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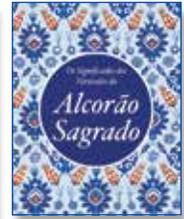
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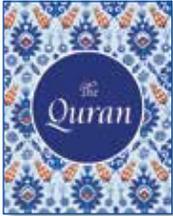
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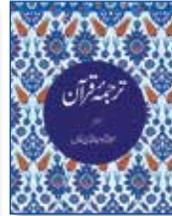
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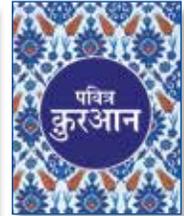
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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

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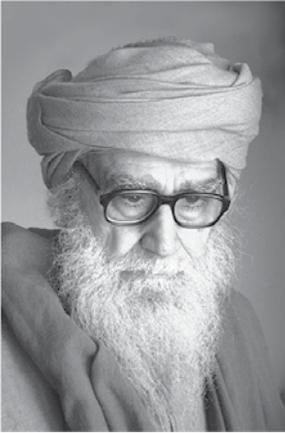
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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 recognized as one of its most influential Muslims'. His books have been translated into sixteen languages and are part of university curricula in six countries. He is the founder of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality based in New Delhi.

POST ELECTIONS: WINNERS & LOSERS

Sage advice to politicians: Rival political leaders may well be fierce competitors, but once elections are over, they need to cooperate to make democracy work.

DEMOCRACY with discipline is a political boon, whereas democracy without discipline may degenerate into anarchy. Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of USA in his Gettysburg Address in 1863, said democracy is: "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." Theoretically, this seems to be a correct definition of democracy but, from the point of view of practical application, it is perhaps incomplete. Democracy is not a religious belief; it is a secular concept. It is a political formula that gives us a workable 'art of difference management'. In every society, there are differences at every level and democracy is a kind of tightrope walk to maintain the balance between differing groups in society. If leaders fail to establish this balance, they risk turning the democratic system into anarchy, which may cause them to miss the opportunities offered by democracy.

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

The success of democracy depends at the outset on free and fair elections. Every person has the equal right to present his opinion by casting his vote. This was the point made by Evelyn B Hall echoing Voltaire's beliefs: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." Democracy spans two periods: the pre-election period and post-election period. In the pre-election period, political parties compete with each other to win the election. But after the election, the situation changes, as the time now comes for taking a U-turn. Instead of considering each other as rivals and continuing to fight, both sides must adopt the way of coordination. Political competition before elections is necessary, but confrontation after elections is so disastrous that it nullifies all benefits of a democratic system. In the pre-election period, it is the political right of participating parties to compete with each other. But it is essential for the success of democracy that after elections both parties change their approach and play a constructive role for the progress of the nation. The party that has lost must accept its defeat without any sense of humiliation, while the winning party must take its victory without pride.

Just as sportsmen demonstrate the sporting spirit, leaders in democracy should demonstrate the democratic spirit. Without the sporting spirit, sports would seriously lose in value. Similarly, if the democratic spirit is absent from a democracy, it becomes difficult to avail of the benefits offered by the democratic system. All parties must adopt the philosophy of adjustment to and respect for each other, rather than

Rival political leaders may well be fierce competitors, but once elections are over, they need to cooperate to make democracy work.

take to political fighting or confrontation. All parties should focus on a single goal, that is, national development. An example worth quoting in this connection is that after the 2008 US elections, when Barack Obama became President, he chose as his Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, who had been his rival in the Democratic party presidential primaries. This was a healthy move meant to guarantee the success of democracy. In a similar manner, post election parties should forget their differences and work together for the best interests of the nation.

Leaders elected in a democratic system are masters of their national affairs for only a limited period. They can do a good job only if they concentrate on the present. If they change their focus and devote all their efforts to ensuring success in the next election, they will lose

out, both in the present as well as in the future. A key prerequisite for the proper functioning of a democratic system is good education. Education is as important as the democratic framework itself. Without good education, a good democracy cannot be established. Therefore, the most important agenda for the winning party should be to provide good education to the citizens of the country.

Democracy is a political boon for a nation, but to turn this potential into actuality, we need such masters of democracy who can fulfil their responsibility with complete sincerity and honesty. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
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Sailing Safely

We must never lose sight of the fact that we are not lone travellers on this earth. There are always others who are trying to race ahead of us in this world of competition. The resulting situation can be approached in two entirely different ways. One is to collide with anything which obstructs our path. The other is to circumvent obstacles and then to go on our way. Clearly, the first is self-destructive, while the second in avoiding confrontations, is much more likely to prove advantageous.

A ship which sails straight at a rock or an iceberg is doomed. It is the ship which veers temporarily off its course to avoid the reefs which will eventually sail safely into harbour.

THE FORM AND SPIRIT OF RAMAZAN

Spiritual Training

RAMAZAN is the ninth month of the *Hijri* calendar. Muslims are enjoined to observe fasting from daybreak to sunset during this month. Fasting is an annual worship in the Islamic faith and one of the five spiritual pillars of Islam.

What is the purpose of this annual practice? The answer can be had from the Quran. "The month of *Ramazan* is the month when the Quran was sent down as guidance for mankind with clear proofs of guidance and the criterion by which to distinguish right from wrong." (2: 185)

The Arabic word for fasting is '*sawm*' meaning abstinence, restraint from desires. That is, saving oneself from all kinds of distraction, including basic needs, for a temporary period of time. The main purpose of fasting is going through the Quran with complete focus and dedication. This is a very serious study. So, believers are required to keep away from all other activities, and concentrate their minds totally on the study of the Quran.

In terms of form, the month of *Ramazan* is the month of fasting. But, in terms of spirit, the month of *Ramazan* is a month of self-training.

In terms of spirit, the month of Ramazan is a month of self-training. Muslims are required to observe the month of Ramazan as a month of introspection in the light of Quranic teachings.

Muslims are required to observe the month of *Ramazan* as a month of introspection in the light of Quranic teachings. The Quran is a divine criterion; it helps us examine our deeds and differentiate the right from the wrong. The Quran is like a divine mirror, in which Muslims can see their true face. They can identify the mistakes they have made in the past in order that they may mend their ways.

This annual practice enables Muslims to reassess and re-examine their past. And, by knowing this they can plan for their future on better lines. To illustrate this point, here are some examples from the Quran.

A believer prepares himself and starts reading the Quran with an open mind. Then he reads this Quranic verse: "Whatever misfortune befalls you is of your own doing." (42: 30). If the reader is sincere he will apply it to his own life and to the life of the Muslim *ummah*. By doing so he

will discover that anything which Muslims have suffered in the past was not due to anti-Muslim forces, rather it was entirely Muslims' own mistakes. This discovery will lead to brainstorming and he will decide with complete determination to convey this fact to the entire Muslim *ummah*.

Then during the study of the Quran, the believer comes across this verse: "God does not change the condition of a people's lot, unless they change what is in their hearts."

(13:11). If the believer is sincere in the true sense of the word, this Quranic verse is bound to make a deep impression on his mind. He will find the proper line of action for the future. He will realize that one has to completely abandon the language of complaint and protest against others because, according to the divine law, that will not work. He will decide to bring about reform in his own life. Thus our own reform is the precondition enshrined in the Quran. If we fulfil this condition, we will be able to receive divine help, and divine help is a guarantee of all kinds of success.

Fasting in the month of Ramazan is like a spiritual rehearsal for every Muslim. If this annual practice is done in the true spirit, it is bound to revolutionize the condition of Muslims, both individually and collectively.

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Wise Man

A wise man is one who deliberately forgets the unpleasant memories of the past and does not let his mind become a jungle of bitter thoughts.

THE GALAXY SPEAKS ABOUT ITS CREATOR

How Great Thou Art!

ACCORDING to a new study, the Milky Way is at least 50% bigger than previously estimated. Research conducted by an international team at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in the US has established the presence of a bulging ring of stars beyond the known plane of the Milky Way. Their findings show that the features previously identified as rings are actually part of the galactic disk, extending across the known width of the Milky Way from 100,000 light years² to 150,000 light years.



