

The background of the cover is a photograph of a sunset. The sun is a bright, glowing orb in the center of the frame, partially obscured by thin, horizontal clouds. The sky transitions from a pale yellow near the horizon to a deep magenta at the top. In the foreground, there are dark, silhouetted stalks of tall grass. In the middle ground, a misty field is visible, with several trees and utility poles scattered across the landscape. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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SEARCH FOR TRUTH

Religion remains the only place where the answers to questions about Truth can be discovered.

Almost everyone who has come into this world asks himself: “Who am I?” This question is present in the mind of almost every person, whether consciously or otherwise. Across the globe, for centuries, great minds have been searching for an answer to this fundamental existential question.

The history of human thought is, directly or indirectly, another name for the search for the answer to this question. In some way or the other, every person seeks to know the answer to this question and other fundamental questions, such as: What is man? How did man come into being? What is the purpose of human life? What is truth, and what is falsehood? Where does a man go after death?

Existential questions like these are called ‘the search for truth’. Moreover, the search for truth has been the biggest concern for man for centuries. Among those

who sought answers to these questions was a class of people known as the philosophers. However, despite thousands of years of effort, the philosophers could not arrive at any satisfactory answer to these questions. As a result, philosophy became a discipline of only intellectual debates, dissensions, and conflicts.

Likewise, in the field of spirituality, people tried to reflect on these fundamental questions of life. However, they, too, met the same fate as that of philosophers. The primary reason for this was that the spiritualists sought truth through meditation in 'the world of the heart'. However, they could obtain no success in this regard. The simple reason behind this is that the heart is just an organ for pumping blood. Therefore, the realisation or consciousness of truth was absent in the heart. If this is the case, how could those searching for it find it there?

The same thing happened with science and its votaries. Knowledge of science acquired great importance with the advent of 'modernity'. In the beginning, people believed that science would finally succeed in

answering the questions raised in the search for truth. However, science quickly narrowed down the scope of its investigation. In their research, scientists found that obtaining answers to existential questions of life was as impossible for them as it had proved to be for philosophers. Thus, they set aside these questions and confined themselves only to researching physical or material things. In this way, it became clear that finding the answers to existential questions through science was impossible.

In this regard, the final domain was that of religion. The task of religion is to help man become aware of the truth and to clarify man's position in the universe. Religions came precisely to give man the proper guidance on these matters. However, if we look at the present state of religions, we will realise that they fell prey to distortion later. Hence, there is an urgent need to re-study religions. Beliefs must be rediscovered in their original form.

Philosophy, Science, and Heart-Based Spirituality have failed to find the correct answers to existential

questions in the search for Truth. After this, religion remains the only place where the answers to questions about truth can be discovered. In this matter, those who do not believe in religion and those who do are both standing on the same platform. For both, it is necessary to rediscover truth through religion. The only difference is that this would be a discovery for deniers of religion, while it would be a rediscovery for believers.

‘Religion’, here, is not used in its conventional meaning, which is a significantly reduced version. The present versions of religion developed in later generations when ‘religious’ people became victims of degeneration. These days, when a person is ‘born into’ a particular religious community, he knows only this reduced form of religion. He becomes familiar with this reduced form of religion to a prejudicial extent. To know the original version of religion, people must come out of the veils of their prejudices. Going beyond the degenerated forms of religion, we need to discover the true form and face of religion. It can be called the

‘Rediscovery of Religion’. Without this ‘rediscovery’, understanding religion’s true importance and meaning will be impossible.

TRUTH: A STUDY

If a man does not discover the truth in its absolute sense, by his very nature, he will continuously pursue his search until he finds the absolute truth.

Some people argue that there is nothing like Absolute Truth. Everything is relative, they say. Every claim to truth is socially constructed. They claim that truth is subjective, i.e., each person has his own truth. Something that appears true to one person need not be accurate for someone else. In other words, they argue that truth is something relative; it is not something real. One can put it thus: ‘There is no full stop in truth, only commas.’

This way of thinking is entirely erroneous. There are no logical or rational grounds for this sort of hypothesis. In this world, everything that man accepts, he does so

in an absolute sense. It is the way human nature is. If man does not discover something in its absolute sense, he continuously pursues his search until he finds it. For example, in ancient times, man knew little about the sun and the solar system. Nevertheless, he sought to investigate these phenomena for thousands of years until he finally discovered their reality. He remained continuously engaged in this search until he arrived at this discovery.

The same happens in all other fields of knowledge, too. For thousands of years, man was engrossed in research in different areas and is still thus engaged. He keeps up his research as long as he does not discover the reality of something that he seeks to know. In other words, everything has a final form for man—from the stars to the atom, nothing is an exception to this rule.

In man's mind, it is as if everything has an absolute character. This certainty is based on curiosity and research that has continued for thousands of years. Therefore, if man starts to believe that things do not

have a final form, all scientific activities will halt, and the journey of knowledge will permanently end.

The very same principle is at work in our personal affairs as well. Man considers himself an absolute being. He cannot remain alive even for a single day if he does not think so. Similarly, a person considers his mother, wife, and children absolute. The system of family life is based on this conception. If this were not so, the whole of human life would disintegrate. Likewise, man also considers his property—his house, business, and bank balance—absolute. He could not manage his economic affairs if he did not regard them this way.

In this situation, to believe that truth is not absolute is to think that truth is an exception to what is a general rule. It would be as if, in an absolute world, the status of truth is that of an exceptional non-absolute! There is no logical basis for this utterly absurd belief. It would be incomprehensible that every other thing has an absolute reality in this vast world, but truth alone is non-absolute, being the sole exception. It is a logical inconsistency that any intelligent person cannot accept.

