

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



There is only one way to succeed in the trials of life and that is through patience and prayer.

ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

Spirit of Islam is a monthly magazine which is now in its seventh 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

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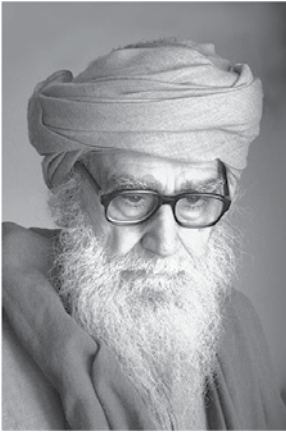
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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 CAUSE OF DISCORD

THE MANNER of Muslims' reaction in the face of provocations is counterproductive. This reaction can even be described as senseless and unnecessary. Perhaps the reason for this can be traced back to their pride psychology. It comes into being when religion is no longer treated as a matter of responsibility, but as a matter of pride. Such an attitude towards religion plays a fair share in contributing to the degradation of the *Ummah*, i.e. the community of believers.

The Quran says: "The true servants of God are those who walk upon the earth with humility and, when they are addressed by the ignorant ones, their response is, 'Peace'." (25: 63) However, the attitude is reversed when religious teachings cease to inspire people to do good deeds and a moral decline sets in. People then become proud and haughty. Whether or not they act upon the teachings of their religion, they believe that they are the chosen people of God. Their attachment to their religion is reduced to lip service. It exists in theory but not in practice; in the outward form but not in spirit. When religion serves

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

only to show one's superiority over others, a high degree of moral perversion has been reached.

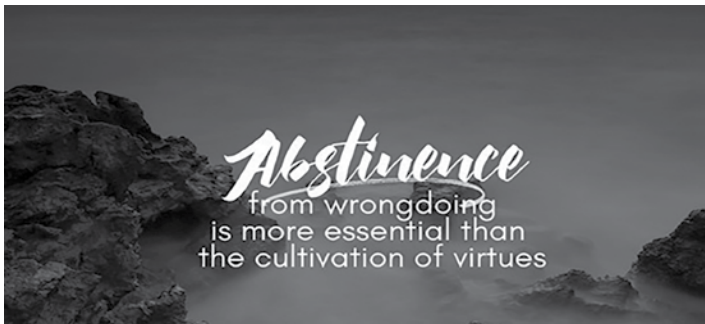
People hold their heads high and declare that they are the upholders of a religion which has retained the pure and original form of monotheism. However, they contradict themselves by manifesting such reverence for personalities both alive and dead as should be accorded only to the Lord, their God. They take pride in saying that Islam teaches one complete equality but they continue to discriminate between man and man. They are the first to pronounce in public that Islam exhorts one to do good and shun evil in all circumstances, but in private they disregard this. If their attention is drawn to this contradiction in their words and deeds, they will turn hostile to anyone daring to criticize them.

The faithful servants of God are they who walk upon the earth modestly and, when the foolish ones address them, answer: peace.

They take immense pride in describing the sublime character of the Prophet, for instance, his resistance to provocation; yet they themselves become annoyed about quite trivial matters and even justify their negative attitude by asking why they should not react in the face of provocations. □

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FROM THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

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SUSTAINABLE LIVING—AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

SUSTAINABLE living means to live in a manner without being a burden on the environment, and instead contributing towards improving the environment. In other words it refers to fulfilling one's needs without infringing on the needs of others in our family, society, nation and the world, for the present as well as future generations.

Islamic Perspective

Before we embark upon an understanding of the Islamic perspective on sustainable living, we need to understand a few fundamentals about Islam.

- The supreme concern of Islam is the discovery of God.
- The Quran is God's message to humankind presented by God's messenger Prophet Muhammad.
- The subject matter of the Quran is man.
- The objective of the Quran is to make man aware of the creation plan of God.
- Islam being a religion of nature lays before man the principles of success in this life as well as the Hereafter.

Coming to the topic of *Sustainable Living—An Islamic Perspective*, let us consider what Islam has to say about pollution.

We all agree that pollution adversely affects our environment and our quality of life, as it affects the very air we breathe. If the most basic need of humans, i.e the air we breathe is not of good quality, other things are not going to be of much help for us to be healthy. From the Islamic point of view, pollution of any kind is against the scheme of God the Creator. Islam tells man that it is his duty to maintain the purity of nature. Failure to do so is, in religious terms, a sin and in legal terms, a crime.

The Quran says:

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

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

In the above verses, the Quran refers to land pollution and water pollution by name but, in their general application, all kinds of pollution are included, such as air pollution, noise pollution and everything else which spoils the peace and tranquillity of the environment.

The message of these two verses is that God Almighty has created things in their best order and man is allowed to enjoy these things for his own benefit. But he is not allowed to destroy the balance of nature. Man was born as a free creature, but the test for him lies in not misusing the freedom. On the other hand he should use the freedom for contributing constructively towards society. Freedom is meant to bring out the creativity which benefits humankind.

Islam tells man that it is his duty to maintain the purity of nature. Failure to do so is, in religious terms, a sin and in legal terms, a crime.

Man can pollute nature, but he does not have the power to create another world. So, becoming sinful before God and depriving humankind of the only source of life, that is, nature, is a double loss for man. This state of affairs requires man to be very careful and cautious, otherwise he will be compelled to pay a heavy price for his negligence.

Islam—The Religion of Nature

Islam has its unique ways of drawing the attention of man towards sustainable living. It gives a broad spectrum of principles and instils in

man the capacity of finding creative ways for practical applications. For instance the Quran presents nature as a model for human behaviour.

Everything in the universe submits itself to the will of God, which in other words can be called as the law of nature. The whole world is controlled by this law, and the crux of this law is submission. Therefore, following Islam means living in harmony with nature. And this in turn means that at all times and in every aspect of life man must unflinchingly do as God desires, bearing in mind that one day he will die and shall have to give an account of his deeds to God. This natural model for man is referred to in several parts of the Quran.

The sun supplies light and heat free to all living beings. Man must adopt the principle of selfless service.

The stream runs its course around rocks and obstructions; man must live a life of avoidance and plan his life around obstacles without confrontation.

The honeybee enters the world of plants; along with the flowers it encounters thorns but it always ignores the thorns. Man must adopt the principle of ignoring the problems and availing the opportunities.

The cow eats grass and then converts it into milk, a wholesome food for humankind. Man should learn the art of positive conversion.

Everything in nature serves as a model for man. Nature's silent and impeccable behaviour shows man the right path. Therefore, man should always follow nature's perfect models.

One can discern from the above points that it is the attitude of human beings which is the most important factor in successfully implementing the good things on this earth. Likewise, it is man's attitude that determines his position towards the ideas of sustainable living. "It is our attitude that determines our altitude".

Everything in nature serves as a model for man. Nature's silent and impeccable behaviour shows man the right path. Therefore, man should always follow nature's perfect models.

A Believer is Likened to a Tree

The Quran says:

Do you not see how God sets forth a parable that the good word is like a good tree whose root is firm and its branches are in the sky,

yielding its fruit every season by God's leave? God gives parable to men so that they become mindful. (14: 24-25)

In this verse, God has compared a believer with a fruit tree. A tree grows from a small seed, receiving food from the earth, water, air and sun. Sprouting from a seed, it becomes a plant and then continues growing until it becomes a full-grown tree; developing into a profitable existence in the full sense of the word. Its branches, its leaves, its flowers, its fruits, its shadow, in short, each part of it becomes beneficial to all around.

The same is true of a believer. When he sows the seed of belief that there is a Creator of this world to whom he is answerable, it starts growing step by step in a moral, spiritual and intellectual course, making progress in its development until it is able, like the tree, to become profitable for the whole of humanity. This capacity of a believer is so great that he receives positive sustenance even from negative happenings. He becomes beneficial for everything inhabiting this earth.

A tree is a physical illustration of the spiritual life. Just like the tree, man must take spiritual food from everything. When he is angry and controls his anger, he is training himself in the art of anger management. When he faces a crisis and manages to keep his patience, he is building his capacity for positive planning. If he faces a violent situation and refrains from reacting, he is shaping his personality so that he can maintain his peace of mind, no matter in what condition he finds himself. This gives a person the ability to conserve his energies, so that he may devote himself to constructive work. It is as if he has enrolled himself in a course of intellectual improvement.

All situations, both pleasant and untoward, are like intellectual food. If you face these situations with a positive attitude, you will help yourself grow. You will enhance your creativity. You will develop your personality along positive lines. One who adopts this course will surely emerge, sooner or later, as a well-developed personality, standing tall, like a full-grown tree.

