

DISCOVER ISLAM

DISCOVER THE TEACHINGS OF THE PROPHET,
THE ESSENCE OF THE QURAN AND THE SPIRIT OF ISLAM



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Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Goodword Books

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Part 1

Life and Teachings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ



Arabia and the Prophet's Early Years

Arabia, a peninsula situated in the south western part of Asia, is a desert country which has been inhabited since ancient times. Various tribes lived here in different regions, ruled by their respective chiefs. It was in this country, at Makkah, that four thousand years ago, the Prophet Abraham settled his family, his wife Hajira and his infant son Ishmael. The progeny of Ishmael were known as Mustariba, or naturalized Arabs, and they greatly multiplied. They were divided into many tribes and clans. The Quraysh, the largest tribe had several clans. They were settled in Makkah by an ancestor of renown called Qusayy. The clans who lived in the vicinity of the Kabah were considered most honourable. These were called Quraysh al-Bitah (the Quraysh of the Hollow).

The location of Makkah on important caravan routes across the Peninsula, and the prestige of the Kabah gave it great advantages as a trading city. This is why the Quraysh became one of the richest and most powerful tribes. The Prophet Muhammad was of the Banu Hashim clan of the Quraysh, who lived in the vicinity of the Kabah

The Prophet Muhammad's unimpeachable trustworthiness won for him the title of "Al-Amin," a faithful custodian, an unfailing trustee.

and enjoyed great honour and prestige in Arabia. These clans were divided into families. Besides these Arabs there were also Christian and Jews who lived in Arabia. A large number of their population lived in Madinah.

The Prophet Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Abdul Muttalib was born in Makkah in 570 AD. When Muhammad was born, his father Abdullah had already died. And when he was six years old, his mother Amina, the daughter of Wahb, also passed away. Afterwards, he lived under the guardianship of his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, and his uncle, Abu Talib.

According to Daud ibn Husayn, as Muhammad grew older he became known as the most chivalrous among his people, tolerant and forbearing, truthful and trustworthy, always the good neighbour. He would stay aloof from all quarrels and quibbles and never indulged in foul utterances, abuse or invective. People even left their valuables in his custody, for they knew that he would

never betray them. His unimpeachable trustworthiness won for him the title of “*Al-Amin*,” a faithful custodian, an unfailing trustee.

The Search for the Truth

Without doubt the Prophet had every opportunity for worldly advancement. He was born into a noble family of Makkah and his virtues guaranteed his success in life. True, he had inherited just one camel and one servant from his father, but his inborn high qualities had impressed the richest woman in Makkah, Khadijah, a forty-year-old widow belonging to a family of merchants. When the Prophet was twenty-five, she offered herself to him in marriage. Not only did marriage with Khadijah provide the Prophet with wealth and property; it also threw open to him a vast field of business in Arabia and beyond. The Prophet had every opportunity, then, of leading a successful and comfortable life. But he forsook all these things and chose something quite different for himself. Quite intentionally, he took a road that could lead only to worldly ruin. Before his marriage, the Prophet had earned

his living in different ways. Now he relinquished all such activity, and dedicated himself to his lifelong vocation – the pursuit of truth. He used to sit for hours and ponder over the mysteries of creation. Instead of socializing and trying to gain a position for himself among the nobles of Makkah, he would wander in the hills and dales of the desert. Often he used to retire to the loneliness of a cave in Mount Hira – three miles from Makkah – and stay there until his meagre supply of food and water was exhausted. He would return home to replenish his supplies, and then



Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter?
Did He not find you wandering and guide you?

The Quran, 93:6-7

go back to the solitude of nature for prayer and meditation. He would beseech the Maker of the heavens and the earth for answers to the questions surging in his mind. What is our true role in life? What does the Lord require of us, as His servants? Whence do we come and whither will we go after death? Unable to find answers to these questions in the centres of human activity, he betook himself to the stillness of the desert; perhaps, there, the answer would be forthcoming.

The Quran tells us about this phase of his life in these words:

“Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter? Did He not find you wandering and guide you?” (93:6-7)

God, indeed, relieved him of his burden. He turned in mercy to His Prophet, illuminating his path and guiding him on his journey. In 610 AD, the Prophet was sitting

alone in his cave. The angel of the Lord appeared before him in human form and taught him the words, which appear at the beginning of the ninety-sixth chapter of the Quran. The Prophet's quest had finally been rewarded. His restless soul had joined in communion with the Lord. Not only did God grant him guidance; He also chose Muhammad as His Prophet and special envoy to the world. The mission of the Prophet extended over the next twenty-three years. During this period the entire content of the Quran was revealed to him.



God-Oriented Life

The meaning that life took on for the Prophet after the Truth came to him can be ascertained from these words: “Nine things the Lord has commanded me. Fear of God in private and in public; Justness, whether in anger or in calmness; Moderation in both poverty and affluence; That I should join hands with those who break away from me; and give to those who deprive me; and forgive those who wrong me; and that my silence should be meditation; and my words remembrance of God; and my vision keen observation.” (*Jami‘ al-Usul*, Ibn al-Athir al-Jazari, hadith no. 9317)

These were no just glib words; they were a reflection of the Prophet’s very life. Poignant and wondrously effective words of this nature could not emanate from an empty soul; they themselves indicate the status of the speaker; they are an outpouring of his inner being, an unquenchable spirit revealed in verbal form.

The Prophet once said: “A discerning person should have some special moments: a moment of communion

with God; a moment of self-examination; a moment of reflection over the mysteries of creation; and a moment which he puts aside for eating and drinking.” (*Sahih Ibn Hibban*, *hadith* no. 361)

In other words, this is how a spiritually awakened person passes the day. Sometimes the yearning of his soul brings him so close to God that he finds something in communion with the Lord. Sometimes fear of the day when he will be brought before the Lord for reckoning makes him reckon with himself. Sometimes he is so overawed by the marvels of God’s creation that he starts seeing the splendours of the Creator reflected therein. Thus he spends his time encountering the Lord, his own self, and the world around him, while also finding time to cater for his physical needs.

These words are not a description of some remote being; they are a reflection of the Prophet’s own personality, a flash from the light of faith that illuminated his own heart. These “moments” were an integral part of the Prophet’s life. One who has not experienced these states can never describe them in such a lofty manner. The soul

“A discerning person should have some special moments: a moment of communion with God; a moment of self-examination; a moment of reflection over the mysteries of creation; and a moment which he puts aside for eating and drinking.”

The Prophet Muhammad

from which these words emanated was itself in the state that they describe; through words that state of spiritual perfection was communicated to others.

When the Prophet Muhammad discovered the reality of the world Hereafter, it came to dominate his whole life. He himself became most desirous of the heaven of which he gave tidings to others, and he himself was most fearful of the hell of which he warned others. Deep concern for the life to come was always welling up inside him. Sometimes it would surge to his lips in the form of supplication, and sometimes in the form of heartfelt contrition. He lived on a completely different plane from that of ordinary human beings. This is illustrated by many incidents from his life.

Development of One's Personality

The men taken prisoner in the Battle of Badr were the Prophet's bitterest enemies, but still his treatment of them was impeccable. One of these prisoners was a man by the name of Suhayl ibn Amr. A fiery speaker, he used to denounce the Prophet virulently in public to incite people against him and his mission. Umar ibn al-Khattab suggested that two of his lower teeth be pulled out to dampen his oratorical zeal. The Prophet was shocked by Umar's suggestion. "God would disfigure me for this on the Day of Judgment, even though I am His messenger," he said to Umar. (*Sirat Ibn Hisham*, vol. 1, p. 649)

This is what is meant by the world being a planting-ground for the Hereafter. One who realizes this fact lives a life oriented towards the Hereafter – a life in which all efforts are aimed at achieving success in the next, eternal world; a life in which real value is attached – not to this ephemeral world – but to the life beyond death. One becomes aware that this world is not the final destination;

it is only a road towards the destination, a starting-point of preparation for the future life. Just as every action of a worldly person is performed with worldly interests in mind, so every action of God's faithful servant is focused on the Hereafter. Their reactions to every situation in life reflect this attitude of looking at every matter in the perspective of the life after death, and of how it will affect their interests in the next world. Whether it be an occasion of happiness or sorrow, success or failure, domination or



Whether it be an occasion of happiness or sorrow, success or failure, domination or depression, praise or condemnation, love or anger – in every state they are guided by accountability to God and thoughts of the Hereafter.

depression, praise or condemnation, love or anger – in every state they are guided by accountability to God and thoughts of the Hereafter.

The goal that Islam gives to a person is to develop his or her personality in such a way that he or she can find entry to the eternal noble world of Paradise in the Hereafter. The present world is temporary and meant as a test. Every situation, experience and circumstance comes to test our response to it. Our positive response elevates our character, while a negative response debases our character. This process is known as purification of the soul. According to the Quran, it is a purified and positively-developed soul that will be competent for being settled in the sublime society of Paradise. (20:76)

The Character of the Prophet

Humility

On one of his journeys, the Prophet asked his companions to roast a goat. One volunteered to slaughter the animal, another to skin it, and another to cook it. The Prophet said that he would collect wood. “Messenger of God,” his companions protested, “we will do all the work.” “I know that you will do it,” the Prophet replied, “but that would amount to discrimination, which I don’t approve of. God does not like His servants to assert any superiority over their companions.” (*Khulasa al-Siyar*, Muhibbuddin al-Tabari, p. 87)

One day Abu Dharr al-Ghifari was sitting next to a Muslim who was black. Abu Dharr addressed him as “black man.” The Prophet was very displeased on hearing this, and told Abu Dharr to make amends “Whites are not superior to blacks,” he added. (*Sahih Muslim*) As soon as the Prophet admonished him, Abu Dharr became conscious of his error. He cast himself to the ground in remorse, and said to the person he had offended: “Stand up, and rub your feet on my face.” When Abu Talib

died, and the Prophet's affliction became more intense, he betook himself to Taif, a town situated at a distance of 75 kilometers from Makkah and seek refuge from the chiefs of the town and in the hope that they would grant him asylum and support. According to Arab custom, this was nothing new. But the leaders were not ready to give refuge to a prophet who believed in the One God. Instead of giving him refuge, they incited the urchins to chase him away from the town by pelting stones at him. One can tell what savage treatment the Prophet received at their hands from this prayer that he made on his return to Makkah: "Lord, I complain to you of my weakness and helplessness. How vulnerable I am among men, most Merciful one!" (*Al-Mu'jam al-Kabir*, al-Tabrani, *hadith* no. 14764)

The Prophet took refuge in an orchard on the outskirts of Taif where he spent the night. According to a tradition, on that occasion God sent the angel of the Mount to him. The Angel said to him: "God has seen the treatment meted out to you by the people of Taif. Now, if you give me permission, I can join the two mounts in order that all these people should be crushed to death." The Prophet replied: "No, although the present generation of Taif has refused to listen to me, I still hope that the next generation

of Taif will listen to me and will follow the path of God.”
(Sahih al-Bukhari, *hadith* no. 3231)

Forbearance

Once the Prophet had to borrow some money from a Jew by the name of Zayd ibn Sa'nah. A few days before the date fixed for the repayment of the debt, the Jew came to demand his money back. He went up to the Prophet, caught hold of his clothes, and said to him harshly: “Muhammad, why don't you pay me my due? From what I know of the descendants of Muttalib, they all put off paying their debts.” Umar ibn al-Khattab was with the Prophet at the time. He became very angry, scolded the Jew and was on the point of beating him up. But the Prophet just kept smiling. All he said to the Jew was: “There are still three days left for me to fulfil my promise.” Then he addressed Umar: “Zayd and I deserved better treatment from you,” he said. “You should have told me to be better at paying my debts, and him to be better at demanding them. Take him with you, Umar, and pay him his due; in fact, give him 20 sa'ahs (about forty kilos) of dates extra because you have alarmed him with your threats.” (*Mustadrak al-Hakim*,

hadith no. 6547) The most remarkable thing about this episode is that the Prophet could still behave with such forbearance and humility even after being established as head of the Muslim state of Madinah.

The Prophet lived among his companions as an equal. No bitter criticism or provocation would make him lose his composure. Once a desert-dweller came up to him and pulled so hard at the sheet he was wearing that it left a mark on his neck. “Muhammad!” he said. “Give me two camel-loads of goods, for the money in your possession is



“Lord, I complain to you of my weakness and helplessness. How vulnerable I am among men, most Merciful one!”

The Prophet Muhammad

not yours, nor was it your father’s.” “Everything belongs to God,” the Prophet said, “and I am His servant.” He then asked the desert-dweller, “hasn’t it made you afraid, the way you treated me?” He said not. The Prophet asked him why. “Because I know that you do not requite evil with evil,” the man answered. The Prophet smiled on hearing this, and had one camel-load of barley and another of dates given to him. (*Kitab al-Shifa*, Qadi Iyad, vol. 1, p. 225)

Patience and Cool-headedness

The emigration from Makkah to Madinah was an example of the Prophet’s patience. When the Quraysh had decided to kill the Prophet, the latter had two options before him: either he could take up his sword in self-defense, or he could leave Makkah for some safer abode. The Prophet adopted the second course of action. He coolly thought the situation over and decided

on emigration to Madinah, where he would be able to continue the same work, only in a different place.

From the point of view of a zealous Muslim political leader of the modern age, the emigration would appear as a flight, for what he would advocate in a similar situation would be a fight to the death; he would be looking no further ahead than making a martyr of himself. But if one looks at the results of the emigration of the Prophet, one can see that it was clearly the greatest watershed in Islamic history.

When faced with enemy onslaughts people usually take retaliatory measures of their own: People are generally used to retaliating when they face any unpleasant treatment by others. *Sabr*, on the other hand, means to bear patiently whatever is meted out by the enemy. For instance, if people in a certain country find themselves up against economic bias, the way of *sabr* is not to start demanding equal treatment, but is rather to make extra efforts oneself to excel over others. Prejudice can only have an adverse effect when people of equal ability are competing for one job. If one of the contestants clearly excels the others in ability, then not even prejudice can deny him his rightful place.

Events from the Prophet's Life in Makkah and Madinah

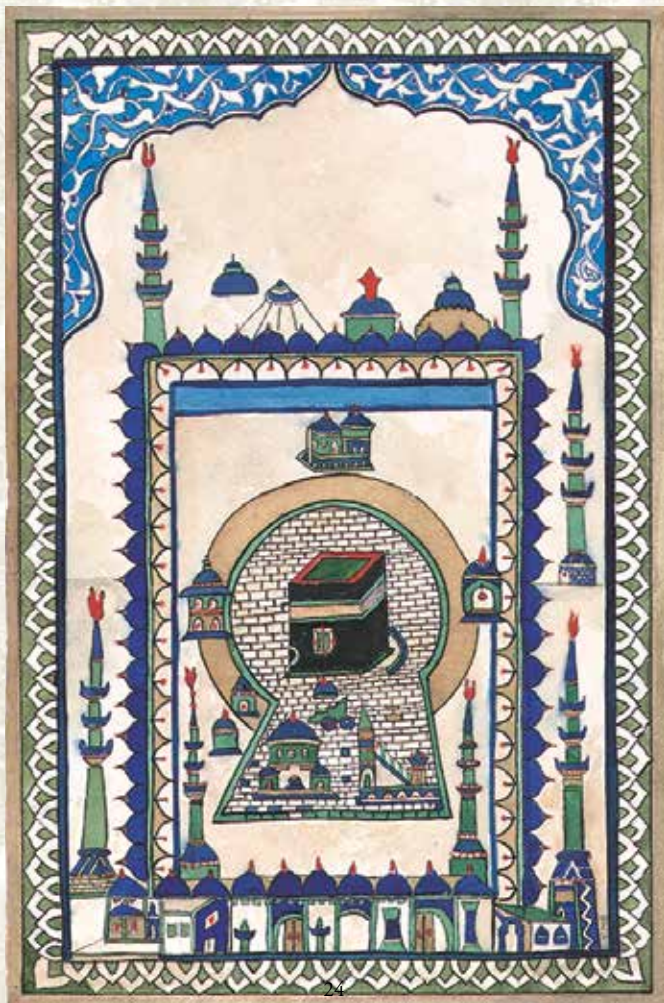
The Prophet's wife Khadijah, his freed slave, Zayd, his cousin Ali, and his childhood friend Abu Bakr were the first converts to Islam. In the first stage, the Prophet was asked to spread the message of Islam quietly to avoid arousing any hostility. Abu Bakr, being an influential merchant, was able to bring some of his friends, also rich merchants, into the fold of Islam. In the second stage the Prophet received the command from God to spread the message publicly.

There was one main reason for the Quraysh to oppose the Prophet, and to keep him from spreading his message. Makkah was a centre of pilgrimage because of the Kabah, which housed 360 idols of the neighbouring tribes and nations. Since Islam believed in one God, the Quraysh feared that once the concept of one God became popular, the tribes would stop visiting the Kabah to pay homage to the idols. This would deprive them of the respect they commanded as guardians of the Kabah. Besides, the

prosperity of Makkah depended mainly on these idols, for trade flourished side by side with the pilgrimage.

But all the Makkans were not hostile. There were people who gave serious thought to the message of the Quran and gradually began to accept Islam. About 200 people from Makkah as well as the neighbouring settlements entered the fold of Islam. As many more members joined the nascent Islamic community, the opposition of the chieftains of Quraysh intensified. They created an environment of hostility for the Muslims, persecuting the slaves or those from weaker sections and threatening the rich of boycott of their business or creating hurdles in their trade.

The Prophet continued to convey the message of Islam to the people coming from outside Makkah. During the years 620-621 AD, several men from the tribe of Khazraj of Yathrib (later came to be known as Madinah) accepted Islam during their pilgrimage to Makkah. They requested the Prophet to send Musab ibn Umayr, a companion of the Prophet, to Yathrib to convey the message of Islam to the inhabitants. There the divine message was immediately well received, and within a year, a number



of people converted to Islam as a result of Musab's preaching. Now the Muslims began to emigrate to Yathrib in large numbers to escape persecution at the hands of the Quraysh. The Prophet along with Abu Bakr migrated to Madinah in total secrecy, as men from the Quraysh had decided to kill him.

The people of Madinah accepted the Prophet as their leader. The spiritual mission of Islam continued here. However, when the Makkans came to know of the firm foothold Muslims had acquired in Madinah, they decided to nip Islam in the bud. Consequently, they launched armed offensive against Madinah causing Muslims to engage in war for defence. The Quran refers to war in some of its verses, but these relate to defensive war only. Launching an offensive against another group is absolutely unlawful in Islam, and so are all other kinds of war such as proxy war and guerilla war. The Quranic principle of war is stated in this verse, "Permission to fight is granted to those who are attacked." (22:39)

Three battles thus ensued between the Muslims and their Makkans opponents: the Battle of Badr in 624 AD, the Battle of Uhud in 624 AD and the Battle of Trench in 627 AD. These battles should rightfully be called skirmishes

since each last for less than a day. Seeing the loss of life and hurdles in his constructive spiritual movement, the Prophet entered into extensive negotiations with the leaders of the Quraysh of Makkah and thus signed a ten-year no-war pact in 628 AD, known in history as the Treaty of Hdaybiyah. This peace treaty normalized relations between the people of Makkah and Madinah, who began to interact and mix freely in a secure environment. The result was that many people from Makkah embraced Islam as they gained knowledge about it. Finally, in 630 AD, when the Quraysh broke away from the peace pact the Prophet and Muslims conducted a peaceful march to Makkah, leading to the city with its inhabitants coming under the fold of Islam.

The Teachings of the Prophet

Sublime Character

In the Quran the Prophet Muhammad is described as being of “sublime character.” Here are two sayings of the Prophet, which throw light on what this “sublime character” consists of:

Never debase your character by saying that if people treat you well, you will treat them well, and if they harm you, then you will do worse to them. Rather, become accustomed to being good to those who are good to you, and not wronging those who harm you. (*Jami' at-Tirmidhi*, *hadith* no. 2007)

Join hands with those who break away from you, forgive those who wrong you, and be good to those who harm you. (*Jami' al-Usul*, Ibn al-Athir al-Jazari, *hadith* no. 9317)

There are two levels of character, an ordinary and a superior level. An ordinary character is based on the principle: do as other have done to you. Such a character might be termed a “knee-jerk character,” for those possessed of such a character offer only reflex responses to treatment by others, breaking with those who break with

Join hands with those who break away
from you, forgive those who wrong you,
and be good to those who harm you.

The Prophet Muhammad

them, wronging those who wrong them, and harming those who harm them. But the higher level of character is based on the principle: do as you would like others to do to you. Those possessed of such a character deal with both friend and foe in the same principled manner, irrespective of how they have been treated. They are reconciliatory, even joining with those who break with them. They are compassionate, even to those who seek to harm them. They are forbearing, even towards those who wrong them.



