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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

ISSUE 62 FEBRUARY 2018

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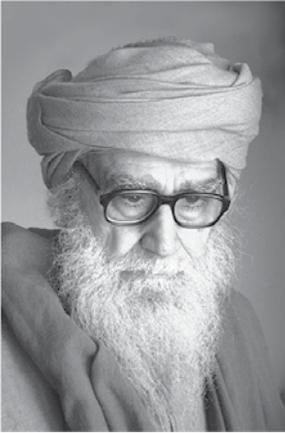
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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

IN SINGAPORE, THE ENRAGED GO TO THE FRAGMENT ROOM

A RECENT news report talked of how some people in Singapore's offices are trying to relieve their stress. One such report is summarized here: *Bad day at the office? A 'rage room' in offices lets stressed-out people take a baseball bat to items ranging from glass bottles to televisions. The 'Fragment Room' consists of a bare, cell-like space with concrete walls, where customers pay to indulge in an unusual form of destructive stress relief.*

After being given overalls, helmets, gloves and shoes, people proceed to smash up items ranging from plates to printers. "Everyone in Singapore, no matter where you come from, what your background is, whatever you do, whatever age you are, everyone is stressed out," says Royce Tan, the founder of 'Fragment Room'.

The set-up, one of several such rage rooms in cities around the world, has two main offerings: half-hour slots with a limited amount of items to smash or the higher priced 'annihilation pack' that lets customers smash as much as they can in half an hour.

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

This practice lacks seriousness in treating this problem and it is not a remedy for the problem. In a photograph that shows someone wielding a bat, smashing things, the person is apparently hitting external items but in reality, he is hitting his own self. And he is making the mistake of not availing of a great opportunity.

Psychological research shows that anger is not an evil. Anger is the release of a great amount of energy from within the mind. You need to give a positive direction to this energy and utilize it for your intellectual development. All you need to do when you get angry is to keep mum. Your total silence will automatically initiate a natural process within you and the released 'anger energy' will be diverted to a positive target. Anger energy is the greatest energy to be released from the human mind in times of crisis.

A simple experiment will demonstrate this point. Whenever you get angry, you should fall completely silent and continue doing whatever work you had been doing. You will see that, even in the state of anger, you will be able to perform better. If you are doing something in which thinking is involved, your inner mechanism will make you more creative.

De-stressing does not require you to physically go some place. When you feel stressed out, you should direct yourself to doing some positive work. If thinking is involved in your work, then intensify your thinking. You will observe that your thinking energy has increased and that you have become more creative. You will be able to take double advantage of this process, because not only will your anger soon get dissipated, but your intellectual energy will also be enhanced.

I have personally experienced this technique in a practical way. There have been two phases in my life. In the first phase, I used to get very angry, while in the present phase, I have successfully dealt with my anger after my discovery. I am a writer. If I compare my previous writings with my current writings, I find that in the latter, my creativity has definitely increased.

All my writings have been published. Anyone may compare both these sets of writings and discover this difference. Anger is not to be frittered away in destructive activity. The reality is that anger is not an unwanted problem—rather, it is a great natural gift that needs to be used wisely. □

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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 is designing a series of courses on peace-building, countering extremism and conflict resolution.

THE CULTURE OF SPIRITUALITY

WHAT is spirituality? Spirituality is an experiential state of being. It is non-material and intangible, yet it is the inner essence of everything, like the nectar is to the flower. Nectar can be found only in a flower, but spirituality is omnipresent. You can extract spirituality from all things, even from wood, thorns and stones. But this requires a creative mind. The honeybee can extract nectar only from flowers, but a prepared or creative mind can extract spirituality from everything—even from abstract ideas. Art is everywhere but it requires an artist to discern the artistry, and he can do so only if he has a truly prepared mind. Those who want to live in a state of spirituality must prepare their minds. It is futile to try to discover spirituality directly from the external or physical world.

For example, you observe a thorn, then you see a flower and the branch of a tree. Then your mind is aroused and you start thinking. An idea takes shape and your mind is further engaged. You think that, in reality, the flower and the thorn are the same. Both spring from the branch of a tree, but both reflect their own inner power which allows them—both deriving from the tree—to assume their own distinctive shapes by availing of their separate energy sources. The same is true of spirituality. Spirituality is a creative phenomenon. It is the mind that creates spirituality, as it is the mind that gives birth to an idea. Just as after a very delicate process, the bud—potential flower—is converted

into a flower, so also is spirituality not a ready-made thing. It is a product of an intellectual process. It is the culmination of a process that occurs between the mind and external realities.

If you want to experience spirituality, you need not visit any spiritual expert. Nor should you try to purchase it from shopping malls. Rather you must develop your own mind and soul in order to initiate the kind of process to produce the state of spirituality. There is no other way to attain spirituality.

Every human being is like a spiritual factory but this factory must be looked at in terms of potential, for it is only you who can convert this potential into actuality.

Spirituality is a creative phenomenon. It is the mind that creates spirituality, as it is the mind that gives birth to an idea.

Spirituality is like milk. Any milking cow is a milk factory, but its milk does not as such exist in its body. The cow ingests food, then this food is processed in its body and after a complex mechanism, it is converted into milk. This is true also of spirituality. Spirituality is like a kind of non-physical milk. It is like aroma-milk and aroma are products of an inner process and are not extraneous entities. You must prepare such a cogitative, analytical mind as is creative and capable of processing

your outer experiences. Once you have done so, you will be able to develop spirituality. Spirituality is a self-engendered thing. It is not something manufactured. It is a product of your own factory. Develop your creativity and you will be able to derive spirituality from every observation and experience. □

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Grow Wiser

One may be beset by most grievous handicaps in life, but it is always possible to rise above one's handicap.

MOST JOYOUS MOMENT

Discovery of God

A NEWS report in a magazine started off a train of thought in the mind that became significant as regards to the realization of God. A celebrity married and in due course, had a beautiful, healthy son. After his birth, she expressed her feelings by exclaiming, "It was the most joyous moment of my life when I held the baby in my arms for the first time. My heart and my mind are full of my son. I am all love for him."

Pondering on the fact as to why the sight of her son should make a woman so overjoyed led to the realization that it was a case of diversion from the truth. Everyone is born with the concept of the Creator. This concept is integral to everyone's thinking. One knows, consciously or unconsciously, that there is a great God who has granted all the bounties which we possess. Therefore, a feeling of deep acknowledgement for the Creator is ingrained in the human psyche. But because no one can physically see the great Giver, whenever any precious thing falls to their lot, this feeling of gratitude gets diverted. The love which they should have given to their Creator is given to something or to someone else.

A feeling of deep acknowledgement for the Creator is ingrained in the human psyche. But because no one can physically see the great Giver, whenever any precious thing falls to their lot, this feeling of gratitude gets diverted.

From this we learn what the greatest virtue for man is, and his greatest wrong. For a person the greatest virtue is to acknowledge the true Giver of all blessings. The true Giver is God. In terms of religion, this acknowledgement is called 'thanksgiving'. Conversely, the greatest deviation of a person, is to seek out a supposed giver, and then attribute the blessings to him. Such a deviation amounts to an eternal failure. Where proper acknowledgement is the greatest virtue, misdirected acknowledgement is the greatest evil. □



WHEN THINGS LOSE THEIR NOVELTY

Being Conscious & Aware

"When opened, it was like a small tent, and when shut, it was all curiously jointed and would fold up to the length of a man's hand."

THIS curious description applies—in case you hadn't already guessed—to the umbrella as we know it today. No one nowadays finds it necessary to describe an umbrella nor to express any astonishment over it, because it is now such a commonplace object. When it was first manufactured in London in 1749, it seemed such a strange, new, wonderful contrivance that it caused a great deal of excitement. An invention which aroused even greater awe was the hand pump which was installed for the first time in an Indian village at the beginning of the previous century. When it caused water to gush forth from the ground, a village woman exclaimed, "Now it is only death which can defeat man." Today we feel that there is nothing so extraordinary about a hand-pump, and even pumps which operate on electricity and diesel oil have come to be regarded as run-of-the-mill items of agricultural equipment.

