

LIVING IN
GOD'S
NEIGHBOUROOD

MAULANA
WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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ALL PRAISE IS DUE TO GOD

Discovering God's greatness in the signs visible everywhere, one is compelled to say: 'All praise and thankfulness is due to God, the Lord of the Worlds.'

One of the essential teachings of Islam is that on receiving anything, we should be grateful to God in acknowledgement of His bounty and utter these words 'All praise and thankfulness is due to God, the Lord of the Worlds.' Praise of God, in its true spirit, is the essence of the Quran. After accepting Islam, a believer's inmost feelings find expression in these words of praise.

Man's existence is a blessing from God. Man's extremely balanced body is a blessing from God. The entire world created so favourably for man is a blessing from God.

When this reality dawns on man, and he realizes God's immeasurable blessings upon him, his soul is filled with gratefulness to God. His greatness overawes his heart

and mind. At that moment, words of acknowledgement of God—'Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds' spontaneously come to his lips.

God is All-Powerful. God is the Giver, man is the taker. The only thing man can offer Him is acknowledge His blessings. The moment of man's greatest worship of God is when God's glory and greatness pervade his soul; when he recognizes God's divinity as compared to man's servitude; when, in full awareness of his helplessness, he comes to acknowledge God's bounties in the true sense of the word.

When man discovers God with all His attributes, his soul lies prostrate before Him. His whole being turns towards God. The feelings inspired in him by God's bounties surge within him like ocean waves. When all these feelings find verbal form, they are called praise and gratefulness to God.

God is the greatest Being, yet in the universe, God remains invisible. But His supreme glory is visible in His creation. Therefore, the realisation of God can be

attained through discovering His greatness in the signs visible everywhere. This realisation finds expression in words such as 'praise be to God—Lord of the worlds'.

DISCOVERY OF GOD

Man's trial rests on his discovery of God Who is in the unseen. Realisation of God means that man begins to feel the presence of God.

What is the test of man in this world? It is to discover and realize God Who is in the unseen. Discovery of God means that man begins to have psychological experiences of the presence of God. Everything has a price. And the price for the discovery of God is to tear down the element of doubt and see the higher reality. Only those who apply themselves with total dedication to discovering God can succeed. Man's mind has been given unlimited potential. The number of particles in the human mind is believed to equal all particles in the universe. Man has been granted this extraordinary capacity to use it to discover the Highest Reality—that is, God.

Man's trial rests on discovering God, Who is in the Unseen. Before seeing Him, man should voluntarily surrender himself before God. He should be so desirous of Paradise that this world appears meaningless to him. He should adopt divine ethics without any external pressure on him to do so. He should develop his intellectual and spiritual being to such an extent that he produces in himself the ability to inhabit the refined world of Paradise. Paradise is a heavenly colony where peace, love, and noble character prevail. Of this world's inhabitants, only those who have succeeded in maintaining a high moral character will find a place in Paradise.

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

LOVE OF GOD

The Quran says: "Remembrance of God gives one's heart peace of mind". (13:28) This means that it is only the love of God which can give man peace of mind in the real sense.

The strongest human feeling or emotion is that of love. When man makes something his foremost concern, it naturally happens that a feeling of love becomes associated with that thing. In religious terminology, this is called "deification". The thing one loves the most is one's deity or the object of one's worship, whether or not one utters this word.

Faith in God is for man to discover God to the extent of loving Him more than anything else. The Quran says that "those who believe love God most." (2:165) This means that one who loves God the most has made God his object of worship.

Genuine love for God will find expression in many ways. Even uttering such words as praise, thanksgiving, and remembrance, as we find in the Quran, also

expresses our love for God. It would be right to say that *Alhamdulillah*, Praise be to God, signifies love for God. Praising God means loving God. Gratitude to God also means loving God. Remembering God also indicates a strong love and affection for God.

The Quran says: “Remembrance of God gives one’s heart peace of mind”. (13:28) This means, moreover, that it is only the love of God which can give man peace of mind in the real sense.

Belief in God begins with the discovery of God. In the Quran, this discovery is called *maarifah*, or the realization of God. When the realization of God becomes part and parcel of one’s existence in the real sense, all those high and noble manifestations expressed in such words as love, gratitude, and remembrance of God come into evidence.

Love of God is a part of faith. This has been a part of the teachings of many revealed religions. For example, in the Bible, it is stated in both the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament that:

LIVING IN GOD'S NEIGHBOURHOOD

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.'

(Matthew, 22:37; Deuteronomy, 6:5)

Love of God is not something mysterious. On the contrary, it is the highest degree of acknowledgement of God. When a person discovers God, becomes aware of God's blessings, and realizes that his existence and entire life are replete with God's blessings, a strong affection wells up within his heart. This strong affection is called the love of God.

To love God is to love the Sustainer of the Universe. Such love is an emotional relationship and brings about a revolution within the human personality. Love of God produces many elevated human qualities, for example, positive thinking, well-wishing for others, trust, courage, and so on.

In relation to God, love is the highest degree of discovery; with reference to man, it means developing human-friendly behaviour. Calling people to God with well-wishing is also a manifestation of the love of God.

PURPOSE OF MAN'S CREATION

When anyone establishes a relationship with God which is imbued with love, he naturally has a strong urge to convey the message of God to the people so that none of God's servants is deprived of the eternal mercy of their Lord.

PURPOSE OF MAN'S CREATION

As per the divine plan, man must develop his personality in the pre-death period, so that he is selected as a deserving candidate for Paradise—his habitat—in the post-death period.

