

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



Our unlimited desires cannot find fulfillment in this world, because it is a limited world.

A MAGAZINE FOR THE JOURNEY OF LIFE

Spirit of Islam monthly...

- ▶ Presents Islam, the religion of nature, in the contemporary idiom to help Muslims rediscover Islam from the original sources
- ▶ Explains Creation plan of God for humankind
- ▶ Enlightens people on the subject of global peace
- ▶ Addresses contemporary issues
- ▶ Assists the readers to deal with life's challenges
- ▶ Offers Spirituality to a wider circle of spiritual seekers
- ▶ Fosters greater communal harmony through religious understanding

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

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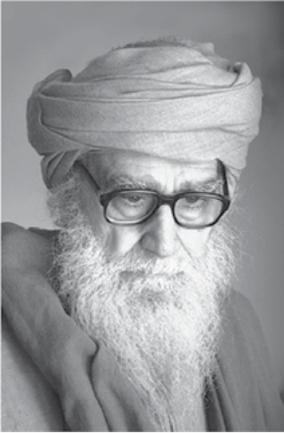
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CONTENTS

■ FROM MAULANA'S DESK	5
■ FROM THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR	7
■ A PURPOSEFUL LIFE	10
■ IN GOD'S COUNTRY	14
■ MAN: A GIFTED CREATION	15
■ FREEDOM OF CHOICE	16
■ MISUSE OF FREEDOM	18
■ TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE	20
■ THE CREATION PLAN OF GOD	22
■ HUMANS ON TRIAL	25
■ FROM THE SPIRITUAL TREE	26
■ QURAN: A GUIDE TO LIFE AND BEYOND	28
■ THE REALITY OF LIFE	32
■ DETERMINISM VS FREEWILL	34
■ THE EXISTENCE OF EVIL	36
■ SURRENDER BY CHOICE	38
■ A HISTORY OF INTELLECTUAL PERVERSION	39
■ FIND YOUR TRUE CALLING	42
■ THE PROBLEM OF EVIL	43
■ MAN'S UNIQUENESS	45
■ EVERY SITUATION IN LIFE IS A TEST	46
■ THE WORD OF GOD	47
■ ASK MAULANA	49

FROM MAULANA'S DESK



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, born in 1925, in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, is an Islamic spiritual scholar who is well-versed in both classical Islamic learning and modern disciplines. The mission of his life has been the establishment of worldwide peace. He has received the Padma Bhushan, the Demiurgus Peace International Award and Sayyidina Imam Al Hassan Peace award for promoting peace in Muslim societies. He has been called 'Islam's spiritual ambassador to the world' and is recognized as one of its most influential Muslims¹. His books have been translated into sixteen languages and are part of university curricula in six countries. He is the founder of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality based in New Delhi.

WHAT DRIVES US TO THE POINT OF NO RETURN?

THE World Health Organization reports that suicide has become the second most common cause of death among young people worldwide. In order to create awareness on mental health and tackle the issue of suicide, WHO has developed a Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020, which was adopted by the 66th World Health Assembly.

The recent case of suicide of the 34-year-old Bollywood actor, Sushant Singh Rajput, has once again opened up the debate on declining mental health and growing case of depression amongst youth. Rajput was good in studies; he had chosen to opt out of engineering to become an actor. At a young age he achieved name and fame for his acting skills.

Despite the prospects of a good life ahead of him, what drove Rajput to the brink so that he ended his life? This question has been bothering me ever since I heard this news.

Man is born with unlimited potential, yet he finds limited use for it. He harbours an ocean of desires in his heart, but all these dreams are never realized. In this case, there is no difference between a poor man and a rich man. Each person finds himself amidst toil and strife. But

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

dwelling on the non-fulfillment of desires or sinking into depression because reality does not match your dreams is not the solution.

We cannot forget that while each of us has our share of challenges in life, we also have an inherent ability to fight back. That resilience is within each one of us, we only have to realize it and get ourselves out of the depths of depression. But there is a precondition. And that is, to not view stress and failures as the endgame. Thomas Edison had famously said, "I have not failed, I have just found 10,000 ways that won't work!" This saying of Edison teaches us that in order to succeed

The ability to make a plus from a minus is the hallmark of human civilization. This is what has kept progress going despite all sorts of failures that have been witnessed throughout history. In this process, each life contributes and therefore each life counts!

in life, we should put in relentless efforts in the face of repeated failures, and we should maintain positivity at all times.

Some say that one should stop thinking about what is bothering one. But this approach is not the right one. This is because our mind never really stops thinking.

Instead of wading through the problem and finding an opportunity, if we choose to simply create an illusion in order to stop thinking about the problem, it impedes our ability to fight back. Resilience is the essence of human spirit! When we dwell on problems and get trapped in failure, we end up obstructing the flow of positive ideas thereby creating a double jeopardy for ourselves.

The ability to make a plus from a minus is the hallmark of human civilization. This is what has kept progress going despite all sorts of failures that have been witnessed throughout history. In this process, each life contributes and therefore each life counts! It is incumbent upon all of us to not only foster our own positive thought process but also extend support to all those around us who may be in need of support and guidance.

Instead of getting disheartened with failures, the remedy lies in feeding the opportunities and starving despair! The health of this equation determines the health of our mind, which in turn determines the success of our endeavours and renders meaning to our lives. □

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FROM THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

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FAITH IN THE UNSEEN

The Quran says:

This is the Book; there is no doubt in it. It is a guide for those who are mindful of God, who believe in the unseen [...]. (2: 3)

FAITH in the unseen is not just a matter of belief. It is directly related to guidance. Only if you believe in the unseen will you receive God's guidance. If you do not believe in the unseen, you will not receive God's guidance.

By 'unseen' is meant a reality that cannot be seen, but is present nonetheless. This is so with God. Although God is apparently invisible, in reality His presence can be experienced more than all existing things. In the above-quoted Quranic verse, faith in the unseen actually refers to faith in God, but in consequence it includes all those aspects of faith which a believer is required to believe in—for instance, divine revelation, angels, Hell and Heaven, etc.

We know things in two ways. Firstly, through observation, and secondly, through inference. From the scientific point of view, both these methods are equally reliable.

Today, science is considered as a reliable means for analyzing and arriving at a conclusion. Science consists of theoretical science as well as technical science. Technical science looks only at the appearance of things, but everything that appears to be visible is, in the final analysis, invisible. For instance, you can see a flower, but you can't see its fragrance, not even through the most powerful microscope. This is so

even though the flower's fragrance has an existence of its own in the same way as the flower does.

According to science, all things are collections of atoms, and, ultimately, all atoms are collections of electrons, which are not visible to the naked eye. Referring to this fact, a scientist commented that the entire universe is an invisible 'mad dance' of electrons'. Another scientist describes it as a collection of 'waves of probability'.

Faith in the unseen is not just a matter of belief. It is directly related to guidance. Only if you believe in the unseen will you receive God's guidance. If you do not believe in the unseen, you will not receive God's guidance.

In this sense, one can say that it is not only the apparently invisible Creator who is in the unseen but also the apparently visible creatures. The British scientist A. S. Eddington wrote a book on this subject, titled *Science and the Unseen World* around a century ago.

The fact is that we see only the external appearance of the things that are visible to us in this world. Their reality remains invisible to us. This is true with God as well. In terms of His being, God is unobservable, but in terms of His creation, God is visible for us. The existence of the creation is evidence of the existence of the Creator. The universe is so meaningful that it is simply impossible to explain it without accepting the existence of the Creator.

God's being invisible to us is, in one sense, in line with the requirements of the test to which we are put. The test is to discover God while He is in the unseen. If God were plainly visible, there would have been no test at all. Because God is in the unseen, faith in Him is an 'examination paper' for us. If God were visible, believing in Him would not have been an 'examination paper' for us.

For God and other articles of faith to remain in the unseen is a great blessing for human beings. It is because of this that our process of thinking continues and that we are led to continuously reflect and ponder on things. It becomes possible for us to find God at the level of discovery. It is because of this that God-realization can become a self-discovered reality for us. And it is a fact that there is nothing greater in this world than a self-discovered reality. Thus, for God and other articles of faith to remain in the unseen is an endless source of intellectual development for us.

