

# SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



People are equal as regards respect, but they are different in the roles they play in life.

# ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

*Spirit of Islam* is a monthly magazine which is now in its seventh year of publication. The aim of this journal is to present Islam in the contemporary idiom, while at the same time the contents are of universal appeal and of interest to a wider circle of spiritual seekers. It is our desire to help Muslims rediscover Islam, focusing on its message of peace and spirituality as derived from the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet, and in general we strive towards religious understanding for bringing about greater harmony.

Another purpose of this magazine is to assist its readers to deal with life's challenges, deriving positivity even from negative occurrences, gaining in spirituality and developing themselves intellectually so that they may contribute constructively to society.

The magazine's regular readers will appreciate that the entire thrust of its articles is directed to the individual—a collection of intellectually prepared individuals being the sole foundation on which a peaceful and harmonious society can be built.

As the subtitle indicates, *Spirit of Islam* is working towards enlightening people on the subject of global peace and regularly addresses relevant contemporary issues. The articles on peace based on the teachings of the Prophet of Islam offer us an ideology of peace—principles which lay down how peace may be established between conflicting groups, controversies resolved and conflicts defused. We believe that violence begins in the mind and so an effective ideology of peace needs to be presented to counter its influence.

We hope and pray that God helps us in this noble endeavour and grants us His special blessings!



# SPIRIT OF ISLAM

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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

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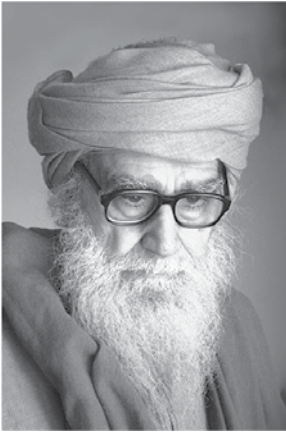
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## FROM MAULANA'S DESK



*Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, born in 1925, in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, is an Islamic spiritual scholar who is well-versed in both classical Islamic learning and modern disciplines. The mission of his life has been the establishment of worldwide peace. He has received the Padma Bhushan, the Demiurgus Peace International Award and Sayyidina Imam Al Hassan Peace award for promoting peace in Muslim societies. He has been called 'Islam's spiritual ambassador to the world' and is recognized as one of its most influential Muslims<sup>1</sup>. His books have been translated into sixteen languages and are part of university curricula in six countries. He is the founder of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality based in New Delhi.*

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## THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

**I**T IS STRANGE to believe that there is a God, but not to believe in God is even stranger. Therefore, I prefer the less strange to the more strange.

Believing in God is so obvious that the application of simple logic is enough for one to believe that there is a God. The French philosopher Rene Descartes, considered the father of modern philosophy, applied simple logic to his own existence when he said, "I think, therefore, I am."

By applying the same logic, one can say, 'I am, therefore, God is.' That is, one can say that when a creature exists, the application of simple logic is enough for one to believe that there is a Creator.

Einstein when asked, "Are you an atheist?" He said, "No, I am a skeptic." When a scientist like Einstein says 'I am not an atheist, but rather a skeptic', I think it means he is trying to say that belief in God is a matter of 50-50: if there is 50% chance that God does not exist, then there is 50% chance that He does exist.

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

Einstein believed in the relativity model of the truth. Quantum physics took this concept further to the concept of probability. In the language of quantum physics, it can be said that 'probably' there is a God. By the Einsteinian model, one did not know whether there was a God or not, but quantum physics made it possible to say that there probably is a God. Now it is an established fact that probability weighs less than certainty, but is more than just saying perhaps.

Scientific studies took knowledge even further ahead. It went beyond the stage of knowing that when the child is in the mother's womb, all those things the child needs are supplied to it. This supply continues for a full nine months, then the child is born, and comes into the external world, where there is a complete life-support system.

Human studies progressed as far as the micro-world where the strange discovery was made that it is not only the immediate world that the child finds totally favourable to him, but that right from the micro-world to the macro-world, the universe is exactly what is required for the continued existence of human beings.

A human being and the world outside of him are totally compatible. Compatibility between man and the mother's womb, compatibility

***The Creator who created human beings also created the universe. Had this not been so, both would not have been so inextricably linked together.***

between man and the solar system, then compatibility between man and the entire universe—the strangeness of this reality is such that it motivates one to seek an explanation for it. The British astronomer Fred Hoyle says that, 'Our world is a well-designed world'. It is not a random world, but rather a well-planned and well-managed world. This fact again necessitates belief in 'pair-creation', that is, one who has created the universe has also created human beings. If you analyze these realities, it will lead to the belief that the

Creator who created human beings also created the universe. Had this not been so, both would not have been so inextricably linked with one another.

The argument used by philosophers to support the concept of the existence of God was the same as the argument from design: where there is a design, there is a Designer. But this question remained to be answered: when God is unseen, how can one believe in His existence? This controversy has been put to end by studies about the fundamental particles of the material world, also known as subatomic particles. A

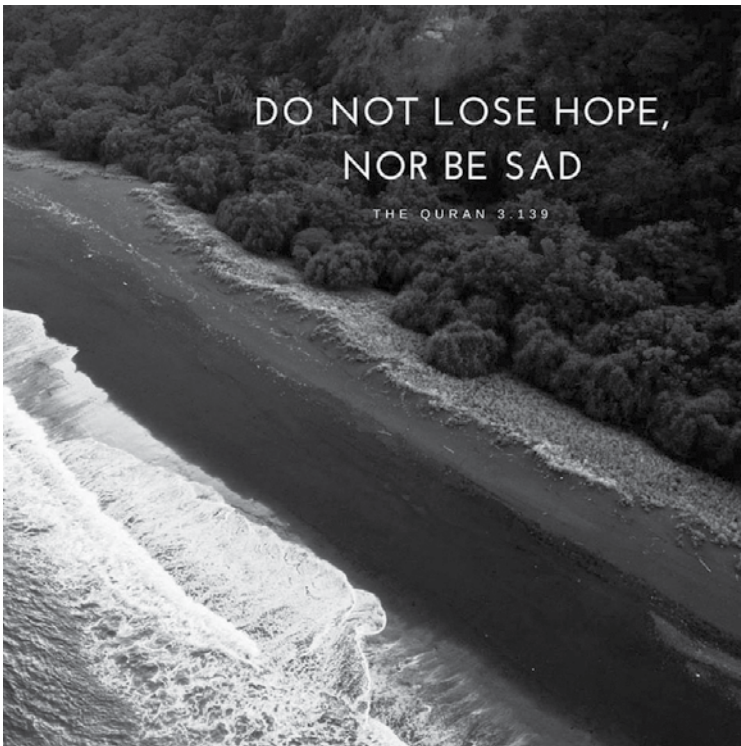
subatomic particle, although not visible, does exist. This shows that for something to exist, it is not necessary that it should be visible.

This discovery has brought about a revolutionary change in the theory of knowledge: probability is also an authentic source of argument, because probability, although less than certainty is greater than possibility. □

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## FROM THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

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### EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

**E**MPOWERMENT of women cannot be achieved by encouraging them to make their entry into every field of life. A better approach would be to increase their knowledge, skills, alertness and awareness in their own sphere of activity. The more a woman is endowed with these qualities, the more effective will be the part she plays in the activities of daily life. An intellectual woman can perform the greatest of services, whereas, if she is left ignorant and untutored, she will never—even if she is brought to the forefront of things—be able to play a role of any significance.

There have been many women in history who never emerged from their homes, but who exerted a great influence upon the outside world. The allegation that women cannot perform great services when confined to the home is refuted by Islamic history. Home management is also undoubtedly great work, but the work which concerns the outside world can also certainly be performed by women, without putting themselves into uncongenial surroundings, or forcing themselves to play unfamiliar roles for which neither training nor biology has fitted them.

It is a little understood fact that the role a woman plays does not depend upon her physical environment, but rather on the degree to which her intellect has been cultivated. In order to progress, it is not binding that



she has to put herself into all kinds of unsafe situations in the outside world. We can understand this from the following argument. If it were put to a writer that he could serve humanity better by stepping out of his study and jumping into the boxing ring, he would surely retort that there is more to solving the problems of the world than just punching people on the nose. He would, indeed, point out that the intellectual can best operate in his own chosen sphere and that it is not physical brashness which counts in this life, but the sharpening of the intellect.

Imagine a reversal of the social structure which entails a surgeon working in a butcher's shop, a teacher selling vegetables etc. In each case, the change of workplace and role would render useless and irrelevant the innate and acquired skills, the knowledge and the moral excellence of these highly qualified and experienced professionals. Their competence and effectiveness would moreover, be eroded by the sense of frustration and discrimination engendered by surroundings which clearly were unsuitable for them.

Studies in biology and psychology have shown that the two genders are different in nature, each being designed for a different purpose. They are endowed by nature with different capacities so that they may play their respective roles in life with greater ease and effectiveness.

