

An impressionistic painting of a forest path. The scene is dominated by vibrant green foliage, with a path leading through the trees. The brushstrokes are thick and textured, creating a sense of depth and movement. The lighting is dappled, suggesting sunlight filtering through the canopy. The overall mood is serene and natural.

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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

SCIENCE AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD
No Contradiction

LIFE IS A TIGHTROPE WALK
Art of Balancing

RELIGIOUS HARMONY
Not Religious Uniformity

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Spiritual Living

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

ISSUE 14, FEBRUARY 2014

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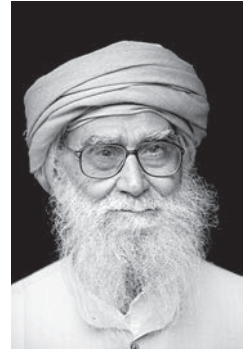
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK

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



THIS IS NOT THE TIME

A YOUNG man from Delhi had to get to Mumbai to appear for an interview for a job abroad. He had booked a berth on a train. On the day of his departure, he left his home for the railway station in a rickshaw. It so happened that some boys threw stones at the rickshaw.

At this, the young man's friend, who was accompanying him, lost his temper. He wanted to get off the rickshaw, catch hold of the boys and teach them a lesson for their misbehaviour. But the young man stopped him.

"Where do we have the time for this?" he asked, as the rickshaw moved ahead.

What the young man wanted to say was, "I have to reach the station at once and catch the train. Then, after getting to Mumbai, I have to appear for the interview. In such a situation, where do I have the time to get stuck with these boys? I'd rather exercise patience in the face of their misbehaviour so that I do not miss my interview in Mumbai."

People have this sort of seriousness about their worldly affairs. But true believers have an even greater seriousness than this about the Hereafter. One who is serious about worldly affairs simply does not

1. The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims 2012, Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, Jordan.

have any time whatsoever to get involved in irrelevant things, like the man heading for the interview.

In the same way, one who is serious about the Hereafter does not want to get involved at all, in issues that will divert him from his goal of the Hereafter.

A passenger who wants to travel from Delhi to Amritsar, in the north-west, will not head in the direction of Kolkata, to the south-east. Likewise, a person who is journeying towards the Hereafter will not want to head off in a direction that will take him far away from his chosen destination.

If we consider ourselves as travellers in this world, we can derive inspiration from the above-mentioned example of the young man. But if we think of ourselves as travellers who are journeying towards the Hereafter, we can find inspiration in the example of the Companions of the Prophet who did not let worldly things divert them from their mission.

If we follow neither path — being concerned with neither sort of journey — then we will be simply wandering about, without any destination whatsoever. □

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan
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Don't disturb the mind

*Missing an opportunity
is not a problem.*

*The real problem is that
your mind gets so disturbed that
you fail to recognize some viable alternative course.*

SCIENCE AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

No Contradiction

THERE is much confusion about Einstein's religious beliefs, in particular about his views on the existence of God. Some think that Einstein was an atheist. Others have a different opinion. An analysis of the various statements made by Einstein about his views will show that Einstein was not an atheist, and was in doubt about the existence of God.

In 1997, *Skeptic*, a science magazine, published for the first time a series of letters that Einstein exchanged in 1945 with an officer in the US Navy named Guy Raner Jr, on the existence of God. Raner wanted to know if it was true that Einstein converted from atheism to theism on being confronted by a Jesuit priest with the following argument: A design requires a designer, and since the universe has a design, it must have a designer. Einstein wrote back that he had never spoken to a Jesuit priest in his life, but that from the viewpoint of such a person, he was and would always be an atheist. He added that it was misleading and childish to use anthropomorphic concepts in dealing with things outside the human sphere and that all we could do was to admire, in humility, the beautiful harmony of the structure of this world as far as we can grasp it.

A design requires a designer, and since the universe has a design, it must have a designer.

Raner replied, asking for clarification of Einstein's position, "Are you, from the viewpoint of the dictionary, an atheist, one who disbelieves in the existence of a God or a Supreme Being"?

To this, Einstein replied, "I have repeatedly said that in my opinion the idea of a personal God is a childlike one. You may call me an agnostic, but I do not share the crusading spirit of the professional atheist, whose fervour is mostly due to a painful act of liberation from the fetters of religious indoctrination received in youth. I prefer an attitude of humility corresponding to the weakness of our intellectual understanding of nature and of our own being."

The view that Einstein holds about the existence of God is the same that almost all scientists hold. They consider themselves agnostics —

neither acknowledging the existence of God nor denying it.

The subject of scientific study is the material world. The material world is the creation of the Creator. Scientific study is, therefore, the study of God's creation. A scientist can deny the existence of a Creator, but it is impossible for him to deny the signs of the Creator in His creation.

In truth, the physical world contains many incredible realities that are beyond material comprehension. For example, meaningful design, intelligence, purposeful planning, etc. These properties in the physical world are an indirect affirmation of the existence of God.

The subject of scientific study is the material world. The material world is the creation of the Creator. Scientific study is, therefore, the study of God's creation.

To justify this opinion, one method that we can use is to evaluate whether or not scientific discoveries are in conformity with the concept of the existence of God. This method of establishing a viewpoint can be called 'verificationism'.

Another argument we can use can be called 'the principle of compatibility'. This means that if a premise which in itself is not demonstrable is compatible with existing known and demonstrable discoveries, we can accept it as true. If this method is applied to the concept of the existence of God, then the existence of God becomes established.

Acknowledgement of Science

Scientific studies have shown that there exists a high order of intelligence and planning in the universe. There is incredible harmony in the universe. These facts have been acknowledged by many world renowned scientists, such as Sir James Jeans, Arthur Eddington, Albert Einstein, David Foster, Fred Hoyle, etc. It has been established that the essence of the universe is 'intelligence'. In the words of a scientist:

Molecular biology has conclusively proved that the 'matter' of organic life, our very flesh, really is mind-stuff.

In 1927, a Belgian scientist, Georges Lemaitre, proposed the concept of the Big Bang. Further research on his proposal resulted in what is now widely accepted as the model of the universe. In 1965, cosmic background radiation—ripples of microwave radiation found every-

where in space with no discernible source—was attributed to the Big Bang. This radiation was the remnant of the Big Bang. On observing this radiation, Joel Primack, an American scientist, observed: *'the ripples are no less than the handwriting of God'*.

George Fitzgerald Smoot is an American astrophysicist and cosmologist, who won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 2006 for his work on the Cosmic Background Explorer. In 1992, when he announced the discovery of ripples in the heat radiation still arriving from the Big Bang, he said it was *'like seeing the face of God'*.

Theory of Everything

Although Albert Einstein was born in a Jewish family, after scientific study he had become doubtful about the existence of God. A year before his death in 1954, he wrote a letter to a Jewish philosopher, Eric B. Gutkind, where he said:

The word God was nothing more than the expression
and product of human weaknesses.

What Einstein refers to as 'human weakness' is not really a weakness but a characteristic feature of man. This characteristic feature has been aptly described in the following words: 'Man is an explanation-seeking animal.' This characteristic feature of man is the foundation of all progress. On the basis of this feature, man seeks out an explanation for all things, thereby reaching the great discoveries that make all developments in civilization possible. If it were not for this feature in man, human civilization would have remained in a state of total ignorance.

**Science has not proved the existence of God directly, but
it would be true to say that Science has accumulated
the data to prove the existence of God.**

It is said that Einstein spent the last thirty years of his life in a quest to find a scientific answer, but he was not successful. This quest was to find a Unified Field Theory. This was an extremely important scientific quest and is still the subject of scientific research. It is now better known as the Theory of Everything.

What is the Theory of Everything? It is a unified theory that would

supposedly give a scientific explanation to all the forces in nature. The 'Theory of Everything' is actually a theory that purports to explain everything.

In 1998, CERN, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, launched a project to build the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), a high energy particle accelerator that would enable scientists to study sub-atomic particles. These particles were the basis of the fundamental laws of physics. Their study would help, so it was felt, in establishing a Theory of Everything. The LHC was built in collaboration with over 10,000 scientists and engineers from over 100 countries, as well as hundreds of universities and laboratories, and at a cost over hundred million dollars. It lies in a tunnel 27 kilometres in circumference, 175 metres beneath the surface of the earth on the Franco-Swiss border near Geneva, Switzerland.

**A scientist can deny the existence of a Creator,
but it is impossible for him to deny the
signs of the Creator in His creation.**

Almost a century has now passed in the search for this Theory of Everything, or, rather, an explanation of everything, but yet scientists have not succeeded in this. Any scientific formula can never be an answer to such a question.

