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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

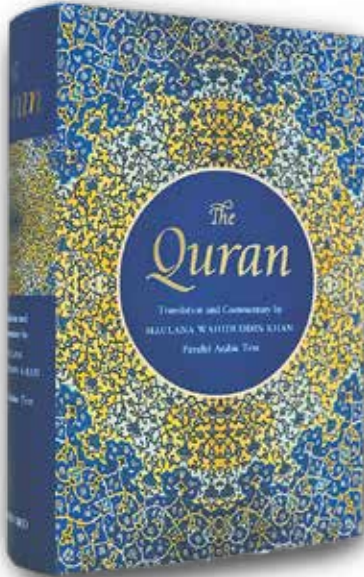


**A violent action is like a boomerang.
It acts against you just as it acts against others.**

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 Global Peace & Spiritual Living

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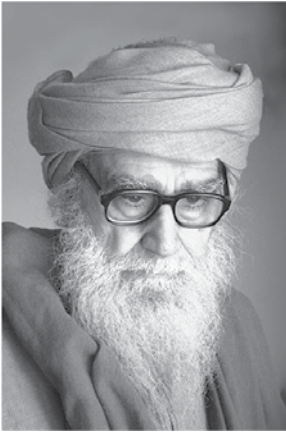
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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 Demiurgus Peace International Award and Sayyidina Imam Al Hassan Peace award for promoting peace in Muslim societies. He has been called 'Islam's spiritual ambassador to the world' and is recognised as one of its most influential Muslims¹. His books have been translated into sixteen languages and are part of university curricula in six countries. He is the founder of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality based in New Delhi.

THE first issue of the monthly *Spirit of Islam* appeared in January 2013. With the beginning of this year, the magazine completes three years of publication. The prevailing circumstances were not favourable for bringing out such a magazine. It is the great favour of God Almighty that the magazine has survived against all odds.

Recently one of our colleagues presented a copy of the magazine to a tourist. On seeing its title, he said, 'No, thank you.' Why did he give such a negative response? It is indeed a direct result of the Paris attacks of November 13, 2015.

Events of the kind which happened in France, defame Islam. The worst aspect of these violent activities is that the perpetrators are doing so in the name of Islam. According to media reports, those who witnessed the mass shooting in one of the attacks at a stadium in Paris said that the gunmen shouted '*Allahu Akbar*' before opening fire. Such incidents of violence are tantamount to doing ungodly activities in the name of Islam.

Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the mastermind behind the Paris attacks, declared in a French-language recruiting video for ISIS: 'Of course, it is not joyous to make blood flow. But from time to time, it is pleasant to see the blood of disbelievers.'

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

This is a sad state of affairs and highly condemnable. This gives us fresh impetus to promote *Spirit of Islam* with greater vigour and enthusiasm. With this spirit, we begin another year of the magazine.

Such incidents of violence have triggered people to think about the seriousness of the current state of affairs. Some consider it a part of the problem of evil, others blame religion and demand eliminating it from our lives and there are yet others who say that Islam is a religion of violence.

It is a grave misinterpretation if the verses of the Quran are used to justify violence; it is a distortion of the teachings of the Quran. It is our endeavour to present the true teachings of the Quran through the Spirit of Islam.

The Quran being the authentic text of Islam, it is important to consult it to understand the significance of peace in Islam. God Almighty is Himself the Author of the Quran. One of the attributes of God is *As-Salam*, or peace. (59: 23) The night on which the Quran began to be revealed is called *Laylatus Salam*, or the Night of Peace (97: 5). The Quran says that God calls people to the Home of Peace (10: 25). There are more than 6,000 verses in the Quran, which directly or indirectly give the message of peace. Islam is a religion of peace. It is a grave misinterpretation if the verses of the Quran are used to justify violence; it is a distortion of the teachings of the Quran. It is our endeavour to present the true teachings

of the Quran through the *Spirit of Islam*.

Islam is a spiritual ideology and peace is the method to bring the ideology into effect. Islam's goal is to convey its teachings to all mankind. Work of this kind requires a peaceful atmosphere. Engaging in acts of violence in the name of Islam jeopardises the cause of Islam.

Violence and extremism are phenomena of the misuse of freedom. Freedom is good if exercised with responsibility. It would yield positive results, bring about societal progress and development. But if misused, it would lead to a state of anarchy.

The purpose of this magazine is to re-engineer people's minds along positive lines and make them understand the creation plan of the Creator. It will help them to plan their lives positively and achieve the success that is their due. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
editor@thespiritofislam.org

DISCOVERY OF GOD

Silent Signs of Science

THE sun is 1,300,000 times the size of our earth, and 149,600,000 kilometres distant from it. Despite this enormous distance, light and heat from the sun reach us in considerable quantity. By cosmic standards, the sun is a relatively small star; it appears large to us because of its proximity.

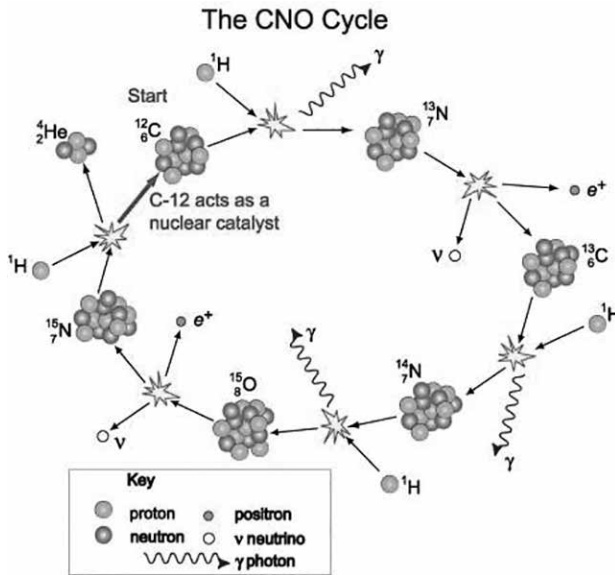
Most stars are both larger and more radiant than the sun. Vast globes of heat and light, they are scattered throughout the universe. They have been shining for billions of years, but their reserves of thermal energy show no signs of exhaustion. How do stars produce such vast quantities of energy? The astrophysicist Hans Bethe spent years exploring this question. Finally he discovered that the secret lies in the CNO cycle (carbon-nitrogen-oxygen cycle). His research in this field won him the Nobel Prize for physics in 1967.

The day that Hans Bethe made this great discovery was one of great joy for him. His wife, Rose, says that she was with her husband in the New Mexico desert when it happened. It was night, and the stars shone with immense lustre on the vast, open desert. She looked up with wonder at the sky. "Gosh," she exclaimed, "how brightly the stars shine!" Her husband replied: "Do you realise, just now you are standing next to the only human being who knows why they shine at all?"

Hans Bethe's discovery answered a very small part of the real question; it did not reach the crux. His discovery of the CNO cycle leaves a greater question unanswered: how does this CNO cycle operate in stars?

A true believer finds the answer to this question in the form of God, the Maker and Sustainer of the universe. It is God who has invested the stars with this magic property. Another fascinating fact is the enormous synchronisation and harmonious existence of countless moving stars and planets that remain in their orbits without striking one another—doesn't this awesome fact point to the existence of a rational being behind it?

***Nature may appear
silent but it speaks
about its creator,
God, for those who
wish to hear.***



It is ironic that a small discovery should make a scientist lose himself in a spontaneous outburst of feeling, while the far greater discovery that a believer makes—that of God—should create in him no such feeling. Those who really believe in God feel the joy of their discovery. Their joy is beyond expression, it is so overwhelming. If there are no traces of the joy of discovery, then the discovery itself has yet to be made. Nature may appear silent but it speaks about its creator, God, for those who wish to hear. □



Contact with God

Every observation and learning can serve as a point of reference to establish contact with God instantly and seek His blessings.

POSITIVE ASPECT OF ILLNESS

Convert Your Loss into Gain

A PRAYER of Prophet Abraham in the Quran says ‘He who cures me when I am ill.’ (26: 80). This is no simple prayer, It refers to a great piece of wisdom learnt through the experience of illness.

It is common for people to fall sick and regain their health. The law of recovery is quite significant. When the branch of a tree is cut, very soon a new branch grows. While a tree does not consciously realise this phenomenon, man can consciously discover this by applying his mind.

