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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

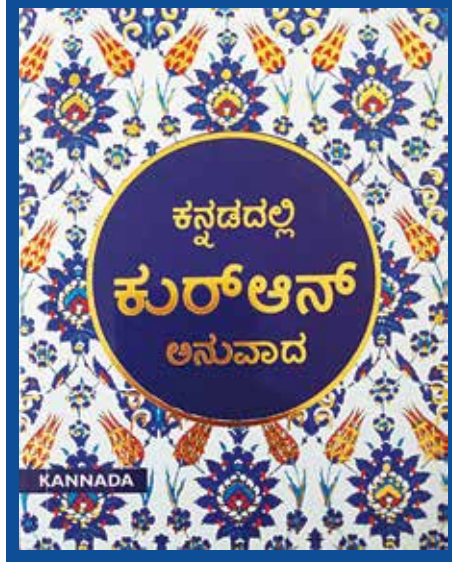
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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

ISSUE 61 JANUARY 2018

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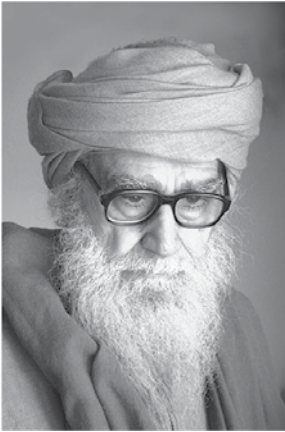
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, born in 1925, in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, is an Islamic spiritual scholar who is well-versed in both classical Islamic learning and modern disciplines. The mission of his life has been the establishment of worldwide peace. He has received the Padma Bhushan, the Demiurgus Peace International Award and Sayyidina Imam Al Hassan Peace award for promoting peace in Muslim societies. He has been called 'Islam's spiritual ambassador to the world' and is recognized as one of its most influential Muslims¹. His books have been translated into sixteen languages and are part of university curricula in six countries. He is the founder of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality based in New Delhi.

ENTERING THE NEW YEAR

WHEN you get out of bed after a good night's sleep and see the first rays of the morning sun, you are bound to exclaim, "What a beautiful morning!" And the morning of every new year's day is not just beautiful, but extra special. In terms of the calendar, New Year's day is but the start of another year, whereas in terms of human life, it is the day for fresh planning—having new experiences, availing of new opportunities, and fulfilling new ambitions.

For every person memories of the previous year are all about successes and failures. For our magazine, *Spirit of Islam*, the previous year was its fifth year of circulation and now, it is entering the New Year. During this period we have gone a long way, thanks to our readers having given us feedback on a regular basis. Their contribution has been of the greatest value to us. In consequence, the New Year for *Spirit of Islam* will be a very special one. Now, in the coming year, we shall be in a position, in the light of all the suggestions readers have made, to further improve the quality of our magazine.

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

When we look at the previous year in terms of the feedback we have received from our readers, we are convinced that, *Spirit of Islam* has been like a beacon, guiding us to the path of spirituality. Indeed, many readers have emailed us that they have rediscovered the positive aspect of their lives. They have discovered how to convert negative thoughts into positive ones. They have realized the truth that life is a great gift from the Creator, and so they should not fail to avail of it.

Many readers have acknowledged that for them *Spirit of Islam* has been more than a magazine. Because, once having been shown the spiritual aspect of life, they have begun receiving the right guidance in leading their lives. As one reader put it, he may have acquired a professional education at the University, but it was *Spirit of Islam* which had taught him the art of thinking. One lady said that in her childhood she used to get angry when provoked, so her mother tried to make her understand how anger was having a negative effect on her health and how some people, by repeatedly giving vent to their anger, get into psychological problems. But *Spirit of Islam* has made it very clear that there is nothing negative about anger.

Anger is a mental state in which the mind releases the maximum energy, and such energy can and should be availed of by just remaining silent. If you remain silent in a moment of anger, nature will take its own course and anger will be converted into positive energy. Having grasped the point made by our magazine, she radically changed her thinking, which enabled her to control her anger and direct it into positive channels.

Every day, when the sun rises, it rises with a golden message. Its message, in essence, is spiritual in nature. Every new year should be taken as a period of potential amelioration. For, every new year offers us fresh opportunities to rediscover the positive aspects of life. Every new year, moreover, brings us to a fresh appreciation of the beauty of nature. For this new opportunity to amass all that is good and beneficial, we wish all our readers a very happy, prosperous and positive New Year. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

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Follow Maulana at speakingtree.in



FROM THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Dr. Farida Khanam has been a professor at the Department of Islamic Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi. She has to her credit the authorship of several books. 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.

WITH the January 2018 issue, *Spirit of Islam* enters its sixth year of publication. The continued interest shown by readers has encouraged our team to begin the new year with the resolution to dedicate ourselves once again to ensure that the pages of the magazine offer spiritual insight, wisdom and lessons to those who yearn for meaning and purpose in life.

A few months back, an educated young woman from Kolkata shared a conversation that the writings of the Maulana had been therapeutic for her during a very difficult phase of her life. The purpose of *Spirit of Islam* is to empower numerous such persons 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 also working towards enlightening people on the subject of global peace and regularly addresses relevant contemporary issues. The violence being perpetrated, especially in the West, in the name of Islam has called for serious deliberation on the matter. Several articles in our various issues have been singularly devoted to understanding the root cause of the problem, to analyze the types of interpretations of Islam that

Islamic scripture and the life 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, conflicts defused and enemies turned into friends.

instigates people to take up arms and how the thinking of those engaged in such heinous acts of terror may be redirected into peaceful channels.

Those who have followed the magazine's contents closely will have realized that Islamic scripture and the life 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, conflicts defused and enemies turned into friends. When a religion has such ideas and concepts to offer, it is certainly erroneous to suggest, as some have claimed, that it is inherently violent.

The increasing readership of *Spirit of Islam* leads our team to hope that the journey we have embarked upon is definitely bearing fruit in people's hearts and minds.

We hope and pray that God may help us in this noble endeavour and give His blessing to our work this year as well! □

Thank you,

Dr. Farida Khanam

Editorial Director, *Spirit of Islam*
hub@the-spiritofislam.org



Intellectual Freedom

The development of human nature is possible only in an atmosphere of freedom. Just as a tree flourishes in an open environment, similarly the human being develops to the full only in an atmosphere of total intellectual freedom.

DISCOVER REASONS FOR GRATITUDE

Conscious Thankfulness

IF you were to enjoy a delicious meal and then say 'Alhamdulillah' in thankfulness to God, then this would be gratitude at a very base level. This is because the gratitude is based on taste and appearance of the meal which is a carnal form of gratitude as opposed to a superior, rational or conscious form of gratitude.

Gratitude at the rational or human level is possible when one were to see food in front of them and be reminded of the entire structure and organisation set up by God that made it possible to get the meal. God has set up a natural process that miraculously culminates in the conversion of what is non-food into food. This universal process makes possible the formation of the various foodstuffs that one finds on the plate.

This should further make one ponder about the fact that the food on the plate in its original form and by itself could not have been a source of energy for us. Consequently God has established a unique system to process the food in our body—the digestive system. This digestive system is an involuntary and automatic mechanism in the body that converts the food we eat into energy further generating new living cells that form the flesh and blood of our body. Such thoughts would then result in an overwhelming sense of gratitude that one will find hard to express in words.

God desires a conscious form of gratitude from man. Merely a carnal form of gratitude does not behoove the beneficence of our Creator.

With the above example, we can understand the difference between a base form of gratitude and a rational, conscious or human form of gratitude. If we only have a poor form of gratitude within, we will always live in a state of ungratefulness. To live with a superior form of gratitude, we require the conscious gratitude of the rational kind. And this is the type of gratitude that is lacking amongst people all over the world. God desires a conscious form of gratitude from man. Merely a carnal form of gratitude does not behoove the beneficence of our Creator. □



EVERY MOMENT IS PRECIOUS

Fleeting Treasure

*Make the most of your life before you are struck down by illness or death.
(Prophet of Islam)*

ABDULLAH IBN UMAR tells of how the Prophet once took him by the shoulders and said: "Live in this world as though you were a wayfarer." Of our passage through life Abdullah ibn Umar would say: "In the evening do not wait for the morning and in the morning do not wait for the evening."

