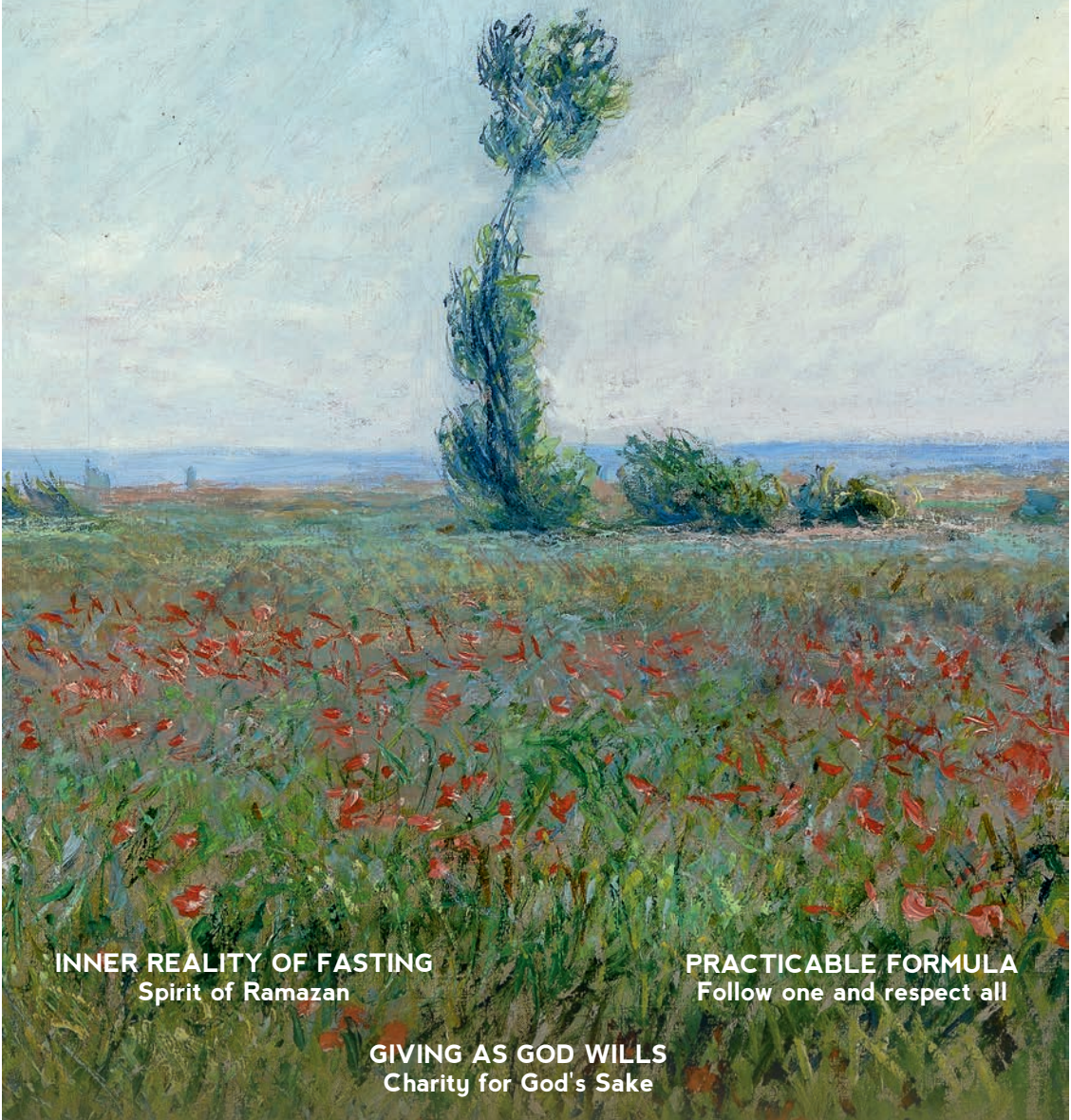


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RAMAZAN SPECIAL

SPIRIT OF ISLAM



INNER REALITY OF FASTING
Spirit of Ramazan

PRACTICABLE FORMULA
Follow one and respect all

GIVING AS GOD WILLS
Charity for God's Sake

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Spiritual Living

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

ISSUE 7, JULY 2013

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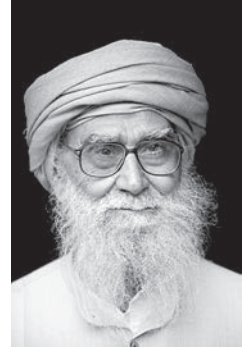
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK

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 third highest civilian honour in India, and the Demiurgus Peace International Award. He has been called 'Islam's spiritual ambassador to the world' and is recognised as one of its most influential Muslims'. His books have been translated into sixteen languages and are part of university curricula in six countries. He is the founder of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality based in New Delhi.



BE AWARE OF YOUR UNAWARENESS

PEOPLE are generally obsessed with the notion: 'I am right, you are wrong'. Some reformers have discovered a compromising principle; they say: 'I am right, you are also right'. Both these formulas are impractical, and will not yield any positive result. Life is full of differences. Even between two persons or two members of a family there are differences; in terms of taste, temperament, way of thinking, etc. In such a situation we have to find a positive method, by which we can turn our negative experiences into a positive result, and convert our problems into opportunities for development.

What is this formula? This formula is based on learning. Make difference a point of discussion. By discussion, I don't mean debate. The purpose of debate is to establish superiority. This is not discussion. The purpose of discussion—on the other hand—is mutual learning; taking something and giving something. This kind of discussion is highly fruitful for every person. It promotes good relationship between different members of society. Discussion inculcates in people the spirit of love and brings an end to hatred.

Here, let me give you an example. One of my articles was published in the 'Speaking Tree' column of *The Times of India* on June 8, 2013. The topic of the article was *U Turn—A Principle of Life*. In this article, I gave some examples from recent history, but all these examples were related to secular people. One Muslim became very angry after reading the article.

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

He said: "Our Prophet is a complete example. You being a Muslim, why have you adopted the example of secular people?" I pacified the man by saying that Islam does not believe in fanaticism or 'we-and-they' concept. There is a good saying of the Prophet in this regard: "*Al-hikma zallah al-momin aina wajadaha fahuwa ahaqqu biha*" (Wisdom is the lost property of a believer; wherever he finds it, he should take it as his own—*Al-Tirmidhi*). This Muslim man was unaware of this *Hadith*. He heard this *Hadith*, and after thinking for a while said: "Today you have helped me increase my knowledge."

This is a good example of discussion. Differences in life are a blessing. If there is no difference of opinion, there will not be any discussion and life will become robotic. It is not good to eliminate differences of opinion amongst ourselves. In such a society the saying 'If everyone thinks alike no one thinks very much' will prove to be true. Sometimes you believe that "I know", while it may be that you don't know. There is every possibility that your thinking is based on inadequate information. Whilst living in your own intellectual cell, you may wrongly believe that you are living in reality. It is better to come out of your cell rather than living in it forever.

Do not be angered by a different opinion from another person. Instead of taking it negatively, make it a point of discussion. If your discussion is a scientific, rational one, it will certainly lead to a useful learning experience. Caliph Umar was the second Caliph in Islamic history. About him it is said: "*Kana yataallama min kulli ahad*" (He was able to learn from everyone). How was he able to learn from everyone? This was through positive discussion. If you present your point with sincerity, and are also ready to accept reality—as it emerges after discussion—then your discussion is a blessing.

To think that you are right, is okay. The only thing which is not okay, is for you to think that you are always right and others are always wrong. This kind of thinking makes you a fanatic and inculcates in you an unrealistic approach. You will be bound to live in bias, and living in bias is like living in an intellectual prison. This kind of living is harmful not for others, but for your own self.

Be aware of your unawareness
— this is the greatest key to intellectual development. ■

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
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GIVING AS GOD WILLS

MAN's life and property are gifts of God. He owes everything he possesses to God alone. The only way to give thanks for these innumerable gifts is to dispose of them as God wishes. Such expenditure of one's wealth is symbolic of one's complete trust in God.

Man owes whatever he earns in this world to the fact that God has given him hands and feet to use for this purpose. He has endowed man with eyes and a tongue with which to see and speak. He has blessed him with an intellect which enables him to think and plan.

At the same time God has made the world subordinate to man. If the world and that which it contains had not been placed at man's disposal, his physical and mental capabilities alone would never have enabled him to derive any benefit from the world around him. If the wheat grain had not grown in the form of a crop but had stayed lying on the ground like a pebble, it would have become impossible for man to harvest grain from the land. If the powers of nature had not performed their specific functions, electricity could not have been produced, and vehicles would not have been made to move.