Faith in the unseen as a condition for God's guidance is no arbitrary condition. In fact, it is a very reasonable condition for a creature like man. To understand any great reality, one needs an awakened mind. Only someone whose mind is awakened is capable of understanding a profound truth. God is, undoubtedly, the biggest and most profound truth—the Absolute Truth. And so, only a person whose mind has been awakened through study, reflection and deep pondering can truly have faith in God and truly realize Him. Someone with an un-awakened mind flounders in intellectual blindness, and in such a situation can hardly hope to arrive at God-realization. □

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A person whose mind has been awakened through study, reflection and deep pondering can truly have faith in God and truly realize Him. Someone with an un-awakened mind flounders in intellectual blindness, and in such a situation can hardly hope to arrive at God-realization.



IN A WORLD WHERE
YOU CAN BE ANYTHING
Be Kind

A PURPOSEFUL LIFE

Pursue the Ultimate Truth

MAN attains distinction only when he leads a purposeful life. Such a life characterizes the most advanced stage of human development. This does not mean that by taking up just any task, which is apparently significant, man's life becomes truly purposeful. A really purposeful life is one in which man discovers his supreme status; a life in which his personality makes manifest its unique distinctive quality. An animal strives to obtain food; a bird flies in search of a better country when the seasons change; a wasp busies itself building up its own home from tiny particles of earth; a herd of deer takes measures to protect itself from wild beasts of prey. All of these appear to be purposeful actions.

But when the phrase 'a purposeful life' is applied to man, then it does not refer to efforts of this nature. Without doubt arranging for one's food, clothes and habitation are some of the tasks that man has to perform in this world; but this is a level of purposefulness in which men and animals, being concerned only with bare survival, are equal. Its true application in relation to man can only be one in which he appears in all his dignity. Man's life becomes purposeful only when it goes beyond commonplace animalism. It is about striving towards attaining the loftier form of superior humanism.

God's creations in this world fall into two categories: animate and inanimate. Obviously, animate objects enjoy certain superiority over inanimate objects. The former can be divided into three classes: the vegetable, the animal and the human. Modern scientific research has shown that plants also possess life, in that they nourish themselves, they grow and they have feelings.

But animals and men surely represent a higher form of life. In what way does man excel animals? Many theories have been advanced in answer to this question over the ages, and great minds are still studying it. Modern biologists have come to the conclusion that it is man's capacity for conceptual thought, which distinguishes him from other life forms. Animals lack this quality, whereas man is conscious of the fact that he is thinking. He consciously forms a plan of action in his mind; in his everyday life his actions are determined by himself, whereas this is not the case with animals. Though many of their actions appear to be like those of men, they are not the result of thought; they all stem from pure instinct. Animals are simply led intuitively by their desires

and their needs in a certain direction. Their actions are governed by environmental stresses from without and physical pressures from within.

It is in terms of this unique conceptual quality of man that we can conceive of what his higher purpose in life should be. The latter can only be one, which does not result from the pressures of desire or of immediate exigencies. It must emanate from his own urge to worship God.

Man's true purpose in life can only be one, which reflects the higher side of his personality; one, which displays him as the superior being that he is.

If one pauses at this stage to take note of what the Quran has to say, one will find that it gives us clear guidance in this matter. Man's purpose in life has been explained in the Quran in the following words:

"I created the jinn and humankind only so that they might worship Me: I seek no sustenance from them, nor do I want them to feed Me—it is God who is the great Sustainer, the Mighty One, the Invincible." (51: 56)

These verses specify man's purpose in life as worship. This is a purpose, which elicits from man his uniqueness in its ultimate form. It raises man to a much higher plane than that of animals. Not a trace of animalism contributes to the achievement of such a goal. God does not demand of you a livelihood, the verse states; rather He himself is responsible for your livelihood. This means that worship of God is a purpose, which is motivated neither by inward desires nor outward influences. Rather it comes into being through thought alone. Only when a person goes beyond his self and his environment can he understand that there is a higher purpose on which he should focus his life.

The worship of God is a purpose, which is motivated neither by inward desires nor outward influences. Rather it comes into being through thought alone. Only when a person goes beyond his self and his environment can he understand that there is a higher purpose on which he should focus his life.

The motive for the fulfillment of this purpose is not the urge to satisfy one's needs or those of others. The worshipper seeks neither to gratify his own desires nor those of the Being he worships. It is a purpose which sets before man a goal far above all these things—a goal which

does not follow internal needs or external pressures, but results purely from conceptual thought.

When a person works, makes money, builds a house, makes an effort to improve his standard of living, he appears to be engaged in efforts towards some worthy end. But a life of this nature cannot be called a purposeful life, for these activities do not demonstrate man's unique status. It might seem as if they are the result of deliberation, but if one looks at the matter in depth, one will see that in reality, the motive force behind these actions is the same urge that motivates an animal in various ways, in its concern for its own survival. It is the driving force of one's desires; the pressure of one's needs and the wish to fulfill the demands of one's self that underlie such a life. These are the considerations which, in fact, guide a person in his search for his livelihood.

To determine the purpose of life is, in short, the effort to make life meaningful. It must be one which is in accordance with man's unique status. It must be one which leads man on the path to success and progress in terms of his true nature.

When man grows up, he realizes that there are certain material necessities without which he cannot live. He requires food, clothes, a place to live. He requires a reliable source of income to sustain him throughout his life. He is forced by these considerations to obtain these things. Then he sees that those who have an abundance of these material things enjoy respect and apparently possess every form of happiness and luxury in this world. Thus he is driven on to do more than just seek a livelihood; he desires to earn to a degree greatly in excess of his actual requirements.

In bustling markets, grandiose offices, and opulent buildings, he is not really guided by deliberate thought. Rather, he is being guided by inflated ideas of his own needs, desires, longings and ambitions to achieve fame and high status in this world. For this reason these activities cannot be considered as being directed towards the purpose which sets man apart from the animal and lends him a higher distinction.

Man's greater dignity cannot be based only on a purpose, which emanates from inner desires and pressures of environment. Man's true purpose in life can only be to seek the pleasure of God. When man seeks the pleasure of his Lord, his human qualities find full manifestation. This is a purpose loftier than the one towards which an animal directs its energies. It distinguishes man from animals. It is the ultimate station of human dignity.

To determine the purpose of life is, in short, the effort to make life meaningful. It must surely, therefore, be one which is in accordance with man's unique status. It must be one which leads man on the path to success and progress in terms of his true nature. Celebrated English writer, Gilbert K. Chesterton, summarized it thus: Man is an exception, whatever else he is. If he is not the image of God, then he is a disease of the dust. □



**Is the presence of human life on Earth just a chance occurrence?
Is there a past and a future of human beings?
What is the purpose of humans in this world?**

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IN GOD'S COUNTRY

Follow the Guidelines

AN 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 of 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 native 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 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 same is true, in a broader sense, of this world. A human being is born into a world which he did not create. 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 a rebel.

The question is: how should one live in the world in order to conform to 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. □



MAN: A GIFTED CREATION

Value Your Life

THE Prophet of Islam is reported to have said: God created Adam in His own image (*Sahih Bukhari*). However, this does not mean that man is like God in physical appearance. It means that God has in a limited way granted man those divine attributes which exist in perfect form in His being.

In the entire universe man is an exceptional creature. He is a living existence. He is the only creature who has been granted a complete personality. He thinks, sees, hears, carries out planned action and can enjoy a multitude of things by using his senses. All these are exceptional qualities which are granted only to man out of all the creatures in the universe.

Man has been given these exceptional gifts so that he may engage himself in an exceptional task. This exceptional task is to recognize and accept the Creator at a conscious level. In this way, the Almighty Lord of the universe has given man the opportunity to discover Him at the level of realization. This realization should enable a person to see God who is physically unseen, to understand that he is actually powerless even though he seems to have some powers, and so that he may surrender himself before God of his own free will and not out of compulsion.

He is blessed in having been given the ability to convert the entire world of nature into spiritual provision for himself, for he has to develop himself intellectually by awakening his consciousness. When he does so, he finds truth at the level of personal discovery; the realization of God comes to him as he prostrates. Then he has to develop his personality to such a degree of moral refinement that he may be held deserving of finding a place in the vicinity of Almighty God. Those who fail to develop such a personality are mere animals in human form. They are worthless in the eyes of God. □

The Almighty Lord of the universe has given man the opportunity to discover Him at the level of realization. This realization should enable a person to see God who is physically unseen so that he may surrender himself before God of his own free will and not out of compulsion.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Self-discipline Rather than Freedom

IN 1945 an atom bomb destroyed the entire city of Hiroshima. This bomb was equivalent to 12,500 tons of TNT (trinitrotoulene). In 1980s, the world's nuclear arsenal contained 12,000 to 15,000 megatons, each megaton being equal to a million tons of TNT. After the Cold War, the number of nuclear weapons has declined significantly, a feat accomplished through arms control agreements. The pace of reduction has slowed significantly compared with the 1990s. Instead of planning for nuclear disarmament, the nuclear-armed states appear to plan to retain large arsenals for the indefinite future, are adding new nuclear weapons, and are increasing the role that such weapons play in their national strategies.

