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SPIRIT OF ISLAM

THE GREATER JIHAD
Constructive Struggle

Realism
KEY TO PEACE

THE FEAR OF GOD
Beginning Of Wisdom

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

Towards Spiritual Living

SPIRIT OF ISLAM

ISSUE 11, NOVEMBER 2013

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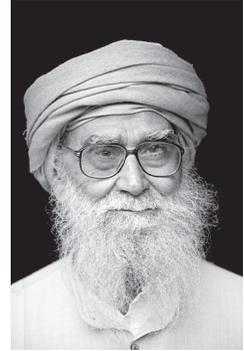
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CONTENTS

■ FROM MAULANA'S DESK	4
Nairobi And Peshawar Attacks Completely Anti-Islamic	
■ THE FEAR OF GOD	7
Source Of True Reform	
■ WISDOM IN RETREAT	9
Farsightedness	
■ THE MESSAGE FROM THE QURAN	12
Discover God By His signs	
■ THE GREATER JIHAD	15
An Intellectual Activity	
■ WAR AS AN INSTRUMENT TO ACQUIRE POWER	18
Absolutely Obsolete	
■ THE SECTARIAN PHENOMENON	21
Product Of A Prejudicial Mentality	
■ A GOOD SOCIETY	27
Can Be A Reality	
■ KEY TO PEACE	30
Realism	
■ THE CONCEPT OF STATE IN ISLAM	33
An Analysis	
■ BELIEF AND DISBELIEF	40
Activate The Inner Vision	
■ THE WORD OF GOD	42
From The Scriptures	
■ ASK MAULANA	45
Your Questions, Answered	
■ Glossary	47

FROM MAULANA'S DESK

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



NAIROBI AND PESHAWAR ATTACKS COMPLETELY ANTI-ISLAMIC

LAST month, there were two deadly attacks orchestrated by self-styled Muslims, killing huge numbers of people — I am referring here to the suicide bomb attack at the All Saints Church in Peshawar, Pakistan and the attack at the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya. Attacks on, and persecution of, non-Muslim minorities have escalated in recent years in many Muslim-majority countries.

These attacks are nothing but an expression of frustration. The fact is that in the first of half the twentieth century, some Muslims started a struggle against their so-called enemies. But they completely failed. They then tried to destabilize these supposed enemies. What happened on 9/11 was an act of this kind.

However, they failed in achieving anything here as well. Now, they have chosen soft targets, like churches and malls. Such acts only show the extent of their frustration. The only cause for these attacks can be found in these Muslims' deep frustration due to their total failure.

The time has now come for Muslims to take a U-turn. Taking a U-turn means accepting one's own mistakes, but many Muslim leaders have no courage to openly accept their mistakes.

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

According to Islam, these attacks are clearly *haram* or forbidden. Suicide-bombing has no justification in Islam. With regard to the bombing of the church in Peshawar, the attackers said that they were taking revenge for US drone strikes. But, taking revenge itself is an un-Islamic act. The argument that these attacks are a legitimate answer to the oppression of others is completely baseless.

Islam does not allow taking of such revenge by attacking innocent people. The concept of revenge is in itself an un-Islamic one; but, for the sake of argument, supposing that Islam does allow taking of revenge, then that revenge must be directed against those who are responsible for the killings for which revenge is sought. In these attacks, those who were present in the church in Peshawar and in the mall in Nairobi were innocent. They were not involved in any kind of attack nor did they carry out any killing, and so they cannot be subjected to revenge.

Attacks of this kind do not in any way solve the problems they claim to be a response to. Rather, they only exacerbate them. The claims of people involved in such attacks of representing and championing Islam are completely false. Islam does not give permission for such attacks at all. However, the real blame goes less to the attackers themselves than to their intellectual mentors. The real culprits are those leaders who have given a political interpretation to Islam.

I think political Islam is the greatest evil in the present age. Such an interpretation has made the violence that Peshawar and Nairobi have just witnessed seem justified to those who carried it out.

Some Muslims quote, among others, the following Quranic verse to justify their hatred of non-Muslims:

O you who believe, do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends; they are friends of each other; and whoever amongst you takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them; surely Allah does not guide the unjust people.

(5: 51)

On the basis of their erroneous interpretation of this verse, they seek to stir hatred against people of other faiths. Once that happens, then it becomes easy for them to seek legitimacy for violence against them. However, the fact of the matter is that their argument is completely wrong. The Quranic verse quoted above is neither about all the Jews or

Christians, nor is it a permanent teaching. It is a temporary instruction and was applicable only to those who were contemporaries of the Prophet and were at war with him.

It is a well-known fact that non-Muslims in every country have formed an opinion of Islam being a religion of violence. This kind of negative image regarding Islam is absolutely wrong. The real blame, however, goes to Muslim leaders and not to non-Muslims. Attacks such as what Peshawar and Nairobi have recently witnessed are bound to show Islam in an even more negative light. The image of Islam is already under fire, and such acts will only degrade its image in the eyes of the world. □

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Strong Character

*Strong is the one who has few needs; whose desires are limited;
who does not seek fame and luxury; who finds pleasure in
being humble, rather than in pretending to be big.*

*Such a person is free of mental complexes,
so nothing prevents him
from taking the right decision.*

*He is never obstructed by self-interest.
He is ready to undergo any sacrifice
in order to achieve his goal.*

THE FEAR OF GOD

PLATO (428-348 B.C) is regarded as one of the three great philosophers of ancient Greece, the other two being Socrates and Aristotle. The book, for which Plato is best remembered, titled *The Republic* and written in the form of a dialogue, is on the subject of the Ideal State. In Plato's view,

Unless philosophers bear kingly rule... or those
who are now called kings and princes become
genuine and adequate philosophers,
there will be no respite from evil.

Throughout the ages, many individuals who came to be known as philosopher-kings (or queens) have assumed power; for example, the Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, the Russian Queen, Catherine II, King Frederick II of Prussia, the Macedonian King Demetrius and the contemporary ruler of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew. But none has measured up to the standard of the good ruler as presented by Plato.

Only the fear of God will right the wrongs of this world.

There were certain pupils of the Greek philosophers who attained kingship. For example, Alexander the Great was taught by Aristotle, and Demetrius was trained in Aristotle's school of thought. Yet, these philosopher-rulers were no better than others. As Peter Green puts it:

What happened was, nothing happened...
Power, it appeared, could corrupt
even philosophers.

Time Magazine, May 13, 1991

According to Karl Marx's theory, the root of all evil is the economic system based on ownership; in which, those who were owners exploited those who were not, in very much the same way a despot would oppress his subjects. It was thought that if the system of individual ownership were to be replaced by that of collective ownership, all kinds of oppression and exploitation could be uprooted. There would then be neither the owner nor the owned, and no group or individual would be able to exploit any other group or individual.

These ideas led to the Marxist revolution in Russia in 1917, whereupon the system of state-ownership was introduced by force. However, as events unfolded, it became apparent that in the guise of the no-ownership system, this had become the most tyrannical regime in modern history, with the rulers proving to be the most oppressive and dictatorial ever witnessed. Instead of collective ownership improving the lot of the underprivileged, it only encouraged further oppression and coerciveness on the part of the rulers.

Similarly, in the second half of the twentieth century, colonialism was branded as an evil, and movements for independence were launched against it on a massive scale. The moving spirits behind these movements held that foreign rule was the cause of all evils, not the least being oppression, and that if it could be replaced by home rule, oppression would die a natural death. These movements for national freedom eventually proved a resounding success and in all the newly freed former colonies, Government posts were promptly secured by the sons of the soil. But oppression and evil did not disappear. Hence rulers continued to be tyrants. Power had only changed hands.

Only the fear of God can hold a man in power to the observance of proper standards of truth and justice.

Islam, tells us that all such claims made for improved temporal systems are without foundation; the only factor that can affect true reform is the fear of God. Nothing else can hold a man in power to the observance of proper standards of truth and justice.

The best historical illustration of this theory is the conduct of the Prophet and his companions. They wielded power, but they remained untarnished by the corruption rampant among the rulers who came before and after them. Their probity was unparalleled; as such it was living proof of the Islamic claim that only the fear of God will right the wrongs of this world. □



WISDOM IN RETREAT

AFTER the demise of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 A.D., for a period of 20 years, Muslims made huge conquests. Every month, news poured in of some large territory being conquered by Muslim armies. But with the murder of the third Caliph in 646 A.D., internecine fighting broke out among Muslims, which put a break to this series of conquests for around a decade.

The person who reopened this closed door was Imam Hasan. In 661 A.D., he withdrew his claim to the Caliphate, expressing, as it were, his decision to retire from worldly action. But this stepping back actually opened up new doors for positive developments in Islamic history.