The only way to give thanks for the innumerable gifts of God is to dispose of them as God wishes.

Whatever man earns in this world is a direct favour from God. In return, man should spend his earnings in a way which would meet with God's approval. He should use his money to help the poor and spend of the wealth which God has granted him in the ways God has specified.

Real charity is that which is given for God's sake alone, not for fame, self-esteem or worldly reward. Wealth saves one from worldly hardship; that which is given away for God's sake saves one from hardships of the life after death. ■



THE INNER REALITY OF FASTING

THE month of *Ramazan* is approaching—the month in which the Quran was revealed. The Quran makes special mention of its revelation in the month of *Ramazan*, while making it obligatory upon its followers. This indicates that there is a close link between *Ramazan* and the Quran. In the words of the Quran:

In the month of *Ramazan* the Quran was revealed, a book of guidance for mankind, with clear proofs and criteria distinguishing right from wrong. Therefore whoever of you is present in that month let him fast.
But he who is ill or on a journey shall fast a similar number of days later on.

THE QURAN 2: 185

The revelation of the Quran started in 610 A.D., in the month of *Ramazan* according to the lunar calendar. The first revelation was made to the Prophet when he was in the cave of *Hira*, and it continued for the next 23 years, finally reaching completion in Medina.

The guidance given in the Quran is the best blessing to mankind from God, because it shows man the path to ultimate success.

The guidance given in the Quran is the best blessing to mankind from God, because it shows man the path to ultimate success. It tells man how to conduct himself so that in his eternal life he can gain entry into paradise. Paradise is the goal of man. Fasting is the path to it.

The month of *Ramazan* is an annual reminder of this blessing. The celebration of the revelation of the Quran is not observed in the usual way but by abstinence and being thankful to the Almighty. Fasting in this month is acknowledgment of the divine blessings. It is like saying, 'O Lord I have heard and I accept it.'

The term *Roza* (fasting) is of Persian origin. In Arabic, it is known as *Sawn* meaning abstinence. Therefore, fasting is an exercise aimed at controlling our desires. In other words, it is the Art of Desire

Management. Therefore, *Roza* literally means that every believer, in spite of being filled with desires, leads his life not by following his own whims and doing whatever he feels is correct—be it taking revenge, robbing, cheating indulging in corrupt practices, getting angry or being selfish—because all of these are actually desires; but by leading a life whereby these desires are wilfully managed. The essence of fasting thus is to eschew all evil ways throughout the year. The true fast is that from which one learns a lesson.

Also, this is a month during which the Quran should be read and understood. The Quran is specially recited in this month. At night the Quran is also recited during the *Tarawih*¹ prayer. This month has been made special so that the blessings of God may be counted even more.

When the Quran is read during the month of its revelation, it reminds us of the time when divine light from heaven fell upon the earth. Man remembers this and calls out, "O Lord, fill my heart with Your divine light and make me among those who are near you". When he reads about Hell and Paradise, his inner self cries out, 'O Lord, save me from Hell, and let me enter Paradise'.

The Quran is a reward to His servants from God. And fasting is acknowledgment of the reward.

In this way the Quran becomes a guiding force in man's life. He earns his livelihood according to its dictates. He bathes in the ocean of its life to cleanse his soul.

The Quran is a reward to His servants from God. And fasting is acknowledgment of the reward. Through fasting man makes himself worthy of being thankful to God. He obeys the command of God and thus revels in the supremacy of God. Having gone through a month's fasting, he creates an ability in himself to lead a life of piety as ordained in the Quran.

According to the Quran, there are two purposes of fasting:

To make one cautious in life.

To make one thankful to God.

THE QURAN, 2: 183 and 2: 185

Food and drink are man's most basic necessities. When he is consumed

1. The additional voluntary prayer performed in the month of *Ramazan*

by hunger and thirst, he understands how weak he really is; he realizes how much he is in need of God's succour. In the evenings, after a whole day of fasting, people eat and drink their fill: that is when their hearts are flooded with a sense of gratitude to God for His having made complete provision for their needs. That is when they praise God and offer up their thanks to Him. This feeling of dependence on God's bounty also makes them adopt a properly cautious attitude to life.

The Prophet is reported as saying that God rewards good deeds from tenfold to 700-fold. His reward for fasting, which is especially for Him, will be countless. In another *Hadith*² he is reported as saying, "There are many who fast and receive nothing in return, but hunger and thirst".

What is the difference between one fast and another, while in appearance both are alike? In actual fact, the appearance is not all that there is to it. The act serves only as a symbol of the essence. One who observes fasting in its essence as well as in its outward form will deserve the promised reward. On the other hand, one who attaches importance to symbols alone, will have nothing to his credit when he comes before God. Fasting of the latter type is of no value in the eyes of God, since the true value of something which is symbolic in its nature, is always determined by the will to virtue which it represents.

The greater significance of fasting lies in its symbolism of an inner spiritual eagerness to make all kinds of sacrifices.

But there is much more to fasting than the caution and gratitude induced by the purely outward, physical forms of abstention. Its greater significance lies in its symbolism of an inner, spiritual eagerness to make all kinds of sacrifices. Obviously, one who refrains from taking food and water on specific days, but who goes throughout his life without any qualms about telling lies, persecuting his fellowmen, thwarting justice, and so on, has missed the whole point of the fast of *Ramazan*. He has concerned himself all along with outward forms and not with inner realities. Such a man cannot expect to find favour in the eyes of his fellowmen and will certainly incur the wrath of God, his Maker.

One who fasts in all sincerity takes care to cast his entire life in

2. Deeds or sayings of the Prophet.

one consistent mould. In all of his affairs, he applies the constraints laid down by God. He checks himself from abusing others, stays his hand from persecution, and halts in his steps towards injustice. As the Prophet said, "Such a man can be likened to a tied-up horse which can go only as far as its rope permits: in that way, he cannot transgress."

Fasting is an Exercise in Self-Discipline

During the month of *Ramazan*, the believer of his own free will, abstains from food and drink in the day time. It is only after sunset that he satisfies his hunger and quenches his thirst. In this way, he builds up his self-control. By practising restraint for one month in a year, he is able to lead a life of self-discipline in all matters for the rest of the year.

Apart from man, there are in the universe innumerable other things, all of which—having no free will of their own—adhere strictly to God's law. Man, however, is not in the same category as these things, for God has given him the freedom to choose the path he will tread.

Notwithstanding this divine gift of freedom of will, it is still the desire of the Almighty that man should, by his own choice, tread the path of obedience.

**By practicing restraint for one month in a year,
man is able to lead a life of self-discipline
in all matters for the rest of the year.**

It is therefore to condition him to follow the path of restraint that the rule of fasting has been laid down. No mere annual ritual, fasting is a form of training undergone every ninth month of the lunar year. It is not just a matter of temporarily enduring hunger and thirst; it is a lesson in the permanent practice of patience and tolerance throughout life.

While on a fast, a man may have food and water before him but, despite his hunger and thirst, he will make no move to eat or drink. He exercises self-control. God desires that he should also exercise the same restraint whenever he has the opportunity to display his ego and his arrogance. He must not fall upon unjust ways just because the bait is tempting and all doors have been opened for him. If man is to earn God's favour, he must eschew the path forbidden by Him, and set his feet firmly on the path of modesty and humility.

The path followed perforce by the universe has to be adopted by man of his own free will. That is why it is desirable that he should lead a life of self-imposed curbs. The unflinching self-restraint, which prevents him from eating or drinking while on a fast, is the virtue which will guarantee moral behaviour throughout his life.

Moral Piety

In the *Hadith*, *Ramazan* is called 'the month of patience' (Mishkat Al-Masabih, 1: 613). This month is meant to serve as a training course which will enable the individual to lead a successful life in this world by keeping his negative feelings under control. Negative feelings, it must be remembered, present the greatest obstacle to human progress. Fasting is the pious way to solve this biggest of human problems.

Fasting creates an ability in man to lead a life of piety.

As the *Hadith* says:

There is a *Zakat* for all things,
and the *Zakat* of the body is fasting.

Mishkat Al-Masabih, 1: 639

Here, the expression *Zakat* is used in the sense of purification. There is, indeed, a way of purifying everything. Just as bathing purifies the body, so fasting purifies the soul.

According to another *Hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad observed:

Whenever one of you is invited to a meal
while he is on a fast,
he should inform his host that he is fasting.

Mishkat Al-Masabih, 1: 651

Yet another tradition of the Prophet gives this very sound advice:

Whenever one of you is on a fast,
he should be soft in his demeanour.
In the event of being abused or provoked,
he should simply say that he is on a fast.