Missing Link

On the issue of belief in God and Science, a more appropriate statement could be as follows: Although the God that religion presents as a matter of faith is not a subject of scientific study, scientific discoveries are indirectly an academic affirmation of this belief. Science has not proved the existence of God directly, but it would be true to say that Science has accumulated the data to prove the existence of God.

In the standard model of Science, there is a missing link. The scientific model explains the 'action', but it does not show the 'actor'. On the other hand, in the model of the universe that the Quran proposes, both the 'action' and the 'actor' are present. In other words, the Quran explains the cause as well as the causative factor. Where Science acknowledges the 'action' (intelligence), then, by extrapolation, there can be no reason for Science not to accept the 'actor' (mind). □

MUSLIM WORLD-VIEW

An Islamic Perspective

ISLAMIC jurisprudence, or *fiqh*, was framed mostly during the Abbasid caliphate. Some of the terms coined by the jurists by way of inference from the Quran and *Hadith* are *Dar ul-Islam* (Abode of Islam) *Dar ul-Kufr* (Abode of disbelief) and *Dar ul-Harb* (Abode of War) The jurists who devised these terms during the Abbasid period were given the status of *mujtahid* (one who exercises *Ijtihad* or independent reasoning in the light of the Quran and *Hadith* to understand religious matters) in later times, and so these terms were never questioned over the last one thousand years. However, upon perusing this matter, it becomes clear that these terms created by the jurists were against the spirit of Islam.

God sees and deals with all human beings in the same light. The Quran refutes notions of God's 'favoured people' in the strongest of terms.

The terms they devised did not exist in the Quran or *Hadith*. They invented these terms on their own by exercising their right of *ijtihad* There are many conditions that have to be met before making *ijtihad*, and *ijtihad* is only considered valid if it fulfills all the required conditions. Religious scholars have said that the *ijtihad* of a jurist can be right or wrong, because a human being is liable to make errors in judgment, and a *mujtahid* is no exception to this.

Ijtihad is a principle of *Shariah* (Islamic law). There is general acceptance among the religious scholars, the *ulema*, that the source of this principle of *ijtihad* in the *Shariah* is a *Hadith* narrated by Muaz ibn Jabal, a senior companion of the Prophet and recorded by a number of traditionists, like Abu Dawood, At-Tirmizi, An-Nasai, Ibn Majah and Imam Ahmad. The *Hadith* is as follows:

Muaz ibn Jabal said that when the Prophet sent him to Yemen as governor, he asked him how he would decide matters. Muaz replied that he would decide in accordance with the Book of God. Then the Prophet asked him what he would do in case he did not find the required guidance in the Quran. Muaz replied that he would seek guidance in the *Hadith*. The Prophet asked him what he would do if he failed to find guidance regarding the

matter in the *Hadith* as well. Muaz replied that in that situation he would exercise his judgment to the best of his ability. The Prophet then placed his hand on his chest and said, "May God be praised, for granting this ability to Muaz".

This *Hadith* is regarded as the fundamental source of the principle of *Ijtihad*. When we examine this *Hadith*, we learn exactly when a Muslim is allowed to do *ijtihad* in Islam—he or she is permitted to do so only when no guidance is available for that particular situation in the Quran and *Hadith*. If guidance is available in the matter at hand in the Quran then any *ijtihad* will be invalid. For example, it is established from the Quran that fasting has been fixed for the month of Ramadan. It is, therefore, not permissible for anyone to do *ijtihad* and fix some other time of the year for fasting. The same applies to the number of obligatory prayers. No one is allowed to do *ijtihad* to increase or decrease the number of obligatory prayers, the number of obligatory fasting days or to change the month of fasting, and so on.

Through this principle, we find clear guidance in the Quran and *Hadith* regarding the use of such terms as *Dar ul-Islam*, *Dar ul-Kufr* and *Dar ul-Harb*. It is not proper for any scholar or jurist to devise new terms on his own by means of *ijtihad* in the face of available guidance.

The sight of a human being should remind us of the Creator who has created all human beings. It should remind us of God's miraculous powers to grant life. Thus, it must bring us to God-realization.

To elaborate, the situations that the jurists use the term *Dar ul-Kufr* for, were the same set of situations that the Prophet faced for the period of thirteen years that he lived in Makkah after receiving prophethood. So, according to the jurists, Makkah, from the beginning of the Prophet's prophethood to the *Hijrah*, had, in principle, the status of *Dar ul-Kufr*. Yet, we do not find a single reference in the Quran and *Hadith* to show that the term *Dar ul-Kufr* was ever applied to the town of Makkah before the Prophet's migration from there.

After the migration of the Prophet, the Makkans openly opposed him. Following the *Hijrah*, the Muslims and the Makkans were at war, and this was a situation similar to the one for which the jurists devised the term *Dar ul-Harb*. Yet, we know that no such term has been used in the

Quran and *Hadith* for this specific situation.

Following the *Hijrah*, a state was established in Madinah under the leadership of the Prophet. To describe a situation such as this, later jurists devised the term *Dar ul-Islam*. But neither the Quran nor the *Hadith* uses the term *Dar ul-Islam* for the Madinah of the Prophet's time. In fact, the Quran uses *Dar us-Salaam* for Paradise (10:25). There is no bit of land on this earth for which the terms *Dar ul-Islam* or *Dar ul-Iman* (Abode of faith) are used in the Quran. Islam does not allow the use of terms such as *Dar ul-Islam*, *Dar ul-Kufr*, and *Dar ul-Harb*, etc. for such situations. Devising such terms by the Abbasid period jurists amounted to transgressing their bounds. They exercised *ijtihad* in a matter where they were not authorized by the *Shariah*.

The coining of such terms by the jurists was an error in judgment. A student of Islam should reject this *ijtihad*. In the terminology of the *Shariah*, it is an invention (*bid'a*) and must be rejected. It is clearly mentioned in the *Hadith* that regardless of who does so, introducing anything new into Islam is not permissible.

Muslims find great appeal in the 'community-oriented approach', but such things are short-sighted, narrow-minded and closeted representations of reality that have no appeal for anyone else.

The coining of such terms as *Dar ul-Islam*, *Dar ul-Kufr* and *Dar ul-Harb* is an extremely serious matter. It relates to the Muslim world-view. It is responsible for inculcating the mentality of 'the chosen people' among Muslims. It is the sign of the decline of a nation.

We learn from the Quran that God does not divide human society on the basis of such demarcations as *Dar ul-Islam*, *Dar ul-Kufr* and *Dar ul-Harb*. God sees and deals with all human beings in the same light. The Quran refutes notions of God's 'favoured people' in the strongest of terms.

The Quran tells us that in the eyes of God, everyone's worth is determined by their personal actions or character, rather than by their belonging to a particular race or community (THE QURAN 53:39). One verse of the Quran in this regard will suffice for this purpose:

The believers, the Jews, the Christians and the Sabeans all those who believe in God and the Last day and do good deeds will be rewarded by their Lord; they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.

THE QURAN 2: 62

Muslims, Christians, Jews and all others are equal in the eyes of God. God will judge people based upon their deeds, rather than upon their belonging to a particular community.

Determining the status of other groups in relation to Muslims is a sectarian viewpoint, which is contrary to the universal approach of Islam. It goes against the creation plan of God. God has made this world for all human beings, and not just for Muslims.

Some *Hadith* reports have been similarly misread (in order to promote a wrong sense of Muslim supremacy). Once, when the Prophet of Islam was in Madinah, a funeral procession passed by. On seeing it, the Prophet stood up. His Companions said to him that it was the funeral of a Jew, indicating that, therefore, there was no need to stand up. The Prophet replied by asking them if the person was not a human being. This incident has been recorded by Al-Bukhari.

This act of the Prophet of Islam clearly shows that every human being is worthy of respect and honour, regardless of his religion. This *Hadith* clearly shows that the way of Islam is to regard everyone as one regards oneself. The sight of a human being should remind us of the Creator who has created all human beings. It should remind us of God's miraculous powers to grant life. Thus, it must bring us to God-realization.

This tradition clearly tells us of the practice of the Prophet of Islam regarding respect for all people. It is strange that none of the commentators of the *Hadith* have taken the main lesson from this. On the contrary, in their commentaries, they have interpreted it, for example, by saying that standing for the funeral of a non-Muslim is not obligatory, or that the Prophet stood only because he was reminded of death, or that the Prophet stood out of respect for the angels who accompanied the dead body, or that the Prophet did not want the funeral passing above his head, or even that the Prophet did stand before the funeral of a Jew but that this command has been abrogated and that Muslims are no longer required to do so.

