



ESSENCE OF QURANIC WISDOM

To Reflect and Uncover
the Embedded Wisdom

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

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HOPEFUL BEGINNING

Bismillah hir rehman ir rahim is the first verse of the Quran. It is repeated no less than one hundred and fourteen times. This repetition shows that, according to the Quran, this verse has great importance in the scheme of things given in the Quran.

The translation of this verse is: “*In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.*” The Prophet of Islam said that at the beginning of everything you do you should recite this verse. So, one can say that this is the word of beginning.

Beginning in this way is very important. It gives you great hope. After reciting this, you can believe that you are starting your work in a world that is controlled by God Almighty and that, if you follow the right path, you will have divine help bestowed upon you.

This belief, freeing you of tension and despair, gives you great psychological courage. It inculcates the spirit of positivity. The recitation of this verse is not simply lip-service: it shows your conviction about the creation plan of God.

Recitation of this word not only gives you courage but it also helps you to build a positive mode in your personality.

This positivity makes you able to plan your life on a realistic basis. This removes all the negative thoughts from your mind. It enhances your creativity.

When you say, “I begin in the name of God Almighty,” you establish a relationship with the greatest power of the universe. You feel that you are not alone in this world. God Almighty is on your side. You feel that you are not an alien in this world, but an integral part of your surroundings.

Saying *bismillah hir rahman ir rahim* is not a ritual. It is a real part of belief. It is a conscious act. On the one hand, it is an acknowledgement of the Creator of the Universe and, on the other, it is a solemn expression of honesty and sincerity.

‘I begin in the name of God’ means I ask for the help of God Almighty in my work and in my life. Reciting these words amounts to refining your soul and engineering your mind on the lines of modesty. It is an acknowledgement from the creature to the Creator. Saying *Bismillah* is, thus, an acknowledgement of the higher authority—that without God’s blessings you could not achieve anything in this world.

In the chapter *Al-Qalam* (the Pen), the Quran narrates the story of certain horticulturalists who omitted to say *Bismillah*. This event is referred to in the Quran as follows:

We have tried them as we tried the owners of a certain orchard, who vowed to harvest all its fruits the next morning, without saying, 'If it be God's will.' A calamity from your Lord befell the orchard as they slept. And by morning it lay as if it had already been harvested. (68:17- 20)

This means that no one can achieve anything in this world without it being God's will. God is the Lord of this universe. When one says *Bismillah*, one invokes God to provide His help. This is like seeking the permission of God Almighty. So, saying *Bismillah* ensures the success of any task in this world.

THE GIST OF THE QURAN

The first verse of the Quran tells us what the gist of the Quran is. All other parts of the Quran are only details of this first verse either directly or indirectly. It is the first verse of the chapter *Al-Fatiha*. The translation of this verse is like this:

All praise is due to God, the Lord of the Universe (1:2)

Here the Quranic word used for praise is *hamd*. *Hamd* is a very comprehensive word in the Arabic language. It includes praise, gratefulness, and acknowledgment with a

sense of awe. According to the Quran, *hamd* is a universal culture. All the creatures of the universe, living and non-living both present *hamd* toward their Creator. *Hamd* is their daily worship. Thus the whole universe acknowledges the glory of God Almighty.

Man and other creatures acknowledge the glory of God, but there is a difference, the *hamd* of the other creatures is a programmed *hamd*: it is inculcated in them by the angels of God. This fact is given the Quran:

Do you not see that all those who are in the heavens and on earth praise God, as do the birds with wings outstretched? Each knows his own mode of prayer and glorification: God has full knowledge of all that they do. (24:41)

But man's case is quite different. Man was born with a mind that has a unique capacity, he was given full freedom. Man does everything by his own choice. So, man's *hamd* is *hamd* by choice. Man's *hamd* is not programmed *hamd*, but his *hamd* is a self-realized *hamd*, discovered by himself. This is the dignity of man.

Material world is controlled by the law of nature. Animals behave under their instinct; all the creatures other than man, behave like computer or robots. Their *hamd* is no doubt a pure *hamd*, but in computer terms it is a programmed *hamd*.

Man is the only creature in this vast universe who enjoys complete freedom. Man possesses the thinking capacity in absolute sense of the word. Man thinks, observes, contemplates, analyzes things, thus he discovers the glory of God reflected in His creation.

After acquiring this self-discovered knowledge he exclaims: ‘O God, I witness Your existence, I acknowledge Your glory, I surrender before You. You are my Lord and I am your subject.’ This is the greatest *hamd* and this kind of *hamd* can be expressed only by human beings.

The chapter *Al-Dhariyat* (Scattering Winds) of the Quran tells us the purpose of creation in these words:

I created the jinn and mankind only so that they might worship Me: I seek no sustenance from them, nor do I want them to feed Me—it is God who is the great Sustainer, the Mighty One, the Invincible. (51: 56-58)

According to the commentators of the Quran, here worship (*ibadat*) means *marefat*. What is *marefat*? *Marefat* means realization of God through contemplation. When one realizes God, he falls into a great sense of awe, and *hamd* is only an expression of this kind of deep feeling towards the Lord of the Universe.

CHARITY IS A DUTY

According to the Quranic concept, the have-nots have their rights. The haves must give the have-nots their due, otherwise the haves shall have to pay a heavy price for their negligence in discharging their duties. Philanthropy is a duty rather than simply a charity.

An event narrated in the Quran in the chapter *Al-Qalam* (The Pen), is the best illustration of this concept:

We tried them as we tried the owners of a certain orchard, who vowed to harvest all its fruits the next morning, without saying, 'If it be God's will.' A calamity from your Lord befell the orchard as they slept. And by morning it lay as if it had already been harvested, a barren land. So, they called out to each other at the break of dawn, saying, 'Be quick to reach your orchard, if you want to gather all your fruits.' So they went off, whispering to one another, 'Be sure to stop any poor person from entering the orchard today.' They set out early in the morning, thinking they had the power to prevent. But when they saw it, they said, 'We must have lost our way. Indeed, we are utterly ruined!' The more upright of the two said, 'Did I not bid you to glorify God?' They said, 'Glory be to God, our Lord. We have surely done wrong.' Then they began to heap reproaches on each other. They said, 'Alas for us, our behaviour was beyond the

pale. Maybe our Lord will give us a better orchard in its stead; we turn to Him.’ Such was their punishment, [in this life]. (68:17-33)

When one gets a harvest, it is not the fruit exclusively of one’s own labour. There are other natural factors involved in the harvest, without which no harvest is possible. So, nature also has a share in every harvest. And this share should be returned to those people who for some reason have suffered deprivation.

What are those natural factors? They are numerous, for example soil, water, bacteria, air, sunlight, etc. These factors are beyond the ability of the harvester to provide, but are externally made available by nature. So, nature has a share in every harvest. Philanthropy means returning this share to the have-not group. Those who pay this share will be rewarded by God, and those who fail in this duty will be punished.

The Quranic concept of philanthropy is based on the principle of equitable distribution of natural wealth.

EDUCATION MATTERS

The first divine revelation received by the Prophet of Islam was the chapter of the Quran entitled *Al-‘Alaq* (The Clot). It begins with these words:

“Read! In the name of your Lord, who created: created man from a clot [of blood]. Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know.” (96:1-5)

This was the first message given to the Prophet by God. It tells us that according to the Quran, learning has the greatest importance in human life. In fact, learning is basic to all our hopes and aspirations: the greater the learning, the greater the progress in life.

According to a tradition, one night in the year 610 A.D., the Prophet of Islam was secluded in the cave of Mount Hira. Suddenly the angel Gabriel appeared and said: ‘O Muhammad, read!’ The Prophet Muhammad being unlettered, said, ‘I cannot read.’ The angel again said: ‘O Muhammad, read!’ The Prophet repeated the same answer. For the third time, the angel said: ‘O Muhammad, read!’ But again the Prophet Muhammad said he could not read. According to the tradition, the angel embraced him and then he began reading the revealed words.

This story gives a great lesson: a lesson of struggle. It should be interpreted as meaning: Read even if you cannot read, learn even if you cannot learn.

This was the first piece of guidance given by the Quran. This revolutionized the minds of the Prophet and his companions, and they did their best to avail of every

opportunity to acquire learning and education. This is illustrated by the following sequence of events.

After the migration to Madinah in 622 A.D, the Prophet of Islam and his companions were attacked by the Quraysh of Makkah. It was a one-day war, which was won by the Prophet and his companions. They were able to capture seventy of their opponents, who were brought to Madinah as prisoners of war.

But the Prophet of Islam meted out no punishment to them. They were educated persons, by the standards of those days. The Prophet of Islam said to them that any one of them who would educate ten children of Madinah would have this service rendered by him accepted as ransom and he would be set free.

It was more than likely that these people might again start a war against the Prophet. But, judging by this incident, the Quranic message is that, even if you are unlettered, try to learn, and learn even if you have no teachers other than those with whom you do not have good relations.

ALL MEN ARE EQUAL

After an unfortunate but significant 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.

All men and women are equal in the eyes of God. If there is any difference, it is only between the Creator and His creatures. As far as God's creatures are concerned, everyone enjoys the same status and respect and deserves to receive the same importance.

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.

Muhammad was a Prophet of God, but in terms of equality, the Quran did not differentiate between the Prophet and a common man. Equality has an absolute value in the Islamic system. No compromise whatsoever is allowed in this regard.

SOCIAL ETIQUETTE

The Quran has given certain injunctions that ensure harmonious social living. One injunction of this kind is set forth in the chapter *Al-Nur* (The Light). The following is a translation of the relevant verses:

Believers, do not enter other people's houses until you have asked their owners' permission and greeted them. That will be the better for you, so that you may

be heedful. If you find no one at home, do not go in until permission has been granted you. If you are told to go away, then go away. That is more proper for you. God knows well what you do. (24:27-28)

These verses give the Quranic etiquette for social living. The Quran emphasizes and encourages good relationship between different members of society. But there are some principles which ensure a better social life and healthy and fruitful interaction. The principles given in these verses can be summarized as follows:

1. The first principle, in this regard is that, if you want to meet someone, you should fix an appointment in advance, so that the person can meet you without any reservation.
2. If you fail to make a prior appointment before visiting someone's home, you must on arrival knock at the door and wait to have permission from the occupants of the house before entering. Without permission from within, you must refrain from entering the house.
3. If you visit someone's home without a prior appointment and, after knocking at the door, you find that there is no response from within, you have to go away and return in due course.
4. If you visit a house without a prior appointment and are told by the occupants that at that particular time a

meeting is not possible, accept this in a positive way and go away without any kind of rancour.

These principles are very simple and very practical. This is good for every society. These principles do not apply only to strangers but must be adhered to even by relatives and friends. These principles are common and universal. There is no exception to them whatsoever.

The spirit of these principles is that the members of society should be each other's well-wishers. They should try to avoid creating problems for others. Everyone should, from others' point of view, be predictable in character. All members of society must refrain from ill-feeling towards their fellow men.

VERIFY AND THEN ACCEPT

Misunderstanding is a common phenomenon of social life. People tend to believe everything that is reported to them without scrutiny. And it is a common experience for reporters always to report things selectively or in a partial manner. It is selective reporting or partial reporting that creates problems. Sometimes people fall into grave misunderstanding and the result is disastrous. Chapter *Al-Hujurat* (The Apartments) of the Quran deals with this problem. It gives a clear direction in this regard. The translation of the relevant Quranic verse is as follows:

Believers, if an evil-doer brings you news, ascertain the correctness of the report fully, lest you unwittingly harm others, and then regret what you have done. (49:6)

There is a background to this Quranic verse. When the Prophet of Islam established a state in Arabia making Madinah its capital, he sent one of his companions, Walid ibn Uqba, as a collector, to a tribe called the Banu al-Mustaliq. When Walid reached the tribal area, he saw that a crowd had gathered outside the town. He feared, due to some preoccupation, that the tribe wanted to kill him or beat him. After seeing this, Walid returned to Madinah, and told the Prophet that the Banu al-Mustaliq had rebelled and they must therefore send an army against them

Then the chief of that tribe, Haris ibn Zarar, himself came to Madinah. He said that they had gathered on the outskirts of their town only to receive the collector, Walid ibn Uqba, but that without meeting them, he had returned to Madinah. The above verse was revealed in the Quran after this incident.

By taking this example, the Quran gives the general direction that, before forming an opinion, we should scrutinize any news we receive. That is, before proper scrutiny, we should not accept its veracity.

The principle to be followed is that if you are going to form a positive opinion, then scrutiny is not necessary. You can

believe that Mr. So and So is a very good person but, when you are going to form a bad or negative opinion about anyone, then you have to investigate the matter before forming your opinion. In such a situation, you have only two options: either to remain silent or, if you want to form an opinion, then you have to go into the matter in depth. Only then do you have the right to form a negative opinion.

LIKE A GOOD TREE

According to the Quran, man must be like a good tree. A good tree is a natural analogy for a good man. The translation of the relevant verses from the chapter *Ibrahim* (Abraham) is as follows:

Do you not see how God compares a good word to a good tree? Its root is firm and its branches are in the sky, it yields its fruit each season with its Lord's permission—God makes such comparisons for people, in order that they may take heed. (14:24-25)

The tree is a unique phenomenon of Nature; moreover, the tree sets an example for man. It is required of man that he translate this tree culture into human life. This culture implies being deep-rooted, vastly spread out and at all times giving out benefits.

A good man is one who is like a good tree. What is a tree? A tree begins from a seed, then it turns into a plant, then

a strong trunk, then branches and leaves, and then flowers and fruits. A stone cannot grow, but a tree continually grows till it becomes completely lush green with many fine attributes, as referred to in the above Quranic verse.

The same is required of men and women. All men and women must develop themselves like a tree. Where the tree develops itself in physical terms, men and women must develop the same qualities in terms of morality.

Every human being should firmly establish himself on his roots; he should be strong like a tree trunk, he should have a vibrant character like the leaves, he should prove himself fruitful for society, he should convey to people positive vibrations of life, just as a tree supplies fresh oxygen to man, and he should provide shelter to his fellow human beings.

A green tree makes our world beautiful. Without trees, our Earth would be barren. A tree is a giver member of our world. It gives everything but on a unilateral basis. For example, a tree continuously supplies fresh oxygen but it never sends the bill for it. Similar behaviour is required of both men and women.

Men and women must live in their society as giver persons. They must adopt this culture on unilateral basis. They must live in their society in such a manner that society may always benefit from them. Like this, men and women can make their society like a beautiful garden.

SELF-CORRECTING MECHANISM

There are one hundred and fourteen chapters in the Quran. *Al-Zalzalah* (The Earthquake) is chapter number ninety-nine. There is a story relating to this chapter in which there is a great lesson.

It is said that once a man came to the Prophet and after some discussion, he accepted the Prophet's faith. Then 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 ibn Abi Talib 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 ibn Abi Talib for your further training. Then why did you leave Ali?" 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 ibn Abi Talib 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)

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 man is accountable to God and every deed of man, big or small, will be evaluated by God. Then he will be rewarded for good deeds and punished for bad deeds. 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 a character-building system.

This concept inculcates a very strong incentive to always behave well and refrain from bad behaviour in every aspect of life. This incentive works not only in public life but in private life as well.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME

Al- 'Asr (The Passage of Time) is the one hundred and third chapter of the Quran. It is a relatively short chapter. Its translation is as follows:

Time is a witness, that man is surely in a state of loss, except for those who believe and do good deeds and exhort one another to hold fast to the Truth, and who exhort one another to steadfastness. (103:1-2)

In this chapter the Quran refers to time. What is time? Time is a passing phenomenon; it is always in a state of travel, from present to future, from morning to evening, from today to tomorrow. Time is beyond your control, you can never stop time.

