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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



The road to God means a sublime passage from unfulfilled desires to total fulfilment.

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

ISSUE 93 SEPTEMBER 2020

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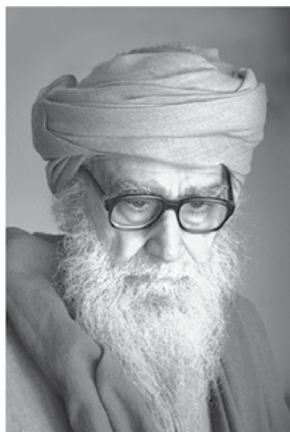
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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.

VIRTUAL MEETING

GOD says, "It is obligatory for Me to love those who love each other and meet each other for My sake." (*Musnad al-Shihab al-Qudhai*) In this *Hadith*, love does not mean material love, but it means meeting each other for the mission of God, i.e. those who are united for the sake of God's mission; whose missionary spirit is so strong that every member of the mission becomes a beloved companion to them. If such people come together, then they deserve to be loved by God.

But it turns out that human beings, despite sharing the zeal for one mission, sometimes don't come together for one reason or the other. For example, sometimes it happens that people participating in the same mission migrate and move to different areas. Similarly, the recent outbreak of Covid has forced people to resort to social distancing as precaution. It is not possible for anyone to interact face to face in such situations. The only possible meeting at the moment is *electronic meeting*.

The possibility of electronic meeting is a facility of modern times. This method did not exist in ancient times. This is also called a *virtual meeting*.

1. The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims 2020, Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, Jordan.

In these times when everyone must follow social distancing, the people of a mission should take full advantage of the facility of virtual meetings.

It means being in different parts of the world and discussing with each other through the internet using video, audio or writing methods. A virtual meeting is a substitute for direct companionship in modern times.

A virtual meeting too—if it is for a mission—is to love for the sake of God, and to gather for the sake of God. In these times when everyone must follow social distancing, the people of a mission should take full advantage of this facility. □

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FROM THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Prof. Farida Khanam is an author, editor, translator, public speaker and former professor of Islamic Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Among her books are 'A Simple Guide to Sufism' and 'A Study of World's Major Religions'. She has translated into English many books authored by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan. Currently the chairperson of CPS International, she is a regular contributor of articles to various publications. Prof. Khanam has edited Maulana's English translation of the Quran and has also translated his Urdu commentary of the Quran into English. She can be reached at hub@thespiritofislam.org

THE LETTER AND SPIRIT OF EID AL-ADHA

(This year's Eid al-Adha was celebrated on August 1, 2020, in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic. The following article was published in the Speaking Tree column of The Times of India. It is now reproduced here. Prof. Farida Khanam writes about the essence of this festival and the lessons to be drawn from it in these changing times.)

E ID *al-Adha* is the second of the two festivals celebrated by Muslims worldwide. It is not only a celebration but a reminder of the spirit that each believer must adopt in his life. The special day begins with two units of *namaz*, to remind the believer of his duty towards God, his fellow human beings and of his pledge to lead a pious life. This festival is a celebration of the Prophet Abraham's sacrifices in the way of God. The festivities last for three days.

The celebration is a tribute to the Prophet Abraham's unwavering faith in God. Abraham is the common patriarch of the Abrahamic religions, including Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Abraham and his son Ishmael were both Messengers of God. Together, they built the Kabah in Makkah. Abraham established the rites of Hajj—the pilgrimage to Makkah—by calling humankind to the house of God.

God tested Abraham by asking him, in a dream, to sacrifice his son, Ishmael. When Abraham told his son about his dream, the latter replied, "*O my father, do as you are commanded; and God willing, you will find me steadfast.*" Abraham then led his son for the sacrifice. At that moment God called out to Abraham that he had already fulfilled His command. It had been a great trial of Abraham's intention and God accepted this as his sacrifice. God sent a ram to be sacrificed instead.

After the fulfillment of God's commands, Abraham was made a leader of humankind.

Abraham is an example of complete submission and devotion to God. His life embodies abnegation of his will in obedience to God's command. Just like Abraham, believers must be ever willing to forsake everything for the greater good.

This great act of Abraham is remembered by all Muslims every year on the 10 *Dhul Hijjah* (twelfth month of the Muslim lunar calendar), the day which concludes the main rites of the Hajj. On the occasion of Hajj, Muslims from all over the world throng to Makkah to emulate Abraham. There the pilgrims perform the animal sacrifice as Abraham did. The Muslim calendar follows the moon, so the months are based

On the occasion of Eid al-Adha, believers reaffirm their belief in God and pledge themselves to parting with their precious belongings, if there is a need for it.

on moon's phases. Therefore, this festival is celebrated on a different day every year, for the lunar calendar is 11 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar.

The feast of sacrifice reminds Muslims of Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his beloved son. In a similar vein, believers reaffirm their belief in God and pledge themselves to parting with their precious belongings, if there is a need for it. The Quran describes these sentiments: "*Truly my prayers, my sacrifice, my*

life and my death all belong to God, the Lord of the worlds." (6: 162)

At the culmination of the Hajj rites, the pilgrims walk around the Kabah seven times, all the while praying and concentrating only on God. The pilgrims pray in the same language, Arabic, thus fostering universal love and brotherhood during Hajj. Of all the Muslim acts of worship, the Hajj is the most prominent. In one *Hadith*, the Prophet of Islam called it the 'supreme act of worship'. It is not just the rituals that make it so, rather it is the spirit in which the Hajj is performed that is important.

This year as we were restrained by the Covid-19 pandemic, a grand celebration was not warranted. Muslims, all over the world, must stringently follow the guidelines of the government and the health officials. It is pertinent to relive the true spirit of worship that rests on introspection, self-purification and embarking on a journey of leading a God-oriented life. □

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THE PURPOSE OF RELIGION

God-oriented Thinking

THERE are two aspects to our world. One pertains to the visible world and the other to the invisible world. The visible world can be likened to the tip of an iceberg. Only the tip or a very tiny part of the iceberg is observable while the major part of it remains hidden from the eyes, submerged within the water. It is only religion that enables us to be able to cross the surface of the sea, deeper into the ocean beds and see the major part of this iceberg.

Repeatedly we come across such occasions in life, when a person feels he is helpless. He feels the very ends of life have slipped away from his hands. At this point, it is only God that appears as saviour. He saves his sinking ship. At that juncture, religion becomes a source of courage and conviction. A religious man, by nature, is a predictable human being. One can reliably predict his behaviour.

Religion is the source of all positive ethics. Religion gives man the power to forgive the offender. Religion raises him above greed. The feeling of envy is uprooted. He treats people with tolerance. He honours people without discrimination. He saves himself from committing injustice, always sticking to the path of justice. He treats even his enemies with justice and fairness. He contributes positively to society, becoming a giver rather than just a taker.

Religion is the source of all positive ethics. Religion makes man God-oriented. Religion makes one a man of principle, he becomes a person of principled character.

Religion makes one a man of principle, he becomes a person of principled character. He develops self-control and self-discipline. A religious person is a serious-minded and honest person. He is ever-ready to appraise himself. A self-corrective mechanism grows within him, and this quality keeps rejuvenating his personality.

How does religion produce these superior and refined qualities in man? The reason for this is the bounds of religion are connected with God, who is the source of all goodness. God thus becomes a source of inspiration for everyone.

Religion makes man God-oriented. It produces God-oriented thinking. His life is a God-oriented life. This is the thing which makes a religious person unconquerable. A religious person develops communion with God and such a person becomes strong and powerful. □

THE PURPOSE OF RELIGIOUS RITUALS

Spirit through Form

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

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

Ritual without spirit is a diluted form of religion, like a nutshell without a kernel. True, the shell does also have some value, but the kernel is the most important part. Rituals are important, but they are like a body which becomes lifeless when there is no spirit.

Ritual without spirit is a diluted form of religion, like a nutshell without a kernel.

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

Sometimes, religion is in its ideal form, that is, ritual and spirit go hand-in-hand. But this ideal state cannot be maintained at all times.

There can be aberrations in the practice of religion. Sometimes it happens that form or rituals are present but the spirit is absent, at least temporarily.

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

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

Rituals might appear as a mere form, but one should understand that form symbolizes the inner spirit. If the inner spirit has real value,

rituals have symbolic value, and both are equally important. Rituals, the external aspect of the inner spirit, help maintain the inner spirit. Without rituals, the spirit would be reduced to an abstract idea. In such a situation, ritual, or form, serves the role of a compulsory or a regular reminder.