The Milky Way Galaxy

Our galaxy, the Milky Way, is a unique astronomical phenomenon of which our solar system is only a tiny part. Until the early 1920's, most astronomers thought that the Milky Way contained all the stars in the universe. Edwin Hubble in the early 1920's with his new telescope was able to produce astronomical photographs that resolved the outer parts of some spiral nebulae as collections of individual stars. He was also able to estimate the distance to the nebulae and found that they were far too distant to be part of the Milky Way.

²Light year = distance that light can travel in one year = 9,500,000,000,000 kilometres.

The Milky Way is estimated to contain 100–400 billion stars. The Solar System is located within the disk, about 26,000 light-years from the Galactic Centre, on the inner edge of one of the spiral-shaped concentrations of gas and dust called the Orion Arm. The Sun is 25,000–28,000 light-years from the Galactic Centre. The Galactic Centre is marked by a concentration of mass best explained as a supermassive black hole with an estimated mass of 4.1–4.5 million times the mass of the Sun.

There are billions of other galaxies in the universe. The Milky Way has several satellite galaxies and together with the neighbouring Andromeda galaxy are part of the Local Group of galaxies, which is a component of the Virgo Super cluster, which is itself a component of the Laniakea Super cluster of galaxies.

The Creator is truly great! He made such a vast universe, of which our galaxy is only a tiny part!

If a person could be far away in space and have a telescope with which he could view the entire Milky Way, he would be able to see a mind-boggling spectacle. He would see that, in the vastness of space, there is a magnificent starry galaxy. On one spiral arm of this galaxy, our solar system is situated. The planet earth is part of this solar system which, along with other planets, is continually revolving around the sun.

The viewer would simply have to exclaim in wonderment:

The Creator is truly great! He made such a vast universe, of which our galaxy is only a tiny part!



Differences Of Opinion

Differences of opinion are immensely beneficial. They help bring to the fore new dimensions of issues under discussion and uncover hitherto hidden aspects of a subject.

SINCERITY

True Value of Moral Action

SINCERITY is a necessary condition for all religious acts. Only those religious acts that are done with sincerity are religious acts in the true sense. An apparently religious act that lacks sincerity is actually useless.

Our minds are a vast jungle of thoughts. They are always filled with all sorts of demands, desires and motivations. This can lead people to biased thinking. In this regard, sincerity demands that a person should free oneself from preconceived notions and form opinions in an objective manner.

The above principle must be applied to religious and moral actions as well. If one does some religious act purely for the sake of God, then in God's eyes it will be regarded as sincerity in one's intention. In contrast, if one performs a religious act by adding some other, personal motive in it—for instance, the desire for fame or in order to be seen as very noble by others, etc.,—the action becomes devoid of sincerity. It will have no value in God's eyes.

Sincerity demands that a person should free oneself from preconceived notions and form opinions in an objective manner.

There is no external standard to gauge a person's sincerity. Sincerity is entirely something related to one's inner intention. Only the person and God, who is fully aware of what one thinks—can know it. □



Negative Experiences

Make negative experiences grist to the mill for your own personality development. Nurture yourself on what they teach you.

THE DONALD TRUMP PHENOMENON

Muslims must Respond Positively

DONALD TRUMP was elected the 45th President of the United States on November 8, 2016. During the election campaign as well as after entering the White House, he issued certain harsh statements about Muslim immigrants residing in America. This triggered criticism against Mr.Trump, not only by American Muslims but also from Muslims all over the world. According to them, this development was clearly anti-Muslim and perhaps no Muslim has given a positive response in the matter.

Muslims believe that the Prophet of Islam is a complete model for them. This complete model, however, is not in terms of superiority of the Prophet, but rather in terms of his offering a guiding example in every matter. Whenever Muslims face a situation, it is their responsibility to search for a corresponding example from the life of the Prophet and then act upon it. If the Prophet is a complete model, then his life must provide a model for Muslims in every circumstance they face. There is indeed a model present in the Prophet's life with regard to the current situation as well.

The Prophet of Islam was born in Makkah, where he initiated his mission in 610 CE. After a period of thirteen years, he and his Muslim followers left Makkah for another town called Madinah. In this way, the Prophet and the Companions of the Prophet settled in Madinah as immigrant Muslims. Here they often had to face certain unpleasant situations from some residents of Madinah. For example, a tribal leader of Madinah, Abdullah ibn Ubayy, became a staunch opponent of the Prophet. Although he had pledged allegiance to the Prophet, Ibn Ubayy abhorred to see that immigrants from outside had taken a prominent place in his city.

Ibn Ubayy would often pass humiliating remarks at the Prophet and the Muslims who had come from Makkah. For example, once he made a statement which has been recorded in the Quran in these words: "Indeed, when we return to Madinah, [we] the ones most worthy of honour, will surely drive out from there the contemptible ones!" (63:8). The Quran or the Prophet showed no reaction at these demeaning words. On the contrary when Ibn Ubayy said this, the Quran simply

Whenever Muslims face a situation, it is their responsibility to search for a corresponding example from the life of the Prophet and then act upon it.

stated: "All honour belongs to God, and to His Messenger and those who believe [in God]: but of this the hypocrites are not aware." (63: 8)

After migration, the Prophet lived in Madinah for ten years. Time and again he would face disparagement from those who had turned hostile to him. For instance, Ibn Ubayy once said to his Madinan followers about the Prophet and the Companions who had come from Makkah: "Our example and the example of these Muslims from Makkah is as the saying goes, 'Feed your dog and it will eat you up!'" (*Seerah Ibn Ishaq*). In spite of such provocations from Ibn Ubayy, the Prophet did not engage in retaliatory measures nor did he respond verbally to the hurtful talk from Ibn Ubayy and his supporters.

Muslims believe that the Prophet of Islam is a complete model for them. This complete model, however, is not in terms of superiority of the Prophet, but rather in terms of his offering a guiding example in every matter.

The approach followed by the Prophet and his Companions in this regard can be summed up in these words: *Take it easy*. Neither did the Prophet take any practical steps nor did he react in words.

What was the reason for this unilateral avoidance on the part of the Prophet? The wisdom behind it was that the Prophet had a positive mission to work towards. Had he reacted to provocation from his opponents, it would have inevitably led to a chain reaction. By not reacting, the Prophet put an end to the provocation in the very first instance. In this manner, he found an opportunity to focus on a higher mission without wasting his time and energy on other issues.

The above policy of the Prophet can be summarized thus: 'Avoid provocation and continue with your mission in a positive manner.' This method of the Prophet proved to be successful and the result was that his mission spread peacefully all over Arabia.

The strange response by present-day Muslims is because they have made their Prophet only a matter of pride for their community. Due to this, they have ceased to take him as a role model. It is only by correcting this tendency will they be able to lead an honourable life in this world. □



THE PHENOMENON OF DEGENERATION

Reform and Revival through Intellectual Awakening

MUSLIMS, like other religious communities, went through a phase of degeneration in their later period and matters have not improved in the present day. What must be done when this happens? The remedy was outlined in advance in the chapter *Al-Hadid* (Iron) of the Quran. The translation of the relevant verses is as follows:

Has the time not come for the faithful when their hearts in all humility should engage in the remembrance of God and of the revelation of truth, so that they should not become like those who were given the Book before them, whose hearts with the passage of time became hardened and many of whom were disobedient? Remember that God brings the earth back to life after its death. We have made Our signs clear to you, so that you may fully understand. (57: 16-17)

These Quranic verses refer to the period of decline of the *ummah* (Muslim community). This degeneration has come about because the members of the Muslim community have lost their fear of God and have become insensitive to their faith. So, what is the principle for their regeneration, or their reform, so that they may be brought back on to the right path?

The principle is given here in terms of an example from agriculture. With the passage of time, land which had been fertile becomes barren. When the farmer tries to make his land fertile again, he begins his task by preparing the land and not by harvesting. If he starts his job by harvesting, it would be like putting the cart before the horse.

The same is true of the declining Muslim community. Here, reformers must start their task from the beginning, and not from the end. For example, if they try in such circumstances to establish their political rule, it will not work. But if they start by reviving the spirit of religion, awakening the soul, and bringing about intellectual development, then it will be a right beginning.

The decline of an ummah means decline in terms of spirit, and not in terms of form. Forms or rituals have always been in existence: what disappears is the spirit. So, it is the spirit that needs to be revived, and not merely forms or rituals.

The decline of an *ummah* means decline in terms of spirit, and not in terms of form. Forms or rituals have always been in existence: what disappears is the spirit. So, it is the spirit that needs to be revived, and not merely forms or rituals.

