

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living



To speak the language of complaint
is to speak against the Creator.

ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

Spirit of Islam is a monthly magazine which is now in its seventh year of publication. The aim of this journal is to present Islam in the contemporary idiom, while at the same time the contents are of universal appeal and of interest to a wider circle of spiritual seekers. It is our desire to help Muslims rediscover Islam, focusing on its message of peace and spirituality as derived from the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet, and in general we strive towards religious understanding for bringing about greater harmony.

Another purpose of this magazine is to assist its readers to deal with life's challenges, deriving positivity even from negative occurrences, gaining in spirituality and developing themselves intellectually so that they may contribute constructively to society.

The magazine's regular readers will appreciate that the entire thrust of its articles is directed to the individual—a collection of intellectually prepared individuals being the sole foundation on which a peaceful and harmonious society can be built.

As the subtitle indicates, *Spirit of Islam* is working towards enlightening people on the subject of global peace and regularly addresses relevant contemporary issues. The articles on peace based on the teachings of the Prophet of Islam offer us an ideology of peace—principles which lay down how peace may be established between conflicting groups, controversies resolved and conflicts defused. We believe that violence begins in the mind and so an effective ideology of peace needs to be presented to counter its influence.

We hope and pray that God helps us in this noble endeavour and grants us His special blessings!



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Towards Global Peace & Spiritual Living

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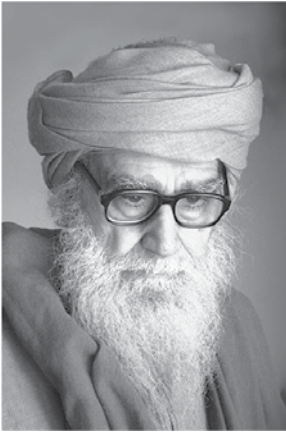
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FROM MAULANA'S DESK



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 Demiurgus Peace International Award and Sayyidina Imam Al Hassan Peace award for promoting peace in Muslim societies. He has been called 'Islam's spiritual ambassador to the world' and is recognized as one of its most influential Muslims¹. 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.

THE PROPHET WANTED PEACE

THE Prophet of Islam, Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Abdul Muttalib, was born in Makkah in AD 570 and died in Madinah in AD 632. The divine book revealed to him is known as the Quran, while his teachings are preserved in the *Hadith* in the original Arabic. A study of both shows that there are two basic Islamic principles: worship of God and compassion to others.

The Prophet said, *"A true Muslim is one from whose hands and tongue people are safe."* This means a Muslim is a peaceful, harmless member of society. This oft-recited invocation reflects his sentiments: *"O God, let us enter into the Home of Peace"*. Living in peace himself, he longed for a society where the culture of peace prevailed. The Prophet gave a workable formula for peace in a multi-religious society: *"For you, your religion and for me, mine"*. It simply meant: *"Follow one faith and respect all"*.

The Prophet never engaged in war of his own volition. He would say: *"Don't wage war against your opponents; always ask God for peace"*. His concept of peace and war was based on *sulh khair*, that is compromise

1. The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims 2018, Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, Jordan.

and adjustment. Aggressive war, undeclared war, guerrilla war, proxy war or any other war is prohibited in Islam. Only defensive war is permitted. Moreover, only a state may go to war. No other organization is permitted to do so. If Muslims were unable to elicit good conduct from others, they had nevertheless to refrain from acting against wrongdoers.

An atmosphere of peace enables normal relations to be established between people. Feelings of love and friendship prevail. In a favourable atmosphere constructive activities flourish and the existing resources can be used for development and progress.

The Prophet thought it essential to differentiate between an aggressor and an enemy. A defensive war might be waged against those who attack them. His followers were not allowed to fight against passive enemies. The problem of enmity had to be solved through love and tolerance. In other words, he wanted Muslims to learn the art of peaceful enmity management.

According to a *Hadith*, "God grants to gentleness what He does not grant to harshness." That is to say, peaceful activism is distinctly superior to violent activism. There is nothing mysterious about the point made in this *Hadith*. This is a simple and a well-known fact of life. In a situation of war and violence, feelings of hatred and enmity flare up between the two sides and, in the process the existing

resources are destroyed. People from both sides get killed and the entire society is pervaded with a jungle of negative feelings. It is quite obvious that in such an atmosphere, no constructive and consolidated work can be done. There is nothing to be achieved in war and violence apart from death and destruction.

On the contrary, an atmosphere of peace enables normal relations to be established between people. Feelings of love and friendship prevail. In a favourable atmosphere constructive activities flourish and the existing resources can be used for development and progress. A positive bent of mind will prevail which will help developmental activities.

The greater ill-effect of war is that it limits opportunities whereas the greatest benefit of peace is that it opens up opportunities to the ultimate extent. War invariably results in further loss, while peace invariably results in further gain. That is why Islam teaches us to avoid war and confrontation at all costs and commands us to establish peace to the greatest possible degree.

I want to narrate an incident relevant to the subject under discussion here. I visited Jerusalem for the first time in August 1995. As you know, Jerusalem is a well known place of conflict in the world. I was walking around the Arab sector of the city. At one place I saw that some Palestinian children were singing this Arabic song in chorus:

Let's make war, let's make war. For war is the way to success.

I went up to them and told them that it would be much better for them to sing their song like this:

Let's make peace, let's make peace. For peace is the way to success.

The children smiled at this. One child about ten years of age got so excited that he rushed to offer me an olive branch which is considered to be a symbol of peace. Needless to say, I accepted it with gratitude. It was indeed the response of nature represented by an innocent child. It is my firm belief that nature loves peace and that if we appeal to human nature the response no doubt will be greatly positive. □

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The suicide attack on the Central Reserve Police Force personnel on February 14, 2019 was a dastardly act of cowardice. I am a 94 year old man, I have spent my life studying Islam and can say with conviction that this kind of violent ideology, while being a permanent threat to world peace, has nothing to do with Islam.

FROM THE EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Dr. Farida Khanam has been a professor at the Department of Islamic Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi. A Study of World's Major Religions, A Simple Guide to Sufism are two of the books amongst others, of which she is the author. She has also translated many books on Islam authored by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan. Currently, the chairperson of Centre for Peace and Spirituality (CPS International), an organization founded by her father Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, she is a regular contributor of articles to journals, newspapers and magazines. Dr. Khanam has edited Maulana's English translation of the Quran and has also translated his Urdu commentary of the Quran into English. Under Maulana Wahiduddin Khan Peace Foundation, along with the CPS team, she has designed a series of courses on peace-building, countering extremism and conflict resolution.

THE ECONOMIC TEACHINGS OF THE QURAN

ISLAM not only allows but encourages honest trade and commerce. The Prophet is reported to have said that a truthful and trustworthy trader shall (in the Hereafter) be among the company of the Prophets and the truthful. There are a large number of verses in the Quran relating to trade and commerce. We are reminded that amongst God's bounties are the beasts of burden created by God for carrying men and material, and the ships which sail by His command carrying men and merchandise. (16: 7; 23: 22)

Legitimate trade is allowed even during the Hajj (2: 198). Men whose business activities do not divert them from prayers and charity are praised (24: 37); while those who leave off prayers when they see some bargain or means of amusement are reprimanded (62: 11); and we are told that the love of God, the Prophet and the struggle for God's cause must have preference over trade.

All illicit ways of making money have been forbidden. For instance, gambling and games of chance; bribery and corruption; hoarding and profiteering; giving short measure or short weight; and usury.

The Prophet of Islam advised traders not to sell the grain purchased by them until they had weighed it. Another saying is that it is open to the buyer and the seller till they part, either to keep the bargain or cancel

it; and that traders must tell the truth and spell out the good and bad points of the goods offered for sale. If they do so, their trade shall be blessed; but if they tell lies and conceal defects, they shall not receive God's blessings. The Prophet severely warned shopkeepers against selling their goods on false oaths.

Economic activity in Islam is governed by what is economically, socially and morally good. Economic activity that is destructive of man's innate goodness and harmful to the individual and society has been declared unlawful or *haram*.

LABOUR AND ECONOMIC RISK

In Islam, gains from economic activity should be based on two factors: labour and economic risk. Income from betting or gambling, for example, is therefore unlawful because it is not acquired through work or labour. Such income is called "unearned income". Income from lending money at a guaranteed rate of interest is unlawful because it is not earned through labour or economic risk. Income from such activities as usury, gambling, monopolistic trade practices, hoarding and speculation is therefore regarded as unlawful or *haram*. All the practices that are not based on productive work can be shown to create hardship and may even lead to social strain and upheaval.

Economic activity in Islam is governed by what is economically, socially and morally good. Economic activity that is destructive of man's innate goodness and harmful to the individual and society has been declared unlawful or haram.

What is most severely condemned in particular is *riba* which is interest or usury. This involves lending money on condition that you get back not only the sum lent but an additional guaranteed sum—without any work on your part and without any economic risk. *Riba* exploits the needs of the borrower and may cause further economic hardship. The lender thus becomes a parasite feeding on the needs of the borrower. As such, *riba* lies at the root of much of the economic and political instability in the world.