When the Prophet entered Makkah victoriously in 630 AD, a question facing him was what treatment should be meted to those Makkans who had conspired and waged battles against him. These people were in the position of prisoners of war and according the custom of the time this invited capital punishment. Western historians have noted with astonishment that the Prophet declared a general amnesty and said to the Makkans who engaged in hostilities: “Let no reproach be upon you this day. Go, you are free.” (*Sirat Ibn Hisham*, vol. 2, p. 412)

Refraining from Retaliation

Once a group of Rabbis came to the Prophet. When they entered, instead of giving the normal ‘Assalamu alaykum’ greeting (peace be upon you), they said ‘Assamu alaykum’, meaning “death to you”. Ayisha heard this, and was not able to contain herself and exclaimed: “Death to you instead,” which means, “May God damn you.” The Prophet told Ayisha not to answer back in this manner. “God is gentle,” he said, “and He likes gentleness in every matter.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari, hadith* no. 6927) In truth, there is no more effective method of winning a

person's heart than by returning soft words for harsh. It is possible to withstand armed onslaught, but noble conduct is a force in itself that no one can resist. It is sure to prevail in all situations.

This principle has been expressed in a verse in the Quran: “Good and evil deeds are not equal. Do good deed in return for bad deed and you will see that one who was once your enemy has become your dearest friend.” (41:34)

This action of the Prophet illustrates that his followers should be unilateral well-wishers of others. Even if they have been treated acrimoniously by those with whom they are dealing, they should still behave respectfully and honourably.

Non-Confrontation

The Quran sums up the Islamic method in the following words: “Then if they should be inclined to make peace, make peace with them, and put your trust in God. Surely, it is He who is All Hearing and All Knowing.” (8:61-62)

This shows that the true Islamic method is to pursue our aims peacefully. Even when there is a fear that our

In truth, there is no more effective method of winning a person's heart than by returning soft words for harsh.

opponents may deceive us, Muslims should still put their trust in God, and be ready to make peace. What this means is that we should concentrate our efforts in that field of action where – without any confrontation with others – there are opportunities for us to advance. As for other fields, those in which no opportunities present themselves – one should let the forces of nature go to work.

Behaviour with People of Other Faiths

Madinah was also inhabited by some idolaters and Jews, who were in a minority. The Prophet decided that some form of law should be established so that there would be no misunderstanding or hostility of any sort, in the future between them and the Muslims. To solve this problem the Prophet of Islam issued a charter commonly known as the covenant of Madinah. Since the Muslims were in the majority, the Prophet's position became that of a leader, or

a head of state. In this capacity he declared in this charter that all the inhabitants of Madinah would enjoy equal rights. A clause of the charter read: *Lil-yahud dinuhum wa lil-muslimin dinuhum*, that is, “For Jews their religion, for Muslims theirs.” (*Sirat Ibn Hisham*, vol.1, p. 503)

Everyone would be free to follow the religion and culture of his or her choice: the affairs of the Muslims would be decided according to the *Shariah*, while the affairs of the Jews and idolaters would be decided according to their traditions, laws and customs.

While in Madinah one day, the Prophet saw a funeral procession passing through a street in the town. At that time the Prophet was seated, but on seeing the funeral, he stood up out of respect. One of his companions said: “O Prophet, that was the funeral of a Jew. Why are you giving so much respect to a deceased non-Muslims?” The Prophet replied: *A'laysat nafsan*, that is, “Was he not a human being?” (*Sahih al-Bukhari, hadith* no. 1312) This example set by the Prophet of Islam shows that irrespective of religion or tradition, all men and women are equally worthy of respect.

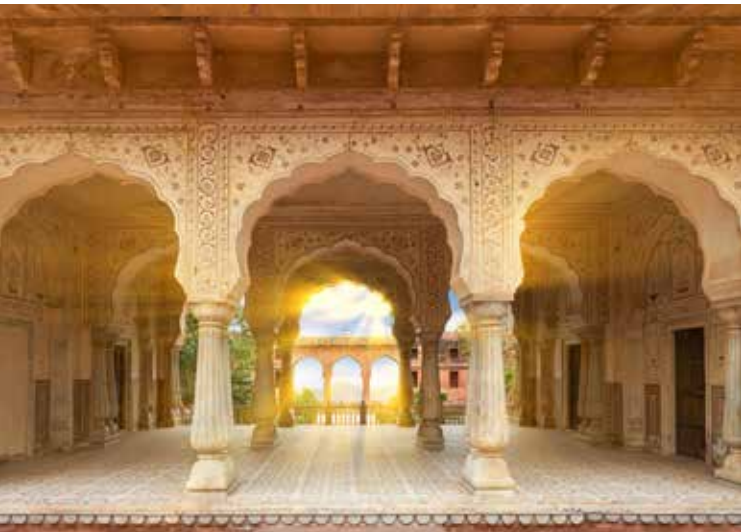
The Wisdom of the Prophet

Anger Management

The hostile members of the tribe of Quraysh had given the Prophet the nomenclature of *Mudhammad* (the condemned one), although his name was Muhammad, meaning “the praised one”. By addressing the Prophet with this derogatory name, the Quraysh used to heap abuses on him. The Prophet said to his companions, “Don’t you wonder how God has saved me from the abuses of the Quraysh? They abuse and condemn a person named Mudhammad, while I am Muhammad.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari, hadith* no. 3533) We tend to become sensitive when our ego is hurt and respond with similar rebuttal. But what did the Prophet do? He managed the issue of being ridiculed at with wisdom. Often we make a certain issue an instance of our dignity being offended and thus respond with hypersensitivity. However, the Prophet taught us that there is also greater dignity in avoiding and even laughing off such situations. Cultivating the attitude exemplified by the Prophet can help us deal with such situations better.

Positive Thinking: Ignore the Problem, Avail the Opportunity

The Prophet would carry out his mission of spreading the message of monotheism in Makkah. The pattern that can be observed repeatedly from the method he followed was that he avoided people's unpleasant behaviour and would steadfastly continue to work to disseminate the teachings of Islam. The Quran is filled with injunctions to the Prophet to avoid the opponents with goodly



Surely, with every hardship there is ease.

The Quran, 94:5-6

patience and focus on his duty. We can say that the Prophet followed the formula: ignore the problem, avail the opportunity. Even in trying situations, he looked for opportunities to spread his message instead of becoming enmeshed in disputes and reactionary behaviour.

We observe such exceptional positivity exhibited by the Prophet even in a very hostile environment. The Prophet would ask his companions to adhere to forbearance and deliberation. In today's idiom we can say the Prophet did not let people erode his positivity and also raised his companions' level of positivity. Why such emphasis on positive bent of mind? We can experience in our own lives that our mind has what is called a 'positivity advantage', that is your brain at positive performs significantly better than at negative. Your intelligence rises, your creativity rises, your energy levels rise. The Prophet, therefore, did not only perform a religious

duty but gave us a very significant lesson in how to train our minds to function.

Seeing Stress as a Challenge, not a Threat

One particular aspect of the life of the Prophet Muhammad comes before us in chapter 94 of the Quran: “Surely, with every hardship there is ease.” (94:5-6) The context of this verse is that Prophet’s opponents would try to dissuade every person or tribe from paying attention to him. They would accuse him of being a heretic. This false propaganda became the means of spreading his message far and wide. People from outside Makkah would come enquiring about the person who claimed to receive revelations. So what started as a campaign to smear the image of the Prophet ended up giving him, as the Quran says, “high renown”. (94:4)

This gives us a principle of turning disadvantageous situations to our advantage, and continuing our activities with hope, as the Prophet did, even in times of great frustration. He saw stress as a challenge instead of as a threat.

The Prophet of Peace

Throughout his life as a prophet what did the Prophet do? He recited to the people non-war-related Quranic verses, such as: “Read in the name of your Lord who created.” (96:1) He kept asking them to discover God, the Creator and Sustainer. He taught them how to worship and make supplications to God. He taught them about morality and humaneness. He told them that when others troubled them, even then they must behave with patience and avoid conflict. He gave people the teachings of the Quran, as a book for reforming themselves and for sharing divine wisdom with others. He taught them that real success is entry into Paradise, not entry into the institutions of power in this world. By his own practical example, he showed people how to carry on the mission of Islam through peaceful means and without resorting to confrontation. He demonstrated how it is possible for people to save themselves from falling prey to hatred of others in even the most turbulent situations, and how, at such times, one can remain peaceful and carry on working for the true welfare of others.

All these non-violent activities of the Prophet are undoubtedly exalted Islamic actions. In fact, it is these that are the very essence of the mission of prophethood. As far as war is concerned, it is only as an exceptional necessity.

War always aims at removing external obstacles, not at producing an inner state of higher consciousness within individuals. For the latter purpose, the appropriate method is advice, exhortation and guidance. It has nothing to do with war.



Reconciliation is best.

The Quran, 4:128

The lesson that we learn from the life of the Prophet is to avoid confrontation at all costs, and avail of the opportunities. No constructive work can be accomplished in the absence of a peaceful environment. Whether it is economic progress, social welfare, spiritual development, even worship, can be performed only in peaceful conditions. This is why Islam stresses the avoidance of war and confrontation. It commands its followers to establish peace at all costs. This is expressed in a verse of the Quran which states, “Reconciliation is best.” (4:128)

Peace is thus inextricably linked to Islam. The goal Islam gives to its followers cannot be achieved in the absence of peaceful conditions, or in a situation of war and violence. In Islam the spiritual goal of a believer is the discovery of God through study, contemplation and reflection over nature, the universe and life. This kind of a spiritual and intellectual work cannot happen when people are continually engaged in war or are living in a society where

violence is perpetrated as a norm. For this reason, Islam places the utmost significance on the establishment of peace at any cost, as without peaceful conditions the very goal or objective of Islam is jeopardized and remains unachieved.

Summary

The Prophet Muhammad followed these very teachings of the Quran throughout his missionary life. The Quran describes the Prophet as “a mercy to all mankind.” (21:107) The Prophet’s mission was to bring about the spiritual awakening in a human being. His mission can be summed up in these words of the Quran: *Kunu rabbaniyin*, that is, to become God-oriented in one’s speech, actions, and thoughts. (3:79) Such a mission requires an intellectual revolution and not a political revolution. The Prophet’s concern was to bring personal transformation in an individual and help him deal with life’s various challenges. With the help of the Quran the Prophet worked to guide individuals in search of meaning and purpose in life beyond material gratification.

Part 2

Spiritual Values from the Quran



An Introduction of the Quran

The Quran is a book of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. It did not come to him in the form of a complete book, but in parts over a period of 23 years. The first verses were revealed in 610 AD, when the Prophet Muhammad was in Makkah. Subsequently, different parts continued to be revealed regularly, the final portion being revealed in 632, when the Prophet was in Madinah.

There are 114 chapters in the Quran, both long and short. The verses number about 6600. When the Quran was revealed in the first quarter of the 7th century, paper had already been invented. This paper, known as papyrus, was made by hand from the fibres of certain trees. Whenever any part of the Quran was revealed, it was written down in papyrus (*qirtas* in Arabic).

During this process, people committed the verses to memory, thus the Quran continued to be simultaneously memorized as well as written down. This method of preservation continued during the lifetime of the Prophet

The Quran lays great emphasis on patience, reconciliation, forgiveness, avoidance and contentment.

Muhammad. In this way, the Quran was preserved during the lifetime of the Prophet.

If you read the Quran, you will find that it deals with all of the subjects relating to human beings. The Quran lays great emphasis on patience (39:10), reconciliation (4:128), forgiveness (42:40), avoidance (7:199), contentment, and so on.

Why all these teachings? These teachings apparently seem to advocate passivity. But that is not so, for they embody great wisdom. The Quran tries to build that kind of mind which is able to manage all the affairs of life on the basis of spirituality. It is not passivity that is advocated but skill in the proper management of life's problems. The purpose of this formula – indeed, it is the Quran's greatest concern – is to concentrate on high goals and one who wants to achieve high goals has no option but to foster the aforementioned qualities. He has to try to effectively manage all undesirable situations. Otherwise,

he will become preoccupied by trivial issues and will fail to continue his journey towards higher goals.

The purpose of this compilation is to give an insight to the reader into the spiritual wisdom contained in the Quran. Leaving aside technical and legal discussions, the focus here is to enlighten a person about the creation plan for human beings as envisaged in the Quran, the nature of life and death, the principles for managing individual and societal issues, and dealing with life's vicissitudes.



Spiritual and Intellectual Development

Learning from Everyone

The Quran lays great importance on learning, for it is learning that promotes and sustains the process of intellectual development. A verse of the Quran in the chapter Maryam (Mary) gives a notable example of this in a conversation the Prophet Abraham had with his father:

Father, I have been given some knowledge which has not come to you, so follow me: I shall guide you along a straight path. (19:43)

Obviously, Abraham's father, who was called Azar, was Abraham's senior. So he could have been reluctant to take advice from someone who was very much his junior. But in the matter of learning, senior and junior have no meaning, for words of wisdom should be heeded, even if the speaker is a much younger person.

If you want to be an intellectually developed person, adopt the habit of acquiring knowledge from all and sundry.

The universe of knowledge and wisdom is so vast that it cannot be encompassed by any single mind. The only thing that can help you to gain more and more knowledge is the spirit mentioned in the Quran. Everyone must develop an insatiable intellectual thirst for the gaining of knowledge from many different quarters – every day and every night.

There are several ways of acquiring knowledge, one of them being through discussion or dialogue. Discussion or dialogue is not just a debating practice; it is an intellectual exchange.

Books are a great source of knowledge. But the study of books is not simply reading. It is establishing contact and consulting with other thinkers and scholars. It is like a global discussion, if the reader has the true spirit, and has the ability to acquire knowledge from universal sources. The library is the place for this, for it is like a global conference room. A library makes it possible for you to reach all the world's minds.

The Prophet of Islam once said that you should acquire wisdom, even if you have to go to the ends of the earth. All men and women should become imbued with this spirit.

There are several ways of acquiring knowledge, one of them being through discussion or dialogue. Discussion or dialogue is not just a debating practice; it is an intellectual exchange.

The Art of Dematerialization

Rain is a unique and natural phenomenon, which is referred to several times in the Quran. One such reference is given in the chapter *Qaf*; its translation is as follows:

And We have sent down from the sky blessed water with which We have brought forth gardens and grain to be harvested. (50:9)

‘Blessed water’ in this verse means fresh water. This is purified water that comes down as rain, giving vital nourishment to all the greenery on the surface of the earth. Without rain all the land surface becomes like a vast desert.

Purified water means desalinated water. The original source of this water is the salt water stored in the seas and oceans that are spread over three-fourths of the earth’s surface. This stored water is saline, nature having mixed

3.5 percent of salt in this water as a preservative. However, salt water is useful neither for man nor for agriculture.

It is nature that initiates a global process of desalination. It is desalinated water that rises in the form of vapour and forms clouds. Then from the clouds there is a downpour of fresh water. It is this blessed water, or desalinated water, that descends and fulfils the needs of humans and agriculture.

It is a demonstration by nature of how we can purify ourselves. By following this natural pattern, we have to process things around us through contemplation, and then make this serve as a tool for the purification of the soul (*tazkiya*).

Nature's reservoir of water has a certain salt content. But nature separates the water content from the salt content and thus makes the water useful for humans and for agriculture. This is true of all other things. Everything around us, big or small, has material content as well as spiritual content. We have to dematerialize these things in order to extract the spiritual content. And then we take the spiritual content as food for our souls. We receive water by a natural process, but spiritual food can only be obtained through an intellectual process. Without this process, we

will certainly face spiritual starvation and finally spiritual death.

For example, everyone can speak. Yet the verbal exchange of dialogue is a rare phenomenon peculiar to human beings: no other creature of this world shares this capacity with us. Speech apparently is a physical phenomenon, but it also has spiritual content, in that it reminds us of the special blessing we have been endowed with by God.

And this discovery enables us to acknowledge God in elevated language – something that cannot be done by any other creature in the physical world.

Self-Correcting Mechanism

It is said that once a man came to the Prophet and after some discussion the Prophet said to him: “Stay with Ali ibn Abi Talib – one of his companions – for your further training.”

A few days later, the Prophet asked Ali about the man who had come to him. He replied that he had stayed with him for a while and then he had gone away, and that now he had no knowledge of his whereabouts. The Prophet said: “Anyone who meets him, bring him to me.” After a few



days the Prophet was able to meet him again. The Prophet said to him: “I asked you to stay with Ali for your further training. Then why did you leave him?” He replied: “You asked me to take training from him. I did so and then I went away.” Replying to a further question, he said that Ali had taught him chapter *Al-Zalzalah* of the Quran, which says:

“Whoever has done the smallest particle of good will see it; while whoever has done the smallest particle of evil will see it.” (99:7-8)

A person is accountable to God
and every deed of his, big or small,
will be evaluated by God.

Quoting these verses of the Quran, the man said that from these verses, he had found the complete message; so there was no need to stay on any longer with Ali. The Prophet asked: “How did you find the complete message in these verses?” He replied: “These verses tell us that a person is accountable to God and every deed of his, big or small, will be evaluated by God. Now I always keep this in mind. I always do what seems good to me and I always refrain from what seems bad to me.”

This story explains very beautifully how the Quran develops a self-correcting mechanism in every man and woman. The Quran wants everyone to be on his or her guard all the time. This concept is bound to make a person conduct himself properly. It is at the basis of character-building.

Spiritual Partners

The Quran gives great importance to the institution of marriage. According to the Quran, the home is the first

unit of any society, and is the primary source of all kinds of valuable experiences. If the home is good, then the whole of society will automatically emerge as a good society.

In the chapter *Al-Rum* (The Romans) the Quran gives basic guidelines in this regard. The translation of one of these verses is as follows:

Another of His signs is that He created for you from among yourselves spouses, so that you might find repose in them, and He created between you affection and kindness. Truly there are signs in this for people who reflect. (30:21)

In these verses, the Quran reveals an important law of nature, that is, that a man and a woman are the counterparts of each other. According to a saying of the Prophet, men and women are two equal halves of a single unit. A man and a woman as a pair can fulfil the real purpose of human life.

According to this, man and woman are spiritual partners to each other. Mutual love and affection are the binding forces for both. Starting life as a pair enables them to have experiences of an elevated nature. In their

daily meetings, they can share spiritual experiences and through discussion they can plan their lives on a spiritual basis. They can find time for joint study. They can together embark on discovering broader areas of the spiritual world.

Both men and women are like cogwheels. One cog cannot move the wheel: the wheel of life can be moved only with the joint effort of both.

But there is a price to be paid for this. This price, in a single word, is none other than adjustment. The fact is that in spite of all their similarities, both have been born with differences. There is no uniformity in the scheme of things in nature. So, we have no option but to learn the art of difference management.

One's failure in this regard is tantamount to failure in life itself. If you want to develop your spirituality, try to adjust with your spouse. Spirituality is the highest goal one can aim to achieve. Without spirituality, both man and woman are incomplete. Spirituality gives you wisdom and strength. And both are necessary to have a successful life.

Reflections on Social Life

All Human Beings are Equal

After an incident in Makkah, the Prophet received a revelation from God Almighty, which has been recorded in the Quran in the chapter *Abasa* (He Frowned). The chapter begins thus:

He frowned and turned away when the blind man approached him, for how can you know that he might seek to purify himself, or take heed and derive benefit from [Our] warning? As for him who was indifferent, you eagerly attended to him – though you are not to be blamed if he would not purify himself – but as for one who comes to you eagerly and in awe of God you pay him no heed. (80:1-10)

The background to these verses is that, one day, the Prophet was engrossed in a conversation with some influential persons of Makkah, hoping to convince them – and, through them, the Makkan community at large – of the truth of his message. At that point, he was approached by one of his followers, Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum, who was blind and poor – with the request for

a repetition or elucidation of certain earlier passages of the Quran. Annoyed by this interruption of what he momentarily regarded as a more important endeavour, the Prophet “frowned and turned away” from the blind man – and was immediately, there and then, reproved by the revelation of the first ten verses of this chapter. In later years he often greeted Ibn Umm Maktum with these words of humility: “Welcome to him on whose account God has rebuked me!”

This incident, recorded in the Quran, teaches the universal lesson that every human being is worthy of respect and should be treated on an equal basis, regardless of whether he is poor or rich, a common man or a highly placed person.

Equality is not simply a moral value, it is more than that. Equality means equal regard, equal opportunities, equal freedom, equal right to development and progress.

Equality has an absolute value in Islam. Muhammad was a Prophet of God, but in terms of equality, the Quran did not differentiate between the Prophet and a common man.