What is degeneration? Degeneration is simply a kind of detachment. When people forget the original message of Islam and cling merely to some lifeless rituals—that is the sign of degeneration.

At such times Muslims need to revive their faith, to rediscover the living ideology of Islam and to re-awaken their minds along the lines which were followed by the Prophet and his Companions. It is this act which is called in the *Hadith* (saying of the Prophet) *tajdeed*, or revival.

The process of *tajdeed* cannot be successful if the reformers only want to revive the ritualistic form of Islam. The above example of the barren land tells us that the starting point for reform is intellectual awakening and not just the revival of ritualistic practices.

Moreover, the task of revival needs a creative approach, entailing the use of the contemporary idiom; reformers should try to sense their listeners' moods and preach in such a manner that their minds may be addressed. If people's minds are not addressed, then no reform movement will yield any positive results. □



Super Achievement

Super achievement is everyone's dream, but super achievement does not suddenly knock at your door. It requires hard labour, continuous effort, well-considered planning, the utilization of full energy on a single focus, and most importantly, unshakable positive planning.

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 GREATEST EVIL OF HISTORY

WAR is not a new phenomenon. It has always been a part of human history. In the very first generation of man, fighting broke out between Adam's two sons and, as a result, Abel was killed by his brother Cain. Fighting has continued since then in every group and nation. However we learn from history that every period of conflict has its end. Conflict has always had a limited span. There is no battle which has raged indefinitely; even the First and Second World Wars were fought for limited periods of time.

But the case of the Muslim community appears to be totally different. We learn from history that once a battle is waged in the Muslim *ummah* it has continued. In this respect, Muslims have become an exceptional community. A deeper analysis of this matter shows that the reason for this is a justification having been found for violence. That is, violence has been legitimized by misinterpretation of religious law. Since, sacred law is unchangeable, the violence which is held justified by it allows no room for revision.

What is this 'justified violence'? It is the perpetration of violence in the name of Islamic *jihad*. In Muslim history, all battles were fought in the name of *jihad*. And the traditional concept of Islamic *jihad* is that success awaits one in either of the two situations: in the case of victory as well as defeat. If they are victorious, Muslims who engage in *jihad* gain in worldly terms and in the case of defeat and death, they become martyrs and go straight to Paradise.

Rightfully speaking, in Islam, *jihad* in the sense of *qital*, or war, is undertaken only in defence. Since defence is a matter only for the state, it takes place infrequently.

All those Muslim activists who are engaged in war in the name of Islam are “non-state actors”. No established Muslim state is involved in this act. The nature of this present violence is itself un-Islamic. It is an accepted principle of Islam that, ‘To declare war is the prerogative of an established state.’ According to this principle, all those Muslim *mujahideen* who are engaged in war have no justification to do so in Islam.

Such people must unilaterally and unconditionally abandon all their violent activities and adopt totally peaceful activities.

The fact is that this concept of 'justified war'—actually, a wrongful war—has been developed on the basis of a wrong interpretation of the Islamic scriptures, both the Quran and the Hadith.

In present times, in particular, there is no possibility of such wars. Now, according to modern universal norms, man has been left no option but that of peace.

The battles waged by Muslims in later times have not been in defence of their country, but—according to their own claim—have been engaged in, in order to eradicate tyranny and establish justice. This is without doubt a war of their own innovation. No where in the Quran or the *Hadith* have Muslims been commanded to resort to war for the purposes of eradicating oppression and establishing justice.

The fact is that this concept of ‘justified war’—actually, a wrongful war—has been developed on the basis of a wrong interpretation of the Islamic scriptures, both the Quran and the *Hadith*.

The worst form of this actually unjustified war is that which, in the beginning, is directed against other nations, but, in its second phase, develops into infighting amongst Muslims.

The reason is that when combatants see that they have derived nothing positive from war, they think that there must be some conspiracy against them to explain why their efforts have become futile.

They even come to regard the people of their own community as conspirators, and imply that their failure is due to their machinations, and, this said, they direct their animosity at their own community.

When things come to this level, the evil goes beyond all limits, that is, Muslims start killing Muslims. The Prophet of Islam had already predicted this evil, which he said would creep into the *ummah*.

This prediction of the Prophet has been fulfilled in the twenty-first century. The self-proclaimed *jihadists* are killing Muslims as well as others.

This phenomenon tells us that, in present times, violence among Muslims is the worst kind of evil. It is a warning to Muslims that if they do not repent and abandon the way of killing and bloodshed, they are taking the risk of being held as unbelievers in the eyes of God.

This prophetic warning should be enough to make the Muslims of today sincerely repent and altogether give up violence without a moment's delay. They should throw their weapons into the sea and lead their lives as peaceful citizens. There is no other option for Muslims. □

No where in the Quran or the Hadith have Muslims been commanded to resort to war for the purposes of eradicating oppression and establishing justice.



Wise Way Of Living

To save our own freedom, we have to tolerate the freedom of others. And to save our own spirituality, we have to overlook the misuse of freedom by others. We have to ignore others' undesirable behaviour in order to ensure that our own personality development will proceed along the right lines. This is the wise way of living in this world.

INNUMERABLE BOUNTIES OF FASTING

Character Building

FASTING (*sawm*) is the third pillar of Islam. Right from dawn till dusk, a man who is strictly on a fast will neither eat as much as one morsel of food nor drink a single drop of water. By submitting to this discipline, that is, by depriving himself of the prime necessities of life, man learns the valuable lesson of fortitude. With no food and drink, he naturally feels hungry and thirsty, and his strength begins to ebb. The entire routine of his life is severely disturbed and his whole system is upset. But, out of a high sense of discipline, he braves all the difficulties and discomfort, and remaining alert and never losing heart, he steadfastly discharges his duties

Food and drink may be temptingly placed before him, but, despite an overwhelming urge to have both, he will not even touch them. In this way, he prepares himself for a well-regulated and responsible life, doing only what is his duty and refraining from pernicious acts and habits. He is strengthened to continue with his mission in life, no matter how

God has endowed man with innumerable gifts, but, all too often, he takes them for granted without any feelings of gratitude.

It is only when fasting temporarily curbs the satisfying of his desires that his consciousness of the value of these divine gifts is awakened.

much he may be beset by adversity. God has endowed man with innumerable gifts, but, all too often, he takes them for granted without any feelings of gratitude. Countless benefits like the air, the sun, the water, have been showered upon man, the absence of any one of which would cast his delicately balanced system into a living hell. But because he has received these things without any effort on his part, he sets no great value upon them, and hardly ever stops to ponder upon how they came to be his.

It is only when fasting temporarily curbs the satisfying of his desires that his consciousness of the value of these divine gifts is awakened. When, at sunset, after a whole day's hunger, thirst and the accompanying discomfort and fatigue, a man begins to eat and drink, he

becomes fully aware of his utter dependence on God's bounty. He is then filled with the realization that he owes an endless gratitude towards the Bountiful Creator.

The life of a believer in this world is one of fortitude and forbearance, limited as it is to the enjoyment of whatever is allowed by God and avoidance of whatever is forbidden by Him. The journey on the path of righteousness and truth is beset by difficulties which a believer must staunchly face up to.

In the face of provocation he cannot stoop to take revenge upon his adversaries who have made him the object of their spite and malice. On the contrary, the slights and injuries of this world should leave him undaunted; he should simply be able to take such untoward incidents in his stride so that he may continue unflinchingly to discharge his duties. Whenever his pride has been hurt, or whenever some unpleasantness has left him in a state of agitation, he must guard against adopting a negative attitude—for this is sheer weakness—and must continue to devote his energies in a positive manner to worthy objectives. Nothing, in fact, should stop him, or even slow him down in his progress towards the Hereafter.

All of the above situations demand enormous fortitude, and, without it, no one can travel along the path of Islam. Thus, the annual month-long period of fasting aims to build up the strength of character. Such strength is essential, if devout Muslims are to tread the path of righteousness for the rest of the year, avoiding impatience, cruelty, evil acts, and making no attempt to meddle with divine commandments. While in its outward form, fasting means abstinence from food and drink for a given period, in essence, it is training for a whole life of self-denial, inculcating patience, fortitude and forbearance. □



Mindset

A negative mindset diminishes one's abilities. But if one works hard with a positive mindset one's abilities are improved. This is a law of nature and the law of nature is irreversible.