The freedom of choice that man has been given in the world today is a test; it is not his right. If he uses his freedom correctly, and makes the right choice for himself, he will be successful. But if he misuses his freedom, he is doomed to failure.

According to a report in *The Telegraph* (October 11, 2017) it is estimated that the US and Russian arsenals combined have power equating to 6,600 megatons. This is a tenth of the total solar energy received by Earth every minute. As Jonathan Schell has pointed out in his best-seller *The Fate of the Earth*, man is now in a position to destroy life on Earth many times over.

What, basically, are these weapons? Like any other weapon, they are just a misuse of the resources of nature. A sword is a misuse of steel, a nuclear bomb a misuse of nuclear energy.

The things from which weapons are made were in the possession of nature for millions of years, causing no destruction. When man gained control of them, however, they suddenly became destructive. Why? It is because nature has no freedom. Man, on the other hand, is free to act as he pleases. What philosophers call a 'problem of evil' is simply a misuse of human freedom.

Modern man takes enormous pride in the freedom he has won for himself. But it is self-discipline rather than freedom that is needed for peace to prevail on Earth. The freedom of choice that man has been given in the world today is a test; it is not his right. If he uses his freedom

correctly, and makes the right choice for himself, he will be successful. But if he misuses his freedom, he is doomed to failure.

Resources that remain in the control of nature function properly. When man gains control of them, however, they cause havoc in the world. This fact shows us how order can be maintained in the world. Man must learn how to utilize these resources in the way nature utilizes them. The model of nature must be applied to human life. This is the real task facing both individuals and societies in the world today. □



**WE LOOK FORWARD
TO YOUR FEEDBACK**

Dear Readers,

*Spirit of Islam team believes in the involvement of readers to enhance the quality of the magazine. Your precious views, suggestions, and recommendations in this regard are earnestly solicited and will be readily acknowledged. Kindly mail us your views at:
thecentreforpeace@gmail.com*

MISUSE OF FREEDOM

Necessary Price for an Environment of Test

IT is said that the entire debate over belief and disbelief boils down to one question: Does logic prevail? Those who have chosen disbelief say that if there were a God, why do we see a contradiction in the world. That is, from our observations of the universe, we clearly come to the conclusion that there is grand design in the world of nature. However, the human world presents quite a different picture. Here, we witness misery, sorrow, suffering and all kinds of evil. According to these people this contradiction between the two worlds—the material world and the human world—shows that our world is a bundle of randomness. Although, in the partial sense there seems to be design in the world, when we look at the picture in totality, the design disappears. This scenario dispels the argument from design that, if there is design, there ought to be a designer.

The problem of evil is not a phenomenon of the material world. It is exclusively a phenomenon of the human world. This so-called evil is a necessary price that we have to pay for all those developments which have culminated into what we refer to with pride as civilization.

The explanation of this contradiction lies in drawing a comparison. When we compare the two worlds, we discover that there is a fundamental difference between the two. The human world is characterized by total freedom without any restrictions. Man is free to choose either nonviolence or violence and bloodshed. He can utilize nuclear energy for constructive purposes, or use it to develop nuclear weapons. This kind of freedom is bound to create chaos and conflict. It has the potential of destroying all systems.

On the other hand, the case of the material world is different. In spite of its mind-boggling vastness and countless components, we find complete determinism in the material world. From the microworld to the macroworld the whole universe is functioning under a rigid discipline, or natural laws. As a result, the material world has a highly predictable character. It is because of this predictability that we have been able to develop science and technology with precision.

Lack of determinism in the human world is the reason why social sciences could not become exact sciences like the physical sciences.

For example, while the solar system has only one definition, political science has a dozen different definitions.

This difference between the two worlds makes us believe that the plan of the Creator regarding the two worlds is different. The Creator has kept determinism in the material world. On the contrary, the Creator's scheme for the human world involves complete freedom for man. There is deep wisdom behind this difference. If we observe the physical world, we realize that there is no phenomenon of intellectual development in it. In other words, it has remained the same for millions of years. But, in the human world there are constant challenges, and it is this kind of challenging environment that leads to progress and development.

Without experiencing challenges there can be no creative thinking or intellectual development. When we observe the material world we find order in it. While in the human world there seemingly is disorder. This "disorder" is not a negative phenomenon; rather it is a positive phenomenon. The positive term for this disorder in the human world is 'challenge'.

Due to this difference, we have to apply two separate yardsticks to judge these worlds. The material world has to be judged from the yardstick of determinism, while the human world should be judged with the yardstick of freedom of choice. Because of its deterministic nature, the material world could be utilized for building technology. Without this predictability we would not have been able to use the material world for industrial development. On the other hand, in the human world because of total freedom there are several problems or challenges, and it is in meeting these challenges that we develop and advance. However, this total freedom also gives rise to evil.

The problem of evil is not a phenomenon of the material world. It is exclusively a phenomenon of the human world. This so-called evil is a necessary price that we have to pay for all those developments which have culminated into what we refer to with pride as civilization. □



TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE

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



THE AGE OF PEACE

ROBIN FOX (b. 1934) is an Anglo-American anthropologist. In his article *'Fatal Attraction: War and Human Nature'*, he talks about war as one of obvious human enjoyments. On the other hand, he also mentions the factors that have made the modern times as one of 'war is dead' periods. Many arguments are put forth to bring home this point: that force is losing its efficacy as a means of extending policy; that democracy is now in worldwide demand and democracies are of their nature pacific; that the growth of transnational corporations aided by better transport and instant worldwide communications is creating a level of international interdependence that will not tolerate war; that all this raises the cost of war to an unbearable level.

In ancient times there were two things in particular that made war seem necessary and unavoidable for those who chose to go to war. The first of these was family-based monarchical rule. The second was the agriculture-based or land-based economy.

In the modern age, a major development completely transformed this situation, and that is what is called the Industrial Revolution. Because of this revolution, today innumerable new economic means and opportunities have become available, utilizing which a person can make great economic progress. Even without becoming a landowner he can become economically wealthy.

This change is so massive and significant that it can, without any exaggeration, be called an 'economic explosion'. It has completely transformed the entire political and economic scenario. Things that

earlier seemed impossible have now become completely possible. Things that earlier appeared merely imaginary have now become a practical reality. The age of political and economic monopoly has come to a complete and final end.

After this revolutionary change, there is now no excuse left for anyone to go to war. A person, group or country can now obtain their economic or political objectives by availing of the vastly expanded opportunities that have now been made possible, using peaceful means alone. In such a situation, there is no need for war at all. War and violence would now only indicate a complete lack of awareness of the ample possibilities that are today available for obtaining one's objectives using peaceful means alone. Today, war has been rendered utterly ineffective and useless in terms of producing any positive results.

After the border clash in the Galwan Valley, tensions between India and China flared up. Whereas the commonalty did speak about teaching a lesson to and wreaking havoc upon the opposing party, the top brass of both governments demonstrated better sense. P.S. Raghavan, chairman of the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), an independent advisory body on security issues, said in an interview, "There is a strict code of conduct observed by the armies of both sides that we shall not shoot. Because if you shoot to kill, that is a sure way of launching an escalation which can go to a war." (*The Print*, June 29, 2020)

Kelsey Broderick, China analyst at consultancy Eurasia Group, said in a note. "The fact that the 15 June incident, despite the fatalities, did not boil over into a larger conflict is one positive signal that higher-ups on both sides are not interested in sparking any kind of war." (*CNBC*, June 16, 2020)

The world has come to realize the inefficacy of war to obtain the desired objective. In this age, talking about war has become anachronistic and obsolete. This is an age of peace.