To fully realise the significance of this law, the Creator has made illness a personal experience. Recovering from illness is common for everyone. To realise this law through recovery from disease or ailment makes it a personal experience.

One experiences losses of different kinds—physical, economic and political. Recuperating after a period of illness, one should not despair looking at the losses. Just re-plan activities and try to convert loss into gain.

This attitude makes a person to be complaint-free. Since it is possible to transform loss into gain, one should be ever grateful and never complain. Not falling prey to negativity and remaining positive is of utmost importance.

Illness will prompt one to think deeply, a blessing in disguise. One will thus discover the meaning of life, remember God Almighty and pray for entry to Paradise.

A prophetic tradition also refers to illness. The Prophet once visited a sick man. On seeing him, the Prophet said ‘Don’t worry, God willing, it will be a source of purification.’ (Bukhari)

This indicates that illness is merely not a problem. There is a positive aspect of illness; it makes the person reflect. Illness will prompt one to think deeply—a blessing in disguise. One will thus discover the meaning of life, remember God Almighty and pray for entry to Paradise. This will purify the soul, and will lead to the emergence of a new human being. □



*No one puts out other people’s lamp.
It is the lack of oil which puts them out.*

MAULANA'S ADDRESS TO ISNA

The Age of Peace

IN August/September 2015, we members of the *Centre for Peace and Spirituality* went on a two-week trip to the USA at the invitation of the *Islamic Society of North America* (ISNA) to attend its convention in Chicago. Besides Chicago, we visited Washington DC, Pennsylvania, and New York.

With God's grace, I got to speak at different venues and to meet people from different walks of life and backgrounds. At the ISNA convention, I stressed upon one point in particular: that today we are living in the 'Age of Peace'. *The Age of Peace* is the title of my latest book, released during this trip at the ISNA convention as well as at the *United States Institute of Peace*, a centre set up by the US Congress to promote peaceful methods of conflict-resolution.

I cited a *Hadith* (words of the Prophet), full of wisdom, in relation to the age of peace that we are living in today. The Prophet is reported to have said: *wise is he who understands the age in which he lives.*

***Wise is he who
understands the age
in which he lives.***

This *Hadith* reflects the importance of something crucial—the need for wise planning. A solid understanding and appreciation of the conditions of the times can aid in wise planning. It is about availing the opportunities afforded by the age in which we live. If we have no idea about the conditions of our times, we will lose out badly.

In my address at the ISNA convention, I stressed that one special characteristic of our contemporary age is freedom; the kind the world never enjoyed before. A major reason was that in earlier ages much of the world was under monarchy, with only the monarch enjoying total freedom. But today we live in an age of democracy where each individual has the inalienable right to be free. When the Prophet was in Makkah, the early Muslims were prevented from praying at the Kabah. Today there is no such restriction. You—Muslims and everyone else—can pray anywhere in the world and none can stop you. Isn't that amazing! The Prophet and his Companions faced opposition when they wanted to worship at the Kabah, and today Muslims are free to build mosques in every country and worship there. This is the freedom that we now enjoy.

If we want to understand today's age as per the message of the *Hadith*, we need to keep in mind the basic feature of this age—freedom. And what is freedom? Basically, it is the power to choose—to avail and make use of opportunities. This is an age of opportunities.

Wise planning involves recognising these myriad opportunities in various fields—business, social work, education and inviting people to God—and using the freedom we have been blessed with, to avail of these opportunities. There is but one restriction—one may not harm or trouble anyone else. As long as one does not harm others, there will be no obstacle to avail the many opportunities that abound today.

Let me cite a story to illustrate this point. When America won independence from Britain, an American man, overjoyed at the news, stepped out into the streets to celebrate. In his joy, he waved his hands about, and by mistake, struck a passer-by on the nose. The angry passer-by asked him why he had hit him. The man said “We’ve won freedom, and I’m now free! I was exercising my freedom!”

The second man replied, “Yes, you are free, but your freedom ends where my nose begins!”

A solid understanding and appreciation of the conditions of the times can aid in wise planning.

In my address, I related this story and talked of 9/11, the destruction of the twin towers in New York. This crime was like hitting the ‘industrial nose’ of America, and totally unacceptable. You cannot avail of existing opportunities by abusing freedom—hurt, damage and kill others. You will have to ensure you don’t hit other people’s ‘noses’ if you are to enjoy the freedom to avail the many opportunities that have opened up. If you want progress, you will have to stop violence, suicide-bombing, gun-culture and the bomb-culture.

The peaceful functioning of the ISNA validates this point. They are doing work in the field of social service. They have established a ‘social empire’, as it were, in America. And why and how has it been able to do so? Surely not by hitting anyone else’s ‘nose’. Without resorting to violence it has achieved so much in the field of social service. This reflects the wisdom referred to in the *Hadith*—the need to understand the age in which one lives and the demands of that age.

The 10,000 odd audience was quick to appreciate this point. We distributed peace-related literature among them, including my latest books, *The Age of Peace* and *Quranic Wisdom*.

Close to the Chicago airport, Muslims of Turkish origin have established a large institution—the *Turkish-American Society* (TAS). It is associated with the well-known Turkish Muslim scholar, Ustad Fethullah Gulen. Our visit to the centre was a great experience. Interacting with the people at the centre, I commented on the remarkable movement led by Ustad Gulen that had spawned an ‘educational empire’—hundreds of high-quality schools across the world, in more than a hundred countries! I also remarked that the Turks had established the Ottoman Caliphate that lasted for a long time but conditions in the wake of the First World War led to its collapse. The Turkish nationalist leader Mustafa Kemal Ataturk is credited with single-handedly destroying it. Having studied the issue, I believe that the Ottoman Caliphate ended not by the actions of any single individual. Rather, it was the demand of the times, the requirement of the age that this should happen.

If earlier people tried to establish political empires, often at a very heavy cost, today we can establish non-political ‘empires’ where the sky is the limit!

How and why do I say this? By the early 20th century, political empires across the world were fast crumbling. Earlier it had been possible to establish political empires and that’s how there was the British empire, the Mughal Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the Roman Empire. Keeping with the changing conditions and demands of the times, Ustad Gulen had clearly focused his attention on non-political work—on promoting education. He caught hold of the root, as it were, education being an issue of the utmost importance. He helped set up a large number

of quality schools across countries. Interestingly, he did not talk about establishing universities. Nothing happens through universities unless the schools that feed the universities are good. You need good schools that provide quality education and moral training. And that’s what Ustad Gulen stressed on.

As I reflect on Mustafa Kemal Ataturk’s declaration abolishing the Ottoman Caliphate, I realise this was not an individual’s announcement. Mustafa Kemal articulated the voice of the new age, telling us that the age of political empires was out for good.

The early 20th century witnessed the end of political empires. Mustafa Kemal laid the foundation by introducing democracy and later Ustad Gulen built a rugged education system on this base. Ustad Gulen has shown that opportunities to progress will still remain—in the non-political sphere. In fact, we have more opportunities than before! If

earlier people tried to establish political empires, often at a very heavy cost, today we can establish non-political 'empires' where the sky is the limit! we can establish them all across the world! we need no army or war for that.

It is amazing that the Turks had established a vast political empire which ended in the early 20th century and then set about establishing a non-political educational 'empire'! God selected them to tell the world not to lament the passing of an age, but recognize the new opportunities and adapt to it.

The ISNA has established a 'social service empire' in America and Ustad Gulen an 'educational empire'—all using peaceful means. I told people I met in America that we at the *Centre for Peace and Spirituality* are trying to establish a '*dawah* empire', calling all people across the world to God. Given the immense opportunities, this empire' is surely possible today.

Muslims must reflect deeply on the *Hadith* referred to above and understand its contemporary relevance and deep wisdom. From this *Hadith* I understand that though times may change, opportunities never cease. The passing of one age doesn't mean all is lost. Instead, understand the conditions and demands of the new age, discover the opportunities and adapt.

We are truly blessed with the freedom to work in a vast range of spheres. We are free to establish a 'social service empire', an 'educational empire', a '*dawah* empire', all in the non-political fields. If we truly understand and appreciate the significance of this, we will not fall prey to despair or waste time in protest and complaint. Resorting to violence will lead to destruction of oneself and others in suicide-bombing, the gun-culture and the bomb-culture. It is futile because opportunities to progress are abundant, and there is freedom to avail them. In my interactions in America, I repeatedly stressed this point.