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

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

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

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One's initial feeling of disappointment should quickly transform itself into a greater determination to try harder, and to channel one's energies more effectively towards one's goal.

THE CAUSE OF DISCORD

A Matter of Introspection

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

The Quran says: "The faithful servants of God are they who walk upon the earth modestly and, when the foolish ones address them, answer: Peace." (25:63). However, the attitude is reversed when religious

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

teachings cease to inspire people to do good deeds and a moral decline sets in. People then become proud and haughty. Whether or not they act upon the teachings of their religion, they believe that they are the chosen people of God. Their attachment to their religion is reduced to lip service: it exists in theory but not in practice; it can be seen in outward form but not in spirit. When religion serves only to show one's superiority over others, a high degree of moral perversion has been reached.

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

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

COPING WITH DEATH

A Domain of Religion, not of Science

TWO books, published in the US, look at death from a scientific perspective. One of them, *On Children and Death*, is written by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who drew material for her work from the families of dying children. The second book is co-authored by Colin Murray Parkes, a senior lecturer in psychiatry at the London Hospital Medical College, and Robert S. Weiss, a professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts. Titled, *Recovery from Bereavement*, the book grew out of work done by the Harvard Bereavement Study. It looks at the way widows and widowers under 45 mourn their losses, and asks the question: Why do some get over their grief, while others do not? Both books, then, are the result of entirely scientific research, and aim to provide solace to the bereaved families by adopting a scientific approach.

Do these books succeed in their aim of offering consolation to those who have been robbed off their near and dear ones? Suzanne Fields, reviewing both works thinks not. "These two books by these priests of science and reason, she writes, address the griefs and protocols of dealing with the dead and dying. Well-meaning books both, concerned with offering practical psychological advice as well as solace, they nevertheless—perhaps inevitably—are useful but not elevating, sensible but never soaring. Grounded in the earth of observation, they are offered to wounded spirits that crave not advice but inspiration." (*Guardian Weekly, January 1, 1984*)

The shortcoming of these books is that they attempt to tackle scientifically a problem that can only be dealt with by religion. It is only by realizing that death—far from being the end of life—is the beginning of real life that we can begin to cope with the distress and suffering that death leaves in its wake. We have been allotted a short while in this world so that we may be put to the test. We are required to realize here that, though we seem to have power, we are in fact helpless before the will of God; though we seem to have possessions and attachments, everything belongs to Him. It is only those who feel they own something who fear its loss. If one believes that everything and everybody is owned by God, then what is there to lose and lament? □



RESTORATION OF RELIGION

Much-needed Task

IN 1509, Michelangelo (1475-1564), painter, sculptor, architect, and poet, was commissioned by Pope Julian to design and paint the frescoes for the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. The project was completed in 1512. Over five centuries, the original colours used by Michelangelo had become considerably subdued and, therefore, distorted. One reason for this was a coating of animal glue which was spread over the surface of the fresco in the 17th century to keep the plaster from flaking. This glue then collected centuries of soot from the torches used to illuminate the chapel before the advent of electricity.

Whereas religion had originally been based on belief in the Hereafter, it later became an instrument for the acquisition of worldly wealth and power.

Under Pope John Paul II, the Vatican ordered restoration of the frescoes. At the beginning of 1986, the first results of the cleaning work were displayed to the public. Renovation revealed some startling things about Michelangelo's original work. The master was previously believed to have used subdued, twilight colours, but it now appears that the colours he used were so vibrant, it was decided that softer lighting would be needed when the cleaning would finish in 1988. Art historians had to revise their whole concept

of the Florentine school which Michelangelo represented, for the Florentines have been considered masters of design, but not of colour.

American journalist, George Armstrong wrote in *The Guardian Weekly* (February 16, 1986) that the axiom of Tintoretto (1518-1594) '*draw like Michelangelo, paint like Titian*' 'has been thrown off balance by the Sistine's restored colours.' The renovation, Armstrong says, "has revealed Michelangelo in a new light." Further restorations culminating in 1999 had a profound effect on art lovers and historians, as colours and details that had not been seen for centuries were revealed. It has been claimed that as a result "Every book on Michelangelo will have to be rewritten".

In very much the same way, the nature of true religion has become distorted over the centuries. Originally, religion is revealed by God and taught in its pure form by the prophets. Then, when it falls into the hands of ordinary men, they corrupt its true message, making it conform to their own desires. Whereas religion had originally been

based on belief in the Hereafter, it later became an instrument for the acquisition of worldly wealth and power.

True faith, as painted by the prophets, springs from the heart, but religion in its corrupted form becomes a mere enactment of rites and ceremonies, devoid of any true spirit. Religion in its pristine form breeds humility in its followers, fostering human unity; but when religion becomes distorted, it becomes a source of pride, with one group using it to assert their superiority over another.

When this happens, it means that grime and dust have collected on the face of true religion. Its true colours have become distorted and it is in need of restoration to its original form. When the renovation is completed, it will be revealed that religion is something quite different from what men have made it out to be. Theologians will be exposed as misleading in their interpretations, just as the public has been misguided in its opinions. □

Religion in its pristine form breeds humility in its followers, fostering human unity; but when religion becomes distorted, it becomes a source of pride, with one group using it to assert their superiority over another.



The concept of a living and powerful God is necessarily accompanied by the concept of accountability. And the concept of accountability guarantees right thinking and right actions on the part of man. It makes man cautious by reminding him of God's chastisement.

FROM DENIAL TO BELIEF

Religion Backed by Science

PROFESSOR Chandra Wickramasinghe (b. 1939) is a Sri Lankan-born British scientist, who headed the department of Applied Mathematics and Astronomy at University College, Cardiff, in Wales. He has been conducting research into the origin of life since 1962 and has worked with the eminent English scientist, Sir Fred Hoyle. The results of their research have been published in a book entitled, *Evolution From Space*.

When the two scientists commenced their research they both agreed on one point: that the notion of a Creator is inconsistent with science. But they were so shocked by the final result of their research that they had to revise their thinking. "From my earliest training as a scientist," Wickramasinghe says, "I was very strongly brainwashed to believe that

New evidence keeps coming to light, which makes belief in God a scientifically credible concept, rather than just a personally desirable creed.

science cannot be consistent with any kind of deliberate creation. That notion has had to be very painfully shed. I am quite uncomfortable in the situation—the state of mind I now find myself in. But there is no logical way out of it."

Both scientists made separate calculations into the mathematical chances of life having begun on Earth spontaneously. Independently, they both arrived at the same conclusion: that the odds against life having ignited accidentally on Earth were staggering in mathematical

jargon 10 to the power of 40,000. Add 40,000 noughts to the figure 1 and you have the figure. "That number is such an imponderable in the universe that I am 100 percent certain that life could not have started spontaneously on Earth," says Wickramasinghe.

As they write in their book: "Once we saw that the probability of life originating at random is so utterly miniscule as to make it absurd, it became sensible to think that the properties of physics on which life depends are in every respect deliberate."

"Sir Frederick Hoyle was tending much more than I towards the higher intelligence Creator," Wickramasinghe explains. "I used to argue against it, but I found myself losing every argument. At the moment I can't find any rational argument to knock down the view, which argues for conversion to God. If I could have found an argument—even a flimsy

one—I would not have been a party to what we wrote in the book. We used to have open minds; now we realize that the only logical answer to life is creation, and not accidental shuffling. I still hope that one day I may go back to favour a purely mechanistic explanation—I say ‘hope’, because I still cannot come to terms with my conversion.”

“My being a Buddhist—albeit not an ardent one—was never a problem, because it is an atheistic religion which does not profess to know anything about creation and does not have a creator built into it. But I now find myself driven to this position by logic. There is no other way in which we can understand the precise ordering of the chemicals of the universe except to invoke creation on a cosmic scale.”

Until recently, belief in God was considered to be just a personal creed, not backed up by rational thought. In recent decades, however, this situation has changed. New evidence keeps coming to light, which makes belief in God a scientifically credible concept, rather than just a personally desirable creed.

Science impresses on man the abstract reality of God’s existence, but if there is a God, then what should man’s relationship with Him be? Science does not, and cannot, answer this question. This is a question that can only be answered by religion.

What should man’s relationship be with God? Science does not, and cannot, answer this question. This is a question that can only be answered by religion.

