

A crescent moon and several small white stars are visible in the dark blue, starry sky at the top of the page. The background transitions to a lighter blue gradient towards the bottom.

The
Spirit
of Islam

MAULANA
WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

The Spirit of Islam

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WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

Translated by:
Prof. Farida Khanam

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FOREWORD

Islam is a religion of nature. As such it is totally in consonance with human nature, and meets all of a person's intellectual and spiritual demands. Islam is a blessing from the God who has created everyone, and is meant for every person equally.

God created the present universe and it is He who settled human beings on earth. He has appointed the same religion for an individual as for the universe, with the difference that the religion which is followed compulsorily by the rest of the universe, has to be followed by humans voluntarily.

The tree stands erect on the earth but its shadow falls on the ground. This is an act of modesty on the part of the tree. Similarly, it is required of an individual that he inculcate this same virtue of modesty in his life.

There are innumerable stars and planets in space. All are continually in motion but they do not clash with one another. The reason is that all stars and planets

travel in their own respective orbits. A human being has to follow this same course in his life. That is, a person has to engage in activities in his own sphere, keeping clear of the spheres of others.

Trees are physiologically so constituted that they exhale oxygen. This is used by living creatures such as animals and humans. Living beings exhale carbon dioxide which is in turn inhaled by trees. This system has been put in place in the universe by God. The same symbiotic relationships are required of people. In human society, all must be of use to others. Everyone should work for the benefit of his or her fellow human beings.

Springs come out of mountains and fall upon rocks. In the course of their journey downstream, they do not break the rocks but rather flow around their sides. The same course has to be adopted by a person in all his activities, that is, instead of going at problems head-on, he should try to ignore them and by availing of opportunities, build his life.

Vapours rise from the seas and take the form of clouds and then fall back down on earth in the form of rains. Rainfall does not differentiate between one country and another. It equally gives water to all fields and orchards. The same should be true of human beings.

An individual's munificence should be like that of the rains. He should function in his environment just like the rains, which are beneficial for all.

The religion that God has given to the universe in the metaphysical sense has been given to us humans in the form of divine principles. The universe is functioning with ultimate success because it has adopted the religion of God in the full sense. Similarly our success lies in adopting the same divine teachings, and regulating the matters of life accordingly.

Those who do so will be successful in the present world as well as in the world to come after death. The successes and blessings of both the worlds are for those who follow the religion of God.

Wahiduddin Khan

March 16, 2021

ONENESS OF GOD

The concept of one God is the essence of Islam and the source of all of its teachings.

God is one. God is an eternal, ever-living reality. He is all in all. Everything is from God. God is not from anything. God is the Creator of all things and He is managing the entire universe.

The Quran puts it thus: “God: there is no deity save Him, the Living, the Eternal One. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. To Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. Who can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows all that is before them and all that is behind them. They can grasp only that part of His knowledge which He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth; and their upholding does not weary Him. He is the Sublime, the Almighty one!” (2:255)

Then there is another chapter in the Quran which has this to say about God: “Say, ‘He is God, the One,

God, the Self-sufficient One. He does not give birth, nor was He born, and there is nothing like Him.” (112:1-4)

This short chapter of the Quran describes the oneness of God. It not only states that God is only one but it also describes what it means to be the one God. This chapter has presented the concept of God in a pure and unadulterated form.

God is one and everyone is dependent upon Him. He is not dependent upon anyone, He himself, all alone, has power over everything. He is does not beget nor is He begotten. He is a unique Being with no equal, no likeness. All kinds of uniqueness inhere His Being, and this Being is of God, the Almighty. The concept of the one God is the central concept of Islam: it is this belief which is the essence of Islam and the sole source of all of its teachings.

WHO ARE THE ANGELS?

Angels are loyal and obedient creatures of God, endowed with special powers and authority to facilitate the workings of the universe.

Angels are among the creatures created by God. They have been endowed with special powers. They have all the power and authority to facilitate the workings of the universe. But all their actions are in total submission to God; not even in the minutest degree do they deviate from the instructions given by God.

At every moment, there are innumerable happenings in the universe. For instance, the orbiting of the stars, the shining of the sun and the moon and the rotation of the earth. Similarly, the rains, changes in the weather, diverse cosmic events, the continuous habitation of man and the animals on earth, and other such countless happenings as are constantly taking place in the world. All of these are arranged by the

angels. The angels are completely loyal and obedient workers.

The angels are invisible to human beings but human beings are visible to them. They keep a watch over human beings on God's behalf. It is these angels who have the power to take a person's soul at the time of death, and bring that soul to God.

The angels are facilitators of this present universe as well as the organizers of heaven and hell in the Hereafter. These angels are countless in number.

The functioning of the angels may be illustrated by the example of a big factory. In a big factory, there are on the one hand large and complex machines and on the other hand is the product of the machines for which the factory has been built. But these machines do not function on their own. For them to function, human workers are required. Therefore, in every factory a number of human workers are there to make the machines work in the desired way. Similarly, in the vast factory of the universe, there has to be the instrumentality of countless angels for everything to happen as it should. The difference between the two factories is that in the earthly factories, the human workers are visible, whereas in the universal factory, the workers or the angels are not visible to the human eye.

THE ROLE OF PROPHETS

The Prophet is an intermediary between God and man. He takes God's messages and conveys it to human beings.

A prophet is one who has been selected to represent God on earth. When God chooses a human being as His messenger, His angel comes to him to inform him of this selection. In this way, he is left in no doubt that he is indeed God's messenger. Afterwards, God sends him His teachings through the angel so that he may inform all human beings of God's will. The prophet is an intermediary between God and man. He takes from God His message and conveys it to human beings.

God has bestowed human beings with reason but, through reason alone, an individual cannot understand the deeper realities of the present life. So far as God and the world Hereafter are concerned, this is totally related to the invisible world and as such, these things are beyond human reason and understanding. What

the prophet does is fulfil this need of every individual. The Prophet informs a person of the realities of life, and of the world Hereafter. In this way, he enables people to plan their life in the full light of divine knowledge.

From the time that people inhabited this world, the prophets started arriving in every age. They told humans of God's will but, there are no authentic records of the teachings of the prophets of ancient times. The later circumstances failed to authenticate their personalities as factually historical and their books also suffered the same fate.

Finally, God chose the Prophet Muhammad as His Messenger. He was born at a time when world history had begun to be put on record. Subsequently, with the invention of the printing press, he became widely acknowledged as a historically established figure, and the Book divinely revealed to him, was preserved for all eternity. Ultimately, there was no possibility that any changes could be made in this divine book he had brought to the world. The Prophet Muhammad was the final messenger to humanity. No prophet will come after him.

WHAT IS THE QURAN?

The Quran is the preserved divine book. Being a completely reliable source of divine guidance, the Quran manifests God's mercy for all.

The Quran is the book of God. The Quran, having been preserved in its original form, is a completely reliable source of divine guidance.

There are 114 chapters in the Quran. Everything that has been laid down in the Quran can be summed up thus: an individual should believe in the one God, and hold himself accountable to Him alone. He should discover that the Prophet Muhammad was a messenger who conveyed God's guidance to humanity.

The Quran is a sacred book sent by God for everyone. It is a book for all because it has been sent by God, Who is the Creator of all mankind.

The Quran is not a new holy book. It is, in effect, a preserved version of the previous divine books. In this sense, the Quran is a book for all human beings and

for all nations. The Quran manifests God's mercy for all. It is the message of God sent by Him for everyone. The Quran is a light of guidance for the whole world, just as the sun is a source of light and heat for the whole world.

THE TRADITIONS OF THE PROPHET

The Hadith is a collection of the words and deeds of the Prophet. The Quran gives us the theoretical guidance, while the Hadith gives us the practical framework.

The Quran is God's word both in word and meaning. The Hadith is that collection of words and deeds which convey God's message, but, so far as its words are concerned, those are the very words spoken by the Prophet. While the Quran presents direct guidance from God, the Hadith presents indirect guidance.

There are many books of Hadith, some of which are of particular importance. For instance, Sahih al-Bukhari,

Sahih Muslim, Jami al-Tirmidhi, Sunan Abi Dawood, Sunan an-Nasai, Sunan Ibn Majah, Muwatta Imam Malik and Musnad Ahmad.

The Hadith constitutes an interpretation and elaboration of the Quran. In the Quran, mostly basic commands have been given, details of which can be learned from the prophetic traditions. Similarly, the Hadith gives us practical framework for the theoretical guidance of the Quran. The importance of the Hadith is such that it cannot be considered separate from the Quran.

The books of Hadith give commands and teachings relating to all the aspects of life, for instance, what a Muslim should be like in his intention and thinking. They specify the details of worship, set an example of how to deal with people in daily life—and in particular, how to address them. They define the limitations in food and drinks and explain what the family structure should be. They explain what the basis of social relations should be and how to settle life's issues in a peaceable manner.

All those matters which relate to human life and on which success in this world and Hereafter depends, are set forth in detail in the books of Hadith. Without

a study of the Hadith, we cannot complete the study of Islam and neither can we know the Islamic teachings for leading life in this world.

The corpus of Hadith is the greatest source of Islamic teaching after the Quran. Once a hadith is proved to be an authentic part of the legacy of the Prophet of Islam, we have to accept it as we do the Quran.

THE MEANING OF ISLAM

Islam is the religion of submission to God. Accepting Islam shapes one's thinking. Subsequently, his desires, his feelings, his interests — everything becomes dyed in the hue of obedience of God.

Islam means submission. The name Islam has been given to this religion because it is based on submission to God. A Muslim is one who is subservient to God in thought, word and deed. All his dealings are done in obedience to God. He bows to God's will in all matters. Islam is the religion of the entire universe, for all the parts of the universe are functioning according to the principles laid down by God.

The same conformity to divine principles is desired of humans also. A person has to live as God's faithful servant just as the rest of the universe totally obeys its Creator. The only difference is that the universe obeys God as a matter of compulsion, while a human being is required to follow divine injunctions of his own free will.

When a person adopts Islam, it is first of all his thinking which is shaped by Islam. Subsequently his desires, his feelings, his interests, his relations – everything become dyed in the hue of God.

Then comes his daily life – his behaviour and dealings with others are moulded according to the virtues upheld by Islam. In short, both internally and externally he becomes an obedient person.

A human being is created by God, so the right attitude for the believer is to live in submission to God in this world. In Islam, the right way of life is to live in conformity with the will of the Lord. The other kind of life is one which is lived independently of God's awareness and marked by arrogance.

HOW DOES FAITH CHANGE A PERSON?

For a believer, faith becomes a source of limitless trust in God. Faith transforms his whole personality. His entire life becomes oriented towards the Hereafter.

The reality or essence of faith is discovery of God. When a person becomes aware of God's existence and apprehends divine realities, that is true faith.

Such a discovery is no simple matter. God is the Creator and Lord of all things, He is the One who awards punishment and no one can escape His grasp. The discovery of such a God has a profound effect upon the whole life of the individual. His thinking is revolutionized to the extent that God becomes the centre of all his emotions.

As a consequence, the believer surrenders him being to God. God becomes the centre of all his attention. Now he becomes a person whose life and death are for God alone.

The result of this faith is that a person's behaviour throughout his life becomes dyed in the hue of God. When he speaks, he is conscious that God is hearing him and when he walks, he takes care that his way of walking is not of one who struts arrogantly. When he deals with people, he is fearful lest he do anything unjust such as would incur God's punishment.

As a result of this faith, a person's entire life becomes oriented towards the Hereafter. In all matters, his eyes are on the Hereafter. In this world, instead of temporary gains, he makes the gains of the Hereafter the centre of his attention. When there are two sides to any matter – the worldly side and the otherworldly side, he ignores the consideration of this world and chooses what would be of value in the life Hereafter.

For him this faith becomes a source of limitless trust in God. At all times and in all events he puts his trust in God. Faith in essence is to have recognized the Lord when this recognition or discovery becomes a part and parcel of a person's heart and mind. Then his whole personality is transformed. He becomes a new human being.

THE TEST OF THIS LIFE

If man, in spite of having freedom, submits to God and leads a principled life in this world, he will be held deserving of Paradise in the Hereafter.

In the present world, every human being is free. God has not set any constraints upon a person. But this freedom is for the purpose of putting him to the test rather than allowing him to lead an unrestrained life. This freedom does not mean that a person should lead his life permissively and then die one day. Its purpose is rather that a person should lead a life of principle of his own will and intention. Of his own will, he should bind himself to obeying high moral principles.

The purpose of creating a human being in this way is to give him the opportunity to be the most superior of the creatures so that he may be credited with being one of those special beings who bound himself to living a principled life, in spite of having no compulsion to do so.

All things in this world are subjected to God. The stars and planets in space revolve in their orbits totally under the command of God. The trees, the rivers, the mountains— all these things strictly follow the plan laid down for them by God. On a parallel with this, the animals follow the pattern determined for them by their instincts. They are totally governed by their instincts. In this world human beings, as an exception, have been granted the blessings of freedom and power. This freedom offers two different paths to a person. One leads him to becoming arrogant and insolent, and leading an unrestricted life. This would mean his failing in his test paper.

On the other hand will be those who make right and proper use of their freedom. Although there is no compulsion for them to adhere to divine principles, they will be successful in their test. They will be given rewards by God, such as no other creature can merit. They will be held to be those of God's servants, who have earned nearness to God. And they will live a life of comfort and happiness eternally.

ACTIONS DEPEND UPON INTENTION

Intention relates to one's thinking or inner state. Any act which is done without the right intention is valueless in the eyes of God.

Intention is of utmost important in Islam. No act, simply on account of its appearance of being commendable can be acceptable to God. God accepts only such deeds as have been performed with the right intention. No act done with evil intention is acceptable to God.

When a person performs some task solely for God's pleasure and with the aim of being rewarded for it in the Hereafter, that shows he is a person of good intention.

On the contrary, when a person acts in a way that is ostensibly religious, with the hope of promoting some worldly interest thereby, receiving appreciation,

gaining in popularity among others and finding a place of honour among them, that shows an evil intention.

Intention relates to one's thinking or inner state. People may not be able to discover the inner state of a person's mind when he performs a certain action. But God is fully cognizant of what is going on in his mind. He knows what kind of feelings he had at that time. People may mistake an evil act for a good act, but God has full knowledge of all things and will deal with everyone accordingly. He will reward a person exactly as he deserves.

The significance of intention is that of truth and meaningfulness. When something is lacking in truth and meaningfulness, it is of no value. Indeed, any act which is done without the right intention is valueless. It has no importance either in the eyes of people or in the eyes of God.

An act is worthy of esteem only when it is pure in intention. Any act done without the right intention is impure in nature.

THE WORLD HEREAFTER IS SURE TO COME

God created man as an eternal creature, dividing his life into two parts. A small part in this world is for action and the eternal life in the Hereafter is to reap its reward.

Human beings have been created as eternal creatures. However, God has divided a person's lifespan into two parts. A very small part of his lifespan has been destined to be lived out in the present world while the rest has been destined for the world after death. The present world is a place for action, while the world Hereafter is a place where the rewards for that action will be reaped.

Where the present world is defective, the world Hereafter is perfect in every respect. The Hereafter is a limitless world. There all things have been provided in an ideal state.

God has placed Paradise in the world of the Hereafter.

Paradise is full of all kinds of blessings. Those who prove to be true worshippers of God and who lead virtuous lives will enter this world of Hereafter. When they enter this world of the Hereafter, the door of Paradise will be opened to them for all eternity.

But those who lead a life of unmindfulness of God in the present world or who lead lives marked by arrogance and insolence are sinners in the eyes of God. All such people will be denied the blessings of the Hereafter.

In the present world God is invisible. But in the world Hereafter, He will appear in all His power and glory, and, at that time, all human beings will surrender before Him. But surrendering at that time will be of no avail. Surrendering before God is acceptable only when it is done in this present world before being able to see God. In the Hereafter, surrendering after seeing God will benefit no one.

Death is not the end of life for a person, rather, it is the beginning of the next stage of life. Death is the middle stage when a person leaves the temporary world of today and reaches the permanent world of tomorrow. He leaves the ephemerality of this world and enters the eternal world. This stage of the Hereafter will be

faced inevitably by everyone. There is no one who can save himself from being called to account in the Hereafter.

PARADISE AND HELL

Paradise is a place of divine blessings, while Hell is totally the opposite. Paradise is a place of divine blessings, while Hell is totally the opposite.

Paradise is a place of divine blessings and Hell is a place where those who have been awarded punishment by God's court will be cast. There are all kinds of blessings in the present world but they are in an imperfect form. Paradise is the place where all these blessings will be there for everyone in a perfect form. Whereas the present world is not an ideal world, the world of Paradise is a completely ideal world. Those who arrive after passing the divine test in the present world will enter into the eternal life of Paradise where they will have all the comforts, luxuries and happiness they desire.

In Paradise, along with material blessings a person will also have mental peace and contentment. On the one hand, material blessings will be showered upon him, and on the other hand, all those disadvantages which caused him all sorts of restlessness and discomfort will be absent, for example, old age, disease, accidents, death, and so on.

Everyone is desirous of an ideal world right from the time of his birth. Everyone mentally cherishes the world of his dreams. But such a world can never materialize for anyone in the present life. After death, however, this world will become a reality for those fortunate souls who are held deserving of it according to their deeds in their lives before death.

In essence, Hell is totally the opposite. If Paradise is a place which gives all kinds of comforts, Hell is a place which gives all kinds of pain.

THE POWER OF SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is described as leading a God-oriented life (*rabbaniyat*), a life based on higher principles, remaining unaffected by the negative actions of others.

What is spirituality? God has demonstrated it eternally in the form of the rose bush. The rose bush has thorns as well as flowers. Amidst sharp thorns God grows flowers on its branches which have beautifully shaped petals and which spread their fragrance all around.

This is an example of spirituality set by nature. Spirituality is the name of living like a flower amidst thorns. Spirituality is what prevents a person from embroiling himself in thorns. He is not provoked when goaded. Unpleasant experiences do not disturb his calm and composure. The unpleasant behaviour of others does not arouse in him feelings of anger and revenge. He lives according to his own principles. His intellectual level rises so high and is so sublime that a

stone thrown at him does not reach him. In the Quran, spirituality is described as leading a God-oriented life (*rabbaniyat*). Those who lead God-oriented lives, do not become influenced by the people around them. The thinking of those who can rise above their mundane environment and live at a godly level, becomes independent of what people say about them. That is, they are not influenced by idle chatter. They find such great things in the state of spirituality that everything else pales into insignificance.

The spiritual person is so empowered that he can even smile at abuses hurled at him. He is able to forgive one who makes him angry, and can forget that person's words and deeds. He is able to welcome the thorns which accompany the flowers.

The spiritual person finds such great things in his own spirituality (*rabbaniyat*) that he is not driven by desire. His spirituality banishes feelings of jealousy and selfishness, and he never feels exploited. His own spirituality is so fulfilling that he seeks nothing beyond that. When such spiritual people come together, they present a society which shines like the sun and blooms like the flowers in a garden.

FEAR OF GOD HELPS MAINTAIN HIGH PRINCIPLES

Fear of God (*taqwa*) means leading a principled life, that is, controlling one's desires and curbing all negative impulses.

Fearing God (*taqwa*) means leading a life of restraint in this world. Restraint means controlling one's desires and curbing all negative impulses.

Umar Faruq once asked another Companion of the Prophet what it meant to go in fear of God. The Companion replied, "O Leader of the believers, have you ever walked along a path which is lined on both sides with thorn bushes?" When he received a reply in the affirmative, the Companion asked what he had done on this occasion. Umar replied, "I gathered my clothes about me and walked carefully along the path." The Companion remarked, "That is how one goes in fear of God." (Tafsir Ibn Kathir, 1/164)

The present world is a testing ground. Here, to

put a person to the test, many thorns are strewn everywhere, such as all kinds of negativity, and having to deal with frivolous people who have issues, which do not merit serious attention. Then there are worldly attractions which distract us. There are also unpleasant circumstances or factors which disturb us mentally and cause us to deviate from the path of virtue.

All these things are like thorny bushes on both sides of the road. At all times there is the fear of getting entangled in these bushes. And then, instead of going forward, one is deterred there.

In such a situation the wise person is one who traverses worldly paths by gathering his clothes about him. And then instead of being embroiled in unpleasant things, he goes on advancing by avoidance of adversity. In all situations he is careful to exercise total self-control. He has to opt for the path of avoidance rather than tread the path of entanglement.

Human beings have been created upright by nature. If nothing bars a person's way, he will, on his own, walk in the right direction. Therefore, a person must not let unnatural obstacles hinder his onward progress. In consequence, by the power of his own nature, he will take the right direction until he meets his Lord.

GRATITUDE TO GOD

All forms of worship, are, in essence, manifestations of the feeling of that gratefulness, which is at the heart of a God-oriented life. Gratitude entails acknowledgement of God's blessings.

Gratitude means acknowledging the blessings of God. This acknowledgement has to be heartfelt, and only then does it take verbal form.

Human beings have been created with the best of bodies and the best of minds. All our requirements have been amply provided for. All the things of the earth and the heavens have been pressed into our service. All the things which we require to lead a life on earth or to build a civilization have been bestowed on us in abundance.

These blessings are showered upon an individual at all times. It is, therefore, incumbent upon him to repeatedly express his acknowledgement of God's blessings. His heart should then overflow with the feeling of gratitude.

All forms of worship, are, in essence, manifestation of the feeling of that gratefulness, which is at the heart of a God-oriented life. Gratefulness itself is the most complete form of worship and relates to a person's entire existence.

Initially, a person refreshes the feeling of gratitude in his heart and mind and then he expresses it repeatedly in verbal form. Subsequently, when these feelings of gratefulness intensify, he starts giving his wealth and his possessions in the path of God, as a way of expressing his thankfulness to Him. Moreover, his feeling of thankfulness compels him to spend his time and energy in the path of God. His whole existence is given to him by God. The world we live in is totally a divine gift. Another name for gratitude is acknowledgement or expression of this reality.

DAILY REMEMBRANCE OF GOD

The words that spontaneously spring from one's lips when one's mind overflows with spiritual feelings of his Lord's beneficence is the essence of zikr, the remembrance of God.

Remembrance of God is one of the basic teachings of Islam. Forgetfulness of God shows indifference, whereas remembrance of God shows attentiveness to the divine will.

Such remembrance is a natural reality. A human being at every moment, experiences such things as are directly related to God. That is, he observes the sun and the moon, the rivers and the mountains, the air and the water,—and sees that everything has been created by God. Similarly, all the creatures that he sees in the world are reminders of the Creator. Right from the earth to the heavens, all things are reflections of God's beauty and perfection. With their entire existence, they testify to God's being. As such, they draw a person towards his Creator.

At every moment, an individual is reminded of God by the things amidst which he spends his days and nights in this world. Influenced by these things, his heart and mind overflow with spiritual feelings of remembrance of God.

Throughout his life a person repeatedly experiences such a connection with God, as causes him to ponder upon his existence, and his heart is filled with the sense that it is God who has created him in the best of moulds and given him all kinds of abilities in abundance. These feelings come to his lips in various ways in different words again and again. This is a true form of remembrance.

A person in his daily life has to come to grips with various ups and downs, and undergo different kinds of experiences, both pleasant and unpleasant. At these times, he focuses his attention on God. Again and again, he remembers God in different words.

In this way, during his daily worship, he repeats aloud various words and phrases. These words are sometimes derived from the Quran and Hadith, and at other time, in acknowledgement of his Lord's beneficence, they spring spontaneously to his lips. All this is remembrance of God.

PRAYER INSTILLS MODESTY IN THE WORSHIPPER

Prayer prepares man to lead a virtuous life. It inculcates in the worshipper the spirit of modesty that enhances one's connection with God as well as with other human beings.

Prayer, or salah, is worship of God. It has been made obligatory on believers five times a day. Congregational prayer is offered in the mosque.

Before saying prayers, the worshipper performs ablutions. Face, hands and feet, are washed with water to awaken the feeling in the suppliant that he should always lead a pious life. Then, by uttering *Allahu Akbar* (God is the greatest) he enters into the act of worship. In this way, he accepts that greatness belongs solely to God. The greatest virtue is to live in this world with modesty.

In the course of the prayer, the worshipper has to recite certain passages from the Quran. In this way,

he recalls to mind God's commandments. Then he bows down and prostrates himself. This is saying by his actions that for him only one course is proper, and that is to lead his life in this world as an obedient servant of God.

When this act of prayer comes to an end, and the worshippers turn their heads to both sides, and say *Assalamu alaykum warahmatullah* (May peace and blessings be upon you), it is as if these believers who have offered their prayers are now fully imbued with a sense of their religious obligations. And they are now entering into the world with no wishes in their hearts for others except mercy and peace. They will live from now on in society as peace-loving members, and will have no ill-feeling towards their fellow men.

Offering prayers is in one respect the worship of God. It is an acknowledgement of God and God's godhead. It means surrendering before God, acknowledging Him as the one for whom all greatness is reserved.

In another respect, prayer prepares a individual to lead his life as an upright person amongst others. While dealing with others his attitude is then one of modesty and sympathy – enhances one's connection with God as well as with other human beings.

FASTING TEACHES RESTRAINT

Fasting reinforces moral discipline that enables a person to lead his life as a worshipper of God and as a well-wisher of all mankind.

Fasting is a form of worship which is performed annually. Each year in the month of Ramazan (the ninth month of the lunar calendar), fasting is observed for the whole month. During the period of fasting, at God's behest, the believer abstains from eating from dawn to sundown. He moreover engages himself in more profound worship and remembrance of God. This act of fasting is done so that a person's materialism may be minimized and his spirituality may make progress. He is then enabled to lead a spiritual life in this world.

Fasting awakens in a person the feeling of gratitude. This ritual deprivation of food and water highlights the importance of these blessings. Then when he has experienced hunger and thirst and eats only in the

evening, he realizes how precious are the food and water which have been provided to him by God. This experience greatly increases his feelings of gratitude.

Fasting reinforces moral discipline. By curtailing the use of certain things, a person is conditioned to leading a life of moral constraint in this world.

Fasting is like a kind of speed breaker. By having to exercise self-control for one month, the believer learns the lesson that he has to lead a life of restraint not just for a month or a year but for his entire lifetime. He must not try to break through the boundaries set by God.

By observing this fast, a person engages himself more and more in worship, in recitation of the Quran and in remembrance of God. Fasting accentuates the effects of acts of worship. In this way, remembrance of God, worship and recitation of the Quran become more effectual.

Fasting is a kind of special training course extending over a whole one month designed to enable a person to lead his life as a worshipper of God and as one who feels good will towards all of mankind.

THE LAW OF ALMSGIVING

Almsgiving, Zakat, is given to human beings, but, in reality it creates a bond between man and his Creator. The spirit of charity is worship; its external manifestation is an act of social service.

Alms is a fixed amount which a person who is materially well-endowed has to give from his wealth at the end of the year. In this way, he purifies his possessions. By giving a part of his wealth in the way of God, he legitimizes the use of the rest for his own purposes.

The setting aside of a fixed amount from his earnings as alms is a practical demonstration or acknowledgement of the fact that the real giver is God. When God is the giver, His servant is obliged to spend from his wealth in the cause of God.

The law of almsgiving prescribes the taking of wealth from the wealthy and giving it to the poor. This, in effect, is a redistribution of wealth and, as such, is a way of reflecting the inequality in society. In this way,

those who are wealthy are reminded of the fact that they are responsible for those who have received less in the division of wealth.

Almsgiving also buttresses morality. For one thing, one who gives alms avoids being miserly and having feelings of selfishness. It reinforces in him the spirit of giving, human friendliness and generosity. For another thing, the receiver of alms comes to regard others as his brothers and becomes their well-wisher, rather than feel jealous of them.

Since alms are given in the cause of God, that establishes almsgiving as one of the forms of worship. Apparently, it is given to human beings but, in reality, it links a person to God, creating a bond between him and his Creator. In spirit, giving in charity is a way of worship; in its external manifestation, it is an act of social service.

THE BENEFITS OF HAJJ

Pilgrimage, Hajj brings a person closer to God and his prophets, creating a living relationship with the history of Islam. Hajj unites God-worshippers worldwide.

Hajj, one of the pillars of Islam, is a form of worship. For those who have the resources to perform Hajj, it is obligatory for them to do so once in their life time. It is not mandatory for those who have neither the ability nor the resources to undertake this pilgrimage.

To perform Hajj, one has to leave one's home and travel to Hijaz in Saudi Arabia. The pilgrim then goes to Makkah and does the circumambulation of the Kabah. After that, he runs between two hillocks, called Safa and Marwa. He next stops at Arafat, where he casts stones at Jamrat. He then sacrifices an animal. In this way, different rituals of worship are performed in the month of Zul Hijja. All of this is what constitutes Hajj.

This Hajj is a symbolic form of surrendering oneself to one's Lord. Through these acts of worship the pilgrim pledges to surrender himself before God, so that his life revolves around God alone, and to signal that he is ready to perform all kinds of sacrifice for the sake of God.

During Hajj, the worshipper remembers the two pious men who built the Kabah, Prophet Ibrahim and Prophet Ismail. He sees the historical places associated with the Prophet Muhammad. He spends some of his time in this environment where the history of Islam initially took shape.

In this way, Hajj becomes a means of bringing a person closer to God and his prophets. It reminds one of the lives of people who were reputed for their virtue, thus creating a living relationship with the history of Islam.

Hajj, moreover unites God-worshippers from all over the world. It refreshes the reality in the mind of the believers that however much their races and nationalities may be different, they all believe in the same God and in the same Prophet: this is a great source of unity. They might be living in different lands but being worshippers of God, they are all as one. Hajj is basically a form of worship of God, but practically there are many other benefits associated with it. One of these is fostering of unity in all the believers.

THE SIMPLE PRINCIPLE OF MORALITY

The simple principle of morality in Islam is: 'you should want for others what you want for yourself. You should like for others what you would like for yourself.'

The way one person behaves with another in daily life must be governed by a set of moral principles, commonly referred to as ethics.

What should be the first principle of morality? This principle is simply that – you should want for others what you want for yourself. You should like for others what you would like for yourself.

Everyone knows that he likes to hear good words. So everyone ought to use good words, kind words when they speak to others. No one wants to have any problems created for him, therefore everyone should avoid creating problems for others.

Everyone wants to be dealt with sympathetically and

cooperatively. Therefore everyone ought to behave in that way with others, that is, deal with them sympathetically, and with full cooperation.

This ethical criterion is quite simple and natural. It is so simple that everyone can understand it, whether he be educated or illiterate, whether he be blind or handicapped, and regardless of his likes and dislikes. The traditions of the Prophet have laid down a moral yardstick which no one will find difficult to understand. In this way, Islam, in terms of personal experience, has made it clear to everyone what their behaviour with others should be and how they should deal with others, and also how not to behave with others.

The Prophet once said that the best of people are those whose morals are the best. Accordingly, becoming a good human being has nothing mysterious about it. There is a simple formula for this and that is, a person should save himself from having double standards. In doing so, he will set an example of superior human morality.

WHY PATIENCE IS NECESSARY IN LIFE

Patience is a superior solution to the problems faced by the individual. It also contributes to building a heavenly personality.

Patience is a great virtue without which a person's aim to lead his life in this world with high ideals can seldom be achieved. The reality is that at every step an individual is faced with experiences so unpleasant and so provoking that they divert him from his true purpose in life – to the point of making him lose sight of his ideals.

This being so, if he allows himself to be provoked at every turn and becomes embroiled in every unpleasant issue, he will cease to be able to surmount the hurdles in his onward journey. He will just keep frittering away his time and energy in irrelevant matters.

The sole solution to this problem is the exercise of patience. Patience is that prolonged self-control which

enables the individual to tread the path of restraint when he has bitter experiences, instead of allowing himself to be provoked into vengeful or retaliatory behaviour. It makes it easier for him to face life's vicissitudes with equanimity and forge ahead on the path of truth.

The exercise of patience, on the one hand, is a solution to the problems faced by the individual. On the other hand, it is a major aid in the building of a superior personality. Those without patience fall a prey to negative influences, while those who are patient develop positive personalities.

It should be emphasized that patience means neither retreat nor capitulation. It means rather curbing turbulent emotions in order to follow a course marked by sanity and wisdom. Being patient and using one's brain makes it easier to determine which is the most beneficial course of action to follow.

SPEAKING THE TRUTH

Truth is the character of nature which is extant at a universal level. A believer, too must be free from falsehood and double standards and be completely truthful.

The believer is a truthful person. He always speaks the truth. In all matters he says what is exactly in accordance with the facts. A believer cannot afford not to express what is the truth. He cannot tell a lie. What does speaking the truth mean? Speaking the truth means that there is no contradiction between a person's knowledge and his words. Whatever he knows he should say and whatever he says should be in accordance with his knowledge. On the contrary, falsehood is the utterance of things which are at variance with true knowledge.

Truthfulness is the most noble aspect of a believer's character. A believer is a man of principle, and for a man of principle, there is no conduct more proper than speaking the truth at all times. Speaking against

the truth is not possible for a true believer, regardless of the circumstances.

The entire world of God is based on truth. Here everything manifests itself in its real form: the sun, the moon, the rivers, the mountains, the trees, the stars, the planets - all stand on truth. They are what they are in reality. They show themselves to be so. In this vast world of God, nothing stands on falsehood. There is nothing which pretends to be anything other than what it actually is.

This is the character of nature which is extant at universal level. A believer too has to have exactly the same character. He must be totally free from falsehood and double standards. A believer is truth all in all. His total existence is moulded on the truth. Just by looking at him, one feels that he is a truthful human being, both inside and outside.

Speaking the truth is not just a matter of policy for a believer. It is rather his religion. Therefore, compromising on the truth is not possible for him. He speaks the truth, because without doing so he cannot live. He speaks the truth because he knows that refraining from speaking the truth is a negation of himself and anything which is negation of oneself, it is totally untenable.

FULFIL YOUR PROMISE

Fulfilling a promise is a deed of a noble ethical quality and faith encourages this most sublime virtue. Fulfilling promise is a sign of possessing a predictable character.

In social life while dealing with others it happens repeatedly that one person makes a promise to someone else. Such a promise is apparently between two individuals or two groups. But there is the third party, and that is God, who is necessarily present as a witness. This being so, every promise becomes a divine commitment.

That is why a believer becomes extremely sensitive regarding promises. He is convinced of the fact that every promise made by one to another is under the eyes of God, and that one who makes a promise will be accountable to God. This conviction compels him to be extremely responsible with regard to promises. Whenever he makes a promise, he should certainly fulfil it.

In a society where people are of such a character that they fulfil their promises, every individual becomes predictable in character. In such a society that special quality prevails on a vast scale. Throughout the rest of the universe, every celestial body functions with 100% accuracy. For instance, one can know in advance about the rotation of the stars and planets and as to where they would be after the next hundred or thousand years. Similarly, in regard to water we know in advance at what degree it will come to boiling point. In this way, the whole universe has become of a predictable character.

In a society where people fulfil their promises, many other virtues flourish. For instance, in such a society people do not quarrel in their dealings, and there is an atmosphere of trust in one another. In such a society, all live in a peaceful state because they have no fear that others will break their promises in their dealings with them.

Fulfilling a promise is a deed of a noble ethical quality and faith encourages this most sublime virtue.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CLEANLINESS

Cleanliness for a believer is a form of worship. The faith of a believer is a guarantee that when he is physically clean, he is also able to purify his soul.

A believer attaches great importance to cleanliness. First of all, belief or faith makes his soul pure. Consequently, his appearance also becomes clean. His thinking based on faith makes him a lover of cleanliness.

A believer daily washes his hands, feet and face five times a day to say his prayers. Daily, he takes bath at least once to cleanse the whole body. His dress, although simple, is always washed clean.

He loves cleanliness and always tries to keep his house clean. Therefore, he cleans his house daily, keeps things in order, and rids his house of anything which could give off a bad smell. All these things become a

part and parcel of his daily lifestyle. A believer is not happy unless everything is kept clean.

This desire for cleanliness is not limited to just one's body and one's home, but extends to one's entire neighbourhood. The believer wants the whole environment to be clean where he resides. He takes extra care that he and his family members should not dirty the environment around their home. This is the training that he gives to others. He does not rest content until he is able to have clean surroundings in his neighbourhood.

Cleanliness is just cleanliness for a person. But for a believer, cleanliness is a form of worship, because he knows that God loves people to be clean.

Furthermore, the faith of a believer is a guarantee that when he is able to be clean physically, he is also able to purify his soul. As such when he is purifying himself, he prays, "O God, clean not just my body but also my soul." Such a prayer becomes a means of purifying the soul.

TOLERANCE LEADS TO RESPECTING DIFFERENCES

Cleanliness for a believer is a form of worship. The faith of a believer is a guarantee that when he is physically clean, he is also able to purify his soul.

Tolerance is a great human and Islamic quality. Tolerance means making concessions to others. Whereas a lack of tolerance shows that a person only considers himself. He is unaware of the demands of others. Tolerance is a noble virtue. It has been variously referred to in Islam, for instance, gentleness, softening of the heart, and being kind to all creatures. When an individual attains to true worship and true religiosity, he rises above all the evils which stem from selfishness. He begins to be aware of external realities rather than just his own self. Such a person starts seeing others with eyes of love; this becomes second nature to him. He does not expect anything from others. Therefore, if others are not good to him,

even then he keeps up his tolerant attitude towards them.

Tolerance enables a person in all situations to respect others, whether they are good to him or not. In all situations he should live amongst them with the best human values, whether they are friends or relatives or unrelated to him. In all situations, he should treat people with sympathy and well-wishing, even if they are unsympathetic in their attitude.

Tolerance in actual fact means being conciliatory towards others. In social life one is unavoidably faced with differences in religion, culture, tradition, personal preferences, and so on. In such a situation, the best course is to tread the path of concession and broad-mindedness while adhering to one's principles. In his personal matters a person should be a man of principle, but when it comes to others, he should be ready to adjust. He subjects himself to self-criticism but with others, he is lenient, kind and broad minded. It is the aim of Islam to produce such a high standard of character in the believers.

AVOIDANCE OF CLASH

Avoiding conflict in all situations of provocation and remaining united, even in spite of differences, is an important teaching of Islam and a sign of excellent character.

Avoidance of friction is one of the important principles of Islam. That is, avoiding confrontation in the face of complaints and differences of opinion, refraining from reaction and maintaining a positive attitude when provoked.

Every man and woman differs in temperament. There are many differences between people which repeatedly give rise to unpleasant experiences. In social life, whether at home or outside home, facing such unpleasant circumstances or situations is totally natural. No one can prevent such situations from arising.

Now there is one method of proceeding on all such occasions of differences, and that is to directly

confront those responsible for the unpleasantness in order to solve the problem. But such an attempt can only be infructuous. It only aggravates the problem. It is not going to solve it.

On such occasions, Islam teaches us avoidance of friction. That is, in all such irksome situations one should try to tolerate unpleasantness instead of putting an end to it. Avoiding conflict in all such situations of provocation and remaining united, even in spite of differences, is the teaching of Islam.

According to Islam, this is not only a social issue but is also a special case for reward. Living amicably with people is an act worthy of reward even in normal situations, but in the face of complaints and unpleasantness, maintaining friendly relations, curbing feelings of irritation and generally displaying a positive attitude attracts a far greater reward. In the eyes of God, people who show such restraint will be reckoned as being the righteous (Quran 16:128). The righteous are those who have given proof of living in the world at an elevated ethical level and at a superior level of humanity.

Without avoidance of friction, it is not possible to attain excellence in human character.

AT THE TIME OF DIFFERENCES

Differences are not evil. What is evil is man not dealing with differences in an appropriate way. Going in fear of God despite there being differences is a great Islamic act.

Differences are part of life. Differences continually arise among people, be they religiously inclined or not. Their inevitability has to be accepted. They can seldom be glossed over or summarily eradicated. Nevertheless, right-minded individuals are capable of adopting the correct attitude to them, however intractable they may seem.

A true believer is one who does not make an issue of differences. He does not take them as necessarily ill-intentioned. Moreover differences should be limited to the sphere in which they have arisen. And treating others as being wrong on every count or as having double standards, or being ill intentioned, or insincere is a totally un-Islamic course to take.

Breaking off a relationship because of differences is not right. In such cases, serious discussion should take place and mutual relationships should be kept up.

In the present world everything exists or happens so that one may be put to the test. Differences are also meant for the purpose of testing an individual. One ought to be extremely prudent on the occasion of differences. One should continually strive to avoid any reaction which would not be approved of by God.

Adhering to justice whenever differences occur is without doubt a difficult proposition. But the reward for this is very great. In Islam every good deed is a form of worship. It is a form of worship when a person faced with differences and conflict prevents himself from being consumed by feelings of enmity and revenge. Only by doing so is he able to adhere to the way of justice, even when differences seem overwhelming.

Differences are no evil. What is evil is a person not dealing with differences in an appropriate way, such as would ensure his passing the divine test. Going in fear of God despite there being differences is a great Islamic act. Not going in fear of God at the time of differences is grievously un-Islamic.

A GOOD NEIGHBOUR IS A GOOD HUMAN BEING

A believer must unilaterally make concessions to his neighbours. Ignoring any unpleasant behaviour, he must return good for evil.

An individual's most immediate human contact—after family members—is his neighbours. These neighbours might just remain acquaintances, but the whole scenario is better if they become companions. It should be borne in mind that keeping the neighbours happy and establishing good relations with them are important aspects of a God-oriented life.

Whether a neighbour belongs to one's own religion or some other religion, whether he belongs to one's own nation or some other nation, in every way, he is to be respected. In all circumstances, he must be given his dues as is the demand of both religion and humanity.

According to a hadith, the Prophet of Islam once

observed: “By God he is not a believer, by God he is not a believer, by God he is not a believer from whose evils his neighbour is not in peace.” (Sahih al-Bukhari 6016) According to this hadith, if a Muslim harms his neighbour, or even if he lives in such a way that his neighbours are not happy with him, then such a person’s faith in Islam will become suspect.

For any person the first criterion for his humanity and his religiosity derives from how his neighbour regards him. From his behaviour with his neighbours, it is possible to tell whether or not he possesses human feelings, or whether or not he is sensitive to Islamic commandments.

If a person’s neighbour is happy with him, it is a proof that he lives up to the standards of religion and humanity. And if his neighbour is not happy with him, it will be a proof that he falls below this standard.

According to Islam, a believer must unilaterally make concessions to his neighbours. He should ignore any unpleasant behaviour on the part of the neighbour and try to return good behaviour for his unpleasant behaviour. He must return good for evil.

Becoming a good neighbour is the proof of being a good human being. Those who behave in this way will share in the mercy and blessings of God in this world as well as the next world.

A BELIEVER'S DUTIES TOWARD HUMANITY

Respecting and fulfilling the rights of his fellow men is the duty of a believer. The fulfilment of these duties makes him deserving of God's succour.

The prime duty of a believer is that which he owes to God. This duty to God (called *huququllah*) entails accepting God with all His perfect attributes, worshipping Him, holding himself in readiness to serve Him and willingly accepting that whatever God demands of him, he will immediately and wholeheartedly carry out.

Another duty of a believer (called *huququl ibaad*) is respecting the rights of his fellow men. This is the duty that he owes to humanity. All men and women who are relatives, neighbours or compatriots or partners in dealings, have certain rights over a believer. Respecting those rights is incumbent on the believer.

Without doing so, he cannot be held deserving of God's succour.

What are the rights of mankind? Wherever a believer comes in contact with other human beings, he should behave as Islam demands. He should not deal with them in ways that do not measure up to Islamic criteria.

For instance, the believer must respect others, never dishonour them, and he should do things which are to their benefit. If it is not possible to benefit others, then at least he must save them from any harm. He must always fulfil promises and never try to usurp others' wealth and property. He must always deal justly with others. He must never accept anything bad said about others without having evidence to support what is said. When giving advice, it must be as a well-wisher. He must never give insincere advice to anyone.

Everyone should fulfil the obligations he has to others. This is called fulfilling one's rights over humankind.