One morning, I thought to myself, "While in America, my friends and I travelled more than 30,000 kilometres in just 15 days, doing *dawah* work!" What a blessing it is to visit so many distant places in such a short time! This is what I call a '*dawah* empire'—not based in some fort or castle. It is peaceful effort. We met many people—Christians, Muslims,

The Quran is the basis of our mission. We have published translations of the Quran in several languages. We have brought out supportive literature to help people interpret the Quran to suit our contemporary times.

Hindus and others, and engaged in conveying the message with them. There were no obstructions whatsoever. I was indeed touched! Here I was, an Indian coming to America and engaging in inviting people to God, and none stopped me; truly amazing! Compare this with the times of the Prophet Muhammad and other prophets. They faced stiff opposition to their work. One can engage in such work without any opposition, the only condition being to be free from hate and complaint against anyone. The origin of every evil is complaint. Complaint leads to hate; hate leads to enmity; and enmity leads to violence, to war, to suicide-bombing, to the gun-culture and the bomb-culture. And the result is destruction.

The Quran is the basis of our mission. We have published translations of the Quran in several languages. We have brought out supportive literature to help people interpret the Quran to suit our contemporary times. Our recent book *The Age of Peace*, must be made available to many more people. Learning through reading is a Quranic principle.

The origin of every evil is complaint. Complaint leads to hate; hate leads to enmity; and enmity leads to violence.

In the Quran, God says: 'Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One who taught by the pen' (96: 3-4). Earlier people wrote by hand, and that took much time and effort. As a student in the *madrasa*, I copied an entire Arabic course book by hand! Today the printing press and the Internet can produce and disseminate books at the touch of a button, and on a massive scale. No matter what your background or educational qualifications, you

can devote yourself fully to *dawah* work. This is such a mobile age! People are constantly moving and you interact with many people every day. Keep the peace literature with you and distribute it to people you meet, an easy way to do this work. We should be grateful to God for all these blessings.

Wherever I travel, including our recent trip to America, I see people searching for a message that addresses their minds, their innate nature, their spirituality—a message that has nothing to do with political wrangling and conflict, and free of hate. Only God can satisfy this inner thirst. And that indicates the importance of inviting people to God.

The 20th century witnessed several 'social movements'. But all of them somewhere got stuck in politics. And where politics appears, protest, complaint and hate inevitably raise their ugly heads. These traits are

not innate to human beings as God's creation. Rather, they are fomented by ambitious, power-hungry leaders.

Today people are thirsty for peace, spirituality, positivity. An entire century went by filled with political hate talk. People want an end to such politics, hate and violence. They are looking for what their innate nature wants. I see this everywhere. If the 20th century was an age of hate, politics and confrontation, our age is—or can be—truly 'The Age of Peace'. □

Understand the conditions and demands of the new age, discover the opportunities and adapt.



Tolerance

In routine matters, where there is none of the stress and strain of opposition, no one has difficulty in being tolerant. It is in situations fraught with conflict, that the truly tolerant man will prove his mettle.

High Thinker

A high thinker cannot waste his time in clashes and confrontations. He will set his journey beyond all these. Nothing has the power to stop the journey of a high thinker.

POLLUTION

Failure of Man

POLLUTION of any kind is against the scheme of God, the Creator. It is man's duty to maintain the purity of nature. Failure to do so is a sin and a crime. Man is permitted to exploit natural resources but without destroying the natural order of things.

Here are two related verses from the Quran:

Do not corrupt the land after it has been set in order. This is for your own good, if you are true believers. (7: 85)

Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what men's hands have done: and so He will make them taste the fruit of some of their doings, so that they may turn back from evil. (30: 41)

These two verses state that God Almighty has created things in their best order and man may enjoy these things for his own benefit. But he is not allowed to destroy the balance of nature. Man was born as a free creature, but man's freedom ends where his mismanagement of nature begins. In these verses, the Quran refers to land pollution and water pollution by name, but in their general application, all kinds of pollution are included, such as air pollution, noise pollution, etc.

Man is not the creator of this world but is a beneficiary of God's creation. Man ought to be aware of this fact; transgressing will prove to be disastrous for him.

Man is not the creator of this world but is a beneficiary of God's creation. Man ought to be aware of this fact; transgressing will prove to be disastrous for him. All pollution is manmade (nature never creates any kind of pollution). While he has the capacity to pollute nature, he does not have the power to create another world. Being sinful before God and depriving himself of the only source of life, that is, nature, is a double loss for man. This state of affairs requires great caution, else he will be compelled to pay a very heavy price for his negligence.

We should utilise natural bounties with great care and responsibility, because there are no alternatives to the present world. We can enjoy this world but have no power to create a new world.

What is pollution! It is the making of things impure. Things are pure by their nature, but our mismanagement, makes things impure. Man must know his limitations. Polluting nature is suicidal. Man can neither create a single leaf of a tree, nor can he create a drop of water. This being the situation, man has to be keenly aware of his shortcomings and live life as a responsible member of society. □

Man is permitted to exploit natural resources but only without destroying the natural order of things.



Art of the Possible

If you try to convince all the members of society of your wish to prevail, you will seldom succeed, so practice the art of doing what is possible and leaving what is impossible.

Two Strengths

'Strong' refers to physical strength and 'honest' refers to spiritual strength: both are equally important. One who has these two qualities can be described as a well-equipped person.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REASON

Power of the Mind

THE Quran gives great importance to the faculty of reason. Several verses in the Quran emphasise the importance of rational thinking. Here is a translation of a related verse.

The worst creatures in God's eyes are those who are deaf and dumb, and who do not use their reason. (8: 22)

What is reason? Reason is the power of the mind to think, analyse and form judgements in a logical manner. It is the most powerful faculty and the distinctive quality of a human being.

Reason is not an isolated faculty. According to the Quran, the whole of creation is based on reason. The religion revealed by God is also a rational religion. Everyone is required to plan one's life using reason. Those failing to do so are considered deaf, dumb and blind (THE QURAN 2: 10). Only that belief is valid which is based on reason and understanding.

Reason is what makes man a rational animal. Man has a mind with boundless capacity, and is like a hidden-treasure. It is his first duty to unfold this potential. Dying without unfolding one's intellectual potential, is to die like an animal. Such a person fails to fulfill the creation plan of God.

Reason needs to be developed. The Quran mentions several methods for this intellectual development—study, contemplation, observation, taking lessons from experiences, etc. Every individual must inculcate the spirit of learning. This will consistently improve one's personality.

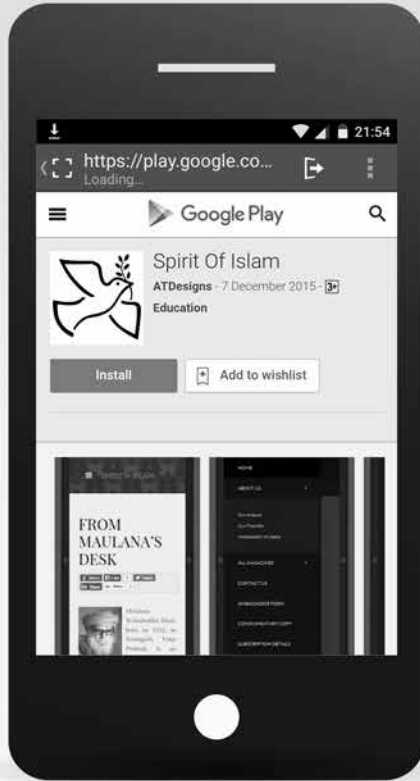
Reason cannot be created but it can certainly be developed. Everyone has a twofold duty of developing his reason or mind, and then using it in life. Reason is a powerful potential of the human mind, and we are duty bound to turn this potential into actuality.

The Quran says that reason has both positive and negative outcomes. When used with sincerity and modesty, it serves as a constructive and healthy agent of one's personality. But if one is a victim of egoism, then reason makes him an arrogant person and that is a negative outcome.

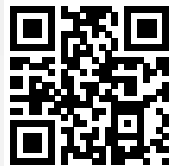
Understanding the Quran requires deep contemplation. Without applying reason no one can contemplate. On reading the Quran one will find that it always addresses reason. Reason is the master key to a better understanding of all human issues. □

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

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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 realise 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



ALL PRAISE IS DUE TO GOD

ISLAM teaches us to be grateful to God and acknowledge His bounty each time we receive anything and utter these words, 'All praise and thankfulness is due to God, the Lord of the worlds.' Praise of God, in true spirit, is the essence of the Quran. A believer's feelings find expression in these words of praise.