Hasan ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib was born in the year 624 A.D. and passed away in the year 670 A.D. When his father, Ali ibn Abi Talib, was martyred in 660 A.D., Hasan was 37 years old. At that time, only Iraq and Iran remained under Ali's Caliphate. In territories such as Yemen, the Hijaz (present day western Saudi Arabia), Palestine, Egypt etc., Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufiyan had established his rule. Many people were secretly opposed to him. After Ali's martyrdom, a large number of people pledged the oath of allegiance to Hasan, Ali's eldest son, accepting him as the Caliph.

**Only that person can act successfully who knows
the secret of successful retreat.**

Cognizant of the delicate situation then prevailing, Hasan accepted the responsibilities of administering the Caliphate. But he very soon realized that, in the given conditions, his insistence on the Caliphate would only exacerbate dissensions among the Muslims. Reflecting his pragmatism, he once told his younger brother, Husain, 'I know that Prophethood and the Caliphate cannot remain together in our family.'¹

Because of this delicate situation, while accepting people's oath of allegiance to him as Caliph, Hasan also took from them their assent to fight against those whom he engaged in war with, and to make peace with those whom he made peace with.

1. Ali ibn Abi Talib was Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law; and Ali's sons, Hasan and Husain were the Prophet's grandchildren.

After Ali's martyrdom, the denizens of Kufa (capital city of Ali in Iraq) made Hasan the Caliph. On the other hand, for Muawiyah, Ali's passing away from this world had cleared the road, as it were. As soon as he heard of Ali's martyrdom, he adopted the title of *Amir-ul-Mumineen* or 'Commander of the Faithful' for himself, and made a plan to bring the remaining Muslim territories (Iraq and Iran) under his dominion. After renewing people's oath of allegiance, Muawiyah headed, along with a force of 60,000 men, from Damascus towards Kufa. Before entering Kufa, he sent a message to Imam Hasan, telling him that instead of entering into war, it would be better if he reconciled with him and accepted him as the Caliph.

At that time, Imam Hasan, too, had an army of 60,000 men, who were brave fighters. But he thought it necessary to save Muslims from shedding each other's blood. And so, he withdrew his claim to the Caliphate, and, remaining as Caliph for just six months, gave the oath of allegiance at Muawiyah's hand in a mosque in Kufa.

**To avoid protesting is not to ignore a problem,
but, rather, a way to focus one's resources
on positive and constructive work instead.**

For some of Imam Hasan's ardent followers, this 'insult' was intolerable. They raised a hue and cry over his decision. They labelled him as a disgrace for the Muslims, and said he had become a *kafir*. They tore his clothes, and even attacked him with swords. Yet, Imam Hasan refused to engage in oppositional politics under any conditions whatsoever and said, 'If the Caliphate was the right of Muawiyah Ibn Abi Sufiyan, then it has reached him. And if it was my right, I have given it to him.'

With Imam Hasan's stepping back, internecine fighting among Muslims was replaced by internal solidarity. In this way, Muslims were able to use their strength and resources in the propagation of Islam, which would otherwise have gone to waste in civil war.

As this example shows, sometimes stepping back is the way to move forward, although few people are cognizant of this fact of life. This action of Imam Hasan's did not represent any sort of defeat or escapism. Rather, it was a very wise political decision, and entirely in keeping with the model established by Prophet Muhammad in his life.

Collective existence is a very delicate affair. If you think only in terms of offensive action, opposition and confrontation with others, you can be sure that you will never succeed in bringing about any social reform. This is because collective life is another name for multiple voices and views and for all sorts of conditions and circumstances. That is why for collective living, you cannot lay down one single rigid criterion. You need to properly understand the multiple forces that face each other in society. You also need to properly gauge your own and other people's conditions and then chalk out your plan of action. This requires great insight, as well as a mind free from psychological burdens.

**To step back is not always cowardice.
It can also be wise pragmatism.**

Sometimes, when it comes to facing opposition from others, you need to remain confined solely to working for the spread of the ideology you champion. This was reflected, for instance, in the first 12 years of the Muhammad's life as a prophet in Makkah. At other times, conditions may demand that you have to accept your opponent's challenge on the battlefield — as was the case of the Battle of Badr between the Prophet with his followers, on the one hand, and the polytheist Quraysh of Makkah on the other. At other times, in order to obtain long-lasting results, you need to save yourself from directly clashing with one's opponent, even if this means unilaterally accepting the opponent's demands — as was the case of the Treaty of Hudaibiya. Patiently bearing a difficult situation also becomes politically wise and necessary. That is also something that Islam teaches us. This is also what we learn from Imam Hasan's example.

Only that person can act successfully who knows the secret of successful retreat. To step back is not always cowardice. Rather, as Imam Hasan's example exemplifies, it can be wise pragmatism. Avoiding a clash with the ruling authorities is not synonymous with tolerating oppression. Rather, it is a wise means to develop the strength necessary to uproot oppression. To abandon politics is not political suicide. Rather, it can be a means to promote other factors and resources in society. To avoid protesting is not to ignore a problem, but, rather, a way to focus one's resources on positive and constructive work instead. □



THE MESSAGE FROM THE QURAN

With regard to the creation plan of God, the Quran says:

WHEN your Lord said to the angels: 'I am placing a caliph on earth,' they replied: 'Will You put there one that will do evil and shed blood, when we have for so long sung Your praises and sanctified Your name?' He said: 'I know what you do not know.' He taught Adam all the names and then set them before the angels, saying: 'Tell me the names of these, if what you say be true.' 'Glory be unto You,' they replied, 'we have no knowledge except that which You have given us. You alone are wise and all-knowing.' Then said He to Adam: 'Tell them their names.' And when Adam had named them, He said: 'Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heaven and earth, and all that you hide and all that you reveal?'

THE QURAN 2: 30-33

The literal meaning of the word 'caliph' is one who takes another's place — a successor. In the age of hereditary rule it was generally used for a monarch who took the place of another monarch. Accordingly, then, the word came to refer to one invested with power.

Man's greatest crime, next to denial of his Lord, is to spread corruption and cause bloodshed on earth.

When God created man, He determined that man should wield power on earth. The angels were apprehensive of man being corrupted by his power and free-will and causing bloodshed on earth. The angels were not mistaken in their apprehension: God too was fully aware of this possibility. But He was looking at the matter from another aspect. For if many human beings were corrupted by their power, a substantial proportion of mankind would acknowledge the fact that, in spite of their power and freedom on earth, they were really powerless before Almighty God. Such people would, of their own accord, adopt the path of submission and obedience to God. True, they would be comparatively few in number, but they would be as precious as the grains of a crop. Grain is far outweighed by hay and straw, but so great is its value that vast quantities of hay and straw are allowed to grow and flourish in the land just so that grain can come into being.

God, in His omnipotence, brought all the progeny of Adam before their first father. Then He said to the angels: 'Look, this is the progeny of Adam. Can you give the name of each one of them, and tell what sort of people they will be?' The angels, having no knowledge about them, could not tell. God told Adam their names and their characteristics, and then commanded him to pass the knowledge on to the angels. When Adam had explained to the angels the nature of the human race, they realized that, besides wicked and corrupt people, there would also be great, righteous, pious souls among them.

**No individual or nation has God's permission to act
in a manner that disrupts the order of nature
established by God.**

Man's greatest crime, next to denial of his Lord, is to spread corruption and cause bloodshed on earth. No individual or nation has God's permission to act in a manner that disrupts the order of Nature established by God. Man should not take the life of his fellow man. All actions of this sort disqualify people from receiving God's mercy. Everything in Nature functions according to a norm set for it by God. To follow this norm is to 'make peace', and to deviate from it is to spread corruption.

"And when We said to the angels:

'Prostrate yourselves before Adam.' they all prostrated themselves except Satan, who, in his pride, refused, and became an unbeliever. To Adam We said: 'Dwell with your wife in Paradise and eat of its fruits to your heart's content wherever you will. But never approach this tree or you shall become transgressors.' But Satan made them forget this injunction and caused them to be driven out of the state of felicity in which they had been. 'Go down from here,' We said, 'as enemies to each other; and on earth you shall have your abode and your livelihood for a while!' Then Adam received commandments from his Lord, and his Lord relented towards him. He is the Forgiving One, the Merciful. Go down hence, all,' We said. 'When Our guidance comes unto you those that accept it shall have nothing to fear or to regret; but those that deny and reject Our revelations shall be the heirs of Hell, and there they shall abide forever.'

THE QURAN 2: 34-39

God stood Adam up among the angels, as well as Satan, and tested them by commanding them to prostrate themselves before Adam. In this way He gave the first man on earth a practical demonstration of the two paths that would be open to his progeny. Either they would follow the example of the angels and bow to God's commandments, even if this meant bowing before an inferior creature; or else they would be proud like Satan and refuse to bow before others which is a refusal to bow to God's commandments.