Difference of biological function does not imply inequality. In fact differences are meant to make both genders play complementary roles and endure the challenges of life by supporting each other with their constructive capacities for which each is best suited. It should not be looked upon as a matter of superiority or inferiority. Looked at with the right perspective, these differences are blessings of God.

What the world perceives as a problem of inequality when it comes to oppression and degradation of women is actually a phenomenon of evil perpetrated by humans upon other humans due to the misuse of freedom. It has nothing to do with the role accorded to each gender by nature. Such evil is a part of every society.

The phenomena of oppression exist between the rich and the poor, men and women, an adult and a child, people in power and the common man, the educated and the illiterate, etc. The solution to this problem

***It is a little understood fact that the role a woman plays does not depend upon her physical environment, but rather on the degree to which her intellect has been cultivated.***

of backwardness of women due to lack of opportunity for progress lies in helping people to change their mindset. To this effect there should be tremendous efforts to raise the thinking levels of the individual to overcome such negative behaviour in society. □

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**BY FORGIVING  
SOMEONE FOR HIS  
ILL TREATMENT,  
ONE AWAKENS  
IN HIM A SENSE  
OF SHAME.**

# THE ETERNAL JOURNEY

*Consider Seriously*

**E**VERY affair should be looked at in its eternal context. A “guardian” may give temporary support in this world, but when one reaches the next world, there will be no one to lend a helping hand. If we keep this in mind that we are on the way to the Hereafter, we will consider everything which will become worthless in the next world as worthless now, no matter how great a worldly price it may seem to command. Importance will be given only to those things which will be of consequence in our after life, no matter how inconsequential they may seem in this world.

In the present world there may be opportunities of using impressive words to defy the truth; to wield one’s power unjustly, content that one can victimize others without being avenged, but in the Hereafter one will be deprived of all words and divested of all power. Wealth here may lead to arrogance but there will be nothing to be proud of in the Hereafter as the wealth will be left behind in this world.

The person who lives his life with awareness towards the eternal context is a person of faith. A person who has no such faith lives on this earth as if he is going to stay here forever. Basically this difference is psychological. However the result is regarding the attitudes which each one adopts in their practical lives. Faith calls for constantly living with a sense of responsibility of thoughts and actions. It instills the consciousness that he will be held accountable in the Hereafter for all his deeds done in this world. □

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*Self-knowledge is the beginning of self-improvement.*

# SURRENDER BY CHOICE

## *Freedom and Compulsion*

**G**OD Almighty created the universe. In its vast space there are stars, galaxies, planets, the solar system, countless other Celestial bodies. All these are in total surrender to God, without the slightest deviation. It is this surrender to God that makes our universe a totally zero-defect universe. This fact is mentioned in the Quran in these words: "God 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?" (67: 3)

However, there was a "missing link" in this universe. The universe, with all its vastness, has surrendered to God under compulsion. Now, there was a vacant room for a creature that surrenders to God by choice. God Almighty created human beings to fill in this gap. Man was given total freedom. At the same time, he was given a thinking mind.

It was required that man utilize this mind and surrender before God by choice rather than as a matter of compulsion.

***The universe, with all its vastness, has surrendered to God under compulsion. It was required that man utilizes his mind and surrenders before God as a reality rather than as a matter of compulsion.***

When such a human being surrenders to God this way, it is as if he is saying, 'O God, You are great and I am not great. I am accepting this fact as a reality, without the slightest compulsion.'

The fact is that man is the only creature throughout the universe who has been endowed with a mind. Although man has no power, as regards freedom, he is totally free without any restrictions. In other words, God is All-powerful while man is all powerless in spite of having complete freedom. When man says: 'O God Almighty, You are my Lord!' he says this consciously, without any compulsion.

This phenomenon is the greatest moment in the entire universe. □



*He who is most in error is one who cannot say 'I have erred.'*

# TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE

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



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## PEACE IN ISLAM

**I**SLAM is a religion of peace in the fullest sense of the word. The Quran calls its way ‘the paths of peace’ (5: 16). It describes reconciliation as the best policy (4: 128), and states that God abhors any disturbance of peace (2: 205).

The root word of Islam is ‘*silm*’, which means peace. So the spirit of Islam is the spirit of peace. The first verse of the Quran breathes the spirit of peace. It reads:

*In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.*

This verse is repeated in the Quran no less than 114 times. It shows the great importance Islam attaches to such values as mercy and compassion. One of God’s names, according to the Quran, is *As-Salam*, which means peace. Moreover the Quran states that the Prophet Muhammad was sent to the world as a mercy to human kind. (21: 107)

A perusal of the Quran shows that most verses of the Quran (and also the *Hadith*) are based on peace and kindness, either directly or indirectly. The ideal society, according to the Quran is *Dar as-Salam*, that is, the home of peace (10: 25).

The Quran presents the universe as a model that is characterized by harmony and peace (36: 40). When God created heaven and earth, He so ordered things that each part might perform its function peacefully without clashing with any other part. The Quran tells us that “the sun is not allowed to overtake the moon, nor does the night outpace the day. Each in its own orbit runs.” (36: 40)

For billions of years, therefore, the entire universe has been fulfilling its function in total harmony with His divine plan.

These are only but a few references to show what great importance Islam attaches to peace. In fact, Islam cannot afford not to be in a state of peace because all that Islam aims at—spiritual progress, intellectual development, character building, social reform, educational activities, and above all missionary work—can be achieved only in an atmosphere of peace and harmony.

According to Islam, peace is not simply an absence of war. Peace opens doors to all kinds of opportunities that are present in any given situation. It is only in a peaceful situation that planned activities are possible. It is for this reason that the Prophet Muhammad went to great extents to establish peace at all costs.

***Jihad is only another name for peaceful activism. And peaceful activism is the only weapon by which Islam wants to achieve all its aims and objectives.***

Some people bracket justice with peace, but Islam does not subscribe to this notion. Islam believes in peace for the sake of peace. According to Islam, justice is not the pre requisite of peace. Peace only provides a framework within which we may work towards justice. There are so many examples in the life of the Prophet, which prove that the Prophet never bracketed justice with peace.

He always took peaceful circumstances as an opportunity to work for justice and did not attempt to derive justice directly from peace. The treaty of Hudaibiyah, between the Prophet and his opponents, provides one such clear example. From the details of the peace treaty it is clear that no clause regarding justice was included. Obviously the conditions of this treaty were quite against justice. But the Prophet accepted this treaty, not because it was giving him justice, but because it was paving the way to work for justice.

Because of the importance of peace, the Quran has clearly declared that no aggressive war is permitted in Islam. Muslims can engage themselves only in a defensive war, not in an offensive war, irrespective of the circumstances (2: 190).

According to Islam, peace is the rule and war is only an exception. Even in defensive war we have to see the result. If the result is doubtful, Muslims should avoid war, even in a defensive situation. Stray acts of aggression are not enough for Muslims to rush into war. They have to

assess the whole situation and adopt a policy of avoidance when war is not certain to achieve a positive result.

There are several examples of this kind in the early period of Islam. In Islamic history, one such example is that of the Battle of the Trench. In this event there was clear-cut aggression on the part of the antagonists, who traveled as far as 300 miles from Makkah to Madinah only to attack the Muslims. But the Prophet got a trench dugout in order to prevent an armed confrontation and thus avoided engaging in a defensive war.

It is true that *jihad* is one of the most important teachings of Islam. But *jihad* is not synonymous with war. In Islam another word is used for war and fighting. This word is '*qital*.' When the Quran refers to war or fighting, it uses the word *qital* and not *jihad*.

*Jihad* literally means to strive or to struggle. So *jihad* actually means peaceful struggle, especially for *dawah* work. The Quran says:

*Do great jihad with the help of the Quran.* (25: 52)

The Quran is simply a book, and not a sword, so "do great *jihad* with the Quran" means to do great *jihad* with the ideological power of the Quran. In fact, *jihad* is only another name for peaceful activism. And peaceful activism is the only weapon by which Islam wants to achieve all its aims and objectives.

The Quran has this to say of the mission of the Prophet Muhammad:

*We have not sent you forth but as a mercy to humankind.* (21: 107)

In the Quran and the *Hadith*, there are many such references that go to prove that Islam is a religion of peace, love and human brotherhood. However, it is also a fact that in later times the image of Islam has altered drastically. Now Islam has come to be regarded as a religion of violence rather than as a religion of peace. It is not the media that has produced this transformation in the image of Islam. The responsibility for this falls on latter-day Muslims, who have failed to maintain the original image of Islam.

In fact, the mission of all the prophets, right from Adam to Christ was one and the same—of establishing the ideology of monotheism in the world, so that man might worship one God alone. As we know, there

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came a large number of prophets in ancient times, but the message of monotheism remained at the initial stage; it could not culminate in a revolution. This state continued up till the time of Christ, the second last Prophet. The reason being that in ancient times, the system of monarchy was entrenched throughout the world. The kings, in order to secure their political interests, adopted the course of religious persecution. These kings suppressed all religious movements, which were different from the state religion. They would nip what they would consider apostasy in the bud, since they saw religion as a matter of affirming one's loyalty to the state. If a person adhered to a religion other than the state religion, he was regarded as a rebel.