In making this reference, the Quran gives a very important lesson, one which is important for everyone, both men and women. This lesson is: take time as an opportunity. Avail of time before it passes away forever. If you miss the train of time, you will never be able to catch it again.

Al-Razi, one of the commentators of the Quran, says: "I was pondering over the meaning of this Quranic verse while I was in Baghdad. Why does the Quran say that time is a witness for man? Then I heard the voice of an ice vender. He was calling out to people, 'O people, purchase my goods before they melt away and vanish.'" The phenomenon of ice successfully explains this Quranic verse. Everyone's life is like a melting piece of ice. Every person is constantly losing his time. When he rises in the morning, he has lost the night, which cannot return to him again. As evening nears he has lost the day. By these verses, the Quran warns every human being to avail of time. Avail

of the opportunities of the day that you will not get during the night, and avail of the opportunities of the night that you will not get during the day.

In other words, with these verses the Quran tells us the importance of time management. Time management is a must for every man and woman. We have a very short time here on this earth. In only a few years time, we will face death. Everyone should undertake a serious planning of his time in order to avail properly of his pre-death period. We have only two options before us, either to avail of the time wisely or face failure forever.

THE FORMULA OF CO-EXISTENCE

The multi-religious society is a universal phenomenon, most societies being multi-religious in composition. A question commonly asked is: how to live in a society where believers of different religions are living side by side?

The Quran was revealed in the first quarter of the seventh century. Some of its parts were revealed in Makkah and some were revealed in Madinah. Both the cities were inhabited by people of different religions, namely Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

In this situation the Quran offered a very simple formula:

For you your religion, for me mine. (109:6)

This Quranic formula was based on a simple natural principle, that is, co-existence or mutual respect. This formula can be expressed thus: Follow one and respect all.

This formula is the only viable one in any multi-religious society, for it establishes instant peace. By following this formula, every religious group can find its due place without doing others any harm. It is a fact that peaceful co-existence is the only way of existence in this world.

Peace is the need of every religion. No religious activity can be carried out without peace, whether directly or indirectly. This formula, in giving room to all the religions in any society, ensures peace for all of them.

In the early history of Islam, there is a very relevant story in the life of the Prophet of Islam that aptly illustrates this principle. The Prophet of Islam migrated from Makkah to Madinah in 622 A.D. at which time there were some Jewish tribes living in Madinah. One day it happened that the Prophet of Islam saw a funeral procession passing through a street in Madinah. The Prophet was seated at that time. On seeing the funeral, he stood up out of respect. One of his companions said, "O Prophet, that was the funeral of a Jew, not a Muslim." The Prophet replied: "Was he not a human being?"

This means that the Prophet of Islam discovered a commonality between himself and that Jew, because both

were men and both were created by God. Both had the same common ancestor; both were members of a universal human society. This commonality was enough to provide a basis upon which both could co-exist.

This formula of mutual respect is useful for all religious groups. By adhering to it, every religious group can flourish without any kind of confrontation.

HOW TO FACE PROBLEMS

The Prophet of Islam started his mission in the first quarter of the seventh century in Arabia—an age of religious persecution. The Prophet's mission was based on the oneness of God, while the people of that time were believers in idolatry. So they became hostile to the Prophet and he and his companions became victims of various kinds of problems.

It was obviously an unfavourable situation for the Prophet and his companions. At this critical juncture, God revealed a meaningful piece of guidance which is recorded in the chapter *Al-Sharh* (Comfort) of the Quran. This divine guidance is as follows:

So, surely with every hardship there is ease; surely with every hardship there is ease. (94:5-6)

In this Quranic verse the same phrase is repeated twice.

From this repetition, the Prophet drew a very meaningful inference. That is, according to the law of nature, the situation of ease is double that of the situation of difficulty. So he formulated this principle: “Two situations of ease will surely prevail over one of difficulty.”

The fact is that in every situation there are problems, but at the same time there are opportunities. This is a law of nature. But it is also a law of nature that the quantum of opportunities will be more than the quantum of problems. This being so, the best course to adopt is to ignore the problems and divert one's energy to availing of the opportunities.

Complaint about or protest against problems is of no value. Problems are not created by some person: they are a part of the creation plan of God. No one has the power to change the course of Nature. We have no option but to accept this natural course. The above Quranic formula is the only formula which it is feasible to follow in our world.

So when you face a problem, don't be negative. Be normal. Don't be disturbed. Don't allow tension to develop in your mind. Simply assess the situation and, by avoiding the problem, try to discover the opportunities. Believe with complete conviction that there are enormous opportunities waiting for you—either hidden or open. So, set about discovering them, using all your mental powers and energy.

In such a situation, lodging complaints and making protests are nothing but a waste of time. Developing tension in your mind is only the result of your failure to understand the law of nature. So, be a realist and ensure your success.

THE REAL ACHIEVER

In the chapter *Al-Qasas* (The Story), the Quran records a story which has a great lesson for every man and woman. Qarun, or Korah, was a wealthy member of the Israeli community of ancient Egypt. When Qarun became arrogant because of his wealth, some of his community members told him that arrogance would not serve him well. According to the Quranic version the story is as follows:

Korah was one of Moses' people, but he behaved arrogantly towards them. We had given him such treasures that their very keys would have weighed down a band of strong men. His people said to him, 'Do not exult in your riches, for God does not love the exultant. But seek the Home of the Hereafter by means of that which God has bestowed on you; do not forget to take your portion [of the Hereafter] in this world.' Be good to others as God has been good to you and do not strive for evil in the land, for God does not love the evil-doers.' But he said, 'I have been given it only because of the knowledge I possess.'
(28:76-78)

According to the Quranic account, Qarun was punished by God on account of his arrogance. This story enshrines one of the divine laws: if someone receives wealth, he should be grateful to God, otherwise he will be disgraced by God Almighty.

Any achievement in this world is due to two factors: (1) one's own efforts, and (2) the support of the infrastructure established by God in this world. The ratio is very unequal. One's own share is less than one per cent, while the share of the divine infrastructure is more than ninety-nine percent. This being so, it is quite unrealistic for a man or a woman to become arrogant. The only realistic behaviour for an achiever is for him or her to show complete modesty.

Arrogance means denying the bounty of God and modesty means acknowledgement of God's contribution. According to the Quran, the arrogant should be punished for their ungratefulness and the modest should be blessed with greater bounty.

This, moreover, is directly related to personality development. Arrogance vitiates one's personality with negativity, while modesty creates positive thinking. There is a great difference between the two: negative thinking is the source of all kinds of evils, while positive thinking is the source of all kinds of goodness. Wise men are always modest in their behaviour.

BLAME THY SELF

The Prophet of Islam and his companions suffered defeat twice, at the Battle of Uhud (625 AD) and the Battle of Hunayn (630 AD). On the occasion of Uhud, they suffered total defeat and at Hunayn they suffered partial defeat.

At the time of both the battles, the opponents were the aggressors and the Muslims were the defenders. In both the cases, the Muslims were innocent and only the opposite party was to be blamed. This was the case in terms of justice and injustice. But the Quran, reviewing both the events, said nothing against the opposite party but gave advice to the Muslims, pointing out their weakness. In the case of Uhud, the Quran pointed out the lack of unity in their fold. The following are the Quranic words:

And God made good His promise to you when by His leave you were about to destroy your foes, until you showed weakness and you disagreed among yourselves [concerning the Prophet's direction] and disobeyed it, after He had brought you within sight of what you wished for. (3:152)

In the case of Hunayn, the Quran pointed out the sense of pride which had erupted among the Muslims. Referring to this battle, the Quran says:

Indeed, God has helped you on many occasions. On the day of Hunayn, when you took pride in your great

numbers, they proved of no avail to you—for the earth, despite all its vastness, became [too] narrow for you and you turned back, in retreat. (9:25)

This is the Quranic way of thinking. According to Quranic teachings, if you face any kind of undesirable experience from another person or group, you should not try to protest against others or register your complaint against them. You should rather try to find out your own weakness, your own vulnerable point that gave the other party the opportunity to overcome you.

According to the creation plan of God, our world is a world of challenge and competition. In this world, success is not the monopoly of any individual or group. It is futile to indulge in complaints and protests against others. The only right thing to do is to engage in introspection in order to discover your own weakness and then to reassess your own planning. This is the only wise response to untoward situations. By self-correction, you can regain the target you failed to achieve.

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, God Almighty 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)

It is obvious that 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. If anyone reviles God or the Prophet, God will punish him, if he has committed a crime in the actual sense of the word. It is not the believer's job to complain about others' behaviour or to demand that others remain silent or refrain from using such language as does not suit the believers. Everyone is accountable before God and God knows how to deal with people's misdemeanours.

HOW TO AVOID TENSION

How to attain a tension-free life? It is a question asked by every man and woman. The Quran gives us a simple solution, which is mentioned in the chapter of the Quran entitled *Al-Ra'd* (The Thunder). The relevant Quranic verse is as follows:

Those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of God—surely in the remembrance of God hearts can find comfort. (13:28)

This Quranic verse refers to the creation plan of God. The formula given in this verse is:

Contentment in this world is only for those who willingly accept the creation plan of God.

According to the Quranic explanation, the present world was created for only a limited period and also for a temporary purpose—that is, to develop your personality so that you may become eligible to enter the next world that is called Paradise.

Now the problem is that, although man was born with an ideal nature, and is an ideal-seeking animal—in the sense of wanting to have all the best things in life—the present world was not created for this purpose. In terms of personality development, the present world has enormous scope but, in terms of material achievement, the present world is very limited in its scope.

Those who want to fulfil their material desires in the present world will very soon find that they have failed to build the edifice of their dreams. Anything that they achieve seems to them less than ideal. This is a source of all kinds of tension and stress.

The formula given in the Quran is this: try your best to

evolve your personality in terms of spiritual development and intellectual development. But, as far as your material requirements are concerned, adopt the need-based formula and not the greed-based formula. All kinds of tension and stress are the result of trying to achieve things that are not achievable in this world.

The problem is that people judge things by a wrong yardstick; they judge their achievements by an ideal yardstick. This is unrealistic. The realistic formula is: use the ideal yardstick only when judging your personality development. But when it comes to your material needs, use a different yardstick. Here, you have to realize that only less than ideal can be achieved.

If you want to have a tension-free life in this world, adopt the realistic approach. Don't run after your desires, for, in reality, they are impossible to fulfil.

WASTE OF MONEY

There is a general tendency for those who earn money to believe that it is their own property. They feel that they can spend their money as they please without any restrictions from outside. This tendency was also prevalent in Arab society. With this background, the Quran in the chapter *Al-A'raf* (The Heights) gives this general guidance:

O Children of Adam, dress yourself properly whenever you are at worship: and eat and drink but do not be wasteful: God does not like wasteful people.
(7:31)

Spending your money is not simply a matter of choice. There are other aspects to be considered. For example, if, by spending your money you take unhealthy food or unhealthy drink, it will destroy your physical fitness. You will cause your health and your activities in life to deteriorate.

In fact, money has two different aspects—the positive and the negative. Positive expenditure of money is undoubtedly good but negative expenditure of money is bad.

Money is a great source of distraction, and it is this distraction that is called in the Quran '*israf*'. *Israf* literally means going beyond all limits. And, in this sense, any waste of money is *israf*. When one indulges in *israf*, it will very soon become a habit and one will habitually go beyond limits in other matters also. And that will prove to be disastrous.

Money is a great asset for the earner. It helps him to live a better life. It helps to pay the bills for his real needs. But when he fails to differentiate between positive expenditure and negative expenditure, it shows that he has become the

slave of his desires, spending his money on such items as afford no real benefit in life.

For this reason, every man and woman must be very cautious in his or her shopping, buying in a strictly selective way. When you are in a shopping centre, don't give in to whims of the moment, but see what your real needs are. The system of modern shopping, or modern consumerism, is the greatest cause of the wastage of money.

Use your money on things that give you some constructive result in return. The kind of expenditure that is not going to give you any return is a sheer waste of money. Spending money is like sowing a seed. If the seed will bring you a good harvest, then it is well worth sowing, otherwise better not sow it at all. The same is true of spending money.

ANGER MANAGEMENT

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. Man is a sensitive animal endowed with intuition and, by his intuition, he knows 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.

Anger is a negative reaction. But a true believer is one who has the ability to give a positive response at that time. A negative response arises out of hate, whereas a positive response flows from love and compassion. A true believer must develop compassion in that situation. He must try to reform his bad habits. He must try to de-condition his conditioning. The message of the Quranic verse is: Do not give a hateful reaction but try rather to give a compassionate response.

Anger is generally the result of provocation and provocation is a test of your capacity to exercise self-control. It helps 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 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.

THE VALUE OF SILENCE

One of the values on which the Quran lays emphasis is silence. But it is not silence just for the sake of silence. Quranic silence is for contemplation, to understand more and more, to enhance your learning. It is a culture of silence in the complete sense of the word. There is a relevant verse in the chapter *Al-A'raf* (The Heights), the translation of which is as follows:

When the Quran is read, listen to it with attention,
and hold your peace, so that you may receive mercy.
(7:204)

This means that when the Quran is recited, you should remain silent and listen to it with total attention. This verse gives us a general principle with a particular reference, that is, when you read or listen to or observe something, keep complete silence and try to understand it, focusing all your

attention on it. This kind of habit is very important if the spirit of learning is to be inculcated.

The Quran tries to develop one's thinking capacity, it tries to build a mind that can understand things in their deeper sense and analyze them with objectivity. The art of silence is necessary to be able to accomplish all these things.

There is a saying: "When I am speaking, I am not listening, and when I am not listening, I am not learning." This saying has the same meaning as is expressed in the aforementioned verse of the Quran.

Silence is not simply refraining from speech. It is more than that. When the human mind, with its unlimited capacity, stops speaking, it instantly starts thinking. The mind is a super computer, switched on at the time of birth and continuing to function eternally. It can never be switched off. Thinking is a continuous process of the mind. The word 'rest' is not to be found in the human lexicon where the mind is concerned.

What is thinking? It is to reflect, it is to consider, it is to activate and utilize your intellectual capacity. Bringing the intellectual faculties into play enables one to arrive at meaningful conclusions. The mind is the most elevated part of a human being and thinking is its supreme role.

It is said that man is a thinking animal. So thinking is the

most important process which occurs in a human being. All the great discoveries have been the result of thinking.

But thinking is not an occasional activity of the mind: it is a continuous process, and it happens not only in the daytime, but also when you are asleep at night. The only difference at that time is that it is transferred from the conscious to the sub-conscious mind.

The issue of silence can be understood in this context. According to the nature of mind, speaking means to stop the process of thinking, while when you are silent you are allowing your mind to carry on its thinking processes without any interruption. Just as a speed breaker on the road reduces the speed of the passing vehicles, human speech breaks man's continuous journey of thought. Silence is a positive habit, it helps you to learn more and more and develop your personality unhindered.

RIGHT USE OF SPEECH

People are generally in the habit of speaking more and thinking less. The Quran is critical of this unhealthy habit. In the chapter *Al-Nisa'* (Women), the Quran says:

There is no good in most of their secret talk, except in the case of those who enjoin charity and kindness, or reconciliation between people. If anyone does that,

seeking the pleasure of God, We will give him an immense reward. (4:114)

This Quranic verse sets the standard for secret as well as open talk, namely, soundness and utility. One can only live up to this standard by being sincere in what one says and speaking only after analyzing the matter in hand. What one says should stem from a positive mind. According to this verse, a person must refrain from futile talk. He should never indulge in talking just for the sake of talking.

Now, the question is, what is the best manner of speaking? And what content of one's speech may be regarded as worthwhile? The Quranic criterion for proper social intercourse is based on three principles. All three principles are described in the above verse of the Quran, which sets them forth as follows:

1. Charity, that is, speaking with the true giving spirit;
2. Kindness, that is, speaking with the spirit of well-wishing towards others;
3. Conciliation, that is, speaking in such a way as to create an atmosphere of harmony among people.