There is no doubt at all that such interpretations are invalid. But explanations and commentaries of this nature continue even today. Books, magazines, journals, radio, television and the internet—all these resources have, directly or indirectly, been used to perpetuate this mindset. Muslims find great appeal in the 'community-oriented approach', but such things are short-sighted, narrow-minded and closeted representations of reality that have no appeal for anyone else.

For example, a TV channel called QTV (Quran TV) has become very popular among the Muslim masses. Although this channel carries the name of the Quran, it only serves to placate the Muslim community.

Khushwant Singh, the famous journalist, wrote a column called 'Spreading Islamophobia' in the *Hindustan Times* a decade ago.

Here is an excerpt from what he wrote:

About the most disturbing phenomenon of the past decade is the widening divide between the Islamic and non-Islamic world [...] I looked forward to the Pakistani Channel, QTV (Quran TV), to take the lead in this direction. I made it a point to tune in every afternoon to see and hear how it was going about its mission. I was sorely disappointed. I expected that it would address itself to non-Muslim audiences among which wrong notions about Islam persist. I found it focused entirely on Muslims, to assure them that their faith was better than any other and that anyone who disagrees is an ignoramus [...]

What Khushwant Singh says here applies to almost every Muslim writer and speaker. This mindset is responsible for Muslims having completely forgotten their goal of *dawah*.

Fiqh or Muslim jurisprudence consists of the details of commands and laws, and hundreds of books about *fiqh* have been written over the years by Muslim scholars; yet, none of them contain chapters on *dawah*. The books of all other Muslim writers, including al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiya, Shah Waliullah, Jamaluddin Afghani, Mohammad Iqbal, etc. are similarly bereft of chapters on *dawah*.

Due to this unnatural way of thinking, the Muslim *ummah*, once intellectually stagnant, is now in regress. The responsibility for this intellectual tragedy falls especially on the sectarian juristic concept of *Dar ul-Kufr*.

Another one of these dangerous concepts is that Muslims are God's vicegerents on earth, and that it is their binding duty to impose upon the world the laws of the *Shariah* on behalf of God.

This concept has come to dominate Muslim thought. Many other things are explained and interpreted in the light of this concept. For instance, there is a *Hadith* of the Prophet which says that the word of God would enter every home in the world. This was interpreted as a concept of Caliphate in the sense that the rule of Islam would be established all over the world. This is illogical and baseless. The *Hadith* refers to the 'word of Islam', not the 'rule of Islam'. It is obvious that, according to this *Hadith*, the word of Islam, or its message, will reach all homes, but this is far from Muslim rule being established all over the world!

This (mis)interpretation is not an explanation, but, rather, a politicization of this *Hadith* report. Muslims have begun to take great pride in saying that Islam is a complete system. This may seem like a beautiful definition of Islam, but it is a later addition (*bid'a*), and has nothing to do with the original Islam. Nowhere in the Quran and *Hadith* do we find anything to suggest that Islam is a total system.

This concept of 'total Islam', if perpetuated, will leave present-day Muslims with two dangerous, futile and evil choices. In order to adhere to their version of 'total Islam', they must declare war against the entire world, because until they conquer all of it, they cannot uphold their supposed version of Islam. Or, they can continue to regard Islam as a 'total system' but compromise with the world, because they are too hypocritically enamoured with material benefits to commit themselves sincerely to their own professed ideals. □



Isolated Living

Individual or isolated living deprives one of interactive learning, greater experience and the opportunity to learn lessons. It is like living in a cocoon.

THE FINAL DESTINATION

Our Unawareness

MT. Everest is the highest peak in the world. It is 29,028 feet or 8848 metres high. One of the first people to try to ascend this peak was a British man called Maurice Wilson. This was in 1934. But what he thought would be the climax of his life turned out to be an enormous anti-climax.

Maurice had been a soldier in the First World War. He was so keen on climbing the highest peak in the world that for this sake he gave



PHOTO: PAVEL NOVAK

up his successful family business. He spent all his money on buying a second-hand aircraft, which he flew, over a distance of some 6000 miles, from England to India, and landed at Purnea, in Bihar. He did not get permission to fly further on, and so he sold it. After this, he set off on his

journey to Mt. Everest through Darjeeling and Tibet.

Finally, all that he had left with him was a small tent, some rice, a camera and a few other things. He began his ascent of the mountain, and managed to climb till a height of around 19000 feet. The 21st of April 1934 was to be his 36th birthday, and he hoped to celebrate that day atop Mt. Everest. A few days prior to that, he had written in his diary:

Only 13,000 feet more to go. I have the distinct feeling that I'll reach the summit on April 21.

But shortly after writing these lines with such evident confidence, a fierce Himalayan storm broke out. The severe weather conditions put an end to his plans of going further up the mountain, and he was compelled to go down. And so, he descended to a lower level. But after this, it was not in his fate to be able to move up the mountain again. No

one really knows what happened to him then, but a year later, when Tenzing Norgay was heading up Mt. Everest, he found Maurice Wilson's corpse, and, with it, his diary, the last entry in which was the sentence quoted above.

Maurice had planned to take a picture of himself atop Mt. Everest with his camera. His camera, he had hoped, would capture his moment of victory. But his time came before that could happen.

There was no Maurice Wilson left whose victory his camera could show to the world! This, in a sense, is the same story of all of us. Everyone thinks that he is advancing towards the peak of success, whereas the reality is just the opposite. In actual fact, everyone is heading towards a destination where there will be no one to welcome him other than Death.

People are all advancing in the direction of the unknown 'tomorrow', and yet they think that they are building a 'successful' world in the known 'today'.

In this world, some people nurse the desire only for worldly success, but they have not even set off on the journey to their dream-world when Death grabs them. Others manage to attain, to greater or lesser extent, the objects of their desire. Yet, this does not give them the happiness they were looking for, and so they are no different from the first category of people. After getting what they hankered after, they realize that these things do not give them true joy. And so, in this world those who obtain the objects of their worldly desire feel as deprived as those who do not. Yet, few people realize this.

Human beings deprive themselves of what is truly worth having, and delude themselves into imagining that the things of this world will give them joy. Life is absolutely uncertain, yet people imagine it to be absolutely certain. People are all advancing in the direction of the unknown 'tomorrow', and yet they think that they are building a 'successful' world in the known 'today'.

How unaware people are who think they know themselves! What failures those people are who consider themselves to be the most successful of all! ❑

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Equal In Respect, Different In Role

THE term 'gender equality' was used for the first time in Europe in the late nineteenth century. To begin with, it was used only to argue for women's right to vote. However, it later came to be adopted for general use to describe the equality of both sexes in every aspect.

This term then spread rapidly all over the Western world, as an expression describing the ideal status of men and women. In the second half of the twentieth century, extensive research was carried out on this subject, and this concept began to be doubted. The latest study done on this is by an IIT-Delhi alumnus, which has been extensively covered by the media.

Islam says that men and women are different by birth, rather than being identical. Both are complementary to each other.

A study team led by Ragini Verma, associate professor of radiology at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, has revealed that there are stark differences between men and women in the structural connections linking different regions of their brains.

Verma and her colleagues are among the first to demonstrate differences in the brain's hard-wiring to support long-standing observations of gender differences in functional tasks. Their findings appeared in the US journal, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, December 2, 2013.

The researchers' findings in this regard only confirm the Islamic position stated in the first quarter of the seventh century. Islam says that men and women are different by birth, rather than being identical. Both are complementary to each other. This fact is referred to in the Quran in these words:

You [men and women] are members one of another.

THE QURAN 3: 195

According to the Quran, everything in this world has been created in the form of pairs:

We created pairs of all things.

THE QURAN 51: 49

In the material world, every atom consists of positive particles and negative particles. In the plant and the animal worlds, there are males and females. The human world consists of men and women.

**‘Men and women are equal in respect
and different in roles’.**

This pair-system in the world means that everything functions in a pair-fashion. In other words, nature functions on the principle of complementarity, rather than in an independent manner.

Observing this natural fact, one can say that using the term 'gender equality' to express the relationship between men and women is not natural. The right statement based on nature in this regard is: 'Men and women are equal in respect and different in roles'. □



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HUMILITY AND SINCERITY IN PRAYER

Sure Path to Positive Thinking

The Quran says:

Successful indeed are the believers;
those who are humble in their prayer [...]

THE QURAN 23: 1-2

HUMILITY and utmost sincerity in one's *Salat* or worship comes when you recall God, who will one day take account of your every thought, word and deed, and who will reward or punish you, as the case may be, for all of these. In this regard, the Quran talks about the humble;

Who know for certain that they will meet their Lord,
and that they will return to Him.

THE QURAN 2: 46

From this we learn that humility and sincerity are the condition engendered in one's heart from the overwhelming consciousness of one's meeting with God. Humility and utter sincerity in prayer is to make oneself so awakened at the conscious level that when one utters the words that are part of the prayer, their meaning and significance activate one's mind.

