

ENGLISH MONTHLY ISSUE 67 JULY 2018 ₹35

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



Replan your course of action on positive lines;
the result will be miraculous.

ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

Spirit of Islam is a monthly magazine which is now in its sixth year of publication. The aim of this journal is to present Islam in the contemporary idiom, while at the same time the contents are of universal appeal and of interest to a wider circle of spiritual seekers. It is our desire to help Muslims rediscover Islam, focusing on its message of peace and spirituality as derived from the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet, and in general we strive towards religious understanding for bringing about greater harmony.

Another purpose of this magazine is to assist its readers to deal with life's challenges, deriving positivity even from negative occurrences, gaining in spirituality and developing themselves intellectually so that they may contribute constructively to society.

The magazine's regular readers will appreciate that the entire thrust of its articles is directed to the individual—a collection of intellectually prepared individuals being the sole foundation on which a peaceful and harmonious society can be built.

As the subtitle indicates, *Spirit of Islam* is working towards enlightening people on the subject of global peace and regularly addresses relevant contemporary issues. The articles on peace based on the teachings of the Prophet of Islam offer us an ideology of peace—principles which lay down how peace may be established between conflicting groups, controversies resolved and conflicts defused. We believe that violence begins in the mind and so an effective ideology of peace needs to be presented to counter its influence.

We hope and pray that God helps us in this noble endeavour and grants us His special blessings!



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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

ISSUE 67 JULY 2018

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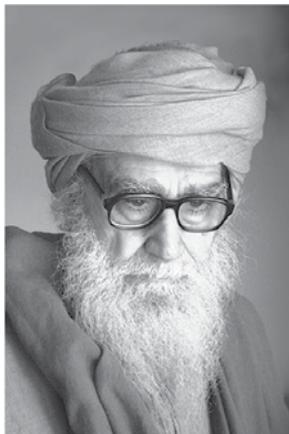
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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.

THE PROPHET OF WISDOM

A CERTAIN journalist of my acquaintance has met all kinds of people during the decade he has worked in his profession. I put a question to him: "You have met many people. Whom did you find possessing 100% clarity of thought?" He pondered over this, then he replied: "I have not found anyone who has cent per cent clarity of thought."

I said, "Clarity of thought is always the result of wisdom. When there is no wisdom there is no clarity of thought. It is, in fact, because of lack of wisdom that people do not think clearly." Then I asked him, "What is wisdom?" When he could not give a clear answer, I gave him this definition:

"Wisdom is the ability to discover the relevant by sorting out the irrelevant."

If you consult the dictionary, you will find that there is no agreed upon definition of wisdom. People define wisdom differently. All available definitions of wisdom are vague and unspecific. For example, the

1. The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims 2018, Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, Jordan.

Oxford dictionary defines wisdom as the quality of being wise, but the principle by adopting which, one can become a wise person, is not made clear in the dictionary.

Wisdom is accepted as the greatest quality of any human being. According to the Quran, the Prophet of Islam was the Prophet of '*Hikmah*', that is, the Prophet of wisdom. There are several thousand of the Prophet's sayings recorded in the books of *Hadith*, but I failed to find any specific academic definition in the printed *Hadith* literature.

Then I applied a practical method: if the Prophet of Islam was a prophet of wisdom, then we must find wisdom in his planning and activities. The American writer Dr. Michael Hart declared in his book, *The 100*, "Out of all the hundred super achievers in history, Muhammad tops the list." He was a supremely successful person in the whole of human history. It is more than certain that he achieved such success by applying wisdom

From all the known activities of the Prophet that led him to success, we can find that in all of his planning, he exercised the formula of patience (sabr).

in his mission, as he was a wise person, as is declared by the Quran itself. Then I studied the activities of the Prophet and, from this angle, he does emerge as the most successful person in human history.

I analyzed all the known activities of the Prophet that led him to such heights of success. I discovered that, in all of his planning, he exercised the formula of patience (*sabr*). He always adopted the formula of patience that is given thus in the Quran: *Walrujza fahjur*

(74: 5). Here, '*fahjur*' means avoid and '*rujz*' means an undesirable aspect, in other words: avoid the unwanted aspect of things and plan on the basis of the available opportunities.

For example, let us take his planning when he was at Makkah, the site of the sacred Kabah which was built by Prophet Abraham about four thousand years ago. In the first quarter of the 7th century, when the Prophet started his mission in ancient Makkah, the Kabah was dominated by unbelievers.

The Prophet of Islam never reacted to this situation. He studied the situation and found that this assembly was a potential audience for his message. By addressing this gathering he was able to spread his mission all over Arabia. He applied wisdom to the situation and engaged in wise planning. He ignored the presence of religious practices which were opposite to his mission of monotheism and availed of the opportunity to further his mission.

There are many such cases of planning in the life of the Prophet. By studying these events, I discovered the academic definition of wisdom: "Wisdom is the ability to discover the relevant by sorting out the irrelevant."

Such wisdom is applicable under all circumstances and, by adopting it, the followers of the Prophet can achieve super success in all situations including the modern international scene. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

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We tend to lose
whatever is second best
on account of just one
reason, and that is,
our futile pursuit of
the very best.

FROM THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Dr. Farida Khanam has been a professor at the Department of Islamic Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi. A Study of World's Major Religions, A Simple Guide to Sufism are two of the books amongst many others, of which she is the author. She has also translated many books on Islam authored by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan. Currently, the chairperson of Centre for Peace and Spirituality (CPS International), an organization founded by her father Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, she is a regular contributor of articles to journals, newspapers and magazines. Dr. Khanam has edited Maulana's English translation of the Quran and has also translated his Urdu commentary of the Quran into English. Under Maulana Wahiduddin Khan Peace Foundation, along with the CPS team, she has designed a series of courses on peace-building, countering extremism and conflict resolution.

SPIRITUAL ROLE OF WOMEN

STUDIES show that women have been specially gifted by nature with such qualities as fit them for the role of bringing about peace and harmony in society in times of conflict. These qualities are gentleness, selflessness, compassion, mildness and, above all, a spiritual approach to life. A study of history tells us that women have always played this role, albeit mostly on the home front.

It is a matter of common knowledge that women have always contributed greatly to normalizing conditions at home by relieving tensions and resolving conflicts. The softness of their approach to problems and their marked capacity for pacifying are clearly attributes which will eliminate stress.

When we look at Islamic history, the first instance we find of such positive feminine influence is that of Khadija, the wife of the Prophet. When the Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation from the angel in the cave of Hira, it was a totally new experience for him, and he trembled in fear of what he had seen and heard. He immediately set off for his home after the disappearance of the angel. When he had regained his composure, he related the incident to Khadija. She did her best to assure him that no harm would come to him as he always spoke the truth, helped the poor and those in distress, and invariably treated others with respect. With these reassuring words,

she successfully calmed him down, employing all her natural gifts of gentleness, sympathy, understanding, and, above all, selfless love.

After the Prophet of Islam left this world, great differences arose among Muslims in many matters. During his lifetime, all such issues had been referred to him for a solution. But after the demise of the Prophet, it was now left to his wife Aisha, who had been under his training for many years, to play the very positive role of guide and mentor. Having become fully imbued with the spirit of Islam, she used to give guidance to both male and female Companions of the Prophet. In this way, she successfully resolved such differences.

However, in those days there was no platform from which her example could benefit the general public, nor was there the media—such as we have nowadays—to cover such roles and place them on record. In most of the cultures in ancient and medieval societies, women remained indoors and played their role within the confines of their own homes. That is why we know so little about the contribution of women in this arena.

The most prominent name of a woman within the Sufi tradition is that of Rabia Basri (713-801). She was born in 713 CE. into a poor family in Basra, Iraq. She devoted her life to worshipping God and serving others. She lived a life of extreme asceticism, and a large number of disciples gathered around her. Her mystical sayings have become proverbial.

Women have always contributed greatly to normalizing conditions at home by relieving tensions and resolving conflicts.

The spiritual role of women has never been properly realized because of the failure to institutionalize their role in society.

In Rabia Basri's times, Muslim society was rent with great religious differences. But her strong spiritual personality exerted such a powerful influence that people eventually forgot their doctrinal differences and rallied around her. She laid emphasis on pure divine love, which alone could minimize all these differences.

The Prophet of Islam said: "Men and women are two equal halves of a single unit."

Teachings to this effect in the Quran and *Hadith* ushered in a new age of gender equality. With this new-found freedom, women were able to play a great role in society, particularly women who belonged to royal families. They were highly educated by the standards of their times,

and, in royal circles, with greater social exposure, they had better opportunities to exert their influence.