The Prophet's advice and the above-quoted sayings clearly indicate the attitude a believer should adopt towards his earthly existence.

He should feel that he is a traveller in a foreign land, making a temporary sojourn, with his true and ultimate destination always in his thoughts. He should not feel that he is at home, in his own country, and that he has made a permanent abode for himself. If he does, his life will most likely be cast in the wrong mould: he will give all of his attention to this life and not to the next.

The time-conscious believer will strive to live his life in the most positive way possible.

He must focus his attention on the temporary nature of his stay on earth. It will enable him to bear all kinds of afflictions and losses without embitterment, as at any moment he may be on the brink of a new life which death will open up to him.

Even strong feelings of revenge will be stifled by this thought, for will not the Just God Himself see that justice is done in the Afterlife?

The time-conscious believer will strive to live his life in the most positive way possible. He will not ever in the evening 'wait for the morning' or in the morning 'wait for the evening'.

Each moment of his life is precious—too precious to be squandered in negative thought or reaction. □



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.



PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESS

IT is a well-known fact that the Prophet of Islam was a supremely successful man in human history. But he was not just a hero, as Thomas Carlyle has called him. According to the Quran he was a good example to be followed. He has shown us the way of achieving success in this world.

By studying the life of the Prophet we can derive those important principles which were followed by the Prophet. In short, the Prophet of Islam was a positive thinker in the full sense of the word. All his activities were result-oriented. He completely refrained from all such steps as may prove counter-productive. He always followed positive methods to achieve his goal.

Begin from the possible

This principle is well explained in the following saying of the Prophet's wife Aishah: "Whenever the Prophet had to choose between two options, he always opted for the easier choice." (*Al-Bukhari*)

To choose the easiest option means to begin from the possible, and one who begins from the possible will surely reach his goal.

Seek advantage in disadvantage

In the early days of Makkah, there were many problems and difficulties. At that time, a guiding verse in the Quran was revealed. It said: "With every hardship there is ease, with every hardship there is ease." (94: 5-6)

This means if there are some problems, there are also opportunities at the same time. And the way to success is to ignore the problems and avail the opportunities.

Change the place of action

This principle is derived from the emigration of the Prophet to Madinah. This was not just a migration from Makkah to Madinah, rather it was to find a more suitable place for conveying the message of God, as history proved later on.

In controversial matters, one should adopt the principle of pragmatism instead of stubbornly refusing to compromise the ideal. One should focus on resolution of the issue, even if it involves making temporary adjustments.

Make a friend out of an enemy

The Prophet of Islam was repeatedly subjected to practices of antagonism by his opponents. At that time the Quran enjoined upon him the return of good for evil. And then, as the Quran added, "You will see your direst enemy become your closest friend." (41: 34)

A good deed in return for a bad deed has a conquering effect over your enemies. And the life of the Prophet is historical proof of this principle.

Turn minus into plus

After the Battle of Badr (a defensive war), about 70 of the opponents were taken as prisoners of war. They were all literate people. The Prophet announced that if any one of them would teach ten Muslim children how to read and write he would be freed. This was the first school in the history of Islam in which all of the students were Muslims, and all of the teachers were unbelievers. A quote from a British Orientalist best describes the Prophet's personality: *He faced adversity with the determination to wring success out of failure.*

The power of peace is stronger than the power of violence

When Makkah was conquered, all of the Prophet's direst opponents were brought before him. The Prophet instead of keeping them as captives or punishing them simply said: "Go, you are free." The result of this kind of behaviour was miraculous: all his opponents became one among the believers.

Refrain from dichotomous thinking

One of the defensive wars in which Muslims engaged in with the Byzantine forces is known as *Ghazwa* of Mutah (Mutah is located about 600 miles north of Madinah). The commander-in-chief of the Muslim side was Khalid bin Walid. Before the battle got over, Khalid decided to withdraw Muslim forces from the battlefield because he realized that they were disproportionately outnumbered by their opponents. When they reached Madinah, some of the Muslims received them by addressing them as: "O *Furrar!*" (O deserters!) To this the Prophet said: "No, they are *Kurrar.*" (*Kurrar* means 'men of advancement').

For bringing about social change, Islam advocates the evolutionary method, rather than the revolutionary method.

Those Muslims who thought that Khalid and his army were deserters were thinking dichotomously, that is, they thought either one can fight in the battlefield or lose and retreat. However, the Prophet observed that there was a third option and that is to avoid war and find time to strengthen oneself. History tells us that the Muslims, after three years of preparation, advanced again towards the Arabian border with the Byzantine Empire, and this time they won a resounding victory.

Discussion and dialogue instead of confrontation on the battlefield

This principle is derived from the treaty signed at Hdaybiyah in 628 AD. At that time, the opponents were determined to engage the believers in fighting, because obviously they were stronger and thus in an advantageous position to win a battle. But the Prophet, by accepting their conditions unilaterally, entered into a no-war pact. It was a ten-year peace treaty. Before the signing of this treaty, the meeting ground between the believers and their opponents had been the battlefield. But after a truce came into effect between the two sides, the area of engagement became ideological discussion. Before this, the two sides only met with each other in battlefield, but now when they met each other instead of fighting they would converse and discuss matters. As a result of the interaction, within two years, majority of the opponents became followers of the Prophet. Thus, Islam emerged as victorious because its ideology was able to win people over to its side.

Gradualism instead of Radicalism

This principle is well-established by a *Hadith* narrated in *Al-Bukhari*. The Prophet's wife Aishah says that the verses of the Quran that were revealed in the beginning were related mostly to Heaven and Hell. And then after a long time when people's hearts had softened and become inclined towards Islam, the specific commands to desist from adultery and drinking came down. This clearly shows that for bringing about social change, Islam advocates the evolutionary method, rather than the revolutionary method. In other words, change is brought about in a gradual manner rather than abruptly.

Pragmatism in controversial matters

During the writing of the Hudaibiyah Treaty, the Prophet dictated these words to Ali: "This is what has been agreed upon between Muhammad, the Messenger of God and Suhayl ibn Amr." Suhayl ibn Amr was the representative of the Quraysh who were opposed to the Prophet. The Qurayshi delegate raised objections over the words 'Messenger of God'.

*A good deed in return
for a bad deed has
a conquering effect
over your enemies.*

He stated that the Quraysh did not believe that Muhammad was in fact a prophet. He demanded that instead of 'Messenger of God', the words 'Muhammad, son of Abdullah' be written. The Prophet promptly accepted this demand and directed Ali to erase the words 'Messenger of God' after his name and write 'son of Abdullah'.

The Prophet gave importance to the signing of the peace treaty, instead of insisting on the words 'Messenger of God' to be written on the agreement. This gesture of the Prophet implies that in controversial matters, one should adopt the principle of pragmatism instead of stubbornly refusing to compromise the ideal. One should focus on resolution of the issue, even if it involves making temporary adjustments.

The principles outlined above throw light on how the Prophet of Islam attained what historians term 'supreme success'.

Unfortunately, today some Muslims have abandoned these teachings of the Prophet. They are wrongly indulging in violence in the name of Islam. Those Muslims who do not disown these actions and choose to observe silence in this matter are also responsible. The need of the hour is to unite and work towards changing mindset of the terrorists.

We must go by the dictum, 'win the mind, win the battle'. The truth is that terrorism is based on an ideology, which can only be dealt with by a counter-ideology based on peace.