Man's existence with a well-balanced body is a blessing of God. The entire world created so favorably for man is a blessing of God.

As this realisation of God's immeasurable blessings dawns, he is filled with gratitude to God and overawed by His greatness. Words acknowledging God—'Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds' come spontaneously to him.

The only thing man can offer God is acknowledgement. Man's greatest worship of God is when his soul is pervaded by God's glory and greatness; when he recognises God's divinity as compared to man's servitude. When aware of his own helplessness, he comes to acknowledge God's bounties.

When man realises God with all His attributes, his soul prostrates before Him. The feelings inspired by God's bounties surge within him

like the powerful waves of the ocean. This feeling expressed verbally is praise and gratefulness to God.

In a universe visible to all, God's supreme glory remains invisible. Realisation of God is to discover this hidden greatness. It finds expression in words such as 'Praise be to God—Lord of the worlds'. □



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THE LIFE FORCE

An Astonishing Fact

A CREEPER growing in a courtyard once had the misfortune to have its roots and branches buried under mounds of earth and rubble when the house was undergoing repairs. While cleaning up, the owner of the house cut away the creeper which had been badly damaged and even pulled out its roots so that it would not grow again. The whole courtyard was then laid with bricks and cemented over. A few weeks later, something stirred at the place where the creeper had been rooted out. The bricks heaved upwards as though something were pushing them from below. This appeared strange, but was dismissed as the burrowing of rats or mice. When some of the bricks were removed, it was found that the creeper had started growing again, although in a sadly distorted form. Not all its roots had been pulled out and when the time of the year came for them to grow, life began to stir within them and they pushed their way up through the cement to the sunlight. It is one of nature's miracles that these tender leaves and buds which can be so easily crushed to a pulp between finger and thumb can summon up such strength and force their way through bricks and cement.

Life is an astonishing, ongoing process of this universe—a force which will claim its right to exist.

The owner of the house regretted taking the creeper's life. He remarked, "It seems to be appealing to me for its right to grow. Now I certainly won't stand in its way." So saying, he removed some more of the bricks so that it would grow unhindered. In less than a year's time, a fifteen foot creeper was flourishing against the courtyard wall at the exact point from which it had been so unceremoniously uprooted.

A mountain despite its great height and girth, cannot remove so much as a pebble from its flanks. But these tiny tender buds of the tree can crack a cemented floor and sprout through it. Whence such power? The source of its energy is the mysterious phenomenon called life. Life is an astonishing, ongoing process of this universe—a force which will claim its right to exist. Even when uprooted, it continues to exist, albeit dormant, at one place or the other and reappears the moment it finds the opportunity. When people conclude that there is nothing visible on the surface, so life must have ended, that is just when it rears its head from the debris. □

THE ISLAMIC WAY OF LIFE

Worshipping God and Doing Good to Man

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

We take on God's own dye. Who has a better dye than God's?
We worship Him alone. (THE QURAN 2: 138)

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

FAITH

By accepting *Iman* (Faith), one enters the fold of Islam. But Faith is not simply the verbal recitation of the *Kalima*, the creed of Islam. According to the Quran, it is realisation (5: 83). Realisation of truth is the door to Islam. When one discovers that Islam is truly God's religion and is the same truth that one has sought all along, one undergoes a unique experience of realisation which in Islamic terminology is *Ma'rifat*.

Making any discovery revolutionises a person's life. But this discovery leads to an intellectual transformation, a new life. Such an intellectual revolution is no simple event. It turns man into superman, giving him the greatest mission of his life. It regulates his life in all aspects. He begins to see entire humanity as his family and the universe as his abode. He becomes a maker of history, rather than a product of it. This is the stuff of *Iman*. And it was this *Iman* which enabled the Prophet and his Companions to bring about the expansion of Islam. As one historian remarked, it was "the most miraculous of all miracles".

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

WORSHIP

Observing a set of rituals is not *Ibadah*, or worship. It is a profound religious experience. It is the physical and spiritual expression of the human personality at a higher plane of consciousness. Addressing man, the Quran says, "Prostrate yourself in adoration and bring yourself closer (to God)" (THE QURAN 96: 19). The Prophet Muhammad was once asked 'What is the essence of *Ibadah*?' He replied: 'The worship of God as though you are seeing Him. Or if you are not seeing Him, He is seeing you.'

There are two kinds of worship in Islam. The first is prescribed at specified times—these include the five daily prayers, fasting during Ramazan and pilgrimage or Hajj. These forms of devotion are among what are called the 'pillars of Islam'. Other forms of worship are *dhikr* and *fikr* (THE QURAN 3: 191), which is to remember God with feelings of fear and love. This is to activate the human soul and see God's signs in everything in one's daily life. This is obligatory for every Muslim at all times.

MORALITY

What is morality? It is to lead life according to the teachings of Islam. The essence of Islamic morality is stated in a *Hadith*: "Behave with others as you would like them to behave towards you" (*Al-Bukhari*). By nature, everyone is aware of the sort of conduct one approves and disapproves. Following this generally accepted moral criterion in relation to others is essentially Islamic morality. Islam differentiates between social manners and social character.

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

Social manners are based on the principle 'Do as they do'. But Islamic morality is based on the formula of unilateral and unconditional positive conduct: 'Do good to others, even if they do not.' Being good to others is evidence that one is also good in relation to God. The

Quran portrays Muslims as individuals who 'repel evil with good' (28: 54). Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad advised a Muslim to 'do good to those who harm him' (*at-Tirmidhi*).

The Prophet Muhammad was the embodiment of the finest moral character. Addressing the Prophet, the Quran declares: 'Surely you have a sublime character'. (68: 4)

The great importance given to moral character serves as a criterion by which to judge all other Islamic virtues. If one is good to others, it is evidence that one is also good in relation to God. The Prophet Muhammad puts it thus: One who is not grateful to man cannot be grateful to God either. (*Al-Bayhaqi*)

SOCIAL RELATIONS

Individual Responsibility

To preserve society from instability and keep it in a perpetually reformed state, Islam has a basic commandment mentioned at many places in the Quran. One such Quranic verse reads: "(Believers are those)... who enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil" (9: 112). The point has been repeated in a number of traditions of the Prophet, such as the following: "A believer ought to open the gate of good and close the door of evil" (*Musnad Ahmad*). This commandment has been misrepresented by certain self-styled advocates of Islamic revolution as being political in nature. It is entirely non-political. It indicates that every member of society ought to have a strong sense of responsibility towards society.

None should remain indifferent on seeing the perpetration of evil or injustice. One should feel the pain of others in one's own heart. When one sees someone engaged in calumny and slander of others, one should attempt

to stop it. Every member of society should consider the upholding of virtue to be an essential duty. The greatest concern of every individual should be to follow what is good and to see that goodness flourishes in society and evil is uprooted. This needs to be done with gentleness and well-wishing, not harshness and violence. This explains why social responsibility is linked with acts of worship in Islam.

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

Family Life

A sane society is an extension of a sane family. Human society at large is a single family gradually extended throughout history. Islam emphasises the significance of a disciplined and well-organised family life because it supports and maintains social stability. A family begins when a male and a female decide as members of society to live together under one roof. However, Islam does not allow such a relationship between a man and a woman, unless it is based on a legitimate marital contract, meant to guarantee lifelong partnership of rights and duties,

and not mere temporary entertainment. Hence, there is no room in Islam for what is known as pre-marital or extra-marital affairs between the two sexes.

Through the institution of marriage Islam aims at building a society free from anarchy, instability, indecency, violence and crime. Marriage, when conducted and maintained on the lines laid down in the Quran and the *Sunnah*, (practice and teachings of the Prophet) provides an organised unit in the form of a home. Successive generations are brought up on this foundation, nurtured physically, morally and emotionally in a healthy atmosphere under the supervision of loving and caring parents. This training at home helps children enter society, equipped with an entrenched sense of responsibility, respect for human values and positive qualities such as sincerity, that are essential for the better construction and development of a social system.

A society composed of homes or training units embodying such values will never suffer from the chaos and destructive instabilities that societies experience today.