One such woman was Maryam Makani, the mother of Akbar, the Mughal emperor of India. Once, Mullah Abdun Nabi, Akbar's teacher, insulted the emperor before the entire court. Akbar was enraged and wanted to punish him. This could have meant even the death sentence for the offender. But Akbar's mother intervened and successfully managed to calm him down. She told him that his pardon would go down in history; that history would remember that 'an emperor, having all the power at his disposal, forgave an offender'.

Such incidents abound in history, but because the central figures were usually either a mother, like Maryam Makani, or a daughter or wife of an emperor—women who were already famous because of their royal kinship—people failed to perceive how their roles could go beyond this framework and become applicable to general situations in society.

The spiritual role of women has never been properly realized because of the failure to institutionalize their role in society.

Both biological and historical studies show that women have been specially gifted with qualities required for the establishment of social harmony. In the Muslim case, this potential of women has never been properly realized because of the failure to institutionalize their role in Muslim society.

Had Muslim women been trained to perform this task, they would have been able to play this role far more effectively, and on a far greater scale. The need of the hour today is to institutionalize this role and give proper training to women so that this capability with which women have been so abundantly endowed by nature may be fully harnessed.

Once this feminine potential has been realized, the world will definitely be a better place for all to live in. □

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MAN AND GOD

Living with Conviction

ANTHROPOLOGY is a discipline which deals with the study of man. It has studied man in detail since ancient times. Of the many things these studies reveal, one important thing is that the concept of God is interwoven very deeply in human nature. Every man and woman is born with the concept of God. Consciously or unconsciously one is compelled to lead one's life with this concept.

Studies show that God is a necessity for man. Man being an explanation seeking being, he wants to explain his existence and the world around him but, owing to his limitations he feels himself helpless. This feeling of helplessness can be overcome only by accepting a limitless Being like God. Experience shows that every person lives a life of unfulfilled desires. It is God alone who provides hope for their fulfilment. Man, owing to his peculiar nature, wants to lead his life in conviction. And there is no other source of this conviction save that of God.

Man requires a goal for his activities in order that he may continue his journey with satisfaction and a sense of fulfilment.

Study shows that all the human beings believe in God in one way or the other. Even the apparent atheists, when faced with some crisis, call out to God instinctively. In this matter there is no known exception of any person.

Every human being is born with the concept of God. Consciously or unconsciously he is compelled to lead his life with this concept.

Now the question arises as to why then these believers in God do not find the result which is expected from such belief. Why even the believers in God are deprived of divine inspiration? They do not enjoy peace of mind. Even those who have put up boards in their homes and offices with such wordings as: "We trust in God" are deprived of God's blessing, which should have come to them because of trusting in God in the real sense. These believers in God feel that they have not been able to establish communion with God. Despite belief in God, people's lives are bereft of divine blessings.

The reason is that people usually associate themselves with some or the other non-God. Although they utter such words as 'they believe in God' but in practice they have associated themselves with some or the other non-god. At times some living or dead human being is given the

pedestal of divinity (godhead), while some believe in the concepts of nature worship. Some, under the influence of humanism have accorded the seat of God to man, what is called 'transfer of seat from God to Man' in the jargon of humanism, and yet others have discovered the law of nature as an alternative to God. Some believe in the monistic concept of God, according to which God is a vague spirit, rather than a Being with whom contact may be established.

The solution to this problem is that everyone should re-examine this entire matter. If a person is serious, he will certainly reach the conclusion that he has to discover the system of thought in which he may find the concept of God in its pure form. This is the problem facing all of human kind. Every person believes, ideologically, in one god or the other. But so far as the result of such belief is concerned, it is not

Man, owing to his peculiar nature, wants to lead his life in conviction. And there is no other source of this conviction save that of God.

forthcoming. Every person, from his own personal experience can understand that this problem is not one of lack of belief but it is one of lack of result of belief in God. This is a universal truth which anyone can understand from their own personal experience.

A number of scholars have carried out research regarding this issue and have tried to find the answer. One of these being a highly educated Bengali scholar, Dr. Nishikant Chattopadhyay. He related his findings at great length in one of his lectures delivered

in Hyderabad (Deccan) in 1904. This lecture has now been published in the form of a booklet. That is, in this matter, the actual problem is that all the religions revealed before the 7th century AD., gave the concept of one God but in later times their original text could not be preserved by their followers. In every religion the concept of God became subject to human interpolations. Hence the original teaching regarding the concept of God could not be preserved.

Islam came to the world in the first quarter of the seventh century. Although Islam too was a religion like other religions, the distinctive feature of Islam is that its original text, the Quran was fully preserved.

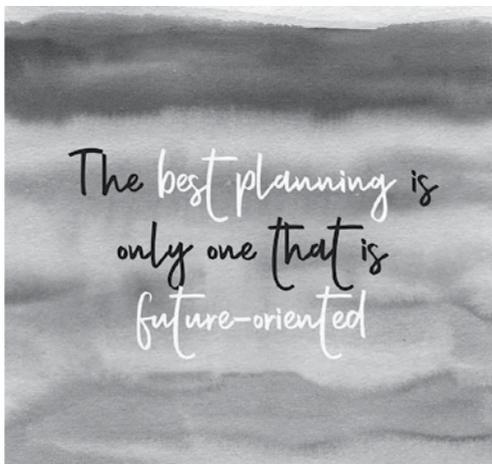
According to the Quran, the sacred book of God, God is one. He alone is the Creator and the Lord of man and the universe. He is sustainer of the entire universe. God is a living being. He sees and hears. At every moment and at every place it is possible for man to contact God directly, without the need for any intermediary. God Almighty can compensate

for all shortcomings in man. God will come to man's rescue in both pre-death and post-death period. God is a limitless source of solace and peace. God in every matter provides guidance to man through His prophets.

God being the Creator and sustainer of man knows man's constitution in the full sense. He is aware of human requirements to the full extent. That is why God alone can understand the needs of human beings and He alone can provide for all his needs. This One God alone can be the God of man. All other supposed beings do not have the capability of fulfilling the human requirement.

Man in every age has been inherently desirous of a concept of God. Religions in every age have furnished man with knowledge about God in response to the urge of his nature. Since in ancient times the method of writing and copying manuscripts was far from flawless, religious books could not be preserved in their original or pristine form. Finally in the beginning of the 7th century the Quran was revealed. Owing to the meticulous arrangements made for its preservation, it became possible that the Quran remained fully preserved in its original form.

Easy translations in several languages are available for people to go through the Quran which has answers to many questions which arise in the minds regarding our life on earth and the concept of God and His creation plan. □



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 IN AFGHANISTAN

Bogor conference: Terrorism, suicide attacks violate Islamic principles, say Muslim scholars

Bogor, Indonesia: Muslim scholars from three countries issued an edict on Saturday saying that violent extremism and terrorism, including suicide attacks, are against Islamic principles, in an effort to convince the Taliban to end their violence. Seventy prominent scholars from **Afghanistan**, Pakistan and Indonesia issued the fatwa, or edict, at a conference in Indonesia on ways to achieve peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Taliban warning

The Taliban urged Islamic clerics to boycott the Bogor conference and warned Afghan clerics, “Do not afford an opportunity to the invading infidels in Afghanistan to misuse your name and participation in this conference as means of attaining their malicious objective.” Indonesian President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo, who opened the one-day meeting, stressed Indonesia’s commitment to helping build peace in the country. Mr. Widodo said the conference was part of Indonesia’s efforts to encourage the role of Islamic clerics, or ulema, in promoting peace in Afghanistan.

“Through the voice of *ulema*, mainly from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Indonesia, presumably the spirit of brotherhood for peace in Afghanistan can be strengthened,” Mr. Widodo said.

The Indonesian leader said: “*Ulema* are the agents of peace ... they have the power to form the face of peaceful people.” In a declaration, the scholars said Islam was a religion of peace and denounced all kinds of violent extremism and terrorism.

“We reaffirm that violence and terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group, as violent extremism and terrorism in all its forms and manifestation, including violence against civilians and suicide attacks, are against the holy principles of Islam,” the declaration said.

The conference at the presidential palace in Bogor, a West Java town on the outskirts of Jakarta, was organized by the Indonesian Ulema Council.

From media reports Sat, May 12 2018. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/> □



Happiness

is a result of intellectual management
and not a result of material achievement.

ISLAM AND POLITICS

Will of Society

IN making an assessment of Islam in relation to politics, one crucial point must be taken into consideration, about politics being only a relative and not the real part of Islam. This difference between a real and a relative feature is what is essential and relevant in all circumstances and at all times, whereas the relative feature is required only in relation to particular sets of circumstances. Wherever such circumstances do not exist, relative features lose their relevance and therefore their desirability. This difference between the real and relative is illustrated by the Quranic injunction to perform the Hajj pilgrimage: "Pilgrimage to the House of God is a duty to God for all who can make the journey." (3: 97)

The wording of the command to perform Hajj shows that it is not obligatory for all believers in an absolute sense. It is obligatory rather for those who have the means and the resources, and who are in good health to reach the place of pilgrimage.