Need for Purification

Rain is a unique and natural phenomenon which is referred to several times in the Quran. One such reference is:

And We have sent down from the sky blessed water with which We have brought forth gardens and grain to be harvested. (50: 9)

'Blessed water' in this verse means fresh water. This is purified water that comes down as rain, giving vital nourishment to all forms of life on the earth. Purified water means desalinated water. The original source of this water is the salt water stored in the seas and oceans that are spread over three-fourths of the earth's surface. It is nature that initiates a global process of desalination through the formation of clouds. It is this blessed water, or desalinated water, that descends and fulfils the needs of humans, plants and animals.

It is a demonstration by nature of how we can purify ourselves. By following this natural pattern, we have to process events and things around us through contemplation, and then make this to serve as a tool for the purification of the soul.

We should learn the art of purification. We must learn to extract spiritual lessons from material events. How does this help in our goal towards sustainable living, you may ask?

A purified person is a spiritual person; one who contributes constructively to the world. He not only refrains from harming the environment but actually contributes towards its improvement. He maintains the beauty which God created and granted to humankind to use beneficially.

Nature is silently calling upon man to mend his ways before he finds that he has no further opportunity to do so.

There are many teachings of the Prophet of Islam regarding sustainable living:

- Simplicity is a part of faith.
- God is pure and loves purity and cleanliness.
- Whoever cultivates wasteland, for him is reward therein.
- There are heavenly rewards for any act of kindness to animals.
- It is considered as charity on the part of the believer if he plants a tree or sows a field and, man and birds or beasts eat from them.

Global Warming

It is of great importance that we understand the seriousness of the issue of Global warming in order to be more sensitive towards practicing sustainable living.

A recent news report from *the Independent* says:

Enormous Antarctic glacier on brink of collapse could raise sea levels by half a metre alone, scientists warn. (The Independent, 9th July 2019)

Global warming is regarded as the greatest problem besetting humankind in the present times. Scientific investigations have revealed that the earth's life support system dependent upon the balance of nature is fast falling apart. It is greatly feared that soon a time will come when nothing will be left on earth to ensure the survival of life.

The present age has been one of an explosion of divine blessings in the form of scientific discoveries leading to advanced technology, covering every aspect of our life. But the abundance of these blessings has only increased humankind's arrogance. While making full use of these blessings, humankind is distancing itself to a great extent from the Giver of these blessings. Perversion in the name of freedom has become the general culture today.

In the 7th century, the Prophet of Islam made it clear that human beings were not being settled on earth for eternity; a time would come when the present inhabited world would come to an end and be replaced by another world where we will have to give an account of every deed, which will either make us deserving of the perfect world of Paradise or make us deserving of punishment. Evil will be separated from the good in that world of the Hereafter.

The phenomenon of Global warming is showing that perhaps the time for this to happen is nearing. Man has to change himself; he has to abandon the way of disobedience to God and opt for the path of obedience to Him. Nature is silently calling upon man to mend his ways before he finds that he has no further opportunity to do so.

Nevertheless, the news of the end times being near is not to be considered as a loss of hope, for the Prophet of Islam said:

If the Hour (the end of this world) is about to be established and one of you was holding a palm shoot, let him take advantage of even one second before the Hour is established to plant it. □

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WITHOUT PREJUDICE

Conspiracy Theories

DURING the lifetime of the Prophet of Islam many of his fellow men opposed Islam and engaged in plotting against Islam and Muslims. The Quran has mentioned this at several places. But the counter-strategy advocated by the Quran was not to unearth their plots and launch movements to defeat them, or even finally to wage war against them. On the contrary, the Prophet and his Companions were enjoined to place their trust in God alone. That is to say, ignoring the plots and antagonism, trusting only in God and rising above circumstances, they were to continue all activities which were of a positive nature. This was an extremely important injunction. By giving this guidance, God set them on a course of positive thinking, which left no room for negative thinking.

In short, this Quranic teaching encouraged the early Muslims to live in a self-sufficient way, free of baneful influence of their opponents. If you have this obsession that others are plotting against you, and that everyone has turned your enemy, it will result in your starting to suspect everyone, to the extent that even if a member of your own community underscores the importance of tolerance and avoidance, you will take it in a negative light and dub him an agent of the enemy. In this way, you will weaken yourselves by turning your own people away from you. One harmful aspect of such negative obsession is that one loses all objectivity in thinking. One's entire outlook becomes partisan and prejudiced. One is unable to see reality as it is. One becomes like the man who can see only the thorns in a garden of roses or the colour blind person to whom a garden blossoming with flowers will appear in melancholy shades of grey. □

The Prophet and his Companions were enjoined to place their trust in God alone, ignoring the plots and antagonism of others and rising above circumstances, to continue all activities which were of a positive nature.



*To act against others is Egoism to
act against oneself is Godliness.*

WEATHERING THE STORM

Observing Equanimity

PEOPLE fall, largely, into two mutually exclusive categories: those reared in the hard school of life, and those born into the lap of luxury. Early environment has a decisive impact upon their yet unformed personalities. It is the way people acquit themselves in their contrasting situations of ease and privation that ultimately determines how their personalities will develop.

To be brought up in the midst of ease and comfort in times of peace and plenty may appear to be the greatest of good fortunes. Yet, that man will have the stronger, better-rounded personality who suffers hardships throughout his life. Too much comfort and convenience turn people into weaklings. Only that person will emerge with the greatest strength of character who puts up a struggle for everything he has. There is a great deal of wisdom in the saying that "it is not ease but effort, not facility but difficulty that makes men."

On the stormy seas of life, there are countless individuals who are confronted by difficulties. Some emerge unscathed, but more often, a large number lose heart, become a prey to despair and ultimately give up even trying. It is only those who stand firm in the face of adversity, resisting all obstacles which hinder their progress, who will finally advance towards a new and successful life.

But there is one danger to the latter group. Once they have attained their objectives, there is a possible degeneration into materialism as a result of their experiences in a world which is nothing if not materialistic. They must guard against being morally swept off their feet by the status in society which material wealth brings with it. Learning from hardships is no learning at all if all it does is turn people towards materialism. Material possessions do one no good whatsoever if they have been gained at the cost of higher human principles.

Hardship in this world can only truly benefit us if, in the process of the ensuing struggle, we learn the lessons of morality. We can only learn from our experiences provided we do not allow ourselves to be destroyed by them. We must always remember that it is quite possible to taste the bitterness of life's potion without falling a victim to its poison. The difficulties of life should give us experiences which enable us to become fuller and richer personalities; they should never cause us to descend into negativism. □

GROWING OLD IS CERTAINLY NOT A COUNTDOWN

The Golden Years

IT IS WIDELY held that once individuals become old, it is time to spend their remaining years in withdrawal or retirement, as their overall capabilities diminish and they are no longer capable of discharging their former responsibilities. It is for this reason that as people age, they begin to lose hope and then so many elderly people are relegated to lead lives of despair and helplessness, sometimes in old age homes. The best-selling Colombian author, Gabriel García Márquez observed in his book, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, "The secret of a good old age is simply an honourable pact with solitude."

This is an extremely morose approach to life, for just languishing, often in seclusion, is definitely not what nature expects from man. Ageing is a natural phenomenon and must be embraced rather than treated like an ailment. As a person ages, his body weakens physically but usually, not his mind. Even the argument of lack of physical strength does not hold good in today's tech-savvy world. An old person may, of course, be unable to run up and down a flight of steps but he can still use a lift or an escalator/elevator to reach his destination. Similarly, a person may lose his vision but, with the support of technology, he can still continue to enjoy his favourite books. Physical limitation is no longer a disabling aspect of life—all one needs is a developed mind and the capacity to think and learn anew.

Ageing is a natural phenomenon and must be embraced rather than treated like an ailment. As a person ages, his body weakens physically but usually, not his mind.

In old age, a man's experience, knowledge and maturity increase, offering him multifaceted ways to lead a fulfilling and meaningful life. This view was endorsed in a study that found that in old age, the mind continues to produce as many neurons as it did at an earlier age. Says a report in *The Times of India*, April 7, 2018, "The findings suggest that many senior citizens remain more cognitively and emotionally intact than commonly believed, said Maura Boldrini, an associate professor at Columbia University in the US. 'We found that older people have a similar ability to make thousands of hippocampal new neurons from progenitor cells as younger people do.'"

In other words, as one ages, one's mind becomes more competent as a result of the production of brain cells coupled with years of wisdom and experience.

In old age, a man's experience, knowledge and maturity increase, offering him multifaceted ways to lead a fulfilling and meaningful life.