The moment that something becomes familiar—be it a discovery or an invention—we tend to take it for granted. We no longer have any sense of wonder about its appearance, functioning and creation. This is even truer of the vast array of God's creation. Yet everything which exists in this world, be it a leaf, a snowflake, or a ray of sunshine, is a veritable miracle of creation. From his earliest childhood, man has been aware of these things; yet they have become objects of such familiarity, that he almost ceases to notice them. Imagine how different his attitude to them would be if he were to see them for the first time; he would be like someone who had been cured of total blindness examining his surroundings with tremendous joy and a great sense of wonderment.

This is how we ought to look at God's creation all around us. We should not lose our sense of awe and gratitude simply because familiarity has taken the edge off our awareness.

The next time sunlight enters a darkened room, a bird sings by the wayside, the moon casts its silvery spell or a rose gives its fragrance to the air, we should remember that these are things which go far and beyond human creativity and that ultimately we owe everything to God. □



MANAGEMENT OF ENVY

In Comparison we may Understand

THE Prophet Muhammad taught that in worldly matters one should look, not at those above themselves, but at those below. Only in this way will one be able to appreciate God's bounty.

In the distribution of worldly benefits, there is no uniformity; some possess less and some have more. And this is a state of affairs which has perennially aroused envy and created friction in society. Now, if an individual compares himself to one who is apparently less well-endowed than himself, he will be filled with a sense of gratitude. But if he always has an eye on those who seem better placed in life, his soul will become corroded with ingratitude.

A simple way of guarding oneself from this emotional evil is to compare oneself to those who have less than oneself and not with those who have more. Sheikh Saadi (1213-1292) one of the greatest figures in classical Persian literature, writes that he had no shoes and walked barefoot. Seeing people wearing shoes, he wondered why he had been denied such things. No sooner had this thought entered his head than he came upon a man with no feet. He was at once full of gratitude, and thanked God for showing him the greater munificence of granting him the use of two healthy feet.

If an individual compares himself to one who is apparently less well-endowed than himself, he will be filled with a sense of gratitude. But if he always has an eye on those who seem better placed in life, his soul will become corroded with ingratitude

God desires that each and every one of His servants should be thankful to Him, but, for this to become a reality, we must all subject ourselves to a constant process of self-appraisal. This means assessing the truly positive aspects of our lives in relation to others, and an unceasing scrutiny of our thoughts so that we should not unwittingly allow ourselves to slip into negativism. The sight of a man consumed with envy is the saddest of spectacles. □



UNDERSTANDING THE QURAN

Through Contemplation

WAHAB IBN ABDULLAH AL-SAWAI, who belonged to the generation after the Companions of the Prophet, once asked Ali ibn Abi Talib whether he possessed any divine inspiration which was not contained in the Quran. Ali said, that they had nothing besides the Quran, "The only additional source of inspiration was the true understanding of the Quran which God bestows upon a person." (*Tafseer Ibn Kathir*)

Ali's answer shows that it is one thing to understand the written words of the Quran, and another to penetrate into the deeper meanings of the Book of God. To understand the words of the Quran all one has to do is read it. But true understanding of Quranic meanings can only come from deep thought and contemplation. The Quran is an ocean of profound meanings; only one who plunges into the depths of its waters can fathom the treasures it contains.

One can put this in another way and say that to understand the words of the Quran one has to know the Arabic language; but to understand the meaning of the Quran one needs to be versed in divine wisdom. One can study the Arabic language, read the Quran, and understand the outward meaning. But the Quran has meanings that lie hidden beneath the surface. These meanings can only be understood by one who has illuminated his vision with the light of God.

All one has to do to ascertain the words of the Quran is open its pages. But to discover the Quran's meanings, one has to explore it in depth. One can sit and listen to a recital of the Quran, or hear someone else reading a translation, but this will only enable one to understand the words of the Quran. To penetrate its inner meanings on the other hand, requires an effort on one's own part.

If we study the Quran on a superficial level, it will only have a superficial effect; our belief in the Quran will lack the force of inner conviction. One who discovers the Quran with its inner meanings, on the other hand, develops a live attachment to the Book of God. The Quran becomes a source of inspiration and spiritual nourishment in life. All of one's thoughts and actions spring from the Quran. It becomes the very life and soul of one's existence. □



JUSTICE IN THE HEREAFTER

Divine Retribution

THERE are many instances in the Quran and *Hadith* of the unerring justice of divine retribution, for in the life after death, a person will be rewarded or punished strictly in accordance with the virtues or vices of his deeds in this world.

The Quran says, "The punishment of the life to come is much more severe, if only they knew it." (68: 33)

When the Prophet went on his Night Journey to the Heavens, amongst the things that he was shown was a world of allegory in which man's worldly actions appeared in another-worldly form. He was shown not only the results of good deeds in the everlasting life after death, but was also given an insight into the forms which evil deeds would assume in the eternal world. Different types of punishments were shown which represented evils of corruption done on the earth: backbiting, slandering, usurping other people's properties, oppressing, etc.

Man's response to the situations he faces in life can take one of two forms: the infernal or the heavenly. An infernal response is one which is categorically opposed to the will of God, while a heavenly response is one which humbly conforms to His will. Those who make the former response are Satanic in character and deserve punishment. The latter evince divine characteristics and will be admitted to the Garden of Bliss.

How do we define 'Satanic' characteristics? They are those personality traits which cause an individual to embark on a retaliatory course, quite unmindful of the consequences, whenever he is confronted with circumstances which are not to his liking. Whether it be pain, sorrow or mere embarrassment which is inflicted upon him, he feels he must hit back, returning hate for hate, anger for anger.

Divine characteristics, on the other hand, being deep rooted in the fear of God, cause a man to rise above fleeting emotions and prevent him from being swayed by passionate love or hate in his dealings. Such characteristics deserve the rewards of God. The Quran explains that the reward given in Heaven will be of the same hue as one's actions

Divine characteristics, being deep rooted in the fear of God, cause a man to rise above fleeting emotions and prevent him from being swayed by passionate love or hate in his dealings.

in this world. "Proclaim good tidings to those who have faith and do good works. They shall dwell in gardens watered by running streams. Whenever they are given fruit to eat, they will say: 'This is what we used to eat before', for they shall be given the like." (2: 25) This means the rewards of the Hereafter will be in exact accordance with one's actions in this world. The form of this reward will be exactly suited to our deeds.

One can understand the need for a place of compensation and reward from the following example. In the science of light, there is a law of nature called refraction. Today this is known as Snell's law, having been discovered initially by Willebrord Van Roijen Snellius. He made his discovery in 1617, but this discovery remained unknown to people, lying unpublished, until a Dutch scientist, Christian Huygens, came to know of it and mentioned it in his research paper in 1703. Only then did the world come to know of Snell's discovery.

The Garden of Paradise is an exquisite and unblemished haven, which God has specifically created for the truly righteous among His servants.

That is, Snell's scientific discovery remained hidden from the eyes of the world for a period of 86 years. It was only after this long period, when Christian Huygens highlighted it, that the world came to know of its importance.

The matter of the Hereafter too is somewhat similar. How many of God's servants are there who are sincerely engaged in virtuous activities away from the limelight, unknown to people, unheralded in the media? How many God-fearing people are there whose inner selves are shaken with the fear of God, but whose undemonstrative expressions fail to show this inner tempest. These are God-fearing people who keep their mouths closed for fear of God, yet no other human being is aware of the virtuous acts of the true believer. How many pious souls are there who have had every opportunity to display their ego and torment others, but who have been halted in their tracks by the fear of God's chastisement.

There are many true believers whose good actions have been lost in the wilderness, recognized neither by near ones nor by more distant people. But this state of affairs will not last forever. In the Hereafter, God will unravel all veils. Then all things hidden from view will appear as clear as daylight. It will be the place where no action done in the world will remain hidden. Even a tiny good deed in the world will appear as plain as daylight, and all virtuous people will be rewarded for their good deeds.

The Garden of Paradise is an exquisite and unblemished haven, which God has specifically created for the truly righteous among His servants. Every situation which confronts a man in this world invites one of two kinds of responses. It is on the basis of this response that one will be pronounced fit for Heaven or for Hell. Man is an aware, sensate being, who is stirred by the situations he faces in life, and who reacts to them mentally and physically, in word and deed. God has given man this freedom to see how he uses it—whether, for example, he returns abuse for abuse, malice for malice, or whether he suffers these things, yet offering only prayers and goodwill in return.