In making an assessment of Islam in relation to politics, one crucial point must be taken into consideration, politics being only a relative and not the real part of Islam.

This injunction does not imply that those who do not have the means should make superhuman efforts to find the wherewithal for the journey, so that they may perform this ritual worship. The injunction only means that those who have the means should perform the pilgrimage and those who do not will not only be exempted, but will not even be held accountable for having failed to do so.

The same is true of politics. That is, if a group of Muslims find themselves in a position to establish the political system of Islam by peaceful methods, and without any violence, then the *Shariah* will require them to do exactly that. But for those who do not find themselves in such a position, it is not their bounden duty to establish an Islamic political system, nor are they required to set in motion political initiatives calculated to create opportunities to do so.

That is why the Quran at no point gives the following command: "O Muslims, establish the political system of Islam." On the contrary, the Quran makes such clear statements about government and politics as prove that they are relative and not the real parts of Islam. For instance, addressing the believers the Quran says:

God has promised those among you who believe and do good works that He will grant them power in the land as He granted to those before them; and that He will surely establish for them their religion which He has chosen for them. He will cause their state of fear to be replaced by a sense of security. Let them worship Me and associate no other with Me. Whoever still chooses to deny the truth is truly rebellious. (24: 55)

From this it is abundantly clear that political power is a gift from God and is far from being a matter of a goal to be attained by human efforts. That is, it is not the Islamic way to launch movements with the aim of achieving political ascendancy. On the contrary, the objective of the Islamic struggle is to inculcate in people the Islamic character and the true spirit of Islam. And then, if, in any given society, a large number of people were to become imbued with this true spirit, a time might come when God in His wisdom bestows them with political authority.

Similarly, the Quran says for the benefit of the believers: "God will surely help him who helps His cause—God is indeed Powerful and Mighty. They are those who, if We established them in the land, would say their prayers regularly and pay the alms tax, enjoin good and forbid evil." (22: 40-41)

From the following verse also, we learn from God's injunction to the Prophet that the matter of political power rests entirely in the hands of God: "Say, Lord, Sovereign of all sovereignty, You bestow sovereignty on whom You will, and take it away from whom You please." (3: 26)

That is why political power cannot be the goal to which believers direct their efforts. The first and foremost duty of the believers is for all of them, as individuals and without exception, to fulfil their personal obligations to the utmost extent. Afterwards, if circumstances are conducive, and they receive political power purely by the grace of God, the responsibility of moral governance will fall upon them, as is mentioned in the above-quoted verse.

It must be conceded that the establishment of an Islamic state is the responsibility not of individuals but of the society to which they belong. In Islam there are certain injunctions of an individual and personal nature, such as ritual fasting, which depend solely upon the will of the individual for their accomplishment. But the establishment of a political system on the basis of Islam depends upon the will of society as a whole. Only if there is a Muslim society possessed of the collective will to accept and institute Islamic government, can a political system based on Islam with all its social caveats, be established. □

THE CAUSE OF DISSATISFACTION

Homesickness

IN the present world, every person lives to a great extent with a sense of dissatisfaction. It is true of almost every person that he lives with the feeling of loss and not with the feeling of gain. This condition is so common that there are very few exceptions to it.

The real reason for this dissatisfaction is 'homesickness'. As is well known, when man was born, he was settled in Paradise. It was, as if Paradise was the home of man. But later on, man was cast out of Paradise and sent to the planet earth. In this respect all those who are existing here on earth are living here as refugees. This is the real cause of people's dissatisfaction. Unconsciously, every human being has become homesick. No human pleasure has been successful in removing this feeling.

The real cause of people's dissatisfaction is that every human being has become homesick. Homesick for his original home, Paradise.

The solution to this issue is just one and that is, to make man aware of the creation plan of God. The divine message should be given to all people that they are here on earth only on a temporary basis and if they endeavour to do good deeds, they will make themselves eligible to receive the blessings of Paradise again.

When anyone travels to his home town, he has to face different kinds of difficulties on the journey, but he has the satisfaction of knowing that after a few hours, he will eventually reach his destination. If people were to become aware of the creation plan of God, they too would come to look upon themselves as travelers with just few hours to go to complete the journey. Hope and the feeling of success in the future will make the problems of the present insignificant. This is the only way to relieve people of their feelings of dissatisfaction and tension. In this situation, there can be no other effective plan. □



DESTINY AND FREEWILL

Balanced

IS man's life predestined or determined by his freewill? Is man free to choose his path or is he helpless? The answer to this question is that in one sense, man is free, but in another sense he is helpless. It is a matter of fifty-fifty or equal share. In our daily lives, each one of us goes about doing things with freedom. But, along with this, we repeatedly feel that there are powers beyond our control which cannot be ignored or else, we will be unable to do our work.

What are these two seemingly opposite factors? One is our individual personalities and the other is the conditions and circumstances within which we act. These conditions or circumstances can be called an 'infrastructure' which is established by nature. As far as our own selves are concerned, we are totally free. We have the freedom to think and speak as we please, to direct our lives in whichever direction we want. In this sense, we are completely free.

But as far as the 'infrastructure' within which we operate is concerned, we do not have the power to change it or to plan our course of action by ignoring it. For instance, if you walk, it is something that you choose to do. But to walk, you need the earth beneath your feet. You need gravity below you. You need atmospheric pressure above you. These things are part of the external 'infrastructure', without which you cannot walk. The same is true for everything in the context of which we do our actions.

Similarly, our birth—place, family, conditions, gender—are predetermined for us. We have no choice in these matters.

Man lies between two different and distinct considerations—in one sense, he is free, and in another, he is helpless and compelled.

This state of affairs tells us that in this world, man lies between two different and distinct considerations—in one sense, he is free, and in another, he is helpless and compelled. In terms of using his will, he is completely free. But he is helpless in the sense that he cannot use his free will without the infrastructure that has been established by the Creator. The right position in this matter is one of balance—a middle-position between freedom, compulsion and predetermined aspects.

The debate about freewill and predetermination is an ancient one. Ancient philosophers and others who came after them have written

much about this. But someone who reads all that they have written is likely to get very confused. Man seeks a clear answer on this issue, but he does not find it in the enormous corpus of writings on this subject. This is because, ordinarily, people veer to one or the other side of the issue. They either think that it is total freedom that prevails or that we are totally predetermined.

*Life is evenly
balanced between
both freewill and
divine will, between
freedom and fate.*

This one-sided thinking approach is not proper. If a writer argues for total freedom, the reader is left thinking that he has ignored the element of predetermination. If the writer says that everything in life is preordained, the reader feels he has ignored man's freewill. And this leads to total confusion in the reader's mind.

As has been suggested here, life is evenly balanced between both freewill and divine will, between freedom and fate. If you reflect on both aspects, your confusion will end and you will arrive at a definitive answer to this question. □



THE RIGHT RESPONSE

Positive Thinking

Isra Mohammed is a Sudanese 15 year old Muslim girl living in Newcastle, England. She was insulted by her classmates in the school because she is a 'Muslim and therefore a terrorist'. She did not answer to their insult but met the Director of the school and requested permission to give a presentation in the school about Islam. The Director accepted her request and called all the 1900 students of the school to attend her presentation. The presentation was admired by all. Not only that, the Director gave permission and allowed Isra to visit all the schools in the neighbourhood and share her presentation. Here is her presentation.

Isra Mohammed: 'My name is Isra Mohammed, I am a Muslim and I am not a terrorist', Kenton School assembly - 2015

16 December 2015, Kenton School, Newcastle, UK

I want you to have a look at the picture behind me. What are your thoughts? Keep those thoughts in mind. Hopefully by the end, you'll alter them, or change them.

So if you all don't know, I am Muslim and I am proud.

But after the events that took place in Paris, France, on November 13th, there is a lot of negativity in the media about Islam.

So, in Google, if you type in Muslim + Islam or Muslim + woman, these are some negative pictures that come up.

People think that Muslim women or Muslim girls have no rights, or have no freedom. But we do. Look at me for example. I'm Muslim. I'm a girl. But I don't wear a headscarf. I have the right and freedom to wear one, my Mum wants me to wear it, but she's given me the right and freedom of [] I feel comfortable enough.

So what is Islam and what do we actually believe in?

Islam is a beautiful religion, just like many others. It is a religion of peace and mercy. As a woman, I used the word [*assalam alaikum*] every day of my life. It's a wish for the other person to be blessed with peace.