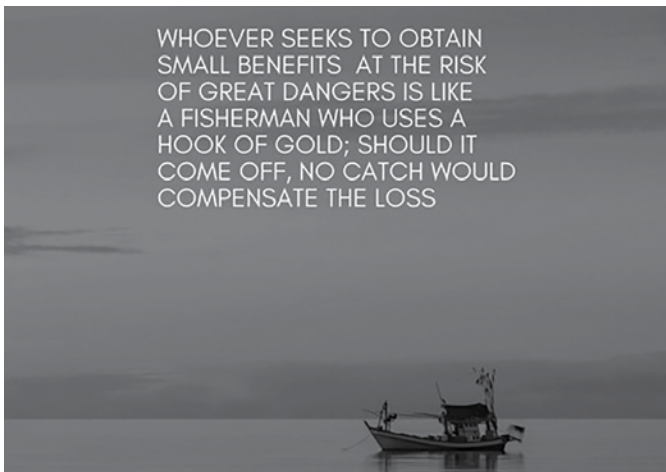
Ageing is not the beginning of a countdown, but is rather, the time for a count-up. The world can benefit greatly from the planning skills and wisdom of the aged. This is, in fact, nature's way of enabling man to pass on his wisdom to succeeding generations.

Longevity and old age are often spoken of in the same breath. But here the emphasis is misplaced. The key aspect of old age is maturity, not longevity. An old person develops mature thinking by experiencing the

vicissitudes of life. This not only enhances his knowledge but makes him a prolific source of guidance and advice. Succeeding generations are always in need of this unique gift from nature so that they may plan a way forward. All major developments have taken place in the world by people 'standing on the shoulders of their predecessors'. It is time to actively acknowledge the contribution that senior citizens can make to society at large and to bring them into the mainstream so that they may uphold the veracity of the old adage—'old is gold.' □



WHOEVER SEEKS TO OBTAIN
SMALL BENEFITS AT THE RISK
OF GREAT DANGERS IS LIKE
A FISHERMAN WHO USES A
HOOK OF GOLD; SHOULD IT
COME OFF, NO CATCH WOULD
COMPENSATE THE LOSS



TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE

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



THE IDEOLOGY OF PEACE

HISTORY abounds in preachers of peace. But it is hard to find in its annals an ideologue who has successfully presented the concept of peace as a complete ideology. Perhaps this is why over the centuries no revolution in the true sense of the word has been brought about on the basis of peace. Although we have had a number of peace-loving individuals, the establishment of a peaceful society on a mass scale has never become a reality. Human interests are deeply associated with peace. That is why every individual, for personal reasons, wants to have a peaceful life.

As every individual desires peace, the following aspects must be considered so that the foundation on which we build the edifice of a peaceful society would not be faulty. What is built on impractical premises cannot procure the results we are looking for.

Ideology of Peace for Guidance

Man is repeatedly faced with diverse situations that make it necessary for him to have an ideology of peace to guide him. Peace being the human need is not enough to make him exercise restraint and remain peaceable in all situations. He needs an ideology which convinces him at the conscious level of the necessity to maintain peace at all times.

Peace should not be Equated with Justice

People hold the idea that they should be first given justice and then

rights, and only then can they live peacefully with others. "Peace with justice" is their watchword. This attitude shows a lack of realism. The truth is that justice does not directly follow from a state of peace. The aim of establishing peace is, in fact, to open up opportunities for the achievement of justice rather than the actual bearing of justice.

Peace has its Price

Like everything else, peace also has its price. No group or individual can have peace unless it is willing to pay for it in due measure. In other words, price refers to showing the willingness to suffer losses.

Peace Works on the System of Cause and Effect

Everything in this world works on the principle of cause and effect. When this reality takes root in the mind of a human being, he will never hold anyone else responsible for his own afflictions. He will instead analyze his actions objectively to discover his shortcomings and rectify his mistakes in order that he may be saved from unnecessary suffering.

Peace Ensues from the Policy of Avoidance

The aim of establishing peace is, in fact, to open up opportunities for the achievement of justice rather than the actual bearing of justice.

According to the law of nature, truth lives on, while falsehood is destined for obliteration. Given this state of affairs, it is enough for the destruction of falsehood that we observe a policy of silence. Speaking out or holding protest movements to stir up agitation against falsehood is to give life to it, while adopting a policy of avoidance results in its dying a natural death. The adoption of a peaceful course to counter falsehood is as good as extirpating it.

Age of Globalization is an Age of Peace

The present age is one of globalization. The entire world has become a global village. Looked at from this view-point, violence or armed struggle in the present day has acquired the character of an anachronism. Those who resort to violence to achieve their goals are unaware of the spirit of the age. In this age everyone can peacefully work towards their goals as long as they follow the policy of 'live and let live'. □



NOBLE ATTRIBUTES OF THE PROPHET

A Sublime Character

THE QURAN describes Prophet Muhammad as one possessing a “sublime character.” (68: 5). Here are two sayings of the Prophet which throw light on what this “sublime character” consists of:

“Never debase your character by saying that if people treat you well, you will treat them well, and if they harm you, you will do worse to them. Rather, become accustomed to being good to those who are good to you, and not wronging those who harm you.” (*Mishkat ul-Masabih*)

“Join hands with those who break away from you, forgive those who wrong you, and be good to those who harm you.”

The sublime character described here was displayed—in its most lofty form—by the Prophet himself. Such character is required of ordinary Muslims as an accessory, but with the Prophet it was a basic requisite. This is clear from this statement of the Prophet:

“Nine things the Lord has commanded me: Fear of God in private and in public; Justness, both in anger and in calmness; moderation in both poverty and affluence; that I should join hands with those who break away from me; and give to those who deprive me; and forgive those who wrong me; and that my silence should be meditation; and my words remembrance of God; and my vision keen observation.”

There are two levels of character, an ordinary and a superior level. An ordinary character is based on the principle: ‘do as you have been done by’. Such a character might be termed a “knee-jerk character”, for one possessed of such a character offers only reflex responses to treatment by others, breaking with those who break with him, wronging those who wrong him, and harming those who harm him.

An ordinary character is based on the principle: do as you have been done by.

But the higher level of character is based on the principle: ‘do as you would be done by’. One possessed of such a character deals with both friends and foes in the same principled manner, irrespective of how he

himself has been treated. He is reconciliatory, even joining with those who break with him. He is compassionate, even to those who seek to harm him. He is forbearing, even towards those who wrong him.

According to the French philosopher, Voltaire (1694-1778), "No one is a hero to his valet." It is because a valet has access to a person's private life, and in private life no one is perfect. Those close to a person usually do not hold him in such high esteem as those who are further off. That is why they cannot come to think of him as a hero. But, as Soren Smith has written, this does not hold true for the Prophet of Islam. History shows that the closer one came to him, the more one was enamoured by his fine qualities.

Zaid Ibn Haritha was the son of Haritha Ibn Sharaheel, a member of the tribe of Kalb. His mother's name was Suda Bint Tha'alaba. She belonged to a branch of the Tai tribe called Bani Ma'an. When Zaid was eight-year-old, his mother took him to her father's home. There, some members of the tribe of Bani Qayn ibn Jasn attacked their camp. Amongst the booty that they captured was the young Zaid. They then took him to the Ukkaz fair and sold him. The buyer's name was Hakim ibn Hazam, a nephew of Khadija, who was later to become the Prophet's wife. He brought the child to Makkah and presented him to his aunt as a

The higher level of character is based on the principle: do as you would be done by.

slave. When the Prophet married Khadija, she placed Zaid in his service. The boy's father and uncle soon learnt of his whereabouts. They came to Makkah to recover him, and take him home with them. They met the Prophet, and said that they would give any compensation that he required, so long as he returned the child to them. The Prophet said that he did not want any compensation. If Zaid wanted to go with them, they could take him. He called Zaid, and asked him if he knew these people.

Zaid said that he did; they were his father and uncle. "They want to take you with them," the Prophet said. "If you want, you can go home with them." "I won't leave you to go anywhere," Zaid replied. His father and uncle were incensed on hearing this. "What, do you prefer slavery to freedom?" they asked. "Do you want to forsake your own folk, and live amongst others?" "I cannot prefer anyone to Muhammad," Zaid replied, "not after seeing the qualities that he has." His father and uncle then returned to their home.

This incident occurred before the commencement of the Prophet's mission. It reveals the tenderness that was inherent in his nature. The

Quran has referred to this characteristic in the following words:

“It was thanks to God’s mercy that you were lenient to them. Had you been cruel and hard-hearted, they would surely have deserted you.” (3: 159)

It was this magnanimity of the Prophet that gave him the power to capture people’s hearts: the closer one came to him, the more one would be won over by his noble character.

What a terrible time it must have been when, as night was falling, the urchins of Taif were chasing the Prophet out of town and pelting him with stones. This was the place where the Hijaz aristocracy used to while away their summer days. The Prophet had made the fifty-mile trip from Makkah to call them to Islam. But the lords of Taif did not listen to his well-meaning words; instead they set the street-urchins on him, who kept on chasing him until night had cast a veil between them and God’s Prophet. His body was covered in wounds. Bleeding from head to foot and utterly exhausted, he took refuge in a vineyard. This was a traumatic experience for any man. The Prophet once told his wife, Aisha, that it was the hardest night of his life.

A person who is in need should not be denied financial assistance because of his misconduct. Rather one should pardon him and continue to help him.