The well-known American evangelist Billy Graham (born 1918) narrates one of his life's experiences. Once, he received an urgent message from an American statesman who wanted to meet him at the earliest. On receiving this message, Billy Graham cancelled his appointments and immediately set out to meet this man. When he arrived at the statesman's palatial home, he was immediately taken to a room, where Billy Graham and the statesman sat on chairs facing

one another. Then, in a serious tone, the statesman said to Billy Graham:

“You see, I am an old man. Life has lost all meaning. I am ready to take a fateful leap into the unknown. Young man, can you give me a ray of hope?” (*The Secret of Happiness*, Billy Graham, 1955, p.2)

This is a common question. Every man and woman—consciously or unconsciously—has this question in his or her mind. This is the first concern of every human being. To find the real answer we have to try to understand the Creation Plan of God. God is the Creator of this world. And only by gaining an understanding of the Creator's Plan can we get the right answer to the question.

The Reason for the Mismatch of Man and the Present World

The Quran, the preserved book of God, gives an answer to this question. According to the Quran, man is born as an eternal being, but his life span is divided into two parts: the pre-death period and the post-death period.

The pre-death period is very short, and the post-death period is eternal.

Everyone feels that they have enormous desires, but they are not able to fulfil them. The reason is that the present world is an imperfect world with many kinds of limitations.

This means that there is a contradiction between man's nature, which seeks fulfilment of his desires, and the world, which is incapable of fulfilling man's desires. Man, by nature, wants a world where his personality can find total fulfilment, but the present world fails to provide such fulfilment.

Sir James Jeans in his book, *The Mysterious Universe*, has rightly pointed out this fact in these words: 'It appears that man has strayed into a world that was not made for him'.

According to the Quran, the present earth is not a habitat for man forever. Man's eternal habitat lies in the world Hereafter. In accordance with this divine plan, man must develop his personality in the pre-death

period, so that he is selected as a deserving candidate for this habitat, or Paradise in the post-death period.

How Can One Gain Entry Into Paradise?

Man is born with total freedom. The only requirement for finding entry into Paradise is that he should use his freedom responsibly and avoid any kind of misuse of this freedom. It is the divine criterion that will decide whose case was one of proper use of freedom and whose was that of misuse. As the Quran tells us:

“We have indeed created man in the best of mould, then We cast him down as the lowest of the low, except for those who believe and do good deeds—theirs shall be an unending reward! What then after this, can make you deny the Last Judgement? Is not God the greatest of the judges?”

(The Quran, 4-8)

It means that while man is born as a complete personality, his present abode, planet Earth, is incomplete. Because of this disparity, man's condition on Earth becomes like that of a fish out of water. The disparity between man's nature and the inability of the present-world to

MAN'S QUEST

fulfil all his desires arouses the need in man to find his real habitat. This habitat is Paradise. Only those men and women will find entry into Paradise who qualify as deserving candidates for it. The planet Earth is a selection-ground for this purpose.

The Quran tells us about Paradise in these words:

“Therein you shall have all that your souls desire,
and therein you shall have all that you ask for.”
(The Quran, 41:31)

The Quran mentions all aspects of Paradise in detail and then guides man in these words: “For the like of this, that all should strive.” (The Quran, 37:61)

MAN'S QUEST

Paradise is that eternal world of God in which His attributes will appear in all their perfection. It will be free of all the defects we experience in this world.

Much as we long for a perfect world, we are compelled to live in an imperfect one. Our happiness is always

short-lived, and our every success is, in some way, eventually a failure. The aspirations that we cherish in the early days of our lives are shattered as we begin to age. Human life in this world is marred by disaster, sickness, old age, and eventually death.

How beautiful the flowers are, but they blossom only to wither. How delicate the sun's radiance, but it shines for only a short while before being covered in darkness. Miraculous though man's existence is, no miracle can save him from death. Everything in this world shall perish. Although this world is inexpressibly beautiful and meaningful, all its virtues are bound to fade. All mundane things have a dark side to them. How, one may ask, could a God Who is perfect be satisfied with the creation of an intrinsically imperfect world? This world is imperfect. Another world must follow to compensate for the inadequacies of the present one.

There is no doubt about the transitory nature of this world. It came into existence at a specific time, some 13 billion years ago. Therefore, its Creator must have existed eternally, for only an infinite Creator

could have fashioned a finite universe. If God had not always existed, this transitory world could never have come into being. Therefore, the very existence of an ephemeral universe shows that there must be an eternal Creator. If the Creator had not existed eternally, He could never have existed at all, and if there had been no Creator, there would have been no creation either.

If we assert that the world was created on a specific date, a Creator must have existed before that date. If we argue that this Creator was Himself created on some previous date, however, our claim can have no meaning. The Creator cannot Himself have been created; He always was. In His infiniteness, He has created a finite world. His existence and that of all mortal creatures depend on His immortality.

Since God is immortal, He must also be absolute, for absoluteness is the greatest attribute of immortality. One cannot be found without the other.

This world manifests God's attributes, but its shortcomings and limitations show the manifestation

to be incomplete. A complete manifestation of a perfect and infinite God would be perfect and infinite. Therefore, another world must be awaiting us. This incomplete manifestation of God's attributes requires a sequel for its fulfilment.

Paradise is that eternal world of God in which His attributes will appear in all their perfection. It will be free of all the defects we experience in the world about us. Paradise is evidence of God's absolute power to make beauty perpetual and joy boundless in a world of everlasting peace and contentment.