A Duty-Conscious Society

One unique aspect of the Quran is that it always lays stress on duties rather than on rights. There are many verses which tell us to do this or do that. But you will not find a single verse in the Quran that encourages human beings to make demands. No verse suggests that people should be able to expect that they can make claims on society. The whole of the Quran is based on this norm.



One such Quranic verse says:

God commands justice, kindness and giving their [due to] near relatives, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and transgression. He admonishes you so that you may take heed! (16:90)

Any ideology based on individual entitlement is unnatural, while any ideology based on duty is natural. Those who are conscious of their own rights will always make demands upon others. Their formula is: Others have to give to us. While the duty-conscious person will always think in terms of self-construction. He will always try to fulfil his own duty. The formula of a rights-conscious person is: They must do it. While the formula of a duty-conscious person is: I will do it. A rights-based ideology is focused

A rights-based ideology is focused upon what has to come from others, whereas a duty-based ideology starts with the self. The rights-based ideology is based on the 'we and they' concept, while the duty-based ideology is based on the 'we and we' concept.

upon what has to come from others, whereas a duty-based ideology starts with the self. The rights-based ideology is based on the ‘we and they’ concept, while the duty-based ideology is based on the ‘we and we’ concept.

A rights-based ideology leads to social anarchy, for it is bound to create different rival classes, while a duty-based ideology leads to harmony, solidarity, peace and compassion.

This same principle is laid down in a saying of the Prophet: “Give to others what others want from you and ask for your rights from God.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari, hadith* no. 7052) This means that you should fulfil your duty towards others and achieve what you want to achieve by your own efforts. This is the only feasible formula in this world. According to the creation plan of God, this world is based on challenge and competition. No one is going to give you what you want: you have to work hard for everything on your own.

A person who is obsessed with what is due to him from others will fail to plan his life on a realistic basis. He is doomed to live a life of failure and tension. A duty-conscious person, on the other hand, will fulfil his duties

One quality required of the people of Paradise is the ability to refrain from creating a nuisance for others

towards others. And according to the law of nature, he will certainly be requited by others. It is this fact that reflects in the saying: 'It is in giving that we receive.'

This world is based on the principle of give and take, so you have to give something to others before you can expect anything from them, and if you ask others to fulfil your needs, no one will pay heed to your demands.

No-Problem Person

In the chapter *Al-Waqi'ah* (The Inevitable Event) the Quran tells us about Paradise. How people will live in Paradise is portrayed as follows:

They will not hear therein any vain or sinful talk, only words of peace and tranquillity. (56:25-26)

Paradise of the Hereafter is an ideal society. The present world is like a recruiting ground, in which people are

being put to the test. Those who qualify in this test will gain entry to Paradise. The present world is a selecting ground and Paradise is a place where those selected will be settled. One quality required of the people of Paradise is the ability to refrain from creating a nuisance for others, i.e. the ability to live in society in complete peace and tranquillity.

According to the Quran, there are two criteria for anyone to be included in the society of Paradise; the first is that



they should live in complete peace, thus ensuring peace and tranquillity for other members of society. Then the second condition is that they should refrain from creating a nuisance for others. In other words, they must prove to be no-problem members of society. Although the above-mentioned verse is about the society of Paradise, it tells us what kind of social values are acceptable in the present world as well. When we keep in mind that the present world is a selecting ground, then it becomes very clear that in both the places the same ethical norms are required – in the present world as well as in the world Hereafter.

Any part of your behaviour that is found undesirable by your fellow beings is a nuisance. You cannot say that you did not act in this manner for the sake of creating a nuisance for others; it is not your opinion that determines what is a nuisance and what is not; it is your fellow beings who have the sole right to determine what is a nuisance and what is not.

In this situation, you have no excuse; you have no right to say that your intentions were good. If your behaviour is acceptable to your fellow beings, then it is not a nuisance and if your behaviour is not acceptable to your fellow beings, then it is certainly a nuisance.

On Anger, Stress and Conflict

Positive Response at the Moment of Anger

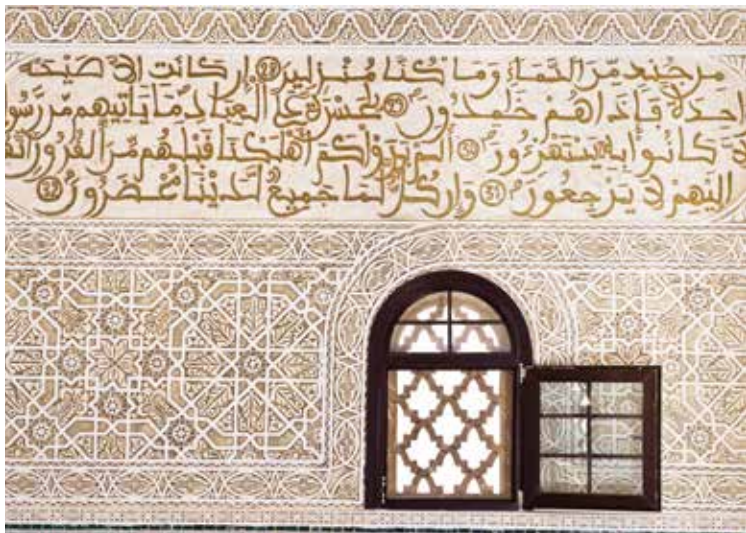
Social problems are the constant concern of the Quran and it sets about addressing them. One of these kinds of problems is anger – a phenomenon which is in evidence in every society. In fact, wherever there are two persons, there must also be provocation and anger. On this subject, the Quran gives a piece of guidance in the chapter *Al-Imran* (The Family of Imran). Its translation is as follows:

For those who spend, both in prosperity and adversity, who restrain their anger and are forgiving towards their fellow men – God loves those who do good works. (3:134)

In this verse the Quran does not say that a true believer is devoid of anger; it says instead that a true believer is one who is able to restrain his anger. So, the definition of a true believer is not one who is free of anger, but one whose faith is so powerful that he is able to control his temper whenever the fire of anger begins to smoulder in his heart.

Anger is not an evil. It is a part of human nature. In fact, anger is a negative expression of a healthy aspect of human nature. A human being is a sensitive animal endowed with conscience which tells him what is good and what is bad. So, it is but natural that when he sees some unprincipled behaviour or an immoral act, he becomes disturbed. But in such a situation, there are two options: to show a negative reaction or give a positive response.

A person of elevated character is one who has the ability to give a positive response at that time. A negative response



The message of the Quranic verse is: Do not give a hateful reaction but try rather to give a response out of well-wishing.

arises out of hate, whereas a positive response flows from love and compassion. The message of the Quranic verse is: Do not give a hateful reaction but try rather to give a response out of well-wishing.

Anger is generally the result of provocation, and provocation is a test of your capacity to exercise self-control. It useful to view provocation simply as a challenge to your imperturbability. So at the time of provocation, prove to be a person who can maintain his or her equilibrium and rise above all irritants. Be the master of your negative sentiments. This upholds the true dignity of human beings, both men and women.

Do Not Provoke Others

During the Prophet's time, some of his companions used objectionable language against the gods of the non-believers. This resulted in a reaction from the other party.

In this situation, the Quran gave a very important piece of advice to the believers. This is recorded as follows in the chapter *Al-An'am* (The Cattle):

Do not revile those [beings] whom they invoke instead of God, lest they, in their hostility, revile God out of ignorance. Thus to every people We have caused their actions to seem fair. To their Lord they shall all return, and He will declare to them all that they have done. (6:108)

God Almighty never guided the Muslims to require others not to abuse Him or the Prophet of Islam; instead, God Almighty advised Muslims to refrain from using derogatory language about the idols of others. That would only provoke them and in return they would abuse God and His Prophet.

This verse sets an example. Muslims must unilaterally uphold ethical standards on this issue. In other words, the Quran points to the reason for conflict: provocation. If one refrains from provocation, one will automatically save oneself from retaliation.

If you are hurt by the negative statements of others, you are not allowed to demand that others should not hurt

you. It is your problem and not that of others. According to Quranic teachings, one must keep one's patience and refrain from giving the other party the chance to hit back. This principle can be called the 'save yourself' formula. Don't make demands of others, but rather control yourself in your speech and behaviour.

This formula gives the easiest solution to problems of antagonism. Moreover, by this method you can save your time and energy and can find more time for constructive activities. This formula saves you from being a victim of distraction, for distraction always leads to useless, time-consuming activities.

It is pointless to say to others: "Don't hurt me!" It is better to avoid hurting others and then the problem is instantly solved. It is not the believer's task to complain about others' behaviour or to demand that others remain silent or refrain from using such language as does not suit the believers.

The Best Way of Settlement

In the chapter *Al-Nisa'* (Women) the Quran gives guidelines on resolution of disputes. The translation of the relevant verse is as follows:

If a woman fears ill-treatment or indifference on the part of her husband, it shall be no offence for her to seek a reconciliation, for reconciliation is best. But people are prone to selfish greed. If you do good and fear Him, surely God is aware of what you do. (4:128)

Here the Quran enjoins us to adopt the policy of reconciliation in controversial matters. The immediate context of this verse is the resolution of husband-wife differences, but the Quran, by giving a particular reference, gives a general direction. The policy of reconciliation is not only effective for problems between husband and wife, but is equally useful for all other problems, both national and international.

When controversy arises, reconciliation is the best course. That is, you have to adopt a conciliatory rather than a confrontational approach. The conciliatory approach

According to Quranic teachings, one must keep one's patience and refrain from giving the other party the chance to hit back.

always minimizes the problem, while the confrontational approach aggravates matters, while leaving the initial problem unsolved.

The fact is that you are not living on an isolated island; you are bound to live in society. You have no option other than to live with others, with a family, with a society, with a nation – this list goes on to international affairs. In such a situation, you cannot afford to live on your own. If you become egocentric and ignore other people, you will unnecessarily make others your rivals, so the best policy is to accept others, adopting the policy of adjustment. You have to avoid all kinds of clash, so that you may save your energy and your time.

Adopting the policy of reconciliation is not just a question of being accommodating towards others. It is much more than that. It allows you to continue your journey of life without any break. It saves you from deviation and permits you to dedicate your life more and more to worthy goals.

The best policy, therefore, is to rid oneself of the confrontational mentality at the very outset.

Why Revenge is Not an Option

According to Quranic teachings, revenge is not an option. Revenge only increases the problem. The chapter *Al-Nahl* (Bees) of the Quran gives practical advice on this point. The translation of the relevant verses is as follows:

If you want to retaliate, retaliate to the same degree as the injury done to you. But if you are patient, it is better to be so. (16:126)

Revenge is the action of inflicting hurt or harm on someone for an injury or wrong suffered at their hands. According to Quranic teachings, there are two levels of revenge – one may be called equal revenge and the second may be called forgetting the bad experience received from others.

Although revenge or retaliation is allowed, but with a strict condition – that it should be an equal revenge, not exceeding the others' bad action. But when seriously thought about, one realizes that this is not an option. It is so difficult that no sincere person can take this option. Because there is no available measurement that may tell

When you forgive a person, you hit his conscience. Forgiveness is a kind of corrective measure. Forgiveness creates a sense of repentance in the other person and he tries to correct himself. In this sense, forgiveness has a value in terms of social reform.

you that your retaliation was completely equal to the action you received from the other.

This option is, therefore, only a hypothetical option. Any sincere person will decide not to take this option, because if during the retaliation you exceed the limit you will be answerable to God Almighty.

So, practically there is only one option and that is forgiveness. While revenge may open a new chapter that is revenge after revenge, forgiveness puts an end to this chain. Forgiveness means that you have put a full stop, while revenge in this case means that you have put commas.

When you forgive a person, you hit his conscience. Forgiveness is a kind of corrective measure. Forgiveness

creates a sense of repentance in the other person and he tries to correct himself. In this sense, forgiveness has a value in terms of social reform.

Although Islam allows retaliation with certain strict conditions, but fulfilling these conditions is so difficult that it practically means that one should not retaliate. The message of the Quran in such situations is: Opt for forgiveness. Do not try to retaliate, because retaliation is bound to create some more problems.



The Nature of Life and Death

The Creation Plan of God

Everyone asks the same questions: Who am I? Why I am here on this planet earth? What is the purpose of human life? What is success and what is failure? These questions may be summed up in a single sentence: What is the creation plan of the Creator? Chapter sixty-seven of the Quran, *Al-Mulk* (The Kingdom), gives the answer to this question. The translation of the relevant verse is as follows:

God created death and life so that He might test you, and find out which of you is best in conduct. He is the Mighty, the Most Forgiving One. (67:2)

According to the Quran, a human being was created as an eternal being. In the above Quranic verse ‘death and life’ represent both the pre-death period of life and the post-death period of human life. So, death and life cover the entire eternal lifespan of human beings.

God created humans with a well thought-out plan, the essence of which is to give a person complete freedom – not simply as a gift, but as a test. The result of this test

would enable God to know who misused his freedom and who put his freedom to the best use. This was, and still is, the divine scheme of things for man.

This test is not just for the sake of testing mankind. It is for a high purpose. Before creating humans, God created an ideal world, that is, Paradise. Now God wanted ideal men and women who would merit being settled in this Paradise for all eternity. Therefore, the present world is a selection ground for Paradise.



This Quranic notion explains human life. It explains not only the existence of man, but also all the misadventures that he faces in this world. It gives great meaning to all the good and the bad in life.

According to this divine scheme, the present human lifetime affords a great opportunity to a person. In the pre-death period of life, an individual has the chance to qualify himself for Paradise, so that in the post-death period of life he may be settled as a deserving candidate in this perfect world. This divine scheme gives one great hope. The present world may be one of problems, for in this world there are sorrows, pains and unwanted situations. But the divine scheme of life prescribed in the Quran gives us a great solace. It is like a bright light in the darkness. It gives men and women great hope that all those sorrows they experience in the present world are for the temporary period of testing, and that once they qualify in the test, they will be fortunate candidates for eternal Paradise.

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that he faces in this world. It gives great meaning to all the good and the bad in life.

Given his often untimely demise, a human being seems to be a completely inexplicable phenomenon, but in the light of the above divine scheme, human life becomes completely explainable and understandable.

The Road to God

Man is a creature and God is the Creator. Every creature must seek the blessings of his Creator. Every man and woman must proceed towards this goal destined by God. This is laid down in the Quran in the chapter *Al-Dhariyat* (Scattering Winds). The translation of this verse is as follows:

Therefore hasten to God; truly, I am sent by Him to give you clear warning. (51:50)

It is an established fact that every person is born with a certain inner urge – nature's gift to him – to reach a particular goal. This urge is so common that there is no exception whatsoever – rich and poor, or educated and uneducated, all are born with this natural urge. So, it is an issue for all individuals.

What is this goal? First of all, it is to find out one's own Creator, to understand the creation plan of God and to grasp all those factors that are relevant to life in this world.

All prophets came to guide mankind towards this goal. To this end, they received revelations which took the form of guidance from God Almighty.

The only path that has no end is the road to God. It continues even after the death of human beings, both men and women. It is an unbroken trajectory into eternity,



from the limited world to a world without limitations. This represents a transition from the imperfect world to the perfect world, from materialism to spirituality and, as such, is a voyage from time and space to beyond time and space. All other roads end with the death of the human being

It is a fact that a person often experiences frustration. The reason is that a human being by birth wants a complete world to live in, but in the present world he is compelled to live in a world that is not complete. Journeying on the road to God is the solution. This road takes you from the incomplete to the complete: it is the hallowed nature of God's path that gives the traveller of this path unlimited bliss.

The Concept of Death

One of the most important teachings of the Quran concerns death. Death is the end of the life of every man and woman, but no one knows when it will come. The Quran refers to this fact in the chapter Luqman:

No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. Surely, God is all-knowing, all-aware. (31:34)

Death is like an individual earthquake. Everyone is doomed to die, but no one knows when he is going to face this fateful moment. Death means complete detachment from the present world. It is like compulsory eviction from the world he has built for himself.

This being so, everyone is living in a state of emergency. Every moment could be his last moment. Every breath may prove to be his last. At any time he may face the fatal verdict of destiny – he may reach the point of no return in his life.

This situation is very serious; it is a great teacher for every man and woman. It creates a new kind of ethics that is based on death. This concept, if taken as a living concept, may change the whole way of a person's life. It may indeed revolutionize the course of his life.

The concept of inevitable death makes you very sincere. It saves you from all kinds of distractions. It nullifies all kinds of lust and exploitation. It tells a person that negative planning is pointless because before its fulfilment, one may die – and death is for all eternity. One may think against his fellow men but no one has the power to fulfil his evil desires against others.

One positive contribution of death is that it makes you live in contentment, and contentment is the only source of peace and a tension-free life.

One positive contribution of death is that it makes you live in contentment, and contentment is the only source of peace and a tension-free life. In fact, the desire for more and more is an outcome of unawareness about death and contentment is a result of awareness of this universal fact.

The concept of death serves as a speed breaker in one's life. Death makes people adopt a realistic approach. Death reminds one of one's limitations. Death is like a corrective measure in one's life, the concept of death serves as a check and balance force in life.

Death serves as a regulator of life. Death serves as a positive teacher of every human being. Death enables one to live a healthy and constructive life.

The concept of death makes you set your target and priorities, and then exert all your energy and time for that target. Death is not a negative event in one's life; it has a completely positive lesson.

Deserving Candidate for Paradise

Who is a deserving candidate for the eternal world of Paradise? According to the Quran, only a *muzakka* (20:76) person will be selected for being settled into Paradise.

Muzakka means a purified soul. The *muzakka* person is one who prepares himself in terms of the Paradise culture, who develops his personality on the lines required for living in the society of Paradise. Paradise is an ideal society. The qualities that are required in a *muzakka* person are given in the Quran in detail.

The hearts of the people of Paradise will be filled with the glory of God (39:75). This is the first quality of a *muzakka* person. That is, he must discover the glory of God in the present world and acknowledge it from deep within his heart. Glorifying God is always a result of discovery. It means that a person should adopt the culture of contemplation (*tadabbur*), and through thinking and reflection, discover God as the Lord of the Universe. This discovery must be intellectually so deep that it should bring about a revolutionary change in his personality. In this way he becomes a *rabbani* (divine) person. (3:79)



A scene from Paradise has been given in the Quran in chapter *Al-Qamar* (The Moon) in these words:

The God-fearing will find themselves in gardens and rivers, in the seat of truth with an all-powerful sovereign. (54:55)

It means that the people of Paradise will have the qualities of truthfulness and sincerity in the complete sense of the word. Those who have proved that they possess this high quality will be enrolled in the bright list of entrants to Paradise.

Only that person will be selected for Paradise who has proved in the present world that he is so intellectually developed that he can live in society with peace and compassion.

The Quran refers to Paradise as *dar us-salam* (10:25). *Dar us-salam* means the home of peace. According to this, every member of the high society of Paradise will be a peaceful person. Only that person will be selected for Paradise who has proved in the present world that he is so intellectually developed that he can live in society with peace and compassion. No excuse, whatsoever, would develop the slightest feelings of hate and violence against anyone in his heart.

About the sublime society of Paradise, there is a very meaningful verse in the Quran in chapter *Al-Nisa* (Women). It says:

Whoever obeys God and the Prophet will be among those He has blessed: the prophets, the truthful, the witnesses for God, and the righteous. What excellent companions these are! (4:69)

The society of Paradise will be a collection of the best individuals from the whole of human history. Every member of this society will possess the fine qualities of positive thinking, peaceful behaviour, sublime character, truthfulness, sincerity and amiable personality, idealist in thought and perfectionist in behaviour.

Those who have developed this kind of personality in the present world are competent members of their society. Only those persons will find entry into Paradise who have qualified themselves in the present world.

Paradise is not anyone's birth right, nor will one receive entry into it through recommendation or wishful thinking. Entry into Paradise is totally a matter of selection, and this selection will be done by none other than God Almighty in the world Hereafter. This criterion has been given in the Quran in these words: "[In the Hereafter] man shall have only that for which he strives." (53:39) It means only that person will find entry into Paradise who qualifies for it.

Part 3

The Spirit of Islam



Discovery of God

Everything in the universe – the sun, the moon, the stars – have all completely subjugated themselves to God's will; they cannot make the slightest deviation from the path He has ordained for them. Similarly, all other elements in nature function in obedience to the laws of nature laid down for them by the Creator. The entire universe has surrendered to God, the Lord of the Universe.

But there is a difference between the status of man and that of the physical world. The physical world has been given no option but to submit to God, whereas man has been given free will, so that he may opt for either good or bad ways. To this end he has been given a thinking faculty, and a conscience with which to make moral judgements for himself. He has the ability to accept and reject in order to follow certain principles in life. He is not bound by fixed laws like all other created beings. He has been given freedom of thought, option and action.