But, at this gravest of moments, the Prophet did not wish his enemies any harm. All he said was: “Lord, guide them, for they know not what they do.” Such was the noble character of the Prophet, and it was this nobleness which finally subdued his opponents and brought the whole of Arabia within the Islamic fold. The force of his sublime spirit was enough to conquer all in its wake. No prejudice, antagonism or contumacy could withstand the charming power of good that was embodied in his person.

The Prophet once said: “Honouring ties of relationship does not mean honouring your ties with those who honour their ties with you; it means honouring your ties with those who sever their ties with you.” The well-known case of the accusation of adultery against Aisha, wife of the Prophet and daughter of Abu Bakr, provides apt illustration of this principle.

This accusation was absolutely slanderous. It was brought against Aisha when she was accidentally left behind while returning from the expedition to Bani Mustalaq (627-628 CE). She was rescued by a

young Companion of the Prophet by the name of Safwan ibn Mu'attal. Indeed, the episode has become famous in Islamic history as the "case of the slander." One of the persons responsible for its fabrication and propagation was a relative of Abu Bakr named Mistah. When Abu Bakr learnt that Mistah was one of those who had defamed his innocent daughter, he cut off the allowance that he used to grant Mistah as a needy relative. When Abu Bakr took this step, God revealed this verse of the Quran to His Prophet:

"Let not the honourable and rich among you swear not to give to their kindred, the poor and those who have fled their homes for the cause of God. Rather, let them pardon and forgive. Do you not wish God to forgive you? He is Forgiving, Merciful." (24: 22)

That is, a person who is in need should not be denied financial assistance because of his misconduct. Rather one should pardon him and continue to help him.

A man came up and insulted Abu Bakr one day when he was sitting with the Prophet. Abu Bakr listened and was silent. The man continued to abuse him. Again, Abu Bakr held his peace. When the man kept on repeating his foul language, Abu Bakr could contain himself no longer,

It was this magnanimity of the Prophet that gave him the power to capture people's hearts: the closer one came to him, the more one would be won over by his noble character.

and answered back. On hearing this, the Prophet immediately got up and left. "Why have you left your place, Prophet of God?" Abu Bakr enquired. "As long as you remained silent, Abu Bakr," the Prophet replied, "God's angel was answering for you. But as soon as you burst out, the angel left." Thus, the Prophet illustrated that God requites one for any wrong done to one, as long as one does not take retaliatory measures of one's own. But God leaves the matter to one who seeks revenge. Obviously, a requital will be more complete if it is left to God.

The Prophet once borrowed some money from a Jewish scholar. After a few days, the Jew demanded payment of his debt. "At the moment, I have nothing to pay you with," the Prophet told him. "I won't let you go until you have paid me back," the Jew retorted. And so, he stayed there, from morning until night, holding the Prophet captive. At this time, the Prophet was the established ruler of Madinah. He had the power to take measures against the Jew. His Companions, indeed, intended to rebuke the man and chase him away.

But the Prophet forbade them from taking any action. "A Jew is holding you captive," protested one of them. "True," the Prophet replied, "but the Lord has forbidden to wrong anyone." Night turned to morning. With the light of dawn, the Jew's eyes opened. He was profoundly moved on seeing the Prophet's tolerance, notwithstanding his power to take action, and embraced Islam. This Jew was a rich man. The day before, he had detained the Prophet on account of a few pence; but the Prophet's noble conduct had such an impact on him that now he was willing to give all his wealth to the Prophet, saying, "Spend it as you please."

Abdullah Ibn Abi Al-Hasma once made a transaction with the Prophet. It had not yet been completed when Abdullah Ibn Abi Al-Hasma had to go home on some urgent business. "Wait here," he said to the Prophet. "We will settle this affair when I come back from my home." When he reached home, he became so engrossed in certain tasks that he forgot his promise. He remembered it after three days and went back to that place. He found the Prophet waiting there. All he said to Abdullah Ibn Abi Al-Hasma was: "You have given me a lot of trouble; I have been waiting here for three days."

There is a magnetic power in conduct such as this which even the most stubborn person cannot resist. □



*A new start begins from accepting
the fact that in the past you
committed a blunder.*



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BELIEF IN GOD

True Fulfilment

A *HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY* is a book by the British philosopher Bertrand Russell published in 1945. In this 800-page book, Russell raises the question as to why humans exert their minds to resolving complex issues of philosophy, for instance, what is the purpose of life, how can one arrive at an explanation of the universe and so on. Humans have been trying to understand these matters since thousands of years, then what is the reason behind still engaging oneself in these subjects that have proved to be so inexplicable and unfathomable? Russell answers that it is actually the “terror of cosmic loneliness” that makes a person yearn to go on the philosophical path of quest and search for the truth.

If a boulder or a piece of rock remains lying on the surface of the earth for millions of years, it would never experience loneliness. However, a human being will surely suffer from the feeling of loneliness. The explanation for this phenomenon is that a human being by his very nature has interwoven in him the desire to submit to God.

A human being by his very nature has interwoven in him the desire to submit to God.

Psychologically, every human being finds himself incomplete. He feels fulfilled only when he finds something outside of him to fill in the psychological vacuum that he certainly experiences. From this perspective,

people can be seen to fall into three broad categories: first is the philosopher who is continually in search of something that would fulfil him, however, he dies without finding that very thing in pursuit of which he spends his entire life; second is the person who accords the position of God to something or someone other than God, and thus gains artificial fulfilment from association with such a person or thing; third is the true believer in God who is able to find the right fulfilment to the requirement of his nature. His feeling of loneliness or the sense of vacuum in his life is fulfilled by his discovery of and belief in God. Such a person is the one who is truly successful. □



ISLAMIC VIRTUES

Model Character

FOR centuries the lives of the Prophet and his Companions have served as models of a truly God-fearing existence for all humankind, and will continue to do so. Hence God's preservation of this page of history with such exactitude that anyone, who is sincere about learning from their example can know, even today, every detail of how they lived and died. The following are a few examples worth emulating.

Being Methodical

During the caliphate of Umar, Abu Hurayrah, a Companion brought 800,000 dirhams from Abu Musa Ashari to Madinah. After the morning prayer, Umar informed the Muslims about this new intake of revenue. "In all of Islamic history, we have not, till now, received such a sum of money. In my opinion, it should be divided into equal portions and distributed among the people." When he asked the gathering what they thought, Usman offered his opinion: "In order to give to everyone, a considerable amount of money will be needed. If people are not counted, it will be impossible to tell who have received their share and who have not. This will result in confusion." Hearing this, Walid ibn Hisham said, "Commander of the Faithful, when I was in Syria, I saw that the rulers there had compiled registers for this purpose, and had appointed people to maintain them. You might do likewise." Umar accepted this advice and delegated the task of compiling registers to three of his Companions.

For centuries the lives of the Prophet and his Companions have served as models of a truly god-fearing existence for all humankind, and will continue to do so.

Reforming Others

A person asked Umar regarding the better of the two courses of action: to be mindful of reproach in doing his duty to God, or to concentrate on improving himself rather than others.

To the above Umar replied: "Whoever is appointed to manage the affairs of a community, should not neglect his duty towards others, that is to say he must carry out his duty even in the face of criticism. But those who are not in authority should concentrate upon themselves. They may nevertheless offer good counsel to those in a position of authority. □

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



MAGIC AND MIRACLE

IN THE TIME of Moses, the Pharaoh yielded so much power that it struck terror into the hearts of everyone who came within its reach. The Quran shows, however, that even such a power as the Pharaoh's was as nothing compared to the power of truth.

The Quran tells the story of how the Lord commanded Moses to go to Pharaoh "for he has transgressed all bounds. Speak to him with gentle words; he may yet take heed and fear Our punishment." (20: 45-46) When Moses expressed his fear of the Pharaoh's "malevolence and tyranny," God told him to "have no fear. I shall be with you. I see all and hear all." (20: 47)

Moses did as God commanded, but when he conveyed God's message to Pharaoh, the latter denied it and asked Moses, "Have you come to drive us from our land with your sorcery? Know that we will confront you with a magic as powerful as yours." (20: 57-58)

A day was then fixed for this confrontation, and all of the Pharaoh's magicians were assembled so that they should overwhelm Moses. At the Pharaoh's command, they threw their wands and ropes on the ground, whereupon they turned into writhing serpents. Moses felt

daunted at this, but God commanded him to cast his staff too. This likewise turned into a serpent, but one larger than all the rest, which devoured all the creatures which the magicians had contrived to summon into existence.