Humility and sincerity are the condition engendered in one's heart from the overwhelming consciousness of one's meeting with God.

Various parts of one's body perform the external actions that form part of the prayer and one's mind is full of fear of having to stand in front of God. This condition becomes so overwhelming that one's body begins to quake with fear. Acquiring this condition requires great effort. That is why patience has been included along with prayer (THE QURAN 2: 45).

A Persian poet says:

At night, when I stand up with the intention of offering prayers,
I keep thinking, 'What will my child eat
tomorrow morning?'

In metaphorical language, what the poet is telling us is that for offering prayers with humility and utter sincerity, the mind should not be engrossed in some other thought. Instead, it should focus entirely on one's meeting with the Lord.

Offering prayer with humility and utter sincerity is possible only for the person who before prayer has developed positive thinking.

Experience shows that the most powerful thing that can shift one's focus away from something is negative thinking. In collective life, one repeatedly faces negative experiences. In this regard, one should abide by patience or *sabr* and completely save oneself from negative feelings.

Offering prayer with humility and utter sincerity is possible only for the person who before prayer has developed positive thinking. And this is possible only when one develops a mindset infused with patience, so that despite the negative experiences one may encounter, one remains firmly established in positive thinking. □



**Accept, Introspect,
Make Amends**

*There are different
kinds of bad deeds.*

*But no matter what kind of
bad deed you have committed,
after each one you should feel repentant
and try to erase the effects of your
bad deed by doing a good deed.*

*The fact is that every bad deed you commit
can pollute your soul. Cleanse it by your tears,
or by some other kind of penitent behaviour.*

WHAT WENT WRONG WITH MUSLIMS

A Result of Not Changing

IN 1770, the Turkish naval establishment was wiped out in the Battle of Çeşme by a Russian fleet. In 1799, the Fourth Mysore War was fought between Tipu Sultan and the British East India Company at Srirangapatnam. In this war, Tipu Sultan was killed. When the British Governor-General of India, George Harris, heard of the death of Tipu Sultan, he is said to have exclaimed: "Today, India is ours!"

These two events symbolise the beginning of the end of Muslim political glory in the modern age. There were a series of such events in most Muslim countries, and the Muslim leadership of that time strongly reacted to this disturbing phenomenon. But history shows that in all their attempts they totally failed to achieve their goal. First, there were complaints, then protests, followed by violence, then the gun culture, and, lastly, suicide bombing. In short, this is the scenario of more than two hundred years of Muslim struggle. What is happening in Egypt today is only the latest manifestation of this unsuccessful Muslim activism.

The time has now come to reassess this long failed struggle. There is no justification for continuing this pattern of resistance. It will only lead to more loss. An unbiased study tells us that the Western powers who Muslims considered enemies were, in fact, not enemies, but harbingers of a new civilisation. It was the Western nations who had developed this new civilisation, and it was bound to spread out across the world. But there were two aspects to this. One was the political dominance of Western nations. And the other was that they had brought to the world an age of new science, technology and industry. The traditional world was then transformed into a new world, which resulted in a change in the balance of power.

The mistake that Muslim leaders made was that they failed to understand this duality. They took it as simply a political phenomenon, and they waged a political war against these Western nations. In this situation, the best policy for Muslims would have been to differentiate between politics, on the one hand, and civilisation, on the other. The better choice would have been to avoid the political problem and to take into account the non-political aspect of Western expansion, that is, the civilisation ushered in by the West, based on scientific discoveries and modern technology.

It was this policy that was adopted by the Japanese after the Second World War, and within less than fifty years they emerged as an economic superpower. The same option was open to Muslim countries. They should have avoided the political problem and availed the opportunities of civilisation instead. Had Muslims done this, history would have taken a different course.

This creative policy is definitely an Islamic policy, and the Prophet of Islam adopted it. During the negotiations prior to the signing of the Hudaibiyah Treaty, he avoided political problems and tried to avail of whatever opportunities presented themselves at that time. Thus, he went on to have that great success that is mentioned in the Quran as a 'clear victory' (THE QURAN 48: 1).

In this regard, consider two verses from the Quran. The first reads,

Believers, turn to God, every one of you,
so that you may prosper.

THE QURAN 24: 31

In this verse, the Arabic word used for turning to God in repentance is *tawbah* (*tubu ilallah*). *Tawbah* means, in a sense, following a U-turn policy, which means to re-assess one's actions and make amends. In the context of this verse, it means that Muslims must adopt such a policy at the level of the entire community.

The other Quranic verse tells us,

God does not change the condition of a people's lot,
unless they change what is in their hearts

THE QURAN 13: 11

This means that if Muslims want to see a new future, they must change their present.

Now, in the twenty-first century, the time has come for Muslims to adopt a U-turn. They must bring to an end all violent activities, and should devote their energies to achieving a two-point formula of education and *dawah*, reaching out to people with God's message. Education will bring their succeeding generations into line with modern standards, and *dawah* work will provide them with a global mission through which they will be able to chalk out a proper line of action for themselves. □

FROM THE SPIRITUAL TREE

Signs Of God

There is a tree beside my house. I call it the 'Spiritual Tree'. I derive spiritual inspiration from it. A tree is an ever-growing being that was initially a seed possessing the potential of becoming a full-grown tree. A seed takes food from the universe around it and then grows into a tree. The same is true with spirituality, the desire for which is intrinsic to, and an integral part of, the very nature of, every human being. To realize this spirituality, Man must derive spiritual food from the universe around



him. A tree converts carbon-dioxide into oxygen; a spiritual person is one who can take positive lessons from negative situations. From this perspective, a tree is an embodiment of a spiritual personality. — Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

It was the 7th of September, 1982, and I was in a mountainous region in Africa, standing in front of a tree that I hadn't ever seen before.

THE entire tree appeared as a sign of God. Everything about it seemed strange. Its delicate flowers, its fruits, its leaves that seemed to have been crafted with mathematical precision—everything about the tree announced that it had not grown on its own, but, rather, that it had been made by someone—its Maker.

Like this tree, every other tree anywhere in the world is a model of God's craftsmanship. But not having seen this sort of tree before, it had greatly affected me. On seeing this strange and beautiful African tree, I spontaneously said:

It seems that everything that God has made in this world has written on it the phrase 'Made by God'!

It is as if God wrote the words 'Made by God' on everything and then kept Himself hidden from people's vision so that they could recognize Him from the things that He has created. Despite His being invisible, they could, in this way, discern His presence.

A person with an expert knowledge of machines can, simply by looking

at a particular machine, tell you where it has been made. The same is true with every other thing in the entire universe. We are in a world full of 'natural machines', as it were, each of these continuously doing its work.

These 'machines' do not have a visible stamp on them indicating who made them. But because their manufacturing is so extraordinary and the craftsmanship that has gone into making them so utterly unique, they themselves announce who their Creator is. In this way, all created things and beings clearly tell us about the Creator.

Nothing in the natural world has a label on it stating in words who made it. But, if you go deeper, you will realize that each of these has, written on it as it were, the name of their Creator. Anyone can clearly discern that every created thing is undoubtedly made by God, and not by anyone else. □



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LESSONS FROM JESUS CHRIST

To Forgive And Forbear

WE find from the Quran and *Hadith* that a large number of God's messengers were sent to different nations and regions. Nearly all of these prophets are unknown from the historical point of view. The records of their contemporaries make no mention of them or their work. It is as if these prophets and the incidents connected with their lives were thought not worthy of being mentioned.

Without a doubt, the prophets are examples of the loftiest human character. But because of the unpredictable nature of History, only events largely connected with people in power have been recorded, thus depriving posterity of the precious details of the lives of the prophets. The Quran revealed this lost chapter for the first time in history.

It might seem that a recital of the facts relating to the life and mission of the Prophet of Islam would have sufficed, but there was a very good reason for making frequent mention of other prophets and also testifying to their having received God's guidance, a blessing that exalted them above all other creatures. It was so that the Prophet of Islam and his *ummah* might learn valuable lessons from the ways in which these prophets dealt with the situations in which they found themselves.

In the Quran, the Prophet of Islam is thus addressed:

These are whom God guided aright,
so follow their guidance.

THE QURAN 6:90

Every one of the prophets mentioned in the Quran was an upright man, guided by God along a straight path. The Quran mentions a number of these prophets by name—Ibrahim (Abraham), Ishaq (Isaac), Yaqub (Jacob), Nuh (Noah), Dawood (David), Sulaiman (Solomon), Ayyub (Job), Yousuf (Joseph), Musa (Moses), Haroon (Aaron), Zakariya (Zachariah), Isa (Jesus), Ismail, Yahya (John the Baptist), Yunus (Jonah), and Lut (Lot) peace be upon them all God has also instructed us not to differentiate between the prophets as they essentially brought the same message to mankind (2:285).