It is through this liberty of choice that man is being tested. But after being given a thinking faculty, a conscience and an ability to judge between good and bad ways, he was

not just left to his own resources. God did not just leave man in a world where there was no way to find the truth. Divine provision for him went much further than that. To see how God gave His guidelines to mankind, we have to go right back to the beginning of creation. He took Adam, the first man – whom He had made not just an ordinary mortal but also a prophet – and taught him everything that He wanted from man, so that human beings would not be left without proper direction or guidance. From time to time thereafter, He sent large numbers of prophets to the world – the last of these being the Prophet Muhammad – so that human beings, who tended to stray, could be recalled to the path of virtue.

Belief in God

Suppose we placed a pebble on a potter's wheel, and then spun the wheel around very fast. The pebble would, of course, fly off, even although a potter's wheel can hardly reach a speed of 25 miles an hour. Now, just think for a moment that the earth we live on is also revolving but at a much faster rate than the potter's wheel. Yet we do not fly off. The earth spins continuously on its axis at a speed of 1000 miles an hour – much faster than the average pas-

“Islam” is an Arabic word which means “submission, surrender and obedience to God.”

senger plane – yet we move around on its surface, and live our daily lives without any fear of being thrown off like the pebble from the potter’s wheel. What a miracle this is. The explanation scientists give us is that the earth pulls us with great force from underneath, while the pressure of the atmosphere from above pushes us firmly to the ground. A force attracting us from below, and a five-hundred mile thick blanket of air enveloping us from above are miracles enough in themselves, and to say that they explain our not flying off into space is to lend even greater credence to the miraculous nature of our entire world.

Everything in this world, is, in fact, a miracle. Just think what happens when we put tiny seeds into the ground. The soil in which they are planted is uniform in constitution, but they bring forth a vast array of plants radishes, carrots, turnips, guavas, mangoes, mustard plants- everything indeed from the humblest blade of grass to the mightiest oak. Each plant has its own distinct appearance, taste and fragrance, and, according to its species, gives certain benefits to mankind.



On all sides of us, a whole world of miraculous diversity and proportions stretches out before our eyes. Moreover, at every instant, a great variety of life forms are continually coming into existence, quite unaided by man. Yet if all of the human beings in this world were to come together, they would not be able to create even one tiny grain of sand. This all amounts to a miracle of such amazing proportions, that words fail us when we have to describe it. When we try to do so, we only degrade it, for we are unable to do justice to it with mere human words. All we

can do is look on in wonder, and ask ourselves: “Besides God, who could have made manifest such a miracle?”

Miracles all around us

Everything in this world is made up of atoms. In its final analysis, every object is a collection of these tiny particles. Yet by some strange miracle, when these atoms come together in certain proportions, they form the dazzling globe of the sun, and when the same atoms accumulate elsewhere in different proportions they flow in cascades: in yet other places, they take the form of subtle breezes or are fashioned into fertile soil. All these things may be made up of the same atoms, but the nature and properties of each separate object are widely different.

This miraculous world provides man with endless resources which he puts to good use whenever he learns how to tap

On all sides of us, a whole world of miraculous diversity and proportions stretches out before our eyes. Yet if all of the human beings in this world were to come together, they would not be able to create even one tiny grain of sand.

them. Massive supplies of whatever he needs in life are constantly being accumulated, and man himself has to do very little in order to avail of them. Take, for instance, the food that he eats. He has but to stretch out his hand for the huge quantities of valuable nourishment which, as part of the order of the cosmos, has been made available to him.

Once he has it in his possession, all he has to move are his hands and his jaws so that the food should reach his stomach. Then without any further effort on his part, the food is absorbed by the body and is turned into flesh, blood, bones, nails, hair and other parts of the human body. Where food keeps the human body going, petroleum, another great earthly phenomenon, keeps his activities going. All man has to do is to extract it from the ground, refine it, put it into his machines and, astonishingly, this liquid fuel keeps the entire mechanism of his civilization running smoothly. Countless resources of this type have been created in this world, and there is enough of everything to meet man's needs. Man's part in bringing these things into being, or in changing them into some useful form, is a relatively small one. Therefore,

with the minimum of effort, he has his clothes, houses, furniture, machines, vehicles and all the other components and accessories of his civilization. Are such occurrences not sufficient to prove that there is indeed a Maker and a Master of this world?

The earth rotates unceasingly in two ways – on its own axis and in orbit around the sun. But it does not create any noise in the process. A tree goes to work in the way of a great factory, but it does not emit any smoke. Daily, innumerable creatures are dying in the sea, but they do not pollute the water. The universe has been running in accordance with the divine order for billions of years, without ever having to reorganize itself, for everything about the way it is organized is so perfect. There are countless stars and planets moving around in space: they keep to the same speed, never lagging behind, and never exceeding their set pace. All these are miracles of the highest order. They are far more wonderful than anything that man can create, and they happen every instant in this world of ours. What further proof do we need that the power of a Great God lies behind this world?

The Signs of God

When we look at the different life forms, we witness an astonishing spectacle. Certain material objects come together in one body, and there comes into being a creature like a fish swimming through water, or a bird soaring in the skies. Of the great variety of creatures which abound on the earth, the one of greatest interest to us is Man. In ways that are a mystery to us, he is moulded into a well-proportioned form. The bones within him take on the meaningful shape of the skeleton, which is covered with flesh and sealed in by a layer of skin, out of which sprout hair and nails. With blood coursing through channels within this frame, all of this adds up to a human being who walks about, holds things in his hands, who hears, smells, tastes, who has a mind which remembers things, accumulates information, analyses it and then expresses it in speech and in writing.

The formation of such an amazing being from inert matter is more than a miracle. The particles of which a man is composed are the same as that of earth and stone. But have we ever heard a piece of earth talking, or seen a piece of stone walking around? The word miraculous is barely



adequate to describe the capabilities of man. But what else is there to this walking, talking, thinking, feeling man which distinguishes him from earth and stone? This factor life- is still a mystery to us: there must indeed be a superior Being who has imbued inert matter with this quality, thus accomplishing a unique feat of creation.

Man has only to think of the nature of his own being to understand the nature of God. The self, the ego in man, has an individuality of its own, which is quite distinct from that of others of his kind living here on this earth.

The ego in man is absolutely sure of its own existence. It is the part of man which thinks, feels, forms opinions, has intentions and puts them into practice. It also decides for itself which course of action to take. Every human being is thus a separate personality with a will and power of his own. Since our experience of such a being is an every day matter, what is astonishing about the existence of God, who also is a being wielding personal power, although on a scale far greater than ourselves? Believing in God is a very similar mental process to believing in one's own self. That is why the Quran says that man himself is ample evidence for himself, however much he may excuse himself. (75: 14-15)

People demand some miraculous proof before they will believe in the truth of God and His message. But what further proof do they require when they have the miracle of the whole of the universe which has been functioning perfectly for millions of years on the vastest of scales? If the doubter is not prepared to accept such a great miracle, then how is he going to shed his doubts when he sees lesser miracles? In truth, man has been provided with everything he needs to enable him to believe in God, and

then to place himself at His service. If, in spite of this, he does not believe in God, and fails to acknowledge God's power and perfection, then it is he himself and not anyone else who is to blame.

Finally, the Discovery of God

One who has found God has found everything. After the discovery of God, no further discovery remains to be made. Thus, when a man has discovered God, his entire attention is focussed upon Him. God, for him, becomes a treasure which he cherishes, and it is to Him then that he has recourse for all his worldly and eternal needs.

God's world is a collection of atoms. In its elemental form, it all consists of one and the same type of inert matter; but God has moulded this matter into countless diverse forms: light, heat, greenery, flowing water. He has also invested lifeless matter with the properties of colour, taste and smell; and everywhere, He has set things in motion, having carefully controlled this motion by gravity. Discovering the God who has made such a world is much more than just acquiring a dry creed; it means



filling one's heart and soul with the radiant glow of divine light and opening one's mind to incredible beauty and delicacy.

When we eat delicious fruits, this gives us a great sense of enjoyment. When we hear beautiful music we are quite entranced by it. When a handsome child is born to a couple, their joy knows no bounds. Then what of our experience of God, who is the source of all beauty, joy and virtue? On discovering Him, can one remain unmoved?

This is something which is hardly imaginable, for such a sublime experience – like coming close to a source of dazzling radiance – must surely leave its mark on one.

Having endowed things with their unique qualities, God Himself must have qualities that His discoverers may savour. To discover Him, therefore, is to experience Him like a fragrance in the nostrils, a taste which excites the palate, a texture which is a joy to caress, a melody which touches the heart. To come close to Him is to live in an everlasting garden of brilliant colours and delicate fragrances. It is to hear such music that one might wish its enchantment to last forever.

The Creator of all light, God Himself is the most resplendent of all beings. He is the light of the Heavens and of the earth, shedding His radiance on the personalities of all who discover Him. His is the greatest treasure house of all true wisdom. He is the greatest repository of all true strength. His discoverers are so fortified by His strength and so enlightened by His wisdom that no flood or hurricane can carry them away. They cannot, once having known Him, do other than evolve into superior human beings.

The Creation Plan of God

A western philosopher has written that it appears that man is a strange creature in this vast universe. It seems that neither man is made for this world, nor this world is made for man. Man and the Universe both seem to be a mismatch for each other.

Man is born with unlimited potentials. But in this present world, he finds only a very limited use of his potentials. Man, according to his nature desires to have an eternal life but very soon death arrives without his permission and finishes him off on a unilateral basis. Man carries unlimited desires within him, but these desires of his are never fulfilled.

World of dream is cherished by every man but these dreams are never realized. In this matter, there is no difference between the poor or rich, the big or the small. In the words of the philosopher mentioned above it seems that man has come to a world which was not made for him.

Why is man and the present world, are not in accord with each other? To find the answer of this question, we have to

know the Creation Plan of God. This question arose due to unawareness of the creation plan only by knowing the creation plan of God we can arrive at a convincing answer.

The reality is that God – the Creator of man, has created man according to His plan. To become acquainted with this plan is necessary for a man to have a thorough understanding of himself – just as the workings of a machine can only be understood when we study the drawings of the engineer who made it. Without the knowledge of engineer’s plan, nothing else can clarify the significance of that machine. Same is the case with man. The creator of the man has created him under a special plan. The plan is that man has to spend a trial period in this present unidealistic world, and after this, according to his deeds, he earns his right to inhabit the ideal world, another name of which is “Paradise”.

The present world is a trial world. Here, any man and woman, to prove their worthiness for an entry into paradise, has two great parts: to acknowledge the truth and a disciplined life. Any man or woman who qualify themselves fully in this test, shall find a place in the ideal world of paradise. And those who fail in this test shall spent their lives in eternal deprivation.

Are we Completely Free?

Man finds himself completely free in this present world, but this freedom is not as his right instead it is a test paper for every one. What Man has to do is that without any pressure applied to him he acknowledges the truth. Without any compulsion he surrenders before the truth. He restricts his freedom by his own choice. To surrender oneself before the truth is without doubt the greatest sacrifice for any man. To acknowledge the truth is, apparently, to make oneself smaller as compared to others



but this is the thing which shall give man the highest position. It will guarantee his entrance into paradise.

In this connection, the second important thing is a disciplined life. Generally, man's character is moulded by his emotions – anger, revenge, jealousy, hatred, rivalry etc. These are negative perceptions which shape up the personality of a man. But a man should opt for a life of principle. He should not build his character under the influence of external incentives, rather his character should be based on principles. He, of his own will power must shape up his personality in the light of sublime principles. This is the thing which is known as heavenly character.

Man has been created under the plan of creation. Man is the most noble creature of this entire universe. The existence of man is such a unique existence that no other example can be found in this vast universe. Man is rightly called as the most superior of the created beings. That is, the best and most meaningful being among all the created things.

The Hereafter

Those huge masses of ice, which we know as icebergs, found floating in the seas of the North and South poles,

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number amongst the most deceptive and, therefore, the most dangerous phenomena to be found in nature. Their deceptiveness lies in the fact that no matter how huge, or wonderful in configuration, what we see of them amounts to only one tenth of their enormous bulk. What lies below the surface of the ocean spreading far and beyond the visible perimeter, poses tremendous hazards to the unwary. In some ways, our lives are like those floating mountains of ice. The part we spend in this world – about a hundred years, or less – is like the part of the iceberg which is visible above the surface. We can see it, touch it, feel it. We can take its measure and deal with it effectively. But the part which comes after death is like the submerged part – vast, unfathomable and fraught with peril. It is something which defies the imagination, but which we must nevertheless try to comprehend, for that is

the part of human life which God has decreed should be eternal and, as such, ineluctable.

We are all familiar with the facts of our origin and the course which life takes from the womb until death. But at the end of our lifespan, whether it terminates in youth or in old age, our familiarity with the nature of things comes to an end. It has been surmised that death means total and final annihilation. But this is not so. Death is simply a means of consigning us to a new womb, to the womb of the universe itself. From that point, we are ushered into another world: the Hereafter. While the present, physical world as we know it has a finite time-frame, the Hereafter stretches away from us into infinity. We fondly imagine that there is some parallel between the pleasures and pains of this world and those of the next, but, in truth, nothing that we can experience in this world will ever match the extremes of agony and bliss of the life after death. Those who merit punishment in the Hereafter will be condemned to suffer the most horrific pain for all time to come. But those who merit God's blessings in the Hereafter shall know the most wonderful joy and contentment.

It is because life in this world is intended to be a testing-ground that the world of the Hereafter remains beyond

our reach. But all around us, we have innumerable signs which can help us, by analogy, to understand and appreciate the nature of the world to come. Imagine a room which ostensibly consists of four walls, furniture, a few material objects and some human occupants. To all outward appearances, that is what the room adds up to. But the moment we switch on the TV set, we are introduced to a hitherto unsuspected world of colour, movement, and highly vocal human activity. This world, with its scenery and very alive human beings, had existed all along. It had only needed the flip of a switch to make us aware of it. Similarly, our terrestrial existence is made up of a world within a world. The world we know is concrete, visible, audible, tangible. The 'other' world, the world within it, or rather, beyond it, is not, however, one which can be apprehended through any of the normal human senses; no switch can be turned on to make us understand what it is really like. Only death can do this for us. And, when we reopen our eyes after death, we find that what had formerly been impalpable, and quite beyond human comprehension, is now a stark, overwhelming reality. It is then that we grasp what had hitherto existed, but had remained invisible.

What we understand by suffering and solace in this world cannot be compared with the suffering and solace of the Hereafter.

What is Success?

Once we have become clear in our minds that the after-life truly exists, we realize that the sole aim of our earthly existence should be to strive for success in the life to come, for, unlike the present ephemeral world, the Hereafter is eternal and real. What we understand by suffering and solace in this world cannot be compared with the suffering and solace of the Hereafter.

Many individuals lead immoral, even criminal existences because they feel that we are free to do as we please in this world. Freedom we do have, but it exists only so that God may distinguish between the good and the evil, and determine who deserves a place of honour and dignity in the Hereafter and who should be condemned to eternal disgrace. While there is nothing to prevent the good and the evil from living cheek by jowl in this world, they will be separated in the Hereafter like the wheat from the chaff,

and will be judged in strict accordance with their record in this life. Some will be condemned to an eternal Hell of pain and distress, while others will be blessed with eternal bliss and pleasure. Each will ineluctably get his deserts.

Two men once brought a case before the Prophet for judgement. One had misappropriated the other's land, but because of certain legal quirks, it was difficult to pass a verdict against him. After due consideration, the Prophet warned him: "If the court gives a verdict in your favour, think of it as being fire and brimstone which you have been awarded." The piece of land might, in terms of this world, have been a prized possession, but in the perspective of the Hereafter it would assume the terrible properties of fire and brimstone.

These two sides of human deeds have been beautifully described through allegories and symbols in the hadith of the *mi'raj* (The Prophet's Journey to the Heavens). When the Prophet reached *Sidrah al-Muntaha* (the lote tree at the end of the Seventh Heaven), he saw four rivers: two flowing inward and two flowing outward. It was explained to him by the angel Gabriel that the two inward-flowing

were rivers of Paradise, and the outward-flowing were the Nile and the Euphrates. By analogy, the present world and the Hereafter are two sides of the same event. The worldly side is trivial and temporary, while the Hereafter side is substantive and permanent. It is to the latter side that we must face up after death. Here one has complete freedom to live out one's worldly existence as one wills; in the life-to-come, one will have no choice about the future course of one's life. One will either be raised to eternal glory, or cast down into the pit of everlasting Hell.



Closeness to God

The Earth is the sun's satellite. It constantly orbits around the sun. It takes one year to complete such a rotation. This movement of the earth around the sun is essential for the healthy functioning of life on earth. If the earth did not revolve around the sun, its existence would have no meaning, and life would come to an end.

This is a practical example of how we should lead our lives in this world. This example is indeed a physical demonstration that shows how man must revolve around God, just as the earth revolves around the sun. It means that all of man's activities should be based on God.

The earth rotates as compelled to by the laws of nature. But man, of his own free will, should surrender to God. He should build a life, which is based on the concept of God. This consciousness is the real ascension of man. In this consciousness lies the secret of all success. A God-oriented life begins with the discovery of God. When individuals, whether men or women, discover God, it means that they have found the truth. And this truth pervades their whole being. This feeling of having discovered the truth

The present universe is an expression of God's attributes. It is a complete introduction to God. God is visible in His creations, just as clearly as a human being sees his own reflection in the mirror.

becomes such a thrilling experience that it fills them with everlasting conviction. This everlasting conviction removes all frustrations from their lives. Therefore, losses are no longer such, for, in spite of them, they never lose the feeling that their greatest asset, i.e. God, is still with them.

Man experiences this realization by pondering upon God's creations. The present universe is an expression of God's attributes. It is a complete introduction to God. God is visible in His creations, just as clearly as a human being sees his own reflection in the mirror.

The vastness of space tells man that God, its Creator, is boundless. The observation of the sun and the stars shows us that God is all light. The heights of the mountains show us the greatness of God. The waves of the sea and the flow of the river tell us that God is a storehouse of boundless

blessings. We see God's bounty in the greenery of the trees. Man's existence becomes a proof of God's existence. In the waft of air he experiences a Divine touch. In the chirping of the birds, he hears God's songs.

For man, a God-oriented life starts by his remembering God. He begins to feel the presence of God. Everything serves to remind him of God. God's remembrance is never absent from his heart and mind. His mornings and evenings are spent as if he is living in God's neighbourhood. Just as rain replenishes the crops, so does he remain ever immersed in the remembrance of God.

The Source of Spiritual Development

God is a spiritual focus for man. One whose heart is attached to God undergoes spiritual experiences at every moment. Belief in God becomes a source of spiritual development for him. Filled with the love of God, he does not need anything further. God becomes a vast ocean for him to continue to swim in without ever experiencing any limit. In the form of spiritual awakening, he receives such great wealth that he does not feel any need for anything else.

For one who discovers God, the entire universe becomes an open book of God for him. Every leaf of a tree becomes a page of the divine book.

When he sees the sun, he feels as if God is lighting His heavenly torch so that he may read His book clearly. The Universe becomes, as it were, a supernal university and he its student.

Finding God is to find his centre of Love. Man by birth is a seeker of a Supreme Being who is far above him, who is free from all limitations and who may form the centre of his feelings, in short, a Being after finding whom a grown man becomes as satisfied as a child after being held in the arms of his mother. This discovery of God saves one from regarding something other than God as God and mistakenly and unrealistically thinking it to be the answer to the urge inherent in his nature. The discovery of God is to fulfill his or her real urge to find God. And the failure to discover God means failing to find that which is man's greatest need.

One who fails to find God is compelled by his natural urge to give the place of God to something other than God. This place is sometimes accorded to a certain human

being, sometimes to a certain animal, sometimes to a phenomenon of nature, sometimes to a certain material power, sometimes to a certain supposed concept and sometimes just to the self.

Even if one fails to discover God, or he becomes a denier of God, it is not in his or her power to stifle the urge in his nature to find God. That is why those men and women who have not found God inevitably come to hold something other than God as God. And this supposed God is always some creature or the other of God. By nature, it is possible for man not to accept the real God as God, but it is not possible for anyone to save himself or herself from granting the status of divinity to something other than God. Making God one's object of worship raises man's position. On the contrary, regarding something other than God as God amounts to descending from the level of humanity. Submission to God is the only way of life for both man and the universe.

God's Prophets

The Islamic concept of prophethood is different from that of other religions. Some religions would have it that even

The present universe is an expression of God's attributes. It is a complete introduction to God.

God Himself becomes incarnate in human shape, and that his prophets are in some way superhuman or other-worldly. But a prophet in the Islamic sense is no different from any other human being. His uniqueness lies simply in his being the chosen messenger of God.

