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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

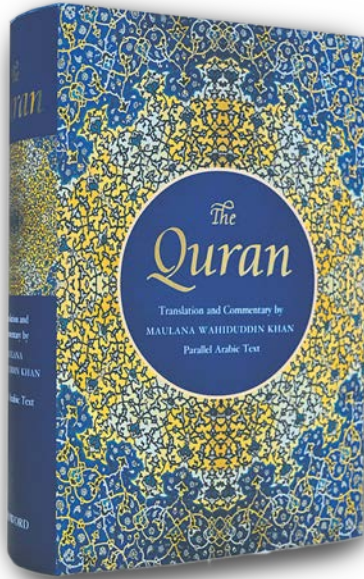


**Self-knowledge is the beginning
of self-improvement.**

The Quran

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY
MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN
PARALLEL ARABIC TEXT

This commentary on the Quran is a concise, easy-to-read guide that enables today's readers to understand the deeper meanings of the Quran and to reflect upon its relevance in the present world. It focuses on the main themes of the Quran, such as God-realization, enlightenment, closeness to God, remembrance, prayer, peace and spirituality. It lays stress on the fact that through reflection, deep thinking and contemplation, divine lessons can be learnt from the signs of God scattered across the world.



This commentary thus explains the meaning of the Quran in such a way as to give readers a clearer understanding of the message of the Quran and helps them in finding their own way of making it relevant to themselves.

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Spiritual Living

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

ISSUE 19, JULY 2014

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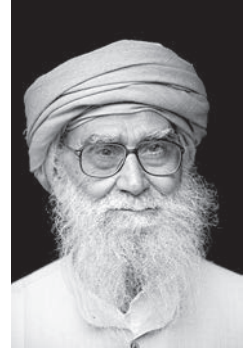
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK

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



WINNERS AND LOSERS, ALL

WINNING and losing are common phenomena in politics. During the era of kings, the equation was clearly that of winners and losers. But now we are living in an age of democracy and a paradigm shift has taken place. Now the real equation is a win-win equation. No one is a loser; both sides are winners.

In a democracy, victory is a responsibility and not something to be arrogant about. No one is a loser; both sides are winners.

Democracy has totally changed the concept of victory and defeat. Earlier, there used to be genuine change in the seat of government, but now elections mean a change of the political team, and that too for a temporary period. In a democracy, victory is a responsibility and not something to be arrogant about.

At Your Service

The new team thanks the old team, and the old team promises its support to the new team. In the kingship era, the motto was: 'I am here to rule the land', but in a democracy the motto is quite different. It is: 'I am here to serve the land.'

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

This was India's 16th general election. We have travelled fifteen milestones in our march towards democracy, and we are now embarking on a new one. Democracy is based on the concept of sharing in politics. In democracy, there are always two benches: the ruling bench and the opposition bench.

The role of the ruling party is to give the country good governance. Governance includes fulfilling of several responsibilities like providing a corrupt-free administration, developing good infrastructure, maintaining high standards of education, boosting the economy and utilising the potential of the country in the best possible manner. The winning team will be judged by its deeds, not by its words.

The role of the opposition is not that of a political rival; rather, it is a role of participation. In this sense, the role of the losing party does not come to an end after the elections, rather it continues. If, in the previous period, it had played a leading role, now it is destined to perform a supporting role.

**May God help the new leaders of the country
realize this noble cause!**

The winning party may inherit some problems from its predecessor. But according to healthy democratic values, the new party must take this as a challenge rather than exploit it in order to blame the previous party. This is the time for both winning and losing parties to set high democratic standards. The winning party must not try to take revenge or blame its predecessors; nor should the losing party adopt the attitude of opposition for the sake of opposition. It should not try to stall the process of governance; rather, it should offer support for the sake of national development.

Mahatma Gandhi was the founding father of India. His vision for a free India was to make India an international lighthouse. I believe that India is potentially a lighthouse for other nations. What is required is to turn this potential into actuality. May God help the new leaders of the country realize this noble cause! ☐

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
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THE TRIAL OF MAN

Angels and Satan

The story of Adam has been narrated in the Quran as follows:

When We said to the angels, 'Bow down before Adam,' they all bowed except for *Iblis* (Satan). He refused and acted proudly and became an unbeliever. We said, 'O Adam! Live with your wife in Paradise and eat freely from anywhere you may wish. Yet do not approach this tree lest you become wrongdoers.' But Satan caused them both to slip through this and thus brought about the loss of their former state. We said, 'Go down from here as enemies to each other; and on earth you shall have your abode and your livelihood for a while!'

THE QURAN 2: 34-36

WHAT was the reason for Satan disobeying God's command and refusing to bow down before Adam? This was because of his feelings of superiority over Adam. He said 'I am better than Adam' (THE QURAN 38: 76). The angels on the other hand were free from such self-pride. They acknowledged that all greatness belongs to God alone and therefore they immediately submitted to God's command and bowed before a lesser creature. In this manner in the beginning of creation, God clearly demonstrated two different characters as examples for mankind. One, a satanic character and the other, an angelic character. All of Satan's efforts are towards this goal of making man follow him, but man must resist all temptations and strive to acquire the character of the angels.

When another person attains a greater share of wealth, fame, or power, man becomes jealous because he does not want to see others becoming greater than him. He refuses to accept the truth proclaimed by others; because doing so amounts to acknowledging another's superior ideology. He is enraged by criticism, because he feels that the critique challenges his superiority.

Consider why very few people are willing to support quiet, constructive work. But a movement to depose a ruler from office will gather large crowds in its support. The reason for this also is the same. In such politics, these people find gratification in refusing to acknowledge the ruler's authority. The principal weakness of man is his refusal to accept another's superiority. On the other hand the real virtue in God's eyes

is that man should eliminate the feelings of personal greatness and immediately submit to God's command even though it may amount to acknowledging someone lesser than him.

Those who stand up against a 'tyrant' ruler will find a large crowd in their support. Seeing the throngs of supporters these people are deluded into believing that the one who is in the seat of power is the only oppressor in the country. All others are examples of peace and justice. If this tyrant is removed from his seat of power then the floodgates of justice will open and winds of peace will blow from all corners. But this is a grave fallacy. The mob that assembles to support the movement challenging the powers of a 'tyrant' does not do so because of nationalist sentiments. Rather, these are always the result of anti-national sentiments which are a common feature amongst most communities.

Man should eliminate the feelings of personal greatness and immediately submit to God's command even though it may amount to acknowledging someone lesser than him.

To challenge the power of another is extremely appealing to such sentiments. When any leader takes up such a negative issue, these sentiments help in drawing the crowds towards his support. Because of these very same reasons the ease with which the unity that develops in the name of fighting against 'oppression' disappears as easily at the time of establishing 'justice'. In reality, rising with the sole purpose of bringing another down is due to anti-national feelings. Starting such movements only serves to create conflict instead of justice and reformation. Merely because such actions are resorted to in the name of religion, they cannot be called religious activities.

Satan does not have any power or authority over human beings. His method is one of false adornment of deeds (THE QURAN 15: 39). That is, adorning bad deeds so that they appear good. Satan uses this very method constantly to make man follow his path. Whenever justice calls for a person to 'bow down' to another; when truth demands one to accept the other's contention, Satan appears and begins instigating and influencing the person to follow his method instead of the angelic method. So that instead of 'bowing down' he spurns and rejects the other. All the evils of human society, within the family or outside of it, begin with a grievance. A person gets angered over a matter that

displeases him. In every such situation, there is a choice between pure truth on the one hand and the demands of egotism and injustice on the other. Man however chooses to ignore the call of truth and becomes an enemy to his brother.

**Man refuses to accept the truth proclaimed by others
because doing so amounts to acknowledging
another's superior ideology.**

This is the real trial of human beings in this world. All such occasions will determine who has adopted the path of angels and who has chosen the path of Satan; who has qualified for eternal paradise and who is deserving of eternal punishment. Whenever such occasions arise one attitude is in conformance with the truth. The other attitude is one that arises from feelings such as stubbornness, hatred, egotism, selfishness and revenge. In the life of a human being, this is a repetition of the same historical case that occurred at the time of the creation of Adam.

In such situations God sends His guidance through the Prophet's words as 'O believers submit to the truth'. On the other hand Satan instigates him, desiring that man follows the same egotistic method that he had adopted at the time of Adam's creation.

The entirety of human history is the story of this two-sided clash. Everyone — man or woman, rich or poor, ignorant or learned, leader or follower — is standing between these calls from both sides. To some, this struggle arises in the day-to-day issues of life and to some it may occur in the major aspects of life. Some face this trial either with their relative, neighbour, tenant, or a business partner and some may be tested against other communities or nations.