Study of the cosmos shows that it operates in unity and harmony; this shows that there must be One God. As science brings one to belief in One God, Islam presents the concept of one God and His creation plan for the humankind. One should be a seeker to discover one’s Creator in the presence of many types of beliefs prevalent among humankind. □



The root cause of most of our problems is our deviation from the peaceful model of nature, which is the best model for us to follow.

RELIGION AND THE LIFE HEREAFTER

Points to Ponder

The crux of religion is indubitably the belief in the life Hereafter.

SO says Allama Shibli Nomani (1857-1914) under the heading 'Life after Death' in his famous book, *Al-Ghazali* (biography of the famed 11th century Muslim philosopher Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali). He goes on to say that it is because of this belief that religion has had an impact on human activities. Yet, despite it being the single most important belief in religion, it has been open to question. He quotes a Bedouin poet who, addressing his wife, expresses this most succinctly:

*Death, rebirth,
My dear: it is all nonsense.*

Shibli feels that the first and most difficult hurdle to be surmounted is the acceptance of the fact that the spirit survives as an entity in its own right, quite independently of the body. The materialists for their part think of the soul as being just one more ingredient in the body, in the way that a chemical element is inextricably a part of a compound, or they regard it as being a particular property of the faculties of thought

We can now assert to a certain extent that the permanent existence of the soul, independent of the body, or the survival of the soul after the death of the body is no more a thing which involves blind faith; rather it has become a reality which can be empirically proved.

and sense perception on parallel with the melody which results when notes of a musical instrument are struck in a particular sequence. Drawing extensively on two of Imam Ghazali's books, he observes that the description of the soul and the arguments which Ghazali has mentioned are all derived from Greek philosophers. Aristotle in his *Theology* has said the same and Avicenna has reiterated this in his own language. But the strange thing is that Ghazali has left out the point which is of prime importance in the discussion of spirit or soul. Soul has no body. It is an essence. Being purely non-material, this makes it of the first importance to prove its existence. As Shibli himself observes:

"The existence of the soul is a matter of intuition. After pondering over it, we come to know that the faculty of reason is not a property of matter. Matter is a lifeless thing. Without reason, you cannot find sublime ideas, arts

and sciences and scientific disciplines in matter. These are delicate substances, quite other than matter, which account for creativity in the fields of the arts and the sciences. Matter cannot have a creative faculty. This is an attribute of the soul. After proving the existence of soul as something separate, the second stage is to prove its survival, that is, its capacity to survive after the death of the body.”

As a corollary to this he adds: ‘Though Avicenna has presented lengthy arguments about the existence of the soul, these are nothing but word games—or tautology—just like other Greek philosophic thoughts. If an atheist bent on denying its existence says, “What you have said is just a kind of repetition of your claim. It has nothing to do with the argument but is a reiteration of your initial statement; and may be matter itself is responsible for its kaleidoscopic manifestations after combining in a particular way. The working of a machine and the music of a musical instrument are similar things, but without having any kind of spirit.” There is no logic by which he can be reduced to silence. That is why Imam Ghazali did not produce any logical argument about the soul.’

Shibli Nomani ends the discussion at this point. And of a work dating back to 1901, we could hardly expect more. Modern research, however, has opened up new vistas of events and realities, so that we can now assert to a certain extent that the permanent existence of the soul, independent of the body, or the survival of the soul after the death of the body is no more a thing which involves blind faith; rather it has become a reality which can be empirically proved.

Science has discovered that the body is composed of innumerable tiny cells. These cells disintegrate each moment, but our diet makes up for those destroyed cells and they are replaced with new ones. The body is thus like a building which is composed of billions of bricks but which is in the process of replacing its bricks at every moment. Now, if the soul is a phenomenon of the body, then with the disintegration or changing of the cells of the body, the soul should simultaneously undergo the same transformation, just as a whole machine is affected when one part of it is broken, or as the breaking of a single string affects the tone of a musical instrument. But such is not the case with the soul. This shows that the soul is independent of the body and has its own existence. This is why a scientist has said, “Personality

The belief in a life after death, which so many persons have found no particular difficulty in accepting as an article of religious faith, not only may be true but is perhaps capable of empirical proof.

is changelessness in change," that is, the human personality is self-existent (as compared to the body), keeping its existence in changeless form amidst continuous changes.

Further proof of the truth of this concept is provided by the discovery in the field of psychology of the 'unconscious' or the 'subconscious'—a major part of the human brain. It has been established that the thoughts stored in the unconscious remain in exactly the same condition until death. Freud writes in his thirty-first lecture:

'The laws of logic—above all, the law of contradiction, do not hold for processes in the Id (inner nature). Contradictory impulses exist side by side without neutralizing each other or drawing apart; at most they combine in compromise. There is nothing in the Id, which can be compared to negation, and we are astonished to find in it an exception to the philosophers' assertion that space and time are necessary forms of our mental acts. In the Id there is nothing corresponding to the idea of time, no recognition of the passage of time, and (a thing which is very remarkable and awaits adequate attention in philosophic thought) no alteration of mental processes by the passage of time. Cognitive impulses which have never got beyond the Id, and even impressions which have been pushed down into the Id by repression, are virtually immortal and are preserved for whole decades as though they had only recently occurred.

The truth is that if life survives after death, there can be no interpretation other than a religious one.

Thus, the processes of the Id being independent of time shows that the unconscious has its own independent existence. It has been established that the body is subject to the laws of time and space and that it is in space and time that all its actions take place. Now if

the soul is simply an extension of the body, then, like the body, it too should be subject to the laws of time and space. Since observation has shown that this is not so, there is the inevitable inference that the soul by its very nature is something separate from (though not extraneous to) the body and that it exists independently. The relation of the soul to the body is not comparable to that of a machine and its movement, nor to that of a musical instrument and the music it produces. Had there been any basis for this comparison, the same laws, which apply to the body, would have affected the soul.'

A branch of modern psychology which makes an empirical study of man's supernatural faculties—psychical research establishes the

existence of life after death at a purely observational level. What is most interesting is that such research does not establish mere survival; rather it establishes the survival of exactly the same personality—the entity that was known to us before death.

Man has possessed many other analyzable traits right from the very beginning, but it is only comparatively recently that they have been analyzed scientifically. For instance, dreaming is one of the oldest known activities of man. But ancient man was unaware of the psychological relevance of dreams, the facts of which have come to light only after recent scientific research. Even more interesting are quite other manifestations of the human spirit, the recent facts and figures of which give strong indications of the existence of extra-sensory perception and of the objects of this perception.

The first institution to conduct research in this field was established in England in 1882. It still exists today under the name of “Society for Psychical Research.” It began its work on a large scale in 1889 by contacting 17,000 people who were asked whether—when they believed themselves completely awake—they had ever had a vivid impression of seeing, or being touched by a living being (who was not actually there) or inanimate object which moved apparently of its own volition or of hearing a voice which, so far as they could discover, was not due to any external physical cause. Many other institutions from other countries conducted similar research and, by means of various experiments and demonstrations, it was shown that even after bodily death, the human personality survives in some mysterious form.

Psychical research establishes the existence of life after death at a purely observational level. What is most interesting is that such research does not establish mere survival; rather it establishes the survival of exactly the same personality—the entity that was known to us before death.

C. J. Ducasse (d. 1969), Professor of Philosophy at the Brown University, made a philosophical and psychological scrutiny of this concept. He did not believe in it in the sense in which it is presented by religion, yet he held that apart from the dogmas of religion, such evidence does exist that compels us to accept the survival of life after death. In his book *A Philosophical Scrutiny of Religion*, he observes:

'These facts strongly suggest that the universe, and the human personality, each have a dimension additional to the material one so capably and successfully explored by the natural sciences.'

Many other scholars who have objectively examined the evidence furnished by psychical research have felt compelled to accept the life Hereafter as a matter of fact. After making a general survey of various investigations in the field of research, C. J. Ducasse observed:

'Some of the keenest-minded and best-informed persons, who studied the evidence over many years in a highly critical spirit, eventually came to the conclusion that, in some cases at least, only the survival hypothesis remained plausible. Among such persons may be mentioned Alfred Russel Wallace, Sir William Crookes, F.W.H. Myers, Cesare Lombroso, Camille Flammarion, Sir Oliver Lodge, Dr Richard Hodgson, Mrs Henry Sidwick and Professor Hyslop, to name only a few of the most eminent.

This suggests that the belief in a life after death, which so many persons have found no particular difficulty in accepting as an article of religious faith, not only may be true but is perhaps capable of empirical proof; and if so, that, instead of the inventions of theologians concerning the nature of the post-mortem life, factual information regarding it may eventually be obtained.