It is no minor matter. If one reflects deeply, one will find that man is a dual being—consisting of body and soul. Other than truth, all things that are a part of human life are connected with man's bodily needs. Truth is what is desirable at the level of man's spiritual needs. It would be incomprehensible if one were to say, that the things needed to fulfill man's physical requirements are all absolute, but the truth, which meets man's spiritual needs, is non-absolute in character.

To accept this sort of division, one would have to believe that a vast contradiction is present in this world—that here, the things we require for our physical needs are present in an absolute sense, but what we need for the satisfaction of our spiritual needs—The Truth—is the only thing that does not have an absolute character.

Truth is man's greatest need. Without truth, man is incomplete. Truth is such a basic need for man that even if truth was not absolute, we would have to pretend that it was so. The fact of the matter is that not accepting the truth as an absolute is intellectual suicide.

To not believe in absolute truth is like someone saying that he does not accept his mother as his mother in the absolute sense. In other words, he might say, "It may be that she is my mother, but it may also be that she is not." No serious person can tolerate this concept of non-absolutism. In the same way, a serious person cannot accept to say that to him; the truth is not absolute but merely relative. That is to say, that A can be confirmed and B, too, and C as well, all the way up to Z! It may be equally true that from A to Z, everything is utterly false and that there is no such thing as truth! No serious person can accept this absurd intellectual jugglery.

A serious person searching for the truth can honestly admit, "I have not yet found the truth. I am presently only a seeker." However, no serious and sane person can say that truth is not something absolute and that there is nothing like Absolute Truth.

Every single thing in the universe in which man lives is absolute. So, a star is a star; it is not an elephant. An elephant is an elephant, not a star. Likewise, everything is, in a known sense, an absolute thing. Moreover, if

anything has not been known in an absolute sense, then man continuously tries to discover it in the absolute sense.

The same thing applies to man's personality. By his very nature, man desires the absolute. He wants to live in certainty. He wants that when he knows a woman is his mother, he should know this fact as certainty. In the same way, when he knows a house is his house, he wants to feel sure that it is indeed his. If this were not the case, man would be uncertain about everything in life. Moreover, it is a fact that man cannot live very long and be at peace in the face of uncertainty.

These facts clearly show that the concept of the absolute is entirely in accordance with man's nature. Contrary to this, thinking that nothing in this world has an absolute character or reality goes against the basic demands of man's nature.

To believe the truth to be non-absolute or relative is like saying that one does not believe anything to be true. Such a belief can only make someone a sceptic, but that is not the recipe for a successful life.

NATURE AND MAN

Acknowledging the blessings of the Benefactor alone is the price one must pay to get the right to use these blessings for oneself.

In this world, man finds himself amidst nature: the sun and the moon, the stars, and the planets, the mountains and the seas, the trees and the desert, the birds, and the animals, etc. When man sees this vast world around him, he is utterly amazed.

History tells us that ancient man began to regard nature as sacred. This led to nature worship. Taking various natural phenomena to be deities, people began to worship them. As a result, man could not use nature to progress beyond a point for thousands of years. He could not engage in research into nature and thereby employ the powers that lay hidden in it. Living amidst nature, he could not make nature useful for himself beyond a fundamental level. Regarding the various natural phenomena as powerful and sacred, people sought to worship them rather than study and investigate them.

Over the centuries, man gradually developed a new understanding of nature. He realised that nature is not a god. Instead, it is a creature, in the same way as man is a creature. With this understanding, nature became an object of study and investigation for man rather than something to be feared, propitiated, and worshipped.

Gradually, a new process began, a process of control over nature. Man's search led him to discover different hidden forces inside nature. Then man started efforts to discover these forces and use them for his benefit.

In this way, a new revolution began. Gradually, it transformed the pattern of human life in the 20th century. The world that had hitherto been hidden in nature appeared ultimately before man. In this way, humankind arrived in the modern civilised world.

On the face of it, there is a big difference between these two worlds. If the first was characterised by nature worship; in the second, man regarded himself as the controller of nature. However, no essential difference exists between the ancient age and the modern age that

succeeded it as regards the relationship between man and nature. In both these ages, man failed to discover the proper relationship between nature and himself. In both ancient and contemporary times, man remained unaware and ignorant of this vital matter.

The fundamental error of ancient man was that he took nature as his deity, although nature is, in reality, a creature of God in the same way as man is. As a result of this error, humankind fell prey to debilitating superstitious beliefs and practices. Man fell so deeply into the pit of these falsehoods that his religion and culture were thoroughly imbued with crass superstition.

In this matter, the case of modern man is just the same as that of ancient man. The difference between the two is only at the superficial level or at the level of mere appearances. In actual reality, there is no difference between them at all. Ancient man's fundamental error was that he had come to regard nature as God. Modern man's mistake is that he believes nature is everything. When he investigated nature, modern man discovered

that many powers are hidden: the steam engine is hidden in nature, like the motor car, the airplane, the telephone, the mobile phone, the internet, etc. Inside nature, an entire civilisation is hidden, a civilisation that can make man's life amazingly attractive and alluring.

Modern man's error was not that he began studying nature and establishing a civilisation. Instead, the error lay in a massive blunder that he made—he took full advantage of the blessings of nature, but he completely ignored or forgot the Benefactor, the Giver of all these blessings—that is, God. These blessings were the creation of God, the Creator. When modern man discovered the blessings of nature, he fell upon them hungrily. Breaking all barriers and restraints, man took full advantage of the bounties of nature that modern science led him to.

This was man's primary mistake. The truth is that to partake of the blessings of God is not legitimate until and unless man acknowledges God, the Benefactor, and the Giver of all these blessings. Acknowledging the

blessings of the Benefactor alone is the price one must pay to get the right to use these blessings for oneself.