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

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

1. And your Lord has commanded that you should worship none but Him, and show goodness to your parents. If either or both of them attain old age, show no sign of impatience and do not rebuke them, but always speak gently to them and treat them with humility and tenderness and say: 'O my Lord! Have mercy on them as they raised me up when I was little'.

(THE QURAN 17: 23-24)

2. No parents have ever given to their children any gift better than a good moral education. (*Al-Adab al-Mufrad*)

3. Live with them (spouses) in accordance with what is fair and kind; if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike something which God might make a source of abundant good for you. (THE QURAN 4: 19)

Legitimate Livelihood

Many social evils can be directly attributed to some members of society having insufficient means of livelihood or others having excess wealth. Islam urges one to earn one's livelihood by all possible but lawful means, so that one's essential needs are met and one stays independent. According to the Quran and *Hadith*, traits like greed and the desire for more, niggardliness, holding money back to centralise it in one or a few hands, are the main roots of criminal and destructive tendencies in society. That is why virtues such as contentment, moderation, simplicity, altruism, charity and sharing one's happiness with others are highly recommended in Islam. Conversely, vices like extravagance, selfishness, monopolistic practices, exploitation, usury and other unfair means of money-making are strongly condemned and prohibited. The following are additional points with regard to one's legitimate earnings.

Every member of society should consider the upholding of virtue to be an essential duty.

Avoidance of transgression: God Almighty has declared in the Quran: Eat of the good things we have given for your sustenance, and do not transgress with respect to them.

(20: 81)

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

Charity: When one is fortunate enough to earn more than meeting one's own needs, instead of being parsimonious one should extend a supporting hand to the less fortunate and the destitute. Otherwise, one's wealth will become a curse rather than a blessing.

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

Through the institution of marriage Islam aims at building a society free from anarchy, instability, indecency, violence and crime.

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



The Spiritual versus the Material

Being spiritual is to adapt one's relationship to other human beings and it is far from meaning the renunciation of all contacts with the material world.

An advertisement for 'Spirit of Islam Online'. On the left, a laptop is shown with its screen displaying the title 'THE GREATER IPHAD' and some text. To the right of the laptop, the text reads: 'NOW ACCESS SPIRIT OF ISLAM ONLINE'. Below this text is a hand cursor icon pointing to the word 'ONLINE', followed by an '@' symbol and the website address 'www.spiritofislam.co.in'.

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THE LIFE-GIVING EFFECTS OF BELIEF IN DEATH

Right Perspective

A YOUNG man graduated from an Islamic University in India. His intention to pursue further studies was shattered when he received news of his father's death. His father had tended the small bit of family owned land. With no one else to till the land, his mother and younger siblings were at a loss. He was now the breadwinner of the family. Conscious of his responsibilities, he realised he would have to give up the idea of further studies and take up his father's work on the family farm.

The young man had a close friend, a senior teacher at the university. He went to take leave of him saying he was going home and would not be returning. The teacher asked him the reason for this sudden change of heart. "My father is dead and now as senior member of the family, I must return to look after household affairs. There seems to be no way to pursue my studies further."

His teacher was silent for a moment. Then, looking up at the young man, he asked: "Tell me, are you immune from death? Can you be certain that you yourself will not die on reaching home? What will happen if you do? Who will look after your family then?" No human being, he said, could look after another. God alone is responsible for everyone's upkeep and maintenance. "God will look after your family, even if your father is gone. Mortals may come and go, but He carries on His work of providing mankind with sustenance. You persevere with your studies, and seek Almighty God's help to manage the situation. Just imagine for a while that you too have passed away."

To base one's life on belief in death is considered a negative attitude. But belief in death has a dynamically positive effect on people's lives.

The young man took his teacher's advice. He decided to trust in God to help him with his affairs. He carried on with the arrangements for further education, sending an application to Medina Islamic University. His application was accepted, and he went to Medina. On completion of the course, the Darul Ifta of Saudi Arabia sent him to an African country in a missionary and teaching capacity. In April 1980, having

lived in Africa for ten years, he met Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, and told him that both he and his family were happy with the way things had turned out for him. He traces his whole success to those magic words of his teacher: "Just imagine for a while that you too have passed away."

When people become aware of the fact that they are going to die, they become better positioned to live their lives to the full.

To base one's life on belief in death is considered a negative attitude. But belief in death has a dynamically positive effect on people's lives. When people become aware of the fact that they are going to die, they become better positioned to live their lives to

the full. They see death and life as they really are: having seen death, they also come to know life better. □



Disadvantages of Life

The minus points in life are like friction on the road. Every road is full of minor points of friction, but these accelerate the pace of the vehicle; the same is true of human life.

Reasoned Approach

The sign of a man of reason is that he has the ability to take the statement in its right perspective. He is free of biased thinking and can take things as they are.

TURNING NEGATIVE INTO POSITIVE

The Art of Conversion

MAHATMA GANDHI spent twenty years in South Africa. In June 1893, he went to Pretoria in the Transvaal, a journey which took him to Pietermaritzburg. He bought a first class ticket and took his seat in a first-class compartment. Railway officials ordered him to move to the van compartment, since non-whites were not permitted in first-class compartments. Gandhi protested and produced his ticket, but was warned that he would be forcibly removed if he did not make a gracious exit. He refused to comply with the order, he was pushed out of the train, and his luggage tossed on the platform in the extremely bitter cold of the winter. Mahatma Gandhi says that this experience changed the course of his life.

Man is capable of staying positive in any situation. He can manage negative experiences and convert them into positive ones.

He became a champion of the anti-apartheid movement, an important part of his freedom struggle that started in 1920. Although the experience was violent in nature, his response was positive. He adopted non-violence for his anti-apartheid campaign.

Mahatma Gandhi's approach points towards the capacity of man. Man is capable of staying positive in any situation. He can manage negative experiences and convert them into positive ones. This is the art of emotion management, the great secret of success. □



Moral Degradation

Irrational argument or using the language of allegation is the sign of an irresponsible person or one who has become morally deviant.

READING THE SIGNS

Sign of Intelligence

WITH the increase of traffic in modern times, the danger of accidents has also increased. To obviate this danger, various forms of road signs have been erected for the guidance of motorists. One such sign reads: "Lane driving is safe driving." Keeping to one's lane is an effective safeguard against accidents, averting the danger of colliding with other vehicles and ensuring that one's journey does not end in disaster.

An article in British motoring magazine by an expert on driving gives some indispensable rules of thumb for drivers. If one is speeding down a main road, for example, and suddenly a ball appears from a side road, one must realise that there is probably a child not far behind it. If one sees the ball, but fails to see the child, one cannot count oneself a good driver. The really good driver stops, not on account of the ball, but on account of the child that he sees with his mind's eye, running behind the ball. It is the quickness of his imagination which saves the child from being run over.

The activities should be confined to one's own sphere; infringing on the sphere of others will result in clash and will bring one's progress to an abrupt halt.

The principles which are required to keep in mind while driving are the same as those we should keep in mind on our journey through life. If one wishes, one can learn from the "highway code" the principle that one should follow in the vaster arena of life.

The activities should be confined to one's own sphere; infringing on the sphere of others will result in clash and will bring one's progress to an abrupt halt. When certain signs appear on the horizon of society, instead of going by the outward signs one should try to make out what these signs imply and try to reach the meaning behind them. If one just goes by what one sees and fails to see what lurks in the background, one will not advance in one's journey through life. Others, more farseeing than oneself, will forge ahead, while one falls victim to dangers that could have been avoided, if one had read the signs properly. □



TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE

We often talk of peace in the context of war. But this is a very narrow and restricted notion of peace. Peace is deeply linked with the entirety of human life. Peace is a complete ideology in itself. Peace is the only religion for both-man and the universe. It is the master-key that opens the doors to every success. Peace creates a favourable atmosphere for success in every endeavour. Without peace, no positive action—small or big—is possible.



THE PRICE OF PEACE

EVERYTHING has its price. You cannot get what you want without paying its appropriate price. Peace too has its price. An individual or group can obtain peace by paying its price. What is the price of peace? Tolerating loss!

This fundamental truth is narrated in the Quran (2: 155-56) in the following words:

We shall certainly test you with fear and hunger, and loss of property, lives and crops. Give good news to those who endure with fortitude. Those who say, when afflicted with a calamity, 'We belong to God and to Him we shall return,' are the ones who will have blessings and mercy from their Lord: it is they who are on the right path!