That, in such a case, the content of this information will turn out to be useful rather than not, for the two tasks which it is the function of religion to perform, does not, of course, automatically follow.'

Ducasse, while accepting life after death as a reality, has refused to accept the religious nature of this same phenomenon. This is only a matter of his own personal predilections. The truth is that if life survives after death, there can be no interpretation other than a religious one. □



Relate to the bounties of God as if they were created specially for you. Cherish the personal benefits you derive from them. This will inculcate enormous gratitude to God.

OPPORTUNITY FOR RE-PLANNING

Journey of Life

WHEN a human being is born, a new journey begins. It is a journey from life to death. This journey is a journey from this world to the Hereafter. This journey continues in all circumstances, whether man likes it or not, whether he knows it or not.

Before death a person only knows of news of someone's death, after death he will discover it as a reality. The most serious thing about death is that it always comes at a point of no return. Death does not give anyone a chance to return to life. A person does not have the chance to do after death what he didn't do before death.

No one knows what happens to a person after death. A person who is alive sees another person leaving the world. But the departed person does not send any information about the place he has gone to. Death is a moment of complete separation from this world. Death does not give a person the opportunity to re-plan his life, or to regain what he has lost.

What should an individual do in such a situation? He should try to gain knowledge about the post-death period. If a person is serious and seeks to know with an open mind, he can find information about the post death period in the Quran. The Quran has answers to the questions of a sincere seeking soul. The Quran addresses to not be heedless in using the opportunity of life you have before death. Because once the life of this world comes to an end, there will be no chance to plan after death. □

Death does not give a person the opportunity to re-plan his life, or to regain what he has lost.



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BLESSING IN DISGUISE

This Life is a Test

MAN is born into the present world. Here he spends his mornings and evenings. His life journey continues here through various experiences. Through these experiences, consciously or unconsciously, man develops the mentality that the present world is the real world. In contrast, he feels that the world of the Hereafter is an unreal world. Because of the apparent difference between the two worlds, man's thinking process functions at the level of the present world. There is practically no place for the Hereafter in his thinking and planning.

This is the biggest problem for human beings. Looking at the broad picture, it would be correct if Hereafter-oriented thinking is fostered in a person, not worldly thinking. In order to save man from going astray in this matter, nature has arranged that the present world be made '*a world of toil and trial*' (90: 4). These problems act as speed breakers for human beings. These problems exist so that man does not consider the present world as the real world, but builds his life in terms of the Hereafter.

It is narrated in a *Hadith* that whenever a person fell ill, the Prophet Muhammad used to say to him: 'Do not worry. This ailment will, God willing, become a means of purification for you.' (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*) This does not mean that when a person becomes ill, he mysteriously becomes a purified human being. The fact is that if a person does not experience any illness or accident, and remains completely healthy, does not experience any harm in life, then the result is that consciously or unconsciously inside him, feelings of pride are created. His heart is emptied of feelings of humility. He even becomes an insensitive person.

But when a sensitive person is afflicted with disease or loss, he discovers his weakness. Feelings of compassion are created in him. He experiences the reality of being a servant of God. In this way, the disease draws him away from other things and brings him closer to God. He turns to God. He begins to remember God. Prayers and supplications begin to flow from his heart. Sickness becomes a means of nearness to God for him. Thus, for a serious person, illness becomes a matter of blessing in disguise.

The fact is that all human affairs are based on man's capacity of thinking. Man should never suffer from the psychology of complaining

or despair when he is ill or in trouble. Rather, whenever an unpleasant situation arises, he should consider it with an unbiased mind. He should try to discover the positive aspects in such negative events. If he does so, he will have the support of the laws of nature. He will discover the positive in the negative, and thus he will be able to save himself from disappointment. It is a fact that frustration is an unnatural frame of mind.

Illness is a seemingly undesirable thing for a human being. But if a person possesses a God-oriented mind, then physical illness will become a source of spiritual health. The real importance in this world is mental awareness. Only an awakened mind is able to learn from events, and the greatest thing that awakens the mind is only one in this world: a difficult situation.

This fact of life has been described in the Quran as follows:

We shall certainly test you with fear and hunger, and loss of property, lives and crops. Give good news to those who endure with fortitude. Those who say, when afflicted with a calamity, 'We belong to God and to Him we shall return,' are the ones who will have blessings and mercy from their Lord: it is they who are on the right path! (2: 155-157) □

Illness is a seemingly undesirable thing for a human being. But if a person possesses a God-oriented mind, then physical illness will become a source of spiritual health.



Real spirituality or contemplative spirituality is that which has the power to address our minds. Any kind of spirituality attained at a level lesser than that of our minds is not true spirituality. All forms of ecstasy are just reduced forms of spirituality.

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



RIGHT START

THE correct beginning of the Islamic process is to begin with the discovery of God, the Lord of the worlds. When a person is in a state of wandering in search of truth, and then finds the truth, his case is as if he has come to light from darkness. He has then got a starting point at the beginning of his task.

Such a man will not be a wandering man, but he will be a man who has gained something. His every step will be towards his destination, not towards useless wandering. Such a man will begin with certainty, not with a jungle of doubts. Such a man is a living man. Such a man has a creative mind. For him, every morning will be a morning of hope, and every evening will bring new lessons.

The discovery of the Creator is a mind-boggling discovery. The mind of the man who discovers the Creator will be awakened to the greatest degree. He will get everything he desires to get, and he will avoid getting entangled where he desires not to get entangled. To discover God, the Lord of the universe, is to get hold of the truth. God is the starting point of every endeavour. The man who does not get a starting point, his case is a case of wandering. Whoever finds his Lord has found the

source of certainty. The man who does not find his Lord, it is as if he did not find the most sought after Being. For such a man there is nothing but wandering in the dark.

Every person has the opportunity to discover God at every moment. For example, every morning when the sun rises, it brings a message of new hope to every man. Every morning comes to man in such a way that it awakens the sleeping man, it brings the man who has wandered in the darkness back to the door of light. If man is serious, he will discover his Creator in this natural event. □

The discovery of the Creator is a mind-boggling discovery.

The mind of the man who discovers the Creator will be awakened to the greatest degree.



IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?

Without Religious Beliefs

EVERYTHING and everyone is disappearing—Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin. What an amazing happening, and well worth recording in my diary. But that will also suddenly disappear.

So wrote Beatrice Webb in her diary, one of the outstanding leaders of the Fabian society, in 1943, half way through the Second World War. The diary was published after her death.

Even in times of peace, outstanding people appear on the world's stage, show what brilliant stuff they are made of, then quickly disappear, not apparently by their own choice, but like so many puppets on a string. Some, like George Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell, manage to last the course much longer than others, but, sooner or later, everyone has to succumb to the inevitable. No matter how brilliant one's career, one has ultimately to die and pass into oblivion.

It is only after we accept that there is a life after death, an eternal existence, that we see some meaning in life.

The fact that human beings are continually leaving this life, when there is still so much to be achieved, still so many heights to be reached, seems to make no sense. It all appears pointless and unjust. Life's very ephemerality and its apparently utter futility present a grave question. In despair, we wonder why we have to be born at all, if after such a brief spell in this world, we are all to be snuffed out, like so many candles.

It is only after we accept that there is a life after death, an eternal existence, that we see some meaning in life. It is only after we give credence to what the prophets have told us of the Hereafter that we see everything fall into place, and have no further regrets about how transient life on Earth is. Then, and only then does life seem to be well worth living, and not just a meaningless, mechanical series of events. □



RELIGION STAGES A COMEBACK

Refuting Mechanical Explanation of the Universe

IF a tree is planted with its roots severed, it will look as green as any other plant to start with, but, on the very next day, its leaves will start drying up, and will go on drying up, and very soon the tree will die. This is exactly what has happened to atheism and disbelief in religion. In the beginning it looked as if atheism was flourishing, religion had become a thing of the past and the world had entered an age of irreligion. But this was a short-lived phenomenon, principally because it was rootless. And now religion has bounced back with renewed vigour.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was a strong wave of what was popularly called scientific atheism. But scientific investigations carried out from the beginning of the 20th century started turning the tide against its credibility. Sir James Jeans declared that the universe as discovered by modern science was not compatible with mechanical interpretations. And now that we have entered the 21st century, there is an increasing number of theoretical physicists whose explanation of the world makes the existence of God imperative. Without His Being, no explanation of the world is possible.