It is no minor matter to separate the blessings and the Benefactor, make full use of the former and forget the latter altogether. It is nothing but a heinous crime. Moreover, this crime destroys man's life. As a result of this, man becomes rebellious. Instead of discipline, he adopts unlimited freedom as his way. Instead of being duty-conscious, he becomes rights-conscious. Abandoning all responsibility, he hurtles off on the path of anarchy. In other words, instead of accepting God as God, he seeks to put himself in God's place. In this way, the philosophy of Humanism emerges, based on the concept of the transfer of seat from God to man.

In the ancient past, man had superstitious beliefs and customs about nature. It undoubtedly was something very wrong, but it was minor in comparison. The ideology about nature in modern times is even more dangerous in its damaging effects. Its damage was not just that it led to devastating wars such as the two World Wars, which had never happened before, or

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that in this age, nuclear bombs were invented, which was unthinkable to ancient man. A deadly ill emerged in line with the modern ideology that was much more dangerous than all previous ills—the idea of unlimited or unbridled freedom. Despite all the superstitions he was drowned in, ancient man considered himself restrained by certain limits and rules. However, modern man thinks of himself as utterly free from all limitations. As a result, an entire civilisation has emerged based on crass exploitation and immorality, which has made man completely rights-conscious.

CULTURE OF HEEDLESSNESS

Consumerism is making people live in intellectual starvation, leading to their complete heedlessness of God and forgetfulness of the purpose of life. Man must learn to ponder over deeper truths and live at a higher level of humanity.

In the present era, a particular culture has spread worldwide, called by different names—‘progressive

culture’, ‘modern culture’, ‘consumer culture’, ‘entertainment culture’, ‘secular culture’, ‘Western culture’, and so on. However, properly speaking, a more appropriate name for it is just one: the culture of forgetfulness.

On a vast scale, this culture has put human beings into complete heedlessness of God and forgetfulness of the purpose of life. As a result, today’s man is engrossed in different types of engagements. In this way, he does not find the opportunity to even think of The Truth.

In the ancient past, man had many free moments. He used to spend those moments in search of meaning. He used to contemplate the reality of things. He used to try to understand issues that were beyond the external world. However, the artificial activities of today’s world have enticed men so strongly towards them that few people now spare time to contemplate the more meaningful questions of life.

One of the many questions about human life is: How can one fulfill the material needs of life? In previous ages,

this question was a straightforward one. Its purpose was to obtain the necessities of life—food, clothing, shelter, etc. However, modern culture has dramatically exacerbated the issue. Earlier, the question was how the needs of life could be obtained. Later, another question became the focus of attention—how can one get life's material comforts and luxuries? The issue went even further, and men began to ask: How can life be as enjoyable and pleasurable as possible? How can man's desires be fulfilled to the maximum possible extent? Arriving here, now man began to focus his whole life only on obtaining material objects of comfort. He no longer had time to think about making his life more meaningful. Because of this situation, we have called contemporary culture the culture of heedlessness.

There are two significant aspects of human life. First is the necessities of life, and the second is the purpose of life. An essential part of the 'progress' that the present age has registered is that it has dramatically increased the production and availability of material objects, going far beyond basic human needs. These consumer

goods have been made to appear very attractive and alluring. As a result, man's full attention is now focused on these things. Consequently, the list of one's needs and wants (and many wants came to be considered needs) became so long that it appeared to have no end. Acquiring these objects became the be-all and end-all for people. In previous ages, the satisfaction of one's needs happened through a few simple things. However, people's list of wants (in addition to their needs) is so long that it seems never-ending.

Acquiring material objects to cater to one's ever-increasing desires has now assumed the form of a veritable religion, the religion of consumerism. A deadly result of this is that today, almost no one wants to reflect on questions related to the very purpose of human life. The phrase 'the higher purpose of life' has become unfamiliar. Modern consumerism has led man to live at the level of beasts. As a result, living at a higher level of humanity has become alien for most people.

For this state of affairs, man has had to pay a hefty

price—and that is, his intellectual development has stopped in the true sense of the term. Now almost every person's condition is such that if you speak with them about issues related to their profession, they will appear to be 'experts', but if you talk to them on any subject other than their profession, you will feel that you are talking to someone foolish. From the physical point of view, they may appear very smart, but in terms of intellectual standards, they seem to be dwarfs. Perhaps it will not be wrong to term contemporary consumerist culture as 'beast culture'. A deadly result of the upsurge of this 'beast culture' is that people of today's age have become victims of intellectual dwarfism.

The condition of contemporary man is such that he now has access to a wide variety of material goods, but at the same time, he has become a victim of intellectual starvation. Today, man first needs to extricate himself from this morass of intellectual starvation. He must make himself consciously so capable that he may be able to ponder over deeper truths. He must live for

a higher purpose than merely catering to his bodily demands. He must rise from the animal level and truly live at the human level.

There are two significant periods of man's intellectual history: one, before the emergence of the consumerist culture, and the other, the period following the rise of this culture. If you reflect deeply, you will discover that man achieved a great deal in etiquette, refinement, and wisdom before the rise of the consumerist culture. In this period, excellent books on intellect and culture were written. However, after the rise of the consumerist culture, the development of etiquette, refinement, and wisdom came to a halt. In this later period, one can name hardly any book that measures up to the standard of learning and etiquette set by the past.

This difference has also reached even the realm of science. Before the spread of the consumerist culture, theoretical science witnessed remarkable developments. Many great thinkers emerged in different fields of science. However, after the rise and

spread of the consumerist culture, the progress of theoretical science almost wholly came to a halt. Thus, scientists work on topics considered 'marketable' in today's terms. In the past, science was the name of scholarly research. However, now, science has turned into a crass commercial activity.