Islam is a beautiful religion, just like many others. It is a religion of peace and mercy.

This is what it means to be Muslim.

In Islam, we live by the five pillars.

The first one, is that there is one God. The second one; the commitment to prayer, the third one, fasting in Ramadan, the fourth one, charity and giving back and the pilgrimage to Mecca, which you must do at least once in your lifetime

In this picture, the small dots are actually people. They are all Muslim. They are there worshipping God. This is what Islam is actually about. Coming together as one.

In Islam, even a smile is charity.

People link us to terrorism, but we are not terrorists. They have hijacked our religion and used it against us.

But what is happening today. These are some negative headlines that come up online, and this is the latest one that came up this week. I want you to know that these headlines are actually false. None of them are actually true. And this upsets us because the people behind them are usually ISIS. If you don't know who ISIS is, it's a terrorist organization, that cause nothing but harm and terror to the world, just like what happened in France. 129 lives were lost.

But ISIS have one goal. They want countries like ours to reject Muslims. They'll be happy and ecstatic to hear, that since the events that took place in Paris, France, Muslims have already been threatened and attacked in the UK, America, Australia and all around the world.

This evil organization have in their minds—if they can get Muslims [to appear as] the enemy of the West, then Muslims in France, the UK, America and Australia will have nowhere to turn but to ISIS.

So if you are someone with a Facebook account, a Twitter account, an Instagram account, or any form of social media, which I'm sure everyone here has, and you are throwing out masses of hate, you are helping ISIS. You are supporting ISIS. This is what they want.

So think about it—do you want to be the person helping a terrorist organization?

People think ISIS only kills non-Muslims. But they don't. They also kill Muslims. Most of ISIS's victims are Muslims, like what's happening in Syria right now.

Therefore, ISIS is not Muslim and is not the face of Islam. In Islam we believe, whoever kills an innocent person, it is as if they've killed all of humanity. That's why all Muslims stand together against ISIS.

Therefore terrorism has no religion and terrorism is not the face of Islam.

I have people coming to me at school, this week, and last week telling me that because I am a Muslim, I am a terrorist. And this is something I go through every day of my life. And it's become worse since what happened in France.

But how is this affecting Muslims around the world?

If you haven't heard, on November 15th, a man pushed a Muslim woman into an oncoming underground train, in London. Why? Because she was wearing a headscarf and she was a Muslim.

Imagine being that woman, and having to wake up every day and walk out your door, knowing you'll be attacked and threatened for doing what you believe.

People also have this idea that refugees and immigrants are stealing their jobs. But they are not.

Take my dad as an example. He is a doctor. And he is Muslim. And he is successful. He saves lives every day. He could have saved one of your relatives.

People always think—that refugees from Syria, I've seen this on Facebook, 'Oh close the borders, they are ISIS, they are coming to destroy our country.'

As a matter of fact, ISIS took over their country, ISIS killed their loved ones. ISIS destroyed their homes.

So how would you feel if it was you? Sitting at home, bombs going off, people dying.

There's children, who are coming to the UK, with no families.

So how would you feel, if it was you, in my situation?

I have a seven-year-old sister. She came home from school last Monday, crying. When I asked why, she said to me, 'People are blaming me in school for the Paris attacks'. She said, "I don't want to go back".

***In Islam we believe,
whoever kills an
innocent person, it is
as if they've killed all
of humanity.***

I have a brother in year seven, he got bullied last week. People were telling him, 'Your religion is killing people.'

This is something I have to go through every day.

People link us to terrorism, but we are not terrorists. They have hijacked our religion and used it against us.

I was in Tesco's just last week. I walked in, the guy goes, 'These are the people we want out of our country. These are the people you don't want around.'

So imagine if that was you. Coming into my country and I'm treating you this way. How would you feel?

So what can we do about it?

We can learn about each other's religions and cultures. We can stop making assumptions. We can be fair to one another.

And remember, when you tell somebody you're a terrorist because of your religion—it's a hate crime. And you have to report it once you've viewed it.

My name is Isra Mohammed, I am a Muslim and I am not a terrorist. ❏



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NO ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF GOD

True Gratitude

MOST fathers dote on their children. They take great pleasure in bestowing material gifts to their children. Nowadays it is common to see some affluent fathers gifting their sons with cars. And on the car's windshield or bumper would be some artwork or sticker with the message *Gift from Dad*.

This is no simple matter. In reality it is a message of ungratefulness. Taking a favour and blessing which is in reality given by God and attributing it not to God but to one's own endeavours is a case of refuting God. And a failure to acknowledge God's benevolence is the greatest sin in this world.

The Quran states that, when the Prophet Solomon received a worldly blessing he immediately said: *Haza min fazli rabbi*, which means, "This is by the grace of my Lord." (27: 40) In other words, the Prophet acknowledged the apparently material blessing as a *Gift from God*. This is the only correct way of true faith.

A true believer considers everything as belonging to God alone and regards everything that he receives as a gift from God. He acknowledges God by attributing everything to Him.

Whatever people get in this world appears to be as a result of their own efforts. But this is only a superficial aspect of the matter. The fact is that every single thing is a blessing from God. It is a test of man for him to remove the veils that cover reality and discover the truth. For every blessing that he gets, he may say, 'This is a gift from God given directly to me by God.'

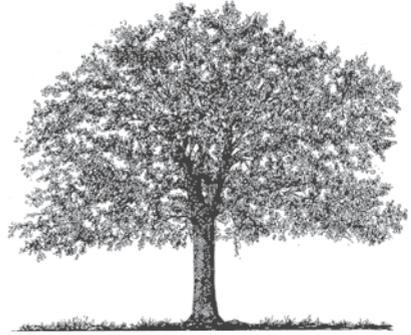
Gratitude is the religious term for such acknowledgement. Only those who acknowledge God are truly grateful to Him. □

A true believer considers everything as belonging to God alone and regards everything that he receives as a gift from God. He acknowledges God by attributing everything to Him.



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



HAPPINESS ONLY IN THE HEREAFTER

CHARLIE CHAPLIN was a British film star. He was born in 1889. And he died in 1977 at the age of 88. He was a comedian and filmmaker and became a worldwide icon as his comic film persona "The Tramp". He entertained thousands across the world with his hilarious shows. But Charlie Chaplin himself was unhappy from the inside. Despite all the fame and wealth and material comforts, he could not find happiness in his life.

It is said that once a man visited a psychiatrist. He said to the doctor that, "I am very depressed. Can you give me such advice so that I can be happy?" Doctor advised the patient to watch a Charlie Chaplin show. The visitor said that he himself was Charlie Chaplin. "I make others laugh but my heart cries from the inside."

Charlie Chaplin was a comedian, but when the time of death approached, psychologically he had become a tragedian. The man who laughed for others, commented on his condition in these words:

"I always like walking in the rain, so no one can see me crying."

This is the story of every person in this world. People laugh superficially, but they do not get any joy from the inside. People tell stories of their apparent successes, but from inside, they live in a defeatist mentality.

The fact is that there is no happiness or comfort reserved for anyone in the present world. Happiness and comfort are only in the Hereafter for God-conscious people. The Creator has created the present world for action. Here only action to achieve happiness is possible and not happiness *per se*. □



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THE CONCEPT OF THE CALIPHATE

Successors on Earth

THE Quran tells us that when God made man, a dialogue took place between God and the angels. In the course of this dialogue, God explained the purpose of creating man, saying: "I am putting a successor on earth." (2: 30)

The dictionary meaning of the word *khilafat* (or caliphate in English) is 'to come after'. *Khalifa* (or, in English, caliph) is someone who takes the place of someone else, or, in other words, 'successor'. This is the literal meaning of the word *khalifa*. But it is generally in politics that a person becomes the successor of someone else. That is why the word *khalifa* began to be used solely for political rulers, both for one who became a ruler through succession as well as someone who acquired this position without succession.

Until the Day of Judgment, man has freedom to spend his life in this world, in the sphere that is in his control. He is free to use this freedom in whatever way he wants—properly or otherwise.

The word *khalifa* in the above-quoted Quranic verse is used in this second sense. This means God settled man on earth as a creature possessing free-will. The earth was given to man's charge for a temporary period. In line with the system of nature, although man is running the affairs of the world just as angels are running the affairs of other parts of the universe, it is only in a limited sense that the world is in man's control. Until the Day of Judgment, man has freedom to spend his life in this world, in the sphere that is in his control. He is free to use this freedom in whatever way he wants—properly or otherwise.

An important principle to bear in mind while seeking to understand the Quran is that one part of the Quran explains another part. In the light of this principle, it is clear from several verses of the Quran what appointing man as *khalifa* means. One of these verses (10: 14) reads: "Then We made you their successors in the land, so that We might observe how you would conduct yourselves."