This is the test that man faces in his entire life. Here on earth man is constantly faced with two alternative courses of action. He can follow the angelic course and carry out God's commandments by bowing before truth and justice in all that he does. He can also act as Satan did, letting himself be controlled by arrogance and contempt, refusing to concede the rights of others.

When he turns to the Lord in repentance, God relents towards him, and cleanses him of his sins as if he had never committed them.

This was the lesson of the forbidden tree. It is when man lets himself be deceived by Satan and exceeds the bounds that God has laid down for him that he goes astray. As soon as he eats of the 'forbidden fruit' he is deprived of God's grace or, in other words, Paradise. But this loss is not an irretrievable one. Man still has the opportunity to turn in repentance to his Lord, rectify his actions and seek forgiveness for his sins. When he turns to the Lord in repentance, God relents towards him and cleanses him of his sins as if he had never committed them.

The raising of the call to truth among men is a test of this nature. The preacher of truth is an 'Adam'; it is for people to bow before him. If, carried away by pride and prejudice, they refuse to acknowledge his position, then they are following in Satan's footsteps. God does not become plainly visible in this world; He tests people by revealing Himself through His signs. Those who can interpret His signs have discovered God Himself, and those who fail to interpret His signs have failed to find God. □



THE GREATER *JIHAD*

ISLAM is, in essence, a peaceful religion. In Islam, peace is the general rule or norm. On the other hand, war is only a rare exception in Islam, as a compulsion in response to an armed attack by others. It is not something that Muslims should initiate.

The basic aim of Islam is to bring about an intellectual revolution in their minds based on *tawheed*, or the oneness of God. Our actions depend on our thoughts. That is why Islam gives great stress to reforming our thought process and on our intellectual awakening. Hence, war is not part of Islam's basic plan of life. In fact, war is something that goes diametrically against this plan. No matter what one's religion, the fact is that through war or any other form of violence, no positive gains or achievements are possible. This is why if all possible efforts to prevent war are made, but yet, these fail; and one is compelled to take to war, the followers of Islam must seek to put an end to war as soon as possible; so that in a climate of peace the true constructive work of Islam can carry on unimpaired.

The basic aim of Islam is to bring about an intellectual revolution in their minds based on the oneness of God.

In this context, it is pertinent to discuss the notion of *jihad* in Islam. *Jihad* is, in fact, another name for peaceful struggle. In today's parlance, it could be called 'peaceful activism', or, in other words, using peaceful means to try to attain certain lofty objectives.

The literal meaning of *jihad* is 'effort' or 'struggle' i.e. to make the greatest possible effort. The Quran says: 'Perform *jihad* with this most strenuously' (this, here refers to the Quran) (THE QURAN 25: 52). The Quran is not a sword or a gun. It is a book of ideology. In such a case, performing *jihad* with the Quran would mean an ideological struggle to convey the peaceful message of Islam to people.

In the light of this verse of the Quran, *jihad* in actual fact is another name for peaceful activism or non-violent activism. Where *qital* is violent activism, *jihad* is non-violent activism.

According to a *Hadith* report, a *mujahid*, one who engages in *jihad*, is he who for the sake of obedience to God combats his own base self or *nafs*. According to another tradition, when the Prophet returned from the Tabuk campaign (in which no war took place), he said, 'We have returned from lesser *jihad* to greater *jihad*.' The 'lesser *jihad*' is a military struggle, while the 'greater *jihad*' is the struggle against one's own evil desires.

Jihad, if understood correctly, is an entirely peaceful action. At the individual level, to engage in *jihad* is to refuse to deviate from the path of God despite the desires of one's baser self and the difficult environment one confronts. It is to face the challenges that stand in one's path and remain steadfast on the path of Truth. At the collective level, *jihad* can be called a peaceful struggle. At the very basis of this struggle is an intellectual awakening among people, leading them to positive and constructive action and refining their character. *Jihad*, understood in this sense, inspires people to seek to become beneficial to others, and to be concerned about their welfare. The weapon deployed in true *jihad* is love, not hatred and violence.

No matter what one's religion, the fact is that through war or any other form of violence, no positive gains or achievements are possible.

Some people misunderstand *jihad* as the equivalent of war, or what is called *qital* in Arabic. Equating the two is to completely undermine the significance of *jihad*. The fact of the matter is that *qital* is a very limited action, and it is of a temporary nature. On the other hand, *jihad* is a continuous and comprehensive action. *Jihad* is an exalted action in Islam, which should carry on continuously, every day and at every moment in our lives. Under no conditions should it stop.

When a person is overwhelmed by the quest for Truth, he is immersed in an intellectual *jihad*. When he realizes the Truth, his *jihad* takes on added dimensions. He engages in *jihad* or struggle to the utmost against his own self and his base, Satanic, desires, and in this way he strengthens and deepens his faith and trust in God. He engages in continuous constructive intellectual development, and so his realization of the Truth continuously develops till at last he reaches the highest possible stage.

According to a *Hadith* report, one's faith increases and decreases. To save one's faith from erosion requires a continuous *jihad*. Living along with other people, one is repeatedly attacked by negative feelings or emotions, such as anger, jealousy, revenge, pride, ingratitude, greed and so on. These negative emotions constantly threaten to weaken or decrease one's faith. In this regard, one has to awaken one's consciousness and struggle against these negative tendencies and quash them. This is a *jihad*, and without this *jihad* no one can save his or her faith from decrease or erosion. □



An Idle Mind: A Devil's Workshop

*A person with no sense of commitment
is only living on the fringes of existence.
He is out of touch with reality and will
soon lapse into utter degeneracy.*

*No really superior being
has ever been found among
the ranks of the idle.*

*As the old saying goes,
the Devil finds work for idle hands.*



Combating Violence

*Instead of combating violence with violence,
we should adopt the policy of avoidance;
remaining united in spite of differences.*

WAR AS AN INSTRUMENT TO ACQUIRE POWER

The Quran lays down:

Fight them until there is no more [religious] persecution,
and religion belongs wholly to God: if they desist,
then surely God is watchful of what they do.

THE QURAN 8: 39

THIS verse has two parts. The same point is made, first in the form of a negation, and then as an affirmation. The verse indicates that persecution or *fitna* should be put an end to in such a way that an environment entirely free of persecution is established.

The persecution that this verse mentions relates to compulsion in religious matters, which, in ancient times, prevailed all over the world. At that time, monarchy was the norm almost everywhere. The two fundamental bases of power were political position and ownership of land. Generally, both rested in the hands of the monarch. In this way, almost the whole sphere of human life was practically under the monarch's control. People were even compelled to follow the same religion of their rulers.

Communities which have discovered the power of modern institutions have been able to achieve impressive success despite not possessing political power.

This sort of coercion was opposed to the scheme of Nature devised by God. Under this coercive system, people could not do anything at all without the monarch's consent. Ordinary people simply had no freedom whatsoever. The situation was akin to Communist rule under the Soviet Union.

God wanted this unnatural system of political coercion to end and for the whole of human life to run according to the natural conditions that He has devised. He wanted people to be free of political coercion. In the early Islamic period, the overthrow of monarchical despotism and its replacement by the Caliphate was the beginning of this process. This Caliphal system was first established in Arabia. At that time, there were two big empires in the region — the Byzantine Empire and the

Sassanian Empire. The establishment of the Caliphate and the ending of monarchical despotism in Arabia was a major challenge to these two powers. Hence, they wanted to destroy it. As a result, the companions of the Prophet had to face stiff opposition from these quarters. With God's assistance, they were victorious, and the coercive system of absolute imperialism was ended.

Ending a system of coercion that was several thousand years old and replacing it with a system based on freedom was a very revolutionary development. This development unfolded over a period of time. With God's help, Islam, in the seventh century A.D., broke this ancient system of coercive rule. Thereafter, this transformation assumed the form of a process that began to unfold through human history. Belgian historian, Henri Pirenne has acknowledged this historical fact with these words, "Islam changed the face of the globe. The traditional order of history was overthrown."

Islam then went through various ups and downs and reached its climax in the 20th century, when political power became very limited, remaining essentially in the form of administration. And so, today the influence of political institutions on human religious life is minimal. In almost all spheres of life, people are now free of political interference and can manage these spheres as they like. This enormous change in the system of human life is in favour of Islam. As with other people, it is now possible for the followers of Islam to mould and lead their lives, free of coercion or interference.

The shift of the focus of influence from politics to institutions has rendered political power into nothing but a political headache.

