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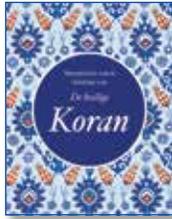
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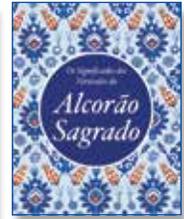
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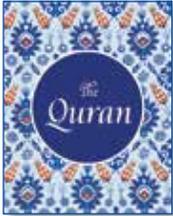
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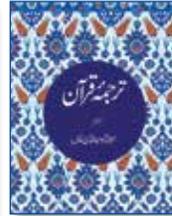
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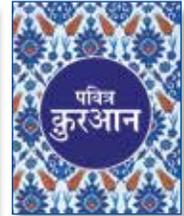
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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

ISSUE 50 FEBRUARY 2017

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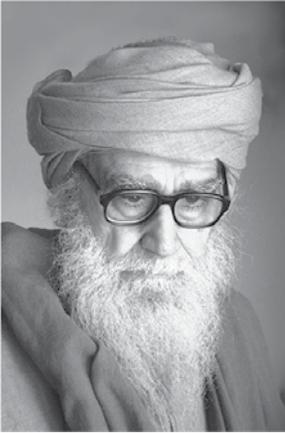
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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 recognized 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.

POSITIVE ALWAYS

TOWARDS the end of December 2016, I happened to meet a Muslim youth of Indian origin in Delhi who had been living in the USA for several years. In the course of our conversation, I asked him to share some experiences of his life in the USA. He immediately replied that the most lamentable experience for him was Donald Trump's election to the presidential seat of America and then openly declaring his dislike for Muslims living in the USA.

I told him his obsession with this point needed to be seen against the backdrop of historical record. The fact is that it is now the 21st century and we are living in the age of democracy. In the democratic culture, no political rule is permanent.

Witness how at the time of the creation of man, Satan declared that he was the enemy of humanity. Apparently the expression of Satan's intention signalled a permanent danger to humanity, but this Satanic declaration notwithstanding, man has never ceased to flourish

There can be no greater challenge to mankind than the challenge of Satan.

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

on planet earth. Man has been able to create a model civilization. When it comes to human achievement, there can be no greater challenge to mankind than the challenge of Satan.

I reminded this Muslim youth that our world has been created by God Almighty. And, equally importantly, He is also its sole Sustainer and the Controller of its history. Hence, it is impossible that human history should be at variance with the creation plan of God. So, why was he so aghast at the results of the US elections? His future, was in the hands of God Almighty, and no human being has the power to alter the course of human history.

I also pointed out that when the Prophet of Islam started his mission in Arabia in the first quarter of the 7th century, God Almighty gave him a very important commandment in the Quran in these words: "O Prophet, do your work and shun misconduct (*rujz*)"

God Almighty has not only created the world, but He is also its sole Sustainer and the Controller of its history.

(74: 5). What is misconduct (*rujz*)? It is negative behaviour towards others. The Prophet was told by God "During your work, you may face negative experiences and instead of reacting you should patiently keep to your peaceful mission with a positive mind."

I said to this Muslim youngster that these teachings of the Quran are for all eternity. Therefore Muslims have to maintain their positivity in every situation. It is God who

shapes human history, and not any political ruler. Muslims must always adopt the attitude of: Do your work, and be friendly in your behaviour towards others.

According to the creation plan of God as set forth in the Quran, there is no permanent enemy. Avoid negative reaction and you will find that your enemy has become your friend, the Quran (41: 34) teaches us.

All people are potential friends. Act positively and you can turn this potential into actuality. And then you will see that for you, the whole world has become a friendly place. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
editor@thespiritofislam.org



PATIENTLY FACING ANNOYANCES

Towards Intellectual Growth

ABDULLAH IBN UMAR reports that the Prophet once said, "A believer who engages with people and is patient when he faces annoyance from them shall have greater reward than he who neither interacts with others nor remains patient at the troubles caused by them." (*Musnad Ahmad*).

A person who lives all by himself, without any social interaction, will not face any unpleasantness at the hands of others. But someone who lives amidst others and interacts with them and is socially engaged will very naturally face various troubles, big and small, from others.

Why is someone who leads a socially-engaged life, and faces unpleasantness at times from others, better than someone who leads a reclusive, lonely life?

The reason for this lies in a law of nature. Every person is born with innumerable capabilities. But these capabilities are in a potential state. In order to actualize this potential, one should face some shock or the other. The system of nature is based on the principle of 'shock treatment'. If one can withstand the shock, then one's capabilities, that lie deep in their own self or nature in potential form, will begin to activate and unfold. That will help one grow intellectually. On the other hand, if one is not ready to face and tolerate shocks, one cannot develop intellectually and will die without making any real progress. □

Every person is born with innumerable capabilities. But these capabilities are in a potential state. In order to actualize this potential, one should face some shock or the other.



Seek Guidance

God did not just leave man in a world where there was no way to find the truth.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Inner Purification

THE most desirable thing in Islam is the purification of the individual; in other words, the intellectual development of the individual in accordance with the creation plan of God.

The desirable attributes of a pious person are a result of this intellectual development. From the academic point of view, study, understanding and following of the Quran and *Hadith* are the means for intellectual development. The more one studies and reflects on these sources, the stronger one's intellectual foundations become, and this is necessary for the inner purification.

But there is an additional concept that is required for purification or intellectual development. It can be termed as the 'psychological aspect' of purification. The scholars refer to this psychological aspect as a

God desires that man should discover the truth by his own contemplation on the realities of life.

feeling of faith that is oscillating between hope and fear. In other words, the believer always lives in a state of uncertainty. Sometimes, he thinks of blessings of God upon him and experiences certainty. Sometimes, he thinks of his mistakes and shortcomings, and finds himself in a state of doubt. These feelings about the state of one's faith are so common that even the Companions of the Prophet were not an exception in this regard.

Why does this happen? This happens because, according to the demands of nature, this is the only way through which man's intellectual development can be carried on continuously. The state of doubt is a sort of intellectual shock, and the study of human psychology tells us that human intellectual development can only happen through shock treatment.

God desires that man should discover the truth by his own contemplation on the realities of life. And the only way to discover reality by oneself is for one's thinking process to continue uninterruptedly.

In order to acquire higher knowledge and realization, one needs a mind-set that admits that one does not know, not a mind-set that insists that one knows. □



LAW OF NATURE

A Model to Follow

BY divine law, nature serves as a model for human behaviour. If people follow natural models, they will always achieve success, just as nature does. In the dictionary of nature, the word 'failure' does not exist. Man has to just follow nature's example and then he can be sure of success.

A pond is like a container of water. The rivers are also reservoirs, but we know that water in a pond gets polluted after some time while the water in the river always remains pure.

The reason for this difference is that the water in the pond remains stagnant with no other inflow of water, but the water in a river is continuously flowing, so that old water mixes with a new supply of water. For this reason the water in the river always remains fresh.

Polluted water is a result of stagnation, while the purity of river water is always a result of its constant flowing.

This model is also applicable to human life. In human society, there are young people and there are also old people. Youth is an energetic age. In his youth, a person is full of energy but lacks in experience. In other words, he is physically powerful but in terms of wisdom, he has little to offer. In contrast, an elderly person has diminished energy but has the moral and mental strength of wisdom and experience. This situation indicates that young people and old people must share with each other. Young people must learn wisdom from their seniors, while the latter must lean on the energy of the former. This is how the model of nature applies to the life of human beings.

***In the world,
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neglect.***

All parts and strata of the world are interdependent. In the world, everywhere there has to be a culture of sharing. This is a universal principle, to which man is no exception. Man should never allow this culture to fall into neglect. □



THE RIGHT WAY OF THINKING

Prevent Confusion

CONFUSION is a common phenomenon amongst most people today. More than 99% people are prey to confused thinking. Because of this, they get deprived of that great blessing that is called right thinking. Right thinking is but another name for sound thinking. The first thing for people to do is to gain expertise in right thinking. Without it, their entire lives will be made meaningless, intellectually as well as practically.