Each time there is a conflict between two persons on any issue the situation of this test arises. In such times, that person who adopts the method of submitting to the truth will be the companion of the angels and that person who adopts the method of pride and egotism joins the brotherhood of Satan. For one there is eternal paradise and for the other there is eternal punishment. □



DEFINITION OF A GREAT MIND

Avoiding Trivial Pursuits

FRANCOIS de La Rochefoucauld (1613–1680) was a noted French author of maxims and memoirs. He once said: 'Small minds are much distressed by little things. Great minds see them all but are not upset by them.'

Life is full of experiences. We have to live in a jungle which is full of all kinds of things, big and small; but, we have to be selective. We have to differentiate between things that are really great and things that have no importance in life. If you pursue everything that comes your way with equal enthusiasm, without setting any priorities; there will be no required focus, resulting in waste of your time and energy.

**If you board an express train, you will learn that
express trains always ignore small stations;
they stop only at large stations.**

We have to develop that wisdom which knows the difference between trivial matters and real issues. Without this sagacity, we cannot do anything worthwhile for ourselves or our society.

If you board an express train, you will learn that express trains always ignore small stations; they stop only at large stations. Adopt the character exhibited by the express train, and you will be able to reach your destination at the right time. □



Live like the flower

*Man should live in the world in the way that the flowers do —
giving off a sweet fragrance even to those who give
nothing but abuse and remaining unruffled
even in the face of violent attack.*

THE SPIRIT OF RAMAZAN

Patience and Self-Control

RAMAZAN — the month of fasting, is a special and blessed month for Muslims. It was in this month that revelations of the Quran began to be made to the Prophet Muhammad, marking the commencement of Prophet-hood.

Ramazan is a month of restraint and worship; of caring and thanksgiving; of repentance and piety. The multitude of benefits of *Ramazan* inspired the Prophet to exclaim: "Welcome to the one who purifies!"

Ramazan is a month of spiritual activism when believers endeavour to awaken their spirituality. It is a scheme to improve human beings. The main aim of fasting is to weaken a man's dependence on material things and strengthen his spiritual resolve, so that he may enter the higher realms of piety.

The Prophet Muhammad divided the month of *Ramazan* into three parts. He called the first ten days, "Blessings", the next ten days, "Forgiveness" and the last ten days, "Freedom from hell-fire". The Prophet also said, "The best days of this world are the last ten days [of *Ramazan*]."

The Month of Supplication

While giving commands regarding fasting, the Quran makes special mention of supplication, or *dua*.

When my servants ask you about Me, say that I am near.
I respond to the call of one who calls, whenever he calls to Me:
let them then respond to Me, and believe in Me,
so that they may be rightly guided.

THE QURAN 2: 186

Fasting by its very nature is an act of patience. Patience and forbearance are what lead man to the state of the heart which enables him to experience the feeling of nearness to God. It is only then that words worthy of divine acceptance come to one's lips. Patience is the ground on which the blessed tree of *dua* is grown.

Dua is not just a verbal act. In its essence, it is an act of the heart. This shows the relation between fasting and *dua*. Fasting increases the

spiritual capability of a man's heart and when this capability increases, the *dua* which ensues is genuine, heartfelt and more precious. Real fasting is that which induces real *dua*.

The Essence of *Ramazan*

According to Islam, man has been brought into this world so that he may be put to the test. He has been given freedom of will so that he may make use of this freedom in following the commandments of God willingly. To pass the test of life, man has to restrict the use of this freedom: he has to promote all that is good and try to eradicate all that is bad. Self-control is needed for this and fasting is a form of annual training to gain this self-control.

One has to have patience for this self-controlled life. Fasting inculcates in the individual this spirit of patience. On this ground, the month of fasting has been termed in a *Hadith* as the month of patience. The most important thing required to lead an Islamic life in this world is patience. For this very reason it was declared in the Quran:

Those who persevere patiently will be
requited without measure.

THE QURAN 39: 10

The same glad news of immeasurable reward for patience is also given in a *Hadith*. Abu Hurairah quoted the Prophet as having said "The good deeds of a person will receive tenfold to seven-hundredfold reward. But [God, the exalted has said] fasting is [observed] for Me and I will give reward [without measure] for it."

The Month of Contemplation

During *Ramazan* a dramatic change comes over the Islamic community. Believers are seen sitting inside mosques, reciting the Quran, immersed in prayer (*dua*) and the remembrance of God. They become more detached and contemplative. Their boisterous and frivolous urges are curbed.

Man is a social being: he is either encouraged or depressed by his surroundings. This sea change in communal life during *Ramazan* therefore affects the individual believer. He is encouraged by the change in his brethren and inclines more and more towards God. Believers turn away from common vices and peace and tranquillity reign in all the neighbourhoods and market places.

All these changes create a good environment for moral rectification. The bad become less so and the good become better.

Training in Humility

The Quran tells us that fasting is prescribed for you so that you may fear God (THE QURAN 2: 183). So what does it mean to fear God? Fearing God means that man should acknowledge his helplessness vis-a-vis God's greatness.

The feeling of helplessness is not simply a feeling but is rather the greatest motivational force in the life of a person. The feeling of helplessness relates to God, but when this feeling is produced in man in the real sense, it finds expression in human relations. One who becomes truly modest before God finds this same spirit making him modest before human beings.

The height of spirituality is a person's realization of his own helplessness and the supreme power of God. The biggest obstacle to a person's spiritual growth is his own ego and false pride which lead to his being distanced from God. The sole concern of a spiritually pure person is earning God's pleasure.

The Month of Sympathy

The Prophet said:

The month of *Ramazan* is the month of sympathy.

Fasting teaches a man what basic human requirements are. It tells him what hunger is and what thirst is. Those who do not get a chance to feel hungry or thirsty, experience these feelings during this month when they fast. For a few hours, the rich also come to live in the same conditions in which a poor man lives.

Ramazan is thus a process of rejuvenation of a believer. He can look forward to applying the lessons learnt during *Ramazan* to everyday life. A person who has fasted in the true spirit can count on drawing upon the reservoir of fortitude that he has built up, on the power of *dua*, of patience and gratefulness when he is faced with any trying situation. □



TRUE FACE

Two representations

IT is said that a Jewish man used to live in the neighbourhood of Sufi saint, Shaikh Bayazid Bustami. When Shaikh Bustami died, the Jew was asked, 'Why don't you accept Islam?'

The Jew replied, 'How can I accept Islam? If Islam is the religion that Shaikh Bayazid Bustami followed, then it is beyond my capabilities, and if Islam is the religion that I see among common Muslims, then I feel ashamed of such an Islam.'

What does a non-Muslim, like this Jew, see in the religion of a venerable Sufi like Shaikh Bustami? He sees a religion that calls for a person to renounce the world and live as an ascetic. He sees a person who prays all night, who completes reading the Quran several times each day and one who fasts for the whole year. He sees a person, who, when he goes on the Hajj, offers extra prayers at every step, who has memorized some words to remember God, repeating them several thousand times every day etc.

On the other hand, what is the 'Islam' that is prevalent among the masses? It is to take the name of Islam but to actually follow one's own whims and fancies. It is to prostrate before God and show arrogance and pride in front of others. It is to recite the Quran ritualistically, whilst ignoring its commands in life. It is to take great pride in Islam as a 'complete religion' and at the same time not to follow even a part of it. It is to champion the name of Islam to gain personal benefit and to sever one's connection with Islam when there appears to be none. It is to follow the cultural version of the religion and at the same time label it as the religion of God.

Islam is a simple and natural religion. It has an endless appeal for human nature. Due to this natural attraction, Islam spread far and wide in its early history. But in the later periods, different fabricated versions of Islam appeared which resulted in Islam losing its appeal to man.

Islam is a religion preserved in its original sources. In actual fact, even today it possesses a natural attraction. If all the artificial veils are lifted and Islam's true face is seen, it will be recognized as the voice of human nature. □

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION

Guidance from God

IT has been stated in the Quran that God sent His revelation to the bees (THE QURAN 16: 68). From this we know that in the animal kingdom there are certain features that are similar to the revelations of God to mankind. A study of these features will improve our understanding of the revelations of God.

The concept of revelation is the receiving of guidance from external sources of knowledge. A study of animal life clearly shows that such sources of guidance exist amongst them. We can find many characteristic features amongst animal life which can only be explained by acknowledging that they have received guidance from sources external to them. Migration amongst animals is one such characteristic feature. The migration of birds and fish specifically demonstrate signs that make the concepts of revelation and inspiration easily understandable to man.