Mishkat Al-Masabih, 1: 611

Leading a life of restraint for a whole month produces a transformation in one's thinking. It enables one to offer a positive response even to

another's negative behaviour. Even strong abuse and other types of provocation will not goad the fasting believer into retaliating in a similar manner. Rather than sink to that level, he will simply explain that he is on a fast. His own heart tells him that by observing a fast he has pledged himself to piety and in view of that, he cannot contemplate any evil action.

In this way, fasting inculcates in man the necessity to abstain at all costs from anti-social activities, and from all ungentlemanly words and deeds. He is thus brought to a life of moral restraint in this world.

A Month of Sympathy and Compassion

According to a tradition, the Prophet Muhammad observed:

The month of fasting is the month of compassion.

Mishkat Al-Masabih, 1: 613

That is, it is a month in which people are helped and shown compassion. This is the human aspect of fasting. That is why the Prophet and his followers used to be generous in giving alms to the poor and needy during this period. No one who asked for anything was ever turned away without his needs being met.

One very significant thing about the month of fasting is that it affords a personal experience of the nature of hunger and thirst. Rich and poor alike go through this trial. And it is not a temporary, one-day rigour; it amounts to a special training course which one has to go through, without a break, for a whole month.

The unflinching self-restraint, which prevents him from eating or drinking while on a fast, is the virtue which will guarantee moral behaviour throughout his life.

In this way, through fasting, one experiences what it is like to be in need. One finds out what hunger and thirst are like. The well-off who, in normal circumstances, are never obliged to suffer the pangs of hunger and thirst undergo this experience personally in the month of *Ramazan*. In this way, fasting brings everyone to the same level. The rich, for a time, descend to the level of existence which is the normal lot of the poor. *Ramazan*, as a training course, awakens the sense of humanity in all human beings. People are then able to share their

feelings and have the urge to do the utmost to assist their fellowmen in distress. In this way, fasting for the month of *Ramazan* produces a general awareness of the necessity to extend a helping hand to others. This consciousness lasts for many months until, on the completion of the year, another month of *Ramazan* is before us once again to renew and refresh our humane inclinations.

The rationale behind fasting for a month is made clear by psychological studies. It tells us that for a habit to be inculcated, thirty days are required. It is not an overnight miracle but a lengthy process. The practice becomes a part of the personality only when it is observed every day for at least thirty days; and it is only then, that it may continue for rest of the year. Fasting is, therefore, a form of training to create the capacity in a man to become the most devoted worshipper. It makes him most grateful to God creating in him a fear of displeasing God. The very hardship of fasting carries a man from the material world to the plain of spirituality.

Leading a life of restraint for a whole month produces a transformation in one's thinking. It enables one to offer a positive response even to another's negative behaviour.

Therefore, *Ramazan* is a month of spiritual activism when devotees try to awaken their spirituality. It is a scheme to improve human beings. Fasting is for personality and intellectual development. This is done by desire management, experiencing helplessness, and connecting to God with true prayers. Fasting produces an atmosphere of generosity, well-wishing and compassion—an atmosphere in which people's needs in society may be happily fulfilled. It is a means by which society may be turned into a truly human brotherhood. This eventually becomes a way of life for the whole year. ■



Keep secrets

Disclosure of other's faults or secrets shows a mindless callousness which breeds nothing but ill-will.

PRACTICABLE FORMULA

AN educated practicing Hindu once said: "All religions are true in their own right. Neither is any religion more true nor is any religion less true." He said that, "it is religious concepts that can establish peace in the world."

This idea is quite common amongst people of different religions. However, a logical analysis will show that this concept is unnatural as well as irrational. In matters of worldly affairs man cannot hold everything to be equally right. For instance, no one says that both geocentric theory and heliocentric theory are right. Everyone holds one theory right and the other wrong. So, why should we adopt as an exception, this incomprehensible practice in the matters of religion?

For you, your religion; for me, mine.

THE QURAN 109: 6

The Mughal Emperor Akbar, propounded a syncretic faith '*Deen-e-Ilahi*' that united the different religions of his subjects. He tried to use the powers of his empire to promote the religion like he did for the use of his currency, but was unsuccessful. Dr. Bhagwan Das, Indian theosophist (1869-1958), after thirty years of study and research, wrote an Encyclopaedia titled *Essential Unity of All Religions* to establish this theory, but it too turned out to be a failure. Mahatma Gandhi tried to use the force of his popularity to perpetrate a similar concept, but also failed in this bid. All his life he continued to utter the words '*Ram Rahim ek hai*' (Ram and Rahim are one). But the last words on his lips at the time of his assassination were: '*Hei Ram*' instead of '*Hei Ram, Hei Rahim*'.

The right approach to this matter is the one enshrined in the Quran. That is, "For you, your religion; for me, mine." There are also several traditions in this regard, in the *Hadith*. All these teachings can be summed up in these words: 'Follow one and respect all.' ■



THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

THOSE who want to interpret human history in the light of predetermined law as is done in the physical world, cannot but meet with failure. While the physical world may be explainable within the framework of pre-determinism, and the laws of nature, the events of the human world are simply not amenable to interpretation in terms of any such law.

Others want to interpret the events of the human world in the context of freedom. But they are not satisfied either, with their interpretation. This is because in the case of human freedom, the suffering experienced in this world has no valid understandable explanation. The failure of both these interpretations is due to the fact that they attempt to explain the whole in the light of a part—which is not at all possible.

The truth is that the right principle by which to interpret human history is neither that of pre-determinism nor of freedom. According to Islam, there is only one correct principle to interpret human history and that is the principle of 'test'. Man has been placed in the present world for the purpose of being tested. On the outcome of this test will depend the eternal future of all mankind.

That person is most precious who leads his life in this world in such a manner that, despite facing all sorts of temptations, he succeeds in overcoming them.

Favourable circumstances were a *sine qua non* for this test in the world. Pre-determinism, to a certain extent, had to be a feature of these circumstances—as a guarantee against any obstacle coming in the way of carrying out man's trial. On the other hand, the element of freedom was also essential in order that the intentions and actions of each individual could be properly judged. For, man can be granted the credit for a good deed only on the condition that, despite having the opportunity to indulge in bad deeds, he chooses of his own free will to act virtuously.

If in this world everything had been totally predetermined, the element of trial would have been absent. However the granting of freedom did

involve the risk of some people misusing their freedom; and misuse it, they did. This gave rise to the problem of human suffering which results from evil; yet this suffering, or evil, is a very small price to pay for a very precious thing.

**The only principle to interpret human history is
the principle of 'test'.**

According to Islam, that person is most precious who leads his life in this world in such a manner that, despite facing all sorts of temptations, he succeeds in overcoming them. Despite having the power to misuse his freedom, he refrains from doing so. Despite the possibility of leading an unprincipled life, he chooses of his own free will to be a man of principle. To identify such individuals, it is essential that an atmosphere of freedom prevail in the world. This is not possible under any other system. ■



Words Can Be False Friends

*Words, because of their easy accessibility,
can be a great source of misconception in this world.
Equipped with fine words and carried away by slogans,
one can be deluded into thinking that one
is on the right path.*

*But words alone cannot prove
whether or not one's stand is a right one.
Success in the next world will be for those
who, having made a critical appraisal of words,
hold on to the truth and reality behind them,
rather than placing their trust uncritically
in hollow, meaningless words.*

FASTING LEADS TO MORAL DISCIPLINE

ACCORDING to Abu Huraira, the Prophet once observed: "When any one of you is fasting, he should refrain from all indecencies. He should not raise his voice. If anyone fights with him or abuses him, he should not retaliate, but simply say that he is fasting."

This tradition tells us that fasting does not entail merely abstaining from food and drink, but demands rather that man should renounce all evil. If he is to shun his evil ways, he should not shout at people or allow himself to be provoked by each and every irritating circumstance.

This shows that fasting is not just a ritual, but aims rather at producing the true spirit within a man; which may change his thinking and his temperament, thus bringing about a transformation in his character. It is perfectly possible, by fasting, to change one's entire personality so that it becomes spiritual in nature.

The individual who fasts in the real spirit will not just give up eating and drinking, but will also abstain from immoral behaviour.

True fasting makes a person sincere to the ultimate extent. Every aspect of his personality is coloured by his seriousness. He is not upset in the slightest by the gravest of provocations. No amount of provocation deflects him from the right path and he becomes a peaceful member of society. He turns into a truly modest—instead of an arrogant—person and does not create problems for others.

The individual who fasts in the real spirit will not just give up eating and drinking, but will also abstain from immoral behaviour. His fasting will have no meaning if, when he changes the timings of his regular intake of food and drink, he does nothing to change an immoderate way of life. ■



TOTAL INVOLVEMENT

ELIAS Howe (1819–1867) was born in Massachusetts, U.S.A. He died at the young age of 48. Although his life was short, his contribution to the world of clothes—that of the sewing machine—will always be remembered.