God's prophets were born into this world just like any other human beings. They led their lives just as others did, thus demonstrating to their people how God's servants should, in practice, conduct themselves on earth, and showing them clearly what path they must tread in order to avert God's displeasure and make themselves worthy of His blessings.

Man has been placed on this earth by God in order that his obedience to his Creator may be put to the test. For this purpose he has been given complete freedom to tread the paths of both good and evil. He has a choice. But to follow the path desired for him by God, man is in need of guiding principles. The true source of guidance, according

to Islam, is to be found in prophethood. Throughout human history, God in His infinite mercy selected certain individuals to communicate His message to mankind, so that all human beings might be given an opportunity to follow the right path. These chosen people were called prophets, or messengers.

A prophet is a person chosen by God as His representative. When God appoints someone as His Prophet, He sends His angel to him to inform him of



his new status. In that way, the individual can have no doubts about his appointment as God's Prophet. Later, God reveals His message to him through His angels, so that he may communicate the divine teachings to all his fellow men.

God has given man a mind so that he may be endowed with understanding. But this mind can only grasp things that are apparent. It cannot go below the surface, and there are many things to be apprehended, for which a superficial knowledge is insufficient. The deeper realities of this world are beyond the scope of the human mind, and so far as God and the next world are concerned, they must remain forever invisible – beyond the reach of human perception.

What the Prophet does is to enlighten people so that they may overcome this human inadequacy. He tells of the reality of things here and now, and also gives tidings of the next world. He thereby enables the individual to formulate a plan for his entire existence in the full light of knowledge and awareness so that he may carve out a successful life for himself.

The Sacred Texts

The Quran

The Quran is a book of revelations from God. Today it exists in the form of a book consisting of 114 chapters. They were sent down by the angel Gabriel or Jibril, bit by bit according to the demand of circumstances. The Quran is a revealed book: it is not authored by a human being. It is the actual word of God in human language. The Quran began to be revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel, in A.D. 610, while the Prophet was sitting in seclusion in the cave of Hira at the top of the Mountain of Light, two miles from Makkah. Thus the scriptures were not revealed in book-form at one point of time. Their various parts were revealed as the occasion demanded. It was later compiled in Madinah during the last days of the Prophet. The entire revelation was completed over a period of 23 years. The last passage was revealed to the Prophet while he was addressing a gathering at Mount Arafat after performing his last Hajj in A.D. 622.

The Quran is a revealed book: it is not authored by a human being. It is the actual word of God in human language.

Themes of the Quran

The main theme of the Quran is to make people aware of the Creation Plan of God. According to this divine plan, man was created as an eternal being. The Creator divided man's life into two parts, pre-death and post-death. The pre-death period is that in which man is put to the test. The post-death period is that in which he will be rewarded or punished. The former is temporary, while the latter will last for all eternity.

The Quran aims at bringing about an intellectual revolution in every human being. All its teachings are therefore spiritual in nature. All its verses address the human mind, their main thrust being to promote contemplation on nature, for which the Quranic words are *tafakkur*, *tadabbur* and *tawassum*. The Quran, in effect, strives to promote spiritual behaviour and peaceful conduct in national as well as international life.

According to Quranic teachings, violence has no place in human life. Although Islam gives freedom to all, this comes with the proviso that this freedom should be exercised without resorting to violence. If an individual is peaceful in intent and conduct, he is allowed to exercise his freedom as he wills.

All the basic tenets of spirituality, ethics, and peaceful behaviour are laid down in the Quran in very clear terms. But the Quran is not a book of law; it is a book



of reflection. Moreover, the Quran presents as a model of Quranic conduct the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet, who lived a full life, followed Quranic teachings in all aspects of his practical behaviour. If one wants, therefore, to have an understanding of the tenets of the Quran, he may refer to the Quran and one who wants to become acquainted with the model of this Quranic conduct may study the life of the Prophet Muhammad, which is known as sirah.

Regarding the multi-religious society, the Quran is very practical. It gives the following formula: For you your religion, for me mine. In other words: Follow one and respect all. This formula is based on the well-known principle of peaceful coexistence indeed, the only way of existence in this world.

Regarding social life, the essence of Islamic teaching is that God has granted freedom to everyone. This freedom in itself demands that people should lead their lives with restraint. Because, if freedom is exercised without restraint, it will inevitably result in clash and breakdown, destroying social life in their wake.

The Quran emphasizes the formation of one's character through introspection and moulding oneself to the will of God. Nowhere does it enjoin the believer to engage in violence, leading to the destruction of fellow human beings.

The most repeated invocation in the Quran is “In the name of God, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful.” The occurrence of this invocation 114 times in the Quran is in itself an indication of how important it is. Every piece of work must have a beginning. It is the Quran's desire that when one initiates any undertaking one should begin by uttering the name of God. One is thus always reminded of God's attributes of benevolence and compassion.

The teaching of the Quran can be summed up under two basic headings: (1) Oneness of God: believing in One God and worshipping Him alone; (2) Brotherhood of Mankind: regarding all human beings as equal and according equal rights to all. These two kinds of precepts can be expressed as monotheism and justice.

Compassion for Humanity

The aim of the Quran – with its 6000-plus verses spread over 114 chapters – is to develop a man who would possess the two sublime qualities of being a worshipper of God and a well-wisher of mankind. According to Quranic philosophy, human life is intertwined with God and mankind. On the one hand is God, his Creator, and on the other are human beings among whom he has to lead his life from the moment of his birth until his death. The Quran encourages man to have sublime feelings for God and to reflect these sentiments in the way he worships Him. At the same time, it is made clear to him that in his heart he must also have feelings of benevolence and compassion for humanity at large. To be a true Muslim requires a combination of these two virtues.

The Quran tells us that God has given innumerable blessings to humanity. Man, as he benefits from this divine bounty, is duty-bound to offer thanks to his Benefactor. He is bidden to love and fear God more than anyone or anything else, and ought to consider himself accountable.



The Quran emphasizes the formation of one's character through introspection and moulding oneself to the will of God. Nowhere does it enjoin the believer to engage in violence, leading to the destruction of fellow human beings.

The Quran tells us, moreover, that the present world is intended to be a testing ground, specially designed for the trial of mankind, for God wants to see whether people are capable of leading their lives in accordance with His will. It is their conduct on earth that will determine whether or

not they are deserving of Paradise in the next, eternal stage of life after death.

According to the Quran, Paradise is another name for God's neighbourhood, and in this neighbourhood only those who are sincere in their belief in God and have compassion and love for God's servants will find acceptance.

God has the same compassionate relationship with every man as a father has with all his children. Therefore, it is alien to the divine scheme of creation that this earthly plane should be marred by hatred, killing and violence. It is God's most cherished desire that love should be returned for hatred, and violence should be met with peace.

The Hadith and Sunnah

Hadith, meaning a "statement" or "report", is used as an Islamic term for the records kept of the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad. Sunnah means the actions the Prophet himself performed, or actions he asked his followers to perform. The Hadith is a record of the Sunnah.

Hadith provides the second fundamental source of Islam, giving us a full account of the life of the Prophet, and serving as a commentary on the Quran

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The Quran principally deals with basics. It is the Hadith which gives the details and necessary explanations of Quranic injunctions. For instance, the Quran says: “Establish the service of worship.” But it does not specify how the worship has to be performed. Not even the timings and units of prayers (*rak'ahs*) are clearly mentioned. We need the traditions set forth in the Hadith to have full information on this.

Even after knowing the details, it might still not have been possible to follow the divine injunctions contained in the Quran. For not everything can be properly understood by words alone. Therefore, the Prophet demonstrated to the faithful how prayer was to be performed. He said to the believers: “Look at me, see how I worship, and follow me.”

The Quran repeatedly reminds us of the importance of Hadith, enjoining us to strictly follow the Prophet:

“Obey God and obey the messenger.” (4:59)

It is as if the Quran is the text and the Hadith the commentary, the Quran being the theory and the Hadith the practice. The Quran and Hadith are complementary to one another and are thus inseparable. Both are equally essential for the establishment of religion.

The contemporaries of the Prophet are known as the Companions, or sahabah. Because the Companions believed in the message of the Prophet, all his actions served as a precedent for them and every word falling from his lips became a commandment to them; and they were anxious to follow each one as faithfully as they could. During the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, many of his Companions learnt by heart whatever he said, and keenly observed whatever he did, all of which they shared with each other. They naturally thirsted after the knowledge of what he said or did, so that many, like Abu Hurayrah, Anas ibn Malik and Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud, kept constant company with him in order to observe and hear his every word and deed. Aishah, the Prophet’s wife, was



the first among women to tell of the Prophet's sayings and doings. She reported more than two thousand *hadith*, while Abu Hurayrah related more than five thousand *hadith*.

Later, the sayings were compiled by various collectors of *hadith*. In this regard, Bukhari and Muslim are the first to have applied the most rigorous measures to ascertain the reliability of each *hadith*. An unbroken chain of narrators was traced for each *hadith* and each transmitter's life was analysed from all angles to validate his trustworthiness.

The Five Pillars of Islam

The Prophet Muhammad has said, “Islam has been built on five pillars: testifying that there is no deity other than God, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God; saying prayers; paying the prescribed charity (*zakat*); making the pilgrimage to the House of God in Makkah and fasting in the month of Ramadan.”

Although a building is composed of many parts, what really holds up the entire structure is its pillars. If they are strong, the whole structure will be sound. But should they be weak, the entire edifice will crumble. Those which support the edifice of Islam are of immense strength, but they must first of all be raised up by its adherents if they are to support its structure.

Man’s life is like a piece of land on which he must build a house to God’s liking. His first step must be to set up these five sturdy pillars, without which Islam cannot raise itself up either at the individual or at the community level. These five pillars – faith, prayers, fasting, charity and pilgrimage – are meant to engender in man a lifelong piety and devotion to God.

Faith (*iman*) means belief in divine truths. Prayer, in essence, means bowing before the glories of God, so that any sense of superiority a man may have will be dispelled. Fasting (*sawm*), with its emphasis on abstinence, builds up patience and fortitude. Charity (*zakat*) entails the recognition of other's needs, so that what has been given to mankind by God may be equitably shared. Pilgrimage (*hajj*) is a great rallying of God's servants around Him. These are not mere empty rituals, but the exercise of positive virtues, the quintessence, in fact, of those qualities



which our Lord wishes to be inculcated in us. If we can cultivate them, we shall be deemed to possess the divine characteristics so cherished by Islam. Thus it is true to say that faith, humility, fortitude, recognition of the rights of others and unity are the pillars on which rests the entire edifice of Islam.

Faith (*Iman*)

Acceptance of God as one's Lord is like making a covenant to place Him at the central point in one's life, so that He may become the pivot of one's thoughts and emotions. It means entrusting oneself to Him entirely, and focussing upon Him all one's hopes and aspirations, fears and entreaties. Then, instead of living for worldly things, one will live for one's Sustainer. He will thus become all in all in one's life.

Man all too often live for worldly things which come to dominate his thoughts and emotions. Some live for their household and family; some for business and the money it brings; some for political activity and party leadership, and some for honour and authority. Every man, big or small, lives for something or the other which is material in

One who is inspired by his faith in God is just like this earthly lover. He sees the glories of God in heaven's blue vaults, and His might and grandeur in the fury of tempests.

this everyday world of ours. But this is to live in ignorance – trying to build one's nest on branches that do not exist. A truly worthy life is that which is lived for one's Lord, with no support other than Him. Man should live in remembrance of God. His name should be on his lips as he awakens and as he sleeps. As he halts or proceeds on his way, he should live in trust of God, and when he speaks or remains silent, it should be for the pleasure of his Lord.

The Essence of Faith

Faith in God is like the electric current which illuminates the whole environment and sets all machines in motion. When a man finds the link of faith to connect him to God, he experiences just such an illumination from within sudden and all-embracing. His latent spirit is then awakened and his heart is warmed by his new-found faith. A new kind of fire is kindled within him. Man, born of the

womb of his mother, has his second birth from the womb of faith. He now experiences what is meant by union with God. A lover, emotionally, is one with his beloved, even when he is physically separated from the object of his love. In this state, he sees in everything the image of the loved one. One who is inspired by his faith in God is just like this earthly lover. He sees the glories of God in heaven's blue vaults, and His might and grandeur in the fury of tempests. The birds, with their twittering, seem to warble hymns to God. The rising sun is the radiant hand of God extending towards him. Every leaf of every plant and tree is a verdant page on which he reads the story of divine creation. Zephyrs fanning his cheeks are harbingers of his unity with God. A true believer in God is like a diver in the divine ocean. Every plunge that he makes serves to unite him in his experience more and more inextricably with his Maker, so that he belongs to God as God belongs to him.

Faith in God means faith in a Being who is at once Creator, Master and Sustainer of all creation. Everything has been made by Him and Him alone, and receives eternal sustenance from Him. There is nothing which can exist

without Him. Consciousness of this and faith in God go hand in hand. As a consequence, a man of faith begins to look upon himself as a servant of God. In each and every thing he witnesses the glory of God, and every blessing he receives strikes him as a gift from God; hymns to the deity and remembrance of God spring from his heart like fountains. He lives, not – in forgetfulness, but in a state of acute awareness, all events being reminders to him of God. When he awakens from a deep and refreshing sleep, he begins involuntarily to thank his Lord for having blessed man with sleep, without which he would be in such a perpetual state of exhaustion that life, brief as it is, would become hellish for him and drive him to madness. When the sun rises high in the sky and sends its light to the world, dispelling the darkness of the night, his heart cries out in ecstasy, ‘Glory be to God who created light. Had there been no light, the whole world would be a fearful ocean of darkness.’ When, driven by hunger and thirst, he eats and drinks, his entire being is filled with heartfelt gratitude and, bewildered and amazed, he asks himself: ‘What would become of men if there were no God to send us food and drink?’ When in need, or if he is hurt, he looks towards God, calling upon Him for succour. When

Discovering God means, moreover, acceptance of the fact that God has not created man, or the universe at large in vain.

he encounters adversity, he accepts it as part of God's design, and if he is fortunate enough to earn profits or, in some other way, finds himself at an advantage, he is reminded of God's blessings and his heart is filled with gratitude. His achievements do not, however, fill him with conceit, nor do his failures crush him or even make him impatient. In all such matters, whether of loss or gain, his adoration of God is never impaired, nor does anyone or anything other than God ever become its object. No expediency ever makes him forget his Lord.

The discovery of the power of gravity on earth and on other bodies, or of radiation in the universe with the help of sophisticated instruments, is an achievement of an academic nature with no overtones of religious compulsion. But the discovery of God is an entirely different phenomenon. It is the direct apprehension of a Being who is all-seeing and all-hearing, and who is the repository of all wisdom and might. Discovering God

means, moreover, acceptance of the fact that God has not created man, or the universe at large in vain. That a magnificent universe should stand mute, without its true significance ever being understood and appreciated, is inconceivable when its Creator and Sustainer is an all-knowing God.

Man's discovery of faith instills in him the conviction that a day must come when the unseen God – the great orchestrator of all events in the Universe – will make Himself manifest, so that man will see and believe tomorrow what he fails to see and, therefore, questions, today. His belief tells him that the manifestation of the Creator and Master will be like the brightness of the sun after the darkness of the night – the manifestation, indeed, of an omniscient Judge and Arbiter.

Prayer (*Salah*)

Prayer, the second pillar of Islam, entails the worship of God five times a day in the prescribed manner. This mode of worship, laid down for mankind by God through His Prophet, is so all-embracing that one cannot imagine any superior way of worshipping the Almighty.

When the time for prayer comes, the greatness of God is proclaimed in the call to prayer, and the faithful are instructed to assemble for prayer as a matter of their own spiritual uplift. They then perform their ablutions – in so doing reviving their sense of cleanliness – and, fixing their minds on God, they make their way to the mosque, where they all offer prayers together. The prayers are led by an Imam, under whose guidance Muslims are shown how they should lead their lives. In the same way as the congregation make the Imam their leader in prayers, so



should all Muslims unite around the Prophet, making him the focal point of their social existence.

The prayer has various stages: bowing low, prostrating oneself, and standing and kneeling before God. In assuming these various postures, the congregation demonstrate their submission to the Lord. When they stand, hands joined in prayer, when they bow low, when they sit reverently before the Lord, when they touch the ground with their foreheads, with each posture they adopt, they renew their covenant of submission to God.

During the prayers, an excerpt from the Quran is read out. One amazing attribute of the Quran is that, no matter which part is chosen and how much of it is recited, its message is clearly conveyed. This is because each page of the Quran is like a summary of the whole. In this way, any short excerpt from the Quran recited in prayer suffices to show what pleases and what displeases the Almighty.

Besides this, the prayers include praise and remembrance of God, supplications to Him and the expression of goodwill towards the Prophet and all believers. The prayers then end with a message of peace to all mankind.

Thus constituted, they are both an act of worship and a reminder of God's commandments. They give solace to believers, while creating social consciousness and unity in their ranks. Prayer is not only a symbol of the Islamic life, but also inculcates self-discipline among Muslims. Although the most important aspect of prayer is its being the main point of spiritual contact with God, it also has valuable lessons for us on how to conduct ourselves in our daily lives.

Prayer, as well as being a ritual mode of worship, is an expression of the inner realities' of humility before, and devotion to God. The ultimate acknowledgement of another's greatness being the repetition of the words, "He is the Greatest," the words, *Allahu Akbar*, are uttered time and time again in prayer. Verbal acknowledgement is thus made of the absolute quality of God's greatness in comparison to that of ordinary mortals.

Physically, the ultimate recognition of another's greatness is the act of self-prostration; no physical act is more obviously a testament to the greatness of another than this. Performed repeatedly during prayers, it is a practical reminder and a clear demonstration of one's belief in the

incomparable grandeur of God. The giving of one's entire attention to God is underlined by turning one's gaze towards the House of God. The direction in which one must face in order to pray is, therefore, of great religious significance, for it not only focuses one's attention on the deity, but also demonstrates that one's very life is turned towards God. Every aspect of one's life, from inner thoughts to outer needs, then becomes truly God-oriented.

The Spirit of Humility

When a servant of God bows before his Lord, and does so, not just as a matter of form, but in the spirit of true humility, the effect of his action does not remain confined to the domain, but extends to his everyday existence, pervading it completely. His thinking and actions bear the permanent stamp of his devotions, for it is impossible for a man to fear God and to bow before Him without being influenced thereby in his dealings with others. A true worshipper cannot be humble and meek before God and yet be arrogant and supercilious to his fellow men. He will not, of course, prostrate himself before them, nor will he address the words "You are great" to another person, as

Prayer, as well as being a ritual mode of worship, is an expression of the inner realities' of humility before, and devotion to God.

he would to God. But he will certainly avoid asserting his own superiority, and instead will adopt a humble demeanour on a parallel with his self-prostration before his Maker. The submission which he expresses in prayer to God becomes a reality in terms of his observance of others' rights. The very act of facing in the correct direction influences him to take a principled stand in his everyday dealings. At prayer in the mosque, he is the epitome of servitude to God: outside the mosque, he is the perfect character – humble in demeanour, morally upright, and kind considerate and forgiving in all his transactions.

The important thing about prayer is that it induces the correct attitude in the devotee, as though the spirit of his prayers were keeping a watchful eye on everything he says and does. When going about his worldly affairs, it is as if the whole world were a mosque; his actions, therefore, at all times and in all places cannot be other than in consonance with what his worship requires of him.

Fasting (*Sawm*)

Fasting (*sawm*) is the third pillar of Islam. Right from dawn till dusk, a man who is strictly on a fast will neither eat so much as one morsel of food nor drink so much as one drop of water. By submitting to this discipline, that is, by depriving himself of the prime necessities of life, he learns the valuable lesson of fortitude. With no food and drink, he naturally feels hungry and thirsty, and his strength begins to ebb. The entire routine of his life is severely disturbed and his whole system is upset. But, out of a high sense of discipline, he braves all these difficulties and discomforts, and, remaining alert and never losing heart, he steadfastly discharges his duties. Food and drink may be temptingly placed before him, but, despite an overwhelming urge to have both, he will not even touch them. In this way, he prepares himself for a well-regulated and responsible life, doing only what is his duty and refraining from pernicious acts and habits. He is thus strengthened to continue with his mission in life, no matter how he may be beset by adversity.

God has endowed man with innumerable gifts, but, all too often, he takes them for granted without any feelings



of gratitude. Countless benefits like the air, the sun, the water, have been showered upon man, the absence of anyone of which would cast his delicately balanced system into a living hell. But because he has received these things without any effort on his part, he sets no great value upon them, and hardly ever stops to ponder upon how they came to be his.