THE MIRACLE OF TEAMWORK

Achieve Great Success

ANDREW CARNEGIE (1835-1919) was a Scottish American industrialist who led the expansion of the American steel industry in the late 19th century. He is often identified as one of the richest people and one of the richest Americans ever. He played a leadership role as a philanthropist for the United States and British Empire. During the last 18 years of his life, he gave away to charities, foundations, and universities about \$350 million—almost 90% of his fortune.

Carnegie shared one of his experiences in these words: “Teamwork is the ability to work together towards a common vision. It is the ability to direct individual accomplishment towards organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.”

The majority of the great events of history was the result of teamwork. If there is a team and every member of the team is imbued with the right spirit and has the sincere will to achieve the projected goal, the team will certainly succeed in this mission.

The above saying is very true. It is based on a law of nature laid down by the Creator. If there is a heavy stone and you want to remove it from its original place by your individual efforts, you may fail to do so. But if you put together a group and try to remove the stone by collective effort, you can certainly achieve your goal. The Prophet of Islam said: “*The hand of God is on the group or team.*”

Teamwork means the combined action of a group. This kind of work is destined to achieve its desired goal, because the work is done with team spirit. What does team spirit mean? It means willingness to cooperate sincerely as part of a team. The majority of the great events of history was the result of teamwork.

If there is a team and every member of the team is imbued with the right spirit and has the sincere will to achieve the projected goal, the team will certainly succeed in this mission.

The highlighting factor is that there are bound to be differences amongst the team members on various issues though they work for a common goal. If all the members stay united in spite of the differences, they will be successful in their mission. Differences should not be used as an excuse to go away from the team.

The Quran has stated the importance of team work in the following verse: Surely God loves those who struggle for His cause in ranks, as if they were a solid cemented structure. (61: 4)

This Quranic verse gives the definition of teamwork: working together like a cemented structure. God Almighty has promised sure success for those who work together with team spirit. Team work means making efforts with total unity and solidarity. This kind of work needs conviction, confidence in and emotional attachment to the mission. Dedication in the members of a team is as important as team spirit. Those who are full of this kind of spirit will certainly achieve success. □



Overconfidence

Overconfidence is a common flaw in the character of those who are lacking in humility. The virtue of modesty makes one a realist—a person who is cut down to size. Such people generally proceed with caution because before taking any action, they take into consideration all of the factors in whatever situation they have to tackle. They make a thorough assessment of the risks involved. Taking this realistic approach makes them take into account their own shortcomings. This serves as a controlling element in their lives and prevents them from having to face untoward consequences.

COMPANIONSHIP OF THE PROPHET

Guidance for All Times

A SCHOLAR has very rightly said, "If there is a collection of *Hadith* in a person's house, it is as though there were in his house the Prophet, speaking to him." This means if you open, with earnestness, a book of *Hadith* and read the sayings of the Prophet, you will feel that the Prophet is directly talking to you and giving you guidance. The same is true about the companionship of the Prophet. If the true spirit is alive in you, and you sincerely desire to follow the Prophet, even today you can experience the Prophet's companionship.

For example, the Prophet's practice was never to hate his enemies. Instead, he used to treat them in a very noble way. If you have an enemy and you do not respond to him with enmity, but instead, think 'I should behave with my enemy in the same way as the Prophet of God did with his enemies', and if you do precisely this, at that moment you will develop a special relationship with the Prophet. You will begin to

associate with him, in terms of your thoughts and feelings. This sense of association with the Prophet will expand so much that you will feel that the distance of time has been overcome and that you have arrived, as it were, in the company of the Prophet. This is a fact. It is something that anyone can experience anywhere.

The believers who were contemporaries of the Prophet were blessed with the physical companionship of the Prophet. Believers in later times can be blessed with spiritual or psychological companionship of the Prophet.

The Prophet's opponents treated him in a very improper way. For instance, they called him with derogatory names such as mad, condemned one, a magician and a liar. Yet, the Prophet never reacted against them negatively. He neither complained nor demonstrated against them. Instead, he prayed to God for such people. Now, if you

face any such negative experiences and wholeheartedly adopt the method of the Prophet in this regard, you will experience certain special feelings of relationship with the Prophet. You will begin to experience the companionship of the Prophet.

One can speak of two forms of the companionship of the Prophet. One is physical companionship. The other is spiritual or psychological companionship. The believers who were contemporaries of the

Prophet were blessed with the physical companionship of the Prophet. Believers in later times can be blessed with spiritual or psychological companionship, provided they fulfill the necessary conditions for this—and that is deep psychological compatibility with the Prophet.

Companionship is not necessarily about being physically present with someone. It depends entirely on psychological compatibility. In the early period of Islam, among those who accepted Islam were some who had psychological compatibility with the Prophet. They drew great benefit from his company. And those who did not have psychological compatibility with him remained deprived of the benefit of his presence, despite being physically present near him.

The difference between the true Companions of the Prophet and the hypocrites was based precisely on this. The true Companions of the Prophet had psychological compatibility with the Prophet. That is why they were able to fully benefit from his company. On the other hand, the hypocrites did not have this psychological compatibility with the Prophet. And, that is why despite being physically present near the Prophet, they remained deprived of the benefit of his company. □



Law Of Nature

*It is a law of nature that the
quantum of scope for success is
more than the quantum of failure.
No failure can stop one's journey,
provided one maintains positivity.
It is one's positive thinking that
matters and not the negative
experiences.*

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



‘ALLAHU AKBAR’ SPEAKS OF A BELIEF

THE phrase *Allahu Akbar* (or God is Great) is the most important part of the Islamic form of ritual prayer. If you add up the number of times this phrase is used in the *azan*, the call to prayer, and while performing the ritual prayers five times a day, it comes to around 300 times every day! This declaration of God being the Greatest is the phrase that is heard and uttered the most number of times in a Muslim's life.

This shows that in Islam the most important thing is that a person should discover the greatness of God. The glory and greatness of God should be the most important part of his consciousness. God's greatness should be an integral part of his consciousness in such a way that under no condition should he lose awareness of it.

The phrase "God is Great" enjoys the status of a master-stroke in a person's life. If you truly discover God you will experience a great and positive upheaval in your life. You will be transformed into a completely new person. God will become the only focus of your thinking. Your life will become a truly God-centred one. God will become your sole concern.

Everything other than God will become secondary for you. You will stop thinking in materialistic terms. Instead of thinking on communal lines, your thinking will be shaped on the basis of certain principles. You will seek success in the Hereafter. You will be fully cleansed of negative thinking. You will become modest and will be freed from arrogance.

In a sense, the phrase *Allahu Akbar* speaks of a belief. In another sense, it embodies a complete way of life for a person. In fact, *Allahu Akbar* is the essence of faith. □

God's greatness should be an integral part of his consciousness in such a way that under no condition should he lose awareness of it.



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EXPLAINING CREATION

Purpose of Life

WHY is there a contradiction between the two worlds—the material world and the human world? The material world is a complete world. There is no defect in it. But the human world is apparently an incomplete world.

When we study the material world, we find that it is well planned, intelligently designed and flawless, while the human world is one in which there are problems aplenty and many kinds of unwanted situations. For man, happiness seems to be an unachievable goal. If God is perfect and all-powerful then why this contradiction in nature? If God is perfect and powerful, the world ought to be a world in which there are no contradictions.

This kind of observation as noted above is based on appearances, but if one tried to explain nature according to God's scheme of things, we would discover that the apparent contradiction is a part of the different aspects of the scheme of the Creator.

Paradise will be accorded on the basis of merit. Only those individuals who pass the test will gain entry into Paradise.

The fact is that, the material world was created as a supporting world. It is a custom-made universe. The universe was made for man and not vice versa, hence we find stability in the world. Man, on the other hand, was created according to quite a different scheme. It is required of man that he develops himself as a self-made man. For this purpose, man has

been given total freedom. It is this total freedom that creates all kinds of problems and not creation itself.