Confusion is something that only human beings suffer from. It is completely unknown in the entire animal world. No animal ever falls prey to confusion while deciding the course of its life. From an ant to a tiger, and from a fish to a bird, every animal's action is always proper and appropriate. Every animal possesses, you could say, a predictable character. You can observe this enviable feature of animals on the popular *Animal World* TV channel. Animals always behave just as they should.

In contrast to this, human beings present a completely different picture altogether, an image of intellectual confusion. The basic reason for this is just one—and it is related to 'thought management'. Among animals, thought management is perfect, while it is not so among human beings.

Here, once again, the question arises as to why is there a difference between animals and humans?

Human beings have to manage their thoughts by themselves. They have to discipline their minds on their own, through their own conscious decision.

The reason for the difference is animals are controlled by their instincts. Their instincts are a definite guarantee of their thought-management. In contrast, man is a free creature. He thinks freely and forms his opinions based on his free will. In other words, human beings have to manage their thoughts by themselves. They have to discipline their minds on their own, through their own conscious decision.

In human beings, why does the process of thought management not continue in the way it should?

This is because human beings live in a jungle of information. They need to have the intellectual ability in order to discern the difference between what is relevant and what is not so as to retain the former and

discard the latter. This is the only art that guarantees healthy thinking for human beings.

This point can be clarified with the help of some examples.

Many people cite Darwinism to argue that life evolved through evolution and therefore, there is no need to believe in God. But this is a gross mistake. First of all, the theory of evolution is still not a proven fact. And even for the sake of argument if one takes it to indeed be a proven fact, it does not prove that the belief in the Creator is false. At the most what the theory of evolution might prove is only that the method the Creator employed was not 'special creation', but, rather, 'evolutionary creation'. The theory of evolution is about the process of creation, not about the Creator Himself.

Likewise, some people say that Quran cannot be a book which can give guidance for all times because the conditions of life keep changing. In changed conditions, it is necessary that people be given new guidance. But this is another example of confused thinking, because Quran in its essence is a collection of certain basic principles, and no changes need to be made in the basics. Changes happen only in non-basics, and for this change in non-basics, Islam has provided for *ijtihad* (exercise of judgement with reasoning) as a method, which is definitely a perfect solution to this issue.

Consider another example to illustrate confused thinking. Many people cite the example of social workers who have devoted themselves to relieving people who are suffering from various ailments. They think that this alone is enough. While it is definitely a good thing to relieve people of their physical ailments and problems, it is not enough. This is because human beings are thinking creatures. So, if they recover from a physical illness, unless they are suitably trained, their minds are likely to fall prey to extreme mental sicknesses—for instance, phobias, pride, jealousy, revenge, lust for power, selfishness, tribalism, arrogance, selfishness, not acknowledging others' contribution, ungratefulness, etc. In contrast, experience tells us that if a person who faces challenges and struggles through them will have a sense of modesty and creativity and strength of mind develops in him. Such a person becomes an asset to the society.

Removing people's physical difficulties is a partial or limited work. The complete work to do is to help people develop right thinking, to assist them in their spiritual development as well.

From the above examples one can know the importance of right thinking in every aspect of life be it personal or pertaining to society. □

THE SCIENTIFIC TEMPER

Indispensible for Success

THE *Discovery of India*, a book well known to millions of readers, was written by India's former Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru, while he was imprisoned at Ahmednagar Fort in Maharashtra. In this book, Jawahar Lal Nehru emphasized the virtue of the scientific temper in these memorable lines: "The scientific approach and temper are, or should be, a way of life, a process of thinking, a method of thinking, a method of acting and associating with our fellow men."

What is the scientific temper? The scientific temper is a frame of mind based on reality, which demands the application of logic in all situations. This quality is of prime importance. It is indispensible for every individual and every group of people if they are to be successful in life.

Scientific temper makes you a positive thinker and dictates a realistic approach. It makes you a giving member of society.

Scientific temper makes you a positive thinker and dictates a realistic approach. It makes you a giving member of society. It ensures that your mind develops along the right lines and makes you a creative thinker. One who possesses a scientific temper, being an integrated personality, never suffers from a superiority complex or the arrogance which would lead to the kind of bias and hatred that stems from unhealthy thought.

Scientific temperament is basic to all kinds of human activities, both individual and social. It makes one patient, tolerant and forgiving. Only those who are imbued with such a spirit can be good members of their societies. While scientific temper gives one everything, it deprives one of nothing. Without it, a man is no better than an animal, while once possessed of it, he emerges as a true human being. □



Religion

Religion is essentially the voice of human nature.

CONTROL OVER THE UNIVERSE

Universal Harmony

THE words of the first verse of the Quran: 'Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe' (1: 1) are in actual fact, a man's spontaneous response when he observes the universe. Telescopic observation tells us that the universe is, to an unimaginable extent, vast and majestic. Moreover, studies tell us that the unobservable universe is as majestic as the observable universe. In spite of all progress made by humankind, man has not yet succeeded in apprehending either the vastness or the grandeur of the universe.

This vast and unfathomable universe is continuously in motion. At every moment, extremely meaningful events are taking place therein. Further study tells us that this vast universe is totally faultless. The universe can continually remain in a faultless state only when there is not even the most minute alteration in its system. Even the tiniest deviation in the universe can disturb its entire system. Modern studies tell us that in spite of the universe being vast to an unimaginable extent, it is entirely harmonious in its function. This is because it is completely controlled by a single force. All its parts are perfectly connected with one another.

The perfect harmony in the universe is a proof that it is functioning under an all-powerful God.

On seeing this universal harmony, scientists find it astonishing. They do not know how to explain this extraordinary feature. This perfect harmony in the universe can be understood as a proof that it is functioning under an all-powerful God. Had this not been so, the whole universe would be reduced to ultimate chaos. This perfect harmony prevailing in the universe can be possible only because its Controller possesses the attribute of omnipotence. □



Prepare

Only after long years of struggle and perseverance is it possible for one to play his part successfully.

THE CULTURE OF DIALOGUE

Intellectual Development

ONE significant aspect of the culture of Islam is dialogue. It is mentioned thus in the Quran: "They conduct their affairs by mutual consultation." (42: 38). This verse indicates that Muslims should base their dealings on dialogue and mutual discussion.

Debate on the other hand is quite different from dialogue. Debate is conducted between two parties, each trying to prove its superiority over the other, while the essence of dialogue is mutual learning without any bias. In dialogue, there are also two or more parties, but no party tries to establish its superiority over the other. Everyone tries to learn from the other. Everyone tries, in the sharing of experiences, to increase their knowledge. Dialogue is a healthy practice, whereas debate is a kind of intellectual wrangling.

In family life, in social life and in national life, it is good to develop the habit of mutual consultation. It leads to intellectual development for everyone.

The practice of consultation (*shura*) was common among the Companions of the Prophet of Islam. For example, it is reported of Umar bin al-Khattab, the second Caliph, that he used to learn from everyone. This means that it was a general habit of his to engage in serious dialogue with everyone he met. He would thereby learn something new to enhance his wisdom and knowledge.

There is great benefit in mutual discussion as everyone gains some new knowledge or experience through this. When one conducts a serious dialogue with another person, both derive some benefit from this. Both enrich their minds and progress on the path of intellectual development.

The Quranic word *shura* is generally taken to be a political term but, in fact, it is not. "Political *shura*" may be a way of proceeding in Muslim society, but it is only an occasional occurrence. In this sense, it is only a small part of Muslim life. On the other hand, in general non-political terms, *shura* is a daily part of Muslim life. In family life, in social life and in national life, it is good to develop the habit of mutual consultation. It leads to intellectual development for everyone. □



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.



PEACE VERSUS VIOLENCE

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

There are more than 6000 verses in the Quran. Of these hardly 40 verses are about commandments of war, which means less than 1%, and these too were revealed in the context of a war like culture which was already prevalent in the society at the time the Prophet was commanded to convey the message.