THE CREATION PLAN OF GOD

According to the creation plan of God the present world is a place for preparation while the next eternal world is the place to reap the rewards of one's actions.

God has a plan for human beings. The plan is that every human being be put in this world for a limited period of time in order to test him, then whoever measures up to the test is accepted and rewarded by God. Those who do not pass this test will be rejected outright.

To meet the exigencies of the test, a person has been given freedom in his life in this world. Here what an individual receives is not his rights: it is only a test paper. Every situation is a test paper, and in every situation, one has to rise to the occasion.

It is not proper for a person to be carried away by his desires and whims. The right attitude for him is that

he should try to understand the creation plan of God and, accepting that, build his life accordingly.

By misusing his freedom in this present world, he can deviate from the divine plan, but he cannot save himself from the consequences thereof.

And in such a situation, it is in the interests of everyone to be extremely prudent in determining the course his or her life will take. Instead of being guided by his own wishes a person should be guided by God's will. Instead of chasing after his desires, he should lead a life in accordance with divine principles.

Every human being is a divine creation, but at the same time, he is subject to the creation plan of God. It is in acceding to this that he will discover the secret of human progress.

Just as humans have achieved success in building a modern industrial civilization by discovering the laws of nature and making use of them, so also, in the next eternal world humans will have a greater success only when they place God's creation plan for humanity in the right perspective and then adopt that plan for building their lives here in this world.

SERVING HUMANITY

The service of mankind is the service of humanity. After submission to and worship of God, there is no work greater than that of serving people.

One of the noble qualities of a believer is his desire to serve people, that is, serving God's creatures, and fulfilling their needs without the hope of any return.

Helping others is, in fact, an acknowledgement of the divine blessings received by him. Only that person helps others who has more blessings than others, for instance, one who has vision helps those who are blind, a healthy person comes to the assistance of a handicapped person, a wealthy person aids a poor man, or a person who has power or position helps out someone who has no such resources.

On all such occasions, when a person helps someone because of the gifts God has given him, he acknowledges the blessings of God. It is like his saying,

“O God whatever I have has been given by You. Now I am again spending it in Your cause.”

By doing social service, by coming to the assistance of others, a person does not just help others but rather elevates his own position, because using the gifts he has received from God only for himself is being selfish.

A selfless person is one who does not live inside the cocoon of his own self but aims to reach out to the whole of humanity. He feels he must lead his life in this world as the well-wisher of all. He should be ever ready to help others. He should accept the rights others have over his wealth.

The service of mankind is in other words, the service of humanity and after the worship of God, there is no work greater than that of serving people.

ISLAM AND HUMAN EQUALITY

In Islam all greatness is reserved for God alone. All human beings are equally God's creation. In this way, there is no difference between one man and another.

In Islam all human beings are equal. The Prophet of Islam, on the occasion of the Final Pilgrimage, declared that no Arab had superiority over a non-Arab. No white man had superiority over a black man. Superiority derives only from being God-fearing rather than from race or colour.

Among human beings there are many differences to be found. But these differences are only for the purpose of recognition rather than to indicate superiority. To build a system of social and national life, it is necessary for people to have such features as make them recognisable to one another. To meet this social need, God has created apparent differences from various respects between people, so that the smooth functioning of the system of the world and

dealings with one another may be facilitated. But, so far as a human being's true superiority is concerned, it is all wholly based on his inherent qualities. That is why there is a hadith which says that God sees people's hearts, He does not see their bodies. Physical differences may affect human affairs, but in the Hereafter, only those will be rewarded who are held to be deserving because of their inner qualities.

In Islam human equality is regarded as of utmost important. At prayers, all believers stand in rows with one another. During Hajj, all Muslims, from all countries wear the same attire to perform the pilgrimage. In Islam everyone has the same position as all others, neither less nor more. By Islamic light, all kinds of greatness are reserved for God alone. In spite of apparent differences between people, all are equally God's creation. There is certainly a difference between God and human beings, but there is no difference between one human being and another.

GOD DOES NOT DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN HIS CREATURES

All human beings are equally God's creatures. They should live in unity and amity in society, just as they live in their own families.

According to Islam, all human beings have been created by the one God. As such, all human beings are of one brotherhood. Differentiating between one person and another is not approved of by God.

Humanity began with one human pair called Adam and Eve. Human beings, wherever they are or in whatever country, they all belong to the same race of Adam and Eve. The differences that are found in colour and language and in other cultural matters, are due to geographical factors. So far as origin is concerned, all human beings are the progeny of Adam and Eve and have now settled all over the world.

The teaching of Islam is that the differences in language, colour and features should not cause people

to regard others as strangers. On the contrary, what should happen ideally, is that they should have good feelings and love for others. They should be of help to one another. All human beings in the vaster sense, should live in unity and amity just as they live in their own families.

The truth is that the relation between one human being and another is not that of strangeness, but of familiarity. It is not one of distance, but of closeness. It is not one of hatred but of love.

When all human beings have the same mother and father, it means that all human beings are equal. Here neither is anyone small nor is anyone great. The difference between great and small is not between one person and another but between an individual and God. So far as human beings are concerned, all have the same position as all others but as compared to God, there is no human being greater than Him. All human beings are equally God's creatures. God looks upon everyone with the same eye. He does not differentiate between his creatures.

HOW TO DEAL WITH ENMITY

Obsessing over conspiracies and enmity causes people to lose their objectivity in thinking. The Quran therefore tells us to ignore all such negativity, and put one's trust in God alone.

During the life of the Prophet Muhammad, many people turned against Islam and began to conspire against the Muslims and their religion. The Quran mentions this at many points. But the strategy that the Quran advised the Muslims to adopt was not that of unearthing these conspiracies, and launching counter campaigns against them and fighting against them to put an end to them and their enmity. On the contrary, the guidance given to the Prophet and his companions in the Quran was that they should trust in God (33:48). That is, they must ignore all conspiracies and animosity. They should only put their trust in God and continue with their positive activities.

This was a very important piece of guidance. Through it, God turned Muslims away from negative thinking

and directed them towards positive thinking. In short, this Quranic teaching meant: “Live in yourself rather than living in others.”

If your mind is filled with the thought that others are conspiring against you, that others have turned into your enemies, it will result in your doubting everyone. You will think everyone has become your enemy or the agent of your enemies. In this way, you will distance yourself from others and thereby lose in strength.

Obsessing over conspiracies and enmity cause people to lose their objectivity in thinking. All their thinking becomes prejudiced. They cannot see the reality of things as they are. They become like the person who, due to some disease in his eye, could see only the thorns of the plants in the garden. Such a person was, as it were, flower blind. He would see the whole garden as being full of thorns. Thousands of beautiful flowers might be blooming there, but he would be incapable of seeing them.

A BELIEVER KEEPS THE PEACE IN EVERY SITUATION

God loves the state of peace. A believer is a peace-loving person and keeps peace at all costs, so that his constructive activities may continue unhampered.

A believer is a peace-loving person. Having faith and being peace-loving are so closely linked with one another that a believer in all situations will try to keep the peace. He can bear with any loss except that of a peaceful environment.

The life a believer wants to lead in the present world is possible only in a peaceful ambience. A state of peace creates a favourable atmosphere for a believer, while a state of turbulence does the very opposite.

Peace always demands some sacrifice. That sacrifice is that even if opponents behave disruptively, this has to be ignored in order to maintain a situation of peace. Even if a disturbance of peace is caused solely by others it has to be glossed over so that an atmosphere

of peace may be maintained. A believer is always ready to make this sacrifice. He bears all kinds of losses and injustice so that peace may not be disturbed, and so that an environment of peace may prevail.

A believer's attitude is always constructive. But such an attitude can be maintained only in a state of peace. That is why he keeps the peace at all costs, so that his constructive activities may continue unhampered.

A believer is a flower in the garden of nature. The flower gets scorched in hot air, while the cool air allows it to remain attractive. The same is true of a believer. For a believer, peace is a basic requirement. Peace is the life of the believer. A believer loves peace. A believer craves peace so that the flower of faith may bloom on his "human tree" and, without any obstacle, may flourish in the environment of nature.

Peace is the religion of the universe. Peace is a universal law of nature. God loves the state of peace. He does not love a state of unrest. It is enough for a believer to love peace. And in no situation should he tolerate any disturbance of the peace.

A LIFE OF WORSHIPPING GOD

A believer keeps to the path of God. Living in higher realities, he settles life's issues thinking not of temporary gains, but of accountability to God and the Hereafter.

The aim of Islam is to develop in individuals the ability to lead a life of God-worship in this world, and an abhorrence of the ungodly life. Life is ungodly when a person's interests are focused on something other than God; all his attention is given to the creations of God and not to the Creator. The thinking, and the emotions of the true believer are centred wholly on the Being of the one God. When a person opts for a path to reach a certain destination, he has to keep to this path without turning right or left, because if he did so, he would never reach his destination. The same holds true for anyone who wants to find God.

In the present world, when a person wants to begin his life, he finds many paths to take. There is a single path

which leads to God, while there are many other paths which divert him and lead him to another destination. The true seeker of God keeps sedulously to the path of God. He takes extra care not to turn to the right or left. If he keeps to the right path leading towards God, he will certainly reach God. On the contrary, one who turns to the right or left will lose his way, and will never be able to reach God.

Wavering from one path to another means that a person becomes subservient to his desires. He attaches importance to worldly interests. He becomes a prey to such feelings as anger, hatred, jealousy and egoism. He recklessly takes any path which he finds before him.

On the contrary, the path leading to God opens up only to one who thinks deeply on the higher realities; who prudently sets his course by serious decisions. He is one who settles the issues of his life on the basis of accountability in the Hereafter rather than on the basis of mere temporary gains or whimsical motivations.

MORNINGS AND EVENINGS IN THE LIFE OF A BELIEVER

While performing his daily activities, a believer continues to remember God, seek God's blessings, introspect and remain within the bounds set by God.

Islam gives a complete plan for living, covering the entire life of the believer. From morning till evening, no moment of life lies beyond the sphere of Islam. A believer gets up early in morning after a night's sleep. First of all, he purifies his body by performing his ablutions, then he says his dawn prayer. This is the beginning of the life of a believer which starts with purification and worship. Afterwards, throughout the day until noon, he conducts his business affairs. But during this activity, a believer keeps remembering God in all matters, remaining within the boundaries set by God. In his dealings, he is totally honest, and in his meetings with people, he fully adheres to moral principles.

Then comes the time for the second prayer, which is said at noon. This is called the Zuhr Prayer. In this, he renews his relationship with God. He purifies his body and soul and then is again involved in the struggle of life. Always a person of principle, he remains engaged in his activities until the time comes for the third prayer, called the Asr Prayer. Once again he goes to pray and seeks God's blessings.

In this way, a believer's time keeps passing until sunset when it is time for fourth prayer, called the Maghrib Prayer. Again the believer leaves his work to say his prayers, according to the method laid down for him, drawing religious and spiritual sustenance from them. After this prayer he again goes to attend to the demands of daily life with a religious mind, until the time comes for the fifth prayer called the Isha Prayer. After offering the Isha Prayer, the believer introspects about his whole day's activities before going to bed so that the next morning, when he gets up, he is able to start his work in a better mental state.

SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT FROM EVERYDAY EVENTS

Just as material food is necessary for the health of the body, so also is learning lessons from all events a form of spiritual nourishment for a believer.

A true believer has the aptitude to learn lessons from everything going on around him. Faith makes a person sensitive. In all matters he tries to go beyond mere appearances in order to plumb the depths of things, thus arriving at their true meaning. Things which people see and fail to take seriously yield up a treasure of wisdom to the believer. His insight is so developed that he is able to see beyond superficialities to the deeper level of things.

The believer has sublime qualities which make his personality multi-dimensional. At every moment he discovers new things. The scattered universe becomes a great source of provision for his soul.

In the rays of the sun, he can see the light of God. In a

breath of fresh air, he experiences the divine touch. In the verdure of the world with its trees and colourful flowers, he has glimpses of a world of meaning. He can see a more profound meaning in every spring and a more meaningful autumn in every autumn.

In this way, all human and non-human events become a source of taking lesson for him. He increases his knowledge from the knowledge of others. Others' mistakes become a cause of improvement of his own mistakes. Right from the ants to the camels and from the rivers to the mountains, in everything he finds some aspect which adds to his insight. All of these become the sources of new experiences, giving his personality a many-sidedness.

Just as material food is necessary for the health of the body, so also is learning lessons from all events a form of spiritual nourishment for a human being. If material food guarantees physical well-being so also is the learning of lessons a guarantee of spiritual health.

HOW SHOULD ONE LIVE IN THE FAMILY

Every member of the family should focus on their duty rather than on their rights. When a problem occurs, everyone should strive to nip it in the bud, rather than let it escalate.

A tradition of the Prophet has it that, “The best of you is one who is the best for his family.” (Sunan Ibn Majah 1977) This holds true for every member of the family, whether man or woman, senior or junior. Everyone has to give proof of being a better man or a better woman within the family. Everyone has to become a worthy member of his or her family.

What is the family home? The home is the primary unit of social life. Many homes together build a society. If the environment at home is good then the society will also be good. And if the environment at home goes awry, then the environment of the society will also certainly go wrong. Another name for a group of good

homes is a good society. On the contrary, a group of bad homes makes for a bad society.

The first criterion of a good individual is his conduct at home. If a person is good and very friendly outside his home but in his home is unbending and inconsiderate in his attitude, he cannot be deemed a good person, because the real criterion of humanity is a person's behaviour at home rather than his behaviour outside the home.

How should one live in the family? The elders must take care of the younger family members and the younger family members must give proper respect to the elders. The men should be kind and gentle with their womenfolk at home. And the womenfolk should be considerate of the men. All the occupants of the home must have their eyes set on duty rather than on their rights. Every member should take his share in household duties and should also help with others responsibilities. Whenever there is any problem at home, everyone should strive to nip it in the bud rather than let it escalate.

The secret of successful family life is the willingness to be of service and compatibility. Every member of the family should be wholehearted in serving others and whenever differences and complaints arise, they should be ready to sink their difference and live harmoniously.

THERE'S BEAUTY IN SIMPLICITY

Living in a state of servitude to God, one inevitably becomes drawn to simplicity. Then, one devotes oneself totally to the achievement of higher purposes in life.

A believer is one who has found God. One who has found God naturally starts appreciating sublime realities. He rises above appearances and takes a keen interest in the world of meaning. Such a person as a matter of temperament becomes one who loves simplicity. He believes in “simple living and high thinking.”

Those who acquire a taste for what is real, lose interest in external, material things. Such people start relishing simplicity. Material things lose their attraction for them. Their souls derive peace from the things of nature. Unnatural or artificial things have no appeal for them. They feel that they are obstacle to their spiritual journey.

Simplicity is a believer's strength. It is a support to him. By embracing simplicity, a believer is able to save himself from wasting his time in irrelevant things. He saves himself from being embroiled in unnecessary matters. And in this way, he is able to devote himself totally to the achievement of higher purposes.

Simplicity is a believer's food. Simplicity becomes an adornment of his modesty. In an atmosphere of simplicity, his personality is better nourished. Simplicity is a believer's beauty. For a believer simplicity is life. If a believer ever finds himself in a world of artificial attractions, he feels as if he is shut up in some prison.

A believer regards himself as God's servant in the most absolute sense. This enables him to live tranquilly in his state of servitude. The temperament of one who willingly lives in his state of servitude will inevitably become drawn to simplicity, because any other style of living which is not marked by simplicity will be at variance with his character and he will not be able to countenance such a situation.

MOVE WITHIN YOUR SPHERE

The believer leads his life in the sphere fixed for him by God. Staying within their limits makes them deserving of God's mercy in this world and the Hereafter.

There are innumerable planets and stars in the universe. All these are constantly rotating in the vastness of space. Space is an infinite field for the movement of innumerable celestial bodies but it is astonishing that no collision ever takes place between them.

What is the secret of this? It is that every star and every planet moves in its orbit with the utmost precision. It never deviates from its celestial course. It is this law of movement which definitely stops the stars and planets from colliding.

A human being is required to follow exactly the same course. God has provided a fixed sphere, for the functioning or activities of all human beings.

Every person has to move within the boundaries of his sphere. When all human beings move in their own spheres, a state of peace is established in society. But when people do not stay within their limits then conflict will certainly begin in society. People will start to clash with one another, in which case they will destroy themselves as well as others.

How should a person lead his life in society? How should he deal with others? What course should he adopt in his words and deeds? For all these issues, God has given clear guidance. He has laid down some eternal principles. Those who conduct themselves just as God desires are, as if, rotating in their fixed spheres. On the contrary, those, who do what has been forbidden by God are, as if, digressing from their fixed sphere; such are those people who produce all kinds of evil in society. Not only do they destroy themselves but they also bring about the ruination of society.

The true believer is one who leads his life in the sphere fixed for him by God. It is individuals such as him who will receive God's mercy in this world and in the next eternal world will have eternal blessings heaped upon them.

THE PURPOSE OF WEALTH

Wealth is a means of putting man to the test. The proper use of wealth leads him to progress, while its wrong use leads him to destruction.

Where wealth is a need in life, it cannot be the aim of life. If wealth is earned so that life's needs may be fulfilled, it is a person's best supporter. But if the acquisition of wealth is set up as the aim of life and the making of more and more money comes to be regarded as a great achievement, then the possession of wealth becomes a misfortune which will destroy a person in this world as well as in the Hereafter.

Every human being has to live in this world for a specified period of time. This being so, a person needs the wherewithal to sustain himself in this world. There has to be considerable expenditure on resources and as such it is necessary for everyone to earn money. In

this context, money or wealth is a valuable support for everyone.

But another facet of human life requires one to gain knowledge. One has to make efforts towards spiritual progress. One has to play a positive part in the development of humanity. One has to develop his personality in such a way that he may become a beneficial member of society.

This is the actual aim or purpose of life. The achievement of this purpose is possible only when a person devotes a considerable amount of energy to it. There should be a limit to the amount of time and energy spent on earning money so that other, more worthy activities may not be neglected.

Wealth fulfils the material or physical needs of a person. But wealth does not suffice to fulfil his spiritual and intellectual needs. One who makes the acquisition of money the be all and end all of life will nourish his body but starve his soul. His intellectual life will be so deprived that it will almost cease as to exist.

According to Islam, wealth is a means of putting a person to the test. The proper use of wealth leads him to all kinds of progress, while the wrong use of wealth leads him into the pit of destruction.

LOSS AND GAIN

In this world, both losing and gaining are tests. Neither is a loser a failure nor is a gainer victorious. Successful is one who maintains his composure in both situations.

In this world a person is sometimes the loser and sometimes the gainer. Loss and gain are two experiences everyone undergoes at one time or another. No one is exempt.

Now the question arises: what does one make of such experiences? Islam tells us that both kinds of experience are meant as tests. Here gaining in itself does not mean success. Similarly, losing does not mean that one has become a total failure.

The actual importance in the matter of losing and gaining does not lie in loss or gain. What is crucial is the kind of response one gives whilst undergoing these experiences.

In the case of losing, a person should not regard

himself as deprived and a failure: he should not lose all hope and fall to lamenting and complaining. On the contrary, he must prove himself capable of rising above the experience by taking everything in his stride. He should bear all forms of adversity patiently and maintain his balance. He should think that just as the giver is God so also is the taker God. This being so, he has to willingly accept His decision, because it is only in doing so that he can again be deserving of God's mercy and succour.

Conversely, when he is the gainer, he should not become proud and consider himself superior to everyone else. On the contrary, he should ensure that success only adds to his modesty. In relation to God and humanity, whatever responsibilities devolve upon him should be shouldered by him in a far superior way. In this world, losing and gaining are both tests. Neither is a loser a failure nor is a gainer victorious. The true sign of success or failure is how the individual copes with these experiences.

The successful one is he who, after experiencing loss or gain, maintains his composure. None of these experiences cause him to deviate from the path of moderation. It is people of such staunchness who will be held successful in the eyes of God. Nothing will come in the way of their success.

SALVATION FOR WHOM

Salvation in the Hereafter is for those who have made themselves deserving of salvation in the life before death by their righteous actions.

What is the greatest issue that should concern a person? It is to attain to salvation in the life to come after death and to have a share in God's mercy for all eternity.

Everyone who is born into this present world has to enter into another world after death. In the present world, a person has all kinds of opportunities to shine while being tested. In the next world, what he will receive will be by way of rewards for his actions. In the world before death he received everything, whether or not he deserved it. But in the world after death, this will no longer be the case. He will receive nothing without having deserved it. At that time, the sole criterion for receiving anything will be merit.

In the next world, only those who are held to be

deserving will be showered with blessings of all kinds, whereas those who are lacking in merit, will have nothing.

This is every human being's greatest problem. Everyone ought to focus totally on not being held undeserving in the next life so that he may not be one of those who fail to achieve salvation. Everyone must devote the utmost effort and give his full attention to how he conducts himself in this present world, so that he may not be held to be lacking in merit in the next stage of life, but rather be the worthy recipient of blessings and salvation.

The next world is a perfect and eternal world, in which there will be all kinds of pleasure and happiness. It is this world to which a person should aspire and it is this world for which he should expend all his energy. It is for this world, full of blessing, that an individual should prove his mettle before rather than after death. The world of today is the world of action: the next world is a world of reaping the rewards for one's actions.

Salvation in the Hereafter is for those who have made themselves deserving of salvation in the life before death.

PRAYER: EXPRESSION OF HEARTFELT ATTACHMENT TO GOD

Prayer, calling upon God, is an unceasing activity. It is an expression of one's unending and heartfelt attachment to God at all times.

Prayer means calling upon God. This means that God's servant calls to Him asking for something for his needs, or to express his willingness to serve Him. This call in itself is a form of worship.

God is a living and eternal existence. He hears, He sees, He has the power to do what He wants and sets the course of events in whatever direction He wants.

It is this conviction about God which arouses this feeling within a person that he should call upon Him. When a person achieves God realization, he naturally has an urge to call upon God to meet his needs. He should call upon God for the blessings of this world and the Hereafter. He should acknowledge God as his Sustainer and Provider.

There is no time or method set for prayer nor does it require a separate language. At all times, an individual can call upon God in any form and in any language. If calling upon God has come from a sincere heart, this prayer will instantly reach God. God will hear it and accordingly will decide upon its acceptance.

There are certain prayers which are repeated in different forms of ritual worship. But most prayers are those which are not linked with any particular activity. For instance, when a person goes to bed at night, some words of prayer come to his lips. Similarly, when he gets up in the morning, he begins to pray for a better beginning for the new day. The same thing happens when he meets someone or eats or drinks something or boards some conveyance to go on a journey, or during his business dealings. Or even in any other situation, in relation to it some words of prayer are uttered by him, for example, 'O God, in this matter grant me something better.' This action of prayer in a believer's life occurs continually in different forms.

Prayer means calling upon God. And calling upon God is an unceasing activity. It goes on in all situations. Prayer is an expression of one's unending and heartfelt attachment to God. The life of a believer is not at any time free from prayer.

PRAYERS REFRESH THE FAITH OF THE BELIEVER

Prayers come to the lips of a believer on all occasions. They continually refresh the faith of a believer, until finally he leaves this world to meet his Maker.

Islam has given us a number of prayers amongst its others teachings. Many of these prayers have been recorded in the books of Hadith. These prayers tell us what kind of words of invocation should fall from the lips of the believers on different occasions. For instance, when someone meets another person he should greet him by saying, 'Peace be upon you' (*Assalamualaykum*). Similarly, when a believer is about to eat food, he should begin by saying, 'In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful,' and when he finishes his food the he should say *Alhamdulillah* (Praise be to God). He should utter the words appropriate to each occasion.

This means that the believer begins his eating and

drinking in the name of God and ends his eating and drinking in the name of God. It is his way of thanking God and acknowledging His blessings.

When some evil idea creeps in a believer's mind, he seeks refuge in God by saying, *Allahumma inni aauzubika minash shaitan nir rajim*, 'I seek refuge in God from Satan, the accursed.' (Musnad Ahmad 16740) When he is faced with some problem, he spontaneously says, *Allah humma alaika tawakkalna*, 'O God, in You we have placed our trust.' (Quran 60:4) In a similar way, when he receives some wealth, he says, *Allah humma barik lana fi amwalina*, that is, 'O God, bless us in our wealth.' (Sahih al-Bukhari 1037). When a believer undertakes some journey, he has these words on his lips: 'O God, You are my Companion during the journey and the Guardian of my family.' (Sahih Muslim 1342)

When he hears of someone's death he says, *Inna lillahi wa inna ilaihi rajiun*, 'We belong to God and to Him we shall return.' (Quran 2:156) In this way, at every juncture of life and at every stage, Islam gives us some prayer to say. These prayers are meant to refresh the faith of the believer. This transforms every happening in this present world into a godly experience. In this way, a believer leads his life in God's remembrance and prayer, until finally he leaves this world to meet his Maker.

GOD IS THE SUSTAINER

God is our Sustainer, who provides us with abundant blessings. This should make a person worship God alone and not associate anything or anyone else with Him.

In the second chapter of the Quran the believers have been told “to worship your Lord, Who created you and those before you, so that you may become righteous, Who made the earth a bed, and the sky a canopy; and it is He who sends down rain from above for the growth of every kind of fruit for your sustenance. And do not knowingly set up rivals to God.” (2:21-22)

God alone has created human beings and all that is in the heavens and on earth. He has invested the world with profound significance and He constantly looks after its needs. The proper course for an individual is to take God as his Creator, Master and Sustainer, and not attempt to set up anyone as a partner with Him; that is, a person should give himself up entirely to

God. But since He is invisible, it often happens that a person comes to give importance to some visible object and starts worshipping it instead of God. He equates the created with the Creator—sometimes partly sometimes wholly, at times calling it by the name of God and at times doing so without taking God's name.

Therein lies a person's basic error. The prophets taught people to glorify God alone, and forsake any other things that they had elevated to a position of glory. A human being is such a creature as cannot stand on his own. At all times, he needs different things to support his survival on earth. He needs an earth which has gravity so that he may stay on it. He needs an atmosphere which at all times supplies him with oxygen. He needs a sun which gives him continuous heat and light. He needs a continuous flow of water in this world because no life is possible without water. He needs such food as constantly gives him strength and energy.

God has provided abundant quantities of innumerable things in this world, and that enough for a person to worship God alone and not associate anything or anyone else with Him.

A PERSON OWES EVERYTHING TO HIS CREATOR

A person owes everything to his Creator. If he becomes conscious of this reality, his Lord will mean everything to him, as a mother means everything to her infant.

Chapter 2 of the Quran states: “In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of night and day; in the ships that sail the ocean bearing cargoes beneficial to man; in the water which God sends down from the sky and with which He revives the earth after its death, scattering over it all kinds of animals; in the courses of the winds, and in the clouds pressed into service between earth and sky, there are indeed signs for people who use their reason.” (2:164)

The vast universe spread out before us serves as a magnificent introduction to God. The existence of a boundless cosmos of which the earth and the heavens are parts is proof that it must have a Creator. Despite apparently different and contrasting elements, all

things work together in absolute harmony, showing that their Creator and Sustainer is the one and only God. Then the fact that every single thing benefits the rest of the universe, in some manner or the other, shows that all things have been designed according to a definite and absolutely conscious plan. Apparently lifeless objects are invested with life through a natural process: this shows that death is only a temporary phase in this universe. Here death is always followed by new life. Every variety of animate creature flourishes in this world in huge numbers. All are being sustained by varied forms of the same food and drink, indicating the unfathomable power of God. The atmosphere totally encompassing the earth shows that a person's life is entirely in the Creator's hands. Everything in this universe has been harnessed to cater to the needs of human beings. This is indicative of the fact that the Creator is a highly compassionate Being. Even before an individual has been born into the world, all his requirements have already been taken care of. Mankind has only one God: He is the only worthy focus of a person's attention. Our very existence on earth, and all the benefits we derive from the world around us, are manifestations of His unbounded grace and mercy. In return, we should become God's

devoted servants, living for Him, dying for Him, and setting all our hopes on winning His eternal favour. A person owes everything to his Creator. If he becomes conscious of this, his Lord will mean everything to him, as a mother means everything to her infant.

THE MEANINGFUL UNIVERSE CANNOT HAVE A MEANINGLESS END

Those who think deeply realize that it is unthinkable that a meaningful universe should have a meaningless end. This leads one to seek one's purpose in life.

Chapter 3 of the Quran states: “There are signs in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day for people of understanding; who remember God while standing, sitting and [lying] on their sides, and who ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth, saying, ‘Lord, You have not created all this without purpose. Glory be to You! Save us from the torment of the Fire.

Lord, those whom You condemn to enter the Fire You have surely brought to disgrace. Wrongdoers will have no supports.’” (3:190-192)

The universe with its whole existence is a silent declaration of God’s presence. When a person removes the manmade veils from his eyes and opens his ears, he starts seeing and hearing this silent proclamation all around him. It then appears improbable to him that, in a universe where the stars and the planets have continued to exist for millions of years, a person may cease to exist within fifty or a hundred years, taking with him to his grave all his desires and aspirations. In a world which abounds in the beauties of nature, with the fragrance of flowers, where countless meaningful blessings like air, water and the sun have been provided, should a person’s end be nothing but only sorrow and suffering? He also finds it unthinkable that, in a world of limitless possibilities where, just by sowing seeds in the ground, a whole forest of trees comes into existence, one should fail to receive the fruits of virtuous actions; that in a world where the sun shines daily after the dark night, centuries would go by without being illuminated by the lustre of fairness and justice; that in a world where earthquakes and tempests lie dormant, people should continue to

perpetrate tyranny and oppression without ever being checked.

Those who think deeply, seeking a more profound reality, find it unthinkable that a meaningful universe should have a meaningless end. They discover that the message conveyed by the preacher is the announcement, in human language, of the same reality, which is being silently proclaimed by the whole universe.

THE UNIVERSE SPEAKS OF THE GLORY OF GOD

The discovery of the meaningfulness of the universe is to discover the Creator through His creation. This makes one a God-worshipper with his eyes focussed on the Hereafter.

Chapter 3 of the Quran states that: “There are signs in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day for people of understanding; who remember God while standing, sitting and [lying] on their sides, and who ponder

over the creation of the heavens and the earth, saying, 'Lord, You have not created all this without purpose. Glory be to You! Save us from the torment of the Fire. Lord, those whom You condemn to enter the Fire You have surely brought to disgrace. Wrongdoers will have no supporters. Lord, we have heard a caller calling to the true faith saying, "Believe in your Lord," and we believed. Lord, forgive us our sins and remove from us our bad deeds and make us die with the virtuous. Our Lord! Grant us what You have promised to us through Your messengers, and do not humiliate us on the Day of Resurrection. Surely, You never fail to fulfil Your promise.'" (3:190-194)

A person finds himself in a world where countless signs of God are scattered all around him. These signs are indicative of reality. Those who reflect and ponder over these signs and earnestly try to hear the message, will certainly find the Creator amidst the creation which demonstrates His glory.

The discovery of the meaningfulness of the universe is no simple matter. This is to discover the Creator through His creation. It is to find the sought (God) by the seeker. The inevitable result of this discovery is that a person becomes serious to the utmost degree. This discovery further reflects in his personality. He

becomes a companion of those who were seekers of the truth and who followed the truth after discovering it.

The discovery of reality is not merely the discovery of some philosophy. It is the discovery of one's responsibilities. It is the discovery of one's beginning and end. One who made this discovery, he necessarily opts for a life of God-worship, directs his gaze to the straight path which will lead him to Heaven.

SPIRITUAL DEATH

Everyone is a seeker after the truth by birth. One who is able to find truth is spiritually awakened, while one who does not is spiritually dead.

Chapter 6 of the Quran states: "Can he who was dead, to whom We gave life, and a light whereby he could walk among people be like him who is in utter darkness from which he can never emerge? Thus the deeds of those who deny the truth have been made fair-seeming to them." (6:122)

One such person is he who did not receive the truth, or when the truth appeared before him, he failed to accept it. Such a being is little better than a dead person. In the intellectual sense, the result of the deprivation of the truth was that his inner personality failed to move in the right direction. His mind did not receive the desired intellectual food. His soul, which was a seeker after the truth by birth, could not perceive what he wanted.

Such a person will apparently be alive physically but, spiritually, he will be a dead person. Being deprived of material food renders the human body lifeless. Similarly, the inner personality of such a person will sink into a lifeless state. In the physical sense he would be alive but spiritually he would be dead. On the contrary, one who has discovered the truth, who has opened his heart to guidance, will have an inner existence which is alive and resilient. The truth will become the light of his eyes with which he will see the paths of the world. It will become the energy of his feet which will enable him travel to the path of truth. The truth will reflect in his speech and in his character. He will live in truth and die in truth.

The difference between one who has discovered the truth and one who is deprived of the truth is that of

life and death. If one is dead, the other is alive in the full sense. Though apparently alive, a person becomes virtually dead when he is unable to perceive the truth.

ON DOOMSDAY

On Doomsday it will become apparent to people that the guidance provided by God through His messengers was so clear that nobody could have remained unaware of realities.

Chapter 6 of the Quran states: “Company of jinn and mankind! Did messengers not come from among you to recite My revelations to you, and warn you of the meeting of this Day?’ They will say, ‘We bear witness against ourselves.’ It was the life of this world that deceived them and so they will bear witness against themselves, that they rejected the truth. Your Lord would not destroy a community for its wrongdoing, so long as its people were still unaware.” (6:130-131)

When Satan deceives a person and wins him over to his side, he tries to fulfil his challenge to God which

he made at the beginning of creation that he would make a large part of God's creation fall a prey to his temptations (17:62).

On Doomsday, when the veil is removed from reality, it will be clear that those who had gone astray, or had misguided others, did not do so because of any misunderstanding. The reason for this was not their being unaware of the truth but their deliberately ignoring it. They could not rise above worldly pomp and show; they could not forego immediate benefits. The guidance provided by God through His special messenger was so clear that nobody could have remained unaware of realities. But their worship of the world drew a veil over their eyes; in spite of knowing, they chose to remain unaware; in spite of listening, they did not pay heed.

In the Hereafter, they will be shorn of the artificial supports on the strength of which they had remained careless of the Truth. There it will be pointed out how the Truth had appeared before them and how they had rejected it with the help of false words; how, though their mistake had been explained to them, they still thought that they had been successful in justifying their stand by clever misrepresentations.

God forgives unintentional error but He does not forgive arrogance or insolence.

SATAN'S DECEPTION

One who treads the path of jealousy and pride makes himself deserving of hell, while one who remains humble, proves that he deserves the garden of Paradise.

Chapter 7 of the Quran states: “We created you, then We shaped you and then We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate yourselves before Adam,’ and they all prostrated themselves, except Satan. He was not among those who prostrated themselves.

God asked, ‘What prevented you from prostrating yourself when I commanded you to?’ He replied, ‘I am better than he is; You created me from fire, while You created him from clay.’ God said, ‘Get down from here! This is no place for your arrogance. Get out! You are contemptible!’ Satan said, ‘Give me respite until the Day of Resurrection,’ and God replied, ‘You are granted respite.’ Then Satan said, ‘Because You have put me in the wrong, I will lie in ambush for them on Your straight path: then I will surely come upon them

from before them and from behind them and from their right and from their left, and then You will find most of them ungrateful.' He said, 'Get out of here, despised, and rejected! I shall fill Hell with all of those who follow you.'" (7:11-18)

Whatever God has bestowed upon a person in this world, has been given for the purpose of eliciting his gratitude. But this is the very thing which he does not offer to his Lord. The reason for this is that Satan contrives to distort a person's feelings and steers him away from any expression of gratitude.

It becomes evident from the story of Adam and Satan what the real criterion is for the judgement of one's case. A person is being judged at the point where feelings of jealousy and pride develop in the human heart. In this world of trial, it may repeatedly happen that one individual rises above another; sometimes a person receives a greater share of wealth and honour as compared to his fellowmen. Sometimes, in a deal between two persons, it happens that one of them considers his discharging of the other's legitimate rights as degrading to himself. On all such occasions, it is being seen whether a person responds positively or reacts negatively.

Sometimes God chooses a messenger to convey His word to the people, but his status as a guide is not readily acceptable to them. For this would imply that they were inferior to the messenger, as they had failed to arrive at the truth themselves. On such occasions, Satan stirs up feelings of jealousy and pride. Puffed up with the feeling: 'I am better,' a person is not prepared to acknowledge the superiority of his brother. In the eyes of God, this amounts to treading the path of Satan. In such instances, one who treads the path of jealousy and pride makes himself deserving of the fate of hell, while one who remains humble, proves that he deserves to find an abode in the garden of Paradise.

SPIRITUAL RAIMENT

Spiritual Raiment means to live in fear of God, acknowledge the Truth, be modest and lead a principled life.

Chapter 7 of the Quran states: "O children of Adam! We have sent down to you clothes to cover your nakedness, and to be pleasing to the eye;

but the raiment of righteousness is the best. That is one of the signs of God, so that people may take heed. Children of Adam, do not let Satan seduce you, just as he turned your parents out of the Garden: he deprived them of their garment in order to make them aware of their nakedness. He and his forces watch you from where you do not see them! We have made the devils friends of those who do not believe.” (7:26-27)

God has created the system of the world in such a way that its externals are the signs of an inner reality. By pondering over outward things, a pe can arrive at hidden truths. One such outer emblem is human attire.

Clothes protect a person and are also a means of improving his looks and prestige. This is indicative of the fact that a form of clothing is necessary for a person’s spiritual existence as well. This clothing is righteousness born of the fear of God (*taqwa*), which represents the inner personality of a human being. This vestment of *taqwa* on the one hand protects a person from the attacks of Satan and, on the other, enhances his inner self and makes him capable of inhabiting the fine and aesthetic world of Paradise. What is this righteousness, or *taqwa*? It is fear of God, acknowledgment of the Truth, adhering to uniform

criteria for oneself and others, considering oneself a subject of God, behaving with modesty and humility, leading a Hereafter-oriented life instead of going astray in the world. When a person develops these virtues, he 'dresses' his inner self. While the outer body is covered by a garment made of cloth, the inner self, the soul, is clad in *taqwa*. But if his behaviour is the opposite, he is, as it were, laying his inner self bare.

The way that Satan leads a person astray is by misinforming him. He shows the prohibited tree as the fountainhead of all advantages. He approaches a person in such innocuous ways that he has no suspicion that he is about to be misled. Satan knows all the weak points, delicate places in the moral armour of human beings and he takes care to attack those very spots.

Which people is Satan successful in misguiding? He is successful with those who are unable to give proof of faith on occasions of trial; with those who do not carefully ponder over the signs of God; with those who reject valid arguments; and with those who cannot abide by the demands of truth in preference to their own personal inclinations. They do not recognize the truth as such if it does not promote their interests.

REJECTION OF THE TRUTH

On Doomsday everyone will understand that rejecting the Truth was due to arrogance, though one kept quoting 'principles' to justify one's rejection.

Chapter 7 of the Quran states: “For all people a term has been set: and when [the end of] their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor can they advance it. Children of Adam! If messengers come to you from among yourselves, reciting My revelations to you, then those that take warning and mend their ways, on such shall come no fear nor shall they grieve. But those who deny and scorn Our revelations shall be the inmates of Hell, where they shall remain forever. Who does a greater wrong than he who invents lies against God or rejects His revelations? Such people will have what has been decreed for them. And when Our messengers come to them to take away their souls, they shall ask them, ‘Where are those you used to call upon besides God?’

They will answer, ‘They have deserted us,’ and they will bear witness against themselves that they were disbelievers.” (7:34-37)

The decision about Heaven or Hell as the final destination for a person is taken on the basis of his response after the truth has appeared before him, supported by arguments whose rationality is testified to by his intellect. The message is conveyed to him in the full sense. Even after that, if a person refuses to accept the Truth, he does so out of egotism. His desire to maintain his superiority prevents him from lowering himself in comparison to the Truth. Such a person has no value in God’s eyes.

Whenever a person rejects the truth, he does so imagining that he has something to back him up. He may rely on wealth and power, or on respect and popularity. He may feel confident that all his personal matters are in such good order that rejection of the Truth will not harm him in any way. He has erroneously regarded as supports—on which he could depend for salvation—the things, actually meant for his trial.

But on Doomsday, when all these false props desert him, it will not be difficult for him to understand that he was actually rejecting the Truth merely due to arrogance, though he kept quoting ‘principles’ to justify his rejection.

FOLLOW THE WORLD OF NATURE

God has set the world in order. Reform means that man follows the reformed system of his own free will, which is being followed compulsorily by the rest of the universe.

Chapter 7 of the Quran states: “Do not spread corruption on the earth after it has been set in order.” (7:56)

By the reform of the earth means the system that God has established in the physical world. A person has to live by coordinating with the system God has established in the world. It is not lawful for him to adopt an attitude which goes against this system.

God has made this world as a realm of silent activities. Therefore do not create mischief on earth. Here God has arranged clean air for you to breath in so you should not pollute it. The vegetable world and the animal world function in their own spheres. You should also function in your own sphere. Do not interfere with

others' spheres. Here, all work is being done with realistic planning. You should also do the same, that is, instead of handling things emotionally or impatiently, you should also proceed in a planned way.

Everything in this world is acting in perfect coordination. You should also lead your life on earth in coordination with everything else. In this world everything is of benefit for others. You too should become of benefit for your fellowmen.

The world has been set in order by God. Human beings have not to reform it. They have only to follow this reformed plan of the Creator. Like the reformed planet earth, people have also to reform human society.

In the world of God, only two attitudes are possible for a person – that of reform and that of creating mischief. The attitude of reform means that a person consciously follows the correct or reformed system which is being followed unconsciously by the rest of the universe. As opposed to this, the attitude of mischief is that where a person deviates from the universal system. He does not live harmoniously with the reformed system of God and adopts some self-made attitude. The reformed world of God is the best place for human habitation as well as gives the best example of righteous human action.

THE VOICE OF GOD

God has instilled a conscience in every human being. Everyone has the option either to follow his inner voice, or to ignore it and start following his desires.

Chapter 7 of the Quran states: “When your Lord brought forth offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They replied, ‘We bear witness that You are.’ This He did, lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, ‘We had no knowledge of that.’ Or lest you say, ‘Our forefathers associated others with God before our time, and we are only the descendants who came after them. So are You going to destroy us for what those inventors of falsehood did?’ We explain Our signs in detail thus, so that perhaps they may return to Us.” (7:172-174)

This alludes to the fact that the consciousness of the Creator or Lord has been instilled so deeply in the

soul of human beings that he never loses it. In present times, the experience of Russia on the one hand and the experience of Turkey on the other hand tells us that even in a totally anti-religious environment, human nature does not change, because God consciousness is inherent in human nature.

However, there is one difference between animals and human beings. Animals are not capable of going against their nature. They are compelled to do whatever their inner nature urges them to do. But the case of a human being is different. This awareness inheres in his nature, but he is completely free in the matter of action, even although his mind and his conscience start pointing out to him what is right and what is wrong. A human being has, therefore, the power and the option either to follow his inner voice, or to ignore it and start doing whatever he likes.

It is on such occasions of moral choice that a person is on trial and on the basis of its result, decisions regarding heaven or hell are taken. The one who lends his ears to the voice of God and does whatever He tells him to do through the silent language of his inner nature, passes the test. The doors of heaven will be thrown open for him after death.

Now, nobody has the excuse of ignorance and nobody can say that he is just doing whatever has been done since ancient times. A person brings the consciousness of God along with him right from the time of his birth. This consciousness remains preserved even with changes in his circumstances. In view of this, what excuse does anyone have to follow the path of misguidance?

WHY WE ARE UNGRATEFUL TO GOD

There is perfect coordination between man and the universe. That is why man is provided for everything he needs. Yet man does not submit to God.