MAN'S TEST

Man is a masterpiece of divine creation. Therefore, the proper attitude for man is to remain subservient to God and build his life according to His Creation Plan.

Man is God's servant. God has created man with a plan, that is, to place him temporarily on Earth to test him. Then those who pass this test will be rewarded

with eternal Paradise, while those who fail will be rejected outright.

For this test, man has been granted freedom in this world. Whatever man receives in this world is not a matter of right but only a matter of trial. Every situation here is a test; man must perform adequately in all conditions, as God requires.

The proper attitude for man is not to take to the path of his desires but to try to understand the divine plan of creation, and then after being convinced of its ineluctability, build his life accordingly.

Man may deviate from the divine plan by misusing the freedom given to him by God, but he cannot save himself from the consequences of this deviation.

In such a state of affairs, it is in man's interest that he remains highly cautious in determining the course of his life. Instead of being guided by his will and desires, he should make God's will his guide. Instead of pursuing his desires, he should lead a life in conformance with God's commands.

Man may be a masterpiece of divine creation, but he must remain subservient to God's plan. Making a full acknowledgement of these two aspects of the existence of humanity is the key to human progress.

Man succeeded in building a modern industrial civilization by discovering and exploiting the laws of nature. Similarly, in the next world, man will achieve lasting success on a much vaster scale, but only after striving earnestly to comprehend the creation plan of God for humanity and then adhering unflinchingly to its edicts.

THE CHALLENGE OF MAN

In the world before death, we should be content with what we have and patiently persevere in the face of challenges so that in the world after death, we may be eligible for Paradise, where there is complete fulfilment of desires.

In line with the law of nature, man is born in such conditions that his entire life passes in toil. Accordingly,

arduous struggle and sorrow are a necessary part of the Creator's creation plan. No person has the power to save himself from this course of toil in this world of test.

In the life of this world, sorrow and toil are part of the Creator's creation plan. This system exists so that man can be reminded that the present world has not been made for him as a place to make merry but as a sort of examination hall. The present world exists so that man can pass through different situations. Amidst these situations, it is decided whether a person is worthy of being settled in the eternal world of Paradise or not. Those people who, passing through these situations, give the desired response will be lodged in eternal Paradise in the Hereafter, while those who do not provide the proper and desirable response will live in eternal deprivation.

This state of toil remains intact in this world. However, people do not understand its reality because of unawareness of God's creation plan. By wrongly reacting against it, they fail in the examination of life.

These days, big companies claim to be engaged in the work of 'de-stressing'. They try to provide peace of mind to people by asking them to stop thinking. However, stopping the mind's thought process is only a form of temporary anaesthesia. It is not the real solution to the problem. The only real solution to it is just one—and that is stress management.

It is common to observe that victims of problems often get engaged in social services. It is just a way of diverting one's mind to get over grief, but this is not necessarily a proper response to the issue of 'toil'. Social service is a service to humanity; in this sense, it is undoubtedly a praiseworthy activity. However, if seen in relation to the creation plan of nature, an unwanted element might be present in it. The psyche of a person who experiences misfortune or problems in life is: "Let no one suffer what I have suffered." This seems to be the motivation for people who engage in social service.

This psyche tells us that man considers all issues simply as worldly issues. To him, all problems relate only to

this world. The most significant act, he thinks, is to make the world a problem-free place. However, this thinking is against nature's creation plan, so it will never fructify here.

Whenever someone faces an unpleasant experience, it is so that he should derive a lesson from it. He should remember that the present world is a world of test. Here, no one will ever obtain a life of total comfort. Therefore, man should learn lessons from the negative experiences of the world. He should awaken within himself the consciousness that he will never attain the ideal life of his dreams in this limited world. He should search for the perfect life he desires in the unlimited world of the next period of life, that is, in the Hereafter.

In this situation, the true lesson one should derive from unpleasant experiences is that man should remember Paradise of the next world. He should awaken this thought: "Let me not suffer in the Hereafter that I have suffered in this world."

Prosperous is he who, while in the temporary world,

has recognized the eternal world, who, in the failures of the present world, has discovered the secret of the lasting success of the next period of life.

God made the present world according to a plan that every person should be engaged in 'toil'. But, Paradise in the next eternal world will be totally free from sorrow, and only those with whom God is pleased will get a place there. Not understanding this fundamental point about life creates the problems mentioned above.

If you view the issue in the light of God's creation plan, you will discover that the root of all human problems is that people want to make their 'paradise' in the world before death; whereas here, the conditions needed for this purpose are not present. Just as on sand or quicksand, no building can stand; in the same way, in the present world, no one can build his 'dream palace', his ideal world. When man fails to create a perfect world for himself here in line with natural law, he often becomes a victim of negative reaction, leading to further devastation. The right thing for man to do in this regard is to acknowledge the law of creation and develop a plan for his life in line with it. Moreover, this

LAWLESSNESS IN THE HUMAN WORLD

plan is just one—while still here, in this present world, he should strive to make himself the sort of desirable person who in the world, after death, will be deemed eligible for entry in Paradise.

Thus, according to God's creation plan, in the world before death, we should be content with what we have and patiently persevere in the face of challenges, no matter how harsh they might seem, so that in the world after death, we may be held eligible to find a place in Paradise, where there is complete fulfilment of desires.

LAWLESSNESS IN THE HUMAN WORLD

God has given man freedom to test him. So, some people use their freedom correctly, while others misuse it. But after the Day of Judgment, only those who used their freedom correctly will be admitted into the ideal world of heaven.