A deadly result of this situation is that man's intellectual and mental progress has almost completely stopped. Everywhere, you will see people who look very happy and beautiful, but human beings having a sense of fulfillment are almost nowhere to be found. There is an urgent need to change this situation. Otherwise, humanity will turn into a new sort of anarchic jungle.

The bodies of a man and several animals have many similarities. Their bodily activities are, to a great extent, similar. It is as if animals are humans that walk on four feet and humans are animals that walk on two feet. However, the study of psychology presents a different picture. It tells us that man enjoys a special status in the whole universe. The reason for man's position is just one—and that is man's mind. Man's

mind distinguishes him from animals and everything else in the universe. Man's mind is a great treasure. This mind gives man a distinguishing status not enjoyed by any other thing or being in the universe.

The culture of consumerism has vastly exacerbated man's physical demands and, at the same time, has almost completely stopped the proper development of man's mind. However, it is the mental component that is man's real being. It is this that makes man. Without this mental component, man would be just a beast.

A movement must be launched to overcome this problem. Once again, man should be brought back to his original or true nature. Man should be made a man once again. Once again, man should be capable of using his intellectual potential for proper development. He should once again become actively engaged in the path of actual intellectual progress.

RELIGION AND HUMAN LIFE

A human personality consists of a body and a soul. To stay healthy, man requires nourishment for both. Religion is man's spiritual nourishment. It is food for man's soul.

What is Religion? The crux of religion is what is generally called 'Spirituality'. Religion is another name for spiritual science. If other scientific disciplines are about external or physical realities, religion is that science that studies the inner man.

A human personality is manifested in two ways—body and soul. For the health and progress of both, man requires continuous nourishment. The nourishment for the body is material stuff: food and drink. If someone were to stay without food and drink for a while, it would affect their physical condition. They would die if they faced hunger and thirst for a long time.

The same is true of the soul. Religion is man's spiritual nourishment. It is food for man's soul. Without authentic religion, man's soul would wither. Religion

gives strength to man's inner being. Religion is the basis for man's spiritual life. Religion is not another name for singing hymns and performing some rituals: it represents the Truth. Every person, rich or poor, powerful or weak, needs religion. Through religion, man obtains what can be called the right starting point of life. Man deprived of religion is also deprived of the right starting point in life.

Religion is the answer to the question, 'Who am I?' It informs man of the purpose of creation. Religion gives man the true philosophy of life. It is a guidebook for life. Religion takes man out of the darkness of ignorance and unawareness and into the light of wisdom and awareness.

Religion makes a person a good member of society. It blesses man with a code of conduct to be able to live with others as a good and trustworthy human being. Religion prepares man to become someone who is not a problem for others. Religion makes man a giver, not just a taker.

Religion is a companion of man in his times of difficulty. It bestows man with the art of crisis management. Religion makes man capable of not becoming a victim of crisis but converting crises into occasions for intellectual nourishment.

Religion is a sign of the intellectual health of a person. Religion makes man capable of converting a negative experience into a positive result. Religion can help man transform an enemy into his friend.

As opposed to conventional belief, religion is not a set of rituals and dogmas. True religion is not that a person is born into a particular family linked to a specific religious tradition. As a result, he becomes connected with some 'religious' groups he identifies with. These are all external things. It is not the reality of religion. The reality of religion is inner realisation, and inner realisation is far above external things.

Religion instills right thinking in man. It shows man those hidden things the ordinary human eye cannot see. Religion makes man capable of drawing lessons

from the past and seeing the future in the present. Religion makes a man a superman. Religion is a means for man's spiritual evolution.

Our world has two aspects—one, the visible world, and the other, the world that cannot be seen. The world is like an iceberg. Only the tip of an iceberg is visible. The physical eye cannot see the more significant part. Religion makes the non-visible dimension of the world a visible thing for a man.

In life, one repeatedly faces occasions when one feels helpless when one begins to fear that one has lost control over things. At such times, religion appears as a hope, a means for salvation. At this time, religion saves man's drowning ship. Religion is a source of certainty and confidence in all sorts of challenges.

Religion is the source of all virtue. Religion gives man the strength to forgive those who get angry with him, rise above greed, overcome jealousy, accept others, relate respectfully with all, save oneself from injustice, always behave well even with enemies, be a giver, and

not just a taker. Religion makes man someone who lives for a higher purpose. It creates within man a principled character. It nurtures self-control and self-discipline in a person.

A religious person is a person who is serious about life. A religious person is an honest person. A religious person is constantly engaged in introspection. He has within himself a self-correcting mechanism.

How does religion generate these virtues in a person? Religion is connected with God, the epitome of all virtues. God is the source of all good inspiration.

Religion makes a person God-oriented. Religion engenders God-oriented thinking in a person. It is God-oriented thinking that makes a religious person unconquerable. A religious person acquires a close personal connection and relationship with God. Moreover, someone who comes to be blessed with this gift becomes more powerful than the sun, the moon, the mountains, and the seas.

Here, it is appropriate to relate a story that symbolically

expresses how a genuinely religious person possesses an indomitable spirit and how even a fierce storm at sea is not a problem for a genuinely religious person.

It is said that a ship set sail from America for Africa. It was passing through the Atlantic Ocean when a massive storm suddenly occurred. The vessel began tossing about wildly. All the passengers but one were very nervous and began running helter-skelter. The ship was tossing and turning almost to the water level, and it seemed it would soon drown.

In this turmoil, a passenger was rushing about when suddenly he saw a girl sitting calmly in a corner and playing with her doll. The passenger called, "Child, don't you know what is happening?"

"What?" the girl asked.

"Our ship is in the midst of a fierce storm, and very soon, we will drown!" the man shouted.