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

In this regard, one needs to stress the need for people to distinguish between Islam, on the one hand, and Muslims, on the other. They must not label all the actions or behaviour of Muslims as 'Islamic'. The fact is that behaviour of Muslims must be judged on the basis of Islam. Islam should not be sought to be understood on the basis of the Muslims' behaviour. Islam is an ideology. A person can be truly considered to be a Muslim only

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if he follows the teachings of Islam. Those who do not follow Islamic teachings do not have anything to do with Islam, even if they claim to be its champions.

In the light of the above facts, one can construct the following qualities of a peace loving person in comparison with a person inclined towards violence:

A peace-loving person first thinks and then acts. In contrast, a violence inclined person first acts and then thinks.

A peace-loving person is well-grounded in truth. A violent person stands on falsehood. Peace and positive constructive work go hand-in-hand, while violence is wholly destructive.

A peace-loving person lives in the love of others, while a violence loving person lives in the hatred of others.

A peace loving person overlooks problems and takes advantage of the available opportunities, while a person inclined towards violence ignores the available opportunities and gets entangled in a pointless battle with problems.

Peace results from well-planned effort or action, while violence is a passion-driven aggressive action. Peaceful action is based on hope, at the beginning as well as at the end, while violent action is based on false hope at the beginning and frustration in the end.

History is witness to the fact that whenever anyone has attained any success, it has only been after adopting the method of reconciliation.

The path of peace cultivates a garden blooming with flowers, while the path of violence creates a thorny jungle of hatred and enmity. Peace ends in success, and violence in utter failure. Peaceful action abides by the law, while violent action is lawless.

In peace, one fulfills the obligations one owes to God as well as those one owes to God's creation, including other human beings. Violence, on the other hand, is a violation of the rights of God as well as the rights of people. If peace is heaven, then violence in comparison is hell. Choosing peace is making the right choice. On the other hand, if one chooses war, it proves that he has failed in the test of making a correct choice.

In this world, there are many things that are not desirable, but they exist for the purpose of testing us. Such things are there so that people

should avoid them and thereby prove that they can distinguish between good and bad. The same principle holds for war, too. War is something that is possible for people to resort to, but the right thing for human beings to do is to desist from it.

In the ancient past, considering the prevailing conditions, permission was given for defensive war. This permission was in accordance with the law of necessity. But, in the changed conditions of today, this necessity no longer exists. And that is why there is now no need at all for war.

RECONCILIATION IS BEST

The Quran describes a particular natural law in the following words: *'Reconciliation is best'* (4: 128).

In the event of a conflict between two parties, they can engage in violent confrontation. But there is another method they can choose: to immediately come to an agreement and end their conflict. This is what reconciliation is about.

It is very rare for this sort of reconciliation to be equally in accordance with the desires of both parties. In most cases, this reconciliation happens on a unilateral basis. That is to say, one of the two parties sets aside its desires and agrees to settle the dispute according to the desires of the other party.

Why is this sort of unilateral reconciliation taken to be best? The reason for this is because a situation of conflict calls a halt to constructive activity. The benefit of agreeing to reconciliation is that one is spared the need to waste one's time, strength and resources on useless confrontation and so can focus on constructive efforts instead. A course of action that is opposed to reconciliation is always and inevitably a course that leads to destruction. The method of reconciliation is always, and in every case, a beneficial one.

Those who regard the Quran as the book of God can be considered to be true believers only when, abiding by the teachings of the Quran, they become fully and completely peace-loving.

History is witness to the fact that whenever anyone has attained any success, it has only been after adopting the method of reconciliation. Not a single person has ever achieved any real success through confrontation and fighting. The importance of reconciliation lies in the fact that it provides an opportunity to fully exercise one's right to use the available opportunities. On the other hand, the path of confrontation

A peace-loving person is well-grounded in truth. A violence inclined person stands on falsehood.

leads one to waste one's energies in trying to destroy others, as a result of which one can engage in no constructive work whatsoever. The secret of success lies in establishing and developing oneself and definitely not in the destruction of hypothetical enemies. □



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MY HOME

A Test

IN this world, people build a house for themselves, which they call 'my house'. They name their houses after themselves. So it is with everything else. But in actual fact, in this world, every home is a 'test-house'. In this world, every car is a 'test-car'. In this world, every property is a 'test-property'. In this world, every child is a 'test-child'.

In this world, every single thing is for the purpose of a test.

Man, however, forgets this biggest reality, until suddenly death overtakes him and then he leaves everything behind and enters the next stage of life all alone. At this time, he realizes that the things he had thought of as his own had actually been given to him by God for a temporary period and for the purpose of a test. As soon as the pre-death period of one's life gets over, all these things are taken away from him. And now he finds that he has to live in such a world where he has to pass his life in a state of complete deprivation. The only exception to this will be those people who, because of their good deeds, will be given back all things as a reward. □

At the time of death, man realizes that the things he had thought of as his own had actually been given to him by God for a temporary period and for the purpose of a test.



After Making a Mistake

Often, people make a mistake, and then add to it by making yet another mistake—the mistake of trying to justify their first mistake. But what they should actually do on making a mistake is reflect and seek to discover why they made that mistake in the first place. If one does not do that, and, instead, seek to justify the mistake, one remains in a state of error as before. On the other hand, if one seeks to find out why they made that mistake, they will save themselves from repeating it.

THE EVIL OF ONE'S SOUL

Seek the Protection of God

A HADITH of the Prophet Muhammad contains a *dua* or prayer to God thus: "O God, guide me to the right path and protect me from the evil of my own self." (*Sunan at-Tirmidhi*). This *Hadith* refers to the path of guidance, a path by treading which a person will find success in both this world and the Hereafter.

This path has been clearly explained in the Quran and *Sunnah*. To know the path of guidance or the right path and to walk on it is not something difficult for us. Then, what is the evil of the soul that is referred to in the above-cited *dua*? What is meant here is that whilst knowing the truth a person changes its meaning by giving it a wrong interpretation.

Wrong interpretation always happens because of the evil of one's own self. There is enormous room for misinterpretation, and even a very clear commandment can be twisted to supposedly mean something completely different.

We should beseech God for His help to protect us from Satan, to enable us to recognize Satan's deceptions, and to protect us from Satan's evil suggestions.

For instance, the Quran commands the believers 'to establish prayer' (2: 43). If one is free from evil, one can very easily understand the meaning of this commandment. But if a person is under the influence of evil promptings, that is, if his intention is not right, he can give an absurd interpretation and make this commandment appear to mean something entirely different. Thus, he could claim that by establish prayer is meant 'to establish a political system', or that it means 'to do social reform or social work'.

It is for each one to save themselves from such evil. We cannot save ourselves from such wrongdoing simply by reciting some words of *dua* or supplication. Actually, in this matter, fifty percent of the work here is the individual's, and the remaining fifty percent is the work of praying to God. In this regard, the proper approach is to discover the right path, motivated by sincere intention. We must have true enthusiasm for this task. And then, we should pray to God to help us to remain steadfast on the right path. We should beseech God for His help to protect us from Satan, to enable us to recognize Satan's deceptions, and to protect us from Satan's evil suggestions. □

DRAWING LESSONS

Food for the Soul

WHEN a person grows deep in his discovery of truth and becomes strong in faith, he takes life seriously. One aspect of this seriousness that comes from faith is what can be called 'drawing lessons'. The Quran has many verses which call man towards contemplation, to derive spirituality from material events and to learn the right lessons from history. There are similar references in the corpus of hadith—for instance, the Prophet once said, "My silence should be for contemplation, and my vision keen observation." (*Musnad al-Shahab al-Qazai*)

Faith or the realization of Truth results from drawing lessons from various experiences and observations. What is the discovery of faith? It is the discovery of the Creator after reflecting on creation. You discover the invisible world through the visible world. Through the signs of God scattered all over the visible world, you discover the inner realities of life. You develop the capacity of discernment and insight, along with external vision.

Faith or the realization of Truth results from drawing lessons from various experiences and observations.