This Quranic verse tells us a basic fact of life. Natural law states that it is necessary for people to face loss. The challenges may come from others, it could be economic loss, becoming a victim of accident or being denied what is considered to be one's right.

Every individual undergoes such unpalatable experiences some time in life. This is in accordance with the Law of Nature. In such situations, inability to cope with losses can result in frustration and violence. Acceptance will enable them to live in peace.

Despite a temporary setback, with patience and tolerance, one can remain balanced, pragmatic and make new life-plans.

To patiently accept and tolerate loss is not defeatism. It requires great courage and boldness to voluntarily accept reality. It is being aware that though there has been loss, one still has other resources to rebuild one's life.

Despite a temporary setback, with patience and tolerance, one can remain balanced, pragmatic and make new life-plans. To forget what one has lost, is to be able to carry on with one's life purpose with what one still has. It's saving oneself from hopelessness, and with wisdom, surging ahead in life.

***To patiently accept
and tolerate loss
is not defeatism.
It requires great
courage and boldness
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accept reality.***

Every evening is followed by a new morning. The world is full of potentials and possibilities. If you lose one opportunity, you can gain another. If you miss one door, another opens for you. If a certain plan fails, one can always make new plans and move on.

Good news always accompanies bad news. Every accident delivers a quiet message of encouragement—not to be disheartened, instead muster courage and look for new opportunities. Nature rewards such positive responses. It tells us that we can rebuild our lives—maybe better than before; converting what seems to be our defeat into a new and brighter future.

Those who do not accept loss fall prey to negative thinking and become a burden on others. On the other hand, those who respond with patience and courage can help build a new mansion on past ruins. They search and discover a new dawn after a dark evening, and carry on with their life's journey. □



Double Standards

*Double standards make people directionless.
And one who is directionless cannot embark
on a journey of importance.*

IN THE NICK OF TIME

A Stitch in Time Saves Nine

A MEDICAL college professor, putting a student through an oral examination, asked him, "how many of these pills would you give to a man who has had a heart attack?" "Four" replied the student.

A minute later he piped up, "Professor, can I change my answer?" "You can by all means", said the professor, looking at his watch, "But regrettably, your patient has been dead for 40 seconds."

Certain matters in life are critical and require immediate action to be taken without a moment's hesitation. But an instant decision must also be a correct one, else the consequences could be drastic, and mean a lifetime of regret.

Our decision making is similar to our preparations to board a train. We have to pack our luggage, ensure we take the right things with us, buy a ticket, arrange transport to the station and be on the platform at the appointed time, otherwise we are surely going to be left behind. For the train is no respecter of persons. It arrives on time and departs on time and pays no heed to tardy passengers. If we are like the medical student who was caught on the wrong foot because of lack of preparation and who was much too late with the correct answer, the train of life will go on its scheduled course and we shall be left standing, wondering what to do next and how to avert the disastrous consequences of our failure to get on board.

Certain matters in life are critical and require immediate action to be taken without a moment's hesitation.

We have to be prepared for all eventualities in life. That means ensuring a good education and gaining relevant experience for our chosen occupations. It requires mental and physical readiness to seize opportunities, and stay focused, never permitting one's energy to be frittered away in pointless vacillation. □



The past and present may lie in ruins, but the future is still safe.

SPEECH MANAGEMENT

Words Hurt and Words Heal

AN important teaching of the Quran is to use words with an extreme sense of responsibility and not letting one's tongue get out of control. This teaching is stressed in the chapter *Al Nisa* (Women) of the Quran:

There is no good in most of their secret talk, except in the case of those who enjoin charity and kindness, or reconciliation between people. If anyone does that, seeking the pleasure of God, We will give him an immense reward. (4:114)

This Quranic verse includes talks and conversations. The power of speech given to man is a rare quality, an exclusive boon. But it involves responsibility, and has to be used with great caution. Speech has value only when it is useful. Misuse is liable to punishment. The art of speech management means control of your tongue, thinking before speaking and calculating in advance the impact of what you say.

Avoid negative talk, lying, misrepresentation of facts and utterances which may create rift or suspicion between people or groups. Speech is most commonly misused when the difference between an allegation and a statement based on evidence is not understood. Begin by examining whether what you have to say is supported by logic. If you have good reason to speak, then open your mouth, else remain silent.

The art of speech management means control of your tongue, thinking before speaking and calculating in advance the impact of what you say.

What is right speech? It is based on truth and stands up to objective analysis—being based on verified data which is positive in nature and which will not create problems.

Most of our activities are related to speech in one way or another. Each one of us ought to cultivate the art of speaking that is positive and which creates a healthy atmosphere in the family, society and the nation. Good speech is the basis of nation building. People generally lack discipline and dislike constraints on their

activities. This is very true of speech. Right speech means disciplined speech; talking in a controlled way—weighing each word before uttering. Well thought out speech is a source of building harmony and goodwill. The art of managing speech is vital for everyone. Those with the art of right speech can be declared wholesome human beings. □

SUCCESS OUT OF FAILURE

A Matter of Profound Vision

THE Prophet Joseph was thrown into a deserted, dried-up well by his brothers. This was apparently a disaster. But the Quran says that as soon as he was cast into the pit God's revelation came to him that he would emerge from it to a new life. And would soon reach such heights that even his own brothers would fail to recognise him. God knew the reality. God revealed to Joseph that his worst moments were about to become his best. Where antagonists intended to end his life, a whole fresh chapter unfolded.

There is a *Hadith* which says, "Beware of the believer's wisdom, for he sees things by the light of God." This is clearly illustrated by God's divine inspiration about Joseph's future life. It means looking into and not at things to find their hidden potential. What initially appears to be the worst fate soon changes for the better. Seeing things through the light of God will give us the vision to see the advantage in an apparently disadvantageous situation. Future plans based on this inner vision, will have a greater guarantee to surmount all obstacles. The strength of this planning cannot be thwarted by those who fail to see the reality and judge only by appearance.

Many Muslims live under the wrong impression that they have been oppressed. Taking this at face value, Muslims hold certain nations as oppressors and waste precious time and resources in protests and retaliation. Sadly, they are perpetually engaged in such activities; they have yet to see their own situation by the light of God. Had they ever perceived it this way, they would have known that the worst dilemma can bear the best of fruits.

Seeing things through the light of God will give us the vision to see the advantage in an apparently disadvantageous situation.

Arnold Toynbee in his well-known book, *A Study of History* has examined in depth twenty one civilisations of the old and new worlds. What struck him as truly remarkable is that creators of great civilisations were mostly nations which had suffered major defeat, or faced conditions of great adversity—proof that favorable developments are born from the wounds inflicted by unpropitious circumstances. Modern civilisation produced by the western countries provides a clear example in support of Toynbee's theory.

Muslims ruled over a large part of the globe before the rise of the western nations. They had conquered Syria and Palestine, holy to the Christians. To recover them, the Christian nations launched a united assault on the Muslim world. Known as the Crusades, these wars were waged intermittently for almost two hundred years from 1095 to 1271. Finally after a crushing defeat from the Muslims, the western nations lost their military aspirations. Instead of challenging the Muslims on the battlefield, they aspired to improve things in other spheres. This situation was marked by a new way of thinking called the Spiritual Crusades. They challenged their opponents in non-military fields.

They set about learning Muslim sciences; academic books were translated from Arabic to English. After the first stages of imbibing

Creators of great civilisations were mostly nations which had suffered major defeat, or faced conditions of great adversity.

Muslim learning, they began adding to this body of knowledge. Persistent efforts over several hundred years saw human history enter a new era: the Scientific Age. From the wounds of a crushing defeat, modern civilisation began its ever-accelerating evolution, leading its creators to eventual world dominance. The tremendous success of the western nations emerged from an abysmal failure. The defeats in the crusades led them to a victorious modern age. □



Sanctity of Life

Killing another human being without legitimate reason is the most serious crime. Just one such incident can rob people of their respect for the sanctity of human life.

GOD, PROPHETHOOD AND LIFE AFTER DEATH

Unseen but Comprehensible

WE live in a materialistic world where symbols, richly representative of life's realities have been given concrete forms. Those who are sincere in their search for truth will look deeply into things and recognise their significance. They will find a great diversity of proof of God's existence that will satisfy their intellectual curiosity and silence their skepticism. Tentative beliefs will get converted to unshakable conviction.