Today, we live in an age where institutions now enjoy the influence that political power and monarchs once did. Like other people, the followers of Islam too, can establish all sorts of institutions to progress in all spheres of life. In this way, they can progress even in the political sphere. Through institutions, they can establish their influence in a manner that was earlier possible only through the possession of political power. By setting up educational institutions, they can educate and train the next generation. Through media houses, they can help shape the intellectual climate of society. Through books and scholarship, they can spread their views. Through research institutions, they can

promote new thinking. By setting up industries, they can improve their economic conditions. Using modern means of communications, they can link up with others. Through NGOs they can organize their religious and cultural affairs in a more effective way. And so on.

In the modern age, the communities that have discovered this reality — of the power of modern institutions — have been able to achieve impressive success despite not possessing political power. Some of them have set up their own educational empires. Others have established industrial empires or publishing empires or media empires. The latest example of such a non-political empire is the information technology empire, which has enabled those who run it to exercise an enormous control over peoples' lives at the global level.

In almost all spheres of life, people are now free of political interference and can manage them as they like.

The shift of the focus of influence from politics to institutions has rendered political power into nothing but a political headache. And so, it is not necessary now, nor even desirable, for the followers of Islam to wage war for the sake of capturing political power. Irrespective of who wields political power, the followers of Islam can now, under all conditions, establish non-political institutions and thereby access all the desirable benefits.

This does not mean that the followers of Islam must totally ignore politics. It simply means that while accessing the benefits that accrue from institutions and organizations, they can take to the path of peaceful political work in a limited arena. They must abstain completely from political agitation, however, and, instead, pursue their political journey calmly, within the possible limits. It may be then, that God will give them the opportunity of entering into institutions of political significance. □



THE SECTARIAN PHENOMENON

IN the later periods of any *ummah* or religious community, a phenomenon inevitably appears — that of its religion being divided up into different factions or sects. The Quran refers to this phenomenon of people splitting up their religion and becoming divided into sects, ‘each one exulting in what they have.’ (THE QURAN 30: 32) Further, in this regard, God tells us: Your religion is but one religion—and I am your only Lord, therefore, fear Me. Yet they divided themselves into factions, each rejoicing in what they had. (THE QURAN 23: 52-53)

These lines can be better understood in the light of another Quranic verse: They have taken their learned men and their monks for their lords besides God. (THE QURAN 9: 31)

From these Quranic verses, it appears that the phenomenon of a religion splitting into factions is a historical process that emerges in the life of every religious community. This has happened in the case of Muslims, too. There is no exception to this rule.

A political interpretation of Islam is an example of an error in reasoning, because Islam is a divine movement, and not a political movement.

How and why does this happen? In the later period in the life of a religious community, various reformers arise. These reformers’ interpretation of their religion is influenced by their circumstances. They begin to invite people to accept their faith as interpreted by them. Accordingly, a group of followers slowly starts to form around them. Gradually, these followers begin to develop a strong prejudice in support of their own particular school of thought. They believe that whatever the leaders or founding-figures of their group have said is the final word, the ultimate truth. This prejudicial mentality begins to harden, until each group is transformed into a distinct sect. Each sect becomes firmly convinced that it alone is true, and that all others are deviant. This is the historical process that the Quran indicates in the above-quoted verses.

In the light of this, one could say that the splitting up of a religion into factions that the Quran refers to is about people following the religion fabricated by their leaders instead of the religion of God. When this happens, it does not mean that a religious community ceases to take the name of God and their prophet. Members of such a community continue to talk of God and their prophet, but, in reality, they follow the religion made by their leaders. They take the name of God and their prophet, but this is only to seek to back their claim, with the help of references to God and their prophet, that their particular sect is correct.

It is undesirable, of course, for a community to be split up into rival sects. Such sects, no matter whether they call themselves 'religious' or 'divine', are guilty in God's eyes of factionalism. Their case has nothing to do with genuine religious adherence. In God's sight, they are followers of a religion that their elders have fabricated, and not the religion of God and God's prophet.

Individuals from different sects, who, in their individual capacity, remain firm on the straight path shown by God, will be deemed worthy of salvation in the Hereafter.

This phenomenon of sectarianism is not something that was exclusive to religious communities in the past, before the advent of the Prophet Muhammad. In fact, it is something that happens with every religious community when it declines in its later period. The Prophet Muhammad predicted that this would certainly happen among the Muslim *ummah*, too. According to a *Hadith* report (recorded in the Sunan al-Tirmidhi), the Prophet said that the Children of Israel were divided into 72 sects, and his *ummah* would be divided into 73 sects. All of them will be in the fire of Hell except one. The Companions asked him who these chosen people were who would be saved from Hell, and he replied that they are those who follow his path and the path of his Companions.

The figure of 73 mentioned in this report is not to be taken to indicate a particular number. Instead, it symbolizes a vast number. In other words, the report tells us that a vast number of sects would emerge among the Muslims. This *Hadith* also does not mean that all of the '73' sects will be doomed and that only one sect will be saved. In accordance with God's law, salvation is always of individuals, not of communities or groups.

The concept of a single 'saved sect' or *firqa al-najiya* has absolutely no basis. It has nothing to do with the *Hadith* of the Prophet quoted above. This *Hadith* tells us that salvation in the Hereafter will not be on the basis of one's sectarian affiliation. Rather, individuals from different sects, who, in their individual capacity, remain firm on the straight path shown by God, will be deemed worthy of salvation in the Hereafter.

As mentioned earlier, the splitting of a community into sects always starts with the leaders of that community. Under the influence of the conditions they are faced with, these leaders present certain ideas, which in later times, owing to exaggeration and prejudice, leads to the emergence of separate sects. Later, these sects become clearly-defined, separate communities.

This happens due to basically two factors. Firstly, what can be termed a 'shift of emphasis'. The other is an error in reasoning, or what in Urdu is called *ijtihadi khata*. Here are examples of both of these, from the past as well as the present-day.

The concept of a single 'saved sect' has absolutely no basis.

Some Sufis provide an example of a 'shift of emphasis' in Muslim history. Many leading Sufis appeared at a time when powerful Muslim Sultanates had been established. The Sufis perceived that the minds of the people had become overshadowed by politics, while, in contrast, the spiritual dimension of Islam had greatly weakened among them. In this context, some Sufis gave such great stress to the spiritual dimensions of Islam or 'the affairs of the heart' as if they were everything, or Islam in its entirety.

Leaving aside a few controversial methods employed by some of them, the case of some of these Sufis was, in essence, one of a 'shift of emphasis'. As a result of this 'shift of emphasis' in the name of religion, a certain esoteric religiosity spread among Muslims, and rational thought and realism went into decline.

A second factor for the emergence of sectarianism is, as we mentioned above, an error in reasoning or *ijtihad*. An example of this is provided from the Abbasid period. At this time, *Hadith* reports and the narratives about the companions of the Prophet were collected and compiled in

books. People now learned that among the companions there were many minor differences in matters of the method of worship. Guidance in this regard was provided in the *Hadith*, because the Prophet is reported to have said about his companions that whichever of them people followed, they would be rightly guided.

According to this *Hadith* report, minor differences in methods of worship were because of the phenomenon of diversity. They were not a question of truth versus falsehood. Each of these methods was equally proper. But the *fuqaha* or legal specialists in the Abbasid period engaged in *ijtihad* and declared, 'Truth cannot be many'. Then, they debated among themselves and adopted one or the other method of worship and declared that the other methods ought to be abandoned. Different *fuqaha* did this with regard to their particular methods of worship. In this way, various schools of *fiqh* came into being. Later on, exaggeration and bias led these schools to finally turn into distinctly separate *maddhabs* of jurisprudence.

Splitting up of a religion into factions that the Quran refers to is about people following the religion fabricated by their leaders instead of the religion of God.

Consider an instance of a 'shift of emphasis' leading to sectarianism from the contemporary period. This concerns the group commonly known as the Tablighi Jama'at. The founder of the Tablighi Jama'at, Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalvi (d. 1944), observed that people had generally become lax about their prayers. In the words of the poet Muhammad Iqbal:

Masjiden marsiya khwan hain ki namazi na rahe
(Mosques lament that sincere worshippers no longer remain)

Faced with this situation, Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalvi gave great stress to the importance of prayer. He launched a full-fledged movement to encourage people to pray. But later on, this movement fell prey to exaggeration and prejudice. Its followers began to think that religion was just another name for praying in mosques and travelling from place to place. But the fact is that the message of Islam and the Islamic mission are centred on the human being, not on the mosque as such.

An example of an error of *ijtihad* from the contemporary period is provided by the Jama'at-e-Islami, which is based on the ideas of Maulana Sayyed Abul 'Ala Maududi (d. 1979). Maulana Maududi was born at a time when various political movements were powerful in different parts of the world — communist movements, democratic movements, movements for national independence, and so on. At this time, generally speaking, people considered politics to be the most important thing. Maulana Maududi was influenced by these conditions. And so he presented Islam in such a way as if it were a political system and as if its purpose was to establish its rule all over the world. In accordance with this understanding, he developed a political interpretation of the Quran and expressed the *Sunnah* or practice of the Prophet in political terms. This was clearly an example of an error in *ijtihad*, because Islam is a divine movement, and not some political movement.