Certain features in the animal kingdom show similarities to the revelations of God to mankind.

Here, we present the example of migratory birds. There are many birds that migrate from their homes to other favourable places and then after a specific period return back to their original abodes. This seasonal migration is done at specific times due to seasonal changes and in search of food.

Extensive studies have been carried out on the flight patterns of these migratory birds. The common theme that emerges from these studies is that the flight pattern of these migratory birds is not random or aimless. In the words of one expert ornithologist, 'these flight patterns demonstrate a very high level of geographical arrangement'. These journeys are as meaningful as any well planned and purposeful journey of man. Recent observational studies have further established that these migratory journeys are undertaken on 'well-defined flyways'.

This journey of the birds is extremely remarkable. A successful journey from one place to another for man becomes possible only after he has obtained knowledge of the path and the destination from external sources. These external sources for man can be the instructions from

others, or a study of the discoveries of others or the experience of oneself of unfamiliar conditions and situations. If man were to be cut off from the progressive and historic collective knowledge base and the interaction and exchange of ideas with others and the knowledge from the academic institutions of learning then he would be helpless and unable to make a journey or do anything.

The flight patterns of migratory birds demonstrate a very high level of geographical arrangement.

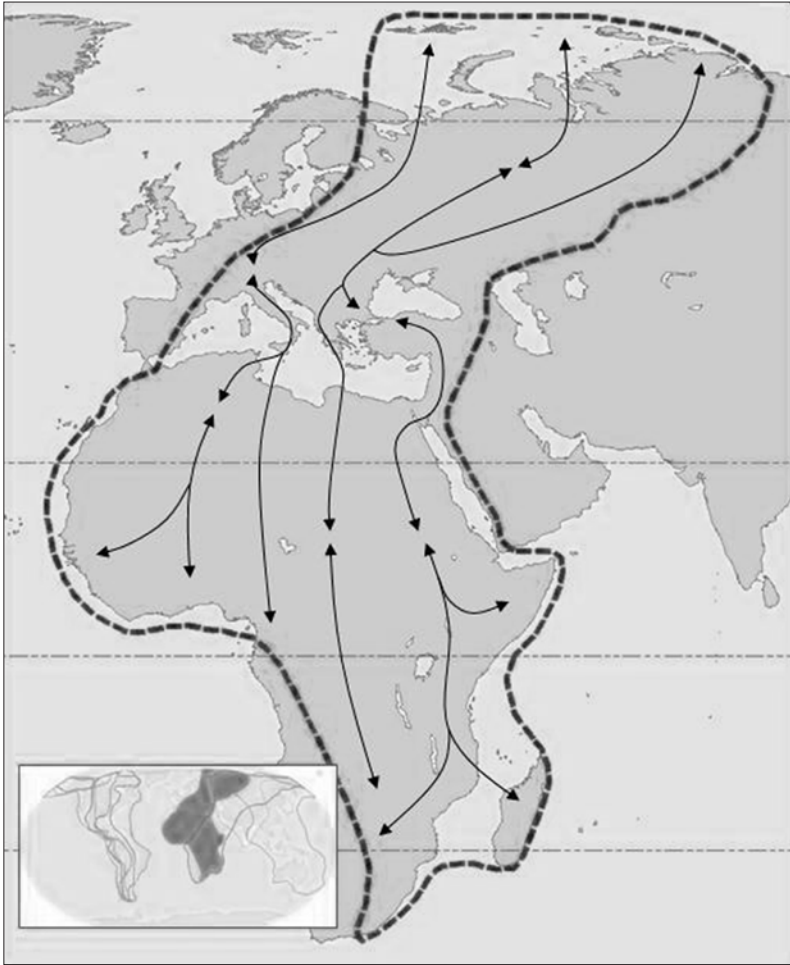
For instance, Muslim geographer Al-Idrisi (1099–1165 AD) got his initial concepts of the spherical shape of the earth from the works of Indian astronomers and mathematicians, possibly Aryabhata. The Latin translation of Al-Idrisi's geographical works amongst others influenced Christopher Columbus' voyages. Columbus' experiences advanced the knowledge of those explorers who came after him. This sequence progressed one after another until the knowledge of the earth's geography reached the advanced stage, which we find it in today.

Today when the captain of a ship sets sail across the oceans from one shore to the other or when the pilot of an airliner takes off from one airport to land at another, they are able to do so, utilizing the knowledge gained from thousands of years of human experience.

Birds do not have any recourse to such knowledge. They cannot exchange ideas with others in the manner that man does. Hence, they are unable to derive any benefit or knowledge from the experiences of their brethren. No bird can express its ideas in the form of a book so that other birds could read and benefit from it. Completely devoid of any such capability or facility they are still able to undertake journeys similar to those of man. They are able to successfully complete incredible journeys from one place to another distant place in the same manner as the remotely controlled journeys of a rocket in space.

An expert researcher on the migration of birds has written that, 'the migration flights of birds follow specific routes, sometimes quite well defined over long distances.' The migratory behaviour of birds has a unique regularity in Africa. For example, the standard-wing night jar which nests in a belt extending from Senegal in the west to Kenya in the east along the equatorial forest migrates northward to avoid the wet season.

A map tracing the intercontinental migratory flight route taken by the European White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) is shown below.



Mediterranean Black Sea Fact sheet [BirdLife International]

This flight-path between its nesting grounds in Europe and Russia and its wintering grounds in tropical Africa is known as the Mediterranean/ Black Sea Flyway. To avoid the harsh winters, these birds of Western Siberia and Central and Eastern Europe, migrate south in autumn to the warmer areas of Africa and Asia. In this long journey they have to negotiate the Ural Mountains and cross three seas — the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.

To achieve their goal they fly in a systematic order and direction which is most suitable for them. They choose their paths in such a manner that their flight over the sea is minimized. Maximizing their journeys over land allows them to take advantage of updrafts and thermals to maintain their soaring flight and rest on land as and when required.

Today when the captain of a ship sets sail across the oceans, he is able to do so, utilizing the knowledge gained from thousands of years of human experience.

As a result, migration through the Mediterranean basin is concentrated at a number of narrow straits and 'land bridges'. Many migrants cross from southern Italy, over the Messina Strait to Sicily and on into North Africa, some via Malta. Another group takes the path over the land mass of Greece that extends a long way into the Mediterranean and then onto Crete before crossing over into Africa at the narrowest part of the sea in this region.

Other birds circumvent the Mediterranean to the East, passing into Anatolia via the Turkish Straits of Bosphorous and Dardanelles. From here, they cross into the Middle East at the Belen Pass before heading down the Jordan Rift Valley to Egypt and the Red Sea. The majority of these birds enter into Africa through the Sinai Peninsula before heading south along the Nile valley.

Yet another group of migrant birds follow a completely western route over the Strait of Gibraltar where the sea crossing into Africa is only ten miles.

In the words of an ornithologist, 'these well-separated routes are a probably a result of a stork's aversion to long flights over water and the support they require over land'. This was the very same reason that the ancient mariners crossed the seas from the straits rather than from the open seas.

This migratory journey of birds is incredibly amazing. Today, when man undertakes such journeys, he can only do so with the help of many forms of knowledge. Birds however have neither the mental capability of man nor any other mechanism of utilising knowledge. Then how is it that these birds are successful in such complex journeys?

According to an expert ornithologist the answer to this is that 'birds have evolved a highly efficient means of travelling swiftly over long distances with great economy of energy'. But these are just words. While agreeing that behavioural and physiological adaptations necessary for migration are under genetic control, these experts acknowledge that migration has developed independently in many avian lineages.

Completely devoid of the capability to derive benefit from knowledge, migratory birds are able to undertake long journeys similar to those of man.

The truth is that birds do not demonstrate any evidence in their nature that proves that they have developed this capability through the process of evolution. If you ponder over this phenomenon, there can be only two possible hypotheses: One, that these birds have a complete knowledge of the geography of both the land and sea masses of the continents of Europe, Africa and Asia. However, no study has established this as a fact. According to all our available information, birds on their own have no knowledge of any kind of geographical facts. In support of this hypothesis, whatever is written or spoken is without any foundation and is only a supposition which has no evidence in factual knowledge.

The second possible hypothesis — is that some external power with complete geographic knowledge is helping these birds, using some sort of hidden remote control. This power is guiding the birds in a manner similar to that used in the radio-communication control of unmanned spacecraft. This second hypothesis is a more credible hypothesis. In reality, this matter confirms and establishes as true the concept known in divine religions as 'revelation'.