This shows that no party is willing to start aggression. They fully realize the catastrophic effects of war which no one is willing to suffer. This episode is ample proof that the age of war is over. The world has come to realize the inefficacy of war to obtain the desired objective. In this age, talking about war has become anachronistic and obsolete. This is an age of peace. Diplomacy is the only viable approach to resolve international disputes. Those individuals and organizations still wishing to achieve their goals through violence and warfare are ignorant of the times they are living in. □

THE CREATION PLAN OF GOD

This Life is a Test

GOD, according to His will, created a perfect world called Paradise. A world in accordance with all of our desires as human beings, in that it is free of all limitations and disadvantages, free of fear and pain; free of all imperfections. An eternal world where there is neither death nor old age. An ideal world where we could achieve complete fulfillment.

Who will qualify for Paradise? Those pure souls who, in their life in this world, come up to the standard of citizenship of Paradise—a perfect world of eternal comfort and pleasure, a world which holds far greater meaning than this one.

A perfect Paradise cannot be inhabited by less-than-perfect beings. So, God created perfection-seeking beings—us. He intended us to spend a period of trial in this present and imperfect world and after this, according to our deeds, we will earn the right to inhabit the perfect and eternal world.

As part of this test, Paradise is kept hidden from us. This world, therefore, has all the components necessary for a test. It has perfection-seeking beings in a less-than-perfect world. Beings who have been given complete freedom to choose their actions. We thus have a choice—we can misuse our freedom to do evil, or we can use our freedom wisely, submit to God and qualify for Paradise.

Who will qualify for Paradise? Those pure souls who, in their life in this world, come up to the standard of citizenship of Paradise—a perfect world of eternal comfort and pleasure, a world which holds far greater meaning than this one. Perhaps it is this divine plan which Jesus Christ was referring to:

"This is how you should pray: Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven." (Mathew 6: 9)

The test rests on our discovery of God, who is in the unseen. Before we can see Him, we should voluntarily surrender ourselves to Him. Our desire for Paradise should make this world seem insignificant. We should willingly adopt divine ethics. We should develop intellectually and spiritually until we are fit to inhabit the refined world of Paradise.

Only those of us who succeed in maintaining a high moral character will find a place in a world of peace, love, and understanding.

For people who have no concept of Paradise, complete fulfilment in this world will be a quest doomed to failure. They could expend all their energy in pursuit of a dream world, but they will ultimately fail to construct it.

For those who have fully grasped the concept of life in Paradise, know that the pursuit of Paradise begins right here in this world itself. They have the pleasure of discovering it intellectually now, and will have the pleasure of experiencing it physically in the next world. Today, peace of mind; tomorrow, a truly peaceful life. Today, the satisfaction of intellectual conviction; tomorrow, the pleasure and comfort of a perfect and eternal life. Today, intellectual Paradise; tomorrow, Paradise itself. What could possibly be greater?

All of us come into this world like ore, which has to be extracted and refined until it can be of use. We have to expand our consciousness through intellectual and spiritual development.

Unlike other beings, we are conscious of the past, the present as well as the future. We cherish a very pleasant consciousness of the future, aspirations of a better life or of the fulfilment of our dreams. Our lives centre on our constant efforts to improve our future, but this perfect future does not seem to ever materialize. This is a part of God's creation plan. Our perfect future will not materialize in this world, but in the next. Those who have passed the test will find it, while those who have failed will not. This world is only a pathway to our final destination—Paradise.

In this world, everyone suffers frustration and failure. It is because everyone wants to live a perfect life in this world. Fulfilment of such a wish is not possible owing to the reason that this limited and ephemeral world was not created for this purpose. Despite all our efforts, we are doomed to failure in our quest to build a perfect life for ourselves. The present world is not Paradise; it only introduces us to the concept of Paradise. We are allowed to see only glimpses of perfection in this world, which only increases our desire for perfection—Paradise. This life is a journey, not the destination. We are prone to committing the error of taking it for a destination. Thus, life becomes an irretrievable missed opportunity.

The fact that the life of this world is a journey, not the destination, cannot be overemphasized. It is a time to sow, not to reap. The present world is limited. It does not have the means to fulfil our unlimited desires. It has the means to provide us subsistence at the physical level, but does not have the means to give us fulfilment at the spiritual level.

During this limited life on Earth, what we need to do, first and foremost, is to seek the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Having seen a glimpse of Paradise on this Earth, we should seek it in the core of our being. Intellectually, spiritually and morally, we should strive to make ourselves deserving of Paradise. We should devote our lives to preparing for the next life. All of us come into this world like ore, which has to be extracted and refined until it can be of use. We have to expand our consciousness through intellectual and spiritual development. This expanded consciousness is what being human means. Those who fail to attain the human level fail the test, and fail to achieve Paradise. Those who succeed will find both peace and happiness in this world, and a place in the Garden of Joy in the world to come, which we call Paradise. □



HUMANS ON TRIAL

Why has God Given Man Freedom?

UNLIKE any other creature in the universe, man appears to enjoy free will. God has not placed any curbs on him. This freedom is for the purpose of putting man to the test, and is not meant to encourage him to lead a life of permissiveness like animals do, and then just pass away one day. Rather its purpose is that man should lead a morally upright life of his own free will, thus demonstrating that he is of the highest moral character.

One who conducts himself in this manner should be reckoned as God's special servant who, without any apparent compulsion, chose to be a man of principle; who, without being subjected to any external force, did of his own free will, what his Lord would have desired. This liberty accorded to man gives him the opportunity to gain credit for being the most superior of all creatures of God.

All the things in this world are God's subjects. The stars and their satellites rotate in space entirely at their Lord's bidding. Trees, rivers, mountains, and all other such natural phenomena function according to the unchangeable laws of God laid down by Him in advance. Similarly, the animals follow exactly those instincts instilled in their species as a matter of Divine Will. Man is the only creature who has been given, exceptionally, the gift of power and freedom.

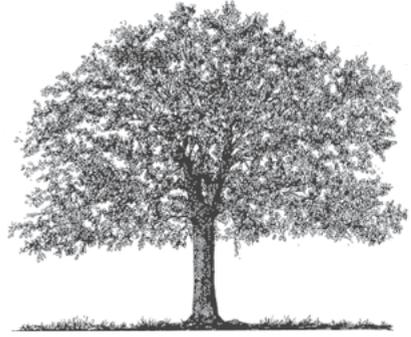
This freedom has opened doors of two kinds for man, one leading to success and the other to failure. If, on receiving freedom an individual becomes arrogant and insolent, it will mean that he has failed the test.

If on the other hand, he remains modest and humble, bowing to his Lord's will on all occasions, he will have made the right use of his God-given freedom. He will, without any compulsion, have bound himself by divine principles. One who chooses this course will succeed in the test of freedom. He will be handsomely rewarded by God as no other creature. Held to be the chosen servant of God, he will remain in an everlasting state of blissfulness and blessedness. □

The freedom granted to human beings is for the purpose of putting man to the test, and is not meant to encourage him to lead a life of permissiveness like animals do, and then just pass away one day.

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



THE VEIL OF CAUSATION

A STRONG conviction in the existence of God is most desirable, but experience shows otherwise. Most people are unable to have a strong faith in God. Some of them go to such extremes as to deny God altogether. This fact can be observed throughout the history of humankind. Why is this so?

This is because in accordance with the creation plan of God, all events and incidents are a consequence of cause and effect. For every event that happens in this world there appears to be a cause, because of which, most people attribute the event to its cause. Due to the presence of this apparent cause, they are unable to see the hand of God behind the event.

This phenomenon has been observable throughout human history. But in the present age with the discoveries of science, it has taken the form of an ideology that could be called the 'law of causation'. When scientific developments using microscopic and macroscopic observations in the universe uncovered the natural causes for all events, it came to be understood that everything was the result of its cause. Because of these scientific discoveries it came to be said:

If events are due to natural causes; they are not due to supernatural causes.

However, this is the very test of man in this world. Man needs to develop his consciousness so that he can see the hand of God behind every causal event. He should discover that in these events the cause is just a veil and not the reality.

The name of this discovery is faith in God. Those people who are able to discover this reality in this world are the ones who will deserve a reward from God: entry into everlasting Paradise. □

Man needs to develop his consciousness so that he can see the hand of God behind every causal event. He should discover that in these events the cause is just a veil and not the reality.



QURAN: A GUIDE TO LIFE AND BEYOND

Towards A Meaningful Living

MEDICINES are usually accompanied by leaflets explaining what illnesses they are designed to cure, how they should be used and what their basic formulae are. But, it is a tragedy that man is born into the world in such a condition that he knows neither what he is nor why he has been put here. No convenient handbook accompanies him. There are no signboards fixed to the summits of the mountains to give him directions or provide him with answers to his questions. Man has, in consequence, formed strange opinions about himself, the Earth and the sky, being ignorant of the essential reality of life.