In this world there is no escaping adverse sets of circumstances in which unpleasantness occurs over and over again, thus arousing strong antipathies. But believers are exhorted, by divine commandments, to rise above the treatment meted out to them and to confront negative treatment with positive behaviour.

When a true word is spoken, one acknowledges it, another denies it. An issue arises, eliciting justice and mercy on the one hand, and cruelty and oppression on the other. Adverse circumstances come into being, arousing feelings of humility in one and contumacy in another. Attitudes of goodwill and regard for others are faced off by the urge to hate and avenge. These opposing reactions are what determine our fate in the Hereafter; the positive taking us to Heaven and the negative to Hell. We should never lose sight of the fact that it is by them that we stand, or fall. □



Great Minds!

*Only those who stand firm in
the face of adversity, are finally
able to advance towards a new &
successful life.*

MEN AND WOMEN

Status in Islam

UMME SALMAH, the Prophet Muhammad's wife, once remarked to the Prophet, "I hear of God mentioning men but not women." It was in this context that the following verse was revealed to the Prophet:

I will deny no man or woman among you the reward of their labours. You are members one of another. (QURAN 3: 195)

This makes it clear that, although males and females differ from one another biologically, they are equal in terms of human status, they have a definite partnership with one another, and there is no distinction made between them as regards their respective rights. They are in fact, each other's lifetime companions.

The Principle of Division of Labour

Within the social framework, however, Islam—to the extent that it is both natural and practical—has adopted the principle of division of labour in respect of the genders; the man's field of activity being basically external to the home, while contributing what is practically possible in the home. The woman's role is to do basically with management of home and family while contributing what is practically possible to the society.

This division, however, has never been intended as a form of discriminatory treatment. Its main purpose has always been to preserve the distinctive characteristics of both, while deploying their respective talents and skills in the most socially useful manner. This enables them to make the best use of their innate capabilities without causing any undue disruption in the family or in society.

In modern parlance, this is a form of managerial optimization rather than gender discrimination. For this principle to be effective, the spheres of activity of men and women have had to be quite different and of course, separate from each other. The traditional distinction has been so often cited by feminists as an inhibiting factor in women's lives that the true meaning of equality has been lost sight of. After all, it will be the very same virtues in thought, word and deed which will be prerequisites for both genders to enter Paradise. If the qualities of piety, humility, honesty, patience and compassion are demanded of men, they will in like measure be demanded of women. The fact

that men and women function in different spheres has no bearing whatsoever on the ultimate equality—equality in the eyes of God.

Basic Attributes of Men and Women

The characteristics of true believers, both men and women are depicted in the Quran in the following words:

Men and women who have surrendered, believing men and believing women, obedient men and obedient women, truthful men and truthful women, enduring men and enduring women, humble men and humble women, men and women who give in charity, men who fast and women who fast, men and women who guard their chastity, men and women who remember God in abundance—for them God has prepared forgiveness and a great reward. (33: 35)

These then are the basic attributes which both men and women must cultivate if they are to endear themselves to God and become His favoured servants:

ISLAM: Islam means one should willingly obey God, leading one's life within the bounds of God's commandments.

IMAN (Faith): Islam really begins to take root with the conscious discovery of God, which is known as *iman* (faith). When *iman* is genuine, the men or women concerned cannot but surrender themselves to God and mould their thinking upon the truth.

QUNUT (Sincere obedience to God): This entails the adoption of the path of piety as shown by God and His Prophet. It means the fullest concentration of the heart and mind on the will of the Almighty.

SIDQ (Truthfulness) means living an honest, straightforward life in the sense of saying plainly what one is going to do, and then actually doing as one has said. In other words, it means leading a life of principle.

SABR (Patience) is a quality which enables one never to deviate from the right path, even when faced with difficulties in following it.

KHUSHU (Humility) is a powerful emotion which engenders an attitude of humility and submission. One comes to this state through a realization of God's greatness and His absolute power in stark contrast to man's total powerlessness. In consequence, he becomes kind and humble towards other human beings.

SADAQAH (Charity) is the duty of acceding to others the right to share in one's wealth. It makes one aware that if one's own needs require the expenditure of money for their satisfaction, so also do the needs of others. One is never then oblivious to the needs of others.

SAWM (Fasting) must be practiced for the sake of God. By fasting, man contrasts his own helplessness with God's omnipotence and thanks God for the food and drink which He has bestowed upon him.

IHSAN (Chastity): It is important as it keeps one pure and guards one against shameful behaviour. The sense of shame which God has given man acts as a natural deterrent against permissiveness.

DHIKR (Remembrance of God): Truly virtuous men and women must remember God at all times.

Another chapter in the Quran mentions three more qualities of believing men and women. These are penitence, devoutness and obedience.

TAWBAH means feeling penitent about having committed a wrong and then turning away from it. This is a very special attribute of believing men and women.

IBADAH (Worship): Believing men and women worship only God.

SIYAHAH (Travelling) implies the virtues of undertaking journeys for God's cause. Travelling for the cause of God includes taking such action for the sake of God as necessitate moving about from one place to another. Examples of such travel are covering long distances in order to acquire knowledge of religion; visiting scenes of natural beauty or places of historical interest which have some lesson for mankind; and, especially undertaking journeys in order to convey God's message to His creatures.

The Quran by laying out the qualities which both men and women should possess has brought out the point of equality of the genders in the highest area of life. The other differences are merely of different roles in worldly life based on the biological and physiological differences which are in the very nature of men and women. □



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.



GOING AGAINST THE CREATION PLAN

SUBSCRIBING to the notion that violence is a viable method of gaining one's ends and then launching a violent course of action are against the creation plan of God. Neither the concept nor the deeds stemming therefrom are in accord with the divine scheme of things. That is why the violent way is destined not to produce any good results and serves no end save that of destruction.

If a farmer has a fertile piece of land, he can grow crops in abundance. But this will be possible only if he follows an appropriate method which is in consonance with nature. If however, he mindlessly starts pelting his fields with stones or dropping bombs on them, he will never be able to harvest the desired crops. In spite of being the owner of fertile acres, he will be no better off than one who has not a square yard of land to his name. The same is true of human life. Human life flourishes in an atmosphere of peace, but is destroyed in an atmosphere of violence.

Violence is the outcome of differences between people. One who believes in violent methods considers differences as evil or an obstacle in his path. For this reason, he becomes bent on obliterating evil, for he thinks that he can achieve his objective only when he has removed the differences between himself and others. This is a great misunderstanding, for differences are not man-made. They are ordained by the Creator Himself, and are an essential part of nature. And something which is an essential part of nature cannot be brought to an end. We can only accept nature. Eliminating it is beyond our power. When one group is annihilated in the name of differences,

another such group immediately takes its place, and so it goes on and on quite endlessly. That is why this chain of action and reaction over the issue of differences can never be halted.

The method of violence goes against the plan of nature, which ensures that each individual has full opportunities to perform his role in human progress by exploiting their capabilities to the fullest extent. This benefit can be availed of only in a peaceful atmosphere. The perpetrators of violence, by categorizing people as enemies, attempt to obliterate the precious lives of human beings, even before they have had the opportunity to utilize their potential and benefit humanity.

According to the law of nature, any great task always requires the support of society as a whole. Without collective participation, no one can accomplish any great feat.

According to the law of nature, any great task always requires the support of society as a whole. Without collective participation, no one can accomplish any great feat. And this can materialize only in a peaceful atmosphere. Mutual co-operation is just not possible in an atmosphere of violence. In such an atmosphere people tend to be psychologically unbalanced. How then can mutual co-operation become possible in such an environment?

One of the evils of violence is that, in the vicious atmosphere created by it, there is no possibility of any sustainable development. Any great task of progress becomes result-oriented only after long-term planning and action. This kind of planning can make headway only in a peaceful atmosphere. In a violent atmosphere, such plans face setbacks time and again, without any progress being made; on the pretext of killing the enemy, the process of human progress is dealt a deathblow.

The worst effect of the use of violence is that one receives nothing in return, and perhaps even forfeits previous gains. Any victory earned by means of violence is actually a defeat.