There are such instances in the animal kingdom that cannot be understood unless it is accepted that these animals are in receipt of guidance from an external treasure house of knowledge. This in religious terms is referred to as revelation. A study of animal life makes it possible for us to understand the concept of revelation. Credible circumstantial evidence in favour of a hypothesis is sufficient to establish its occurrence and veracity.

The concept of revelation means that God sends His guidance to man in an unseen manner. This guidance tells man what he must do and what he should refrain from. This connection of revelation between

God and man (Prophet) is unseen; hence some people refuse to believe in it.

In other creation, for example a study of the migratory journeys of birds shows that there exists such guidance similar to revelation. Migration with such precision is an instance that makes credible the concept of revelation. No other theory can be propounded to explain these journeys other than that it be acknowledged that they are in receipt of hidden guidance from an external source. When the birds themselves do not possess these known faculties then what else can be said other than that this guidance is external to them.

Some external power with complete geographic knowledge is helping these birds, using some sort of hidden remote control.

The proclamation of the Prophet that he has received guidance from God in the form of revelation is without doubt a remarkable claim. But, such hidden guidance is not strange in this present world. There are other instances in this world that verify that such guidance is evident. The case of migratory birds that has been briefly mentioned in this article is just one example amongst many others in this world. □



Big Bird of the Storm

*'The elephant walks on without being disturbed by barking dogs'.
This is the best illustration of one who has the capacity for
'big bird thinking'. Life is full of storms, full of barking,
full of untoward situations. You have only two
options: either to waste your time and energy
by constantly stooping to reactionary
behaviour or to ignore all undesirable
situations and try to live like the
elephant in the adage. Elephant-
style living is the only
successful way to live
in this world.*

ZAKAT: THE PRESCRIBED CHARITY

Social Welfare

ZAKAT, or the alms-tax, is one of the five basic tenets of Islam. Its payment is obligatory, at the minimum fixed rate of 2.5% per annum, on all wealth that is subject to growth. It takes the form of the giving of alms out of one's own private means. This amount is given in the name of God and is to be spent on worthy religious causes and on meeting the needs of the poor and the helpless.

Zakat is an annual reminder to man that everything he possesses belongs to God, and that nothing should, therefore, be withheld from Him.

Man himself plays only a very small part in obtaining whatever he owns in this world. Were he not to have the benefit of God's endless bounty, he would neither be able to grow grain, raise cattle, set up industries nor accomplish any other work of a useful nature. The system of life created for him by God, fulfilling all of his requirements from those of his inner being to those of his external environment, is one of greatest perfection. Were God to withdraw even a single one of His blessings, all man's schemes would lie in ruins and all his efforts would be in vain. All productivity would grind to a halt, and life itself would come to a standstill.

Society should be so ordered that people fortunately placed in life come to the assistance of their less fortunate brothers.

The observance of *Zakat* is a way of acknowledging this fact of life. Islam desires that private wealth should be considered as belonging to God, and therefore should be spent in the way as ordained by God.

In doing so, no one should consider that he is conferring a great favour upon those less well-endowed than himself, and should in no way be condescending to the recipients of his charity. When a man gives alms to others, he should do so with the knowledge that they have a rightful share in his wealth, for this is as God has ordained. He is doing no more than giving others their due. But when he gives, he can feel reassured that he himself will be given succour by his Maker on the Day

of Judgment. In giving to others, he knows for certain that he will not be denied by God at the Last Reckoning.

One's Responsibilities To Others

Zakat gives a clear indication of what one's responsibilities to others should be. Everyone is required to recognize the rights of others, just as everyone is expected to sympathize with those afflicted by adversity. This feeling should be so well developed that one has no hesitancy about sharing one's possessions with others, or coming to their assistance, even when it is clear that nothing can be expected in return. Even where there are no ties of friendship, one should be a well-wisher of others and guard their honour as if it were one's own.

Gifts From God

Zakat brings the realization that all of one's possessions are gifts from God and makes one more keenly aware of the virtues of devotion to God. In the light of such awareness, one cannot remain insensitive to the needs of the society in which one lives. *Zakat* is a perennial reminder that a selfish stance is a wrong stance, and that others must be given their rightful share of our earnings.

***Zakat* is in the nature of an annual reminder to man that everything he possesses belongs to God.**

One unfortunate aspect of human relationships is that people tend to give to others only when they hope to gain something in return. Money, they feel, should be returned with interest. When such an understanding becomes a factor in our social organization, exploitation becomes rampant; everyone is ready to plunder everyone else. This results in society falling prey to oppression and disorder.

No one — no matter whether they are rich or poor — can be at peace in a society stricken with this malaise. Society should be so ordered that people fortunately placed in life come to the assistance of their less fortunate brothers, in the knowledge that they will ultimately be rewarded by God. Believers have the assurance of God that if they give to others, whatever they give will be returned to them many times over in the next world; their trust in God's promise is complete. In a society ordered in this way, feelings of antagonism and indifference are not allowed to develop; people are not bent on exploiting one

another. There is never an atmosphere of mutual resentment and dissatisfaction, for everyone lives in peace with his neighbour. Such a society, in short, is a haven of contentment and well-being.

In its external form then, *Zakat* is an annual tax. But in its essence, it is the principle on which God and his creatures have a right to a share in one's property.

The *Ramazan* Charity

Zakat-al-Fitr is specifically related to the month of fasting and is given before the special *Eid* prayer. The reason for this *Zakat* is two-fold.

According to a *Hadith* reported by Ibn 'Abbas: The Prophet made *Zakat-al-Fitr* obligatory for the fasting person to keep him from idle talk and indecent conversation and to provide food for the needy. Discharging the duty before the prayer is an accepted *Zakat* while discharging it after the prayer is just *sadaqah* (voluntary charity).

In its external form then, *Zakat* is an annual tax. But, in essence it is the principle on which God and his creatures have a right to a share in one's property.

Zakat-al-Fitr perfects the fast of *Ramazan* and purifies the fast of any indecent act or speech. It is obligatory on all Muslims: young, old, male and female. Every Muslim who possesses over and above what is needed as basic food for the duration of one day and night must pay *Zakat-al-Fitr* for himself and his dependants and distribute it amongst the poor and needy. The earlier it is given the easier it is for them to make arrangements, so that they may also take part in the celebrations of *Eid* without any difficulties. □



Reality

Do not look at things from the point of view of personal desires and whims, but from the point of view of reality.

TOUCH ME NOT

Emotions and Egos

THERE is a small plant found in shady areas. Its scientific name is *Mimosa pudica*. On account of its sensitive nature it is popularly called 'touch-me-not'. Its leaves fold inward and droop when touched, and they re-open on their own minutes later.

This is a phenomenon of nature. It is an illustration of how to successfully tackle men and women. By nature, women are emotional and men are egotistic. Allowance must be given to both the sexes in this matter. Don't meddle with women's emotions, and you can successfully deal with them. Similarly, don't threaten men's ego. This is the basic formula for dealing with the two.

If one is sensitive to this aspect of women and men, one will never have a bitter experience — both at home and outside, and can be assured of a normalcy in every situation.

Generally, people live in tension. In majority of the cases, the reason is improper handling of men or women. Intentionally or unintentionally, people often ruffle the emotions of a woman or the ego of a man, and it is this improper handling that leads to breakdown. The result is that both parties unnecessarily develop tension.

For example, if a man returns late from the office, and his wife becomes angry, he shouldn't get provoked, rather he should reply with a smile: "I am hungry right now, let us eat something and we'll talk about this later." On the other hand, if a woman insists on going shopping, while her husband doesn't want to do so, then in such a case the husband should not refuse downright. He should say: "Yours is a good idea, but not for today. I will abide by your suggestion tomorrow." This is the easiest way to settle the matter between both the parties.

A tension-free mind is the greatest need for all of us. The only solution is to learn the art of management. The art of management only requires a few words, while tension swallows up your peace of mind as well as your physical health. □



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF *IFTAR*

True Perspective

I*FTAR* is an Arabic word, which literally means 'to break'. In the Islamic context, it means to break the fast, to eat and drink in the evening after the daylong fast. *Iftar* is not simply a matter of having dinner. It has great significance. It is a combination of spiritual and physical food.