When the magicians saw the effects of Moses' power, they realized that it had nothing to do with magic, but was a matter of divine truth. What was evidently a miracle had given them a glimpse of the very face of the Almighty, and they expressed their belief in Him there and then. The Pharaoh was, of course, humiliated; and he felt so furious at this unforeseen development that he ordered the magicians' hands and feet to be amputated from opposite sides, after which they were to be tied to the trunks of palm trees and crucified. When the magicians heard this sentence—the severest in the land—they did not, as the Pharaoh might have hoped, renounce their new-found beliefs. They said to the Pharaoh: "We cannot prefer you to the clear signs which have come to us." (20: 72)

When the magicians saw the effects of Moses' power, they realized that it had nothing to do with magic, but was a matter of divine truth.

To the eternal credit of the magicians, they preferred truth to power; proofs to personality. Even when threatened with the direst of punishments, they saw the folly of putting mere mortals before Eternal God. □

ATTENTION

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ADAPTING TO A NEW WORLD

Overcoming Culture Shock

ON NOVEMBER 18, 1984, a host of giraffes from Kenya were transported by aeroplane to the United States. Surviving members of a particularly long-necked species of giraffe, they were being taken to the United States for breeding. The journey in the aeroplane presented a problem for the organizers; for the giraffes had never heard the loud noise of jet engines before, and it was thought that they may become alarmed when placed in an aircraft for the first time. In order to make them accustomed to the sound which they would have to experience during the long flight from Kenya to the United States, the giraffes were exposed to tape-recordings of the sound of jet engines for several weeks before their departure. When they finally set foot on the aircraft the sound was nothing new to them, and they showed no adverse reactions when the engines were switched on. (*BBC News, November 18, 1984*)

Any animal or human being experiences a certain shock on stepping into a new environment. If one has been accustomed to a certain set of conditions for years, any change in these conditions will have an inevitable effect on one's general disposition. When human beings are subjected to such a change in their environment, the impact it has on them is known as "culture shock".

In this world, man can put up an excuse by casting a camouflage of words upon his actions; in the next world empty words will have no weight.

To avoid suffering from the effects of culture shock, humans go through a period of preparation—much like that the giraffes underwent—before switching to a new environment. They read books on the country they are going to visit; they learn its language and acquaint themselves with the habits and

customs of its people, which may be very different from their own. Only then will they be in a position to enjoy the pleasures that it has to offer.

All men are destined to leave this world. The journey they will undertake after death will be more momentous than any they have undertaken in their lives. The conditions of the next world will be entirely different from those they have experienced on earth. In this world people succeed by all sorts of underhand means; in the next world there will be only one basis of success, and that will be the real worth of one's own actions. In this world, it is often injustice that holds sway; the next

world will be one of total and perfect justice. In this world, man can put up an excuse by casting a camouflage of words upon his actions; in the next world, empty words will have no weight. Only those words that are supported by reality will ring true.

Before switching to this totally different world, man needs to become accustomed to it. For this reason, God sends His prophets to teach man the conditions that will prevail in the eternal world for which he is bound. He reveals His scriptures to enable man to prepare himself for the next world, and adopt its conditions before he gets there. If man fails to take heed of these warnings, however, he will reach the next world unprepared. He will be exposed to such a massive shock that he will not be fit to enjoy the untold blessings that lie there. □



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ISLAM'S ORIGINAL SOURCES

The Quran and Sunnah

A TRUE believer in Islam is one who subordinates his thinking to God, who follows God's dictates in all aspects of his life. What are the dictates of God? These are preserved in the original sources of Islam: the Quran and the *Sunnah*. Both the Quran and *Sunnah* were transmitted to us through the last Messenger of God, Muhammad bin Abdullah.

The Quran

The Quran is a book containing the literal Word of God. It was transmitted from God through the Angel Gabriel to Prophet Muhammad, who, in turn, delivered it to us. The Quran covers a wide variety of topics, including evidence to support its claim of being the Word of the Creator, stories of earlier generations, instructions which humanity is asked to obey and tidings of the Hereafter. The claim of the Quran that it is protected from change is confirmed by the fact that in its 1400 year history, not one of its verses has been proven to be wrong even with the coming of the scientific era and the fact that the earliest copies and the latest copies are exactly the same.

The Quran is a book containing the literal Word of God.

The Quran is no new heavenly scripture. It is only an authentic edition of the previous heavenly scriptures. In this respect, the Quran is a book for all human beings of all nations. It is the expression of God's mercy for one and

all. It is a comprehensive message sent by God for each one of us. The Quran is a light of guidance for the world just as the sun is the source of light and heat for the world.

The Quran has 114 chapters. Its contents in a nutshell are: belief in one God, and considering oneself answerable to Him; firm belief that the guidance sent by God through the Prophet Muhammad is the truth and that man's eternal salvation rests thereon.

The Sunnah/Hadith

The *Sunnah* can be described as the sayings and the actions of the last prophet of God: Prophet Muhammad. Through the *Sunnah*, we obtain examples from the life of the Prophet, who is a model for a believer. Whatever the Prophet did, said, or approved of is a source of Islam just

as much as the Quran. The Prophet's role is not overemphasized: his life was dictated by what the Creator desired, and the Messenger did not add or subtract to Islam according to his own personal whim.

God's prophets came to the world to make this chosen path plain to us. In their words and deeds, they showed us how to live in accordance with the will of God. It is this way of life, which is known in Islam as the *Sunnah* or the path of the prophets. It covers every aspect of life, from personal matters to social reform and nation-building. Those who earnestly seek to be included amongst God's chosen servants must follow the path of the Prophet in all respects. In no walk of life should they consider themselves free to tread another course.

The most important practice of the Prophet's personal life was preaching the word of God. A study of his life shows that his greatest concern was to bring people to the path of the Lord. That his concern had turned to anguish is clear from this verse of the Quran:

You will perhaps fret yourself to death on account of their unbelief. (26: 3)

The Prophet said that one who disregarded his *Sunnah* was not one of his community. Just as this remark applies to the marriage contract and other such social obligations, so does it equally apply to the duty of calling people to the path of God. Only those have the right to be called true followers of the Prophet, who, along with other obligations enjoined by him, adopt this all-important practice of the Prophet as well.

The Sunnah can be described as the sayings and the actions of the last prophet of God: Prophet Muhammad.

In the Quran, these words have been addressed to the faithful:

You have indeed in the Prophet of God a good example for those of you who look to God and the Last Day and remember God always. (33: 21)

It is clear from this verse that in the life of the Prophet Muhammad, there is a perfect example for every human being. But the only real beneficiaries will be those whose apprehension of God is already profound, whose hopes and aspirations centre on God, whose lives are lived in fear of the punishment of the Lord. Those who cherish the

thought of eternal bliss and truly yearn for it with every fibre of their beings will be the ones to learn from the Prophet's example.

Why should this be so? The reason is that one has to be sincere in one's search for truth if one is going to find it. If one "looks to God and the Last Day," one will be sincere with regard to them. Sincerity will enable one to see the life of the Prophet in true perspective, and draw the right lessons from it. This is the relevance of the *Sunnah* for a believer.

The most important practice of the Prophet's personal life was preaching the word of God.

Therefore, there is a need to rediscover Islam through its original sources—Quran, the word of God, and the *Sunnah*, the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. It is imperative that for any study of Islam to be objective, distinction must be made between the source of Islam and the practice of

Muslims. Today, there are many misconceptions prevalent about Islam and we must take an objective view of each misconception judging them in the light of original Islamic sources rather than by the conduct of Muslims to reveal the true face of Islam.

For the seeker who wants to know more about Islam, the following is a concise yet comprehensive course that can be followed.

1. The Quran
2. Biography of the Prophet by Ibn Kathir
3. Mishkat al-Masabih, a book of *Hadith*
4. Lives of the Prophet's Companions by Muhammad Yusuf Kandhalvi

These are well-known and readily available books. Though originally written in Arabic, they have been translated into and published in several languages. They can be acquired and read in the language of one's choice. □



A person will appear as an enemy if that is how you see him. If you do not view him with animosity, he will surely be amicable in return.

SERENDIPITY

In the Physical and Spiritual World

HORACE WALPOLE (1717-1797), the renowned man of letters, who wore many feathers on his cap, once found himself at a loss for an exact expression for the faculty of making happy or unexpected discoveries by accident. He then coined the word 'serendipity', deriving it from the title of a Sri Lankan fairy tale, "*The Three Princes of Serendip*". The word thereupon entered the English language and, since 1754, has become a regularly used expression, since there do seem individuals who possess such a faculty and important discoveries have often been made in this way. One such discovery was of Penicillin, made in 1928 by Sir Alexander Fleming, a Scottish scientist who shared the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1945 with Ernst Chain and Howard Florey.

But serendipity is not all that it takes to make a great discovery. Taunted by the remark that the discoveries made by scientists were not really their own achievements, but the result of chance, the distinguished Indian scientist, Sir C. V. Raman retorted, "That is true. But chance of this nature only happens to scientists!"

Discovery results primarily from a finely tuned concentration of the mind. The more keenly one's attention is focussed on any given subject, the more alive one becomes to its hidden subtleties. In this way, the genuine scientist, involved day and night, with the object of research, develops such a close mental affinity for it, that he is able, inevitably, to progress from partial to absolute truths.