The strangest thing in the world is how people love to boss others around, how cunningness seems to be

the rule rather than the exception, how good-hearted people seem to count for nothing, and how sycophants rule the roost, while honest people, who do not hesitate to call the truth as the truth and falsehood as falsehood, have no respect or popularity here.

All this is happening in a world that, in its essence, is flawless—where a single tree stands as a stunningly beautiful model of perfection, where birds know of no other song but of beauty and peace, where the sun and the moon cannot help but pour out their light, where no star trespasses into the orbit of another to plant its flag forcibly!

Observing this contradiction between man and the rest of the cosmos, some people claim that there are two gods: one, the God of light, and the other, the God of darkness. Some others argue that there is no God at all. They maintain that if there were indeed a God, why is there such lawlessness in the human world?

But the reality is that this world is a testing ground where we are constantly being examined. The ideal

world will come after death. The whole of creation other than man is a preliminary glimpse, as it were, of that perfect world. Just as the rest of creation fully obeys God, human beings will do the same in the world to come. As of now, in the present world, they enjoy God-given freedom. They can choose to obey God, like the rest of creation, but they can also choose to disobey Him—the test they are constantly given concerns their choice to use this freedom.

To be tested in this world, it is necessary that human beings should have complete freedom of action. So, some people use their freedom correctly, while others misuse it. But after the Day of Judgment, only those who used their freedom correctly will be admitted into the ideal world of heaven. Everyone else will be gathered together and dumped in a universal litterbin, just as rubbish is collected and thrown away.

QUALIFICATION FOR THE IDEAL WORLD

One needs to have two qualifications to be eligible for Paradise in the Hereafter: one is to acknowledge the truth of the one God, and the other is to lead a principled life.

In the present world of trial, to be eligible for Paradise, any man or woman needs to have two qualifications: one is to acknowledge the truth of one God, and the other is to lead a principled life. Those men and women who qualify for this test will be given a place in Paradise where all their desires will be fulfilled. Those who fail this test shall spend their lives in eternal deprivation.

In the present world, man finds himself free. However, this freedom does not belong to him as a matter of right but is a test paper. Man must acknowledge the truth of One God and surrender to Him—not by compulsion but by his own choice. This surrendering before the One God is, without doubt, the greatest sacrifice that any man can make. Acknowledging the truth of One

God is like making oneself smaller, not only to God but to others as well. But this is the virtue that will raise man to the highest position. It will take him to the very entrance to Paradise.

The second important thing in this set of requirements is to lead a principled life. Generally, man's character is moulded by his emotions—anger, revenge, jealousy, hatred, rivalry, etc. These are the negative feelings that shape man's personality. But what man ought to do is to become disciplined in such matters. He should not build his character under the influence of external incentives but by his own decisions; he should establish it based on higher principles. This is what is called a divine character.

GOD-FEARING PEOPLE

The whole life of one who is convinced of the Truth changes. He shuns irresponsible behaviour, egoism, and arrogance. He becomes an obedient servant of God.

Prophet Muhammad was asked what counted as more important for a person to find a place in Paradise. The Prophet replied: “Fearing God and having the best moral character.” (Sunan al-Tirmidhi, 2004)

The greatest success for a person is that he should lead such a life in this world that when he dies, he finds a place in Paradise where he will have a life of eternal happiness. The secret of this successful life has been explained in this tradition.

The most essential things in this connection are the acceptance of the greatness of God, remaining ever mindful of Him and regarding oneself as accountable to Him, believing that one cannot save oneself from God’s chastisement. All one’s deeds, open or hidden,

are in the knowledge of God, and that no strategy can save oneself from standing before God after death.

The whole life of one who is convinced of this truth changes. The permissiveness of his life is replaced with restraint. He avoids irresponsible behaviour, and shuns egoism, arrogance, and other such negative feelings. On all issues, he becomes an obedient servant of God.

Another quality of a God-fearing person is that his character becomes heavenly. He starts leading his life in this world just as the people Paradise will live in the Hereafter. In his heart, he cherishes feelings of well-wishing for others. He speaks good words and refrains from harshness. He meets other people as if he were meeting with his brothers and sisters. While dealing with others, he always adheres to what is just. He adheres to moral principles in his dealings. These are some of the characteristics of the people of Paradise.

TWO TYPES OF SOULS

In the present world, man is free to choose between two courses: he can accept God's greatness and surrender before Him or he can live in his own glory.

The Quran says: "He who purifies it (his soul) will indeed be successful, and he who corrupts it is sure to fail." (91: 9-10)

The present world is a testing ground for us before the life of the Hereafter dawns. It is an opportunity for us to prepare for the Hereafter. If you leave this world and enter the world of the Hereafter as a noble and pure soul, you will be settled in the delightful environs of heaven. And if you depart from this world for the world of the Hereafter as a soul laden with evil, you will be hurled into the universal dustbin for all eternity.

The present world is, as it were, God's nursery. Different types of plants are grown in a nursery. The gardener inspects all of them. Those that he does not want, he plucks out and throws away. And the ones

he finds desirable, he carefully lifts from their beds so they can grow and flourish in a garden.

In the present world, you are free to choose between two courses. You can choose to purify your soul or to pollute it. You can accept God's greatness and surrender before Him or you can live in your own glory. When you are faced with the truth, you can choose to acknowledge it unhesitatingly. You can be concerned about the welfare of others and be just in your dealings with others. Whether in friendship or enmity, you can willingly choose to obey God's will instead of your whims or the prodding of your ego. If this is how you choose to be and opt to lead your life, you have cleansed your soul. And you will then be settled in the beautiful world of God's Heaven.