Contemplation and reflection are an integral and continuous part of the life of a person of deep faith in God. This way of thinking leads one to constantly think of and remember God. Every single day one discovers things that help one's faith to increase and become stronger. While other people see only the exterior form of things, such a person discovers their inner realities.

There is no need for seclusion or for being in any sort of special place in order to engage in contemplation and reflection. These processes are constantly happening in the mind of a person of faith, and they do not stop even in the midst of the hurry-burry of the world.

Drawing lessons from things and events is a sort of spiritual sustenance for a person of deep faith. Physical food is a means for building such a person's bodily strength, while learning lessons from one's surroundings is the spiritual food. Without physical food the body cannot be healthy. In the same way, without intellectual food, spiritual development is not possible. □

TWO MIND SETS

Communal or Islamic

THERE was an article in a well-known Muslim magazine titled *'The Modern Age and Jihad'*. In its opening lines, the article spoke of what it claimed was the terrible oppression that Muslims were suffering, which, it said had led to the emergence of what it called *'jihadi'* organizations.

This way of thinking is not something specific to just this one Muslim writer, the author of this article. Rather, it is the very same way of thinking of almost all present-day Muslim orators and writers. They claim that the violent actions that present-day Muslims are engaged in is a result of the supposed oppression of Muslims. But the point that needs to be considered here is that during the time of religious persecution the Prophet and his Companions actually faced atrocities on a large scale. One of these have been mentioned in the Quran in these words: "When they came against you both from above you and from below you, your eyes rolled [with fear] and your hearts leapt

The present world is functioning on the established laws of nature. To know these laws of nature and to base one's actions on them is the only secret of success in this world.

up to your throats, and you entertained [ill] thoughts about God. There the faithful were put to the proof and they were shaken as if by an earthquake." (33: 10-11)

Despite such extreme conditions, the Prophet and his Companions never adopted the method of reaction. Rather, they remained firm on unilateral patience and planned their actions on completely positive foundations. This resulted in the great success of the early period of Islam.

The greatest mistake of present-day Muslims is that they have not been able to differentiate between Quranic teachings and the historical events which took place under certain specific situations. Instead of understanding the present age of religious freedom and planning positively, they have adopted the method of negative actions based on reaction. Today, Muslims throughout the world are engaged in such actions. Almost all Muslim orators and writers today are doing just this one sort of thing. Without any doubt at all, this is a destructive attitude, a wrongful innovation. Till such time as Muslims abandon this innovation they are not going to gain any success at all, no matter how big their supposed sacrifices may be.

The greatest damage that the psyche of reaction causes is that it leads to negative thinking in a person. Such a person begins to live in hate and complaint. The deadly result of this sort of thinking is that it stops the process of a person's intellectual development. It is not possible for one to think on proper lines and to plan one's actions on proper lines.

If the Muslim community wants the present situation to change, they must know that this can come about only through one strategy—Muslims must unilaterally put a firm end to all their present negative activities, and, motivated by a sincere concern for the welfare of all human beings, engage in peacefully sharing with them Creation Plan of God. Other than this there is nothing that can become a means for the Muslims' welfare and salvation.

In this world, any sort of success can be had only through wise planning. Complaining and protesting against supposed oppression can yield no result. The present world is functioning on the established laws of nature. To know these laws of nature and to base one's actions on them is the only secret of success. In the words of the Quran (24: 31), this is the time for collective repentance for Muslims, that is to say, the time to take a U-turn and head towards progress and development. □

The greatest damage that the psyche of reaction causes is that it leads to negative thinking in a person.



Informal Education

Informal education can be had outside the school or university. There are various means for informal education, for example, library, journals, seminars and conferences. The home is also a centre for receiving informal education. But if other members in the family are not ready to accept your ideas, then you should apply these ideas to your own self. You should neither hate nor fight with members of the family, you should only pray for them.

PEACE ACTIVISM

Reflections

THE following remark is from a letter of a person wishing to know the usefulness of the method adopted by some well-meaning persons. “Many people, who are probably well-meaning, say they are working for communal harmony—harmony between people of different faith communities. But basically what they are doing is fighting what is called ‘communalism’. They criticize people and groups who are spreading hate in the name of religion and issue statements and take out demonstrations when a particular community is attacked by members of another. In other words, while they say or think that they are working for peace, what they are essentially doing is condemning communalism and hate in the name of religion.”



The solution for the above mentioned problem could be that instead of adopting the method of issuing statements against others or holding demonstrations one should explain to people that differences are part of nature. Rather than attacking members of other communities, one should adhere to the principle of mutual respect. People who seek to promote harmony and peace between members of different communities must educate people to accept differences, rather than becoming provoked or trying to eliminate differences.

In the light of experience, the principle for communal harmony is based on mutual respect. In other words, the principle that people should adopt in this regard be: “We may have differences, but we will accord complete respect to each other.”

Those who preach peace must first be peaceful with themselves and with their surroundings.

Very often, people organize meetings in the name of promoting communal harmony, but these turn into communal debates. This is wrong in terms of method. The right way is that meetings for communal harmony should not be for eliminating differences, but, rather,

for fostering the spirit of respecting each other in spite of differences.

Protesting against those who engage in promoting what is called ‘communalism’ is not a successful method in terms of its results. Far from succeeding, it is only to make another mistake. Those who attack members of another community are at fault, and those who

demonstrate against the attackers are also at fault. The result-oriented approach in this regard is to counsel people to cultivate in themselves respect for people who follow different faiths.

Demonstrating against others is a negative approach and has no positive aspect at all. Instead of solving the problem, it can only create more problems. This method of working for harmony cannot bring about change in people. It cannot transform their hearts. This approach is unnatural. The right response to those who are prejudiced against others is to try to educate them to understand that nature abhors uniformity and to recognize that differences are a part of creation. People should learn to live with differences, rather than try to get rid of them.

Changing people's minds in this regard can be achieved by adopting a realistic approach. Those who issue statements against others and take out protest demonstrations are only stooping to reactionary conduct. Instead of doing this, they should train people along the lines of peaceful living. They should live with people of different faiths in a spirit of mutual respect.

Not everyone who calls himself a 'peace activist' is really so. Many such people are only critics of others in the name of promoting peace and inter-communal harmony—'peace critics' you might want to call them, not 'peace activists'. A peace activist, should possess the quality embodied in this famous saying of Jesus Christ: 'Love your enemy.' Even if someone appears as one's enemy, one's conduct towards him should be determined by high moral principles. This is a trait a peace activist ought to possess, and one must also impart this teaching to others.

People who seek to promote harmony and peace between members of different communities must educate people to accept differences, rather than becoming provoked or trying to eliminate differences.

There are some other essential qualities to be a peace activist. Someone who is not at peace with God, with himself, with his family and with his neighbours but yet claims that he is working for inter-community peace or even for world peace cannot be a true or successful peace activist. In other words, peace work, like charity, begins 'at home'. Those who preach peace must first be peaceful with themselves and with their surroundings. Those who are not peaceful with themselves and others are only 'professional' peace activists, not peace activists in the true sense of the word. □

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



GOD'S GUIDANCE

A DUA or supplication appears in a *Hadith* of the Prophet as follows: "O God, give me guidance and show me the right way." (*Sahih Muslim*)

In this *dua*, the phrase 'give me guidance' means a request to be guided along the straight path. The next phrase in this *dua* is 'and show me the right way'. This means that even after being guided to the straight path people have need of continuous guidance from God. If we reflect, we will realize that the request 'show me the right way' means a request to be saved from distractions.

This same point has been mentioned in the Quran (6: 153): "[He has enjoined], 'this is My straight path; so follow it, and do not follow other ways: that will lead you away from His path.'

The verse provides the example of a person who sets off on his journey on the highway, but then on the way the road may meander off onto narrow, misleading paths, and in this way, straying far from the highway.

One way people can go astray is if they do not adopt the straight path. A second way they can go astray is if they start off their journey on the straight path but later get distracted by things that they see on the

way and so change their direction, wandering away from the straight path and meandering off on little, narrow lanes.

Both sorts of people have gone astray. If the first sort of people had gone astray at the very outset of their journey, the second sort go astray later, wandering away from the straight path.