It is only when fasting temporarily curbs the satisfying of his desires that his consciousness of the value of these divine gifts is awakened. When, at sunset, after a whole

The annual month-long period of fasting builds up the strength of character which is essential, if devout believer are to tread the path of righteousness for the rest of the year, avoiding impatience, cruelty and all such evil acts, and making no attempt to meddle with divine commandments.

day's hunger, thirst and the accompanying discomfort and fatigue, a man begins to eat and drink, he becomes fully aware of his utter dependence on God's bounty. He is then filled with gratitude towards God and the realization comes to him that, even were he to lay down his life for this Bountiful Creator, the price he should have to pay would not be too high.

The life of a believer in this world is one of fortitude and forbearance, limited as it is to the enjoyment of whatever is allowed by God and avoidance of whatever is forbidden by Him. It will naturally be beset by all the difficulties encountered in the path of righteousness and truth, and the believer must staunchly face up to them. Much of his time must be given to such activity, and no precious

moment can be wasted in stooping to revenge himself upon adversaries who have made him the object of their spite and malice. On the contrary, the slights and injuries of this world should leave him undaunted; he should be able simply to take such untoward incidents in his stride so that he may continue unflinchingly to discharge his duties. Whenever his pride has been hurt, or whenever some unpleasantness has left him in a state of agitation, he must guard against adopting a negative attitude – for this is sheer weakness! – and must continue to devote his energies in a positive manner to worthy objectives. Nothing, in fact, should stop him, or even slow him down in his progress towards the Hereafter.

All of this demands enormous fortitude, and, without it, no one can travel along the path of Islam. The annual month-long period of fasting builds up the strength of character which is essential, if devout believer are to tread the path of righteousness for the rest of the year, avoiding impatience, cruelty and all such evil acts, and making no attempt to meddle with divine commandments. While in its outward form, fasting means abstinence from food and drink for a given period, in essence, it is training for a

whole life of self-denial, inculcating patience, fortitude and forbearance.

The Prescribed Charity (*Zakat*)

Zakat is the fourth ‘pillar’ of Islam. *Zakat* means setting apart for God every year a certain portion of one’s saving and wealth (generally 2.5 percent) and spending it upon religious duties and on poor and the needy. The fulfilment of this duty is, in fact, a kind of reminder that all one has is in trust for God. Man should, therefore, hold nothing



back from God. To whatever one may amass in one's lifetime, one's own personal contribution is insignificant. If the Supreme Being, who is at work in the heavens and on the earth, refused to co-operate with man, there would be nothing that the latter could accomplish single-handed. He would not be able to plant so much as a single seed to make things grow. Nor could he set up any industries, or carry out any other such enterprise. If God were to withdraw anyone of His material blessings, all our plans would go awry, and all our efforts would be brought to naught.

Zakat is the practical recognition of this fact through the expenditure of money. Islam requires man to consider his personal wealth as belonging to God and, therefore, to set apart a portion for Him. No maximum limit has been prescribed, but a minimum limit has definitely been fixed. According to statutory *zakat*, each individual must abide by this and spend a fixed minimum percentage of his wealth every year in the way prescribed by God. In so spending his wealth, he is permitted neither to belittle the recipient nor to make him feel obliged or grateful to himself. His wealth must be given to the needy in the

spirit of its being a trust from God which he is making over to the genuine titleholders. He should feed others so that he himself is fed in the Hereafter, and he should give to others so that he himself is not denied succour by God in the next world.

Zakat is a symbol of one's obligation to recognize the rights of others and to be in sympathy with them in pain or in sorrow. These sentiments should become so deep-rooted that one begins to regard one's own wealth as belonging, in part, to others. Moreover, one should render service to others without expecting either recognition or recompense. Each individual should protect the honour of others without hope of any gain in return. He should be the well-wisher of not just friends and relations, but of all members of society. *Zakat*, first and foremost, makes it plain to people that their entire 'possessions' are gifts of God, and, secondly, dissuades the servants of God from living in society as unfeeling and selfish creatures. Indeed, throughout their entire lives, they must set aside some portion for others.

One very wrong way of conducting oneself in any social set-up is to live in expectation of worldly gain from the

Zakat is a symbol of one's obligation to recognize the rights of others and to be in sympathy with them in pain or in sorrow.

services rendered to others. An example of such behaviour is to lend money in the hopes of getting it back with interest. Where this is a common practice, exploitation becomes rampant, with everyone trying to subjugate and plunder others. As a consequence, the whole of society is plagued with disorder.

No one, be he rich or poor, can be happy in such a set-up. If a man is correctly motivated, he will be of service to his fellow-human beings only in the hope of receiving a reward from God: he will give to others with the divine assurance that he will be repaid in full in the next world. In a society where there is no exploitation, feelings of mutual hatred and unconcern cannot flourish. A climate of mutual distrust and disorder is simply not allowed to come into being; each lives in peace with the other, and society becomes, a model of harmony and prosperity.'

On the legalistic plane, *zakat* is an annual tax, or duty, in essence and spirit: it is recognition on the part of man of the share which God, and other men, have in his wealth.

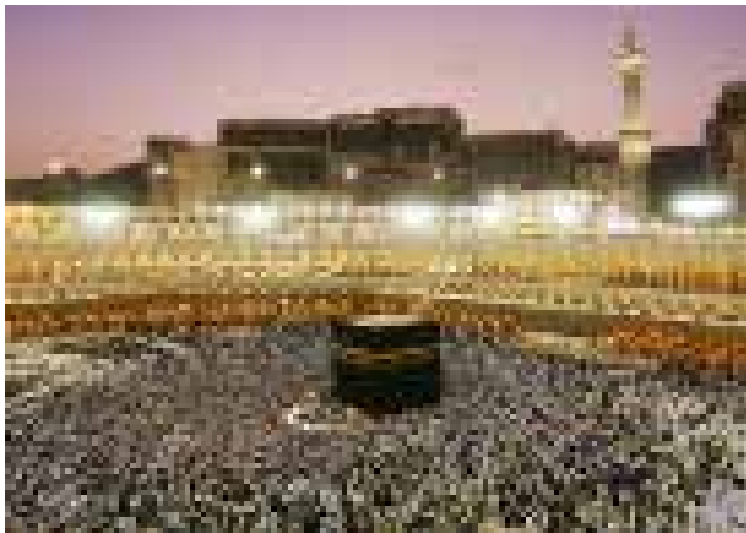
The Pilgrimage (Hajj)

The fifth pillar of Islam is pilgrimage or Hajj. On this occasion, believers from all corners of the earth gather together at Makkah, and perform the various prescribed rituals in worship of God. These are symbolic representation of those qualities which according to Islam, it is imperative that we personally cultivate. They are a concretization in different visually appreciable forms of the dictates of Islam – a physical affirmation to God that man will organize the moral structure of his life on the same pattern. Although these particular elements are inherent in other modes of Islamic worship, in Hajj, they are more pronounced, more comprehensive and altogether on a grander scale.

One very important obligation during Hajj is the wearing of unstitched clothing (*ihram*), for it is inconsistent with Islam that the material distinctions of clothing should set up artificial barriers between the servants of God. Dressed in this way, all men of all countries look alike in identical,

simple garments, and no pilgrim may then feel tempted to take pride of place over another.

In Islam, man's life must rotate around God. Circling the holy Kabah is but a symbolic representation of this. Similarly, running between Safa and Marwa, two hillocks of the region, gives physical expression to the Islamic precept that the true servant of God should come running at his bidding, that he should have an overwhelming feeling of urgency about carrying out God's commandments.



The vocal affirmation of man's desire to bow to God's will is the repetition of the words, '*Labbaik allahumma labbaik*' (Here I am, O Lord, Here I am.) The assembling of the pilgrims on the vast plains of Arafat is an impressive visual reminder of the day when according to Islam, all men will be assembled before God. On the score of wanting man to be intolerant of the devil, Islam is quite positive, and the casting of stones at the symbolic figures of 'Satan' gives physical expression to this striving to ward off evil. Perhaps the greatest Islamic imperative is that man should be steadfast in his covenant with God, even at the cost of life and property. The material expression of his adherence to this covenant is the symbolic sacrifice of animals in Mina.

Islam has always set a great value upon social harmony. In order, therefore, that all discord should be eliminated, much emphasis is placed upon the individual's ability to ignore the malevolence of others. The Hajj period, with its assembly at one place of a heterogeneous crowd running into millions, provides a special occasion for the exercise of such self-discipline. It has been ordained then for the duration of the Hajj period, when there are bound to be

occasions for grievances, that anger, foul talk, fighting, injury to living things, obscenity or dishonesty will not be indulged in by anyone. God's servants must treat each other with respect and decency if they expect to have God's blessings.

Hajj is a complete lesson in leading a God-oriented life. In that it reminds one of the awesome day of Resurrection – a day that could be painful for many – it is a prelude to the attainment of God, exhorting us to strive with all our might to tread the path of righteousness. It warns man that! Satan is his arch-enemy and that he should never allow him to draw near. It conveys the message that if we are anxious to receive the bounties of God, we should be ready to sacrifice our lives and property for His sake. A grand demonstration of the equality of man, it provides a situation in which being able to bear the disagreeable behaviour of others, and living together in an atmosphere of amity and goodwill, are of paramount importance.

Hajj, in a nutshell, is a complete mode of worship which, if performed in the correct manner, will have a transfiguring effect upon the moral aspects of the affairs of man, be they worldly or religious in nature.

Part 4

In Search of God



A Most Evident Mystery

What one is most convinced of is his or her own existence. Despite this, in purely scientific terms, everyone is a mystery. For man is not what he physically appears to be, but consists of what he calls I, and the I is not observable.

That is why when the philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650) wanted to give proof of his own existence, he did not say: "I consist of a body that is observable, therefore I exist." Instead he had to say: "I think, therefore I exist."

Man undoubtedly has an observable existence. We all know that man exists. But, in fact, this man's existence is at the level of "I" and the cognisance of I is at the level of perception or comprehension, and not at the level of observation.

Exactly the same is true of God. It is, as if, God is a Greater I. God, at the level of His creation, is directly observable. But God at the level of His Being is not directly observable by man. We shall have to believe in God on the basis of the same logical principle which

Descartes employed to know himself, and on which all men and women believe in their own existence.

I can comprehend God, therefore God exists. The truth is that God's being comprehensible is an undeniable proof of His existence. If we deny God, we shall have to deny our own selves. Since we cannot countenance our own denial, we cannot countenance God's denial either. Everyone who believes in his own existence is logically compelled to say, "I exist, therefore, God exists."

Does God Exist?

Does god exist? My answer to this question is in the affirmative. Based on my study and my experience, I can say with full conviction that God exists. There is no doubt about it. When I say that God exists, I say this in the scientific sense and not in the popular sense.

People generally believe that they are in a position to prove or disprove anything. But this is not the scientific position. According to modern science, you cannot prove or disprove anything, You can only arrive at a probability,

rather than a certainty. If there is sufficient data to show that this or that thing probably exists, then one can make the statement that this or that thing exists.

The present question of whether God exists itself raises another question. Studies in anthropology, that is, the science of man, have established that the concept of God is ingrained in human nature. Belief in God runs in our blood. Every man and woman is a born believer. Everyone undergoes this experience at one point of time or the other. Especially in times of helplessness and in crisis, we discover that there is a Supreme Being. Every man and woman has experienced this natural fact at least once in his or her life.

Then why this question? If the concept of God is present in our flesh and blood, why does one question the existence of God? The reason is very simple. People want to know whether there is a rational basis to their inner belief, whether there is some scientific proof in favour of their inner feelings.

I must emphasise that there is certainly a scientific basis for belief in the existence of God. But people generally fail

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to discover it for the simple reason that they try to apply a criterion which they wrongly believe to be scientific. They want a proof in terms of observation, whereas this is neither the scientific method nor the criterion by which to judge. If you apply the right criterion, you will find that God is a proven fact.

Here I recall an incident which took place in 1965, when I was living in Lucknow. I happened to meet a gentleman, who was a Doctor of Philosophy and a great admirer of Bertrand Russell. Of course, he was an atheist. During our conversation about God he asked: "What criterion do you have to prove the existence of God?" I replied: "The same criterion which you have for proving the existence of anything else." The dialogue ended there. There was no question and no answer after this.



Why did this learned man fall silent? The reason is very simple and well known. My answer was to him a kind of reminder. I reminded him of the fact that we are living in a world where inferential argument is as applicable to the concept of God as to any other concept.

In our modern times scientific knowledge has increased to an unbelievable extent. But, according to the Encyclopaedia of Ignorance, “increase in knowledge has only increased our ignorance.” One scientist has rightly said: “We know more and more about less and less.”

Now it is an established fact that science gives us but a partial knowledge of reality.

Human knowledge has two different phases – the pre-Einstein period and the post-Einstein period. In the pre-Einstein period, knowledge was confined to the macro or material world, which was observable and measurable. So, it was generally held that everything, which has a real existence, should also be observable. Anything which could not be observed had no real existence. This meant that only the seen world was real and what was unseen was unreal, or some kind of fiction.

This concept created the theory which is generally called logical positivism. It means that the only valid logical argument is one which is demonstrable in material terms, otherwise it is simply a baseless claim, and not a valid argument.

But, in the post-Einstein period, in the early years of the 20th century, when the atom was split, the whole situation changed. After the splitting of the atom, matter as a solid substance, disappeared. It was replaced by the micro world, beyond the atomic world, where everything was reduced to unseen waves, neither measurable nor observable.

When we reflect deeply about our world, we find that all over the universe there are clear signs of planning, design and intelligent control.

After this revolution in knowledge, logical or rational argument also changed drastically. This changing situation compelled the philosophers and the scientists to revise logical criteria. It has now become an accepted fact that inferential argument is as valid as direct argument.

In the post-Einstein era, it was discovered that even so-called observable matter was unobservable. Now everything was waves, and waves were not observable.

Present-day science includes so many things, like electrons, the law of gravity, x-rays, etc., all of which are non-material in nature. They cannot be observed, but every scientist believes in their existence, for the simple reason that, although we cannot see these things directly, we can see their effect. For example, a falling apple, in the case of gravity, and a photograph, in the case of x-rays. We believe in the existence of all these things, not by observation but by their result; in other words,

by way of indirect knowledge. This change in human knowledge also changed the theory of logic. Now it is well established in science that inferential argument is as valid as direct argument. (For details, see *Human Knowledge*, by Bertrand Russell).

In the pre-Einstein era, unbelievers held that the concept of God pertains to the unseen world. And since no direct argument was available to bear this out, belief in God was held to be illogical and all the relevant indirect arguments were considered scientifically invalid, since they were inferential in nature.

But now the whole situation has changed. Nothing is observable. So the existence of anything can be established only by means of inferential argument, rather than by direct argument.

If inferential argument is valid with regard to the unseen micro world, it is also valid with regard to the existence of God.

Bertrand Russell, in his book, *Why I am not a Christian*, has admitted this fact. He says that the argument centering on design, propounded by theologians to prove the existence of God, is scientifically valid.

Since ancient days, theologians have argued that when there is a design there must also be a designer. As we see that our world is well designed, it compels us to believe that there is a designer.

When we reflect deeply about our world, we find that all over the universe there are clear signs of planning, design and intelligent control. These signs lead us to believe that there is a Creator of creatures, there is a Designer of designs, and there is a Mover of all movements.

No other explanation presents itself. Here I would like to refer to some of these universal signs.

The Beginning of the Universe

Let us begin from the beginning. Science tells us that 13.5 billion years ago there was a Big Bang in space. After this Big Bang our universe came into existence. Scientists have found evidence to believe that in the beginning there was what they call a cosmic ball. All the particles now present in the universe were tightly bound to each other in this cosmic ball in a highly compressed state. According to the known physical laws, only an inner journey was possible for these particles. Physically, there was no possibility

of their outward journey in space. Then, according to astronomical studies, this cosmic ball suddenly exploded. The compact particles scattered outward and the present universe came into existence, perhaps within the space of a few minutes.

It was a violent explosion and we know that every explosion is destructive, except one, which is preplanned. Chernico of Russia is a recent example. It was a sudden explosion, which proved totally destructive. On the other hand, there is the example of exploding rocks to build tunnels. This second type of explosion is always pre-planned, and as such, is always constructive in its result.

The Big Bang explosion resulted in a universe that is highly constructive and meaningful, in every sense of these words. This miraculous phenomenon is enough to make us believe that the Big Bang explosion was certainly pre-planned. And when it is proved that it was pre-planned, it is automatically proved that behind this pre-planning there was a planner, indeed a Super Planner. And it is this Super Planner who is God Almighty.

Expansion

Scientific studies in space have proved that our universe is an expanding one. We know that in the human world, every expansion has its limits. When you blow up a balloon, you cannot blow indefinitely. Every balloon has a blowing limit and after reaching that limit it bursts.

In human history, there have been so many political empires – the Roman empire, the Ottoman empire, the Mughal empire, the British empire, etc. – Their rulers wanted to expand their realms indefinitely. But after reaching a certain limit they became unmanageable and over time, they disintegrated.

The same is true of industrial houses or industrial companies. The masters of these industrial empires always want to go on and on expanding. But every day we hear the news that this or that industrial company is facing bankruptcy. Why? It is for the simple reason that after some time, they reached an unmanageable limit, and collapsed.

Contrary to this, the universe presents an exceptionally different example. Although the universe is constantly

This exceptionally unique phenomenon of the universe is a sufficient proof that there is a Super Manager or Super Planner behind this world.

expanding at an astonishing speed, it is still functioning smoothly after billions and billions of years of expansion. It has never become unmanageable to the point of collapsing. This exceptionally unique phenomenon of the universe is a sufficient proof that there is a Super Manager or Super Planner behind this world. Otherwise, it would have collapsed long ago.

(For more details, see *Evidence of God in an Expanding Universe*, compiled by John Clover Mansoma).

Harmony

Studies show that there is complete harmony in the universe. There are innumerable stars and planets in space, perhaps more than all the grains of sand on the coasts of all the oceans. All these bodies are continuously moving at an unbelievably rapid speed. But there is no collision between these astral bodies.

There are numerous such phenomena in the universe. The rains, for example, are the result of very complex action between the ocean and the sun. A harmonious and universal process makes rainfall possible.

The exchange between man and the tree also serves as an example of such harmony. Man inhales oxygen and exhales carbon dioxide. Contrary to this, the tree inhales carbon dioxide and exhales oxygen. This exchange is an extremely complex harmonious process that insures the life of both man and the tree.



Such miraculous phenomena speak without any doubt of there being a central management behind the universe. There is, indeed a super manager, and this super manager is none other than God Almighty.

The Right Proportion

Studies also show that everything in the universe is in the right proportion. The universe is a unique industry. All the products of the universe are produced at the standard of zero defect. Look at the tree. Its present shape is the final model. Any other model of a tree would be unthinkable. Let us look at a man or a woman. Both are “final models.” No artist could produce any better model for a man or a woman.

There are countless things in our world created by God. But everything in nature is so perfectly created that everything is a “final model”. But if you look at motor cars manufactured by humans, you will find that very many improvements have been made from the time the first motor car was assembled. And this process of development is still continuing. Studies also show that everything in nature is in perfect order. Take, for example, the distance between the sun and the earth. The distance between the

sun and the earth is 93,000,000 miles. Compare this with alternatives and you will find that this distance is perfectly according to our needs.

Had this distance been double the present distance, i.e. 180,000,000 miles, then the earth would have become so cold that everything would be frozen. No life on earth would have been possible. And if this distance were half of the present distance, i.e., 50,000,000 miles, the temperature on the surface of the earth would be so hot that everything would be burnt and again life on earth would be rendered impossible.

Now let us take the size of the earth. Had the size of the earth been double the present size, the gravitational pull would have increased to such an extent that it would have badly affected the growth of human beings. Every man and woman would have been reduced to dwarf-like sizes.

If the earth were half of the present size, the gravitational pull of the earth would have decreased dangerously. Then every man and woman would have experienced an unchecked physical growth. Everyone would be as tall as the Qutub Minar. What a terrible world it would be!

The planet earth is a unique exception in the Universe because of its rare qualities and attributes. This exception itself is a proof of God's existence.

But, in the world of nature, everything is perfect from the outset. There is no need for reform or improvement. Everything is a perfect and final model. No change is required in anything. This wonderful perfection is a clear proof that there is a perfect Creator behind creation. Otherwise perfection of such a kind in this world could never have been possible.

Checks and Balances

Studies show that in nature a system of checks and balances is prevalent everywhere. Without this system, our world would have become uninhabitable.

One such example is found in the world of insects. Biological studies tell us that every insect has the potential of unlimited growth. For example, every grasshopper has the potential to grow bigger and bigger until it becomes as big as a camel or an elephant. This is true of every other insect.

According to this, our world should have been filled with insects as large as elephants and camels. Had it been so, there would have been no possibility of mankind living in such a jungle of huge animals and creating a civilization.