According to the Quran, man was created according to a special scheme. God Almighty created Paradise as man's eternal abode. But this Paradise will be given to mankind on a purely selective basis. God will watch man's behaviour in the present world, then, according to the record prepared by the angels, Paradise will be accorded on the basis of merit. Only those individuals who pass the test will gain entry into Paradise. □



ZAKAT—THE PRESCRIBED CHARITY

Social Welfare

ZAKAT, or the alms-tax, is one of the five basic tenets of Islam. Its payment is obligatory, at the minimum fixed rate of 2.5% per annum, on all wealth that is subject to growth. It takes the form of the giving of alms out of one's own private means. This amount is given in the name of God and is to be spent on worthy religious causes and on meeting the needs of the poor and the helpless.

Zakat is an annual reminder to man that everything he possesses belongs to God, and that nothing should, therefore, be withheld from Him.

Man himself plays only a very small part in obtaining whatever he owns in this world. Were he not to have the benefit of God's endless bounty, he would neither be able to grow grain, raise cattle, set up industries nor accomplish any other work of a useful nature. The system of life created for him by God, fulfilling all of his requirements from those of his inner being to those of his external environment, is one of greatest perfection. Were God to withdraw even a single one of His blessings, all man's schemes would lie in ruins and all his efforts would be in vain. All productivity would grind to a halt, and life itself would come to a standstill.

The observance of *Zakat* is a way of acknowledging this fact of life. Islam desires that private wealth should be considered as belonging to God, and therefore should be spent in the way as ordained by God.

In doing so, one should not consider that he is conferring a great favour upon those less well-endowed than himself, and should in no way be condescending to the recipients of his charity. When a man gives alms to others, he should do so with the knowledge that they have a rightful share in his wealth, for this is as God has ordained. He is doing no more than giving others their due. But when he gives, he can feel reassured that he himself will be given succour by his Maker on the Day of Judgement. In giving to others, he knows for certain that he will not be denied by God at the Last Reckoning.

Responsibilities to Others

Zakat gives a clear indication of what one's responsibilities to others should be. Everyone is required to recognize the rights of others, just as everyone is expected to sympathize with those afflicted by adversity.

This feeling should be so well developed that one has no hesitancy about sharing one's possessions with others, or coming to their assistance, even when it is clear that nothing can be expected in return. Even where there are no ties of friendship, one should be a well-wisher of others and guard their honour as if it were one's own.

Gifts from God

Zakat brings the realization that all of one's possessions are gifts from God and makes one more keenly aware of the virtues of devotion to God. In the light of such awareness, one cannot remain insensitive to the needs of the society in which one lives. *Zakat* is a perennial reminder that a selfish stance is a wrong stance, and that others must be given their rightful share of our earnings.

One unfortunate aspect of human relationships is that people tend to give to others only when they hope to gain something in return. Money they feel, should be returned with interest. When such an understanding becomes a factor in our social organization, exploitation becomes rampant; everyone is ready to plunder everyone else. This results in society falling prey to oppression and disorder.

When a man gives alms to others, he should do so with the knowledge that they have a rightful share in his wealth, for this is as God has ordained. He is doing no more than giving others their due.

No one—no matter whether they are rich or poor—can be at peace in a society stricken with this malaise. Society should be so ordered that people fortunately placed in life come to the assistance of their less fortunate brothers, in the knowledge that they will ultimately be rewarded by God. Believers have the assurance of God that if they give to others, whatever they give will be returned to them many times over in the next world; they trust God's promise completely. In a society ordered in this way, feelings of antagonism and indifference are not allowed to develop; people are not bent on exploiting

one another. There is never an atmosphere of mutual resentment and dissatisfaction, for everyone lives in peace with his neighbour. Such a society, in short, is a haven of contentment and well-being. In its external form then, *Zakat* is an annual tax. But in its essence, it is the principle on which God and His creatures have a right to a share in one's property.

The *Ramazan* Charity

Zakat-al-Fitr is specifically related to the month of fasting and is given before the special *Eid* Prayer. The reason for this *Zakat* is two-fold.

According to a *Hadith* reported by Ibn Abbas: *Zakat-al-Fitr* is an atonement for the fasting person's inadvertent idle talk and to provide food for the needy. Discharging this duty before the prayer is very important.

Zakat-al-Fitr perfects the fast of *Ramazan* and purifies the fast of any indecent act or speech. It is obligatory on all Muslims: young, old, male and female. Every Muslim who possesses over and above what is needed as basic food for the duration of one day and night must pay *Zakat-al-Fitr* for himself and his dependants and distribute it amongst the poor and needy. The earlier it is given the easier it is for them to make arrangements, so that they may also take part in the celebrations of *Eid* without any difficulties. □

Society should be so ordered that people fortunately placed in life come to the assistance of their less fortunate brothers, in the knowledge that they will ultimately be rewarded by God.



Comprehensive Principle

All individuals be they literate or illiterate, able-bodied or handicapped, whether of one class or another, are certain at all events, of their own likes and dislikes. What is required of them is they should follow the principle that whatever behaviour they want from others, they should themselves accord to others. Conversely, whatever behaviour towards themselves they abhor in others should likewise be eschewed by them.

GOOD PARENTING

Equip Your Children for Life

PARENTING or child rearing is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, financial, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood.

We all are familiar with the following maxim: *To be born with a silver spoon*, in reference to a child born in an affluent family. Favoured children are frequently less successful in their lives than those who have failed to find favour from their family. Favour is only another name for pampering. There is a better alternative for parents rather than giving favour; it is to give their child self-confidence. A non-favoured child is also a favoured child, but in a different sense; he has the self-confidence and incentive to work hard. If you love your child and in all situations you are ready to provide him with help, that means you are making your child happy but with a side-effect; it will lessen the spirit of confidence in the child. Self-confidence is the best gift parents can give their children.

Parents cannot be with the children all through their life like shadows. Children as they grow have to face life with all the challenges it poses. Good parenting is to train your children to develop self-confidence to the extent that they may stand up to the challenges of life, especially in the later period of their lives. That kind of parenting is good which proves to be effective in their future and that kind of parenting is bad which has untoward results. It is not inside the home that parenting may be judged good or bad. It is outside the home that parenting must be judged. That parenting which proves effective outside the home is good parenting.

Parenting is a complex task. Parents have great love for their children. That is but natural, but as far as their children's future is concerned, love alone is not enough. Love often turns into pampering their children. And over-providing is not good parenting. That can make a child too easy-going. He may shirk hard work and this tendency could stop his future development.

Good parenting calls for living between two opposites: on the one side being soft and on the other side being strict. Parents have to be both subjective and objective in their behaviour towards their offspring.

Parents are almost always emotional towards their children. But according to the law of nature, emotional behaviour may not prove

good for them. It is in their nature to be emotional, but the best parents are those who control their emotions and try to tackle the child with a realistic approach.

There are many examples of persons born into poor families, who after hard work, emerged as super achievers. For example, B. R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) was born into a poor family in Maharashtra, who were subjected to socio-economic discrimination. Although Ambedkar was admitted to a local school, he was segregated and given little attention or help by his teachers. He was not even allowed to sit in the class. When he needed to drink water, someone from a higher caste would pour that water from a height, as he was not allowed to touch either the water or its vessel. But this hardship only enhanced his incentive to have an education. He used to read his school books by the street light because there was no electricity in his poor home. His efforts bore fruit. Despite all kinds of hardships he continued his studies till he emerged as a great expert on constitutional law. Finally, he was elected to the Constituent Assembly of India and was appointed to draft the first Constitution of India.

From the above example we can see that it is challenge that motivates the child to the extent that he can rise from 'zero' to a hero. □

Good parenting calls for living between two opposites: on the one side being soft and on the other side being strict. Parents have to be both subjective and objective in their behaviour towards their offspring.



Your Destiny

Always remember that although others can create hurdles in your life, no one has the power to decide your destiny.

WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Age of Peace

THERE are several verses in the Quran which make predictions of future events. For instance, the prediction of the victory of the Romans over Sassanid Persia (30: 1-2). This prediction was fulfilled within ten years, but of greater significance is the prediction in the Quran which clearly applies to the rise of western civilization—a pro-human civilization—in the later period of human history:



‘We shall show them Our signs in the universe and within themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth.’

(41: 53)

This verse clearly foretells the developments which took place in western nations one thousand years after the revelation of the Quran. This civilization of the West was, in reality, based on science. There are two aspects to this: the theoretical and the practical, or applied aspect.

The applied aspect of western civilization may also be called the technological aspect. It is this aspect which is mentioned in the following tradition of the Prophet:

The greatest benefit of these modern developments is that for the first time in human history the age of peace has been ushered in.