But, on the other hand, you can choose to be immersed in your self-perceived greatness. When confronted with the Truth, you can choose not to accept it. In your dealings, you can choose to be unjust and cruel. You can choose to follow your own will, not God's will. If you behave in this way, you have polluted your soul.

The Lord of this universe will not accept you in His neighbourhood.

THE CONCEPT OF DEATH

The temporary period of man's life before death is a preparation ground and the eternal period of life after death, is where one reaps the reward for one's actions.

The dictionary defines death as the permanent cessation of life. Unfortunately, this dictionary definition of death presents a negative picture of death. It reminds us that man may have been born as a complete man, but his life ended after a very limited period. That is why his desires remained unfulfilled.

Compared to this definition, Islam presents a positive concept of life, according to which death marks the second phase of human life. According to Islam, man has been created as an eternal being. Then his lifespan has been divided into two phases—life before death and life after death. The period of life before death is a preparation ground, while the period after death is

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when one reaps the reward for one's actions. According to this creation plan, man ought to regard the period of life before death as a preparatory period and must spend all of it in preparation for the second phase. On the other hand, the stage of life after death is only for reaping the reward for one's actions and not for further action.

The event of death is indeed a message for life. The message is: what you have to do, do today itself in the life before death as no one will be given time for preparation in the afterlife. Successful is one who prepares for eternal Paradise in his life before death.

REMEMBERING DEATH

Remembering death is the best means of self-correction. Everyone will face death, after which one can no longer act but only face the consequences of one's actions.

Man is an intensely sensitive being. He cannot easily tolerate any difficulty, no matter how small. Therefore,

people must reflect on how they will live amidst very difficult conditions after they die if that happens to them. If we ponder over this issue thoughtfully, it can create a revolution in our lives.

The Quran says that when the inhabitants enter Paradise, they will say: "Praise be to God Who has taken away all sorrow from us." (35:34). A life of pain is the most intolerable thing for a human being. A life free of pain is the most desirable thing for a person. If we reflect on this matter with the attention it deserves, death will become our most significant concern. We will think more about death than about life.

Realizing that we all must die can be a 'masterstroke'. In the game of caroms, a 'masterstroke' is a stroke that causes all the coins on the board to shift from their present position. In the same way, if we develop an awareness of our eventual death, our whole life will be completely transformed.

Ignoring the reality of our death makes us unaware of our reality. In contrast, remembrance of our death makes us fully aware and alert.

Awareness of death makes a person very serious about life. The most significant concern for such a person is to realize who he is and what his future is. “What is my life?” he asks. “What is my death? What do I need to do in the phase of life before death? What is going to happen to me in the phase after death?”

Remembrance of death makes a person serious about the affairs of life. He begins to take stock of his life at every moment. If a person seriously thinks about death, it would change the entire focus of his life. His life would become Hereafter-oriented from being solely present-world-oriented.

Someone who has adopted the path of worldliness, of worship of the world, is busy, at every moment, trying to earn worldly wealth. This is made possible for him because he derives pleasure through his busyness. He thinks he will construct a magnificent worldly future for himself. But if he knew that one day he would have to leave all his material acquisitions behind and depart from this world, he would no longer have any interest left in his occupation. This realization would become a

means for new thinking to develop in him. He will now think: "If nothing of the worldly wealth I have earned will accompany me, I need to change the direction of my activities."

If you get angry with someone and want revenge on him, the thought of death can change your life's direction. You will think: "When my taking revenge cannot harm anyone in the eternal sense, why should I waste my time doing that?"

Awareness of death serves as a reminder for us. It helps us reform our behaviour. It can take us away from negative actions and make us busy doing good actions. This thinking is a powerful means of self-correction. Awareness of death makes us serious about life and realistic in our approach. Death reminds us that one day we will have to depart from this world of humans and enter the world of God.

Every person will have to face death someday or the other. After death, one can no longer act but only face the consequences of one's actions.

FULFILMENT IN PARADISE

The present world is just an introduction to Paradise. Those who discover God and mould their life according to His Creation Plan will attain Paradise in the Hereafter.

Paradise is the name of the ideal world, the desire for which is lodged in the hearts of all human beings. In Paradise, man's personality shall achieve fulfilment in the complete sense. Man desires Paradise with every fibre of his being, and Paradise in all its entirety awaits him.

Paradise is a world where man attains his complete fulfilment, where he thinks the way he wants to think; where he sees what he desires to see; where he listens to the sounds that give pleasure to his ears in the real sense; where he touches those things which give him the highest degree of pleasure; where he has the company of those people who make his life highly meaningful, where the winds are life-giving zephyrs for him, where he eats such food as he eternally craved for

and he sips such drinks as are only beautiful figments of his imagination today.

Paradise, hidden from our eyes due to the exigencies of man's trial, has been created for man alone. However, entry to this world of Paradise has been restricted. Entry will be given only to those pure souls who have brought with them the necessary qualification.

Paradise has been brought into existence in the world after death. The stage before death is one of preparation, and the stage after death is to receive the reward commensurate with this preparation.

The present world is just an introduction to Paradise. It is not Paradise in itself. The present world is a passageway and not a destination. It is the place for preparation and not for reaping the harvest. The present world is full of limitations. It does not have the means to fulfil the unlimited desires of man. It has all the necessary components for man to prepare himself for Paradise, but it is not a place to achieve fulfilment of his desires.