For physical travel there is a highway, with narrow paths leading off from it on either side. Likewise, the journey of Truth has a highway, with narrow lanes leading away from it on both sides. If you continue to journey along the highway of Truth, you will arrive at your desired destination. But if you take to one of the narrow paths that lead away from the highway, you will deviate from your desired destination.

There is only one way to save yourself from this deviation. And that is, to keep asking God to save you from going astray. □

For physical travel there is a highway, with narrow paths leading off from it on either side. Likewise, the journey of Truth has a highway, with narrow lanes leading away from it on both sides.



How to Question

Often people ask questions without being really serious. A person should ask a question on a subject which he has been thinking of and studying about. This means before asking a question, he must prepare himself. And when he receives an answer for that question from someone, he should objectively ponder over it. This means that one who asks a question has a pre-questioning responsibility and a post-questioning responsibility. Only those who fulfil both these conditions should question.

REFORMING A COMMUNITY

An Important Task

THE question of reforming a community always arises after the period of a prophet. Hence, to reform a community means to bring back on to the path of the prophets the later generations of a people among whom degeneration has set in. In other words, the purpose of reforming a people is to bring back their later generations to the ways prevalent at the time of their prophet. It is this that Imam Malik refers to when he cites his teacher Wahb ibn Kaisan: "The Muslim community, in its last phase, will be reformed through that which reformed it in its first phase." The narrator asked Imam Malik what was it that Wahb was referring to. Malik replied that what Wahb was speaking of was *taqwa*, or God-consciousness. (*Musnad al-Muwatta*).

One of the traits of the Prophet's Companions mentioned in the Quran is that they were 'firm and unyielding towards those who deny the truth' (48: 29). That is to say, in matters of religion, they did not imbibe external influences. In contrast to this, with regard to degenerated people the Quran says that they are prone to imitating others (9: 30). That is to say, with regard to religion, they imbibe external influences.

When degeneration sets in among a people, it is the duty of its reformers to deeply study its conditions. Discovering the root cause of this degeneration, they must plan, in a realistic manner, for the community's reform.

In these verses, a law of nature is explained with the help of references to some communities. When a particular community or people are in their ascendant phase, they are so firm on their principles that they remain established in their religious teachings without accepting any influences from their surrounding environment. In contrast to this, when a people begin to degenerate, they lose their concern for principles. As a result, in matters of religion they begin to accept influences from the surrounding environment. This is the cause for the decline of communities.

When degeneration sets in among a people, it is the duty of its reformers to deeply study its conditions. Discovering the root cause of this degeneration, they must plan, in a realistic manner, for the community's reform. In the modern age, there was great talk about Communism, Socialism and Democracy. Their proponents viewed human life in terms of socio-political systems.

Soon, others, too, began to imitate them. Among these were numerous Muslim thinkers, who began interpreting Islam, too, as a socio-political system. For instance, there are certain commands that have been mentioned in the Quran in the intransitive sense, but these people wrongly interpreted them in the transitive sense. These commands in the Quran were meant for a person to practice in his individual life. But some Muslims scholars described these commands in terms of imposition on others by force.

Converting intransitive Quranic injunctions into transitive injunctions led to the emergence of various evils in the Muslim community. As a result the mentality of political extremism took root among the Muslim community. People began to clash with political authorities in the hope of enforcing the system that they desired. Consequently, the Muslim *ummah* was badly fractured, leading to radicalization.

In line with the law of nature, this political extremism proved to be completely useless and pointless. It had no positive result whatsoever. The consequent frustration that was generated among people took a terrible form—of suicide-bombing, based in the belief that even if one could not subjugate one's supposed enemies, they could be harmed, even if it meant losing one's own life.

Reforming a community is a very sensitive matter. In this work there is always the possibility that people may veer to some extreme or the other, and then, instead of reform, their work will only lead to further harm. □



Result of Negativity

*When negative thoughts
come in from one door, intellectual
development exits from another.*

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Islamic Perspective

ACCORDING to the Quran, God has created the universe with a certain purpose. All its parts, which are strictly under His control, are carrying out His divine scheme without the slightest deviation.

Similarly, man, too, has been created with a certain purpose. Yet man, unlike the rest of the creation, is totally free. He can do what he wants by his own decision. However, in spite of this freedom, he is being watched constantly by God, for God does not allow any such deviation in human history over a long period as would nullify His very creation plan.

Creation Plan of God

The universe made by God is so vast that, despite the enormous progress made by human beings in their attempts to fathom it, many of its secrets still remain unknown. The planet Earth, made by God as part of the cosmos, was and still is unique in the entire universe, in that it has been endowed with all the other factors which are essential to make it habitable for man.

Amongst the entire universe that functions compulsorily under the will of God, man is the only creature that has been granted free will.

After bringing into existence a favourable world in the form of the Earth, God created the first man, Adam, and his female counterpart, Eve. Although the precise date of this event is unknown, Adam and Eve were the first pair of human beings to set foot on Earth.

Adam was the first man as well as the first prophet. The way of God is to select a man as His messenger from amongst human beings themselves in order to send His revelations to humankind. Therefore, God revealed to Adam

through an angel the purpose of man's inhabiting the earth. According to this plan, God created a special creature in the form of man, upon whom He bestowed freedom. Amongst the entire universe that functions compulsorily under the will of God, man is the only creature that has been granted free will. The rest of the universe has no choice but to submit to the will of God. It is desirable for man also to opt for this divine plan of his own free will.

This plan of divine will is based on two basic principles—monotheism, and justice. Monotheism holds man to worshipping one God alone, and not associating anyone or anything in this worship. Justice holds man to adhering completely to ethical principles in dealing with other creatures, including fellow human beings, and refraining from all kinds of injustice and oppression.

Along with this, God informed man that, although he appeared to be free, he was fully accountable to Him. God has a complete record of man's actions. In the eternal life after death God will judge everyone according to this record. One who exercised his freedom wrongly will be thrown into eternal hellfire.

Adam died at a ripe old age. For a long period of time his people continued to adhere faithfully to the divine guidance. But later, degeneration set in. Polytheism replaced monotheism. People began to adopt the ways of injustice and oppression instead of justice and rectitude. After about one thousand years the perversion became all-pervading and they were completely distanced from the path of the religion as shown by Adam.

The Age of Perversion

God subsequently sent Noah as His messenger. Noah was granted an exceptionally long life of nine hundred and fifty years. During this extended period, he continued to show people the right path, generation after generation. But only a few people heeded his words. The rest persisted in their sinful ways. Then, in accordance with the ways of God, a huge flood engulfed them by way of punishment. Noah and his small band of followers were saved in an ark, while all the rest were drowned.

At that time, human population was probably concentrated only in the region of Asia known as Mesopotamia. The men and women saved in the wake of this flood settled afterwards in other parts of the world. Their race multiplied until it spread over the continents of Asia, Africa and Europe.

*In the eternal life
after death God
will judge everyone
according to this
record.*

After the death of Noah, his people continued for a considerable time to adhere to the divine path shown by him. But again degeneration set in amongst later generations and they deviated from the path of monotheism and justice. God's messengers—the Quran has mentioned twenty-six by name—continued to come for several thousand years.

The *Hadith* tells us that more than one hundred thousand messengers came to the world. In this way a long period elapsed between Adam and Jesus Christ, when God's messengers continued to come to the world in almost every generation. But each time only a few individuals believed in them. The majority rejected these prophets in every age.

The Reasons for Perversion

What were the reasons for this continued transgression? There were two main reasons; one, political absolutism; another, ignorance about the world of nature.

In ancient times, the system of monarchy prevailed over large parts of the world. The kings of those days had adopted an easy strategy for the consolidation of their empires, and that was to apply a complete curb on intellectual freedom. As a result, science could not make any progress.

The same was the case with religion. The policy adopted by these kings was not to allow their subjects to follow any religion other than that approved of by the king. Superstitious religion served their purpose only too well. Therefore, not only did they themselves embrace superstitious religion but they also compelled their subjects to adhere to it. People were denied the right to think freely and opt for any religion other than the official one. This policy of the kings produced the evil of religious persecution. History shows that religious persecution has continued from time immemorial in one form or another.