According to Islamic teachings, there are five pillars of Islam. One of these pillars is fasting during *Ramazan*, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Fasting begins from dawn and ends at sunset. One can take food before dawn, after which one is required to maintain a total fast until sunset. After sunset, one is allowed to eat and drink according to one's choice. Taking food before dawn is called *sehri*. Taking food after sunset is called *iftar*.

Iftar is like dinner, but it is a dinner combined with a spiritual experience. It is like a compulsory form of training. When one experiences hunger in the daytime, one discovers the importance of food and water which give us energy. Indeed, one discovers the fact that one cannot live without food and water. And, after this experience, when a person takes food and water in the evening, he is filled with gratitude to God Almighty, who not only created him, but also provided him with all the basic needs, essential for his continuing existence.

***Iftar* not only gives physical energy, but also becomes a source of spiritual development.**

This spiritual experience also inculcates in his mind the importance of philanthropy. He becomes more sensitive towards those people who are unable to meet their needs. This feeling gives him an incentive to give assistance to such people.

In this sense, *iftar* is a source of spiritual learning. The *iftar* time becomes a time of inspiration. It is the moment when physical food is converted into spiritual food. *Iftar* not only gives physical energy, but also becomes a source of spiritual development.

According to Islamic teachings, *iftar* should be a simple meal and not a lavish affair. Simplicity saves us from distraction and will make us

concentrate on the spiritual aspect of fasting. On the other hand, if the *iftar* takes the form of a lavish affair, all attention will focus on the taste and the physical aspects, and the spiritual benefits will be lost. In fact, a lavish *iftar* kills the true spirit of fasting. The Prophet of Islam and his Companions always used to take simple food at the time of *iftar*.

Iftar ostensibly ends the time of fasting, but treating it as just that would be an underestimation. For the spiritually awakened mind, it is like a new beginning towards spiritual upliftment. Such a person will analyse the experiences of the day and try to learn lessons from them.

***Iftar* gives a glimpse of the boundless rewards that await man in the world Hereafter.**

These days, organizing *iftar* parties has become a tradition. But this party should not be like any other party. Such a party should give us an opportunity for spiritual exchange, turning our individual experience into a social experience.

It is reported that the Prophet of Islam used to say at the time of *iftar*, 'Thirst has been quenched, and hunger is no more, and, God willing, God will bless us with His reward.' This shows that *iftar* invokes the spirit of prayer. It gives us an opportunity to say, 'O God, I have fulfilled my duty and now I hope You will not deprive me of Your higher blessings.'

During the fast, the pangs of hunger and thirst make a man feel vulnerable and he turns towards God with renewed zeal. He cries out, 'God, I have obeyed Your one command, there are many I could not. I kept one day's fast, but I failed on several other occasions. I seek Your special blessings.'

When a sincere prayer like this is uttered, God turns His special attention to it, and the rewards are boundless. Man prays in this world and the reward is given in the world Hereafter. But fasting is an exception for which a taste of the reward is given in this world itself. *Iftar* gives a glimpse of the boundless rewards that await man in the world Hereafter. ◻



THE CULTURE OF PEACE

Teachings of Islam

WHAT is Peace? Some scholars define peace as the absence of war. This definition is, from the dictionary or literal point of view, correct. If a society is free from violence and war, the situation that prevails may be termed as 'peace'. Whenever there is no war or violence between individuals or groups, a state of peace begins to emerge on its own.

However, for peace to be established in any society, it is not enough that it has succeeded in ending violence or war. To define peace as the absence of violence or war is a limited definition of peace. A better way of defining peace is on the basis of the positive attributes that characterise peace. Accordingly, a society can be said to enjoy peace if positive and constructive thought and activity flourish among its members.

The establishment of peace in a society can be likened to the lifting of the gates of a dam, leading to a river being filled with plenty of water. Life is like a flowing river that seeks to surge ahead, driven by its own inner force. It stops its journey only when some artificial barrier is placed in its path. In the absence of such a barrier, life flourishes in all its dimensions, impelled by Nature.

A society can be said to enjoy peace if positive and constructive thought and activity flourish among its members.

Violence and war are barriers that seek to block the natural flow of life. In contrast, peace opens up all the barriers that seek to impede life's onward journey.

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

Peace is the Religion of the Universe

The Quran tells us:

The sun cannot overtake the moon, nor can the night
outpace the day; each floats in [its own] orbit.

THE QURAN 36: 40

Referring to an astronomical phenomenon, this Quranic verse tells us about the principle on which the system of the entire universe is based. And this is the principle of peace. There are innumerable entities in the cosmos, and all of them are in constant motion. Yet, they do not clash with each other. Every entity in the cosmos carries on doing its own work in its own orbit. None interferes in the sphere of the others. This is why they never clash with each other.

This 'culture of peace' is also what human beings should imbibe. They should base their lives on precisely the same universal principle that conforms to the rest of the cosmos. This means they must abandon the path of violence and confrontation and tread the path of peace.

The highest attribute of the God who has sent the Quran is mercy, and this book is an expression of His mercy.

The culture of the cosmos is a 'culture of peace'. It is because of this peace that the cosmos has been functioning for millions of years and yet has not witnessed any confrontation that has impaired its functioning. If a 'culture of violence' had pervaded the cosmos, by now it would have been devastated, and there would have been no possibility for human life to exist.

The same Creator who made the rest of the cosmos has created us human beings, too. The Creator wants that human beings should adopt the very same 'peace culture' that He has established throughout the rest of the vast cosmos. The only difference is that this 'peace culture' prevails in the rest of the cosmos on the basis of Nature, while humans are independent creatures and have free will. And so, God wishes that they should freely decide to adopt this 'peace culture' in their lives.

The Quran, a Book of Peace

The Quran is, without doubt, a book of peace. It is not a book of violence

and war. All the statements of the Quran are, directly or indirectly, related to peace. The very first phrase in the Quran is: *Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim*, which means, 'In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.' In other words, the highest attribute of the God who has sent this book is mercy, and this book is an expression of this attribute of His mercy.

All the verses of the Quran are, directly or indirectly, based on peace. There are 6,666 verses in the Quran. Of these, hardly 40 are about commandments of *qital* or war — in other words, less than 1 per cent. In fact, they amount to just around 0.6 per cent of the total number of verses.

The culture of the cosmos is a 'culture of peace'.

Those who regard the Quran as God's Book can be considered to be *momins* or true believers only when, abiding by the teachings of the Quran, they become fully and completely peace-loving. Under no conditions whatsoever should they take to the path of violence.

In this regard, one needs to stress the need for people to distinguish between Islam, on one hand, and Muslims, on the other. They must not label the actions or behaviour of Muslims as 'Islamic'. The fact is that the behaviour of Muslims must be judged on the basis of Islam; and not Islam sought to be understood on the basis of Muslim behaviour. Islam is an ideology. A person can be truly considered to be a Muslim only if he follows the teachings of Islam. Those who do not follow Islam's teachings do not have anything to do with Islam, even if they claim to be its champions.

Peace versus Violence

Peace is a well-planned effort or action, while violence is a passion-driven, aggressive action. A peace-loving person thinks first and then acts. On the contrary, a violence-loving person first acts and then thinks, if at all. Peaceful action is based on hope, in the beginning as well as at the end, while violent action is based on false hopes in the beginning and frustration in the end.

A peace-loving person is established in truth. A violence-loving person is established in falsehood. Peace and positive constructive work go hand-in-hand, while violence is wholly destructive. Peace ends in

success, and violence in utter failure. Peaceful action abides by the law, while violent action is lawlessness.

A peace-loving person overlooks problems and uses the opportunities available, while a violence-loving person ignores the opportunities available and gets entangled in a useless battle against problems. The path of peace cultivates a garden bursting with flowers, while the path of violence creates a thorny jungle of hatred and enmity.

In peace, one fulfils the obligations one owes to God as well as those one owes to God's creatures, including other human beings. Violence, on the other hand, is a violation of the 'rights of God' as well as the rights of people. If peace is heaven, then violence, in comparison, is sheer hell. Choosing peace is making the right choice. On the other hand, if one chooses war, it proves that he has failed in the test of making a choice.

The behaviour of Muslims must be judged on the basis of Islam; and not Islam sought to be understood on the basis of Muslim behaviour.

In this world, there are many things that are not desirable, but they exist for the purpose of testing us — for instance, alcohol. Alcohol exists not so that people should drink it, but, rather, so that they should avoid it and thereby prove that they can distinguish between good and bad. The same thing holds for war, too. War is something that can be resorted to, but the right thing for human beings to do is to desist from it.