The sewing machine invented by Elias Howe was at first utilized, not for sewing clothes, but for stitching shoes. The main breakthrough was the development of a lock-stitch by a shuttle carrying a lower thread, and a needle carrying an upper thread which passed through a hole situated at the tip of the needle. For thousands of years, people had been accustomed to making a hole at the base of the needle. So, following their lead, Elias Howe made the needle of his machine with a hole at the base, instead of at the tip, as is now the practice. The placement of an eyelet, simple as it may seem to us now, remained a big hurdle for its inventor for quite some time. It was only a dream which finally brought about the desired solution.

As he was racking his brain to perfect his machine, Howe dreamt that he had been captured by a primitive tribe and was ordered to produce an operational sewing machine within twenty-four hours, failing which he would be speared to death. He tried hard, but could not accomplish it. When the deadline was up, the tribesmen surrounded him and raised their spears to kill him. Scared, yet still concentrating, he observed that each spear had an eyelet at the tip. He kept on gazing at the eyelet and then woke up with a start: the solution was right before him. For the machine to work, the placement of the hole had to be neither in the middle nor at the base, but at the tip. His lucky dream helped him, in 1845, to produce a sewing machine that would complete 250 stitches a minute.

What is a dream? It is the result of complete involvement. What we think about during the day, we dream about at night. Howe succeeded in inventing a machine only because he had engrossed himself in it to such an extent that he came to dream about it. Such is the case with any undertaking, whether one wants to invent a machine, or bring about a revolution in human life. One achieves success in one's aim only after complete involvement; only when the thing one has set one's mind on becomes a part of the subconscious existence that it is reflected in one's dreams. ■

SOCIAL WELFARE IN ISLAM

ALL human beings, according to Islam, have been created by one and the same God; and for this reason, they belong to one great brotherhood. All being descendants of the same progenitors, they should naturally be each other's well-wishers and should willingly come to one another's assistance, like members of the same large family. Charity, an important way of bringing justice to society, has been preached by every religion of the world. And justice being the essence of religion, Islam has made charity obligatory and binding upon all those who embrace the faith, laying the greatest emphasis on the support of the needy and destitute members of society. It is thus a sacred duty of the affluent to give part of their wealth to fulfil the needs of deprived members of the community.

Charity is an important way of bringing justice to society.

A society can flourish only when its members do not spend all their wealth on the satisfaction of their own desires, but reserve a portion of it for parents, relatives, neighbours, the poor and the needy. As the saying goes: Charity begins at home. A true believer, after meeting the needs of his family, is thus always prepared to assist other people in need of his help.

Charity, in its broadest sense, has been called *Sadaqa* in Islam. Such great importance is attached to charity that the month of *Ramazan* has been fixed for individuals to be trained in the practice of charity. It has therefore been made into an institution in order to give it permanence and regularity. The law of *Zakat*, i.e. to take from the wealthy and give to the poor, rotates wealth in such a way as to balance social inequality.

There are two forms of charity in Islam—obligatory and voluntary, which are respectively called *Zakat* and *Sadaqa*. *Zakat*, from the verb *Zakat*, which signifies 'to thrive'; 'to be wholesome'; 'to be pure'; means purification. Giving up a portion of one's wealth, which is in excess of what one needs for one's own sustenance, is a purifying process which legitimizes the use of the remainder by the donor.

Deducting *Zakat* from one's earning is a material acknowledgment of the fact that the actual giver is God. And since the giver is God, the recipient is duty-bound to spend it in His cause. In spirit, *Zakat* is an act of worship, while in its external form, it is the carrying out of a social service. *Zakat* is thus not just the payment of a tax, but is of great religious significance. Its importance is underscored by the fact that the Quran treats it on par with *Salat* (prayer).

There are many Hadith that stress the importance of giving *Sadaqa* in the holy month of *Ramazan*. Therefore, in this month of fasting, almost all those who can afford it, help poor people in one way or another.

The Quran frequently enjoins believers 'to perform the worship and pay the *Zakat*', and even goes to the extent of saying that 'one cannot attain righteousness unless one spends out of one's wealth for the love of God'. It also says:

"By no means shall you attain righteousness
unless you give of that which you love."

THE QURAN 3: 92

Since charity is purely for the sake of God, it has value only if something good and valuable is given. It should be lawfully earned or acquired by the giver. It should include such things as are of use and value to others. So the test of charity lies in giving away not just things that we have discarded, but things that we greatly value. What God demands is unselfishness. It may be in any form—personal efforts, talents, skills, learning, property or possessions. Charity is, in the words of the Prophet, 'to place a thing in the palm of God'. It is therefore obvious that placing worthless things in the hand of God is a dishonour to Him.

The law of *Zakat* (to take from the wealthy and give to the poor) rotates wealth in such a way as to balance social inequality.

But the demand of Islam that all its followers should spend their wealth freely for the common good of society cannot be met solely by the payment of the obligatory levy of *Zakat*. There must also be additional almsgiving on a voluntary basis. This is referred to in Islamic literature as *sadaqat-al-tatawwu* (the alms of spontaneity). The only difference between *Sadaqa* and *Zakat* is that the former is voluntary, while the latter is obligatory, and collected by the government as a compulsory

levy. The rate and exemption limit (*Nisab*) for *Zakat* are fixed, while the amount of other, *Sadaqat*, is entirely dependent upon the will of the giver. The term *Sadaqat*, as applied to alms, is an indication of the sincerity of the almsgiver's religious belief.

The term *Sadaqat* is also, in certain cases, used in a very broad sense to cover all kinds of charity, and should be interpreted according to the context. From the root *Sadaqa*, 'to speak the truth; to be true', it literally means righteousness. Ibn Arabi explains it as a 'voluntary act of worship, a choice made by one's own free will. If this is not the case, then it is not voluntary *Sadaqa*. For man makes it obligatory upon himself as God makes mercy obligatory upon Himself towards those who repent.'

Giving up a portion of one's wealth is a purifying process which legitimizes the use of the remainder by the donor.

The scope of charity as defined in the Quran is so vast that even a poor person who has nothing tangible to give can offer *Sadaqa* in the form of a smile, or by offering a glass of water to a thirsty person, or by uttering a kindly word. Good conduct is frequently referred to in the *Hadith* as *Sadaqa*. Even planting something from which a human being, a bird or an animal may later eat also counts as *Sadaqa*. In this extended sense, acts of loving kindness and even greeting one another with a cheerful expression are regarded as *Sadaqa*. In short, every good deed is *Sadaqa*.

According to a *Hadith*, the Prophet observed: "In one's wealth there is a due (to God and His men) besides *Zakat*". Ali, the fourth Caliph, has explained this *Hadith* thus: "God has ordained that the rich are to pay out of their wealth to an extent sufficient for the needs of the poor, so that if they do not find food and clothing, or any other need remains to be fulfilled, it would be because the rich are not doing their duty, and for this God will take them to task on the Day of Judgement." And, according to Abdullah ibn Umar, the great religious scholar of the first phase of Islam, "If the *Zakat* levy is insufficient to meet the needs of the poor, then it is the duty of the rich of every town to put the poor on their feet."

The Quran, in fact, refers to the *haq*, i.e. the right of the poor to be given assistance; so that what the wealthy man is asked to give is not

just charity, but that which, as a matter of right, should come back to the poor who, by their labour, are creators of the national wealth.

There are many verses in the Quran, and many traditions of the Prophet, which make it quite clear that there is a due besides *Zakat*, and that even when the wealthy have paid this tax, they have still not fully discharged their duties. Abu Zar Ghifari, one of the Prophet's companions, reported that the Prophet said that losers are those who, having an excess of riches, just squander their wealth, heedless of the fact that they can be saved only if they spend generously for a good cause (Bukhari and Muslim).

Charity is a material acknowledgement of the fact that the actual giver is God.

Since *Zakat* and *Sadaqa* are not only moral obligations to society, but acts performed by believers to seek God's pleasure, a high standard is set for the manner of their accomplishment. Abdullah Yousuf Ali writes of charity in his commentary of the Quran: 'It must be in the way of God. No reward must be expected for it in this world. It must not be followed by references to, or reminders of, the acts of charity. Still less should any annoyance or injury be caused to the recipient, e.g. by boasting that the giver brought relief to the person in his hour of need.' Thus the spirit of kindness and well-wishing is the essence of charity. The giver is not to expect any reward from the recipient, as there awaits for him an abundant reward from God—material, moral and spiritual—whatever God thinks is best to confer upon His servant.