The element of freedom is essential in order that the intentions and actions of each individual can be properly judged.

The other main factor in this connection was ignorance. In ancient times, man knew little about the world and its phenomena. Political absolutism had placed an almost total ban on scientific research. Therefore, all kinds of superstitions regarding natural phenomena prevailed. It was generally held that the sun, the moon and the stars etc. possessed supernatural powers. Similarly, it was believed that the sea, the mountains and other such natural phenomena were

endowed with some extraordinary, mysterious power and that they exercised decisive control over human destiny.

The Problem of Evil

Those who want to interpret human history in the light of predetermined law in the physical world cannot but meet with failure. While the physical world may be explainable within the framework of pre-determinism, the events of the human world are simply not amenable to interpretation in terms of any such law.

Others want to interpret the events of the human world in the context of freedom. But they, too, are not satisfied with their interpretation. This is because in the case of human freedom, the suffering experienced in this world has no valid understandable explanation.

The failure of both interpretations of pre-determinism and absolute freedom is due to the fact that they attempt to explain the whole in the light of a part—which is not at all possible.

The truth is that the right principle by which to interpret human history is neither that of pre-determinism nor of freedom. According to Islam, there is only one correct principle to interpret human history, and that is the principle of test. Man has been placed in the present world for the purpose of being tested. On the outcome of this test will depend the eternal future of every individual.

According to Islam, there is only one correct principle to interpret human history, and that is the principle of test.

The element of freedom is essential in order that the intentions and actions of each individual can be properly judged. For, man can be granted the credit for a good deed only on the condition that, despite having the opportunity to indulge in bad deeds, he chooses of his own free will to act virtuously.

If in this world everything had been totally pre-determined, the element of trial would have been absent. However, the granting of freedom did involve the risk of some people misusing their freedom, and misuse it they did. This gave rise to the problem of human suffering which results from evil. Yet, this suffering, or evil, is a very small price to pay for a very precious thing. According to Islam, that person is most precious who leads his life in this world in such a manner that despite facing all sorts of temptations, he succeeds in overcoming them. Despite having the power to misuse his freedom, he refrains from doing so. Despite the possibility of leading an unprincipled life, he chooses of his own free will to be a man of principle. To identify such individuals it is essential that an atmosphere of freedom prevail in the world. This is not possible under any other system. □

RIGHT AND WRONG THINKING

Differentiate

SURAH AHZAB, a chapter in the Quran, tells us that man has been given something that has not been given to anybody else in the heavens and the earth—and that is, *amanat* or trust. It is this trust that makes man the most noble of all creatures. *Amanat* here actually means freedom of thought—the capacity to freely think and to freely plan one's actions. The proper use of this trust makes a person eligible for Paradise, while failure to use it properly makes him fit for Hell.

According to the Quran, misuse of freedom leads to two kinds of results: injustice, and ignorance. On account of misusing his freedom, man quickly deviates from justice. In the same way, misusing his freedom leads him to deviate from the path of wisdom. It is this deviation that makes one deserving of punishment in the Hereafter.

If you reflect on the matter, you will realize that for a person's reform it is enough if he does not deviate from his nature. If you exercise control over yourself and do not stray from the path of nature, nature itself will become your guide. Deviating from nature leads one to destruction. In contrast, remaining established in nature makes one successful.

Further reflection tells us that our test lies in always making the right choice and saving ourselves from the wrong choice. This issue of right choice and wrong choice relates to both thought and action.

Misusing freedom leads man to deviate from the path of wisdom.

In terms of thought, the model for making the right choice is provided by what the angels did at the dawn of creation. In contrast, making the wrong choice is epitomized by what Satan did. When the angels were told to bow down before man, they did so. Satan did not agree to this. He objected to man being given charge of the earth.

This objection by Satan is an example of 'selective thinking'.

Satan was the chief of the *Jinn* (a living creation of God made from fire; they have free will just like mankind). God had assigned to him an important position. Yet Satan ignored this aspect and showed his resentment by refusing to bow down to man and disobeyed God's commandment.

This same disease has characterized the whole of human history. More than 99% of people are victims of negative thinking—that is to say, selective thinking. They ignore the good things that they do have and make a big issue out of the things that they do not have and turn the latter into the vortex around which their thinking constantly revolves.

In this regard, Muslims are no exception. Today, all kinds of excellent opportunities are available for Muslims to make use of, just as is the case with other people. But in line with the law of nature, there are also some things that Muslims have not been given. What Muslims have done is that they have made what they do not have the centre-point of their thinking, while ignoring all the things that they have been given. As a result of this, throughout the world Muslims have got stuck in the quagmire of negative thinking. And because of this, they are bereft of gratitude, which is the highest form of worship.

Reflection tells us that our test lies in always making the right choice and saving ourselves from the wrong choice.

Ignoring the 99% of the bounties of God that they have been blessed with and obsessing about the 1% they have not received shapes their thoughts and actions. It is against what God desires of us. The greatest price that people who are engrossed in this will have to pay in terms of their failure to develop a positive character. And lacking a positive character means being deprived of God's blessings. □



Success

The conviction that one's goals are worthwhile, the observation of discipline with no contradiction between words and thoughts, cool thinking even in times of crisis—all these are qualities of mind which determine success.

SERVANTS OF GOD

Righteous Personality

A PERSON once asked the Prophet Muhammad: "Who are the people close to God?" The Prophet replied: "They are people who when you see them, you are reminded of God. In this *Hadith*, 'being reminded of God when you see them' means your meeting and interaction with them will be a source of the remembrance of God.

When someone discovers the Truth and begins to live in the fear and the love of God, he develops a certain level of seriousness. Everything he speaks is, directly or indirectly, a mention or remembrance of God. He seeks the pleasure of God in all his affairs and sees the 'hand' of God in everything. As a result, his life becomes very different from that of others. His talk is coloured with the hue of God. Whatever he speaks contains spiritual insight for those who listen to him. He does not speak anything unnecessary and frivolous. Instead, everything that he speaks is related to God. The result of his speech is such that people who gather around him begin to benefit from his talk.

When someone discovers the Truth and begins to live in the fear and the love of God, he develops a certain level of seriousness.

Commenting on the above-mentioned *Hadith*, one of the scholar says: "It probably means that these people tell other people about God and make them remember Him." □



Focus on Opportunities

Problems are the creation of man, not of God Almighty. Opportunities are the creation of God. The quantum of opportunities is always more than 99%, while the quantum of problems is less than 1%. Therefore one should not be disturbed by problems, as they are far less in number. One should always focus on the opportunities.

ISLAM & PEACE BUILDING

Inseparable

IN our closely interlinked world, peace and prosperity for everyone crucially depends on harmonious relations between communities and countries. Today, countries and communities can no longer afford to live in isolation from each other. Because we are all now so closely interdependent, peaceful and mutually-beneficial relations between different religious communities have become indispensable. We simply cannot afford to resort to conflict in order to resolve disputes.



Today, the world is crying out for peace. Islam positively encourages Muslims to work for peace and for harmonious relations between them and people belonging to other communities.

Given the serious threat to peace posed by terrorism perpetrated in the name of Islam, it is very important to articulate and promote a positive, meaningful approach to conflict-prevention, conflict-resolution and peace-building. After all, if conflicts are prevented at the very outset, violence can be done away with. Amicably negotiating differences before they degenerate into a conflict is the most sensible way for us to handle conflicts.

An important point in the above context is to know that one should differentiate between Islam and Muslims: one should judge Muslims in the light of Islamic teachings and not *vice versa*. Islam, as per the, Quranic teachings and examples from the life of the Prophet Muhammad, provides inspiration and appropriate guidance for peaceful relations between Muslims and other communities and for non-violent conflict-prevention and conflict-resolution and peace-building methods and approaches. Contemporary instances of Muslims resorting to violence in the name of their religion is, in complete contrast to Islamic teachings.