God will certainly support His religion with the *fajir* or non-believer. (*Sahih Bukhari*)

Fajir here means a secular person. This saying of the Prophet is, in fact, a prediction of the emergence of western civilization which, in essence, was pro-human. That is, it would benefit all of mankind as well as the divine religion.

Western or modern civilization is not the property of a certain race or community. It owes itself entirely to the discovery of hidden natural laws and the development of a technology which benefitted and still benefits the whole of humanity. For example, the discovery of the laws of nature introduced a new age of communication, from which everyone benefitted, including the proponents of the religion of Islam.

The evolution of western civilization has two sides to it. One pertains to the intellectual revolution brought about in the social and political world. For instance, one major step forward was the replacement of monarchy by democracy. The other side pertains to the benefits introduced by science and technology such as the modern means of communication. This has given people a thorough knowledge of geography, and facilitated travel from one place to another. The printing press too has greatly facilitated the dissemination of ideas across the whole world. Electronic technology has, indeed, turned the whole world into a global village. Now it has become possible to speak from one part of the globe and be heard and watched across the world.

The greatest benefit of these modern developments is that for the first time in human history the age of peace has been ushered in. In earlier periods of human history, battles had to be fought if any end was to be achieved. Everything was decided upon on the battlefield and because of this, a great number of human beings left this world without having performed their due role. In the wake of modern developments, for the first time in human history, it has become possible to achieve any target, great or small, through completely peaceful means.

Through long planning the Creator had brought about a revolution in human history, which brought the age of war to an end. In this way, it had become possible by using peaceful means to attain all ends in a way which was far better than the violent one which achieved nothing of any value.

This is the greatest achievement of the modern age. Those who adopt the method of war and violence in today's age only demonstrate that they are totally unaware of the modern developments of history. This crass ignorance is reflected in their reckless use of arms. By stooping to violence, they have committed the most heinous crime in history.

In such a situation, those who in the twenty-first century have abandoned the peaceful method and opted for the strategy of guns and bombs, are only proving that all they can carve out for themselves and others is a history of death and destruction, and in the Hereafter this verse of the Quran will apply to them:

Those of you who act thus shall be rewarded with disgrace in this world and with a severe punishment on the Day of Resurrection. (2: 85)



TRAINING IN WISDOM

In the Company of the Prophet

THE first ten years or so of a person's life is called the formative period. In this initial period of life, the major part of a person's character is formed. From the point of view of training, this phase of a person's life is of great importance.

In his lifetime, the Prophet of Islam specially selected two people for this purpose of training. One was Ali and the other was Aisha. He provided both of them the opportunity to be in his company when they were at a young age itself, and thereby they received training and obtained what is called prophetic wisdom in the Quran (2: 129).

This objective of training in wisdom can be achieved only at a young age. The method that the Prophet adopted to keep Ali in his company when the latter was still young, was by becoming his guardian. Aisha being a woman, adopting this method was not possible. Therefore, the Prophet married Aisha though she was very young.

Some people have tried to provide an interpretation of the issue of Aisha's age when she got married. But this is an unnecessary effort. This is a question of point of view. These people look at the issue from the point of view of marriage. But the actual matter was the issue of Aisha receiving training from the Prophet in the formative period of her life.

One way of benefitting from the Prophet was to preserve his sayings and to narrate them to people. Another way was by hearing the Prophet speak or observing him closely, and inferring principles of wisdom.

The results confirm this analysis and the issue is considered an established fact amongst Islamic scholars. They agree that Ali and Aisha occupied—in terms of insight and understanding of religion—a distinctive stature among the Companions of the Prophet.

One way of benefitting from the Prophet was to preserve his sayings and to narrate them to people. In this regard, Abu Hurayrah had the most prominent position among the Prophet's Companions. Another way was by hearing the Prophet speak or observing him closely, and inferring principles of wisdom through this. This second manner of learning from the Prophet could be obtained only through continuously

being in his company. For this second purpose, Ali and Aisha were chosen, at a young age.

Consider, for instance, this saying of Ali: 'The value of a person lies in what he excels in.' This point is not found in these same words in any *Hadith* of the Prophet. This is a piece of wisdom that Ali derived as a result of being in the company of the Prophet. This wisdom can be expressed as follows: 'The value of a person lies in his excellence.'

The same thing was true of Aisha. Aisha's inferences from the life of the Prophet are very famous. All her inferences offer great wisdom. She extracted these principles of wisdom by being in the company of the Prophet. Consider, for instance, this wise saying of Aisha: 'Whenever the Prophet had to choose between two options, he always opted for the easier of the two.' (*Sahih al-Bukhari*).

Words of the Prophet that others heard him say are called *Hadith*. The distinction of Ali and Aisha is that they not only related sayings of the Prophet, rather they observed the Prophet closely and then deduced principles through this observation. By living in the company of the Prophet they grasped his wisdom and insight, and then expressed them in their own language. This company greatly boosted their capacity to grasp matters. At a young age, the two of them benefitted a great deal from the Prophet's company. And they were able to share this wisdom with others for many years after the Prophet. □



Ego Versus Conscience

Psychological studies show that every human being is born with an ego and a conscience. If you follow the tit-for-tat policy, it arouses the ego of the other person, whereas if you follow the policy of forgiveness, it will activate the other person's conscience. And it is a fact that, in controversial matters, the conscience always plays a positive role.

WORSHIP IN ISLAM

Connect to God

GOD has stated in the Quran: "I only created mankind and the *Jinn* that they might worship Me." (51: 56). According to Islam, the principal goal of life on this earth, from day one, is for human beings to show profound reverence for their Creator. The individual who lives for worship has fulfilled the purpose of his life. Conversely, one who does not lead a life of self-dedication to God has become derailed. What is worship? Worship, the equivalent to devotion, means giving oneself up wholly to God: it means surrendering oneself in both the physical and the intellectual sense.

In Islam, there are four practices which are important and complementary aspects of *ibadat* (worship): *namaz* (prayer), *sawm* (fasting), *hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca) and *zakat* (alms-giving). These four forms of worship symbolise the nature of the extended worship required of human beings throughout their lives. *Namaz*, for instance, conditions human beings in modesty—a quality which gives a proper religious hue to all spheres of human existence.

Similarly, fasting inculcates patience, a virtue without which there can be no peace on earth. No less important is *zakat*, which is a gesture of well-wishing for humanity at large. *Hajj*, while affording spiritual benefit to the individual, aims at the uniting of all of God's servants under the

banner of His religion. Each of these categories of obligatory worship has a form as well as a spirit; just as the human being has a body as well as a soul—the one being inseparable from the other. The essence of each of these separate rites of Islamic worship is their spirit rather than their form. On *namaz* the Quran is explicit: "Successful indeed are the believers who are humble in their prayers." (23: 1-2)

Namaz (prayer), conditions human beings in modesty, fasting inculcates patience, a virtue without which there can be no peace on earth. Zakat is a gesture of well-wishing for humanity at large.

On the subject of fasting, we learn from a *Hadith* that the one who fasts, but who does not at the same time give up telling lies or practising other forms of deceit, is not truly fasting in the religious sense of the term, but is merely experiencing hunger and thirst.

Similarly, with regard to animal sacrifice, the Quran says: "Their flesh and blood do not reach God; it is your piety which reaches Him." (22: 37).

The Quran, moreover, makes it plain that when a servant of God turns to his Creator in worship, contact with Him is immediately established and without the intercession of any kind of intermediary. The act of worship, therefore, is a direct link between God and His servants. This has been variously expressed in the Quran and *Hadith*.

For instance, the Quran says: "Prostrate yourself and come closer to God." (96: 19) In the same vein, a *Hadith* tells us that when the worshipper is at his prayers, his contact with God may be established by the merest whisper. Islamic worship is, in fact, an acknowledgement at the spiritual level of man's servitude to God Almighty. When the individual finds himself engrossed in true worship, he feels as if he is seeing God, as if divine light has descended upon his inner being; as if he has come very close to God. The achievement; of such spiritual states is the real goal of worship. Any experience, which has such a profound effect upon a man's inner personality, must manifest itself in his external behaviour. Therefore, when an individual incorporates worship in his life on a regular basis, its effect becomes apparent in his moral conduct. Ultimately, his entire behaviour takes on the hue of his devotions.