The Quran admonishes us not to spend "to be seen of men" (THE QURAN 2: 264). This is false charity. Spending with this motive is worse than not spending at all. In the next verse, God gives us a beautiful parable to illustrate what true charity is like. It is like a field with good soil in an elevated position. It catches good showers of rain and the moisture penetrates the soil. With these favourable conditions, its output increases enormously. Similarly, a man of true charity is spiritually healthy. He is best placed to attract God's bounties. The Quran goes on to give four parables (THE QURAN 2: 261-266) which explain the truly spiritual nature of charity and how it bears on the whole of our lives.

Yet, there are some people who think that acts of charity would ruin them. Abdullah Yusuf Ali comments on such doubts: "No kind or generous act

ever ruined anyone." And we have never heard of anyone who, due to his generosity to good causes, has been impoverished. This is because the generous alms-giver has God's promise that He will shower him with greater bounties (THE QURAN 2: 268). On the other hand, false generosity, that is, extravagant expenditure for show or self-indulgence can and does lead people to ruin. The Quran makes the point that publicity should never be the motive for an act of charity (THE QURAN 2: 271). We must remember that we can seek God's pleasure only if our motives are pure.

The test of charity lies in giving away not just things that we have discarded, but things that we greatly value.

The Quran states, "Charity is for those in need"(THE QURAN 2: 273). This is a general condition to help people in need; whether they are good or bad, on the right path or not, Muslims or non-Muslims. We are not supposed to sit in judgement on these matters. It is worth reiterating here that the chief motive in charity should be God's pleasure and our own spiritual good. This verse was revealed in the first instance in Medina, but is of general application. The concept of charity in Islam is thus linked with justice, and is not limited to the redressal of grievances. It implies, apart from the removal of handicaps, the recognition of the right that every human being has to attain the fullness of life.

Inspired by the traditions of the Prophet, the spirit of helping others to earn God's pleasure has been best reflected in Muslim society in the field of education. Following the dictum: "The greatest charity is for a Muslim to learn something and then teach it to others" (Ahmad), Muslims in large numbers have devoted themselves to the enlightenment of others in the field of education, generation after generation. They did this individually and also by establishing primary schools and colleges. These educational institutions, set up in the house of the teacher or in separate buildings, generally levied no charges for instruction. Wealthy people helped in the running of these *madrasas*, not only through *Zakat* but also by making them endowments (*wakf*) of their properties, the income from which met the needs of these schools. Orphans and poor people were given stipends in addition to board and lodging.

Wakf is a permanent form of charity which is called *sadaqa jaria*. It covers, in addition to giving an education to the needy, such good

works as helping someone to recover from some disease by monetary assistance; looking after orphans and the destitute, and giving scholarships to students. This being an institution is the reason for so many centres of social welfare having continued to exist among the Muslim community. However, there are no statistical records of the work of individuals in this field.

The chief motive in charity should be God's pleasure and our own spiritual good.

Inspired by the verses of the Quran and the traditions and practices of the Prophet and his companions, the giving of *Sadaqa* to individuals or institutions remains a widespread practice among Muslims. The Prophet, the most generous of men, used to give with his own hand. When asked for anything, he never refused. If he had nothing to give, he would borrow from one of his companions and repay him later.

The Prophet's wives were also renowned for their almsgiving. Of them, Zaynab-bin-Jahsh was the most generous. The Prophet used to call her "the longest in arm". She was also known, on account of her almsgiving, as the "mother of the poor." Whenever anyone uttered any words of blessing for her, she would return the blessing along with some alms. Then we have the shining examples of generosity set by the pious Caliphs. Once when the Prophet urged them to give *Sadaqa*, Umar bin al Khattab brought the half of what he owned, only to discover that he had once again been outdone by Abu Bakr who had given away all that he possessed.

There is a very interesting example of the generosity of Usman, the third Caliph. During the Caliphate of Abu Bakr, people were in great distress due to a drought. The Caliph told them to remain patient, for God would soon relieve them. Before long, Usman's caravan arrived with its merchandise from Syria. There were one-thousand camels, all of them loaded with wheat and foodstuffs from Syria. When the news got around, all the great traders of Medina rapidly converged on Usman's house. When he emerged to meet them, they expressed their urgent desire to purchase the foodstuffs, so that they could pass them to those who needed them in Medina.

Ushering them inside, he asked them how much profit they were prepared to give him on this merchandise. "Twelve dirhams on every

ten dirhams worth." They replied. "But I can get a better price." Said Usman. "Then we'll give you fourteen." Usman again said that he could get a better price, whereupon they put their price up to fifteen dirhams. But Usman stood firm. Bewildered by his attitude, they asked him who could give him a better price, considering that all the merchants of Medina were already assembled there. "I can get ten dirhams for every dirham worth," he told them, then asked if any one of them could give a better price than that. No one spoke up. Then, Usman recited the verse of the Quran which says that those who do good will be rewarded ten-fold (THE QURAN 6: 60). He explained to them that he intended to give away all the wheat and other foodstuffs to the needy people of Medina.

The constant giving of little is said to please God more than the occasional giving of much.

According to the teachings of Islam, the giving of *Sadaqa* serves a number of functions. *Sadaqa*, first and foremost, acts as expiation for sins. Believers are asked to give *Sadaqa* immediately following any transgression. Voluntary almsgiving can also compensate for any shortcoming in the past payment of *Zakat*. *Sadaqa* also gives protection against all kinds of evils, wards off affliction in this world, questioning in the grave, and punishment on Judgement Day.

It is, therefore, recommended to give *Sadaqa*, by night and by day, in secret and in public to seek God's pleasure (THE QURAN 2: 274). The constant giving of little is said to please God more than the occasional giving of much. *Sadaqa* is also a means of moral edification. It purifies the soul of the evil of avarice, and is a reflection of the generosity of God, the All-giving.

We conclude with a *Hadith*, which sums up the essence of charity: "Every good act is charity. Your smiling to your brother is charity; an exhortation of your fellowmen to virtuous deeds is equal to almsgiving; your putting a wanderer on the right road is charity; your assisting the blind is charity; your removing stones, and thorns, and other obstructions from the road is charity; your giving water to the thirsty is charity. A man's true wealth as regards the Hereafter is the good he does in this world to his fellowmen. When he dies, people will ask, "What property has he left behind him?" But the angels will ask, "What good deeds has he sent before him?" ■

RELIGION AND SECULARISM

PEOPLE generally believe that religion and secularism are quite opposed to each other—religion is anti-secularism and secularism is anti-religion. However a deeper study shows that this kind of thinking is completely unfounded. Instead, secularism is a great blessing for religion. One can understand this fact simply by applying the well-known saying: “It is in comparison that we understand”.

History tells us that during previous centuries, religion was always under attack; it is a recent phenomenon that religious people enjoy freedom. In previous centuries, religious people were like a deprived class, but now religion is flourishing everywhere in the world. What is the reason for this change?

Secularism tries to better the material world, and religion tries to create a better member of the society.

It is due to modern secularism. Secularism is the dominant thinking of the modern age. And it is due to this secularism that religion is finding greater acceptance in modern society.

The fact is that the previous age was an age of persecution—persecution of political opponents; persecution of women; persecution of slaves; and, of course, religion was included in this list of persecution.

Then, after the advent of modern science, secular thinking emerged; gradually it became the dominant thinking of the present world. If the previous age was an age of persecution, the present age is an age of secularism.

Secularism has brought a great intellectual revolution. Secularism is a kind of compromise that is based on practical realities. Secularism is not a religion; it is simply a practical adjustment between different groups of society.

According to the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, secularism is a policy of non-interference in religious matters. A secular scheme in political administration implies that all common issues, like infra-

structure, irrigation, city planning, etc., will be managed by the state; and all other 'non-political fields', are open to one and all. Religious people may enjoy complete freedom in fields such as moral reform, spirituality, and education—especially informal education.

Secularism has brought about a great intellectual revolution.

This secular scheme is highly appreciable and practiced happily by many religious people. Administration of a multi-cultural and multi-religious society is a great responsibility. It is good that all these responsibilities are given to secular departments; so one is free to avail the opportunities present in modern times in other fields.

One American author has provided a wrong proposition by using the phrase 'clash of civilization' as a theory where people's religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the world. This proposition is unrealistic. A better proposition is 'adjustment of civilizations'. So is the case of religion and secularism. There is no clash between religion and secularism; in fact, both, religion and secularism, are complimentary to each other. Secularism tries to better the material world, and religion tries to create a better member of the society. So, both can coexist without any clash. ■



Mental Equilibrium

*When negatively affected by
another's unpalatable behaviour,
your mental equilibrium is upset.*

*On the other hand, emotionally untouched
by such behaviour, your mind will fully retain
its equilibrium and, without wasting a single moment,
you will continue to perform your work in the normal way.*

A FOOL'S PARADISE

WHAT a shock it will be for man to realize that his activities on earth have amounted to nothing. People take pride in asserting themselves, but they would do better to discover their humility and abject helplessness in the presence of God. They seek to justify their errors, but they would do better to admit them. They have been given tongues with which to praise God, but they praise human beings instead.