This is what constitutes well thought-out speech and is the only legitimate use of one's tongue. This kind of speech is useful to both the speaker as well as the listener. For the speaker's part, it conveys sincerity and positivity, while for the listener it is also fruitful in all respects.

The tongue is a very important organ of a human being; but it is like a double-edged sword. It has plus points as well as minus points. The right use of the tongue can produce a healthy atmosphere in society. Conversely, the wrong use of the tongue is so baneful that it may destroy the whole social fabric. The right use of the tongue can create the spirit of love among people, while the wrong use of the tongue will create hatred and intolerance in society.

The tongue is a great blessing for mankind. No creature other than man possesses such an asset. Meaningful speech is a very rare phenomenon in the universe. No two astronomical bodies, no two trees, no two animals, and no mountain or river can enter into a meaningful conversation. It is only human beings who have this unique capacity.

But in terms of use, this unique blessing can be described in two different ways—healthy use and unhealthy use. One who uses his tongue along healthy lines will receive a double reward. This will help develop his personality and then he will receive more and more blessings from the Creator. Make your speech the result of positive thinking, rather than an abrupt expression of ill-considered ideas.

DE-CONDITION THE MIND

The chapter *Al-Shams* (The Sun) of the Quran sets forth a very important principle, termed in modern language the

principle of de-conditioning. The translation of the relevant verses is as follows:

He who purifies it will indeed be successful, and he who pollutes it is sure to fail. (91:9-10)

In this Quranic verse, to ‘pollute’ means ‘conditioning’ and to ‘purify’ means ‘de-conditioning’. According to this, everyone is born as Mr. Nature, but due to environmental influences, he deviates from his original nature and becomes Mr. Conditioned. The first need for every man and woman is to make himself or herself again Mr. or Ms. Nature. If he or she is to revert to his or her original nature, it requires de-conditioning of the conditioned mind. This de-conditioning is imperative if objective thinking is to be evolved. Conditioning makes one a biased person, whereas de-conditioning brings one back to one’s true nature, so that one again becomes Mr. Nature.

In the physical world, an onion is an example of this psychological process. Every onion has a core but this core is covered over by many layers. If you peel off these layers down to the last one, you will reach the core, and the same is true of most men and women. Their personalities are layered over by different kind of biases and prejudices. It is only de-conditioning that will remove these external forms of pollution and restore the human personality to its pristine state.

In this sense, one can say that every human being has two different periods of his life—the pre-maturity period and the post-maturity period. In the former period, due to conditioning, everyone's mind is full of different elements, both black and white. Thus everyone's mind is a jungle of thoughts. De-conditioning then basically calls for the mind to be sorted out. Through introspection or self-criticism, all those notions which are really undesirable can be discovered. The fact is that in the age of immaturity, no one has the power to distinguish between the true and the specious, so he imbibes everything indiscriminately. Now he needs to cast out all erroneous and therefore superfluous ideas. For this, he has to develop the power to recognize which are the undesirable elements of which he must rid his mind, so as to make himself a purified person or a de-conditioned mind.

There is no mathematical way to sort out this mixture of good and bad. It is a completely subjective process. Everyone must develop the power to distinguish between wanted and unwanted things, between biased and unbiased opinions. This kind of ability is a must if you are to de-condition your conditioning.

Why de-condition? The process of conditioning has a deleterious effect upon your personality. It is the art of de-conditioning that makes you able to return to your original status. The process of de-conditioning is a process of

cleansing. There is no other way to develop your potential other than de-conditioning or cleansing.

De-conditioning is not a very easy process. You have to initiate a relentless process by which to identify and eliminate all undesirable facets of your personality. It is like self-flagellation, during which you should be prepared to accept all kinds of criticism. Conditioning is like living in darkness, whereas de-conditioning means re-entering the golden light of day.

NEGATIVE REMARKS

In the chapter *Al-Hujurat* (The Apartments), the Quran gives a commandment relating to social ethics. The translation of this verse is as follows:

Believers, let not some men among you ridicule others: it may be that the latter are better than the former: nor should some women laugh at others: it may be that the latter are better than the former: do not defame or be sarcastic to each other, or call each other by [offensive] nicknames. How bad it is to earn an evil reputation after accepting the faith! Those who do not repent are evil-doers. (49:11)

Those negative habits referred to in this verse relate to the use of the tongue. People generally tend to point out others'

weaknesses and, even if there are none, they will try to invent some, and then make negative remarks.

Giving people nicknames or making derogatory remarks is a common habit in both men and women. Giving a nickname means calling someone by the wrong name. This kind of negative remark worsens the healthy atmosphere of a society. It is like social pollution. Believers are strongly exhorted not to indulge in such negative practices.

Making negative remarks about others is not simply bad for others, but acts like a boomerang. It is bad for both the parties. A person who uses such undesirable language pollutes his own nature, having committed a moral crime by uttering negative words against another. Moreover, he pollutes the ethical atmosphere of the whole of society.

This is a general piece of advice, but it is meant especially for believers, because believers are those who have given a firm commitment to God Almighty, in terms of which they are not supposed to indulge in this kind of unworthy activity. This is tantamount to breaking the solemn pledge they have taken at the time of declaring their belief.

It is a fact that to err is human. Nevertheless, if anyone indulges in these unwanted practices, even if it is unintentionally or mistakenly, he must, on the one hand, apologize to the person about whom he has passed a negative remark, and, on the other hand, he should ask for

forgiveness from God Almighty. Repentance is as good as correcting your mistake.

The individual has only two options: either he should refrain from indulging in such undesirable activities or, even if he only occasionally commits this kind of error, he must very soon repent and try, in all sincerity, to compensate for it by taking corrective measures.

Every man and woman is responsible for building a healthy society. It is their social duty not to indulge in such activities as may cause damage to the healthy atmosphere of a society. These kinds of practices are against the plan made by the Creator. Calling others by nicknames, passing derogatory remarks, or attempting character assassination, are all like poison, not in the physical sense, but in the psychological or ethical sense. Believers are required to be self-disciplined in their morality, for those who fail to adopt this kind of ethical discipline will be severely punished by God.

SOUND SPEECH

The Quran greatly emphasizes on sound speech or straight speech. This is very important in social life. In the chapter *Al-Ahzab* (The Confederates) the Quran gives its guidance in this regard in these words:

Believers, fear God, and say the straight speech. He will make your conduct sound and forgive you your sins. Whoever obeys God and His Messenger has indeed achieved a great success. (33:70-71)

The fear of God is not simply a fear, fear of God makes you highly sincere, it makes you responsible, it makes you honest, and it is these qualities that make you able to speak in a sound manner. And there is no doubt about it that sound thinking has the greatest importance in terms of personality development as well as in terms of building a better society.

Sound thinking leads to sound speech. Sound speech is one in which there is no confusion and which is based on facts. Sound thinking inculcates realistic thinking and it is realistic approach that leads to all kinds of success.

Sound speech or sound writing is easily understandable. It addresses peoples mind, it touches the heart of men and women. A sound thinker always speaks in the language of nature, and nature is common to both the speaker and the listener. It is this commonality that makes speaking and writing of a sound thinker acceptable to all.

Sound thinking is always based on reason; sound thinking is a result of awakening your mind; sound thinking is an outcome of deep contemplation; sound thinking is free of all kinds of bias and prejudice.

Due to this quality sound speech and sound writing reaches directly to the heart of the people. It has the power to change people's character. It may revolutionize people's mind. It is this quality of sound speech that can bring about reform in a society. It has the power to build a healthier nation.

Sound speech or sound writing represents the whole personality of a man. Sound speech or sound writing is a sign of an integrated personality. It tells that the concerned person is an honest person. It means that what he is saying is not simply as lip-service on his behalf, but is his sincere opinion. He is free of hypocrisy. There is no difference between his thinking and his speaking.

A person having these qualities is a great asset for his society. His sound thinking is a guarantee that he will not create problems for his fellow beings. He will live as a trustworthy person. He will be free of the self-centred mentality. He will follow his conscience rather than his own interest. He will adopt a principled character. His sound thinking will make him sound in every aspect of life.

According to the Quran, sound speech or right speech is divine speech; it is like speaking the language of Paradise. Paradise is the place where only right persons will find entry, so one who follows this principle, he is liable to seek double blessing by God. He becomes a good member of a society in this world and in the Hereafter he will be accepted as a fortunate member of the society of Paradise.

THE VALUE OF DIFFERENCES

Uniformity is not the culture of our world. This lack of uniformity is observable all over the world. The Quran affirms this fact. It says that the stones of the mountains are different in colour (35:27), in plants there are diverse varieties (20:53), and the same picture is observable in the animal world. Regarding man, the Quran, in the chapter Al-Rum (The Romans) has this to say:

Another of His signs is that He created the heavens and earth, and the diversity of your languages and colours. There truly are signs in this for those who know. (30:22)

It is a fact that our life is full of differences. In fact, every man is Mr. Different and every woman is Ms. Different. Diversity is an integral part of nature and is immutable.

What to do in such a situation? The only option in this case is to adopt the principle of tolerance. Maturity is the ability to accept things that we cannot change. And every man and woman should prove to be a mature person in this regard.

In such a situation, everyone should learn the art of difference management, rather than try to eliminate the differences, for this can lead to nothing but failure.

Difference management is not a difficult task. In terms of the capacity of the human mind, it is certainly an easy task.

Regarding the capacity of the mind, it has rightly been said: “I am large enough to contain all these contradictions.”

Difference is not an evil: it has a great positive value. Difference is a challenge. Difference awakens the mind. Difference invites discussion and dialogue. And, dialogue and discussion lead to intellectual development. Difference saves us from being a victim of intellectual stagnation.

There is a saying: “If all think alike, no one thinks very much.” This saying aptly explains the value of difference. Uniformity is not part of the scheme of nature. The scheme of nature is based on diversity rather than uniformity.

Tolerance is not a passive attitude. Tolerance is an amalgam of all kinds of noble values, such as exercising patience, giving respect to others, forbearance, deep wisdom, and the willingness to co-exist with others. These qualities are what make up a good person. One who is lacking in the spirit of tolerance is bereft of all kinds of human values.

Distraction from worthwhile objectives is a fatal lapse in any man or woman, but the spirit of tolerance saves one from such deviation. One who is tolerant will certainly be spared unpleasant situations, while one who is intolerant will find himself involved in all manner of things that are not to his liking. Individuals who are intolerant, both men and women, are bound to ruin their lives—partially if not totally.

Tolerance means giving a well-considered response in any given situation. It is the sign of a sound mind. A person of sound mind is one who refrains himself from instant reaction, who tries to examine the situation, who judges the pros and cons of his actions, and only then does he give his response. This is the spirit of tolerance; and tolerance is the sign of a wise person.

A COURSE IN SELF-CONTROL

In the chapter *Al-Baqarah* (The Heifer) of the Quran, believers are enjoined to fast during the month of Ramadan, fasting being one of the five pillars of the religion of Islam. The translation of the relevant verse is as follows:

Believers, fasting has been prescribed for you, just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil. (2:183)

What is meant by fasting? In this context, it is to abstain from eating and drinking for one whole month. The period of fasting begins from sunrise and ends at sunset. Throughout this month, believers can eat and drink during the night, but not in the daytime.

According to Islamic teaching, fasting is not simply about experiencing hunger and thirst. In fact, hunger and thirst are symbolic of purifying one's soul and training oneself

to control one's desires. The Prophet of Islam has said to this effect that one, who fails to abstain from using abusive language and persists in his evil habits, will not have his abstinence from eating and drinking accepted by God.

The fact is that everyone has enormous desires, everyone has an ego and there are so many negative thoughts hidden in the human heart. To live the life of a true believer, one is required to control one's desires and to try to live a life of self-restraint.

By giving up eating and drinking in the month of Ramadan, one tries to train oneself for a greater form of fasting, that is, refraining from all kinds of evil habits. Psychological studies show that if someone forms a habit over a period of a whole month, this habit becomes a part of his second nature. In one sense, fasting in the month of Ramadan is based on this human psychology, which is used to bring about moral training.

Self-disciplined behaviour has the greatest value in the life of a man or a woman. Self-discipline makes one a predictable person and a good member of society. Self-discipline makes one a man of principle, thus enabling one to perform one's duties. Self-discipline develops a mature personality and makes it possible for one's potential to be utilized in significant ways. Self-discipline, in helping one to evolve as a developed personality, is the key to all kinds of success. It saves one from provocation, anger

and unnecessary involvement. It is a master formula by which one can manage all the affairs of one's life. Without self-discipline, one is like an animal, whereas with self-discipline one becomes a man in the complete sense of the word. Self-discipline, in setting bounds to one's freedom, helps one to manage one's desires and checks one from going astray.

Self-discipline is an act of the present, but it brings one great benefit in the future. Self-discipline is the best formula for future building. It saves one from saying: "Alas, I missed the bus!"

RESPECT ALL CULTURES, DO NOT DISCRIMINATE

God Almighty sent more than one hundred thousand prophets or messengers to every group of people. All the messengers of God enjoy the same equal status. There is a verse in the Quran to this effect. In the chapter *Al-Baqarah* (The Heifer), the Quran, referring to these messengers, says:

The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and [so do] believers. They all believe in God and His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. They say, 'We do not differentiate between any of His messengers. We hear and obey.

Grant us Your forgiveness, Lord, to You we shall all return!’ (2:285)

This Quranic verse relates directly to the messengers or the prophets of God, but it also has a broader application, according to which everyone is worthy of respect, regardless of his creed or culture.

Such belief promotes a culture of equal respect among mankind. Difference in belief is necessarily subject to discussion, but it is not a reason for discrimination. If your belief system is different from that of others, you have every right to engage in discussion and dialogue on the subject, but in the process you have no right to show disrespect to others. This holds true, even if you feel that your personal ideology enshrines the supreme truth. The culture of discrimination is, after all, quite alien to the divine religion.

Islam has two aims regarding society—dissemination of the truth as set forth in the Quran, and maintaining a healthy society that honours the principles of respect and peaceful co-existence. To this end, the Quran lays great emphasis on restraint and discipline—conflict and extremism being completely alien to the Islamic system of thought.

In everyday life, everyone should be disciplined and bow to the principle of tolerance, for others have a right to live according to their convictions, just as I want to live

according to my own convictions. This is the best way to build a healthy society. A healthy society is not necessarily a uni-religious society; a healthy society is one which is based on religious freedom and religious tolerance.

Mutual respect is not simply of moral value; it is also a great source of intellectual advancement. When you tolerate the ideology of others, you give others free rein to express their views, thus creating an atmosphere conducive to positive discussion and peaceful dialogue. And, positive discussion and peaceful dialogue invariably lead to intellectual challenges and ideological questioning. Respect for all cultures is, therefore, a factor which is greatly supportive of all kinds of intellectual development.

The most important aspect of having respect for all cultures is that it eliminates all kinds of negative thinking. It helps you to discover the beauty of others' thinking and way of life, which is vital if a healthy society is to be established.

WHEN YOU MAKE A MISTAKE

One of the Quranic teachings is *tawbah*, which means repentance. When you make a mistake and do *tawbah*, the blessing of God will return to you. In the chapter *Al-Tahrim* (Prohibition), the Quran says:

O believers, turn to God in sincere repentance, in the hope that your Lord will forgive you your bad

deeds and admit you into gardens watered by running streams. (66:8)

In this verse the Quran declares that after engaging in genuine *tawbah*, one who has erred will be unburdened of the effect of his bad deeds. What is most important about this is that the wrong-doer will be granted forgiveness by God and will consequently be rewarded with Paradise in the hereafter. This divine blessing is not confined to the next world; in the extended sense, it also includes the present world. Family life and social life will also be blessed with the fruits of *tawbah*.