In a 200-page book, published in 1988, entitled *A Brief History of Time*, Stephen W. Hawking, one of the foremost physicists of the modern age, explains the Big Bang Theory, according to which the universe is constantly expanding. After working out the relevant mathematical equations, Hawking concludes that the expansion of the universe is taking place according to a well-calculated scheme.

The initial rate of expansion must have been fixed with great accuracy so that it would always be less than the critical rate, i.e. the rate at which the universe would begin to collapse. If the 'Big Bang' model is correct, and time itself started with it, the initial universe would have exploded and come to an end a very long time ago. But the universe did not explode. This phenomenon cannot be explained unless it is accepted that the rate of expansion of the universe has been determined with the utmost precision. Stephen Hawking writes:

There are increasing numbers of theoretical physicists whose explanation of the world makes the existence of God imperative. Without His Being, no explanation of the world is possible.

It would be very difficult to explain why the universe should have begun in just this way, except as the act of a God who intended to create beings like us.

One of the most amazing qualities of the universe is that no interpretation of it, other than that which accepts God's existence, can explain it, despite the best brains in every age having attempted to unravel its mysteries.

One of the most amazing qualities of the universe is that no interpretation of it, other than that which accepts God's existence, can explain it, despite the best brains in every age having attempted to unravel its mysteries.

It is claimed that the universe has always been in existence in its present form. It is also claimed that it came into being on its own and that it continues to exist on its own. Cause and effect are believed to have created everything, and attempts have also been made to prove the law of evolution to be the originator of the universe.

But all this has been disproved by current knowledge. The more we learn about the universe, the more strange does it seem that something, or someone, other than God Almighty should be the Lord and Master of the universe.

Whatever arguments or contrary opinions have been expressed to propagate this theory have been proved erroneous by the knowledge acquired through human research. □



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INTRINSIC REALITY

Never Outmoded

IT is earnestly claimed that religion has been rendered old-fashioned and redundant by modern civilization. But what actual contribution has modern civilization made to humanity? New modes of travel, novel architectural designs, new means of communication, latest styles of clothes and so on. In short, commodities and conveniences have become more luxurious, more glamorous, and more effective than ever before. The question we must ask ourselves is: What does the existence of such amenities have to do with belief in God and religion?

Does the possession of a modern house and a luxury car turn belief in God into a meaningless cipher? Do wireless modes of communication leave no room for belief in inspirational forms of revelatory transmission?

Does the ability to fly in the Earth's atmosphere and beyond preclude the possibility of an afterworld in the cosmos? Does the availability of gourmet food, high fashion clothes, and elegantly designed furniture reduce belief in the Garden of Paradise and the Fire of Hell to things of the ignorant past? Does the legislative capacity of certain individuals seated in grandiose parliament buildings invalidate the guidelines enshrined in the Holy Scriptures? While acknowledging the importance and utility of modern technology and its resultant amenities, we fail to comprehend in what way these things verify or negate religious truths.

The relevance of religion is its concern with fundamental values rather than with social manifestations. Social phenomena undergo constant changes, whereas the values of life are immutable.

The relevance of religion is its concern with fundamental values rather than with social manifestations. Social phenomena undergo constant changes, whereas the values of life are immutable. Although fast, modern forms of transport have replaced their slower forerunners. That does not mean the ethics of vehicle manufacture and use are thereby invalidated. Modern means of communication may have rendered the older methods obsolete, but whether these facilities should be utilized to convey truth or falsehood is as pertinent a question as before.

Whether members of parliament go to work on foot or by helicopter does not alter the fact that they are bound to fashion laws in accordance with the order that rules the entire cosmos. Whether they are housed in huts or in magnificent buildings, judicial bodies are still bound to mete out justice by the same absolute standards so that the innocent are defended and the guilty punished.

Thus, religion comes out as an integral need for human beings. The religion of Islam as derived from its original sources presents the fulfillment of this need. The Quran, the preserved word of God, is guidance for man from the Creator of the universe. The Quran presents the creation plan of God. Accountability in the Hereafter is central to God's scheme. This concept gives meaning to our temporary lives in this world. The promise of a perfect world in Paradise is in consonance with our desire for perfection and justice which cannot be fulfilled in this world. To be successful in the Hereafter we need to mould our lives so that it becomes acceptable to the Almighty, our Creator and Sustainer. □

The promise of a perfect world in Paradise is in consonance with our desire for perfection and justice which cannot be fulfilled in this world.

**WE LOOK FORWARD
TO YOUR FEEDBACK**

Dear Readers,

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TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE

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



THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION IN PEACE-BUILDING

SINCE most people believe in one religion or the other, the role of religion can never be overstressed when it comes to peace-building. It is crucial that religious people should refrain from extremism and tread the path of tolerance. This is the teaching of all religions. No religion approves of extremism. If they follow the teaching of their religion, this will reinforce the culture of tolerance. The culture of tolerance is indispensable for the establishment of peace.

Since the majority believes in one religious system or the other, religion provides a ready-made instrument for establishing peace in society. If we speak of peace and tolerance with reference to religion, it will have a vast appeal. People will attach great importance to it and will try to practise it. At the same time, one has to sedulously refrain from extremism while communicating the teaching of the respective religions. If this can be done, religion will, without doubt, prove to be the greatest means of bringing about peace in society.

No religion approves of extremism. If they follow the teaching of their religion, this will reinforce the culture of tolerance.

It is also a fact that religion, in its authentic form, teaches well-wishing for one another. Jesus Christ said, 'Love your enemy', which means to establish friendly relations with everyone including one's opponents, and win over one's enemy by using the power of peace. In business,

a customer-friendly culture is adopted. Similarly, the essence of the social teachings of every religion is human-friendly culture.

History tells us that in every age, religion has been the means of uniting people—far from splitting them asunder. But in the age of democracy in modern times, a new culture has come to be promoted—that of the Vote Bank. This has divided people into different groups. Now human relationships have become that of rivalry rather than of brotherhood.

This phenomenon has emerged in the wake of democratic politics. Democratic politics is undeniably important, but there is a great need for religion to not be politicized.

The need of the hour is, thus, to awaken the spirit of religion. It is, therefore, the duty of religious scholars to engage in this most important task.

It is also a fact that religion, in its authentic form, teaches well-wishing for one another. The essence of the social teachings of every religion is human-friendly culture.

The study of religion tells us that one thing is common to every religion and that is spirituality, or a non-materialistic outlook. A non-materialistic outlook is essential to peace. In this respect, peace is deeply related to religion. A materialistic outlook disturbs peace, while a non-materialistic outlook fosters the environment of peace. This is why, the most important way of establishing peace is to revive the spirit of religion.

The ideology of Islam is a peaceful one in the full sense. Islam embraces the whole of humanity. It does not believe in the 'We and They' concept.

The Prophet of Islam observed that all human beings are God's family. All human beings are blood brothers and blood sisters. Therefore, they have to live in this world as a universal family.

There are many religions in this world, and they have many things in common. While there are also many differences, Islam teaches us to manage the differences, rather than trying to eliminate them. The formula of Islam in this regard is to follow one and respect all.

Peace is, without doubt, extremely important. It would be right to say that peace is the greatest good—the *summum bonum*. Without it no progress is possible, neither religious nor secular.

The formula for peace in Islam is the same as has already been adopted in the secular world and that is, peaceful co-existence. This is the only formula in this matter which is practicable.

There are two parts to every religion: belief and value system. The value system relates to the social system which is based on ethical norms. Ethical norms are common to almost all religions. There are some differences in beliefs, but beliefs are of a theoretical nature. They are in the mind of the believer, so differences in belief do not create any problem so far as the establishment of peace is concerned.

One part of every religion is its spirit and another is its form. Spirit is the essence or the real part. For instance, speaking the truth, honesty, well-wishing, etc. The spiritual content of religion does not create any problem. The problem is always created by the form of the religion. When the form is emphasized, differences, clash and confrontation ensue.

According to Islam, the spirit of religion is its real part and the form of religion is a relative part. Islam forbids stressing on the relative part, which is called extremism in Islam. Islam's emphasis is on the spirit. So far as form is concerned, the way of tolerance will be adopted.