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ENTERPRISE

Public finance as practiced in the early Islamic period was based on the ethical and social philosophy of Islam. It did not depend on the discretion of the ruler, rather it was based on guidance from Islamic *Shariah* (law) and aimed at public interest. The general principles

of public finance in Islam are derived from the verses of the Quran. Although certain economic teachings are to be found in the scriptures, the exact details of fiscal policies are not given. These were however elaborated upon by the Prophet of Islam, and so the *Sunnah* (way of the Prophet) is the second most important authority on public finance in Islam.

The Quran says: ‘...of their wealth take alms’ (9: 103), and the method of the Prophet clarifies how the dues collected from the wealthy are to be distributed amongst the poor. The aim was to achieve a healthy circulation of wealth in society. This task was entrusted to the state: this may be considered an example of the earliest public enterprise in Islam. The system of public financial enterprise at the time of the Prophet was very simple as the Prophet himself did not own anything of any great value, nor did the community give much importance to wealth. At the time of the first four Caliphs, who were also Companions of the Prophet, the public money collected consisted of alms (*Zakat*) or certain taxes. All the funds were collected in the public treasury (*bait ul maal*).

The money was used for specific purposes like the running of the government and the welfare of society. However, a major part was reserved for the support for orphans, widows, travellers, the sick and destitute and for assistance in the marriage of orphan girls.

The second Caliph, Umar said: ‘Taxes are justified only when they are collected in a just and legal way and they are spent justly and legally.’

Since Islam kept in view the totality of human activities, the state assumed an active role in looking after the welfare of its members. Public works and care for the subjects of the states were always considered to be religious and moral obligations of the ruler. Abu Yusuf, a famous jurist always maintained the need for such state policies to secure the wellbeing of the people and increase the welfare of the subjects. Abu Musa al-Ash’ari says: ‘The best of men in authority are those under whom people prosper and the worst of them are those under whom people encounter hardship.’

Al-Ghazali too includes fulfilment of the basic needs of members of society as one of the social obligatory duties carried out by the state. He states: ‘It is incumbent on the ruler to help the people when they are facing scarcity, starvation and suffering especially during a famine or when prices are high as people fail to earn a living in these circumstances and it becomes difficult for them to make both ends meet. The ruler should, in these circumstances feed the people and

give them financial assistance from the treasury in order to improve their lot.'

To sum up, the fulfilment of basic economic needs, the safety of society, support in times of famine and similar disasters are the social obligations of the state. In Islam the state enterprise is thus the public enterprise established with the sole aim of serving humanity. It is achieved through collection of dues and taxes by the state into the state treasury and the utilization of these public funds for the good of the whole society and all its members, on an equal basis according to their needs. Islam does not lose sight of the human community in any of its commandments as revealed in the Quran and expounded in the teachings of the Prophet.

THE CONCEPT OF ZAKAT AND SADAQAH AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

Zakat is the fourth 'pillar' of Islam. *Zakat* means setting apart for God, every year a certain portion of one's savings and wealth (generally 2.5 percent) and spending it upon religious duties and on needy members of the community. The fulfilment of this duty is, in fact, a kind of reminder that all one has is in trust from God. Man should, therefore, hold nothing back from God. To whatever one may amass in one's lifetime, one's own personal contribution is insignificant. If the Supreme Being, who is at work in the heavens and on the earth, refused to assist man, there would be nothing that the latter could accomplish single-handedly. He would not be able to plant so much as a single seed to make things grow. Nor could he set up any industry, or carry out any other enterprise. If God were to withdraw from us His material blessings, all our plans would go awry, and all our efforts would be brought to naught.

Zakat is the practical recognition of this fact through the expenditure of money for the cause of God. Islam requires man to consider his personal wealth as belonging to God and, therefore, to set apart a portion for Him. No maximum limit has been prescribed, but a minimum limit has been fixed. According to statutory *Zakat*, individuals must spend a fixed minimum percentage of their wealth every year in the way prescribed by God. While spending from this wealth, one is not permitted to belittle the recipient or to make the recipient feel obligated. This wealth must be given to the needy in the spirit of it being as a trust from God that is being handed over to the genuine

The second Caliph Umar said: 'Taxes are justified only when they are collected in a just and legal way and they are spent justly and legally.'

titleholders. The giver of *Zakat* should feed others so that he himself is fed in the Hereafter, and he should give to others so that he himself is not denied succour by God in the next world.

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

The fulfillment of basic economic needs, the safety of society, support in times of famine and similar disasters are the social obligations of the state.

We must serve our fellow human beings only in the hope of receiving a reward from God. We must give to others with the divine assurance that we will be repaid in full in the next world. In a society where there is no exploitation, feelings of mutual hatred and

unconcern cannot flourish. A climate of mutual distrust and disorder is simply not allowed to come into being; each person lives in peace with another, and society becomes a model of harmony and prosperity.

On the legal plane, *Zakat* is an annual tax, or duty; in essence and spirit, it is recognition on the part of man of the share which God, and other men, have in his wealth. There are two forms of charity in Islam—obligatory and voluntary. In addition to *Zakat* there is *sadaqah*. *Zakat*, derived from the word *zakah*, means to purify. By giving up a portion of the wealth in one's possession, the remainder to be used by the alms-giver, is purified or legalised.

According to the teachings of Islam, the giving of *sadaqa* serves a number of functions. *Sadaqa*, first and foremost acts as expiation for sins. Believers are asked to give *sadaqa* immediately following any transgression. Voluntary alms-giving can also compensate for any shortcoming in the past payment of *Zakat*. *Sadaqah* is recommended 'by night and by day, in secret and in public' in order to seek God's pleasure (2: 274). The constant giving of a little is said to please God more

than the occasional giving of much. *Sadaqa* is also a means of moral edification. It purifies the soul of the evil of avarice, and is a reflection of the generosity of God the All-Giving.

Inspired by the verses of the Quran and the teachings and practices of the Prophet and his Companions, the giving of *sadaqa* to individuals or institutions remains a widespread practice among Muslims. The Prophet, the most generous of men, used to make personal donations.

Zakat is God's due portion of what we own and what we produce. There are many ways of making a living in this world: one can work on the land, in a factory, a shop or in an office. But what part do we actually play in all this? Our role is, in fact, minimal. Multiple forces are at work in the universe and within us. All these forces come together to enable us to earn a livelihood. All this has been ordained by the Lord of the Universe. That is why, once a year, one should calculate one's earnings, and put aside a portion for God. By doing so, one acknowledges the fact that it is all from God.

Zakat is a symbol of one's duty to recognize the rights of others and have sympathy with them in pain or sorrow. These sentiments should become so deep-rooted that one should begin to regard one's own wealth as belonging, in part, to others.

Without His help, one could earn nothing. To spend for the cause of God is to express a sublime attachment to the Lord. It shows a yearning to empty oneself before Him. One should feel as one gives that one is offering everything to God and seeking nothing for oneself. The following verse shows the spirit in which a Muslim should help others:

'We feed you for the sake of God alone, we seek neither recompense nor thanks from you.' (76: 9)

There are eight categories of people, eligible to receive *Zakat* which have been specified in this verse of the Quran:

'Alms are only for: the poor and the destitute, for those who collect *Zakat*, for conciliating people's hearts, for freeing slaves, for those in debt, for spending for God's cause, and for travellers in need. It is a legal obligation enjoined by God. God is all-knowing and wise.' (9: 60)

Zakat funds are to be spent, according to the Quran, on the poor and the destitute, the wayfarer, the bankrupt, the needy, those who newly embrace Islam, captives, collectors of *Zakat* and in the cause of God. The last category allows *Zakat* funds to be used for the general welfare of the people—education, social work, etc. *Zakat* in spirit is an act of worship, while in its external form, it is the carrying out of a social service.

Zakat is thus not merely the payment of a tax, as it is generally understood, but rather a matter of great religious significance. Its importance is underscored by the fact that the Quran treats it on par with (*salat*) prayer. The Quran frequently enjoins the believers, 'to say prayers and pay the *Zakat*' and goes to the extent of saying that one cannot attain righteousness unless one spends out of one's wealth for the love of God:

'By no means shall you attain righteousness unless you give of that which you love.' (3: 92)

Moreover, the Quran disapproves of people who make a show of their alms-giving. (2: 271)

Zakat is a test of the sincerity and unselfishness of the believer. For there is no authority to force any Muslim to pay it. It is entirely up to the conscience of the individual whether they pay or not. The willingness to pay shows that one's heart is free of the love of money. It shows that one is prepared to use one's money for the service of humanity.

The Prophet of Islam was always very concerned for the poor and the needy. He went so far as to say:

'He is not a believer who eats his fill while his neighbour remains hungry by his side.' (*Muslim*)

THE UTILIZATION OF ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Agriculture is essential and should be given priority in any community. According to the Quran, God has spread out the earth and made it fertile and therefore fit for cultivation. He sends the "fertilizing winds" to drive the clouds and scatter the seeds and He sends down rain to bring forth vegetation of all kinds. The many verses in which these bounties and favours of God are mentioned all serve to encourage people not only to thank God but to engage in farming.