Chapter 14 of the Quran states: “It was God who created the heavens and the earth. He sends down water from the sky with which He brings forth fruits for your sustenance; He has made ships subservient to you, so that they may sail across the sea by His command; and has subjected the rivers to you. He has also subjected to you the sun and the moon, both

steadfastly pursuing their courses. He has subjected to you the night as well as the day; He has given you all that you asked of Him; and if you try to reckon up God's favours, you will not be able to count them. Truly man is very unjust, very ungrateful." (14:32-34)

To the most wonderful extent, the present world bears testimony to God's existence. The rotation of the stars and planets in the vastness of space, the provision and sustenance for life on the earth, the abundance of water, a person's ability to run his vehicles on land, sail on water and fly in space, the earth's being favourable to people with its rivers and mountains, the regularity of the seasons and the occurrence of day and night by the light of the sun and the moon—all these are phenomena too great to be adequately expressed in words. There is such perfect coordination between human beings and the universe that every imaginable or unimaginable necessity of an individual has already been provided for here in abundance.

All these things are so wonderful that they should shake a person and should overwhelm him with feelings of willingness to submit to God. In spite of this, why, on seeing the universe, is he not filled with wonder and why does he not tremble at the concept of the Creator of the universe? The reason for this is that a person

sees the universe as soon as he is born. By seeing it again and again he takes it to be an ordinary thing; he does not find any uniqueness in it, and takes it for granted.

Moreover, when a person receives anything in this world, it appears to be available to him by the process of 'cause-and-effect'. On this basis, he thinks that whatever he attains is due to his own diligence and talents. That is why he does not develop feelings of gratitude to God, the Giver and the Sustainer.

SAVE YOURSELF FROM SATANIC BEAUTIFICATION

Those who are sincere and intellectually awakened can go beyond the outer beautification to grasp the inner reality, and save themselves from Satan's deception.

Chapter 15 of the Quran records a dialogue between God and Satan (Iblis). At the time of the creation of the first man, Satan became his enemy from day one. Therefore, challenging this act of God,

he said, “My Lord, since You have let me go astray. I shall make the path of error seem alluring to them on the earth and shall mislead them all, except for Your chosen servants.’ God said, ‘This is the path which leads straight to Me. Surely, you shall have no power over My true servants, except those misguided ones who choose to follow you. Surely, Hell is the place to which they are destined.’” (15:39-43)

In this world, a person, at every moment may come under the influence of Satan. Satan knows the weak points of a person and through them he keeps misleading him. Satan does this by putting a fine veneer on things, that is, presenting evil in the form of good, giving beautiful justifications for wrong deeds.

This is an extremely difficult test. Only those can save themselves from this trial who are sincere, that is, who are selected by God and are able to develop their intellect to the level of being able to counter the beautification of Satan. Whenever Satan sets himself to beautifying some wrong deed, they should be able to see the reality beyond the words; they should be able to go beyond the outer beautification to the inner reality.

In accepting the truth or following the truth it is this Satanic beautification which always acts as an

obstacle. What Satan does is to show falsehood in the form of truth. He insinuates into a person's mind such beautiful explanations or justifications that he starts doubting whether particular attitudes or deeds are wrong. He thinks they are right because of Satan's presenting things in a beautiful light. Saving oneself from this is not possible without intellectual awakening or intellectual development. Those who make themselves conscious of satanic falsehood by the help of God are God's special servants. It is people such as these who will be able to save themselves from Satan's temptation.

GOD COMMANDS JUSTICE AND KINDNESS

Man must be generous and fulfil the rights of others, be they weak or strong. He must also be just, kind and abstain from things forbidden by God.

Chapter 16 of the Quran states: "God commands justice, kindness and giving their [due to] near relatives, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and

injustice and transgression. He admonishes you so that you may take heed! Fulfil the covenant of God when you have made one; and do not break your pledges after their confirmation. Indeed you have made God your surety; for God knows all that you do.” (16:90-91)

The first thing an individual must ensure is that justice (*adl*) is done. This means that whatever right one person has over another should be fully discharged, be the claimant weak or strong. In the fulfilment of rights, only the nature of the right will be considered and not any other factor.

The next thing is showing consideration (*ihsan*). This means that while ensuring that one's rights are honoured, one should be broadminded. The demands of justice should be mitigated by human considerations. One should exhibit such generosity and sympathy as go beyond legal requirements. A person should have the courage as far as possible to reconcile with whatever is rightfully due to him and try to give to others more than is rightfully their due. The third thing is 'giving near relatives their due'. This means that just as a person becomes anxious when he sees his wife and children in need and fulfils that

need, he should be similarly sensitive about the needs of others who are close to him.

After this, three things have been prohibited in this verse.

The first thing is moral evil (*fahsha*) which is clearly judged to be such by the human conscience and is universally considered shameful.

The second is the perpetration of such deeds as are judged improper by common moral standards. This includes all those things which are considered evil and which human nature refuses to accept.

The third thing is transgressing all limits (*baghi*). This includes arrogance; a person exceeding his recognized limits and attacking another person; his engaging in sinful behaviour in order to harm another's life, property and honour; his making use of his strength and influence to gain an illegitimate advantage.

A VIRTUOUS LIFE

Faith in God and the concept of accountability to Him makes one's life virtuous. Then one's thinking, intention and will, all take a positive direction in every respect.

Chapter 16 of the Quran states: "To whoever does good deeds, man or woman, and is a believer, We shall assuredly give a good life; and We will bestow upon them their reward according to the best of their works." (16:97)

The beginning of a virtuous life happens when an individual is convinced of the fact that he has been created by a Creator and that it is He who sustains him. And at every moment he is under His Guardianship. It is this belief which is the sole basis of a virtuous life in this present world.

The whole personality of a person changes once he sincerely accepts this reality. He undergoes a revolution in his life. His character becomes spiritual

in nature. He follows all the teachings God has given to reform himself. Faith and virtuous deeds render his life virtuous. His thinking becomes constructive. His intention and his will all take a positive direction in every respect. He maintains a healthy attitude. Whenever anyone meets him, he feels that he is meeting someone who has a divine light in his heart.

This holds true for both men and women. The secret to spiritual progress is common for both man and woman, that is, the doing of good deeds. In this respect, there is no difference between the one and the other.

Those men and women who have regulated their lives in this healthy way are God's chosen servants. God will select them for special blessings in the present world as well as in the eternal world after death.

A good life in this world is granted by God. But this blessing is received only by those who willingly lead their lives in accordance with the divine plan.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

One should be patient, not hasty. Man's desire for instant gratification is the greatest reason for his being deprived of the bounties of God in the Hereafter.

Chapter 17 of the Quran states: "Yet man asks for evil as eagerly as he should ask for good. Truly, man is indeed hasty. We have made the night and the day as two signs. We blotted out the sign of night and made the sign of the day illuminating, so that you may seek the bounty of your Lord and learn to compute the seasons and the years. We have set everything forth in detail." (17:11-12)

The system of night and day shows that it is the way of God that there should be darkness first and, thereafter, light should take its place. In God's eyes, both of them are equally important. Just as there are benefits in light, similarly, there are benefits in darkness. If there were no distinction between night

and day, how would humans allocate their time and how would they alternate work with rest?

A person should neither be afraid of darkness, nor should he constantly hanker after light, because eternal light is not possible in this world of God. One whose desires are such had better leave this world and go in search of another world.

It is strange that this is the greatest weakness of an individual: he never wants to face any period of darkness, but immediately wants to have light. His undue haste is a sign of this weakness. Haste is, in fact, the equivalent of not reconciling with the plan of God. And not reconciling with the plan of God is the real cause of all human destruction.

God wants a person to be patient about acquiring the immediate luxuries of the world, so that he should keep to the right path on his journey towards the Hereafter. But due to his hasty nature, a person rushes to acquire ephemeral worldly luxuries, which prove to be impediments to his continuing on his onward journey. His desire for instant gratification is the greatest reason for his being deprived of the bounties of the Hereafter.

This is likewise true of the world, where real success is achieved through patience and not by a hasty approach.

THE CONCEPT OF GOD IS INGRAINED IN HUMAN NATURE

Finding oneself helpless, one starts calling out to the one and only God. This brief recognition of God's godhead should become a permanent part of one's life.

Chapter 17 of the Quran states, "Your Lord is He who causes the ships to move onward for you across the sea, so that you may go in quest of His bounty: He is most merciful towards you. When danger threatens you at sea, you call upon Him, and forget all others you are wont to invoke. But when He brings you safe to land, you turn away from Him. Man is ever ungrateful." (17:66-67)

God has imposed certain laws upon our world. This is what enables a person to navigate the seas and fly in the air. All these dispositions were made so that he might realize God's mercies and become a thankful servant of God. But he thinks totally differently. He takes everything for granted, thinking that everything

is happening as a matter of cause and effect. That is why he fails to receive any divine inspiration from life's events.

The concept of God is ingrained in human nature to the utmost extent. One demonstration of this is that when a person is faced with a calamity, such as being on the point of being shipwrecked, all artificial barriers are removed at that moment, and finding himself helpless, he starts calling out to the one and only God.

He is made to experience such adversity so that he may mould his conduct accordingly. This temporary recognition of God's godhead should become a permanent feature in his life. But, unfortunately, that same person who remembers God in the tempest, forgets God as soon as he safely reaches the shore.

BREAK FREE OF MENTAL CONDITIONING

Negative experiences develop a mental conditioning in a person. One who can break free from this and discover the divine way of thinking is rightly guided.

Chapter 17 of the Quran states: “We send down in the Quran that which is healing and a mercy to those who believe; as for the evil-doers, it only increases their loss. When We bestow a favour upon a person, he turns his back and draws aside; and when evil afflicts him he gives himself up to despair. Say to them, ‘Everyone acts in his own way, and your Lord knows best who is rightly guided.’” (17:82-84)

When a person is granted ease and affluence, he demonstrates great self-confidence, becoming stubborn and unwilling to accept any new proposition, as if he were made of iron that cannot be bent. It is when he is deprived of all material props that he experiences a state of helplessness. Then he loses all courage and falls a prey to frustration.

In the present world, everyone undergoes this experience, but there is no one who discovers himself in the process. In this world, where a person is granted full freedom, he shows total disregard for the truth and does not try to imagine what his plight will be when Doomsday comes to take away all his power. How weak a person is, yet how powerful he considers himself to be!

People's circumstances and bent of mind gradually lead them into forming a particular mental framework within which their thoughts are conditioned. But the right way of thinking is that which accords with divine knowledge. And the wrong way is that which runs counter to divine knowledge. This is the point on which a person is being tested. What he has to do is break this framework formed by his mental conditioning, so that he may see things as they are. That is to say that he should start seeing things from the divine viewpoint. Those who break free of this mental conditioning and discover the divine way of thinking are the ones who are rightly guided.

BOWING BEFORE THE TRUTH

Surrendering before the truth amounts to surrendering before God. And one who does not surrender before the truth is as if following Satan.

Chapter 20 of the Quran states: “We made a Covenant with Adam before you, but he forgot, and We found him lacking in constancy. When We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate yourselves before Adam,’ they all prostrated themselves, except for Satan, who refused. We said, ‘Adam, [Satan] is an enemy to you and to your wife. Let him not turn you both out of Paradise and thus make you come to grief.’” (20:115-117)

To adhere steadfastly to God’s commandments, unwavering determination is essential. If a person is influenced by irrelevant factors, he will undoubtedly deviate from the path of God. In order to remain steadfastly on the path of God, it is not enough to know what His commandments are; it is also

absolutely necessary to have the will to resist all that goes against His commandment, and not to let oneself be influenced by it.

When God ordered that all should kneel down before Adam, the angels immediately dropped to their knees. But Satan did not do so. The reason for this difference in behaviour was that the angels treated this matter as pertaining to God, whereas Satan, on the contrary, saw it as the affair of a mere mortal. When an issue concerns God, a person has no option but to bow to His wishes. But when it is treated as relating to a human being, the person in question will appraise the human being before him. If the latter is comparatively stronger, he will kneel down; otherwise he will refuse to kneel down, even if such an action be the demand of truth and justice.

This story of Adam and Satan is being enacted in the life of every person. Everyone is confronted with this situation: in life's activities or dealings he is often faced with such a person to whom he owes something, whether it be in the form of some action or in the form of some good word. On all such occasions a person is again being tested; it is just the same kind of test as the first man was given. On all such occasions a person must surrender before the truth. One who surrenders

before the truth is as if surrendering before God. And one who does not surrender before the truth is as if following Satan.

FINDING GOD IS POSSIBLE

In the mirror of creation one can discover one's Creator by observing the universe, learning lessons from its wisdom and reading all its divine realities.

Chapter 22 of the Quran states: “Do you not see how God has subjected everything on the earth to you, and the ships that sail on the sea by His command. He holds back the sky from falling down on the earth, except with His permission. God is most compassionate and most merciful to mankind—it is He who gave you life. Then He will cause you to die. Then He will give you life again. Surely, man is most ungrateful.” (22:65-66)

All the things of this earth maintain a harmonious balance. If this balance is upset, it will be harmful to us instead of being useful. If a piece of metal is put

in water, it will sink immediately. But God has made water subject to certain rules on account of which, if iron is given the shape of a boat, it will not sink in water. The numerous spheres floating in space should apparently have fallen down, but according to a set law of nature, they keep exactly to their orbits.

A human being has not created himself. God has created him. Then He has maintained him in a world which is full of blessings. But after being given freedom, people have become so rebellious that they do not acknowledge the graciousness of their greatest Benefactor.

The universe in itself is a complete argument; it is the practical demonstration of all the realities which a person has been theoretically asked to accept. If he reflects on the system of the universe, if he hears the silent messages, if he learns lessons from its wisdom, then in the open book of the universe, he will read all the divine realities. In the mirror of creation he will be able to see the Creator in the full sense.

Finding God is possible. The only condition is that one has to develop the ability to engage in serious study.

MORAL RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD PARENTS

A believer should be grateful to God, acknowledge and submit to Him. He should treat his parents honourably, speak gently to them and fulfil their needs.

Chapter 31 of the Quran states: “We have enjoined Man to show kindness to his parents—for his mother bears him, in hardship upon hardship, and his weaning takes two years. [We said] Give thanks to Me and to your parents; all will return to Me. But if they press you to associate something with Me about which you have no knowledge, do not obey them. Yet be kind to them in this world and follow the path of those who turn to Me. You will all return to Me in the end, and I will tell you everything that you have done.” (31:14-15)

After God, a person’s parents have the first claim upon his loyalty. But, if the parents’ desire clashes with God’s will, then preference has to be given to God’s

will and the parents' wishes have to be accorded the second place. However, it is necessary even then to continue to serve the parents as before.

As regards God, a person's responsibility is to be grateful to Him, acknowledging His godhead from the deepest recesses of his heart. He should be filled with feelings of acknowledgement of the blessings of God. All his existence should become a remembrance of God Almighty.

A person's responsibility with regard to parents is that he should give them their rights. He should treat them honourably. He should speak to them with gentleness. He should fulfil their needs. He should support them in the full sense.

If there is a clash between the commands of the parents and the commands of God, it is incumbent upon a person to fulfil the commands of God. At such times a person's obedience to the command of parents is not necessary, but even at that time he must treat them gently. He will be duty-bound to do so. One is never exempted from moral responsibility.

GOD EXPECTS VOLUNTARY OBEDIENCE FROM HUMANS

Almighty God created man and gave him freedom. Voluntary obedience to God's will makes him deserving of eternal reward, and saves him from eternal punishment.

Chapter 33 of the Quran states: “We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it, because they were afraid of it. But man bore it: he surely proved unjust and ignorant. God will punish the hypocrites, both men and women, and polytheists, both men and women, but God will turn in His mercy to believing men and believing women; God is most forgiving and most merciful.” (33:72-73)

Human beings and the universe – both are God's creations. It is required from both to remain totally under God's subjection. However, there is a difference between the two. The universe has accepted subjection to God as a matter of compulsion, whereas it is

required of a person that he accept this subjection of his own free will.

The offering of 'trust' here means a transference of power, to be used at a person's discretion. This power is something with which God has entrusted a person temporarily, by way of trial, so that he, of his own volition, should become obedient to God. Acceptance of this trust amounts to becoming God's representative. One has to impose upon oneself what the stars and planets do under compulsion. In other words, surrender voluntarily to God's will.

In this universe, only God is the Lord and all things are His subjects. But Almighty God willed that He should create independent creatures who, without any compulsion, would voluntarily do whatever God wanted them to do. This voluntary obedience constituted a great trial for mankind. The heavens, the earth and the mountains could not undertake it. However, human beings accepted it, in spite of the serious risks involved. Now a human being is God's trustee in this world. He has to apply the rule of God to himself just as God applies it to others according to His will. Human beings are being put to the test and the present world is a vast examination hall.

God's trust is an extremely crucial responsibility, because it gives rise to the problem of reward and punishment. Other creatures, being helpless, are bound to conform to the will of God. So there is no question of reward or punishment for them. But, a human being enjoys freedom and this being so, he is deserving of reward or punishment.

PRIOR INTIMATION OF THE DOOMSDAY

God gave man the capability to think and distinguish between truth and untruth. By using it one receives proper guidance while failing to use it leads one astray.

Chapter 35 of the Quran states: "O Men. The promise of God is true. Let not the life of this world deceive you, nor let the Deceiver deceive you about God. Surely Satan is your enemy: so treat him as an enemy: he calls on his followers only so that they should become inmates of the burning Fire. Those who are bent on denying the truth will have a severe

punishment, while those who believe and do good deeds will have forgiveness and a great reward. Is he whose evil deeds are made alluring to him so that he looks upon them as good [equal to the man who is rightly guided]? God leaves to stray whom He wills, and guides whom He wills. Do not destroy yourself with grief for them. God has full knowledge of all their actions.” (35:5-8)

The warning given by the prophets does not come true immediately. Death, earthquakes and accidents are like a prior intimation of Doomsday. But Satan immediately warps people’s minds by saying that all these events are the result of cause and effect rather than the result of divine intervention. But all such kinds of thoughts are the deception of Satan. The day will inevitably come when truth and falsehood will be separated, when good people will be rewarded for their good deeds and evil people will be punished for their evil deeds.

Almighty God has blessed every human being with the capability to think and distinguish between truth and untruth. One who utilizes this innate talent, receives proper guidance and one who does not, is left to go astray.

When Truth appears before a person, he has two options before him. If he accepts the Truth, his mind starts off in the right direction and he becomes a wayfarer, journeying towards the Truth. But if some extraneous consideration or some psychological complication comes in his way and, under its influence, he refuses to accept the Truth, he then starts devising ways and means of justifying his rejection of it and tries to prove that his bad deeds are actually good deeds.

WHEN YOUR HANDS AND FEET BEAR WITNESS TO YOUR DEEDS

When man is guided by his nature, he becomes the traveller of the straight path which will lead him to eternal Paradise.

Chapter 36 of the Quran states: “[And God will say], ‘Separate yourselves from the righteous this Day, you criminals. Did I not enjoin you, sons of Adam, not to worship Satan—for he is your sworn enemy—but to worship Me? Surely, that is a straight path. Yet he led astray a great multitude of you. Why

did you not then understand? This is the Hell you were promised. Enter it this Day on account of your denial of the truth.' Today We shall seal up their mouths and their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to their misdeeds." (36:59-65)

In the present life, good people and bad people live in the same world. But in the life of the Hereafter, these two groups will be separated; the followers of Satan will be with Satan and the subjects of the Most Beneficent God will be with God. Nobody worships Satan per se, but the worshipper of anybody other than God is, in fact, indirectly the worshipper of Satan.

Modern research has proved that a person's skin is a form of record on which his utterances are recorded and from where they can also be reproduced. This is a sign which makes it understandable that in the Hereafter person's entire being will bear witness to his deeds.

In everyone's nature, the concept of God exists from birth in the conscious mind. Every human being from his birth has this inclination to accept someone who is great and surrender before him. It is as it were the covenant of nature. All human beings are bound by this covenant of nature to God. When a person is

guided by this natural guidance, he walks the path of obedience to God and he becomes the traveller of the straight path set by God which will lead him to the destination of eternal blessings.

BE IGNITED BY THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOD

A man of knowledge is one whose mind is ignited by the remembrance of God while that man is devoid of knowledge whose mind is ignited only by material factors.

Chapter 39 of the Quran states: “When man suffers some affliction, he prays to his Lord and turns to Him in penitence, but once he has been granted a favour from God, he forgets the One he had been praying to and sets up rivals to God, to make others stray from His path. Say, ‘Enjoy your unbelief for a little while: you will be one of the inmates of the Fire.’ Is he who prays devoutly to God in the hours of the night, prostrating himself and standing in prayer, who is ever mindful of the life to come and hopes

for the mercy of his Lord [like one who does not]? Say, 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?' Truly, only those endowed with understanding will take heed." (39:8-9)

Every human being passes through times when he finds himself utterly helpless. At this juncture, he forgets everything and starts appealing to God. In this way, in times of helplessness, every person comes to know that there is nobody worth worshipping except the one and only God.

But, as soon as he is out of trouble, he resorts to his earlier ways. A human being only becomes more arrogant and starts attributing his relief from affliction to beings other than God. For some, it becomes the miracle of cause and effect, while for others it is a feat of supposed gods. If a person keeps quiet after making a mistake, it involves the misguidance of only one individual. But, if he starts giving false explanations in order to justify his mistakes, he becomes one who misleads others.

There are two types of people: those who make material interest their supreme concern; others who make God their supreme concern. It is this second type of individual who is a person of God. His realization

of God is his conscious discovery. He discovers God as the most Majestic and Supreme Being, so much so, that all his hopes and all his fears are linked to that one and only Being. His restlessness keeps him out of bed at night. His loneliness is not that which is born out of unawareness, but the loneliness of the remembrance of God.

A person of knowledge is one whose mind is ignited by the remembrance of God, and that person is devoid of knowledge whose mind is ignited only by material factors. He is awakened only by material shocks and thereafter is lost, deep in slumber.

READ THE SIGNS OF GOD ALL AROUND

Those who read the signs of God all around them, are filled with the deep realization of God. Those who do not keep these capabilities alive, will remain deprived.

Chapter 39 of the Quran states: “Have you not seen that God sends down water from the sky,

guides it to form springs in the earth, and then, with it, brings forth vegetation of various colours, which later withers, turns yellow before your eyes, and then He makes it crumble away? There is truly a reminder in this for those who possess understanding. Anyone whose heart God has opened up to Islam possesses a light from his Lord. But woe betide those whose hearts have been hardened against the remembrance of God! Such people are in obvious error.” (39:21-22)

The wonderful system of rains on the earth, the resulting growth of greenery and the subsequent preparations for harvesting, have countless meaningful lessons in them. But, these lessons are available only to those who engage in deep thinking.

On the one hand, God has created the external world in a way that everything in it has become a sign of great realities, and, on the other, He has endowed human beings with the ability to read these signs and understand them. Those who keep their natural capabilities alive and, by utilizing them, give deep consideration to the things of the world, will have their minds filled with the deep realization (ma‘rifah) of God. Whereas those who do not keep these capabilities alive, will be unable to learn anything, even though surrounded by countless lessons. They

will not be able to see, even after seeing, and will not be able to hear, even after hearing.

In the present world the course of everything is set so that everything has a beginning and then an onward journey is towards completion. For instance, a plant begins from a seed and then develops into a fully grown tree. Similarly, in agriculture there is a beginning with the sowing of seed and then there is the culmination with the harvesting of the crop. This is the case with everything in this present world.

This event or situation has a divine lesson for a person. In this way God tells a person that he is also going from beginning to completion, from childhood to old age, and then, after death entering into a new eternal life as his final destination.

HOME IS THE FIRST TRAINING GROUND

Our home is our first training ground. By receiving this training, we can fulfil the rights and obligations of God's servants as well as the obligations we owe to God..

Chapter 46 of the Quran states: “We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents: his mother bore him in pain and in pain she gave birth to him, and his bearing and weaning takes thirty months. At length, when he reaches the age of full maturity and attains forty years, he says, ‘O my Lord! Help me to be grateful for Your favours which You have bestowed upon me, and upon both my parents, and to do good deeds that will please You. Grant me righteousness in my offspring. Truly, I have turned to You and, truly, I submit to You.’ We accept from such people the best of what they do and We overlook their bad deeds. They will be among the people of Paradise—this is a true promise that has been given to them.” (46:15-16)

Human procreation takes place through a father and a mother who nurture their offspring through infancy to adulthood. This is, so to say, the natural system of a person's training, which ensures that he develops a keen consciousness of his duties towards human beings along with the feeling that he must acknowledge the grace of his Benefactor and discharge his duties towards Him. This feeling cultivates two principles in every person: firstly, to honour his pledges towards other people and, secondly, to fulfil important obligations to God, the Creator and Lord.

Those who learn a lesson from nature, the great teacher, who activate their sense of moral awareness to the extent that they properly identify and appropriately fulfil their duties towards all, ranging from their parents right up to God, are the ones who will be treated as deserving of the eternal grace of God in the Hereafter.

Everyone's home is his first training ground. This training begins with one's parents and then spreads out into the entire society. If a person fully accepts this training in the initial training ground, he will be able to fulfil not only the rights and obligations of God's servants but also on a vaster scale, the obligations he owes to God as well.

HUMAN BEINGS ARE ALL ONE

Human beings, in view of their origin, are all one. The basis for distinction, if any, between them is as to who are God-fearing and who are not. And this is known only to God.

Chapter 49 of the Quran states: “Mankind! We have created you from a male and female, and made you into peoples and tribes, so that you might come to know each other. The noblest of you in God’s sight is the one who fears God most. God is all-knowing and all-aware.” (49:13)

Men apparently appear to be different from one another, but all of them initially are the children of the same Father and Mother, Adam and Eve. When God decided to create a human being, He initially created the first pair, one man and one woman. It was from this initial pair that the human race originated. Gradually, the number of human beings began to spread to various parts of the land until, after a long

period of time, the entire earth became populated with men and women.

Geographical conditions on the earth are not uniform everywhere. This lack of uniformity is found in different places. For instance, in some parts of the earth there is extremely hot weather while in other parts there is cold weather. In some parts, the staple food is non-vegetarian, while in other parts, the main source of food is vegetarian.

Human beings differ from each other in many ways, notably in terms of race and place of origin—some are black, some are white, some are from the rain forests, some are from the tundra. But all these differences are for the purpose of identification—not for the making of distinctions. Indeed, many evils have stemmed from these differences being used to discriminate between one person and another, between one community and another, between one nation and another. Humanity has been repeatedly torn asunder by such prejudice.

Human beings, in view of their origin, are all one. Among them, if at all there is any basis for distinction, it is as to who is fearful of God and who is not. Even this is known only to God and not to any human being.

DESCRIPTION OF DOOMSDAY

Those who found themselves free in this world and became arrogant will be held deserving of punishment in the Hereafter by God.

Chapter 50 of the Quran states: “We created man—We know the promptings of his soul, and are closer to him than his jugular vein—and the two recording angels are recording, sitting on the right and the left: each word he utters shall be noted down by a vigilant guardian. The trance of death will come revealing the truth: that is what you were trying to escape. The trumpet will be sounded. This is the Day [you were] warned of. Each person will arrive attended by an [angel] to drive him on and another to bear witness. You were heedless of this, but now We have removed your veil, so your sight today is sharp. His companion attendant will say, ‘I have here his record ready.’ ‘Cast into Hell every ungrateful, rebellious one, hinderer of good, transgressor, causing others to doubt, who has set up another god besides

God: cast him into severe punishment' — and his associate [Satan] will say, 'Lord, I did not make him transgress, he had already gone far astray himself.' God will say, 'Do not quarrel in My presence. I gave you the warning beforehand and My word shall not be changed, nor am I unjust to My servants.'" (50:16-29)

The study of this world shows that there is an unerring system of recording in operation here. A person's thoughts are impressed on the membrane of his brain. Every utterance he makes is permanently preserved in the shape of sound waves in the air. A person's actions are preserved in the external world by means of heat waves in such a way that they can be repeated at any time. All these are known facts of today, and these known facts are what make the Quran's claim credible: a person's intentions, his utterances and his actions, are all in the knowledge of his Creator. All affairs of all human beings are entered in the registers of the angels.

In these verses, a picture has been drawn of death and Doomsday thereafter. It shows what will happen to those who, finding themselves free in this world, became arrogant. This description of Doomsday is so clear that it needs no explanation.

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

God has created man and placed him on earth to prove himself to be a true servant of God, so that he may be held deserving of the eternal blessings in the Hereafter.

Chapter 51 of the Quran states: “I created the jinn and mankind only so that they might worship Me: I seek no sustenance from them, nor do I want them to feed Me—it is God who is the great Sustainer, the Mighty One, the Invincible. The wrongdoers will meet the same fate as their predecessors—let them not ask Me to hasten on [the punishment]—woe, then, to those who are bent on denying the truth, when the Day arrives which they have been promised.” (51:56-60)

God Himself possesses all kinds of powers. However, He has created the angels to effect the administration of His vast domain. But, the case of human beings is different. Human beings were not created to fulfil any administrative or other needs of God. The sole

purpose of their creation was their devotion and servitude ('ibadah) to God. This implies bowing down completely and without any reservation before God and dedicating oneself entirely to Him.

The substance of this devotion is deep inner realization of God, or ma'rifah. (Tafsir ibn Kathir, vol. 7, p. 396). In other words, it is required of a person that God should be a discovery for him. He should recognize God without seeing him. This is essential to God-realization. The shape which the life of a person takes as a result of this is one of devotion and subservience. A pail, afloat in water, sinks, when filled with water. Similarly, when the time given to a person to perform his life's work is over, he dies immediately. One who reforms himself before the overflowing of the pail, may save himself, but one who remains careless and negligent till the last moment, faces drowning.

If transgressors are not immediately seized upon, they should not imagine that they have been left free to do as they choose. They go free because it is not God's way to catch hold of human beings in haste. It is certainly not because God has no plan ever to bring them to book.

God has not created human beings for the completion of His own being. A human being has rather been given

an opportunity to prove himself to be a true servant of God in this present world of trial, so that he may be held deserving of the eternal blessings of God.

YOU WILL RECEIVE THE REWARD OF YOUR DEEDS

In the world of God, everyone will be rewarded according to his deeds. As he sows, so shall he reap. No one's efforts or deeds shall be of any benefit to others.

Chapter 53 of the Quran states: “Has he not been made acquainted with what was written in the scriptures of Moses? And with Abraham who kept his word: that no soul shall bear the burden of another; and that man shall have only that for which he strives; and that [the fruit of] his striving shall soon be seen; and in the end he will be repaid for it in full; that all things in the end shall return to God.” (53: 36-42)

When God created human beings, He also arranged for a series of prophets for their guidance. In every age and in every nation God has sent prophets so that

they may convey God's messages to people. So far as material resources were concerned, a person could find these on his own, but so far as life's principles were concerned, God continued to send prophets for the purpose of conveying them to mankind.

Every prophet was an equally true representative. But, with the passage of time, the books brought by the previous prophets were either forgotten by their followers or they had interpolations made in them by human beings. Ultimately, God sent the Final Prophet with the Quran, and God took it upon Himself to preserve this guide book in its totality, so that it might be a source of authentic guidance for people in every age.

The sum and substance of the reality revealed by Almighty God through His prophets is that every person has to receive whatever reward befits his deeds. Nobody can save himself from the fate resulting from his deeds and nobody other than himself can be his saviour. There are none more foolish in this world of God than those who are not affected by this prophetic warning.

So far as a person's affairs in relation to God are concerned, everyone is responsible for his own deeds. No one can share in the consequences of the

actions of others, nor can anyone be of help in any way to others. In the world of God, everyone will be rewarded according to what he has done for himself. As he sows, so shall he reap. No one's efforts or deeds shall be of any benefit to others.

WEIGH YOUR WORDS AND DEEDS

In this world it is imperative that human beings weigh their words and deeds in the balance of justice. They should not be unjust either in giving or in taking.

Chapter 55 of the Quran states: “The Merciful who taught the Quran – He created man and He taught him speech. The sun and the moon move according to a fixed reckoning; the stars and the trees bend in prostration. He raised the heavens and set up the measure, so that you should not transgress the measure. Always measure with justice and do not give short measure.” (55: 1-9)

Creating human beings and sending them guidance are both expressions of God's attributes of mercy.

After creating human beings, God has given them the opportunity to secure a place on both earth and in heaven, where they may find for themselves an eternal world of happiness and comfort.

Afterwards, the advent of the prophets and the revelation of divine messages, or books, are the culmination of the divine blessings. In this way, every person has been given the opportunity to begin his life with right guidance in this world. Without deviating from the right path, he should continue on his onward journey on the straight path which will lead him to his destination.

God created human beings. He granted them the unique power of speech—a power not bestowed upon any other creature or anything else in the whole known universe. Then, there is the practical example of the role of justice and fair play which inheres in the universe at God's behest. The whole world surrounding the human being is based on these principles of balance and justice, which God wants human beings to follow; and this is clearly set forth in the Quran. The Quran is the verbal expression of this Divine justice and the universe is a practical expression of it. It is imperative that the subjects of

God weigh their words and deeds in this balance. They should not be unjust either in giving or in taking.

The weighing scale is a symbol of justice. It measures or weighs things with exactness. The weighing scale demonstrates to a person what principles he ought to follow in giving and taking, in all his dealings in this world. A person's words and deeds should not be at variance with one another: all his behaviour should measure up to the standard of truth.

REAL SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Success or failure in the Hereafter will be judged on the basis of divine moral values. Failure on that Day is real failure and success on that Day will be real success.

Chapter 64 of the Quran states: "It was He who created you; and some of you are those who deny this truth, and some who believe [in it]. God sees everything you do. He created the heavens and the earth for a purpose. He formed you and gave you the best of forms. To Him you shall all return. He knows

whatever is in the heavens and on the earth. He knows all that you conceal and all that you reveal. God is aware of what is in your hearts.

Have you not heard about those who denied the truth before you and tasted the evil consequences of their conduct? They will have a painful punishment. That was because their messengers came to them with clear signs, but they replied, 'Shall mortals be our guides?' And so they rejected the truth and turned away. God has no need of such people; God is self-sufficient and worthy of all praise.

Those who deny the truth claim that they will never be raised up again. Say, 'By my Lord, most surely you will be raised up again and then you will be told of all that you have done; and that is easy enough for God.' Believe then in God and His Messenger, and in the light which We have sent down. God is fully aware of all that you do. When He shall gather you all for the Day of Gathering, that will be the Day of loss and gain; and whoever believes in God and does good deeds shall be forgiven their sins and admitted to Gardens through which rivers flow, where they shall dwell forever. That is the supreme triumph." (64: 2-9)

One who is successful here becomes very happy,

but one who meets with failure is looked upon with contempt. In this world, however, success is as valueless as failure is.

The place of true success or failure is the Hereafter. One is a failure if he fails in the Hereafter and successful if he is successful in the Hereafter, and the criterion for success or failure there is entirely different from that of this world, where it is based on outward materialism. Success or failure in the Hereafter will be judged on the basis of divine moral values. At that time, people will be surprised to see that the whole significance of things has completely changed. Gaining, which was considered as such will actually turn out to be losing, while what was considered as losing will turn out to be gaining in the real sense. Failure on that Day is real failure and success on that Day will be real success.

WHY IS THERE IMPERFECTION IN THE HUMAN WORLD

The misuse of freedom by man leads to imperfections in the world. Those who use their freedom properly will be rewarded while those who misuse it will be punished.

Chapter 67 of the Quran states: “Blessed is He in whose hand is the Kingdom: He has power over all things; He created death and life so that He might test you, and find out which of you is best in conduct. He is the Mighty, the Most Forgiving One. He created seven heavens one above the other in layers. You will not find any flaw in the creation of the Gracious One. Then look once again: can you see any flaw? Then look again and again. Your gaze will come back to you confused and exhausted.

We have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps, and We have made them for driving away devils. For them We have prepared the punishment of the blazing Fire. Those who are bent on blaspheming against their Lord

will have the punishment of Hell: an evil destination.”
(67: 1-6)

A study of the present world reveals a certain contradiction. The whole universe is functioning quite perfectly and in the most well-organized manner. It has no defect in it anywhere. On the contrary, one finds many defects in human life. This is because the nature of a human being's creation is different. A human being in this world is living under testing conditions. For a test to be valid, there has to be freedom of action. This freedom of action has given the opportunity to human beings to create disturbance and imbalance in the world.

Human freedom has come at the cost of the transgression rampant in the human world. If such conditions did not exist, how could divine approval be given to those worthy persons who did not transgress, in spite of having the opportunities to transgress and who abstained from arrogance in spite of having the power to be arrogant?

Paradise and Hell are not for anything other than a human being in the universe. A human being is in a special category, for he is a responsible creature. He is unique in having been granted the ability to

discriminate between truth and falsehood. On this basis, he will be subjected to an assessment of his deeds. Those who succeed in this test will be rewarded, while those who fail will be deserving of punishment.

LISTEN TO YOUR INNER VOICE

A person's inner voice, his conscience is like a divine court of justice. It warns a human being in advance of his errors, of his wrongdoings. But man does not pay heed.

Chapter 75 of the Quran has this to say: "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)

Every person by birth has a conscience – a faculty which functions independently. It remains uninfluenced by one’s thinking and one’s desires and tells a person again and again what is right and what is wrong, what should be done and what should not be done.

This conscience is like a divine court of justice. It warns a human being in advance of his mistakes and his wrongdoing. It repeatedly tells him what is right and what is wrong. In spite of that, a person remains ignorant, becomes forgetful of God and leads his life as if there will be no Doomsday when he will be judged for his words and deeds.

Those who adopt this attitude of neglecting their conscience are, as it were, denying their own nature. A person’s inner voice calls him, but he is not ready to listen. The truth is that his conscience issues a prior announcement of a divine verdict. If he pays heed to it, he will, before his death, learn what is going to happen after death and how he will be dealt with.

CHOOSE YOUR PATH

Man is free in this world. If he chooses a life of gratitude to God, he will be held deserving of bounties in Paradise in the Hereafter.

Chapter 76 of the Quran states: “Was there not a period of time when man was nothing worth mentioning? We created man from a drop of mingled fluid so that We might try him; We gave him hearing and sight; We showed him the way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful.

[Now,] behold, for those who deny the truth, We have prepared chains, iron collars and a blazing fire, but the righteous shall drink from a cup mixed with the coolness of kafur, a spring from which God’s servants will drink, making it gush forth in branches. They keep their vows and fear a day the woe of which will spread far and wide; they give food, despite their love for it, to the poor and orphans and captives, saying, ‘We feed you for the sake of God alone, we seek neither

recompense nor thanks from you. Truly, we fear from our Lord a woefully grim Day.' Therefore, God will ward off from them the woes of that Day, and make them find brightness and joy, and their reward for being patient will be a Garden and silk [clothing]." (76:1-12)

A human being has been created free in this world and then he has been shown two paths leading respectively towards a life of gratitude and a life of ingratitude. Now, it is for the concerned person to choose either of the two paths. For one who adopts the way of ingratitude, there will be the punishment of Hell in the Hereafter, and for one who adopts the way of gratitude, there will be the bounties of Paradise.

One who recognizes God, also recognizes all realities. The knowledge of God opens the door to all other knowledge for him. If he has known God, then he becomes in the full sense a knower of reality. This realization enables him to fulfil divine obligations as well as the obligations toward fellow human beings. In reality, there is no difference between human nature and divine law.

PREFER THE HEREAFTER OVER THE PRESENT WORLD

In this world the real test of a person is that he should prefer the Hereafter to the present world, by controlling his desires and not behaving arrogantly.

Chapter 79 of the Quran states: “[O Men!] Are you more difficult to create than the heaven which He has built, by raising its vault high and fashioning it flawlessly, and making its night dark and bringing forth its morning light, and the earth which He spread out, after that bringing forth from it its water and its pasture land, and making the mountains firm: [all this] as a means of sustenance for you and your animals?”

When the great overwhelming event arrives, on the Day that man remembers what he strove for and Hell is there for all to see, anyone who has acted arrogantly and prefers the life of this world, will find himself in Hell; but one who fears to stand before his Lord and restrained himself from base desires, shall dwell in Paradise. They will ask you [Prophet] about the Hour,

saying, ‘When it will come to pass?’, what have you to do with the mentioning of it? Your Lord alone knows when it will come; you are but a warner for those who fear it. On the Day when they see it, they will feel as if they had tarried in this world for only one evening or one morning.” (79:27-46)

The magnificent phenomenon before us in the shape of the universe is so great that all other things are small in comparison to it. So, in the world when the occurrence of a big event is possible, why should the occurrence of a small event not be possible? There are already many factors in existence on a large scale which explain the Quran’s declaration that human beings shall one Day have to face resurrection.

Every person is between two domains. One is the present world, which is before him, and the other is the world of the Hereafter, which is hidden from view. The real test of a person is that he should prefer the Hereafter to the present world. But this can be done only by one who has the courage to exercise control over the base desires of the self and not behave arrogantly.

A human being has been placed in this present world in order that he may be tested. A test necessarily

requires freedom. That is why nothing has been imposed on him as we see with the rest of the universe. He is free to follow the divine way or deviate from it. But this freedom applies only to actions and not to consequences. Every human being has to finally come to grips with the consequences, which will be in accordance with the eternal laws of God.

THE BLESSING OF FOOD

All honour and success in the Hereafter will be reserved for those who show gratitude for God's blessings like food, health, life support system and so on.

Chapter 80 of the Quran states: "Let man reflect on the food he eats. We let the rain pour down in torrents and then We cleaved the earth asunder. We make the grain grow out of it, and grape vines and vegetables, and olive trees and date palms and burgeoning enclosed gardens and fruits and fodder as provision for you and for your cattle to enjoy. But when the deafening blast is sounded, on that Day

a man shall flee from his own brother, his mother, his father, his wife and his sons: on that Day every man among them will have enough concern of his own—on that Day some faces will be beaming, laughing, and rejoicing, but some faces will be covered with dust and overcast with gloom: those will be ones who denied the truth and were immersed in iniquity.” (80:24-42)

A human being is a creature who needs continuous food and provision to survive in this world. This food has been arranged on earth on a very vast scale, and we have no hand in this arrangement. This arrangement of food has been done in the form of agricultural products, the supply of water on earth, and because of water all kinds of grains, fruits or dry fruits are produced.

If a person is to be blessed, he should lead a life of God worshipping in this world. The driving force behind the true godliness required of a person is, in reality, his sense of gratitude. If he gives serious consideration to his creation and the various natural systems in operation around him, he will eventually develop a sense of gratitude towards his Lord. The state of being which results from these feelings of gratitude and obligation is known as godliness. This is adoration of God in the real sense.

All honour and success in the Hereafter are reserved for people such as have a sense of gratitude.

BLESSINGS COME WITH RESPONSIBILITIES

The extraordinary gifts man has received from God are a trust. Man must make use of them according to God's will.

In chapter 82 the Quran addresses man thus: “O man! What is it that lures you away from your bountiful Sustainer, Who created you, fashioned you and proportioned you, in whatever form He pleased? Yet you deny the Last Judgement. Surely, there are guardians watching over you, noble recorders, who know all that you do: the virtuous will dwell in bliss, whereas the wicked will be in Hell; which they shall enter on the Day of Judgement, and from which they will find no escape. What will make you realize what the Day of Judgement will be? Again: what will make you realize what the Day of Judgement will be? It will be a Day when no human being shall be of the least avail to any other human being, God [alone] will hold command on that Day.” (82:6-19)

Human beings are the most meaningful creatures in the known universe. A human being has been given a body which is perfect to the ultimate extent. He has been given a mind of such excellence that no one can conceive of a better mind. Then he has been placed in a world which is exactly in accordance with human requirements.

Such gifts bring with them responsibilities. This is a natural principle which applies to all mankind. The nature of the extraordinary gifts a person has received in itself implies that they come with certain responsibilities. One of the great responsibilities is that a person should consider these blessings as a trust from God, and then make use of them according to God's will.