Still busy playing with her doll, the girl replied calmly, "But this will never happen. You must know that my

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father is the captain of this ship, and he will not let it sink.”

This little girl is the image of a genuinely religious person. A truly spiritual person never falls prey to despair. He retains his senses and balances even during a major crisis. He never loses faith and courage. He always lives in hope. He can always say, “God Almighty is the Captain of my ship, and He will not let it sink.”

MAN'S POSITION IN THE UNIVERSE

The principle underlying the proper relationship between God and man is this: Man's freedom ends where God's domain begins.

Social reformers and thinkers have concerned themselves with the relationship between one man and another. This relation is this: Every man is free as long as his freedom does not impinge on or interferes with the freedom of others. This concept can be conveyed through the following story:

It is said that when America won political independence from Britain, a man came out of his house, wanting to celebrate his 'freedom'. So he went out into the streets, waving his hands in glee. Then, suddenly, his hand hit another man's nose. The second man got angry and said, "What foolishness is this? Why did you hit my nose?" The first man replied, "Today, America is free, and now I can do anything I like!" The second man retorted, "Brother, America may be free now, but your freedom ends where my nose begins."

This story clarifies the moral principle regulating the relationship between one person and another. However, as far as the issue of the relationship between man and God is concerned, man has not been able to properly discover it through his efforts.

This is no complex matter. The principle of the proper relationship between one man and another tells us something about the appropriate relationship between man and God. In light of the principle mentioned above, it can be said that the principle underlying the proper relationship between God and man is this:

Man's freedom ends at the point where God's domain begins.

In this world, all the things man has received are God's gifts. All items are obtained by man only because they have been given to him by God. The same is true of freedom as well. In this world, man's freedom is a blessing or gift from God. It is known that a gift brings a corresponding responsibility with it. In line with this general principle, man's freedom is tied to a necessary obligation, which is that man should use his freedom responsibly and correctly. He should not misuse it.

The improper use of this freedom is to believe that this freedom is man's right, that he is the master of this freedom. He begins to think, "I will use this freedom as I please, following my desires. I do not have to ask anyone how I should use my freedom."

Contrary to this, the right way to use this freedom is that man should try to discover whom he has obtained this freedom from. And then, man should find out what the Giver of this freedom intends by giving it

to him and how he should use this freedom, and act accordingly. This discovery makes man aware of the proper use of the freedom he enjoys.

The right and wrong use of human freedom is not a mystery. Any person, if he is sincere, can discover this fact. But, to discover any truth, the seriousness of purpose is necessary. Therefore, seriousness is also required to find out this law of freedom.

The person who reflects on this question with seriousness will discover a criterion inside every person for distinguishing between right and wrong present in him by birth. With his natural awareness, every person can know which action is right and which is not. This criterion is called 'the conscience'. Another name for it is 'common sense'.

In this way, man can learn what to do and what not to do by listening to the voice of his conscience. It is as if every person's conscience is his guide for him. Inside every person, this warner is present. Experience tells us that this element is never inactive. It never allows

man to be heedless. It never makes a mistake in carrying out its duties.

By birth itself, within every person, a specific, powerful emotion is present. It is the emotion of acknowledgement. Every person can personally experience this. Through his conscience or common sense, every person knows that he ought to acknowledge people's kindness. Man's internal guide recognises this acknowledgement as a lofty ethical virtue. Acknowledgement is a high level of righteousness, while a lack of acknowledgement indicates insincerity. In this sense, a person who acknowledges others, maintains his status as a human, while someone who does not falls from that status.

In the same way, the decision of the conscience or common sense is also accurate about the Creator. In line with his nature's voice, every person should acknowledge his Creator. He should acknowledge the manifold blessings of his Creator—all that he owes to Him. He should consciously recognise and be grateful for all that His Creator has given him. He should feel this in his heart and openly announce it through his

tongue. Acknowledging God is in accordance with human nature, while non-acknowledgement deviates from it.

In the same way, every person experiences that his conscience is a moral criterion that, at every opportunity, is bearing witness. When a person lies, his conscience scolds him. On the contrary, if he speaks the truth, it becomes a means for him to feel at ease. The conscience knows injustice to be always evil and justice to be always good. The conscience expresses its displeasure with dishonesty and its satisfaction with honesty. The conscience knows violence to be inhumane and peace to be good. The conscience knows hate to be wrong and love to be a blessing. The conscience rebuts anger and hails forgiveness.

In the same way, when man surveys the world around him, he finds that besides him, all creatures are firmly bound by the law of their Creator. From the seas and the lands to the vast skies, all creatures are, in perfect discipline, doing just what they have been made to do by the Creator. No creature, big or small, deviates

even a fraction of an inch from this discipline. From the minerals, the plants, and the animals of the Earth to the stars and planets in space, all things are bound by this universal discipline.

The Creator has established this discipline in the universe. Moreover, this discipline is desirable for men, too. Therefore, like the rest of the universe, man should become part of this universal discipline. However, there is one big difference—the rest of the things in the universe are compulsorily bound by this universal discipline, while man should voluntarily choose to abide by it in spite of having freedom of choice.

For example, all the planets in the solar system revolve around the sun. In the same way, man should accept God as his focus or center and establish his life around Him. Nothing in this world is stagnant. Here, everything is in constant motion. The universe is like a vast factory, constantly moving, but we see no sound, smoke, or pollution here. In the same way, man's actions should

be such that they do not cause any pollution—moral corruption, strife, hate, and the like.

Likewise, in the universe, everything is established to benefit others. Everything is engaged in beneficial action, from the shining sun to the flowing rivers, from the lush green trees to the cool breeze, from the mountains to the seas, from radiant flowers to busy insects. Every component of this vast universe is a unilateral giver. In the same way, man should plan his life in this world in such a manner that he becomes beneficial to others. Every person should be of benefit to other people and other creatures of God.