Centre for Peace and Spirituality has devoted itself to the task of presenting a peaceful counter-ideology based on Islamic scripture. Our goal is to educate and enlighten people about the peaceful teachings of Islam so that they can abandon the course of violence and re-discover and utilize the power of peace. □



*To bear with
controversy is a
sign of
knowledge.*

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN



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MUTUAL CONSULTATION

Seek Wisdom from Others

ONE of the teachings of the Quran is *shura*, which means mutual consultation. The Quran inculcates the spirit of *shura* amongst believers, so that they may decide upon all issues by discussion and counseling. In the chapter *Al-Shura* (Mutual consultation), this principle—placed in the context of virtues which will entitle believers to God's beneficence—is mentioned as "those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation and spend out of what We have provided for them". (42: 38)

What is consultation? Consultation means the act of discussing something with somebody before making a decision. Consultation is not an isolated habit. The willingness to engage in it results directly from qualities like modesty, sincerity, caution and the spirit of learning. Without these qualities, no one can engage sincerely in consultation. Belief in God brings with it all these virtues and makes one absolutely sincere in all aspects of life. It is this sincerity as well as modesty that compels a believer not to decide upon anything without first consulting others.

The habit of consultation creates a degree of trust between the different members of society. Mutual trust and the spirit of cooperation is essential for building a good society, and consultation is a vital part of that process.

The best form of consultation is that in which one seeks others' advice, while endeavoring to share experiences. Consultation is important, not just for the individual but also for society. As far as the individual is concerned it is through consultation or discussion that he develops his personality. Consultation makes one a better person and a society comprising individuals of this kind becomes a wise society.

In such a society people trust and help each other. Indeed, the society becomes like a family. Here consultation does not only mean addressing major issues. Issues of that kind no doubt warrant consultation but more important is personal consultation. Everyone needs others' advice even in matters of daily

life. The habit of consultation creates a degree of trust between the different members of society. Mutual trust and the spirit of cooperation is essential for building a good society, and consultation is a vital part of that process.

Consultation in one sense is a 'give and take' culture. When you discuss an issue with someone, it is not simply a verbal exchange. During a discussion you take something from the other and also give something to the other.

Fruitful consultation has two conditions attached to it. One precondition for effective consultation is that both the parties should have open minds. The other condition is that both parties should be ready to accept opinions on their merits and without bias. It can be conducted between the rich and the poor, between seniors and juniors, between the educated and the uneducated, between the young and the old or between men and women. This all-encompassing nature of consultation makes it fruitful to the ultimate extent. □



In avoidance
of temptation,
man shows
that he is
prudent.

WOMEN IN ISLAM

As per Nature

*Treat women well, for they have been created from a rib.
(Prophet Muhammad)*

IT is very important to understand the above saying of the Prophet in the right perspective. This saying does not refer to the creation of Adam and Eve, rather it is about women in general. It is the manner of every woman's creation that is referred to here and not specifically that of Eve. The first important thing to know is that this statement is meant in the metaphorical sense and so it should not be taken literally.

The words 'they have been created from a rib' have no connection with the point conveyed in the rest of the sentence which says women should be treated well. The correct interpretation of the word 'rib' would be one which is in accordance with the underlying purpose of the Prophet's statement. The Prophet had wished to convey: "Women are akin to a rib and should be treated with due consideration." There is another saying which explains what this means. "A woman is like a rib", said the Prophet, "if you try to straighten it, it will break."

The teachings of Islam with respect to women are in accordance with nature. The nature of womanhood as fashioned by the Creator, for the special contribution they have to make to society, demands that their true nature be appreciated.

The above saying of the Prophet related in *Al-Bukhari and Muslim*—the most authentic collections of Prophet's teachings—makes it clear that women are *like* ribs; they are not actually created from ribs. The allusion is figurative not literal. Light is also cast on the meaning of the metaphor. Ribs break when one tries to reshape them. Hence they should be allowed to remain as they are. The same holds true of women: it is wise to let them be on their true nature.

"Women have been created from ribs", and "Women are like ribs", are just two different ways of saying the same thing. There is a difference in the mode of expression of the two statements, but there is no difference in meaning. It is common in every language

for metaphors to be expressed directly, without the use of the words "like" or "as". For instance, if one wishes to pay tribute to a person's bravery, one can say that he is like a lion. But there is not much force in

saying that a person is 'like a lion' as there is in saying that 'he is a lion'. The Prophet used a parable to explain the delicateness of women's nature, pointing out that they should be treated in accordance with their nature. Their delicate emotional constitution should always be borne in mind. God has created them that way, and He has done so for a good reason. They should be treated kindly. If they have to be told something, it should be done tactfully, in a gentle tone. Abruptness and severity will break them, as a rib is broken by any attempt to change its shape. Once, when the Prophet was on a journey, he saw some women riding on a camel. The man leading the camel made the animal to drive on faster, forgetting that this would cause undue discomfort to his passengers. So the Prophet said to the camel driver: "You have glass cases there. Be gentle with them."

Modern research has further helped us with scientific studies on the differences between males and females. Scientific researchers almost unanimously agree that hormones help determine how people feel and act. Thus the male-female differences are entirely genetic in nature. The passivity found in women is due to the particular nature of the female hormones. Differences between male and female hormones exist from birth; they are not acquired later on, as would be the case if they had stemmed from differences in environment.

Islam is a religion of nature. The principles Islam requires us to follow are in fact our own instinctive human requirements expressed in words. The teachings of Islam with respect to women are in accordance with nature. The nature of womanhood as fashioned by the Creator, for the special contribution they have to make to society, demands that their true nature be appreciated.

Due to their delicate nature Islam teaches men to be gentle with women. That way they will not lose heart or become too despondent to perform their special duties in life. It is best to let them be, in their natural state. If one treats them as though they were tough metal, one would break them. □



Difficulties are Ladders

*God has made difficulties the ladders
to our success provided we give a
positive response to them.*

INTROSPECTION

Personality Development

ISLAM places the highest emphasis on being a purified personality. It is necessary for every believer to purify himself. Without purification, a God-oriented personality cannot be developed. Purification leads to growth, an example of which can be seen in the tree. A tree is a result of the growth and development of a seed. When a seed finds a favourable environment, it starts growing until it becomes a green, verdant tree. The same is true of the purification of a human being.

Purifying oneself involves struggle on the part of the individual. It is not at all related to any mysterious inspiration from some supposedly saintly person. Rather, it means abandoning a life of unawareness and leading a life ruled by the conscience. The believer has to save himself from anything which comes in the path of truth, and when he faces any hurdles, he must not resort to expediency. When desires arise within him, he must crush them, and when he is overtaken by arrogance, he should be able to overcome his overweening pride.

In the process of purification, introspection is crucial. It awakens the mind, jolts the personality and gives the individual an incentive to reform himself after making a mistake. One who is desirous of purifying oneself should be careful about his speech and actions at every moment. With total objectivity, he must repeatedly engage in self-reappraisal. This is the process of introspection.

In the process of purification, introspection is very crucial. It awakens the human mind, jolts the human personality and gives the individual an incentive to reform himself after making a mistake.

The most powerful feeling in a person is that of egoism. This feeling is so intense that every person lives with the notion that he is all in all. This is a form of self-glorification. This kind of attitude should be anathema to a person aiming at purifying himself. What one should do is to develop anti-self thinking, so that he may be able to stand up to criticism. This feeling was so intense in one of the Companions of the Prophet that he said, "May

God bless the man who sends me the gift of my shortcomings."

An introspective mentality is born out of a discovery—that of one's own helplessness. The seeker must discover that his sense of 'I' exists only

at the level of his own senses, or feelings. It doesn't exist in reality; he has no power over anything outside of his own feelings. He exercises no power over anything outside of his own self. He exercises no power in the matters of life and death, the life support system, the divine court, etc. When a person discovers his total powerlessness, the feeling of helplessness is necessarily born within him. It is this feeling of helplessness which compels one to engage in introspection and it is in this discovery that the real secret of purification lies. □

This introspective mentality is born out of a discovery—that of one's own helplessness.



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

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

THE QURAN: A BOOK OF GUIDANCE

Spirit versus Form

IN earlier times, the Quran was a book of guidance for people, but now it has been turned into a book of pride. Today we need to once again make the Quran a book of guidance for ourselves. This requires Muslims to revise the policies and activities in which they are currently engaged.

In the *madarasas* and mosques, sermons given are generally centred on the form of religion. In Muslim congregations, it is only the form or the outward aspects of religion that is discussed. We have to return to the original spirit of Islam. This can be understood from a saying of the Prophet. The Prophet is reported to have said that in later times, mosques would be full of worshippers but devoid of guidance.