That is why in ancient times prophetic movements could go no further ahead than the stage of *dawah*. No sooner would a movement based on monotheism arise then the coercive political system would

***It is no exaggeration to say that Islam and violence are contradictory to each other. The concept of Islamic violence is so obviously unfounded that, prima facie it stands rejected.***

be activated to pull it out by its roots. The reason for the absence of any historical record of prophets (besides the Prophet Muhammad) in antiquity is traceable to the intense opposition of these coercive political systems. Prophet Jesus was the last link in the chain of these persecutions faced by the preachers of monotheism. Then God decreed the abolition of this coercive political system, even if it entailed the use of force in order that the age of religious persecution might be brought to an end forever, and be replaced by the age of religious freedom. This divine

plan was brought to completion through Prophet Muhammad and his Companions. This is the command given in the Quran:

**"Fight them until there is no more (religious) persecution and religion belongs wholly to God." (8: 39)**

Therefore the Prophet Muhammad received special divine succour in the form of a powerful team consisting of more than one hundred thousand individuals. Equipped with this team the Prophet had to engage in defensive war to end this coercive system of religious persecution, and it was in Arabia that it was first of all overthrown. Then within a very short span of time, they advanced to abolish the coercive system established by the Sassanid and Byzantine empires. In the wake of this Islamic action, the coercive system was abolished forever in the major part of the inhabited world of the time. This defensive war engaged in by the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions was not a



war as is commonly understood, but rather a divine operation, which was carried out by a people who possessed a high standard of moral character.

However, this operation was certainly only temporary in nature. Its goal was to put an end to the age of religious persecution and usher in the age of religious freedom. This end was fully achieved during the early period of Islam, the age of the pious Caliphs. Afterwards the time came to keep the sword in its sheath and engage in *dawah* work, that is, the task of calling people to God, which was the real and permanent goal of Islam. According to the explicit command of the Quran, the call to God is the true and eternal mission of Islam, whereas war is only temporary and allowed only in exceptional cases.

Here it would be pertinent to refer to a great Companion of the Prophet. After the period of the pious Caliphate, a group of Muslims once again engaged in war. At that time some senior Companions were present in Makkah and Madinah. But they did not join these wars, one prominent name being that of Abdullah ibn Umar ibn al Khattab. He did not approve of these wars; therefore he remained away from them. Some of those involved in these wars came to him and said: "God has commanded us in the Quran to fight against *fitna* (persecution). Then why do you not join with us in these wars?" Abdullah ibn Umar replied, "the command of the Quran to fight against *fitna* is not what you hold to be *fitna*. *Fitna* meant religious persecution and we have already fought and put an end to this *fitna* (*qad fa'alna*). Therefore now after the removal of this obstacle, we have to engage ourselves in peaceful *dawah* work, rather than initiating hostilities and creating new *fitna* once again, which is akin to creating new obstacles for peaceful Islamic *dawah* (*Sahih al-Bukhari*).

Abdullah ibn Umar had made an extremely pertinent point at the most appropriate time, but others did not forcefully take up this point of view. Afterwards, when the Islamic sciences were being developed, this important point made by Abdullah ibn Umar was not highlighted, with the result that history took the course of wars and conquests, while in terms of the real teachings of Islam, history should have taken the course of the call to God and the propagation of Islam.

It is no exaggeration to say that Islam and violence are contradictory to each other. The concept of Islamic violence is so obviously unfounded that, *prima facie* it stands rejected. The fact that violence is not sustainable in the present world is enough to convince one that violence, as a principle, is quite alien to the scheme of things in Islam.

Islam claims to be an eternal religion and such a religion cannot afford a principle in its scheme which will not be sustainable in later periods of human history. An attempt to bracket violence with Islam amounts to casting doubts upon the very eternity of the Islamic religion.

No wonder, then, that the Prophet Muhammad so earnestly used to entreat his Lord in his daily prayer:

“O God, You are the original source of Peace; from You is all Peace, and to You returns all Peace. So, make us live with Peace; and let us enter Paradise: the Home of Peace. Blessed be You, our Lord, to whom belongs all Majesty and Honour!” □



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# CONCERNING WOMEN

## *Clarification of a Misunderstanding*

**A**n anthology of the Quran prepared by English orientalist Edward William Lane (1801-1876) was published in 1843. It carried a foreword by way of introduction to Islamic teaching, which inter alia, stated that “the fatal point in Islam is the degradation of woman.”

This ill-considered observation gained such currency that it was commonly repeated as if it were an established fact. Almost a century and a half has elapsed, but this conviction has only deepened. It has even been quoted as if it were gospel truth by a prominent person in one of the court cases.

Suppose a doctor tells his patient that his eye is a very delicate organ of the body, to be treated gently and with great care, unlike his fingernails, which can be cut and filed if necessary. The doctor’s instruction does not mean that he is degrading the eye vis-a-vis the nail. He is only pointing out the difference between the nail and the eye.

If all laws in Islam are based on this fundamental reality that men and women are of two different genders, it is because their distinctive differences are established biological facts. This being so, male and female spheres of activity cannot be one and the same, whether in family or in social life. There must necessarily be differences in the kind of work that they do, and also in their places of work.

***Islam has never asserted that woman is inferior to man: it has only made the point that woman is differently constituted.***

All scriptures have held the same concept of women without its ever having been doubted. In modern times it has been challenged by the women’s liberation movement, which holds that men and women are alike in every respect and that both should, therefore, be given equal opportunities.

This movement first reared its head in Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, later spread across Europe and America. In 1772, the momentum increased with the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, written by Mary Wollstonecraft. The author asserts that women should receive the same treatment as men in education, work opportunities and politics, and the same moral standards should be applied to both genders. Such was the zeal and fervour with which this movement was launched

that it spread far and wide. Both men and women participated, and differences between man and woman were brushed aside as being a sign of backwardness. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this trend established its hold all over the world, and laws were made or modified accordingly. All doors were to be thrown open to men and women alike.

In practice, however, this experiment has been a failure. Even after a struggle of almost 200 years, women have failed to achieve equal status to that of men. The situation is the same today as it was before the launching of the "women's lib" movement. The only practical result has been that women have become a part of every field and work side by side with men. This has given rise to new problems and society is paying a heavy price for it.

The failure of women's liberation has led to wide-ranging research being carried out, employing strictly scientific methods. Finally the patent biological differences between men and women have been scientifically proven. These differences have all along been a reason for women's failure to find an equal place in every department of life. Where philosophers had doubted the religious concept of women erroneously—scientific findings have now re-established this concept's veracity.

***"We are not doing women—and specifically women's health—any favors by pretending that things are the same if they are not" .***

For instance, the following research though specifically related to the medical field, which can draw our attention to understanding the facts that the differences between the genders are a part of nature and not a creation of society. They are real and one cannot just wish them away.

Catherine Woolley is the William Deering Chair person in Biological Sciences, professor of neurobiology in the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences and a member of the Women's Health Research Institute at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. This is what she has to say:

**"The importance of studying gender differences in the brain is about making biology and medicine relevant to everyone, to both men and women. It is not anyone who studies about things such as who is better at reading a map or why more men than women choose to enter certain professions."**

Male and female brains operate differently at a molecular level, the research team reports in a new study of a brain function involved in learning and memory, responses to stress, etc.

For 20 years, Woolley actively avoided studying gender differences in the brain until her own data showed her that differences between females and males were real.

“Being a scientist is about changing your mind in the face of new evidence,” Woolley said. “I had to change my mind in the face of this evidence.”

“We are not doing women—and specifically women’s health—any favors by pretending that things are the same if they are not,” Woolley said.

Currently a lot of research is focusing on these differences. Science has supported the religious concept of men and women being different, as being the right one. Still the allegation continues to be made that Islam has ‘degraded’ woman. The Islamic concept of womanhood considers the two genders as “equal in respect but different in roles”.

It is very unfortunate that well-read people have said that religious laws pertaining to women were socially reactionary. Such remarks are made so indiscriminately and so frequently that it is time one considers the possible root causes. One of the root causes is that the results of research on the differences between man and woman have remained only as academic. These findings need to be transformed into a popular intellectual revolution. The social penetration of these ideas will have to take place on a very large scale. This is not far fetched since modern science has provided all the arguments in its favour. It is only a question of engaging wholeheartedly in the dissemination of those findings.

*Anyone who studies the Islamic concept of womanhood will know that Islam considers the two genders as “equal in respect but different in roles”.*

### **Men and Women Equal in Respect, Different in Role**

The term ‘gender equality’ was used for the first time in Europe in the late nineteenth century. To begin with, it was used only to argue for women’s right to vote. However, it later came to be adopted for general use to describe the equality of both sexes in every respect.