There are many sayings of the Prophet which commend agricultural production. The Prophet of Islam said:

'When a person plants a tree or cultivates a crop, from which birds or human beings eat it is accounted as a (rewardable) charity for the one who plants'.

Stressing the importance of irrigation and land reclamation for agricultural purposes, the Prophet also said:

'Whoever brings dead land to life, for him there is a reward in it, and whatever any creature seeking food eats of it, shall be considered as charity from him.'

Agriculture is a vital activity which has benefits in this world and rewards in the Hereafter. This was one occupation, which the Prophet considered very dignified. Although many people do not look upon farmers and shepherds with respect, the Prophet gave dignity to this occupation when he said:

"God did not send a prophet without his having tended sheep." "You too, O Messenger of Allah?" asked his Companions. "Yes, I tended sheep for wages for the people of Makkah."

One should observe all the Islamic advice and regulations about the proper care and treatment of animals: to provide for them all that their kind require, not to burden them beyond what they can bear, not to injure them and if they are used for food, to slaughter them in the most kind and efficient manner.

INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

While agriculture is essential and highly encouraged as an occupation, the Prophet saw that it was undesirable that people should confine their economic efforts solely to agriculture and pastoral pursuits.

In addition to agriculture, Muslims needed to develop the industries, crafts and skills needed to build a strong community.

The Quran mentions the opportunities and the needs for various types of industrial production involving the use of iron, copper and other minerals—resources which God has placed at the disposal of man.

'And We provided and revealed the use of iron, in which there is great power and benefits for mankind...' (57: 25)

It speaks, for example, of the value of shipbuilding and the vast expanses of ocean, which can be explored in various ways for the benefit of mankind.

In engaging in industrial production and the manufacture of goods, the benefit of mankind and the environment in general must be given high priority. Whatever is harmful, or is intended for a harmful purpose, should not be manufactured or produced. Whatever is harmful to the beliefs, good morals and life style of a society should likewise not be produced.

TRADE

The Quran and the *Hadith* of the Prophet, urge Muslims to engage in trade and commerce, and to undertake journeys for what the Quran refers to as “seeking the bounty of God”.

All trade in Islam is allowed unless it involves injustice, cheating, making exorbitant profits, or the promotion or selling of something which is *haram*.

It is *haram* to do business in alcoholic drinks, intoxicants, harmful drugs, or anything the consumption and use of which, Islam has prohibited. One should not promote such products which are *haram*. Professions involving the use or propagation of harmful knowledge are also not allowed.

The Prophet, said:

'When God prohibits a thing, He prohibits (giving and receiving)
the price as well.'

Any healthy community or society needs a variety of professions to meet its needs. Professions relating to man’s basic needs—food, clothing, shelter, health care, education, and defence. It is the basic teaching of Islam that in choosing one’s profession one should be driven by what is essential for the humankind and not by what gives the individual huge profits. All the commandments of God, the teachings of the Prophet point towards the fact that one should involve oneself only in those economic activities which are totally beneficial to humankind and shun even the smallest economic activity which is harmful to humankind. There is huge accountability regarding this aspect. □

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INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE

Building Bridges

WE are living in an age of information—the age of the knowledge explosion. Today, everyone wants to know more and more about everything, including religion. The result is that, today, on the subject of religion, people are far better informed than ever before.

At the same time, we are living in a world of differences—of multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic societies. To remove the differences people fight amongst themselves not realizing that differences cannot be removed. A reformer has rightly said that, nature abhors uniformity. This means ‘difference’ is a part of nature and it exists in every aspect of life including religion. What we need to do is simply learn the ‘art of difference management’ rather than the art of difference elimination. For, who has the power to remove differences?

How do we manage differences? In ancient times, people used to take a confrontational course whenever differences arose. They knew only one way to settle disputes, and that was war. But democracy put an end to this way of settling matters and introduced the culture of peace.

We should also understand that difference is not a curse, but rather a blessing. History shows that difference of opinion leads to dialogue, and dialogue results in intellectual development, which is a boon for everyone concerned. Difference of opinion also leads to high thinking, which is the sole key to all kinds of human progress.

In the realm of religion, today, differences are managed only through meaningful and positive ‘inter-faith dialogue’ between people of world religions. The aim of dialogue is to seek peaceful solutions to controversial matters, in spite of differences. There may be differences in religion and culture, but there is absolutely no difference or discrimination made between people in terms of respect and honour.

In the realm of religion, today, differences are managed only through meaningful and positive ‘inter-faith dialogue’ between people of world religions. The aim of dialogue is to seek peaceful solutions to controversial matters, in spite of differences.

The principle of dialogue is that the parties should present their viewpoints supported by arguments, while remaining ever ready to give and take—a pre-requisite of a successful dialogue—rather than insist on all demands being unconditionally met.

Dialogue, or peaceful negotiation, is the path prescribed by Islam. Islam is based on the principle of *dawah*, which is another name for peaceful negotiation. Violence is totally forbidden in Islam. There is only one exception to this ban and that is when it is engaged in self-defense. This can take place only at the time of external invasion, and such action is the prerogative of an established government. Non-governmental organizations have no right to wage a war in the name of justice, or even in self-defense.

The Prophet of Islam started his mission in AD 610. This mission was to communicate his ideology to people by talking to them, listening to their objections and trying to convince them of his viewpoint by means of arguments. One of the initial Quranic verses revealed to him was that the ideology given by God to the Prophet should be spread by him among the people. The Prophet's ideology was based on monotheism, whereas his Arab contemporaries believed in polytheism. It was but natural, therefore, that his mission should be subjected to bilateral negotiation.

He would communicate his point to people, listen to their responses and then give them further explanations. In this way his mission became a practical demonstration of what we now term dialogue. To make this dialogue fruitful, the Quran lays down certain meaningful guidelines: "Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation and reason with them in a way that is best." (16: 125).

This verse shows that your conversation with others should be carried on in the best and most gracious way, that is any bickering with other parties has to be avoided. After listening to their objections, the point should be made in such a way as appeals to their minds. That is, it should not end in mere debate, but should be result-oriented. The conversation should not appear to be between rivals, but should take a scientific course.

The Quran makes this quite explicit:

"Good and evil are not alike. Repel evil with that which is best, then he between whom and you was enmity will become as if he were a warm friend." (41: 34)

This verse of the Quran tells us that no one is an enemy. Everyone is potentially a friend. This is so because everyone is born with the same nature. From this Quranic principle, we learn that the beginning of any dialogue should not be marked by any sign of frustration about the possible outcome. The right approach is to display a hopeful attitude and at the very outset to, suppress any tone which would suggest low expectations of success.

In this regard, another verse of the Quran is as follows:

“Say: “O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you that we worship none but God.” (3: 64)

We learn from this verse the subject of discussion, when a conversation is being held between two parties. That is, the beginning of a dialogue should not be started with a controversy. Instead, a common ground should be sought on which the discussion should begin. The sequence of the discussion, therefore, should be from agreement to difference of opinion and then back to agreement.

In Islam, the formula for social peace, social harmony and inter-faith dialogue is based on peaceful co-existence as has been given in the following verse of the Quran:

“You have your religion and I have mine.” (109: 6)

In other words, the principle of dialogue given by Islam is, 'Follow one and respect all', or the method of 'mutual respect'. As per the teachings of Islam, while respecting others, we have to welcome differences wholeheartedly without any reservation. It is hatred, which has to be eliminated, and not difference of opinion. People may have their differences in belief, religion, culture, etc., but while following their religion, they have to have mutual respect for others and discover a common bond between them, which shows them all to be human beings.

When dialogue takes place between two parties on a controversial subject, it is essential that an amicable atmosphere be maintained. If media belonging to both the parties set about arousing animosity, and people on both sides are engaged in spreading antagonistic feelings, an unfavourable atmosphere will be created that will make no fruitful dialogue possible.

It is a fact that the result of dialogue is not solely dependent upon the atmosphere of the immediate surroundings, but depends rather upon the external environment.

Another principle of dialogue can be drawn from the Hudaibiya Peace Treaty. This treaty was signed only after long negotiations between the Prophet of Islam and the Quraysh. It is a matter of historical record that the conclusion of this treaty was possible because the Prophet unilaterally accepted the conditions laid down by the Quraysh.

The principle of dialogue derived from this *Sunnah* (method) of the Prophet is that both the parties should present their viewpoints supported by arguments, while remaining ever ready to give and take—a pre-requisite of a successful dialogue—rather than insisting on all demands being unconditionally met.

In practical matters, Islam advocates flexibility to the ultimate possible extent.

We learn from a number of examples throughout Islamic history that Islam not only lays down principles of dialogue, but also gives practical illustrations. In the Makkah period of his mission, the Prophet of Islam repeatedly practiced the principle of dialogue. For instance, once the Quraysh sent their leader, Utba ibn Rabiyya, as their representative to the Prophet of Islam so that an atmosphere of peace might be arrived at through negotiation on the subject of mutual differences.