Whenever a difficult situation arises, the right course is not to take immediate action but to stop and reflect patiently on the possible consequences of one's response

According to the Creation plan of God, everyone is free. But when an individual is free, he can also misuse his freedom. As a rule, whenever people find themselves in problematic situations—and life is full of such contingencies—there is a tendency to make an immediate response.

Islam positively encourages Muslims to work for peace and for harmonious relations between them and people belonging to other communities.

This kind of instant reaction, however, serves only to add new problems to the existing ones. Reaction unleashes an unending chain of action and reaction. The results of following this path are disastrous.

Whenever a difficult situation arises, the right course is not to take immediate action but to stop and reflect patiently on the possible consequences of one's response. Those who choose to react by making an immediate emotional response can only cause an exacerbation of their difficulties. On the other hand, those who adopt a well-considered approach will certainly find ways and means of converting problems into opportunities for improving the situation that they are faced with. There is great wisdom in engaging in this sort of result-oriented planning. □



A Human Weakness

A general weakness of us humans is that we think that the good things that we have are because of our own efforts, and we blame others for us not having the things that we do not have, but want. A disastrous consequence of this is we fall prey to false pride in our abilities, on the one hand, and to false complaints against others, on the other. Actually we should consider the good things that we have as gifts from God, and should attribute the lack of the things that we do not have but want, to our own shortcomings. In this way we can really help ourselves in character-development. It can make us positive-thinking people.

GLAD TIDINGS

From the Quran

We have made it (the Quran) easy, in your own language, so that you may convey good news to the righteous. (THE QURAN 19: 97)

THE Quran is a divine book, revealed specifically for the purpose of conveying glad tidings to humankind. This good news is that if man treads the path of good and of right action in the limited life of this world, he will find a place in eternal Paradise in the life Hereafter. The Quran makes it clear that these glad tidings of Paradise are meant only for the righteous.

This good news is for those who adopt a God-oriented or righteous life in this world. Paradise is not to be the destiny of all and sundry, for it is only for the God-fearing (THE QURAN 3: 133). It is to be given on a selective basis only to those who are deserving of it. To find a place in the ideal world of Paradise there is only one condition, and that is, being God-fearing or righteous.

Being God-fearing or righteous means leading a life of restraint or guarding oneself against evil. It is, in actual fact, a phenomenon of sensitivity. When someone becomes highly aware of something, then, naturally, he becomes very sensitive about it. Sensitiveness plays the greatest role in human life. One who is not sensitive about something will ignore it, while something about which he is sensitive will become his concern. He will pay his greatest attention to it.

***Being God-fearing
or righteous means
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oneself against evil.***

The message of the Quran for man is that he should save himself from distraction. He should awaken his consciousness to the extent that obedience to God becomes his sole concern. No other thing should become the object or centre of his sensitivity.

Another verse in the Quran states: 'Do not follow what you do not know; for the ear and the eye and the heart shall be called to account.' (17: 36)

This verse of the Quran commands us to adopt right thinking. The soundness of human life depends upon this. In both his words and actions the righteous person fully conforms to the divine laws.

According to the Quran, this is in line with the creation plan for which man has been created and settled on planet earth. The earth is no luxury resort; in actual fact it is a testing ground for the purpose of selecting those individuals who, thanks to their superior qualities, are worthy of being lodged in an ideal place like Paradise. This is what is referred to when the Quran says:

He created death and life so that He might test you, and find out which of you is best in conduct. (67: 2)

All the things that God has created can be broadly divided into two categories: the material world, and the human world. The material world means the entire vast universe known as nature. The material world is totally governed by the divine laws laid down by God. It does not deviate to even the slightest degree from these laws. But man's case is different. In this entire universe, man enjoys an exceptional position. Man has been granted freedom of choice. Man has full freedom to speak and act as he pleases. This finds expression in different verses of the Quran.

Man has been granted the power of hearing, seeing and thinking, so that by using these faculties he may discover the right path for himself.

Do they seek a religion other than the religion of God? When everything in the heavens and the earth has submitted to Him, willingly or unwillingly? To Him they shall all return. (3: 83)

In the above verse of the Quran, the word 'submission' has been used, with the implication that while obedience to the Creator is required by the rest of the universe compulsorily, the same obedience is required of man voluntarily.

Man has been granted the power of hearing, seeing and thinking, so that by using these faculties he may discover the right path for himself—what is called in the Quran 'the straight path' (*sirat-al-mustaqim*). Deviation from the straight path is proof of the fact that one did not make proper use of the capabilities granted to him by God. Such a man will be held accountable by God. No excuse whatsoever will be accepted from him. (THE QURAN 30: 57)

An important principle of human life is avoidance of arrogance. In this regard the Quran says: "Do not walk with pride on the earth: for behold, God does not love arrogant and boastful people." (31: 18)

The above verse of the Quran gives us to understand that arrogance is the source of all evil. By contrast, modesty is the greatest source of all good. According to the Quran, the kind of man desired by God is one who is totally free of arrogance. Such a person is a modest person in the fullest sense.

In the chapter *al-Fajr* (89) of the Quran, we are told that all the pleasant or unpleasant experiences faced by man occur solely as a means of putting him to the test, but man takes such incidents in a negative manner. As a result, having pleasant experiences causes him to suffer from a superiority complex whereas unpleasant experiences give him an inferiority complex. (89: 15-16)

According to the Quran, both complexes affect man in extremely adverse ways. The right thing for him to do is that in both sets of circumstances, pleasant and unpleasant, he should consistently tread the path of moderation. Those who prove to be moderate in personality and conduct are described in the Quran as souls at peace (*nafs al-muthmainnah*), (89: 27), that is, complex-free souls. The greatest success for man is his gaining entry into Paradise in the eternal life after death. On this subject, the Quran says: "Truly, this is a great victory! It is for the like of this that all should strive." (37: 60-61)

The message of the Quran for man is that he should save himself from distraction.

This is a clear indication that, according to the Quran, man's goal should be one and only one, and that is, Paradise. The greatest feature of Paradise is that it is the realm of the Lord of the universe. And without doubt, there can be no success greater than finding oneself in close proximity to one's Lord in the eternal life after death. This unique desirability of Paradise is expressed in this verse of the Quran, which gives voice to a sincere and heartfelt human longing:

My Lord, build me a house in nearness to You in Paradise. (66: 11) □



GOD

If we deny God, we shall have to deny our own selves.

THE BEGINNING OF REALIZATION

Our Helplessness

The Quran states: "We have created man into a life of toil and trial. Does he think then that no one has power over him?" (90: 4-5)

THE present world is so designed that man must inevitably undergo hardships. No one is exempt from this general law. This fact shows how helpless man is. In this world, it is only the Creator who is Almighty, All-Powerful. This contradistinction is final. No one is exempted from it, that is, [God is All-Powerful, and man is totally powerless].

The Quran states: "Every human being is bound to taste death" (3: 185). It is a fact that whoever is born into this world has to die after a limited period of time.

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The incidence of death bespeaks man's helplessness. This event proves that helplessness is man's lot in life. None but the Creator has true power.

In the light of these facts, one can realize that human beings are in a position of total helplessness, while the Creator is omnipotent.

This discovery is the beginning of realization. For one who makes this discovery, the journey towards the path of realization has been well and truly initiated. Subsequently, all other things, which are desirable in the divine way will become part of his life. This realization is like an intellectual revolution in that it colours man's entire life in the hue of God. (2: 138) □



Right Planning

Awareness of the times along with right planning leads to success. One should be aware of the times one lives in, which will help in doing the right kind of planning. Awareness and right planning will give one success in one's endeavours. Fighting against one's circumstances is reaction, which leads to no positive result at all.

UNFULFILLED DESIRE

Life Eternal

THE British national daily newspaper *The Guardian* published a news report that was later republished in *The Times of India* on 19 Nov, 2016, under the title *Dying girl gets wish to have her body frozen*.

LONDON: The teenager's instructions were explicit: she didn't want to be buried, but to be frozen—with the hope that she could continue her life in the future when cancer was curable.