This term then spread rapidly all over the Western world, as an expression describing the ideal status of men and women. In the second half of the twentieth century, extensive research was carried out on this subject, and this concept began to be doubted. The latest study done on this is by an IIT-Delhi alumnus, which has been extensively covered by the media.

A study team led by Ragini Verma, associate professor of radiology at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, has revealed that there are stark differences between men and women in the structural connections linking different regions of their brains.

***Islam says that men and women are different by birth, rather than being identical. Both are complementary to each other.***

Verma and her colleagues are among the first to demonstrate differences in the brain's hard-wiring to support long-standing observations of gender differences in functional tasks. Their findings appeared in the US journal, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, December 2, 2013.

The researchers' findings in this regard only confirm the Islamic position stated in the first quarter of the seventh century. Islam says that men and women are different by birth, rather than being identical. Both are complementary to each other. This fact is referred to in the Quran in these words:

You [men and women] are members one of another. (3: 195)

According to the Quran, everything in this world has been created in the form of pairs:

We created pairs of all things. (51: 49)

In the material world, every atom consists of positive particles and negative particles. In the plant and the animal worlds, there are males and females. The human world consists of men and women.

This pair-system in the world means that everything functions in a pair-fashion. In other words, nature functions on the principle of complementarity, rather than in an independent manner.

Observing this natural fact, one can say that using the term 'gender equality' to express the relationship between men and women is not natural. The right statement based on nature in this regard is: 'Men and women are equal in respect and different in roles'.

## The Role of Women in Society

Studies show that women have been specially gifted by nature with such qualities as fit them for the role of bringing about peace and harmony in society in times of conflict. These qualities are gentleness, selflessness, compassion, mildness and, above all, a spiritual approach to life. A study of history tells us that women have always played this role, albeit mostly on the home front.

It is a matter of common knowledge that women have always contributed greatly to normalizing conditions at home by relieving tensions and resolving conflicts. The softness of their approach to problems and their marked capacity for pacifying are clearly attributes which will eliminate stress.

When we look at Islamic history, the first instance we find of such positive feminine influence is that of Khadija, the wife of the Prophet. When the Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation from the angel in the cave of Hira, it was a totally new experience for him, and he trembled in fear at what he had seen and heard. He immediately set off for his home after the disappearance of the angel. When he had regained his composure, he related the incident to Khadija. She did her best to assure him that no harm would come to him as he always spoke the truth, helped the poor and those in distress, and invariably treated others with respect. With these reassuring words, she successfully calmed him down, employing all her natural gifts of gentleness, sympathy, understanding, and, above all, selfless love.

After the Prophet of Islam left this world, great differences arose among Muslims in many matters. During his lifetime, all such issues had been referred to him for a solution. But after the demise of the Prophet, it was now left to his wife Aisha, who had been under his training for many years, to play the very positive role of guide and mentor. Having become fully imbued with the spirit of Islam, she used to give guidance to both male and female companions of the Prophet. In this way, she successfully resolved such differences.

However, in those days there was no platform from which her example could benefit the general public, nor was there the media—such as we have nowadays—to cover such roles and place them on record. In most

*Science has supported the religious concept of man and woman being different, as being the right one.*

of the cultures in ancient and medieval societies, women remained indoors and played their role within the confines of their own homes. That is why we know so little about the contribution of women in this arena.

***Women have been specially gifted by nature with such qualities as fit them for the role of bringing about peace and harmony in society in times of conflict.***

The most prominent name of a woman within the Sufi tradition is that of Rabia Basri (713-801). She was born in 713 CE. into a poor family in Basra, Iraq. She devoted her life to worshipping God and serving others. She lived a life of extreme asceticism, and a large number of disciples gathered around her. Her mystical sayings have become proverbial.

In Rabia Basri's times, Muslim society was rent with great religious differences. But her strong spiritual personality exerted such a powerful influence that people eventually forgot their doctrinal differences and rallied

around her. She laid emphasis on pure divine love, which alone could minimize all these differences.

"Men and women are two equal halves of a single unit."

The above teaching of the Prophet and many more teachings to this effect in the Quran and *Hadith* ushered in a new age of gender equality. With this new-found freedom, women were able to play a great role in society, particularly women who belonged to royal families. They were highly educated by the standards of their times, and, in royal circles, with greater social exposure, they had better opportunities to exert their influence.

One such woman was Maryam Makani, the mother of Akbar, the Mughal emperor of India. Once, Mullah Abdun Nabi, Akbar's teacher, insulted the emperor before the entire court. Akbar was enraged and wanted to punish him. This could have meant even the death sentence for the offender. But Akbar's mother intervened and successfully managed to calm him down. She told him that his pardon would go down in history, that history would remember that 'an emperor, having all the power at his disposal, forgave an offender'.

Such incidents abound in history, but because the central figures were usually either a mother, like Maryam Makani, or a daughter or wife of an emperor—women who were already famous because of their royal



kinship—people failed to perceive how their roles could go beyond this framework and become applicable to general situations in society.

Both biological and historical studies show that women have been specially gifted with qualities required for the establishment of social harmony. In the Muslim case, this potential of women has never been properly realized because of the failure to institutionalize their role in Muslim society. Had Muslim women been trained to perform this task, they would have been able to play this role far more effectively, and on a far greater scale. The need of the hour today is to institutionalize this role and give proper training to women so that this capability with which women have been so abundantly endowed by nature may be fully harnessed. Once this feminine potential has been realized, the world will definitely be a better place for all to live in. □

*The spiritual role of women has never been properly realized because of the failure to institutionalize their role in society.*



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# FROM THE SPIRITUAL TREE

*There is a tree beside my house. I call it the 'Spiritual Tree'. I derive spiritual inspiration from it. A tree is an ever-growing being that was initially a seed possessing the potential of becoming a full-grown tree. A seed takes food from the universe around it and then grows into a tree. The same is true with spirituality, the desire for which is intrinsic to, and an integral part of, the very nature of every human being. To realize this spirituality, man must derive spiritual food from the universe around him. A tree converts carbon-dioxide into oxygen; a spiritual person is one who can take positive lessons from negative situations. From this perspective, a tree is an embodiment of a spiritual personality. —Maulana Wahiduddin Khan*



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## REAL LOSS

**T**HE present world is a preview of the Hereafter. Here, a person receives in embryonic form the joys and blessings which God has made fully available in the world to come. This is so that he may see the infinite joys of eternity in the guise of the incomplete blessings of this world—so that he may see one drop of water, and realize that it is indicative of a vast ocean beyond.

One who understands the true nature of this world will look beyond the ephemeral pleasures of this world to the eternal joys of the Hereafter. Only one who does not see the world in its true light will set store in it, making it his ultimate goal instead of the Hereafter.

The sun shines in order to acquaint man with the radiance of the after-life. Flowers and trees blossom in order to remind one of the beauty of God's eternal world.

The pleasures of this world should serve to increase one's longing for the world to come; but often one becomes so engrossed in them that one fails to even think of the infinitely greater joys of the Hereafter.

One who is seduced by the alluring pleasures of this world loses out on the next world. What anguish and despair he will feel when he reaches

that world, and beholds the eternal blessings which it has to offer.

He will realize then his foolishness. "This" he will cry out, "is the true life. Earthly life has no reality now. But I have lost eternal life for the sake of the transitional blessings of the world. I have forfeited true and lasting bliss—all for the sake of pleasures which did not endure. In seeking freedom on earth, where there was no freedom to be found, I lost the true freedom that is to be had now." □

*The pleasures of this world should serve to increase one's longing for the world to come; but often one becomes so engrossed in them that one fails to even think of the infinitely greater joys of the Hereafter.*



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# TOLERATING LESSER EVIL

*Wisdom*

**U**MAIR IBN HABIB IBN HAMASHA, a Companion of the Prophet, instructed his son, saying: "O my son, he who refuses to tolerate the lesser evil of a foolish person will have to tolerate the bigger evil of such a person."

If a foolish person throws pebbles at someone, the latter may immediately react by doing the same thing to him. However, the best answer in such a situation is to exercise tolerance. By tolerating 'pebbles' you will prevent the situation from turning into a conflict that involves 'rocks'. The fact is that not to be willing to tolerate the lesser evil of a foolish person will always mean that you will have to accept having to face a much bigger evil instead, sooner or later.

Suppose a situation arises that threatens to turn into violence between two communities. There are two ways to respond to this. One way is by exercising patience. The other way is to get agitated. If you get agitated, it is bound to only further escalate the conflict and degenerate into violence. On the other hand, if you control yourself and exercise patience, the problem will be nipped in the bud and be soon finished off.

***Wise is one who does not make matters an issue of pride, but adopts the practical wisdom of putting an end to conflict so that time and energy can be spent on more constructive issues.***

Such situations should not be judged by trying to determine which party is right or which party is wrong. The wiser party is one which rises above this and tries to de-escalate the conflict, even if it involves unilaterally accepting the conditions of the other party.