Violence is a wrong choice made by one suffering from the feeling of deprivation. Any group, rightly or wrongly, may suffer from this feeling. There is only one useful way of getting rid of it and that is by peaceful means. The violent method is so lethal that it is no choice at all for anybody. Violence, from the point of view of its result, only adds to this feeling of deprivation, instead of putting an end to it. Violence is nothing but an outburst of a provoked person. Violence provides no positive solution to any problem.

Victory is also a Defeat

King Pyrrhus, a Greek king of the third century BC, went to war with the Romans. Ultimately, he won a complete, but costly victory over the Roman army. In this prolonged battle his armies were destroyed, and his country's economy was totally devastated. For King Pyrrhus it was apparently a victory, but its result was nothing more or less than a defeat. It was his costly military successes which gave rise to the now current phrase "pyrrhic victory".

When we look into the history of different wars, it would be no exaggeration to say that most victories are pyrrhic in nature. Each victor has to suffer two losses. First, he sacrifices life, wealth and resources, and secondly, he loses the love and respect of the vanquished. No victor can avoid suffering these losses. The only difference between one victor and another is that while some victors suffer their losses sooner, others suffer them later.

The real process of human progress is set in motion only when the individuals making up society have the capability for peaceful thinking.

This matter of loss relates only to the violent method. A peaceful method leads to a totally different outcome. Once the peaceful method has been employed, victory and victory alone ensues; there is no room for defeat. If a peaceful method does apparently lead to a defeat the final outcome even then is a victory. For, by using a peaceful method, one might lose a war, but one does not lose opportunities. One still has opportunities and possibilities, by availing of which one can start life all over again and reach the destination of success.

The Age of War has come to an End

In ancient and mediaeval times, military encounters took place in the form of hand-to-hand fighting between soldiers wielding swords. But in modern times, highly sophisticated weapons such as nuclear missiles are used.

The basic difference between early and modern warfare is in the extent of the carnage in each case. The wielding of swords could sever the heads of only a few of the combatants, but now in the atomic age the equation has totally changed. For now war means general destruction. Moreover, the bomb aimed at the enemy is destructive to the user too. When we face up to these hard facts, we have to concede that war has become a futile exercise. War is now only a manifestation of madness, instead of being a measure calculated to enable one to achieve one's

objective. After the emergence of nuclear weapons, war has become a thing to be abhorred and abandoned. When we can see that resorting to war shows no positive results, waging it, far from being a wise step, is nothing short of madness.

It is believed by some that the establishment of peace requires a world government. This would require an armed police force and an army, on the strength of which peace would be established all over the world. But this concept of world government is impracticable, for it would only serve the purpose in a very limited way. The scheme of world government for establishing peace is far from ideal.

Let us suppose that such a world government were to come into being. It would be able to establish peace only at the level of administration. In other words, this projected world government could at best establish social peace. But what is more important than this is mental peace, which cannot be brought about by any world government.

Peace in the form of social stability, as enforced by established governments, was prevalent in the monarchies of ancient times. But the

So far as external peace is concerned, it is necessary for everyone to cooperate in order to maintain it. But any individual can achieve inner peace of mind, by one's own personal decision.

desired results could never be achieved. The Roman Empire provides one such example. During its rule which lasted for more than a thousand years, it established peace over a large area of the globe. This was known as the Pax Romana. But in spite of the establishment of peace for such a long period of time, no scientific or intellectual progress could be made.

This shows that, in spite of the desirability of social peace, it would only be partially useful for human progress. The real process of human progress is set in motion only when the individuals making up society have the capability for peaceful thinking.

Along with peace as an external manifestation, it is essential for human progress that people have internal peace, so that they do not live lives full of unnecessary tension, stress and contradictions. The most essential condition for human progress is that the thinking process once set in motion, should not in encountering obstacles, become perverted. This is essential to the development of one's personality. Only by this process can the individual attain to the highest spiritual and intellectual level.

Peace is undoubtedly an essential condition for human progress. It is, indeed, the basis of all human progress. If social and political peace accounts for 50% of this basis, mental and spiritual peace accounts for the other 50%.

The establishment of peace on national and international fronts appears, in practice, to be difficult. Perhaps, in the ideal sense, it is not attainable at all. But in all situations, peace of mind can certainly be attained. So far as external peace is concerned, it is necessary for everyone to cooperate in order to maintain it. But to achieve inner peace of mind, little or no external cooperation is required. By one's own personal decision, one can attain such peace, even when all others have turned inimical to the idea. This advantage possessed by the individual is undoubtedly the most fortunate thing. Indeed, there is no blessing greater than this. □



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CONSTANT CHOICES

Introspective Attitude

WE are judged not only by how well or how badly we answer our test papers at school and college, but by how we acquit ourselves in our day-to-day experiences. Some of these require no exercise of our sense of right and wrong, make no appeal to our consciences and involve no moral choices. They are simply routine matters which require a physical or mechanical response. But there are many occasions on which we must consider what is good and right, and having made our decisions, we must act accordingly.

Some other types of experience are not so clear-cut, in that they place us in the dilemma of not being able to tell which the right course is, or of feeling that no matter which course we take, the outcome is likely to be harmful or disagreeable. It is simply a choice of the lesser of two evils. It is such experiences which are the real 'test papers' in life. For it is upon our making the correct responses and upon our unshakeable will to abide by them that our ultimate fate will depend. On the Day of Reckoning, all our correct answers will be measured against all our wrong answers. Only those who have made the correct moral decisions, and consistently followed them through, will find favour in the eyes of the Almighty. Those who have taken the wrong course, or who have simply run away from difficult situations, will fall from divine favour into eternal perdition.

The lust for power must be tamed and extirpated and one's energies devoted instead to furthering the interests of others.

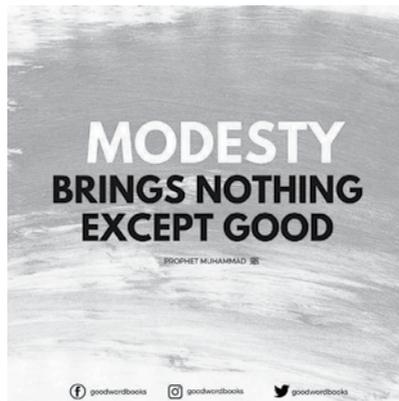
But in situations in which the human mind will seem too frail to be able to deal with overwhelming moral complexities, we should never lose sight of the fact that man does not stand alone; God is forever there, at his side. Man has only to turn to Him to receive divine succour. Once a man has put his trust in God,

he finds that all his problems can be appropriately solved and that, in order to do what is right, he no longer feels any hesitation in embarking on courses which had previously struck him as too difficult, unpleasant or even dangerous. He is then armed with the knowledge that engaging in right action gives one strength, and that adopting the wrong course can only bring about one's downfall. Right action will take him closer to God and wrong action further away from Him. One who deliberately turns away from his Saviour will find himself in the hands of the devil, whereas one who turns to God will be given shelter and support, and

guidance as to the correct response to give in any situation calling for principled behaviour. Those who turn to Satan seldom realize that they are launching themselves on the downward path to self-destruction.

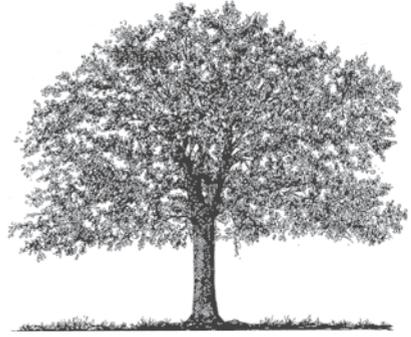
Often, the experiences which we have in life are the result of the circumstances which we find ourselves in. Pain and deprivation may be our lot, we may be forced to live in poverty. Such circumstances call for curbing our impatience and indignation, and to show gratitude to God for whatever mercies He has chosen to bestow upon us. One may, on the contrary, find oneself in a position of rank and affluence, in which case it is arrogance, overweening pride and miserliness which have to be guarded against. Then one should go out of one's way to be unfailingly humble and to be consistently generous in spending for God's cause to the point of leaving oneself with nothing more to spend. Perpetual counting and accumulating of wealth must be avoided at all costs, for its glitter has such a mesmerizing effect that it begins to take the place of faith and religion. The lust for power must likewise be tamed and extirpated and one's energies devoted instead to furthering the interests of others.