When he examines his own being, it appears to him as an amazing accumulation of intellectual and physical powers. Yet, he did not will himself into being, nor did he play any part in the making of himself. Then he looks at the world outside of him and finds a universe of such extreme vastness, that he cannot encompass or traverse it. He cannot even count the innumerable treasures it contains. What is all this, and why is it there? Where did this world start from and where will it all end? What is the purpose of all this existence? He finds himself completely in the dark on these subjects.

Man has, of course, been given eyes, but all his eyes can do is see the outside of things. He has intelligence, but the trouble with human intelligence is that it does not even know about itself. Up till now, man has been unable to find out how thoughts enter the human mind or how the mind functions. With such inadequate faculties, he is neither able to arrive at any sound conclusion concerning himself, nor he is able to understand the universe.

This riddle is solved by the Book of God. The Quran is a scripture which gives us definite knowledge concerning the realities of life.

Those who have tried to understand the universe without recourse to the guidance of God will be akin to those blind people who try to find out what an elephant is by touching the different parts of its body. One will touch its leg, and think he has found a pillar. Another will feel its ear, and think it is a winnowing basket. Its back will be proclaimed a platform, its tail a snake and its trunk a hosepipe. But where in all this is the elephant? No matter how these blind people put together their findings, they cannot arrive at the correct answer. This is the eternal

predicament of all atheist philosophers and thinkers. In the absence of true knowledge their conclusions have been like those of a man, fumbling in the dark, and just hazarding wild guesses as to the nature of his surroundings, without ever truly understanding it.

There have been people in this world who have devoted their entire lives to the quest for Truth, but who, in their desperation at being unable to find it, have even taken the extreme step of putting an end to their lives. And then there have been others who sought the Truth, but having failed to find it, settled for a concocted philosophy based on pure conjecture. While the latter, mistaking conjecture for reason, compiled their conclusions and presented them to the world as Truth, the former saw speculation for what it was, rejected it, then—anguished at their own ultimate helplessness—opted out of this mysterious world.

Both groups were denied True Knowledge, for, in reality, no one can understand the secret of life without the help of the original Keeper of the Secret—God. True, man has been given the capacity to think and understand. But this capacity is little better than an eye, which can see only so long as there is some external source of light. In pitch darkness, this self-same eye cannot see anything whatsoever. Only when a light is switched on does everything become clearly visible. The human intellect, like the eye, needs the light—the light of God’s revelation—if it is not to grope in the dark forever. Without God’s revelation, we can never arrive at the truth of things.

The Quran presents to us the knowledge about God. It not only speaks about His existence but also paints an incredibly vivid picture of the Being who sustains and directs the universe.

The Quran presents to us the knowledge about God. It not only speaks about His existence but also paints an incredibly vivid picture of the Being who sustains and directs the universe. Not only does it tell us about the Hereafter, but describes also the Day of Judgement so graphically that its horrors become deeply etched on our consciousness. There is a well-known story of a Greek artist who painted such a realistic picture of a bunch of grapes that birds would come and peck at it. Just think that if a painting executed by an ordinary mortal could have such an extraordinary effect, what heights of consummate artistry could not be reached by the Lord of the universe in the Quran? Could any mere mortal truly appreciate the perfection of such art?

The Quran bears verbal witness to the sovereignty of God. It describes, with great force and clarity, the great, hidden, determinative force at work throughout the entire cosmos, and gives us definitive information on those metaphysical realities, which elude the hand and the eye. Not only does it spell out the facts of existence, but it also builds up an astonishing gallery of word-pictures. Thus, it brings a hitherto unseen world before our very eyes.

The Quran, first and foremost, is the Proclamation of God. Just as every individual and society possesses a set of guidelines for its optimal functioning, so is the Quran a 'Guidebook' for entire humanity revealed by the Almighty, Master of Man, King of kings.

The Quran shows us where strength in this world really lies, giving us a handhold on a rope that never breaks. Without this, we have no real support in life. Moreover, it is only through attachment to God that human beings can retain their hold on the cord that binds each to each.

The Quran explains that it is God alone who sustains us throughout our lives here on Earth. Through Him our hearts are set at ease, for it is He who provides true warmth in life. He rescues us in times of peril, assists us in the hour of need. All power rests in His hands. Honour and glory will be the reward of any nation that looks to Him for support, while only disgrace and humiliation will be the lot of those who abandon Him. To know this is to

hold the key to all the treasures in life. He who possesses this key gains all; he who loses it, loses all.

The Quran, first and foremost, is the Proclamation of God. Just as every individual and society possesses a set of guidelines for its optimal functioning, so is the Quran a 'Guidebook' for entire humanity revealed by the Almighty, Master of Man, King of kings. To put it very simply, the Quran is a book of directions, showing man the right path to tread. It is a Light which guides his faltering steps, giving him timely reminders of God's will, awakening his sleeping nature and conveying the Lord's admonition. It is a book that, in giving him the moral sense to distinguish right from wrong, cures him and his society of all ills. In this sense, it is a book of wisdom, full of every expression of correct understanding. It lays down for us the very foundations on which to build and organize society. In short, it provides everything that man as an individual and as a member of society will ever need. Without this, man can never be the gainer, no matter how hard he tries.

How can a believer gauge whether he has actually developed a relationship with God? There is only one answer to this question: by turning his eyes inward, and judging how his inner self stands in relation to the Quran. The way one relates to the Quran is a true reflection of one's relationship with God. The degree to which a man adheres to the tenets of the Quran will be a sure indication of his attachment to his Maker. If the Quran is the book he values most, it goes without saying that God is dearer to him than any other. But if some other book is held in greater esteem by him, then the most important person in his life will be its author, and not his Maker. When one discovers one's true Creator, it is impossible that he will hold words of others more precious than the words of guidance from His creator. It is the means through which the Almighty converses with His servants. It is a scale on which man's devotion to his Creator may be measured.

When man fears to stand alone, without support, in an unfathomable universe, the Quran sets his mind at rest by making his destination clear to him, and directing him towards it. In the Quran man thus meets his Lord, beholds His promises and rejoices in His good tidings. In this way, the Quran fills a man with conviction to define his place in the world. Giving concrete form to the instinctive feelings which swirl in man's subconscious about his Lord and Master, the Quran sets his feet well and truly on the path of submission to Him, the path of Islam (Islam as contained in the original scriptures and the life of the Prophet, and not the Muslim culture which people are witnessing) and brings him closer to God. This is when man has found his true purpose in life. □

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THE REALITY OF LIFE

The Perfection of Natural Laws

PEOPLE in general, try to live this worldly life in as prestigious and comfortable way as possible. It is because they believe that afterwards, neither man, nor anything that concerns him, will remain. Some do think about this matter, but only on a philosophical level. They seek a theoretical explanation of the world. Such explanations are interesting from a philosophical point of view, but they are of no intrinsic value to man. Theoretical discussions about whether a cosmic spirit keeps the whole universe revolving for its own fulfillment, or whether everything is part of some sublime being, do not raise any personal issues for man. Some have a religious answer to the question, but their solution is also of no import to man. Some see life as a mysterious, recurring cycle, with man repeatedly being born and dying; some claim that man will be rewarded and punished in this world. These are the creeds of which most religions are made.

All such solutions to the problems of life differ from one another considerably but in so much as none of them raises any serious personal issue for man, they are all the same. They are either explanations of events or a means of providing us with some sort of spiritual satisfaction. They do not issue us any warning or stir us into any action.

The Islamic perspective provided by the Prophet Muhammad is of an entirely different nature. The Prophet in his solution to problems places every individual in a precarious position from which the next step leads either to a dreary and unfathomable abyss of destruction or to a world of eternal bliss. It requires every man to take a serious view of his situation—even more so than a traveller in the night whose torch reveals a black snake slithering menacingly in front of him.

The message taught by Muhammad contains a greater warning for all humankind. He taught that after this world a vaster world is awaiting us, where every person will be judged and then punished or rewarded according to his deeds. The props which man relies on in this world will not support him there, for there will be no trading, no friendship and no acceptable intercession.