If you make a mistake that arouses anger in another, but then you repent and say: "Please forgive me, I was wrong," this will certainly cause the aggrieved person to have a change of heart. Such an apology will, on the one hand, inculcate positivity in your soul and, on the other, it will promote the culture of love among the people you are living with.

In family life as well as social life, untoward events are unavoidable. Such happenings sour relations and create a distance between people. The best solution is *tawbah*. Don't wait for others to take the lead. It is for you to come forward and say without hesitation: "I'm sorry, I was wrong." This is the only way of maintaining normalcy among relatives, friends, acquaintances and even strangers. Problems in social life invariably arise from some kind

of wrong behaviour. In reality, men are by nature egoists and women are emotional. The simple solution to having a tranquil social life is not to ruffle the ego of a man and not to neglect a woman's emotions. There is no social ill that cannot be set right by this two-point formula. But it must also be accepted that to err is human, so whenever you err and some man or woman becomes negative towards you, do not hesitate but at once admit your mistake and say: "Sorry, I was wrong." This short sentence will prove to be magical in its effect and the whole situation will instantly be normalized. This is the miracle of *tawbah*.

Tawbah is an instrument of self-correction, initiating a process of self re-assessment. This process is vital, as it enhances your intellectual calibre and increases your capacity for analysis. This, in turn, leads to spiritual development.

People have no difficulty in saying: "O God, forgive me." But when it comes to a human problem, they are reluctant to say: "O brother, please forgive me." This kind of hesitation is against the spirit of faith. A true man of faith will say to another: "Forgive me," just as easily as he says to God: "O Lord, forgive me." *Tawbah* is an inner spirit, a readiness to atone for every kind of mistake.

LET THERE BE NO VAIN OR SINFUL TALK

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. Those who prove that they have the capacity to live according to this norm will be included in the list of those who will be settled in Paradise.

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.

So every man and woman must be very cautious in this regard. You must understand that when you create a nuisance for others, it is not simply a problem for those others but is also a great problem for you, because such behaviour will certainly prevent you from being included in the list of those who will enter Paradise. No one can afford to indulge in this kind of behaviour.

How should we define ‘nuisance’? 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. In this case, good

intentions and bad intentions are not relevant; the only thing that matters is the reaction of your fellow beings. 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. ‘Nuisance’ is obviously not a sin. But it is as bad as a sin, because when you hurt the sentiments of your fellow beings, your actions in terms of their results are certainly a sin.

CONSCIENCE SERVES AS A CORRECTIVE TO EGO

According to the Quran, all human beings, both men and women, are born with two opposite moral constituents. The first is mentioned in the chapter Yusuf (Joseph) as *al-nafs al-ammara* (12:53) and the second is mentioned in the chapter *Al-Qiyamah* (The Day of Resurrection) as *al-nafs al-lawwama* (75:2).

What are *al-nafs al-ammara* and *al-nafs al-lawwama*? In psychological terms, they are the ego and the conscience—with which everyone is born. Almost all human behaviour is affected by these two features. Negative behaviour is the result of *al-nafs al-ammara* and positive behaviour is the result of *al-nafs al-lawwama*.

The ego, if left uncontrolled, becomes the source of all evil, for it is a highly inflammable part of man. In a normal

situation, it remains in a dormant state, but when one's ego is negatively touched, it becomes super ego and the result is breakdown. The best way to avoid an ego problem is not to provoke it. In the absence of provocation, the ego creates no problem. But provoke the ego and it is like setting a lighted match to a powder keg.

By contrast, the conscience is the source of all kinds of good. The conscience checks you from indulging in any evil practices, and if you do indulge in any kind of misdemeanour, the conscience becomes alive and compels you to repent and amend your behaviour. The conscience in this way serves as a corrective to every human personality.

This means that whenever there is any controversy, the outcome is in your own hands. If you provoke the ego of the opposite party, you are bound to taste the bitter results of your action. Your negative action will be followed by a negative reaction, and you shall have to pay the price for your own uncalled for initiatives. The best way to confront controversial situations is to be cautious and to try to activate the conscience of the opposite party. This policy will definitely work. The verdict of your rival's conscience will certainly go in your favour. This is a simple formula for a better life.

No one is a born enemy. Enmity is a relative phenomenon of a personality. It is your own negative action that turns a person into your enemy. If you avoid negative action, the

apparent enmity will disappear. Enmity is the product of your own wrong behaviour, and through good behaviour you can make people your dear friends.

The ego and the conscience are both good and healthy parts of the human personality. The ego, in the positive sense, gives you determination; it helps you to build a strong personality and, being one of your greatest strengths, it gives you the courage to face challenges. Learn the art of ego management, and the ego will prove to be a blessing for you.

The conscience is also very important for the development of your personality. The conscience instills in you the spirit of mercy and enables you to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong. Above all, the conscience serves as the moral keeper of your personality.

AVOID UNNECESSARY CONFLICT

The Prophet of Islam started his mission in Makkah in 610 AD. At that time he used to pray by adopting the Kaaba as the *qiblah* (prayer direction). Then in 622 he migrated to Madinah where some Jewish tribes had settled. The Prophet then adopted the Jewish *qiblah* for his prayers over a period of fifteen or sixteen months. Then he again turned his face towards the Kaaba as the *qiblah* for his prayers.

This event is referred to in the Quran in the chapter *Al-Baqarah* (The Heifer):

But even if you should produce every kind of sign for those who have been given the Book, they would never accept your prayer direction, nor would you accept their prayer direction: nor would any of them accept one another's direction. If, after all the knowledge you have been given, you yield to their desires, then, you shall surely become a transgressor. (2:145)

This prophetic example embodies an important principle: avoid unnecessary controversy. At that time, the Jews were a dominant community in Madinah (then known as Yathrib). For centuries they had been using the Dome of the Rock (Jerusalem) as their *qiblah* for prayer. It was sacred not only for the Jewish community but also, because of the Jewish influence, for the non-Jewish community.

In such a situation, adopting the Kaaba as the *qiblah* was rather exceptional. In the early months, the Prophet had wanted to avoid unnecessary controversy, so he adopted the Jewish *qiblah* for his prayers five times a day. From this prophetic event we can derive a general principle, not only with regard to prayers, but in other spheres of life also.

This principle is very important; it saves you from unnecessary conflict. It gives you the opportunity to continue your mission in society without a break. It saves

you from wasting your energy and time in futile quarrels. It shows great practical wisdom. And without practical wisdom, you cannot achieve any worthy goal in this world.

A man with a mission cannot afford to engage in unnecessary conflict. As a man of dedication, he is determined about achieving his target. He always starts his activities in properly selected fields and never behaves like a grasshopper, jumping from one thing to another. A man with a mission always perseveres and avoids hindrances.

The above example set by the Prophet is an extreme example of this kind. People are not generally ready to be flexible about matters such as prayer, but the Prophet adopted this formula when dealing with this very sensitive issue of prayer.

This formula is applicable to all the affairs of human life—wife and husband relationship, family affairs, social matters, national and international issues—everywhere there are scenarios of such kind and everywhere this formula is applicable. This formula is a universal formula; in this sense you can say that it is a divine formula. It is applicable to both religious and secular affairs.

UNDERSTAND THINGS IN CORRECT PERSPECTIVE

The chapter *Al-Zumar* (Crowds) of the Quran gives a criterion by which we can recognize those who are endowed with understanding. The translation of the relevant verse is as follows:

Who listen to what is said and follow what is best in it. These are the ones God has guided; these are the people endowed with understanding. (39:18)

A statement, whether religious or secular, has different aspects to it. You can see it from different angles. No statement about the human condition is ever as simple as ‘two plus two equals to four’. So, every statement can be interpreted in different ways. Although each statement has only one real meaning, everyone has the freedom to put a right or a wrong interpretation upon it.

Whether the statement will be taken in its true sense or otherwise is determined not by the wording of the statement itself but by the mind of the listener. If the listener is objective, he knows, taking the statement point by point, how to sort out what is valid and what is invalid. He has the ability to assess and analyze things. Moreover, if he is an honest person, he will take the statement in the right way, without allowing misunderstandings to arise.

The sign of a man of reason is that he has the ability to take the statement in its right perspective. He is free of biased thinking and can take things as they are without going astray.

Anyone who has any claim to being a man of logic and reason must develop this kind of understanding. He must train his mind in such a way that he can understand things in their correct perspective. This is a very great asset for both men and women.

If you want to be a right thinker, you have to train yourself and develop this quality. The first condition of right thinking is that you should be objective and be free of all kinds of bias and prejudices. You must have the ability to analyze things on a logical basis. You must know the difference between what is relevant and what is irrelevant.

Moreover, if you are to take things from the correct angle, you must be an intellectually honest person and also possess the quality of modesty. When one fails to understand things in a proper manner, it is not simply a failure of understanding, it is more than that, it is a missed opportunity.

If you take things in the right way, you develop your intellect and your personality. Do not miss the opportunity to do so.

Make yourself a complex-free person and then you will

be able to understand things without any difficulty. Make yourself free from arrogance, bias and hatred, and then, according to the above definition, you will become a person who can be described as a man of understanding. It is evident that people of understanding are not born: they are trained. Train yourself and you will become a man of understanding.

INTELLECTUAL PARTNERS

According to Islamic teachings, both men and women are equal in status. In fact, men and women are two equal halves of a single unit. Both are intellectual as well as spiritual partners to each other. In the chapter *Al-Imran* (The Family of Imran), the Quran emphasizes this principle. The relevant Quranic verse is as follows:

Their Lord accepted their prayer, saying, ‘I will deny no man or woman among you the reward of their labours. You are members one of another.’ (3:195)

‘Members one of another’ does not mean that both are one and the same in every respect. It does not mean that both are each other’s counterparts. It means rather that both are made in such a way that they can play a complementary role to each other. So, both are complementary partners to each other rather than each other’s counterparts.

There is a saying: “If all think alike, no one thinks very much.” So, uniformity between men and women could never have been good for mankind. The creation of man or woman is based then not on uniformity but on difference. Due to this, each is capable of becoming a useful partner for the other.

According to the divine scheme, man and woman were made on the principle of mutual support. Both are intellectual partners to each other; both can discuss and exchange with their partners ideas and experiences. According to the divine scheme, marriage is a communion of two such partners.

Man and woman are like two wheels. A cart runs on two wheels. Such is the case of human life: human life also needs two wheels to run smoothly and man and woman after marriage provide those two wheels. The wheels may be on different sides of the cart but they both play important roles and both are completely equal. There is no inequality between the two.

Life, to be worth living, requires a number of vital inputs, such as education, an understanding of life’s moral principles and a willingness to uphold them. Those men and women who are educated and who are trained in home discipline are better qualified to play their respective roles. Education equips both to serve as worthy partners.

The home is a single unit of society and society is a combination of different homes. According to Quranic teachings, every home must serve as a training centre for civic responsibilities and every home must supply society with better members. The home, in effect, is a school and husbands and wives are the teachers in that school. As good teachers they produce healthy homes and this in turn makes for make a healthy society. In this sense, a husband and a wife are the builders of a society. Indeed, they are the builders of a nation.

It is a fact that men and women are both different in nature, but this difference is good for their respective roles, provided both learn the art of difference management. This habit will save their time and prevent them from being distracted from worthwhile pursuits. They will then be better able to play their roles in domestic and social life.

Nature has provided them with different fields of work, like intellectual progress, spiritual development, and giving assistance in establishing peace in society. This is the true role of both men and women. Moreover, this is the only criterion for a successful marriage.

A PREDICTABLE CHARACTER

According to the Quran, a true believer is one who has a predictable character. In the chapter *Al-Baqarah* (The Heifer) the Quran says:

Virtuous are those who, despite their love for it, give away their wealth to their relatives and to orphans and the very poor, and to travellers and those who ask [for charity], and to set slaves free, and who attend to their prayers and pay the alms, and who keep their pledges when they make them, and show patience in hardship and adversity, and in times of distress. Such are the true believers; and such are the God-fearing. (2:177)

This Quranic verse tells us what kind of moral qualities a true believer has. The summing up of these qualities is that he is a predictable character. In every situation, you can believe with certainty that he will do this and he will not do that.

For example, if he promises you something in the course of his dealings with you, you can feel convinced that he will not break his word. He will certainly fulfil his promise. If you are in his neighbourhood, you can believe with certainty that he is not going to create any problems for you.

Being predictable in character is the best description of a true human being. Man is a social animal: he lives in a society and every time he is with other people he must exhibit the best human traits, the most important of which is his predictability. He must always fulfil predictions about himself and live up to the expectations of others regarding

his speech and behaviour. His dealings should invariably be fair and just according to the accepted social norms.

A predictable character, in projecting a better image of your personality, has many benefits. It is the source of all kinds of social good

The quality of being predictable promotes high values in a society, such as mutual confidence, and it removes all kinds of negative feelings such as hate, intolerance and indifference. It, moreover, obviates any occasion for complaint, protest or conflict and prevents unnecessary misunderstanding, etc.

All good machines are predictable, but there is a difference between a man and a machine. A machine is a lifeless mechanism, the contrived product of technology, but man's predictable character is the outcome of his intellectual awakening, his ability to control his emotions, and the repeated demonstration of his just behaviour. On the one hand, it gives peace of mind to the person himself and on the other hand it helps promote a peaceful atmosphere in the society.

A predictable character means a self-disciplined character; it is a sign that the person who shows this kind of behaviour is a man of a high calibre. He has that admirable quality of being realistic in his approach. He is a positive thinker and free of all kinds of negative thought. Only men of

predictable character can build a better society. There is no alternative to this.

The whole of nature is completely predictable. Nature will accept only those men and women who prove to be as predictable as other parts of nature.

DON'T LIVE IN SUSPICION

One of the divine commandments given in the Quran is that of avoiding suspicion. In the chapter *Al-Hujurat* (The Apartments), the Quran gives important guidance:

Believers, avoid much suspicion. Indeed, some suspicion is a sin. (49:12)

Suspicion means believing something to be bad without there being any substantial evidence. Allowing suspicion to become a habit can have a disastrous effect on any society. In moral terms, suspicion is a sin and in the legal sense it is a crime. In both cases, it is to be completely avoided.

The Prophet once said: “Do not be suspicious of your fellow men. Suspicion is tantamount to a lie.” When you suspect another person of some wrongdoing and you have no irrefutable evidence in support of your suspicion, you are committing falsehood. In other words, you are telling a lie.

It is said that man is a social animal. Collective living is

must for mankind in this world. And collective living is always based on mutual trust. Without mutual trust, no healthy society can be established. In a society where people are subject to misgivings and everyone becomes suspicious of everyone else, there can be no mutual trust.

The habit of suspicion is like smoking. It not only ruins the health of the individual who has this bad habit, but it also pollutes the whole of the social atmosphere. Suspicion is just like moral pollution. Just as air pollution is harmful for everyone so also is this kind of moral pollution. It is, in fact, like a spiritual pollution.

All those living in a society where the majority of its members are of a suspicious cast of mind, are bound to inhale its morally polluted air. Everyone is bound to suffer from bad health in terms of morality. So, suspicion is not an individual, but rather a social evil.

In such a society, everyone becomes unpredictable, causing mutual trust to disappear. And an absence of mutual trust leads to many other problems. For example, in such a society, no one will dare to support any other person and then there can be no development of the culture of friendship.

There will be no unity and solidarity in such a society. This being so, its members will lose their self-confidence and will not venture to launch any large-scale project. This is

because such projects need collective efforts and collective efforts are not possible in a society where people live in an atmosphere of suspicion.

Suspicion is not a single evil; it leads to many other evils. Suspicion is like a poisonous weed which rapidly multiplies in a jungle of moral evils. Suspicion has no plus points. On all counts it has only negative points. Anyone who wants to inculcate sound thinking in his mind must avoid suspicion at all costs.