God has created man as an intelligent being. In terms of his abilities, the first man ever was as complete as the 21st century man. The place where man was settled—planet earth—had everything in it for man's needs. However, these were mostly present only in potential form.

It was man's task to convert the potential into the actual. The whole of human history is a reflection of this journey; this journeying from potential to actual.

The most appropriate word for this journey is 'civilization'. Man's entire history, from Adam till the Day of Judgment, is but another name for this civilizational journey. The Creator has made the earth as the abode of civilization. It was man's task to develop this 'potential civilization' into 'actual civilization'. *Khalifa* is the name of the creature who would play this role—irrespective of whether he is religious or secular.

The word 'civilization' is generally employed to refer to material progress. A conventional understanding of the term 'civilization' is that it refers to a stage of high social, cultural and scientific progress. But this is a limited understanding of the term. To fully understand what 'civilization' means, one must see it in the context of God's creation plan. The builders of civilization do not create anything on their own. Rather, they progress along the journey of civilization using the natural resources that the Creator has created. The human builders of civilization are, as it were, workers of the Creator. They are giving practical shape to God's creation plan.

In reality, this journey of civilization is a journey of divine civilization. It is taking man to that stage where he can have a high experience of praise for God and gratitude to Him, where he can reach the higher stages of God-realization. But because this work is happening while keeping human freedom intact, people have not been able to understand its significance.

To properly understand this journey of civilization, it is necessary to set apart the evils produced as a result of human freedom and then see how God is managing human history. To meaningfully understand human history, it is most important to keep apart the human element and look at the working of the divine element in history.

Although man is running the affairs of the world just as angels are running the affairs of other parts of the universe, it is only in a limited sense that the world is in man's control.

A Survey

God has bestowed man with freedom. Man has been granted this freedom so that he can discover things himself and cultivate a self-developed personality.

Man sometimes uses this freedom properly. At other times, he misuses it. But the All-powerful God is managing history and taking it towards the stage that is its real stage—the completion of the realization of God.

Since the beginning of human history, God sent a series of messengers to the world to tell people of His creation plan. They tried to keep the journey of human civilization progressing in the right direction.

To properly understand the journey of civilization, it is necessary to set apart the evils produced as a result of human freedom and then see how God is managing human history.

But a study of history reveals that people did not prove to be responsible in using the freedom that they had been granted. Soon, history in general deviated from the path of monotheism and began travelling on the path of polytheism. This was because people found that they did not see the God that the prophets told them about, while they could see the things made by God abounded all around them. Because of this, people left the invisible God and began considering visible objects their deities. They began considering every object that appeared to them to be great as gods or partners of God. This is how 'nature worship', emerged.

Nature worship spread far and wide. One reason for this was kings in ancient times found nature worship to be convenient to them, and so they patronised it. They employed this form of worship to claim a mandate for their rule. In this way, in ancient times polytheism acquired the status of official religion throughout the world. As a result of this nexus between nature worship and political power, polytheism acquired dominance all across the world.

Monarchy

In ancient times—and this continued for thousands of years—much of the world was under monarchy. Monarchical rule would very soon turn into personality cult. And personality cults gradually acquired the form of idol worship. This is why in ancient times monarchical rule finally turned into religion based rule. For instance, the Egyptian ruler at the time of Moses, the Quran (79: 24) tells us, proclaimed, "I am your supreme Lord".

The system of monarchical rule emerged as the greatest evil in ancient times. It was the gravest misuse of human freedom. This system was

ended at the political level through the democratic revolution.

In the Hereafter, the wrongs of the monarchical system of rule will become clearly manifest. A part of the *Hadith* report refers to this in these words: "God, the Exalted and Glorious, on the Day of Judgment would say: 'I am the Lord; where are the lords of the earth?'" (*Sahih Muslim*)

Three Periods of the Caliphate

In the Quran, the word '*khilafat*' is not used in the sense of 'Islamic Caliphate'. According to the Quran (10: 14), all those people were '*khalaiif fi al-arz*' who, in different ages, were given the role of ruler, irrespective of whether, in terms of belief, they were religious or non-religious. Throughout history those who received the opportunity to play the role of ruler (*khilafat-e-arzi*), can be classed into three groups:

The rulers who used religion as the basis of their rule: It lasted from ancient times to the 7th century CE.

The rule of monotheists: This was the age of Muslim Sultans. It lasted from around the 8th century to the 18th century.

The rule of secular people: This period began in the 19th century, and continues today.

In the first period people did not enjoy religious freedom. It was an age of religious persecution and coercion. During such an age people lost their right to think freely. And so, the process of intellectual development came to a complete halt. It was impossible for intellectual progress to continue.

God wanted man to discover the laws hidden in nature so that he could discover the Creator of these laws, and so that such means be developed that the task of inviting people to God could be carried out more effectively. This process had been completely blocked in the age of persecution and coercion. God sent a large number of prophets to the world to tell people that by misusing their freedom they were placing a hurdle in His plan. However, the peaceful efforts of the prophets to call people to God were ineffective in preventing man from continuing on the course he had adopted.

The journey of civilization is a journey of divine civilization. It is taking man to that stage where he can have a high experience of praise for God and gratitude to Him, where he can reach the higher stages of God-realization.

After this, God did not put an end to human freedom but decided to take away the despotic role of rulers. The Quran refers to this Divine decision thus: "Fight them until there is no more [religious] persecution, and religion belongs wholly to God." (8: 39). In other words this verse is referring to the end of religious persecution and coercion and the opening of the door to God's blessings upon man.

As is well known, the Prophet of Islam and his Companions did precisely this. They transformed the entire political map of ancient times.

The role that Muslims played in this period was not of establishing any political system. In actual fact, it is not the aim of the Muslim *ummah* to establish any particular system. The task that was accomplished in the Muslim period had two major aspects to it: to usher in the age of freedom in the world, and to initiate the task of the scientific study of nature.

God wanted man to discover the laws hidden in nature so that he could discover the Creator of these laws, and so that such means be developed that the task of inviting people to God could be carried out more effectively.

The Quran (42:38) refers to people who "conduct their affairs by mutual consultation". This reference is not in a limited sense. It conveys news of a global revolution. It means that God wants that the age of monarchy be ended and that the age of democracy take its place, so that people can think freely, that their potentials can unfold, that they can discover the secrets of nature, and bring in the age of the divine civilization, which is referred to in the Quran (31: 27) in the following words: "If all

the trees on earth were pens, and the sea [were] ink, with seven [more] seas added to it, the words of God would not be exhausted: for, truly, God is Almighty and Wise."

The Age of Democracy

The age of democracy is another name for the age of freedom. In line with God's creation plan, it was essential for an environment of freedom to remain on earth. The role that is required for man to play is possible only in an environment of freedom. This age of democracy started in the Muslim period. It advanced further, in the form of a process, till it culminated in the form of the French Revolution of 1789.

Democracy is a great stage in human history. It was in this age that for the first time freedom and peace became a choice for people. Prior to this, people could enjoy freedom and peace only if they were granted to

them as a gift by their rulers. But now it no longer remained something that could be had only if it were given as a gift by someone else. Instead, it became an absolute right of everyone. It was not possible for any individual or group to snatch this right away from others.

Many people today complain that they are deprived of the opportunity to live and work in an atmosphere of freedom and peace. Such people are simply unaware of the secret of life. If you want to enjoy the blessings of freedom and peace that we have been bestowed with in this age, you must know that you should set such a goal for yourself that can be achieved without having to resort to violent confrontation with anyone. If you devise a goal for yourself that will disturb someone else's life, you will be left to complaining and protesting against others. But if you devise a purpose for yourself that will not, in any way, become a problem for others, you can carry on with your work for the rest of your life, and you will have no complaints against others.

This secret is referred to in the Quran (4: 128) thus: "Reconciliation is best". This indicates that the aim that you set for yourself should not lead to you entering into confrontation or conflict with others. In this way, you will find that everything in this world is favourable for you. It will become possible, then, for you to achieve your purpose, while being safe from developing the psyche of complaints against others. On the other hand, if you speak the language of complaint, it only means that you have chosen a wrong aim for yourself. It is a problem of a wrong aim, not one of other people's oppression or enmity.

Another major development that occurred in the Muslim period was that nature was removed from the pedestal of an object of worship and was made an object of study and investigation. This happened in stages, till it finally reached the age of the scientific revolution. The scientific revolution fulfilled this prediction in the Quran (41: 53): "We shall show them Our signs in the universe and within themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth."