This means in the later period of Islam, people will perform all rituals associated with religion, but their worship would lack inner spirit. Instead of focusing on reviving the spirit of Islam in individual believers, present day Muslims only speak about working towards gaining political power, which they think is the solution for bringing about a change.

Peace and tolerance are important lessons learnt in prayer. But the real test of the worshipper lies in the application of these lessons in society when he is actually living in the midst of people.

As an example, consider the obligatory prayer which Muslims are required to observe five times a day. Towards the end of every prayer, the worshipper turns to his right and his left and utters the words: '*Assalamu alaykum wa rahmatullah*'. It means: 'May the peace and blessings of God be upon you.' In other words, by doing this, a worshipper is in effect addressing all of humanity and telling people that they are safe from him. He is making a pledge to live in society as a peaceful person. Thus peace and tolerance are important lessons learnt in prayer. But the real test of

the worshipper lies in the application of these lessons in society when he is actually living in the midst of people. Although we see people meticulously performing prayer, when they return to society it appears they have not imbibed the spirit of prayer—they would get provoked, enter into conflict and even resort to violence.

Here it can be seen how the spirit of prayer is as essential as the form of prayer—without the former, the latter is merely a robotic act. □

THE IMPORTANCE OF A SECONDARY ROLE

For the Greater Good

IN the Chapter *Al-Zukhruf* (Ornaments of Gold), the Quran describes a law of nature, which is very important for the purpose of nation building. The translation of the relevant verse is as follows:

Is it they who apportion the blessing of your Lord? It is We who distribute among them their livelihood in the life of this world, and raise some of them above others in rank, so that they may take one another into service; and the blessing of your Lord is better than (the wealth) which they amass.

(43: 32)

These differences between people are not simply a matter of disparity or discrimination; there is great wisdom behind these differences. They give us a form of direction on how to manage our social system. In simple words, it means that one person must take the primary role and other members of society must accept a secondary role. This is the only method of organization by means of which a society can achieve its highest targets.

It is a fact that a great achievement requires the joint efforts of a great number of people; a single individual on his own cannot achieve the highest of social goals. So, what is the principle for a successful joint effort of this kind? It is to entrust one competent person with the role of leadership, while all the other persons take a back seat and play a secondary role.

A great achievement requires the joint efforts of a great number of people; a single individual on his own cannot achieve the highest of social goals.

It is a fact that without joint efforts no high goal can be achieved, but joint efforts always need someone at the helm of affairs. Without a boss you cannot run a company; without a prime minister you cannot run a government; without the head of the family you cannot run a home; without a coordinator, or a supervisor, you cannot run a joint effort. Adherence to the principle of leadership is an integral part of any successful joint effort.

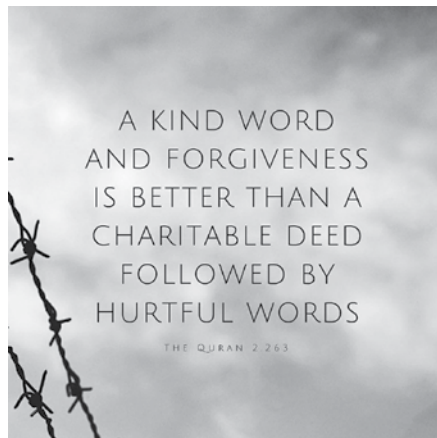
This being so, the law of nature set forth in the above Quranic verse is a great blessing for us. God Almighty created people with differences or

disparities. It is this difference or disparity that gives us the opportunity to bow to the principle of leadership in our social activities. This principle could not work if all the members of society were equal. Equals need a superior person to manage their affairs. This requires them to accept the principle of leadership.

A secondary role is not an inferior role; it is a role that has a value higher than that of the person primarily in command.

Every train requires an engine for its smooth running. Without an engine, the train would not be able to move an inch. The same is true of society. Society is like a train which we need to mobilize, but this mobilization cannot be achieved without an engine to lead the way. The same principle that requires physical movement is applicable to social movement; the social train cannot travel towards its goal without an engine.

A secondary role is not an inferior role; it is a role that has a value higher than that of the person primarily in command. Those who accept the secondary role will be rewarded doubly, because apart from their normal role, they have proved to have a great ability—ego management. Without learning the art of ego management, no one can successfully play a secondary role. □



THE PAYMENT OF DUES

Trust Factor

A BELIEVER has important responsibilities towards both God and man. His duty towards God means believing in God and His attributes, worshipping Him, regarding himself accountable to God and making himself ready to carry out wholeheartedly any such demands that God may make upon him.

Another responsibility of the believer is one which concerns the rights of human beings. This responsibility devolves upon him in his relations with others. Every person with whom he has dealings with has some rights over him. It is incumbent upon a believer to fulfil those rights, failing which he will not be deserving of God's succour.

The following is an example which discusses the responsibilities of a believing employer towards his employee.

According to a saying of the Prophet, God said: "I will become a claimant against the person who engaged a labourer, made him labour fully, but did not pay the wages." On another occasion the Prophet of Islam observed: "Pay the labourer his wages before his sweat dries up."

In this world, it repeatedly happens that one person employs another. In all such matters Islam enjoins the full payment of wages without any delay. After getting the work done, asking the labourer to come the next day for payment is extremely inconsiderate, and as such Islam forbids it.

Just as an employer needs the services of an employee, so also does the employee need compensation for his labour. This is a two-sided demand. When the worker has finished his work, it becomes incumbent on the employer to refrain from placing any obstacle in the way of payment of the sum he has promised. In cases where wages or compensation have not been fixed in advance, Islam demands that for all services rendered, commensurate requital should be made in one form or another. If this cannot be done, for any reason, in material terms, the services should be fully acknowledged and publicly commended, and supplications made to God for the performer of the services.

Paying immediate recompense on completion of a task increases mutual trust in society. Any practice contrary to this will cause society as a whole to fall prey to misgivings about a lack of trustworthiness in their fellow men. □

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



WORSHIP OF GOD

ACCORDING to the Quran, worship of God controls one's character. In Chapter *Al-Ankaboot*, the Quran says: "Surely prayer restrains one from indecency and evil" (29: 45). This Quranic verse gives us a very important aspect of worship. It presents the true picture of the worship of God.

Worship is not a spiritless ritual. Worship is a living act. A worshipper recites verses of the Quran during his prayer. These verses tell him about the do's and don'ts of daily life. They tell him what the secret of success is and how one can obtain salvation in the world Hereafter.

It means that worship makes a person conscious about his daily behaviour and social conduct—from his family life to other walks of life. After performing prayer, when the worshipper returns to society, he is a man with a difference.

For example, in his worship, the worshipper repeatedly says *Allahu Akbar*, which means, 'Only God is great', or in other words, 'Greatness belongs only to God Almighty'. This saying inculcates the spirit of modesty in the worshipper. At the end of this worship, he addresses

all of mankind by saying, *Assalamu alaykum wa rahmatullah*, which means, Peace and blessings of God be upon you.

A believer who worships every day and imbibes in himself this spirit through his worship is bound to become a person who is very cautious in his behaviour. He would lead a life of modesty. He would live with the spirit of peace for all mankind.

This Quranic verse gives us a criterion to judge the veracity of worship of every individual. If one's worship reflects in one's behaviour, then it is worship in the true sense of the word. Those whose worship does not fulfil this criterion are merely performing a spiritless ritual and not engaging in real worship. □

A believer who worships every day and imbibes in himself this spirit through his worship is bound to become a person who is very cautious in his behaviour.



*Problems
are not created
by some
person, they
are part of
nature.*

MAALLAYA WAHIDUDDIN KSAW

GOD REALIZATION

Positivity and Purity

Every Paradise has a Serpent

This world is beautiful. The only problem is that we cannot enjoy it. This world cannot be enjoyed by any man while in it. There are always some problems—boredom, troubles, evil, disease and eventually death. Everyone wants to enjoy life on earth but no one has really been able to—what is the reason for this?