How many believers, who are ostensibly imbued with religious fervour, suffer a moral collapse the moment they have to go through an exacting phase in life? How many give way to scepticism and despair the moment they have the merest whiff of adversity. It is at such junctures in life that they should prostrate themselves before the Almighty and beg for forgiveness, mercy and guidance. God will be there. He will not fail them. □



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



SPIRITUALLY STRONG

*A strong believer is better and more lovable to God than a weak believer, and there is good in both.
(Prophet of Islam, Sahih Muslim)*

THERE are two kinds of people—strong and weak. Believers too can be categorized into these two groups. However, just as a strong believer shall be rewarded for performing outstanding feats on account of his superior abilities, a weak believer too shall be rewarded. The only prerequisite is that the weak believer must possess the true spirit of faith. A strong believer will be naturally given reward for putting to use his special capacities for the religious cause. But God's bounties are not limited or restricted to such people. If a weak believer proves deserving, he too will be given high reward by God.

A weak believer has certain additional qualities. For example, he is generally more modest as compared to others. Such a person tends to be more engaged in prayer and remembrance of God. A weak believer, due to his helplessness, is in a far better position to utter such words of prayer as may invoke God. Such aspects of his nature serve to increase the spiritual feelings of the weak believer. If a strong believer is marked

by great physical power, a weak believer is strong in terms of spirituality.

For a strong believer there is the possibility of developing pride, however, a weak believer is always shielded from such inclinations. His helplessness further strengthens his humility. In this way, a weak believer, in spite of his weaknesses becomes deserving of God's special blessings as compensation for his helplessness. □

A weak believer, due to his helplessness, is in a far better position to utter such words of prayer as may invoke God.

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SIMILARITIES BETWEEN SIKHISM & ISLAM

Benefit from Understanding

Islamic scholar Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, and Giani Harpreet Singh, Jathedar of Takhat Shri Damdama Sahib, discuss Islam and Sikhism. The Jathedar recently released a Gurmukhi version of Maulana's translation of the Quran. The samvad was moderated by Mona Mehta and Reena Singh from *The Times of India*.

GIANI HARPREET SINGH, Jathedar of the Takhat Shri Damdama Sahib says that it took him more than two years, working with scholars at Punjabi University, Patiala, to translate Maulana Wahiduddin Khan's translation of the Quran into Gurmukhi. "Mohammad Habib, my PhD guide, Mohammad Yusuf, Satinder Singh and I, worked on the project. Mohd Habib motivated me and introduced us to Maulanaji's translation of the Quran. He said a Gurmukhi translation will send out a good message."

The Quran's message is 'take your nectar of wisdom, and ignore the rest'. Wisdom is present in everything in nature. The rose has both beauty and thorns—the wisdom is to live in peaceful coexistence. "That is the spirituality in Islam."

The Jathedar continues, "It was a great learning experience. There are many similarities between the Quran and the Guru Granth Sahib. They both talk about *Aek Khuda*, or *Aek Rab*—One God. Ishwar or Parmatman is One; He is the creator, Brahman; He runs the show. Gurbani talks of *Aek Rab ka hukum*—that the world operates according to the Supreme Being's will. The Quran talks of one *Rab*, Supreme Being. The Guru Granth tells Sikhs that their aim should be to live according to His *hukum* (commandment); whether you experience *sukha* or *dukha* (happiness or sorrow), that's His will."

Maulana adds: "After my education, I became a seeker. I went to the jungles and mountains, and kept repeating to myself, *Khudawand tu kabb aayega, mein kabb tak tera intezaar karoon* (When will you reveal yourself to me, O God; how long do I have to wait?) During this phase I read extensively. The basic teaching of Islam is oneness of God. I studied Islam from the prism of science, not philosophy.

"In *The Brief History of Time*, Stephen Hawking described creation as part of one big whole; everything tied in one string. We talk of the oneness of God, and science calls it the (single) string theory. That's

when I returned to Islam. Science proved to me that there is one source managing creation.” Then why is religion often used to incite violence and terrorism? Jathedar Harpreet Singh laments that “while people are adopting religion, they have not understood the thought behind it. Till they do, violence will continue. *Swarth*, (selfishness), is also responsible for violence. Science has made life easier; it has provided us with luxuries; but, our desires have increased. Some want to acquire things even at the cost of killing others.”

Politicisation of Islam

Maulana says that the “Violence that you see in the name of Islam is not due to faith; it is politicisation of Islam for votes.” He cites the example of a person he knew in his youth, who made his money building mosques and pocketing half the donations. He would play on people’s emotions, saying, the donations they made for Mosques would ensure them Paradise.

The problem is not that some people do not follow religion. The biggest problem is the rabble rouser; he is present in every faith, group, and community.” But for every rabble rouser, isn’t there a spiritual leader who can bring people back on the right path? Jathedar Harpreet Singh says, “People have always been drawn to materialism. The desire for ‘matter’ actually becomes a weakness. These people then follow a path that leads to fulfilment of desires, and they don’t think of right and wrong. *Padarthwaad* or materialism, overpowers religious thoughts. Materialism becomes number one, and religion, a poor second.”

But Maulana says that he finds people who follow the Sikh *dharma* (religion), exceptional. “I went to Amritsar to know why the Sikhs never have *gurus* (priests) who provoke or instigate them, unlike the Muslims. I discovered that in Sikhism, the *gurus* made the Granth Sahib as eternal *guru*. The Guru Granth cannot be a rabble rouser. So, among Sikhs, there is lot of positive unity, and relatively, they are more peaceful. But Muslims instead of following the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet are following those who have interpreted Quran in any way. The differences among the two religions were created by Mughal kings, especially Aurangzeb. Otherwise, I think both religions have many similarities. It was Aurangzeb who politicised Islam.” The Jathedar adds, “As Maulanaji points out, the Guru Granth Sahib is both our Granth and

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Guru. What we call the *shabad*, the word, in which there is wisdom—that is the *guru*, the voice of Parmeshwar. Guru Nanak acknowledges the *vaani* he wrote as coming from Akal Purakh. Whatever is written here has come from Him....”

Maulana recalls an article he wrote at the peak of the Sikh separatist movement. “I addressed both Kashmiris and Sikhs and denounced the separatist movements. But reason prevailed upon the Sikhs and the Khalsa movement died out, but the Kashmir trouble is alive. Kashmir has been destroyed, while the Sikhs are flourishing. The same is happening to the Rohingyas and in Palestine, too.” He points out that Sikhs should be considered as role models. The Jathedar clarifies that the Punjab violence was not based on religion but on economics. After Partition, Sikhs were upset that some Punjabi-speaking areas had gone to other states, while other states were carved out on the basis of language. They were also upset about sharing of river waters with other states. “The riparian rule for water was not followed as was done in other states. Punjab is an agricultural state, but gives water to other states, even when there is no water left for its own lands. It was then that the cry for a separatist movement started.”

What are their views on leaving worldly comforts in the pursuit of spirituality? “When Guru Arjan Dev was asked what is the best religion in the world, he said, *sab dharam meh saraysat dharam, har ko naam jap nirmal karam*—of all religions, the best religion is to chant the name of the Lord and maintain pure conduct. There is no need for *sanyas*, isolation, or *havans* and dips in freezing waters. Bhagat Dhanna in the Guru Granth Sahib, demands food, shelter, wife, and a horse. He says, ‘If I have all these means of sustenance, then I will serve you without worries,’” points out the Jathedar.

Maulana adds: “This talk about leaving one’s home (which is called *rahbaniyath*), like the monk who sold his Ferrari, does not exist in Islam. Islam does not say materialism and spirituality are different. Both are intertwined. Just don’t rob anyone to become a billionaire. In the Quran, there is a chapter on the honeybee, which is seen as a role model.” The honeybee takes only nectar from flowers, ignoring the rest. The Quran’s message is ‘take your nectar of wisdom, and ignore the rest’. Wisdom is present in everything in nature. The rose has both beauty and thorns—the wisdom is to live in peaceful coexistence. “That is spirituality in Islam,” says Maulana. He ends on a cautionary note: “But Muslim society today has degenerated. Like Guru Granth Sahib guides the Sikhs the Quran and the life of the Prophet should be the guidance for the Muslims.” □

AN EXEMPLARY TALE

Progressive Individuals

MR. A.M.Khan had procured a B.E. degree in electrical engineering from Banaras Hindu University. A few years later a vacancy for the post of a senior lecturer arose in a private polytechnic of Chandauli, a district in Varanasi. The successful candidate was expected to function as the head of the Department of Electrical Engineering.