In the ancient past, considering the then prevailing conditions, permission was given for defensive war. This permission was in accordance with the law of necessity. But now, in the changed conditions of today, this necessity no longer exists. And that is why there is now no need at all for war.

Reconciliation is Best

The Quran (4: 128) describes a particular natural law in the following words: 'Reconciliation is best' (*as-sulh khair*). The word *sulh* means reconciliation. In the event of a conflict between two parties, they can engage in violent confrontation. But there is another method they can choose: to immediately come to an agreement and end their conflict.

This is what reconciliation is about.

It is very rare for this sort of reconciliation to be equally in accordance with the desires of both parties. In most cases, this reconciliation happens on a unilateral basis. That is to say, one of the two parties sets aside its desires and agrees to settle the dispute according to the desires of the other party.

Why is this sort of unilateral reconciliation termed as 'best'? The reason for this is because a situation of conflict puts a halt to constructive activity. The benefit of agreeing to reconciliation is that one is thereby spared the need to waste one's time, strength and resources on useless confrontation and one can focus on constructive efforts instead. A course of action that is opposed to reconciliation is always and inevitably a course of destruction. The method of reconciliation is always, and in every case, a beneficial one.

Those who do not follow Islam's teachings do not have anything to do with Islam, even if they claim to be its champions.

History is witness to the fact that whenever people have attained any kind of success following conflict, it has only been after adopting the method of reconciliation. Not a single person has ever achieved any real success through confrontation and fighting. The importance of reconciliation lies in the fact that it provides an opportunity to fully exercise one's right to use the available opportunities. On the other hand, the path of confrontation leads one to waste one's energies in trying to destroy others; as a result of which, one can engage in no constructive work whatsoever. The secret of success lies in stabilising and building up oneself, and definitely not in the destruction of imaginary enemies.

No to 'Corruption in the Land'

The Quran describes a certain form of behaviour in the following words:

When they are told, 'Do not cause corruption in the land,'
they say, 'We are only promoters of peace,' [...]

THE QURAN 2: 11

This Quranic verse refers to people who, on the face of it, are engaged

in some reformist efforts but whose method is not proper. Their method is such that, in actual practice, it causes *fasad*, or 'corruption' in the land. Here, 'corruption in the land' means that as a result of their method, people start clashing with each other. Their method leads to stirring up hatred between people, weakening their moral sensibilities and engendering negative thinking. All these are forms of *fasad fil ardh* or 'corruption in the land' which this Quranic verse talks about, because they destroy social peace, leading to violence and confrontation.

All activities undertaken in the name of reform that disturb social peace and cause loss of life and property are wrong.

From this Quranic teaching we learn that for an action to be considered proper, it is not enough that it appears to have started for a good cause. In addition to this, it is necessary to keep in mind the sort of results activities undertaken in the name of reform produce. If these activities give birth to hatred, tension, violence and so on and so forth amongst people, then, despite claiming to be reformist activities they are definitely not so. Rather, they are destructive activities, leading to *fasad* or 'corruption' in the land. Those who engage in such activities should be considered criminals and enemies of humanity, and certainly not reformers or servants of humanity.

An action can be considered a genuine reformist effort only if it is carried out within the limits of peace and humaneness. All activities undertaken in the name of reform that disturb social peace and cause loss of life and property are wrong. Efforts in the name of reform must also necessarily bring about true reform in terms of their results. If, instead, they result in what the Quran refers to as *fasad* or 'corruption' in the land, then they are actually themselves a form of *fasad*, irrespective of the beautiful words used to describe them.

Ending Conspiracies

The Quran tells us:

If you persevere and fear God, their designs will
never harm you in the least.

THE QURAN 3: 120

This Quranic verse indicates a very important fact of life. The real issue

for individuals or groups is not whether they might have enemies who are conspiring against them. Rather, it is whether or not they have sufficient *sabr* or patience and have adopted the necessary precautionary measures to cause any conspiracies against them to fail.

If conspiracies can be likened to the rain, patience and God consciousness are like a strong roof. Rain is a problem only for those who have not bothered to make a firm roof over their heads.

Restrain yourselves from committing excesses (*ghulu*) in religion.

The world runs on the principle of competition. And that is why it is but natural that sometimes rivalries will develop between individuals and groups, which may later assume the form of conspiracies against each other. Whenever something like this happens, one should consider it not as an enemy's conspiracy but, rather, as an expression of a basic law of Nature. To think of a conspiracy as an action of an enemy takes one towards violence. In contrast, if one takes it to be a result of a basic law of Nature, one will nurture a way of thinking that will lead one to take wise measures to avoid falling prey to such conspiracies — just as a wise man does not protest against the rain; but rather, builds a roof over his house to save himself from getting wet.

No To Extremism

The Quran tells us:

Do not go to extremes in your religion.

THE QURAN 4: 171

The same point is made in a *Hadith* report, according to which the Prophet declared:

'You should restrain yourselves from committing excesses (*ghulu*) in religion. For it was due to their having gone to extremes in religion that the previous communities were destroyed.'

This *Hadith* is recorded in the collections by Al-Nasai and Ibn Majah, and in the *Musnad* of Imam Ahmad.

The word *ghulu* means extremism. *Ghulu* or extremism in every matter is wrong. It is the very antithesis of the essential spirit of religion. *Ghulu* can easily escalate into violence and confrontation. Those who have fallen prey to the psychological malady of *ghulu* refuse to accept moderation. They scorn peace and moderation, thinking them to be inferior, and that is why they are very easily attracted to violence. In the name of attaining some lofty objective, they unleash deadly violence.

The opposite of *ghulu* or extremism is moderation. If you are moderate in your thinking, you will think in terms of peace. All your efforts will be through peaceful means. Moderation and peace are very closely interlinked. Where there is moderation, there will be peace. Likewise, where there is peace, there will be moderation.

In contrast, the *ghulu*-psyche always drags one towards extremism. And extremism very easily turns into violence and confrontation. *Ghulu* and violence are thus very closely linked. This is why *ghulu* in religion is looked at with great disfavour in Islam. Inclination towards *ghulu* is another name for addiction to violence. And abstaining from *ghulu* is another name for cherishing moderation. □

.....to be continued.



Keep your mind alive forever

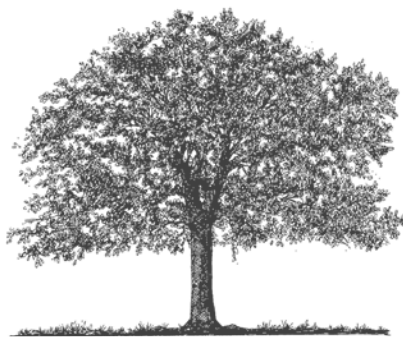
*It is a fact that intellectual discovery is the most thrilling experience.
A discovery made by Archimedes while he was bathing gave
him such a thrill that he leapt out of his bath,
shouting: Eureka! Eureka!*

*And such a thrill is great food
for the intellect.*

*This process staves off intellectual starvation,
thus making the discoverer permanently
alive and young.*

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



QUALITATIVE OR QUANTITATIVE ISLAM

MANY Muslim groups and organizations have mushroomed in the present age. Several differences can be found between them, but one thing is common to all. That is, in one way or another every one of them has given a quantitative interpretation of Islam. In place of a qualitative interpretation of the divine religion, a quantitative interpretation has created misguidance and caused a great loss in the name of religion.

In a qualitative interpretation of Islam man is always dissatisfied with his religiosity. This is because piety and fear of God are personal matters of the heart. They cannot be quantified and measured. But in the form-based interpretation religiosity becomes a quantified and measurable object. This results in fearlessness in man. Having quantified his deeds, he feels that he has complied with what was expected of him and therefore becomes complacent. Spirit-based or qualitative thinking creates a fear of God whereas form-based or quantitative thinking creates a false sense of conviction and makes man fearless of God.

The Companions of the Prophet always remained in a state of fear

that their deeds were not good enough and strived to do better and more. This was because, to them religion was an internal matter of the heart that could not be measured or described in mathematical terms. Present day Muslims, on the other hand, do not fear God due to their form-based mind set and assume that as long as they are complying with the required number of rituals they have done their duty; therefore, their affairs are in perfect order.

Spirit based or qualitative thinking creates a fear of God whereas form-based quantitative thinking creates a false sense of conviction making man fearless of God.

There are many interpretations of religion that are based on its external manifestations such as a political interpretation, an interpretation based on social issues, an interpretation based on intercession, an interpretation based on being the '*khair ummat*' (best of the communities) etc.