It is because this world was not meant for a person to enjoy it. It has been made only for a test. Just like a student in an examination hall cannot enjoy his time in it, in the same way we cannot enjoy ourselves in this world. We have to take the test and try to pass it. If we do not attempt it, we will fail. This world is for trial but man wants to relax or indulge in it. Just as the best of foods eaten in excess lead to troubles and pain, the same is the case with our life. Too much of anything in this world, will result in problems—boredom, poor health, tiredness. We must soon realize that we have no other option but to accept the ‘test’ that God has set for us. We must accept the Creation Plan of God.

Scientific Argument

There are two distinct periods in the history of religion—pre-scientific period and scientific Period. Prior to 18th century, in the pre-scientific period there was a traditional framework of thinking. From the 18th century onwards, the framework of thinking is based on science.

We have to come out of all distractions and devote ourselves to the purpose of discovery of God. To realize God, we must purify our souls.

In the pre-scientific period, religion consisted of man’s own ideas—the oceans, mountains, sun, moon and other objects of nature were worshipped and held in veneration. In the scientific or modern world, in which man had set foot on the moon, the god-ship of moon and other natural objects came to an end. These natural objects and phenomena are now not looked upon as gods. Science has given man an opportunity to come out of the age-old myths and seek the truth. It has

brought him out of darkness and into the light. Science made people realize that the things that they used to worship as gods cannot help or harm them in any way.

Earlier people thought that they must accept God as a belief and not as a truth because there was no proof of God. Knowledge was earlier restricted only to the macro world—or things that one could observe directly. So people thought that if they cannot observe God, then He does not exist. Today science has helped humans reach the micro-world of atoms, electrons and quarks. The science of particle physics revealed that even though we are not able to see these micro particles, they do exist as we can determine their effects. This inferential argument is held scientifically valid and acceptable. Another example is that we do see the effects of gravity all around us, however, we cannot observe the force of gravity.

Knowledge of Things and Knowledge of Truths

We are unable to observe the truth directly with our eyes, but we know and accept it. It is now acknowledged that we have to accept inferential arguments for the existence of things we cannot see directly. With this change in reasoning, even Bertrand Russell was compelled to say in his book *Why I am not a Christian*, “If there is a design, there is a designer.” Russell opined that this argument from design was a valid argument. In the pre-scientific age, God was only a belief, but in the scientific age, we must accept the existence of God as a reality, as His existence can be proved by inferential argument.

Another important argument the scientific era has validated is the universality of God. Earlier due to a diversity of beliefs, people thought there could be many gods. Science helped us overcome this myth. It concluded that all things—mountains, man, trees, rocks, etc., at the end, are one and the same, consisting of atoms, which are nothing but a ‘mad dance of electrons’. In essence, when there is no diversity of things, then we have no option but to accept that there are not many gods, rather all have been created by only one Universal God.

By acknowledging the good favours of people and accepting them as good favours of God, reiterating and repeating good things, words and actions and forgetting all negative experiences —this is the way to developing a positive personality.

Ignorance can be an excuse to do anything. Once you know however, you are compelled to do the right thing. There are only two right ways to arrive at any conclusion—rational knowledge or revealed knowledge. Without recourse to either of these, you do not have a basis to arrive at any solid conclusion. A claim must be backed up by either arguments

from rational or experimental knowledge or from revealed knowledge of scriptures. If it cannot be verified by these two forms of knowledge, then it must be considered baseless.

Removal of Barriers between Man and God

Yet another contribution of science is the removal of the barriers between man and God. Many people all over the world believe that man needs an intermediary to reach God and they believe that the saints—both alive and dead are those intermediaries.

In the earlier days, there was no direct method of communication over long distances. Letters had to be sent physically by man or pigeons. Today science and technology have shown man that direct communication is possible—so it is certainly possible for us to contact God also. Thus the concept of ‘wasila’ or ‘referrals’ as a means of communicating with God has been shown to be a superstition. We must realize now that if we call to God, He can listen to us.

The age we are living in today gives us the potential to reach a higher level of God-realization

In this way, science has overcome all the fallacies that had become barriers for man to reach God. It is now up to man to find God. If he continues to remain blind in spite of the truth around him, then it is his own fault.

Paradise

Another idea that science has made clear is the concept of Paradise. Hundreds of years ago, man could not conceive of the concept of Paradise. Even the palaces of kings did not have the facilities and conveniences that a common man today enjoys—such as modern housing, furniture, access to communication and information, transportation, and so on. All these things were hidden in nature and they have been invented or discovered by research and experimentation. These modern day comforts and conveniences are the prototypes of Paradise. These amenities give us an introduction to the far greater comforts that we will enjoy in Paradise.

Science has made religious truths understandable.

Level of God Realization

In the pre-scientific times, when man looked up at the sky, on a clear night he could observe about 10,000 stars. Nowadays, after the invention of the telescope, it has been discovered that there are more

than a trillion stars and most of them are incredibly big and much bigger than the sun. Therefore the level of God-realization (*marifat*) that people of previous times had was less than the realization of the present day people. People are now in a better position to appreciate God's glory and majesty compared to those of the previous times.

Islam is not based on the quantity of rituals we perform, but on the level of realization of God that we could attain in our lifetime. Thus, the age we are living in today gives us the potential to reach a higher level of God-realization (*marifat*). We now have far greater knowledge about God's wisdom and intelligent design in His creations than before.

A Higher Level of God Realization

Every Prophet had a high level of realization of God. This high level of realization was given to prophets because the 'unseen' was made evident to them. However, the people of later times, using scientific means have been able to see the unseen world, and they would thus be able to achieve the same level of realization as the prophets.

For example, the people of yesteryears only knew that we breathe in and breathe out air. People today know that respiration is a process of inhaling oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide. This carbon dioxide is taken in by plants and trees, and they give out oxygen in return. This scientific fact, which has made evident the munificence of God was not known to people in earlier times.

Take another example. We know that the Prophet was taken from Makkah to Jerusalem in a very short time in a journey called *miraj*. This journey was meant to increase his understanding of God's bounties. But today we can make a similar journey in an airplane and thereby acknowledge God's blessings upon us. Such observations take our realization of God to a much higher level.

Modern day comforts and conveniences are the prototypes of Paradise. These amenities give us an introduction to the far greater comforts that we will enjoy in Paradise.

Lure of the Present Day World

The people of yesteryear could make Paradise their goal as they did not have many distractions from the path of religion. There were no paradise-like comforts in the world to get enmeshed in—no shopping centres, luxury homes, cars, airplanes, instant communication, etc. People used to bury their money as treasure beneath the ground as

they had no use of money beyond a certain minimum amount. Paradise was a dream of the after-life at that time and could not have been realized in this world.

Today however, people have many other options. Nowadays, it is possible to expend one's money for various activities. We can buy many things for our pleasure and luxury. With the amount of material comforts, people try making a Paradise for themselves in this very world.

Going after material advancements serves to distract people from the path of religion and spirituality. Thus although the knowledge and discoveries of the present world potentially give us an opportunity to realize God at a higher level, they also cause to distract us in wasting our time and potential in superficial entertainment and enjoyment.

Islam is not based on the quantity of rituals we perform, but on the level of realization of God that we attain in our lifetime.

The path to God Realization

To seek something, we must have sincerity. Without sincerity, we will not be able to seek it, find it or accept it. Only with sincerity, can one find the truth.

Gautama Buddha once went to a milkman. The milkman told Buddha: "I will give you milk in return for knowledge." Buddha gave him a pot for the milk. He washed it and put fresh milk in it for Gautama who took it and started going away. The milkman said, "Buddha, where are you going, you have still to give me knowledge". To this Buddha replied: "I have given it to you. I gave you a pot. You first cleaned it and then poured milk in it. You realized that only a clean pot could contain milk. In the same way, only if you become a clean container by cleansing yourself of jealousy, anger, and hatred will I be able to impart knowledge to you. If you are not cleansed, the knowledge that I give you will only be spilled over."

If one's inner container is not clean, God will not accept it. If you desire direct communion with God, you must be sincere and cleanse yourself. Without that you cannot be in communion with God. We must first cleanse our heart and mind of all negative thoughts and words.