What is required in conflict situations is to put an end to the conflict by whatever means possible, as conflict may turn to violence which would be to the detriment of both sides. Wise is one who does not make matters an issue of pride, but adopts the practical wisdom of putting an end to conflict so that time and energy can be spent on more constructive issues. □



# SELF DEVELOPMENT

## *Methodology*

**H**ARRY EMERSON FOSDICK has explained one fact of life in these words: "No steam or gas ever drives anything until it is confined. No Niagara is ever turned into light and power until it is tunneled. No life ever grows until it is focused, dedicated, and disciplined."(*Living Under Tension by Harry Emerson Fosdick*)

There is but one law of nature, which applies to both animate and inanimate objects. It is that there is a price to be paid for every end in life: without paying that price, nothing can be achieved. In this world one has to sink before one can rise; one has to resign oneself to loss before one can gain, to backwardness before one can advance; one has to be able to accept defeat before one can claim victory.

The world in which we live has been created by God, not by us. This may appear to be a simple fact, but it is one that a person usually forgets in his everyday life. Since, we are living in God's world, we have no alternative but to understand the principles He has set for the world and follow these in our lives. There is no other way we can make a place for ourselves in the world. Trying to follow our self-styled principles for achievement will only lead to failure and frustration.

It is important to draw lessons from the lives of those who have gone by and heed the guidance given by prophets and messengers in order to know the way to lead life in this world. Those who wish to advance and be successful in life without passing through the necessary stages, will have to build another world for themselves—one which satisfies their own requirements; for in the world that God has created, their dreams can never come true. □

***There is but one law of nature, which applies to both animate and inanimate objects. It is that there is a price to be paid for every end in life: without paying that price, nothing can be achieved.***



*Only after a long period one's efforts reap true rewards.*

# OBSERVING THE UNIVERSE

*A Silent Teacher*

**T**HE Quran is a book of cosmic knowledge, a dictionary which defines the true meaning of what we see in the world around us. The Quran says that:

“He (God) ordains all things. He makes plain His revelations.” (13: 2)

God ordains all things in that He manages the universe; He makes plain His revelations in that He explains its relevance in the Quran. Observing the universe, one cannot fail to be struck by the wonderful works of art, the ingenious displays of consummate skill, which lie before one.

*The Quran is a book of cosmic knowledge, a dictionary which defines the true meaning of what we see in the world around us.*

There are atoms, dancing around within matter. Two particles—without life—come together to mould a third object—a new life. Stars revolve in space, without the slightest deviation from their set speed. Tiny seeds are transformed into luxuriant trees. Life in all its multiple forms seems like a torrent surging all around us, all these events, and many more, are happening in the universe, but they are happening silently. No cosmic event defines itself. Nothing speaks to man, revealing to

him its inner significance.

Seeing this, a person tends to think that perhaps the universe is a collection of dumb masterpieces. Once again, the Quran comes to his rescue, telling him that the world, in all its manifold vitality, is not without purpose. There will come a time when everything will be revealed in all its meaning, when a needle will be lodged on the record of the universe, and music will emerge from its hitherto silent groves. For every vision there is a horizon in this world, but when the truth comes to light it will illuminate all things. All one's questions will be answered. A person will take up the place which, in relation to reality, is rightfully his. □



*Abstinence from wrongdoing  
is more essential than the  
cultivation of virtues.*

# THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

## *Awaken the Senses*

**T**HE power-supply used to be plentiful in the Ivory Coast. The country had at one time been called the "Showcase of Africa" due to its glittering array of houses and shops. In December 1983, everything suddenly changed. People were forced to eat by candlelight in luxury hotels, while houses and offices were lit by lanterns. Hydro-electric stations which had supplied ninety two percent of the Ivory Coast's electricity were brought to a standstill by a severe drought which reduced the water flowing through the dams to a trickle. The turbines simply stopped running, and the electricity supply fell so low that at times there would be no power for up to 18 hours. Industrial production was reduced by 65%. Computers, electric typewriters, refrigerators and other gadgets ceased to operate.

For fear of being caught in the lift, many businessmen gave up going to their offices. One commuter explained his situation to a New York Times correspondent: "For years I had gone from my air-conditioned villa to my air-conditioned car to my air-conditioned office. I never realized how hot it really is here." This businessman, dwelling in air-conditioned surroundings in the heart of Africa, was living in an artificial world. When the electricity failed him, he realized that in reality things were very different from what he had supposed.

The same is true, on a larger scale, of all humankind. People consider themselves free in the present world. They think of everything they have as their own property. But when death comes, it will dawn on an individual, all of a sudden, that he had just been fooling himself: he had been given freedom as a test whereas he had thought it was his right; he had taken what was God's to be his own; he was responsible to God for his actions, but he lived under the misapprehension that, whatever he did, he would never be taken to task for it. □

***People consider themselves free in the present world. They think of everything they have as their own property. But when death comes, it will dawn on an individual, all of a sudden, that he had just been fooling himself: he had been given freedom as a test whereas he had thought it was his right.***

# EXPERIENCING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

## *Constant Requirement*

**O**NE of the three astronauts who travelled in the Apollo 15 American spacecraft was Colonel James Irwin. He later described the magic of that moment, in August 1972, when he set foot on the moon. It was an ecstatic experience, he said, to feel oneself in God's presence, to feel so close to Him that His greatness appeared before one's eyes. Colonel Irwin did not look on his voyage to the moon as a voyage of mere scientific discovery; it had given him new spiritual life as well.

The moon was a new sight for Colonel Irwin. That is why, struck by its magnificence, he was able to experience there the presence of God. Colonel Irwin's experience was not a unique one, for in truth all that God has created is so wonderful that one has only to gaze upon it to

***In order to see God in His creation, we too have to look at everything—not as old and familiar—but new and exciting; we have to look at things as if we are seeing them for the first time.***

become lost in the wonders of what He has fashioned. The face of the Creator shines continually in the perfection of His creation. In order to see God in His creation, we too have to look at everything—not as old and familiar—but new and exciting; we have to look at things as if we are seeing them for the first time.

There is no greater discovery than the discovery of God, no greater realization than to feel Him everywhere. When this realization is awakened, then everything becomes a reflection of His glory. The sunshine will portray His light, the trees His beauty. One will feel His gentle touch in the winds as they caress one's body. As one prostrates oneself before Him, it will be as though one has cast oneself at His feet. God is, indeed, everywhere, but only those who are blessed with vision can behold Him. □



*There is no greater sacrifice than that of one's own opinion.*



# PRAYER FENDS AWAY INDECENCY AND EVIL

## *Meaningful Prayer*

**T**HE believer has been advised in the Quran to be steadfast in prayer, for prayer fends away indecency and evil. When the Prophet of Islam was asked about this verse he said:

“If a person’s prayer does not fend away indecency and evil, then his prayer is not really prayer at all.”

Prayer is to remember the fact that one is living before a God who—though man cannot see Him—can see man. Whoever leaves the mosque with this fact firmly embedded in his mind cannot live forgetful of God. In prayer a person testifies to the fact that God is the greatest of all beings. If one is truthful in one’s testimony, then one will not claim greatness for oneself when one has finished praying.

Whatever one recites in prayer is a covenant before God that one will keep His commandments; then how is it possible that one should leave the mosque and treat people with arrogance and contumacy? The actions of prayer are a manifestation of the fact that one’s heart is full of fear and love for God.

*Prayer is to remember the fact that one is living before a God who—though man cannot see Him—can see man.*

If one prays in the true spirit of prayer, then one’s prayer will surely fend away indecency and evil. But if one’s prayer is devoid of spirit, then it will be no more than a perfunctory action which has no connection with real life. It will be prayer in form, but not in reality: for it will not fend away indecency and evil. □



*Wisdom is the ability to discover the relevant by sorting out the irrelevant.*

# IN GOD'S COUNTRY

*Follow the Rules*

**A**N American lady went on a tour of Russia. There, she saw pictures of the Chairman of the Communist party hanging everywhere she went. She took offence at this and gave vent to her feelings in the presence of some Russians.

Her companion whispered in her ear: "Madam, you are in Russia now, not America."

One can live as one likes in one's own country, but when one goes to a foreign country one has to abide by its laws. If one does not do so, then one will be considered an offender. The same is true, in a broader sense, of this world. A human being has been born into a world which he has not created.

The world in which one lives is entirely of God's making. Man, then, is not in his own country: he is living in the country of God. The only way that a person can prosper is by understanding God's scheme and living in the world according to that scheme. If he contradicts the scheme of God then he will be considered as a rebel.