Solution of the Problem

To solve the problem of sectarianism, each group must continuously introspect. They should continuously examine in an impartial manner, the ideas of their founding-figures or leaders. They should examine the teachings and practices of their leaders in the light of the Quran and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. They must engage in this sort of analysis with a completely open mind. No religious movement or group can be exempted from this self-examination. It will help in elucidating the truth and in enabling every group to once again discover the religion of God and become established in it.

Salvation in the Hereafter will not be on the basis of one's sectarian affiliation.

To consider a religious scholar or leader's words said under the influence of certain conditions, cannot, in its initial stages, be regarded as always and necessarily akin to sectarianism. Rather, it may well reflect his particular way of thinking, or his personal *ijtihad*. But when a group emerges around this person, and this group is infected with a prejudicial mind-set and gets crystallized as a distinct sect, the problem of splitting religion into sects begins. This problem slowly begins to grow, till it becomes extreme, so much so that every group, consciously or unconsciously, begins to think that it alone is in the right and that all other groups are false or deviant. This is called *tahazzub* in Arabic, or 'groupism', which the Quran (23: 53) refers to. People who fall prey to

this psyche of *tahazzub* refuse to listen to any criticism of themselves, no matter how legitimate it may be.

Religious factionalism is certainly an issue. It is not, however, an eternal problem. Under the influence of circumstances, this happens with every religiously-defined community. But, alongside this, a solution to this problem is also undoubtedly present — and that is, introspection. An individual introspecting about himself or herself is one sort of introspection. In addition to this, the Quran also teaches us what can be called ‘collective introspection’, as the following Quranic verse indicates:

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

THE QURAN 24: 31

From this verse, we learn that success, in the sense of reforming one’s conditions, is linked to collective repentance. In this regard, Muslim community institutions must clearly and openly decry sectarian rivalry; they must issue relevant *fatwas*; and the Muslim media should publish articles about this issue. In this way, joint efforts can be made towards the collective repentance that the Quran talks about.

This is the way to help solve the phenomenon of sectarianism. □



Positions of Power

*Positions of power have
always been objects of envy for people.*

*However, these coveted seats lose their charm
as soon as they come within our grasp.*

*The price we pay for them is our freedom
— mental, moral, emotional and physical — and, surely,
renunciation of such freedoms is too great a price
to pay for anything so purely material.*

A GOOD SOCIETY

A GOOD society is the cherished ideal of every human soul. But a consensus has yet to emerge on what constitutes a good society. This is undoubtedly one of the most complex questions facing us today.

It would be no exaggeration to say that three major initiatives, designed in their separate ways to offer a solution, have been utter failures. A hundred years ago it was generally assumed that the setting up of a national government would provide the answer. It was felt that foreign rule was responsible for the rot that had set in society, and that indigenous rule alone could set matters right. In 1947, we finally succeeded in establishing a national government, but it failed to yield the desired result of a good society.

Similarly, the initiative which led up to home rule, i.e. the non-violent movement started seventy five years ago by Mahatma Gandhi, did not usher in any utopian ideal. It had come to be assumed that once the principle of non-violence became the mainstay of Indian politics, it would automatically be put into practice in society. But this transference of a principle from the political to the social sphere did not take place. We may have been successful in launching a political movement based on non-violence, but we were to find that it took more than earnest enunciation of the principle of non-violence to build a good society.

A good society is the cherished ideal of every human soul.

The third initiative, carried out after independence, was the attempt to bring about a good society by legislation. There are now scores of laws aimed at social reform, each social evil having several specially framed laws to counteract them. But this multitude of laws has done little to bring a good society into existence.

As seen, our basic shortcoming is to think purely in terms of systems. This has caused us to devote all our attention to overall 'social reform', at the expense of the more worthwhile 'reform of individuals'. Over a period of a hundred years, all the major movements launched in our country have been system-based, rather than individual-based.

The individual is the primary unit of society. If individuals are reformed, society follows suit. And if individuals degenerate, society too goes into decline. That is why our best efforts should centre on the individual, who is, after all, the basic building block of the society. The day we reform individuals in their thousands, we shall have set ourselves well and truly on the path of successful social reform.

The solution to our problems lies in inter-community meeting, instead of protests and demand meetings with the government. The most urgent need of today is to hold inter-community dialogues at a national level. Serious-minded and influential people from all communities should participate in these interactions. Their goal should be the securing of peace on the basis of purely non-political grounds.

Representatives of all communities should hold discussions with open hearts. They must strive to put an end to controversial situations on all sides and should discover a common basis by adopting which, all communities can live together as good neighbours.

**The soul of all reformation is the
reformation of the individual soul.**

A dialogue of this kind is exactly in accordance with the Islamic *Shariah*. The Hudaibiya peace treaty in Islamic history is an instance of a successful dialogue of this nature. After the Prophet's emigration, relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Arabia considerably deteriorated. A number of battles and skirmishes ensued, and walls of prejudice and hatred barred them from coming closer to each other.

Finally, peace could only be established at Hudaibiya near Makkah in 628 A.D. through peaceful negotiations between the Prophet Muhammad and the non-Muslim Makkan leaders.

If such a dialogue is held with full justice and sincerity, a new chapter will be opened in the history of India. It is this point of inter-community relationship where the history of India is standing still. Once this problem is solved and relations between communities improve, nothing else will come in the way of India's progress.

The dialogue, if it has to succeed, should not take the form of polemics. Representatives should not become spokesmen of their respective

communities during the discussion. What should be uppermost in their minds are the vaster national interest and the paths of progress and harmony for all.

All parties will have to commit themselves to differentiating between issues and non-issues, so that they will not hold anything as a matter of prestige; that they will not adopt the way of claim and counter claim; that they will speak only with a vision of the result before them; that their way will be one of impartiality; that while pressing their demands, they will also be willing to concede; that while taking from others, they will also be willing to give.

Dialogue means, an attempt to solve controversial matters through negotiation; rather than, through confrontation.

Dialogue is not a meeting of rivalry but is a brotherly meeting. Such noble tasks are performed by rising above the victory-defeat psychology. Its aim is to solve matters and not confound them. The feeling at work behind a dialogue is one of reconciliation and not one of rivalry.

Dialogue means, an attempt to solve controversial matters through negotiation; rather than, through confrontation. If a dialogue is started with this spirit, its success is certain. The door to the progress of our country has been shut for about half-a-century; and a dialogue keeping this spirit in view, can surely open the closed door, provided it is conducted with true spirit. □



Importance of Education

*Education makes man a right thinker and correct decision-maker.
Education brings him knowledge from the external world,
teaches him to reason, and acquaints him with past history,
so that he may be a better judge of the present.*

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 time to resolve this 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.

I have made an in-depth study of this problem from the historical as well as the Islamic viewpoints. I should like to make a brief presentation of my findings. According to my study, basically, there are 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; or, in other words, on mere wishful thinking.

Peace is not aimed at satisfying the concerned parties in terms of rights and justice.

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 its 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 objective of peace is only to normalise 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 their own personal criteria. It is situations and circumstances which will dictate to what extent we can achieve these goals.

In fact, in this competitive world, it is not possible for anyone to receive perfect justice. So, one has to be content with practical justice (pragmatic solutions). During my studies, I found that those people who seek peace with justice fail to achieve anything positive. Moreover, in the course of this futile pursuit, they lose what they already had in hand. Conversely, those who delink justice from peace are always successful in life. After making this study I have come 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 that are present.

**In this competitive world, it is not possible for anyone
to receive perfect justice.**

To illustrate my point, I cite here two examples from history, one from the early period of Islam and another from the modern history of Japan. It is a well known fact that the Prophet of Islam was repeatedly challenged by his opponents. There were several instances of wars and violence. Then, the Prophet managed to finalise a peace treaty between the Muslims and their opponents known as the Hudaibiya Peace Treaty. Now, how was this peace treaty finalised? 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. (THE QURAN 48: 1)

Now, why does the Quran describe this as a victory, when in fact, it entailed the acceptance of all the conditions imposed by his enemies?

The Quran called this a victory because, although the peace treaty itself was devoid of justice, it instantly normalised 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 greater scale throughout the whole of Arabia.