The interview for this post was to be held at the official residence of the then Commissioner of Varanasi who at that time was the President of the Managing Committee. In his capacity as President he was present at the interview.

Two professors from the Banares University were the other members of the interview board. One of them had taught Mr. A.M.Khan at the Banaras Hindu University. As soon as one of the professors put a question to Mr. Khan the other professor addressing the commissioner said. 'He is the best candidate, there is no question of interview. Mr. Khan received his appointment letter one week later for the post of Senior Lecturer of the Chandauli Polytechnic and the Head of the Department of Electrical Engineering. Subsequently, he continued to receive promotions until he retired as Joint Director, Technical Education.

The world runs on the principle of give and take. Here no value is placed on grievances, protests and demands. The simple rule observed by this world is receiving and giving in equal measure.

Often we come across people who try to give us the impression that employment opportunities are scarce. If we go to the root of the matter in many cases we will find that there is a dearth of worthy candidates. Mr. Khan received such an unexpected response only because he had worked very hard at his studies, always securing good marks. His performance and character throughout his studies were highly commendable. His professors formed a good impression of him. This was the reason why he had become their first choice.

Every Institute and office wants good workers, because without competent persons offices cannot be run satisfactorily. No one is an enemy to his own self. That is why no one can ignore a good worker.

Good, dependable workers are generally in demand. If you fulfill the needs of others, you will be sought out by them.

The world runs on the principle of give and take. Here no value is placed on grievances, protests and demands. The simple rule observed by this world is receiving and giving in equal measure. If you want employment, you must make yourself useful. You must develop the skills needed by other people. Then you will see that you don't need to pursue employment instead employment will pursue you. □



ONE'S OWN RESPONSIBILITY

Developed Societies

DURING the Second World War, Sir Winston Churchill, Britain's Prime Minister and popularly acclaimed military leader, gave to the people of Britain the motto: IT ALL DEPENDS ON ME.

The following incident of a training camp is a good illustration of this motto. It was in Chandigarh that a camp was to be inaugurated by an Indian minister, which had been arranged for the Principals of various polytechnic colleges. A British Professor had been invited to address the gathering. When the minister was about to start his inaugural address, the power suddenly went off and the loudspeakers went dead. There was no battery on hand as an alternative arrangement. However, there was a battery available in the polytechnic's workshop.

The trainee Principals started looking around for an attendant who could be sent to the workshop to fetch the battery. But as soon as the British Professor realized what had happened, he himself dashed to the workshop, picked up the heavy battery and came running back to connect it to the loudspeaker system. The microphone immediately started functioning again.

Such an attitude on the part of an individual, whatever his community, is the underlying cause of collective progress of the society to which he belongs. Similarly, at the national level, progress and development are directly correlated with the prevalence of this spirit among the people.

Genuine reform will come about only if the spirit of reform is generated among the people concerned.

For any work which people want to take up to correct some wrong in the society or its improvement, they start with proposals for new laws by the government, or demand for changes to be made in the administration, so that the malady may be set right. But the legal system and the administration have their limits and, as such, are only partially effective. Genuine reform will come about only if the spirit of reform is generated among the people concerned. □



MAN'S QUEST

What is Truth?

MUCH as we long for a perfect world, we are compelled to live in an imperfect one. Our happiness is always short-lived and our every success is, in some way, eventually a failure. The aspirations that we cherish in the early days of our lives are shattered as we begin to age. Just as we begin to take root on earth, disease, old age and death overtake us.

How enchanting the flowers are, but they blossom only to wither. How delicate the sun's radiance, but it shines for only a short while before being covered in darkness. Miraculous though man's existence is, no miracle can save him from death. Everything in this world shall perish. Although this world is inexpressibly beautiful and meaningful, all its virtues are bound to fade. All mundane things have a dark side to them. How, one may ask, could a God who is Himself perfect, be satisfied with the creation of an intrinsically imperfect world? The absolute cannot abide in the non-absolute. This world must be inconclusive. Another world must follow to compensate for the inadequacies of the present one.

Paradise is that eternal world of God in which His attributes will appear in all their perfection. It will be free of all the defects we experience in the world about us.

There is no doubt about the transitory nature of this world. It came into existence at a specific time some four and a half billion years ago. Its Creator must have existed eternally, for only an infinite Creator could have fashioned a finite world. If God had not always existed, then this transitory world could never have come into being. The very existence of an ephemeral universe shows that there must be an eternal Creator. If the Creator had not existed eternally, He could never have existed at all and, if there had been no Creator, there would have been no creation either.

If we assert that the world was created on a certain date, then this means that there must have been a Creator before that date. If we go on to assert that this Creator was Himself created on some previous date, then our claim can have no meaning. The Creator cannot himself have been created; He always was. In His infiniteness He has created a finite world. His existence, and that of all mortal creatures, is dependent upon His immortality.

Since God is immortal, He must also be absolute, for absoluteness is the greatest attribute of immortality. The one cannot be found without the other.

This world is a manifestation of God's attributes, but its shortcomings and limitations show the manifestation to be incomplete. A complete manifestation of a perfect and infinite God would itself be perfect and infinite. Another world must be awaiting us. This incomplete manifestation of God's attributes requires a sequel for its fulfilment.

Paradise is that eternal world of God in which His attributes will appear in all their perfection. It will be free of all the defects we experience in the world about us. Paradise is evidence of God's absolute power to make beauty perpetual and joy boundless in a world of everlasting peace and contentment.

Everyone is seeking some unseen fulfilment. Everyone seeks a perfect world, but this has always eluded man. Yet, it is quite natural that he should continue to strive, for the universe in which he lives testifies to the existence of one, infinite God. The emergence of a world of infinite blessings is just as likely as the existence of the present transitional world. How can an inherently infinite Creator be satisfied with a finite manifestation of His attributes? God, who created all things from nought, can surely endow creation with perpetuity. This second creation is no more difficult than the first.

Immortality is God's unique quality, in which He has no partner. Immortality signifies the highest possible perfection which only God can attain. No one can today imagine the wonderful nature of that Paradise which is a manifestation of God's immortality; that beauty which will never fade; that joy which will never end; that life, the continuity of which will never be interrupted; that world where all our hopes and desires will be fulfilled. No one will wish to part for even a moment from this wondrously delightful Paradise, no matter how many millions of years have passed.

Man is always searching for a world of everlasting content. This quest is quite correct and in accordance with human nature; but our dreams cannot come true in this world, for here, there cannot be an eternally perfect order. The resources needed for such a world are lacking.

Man is always searching for a world of everlasting content. This quest is quite correct and in accordance with human nature; but our dreams cannot come true in this world, for here, there cannot be an eternally perfect order.

The Prophet taught that God has made this world one of trial and tribulation, not one of reward and retribution.

The world is full of things which put man to the test, whereas the factors required for a life of everlasting delight and repose will be forthcoming only in the next world. Death divides these two worlds. Death marks the completion of the trial of man and his entrance into the world of eternity.

If one wishes one's dreams to come true, one should not try to construct a heaven on earth. One should rather try to succeed in the trial of life, accepting the role of God's true servant, adopting the life pattern of the Prophet and restricting one's freedom to the limits which God has laid down. The dreams of those who succeed in the trial of life will be fulfilled in the next world. Those who fail will find nothing but woe awaiting them. □



POLITICAL POWER NOT AN OBJECTIVE

Spiritual Individual

Contrary to common belief, gaining political power is not the main objective of Muslims. This is a misconception.



IN modern times, those nations who have understood this have achieved success even without having political power. Some have become established and excelled in the field of education, while others have set up empires in industry, communications and finance. The last in the list of these non-governmental empires is that of information technology. This has given man the opportunity to keep his finger on the pulse of human activity at the international level.