***The only way that a person can prosper is by understanding God's scheme and living in the world according to that scheme.***

The question is: how should one live in the world in order to conform with the will of God? It was to provide an answer to this question that God raised up His prophets. The prophets showed people, plainly and in terms that they could understand, exactly what the Lord requires of them; they defined the principles

that God wants a person to adhere to and the character He wants them to embody. The Quran is a collection of this prophetic guidance. It provides spiritual guidance on how to lead one's life such that one can develop a noble personality which in the Hereafter is held deserving of God's blessings. □



*It is easier to blame others than to accept the responsibility oneself.*

# POLYGAMY AND ISLAM

## *Solution to a Problem*

**O**NE of the commandments given in the Quran as a matter of social organization concerning polygamy, is permission for a man to marry up to four women:

*If you fear that you cannot treat orphans with fairness, then you may marry such women (widowed) as seem good to you: two, three or four of them. But if you fear that you cannot do justice, marry one only. (4: 3)*

This verse was revealed after the Battle of Uhud 625 CE, in which seventy Muslims were martyred. Suddenly, seventy homes in Madinah were bereft of all male members, and the question arose as to how all these widows and orphans were to be cared for. This was an acute social problem. It was solved by the revelation of this verse asking the people who could afford it to take care of the orphans, by marrying the widows and keeping their orphaned children under their guardianship.

The background and wording of this verse appear to express a commandment that should be only temporary in effect. That is to say that it applied only to a particular state of emergency when, due to loss of men in battle, the number of women exceeded the number of available men. But the Quran, despite its having been revealed at a particular time and place, is universal in its application. One of the great characteristics of the Quran is that it describes eternal realities, with reference to temporal issues, this commandment being typical of this special quality of the Quran.

***The permission to practice polygamy in Islam was not given in order to enable men to satisfy their carnal urges. It was designed as a practical strategy to solve a particular problem.***

Looked at from a practical angle, the above commandment of the Quran can be complied with only if that particular situation exists in society that existed in Madinah after the Battle of Uhud—that is, there is a disproportion in the ratio of men and women. In the absence of such a situation, this commandment of the Quran would be inapplicable. But studies of human society and its history have shown that the situation in ancient Madinah was not one that existed only at a particular point in time. It is a situation that had almost always been prevalent throughout the world. That situation of emergency is, in fact, the general situation of humankind. This commandment is yet another

proof of God's omniscience. His commandment, seemingly elicited by an emergency, became an eternal commandment for the whole of our world under similar circumstances.

### **The Willingness of Women**

The presence of a greater number of women in a society is not the only prerequisite for polygamy. It is, in addition, compulsory that the woman who is the object of the man's choice should be willing to enter into the married state. This willingness on the woman's part is a must before a marriage can be lawful in Islam. It is unlawful to marry a woman by force. There is no example in the history of Islam where a man has been allowed to force a woman into marriage.

### **Solution to a Problem rather than a Commandment**

The permission to marry more than one woman is provided as a solution to a social problem in the Islamic *Shariah*. The principle of polygamy, as enshrined in the Islamic *Shariah* is designed, in fact, to save women from the ignoble consequences of being alone. This commandment, although apparently general in application, was given only as a solution to a specific social problem. It provides an arrangement whereby

*If the commandment to practice polygamy is seen in the abstract, it would appear to be biased in favour of men. But when placed in the context of social organization, it is actually in favour of women.*

surplus women may save themselves from sexual anarchy and have a proper stable family life. That is to say, it is not a question of adopting polygamy rather than monogamy. The choice is between polygamy and sexual anarchy.

If the commandment to practice polygamy is seen in the abstract, it would appear to be biased in favour of men. But when placed in the context of social organization, it is actually in favour of women. Polygamy is both a proper and a natural solution to women's problems.

The permission to practice polygamy in Islam was not given in order to enable men to satisfy their carnal urges. It was designed as a practical strategy to solve a particular problem. Marrying more than one woman is possible only when there are more women than men. Failing this, it is out of question. It is inconceivable that Islam, just to satisfy man's desires, would give us a commandment that is neither possible nor practical.

To have more than one wife is not an ideal in Islam. It is, in essence, a practical solution to a social problem. □

# THE NEWS OF SALVATION

*Serious Issue*

**W**HAT a mass of information there is clogging the atmosphere nowadays. Everyone has some message to convey to others. But in all this confusion, there is no one seeking to convey the message of eternal life; there is no one anxious to break the news of salvation and damnation in the world to come.

People's conversations revolve around worldly matters; no one has time for matters pertaining to eternal life. This implies that people are unaware of the meaning of eternal life. No one has that news to tell—for if they did they would never be able to keep it to themselves. Indeed, so critical is the importance of this matter that no other news would seem worth telling. They would make it their prime task in life to inform others of the dangers of hell-fire, and the joys of paradise.

If one knows there is going to be an earthquake in a few moments, or a volcano is about to erupt, then one can think of nothing else; one leaves all other matters aside and talks only of the dreadful fate about to descend.

Yet speakers make their speeches, and writers write their lines, but their words do not contain mention of man's coming before the Lord to be judged. It appears that they do not even know of the coming of that fearful day.

People's minds are occupied by matters—political, social and economic—of individual and national concern. They experience these things in the world about them; the effect of these matters is there to be felt. That is why they consider them important and worth talking about. But the greatest issue facing us is the Day of Judgment. One cannot actually see it, but no future event exceeds it in importance. It is the matter most worth talking about, the greatest news that anyone can hear. □

*People's minds are occupied by matters—political, social and economic—of individual and national concern. They experience these things in the world about them; the effect of these matters is there to be felt. That is why they consider them important and worth talking about. But the greatest issue facing us is the Day of Judgment.*

# LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

## *Beneficial Conversion*

**E**XPERIENCE always provides opportunities to learn lessons. But there are very few people in this world who seize them. Experience can always teach one something of value and should be a source of intellectual development. But, as a rule, people fail to understand the positive gain they can derive from bad situations. This is because, in untoward circumstances, their first impulse is to complain and indulge in negative feelings rather than think of what their experience can teach them.

It is a law of nature that when any unpleasant event takes place, it is not necessarily the fault of others. It is remarkable how often it happens in such cases that to a greater or lesser degree both the parties are to blame. More often than not, it transpires that whenever there is any unpleasantness, it is seen as a one-sided affair. People tend to gloss over their own culpability and lay the entire blame at the door of others. This happens in almost 99 per cent of the cases.

***One should invariably treat experiences as occasions for learning lessons, rather than making them grounds for complaint. Doing so means that the person concerned has been able to change a negative event in his life into something positive. He has converted his loss into a gain***

But, in this way, holding a one-sided opinion is against the law of nature. It is on historical record that even the Companions of the Prophet had to take their share in the responsibility for undesirable happenings. One instance of such an event—the Battle of Uhud—took place during the lifetime of the Prophet. In this battle, the Companions of the Prophet were initially victorious. But later on, due to their own ineptitude, they were forced to incur heavy losses. (3: 152-153)

One should invariably treat experiences as occasions for learning lessons, rather than making them grounds for complaint. Doing so means that the person concerned has been able to change a negative event in his life into something positive. He has converted his loss into a gain. On the contrary, those who

on such occasions are inspired to do nothing but complain and nurse feelings of hatred deprive themselves of any gain which they could have had from an unpleasant experience. In this way they have failed to seize a golden opportunity to learn something of value and have thus disadvantaged themselves in ways they cannot begin to understand. □

# MORNING IS THE BEST TIME

*Be on Nature*

**P**EOPLE have always believed that morning time is the best time because one's mind is most fresh at this time of the day. The Quran expresses this fact in the following words: "The recitation at dawn is indeed witnessed." (17: 78)

Several researches performed in today's world corroborate to the fact that morning is the most productive time of the day. Similarly, numerous books authored on this subject describe morning time as the best time. One such book is titled, *'What The Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast'* by Laura Vanderkam.

Research has shown that a person's mind is blank in the morning. The mind works like a computer and has a similar file storage mechanism.

Whatever the mind experiences, listens, sees and undergoes during the day gets stored and by evening, the mind becomes accumulated with a jungle of thoughts. But when one sleeps at night, one's mind starts to work.

During sleep, the mind sorts out the observations and thoughts and stores them in their respective files. As a result of this process, a person feels fresh when he gets up in the morning, because his mind has been cleared of all thoughts and is blank once again.

***'Early to bed, early to rise; makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.'***

It is for this reason that one has the ability to work far more peacefully in the morning. Whether it is reading, contemplation, worship or planning—everything is best done in those early hours. Another aspect of the morning time is that one has least distractions to be enmeshed in. This is thus the time when a person can focus on work far more effectively than at any other time during the day.

An ancient saying aptly illustrates this principle in these words:

*'Early to bed, early to rise; makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.'* □



# NECESSARY PREPARATION

## *Rule for Success*

*Gandhi* is a very famous biographical film, released in 1982, on the life of Mahatma Gandhi. The character of Gandhiji has been played by the English actor Ben Kingsley. It is said that Kingsley had to experience great rigour in the process of the preparations of moulding himself in Gandhiji's character. For example, Kingsley had the habit of leading a royal lifestyle and was used to having lavish meals. However, for the proper portrayal of the role of Gandhiji, he observed partial starvation for a very long time.