Now let us look at the example of Japan. In World War II, Japan was defeated by the USA. Okinawa Island was occupied by the American army after the conclusion of a peace treaty, the terms of which were dictated by America. Japan, willingly or unwillingly, accepted this 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 lost Okinawa Island for a few years, but it gained the entire USA (North American continent) as its industrial market. And now Japan 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? This is because in every adverse situation a status quo exists between the two sides. If any party decides on a change in the status quo, the result will be breakdown. Instead, by accepting the status quo each party will find room for advancement towards its goal. The Quran says that of all courses 'reconciliation is the best.' (THE QURAN 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.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that 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. □

Serenity Prayer

*God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.*

THE CONCEPT OF STATE IN ISLAM

The following Quranic verse provides us an insight into the Islamic understanding of political power:

Say: "O God! Lord of Power, You give power to whom You please, and You take away power from whom You please."

THE QURAN 3: 26

THE actual possessor of power is God, and it is He who grants power on earth to whom He wills. It is also He who takes away power from whomsoever He wills. So, the whole matter in this regard rests with God. If someone receives power, it is not due to his own effort: it is given to him by God alone. Similarly, when power is taken away from him, it is done by God alone.

Thus, the dominance or subjugation of any group is ultimately for God to decide. Political power is totally governed by God, just as the entire universe is running in accordance with the Divine plan. It is like saying that God alone is the controller of the universe and that He alone has the final word as to who is going to be given political power. Just as God exercises full power over the setting and rising of the sun, so also He has full power over the granting of political ascendancy.

Just as God exercises full power over the setting and rising of the sun, so also He has full power over the granting of political ascendancy.

This is an incontrovertible fact. There is another Quranic verse in this connection which throws further light on the issue:

And He will bestow upon you other blessings which you desire; help from God and a speedy victory.

THE QURAN 61: 13

In this verse, 'other blessings' includes political power. This has been characterized as something secondary. When we take this verse in its literal sense, it transpires that the status of political power has a secondary rather than a primary position in Islam. Primary place is given to the purification of the self through intellectual and spiritual development.

Another point made clear in this verse is that the receiving of political power depends solely upon Divine succour. Victory and defeat apparently belong to the human world, but both are totally governed by God.

As we learn from the Quran, God grants victory to whomsoever He wills and defeat to whomsoever He wills. From this understanding, it emerges that political power is a promise from God, and not a target. That is, it is not something that Muslims should aim at, for they can receive it only by divine edict.

Another point that we learn from this verse is that power is not granted to any group simply because of its struggle for that end, but, rather, on the fulfilment of two specific conditions. The Quran makes it clear that true faith and virtuous character alone are the deciding factors in receiving political power.

The actual possessor of power is God, and it is He who grants power on earth to whom He wills.

What is meant by faith is that the group who is to be the recipient of political power should have undergone the intellectual and spiritual revolution called *Iman* (faith) in the Quran, that is, they should evince absolute trust in God, total submission to the Prophet, full conviction regarding the existence of the angels, of the hereafter, of hell and heaven; in short, they should display a keen desire to mould their lives in accordance with the spirit of the Quran. When such qualities of faith are produced within a group, the time will come for it to be considered by God for the grant of political power. Good deeds necessarily entail full conformity with the divine commands regarding worship, moral character and the upholding of justice. In the words of the Quran, our lives should be wholly dyed in God's hue. When this quality of good character has been developed in the majority of the people, only then is political power given to that group by God's command.

Then there is another verse in this connection which throws further light on the subject. This is in the context of the granting of political power to the Prophet Solomon. The words uttered by the Prophet Solomon after receiving power was '*le-yabluwani*' (This is meant as a test for me). These words tell us that political power is given in order to try us. The test contrives to separate the grateful from the insolent servants of God. (THE QURAN 27: 40)

According to the Quran, the nature of political power in this world is exactly the same as that of other things. That is, when an individual is given wealth, offspring or anything of a material, worldly nature like success, all that is designed to test him. All these blessings serve as 'test papers'. And political power is also a 'test paper'.

Therefore, according to the Quran whoever receives power should realize that power is given to him in order to test him. It is not something to take pride in, nor is power to be considered as a gift from God.

**Victory and defeat apparently belong to the human world,
but both are totally governed by God.**

The concept of the State that emerges from these verses of the Quran makes it clear that political power is not the target or goal of our activities or actions. Rather it is the result of some other set of actions. That is to say, according to the Quran, the objectives of our struggle should be faith and good character. These conditions have to be fulfilled, and only then can a group be blessed with political power by God, if He so desires. We might say, by way of analogy, that the position of faith is that of the seed and the position of power is that of the fruit.

According to the Quran, the whole matter can be likened to a tree. The position of the seed in this example is that of action and the position of the fruit is that of receiving the reward of that action. In this way, those who sow the seed of *Iman* and good deeds may receive political power as a gift from God.

We must then consult the Quran and *Sunnah* as to what is the structure of political power in Islam. In the Quran, the first principle that comes before us is in the form of approbation of 'those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation'. (THE QURAN 42: 38)

This verse alludes to a basic principle of conduct so far as the political structure of Islam is concerned. This shows that the political system of Islam is based on mutual adjustment, this being one of the most important social principles of Islam, which is equally desirable, both prior to and after receiving political power.

It is noteworthy that this verse enjoining Muslims to settle their affairs by consultation was revealed in Makkah, whereas Muslims received political power only in Medina after their migration. The revelation

of this verse in Makkah shows that this principle of consultation is an all-time social principle. The practical proof of this principle at all times is made clear by the fact that whenever any social problems arose, the Prophet would always call his companions for consultation. Therefore we find in the books of *Seerah* (the Prophet's biography) a number of examples which begin with these words, "O people, give me advice."

After the death of the Prophet in Medina in 632 A.D, Abu Bakr Siddiq was appointed as a leader of the Believers, and first successor of the Prophet. Events prove, that the Prophet was of the opinion that this task of leadership should go to Abu Bakr, but he never nominated the latter, nor did he prepare a will.

According to the Quran whoever receives power should realize that power is given to him in order to test him.

There were, however, certain indications of his wishes during his lifetime. For instance, the task of congregational prayer is such as performed only by the head of the State. That is why the Prophet of Islam used to lead the prayer himself. For, according to Islam, the Imam of the mosque should be one who is the leader of the political institution, or he could be one appointed by the head of the State as his deputy. It is significant that the Prophet of Islam made Abu Bakr lead the prayer several times. This stand of the Prophet was to make it clear to the people that the appointment of the leader of the believers should be in accordance with the opinion of the people. That is why after his death, when the companions gathered together at an assembly hall in Medina, Abu Bakr was appointed the successor of the Prophet, after a long consultation.

Although the Islamic system is democratic in its nature, it would be appropriate to say that democracy in Islam is indirect democracy rather than direct. That is to say, the entire public is not consulted in the Islamic democratic system. Instead we find different methods in that period of Islam ruled by the 'Rightly Guided Caliphs'.

None of the Caliphs of this period were appointed after consulting the public. Only the senior people available in Medina were consulted. This pattern was adopted concerning the appointment of all the four 'pious' Caliphs. With these standard examples during this period before us,

we should not be wrong in saying that the democratic system of Islam is almost the same as what is called indirect democracy in the parlance of today.

This system entailed selecting a central body consisting of intellectuals, leaders and others who have a say in society after seeking the opinion of the public. This body then selected the Caliph. That is to say that this decision-making body will be formed by public opinion and this body in turn will be entrusted with the task of selecting the leader.

**Muslims have been enjoined to settle their affairs
by mutual consultation.**

The political structure of Islam is not an unchangeable, rigid structure, but has sufficient flexibility to suit different circumstances. For instance, the selection of Abu Bakr took place after a discussion among the companions, while Umar Faruq was appointed by Abu Bakr Siddiq, the leader of the Believers himself, during his last days. Then, the third Caliph was selected by a six-member board nominated by Caliph Umar. So far as the selection of the fourth Caliph is concerned, it took place in an emergency situation, due to the murder of the third Caliph Uthman; the circumstances did not allow holding normal discussions. Therefore, a group of Muslims declared Ali ibn Abu Talib to be the fourth Caliph and the Muslim community accepted his Caliphate.

During the Umayyad period, Umar bin Abdul Aziz, who is known as the 'fifth pious Caliph', was selected. His election took place in the following manner. The preceding Caliph, Sulaiman ibn Abdul Malik, had left his will in a sealed envelope with instructions that it should be opened only after his death. So, this letter was opened in the mosque of Damascus after his demise.

This announcement was made by Reja ibn Haywa, who was appointed by Caliph Sulaiman to read out this will to the large number of people gathered in the mosque. It was an official announcement of the nomination of Umar bin Abdul Aziz as Caliph. But Umar bin Abdul Aziz publicly declared that he was returning this nomination to the people and it was up to them to choose whoever they wanted. At this turn of events, all the people gathered in the mosque chorused: "We accept you as our Caliph." Only after this general consent did Umar accept the Caliphate.