Islam attaches great importance to the life Hereafter. According to the teachings of Islam, man should make the success of the Hereafter his greatest concern. If a living awareness of this concept is produced in man, material differences, and controversies will be minimized and replaced by a non-materialistic or other-worldly outlook. The following verse of the Quran is significant in this regard:

And God calls to the Home of peace. (10: 25)

This means according to the creation plan, peace and harmony should prevail in human society. God Himself is peace. He intended this world to be peaceful, and only a peaceful world will be able to receive His blessings. A peaceful world is like Paradise on Earth. It is only in such a world that we can meet and establish contact with God Almighty, the Creator of man and the universe. □

There are many religions in this world, and they have many things in common. While there are also many differences, Islam teaches us to manage the differences, rather than trying to eliminate them. The formula of Islam in this regard is to follow one and respect all.

THE ROAD TO RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Follow One, Respect All

WHAT the world needs today—perhaps more than anything else—is an acceptable formula for the attainment of religious harmony. This being currently one of the most important topics under discussion, the Islamic viewpoint in this regard is presented here.

If anyone seeks a religion other than Islam [submission to God], it will not be accepted from him; he will be among the losers in the Hereafter.

(3: 85)

A few commentators of the Quran take this verse to imply that salvation according to Islam is destined exclusively for Muslims. Islam thus appears to uphold the superiority of the Muslim community. But this is an out-of-context interpretation and is certainly not correct.

Salvation, by Islamic standards, depends upon the individual's own actions, and that it is not the prerogative of any group. No one can earn salvation by the mere fact of associating with a particular group.

Another verse of the Quran serves as an explanation of the above-quoted verse. It states that:

The believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabaeans—all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds—will be rewarded by their Lord; they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve. (2: 62)

This verse rules out the concept of community superiority for any given group, in so far as Muslims have been bracketed here along with other religious groups. The content of this verse makes it very clear that salvation, by Islamic standards, depends upon the

individual's own actions, and that it is not the prerogative of any group. No one can earn salvation by the mere fact of associating with a particular group. Salvation will be achievable only by a person who truly believes in God and the world Hereafter, and who has given genuine proof in this life of having lived a life of right action.

Another important aspect of Islam is that it does not advocate belief in the manyness or multiplicity of reality. On the contrary, it stresses reality's oneness. According to Islam, reality is one, not many. That is why, in describing monotheism, the Quran states:

That is God, your true Lord. What is there, besides the truth, but error? How then can you turn away? (10: 32)

The above verse talks about Monotheism (i.e. one Lord being the Creator, Sustainer and object of worship). Islam does not propagate the manyness of reality and does not accept it even as a hypothesis.

Both of the above-mentioned points—(a) the oneness of Absolute Reality, and (b) salvation as the prerogative of the true believer in this oneness—form a major part of Islamic ideal. Just being born into a certain group or community, or associating oneself with others of similar persuasions, does not entitle one to salvation.

But it is a fact that; in practice, different kinds of religious groups do exist. Given the various kinds of differences separating them, it is a pertinent question how to bring about harmony between them.

Experience has shown that repeated attempts to bring about harmony on the basis of considering all religions as one have been a failure. The Mughal ruler Akbar (d. 1605) attempted to achieve religious harmony by state enforcement of his newly formed religion, '*Din-e-Ilahi*'. Dr Bhagwan Das (d. 1958) spent the best part of his life producing a one-thousand page book titled *Essential Unity of All Religions*; Mahatma Gandhi (d. 1948) attempted to spread this ideal at the national level by a countrywide movement whose slogan was '*Ram Rahim ek hai,*' meaning *Ram* and *Rahim* are one and the same. But events have shown us that all failed in their attempts to achieve the goal of religious harmony.

Salvation will be achievable only by a person who truly believes in God and the world Hereafter, and who has given genuine proof in this life of having lived a life of right action.

Islam's approach to the entire problem is much more realistic in that it accepts ideological differences. Once having accepted these differences, it then advocates the policy of tolerance and respect for one another in everyday dealings. This is on a parallel with the principle expressed in the English saying: 'Let's agree to disagree.'

In this connection, one of the commands of the Quran is that, in principle, 'there shall be no compulsion in religion' (2: 256). At another place it declares that 'you have your religion and I have mine' (109: 6). It was as a result of this commandment that, when the Prophet Muhammad migrated to Madinah, he issued a declaration re-affirming his acceptance of the religion of Muslims for the Muslims and the

religion of Jews for the Jews. In order to perpetuate the atmosphere of mutual harmony, the Quran enjoins the Muslims in their dealings with people of other faiths: 'Do not revile those [beings] whom they invoke instead of God, lest they, in their hostility, revile God out of ignorance.'

(6: 108)

This principle formulated by Islam is best described not as religious harmony, but as harmony among religious people. This is a principle whose utility is a matter of historical record. It is evident that in the past as well as in the present, wherever religious harmony has existed, it has been based on unity despite differences, rather than on unity without differences. It is not based on agreeing to agree, but on agreeing to disagree.

Although Islam believes in the oneness of reality, it lays equal stress on the practice of tolerance in everyday dealings.

One revolutionary example of this principle is to be found in the life of the Prophet Muhammad. It concerns the conference of three religions which was held in the Prophet's mosque in Madinah. This conference is described by Mohammed Hussein Heikal in his book, *The Life of Muhammad*:

The three scriptural religions thus confronted one another in Madinah. The delegation entered with the Prophet into public debate and these were soon joined by the Jews, thus resulting in a tripartite dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This was a truly great congress which the city of *Yathrib* (another name of Madinah) had witnessed. In it, the three religions which today dominate the world and determine its destiny had met, and they did so for the greatest idea and the noblest purpose.

Although Islam believes in the oneness of reality, it lays equal stress on the practice of tolerance in everyday dealings, even if it means going to the extent of permitting people of other faiths to come to an Islamic place of worship for religious discussion, and if it is time for their prayers letting them feel free to perform their worship according to their own ways in the mosque itself.

Tolerance has been the rule throughout the history of Islam. It has, in fact, been one of the main underlying causes of its successful dissemination. Encyclopedia Britannica makes a note of this fact:

Islam achieved astonishing success in its first phase. Within a century after the Prophet's death in AD 632 (the early generations of Muslims), it had brought a large part of the globe—from Spain across central Asia to India—under a new Arab Muslim empire.

Despite these astonishing achievements other religious groups enjoyed full religious autonomy.

Although the necessity to bring about harmony among different religions is not a newly-felt imperative, endeavours towards that end are still only in the formative stages. If progress towards that goal has been slow, it is because of the established positions which ancient religions have secured in the hearts of their followers, simply by virtue of their antiquity. Trying to bring about changes in these religions per se has never brought about harmony, because instead of old religions being brought closer together by this process, they have developed rather into new religions, a process which has either left the problem of disharmony unsolved or further aggravated. There are many examples of such abortive efforts in the past.

In view of this historical reality, it is clear that the suggestion made by Islam on producing harmony among different religions is the only viable solution. Any alternative suggestion, however attractive it might appear, would be either impracticable or counterproductive.

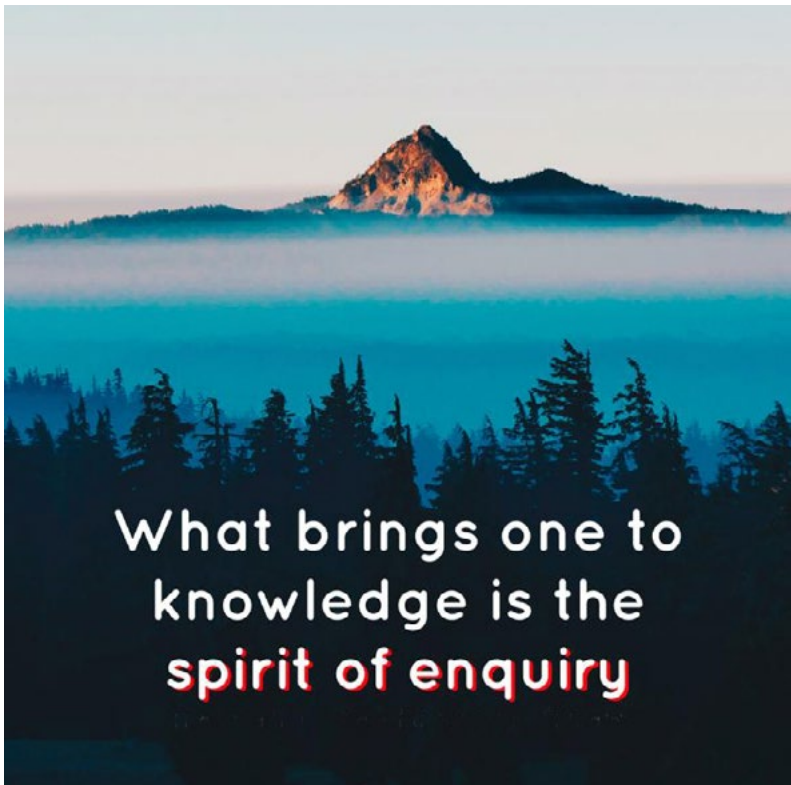
A religious scholar said, 'We have been attempting to bring about interreligious harmony for the last one hundred years, but the results have been quite dismal. It would seem that there are insurmountable obstacles in the way.'