***Training and instructing of one's people are undoubtedly the most challenging of duties. Those who shoulder the responsibility of guiding their community without equipping themselves adequately are committing a grave mistake.***

Kingsley had a plump body, while Gandhiji was a man with a thin frame who would often walk holding a stick in his hand for support. It was therefore important that when Kingsley came on screen, he should appear to the audience as slender in build just like the real Gandhi. For this reason, before the making of the movie, Kingsley would eat very less or remain hungry in order that he could look slim. As a result, he was able to reduce his weight by seven kilograms. The Marathi woman who has starred in the movie as Gandhi's wife, Kasturba Gandhi, also had to adhere to a similar demanding and harsh lifestyle prior to playing her role.

For a person to enact the role of a fictional character in a movie, it is much less difficult than to perform the task of a leader who has to guide his community in real life. In spite of the enormity of this task, it is very strange that when it comes to the responsibility of guiding their community, people make haste to plunge into the field without any preparations at all.

Training and instructing of one's people are undoubtedly the most challenging of duties. Those who shoulder the responsibility of guiding their community without equipping themselves adequately are committing a grave mistake. □





# ONE-SIDED REPORTING

## *Intellectual Dishonesty*

**P**EOPLE generally have the habit of stating only one half of the story. They mention its latter half, but do not speak a word about its first part. For example, a man was once hit on the road by another person. While recounting what happened with him, he simply said that he was beaten up by someone. However, he did not reveal what he had himself done which had provoked the other person to react in anger.

Similarly, at one time a dispute occurred between two groups which led to instances of maltreatment and persecution of members of one group by another. In all such incidents, it almost always happens that one group, owing to its actions, provokes the other group into taking retaliatory measures. It then results in a riot. However, when it comes to detailing the account of such events, it is seen that people of the first group would only relate the second half of the story. They would blame the other group for carrying out the rioting, but would never specify the action they had originally taken which then provoked the second group to exact revenge.

***Every person has the habit of recounting an incident in such a manner that only the involvement of the other person is apparent, whilst remaining silent about their own involvement in the matter. This manner of reporting is unjust and biased.***

This tendency can be called incomplete or one-sided reporting of events. Such kind of reporting is very common in our society. Every person has the habit of recounting an incident in such a manner that only the involvement of the other person is apparent, whilst remaining silent about their own involvement in the matter. This manner of reporting is unjust and biased. Moreover, speaking of events in this way is a sign of intellectual dishonesty as it goes against the demands of justice and fairness. Looking at a situation in this one-sided manner is ethically incorrect and is of no use when it comes to finding a solution to the resulting problem or dispute.

A person who gives an incomplete account of facts may be happy himself, but as far as the world outside of him is concerned, this attitude can have no positive consequence whatsoever. □

# WHY IS PRAYER NOT ACCEPTED?

*Giving to Receive*

SOME people asked a venerable elder: "What is the reason that we ask from God, but our prayers do not get answered?" The elderly sage replied, this is because you people ask of God what you are not prepared to give to other human beings. He explained by saying that you pray to God to save you from the oppression of those who oppress you, however, when one of you achieves dominance over people, you do not abstain from oppressing them. Similarly, you ask God to ensure the safety and security of your wealth and lives, but when you get the opportunity you make the violation of another person's life and property permissible for yourself. You seek an honourable life from God, but when you attain power over somebody you do not shy away from dishonouring them. You want God to protect you from the conspiracies of enemy nations, but if you develop some differences with a person, you do not rest content in conspiring to uproot him.

***The necessary condition for acceptance of one's prayer is that the seeker be extremely sincere in his request. The prayer should be a call which represents his entire personality, an outpouring of his being, and not merely words that he has uttered from his lips.***

The necessary condition for acceptance of one's prayer is that the seeker be extremely sincere in their request. The prayer should be a call which represents his entire personality, an outpouring of his being, and not merely words that he has uttered from his lips. When a person is sincere, his life becomes devoid of contradictions—there remains no difference between what he prays for and what he does

in his real life. For example, to persecute others and be unjust in one's own area of influence, while protesting against another's oppression is a contradiction which points to the lack of earnestness of one's stance.

For the acceptability of one's prayer, it is crucial that a person gives to others in his life what he seeks from God in his entreaty. If he seeks mercy and blessing for his own self from God, then he too, in his dealings with people, should be an embodiment of compassion and kindness. □



# ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD

## *Real Test*

**T**HIS story is about a Ms. Sybil D'Silva, She was visited in her home by a woman aged about 35. She told Ms. D'Silva that her husband was seriously ill, and that she needed 5000 rupees urgently for his treatment. "I am not begging from you," she said, taking a golden necklace out of her pocket. "All I want to do is sell this golden necklace for just 5000 rupees."

Ms. D'Silva said she was not interested, but the woman kept pleading the desperateness of her case. Eventually she persuaded Ms. D'Silva to give her the money and buy the necklace.

Next day Ms. D'Silva took the necklace to a goldsmith He tested it on his touchstone. After examination, its reality came to light. Telling her story to the police, Ms. D'Silva said: "He told me it was brass."

So it will be in the next world. In this world, everyone is delighted with his deeds; everyone thinks of what he has done as gold. But gold is only real when it is shown to be such on the goldsmith's touchstone. In the next world, God will judge everybody's actions on His own touchstone.

The value of gold will only be attached to those actions which are proved to be made of gold when put on God's touchstone. If one's golden actions turn out to be made of brass, then they will only mean disgrace and doom. People have the chance to disown what belonged to them, in the world. But on the Day of Judgement there will be no disownment. That which they were proud of in the world will cause them only disgrace and humiliation when they come before God. □

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# WHAT IS TAKEAWAY?

## *Usefulness of Anything*

**D**URING a walk along a street in London, a board in front of a shop with the words 'TAKEAWAY' written in bold expression triggered the mind to think further. Initially, this expression was used to indicate that a restaurant offered you the facility of paying for food which you would then take home instead of sitting down and eating it on the premises. Later, this word came into common parlance and was alternatively used to refer to the gist of something worth remembering, some key fact, point, or idea which you had heard at some lecture or meeting, or read in some book or article.

***The success of a speech or a written text depends upon the degree to which it offers new points or ideas to take back home.***

The success of a speech or a written text depends upon the degree to which it offers new points or ideas to take back home. On the contrary, if it offers you nothing fresh which you could regard as a takeaway, then listening to such a speech, or such a book or article should be deemed a sheer waste of time.

A writer or a speaker must think deeply beforehand about finding something worth sharing with others and then expressing it in clear language. The criterion of success for an article or a speech is that it offers a real 'takeaway'—something that may be beneficial for the reader or hearer, and will contribute to his intellectual development. □



## ***Learn from All***

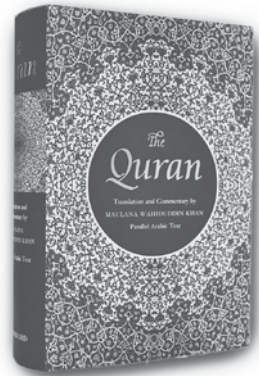
*The spirit for learning in us should be so great that we should learn from every individual around us. Words and behaviours which affect us in a negative manner must provide us with positive lessons. Thus we can develop the capability to learn from every instance in our life.*

# THE WORD OF GOD

*From The Scriptures*

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

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



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

***O mankind! Fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul. He created its mate from it and from the two of them spread countless men and women [throughout the earth]. Fear God, in whose name you appeal to one another, and be mindful of your obligations in respect of ties of kinship. God is always watching over you. (4: 1)***

All human beings are one and the same by birth. Ultimately, everyone can trace his origin to the same man and woman as father and mother. It is, therefore, necessary that all human beings should have a feeling of affinity with each other and live with fairness and goodwill like the members of one extended family. This racial unity becomes more compact in family relationships and the importance of decent behaviour among kinsfolk becomes further heightened. Good behaviour between fellow human beings is important, not merely from the moral point of view, but rather as a matter of personal concern to man himself. This is so, because everyone is governed by the Great, Almighty God, who as the Reckoner for one and all, will decide the eternal future of all human beings in the Hereafter, requiting them according to their actions in this world. Man should, therefore, not consider his dealings with others as a matter between man and man, but as a matter between man and God. He should fear the grip of God and should adhere to the bounds set by God so as to save himself from His wrath.

According to a *Hadith*, God proclaimed, 'I shall associate Myself with one who strengthens the ties of kinship and detach Myself from one who severs them.' This shows that man's attachment to God is being tested by the criterion of his relations with other human beings. One

who goes in fear of God while dealing with the rights of others, is one who truly venerates Him; one who loves other human beings, is one who really loves his Creator. The virtues of fair dealing and compassion are general requirements of human society, but so vital are they to maintaining good family relations that in importance they stand second only to God.

***Give the orphans the possessions that belong to them, do not exchange good things with bad and do not consume their property, adding it to your own. Surely, this is a great crime. If you fear that you cannot deal fairly with orphan girls, you may marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then only one—or [from among] those whom you rightfully possess. That is more likely to keep you from committing an injustice. And give the women their dowers willingly, but if they, of their own accord, remit any part of it to you, you may make use of it with pleasure and goodwill. (4: 2-4)***

Orphan boys and girls are the weakest members of a family or society and, therefore, dealing with them appropriately is the toughest test of one's being imbued with the fear of God.