A Likeness of God

A Likeness of God is to be found in man, even as the existence of man is proof of the existence of God. What is the nature of God? He is a live, self-sufficient Being, with a mind that is all-knowing, eyes that are all-seeing and ears that are all-hearing. His power is infinite, reaching the furthest corners of the universe, and no object of His will, great or small, can escape its force. And quite independent of all objects of creation, God has His ego.

Man may not be omniscient and omnipotent, but he certainly thinks, sees, hears, has a will, acts of his own volition and understands quite precisely what is meant by the 'ego—the 'I'. To believe in God is to have faith in a higher form of the 'I'. Man's experience of himself, his attributes, his characteristics, make it possible for him to comprehend the eternal Being who possesses these very attributes and characteristics but to a superlative degree. This is the Being whom we call God, or Allah.

If one is sure of one's own existence, why should one not be sure of the existence of God? Here am 'I', sitting in one place, observing the universe. Why, then, should there not be a Being greater than I am, situated elsewhere in the universe, watching over it? We direct the movements of machines in outer space by remote control, so why should we have any difficulty in accepting that there is a God who controls the universe? Man metes out punishments and gives rewards as per his concept of justice, so why should there not be an all-powerful God who administers reward and retribution according to his unique concept of justice?

Our present world is a natural model where we can understand supernatural realities.

Indeed, believing in God is no different from believing in one's own self. It is no more difficult for man to accept the existence of God than it is for him to accept his own existence. Belief in God is doubtless an extraordinary feat of the imagination, but it is no more extraordinary than believing in man. Once one has accepted one such extraordinary phenomenon, what is there to prevent one from accepting another?

A Likeness of Prophethood

"This is London, here is the latest news." These words are uttered by a news reader sitting far away from us in London. We cannot hear him directly, but the moment we switch on our radio sets, the voice comes over so loud and clear that the distance between the broadcasting station and our home seems to have shrunk.

We direct the movements of machines in outer space by remote control, so why should we have any difficulty in accepting that there is a God who controls the universe?

This purely physical phenomenon gives us an idea of prophethood. As in the radio, the prophet provides a link between us and God's 'broadcasting station'. The prophet 'picks up' words coming from God Himself and relays them to us.

But for the prophets, we would not be able to hear the words of God. So prized are radios and transistors for the information and entertainment they bring to people that there is hardly a home in the entire world without one. How wonderful it would be if people were to realise the importance

of divine 'broadcasts', and listen to the prophets with the same rapt attention. They would be influenced and would follow them sincerely. The functioning of prophethood is not any more difficult to understand than the workings of a radio. One is powered by electricity, the other by the sheer divine revelation.

A Likeness of Life After Death

People are conscious of what is visible, audible, tangible and interpret them through the senses. They feel they know as much about it as is humanly possible to know, and do not suspect that another world might exist in their midst—of which they know nothing.

Switch on the television and you see a hitherto unseen 'world' on its screen. Darting figures, a hubbub of voices, rows of houses, mountain scenery—visual and auditory inputs that make their impact on viewers.

The experience of television is an analogy of life after death—a world beyond our world, just as complete in every detail as the one before us. It shows how another world can exist within the present world, yet remain outside the range of normal human sensitivity unless we are tuned to it. The world on television is present before us, but becomes visible only when the set is switched on. In like manner, the world of the hereafter is already omnipresent, but will impinge on the senses when ‘switched on’ for us by God.

Scientific concepts are often demonstrated and understood through models. Our present world is a natural model where we can understand supernatural realities. Our world is in a way, a reflection of these. Through serious contemplation on the world around, one will find answers to everything.

God, divine revelation, and life after death are concepts which we cannot grasp with our limited vision. They lie in the unseen world. But there are many things in this very world, which cannot be seen with the naked eye. In fact, all higher realities are of this nature, and are accepted solely on the basis of scientific ‘clues’. The same applies to divine revelation and life after death. True, these cannot be seen, but there are clear indications throughout the universe which provide convincing proof of their actuality. If we think seriously about them, we have no option but to accept them. □

Belief in God is doubtless an extraordinary feat of the imagination, but it is no more extraordinary than believing in man.



Nation Building

The process of building a nation is like growing a garden. If you start by sowing seeds, you can grow a beautiful garden; but if you start with the garden itself, you will not reach your desired goal.

THE AGE OF CIVILISATION

Recognise and Avail

VIOLENCE is a remnant of primitive society. People knew only one way of settling their affairs—that of violence. At some point in the Stone Age two people, having started a quarrel, threw stones at each other in anger. The stones collided and resulted in sparking. Observing the sparks, they forgot their quarrel and began to ponder on the phenomenon. They discovered that there was something hidden in stones, which was separate from the stones. That is, the stones do not have light, but what resulted from their collision was light; stones are hard, while the spark was “soft”, and so on. Such events started the pursuit of the study of natural laws.



It took thousands of years for man to discover the laws hidden in nature, Understanding them helped to harness the potential of nature for man's benefit. Steam power is an example of the hidden potential of nature. Similarly, cars and aeroplanes were built by utilising natural resources. Over a period it became possible to convert matter into technology. The discoveries and inventions during this period contributed enormously to modern civilisation and completely changed human lifestyle.

The greatest characteristic of the civilised world is that it has enabled man to lead a comfortable life.

The greatest characteristic of the civilised world is that it has enabled man to lead a comfortable life. Modern civilisation has, from every aspect, given a comfortable life to people—all daily activities have been made comfortable and convenient. Today a civilised life means a comfortable life. The age of civilisation has potentially brought the age of war to an end. War and violence have become as irrelevant as trying to light a fire in the kitchen by knocking two stones together instead of using matchsticks or a lighter. But even today, the war and violence is regularly opted for settling differences, an uncivilised option—one which had relevance only in primitive ages.

Why then is it that the course of war is taken, and is not entirely abandoned? The reason is that though man learnt to convert matter into technology, he failed to discover the art of managing differences. Difference is a part of nature. It boosts one's intellectual development.

If there are no differences, there will be no intellectual development. The problem arises when we are unable to manage differences. What is the art of difference management? Settling differences through peaceful negotiations. It is to apply reason to settle differences as was applied to the discoveries of nature.

The civilised way of managing differences is to apply reason and to try to settle it through peaceful dialogue.

The civilised way of managing differences is to apply reason and to try to settle it through peaceful dialogue. The age of civilisation is still incomplete. It has offered us material comforts but is yet to find peaceful ways to settle differences in a civilised manner. When that happens, the age of civilisation will have truly arrived. □



Wait and Watch

When the development of any event is not to our liking, we must maintain normalcy and patiently wait for the future. We must adopt the policy of 'wait and watch' and refrain from jumping to conclusions.

Manage Crisis

God has given so much wisdom to man that he can think through any crisis. No crisis is big enough to bring to halt the thinking capacity of mind.

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**

He created you from a single soul, then produced its spouse from it, and He has provided for you eight heads of cattle in pairs. He creates you stage by stage in your mothers' wombs in a threefold darkness. Such is God, your Lord. Sovereignty is His. There is no god but Him. So what has made you turn away? (39: 6)

God made man and created woman as his mate. Through the first man and woman a generation of human beings came into existence. God also made extensive provision to fulfil their needs. In the early days of civilisation, sheep, goat, camel and cow (a couple from each totalling to eight) catered to economic and social requirements of man. As civilisation entered the next stage, man harnessed nature's potential for his progress.

The 'three fold darkness' refers to the three membranes, that enclose the foetus inside mother's womb. It was impossible for a man to give such precise description lest it were revealed to him by the Creator Himself.

If you are ungrateful, remember that God has no need of you. He is not pleased by ingratitude in His servants; if you are grateful, He is pleased [to see] it in you. No soul shall bear another's burden. You will return to your Lord in the end and He will declare what you have done: He knows well what is in the hearts of men. (39: 7)

To accept God and be grateful to Him is sought by the soul of man. Such an acknowledgement amounts to admission of the Truth, which is the demand of rationality.

In the Hereafter, a state of perfect justice shall prevail. Every man will receive the outcome commensurate to his deeds (in the pre-death period). The Hereafter will remove the shortcoming of the present world.

When man suffers some affliction, he prays to his Lord and turns to Him in penitence, but once granted a favour, he forgets the One he had been praying to and sets up rivals to God, to make others stray from His path.