De-conditioning of the mind: As soon as we are born, we start getting conditioned by our environment and the people around us. Upon becoming an adult—we have to start de-conditioning our minds' conditioning, layer by layer, to reach our true nature.

Get rid of the confusion: Once we have reached our true nature, we must try to rid our minds of the confusion around us. Everything in the physical world is verifiable so there need not be any confusion. Man lives in a jungle of ideas and is overwhelmed everyday by new concepts from people around him and from the media. It is difficult to get rid of this jungle of ideas. It is up to us to get out of this mire of confusion and seek clarity in our thoughts.

Build a positive personality by banishing all negative thoughts:

Every moment, we are confronted with problems or negative experiences. We must kill all such negative thoughts immediately. If this is not done, these negative thoughts will fester in our minds and lead to a negative personality. On the other hand, we must cultivate and develop positive thoughts by acknowledging the good done by others. By acknowledging the good favours of people and accepting them as good favours of God, reiterating and repeating good things, words and actions and forgetting all negative experiences—this is the way to developing a positive personality.

*We must cultivate
and develop
positive thoughts by
acknowledging the
good done by others.*

Concentrate on realizing and discovering God: When we focus or concentrate on one thing, it will soon become clear and evident. For example, it is said of Newton that when he was a child, he used to be lost in thoughts all the time. Later, it was realized that he used to be actually concentrating on a specific idea. Only through such focus, was he able to discover and understand the great laws of nature.

Likewise, we have to come out of all distractions and devote ourselves to the purpose of discovery of God. To realize God, we must pay the price and purify our souls. □



ROOT CAUSE OF TERRORISM AND ITS SOLUTION

Changing the Mindset

THERE is no doubt that terror attacks in different parts of the world are highly condemnable. People the world over are trying to find a solution to this menace. The authorities are trying to crush the terror menace through legal action, while reformers are trying to curb it by engaging in condemnation. However both these methods are, apparently, proving to be ineffective. Then what is the solution?



Practical assessment shows that the present problem of terrorism is based on an ideology and an ideology cannot be countered through legal action or by mere condemnation. We have to develop a counter-ideology to overcome it.

*Peace is always
desirable for its own
sake, and every other
desirable state comes
after peace, not
along with it.*

According to UNESCO, 'Violence begins from the mind', it has to, therefore, be uprooted from the mind itself. This succinctly captures the root cause of terrorism. Therefore, in order to eliminate this root cause we need to initiate our efforts by beginning from the right starting point—the re-engineering of minds of individuals by taking them away from the culture of violence and bringing them closer to the culture of peace.

Mistaken belief

To explain the importance of the above, Let us take two parallel examples from history: one of the American campaign against Communist Russia and the other of the American campaign against Saddam-led Iraq. While the US was successful in curbing the menace of Communist Russia, the same America failed to cope with the menace of Saddam-led Iraq. This is because America met the Russian challenge at an ideological level while it opted for military action against Saddam's Iraq.

Terrorism will persist in one form or another until the ideology of violence is countered with another ideology based on peace. The ideology behind present day terrorism is that, 'Islam being a political system, it is the duty of all Muslims to establish Islamic rule in the

world.' This thinking was not prevalent during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. It is a later innovation which was developed in the last few centuries by a handful of people. Having become widespread in the Muslim world today, it is leading to present-day violence. It has swayed many Muslims, especially the easily influenced youth, and they have become obsessed with trying to establish the political rule of Islam, thinking it to be their ticket to Paradise. Failing to achieve this objective by the peaceful method, they have started resorting to suicide bombing. The idea being that if one cannot eliminate the non-Islamic rule, then one should at least de-stabilize it and pave the way for Islamic rule.

Peace is a pre-condition

Understanding Islam through its original sources—the Quran and *Hadith*—one can say that this political interpretation of Islam is an innovation and the real Islam is based upon peace, compassion and tolerance.

Peace is not prevalent in the world as people the world over are acting intolerantly and indulging in acts of violence, saying, "Give us justice and peace will ensue." But when people, ostensibly seeking justice, stoop to violence, peace can never prevail. Peace is always desirable for its own sake, and every other desirable state comes after peace, not along with it. So, the maxim to follow is: "Ignore the problems, and avail of the opportunities." Once people become tolerant and obtain peace for its own sake, it opens up opportunities, which enable people to strive for their ideals, eventually attaining justice and other constructive ends.

Islam: the religion of peace

This is the ideology of peace which can counter the ideology of violence and it is based on the original sources of Islam. The Prophet of Islam provides a very clear example in his method of negotiating the Hudaibiyah Peace Treaty. In this treaty he unilaterally accepted all the conditions of his opponents, without receiving justice or his rights, to enter into a 10-year no-war pact. This gave him and his Companions an opportunity to work uninterruptedly on a constructive programme. Using this peaceful non-political programme, they were able to consolidate themselves so thoroughly that without waging war, they acquired Makkah peacefully.

From this example of the Prophet Muhammad, we can understand that Islam is a completely peaceful religion and the Islamic method is a completely peaceful method. Give people the true understanding of Islam and God willing, peace will prevail. □

SOCIAL ETIQUETTE

Healthy Society

THE Quran has given certain injunctions that ensure harmonious social living. One injunction of this kind is set forth in the Chapter *Al-Nur* (The Light) in these words:

Believers, do not enter other people's houses until you have asked their owners' permission and greeted them. That will be better for you, so that you may be heedful. If you find no one at home, do not go in until permission has been granted to you. If you are told to go away, then go away. That is more proper for you. God knows well what you do. (24: 27-28)

These verses give the Quranic etiquette for social living. The Quran emphasizes and encourages good relationship between different members of society. Towards this end, there are some principles which ensure a better social life and healthy and fruitful interaction. The principles given in these verses can be summarized as follows:

The first principle, in this regard is that, if you want to meet someone, you should fix an appointment in advance, so that the person can meet you without any reservation.

Everyone should, from others' point of view, be predictable in character. All members of society must refrain from ill-feeling towards their fellow men.

If you fail to make a prior appointment before visiting someone's house, you must on arrival knock at the door and wait to have permission from the occupants of the house before entering. Without permission from within, you must refrain from entering the house.

If you visit someone's home without prior appointment and after knocking at the door, you find that there is no response from within, you have to return without taking offense.

If you visit a house without a prior appointment and are told by the occupants, that at that particular time a meeting is not possible, accept this in a positive way and go away without any kind of rancour.

The above principles are simple and practical. This is good for every society. These principles do not apply only to strangers but must be adhered to even by relatives and friends. These principles are common and universal. There is no exception to them whatsoever.

The spirit of these principles is that the members of society should be each other's well-wishers. They should try to avoid creating problems for others. Everyone should, from others' point of view, be predictable in character. All members of society must refrain from ill-feeling towards their fellow men. □



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TIME IS A TREASURE

Value its Preciousness

TIME is our greatest wealth. All of us have been blessed with the gift of time, but few of us spend it properly. Someone has rightly said, 'Money lost can be earned again, but lost time is lost forever. So, use your time judiciously.'

It is unwise to waste and idle away one's time. It is a waste of life to spend time on useless things. One should use time on things that will benefit oneself in the true sense. Time is an external thing. It is determined according to the calendar. But the proper use of time is something that depends on an individual's own quality.

We must properly regulate our life in order to use the time that we have been allotted in the most beneficial manner. All of us have only a limited period of time in this world. And, after that, our period is up! We won't ever be able to get back the time that has passed. So, we need to clearly distinguish between proper and improper use of time.

Success comes to one who utilizes his time and not to the one who wastes it. Success comes from planning and planning is the wise utilization of one's time.

We need to save ourselves from the improper use of time in the same way as we might want to stay away from a forbidden thing.

To be deeply concerned about not spending our time in an improper way will help us use it in the right way. To further get direction of how to use one's time productively one should take care of what one does in a day. Every new day that dawns brings with it many opportunities. These opportunities do not loudly announce themselves. Rather they speak very silently. It is for us to recognize

them and to use them in a properly-planned manner. Someone has rightly said: 'A day you have lived fully was your day. All other days are simply dates on your calendar.'