What holds for scientific discovery is no less true of spiritual discovery, and, for man, the greatest discovery he can make is God. But just as the scientist can make his discoveries only if he immerses himself totally in his subject, so can man discover the awesome splendour of God only if he engrosses himself totally in his Creator.

Discovery of God comes from giving one's entire mind to God. It is only when one turns resolutely away from this material world in order to contemplate the divine processes of nature that one becomes aware, in every fibre of one's being, of the magnificence of the Supreme Reality. □

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Creator.***

START CHANGE WITH THE INDIVIDUAL

Consolidation before Expansion

A TREE is a unique phenomenon of nature. The roots of a tree go deep into the soil and its stem and branches rise above and spread out into the open. This phenomenon of nature is mentioned in the Quran in these words: "Do you not see how God compares a good word to a good tree? Its root is firm and its branches are in the sky, it yields its fruit each season with its Lord's permission—God makes such comparisons for people, in order that they may take heed." (14: 24-25)

This principle of nature is also applicable to the human world. That is, real change in human life can be brought about by following a principle demonstrated in the natural world: first consolidation and then expansion. Here, consolidation means to firmly establish one's base in the ground, while expansion means to spread out all over the world after gaining strength from the groundwork done before.

If you want to bring about real change in society, first of all you will have to change individual life.

Many people speak of social change or social reform. If you want to bring about real change in society, first of all you will have to change individual life. For example, if you want to successfully establish a political system, you

will have to train people's minds in a way that they develop acceptability for that system.

Similarly, if you want to run successful institutions, you will first need to educate individual minds in order that you have competent people for running these institutions. Individuals are the base of any social building. If you want to bring about change in society, you have to begin your work from individuals.

Building an institution without forming a base is like making sandcastles, which do not have a lasting existence. □



The formula for destressing: forget the past and replan the future.

MILITARY POWER IS SELF-DAMAGING

A Leaf Out of History

IN THE PRESENT world, at times, it becomes a matter of necessity to use force. But the use of force should be resorted to only when absolutely necessary, and that too only temporarily. Excessive focus upon accumulating military power is useful neither for individuals nor for nations; neither for Third World nations nor for superpowers.

In his speech on October 5, 1991, George H. W Bush, the former American President said:

“One cannot separate foreign policy and military issues from economic growth and reform. The world has seen only too clearly the immense costs of over-armed, aggressive states such as Iraq. It has also seen how excessive focus upon projecting politico-military power and neglecting the economy has badly, perhaps permanently damaged the USSR.”

Spending more resources on military power is always at the cost of neglecting the front of economic progress.

No one is powerful enough to keep pace with economic progress and military power at the same time. Spending more resources on military power is always at the cost of neglecting the front of economic progress. Such a policy inevitably brings dangerous results, examples of which can be found in both distant and recent history.

Peace should form the general policy and war should only be an exception. The best and correct policy for any individual or nation is to set matters right in all dealings with others through peaceful means. The way of clash and confrontation should be adopted only in emergencies. □



Much as we long for a perfect world we are compelled to live in an imperfect world.

HOW TO FIND PURPOSE IN LIFE?

Meaningful Existence

MEDICINES are usually accompanied by leaflets explaining what illnesses they are designed to cure, how they should be used and what their basic formulae are. But, it is a tragedy that man is born into the world in such a condition that he knows neither what he is nor why he has been put here. No convenient handbook accompanies him; neither are there any signboards fixed to the summits of the mountains to give him directions or provide him with answers to his questions. Man has, in consequence, formed strange opinions about himself, the earth and the sky, being ignorant of the essential reality of life.

When he examines his own being, it appears to him as an amazing accumulation of intellectual and physical powers. Yet, he did not will himself into being, nor did he play any part in the making of himself. Then he looks at the world outside of him and finds a universe of such extreme vastness, that he can neither encompass nor traverse it, nor can he count the innumerable treasures it contains. What is all this and why is it there? Where did this world start from and where will it all end? What is the purpose of this existence? He finds himself completely in the dark on these subjects.

The Quran bears verbal witness to the sovereignty of God. It describes, with great force and clarity, the great, hidden, determinative force on work throughout the entire world, and gives us definitive information on those metaphysical realities, which elude the hand and the eye.

Man has, of course, been given eyes, but all his eyes can do is see the outside of things. He has intelligence, but the trouble with human intelligence is that it does not even know about itself. Up till now, man has been unable to find out how thoughts enter the human mind or how the mind functions. With such inadequate faculties, he is neither able to arrive at any sound conclusion concerning himself, nor is he able to understand the universe.

Towards the above questions the Quran is presented as a book which offers knowledge concerning the realities of life. Understanding the universe on our own is just like those blind people who tried to find out what an elephant is by touching the different parts of its body. One touched its leg and thought that it was a pillar. Another felt its ear

and concluded that it was a winnowing basket. Its back was proclaimed as a platform, its tail as a snake and its trunk as a hosepipe. But in all this explanation the description of the real elephant is not there. No matter how these blind people put their findings together, they cannot arrive at the correct answer. In the same manner many people in their attempt to fathom the nature of reality in the universe have failed to draw the right conclusions, have been fumbling in the dark and just hazarding wild guesses as to the nature of their surroundings, without ever truly understanding it.

There have been people in this world who have devoted their entire lives to the quest for Truth but in their desperation at being unable to find it, have taken the extreme step of putting an end to their lives. Then there are some who drew conclusions based on pure conjecture. The latter mistaking conjecture for reason, compiled their conclusions and presented them to the world as Truth, the former saw speculation for what it was, rejected it, then—anguished at their own ultimate helplessness—opted out of this mysterious world.

The message of the Quran conveys that man has been given the capacity to think and understand, but this capacity is little better than an eye, which can see only so long as there is some external source of light. In pitch darkness, this self-same eye cannot see anything whatsoever. Only when a light is switched on, does everything become clearly visible. The human intellect, like the eye, needs the light—the light of God's word.

The Quran is a book of guidance showing man the path to tread. It is a Light which guides his faltering steps giving him timely reminder of God's will, awakening the minds of the readers.

The Quran presents this concept by saying that not only God exists, but also paints an incredibly vivid picture of the Being who sustains and directs the universe. Not only does it tell us about the creation plan for this world it also tells us about the life Hereafter. It describes the Day of judgement so graphically that its horrors become deeply etched on our consciousness. There is a well known story of a Greek artist who painted such a realistic picture of a bunch of grapes that birds would come and peck at it. Just think that if a painting executed by an ordinary mortal could have such an extraordinary effect, what heights of consummate artistry could not be reached by the Lord of the Worlds in His word—the Quran?

The Quran bears verbal witness to the sovereignty of God. It describes, with great force and clarity, the great, hidden, determinative force at work throughout the world, and gives us definitive information on those metaphysical realities, which elude the hand and the eye. Not only does it spell out the facts of existence, but it also builds up an astonishing gallery of word-pictures, which bring a hitherto unseen world before our very eyes.

The Quran shows us where strength in this world lies, giving us a handhold on a rope that never breaks. Without this, we have no real support in life. Moreover, it is only attachment to God that human beings can retain their hold on the cord that binds each to each.

The Quran explains that it is God alone who sustains us throughout our lives here on earth. Through Him our hearts are set at ease, for it is He who provides true warmth in life. He rescues us in times of peril, assists

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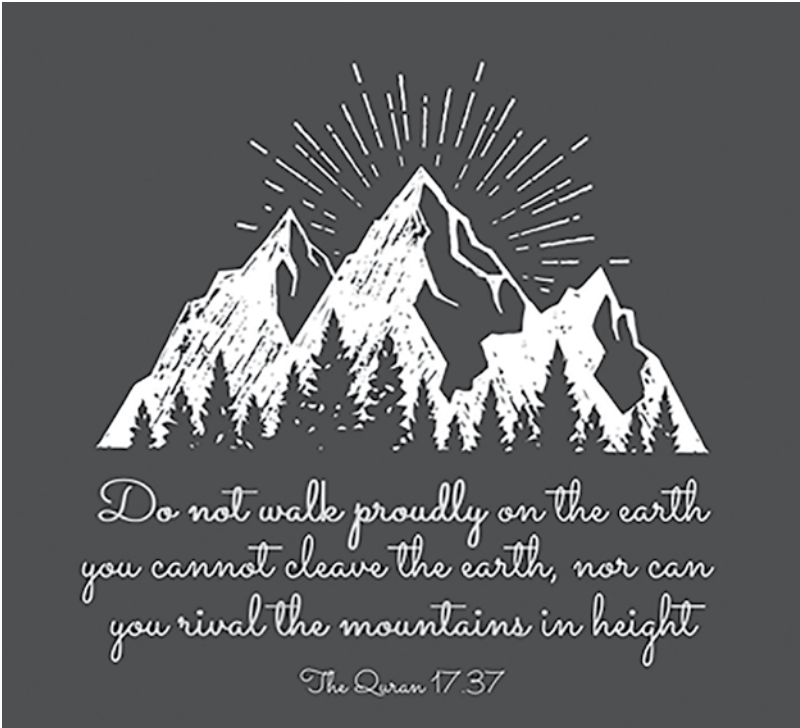
us in the hour of need. All power rests in His hands; honour and glory will be the rewards of any nation who looks to Him for support, while only disgrace and humiliation will be the lot of those who abandon Him. To know this is to hold the key to all the treasures in life. He who possesses this key gains all; he who loses it, loses all.