The warning, which the Prophet delivered, to humankind makes his existence a matter of personal importance to everyone. Everyone's fate, according to his teachings, hangs in the balance. Everyone has freedom

to either believe in his message, follow his guidance in preparation for everlasting Paradise, or one can ignore his teachings depriving oneself of this Paradise.

There are two things, which make this matter even more worthy of our attention. Firstly, those who consider material aggrandizement to be all that is worthwhile in life have no proof for their theory. Their ideas are based on superficial attractions. Those who speak in philosophical terms have only analogies to offer as evidence. They do not have full faith in what they say. Then there are those who speak without reliable historical information. The criterion with which to judge the past is history, and history does not verify the authenticity of their dogmas.

The Prophet Muhammad, born in the full light of history, presents his teachings which have been recorded in book-form. The Quran exists in its revealed form. So, one is free to put this through their scrutiny.

The Prophet warned us that we are confronted with a reality which we can never change; we have no choice but to face it. Death only transfers us to another world; it does not obliterate us altogether. The Creator has established an eternal scheme for success and failure, which no one can alter or opt out of. We have to choose between Heaven and Hell; we have no other choice.

If the meteorological department forecasts a hurricane, it is telling us about an impending disaster in which those affected will have no say in the matter; another power will control events. One can either escape or expose oneself to destruction. So, when the earthquake of the Last Day occurs, we will be subject to judgement by our Creator. There is no escape from this. □

The Prophet Muhammad taught that after this world a vaster world is awaiting us, where every person will be judged and then punished or rewarded according to his deeds. The props which man relies on in this world will not support him there, for there will be no trading, no friendship and no acceptable intercession.



DETERMINISM VS FREEWILL

Equal Role in Life

IS man's life predestined or is it determined by his freewill? Is man free to choose his path or is he helpless? The answer to this question is that in one sense, man is free, but in another sense he is helpless.

It is a matter of fifty-fifty or equal share. In our daily lives, each one of us goes about doing things with freedom. But, along with this, we repeatedly feel that there are powers beyond our control which cannot be ignored or else, we will be unable to accomplish our tasks.

What are these two seemingly opposite factors? One is our individual personalities and the other is the conditions and circumstances within which we act. These conditions or circumstances can be called

'infrastructure' which is established by nature. As far as we are concerned, we are totally free. We have the freedom to think and speak as we please, to direct our lives in whichever direction we want. In this sense, we are completely free.

Man lies between two different and distinct considerations—in one sense, he is free, and in another, he is helpless and under compulsion.

But as far as the 'infrastructure' within which we operate is concerned, we do not have the power to change it or to plan our course of action by ignoring it. For instance, if you walk, it is something that you choose to do. But to

walk, you need the earth beneath your feet. You need gravity below you. You need atmospheric pressure above you. These things are part of the external 'infrastructure', without which you cannot walk. The same is true for everything in the context of which we carry out our actions. Similarly, our birthplace, family, conditions, gender are predetermined for us. We have no choice in these matters.

This state of affairs tells us that in this world, man lies between two different and distinct considerations—in one sense, he is free, and in another, he is helpless and under compulsion. In terms of using his will, he is completely free, but he is helpless in the sense that he cannot use his free will without the infrastructure that has been established by the Creator. The right position in this matter is one of balance—a middle-position between freedom, compulsion and predetermined aspects. Jawaharlal Nehru has aptly worded this standpoint. He wrote, "Life is like a game of cards. The hand that is dealt you is determinism; the way you play it is free will."

The debate about freewill and predetermination is an ancient one. Ancient philosophers and others who came after them have written much on this subject. But someone who reads all that they have written is likely to get very confused. Man seeks a clear answer on this issue, but he does not find it in the enormous corpus of writings on this subject. This is because, ordinarily, people veer to one or the other side of the issue. They either think that it is total freedom that prevails or that we are totally predetermined.

This one-sided approach is not proper. If a writer argues for total freedom, the reader is left thinking that he has ignored the element of predetermination. If the writer says that everything in life is preordained, the reader feels he has ignored man's freewill. This leads to confusion in the reader's mind.

*Life is evenly
balanced between
both freewill and
divine will, between
freedom and fate.*

As has been suggested here, life is evenly balanced between both freewill and divine will, between freedom and fate. If you reflect on both aspects, your confusion will end and you will arrive at a definitive answer to this question. □



THE EXISTENCE OF EVIL

Not an Inherent Feature

THE physical world, it has been established, functions according to certain fixed, predetermined laws. It is curious that those who extend the application of these laws to the study of human history cannot but meet with failure. While the physical world may be explainable within the framework of predeterminism, the events of the human world are simply not amenable to interpretation in terms of such laws.

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

According to Islam, that person is most precious who leads his life in this world in such a manner that despite facing all sorts of temptations, he succeeds in overcoming them. Despite having the power to misuse his freedom, he refrains from doing so.

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

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

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

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

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



SURRENDER BY CHOICE

A Conscious Decision

GOD Almighty created the universe. In its vast space there are stars, galaxies, planets, the solar system, and countless other particles and so on. All these items of creation have adopted a culture of worship, which is total surrender to God, without the slightest deviation. It is this surrender to God that makes our universe a 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)

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.

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 utilizes this mind and surrenders before God as a reality rather than as a matter of compulsion. When such a human being surrenders to God, 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, who consciously knows 'I am what I am'. 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. □



A HISTORY OF INTELLECTUAL PERVERSION

A Curb on Freedom of Choice

ACCORDING to the Quran, God has created the universe with a certain purpose. All its parts which are strictly under His control are carrying out His divine scheme without the slightest deviation. Similarly, man too has been created with a certain purpose. Yet man, on the contrary, is totally free in his choices. He can do what he wants by his own decision. However, in spite of this freedom he is being watched constantly by God, for He does not allow any such deviation in human history over a long period as would nullify His very creation plan.

A Custom-made Universe

The universe made by God is so vast that, despite the enormous progress made by human beings in their attempts to fathom the universe, many of its secrets still remain unknown. The planet Earth, made by God as part of the cosmos, was and still is unique in the entire universe, in that it has been endowed with an atmosphere and all the other factors which are essential to make it habitable for man.

After bringing into existence a favourable world in the form of Earth, God created the first man Adam, and his feminine counterpart Eve. Although the precise date of this event is unknown, Adam and Eve were the first pair of human beings to set foot on Earth.

Adam was the first man as well as the first Prophet. The way of God is to select a man as His messenger from amongst human beings themselves in order to send His revelations to humankind. Therefore, God revealed to Adam through an angel the purpose of man's inhabiting the Earth. According to this plan, God created a special creature in the form of man, upon whom He bestowed freedom. Amongst the entire universe that functions compulsorily under the will of God, man is the only creature that has been granted free will. The rest of the universe has no choice but to submit to the will of God, it is desirable for man also to opt for this divine plan of his own free will.

This plan of divine will is based on two basic principles—monotheism and being a well-wisher of humanity. Monotheism holds man to worshipping one God alone, and not associating anyone or anything in this worship. Being a well-wisher holds man to adhering completely

to ethical principles in dealing with other human beings and refraining from all kinds of injustice and oppression.

Along with this, God informed man that, although he appeared to be free, he was fully accountable to Him. God has a complete record of man's actions. In the eternal life after death God would judge everyone according to this record. One who exercised his freedom wrongly would be thrown into eternal hellfire.

God has a complete record of man's actions. In the eternal life after death God would judge everyone according to this record. One who exercised his freedom wrongly would be thrown into eternal hellfire.

Adam prepared tablets of clay on which he engraved the basic divine teachings, then heated them in a fire, thus preserving this divine guidance for the coming generations. It is believed that these divine teachings were written by Adam in the Syriac language.

Adam died at a ripe old age. For a long time after his demise, his people continued to adhere faithfully to the divine guidance. But later, rot took root in the people. They took to worshipping nature and other human beings like themselves. People began to adopt the ways of injustice and oppression instead of justice and rectitude. After about one

thousand years the perversion became so all-pervading that they were completely distanced from the path of monotheism as shown by Adam.

Deviation from the True Path

God subsequently sent Noah as His messenger. He was granted an exceptionally long life of nine hundred and fifty years. During this extended period, he continued to show people the right path, generation after generation. Only a few people heeded his words. The rest persisted in their sinful ways. Then, in accordance with the ways of God, a huge flood engulfed them by way of punishment. Noah and his small band of followers were saved in an ark, while all the rest were drowned.