A paradisiacal person, one fit to inhabit Paradise, is such an ardent seeker of Paradise that he begins to feel like he is living in Paradise while remaining physically in this world. If he has found Paradise in terms of such a feeling in this world; in the next world, he will physically become a resident of Paradise.

We can say that to be held eligible for entry into the perfect world of Paradise in the Hereafter, we must discover God's Creation Plan. According to this Plan, we must spend a period of trial in this imperfect world, and according to our deeds, we will earn the right to inhabit the perfect and eternal world—Paradise. We are, therefore, placed in situations where we face hardships from time to time throughout our lives as part of our test. Our desire for Paradise should make this world seem insignificant to us. We should discover and submit to our Creator while He is unseen and willingly adopt divine ethics. We should develop ourselves intellectually and spiritually so we will be found eligible for the citizenship of the refined world of Paradise by God Almighty.

A BUD THAT WILL BLOOM IN HEAVEN

If you willingly surrender before the Truth, and respond positively in the face of trials and tribulations you prove yourself deserving of Paradise.

Quran says: ‘He will admit them into the Garden He has already made known to them.’ (47:6)

Elsewhere, it says about the people of Paradise: “Whenever they are given fruit to eat, they will say, ‘This is what we were provided with before,’ because they were given similar things.” (2:25)

A tradition of the Prophet of Islam relates that Heaven and Hell result from the actions of people returned to them. (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2577)

From the above, we learn that entry into heaven begins in this very world itself. A heavenly person obtains his heaven in this world itself. It is as if a replica of heaven exists in this world and that only he will enter Heaven in the Hereafter who had attained this replica of Heaven while living in this world. This worldly replica of

heaven is, as it were, a cash award granted to someone before the real reward, as a preliminary indication or symbol of the heavenly reward after death.

Who are these heavenly people? They are those who experience the psychological states that make them eligible for heaven in the Hereafter. In the words of the Quran, “True believers are those whose hearts tremble with awe at the mention of God, and whose faith grows stronger as they listen to His revelations.” (*The Quran*, 8:2)

They are acutely aware of being accountable to God. Expelling all feelings of envy, malice and revenge from their hearts, they experience divine forgiveness. In their tears of repentance, they have seen the mercy of a beneficent Master who forgives His servants for their mistakes. They forgive others so their Lord will forgive them. They willingly surrender themselves before the Truth.

People of Paradise are like flowers of the garden of heaven. In this world, they are, as it were, buds that

will bloom in heaven in the world to come. Everyone's Heaven and Hell is hidden in the different types of conditions one faces in life. In the face of such situations, if you react negatively, you prove yourself eligible for eternal deprivation. If you respond positively, you establish yourself as qualified for Heaven.

ETERNAL BLISS OR ETERNAL DEPRIVATION

Death means eternal bliss for some and eternal deprivation for others. Fortunate are those who find themselves on the threshold of Heaven at the time of death.

The greatest calamity afflicting our world is that one million people die every day. No one knows, of those who are alive today, who will be dead tomorrow. Every one of us shall taste death, but no one knows when death will come. We do not know which of our fellow men will leave this world tomorrow, and who will remain to receive this message.

Every man born in this world has to enter another world after death. In this world, man has been granted all the opportunities as a matter of test. Whatever man receives in the next world will be purely based on his deeds in this world. This means that before death, man has been given many things and opportunities, whether or not he deserves them. After death, one will receive in the Hereafter only what he deserved on the basis of his performance in this life.

Death is not the end of our lives; it is the beginning of our real life. After death man will be brought before the Lord for final judgement. The angel who is to announce the Last Day is ready and waiting with the trumpet in his hand for God to give the order to sound it. This will be a most terrifying time for man. He will want to speak, but will be struck dumb. He will want to walk, but his legs will not carry him. All disparity between men will disappear on the Day of Judgement. Fear of God will seal everybody's tongue. Injustice will benefit no one; truth will be inescapable. Man will stand alone, answerable for his actions.

Man has many concerns in this world, but after death he will be concerned with one thing alone: saving oneself from being deprived of God's blessings. If one has ample time at one's disposal, one engages in many tasks. But if time is short then one concentrates on the most important task.

No time is fixed for death. It can come at any moment. This fact makes death an even more delicate issue. Everyone is on the move and everyone's journey ends in death. Death means eternal bliss for some and eternal deprivation for others. Fortunate are those who find themselves on the threshold of Heaven at the time of death; they will dwell in eternal bliss; they will know neither grief nor apprehension.

SALVATION

Salvation in Paradise is for those who, despite having done every kind of good deed, attach no value to it and realize that only God's mercy can gain them entry into Paradise.

What is the most outstanding issue facing man in this world? It is how to secure salvation in the life after death so that he may find his true abode and share in God's eternal blessings.

God has created this world as a place of trial for man. Salvation is for those who prove themselves eligible for settling in the ideal world of Paradise in the Hereafter. God seeks those who manage to see God despite His invisibility, who obey God and devote their lives to Him; who tremble on remembering death; and realize that the present world is the place for action, while the next world is the place for reaping the reward for one's deeds. Those who display such character will be welcomed in Paradise in the Hereafter.

God's blessings will be given to those who earned it;

who prepared themselves in this world so they may be held deserving of Paradise. But those who have done nothing to earn God's blessings will not have anything in store for them in the Hereafter. They will be compelled to live in a state of utter deprivation. To ensure that one is not deprived of God's blessings, one must work hard for one's life in the next world while living in this world. Salvation would elude the one who fails in this matter.