There are two ways of leading life. One is to simply pass time, and the other is to avail of time. If you live just to pass time, you are simply wasting your life. But if you spend your life meaningfully you are truly living. You are making proper use of this amazing blessing that is called life. Success comes to one who utilizes his time and not to the one who wastes it. Success comes from planning and planning is the wise utilization of one's time. □

THE SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Spiritual Upliftment

ISLAM is an answer to the demands of nature. Islam as it is, is in fact a counterpart of human nature. This is why Islam has been called a religion of nature in the Quran and *Hadith*.

A man once came to the Prophet Muhammad and asked him what he should do in a certain matter. The Prophet replied, 'Consult your heart about it'. By the heart the Prophet meant common sense. That is, what one's common sense tells one would likewise be the demand of Islam.

What does human nature desire more than anything? It desires, above all, peace and love. Every human being wants to live in peace and to receive love from the people around him. Peace and love are the religion of human nature as well as the demand of Islam. The Quran tells us, "God calls to the home of peace".

One of the teachings of Islam is that when two or more people meet, they must greet one another with the words, *Assalamu Alaikum* (*Peace be upon you*). Similarly, *salat*, or prayer, five times daily is the highest form of worship in Islam. At the close of each prayer all worshippers have to turn their faces to either side and utter the words *Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatullah* (May peace and God's blessings be upon you). This is like a pledge given to people: "O people you are safe from me. Your life, your property, your honour is secure with me. "

A true and perfect man, from the religious point of view, is one who has reached that level of spiritual development where nothing but peace prevails.

This sums up the spirit of true religion, the goal of which is spiritual upliftment. It is the ultimate state of this spiritual upliftment which is referred to in the Quran as the 'soul at peace.' (89: 27)

Thus a true and perfect man, from the religious point of view, is one who has reached that level of spiritual development where nothing but peace prevails. When a person has attained that peaceful state, others will receive from him nothing but peace. He may be likened to a flower which can send out only its fragrance to man, it being impossible for it to emit a foul smell.

An anecdote mentioned below brings out the spirit of religion. The story goes that once a Sufi saint was travelling along with his disciples.

During the journey he encamped near a large grove of trees upon which doves used to perch. During this halt one of the Sufi's disciples aimed at one of the doves, killed it, cooked it and ate it. Afterwards something strange happened. A flock of doves came to the tree under which the Sufi was resting and began hovering over it and making a noise.

Peace and love are the religion of human nature as well as the demand of Islam.

The Sufi saint asked the leader of the birds what the matter was. The leader said, 'One of your disciples has killed one of us.' The saint questioned his disciple about it. The disciple said that he had done nothing wrong, as the birds were their food and what he had done was normal. The Sufi conveyed this message to the leader of the doves.

The latter replied: 'Perhaps you have failed to understand our point. Actually what we are complaining about is that all of you came here in the garb of Sufis yet acted as hunters. Had you come here in hunter's garb, we would certainly have remained on the alert. When we saw you in the guise of Sufis, we thought that we were safe with you and remained perched on the top of the tree without being properly vigilant.'

This anecdote illustrates well the reality of a true religious person or spiritual person. One who has reached the stage of spiritual upliftment, and has found the true essence of religion no longer has the will or the capacity to do harm. He gives life not death, to others. He benefits others, doing no injury to anyone. In short, he lives among the people like flowers and not like thorns. He has nothing but love in his heart to bestow upon others.

A believer who worships God can feel himself becoming imbued with a special kind of peace and in turn he will live as a peaceful person in society. He will be a well wisher to everyone and will consider all as his fellow beings. □



REFLECTIONS ON LIFE AND DEATH

Ephemeral and Eternal

OF all the stages through which a person will have to pass, death is the most certain. Yet, it is something that few people bother to seriously think about, leave alone prepare for. Everyone who is alive now will be dead sometime in the future. One day, the eyes of those who now see will fade and their tongues will freeze into silence. Every human being will one day be leaving this world, never to return, and will enter a world which he will never leave.

Death is commonly defined as the end of life in an organism. Upon death, apparently all biological and other-related activities of a living being stop, including the mind and the senses. Research suggests that about 150,000 people die every day around the world. Throughout history, a great majority of people have believed that humans also have a soul in addition to the physical body and that the soul continues in the afterlife, after leaving the body. It is here that religion adds a very important aspect to the concept of death.

That is, religion says that there is a very meaningful relationship between the pre-death and the post-death period of a human being. The period before death in the present world can be likened to a nursery where human beings are meant to grow and develop, while in the phase after the present life, a human being will find his true habitat. Human beings grow in the nursery of this present world, and in the world of the Hereafter plants from this nursery are selected for being settled in Paradise.

According to Islam, in the pre-death period, the Creator has bestowed complete freedom to a person. This freedom is meant as a person's test. Those individuals who give proof of not having misused their freedom and show that they are competent to lead life in a highly disciplined way will be made deserving of entry to Paradise. Paradise is a sublime society where selected persons from entire human history will be brought together and where they will live for eternity.

Since all of us must, one day or the other, face death, we need to reflect on death often and lead our lives in this world in such a way that when our death finally arrives, we will be adequately prepared for it, having lived as our Creator wanted us to. We should give attention to the reality of life and death, and thereby lead our lives in a truly meaningful manner. □

CONSOLIDATION BEFORE EXPANSION

Natural Principle

A TREE is a unique phenomenon of nature. Its roots go deep into the soil and its trunk rises up and its branches spread out high above. This principle of nature is also applicable to the human world. That is, real change in human life can be brought about by following the natural principle: first consolidation and then expansion. Here, consolidation means to firmly establish one's base in the ground and expansion means to spread out everywhere.

Individuals are the basis of any social building. If you want to bring about change in society you have to begin your work at the level of the individual.

If you want to bring about any real change in society, you must first of all change individual thinking and conduct. For example, if you want to successfully establish a political system, you shall have to train people's minds in such a way that they find that system acceptable. Similarly, if you want to run successful institutions you shall first of all have to educate individual minds. Individuals are the basis of any social building. If you want to bring about change in society you have to begin your work at the level of the individual.

Building an institution without first laying a solid foundation is like building sandcastles which soon crumble away. □



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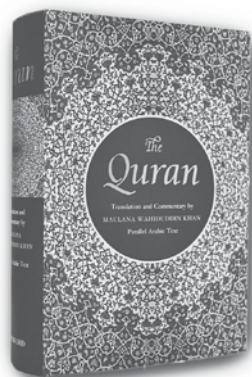
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THE WORD OF GOD

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 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



Before you also the messengers We sent were but [mortal] men to whom We vouchsafed revelation. Ask the People of the Book, if you do not know. [We sent them] with clear signs and scriptures. We have sent down the Reminder to you, to enable you to make clear to mankind what has been sent down to them, so that they may reflect upon it. (16: 43-44)

'The People of the Book' (*ahl az-zikr*), i.e. those who have a knowledge of historical facts relating to past peoples and past prophets. What had to be ascertained from them was not about truth or untruth: they were to be asked about whether the prophets appearing in past ages were human beings or not. The fact that the Prophet Muhammad was a human being was treated by the people of Makkah as evidence of his not being the prophet of God. They were told to ascertain from the communities among whom prophets had been appearing (just as in the case of the Jews) whether the prophets who appeared among them were human beings or angels.

A prophet appears for the purpose of 'reminding'. This reminding is, in fact, done with the help of arguments. However, it is also necessary for the preacher to prove himself to be absolutely serious in this regard. If a man makes people aware of heaven and hell, but at the same time engages in such activities as prove him to be flippant about heaven and hell, his *dawah* efforts will become ridiculous in the eyes of the people.

However, even if the call of the preacher is of a high standard and is presented in a perfect manner, it will benefit only those who

pay attention to it. Those who do not pay attention can never be benefited by the call of truth.