The Quran is a book of guidance showing man the path to tread. It is a Light which guides his faltering steps giving him timely reminder of God's will, awakening the minds of the readers. It conveys the Lord's admonition. It is a book that helps one to distinguish right from wrong. It is a book of wisdom. It is a book which lays down for us the very foundations on which to build and organize society.

How can a man gauge whether he has actually developed a relationship with God? There is only one answer to this question: by turning his eyes inward, and judging how his inner self stands related to the Quran. For how one relates to the Quran is a true reflection of one's relationship with God. The degree to which a man adheres to the tenets of the Quran will be a sure indication of his attachment to his Maker. If the Quran is the book he values most, it goes without saying that God is dearer to him than any other. It is a scale on which man's devotion to his Creator may be measured.

When man fears to stand alone, without support, in an unfathomable universe, the Quran sets his mind at rest by making his destination clear to him, and directing him towards it. In the Quran man thus meets his Lord, beholds His promises and rejoices in His good tidings. In this way, the Quran fills a man with sufficient conviction to define his place in the world. Giving concrete form to the instinctive feeling which swirl in man's subconscious about his Lord and Master, the Quran sets his feet well and truly on the path of submission to Him; brings him closer to God, which is the true purpose in life. □

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SILENCE

The Most Beautiful Voice

KNOWN to be a man of few words, a wise man was asked why he was so miserly with words. He replied, "The Creator of the world has given man two ears, but just one tongue. This is so that we may listen more than we speak, not so that we may speak more than we listen."

Listening more than speaking is certainly the most prudent course to adopt. In doing so, we increase our own knowledge, we give ourselves the opportunity to have a better understanding of the other man's viewpoint and by our silence we encourage in the speaker a greater receptivity to what we shall have to say when finally it is our turn to hold forth. When we speak, it is not generally sufficient just to utter the truth. We have to be able to talk persuasively if our listeners are to be convinced. This is where our having listened carefully to what they have to say is an advantage, for then we know in advance what misapprehensions we have to sweep aside, what illusions we have to dispel and what emotional barriers we have to break down. If we continue to speak without ever listening to others, we shall always find ourselves in a weak, uncertain, ill-informed position. Xenocrates has aptly said, "I have often regretted my speech, never my silence."

Sometimes, we voice opinions which are not so well supported by facts as we imagine, and so we can save ourselves the embarrassment by first hearing the subject discussed from different angles by different speakers. It is only after mature reflection upon what they have said that we should venture to air our own views. And even then, they should be aired with full consideration for the feelings of our listeners.

The propensity to talk too much is often a sign of being more interested in singing one's own praises than of getting to the heart of the matter. It shows lack of seriousness in one's general attitude to others. The effect of this is to be seen at its worst when the flow of talk is based on insufficient or superficial knowledge. What it most obviously betrays is a lack of character.

The practice of listening more than speaking is not just the external expression of one isolated personality trait; it reflects rather a whole state of mind. Indicative of sincerity and humility, it is the essence of a fine character. □

THE KEY TO SOCIAL HARMONY

A Shift in Outlook

IT BECOMES distressingly clear as we progress through life, that many individuals are less well-equipped than others to succeed in any material or spiritual sense. Although we are all equal in the eyes of God, when it comes to justice, mercy and obedience to the Divine Will, it is quite apparent that the provision is disproportionate.

Philosophers, men of medicine, sociologists, and educationists are still arguing as to the roles of heredity and environment in producing this inequitable state of affairs, and as yet, they are far from producing a solution to the problem. There is no wishing it away, and much as governments and philanthropists have striven to redress this imbalance, we have only to look around us to see with what seeming permanence this situation is stamped. Many countries have attempted to provide equal opportunities for all; but even where material assistance is the greatest, there is always a small group of individuals who stand head and shoulders above the others. There is always, beneath them, a large body of quite average performers, and sometimes an equally large, or even larger group at the foot of the ladder who make very little of their lives, many of them being what modern educationists would call "under-achievers". That is, they do have a certain potential, but they do not make serious efforts to live up to it.

Capitalism has always exploited such situations, exaggerating the differences between the different classes of people. Socialism, on the other hand, has tried to eliminate such differences, in the interests of both the state and the individual. But irrespective of political objectives, individual psychology has remained fundamentally the same. There is still the same friction caused by one individual doing better than another, the same resentment at success being the lot of one's neighbour and not of one's own self, the same reluctance to give honour and acknowledgement where they are due. Sometimes this takes the extreme form of character assassination of genuinely superior individuals.

This is when we must stop short of such baseness. This is when we must discount the effects of whatever political and educational systems

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We must discard hardened attitudes of envy, bitterness, spite, and returning to a pure mental state from which all acrimony has been banished.

we live under. This is when we must discard hardened attitudes of envy, bitterness, spite, and, returning to a pure mental state from which all acrimony has been banished, look upon ourselves and our fellow-men as being equal in the eyes of God. According to a *Hadith*,

All men descend from Adam and Adam was created from earth.

It is this aspect of human existence upon which we must keep our attention firmly focussed, irrespective of its material trappings. It is then and only then that we shall live in true social harmony. □



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IS THERE AN AFTERLIFE?

The Eternal Soul

WHEN I am dead, will I then be raised up again? This question may hover on the periphery of the consciousness of even those who do not have any deep convictions of the reality of life after death, but the fact remains that very few people give any direct attention to the question of the afterlife. The plain truth that tomorrow's life is not willingly and eagerly contemplated in the present world is surely an indication of conscious or subconscious doubt as to its existence.

If, however, we give serious thought to this reality, it becomes easily comprehensible. God, wishing to put us to the test, has not divulged the secrets of life after death to us, but has spread His signs throughout the world which, if pondered over, can lead us to a true realization of the essence of all things. This universe is a mirror in which we can gaze upon the image of the next world.

It is common knowledge that human beings have not always existed in their present state. Man is derived from a formless substance, which gradually takes on the form of a human being as it grows in the mother's womb. This process continues until, in the outside world, it develops into a full-fledged human being. The metamorphosis of an insensate, valueless substance, imperceptible to the naked-eye, into a six-foot tall human being, is an everyday event, so why should there be any difficulty in understanding how the minute particles of our bodies, after being scattered in the ground, will once again take on a human form?

Every individual walking around is, in fact, an accumulation of countless atoms, previously dispersed in unknown dimensions throughout the earth and atmosphere. The forces of nature brought these atoms together in one meaningful, sensate pattern, so that we are now able to observe these same scattered atoms in the form of a human being capable of thought, feeling and movement. The very same process will be repeated when, subsequent to our death, our particles are diffused in the air, water and earth. Afterwards, at God's command, they will be reassembled and once

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again assume the form of a human-being. What is so extraordinary about the re-occurrence of an event which has already happened once before?

Even in the world of matter, there are indications of the practicability of a repetition of life. Every year, in the rainy season, vegetation flourishes and greenery spreads in all directions. Then the summer pronounces its death sentence and the earth dries up. Where flowers bloomed, only a barren plain can be seen. Thus a full-fledged life expires. But when the rains come again, and water pours down from the sky, that very same vegetation is revived and dry land once again becomes a meadow. In this very same manner man will be raised to life after his death.

The fact that the body alters whereas the soul does not, is conclusive proof of the transitional nature of the body and the eternal nature of the soul.

This proves that the word "homo sapiens", rather than being a label attached to a certain physical form, which is erased with its death, is a separate entity which remains intact even after the diffusion of the body's composite parts. The fact that the body alters whereas the soul does not, is conclusive proof of the transitional nature of the body and the eternal nature of the soul.

Some people consider life and death to be the accumulation and subsequent diffusion of multitudinous particles of matter. This theory has been expounded by an Urdu poet, *Chakbast*, in the following words:

What is life? Elements arranging themselves in order, And death? Their diffusion.

This, however, is a statement which is not borne out by fact. If life were simply "elements arranging themselves in order", then it follows that it should survive only so long as this orderliness endured, and it should conversely be possible for an expert scientist to create life by an accumulation of these elements; obviously, both these propositions are ludicrous.