The next world is the perfect and eternal world where all kinds of pleasure and happiness are in store for man. Man should earnestly aspire for this. But the time for action to secure a place in that blessed world is not the world after death but the world before death. Salvation in the life Hereafter is only for those who prove themselves deserving.

We should understand that Paradise will not be given to anyone purely based on the quantum of his good deeds. It will be provided, instead, by the mercy of God Almighty. The preferred ones are those unique people who, despite having done every kind of good

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

deed, have attached no value to their actions. They realize that they will gain entry into Paradise only when God's mercy envelopes them.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

On Judgement Day, God will appear before mankind. Those who had been considered worthless and rejected in the world will be raised in value and accepted in God's sight.

The Day of Judgment is sure to come—God has decreed it. No one can delay it, nor can anyone save himself from it. What an awe-inspiring day it will be when God sits in judgement. No one will be able to be defiant or proud. Those who were loquacious in the world will be rejected by God. Those who were thought of as mighty and powerful in the world will be reduced to powerlessness. Those who feigned piety in the world will be exposed for the impious beings they really were.

People eat, drink and make merry in this world. They

establish themselves in comfortable homes. They seek to win promotion in life. They believe or reject matters at will. They feel that they are free to do and say what they like. They strive to excel in whatever department of life they choose. Man has been deluded by his worldly position. He thinks that what he owns in this world will always be his. He forgets that he is being put to the test by means of all the power which he wields in this ephemeral world. Nothing that he has will last. Everything will be taken away from him. He will be stripped of even the most basic of the worldly amenities he used to enjoy. He will be brought before the Lord of the Universe on the Day of Judgement.

On Judgement Day, God will appear before mankind. On that Day, those who had been considered worthless and rejected in the world will be raised in value and accepted in God's sight. Those who had been considered weakest among men will, by the grace of God, be given great importance: it will be their testimony that will determine people's eternal destiny. Only the faithful will be honoured; those who acknowledge

WITHOUT AN IDENTITY CARD

God's greatness and bow before Him, who abide by the truth and do good to others. They will inherit a new, complete and everlasting world in which they will enjoy the eternal delights of Paradise, while those who defied God in the world will be thrown into the eternal dustbin.

We must foresee the coming of that Day before its arrival. Those who fail to see it coming before it is upon them will have to pay dearly for their shortsightedness. Successful is one who has proved himself deserving of Paradise in this world itself.

WITHOUT AN IDENTITY CARD

On the Day of Judgment, rewards will be distributed to those who made themselves eligible for such a reward before the arrival of that day.

Once, a boy from a village came to the city. Walking down a street, he passed by a school building. It so happened that the school was celebrating a function that day. The schoolboys had formed a queue outside

a window. The village boy went closer to see what the matter was. He noticed that the students were being given sweets. And so, he also joined the queue. As the line moved ahead, he advanced, too, dreaming of the sweets that he thought he would soon be eating, like the other boys.

Soon, the boy reached the head of the queue. With great joy, he stretched his hand towards the window. Just then, he heard a voice from behind the window say, 'Your identity card?' The boy had no such card. And so, he was asked to go away. It then struck him that the sweets were being given to only those boys who had spent a whole year as students in the school and not to just any passerby.

Something like this is going to happen in the Hereafter. The Day of Judgment will be the day of Divine decision. On that day, everyone will be gathered together. Rewards will be distributed, but those who receive them will be the ones who made themselves eligible for such a reward before the arrival of that day.

These are the people who will appear there with their 'identity card'.

That day is bound to come when one can see the most beautiful scene one can ever witness of the Lord; when a head can experience the greatest honour of prostrating before the Lord. But all this will be only for those who, before the advent of that day, had proved themselves eligible for the Lord's favour. If they fail to prove themselves eligible for this in the present world, they will not be able to see God in the Hereafter. On that day, when others are rewarded, they will experience eternal deprivation.

How fortunate will be those who are included among God's faithful servants, for they will be honoured in Heaven on that Day. How unfortunate will be those whom God rejects, for they will have nothing to look forward to except eternal torment and disgrace.

THE COURT OF JUSTICE

What an awesome event God's court of justice will be! People's real natures will be revealed in that world. God's Power and Justice will be seen in all Magnanimity.

Prophet Mohammad once asked his companion, Abdullah Ibn Masood, to read him a part of the Quran. "Me, read the Quran to you when it has been revealed unto you?" Ibn Masood asked in astonishment. "Yes," the Prophet answered, "I like to hear it read by someone else." So Abdullah Ibn Masood started reciting chapter Al-Nisa. When he reached this verse, the Prophet asked him to stop: 'What will they do when We bring a witness from each community and bring you as a witness against these people?' (The Quran, 4: 41) Abdullah Ibn Masood looked at the Prophet and saw tears flowing from his eyes. (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 5050)

What an awesome event the setting up of God's court of justice will be! There will be no occasion for

contumacy or denial. On the contrary, those whom people disregarded in this world will be the ones to be brought forward as God's witnesses; for they were God's witnesses on earth, warning humanity of the impending Day of Judgment. They were considered the most insignificant people on earth, but their testimony will decide people's eternal fate.

Think of the state of those loquacious in the world but find themselves without words on that Day; and those who wield power and prestige, only to be divested of all traces of power on that Day. Superficial veils will be rent asunder, and those who feigned false piety will be exposed for the hypocrites they were. The tables will turn on that day when many who are last in the world will be the first in the sight of God.