Islam advocates an atmosphere where peace, tolerance, love and well-wishing are the order of the day—an atmosphere where controversies are resolved without the use of violence.

The traditions tell us that Utba heard the Prophet out patiently and with full attention; and then conveyed what he had said to the Quraysh. Similarly, at the invitation of his uncle, Abu Talib, representatives of the Quraysh gathered at the Prophet's home and held negotiations there peacefully on controversial matters.

This principle of peaceful negotiations can also be witnessed in the negotiations held at Hudaibiya between the Quraysh and the Prophet of Islam that continued for about two weeks, culminating in the treaty of Hudaibiya. This event, without doubt, is a successful example of peaceful negotiation. Again, in the presence of the Prophet of Islam, tripartite talks were held between representatives of three religions—Islam, Judaism and Christianity, in the Prophet's mosque in Madinah. This historic event, which took place in the sacred place of worship, shows the importance given to peaceful dialogue in Islam. These examples, which are many in number, relate to the golden age of the Prophet and his Companions. That is why; the practice of dialogue in terms of bilateral negotiation enjoys the position of an established principle in Islam.

Conclusion

It becomes clear from the above discussion that the method of Islam is that of peaceful dialogue. The Quran tells us that the way of peace is the best way. (4: 128)

There is another verse, which tells us that the way of negotiation and arbitration should be adopted in controversial matters. (4: 35)

The Prophet said "Do not desire or seek confrontation with the enemy, but rather ask for peace from God."

The objective of Islam is to bring about a divine revolution, to invite people to the worship of God, to strive for a society in which spiritual, ethical, and human values are cherished. Islam advocates an atmosphere where peace, tolerance, love and well-wishing are the order of the day, where controversies are resolved without the use of violence. This is the desired world of Islam and such a world can be established only through peaceful dialogue. The truth is that Islam is based on monotheism, with regard to God; and on peaceful dialogue, with regard to methodology. This is the essence of Islamic teaching. No other way is possible in Islam. □



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TOWARDS GLOBAL PEACE

We often talk of peace in the context of war. But this is a very narrow and restricted notion of peace. Peace is deeply linked with the entirety of human life. Peace is a complete ideology in itself. Peace is the only religion for both—man and the universe. It is the master-key that opens the doors to every success. Peace creates a favourable atmosphere for success in every endeavour. Without peace, no positive action—small or big—is possible.



REALISM IS THE KEY TO PEACE

PEACE is a must for the survival of our civilization. Peace is a must for all kinds of constructive work. As such, it is of the greatest concern to everyone. Everyone wants a peaceful society, a peaceful world. Yet, for the greater part of humanity, peace remains a distant dream. Why so? Why this sad state of affairs? Why this contradiction between ideal and practice? It is high time to go deeper into the matter. It is the duty of all sincere people to inquire into the real cause of this contradiction so that a viable peace formula may be evolved.

An in-depth study of this problem from the historical as well as the Islamic perspective reveals two viewpoints in this matter: the concept of peace as defined by social scientists and the concept of peace as defined by the ideologists. The scientists' concept of peace is based on realities while the idealists' concept of peace is based on utopianism. In other words, on mere wishful thinking.

It is mainly the ideologists' concept of peace which has created the present crisis of peace throughout the world. The scientists' formula for peace is the only practicable one, for the idealists' formula is merely a formulation of people's own wishes.

Academicians define peace as an absence of war. But the idealists differ with this notion saying that the mere absence of war is nothing. They hold that peace and justice should go hand in hand. To them the only acceptable formula is that which restores justice in its ideal sense. But the building of such a utopian world is simply impossible.

This concept of peace is seemingly beautiful. Because of this apparent beauty, it has gained general popularity. The masses everywhere are obsessed with the idealistic concept of peace. But one has to differentiate between what is possible and what is impossible. There is no other alternative. One has to be practical rather than idealistic if one wants to achieve a positive result. The object of peace is only to normalize the situation between two warring sides.

Peace is not aimed at satisfying the concerned parties in terms of rights and justice. Rights and justice are totally different issues. Linking them with peace is unnatural as well as impractical. These are goals to be worked for separately and independently. Furthermore, in this world of competition, no one can receive peace and justice in terms of his own personal criteria. It is situations and circumstances which will dictate to what extent we can achieve these goals.

In fact, in this world of competition, it is not possible for anyone to receive perfect justice. So one has to be content with practical justice (pragmatic solutions). In depth studies have found that those people who seek peace with justice fail to achieve anything positive. Moreover, during this futile exercise they lose what they already had in their hand. Conversely, those who delink justice from peace are always successful in life. The study leads to the conclusion that the scientific concept of peace is the only correct and practicable concept. Thus peace is not meant to establish justice. The purpose of peace is only to normalise the situation so that one may uninterruptedly avail of the opportunities present at that time.

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To illustrate the point, there are two examples from history, one from the early period of Islam and one from the modern history of Japan. It is a well known fact that the Prophet of Islam was repeatedly challenged by his opponents in ancient Arabia. There were several instances of wars and violence. Then the Prophet managed to finalize a peace treaty between the Muslims and their opponents. It is known as Hudaibiya Peace Treaty in Islamic history. Now how was this peace treaty finalized? If you examine historical records, you will find that, in terms of justice being done, several problems arose. The treaty could be concluded because the Prophet was able to delink the question of justice from the question of peace. This delinking of the

two issues gave him the success which is described in the Quran as a clear victory. (48: 1)

Now, why does the Quran describe this as a victory, when in fact, it was the acceptance of all the conditions imposed by the Prophet's opponents? The Quran called this a victory because, although the peace treaty itself was devoid of justice, it instantly normalized the situation, thus enabling the Prophet to avail of the opportunities present at the time. What the Prophet lost in Hudaibiya, he gained on a far larger scale throughout the whole of Arabia.

Take a look at the example of Japan. In World War II, Japan was defeated by the United States of America Okinawa Island was occupied by the American army after the conclusion of a peace treaty. Its terms were dictated by America. Japan, willingly or unwillingly, accepted a treaty in which justice was delinked from peace. But what was the result? Within a period of forty years the entire scenario had changed. Japan did lose the Okinawa Island, but it gained the entire USA (North American continent) as its industrial market. And now it enjoys the status of a world economic superpower.

Why is it that reason and religion both advocate the acceptance of reality or unilateral adjustment in times of conflict? It is because in every adverse situation a status quo exists between the two sides. If any party opts for a change in the status quo the result will be breakdown. Instead, by accepting the status quo it will find room for advancement towards its goal.

The Quran says that of all courses, reconciliation is the best (4:128). That is, in matters of controversy, the best policy is peaceful settlement rather than confrontation. This is because conciliation or peaceful settlement gives one scope to make progress, whereas confrontation arrests the onward journey to success.

Peace is a must not only for our advancement, but for our very survival. But peace can be attained only by accepting two simple precepts. Make all efforts to change what we can, and learn to live with the things which we cannot change. In matters which we can change we should be dedicated activists. In matters which we cannot change we should become status quoists. Otherwise, peace for us will forever remain a distant dream. □



THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Discover Your Helplessness

SINCE the past five hundred years, the scientific study of the universe has been underway. Numerous great minds have been involved in research and findings related to the universe. The final outcome of these studies has revealed that the cosmos is so vast and expansive that it is near impossible for the human mind to fully encompass it. The most recent study estimates that human knowledge has been able to fathom only five percent of the universe. With respect to this five percent, a scientist has acknowledged that the more we discover the more we come to understand that even those phenomena we have discovered are yet undiscovered. In other words, it can be said that we are striving to know more and more about less and less.

Knowledge of creation is equivalent to knowledge of the Creator. However, experience shows that humans have been able to discern only a meagre five percent of the creation of this Creator. In this scenario, for a person to demand that he be provided absolute knowledge of the Creator is undoubtedly unscientific. If humans have not been able to acquire thorough knowledge of creation, how can they have conclusive knowledge about the Creator?

Creation lies within space and time, while the Creator exists beyond space and time. If the mind is so confined as to be unable to encompass that which lies within space and time, how can it comprehend that which goes beyond the realm of space and time?

Creation lies within space and time, while the Creator exists beyond space and time. If the mind is so confined as to be unable to encompass that which lies within space and time, how can it comprehend that which goes beyond the realm of space and time?

The truth is that in this world a person can discover God only at the level of his helplessness and not at the level of absolute knowledge. □



FROM THE SPIRITUAL TREE

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



THE REALITY OF TAZKIYA

AS stated in the first chapter of the Quran, one of the duties of the Prophet *vis-a-vis* his contemporaries was “to teach them the scripture and wisdom, and purify them.” (2: 129). In other words, teach them *tazkiya*.

It is necessary for every believer to purify himself. Without purification, that calibre of personality, referred to in the Quran a God-oriented personality, (3: 79). cannot be developed. The truth is that purification alone can lead man to Heaven. (20: 76)

Tazkiya literally means growth, one example of which can be seen in the tree. A tree is the result of the growth of a seed. When a seed finds a favourable environment, it starts growing until it becomes a green, verdant tree. The same is true of the purification of man. In this sense *tazkiya* also confers intellectual development.