Human creation has an extremely meaningful purpose, that is, one day every person will have to stand up in God's court where it will be ascertained who has made proper use of God's blessings, and who has failed in fulfilling his responsibilities. This day of justice will come after death. On that day God will test each person according to his record and those who come up to the mark will enter Paradise and those who fail, will be sent to hell.

THE REALITY OF LIFE HEREAFTER

The existence of the present world is proof of the existence of the world Hereafter. Living out their lives without taking the Hereafter into account makes one deserving of punishment.

Chapter 84 of the Quran states: “When the sky bursts open, and obeys its Lord as it must, when the earth flattens out, and casts out all that is within it and becomes empty; and obeys its Lord as it must, O man, having striven hard towards your Lord, you shall meet Him: he who is given his record in his right hand shall have an easy reckoning and he shall return to his people, joyfully, but as for him whose record shall be given to him from behind his back, he will pray for utter destruction and he will enter the blazing flame. He used to be happy with his own people; for he never thought that he would have to return [to God]. But he will indeed! His Lord was ever watching him. I swear by the glow of sunset, by the night and what it covers and the moon when

it grows full, you will progress from stage to stage. What is wrong with them that they do not believe? When the Quran is read to them, why do they not fall to their knees? Indeed, those who are bent on denying the truth reject it—God is quite aware of what they are storing in their hearts. Therefore, give them the news of a painful punishment. But for those who believe and do good works; for them there shall be a never-ending reward.” (84:1-25)

Whatever is related here about Doomsday refers apparently to an unknown world. However, such evidence exists as points to its veracity. An example of this is the present world itself. The very existence of the world proves that another similar or different world may come into existence. Furthermore, certain extraordinary aspects of the Quran prove that it is the Book of God.

In spite of such clear indications, there are those who do not believe in the Hereafter and live out their lives without ever taking it into account. Such individuals are certainly committing a crime which is deserving of the punishment mentioned above.

IF THERE IS CREATION THERE MUST BE A CREATOR

The creation is an introduction to the Creator. One who seriously reflects on the universe, will certainly discover God and lead his life in accordance with his commands.

Chapter 86 of the Quran states: “By the heavens and that which comes in the night— and what could make you know what it is that comes in the night? It is the shining star—[for] no human being has been left unguarded. Let man reflect on what he was created from. He was created from spurting fluid, issuing from between the backbone and the breastbone: He certainly has the power to bring him back to life. On the Day when secrets are disclosed, [man] will have no power, and no helper. By the heavens, ever-revolving, by the earth cracking open with new growth, it is surely a decisive utterance; and is not to be taken lightly. They are planning a scheme,

and so am I: so bear with those who deny the truth, and let them be for a little while.” (86:1-17)

A star shining upon a person is a symbolic reminder of the fact that an Observer is watching him. This Observer is recording a person's deeds. He will resurrect him after his death and take the reckoning of all his deeds. It is the period of respite (during which a person is put to the test) which acts as a 'wedge' between him and the aforesaid event. As soon as the period of trial is over, he will face the consequences—from which he seems to be far away today.

The Creator of the universe in His being is invisible. But in His creative activity He is visible in all the things of the universe. If a person seriously reflects on the universe, he will certainly find God. He will certainly learn the reality that in the present universe the only right attitude for him is one of obedience to God. Those who are insolent or arrogant have no place in this world of God. The creation is an introduction to the Creator, if there is creation there must be a Creator. Creation gives glimpses of the Creator to the observer.

UPS AND DOWNS IN LIFE

A contented soul is one who bows before God and thanks Him on receiving something, and expresses his humility when something is taken away from him.

Chapter 89 of the Quran states: “As for man, when His Lord tests him, through honour and blessings, he says, ‘My Lord has honoured me,’ but when He tests him by straitening his means of livelihood, he says, ‘My Lord has disgraced me.’ No indeed, but you show no kindness to the orphan, nor do you urge one another to feed the poor, and you greedily devour the inheritance of the weak, and you have a love of wealth which can never be satisfied. No indeed! When the earth is crushed and ground to dust, when your Lord comes down with the angels, rank upon rank, and Hell is made to appear on that Day, then man will be mindful, but what will being mindful then avail him? He will say, ‘Oh, would that I had provided beforehand for my life!’ On that Day no one will punish as He

punishes, and none can bind with bonds like His! [But to the righteous, God will say], ‘O soul at peace, return to your Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing. Join My servants. Enter My Paradise.’ (89:15-30)

Every person passes through two sets of circumstances in the world—sometimes finding or receiving things and sometimes losing them. Both eventualities, meant to gauge human reactions to different conditions, are for the purpose of putting one to the test. If the individual starts to boast when he receives something and acts negatively when things are taken away from him, he has failed the test.

The other type of person is one who would bow down before God and thank Him when he received something, and when things were taken away from him, he would once again bow down before God and express his humility. It is the second type of person who has been called the contented soul (an-nafs al-mutmainnah).

In this world, whatever we receive in terms of wealth or in any other forms, serves the purpose of test. They are not desirable in themselves but are rather a means to achieve another purpose. The purpose is that one should make use of these things in such a way that they become a means of salvation in one’s future eternal life.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

God has commanded a person to scale two heights—one is to have firm faith in God, and the other to treat others with justice, and help them in their hour of need.

Chapter 90 of the Quran states: “I swear by this city—and you are dwelling in this city—and by parent and offspring, that We have created man into a life of toil and trial. Does he think then that no one has power over him? He says, ‘I have spent enormous wealth.’ Does he then think that no one sees him? Have We not given him two eyes, and a tongue, and a pair of lips, and shown him the two paths? But he has not attempted the ascent. What will explain to you what the ascent is? It is the freeing of a slave; or the feeding in times of famine of an orphaned relative or some needy person in distress, and to be one of those who believe and urge one another to steadfastness and compassion. Those who do so are the people of the right hand, and [as for] those who are bent on denying

the truth of Our revelations, they are the people of the left hand, and the Fire will close in on them.” (90:1-20)

No person has ever been able to free himself from hardship. This shows that a person is subordinate to some Superior Power. Similarly, a person's eyes indicate that there is also a Superior Eye which is watching him. His power of speech implies that there is One capable of speech over and above him, who has bestowed upon him the power of speech and showed him the right path. If a person realizes himself in the true sense, he will certainly recognize God.

God has commanded a person to scale two heights—one is to treat others with justice, and help them in their hour of need. The other is to have firm faith in God. When such belief enters the inner depths of a human being, it does not remain confined to his own thinking but rather makes him become communicative. He then tries to share his discovery of God with others.

A person finds it difficult to lead his life following divine principles. But this apparent difficulty becomes easy when he learns that this is going to lead him towards eternal salvation.

THE HIGH PURPOSE OF HUMAN LIFE

God created man with superior capabilities to recognize the Truth conveyed through the prophets, and live a God-oriented life so that he may receive God's eternal blessings.

Chapter 95 of the Quran states: “By the Fig and the Olive, and by Mount Sinai, and by this secure land, We have indeed created man in the best of mould, then We cast him down as the lowest of the low, except for those who believe and do good deeds—theirs shall be an unending reward! What then after this, can make you deny the Last Judgement? Is not God the greatest of the judges?” (95:1-8)

Fig (tin) and olive (zaytun) are the names of two hills in the vicinity of Jerusalem where Jesus did God's work. Mount Sinai (Tur Sinin) refers to that hill where God made His revelations to Moses. The 'secure land' (al-baladul amin) refers to Makkah where the Prophet Muhammad was born.

These places are historical reminders of the reality, that God is keeping a watch over human beings. He communicated what He liked and what He disliked through His trustworthy messengers. In this way, God told everyone in advance that he should lead his life in this world in such a way as to save himself from dire consequences and have his share in the eternal blessings of God.

God has created human beings with superior capabilities. These capabilities have been given to a person so that he should be able to recognize the Truth conveyed to him through the prophets, and to shape his life in accordance with it. Those who do so, will reach a high position of honour, which will be theirs for all eternity. On the contrary, those who do not make their God-given capabilities subservient to God's will, shall have even the existing blessings taken away and they shall have no place to take refuge. Their lot shall be total deprivation. The raising of prophets and the end-results of their mission, bear testimony to the veracity of this fact.

Elevation of purpose alone can be the object of human life. That high purpose is an individual's making proper use of his abilities so that he may attain realization of God and leading a life approved of by God. Such

people deserve great reward from God. Those who fail to live up to this criterion can have no fate but total loss.

THE PURPOSE OF SENDING THE PROPHETS

Man ought to build his life taking guidance from the book of God and the teachings of the Prophet, to make himself deserving of the eternal Paradise.

Chapter 96 of the Quran states: “Read! In the name of your Lord, who created: created man from a clot [of blood]. Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know. Yet man behaves arrogantly, because he thinks himself self-sufficient: truly, all will return to your Lord.” (96:1-8)

These are the verses of the Quran which were first revealed to the Prophet of Islam. This shows God’s method of sending revelation to the Prophet, and explaining its purpose. Its purpose was that human

beings should be told what they could not otherwise know.

In this life, a person appears to be free. This results in the misunderstanding that he will not be taken to task for his misdeeds. In the present world, a person lives for a period of time and then dies. This makes people think that human life extends just from birth to death, and does not go further than that.

To tell a person that this supposition was wrong, God sent revelations through prophets continuously, in every age and in every nation, until the Prophet Muhammad was born: he was the last of the prophets. Now he is the source of divine guidance till Doomsday.

These prophetic tidings mean that a person in the present world is not entirely free to do what he wants to do, that he has to follow God's commands as conveyed by the prophets in his life's affairs.

God, after giving this information has not just left a person to his own resources: He is constantly watching him. After death all human beings will return to God and then, according to the records of their worldly deeds, they will be rewarded or punished. For a person's guidance, the real importance is not that of the mere existence of a living Prophet but the

existence of the book he has brought. God's book, the Quran, is in a preserved state and the Prophet's traditions have also been recorded and preserved, so now a person has no excuse to deviate from the right path. He ought to build his life by taking guidance from the book of God and the sayings and deeds of the Prophet, and make himself deserving of the eternal blessings of God.

EVERYTHING IS BEING RECORDED

Whatever a person does or says or even thinks, is all being recorded at every moment. All of a person's deeds in this world will be presented in the court of God.

Chapter 99 of the Quran states: "When the earth is shaken with its violent shaking, when the earth shakes off her burdens, when man asks, 'What is happening to her?' On that Day it will narrate its account, for your Lord has so directed it. On that Day people will come forward in separate groups to be shown their deeds: whoever has done the smallest

particle of good will see it; while whoever has done the smallest particle of evil will see it.” (99:1-8)

The earthquake on Doomsday will be the announcement of the end of the testing period for human beings. This would mean that the freedom which was theirs on account of their being on trial, has now been snatched away from them. Now the time has come when human beings will be recompensed for their deeds. Today, God’s world is silent, but when conditions change, everything found here will start talking. The inventions of the present day have proved that lifeless or inanimate things also have the capacity to ‘talk.’ A performance in a studio is fully reproduced by a video film and records. Similarly, the present world is, so to say, a big ‘studio’ of God. Whatever a person does or says or even thinks, is all being recorded at every moment. And when the time comes, this world will repeat everybody’s story in such a way that not a thing, great or small, will be left out.

To keep one’s behaviour upright in this world only one thing is enough: that a person has the firm belief that he is being watched by God at every moment. All of his deeds in this world will be presented in the court of God. Be they big or small, whether they have been

done openly or in hiding, everything will be disclosed there.

When a person is fully convinced of this reality, even before the shaking of the earth, he himself will be shaken. Before the earthquake of Doomsday, he will experience an earthquake in his own inner self which will totally transform him. Subsequently, he will become his own keeper. Instead of living a free, permissive life, he will lead a life which has restrictions. He will no longer use his power freely, but at the command of God.

LOYAL SERVANT TO THE MASTER

Man's death sounds an alarm that he is totally in the grip of God. Death in fact is a door to the entry into the world of judgement.

Chapter 100 of the Quran states: "By the snorting, panting horses, striking sparks of fire with their hooves, as they gallop to make raids at dawn, and raising clouds of dust, forcing their way into the midst

of the enemy, surely, man is ungrateful to his Lord. He himself bears witness to that. Surely, he is ardent in his love of wealth. Is he not aware of the time when the contents of the graves will be brought out? And the hearts' contents shall be brought into the open? Surely, on that Day, they will know that their Lord had full knowledge of them all." (100:1-11)

The horse is a very loyal animal. He sacrifices himself to the utmost extent for the sake of his master. Even on the battlefield, he does not leave his side. This is an example which shows how a person should conduct himself. A person should also be loyal to his Lord, just as the horse is loyal to his master. But, in practice, there is no such parallel.

In this world, the animal is grateful to his master, but a human being is not grateful to his Lord. Here, an animal knows his obligations towards his master, but a human being does not know his obligations towards his Lord. Here, an animal is totally obedient to his master, but a human being is not totally obedient to his Lord.

A person appreciates any animal which is loyal to him. Then, how is it possible that he does not comprehend that in the eyes of God only that individual is worthy

of appreciation who is loyal to Him? It is the love of wealth which blinds him to this. He is unable to learn the truth, even from his own experiences.

This situation or state of affairs is not going to last forever. A person's death sounds an alarm that he is totally in the grip of God. Death in fact is a door to the entry into the world of judgment. There a person has to stand before the court of God from whom nothing great or small is hidden.

SUPERFICIAL DEEDS DON'T CARRY WEIGHT IN THE HEREAFTER

In this world even falsehood can appear weighty to certain people. But in the Hereafter, nothing will carry weight except for the truth.

Chapter 101 of the Quran states: "The Clatterer! What is the Clatterer? Would that you knew what the Clatterer is! [It is] a Day when mankind shall be like scattered moths and the mountains like tufts of carded wool. Then, the one whose good deeds weigh

heavy on the scales, will have a most pleasing life. But as for him whose deeds are light on the scales, the Abyss shall be his home. What will convey to you what this is like? It is a blazing fire.” (101:1-11)

The turmoil of Doomsday will smash everything. People will completely lose their bearings. Thereafter a new world will come into existence where only Truth will carry weight. All falsity will be set at naught. In the present world, the approval of the people prevails. Here things carry weight according to the likes and dislikes of people. The world of the Hereafter is the world of God, where everything will be subservient to His will.

In the present world, any deeds performed are judged according to their appearance. In the Hereafter deeds will be judged according to their inner reality. The more sincere a person's deeds, the more importance they will be given. The deed which is devoid of sincerity will carry absolutely no weight in the Hereafter, however significant it might have seemed to the superficial people of the present world.

In the present world that action becomes weighty which is marked by concession to worldly situation, which is in accordance with the traditions of the times

and has become important because of long social custom. Those who have such deeds to their credit attain to the status of greatness and honour in the eyes of the people.

What happens in the Hereafter will be totally different. There, only a principled life will carry any weight. Only those actions which have been performed according to a high standard of ethics, will be given any importance. There, all the importance will be given to those actions which possess eternal values rather than just meeting exigencies of the time. In this world even falsehood can appear weighty to certain people. But in the Hereafter, nothing will carry weight except for the truth.

THE RACE FOR MATERIAL ACQUISITION

A person wants to accumulate more and more material assets. But after his death, he will realize that any increase in worldly goods only increased his accountability.

Chapter 102 of the Quran states: “Greed for more and more distracted you [from God] till you reached the grave. But you will soon come to know. But you will soon come to know. Indeed, were you to know the truth with certainty, you would see the fire of Hell. You would see it with the eye of certainty. Then on that Day you shall be questioned about your worldly favours.” (102:1-8)

The present world is a huge banquet of material things of all kinds. All these things have been placed in the world for the purpose of putting a person to the test rather than for his unrestricted use. If a person looks at things as part of a test, he will make use of them

only according to his needs, and with great care and a sense of responsibility.

But a person generally does not adopt a responsible attitude. The attraction of material things draws him towards them and he rushes towards them; his greed does not let him stop at any point. He wants to have more and more and engages himself fully in the acquisition of worldly wealth, morning and evening until his time of death approaches and he leaves the present world for the world of Hereafter with all his life's earnings. At that time, all of a sudden, he finds himself in a situation where he realizes that he has nothing that will be of any avail to him in the next stage of life.

A person wants to earn more and more so that he may accumulate more and more material assets. He remains caught up in this pursuit until the day he dies. After his death, he realizes that what was worth accumulating was something other than he had imagined. But this realization after death will be of no avail.

Any increase in worldly goods increases a person's accountability. But he, in his foolishness, thinks that he is adding to his success.

PROPER UTILIZATION OF THIS LIFE

A purposeful life is one in which one has faith, i.e., accepts the reality of life, abstains from the sinful, engages in virtuous deeds and shares one's discovery with others.

Chapter 103 of the Quran states: "I swear by the passage of time, that man is surely in a state of loss, except for those who believe and do good deeds and exhort one another to hold fast to the Truth, and who exhort one another to steadfastness." (103:1-3)

Every human being is born at a particular point in time. With the passage of time, his age keeps increasing until he reaches that point which is the last stage of his life. Then his death becomes imminent. This nature of human life tells us that only that person is successful who is able to make good use of his time before his death. Otherwise, his period of life will pass and finally he will have nothing to his credit.

At every moment a person is advancing towards his death. This means that if one does not make the best of the time which is still left to him, he will finally face total destruction. In order to be successful, a person has to exert himself, while to be a failure, he has to do nothing, except rush headlong towards it.

A venerable gentleman tells us that he understood the meaning of this chapter of the Quran from an ice vendor who was shouting in the market, 'O, people! Have mercy on one whose assets are melting away!' On hearing this cry, the gentleman said to himself that just as the ice melts away to nothing, similarly the lifespan given to a person is fast passing away. If the existing opportunities are lost in inaction or in evil action, this is one's loss. (Imam al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, v. 32, p. 278)

One who utilizes his time properly is one who adopts three courses in the present world. The first is that of faith, which means to become conscious of the reality of life, and show willingness to accept it. The second is that of virtuous deeds, which is engaging in activities required to be done as a matter of religious duty and abstaining from what is sinful. The third is sharing with people one's discovery of the higher reality. This follows upon such a deep realization of the Truth that

the concerned person feels eager to enlighten others with it.

Patience is necessary for leading a successful life in this world. When a person forsakes all those things which go against his belief only then is he able to receive the blessings of faith. When he applies the brake to his desires, only then is it possible for him to engage in virtuous action. Only when a person is patient during unpleasant experiences, is he able to exhort others to accept the truth.

RISE ABOVE MATERIALISM, FOCUS ON SUBLIME REALITIES

Man should raise himself above superficial things, refrain from following his desires and focus on sublime realities, to reach the high level reserved for him in Paradise.

Chapter 7 of the Quran states: “If it had been Our will, We could have used these signs to exalt him, but instead he clung to the earth and followed his own desires—he was like a dog that pants whether you

chase it away or leave it alone. Such are those who reject Our signs. Tell them this story so that they may reflect.” (7:176)

The signs of truth are in evidence everywhere in the present world. A person’s conscience guides him to the truth. The universe by its very existence is a silent declaration of the truth. Moreover, God’s Messenger takes guidance from God and conveys it to people to the ultimate extent.

Similarly, God has made a universal arrangement for the guidance of human beings. If a person were to listen to these divine messages and seek guidance from them, he could never go astray. He would certainly find the truth and then he would head towards that destination which is the real destination of success. During this process he would develop himself intellectually. His soul would keep evolving and he could become God’s preferred servant for whom He has reserved eternal blessings.

But the tragedy with most people is that they get defeated by succumbing to material things which draw them towards them. They ignore the voice of their own consciences and the silent announcement of the universe and the guidance of the Prophet to rush

towards material attractions. And finally, they get destroyed in a world which has the best opportunities for realizing the truth. But they fail to find the truth and their fate is destruction.

God has opened up the best opportunities for human beings in this world. He has provided all those factors, all those resources by which a person may undertake his journey and reach great heights. But one condition of this journey is that a person has to raise himself above superficial things and refrain from following his desires. He must ignore apparent attractions and focus his attention on sublime realities. Only people who do so will reach the high level reserved for human beings. Those who fail to do so will fall from the high status of humanity to the low level of animals.

ISLAM TEACHES COMPASSION FOR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS

Islam is a religion of mercy, a culture of peace. The gist of its teachings is that people should love one another. They ought to become symbols of mercy for one another.

When you open the Quran you will find that it begins thus: “In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful.” (1:1) This being the very first verse shows the importance of mercy, compassion and gentleness. When we are in the eyes of God, every act must become a symbol of mercy, compassion and gentleness. There should be no other feelings in one’s heart except for mercy and compassion for others.

Islam teaches the believer that when one meets another, he should greet him by saying Assalamu alaykum, that is to say ‘Peace be upon you’. He should express concern for peace and the security of others. Prayer is a form of worship in Islam which is performed five

times a day. To conclude the prayer, the worshipper turns right and left and utters these words: May God's peace and blessing be upon You.

In this way, Muslims are taught that they should have feelings of compassion for all human beings.

The truth is that Islam is the religion of mercy. All its teachings, directly or indirectly, relate to peace and harmony. Islam desires that everyone should have good feelings for everyone in his heart. He should see others as his very own, as human beings and not as friends or enemies.

This is the only way to build a better human society. This is repeatedly given special mention in Islam. A society in which these qualities exist will necessarily make progress. In such a society everyone will find that what he wants for himself will be given to him by others rather than what he does not want for himself.

Islam is a culture of peace. The gist of Islamic teachings is that people should love one another. They ought to become symbols of mercy for one another.

THE MOTIVATION FOR SOCIAL SERVICE

According to Islam when someone helps anyone, he becomes deserving of divine succour. Whatever good he has done to others, he will receive from God on a larger scale.

According to a tradition of the Prophet: “One who helped in removing the pain and trouble of another in this world shall have his trouble and pain removed by God on the Day of Judgment. One who has helped someone in difficulty shall have his difficulty eased by God in this world as well as in the Hereafter. One who kept another’s defects and negative points a secret shall have such negative points of his own kept secret by God in this world and as well as in the Hereafter. God helps people so long as they help their brothers.” (Sunan Abu Dawood 4946)

This teaching of Islam has made human service, a matter of personal interest for everyone. Accordingly, when someone helps anyone, he immediately makes

himself deserving of divine succour. Whatever good he has done to others, he will receive from God on a large scale.

This teaching produces an extraordinary willingness to serve others. When a person sees someone in pain, he feels that precious moment has come when by removing that person's difficulties he can make himself deserving of God's mercy. Similarly, when he sees that someone is in trouble, he rushes to solve his problem, for he is convinced that by removing his difficulty, he can help himself in having his own difficulty removed at some critical point. Whenever a person's failing or flaw comes to his knowledge, instead of making it public, he keeps it secret. In this way he makes himself deserving of having his flaws or failings kept secret by God.

The system of the world is such that sometimes someone is in need of something and another person is in a position to fulfil his need. Such circumstances exist so that one who he is able to fulfil another's need by helping him may make himself deserving of God's succour. And the person who has been helped should express his gratitude and acknowledgement. These feelings of gratitude and acknowledgement should come naturally to him.

GOOD BEHAVIOUR IN ABNORMAL SITUATIONS

Islam advocates good behaviour in all situations regardless of whether others behave well to one or not.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “Do not become imma‘a, that is, do not say that if people treat you well, you will treat them well, and if they harm you, you will do worse to them. You should rather get into the habit of doing good to those who are good to you, and doing no wrong to those who harm you.” (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 2007)

There is another tradition which says: “Join hand with those who break away from you, be good to those who harm you and forgive those who wrong you.” (Jami‘ al-Usul 9318)

Islam advocates a superior form of moral code which entails being consistently good in one’s behaviour in

all situations, regardless of whether others behave well or not. Islamic ethics has nothing to do with reaction. It is based rather on high moral principles. Ethics in Islam is a form of worship. It is not a reactive human attitude.

The reward of worship is commensurate with the intensity of feeling accompanying it. For example, when someone experiences bad behaviour or evil on the part of others, yet is consistently well behaved and does not respond to evil behaviour with evil, his reward will increase. This is because he adhered to the principles of good behaviour even if it meant the hurting of his own sentiments.

In a normal situation, good behaviour is simply a matter of good manners but in an abnormal situation good behaviour becomes a form of superior worship. In a normal situation what is good behaviour or good manners does nothing towards the development of the human personality. But when in an abnormal situation one does not give in to the influence of the bad behaviour of others and continues to behave well, this course of action will further the development of one's personality.

Good behaviour in response to bad behaviour without doubt exemplifies the greatest form of ethics.

SELFISHNESS IS AN INSULT TO HUMANITY

The teaching of Islam is that everyone should follow the same course of action for others as he does for himself. The same attitude he should adopt towards others as he would like them to adopt towards him.

According to one tradition the Prophet of Islam once observed: “None of you can be a true believer until he likes for his brother what he likes for himself.” (Sahih al-Bukhari 13)

According to this tradition, the criterion of human ethics is so simple that anyone can understand and follow it. The truth is that in this matter, no other criterion could be simpler.

Everyone knows without being told what he approves of and what he does not approve of. The teaching of Islam is that everyone should follow the same course of action for others as he does for himself.

Everyone likes others to talk to him politely, so everyone should try to talk to others politely. Everyone likes the promises made to him to be fulfilled. He should adopt the same attitude towards others as he would like them to adopt toward him. Everyone likes to be dealt with honesty so he too should be honest with others.

The evil person is one who knows the truth about himself, but forgets it in the case of others. As compared to him, the good human being is one who does not have this double standard. He should be to others what he is for himself.

Knowing one's own likes and dislikes is selfishness. Knowing others' likes along with one's own likes is sacrifice. Selfishness is an insult to humanity, whereas, sacrifice is a superior form of humanity. A selfish person acknowledges only himself, while a person who lives at the level of sacrifice, acknowledges others as well.

BE LIKE THE FRUIT-BEARING TREE

A believer is like a fruit-bearing tree. Whatever he finds in this world, he returns in a better form. This shows human perfection.

It is recorded in a tradition that the Prophet of Islam once observed: “There is one of the trees which may be compared to a believer.” Then he said, “This is the date tree or date palm.” (Sahih al-Bukhari 72)

What is the significance of the date tree and other such fruit-bearing trees? It is that these trees take their sustenance from the earth, the air and the sun. In this way by using all the resources around it, a tree replete with fruit stands on the earth like a force of nature. It takes all the elements nature offers and then converts them into that more precious and more beneficial thing called a fruit. Then this fruit is not meant just for them but is rather meant for others to eat as food and derive energy from.

The case of a believer is identical. The society in which a believer lives has many things to offer him. With this provender his mental and physical personality keeps developing until he becomes a complete human being. But it is not lawful for a believer to keep on taking without being ready to give. In this matter, a believer does exactly as a date tree or any other fruit-bearing tree does. It accepts that others must have a share in its fruits and lives in such a manner that its existence is beneficial not only for itself but also for others. Whatever it has received from the world it does not keep for itself, but rather regards it to be the common asset of the whole humanity.

When whatever a person finds in this world, he returns in a better form, that shows human perfection.

HELPING OTHERS MAKES YOU HAPPY

Helping others is an extremely noble task. When someone helps another to surmount his difficulties, he becomes happy and deserving of God's succour.

According to one tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: "That person is enviable whom God has given wealth and then he spends from it day and night to help people." (Sahih al-Bukhari 7529)

According to Islam, wealth has not been given to a person in order to fulfil his wishes. Wealth is rather given to him so that he may use it for the welfare of his fellow human beings. Wealth should be used to earn divine rewards rather than to fulfil one's personal desires.

According to Islam, a person has two responsibilities: one in relation to God and the other in relation to others. In relation to God, a person's responsibility is to accept His godhead and become His worshipper.

In relation to human beings, his responsibility is to become the well-wisher of others and come to their assistance on all occasions, whenever there is an opportunity. The individual can help others in many ways. One of these ways is to spend one's wealth on them. Wealth enables a person to be of help in easing and solving people's problem. It makes it easy for him to remove others' difficulties.

Helping others is an extremely noble task. When someone avails of the precious opportunity to help another to surmount his difficulties, he has reason to be happy. This happiness is like reward for his actions. Another great reward is what he will find in the next world.

Coming to the rescue of others is not just a series of isolated incidents. It is a permanent characteristic of the believer. A true believer is one who is happy to bring happiness into the lives of others, who considers that his success lies in fulfilling others' needs. He is always on the lookout for such occasion, morning and evening, when he can help others and perfect his humanity.

ACTIONS THAT PROMOTE BROTHERLY FEELINGS

Islam desires that complaint and hatred must be replaced by love and well-wishing. This helps to cement relationships and in building a harmonious society.

The Prophet once observed: “O people, shake hands, this will obviate malice. Give others gifts. This will foster love among you and will help in putting an end to enmity.” (Muwatta Imam Malik 694)

Human society is no collection of inanimate objects. It is rather a grouping of sensitive individuals. When such people live together in unity, it promotes good human relations which is indispensable to humankind, in that it promotes brotherly feelings.

Greeting and shaking hands with one another create a good ambience in society. Being pleasant when meeting people and shaking hands are obligatory in the building of a harmonious society. After greeting

when one shakes hands with others, it is but natural that feelings of alienation should end and be replaced with feelings of closeness.

Another way to generate brotherly feelings is to give gifts to one another, whether big or small. When this is done in all sincerity, it fosters extraordinary love in both the giver and the taker. Gifts bind both the giver and the taker in a noble human relationship.

It is desirable in Islam that negative inclinations should be suppressed and positive propensities be promoted. An atmosphere marred by complaint and hatred must be replaced by love thus promoting healthy relationships. Shaking hands plays a very important role in cementing relationship and in building a great society.

IRON CHARACTER

A believer's iron character is a guarantee that he will stick firmly to the truth and justice, that in all situations he will be of sterling character.

Chapter 57 of the Quran states: “We sent Our messengers with evidence and, with them, We sent down the Book and the Scales of Justice, so that men might act in all fairness. We sent down iron with its great inherent strength and its many benefits for mankind, so that God might know who would stand up for Him, though unseen, and His messengers. God is powerful, and almighty.” (57:25)

According to this verse, what is desirable for a person is that he should steadfastly adhere to justice. A society whose individuals do so will benefit in many different ways. Peace will prevail in such a society. People's right will be respected and everyone will have the opportunity to share freely in God's blessings. In such

a society all the benefits which God has destined for people will reach everyone without fail.

Adhering to justice necessarily demands maturity and firmness. In the present world there are many factors which can cause a person to deviate from the path of justice. These are factors which will not likely lead him to the path of justice. In such a situation, firm resolve and determination alone can keep a person invariably on the path of justice. Iron is symbolic of this firm character. Iron is exceptionally firm, that is why it is extremely useful for all those things which require hardness – from needles to machines and bridges and innumerable other things which reflect this beneficial quality of iron.

This firmness is likewise desirable in humans. A human being needs to become as firm as iron in order to perform all of his human duties. A person's being like iron in character is a guarantee that he will stick firmly to the truth, that in all situations he will be of sterling character. Iron is in no way a sign of violence, it is a sign of strength.

SPENDING MONEY ON OTHERS

Spending money on others is in one respect is a human service and in another respect it is divine worship.

Chapter 2 of the Quran states: “They will ask you what they should spend on others. Say, ‘Whatever you give should be for parents, close relatives, orphans, the needy, and travellers. God is well aware of whatever good you do.’ (2:215)

This verse of the Quran tells us what the items of expenditure on others should be. The truth is that all those people with whom you came into contact, whether temporarily or on a permanent basis, all deserve having money spent on them when in need.

In this connection the natural order of things is that if anyone’s relatives are in need, the money should be spent on them first of all. The reward is equal for fulfilling the needs of relatives and those who are

unrelated. The closeness or distance of the relationship does not make any difference in this matter.

Next in order of importance come the neighbours. Fulfilling their needs is a great human act. These neighbours could fall into different category, for example, a permanent neighbour and others who become temporary neighbours as on a journey. There are yet others like travellers, who also deserve to have needs fulfilled.

In society it often happens that certain people become orphans. Sometimes people meet with accidents and so become needy. Such people are especially deserving of support. Every society is duty bound to help them. Help for such people can be done individually, as well as through social institutions which can provide help in an organized way.

Spending money in one respect is a human service and in another respect it is divine worship.

SPREAD COOLNESS LIKE THE ICE

Just as ice spreads coolness in the environment, a believer should likewise be a source of comfort rather than a source of trouble to people around him.

The Prophet is reported to have said: “When one person met another and did not eat or drink anything, it was as if he had met a dead person.” (Kashful Khifa 2493)

The obvious meaning of this tradition is that when anyone meets another, he is offered something, even if it is only some dates or a glass of water. At the time of meeting, offering something to drink or eat is a matter of social etiquette. Everyone does so, be he rich or poor, big or small, man or woman. This dissipates away any feeling of strangeness and the two people are brought close together.

But the real spirit of this prophetic saying is that everyone should be the well-wisher of others. When

he talks to someone, he should be pleasant and speak well of him. When he gives a message to anyone, it should be clear and well-intentioned.

It has been said that at all times, a person emanates something of himself. It is like ice spreading coolness in the environment, or fire generating warmth on a cold night. Similarly, a person at every moment gives off something of himself. This phenomenon may occur consciously or unconsciously. Now the sincere person's task is to remain positive about doing this. Just as ice spreads coolness in the environment, he should likewise be a source of comfort rather than a source of trouble.

Once one's social instincts have been aroused, one will, of course, be amiable towards others. When anyone meets such a person, he will find it a pleasant experience. He will feel that he has passed through a valley of flowers without thorns.

SHARE YOUR RESOURCES WITH OTHER HUMAN BEINGS

Individuals are permanently indebted to society. Human decency demands that a part of one's earnings be regularly given to the needy and the deprived, on a regular basis.

The Quran explains in detail which people will be ushered into Paradise in their next life. One of their qualities has been described thus: "They give a due share of their wealth to those who ask [for help] and to the destitute." (70:24-25)

In the present world everyone has many associations with other human beings. On the one hand, he is linked with the vaster world of nature and, on the other hand, with human society. Whatever a person does, there is an amalgam of all these elements in his life. No one has the power to be independent of his environment and achieve things of value in total isolation.

A human being receives innumerable benefits from the world of nature (sun, air, water and much more). These too have a claim upon him, and that is that he should express his gratefulness to the Creator of the universe, sincerely, from his heart. This feeling of gratitude should be so strong that the remembrance of the Creator should become a permanent part of his life, day and night. Those who fulfil these obligations which they owe to God are the sole creatures who deserve to live in this world as a matter of right.

Individuals are permanently indebted to society. Whatever wealth a person earns, be it more or less, there is a part played in every situation by the society of which he is a member. Whatever a person earns is never just gained by dint of one's own personal striving: it is rather the common gift of the entire society.

Human decency demands that this fact should be acknowledged. A practical form of this acknowledgement is the gift of a part of one's earnings to the needy and the deprived, on a regular basis. That is, help should be given to those who ask and also to those who do not ask but are evidently in need and deserving of being given material support. It is only after fulfilling others' rights that a person may spend his wealth on himself.

BE OF USE TO OTHERS

The desirable human being in this universe is one who is of avail to others. One who does not do so will find no place in the map of nature.

One of the laws of nature is described thus in the Quran: “He sends down water from the sky that fills riverbeds to overflowing, each according to its measure. The torrent carries along swelling foam, akin to what rises from smelted ore from which man makes ornaments and tools. God thus depicts truth and falsehood. The scum is cast away, but whatever is of use to man remains behind. God thus speaks in parables.” (13:17)

In this verse of the Quran two natural phenomena are mentioned. One is that when there is rainfall, the water flows and reaches rivers and streams. At that time a great deal of foam surfaces on it. In the same way when silver and other minerals are heated in order to clean them, their impurities appear in the shape of

foam, but immediately thereafter the foam, which is are of no use, evaporates into space and the water and minerals which are useful for mankind, remain intact. These are the events of nature through which God shows symbolically what principles He has laid down for success or failure in life. One principle is that, in this world, only that person has a place who proves useful to others. The individual who has lost his capacity to benefit others has no place in this world created by God.

Living for one's own self is against the scheme of nature. A person ought whenever necessary, to be a help to others while fulfilling his own personal needs. One who does not do so will find no place in the map of nature.

The desirable human being in this universe is one who is of avail to others.

CHARITY IS NOT AN OCCASIONAL ACT

Charity is an expression of well-wishing for others. When this spirit of charity is born within a person, it finds expression on all occasions.

It is desirable in Islam that everyone should be imbued with the spirit of charity. On all occasions he should be ready to give alms. The Prophet of Islam once observed that every Muslim is exhorted to give alms. When asked if the person concerned did not have anything to give, the Prophet replied he should work and earn and then he should keep some of his earnings for himself and give the rest to others. Then again he was asked what the person should do if he was unable to earn. The Prophet said, then he should help the needy. Again he was asked what he should do if he couldn't help the needy. The Prophet replied, he should urge others to do good. He was asked what if he could not do this either. Then the Prophet observed

that he should refrain from doing evil as that is also a form of charity. (Sahih al-Bukhari 1445)

Alms-giving is not an occasional act. It has to be performed regularly. When this spirit of charity is born within one it finds expression at all times. One who possesses this charitable spirit will surely act in accordance with it.

Charity in fact, expresses well-wishing for others. When this spirit of well-wishing is awakened, a person feels the inner compulsion to help others. If he has money he will help others with it. If he does not have money, he will earn some so that he may meet his own requirements and then give the rest to others. And if he does not have money, he will try to help others with his other capabilities, for instance, removing thorns from the path, or guiding travellers. This feeling will sometimes express itself in the form of urging others to do good. To reform others, he will say good words to them. The last form of charity is that he should save others from such of his actions as may harm them.

THE WEALTHY MUST SHARE WITH THE NEEDY

The wealthy should not consider their wealth to be theirs alone, but rather think that it is others' share which has fallen to their lot by chance.

Islam lays great stress on the wealthy not keeping their wealth for themselves, but spending it on others as well. It is recorded in a tradition, that the Prophet once observed that the help you receive is on account of the weak. (Sahih al-Bukhari 2896)

It has been generally observed that some are wealthier than others. What is the reason? The reason lies in the system of nature which God has established to meet His exigencies. This world has been made for the purpose of putting a person to the test. It is the demand of this test that there should be differences between the people. In actual fact, it is these differences which create testing situations in human society. If there were no differences of this kind between people there will be no circumstances in which one might be tested.

One of these differences is congenital, some being strong while others are weak mentally as well as physically. It is due to these differences that some, because of their superior abilities, are able to acquire more wealth, whereas others, because of their lesser abilities can never be really wealthy.

It is as if one having more wealth is explained by the weakness of others. If all are strong, then there would be only a few who would not be able to acquire more wealth. Therefore, the wealthy person should acknowledge this natural state of affairs. He should accept it that his wealth is not the result of his own ability but is rather the result of divine nature of things.

If this thinking is inculcated in the minds of the wealthy they will not consider their wealth to be theirs alone, but will rather think that it is others' share which has fallen to their lot by chance. This feeling will compel them to see that whatever they have derived from others should be returned to them. This is the teaching of Islam and this is the true human spirit.

FULFILLING OTHERS' NEEDS IS A HIGHER LEVEL OF HUMANITY

If feeding oneself serves the interests of this world, then feeding others serves the interests of existence in the Hereafter. It raises man to a higher level of humanity.

The Quran shows one aspect of God's desired people as being their willingness to give food—despite their love for it—to the poor and orphans and captives (76:8). Moreover, the Quran tells us that in the Hereafter, when the people of hell are asked what it was that brought them to hell, one reason they will give is this: “We didn't feed the poor.” (74:44)

In such verses the act of feeding the poor is symbolic. This means that according to Islam it is a must for everyone, that whenever he sees anyone thirsty and hungry, he should give him food and drink. He should fulfil his needs.

Feeding others or fulfilling their needs is without

doubt an act of great virtue. If just earning and feeding oneself is the average level of humanity, then earning, sharing one's food with others and fulfilling their needs takes a human being to a higher level of humanity.

If in any society people are imbued with such a spirit that they take into account in their earnings the share of others and, along with fulfilling their own needs, they fulfil others' need as well, such a society will be a peaceful one. In such a society everyone will lead his life peacefully. Such a society will be like one big family each member of which will feel for others. They will have good feelings for others, just as they have good feelings for the members of their own family.

Those who build such a society in this world fulfil the will of God. These are the people who will be lodged in the society of Paradise in the Hereafter, for they shall have the right to lead their lives in consonance with this heavenly society. They already live their lives in this world on the pattern of the heavenly society.

If feeding oneself serves the interests of this world, then feeding others serves the interests of existence in the Hereafter. If feeding oneself gives us temporary happiness, then feeding others give us permanent

happiness. Eating oneself is commonplace, while giving food to others is living on a high level of humanity.

DO ACTS WHICH BENEFIT PEOPLE EVEN AFTER YOUR DEATH

In giving to others one finds even more for oneself.
Establishing an environment of human oneness is
indeed a great service to humanity.

According to a tradition, the Prophet once observed: “When a person plants a tree and then he dies and this tree grows and bears fruit which human beings and birds eat, then this will be a continuous form of charity so long as the creatures of God keep benefiting from it.” (Musnad Ahmad 15616)

Being of use or being helpful is an immutable principle in Islam. It is called continuous charity. This means that when a person does something good which benefits others, for instance, he plants a tree or builds a bridge and then he dies but his work is still extant

after his death and continues to benefit people, then this kind of continuous charity is regarded as being of great importance and deserving of a great reward. Continuing charity in fact reflects a noble aspect of a person's character. It shows a high level of altruism when a person does something which will benefit succeeding generations, long after he has left this world.

Munificence is a noble virtue. One who is of such a character does not do something good only when the need arises. He rather does things which are of general benefit. His wish is that even his death does not put an end to his beneficence. He wishes that the good he does should continue even when he has left this world.

Being of service to others is in fact the perfection of humanity. In giving to others he finds even more for himself, more than he has given to others. Such an act obliterates the concept of 'we' and 'they'. And establishing an environment of human oneness is indeed a great service to humanity.

EXTEND COMPASSION TO ALL

Fulfilling one's own need is to respond to one's own natural urges. Fulfilling others' needs is a form of worship and demonstrates the highest form of human values.

A tradition reported in different books of Hadith has been recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari under the title, 'Mercy to man and animal'. According to this tradition, "A man was once walking along a path and because he was extremely thirsty, when he saw a well, he got down into it and drank water from it. Then when he came back up, he saw a dog there who was panting with severe thirst and eating wet mud. The man saw that this dog was also suffering in the same way as he had been suffering. So he again went down into the well. Once down, he filled his shoe with water which he caught hold with his teeth. He then came back up with the water and offered it to the dog to drink. God accepted his deed, and gave him salvation and forgave him. People asked, 'O God's messenger,

is there any reward for serving animals as well?’ The Prophet said, ‘Yes you will be rewarded for serving any animate thing.’” (Sahih al-Bukhari 2363)

When a person’s body is in need of water he naturally feels thirsty. That leads him to drink water and fulfil the need of the body. The same is true of feeling cold or hungry. This is a call from nature telling a person that now he has to eat, or use woollen clothes, or drink water and thus fulfil his needs.

Animals also have such feelings but animals are aware of them only within themselves. The case of a human being is different. It is required of humans to extend these feelings to others. Just as he feels his own need and makes arrangements to fulfil it, he should feel the need of others and also of animals, and try to fulfil their needs.

Fulfilling one’s own need is to respond to one’s own natural urges. But fulfilling others’ needs is a form of worship and demonstrates the highest form of human values.

THE RIGHTS OF NEIGHBOURS

One should treat one's neighbour with the same respect and honour as he does his own family members. Then he can be said to be a truly good person.

Islam lays great stress on giving neighbours their rights. The Prophet of Islam once observed, "Those who believe in God must interact with their neighbours with respect and honour." (Sahih al-Bukhari 6019) There is another tradition in which he said: "That person is not a believer who gives trouble to his neighbour." (Sahih al-Bukhari 6016)

Any person's first contact is with his neighbour. Therefore, a person's first test is also in terms of his relationship with his neighbours. If someone is evil, his relations with his neighbours will be bad. If someone is good, his relations with his neighbours will be good. A person's humanity is not known by how he behaves with those who live at a distance. The real sign of

his humanity is how he deals with those who live in his neighbourhood. In this matter, without doubt, a neighbour is the nearest person a person will come in contact with.

