four phases in his or her life. Everyone is subject to this law of nature. There is no exception to this rule.

The first period is that of childhood, which lasts from birth to about ten years of age. In this period, one's basic personality is developed. The second period is the phase of adolescence. This is from ten to twenty-five years of age. In this period, a person attains maturity, both at the physical and mental levels. The third is the period of full strength, that is, from twenty-five up to thirty-five years of age. In this period, a person enjoys maximum strength. Old age is the last phase. It is a phenomenon of biological degeneration. The process of ageing begins after thirty-five years of age, and continues until the rest of one's life.

According to biological studies, everyone has ten best years of their lives when they enjoy their best years of mental and physical energy.

According to this biological definition, everyone has ten best years of life. In this period a person enjoys full strength and energy. In this age one can do anything. This age is the greatest natural gift for every person. A person reaps the benefits of the base for his entire life that he develops for himself during this ten-year period.

Everyone must realize that he or she is subject to the law of nature. A person can build his future only by following the nature. If we deny this law, we will have no place in this world.

It is the first duty of every person to realize this fact and understand that winning in this matter is winning forever, and losing in this matter is losing forever. □



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

Have they not reflected that their companion is not mad? He is only a plain warner. Have they not looked into the realms of the heavens and the earth and all that God created, and seen that the end of their time might be near? What will they believe in if they do not believe in this? No one can guide those whom God lets go astray: He leaves them blundering about in their arrogance. (THE QURAN 7:184-186)

A man with a mission is a man of principle. His thinking is unconditioned thinking. He has risen above all kinds of worldly interests. Truth becomes his sole concern.

He sacrifices his life and property for a goal, which does not appear to yield any result in this world. That is why a man with a mission is called crazy, out of his mind. A prophet of God was the greatest man with a mission, of his time. So, people in every age have called the prophets of God fanatics.

To call a missionary of God's religion a madman is the greatest of all transgressions, because the message with which he comes is one which is corroborated by the entire heaven and earth. He calls mankind towards God who is supremely manifest in His Creations in the Universe. He informs people of the Hereafter which, in heaven and on the earth, is equal in gravity to a full pregnancy in a woman's womb. But people are not serious about the truth. So, a man who sacrifices his life for the sake of the truth appears mad to them. Had they known the real value of truth, they would never have used the word 'mad'.

They ask you [Prophet] about the Last Hour, 'When will it come?' Say, 'Knowledge about it rests only with my Lord; He alone will reveal when its time will come, it lies heavy on the heavens and the earth: It will

suddenly overtake you.' They will put questions to you as though you had full knowledge of it. Say, 'Knowledge about it rests only with God, though most people do not realize it.' Say, 'I myself have no power to benefit or do harm, save as God pleases. If I had knowledge of the unseen, I would have availed myself of an abundance of good, and no harm would have touched me. I am but a warner and a bearer of good tidings for those who will believe.' (THE QURAN 7: 187-188)

'On which day will Doomsday occur?' Questions of this sort are produced by non-serious minds. Only the sincere will believe in the Day of Judgement, without wanting to know the exact date of its occurrence. As this world is a place of testing, Doomsday will be indicated here in terms of caution and warning alone.

It was He who created you from a single soul, and from it made its mate so that he may find comfort in her. Once he has covered her, she conceives and goes about with a light burden. When it grows heavy, they both call to God, their Lord, 'If You bestow on us a healthy child, we will surely be grateful,' yet when He grants them a healthy child, they begin to ascribe to others a share in the gift they have received. But God is far above what they associate with Him! Do they associate with Him those who create nothing and are themselves created? They can give them no help, nor can they help themselves. It makes no difference whether you call on them or remain silent. If you call them to the right path, they will not follow you. Those whom you call on besides God are but creatures like yourselves. Call upon them, then, and let them respond to you, if what you say is true. (THE QURAN 7: 189-194)

This vast universe itself introduces its Creator. This introduction in no case admits of the concept of polytheism. In the universe countless items or parts are found separately; but all these parts combine and become a harmonious whole. There is no contradiction or clash among them. This perfect harmony could not be possible unless the Creator and Lord of this universe were one and in control of its functioning.