They have been endowed with the emotions of love and fear to offer to God, but they prefer to offer them to other objects. Hoarding wealth is their greatest aim in life, whereas it should be to give their wealth in God's cause.

True virtue lies in being kind to the weak, but they ignore the weak and hail the mighty. They prefer to engage in noisy, worthless pursuits, but they would do better to delve into the silent world of meanings. Individual progress lies in being able to criticize themselves, but they never cease to criticize others.

They were expected to consider worldly wealth as worthless, but they have striven after it relentlessly, as if it were the source of all goodness.

**Only those are in the right, who measure up
to the standard set by God.**

Today people recognize only the cruelties and injustice perpetrated by others. What will become of them when they learn of the cruelties and injustice perpetrated by themselves?

People have taken shelter in objects other than God, and think that they have gained a firm footing in life. But what will become of them when they find that there is no real refuge, save in God?

People justify themselves by means of words. What will become of them when they learn that there is no substance to their words?

By accumulating worldly amenities, they feel sure that they have all they need to succeed in both the worlds. What a shock they will receive when they learn that death has obliterated all in its wake! People

unendingly compile lists of others' wrongdoings. What will become of them when they learn that all mistakes they have made have been observed by the angels of God, and that they will be confronted with the entire list on the day of reckoning?

People consider that the problems of this life are the real problems. What will be their state when they learn that the real problem is that of accountability after death and leading on to an eternal life, far from this ephemeral life?

True virtue lies in being kind to the weak.

People have set up their own standards about what is right and what is wrong and, when they measure up to their self-devised standards, they think they are in the right. How shocked they will be when they learn that only those were in the right, who lived up to the standard set by God!

People think that they are fortunate when they are welcomed by a host of people. But what will happen when they will find that only those are fortunate, who are to be welcomed by God and his angels?

Man is living in a fool's paradise of his own making, but the resurrection will shatter all his dreams. Then, only those who take refuge in God's mercy will be saved. ■



Self-control

*Not descending to intolerant behaviour,
in spite of facing unpleasant situations,
is a clear proof of self-control.*

*One who has this ability becomes
so strengthened by it that
no one can defeat him.*

RAMAZAN : THE MONTH OF PEACE

A GROUP of people subscribe to the notion that *Ramazan* is the month of *Furqan*; that is, the month of victory. According to their way of thinking, victory becomes certain if Jihad, in the sense of war (*qital*), is waged in the month of *Ramazan*. That is why, over the last few years, some battles were waged against supposed enemies in the month of *Ramazan*, but such wars have always ended in the destruction and defeat of the aggressors themselves. In spite of this obvious reality they have not changed their opinion or reconsidered their stand. It is strange indeed that they are still talking of war.

Now the question arises, as to what is the basis or source for regarding the month of *Ramazan* as the month of victory. In fact the battle of *Badr* took place during the life of the Prophet in the month of *Ramazan*, in 2 A.H., on the 17th day of the month. In this war the Prophet and his companions emerged victorious. This was why the month of *Ramazan* came to be regarded as the month of victory.

The month of *Ramazan* is the month of awakening one's inner nature, rather than of involving oneself in external conflicts and controversies.

But this is as baseless as anything could be. The occurrence of the battle of *Badr* was not a matter of choice for the Prophet of Islam. The Battle of *Badr* was a defensive war. It was fought in the month of *Ramazan* only because the enemy had marched towards Medina at the place called *Badr*, to attack Medina in this month. This was a unilateral action on the part of the other party (opponents). It was because of their armed aggression that the defensive war at *Badr* had taken place.

One proof of it is that: in the initial history of Islam some other battles besides *Badr* also took place, for instance, the battle of *Uhud* and *Hunain*. None of these battles were fought in the month of *Ramazan*.

Had it been the choice of the Prophet of Islam, these battles would also have taken place in the month of *Ramazan*. This is clear proof that the month of *Ramazan* has nothing to do with war and fighting.

The truth is that war is never the choice of the believers. War can be waged in Islam only in defence, to counter the armed aggression of the opponents. And it is more than clear that it is the aggressor who fixes the date according to his choice, leaving no option open to the defender.

According to a tradition, the Prophet observed:

Do not wish for confrontation with the enemy;
instead, ask for peace from God.

Sahih al-Bukhari

This observation of the Prophet tells us the basic principle of Islam with regard to war. Peace in Islam is the rule, and war an exception. In Islam, war is an act of compulsion rather than an option. The situation of war is not created by the believers. It is, in actual fact, the other party which is responsible for compelling the believers to go to war in defence.

The month of *Ramazan* is called the month of patience. It is the month of training in self-control; of placing curbs on one's desire; of refraining from being provoked in spite of provocation; of producing spirituality in one by bearing the pangs of hunger and thirst; and striving to come closer to God by remembering Him more—by means of prayer and the reading of the Quran. This closeness to God is possible only when man withdraws from the human world and brings himself closer to the spiritual world of God.

***Ramazan* is the month of training in self-control; of refraining from being provoked in spite of provocation and striving to come closer to God.**

Keeping these realities in view it would be very appropriate to say that *Ramazan* is the month of peace, rather than a month of war. The month of *Ramazan* is for awakening one's inner nature, rather than for involving oneself in external conflicts and controversies. The month of *Ramazan* is for engrossing oneself in thoughts of God, rather than in embroiling oneself in the thoughts of this world.

According to a tradition—once, at the sighting of the new moon of *Ramazan*, Prophet Muhammad observed:

O God, let the moon of the month of *Ramazan* bring
a month of peace and security for all of us.

At-Tirmizi, Ad-Darmi, Musnad Ahmad.

This *Hadith* shows the feelings with which the Prophet of Islam welcomed the month of *Ramazan*. These words of the Prophet provide a certain proof that the month of *Ramazan* has nothing to do with war and fighting. Rather, it aims at building a society in which peace and goodwill flourish.

While giving the command of fasting in the month of *Ramazan*, the Quran says:

So that you may guard yourselves.

THE QURAN 2: 183

That is, fasting has been prescribed to enable people follow the right path; to receive training for a life of righteousness.

Taqwa, or guarding oneself, finds explanation in a *Hadith*. Umar Farooq, the second Caliph once asked Ubayy ibn Kaab, a senior companion, as to what *Taqwa* was? He replied, "O, Leader of the believers, have you ever taken a path with thorny bushes?" He said, "Yes." Ubayy ibn Kaab asked as to what he did then? "I gathered my clothes and walked my way." Ubayy ibn Kaab said. It is this cautious attitude which is called *Taqwa* (Al Qurtubi p. 162).

The month of *Ramazan* is the month of *Taqwa*. In the light of this saying by the companion it would be wholly appropriate to say that the month of *Ramazan* is the month of guarding oneself against the thorns. In such a case, how strange it would be to conceive of the month of *Ramazan* as the month of entangling oneself in thorns. ■



In the end

*The ultimate reckoning should make us
examine our lives with the greatest earnestness.*

EID-UL-FITR

THE word *Eid* in Arabic means 'returning at regular intervals' and refers to the two annual Islamic religious celebrations. The fact that they occur in a regular cycle is important, for it gives a repeated opportunity for renewal, to forgive enemies, and contact people one has not seen for a long time.

Although there are several special times in the Islamic calendar, there are really only two religious festivals. These are *Eid-ul-Fitr* and *Eid-ul-Adha*. *Eid-ul-Fitr* concludes *Sawm*, the ritual fasting period of *Ramazan*, the fourth great pillar of Islam. *Eid-ul-Fitr* which marks the end of *Ramazan* is a day of thanksgiving and jubilation, as it signifies the successful completion of the sacred month of *Ramazan*, the time of earnest labour spent in fasting, prayers and study of the Quran. It is the loftiest achievement of moral exercises, which is celebrated with the greatest of zeal on the day of *Eid-ul-Fitr*.

It is with this spirit of thanksgiving that *Eid-ul-Fitr* is observed all over the Muslim world, by offering prayers to God, and rejoicing on the accomplishment of an act of dedication and submission to the Almighty. The Muslims pay obeisance to the Lord in congregation—displaying the real spirit of brotherhood, equality and fraternity through congregational prayers and feasts.

**Real happiness lies in sharing the bounties that
God has given us with others.**

An atmosphere of festivity and celebration can be found in all Muslim localities all over the world. There is no dearth of delights and merriment that accompanies any human celebrations. The poor and rich alike are attired in their best clothes, houses are cleaned and decorated, and greeting cards and gifts are exchanged. Delicious meals are cooked, and friends and relatives are invited. It is also an occasion when friends from different communities share this joyous occasion. They have meals together and take part in one another's happiness.