To accept that times have changed, it is important to understand the following reports which are enshrined in *Sahih al-Bukhari*. After the fourth Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib, political conflict ensued between Abdullah ibn Zubayr and the Umayyads. Abdullah ibn Umar, one of the senior-most Companions of the Prophet, held himself aloof from the battle. People approached him and by quoting a particular verse of the Quran about fighting, they asked him why he was not joining in the battle. Abdullah ibn Umar replied that fighting as mentioned in the Quran did not refer to political infighting, but rather to the religious coercive system, which had already been put an end to by the Companions of the Prophet. (*Fathul Bari*)

From this we learn that the war against persecution was a war of limited duration and temporary in nature, meant to be engaged in only until its specific purpose had been served.

Invoking the Quranic exhortation to do battle against persecution in order to validate acts of war, which had quite other aims, is highly improper. This verse could be cited only if the same state of affairs as existed at the time of its revelation, were to prevail once again.

The Islamic method, being based totally on the principle of non-violence, makes it unlawful for believers to initiate hostilities. Except in cases where self-defence has become inevitable, the Quran in no circumstance gives permission for violence.

The biographers of the Prophet Muhammad have put the number of *ghazwah* (battle) at more than 80. This gives the impression that the Prophet Muhammad in his 23-year prophetic career waged about four battles in a year. But this impression is entirely baseless. The truth is that the Prophet Muhammad in his entire prophetic life, engaged in war only on three occasions. All the other incidents described as *ghazwah* were in actual fact examples of avoidance of war and not instances of involvement in battle.

For instance, in the books of *Seerah*, the incident of *Al-Ahzab* is called a *ghazwah* (battle), whereas the truth is that on this occasion the armed tribes of Arabia, twelve thousand in number, reached the borders of Madinah with all intentions of waging war, but the Prophet and his Companions dug a deep trench between them, thus successfully preventing a battle from taking place. The same is the case with all the other incidents called *ghazwah*. The opponents of the Prophet repeatedly tried to embroil him in war, but on all such occasions, he managed to resort to some such strategy as averted the war, thus defusing the situation.

There were only three instances of Muslims really entering the field of battle—Badr, Uhud and Hunayn. On all these occasions, war had become inevitable, so the Prophet was compelled to encounter the aggressors in self-defence. Furthermore, these battles lasted only for half a day, each beginning at noon and ending with the setting of the sun. Thus it would be proper to say that the Prophet in his entire life span had actively engaged in war for a total of a day and a half. That is to say, the Prophet had observed the principle of non-violence throughout his 23-year prophetic career, except for one and a half days.

The Islamic method, being based totally on the principle of non-violence, makes it unlawful for believers to initiate hostilities. Except in cases where self-defence has become inevitable, the Quran in no circumstance gives permission for violence. □



HAVING REGARD FOR OTHERS

A Prophetic Practice

*Make things easy for people and do not deal with them harshly.
Give them glad tidings and do not make them hate you.
(Prophet of Islam, Sahih al-Bukhari)*

THE above *Hadith* teaches us about having regard for others. If you study the corpus of *Hadith*, you will learn that it was the practice of the Prophet of Islam to have regard for others to the maximum extent. One should completely abstain from harshness, whether in word or deed.

Having regard for others does not mean being indifferent to people or leaving them as they are. Rather, it means, to adopt the right starting-point for the process of reform. The right method of reform is to make allowances for the external aspects of people's actions and to focus more on the inner aspects of their actions. This is because reform of the inner dimension does not come about through reforming the external dimension. Rather, it is when the inner being is reformed that the external or outer dimension comes to be transformed too.

Having regard for others is another name for a wise approach. And it is a fact that true transformation always comes about through a wise method, not through an unwise one.

One benefit of having regard for people is that following the path of religion does not appear difficult to them. They would thus try to adopt religious teachings without feeling repulsed. As a result, a person is first reformed internally, and then, gradually, his external deeds and actions also take the religious form.

Having regard for others is another name for a wise approach. And it is a fact that true transformation always comes about through a wise method, not through an unwise one. The method that a religious reformer uses must always be that of having regard for people. The reformer's entire stress should be on trying to inculcate the spirit of religion among people. As soon as this spirit emerges, people begin to behave and conduct themselves according to religion, something which a reformer who uses extremist measures may never be successful in achieving. □

WISDOM

Ability to Sort out the Relevant from the Irrelevant

WISDOM is the greatest human quality, but it is strange that no clear definition of wisdom can be found in the dictionary. The reason is that wisdom is not an independent concept; it is another name for practical wisdom.

As expressed by a scholar, wisdom is the ability to discover the relevant by sorting out the irrelevant. That is, a wise man is one who knows the relative value of things.

It is also noteworthy that information and wisdom are not one and the same thing. If a certain person has a lot of information, it does not necessarily imply that he also possesses wisdom.

Generally people live in a wrong dichotomy, that is, of right and wrong. They take what they think is right and reject that which appears wrong to them. But this is not wisdom.

Wisdom demands one to judge on the basis of result. Experience shows that in this world, one does not have a choice between good or bad. Rather, the choice is between lesser evil and greater evil. Wisdom in such a case is to choose lesser evil over greater evil.

It is also noteworthy that information and wisdom are not one and the same thing. If a certain person has a lot of information, it does not necessarily imply that he also possesses wisdom. Information is related to memory and one who has a good photographic memory can store a lot of information and facts. Wisdom, in truth, is related to the power of analysis of these facts.

It requires wisdom even to differentiate between internal or inner and external or outer knowledge. Someone has very rightly remarked:

Knowing others is wisdom; knowing the self is enlightenment.

In this present world, each of us needs to equip ourselves in two ways—one, *vis-à-vis* our own self, and the other, *vis-à-vis* others. It is not enough for us to be prepared in only one of these ways and not in the other.

With regard to other people, wisdom lies in expecting only what is realistically possible. Any over-expectation in this regard always leads

to harm. While forming our expectations of others we must completely set aside our emotions and establish our expectations on the basis of reality.

But as far as our own selves are concerned, we must have the highest expectation. We must discover ourselves and try to use our abilities to the maximum extent possible. *Vis-à-vis* others, realism is desirable, while *vis-à-vis* our own selves it is idealism.

The guiding principle with regard to the above mentioned points is, "Be an idealist in your own home, and as soon as you step out of your home, become practical." To fulfil both these demands is a difficult task. In this world, only those people are successful who can fulfil them both.

We need to be realist when it comes to others and idealist when it comes to our own selves. One who does the opposite can never be successful in this world. □



CREATIVE ABILITIES OF MINORITIES

Law of Nature

IN recent times there has been a great deal of research done on 'minorities' and 'majorities'. This research has highlighted numerous issues that were hitherto not known or not properly understood. One of these issues is about creativity and about how certain conditions encourage people to be creative—in terms of ideas or practical work.

When there are two groups in a society—a majority and a minority—then, according to the law of nature, a sort of gulf is created. As a result of this gulf, a process is set in motion, which nurtures the creative abilities of the minority. It acts as an incentive to the minority, enabling them to progress.

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This process is evident in every country where there is a majority and one or more minorities. In such a situation, the process that promotes creative abilities among the minority is always set in motion, whether or not direct efforts are made for this. If this process of nature is not blocked, it will function on its own, till it reaches its culmination.

There is only one thing that can stop this process of creativity. And that is, if the minority develops a violent mentality. If leaders lacking foresight emerge among the minority who

stir up their people with emotional rhetoric and, drowning them in negative thinking, lead them on the path of hate and violence, the process of creativity will definitely stop. Otherwise, this process will never—under any conditions—come to a halt. This is, you could say, nature's decision. And nothing, except for suicide, can stop nature's decision. □

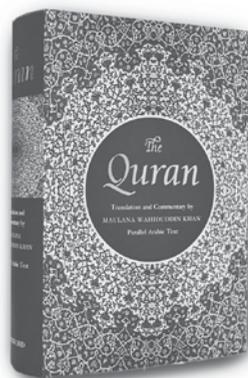


THE WORD OF GOD

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 mankind, along with divine admonition, and stresses the importance of man's discovery of the Truth on a spiritual and intellectual level.