The Prophet Muhammad was instructed by God to follow the guidance of the prophets before him. By extension, all the followers of Prophet Muhammad must also seek guidance from the lives of the other prophets. Each one of us must evaluate the situation we face, and then, whilst examining the lives of other prophets, should determine in which prophet's story we can find a similar example. Our response to this situation should be the same as that of the prophets.

Every one of the prophets mentioned in the Quran was an upright man, guided by God along a straight path.

For example, from the Prophet Abraham we learn what our behaviour should be towards unbelieving parents. We are to obey them as long as doing so does not contradict God's commands.

We are to convey to them the message of God in a gentle, kind-hearted and reasonable manner. But if they chose to disbelieve, we must not force them, but, instead, should pray for their forgiveness instead.

The Prophet Ismail's example shows us what our behaviour should be towards believing parents. We are to obey them in what is right and seek guidance from them and assist them in their work.

We learn a lesson from the Prophet Yusuf's example of not standing against rulers and not confronting them in the political field. We should accept their position and avail of the opportunities that arise in other, non-political, spheres.

Similarly, from Jesus' life we can draw many lessons that can provide us with wonderful guidance. The Quran repeatedly mentions Jesus Christ, and we can learn much from his life.

Unilateral Good Character

Jesus Christ says:

“But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you”.

LUKE 6: 27-30

The same teaching is echoed in the Quran:

And good deeds and evil deeds are not alike.
Repel evil with good and he who is your
enemy will become your dearest friend.
(THE QURAN 41: 34)

This is a practical code of conduct for us, showing us the way to live in peace and harmony.

Duty Consciousness

When some people asked Jesus what they should do in the face of the oppression of the Romans ruling over them, he said:

Give to king what is due to the king.
And give to God what is due to God.

Similarly, a *Hadith* cited by Al-Bukhari says:

Give the ruler his rights. Ask for your rights from God.

Peace under all circumstances

Jesus said:

To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also.
And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your
tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him
who takes away your goods, do not ask them back."

What Jesus Christ meant here was to put an end to the root cause of all conflicts. Thus paving the way for the other person to realize and make amends for his behaviour. □



Awaken the man within

*By forgiving someone for his ill-treatment of you,
you awaken in him a sense of shame, whereas
by returning evil for evil, a reaction of
revenge and retaliation
is set aflame.*

DOMINION AS A TEST

Creation Plan of God

WILLIAM Penn was born in London in 1644 and died in 1718. A great advocate of religious tolerance, he took part in both: religious affairs and politics. One of his sayings is as follows:

Let the people think they govern, and they will be governed.

Penn said this on the basis of his study of history. But this is not something related only to history. It is, in fact, a universal law of nature. It is established by God himself according to His own creation plan. This natural law set by the Almighty God has been described in these words in the Quran:

We alternate these days among mankind.

THE QURAN 3: 140

By 'days' here is meant the days of victory and defeat, of domination and subjugation. In this world just as everything else is for the purpose of testing people, so is political power. That is why it is granted to each group by turn, so that every group can be tested. In this world, the state of domination and power is for the sake of testing people, just as the state of subjugation and submission, too, are.

In this world, the state of domination and power is for the sake of testing people, just as the state of subjugation and submission, too, are.

What is required from man is that when he is granted power, he should not suffer from pride and arrogance. And when man finds himself in a state of subjugation, he should not fall prey to negative psychology. Either of the states should be acceptable to man as a matter of divine ordainment. In both states, man's eyes should be set on shouldering his own responsibilities, rather than on the right or wrong attitude adopted by others.

If you bear this in mind, it will keep you away from negative activities. It will enable you to save your capabilities from being wasted, and so you can focus on beneficial and result-oriented actions. Loss of power is from God. Protesting against it is to protest against God. And is there anyone who can succeed in his protest against God? □

THE BIBLE'S TESTIMONY

A Point to Consider

THE Prophet Moses is said to have lived in around the 13th or 14th century BCE, while the Prophet Muhammad was born in the 6th century CE. In other words, there is perhaps a gap of some 2000 years between the two. Several statements attributed to Moses are found in the Bible. The Bible says that once Moses addressed his people, saying:

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' And the Lord said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.' And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?'— when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

THE BIBLE Deuteronomy 18: 15-22

These words of Moses are clearly a prediction. Here, he predicts that after him, a prophet like him would appear. The entire history after the Prophet Moses indicates that there was only one prophet like him—and that was Muhammad Ibn Abdullah.

Christians take this prophecy of Moses to apply to Jesus, although Jesus was in many respects in no way like Moses.

Moses was born in the natural way, through a mother and a father, while Jesus was born in a supernatural way. Moses married a woman, while Jesus abstained from marriage and married life. Moses led his people, while Jesus did not get the opportunity to lead his community. *Shariah*

laws were revealed to Moses but not to Jesus. Moses took his people out of the slavery at the hands of Pharaoh, while despite the advent of Jesus, the Jews remained under the Romans. Clear differences like these exist between Moses and Jesus. And so, accordingly, Jesus cannot be termed to be kind of prophet that Moses was.

This is such an obvious fact that many non-Muslim researchers themselves accept it. For instance, a Christian scholar, Rev, James L. Dow, has written a dictionary of the Bible. Rev. Dow writes:

The only man of history who can be compared even remotely to him [Moses] is Mahomet [Muhammad].

Rev. James L. Dow, *Dictionary of the Bible*, Harper Collins, Glasgow, 1992,

It is a historical fact that among all the prophets, the Prophet Muhammad is the only one who can be considered to be like Moses. In this way, the Bible's statement quoted above applies to him, thus testifying to him. And what Rev. Dow says is the witness of a Christian scholar.

Strangely enough, the very same point is made in the Quran, in a verse revealed in the Makkan phase of the Prophet's life. Thus, the Quran says:

We have sent a messenger who is a witness over you,
just as We sent a messenger to Pharaoh before you.

THE QURAN 73: 15

Here the Quran points to the same truth that is contained in the Bible. In this way, what the Quran relates here is a proof of the truth of prophethood. □



Immeasurable Hope

*Belief in God plays a great role
in our lives in that it adds
immeasurable hope
to our struggle.*

LIFE IS A TIGHTROPE WALK

Art of Balancing

LIVING life is like tightrope walking. 'Tightrope walking' means maintaining your balance between two opposite positions; proceeding very cautiously, so that you avoid either of two equally bad situations.

The word 'tightrope walk' was initially coined for a form of entertainment. A tightrope is a tightly stretched wire or rope fixed high above the ground on which someone walks across, in order to entertain people. But the spirit of the tightrope walk, that is, maintaining a balance between two opposites, is a great principle in real life.

**Maintaining a balance between two opposites,
is a great principle in real life.**

You like sweet food items, but your doctor says that you are diabetic, so you have to avoid sweets. In this case, you will try to find a balance between your desire and the doctor's advice. At home, you experience a disturbing situation, but when you are in your office, you feel that you have to deal with office affairs with a cool mind, so you try to find a balance between two contrary mental states. You are walking on the road, and a scooter-rider hits you. Naturally, you become angry and you want to beat him up, but you think that if you turn violent, the police will arrest you and take you to jail, so you try to control your emotions. In your business, you have suffered loss and fallen into despair, but you think: 'I have lost the present, and if I give in to despair, I will lose the future also.' So, you seek to balance the way you feel.

There are hundreds of such situations that we face in our daily lives. Life is indeed like a tightrope walk. If you lean to one side, you are bound to fall. So, save yourself from leaning to one side, and maintain a balance between the two sides. This is the only formula for a safe journey through life.

For example, a student who fails in an examination thinks of committing suicide due to deep frustration. Then, he remembers the well-known saying: 'Try, try, try again!' He starts rethinking his future plans, and says, 'If I have lost the first chance, there is every possibility that I will be able to avail of the second chance.' He then starts studying with

renewed diligence, appears in the second examination and passes with good marks. This student was able to maintain a balance between two opposite choices and was saved.

According to the conventional dictionary, a tightrope walk is a form of entertainment. But there is another dictionary—the dictionary of wisdom. In this dictionary, a tightrope walk means ‘living with wisdom’.

**One has to maintain a wise balance between
personal desires and external realities.**

A dictionary of words can enhance your vocabulary, but a dictionary of wisdom gives you a chance to achieve success while remaining unaffected by the vicissitudes of life.

Everyone is full of desires, but the world outside of us is full of realities. You have to maintain a wise balance between your personal desires and external realities. This is the real art of life. This is an art which is required by everyone, be he a leader or a common man, a wealthy person or a poor man, an educated or an uneducated person.