Do those who devise evil plans feel secure that God will not make them sink into the land, or that a punishment will not come upon them from where they least expect? Or that He will not seize them suddenly in their daily activities and they will not be able to frustrate Him? Or that He will not punish them by giving them a fright? Indeed, your Lord is kind and merciful. (16: 45-47)

This verse pertains to the last stage of the Makkan period when the opponents of the Prophet Muhammad were conspiring to kill him. The Prophet is God's representative on God's earth. Therefore, hatching such a conspiracy against a prophet must necessarily be the handiwork of such persons as are absolutely fearless of God's retribution.

The fact is that God is the possessor of such control over man that He can cause him to be buried deep in the earth if He so desires, or He may wreak vengeance on him at the very place which he considers safe; or God may seize him in the course of his activities and he will not be able to save himself. God may even seize upon him when he is conscious of the risk and fully aware of the situation.

In short, God may seize upon man at any time and in any situation. If He sees people doing mischief, yet lets them go unpunished, they should not become fearless, because His restraint is due to His consideration of 'test' conditions and not to His being powerless.

Have they not observed the things God has created, casting their shadows right and left, prostrating themselves before God in all humility? Everything in the heavens and all the creatures on the earth prostrate themselves before God, as do the angels, and they do not behave proudly: they fear their Lord above them, and do what they are commanded. (16: 48-50)

Man indulges in arrogance in a world where all the things surrounding him are teaching him lessons in obedience. For example, the shadows of material things. The shadow of a thing standing erect falls on the ground. In this way, it symbolizes kneeling down (*sajdah*). It shows symbolically how a man should bow down before his Creator.

Though angels are not visible to man, the running of this immense universe in the most regulated manner proves that the agents appointed by God to run it are extremely powerful. These angels, in spite of being extraordinarily powerful, are totally obedient to God.

If they were not so, the system of the universe would not function continuously with so much precision and uniformity.

In view of this, to be entirely correct in his behaviour, man can do no other than surrender himself to God, do obeisance to Him and become His most obedient subject.

God says, 'Do not take two gods. He is only One God. So fear Me alone.' To Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth, and obedience is due to Him alone. Will you then fear anyone other than God? (16: 51-52)

God has warned man through His prophets that he should not hold to any god except the one and only God. The God of this universe is only one. Man should fear only Him; he should be obedient to Him alone.

If a man fully realizes that it is God who is the sole Creator and Lord of all, and that his life completely depends upon Him, the feeling that develops in him as a result of this realization is fear of God (*taqwa*).

Eternal obedience is the due of God alone in this heaven and earth. Everything here is completely bound by divine law. In such a world, to pray to or to worship or to repose hope in anybody else is absolutely irrational. The present universe is such that it completely rejects ascribing partners to God (*shirk*). □



*When
people forget about
death,
they forget how to
live.*

MAALANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

Why should I respect Islam and its adherents? Suicide bombers, cruelty towards 'sinners', patronising towards women, conservative medieval social norms, sanctimonious people who look down upon others who drink and smoke...

You are under no compulsion to respect Islam and its adherents. However, you must certainly analyze what you hold in contempt.

The very word 'Islam' (from the Arabic *silm*) connotes peace. According to a teaching of the Prophet, "Peace is Islam." (*Al-Bukhari, the most authentic book after the Quran*) This means that peace is one of the prerequisites of Islam. The Prophet once stated: "A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands people are safe." One of the attributes of God described in the Quran is '*As-Salam*', which means peace and security. As per *Sahih Muslim*, the second most authentic book of *Hadith*, a teaching is recounted as follows. It is narrated on the authority of Abu Huraira that the Messenger of Allah observed:

"He who killed himself with steel (weapon) would be the eternal denizen of the fire of Hell and he would have that weapon in his hand and would be thrusting that in his stomach for ever and ever, he who drank poison and killed himself would sip that in the fire of Hell where he is doomed for ever and ever; and he who killed himself by falling from (the top of) a mountain would constantly fall in the fire of Hell and would live there for ever and ever." (*Sahih Muslim*).

In addition, the Quran makes a very clear statement: "Whoever killed a human being, except as a punishment for murder or for spreading corruption in the land, shall be regarded as having killed all mankind." (5: 32)

It is true that some Muslims are engaged in violence in the name of Islam, but these violent activities are quite against Islamic teachings. Islam in its very essence connotes peace and there is no association of a peaceful religion with terrorist movements at all. You have to judge Muslims in the light of Islamic teachings, and not vice versa.

How can we eliminate all terrorists from the world? Can there be everlasting peace?

Terrorism is a phenomenon that results on account of misuse of freedom by human beings. God bestowed freedom upon mankind in order to put us to the test in this world. It is the misuse of this God-given freedom which creates all kinds of problems in society.

As we cannot abolish this freedom, we cannot establish an ideal system. It is this fact due to which establishing a perfect society or system is simply not possible.

Which extremely unfair society became fair without violent processes?

The term 'fair' has to be understood in a pragmatic sense and not in the ideal sense. This is because in this world, everyone has been granted complete freedom to make their own moral choices. It is this freedom that divides people into two categories—those who misuse their freedom and the others who make proper use of it.

In view of human freedom, I would like to present a pragmatic example of such a society which was fair—this was the society that Prophet Muhammad established and which lasted for a limited period of time—for about 25 years. It was established after a long peaceful struggle with the Quraysh tribe. A few violent clashes were merely defensive and did not last more than a couple of hours. Later on, after the death of the Prophet, this society was also marred by violence which was the result of misuse of freedom by some people called Khawarij or the uncivilized desert dwellers, who became the chief reason for the strife and violence in the society of that time. But despite their sharp differences, the opposing parties used to come together for performing the religious rites of the deceased. I do not know of any other such example.

Why is there Islamophobia, but no Hinduphobia or Buddhistphobia?

There's no such thing as 'Islamophobia'. This is a concept which only some Muslims have themselves innovated. There would have been Islamophobia if this term had been coined by the West describing their own attitude towards Islam. On the other hand, this term has been attributed to the West by the Muslim community. Thus Islamophobia is an allegation, and not a real phenomenon.

It is a common perception that Muslims become emotional very easily when it comes to controversial issues. This is why people have come to fear Muslims, while Hindu and Buddhist communities are tolerant in comparison. It is because of people's perception of Muslims as being intolerant that there is fear of Muslims, but not of people of other faiths.

If the Muslim community embraces peace, cultivates tolerance and avoids being over-sensitive on trivial issues then the so-called 'Islamophobic' perception shall also disappear.

What is wrong with Islam in the 21st century?

In my opinion there is only one problem facing present-day Muslims—that is, their self-styled concept of *jihad*. All other issues of intolerance and extremism have branched out from their misconceptions about *jihad*. The most essential point for Muslims today is to know the importance of peace and to know that *jihad* is not needed in today's age. The command for *jihad*, in terms of *qital* (war), is suspended. If in present times, we can achieve everything we want by peaceful methods, then why engage in *qital* or fighting? This is the basic problem that needs to be addressed. Trying to establish Islamic *Shariah* by force or through coercion is also an offshoot of this wrong concept of *jihad*. Muslims must throw away their arms in the oceans and work peacefully for constructive goals.

Whenever Muslim countries are in crisis, why does Islamic fundamentalism flourish there immediately?

Crisis in Muslim countries leads to flourishing of Islamic fundamentalism. This is because since the time the Palestinian issue gained prominence, *Ikhwanul Muslimun* (Muslim Brotherhood) has gained stronghold in Arab countries. The Muslim Brotherhood were initially against the West but later they also turned against their own Arab rulers and tried to dethrone them because they thought that these rulers were agents of the West. In order to destabilize the Arab rule, Muslim Brotherhood began confronting and clashing with the rulers. As a result, the Arab rulers became very sensitive towards Islamic movements, as they considered them to be a form of extremism or fundamentalism whose aim was to revolt and de-stabilize the existing rule.

Is the concept of 'religion' to be blamed for the chaos in the world, or is it humans who are responsible?

The source of chaos in the world is not religion. Its source is the misuse of freedom by human beings. God bestowed freedom upon mankind in order to put us to the test in this world. It is the misuse of this God-given freedom which creates all kinds of problems in society. Evil is not a part of creation. It is a result of misuse of freedom by man. □



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