How was mankind saved from this horrible fate? It was due to a simple mechanism in nature. The fact is that although the body of an insect has the ability for unlimited growth, its breathing tube does not have any scope for growth. This double system in the body of insects serves as a check against its unlimited growth. The growing body of the insect narrows its breathing tube and this double mechanism in its body serves as a killer for the insects.

There are so many other examples of such checks, and it is these checks that maintain the balance in our world. If this were not so, our earth would have become uninhabitable for mankind. (See *Man Does not Stand Alone* by Cressy Morrison). The planet earth is a unique exception in the Universe because of its rare qualities and attributes. All the numerous celestial bodies in the

The planet earth is a unique exception in the Universe because of its rare qualities and attributes. This exception itself is a proof of God's existence.

Universe are either huge fiery stars or rocky planets, with the sole exception of the earth, which has life and its accompanying support elements. This exception itself is a proof of God's existence. Every exception necessarily requires an answer to the question: Who or what is the cause of this exception? Without believing in 'cause and effect', you cannot explain why there is an exception. And this unique exception in the case of the earth is proof enough that God exists.

In conclusion, I would like to say that in such a situation the choice we have is not between the universe with God, and the universe without God. This is not an option. The real option is between the universe with God or no universe at all. As we cannot opt for the proposition "the Universe without God" we are compelled to opt for the proposition, "the Universe with God."

Man Does Not Stand Alone

Julian Huxley, (1887-1975) the well-known British writer, did not believe in God. He believed that man did not need God, a concept explained in his aptly titled book: *Man Stands Alone*.

It is noteworthy that a reputed American scientist, Cressy Morrison, countered Huxley's thesis with a book titled: *Man Does Not Stand Alone*.

Even more so today, many people express the view that they do not need God; that success can be theirs without their believing in the Almighty. But if you conduct a survey, you will find that their views do not reflect mature perception. In fact, such remarks are spawned by immature minds mostly belonging to the under forty age group. Psychological and biological studies show that human beings attain maturity only after reaching middle age. Prior to this, they are not in a position to form any sound opinions on the realities of life. Surveys show, indeed, that superficial remarks about God are made mostly by those who are as yet immature. But with the transition from

However great one's material success, one inevitably dies within the span of 100 years, leaving all one's wealth behind.

immaturity to maturity, which comes with the acquisition of experience and knowledge, a great number of people, including atheists and apostates, become serious in their approach to the subject of God. A thinker has aptly said:

A smattering of knowledge turns people away from God. Greater knowledge brings them back to Him.

Here are a few examples to illustrate this point. Let us take the case of a youth who, having grown up with romantic ideas, enthusiastically enters upon married life by opting for a "love marriage". But very soon this love turns to hate and the couple ultimately separate. Then the husband realizes that his acceptance of love as the "summum bonum" was the result of his own immaturity. Consciously or unconsciously, he begins to feel that his perception has not been clear enough to understand life in depth and that a superior guide is required to compensate for his inexperience. Then there is the example of an ambitious businessman who starts a business. His business



goes on expanding until a time comes when it becomes unmanageable. Now he realizes that certain personal limitations bar his way to fulfilling his desires and ambitions. He comes to feel that he needs a vaster world in order to realize his dreams.

Similarly, yet another youth forms a political party in order to fulfill his ambitions, and a time comes when he finally contrives to secure an important political niche for himself. But then he meets the fate of Jawaharlal Nehru. Like Nehru after he was elevated to the position of Prime

Minister, he suffers from second thoughts. He feels that there exists a far greater power than himself and that, without the cooperation of this power, he cannot carry his plans into effect.

Most young people enter life with great ambitions. But again and again they undergo such experiences as remind them of their helplessness. Disease, accidents, losses, disadvantages – all these repeatedly remind them that their lot in life is one of unfulfilled desires. Then they see that, however great one's material success, one inevitably dies within the span of 100 years, leaving all one's wealth behind. Such bitter reflection shows that all the sweet dreams of childhood and youth stemmed from ignorance. For it is impossible to have complete fulfillment in this present imperfect world.

One's goal in life – whether it be the making of money, the acquisition of fame or power, or anything else of this nature – proves less than ideal. After the individual manages to achieve these things, he again suffers from the feeling that whatever he has achieved falls far below his expectations. Thus he remains as unsatisfied as ever. Finding success becomes as meaningless as not finding it.

God – A Source of Conviction

If You have a super-telescope that can view the entire Universe, you will first of all see that rare planet called Earth. You will observe that, amidst the totally lifeless universe, this tiny planet has an abundance of life and all kinds of life-supporting elements. This rare, exceptional sight is so overwhelming that you will be wonder-struck.

You will also see that – the Earth, along with its moon and the other planets, is continuously in motion, i.e. it rotates on its axis, and orbits around the sun. Then this entire solar system revolves in the wider circle of the galaxy. And this galaxy rotates in the much wider circle of the other galaxies.

The movement of the stars and planets in this vast endless space will appear astonishingly strange to your sight. You will then see an unbelievable number of vast balls of fire, called stars, which rotate with great speed. Amidst all these astral bodies, our Earth appears hardly bigger than a grain of sand. And this sight will be so strange to you that your own existence will appear to be totally insignificant

and valueless. This experience will lead you to the discovery of two things at the same time. Firstly, there is a powerful God in this universe, who is its Creator as well as its Sustainer. If you can recall this sight of the universe to your mind, your heart will automatically call out that the universe itself is a clear proof of its Creator. Secondly, you will feel that you are a helpless and an insignificant creature in this universe, and that without God, your very existence is not possible. This is the most important reality of life. When one comprehends this reality, one will voluntarily turn towards God. With one's whole being, one will call out:

“O God, help me! For, without Your help everything will go wrong.”

In this vast universe, man's only source of support is God. It is by God's guidance that man's ship is brought safely to the shore. Belief in God is the most important thing for man. Man is nothing without this belief.

Sometimes, in the course of daily life, a feeling of helplessness comes over man, the same kind of helplessness that he experiences after the observation of the universe through a telescope.



All men and women have the feeling that they suffer from limitations, when they cannot achieve what they want. These limitations make them feel helpless. Each one of us has experienced either a loss, illness, accidents, death or old age. These experiences repeatedly remind us of the fact that we are in need of a superior power. Without the help of such a superior power, we cannot go on in life. These feelings amount to a psychological proof of the existence of God. We go through this psychological experience at some point of time in our lives. Each one of us, in his inner feelings, witnesses the existence of God.

The nature of every human being constantly urges him or her to recognise the need for God. Without God, our lives cannot be complete. Without the help of God, we cannot succeed in life.

Man's position is further illustrated by the following example.

A hundred years ago, a ship sailed from the coast of America to Africa. When the ship was far out to the deep sea, a severe storm broke out. The ship began to shake and jolt. All the passengers were in a state of great fear and anxiety. At this time of crisis, one of the passengers saw a little girl sitting in a corner of the deck. She was playing with her dolls, quite undisturbed by the storm. On seeing this, he became curious and asked her, "Do you know what is happening to our ship?" She asked, "What is the matter?" The passenger told her that the ship was caught in a dangerous storm. The girl calmly replied: "You know, my father is the captain of this ship. He is not going to let it sink."

The girl's faith in her father saved her from being a victim of fear at this crucial moment. The same is true of a religious person. He has the same childlike faith in his

Creator, God Almighty. But his is a faith of far greater intensity. When catastrophe threatens, he can say with much stronger conviction that God Almighty is the captain of the ship of his life: He will never let it sink at any time or in any situation. In short, spirituality awakens the mind. Spirituality is a great strength at all times. Spirituality is the best formula for character building. Spirituality is a promoter of all good and a killer of all evils. Spirituality is the essence of all religions. Let's all adopt this universal religion.

The Concept of Accountability

God is indispensable to man. His life is incomplete without God. A philosopher has aptly remarked that had there been no God, we would have had to invent one. Fortunately, God exists in reality. We can believe in God with conviction, not as a supposition, but as a fact. And we can accord Him the place He deserves in our lives.

It is essential that man should have within his reach, a super formula for life's management. God provides just such a formula – a complete principle for life's management.

Human beings are not like machines controlled by a mechanical system, nor are they like animals who are governed by their instincts. Human beings enjoy freedom. They take decisions about their actions of their own free will. Now the question arises as to how to keep man to the right course, how to make him consistently disciplined in his behaviour. History shows the ineffectiveness of all worldly measures in this connection, whether – social pressures, enforcement of the law of the land or the appeals of reformers.

Experience shows that the pressure of society is limited, if not totally ineffective. There are so many loopholes in the law that it is not difficult for wrongdoers to find a way out. The reformers' bid to reform people are nothing but appeals and appeals alone cannot bring about a revolution in human life.

The truth is that for the attainment of disciplined behaviour, it is essential for one to be convinced of the existence of a power far superior to himself, a Being Who is aware of man's activities at every moment; who can reward and punish man, and from whom it is impossible to escape.

Belief in God compels man to steadfastly adopt a proper attitude in all situations, privately as well as publicly. Only then can he save himself from the wrath of God.

There can be only one being of this nature and that is God. Belief in God functions at two levels at the same time. On the one hand, man finds in God a guardian who is aware of all his activities and who has unlimited power to chastise him. It is not possible for man to escape God's chastisement. Belief in God compels man to steadfastly adopt a proper attitude in all situations, privately as well as publicly. Only then can he save himself from the wrath of God.

Another point is that belief in God is a storehouse of limitless hope. Man can lead his life in this world with the conviction that if he incurs any loss because of treading the path of truth, or if he suffers from any other adversity, he will be able manfully to endure it. For if he adheres to the path of truth, God will grant him a reward in the form of eternal paradise, and there can be no reward greater than this. It is not possible for man on his own to bind himself

to moral values or adhere to justice. This is possible only when he is convinced of the fact that he is under a super power – a super power who observes justice to the extent of perfection; for whom it is fully possible to guide man to the true path and also punish those who deviate from this true path.

This present, limited world is totally inadequate for punishing a criminal. Similarly, this world is also inadequate for granting great rewards for one's good deeds. The concept of God tells us that God can create a far better world free from all the limitations of the present world, where reward and punishment both can be satisfactorily awarded. The concept of a living and powerful God is necessarily accompanied by the concept of accountability. And the concept of accountability guarantees right thinking and right actions on the part of man. It makes man cautious by reminding him of God's chastisement. Moreover, this gives him the conviction of receiving God's reward if he adheres to the right path at all costs and in all situations.

The concept of God provides man with an ideology in which loss is turned to gain and in which adversity brings with it good tidings.

Part 5

The Purpose of Life



Human Destiny

If some being from outer space were to traverse the universe in a spaceship and land on the planet earth, he would be dumbfounded at the uniqueness of what he saw, namely, human beings and many other forms of life. For the earth, in sustaining these life forms, is the outstanding exception amongst all the stellar bodies which are scattered throughout the immensity of the cosmos. Amongst the myriad stars, in the vastness of space, there are certainly a number of other planets in existence, and, like the earth, they are constantly revolving around their suns in their many respective galaxies, but on their gaseous or dry rocky surfaces there is no trace of life as we know it. If, indeed, there is life on this earth, it is only because of the life-sustaining things that are found in abundance everywhere, i.e. all those pro-life factors which add up to the human life support system.

Those who are born on this planet earth and live their entire lives here do not realize the astonishing singularity of nature. The reason is that, having seen the earth since childhood, day in and day out, they have become

habituated to its many features. Thus, they fail to notice how exceptional are their physical surroundings. Had it not been so, every morning, they would cry out: “Oh! what a beautiful earth, what a perfect world!”

The unique nature of the life-giving aspect of the planet earth has existed since time immemorial, but it is only in modern times that scientific discoveries have made this fact common knowledge. The man of today appreciates to a far greater extent than ever before the very special nature of the earth’s life support system.

What is this life support system? It is a gift which has been given to man by a Giver. In such a situation it is essential that man should strive to recognize his Benefactor, acknowledge the Giver of this gift and submit to Him wholeheartedly. And, having done his best to understand why the Giver has bestowed this unique gift upon him, he should lead his life in accordance with the will of the Giver. But this does not happen.

Man, in leading his life in this world, tries to build a bright future for himself and his children and ultimately builds a civilization for himself. But it never occurs to him that he should attempt to find out who has created the unique

The Creation Plan regarding life, which we have been told of by God through His prophets, is that the Creator has created man as an eternal creature, with the first brief span of his life in the pre-death period and the rest of his life – a much longer period – in the post-death period.

system which sustains his life or what its Maker wants from human beings. Moreover, he has no clear appreciation of the fact that everything in this world has: its right use and its wrong use. Take for instance iron – a gift from our Creator. One use of iron is the construction of useful machines, whereas another use of iron is the manufacture of destructive weapons. Evidently, the manufacture of useful machines is the right use, while the manufacture of destructive weapons is the wrong use.

The same is true of nature's life support system in that it may be looked at from two different angles, a right one and a wrong one. One who looks at it from the right angle will develop the correct and desired attitude towards it, while one who looks at it from the wrong angle will develop an attitude towards it which is erroneous and undesirable in every respect.

Now the question arises as to how to determine which are the right and wrong angles with respect to the life support system. The only way in which we can do this is to learn about the Creation Plan devised by the Creator. It is through this Creation Plan that we shall learn which attitude towards the life support system is right and which attitude is wrong.

The Creation Plan regarding life, which we have been told of by God through His prophets, is that the Creator has created man as an eternal creature, with the first brief span of his life in the pre-death period and the rest of his life – a much longer period – in the post-death period. The pre-death period is that of trial and the post-death period is that of reward or punishment, in accordance with how well or badly man has acquitted himself during the period of trial.

When human history has run its course, it will terminate with the Day of Judgement. The happenings on that day will be on an epic scale. Then the Creator of man will manifest Himself in order to mete out rewards or punishments commensurate with the record of human deeds on earth. Those who have passed the test will be

blessed with eternal paradise, while those who have failed the test will be cast into eternal hell.

In the light of this Creation Plan of God, we can understand what man's attitude should be regarding life and the life support system. The right angle in the matter of the life support system is to look at it with the eyes of the Creator and the wrong angle is to look at it as a means to satisfy man's personal desires. The former is what makes man's attitude right and the latter is what makes it wrong.

When we look at it from this viewpoint, then two different stances are adopted regarding life and the life support system. That which is formed in accordance with the plan of the Creator is that the life support system should be regarded as a test support system. On the contrary, when we look at it from the angle of egocentric human thinking, it takes on the character of a mere means of purveying enjoyment. In the first case, life is seen in terms of responsibility, whereas in the second case, life is reduced to an animal level – that is, eat, drink and be merry and then leave the world in that state.

In present times, scientific investigations have discovered the meaningfulness of human life and the life support



system to a far greater extent than ever before. This should have resulted in man becoming more serious regarding the purpose of his life and, by making proper use of his blessings, he should have acknowledged the Giver of Blessings to a much greater degree than hitherto. But the result has been totally the opposite. Man has forgotten the reality that the life support system is in actual fact a test support system. Instead, man has looked upon the life support system merely as a means of ensuring enjoyment, and his goal in life has been reduced to securing more

and more material things for himself in order to make life increasingly enjoyable.

I am reminded of an experience I once had which taught me a valuable lesson. This experience is highly illustrative of the present state of affairs. In 1972, I had occasion to travel to a place of architectural interest in Rajasthan accompanied by Mufti Mohd. Jamaluddin Qasmi and some others. The building we had come to see was situated on top of an uninhabited hillock. We climbed the road leading up to it in a jeep, and when we reached



the top, we witnessed an unimaginably strange sight. A large building with a spacious hall, built there in this desolate place, possibly by some raja or other ruler some two hundred years ago was still intact, but there was no trace of human occupancy. On the contrary, there were hundreds of monkeys in and around the building. They scampered about, making shrill chattering, meaningless noises. There is something unique about the way of a monkey. It can occupy a place with impunity, and then run and jump about for no rhyme or reason. This being the state of affairs, we had to be content with seeing the building from the outside, and left without entering it.

I thought that these ‘usurper’ monkeys occupying the building did not care who had built it or for what purpose it had been built. They were just leaping about, jumping up and down and creating a meaningless clamour. Remaining totally unaware of such questions, they were indulging in activities which were little short of criminal, and which were far from being the proper use of the building.

Then I began to wonder whether this criminal use of such a beautiful building would go on, or would its builder eventually appear and punish the monkeys for such

outrageous behaviour and then hand it over to those for whom it was built?

Let us reflect upon this example. This building had been constructed for a specific purpose. So it should, strictly speaking, have been used for the purpose it was intended for. But instead, it had been infested with monkeys who, with gay abandon, had begun to indulge in wild, noisy, riotous behaviour.

This example is analogous to the entire world of today. The present planet earth has become like that building, only on a far greater scale, the men and women who have spread all over the earth having behaved with extreme irresponsibility. They look at the earth with the sole intention of fulfilling their desires, totally oblivious of the reality of who has built this world and for what purpose.

How has this come about? In present times when science has discovered and made known the facts of the life support system, disseminating them on the greatest possible scale, exactly at the same time another development has taken place, viz. the coming into existence of a new culture, called the culture of instant gratification. For a variety of reasons this has happened all

over the world. Where enjoyment is constantly sought, an environment has been built up in which people have come to expect that everything that exists here is meant for man's enjoyment.

Thus, under the influence of the environment, rather than as a result of any rational thinking, the life support system has virtually assumed the position of an "enjoyment-support" system. And this has reduced human society to the animal level.

What is the difference between man and the animals? The difference lies in the fact that while an animal is aware only of its own interests, man, ideally, besides being aware of his personal interests, recognizes his responsibility and fulfills its demands.

But in the world of today it appears that this difference has been obliterated. Human culture today is little better than the culture of the animals. Besides the apparent differences, there seems to be no real difference.

But this is not a simple matter. This clearly amounts to deviating from the path of nature. And deviation from the path of nature always becomes the cause of double

deprivation. That is to say, deprivation in the pre-death period as well as in the post-death period. By misusing his freedom in this world, man can deviate from the path of nature, but he has not the power to save himself from the fatal consequences of doing so. This is the greatest danger facing the human being of today.

What it means to be deprived in the pre-death period can be understood by everyone judging from his own personal experiences. Everyone has an attractive goal before him. He spends all his time and energy attempting to reach this goal he has set for himself. But we find that, finally, what everyone is destined to get is pure and simple frustration. In this world, everyone, be he rich or poor, dies ultimately in despair. No man or woman is an exception to this.

Why does this happen? The reason is that man dreams of reaching a particular destination, but in order to do this he requires certain resources, and the resources to fulfill such dreams just do not exist in this world. That is why, even after the greatest struggle, man's life is finally terminated without his having reached his desired goal.

Man has special faculties called the five senses – sight, touch, taste, smell and hearing. These five senses are

The fact that man has desires in this world without having the means to fulfill his desires, is a sure indication that, according to the Creation Plan, the means to fulfill desires have not been placed in pre-death stage of life.

in actual fact nodal factors in the human capacity for enjoyment. It is through each of these senses, that the enormous treasure of enjoyment which the Creator has placed at man's disposal impinges upon his consciousness. Sight is a purveyor of extremely pleasant experiences and so are touch, taste, smell and hearing. There is no other creature in this universe, including the animals, who is possessed of the capacity to enjoy these pleasures in the way that man does. The ability to enjoy these uniquely elevated kinds of pleasures is an exceptional divine gift to man.

Man, moreover, possesses the capacity for thought. This uniquely human capacity is the greatest means of experiencing the highest form of pleasure. Thinking provides a limitless treasure house of pleasure for man. The act of thinking, which is seldom outwardly manifested,

gives man the keenest sense of pleasure, which is just not realizable by any other means.

Although man has the capacity to experience these pleasures, he does not always find the means to satisfy his longing for the enjoyment of them. Everyone is born with a limitless capacity for enjoyment, but after a very short period in this world every man and woman dies with unfulfilled desires.

The fact that man has desires in this world without having the means to fulfill his desires, is a sure indication that,



according to the Creation Plan, the means to fulfill desires have not been placed in pre-death stage of life. Man in fact has been given these desires so that he may understand the reality of life and plan his life accordingly.

It should also be borne in mind that man is unique in understanding the concept of tomorrow. The animals are also living creatures, but no animal entertains such a concept. The limited animal mind only knows the present. It has no inkling of the future, whereas man's practical experience tells him that in the present world he may anticipate the future, although it is seldom clear whether his desires for the future are achievable.

A clue lies hidden in this reality. This clue tells man that, due to his limitations, the future he desires has not been destined for him in this world. So in order to find this desired future in the next stage of life after death, he has to make the necessary preparations in this present world.