Translated from Arabic and commentary by
Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



Those who bear the Throne, and those who are around it, glorify their Lord with His praise, and believe in Him. They ask forgiveness for those who believe, saying, 'Our Lord, You embrace all things in mercy and knowledge. Forgive those who turn to You and follow Your path. Save them from the punishment of Hell and admit them, Lord, to the Eternal Garden You have promised to them, together with their righteous ancestors, spouses, and offspring: You alone are the Almighty; the All Wise. Protect them from all evil deeds: those You protect from [the punishment for] evil deeds will receive Your mercy—that is the supreme success. (40: 7-9)

The subjects of God who set themselves the task of preaching the pure and unadulterated Truth are always harassed. They are made to feel lowly and small and treated as such wherever they may be. But, at the very time when this treatment is being meted out to them, the heavens and the earth are bearing testimony to their righteousness. The angels who have been charged with managing the affairs of the universe, will look forward to their ultimate glorious reward. Those who were looked down upon by the ignorant in this ephemeral world will be raised to such an exalted position that the angels nearest to God will pray for them.

Those who deny the truth will be told, 'God's abhorrence of you is greater than your hatred of yourselves. You were called to the faith but you denied it.' They will say, 'Our Lord! Twice You have made us die, and twice You have given us life! Now we have confessed our sins: is there any way out [of this]?' [They will be told], 'This is because when God alone was invoked you denied the truth, yet when others

were associated with Him you believed in them.' Judgement rests with God, the Most High, the Most Great. (40: 10-12)

God has showered His mercy in the form of guidance. But, people in general have not accepted it. As a result in the Hereafter, the rejecters of guidance will be completely deprived of God's grace. In the world, they ignored God's grace. In the Hereafter, God's grace will pass them by.

At that time, those who deny the truth will say, 'O God! You created us from the earth, that is, we were lifeless and you infused life into us. Afterwards, when our lifespan was over, we became lifeless for the second time. Now we have been raised again in the world of the Hereafter. In this way, you have twice given us life and twice given us death. Now, if you give us a third opportunity and send us back into the world, we will admit the Truth and live a life full of righteous deeds.'

But, this request of theirs will not be heard, because they proved that they could not recognise the Truth when it was hidden from their eyes. They were capable of recognising only so-called gods. They did not have the ability to recognise the real invisible God, and such people who are enamoured by outward appearances have no value in the eyes of God.

It is He who shows you His signs, and sends down provision for you from heaven; but none pays heed except the repentant. Therefore call upon God, making faith pure for Him, averse as the deniers of the truth may be to it: Exalted and throned on high, He lets the Spirit descend at His behest upon whichever of His servants He will, so that he may warn of the Day of Meeting, the Day when they shall rise up [from their graves] and nothing about them will be hidden from God. 'To whom shall the kingdom belong that Day?' It shall belong to God, the One, the All Powerful. That Day every soul shall be requited for what it has earned. On that Day none shall be wronged. And God is swift in reckoning. (40: 13-17)

There are countless signs in the universe which teach us lessons in symbolic language. One of these is the system of rains. This natural phenomenon is symbolic of God's inspiration. Just as rains are useful for fertile land and useless for barren land, similarly the inspiration from God brings forth fruit in some but not in others. This 'rain' enters the souls of those who have kept their hearts open and makes their existence lush green. On the contrary, those whose hearts are full of the greatness of beings other than God are like barren lands.

God is fully aware of His subjects. Whoever He finds capable, He chooses for the purpose of conveying His message. The main aim of this message is to warn the people of the fast approaching day when they will be presented before the Lord of the Universe, from whom nothing will be hidden and whose judgement will not be influenced by anybody. □



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ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

There is a perception that intolerance is on the rise in India. What do you say?

Intolerance is there in every society. It existed in the past, the only difference being that now, with modern means of communication, news about it spreads far and wide.

Tolerance, intolerance—these are part of every society. Human beings have freewill, and so there will sometimes be intolerance, there will sometimes be dissent, there will be differences. These things will always be there. Now, the key is how to handle them. The wise approach is that if someone says something that might hurt you, you should simply not react. Just ignore it. Why should you enter into a debate? If you do not react, if you simply keep quiet, the matter will die out on its own.

But there's so much violence happening in the world, in the country.

Millions of things are happening in the world, in the country, but the media is highlighting only that one incident of violence. It ignores everything else. And so, following the media, people also do not look at the million good, constructive things that are happening and get taken up by the one thing that the media highlights.

But don't you think that intolerance has increased in India, if you compare the situation today with that of a few decades ago? Especially Muslims, since they are a minority in India, are affected more by intolerance, violence and by communal riots. How do you think communal violence can be stopped?

The solution is not through protests, issuing fiery statements or through taking out demonstrations. If you want to solve the problem of riots, you should understand why they happen in the first place. Generally, riots are a result of some very small issue. If you just ignore this issue and do not blow it out of proportion, it will not escalate into a riot.

I'll give you an example. Once, a Muslim boy drank water from a hand-pump, with his mouth or hand touching the pump's spout. Some Hindus told him not to do that. The Muslims protested against this, and it soon turned into a riot! Now, the same thing has happened with another Muslim, too. He was told not to drink like that, and he responded very differently. He simply said, "Okay, I'll use a glass to drink", and then of course no one got angry and the matter ended there. So, the lesson

from this is: Do not exaggerate or get agitated about a small thing, because that could easily lead to a riot. Just ignore these issues and everything will be fine.

Let me cite another example. A temple and a mosque stood in the vicinity of each other. One day, *Bhajans* (religious hymns) were being broadcast through the temple's loudspeaker. A group of Muslims went to the temple and demanded that they turn it off. The Hindus refused, and then the agitated Muslims destroyed the loudspeaker. And after this, matters escalated into a riot.

Now, this happened because these Muslims reacted angrily to a small thing. Why should they have got agitated like that? No one was stopping them from praying in the mosque. They could have continued doing just that, isn't it? And then there would have been no riot.

So, the point is that avoiding getting agitated about petty issues and avoiding confrontation are the solution to communal riots.

On many occasions there seems to be a contradiction between what is said to be Shariah law and the law of the land. What do you feel about this?

In this regard, Islamic teachings are very clear. Some people may talk of enforcing *Shariah* in India, but this is totally irrelevant since India is a secular country. With regard to the Indian context, the Islamic position is that Muslims should focus on their faith, their worship, their character-building as per Islamic teachings but the law of the land must be in accordance with the country's Constitution. That means that Muslims have to follow the country's Constitution. Muslims should not raise the question of enforcing *Shariah* law in the country. It has no relevance. *Shariah* law may apply to countries where Muslims are a majority, but not in a country like India.

Many Indians suspect Indian Muslims of being pro-Pakistan. Do you think this is true?

This suspicion is unfounded. Soon after the Partition, many Indian Muslims migrated to Pakistan. But who migrates there now? No one! So, the Indian Muslims have joined their fate with India's. If there are one or two people who think otherwise, you shouldn't use that to form a general impression of the Indian Muslims as a whole.

In your experience what is the actual problem of Muslims?

The root of the problem is that while Muslims have religious education, they lack secular education. To understand this, you have to go back

a bit in history. When the British came to India, many of the *ulema* stiffly opposed modern education. They thought that Western-style education was against Islam. On the other hand, Hindus enthusiastically embraced this sort of education. That is why the Indian Muslims are at least a hundred years behind their Hindu compatriots. That's the basic reason for Muslim backwardness. It can't be resolved unless Muslims go in for modern education in a big way. Without that, Muslims cannot change. □



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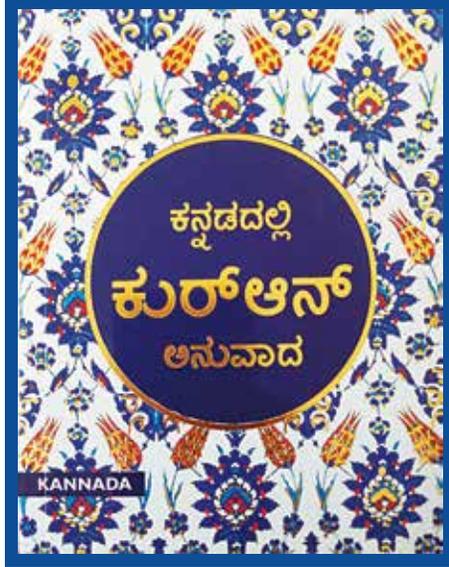
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