At that time, human population was probably concentrated only in the region of Asia known as Mesopotamia. The men and women saved in the wake of this flood settled afterwards in other parts of the world. Their race multiplied until it spread over the continents of Asia, Africa and Europe.

After the death of Noah, his people continued for a considerable time to adhere to the divine path shown by him. But again degeneration

set in amongst later generations and they deviated from the path of monotheism and justice. God's messengers—the Quran has mentioned twenty-six by name—continued to come for several thousand years. The corpus of *Hadith* informs us that about one hundred thousand messengers came to the world. In this way a long period elapsed between Adam and Jesus, when God's messengers continued to come to the world in almost every generation. But each time only a few individuals believed in them. The majority continued to reject these prophets in every age.

The Reasons for Perversion

What were the reasons for this continued transgression? There were two main reasons; one, political absolutism; another, ignorance about the world of nature.

In ancient times, the system of monarchy prevailed. The kings of those days had adopted an easy strategy for the consolidation of their empire, and that was to apply a complete curb on intellectual freedom. As a result, science could not make any progress in the days of old.

The same was the case with religion. The policy adopted by these kings was not to allow their subjects to follow any religion other than that approved of by the king. Superstitious religion served their purpose only too well. Therefore, not only did they themselves embrace superstitious religion, but they also compelled their subjects to adhere to it. People were denied the right to think freely and opt for any religion other than the official one. This policy of the kings produced the evil of religious persecution. History shows that religious persecution has continued from time immemorial in one form or another.

The other main factor in this connection was ignorance. In ancient times, man knew too little about the world and its phenomena. Political absolutism had placed an almost total ban on scientific research. Therefore, all kinds of superstitions regarding natural phenomena made inroads unchecked. It was generally held that the sun, the moon and the stars, etc. possessed supernatural powers. Similarly it was believed that the sea, the mountains and other such natural phenomena were endowed with some extraordinary, mysterious power and exercised decisive control over human destiny.

The end of religious persecution and flourishing of scientific temper was the direct result of Islamic revolution. Islam paved the way for scientific investigation, and allowed individuals to choose an ideology for their lives and practice accordingly out of free will. □

FIND YOUR TRUE CALLING

You are made for a Higher Purpose

ROBERT Clive (1725-1774) was the first British Governor of the Bengal Presidency. He began as a writer for the East India Company. Dissatisfied with his salary of a mere 5 pounds a year, he decided to end his life. Clive became so depressed with his desk job he attempted suicide by putting a loaded pistol to his head and pulling the trigger, but the gun failed to fire. Suddenly realizing that God had made him for a bigger task, he joined the East India Company's Army, and gradually reached the top. Robert Clive went on to become instrumental in establishing British rule in India.

The Quran and the *Hadith* tell us that if God prevents a task from happening the way you had planned it, it is a clue that He wants you to do something else. A *Hadith* report says that when God loves a people, He tests them through difficulties. (*Tirmidhi*)

Be grateful for the seeming setbacks and problems you face in life. They may be God's way of telling you that He has some higher purpose for you.

And why is this so?

It is to make you rethink and re-plan your life. It tells you that He has created you for something bigger than what you are presently involved in. God has not made you to make this world your goal and purpose and to get lost in it. He has created you to worship Him. So, instead of chasing the world, devote yourself to God-realization and inviting people to God.

Moses was brought up in Pharaoh's palace, but God created such conditions that his stay there could not continue. God had created Moses not to live in the palace, but for a far higher purpose—to invite people to God.

So, be grateful for the seeming setbacks and problems you face in life. They may be God's way of telling you that He has some higher purpose for you. □



THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Answering an Age-old Question

IN its issue no. 134 (1992), the journal, *Faith and Reason*, (published in England), brought out an article titled, '*The Relationship between Faith and Reason*', by Dr Paul Badham, a Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at St. David's College, Lampeter, in the University of Wales. He appears to be defenceless while discussing the Problem of Evil. He writes:

"I have to acknowledge that the existence of so much evil and suffering in the world counts against any vision of an all-powerful and loving God."

The problem of evil is the question of how to reconcile the existence of evil and suffering with an Omnipotent, Omnibenevolent, and Omniscient God. To put it simply, this is a question of why there is so much suffering in the world if there indeed is a God who loves His creation.

It must be noted that evil is a relative term. An evil is an evil so long as it cannot be explained. A doctor performs surgery on the patient's body, a judge sentences a criminal to be hanged. All this appears to be injustice and cruelty, but we do not call it so, simply because we have a proper explanation to give for the acts of the judge and the doctor. The same is true of the evil pointed out by Dr. Badham.

The evil that exists in human society is not spread over the entire universe. Leaving aside the limited human world, the vast universe is perfect, par excellence. It is entirely free of any defect or evil.

Now the question arises as to why there is evil in the human world. To arrive at an understanding of this we shall have to understand the creation plan of the Creator. The creation plan of God provides the only criterion by which to judge the nature of this matter.

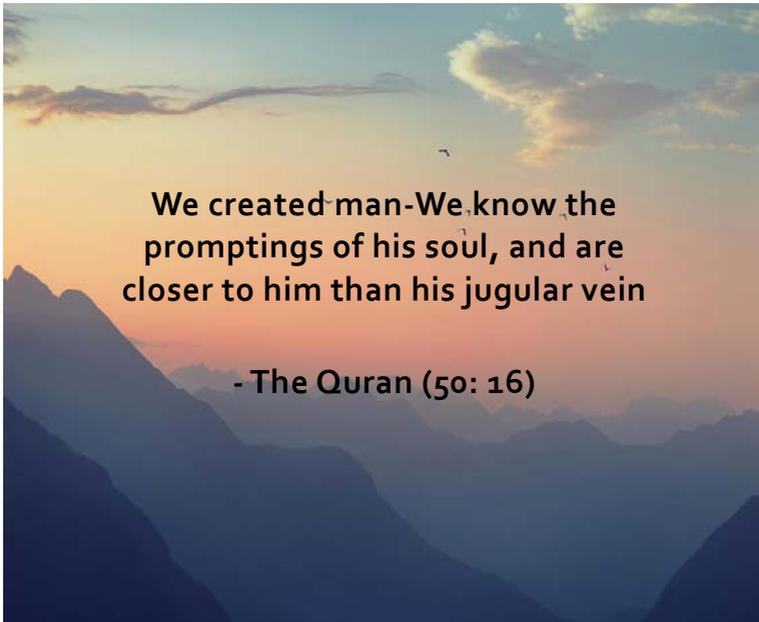
The creation plan of God as revealed to His Prophet is that this world is a testing ground, where man's virtue is being placed on trial. It is in accordance with the records of this period of trial that man's eternal fate will be decreed. It is for the purpose of this test that he has been

The present world appears meaningless when seen independently, that is, without joining the Hereafter with it. However, when we take this world and the Hereafter together, the entire matter takes a new turn.

granted freedom. In the absence of freedom, the question of life being a test would not arise.

The evil in question is, in fact, a concomitant of this freedom. God desires to select those individuals who, in spite of being granted freedom, lead a disciplined and principled life. For individuals to prove their worth an atmosphere of freedom must be provided. Undoubtedly, due to such an atmosphere, some people will surely misuse this freedom and perpetrate injustice. This is the inevitable price to be paid for such a creation plan to be brought to completion. No better creation plan can be envisaged for this world.

The present world appears meaningless when seen independently, that is, without joining the Hereafter with it. However, when we take this world and the Hereafter together, the entire matter takes a new turn. Now this world becomes extremely meaningful and extremely valuable. What at first was seen as Problem of Evil, is essentially a misuse of freedom by man. □



MAN'S UNIQUENESS

Responsibility and Privilege

EARTH contains nearly 1 trillion species, according to a study from biologists at Indiana University. Among all of these, human beings have a special status. All other living creatures fully comply with the law of nature. In the whole world, human beings are the only creatures who have been given full freedom. They can choose their actions based on their own will. This concept is mentioned in the Quran as 'appointing man as successor on Earth' (2: 30) and 'giving the trust to man' (33: 72). On the basis of this feature, human beings can earn the reward of eternal Paradise in their next phase of life.

In contrast to other living beings, man must do something unique—and that is, to live in self-discovered truth. Man must, through his own choosing, walk on the right path. Through his own will he must lead a life of self-control. Through his own decision he must adopt a life of submission to his Creator.