When the individual develops the habit of suspicion, it gradually becomes his second nature. He starts suspecting everything, he loses conviction and he feels that every man and woman except himself is a suspicious person. He does not realize that suspicion is the result of confused thinking and that having a suspicious nature is very dangerous for himself as well as for other individuals.

Suspicion is a kind of confusion and confusion is like poison to the mind. It is quite in order to form opinions about others, but it is completely wrong to form opinions about others based on suspicion.

WISH WELL, BE HONEST

In the chapter *Al-A'raf* (The Heights) of the Quran, it is mentioned that when the Prophet was assigned the duty of prophethood, he came to his community and said:

I am conveying my Lord's messages to you and I am your well-wisher and your honest adviser. (7:68)

The Prophet said this in the context of his divine mission. But this declaration also has a greater application in that it gives us two basic principles upon which to build a healthy society, that is, well-wishing and honesty. If you want to have a better society, these two principles should be adhered to, for there is no better formula for social re-engineering than the inculcation of the spirit of well-wishing and honesty in all members of society. When the majority of the individuals making up society possess these qualities, that is the best guarantee of a better society.

What is well-wishing? Well-wishing means that every member of a society is free of hatred for others, and is able to remain detached from the bad experiences which are the fault of others. He is able to love other members of society in spite of grievances.

Grievance is an unavoidable part of social life, so a member of society can wish others well only when he is able to downplay his grievances sufficiently to be able to maintain good relations with other members of his society.

What is honesty? An honest person is one who is a trustworthy person. This quality is also vital to the betterment of social living. The best society is one whose members are entirely trustworthy and responsible.

Trustworthy individuals make trustworthy societies, and trustworthy societies make trustworthy nations, and trustworthy nations provide the basis for better international relationships.

The criterion of well-wishing and honesty has a two-fold impact. On the one hand, it is the only source of individual development; it reflects the best individual character. Individuals for their own benefit need many qualities, but the essence of all these qualities can be summed up in these two words: well-wishing and honesty.

The other aspect of these two qualities is that they are the sole basis on which a better society may be built. This is the only right starting point, if you wish to have a better society. Start the process from the individual character, try to condition individuals along the lines of well-wishing and honesty, and you will find that on the culmination of the process, you will have reached your social goal.

Well-wishing and honesty are both positive qualities. If negative thinking is the source of all evil, positive thinking is the source of all kinds of goodness. So, well-wishing and honesty are not just two qualities: they include more than two thousand qualities. One who has the qualities of well-wishing and honesty will certainly possess all kinds of other good qualities.

Well-wishing and honesty are two pillars of character

building and it is on these two pillars that the whole edifice of social uplift can be founded. If these pillars are weak, the whole structure will prove to be weak, but if these two pillars are strong, the whole structure will have everlasting strength.

LEARNING LESSONS

One of the major concerns of the Quran is to inculcate in every man and woman the spirit of contemplation. In the chapter *Al-Hijr* (The Rocky Tract) the Quran refers to certain historical phenomena and then says:

There are certainly signs in that for those who can learn a lesson. (15:75)

Natural phenomena as well as historical events have great lessons for those who go deeply into them and learn lessons from them. The Quran, in referring to them, attempts to develop the thinking habit, so that readers may gain from them intellectually.

Jesus Christ once said: "Man does not live by bread alone." (Matthew 4:4) This is an important teaching of all religions. This means that all men and women need two kinds of nourishment: the physical and the spiritual. Everyone knows the importance of physical nourishment

but, where spiritual nourishment is concerned, people remain in ignorance of how vital it is.

Man cannot afford to live in a state of physical starvation, for physical starvation brings on weakness and disease. Everyone, being aware of how debilitating this can be, makes sure that he or she has proper sustenance.

The same is true of spiritual starvation. Spiritual starvation makes you a weak personality. It erodes the faculty of wisdom. It deprives you of moral values. Spiritual starvation may go to such an extreme that one may face spiritual death.

To keep spirituality alive, spiritual food is at all times a necessity. The source of that spiritual food is thinking or contemplation. Moreover, one should develop the habit of not taking things at face value. The deeper aspect of things must be gone into so that their inner meaning may be discovered. This requires an uninterrupted intellectual process.

The individual must keep his mind alive every day and every night. When he studies a book, when he observes a scene, when he is confronted by a historical event, he must properly activate his mental faculties in order to learn some spiritual lesson from it. He must endeavour to turn his experiences into meaningful lessons.

Men and animals both have experiences of different kinds

each day and night, but the difference is that animals take them at face value and are unaware of the need to discover their deeper meaning.

But man has the capacity for what is called ‘conceptual thought’. Man can penetrate to the deeper aspect of things, and then learn from them hidden lessons. This difference is very important. Those who fail to take lessons from experience, be they men or women, are reducing themselves to the level of animals.

Spirituality is a requirement of man: animals have no such requirement. Animals can live without spirituality, but man cannot. Man cannot afford to deprive himself of spirituality. It is in man’s own interests to keep his mind alive, so that he may not lose any opportunity to learn spiritual lessons from the happenings of life.

Spirituality makes you a creative thinker: without creativity, man is little better than a stone statue.

CHARACTER ASSASSINATION

During the Prophet’s time, there were certain people in Madinah who wanted to defame a member of the Prophet’s family. It was a case of character assassination. At that juncture some verses were revealed in the Quran, which

appear in the chapter *Al-Nur* (Light). The translation of one of these verses is quoted below:

Those who desire that indecencies should spread among the believers, will have a painful chastisement in this world and the Hereafter. God knows, and you do not know. (24:19)

According to Islamic teachings, character assassination is a heinous crime. An act of this kind is against humanity, against ethical values, and against Quranic teachings. Those guilty of any ethical crime of this nature will be severely punished by God Almighty.

If you criticize someone on the basis of undeniable facts which stand up to objective scrutiny, you are acting lawfully and are exercising your moral rights as set forth in the divine book. If your intention is good, your action will be treated as promoting reform. Moreover, you will receive reward from God Almighty.

But if you are abusing someone, or using unethical or immoral language without any evidence to support what you say, then you are committing a crime. The use of abusive language against anyone, which has no factual base, is an act of character assassination. No one has the right to use such language. Criticism based on facts is constructive, but making allegations without any basis in fact is the worst kind of crime.

In this regard, two courses are open to all: if an individual has an accusation to make against anyone and he has undeniable proof in support of what he has to say, then he is allowed to express his views. If, on the other hand, he has an adverse opinion about anyone, but has no evidence to support his negative remarks, then he has to remain silent. No one is allowed to make damaging remarks against anyone if he cannot produce irrefutable proofs of the truth of his statement.

The Prophet once said: “If you make a negative remark against someone while that person is innocent, then it will have a boomerang effect. Your negative remark will turn back upon you and you will find that remark being applied to you.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, 6045)

The practice of character assassination is injurious to the whole of society; it spreads the feeling of mistrust. It causes misunderstanding and the result is very dangerous, for everyone becomes suspicious of the other members of society.

In such a society, no healthy activity is possible and no positive planning can be done. The habit of character assassination is bad for all and good for none.

The whole of society must be alert to anyone indulging in this kind of activity and the wrongdoer must be openly condemned. Indeed, social ostracism is the only check by

which this kind of baneful habit can be eliminated from society.

Character assassination is more dangerous than physical assassination. Any society that ignores this heinous practice is callous and inhuman.

DON'T BE A SLAVE TO YOUR DESIRES

Desires are an integral part of human nature. All men and women have a strong tilt towards fulfilling their desires and this is their greatest weakness. Pointing out the gravity of this failing, the chapter *Al-Jathiyah* (Kneeling) of the Quran admonishes us on this subject in alarming terms:

Consider the one who has taken his own desire as a deity, whom God allows to stray in the face of knowledge, sealing his ears and heart and covering his eyes—who can guide such a person after God [has abandoned him]? Will you not take heed? (45:23)

Desire is an essential part of one's personality. But it is like grease to an engine and not like the driver of that engine. Desire can serve as a motive force, but mindless yielding to desire will lead to disaster. If you want to be successful, try to steer your life in a rational manner. Don't give it over to

your desires. Remember that where desire is blind, reason has the capacity to discern the true nature of things.

It is said that man is a slave to desire. But this saying expresses only half of the truth. It is a fact that the human mind is full of desires but, at the same time, it is also true that man's mind has the capacity for logical thought.

When you find that your mind is overwhelmed by desire, examine that desire in the light of reality. Assess it in terms of its potential results, and find out objectively whether it is feasible or not to fulfil it. Judge it by all the possible effects it can have, whether good or bad. Then, after a complete examination, if you are satisfied that its results will be beneficial, go ahead and fulfil your desire—but with great care and planning.

Don't run after your desires. Even if you are following your desires, check and re-check them again and again. Don't wait for the end result, but keep evaluating and re-evaluating them as you go along. It is also very important to turn back if you find that you have taken a wrong step. Stop your journey before reaching the point of no return.

Then there are different kinds of desires, some of which are improper. You have to distance yourself from desires of this kind. Other desires are quite proper and you may entertain them. But always keep this fact in mind that every

desire must remain within certain boundaries. Even good desires are useful only in a limited manner.

Right desires are helpful for the development of your character. But bad desires are detrimental to your personality. If you follow your bad desires, they can ruin your future to the extent that you cannot ever recover from their effects. You must therefore live a life that is reason-based and not desire-based.

Never judge a desire for its own sake: always judge it in terms of the result of its fulfilment. This result is the only criterion by which it may be determined whether a desire is good or bad for your life. Desire cannot be eliminated, but it can certainly be controlled. Don't become a victim of your desires. Prove to be well in control of your desires.

THE MONEY CULTURE

Relative to money, there are two cultures prevailing in our society—money for the sake of man and man for the sake of money. The Quran rejects the concept of man for the sake of money, subscribing to the other concept that money is for the sake of man. In the chapter *Al-Takathur* (Greed for More and More) the Quran has this to say:

Greed for more and more distracted you [from God]
till you reached the grave. (102: 1-2)

According to the Quranic concept, money or material goods are only meant to fulfil man's needs. Money is not a goal in itself. Money can fulfil the physical requirements of man, but man is more than a physical entity. Man is an intellectual being, and as such can find fulfilment in pursuing some alternative goal which is higher than that of money.

What is that higher goal for a man? It is intellectual development; it is to unfold the spiritual nature of his personality; it is to enhance his mental capacity. All these things are superior to man's physical being.

When man takes money as something which will fulfil his needs, he remains on the right path. He can travel along the road of life smoothly and successfully. But when he takes money as his supreme goal, he goes astray. For both men and women money-oriented thinking is the greatest source of distraction from the right path.

Man is greater than money. Man should live for a higher purpose and he should use money solely as his material base for constructive activity. Money is certainly useful for man, but it is certainly a wrong option if he focuses on the acquisition and hoarding of money as the principal ends in his life.

Money gives you material comfort, but it cannot give you wisdom and learning. The best course is for you to live as

a seeker of truth, wisdom, learning and ultimately a goal that is elevated. That is the only right way of life for man.

It is true that money does effectively render material assistance. In that sense, it is a good helper. But it is not a good leader. A money-obsessed man is like one who has made money his leader. Money which is commensurate with needs is good, but excess money is bad. Save yourself from greed and then you will be able to save yourself from being overly money-minded.

Money is very helpful in some respects, for example, when it is used to acquire knowledge or to establish a library or a college. There are many such activities which need money. Indeed, without money it is very difficult to have a successful life on this earth.

Money has both its plus points and its minus points. One plus point of money is that it provides a good material source for worthwhile objectives, while a minus point is that its possession can be like taking an overdose of sleeping pills. And an overdose of sleeping pills sometimes kills the person who takes it.

Money for the sake of money is bad, but money for the sake of some higher purpose is good; money as a necessity is good, but the money culture per se is a disaster. The money culture reduces a man to the animal level.

NO DOUBLE STANDARDS

According to the Quran, it is a sign of a bad character to have double standards. Two verses of the chapter *Al-Saff* (Ranks) are of relevance:

O faithful! Why do you say one thing and do another?
It is most hateful to God that you do not practise what
you preach. (61:2-3)

Having double standards is anathema in this world. It is a kind of hypocrisy and hypocrisy is completely unwanted in Islam as well as in nature. A person with double standards believes himself to be a good person but, in the eyes of others, he is certainly a bad person. Double standards are alien to personal integrity. Integrity is a part of faith. One who loses his integrity will consequently lose his faith.

Double standards are a perpetual obstacle to personality development. One who habitually observes double standards will not be a strong personality. People of this kind will inevitably live with a weak personality and die with a weak personality.

Such people are devoid of sincerity. They say one thing but do something else. It is their petty interests which control their behaviour. They are not controlled by firm principles but by immediate gain. Their behaviour is interest-based rather than principle-based.

The character of those with double standards is not predictable. Such people talk much, but fail to back up their avowed resolutions with firmness of action. As a result, they will very soon lose the trust of their society. They appear to be human but, in fact, they resemble sub-human creatures.

Having double standards means saying one thing and then doing something else. This kind of character is completely alien to the world of nature. No animal shows a character of this kind. It is only man who indulges in this kind of inhuman behaviour.

Our tongues were not made for double talk. Our minds were not created for double thinking. Our personality was not made to live a life like this. One who descends to double talk and double thinking is bound to become unwanted in this world of truth. Our world is a world of truth and it is not ready to accept anything that is not based on truth.

Having double standards means being a characterless person. A man of character cannot afford this kind of duality. A man of character is a man of principle, a man of integrity. A man of character is, in short, a trustworthy person.

Those flawed by such duality are unable to achieve any great success. All the super achievers of history were men of integrity. Those with double standards will lose all

those qualities which are essential for super achievement. Double standards make people directionless. And one who is directionless cannot embark on a journey of any importance

People of this kind always believe that they are very clever, but they are not. The really clever person is one who can rightfully convince others to trust him. Those with double standards inevitably fail to establish goodwill or trust in society. Such people display themselves as beautiful flowers but, in fact, they are flowers of plastic, not real flowers.

NO POLLUTION

Pollution of any kind is against the scheme of God the Creator. It is man's duty, therefore, to maintain the purity of nature. Failure to do so is, in religious terms, a sin and, in legal terms, a crime. Man is permitted to exploit natural resources for their benefits, but he must do so without destroying the natural order of things.

One verse worth quoting from the Quran on this subject is from the chapter *Al-A'raf* (The Heights); another relevant verse is from the chapter *Al-Ankabut* (The Spider):

Do not corrupt the land after it has been set in order.
This is for your own good, if you are true believers
(7:85)

Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of the evil which men's hands have done: and so He will make them taste the fruit of some of their doings, so that they may turn back from evil. (30:41)

The message of these two verses is that God Almighty has created things in their best order and man is allowed to enjoy these things for his own benefit. But he is not allowed to destroy the balance of nature. Man was born as a free creature, but man's freedom ends where his mismanagement of nature begins.

In these verses, the Quran refers to land pollution and water pollution by name but, in their general application, all kinds of pollution are included, such as air pollution, noise pollution, etc.

Man is not the creator of this world. Man is only a beneficiary of God's creation. Man ought to be aware of this fact, for transgressing his limits will prove to be disastrous for him. All kinds of pollution are man-made, (pollution is unknown in nature; nature never created any kind of pollution) but where man has the capacity to pollute nature, he does not have the power to create another world. So, becoming sinful before God and depriving himself of the only source of life, that is, nature, is a double loss for man. This state of affairs requires man to be very careful, to be very cautious, otherwise he will be compelled to pay a very heavy price for his negligence.

Man must, of course, utilize natural bounties but he must do so with great care, because he has no alternative to the present world. The greatest minus point of human beings is that they can enjoy this world but have no power to create a new world.