Worship is not something extraneous, in the nature of an appendage. It is rather the mainspring of the truly religious life.

As the Quran puts it: "Surely prayer restrains one from indecency and evil." (29: 45). But it is only sincere, heartfelt worship which renders the believer worthy of receiving God's blessings. In prayer one's whole being should be involved. Worship devoid of this spirit and performed purely for show is fit only to be rejected by God as an empty ritual. The Quran mentions that it is only those who say their prayers in right earnest who will be ushered into Paradise and it admonishes those who are only posturing when they pray: "Woe to those who pray, but whose hearts are not in their prayer. Those who do things only to be seen by others. Who are uncharitable even over very small things." (107: 4-7). For the true believer, worship is not something extraneous, in the nature of an appendage. It is rather the mainspring of the truly religious life. In essence, Islam is a holistic spiritual system, and worship being the key factor builds and ensures the continuance of a relationship between the Almighty and His creatures, His servants give expression to their love, humility, reverence, obedience and devotion, in return for which they may expect their Maker to look upon them with His divine mercy and magnanimity. □

LEARNING ABOUT LIFE FROM THE FAMILY

Continuous Experience

THE family is a unit of larger humanity. The conditions found at the macro-level in mankind are also found, on a smaller scale, within each family. In this sense, for every person, the family serves as a training school. Within our own families, we can learn all the many things that are necessary in order to lead a successful life in this world. But there is one condition for this—you must not idolize your family. You should view your family in just the same way as you view other people.

It sounds strange, but it's true: you can find all the many different types of characters that exist in the world among members of your own family! For everyone, one's family is like the legendary cup of the Persian king Jamshid. If you looked into this cup, so the story went, you could see every single thing in the universe! In the mirror of your family you can see models of all sorts of moral standards, high and low. In this way, by interactions with one's family members, one can gain valuable experience. The wisdom gained from these experiences will be of immense help in the course of planning realistically.

Most people fall prey to a one-sided way of thinking about members of their families. This is due to lack of objective, unbiased thinking.

Very few of us, however, take proper advantage of these potential learning experiences afforded to us by our families. Why does one miss out on such a learning opportunity? There is just one reason for this—it is lack of objective, unbiased thinking. Most people fall prey to a very one-sided way of thinking about members of their families. They ignore or seek to ignore the faults of their near and dear ones. They view people outside their families critically, but they generally don't think in the same way when it comes to their family members. Because of this, they fail to draw the lessons they could from both members of their families as well as others. □



DEATH: A DEMOLISHER OF DESIRES

Live Life Better

Every human being is bound to taste death. (THE QURAN 3: 185)

THE Quran reminds us that our deaths have been decided by God. We are brought to life by God's decision. Likewise, death, too, happens because God wills it so.

Unlike what many people believe, death is not an accident. Rather, it is a test. If we think of death as an accident, it leads us to be miserable. On the other hand, if we accept death as a reality, we can be fired with a new determination. Accepting the above concept of death will create a mindset wherein a person will take life seriously resulting in motivating him to live a God oriented life. It will prevent him from misusing God given freedom.

Everyone who is born into this world has been born in order to go through an examination. For each of us, a certain period of time has been decreed for this examination. Once this period of time is over, the angel of death appears to take our souls and convey us to the world of the Hereafter.

We need to be realistic—to face the reality as it is—on the question of death. We must accept death as an undeniable fact. We need to take death as a means to learn appropriate lessons, not as something to regret or mourn about.

Along with acceptance one should also remember death often as it demolishes all desires. Just as the one who accepts the reality of death, will become exceedingly serious, the one who remembers death often will become very conscious of the accountability for each and every deed he does in this world. He will be extra careful to spend his time, talent and energy for doing good in this world and refrain from going towards what gives him pleasure. He will train himself to be a paradisiacal personality.

The Prophet of Islam said, "Remember death often because it demolishes all desires." (*Sunan Ibn Majah*).

We need to accept death as an undeniable fact. We must take death as a means to learn appropriate lessons, not as something to regret or mourn about.

Death is a sort of personal earthquake. Just as people have no control over an earthquake, they have no control over death, a unilateral attack that everyone must face, some day or the other. Death comes whenever it decides to, and man simply has to accept it, whether he likes it or not.

But none of us know when our last moment in this world will arrive. This realization is enough to make every worldly pleasure unattractive for every person. Wealth, political power, fame etc, everything comes to be seen as utterly meaningless.

This matter is not limited just to conventional material pleasures, but is wider than this. For instance, people's minds are such that if they develop differences with somebody, they derive great pleasure in doing their character assassination. Disfiguring their image becomes their favourite pastime. They begin to think that talking bad about them is a good thing, even though what they say is baseless.

If people were to live in awareness of death, they would have abstained from such negative talk because they would know that as soon as death arrives, all this talk would become baseless and there would be no one to listen to it. One's unpleasant experience with others might cause one to engage in negative activities. But the thought of death keeps in check these negativities in a person, as he realizes that his life in this world is only temporary.

Being ever conscious of death, will actually make us live better. We will value everything we possess today in terms of time and resources and make use of it to the best of our abilities. The constant thought that one day all this will be taken away from us, will be a great motivator for putting it to the best use today. □



Defuse

*If someone provokes you,
defuse the issue through
unilateral avoidance.*

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 Rocky Tract

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Alif Lam Ra.

These are the verses of a clear Book, the Quran. A time will surely come when those who are bent on denying the truth will wish that they had surrendered themselves to God, so leave them to eat and enjoy themselves and let them be beguiled by vain hopes; for soon they will realize [the truth]. We have never destroyed a township without a definite decree having been issued; no people can forestall their doom, nor can they delay it. (15: 1-5)

The freedom enjoyed by man will last only for the duration of the period of testing. This is a very critical issue. If a man seriously thinks this problem over, he will feel that the period which is going to end tomorrow has, as it were, ended today itself. This thought will shake him terribly. But man lives his life in 'today'. He does not pay attention to 'tomorrow'. Reality lies exposed before him, but he remains engrossed in wishful thinking. He seeks out some imaginary supports of his own devising and thinks that they will help him on the Day of Judgement.

But such wishful thinking will not come to his rescue when the period of testing is over and God's angels come to take him away from the world of trial to the world of retribution.

At a time like this, he starts remembering the occasions when he had tried to reject a genuine argument by mouthing false words; when he had ignored the voice of his conscience and followed the desires of the self; when purely out of self-interest he had ignored the divine preacher of truth, in spite of seeing glimpses of God in him. When he

sees that no device of his has been of any avail, he will say, 'Alas! I should not have done what I have done! I should have adopted the way of one who surrenders to the Truth instead of the way of one who rejects the Truth.'

They say, 'You to whom the Reminder [the Quran] has been sent down, you are surely possessed. Why do you not bring down the angels upon us, if you are truthful?' But We send down the angels only to bring justice and then they will not be reprieved. (15: 6-8)

The addressees of the Prophet Muhammad suspected him of being mad. What was the reason for this? The reason for this was his declaration that he was a representative of God; that one who accepted his word would be successful, while one who did not would remain a failure.

But the addressees themselves actually perceived things to be just the opposite. They were of the view that the prevalent system had bestowed the position of leadership on them. On the contrary, the Prophet, due to his being a preacher of an unconventional religion, was a stranger and a man without a status in the prevalent system. Because of these apparent shortcomings, the addressees were emboldened to say that he (the Prophet) appeared to them to be a madman. They said, 'God has given us all kinds of worldly glories, yet still you say that success lies with you and your supporters.'

But such thinking was caused by a difference in perception. The addressees regarded whatever was material in their possession as 'rewards', though all of these things were simply a means of trial, given to all and sundry on a temporary basis.

They also used to say, 'You claim that the angels of God come to you. Then why are these angels not visible to us?' This comment too was due to a difference of point of view. An angel who comes to a prophet is the angel of revelation. He brings God's words to the prophet. Besides this angel there are other angels of God who come to the people in order to uncover the reality to them. But they come after the process of conveying the truth to the people is over. And when they come, it is the time for judgement and not the time for calling people to the faith.