We observe that it is not only those who have been torn limb from limb in some accident, who die. In every condition and at every age people are passing away. Sometimes perfectly healthy human beings suffer sudden heart-failure and no doctor can provide an explanation. We may regard a corpse as an "orderly, elemental manifestation", but the soul which inhabited it has departed. All elements are arranged in

the same order as they were a few minutes beforehand, but they are utterly lifeless. This shows that the organization of elemental matter does not create life, rather life is an entirely separate entity.

Clearly, life is not something which can be eliminated. When we grasp that it is something with eternal properties, we can appreciate just how rational and natural the 'life-after-death' theory is. The facts cry out that life does not consist merely of what can be seen prior to death. There must be a life after death also. Our intellect accepts the transient nature of this world, but man is a being which survives it. When we die, we do not pass into oblivion, rather we retire to reside in another world. The present world is nothing but a tiny interlude in our never-ending lifespan. □

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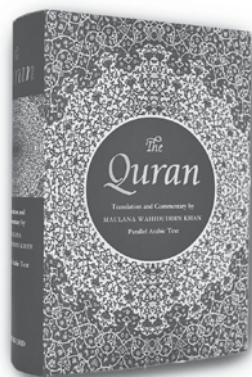
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THE WORD OF GOD

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 AD 610 and 632. 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



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

When the sun is folded up, and when the stars lose their light, and when the mountains are moved, when ten-month pregnant camels are left untended, and when all beasts are gathered together, and when the seas are set on fire, when the souls are divided into different classes, and when the female infant buried alive is asked for what sin she was killed, when the records of men's deeds are laid open, when the sky is unveiled, and when Hell is set ablaze, when Paradise is brought close: [then] each soul shall know what it has put forward.

(81: 1-14)

The scenes of Doomsday, or the Day of Judgement, have been described at various points in the Quran. When Doomsday arrives, the present balance of the world will break down, and man will feel himself helpless. On that Day, all things except good deeds will lose their value. Then the oppressed person will have the right to take his revenge upon his oppressor.

I swear by the receding stars, the planets that run their course and set, and the night that falls, and the first breath of morning. Truly, this is the word brought by a noble messenger, endowed with power and held in honour by the Lord of the Throne who is obeyed there and is worthy of trust. Your companion is not one possessed: he truly beheld him [the angel¹] on the clear horizon. He is not a withholder of the knowledge of the Unseen. Nor is this the word of an outcast devil.

¹ Angel—messenger, who brings divine revelation to man.

So where are you going? This is merely a reminder to all mankind; to every one of you who wishes to tread the straight path. But you cannot will it unless God, the Lord of the Universe, so wills it [to show you that way]. (81: 16-29)

The occurrence of day and night on the earth and the change of position of the stars as observed by man are due to the rotation of the earth on its axis. In this context, the meaning of these verses is that the system of axial rotation of the earth is a witness to the fact that Muhammad is the Prophet of God and that the Quran is the word of God which has been revealed to him through an angel.

The axial rotation of the earth is one of the truly remarkable phenomena of this universe. It is, so to say, a model which makes the matter of revelation understandable to us. When you imagine that the earth, while rotating on its axis, also revolves round the sun in the vastness of outer space, you will feel as if there is a powerful remote control system which directs its movements with the utmost precision. The establishment of contact between man and God through an angel is also on a parallel with this. The controlled movement of the earth symbolically helps us in understanding the miraculous nature of man's contact with God through the angel. □



ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

Why is it so difficult to accept defeat?

It is difficult because people are not ready to accept the role of the law of nature in deciding a result, be it success or failure. Man is often governed by his ego and whims, which makes him a case of failure. The logo of *The Times of India* bears the following inscription, 'Let truth prevail'.

On the same lines, I would say in real life, the principle to be followed is: 'Let the law of nature prevail'. If, however, we desire that our ego prevails, it would be hard for us to accept failure and draw a positive lesson from it. On the contrary, if we accept our shortcomings, not only are we able to accept failure but also work towards self-improvement.

When does self-respect become ego?

Some take self-respect as an excuse to play a demanding and revenge-seeking role. What they do not realize is that being demanding and revengeful is a negative manifestation of 'ego', which has no place in Islam. Islam teaches its proponents to be firm when it concerns a duty; not to be stubborn in demanding a right.

A duty-conscious mindset looks at fulfilling the rights of others whereas the mindset of seeking revenge simply aggravates the negative effects of a person's ego. A very important principle to keep in mind is that doing one's duty is a virtue only when it does not create another issue.

The Companions of the Prophet had migrated from Makkah to Madinah. When Makkah was brought back into the fold of Islam, many Companions said that they should take back their property which they had left behind in Makkah. When the Prophet came to know this, he announced that they all should immediately return to Madinah—he did not allow the redeeming of lost property, as it would have opened up a new chapter of avenging what was once lost. Those who were occupying the property would not have given it up so easily.

During my days at my home village, a person usurped an area encompassing thirty trees from our orchard. A neighbour, when he learnt of this, told me that he would help me retrieve the ownership on gunpoint! I refused. I told him that retrieval would not put an end to the chain reaction that would begin.

In essence, we must always think whether a new problem is being generated or is the issue getting resolved. After thinking on these lines, we should determine our course of action.

Should I stop getting offended for everything?

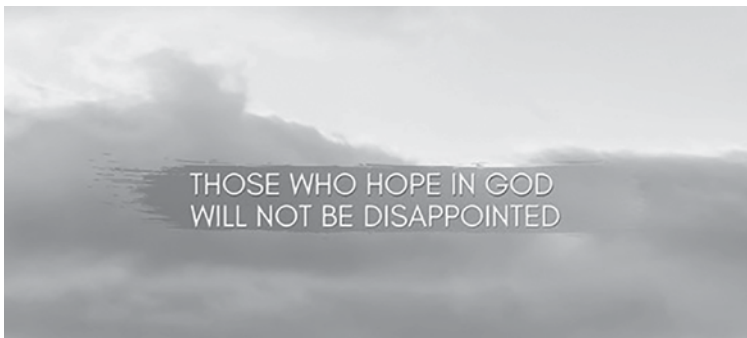
Yes, absolutely! God helps those who take themselves to such levels of objectivity that they are not offended at all. God loves the one who does not get offended whatever be the situation—when a person does this, angels would rush in his direction, exclaiming: 'Here is the kind of a person we were looking for!'

How can a person identify his shortcomings?

In order to identify our own shortcomings, we must possess an objective mindset and should not get offended by what another person tells us about ourselves. We should imagine the other person to be like a mirror, which gives us an exact reflection of ourselves.

Either one becomes angry on criticism or is overjoyed upon being praised; both these responses are improper. Criticism should be welcomed and due thought should be given to the message being conveyed without becoming disturbed by its tenor. However, one gets offended when one's ego is touched and that happens even when someone speaks the truth.

Our dormant ego may still get aroused on provocation. A true realist is one who has an awakened mind, one that is able to gauge the slightest of deviation from the path of realism. He accepts feedback as it is and introspects to realize and overcome his shortcomings. □



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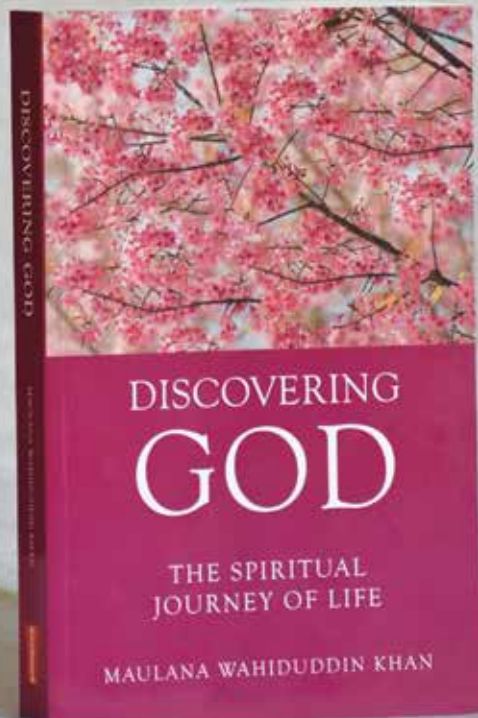
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DISCOVERING GOD

The author, through his study of science, religion, psychology and the experiences of his own life, enlightens about the path to discovery of God through one's journey of life. A discovery of this kind involves pondering on the word of God, converting one's material experiences into spiritual insights, constant introspection, and contemplating on the numerous phenomena of the universe. This kind of spiritual and intellectual endeavor of remembering God and recognizing His majesty and glory in everything around provides nourishment to the soul. Such a person develops strong affection for His Creator, Sustainer and Benefactor, a feeling which reflects in his character and behaviour. Discovery of the noble and merciful God makes a person rise above negative thinking; his heart becomes free of hatred, anger, and vengefulness. He develops the ability to engage in positive thinking even in unpleasant situations. The personality that undergoes this spiritual process is deserving of being settled in Paradise in the Hereafter.



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