People are hidden behind artificial appearances in this world. Some hide themselves behind seductive words; others conceal their true natures behind material grandeur and splendour. But they will be denied these things in the life to come. Everyone will appear in his true garb. One who realizes the awe-inspiring nature

of that day will suddenly be reduced to silence; worldly honour will seem to him as meaningless as worldly disgrace.

What a calamitous day that will be. If one were to gauge the severity of that day, one would cease to talk so loquaciously or be so allured by worldly things; worldly honour would seem just as meaningless as worldly disgrace. On that Day, God's Power and Justice will be seen in all magnanimity.

WHEN ONLY TRUTH WILL CARRY WEIGHT

In this world, even falsehood can appear weighty to certain people. But in the Hereafter, nothing will carry weight except for the truth.

The time will come to pass when the whole of creation will be gathered before the Lord. All voices will be silenced except for the voice of God. Only the truth will have any weight on that day. Nothing else will be

of any consequence. On that day man will be judged. Referring to this Day, the Quran states:

“The Clatterer! What is the Clatterer? Would that you knew what the Clatterer is! [It is] a Day when humanity shall be like scattered moths and the mountains like tufts of carded wool. Then, the one whose good deeds weigh heavy on the scales will have a most satisfying life. But as for him whose deeds are light on the scales, the Abyss shall be his home. What will convey to you what this is like? It is a blazing fire.” (101:1-11)

The turmoil of Doomsday will smash everything. People will completely lose their bearings. After that, a new world will exist where only truth will carry weight. All falsity will be set at nought. In the present world, the approval of the people prevails. Here things carry weight according to the likes and dislikes of the people. The world of the Hereafter is the world of God, where everything will be subservient to His will. In the present world, any deeds performed are judged according to their appearances. In the Hereafter, deeds

will be judged according to their inner reality. The more sincere a person's deeds, the more important they will be. The deed devoid of sincerity will carry no weight in the Hereafter, however significant it might have seemed to the superficial people of the present world.

In the present world, that action becomes weighty, which is marked by concession to worldly situations, following the traditions of the times and has become important because of long social customs. Those who have such deeds to their credit attain the status of greatness and honour in the eyes of the people.

What happens in the Hereafter will be different. There, only a principled life will carry any weight. Only those actions performed according to a high standard of ethics will be given any importance. There, all the importance will be given to those actions which possess eternal values rather than just meeting the exigencies of the time.

In this world, even falsehood can appear weighty to

CONCLUSION

certain people. But in the Hereafter, nothing will carry weight except for the truth.

CONCLUSION

The selected people of Paradise are the ones who have realized God while He is unseen, who adhere to the social and moral ethics set by God and are giver members of society.

Paradise is another name for eternal life in the neighbourhood of God (66:11). Paradise is the eternal ideal world, which is the ultimate objective of every human. Paradise is called the 'Home of Peace' (10: 25). We learn from the Quran that the people of Paradise will wish peace for one another, which indicates the importance of peace in the ideal society. In the world before death, those who live in the neighbourhood of God at the psychological level and feeling will, in the world Hereafter, live in the eternal neighbourhood of God—Paradise—in reality.

The good fortune of finding a place in God's

neighbourhood in the eternal life of the Hereafter will be based totally on merit. God's neighbourhood is like a universal garden. Only those will find a place in this universal garden that measure up to the divine criterion. Anything short of this will not guarantee a place in this universal garden.

Who will be eligible for entry into God's Paradise? God will allow only those people to live in His neighbourhood who adhere to divine ethics at two levels: one stands in relation to man versus man, and another stands in relation to man versus God. These two codes of ethics are different in their dimensions. In relation to other human beings, one must follow social ethics like love, respect, well-wishing, and peace. Adherence to such social ethics makes one a giver member of society.

But no one can be held deserving of entry into Paradise just by adhering to social ethics. To be deserving of entry into the neighbourhood of God, man has to live up to the divine code related to God. This begins with the realization of God. When an individual discovers

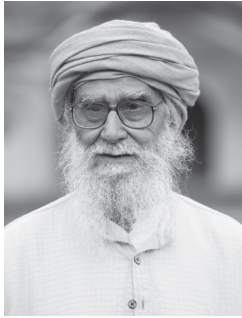
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his Creator, this transforms his mind. His divine nature is awakened, and, as a result, all those qualities have been produced that measure up to the standard of elevated human ethics.

Everything has a price, and the price of Paradise is the realization of God. Nothing less than that can open the gates of Paradise. The truth is that if anything less than the realization of God is regarded as the price of Paradise that would constitute the belittling of Paradise. Those selected for Paradise are the ones who have made God their foremost concern in the life of this world. Their thinking and feelings have all been devoted to God. Their mornings and evenings have been filled with the remembrance of God. These are the fortunate souls who will be selected to live in the neighbourhood of God for all eternity.

God's angels will welcome those men and women who reach the Hereafter with all the above qualities. The angels will come forward and say: "Congratulations, O Blessed Souls! Enter God's Heaven by divine decree. Here, there is no death and no parting from this joyous

world. The eternal life has been given to you for all eternity.” The Quran says: “O Soul at peace! Come to your Lord well pleased, and He will be well pleased with you. So enter among My chosen servants. And enter My Garden.” (The Quran, 89:27-30)



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

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LIVING IN GOD'S NEIGHBOURHOOD

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