God has created man with great potential and this potential of the human personality is actualized by *tazkiya*. In this sense it would be right to call it the building of the human personality on a divine foundation.

When a person accepts faith he has, in fact started the journey of *tazkiya*. Gradually, he becomes a purified soul, or an intellectually

and spiritually developed personality. This is the man who will gain entrance into the eternal Paradise of the Hereafter.

There is nothing mysterious about *tazkiya*. It is not at all related to any mysterious inspiration from some supposedly saintly person. *Tazkiya* is not an abstract concept. It is a known reality. It is the result of a struggle on the part of the individual. It can be attained, through contemplation. This entails pondering over or thinking about oneself and the universe, and receiving intellectual sustenance for God realization. This is the process which results in a purified personality. □



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CLARIFICATION OF A FALLACY

Matter of Prudence

THERE are certain verses in the Quran which convey injunctions similar to the '*...slay them wherever you find them.*' (2:191). Referring to such verses, there are some who attempt to give the impression that Islam is a religion of war and violence. This is totally untrue. Such verses relate in a restricted sense, to those who have unilaterally attacked the Muslims. The above verse does not convey the general command of Islam.

The truth of the matter is that the Quran was not revealed instantly in the complete form in which it exists today. It was revealed from time to time, according to the circumstances, over a timespan of 23 years. If this is divided into years of war and peace, the period of peace amounts to twenty years, while that of war amounts only to three years. The revelations during these twenty peaceful years were the peaceful teachings of Islam as are conveyed in the verses regarding realization of God, worship, morality, justice, etc.

This division of commands is a natural one and is found in all religious books. For instance, the Gita, the holy book of the Hindus pertains to wisdom and moral values. Yet along with this is the exhortation of

The commands, being specific to certain circumstances, had no general application and were meant to be followed only in the short term. They were not meant to be valid for all time to come. That is why, the permanent status of the Prophet has been termed a mercy for all humankind.'

Krishna to Arjun, encouraging him to fight. (3: 30). This does not mean that believers in the Gita should wage wars all the time. Gandhiji, after all, derived his philosophy of non-violence from the same Gita. The exhortation to wage war in the Gita applies only to exceptional cases where circumstances leave no choice. But for general day-to-day existence it gives the same peaceful commands as derived from it by Mahatma Gandhi.

Similarly, Jesus Christ said: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on Earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matthew, 10: 34)

It would not be right to conclude that the religion preached by Christ was one of war and violence, for such utterances relate purely to particular occasions. So far as general life is concerned, Christ taught peaceful values,

such as the building up of a good character, loving each other, helping the poor and needy, etc.

The same is true of the Quran. When the Prophet of Islam emigrated from Makkah to Madinah, the polytheist tribes were aggressive towards him. But the Prophet always averted their attacks by the exercise of patience and the strategy of avoidance. However on certain occasions no other options existed, save that of retaliation. Therefore, he had to engage in battle on certain occasions. It was these circumstances which occasioned those revelations relating to war. These commands, being specific to certain circumstances, had no general application and were meant to be followed only in the short term. They were not meant to be valid for all time to come. That is why, the permanent status of the Prophet has been termed a, 'mercy for all humankind.' (21:107) □



*Of the two kinds of memories, good
and bad, the former gives you energy,
while the latter ruins your life.*

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EXCOMMUNICATION FROM ISLAM

God's Domain

THE Prophet said, "When a person calls his brother a disbeliever (*kafir*), it applies to one of the two. If the addressee is not a disbeliever, then the person who has made the claim will become a disbeliever in God's eyes." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*)

Commenting on a similar saying of the Prophet in *Sahih Muslim*, Imam al-Nawawi has stated: "It is the position of people of the truth (*ahl al-haqq*) that no person from among the people of the *qiblah* (direction of the Kabah, the sacred house of God) shall ever be declared as *kafir* for any sin." (*Sharh al-Nawawi*) That is, a person who prays facing the Kabah as *qiblah* will not be declared as *kafir*, or will not be excommunicated from Islam, on any pretext.

The truth is that to declare any person as *kafir* or disbeliever is entirely God's domain, it is not upon any human being to do so. Belief in or denial of religion can be truly ascertained

Belief in or denial of religion can be truly ascertained through a person's intention, and only God has true knowledge of one's intentions.

This is why only God, and not any human being, can pass a verdict on a person being a believer or disbeliever.

through a person's intention, and only God has true knowledge of one's intentions. This is why only God, and not any human being, can pass a verdict on a person being a believer or disbeliever. The sole responsibility of an individual is that if he sees another person at fault, he should earnestly persuade and advise him about the right course and pray to God for his guidance. To declare a person *kafir*, or disbeliever, is to stray in God's domain, for which nobody has any right.

A person who labels others *kafir* and excommunicates them from religion is actually proclaiming about himself that he does not possess a fearful and submissive heart. One who truly believes in God cannot

afford to issue statements about another person's disbelief, as he would be refrained by the apprehension that if the person whom he has declared as *kafir* is not really so, then he would himself be seen as such by God. No one who has genuine fear of God can ever afford to take such risks. □



WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PRESENT-DAY VIOLENCE IN THE NAME OF ISLAM?

An Objective Analysis

WHO is to be held responsible for the present-day hatred and violence in the name of Islam? The responsibility for this does not lie with those Muslim youth who driven by acrimony carry out violent activities. Rather the responsibility for such action is to be borne by those so-called Islamic thinkers who, in the name of bringing about an “Islamic revolution”, gave such a way of thinking to Muslim youth whose result could be nothing but violence and hatred in the name of Islam.

The method of Islam is that of *dawah* or peaceful dissemination of Islamic teachings. The way of politics is contrary to *dawah*. While the basis of *dawah* is peace, politics is based on confrontation with others. Present-day Islamic thinkers gave a political interpretation to Islam, as the result of which the Islamic movement became a political movement. This culminated into all those unpleasant aspects—generally identified with politics—to be associated with Islam as well.

Those engaged in *dawah* consider others as potentially their friends. The case of politics is totally opposite to this, as those who are involved in politics look at others as their rivals or opponents. This is why *dawah culture* fosters mercy and compassion between people, while political activism leads to the spread of hatred. All kind of good finds its way in a society where people have mercy for each other, while the culture of hatred breeds animosity and violence. No virtue can ever be found alongside hatred. □

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ISLAMIC VIRTUES

To Emulate

FOR centuries the lives of the Prophet and his Companions have served as models of a truly God-fearing existence for all humankind, and will continue to do so. Hence God's preservation of this page of history with such exactitude that anyone, who is sincere about learning from their example can know, even today, every detail of how they lived and died. The following are a few of the examples worth emulating.

The Quran is for Admonition, not just for Recital

Aishah, hearing of certain individuals who read the Quran all night, reading it right through once, or even twice in a night, remarked, "What is there in mere recitation?" "I used to stay up all night with the Prophet and, in his recitations of the chapters entitled 'Cow', 'Family of Imran', and 'Women', whenever he came to a verse which contained a warning, he would pray to God and seek refuge with Him, and whenever he came to a verse bearing good tidings, he would pray to God and express his longing for what was mentioned in the verse".

Bear Hardship with Patience

Abu Bakr once recited this verse of the Quran before the Prophet: "He that does evil shall be requited with it. There shall be none to protect or help him." (4: 123) "How," he asked, "can things now turn out well for us, since we shall have to pay for the evil that we do?" "May God forgive you, Abu Bakr," the Prophet said, "don't you ever become ill, or feel fatigue or distress? Aren't you sometimes afflicted with hardship? Don't you fall into error now and then?" Abu Bakr said that he did indeed. "This then is the requital of your sins in this world," said the Prophet.

Encouraging Criticism

The Caliph Umar once came to the drinking place of the Bani Harithah where he came upon Muhammad ibn Maslamah. "How do you find me?" he asked Muhammad ibn Maslamah. "By God, I find you just as I would like you to be and just as it would please any well-wisher to see you. You are good at accumulating wealth, I see, but you keep your hands clean of it yourself, distributing it equitably".

"But," went on Muhammad ibn Maslamah, "If you adopt a crooked course, we will straighten you, just as we straighten swords by placing

them in a vice.” At these words, Umar, the second Muslim Caliph, exclaimed: “Praise be to God, who has put me among a people who will straighten me when I become crooked.”

Rising above Love and Hate

When the Prophet emigrated from Makkah to Madinah, the keys of the House of God in Makkah were in the custody of one Uthman ibn Abu Talhah, they having remained in the keeping of his family for several generations. One day, the Prophet asked Uthman for the keys, but the latter refused to hand them over, and spoke rudely to him. The Prophet heard him out but all he said finally was: “Uthman, perhaps you will live to see the day when I shall have these keys in my hands. I shall then be in a position to give them unto whom I will.” “It will be a day of disgrace and woe for the Quraysh when the keys of the Kabah are in the hands of one such as you”, replied Uthman.