The first phase of Islamic history is known as the 'golden phase'. There is no doubt about it that consultation is an established practice in Islam and we see this from the precedent set in this golden period. Yet there is a high degree of flexibility in the principle of consultation in Islam. It is not a hard and fast rule. That is why we find that all the five Caliphs were appointed by different methods. Then another fact is that the area of this principle of flexibility in Islamic democracy is very vast. As we see during the Umayyad period, Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufiyan, the founder of the Umayyad Caliphate, nominated his son to succeed him. This was clearly the way of kingship or dynastic rule, going patently against the precedents set in the golden period. But this method introduced by Muawiyah became so common that it was adopted by almost all the succeeding Caliphs right from Muawiyah to Aurangzeb. Yet, the Islamic scholars in general accepted their Caliphates, giving them their silent approval. This shows that there is great flexibility in the Islamic concept of democracy based on consultation.

The position of political rule in Islam is not that of the target of action, but is rather the result of action.

This flexibility goes to the extent of even accepting dynastic kingship, if circumstances demand it. As for the governments established on the principle of dynastic rule, the scholars held the view that a government's fulfilling its social, economic and religious responsibilities was more important than this or that political structure.

That is why in later history we find that although the Muslim scholars did not react to this dynastic rule, they did speak out openly about their responsibilities towards social justice.

The religious scholars (*Ulama*) never shirked their role of reminding the kings of their social duty. Most of the scholars refrained from accepting any government post so that they might not have to yield to any undue pressure. They thought that by remaining independent they would be able to play their role of censuring the policies of the government and of reminding the rulers of their duties.

That is why in later periods of Islamic history, when dynastic rule had become the order of the day among the Muslims, the rulers, more or less, could not deviate far from the Islamic principles of justice. For instance, the ruler had to come to the mosque to pray with the public;

he had to spend the money of the treasury to fulfil the requirements of the public; he had to discharge his religious responsibilities and see to it that the public had no difficulty in discharging religious rites. Anyone could approach the king to register his or her complaint. And there was a proper arrangement by the government for the free religious education of the people, etc.

From our study of the Quran, *Hadith* and Islamic history, we come to these conclusions:

1. The position of political rule in Islam is not that of the target of action, but is rather the result of action. That is to say, fulfilling the criteria of faith and good deeds alone makes one deserving of political power.
2. There is no hard and fast rule for the political structure in Islam. Rather, we find great flexibility.
3. Although there may be adjustment so far as the political structure is concerned, there can be no adjustment or concession so far as the Islamic spirit is concerned.
4. According to the study of the *Hadith*, our actions towards political reform will be limited to the giving of advice, i.e. by peaceful means. This should never go to the extent of launching violent movements aimed at ousting the rulers. As the *Hadith* traditions have it: "When you find corruption among the rulers, you must pay your due and ask your due from God". It is as if the principle of Jesus Christ is also accepted in Islam: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Luke: 20: 26).

The Quran tells us: "God enjoins you to do justice". This justice in its basic sense pertains to individual character. It demands that everyone in his personal life should develop a character based on justice. When the number of these just people grows into a large group, then they desire to lead their lives based on justice at the congregational or social level. When this social life manifests itself in the form of an organized social institution, it is called a state. This action (the desire to lead a just life) will be called just character from the individual point of view, and this same action at the social level will be the mainspring of the just state. □



BELIEF AND DISBELIEF

MAN has an innate need for something to depend upon in this world; something which he can look up to. To believe in God is to look up to Him alone, while disbelief is to live in veneration of others besides Him.

In ancient times, awe of natural phenomena, such as the moon and the sun, dominated people's lives. In the modern age, however, man has become more materialistic, finding fulfilment in such things as wealth and the greatness of other human beings. Whatever the object of his veneration may be, man is satisfying an instinctive urge in looking up to these things and depending upon them. The urge is real enough, but such means of fulfilling it, which amount to worship of others besides God, are false.

To truly believe in God is to find the true answer to the human search for a superior Being. It is to see beyond superficial forms to the Ultimate Reality that lies hidden within all things.

Man has an innate need for something to depend upon in this world; something which he can look up to.

A believer is one who is not beguiled by the outward splendour of worldly things. He realizes that everything has been created by God. He is not overawed by things of material grandeur, because he knows that they, like him, have been created by God. He does not look to mortals for fulfilment of his needs, for he knows that they themselves are helpless before God — that all are in truth His humble servants. He presses on until, passing by all creation, he reaches the Creator himself.

A believer is one who acknowledges that everything is from God. Seeing that he has no power in this world, he looks to God for help and protection. The beauty of this world serves to remind him of God's beauty; the greatness of natural phenomena impresses on him the greatness of the One who created them. So absorbed is he in the glory of God that he loves nothing more than to spend his time singing the praises of the Lord.

To believe in God is to see the invisible force behind visible objects. This requires a special vision, enabling one to penetrate superficial forms and perceive the reality of all things.

To truly believe in God is to find the true answer to the human search for a superior Being.

One endowed with such vision sees God's greatness everywhere; he looks only to God as great. He submits entirely to God, and trusts in Him alone. So engrossed in God's overpowering greatness does he become that all worldly creatures, including himself, fade into insignificance in his sight. □



True Character

Inclinations towards peace or violence serve as indicators of the true character of the human being.

If the former proves the humanity of the individual, the latter proves his animality, despite his appearing to be a human being.

An advertisement for 'Spirit of Islam Online'. On the left, a laptop is shown with its screen displaying an article titled 'THE GREATER JIHAD'. The article text is partially visible, starting with 'ISLAM is, in essence, a peaceful religion...' and 'The basic aim of Islam is to bring about an intellectual revolution...'. To the right of the laptop, the text 'NOW ACCESS SPIRIT OF ISLAM ONLINE' is displayed in a large, white, serif font. Below this text is a hand cursor icon pointing upwards. At the bottom right of the advertisement, the website address 'www.spiritofislam.co.in' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font.

THE WORD OF GOD

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

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

The true servants of the Gracious One are those who walk upon the earth with humility and when they are addressed by the ignorant ones, their response is, 'Peace'; and those who spend the night prostrating themselves, and standing before their Lord, who say, 'Our Lord, ward off from us the punishment of Hell, for its punishment is a dreadful torment to suffer. Indeed, it is an evil abode and evil dwelling-place.'
25: 63-66

They are those who are neither extravagant nor niggardly, but keep a balance between the two; 25: 67

A man's way of walking symbolises his whole personality. Those in whose hearts belief in God has taken firm root, become the embodiment of humility and modesty. The fear of God takes away any sense of superiority they may have. This sense of servitude to God permeates all aspects of their lives.

But this is not all. The realisation of God makes them (the believers) true advocates of His cause. In discharging this responsibility, they often face strong opposition from their addressees. The promulgation of the truth by the believers becomes unbearable to those who deny the truth and they take aggressive action against the preachers. But the fear of God prevents the believers from retaliating; they simply avoid conflict and pray for their opponents to be guided.

The realization of God results not only in their calling upon God during the daytime but also in their nights being filled with the remembrance of God.

Similarly, realisation of God makes them extremely prudent. They earn with a sense of responsibility and spend with a sense of responsibility. It is their sense of accountability to God which makes them moderate and cautious in the matter of income and expenditure. A tradition of the Prophet says, 'Wisdom lies in man adopting the path of moderation.'

Those who never invoke any other deity besides God, nor take a life which God has made sacred, except with the right to do so, nor commit adultery. Anyone who does that shall face punishment: he shall have his suffering doubled on the Day of Resurrection and he will abide forever in disgrace, except for those who repent and believe and do good deeds. God will change the evil deeds of such people into good ones: He is most forgiving and most merciful. He who repents and does good deeds has truly turned to God. 25: 68-71

Three sins have been mentioned in this verse — polytheism, the killing of a person without justification, and adultery. These three forms of wrongdoing are great sins against God and His subjects. The sign of real faith in God is that a man abstains from them. Those who have indulged in these sins can save themselves from retribution by repentance, but for those who die without repenting and reforming, there will be severe punishment before God at God's behest, which they will in no way be able to avoid.

Real virtue in the eyes of God is a man's becoming God-fearing. Any virtue which makes a man fearless of God is, in fact, a sin, while that sin which makes a man God-fearing is in fact, in terms of its result, a virtue.

If a man happens to commit a sin but later on, seeing the error of his ways rushes towards Him in repentance (*tawbah*) and seeks His pardon, then God will mercifully add this sin to the list of his virtues, because that had made him turn towards Him.