What is pollution? It is the making of things impure. Things are pure by their nature; it is man who, due to his bad management, makes things impure. Man must know his limitations. Any move to pollute nature is like a suicidal act.

The most crucial aspect of this issue is that, in terms of creation, man is completely helpless; he cannot of his own create a single particle. He cannot even create a single leaf of a tree, nor can he create a single drop of water. This being the situation, man must become fully aware of his shortcomings and try to live in this world as a responsible member of society.

HIGH THINKING

The chapter *Al-Ahzab* (The Confederates) of the Quran refers to what is called *zikr Allah* in the Quran. The translation of the relevant verse of the said chapter is as under:

Believers, remember God often. (33:41)

God Almighty is the Creator of the Universe. God is the highest reality. God is beyond time and space. God is omnipresent. God is greater than all great things. God is supreme in every sense of the word.

Remembering God, in other words, means remembering the Higher Reality. This kind of remembrance inculcates in one's mind, high thinking and high thinking is the source of all kinds of high ideals. It is high thinking that makes one's personality a great personality. High thinking leads to spiritual uplift and intellectual development.

There are two worlds—material world and immaterial world. High thinking means thinking about the immaterial world. High thinking means living in the immaterial world. It is this immaterial world that is called the spiritual world, and it is spiritual thinking that leads to intellectual development.

Living in the immaterial world does not mean abandoning the material world and taking refuge in jungles and mountains. No, immaterial living means to extract immaterial items from the material world. When you are able to extract spiritual lessons from the material world, you are a spiritual person, that is, you have discovered the inner meaning of the external world.

Material world is full of immaterial lessons. In every material experience there are some meaningful lessons.

Find out these lessons and you are spiritually a developed person.

Materialism means living in material desires like money, fame, power, etc. Immaterialism means living in goals that are higher than material goods. This kind of living inculcates high thinking, and high thinking leads to spirituality.

High thinking means living in high ideals. When you set a goal above the material goods, you are living in high thinking. High thinking is the greatest achievement in this world. High thinking is the only wealth that cannot be looted or destroyed.

Air is a physical demonstration of high thinking. Air travels and moves around, but there is no clash or confrontation, so is the case of high thinking. A person who is a high thinker cannot waste his time in clashes and confrontations, he will set his journey beyond all these things. Nothing can stop the speed of air. So is the case of a high thinker. Nothing has the power to stop the journey of a high thinker.

A high thinker is free of all kinds of negative thought. He is free of anger and lust; he is free of intolerance and confrontation, he is free of hate, he is free of frustration and despair, he is free of tension and stress, he is free of complaint and protest.

A high thinker is free of all kinds of negativity and he is full of all kinds of positive thoughts. High thinking makes a

man superman. High thinking develops the very important ability to act and not to react. Such a person is able to ignore all the problems and avail all the opportunities.

IGNORE THEM POLITELY

Life is a series of different kinds of experiences, both good and bad. When we have a good experience, that suits us perfectly well, but what to do when we have some bad experience? The Quran gives us a very simple answer: Avoid any unpleasantness by remaining non-committal.

This principle is set forth in the chapter *Al-Muzzammil* (The Wrapped One) of the Quran. When the Prophet of Islam started his mission in Makkah in 610 AD, the situation was highly unfavourable. Often he faced unwanted situations, and at that juncture this verse was revealed in the Quran:

Bear patiently with what they say, and ignore them politely. (73:10)

In such a predicament, patience is not a passive attitude; it demonstrates great wisdom. When you keep your patience, you are saving your time and energy. Being patient in a difficult situation means that if you sense that the other party is not in a responsive mood, you should adopt the principle of avoidance, give him an evasive reply and then proceed with your own affairs. It is only if you see

that the other party is listening to you in earnest that you should present your point of view to them. This principle is very important in social life. Society is a combination of different kinds of people and the way we live our lives in society is very often determined not by our own choices but by the will of others. If you try to convince all the members of society of your wish to prevail, you will seldom succeed, so practice the art of doing what is possible and leaving what is impossible.

This is a sign of maturity. The mature person remains even-tempered in situations which are impossible for him to change. If it is possible to bring about a change in the situation, then try for change, but when change is not possible, simply adopt the formula of adjustment.

This formula is important not only in society but also in your family. In the domestic sphere, there are always occasions when you feel that you cannot convince other family members of the rectitude of your views. That is when you should follow this formula: For you, your way of thinking, and for me, mine.

Studies show that difference is a part of life. Everyone has a different mindset, everyone sees things from a different angle, and everyone has different tastes. It is almost impossible to bring about uniformity among people. Trying to establish uniformity is like trying to make the impossible possible.

In such a situation, adopting the above Quranic formula, 'Live and let live', which is based on a practical principle, is the only common sense solution. It means simply that you should live by your own principles and let other people live by their own principles. This is maturity, this is adjustment, this is the positive way of life.

'Ignore them politely' means deal with them in a positive manner. If the questions put to you are of a contentious nature, respond to them in an indirect way or simply change the subject. To change the subject is also a polite way of answering. This kind of answer shows maturity and a disciplined mind. Moreover, it is the sign of a strong personality.

LIFE IN A STATE OF URGENCY

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* (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. It can bring about a sea change in every human being.

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 compels you to 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 dispels all those negative desires, 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. The concept of death controls desires. Death enables one to live a healthy and constructive life.

The concept of death compulsorily makes you live a purposeful life, it makes you set your target and priorities, and then exert all your energy and time for that target. One who is aware of the reality of death, cannot afford to live a purposeless life. Death is not a negative event in one's life; it has a completely positive lesson.

MUTUAL CONSULTATION

One of the teachings of the Quran is *shura*, that is, mutual consultation. The Quran inculcates the spirit of *shura* among believers, so that they may decide upon all issues by discussion and counselling. In the chapter *Al-Shura*

(Mutual Consultation), this principle—placed in the context of virtues which will entitle believers to God's beneficence—is mentioned as *“those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation and spend out of what We have provided for them”*. (42:38)

What is consultation? Consultation means the act of discussing something with somebody before making a decision about it. Consultation is not an isolated habit. The willingness to engage in it results directly from qualities like modesty, sincerity, caution and the spirit of learning. Without these qualities, no one can engage sincerely in consultation. Belief in God brings with it all these virtues and makes one absolutely sincere in all aspects of life. It is this sincerity as well as modesty that compels a believer not to decide upon anything without first consulting others.

The best form of consultation is that in which one seeks others' advice, while endeavouring to share their experiences. A man who never consults anyone else is only half a man. While a man who does consult others becomes a whole human being. Consultation is very important, not just for the individual but also for the whole of society. As far as the individual is concerned, it is through consultation or discussion that he develops his personality. Consultation makes one a better person and a society comprising individuals of this kind becomes a wise society.

In such a society people trust and help each other. Indeed, the

whole of society becomes like a family. Here consultation does not only mean addressing major issues. Issues of that kind no doubt warrant consultation but more important is personal consultation. Everyone needs to receive others' advice in his or her daily life. The habit of consultation creates a degree of trust between the different members of society. Mutual trust and the spirit of cooperation are very important for building the best kind of society, and consultation is an essential part of that process.

Consultation is not an individual exercise: it is a bilateral procedure. Consultation is a mutual exchange—in its true spirit, a great source of intellectual development. When two individuals discuss some subject with each other, a third idea is bound to emerge, and it is this third idea which leads to personality development.

Consultation in one sense is a give and take culture. When you discuss an issue with someone, it is not simply a verbal exchange. During a discussion you take something from the other and also give something to the other.

Fruitful consultation has no conditions attached to it. It can be conducted between the rich and the poor, between seniors and juniors, between the educated and the uneducated, between the young and the old, between man and woman, in short, between everyone and everyone else. This all-encompassing nature of consultation makes it fruitful to the ultimate extent.

One precondition for effective consultation is that both the parties should have open minds. Both parties should be ready to accept opinions on their merits and without any bias.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REASON

The Quran gives great importance to the faculty of reason. There are dozens of verses in the Quran that emphasize the importance of rational thinking. One such verse is found in the chapter *Al-Anfal* (The Spoils of War). The translation of this verse is as under:

The worst creatures in God's eyes are those who are deaf and dumb, and who do not use their reason.
(8:22)

What is reason? Reason is the power of the mind to think, understand, and form judgements by a process of logic. This power is given to every human being by the Creator. Reason is the greatest faculty of every man and woman. Reason alone is the distinctive quality of a human being.

Reason is not an isolated faculty. According to the Quran, the fact is that the whole creation is based on reason. The religion revealed by God is also a rational religion. Everyone is required to plan one's life by using reason. Those who fail to do so are according to the Quran deaf,

dumb and blind (2:18). Only that belief is a valid belief which is based on reason and understanding.

Reason is so important that it is said that man is a rational animal. Man has an unlimited mind, full of unlimited capacity, but mind is like a hidden treasure. It is everyone's first duty to unfold his or her potential. One who dies without unfolding one's intellectual potential, is dying like an animal. Such a person fails to fulfil the creation plan of God.

Reason needs to be developed. According to the Quran there are several ways of this intellectual development—study, contemplation, observation, taking lessons from experiences, etc. It means that every man and woman must inculcate the spirit of learning in their personality.

Reason cannot be created but it can certainly be developed. So, everyone has a twofold duty, developing his reason or mind, and then using it in different activities of life. Reason is like a potential in the human mind, and it is the duty of every man and woman to turn this potential into actuality.

According to the Quran, reason has both the points: plus point as well as minus point. When you use your reason with sincerity and modesty, reason will then serve as a constructive and healthy agent of your personality. But if you become a victim of egoism, then reason makes you an arrogant person and that is the minus point of reason.

According to the Quran, to understand the Quran requires deep contemplation. Without applying reason no one can undertake deep contemplation. In this sense reason is very important for the understanding of the Quran. If you read the Quran you will find that the Quran always addresses the reason. So, without developing the reason no one can understand the Quran properly.

Reason is the key to all kinds of better understanding—religious matters, spiritual matters, social matters, or any matter can be understood by applying reason. Reason gives us the master key to a better understanding of all kinds of human issues.

SENSITIVITY AS AN INNER CHECK

All men and women have a unique kind of faculty, that is, conscience, which is the centre of moral sensitivity. This faculty is a natural gift to all. The Quran refers to this faculty in the chapter *Al-A'raf* (The Heights):

If an evil impulse from Satan provokes you, seek refuge with God; He is all-hearing, and all-knowing. When any evil suggestion from Satan touches those who fear God, they are instantly alerted and become watchful; but the followers of devils are led relentlessly into error by them. They never desist. (7:200-202)

These Quranic verses give clear guidance on how to maintain our spiritual purity. Each time a person comes under the influence of an evil temptation, his conscience, or his moral sensitivity, becomes alive. It warns him almost instantly, emerging like a moral teacher. It persuades man not to succumb to wrong temptations and not to deviate from the right path.

Anyone who listens to his inner voice is surely saved from becoming a victim of evil forces. But one who fails to pay heed to it will lose the opportunity to act righteously. And that will be his last chance.

Nature has endowed us with two very important faculties: reason and conscience. Reason works in logical terms, while conscience works in terms of sensitivity. Experience shows that reason sometimes guides us rightly but, quite often, its analysis is wrong, being based on faulty logic. Conscience, on the other hand, never fails. Conscience is the strongest check against wrongdoing.

The difference between a man and an animal is that a man has a conscience, while an animal is quite lacking in this faculty. Animals are not sensitive to right and wrong. They entertain no such ideas. But man has the highly distinctive quality of possessing a conscience.

Anyone who wants to live on this planet as an honest person or as a man of character must keep a guard upon his

conscience or moral sensitivity. Nothing else can guarantee one's personal morality.

There are numerous examples in history of many men and women who decided to do some evil deed and then their conscience was aroused, their moral sensitivity was awakened and the result was positive: they abandoned their evil plan. They refrained from indulging in the evil practices that they had had in mind. Conscience, or the faculty of sensitivity, is the greatest bounty from God to man. Conscience, or the faculty of sensitivity, is like a divine judge sitting in everyone's heart.

There are some who observe that human sensitivity is a kind of natural weakness. Should one adopt the formula of tit for tat? This would be an unwise course to follow, for the 'tit for tat' formula has nothing positive about it. It is simply a reaction. And reaction cannot work. You have to see things in terms of result and not in terms of your own sentiments. When you are living in a society, you cannot afford any kind of arrogant behaviour. You have to be a realist. You have to be tolerant. You have to adjust with other people, rather than trying to impose your opinion upon them.

NO AGGRESSION

According to Quranic teachings, aggression is completely prohibited in Islam. No circumstance whatsoever permits believers to indulge in any act of aggression. Chapter *Al-Tawbah* (Repentance) makes this quite clear. The translation of the relevant verse is as follows:

As long as they act straight with you, act straight with them. God loves those who are righteous. (9:7)

This verse in the Quran stresses the need for peaceable conduct towards others, but it is implied that if others breach the peace, you must reassess the whole situation, re-plan your strategy and reconsider your future course of action.

This does not mean that, in the case of a breach of peace, you should at once commence hostilities. This kind of instant reaction is not permitted in Islam. In fact, war is a last resort, at a stage when all efforts to de-fuse the situation have failed, and there is no other alternative.

It must be conceded that peace is good for everyone. Initially, everyone has the same peace-loving nature that you have. So, if there is a breach of the peace, do not act in haste. Perhaps there are options other than war. For example, if there is a misunderstanding, you should try to clear it up by amicable means. The option to wage war is the hardest option in human life and is counterproductive for

both sides. It is permitted only under the law of necessity. In a normal situation, Muslims would be expected to carry on their affairs by peaceful methods—a course of action that will continue to bear fruit, unless there is some unavoidable breakdown.

Aggression, being an expression of anger, and not the outcome of any reasoned planning, cannot serve any positive purpose. It should not, therefore, be a course that anyone should consider following. Experience shows that aggression, a form of uncontrolled behaviour, is bad for both the aggressor and the victim of aggression. Indeed, leaping into aggression is leaping to one's own destruction.

Considering that aggression entails great losses in terms of money and human life, and also in terms of opportunity, what drives one to aggression? It is nothing but anger and vengefulness, or the urge to exploit. All these stimuli are negative, and no negative action resulting from them is going to yield any positive results. Positive ends can be achieved only through positive action. No wise man can countenance aggression.

Aggression breeds hatred, and hatred is the source of all kinds of evil. Aggression, therefore, is disruptive of the fabric of society. People who follow aggressive instincts cannot, therefore, play any constructive role in building a better society and should ponder upon how even the

animals in the jungle live peacefully without indulging in aggression.

The alternative to aggression is peace. Peaceful behaviour is the best course, leading inevitably to peaceful ends. There is no logic to aggression. But there is every reason to support peace. Constructive activity, of whatever nature, stems from long-term, unflagging efforts and aggression only disrupts this process.

Aggression is the ugliest form of human behaviour, while peaceable action is the finest conduct in which both men and women can engage.

DE-CONDITION YOUR MIND, INTROSPECT

The chapter *Al-Isra*’ (The Night Journey) of the Quran points out a problem—that of mindset—which is common to all men and women:

Say to them, ‘Everyone acts in his own way and only your Lord knows best who is rightly guided.’ (17:84)

Acting in one’s own way, that is, according to one’s own mindset, is a psychological phenomenon. It stems from a set of attitudes or fixed ideas that vary from one individual to another and are often difficult to change.

The human mindset, according to which all men and

women think, is conditioned by the social environment. But this mindset does not provide a set of moral standards. Only God Almighty can do that.

It is the duty of every man and woman to examine his or her mindset when he or she reaches maturity. Then he or she must discover the norms that are approved of by God and try to come to terms with the standards set by their Maker.