Orphans deserve to be treated in a manner which is just and compassionate and whereby their rights are ensured the maximum protection. It is a major sin for a joint property to be divided in such a way that some are given valuable shares, while others are given worthless shares, only for the purpose of tallying the listed items. ❑

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# ASK MAULANA

*Your Questions Answered*

***Director of the New Delhi-based Centre for Peace and Spirituality, editor of the monthly Al-Risala journal and author of almost two hundred books, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan is one of India's best known Islamic scholars. In this interview with Yoginder Sikand, he talks about issues related to Islam and women.***

***You have written extensively on the issue of Islam and women. Contrary to many traditional ulema, you argue the case for gender equality in Islam. How does your approach differ from that of most traditionalist scholars?***

The approach of the traditionalists is based largely on the corpus of medieval *fiqh*, (Jurisprudence) while my understanding is based on a direct reading of the principal or original sources of Islam—the Quran and the authentic *Hadith*. The former, by and large, uphold what can be called the Muslim cultural tradition that developed in the medieval period of Muslim history. So, I would call mine a scriptural approach and theirs a cultural approach.

Take, for instance, the institution of the *burqa*, which many traditionalists stress as essential for Muslim women. The *burqa* is part of Muslim culture, but is not mentioned or advocated in the Quran. Another example is the traditionalist *ulema's* insistence that women and unrelated men cannot, or should not, talk to each other, on the grounds that, so they say, a woman's voice is something to be kept concealed from such men. This notion is absent in the original sources of Islam. In fact, there are many *Hadith* that tell us that there was considerable intellectual exchange between men and women at the time of the Prophet. For instance, Aisha, one of the wives of the Prophet, regularly spoke to or addressed many of the Prophet's Companions, on a vast range of issues. They used to come to her for guidance and discussion. According to one report, whenever the Companions faced a problem to which they could find no answer they would approach Aisha. So, how, then, can it be said that a woman's voice is to be kept concealed. I am not aware of any authentic *Hadith* about the women's voice.

If the traditionalists have any such proof of their claim, they must offer it. But even supposing, hypothetically, they are able to come up with such proof, we need to redefine or reinterpret it in the present context, and also by taking into account the accepted principle, recognized by

Islamic scholars, that sometimes 'necessity makes the unlawful lawful'. We are living in a vastly different age today, where there is simply no escape from hearing the voice of women!

***Many traditionalist scholars often cite a Quranic verse that describes men as the qawwam of their wives to argue that this means men are their superiors and that women must be subordinate to them. How do you interpret the term qawwam?***

It is a universal principle that everywhere—in government, in a business, in a school or whatever—there has to be a manager to manage practical affairs or else there will be chaos. This applies to the family also. This role of manager of affairs is what is actually meant by *qawwam*. It does not at all imply subordination or degradation, or any sort of hierarchy. Rather, it is simply a principle for overall management and administration of the family. In my own home my daughter is the *qawwam*. She runs the affairs of the house. She is the manager of the house. So, it does not mean that a woman cannot be the *qawwam* of her house.

Unfortunately, many scholars translate the term *qawwam* to mean that the man is the *hakim* or ruler of the house, as if he can be some sort of dictator. Many Quranic commentaries give a completely wrong interpretation of the term. Some go to the extent of describing husbands as the 'symbolic god' of their wives. This is really a sign of deep-rooted patriarchy and deviation from Islamic teachings. It is a wrongful innovation

We have the model of the Prophet Muhammad to explain the correct meaning of the term *qawwam*. His first wife Khadjiah looked after him when he was in distress. He worked for her, in the business that she ran. He took the advice of another of his wives, Umme Salamah, on many issues, contrary to some Muslim scholars, who argue, without any convincing proof, that a Muslim man may take the advice of his wife but must do precisely the opposite of what she recommends.

One can cite several examples to suggest that the Quran does not call for women's subordination to men, unlike what some traditionalist Muslim scholars as well as critics of Islam claim, and contrary to what their rendering of the term *qawwam* suggests. Thus, for instance, although the Caliph Umar issued a *fatwa* calling upon women not to pray in mosques, his wife refused to listen to him and he could not stop her because that was her Islamic right. Barirah, the wife of Mughis, a Companion of the Prophet, once came to the Prophet in order to seek a divorce from her husband. The Prophet advised her against this, to



which she responded by asking him if that was his personal opinion or the command of God. When the Prophet replied that it was his own view, she told him that she did not agree, and so the Prophet arranged for her to be separated from her husband.

***Traditionalist scholars (as well as critics of Islam) contend that the Quran allows husbands to beat (dharaba) their wives if they are disobedient. How do you respond to this argument?***

The *dharaba* that the Quran refers to is simply a token pat, not wild hitting. One *Hadith* report suggests that this should be done with a tooth-stick (*miswak*), which implies that it is not meant to be any sort of serious beating. According to another *Hadith* contained in the *Masnad of Imam Ahmad*, no prophet ever beat his wives. Sometimes, the Prophet Muhammad had problems with some of his wives but yet he never beat them.

***The Deobandi-dominated All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) projects itself as the sole authority as regards Muslim Personal Law matters (most of which impinge on Muslim women) in India. What do you feel about this organization, particularly its stance on Muslim women's issues?***

The claim that the AIMPLB is the spokesman of all the Muslims of India is completely false. In fact, it does not have any mass base. It is, to my mind, just a group of *maulvis* who have put a stamp on themselves, projecting themselves as leaders while they have little contact with the masses. They might represent just themselves, but certainly not all or most of the Indian Muslims.

Permit me to say this, but I regard the traditionalist *maulvi* class, to a very large extent, as responsible for the backwardness of the Muslims of this country—and not just as far as women's issues are concerned. They have little knowledge of the complexities of the contemporary world and so cannot address modern problems or interpret Islam in a manner that would appeal to modern minds. But, I see signs of change all around now. Increasingly, Muslims are refusing to listen to their *fatwas* which they find outlandish, and are marching ahead in the race for modern education. Even the sons of leading *maulvis* are choosing not to become traditional *maulvis* but, instead, are entering universities. I hope that augurs well for the future and that modern educated Muslim scholars would be in a better position to interpret Islamic teachings, including about women, in a proper manner. □

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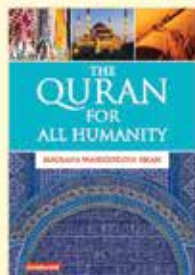
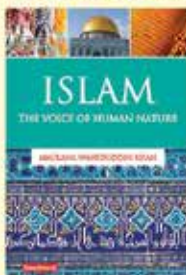
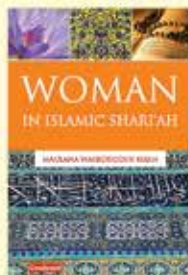
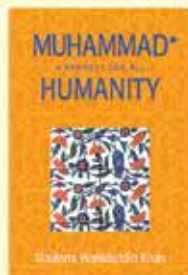
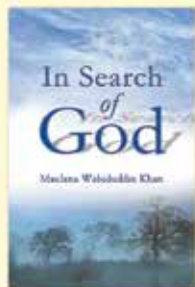
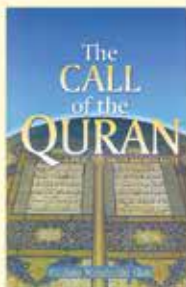
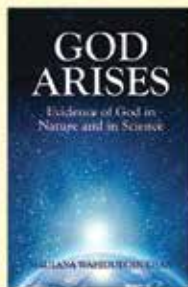
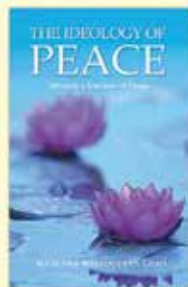
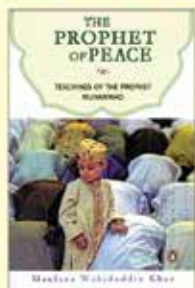
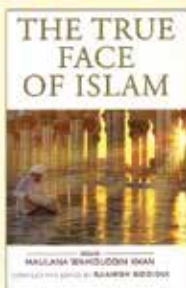
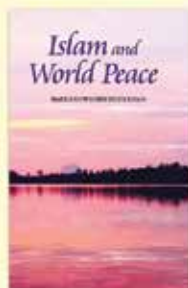
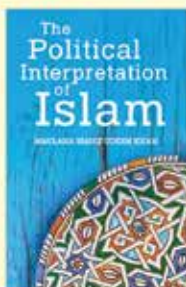
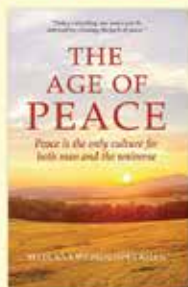
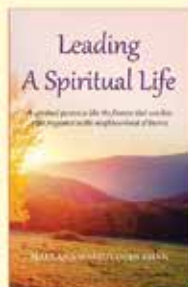
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