The goal we want to attain is certainly a proper one. It is simply that the strategy we employ is impracticable. Religious harmony is without doubt a desirable objective. But it cannot be achieved by attempting to alter people's beliefs—a policy advocated by more than one scholar in this field. The only way to tackle the problem is to encourage people to show respect for others' beliefs and to be compassionate at all times in their dealings with adherents of other religions. It is very much possible to inculcate this attitude without in any way tampering with long-cherished credos. It should never be conceded that the goal of

It is evident that in the past as well as in the present, wherever religious harmony has existed, it has been based on unity despite differences, rather than on unity without differences. It is not based on agreeing to agree, but on agreeing to disagree.

religious harmony is unattainable simply because people's beliefs differ from one another. It is certainly a possibility provided that it is seen as a matter of practical strategy and not as a pretext for making ideological changes.

'Practical strategy' is something which people regularly resort to in matters of their daily existence. As such, it is a known and acceptable method of solving the problem. Since no new ground has to be broken, either for the religious scholar or for the common man, it should be a very simple matter for people to extend their everyday activity, to include an honest and sincere effort towards global religious harmony. It is simply a question of having the will and the foresight to do so. □



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN ISLAM

No Compulsion at All

CONTRARY to the common misconception that Islam denies religious freedom to others, Islam upholds religious freedom for everyone. Religious freedom is the basic human right whose violation has caused conflicts, wars and bloodshed in both ancient and modern societies. The Quran, therefore, declared for the first time in human history:

“There shall be no compulsion in religion.” (2: 256)

The Quran also states clearly, “You have your religion and I have mine.” (109: 6)

The principle that we obtain from the above verses of the Quran is generally referred to, in today's context, as religious freedom.

In view of this prohibition of compulsion, all Islamic jurists without any exception hold that forcible conversion is under all circumstances null and void. Any attempt to coerce a person to accept Islam is a grievous sin. According to this principle of ‘non-coercion’, it is not permissible to exploit or manipulate personal weaknesses or calamities (e.g. poverty, sickness, famine, etc.) for religious conversion. That is why old and downtrodden non-Muslims were exempted from taxes and given all monetary support by the Islamic state without ever being asked to embrace Islam just for the advantages it would give them.

Once, a Jewish widow came to the Caliph Umar asking for some financial aid. Umar promised to take care of her needs and also presented Islam to her. But the lady refused. Umar then gave her more than she had asked for. When she departed, Umar raised his hands towards heaven and said:

“O God, bear witness that I have not exercised any coercion on this lady.” (*Tarikh Umar ibn al-Khattab by Ibn al-Jawzi*)

The principle of non-coercion mentioned in the Quran (2: 256) has not been confined to religious freedom alone. Rather, it has been extensively elaborated upon and widely applied to all social, cultural, and political spheres of society. This has led to the development of a new culture in which individuals enjoy freedom of expression, dissent and criticism without any fear or restriction. Two examples may suffice to explain to what extent this essential human right was observed in early Muslim societies.

Once Caliph Umar came to a well of the Banu al-Harith where he met an outspoken person named Muhammad ibn Maslamah. "How do you find me?" he asked Muhammad, "By God, I find you just as I would like you to be and just as it would please any well-wisher to see you. You are good at accumulating money, I see, but you keep your hands clean of it yourself, distributing it equitably to others." "But," went on Muhammad ibn Maslamah, "If you adopt a crooked course, we will straighten you, just as we straighten swords by placing them in a vice." At these aggressively critical words, Umar, the second Muslim Caliph, exclaimed:

"Praise be to God, who has put me among a people who will straighten me when I become crooked." (*Kanz al-Ummal*)

When Muslims at Madinah, with their increasing affluence, began to settle huge dowers on their daughters, Umar, in his capacity as Caliph, ordered that no one should demand or pay a dower that exceeded four hundred dirhams, and that anything in excess of this amount would be confiscated and deposited in the public treasury.

With the advent of Islam in the seventh century, it was declared for the benefit of humankind that all greatness was the exclusive prerogative of God, and that in the eyes of God, all human beings were equal.

After the proclamation of this ordinance, when he came down from the pulpit, an old woman stood up and confidently said:

"The Quran has set no restrictions on this matter. Therefore, Umar has no right to set an upper limit to the dowers."

To back up her contention, she loudly recited this verse of the Quran:

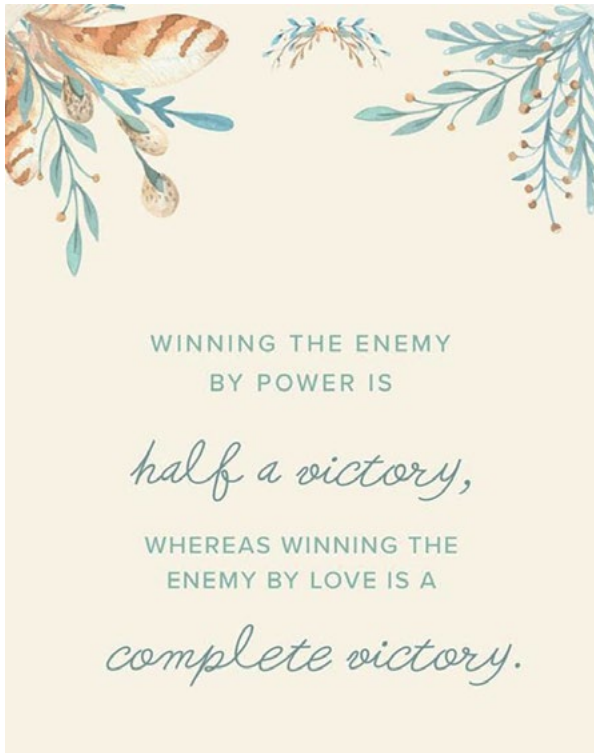
"If you desire to replace one wife with another, do not take any part of her dower back: even if you have given her a treasure." (4: 20)

Umar said: "May God forgive me, everyone knows better than Umar, even this old lady." (*Tirmidhi, Ahmad*)

With the advent of Islam in the seventh century, it was declared for the benefit of humankind that all greatness was the exclusive prerogative of God, and that in the eyes of God, all human beings were equal. The Prophet Muhammad declared not once, but on many occasions that all people were alike, all were brothers.

The Prophet not only stated the truth but also made it a reality by bringing about a revolution based on the idea of human equality. On achieving political domination in Arabia, he was able to put this theory into practice in his capacity as ruler of a state. In this way, Islam put an end to discrimination between human beings on the basis of race, colour, status, etc. People were assigned a high or low status according to their moral worth. □

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WHEN THE SHIP COMES HOME

A Reversal of Fortune

IN the 1984 Observer Europe I Singlehanded Trans-Atlantic yacht race (OSTAR), the trimaran of Frenchman Phillippe Poupon was first to cross the line. As he approached the finishing line in Newport, Rhode Island, he was welcomed by a fanfare of boats' horns and sirens; red flares and rockets flashed in the evening sky, welcoming the boat that everyone thought was the winner. Phillippe Poupon shared their belief. He leapt on to the port wing of his trimaran and raised both arms in the air in triumph.

On the following morning another yacht, the 53-foot trimaran of Yvon Fauconnier—Umupro Jardin V emerged unannounced and unheralded from the mist. Yet it was this yacht that was to be declared winner of the race. In the middle of the Atlantic, the catamaran of Yvon Fauconnier's countryman Phillippe Jeantot Credit Agricole II had capsized. Fauconnier immediately went to his rescue. The operation to recover Credit Agricole II took a whole day and Yvon Fauconnier remained on the scene until it had been completed. The race committee heard about the part that Fauconnier had played in Jeantot's rescue, and awarded him a 16-hour compensation. When this was removed from his overall time, Fauconnier was declared the winner of the 1984 OSTAR.

One who stopped for a while on his way through life to give another a helping hand; who, far from the spotlights of fame and acclaim, committed an act of sincere goodwill towards a fellow human being will be shown mercy on the Day of Judgement.