The democratic revolution and the scientific revolution in modern times are fully favourable to Islam. The modern age is completely in Islam's favour. This phase started in the period of Muslim political rule, but its culmination happened in the third period of history, the age of the rule of secular people.

***God has bestowed
man with freedom.
Man has been
granted this freedom
so that he can
discover things
himself and cultivate
a self-developed
personality.***

New Role of the Muslim *Ummah*

Indicating a principle of nature, the Quran says:

Say, "Lord, sovereign of all sovereignty. You bestow sovereignty on whom you will and take it away from whom You please; You exalt whoever You will and abase whoever You will. All that is good lies in Your hands. You have the power to will anything" (3: 26).

This means *khilafat-e-arzi* or political rule is not the monopoly of any group. It is a role that God, in accordance with His Plan, gives sometimes to one group, and sometimes to another. When a particular group receives political rule, it must find out for what purpose this role has been given to it. And when political rule is snatched from it, then, too, it should know why this post has been taken away from it. Lack of awareness of this will deprive the group of God's help. Consequently, it will be unsuccessful in every way.

The conditions of this new age show us that the role of the Muslim ummah has now changed. And this role is just one: global dawah.

The Muslim empire was established in the 8th century CE. This was a sign that the role of *khilafat-e arzi* had now been given to Muslims. This role was to end the system of kingship of the ancient type. This task was accomplished through Muslims on a global scale. For centuries, in whichever land Muslims entered, they put an end to the centuries-old system of political dictatorship. But then a time came when Muslim Sultanates began to decline. The early 19th century announced the end of Muslim political dominance. Across the world,

one Muslim Sultanate after another began crumbling before Western powers and started coming under their domination. Following this, Muslims made many efforts—on a massive scale—to restore their political glory. But despite many struggles over a period of 200 years, they completely failed in this regard.

This is no ordinary matter. It was, in fact, an announcement of the change in the Muslims' role. In the 18th century, the Muslims' political role had ended. The role that was now required of them was another one—to use modern opportunities to communicate the religion of God at the global level. In the modern period, God had according to His plan given Western powers the opportunity to discover new means and resources, and make them available for common use. Through the Western powers those things came into being for the first time that were necessary for engaging in *dawah* at the global level—for instance,

religious freedom, openness, global travel and communications, the printing press and much more.

These new conditions were an indication that the role of the Muslim *ummah* (community) had now changed. This new role of the Muslim *ummah* was predicted in a *Hadith* in the following words: "There shall not remain on the face of earth any house, big or small, in which the word of God will not have reached." Muslims' role now was to use modern opportunities to convey the universal message of Islam to the whole of humankind. But strangely, almost the whole of the Muslim *ummah* remained unaware of this fundamental reality. They did not understand this change in their role. Instead they sought to regain their lost political glory by fighting against their supposed enemies. This action was against the divine plan. That is why it did not receive God's help, and failed miserably and completely.

Change of Role

The 19th and 20th centuries have taken the Muslim *ummah* into a new age. The conditions of this new age show us that the role of the Muslim *ummah* has now changed. And this role is just one: global *dawah*. However, Muslim leaders remained completely unaware of today's age. As a result, they could not even tell the Muslim *ummah* about their new role. A major tragedy of the Muslim *ummah* in this age is its unawareness of the role that it should play at this time. That is why the whole *ummah* seems to have no knowledge of the direction in which it should head.

This age is a period of the degeneration of the *ummah*. In this age, almost all Muslim leaders, through their rhetoric and writings, fed to the degenerated psyche that Muslims had come to develop. But this was definitely against God's creation plan. In the 19th and 20th centuries, Muslims witnessed many efforts and struggles—but these were based on a self-created communal role that Muslims saw for themselves, and not for the role that God wanted. Because of this, the *ummah* remained bereft of God's help in all of this. The aims that the Muslims devised in this period for themselves were all communal aims, devised in line with the degenerate mindset that they had developed. Therefore, they failed to achieve what they wanted.

The democratic revolution and the scientific revolution in modern times are fully favourable to Islam. The modern age is completely in Islam's favour.

Another failure that the Muslims have had to face was that the whole Muslim *ummah* developed a negative psyche. Despair, negative thinking, complaint, protest-mentality, hot-temperedness, violence, considering the rest of the world as enemies, imagining conspiracies lurking everywhere, gun culture, and, finally, an extreme manifestation of a sense of failure—suicide-bombing: this is the general image of the Muslim *ummah* in the 21st century. Because of this, the whole community has come to be embroiled in a violent psyche—some of its members are engaged in active violence, while others are engaged in passive violence.

This is a situation of general destruction. There is only one way for the *ummah* to come out of this destruction—and that is for it to completely stop negative thinking and to replace this completely with positive thinking. It must be prepared to, once again, carry on with its actual mission—that is, the mission of inviting people to God. No excuse that seeks to avoid this mission is acceptable.

***Dawah* Efforts**

In the past, Muslims established political empires. Today, many Muslims still dream of reviving these empires. But this is an anachronism. Muslims should understand God's plan for human history and chalk out their aims accordingly. The fact is that the age of building political empires has gone. But there is now another, bigger opportunity for Muslims that is fully available to them—and that is, to work at the global level for peaceful dissemination of the divine message.

In the past, deadly wars were fought to establish political empires, resulting in much loss of life. But today to establish a '*dawah* empire', to invite people across the whole world to God, there is no need for war at all. In the new conditions, it has become fully possible to engage in *dawah* globally in a peaceful manner. □



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RUNNING WITHOUT A DESTINATION

Race for Materialism

EVERYONE seems to be talking non-stop, doing this and that, being busy with all sorts of things, chasing different dreams. They are all driven with the purpose of fulfilling unlimited desires. They want to acquire all sorts of comforts for themselves and their children. This is a mad race of materialism. But what is the end result of all this? Everyone feels that their hopes have not been met, that their desires still remain unfulfilled. And so, people are living in terrible despair, bitterness, tension and frustration. They feel they have been deprived of, or denied, what they wanted. Nobody at all seems content. This is how their days and nights pass—in this sorry predicament—till one day, the little world of their dreams comes crashing down when death sweeps them away.

People are busy with things that belong to this temporary world, instead of preparing themselves for the eternal life after death. The life of this world is a test, and hence it is God's responsibility to provide every one of us with the things that we need to undergo this test. But as far as life after death is concerned, God has not taken responsibility for it. Our life after death depends entirely on our actions in this world. We will reap there as we have sown here, on earth. Yet, strangely, people are preoccupied doing everything possible for their life in this world but have completely forgotten the life that will come after death.

People are busy with things that belong to this temporary world, instead of preparing themselves for the eternal life after death.

In this world, if you face a shortage of something today, you can make efforts and acquire what you need tomorrow. But in the life after death, you will not have the chance of engaging in any actions to make up for any shortage on account of your deeds while on earth. □



THE RATIONAL BASIS OF RITUALS

True Form with Spirit

WHAT is ritual? Ritual is a religious ceremony carried out in a prescribed order. They are a part of every religion. In their absence, religion becomes an abstract philosophy. Philosophy with rituals is religion and religion without rituals is philosophy.

Rituals are not simply a set of rites; in fact, they are the outer expression of the inner content of religion. Religion begins as an inner spirit but this spirit must always have an external manifestation. It is this externalization of the inner spirit which is called ritual.

Ritual without spirit is a diluted form of religion—like a nutshell without a kernel. True, the shell does also have some value, but the kernel is the most important part. To cite another example, you can say that rituals are important, but they are like a body which becomes lifeless when there is no spirit.

Rituals are not simply a set of rites; in fact, they are the outer expression of the inner content of religion.

There are two levels of religion. One is that in which spirit and rituals, or form, both have their distinct values. That is the ideal version of religion. The other level is that in which religion is characterized by rituals, without there being apparently any inner spirit.

Sometimes religion is in its ideal form, that is, ritual and spirit go hand in hand. But this ideal state cannot be maintained at all times. There can be aberrations in the state of religion. Sometimes it happens that form or rituals are

present but the spirit is absent, at least, temporarily.

Religion in this latter state is at a minimum level. But this minimum state is not worthless. It also has its value and, indeed, has a very important role to play. It maintains the consciousness of religion and keeps one mindful of it.

This minimum role of rituals can be described as a reminder of spirit through routine. When you observe them at their prescribed times, it reminds you that rituals should be performed keeping in mind their inner content, that is, spirit.

Rituals are apparently a mere form but this is not so, for form symbolizes the inner spirit. If the inner spirit has real value, then rituals have symbolic value and both are equally important.

Rituals, the external aspect of the inner spirit, help maintain the inner spirit. Without them the spirit would be reduced to an abstract idea. In such a situation, ritual, or form, serves the role of a compulsory or a regular reminder.