This process can be called the de-conditioning of conditioned minds. It is this deconditioning from which one's intellectual journey begins. It is the first duty of every human being to examine his conditioned mind, scrutinize it by intensive introspection, and then correct his way of thinking.

Without undergoing the process of de-conditioning, one is bound to live by one's own suppositions. De-conditioning purifies the mind. De-conditioning makes each human being aware of the creation plan of God, of the laws of nature and of the external realities that have remained hidden from one's mind because of conditioning.

It is this intellectual process that guarantees right thinking, right action and right planning in this world. Without de-conditioning our minds, we are unable to understand the truth beyond our mental ambit. We are not able to comprehend the realities exterior to the human mind.

Man is born in a world that is not of his own creation. The world was created by God and it is God who has determined the laws of this world. Man has no option but to discover this divine law and follow it with complete sincerity. And through de-conditioning, one enables oneself to carry on this process. As man cannot create a world of his own, he must follow the laws of the Creator of this world. This is a prime requirement for every man and woman.

It is not a question of coercion: in reality, it is a matter of right guidance for the person who is trying to know on his own what is unknowable. Only the Creator can know what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. So one should submit to the divine will in all humility and sincerity. It is in one's best interests to follow this path. One always thinks according to one's mindset, and one's actions are but the expression of one's mindset. If the mindset is right, one's actions will be right, but if the mindset is wrong, one's actions will also be wrong. So it is essential for every man and woman to de-condition his or her mind so that he or she may be able to think in an unbiased manner.

IN SPITE OF OLD AGE

Old age is generally believed to be a burden, an unwanted situation. This view is put in perspective in a verse of the

Quran, in the chapter *Al-Nahl* (Bees). The translation of this verse is as follows:

God created you; then He shall cause you to die: and some shall have their lives prolonged to abject old age, ceasing to know anything after once having had knowledge. God is all knowing and powerful. (16:70)

This Quranic statement gives the general picture of old age. Yet there can be an exception to this. One can overcome old age, provided one is serious about doing so. The Prophet of Islam once said that one who reads the Quran will never experience the problem of old age. He can prolong the period of his youth.

In this saying of the Prophet, reading the Quran means studying it, reflecting upon its verses, finding out its hidden meanings and plumbing the depths of its wisdom.

The Quran is a book of God, enshrining the wisdom of nature. A source of divine secrets, it has to be rediscovered every day.

It is a fact that intellectual discovery is the most thrilling of experiences. A discovery (about the pressure of water on immersed solids) made by the Greek philosopher Archimedes while he was bathing gave him such a thrill that he leapt out of his bath, shouting: 'Eureka! Eureka!' (I have found it!) Such thrill is great food for the intellect.

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

Why does old age turn into ‘abject’ old age for the common man? The reason is that he makes no thrilling discoveries. The Quran is a book of wisdom, but its wisdom is hidden between the lines. Only when one reflects upon its verses does one discover that hidden wisdom. This experience gives one the thrilling feeling of coming upon a treasure trove. Research has established that a person’s body is subject to degeneration, but the mind is not. The mind is free of decrepitude. If saved in time, the mind can be alive forever.

But this capacity of the mind is a potentiality. It is only those who can turn this potentiality into actuality who will enjoy a new lease of mental life. And this can be achieved only through reflection. But those who have no such habit and simply recite the Quran cannot benefit from this enormous potential of the mind. By birth everyone has this potential, but only those can avail of it who are ready to go beyond their own biases.

What is reflection upon the Quran? It is trying to go beyond its apparent meaning. It is endeavouring to find out the wisdom hidden between the lines. It is to retain its verses in your mind while trying to act according to its deeper meaning by means of serious study.

The Quran covers all the subjects in nature. It refers to all the great wisdom hidden in creation, so one who ponders upon the verses of the Quran will certainly discover in them a more sublime meaning again and again. And on each occasion this discovery will enliven his mind.

AVOIDING THE USELESS

The Quran advocates a purposeful life. It exhorts people not to indulge in useless talk or useless activity. On this subject there is a particularly apt verse in the chapter *Al-Mu'minin* (The Believers) of the Quran. Its translation is as follows:

Successful indeed are the believers; those who are humble in their prayer; and those who turn away from everything vain. (23:1-3)

Human pursuits fall into two categories: worthy and unworthy. A worthy pursuit is one which leads to positive results and an unworthy pursuit is one which leads to no result at all. A true believer is one who has before him a specific target, which makes him selective. He therefore makes a point of always selecting that kind of activity which is worthy and avoids that which is unworthy. It is this kind of person who will be rewarded with success by God Almighty.

Before taking any action, the believer must assess its possible result. He must anticipate its consequences. His response to any situation must be rational and well-considered and not simply an emotional outburst. This principle includes all kinds of human expressions and activities like thinking, discussion, dealing, association, shopping, outings, reading, etc. A believer must adopt this kind of behaviour in every aspect of his life, both in word and in deed.

It is a fact that we are on this planet earth for a limited time. Our lifespan being so very short, we cannot afford the luxury of wasting time and energy; we have to be very prudent. We have to select only such targets about which we can say with certainty that in the end they will yield the required result. No excuse in this regard is acceptable.

When you use your mind, use it on healthy subjects; when you speak, say whatever is good for you and good for others; when you are going to take a step, examine all the relative aspects. If there is any possibility that your step will prove to be counter-productive, then refrain from taking it.

A wise man always differentiates between a positive response and a negative reaction, between a realistic approach and an emotional approach. He invariably adopts a result-oriented policy. Jumping into things without assessing the result is a habit that only fools can afford, for

fools rush in where angels fear to tread. But a wise man cannot afford this kind of involvement.

‘Useless’ means ‘without any result’ and whatever has no result is pointless and liable to be thrown into the litterbin. If even animals follow the result-oriented path, then why cannot men and women?

If an honest person indulges in useless activities, his conscience will go against him. Before facing others, he has to face up to his own conscience and there are very few who can do that. Conscience, working as an internal check, is a moral keeper for every man and woman. Conscience never fails and if you pay heed to it, you will surely save yourself from going astray. Follow your conscience and you will surely develop into a divine personality.

MODESTY STEMS FROM REALIZATION OF GOD

The Quran promotes modest behaviour, its culture being that of modesty—an incomparable virtue. The translation of the relevant verse of the chapter *Al-Furqan* (The Criterion) of the Quran is as follows:

The true servants of the Gracious One are those who walk upon the earth with humility and when they are addressed by the ignorant ones, their response is, ‘Peace’. (25:63)

When one discovers God, one discovers at the same time that the only possible way for a person to conduct himself is with modesty. Modesty stems directly from the realization of God. It is not possible to separate it from belief in God.

In their daily prayers, believers recite the words *allahu akbar* several hundred times. *Allahu akbar* means ‘God is great’, but at the same time it implies: ‘God is great and I am not great.’ This is the genesis of modesty in the religion of Islam.

The above Quranic verse refers to the true, faithful, and loyal people of God immersed in deep spirituality, and principally it refers to the early believers or the companions of the Prophet, whose conduct was marked by humility in every aspect of life. The companions of the Prophet, having followed this principle throughout their lives, became historic models for the rest of the believers for all eternity.

According to Quranic teachings, modesty is essential in every aspect of human life—in thinking, in speech, in behaviour, in dealings, when angry or provoked, during unpleasant experiences, etc. In a situation where retaliation could be expected, instead of retaliating, the believer would say: “Let us go our own way, we have no wish to quarrel with you.”

The believer’s personality is a modest one in the complete sense of the word. Modesty has twofold benefits: first, it

makes one a better member of society. Second, it makes one a successful candidate for Paradise. Modesty is good for the present world as well as for the world hereafter.

Modesty is, moreover, the door to knowledge: it makes one a seeker, imbued with the spirit of learning. A seeker tries to know more and more about reality. And when he is modest, he can learn from everyone, irrespective of religion, status or age. Modesty is thus the master key to all kinds of success.

For a man in this world, there are two possible ways of behaving: arrogantly or modestly. According to Quranic teachings, arrogant behaviour is totally undesirable, it being unacceptable to God Almighty. Human arrogance is a most strange form of behaviour in this world, considering that all other creatures are free of arrogance. In such a world, an arrogant person is unfit to be accepted along with other creatures. Indeed, arrogance closes the door to God's blessing.

Modest behaviour is, however, universally acceptable: the entire material world has accepted modesty as its culture. Even the animals live with modesty. Man, too, must adopt this universal culture of modesty.

THE PROCESS OF PURIFICATION

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, by the established law of nature, 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 man and 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 our food for *tazkiya*.

Everyone should learn the art of dematerialization; everyone must learn the art of extracting the spiritual content from the material content. Only through this process can we develop our faith.

Water is our physical food, but physical food is not enough. At the same time we need spiritual food. And the way to have that spiritual food is to separate it from the dross of material things, just as salt is separated from sea water to give us fresh water.

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.

HUMAN LIFE IS A BLESSING OF GOD

God Almighty created billions and billions of things, some living and some non-living. Out of all of these, man is the only creature who was created with a sense of pleasure. This uniquely human sense is what makes life agreeable and enjoyable for him. Without this sense of pleasure, he would go through life like a stone or a robot. Moreover, every person feels that he can fulfil all his desires in this life. But everywhere in this world there are limitations and disadvantages. So human beings, whether rich or poor, are unlikely to find fulfilment.

But, here God Almighty has given man another unique blessing. He has created Paradise, a perfect world with ideal situations. Then, God Almighty has ordained that all

those who prove themselves deserving of it should live in this perfect world for all eternity. A Quranic verse that mentions this special blessing is quoted here:

Therein you shall have all that your soul's desire, and therein you shall have all that you ask for. (41:31)

God Almighty decided that those men and women who passed the divine test would be selected for settlement in this eternal Paradise, where there is no fear, no shortcomings, no limitations, and no disadvantages. The criterion for deserving candidates for Paradise is basically one, and that is, that they should not have misused the freedom given to them by God Almighty.

There are some dos and don'ts about the uses of freedom, and these are clearly mentioned in the Quran: it is only those who measure up to these criteria who will be selected for entry into Paradise in the post-death period of life.

God has divided human life into two parts — the pre-death period and the post-death period. The pre-death period is one of trial. During the trial period human beings are put to the test so that they may be judged, while the post-death period is one of reward or punishment. Every person has been given freedom and the crucial test is whether he misuses his freedom or uses it properly. Through an unseen system, life is being recorded day and night. At the end, this record will be produced before God and, on the basis

of this, God Almighty will decide the fate of every man and woman. Those who fail to pass the test will be thrown into the universal litterbin, while those who pass the test will be admitted into Paradise.

Man was created for this purpose. Man was created to enjoy the greatest blessing of God, that is, Paradise. But only such people will experience this enjoyment who prove that they are deserving candidates. This is the greatest blessing of God to man. This blessing is so great that it is enough to justify all life's hardships.

The concept of Paradise has been ridiculed as being a beautiful idealization of human wishes. But it would be more appropriate to say that Paradise is a beautiful realization of human wishes. Given the reality of desires, it is but natural that their fulfilment should also be a reality. It is quite rational to believe that fulfilment is possible—although far off in the future.

ALL CREDIT GOES TO GOD ALMIGHTY

In the tennis Grand Slam held at Wimbledon on July 6, 2014, Serbia's Novak Djokovic defeated Swiss Roger Federer. After his victory in the four-hour long match, Djokovic said: "He (Federer) is a magnificent champion,

a magnificent role model. Thank you for letting me win today.”

When someone achieves great success, he always gives its credit to himself, his parents, friends or someone else. However, this is a totally wrong attribution. In fact, it is God Almighty who has created the successful person, and it is He who provided the necessary infrastructure for the person to play his requisite role. All assistance and support supplied to him was directly given to him by the Creator. Other than God no one has any power at all to bestow these favours upon a person. It is strange that every person is so unaware of this fact; he fails to give the credit of all these blessing to his Creator. This is no doubt the greatest blunder of mankind.

Any blessing or success that comes to a man or woman is a test for him or her. If a person gives the credit to the Creator, then he passes his test. But, if he gives the credit to someone other than the Creator he fails in the test.

However, this state of affairs will continue only up till the Doomsday. On the Doomsday the veil will be lifted up from everything, and truth will become so obvious that the blind will also be able to recognize it. That day failures will have punishment awaiting for them and those who pass the test will be rewarded. This is the reason why the Quran refers to this day as the *“Day of Loss and Gain”* (64:9).

BETWEEN RATIONAL CHOICE AND EMOTIONAL CHOICE

Life is a game of choices. Every moment you have to opt for some choice, either on a rational level or on an emotional level. The rational choice always leads to success, while the emotional choice leads to problems, if not total failure. Opting for the rational choice endows one with peace of mind, while the emotional choice is bound to give rise to second thoughts later in life.

This is due to the law of nature. The law of nature is based on realities, it is not based on anyone's emotions. When a person goes through a situation and takes decision on a rational basis, he instantly receives the support of the law of nature. However, if a person decides on the basis of his emotions, he does not get the support of the law of nature. It is this difference that creates problems. This law of nature is mentioned in the Quran in these words:

You may dislike something although it is good for you, or like something although it is bad for you: *God knows but you do not. (2:216)*

The Quran also applies this principle to the issue of marriage. There is a very relevant verse in the Quran in this regard:

If you dislike them, it may be that you dislike something which God might make a source of abundant good. (4:19)

The experience of marriage comes to every man and woman. There is no escape from this experience. It means that at the time of marriage, everyone faces the moment of either making a rational choice or an emotional choice. Marriage leads to lifetime companionship. Therefore, it is necessary for both partners to be very serious in this matter. They must take into consideration the long-term benefits, rather than short-term gains. Both should make a rational decision and not an emotional decision.

There is, however, a problem. The time for marriage always comes when both partners are in their age of immaturity and have little experience of real life. At this stage, they are not in a position to take a decision on purely objective basis.

Then what should be done? The Quran gives a very practical criterion for making a decision in this matter. One who keeps in mind this practical criterion will ensure that his or her married life is a success. Those who fail to follow this criterion take the risk of turning their marriage into a problem marriage.

The Quranic criterion in this regard is: Don't follow your desires, follow your reason. Those who are governed by

their desire only see the appearance, or take things at face-value. But, being governed by reason makes one reach the depth of the matter. Reason follows reality and decides by seeing the future rather than the present. Due to this difference, an emotional judgement creates problems, while a rational judgement always leads to success.

For example, if at the time of marriage one sees only the appearance and chooses a smart spouse, then this is not a simple matter. A smart choice will bring with it a total culture—a culture of entertainment, shopping, and fashionable living. This choice causes a shift of focus, that is, giving importance to superficial activities such as excessive expenditure on material items, engaging in entertainment and dissipation, and leading a fashionable lifestyle. In contrast to this, if your choice is based on the merits of the individual, the focus at home will be quite different. Importance will be given to serious discussion, intellectual development, simple living, right use of money and energy and concentrating on deeper aspects of things rather than on their superficial aspects. The difference between these two choices is bound to create two kinds of future. The first choice may lead to a life full of unending problems. On the contrary, the second choice will lead to a successful life.

Making an emotional choice in marriage may give one temporary pleasure, but in the long run it is bound to turn

into a life of problems. While, a rational choice in this regard may seem to be a hard choice in the beginning, however in the long run it will certainly result in a good life for both the partners.

An emotional choice in marriage promotes superficial activities at home, that is, the culture of wasting time and energy. On the other hand, a rational choice in marriage promotes a healthy environment and fosters constructive activities at home, as both partners embark on building a bright future for themselves and their children.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROMISE

Promise means to commit oneself by a pledge to do or give. Fulfilling a promise is the most positive and greatest quality of a person. There is nothing comparable to it. According to the Islamic teaching, promise is not simply part of social ethics, it is a responsible pledge for which man is accountable before God. The Quran says in the chapter *Al-Isra* ' (The Night Journey):

Keep your promises. You will be called to account [before God] for every promise which you have made. (17:34).