The present world may be likened to an examination hall. The examination hall duly caters for the basic requirements of the student, but it does not provide for the means to the fulfillment of all his desires. Therefore, the student who regards the examination hall as just an examination

According to the Creator's Creation Plan, the right and successful way for man to lead his life on the present planet earth is to regard this place as one of trial rather than of enjoyment.

hall, and nothing more, will not fall a prey to frustration, whereas the student who comes to regard the examination hall as a means to the fulfillment of his desires will find there nothing but frustration.

According to the Creation Plan of the Creator, the present world is meant as a testing ground. The life support system here provides only for the prerequisites of the trial man has to undergo. Now those who regard the world merely as a testing ground and lead their lives accordingly will not fall a prey to frustration. But those who regard this world as a place which ought to provide for the fulfillment of their desires will experience utter despair and frustration for, according to the Creation Plan, this world, by design, has not been equipped to fulfill their desires.

According to the Creator's Creation Plan, the right and successful way for man to lead his life on the present planet earth is to regard this place as one of trial rather

than of enjoyment. One who does so will be blessed with eternal success in the next life.

A life lived with this concept of testing in mind is quite distinct from that which is lived with the concept of enjoyment to be had at all costs: the plans for both these kinds of life are totally different from one another. To further illustrate this point I should like here to cite some instances of both kinds of life.

The basic difference in this matter is one of thinking. The concept of the test develops Creator-oriented thinking. One who is imbued with this concept tries to find out, in terms of the Creation Plan of the Creator, what he should do and what he should not do. On the contrary, one whose concept of life is based on enjoyment, will inevitably indulge in self-oriented thinking. He imagines he is to be governed only by his own will, rather than by someone other than himself – a superior being.

One who subscribes to the theory that the earth is a testing ground will focus on such activities as will reap a reward in the life hereafter. However, one who believes in the theory that the earth is a place for enjoyment will engage in such activities as improve his worldly life. So

The test-oriented person will avoid all unnecessary wastage of money, time, food, water, and above all, words.

test-oriented thinking makes man content as regards wealth; he will remain content if his basic requirements are provided for. On the contrary, enjoyment-oriented thinking will always lead to the endeavour to accumulate more and more wealth. There is no limit to human greed. If a man who has developed this test-oriented thinking has a small car and his friends want him to buy a bigger car, he will say: "I do not want to make my test paper more difficult." By contrast, the enjoyment-oriented person will always be striving not only for a bigger and bigger car, but also for many more cars.

The test-oriented person will keep himself away from futile entertainment, for he will consider it to be a distraction. Conversely, the enjoyment-oriented person will jump into the fray of the entertainment culture, regardless of the amount of time and money he will be squandering. The test-oriented person will avoid all unnecessary wastage of money, time, food, water, and above all, words. Unlike

him, the enjoyment-oriented person will not attach any importance to wasteful expenditure. The test-oriented person will consider himself bound by moral values, whereas to the latter, personal interest, and not moral values, is supreme.

According to the Creation Plan of the Creator, what is important in this matter is what kind of personality is being nurtured in a man while he experiences different sets of situations. Will it be a God-oriented personality or a self-oriented personality? Just as man has constantly to acquire food in the present world for his physical existence, so also does his spiritual existence require a continual supply of spiritual food. It is this spiritual food which develops in man the God-oriented personality.

What is spiritual food? It is the truth, accepted by man whether it comes to him from his own people or someone else. That means that his thinking should not be the result of conditioning: he should form his opinions unaffected by his immediate circumstances. His life should be one of thanksgiving and acknowledgement rather than of ingratitude and denial. He should respond positively, even in a negative situation. He should temper his use of freedom by self-imposed discipline, adhering to justice in



all situations, even if it goes against his interests. He should keep before him the eternal rewards of the Hereafter rather than the temporary gains of this world.

Those who regard the present world as a testing ground and lead their lives accordingly will be lodged in the Hereafter in the Eternal Gardens in close proximity to their Creator. Those, on the other hand, who regard this world merely as a place of enjoyment will finally face the dreadful consequences of being denied access to the eternal world: they will have nothing but deprivation and frustration in store for them.

Pre-death and Post-death Periods of Life

Just over two years ago – March 11, 2006 to be precise – while I was on an evening flight back to Delhi from Hyderabad, several members of my CPS (Centre for Peace and Spirituality) team, who were accompanying me, distributed some dawah pamphlets and then engaged in dawah work with the passengers. One of the passengers was Ms. Neha Batwara. I had no personal contact with her at that time and after the plane landed in Delhi, she went off to Alwar, her home town. However, just over two weeks later, we received the following letter by e-mail on March 28, from Hyderabad:

Respected Maulana Wahiduddin Khan,

I am Neha, working in an MNC. There can be nothing better than getting a job in a top MNC just after graduation. But believe me, I am in search of a more purposeful life. That's why I am writing to you.

I met Khalid Ansari and Sadia Khan (CPS members) on a flight to Delhi and could clearly see the difference your guidance had made to their lives.

Maulana, I know we have been created by God, and we all have a purpose here to fulfill on earth, which, if carried out, will be more satisfying than getting heaven after death. But the point on which I am ignorant is knowing the purpose for which I have been sent here. I shall be grateful to you for the whole of my life if you can help me in any way. I am currently in Hyderabad.

Regards,

Neha Batwara, Software Engg, MIEL, Hyderabad

This letter is not simply a letter from one single individual. It is rather the voice of every soul. It expresses the feelings of every man and woman. Everyone is searching for a purposeful life. It is the call of every person's nature. But people want to find this purposeful life in the fullest sense before their death in this present stage of life itself. Neither have they any consciousness of the next life after death, nor are they ready to wait for it.

The basic question is: Where does man want to achieve this purposeful life? – in the world made by himself, or in the world made by God? Obviously, this purpose has to

be achieved in the world made by God, because the world made by himself just doesn't exist.

In such a situation, it is very natural that man should first of all learn what the laws are that govern this world made by God and what Creation Plan its Creator had in mind while creating the world. This is because, without reconciling himself to it, he can never achieve his goal.

If you have a car and you want to drive it on the street, first of all you will have to learn what traffic rules are followed in the country in which you find yourself, e.g. whether the traffic keeps to the left or the right. This is a must, for if you start driving on the left in a country in which the law prescribes keeping to the right, you will certainly have a disastrous journey.

The same is true of the much vaster journey of man's life. Man's life's journey is not made in space or in a world made by himself. He undertakes this journey in the world made by God. Therefore, it is essential for all men and women to understand God's creation plan and to build their lives accordingly. In the absence of such planning they cannot save themselves from failure.

Man's own experience is sufficient for him to grasp the point that, if nature makes provision for him to survive and to make satisfactory progress through life, it is all part of God's plan. For example, when a man wants to quench his thirst, water is available everywhere, and it is the water provided by nature which best satisfies his needs. Similarly, when man feels hungry, he appeases his hunger by eating the food provided by nature. Likewise, everyone needs to breathe in oxygen. Without oxygen no one could survive for even a few seconds. Again, nature is the great provider. It provides both the oxygen and the breathing apparatus with which human beings have been endowed. But if nature provides man with these and all other human requirements, it is because God planned things that way.

Now when it comes to understanding the purpose of life, man must likewise learn about the creation plan of God. He has no alternative but to do so.

The Quran – which is the book of nature – answers our question. In Chapter no. 103, it is stated that history is a witness that 'man is in loss,' except those who follow the course of life set by the Creator.

Man's life's journey is not made in space or in a world made by himself. He undertakes this journey in the world made by God.

Looking at it from this angle, we find that human life is divided into two stages – the stage before death and the stage after death. The stage before death is one of action and the stage after death is one of reaping rewards. What we have to receive after death, we cannot receive before death. What we have to do before death, we shall have no opportunity to do after death.

The study of man shows that every human being is born with unlimited desires. These desires are dear to everyone. But it is also a fact that, in all of human history, no one has entirely succeeded in fulfilling these desires. Many people have spent their whole lives in seeking to fulfill their desires, but it has all been of no avail.

They were ostensibly highly successful in life, but every one of them breathed his last with utter regret and grief that he had failed to fulfill his desires. In the world of today he had failed to find what he wanted.

The study of the world shows that, here, the principle of the pair is well established. Here everything has its pair. Everything becomes complete by uniting with its pair. This principle is enforced at a universal level. Right from earth to space – everywhere indeed – this system is enforced. For instance, a negative particle has a positive particle as its pair. Human beings are made up of men and women. In the animal world, there are males and females. In the vegetable world also there are the male and female sexes. This system of pairs is found at the universal level in all creatures. In this vast and complete system there is only one exception and that is of human desires. Every person is born with a deep sense of desire, but all die without the fulfillment of their desires. There is desire in the world but its pair, the fulfillment of desire, does not exist here.

Every man and woman born in this world is faced with this question. Everyone wants to find the answer to this question but, before finding a satisfactory answer, he leaves the world in despair without his desires being fulfilled.

American missionary Billy Graham writes that once he received an urgent message from an aged American

billionaire. Billy Graham cancelled all his programmes and immediately left to meet him. When he reached his house, he was ushered into the room where he had to meet him. The billionaire said to Billy Graham without any introduction. "You see I am an old man. Life has lost all meaning. I am going to take a fateful leap into the unknown. Young man, can you give me a ray of hope?" Billy Graham had no satisfactory answer to his question. The American billionaire left the world with this feeling of deprivation. Billy Graham himself, according to recent information, met with a severe accident, is confined to bed and is now waiting to go to his final destination.

The same is the case with every man and woman in this world. Everyone wants to know the purpose of his life. Everyone is in search of a life full of happiness. Everyone wants to find a life of total fulfillment, but his life ends in failure. Events tell us that all men and women come to regard material things as having real existence. And everyone has tried to find a life of fulfillment by accumulating such material things. But no one, without exception, has been able to achieve this desired fulfillment.

In such a situation the actual problem is that we keep repeating this same unsuccessful experience. But now, we have to make a reassessment of this matter. The first thing we have to do is to concede in all seriousness that the material things of the world do not provide fulfillment. This being so, where is this source of fulfillment to be found? When human desire continues to exist, then we shall have to believe that it is something real, and when it is something real, then certainly its source of fulfillment should also be available in the universe.



When human desire continues to exist, then we shall have to believe that it is something real and when it is something real, then certainly its source of fulfillment should also be available in the universe.

This issue can be understood by the example of a journey. When anyone travels by train or by air, there are two stages to his journey. One is when he is in the course of his journey and the other is the reaching of his destination. For a journey to be successful, the traveler must understand the difference between the two situations. The traveler who fails to do so will unnecessarily fall a prey to mental tension and will finally lose his balance.

The wise traveler is one who takes the journey as a journey and does not regard it as his destination. It is natural that during the journey all the facilities are not available which can be expected at his destination. But every traveler tolerates this, because he is certain that the state of the journey is a temporary one. Finally his journey will come to an end, and he will reach his desired destination; and after reaching his destination, he will find all that he wanted, which he had not found during the journey.

Our present life covers a very short span of our existence. Its being short itself is a proof that it is a state of journey. It is a period before arriving at the destination. That is why it is not possible to find all the things which we want to find in our present brief lifespan. Undoubtedly, we will find all these things, but we are not going to find them during the interim stage of our journey.

As we know, our life is divided into two stages, the pre-death stage and the post-death stage. The pre-death stage is that of the journey and the post-death stage is that of arriving at the destination of the journey. It is the reality which should be brought to everyone's knowledge. It is the fact which makes man's life more meaningful, which introduces every man and woman to the purpose which can render his or her life meaningful in the full sense, and be a source of fulfillment.

This explanation of life is linked with the question of man being reborn after death. That is, is there life after death just as we are experiencing life before death? The answer to this question is in the affirmative. It is important to understand that we can find the answer to such questions by using exactly the same scientific method as we do when learning of other facts.

What is the scientific method for learning about scientific realities? It is not as if what we want to know comes to the knowledge of the scientist in its total form. If this condition were applied, all the realities would continue to elude scientists. The progress of knowledge would come to a halt. Man would continue to grope in the dark on the subject of reality. For no reality comes to our knowledge like a mountain which is visible from a distance.

Instead, what happens is that during research, the scientist discovers a clue. On giving thought to this, he arrives at a reality of which he had no prior knowledge. In this world every discovery is made by means of a clue. Clues are, in fact, the key to all discoveries in this world. For instance, it has been accepted in science that the 'big bang' occurred thirteen billion years ago. Similarly, it has been accepted in science that biological evolution has taken place on the earth. It has also been accepted in science that our universe is an expanding universe, and so on.

Such facts as have become established realities today had not been observed by man. Instead, what happened was that certain indicators came to man's attention. Then by studying these, man expanded his knowledge and went

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on to greater discoveries. This reality was not visible, but it did exist. Its existence was accepted as a fact, in spite of the fact that nothing but a clue had been observed.

The same is true of life after death, or the next stage of life. There are clear clues regarding the next stage of life. If the clues are given serious thought, they can bring us to the conviction that there is life after death. That there is another stage of life after death is a fact which shall necessarily have to be faced by everyone.

What is this clue? For instance, the human body is made of innumerable cells, which keep degenerating. On the other hand, our digestive system keeps converting the food we eat into the form of cells. Our digestive system may be compared to a factory of cell formation. By means of this system, after about every ten years our entire body is changed. With new cells our body is replaced by a new body.

It is as if our body repeatedly experiences death. Yet we find that man's consciousness remains intact. It does not die. It is a known fact that man's real existence is his mental existence. This mental existence remains inviolate and survives despite repeated physical deaths. It is a clue which tells us that man, according to his origin, is an eternal creature. A part of this eternal existence is placed in the stage of life before death, while the major part of it is placed in the stage of life after death.

Similarly, another clue in this matter is that man possesses – exceptionally – the concept of justice. Man by his nature wants justice to prevail in the world. That is, the doers of good should be rewarded for their good deeds and the evil-doers should be made to suffer the consequences of their bad deeds. Keeping this clue before us, the human mind comes to discover that the ideal world, which could not be achieved in the pre-death stage of life due to all kinds of limitations, will be attainable in the post-death period in its perfect form, as desired by man.

Similarly, another clue in this matter is that man is the creature who exclusively has the concept of tomorrow.

No animal or non-animal has this concept of the future. When we give deeper thought to this clue, we discover the reality that the desired world which man fails to find in the present limited world, will be found in the post-death period, which is the unlimited stage of life. This will be a world where man will experience fulfillment in the full sense. The coming into existence of an ideal world after death is as established a fact as other established facts are. However, in the ideal world of the future, one will not automatically find a place. Only those men and women will find a place in that ideal world who have proved their worthiness in the world before death.

It is the law of nature that all rewards are given to those who deserve them, while those who are not held deserving can never have any kind of reward. The question is: What is the formula for being held deserving of this ideal world? The formula is only one, and that is purification of the soul.

One who wants to find a place in this ideal world of the future has to prove in this world that he saw the unseen world with his insight while living in the seen world; that he discovered the truth in the jungle of confusion; that



he adhered to a positive attitude in the midst of negative experiences; that he raised himself above the animal level and elevated himself to the highest level of humanity; that he distanced himself from such base qualities as ingratitude, dishonesty, selfishness and egoism; that he was a seeker of paradise with all his heart and soul. In short, he was one who wholeheartedly chose the God-oriented life.

Men and women with such qualities are the gems of humanity. These are the people who will inhabit the ideal world of the future. Those who do not come up to

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this standard will be rejected and cast into the universal dustbin, where they will be condemned to live a life of eternal regret. They will never be delivered from this life of humiliation and penance.

The Final Destination

When Professor Nau Nihal Singh finally retired from an American University, he came to India where he was elected to the Rajya Sabha from 1992 to 1998. When he was nearing the end of his tenure, I chanced to meet him and was invited to his home. I found that his whole house was like a huge library. He was a scholar in the real sense.

In the course of our conversation, I learnt that he had done his masters in political science. He later went on to complete his doctorate on international relations. Then he saw an advertisement by an American University for the

post of professor on this subject. So Prof. Singh applied for it and was almost immediately called for an interview.

When he reached the USA, he was received by someone who told him that he had been sent by the university to serve as his guide. Then he drove Prof. Singh to the university, where he was accommodated in the university guest house. This guide came daily to Prof. Singh and showed him around the vast university campus from morning till evening. In this way, he took him to different departments of the university and acquainted him with all the main areas of activities of the institution, for instance, the library, the dining hall, the class rooms, the teacher's club, students meetings, university workers meetings, etc.

Almost a week passed in this way. Prof. Singh started to feel anxious. He said to the chairman of his department, "I was called for an interview and I have been here for a whole week." But so far no interview has taken place. The chairman replied, "Your interview has already been done and we have selected you. Now you can join as soon as possible." Then the chairman told Prof. Singh that the person whom he had met at the airport, and who had acted as his guide, was a senior professor and

Now God created the present planet earth as a model of that world. Here everything exists that is available in the world of Paradise, the only difference being that Paradise is perfect whereas the present world is imperfect.

also his interviewer. He added that they had learnt of his educational qualifications from the papers he had sent them and now they wanted only to know whether or not he measured up to the culture of the university. This had been the task of his interviewer, who had taken him to the different departments of the university and introduced him to all the activities going on there. The students and teachers had been observant of his behavior during their meetings. And the interviewer too was doing likewise. The report of the interviewer was wholly positive as were the reports of other teachers, students and workers whom he had met during his week-long stay there. Therefore, on the basis of these reports they had selected him.

This incident parallels the situation of Paradise and man. God created a Paradise, a vast world which was perfect in the fullest sense of the word. Here everything was of the

highest possible standard. Therefore, God wanted such people to inhabit this world as were flawless in character and thus fully qualified to live in this ideal environment.

Now God created the present planet earth as a model of that world. Here everything exists that is available in the world of Paradise, the only difference being that Paradise is perfect whereas the present world is imperfect. Paradise is an ideal world whereas the present world is far from being ideal. Paradise is an eternal world whereas the present world is ephemeral. Paradise is free from all kinds of fear and sorrow, whereas the present world is beset by these very ills. Paradise is the world of reward whereas the present world is a testing ground.

According to this plan, God created man and settled him in the present world, on the planet earth. God gave man the opportunity to stay here without applying any curbs on his freedom. Man has the right either to use his freedom in a rightful manner, or to misuse it as he pleases. Every man who is born into this world has two invisible angels of God with him at all times. They are constantly preparing records of man's words and deeds. It is on the basis of this record that he will be awarded paradise or hell in the next world.

Man will live with complete freedom in the world of Paradise but he will be so mature and conscientious that under no circumstances will he misuse his freedom. He will lead a life of complete discipline in spite of enjoying total freedom. This is the man for whose selection this planet earth was created. All those circumstances that are present in the world of Paradise are also present in this world. Now what is being observed is the man who, while experiencing all kinds of situations, both good and bad, has proved to possess a character worthy of Paradise. That is the one who will be selected and accommodated in the eternal world of Paradise.

God's invisible angles are ever present with man and they are preparing the records of his deeds at every moment. This is the test of man and it is on the basis of this test that the future of every human being will be decided. The test is of man's acknowledgement of the greatness of God on every occasion, which is whether or not he paid attention to the voice of his conscience or ignored it. When man was confronted with logical argument, did he surrender to the truth or go against it? Or else, when there was a choice between ego and

truth, did he accept the truth or his own ego, having become an egoist?

Similarly, while dealing with people did he adhere to justice or did he become unjust in his own interests? Was he a good person in private just as he appeared to be in public? Did he make truth his supreme concern or did he make anything else his supreme concern?

In the same way when he came into a position of power did he become victim of corruption or did he adhere to justice even after coming into power? When he received wealth or when he experienced poverty, did he prove himself to be on the path of moderation or did he deviate from it? In social life, when he was given a front seat, how did he behave and when he was given a back seat, how did he react? Did he subjugate his desires and emotions to principles or did he give in to his desires. The decision about the eternal future of every man and woman will be based on this very record.

The present world has been created for a limited period of time. After the completion of this period, all the human beings born in this world will be presented before God.



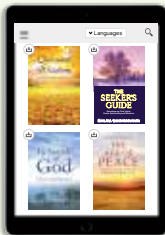
According to the records prepared by the angels, God will decide the future of every man. Those men and women whose records show that they lived in the world with nobility of character, and used their freedom according to God's will, thus proving that they were fit to be lodged in the environs of paradise, will be selected to inhabit the Gardens of Paradise. And all those who failed to demonstrate nobility of character will be rejected and sent to the universal dustbin to spend a life of frustration and regret and will never escape from this condition.

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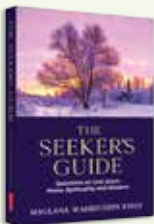
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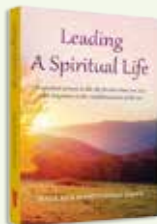
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