The elation of Phillippe Poupon, the apparent winner of the race, turned to anguish. "People will not understand why I am not the winner. I am the first boat. I used to like this race because it was so simple: the winner was the winner. But for me, this race is finished." Later at a press conference Poupon put his face behind his hands and wept.

It will be much the same when man's ship crosses the finishing line of time, and when the results of his endeavours in life are announced. There will be one who crosses the finishing line amidst a fanfare of worldly acclaim. He will be the one who made a great show of his piety, who always appeared at the forefront of religious rites and ceremonies. He will appear to be the winner of the race, but there will be another who arrives unheralded and unacclaimed who will emerge triumphant.

He is the one who stopped for a while on his way through life to give another a helping hand; who devoted a few hours of his precious time to saving a precious soul; who, far from the spotlights of fame and acclaim, out in the midst of the lonely ocean of life, committed an act of sincere goodwill towards a fellow human being. He will be shown mercy on the Day of Judgement because of the mercy that he showed to others in the world.

On that day it is the last who will indeed be first, and the first who will be last. □

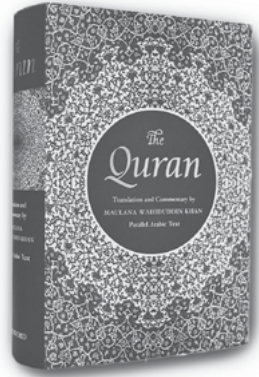


THE WORD OF GOD

From The Scriptures

The Quran is the book of God. It has been preserved in its entirety since its revelation to the Prophet of Islam between AD 610 and 632. It is a book that brings glad tidings to humankind, along with divine admonition, and stresses the importance of man's discovery of the Truth on a spiritual and intellectual level.

Translated from Arabic and commentary by
Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



You may [feel the inclination] to leave aside a part of what is revealed to you and you may be distressed because they say, 'Why has no treasure been sent down to him, why has no angel come with him?' But you are only to give warning. God is the guardian of all things. If they say, 'He has invented it himself.' Say, 'If you are truthful, produce ten invented chapters like it, and call on whom you can besides God, to help you.' But if they do not respond to you, then know that this [Quran] is sent down with God's knowledge and that there is no deity but Him. Will you then surrender yourselves to Him? (11: 12-14)

When the Prophet Muhammad started opposing the ascribing of partners to God (*shirk*) and called upon the people to accept the oneness of God (*tawhid*), his addressees became perturbed. This was because the people most adversely affected by his statements were their great ones—the great ones whose religion they had adopted and were proud to venerate. The position was that these leading lights of ancient Arabia had attained pre-eminence in their eyes through a historical process, while as yet no historical greatness was attached to the Prophet Muhammad. He appeared to them at that time as a man of no consequence. So, the people of Arabia were greatly upset that an ordinary man was making statements which made their leaders lose in credibility.

Under these circumstances the thought crosses the preacher's mind that he should at least temporarily give up being critical in his approach and present his message in a more palatable way. '*You may (feel the inclination) to leave aside a part of what is revealed to you*' means this very portion of the revelations, which contained criticism of polytheistic

beliefs. But, Almighty God wants to clarify everything. And if, as a result of fully clarifying the Truth, the preacher is ridiculed and opposed, this inimical reaction on the part of the addressees is the cost a man has to pay in this world for becoming the preacher of unadulterated Truth.

The most certain proof of the veracity of God's messenger is his inimitable discourse. Those who scorned the Prophet and who rejected the idea that this apparently ordinary man possessed that Truth, which even their great ones did not have, were told that they should not test the Prophet's veracity on the basis of his material condition, but should appreciate that his missionary discourse was so great that neither they nor their leaders could produce the like of it.

Those who desire the life of this world and all its finery shall be repaid in full in this life for their deeds—nothing shall be denied them. These are the people who, in the world to come, shall have nothing but Hellfire and all that they used to do shall be in vain. (11: 15-16)

This inimitable distinction is a definite proof of the fact that the Prophet was speaking for and on behalf of God. In spite of this clear sign of the Prophet's veracity, why are people still hesitating to become the obedient servants of God?

There are two kinds of religion—one adulterated and the other unadulterated. The former, although a compromise between religion and worldliness, displays the label of religion. This is why in every period big institutions come into existence on its basis and through them, people with vested interests receive worldly benefits in the name of 'religion'.

The case of unadulterated religion is just the opposite. When its call goes out, it is to project a purely theoretical Truth; it is not surrounded by economic interests and leadership considerations. This being so, when the call of unadulterated religion reaches those who have attained a high status and great respect in the name of adulterated religion, they are horrified, because they feel that, on adopting it, they will lose all their worldly benefits.

People often engage themselves in worldly activities in the name of religion. The call of pure religion among such people amounts to exposing them for what they really are. The call of truth is, in fact, a subtle test paper for its addressees. Now the very people who were engaged in activities in the name of religion resist the call of truth. Their resistance to the divine message shows that their 'religious' observances were, in fact, interest-oriented worldly activities. Had they

been sincere in their service to religion, they would have lost no time in recognizing the Truth in its unadulterated form.

The call of Truth thus serves as a discriminator between sincere and insincere people. The sincere are ready to make any sacrifice for the true cause of religion. But the insincere favour only that religion which ensures the safety of their worldly gains. They cannot even contemplate losing their material assets. They want to spend their time and energy only on those religious activities which bring them fame, honour and all other worldly benefits. Obviously such efforts cannot bear fruit in the Hereafter. □



ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

The remedy for ignorance is asking questions. (Prophet Muhammad)

The spirit of enquiry is the hallmark of an open society and the above saying of the Prophet aptly illustrates this principle. A culture of curiosity and open-mindedness will foster development in any society by motivating its members to learn enthusiastically and enrich their knowledge. This is because awareness of one's ignorance is half of knowledge, as it becomes a stepping-stone to seeking and finding answers. A questioning mind is like a flowing river that is replenished with fresh thoughts and ideas and continues on its journey.

Is Religion necessary in today's world?

Religion undoubtedly is more than a necessity for this world. The strife in this world is because people have become materialists. The aim of religion is to make people spiritual instead of being materialists. If the world has to have peace, religion should become more widespread.

How do we know if by following religion we have become hardliners?

Hardliners are not products of religion, but products of erroneous interpretation of religion. When you only define religion in terms of form, it makes you a hardliner. If you define it in terms of spirit, you will not become a hardliner.

Would the world be more peaceful, without religion and borders, and with common culture and one language?

It is a mistake to believe that the world would be a more peaceful place if there were just one culture or one language, without religions and without borders. This will never happen because difference is part of nature.

There are two key aspects of human knowledge: humanities and physical sciences. Physical science does not have any differences, for instance, water shall always be H₂O, and every scientist will always end up with the same conclusion through different experiments. In the subject of humanities, however, there will always be differences, as we learn from many scholars. For instance, Dr. Alexis Carrel has written a 312-page book, wherein he has failed to find the reality of human life. That is why he titled the book, *Man, the Unknown*.

Psychological studies show that each one of us is different from others. It can be seen that even in a family living together in the same house, following the same culture and speaking the same language, there can still be differences. Such differences are not a problem. Any difference causes discussion and it further leads to brainstorming.

Why do most Muslims have a tendency to try to convert people to their religion?

Islam does not subscribe to the concept of conversion. It believes that religion is a matter of individual choice. The search for the truth should be every person's individual effort and the decisions one then takes in the matter of religion is completely personal.

The concept of religious conversion is alien to the Quran. It has no basis in the Quran. The Quran speaks of *ma'rifah* which means God-realization or the discovery of God. So, the truth is your own discovery, your own realization. It is a personal choice. If you want to know what the purpose of life is, what life and death are about, you have to study, reflect and discuss with learned people. And after that you may reach some conclusion. And that is your religion. So, your religion is your own discovery.

In religious 'conversion' there are two parties, the converter and the converted. But this is not the concept of Islam. In Islam, there is only one party—and that is you. If you want to find the truth, you have to reflect and study on your own. And when you discover something as the truth, you opt for it.

What sort of reforms do you suggest in Islam to adapt to the today's world? Can we adopt a thousand years' old religious model?

Islam does not need reform; it needs revival. The authentic text of the Quran is available and needs no alteration or correction. The only need is to re-interpret Quranic teachings in the modern idiom.

Some Muslim scholars consider Islam to be a complete socio-political system, which is the root cause of many problems. Islam is a religion of individual following and not of forceful implementation of a particular system or state in society. □





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