Man is a social animal and he needs to interact with fellow human beings. Festivities and celebrations exist in all societies of the world. Likewise, for the Muslim community, this is a great occasion to interact

with one another. This festival brings people together fulfilling a basic need of human nature. Due to one's own priorities, often one does not have the time to socialize in this fast-paced world. The celebration of *Eid* thus acts as an excuse to break and stay away from these routine engagements and merge with humanity, in order to sustain unity and cohesiveness.

One of the main reasons for celebrating *Eid* is that happiness can be spread among all mankind. By sharing happiness with one another we can certainly make this world a better place to live in. This will definitely foster a feeling of brotherhood and promote love for all mankind irrespective of caste or creed. Thus *Eid* symbolizes a new basis for human unity as well.

**By sharing happiness with one another we can certainly
make this world a better place to live.**

It should also not be forgotten that real happiness lies in sharing with others the bounties that God has given us. We should not forget those who are afflicted with poverty, ignorance, disease and other misfortune. That is why charity has been held obligatory before the *Eid* prayers. The needs of fellow human beings should never be ignored. For, the real essence of *Eid* lies in spreading happiness and love all around us, which can be fulfilled only when we help the poor and the needy. It is incumbent on us to give alms (*sadqa fitr*), on this festival. Alms should be given well before the *Eid* day so that the poor may take part in the celebrations as well.

The occasion of this festival provides, above all, a valuable opportunity to extend the hand of friendship to people from other communities, and remove misunderstandings often prevalent in society. Muslims should come out of their seclusion and forge friendship, in order that this misunderstanding—which clearly stems from a narrow perception—is effectively brought to an end.

Eid provides a God-given opportunity for interaction between different communities. By sharing our happiness with them we can go a long way in easing the tension existing between Muslims and non-Muslims. The establishment of cordial relations among different communities will definitely result in prosperity of the community and the nation at large. ■

THE CONCEPT OF TOMORROW

IN the universe known to us, man is the only creature who possesses superior intelligence. No other creature, so far as we know, is so abundantly endowed with this faculty. Animals, apparently very much like ourselves in certain ways, exist nevertheless on a lower plane, because all their actions are governed by instinct. Instinct, in a broad sense, may be defined as unconscious intelligence. Conscious intelligence—the wellspring of moral choice—is the hallmark of *homo sapiens*: no other species can lay claim to it.

Modern research has shown that the human brain has infinite potential: it contains approximately 100 billion nerve cells or neurons, each having about 10,000 connections with its neighbours. This means that man is born with unlimited capacities. It has been found that the average person utilizes less than 10% of their brain's capability. Experience shows that everyone departs from this world with an acute sense of having failed to achieve what he/she most desired.

Fulfilment is the deepest aspiration of a human being. But seldom does anyone attain this objective before death. This is a tragedy which falls to the lot of the majority of men and women in this life.

Man requires a far superior world and far greater longevity for his total fulfilment.

In this world, there are innumerable creatures other than man. They are born and they die like human beings. But unlike man, they are never faced with the problem of discontentment. The word 'tragedy' exists only in the human lexicon. Nowhere does it figure in that of animals.

We can find the answer to this contradiction if we compare man with animals. A comparative study of man and animals shows that the concept of tomorrow—an exceptional one—is entertained exclusively by man. If it is man's nature to want to extend his today into tomorrow, it is because he hopes that what he failed to find today, he will find tomorrow.

The case of animals is quite different. The study of animals shows that

they have no concept of tomorrow. They live only in 'their today' and also die in 'their today'. A number of animal activities which seem to be based on a certain consciousness of tomorrow—for instance, the gathering of food by ants for the future—are governed by an innately perceived threat of extinction, rather than by any consciousness of tomorrow or the future.

When we ponder upon the unique quality of foresight in man, we find that his urge to find fulfilment is relative to tomorrow: that is, he sees his fulfilment as achievable in the future. The biological span of today is very brief. That is why nature has provided for human fulfilment in the life-span of tomorrow.

There are two stages of human life, one pre-death and the other post-death. The pre-death stage is temporary, while the post-death stage is eternal. This division has been purposefully made. Its objective is to enable man to find in the next stage of life—tomorrow—whatever he has not been able to find today.

As mentioned above, the human brain has such an immense potential that man's physical age—about 100 years—is totally inadequate for its realization. Even if our age were to be greatly extended, the conditions on earth are so full of constraints that man's unlimited mind would never be able to utilize its full potential.

The life span before death is like a training period, and the present world is, as it were, man's training ground.

When we look at this reality we are compelled to believe that man requires a far superior world and far greater longevity for his total fulfilment. In the present situation, the potential of the human mind must always fall short of being used to its fullest extent.

To explain life in terms of this reality, let us draw a parallel between human life and an iceberg. We are aware of only the very tiny part of the iceberg which appears above the surface of the ocean, while the larger part lies hidden beneath the waters. In exactly the same way we are also aware of only that tiny part of life which occurs in the first stage before death, while the remainder—the infinitely extended part—lies hidden from us, in the ultimate stage of life after death. Without the element of belief, it is difficult to explain human life, and when an

analogy is the only possible means of elucidating an observation, it must necessarily be equated with academic proof: of that particular concept being the true one. That is, it is the correct scientific stand.

Keeping these realities in view, when we explain human life, we have to portray the present world as a temporary abode, rather than as man's eternal destination.

**Fulfilment is the deepest aspiration of the human being.
But seldom does anyone attain this objective
before he dies.**

The life span before death is like a training period, and the present world is, as it were, man's training ground. Here, ideally, he should receive very thorough moral conditioning during what is only a temporary stay, and then move on to the next eternal world. Every man is necessarily faced with death. What is death? Death is, in fact, a bridge. It acts as a mode of transference from temporal life to eternal life. And it is in the Hereafter that he shall find an opportunity to utilize the full potential of his mind and achieve the happiness induced by total fulfilment.

However, in the second stage of life, the true achievers will only be those who had been receptive to the necessary training in the first stage. Those who arrive there without such training will be deprived of any further opportunity to exploit their own potential. Their case, in the world of the Hereafter, will be identical to that of one who remained deprived of fulfilment in the world he left behind, because of his own unwillingness to subject himself to moral conditioning. This deprivation will be, without doubt, a punishment. A harsher punishment is difficult to imagine.

If man lives only in his 'today' and dies in his 'today', it is as if he has lived and died the life of an animal. The real man is one who reaches his 'tomorrow' by living out his 'today' in a state of moral rectitude. He is one who, after having reached the limit of this worldly life span, dies after having made full preparation for his tomorrow. Indeed, it is only one such as he, who is worthy of being called a successful person. ■



FASTING AND FEASTING

THE Prophet is reported to have said: 'The fasting person has two delights: one at the time of breaking the fast and the other at the time of meeting with his Lord God most High' (Hadith-Sahih Muslim).

Fasting, and the breaking of the fast; both are different experiences in their own right.

The reality of this life can be known through the experience of fasting. Eating, drinking and certain other specific activities are prohibited during the fast for a temporary period throughout the day. Similar prohibitions are imposed upon the true believer throughout his life. He has to abstain from all that has been forbidden by God and live life as a 'fasting' person.

The very purpose of life is the 'testing' of man. Fasting is a semblance of this test. This worldly life is only to do good deeds as enjoined by God, to follow the path He has shown and refrain from all that He has prohibited. For this conscientious life the promise of God is boundless rewards in the Hereafter; rewards which are not exposed in this worldly life. Fasting thus gives an awareness of the patience and struggle of this life.

In contrast to fasting, *Iftar* (breaking the fast), presents a semblance of life Hereafter. In the same spirit, the whole month of *Ramazan* resembles the conditioned life of this world. Likewise, *Eid-ul-Fitr*, the day of feasting, also gives us a faint taste and semblance of the life Hereafter.

The day of the festival brings an end to the prohibitions and restrictions placed during the period of fasting. *Eid* reminds us of the joys and pleasures of the Hereafter for a believer who has successfully passed this worldly test.

A true believer, having undergone the period of fasting in a most sincere way, gets the feeling of the Hereafter as soon as the month of *Ramazan* is finished and the celebrations for *Eid* are under way. He feels as if he is being entertained as a guest by God Himself. From the

depths of his being, his heart cries out:

Oh God, as you have helped me carry out the injunctions
of fasting and at the culmination of the month
have bestowed on me the joys of *Eid*,
accept this life of mine as one
spent in fasting and bestow on
me the delights of Paradise.