In the same way, the study tells us that man always thinks of a particular result and then plans the course of action to seek to obtain this result. Man's thinking is result-oriented. He wants to engage only in that action that produces his desired result. Man's nature is such that he is reluctant to engage in any activity that does not create the desired result. Human nature demands that man plan the course of his life, in the broader sense, under this principle. In the same way, as

in the pre-death phase of his life, man plans his actions based on the results he seeks; in the post-death period too, he should make the result the criterion. He should organise his activities in the pre-death phase of his life in a way that benefit him in the post-death phase of his life.

The system of this world is divided into 'today' and 'tomorrow', the present and the future. Other than man, all the creatures in this world act in the present. They have no concept of life other than 'today' or the present. The word 'tomorrow' is found only in the dictionary of man.

This difference is a sort of message to us from nature. In this difference, nature is exhorting man not to focus on (or remain concerned only with) his 'today' but to keep his 'tomorrow' in front of him and accordingly plan his life. The success of other creatures lies in obtaining only what they need 'today'. However, man's success is that he should be successful not just today (that is, in the life before death) but also tomorrow (that is, in

the life after death). Man's success lies in obtaining the best place in the eternal world after death.

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

The critical aspect of the creation plan of God is that man has been created with total freedom. Paradise is the reward for those who use their freedom correctly.

Man is a truth-seeking being. I have personally experienced this myself. From childhood, I have desired to search for the truth somehow or the other. In the year 1942, this desire became particularly intense. At that time, my condition was such that I would go off into the wilderness and, in solitude, would cry out, "O God! When will you come? Till when shall I wait for your arrival?"

Finally, I got the answer to this in a tradition of the Prophet. According to this *Hadith*, God said: "I was a hidden treasure. I wanted to be known. Therefore, I created man." (Kashf al-Khafa by al-'Ajuni: 2016)

According to this statement, the purpose of man's existence is to attain a realisation (*maarifah*) of his Creator. Moreover, as a reward for this realisation, he will be rewarded with a place in eternal Paradise in the Hereafter. The period of man's life before his death is the period to acquire this realisation, and the post-death phase of his life is the period to live a life of comfort and peace in eternal Paradise if he proves eligible for this.

How Can We Realize God?

Realisation of God is no easy matter. It is a challenging campaign. This is because an element of doubt is present in every single component of this world in the pre-death period of life. In this world, nothing is bereft of doubt. In the pre-death phase of life, man's task is to draw apart the curtains of doubt and see the truth. Despite doubts, he should obtain a state of complete certainty.

A veil of doubt is placed over everything that exists in the world. As soon as a person takes birth in this world,

he finds himself in a jungle of conflicting thoughts. Man is confronted with all sorts of philosophies of life that can leave him utterly confused. There are dogmas of religions and other worldviews, and each religion or ideology claims it is true. Each person nurses a storm of emotions and desires inside him, which are a hurdle in acting rationally. Everyone is entangled in family attachments and social bonds. Everyone is guided by self-interest. Everyone is so caught in the web of wealth and relationships that he does not know what to do or what not to do.

Only someone who can develop objective thinking can realise the truth in such a situation. He should develop the ability to lift and remove the curtains of doubt and see truth as truth and falsehood as falsehood. He should see things as they indeed are. Along with this, he should be able to accept willingly what he knows to be true. If he realises something is right, he should accept it unhesitatingly. Changing the direction of his life, his aim should be to attain self-discovered truth.

The means to remove the curtain of doubts that man is

confronted with is just one: knowing and understanding God's creation plan. This creation plan explains things so that all doubts are removed, and the truth is made evident, like the sun appearing bright and shining after the dark clouds have moved away.

The Creation Plan of God

What is God's creation plan? God created an ideal world called Paradise that was perfect in all respects. He ordained that this ultimate world be inhabited by impeccable ideal human beings. To achieve this target, God first settled man on Earth giving him complete freedom. The present world is a selection ground for this grand project. Here, it is being observed who makes proper use of his freedom and who misuses it. At the end of human history, those who have abused their freedom will be rejected, and those who may have exercised their freedom judiciously will be selected by God and settled in Paradise.

What is Paradise?

Paradise is the ultimate answer to the human quest. It is a vast, zero-defect, evil-free universe, complete

in itself. Certainty prevails all over the universe, but the human world is marred by uncertainty. Fear is unheard of in the universe, but man continually suffers from fear and apprehension. The rest of the universe is in a state of equilibrium as it receives everything that it needs, while human beings are in a state of imbalance as they are the only creatures in the world to suffer from the painful thought that they have not received what they wanted. Moreover, the rest of the universe is evil-free, while human beings continually suffer from the problem of evil.

The Problem of Evil

The most debated question concerning man and God in philosophy has been ‘the problem of evil’. That is the issue of why there is so much suffering in the human world. If God is All-Good, why did He make such a world where people are forced to face different types of problems and where there is so much suffering?

This question can be answered by understanding the creation plan of God. Unpleasantness has been put

into this world for man to learn proper lessons from it. The true lesson taught by unpleasant experiences is that man should remember the next world of Paradise where there will not be any suffering. His approach thus becomes: “Let me not suffer in the Hereafter what I have suffered in this world.”

Freedom for Testing Man

All the things in this world are God’s subjects. The stars and satellites rotate in space entirely at their Lord’s bidding. Trees, rivers, mountains, and all other such natural phenomena function according to the unchangeable ways God laid down for them in advance. Similarly, the animals follow precisely those instincts instilled in their species as a matter of Divine Will.