Look at the case of man and woman. Man and woman both are born as independent beings. But at the same time both are complementary to each other in the full sense of the word. This harmony is so perfect that each of them feels that he or she was created for the other. This is a most wonderful example of harmony in this world. This harmony is a clear proof that both the male and the female were created by one and the same God. Had there been more than one Being in action in the universe, this perfect harmony between two different and opposite entities would not have been possible.

ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

There are some who speak and talk about past negative experiences. Is it not important to forget the past?

Yes, it is very important to forget the unpleasant experiences of the past. Because, the choice in this context is not between forgetting and not forgetting: The real choice is between living with all kinds of bitter memories and totally freeing yourself from them. Try to forget unpleasant memories, for the alternative to this is living in bitterness and that is not a good choice for anyone. The habit of forgetting leads you to many good things. It saves you from distraction, it economizes your energy, it prevents you from wasting your time, and it shields you from negative thoughts. All these things are so important for a better life that any sacrifice to achieve it is certainly worth it.



How to explain the phenomenon of depression?

Depression is a sign of mental disturbance. Such disturbance leads to intellectual upheaval and, finally, to brainstorming. Depression is a symptom of deprivation. When you think that you are seriously lacking in something that you earnestly desire, this thought is bound to lead to depression. Depression is not a physical phenomenon: It is psychological in nature. If you feel that you have gained what you wanted to gain, that will give you a sense of satisfaction. But when you feel that you have failed to achieve your goal, it leads to depression. In the first case, your life very soon comes to a full stop, but in the second case, your life goes on, punctuated by commas.

What should one do when provoked?

Our world is one of provocation. Whenever there are provocations, big or small, you have only two options: Either to succumb to anger and hatred and fail to do anything positive in the situation, or to remain patient. By being patient, you save time and energy. Being patient means having a calm nature. When you are calm you can serenely face a challenge without allowing yourself to be provoked, making yourself strong enough to overcome all difficulties. Only patience will enable

you to use your mental capacity to the fullest extent. Patience is a precious virtue; it costs nothing to acquire this virtue. It requires only the training of your mind; you have to train yourself to control your emotions.

What is meant by rational thought?

Rational thinking means reason-based thinking. It is the kind of thinking that is based on proven facts. It is based on sound reason. We tend to let our heart rule our thinking and this can cloud our judgement. We need to control our emotions and understand the realities of life objectively; only then will we be able to develop rational thinking.

How should one deal with difference of opinion?

Difference is a part of nature. It is difference that paves way for intellectual discussion. Difference per se is therefore not an evil but a blessing. There have to be certain pre-conditions if difference is to be a healthy social asset. In spite of differences you have to remain peaceable. You have to be sincere and objective, so that the difference may be expressed in a disciplined manner. You have to express your differences peacefully, and at the same time be open-minded enough to allow others to freely express their views. In the matter of disagreement and criticism people should shed off their unnecessary sensitivity, instead of attempting to put a stop to the act of criticism and disagreement itself.

It is almost impossible to achieve the ideal; but if we do not aspire to the ideal, where will righteous motivation come from?

Try to achieve the ideal but, at the same time, be prepared to accept the practical. The ideal should be your goal. But one has to deal with all sorts of people and keep social realities in mind. In such a situation, non-acceptance of the less-than-ideal is bound to lead to disappointment.

Is it necessary to entertain feelings of guilt? Does it not undermine confidence?

This thinking is based on a wrong assumption. Guilt means admitting your mistakes, so guilt gives you renewed confidence that henceforth you will do your work in a better way. Feeling guilty means being more cautious and more sincere; so, guilt is an entirely positive quality. There is nothing negative about it. □

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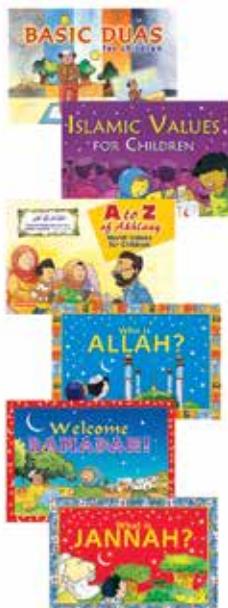
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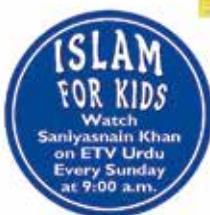
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