Write me down amongst the list of persons
who have been bestowed the life
of Paradise by opening
thy gates of mercy.

As fasting does not imply mere hunger and thirst, the day of the festival does not imply mere feasting and celebration. It should rather strengthen in us the right perspective of the ephemeral nature of this worldly life and the imminent delights of the life Hereafter that are sure to follow.

This should be truly manifested in the thankfulness we present to the Creator by offering prayers and also by giving more in charity to the needy. As the period of fasting was spent in self-preparation and spiritual development, the day of *Eid* should inculcate in the believer a new spirit and a renewed sense of zeal and determination towards the journey to the life Hereafter.

The message of *Eid* fosters the rekindling of our faith and the opening of new vistas and an entirely fresh and innovative approach to the struggles of life which would culminate by the grace of God with the rewards of everlasting Paradise. ■



Sincerity

*Acceptance of something is not dependent upon knowledge alone;
one has also to be sincere about it.*

THE WORD OF GOD

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 A.D. It is a book that brings glad tidings to mankind, along with divine admonition, and stresses the importance of man's discovery of the Truth on a spiritual and intellectual level.

Translated from Arabic and commentary
by **Maulana Wahiduddin Khan**

THE DAY OF RESURRECTION

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

By the Day of Resurrection, and by the self-reproaching soul! Does man think that We cannot (resurrect him and) bring his bones together again? Indeed, We have the power to restore his very finger tips! Yet man wants to deny what is ahead of him: he asks, 'When is this Day of Resurrection to be?'

But (on that Day), when mortal sight is confounded, and the moon is eclipsed, when the sun and the moon are brought together, on that Day man will ask, 'Where can I escape?' But there is nowhere to take refuge: on that Day, to your Lord alone is the recourse. On that Day, man will be told of all that he has sent before and what he has left behind. Indeed, man shall be a witness against himself, in spite of all the excuses he may offer. 75: 1-15

Man has the innate capacity to distinguish between good and evil. By his very nature, he wants anyone indulging in evil to be punished and, anyone doing righteous deeds to be rewarded. It is this consciousness which is called in the Quran the self-reproaching soul or *an-nafs al-lawwamah*. This faculty bears testimony at the psychological level, to the reality of the world of the Hereafter. If, in spite of this inner testimony, an individual does not fulfil its demands, it means that he negates what he has already accepted.

[Prophet], do not move your tongue too fast in your attempt to learn this revelation: We Our self shall see to its collection and recital. When

We have recited it, followed its words attentively; and then, it will be for Us to make its meaning clear. 75: 16-19

When revelations (*wahi*) were made to the Prophet Muhammad, he used to make haste to receive them. Here, he has been asked not to do this. It is further stated that he should pay full attention to that part of the Quran which had already been revealed and which had already been addressed to him and should not concern himself with that portion which had not till then been revealed and had not been addressed to him.

This shows that an individual should pay the fullest attention only to that portion of the Quran for which he is accountable at that moment. To make a point of seeking out that portion of the Quran for which he has not yet been made accountable, is being over-hasty and is entirely against Quranic wisdom.

Truly, you love immediate gain and neglect the Hereafter. Some faces will be radiant on that Day, looking towards their Lord; and some faces will on that Day be gloomy, dreading some great affliction. But when [man's soul] reaches the throat, and when it is asked: 'Could any magician save him now?'; and he knows that it is the time of parting; when his legs are brought together [when affliction is combined with affliction]; on that Day he will be driven towards your Lord! 75: 20-30

There is only one reason for neglect of the Hereafter and that is the desire to obtain an immediate reward for all one's striving (*kalla bal tuhibbuna'l 'ajilah*). In relation to the Hereafter, the result of one's actions seems infinitely remote. Therefore, man disregards it. But in relation to this world, instant gratification appears to be a distinct possibility, so man rushes towards it.

It is obvious that ultimately death overtakes every human being and nullifies all successes. Yet nobody learns a lesson from this, until he himself faces death—which takes away all opportunities for learning lessons.

He neither believed nor prayed, but rejected the Truth and turned away! Then he went off to his people, swaggering. Woe to you, [O man!], yes, woe to you. Again, woe to you, [O man!], yes, woe to you! Does man, then, think that he is to be left to himself, to go about at will? Was he not once a drop of ejaculated semen, which then became a

leech-like clot; then God shaped and fashioned him in due proportion, fashioning out of him the two sexes, the male and the female? Then is He not able to bring the dead back to life? 75: 31-40

In the beginning, a human being enters the womb of his mother in the form of a drop. Then he develops and takes the shape of a leech (*alaaqa*). He further develops, and his limbs and features acquire their typical characteristics. Then he emerges, as a male or female. All these wonderful changes take place without any effort on the part of human beings. So, for a system of nature which brings about such wonders every day, the creation of a new world after the present world should not be difficult. The fact is that the real impediment in the way of acceptance of Truth is egotism or conceit, and not any dearth of arguments or reasoning. ■



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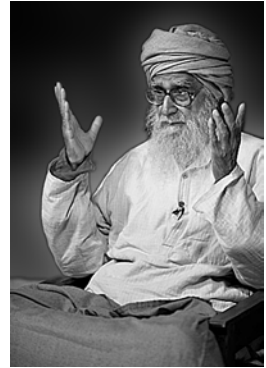
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ASK MAULANA

How should one respond in case of differences?

Differences are a part of life. A divergence of views and behaviour arises between people for a variety of reasons. And differences can occur between anyone. It can occur between two sincere people too. But even if differences cannot be prevented, that is no reason for any individual to indulge in negative behaviour. It should be borne in mind that despite differences, positive behaviour is both: a possibility and a necessity.



Regarding a person as always being wrong about everything—just because he holds different opinions—and calling him a hypocrite, ill-intentioned and insincere, are entirely un-Islamic reactions. The true believer looks at the issue of difference as a matter of intentions, and limits any ensuing dissension to the sphere of its origin. He never allows matters to escalate.

Severing relationships due to differences is not in accordance with the spirit of Islam. Mutual relationships should be maintained, while continuing serious discussion of contentious issues. Not greeting the person with whom one has differences, or refusing to meet such a person, is highly improper.

In this present world everything is designed to put man to the test. Differences also serve this purpose. Man ought to be extremely cautious, particularly at moments of contention. He should continuously strive to be tolerant; lest he show some improper reaction, which would be displeasing to God.

Remaining impartial in the face of differences is indeed a difficult task. But its reward too is great. Every right act is treated as an act of worship in Islam; it is therefore an act of superior worship when—in spite of controversies—one keeps one's heart free of enmity and vengefulness, and adheres strictly to the path of justice.

The emergence of difference is not in itself a bad thing. What is bad is that, at the time of differences arising, the individuals concerned do not rise to the occasion. They fail miserably in the divine test. Remaining

within the confines of decency is a virtue, and crossing the boundaries at such moments is an immoral act of the worst degree.

What is our duty to our parents?

The Quran has this to say regarding parents:

At several places the Quran exhorts us to be on our best behaviour with parents; to pay their dues, and, even when scolded by them, to refrain from angry retorts; we should never be found lacking in loving them or in serving them. That is to say: we should at all times conduct ourselves with the utmost propriety, regardless of how our parents treat us.

According to a *Hadith*, a man approached the Prophet and asked, "O Prophet, who is more deserving of my good behaviour?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man then asked, "Who after that?" The Prophet again said, "Your mother." The man again repeated the question and the Prophet again said, "Your mother." When the man asked the Prophet a fourth time, the Prophet replied "Your father." (Sahih Muslim 16: 102)

There are many traditions which tell us that, after God, it is to parents that one has obligations, more than to anyone else. One reason for this is, in this world, individuals receive the maximum benefits from parents. As such, it is incumbent upon a person when he grows up, to serve his parents to the best of his ability. He should be of assistance in their old age as they had assisted him in his childhood.

Another reason is that: serving parents enables a person to become a servant of humanity at large, to look at all human beings with love; to honour them and to pay them their dues. ■



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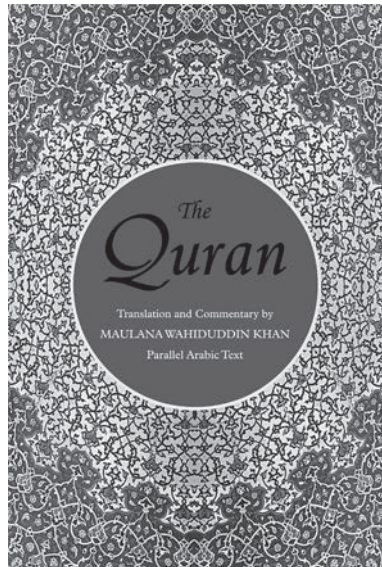
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