This is man's uniqueness. But there is always a responsibility that comes along with every gift. And so, along with man's uniqueness a certain responsibility is also present—and that is what is called a test. The test for man is for him to bow down before God despite the freedom that he enjoys. Despite this freedom, he must obey God. Despite this freedom, he must save himself from defiance and deviance. He must stand firm in self-discovered truth and adopt the method of self-imposed discipline. This disciplined life is termed in the Quran and *Hadith* as doing something for the sake of God. This conduct that is desired of man is so important that for this, the Creator has assured the greatest reward—eternal Paradise. □

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EVERY SITUATION IN LIFE IS A TEST

Comforts and Hardships

A COMMON phenomenon observed when Muslims get their cherished homes built for themselves is the display of words put up in frame outside their home: "This is by the grace of my Lord." These words are part of a much larger Quranic verse. Apparently, the owner means that the house he possesses is a blessing bestowed on him from God or a gift given to him by God. But this is not the correct or implied meaning of these words.

The phrase "this is by the grace of my Lord" has appeared in the Quran in Chapter al-Naml. These are the words spoken by the Prophet Solomon. The context given in the Quran is that when the Queen Sheba entered Solomon's royal court, he demanded the jinns of his kingdom to bring to him her crown all the way from Ma'rib in Yemen to Jerusalem in Palestine. One of the jinns who was under Solomon's command accomplished this feat in the twinkling of an eye. When Solomon saw this extraordinary feat of the Queen's crown being so swiftly placed before him, he exclaimed: "This is by the grace of my Lord, to test whether I am grateful or ungrateful." (27: 40)

If we keep all of Solomon's words before us, we will realize that he had taken God's "grace" as a means of putting him to the test. According to him, this special blessing of God upon him was to test if he would acknowledge His bounties and humble himself before God, or if he would become arrogant and haughty.

In truth, believers will receive God's gift in the world Hereafter. Whatever a person gets in this world is only meant to test him. Its real purpose is to test a person and not to bestow anything upon him. From this perspective, the comforts and luxuries of this world are, in essence, the same as the difficulties and hardships—both situations are meant to examine a person. One is required to be grateful to God when he enjoys well-being and to exhibit patience when he experiences problems.

A person should develop the ability to express gratitude to God when in comfort, and to remain patient when faced with troubles. This approach is the real gift of God to human beings in this world. □

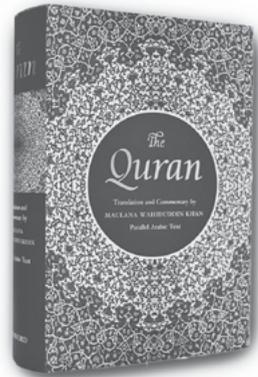


THE WORD OF GOD

From The Scriptures

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

Translated from Arabic and commentary by
Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



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

The decree of God is at hand, so do not seek to hasten it. Holy is He, and exalted far above what they associate with Him. He sends down the angels with revelations by His command to whoever of His servants He pleases, saying, 'Warn humankind that there is no god save Me, so fear Me.' He created the heavens and the earth for a true purpose. He is exalted above anything they associate with Him.

(16: 1-3)

The reality of religion is that man should apprehend the Being of God and His workmanship in the universe so intensely and realistically that the Being of the one God should become everything for him; man should fear only Him and on Him alone, should he build up his hopes. The one God should be the entire focus of his heart and mind.

This is what constitutes the act of making God the object of worship (ilah) and amounts to praying to Him. All the prophets came into the world in order to bring about this condition. Those who prove to have this sense of submission to God will be treated as successful on Judgement Day, but those who go against this will be left without hope. For the general people, this decision will be taken on Doomsday (Judgement Day), but for the addressees of the prophet, it starts in this world itself.

There is perfect unity in the universe and at the same time, there also is perfect meaningfulness. Unity in the universe makes it unwarranted for anyone to make somebody other than the one God the centre of his attention. And it is the natural consequence of its meaningfulness that it should meet a meaningful end. In this way, the system governing

the universe provides arguments in favour of both the unity of God (tawhid) and the existence of the Hereafter.

He created man out of a [mere] drop of sperm: yet he shows himself to be openly contentious! He has created cattle for you: from them you derive food and clothing and numerous other benefits; how pleasant they look when you bring them home in the evenings and when you take them out to pasture in the mornings. They carry your loads to places which you could otherwise not reach without great hardship—surely, your Lord is compassionate and merciful—He has created horses, mules and donkeys, so that you may ride them, and also so that they may be put on show, and He creates other things beyond your knowledge. (16: 4-8)

Man's life begins from a humble fluid. But when man grows up, he tries to take a stand in opposition to God. If he were to keep in view the reality of his origin, he would never allow himself to become arrogant in this world.

Animals, in particular, cattle, are among the various bounties with which man has been blessed in the present world. These are just like living machines of nature that are engaged in catering to the various requirements of man. Cows consume grass and fodder and convert them into meat and milk for his consumption. Sheep produce wool on their bodies which is used for his clothing. The owner of these animals includes them in his assets and this enhances his prestige.

'He creates other things beyond your knowledge' refers to those benefits that are available through sources other than animals. A part of these other sources was available to man even in ancient times. Man has discovered the major part of it in modern times and, for instance, is utilizing machines in place of animals.

Man's innumerable worldly endowments have not been created by him but have been provided for him by God. This shows that the Creator of this world is a kind Creator. Thus it necessarily follows that man should be grateful to his Creator and discharge the obligations due to Him as his Benefactor. □



ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

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

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

Should we follow humanity or God?

These are both different issues. We believe in God because He is the Creator. Humanity is not a creator; it is a social phenomenon. It is a known fact that nature is an enormous reservoir of facts and knowledge, and according to science, man—in his limited lifetime—can acquire only a partial knowledge of reality. If science has a limited scope, then the question arises as to how should one attain wisdom?

There are numerous grave situations in life that require wisdom and guidance from God the Creator of the universe to find solutions. The Quran says: He grants wisdom to whom He will; and whoever is granted wisdom has indeed been granted abundant wealth. Yet none bear this in mind except those endowed with understanding. (2: 269) There are many examples from the life of the Prophet where he was guided towards wise solutions for problems by God Almighty. So, belief in God is essential because there are many occasions in life when we require wisdom to deal with the situations in our life. Quran the book of God and the life of the Prophet who lived under divine guidance present this wisdom. Belief in humanity is only one aspect of belief in God. It is because of our belief in God that we can inculcate human values in ourselves.

What is actually within man's control?

The present pandemic is directly giving us this understanding of what we can control and what we cannot. Natural laws will always remain as God has ordained them. These are laws which God has defined. There

are physical laws known to man, and man cannot alter them. Human beings have freedom only to choose their action. For example, a person cannot change the natural laws governing the natural resources, but he can choose to make use of them with responsibility or be a reckless user. According to the creation plan of God, this is a test for man and he will be accountable for the choices he made in life, which is entirely in his control. Belief in God and accountability of our actions instill in man a responsible behaviour towards every resource God has bestowed on us in this world. □

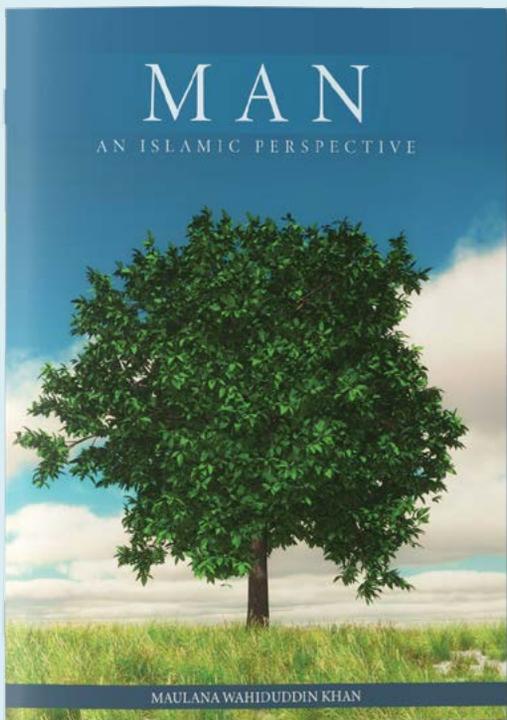


Man: An Islamic Perspective

A booklet by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

The Padma Bhushan awardee Maulana Wahiduddin Khan sets himself the task of investigating man's nature and his true place in the cosmos as revealed in the Islamic Scriptures.

He then applies the results to the resolution of man's present predicament.



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