Because of this closeness, the effect of every action reaches one's neighbours. If, for no good reason, you make noise in your home, the sound will travel to the neighbour. If you pollute the air, the smoke will enter your neighbour's home. If you throw garbage outside your home, this unpleasantness will have to be borne by your neighbour too. In this way, the effect of all your good and bad deeds reaches your neighbours. He experiences the good things that you do and also the bad things that you do.

Therefore, one ought to be very prudent about how he deals with neighbours. He should treat his neighbour with the same respect and honour as he does his own family members.

Anyone who is living in the neighbourhood of a tree cannot be adversely affected by its shadow. Similarly, the effects of the good deeds of a truly good person will inevitably reach his neighbours.

BE OF SERVICE TO OTHERS

When true religion is received by an individual the feeling of human well-wishing inevitably develops in him. Such are those who pass the divine test.

The Prophet of Islam once observed: “Religion is well-wishing, religion is well-wishing, religion is well-wishing.” People asked him, “O God’s messenger, for whom?” He replied, “For God, for His book, for his Prophet, for the leader of the believers, for the common man and for everyone.” (Sunan Abu Dawood 4944)

When true religion is received by an individual the feeling of human well-wishing inevitably develops in him, just as when we put sugar in water, the water naturally becomes sweet. So whoever receives religion in its true spirit will necessarily be imbued with the spirit of well-wishing. Where there is no heartfelt well-wishing towards others, there can be no religion either.

There are many aspects to well-wishing. When you see someone doing something wrong or saying something wrong, your well-wishing would extend to your reaching out to him and trying with gentleness, compassion, sympathy and serious argument, to make him understand the error of his ways so that he may leave off his wrongdoing.

There are such people who look at others only to see what they can gain from them. Such people are not desirable in God's eyes. They are misfits on the map of nature. They fail in the test which God has set them in the present world.

There are others who see people as potential objects of their beneficence. Such people will feel content only when they are able to be of service to others or when others can benefit from them. Such are those who pass the divine test.

BE READY TO REMOVE OTHERS' PAIN

A true human being should be ready to relieve others' pain just as he does his own. He is happy to see others happy and sad to see others sad.

According to a tradition the Prophet of Islam once observed: "There are more than seventy branches of faith, the most superior branch is believing that there is no God save Allah and its lesser most branch is removing anything from the path which may cause others injury. And modesty is also a branch of faith." (Al-Adab al-Mufrad 598)

One aspect of the temperament produced by faith is always having the urge to help others. It becomes impossible for a true believer to see someone in pain and difficulty and not help him. Even if he sees anything like a stone or a thorn in the path, he will not rest content until he removes it. He always fears that someone might take that path and get hurt.

One way of leading one's life is thinking only about oneself, being concerned only about one's own comfort and problems. Once his problems have been solved, he does not care about anyone else. But such a person is not a true human being. His character is not of the noble kind which nature demands.

The true human being is one who becomes uneasy at the pain of others, just as he is uneasy about his own pain. He should be ready to remove others' pain just as he does on his own behalf. As he becomes active in solving his own problems, he looks upon the affairs of others as he looks upon his own. He is happy to see others happy and sad to see others sad or in trouble.

What differentiates human beings from stones is this sensitivity. A stone has no sensitivity, while a human being is a sensitive creature. If a person loses his sensitivity, there will be no difference between him and a piece of stone.

SPEND ON OTHERS

In this world one who makes money should not regard it as his personal possession, but rather give some of it to others to fulfil their needs.

The Prophet of Islam once observed: “Every day when God’s servant gets up in the morning, two angels come down from the heavens. One of them says, ‘O God, give those who spend from their rewards,’ and the other angel says, ‘O God, destroy the money of those who do not give money to others.’” (Sahih al-Bukhari 1442)

This saying of the Prophet in actual fact indicates the system of nature according to which God has created this world. In this world success is meant for those who lead their lives in consonance with the system of nature. For those who are not ready to be in accord with this natural system, there is nothing but failure in this world.

The Creator's plan of nature is that in this world one who makes money should not regard it as his personal possession, but he should rather give some of it to others so that they may also fulfil their needs. Any society consisting of such people will flourish and positive values will prevail therein. Such a society will be like a green tree. Here, everyone will receive his or her share. There the giver will also get things in various forms in return for what he has given to others, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly.

On the contrary, in a society where those who have wealth keep it to themselves, it will be found that its members will not have good relations with others. There people will be jealous of those who have received more than they have. The wealthy will live in their own sphere. They will not have the trust of the other members of society. As a result, such a society will become like a shrub with thorns. There even the wealthy will have even less peace and contentment than those who have no wealth.

BE GIVER MEMBERS OF SOCIETY

The desired human society is one whose members are imbued with the spirit of giving. A society in which there is only the spirit of taking is against nature's plan.

According to one tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: "Wealth is very productive and sweet. It will be a source of blessing for one who takes it with a generous heart. It will not be a blessing for one who takes it with greed. He will be like the person who eats but is not satiated. The upper hand is better than the lower hand." (Sahih al-Bukhari 3143)

'The upper hand is better than the lower hand' means that the status of the giver is greater than that of the taker. Islam fosters this spirit in everyone. Regardless of the society one lives in one should live in such a way that he is a giver member of society. Being a taker member is not approved of in Islam.

This give and take is no simple matter. It is a core factor in ethics. In a society where people have this giving spirit, positive moral values will be promoted. In such an atmosphere there will be mutual love, the making of concessions to others, social service, well-wishing, and brotherly relations. Such values will be cherished. The whole of society will become like a family, where no one takes another as an outsider. Everyone will rather become like a near and dear one. On the contrary, in a society where all are bent on taking from others, negative values will take root. In such a society, people will live like strangers. There will be no mutual trust. Selfishness rather than well-wishing will prevail.

The desired human society is one whose members are imbued with the spirit of giving. A society in which there is only the spirit of taking is against nature's plan. Such a society can never flourish.

EACH FOR ALL, ALL FOR EACH

When two human beings meet, it is the meeting of two beings who should be examples of mercy and blessing for each other.

The system of nature is based on the principle of selfless munificence. In this world everything is of benefit to others at no cost to them. Here duties are carried out without rights being an issue. Here others are given concessions but without any display of one's own greatness.

The sun gives light and heat continuously to the entire world, on an unconditional basis. At all times and in every corner of the world the air supplies the oxygen every moment on which people's lives depend, but it has never given any bill for it. Water, without which life would have been impossible, is available at a universal level but all this happens without there being any recompense.

The trees give shade and flowers and fruits but they don't demand any price for it. The earth grows all kinds of crops which are a support for humans and animals, but the earth does all this without wanting any reward for it. It is does all this just to serve others. Everywhere we hear beautiful birdsong but the birds don't even expect any appreciation from us.

A human being too is a part of nature. He also has to adopt the same way as the rest of the world has done on a vast scale. No other method of life is possible or desirable in this world.

Humans are social animals. A person always lives his life amongst many others, being constantly in contact with them. Now the right and natural method is that when human beings interact with each other, everyone should benefit in one way or the other from everyone else. When two human beings meet, it is not like the meeting of two stones. Rather it is the meeting of two beings who should be examples of mercy and blessing for each other.

Nature is the best guide, provided it suffers no disturbance.

THE ETHICS OF THE UNIVERSE

Man should follow the ethics of the universe. He ought to convert his anger into forgiveness. He ought to divert his negative feelings into positive feelings.

The universe serves as a model for human ethics. The ethical behaviour that our Creator desires from us has already been established perfectly in the universe on a vast scale so that a person may take lessons from it and follow that ethical behaviour throughout his life.

Heaven, in spite of its infinite vastness, is totally silent. In this way it is telling every human being to be silent and become a learner more than a communicator. However much glory is heaped upon you, you should live as if you have nothing and are nothing.

The sun is a limitless treasure house of light and heat. At all times, it gives light and heat to the earth but it asks for nothing in return. This is a lesson that a person

should benefit others unconditionally. He should keep giving to others whether he receives any recompense or not.

The air is always on the move. It passes through the narrow and open places, but it confronts no one. In this way it gives a silent message to every person: he should organize his activities in such a way that he does not clash with anyone. Your activities should not create any trouble for others. The tree grows out of the ground in the form of a sapling and then it grows into a fully developed tree giving people shade, greenery, flowers, fruits and other things. It takes its food from mud and water and then it turns into a lush green tree. In this way it tells us humans to follow suit. A human being ought to convert his anger into forgiveness. He ought to divert his negative feelings into positive feelings. Even when others treat him badly, he should respond with the gift of goodness. This is the model of ethics which is displayed by the universe at every moment. Human beings ought to adopt this universal model too.

HAVE GOOD OPINIONS OF OTHERS

The holding of a good opinion implies rooting out a bad opinion about others. This is an internal jihad which merits a great reward in Islam.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed, “Holding good opinions about others is a form of worship.” (Musnad Ahmad 7956)

In life occasions repeatedly arise when a person comes to mistrust another. This happens because a person is suspicious about someone. Consciously or unconsciously, he comes to regard him as evil which is why he is believed to be engaged in wrongdoing.

Another major reason for mistrust is the lack of information. Sometimes it happens that an individual is not fully informed about the circumstances of others. His knowledge is only partial and, and because of this, he is not able to see the issue in the correct light. He then suffers as a result of this misunderstanding.

Due to such misapprehension, the forming of correct opinions has become a very difficult task. If a person forms some opinions as a result of prejudice or incomplete knowledge, he will be doing a grave injustice to his fellow human beings. In such a situation what a person has to do is to rid himself of biased thinking and on the other hand before forming any opinion, he should try to have full knowledge of the matter. This has made the question of holding a good opinion one of jihad, which means striving. It is thanks to this aspect of holding a good opinion that it has been accorded the status of a great form of worship.

The holding of a good opinion is no simple matter. It is to root out a bad opinion about others and replace it with a good opinion about others. This is an internal jihad and that is why this act will merit a great reward according to Islam.

HOW TO PURIFY YOUR WEALTH

A person should give his wealth to others without any hope of return. The giving of wealth at the same time becomes good for the taker as well as for the giver.

The Quran thus defines one aspect of the true worshipper of God: “One who gives his wealth to become purified, and owes no favour to anyone, which is to be repaid, acting only for the sake of his Lord the Most High—and before long he will be well satisfied.” (92:18-21)

Islam is emphatic that a person should not reserve all his earnings for himself. He must give some of them to others. Spending all one’s money on oneself and not giving any away for the cause of God or meeting others’ needs is discouraged in Islam.

If anyone gives from his wealth to someone who formerly had helped him, this is indeed a good deed, but such gifts do not fulfil the demands of Islamic

teachings. This does not serve the purpose for which Islam wants you to spend money on others. When someone gives a share of his wealth to others, this is apparently to meet others' needs. But according to Islam the true purpose is to reform the giver. In this way the giver purifies his heart and his soul.

Certain moral evils are linked with wealth, for instance, stinginess, greed, a feeling of superiority, and so on. But when it is at God's behest that the wealthy person gives to others, then he removes these evils from within him. To reserve money for himself is to nourish these evils, whereas to give to others from his money is like cleansing himself of these evils.

When a person gives his wealth to others without any hope of return, that suppresses his feelings of stringiness. His love of wealth is diminished. He learns the lesson that wealth is for need, not for the owner's glory. The giving of wealth should at the same time be good for the taker as well as for the giver.

FREE FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPLEXES

To make oneself deserving of Paradise, one must try to forget bitter memories and rise above all kinds of negative feelings and psychological complexes.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once said of a man who passed by the place where he was sitting that he would go to Paradise. One of the men sitting with the Prophet started wondering what that special act was that had caused the Prophet of Islam to say that he would go to Paradise. Therefore, he went to the man's house and, with his permission, stayed there for three days. On the third day, when he was leaving, the host enquired as to why he had come there. Then the guest told him what the Prophet had said about him, and that he had come there to watch what special thing he was doing, but he had not seen any special act which was greater than that of the common believer. Then the host replied, "I am as you saw me but there is one thing in me perhaps because

of which the Prophet had spoken like this. It is that I don't bear any malice toward anyone." (Musnad Ahmad 12697)

In the modern world it happens repeatedly that one person has a grudge or a complaint against another. Living in society without complaints is not possible. Sometimes someone utters bitter words. Sometimes someone does not fulfil your expectations. Sometimes you are harmed by someone. Sometimes someone injures your ego or casts a slur upon your honour.

In this way bitter memories are often accumulated and to obliterate them is impossible. This is the point where a person is being tested. This is the point where he can make himself deserving of Paradise. To pass this test, a person must try to forget bitter memories and, even if he is reminded of them, he should not come under their influence. One who rises above these negative feelings, will be ushered into the gardens of Paradise.

ENVY DESTROYS YOUR INNER BEING

One's soul or inner personality is actually the real human being. One must preserve one's inner personality, especially from negative influences.

The Prophet of Islam once observed: "Save yourself from envy or jealousy, for envy eats up virtues as fire eats up wood." (Sunan Abu Dawood 4903)

Fire is the killer of wood. Therefore, wood has to be saved from fire in order to preserve it. Similarly, some things are killers of the human body. For bodily health, it is necessary for the body to be completely saved from such fatal things.

Exactly the same is true of a person's inner personality. A person's soul or his inner personality is actually the real human being. For this real human being, some things are quite fatal. These things will eat into his inner being like fire, therefore, it is to a person's advantage to save his inner being from them. He must

preserve his human existence. Of the fatal things, the worst is envy. Those who fall a victim to envy will certainly do damage to their spiritual life.

What is envy? Envy is that state of mind in which one covets what another has and cannot bear to see him in possession of it. Such envy, without doubt, harms the envier. It does not lessen the greatness of the envied one.

In the present world when anyone finds some good thing in life, it is in actual fact a gift from God. God gives something to someone or other things to others because of the exigencies of putting a person to the test. Someone is given less, another is given more. In such a situation, becoming envious of others' special abilities is to go against the natural system established by God. In such a situation of strife, no one can become successful: by failing to accept the divine verdict a person destroys himself.

SAVE YOURSELF FROM SUFFERING BY SAVING OTHERS

The easiest way to have a peaceful life is to keep the peace with others. One who does not make anyone suffer, saves himself from suffering.

There is a tradition according to which the Prophet of Islam once observed: “One who harms another will be harmed by God; one who causes hardship to another will suffer hardship by God’s will.” (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 1940)

God has created the system of this world in such a way that here no action is unilateral. Here every action is bilateral in its consequences. If you throw a ball at a wall, it will rebound at you. If you abuse someone, these words of abuse, meant only for others, will enter your ear as well. If you take revenge upon someone, his family members will likewise take revenge upon you. The same is true of every action. When anyone acts against another, he should realize that just as the

other party will suffer from it, so too will he have to suffer in one form or another in consequence.

This grave reality, as explained in the above prophetic saying, relates to everyone. No one is exempt from it. No one has the power to escape it.

The truth is that in this world the easiest way to have a peaceful life is to keep the peace with others. One who gives no one any trouble, saves himself from trouble. One who does not make anyone suffer, saves himself from suffering in this world.

In this world no one can lead a life apart from the system of nature. Here everyone has to live in accord with this plan of nature, whether big or small. Here living in accord with the plan of nature leads to success, while deviation from it leads to failure.

Islam is not something separate from nature. Islam is in fact an application of these eternal principles of nature to human life.

REFORMED LIFE

The right way for a person is to lead his life without corrupting the reformed world. He should live a life based on the principles of honesty and justice.

The Quran tells us that God's messenger, Shuayb, was sent to the people of Midian by God. These people had become corrupt, so he addressed them thus: "O my people, worship God; you have no other god but Him. A clear sign has indeed come to you from your Lord. So give full measure and full weight, and do not deliver short. Do not corrupt the land after it has been set in order. This is for your own good, if you are true believers." (7:85)

According to the Quran the present world is a place of reform. Here, the right way of for a person is to lead his life without corrupting the reformed world. If he introduces perversion into the set plan of nature, that will be an unforgivable offense. For such a crime, a person cannot save himself in the court of God.

One aspect of this plan of nature relates to the material world, for instance, the systems of air, water, trees, and agriculture. It is a person's right to make use of these things without making any changes in them. But if he changes the system, in any way, for instance, if he cuts down all the trees, and pollutes all the water or reservoirs or indulges in any such activity by which he may change the proportion of gases in the air, this will be an unforgiveable offence.

The other plan for human society is that the weighing scale should be accepted as a symbol of justice. The virtue of the weighing scale is that it weighs things with total exactitude. Showing less or more than the actual weight is against nature. A person too should develop this virtue. He should adopt the principle of justice exactly like the weighing scale in his dealings with others. He should carve out his entire life in line with the principle of justice.

The weighing scale in one respect is a symbol of correct weight. And in another respect so far as moral values are concerned, it is a symbol of justice and honesty.

SOCIAL REFORM SPRINGS FROM PERSONAL REFORM

To form a society of peace and contentment, individuals should concentrate on their duties, inculcate mutual trust and promote positive values.

The Prophet of Islam once observed: “Very soon the rulers will become corrupt.” The people asked what should be done at that time. The Prophet replied: “Give them their dues and ask for your rights from God.” (Sahih al-Bukhari 7052)

The same was stated thus by Jesus Christ: “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Romans 13:1). This is one of the important divine teachings which may be expressed in these words: a human being should keep his eyes on his duties and not on his rights. Instead of clashing with others in the name of rights, he should try to know his duties and engage himself in discharging those duties.

A person's eyes should not be on his rights but rather on his duties. He should not look to what he has been deprived of but should see rather what he has. All his attention should be focused on what he has given to others and on what he has added to the benefit of humanity.

The attitude of demanding one's rights leads to conflict and confrontation in society. It puts an end to mutual trust in society and instead produces hatred and enmity. On the contrary, in a society where individuals concentrate on their duties, positive values will be promoted and mutual trust will flourish. People will respect one another and in such a society peace and contentment will prevail.

The government is formed out of society: society is not formed out of the government. If in any society positive values prevail, the government that will be formed there will be a good government. On the contrary, where society is marred by negative values, its government will also fall a prey to negativity. The principle mentioned in this prophetic saying, if adhered to, is a guarantee of the reform of society and along with it the reform of government.

Personal reform is the greatest guarantee of social reform.

SAVE YOURSELF FROM MENTAL AGITATION

Restraining one's anger is not of trifling importance,
it is the key principle in the reform of all social issues.

According to the Quran two of the qualities of the believer are restraint of anger and being forgiving towards their fellow men. (3:134)

According to a tradition, a companion once said to the Prophet, "O Messenger of God, tell me something which benefits me and is brief so that I may remember it." The Prophet replied, "Don't be angry." The questioner repeated his question again and again. On each occasion the Prophet replied, "Don't be angry." (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 2020)

For the reform of the individual as well as for the building of society this is a key principle. In the present world, everyone repeatedly faces such experiences as may provoke his anger. Now if a person is influenced by these negative incidents he cannot lead a life of

normalcy. There will be no time when he is not a prey to mental agitation. This abnormal state will have a negative effect upon his functioning. He will not be able to form a positive plan for his life's struggle.

The same is true of society in its totality. If the members of any society are unable to control their anger, there will never be any peace. People will hate one another. There will be no adherence to such values as well-wishing and mutual sympathy. Such a society can never make progress.

Restraining one's anger is not of trifling importance: it is the key principle in the reform of all social issues.

REFRAIN FROM SPREADING RUMOURS

One should refrain from passing on anything they hear. One should think critically, investigate its genuineness, and only then form one's opinions.

One of the commandments of the Quran is: "Believers, if an evil-doer brings you news,

ascertain the correctness of the report fully, lest you unwittingly harm others, and then regret what you have done.” (49:6)

When a number of people live together in a society, all kinds of untoward incidents can take place. Then many different versions of these events are circulated and spread throughout the whole of society. But experience shows that just the hearing of some news is not enough, because if people start narrating it to others, it almost always happens that the nature or the wording of the news undergoes a change. If the event was initially a simple matter, by the time it reaches the last stages, it has become a very grave matter indeed.

The solution to this problem is that people should learn to think more critically. They could refrain from immediately passing on anything they hear and adopt the practice—especially in the case of bad news—of properly investigating the matter. That would be more judicious. They must examine the nature and genuineness of anything reported from all aspects and only then should they form their opinions.

If, on hearing bad news, say of a crime, and without investigating the facts, you communicate to others what is an unsubstantiated opinion about a supposed

miscreant, you will have given a bad reputation to someone who is perhaps not even guilty of any crime, thus doing him immense harm. When the truth is finally made public, you will feel nothing but shame. Investigation is essential to distinguish facts from rumours. Those who are disinclined by nature to proceed to further examination, should refrain from expressing their views to others. Proper investigation is essential if the right conclusions are to be arrived at. Speaking without investigation is totally frivolous and, moreover un-Islamic.

VICTORY IN HUMAN COURTS IS NOT FINAL

In a human court anyone can save himself by being cunning or clever; but in God's court, no cleverness or strategy can be of any avail.

According to a tradition, two men once came to the Prophet of Islam. They were fighting over a piece of land. Each claimed that the land was his. But neither of them had any firm proof. The Prophet said,

“You have come to me with a controversial matter, but I am a human being. And it is possible that I may decide in favour of the one who is eloquent and clever with arguments. If I decide to favour someone with something which did not belong to him, he should not take it, because for him it would be a piece of fire. He will appear on Doomsday with that thing which did not belong to him hanging around his neck.” Then they both wept. Both said to one another, “Give my brother his right, give my brother his right.” (Musnad Ahmad 26717)

It generally happens that when there is a conflict between two people, they take the matter to court. The court gives its verdict on the testimony of witnesses. But these witnesses most often do not give adequate proof. The court, therefore gives a verdict which appears to be right but in reality is not so. In this way, because of the wrong decision of the court, often the rightful owner remains deprived of what is his and one who has no title to ownership becomes the owner.

The solution to this is that people should not take the human court to be the ultimate court. They must be sensitive to the truth that there is a court superior to the human court. This is the divine court in which

nothing is hidden from God. In the court of God, all cases will appear for revision, and there, verdicts will be given on the basis of fact rather than on hearsay. There, many successes will turn into defeat, and many defeats will be turned into victory.

In a human court anyone can save himself by being cunning or clever, but in God's court, no cleverness or strategy can save him.

THE NECESSITY OF CONSULTATION

Consultation means including others in whatever requires deeper understanding. It is very useful in this world and worthy of reward in the Hereafter..

One of the qualities desired of believers is thus alluded to in the Quran: "They conduct their affairs by mutual consultation." (42:38)

A human being most naturally has recourse to consultation, for these are always limitations to his knowledge. He cannot be cognizant of all the aspects

of the matter in hand. To arrive at the right decision in the present world, it is necessary to take all the relevant aspects into consideration. Consultation is the solution to this problem. It compensates for whatever is lacking in the individual.

When an issue is placed before a number of people and everyone has the opportunity to give his opinion freely, in such a case, all the aspects of the matter become clear. Now it becomes possible that, in the light of collective knowledge, a correct decision is taken.

To ensure the effectiveness of consultation certain human qualities are necessary. A person should be conscious of his own shortcomings and his ego should not become an obstacle to his accepting the right decision. He should have the ability to rise above prejudice and listen to people's opinions openly. He should not himself claim to know everything. He must be prepared to admit that there may be some things of which he may be ignorant.

Consultation is good for individuals as well as for society. It is useful in small matters as well as in great or important matters. This applies equally to men and women: no one should deny this. Furthermore,

consultation is not just a worldly act but is rather a form of worship also. Consultation is very useful in this world and worthy of reward in the Hereafter. Consultation means a person including others in whatever requires deeper understanding.

SPREADING RUMOURS IS A GREAT SIN

In Islam, repeating evil things without proper investigation is a great sin. On hearing negative things immediately ask for proof. Without proof the news should be disregarded.

Chapter 24 of the Quran gives some special social guidance. The background was that in Madinah there were some irresponsible Muslims who heard something absurd about the Prophet's wife Ayesha and immediately began to spread rumours about it. This act has been defined in the Quran as 'spreading evil'. There is another piece of necessary guidance given in the Quran against this background: "When you heard it, why did you not say, 'It is not right for us to speak

of this. God forbid! This is a monstrous slander.' God warns you never to repeat the like of it again, if you are true believers." (24:16-17)

This verse relates originally to false slander about Ayesha. But the Quran, being an eternal book, this verse has a general and broader sense and that is that everyone should scrupulously refrain from such ill-advised rumour mongering as which took place in early phase of Islam in Madinan society.

In social life it often happens that something takes place which is quite innocent, but it has a negative meaning ascribed to it by some who are either foolish or wicked and then this wrong impression is spread everywhere.

According to the Islam this course of action is the worst of transgression. The right thing to do is that when someone hears negative things he should immediately ask for proof of them. If proof is not forthcoming, they should be disregarded. People's minds should be so well-instructed that they should never accept anything without proof.

In Islam repeating evil things without proper investigation is a great sin.

THERE IS GAIN IN LOSS

In this world there is some aspect of gain even in loss. Here, after losing one can find much more if he does not lose courage, and makes the best use of his abilities.

One of the teachings of the Quran is that a person ought not to grieve over what has escaped him. (57:23) This is a very important principle which is essential for the building of a successful life in the present world.

The present world has been created in such a way that everyone necessarily experiences loss. No one is exempt from this, not even the prophets. This is not loss in any simple sense: it is rather a ladder to great progress. The truth is that in this world, without loss, no one can ascend the great ladders of progress. If a person is orphaned in childhood, that is apparently a huge loss. But the second aspect of it is that deprivation of the guardian leads to self-confidence. If the father lags behind in economic progress, his children have a

great motivation to work hard and compensate for it. They work so hard that often they earn greater success than their father.

An individual was once given agricultural land by his father but his relations, by illegal means, managed to take away this ancestral land from him. Then he left the village to work in the city. There he got a job in a factory, where he found a great opportunity to demonstrate his expertise. He gradually made progress and finally became the owner of the factory. Whatever he had lost in the agricultural field, he found with greater advantage to himself in the industrial field.

In this world there are so many opportunities that here even in loss there is sometime some aspect of gain. Here, after losing a great deal, a person can find much more than he had before, provided he does not lose courage, and continues to make the best use of his God-given abilities.

Frustration, is the loss of hope and courage, and is frequently due to some temporary loss. But if a person is able to set his eyes on the future, he will never have this feeling of frustration, because circumstances in the world keep changing and just as the earth keeps rotating so that night becomes day,

similarly opportunities arise in abundance and if one opportunity is lost, then another is immediately there to be availed of.

WHAT IS REQUIRED OF A HUMAN BEING?

Living in society one should follow justice and be patient. He should think whether or not his conduct is consistent with his being human.

Chapter 14 of the Quran states: “Do you not see how God compares a good word to a good tree? Its root is firm and its branches are in the sky, it yields its fruit each season with its Lord’s permission—God makes such comparisons for people, in order that they may take heed.” (14:24-25)

It is a rule of nature that fruit-bearing trees should bear fruit in their proper season. When the season approaches, flowers blossom on the branches and very soon they bear fruit.

Giving fruit at the right time is the virtue of a tree.

The same quality is desirable in a human being. What appears on the tree in the form of fruit should appear likewise in human life in the form of ethical behaviour. It is as if the tree is a material flower and a human being is the ethical flower. The tree bears fruits according to physical laws, while a person behaving ethically results from his conscious decision-making.

While living in society, it is desirable that the individual should on all occasion demonstrate by his words and deeds what is expected from him as a human being. If he has to speak on some issue, he should express himself as justice demands. He should not utter anything which is against justice. Even if he is severely provoked, under no circumstances should he respond with impatience, because an intolerant attitude is at variance with a person's humanity.

The same attitude should be adopted in all practical matters. Whenever he engages in any action involving others, a person should first think whether or not his conduct is consistent with his being human or not. When he walks along a path, he should give way to others. When he has any dealings with others, it should be in accordance with all expectations of him as a human being. Society at large sets a high value upon predictability of character.

SAVE YOURSELF FROM SATANIC DECEPTION

Satan beautifies any wrongdoing. If one immediately discerns what is wrong about it and seeks God's forgiveness, one can save oneself from Satan's deception.

The Quran tells us that at the time of creation of Adam the following dialogue took place between God and Iblis: "He said, 'My Lord, since You have let me go astray. I shall make the path of error seem alluring to them on the earth and shall mislead them all, except for Your chosen servants.' God said, 'This is the path which leads straight to Me. Surely, you shall have no power over My true servants, except those misguided ones who choose to follow you. Surely, Hell is the place to which they are destined. It has seven gates: and each gate has a portion of them allotted to it.'" (15:39-44)

Satan's way of making people deviate from the right path was beautification. Beautification means

presenting evil deeds as if they were good deeds. From this lure of beautification, only those can be saved who are God's chosen servants. What form will their salvation take? One answer to this is found in this prophetic saying: "God said, I will keep forgiving My servants as long as they keep seeking My forgiveness." (Musnad Ahmad 11237)

This shows that satanic beautification is countered by forgiveness. Whenever Satan beautifies any wrong act, God's servant should expose his satanic deception. By using the wisdom granted by God, he should see through the beautification of Satan and, seeking forgiveness from God, he should not embroil himself in the net of satanic temptation.

Satanic beautification takes place at the level of thoughts. The only way for a person to counter this is to take the help of divine revelation, divine knowledge and deep reflection to make himself so aware that when Satan beautifies any wrongdoing he should immediately be able to analyze it and discern what is wrong about it. In this way, he can save himself from falling into the trap of Satan's deception.

CONVERT MATERIAL LOSS INTO SPIRITUAL GAIN

Remaining patient in the face of hardship increases a person's spirituality. The more sensitive he becomes, the more capable does he become of receiving divine inspiration. This increases his modesty.

According to the Quran, God afflicts people with calamities and loss. But if a person endures with fortitude and remains patient, he receives divine guidance. God sends His blessings and mercy on such persons: "They are the ones who have blessings and mercy from their Lord: it is they who are on the right path." (2:157)

This point is further clarified by a tradition of the Prophet. The Prophet once observed that whenever any Muslim suffers from any hardship and at that time he says, "I belong to God and to God I will return," and then he prays, "O God, reward me on my affliction and grant me better than that," then God hears his prayers and sends His blessings upon him. (Sahih Muslim 918)

According to the divine law operating in this universe everyone has such experiences of hardship. If a person is not overcome by these difficult circumstances and instead of complaining against others, turns to God, then this patient attitude brings him a very good reward. This good result comes in the form of the light of divine guidance.

Remaining patient in the face of hardship increases a person's spirituality. The more sensitive he becomes, the more capable does he become of receiving divine inspiration. This increases his modesty. Traits which are anathema to faith, such as arrogance, vengefulness, ingratitude, love of power and desire for greatness are put to an end. One who, at a conscious level, becomes distant from worldly concerns, comes closer to the Hereafter.

Hardship is an entry point to the world of meaning. Through hardship a person receives the light of God-realization. In hardship a person loses the material assets but, in return, he receives spiritual blessings. But such "gain in loss" is destined only for those who have the courage to remain patient in the face of loss, calamity and hardship.

SUPERIORITY COMPLEX LEADS TO EVIL

A great attribute of the Angels is gratitude, which leads to positivity, while Satan is guilty of ingratitude. He felt himself superior to Adam. The superiority complex is at the root of all evil.

When God created Adam, He commanded Iblis, the Chief of the Genies to prostrate himself before Adam, but Iblis refused to do so. This was because he felt himself to be superior to Adam. This regarding of himself as being superior was the crime due to which Satan chose not to follow God's commandment and was held rejected. (Quran 7:12)

It is this feeling which is at the root of all evil. Much of the negativity in human life is ultimately the result of this self-styled superiority complex.

When someone does not acknowledge the truth, it is because he holds the person from whom he receives knowledge of the truth to be inferior to himself.

When he wrongs anyone, he justifies his actions by considering the person he has wronged to be inferior to him.

Similarly, in institutions when there are quarrels about posts the reason is invariably the same. It is because one person regards himself as being more deserving of that post than another.

If one who has this feeling of greatness about himself has more power than a person whom he considers weak, he does not deem it necessary to treat that person with justice. This is an active expression of his superiority complex. On the contrary, one who has a superiority complex but has no power, can only passively express his feeling of superiority.

People who are afflicted by such weakness as jealousy and envy, engage in a battle of words in order to prove others inferior. When they themselves prove ineffectual in their endeavours, they nurture negative feelings in their hearts and resort to voicing such sentiments as prove others to be inferior to themselves.

One great attribute of the angels is gratitude, while Satan is guilty of ingratitude.

THE PEACEFUL SOUL

A peaceful soul uniformly maintains a spiritual relation with God in all situations. No experience, be it ease or hardship, disturbs his peace of mind.

The Quran describes the successful person as a peaceful soul (89:27). This applies to one who lives in a state of peace, dies in a state of peace and in every situation leads a peaceful life.

The Quran gives us two caveats about this: one is that when God grants someone peace, contentment and abundance, he should not become proud but should rather live as a modest person in this world. Another caveat is that when God gives someone less than others in economic terms, he should not suffer from frustration and disillusionment but should rather respond to such a situation with patience and gratitude.

In the life of this world, circumstances are never quite uniform. Sometimes there is affluence. Sometime

there is a lack of resources. Sometime there is hardship. Sometimes there is ease. Sometimes situations are favourable and sometimes they are unfavourable. All these different circumstances, whether propitious or unpropitious, are for the purpose of putting a person to the test. One who remains positive in all such situations is successful in the eyes of God, whereas one who responds negatively has failed.

Having a peaceful soul does not always mean being happy. In this world only that person can be happy who is shallow in his thinking. The truth is that no amount of material comforts can satisfy a person of discerning taste because such an individual will find all material comforts below his intellectual level. That is why he can never be satisfied with material things.

In this verse 'peace' and 'contentment' are words not used in the context of worldly comfort: they are used rather in the context of God. This means that when a person is put to the test by God, whether by affluence or by want, he should always accept things with grace. No experience in relation to God should disturb his peace of mind, whether in ease or in hardship. In all situations his spiritual relation with God should be uniformly maintained.

GOD HELPS YOU AS LONG AS YOU HELP OTHERS

It is an ineluctable law of nature that a person receives only after he gives. By giving comfort to others, he can receive comfort for himself.

According to Abu Hurairah, the Prophet of Islam once observed that one who helps in solving others' problems will have his own problems solved by God in this world as well as in the next. (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 1930) There is another tradition narrated by Abdullah ibn Umar according to which the Prophet of Islam once observed that one who fulfils the need of his brother will have his need fulfilled by God. (Sahih al-Bukhari 2442) Another tradition has it that the Prophet once said that God helps the servant as long as he helps his brothers. (Sahih Muslim 2699)

Those who help others and help in solving their problems are under the protection of the divine system which God has established at the level of

nature. Due to this protection they meet with success after success.

The eternal law of the system of nature is that one who helps others will be a favoured person. People's hearts will be softened for him. He will receive honour and respect from everyone. And one who finds such honour and respect in society will have all his problems solved. Helping others means being beneficent, and beneficence has a tremendous attraction to it. One who becomes beneficent towards others attains the status of a leader among people. People are ready to give him his dues or his rights without his asking for them. He becomes the giver and others become the takers and it is a law of nature that the giver finds a prominent place in society. It is an ineluctable law of nature that a person receives only after he gives. By giving comfort to others, he can receive comfort for himself. There is no exception to this rule.

NEVER BREACH THE TRUST REPOSED IN YOU

If you have anything which can be beneficial to someone, it is as if you are holding it in trust for him. You have to convey it to the person whom it might benefit.

According to Abu Huraira, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “If someone reposes trust in you, you should repay that trust but if someone is guilty of a breach of trust, you should not treat him likewise.” (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 1264)

Repayment of trust is without doubt a very important Islamic commandment (Quran 23:8). If anyone has had a certain trust reposed in him, he should feel uneasy until he is able to repay it. Trust does not relate to any one thing in particular. It relates to words, deeds and beliefs.

If you have anything which can be beneficial to someone, it is as if you are holding it in trust for him

and you can convey it to the person whom it might benefit. If some words of yours can save someone from being dishonoured, these words are a trust with you. It is necessary that you utter those words so that your brother may be safe as to his honour and his wealth. The advice of the Prophet is that you should never be guilty of a breach of trust.

This advice is very important. The truth is that as long as one thinks along these lines, one will repay the trust, irrespective of the other person's attitude. Only then will one be able to succeed in the test of the repayment of trust.

In the present world it often happens that one person has a complaint against another. This complaint is sometimes right and sometimes wrong. If one is influenced negatively by these complaints he can never adhere to good ethics or good moral values. In this world the practice of repaying trust is to be adopted in spite of others' breach of trust. We have to behave well in spite of the bad behaviour of others. One who does not believe in this principle can never tread the right path.

HATRED FOR A PERSON WILL BLIND YOU OF HIS VIRTUES

Real faith produces an intellectual revolution in the individual that enables him to form his opinions by rising above personal preferences. This leads to sagacity.

According to a certain tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “A believer is wise and sagacious.” (Musnad al-Shahab 128) This does not mean that sagacity or profound understanding is associated with some races or groups. That it is found in those who call themselves believers does not mean that it is a special feature of any particular group. It is rather a special feature of faith. One who has true faith will be possessed of this quality.

What is sagacity or wisdom? The greatest secret of sagacity is expressed in this prophetic exhortation: “O God, show me things as they are.” (Tafsir al-Razi, v. 1, p. 119)

This means to see the reality of things. Belief produces this quality in a person and one who has the ability to see things as they are will always form the right opinion and his judgement will always be right.

Real faith produces an intellectual revolution in the individual. This enables him to form his opinions by rising above personal matters and when this quality is developed within one, it leads to sagacity.

When anyone sees another with jealousy and hatred, he will not be able to see his personal virtues. He will find him all evil. On the contrary, when a person looks upon another with love and respect, even his evils will be ignored and he will regard him as being all good.

It follows that if an opinion is formed when one is in a state of anger, vengefulness and high dudgeon, such an opinion can never be a normal one. When any such feelings dominate one, he will not be able to form the right opinion about anyone.

YOUR BEHAVIOUR AT HOME REFLECTS THE TRUTH ABOUT YOU

One's behaviour at home best reflects the truth about everyone. If one is a good human being within the home, he will become a good person outside in society.

The Prophet of Islam once observed, “The best of you is one who is best for his family. And I am best of all for my family.” (Sunan Ibn Majah 1977)

The first practical test of a person takes place in his own home. And his behaviour is shown for what it is in that context. Almost daily he is being tested on the genuineness of his words and his deeds. If a person is good, he will prove himself to be so in domestic matters. But if he is bad, his evil cannot remain hidden in his home from his family members.

Outside the home he can say good things and utter sweet words with duplicity. Even if he is not good, he can show himself to be good. But within the home no

one can hide his personality. Home is the best mirror to reflect the truth about everyone. In this way the home has become a training ground for everyone. If one is successful in becoming a good human being within the home, he will become a good person outside the home as well.

The home is the basic unit of a family. A number of homes make a society. The reform of homes is thus the reform of all of society and the vitiation of the home is the vitiation of all of society.

All those matters take place at a lesser level within the home which take place outside the home on a higher level. Every home is a part not only of society but is also a significant part of social life. A person must live in society with respect for everyone. He should be everyone's well-wisher. He should address people gently. He should do his work without creating obstacles for others. His eyes should be on his duties rather than on his rights. Instead of seeking service from others, he should have the inclination to serve others.

LIVE TOGETHER HONOURABLY OR SEPARATE KINDLY

Be it in situations of unity or differences, it is incumbent upon people to maintain the code of ethics. They should live together honourably or separate kindly.

At times of differences between husband and wife what action should they take? The Quran says specifically: “Divorce may be pronounced twice, and then a woman must be retained honourably or released with kindness.” (2:229) This verse in its basic sense applies to a husband and wife. But it has a vaster application. This verse tells us, in fact, that the moral and ethical spirit of Islam relates to all human matters or relations.

In social life it regularly happens that certain matters involve dealings between two or more people. For instance, travelling together, running an institute together, conducting business together, and so on. In all such ventures either for a limited period of time

or a longer period of time, two or more individuals come to work together. Sometimes it happens that in the initial stage two persons come together for a longer period of time. But later such a situation arises in which their mutual relations become strained.

In such matters both parties should observe the Islamic principle regarding living together. That is, either they live together honourably or they separate from each other kindly.

When two people come together for a purpose, Islam gives them the command that, in all situations they must maintain their unity. For both the parties involved in any matter, Islam also gives the command that it is incumbent upon them that in both, unity or difference, they do not forsake their code of ethics. Neither of them has the right, after the relationship no longer exists, to vilify the other, or begin actively accusing him of wrongdoing.

SPEND MONEY ON RELATIVES, ORPHANS AND THE NEEDY

One aspect of the realization of faith is that the believer spends his money to help his relatives, orphans, travellers and the needy.

The Quran thus defines the qualities of the believers: “They give away their wealth to their relatives and to orphans and the very poor, and to travellers and those who ask [for charity], and to set slaves free.” (2:177)

This verse shows in what ways the realization of faith finds expression in the family and in society.

The Quran tells us that the believer starts helping needy relatives since he is closely connected with them. But when there are many kinds of complaints there can be no expectation that the relatives will be grateful to him. That is why Islam strenuously encourages assistance for needy relatives.

Similarly, a believer loves to help orphans and the

needy. His sensitive heart becomes a guarantee that he will not regard the weak as lowly but that he should rather rush to help them.

The same is true of the traveller. A traveller might be well off in his hometown. But when he is far away from his home on a journey, he can in many ways need help. Here the believer's faith motivates him to help the traveller in whatever way is necessary. Similarly, if there are people who are beset by some problem because of social traditions such as slavery and they don't have enough money to buy their freedom, it is one of the virtues of the believer that he will spend money to free them.

COMPETE WITH ONE ANOTHER IN DOING GOOD WORKS

Life progresses on the principle of competition. One should compete to do good deeds like pursuing knowledge, calling people to God and social service.

Chapter 2 of the Quran has this to say: "Each community has its own direction in which it

turns: vie, then, with one another in doing good works.” (2:148)

This verse refers to the direction of prayer but it is the way of the Quran to convey a fundamental truth relating to the entire human life. “Vie with one another in doing good works,” although revealed in a particular, immediate sense in its Quranic context, in respect of the vaster picture, it gives us a general command which provides every human being with a basic guidance which is valid at all times.

Life progresses on the principle of competition. It is only human to want to make progress. Due to this natural urge, we find that every person is struggling to advance himself and, in vying with others, is expending all of his energy.

This urge to compete generally takes one in the direction of one’s desires. Just as this urge is there in every individual, so also are material desires a powerful driving force in everyone. As such, it often happens that the urge for fulfilment of material desires takes a person’s spirit of competition in the wrong direction. In this world, most people are bent on acquiring more and more wealth. This is why their inner urge to compete takes them in the wrong direction of greater and greater gain.

But the Quran teaches us that a person should direct his urge to compete towards the doing of good deeds. Instead of pursuing material desires he should make his target the doing of good, as God has told us. Good refers to knowledge as well, for it is the source of a person's intellectual progress. Similarly, it may also refer to calling people to God. This area of activity is so vast that it knows no bounds. Another field of competing in goodness can be found in social service.

RECONCILIATION IS NO DEFEAT

Where confrontation closes the door to progress, reconciliation opens the door to it. Reconciliation is no defeat, but another name for acting wisely.

The Quran teaches us that at times of confrontation both the sides concerned should opt for conciliation: "For reconciliation is best but people are prone to selfish greed." (4:128) This principle applies to all matters in human life. Whether it relates to the home or to outside the home, whether it relates to two persons or to the whole community or group,

whether it is national or international, in social life this is the only solution to controversy.