There is a scientific relationship between the inner spirit and external rituals. The spirit, when externalized, is not an entirely detached phenomenon. It is very much attached to inner consciousness. Without inner consciousness, no one can perform external rituals. Both are complementary to each other.

It is difficult to understand the inner spirit without external form or external form without inner consciousness. Religion always begins from consciousness. This consciousness gradually, or sometimes even suddenly, expresses itself in the form of rituals. So, rituals stem from consciousness. Consciousness is the real source of rituals.

An important role that ritual plays is to give a religion an identity—without which religion would remain an abstract idea. □

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UNITY

God and in Nature

IT is generally said that in present times, the world has assumed the form of a global village. But this is only half the truth. Modern technology and communications have, of course, greatly reduced distances across the world. But the closeness thus produced is of a purely physical nature. Modern technology may have bridged certain gaps, bringing the external world closer together, but the task of bringing unity into the internal world has yet to be accomplished.

Spiritual Unity

What is spiritual unity? Let us take a very simple example. When you live in a crowded settlement, the walls all around give you a sense of limitation. You experience the friction of living in close contact with others and you suffer from mental tension. Later, when you emerge from that dense human settlement into open, natural surroundings you immediately feel that your tension has evaporated and you have

Although, physically, all human beings appear to be different, spiritually they are one. It is as if spiritual unity between human beings already exists, it does not have to be externally imposed.

once again become serene. The feeling of separateness is replaced by an all-pervasive feeling of unity. You immediately become part of a world where there are no boundaries. A sense of universality prevails.

We have all had this experience at one time or another. It shows us what spiritual unity is. It is, in fact, the raising of one's existence to a higher plane. The moment you achieve this, you feel you are emerging from a limited world to become a citizen of an unlimited world. Disunity now disappears, giving way to unity all around.

Although, physically, all human beings appear to be different, spiritually they are one. It is as if spiritual unity between human beings already exists, it does not have to be externally imposed. We have only to make people aware of its existence. Once the outer, artificial veils are removed, what remains will be pure spirituality.

In reality, the various sets of circumstances that confront man in this world lead to drawing of different veils over man's natural propensities. For instance, the veil of material greed produces self-centeredness; the veil of jealousy causes him to see himself as being separate from

others; the veil of prejudice causes him to discriminate between human beings.

These veils, in fact, tend to block man's natural urge towards spiritual unity. What is required is to remove these artificial veils in order that the true, inner reality be brought into focus.

The aim of all religions, basically, is to encourage this spiritual unity within man and between man and man. No religion is at variance with another so far as this goal is concerned. The language in which this is set forth may vary from one religion to another, but, without doubt, the main concern of all religions is to produce spiritual unity within and between all human beings. Without spiritual unity, there is little hope of creating peace and harmony throughout the world. And where there is no peace and harmony, the dream of human progress will forever remain elusive.

Now, what is Islam's contribution to spiritual unity? The subject is too vast for more than just a few basic points to be briefly touched on.

The Unity of God

The most important factor in Islam's contribution is its concept of monotheism—of there being only one God (2: 163). According to Islam, God, or the Ultimate Reality of this universe is only one, called God in Islam. It is implicit in the concept of the oneness of Godhead that differences and multiplicity would appear to exist in reality, yet there is an underlying unity.

In this way the concept of divine unity engenders spiritual unity. All human beings are one, because they are the creation of one God. All human beings are God's family. God is indeed the greatest reality of the universe. And when it is acknowledged that there is only one greatest reality, it is but natural that all other creation should acquire the character of unity.

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The Unity of Nature

The Quran states that "There is no altering the creation of God." (30: 30) According to the Prophet of Islam "Every child is born with an upright nature" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*). We learn from this that unity is found among

all human beings at the level of nature and creation. Nature forms the common constituent in the creation of human beings, just as the atom forms the common constituent in all the varied objects of nature in the physical world. That is to say that the same unity which exists in the external world at the physical level, has existed among human beings at the spiritual level from the outset.

But man tends at times to be oblivious of his own nature. This is no less true in the sphere of unity. Today people are unaware of their spiritual potential. In such a situation, the easiest way to bring about spiritual unity is to make men aware of that potential. The moment they became aware of it, spiritual unity will come into existence of its own accord.

The Unity of Humankind

The Quran says, "O men, have fear of your Lord, who created you from a single soul. From that soul He created its mate, and through them, He scattered the earth with countless men and women." (4: 1)

This shows that men and women have been created from the same substance. Their being physically one, of necessity, demands their spiritual oneness.

When it is acknowledged that there is only One Greatest Reality, it is but natural that all other creation should acquire the character of unity.

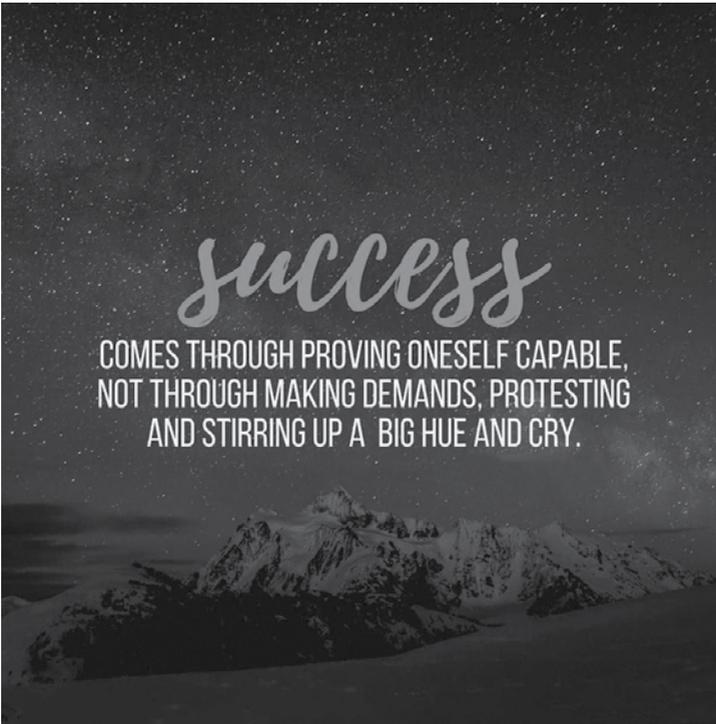
Making a similar point, the Prophet Muhammad said that all human beings are brothers (*Abu Dawud*). This gives rise to the concept of a common brotherhood, and without doubt, it is this sense of brotherhood which generates the strongest feeling of oneness and togetherness among different people.

That is to say that when all human beings in this world are virtually blood brothers, they must, as this concept necessarily demands, live as brothers in spirit too. Any other way of living is a deviation from reality.

In 1893, Swami Vivekananda went to Chicago to participate in the Parliament of Religions. As the *Encyclopedia Britannica* puts it, his was a 'sensational appearance.' On that occasion all the speakers at the conference followed the common practice of addressing the audience as "Ladies and gentlemen." But when Swami Vivekananda took the stage, he addressed the assembly as "Sisters and brothers of America." No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the hall resounded

with a long burst of applause. Of all the delegates at the conference, Swamiji received the greatest ovation.

The reason for this was the form of address, "Ladies and gentlemen" produces a sense of alienation and strangeness, whereas the phrase "Sisters and brothers" introduces a note of closeness and familiarity. By using this phrase, Swami Vivekananda touched a chord in the hearts of those of different creeds and colours. Their natural feeling of unity was awakened, and then what ensued fulfilled the best of expectations. All of a sudden, the gaps between them were bridged. They all began to feel themselves what they really were, and for that moment, physical divisions disappeared and were replaced by a rare spiritual unity. □



AFTER DEATH

Life Hereafter

MOST people want to live long, till a ripe old age. Yet, everyone has to die some day or the other. We all dream of doing many things but death stops us in our tracks and carries us away.

Why does this happen? Why is it that we want to live long, but yet death arrives, suddenly and without our permission, and blots out all our dreams? Every person asks this question and has tried to find an answer to it. We all want to know why we have to die. We all seek answers to existential questions about life and death.

We can get some clues about the answers to these questions from modern scientific discoveries about DNA. Every person has a certain DNA. Your DNA is a complete encyclopedia of your personality. It contains information about many things, big and small, related to your personality. If you decode this DNA, you will find that it is much bigger than the most voluminous encyclopedia.

Yet, intriguingly, the DNA does not contain information about one major aspect of our personality. If you study someone's DNA, you can get an idea of everything about him except for one thing. And this one thing is when precisely this person will die.

Among all living beings, it is only man who has a conception of 'tomorrow'.