On balance, life is the same for all. Almost everyone is destined to face similar situations, and so everyone would be well advised to adopt this formula of careful tightrope walking. □



Surviving Competition

*In this competitive world, those who want concessions
will always find themselves in the back seat.*

*It is only those who make every effort
to earn excellent qualifications
who alone will come
to the fore.*

RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Not Religious Uniformity

WHAT the world needs today—perhaps more than anything else—is an acceptable formula for the attainment of religious harmony. This being currently one of the most important topics under discussion, I shall attempt to present here, in brief, the Islamic viewpoint.

Let us begin with a verse of the Quran which reads:

If anyone seeks a religion other than Islam (submission to
God), it will not be accepted from him;
he will be among the losers
in the Hereafter.

THE QURAN 3: 85

In the opinion of certain interpreters, this verse implies that salvation according to Islam is destined exclusively for Muslims. Islam thus appears to uphold the superiority of the Muslim community. But this is an out-of-context interpretation and is certainly not correct.

Let us take another verse of the Quran which serves as an explanation of the above-quoted verse. It states that:

Believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabeans — whoever
believes in God and the Last Day and does
what is right — shall be rewarded
by their Lord; they have nothing
to fear or to regret.

THE QURAN 2: 62

This verse rules out the concept of community superiority for any given group: even Muslims have been bracketed here along with other religious groups. The content of this verse makes it very clear that salvation, by Islamic standards, depends upon the individual's own actions, and that it is not the prerogative of any group. No man or woman can earn his or her salvation by the mere fact of associating with a particular group. Salvation can be achievable only by a person who truly believes in God and the world hereafter, and who has given genuine proof in this life of having lived a life of right action.

Another important aspect of Islam is that it does not advocate belief in

the many-ness of reality; on the contrary, it stresses reality's oneness. That is, according to Islam, reality is one, not many. That is why, in describing monotheism, the Quran states:

That is God, your true Lord.
What is there, besides the truth, but error?
How then can you turn away?

THE QURAN 10: 32

This verse makes it clear that monotheism (*i.e.* belief in one Lord being the Creator, Sustainer and object of worship) is the truth. All other paths lead one away from, rather than towards, the truth. The fact that certain religious thinkers believe in the many-ness of reality is of no concern to Islam. With oneness as its ideal, it cannot accept many-ness even as a hypothesis.

Both points — the oneness of Absolute Reality, and salvation as the prerogative of the true believer in this oneness — form a major part of Islamic ideals. Just being born into a certain group or community or associating oneself with others of similar persuasion does not entitle one to salvation, be one a Muslim or a non-Muslim.

Islam advocates the policy of tolerance and respect for one another in everyday dealings.

Now let us deal with the fact that in practice, different kinds of religious groups do exist. Then, given the various kinds of differences separating them, let us consider how to bring about harmony between them.

One solution commonly advocated is to spread the conviction that all religions are essentially one: that they are simply diverse paths leading to a common destination. Islam, however, does not accept this view, and, in any case, experience has shown that repeated attempts to bring about harmony on this basis have been a failure.

The Emperor Akbar attempted to achieve harmony by state enforcement of his self-formulated religion, 'Din-e-Ilahi'; Dr Bhagwan Das spent the best part of his life producing a thousand-page book titled *Essential Unity of All Religions*; Mahatma Gandhi attempted to spread this ideal at the national level by a countrywide movement whose slogan was *Ram Rahim ek hai*, meaning Ram and Rahim were one and the same. But

events have shown us that they all failed in their attempts to achieve the goal of religious harmony.

Islam's approach to the entire problem is much more realistic, in that it accepts ideological differences. Once having accepted these differences, it then advocates the policy of tolerance and respect for one another in everyday dealings. This is on a parallel with the principle expressed in the English saying: 'Let us agree to disagree.'

This principle formulated by Islam is best described, not as 'religious harmony', but, rather, as 'harmony among religious people'.

In this connection, one of the commands of the Quran is that 'there shall be no compulsion in religion' (THE QURAN 2: 256). At another place, the Quran declares that 'you have your religion and I have mine' (THE QURAN 109: 6). It was as a result of this commandment that, when the Prophet Muhammad migrated to Madinah, he issued a declaration reaffirming his acceptance of the religion of Muslims for the Muslims and the religion of Jews for the Jews. In order to perpetuate an atmosphere of mutual harmony, the Quran commands the Muslims in their dealings with unbelievers:

Do not revile those (beings) whom they invoke instead of God, lest they, in their hostility, revile God out of ignorance.

THE QURAN 6: 108.

This principle formulated by Islam is best described, not as 'religious harmony', but, rather, as 'harmony among religious people'. This is a principle whose utility is a matter of historical record. It is evident that in the past, as well as in the present, wherever religious harmony has existed, it has been based on unity despite differences, rather than on unity without differences. It is not based on agreeing to agree, but, rather, on agreeing to disagree.

One extremely revolutionary example of this principle is to be found in the life of the Prophet Muhammad. It concerns the conference of three religions which was held in the Prophet's mosque in Madinah. A 60-member Christian delegation from Najd had come to Madinah to determine the situation there. They stayed at the Prophet's mosque. Following them, the Jewish scholars of Madinah also came to the mosque. In this manner, the followers of three faiths (Islam, Christianity

and Judaism) gathered in one place. They carried out dialogues and discussions on various religious topics for many days.

Reports say that during this period, when it was time for the Christians to pray, they stood up in the mosque itself and prayed according to their custom. The Prophet saw this, and let them continue what they were doing. So they performed their prayer in the mosque.

This conference is described by Muhammad Husain Haykal in his book, *The Life of Muhammad*:

The three scriptural religions thus confronted one another in Madinah. The delegation entered with the Prophet into public debate, and these were soon joined by the Jews, thus resulting in a tripartite dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This was a truly great congress which the city of Yathrib [the earlier name for Madinah] had witnessed. In it, the three religions which today dominate the world and determine its destiny had met, and they did so for the greatest idea and the noblest purpose.

Although Islam believes in the oneness of reality, it lays equal stress on the practice of tolerance in everyday dealings, even if it means going to the extent of permitting non-Muslims to come to an Islamic place of worship for religious discussion, and if it is time for their prayers, letting them feel free to perform their worship according to their own ways in the mosque itself.

Tolerance has been the rule throughout the history of Islam. It has, in fact, been one of the main underlying causes for its successful dissemination. Here I quote from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

Islam achieved astonishing success in its first phase. Within a century after the Prophet's death in AD 632 [the early generations of Muslims)... had brought a large part of the globe — from Spain across central Asia to India — under a new Arab Muslim empire... despite these astonishing achievements, other religious groups enjoyed full religious autonomy."
Encyclopaedia Britannica 9/912

And this is the part which I wish particularly to stress:

Despite these astonishing achievements, other religious groups enjoyed full religious autonomy.

Now, a factor that needs to be noted here is that when any religion, having reached this stage of antiquity, has secured a sacred place in the hearts of its believers, it becomes impossible to bring about any changes in the attitude of those who claim to be its followers. Efforts to bring about a change can produce a new religion, but they can never succeed in changing the old religion. There are many examples of such failures in the past.

A very important point from the practical point of view is that although the necessity to bring about harmony among the different religions is not a newly-felt imperative, endeavours towards that end are still only in the formative stages. If progress towards that goal has been slow of attainment, it is because of the established positions which ancient religions have secured in the hearts of their followers, simply by virtue of their antiquity.

Trying to bring about changes in these religions *per se* has never brought about harmony, because instead of old religions being brought closer together by this process, they have developed, rather, into new religions — a process which has either left the problem of disharmony unsolved or has further aggravated it. There are many examples of such abortive efforts in the past.

Encourage people to show respect for others' beliefs and to be humanitarian at all times in their dealings with adherents of other religions.

In view of this historical reality, it is clear that the suggestions made by Islam with regard to promoting harmony among the followers of different religions is the only viable solution. Any alternative suggestion, however attractive it might appear, would be either impracticable or counter-productive.

Once, when discussing this point with me, a religious scholar said, 'We have been attempting to bring about interreligious harmony for the last one hundred years, but the results have been quite dismal. It would seem that there are insurmountable obstacles in the way.'

I replied that the goal we want to attain is certainly a proper one; it is simply that the strategy we employ is impracticable. Religious harmony is, without doubt, a desirable objective. But it cannot be

achieved by attempting to alter people's beliefs — a policy advocated by more than one scholar in this field. The only way to tackle the problem is to encourage people to show respect for others' beliefs and to be humanitarian at all times in their dealings with adherents of other religions.