There is just one practical form of reconciliation and that is that both the concerned parties must be willing to accept the status quo. The only obstacle to such acceptance is greed. They want to have more than is their due at that time, and, naturally the other party is not willing to accede to this. This is the thinking which becomes an obstacle to reconciliation. And then the conflict goes on and on, futilely, until they have lost even what they already had.

Refusing to put an end to controversy is mostly what thwarts reconciliation. But this is a secondary issue. What is more important and worth considering is that reconciliation opens the door for fresh action. After reconciliation a person finds his way to continue his onward journey. The state of conflict halts life's journey, while the act of reconciliation restarts the interrupted journey of life.

Reconciliation is no defeat. Reconciliation is in fact another name for acting wisely. Reconciliation is an acknowledgement of the reality. Reconciliation means taking an unemotional decision on an emotional occasion. Reconciliation entails avoidance of

arrogance in controversial matters. Those concerned must refrain from making personal pride an issue. The way of reflection and control should be adopted rather than the way of emotionalism or provocation. Where confrontation closes the door to progress, reconciliation opens the door to it.

ACKNOWLEDGING SOMEONE AMOUNTS TO THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD

Special merit of a person is a direct gift from God. When we acknowledge someone's contribution, it amounts to the acknowledgment of God.

When a person fails to acknowledge someone's excellence, the reason behind it is always the fear that in acknowledging others' greatness, his own stature will become diminished. But he forgets that by doing so, he is incurring a very great loss and that is that his stature will become diminished forever in the eyes of God.

If a person has some special merit, it is not due to his own efforts. It is a direct gift from God. That is why acknowledging someone amounts to the acknowledgment of God, and not acknowledging someone amounts to failing to acknowledge God. That is why a person must be afraid of God while adopting the attitude of disregard for others. He should look upon his attitude as pertaining to God rather than pertaining to human beings.

One aspect of this matter is of great significance and that is that acknowledging others is not acknowledgement in the simple sense: it relates rather to the development of one's own personality. By acknowledging another's merit or superiority is to promote one's humanity, whereas disregarding is to vitiate one's own personality in respect of its humanness.

The issues of acknowledgement and disregard are of significance to all society. When one person acknowledges another, by doing so he promotes elevated human values in society. On the contrary, if he is not ready to give credit to another, the lack of appreciation and disregard will be promoted in society.

Acknowledgement and lack of appreciation are no simple matters. One who recognizes merit establishes the tradition of appreciation in the entire society. On the contrary, one who does not do so, establishes a precedent of a lack of appreciation in society. Although lack of appreciation is the fault of a single person, this failing influences society at large. This is why in the matter of disregard, a person should be aware of its being unpropitious to the ultimate extent.

SAVE YOURSELF FROM JEALOUSY

Wanting to see oneself as great is a natural urge. But the true human being is one who sees greatness in others and becomes motivated by this to work harder than before.

Satan is a person's greatest enemy. That is why the Quran calls Satan 'the devil'. In the early period of human creation, God commanded Satan to bow down before Adam but he refused to do so. The conversation which ensued between God and Satan is described thus in the Quran: "God asked, 'What prevented you

from prostrating yourself when I commanded you to?’ He replied, ‘I am better than he is; You created me from fire, while You created him from clay.’ God said, ‘Get down from here! This is no place for your arrogance. Get out! You are contemptible!’ Satan said, ‘Give me respite until the Day of Resurrection,’ and God replied, ‘You are granted respite.’

Then Satan said, ‘Because You have put me in the wrong, I will lie in ambush for them on Your straight path: then I will surely come upon them from before them and from behind them and from their right and from their left, and then You will find most of them ungrateful.’ He said, ‘Get out of here, despised, and rejected! I shall fill Hell with all of those who follow you.’” (7:12-18)

The real weakness of a person because of which evil develops in him is that he wants to see himself as great. But there are differences between people here according to the very law of nature. There are some who have less and there are others who have more. Therefore when someone finds another greater than himself, he becomes jealous. This jealousy causes a negative mindset and his entire character becomes negative.

Wanting to see oneself as great is a natural urge. This explains the urge to compete with others. But this is a course of action marred by jealousy and envy. And then once one suffers from jealousy, he holds all kinds of evil as legitimate for him to indulge in. The true human being is one who sees another as great and becomes motivated by this to work harder than before.

LOOK BEYOND THE PRESENT

One should form his opinions in the light of realities rather than personal prejudices. He should try to arrive at an understanding of the infinite mindset of God.

The Quran has this to say: “When We bestow a favour upon a person, he turns his back and draws aside; and when evil afflicts him, he gives himself up to despair. Say to them, ‘Everyone acts in his own way, and your Lord knows best who is rightly guided.’”
(17:83-84)

A person's thinking is conditioned. For instance when someone has abundant wealth and a successful life this causes him to develop undue self-confidence. He does not attach any importance to anyone other than himself. Nor is he able to pay attention to anything said by another. On the contrary, one who is beset by adversity and lives in a state of deprivation, loses courage. He has no hope or trust in anyone else. Both types of people fail to rise above their immediate circumstances and are not able to plan their actions in an unbiased way. This is generally the case.

For instance, at the time of Hudaybiyah, the Makkans saw the matter in relation to the present, while the believers saw the matter as it would affect the future. The Makkans were thinking only of present gains, while the believers looked at the whole matter with great foresight. Because of looking to the future, they were able to do sound planning. By just looking at the present Makkans thought that if 1400 Muslims entered Makkah for Umrah the prestige of the Makkans would be at stake. That is why they opposed the intention of the Muslims to enter Makkah to perform Umrah. On the contrary, the believers saw that if they went back after signing a peace treaty, extraordinary opportunities for the divine mission would be opened

up for them. And the apparent defeat of the present would finally turn into a great victory of the future.

The secret of a person's success in this world is to think by rising above the limits of his immediate sphere. He should form his opinions in the light of common realities rather than personal prejudices. He should not remain confined to his own narrow mindset. He should try to arrive at an understanding of the infinite mindset of God.

NO DOUBLE STANDARDS

Contradiction between words and deeds is the mark of a hypocrite. A sincere person has no double standards. His thinking and character are governed by divine principles.

The Quran says that God has not placed two hearts in any man's body (33:4). This means that God does not want a person to adopt double standards, whatever be the issue. God's does not show His mercy to people with double standards. The true human being is one who speaks as he acts, and who acts as he

speaks. Saying something and then doing something else is not the way of a believer.

Another name for having double standards is being a hypocrite. Such a person hides his real personality. He utters such words to please people as are totally lacking in sincerity. To gain popularity with people, he makes such speeches on stage as bear little relation to the truth. Such a human being is a pretender rather than a true worshipper of God.

The difference between a hypocrite and a sincere person is that a hypocrite is one thing within and something else outside, whereas an honest, genuine person is the same within and without. A hypocrite's purpose is to please people, whereas a sincere person's purpose is to please God.

Contradiction between words and deeds is the mark of a hypocrite because he keeps changing his words and deeds with each change of circumstance. But there is no contradiction to be found in a sincere person, because a sincere person's thinking and character are governed by eternal divine principles, and divine principles are immutable.

In this world a sincere person is one desired by God. He is the person who will be held deserving of God's eternal mercy.

DON'T SEEK FULFILMENT OF ALL YOUR DESIRES

To succeed in life, one should keep one's desires in control. One's attitude should be based on well-considered principles, rather than let it be influenced by selfish thinking and desires.

Addressing the Prophet Dawud, the Quran sets forth a principle in chapter 38: "Do not follow your desires, lest they divert you from God's path." (38:26)

God has created a right path for humans and has then inculcated this right path in human nature itself. If a person understands this silent guidance of nature and follows it, he will never go astray; he will never deviate from this straight path; he will continue to follow this thoroughfare of life until he finally reaches his destination.

There can be only one thing which will make a person deviate from this thoroughfare of nature and that is

his own desires. These desires tempt a person at every turn in life. Wise is one who does not follow the path of his desires. One who has been overcome by his desires and strayed from this straight path of his nature will fall into disgrace, and one who has digressed from the path of nature will be destined for destruction.

A person's desires lead him astray in different ways. Sometimes he is embroiled in apparent glitter and is far removed from deeper realities. Sometimes for immediate gain he strays from the path which is going to lead him to permanent benefit. Sometimes some matter is taken up as a prestige issue and the person concerned gets provoked, and not thinking of the consequences, he takes to the path of violence. It is he himself who suffers the most from taking this course of action.

A person's desires are the greatest enemy of humanity. One who wants to lead a successful life must keep his desires in control rather than allow himself to come under the influence of his desires. Instead of seeking to fulfil all of his desires, a person must stick to higher principles. Instead of becoming the victim of his desires he must adhere to lofty human principles. His attitude at all times should be based on well-considered principles, rather than let it be influenced by selfish thinking and desires.

FOCUS ON RESULT-ORIENTED ACTIVITIES

We must develop a high moral character. We should expend our energy on result-oriented actions, rather than on those activities which are not result-oriented.

The Prophet of Islam was given this command in the Quran: “Have patience, then, as had the steadfast Messengers before you; and be in no haste about them.” (46:35) This shows that patience and perseverance are superior to impatience and haste. The difference can be understood by studying those verses of the Quran which were revealed in the initial stage of prophethood in Makkah:

“O you, wrapped in your cloak, arise and give warning! Proclaim the glory of your Lord; purify your garments; shun uncleanness; do not bestow a favour in the expectation of receiving more in return; and for the sake of your Lord, be patient.” (74:1-7)

In the light of these verses, we can be specific that in the present circumstances we should act only on those commands which have been recorded in these verses of the Quran, and as far the rest, we have to remain patient.

That is to say, we must inform people of the issue of facing the Hereafter in terms of warning and giving good tidings. God's greatness and glory should become our subjects of discussion. We must develop a high moral character. All kinds of evils practiced in the name of belief should be shunned. Our behaviour with others should be good, not for the return it will bring, but for God's pleasure.

This is as it were a five point programme which was given at that time, although there were many other problems in Makkah in those days, for instance, 360 idols in the Kabah, all kinds of crime in the city, the parliament of Makkah, that is Darul-Nadwa, was under the influence of the idolaters, the political influence of the Roman empire and the Sassanid Empire, and so on. But the Prophet was enjoined to remain patient on all of these issues. In other words, energy should be expended only on those actions which were result-oriented. And those activities which were not result-oriented at that time were to be kept pending.

PATIENCE IS REQUIRED AT ALL TIMES

Patience is needed at all times in this world of trial. On occasion of loss, patience saves one from frustration. In times of gain, patience helps to suppress the feeling of greatness.

There are courses of action of two kinds, one of which may be called positive and another is which is adopted as a matter of exigency. For instance, healthy food is a permanent need of the body, while, along with that sometimes the body needs medication. But medication is a purely temporary requirement, whereas food is a permanent requirement of the body. The same is true of religion. In religion patience is a positive teaching. For us patience is a permanent religious requirement. Patience is a great virtue which is required at all times and in all circumstances.

Patience is the most important principle which must be adhered to at all times by everyone in this world of

trial. Without patience, no one can successfully pass the divine test.

In this world a person has to patiently deal with the temptations of Satan. He has to remain patient in the face unpleasantness on the part of other human beings.

Patience is needed at all times and on all occasions. On the occasion of loss, patience saves one from frustration. On the occasion of gain patience helps to suppress the feelings of greatness. On the occasion of being disillusioned, the best course is not to lose patience. When in excellent health, patience keeps a check on one's pride. On the occasion of provocation patience saves one from being mentally disturbed.

Patience is not a human law or principle. Patience is rather a law of nature in itself. It relates to every issue in life, whether individual or social.

EVERY PERSON IS PART OF THE DIVINE FAMILY

All human beings are as if God's family. One should not differentiate between one person or another, and one should value others just as one values oneself.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: "All human beings are God's family. The best of you in the eyes of God is one who is good to his family." (Kanzul Ummal 16056)

For the building of a good human society it is necessary for people to respect one another, honour one another and show appreciation for one another.

How is this feeling of respect to be produced? The most effective and successful way is for it to be instilled in the mind that the Creator who has created one has created other human beings also. So all human beings are as if God's family.

This consciousness produces the feeling that one

should not differentiate between one person or another, and that one should value others just as one values oneself. While humiliating another, one should feel as if one has humiliated a member of the divine family. Similarly, when one gives respect to one person, one should feel happy that one has given respect and honour to a member of the divine family.

The truth is that there is no fortune greater for any human being than doing something which gives him the happiness that he has shown respect to a member of the divine family. This belief makes one deserving of reward in the eyes of God. Along with this one greater benefit is that during this act, noble feelings are engendered. And by honouring others he makes himself a person worthy of honour.

FORGIVING YOUR ENEMY IN SPITE OF HAVING POWER

Forgiveness is a virtue, and forgiving even when one has the power to punish is the greatest possible virtue.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “When you overpower your enemy, make his forgiveness an acknowledgement of your power. That is, by forgiving him, you thank God for having invested you with power.” (Adab al-Duniya wa al-Din, al-Mawardi, p. 400)

What is morality or ethics? Morality is what defines the nobility of human character. In human relations the noble character that is expected of a human being finds expression in his morality. His code of ethics is the criterion by which to judge a person’s humanity.

For example, suppose someone has become your enemy. Then it happens that later on you are able to overcome him. At that time one way of viewing the

whole matter is in the light of revenge, and you think that now the time has come to avenge yourself. But this is a very base kind of thinking. It has no relevance to a high degree of humanity.

Another way of looking at the whole matter is from the viewpoint of God. Then you regard your success as something given to you by God. In such a situation, your feelings will be totally different. You will be filled with gratitude. And after your success, the highest form of thanksgiving would be for you to forgive your enemy.

When your enemy is in your control, forgiving him is not so easy. It is a matter of great sacrifice, because it involves suppressing your ego. It entails cooling the fire of revenge within you. Only then can you forgive your enemy even when the enemy is fully in your control.

Forgiveness is a virtue, and forgiving even when one has the power to punish is the greatest possible virtue.

STRIVE TO REFORM OTHERS WITH FEELINGS OF WELL-WISHING

In society people must be mirrors of others. We should make people aware of their faults and accept it wholeheartedly when someone discerns faults in us.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “A believer is another believer’s mirror and when he finds some shortcomings in him, he rectifies them.” (Adab al-Duniya wa al-Din, al-Mawardi, p. 381)

A person’s humanity demands that he should be the well-wisher of other human beings. Everyone should wish what is best for others. Everyone should regard others as brothers and sisters, and should be happy about their progress. And if you find any fault in your brother, you should strive for his reform out of a feeling of well-wishing.

If you stand before a mirror, it will show your face

exactly as it is. Similarly, when a true human being finds some fault or shortcoming in another person, his human feelings compel him to make that person aware of it. Indeed, in society people must be mirrors of others.

When the mirror shows anything lacking in one's face, it bears one no ill will. It only shows if there is any blemish. It does not aim at humiliating one. Similarly, a true human being is one who makes his brother aware of any lacking without having any feeling of hatred in his heart or of wanting to show him to be inferior. While doing so, he does not project himself as being superior or another as being inferior. His aim should be only to correct the shortcoming.

When a mirror shows anything on a person's face, he accepts it without demur. But when someone tells another of his shortcomings, he takes it as a humiliation. This is the greatest obstacle in an individual's progress. A person should wholeheartedly accept it when someone discerns any such fault, just as he accepts the reflection of the mirror.

THINK ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR WORDS AND DEEDS

Everyone should introspect on one's words and deeds without bias on a daily basis. One must think about what is worth saying or doing and then only speak and act.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed “Make an appraisal of yourself before being reckoned with.” (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 2459)

A person is free to act in the present world but he is not free as to the consequences of his action. You are free to say whatever you want to. But you have no power to save yourself from the consequences of your words and deeds.

If someone speaks harshly to others, he cannot expect to get the same response to his bitter words as he would have had to pleasantness. When someone speaks unkindly, he must realize that he will have to suffer the negative reactions from others. Those who

act without forethought must know that their acts will have consequences according to the law of nature, rather than according to their own personal desires.

One consequence of harsh words and deeds is that which appears immediately in this world. Other consequences are those which appear in the world after death. The consequences in the Hereafter are going to manifest themselves just as they do in this world. A person no doubt has the power to say whatever he wants and do whatever he wants. But he is powerless to save himself from the consequences of his own words and deeds, neither in the present world nor in the world Hereafter which will be the reality after death.

In such a situation, wisdom demands that every person should become his own watchdog. Everyone should make it a habit to introspect on a daily basis. Everyone should analyze his words and deeds without any bias and must think above all what is worth saying or doing. Before he suffers from the consequences, he must engage in introspection, so that he may save himself in advance from a miserable fate.

THE PERFECTION OF HUMANITY

One should be a man of character by speaking the truth, never uttering words as are at variance with reality and only making promises that one can fulfil.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “Those who did not do injustice in dealings with others; those who did not lie while conversing and those who did not break their promises are of those who have perfected their humanity.” (Adab al-Duniya wa al-Din, al-Mawardi, p. 501)

Who is the perfect human being? The perfect human being is one who possesses the noble qualities of humanity. He is one who in every experience and on all occasion proves that he is a human being in the real sense.

To really know a person, it is not by his appearance but by his dealings. One who keeps his humanity in all dealings is the true human. On the contrary, one who in his dealings does not fulfil the expectations or

hopes of others, as would be expected from a human being, has failed to prove his humanity.

Human perfection manifests itself in the total justice with which an individual conducts himself in his dealings with others. He never accepts anything which is not his by right, even if he evidently has the power to take it.

Similarly, humanity demands that one should always speak the truth. He should never utter such words as are at variance with reality. Moreover, a sign of nobility in a person is that when he makes a promise, he fulfils it in all situations. This is the surest sign of an individual being an individual of character.

LIKE FOR OTHERS WHAT YOU LIKE FOR YOURSELF

Social ethics demand that one should like for others what he likes for himself and disapprove of such behaviour towards others as he does not like for himself.

According to a hadith, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “No one can be a believer unless he

likes for his brother what he likes for himself.” (Sahih al-Bukhari 13)

The simple and natural principle of ethics is that one should like for others what he likes for himself. He should disapprove of such behaviour towards others as he does not like for his own part.

This is a generally accepted criterion. There is no one who is not aware of this reality. This principle gives an ethical criterion to everyone in the light of which he may decide upon right behaviour for himself and eschew wrong behaviour towards others.

No one likes conspiracies against himself, therefore, he should not plot against others. Everyone dislikes those who are not his well-wishers, therefore, he himself should wish everyone well. No one likes harsh words, therefore he should not speak harshly to others. Everyone knows that if he is dishonourable, this will be to his discredit. Therefore, he should under no circumstances, attempt to dishonour others. No one likes his money and his property being taken away from him, so he should refrain from acting in this way with others. Similarly, everyone knows what he likes. Everyone knows what makes him happy. So everyone must crave for others what he craves for

himself. Everyone should want to give to others what he wants to have for himself. If the individuals making up society adopt this principle, such a society will develop in an excellent way.

LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF GOD

Our conscience is our guide. By following the voice of our conscience, we will never stoop to evil. Ignoring our conscience is like ignoring the voice of God.

According to a tradition narrated by Nawwas ibn Sam'aan, a companion of the Prophet once asked the Prophet what was good and what was bad. The Prophet observed that goodness is good behaviour and sin is what stabs your heart, and you do not want people to learn of it. (Sahih Muslim 2553)

The feeling of virtue or goodness is within a person's heart. And while dealing with other human beings, it manifests itself in the form of good behaviour. Virtue or good behaviour in its essence is an inner reality and good behaviour becoming evident in daily life is its external proof.

When there is goodness in a person's heart when he meets others, his happiness and contentment will show on his face. When he speaks, his words will reflect his feeling of well-wishing. His moral behaviour will be evident in all situations, whether or not others have treated him well. Furthermore, his good behaviour will be genuine and not something artificial.

What is evil or bad behaviour? The criterion is to be found within a person's heart and conscience. When anyone thinks of anything bad or indulges in any illicit acts, the voice of conscience immediately alerts him to his wrongdoing. In silent language his conscience keeps telling him that this is wrong and you must stop doing it. If a person follows the voice of his conscience, he will never stoop to evil.

By means of this voice of conscience, God wants everyone to discipline himself. Overlooking the voice of conscience is like ignoring the voice of God.

IN GIVING LIES THE SECRET OF FINDING

Responding with modesty to an arrogant person elevates you. In this way, adopting the attitude of modesty becomes a source of success for the modest person.

The Prophet of Islam once observed: “By giving alms wealth does not decrease. And when a believer forgives, God grants him greater honour. And the believer who is modest for the sake of God, is raised by God on high.” (Sahih Muslim 2588)

Ethics, in other words, is a matter of giving. When one says good words to another, or behaves in a good manner, it shows that he loves him. Similarly, when one gives monetary aid that is also giving something to others.

Such giving seems to be unilateral. That is, the individual without getting anything in return is giving of what belongs to him. But this is an ethical matter

and is not unilateral. The truth is that in giving lies the secret of finding.

In a society where people help one another in monetary terms, there will be the tendency to spend rather than hold on to one's wealth. In that way the distribution of wealth will increase and the urge to exploit others will cease. In such an environment, it is but natural that the giver becomes a recipient of society's benefits in many ways. When such a society flourishes, its benefit will reach everyone—the giver as well as the taker.

When anyone is arrogant to you, if you do not react to this but rather adopt the way of modesty, according to the law of nature, your status becomes elevated and that of the arrogant person is lowered. In this way, adopting the attitude of modesty becomes a source of success for the modest person.

A SOCIETY OF GOD'S CHOICE

A believer, as well as fulfilling his own needs, is ready to fulfil the needs of others. In such a society, human values are given pride of place.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: "God is at the service of a person so long as he is at the service of his brother." (Sahih Muslim 2699)

The system of the present world has been created by God according to natural laws. This being so, it is not possible for one not to reap the consequences of his deeds. One aspect of this law is that when an individual helps other members of society by meeting their needs, a favourable atmosphere is produced in the whole environment. This has to become a two-sided matter. One who has had help from others, must be ready to give help in whatever way he can.

Helping a human being is not like tending to a stone statue. It is rather helping a living sensitive being. It

is this life and sensitivity within a person which make the matter two-sided. One who has received help, by virtue of his own nature, becomes ready to help others.

There are two forms of social system. One is that each individual thinks only about himself; he has no concern for anything other than his own interests. He acts only when he thinks there will be some material gain and where there is no material gain, he remains inactive. Such a society will be deprived of God's help. The spirit of noble humanity is not evident in such a society and where there is no such spirit, everyone has to reap the evil consequence in some way or the other.

In another kind of society, the individual as well as fulfilling his own needs, is ready to fulfil the needs of others. He cares for the feelings of others just as he cares for his own feelings. In such a society, human values are given pride of place. Everyone feels that he is living in the environment of his own brothers, rather than in an environment of strangers.

REMOVE EVIL WITH GOODNESS

One cannot remove evil by responding with evil. The best corrective strategy is that the one who has behaved badly should be shown good behaviour in return.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “God does not remove evil from evil but he removes evil from good. Dirt is not cleaned by dirt.” (Musnad Ahmad 3672)

Good behaviour towards others is engrained in human nature. Everyone by his nature wants to behave with others in a way which will elevate his position in society. Then why does it happen that he often deviates from this high moral attitude? The reason is reactive psychology. It is in reaction that he returns evil for evil.

Whenever in society one's feelings are hurt, the person concerned regards his honour to be in danger. And to safeguard his honour, he thinks that he must

return the slight (real or imagined) tit for tat in order to compensate for this. But this is a wrong strategy. Such an act does not yield any positive results.

Just as filth cannot be cleaned by filth, so also it is not possible for one wrong to be rectified by another wrong. Bad behaviour is not the answer to bad behaviour. The best corrective strategy is that the one who has behaved badly should be shown good behaviour in return.

When you return bad behaviour for bad behaviour, it makes your adversary vengeful. He then becomes a greater problem for you than before. On the contrary, if you return good behaviour for bad behaviour he will feel ashamed of his bad deeds. His conscience will start to prick him and this feeling will compel him to rectify his attitude towards you. One ought to refrain from seeking revenge whatever the issue. He should rather seek a solution to the problem.

JOIN HANDS WITH THOSE WHO BREAK FROM YOU

The superior human being is one who thinks rationally rather than emotionally. His attitude is governed by well-considered principles rather than knee-jerk reactions.

According to a tradition the Prophet of Islam once observed: “Should I not tell you what the best moral course is in this world as well as in the Hereafter?” The companion present there replied, “O Prophet of God, yes!” Then the Prophet said, “If someone separates from you, join with him; if someone deprives you of something give it to him; if someone is unjust to you, forgive him.” (Al-Mujam al-Kabir, al-Tabarani 739)

In this world a person often has such bitter experiences that he succumbs to anger. On all occasions of deprivation or injustice it generally happens that the aggrieved people respond in anger. They want the bitter experiences they have faced to be returned

tit for tat, so that they teach the offending person a lesson.

This is not high thinking. The superior human being is one who thinks rationally rather than emotionally. His attitude is governed by well-considered principles rather than knee-jerk reactions.

The mind of such a human being does not get disturbed by another's attitude. His mental maturity enables him to rise above reaction and find a level of existence superior to it. He behaves well towards everyone, even if he is receiving bad behaviour from others.

This high thinking enables him to continue to join hands with those who wish to sever the relationship with him. He is happy to give, even to those who do not want to give anything to him in return. Even those who are not good to him or are unjust to him are forgiven by him unilaterally.

BE SENSITIVE TO OTHERS' NEEDS

God's Paradise is a sublime place. Only those will be lodged there who are universal in their thinking, who are concerned for all human beings, and not just for themselves.

The Prophet of Islam once observed: "One who has his fill while his neighbour remains hungry is not a believer." (Sunan al-Kubra, al-Baihaqi 19668)

One who has this high level of sensibility will never like it that he has had his fill and eats and drinks, knowing that there are people who are suffering from hunger and thirst because they have nothing to eat or drink. Such a person will never feel happy about being satiated while others are hungry.

This relates to human sensitivity, and not just to eating and drinking. It applies to every human being. The sign of a true human being is that when he finds people in a state of need, he is concerned, and does not rest until he has been able to fulfil their needs.

Need relates to the full spectrum of life. If you are concerned about the education of your children but have no concern for educating the children of your neighbours or of your countrymen, this will be a serious shortcoming on your part. Similarly, if you are doing everything to improve the economic condition of your family but don't think of others then the above criterion will apply in this case likewise.

God's Paradise is a very fine and sublime place. Only those people will be lodged there who are universal in their thinking, who are concerned for all human beings and not only just for themselves.

Similarly, in the present world the very society will be made excellent only by those who have the virtue of doing for others what they do for themselves; who think not only about themselves but also about others. They have to be concerned with providing others' needs just as if society were a vast family and they were the members of that family.

LIGHTEN PEOPLE'S BURDEN

Helping others ultimately benefits the helper. One who fulfils the needs of others gets God's attention and God fulfils his need on a greater scale.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: "One who wants God to save him from the torments of Doomsday must either be lenient with the borrower of money or should write off of the debt." (Sahih Muslim 1563)

When someone borrows money to meet some of his needs, but when the time for repayment comes and he has no money to pay off his debt, in such a situation, one who has given the money should give more time to the borrower and if he sees that the borrower's circumstances are straitened, he should write off his debt. Such a course of action is greatly loved by God. In the Hereafter, God will deal leniently with one who is lenient with God's servants in this world.

This principle relates not only to the debt but to all

matters of life. In social life it repeatedly happens that someone becomes embroiled in some problems, while some other person has the power to help him surmount his difficulties. All such occasions are precious opportunities for people to be kind to their brothers, thus receiving kindness from God in large measure.

Relieving the burden of another results in relieving his own burden. Coming to the help of others ultimately benefits the helper; his own problem is then solved. One who fulfils the needs of others gets God's attention and God fulfils his need on a greater scale. Moreover, becoming perturbed on finding someone in difficult circumstances in one respect is a humane attitude. One thus perturbed, proves that he is a good human being. Another benefit is that by attending to others' need, he earns God's blessing for the good deeds he has done. The reward in the Hereafter is for the work done in this world. And, doubtless, there is no blessing greater than this.

A LIFE OF RESTRAINT

A believer engages only in those things for which God has given His permission and refrains from what God has forbidden.

According to one tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “The example of a believer and his faith is like that of a tethered horse who moves away then comes back to where he is tethered.” (Musnad Ahmad 11526)

A human being has not to lead his life in this world as an untethered horse. Rather he has to lead his life like a horse tied up with a rope. A person’s success lies in subordinating his freedom to his principles. He should lead a principled life rather than an unprincipled life. What, in essence is this principled life? It is one, in effect, in which the believers differentiate between the lawful and the unlawful. He engages only in those things for which God has given His permission and refrains from what God has forbidden.

A person ought to think along constructive lines and avoid distractions in all situation. He should utter only those words which are right and proper, and where he thinks he cannot do so, he should remain silent. In his dealings with people, he should bind himself to the principle of justice, and should not ever deal with people unjustly. His behaviour should be responsible rather than irresponsible. He should completely avoid irresponsible behaviour.

Where a horse is bound by a material rope, a human being is bound by the divine moral and human principles laid down by God. A horse is compelled to remain within the ambit allowed by his rope. The same is true of a person when he adopts a life of principles. A person's nobility is to remain bound by principles of self-restraint. He should adopt a life of restraint willingly and of his own choice such as the horse has adopted by compulsion.

A BELIEVER IS FLEXIBLE IN PRACTICAL MATTERS

A believer is never a rigid or unbending person: he is very flexible. His attitude is one of softness and not of hardness.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed that “the life of a believer is like that of a plant which is moved to and fro by the air. One puff of wind bows it down to the ground while another puff from the other side brings it up straight—unless his final time has come.” (Sahih Muslim 2810)

A believer is never a rigid or unbending person: he is very flexible. He has full faith in his ideology and in his belief, yet in practical life, his attitude is one of softness and not of hardness.

In religious life a person can be inflexible in his faith but so far as his dealings with others are concerned, he has to be flexible. Belief is a personal matter and it is formed by being in accordance with the state of

reality. But in practical matters making concessions to others is necessary. Without making concessions to others no practical life can be established.

Why is it that, in practical life, a person adopts an inflexible attitude? It is always because of arrogance or egoism. Whenever there are differences with anyone, a person immediately makes it an issue of his prestige. He begins to think that if he is very flexible, he will become inferior as compared to others. It is this feeling which stops him from adopting a flexible attitude. He regards his stand as one of principle and becomes rigid about it. On all such occasion the peaceful stand is the better one; the issue should not be taken as a matter of honour. The issue should be solved rather by a soft and flexible approach.

According to divine belief, the personality that takes shape is founded on the truth that all greatness is God's and that the believer is only His servant. All the believer has is modesty. Such feelings make a God worshipper a soft person, which has an effect in various forms with other people.

Softness or kindness is the way of concession and is a divine method. On the contrary, the rigidity and harshness of an uncompromising attitude leads to a totally ungodly approach.

WHY RESPECT ALL HUMAN BEINGS?

God-oriented living means that one looks at all with respect and honour, whether he belongs to one's own religion or community or to another.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam was once seated at some place in Madinah when a funeral procession was passing by. The Prophet stood up in deference to it. Then one of his companions told him that it was the funeral of a Jew. The Prophet replied, "Was he not a human being?" (Sahih al-Bukhari 1312)

One principle of the God-oriented life is that everyone should be looked at with respect and honoured, whether he belongs to one religion or another and whether he belongs to one's own community or to another. Respect derives from the fact that I have been created by God in exactly the same way that other human beings have been created by God. Regardless

of his choice of religion or culture, the believer still remains a human being. Because of this commonality, he continues to remain worthy of everyone's respect.

When you look at a person and your eyes are set on differences, then as a result, you want to keep your distance from him. You will find there is no commonality between you and him. On the contrary, if you look at him as a human being, he emerge as a masterpiece of God's creation. Then his existence will remind you of the high attributes of God. Then in such a situation you will forget the apparent difference and you will be lost in the divine creation that he represents.

In the mirror of creation, you will find God. In the form of the human being you will imagine a being, or a person who has also been created by God and who is worthy of respect as you think you are yourself. His relationship with God is equal of your relationship with God, the Compassionate and Merciful.

For any human being, respect is not for a person but for God. When a believer respects some person, it is in fact an expression of divine feelings that are aroused in him about God as the best Creator. And the expression of these divine feelings has no limit. Such

feelings find expression in the matter of all kinds of human beings and not only of those who are related to you.

REFRAIN FROM FUTILE ACTIVITIES

The true human being is a man with a purpose. He is focused. This purposefulness produces concentration.

There is a tradition, in which the Prophet of Islam once observed: “One of the virtues of a believer in Islam is that he should refrain from and abandon those activities in which there is no benefit.” (Sunan Ibn Majah 3976)

The true human being is a person with a purpose and all his attention is devoted to achieving it. This purposefulness produces concentration. And he engages himself only in those activities which clearly relate to his purpose, and he stays away from anything which is irrelevant to his purpose.

Such a person differentiates between what is essential and what is not. Before engaging in any activities he sees what is necessary as his purpose. He thinks before he speaks. He gauges whether his words or speech are going to serve any purpose. His sensitivity about his purpose compels him to become a watchdog on his thinking as well. He does not spend his mental energy and thinking on such things as are not going to produce any positive gain either to him or to humanity at large.

The difference between a purposeful person and a purposeless person is that the former leads a well-considered life, while the latter has no clear goal before him. He leads his life without any destination right up to the point when he leaves this world.

A true human being is one who is a person of principle. The activities of such a person are governed by his principles rather than by his personal desires. Such a human being reins in his personal desires and looks at things on their genuine merit. Such a person naturally accepts only those things which are important in principle. He keeps away from those things which are not important in principle, no matter how attractive they may seem.

BE AN AMBASSADOR OF POSITIVITY

An ambassador of goodwill is one who loves goodness, shuns negativity, takes positive things from others and conveys positivity and goodwill to them.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “Should I not tell you who are the worst of men?” Everyone said, “Yes, O Messenger of God.” The Prophet replied, “The worst of you are those who indulge in backbiting, who create differences between friends and who strive to find negative points in people.” (Adab al-Duniya wa-al-Din, al-Mawardi, p. 422)

In nature God has provided examples of all types of human character. These examples have been created so that a person may reflect on them and take lessons from them. And then he should develop a good character and be warned by the examples of bad character.

There are two kinds of insects. One is the bee which is always searching for fragrance and sweetness and nectar. In whatever flower it senses fragrance and nectar, it immediately reaches it. In this way, it gathers the sweetness of the flower, so that it may give it to human beings. Another example is that of the common fly, which is interested only in filth. It flies about all the time solely to find dirt and have its share of it.

Similarly, there are also two kinds of human beings. One who loves goodness and when he interacts with others, he takes positive things from them and conveys them to other people and becomes an ambassador of goodwill and positivity. He is the good human being. Such a person is desired by nature. All the opportunities of nature are destined for such people. A different kind of person is one whose soul finds sustenance in saying negative things about people. When such a person meets others, he is interested only in finding out their shortcomings. If he does not find any shortcomings or any negative points, he concocts something negative about them and then goes and gossips about it to others.

PRIDE AND SELF-GLORIFICATION

One's ego amplifies the feeling of pride and self-glorification, eating up a person's virtues and becoming a permanent obstacle to the development of noble qualities.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: "Pride and vanity eats up virtues, just as fire eats up food." (Shuab al-Iman, al-Baihaqi 6861)

The feeling of ego is natural to a human being. No one is bereft of the "I". This feeling is very precious for a person. This is because a person must have determination and confidence. In leading his life, he should brave all hardships with self-confidence. In that way he will keep on progressing.

But most people make a wrongful use of this feeling. Their feeling of the "I" or the ego turns into self-conceit or self-glorification. This is a wrong use of it. And the wrong use of anything always makes it evil, no matter how innately good things may be.

The feeling of pride and self-glorification is not something simple. It eats up all of a person's virtues. It is a permanent obstacle to the development of noble qualities. Pride makes a person an egotist. And one who is an egotist lives as if he has encased himself in his personal shell. Such a person is totally lacking in the ability to understand external realities and benefit from others. He fails to make anything external to him a ladder to progress.

When such a person does anything virtuous, that also conveys a feeling of pride. Whatever he does he does for show. His activities revolve around his own self. In reality the better part of a person's activities should be that which is external to his 'shell'.

Nature wants to see a person as modest. But a conceited person suffers from the delusion of greatness and loves acknowledgement of his imagines greatness. But it is he who demonstrates a lack of acknowledgement. Such a person wants to be given a very special place, but he does not acknowledge the contribution of others.

THE RIGHTS OF THE NEIGHBOUR

In leading his life, a believer should brave all hardships with self-confidence. In that way he will keep on progressing.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “By God, he is not a believer, by God, he is not a believer, by God, he is not a believer.” People asked, “O Prophet of God, who is not believer?” The Prophet replied, “One from whom his neighbour is not safe.” (Sahih al-Bukhari 6016)

A human being is a social animal. Wherever he lives, he lives in society. Even if he travels, he has some co-travellers. All these people are his neighbours.

Now, there are two types of people. One type consists of those who recognizes others' need and does not do anything which will hurt the feelings of others or anything which may create problems for others. He never does them any harm. This is the person who cares for the rights of neighbour.

The other type of person is one who knows only how to make concessions to himself. He is not interested in making concessions to anyone else. Such a person will be a constant problem for others. He will hurt others' feelings by his careless talk. He will engage in such activities as will destroy the peace of others. One who engages in such irresponsible activities to achieve his end as disturbs the lives of others, is an evil neighbour for those who are close to him.

Those who are good for their neighbours are good people. And those who are evil for their neighbours are evil people. To do harm to others for one's own gain is undoubtedly a crime and anyone who does so is a sinner. Those about whom neighbours have a good opinion are good people, and those for whom neighbours have a bad opinion are without doubt bad people.

THERE IS A SUPERIOR POWER OVER ALL OF US

A believer recognises others' need and does not do anything which will hurt the feelings of others. He never does them any harm.

Abu Masood al-Badri was, by his own account, a senior companion. He said that once when he was beating his servants, the Prophet of Islam came to him. On seeing this, the Prophet said, "O Abu Masood, learn that God has more power over you than you have over this slave." On hearing these words the whip fell from Abu Masood's hand. He said, "I will never again hit any slave." Later he set his slave free. The Prophet of Islam said: "If you had not done so, you would have incurred the risk of hell fire." (Sahih Muslim 1659)

All the forms of persecution and injustice in the world have one reason and that is that when one person confronts another person, he regards it to be a human

affair. He thinks that his adversary is just a human being. And if he does him any injustice, he is not going to be punished for it.

But the reality is that there is a superior power over human beings and that is God. God is watching all human beings. Anyone who hurts another unjustly or does any injustice to anyone will be chastised and punished by God for his misdeeds.

The anticipation of God's punishment is the greatest deterrent for any wrongdoer. It makes a person aware that the issue he has taken up as something human is indeed a divine matter. You may be powerful as compared to others but, as compared to God, no one is powerful. When God chastises, no one, whether powerful or powerless, can escape God's wrath.

This belief reinforces moral disciplines and curbs the misuse of human freedom. If you are convinced of this reality, you will not seek out anyone weak whom you can oppress and you will not seek out anyone helpless against whom you feel emboldened to perpetrate some act of injustice.

DO NOT BE ANGRY

A believer does not become angry even upon provocation, does not fritter away his energies and discovers something favourable even in unfavourable situations.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam was once asked by one of his companions: “O Prophet of God, tell me something by which I may live and that should be brief so that I don’t forget it.” The Prophet said, “Don’t be angry.” (Muwatta Imam Malik 1891)

Anger is the main cause of all evils. One who can control his anger will save himself from all those evils. So if one has to give some very succinct advice, it would be: “Save yourself from anger.”

Everyone has an angry streak in him. But, in general, his anger remains dormant. This anger surfaces only when some unpleasant event provokes the person.

A human being is being tested in this worldly life, when he has to listen to some bitter words from

someone and he becomes angry. Then what he should do is extinguish the fire of anger, rather than stoke it to the point where even he is burnt in this fire.

The successful person is one who does not become angry even in situations of extreme provocation. He does not become upset at all. Such a person will manage to nip anger in the bud and not allow it to escalate out of control. The greatest benefit of this habit of not getting angry is that a person saves himself from frittering away his energies. He discovers something favourable even in unfavourable circumstances.

Not getting angry is a sign of broadmindedness. On the contrary becoming angry shows a lack of magnanimity.

CAUSING HARM TO OTHERS

A good human society is one in which individuals make concessions to others, they are aware of the rights of others and they do not create problems for them.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “Do not harm God’s servants, neither embarrass them nor seek out their secrets (in negative terms).” (Musnad Ahmad 22402)

To establish a good human society, it is essential that moral feelings should be alive in its members. They make concessions to others, they are aware of the rights of others and they do not create problems for them, even when there is a genuine reason to do so.

Everyone must live in society in such a way that no one harms another. He should not utter such words as hurt the feelings of others. He should not engage in such activities as are of personal interest to him but which are harmful to others. Words and deeds may be hurtful to others, and one who hurts others has

no value either in the eyes of God or in the eyes of people.

Sometimes such things happen or one makes such mistakes of which one is ashamed. Mentioning such things again and again is to embarrass the errant person and that is not right. Saying you have done this, you have done that, your parents have done this, your parents have done that, in order to embarrass others is an inhuman way to behave. A person ought to respect others just as he respects himself. There are some things which one wants to keep secret; one does not want them to be known by others. Therefore, one who wants to make such things known in order to cause embarrassment and give a bad name to others is unethical in his conduct. This is a permanent obstacle to forming a good society.

WRONGFUL USE OF SPEECH

Wrongful use of the speech is indulging in idle gossip, spreading rumours and misleading others by giving out false information. This is evil in the eyes of God.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “The greatest sinners are those who indulge in idle talk.” (Kanzul Ummal 8293)

One of the most precious things granted to a human being by God is his tongue. It is with his tongue that a person speaks. That is how he exchanges his thoughts with others. The tongue is a very important element in establishing connections with others. In this respect, the tongue is a blessing the like of which no other creature has been given.

If the tongue is used according to need, there are great benefits in it. But if the tongue is used in an uncalled for way, this innately beneficial thing becomes an extremely harmful thing for others.

Speaking more means thinking less. One who is speaking all the time will never hear what others have to say and will thus limit his own knowledge. Speaking more always means restricting the scope of the speaker's ability to gather knowledge, reflect upon it and analyze it.

This results from the unnecessary use of the tongue. When the tongue is wrongly used, the harm caused by this is incalculable.

The wrong way to use the tongue is to abuse others or indulge in idle gossip about others to spread rumours and mislead others by giving out false information. One who speaks such words as create mistrust among his hearers cause people to start hating others. People begin to have doubts about one another quite unnecessarily.

Such a futile use of words devalues the original blessing of the tongue. Such wrongful use of words is evil and negates the blessing of the tongue. In the eyes of God this is evil and sinful.

CLAPPING DOES NOT HAPPEN BY JUST ONE HAND

Patience and being God-fearing are guarantees that the antagonistic plan will necessarily become fruitless. God has placed the matter in our own hands.

The Quran states: “We have created pairs of all things so that you might reflect.” (51:49) This is a universal principle of nature. Here any happening takes place through interaction with other things or beings. Nothing in this world can have beneficial outcomes in total isolation.

The same principle applies equally to social life. This is expressed by the ancient saying that clapping cannot be done by just one hand. A person may keep waving his hand in the air, but he will not be able to clap. Clapping necessitates the second hand striking it. Only then can clapping be engaged in.