After the conquest of Makkah, God’s Messenger reigned supreme there, and asked for the keys of the Kabah to be handed over to him. When the keys were actually in his hands, his own cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, arose and asked for them to be given to him. The Prophet, however, did not respond, Instead, he summoned Uthman ibn Talhah. When he stood before him, the Prophet handed him the keys, saying, “Here are your keys, Uthman. This is a day of righteousness and fulfillment of promises.”

Receiving Praise, not with Conceit, but with Humility

According to Naafi someone launching into extravagant eulogies to Abdullah ibn Umar, addressed him as “most noble of men, son of the most noble”. “Neither am I the most noble of men, nor am I the son of the most noble,” replied Ibn Umar. “I am just one of God’s servants; in Him do I have hope, and Him do I fear. By God, you are bent on destroying a man with such praise.” □



*An honest person cannot afford
to live as an indifferent member
of society.*

PEACE FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE

Realistic Goal

PEACE is the most discussed theme in the world. Every section of society claims that it wants to establish peace. It is difficult to find a single person who is an exception to this rule. But, why is it that peace has remained only a subject for debate, and to this day has failed to become a practical reality? This contradiction is very strange, but it is a fact that no one can deny.

The reason is that people have bracketed other ideas along with peace, which are not directly related to it. For example, people say they want 'peace with justice', or 'peace with human rights', or 'peace with equal sharing', or 'peace with a problem-free society', etc. Such definitions of peace are unrealistic, and hence they are not practically achievable.

According to the law of nature, the only right way to establish peace is to go all out to do so, without associating any other issue with it. Once peace is established, then it is everyone's own task to discover opportunities and avail of them through realistic planning.

Peace relates to 'means' and not to 'ends'. All peace does is open up opportunities. It is then up to people to avail of these opportunities to achieve their goals. Peace cannot present a person with what he desires. It is for the person himself to reach his goal through planning and struggle.

According to the law of nature, the only right way to establish peace is to go all out to do so, without associating any other issue with it. Once peace is established, then it is everyone's own task to discover opportunities and avail of them through realistic planning.

Rain cannot of itself grow fruits and vegetables. According to the law of nature, rain is only meant for the purpose of irrigation. It is for the farmer to carry out irrigation by utilizing the rainwater and sowing the seeds in the soil. This process will then yield the required end products.

The same is true of peace. Peace is like rain. Peace only provides you with the opportunities. It is up to people to avail of these opportunities by wise planning. That is why 'peace for the sake of peace' is the right formula. 'Peace for the sake of justice' or 'peace for the sake of anything else' is unrealistic and, therefore, unachievable. □

BETWEEN A GREATER AND LESSER EVIL

Pragmatism

FORGIVENESS does not mean retreating or adopting a passive attitude. It is simply doing what is possible and ignoring what is impossible. In such situations, people generally see what is right and what is wrong. But this kind of thinking is not workable. You have to see things in terms of their result. If the result of your initiative is likely to be good, that is a good thing, but if the result is likely to be bad, better not embark upon it.

In this life the choice is not always between right and wrong. The choice is rather between the lesser evil and the greater evil. In every situation things must be examined objectively. Try to discover which option is the better one for you—better, not in terms of good and bad, but in terms of lesser and greater evil. When the option is between these two opposites, no wise person will opt for a course of action that will lead to the latter.

Opting for the lesser evil is not simply avoidance. It has two very clear benefits: firstly, it saves you from further loss and secondly, you are able to economize on your time and able to achieve your objectives by re-planning your activities.

No situation is favourable in an absolute sense. It can only be so in a limited sense. And a situation being unfavourable only means that one way is closed to you while, at the same time, there are other ways open to you. You can carry on your journey simply by changing your direction. When you face such a situation, do not delay but re-assess your plans and establish your priorities along new lines. Always remember that although others can create hurdles in your life, no one has the power to decide your destiny. Your destiny is in your own hands and by a re-examination of the situation, you can reformulate your plans and attain your objectives by following an alternative path. If you have to face some loss, take it as being temporary. No loss is so drastic as to be permanent.

Life is full of changes. At every moment there are changes in life. Loss and gain are also subject to change. Situations, whether positive or negative, are temporary in nature. So, when you face some unwanted situation, do not despair. Just have faith that, sooner or later, the problem will be resolved. An unfavourable situation, no matter what, is nothing but a new challenge. Try to meet that challenge and very soon you will find that it was truly a blessing in disguise for you. It was meant to provide you with a stepping stone to better things. □

THEME OF THE QURAN

Paradisiacal Personality

IF you read the Quran, you will find that it deals with all of the subjects relating to human beings. But the basic theme of the Quran is the creation plan of God. All other subjects touched on by the Quran are related to this basic theme, directly or indirectly. God Almighty created the universe, and, it is God Almighty who revealed this book that is called The Quran. The primary purpose of the Quran is to reveal that divine plan according to which the world was created and people were settled in it.

This theme, which is central to the Quran, is thus described in chapter sixty-seven, *Al-Mulk* (The Kingdom): "He created death and life so that He might test you, and find out which of you is best in conduct." (67: 2)

The environment of Paradise will be free of all kinds of negative states, for negative factors cannot be part of the psychology of the spiritual inhabitants of Paradise.

Here the words "life" and "death" refer to two different periods of humanity. The word "life" represents the pre-death period and the word "death" represents the second period of life, which may be called the post-death period. God Almighty created man as an eternal being but he divided his life into two periods—the before-death period and the post-death period. The pre-death period is very short, about hundred years, while the post-death period has no such limit. It will continue for all eternity.

According to the Quran, God Almighty created an ideal world that is called Paradise. The present world—the planet earth—has all those things that man needs or desires. But, in this world everything is imperfect in its form. In Paradise, on the other hand, everything will be perfect and ideal. Paradise will be free of every kind of limitation or disadvantage. Moreover, Paradise is an eternal world. Paradise has a beginning but it has no end.

God Almighty created man and woman, bestowed them with freedom of choice and then settled them on the planet earth. Through His prophets, God Almighty gave guidance to humanity. In every age the prophets told the people of all nations about right and wrong. They told them what was good and what was bad.

This was simply a matter of guidance: there was no compulsion for people to follow it. People were asked to develop their thinking in such a way as to bring about moral consciousness in themselves and to lead a good life by their own choice. In this sense, everyone is being tested. For this purpose God Almighty established a system of complete recording. This recording system is managed by the angels. It is so comprehensive that it can record the intentions, the speech, the behaviour and the dealings of every single person. This system is operative at all times, day and night. The purpose of all these arrangements is to select the kind of men and women who deserve to gain entry into eternal Paradise. At the time of Judgement Day, God will appear with His angels and according to the angelic record He will select those men and women who passed the test.

What are those qualities that are required for a person to be a deserving candidate for Paradise? In a single word, it is spirituality. Paradise is a spiritual world and only those men and women who have developed spiritual qualities in their personality will be blessed with entry into Paradise.

According to the Quranic description, "Paradise is the home of peace." (10: 25). Paradise is a place where there is no nuisance, no noise and it is free of all kinds of pollution. The inhabitants of Paradise will be positive thinkers in the complete sense of the phrase. The environment of Paradise will be free of all kinds of negative states, like anger, malice, hate, revenge, wrong desires, jealousy, fighting, exploitation and dishonesty, for these negative factors cannot be part of the psychology of the spiritual inhabitants of Paradise. The Quran thus serves as guidance for humankind towards becoming Paradisiacal personalities. □



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POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SPIRITUALITY

Different Results

THE definition of spirituality given in the dictionary is—the state of being opposed to worldliness. This definition is partly true, for unworldliness is not just for the sake of unworldliness. It is for the sake of a higher goal. And that goal is to develop a spiritual way of life.

There are two kinds of spirituality—negative spirituality and positive spirituality. Negative spirituality means renouncing the material world, or leaving society and settling in some jungle or on some mountain. This kind of negative spirituality has no creative role. It suppresses all the natural qualities of a human being, who then dies without having made full use of his potential.

The fact is that God Almighty has created man with great potential. It is not good to suppress this potential. One should rather avail of this potential for the sake of personality development. It means experiencing all the good and all the evils of society and trying to live with others without reaction.

Quranic spirituality is spirituality of the positive kind. It means living in the world and trying to derive spiritual food from material things as a matter of intellectual discipline. It means to control rather than kill one's desires.

The fact is that God Almighty has created man with great potential, It is not good to suppress this potential. One should rather avail of this potential for the sake of personality development. It means experiencing all the good and evils of society and trying to live with others without reaction.

Positive spirituality can be termed creative spirituality. For example, there is a verse in the Quran which says with reference to the believers that "they forgive people when they are angry." (3: 134). It means that positive spirituality is based on the formula of anger management rather than on trying to become

a person who has no feelings of anger. The formula for positive spirituality can be summarized thus: turn your negative sentiment into positive responses; make friends out of enemies.

The formula for positive spirituality is based on the principle of simple living and high thinking. Simple living and high thinking are complementary to each other. Simple living saves you from all kinds

of distractions and high thinking saves you from being the victim of negative experiences. Simple living and high thinking are a *sine qua non* of the spiritual culture.