In another verse in the chapter *Al-Saff* (Ranks), the Quran says:

O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do? It is most hateful to God that you say that which you do not. (61:3)

To not fulfil a promise is a very wrong habit. It bears serious consequences for a man. To break a promise may ruin the whole personality of a human being. This habit and spirituality cannot coexist. If one makes promises and fails to fulfil them, then this habit may lead to nonexistence of all positive qualities.

In social life a person possessing this habit loses his credibility. He will not be regarded as having a predictable character, which is the greatest social value of a person. Keeping promises is one's social identity. A person who loses this social identity will lose his social status.

The greatest danger of this habit is that such a person will be presented before God on the Day of Judgement and will be asked by Him: 'Why did you fail to fulfil the promise after having pledged it?' It means that this habit has grave consequences, because a person of this kind takes the risk of being disgraced in the eyes of God. Without doubt there is no loss greater than this.

Breaking of a promise is a very bad habit. It is so bad that even a small kind of breaking of the promise is very serious in nature as its grave kind.

LIFE AND DEATH

Gopinath Pandurang Munde (12 December 1949—3 June 2014) was a senior political leader of India. In the general elections held in May 2014 he achieved a spectacular victory and was selected as a cabinet minister in the union government. On June 4, 2014 he was to take charge of his ministry. But only one day before, that is, on June 3, he suffered a road accident and died on the spot.

That day Gopinath Munde was on his way to the Indira Gandhi International Airport to fly to Mumbai. He was going to address a victory rally scheduled in Beed and Parali in Maharashtra. But before reaching the airport, his end came about. Thus, Gopinath Munde left behind all his success of the pre-death period and entered the post-death period all alone.

This is not the case of a single person, it is the case of every man and woman. Every person tries hard to build a world of his own. But before attending his victory day celebrations, he dies at the point of no return. Death is everyone's fate. No one can escape from dying. There is a verse in the Quran in the chapter *Al- 'Ankabut* (The Spider):

Every soul shall taste death. (29:57)

This is the law of nature and there is no exception to this law. Death reminds us that the present world is not our

final abode. We have to prepare ourselves for the world hereafter. Death is only a reminder of the fact that everyone is doomed to enter the other world.

PATIENCE FOR THE SAKE OF PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

Quran lays a lot of emphasis on patience (*sabr*). According to a Quranic verse in the chapter *Al-Zumar* (Crowds):

Truly those who persevere patiently will be requited without measure (39:10)

Such a verse has not appeared in the Quran for any other deed. Only for patience does the Quran say that its reward would be countless in measure.

What is this reward? This reward is not a result of any mysterious phenomenon. It is that which those who exercise patience receive instantly, if they have exercised patience in the real sense.

Patience and reward are inseparable part of each other. In the above verse of the Quran, reward refers to personality development. A developed personality is the biggest quality of a man. In reality, personality development is what separates man from an animal. And the biggest source of personality development is through patience.

In truth, man is born with unlimited potential. As soon as

he is born, this potential starts to unfold on its own. This potential does not require any additional endeavour for its unfolding.

An allegorical reference in the Quran clarifies this further:

Have you not considered how God sets forth a parable of a good word (being) like a good tree? Its root is firm and its branches are in the sky, it yields its fruit each season with its Lord's permission—God makes such comparisons for people in order that they may reflect. (14:24-25)

Tree is a unique phenomenon of nature. It is a self-growing phenomenon of creation. The entire tree is potentially hidden in a seed and when the seed unfolds, it turns into a tree. So is the case of man. Man is born as a child, which is like a seed. The child has unlimited potential to grow and if given an opportunity to unfold, it will go on growing and become a mature and complete person.

All qualities—wisdom, positive thinking, love, generosity, forbearance, and so on are innate in man. Given a chance to grow, just as a seed grows to become a complete tree, a man would also grow into a complete man.

What hinders the growth or personality development in man? Man has to live in society and there he always encounters unwanted situations, which can disturb him. He may thus develop anger, hatred, malice, and negative

thinking. These obstruct the natural course of growth of man. In such a scenario, man's personality development has just one condition—that he develops in him the quality of patience. He must learn to remain unaffected despite facing unwanted experiences. In other words, he must learn the art of unaffected living.

Now the question is how to lead an unaffected life? The method is very simple. It is all a matter of thirty seconds. You need to become Mr. Thirty Seconds or Ms. Thirty Seconds, and the remaining job will be done by nature.

Whenever you encounter an unwanted situation, you tend to become impatient. If left unchecked, it would reach the state of a breakdown. If you want to put a check on your unwanted reaction, you need to empty your mind for thirty seconds by observing silence. As a result, the anti-wave that had arisen, would break and disperse. It would not become a part of your personality.

If you practice this, you will realize that although for the first thirty seconds you were very disturbed but after thirty seconds, you became absolutely normal. After thirty seconds, you return to your normal state of mind.

If you want to test the veracity of this formula, you need to experiment with it. In the very first experience you will find that this formula is a hundred percent successful formula.

ADJUSTMENT—A GOLDEN PRINCIPLE

What is adjustment? Adjustment means living with a normal mind in an unwanted situation. Adjustment is a way of life. Apparently, adjustment is a behaviour that you adopt towards someone else, but in fact it is for your own self.

The problem is that according to the creation plan of God, our world is a world of differences. Every human being is either Mr. Different or Ms. Different. Also, everyone has the freedom of choice to behave in whichever way they want. In such a situation, every human being is compelled to live in a jungle of differences. You cannot change this creation plan. Then, what to do in such circumstances?

The only realistic option for you is to adjust with other people. Here, adjustment means to not react, to not try to change others, to not become negative, to not take the situation as an obstacle, but to manage it smoothly.

In every situation you have two options either to adjust with others or to opt for the way of not adjusting. If you opt for the principle of non-adjustment, then it will only enhance your problems. You will live in tension, disturbance of mind and thus waste your time and energy. But if you opt for adjustment, then you will be able to instantly free up your mind. You will be able to save yourself from all kinds of negativity.

Adjustment gives you a chance to continue your journey. While the policy of non-adjustment is bound to halt your life's journey, either temporarily or in a permanent manner.

Adjustment is not submissive attitude, it is rather an attitude of wisdom. It is the same principle which everyone follows when they are on the street. On the street there is traffic coming from both sides. So, everyone opts for the keep-right or keep-left policy, in accordance with the traffic rules of their country. This is a way of adjustment on the roads. If you refuse to follow this traffic culture, you may face a disastrous situation, may be even death. Adjustment is based on a natural formula: 'Save yourself'. When you are not in the position to change others, change yourself. It is this behaviour that is called adjustment.

One of the teachings of the Quran is mentioned in the chapter *Al-Nisa'* (Women) in these words: *As-sulh khair*, that is, *Settlement is best*. (4:128)

Settlement is only the other name of adjustment. This Quranic verse refers to a law of nature. According to the law of nature, settlement is the best way of life. When you face any kind of difference with the other party, do not adopt the way of confrontation—but adopt the way of adjustment. This is best for you in terms of the result. By adopting this formula, you will reach your goal without any delay. Be practical: do not waste your time and energy. Adopt the way of adjustment, and ensure your success.

DIFFICULT TIMES: A BLESSING

I have received a question through email. The text of the question is: ‘I often pray to God thus: “Please make my family and loved ones happy. Let their difficult times be transferred onto my life, and let them never face any difficulty in their life. Lord, I am ready to face every hardship, but I want them to stay happy and prosperous forever.” Is this prayer in accordance with the Quran?’

The answer to this question is very clear. This kind of prayer is not in accordance with the spirit of the Quran because it is against the creation plan of God. Any prayer that goes against the creation plan of God can never be accepted, even if the person continues to pray. The Quran in the chapter *Fatir* (The Creator) clearly declares:

No burden-bearer shall bear another’s burden. (35:18)

The above kind of prayer reflects that parents have made their family’s worldly betterment their sole concern. While according to the Quran, parents should make their family’s other-worldly (*akhirat*) betterment their concern. According to the Quran, a believer must adopt an *akhirat*-oriented or hereafter-oriented thinking and life for himself as well as for his family. Going against this will only invite divine wrath. A verse in the chapter *Al-A’la* (The Most High) from the Quran that points towards this is:

But you prefer the life of this world, although the Hereafter is better and more lasting. (87:16-17)

Moreover, such a prayer goes against wisdom. According to the law of nature, difficulty is not a problem, it is instead a blessing. There is a well-known saying: 'It is not ease but effort, not facility but difficulty that makes men.' This saying is based on the law of nature. According to the law of nature, difficulty is the only course of building a true personality. Difficulty is not a curse, rather it is a stepping-stone towards success.

The problem is that people take difficulty as difficulty, while, in fact, it is a challenge. 'Difficulty' is a negative word, while 'challenge' is a positive word. Challenge motivates you, unfolds your potentials, and enhances your creativity. In short, challenge makes a man a superman. When you meet a challenge, you enhance your process of intellectual development. It is intellectual development that leads to all kinds of greater achievement.

Take the difficulties of life as a challenge, and soon you will discover that what you had considered as an evil was actually a blessing.

THE MIRACLE OF POSITIVE RESPONSE

There is good news from Britain.

On May 22, 2013 a British soldier was beheaded by two Muslims in Woolwich, southeast London. In the aftermath of this incident, there were some angry protests from the Christian side. Apparently it was a sad event, but it turned into a pleasant experience.

According to reports some people gathered outside a mosque on May 26, 2013, at Bull Lane, York. They wanted to show their anger at the unprovoked killing. When the people of the mosque received this news, they silently made a plan. According to the plan, when the protesters turned up before the mosque, the members went out and welcomed them. They invited the protesters inside the mosque and offered them tea, biscuits and custard creams in a friendly atmosphere. This kind of behaviour was bound to produce a positive result. Reports tell that instantly tensions were defused and a potential confrontation was avoided.

This event testifies to the veracity of Quranic teaching. The Quran says in the chapter *Fussilat* (Revelations Well Expounded):

Good and evil deeds are not equal. Do good deed in return for bad deed; then you will see that one who

was once your enemy has become your dearest friend.
(41:34).

The Quran tells us that every human being was created on *al-fitrah*, that is, *divine nature*. (30:30).

It means that human nature is based on positive response. Negative reaction is only a temporary phase. If someone shows a negative reaction, you should adopt the policy of avoidance, and very soon you will find that the whole thing is normalized.

Life is full of crises. The only solution is that you should learn the art of crisis management. Don't take the problem as a problem, but take it as a normal event. Try to defuse it and the crisis will be managed in a very smooth manner. By applying wisdom, you can turn hate into love and negativity into positivity, then why opt for the harder course of action when the easier course of action is available? According to Islamic teaching, every situation is a test paper. Apply your wisdom and you will certainly stand the test.

READY TO RESPOND EVERY MOMENT

God Almighty created man and declared that He would help him in every aspect and would be with him, in every situation. There are many verses in the Quran which describe this fact. One such verse of the Quran is as follows:

All those who are in the heavens and the earth ask of Him; every day He is in a state. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? (55:29-30)

This verse addresses man. Man is the concern of God and God Almighty is ready to respond to man at all times. The following *hadith* further illustrates the meaning of the above-mentioned verse of the Quran:

Prophet of Islam said, “Every moment God is ready to forgive one who seeks forgiveness from Him, is ready to help one who seeks help from Him and is ready to respond to one who calls upon Him.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, 1145)

How can we enable ourselves to find this ever-available help of God? It is by using every event in your life as a point of reference. Our world is full of points of reference, provided you are awakened enough to recognize them. Every observation and learning can serve as a point of reference to instantly establish contact with God and seek His blessings. By following this method, you would be able

to receive divine blessings every moment. For example, when you undergo hurtful experience in life, you can make it a point of reference and pray to God to save you from the hurtful experience of the eternal life in the world hereafter. Similarly, when you receive comfort in life, you can make it a point of reference and pray to God to provide you comfort in the eternal life.

We are living in a world where every moment we are distracted and fail to continually remember God. How should we overcome this weakness? How should we continue to live in the remembrance of God? This continuity can be maintained only by engaging in intellectual effort on a constant basis.

Our mind is like a mobile phone. A mobile phone becomes inactive when its battery exhausts and so we need to recharge it. The same is true of our mind. Our mind also needs to be recharged, again and again. This is the only way to continue to inculcate divine awareness, every day and night.

For example, when you are reading this article, you are using your mind, your eyes as well as the external light—sunlight or electric light. All these things were not created by you, but are supplied by God Almighty alone. Remember this divine bounty and present your gratefulness to God. This is acknowledgement and acknowledgement is what

makes you a deserving of receiving further bounties. This is mentioned in the chapter Ibrahim (Abraham) of the Quran in these words:

Remember the time when your Lord declared, “If you are grateful, I will surely bestow more favours on you; but if you are ungrateful, then know that My punishment is severe indeed.” (14:7)

This is God’s promise to man and God never betrays His promise.

ANIMALS AS TEACHERS

According to the Quran, Cain and Abel were the first sons of Adam and Eve. As the result of a controversy which arose between the two brothers, Cain killed Abel. One part of this story is narrated in the chapter *Al-Ma'idah* (The Table) of the Quran:

When they both presented an offering, it was accepted from one of them and not from the other. The latter said, ‘I shall kill you!’ The former said, ‘God accepts [things] only from the righteous. If you raise your hand to kill me, I will not raise mine to kill you...His lower self persuaded him to kill his brother, and he killed him and he became one of the lost. Then God sent a raven, which scratched the earth,

so that He might show him how to hide the corpse of his brother. (5:27-31)

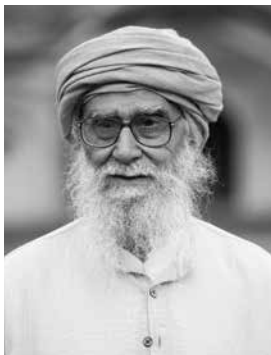
In this story the Quran depicts the raven as a teacher of man. This is not only an isolated incident. It has a general application. It teaches the lesson that in animal behaviour there are good examples for man. Man should study such behaviour and discover those good habits that are practised by animals and imitate them in his own life.

Why can animals serve as teachers to man? The reason is that man and animals both were created with the same nature, that is, following the good universal model for behaviour. But there was a difference. Man was given freedom of choice, while animals have no choice other than to follow the universal pattern. There are deviations in human behaviour but, in the case of animals, there is no deviation from the path of nature.

Due to this difference, man can be right or wrong but animals are always right. So, man should emulate the behaviour of animals in his life. This is the best way for man to stick to the straight path adopted by animals under the guidance of nature.

For example, tigers are the most powerful animals but they always avoid fighting. Jim Corbett, the well-known hunter, has rightly said that the tiger lives like a noble person in the jungle. There have been no wars in jungles such as

World War I or World War II. Warfare is quite unknown in the culture of the jungle. A jungle sets the high standard which society must live up to if it is to be peaceful. Man must also follow this pattern of the animals. Every animal, big or small, provides us with a good example of social behaviour.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021), an Islamic scholar, spiritual leader, and peace activist, was internationally recognized for his seminal contributions to world peace. The Government of India posthumously honored him with the Padma Vibhushan Award in 2021 for his contributions to spirituality. Maulana authored over 200 books that delve into Islam's spiritual wisdom, the Prophet's non-violent approach, its relationship with modernity, and other contemporary issues. His English translation of the Quran and Quran Commentary are widely appreciated for their simplicity, clarity, and ease of understanding. In 2001, he founded the Centre for Peace and Spirituality International to promote a culture of peace and convey the spiritual message of Islam at a global level.

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