And those who do not bear false witness, and when they pass by frivolity, they pass by with dignity; who do not turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to the signs of their Lord when they are reminded of them; who say, 'Lord, grant us joy in our wives and children and make us a model for the righteous.' 25: 72-74

In the present world, Satan has been at pains to glamorise wrongdoing and has taught the worshipper of untruth to present his case in the most appealing way. People, deceived by appearances, are therefore drawn towards evil. But if the outer covering of deceit could be removed, the

wickedness thus uncovered would appear so ugly that people would be sure to keep their distance from it. From this point of view, every bad thing in which a man indulges is a falsehood. In the present world, the test of a man is that he should recognise falsehood. He should be able to tear down the outer curtain and see things in the light of reality.

When a man is given advice which goes against his whims and fancies, he immediately becomes annoyed. In the eyes of God, such a person is blind and deaf, because he has not used his eyes to see reality and has not used his ears to hear the voice of Truth. If he has not welcomed the advice, it is because he is like a man deprived of the powers of hearing and seeing. In the eyes of God, a man capable of seeing and hearing is one who avoids pointless things when he sees them, but if true advice comes his way, immediately accepts it.

Every man with a family is the leader (*imam*) of his family. If his family members are God-fearing, he is the *imam* of God-fearing people. But if his family members are forgetful of God, he is at the head of those who are oblivious of God.

These are the ones who will be rewarded with lofty mansions in Paradise, for their steadfastness. They will be received therein with greetings of welcome and salutations of peace. There they shall abide forever: blessed dwelling and a blessed resting place. Say, 'What would my Lord care for you, if you do not call on Him. Because you have indeed rejected the truth and His punishment is bound to overtake you. 25: 75-77

Those who had humbled themselves in this world for the sake of Truth, will be lodged in the loftiest dwellings of paradise. They lived with humility in this world so, in the Hereafter, God will reward them with high status. This was expressed by Jesus Christ as follows: 'Blessed are those who are poor in this world. It is they who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'

Paradise is the place on high where all desires will be completely fulfilled; the qualities which take a human being to paradise may be developed by one who is prepared to exercise patience. For, in exercising patience, he will be able to fully curb his desires in this world. This is the price one has to pay for entering Paradise. One who is not prepared to pay the requisite price of patience in this world will be doomed to live forever in hell. □

ASK MAULANA

Who is responsible for bomb blasts?

Bomb blasts have become a regular feature of our daily existence. The worst aspect of this is that the lives of innocent people are lost, without the interests of the perpetrators of such crimes being served in any way. Moreover, the suicide bomber is also killed, thereby causing his family suffering and disgrace.

The truth is that the bomb blast is beneficial neither for the perpetrator of the crime nor for those targeted by it.



Then why do such futile bomb blasts continue, and who is responsible for them? I think that a very small share of the responsibility is that of those immature individuals known as 'suicide bombers'. In actual fact, the major share of the responsibility for such dastardly activity is that of the intellectuals or leaders who, by means of their emotional speeches and writings, incite people to commit such gruesome acts. And when such acts have been executed, it is they who justify them. It is they, therefore, who must be held to account for the continuation of such inhuman activities.

In this regard, Islam lays emphasis on two important precepts. Firstly, violent activism is totally unlawful in Islam. Under no circumstances are Muslims allowed to adopt violent methods to achieve their goals. They must necessarily remain within a peaceful sphere of action. According to the teachings of Islam, there is nothing that cannot be achieved within this sphere. And if things cannot be immediately attained by adopting the peaceful method, they must simply be waited for patiently.

Secondly, it is the duty of the senior members of society to try to place curbs upon evil-doing by giving sincere advice, acting thus as the well-wishers of those prone to violence. It is a duty, which, if not performed, criminalizes — in the eyes of God — all those who, despite having the ability to reform people, remain passive in crucial situations.

All those who issue statements which, directly or indirectly, justify these acts will be taken to task in the Hereafter by God. Their crime becomes all the more serious when they distance their own children from violent activities, placing them in the safe havens of higher education, while justifying through the media the militant activities of the youths who will ultimately destroy themselves along with their innocent victims.

Many different kinds of problems — political, economic, and national — now vitiate society. No social group can be entirely free of them. This being so, there is only one course to follow and that is peaceful effort for the attainment of one's lawful goals. In no situation, and for no one, can violent struggle ever be lawful. As well as being the essence of Islamic teachings, this is what reason demands.

How to put an end to the destructive gun and bomb culture?

We can say with absolute certainty that if we opt to counter violence with violence, we shall never succeed. The clear proof of this is that, over the last 50 years, there has been an ongoing effort to counter terrorism with terrorism: had this been the right method, militancy would by now have been eliminated.

The failure of this approach of counter-terrorism is a factual proof that it is not a solution to this problem. Obviously, a method which has shown no results whatsoever, even after a fifty-year struggle cannot be expected to succeed in future. The truth is that recourse to violence has become commonplace because of the overwhelming influence of a negative ideology. Therefore, nothing but a strong, positive ideology can solve this problem.

This positive ideology advocates educational activism taking the place of violent activism. With continuous ideological effort, people should be convinced that no goal can be achieved through violence. Destruction may be achieved through violence, but not construction. It should be impressed upon the people, in the light of both history and ideology, that violence is only an ill-considered reaction. It is not the result of well-thought-out planning. No group or nation in human history has ever achieved any worthwhile success through violence; and it is certainly not possible, even today. □



Glossary

Abu Bakr Siddiq, died 632 AD; a close companion of the Prophet; also the first Muslim Caliph.

AH, Islamic lunar year of Hijrah.

Aisha, (612-678); daughter of Abu Bakr, wife of Prophet Muhammad; one of the most intellectual and influential women in Islamic history.

Ali bin Abi Talib, died 661 AD; cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad; the 4th Muslim Caliph.

Amir-ul-Mumineen, commander of the faithful.

At-Tirmidhi, also Imam at-Tirmidhi (824-892); Islamic scholar and collector of *Hadith*.

Aurangzeb, also Aurangzeb Alamgir; died 1707; sixth Mughal emperor.

firqa al-najiya, sect that is guaranteed salvation.

fasad, spreading corruption, rebellion, dissension, mischief and disorder across society.

fatwa, legal opinion; judicial verdict.

fitna, persecution

fiqh, Islamic jurisprudence

fuqaha, Islamic jurists

haram, forbidden

Hasan bin Ali bin Abi Talib, died 670 AD; elder son of Ali bin Abi Talib; grandson of Prophet Muhammad.

Husain bin Ali bin Abi Talib, died 680 AD; younger son of Ali bin Abi Talib; grandson of Prophet Muhammad.

ijtihad, exercise of judgement with reasoning.

ijtihadi khata, error in reasoning.

Jama'at-e-Islami, Islamic revivalist and political organisation founded in 1941 by Maulana Sayyed Abul 'Ala Maududi.

Jihad-bil-nafs, struggle against ourselves to control negative and undesirable feelings.

Kufa, capital city of Ali in Iraq.

maddhab, school of thought; creed.

Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalvi, died 1944; founder of Tablighi Jama'at.

Muhammad Iqbal, died 1938; also known as Allama Iqbal; philosopher, poet and politician.

mujahid, one who struggles in the way of God.

Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufiyan, died 680 AD; secretary of Prophet Muhammad; founder of the Umayyad dynasty of Caliphate.

nafs, one's own self.

Umar, also Umar Faruq or Omar bin al Khattab; died 644 AD; a close companion of the Prophet; the 2nd Muslim Caliph.

Rightly Guided Caliphs, also Khulafa ur-Rashidun; refer to the first four Caliphs after prophet Muhammad - Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman ibn Affan and Ali.

qital, armed warfare

Reja ibn Haywa, died 691 AD; Islamic jurist under the Umayyad Caliphs.

Sayyed Abul 'Ala Maududi, died 1979; journalist, theologian, Muslim revivalist leader and political philosopher, founder of Jama'at-e-Islami, the Islamic revivalist party.

Seerah, also Seerath; Prophet's biography

Shariah, moral code and religious law of Islam.

Sulaiman ibn Abdul Malik, died 717 AD; Umayyad Caliph.

Sunan al-Tirmidhi, *Hadith* collection of Abu 'Isa Muhammad ibn 'Isa at-Tirmidhi, Persian Islamic scholar; died 892 AD; one of the six major *Hadith* collections.

Sunnah, practice and teachings of Prophet Muhammad.

Tabuk, province of Saudi Arabia

Tablighi Jama'at, Islamic religious movement started in 1926 by Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandhlawi in India.

tahazzub, groupism, sectarianism

tawheed, Monotheism, or the oneness of God.

Ulama, religious scholars

Umar bin Abdul Aziz, died 720 AD; Umayyad Caliph; great grandson of Umar ibn Al Khattab.

Ummah religious community; followers of a prophet.

Uthman, also Usman or Uthman ibn Affan; died 656 AD; a close companion of prophet Muhammad; also the 3rd Muslim Caliph.

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