Positive spirituality is mentioned as follows in the Quran: “You are on the sublime character.” (68: 4). Sublime character is that character which is based on high thinking.

If you read the Quran, you will find that it lays great emphasis on patience (39: 10), reconciliation (4: 128), forgiveness (42: 40), avoidance (7: 199) and contentment (4: 32). These teachings apparently seem to advocate passivity. But that is not so, for they embody great wisdom. The Quran tries to build that kind of mind which is able to manage all the affairs of life on the basis of spirituality. It is not passivity that is advocated but skill in the proper management of life’s problems. The purpose of this formula—indeed, the Quran’s greatest concern—is to concentrate on high goals and one who wants to achieve high goals has no option but to foster the aforementioned qualities. He has to try to effectively manage all undesirable situations. Otherwise, he will become preoccupied by trivial issues and will fail to continue his journey towards higher goals.

In the chapter *Al-Shams* (The Sun) of the Quran, you will find these verses: “He who purifies it will indeed be successful, and he who corrupts it is sure to fail.” (91: 9-10). These Quranic verses refer to the importance of personality development, laying emphasis not on its physical but on its spiritual aspects. It is no exaggeration to say that this is the main theme of the Quran, personality development being its basic goal.

The Quran tries to build that kind of mind which is able to manage all the affairs of life on the basis of spirituality. It is not passivity that is advocated but skill in the proper management of life’s problems.

What is purification of the soul? It is to purify your mind of all kinds of bias and negativity. In other words, it is to de-condition your conditioning. This is the mind the Quran tries to build. One who fails in this de-conditioning process will become a corrupt or an unwanted personality in the divine scheme of things.

Man’s personality is like an onion. An onion has a central core, but this core is covered by many layers. If you want to reach the core, you have to remove all these covers or layers. The same is true of the human being. A human personality is always subject to the process of conditioning, which wraps it up in many layers.

The process of conditioning begins right from birth. Initially, it is an unconscious process. The individual's family, his institutions, his society, and his community: all are sources of this conditioning. From childhood up to adolescence, he is affected by this conditioning. Only after reaching adulthood does he become able to understand this problem consciously.

From here onwards begins what is called personality development. It calls for an awakening of the mind and a conscious discovery of this problem. At this stage, the individual must develop the capacity for anti-self thinking. He must engage in introspection. He must try to de-condition his previous conditioning with complete objectivity. This is the most important task for every man and woman.

What is de-conditioning? It is a process of sorting out the ideas and concepts you have stored in your mind, all of which you must view with complete objectivity. You must overhaul your personality in a dispassionate manner. You have to remove the negative thoughts in your mind to turn your negativity into positivity.

A man asked the Prophet of Islam a very comprehensive question. He said, "O Prophet, give me a master piece of advice by which I may be able to manage all the affairs of my life." The Prophet replied: "Don't be angry." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*)

This means you must try to purify yourself of anger. Don't allow anger to become a part of your personality. It is only in this way that you can truly develop your personality. □



*Repentance is an inner spirit, a
readiness to atone for every kind
of mistake.*

A PURPOSEFUL LIFE

A Life Well Lived

MAN attains his highest distinction only when he leads a purposeful life. Such a life characterizes the most advanced stage of human development. This does not mean that by taking up just any task, which is apparently significant, man's life becomes truly purposeful. A really purposeful life is one in which man discovers his supreme status; a life in which his personality makes manifest its unique distinctive quality.

An animal strives to obtain food; a bird flies in search of a better habitat when the seasons change; a wasp busies itself building up its own home from tiny particles of earth; a herd of deer takes measures to protect itself from wild beasts of prey. All of these appear to be purposeful actions. But when the phrase 'a purposeful life' is applied to man, then it does not refer to efforts of this nature. Without doubt arranging for one's food, clothes and habitation are some of the tasks that man has to perform in this world; but this is a level of purposefulness in which men and animals, being concerned only with bare survival, are equal. Its true application in relation to man can only be one in which he appears in all his dignity. Man's life becomes purposeful only when it goes beyond common animalism and takes the form of superior humanism.

God's creations in this world fall into two categories: animate and inanimate. Obviously, animate objects enjoy a certain superiority over inanimate objects. The former can be divided into three classes: the vegetable, the animal and the human. Modern scientific research has shown that plants also possess life, in that they nourish themselves, they grow and they have feelings.

Man's true purpose in life can only be one, which reflects the higher side of his personality; one, which projects him as the superior being, that he is.

But animals and men surely represent a higher form of life. In what way does man excel animals? Many theories have been advanced in answer to this question over the ages, and great minds are still studying it. But modern biologists have come to the conclusion that it is man's capacity for conceptual thought, which distinguishes him from other life forms. Animals lack this quality, whereas man is conscious of the fact that he is thinking. He consciously forms a plan of action in his mind; in his everyday life his actions are

determined by himself. Whereas this is not the case with animals. Though many of their actions appear to be like those of men, they are not the result of thought; they all stem from pure instinct. Animals are simply led intuitively by their desires and their needs in a certain direction. Their actions are governed by environmental stresses from without and physical pressures from within.

It is in terms of this unique conceptual quality of man that we can conceive of what his higher purpose in life should be. The latter can only be one, which does not result from the pressures of desire or of immediate exigencies. It must emanate from his own urge to worship God.

Man's true purpose in life can only be one, which reflects the higher side of his personality; one, which projects him as the superior being, that he is.

If one pauses at this stage to take note of what the Quran has to say, one will find that it gives us clear guidance in this matter. Man's purpose in life has been explained in the Quran in the following words:

Man's true purpose in life can only be to seek the pleasure of God. When man seeks the pleasure of his Lord, his human qualities find full manifestation.

"I created humankind and the *jinn* that they might worship Me. I demand no livelihood of them, nor do I ask that they should feed me. God alone is the Munificent Giver, the Mighty One, the Invincible." (51: 56)

These verses specify man's purpose in life as worship. This is a purpose, which elicits from man his uniqueness in its ultimate form. It raises man to a much higher plane than that of animals. Not a trace of animalism contributes to the achievement of such a goal. God does not demand of you a livelihood,

the verse states, rather He himself is responsible for your livelihood. This means worship of God is a purpose, which is motivated neither by inward desires nor outward influences. Rather it comes into being through thought alone. Only when a person goes beyond his self and his environment can he understand that there is a higher purpose on which he should focus his life.

The motive force towards the fulfillment of this purpose is not the urge to satisfy one's needs or those of others. The worshipper seeks neither to gratify his own desires nor those of the Being he worships. It is a purpose which sets before man a goal far above all these things—a

goal which does not follow internal needs or external pressures, but results purely from conceptual thought.

When a person works, makes money, builds a house, makes an effort to improve his standard of living, he appears to be engaged in efforts towards some worthy end. But a life of this nature cannot be called a purposeful life, for these activities do not demonstrate man's unique status. It might seem as if they are the result of deliberation, but if one looks at the matter in depth, one will see that in fact the motive force behind these actions is the same urge that motivates an animal in various ways, in its concern for its own survival. It is the driving force of one's desires; the pressure of one's needs, and the wish to fulfill the demands of one's self that underlie such a life. These are the considerations which, in fact, guide a person in his search for his livelihood.

Man realizes that there are certain material necessities without which he cannot live. He requires food, clothes, a place to live; he requires a reliable source of income to sustain himself throughout his life. He is forced by these considerations to obtain such things. Then he sees that those who have an abundance of these material things enjoy respect and apparently possess every form of happiness and luxury in this world. Thus he is driven on to do more than just seek a livelihood; he desires to earn to a degree greatly in excess of his actual requirements.

In bustling markets, grandiose offices, and opulent buildings, he is not really guided by deliberate thought. Rather, he is being guided by inflated ideas of his own needs, desires, longings and ambitions to achieve fame and high status in this world. For this reason these activities cannot be considered as being directed towards the purpose which sets man apart from the animal and lends him a higher distinction.

Man's true purpose in life can only be to seek the pleasure of God. When man seeks the pleasure of his Lord, his human qualities find full manifestation. This is a purpose loftier than the one towards which an animal directs its energies. It distinguishes man from animals. It is the ultimate station of human dignity.

To determine the purpose of life is, in short, the effort to make life meaningful. It must surely, therefore, be one which is in accordance with man's unique status; it must be one which leads man on the path to success and progress in terms of his true nature. □



REALITY OF LIFE

Accountability in the Hereafter

FOR most people, there is only one life—that of the world—and they try to live it in a prestigious and comfortable way for afterwards, neither man nor anything that concerns him, will remain.

Some do think about this matter, but only on a philosophical level. They seek a theoretical explanation of the world. Such explanations are interesting from a philosophical point of view, but they are of no basic value to man. Theoretical discussions about whether a cosmic spirit keeps the whole universe revolving for its own fulfillment, or whether everything is part of some sublime being, do not raise any personal issues for man. Some have a religious answer to the question, but their solution is also of no import to man.

Some see life as a mysterious, recurring cycle, with man repeatedly being born and dying; some claim that man will be rewarded and punished in this world. These are some of the creeds presented by people.