All of the aforementioned are form-based interpretations of religion. The most important part of religion is its inner content. Therefore all such interpretations of religion which are based on form and external rituals will be undoubtedly invalid. Following such ritualistic forms of religion is an innovation and cannot be considered as following the religion sent by God and professed by the Prophet. ❑



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FASTING AND FEASTING

Semblance of The World And The Hereafter

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

Hadith – Sahih Muslim.

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

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

Fasting gives us an awareness of the patience and struggle of this life.

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

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

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

A true believer, having undergone the period of fasting in a most

sincere manner, gets the feeling of the Hereafter as soon as the month of *Ramazan* is over and the celebrations for *Eid* are under way. He feels as if he is being entertained as a guest by God Himself. From the depths of his being, his heart cries out:

Oh God, as you have helped me carry out the injunctions of fasting and at the culmination of the month have bestowed on me the joys of *Eid*, accept this life of mine as one spent in fasting and bestow on me the delights of Paradise. Write me down amongst the list of persons who have been bestowed the life of Paradise by opening thy gates of mercy.

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

The reality of this life can be known through the experience of fasting. In contrast, *Iftar* or *Eid* reminds us of the joys and pleasures of the Hereafter.

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

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



DEVOTION TO GOD

Tawheed and Shirk

MAN requires a support system for his subsistence in this world. Every man lives in the glory of something or the other. A believer is one who lives in the glory of God alone. An unbeliever lives in the glory of things other than God.

In ancient times, man lived in the glory of heavenly bodies such as the sun and the moon. In the present materialistic world, man lives in the glory of some contrived material power. Some have glorified wealth and pursue it to find the answer to their inner quest. Some others are engrossed in the worship of their heroes and leaders, living in someone else's glory. In this way they derive satisfaction for their natural urge of relying on a sustainer that will support their existence.

A believer is one who lives in the glory of God alone.

All these are different forms of *shirk*, or associating others with God. These are artificial solutions to a natural quest of man. A *momin* or a true believer is one who finds the true answer to this natural quest. He does not get caught in the allure of external appearances; instead, he passes them by and reaches the ultimate goal.

A *momin* is not deceived by the glitz and glamour of the world. To him, all these things are mere creations. He finds them in the same powerless position as himself. A *momin* does not stop at any of these things but continues his journey until he reaches God. He passes by all of creation to reach the Creator.

A *momin* is one who considers everything that belongs to him as given to him by God. He expresses his utter helplessness to God. In the beauty of the earth, he finds the beauty of God. The glory of the Universe makes him realize the glory of God. All greatness to him is only a reflection of the greatness of God. He loses himself in the glory of God, finding joy in praising and glorifying the Lord.

Faith in God refers to discovering the Unseen in the perceived; to uncover the truth hidden in appearances. One who develops this kind of vision finds the glory of God all around him. He makes God alone his everything. He is so engrossed in the glory of God that he cannot see any other glory, in himself or in anybody else. □

RAMAZAN AND EID-UL-FITR

Deeds and Reward

A portion of an authentic *Hadith* reported by Abu Hurairah and recorded in Musnad Ahmed is as follows:

During the last night of *Ramazan*, the sins of all the believers who have been fasting are forgiven.

It was asked, 'O Prophet of God, Is this night the one known as the 'night of power'?'

The Prophet replied, 'No, but as soon as the deed is done, the reward for the deed is immediately bestowed'.

ACCORDING to this *Hadith*, on the last night of *Ramazan*, those amongst the followers of the Prophet who have fasted in the true spirit will be rewarded for their deeds, and this will be noted in their records. This night of *Ramazan* is referred to in other *Hadith* literature as the 'night of reward' (al-Bayhaqi). God rewards His believers for every good deed. Due to the special significance of worship during *Ramazan*, this reward has been specifically mentioned by the Prophet.

In reality, those who have spent the month of *Ramazan* in its true spirit can never even contemplate that they can spend the last night of *Ramazan* in frivolous activity.

It has been generally noted that when the month of *Ramazan* is completed, the night before *Eid* is spent by most people in careless indulgence and entertainment. They throng shopping centres and market places. The above *Hadith* is a warning against all such frivolities.

The 'night of reward' is best utilised in more prayer and supplication, in introspection of the whole month of *Ramazan* that has just passed and in making fresh resolutions for the new year to come. To spend this night in frivolous shopping and entertainment is to ignore its importance and lose this great opportunity to earn rewards. In reality, those who have spent the month of *Ramazan* in its true spirit can never even contemplate that they can spend the last night of *Ramazan* in frivolous activity. To such people, this last night will be one of prayer and supplication and not of negligence or entertainment.

Another authentic *Hadith* regarding *Ramazan* has been reported by Anas ibn Malik. One part of this *Hadith* is:

When the day of *Eid-ul-Fitr* dawns on them, then God is pleased and proclaims to the angels, 'O my angels, What is the reward for the doer who has completed his deed? The angels reply, 'Our Lord, such a person should be given the complete reward for the deed done'.

After the end of *Ramazan*, the day of *Eid-ul-Fitr* appears with glad tidings, with tidings of everlasting happiness as reward. This reward is for those believers of God who have proved themselves deserving of it by reviving the true spirit of all kinds of good deeds during the month of *Ramazan*. □



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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FASTING AND LIFE

Brakes on Desires

FASTING in the month of *Ramazan* is not just a kind of annual custom. It is a living creative process. Fasting is related to the entire life of a human being, the aim of which is to make man's life a fasting-oriented life.

The reality of fasting is to put a curb on desires. In one *Hadith*, this is referred to as 'renouncing one's desires'. Food and water are essential needs of man. Sleep and rest are also needs of man. During the month of fasting there are restrictions to these essential needs by compulsion. This training inculcates in man the capability to restrain his desires willingly so that he consciously leads a disciplined life.

The aim of fasting is for man to apply a brake on his desires so that he may carry out the desirable deeds in this world.

There is a 50:50 ratio in all the actions man has to perform in life i.e. 50% of the actions require abstaining from something and the other 50% acting on something. In the Islamic creed, 'There is no other God' comes before, 'there is one God'.

The same ratio of negative and positive aspect is found in all the religious acts. In this respect, the aim of fasting is for man to apply a brake on his desires so that he may carry out the desirable deeds in this world.

Symbolically speaking, the position of fasting in human life is akin to the brakes in an engine. Brakes keep the engine of a vehicle in control so that the journey can be completed successfully. If there is no brake in the engine, the vehicle will not be able to function effectively.

The same is the case of fasting in the life of a believer. Man should accord the place of brakes to fasting in his life so that he may travel successfully on the path of God. The fasting of that person is true for whom fasting is like applying brakes on the things forbidden by God. □

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

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

Qaf. By the glorious Quran! Indeed, they are astonished that a warner should have come to them from among themselves. So these deniers of the truth say, 'This is indeed a strange thing, to come back to life after we have died and become dust? That is most improbable!' We know very well what the earth takes away from them: We hold a book which records all things. But they denied the truth when it came to them, so they are in a state of confusion. (50: 1-5)

The history of the prophets shows that their contemporaries were not ready to accept them. It was only in later times that people readily accepted their status as prophets.

The reason for this is that the prophet appears to his contemporaries as 'a person just like themselves'. They find it surprising that one whom they have always treated as their equal should suddenly become great and start advising them. But, as time passes, a history of greatness becomes attached to the prophet's name. So, he starts appearing to succeeding generations as a 'person greater than themselves.' That is why, in later periods people did not find it difficult to accept the prophetic status of a prophet. In other words, to the people of the early days, the prophet was a controversial figure, while to the people of later times he acquired the aura of an established personage. The people of the earlier period had to undertake a journey in consciousness in order to fill the gap between them and the prophet, while in the later period, this gap would have been filled by history itself.

In the eyes of those who entertain doubts about the prophet-hood of God's messenger, everything about him becomes doubtful — even those beliefs that are already enshrined in tradition. However, nothing

can act as a shield or an excuse for the doubters. If the rejecters of the prophet were simply to consider the inimitable literary majesty of his book, they would be compelled to accept as a prophet the one who brought that book.

Have they not observed the sky above them and marked how We have built it and adorned it, leaving no flaws in it; We spread out the earth and set upon it solid mountains and We brought forth from it all kinds of delightful plants, as a lesson and reminder for every human being who turns to God; and We have sent down from the sky blessed water with which We have brought forth gardens and grain to be harvested, and tall palm-trees with their thickly-clustered dates, as a provision for human beings; and by [all] this We bring dead land to life. Such shall be the Resurrection. (50: 6-11)

The meaningfulness of the universe, its creative wisdom, its being free of shortcomings, and its being consistent with human needs compel every thinking and rational man to accept the sublimity of creation, and one who gives serious consideration to the system of the universe, will find the Creator in His creations. He will see a glimpse of the other world (the Hereafter) in this world, because, in fact, the world of the Hereafter is essentially another, more superior form of the present world.