Unlike all these creatures in the Universe, man is free in this world. God has not placed any curbs on him. As such, the critical aspect of this creation plan is that man has been created with total freedom. But this freedom is to test man and not encourage him to lead a life of permissiveness. The purpose of freedom

is that man should lead a morally good life of his own free will, thus demonstrating that he is of the highest moral character.

One who conducts himself in this manner will be reckoned as God's special servant who, without any apparent compulsion, chose to be a man of principle, who submitted to God's Will despite having freedom not to do so. This liberty accorded to man allows him to gain credit for being the most superior of all God's creatures.

The decision regarding a person's eternal future will hinge on his use of freedom—whether he used his freedom correctly or misused it. For those who use their freedom correctly, Paradise is their reward. Those who misused their freedom will live in eternal deprivation.

The Positive Role of Challenges

In some way or other, all the problems in life are the price of the inappropriate use of freedom. When people misuse their freedom it creates problems for

others. On its face, this price seems to be a very high one. However, from God, we have this good news: after death, when the Day of Judgement will come, God will hold one to task only when it was proved that he had misused the freedom he had been given. For whatever other difficulties a person may have faced based on God's creation plan like the problems that he faced due to the misuse of freedom by others or due to the handicaps that he faced, arrangements will be made for their compensation. This will make it clear that whatever difficulties and hardships he had encountered while on Earth were in line with the demand of justice.

A study tells us that a more significant incentive is not ease and comfort for man's progress but challenge and difficulty. One aspect of this freedom is that it produces competition and challenge, without which no progress is possible. Misuse of freedom leads to problems, and problems are, in a sense, a sort of shock treatment because they can become a means for man's inner growth. It is only through challenges that we can progress in life.

People's engagement in different kinds of activities with complete freedom, at times, goes against the interests of others. It is a challenging situation, causing great suffering to people. This is necessary for testing human beings and selecting them for Paradise. Further, this system is not evil in the absolute sense, for there is also an element of goodness. Suffering and challenges are the most powerful teachers of life. All such unpleasant experiences prove to be a kind of 'shock treatment' for individuals, leading them to undergo a tremendous mental activity called 'brainstorming'. As per psychological studies, brainstorming is the source of intellectual development.

With ease and comfort, often, man's abilities are ruined. In contrast, challenges and problems often motivate people to develop virtues and scale new heights. That is why one can say that it is not ease but effort, not facility but difficulty, that makes men.

This point can be understood with the help of a real example. In the materially affluent societies of the West, a new disease has emerged named 'Affluenza'.

This is a disease of the materially rich. In 'rich' families, people become intellectual dwarfs instead of intellectual giants. Their IQ is very low. They are lazy and do not do much work. In contrast to them, people who have grown up with difficulty and challenges often go on to do great things.

Is It Possible to Achieve the Ideal?

Another thing to understand is that in every period of human history, thinkers and reformers have tried to establish an ideal society or an ideal state. However, despite all their efforts, they could only make a non-ideal society or a non-ideal state. Why was this so?

This fact of history can be adequately understood only when viewed in light of the Creator's creation plan. God did not make this world for the establishment of an ideal state or society. The limitations of this present world and the presence of different disadvantages are concrete barriers that prevent an ideal state or society from being established here.

Is Man's Life Governed by Destiny or Free Will?

I am often asked this question: "Is man's life governed by destiny, or does he have freedom of choice?" The fact is that God has provided the infrastructure to man in the form of a life support system and the different situations that present themselves to man. This is the destiny part of the matter. However, man can respond to all these situations as he likes. In this aspect, he is entirely free. That is his free will or his freedom of choice.

Therefore, I say that the matter is 50-50. Destiny plays a 50 percent role, as man cannot change the infrastructure and situations provided to him. Free will plays the remaining 50 percent role, as man is entirely free to respond to situations the way he likes.

Freedom has opened doors of two kinds for man, one leading to success and the other to failure. If an individual becomes arrogant and insolent, he has misused his freedom and failed to pass the test.

But if, on the other hand, he remains modest and humble, bowing to his Lord's Will on all occasions, he will have made the proper use of this 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. God will handsomely reward him as no other creature. Held to be the chosen servant of God, he will remain in an everlasting state of blissfulness and blessedness in the eternal world of Paradise after death.

If Man Has a Free Will, How is God All-Powerful?

Another question I am often asked is, "If God cannot control man's action, then how is He All-Powerful"? There is no doubt that God is All-Powerful. However, since He has decided to put man to the test, He has given man freedom of choice to do what he likes. As if there was no free will, there would be no test. So, to test man, God has withheld His power when it comes to man and given him the freedom to respond in any

way that he wants. God, however, is getting a record of all of man's thoughts, speech, and deeds maintained, and will hold him accountable for them on the Day of Judgment. On that Day all of humanity will see the power of God.

What is Man's Trial?

This limited world where man finds himself before death has all the necessary ingredients for the 'trial'. It has man as the perfection-seeking creature in a less-than-perfect world where he has been given complete 'freedom'. Man, thus, has a 'choice' to misuse his freedom by creating havoc, killing people, living a life of leisure, or using his freedom wisely by submitting to an unseen God and living a disciplined life, to qualify for Paradise.

Man's trial rests on discovering God, Who is in the Unseen. Before seeing Him, man should voluntarily surrender himself before God. He should be so desirous of Paradise that this world appears meaningless. He should adopt divine ethics without

any external pressure to do so. He should develop his intellectual and spiritual being to such an extent that he produces in himself the ability to inhabit the refined world of Paradise. Paradise is a heavenly colony where peace, love, and noble character prevail. Of this world's inhabitants, only those who have succeeded in maintaining a high moral character will find a place in Paradise.