It is important to realize that it is quite possible to inculcate this attitude without in any way tampering with long-cherished credos. It should never be conceded that the goal of religious harmony is unattainable simply because people's beliefs differ from each other. It is certainly a possibility, provided that it is seen as a matter of practical strategy, and not as a pretext for making ideological changes.

Religious harmony is, without doubt, a desirable objective; but cannot be achieved by attempting to alter people's beliefs.

'Practical strategy' is something which people regularly resort to in matters of their daily existence. As such, it is a known and acceptable method of solving the problem.

Since no new ground has to be broken, either for the religious scholar or for the common man, it should be a very simple matter for people to extend their everyday activity, within their own sphere of existence, to include an honest and sincere effort towards global religious harmony. It is simply a question of having the will and the foresight to do so. □



***Ignore
The Divisions***

*The way to prosper is to
ignore the matters that divide one from others
and concentrate on cultivating areas of mutual concern.*

DIVINE SIGNS

For Those Who Think

ONCE, when visiting a book fair, I felt as if I had entered a city of great learning. But there, I also saw a dog running around looking for food and obviously unaware of the fair, the books and the importance of knowledge. This sight reminded me of some verses of the Quran: 'Those who deny the truth may take their fill of pleasure in this world, and eat as cattle do, but the fire will be their ultimate abode.' (47: 12). And another verse: 'Those who are blind in this world will be blind in the world hereafter also.' (17:72).

God's signs—divine signs from which lessons may be learned—are visible everywhere, but most of us human beings move around in blind ignorance of them. I thought that the dog, being unaware of all that was contained in the books all around it, was similar to the way most human beings lead their lives. People are lost in the creation, and not in the Creator. God has given us wisdom, but we human beings do not apply it. For example, we seldom address ourselves to the biggest questions in life: "What is the Truth?", "Who is the Creator?", "What is the purpose of life?" and "What happens before and after death?" Man continues to be lost in the world of appearances, without even giving a thought to the real world.

We should understand what God wants from us by understanding His divine signs and then lead our lives accordingly. We should remember that God expresses His mind in the Universe and that the Universe is thus full of divine intelligence. We must, therefore, observe it and extract spiritual lessons from it. It is wrong to imagine that one man can know everything by oneself. We need God, the Creator, to guide us here, as everywhere else, for the human mind is not sufficient. Without God's guidance, man cannot acquire knowledge.

In the world as God envisaged it, there would be no malice; there would be universality rather than exclusivity; there would be no intolerance, no anger and no negative thinking. A world where everyone existed peacefully would be of benefit to all. But such a world will come into being only when human beings develop their personalities in accordance with God's likes and dislikes. While the world of nature has no choice but to exist in a state of harmony, we human beings, with our freedom of will, must choose deliberately, and of our own accord, to live in this way. What we need to do, as the Quran says, is colour ourselves 'in the dye of God.' □

THE WORD OF GOD

From The Scriptures

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

Translated from Arabic and commentary
by **Maulana Wahiduddin Khan**

But those who believed and did good deeds will be brought into Gardens with rivers flowing through them. They shall abide there forever by their Lord's permission, and will be welcomed with the greeting, 'Peace!' (14: 23)

To say *assalamu alaykum* or 'peace be with you' at the time of meeting someone is not simply a formal social custom. This is, in fact, an outward symbol of a heartfelt connection.

Those who have lived their lives in this world with feelings of benevolence towards others, who have known how to forget their grievances and love others wholeheartedly, who have always spoken of others with respect, who have chosen for others what they desired for themselves, who have always longed in their heart of hearts for the well-being of others and who have rejoiced in seeing others in a state of well-being—such will be the people who will be entitled to take up their abode in the splendid world of paradise. The greeting *assalamu alaykum* has always given expression to their feelings of love and well-wishing whenever they met their brothers; in the Hereafter, when they greet their heavenly neighbours, this salutation will assume a powerful and more aesthetic form.

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—but an evil word is like an evil tree torn out of the earth; it has no foothold. (14: 24-26)

Those who think deeply, seeking a more profound reality, find it in the present world, Almighty God has appointed outward symbols for

different realities. For example, a good tree is a symbolic representation of the believer.

It is the special characteristic of a tree that it makes the whole world its 'dining table', and in this way develops from the stage of a seed to establish itself on the earth as a majestic tree. The tree absorbs from the earth water, minerals and salts in order to grow; at the same time, it obtains nourishment from the air and light from the sun. It takes nourishment from below as well as from above.

Using all these through the process of photosynthesis, the tree is able to make food throughout. This is what is meant by 'yields its fruit all the time'.

This is also true of the believer. While the common tree is materially a tree, the believer is a conscious 'tree'. The believer observes in the world God's creation and, looking to the system governing it, derives from it a proper lesson and guidance. Moreover, he continuously receives God's blessing from 'above'.

Fruit ripens on the tree in the proper season. Similarly, a believer adopts such behaviour as is proper for every occasion. Whether it is under economic constraints or in economic prosperity; whether it is in a moment of happiness or sorrow; whether it is a matter for complaint or commendation, whether it is in a condition of strength or weakness, on every occasion his language and behaviour express the reverence which he is expected to show as a true servant of God.

The opposite example is that of the 'evil tree', i.e. the wild bush. Its appearance suggests that it is provided with extremely unwholesome food, as a result of which it is covered with thorns, and bitter fruits with an unpleasant taste grow on its branches. It greets anyone who goes near it with a foul smell. Nobody likes such a tree. Wherever it grows, it is uprooted and thrown away.

This is the case with the unbeliever, who, from the beginning, has always been a *persona non-grata* on this earth. To him, the universe, despite its superlative features, has no argument in its favour and teaches no lesson. Though there is no end to the liberality of God's blessings, he has no share in them; God's magnanimity is not reflected in his character or his dealings.

God will strengthen the believers with His steadfast word, both in the present life and in the Hereafter. God lets the wrongdoers go astray. He does what He wills. (14: 27)

Being steadfast in the world means persevering in righteousness and doing good deeds at every turn in one’s life. Being steadfast in the Hereafter means having been successful at the time of question-answer in the grave.

Man is at every moment being put to the test. He faces different types of favourable and unfavourable events. On these occasions, only those who have grown the ‘tree of faith’ inside themselves behave in a correct and godly manner.

In the prevailing circumstances, they manifest the most appropriate reaction expected of them according to the will of God. In contrast to this, the man whose personality has grown like a wild bush evinces bitterness at every event; on every occasion he proves to be a thorn.

When these two types of person are finally tested beyond the grave, the one who proves himself to be the ‘good tree’ will be ushered into the Garden of Paradise. And the one who proves to be the ‘evil tree’ will receive the appropriate punishment of being uprooted from this world in order to be thrown as fuel into the fire of Hell. □



An advertisement for 'Spirit of Islam Online'. On the left, a laptop is shown with its screen displaying an article titled 'THE GREATER JIHAD'. The article text is partially visible, starting with 'ISLAM, in essence, a comprehensive way of life...'. To the right of the laptop, the text reads: 'NOW ACCESS SPIRIT OF ISLAM ONLINE'. Below this text is a hand cursor icon pointing upwards. At the bottom right of the advertisement, the website address 'www.spiritofislam.co.in' is displayed.

ASK MAULANA

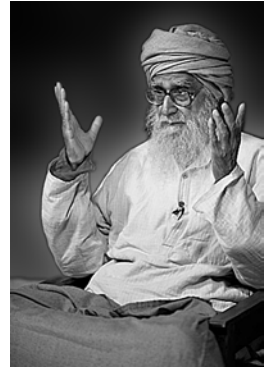
Your Questions, Answered

EXAM STRESS

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan answers questions posed by students on the eve of their exams.

The pressure of studies, together with the repeated questioning of my parents, is stressful and I end up getting very depressed thinking of the consequences if I do not meet my parents' expectations.

Parents are always eager for their children's success. But, at the same time, they should be realistic. Parents must limit themselves to wise counseling. It would be counterproductive if they constantly question their children and put inordinate pressure on them.



Parents must know that in practical life, getting lower grades in exams is a relative thing; because a student learns even if he gets less marks, and then in the next term, he can try to score better. This is the case in other spheres of life, too. There are many examples to prove this. For example, Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda were not toppers at school, but they became heroes in practical life.

We are told that board exams are crucial for students, but fear and uncertainty haunt me and have made me very apprehensive about the future. Some of my friends say that they'll commit suicide if they don't perform well.