Before them, the people of Noah and the people of Rass denied this truth; and so did the people of Thamud. And the tribe of 'Ad, and Pharaoh, and the brethren of Lot, and the dwellers of the Wood, and the people of Tubba': every one denied their messengers, and so My warning came true. Were We then worn out by the first creation? Yet they are in doubt about a second creation. (50: 12-15)

In the course of history, as presented by the Quran, it has happened again and again that as a result of the prophets' addressees rejecting them, the communities were destroyed. A few of these devastated nations are mentioned here by way of example. The destruction of these peoples is, in fact, a sample of the conditions in the Hereafter. A part of the punishment the rejecters of Truth are destined to receive in the Hereafter is shown here in this world of today.

The first creation of this world proves the possibility of the second creation. If a man is serious, he does not require any further proof, to make him believe in the Hereafter. □

ASK MAULANA

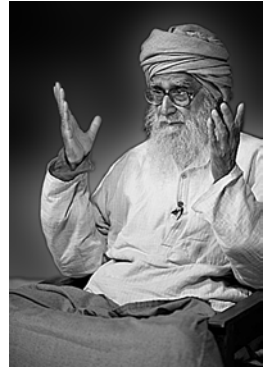
Your Questions, Answered

What should we do when we come across people who lie to us?

When you come across people who lie, don't take their words seriously. You must try to avoid such people and not enter into any dealings with them.

What is the difference between belief and ideology?

According to general perception, belief is that which is based on subjective thought and ideology is that which is based on objective facts. But, according to my experience, there is no difference between belief and ideology. If one is able to find reasons to believe, then his belief becomes ideology.



How can we adopt two different attitudes at the same time — following idealism at the level of thinking and adopting a practical attitude in other matters?

It is quite possible to do so. Idealism pertains to one's own mind and behaviour. So, there is no problem in adopting what you want to adopt for yourself. But, when it comes to society, you have to be practical and you have to take others into consideration. You have to adjust with other people. In such situations, it is quite reasonable for a person to adopt idealism in his own life, and to adhere to practical wisdom in his social behaviour. Both the behaviours can be summed up in a single formula: idealism for individual life, which is possible — and pragmatism for social life, which is also possible.

What is the main obstacle to realizing the difference between reaction and positive action?

Positive response means giving a well-considered response to the situation. On the other hand, reaction is a response given without doing serious planning for analysis of the situation. If you are serious you will certainly opt for the first choice; but if you are not serious you will be prone to taking the second option.

What is the “Art of Questioning”? What is the definition of a healthy question?

A question for the sake of questioning is an unhealthy question, while question for the sake of learning is a healthy question. This is the art of questioning. One who knows this fact is a master of the art of questioning.

How does one deal with the guilt that is sometimes borne out of introspection?

Guilt-consciousness is a very positive sign. It provides you an incentive to correct yourself. If one is ready to correct oneself, then the feeling of guilt is very good. However, it becomes a problem only in the situation when one is not ready to reform oneself.

In an article it is written that it is very important to love ourselves in order to feel the love and affection from others. What is your view on this and how important do you think it is to love one’s own self?

I don’t subscribe to this formula. My formula is: Discover your responsibility toward yourself as well as toward others. It is the sense of responsibility that is important, and not love. Love is the highest aspect of man’s nature. It is, thus, meant only for God, the Creator. According to my experience, the right formula is: Love for God and responsibility towards fellow human beings.

Man has been given a very strong ego which comes in the way of surrendering before God. Why is man put under such a difficult test?

It is not a matter of difficulty; rather, it is a matter of realization. If you realize that the ego is a gift from God and it was not created by you, then it becomes very easy to surrender to God. Because after this discovery, surrender becomes acknowledgment of God, and to acknowledge is the greatest urge of one’s nature.

When we are born with the spirit of submission, what makes us turn arrogant and become a rebel?

Man is born with ego. Modesty comes when we exercise control over our ego. Ego comes by birth and modesty comes by choice. □

Glossary

- Abu Hurairah** a companion of the Prophet renowned for his memory of *Hadith*; died 681 AD.
- 'Ad** ancient Arab tribe that lived between 10th century BC to 3rd century AD. The prophet Hud was sent by God to guide them.
- Adam** First man and first prophet.
- Al-Idrisi** Muhammad Al-Idrisi (1099–1165 AD); Muslim geographer, cartographer, Egyptologist and traveller who lived in Sicily, at the court of King Roger II.
- Allah** Arabic word for God.
- Al-Bayhaqi** (994–1066); Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn Husayn al-Bayhaqi or Imam al-Bayhaqi; Islamic scholar of *fiqh* and collector of *Hadith*.
- Al-Bukhari** (810–870); Muhammad Al-Bukhari; Persian Islamic scholar who authored the *Hadith* collection known as *Sahih al-Bukhari* regarded as the most authentic collection of *Hadith*.
- Al-Nasai** (829–915); a noted Persian scholar and collector of *Hadith*, famous for his work *Sunan al-Nasai*.
- Anas ibn Malik** a companion of the Prophet (~711).
- angel** A living creation of God made from light; angels have no free-will and are in constant obedience to God.
- Aryabhata** (476–550 AD) was a great Indian mathematician and astronomer.
- as-sulh khair** Arabic for 'reconciliation is best'.
- Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim** Arabic for 'In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.'
- Ciconia ciconia** White stork; large bird in the stork family Ciconiidae.
- dua** Arabic for supplication; an act of worship in Islam.
- Eid-ul-Fitr** Festival of the breaking of the fast; one of the two festivals of Islam; It celebrates the conclusion of the month of fasting — *Ramazan*.
- fasad** Arabic for spreading corruption, rebellion, dissension, mischief and disorder across society.
- fasad fil ardh** Arabic for corruption in the land.
- ghulu** Arabic for extremism.
- Hadith** sayings and deeds of the Prophet of Islam.
- Haj** Pilgrimage
- Hudaibiya** a place just outside Makkah where the Treaty of Hudaibiya was made between Muhammad representing the state of Medina and the Quraysh tribe of Makkah in 628 AD.
- Iblis** Satan
- Ibn 'Abbas** Abdallah ibn Abbas (618–687); paternal cousin and companion of the Prophet of Islam.
- Ibn Majah** (824–887); Islamic scholar and compiler of *Hadith*.
- Iftar** Breaking of the fast.
- Imam Ahmad** Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855); Islamic scholar and theologian; famous for *Hadith* collection known as *Musnad Ahmad*.
- Imam Muslim** Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (815–875); Persian Islamic scholar, traditionist or compiler of *Hadith* best known for *Hadith* collection *Sahih Muslim*.
- khair ummat** Arabic for 'best of the communities'.
- Lot** Prophet of God, sent to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; nephew of Prophet Abraham.
- Mimosa pudica** also called 'touch-me-not' is a creeping perennial herb; the leaves of which fold inward when touched or shaken, re-opening minutes later.
- momin** Arabic for true believer.
- Musnad** see *Musnad Ahmad*.
- Musnad Ahmed** a collection of *Hadith* reports by Islamic scholar Ahmad bin Hanbal (780–855).
- qital** armed warfare
- Ramazan** Ninth month of the Lunar calendar; month of fasting.
- sabr** Patience
- sadaqah** voluntary charity
- Sahih Muslim** Famous *Hadith* collection by Imam Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (815–875).

sehri partaking of food at dawn before the start of the fast.

Shaikh Bayazid Bustami also Bayazid Bastami (804-874 AD); Persian Sufi saint.

shirk association of partners with God.

Sufi a practitioner of Sufism.

Sufism a branch of Islam, defined by adherents as the inner, mystical dimension of Islam.

sulh Arabic for reconciliation.

Sunnah practice and teachings of Prophet Muhammad.

tawheed Monotheism or the oneness of God.

Thamud People of ancient Arabia that lived during the first millenium BC. The prophet Salih was sent by God to guide them.

Zakat the obligatory alms tax, one of the five basic tenets of Islam.

Zakat-al-Fitr Zakat tax specifically related to the month of *Ramazan* to be given before the *Eid* prayer.



Final Destination

*Man considers himself free in the present world.
He thinks of everything he has as his own property.
But when death comes it will dawn on him, 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.*

THE GREATER JIHAD

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