This, then, is nature's announcement to the effect that man is an eternal creature, a creature that will never die. Man has eternal life. Death does not put an end to him.

Among all living beings, it is only man who has a conception of 'tomorrow'. Animals live only in the present moment, in 'today'. No animal has a conception of 'tomorrow'. Because they have a limited or lower-level consciousness,

animals are born in 'today' and they also die in the same state. But man is an exceptional creature in this regard. He is the only creature who has an understanding of 'tomorrow'.

To properly appreciate the import of this point, bear in mind that human beings have unlimited ambitions, and that they die with many of their ambitions remaining unfulfilled. In this sense, every man is a case of unfulfilled desires. In the whole of the cosmos, man is the only such creature. No other creature suffers from this painful dilemma.

This fact tells us that there must certainly be an answer to this dilemma. Human desires and ambitions ought to be fulfilled, just as is the case with all other creatures. This indicates that there is a world that will come after this present one, a world where human beings will find complete fulfilment of their wishes and hopes.

There is another important aspect of this issue—and that is, the desire for justice is inherent in, or intrinsic to, human nature. By nature, human beings want to be treated justly. They desire justice in this world. They want good people to be fully rewarded for their goodness and evil doers to be suitably punished. This is a basic demand of human nature. This demand, too, requires that there should be another world after this one, where justice finally prevails, because it is not possible in this world.

If you keep this in mind, the concept of the Hereafter will become absolutely real and clear to you. With belief in the Hereafter you get a complete answer to every question. Everything falls into place. □



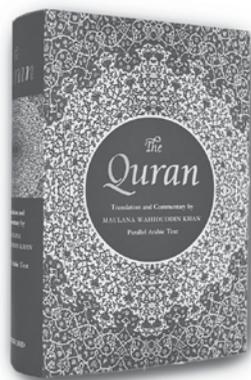
*The choice lies
not between a
life with
problems and a
life without
problems, but
between one
kind of
difficulty and
another.*

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 AD. It is a book that brings glad tidings to humankind, 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



It is God who provides livestock for you, some for riding and some for your food: you have other benefits in them too. You can reach any destination you wish on them: they carry you by land, as ships carry you on the sea. He shows you His signs; which then of the signs of God will you deny? (40: 79-81)

Man needs many things for the upkeep of his existence and the development of human civilization, such as food, mounts, different types of industries, means of transportation etc. All these things exist in plenty in the present world. God has created the physical world in such a way that it is subservient and capable of being used by man for meeting his requirements.

All these things are, so to say, signs from God. Though this declaration is in indirect language, it is in man's interest to understand it, because when God resorts to direct communication, it will mark the end of the period allowed for the performance of good or bad deeds and not the beginning.

Have they not travelled in the land to see the fate of those who went before them? They were more numerous and mightier and left greater traces of their power on the earth; yet all that they accomplished was of no avail to them. (40: 82)

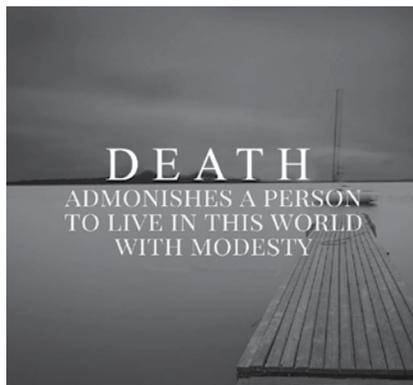
When messengers came to them with clear signs, they revelled in whatever knowledge they had, and so they were engulfed by the very punishment they mocked: but when they saw Our punishment, they said, 'We believe in God—the One God—and we reject the partners we used to associate with Him,' but believing after seeing Our punishment

did not benefit them at all: this is the law of God to deal with His creatures, and thus the disbelievers were the losers. (40: 83-85)

Knowledge is of two kinds. One is that which enables human beings to make worldly progress. The other is that which shows the path leading to success in the Hereafter. Those who possess worldly knowledge immediately receive the substantial benefits of this knowledge in the shape of worldly progress. Whereas the result of the knowledge of the Hereafter is not immediately visible in a tangible form. That is why the possessor of this knowledge comes to be degraded by worldly people.

This difference creates a superiority complex in those who are in possession of worldly knowledge. So, when prophets appeared among such people, they considered themselves superior and the prophets inferior. They even went to the extent of ridiculing the prophets. But God caused them to be destroyed in spite of all their powers and superior development. Now their remains are to be found either in the form of ruins lying above or interred deep in the earth. In this way, God Almighty has set a historical example for human beings—that the secret of permanent success lies in the knowledge of the Hereafter and not in worldly knowledge.

The prophets were initially rejected by their communities. The prophets had all the force of argument on their side, but these communities were not prepared to accept their credo. Finally, God made them aware of the reality in the language of punishment. Only then did they bow down before the truth. But this was of no avail, because only that admission of truth is desirable and useful which is arrived at on the basis of arguments. Any such admission which is made after seeing the divine punishment is worthless. □



ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan answers your questions on society and spirituality.

Some people talk about a world without borders, what is your opinion about this?

A world without borders is one in which people should be able to live anywhere, work anywhere and contribute anywhere—for the world is one.

All thinking people have a beautiful dream—that of living in a world without borders. But for all these people, this only remains a dream, as no one has ever been able to actualize it. As far as I am concerned I can say that I have made it a reality. I always actually live in a world without borders. In my experience, the concept of a world without borders is quite an achievable target.

In a single sentence, I can say that a world without physical borders may not be achievable, but a world without psychological borders is quite attainable for anyone who so desires it. There is no need for external permission for this purpose: every individual can enter into this state—by his own decision.

In one of your articles you have presented spirituality as a solution to eradicate corruption. My question is, how to inculcate spirituality among people?

Basically I feel it is a part of education, both formal and informal. Education means the training of the mind, with special emphasis on inculcating high values. To spread spiritual values in society, we need value-based education, especially during schooling, which is a preparatory period of life, and if we want to build a spiritual society, we must adopt a spirituality-oriented form of education.

Kindly explain how exactly spirituality will stop a person from being corrupt?

One aspect of spirituality is that it makes one evaluate actions in terms of their results—a major factor in having a sense of responsibility. One who is a spiritually developed person is able to see things in terms of value. He is able to differentiate between right and wrong. There is a saying: 'A wise man is one who knows the relative value of things.' The spiritually developed person is a wise person and a wise person is one

who has a predictable character. All these qualities stem from spiritual training. It is the responsibility of reformers, therefore, to train people to become duty conscious by enhancing their thinking capacity—for the duty-conscious person can never involve himself in any such negative activity as corruption.

There is much discussion about the necessity for social reform but this has not come about. What is the reason for this?

Though Himalayan efforts have been made with regard to bringing about social reform, they have proved infructuous. In my opinion this is so because the starting point is not the right one. The starting point must be to bring about change in the individual. The mind of the individual must be addressed in order to revolutionize his thinking. This is the right and only way to carry out social reform. Other methods have proved ineffective.

When we are living in a society we face many unpleasant experiences from people we deal with. How to love all human beings in spite of such negative experiences?

The rationale behind the 'love all' formula is that you should consider every person as a benefactor irrespective of the type of experience you have with them. It is lack of awareness of this fact that makes you unable to adopt this love-all culture. For example, a person who was in need of some help approached his relative requesting him to come to his assistance. This relative instead of extending his help gave advice about the importance of self-help. Though hurt and disappointed the person returned vowing to himself to never ask for help and worked hard to make himself self-sufficient. Later in life whenever he thought about his relative, he felt he had actually been his benefactor and found that he did not have any negative feelings for him in his heart. In fact, he looked at him as his benefactor. The above is an example of an individual.

Let us understand this in terms of love for all humanity. We are living in a civilization. Civilization is an advanced stage of refinement in ethical and material matters resulting from continuous effort on the part of all humankind. It has taken thousands of years of the joint efforts of humanity to bring civilization into existence. The whole of humanity was involved in this process. The discovery of this reality about history gives rise to the culture of 'love for all', while unawareness of this leads to hate culture. The truth is that in this world the most realistic principle is that of 'love for all'. We cannot afford the opposite of this. □

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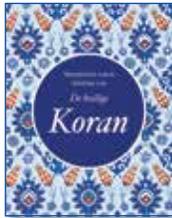
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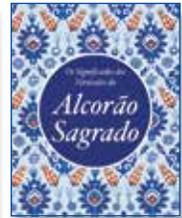
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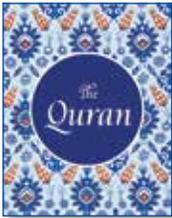
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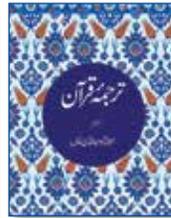
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