Say, 'Enjoy your unbelief for a little while: you will be one of the inmates of the Fire.' Is he who prays devoutly to God in the hours of the night, prostrating himself and standing in prayer, who is ever mindful of the life to come and hopes for the mercy of his Lord [like one who does not]? Say, 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?' Truly, only those endowed with understanding will take heed. (39: 8-9)

Every man passes through times when he finds himself utterly helpless. At this juncture, he forgets everything and starts appealing to God. In times of helplessness, every man comes to know that there is nobody worth worshipping except the one and only God.

But, as soon as he is out of trouble, he resorts to his earlier ways. Man only becomes more arrogant and starts attributing his relief from affliction to beings other than God. For some it becomes the miracle of cause and effect, while for others it is a feat of supposed gods. If a man keeps quiet after making a mistake, it involves the misguidance of only one man. But, if he starts giving false explanations in order to justify his mistakes, he becomes one who misleads others.

There are two types of people: Those who make material interest their supreme concern; the other make God their supreme concern. It is this second type of individual who is a man of God. His realisation of God is his conscious discovery. He discovers God as the most Majestic and Supreme Being, so much that all his hopes and all his fears are linked to that one and only Being. His restlessness keeps him out of bed at night. His loneliness is not the loneliness born out of unawareness, but the loneliness of the remembrance of God.

A man of knowledge is one whose mind is ignited by the remembrance of God, and that man is devoid of knowledge whose mind is ignited only by material factors. He is awakened only by material shocks and thereafter is lost, deep in slumber.

Say, '[God says] O My servants who have believed, fear your Lord. For those who do good in this world will have a good reward—and God's earth is spacious. Truly, those who persevere patiently will be requited without measure.' (39: 10)

When a man attains deep realisation of God, the essential result is that he becomes God-fearing. The realisation of the majesty of God makes him humble and he spends his life following the commandments of God. This makes him renounce everything and lead a God-oriented life.

To build one's life on the basis of faith involves a tremendous trial. They succeed in this trial for whom faith is the greatest wealth, for the sake of which they are prepared to forego everything else. A life of faith is a life of patience. Those who are prepared to become believers at the price of patience will be the blessed ones with the superior grace of God. □



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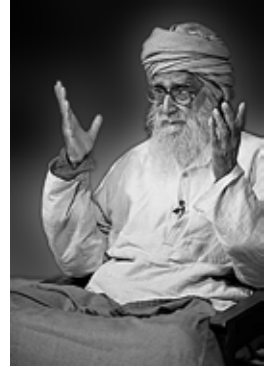
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ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered



According to some schools of thought, God is to be found within ourselves. Hence, they stress the need for meditation on, and supposed discovery of, what they call 'the Divine/ God/ godliness within us', instead of the worship of what they consider an 'external' God. What is the Islamic position on this claim?

The 'indwelling God' is a philosophical concept and not an established fact. If the concept of the indwelling God was factual, then every person should have experienced that God. However, there are only few persons who make this claim. People at large have never had this experience. Everyone knows that thirst and hunger are indwelling realities. So, had God been an indwelling fact, we would have been able to realise God just as we realise thirst and hunger. If only few people claim they have realised God dwells in them, while the larger part of humanity has not experienced this, it means that the concept of indwelling God is not correct.

The notion of a God inherent in human beings (and in everything else) and which one should discover within oneself, rather than outside oneself, is not in accordance with Islam. 'God within' is an abstract term, which has no rational or scientific basis. Therefore, such a notion can only lead to formation of vague ideas rather than a clear, rational philosophy. Islam is a reason-based religion. Abstraction is not in the Islamic scheme of things.

Is the notion of an indwelling God—God as dwelling inside human beings, akin to shirk or associationism?

I will not say that the notion of indwelling God is akin to *shirk*. In my opinion, this concept is an abstract philosophy without rational basis.

God is omnipresent, so does it mean that He is present inside us also?

No. The idea that God exists inside man is not an Islamic concept. The Islamic belief is that God is constantly watching man and is aware of all his actions.

It is said that God created man in His image. The Quran says that God is closer to us than our jugular vein. If someone uses these to claim support for the notion that God resides within us, that He is

not just somewhere 'out there', that human beings are 'divine' etc. (these are claims made, among some others, by many so-called 'New Age' 'spiritualists'), what would your response, from the Islamic standpoint, be?

Deriving the above meaning from this verse of the Quran that you refer to is not right, because this verse means that God is aware of His creation. That God is nearer to us than our jugular vein does not mean that God is within us. The *Hadith* which says that God has created man in His image means that God has partially bestowed on us some of the attributes that He possesses, attributes which have not been given to animals. The *Hadith* does not have the meaning that God is inside us.

Some claim that God is just another name for the totality of existence, and that since human beings are part of this totality, they are part of God and are not inseparable from Him and that by 'finding ourselves' we find Him. What is the Islamic position on this?

This is a concept that has no scientific basis. It may exist in books but no person has been able to find God by simply looking inside himself.

Is the notion of an impersonal God, which some advocates of meditation posit, compatible with Islam?

There is no concept of impersonal God in Islam. According to Islamic teaching, we should love and fear God. We must know that one day we will be held accountable to Him and that He has the power to punish and reward us. All our blessings are from God. The life-support system and every bounty we enjoy is given to us by him. This realisation necessitates the belief in a personal God. If God were impersonal, then all this realisation about him would disappear. God would then become a vague idea, rather than an entity whom we ought to love for all blessings and fear for wrongdoing.

Some advocates of meditation do not agree with the notion of a transcendent creator God of the theistic religions. In place of this understanding of God, they claim that God is immanent in the Creation. In other words, they say, they believe that Reality or God is 'non-dual'. What is the Islamic position on this? Is this 'non-dualistic' understanding of Reality the same as what is posited according to the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud that some Sufis talk about? Is this concept Islamic?

The concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud* is similar to the notion that reality is non-dualistic. However, this is not in accordance with Islamic teaching, which holds that the Creator and His creation are separate. The Creator

is a being with a distinct entity, and everything else has been created by Him.

Wahdat al-Wujud is an un-Islamic concept. It is basically a version of the concept of monism, which is not derived from the Islamic scripture.

Some advocates of meditation claim that through meditation one can attain what they call 'self-realisation', which, they claim, is the apex or goal of the spiritual quest. In their understanding, worship of, and prayers to God, are not necessary for 'self-realisation'. What one needs to do, they say, to attain spiritual advancement is to learn to 'be in the moment', including by sitting still and keenly observing one's breath or thoughts, for instance.

What do you say about this?

This is a supposition. Self-realisation is not possible without *tadabbur* or contemplation over God and His creation. God has a prime role in one's realisation. This is because thinking about the fundamental reality begins with the question of who created man. If we eliminate this, we have no starting-point for our thoughts and understanding. The starting point of the art of thinking is to know the Creator. Without this, the process of thinking cannot begin at all.

Enlightenment is related to intellectual awareness. According to my knowledge, simply observing one's thoughts cannot lead to intellectual development. Intellectual enlightenment is the result of a continuous thought process. And the claim that sitting still and observing one's breath leads to enlightenment, too, is unscientific, because observing one's breath is a physical phenomenon and so it cannot lead to spirituality, which is an intellectual attainment.

Is it possible, as some people claim, to come to know oneself (or what they call 'self-realisation') and God through one's own efforts (such as through meditation), without the need for following the guidance of the prophets in the form of Divinely-revealed scripture?

No. Without scriptural guidance, one can only have a vague idea of God. One will not be able to get the details. For example, without scripture, although one may discover that there is a God, one cannot determine His attributes. □



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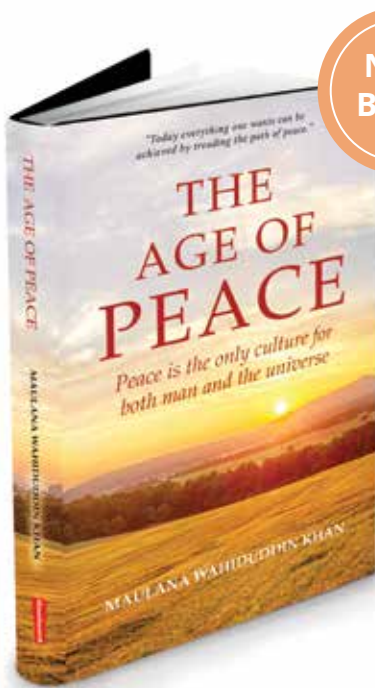
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