From the Quran we learn that in the case of being

harmful by an opponent, the same holds true. The plan to harm an opponent is successful only when the opponent does something intentionally, or unintentionally, which activates the planner to do something harmful. If the other party's hand does not become the activator, the enemy's antagonistic "clapping" cannot take place. The Quran tells us that there are people who want to harm believers by being inimical towards them. But the Quran tells us clearly that "if you persevere and fear God, their designs will never harm you in the least: God encompasses all that they do." (3:120)

This verse can be explained thus: the plotting of an enemy can succeed only 50%. It can be successfully carried out when the other party through some of its own mistakes can fulfil the other 50 % of the plan of the antagonist. Patience and being God-fearing are guarantees that this second half which can complete the plan will not be received by the enemy. When this happens the antagonistic plan will necessarily become fruitless. In this way, God has placed this matter in one's own hands. In this way the enemy's plot cannot succeed.

THE CRITERION OF UPRIGHT BEHAVIOUR

To lend support to God's religion one has to have an iron character, exemplified by dependability, trust, and not showing any weakness in the face of difficulties.

“**W**e sent Our Messengers with evidence and, with them, We sent down the Book and the Scales of Justice, so that men might act in all fairness. We sent down iron with its great inherent strength and its many benefits for mankind, so that God might know who would stand up for God, though unseen, and His messengers. God is powerful, and almighty.”
(57:25)

The present world has been created by God in such a way that material things have become symbols of human ethics. In the verse above two things have been mentioned in this connection: one the balance, or scale, and the other, iron.

What the balance (or the scales of justice) does is measure things. Just as a person measures excess or shortage by means of a balance, similarly, God's book is also a balance which gauges truth. People should test their actions by the standard of God's book and find out how far they are right and how far they are wrong. One who wants his behaviour to be upright in the present world, so that he may achieve success in the Hereafter, he must measure his words deeds by this divine scale. If he does not do so, he will become a failure in the next world.

The other symbol mentioned here is that of iron. What is the quality of iron? It is hard and one can depend upon its hardness. When any bridge or building is given the support of iron, the builder is fully confident that it will remain firmly standing and will withstand any storm. It is people of this kind who are required for the support of God's religion. Only those can lend support to God's religion who have this iron character and on whose words one can fully depend. They are such as one can fully trust, and do not show any weakness in the face of difficult circumstances. They prove to be as inflexible as steel when subjected to the pressure of the self and Satan.

FORGIVENESS AND MODESTY ARE NOT WEAKNESSES

Nature is your representative with others. When you behave forgivingly and modestly, you find yourself having the support of that representative.

Just as the Prophet of Islam told us the ways of worship by which a person can become a servant of God whom He likes and approves of, similarly, he also gave us the ethical principles which, if adopted, can bring a person a place of honour and respect amongst his fellow human beings.

There is a hadith in this connection: “God enhances the honour of those who forgive and one who is modest for the sake of God, is elevated by Him.” (Sahih Muslim 2588)

Generally, people take it that if someone does evil to another, if he is not punished, he will be emboldened to do further evil deeds. But this tradition of the

Prophet, on the contrary, tells us that one who forgives an evil-doer will have his honour increased.

Similarly, a person usually thinks that one should never bow before others in dealing with them. If one bows, then others will make him bow even more. But the Prophet of Islam says that in dealing with others, adopt the way of modesty. And that if you do so, you will reach greater heights than before, with the help of God. The reason for this is that the way of forgiveness and modesty appeals to nature. It has the power to conquer humans. It conquers a person from within. One who adopts the way of modesty and forgiveness is as it were addressing the nature vested in everyone by God. It is human nature to surrender before the truth and acknowledge the person who stands by the truth.

Nature is your representative within the other person. And when you behave forgivingly and modestly, you find yourself having the support of that representative.

FOLLOW PRINCIPLES, NOT YOUR DESIRES

If people provoke you and you react, you are following your desires. The prophetic method, in the face of provocation, is to tread the path of patience and avoidance.

According to Abdullah ibn Umar, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “None of you can be a believer until his desires become subservient to what I have brought.” (al-Sunnah, Ibn Abi Asim 15)

From this prophetic saying we learn that there are two ways of acting in this world: one is following one’s desires and the other is following the divine message conveyed by the Prophet.

Truth came before you and your heart affirmed that this was the truth, but along with this, consciously or unconsciously, you had this feeling that if I accepted the truth my position would be lowered. If you believe the truth, then it means following what the Prophet

brought, but if you deny the truth, it means following your desires.

You were criticized by someone and your ego was hurt. You were disturbed and angry. Now at that moment you are reminded of that command given by the Prophet, not to become arrogant, but to live among others with modesty. Now if you adopted the way of modesty in answer to the criticism, it is like following the teaching of the Prophet. But if you reacted to the criticism, it is following your desires.

When someone's behaviour hurts you, you became provoked. But a teaching of Islam is that if people provoke you, even then you must tread the path of patience and avoidance. Now, if you adopt patience in the face of provocation, it is like following what the Prophet has laid down. But if you started fighting with the party who provoked you, it is like following your desires. This is true of life in its entirety. In every situation there are two alternatives: either be modest and forgiving, or react to the situation. The latter is to be avoided.

WINNING THE HEART

Revenge turns society into a jungle of negative activities. Good behaviour in return for bad behaviour wins hearts.

When the Prophet of Islam began to communicate the message of monotheism, he met with stiff opposition in Arabia. All kinds of violence was used against him. But the Prophet did not take any retaliatory measures. He behaved well with his opponents so that he might win their hearts. The Prophet's hometown was Makkah. And the Makkans subjected him to so much oppression and violence, that he was forced to leave Makkah. Then a time came when he entered Makkah as the victor. Makkah came under his control. At that time, the inveterate Makkan antagonists were brought before him. They stood out against him but the Prophet did not decree any punishment for them. Rather he freed

all of them unconditionally. The result of this positive behaviour was that all of them accepted Islam.

Similarly, the Hawazin tribe rebelled against him and attacked his people. Then the Prophet was forced to fight with them. This is known in Islamic history as the war of Hunain. Finally, he became victorious. And thousands of the Hawazin were arrested and brought before him. With them also the Prophet did not take any revenge. He released all of them with honour. This sublime demonstration of ethical behaviour was so powerful that the whole tribe accepted the Prophet's message.

Taking revenge, to teach a lesson is not the way of Islam. In the case of such activities, the problem becomes more grave. But when good behaviour is given in return for bad behaviour, this conquers a person's heart. And there is no other way more powerful than the conquering of hearts, whether it applies to individual or groups or society as a whole.

The way of revenge turns the entire society into a jungle of negative activities. On the contrary, the way of conquering hearts produces an atmosphere of good ethics and humanity in all of society. Revenge only increases the problem, while the way of winning hearts solves the entire problem.

DETACHMENT FROM THE WORLD

Detachment from the world makes one free from prejudice and one is able to think and see things as they are. Such a person can adopt the right stand based on truth and justice.

According to a certain tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “Whenever any servant of God leads a life of disinterestedness with the world, God plants wisdom in his heart. And he speaks words of wisdom. And God tells him the remedy for the ills of the world, and then leads him to the home of peace in safety.” (Shuab al-Iman 10050)

What is wisdom? Wisdom is, in fact, another name for realistic thinking and far sightedness. When a person has reached that level of intellectual development where he may analyze problems in an unbiased manner and is able to take decisions at a deeper level, that is wisdom.

The source of this wisdom is detachment from the world, because it sometimes happens that some worldly concerns become such an obsession that a person becomes blind to understanding the reality of things. And in the same way sometimes, worldly experience makes him prejudiced. Such a person, due to his biases, is not able to look at things in their real form.

Those who are free from prejudice, who can think and see things as they are, who can form realistic opinions, will adopt the right stand, which is the demand of truth and justice.

Detachment from the world frees a person from his limitations: such a person is an intellectually developed being. By temperament, he is realistic and is very serious and conscientious about his faith. He proceeds in a very serious and cautious manner. Those possessed of such a noble character, are destined to become successful in this world as well as in the next. Detachment is not abandonment of this world. It is a source rather of intellectual development.

CONCESSION TO CIRCUMSTANCES

The Prophetic method is that while commencing our activities we should give concession to circumstances. This ensures success in any effort, whether it relates to religion or to the world.

When the Prophet received prophethood, he was given this command by God to worship the one God alone and to communicate God's message to the people. But the Prophet did not proceed by immediately going to open places, saying prayers in public or openly calling people to God. On the contrary, what he did was say his prayers in private for a few years and he communicated the message of God to people privately by meeting with individuals. This was a concession he made to circumstances. Making allowances for circumstances is an important principle of Islam, even when some command is set forth in the Quran and Hadith in the absolute sense, we shall have to see, according to the circumstances, what is the best way to carry out that command. Whatever

is practical in accordance with circumstances will be adopted to implement that command. Ignoring the circumstances is not the Islamic way and is not the Sunnah of the Prophet of Islam.

This way of proceeding may be called the natural method. In this world, in any matter, a result-oriented struggle can be only that which makes full concessions to the circumstances. Not making concessions to circumstances is to clash with nature, and Islam does not teach us to clash with nature.

Throughout all of his twenty-year prophetic career, the Prophet of Islam made full concession to circumstances. For his followers also this was the only method. Regardless of the environment, they had to understand it fully and had to plan their activities according to circumstances. Without this they could not receive divine succour.

Concession to circumstances is the equivalent of concession to nature. The laws under which the Creator has created this world have to be followed: this is concession to circumstances. This concession is essential to achieve success in any effort, whether it relates to religion or to the world.

USE THE RIGHT CRITERION TO JUDGE MATTERS

The criterion to judge matters is not whether one is stern or gentle, but to see if one is God-fearing, well-intentioned and has the ability to discriminate between truth and untruth.

Most intellectual deviations result from the fact that the criterion for action is not clear in peoples' minds. It often happens that a person thinks he is on the right path, but the criterion by which he judges the matter is often wrong. If he were to judge the matter by right criterion, he would know that his thinking was 100 per cent wrong.

For instance, when the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, appointed Umar Farooq as the second caliph, or the leader of the believers, then most of the companions failed to come to an agreement on this. Their stand was that Umar was a stern disciplinarian and such a person should not be appointed as the leader of the believers. Abu Bakr called Uthman and asked him to

tell his opinion on this matter. Uthman replied that it was right that “he was stern in character but his inner self was better than his outer self.” (Tarikh al-Tabari, vol. 3, p. 428)

From this we learn that those who opposed the leadership of Umar Farooq were applying a wrong criterion in support of their opinion. For a believer, whether he was stern and severe or gentle was not the issue. The real criterion was that he should be well-intentioned; he should be God-fearing and should have the power of insight. He should have the ability to discriminate between truth and untruth.

If we look at the matter in terms of the right criterion, we will find that the appointment of Umar Farooq to the caliphate was 100 per cent right, because the most important quality of a caliph was being farsighted and he had this quality par excellence. On the contrary, if this matter is judged by a wrong criterion, it could be said that the selection of Umar Farooq for caliphate was not right, because he was of a very harsh temperament. But this criterion is not right in itself. The ability that is required must be in accordance with the task to be performed.

TOLERANCE IS A PRACTICAL NEED

For harmony and progress in society the only practical formula is to follow tolerance and forbearance. Human civilization cannot evolve without this spirit.

Whenever a number of people lead their lives along with others, there are bound to be differences between them and complaints will certainly rise from them. This will happen in the family, in society, in a country and in international life. At whatever level a person lives and establishes relations, it is unavoidable that there will be unpleasantness—even evil.

What should be done in such a situation? The answer to this question is tolerance. In such a situation, people and groups should deal with others according to the spirit of tolerance and forbearance. Making progress while living together is the only practicable way to

go. Without this spirit of progress, human civilization cannot evolve.

Tolerance does not mean inactivity. Neither does it mean that a better course of action was possible but that a person opted for a lesser solution. The truth is that in this present world tolerance is the only choice possible. Tolerance is our practical need rather than a passive retreat.

It often happens that a person finds a certain set of circumstances unpleasant and starts fighting against them. He thinks that his struggle will bring into existence a more propitious way of life than his present situation. But this is not so. His inability to be tolerant can only have a negative outcome.

WHEN TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST EVIL

Prior to taking action against evil one should think if it will be result-oriented and in conformity with wisdom, otherwise it will be considered rebellion rather than the implementation of an Islamic command.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “One who sees evil should change it out of hand.” (Sahih Muslim 49) Now let us look at another tradition. The Prophet of Islam once said to Ayesha, his wife: “When the Quraysh rebuilt the Kabah, they did not lay the foundations on the Abrahamic foundations. Some land was left outside of this building. This land initially was part of the Kabah.” Ayesha replied, “O God’s Messenger, why didn’t you rebuild the Kabah according to the Abrahamic foundations?” The Prophet said: “Had the Quraysh not been new Muslims, I would certainly have done so.” (Sahih al-Bukhari 1583)

A comparative study of these two traditions shows that changing what is not good or disapproved of is not to be taken in the absolute sense. As a command it should be seen as relative to circumstances. Had it been an absolute command, the Prophet would certainly have rebuilt the Kabah and done away with the changes the Quraysh had made in it. He would have rebuilt the Kabah on the original Abrahamic foundations.

From this comparative study we also learn that only power, or the ability to do things is not the sole factor in changing what is evil. It has to be accompanied by wisdom. After the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet of Islam became the ruler of Arabia. He then had the power to demolish the structure of the Kabah and lay the foundations on the original base laid by Prophet Abraham. But in spite of having the power to do this, he did not, because in the words of the above hadith, doing so would not have shown wisdom.

The command to change the evil does not mean that whenever one sees evil, one should immediately take action against it. In social life, no step is taken just on seeing evil. Circumstances have also to be kept in view. Whenever a believer sees any evil, it is incumbent upon him before thinking of taking any action, to think of whether he has real power to do

so or not. If, apparently, he has any power, he should even then see whether or not it is in conformity with wisdom. Without taking into account the twin conditions of power and wisdom, the extirpation of evil is rebellion rather than the implementation of an Islamic command.

NO ONE IS AN ETERNAL ENEMY

If one appears to be your antagonist, never regard him as your permanent opponent. Attribute his opposition as temporary in nature. Try to influence him positively.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the general thinking of the communist world was that those who were not with them were their enemies. Such thinking was, both erroneous and destructive. For about 50 years, all the communists who indulged in this foolish thinking set about massacring all those people who did not agree with their movement. In the former Soviet Union, the communists killed twenty million people and destroyed the lives of countless families.

In those countries where they did not have such power, they engaged in an unending verbal warfare with those who did not side with their movement. Levelling false accusations, indulging in character assassination, printing false literature, issuing false propaganda and laying all kinds of blame at their door became their way of life. Towards this end they squandered all their best abilities and best resources.

Such thinking is entirely unnatural. Experience shows that a person's thinking keeps changing. Today he thinks along one line. Tomorrow he thinks along another line. With the increase in information and the acceptance of new arguments, a person's mind keeps changing. A human being is not a rigid statue. He is a living being. Over and over he is swayed by external influences.

If any person appears to be your antagonist, you should never regard him as being your opponent forever. Rather, his opposition should be attributed to inadequate knowledge or wrong information, and therefore of a temporary nature.

WE HAVE TO FOLLOW THE LAWS OF NATURE

What we can achieve through the patience and peace, we cannot achieve by violence. What we can achieve gradually, we cannot achieve at one fell swoop.

Success is to live in accordance with the system of nature as laid down by God. This is the secret of life, whether it concerns the life of the individual or the state or society at large.

The world in which we find ourselves was not created by us. Nor were we consulted about its creation by God. This world has been built on certain immutable principles, is governed by these principles, the world will go on functioning in the same way.

This means that in this world our position is secondary, and we have to coordinate unilaterally with the system of nature. If we do not adjust to it, it is we who shall be the losers and not the world.

A farmer has a good yield from his farm when he fully cooperates with the nature's law of agriculture. Similarly, an engineer is able to perform any technical feat when he fully conforms to the laws of nature regarding physics and chemistry. Exactly the same is true of the human world. The human world has to abide by the fixed laws of nature. Here, success is destined only for those individuals or nations who conform to these principles which have been laid down in advance by nature. No person has the power to ignore the laws of nature when he sets himself to building a successful life in this world for himself. In the map of nature what we can achieve by hard work, we cannot achieve by making concessions. What we can achieve by patience, we cannot achieve by hasty actions. What we can achieve through the power of peace, we cannot achieve by violence. What we can achieve gradually, we cannot achieve at one fell swoop.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERACTION

Interaction is not just a form of social behaviour. It is the great wisdom of life. It promotes mutual love. It is a process which is conducive to intellectual development.

Interaction is no simple and ordinary matter. It is a ladder to all kinds of human progress. In a society where there is no human interaction, everyone will suffer from limitations. No individual or group will be able to make appreciable progress.

Interaction is the law of nature. It underpins ongoing progress throughout the whole universe. The trees cannot interact with one another, so God gave them the medium of air to unite. The stars in space are at great distances from each other, so it is not possible for them to come together physically. God therefore gave them light, a medium by which they are linked with one another. The springs coming down from the mountain tops are very far from the seas. Then God

gave them the gift of flowing rapidly and by flowing in this way, these springs are united with the seas. These springs first join with the rivers and then the waters of the rivers unite in the seas.

Interaction is a universal culture. It is a culture which should be adopted by human beings. Just as the system of the rest of the universe is functioning harmoniously in exactly the same way, the system of human life can function advantageously when people also adopt this universal culture. (Quran 3:83)

When two people or more than two people come together it is not like the coming together of stones, but is rather the coming together of such creatures as have hearts and minds. Such coming together of human beings results in great benefits of all kinds. This promotes mutual love. It is a process which is conducive to intellectual development. People learn new things from each other's experiences. Every individual contributes to the common treasure of humanity. Interaction is not just a form of social behaviour. In a vaster sense, it is the great wisdom of life.

THE PATH IS NOT NARROW

While finding obstacles in your path, never opt for the path of confrontation. Avoid the obstacles and find the solution in spite of the obstacle.

After the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet of Islam was going from Makkah to Taif along with his companions. On his way, he found a path through the mountains which was apparently narrow. When he reached it, he asked the people the name of this path. They told him that it was called the ‘narrow path’, the narrow path which was difficult to traverse. The Prophet said: “No, it is an easy path.” (Sirah Ibn Hisham, vol. 2, p. 482)

In saying so, he meant that, this path might indeed be narrow and difficult to negotiate if they went at it head on. But they could make it easier to traverse by finding a strategy to do so. In this way, the narrowness of the path would not remain an obstacle for them.

This shows how in prophetic vision a narrow path

maybe seen as a wide path. Narrowness is narrowness. The rock is a rock at all events. But the crux of the matter is not the narrowness of the path or the rocky obstructions in it, but the adoption of the right method to circumvent these difficulties. The focus should be on positive possibilities rather than on the negative aspects of the situation.

One way to proceed is by direct confrontation. An alternative way is that of avoidance. In direct confrontation the narrowness or the rock will remain as it is, but the method of avoidance will render their existence practically ineffective.

Whenever you find any obstacle in your path, you should not think of opting for the path of confrontation. You should think rather of how to avoid the obstacles and of how to find the solution in spite of the obstacle's existence. That is what should matter to you.

The truth is that every path is narrow. Narrowness and openness are both relative things. There is only one really important thing and that is strategy. And strategy is always totally in the hands of the wayfarer.

ACCEPT TEMPORARY LOSS FOR GREATER GAIN

Continuing the conflict stops positive activities. Ending conflicts, even at the cost of incurring material loss, is better as it allows constructive activities to go on unhampered.

Suhaib Rumi was a companion of the Prophet on the occasion of the emigration. When he was ready to leave Makkah for Madinah he took along some gold coins. When he left his home, he met some youths of Makkah. During the conversation, they found out that he was leaving Makkah, and was carrying gold coins so they said, 'We won't allow you to go to Madinah with your gold.' Suhaib Rumi said, 'If I give you the gold, will you let me go to Madinah?' They said, 'Yes.' Suhaib Rumi immediately gave them the gold coins and left for Madinah.

When he reached Madinah, he first of all met the Prophet Muhammad and told him what had happened to him while he was leaving Makkah. On hearing this

the Prophet said, “O Suhaib, your commerce was successful!”(Hayatus Sahabah, vol. 1, p. 438)

From this event we learn one important tradition, or Sunnah, of the Prophet. That is, if any form of controversy arises and if it can be put to an end by incurring some material loss, then this controversy or conflict should be put to an end, even at the cost of incurring some material loss.

This method appears to be one which entails loss. But, in reality, it is one from which great benefit may accrue. In following this path a person finds something greater by giving up something quite paltry.

In this incident, there were on the one hand a few coins and on the other was a person’s very existence. At all events a person’s existence is extremely precious and is worth more than a few dinars. If therefore, by giving away the few dinars a person’s life is saved, then this commerce is one of profit rather than of loss.

Continuing the conflict results in further activities coming to a halt. But if the conflict is put to an end, this would result in the continuation of all activities. And continuation of constructive activities is a thousand times better than stopping all activities because of some conflict.

THE PATH OF MODERATION

Every person has to struggle to build his life. The way of moderation and realism is the way of success, while the opposite is the way of failure.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “The person who adopts the path of moderation will never find himself in straitened circumstances.” (Musnad Ahmad 4269)

Spending within one’s income and strictly according to one’s needs is moderation. Whereas spending without any reference to income and spending on unnecessary things shows a lack of moderation. One who spends with moderation will always remain satisfied and happy. One who is lacking in moderation in spending is bound to suffer from problems.

This principle relates not only to income and expenditure in the purely monetary sense, but rather relates to all matters in life. In other matters of life also there is the way of moderation and its opposite.

And in this world the only successful person is one who adopts the way of moderation.

For instance, if you are friendly with someone, you should proceed in this with moderation. If you do not do so, your friendship may run in difficulties. Similarly, if you have differences with someone, it is necessary that you should rein in your differences and not go as far as being inimical towards him. If differences remain in the sphere of differences, they can be brought to an end at any time. But if differences escalate to the level of enmity then it is very difficult to put an end to them. Every person has to struggle to build his life. In this matter too he needs to adopt the path of moderation. Whenever he takes a step, he should take it with careful consideration. Whenever he plans anything, he should make realism not desirability his guide. Instead of trying to get results sooner rather than later, he should follow the principle of being gradual in his approach.

The way of moderation is the way of success while the opposite is the way of failure.

ACCEPTING STATUS QUOISM

Accepting the status quo is great wisdom. Immediately upon accepting it, a person finds the correct starting point for his actions. This eventually leads to success.

One of the practices of the Prophet of Islam is willingness to accept status quoism – that is, accepting the status quo in controversial matters. In planning one's action, in controversial matters, it often happens that there is some issue that seems unresolvable. On the one hand is the first party, and on the other is the second party, and both remain adamant about the correctness of their stand. Crossing over the line of controversy is not easy for either. Circumstances should indicate that if they tried to change the status quo, they would meet with serious conflict or confrontation. As a result, great untowardness would have to be faced. In such a situation, the demand of wisdom is that at the crucial point, whatever is practical in the situation should be

maintained as it is, and by making efforts, some other course of action should be sought out and acted upon.

When the Prophet of Islam did not insist on the performance of Umrah on the occasion of Hudaibiyah and was willing to come back to Madinah without performing Umrah, it was an instance of temporarily accepting the status quo. There are other such incidents which show that he accepted the status quo permanently. One signal example of this was his acceptance of the foundation of the Kabah as built by the polytheists Makkans. And he did not insist on building it on the foundation laid by the Prophet Abraham.

This method is extremely important in controversial matters. It makes it possible for one's energy to be spent only on constructive activities.

It happens sometimes when one is driving one's car that one reaches a road block, but one does not collide with it. One rather drives around and finds other ways which are open-ended. Then one reaches one's destination. It is such wisdom which is at the basis of the status quo.

Immediately after accepting the status quo, a person finds the correct starting point for his actions. Finding the right starting point for one's actions is another name for success.

RECONCILIATION IS BEST

Reconciliation in controversial matters is great wisdom. It prevents one's time and energy being spent futilely and channelizes them towards constructive ends.

In giving commands regarding the relationship between a man and a woman, the Quran has this to say: "If a woman fears ill-treatment or indifference on the part of her husband, it shall be no offence for her to seek a reconciliation, for reconciliation is best. But people are prone to selfish greed. If you do good and fear Him, surely God is aware of what you do." (4:128)

Reconciliation, a common natural process, is best. It relates to problems of the home as well as to difficulties at the international level. Whenever any individual or group has an unpleasant experience with another individual or group, the wise approach on such an occasion is not to adopt a reactionary

attitude. On such an occasion, the best way is that of reconciliation, not of confrontation.

The policy of reconciliation in controversial matters is not one of retreat or cowardice. Its purpose is, in actual fact, to prevent one's time and energy being spent futilely and to channel one's energies towards some worthwhile endeavour.

The opposite of reconciliation is battle, or war and violence. In the situation of war and violence both the parties reach a dead end. Their journey stops at the point of the confrontation. On the contrary, in such matters a person should adopt the policy of reconciliation so that he may continue his journey without interruption. He should go on without a break until he finally reaches his destination.

The way of reconciliation appears at first sight to be the way of loss. But if we keep our eyes on the future rather than on the present, we shall find that it is the path to discovery in the full sense. In the last analysis, the policy of reconciliation inevitably leads to success, while the policy of confrontation cannot do other than lead to ruination and failure.

BEGINNING FROM THE MINIMUM

Beginning with the minimum or a small objective is always possible, while beginning with the maximum is almost always impossible and impracticable.

The Prophet of Islam was born in Makkah in 570 AD, and died in Madinah in 632 A D. He received his first revelation in 610.

At that time Makkah was faced with many grave problems. For instance, there were the 360 idols which had been placed in the sacred Kabah. Dar al-Nadwah, the centre of social decisions, was in the possession of idolaters. All kinds of sinful behaviour, like adultery, drinking and gambling were rampant in Arab society. Arabs were under the subjugation of the Roman and Sassanid empires.

But the first revelation the Prophet was given in such circumstances did not refer to any of these problems. He was simply asked to “read in the name of your Lord, who created, created man from a clot (of blood).

Read! Your Lord is the most bountiful one who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know.” (The Quran 96:1-5)

It would be correct to say that, in relation to the magnitude of the problems of that time this commandment could be described as minimalistic. But had the Prophet been commanded to take action against all those evils, it would have resulted in severe conflict and confrontation with the Makkans.

The benefit of beginning with a very low key objective is that each small step will more surely take one to one's destination. Whereas beginning with the seemingly highest priorities would in most cases prove counter-productive.

The conditioning for achieving success regardless of this issue lies in beginning at the right starting point. And the right beginning is only that which lies within the realms of the possible. Beginning with the possible is the only right starting point.

It is a fact that the minimum is always possible. Whereas beginning with the maximum is almost always impossible and impracticable.

Beginning with the minimum does not mean beginning with something inadequate. It just means beginning

with what is feasible. Similarly, beginning with the maximum does not mean beginning with something more advantageous. It means rather beginning with the impossible.

IDEALISM WITH SELF, PRAGMATISM WITH OTHERS

In personal matters the believer must try to behave in a way which is ideal. But in social matters one should be practical and adjust to others' needs.

During his last days, the Prophet of Islam performed Hajj, going from Madinah to Makkah. On this occasion, he delivered the famous sermon known as Hajjatul Wida (The Final Sermon). In this sermon the Prophet declared that no Arab is superior to a non-Arab, no white is superior to a black, except for his piousness and divine spirit. (Musnad Ahmad 23489) In this way the Prophet put an end to the old tradition of differentiating between one man and another. But on another occasion, the Prophet also observed:

The leader will be from the Quraysh. (Musnad Ahmad 12307) That is, the political leader of the Muslims will be from the Quraysh. The second statement is not apparently in accordance with the first statement. It is because a concession had to be made to practical exigencies.

The Prophet of Islam, on the one hand, would stand in prayer when he was alone for such a long time that his feet would become swollen. But while leading the prayer along with other worshippers, when he heard any child crying he would shorten the prayer. (Sahih al-Bukhari 709) This shows that when the matter pertains to the believer's own person, the believer must try to behave in a way which is ideal. But when it pertains to social matters, he should be practical and adjust to others' needs. In this second type of situation, the practical requirement will be given preference according to the circumstances, because that alone is what is practicable. In such matters, trying to adhere to the ideal is just not feasible.

From this we learn that one Sunnah, or practice, of the Prophet was that while dealing with others it should not be the ideal viewpoint or ideal justice which should be adhered to. Rather what should be appreciated is the real requirement or real situation of the people

with whom there was going to be some interaction. In this way, by assessing the real state of affairs that policy should be adopted which is possible in practice rather than what is right from the ideological standpoint.

WHY RECONCILE WITH PEOPLE?

One should seek reconciliation with one's adversaries in order to save oneself from futile imbroglios and to remain engaged in constructive activities.

Reconciliation is not to establish one's rights. Reconciliation is to save oneself from the evil intentions of the other party. If the other party is just, there is no need for reconciliation. Even without reconciliation you will get your dues. But when the other party is unjust, this will entangle you in irrelevant things which will cause you to deviate you from being constructive. At that time, the believer seeks reconciliation with his adversaries in order to save himself from futile imbroglios and remain engaged in constructive activities.

Those who do not understand these truths engage themselves in listing their rights at the time of reconciliation. They insist that they be given their dues. This kind of effort is a permanent obstacle to reconciliation. Such attempts only aggravate the issue. They do nothing to further the cause of reconciliation. This world is a testing ground. It is full of unjust people just as there are plants, which are full of thorns. In such a world a person's first priority should be not to become involved with unjust people. He should keep his distance from them and continue on his own forward journey.

But if certain controversial issues arise with some unjust person, in the first instance, he should seek reconciliation and then move on. A person's whole attention should be on continuing with his onward journey unhampered, rather than focus on the other party giving him his rights.

Such reconciliation is in no way a retreat. It is a principle adhered to by purposeful people. One who has no purpose in life may devote his energies to getting his rights back at the crucial moment and spend all his life in achieving some impracticable reconciliation. Reconciliation has been given great importance in

Islam. It has been said that reconciliation is best in all conditions. Even on the occasion of Hudaibiyah, the Prophet of Islam arrived at a reconciliation with his antagonists by accepting all their conditions.

COMPLAINING ABOUT OTHERS IS A WASTE OF TIME

Complaining about others is a waste of one's time. Everyone's future is within his own hands. One can build one's life by one's own efforts.

Whatever misfortune befalls you is of your own doing—God forgives much (42:30).

This verse of the Quran tells us that whenever a person is afflicted by any calamity in this world, it is due to his own deeds or misdeeds. In this world, complaining about others' injustice is meaningless. Everyone has to suffer the consequences of his own deeds. Complaining about others is a waste of one's time. There is no benefit in doing so.

This system has been devised by nature itself and

there is much that is good in this system. It is a great source of hope. This system of nature has put the solution to our problems into our own hands. We are not dependent upon anyone else.

If anyone is suffering from some problems and the cause is traceable to someone else, it means that we are dependent upon others. We need others' help. But God has devised the system of this world in such a way that matters have been placed in one's own hands. That is, by one's own efforts one can build one's own life. Everyone's future is within his own hands.

It sometimes happens that a person suffers due to his own mistakes or foolishness. By opting for a wise approach, those so afflicted can save themselves from loss. Sometimes due to lack of planning things go wrong. But there is always the opportunity to do the requisite planning and rectify matters in the future. Sometime due to impatience a person finds himself in trouble. But it is possible for him to adopt the correct attitude and save himself from further loss. Sometimes due to an emotional approach, certain people find themselves in trouble, but they always have the opportunity to once again opt for the principle of realism, and thus reach their desired destination.

IN EVERY DIFFICULTY, THERE IS EASE

There are always opportunities along with difficulties.
We should ignore the difficulties and avail of the
opportunities to continue our path to success.

When Muslims had been going through very difficult times in Makkah, this verse was revealed: “So, surely with every hardship there is ease; surely, with every hardship there is ease.” (94:5) This Quranic verse tells us of the law of nature by which there are always opportunities side by side with difficulties. Therefore the wisest course is to ignore the difficulties and avail of the opportunities. In this way, one can continue on one’s onward journey in a far better way.

Generally, people know only one type of action in this world, and that is battling with difficulties, removing all obstacles and carving out their path. But this is not Islamic activism. Islamic activism, on the contrary,

is to avoid difficulties rather than fighting with them and availing rather of the opportunities which present themselves. Therefore, Islamic activism, to put it briefly, is to ignore the problems and avail of the opportunities.

In the modern world, difficulties and problem can never be brought to an end. In the present world the existence of difficulties and problems is inevitable, just like the thorns in the rose plant. Therefore, opting for a course of confrontation to solve the problem of difficulties is to fight with eternal realities. There is no one who can change these realities of nature by opting for a collision course.

Wise indeed is he who ignores the difficulties and problems and seeks out the opportunities. The successful journey of life always follows in the path of opportunities, rather than colliding with the rocks of difficulties. Just as there are both roses and thorns in the bush, so also is the present world filled with both difficulties and opportunities. The test of a person's acumen is his ability to not embroil himself in difficulties. He should try to discover opportunities and avail of them. He should abandon the way of protest and complaint and continue on his journey with patience and fortitude. Such are the people who

will finally be successful. For those who adopt the contrary course, there will be for them nothing but failure in this world of God.

KEEP YOUR MIND OPEN

The God-oriented person keeps all the windows of his mind open. Increasing his knowledge, his personality keeps developing until it reaches a peak of perfection.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “Words of wisdom are a believer’s lost treasure. Wherever he finds it, he is entitled to it more than anyone else.” (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 2687)

This tradition tells us the way of the believer. A believer is free of all kinds of prejudice. He does not discriminate between one person and another. He sees all individuals as God’s creatures and all human beings as God’s family. This thinking on his part is universal in character. Such a person learns lessons from everything. Owing to his universal thinking he comes to regard every useful thing as his own. As a

true believer, he thinks every good thing to be the word of God. He takes everything, every good word, as if it were his very own.

This thinking of a believer, or a God-oriented person, makes him limitless. He continues to increase his intellectual treasure by adding new things to it. His life never stagnates. At every juncture he finds something positive by which he may continue his onward journey of life.

In this world, success relates more than anything else to information. The more information an individual has, the greater is his success. The God-oriented person keeps all the windows of his mind open. As such it becomes possible for him to go on increasing his store of information.

A believer is an unbiased person. He is a seeker of truth to the ultimate extent. Due to such thinking, he becomes like one who is ready to accept any good thing regardless of the source.

A God-oriented person's thinking is totally that of a student. New things, new information, new knowledge give food for his soul. Like a tree, he keeps on growing. His personality keeps developing until it reaches a peak of perfection.

WORKING FOR A HIGHER GOAL

Man should learn to work in spite of excuses and should continue his activities. Such people achieve higher goals in the present world, and they are destined for success and progress in the next world as well.

The Prophet of Islam once observed: “There are two blessings about which people are deceived: health and free time.” (Sahih al-Bukhari 6412)

In leading one’s life in this world, there are two things which are necessary if anything is to be accomplished. These two things are health and time—undoubtedly great blessings of God. It generally happens that a person is so engaged in economic activities that he is not able to devote his time to higher purposes, while living for higher purposes in life is the essence of humanity. Those who live only for making money are leading a life like that of the animals.

When the time comes for working towards a higher goal in life, most people think that only when they

have enough time and are in good health, will they involve themselves in such work. But in life it never happens that both health and time exist in their ideal form. In most cases, if one is in good health, there is no time and if one has the time, he is in poor health. Setting the conditions of health and time for achieving a higher goal means that a person will never be able to do anything for a higher purpose in life until, finally, death puts an end to everything.

Life is punctuated by excuses. Sometime a person has the excuse of deteriorating health and sometimes he has the excuse of a lack of time. Now wisdom dictates that one should never use these things as excuses. Such excuses should be considered as being unworthy of consideration.

Shortcomings in life are not meant to weaken a person's resolve. Shortcomings in life should act rather as a driving force. The feeling of shortcoming or inadequacy should only increase one's intellectual activity. The feeling of something being lacking should make a common person into an extraordinary person.

A person should learn to work in spite of excuses and should continue his activities. It is such people who achieve higher goals in the present world and are destined for success and progress.

PROFESSIONAL HONESTY

Professional honesty makes one dependable in the eyes of others. Then one can find a place of honour amongst one's own people and in other communities.

The Prophet of Islam migrated from Makkah to Madinah in the thirteenth year of his prophethood. It is this journey which is known as the Hijra, or emigration. This was the most risky journey, because the Makkan leaders were bent upon killing him. He had to reach Madinah in secrecy. It was certain that when he left Makkah for Madinah, the Makkan leaders would send their people in hot pursuit of him.

In such circumstances many kinds of precautions were necessary, for instance, after leaving Makkah, going in the opposite direction to Madinah, then staying in the cave of Thaur, initially walking on foot and then after some distance riding on camel back, avoiding the known path for the path not known to people, and so on. In ancient times, when there were no roads such a

journey could be undertaken only with the help of an expert guide. Otherwise, it was impossible.

The Prophet of Islam and his companion, Abu Bakar Siddiq, selected one Abdullah ibn Urayqit, to guide them on this journey. Abdullah ibn Urayqit used to guide people over long distances as a profession and, although he was a polytheist and belonged to the community of those who were hostile to the Prophet, the Prophet still accepted him on this risky journey. (Sirah Ibn Hisham, v. 2, p. 98)

What was the reason for this selection? The reason was that although Abdullah ibn Urayqit belonged to the community of the Prophet's dire opponents, he was known for his professional honesty, that is, he was totally sincere in his profession. Whatever service he accepted, or whatever responsibility he undertook, he performed it with total honesty. In the matter of his undertaking he did not let his beliefs or any other personal interests come in the way.

Professional honesty is a quality which makes one dependable in the eyes of others. Even his enemies trusted him. He behaved in such a way that people took him at his word. He thus had a place of honour amongst his own people as well as those of other communities.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Without knowledge, a person is limited. Knowledge is a treasure house of wisdom and deeper awareness. It helps one make proper use of one's abilities.

The Prophet of Islam started his dawah work in Makkah. His dawah work involved conveying the message of God to people. This was a totally peaceful initiative, yet the Makkans unilaterally engaged in violence against him. Later, the Prophet left Makkah for Madinah along with his companions. Now Madinah became the centre for his dawah work. However, the Makkans did not rest content at that. They continued to launch aggression against him and as a result, a battle took place in 2 A.H. which is known as Battle of Badr.

In this battle God helped the Prophet and his companions, and he emerged successful against his opponents. A notable event pertaining to this battle was seventy Makkan people being taken as prisoners

of war. According to the standards of that time, these people were educated, whereas the Madinans were not. So the Prophet of Islam, instead of asking for ransom money from these prisoners of war, asked each of them to educate ten Madinan children. After educating ten Madinan children in reading and writing, they would be set free. Therefore, many prisoners of war taught Madinan children and thus secured their release. (Sirah Ibn Kathir, v. 2, p. 512)

This was the first school in the history of Islam. This was the first occasion on which some system was established for the education of Muslim youths. All the teachers of this school were non-Muslims, that is, they belonged to the Quraysh, the tribe that had turned hostile to the Prophet.

This shows the great importance attached to education in Islam. In the light of this event one can conclude that education had to be sought in all situations, even if all the teachers belonged to the “enemy” community. A person, by birth, is gifted with many kinds of abilities but to avail these abilities and put them to use, education is a must. Education gives a person awareness. Education teaches him to make proper use of his abilities. Education enables a person to keep himself informed of the world all around

him. Education makes it possible for him to study the experiences of other human beings by reading books. Education enables him to be aware of the successes and failures experienced by others throughout history. Without knowledge, a person is limited. Knowledge is a treasure house of wisdom and deeper awareness.

PLANNED ACTION REQUIRES PATIENCE

Patience helps man to rise above his emotions and engage in planned action, which has been executed with proper foresight.

Chapter 48 of the Quran states: “Have patience, then, as had the steadfast Messengers before you; and be in no haste about them.” (46:35)

Life has to be lived amidst difficulties and problems, especially for those who have a mission in life. Such individuals face obstacles, difficulties and opposition at every step, as if they were travelling through a violent storm.

This being so, there are two ways to lead one's life – one is that whenever one is confronted with an untoward situation, action is promptly taken as an immediate reaction. Another way is that in an adverse situation a person should control his feelings. He should think over the matter coolly. He should consult others, then take action in response to it after making a well-considered decision. One way is that of haste, while the other way is that of patience.

Any step taken in haste tends to have a less favourable outcome. This is because in such a case, the whole background study has not been included. In such a situation the individual does not gauge either his own ability properly nor that of his adversary or any other party. And, without caring for the consequences, he immediately enters the fray. And it is a law of nature that any step taken without caring for the consequences will never carry one to success.

Where patience is concerned, the situation is totally different. One who opts for the way of patience will always think of the consequences before taking any action. He will make concessions to realities rather than to emotions. He knows that he is in a world where the law of nature has the upper hand, rather than his own desires and leanings.

Patience helps a person to rise above his emotions and give thought to the reality that in rising above his personal desires, he will come to understand the system of nature. Patience enables one to engage in action which has been planned and in this world successful action is only that which has been executed with proper foresight.

BE OF BENEFIT TO OTHERS

Only one who proves useful to others has a place in this world. An individual or group who has lost its capacity to benefit others has no place in this world of God.

Chapter 13 of the Quran has this to say: “He sends down water from the sky that fills riverbeds to overflowing, each according to its measure. The torrent carries along swelling foam, akin to what rises from smelted ore from which man makes ornaments and tools. God thus depicts truth and falsehood. The scum is cast away, but whatever is of use to man remains behind. God thus speaks in parables.” (13:17)

The Creator of this world has established the system of this world on the principle of profitability. That is, whatever is beneficial for others should be retained and whatever is not beneficial for others should have no efficacy, and, in this way, it will be considered to be valueless, and cast aside just like garbage.

Profitability begins from the mind of the individual. That is, a person should be others' well-wisher and while thinking of his own interest, he should be mindful of others' interest as well. He should think in what ways he can be of use to others. So far as others are concerned, he should have feelings of sympathy rather than of disinterestedness.

Everyone leads his life in society. Everyone's activities take place in some society. One who wants only to serve his own interests and engage in fulfilling his own personal demands goes against the plan of nature, and one who does so can never succeed in this world of God.

The right way for a person to build his life is to ensure that others also have a share in it. In terms of the system of nature, when he gains something, he should also see to it that others also have a share in it. His principles should be those of give and take,

while benefiting himself from others he should also give benefit to others.

Through the events of nature, God shows symbolically what principles he has fixed for success and failure in life. One principle is that in this world only that individual can have a place who proves useful to others. The individual who, or the group which, has lost its capacity to benefit others has no place in this world. This principle applies to humans as well as to the rest of the universe created by God.

BE HOPEFUL FOREVER

Hope is a blessing of God. Even if some doors of life have been closed, there are other doors still open, by entering which one can continue on one's life's journey.

The Prophet of Islam once observed: "Hope is a blessing from God for my people. If there were no hope, no one would plant a tree and no mother would suckle her child." (Kanzul Ummal 7560)

In the life of this world, a person often has bitter experiences. He has to undergo such experiences as leave him heart-broken. A person nevertheless continues on his onward journey. His journey never comes to a halt.

The secret of this is hope. Nature has instilled this feeling of hope in every person. It is this eternal feeling of hope which keeps a person continuously active.

In this world, all things are accomplished gradually. The farmer sows the seed in the soil and after a long time he receives its fruit. The mother undertakes the great hardship of bringing up her children although that time is very far off when they will grow up and be able to serve their mother. But all over the world, men and women are constantly active. The reason is that in everyone's heart there is enshrined feeling of hope which sustains him. In the absence of such hope, all activities would come to a halt.

However, it sometimes happens that a person suffers some great loss. He has such experiences as destroy all his plans. This is a great moment of trial for a person. But if he continues to remain hopeful, if his eyes are set on the future and not on the present, he will soon find that even in the face of discouragement,

a ray of hope still exists for him. Even in extremes of frustration, he can see that opportunities have not come to an end for him. Although some doors of life have been closed to him, there were other doors still open to him, by entering which he could continue on his life's journey.