"I want to live and live longer and I think that in the future they may find a cure for my cancer and wake me up," the 14-year-old wrote to a British judge before her recent death. She said "being cryopreserved gives me a chance to be cured and woken up—even in hundreds of years' time."

Her plaintive words convinced high court judge Peter Jackson to grant her final wishes in what he called the first case of its kind in England, and possibly the world.

The judge said the girl had chosen the most basic preservation option at a cost of about £37,000 (\$46,000) after extensive research.

Cryonics is the practice or technique of deep-freezing the bodies of those who have died of an incurable disease, in the hope of a future cure.

The girl's parents disagreed about the procedure, with the mother favouring it and the father initially saying no, though he softened his stance as his daughter's death neared. The girl, who, along with her parents, can't be named for legal reasons, asked the court to designate that only her mother could dispose of her remains so that she could be cryogenically preserved, an unproven technique that some people believe may allow frozen bodies to be brought back to life in the future.

The concept is regarded with scepticism by many in the medical community because it has not yet been proven to be effective. Barry Fuller, a specialist in low-temperature medicine at University College London, said the technology of preserving cells at ultra-low temperatures is promising but cannot yet be applied to large structures

The desire for eternal life is innate in every human being consciously or unconsciously. But it is also a fact that no one has been able to realize this desire. Everyone is destined to die.

like a human kidney. "At the moment we have no objective evidence that a whole human body can survive cryopreservation with cells which will function after re-arming," he said, referring to the process of re-activating cells in the future. He said there is ongoing research with the immediate hope that scientists could use the technology to preserve human organs for transplantation. He said that would be "a major first step into proving the concept."

The judge called the case that began in the family division of the court unprecedented. Calling the case "an example of the new questions that science poses to the law." The girl's lawyer, Zoe Fleetwood, told the BBC the girl learned of the favourable ruling on 6 October, 11 days before her death. "She was delighted," said Fleetwood, adding that the girl described the judge as a hero. His ruling cleared the way for the girl's remains to be taken to a specialist facility in the US for the start of the preservation process. Lawyers say that has been done, but details have been kept private.

The girl was too ill to attend court proceedings, but Jackson visited her in a hospital. He said he was impressed by the "valiant way" she dealt with her impending death from a rare form of cancer. He said she spent her final months researching cryonics on the internet. "I don't want to be buried underground," she wrote at the end of her note. "I want to have this chance. This is my wish."

Medical experts say cells once damaged during freezing cannot be converted to living tissue. In spite of what they say, there have been about 250 people spending huge sums cryo-preserving their bodies with thousands more having already paid up to do the same when they die. This desire to live eternally is not only the desire of a British girl. It is innate in every man and woman, consciously or unconsciously. But it is also a fact that no one has been able to realize this desire. Everyone is destined to die. According to a survey the average age of a human being is about 72 years. Why is this disparity between human desire and actual fact? A study of man shows that, according to God's creation plan, he is born with a complete personality. In terms of his creation, there is no defect in his personality. Then why it is that no one is able to achieve the goal of eternal life? When the creation is perfect, the desire of human beings must also be perfect.

This disparity poses a great question. The answer is only one, that is, eternal life is not possible on the planet earth. It requires a new world, that is, Paradise. We have to make ourselves deserving candidates for Paradise. Only in this way can eternal life be achieved that is, in the Paradise which is attainable in the world Hereafter. □

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 CE. 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**

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

(5: 69)

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

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

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

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

The situation changes, however, as time passes. For the generations that follow, religion becomes a kind of national heritage. Tidings which had been given on the basis of faith and righteous actions come to be considered to be the result of ethnic affiliations. People imagine that they have a special relationship with God that others do not enjoy: one who belongs to a particular community believes he is sure to be saved, no matter what the standard of his faith and deeds. Paradise is for us, hell for them, he imagines. But God does not have a special relationship with any particular community. He has regard solely for a person's thoughts and deeds. In the Hereafter, people will be judged according to their deeds and character, and not on the basis of the group to which they belong. □



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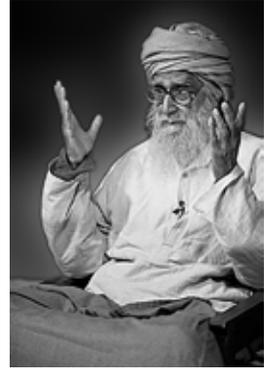
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ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered



How should we look at the phenomena of problems?

According to the law of nature, everyone is faced with problems, both inside and outside the home. If he takes problems as problems, he will lose hope and end in failure. However, if he takes the problems that arise as challenges, he will consider them in a level-headed way and, by using his powers of reasoning, will be able to solve them successfully.

Why do you consider problems as a blessing in disguise?

I say that problems are a blessing in disguise because it is problems that activate our minds. The occurrence of problems always leads to brainstorming. They save us from intellectual stagnation by stimulating intellectual awakening. The fact that problems result in creative thinking is the greatest blessing for all human beings.

What prevents us from thinking positively while facing a problem?

We live in a society. A society is a construct whereby human beings live in congregation for mutual benefit. But all of its members have their differences. Differences are a part of nature. Indeed, society is an amalgam of highly disparate elements. It is this difference that creates problems. When you face a situation which is not in accordance with your desires, you become irritated. Then a chain reaction sets in—leading to anger, vengefulness, negative thinking and violence. It is this phenomenon that prevents you from thinking positively in this sort of situation.

Is there any method to face problems positively?

I suggest two principles to follow: one is, to manage the problems, rather than trying to eliminate them. For this, one has to learn the art of 'problem management'.

The second principle is that if you don't get the best, be content with the second best. It is a fact that in every situation there is always something that can be called the 'second good'. All that is required is to opt for the 'second good' and forget the 'first good'.

According to psychological studies, every problem begins in the mind, and it is also in the mind where problems can be solved. So, it is like changing your intellectual gear. If you are able to change your intellectual gear, then you have found the method for facing the problems.

Do you suggest that we should replace the word 'problem' with the word 'challenge' in our minds?

Yes, certainly! All situations, both good and untoward, are like intellectual food. If you try to face these situations with a positive attitude, considering them as challenges, you will be helping yourself grow. You will be enhancing your creativity. You will be developing your personality along positive lines. One who adopts this course will surely emerge, sooner or later, as a well-developed personality, standing firm and tall, like a fully-grown tree. □



Unfavourable Situation

An Unfavourable situation, no matter what, is nothing but a new challenge. Try to meet that challenge and very soon you will find that it was truly a blessing in disguise for you. It was meant to provide you with a stepping stone to better things.

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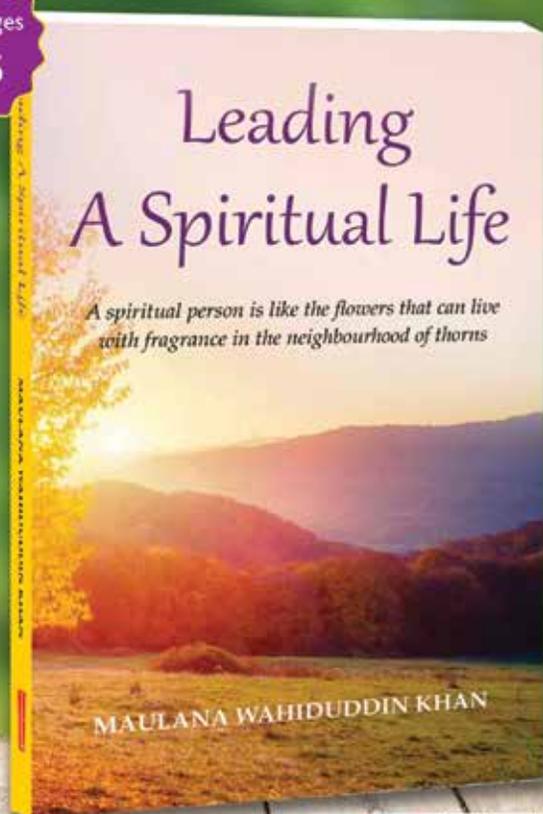
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