It is We who have sent down the Reminder [the Quran] and We will, most surely, safeguard it. (15: 9)

The Quran, revealed by God in an age steeped in tradition—many centuries before the modern, scientific age—was a controversial book which presented a challenge to the whole of humanity. It set a definite standard for mankind to observe until Doomsday. If it was to survive,

it needed a strong group to protect and preserve it. But there was no such group. The early Muslims were extremely weak as compared to their many enemies. Moreover, in the seventh century A.D., paper and the printing press had not yet come into existence. Yet the Quran has remained intact, in the original Arabic, till the present day. There are several reasons for its survival. One is that the absolute veracity of its statements have stood the test of time. Another is that strenuous efforts were immediately made to write down the divine revelations and commit them to memory. But the most compelling reason was that God Himself had ensured its safekeeping, 'We will, most surely, safeguard it.'

We sent messengers before you to the previous peoples, but there was never a messenger who came to them but they mocked him: thus We cause this [habit of mocking] to enter into the hearts of the sinful.

They will not believe in it, though they have before them the example of former peoples, and even if We opened to them a door from heaven, and they began ascending through it, they would still say, 'Our eyes have been dazzled. We are bewitched.' (15: 10-15)

God's prophets were scoffed at in every age. The reason for this was that people judged their worth as representatives of God by self-devised, imaginary standards. The contemporary prophets did not appear to match up to the said standards, and so were dismissed as objects of ridicule.

In order to discover a new reality, it is necessary for a man to think with an open mind and be prepared to form an opinion purely on the basis of facts. Those who reject the truth do so mostly because the truth appears to them strange in relation to their own familiar standards. Over a long period of time those familiar standards permeate their hearts to such an extent that it becomes impossible for them to think of accepting alternatives. Till the last moment they are unable to emerge from the sphere familiar to them and recognize the truth.

The result of this attitude in communities was that the people belonging to them, in spite of being shown miracles, did not embrace the faith. Once they judged a prophet to be an ordinary man, basing their opinion on purely material factors, the person so judged could never be anything more than ordinary in their eyes. Even if he performed supernatural feats in front of them, their ideas were so rooted in the earlier traditions that he went on seeming unimportant, and so they would hold that his feats were just magic or some optical illusion and not a proof of his being a representative of God. □

ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

What comprehensive advice would you give related to welfare, both for this world and for the Hereafter?

In the light of the Quran, my answer is, "Adopt the method of patience, and then, with God's blessings, you will be successful in this world, and in the Hereafter, too."

The fact is that there is a permanent divine guide within man. And that is, man's conscience. The human conscience is an unerring guide. It always guides man in the direction of the right path. But in addition to this, man has various types of desires. In the Quran, the conscience is called *nafs al-lawwama* and desires are called *nafs al-ammara*.

Man's conscience gives him, at every moment and opportunity, the right guidance. But along with this, man's desires seek to drag him in their direction. In this way, a conflict emerges between man's conscience and man's desires. In this conflict, often desires overpower the conscience, and man, ignoring the voice of his conscience, runs after his desires. This happens both in the case of worldly affairs as well as the affairs of the Hereafter.

In such a delicate situation, it is patience that proves of benefit to man. If you are able to be patient, you can control your desires. In this way, you will not deviate from the Straight Path. Following your conscience, you will be able to carry on journeying in the right direction till you arrive at your destination. That is why the Quran (39: 10) says "Truly, those who persevere patiently will be rewarded without measure."

In practical terms, in life the importance of a passive attribute is more than that of an active attribute. Someone who knows only to act but not to stop can never obtain any higher-level of success in life. Life is like a car. If a car does not have a brake, then, no matter how otherwise good the car is, it cannot reach its destination. The importance of patience in life is like the importance of a brake in a car.

What is the importance of trials in our lives?

According to a *Hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad said: "Indeed, greater reward comes with greater trial. And indeed, when God loves a people



He subjects them to trials, so whoever is content, then for him is pleasure, and whoever is discontent, then for him is wrath." (*Sunan at-Tirmidhi*)

From this *Hadith* we learn that trials are a means for our spiritual development. We face different types of shocks. Tests and trials of life shake up our minds and our hidden potentials are awakened.

While undergoing these unpleasant experiences if you wallow in negative emotions, and allow yourself to fall prey to anger, start living in frustration and complaint, you will fail in the test. You do not gain anything positive from the tests. But in contrast, if you are intellectually awakened, you will be able to maintain your balance when faced with a test. Despite unfavourable experiences, you will preserve your positive thinking. You will be able to extract goodness from the trials you go through.

Trials always appear to come to us in the form of problems. People who panic when faced with a problem will not get anything from trying situations, other than complaint and despair. But those who regard trials as part of God's Plan, face them with a positive mind-set. It is these people for whom trials of life work as a means for increasing their reward.

With God, there is no lack of reward. But one gets a great reward from God, only when one develops a great deservingness for it. And there is just one means for making oneself deserving of great reward—one must, in every condition, remain steadfastly positive in one's thinking. Your positive thinking must remain firmly in place, and no event should cause you to waver.

Who is a complete person?

He is someone in whom the human attributes are found in the fullest possible manner. God has given every human being attributes in potential form. A complete person embodies these attributes to the maximum possible extent. Such a person has a balanced character. He is free from psychological complexes. He lets his conscience prevail over his ego in every situation, until he becomes an emblem of a soul at peace. (89: 27)

A complete person is one who, passing over the material things of the world, begins to live in the higher realities of life. He rises above things of superficial importance and engages himself in matters of deeper significance. He reaches the stage of perception described in a *Hadith* as the ability to "see things as they are". Such a person thus begins to see

things as they truly are, rather than as they externally appear to be. He willingly bows down before a reasoned argument just as a person bows down before might. He judges matters on their true merit, not because they may be for or against him. Despite having great capabilities, he develops in himself modesty. He is free from every sort of negative emotion. He relates to people without making any distinction of 'friend' and 'stranger'. He is completely above personal interest. Instead of living in his own self, he lives by the higher principles of life.

God has made every human being a complete person in the potential sense. But to turn this potential 'completeness' into a reality, that is, in the form of a real character, is a task for each person to do. A verse in the Quran speaks of this reality in these words: "We have indeed created man in the best of mould, then We cast him down as the lowest of the low." (95: 4-5). According to this verse, every person born on earth becomes a case of the "lowest of the low". It is a person's own conscious effort that makes him reach the stage described by the phrase, "best of mould".

The secret of becoming a complete person lies in inculcating a sense of deep God-consciousness. It is the fear of God that makes someone a complete person. There is no other way of becoming a complete person. □



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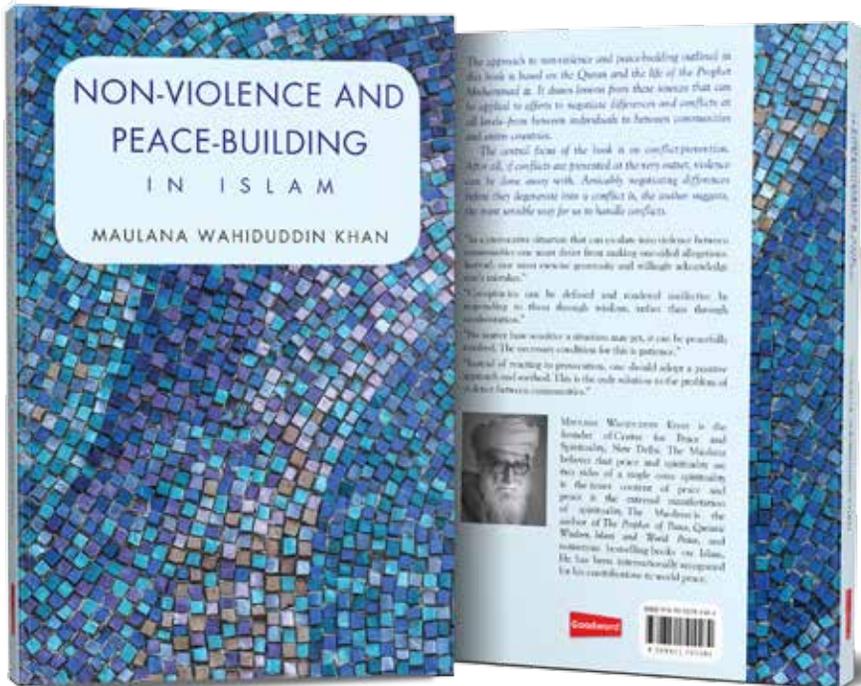
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