All such solutions to the problems of life differ from one another considerably but in so much as none of them raises any serious personal issue for man, they are all the same. They are either explanations of events or a means of providing us with some sort of spiritual satisfaction. They do not issue us any warning or stir us into any action.

The Islamic perspective provided by the Prophet Muhammad is of an entirely different nature. The Prophet in his solution to problems places every individual in a precarious position from which the next step leads either to an awful abyss of destruction or to a world of eternal bliss. It requires every man to take a serious view of his situation.

The message taught by Prophet Muhammad, contains a great warning for all humankind. He taught that after this world a vast world is awaiting us, where every person will be judged and then punished or rewarded according to his deeds. The props which man relies on in this world will not support him there, for there will be no trading, no friendship and no acceptable intercession.

The warning, which the Prophet delivered, to humankind makes each person's existence a matter of personal importance. Everyone's fate, according to his teachings, hangs in the balance. Everyone has freedom to either believe in his message and follow his guidance, in preparation

for everlasting Paradise or ignore his teachings depriving oneself of Paradise.

There are two things, which make this matter even more worthy of our attention. Firstly, considering material aggrandizement to be all that is worthwhile in life without any proof based on superficial attractions. Speaking in philosophical terms with only analogies to offer as evidence.

Secondly speaking without reliable historical information. The criterion with which to judge the past, is history, and history does not verify the authenticity of such dogmas.

The Prophet Muhammad, born in the full light of history presents his teachings which have been recorded in the written form. The Quran exists in its revealed form. So one is free to put this through their scrutiny.

The Prophet warned us that we are confronted with a reality, which we can never change; we have no choice but to face it. Death only transfers us to another world; it does not obliterate us altogether. The Creator has established an eternal scheme for success and failure, which no one can alter or opt out of. We have to choose between Heaven and Hell; we have no other choice.

If the meteorological department forecasts a hurricane, it is telling us about an impending disaster in which those affected will have no say in the matter; another power will control events. One can either escape or expose oneself to destruction. So, when the earthquake of the Last Day occurs we will be subject to judgement by our Creator. There is no escape. □

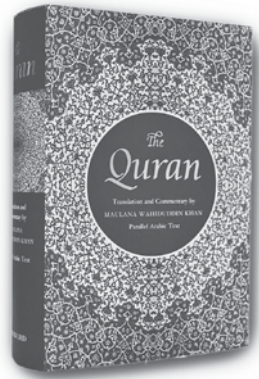
The message taught by Muhammad, contains a great warning for all humankind. He taught that after this world a vast world is awaiting us, where every person will be judged and then punished or rewarded according to his deeds.



Either we have to live with peace or we destroy ourselves without peace.

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 AD 610 and 632. It is a book that brings glad tidings to humankind, 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

Remember Our servant David, a man of strength who always turned to Us, We made the mountains join him in glorifying Us at sunset and sunrise; and the birds, too, in flocks, all turned to Him. We made his kingdom strong, and bestowed upon him wisdom and sagacity in judgement. (38: 17-20)

David presents a good example of being a devout subject. God bestowed him with extraordinary strength, yet he remained ever grateful to Him. David used to sit in the foothills of the mountains and sing praises of God. He praised with such devotion that it would turn the entire environment spiritual.

God also blessed David with a very strong empire. The secret of this strength was his wisdom (*hikmah*) and his decisiveness (*fasl al-khitab*) which made him capable of taking right decisions at the right time. These two attributes make a ruler efficient. His innate wisdom ensures that he does not take any action which will bring more harm than good. And his ability to distinguish between right and wrong ensures that his decisions will always be based on justice.

Have you heard the story of the disputants who entered his chamber by climbing over the wall? When they reached David, he took fright, but they said, 'Do not be afraid. We are two disputants, one of whom has wronged the other: judge between us fairly—do not be unjust—and guide us to the right path.

'This brother of mine has ninety- nine ewes and I have only one. He said, "Let me have charge of it," and got the better of me with his words.' David said, 'He has certainly wronged you by demanding that your ewe be added to his ewes! Thus many partners wrong one another— [all]

save those who believe [in God] and do righteous deeds: but how few are they!’ And [suddenly] David understood that We were only putting him to the test, and so he asked his Lord to forgive him his sins; he fell to his knees, and turned to Him in repentance. (38: 21-24)

It is said that David had fixed each of the three days for different purposes—one day for holding court and deciding cases, a second day for spending with his family and a third day for remaining in solitude and praying to God. It happened once that on a day fixed for prayers, as he sat engrossed in his devotion, two men who had jumped over the wall of the palace, entered the room and stood beside him. This was an extraordinary occurrence and, therefore, he was somewhat afraid. But the two men allayed his fears and said that they were parties to a dispute and begged him to settle it for them.

We forgave him his sins. His reward will be nearness to Us, a good place to return to, We said, ‘David, We have given you mastery over the land. Judge fairly between people. Do not follow your desires, lest they divert you from God’s path: those who wander from His path will have a severe punishment, because they ignore the Day of Reckoning.’

(38: 25-26)

The two intruders presented their case before David. The case was in allegorical language and bore a reference to some incident in the life of David himself and was meant as an admonition to him. While David gave his decision, he recounted the incident from his life, having quickly understood the analogy. Realizing his mistake, he immediately asked for forgiveness and prostrated himself before God.

David enjoyed tremendous power at that time, but he did not punish or even scold the intruders. This is a sign of a true subject of God. He is never unduly stubborn and when his attention is drawn towards his shortcoming, he readily accepts it and rectifies it, even if the person who pointed out the error does so in a rude manner.

A ruler always has two options before him—to decide cases according to his own whims or in consonance with principles of justice. The ruler who decides matters according to his own whims and desires, has in fact gone astray, and will ultimately have to suffer the scourge of God. But the ruler who decides cases by abiding by the principles of truth and justice, is the one who is on the right path. God will reward him immensely.

The divine injunction which is applicable to a ruler is equally applicable to his subjects and must be followed by the common man in his respective spheres of authority. □

ASK MAULANA

Your Questions Answered

How should we manage our ego?

It is very easy. It is said that when a peacock sees its beautiful feathers, it becomes proud, but when it sees its ugly legs, it becomes modest. The same is true of man. In every human personality there are plus points as well as minus points. Those who see their plus points become egoists, while those who see their minus points become modest. So, when a plus point comes to mind, turn your attention to the other side of your personality which has some minus point. And you will suddenly become a modest person. This is the easiest formula for maintaining modesty, avoiding arrogance.

Is it necessary to exercise restraint over our desires? If yes, how can we do this?

Our desires are unlimited, but our capacity is limited. Due to our limitations, we cannot fulfill all our desires. So, it is realistic to control our desires. If we fail to control our desires, we will fall into despair, and certainly no one can afford to follow a path which leads nowhere except to despair. It is a fact that controlling desires is a lesser evil and despair is a greater evil. And no one would prefer to involve themselves in a greater evil.

Restraining desires is often associated with the stifling of personality development. Please comment.

This is a sheer fallacy. When unlimited desires cannot be fulfilled, trying to fulfill all desires will lead to a negative and not to a positive growth of the personality. Any scientific survey can disprove this kind of formulation.

Does prayer help in developing one's personality?

Yes. Prayer means trying to establish contact with the higher reality and the higher reality is the source of all kinds of inspiration. So prayer, if it is a true prayer, will certainly help to develop the personality of the individual, be it a man or a woman.

What is the importance of ritual?

Ritual is the outer form of worship. When imbued with the inner spirit, rituals are good but without that, rituals are of no avail. The body of a human being is important, but without the inner spirit, the body is

almost lifeless. By this example you can understand the significance of rituals.

What is most dangerous for spiritual development?

In my experience, it is excessive concern for materialism. Material goods are a necessity, but when you become greedy for material things, you take the risk of losing your spirituality.

Can man ever be free of negative feelings such as fear and doubt?

No. Negative feelings are not evil. They also have their positive aspects. A negative feeling is a kind of shocking experience which awakens your mind; negative feelings motivate you to reassess your plans and your mode of life. If you engage in introspection, a negative feeling becomes a great teacher provided you do not allow your negative thoughts to overpower you.

What is the difference between adjustment and compromise?

There is great difference between the two. Adjustment is a principle of wisdom; it is the well-considered behaviour of a wise person; while compromise is a form of expediency, designed merely to secure your interests without following any principle.

We are often told that we should always remain hopeful. How different is this state of positive hopefulness from having false hopes? How can we differentiate between the two?

The difference between the two is very clear. True hope is based on reality, while false hope is based on unreal romanticism. When you examine the situation and adopt a well-considered position, you have the right to be hopeful but when you ignore the realities and adopt the posture of the ostrich, then you are entertaining false hopes. □



One has attained a superior moral status when one becomes indifferent to praise or blame, and when, his opinion of others does not depend upon whether they agree or disagree with him.

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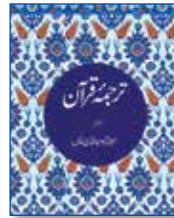
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