SINCERE LEARNERS AND TEACHERS

A learner should also be a sincere listener. He should listen attentively and should take it in the sense in which the speaker wants it to be taken.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: "Knowledge is like a treasure to which the key is asking questions. God may be merciful to you, but you should keep questioning. Because there are three types of people who are rewarded for knowledge: one, the speaker, the other, the hearer and the third, the taker." (Al-Adab al-Duniya wal-Din lil-Mawardi, p. 110)

The world of knowledge has no limits. This world is a treasure house of knowledge. There is no single person who has a monopoly of all the knowledge relating to the sciences. This knowledge is shared by many people.

Then how can you find this treasure which is stored in people's minds? There is only one way to do this and that is to become a seeker of knowledge. In your heart you have an unlimited interest in acquiring it. When this happens, you will start making enquiries and so you will be able to add to your information. You will read the books of scholars so that you may share in the knowledge which is available in their writings.

A person's value is commensurate with the knowledge he has. One who is more knowledgeable will have greater value. All progress in life is directly linked with knowledge. The greater the knowledge, the greater the progress.

In matters of knowledge, people may be divided into these three categories – those who share knowledge, those who are the listeners and those who accept knowledge and add to what they already know.

A person ought to be sincere in whatever category he finds himself. If he has the opportunity to speak, he

should say only what is proper to say, and remain silent on what is not in accordance with reality. Whatever he says should be an expression of the truth rather than an expression of his own self-glorification. Similarly, one who listens should also be a sincere listener. He should listen attentively and should take it in the sense in which the speaker wants it to be taken.

THE TRUE SEEKER OF KNOWLEDGE

Seek knowledge through scholars and intellectuals, through books and from the universe spread out in front of you. Each is a hidden source of God-consciousness.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “Good questioning is the half of knowledge.” (Kanzul Ummal 29262)

Who is the person who asks good or deep questions? He is one who has reflected upon the issue about which he has questions. Without a good acquaintance of the problem, no one can pose good questions. A

good question in itself is a proof that the questioner is already in possession of some knowledge, and now the task of the person who answers the questions is already half done. Just by giving a part of his knowledge he can complete the questioner's knowledge.

If you want to acquire the treasure of knowledge which others have, you must first of all prepare yourself for this. Only by increasing your own academic capability will you be able to really benefit from others' knowledge, or benefit from books written by others and digest the knowledge enshrined therein.

Getting answers to questions, learning and imbibing knowledge are not unilateral actions but rather bilateral actions. That is, the more the questioner or the learner is prepared, the more will he be able to understand the answers given by others or the knowledge imparted by others. The truth is that it is a fifty-fifty matter. That is, it is only if you have half of the knowledge that it will be possible for others to give you the other half. It is a bilateral process, not a unilateral process.

The world is full of knowledge. One source of knowledge comprises the scholars and intellectuals. Another source comprises of those books which have

been written by the best minds and which are available in libraries. Then the third source is in the form of the universe which is spread out in front of us. Each part of it has a hidden source of God-consciousness in it. This means that one who is a seeker of knowledge will be able to find it at any point in the vast treasure of knowledge scattered all around him. The condition is that a person should be a seeker of knowledge in the real sense. He should have developed the ability to acquire it.

LEARN FROM OTHERS

Not benefitting from others is the greatest loss. If a person finds something lacking in him, he should compensate for it by deriving benefit from others.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “Seek guidance from the wise and you will be guided, and do not go against that, otherwise you will repent of it.” (Kanzul Ummal 7180)

All human beings are not cast in the same mould.

Some have less knowledge, while some have more knowledge. Some have more experience while some have less experience. Similarly, some are gifted naturally with more wisdom and understanding, while some are less well-endowed. This difference exists so that people may benefit from one another. If a person finds something lacking in him, he should compensate for it by deriving benefit from others.

This is the system of nature, and it is only by acting in accordance with it that a person can be successful. Those who go against the system of nature can expect nothing but ruination.

A person should know himself. Moreover, he should know others. Those who are unbiased in this matter will know themselves as well as others and their thinking will be that on all occasions they will do well to seek guidance from others. Those who have more wisdom and experience or have more knowledge will be able to accept that guidance with an open mind, because he will know that on such occasions going against the way of wisdom will not take him anywhere except in the direction of destruction.

When anyone does not listen to the wise, why does he do so? The reason is that he takes the matter as one

of prestige. He thinks that if he listens to others, he will seem inferior to them. But such thinking is totally foolish. Making a prestige issue of such matters is akin to closing the door of success and progress on oneself. Not listening to the wise appears to be just not paying attention to others but, in reality, it is one's own loss. When a person does not listen to a valid point made by others, it amounts to rejecting one's own nature and denying one's own conscience. And this, without doubt is the greatest loss.

THINK OF THE CONSEQUENCES

A person must plan his actions only after deep analysis of its consequences to avoid his actions becoming counter-productive.

The Prophet of Islam once observed: "When you want to engage in any task, think beforehand of the consequences. If the result is right, then go ahead, but if the result is not right, then refrain from it." (Kanzul Ummal 43149)

In the universe, only God is the Being who has the power to do something without any fear of the consequences (Quran 91:15) But so far as a human being is concerned, he is a limited and powerless creature. For him, such activities are not possible in which the consequences have not been reflected upon. If a person does engage in any such activity, he more than anyone else, will have to suffer the evil consequences.

A person exists in a world where there are human beings like himself. Everyone wants to serve his own interests while there are many kinds of material forces which are working under their own laws towards other ends. In this way, it is as if a person were living in a world where he has to pursue his objectives in an environment filled with opponents.

In such a situation, what ought a person to do? The answer is only one and that is, before undertaking any such activity, he should reflect upon all its aspects. On the one hand, he should make an estimate of his own power. On the other hand, he should without bias see whether or not the relevant factors in the external world are favourable to him and how many factors are favourable and how many factors are unfavourable to him. A person must plan his actions only after deep analysis.

If you go ahead without a proper analysis of the circumstances, it is quite possible that because of having wrong initiatives, your actions will become counter-productive and you may lose any unexpected benefit or even that which you already possessed before taking any action. If, after suffering such consequences, you start blaming others that will be adding insult to injury. Your loss, which circumstances exacted from you, will be the price of your mistaken course of action.

CHOICE BETWEEN LESSER EVIL AND GREATER EVIL

Accepting what one already has, opens the door to progress. A deeper awareness of reality makes one content with the lesser evil and will devote all his energy to constructive activities.

The second Caliph of Islam, Umar Faruq, once observed: “The wise person is not one who knows good and evil, but one who knows out of two evils which is the lesser evil.” (Dham al-Hawa, Ibn al-Jawzi, p. 8)

The matter of life is a very delicate one. Here everyone has been granted freedom. Everyone is pursuing his own interests. Everyone is engaged in fulfilling his own aims in life. Therefore, no one finds adequate scope for his actions. Everyone has to traverse a path or road which is already crowded. This situation has rendered it impossible for a person to find an ideal world in the perfect sense and in consonance with his desires.

The truth is that in this world the choice is not between good and evil but between two evils. It has to be ascertained which is the lesser evil. In this world, willing acceptance of the lesser evil shows wisdom. Pursuing the ideal good is the way of the unwise, because in this world no one can find total goodness.

One who is willing to accept the lesser evil will find the starting point for his endeavours. His constructive activity can start immediately. On the contrary, those who are not willing to accept the lesser evil will unnecessarily clash and engage in confrontation with others. In this way, they will incur losses and all the opportunities they had for making progress will remain elusive.

One who has deeper awareness of reality will be content with the lesser evil and will devote all his energy to positive, constructive activities. On the contrary,

those who do not have any deeper understanding will engage in meaningless clashes and confrontations in the name of achieving the ideal good. When they suffer the consequences of this and they lose what they already have, they will start blaming their supposed enemies, whereas the loss they had incurred would be the result of their own foolishness rather than the result of injustice or oppression on the part of others. Willingness to accept what one already has, opens the door to progress. Those who learn this reality are the ones who may be called the wise.

BALANCED THINKING

Take loss and gain within the framework of a test, not personal interest. This belief saves one from frustration in loss and feeling arrogant when achieving success.

Chapter 57 of the Quran states: “No misfortune can affect the earth or your own selves without its first having been recorded in a book, before We bring it into being. That is easy for God to do; so that

you may not grieve for what has escaped you, nor be exultant over what you have gained. God loves neither the conceited nor the boastful.” (57:22-23)

In the present world there are times when a person suffers from deprivation and as a result he is given to despair. But at other times he is successful and, as a result, he becomes swollen up with pride. Both these states are forms of ruination. Neither will lead a person to progress.

When a person gains, what is the reason? Both losing and gaining are related to the system of nature. The fact is that this world has been created for the purpose of putting a person to the test. The whole system here is based on the principle of this exigency. Here failing is a test paper and so also is succeeding.

In such a situation, the right approach or attitude for a person is that he should take both the happenings within the framework of a test, rather than within the framework of his personal interests. A person ought to think that what he has lost he was destined to lose by a rule of nature. Similarly, when he gained something, it was the demand of the system of nature. In both the cases the actual reason for things happening as they do stems from nature, rather than from a person's own desires or struggle.

If a person understands this reality he will be able to evaluate his experiences in a normal way. This belief saves a person from a sense of deprivation when he suffers the experience of a loss and which is apparently unnecessary. Similarly, this belief saves a person from pride and arrogance when he meets with success, for this attitude causes him to lose both in this world as well as in the Hereafter.

DOUBLE BENEFIT, DOUBLE LOSS

Those who do good in this world will be given a double reward in the next world, while those who do bad deeds will be given a double punishment.

The Quran has this to say: “Those people who do good deeds will receive a double reward.” (28:54) Similarly, the Quran at another place states: “The evil will be given double punishment.” (7:38)

These statements of the Quran relate to the Hereafter, which is the place for eternal reward and eternal punishment. God has laid down the law that those who do good in this world will be given a double reward in

the next world, while those who do bad deeds will be given a double punishment. That is, every action will be judged good or bad in reality. The same is true of this world. In this world one who takes right action will receive a double benefit for it. On the contrary, one who takes wrong action will doubly suffer from its consequences. This is an eternal law of nature and it is not going to change for anyone.

For instance, if you are in an environment or society where you want to lead a life following your own desires you will adopt a confrontational approach, thinking that others are obstacles in your path. This kind of violent step will without doubt be a wrong one. Such actions cause a person to suffer two losses at the same time. One is that due to violent activities a tit-for-tat atmosphere develops and people start retaliating with violence against you. As a result, you will lose what you had beforehand. Another loss resulting from this kind of confrontational attitude is that all the other constructive opportunities that were otherwise available will also be lost to you; you will not be able to tap into those opportunities or those resources.

If, however, you make the effort to achieve your goal peacefully and quietly, that would undoubtedly be the right approach and you will receive a double benefit for it. For one thing, you will save yourself from

unnecessary clash and confrontation and will continue to your onward journey in a gradual manner to achieve your goal. Moreover, another benefit you will have will be that you will be able to use all those constructive possibilities which existed in that environment in your favour, to the point where you enter upon a new and better future. This is the law of nature and there can be no change in the law of nature.

AN ENEMY IS ALSO OUR FRIEND

Everyone has a conscience and an ego. If you awaken the conscience of a person, he will become your friend; if you hurt his ego, he will become your enemy.

According to the Quran: “Good and evil deeds are not equal. Repel evil with what is better; then you will see that one who was once your enemy has become your dearest friend.” (41:34)

It repeatedly happens that one is affronted by something said or done by another person. One minds something when one is hurt. Such incidents take place as are provocative to the emotions. On

such occasions, there are two kinds of response—one negative and the other positive. Whenever any unpleasant thing takes place the individual concerned reacts negatively by becoming angry. Such retaliatory action of only aggravates the problem; it only increases mutual bitterness. Initial opposition finally leads to enmity. The one who responds thinks that by giving a rejoinder the problem can be ended. But the other party aggravates the problem by its reactions. Another option is that whenever any unpleasant thing takes place, the person concerned should not adopt reactionary tactics. Sometimes he remains silent, but if he does have to speak, he should return good words for bitter words. Instead of exacting his revenge, he had better engage in positive activities with the intention of reforming the opposite party.

If the former attitude was a reason for increasing enmity, the latter attitude will help in turning your enemy into a friend. If the former attitude aggravated the situation, the latter attitude will nip the problem in the bud.

Every human being is possessed of a conscience as well as an ego. If you awaken the conscience of a person, then the person will ultimately become your friend and well-wisher, but if you adopt an attitude which hurts his ego, then, on the contrary, he will become your enemy. In every person there is hidden both a friend and an enemy. While one attitude of

yours turns him into a friend, another attitude turns him into your enemy. Now it is up to you to choose between the two.

CHANGING THE PLACE OF ACTION

Refrain from making problems targets of confrontations, rather use the method of peaceful negotiation, even if that means finding another place where opportunities present themselves.

When the Prophet of Islam was in his early prophetic period, he lived in Makkah for a period of 13 years. There he found some supporters but the majority become hostile to him to the point of deciding to kill him. At that time the Prophet took no retaliatory action. Nor did he become determined never to leave Makkah at any cost. Instead what he did was to quietly leave Makkah for Madinah.

It was a matter of changing his place of action. After making a deep analysis of the circumstances, the Prophet decided that he would not spend or waste his energy in confrontational activities with the Makkans

but would rather leave Makkah and make Madinah his centre of action. This was the way of the Prophet, which may be called 'changing the place of action'.

In practical and controversial situations this was an extremely important practice of the Prophet. This practice may be differently expressed as refraining from making the problems targets of confrontations but rather staying away from the place where the problems are and finding another place where opportunities presented themselves.

This principle is exactly in accordance with Islam and with reason. When anyone is not able to follow this principle, it is because he is making the matter one of his own prestige. But wisdom demands that in no situation should any issue be made one of honour and prestige. In that way the path to the solution remains open. Turning any matter into one of prestige and honour is to take it to the extent where no solution will work, no strategy towards its solution will be workable.

There are two ways of changing the place of action. When there is no opportunity to continue one's mission at one place, one should select another more opportune place for one's activities. When the way of war is not effective, adopting the way of reconciliation

is best. When the problem cannot be solved by confrontation, one should try to find the solution to the problem through peaceful negotiation. When the direct struggle is not proving beneficial, adopting an indirect struggle becomes important.

HONESTY AND JUSTICE

Trust and justice are the principles by observing which a person becomes a true human being. When such positive people come together, it forms a good society.

In chapter 4, the Quran states: “God commands you to hand back your trusts to their rightful owners, and when you judge between people, to judge with fairness. God’s instructions to you are excellent. God hears and sees all things.” (4:58)

Every responsibility is a trust and fulfilling that trust to the letter is essential. Similarly, when one has any dealing with others, he should deal justly with them, be they friend or foe. Even if the way of honesty and justice apparently seems to be contrary to one’s

interests and other considerations, even then the person concerned has to stick to justice and truth, because betterment and success lie in the ways laid down by God rather than in the ways which are in accordance with our desires.

The entire system of life proceeds on the principle of trust. It repeatedly happens that one person has something which belongs to another person, which makes it necessary for him to hand back the trust to the owner. This trust is not limited in nature but relates to a vaster area in which most of the matters pertaining to life are included. This trust may be a word or money, or property or secrets. It may be anything at all.

Moreover, the command of justice is also linked with it. In social life it repeatedly happens that in some matters relating to one person or more, there is one who stands for justice and another who stands for injustice. One attitude is positive and another is negative. On such occasions, the noble person is one who when he speaks, he speaks justly, and when he deals with others he always deals with them by adhering to the principles of justice. His love of justice is so great that in such matters he does not differentiate between his own people and those who are not related to him, even if the matter of the stand

of justice goes against all his personal interests. Even then, he ignores personal interests and adopts the path of justice and truth.

Trust and justice are the principles by observing which a person becomes a true human being and a number of such people together form a society which is based on social welfare.

THE WELFARE OF HUMANITY

God-consciousness makes a person serious, modest and responsible. He becomes a person who can sense others' pain and is sympathetic to everyone.

While mentioning the blessings bestowed by God upon humans, the Quran says: "Remember the favours of God, so that you may prosper." (7:69)

In the present world, the right attitude for a person depends upon only one thing and that is realism. That is, a person should understand his real position and should mould himself accordingly. Acknowledgement of his actual position is the source of all human virtues.

What is this real position? It is that a human being is God's creature. God has not only created him with the best of body and but he has given him a world which has all kinds of favourable factors. A person's very existence is a blessing of God and the world with all its components is also a great blessing.

When this consciousness has been fully awakened within one, it results in his becoming a modest person and he starts living with a great sense of responsibility. He becomes a serious person and, with regard to his feelings, he becomes a person who can sense others' pain and is sympathetic to everyone.

In such a society the presence of such people is a sure guarantee of its betterment. Such a society will be one based on justice rather than on oppression. In such a society everyone on their own initiative will fulfil their responsibilities, will not live for their own selves or become neglectful of others' rights.

One who lives with the feelings of divine blessings is a lover of truth. This feeling which has been given to him by God compels him also to become a giver.

WHICH DEEDS ARE HEAVY IN THE SCALES?

Speaking the truth, adhering to honesty and justice, fulfilling the rights of others and being their well-wishers, are the deeds heavy on the divine scales.

According to chapter 7 of the Quran: “Truth alone will be of weight that Day. Those whose scales are heavy shall be successful, and those whose good deeds are light in the balances will be the ones who have lost themselves because they wrongfully rejected Our signs.” (7:8-9)

The deeds performed by a person in this world have two aspects to them – the material and the ethical. The material aspect relates to its external form which is visible and is the physical dimension of an act. On the contrary, the ethical aspects relate to the inner existence and are not apparent or visible.

The material aspects of human actions are visible in the form of wealth, property and other material goods. These material things are a source of honour

for a person. He gets everything by them. That is why everyone is in hot pursuit of material gain. They work hard to get these things but a person's efforts bear fruits only in the life of this world. Death separates a person from all these material gains forever. These things are not going to be of any use to anyone after death.

Then we have the ethical aspects of human actions, that is, speaking the truth, adhering to honesty and justice while dealing with others, fulfilling the rights of others and being their well-wishers.

After death people's actions will be weighed in the divine scale of justice. One who worked only for worldly things will be of no value on that scale, but those who did good deeds in worldly life will find that their actions will weigh heavily in the scales of the Hereafter. The former will be total failures while the latter will be judged successful.

MORAL RESTRAINT

Success is only for those who save themselves from evil, who are able to differentiate between right and wrong and who lead a life of modesty and self-restraint.

The Quran states: “For those who believe and are mindful of God, there is good news in this life and in the Hereafter: the Word of God shall never change. That is the supreme triumph.” (10:63-64)

According to the Quran acknowledgement of God is acknowledgement of the greatest reality. One who acknowledges God in the full sense has found the right starting point for his life. On the contrary, one who does not acknowledge God cannot find the right starting point for his life. Success is destined for the former and failure for the latter. When a person acknowledges reality, he necessarily becomes serious. This acknowledgement tells him that there is a superior power in this world besides him, and to ignore this is just not possible. This feeling compels

him to lead a life of restraint, a responsible life. This is a life which is mindful of God.

No change can be made in the law God has laid down for this world. The only possible way for a person to build his life is in accordance with this law. If he does not conform to this law of nature he himself will be the loser rather than the law of nature.

In this world, success is only for those who save themselves from evil, who are able to differentiate between right and wrong, who know that, in this world of God, they have to lead a life of modesty rather than a life of arrogance. They have to know that for them the right way is to lead a life governed by moral principle rather than a life of permissiveness. Here a person has to lead his life within the limits of morality. He cannot lead an unbounded life like the animals of the jungle.

In this world, moral restraint is as essential as abstinence from those fruits which are not good for health.

THE LIFE OF BELIEF

A God-conscious life means having conviction in God, being responsible and leading a life of restraint. One who does so is destined for success in this world and the next.

Chapter 10 of the Quran has this to say: “For those who believe and are mindful of God, there is good news in this life and in the Hereafter: the Word of God shall never change. That is the supreme triumph.” (10:63-64)

Belief means heartfelt acknowledgement of the Lord. When someone acknowledges the Lord of the worlds in this way, the spirit of God-consciousness is necessarily produced within him.

Adopting the life of belief is to take to the path which is being followed by the entire universe. One who does so feels peace and contentment that he has found the ultimate truth. He starts feeling he is in conformity with the rest of the universe. This mute feeling testifies to his having become a co-traveller along with the universe and that is he is finally destined for salvation and success.

Such belief grants a person the greatest blessings of conviction and trust. One who has associated himself with God has without doubt secured such conviction and trust as are a must for life. Such a person's every act is result-oriented because, it has been so destined by the Lord of the universe, and no one can change this verdict of the Lord.

Such are the people who are successful in the real sense. There is nothing which can stop them from reaching the destination of success: leading a God-fearing life means leading a life of restraint. Conviction in God and the apprehension of God's chastisement awaken the consciousness in a person that he should lead a responsible life in this world. He should differentiate between right and wrong. One who does so is destined for success.

RETURN GOOD FOR EVIL

Returning good for evil is the path to success. It means countering anger with forgiveness, provocation with silence, war with negotiation and hatred with love.

In chapter 13, the Quran, mentions the qualities of successful people. It describes them as “those who

are steadfast in seeking the favour of their Lord and pray regularly and spend secretly and openly and ward off evil with good. Theirs shall be the final abode.” (13:22)

When evil insinuates itself into social life, it cannot be brought to an end by another evil. Evil cannot be countered by evil. This is the law laid down by God for this world. No one can change this divine law.

When darkness envelops the earth at night, it does not take more darkness to remove the darkness of night. On the contrary, what the universe does is bring the bright sun before it, then on its own the darkness disappears.

This is the law of nature. To be successful, a person should adopt this way of nature in his life. If he wants to remove evil, he shall have to do good in return for evil. This is the only way. No other way is practical in this regard.

If anyone speaks bitter words, reply to them with sweet words. Then the other person will find it embarrassing and will fall silent. Sweet words in return for bitter words means solving the problems indirectly, and in this world change is better effected indirectly rather than directly.

Anger has to be countered with forgiveness. Provocation has to be countered with silence. War is not to be ended with more war but with negotiation. The answer to hatred is not hatred but love and compassion. Honour must be returned with honour. This is the only way to success in this world. Other paths will only lead to ruination and extinction.

BEARING WITH BITTERNESS

In life one should be patient: refraining from negative reaction, maintaining a positive attitude at all times and adhering and following the path of truth unilaterally.

According to Chapter 23 of the Quran, God will say of his obedient, loyal servants in the Hereafter: “I have rewarded them this Day for their steadfastness, and it is they who have triumphed.” (23: 111)

Patience is the only price of a virtuous life required in this world. Those who are willing to pay this necessary price of patience are the ones who will be successful in this world as well as in the eternal world after death.

In the present world everyone has freedom. There are no restraints placed on anyone. Here the good as well as the evil have every opportunity for action. They may engage in whatever activity they wish. It is because of this that in human society there are obstacles at every step. A person has to experience bitter words along with sweet words. Here a person experiences gain as well as loss. Here a person's journey traverses pleasant as well as unpleasant paths.

Given this situation, how can one adhere to a God-oriented life? How is it possible for one to adopt divine ethics when one repeatedly has such experiences as make it very difficult to lead a principled life?

There is only one answer to this question: patience. This entails refraining from negative reaction, maintaining a positive attitude at all time in all circumstances, bearing with the bitterness one undergoes in life, and following the path of truth unilaterally.

This is what is meant by patience and for building a noble human personality, patience is indispensable.

TO WHOM IS GOD'S MERCY DENIED

The greatest obstacle to finding the truth is arrogance; the greatest thing in favour of finding the truth is modesty.

Chapter 45 of the Quran states: “Those who believed and did good deeds will be admitted by their Lord into His mercy – that shall be the manifest triumph. But those who rejected the truth [will be asked], ‘When My revelations were recited to you, were you not arrogant and did you not persist in wicked deeds?’” (45:30-31)

The greatest obstacle to finding the truth is arrogance; the greatest thing in favour of finding the truth is modesty. One who is arrogant comes to regard himself to be so superior that he feels he is greater than the truth. When the message of truth is conveyed to him, this mindset causes him to feel that it would be belittling for him to accept it. This thinking becomes an obstacle to his accepting the truth.

On the contrary, one who is modest and humble will see himself as what he is in actuality. Such a person is ready, as it were, to accept the truth in advance. When the truth is conveyed to him, he finds no obstacle in recognizing it. He immediately accepts it and bows to it.

When it comes to accepting guidance, arrogance is the greatest stumbling block. Indeed, arrogance is a crime in the eyes of God. This comes within the jurisdiction of God: all greatness belongs to God alone. A person's position as compared to God is but that of a humble servant. To one who accepts his actual position, God turns and grants him His blessings, whereas one who does not accept his real position can never be held deserving of God's mercy.

The successful person is one who is free from arrogance. Conversely, one who is blemished by arrogance will be a failure and then nothing can save him from the wrath of God.

DON'T BE DISTRACTED BY WEALTH AND CHILDREN

When one receives a divine reminder, one should immediately adopt it willingly, allowing neither wealth nor children to be an obstacle in this path.

Chapter 63 of the Quran states: “O believers! Do not let your wealth or your children distract you from remembrance of God. Those who do so will be the losers.” (63:9)

Conscience is God’s reminder. Everyone has a conscience which is like the voice of God. This conscience reminds one on all occasions what is truth and what is untruth, what is in accordance with the will of God and what is not.

This divine reminder is a warning to a person on all occasions. Yet he still falls into error. Why is this so? The reason is that his excessive love of wealth and children, causes a person to ignore God’s reminder. In spite of knowing the will of God, he follows a path which is at variance with it.

What should be the right attitude for a person in the present world and which path will lead him to success? When he receives a divine reminder, he should keep an open heart and immediately become attentive to it. He should adopt it willingly in his life and neither wealth nor children should become an obstacle in this path.

The feeling of love in a human being is innate. For instance, there is his love of wealth and children. This feeling is meant to put a person to the test. It is meant to show that, even in his pursuit of the things he loves, no matter how attractive they may be, he does not forget God. Indeed, all his attention is still given to his Creator.

DON'T CORRUPT YOUR PERSONALITY

One who develops a virtuous personality succeeds, and one who corrupts his personality fails, in the present world as well as in the Hereafter.

On the subject of the human soul, chapter 91 of the Quran says: "He who purifies it will indeed be successful and he who corrupts it is sure to fail." (91:9-10)

In the present world, a person has two distinct possibilities before him. One is the possibility of developing a virtuous personality and the other is of corrupting his personality.

These two possibilities exist for everyone in all situations. One who avails of the former possibility succeeds, while one who opts for the latter, fails.

The world presents a person with all kinds of circumstances. Here one is repeatedly faced with different types of people. It is in dealing with these situations and incidents that the human personality develops. For instance when you suffer a temporary loss, if you take it as something permanent, you will become disheartened. On the contrary, if you regard it as something of a temporary nature, you will proceed with courage and confidence.

Similarly, if, in response to acts of provocations you become provoked, it follows that your concentration will be disturbed. But if you face such situations with patience and forbearance, this will show that you have been able to maintain your mental equilibrium. Then again, you sometimes feel that others are not attaching as much importance as is due to you as your merit. This gives you an inferiority complex.

Such experiences cause your capabilities to become diminished. However, if you attribute this state of mind to incomplete preparation, such incidents would act as an incentive to work harder and by doing so, you will be able to find in the future you have failed to find in the present.

GOOD MORALS MAKE ONE BEAUTIFUL

Those who are the well-wishers of others, respect others, discharge their duties and have good morals will gain entry into gardens of Paradise in the Hereafter.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “Nothing carries more weight in the eyes of God than good morals.” (Sunan Abu Dawood 4799)

This means that in the scheme of nature nothing is more important than good morals. Good morals give lustre to humanity. Good morals are only another

name for the highest expression of the humanity of the individual.

The beauty of the river is in its flow of water. The beauty of a flower is in its fragrance. The beauty of the garden is in its greenery and freshness. Similarly, the beauty of a human being is his adherence to the highest moral principles in all his dealings.

Good morals demand that when you talk to anyone, you should utter good words, even in return for bitter words. When you deal with people, you should deal with fairness. You should help people without expecting any return. Wherever you come in contact with others, your attitude should be one of modesty.

Good morals mean making concessions to others while bad morals mean conceding only to oneself. Those who live for themselves, who promote only their own interests, will be seen as unabashedly ego centric. On the contrary, those who are the well-wishers of others, who respect others, who regard the discharging of their duties as obligatory, whose words and actions reflect good morals are the ones who in sufficient numbers will be the mainstay of an exemplary society. It is people such as these who will gain entry into gardens of Paradise in the Hereafter.

ALL HUMAN BEINGS ARE EQUAL

One who is superior in moral character is also superior in position to one who is lacking in moral fibre. It is one's inner character, not outwardly pleasant appearance, which counts in the eyes of God.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam, while preaching the sermon on the occasion of the Final Pilgrimage observed: "O people, no Arab is superior to a non-Arab and no non-Arab is superior to an Arab, no white is superior to a black and no black is superior to a white, except in religiosity and God-consciousness." (Musnad Ahmad 23489)

The Creator of all human beings is one and the same. All human beings are the children of Adam and Eve. As such, all human beings are equal.

The human races are apparently dissimilar. For instance, some are white and some are black. But all these differences are solely of appearance. In reality, there is no difference between one and another.

This concept of human equality is in accordance with Islam as well as with nature. Furthermore, a good society can be built only by giving an equal position to all human beings. In a society where there is no equality, peace and prosperity will not flourish. Such a society will be eternally beset by tension and conflict. The difference between one person and another is based not on race or colour or language. It is based rather on character. It is the individual who is superior in morality who is superior to others. One who is superior in moral character is also superior in position to one who is lacking in moral fibre. Regardless of how outwardly pleasant he might seem, in the last analysis, it is character which counts.

GIVE TO PEOPLE THEIR RIGHTS

A society whose members readily accept the truth, give respect to others, fulfil their trusts and discharge their responsibilities is the best society.

Who are the best people? According to a tradition of the Prophet, the best people are

those who, when given their dues accept them, and when others ask for their dues from them, they give them, and also those who judge people fairly, just as they judge themselves. (Musnad Ahmad 24379)

Those with such virtues are the best people. A society whose members are possessed of such qualities is the best and, consequently, the most successful society.

The signal quality of these people is that they readily accept the truth. When truth is conveyed to them they see how logical it is. Whenever they are reminded of any duty, they are immediately willing to accept it. They see the truth always in the form of what is right and they see falsehood in the form of what is wrong. Therefore, they waste no time in leaving the path of untruth, recognizing the truth and in wholeheartedly accepting it.

Another of their qualities is that whenever they are asked to return anything that has been entrusted to them, they hasten to restore it immediately to the person concerned. Whenever they are reminded of their responsibilities, they unhesitatingly accept them. They are always ready to discharge their responsibility.

The third quality of such individuals is that in the matter of principle, they do not differentiate between

themselves and others. They take just measure of others just as they take just measure of themselves. What they think pertains to justice for themselves is applicable in like measure to others. They look at everyone with the same fairness. They deal with others by the same standards as they want others to apply to them.

COMPASSION FOR ALL

The truly human society is one in which its members are compassionate and show love for one another. Such people will receive God's blessings in the Hereafter.

The Prophet of Islam once observed: "God is merciful only to those who are themselves merciful." (Sahih al-Bukhari 1284)

To form a good society the most important condition is kindness. When the members of a society are kind and gentle to one another, such a society will be one of peace and progress. In a society where people do

not show kindness and gentleness to others, it will be like a jungle in which no one will be at peace.

When someone is kind to another, this is not just between the two people concerned. It results rather in a social or collective event in the full sense. In such a society the traditions of kindness and gentleness are promoted. People speak highly of such values as mercy and compassion and this encourages noble human values, while base human initiatives are discouraged.

The benefit of being kind to others is that one who behaves in this way is at peace with himself and becomes respectable in the eyes of others. Moreover, others refrain from harming him and in this way through such actions the environment that is produced is admirable, with the benefit of such good deeds directly or indirectly reaching the doers as well.

Those who are kind to others also receive a share in God's blessings and in the Hereafter, they will be held even more deserving of God's blessings.

The truly human society is one in which its members are compassionate and show love for one another.

DON'T LIVE FOR THE SAKE OF WEALTH

Wealth is a human need, not a person's purpose in life. Those who are content can make spiritual progress and reach great heights of intellectual development.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: "That person was successful who obeyed God and who received sustenance or provision according to need, and whatever God's blessing he received he was graced by God with contentment for it." (Sahih Muslim 1054)

In this world the secret of success does not lie in having more and more but rather in contentment with what one has. There is no limit to the desires of a greedy person but a person who is contented has his limits. When he reaches a certain point, he becomes satisfied. But the greedy person always lives in a state of discontent. On the contrary, one who knows contentment always lives a life of satisfaction.

Who receives provision according to his needs? It is that person who does not devote all his efforts to acquiring wealth but rather leads an intellectual and spiritual life along with practical endeavours. His spirituality and his intellectual development become a guarantee that he will not regard money as all in all. Such a person, thanks to his temperament, learns the reality that wealth is for him and that he is not for wealth. When he sees that a limited amount of wealth is enough for his requirements, he loses craving for unlimited money. His life is one of peace, contentment and satisfaction.

It is necessary for a person to have enough wealth to meet his needs, but it is not necessary for him to have so much wealth that he does not even know where to spend it.

Wealth is a human need, but it is not a person's purpose in life. This is the secret of a peaceful life in this world and those who are content to lead such a life are destined to make exceptional spiritual progress and reach great heights of intellectual development.

PEACEFUL SOCIAL LIFE

In social life, often one is hurt by others. In spite of this one should have good feelings for others and have a heart free of enmity for others.

The Prophet of Islam once observed: “Do not bear malice towards others, do not be jealous of, or feel enmity for one another. O servants of God! Live like brothers; it is not lawful for a Muslim to stay away from his brother for more than three days.” (Sahih al-Bukhari 6065)

How should we lead our lives in human society? A natural example has been set by God in the immediate life we lead. Take the example of brothers and sisters. In every home, there are brothers and sisters. By the very force of nature, the brother is the well-wisher of his sister. He loves his sister and is concerned with her problems. He cares for her needs just as if they were his own. That is what makes every home a cradle of peace. The way a person lives in his home is exactly

the way he should live in society. Everyone's home is a natural model which tells us how to live in society and if a person lives in society just as he lives in his own home, the whole of society will become one of peace and well-wishing.

What is this natural model? It is that everyone is the well-wisher of others. Everyone is free of malice for others. People are happy with the progress others make. If anyone makes progress in society, others should not be jealous of him. Every man and woman should have good feelings for others. Their hearts should be free of enmity for others. In social life, it often happens that one is hurt by others. On such an occasion, the one who has been hurt ought to forgive the one who has hurt him.

If sometimes some issue escalates and they keep their distance from one another, they may do so for only three days. After three days, it is incumbent upon them to cool their anger and start meeting with one another again in a normal way.

MAKE YOUR INNER EXISTENCE VIRTUOUS

The true human being is one who proves himself virtuous by his deeds: who is a positive thinker, his life is based on principles and he adheres to moral values.

The Prophet of Islam once observed: “God does not see your appearances or your wealth. He sees your heart and deeds.” (Sahih Muslim 2564)

In the view of nature, who is important and who is unimportant? The answer is that one who is good as regards his inner personality is a good person in the real sense. One who is bad regarding his inner personality is bad, even if he has assumed a very pleasant appearance.

One kind of appearance is achieved by clothing and other embellishments, while another kind of appearance is that which is projected by propaganda. Both kinds of appearances are in reality valueless.

Those who depend on appearances of this kind are of value neither to themselves nor to society.

A very different kind of person is one who possesses noble human qualities. He is a person of principle, who adheres to moral values. He is a positive thinker, whose heart is filled with positivity. Such a person is the one desired by nature. It is people such as these who are the mainstay of a successful society in the real sense.

One who is lacking in such values cannot be a doer of good deeds solely on the strength of his appearance. He may look very pleasant but in actuality he will be an evil person. Good actions can be performed only by one whose inner existence is also virtuous.

A person incapable of good actions is like a statue carved in stone. The true human being is one who proves himself virtuous by his deeds.

DON'T DISCUSS THE FAULTS OF OTHERS

If someone has some failing or shortcoming, you should meet that person and advise him of this privately. Talking of these failings in public is highly objectionable.

The Prophet of Islam has said: “Do you know what backbiting is?” The Companions said: “God and His messenger know the best.” Thereupon the Prophet replied, “Backbiting implies your talking about your brother in a manner which he does not like.” The Prophet was then asked: “But what if we actually find that failing in our brother which we alluded to?” The Prophet said: “If that failing is actually found in him as asserted by you, you indeed subjected him to backbiting, but if it is not found in him, then it is slander.” (Sahih Muslim 2589)

One of the most important things required for a healthy society is for people to speak generously of the virtues of others. They must refrain from speaking

to others of their faults and their deficiencies. By speaking of the virtues of others, positive values are promoted in society. On the contrary, if people's negative points and weaknesses are spoken of to one another, then negative concepts will be promoted in society.

Speaking of one another's personal failings or weaknesses is called backbiting. Even if you find some failing or shortcoming in someone you should meet that person and advise him of this privately. Talking of these failings in public is highly objectionable.

An even graver evil is talking about shortcomings which the person concerned does not have. This is called slander and is without doubt a great crime. While blaming others baselessly, one should think very seriously that this is a bilateral matter. That is, if the person concerned is not blameworthy, the accusation will rebound on the accuser, and he himself will be held blameworthy in the eyes of God.

A SYMPATHETIC ATTITUDE TOWARDS FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS

A true human being is magnanimous. He benefits others, even when he is not expecting any return from them. His munificence is unconditional.

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once observed: “Do not underestimate good words, even if it is just meeting people with a cheerful countenance.” (Sahih Muslim 2626)

A good society is composed of good people, and good people are those who are beneficent, who lead their lives in this world as giver members. Those who have something of substance should share it with others and if they do possess very little they should give whatever they have.

The essence of humanity is well-wishing. There should be feelings of sympathy and well-wishing in the heart of everyone for all others. This is the real criterion

of humanity. One bereft of brotherly feelings is not a human being. He may look like a human being, but in reality he is not.

Feelings of sympathy for others will manifest themselves at all time and on all occasions. Even when the sympathizer is apart from others, he is still concerned with praying for them.

When such a person meets others with sympathy in his heart his feelings will show on his face. If he finds any obstacle on the path, he will remove it so that the passer-by should not be hurt. If he finds someone who has been injured, he will be concerned about his treatment. If he finds someone in straitened circumstances he will spend from his own pocket to fulfil his needs.

A true human being is magnanimous. He benefits others, even when he is not expecting any return from them. His munificence is unconditional.

DOUSE THE FIRE OF JEALOUSY

One should always be positive, never indulging in negative thinking. Jealousy is a killer of positive thought that closes the door to one's progress.

The Prophet of Islam once said: "Avoid envy, for envy devours good deeds just as fire devours fuel or dry wood." (Sunan Abu Dawood 4903)

Envy or jealousy is a feeling of resentment at another's greatness. When you feel jealousy it is you yourself who suffers. It is a feeling of unhappiness that you cannot be so great or achieve or have so much as another person.

The system of this world is so arranged that people cannot achieve equal success. Here some have more and some have less. This is the law of nature. In such a situation, being jealous of others' greatness is like fighting with nature and no one can succeed by pursuing such a course.

The secret of worldly success is to be positive in one's thinking and never indulge in negative thinking. But

jealousy is a killer of positive thought. One who suffers from jealousy has nurtured negative feelings in his heart. It is like having closed the door to his own progress.

In a society there are inevitably some who have received more than you and some who have received less. In such a situation, the right attitude for you would be to seek out someone less fortunate than you and then set about helping him. When you encounter someone in better circumstances than yourself, rather than feel jealous of him, you should feel that he is also a human being just as I am a human being and if by making proper use of his potential he achieved great success, then it is possible for me to do so as well. This is positive thinking.

THE PEOPLE OF PARADISE

Those who submit themselves to the will of God, have well-wishing for others, adhere to justice with others, are the people of paradise.

The Prophet of Islam was asked what it was that counted as more important for a person to find a place in Paradise. The Prophet replied: "Fearing

God and having the best moral character.” (Sunan al-Tirmidhi 2004)

The greatest success for a person is that he should lead such a life in this world that when he dies he finds for himself a place in Paradise where he will have a life of eternal happiness. It is the secret of this successful life which has been explained in this tradition.

The most important things in this connection are the acceptance of the greatness of God, remaining ever mindful of Him and regarding oneself as accountable to Him; believing that one cannot save oneself from God’s chastisement, for all ones deeds, open or hidden, are in the knowledge of God, and that no strategy can save oneself from standing before God after death.

The whole life of one who is convinced of this truth undergoes a change. The permissiveness of his life is replaced with restraint. In all matters, he avoids irresponsible behaviour and this obviates egoism, arrogance and other such feelings. On all issues, he becomes an obedient servant of God.

Another quality of a God-fearing person is that his character becomes heavenly. He starts leading his life in this world just as the people of Paradise will live in the Hereafter. In his heart, he cherishes feelings of

well-wishing for others. He speaks good words and refrains from harshness. He meets with other people as if he is meeting with his brothers and sisters. While dealing with others he always adheres to what is just. In his dealings his guiding principles are moral and human and in no way serve his personal interests.

THE DIGNITY OF A HUMAN BEING

A human being should follow the principles of justice in life, return good behaviour for bad behaviour and be a worthwhile member of society.

The secret of human success, in principle, is only one and that is to keep to the straight path of nature and never deviate from it. This has been expressed thus in the Quran: “Do they seek a religion other than the religion of God, when everything in the heavens and the earth has submitted to Him, willingly or unwillingly? To Him they shall all return.” (3:83) God has laid down only one path to success for both humans and the universe. The universe is following

this course compulsorily, like a machine. A human being, however, has to follow this course of nature of his own free will. In this voluntary submission, lies the dignity of a human being and it is for this voluntary acceptance that he will be rewarded with Paradise.

There are many tall things on the earth like trees and mountains. The trees and the mountains are apparently standing erect, but they cast their shadows on the earth. In ethical terminology this is called modesty. A person ought to opt for modesty in his behaviour. The birds grace the environment with their sweet melodies, morning and evening. Listening to them, a person ought to spare others his bitter words. People should be able to expect only good words from him.

The stars keep to their orbits in their onward journey. Similarly, a human being should follow the principles of justice in leading his life. The tree takes in carbon dioxide and gives in oxygen in return. Similarly, a human being should return good behaviour for bad behaviour. The sun shines on all. Similarly, a human being ought to be a worthwhile member of society.

The universe is a defect-free model of unassailable integrity. This model has been devised by nature itself. A human being must also follow this model. This is the only way to human success.

UNDERSTANDING THE SPIRITUAL ESSENCE OF ISLAM

In the present book, the author expounds on the spirit of Islam instead of the outward forms of various religious rites. Every form, activity, belief and teaching of Islam are aimed at inculcating God-consciousness in a believer, well-wishing towards fellow human beings and above all constant self-introspection.

The book explains that a believer's response to situations of life should be one of a heightened awareness of being ultimately accountable before God, be they unpleasant, success and failure, disputes and controversy and so on. Being extremely cautious in his speech and actions, a believer's life experiences are an opportunity for spiritual development and purification of the soul.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021) was an Islamic scholar, spiritual leader and peace activist. His work has received international recognition for his seminal contributions toward world peace. The Maulana authored over 200 books dealing with Islam's spiritual wisdom, the Prophet's non-violent approach, Islam's relation with modernity and other contemporary issues. He founded Centre for Peace and Spirituality International in 2001 to popularize the culture of peace and share the spiritual message of Islam with people.
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