The Secret of Eternal Success

In light of this creation plan, the root of all human problems is that the unenlightened want to make their Paradise in this world before death, whereas under the natural laws, the situation here on earth makes this impossible. Therefore, according to God's creation plan, man has to be content in this limited world before death, so as to make himself eligible for Paradise in the eternal world after death.

Therefore, the right and proper thing for a man to do is acknowledge and accept this law of creation, and plan his life accordingly. His sole aim in this world should

be to make himself acceptable in the eyes of God so that he may be held eligible for admission into Paradise in the eternal world after death. Successful is one who has realized the eternal world of Paradise in this temporary world, who has discovered in the failures of the present world, the secret to eternal success in the next eternal world.

God is Selecting Individuals for Paradise

The Creator has given man freedom while managing history so that despite perversion at the collective level, desired individuals continue to be born unhindered. According to God's creation plan, the present world is a selection ground to select the desired individuals out of the whole of human history. Therefore, the purpose of creation is to select those individuals, from every age and every race, who, despite enjoying complete freedom, would commit themselves to the commands of God. If we understand this point, human history becomes meaningful.

THE DARKNESS SHALL END!

Every day, the darkness of night is dispelled by the light of the sun. Likewise, the arrogant and the defiant shall have to bow down, and the Truthful will be rewarded in the Hereafter.

In this world of God, a human being appears to be a contradiction. In such a world where the sun rises at exactly its appointed time, man says something today and then denies it the next day! In a world where water can be squeezed out even from hard, dry stones, man cruelly oppresses his fellow man. In a world where the moon sheds light on all creatures without discrimination, man behaves in one way with some people and another with somebody else. In a world whose meaningfulness expresses itself in the beauty of a flower, man behaves more cruelly than a thorn. In a world where the wind blows all around, like a selfless servant, man lives in such a way as if there is no other purpose to his life than promoting his interests. In a world where one tree never troubles another, man never ceases to torment another. One person derives malicious pleasure in seeing another being destroyed.

All this happens daily in this world. But God does not interfere in this. He does not end this contradiction. Seen in the universal mirror of His creation, God seems so very beautiful, but in the grief-filled realm of human existence, how different His face seems to appear! Horrific things happen before God, but this does not stir Him. God sees people being slaughtered, but He does not bother about this. He sees the most barbaric things being done to the most sensitive person in the universe, but this does not make Him anxious or uneasy. Why is God seeing everything but does not express His reaction to it all?

This question has troubled the thinking people most in every age. But this question arises only because we do not consider God's wisdom regarding His creatures. In God's creation plan, this world is a testing ground. However, in our foolishness, we want to think of it as a place where rewards and punishments for good and evil actions should be meted out. We want that what is to happen on the coming Day of Judgment should happen today before our very eyes.

CONCLUSION

Every day, the darkness of night is dispelled by the spreading light of the sun. So, likewise, the darkness of life will get over one day, oppression will end, the arrogant and the defiant shall have to bow down, and those who remain on the path of the Truth will be rewarded. All this will happen in its fullness, but it will happen after death, in the Hereafter, and not before it.

CONCLUSION

This life is a journey to Paradise, not Paradise itself. We should make ourselves deserving of Paradise by developing a divine personality within us in this world.

For seekers of truth, a reason-based understanding of the creation plan of God is the only solution. God, according to His will, created a perfect world called Paradise. A world as per all of our desires as human beings in that it is free of all limitations and disadvantages, free of fear and pain, and free of all imperfections. An eternal world where there is no

death or old age. An ideal world where we can achieve complete fulfillment.

As a less-than-perfect being cannot inhabit a perfect Paradise; so, God has created a perfection-seeking being—man. God intended that man must spend a period of trial in this present and imperfect world; and after this, according to man's deeds, he can earn the right to inhabit the perfect and eternal world of Paradise, or live in eternal deprivation.

As part of this test, Paradise is 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 are free 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.

The test of man rests on his discovery of God, Who is unseen. Before we can see God, we should voluntarily surrender ourselves to Him. Man's desire for Paradise should make him willingly adopt divine ethics. He

CONCLUSION

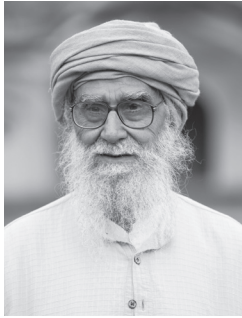
should develop his personality intellectually and spiritually to be eligible to inhabit Paradise's refined world. Only those who maintain a high moral character will find a place in a world of peace, love, and goodwill in Paradise.

In this world, everyone suffers from frustration and failure. It is because everyone wants a perfect life in this world itself, which is impossible. After all, this limited and ephemeral world was not created for that purpose. Despite all our efforts, we will fail to make a perfect life in this world of test. The present world is not Paradise; it only introduces the concept of Paradise to us. We can see only glimpses of perfection in this world. This should increase our desire for complete perfection which we can only find in eternal Paradise.

This life is a journey to Paradise, not Paradise itself. Therefore, we should devote our lives to preparing ourselves for Paradise in the next life. During this limited life on Earth, what we need to do, first and foremost, is to seek out the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and submit to Him voluntarily. Having

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seen a glimpse of Paradise on this Earth, we should seek it in the core of our being. Intellectually, spiritually, and morally, we should make ourselves deserving of Paradise by developing a divine personality within ourselves.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021) was an Islamic scholar, spiritual leader and peace activist. His work has received international recognition for his seminal contributions toward world peace. The Maulana authored over 200 books dealing with Islam's spiritual wisdom, the Prophet's non-violent approach, Islam's relation with modernity and other contemporary issues. His English translation of the Quran is widely appreciated as simple, clear and easily understandable. He founded Centre for Peace and Spirituality International in 2001 to popularize the culture of peace and share the spiritual message of Islam with people.

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