According to my experience, nothing of this sort is crucial in life. What is important in life is sincerity and determination. Parents must inculcate this spirit in their children. Qualifying in an examination is good only for securing further admission in educational institutions, but it is not necessary for a better life in the future. Parents must educate their children in the principles of life and try to inculcate in them virtues like patience, wisdom, and adjustment. They must help them understand the importance of a realistic approach. They must teach them to learn from failure, and to know that it really doesn't matter if you don't get your way in everything. These are the things that alone come to use in real life. If you top in examinations, it is no guarantee that you will also top in life. If you are aware of the principles of life, success will follow

you. You mentioned about your friends talking about suicide. Suicide is not an option. Discover your potential, and you will realise that suicide is akin to underestimating both — yourself and the Creator.

I think I have a split personality that is compelling me on like a strict mentor. But pressure to match up to my friends hounds me, and I find that I am unable to concentrate. How do I deal with this?

Don't take your friends as models to emulate. There are thousands of books that discuss the lives of successful persons. You should read these books and try to draw lessons from the lives of such people.

Excessive academic stress is telling on my nerves. I sometimes go completely blank, and I am on the verge of a breakdown. I want my family to talk to me more, but they leave me entirely alone, saying that I shouldn't be disturbed. I am beginning to feel desperate. I have even thought of running away from home.

What your family is doing is out of love. In fact, they are giving you more time to discover your capabilities. Then why complain? Take it as an opportunity. Your books are your best companions. Try to live on your own, then you won't complain about others. The other name for this attitude of yours is 'underestimation of yourself'. Knowing more about the lives of successful people is more important than contact with family members, as the former gives you guidance for life, while the latter only give you emotional satisfaction.

There is a world beyond parents, friends, and school. You should try to increase your learning by knowing about this world. And, be thankful to the person who gives you more time by not coming to meet you!

What if I start panicking during my Maths exam? I keep thinking about this and get tense, and this might make me blank out. I am deeply worried about this.

This is not a bad sign; it only means that you have some capability other than in Mathematics. You should discover that capability and develop it; and in this way, you may emerge a successful person. There are so many persons in history, in the present and in the past, who were not good in Mathematics but who emerged as heroes in practical life!

There are numerous subjects other than Mathematics. The Creator has given different capabilities to different people so that in every field people who can excel emerge. You also have a special quality; discover it and try to make progress in that field. □

Glossary

Abu Dawood noted 9th century collector of *Hadith*.

An-Nasai noted 9th/early 10th century scholar and collector of *Hadith*.

At-Tirmidhi 9th century Islamic scholar and collector of *Hadith*.

Dar ul-Harb Abode of War.

Dar ul-Islam Abode of Islam.

Dar ul-Kufr Abode of Disbelief.

Dawah Conveying the message of God

Din-e-ilahi a Persian term which means 'Divine Faith'. It was an elitist, eclectic religious movement which never numbered more than 19 adherents, formulated by the Mughal emperor Akbar in the late 16th Century CE.

Fiqh Islamic jurisprudence.

Hadith sayings and deeds of the Prophet of Islam.

Hudaibiya a place just outside Makkah where, in 628 CE, the Treaty of Hudaibiya was entered into between the Prophet Muhammad, representing the state of Madinah, and the Quraysh tribe of Makkah.

Ibn Majah 9th century Islamic scholar and compiler of *Hadith*.

Ijtihad the application of independent reasoning in the light of the Quran and *Hadith* to arrive at a knowledge of truth in religious matters.

Imam Al-Bukhari 9th century Islamic scholar who authored the *Hadith* collection known as Sahih Al-Bukhari, which is regarded as the most authentic collection of *Hadith*.

Mujtahid one who exercises *Ijtihad* or independent reasoning in the light of the Quran and *Hadith* to understand religious matters.

Najd a region in the centre of the Arabian Peninsula.

Sahih Al-Bukhari *Hadith* collection by Imam Al-Bukhari, regarded as the most authentic such collection.

Salah also *Salat*; the Islamic prayer.

Shariah moral code and religious law of Islam.

Sunan al-Tirmidhi *Hadith* collection of Abu Isa Muhammad ibn Isa at-Tirmidhi.

Tawbah turning to God in repentance.

Ulema also *ulama*; religious scholars.

Ummah religious community; followers of a prophet.

Yathrib now known as Madinah.

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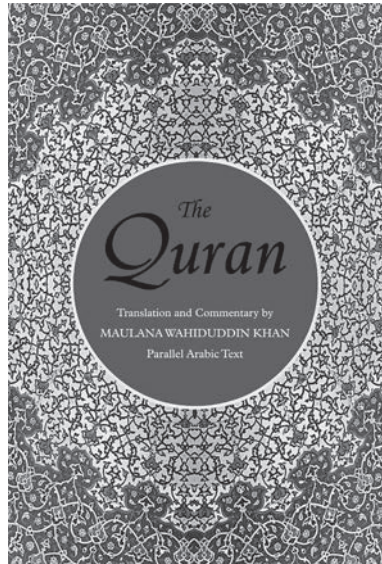
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The Quran

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY
MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN
PARALLEL ARABIC TEXT

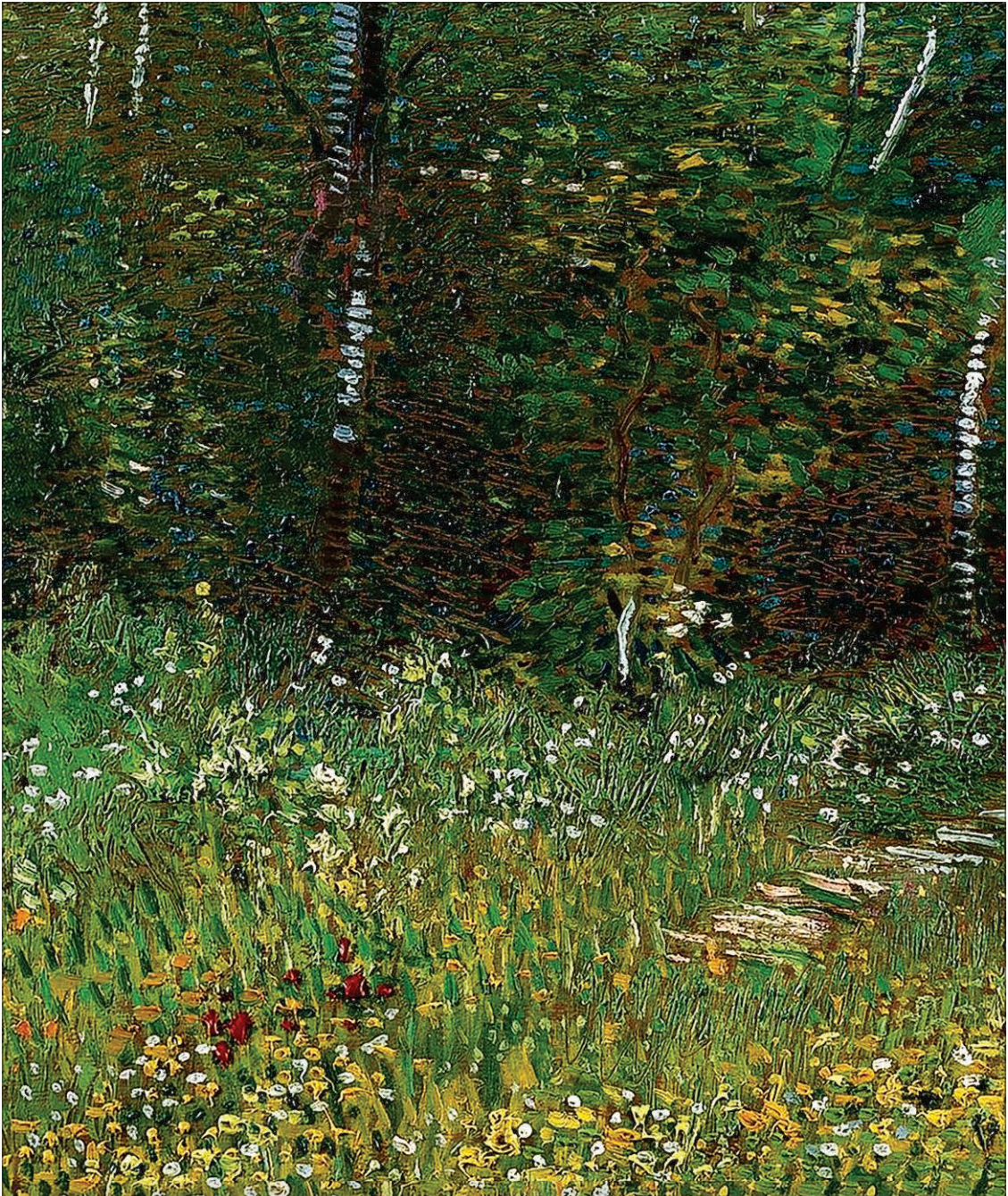
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